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by Robert W. Lowndes

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BUT WHAT, ASKED PILATE, IS TRUTH?

As with the Roman procurator: my interest in the abstraction, truth, is little more than academic. Our inflamed world is no more conditioned to "truth" in its pure state, than are human beings conditioned to imbibe unadulterated H₂O. Extendingly, the "truth" about anything in particular is in a similar state of dilution.

Let it be published in 95 pt. caps, bold ital. that the "truth" does not necessarily equal the sum of material evidence gathered, even assuming each separate item accurately to have been stated. Collect the facts about any particular condition, collate and summarize them -- and you are still likely to be somewhat distant from "truth" about this condition. Something will be missing -- enough of a something so that a projected course of action, based upon this summation may well be divorced from either wisdom or plain common sense.

Take that perennial subject of discourse and object of aspiring violence (war of obliteration on the part of enemies; rape on the part of ingenuous friends), the Soviet Union. John Michel's recent convulsion in Vantage Point leaves the USSR as an ideal exhibit for this essay. (Dinner cleared away, coffee consumed, the deep-bowl pipe lit and fuming, and the dancing girls disporting about, Frere Michel is wont to call for the "truth" about the USSR and its peoples. In fact, he's inaugurated a medal to be presented annually to that person distilling the maximum veracity on Stalinland.) So far's such removed-from-the-scene parties as Vanguardifs are concerned, the question is: how can the "truth" be recognized, if and when discovered?

Spake Zarathustra: tell me your truth and I will tell you mine.

Roughly, we can find three diverse mainstreams of individual "truth" here:

(1) The "Hearst truth". (Sung by all persons, reimbursed or not, who consider detestation of the Soviet Union to be their Mission In Life.) Simply expressed: Russia is the entity of Evil; Stalin is Antichrist. (Infinite are the variations upon this theme.)

(2) The "Stalinist truth". (Chanted by upper case C or lower case c communists, sympathizers, fellow-travellers, etc.) The USSR's the first Socialist state to be seen; granting various follies and venalities, the very fact that it is a Socialist state suffices to merit the sympathy of all Socialists. Further, at its worst, the Soviet State represents progress in social and economic environment and the well-being of a people as an entirety.

(3) The "Socialist Anti-Stalinist truth". (Keened by the members of the "Russia-was-all-right-until" Society -- and the list of "untils" is as long as the list of variations upon the Hearst theme.) The USSR is not a Socialist State, but a new type of Class Society -- based upon and run by a Collectivist Bureaucracy.

(Each of these categories, in their most literate exhibitions, set up norms of logic and historico-socio-economic verity, and present valid deductions from the "facts" within their own framework.

Since the Microbe Hunters have yet to isolate a Pure Motive, there is no point in going into that aspect of the situation.)

For me; while it gives emotional satisfaction to accept the Stalinist "truth", I cannot find any other reason for such adherence. The mere fact that many anti-Soviet writers are known liars does not make the Stalinist claims valid. Putting aside the issue of Socialism, then it can be readily seen that Russia today has come a long way from the Russia of the Czars; but this again does not substantiate the basic Stalinist pretensions.

Brother Michel, of course, will accept testimonials from members of Group 2, only; he said as much when he qualified the offer with "what I consider to be the truth". (And why should he do otherwise? Would one of Hearst's heterae commend a purveyor of the greatest amount of some other brand of "truth"?)

The Lowndes medallion, however, will not be cast until I can find out, via Time Machine, what the TRUTH about the USSR is. This done, the trophy will be presented to that person who, at the present time, delivers the most of the nearest to the Real McCoy.

EN PASSANT

While Mailing #2 seems to indicate a general rise in Vanguard's quality-level, much of the better-grade ore seems to have been washed out with the slag. There is no publication in this mailing which struck me, as a whole, to be up to the level of what I considered the three best in the First Mailing: Tumbrils, V-R Record Review, and Heeling Error.

Tumbrils is still far in the lead, containing such outstanding items as "The Folded and The Quiet" and the von Hoffmannstahl translation. (The poem has many individual points where carping may be done over the flow of words, or the word-selection itself, but counting the fly-specks upon cathedral windows is not the Critic's mission -- even though the practice is far from uncommon.) "Eblis in Bakelite" misses top praise only by the failure of the author to present documentation (however brief) for the initial premise of Clark Ashton Smith's having been damned by indiscriminate adulation. Lower in the scale of merit is "FAPA and the Pamphleteers",

which tries to straddle two distinct essay-forms -- that of the rambling and chatty discourse, and that of the serious theme-and-development presentation. (Without consideration of merit, this review would fall into the first category, while "But What, Asked Pilate, Is Truth?" belongs in the second division.)

Of scant interest to me were Michel's "sociological repetitions" (to quote Kubilius) and the Wollheim excerpt-grab-bag. Personal prejudice enters into my estimation of the first mentioned in that I've heard it all too many times. (But on the other hand, "Where Is My Wandering Test-Tube Tonight?" held my interest, despite a similar lack of material not seen or heard before.) In K'Taogm-m, my main objection (besides a lack of interest in the excerpts selected) was the practice of presenting such a high percentage of miscellaneous quotations in a magazine labelled: "Thoughts and Random Opinions of D. A. Wollheim". Anyone can fill up pages with quotes. The article on the FSNY "Prep School" could be

 listed as Exhibit A in any court wherein that society was on trial for general idiocy and lack of taste. (To which body of exhibits Lowndes admits to having contributed.)

Both of the above publications, however, were more agreeable than the pretentiously absurd folio on Baudelaire, wherein a few undeniable facts about the man, a repetition of traditional views upon his poetry, a couple of bleeding chunks of the poetry itself (in translation), and excuses for not having done more with the project are slapped together and called an appreciation. All this in a style strictly from High-School frosh. I am conscious of Watson's excellent work upon the fine picture of Baudelaire, which adorns the fly-leaf, but in a throw-away of this nature, the effort

was wasted, I fear.

Special mention to Fan-Tod's neatness; the artistic elegance of Cry in the Night, and the improvement of Temper over Zissman's earlier 2-1-1.

In reference to "Lowndes and Logic" (I have never read the book called "Women and Men"; neither has Zissman.) I am willing to be instructed by any criticism of my efforts which shows an awareness of what the item in question was about. Since "L&L" bases itself on twin misconceptions: (1) "Free and Unequal" was an attack upon women, and (2) Lowndes considers women to be inferior to men, and attempts to prove it in "F&U"; since Zissman does not so much as mention the article's point in passing, there's no point in my replying to her critique. I have said.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS ON POUND (by El-Hanyf)

There are times when issues become more important than the individuals about whom they revolve. It can be argued that Ezra Pound is hardly worth all the wordage about him that has filled recent Vanguard publications, that granting the merit of his poetry and prose, and his innocence on the "treason" charge, this very innocence convicts him, as a human being, of something worse than statutory "treason".

The issue involved is simply expressed: here is a man whose sole crime (so far as any published data from his accusers goes) has been disagreement. Pound opposed the entrance of the United States into the war; he believed that the economic base of the USA was unsound. He further contended that we would be unable to withstand the test of war against the Axis nations, solely for economic reasons.

He approved one aspect of Italian Fascism and German Nazism. (Whether or not that approval was based upon misconceptions as to the difference between what these governments proclaimed officially they were doing, and what they were doing in actuality, has yet to be resolved to my satisfaction.) There is not evidence to support a contention that Pound approved the drive of these economies toward war, or that he approved of their concomitant brutalities.

(In ruling against the deportation order on Harry Bridges, Justice Douglas said that the associations Harry Bridges had with various Communist groups seem to indicate no more than cooperative measures to attain objectives which were wholly legitimate. He argued further that one cooperating with an organization solely in its

 wholly lawful activities "cannot by that fact be said as a matter of law to be 'affiliated' with it."

I submit as a possible extension of this, that a person approving solely of a particular aspect of the economy of Fascist Italy and/or Nazi Germany (which he believed would be of progressive value in his own native land) cannot by that approval alone be identified as a Fascist. (Particularly when no proof exists that this factor alone, if put into effect, would involve the over-all criminalities of fascism as seen in these two nations.) I submit further that it is not treason to be opposed to war, or to have believed, however mistakenly, that America's entrance into the present war would lead directly to America's economic debacle. You may call such a opinion stupid, lacking in insight, devoid of moral position, or what you will -- except treason. It should be remembered, too, that a group of persons who openly sought to sabotage the war effort by destroying civilian and soldier morale, to plot violent overthrow of the US government in order to install not just one economic factor, but the entire bloody framework of the Italo-German regimes -- these persons were not charged with treason, but merely sedition.)

There is better reason to presume Pound did not approve of the Fascist drive toward war or the official barbarities toward so-called "inferior" peoples and toward culture and non-military progress. Whatever else may be said about him, no one can justly accuse Ezra Pound of cowardice; he stated what he believed and said it forthrightly, letting the chips fall where they may. (There has been no report of his having attempted, upon capture, to deny or alibi his broadcasts to America over the Italian radio, urging non-entrance of the USA into war, non-support of the war effort after that entrance had been made, and proclamations concerning the superiorities of the Italian economy.)

Had he approved of Italian and German Anti-Semitism, etc., he would have said so in no uncertain terms. The reasonable assumption is that Pound considered the most important thing for America was understanding that her economy needed drastic change, and that, in this single respect, we had much profitably to learn from the "enemy". That, further, Pound had sufficient faith in America not to consider that such a change would automatically involve an adoption of the entire framework of Italo-German fascism.

And in this lies at once Pound's honor and his obloquy.

THE NIMBLE AERONAUTS

By Henry E. Sostman

Control,
control in the pit,
in the adder's mouth the
child's tongue;
alien to our stratosphere.

The wish
fathered of instinct,
the foot that follows foot that
follows foot,
the terror at endings, terror at new things,
abhorrence of the instinct and the pit
and fang; controlled delinquency of the pit
the white flame of the white wax.

The act
nothing,
talk the act, fascination the act,

to spin bright eidolons of courage till
to weave brisk recreations till the day
when the slow beast with
certainty will creep
between
the acquiescent thighs of sleep.

LOWNDES FOR PRESIDENTE (By El-Hanyf)

Part Two

The interview was momentarily interrupted as a runner came up to the Candidate's litter. "Oh Lowndes, live forever," he saluted, "the editor of Gourmet urgently beseeches your article upon the Food Situation; deadline approaches."

The Great Man took an envelope out of his coat pocket. "I had wanted to make a few revisions, but no matter. Here it is; let him use the Blue Pencil without fear." The runner kissed the envelope reverently, then sprinted away, grasping it firmly.

"It is but another of my plans for the better world," he said when we were again alone, save for the blonde in his litter, and the cat, Blackout. "Eating has become more of a pleasure than a necessity in our present society, but getting a balanced diet, a c

avoiding a run to fat, on the part of many who lead more or less sedentary lives, is another matter. Then, consider the female populations, victimized by Diets, Charlatans, Reducing Schools and what not, all under the questionable ideal of keeping a slender figure. However, our physicists will deal with that problem."

"How?" I asked, thinking of the Light of my Life, who lives on Fruit, Biscuits Horribilis, Beer Mats, and such, one week out of four, in order to keep down to a curiously-determined "correct" wt.

"Half-Food," he replied. "It will be composed of positive and negative matter in precarious balance, so treated as to retain itself until inside the stomach. Then the chemical reaction of the digestive juices will unbalance it; as they penetrate, it will simply cancel out. You will taste it, chew it, feel a "full" and satisfied reaction, but no energy or fat-making matter will go into your system. Thus, you will be able to eat to your heart's desire without fear of fat, indigestion, of nutritional imbalances.

"You look somewhat puzzled," he added.

"But -- if we gain no energy from our food, Magister," I inquired worriedly, not wishing to appear an ignoramus before the Elect, "how will we keep from starving to death?"

"Oh -- that?" He yawned and stretched a hand toward Blackout, who permitted the Hope of Humanity to be bitten. "The scientists will perfect energy tablets, to be prescribed for each individual case in order to obtain the exact amount of nutrition required. You'll swallow one a day between meals."

I examined my notes. "What will you do for the Farmers?"

"For them -- the musical corncob. When dropped, it will play De Profundis Clamavi.

"Then, for the delectation of Man, in the Brave New America, we shall make it possible for Woman to be ever more enticing by altering the content of her breasts at will to suit her personality. This will be done by chemical preparations. Consider the delights of, say, a blonde who offers creme de menthe to her lover (or chocolate milk, for the teetotaler). Again, it will depend upon the individual, of course. Beer, mead, sloe gin, or, on the non-alcoholic side, various fruit flavors. Of course, the actual quantity produced will not be great."

"Will a woman be able to change her flavors?" I wanted to know.

"As easily as changing her lipstick, face powder, or hair-color. Why I can visualize a complaint in a Divorce Court even now -- 'he left me for a red head with six delicious flavors, your Honor!'"

"Oh -- we'll still have marriages and divorces?"

"Lawyers have to live, too, you know. And now, my friend, I think you have sufficient for one interview."

We departed in an aura of admiration.

NOTE

As evidenced by the poem in this issue by Henry Sostman, this publication is open for material the editor considers to be of merit. Particularly, are we interested in such material from Vanguardists who may be unable to issue their own magazines.