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A 10-INCH POUND OF FLESH WHEN THE LEGEND BECOMES FACT THE CIVIL WAR OVER GENDER “THE SOCIETY TO CUT UP MEN”

Hollywood director John Ford said, “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” You know: like the history of the Stonewall riot. I’m not serving up any such media lie for the Legend Himself who, as a person and an author, delivered his truths about others to themselves in his books and advice columns. Realistically, Larry was a kind of Exhibit A of a homomasculine gay man traumatized twice: first by straight homophobes for not being a man, and second by politically-correct homosexists for being a man. He lived in anti-male times.

Just as he was entering publishing, he, and all of us back then, had to cope with the man-hating separatist Valerie Solanas who founded her “Society to Cut Up Men” and wrote her *SCUM Manifesto* published by Larry’s rip-off publisher Maurice Girodias in 1967. That was the year before Solanas shot and wounded Andy Warhol and my dear friend, the British art critic and leatherman Mario Amaya, in Warhol’s Factory on June 3, 1968. That was two days before a gunman mortally wounded presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy on June 5 in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, eight miles from Larry’s home where he sat writing *The Kiss of Leather*.

Making his own way, the trained psychologist worked on himself to re-shape his existential angst, and to correct his defensive gender anger, into political action and creative sadomasochism beloved by like-minded leathermen. He was one of them. They made him a best-selling author who helped them negotiate positive masculinity in a gay culture dominated by drag and

effeminacy that have equal right to exist and compete but not to exclude. Male representation is not male domination. It is not gender tyranny. Homomascularity, which is Walt Whitman's virile strength in *Leaves of Grass*, need not be erased by people who are afraid of men. Flagging existential rainbow reality, homomascularity is nonaggressive, respectful, open, and equal in social justice to every other declarative queer identity. Homomascularity aspires to represent the platonic ideal of the best that human males can be minus the toxic worst of racism, sexism, and ageism. As the coiner of the word *homomascularity* in 1978 with first use in *Drummer* 31, September 1979, may I clarify that archetypal *homomascularity* is never a synonym for stereotypical *hypermasculinity*. Toxic masculinity does indeed exist in some men and some women, but masculinity itself is natural and non-toxic.

In the separatist civil war over gender identity in the early 1970s, Larry Townsend was a political pamphleteer, who, like a gay Tom Paine, wrote many essays encouraging unity. The setting of one of Larry's first historical novels, *The Adventures of Captain Goose*, is the American Revolution. Long before the kill-joy cancel-queer Richard Goldstein wrote his anti-leather screed, "S&M: The Dark Side of Gay Liberation," in *The Village Voice*, July 7, 1975—just two weeks after publication of the first issue of *Drummer*—Larry was writing common-sense theories about gay liberation, gay character, and police brutality in dozens of political columns in dozens of gay pop-culture publications such as *The Advocate*, *Vector*, *Drummer*, *Honcho*, *Entertainment West*, *California Scene* (published alongside Christopher Isherwood), *H.E.L.P. Incorporated Newsletter*, *Data-boy*, and *Coronet* (writing about himself as "Ralph Clark.") *Ralph* was the name of his nephew who for twenty-four years (1992-2016) owned the restaurant "Bistro Ralph" north of the Golden Gate Bridge in Sonoma County on the main square in Healdsburg where we often dined with Larry not far from our home.

The Advocate in a burst of pure pop-culture camp so liked his novel, *The Scorpius Equation*, it created a new gay cartoon strip based on it in 1972 called *Alpha and the Scorpions*. As an action-driven novelist, Larry also wrote activist journalism to rally

leatherfolk to resist the intramural intra-minority, gay-versus-gay stressors, and sexism of the politically correct.

Literary arbiter, Winston Leyland, the former Catholic priest and founder of Gay Sunshine Press, who published three of my leather fiction books, wrote about Larry's novels in "Looking at Pornography" in proto-*Drummer* 1, 1971, saying judgmental gay liberationists

usually take a "beneath contempt" approach to gay porno novels. If mentioned at all, they are usually airily dismissed with the usual [Marxist] clichés of "sexist capitalist exploitation"...The chief function of porno novels... is fantasy...solitary sex, and orgasm. Now the ideal presented by gay liberation is a situation where gay brothers and sisters are able to communicate verbally and sexually without...considerations of age, beauty, and other limitations ...Religious conservatives down through the centuries have barred sex outside established norms. How ironic it would be if we gay liberationists fell into a similar "holier than thou" syndrome.

Why do uptight gay heretics resisting the gay god Priapus think that three-dimensional character development in erotica is about no more than the protagonist's hardening 10-inch pound of flesh? In truth, many sex authors of gay men's adventure stories go way beyond their hero's endowment to write literary erotica with proper character development, plot, dialogue, style, and wit. Larry never won a Lambda Literary Award for his best-selling work, because Lambda, founded in 1989 did not consider erotic writing as a specific literary category until 2001 when he was 71 and past his prime. Reviewer Richard Labonté, the founder of A Different Light Bookstores, and the editor who included Larry in his *Best Gay Bondage Erotica* anthology, suggested in his November 23, 2010 email: "I think the first erotica award was implemented 2001, but maybe 2002."

In 1993 for the Fifth Lambda Literary Awards, Larry was nominated for his novel *Masters' Counterpoints*. The nod for the trophy was listed politely as a "Gay Mystery" because the category

for racy “Men’s Erotic Fiction” did not yet exist. This publishing contract between strange bedfellows happened because Larry, always the smartest marketing person in the room, fluffed up two of his older S&M murder novels, both featuring his detective Bruce MacLeod, and submitted them to the newly founded Alyson Press which was soliciting established authors to build its list of titles, including two of mine. Alyson, signing up his famous name, jumped to publish his *Masters’ Counterpoints: A Bruce MacLeod Mystery* and his *One for the Master, One for the Fool: A Bruce MacLeod Mystery*.

Because Alyson was owned by that group that also owned *The Advocate*, Larry benefitted from the corporate synergy that boosted them, and promoted him, while he used them in his relentless lifelong marketing plan of selling his reprint rights for his old titles to new publishers designing new covers to reach new readers. The trap of his game plan caught him in the jots and tittles of legal contracts and copyrights with a variety of publishers from Alyson in Los Angeles to Modernismo and Masquerade Books in New York to Nazca Plains in Texas to Bruno Gmünder Verlag in Germany. Not all broke bad, but his tactics led to troubles that bedeviled his life, and to a scandal that hovered over his deathbed.