

‘Art Emotion’ versus Political Correctness

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Hi, I’m glad to be here, I’m grateful for having been invited, and I will be as brief as I can. But I have a story here, essentially of two books, they are both mine. The more recent is a book called *The Skull of Yorick*; the subtitle is long, it’s called “The Emptiness of American Thinking at a Time of Grave Peril,” and then the subtitle to the subtitle is, “Studies in the Cover-up of 9/11.” Preceding that by a number of years, a book that came out in 2006 was called *A Nation Gone Blind*, with the subtitle “America in an Age of Simplification and Deceit.” I want to just tell you a little about the first one and then a little bit about the second one, and then wrap it up as a story, and it’s a story about reading.

I’m the literary guy for this panel, and you might think of what I’m saying as a sort of footnote to much else of what’s been said, but it’s an important footnote, as footnotes often are.

I think, that part of the dilemma, the trouble with terror, the dead end, the calamity, the blindness of the nation—this may sound absurd—but I think some of it is due to the fact that Americans have forgotten how to read, or they’ve been taught how *not* to read.

When I was in grade school, middle school, junior high school, the teachers always said, “You learn a lot by reading; you can go to foreign lands, you can meet

foreign people, you can shake hands across the sea, you learn how to make a camp fire.” Yes, but, when I got bigger, I thought, I don’t think reading for information is the real reason for reading, especially not what you call literature.

When I talk now about literature, please assume me to be talking about the arts. Few people understand how to use the arts, and what they’re for (the Schiller Institute not included). I have this long paragraph that I won’t read (a beautiful one, though; you can never trust a writer, because they always want to read their own stuff out loud!). So, in any case, this is my page 125, from *A Nation Gone Blind*, and I met a guy, whom I’ve lost touch with, but, because he wrote me and we got in touch, because he was floored by page 125, I’ve always called him my “Page 125 Guy.”

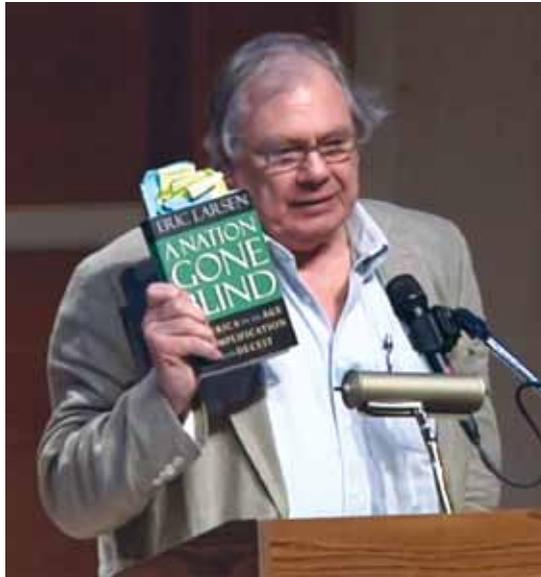
Art Emotion

And the point there is, in answer to this question, that one should read, not for information, but for experience, and

the question is, experience of what? And the answer is this: When you’re involved with a piece of art, if it’s going well, you are in what I call—and so did T.S. Eliot; I have to give him first credit—“art emotion.” And this is a unique and vitally important thing for the human race, whereby you are using both your mind and your emotions, and art is almost the only place where that can be *caused* by human manufacture. It’s almost the only thing that we have, that can be designed in order to produce the full use of the mind and of the heart, *at one and the same time*.

Now, when you read a book, if it’s a good one, and you’re reading it well, and it’s working and you get that “art emotion”—I call it sometimes feeling-thinking, or thought-feeling, or art emotion—what you realize is this: You realize that you’re *absolutely alone* in the universe.

Now there’s much more to be said about that, but you realize that every single one is alone, and that what you have in eyes, are a couple windows to look out



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through. You're in here, and the world's out there, and you see it only through those things. Maybe, the ears and the nose, too, but through the senses. And so, it's that sense of aloneness, that is the experience, the central experience, that one gets from reading.

Now, I will read a little tiny bit, here: "This simple, rudimentary thing, art experience, or art emotion"—it could be called felt understanding, or awareness feeling, as I said—"brings into one's awareness the existence of the meaning-responsive self." That is, you realize that you're alive! You realize that you're alive, too, if you have a good dinner, but it's not both mind and heart in a highly intense unification. It's more the belly says, "Oh boy, that's good!" But in other words, you are taught the vital, absolute importance, the essentialness of self, as an entryway to all other experience, or perhaps to all other experience, that can contain meaning.

I was raised that way. And in college, I learned all about that, and I began to review the great writers and I studied them, and I wanted to become one of them. I thought I was sort of getting there. I want to write novels, and I had done that—*The Decline and Fall of the American Nation* is a novel, oddly enough, not a nonfiction book.

And Then Came ... Political Correctness

But some time around 1991, maybe Sept. 17, I'm not sure, the world went dead around me, the literary world died. And I have an example of how it died, and it became evident that art emotion was of no interest to the American readership, inside or outside of academia any more.

And so, what replaced the art emotion, and the significance of the understanding of the self, and the relation of the self to the universe, and all of the other selves, what replaced it was four words: race, class, gender, and ethnic identity. Political correctness came. And it was here to stay, and I think I blame it for the cover-up of 9/11, largely.

So, I went to an old magazine I had published in, years earlier, the *North American Review*, the oldest literary quarterly in the U.S., founded by Thomas Jefferson. I am happy to have appeared in it, and I thought I would look at it and see whether it had been struck by the plague—and indeed, it had. What I read in the note from the editor, "*The North American Review* is the oldest literary in America, founded in 1815, and one of the most respected. We are interested in high-quality

poetry, fiction, and nonfiction on any subject, but we're especially interested in work that addresses contemporary North American concerns and issues, particularly with the environment, gender, race, class, and ethnicity"!

Well! I ask! Where is the rest of life? Where is everything else? This reminds me of Orwell, you know? "All animals are created equal, but some are more equal than others." So "on any subject, so long as..." Okay.

Now, I just have to touch on one metaphor, because I like it: "The age of simplification" that's what I'm calling it, "is real, and the confusion between thought and feeling is real, where thinking should come first, as in the classroom, feeling does, instead." And my advice to kids nowadays: Don't go to college. Find some smart person and read with them. So anyway, "feeling comes first in the classroom. And where feeling should come first, as in the *vital germ of life* in spiriting a piece of writing," I say in here, that what should begin a piece of writing isn't a concept, an issue, or a public concern like race or class, no! It should be *some small element of life* that the writer cannot *not* write about. It's not the issue first! It's the *impulse* of life first. It may lead to issues, sure! But it depends on whether the horse or the wagon goes first. And so, "the vital germ of life in spiriting a piece of writing is taken over by abstraction, which takes the lead instead, akin to a plough horse stepping on a rosebud." You know, plough horses' hooves are about like that, dinner plate size, and the ones I knew when I was a kid were, and the poor little thing would step on a rosebud, and that's it!

So, there is art. It's been lost. And how does this affect education? Well, it affects education in this way: I call a class of people in the universities now, whom I call the "New Professors"; people think I don't like them, just because they're young and I'm old. But I don't think that's the case. Many of them are really nice! But, they don't see things, they don't feel things; they talk about ethnicity and so on, and that's it.

So, the New Professors, at least in the literary part of the humanities—it's true in art, too; music may have escaped, because it's the purest of those arts—but, they're not so much educating their students as they're doing the equivalent of poking out their eyes! Making them passive and mechanical, instead of encouraging and strengthening them, or the capacity and talent they have, for whole and autonomous intelligence: intelli-

gence of the kind that's needed, if there is to be, accordingly, an intelligent nation.

Too Close to the Bone

There's more that comes up in *The Skull of Yorick*, but that's the theme. And when the book came out, people said, oh, you've got to set up a website, and publicize it. Well, I was the only one in the nation publicizing it! It was completely un-reviewed, and nobody liked it; the *New York Times* hated it, though they'd liked my previous two books, *real* well. But this one was too much, too close to the bone, told the truth too clearly. I think what happened in *The Skull of Yorick* is, I set up the website, but I didn't have anything to do, except vent my spleen about all of the blind people I saw in the arts and in the news, and in information and media: everybody from Amy Goodman to Thomas Friedman, Frank Rich.

So, I wrote essay after essay after essay. And a bunch of them are here, in *The Skull of Yorick*. And so, it's the same story, but it's with the *huge* application of studied, institutionalized—I don't know, how many of the major people that we read daily in the paper, and books, how many of them *know* they're lying! How many of them don't. It doesn't matter in the eyes of God, to me, but it certainly matters on the human realm.

But in any case, the beginning of *A Nation Gone Blind* is more true now than it was then. I talked about television a bit—I didn't want to, but I had to. Can't get away from it. And that subject, the subject of our media-drenched culture, is the subject of lying.

I start my America in 1947; I was born in 1941, and became a little bit aware in 1946, or '7, and have some memories from then. And I'm very grateful for having had that glimpse, before the mass media changed the country forever. But those 60 years that brought us the New America have also brought us a virtually perfected socio-political culture of lies and lying, a culture built on a foundation of lying, framed by walls of lying, covered by a roof of lying.

And now, the greatest lie of all continues with us, stripping us of our freedoms, of our Constitution, of our republic, of our rights. And the only way to fight back, the only way to *be able* to fight back, is first, use the "I": Realize that you're in it, all by yourself, and I'm in it all by myself, and the initiative has got to come from each tiny, tiny little flame, that will then influence all the other flames.

Anyway, that's the narrative reading. Thank you very much for your time.