

**Volume Sixteen**  
of  
**THE  
DECLINE AND FALL  
OF THE AMERICAN  
NATION**

**A New & Revised Edition**

(The Universities of Asia Press, Beijing, 2147, X. Jin Li, General Editor)

Entitled:

“The Role, Status, and Condition  
of Intellectuals in Higher Education  
During the Middle and Late Ante-Penultimate  
Period of The Collapse”

Consisting of

The Important Segments of the Larsen Papers:  
Fragments I-VII and the Famous “*Diary*”

all in

The Bhāskara Presentation,  
Newly Edited & Revised by

X. Jin Li,

General Editor

The Universities of Asia Press

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## A Note To the Reader

Volume Sixteen of that indispensable and magisterial work of historical scholarship, *The Decline and Fall of the American Nation*, as every reader knows, consists entirely of the annotated and edited papers of Eric Larsen, M.A., Ph.D., member of the faculty of The Actaeon College of Institutional Analysis and Social Control, The University of New York (New York, New York, United States of America, The Americas), during what is now known to have been the Late Ante-Penultimate and the Early Penultimate Period of Collapse. Evidence within these unique and famous papers themselves, along with a small number of very rare corroborative discoveries found through subsequent archaeological work in the layers of Actaeon's rubble, indicate that Larsen, during this specified period, was engaged in a highly ambitious project, to which he had given the general working title of "My Life in Education and the Arts Before and During the Gathering of the Great Calamity As I Have Experienced and Now Believe I Understand It." That project, as specialists in this area of The Collapse generally agree, consisted mainly of new work written for the occasion of the doomed project itself, but also of certain earlier pieces refurbished for inclusion in it. Whether or not the author seriously hoped for successful publication of so radical a work, and, if he did have that hope, exactly how he imagined he could safely bring about its realization, are questions whose answers remain unknown.

It should be mentioned, in accordance with Volume Sixteen's title page, that the edition of the papers used as a basis for this current and revised edition is the famous "Ceylon Version" of 2110. We have made no changes in that edition's *organization* or *sequence* of the papers—no changes, that is, in the so-called "Bhāskara Presentation," which was the first (following studies making use of both chemical and textual evidence)<sup>1</sup> to break up the famous "*Diary*" itself<sup>2</sup> and present that work in three separate sections. This was done in the belief that such a change allowed for a more holistic and less *linear* reading and an experience therefore far more in keeping with this strongly anti-Simplification author's own true aims. The Bhāskara Presentation, of course, was also the first to present the Larsen fragments in the sequence now generally believed to be that intended by the author rather than in the order of their discovery. The sequence of the archaeological

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<sup>1</sup> See Maximillian Shandra, *Dating the Larsen Papers: A Writer's Progress toward Calamity* (Bangkok, 2096).

<sup>2</sup> In the Bhāskara Presentation also, "Fragment VI" was already segmented, being broken into four separate sections, although these themselves remained, as they do now, in a chronological order. (Editor)

discoveries, however, as tradition dictates, remains, and is expressed by the Roman numerals that identify each fragment, sometimes functioning, further, as a convenient reference to it.

We have always found the Bhāskara Presentation both effective and convincing, and therefore have adopted it in its entirety.

X. Jin Li

## Editor's Foreword

In the “Late-Penultimate” and “Ultimate”<sup>3</sup> periods of the American Collapse—a fact familiar to even the most casual student of this massive subject—the greatest destruction of business, cultural, and scholarly archives (other than those maintained in secure areas by the military, the government, or great corporations) did not result from direct action by armed forces or through military armaments, whether domestic or foreign, as might logically have been expected. Instead, most archival (and other) destruction came about through the massive, ruinous, uncontrollable fire-storms that engulfed all of that nation’s urbanized and most of its densely suburbanized areas, caused by the myriad blazes set by masses of raging and anti-educated members of the middle and lower-middle classes. (The only slightly less widespread acts of arson that were committed by the middle- and upper-middle-classes, predominantly by their males, differed significantly, the sole motive in these latter cases being malicious vandalism, not the blind and near-directionless rage of the lower classes. For a complete analysis of the mass psychology of the Middle and Late Ante-Penultimate and of the Penultimate and Ultimate themselves, see Volume Three of *The Decline and Fall of the American Nation* [pp. 493-572].)

Even by the time of the Late Preliminary, undeniably, all American universities modeled themselves to an irreversibly debilitating extent (as we see the matter from our own modern perspective) on the hierarchic model of the corporation or corporate state.<sup>4</sup> The universities, as a result, like the corporations, maintained fire- and even thermo-nuclear-resistant security and preservation systems for their own archives, vast numbers

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix, p. 2952, for a chronology of the periods of the Collapse from the Early Preliminary (1950-1964) through the three stages of the Ultimate (2025-ca. 2085).

<sup>4</sup> Some scholarship argues for later dates, as late as Early or Middle Ante-Penultimate, the second of these being the period of the earlier Larsen papers. The majority of views, however, hold generally for the Late Preliminary as marking the completed corporatizing of the universities.

of which, as a result, have come down to us undamaged. Little of that archival material has proven to be of any true significance, however, in revealing the root causes of the Collapse. The reason for this failure is that, with extremely few exceptions, the purpose of corporate archives of the period was not to express or clarify, but rather to obscure and suppress any and all information that might be revelatory of the real workings, conduct, or aims of the corporation itself. The sheer meaninglessness, to the point often of what seems little more than intentional gibberish, of the vast majority of such archives remains an extraordinary aspect of pre-Collapse American communication and culture.<sup>5</sup>

In the corporate university structure, those in leadership and governing (that is, in “ownership”) positions were housed at the top of an imaginary pyramid and designated not through accurate terms such as “owners,” “governors,” “regulators,” “chiefs,” or “bosses” but through the ingeniously neutralized term<sup>6</sup> of “administrators.” These figures, in the university as in the corporation itself, were solely responsible for the ongoing creation of what was then known as “product,” this being something that, among college or university administrators themselves, was referred to almost invariably (and, again, abusively) as “image.” Any “product” of a traditional kind actually suitable to the university—“education,” “learning,” or “knowledge,” for example—essentially disappeared from the university altogether as the administrators, in a complex and curious evolution, took over the roles both of owner-governors *and* producers. “Image,” in short, became the sole “product” of the university, the administrators themselves having become at one and the same time the producers, controllers, and beneficiaries of it.

The word “faculty,” meanwhile, did for a certain time remain in use, although it was a term that even by the Late Preliminary or Early Ante-Penultimate was separated entirely from its original “medieval” connotation as designating both the university’s governing *and* producing element (the body, that is to say, in charge of the gathering, maintaining, and handing on of “knowledge”).<sup>7</sup>

In applying this corporate model to the university, the administrator-producer-owners found themselves burdened with large numbers of useless “workers” or erstwhile “producers,” these of course being the remains of their inherited faculties. Due to a byzantine complexity of legalities that were in place from approximately the Early Ante-Penultimate on, it was out of the question for administrators to dispense with these “faculty” in such simple ways as they may actually have wished, but they were forced to do so instead by relying upon far more indirect methods. Two of the most common of these were the encouraging of poor health and thus early death;<sup>8</sup> and the curiously-named

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<sup>5</sup> See Delia Nawrocki, *Language and the American Collapse* (Helsinki & Beijing, 2118).

<sup>6</sup> For analysis of this calculated abuse of language, see, besides Delia Nawrocki, George Orwell (*The Lost Orwell: Texts Restored and Rediscovered*, Pilgrim Press, Delhi, 2099, Iridhati Rushdie, General Editor), especially this inexplicably neglected English author’s satiric novels *1984* (1948) and *Animal Farm* (1945).

<sup>7</sup> The original model of the university was radically different from this later corporate and hierarchic “pyramid.” The old European (and American) university could better be thought of not as a pyramid at all but as a group of gathered cottages or small houses, some perhaps finer than others but none significantly higher. It should be mentioned that by the beginning of the final quarter of the Twentieth Century, from the Late Preliminary on through the Middle Ante-Penultimate, very close to *all* memory of the original role and purpose of faculty had been lost, even by those faculty themselves who remained inside what was still popularly referred to as “academia.”

<sup>8</sup> See note 7, See note 7, p. 2620 (in “Fragment II,” subtitled “Voicemail”). [Editor]

concept of “attrition,” which in fact simply meant making no replacements for those “faculty” who died. Other methods of eliminating these expensive and useless workers included the equivalent of surgical excisions of previously accepted or even once-prestigious areas of “knowledge” (most notably, history, literature, art, music, and philosophy); the increase in numbers of “administrators” with a proportionate decrease in numbers of “faculty”; and, perhaps most common of all, the use of purely political means to *give the appearance* of there no longer being adequate “funding” for maintaining the university’s previous numbers of “personnel” (as in the phrase “faculty personnel”).

Important and effective as each of these methods was, still another aspect of “faculty-management” from the Early Ante-Penultimate onward is even more deserving of notice. This is the phenomenon of faculty members committing—and being encouraged to commit—intellectual suicide by themselves becoming administrators.<sup>9</sup> In some extreme cases, this was done by faculty members’ voluntarily stepping forth and *requesting*<sup>10</sup> to be sent to special “schools” where they would be taught “how” to be administrators. Much more often, however, the suicide was accomplished not through full-fledged administratorhood but through faculty members becoming “fund-raisers” and “grant-seekers” of various kinds, thus being transformed, by definition, into demi-administrators and immediately losing their intellectual independence and integrity. Most frequently of all, however, intellectual death was accomplished by means of faculty members’ taking up or embracing types of so-called “learning” or “knowledge” that in fact were nothing of the kind but that consisted actually (and only) of image rather than content, being thus by definition “product” rather than anything having genuine intellectual content, and thus being historically of no interest to a faculty member but only to an administrator.<sup>11</sup> Even through the use of such debilitating, corrupting, and deforming measures as these, however, faculty very seldom rose to the same entirety of privilege, power, “ownership,” and reward that true administrators enjoyed. Nevertheless, the results were efficient in the elimination of “faculty” through neutralization, and therefore the methods continued to be held in great value by administrators. Notably, in none of the archival research projects undertaken since *The Collapse* itself has any archaeological evidence come to light identifying even one single “converted” faculty member who considered his or her intellectual suicide to have been a loss rather than a gain, or even to have recorded the thought, whether in public or private, that such a question could so much as even have arisen. Even so, there does remain the possibility that the converteds, if secretly in a state of humiliation and despair, could have been lying.




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<sup>9</sup> Influences that could be powerful enough to cause educated people to choose intellectual death by becoming administrators might seem unimaginable. As a guide to this aspect of Middle Ante-Penultimate intellectual enervation, perversion, and self-destruction, however, see especially Larsen’s “Fragment IV” (pp. 2717-2810), containing the ambitious and brilliant seventh chapter, “Despair Notes: How Deconstructionism Happened and What It Really Meant,” of Alan R. Bloomgarden and Ira Margolies, *The Decline of Literature and Reason in an Age of Theory* (Yale University Press, 1992). See the Editor’s Note to “Fragment IV” for a discussion of the authorship question.

<sup>10</sup> Notice the case of “Dr. Socialism” (whose disappearance Larsen somewhat wistfully regrets) as alluded to in Larsen’s famous “*Diary*.” Dr. Socialism is known to have been one of those who “volunteered” for such a “special ‘administrative school.’”

<sup>11</sup> Again, see “Fragment IV” for examples of “fields of knowledge” of these pseudo-academic types.

As mentioned previously, because of the university structure that prevailed from the Late Preliminary onward (or possibly from even earlier), such archival information as we do possess is almost entirely that generated either by administrators themselves or by “converted” faculty, these being the only two camps (other than certain numbers of researchers in the “hard sciences”) that had automatic access to encrypted, vaulted, and supra-heat-resistant storage and retrieval systems capable of surviving the firestorms of the Collapse.

Truly “unconverted” faculty members, on the other hand, being perceived by administrators as insignificant at best (albeit burdensome) and as implicitly dangerous saboteurs at worst, were caused to remain invariably under-equipped and poorly treated, even their physical health, as mentioned already, being put deliberately (although of course never openly) in jeopardy in the anticipation of premature death and thus early departure. As for the matter of the information storage and retrieval systems that were made available to the unconverteds, these remained primitive even into the Middle Penultimate. Evidence has been found showing that a small nucleus of urban American unconverted faculty members labored on archaic pre-Stigler, base-non-unified, sensory-depletive systems *as late as into the Middle Ultimate itself!*

All of which leads us to the Larsen papers themselves. So well known are these famous documents that in truth they need no introduction even to the non-specialist. The incalculable good fortune of our even being in possession of them, however; the almost infinite odds against their having been discovered at all in the ruins and ashes of the great burned city where Larsen long ago lived and worked—surely these are matters that deserve to be acknowledged once again as causes of amazement and gratitude even if only in passing.

As must, too, the sheer uniqueness of the documents. In spite of the often badly damaged state of some of the papers—so that in many cases we possess only widely separated pieces—the fragments and parts of whole writings that we do possess give us a clear idea of the scope, ambition, and intensity of Larsen’s aim, his undyingly passionate concern for the doomed and inimical age he lived in, and, more sadly, the toll that all of this took on a mind so fine as his, as we know from the intimations of panic and perhaps breakdown itself that are hinted at in certain of the later papers,<sup>12</sup> even though these nevertheless remain some of this extraordinary thinker’s most brilliant works.

By the time Larsen set out on his final project, life in the American university—and nation—had become intensely uncongenial to unconverteds, whose sheer numbers had diminished enormously and whose extant contributions are therefore now *extraordinarily* rare. The Larsen papers, thus, are a part of that merest handful of surviving written works that are incontrovertibly known not to have been composed by administrators or by converteds but by single individuals from among that small, dwindling, turn-of-the-century category of unconverteds who, like Larsen himself, continued until the end<sup>13</sup> to struggle against the steady and (as we can now so easily see) increasingly deadly erosions of learning, meaning, and conscience in the decades preceding the Collapse.

But let us allow Larsen’s words to speak for themselves across the great silence that followed the Ultimate, bringing us their observations not only of the daily life of a

<sup>12</sup> Though admittedly not *only* in the later papers. See the Editor’s Notes throughout Volume Sixteen.

<sup>13</sup> The time and cause of the writer’s death are not known with any certainty.

true unconverted, with its pronounced rigors, losses, and hopes, but offering us also a candid record of the inside workings and structure of the American university as it existed in the Late Ante-Penultimate and Early Penultimate—knowing now, as the doomed Larsen never could—what incalculable, immeasurable, crushing sorrows and losses were so soon to follow.

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## A Note on the Condition of the Papers:

The Actaeon College of Institutional Analysis and Social Control was spared destruction by fire no more than were those areas of the city around it, whether immediately nearby or quite far away. A number of factors, even so, contributed to the fortunate and relatively complete survival of the Larsen documents.

We know that the college itself was housed in two buildings, neither of them especially large, one four stories high and the other six, known, respectively, as Non-Presidential Hall and Presidential Hall. By the time of the Ultimate, however, these structures had been pressed in upon by a number of very high urban towers—ranging from fifty to as many as ninety stories. Even so, those massive piles rose up only on that side of Actaeon toward the center of the city rather than on the side away from the center. As a result, when the Collapse actually took place, the hurricanic winds of the great fire-storm, rushing into the vacuum that had been created at the city-center, caused the great towers to topple *away* from Actaeon rather than *toward* it, with the result that the college's site was far less deeply buried in rubble than were other parts of the city, even some of those immediately adjacent.

Further, there is the matter of the location of the papers inside Actaeon itself. Although most scholars believe that the author had retired from the institution a number of decades before the onset of the Early Ultimate in 2031 (it is unknown—though considered highly doubtful—whether Larsen was any longer alive by that point), his *office* remained apparently untouched between the time of his departure and the end. Whether this was due simply to neglect, or to the precipitate decrease by then in the number of unconverteds (resulting in a diminished need for the inferior office space given them), or whether it was a reflection of the institutional chaos and absence of leadership or control by that time—these questions can never be answered for certain. What *can* be known, however, is that Larsen used the office as a repository for copies of every piece—or so it is now thought—of the writing that makes up any part of what we refer to with familiarity as The Larsen Papers.

In addition, the *location* of Larsen's office proved of major importance in the preservation—albeit a preservation both partial and imperfect—of the materials. In an

interior and windowless room (in this, the smaller of Actaeon's buildings, most rooms were windowless) on the ground floor, the office was situated *directly below* the paired men's and women's latrines stacked above it in identical locations on the second, third, and fourth floors of the building.

At Actaeon, as elsewhere in the city and nation, fierce and uncontrolled vandalism preceded and accompanied the widespread arson in the weeks and months leading up to the true firestorms and final Collapse. At both of Actaeon's buildings, very strong evidence shows that this vandalism began *in the latrines before spreading elsewhere*, with the wanton sledging of ceramic fixtures and tiles and the breaking open of pipes of the kind used both for fresh water and for waste. Archival, historical, or archaeological research has discovered no other site where *latrines* were the first target of destruction. Whatever its cause, this anomaly in Actaeon's case was of very great consequence in the preservation of the Larsen papers. Over a period that must have extended over weeks and perhaps even longer—in the time, that is, leading up to the firestorms themselves—Larsen's office was saturated by a steady supply of water from above, both fresh and waste. This meant that when fire at last had its turn and swept through the college buildings, the papers, being sodden, stood a vastly improved chance of withstanding complete destruction.

Even so, given the extraordinary intensity of the fire-storms, some degree of burning inevitably occurred, depending mainly on the way the papers happened to have been stacked, clipped, bound together, tied, or piled up. Top and bottom sheets were the most susceptible to loss, with the result that the author's exact intent as to beginnings and endings is not always clear, those elements of the papers often missing altogether. Larsen, further, must have sometimes stacked the papers in random piles (for whatever reason), with the result that pages are sometimes absent in the very midst of a narrative or argument, creating lacunae of sizes we can only estimate, can do nothing to remedy, and can only regret.

In regard to damaged primary documents, editorial policy throughout has followed long-standing tradition in transferring them to the printed page in such a way as to duplicate as nearly as possible the exact physical appearance of the original. This policy explains, throughout, the presence of jagged beginnings or endings of text, sudden white spaces, and the absence of entire sections altogether. Finally, during the estimated eight decades that the papers remained in the office before their discovery, additional forms of deterioration naturally took place, beyond those caused merely by fire and water.

—Ed.

### Fragment III—“My Intellectual Life”

## Part One: The Early Start Good Fortune Gave Me in My Intellectual Life; Its Brief Duration; and Its Sudden End

Editor's Note:

Few segments of the Larsen Papers are more tantalizing than Fragment III, being, as it is, the most intensely—and ambitiously—biographical section of anything else among the discoveries, with the possible exception of the even *more* badly damaged Fragment V. X. I. Wei has shown<sup>14</sup> convincingly that the two fragments are part of a deliberately planned single piece, one intended in fact to have been a book-length epistemological study of the relationship between the private self and artistic perception, and, subsequently, of the relationship between self and symbol, aesthetic microcosm and aesthetic macrocosm (that is, artwork and world). Yanmei Ting has made much the same argument, though declaring further—or differently—that the major “hidden work” known to us only through these fragments was in fact not an exercise in criticism at all, but an enormous, most likely multi-volume, novel.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the more exclusively biographical critics of the Papers have made hypotheses about the *extreme* extent of damage to the pages in these particular fragments, it being generally agreed that we probably have as little as a twentieth, or five percent, of the whole. The most persistent in this branch of scholarship has been Lok-Ho Woo. Persuasively, Woo has made the case that, remaining to the end an “unconverted” inside an increasingly uncomprehending academic world (and general population), Larsen grew inevitably despondent. In a number of extremely readable and moving passages, Woo makes the probability seem quite real that Larsen, in a desperate act of disillusionment and

<sup>14</sup> “Parts of an Unseen Whole: the Aesthetic/Philosophic Biography Dormant in the Larsen Fragments” (*Literary Studies in the American Ante-Penultimate*, Spring 2130, pp. 63-92).

<sup>15</sup> See especially Chapter Seven, “Ghost of the Bildungsroman: the Haunting of the Larsen Papers,” in Ting’s *Darkness Visible: The Lost Novels of Eric Larsen* (Taipei, 2110). [Editor]

disgust, destroyed the novel himself, missing only the fragments left to us now.<sup>16</sup> Powerful controversy remains, of course, as to the premise that the author himself may have put his own work to the flame. If he did so, however, few other actions in that grim era preceding the Collapse could have deprived later generations of so much pleasure, of such value, so completely.

**Part One:**  
**The Early Start Good Fortune Gave Me in**  
**My Intellectual Life; Its Brief Duration;**  
**and**  
**Its Sudden End**

1

Then, all of a sudden, it simply happened: After good luck in birth, family, and upbringing; after strong academic preparation; after signs of genuine promise, my intellectual life (in the early 1980's, when I was entering my forties) collapsed as if over night into a pit of ashes. And there, more or less—no: there, unremittingly, precisely, and exactly, it has remained ever since.

Calamity. But I must point out that it was in no way an individual matter. It was in no way something that happened only to me.

It was the whole world that began to change. The world that I lived in, that I thought I knew so well—suddenly it changed completely.

Think of humans' lives being like the lives of fish in the sea, with the difference that the human ocean is made of air, not water. When the change came, it was as though the air had been depleted suddenly of oxygen. And so enormous kills took place. Dead "fish" by the millions were washed up onto the shores.

By the millions. By the very millions.

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<sup>16</sup> Woo, "These Fragments I Have Shored Against My Ruins" (*Studies in American Intellectual History*, December 2134, pp. 59-174.

Believe me.

•  
A poisonous catastrophe, worldwide, perhaps even universal. I still don't know the full scope of things, even now, at this late date.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever did take place, I know this: I was in the midst of it, I observed it, I still am observing it. And yet I have managed so far, in one way or another, to live through it. All this with the dubious result that here I am now, surviving however best I can in the barren, diminished, depleted world left to me.<sup>18</sup> I do this, mainly, by keeping out of sight as much as I possibly can and by doing my work quietly, insofar as that remains a possibility for me.<sup>19</sup>

And there's the rub, or one of the rubs. Never have I been able to "teach" quietly. Nor have I been willing to, nor have I ever seen why I *should*. All around me, when I stroll through the halls, I look into rooms, on both sides of the corridors, filled with people asleep. This, apparently, is the way "teaching" is now done, or the way the experts do it. As if within the haven of sleep, no harm can be done. For me, the very idea is anathema. Never—not since my first semester, my first day, my first *class* at Actaeon—have I been able to abide it, the dozers in the back, the sleepers along the sides, their heads fallen against the walls, open mouthed, as if they had been made aghast and then knocked cold by the marvels of the things I'd shown them. So it has always been and so it still is, with me. I am driven into a rage against waste, sullenness, loss, emptiness and folly by the *sight even of a single person* asleep in one of my own rooms. Imagine fifty of them.

Classrooms. Somnolaria, they should call them.

And so it has come about, the use of noise. It isn't my credo, but it's the simple necessity of keeping it interesting, keeping them awake, keeping it productive, keeping madness and grief and humiliation and despair at bay throughout every hour *no matter how much energy it may require of me or how great a toll it may take on me*.

A note of explanation may be in order.

•  
From the start, I knew I want<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Almost all dates of composition in the Larsen Papers are in dispute. Liechtenstein and Claire, however (*Times of Doom: Chronologies of Culture from the Early Penultimate to the Collapse* [Ho Chi Minh City, 2114]), make a convincing case that Fragments III, IV, and V were all three most likely written between the end of the Late Ante-Penultimate and the opening of the Early Penultimate, or, that is, sometime between 2005 and 2012 (see Appendix One for a complete chronology of the Collapse). [Editor]

<sup>18</sup> So intense an impression of malaise and emptiness makes it almost impossible not to imagine Larsen in his Actaeon office as he writes. For the atmosphere of that office, see Part I of the "*Diary*" and also "A Note on the Condition of the Papers" in the Editor's Foreword. And of course see also p. 2669 of this present piece, "Fragment III" ("My Intellectual Life"), and notes 16 and 17 there. [Editor]

<sup>19</sup> That the fact of Larsen's making *noise* while doing his job became a central charge at the time of his betrayal by President-Penguin Duck (and by Drs. Correct, Long, Nose, Everybody's, Me, Cleopatra, Know, Race, Class, Gender, Muscle, and Victim) is, to us, of course, astonishing, inexplicable, pathetic, and entirely absurd. [Editor]

<sup>20</sup> The extremely poor condition of the sheets in this section of "Fragment III" deals a heavy blow to readers and scholars, especially those desiring information about the Larsen biography. For a convincing but by necessity hypothetical "reconstruction" of the life, see Maximillian Shandra, *Dating the Larsen Papers: A Writer's Progress toward Calamity* (Bangkok, 2096). [Editor]

graduated from high school, in 1959, I was  
 from college, I was convinced my life would be ded  
 had been a sound one—in high school with teachers like St  
 with instructors like Scott Elledge, Reed Whittemore, Owen Jenkins  
 Harriet Sheridan, and others. As a result, I subscribed to the view that reading  
 could, must, and do strengthen one another. Consequently, I devoted the next  
 years, on and off, to graduate study instead of doing something else—joining  
 say (though they never would have taken me any  
 a fly-fisherman or forest ranger.

I got ready, in other w  
 begun publishing piec

*ern Fiction Studies*

*The South Dak*

was honest but no money in it, a  
 Needed support as I  
 getting ready for all along.

And that was how I came to New York City and Actaeon, age thirty  
 married, my dear wife pregnant for the first time, t

1971, eage

n the certainty (and belief) that here was a pl  
 could lead a literary life that was honest and  
 productive and intellectual integrity and was *genuine*.

Or so I thought. And so they let me g  
 for a certain brief time.

And then, the calamity. And, with it  
 ible realization that what I had undertaken for  
 one entire side of my life's work was not teaching at all, but it was "teaching." And that  
 (two children by this time) there was no going bac  
 emperor meanwhile more and more naked, t  
 Actaeon going more and more the  
 self-deluded in a nation itself  
 idly more and more insane  
 so that I, I, I unsuccessf  
 could have wished  
 again and again failing to learn  
 key thing how *not* to try, *not* make the effor  
 how *not* to increase my effort in inverse proportion to the  
 obvious and observable ignorance, lack of preparation *or of interest in a*

or result—in other words, could have become more adeptly self-deluding, learned how to  
 shut my eyes, how to *widen*.

But, even then, would anything, really, have turned out differently? Would I  
 feated, lost?

If I could only have found my way successfully int  
 —but then at least *what*?

ight have left me alone, the  
 r. Correct and Dr. Long, Dr. Nose  
 leopatra and the vile Dr. All, whom I  
 o on to mention the administrative cohort, all  
 Glad, Happyhand, Shark, Dank, and Rattle, and of  
 n-Duck himself.  
 have seemed a matter only of an alteration in behavior, a  
 emper, mood, pattern, practice. If it were other than  
 anage to come so naturally to all those who did  
 ollowness they were living in the very midst of?  
 g, neither at the beginning nor at the end, not in  
 ctice, or mood. Instead, it was a matter of  
 less than living a lie.<sup>21</sup> And this was do  
 he simplifying of what's there, until at  
 vens' "The Snow Man," one of the mo  
 and only at that time, as it is in the  
 istener, who, "nothing himself, b  
 hing that is not ther  
 the nothing that<sup>22</sup>  
 then it is po  
 only then  
 but not  
 who c  
 crim  
 les  
 ot  
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## 2

become, the one necessary thing above all  
 such as mine is that it be revelatory without being perceived as  
 truth without being understood by the others as expressing truth, to  
 silence, utter *only without sound*,<sup>23</sup> to put forth words that if heard at all

<sup>21</sup> See p. 2612, "Fragment II," and the epigraph used there from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The echo of it here is obvious. [Editor]

<sup>22</sup> The quotation, unfortunately truncated, remains unidentified, "The Snow Man" unknown. [Editor]

<sup>23</sup> See notes 3 and 4 in "Fragment VI" (part 4). Larsen's oxymoronic phrasing here anticipates the subject of the so-called "aesthetics of silence" that is to become so very meaningful at the end of the Papers. [Editor]

nly by their echoes,” since in this way alone, through a kind of ancient code that been all but lost, can one hope to elude them, the simplifiers, with their childish maniacally fierce puritanical wrath and narrowed minds, yet at the same time seek out and find those other remaining few left alive in a dying intellectual world who can still listen, still hear, still respond, still feel, still *read*.

*It must be*<sup>24</sup>

7<sup>25</sup>

Above all, I was trained to believe that in the artistic or intellectual life success invariably lay in solid and continued preparation, no matter the degree of natural talent that may or may not precede it. As a result, I set out to prove myself capable of great diligence by putting enormous effort into my own intellectual preparation and literary training. Or, to be exact, I did so once I was old enough to make conscious decisions of this sort.

Before that, everything in my intellectual—and aesthetic—life was of course the result of such nurturing as I received from my parents, family, background, and surroundings—in other words, the blessings of fate.

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The first time I *feared* failure, or remember fearing it, was in fourth grade. I know the season was spring, and the year must have been 1950 and my age eight. My teacher then was Miss Stryk, pronounced “Strike,” a beautiful young woman with abundant, raven-black hair who became our teacher again two years later.

I had been kept home for a fair length of time, in quarantine along with my two sisters because we had all had whooping cough. It felt less a deprivation than something like a vacation, really, since the spring weather was perfect, none of us felt the least bit sick, and we were free to run about the farm however we pleased. For part of each day, in the afternoons, our mother made an effort to keep us current with our lessons, sitting us down at the dining room table to do whatever work our teachers had given her for us up to that point. In my own case, however, something must have gotten lost or overlooked, because I suddenly found myself behind in arithmetic. The very day I went back, Ms. Stryk set us all to performing a set of long-division problems that I was without the faintest idea of how to do.

This was the first time I remember feeling panic in school, and I’m not certain why the panic should have come just then—unless it really *was* the first time I hadn’t understood something expected of me by a teacher. In any case, I was suddenly overwhelmed this time by a sharp, unalloyed fear, almost as if I were drowning. Our seating was alphabetical, so Richard Jensen was next to me (normally, Patty Klingbile would have been sitting between us, but she was absent that day). I fought back tears and in whispered desperation begged Richard to show me what to do.

<sup>24</sup> So ends a justly famous fragment about *the meaning of literature* that is itself very beautiful in its “found” rhythms, however despairing in tone. The passage is taken as expressing Larsen’s idea that the essential and even radical irony of literature is that only in the deepest and often non-literal senses can or does it function with any lasting effectiveness as a means of “communication”—an irony no longer perceivable to (and therefore rejected by) the “simplifiers” and other converted. [Editor]

<sup>25</sup> The last section number before this was “2.” We have simply no way of knowing how many pages have been lost between that section and this. [Editor]

I don't remember anything about the incident beyond that point (Richard always knew everything, so I imagine he showed me how to do the work—or got Ms. Stryk to show me), nor do I remember wondering just why I had become so badly frightened. It may have been simply the child's terror of being left behind, separated from the herd. But it was, I realize now, the first time I had ever realized that school was not just automatic, that school wasn't something that happened *to* you and would take care of itself without any particular effort from you. Care was involved, and you always had to be absolutely certain to hold up your own side of the project if there were to be any success. Twenty-two years after the fourth grade, when I started as an assistant professor at Actaeon, this understanding had long since been so ingrained a part of what I assumed education *was* that the Actaeon students sitting there and looking up at me with no anticipation or eagerness, but instead with puzzlement, boredom, or sullenness—well, they seemed like people from another galaxy, people who had never been exposed to even a *hint* of such an idea about education as my idea was, let alone to any true experience of it, people for whom the entire proposition had been turned precisely and absolutely upside down, for whom there was no conceivabl

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f course, at age nine or ten, I thought about it in a differe  
ut the effect, still, was the sa

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The truth is that for all my life I have been terrified of failing, or at least all my life after early childhood.

Which doesn't mean, however, that I've always done the most reasonable thing to avoid it, or that by failure I have always meant the same thing as others may mean by failure.<sup>26</sup>

Doubtless, i<sup>27</sup>

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## Four Things that Happened When I Was in the Sixth Grade

When I was in the sixth grade:

- 1) At the north door of the school, standing there waiting to come in after lunch recess, I fell on the ice and was briefly knocked out.

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<sup>26</sup> As an unconverted, Larsen of course saw Actaeon itself (and his being a part of it) as a failure, one reflecting a greater, macrocosmic failure, a failure of the cultural nation itself. To the converteds, however, this perception was completely different: they, too, saw failure, but for them, failure and its causes were *always in other people, not in themselves*. That perception—or myopia—helps explain the strange mixture in the converteds of a fiercely arrogant righteousness on the one hand and a blithe, shallow, almost solipsistic contentedness on the other. See Robert Pinckert's seminal work on the psychology of converteds from the Early Ante-Penultimate through the Late Penultimate (*From Empiricism to Narcissism: A Nation of Unthinking Intellectuals*, Beijing 2113). [Editor]

<sup>27</sup> Again, an entirely unknown number of pages are missing. [Editor]

Outside the door, a sheet of ice had spread out in an apron, and, through thawing and re-freezing repeatedly, had taken on an undulant surface consisting, as it were, of hummocks, some the size of walnuts, others baseballs, others still as large as grapefruits. When I slipped (my feet simply disappeared from under me), I fell sideways so that my right temple, with my body's weight behind it, slammed against an ice-lump of baseball size. Instantly, blackness was everywhere around me. Then stars began floating across that velvet blackness—all of them five-pointed and of different colors. When the stars disappeared and my eyes began to function again, I saw that the last two or three sixth-graders—I'd been in the middle of a whole crowd of them before—were pushing their way in through the entry and disappearing inside. It was as though for a certain period I hadn't existed. That bit of time—for me—had been snipped out of the universe.

2) Stephen Koch's father died. His father, a lawyer, had moved to Northfield from St. Paul in 1946 or 1947. He had an office on the west side of Division Street, on the street level. When he died, of heart disease, he was forty-four.

Later, in ninth grade, I became friends with Stephen and remained so for life. Before that, however, I knew him only distantly and had never spoken to him. He was in the "other" section of sixth grade and in a classroom across the hall.

But of course I knew about his father's death, and I have a memory of Stephen on what I believe was his first day back at school after the funeral. The memory consists of nothing more than my seeing Stephen come out of the building at the end of the day. But I thought to myself, "*He is the one whose father died.*"

He was at the top of the hill when I saw him. I was at the bottom.

The memory is vivid and permanent. Stephen then was thought of by almost everyone as having a superior air, something that, to me, made him interesting and somewhat mysterious. It was true that he had an air. It came from the way he walked, moved, and held himself, and from the fact also that he wore glasses. He had a reputation, already, for being intellectual and bookish. Almost always, he held his chin slightly raised up, adding to the impression that he was thinking of higher things, or that he felt burdened by the necessity of making his way through throngs of lesser beings.

Three years later, our friendship began, and he became the second most influential person in my life, intellectually, before or since.

I was nothing at all like him. I lived out of town, he lived in town. He came from a large city, I had never been close to one. He knew with his life, while the very question hadn't even occurred to visited by disease and death, I had been touched by n to have to live without a father.



The school was built into a hill that sloped down from south to north, so that this entrance was a full level lower than the east and west entran

him, at the close of the first school day after his father  
 the west entrance and walked to a car that was  
 myself was standing near the Second  
 up along the gradient as I  
 car came down the hill  
 I stood, turned and  
 past me.

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reality of symbols, including the directions up and down. Height  
 descent, a significance drawn from nature itself, unarguable, and there  
 putably universal, archetypal, of a kind equally true and real for anyone  
 linking, human existence, but not even these do they agree upon, but  
 arbitrary in the simplifiers' rejection, seeing no need for a rationale  
 in the case of the Green Knight, the example I spoke of earlier  
*only in attitude, not reason*, the attitude being that since they  
*were* accepted, they therefore *will be rejected*, but if  
 a simplifier asked what rationale underlies the  
 and the very empirical basis of the  
 rejected as erroneous, wrong,  
 or critics like Stanley Fish  
 vile and hegemonic  
 in to a beast  
 nger.

●

perhaps even more significant moment symbolically: the  
 time Tom Rankin and I were stepped over by his father.  
 like me, born in 1941—and by then, his father,  
 in what was his second marriage, was far, far from being a young man, o  
 ments typical of her more apothegmatic side, was fo  
 that Tom's unusual intelligence was from his father  
 “child of aged loins.”

What Mr. Rankin's age actually was, I don't know, but  
 past seventy, even older, by 1946. After other faculty positions  
 became professor of English at Carleton, and for some  
 chairman through the 1930s. After his retirement from  
 still went to his college office each morning in October  
 then at midday walked back home along  
 sidewalks shaded by the high elm  
 pleasant shade under branch  
 archways high overhead  
 autumn.

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At one such moment, Tom and I were playing on the walk in front of his house. I remember that the sun was out, the day was pleasant, dappled light and shadows were falling from the trees above us—and we, in the manner of five-year-olds, were blocking the sidewalk by lying on our sides, each leaning on an elbow in order to gain some degree of elevation while also leaving a hand free for whatever play we were involved in.

What that might have been, I don't remember—miniature cars or trucks, or forcing ants to go on detours into their holes, or simply pushing around blocks or sticks or some such thing.

But I remember the rest of it perfectly: that Mr. Rankin appeared; that, without altering his pace, without turning either left or right, without saying a word or making so much as a gesture or nod, he lifted his feet and stepped over us, his pace unbroken, and kept going, then turned in at the front walkway, went up the two concrete steps, continued to the front door—and went in.

Again—as with Stephen Koch, the hill, and the automobile—the symbolism extends in every direction, and in this case again the most pronounced directions are up and down. In the stream of generative power that rose upward from us (or from his son Tom, at least) where we lay on the sidewalk was the promise of futurity for Mr. Rankin: futurity for him, that is, the reward, pleasure, and promise provided by his own offspring. At the same time, downward to us *from* Mr. Rankin flowed all that he was and represented: the authority, security, strength, and stability that had been gathered by him and stored within him through his intellectual harvesting of the preceding century, all of which now, by the very fact of its having existed, was being offered to us, *from* him, while we in return and at the same time offered ourselves *to* him as the potential means by which those things could be carried forward another step into time, into the future.

I came later to think of this as the moment when the 19<sup>th</sup> Century stepped over me, and I have thought of it in exactly that way ever since.

Mr. Rankin—in his rumpled suit and tie, with the old-fashioned air he had about him, with his white hair sticking out and his scuffed leather briefcase—Mr. Rankin stepped over us as if doing so were the most natural thing in the world.

From below, he was enormous. He loomed above, dimmed the light of the sun for an instant—and then was gone, had passed over us, was on his way to lunch, and everything fell back to being nothing nor more less than what it had been before. Except that of course it wasn't the same and never would be, because Mr. Rankin had stepped over us and now he was gone, and I was never to forget that moment, ever.



And how ironic, therefore, the parallels between my own life and Mr. Rankin's. He there then, now gone. I here now, halfway through my fourth decade at Actaeon.

My life: three decades of it had existed *before* Actaeon, and now three and a half have existed *in* Actaeon.

The year Mr. Rankin stepped over me and Tom was 1946. The year now is 2004<sup>28</sup>. If Mr. Rankin was seventy-five years old in 1946, then I still have a decade to go before I reach the age he was when he came home for lunch and Tom and I were on the sidewalk, in his way, playing with trucks, or ants, or twigs.



Parallels. Mr. Rankin had *his* office, at Carleton, and I have *mine*, at Actaeon. Mr. Rankin's, doubtless, would have been in Williams Hall, that ancient, classic, modest, two-and-a-half story red brick hall that was constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, that for almost a hundred years looked out toward the southwest from its rounded knoll, and that was torn down in 1960, nothing but bare ground left behind.

That was during my second year at the college, when they tore it down. How I grieved for that dignified, worn, dusty, comfortable, perfect old building.

Its own symbolism: reaching out in every direction simultaneously, simultaneously having things returned to it from every direction; looking out in every direction, simultaneously being seen from every direction. Then the enormous complexity added even to that, because there was the added symbolism extending also through time itself in every degree of past and future.

But no one else understood, or saw, or cared, or seemed to think about it at all, so it was torn down and came to an end and ceased to be and was never to return or exist or be seen again, ever.

My own office at Actaeon, mine now for over three decades, and the place, as it happens, where I am writing these words<sup>29 30</sup>—an unusual thing, since mostly I work at home, in my apartment, at my desk, in the pleasant quietness there, and only seldom here, although that's not so just now—so that, with a certain timely appropriateness, I remark on the symbolism of *my* office. Which means doing the opposite of what would have been done in the case of Mr. Rankin's. In mine, I must identify the symbolism of the place by identifying its *absence* of symbolism: the absence, that is, of any symbolism reaching *outward*, an absence well symbolized by the lack of *windows* of any kind in my office, as also by the lack of *air*—of any kind, that is, that's fresh, or from outdoors, or moving, as opposed to the kind my office *is* indeed supplied with, at temperatures conveniently either too hot or too cold: air already used up, stale, dead.

No, the symbolism of my room, unlike those rooms that lived on for a century in Williams Hall, finds its strength and greatest expression not horizontally or obliquely, but vertically. For in height and depth, in the directions of up and down, the symbolism of it is strong and deep. Consider:

<sup>28</sup> See note 17. [Editor]

<sup>29</sup> At 11:57 p.m., Saturday, November 20, 2006. [Author's Note]

<sup>30</sup> Is Larsen's note to be taken at face value? Is his identification, only one page earlier, of the year as 2004 an error? See note 4, p. 2653. [Editor]

Below my office is the earth; above, three levels of latrines, stacked up like boxes of crackers.

Indeed, the extraordinary richness of symbolism of this kind is to be found everywhere, rooted as it is in the very life-forces of the vertical, the forces of downwardness and upwardness, of one, of the other, or of both simultaneously. The seed is pushed down, is it not, into the earth, and the sprout pushes up, does it not, into the light. Consider Mr. Rankin stepping over us on the sidewalk: his testicles hung down, yearning toward the earth, and we—the sprouts brought into being from plunged seed like his—we also then grew, aspired, rose upward.

Thus it has been also with my office at Actaeon, a coincidence of identically the same archetypes and symbols. In my office, there have been ambition and aspiration, growth of spirit and a surging toward light, all upward, in the form of my writing and thinking. Then, simultaneously, coterminously, indispensably, there has been the coming downward of the fertilizing element, giving strength and power to the seed and destined thus to aid the birth of further and additional new thought, inspiration, and composition.

Few other offices at Actaeon (if any) have enjoyed the fortune of such perfect placement as mine,<sup>31</sup> and the truth is that, as a result of that room's perfect location, my intellectual fertilization was so powerful over time that the effect grew evident not only in my own literary projects but in my pedagogic skills and ambitions as well. Not only was I able to manage increasingly complex materials, matters, and approaches in the classroom, but I was able also, albeit with ever-greater expenditures of energy and loss of fluids, *to become louder and louder in my pedagogic methods and therefore more and more effective as an instructor*. Success of this kind, however, as the reader knows, did not meet invariably with the approval of all of my colleagues—for the real reason, I have always believed, that they were, in truth, *jealous* of it, although such a truth, of course, would never dare speak its name. Either way, such questions remained moot for so long as I was able to keep my uses of quickness and loudness a secret known only to me—and, of course, to my students themselves.

But secrets are never easy to keep, and they're even harder, logically enough, when the issue has to do with *noise* or with *loudness*—or when the location of such noise happens to be the Actaeon College of Institutional Analysis and Social Control, UNY, where they might at any time be overheard by inquisitive and corridor-creeping colleagues the likes of Dr. Nose, Dr. Snoop, Dr. Correct, Dr. Cleopatra, and Dr. Muscle.

As clearly as if it were yesterday, I remember the day when this close-knit group of colleagues first overheard me—or the day they made a point—if you understand—of overhearing me. All five later claimed they were simply passing my room by chance on their return from lunch; though, in point of truth, I had previously, and more than once, had glimpses of them peering

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<sup>31</sup> I have now, I should mention, returned home, and I am writing *these* words in the comforting environs of my own apartment, my own room, at my own desk. [Author's Note]

through the windows of my classroom doors, this at hours of the day nowhere even *near* lunchtime. Be that as it may, on the occasion in question, the Drs. Nose, Snoop, Correct, Cleopatra, and Muscle not only *heard* (and presumably saw) me being loud but reported *what* they had heard to Actaeon's director of security, Mr. Badge Worn, and afterward to President Penguin-Duck himself, with results that became very meaningful to me indeed. The loudness incident, after all, helped feed and develop President Penguin-Duck's subsequent impression of me as unreliable and a ne'er-do-well, making it all the more probable that he would choose rather to betray than protect me after my failed attempt to expunge Sasha Breatly from my *Aeneid* class.<sup>32</sup>

Still, however calamitous the outcome may already have proven for me both personally and professionally,<sup>33</sup> it remains important, I feel, that the record show as clearly as possible that the loudness heard and reported by the Drs. Nose, Snoop, Correct, Cleopatra, and Muscle be *understood as having arisen for intellectual reasons and on an intellectual occasion that itself served perfectly legitimate pedagogical and educational ends*.

Therefore, let me put down here that the occasion was a discussion of James Joyce<sup>34</sup>—specifically of his short story “Eveline,” and, more specifically still, of these opening passages, which for accuracy and clarity, I quote:

She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains, and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne. She was tired.

Few people passed. The man out of the last house passed on his way home; she heard his footsteps clacking along the concrete pavement and afterwards crunching on the cinder path before the new red houses. One time there used to be a field there in which they used to play every evening with other people's children. Then a man from Belfast bought the field and built houses in it—not like their little brown houses, but bright brick houses with shining roofs. The children of the avenue used to play together in that field—the Devines, the Waters, the Dunns, little Keogh the cripple, she and her brothers and sisters. Ernest, however, never played: he was too grown up. Her father used often to hunt them in out of the field with his blackthorn stick; but usually little Keogh used to keep *nix* and call out when he saw her father coming. Still they seemed to have been rather happy then. Her father was not so bad then; and besides, her mother was alive. That was a long time ago; she and her brothers and sisters were all grown up; her mother was dead. Tizzie Dunn was dead, too, and the Waters had gone back to England.

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<sup>32</sup> For the extraordinary significance of Larsen's remark, see note 6, p. 2653. [Editor]

<sup>33</sup> The details of exactly what had become of Larsen by this time, or had happened to him, are unknown. Both Nissen and Lok-Ho Woo make clear the *extreme* unlikelihood that he was, by the time of composition of this section of the Papers still a member of the Actaeon faculty. (Frederik Nissen, “Negotiations with a Non-Future: Courageous Sanity in the Larsen Papers [*Annals of Lost Americana*, May 2130, pp. 34-51] and Lok-Ho Woo, “Madness Day by Day in the Papers and the “*Diary*” of Eric Larsen: The Destruction of an Artist and Thinker in the Late Ante Penultimate Period of the American Collapse” [*Studies in American Intellectual History*, August 2128, pp. 89-110]). [Editor]

<sup>34</sup> Understood by most scholars to have been an Irish writer highly influential through the Late Penultimate, after which most traces are lost. The only known extract of actual work by him consists of the passage quoted here by Larsen. [Editor]

Everything changes. Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home.

Home! She looked round the room, reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years, wondering where on earth all the dust came from. Perhaps she would never see again those familiar objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided. And yet during all those years she had never found out the name of the priest whose yellowing photograph hung on the wall above the broken harmonium beside the coloured print of the promises made to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque. He had been a school friend of her father. Whenever he showed the photograph to a visitor her father used to pass it with a casual word: 'He is in Melbourne now.'

It is a sad, even a pathetic story—as all know who have read it—of inability to grasp life, failure to achieve birth. It is a story of loss, fear, and a desperate sinking backward into lifelessness. It is a story, in short, very much like the story of Actaeon itself, of death overcoming life.

Throughout the tale—not unexpectedly, considering Joyce's monumental literary and intellectual gifts and achievements—ingenious uses are made of verbal echo, connotation, association, and symbol, all deployed (almost unnoticeably, beneath the commonplace veil of the story's everyday surface) to suggest and reinforce Joyce's theme, that of death taking over where life once was.

Here, then, the first round of questions I posed to my students so they could begin to see some part of the story's full complexity and beauty:<sup>35</sup>

- 01) What are the uses of windows?
- 02) How does *this* window fail in two of the essential uses of windows?
- 03) What is darkness?
- 04) What are the connotations of darkness?
- 05) What can darkness be symbolically?
- 04) What is air? What is air for?
- 05) What are the connotations of air?
- 06) What can air be symbolically?
- 07) What is dust? What is dust for?
- 08) What are connotations of dust?
- 09) What can dust be symbolically?
- 10) What has to be *absent* in order for there to be dust?
- 11) What is water? What is water for?
- 12) What are the connotations of water?
- 13) What can water be symbolically?
- 14) What are the connotations of the word "invade"?
- 15) What, in this case, might *be* "invading"?
- 16) What is the position of Eveline's head in the second sentence?
- 17) What could be significant about the position of Eveline's head there?

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<sup>35</sup> Readers uninterested in the questions may, of course, simply skip over them. [Author's note.]

In that way, then, went the first round of questions, the class, by and large, having a pleasant time, I, by and large, also having a pleasant time—pleasant enough that, as we continued with our work, the forbidden element of *loudness* began gradually manifesting itself, soon to reach the level at which it was to be noted with disapproval and alarm by the Drs. Nose, Snoop, Correct, Cleopatra, and Muscle.

Nevertheless, the sheer joyfulness of the moment, combined with my passion for that moment's pedagogical *and* intellectual usefulness in digging into the revelatory depths of the story, led me to put out of my mind any thought of danger that might be creeping near. So I pushed onward to questions about "Eveline," round two:<sup>36</sup>

- 01) What literal reason might explain why "Few people passed"?
- 02) What symbolic reason might explain why "Few people passed"?
- 03) What is a cinder?
- 04) What causes cinders?
- 05) What might be the connotations of cinders?
- 04) What might be the connotations of the color red?
- 05) What is a field?
- 06) What is a field made of?
- 07) What does a field do?
- 08) What goes into a field? What else? When?
- 09) What comes out of a field? When?
- 10) What are children? What goes into children? When?
- 11) What comes out of children? When? What else? When?
- 12) What do children need that grain or vegetables also need?
- 13) If "the Waters had gone back to England," what has been left behind?
- 14) Assuming the Devines to be gone also; what, then, through association of the sound of words, is missing? What else?
- 15) Remember the color brown. What word does "Dunn" sound like?
- 16) What does the word "dun" mean?
- 17) What happens to grain or vegetables after people eat them?
- 18) When grain or vegetables come out of people, what color are they? When else? In the form of what?
- 19) When grain or vegetables come out of people, where can what comes out be put? When else and where else? Why?
- 20) If put on fields, this substance is put there to create what?
- 21) If "Tizzie Dunn was dead, too," then, by sound- and color-association, what, is missing?
- 22) Eveline, and Ireland, are therefore dying because of lack of what, what, what, and what?

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<sup>36</sup> Readers uninterested in the "Eveline" questions, round two, may, of course, simply skip over them. [Author's note.]

In the classroom by this time, groans and laughter are coming from my students, and there are hand signals and rolling eyes. A desk is slapped by someone, much in the way a thigh might be slapped. There is a guffaw. The mood is festive, approaching the tumultuous. “Damn shit, pro, come off it,” Steve Streather calls out from the back row. As usual, he is all but lying down in his desk, legs flung out, body near the horizontal. “Where you come up with this kind of shit, man?”

I leap at the—what do Drs. Nose, Muscle, and Cleopatra call it?—ah, yes, I leap at the “teachable moment.”

The first, and absolutely critical, move: disarm the group and gain control again through an abrupt and seemingly complete change of subject. I find a tiny crack of quietness in the wall of sound and sneak my voice into it, like a knife into an oyster: “*Streatherian One*,” I shout out loudly: “*Why were all the hotel rooms already booked?*”

The room falls quiet. “The *fuck?*” says Streather.

“Why were all the hotel rooms already booked?” I repeat.

“The fuck hotel you *talkin’* ’bout?”

“Well, what if I call it an *inn*? Why weren’t there any *rooms*?” A hand shoots up. Another. Voices call out. Sound returns to the room like water flooding into a bottle. I’ve had my quiet instant. Now I’ll have to fight sound with sound, quickness with quickness.

“Eveline” questions, round three:<sup>37</sup>

- 01) Why was there no room at the inn?
- 02) But if that’s the way the story went, *why* did it go that way?
- 03) Was Bethlehem a town?
- 04) Did people live in it?
- 05) Did the people live in houses?
- 06) Is it likely that any of the people were kind?
- 07) Did any of them take Mary and Joseph in?
- 08) Why *doesn’t* the story have it that way, then?
- 09) Why not in a store, a market, or a tent in the bazaar?
- 10) Why *doesn’t* the story have it that way, then?
- 11) What is a stable?
- 12) What do the animals do there? What else? And what else?
- 13) What happens to the grasses and grains when they come out again?
- 14) What color are the grasses and grains when they come out again?<sup>38</sup>
- 15) Will the grasses and grains be put on fields again?
- 16) Why? To create what?
- 17) Christ descended from heaven and took bodily form to create what?
- 18) And he is associated with what? And what? And what?
- 19) Why?
- 20) For *what*?

<sup>37</sup> The uninterested reader, of course, may skip. [Author’s note.]

<sup>38</sup> “Horseshit! They’re *brown*, man!” Streather shouted out at exactly this point, unleashing huge bursts of noise, slapping, foot stomping, hilarity. [Author’s note.]

“For *life!*” the class shouted. I called out the repeat, rhythm for rhythm, three or four times—“*Life!*” “*Life!*”—and then, at the split-instant of quiet after one of their responses, I added,

“*Yes! Where there’s shit there’s life, for better or worse!*”

which was repeated once by them and followed by my adding the second line—

“*No shit, no life, for better or worse!*”

this again repeated by the class one time, after which we all joined together, shout-repeating the whole,

“*Yes! Where there’s shit there’s life, for better or worse!*”

“*No shit, no life, for better or worse!*”

“*Yes! Where there’s shit there’s life, for better or worse!*”

“*No shit, no life, for better or worse!*”

“*Yes! Where there’s shit there’s life, for better or worse!*”

“*No shit, no life, for better or worse!*”

Whereupon, in the wonderfully apothecic tumult of chant, shout, and desk-slap, at the very top of the class period’s climax and the moment of its greatest success and effectiveness, I saw, filling the square window in the classroom door, her eyes wide, the shocked round face of Dr. Correct. Also peering in were Dr. Nose and Dr. Snoop, one behind each shoulder of Dr. Correct. And behind them, craning to see, stood Car Cleopatra.

The minute I looked at them, however, they disappeared. I imagined the four of them, along with Dr. Muscle, disappearing hurriedly<sup>39</sup> around the corner on their way to the offices of Deans Glad, Happyhand, Dank, Shark, and Rattle.

My offense, indeed, was not *loudness* alone, but the misdeed of loudness accompanied also by the worse misdeed of *obscenity*, a twin bill of error comprising, my accusers were to say, an unacceptable breach of decorum, “decorum” being, it seemed to me, nothing if not the reddest of red herrings and falsest of false pieties,<sup>40</sup> albeit an effective enough tool for their own focused and particular purposes. In the letter of complaint that Nose, Snoop, Correct, Cleopatra, and Muscle prepared for Rattle—who forwarded it dutifully to Penguin-Duck—they wrote: “It is unconscionable that the students

<sup>39</sup> But with Dr. Muscle putting great effort into trying not to *look* hurried. At all times, Dr. Muscle held his elbows slightly out from his body, the way wrestlers do when circling one another before a grapple. This habit, combined with Muscle’s effort to appear unhurried when he was in fact *positively filled with haste*, gave him even more than his usual comic resemblance to a large primate. [Author’s note.]

<sup>40</sup> Decorum, indeed. At *Actaeon!* Decorum at *Actaeon!* [Author’s Note]

of Actaeon College, whom faculty members are here to *serve*, should be subjected to such vulgar, offensive, intemperate language as Dr. Larsen, shouting at the very top of his lungs, was making repeated use of in his classroom.”

More decorously, I should have shouted,

*“Yes! Where fecal material exists, life exists, for better or worse!”*

*“No fecal material, no life, for better or worse!”*

but that would only have puzzled Streather and the others. Would have been a damper. Nor did I think of it. Nor would I have wanted to.

The class was going much too well.

4) Also in sixth grade, I became, for a time, friends with Tom Prior, and, through him, became acquainted with Denny Gudim. Tom, with his parents, two sisters, and brother, lived on a farm west of ours a so. An old man who was a relative on Tom’s mother’s side of the f also. He slept in a little room off the kitchen, and I almost never except in late afternoon when he would finally come out a his way from the house to the barn for his chores.

I’m convinced that Tom had a bright far from a standout in school; I lost track life, but during the time I did was being limited by

In the case

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ll in high school, I began finding believable signs in myself that lectual gift, almost entirely as a result of the inspiration and exampl came through my close friendship with Stephen Koch. Then, when h ver and I found myself at Carleton, it was as if a fuse had been lit, ard the end of my first year I had reached a point where there wa anted to do with my life and mind. I leapt into this new project were wonderful ones for me. There *was* promise! There rea strength I had fed on its own certainty of itself, and its c read, and wrote, and the more deeply and widely I history of literature and the wondrous, powerf of those arts also that came along with it.

Wh<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Whether this fragment stands in its proper place in the whole is not known with certainty. Undoubtedly, however, it is one of the most tantalizing fragments in all the Papers—the author speaking candidly about his early intellectual growth. The fragmented passage underscores once again the enormity of what has been lost in the material destroyed during the Collapse. [Editor]

I knew perfectly well that such intellectual gifts as I did possess had come to me primarily through luck—the cosmic bio-roulette we play in being born to whatever parents we *are* born to. On top of that, stretching the odds still farther, there is the unpredictability of history itself—an unpredictability, after all, pre-planted also inside your parents, whoever they may be, long before you yourself are planted inside *them*.

I was lucky on both counts, certainly on the history one. On the paternal side, my family had been filled with thinkers and writers, the line reaching back into the middle of the nineteenth century and beyond, constituting for me (or so I thought from fairly early on) a background that surely must offer a significant kind of strength, a force that would give me a natural head start, a push from behind, in anything having to do with education or the intellectual life. Maybe this “force,” if it existed, was only in myself, or perhaps it existed only through the power of *suggestion* that came to me from among the dead, the past. But soon enough I found that I’d begun taking it for granted, like knowing how to walk or how to put your clothes on in the morning: that becoming educated and using your mind to the best of your ability and in the best way possible was simply what one *did*, in whatever way, field, direction, art, or o

When I started at Carleton College, in 1959, though, many of my classmates, were the first in their families the first stepping off into the deep waters. Later, wh Iowa City, the same was true, and few of my cla cated, whereas I was the fourth generation of a great-uncle, in fact, Henning, in a framed wall where I wrote my doctoral compreh over my shoulder to be sure I was doi

Almost never, however, did I  
 fidence about them. I learned quick  
 ill feeling of some sort, or suspic  
 resentment or even a perman  
 only more would be lost  
 loneliness was inesca  
 pitiful omission, t  
 history was abs  
 the enemy of  
 only choice  
 silence, n  
 cultur  
 die  
 u<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> And so what must have been a lengthy discussion of social class and the author’s own family and social-intellectual background survives only in severely fragmented form. Bedford Morris Lin (*History Repudiated: Ossification of the American Intelligentsia in the Ante-Penultimate and Penultimate*, Beijing, 2113) sees a central theme of the Larsen Papers as being the author’s grievous lament at the death of history as an organic element in aesthetics and aesthetic thought. Also see Lin’s brilliant exegesis of Larsen’s “Fragment V” (“The Significance of Things Unseen”): “Past, Present, and Future as Nothingness, Being, and Nothingness: The Passionate Intensity of Larsen’s Aesthetic System” (*Studies in Late American Intellectual History*, August 2109, pp. 752-775). [Editor]

So it was already true in the early 1960's, and it became increasingly so as the 1970's ground on into the 1980's, and as the Calamity gathered, grew, and at last conquered.<sup>43</sup>

When that happened, when the oxygen was sucked out of the politics and vision also changed in such a way that with the help than "a few quick and harmless words" bad became good, go small case, I was no longer someone born into an educat was a person under the onus of having been "privilege of this kind put into place, there was nothing to reclaim a meaningful degree of intellec autonomy or a meaningful degre that would allow individ *thinking*, but ins ful degree of re own domest of party, n princip nor eve back tru s

## 6

fter all, without any history there can be no present; past, no present; without any present, no future. The same is true of human ticularly if defined as organic units of history existing inside of time. One's *is* one, and each passing instant determines more fully what one *will* and to reason thereby, does it not, that the more fully achieved th fully achieved the latter: the more fully achieved the past present; the more fully achieved the present, th<sup>44</sup> malice, and spite have their roles fraternal triplets of idiot bir

<sup>43</sup> Here and elsewhere, Shandra (*Dating the Larsen Papers: A Writer's Progress toward Calamity* [Bangkok, 2096]) finds extremely strong evidence that *some sections* of "Fragment III" were composed at a *very, very late* date. [Editor]

<sup>44</sup> See note 30, p. 2683. Lin examines this poor broken passage with extreme care in his discussion of Larsen's views of time, history, and aesthetics. "Larsen," he writes, "mourns the loss of the historical sense with the same passion that a parent might experience the death of a child. The comparison is not made lightly. In both forms of grief, a great part of the agony and pain comes from knowing that the *future* is what has died." [Editor]

## II

## 1

The first time I remember seeing with true clarity and depth into the authentic nature of art was on a summer afternoon in 1946, when I hadn't yet reached the age of five.<sup>45</sup>

The results of that experience have been inspiring, profound, and lifelong. They have also, however, had the unforeseen and deleterious effect of making my life now—in this, the age of The Calamity—only more empty, regrettable, and bitter than it might otherwise have been. The reason is that now, in so vacuous an age as the one now given us, an age only of the linear, the shrill, the righteous, and the simple, I am driven almost to wish that I had never known what I do know. If my own ignorance were as pure as the ignorance of those who fill not only the halls of Actaeon but the entire nation around me, my life, I believe, would be far, far less painful than I find it now. As things are, I am the man who walked in sunlight for a day before being closed for eternity in darkness.

## 2

What caused my epiphany was this: I watched my father take a photograph.



Our car was parked along a gravel road somewhere outside of Northfield, Minnesota. I leaned against it and looked out at my father, who stood a fair distance away and slightly below me in a field of tall grass that came above his knees. A tripod stood in front of him; on it was his bellows camera. With a black cloth over his head and shoulders, he leaned forward to look through the view-finder.

The photograph was to include a line of trees in the mid-distance, the trees offering a certain contrast by merit of the field of tall grass reaching off toward them. Subjects such as this appealed to my father, who took a great number of them over the years, in varying seasons, lights, and weather.

Our car was a gray two-door coupé, a 1939 Ford. It was a two-seater, although squeezed into the back were two tiny jump seats. My father had placed a wooden plank across them to fill the space between, so that I could sit there too, between my two sisters.



What I learned on the afternoon in 1946 is this: an artwork extends outward from itself in every direction at once, and it extends also through time, with equal force and in both directions simultaneously. For more than six decades now, I have held it as a central tenet of my intellectual and artistic life that these twin characteristics are fundamental and essential, since without them no created thing can achieve its transformation into art.




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<sup>45</sup> Larsen's claim to this degree of precocity has, indeed, been debated fiercely among commentators and scholars. One of the most helpful voices is that of Frederik Nissen, who in an article on a different subject made the justly famous observation about this one that has already been the start of an entirely new direction in Larsen studies. That observation is found in Nissen's "Negotiations with a Non-Future: Courageous Sanity in the Larsen Papers (*Annals of Lost Americana*, May 2130, pp. 34-51). [Editor]

Am I alone in understanding so simple but essential an idea? In the aftermath of The Calamity, there are all around me not the perceptive but only the zealous. And by merit of their zeal, they hold a view directly the opposite of mine: they maintain that the highest (and perhaps the only) measure of a work of art is the success of its existence as a simple straight line.

## 3

I am certain that my new understanding, that day in 1946 when I leaned against the car watching my father, came largely from the energy and achievements of my forebears. The existence of my grandparents and great-grandparents, of my great-aunts and great-uncles, many of them educated, even highly learned, undoubtedly helped make possible my own readiness and thereby my early and sudden recognition of those essential aspects of a work of art that serve to make it a work of art as opposed to something else.

On that long-ago summer afternoon (*silent; it was so wonderfully silent under the massiveness of the summer sky, in the heat of the day*), this is what came suddenly to my understanding and never afterward left it:

For a work to be a work of art, it is essential

1. that it be *deep*;
2. that it be *broad*;
3. that it be *inclusive* (of every atom of life available to it); and
4. that, by merit of these and other yet-unidentified qualities, it be inevitably and perpetually captured *within* and simultaneously dedicated *to* an ongoing struggle both *with and against* the imponderable force of time.

## 4

As clearly as if it were just yesterday, I remember the feeling of the day and of the moment. I remember the heat, the stillness of the air, the dry, olive-dusty green of the crop-grass that rose above my father's knees, and I remember the darker, shadowy, moist-looking green of the trees in the direction his camera was looking, even the hint of gray-blue from the haze in the air when you looked across to where the trees waited, voluminous, dense, shapely, and silent.

One of the quintessentially important facts regarding the moment was:

that I was seeing these trees in the atmosphere and light of a summer afternoon exactly as my great-grandfather Laur. Larsen might have seen them in 1853, or 1862, or 1874. That I was seeing them, further, exactly as my great-uncles Nikolai or Jakob or Henning might have seen them in, say, 1889 or 1895 or 1904; or that I was seeing them as my great-aunts Karen and Ingeborg might have seen them in 1912, or 1928, or 1934, or even in 1941.

In turn, the immense importance of this fact has come to have not one but two quintessentially significant elements. One of these is positive and uplifting. The other is depleted of meaning and therefore despairing.

The positive:

1. From seeing the trees; from seeing my father photographing them; and from seeing them exactly as my forebears had seen them, I concluded that a work of art must necessarily extend not only forward but also backward through time.

And the negative:

2. My being lucky enough to have seen the trees in this durable, timeless, and fecund way caused me to be unprepared for life in the world surrounding me as I write these words now, six decades later, almost seven, when, in the unreverberant and vacuum-like emptiness of The Calamity's aftermath, this is the situation:
  - There are none left capable of seeing the trees in the way I saw them then, with this compound and inexpressibly lamentable result:
    - that it is no longer *possible* to see the trees in the way that I saw them then; and,
    - that it is no longer *permissible* to see the trees in the way that I saw them then.

5

(My father was six-feet-two, and in the manner of people with long limbs he moved in what seemed an unhurried way, never quickly or suddenly. When he took the photograph he was, as always, wearing long trousers. I never saw him, no matter now hot or oppressive the weather, in shorts of any kind. The same was true of his shirts, that they invariably had long sleeves. In hot weather, he would—like now, in the field of long grass—roll them up just above his elbows.

The shirt and trousers were made of khaki, which my father had grown fond of wearing during World War II, in the Navy.

As always when going into the countryside for photographs, he wore ankle-high boots of scuffed brown leather. These were the kind he would wear almost all the time after our move to the farm in 1947. His belt was navy style also, of canvas webbing with a metal buckle that allowed adjustment to any girth. On the front of the flat buckle my father had soldered a silver badge showing a ship's anchor over a background of coiled rope.

My father never wore a hat but preferred, like now, to let the sun beat down freely over his shoulders and head.

After the Navy, my father kept the habit of wearing aviator-style sunglasses like those he had worn in the South Pacific, with rims and temples of thin polished metal. Now, before disappearing again under the black cloth and leaning forward to peer through the view-finder, he took the glasses off and slipped them into the right front pocket of his shirt. In the left pocket, as always, in their slip-case of hard plastic, would be his Pall Malls.

•

(From the road, leaning against the car, I watched my father disappear under the black cloth. He reappeared and looked at the trees—without his sun glasses—then disappeared again for a much, much longer time.

•

I wondered what it was like under the cloth, what was happening there, what my father was seeing. I waited.

•

When he finally came out from under the hood for the last time, he stretched his arms back as if with relief. He tossed the black cloth over his right shoulder, put his sunglasses back on, tapped a Pall Mall out from the case in his left front pocket, lit it with the Zippo lighter he carried in his left pants pocket, and took in a deep breath of smoke. He made none of these movements quickly, but with his typical measured pace; if anything, he moved even more unhurriedly in the moments, like this one, following the completion of something significant or difficult. Holding the cigarette between his lips, he telescoped the camera bellows and locked them closed. Then he lifted the camera straight up from the ground so that the splayed legs of the tripod fell back together with a loose wooden clack that I could hear from the road. With the camera still attached to the tripod, he carried it the way he would a rifle or shotgun, up-angled and resting against his left shoulder.

He came out of the field slowly, the high grass making it look as if he were wading in deep water. As he approached, he looked off in one direction or another, sometimes pausing to gaze back at the trees, or to look in the opposite direction at something on the other side of the field, or, frequently, up into the sky at one compass point and then another. The appearance this gave was that he didn't quite want to come up out of the field, or that he was searching for other things to take photographs of and other points of view to take them from. In actuality, as I came to know later, he was looking at all of the surrounding things that would be a part of the photograph he had just taken even though they would not appear in it. That they would not be seen, as I also came to know later, served only to make them all the more immeasurably important.

## 6

(It's possible that I was wrong. The memory could have come about in a cumulative way, from recollections of several outings over a number of years. To a degree, I suppose, this must be true. On the other hand, the vividness of it makes me believe that at the very least its central outlines come from that single day. The field, the trees, behind them the river. The tripod, my father, the black cloth, the sun, the stillness, the haze. Me seeing as if through my father's eyes, in turn through the eyes of my forebears a hundred years earlier, who had been there also and had also seen what I saw. All of this coming together with the result that on that afternoon I began to understand the nature of space, time, multiplicity, and unity in a work of art.

How could it not have been so? <sup>46</sup> How could I not have begun to understand, with advantages like mine, advantages such as the advantages I had?

## 7

(Everything belonged to the photograph and therefore everything was in it: the day, the light, the colors, the quietness, the scent, the air. My father opened the trunk of the car. Inside were his camera cases. One was larger than the other, but otherwise they were alike, each with a hinged lid and corners reinforced with metal caps. Each had an upper and lower compartment inside, cunningly partitioned into felt-lined shapes, boxes, and trays to hold cameras, film plates, canisters, light meters, even the wooden tripod with its elegant slender legs telescoped shut. The cases had fitted lids and stout metal hasps to keep them tightly closed. This was a good thing because of the road-dust that

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<sup>46</sup> See note 32, p. 2685. [Editor]

seemed to be everywhere in the car and around it, even inside the trunk, where thick accumulations gathered in the back corners and under the floor mats, even behind the curving section of pipe that went from the filler-cap down into the gas tank.

(This, *this* is what I began learning that afternoon: That everything belonged to the artwork, not only the things put into it or contained inside it but the things that were *left out of it*, since once the artwork contained what it *did* contain, everything that was not contained nevertheless remained a part of what *was* in it by the simple necessity of all things in the universe being interconnected; and in the artwork there would be not only the infinitesimal instant of the present but all of the long durability of the past, and not only all of the long durability of the past, but also all of the future with whatever it might bring, not bring, or fail to bring. And all of these, the past, the present, and the future, in however subtle a way, would themselves also be influenced in turn *by the artwork*, since the future cannot help but be determined by the past, and once the future comes into existence, the artwork *will have become a part of the past and can never unbecome a part of that past; and since it exists also in the present it must furthermore be a part of the future, no matter what does or doesn't happen in the universe, no matter whatever does, does not, or fails to take place, and this explains why the artwork exists in all time.*

(The oven-like heat inside the car from the sun beating down on its roof. And the dust: the dust that flew up if you slapped the upholstery; the gritty feel of the dashboard or the rear window-ledge or even the arm rests. The little triangular front vents, which my father swiveled open all the way so they scooped air into the car after he put it in gear and released the clutch and we began moving forward.

His way of driving along the back roads so slowly that I could hear the sound of the tires on my side of the car rolling over the gravel, shifting it slightly. His looking one way out his open window, into the middle distance, then out through mine in the other direction.. I was so short that he could see over me, though much of the time I kneeled on the seat, changing position so I could see out the front, side, or back. Without stopping or even looking at what he was doing, my father took another cigarette from his shirt pocket and lit it when the dashboard lighter snapped out, its coils red. Still gazing out at a passing field, or a hill, or a herd of cattle, or a distant copse of trees, he pushed the lighter back in by feel, and in a moment, from the lighting of his cigarette, the most wonderful scent expanded into the interior of the car, for there was no place in the world where the smell of tobacco was more wonderful, fresh, piquant, and desirable than in the car when a cigarette was first lit, the scent mixing with the air as it came in through the windows, whether we were going fast or slow, or barely even moving, like now, when my father continued looking out over the sun-filled summer landscape that reached outward everywhere around us.

8

(And now more than sixty years later, every bit of it has been swept away and is lost and gone and will never back again and will never happen again.

9

In other words: The Calamity gathered. The Calamity arose. The Calamity metastasized. The Calamity went on existing.

•

As an intellectual, cultural, social disease, the genius of it could not be more perfect. The Calamity brings an end to cycles of growth. And so, as a result, the only thing perdurable is the Calamity itself. And every one of us is locked in, locked up, locked down in our idiot world.

•

Not true? But listen to them, to what they say, look at what they do, Drs. Correct and Me, Drs. Nose and Snoop, Car Cleopatra, Drs. Long and Muscle, Deans Glad, Happyhand, Shark, Dank, and Rattle, and—

•

The Calamity rose, towered, overwhelmed the richness, variety, and wealth that previously had been everywhere. In the scentless air and unfecund soil of its aftermath there came into being The Age of Simplicity. And The Age of Simplicity—since it *is* the Age of Simplicity—is unable to hear, think, conceive, or generate anything beyond or greater than itself.

And therefore it is perfect, a self-maintained perpetual machine, a robot able to create only replicas of itself and nothing else, each generation infinitesimally more simple than the last.

From The Age of Simplicity will therefore emerge (there are visible hints already) The Age of Tyranny.

As a consequence, inevitably, we are doomed.<sup>47</sup>

## 10

(Already, people think, feel, speak, do only certain specifiable things.  
 Already, things, thoughts, and concepts have been simplified.  
 Already, people think, feel, speak, create only single things at a time.  
 Already, the concept that something can be more than one thing at a time is taken to be absurd.

Already, the concept that something can be more than one thing at a time and *thereby the greater rather than lesser* is taken to be absurd.

Already, perception of irony and ironies has been lost.

Already, the concept that a thing can be more than one thing at a time *and that the things that this thing consists of may themselves be contradictory* is taken to be even more absurd.

Already, the concept that what is left out of a thing may be equally important to what is put in, *or even more important than what is put in*, is taken to be inexpressibly absurd.

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<sup>47</sup> The reader's attempt to follow precisely the line of Larsen's thinking and feeling throughout this long and extraordinary section is perhaps more demanding a task than at any other point in all of the Papers. The elegance, however, the passion, certainty, and power with which the author leaps from one peak of desperation, insight, and sorrow to the next, like skipping from one Alp to the next—such thought-writing as this can only inspire awe, and immediately afterward a newly intensified sense of historical sorrow and regret, in any reader swept up by such energies, such perceptions, and such despair. [Editor]

All of which is to say that my own life has come to be measured (and come to be measurable) not by its own characteristics, achievements, and abilities but by the characteristics, achievements, and abilities only of others. And those who thrive and grow healthy and  
 Age of Simplicity, unlike  
 who withers and sicke  
 finally dies  
 inside  
 i<sup>48</sup>

## *Appendix to Fragment III*

Editor's Note:

The close scrutiny made possible by methods of modern scholarship—not only the conventional weighing of internal literary evidence but also forensic chemical and molecular analyses that can accurately determine similarities in paper and ink and thus date time of composition—has by now led scholars to the generally accepted view that the following pieces all belong to “Fragment III.” Large sections of the Larsen papers, obviously, were found intact. At the same time it must not be forgotten how lamentably ruined, how chaotic, how decayed almost to the point of irretrievability was the condition of the author's Actaeon office at the time of its discovery. Wind, flood, fire, and collapse having played their parts, the small room contained shreds and leavings of paper and other types of material in every imaginable state of confusion, decomposition, and disarray. What follow are those salvaged bits and remnants that have been identified with certainty as belonging to Fragment III but that no one has yet been able to reassemble in their proper places within the whole.

i

Or, I should say, perhaps I will, perhaps I will, perhaps I will.

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<sup>48</sup> The pathos of this last truncation, coming in the midst of Larsen's description of the death-in-life that the Age of Simplicity imposes on him and others like him, needs hardly be pointed out. [Editor]

ii

example. In a number of cases these<sup>49</sup> if only among my colleagues, for whom, after all, I've known for almost four decades, more than a sufficiency of time for change to occur—in dear old Professor Razor, for example, or in the once-tolerable Professor Sanctimonious, or even, god knows, in President Peng

iii

e even greater changes, in the *sort* of people hired. Before the Calamity, and even during it, when only very few yet understood what was happening, the fruits of hiring were not in point of fact so bad. Mistakes were made, of course, sometimes bad ones, which is how we ended up with Deans Glad, Happyhand, Shark, Dank, and Rattle, along with Vice Presidents Hammerhand, Happyhand, and Hammerhead, fish of a feather, one might say, though only one of these latter is with us still, grace be to

iv

rgues them to be gifted or dim, however, Happyhand, Gladhand, and Shark were nevertheless still *themselves*, whatever models of mediocrity they may otherwise have been. Though even the blessings of blandness came to a gradual end as Calamity matured slowly into the thinner and meaner degradations of Simplicity. After which changes came in avalanche form and we began no longer getting *people* at all, one might say, good, bad, or indifferent, smart or dumb, but were taken over instead by walking, talking *ideas*, each (an immeasurably important fact) *separate* from the next yet simultaneously *inconsequential enough so as never to intrude upon another*.

These, then, were the beginnings of the Age of Simplicity, when in new hirings came the likes of Dr. Race, Dr. Class, and Dr. Gender, along with Dr. Black, Dr. Gay, and Dr. Gender. The list goes on—and *went* on. Dr. Asian and Dr. Blue Collar appeared in offices near my own, soon followed by Drs. Ethnicity, Hispanic, and Lesbian, all brought into my own department through the influence of Dr. Socialism, himself holder of seniority beyond almost all others. After a short hiatus, more arrived, even thinner (though *widening wildly to the eye*) than their predecessors, among them Dr. Correct, Dr. Post-Colonial, Dr. Theory, and Dr. Third World. With a charmingly alliterative touch, there came also, soon after, the Drs. Victim, Woman, and Worker.

One can imagine how aliena  
myself, how entirely unl  
shared b  
or  
n

v

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<sup>49</sup> Meaning “these changes”? [Editor]

was it, after all, that the new people would actually *think*? What would they do or show—for that matter, what would they *teach*—in their classrooms?

What *could* they think?

How w

vi

r example, content could there possibly have been other than that some people should be *women* and that some people should not; that some people should be gay and that some people should not; that some people should be Hispanic and that some people should not; that some people should be Black and that some people should not; that some people should be lesbian and that some people should not; that some people should be Asian, and that some people should not; that some people should be male, and that some peo

vii

ut whatever they thought, if nothing else, whatever they thought was *simple*

viii

thinking that was pitched even farther toward simplicity.

valent degree of simplification had been apparent

Colonial and Professor Third World. But

further, for they refined away not only

e very concept of “either-or.” No

Theory and Correct anything like

far to The Pure Simple that

allest vestiges of choice,

last, or distinction

from their work.

thinking. No

*or* another.

zeal of

and

k

Professor Theory’s simplifying achievements, however, were bypassed by those of Professor Correct, who pushed simplification still farther. While Theory hewed with mono-minded zeal to *his own single theory*, there always remained the disconcerting possibility for him that other theories *might still exist* in which the concept of “or” still functioned, not having been wholly purged so as to leave, as Theory wished, only the triumphalist thought-concept of *IS TRUE*.

With Professor Correct, even this residual element of complexity done away with, since the professor’s field of study itself, The Correct nature possessed no capability for expression in the comparative or The Correct was expressible in one form only: the absolute. Prof simplified his intellect so exquisitely that he was able to thi

of one single and unmodifiable concept, namely, the con  
all people be forced into correctness *no matter what*.

The sheer giftedness of this develop

ccxix<sup>50</sup>

came about that my good fortune in being given an  
early start in my artistic and intellectual life failed to be of any importance, do me any  
good, bring me happiness, or even allow me in the remainder of my days simply to go on  
describing (and, yes, emulating) the wondrous, durable, breath-taking complexity,  
multiplicity, and harmony of artworks throughout history and of every kind but especially  
those created out of language.

For it could not have been made any more clear that everything I had learned,  
beginning in 1946 when my father stood in the field with his head under a black cloth—it  
could not be more clear that all I learned beginning that day and that I had cherished ever  
afterward was anathema to the new colleagues who began flowing into Actaeon in the  
earliest years of The Calamity, continuing on through the terrible and crushing Age of  
Simplicity.<sup>51</sup>

from early in my life that what made an artwork  
significant and distinctive was that as nearly as possible it hold *everything* in it; and,  
further, that those things not in it  
nevertheless a part of it, an  
things not a part of it  
theless in it.

For it had seemed to me from early in my life that what made an artwork  
significant and distinctive was that as nearly as possible it hold *everything* in it; and,  
further, that those things not in it were nevertheless a part of it, and that those things not a  
part of it were nevertheless in it.

But instead of carefully and studiously putting things *in* until the artwork grew  
into an object of wondrous, life-inspiring complexity, my new colleagues, born of  
Calamity and raised in Simplicity, did the opposite: they took things *out* of the work, and  
once they had begun doing so, they continued with the mono-mindedness of true zeal,  
taking out more and more, simplifying and simplifying, until at last *every artwork had*  
*it only one single idea*. The process went further still  
few truly gifted among the Simplifiers—towe  
Theory and Professor Correct, wi  
process of simplification c  
beyond the reach of ord  
absolute simplific  
ation was reac  
result that *n*

<sup>50</sup> Between fragment ix and this closing fragment, there exist 210 others, all catalogued and available in the archives of the Larsen Papers in the Universities of Asia Central Library. Consisting, however, of words and phrases too incomplete to be meaningful for any but the highly specialized scholar, they have been omitted in the present edition. [Editor]

<sup>51</sup> Generally speaking, it is agreed that by “The Age of Simplicity,” Larsen means approximately the Middle through the Early Penultimate. [Editor]

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(With the consequence that the strongest among my colleagues, discovering themselves free of any ideas whatsoever other than the single, irreducible idea of their each *having* only one idea; so that that one idea, being invincible because unarguable, protected its holders from the effects of any empirically-based intellectual check or balance; so, again, that they grew quickly the more zealous with certitude, the more unseeing with righteousness, the more absolute with faith, and, far from least, the more unspeakably dangerous to those who few who might choose not to follow, but, unconverted, to remain instead manifold, observant, and historic in mind and heart.

(So that once more I have gone into hiding and have grown newly cunning in the arts of secrecy, keenly aware of the danger that lies in writing what I now am writing; knowing that whatever words I assemble in defense of myself, attempting to reveal as clearly as possible how this dread late chapter in my life could conceivably have come about; that these words, with these purposes, must be kept from the eyes and ears of the countless enemies among the theorists, simplifiers, and broadeners by whom I know myself to be surrounded in this, our new, undesired, unhappy, and dangerous age.))))))))))

## APPENDIX

### A Chronology of the Collapse of the American Nation from the Early Preliminary through the Late Ultimate and on to the End

Early Preliminary (1950-1964)  
Middle Preliminary (1964-1971)  
Late Preliminary (1971-1983)

Early Ante-Penultimate (1983-1996)  
Middle Ante-Penultimate (1996-2000)  
Late Ante-Penultimate (2000-2006)

Early Penultimate (2006-2012)  
Middle Penultimate (2013-2019)  
Late Penultimate (2020-2024)

Early Ultimate(2025-2031)  
Middle Ultimate(2032-2037)  
Late Ultimate(2037-2041)

The Collapse (2042?)