



FICTION / MARCH 16, 2024 @ 6:44 AM

'LAMPOON' BY MATIAS TRAVIESO-DIAZ



LAMPOON

'Ronnie' was a tyrant, one of those found nowadays everywhere. He was elected on promises of greatness and prosperity. But as soon as he seized power, he devoted himself – with the help of corrupt and selfish supporters – to neutralizing his



This is not the place to recount the popular uprising that ultimately unseated the tyrant. Rather, we memorialize here an early moment in the struggle: the lampoon war, which in the oppressive heat of one summer brought the Torpid States to the brink of hysteria.

It all started three years after Ronnie came to power. By then he had gotten rid of all but one chain of (sycophantic) newspapers, and allowed only radio and TV stations that dished out adulations and echoed his pronouncements.

Thus, an information vacuum was created, and the regime's opponents set out to fill it. One Monday morning, the walls of Swampia, the capital, appeared covered with bills that proclaimed: 'To the Consumers of State-Issued Offal – Dear Citizens: The Offal that the Interminable provides you matches the low quality of its manufacture with that of its chosen ingredients. It supplies carbohydrates, starches, and fats of negligible nutritional value, but fills the bellies of a population craving to be nourished.

'Let us encourage the new generations to partake of Offal generously, particularly those that are paired off, because they will eat twice as much or more, since they may encourage each other to consume. Let us shun the unpatriotic tendencies that drive certain elements to prefer imported tripe, neglecting the interests of our Torpid States. Let us reject the criticisms of our nation's enemies! Let us seek to preserve our right to fill ourselves with Offal!'

Below that message, there was an ANNOUNCEMENT: 'The fourth anniversary of the Incomparable's advent into to power draws near. Let us pause to remember the achievements of the Unavoidable's Administration, which are nearing, in only three years, those that took Germany eight long years to achieve (1935 to 1943, for after that things were not so good). And let's raise our voices to greet him with a single, unanimous outcry: Sieg Heil!'

Most of the regime's supporters did not understand the messages. The nature of the fraud being committed was only grasped when an Administration mouthpiece explained, in a TV talk show, that the Offal mentioned in the message was a sanitized reference to excrement, and the postings were lampoons that satirized the political institutions and made fun of the pronouncements of the Indispensable.



official pro-government newspaper exemplified the backlash:

‘To the author of the unlawful lampoon: Sir: I want to register my indignation at your writings. Only a degenerate would dare compare the Germany under Hitler with our democracy. We, the patriots who support the Undefinable, do not believe the Torpid States resembles Germany in any respect! In Germany there was no freedom of the press; one could not criticize the government or speak against it; there was official corruption, theft and the looting of the country’s patrimony; opponents of the regime were persecuted, jailed, tortured and assassinated; there was discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities; and the interests of big companies were advanced to the detriment of the people. Where is the resemblance? Cease publishing your execrable lampoon, else you will end up in the hospital from the beating we will give you! Peace and prosperity! Signed: Severus.’

Debates raged at the highest levels of government on how to deal with the lampoons. Ronnie ended the discussions by pounding on his desk: ‘First, deploy all the investigative agencies to unmask the authors. Second, have every lampoon covered by one of ours that tells the true story of our accomplishments. And be gone. My favorite reality show is about to start.’

That night an army of government employees, armed with glue and brushes, descended on Swampia to paste new bills over the existing ones:

‘We reaffirm, with all clarity and vigor, that all in the Torpid States support our leader, the Indomitable. Our country continues to advance towards greatness. We must ignore fake writings. We must reject anonymous words that attempt to disrespect our leader. Let’s march FORWARD!’

The following night, a new set of lampoons was glued on top of these pronouncements. They contained responses to many of the letters to the editor, such as the one from Severus:

‘To Severus: You got us. When we are in the hospital recuperating from the beating that you have promised us, we will be sure to tell our visitors that any resemblance between the Torpid States and Nazi Germany is sheer coincidence.’



further postings. Ronnie ordered the publication in the media of a strongly worded pronouncement from Himself: ‘To the law-breaking lampoonists: I have made it my business to make you pay for your crimes. You should know that I know that you know that I know that you do not know what I know. And so that you worry even more, all that I know I know from reliable sources. So, GET READY!’

This message was quickly followed by a new lampoon surely intended to roil the populace: ‘You thought you knew us all/ With no room for ifs or buts / But hold tight onto your glutes / For in our hands they’ll fall / We will sew up your winkle / With a thread of copper pure / It will have no room to twinkle / But it’ll surely stay secure /’

Lampoons and anti-lampoons continued to pursue each other with rapidity, and by the end of the summer Swampia was covered by a snowfall of multicolored flakes of paper. Words and anti-words became exhausted and ultimately ran out.

So, as words failed, the parties resorted to other means of interaction. For there is power in words, but not that much.

END

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Cuba, **Matias Travieso-Diaz** migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over one hundred of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies and paying magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. A first collection of his stories, ‘The Satchel and Other Terrors,’ was released in February 2023.



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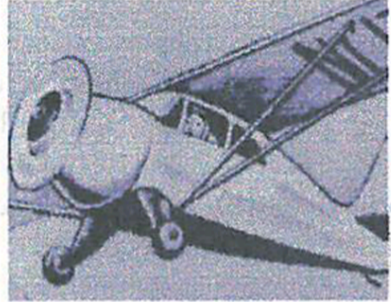
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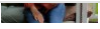
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