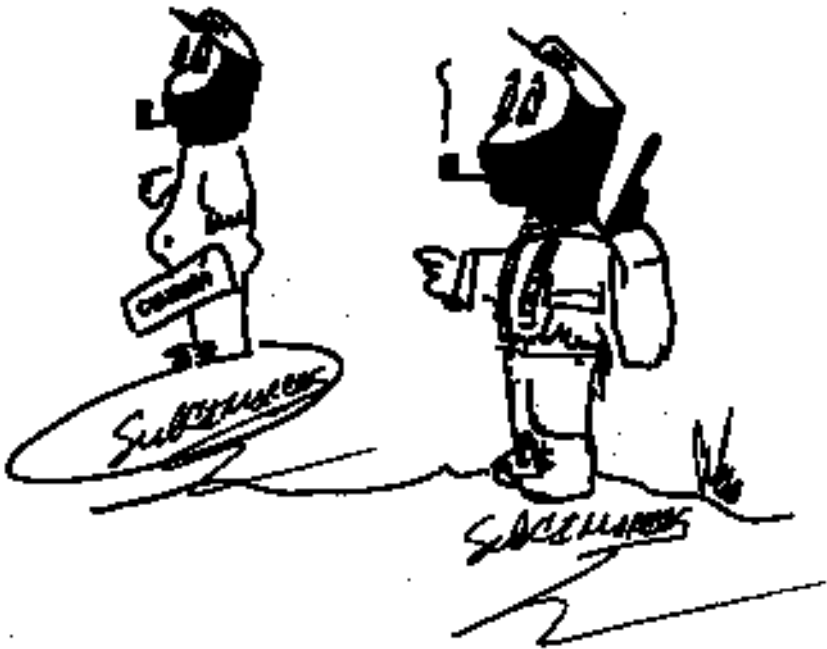


Durito on Cartoonists



As the second round of the San Andrés negotiations on Democracy and Justice begin between the EZLN and the government, Durito and Marcos discuss cartoonists. Unfortunately, the topic becomes all too appropriate as the government negotiators refuse to discuss any of the EZLN's proposals and remain almost completely mute, turning the meetings into a caricature of negotiations. At the same time, in moves that revealed the government's hypocrisy in even pretending to negotiate, the police launched large-scale attacks against peasant squatters, killing three, while the military intensified its harassment in the villages.

March 21, 1996

To the National and International Press

Ladies and gentlemen

Yes, a communiqué. I also wanted to remind you that, exactly one year ago, I wrote to ask who was the author of "There are days when spring invades us through the smallest wound," and to date you haven't answered me. And, while

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you are busy with falling helicopters and falling governors and placing bets on whether or not I will respond to Peace, the former confirms what Galeano wrote and says, I believe, "It was not pain, but it was painful. It was not death, but it killed."¹ You may pay no attention to me, but it is my duty to warn you that there is no analgesic or coffin for that pain.

Vale. Salud, and may "forever" be synonymous with "new."

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

P.S. that reiterates his poetic mediocrity. I was going to write, "The moon was a milky tooth in the nocturnal mouth of the jungle, a silver scarf fluttering alone, a diadem of light for those black and star-studded tresses." I was going to write that "A cloud flung the moon from the night like a dirty rag." I was going to write any one of these things, but it occurred to me that you had surely seen them already at the movies and so I am only going to write, "First quarter moon, relative humidity of so many millibars, partly cloudy with moderate winds from the south to the north . . ."

I was mending my boots and my heart when Durito arrived and told me that he had his contribution for *El Chamuco* ready.²

"So?" I asked him, without even turning around to look at him so as not to be distracted because when you have a needle in your hands, it's like having a sigh on your skin, that is, it can hurt.

"What do you mean, 'So'? Don't you know that I now dedicate myself to artistic cartoons? Besides, what are you complaining about? Wasn't it you who told that cartoonist named Wolinski that the world would be better off if it were governed by cartoonists?"³

"I not only said it, but I reaffirm it. Here in Mexico it's preferable to be governed by a cartoonist than by a cartoon."

1 Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, an outspoken critic of the dehumanizing effects of globalization, is the author of numerous works and a regular contributor to *La Jornada*.

2 *El Chamuco* is a popular Mexican magazine of political cartoons, lampoon, and satire.

3 On December 15, 1995, near the Zapatista community of La Realidad, Marcos gave an interview to Francoise Escarpit, a writer for the French left-wing newspaper *l'Humanité*, as well as George Wolinski and Cyrán, cartoonist and editor, respectively, of the French humor magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. In the course of the interview, Marcos remarked that cartoonists "are the only ones who can laugh at themselves in the mirror. Politicians, when they see themselves in a mirror, see someone who listens to them: like [French President] Chirac who, seeing himself in a mirror, sees a man who accepts his arguments in favor of the bomb. When a woman sees herself in a mirror she smiles or she begins to cry . . . When children see themselves in a mirror, they look for what is behind it . . . Only cartoonists laugh . . . The World would be better if it were governed by cartoonists!" This passage, along with other excerpts from the French interviews, was subsequently published in *El Chamuco*, 1:2 (March 10, 1996), 15-20.

“You are right about that, and that makes me even more right.”

“But,” I interrupt him, “it’s one thing to be governed by a cartoonist, and quite another to be governed by a cartoonist beetle. Let’s just say, like my grandmother used to say, that’s all we need!”

“What you need is a brain and a good sense of humor,” Durito says, offended, but not enough to withdraw and let me finish the last (for now) patch. I keep quiet and pay veery close attention to the final stitches.

Durito does not surrender (a true Zapatista beetle), and charges ahead:

“That stuff about your having a sense of humor is a myth lacking ingenuity. No wonder they say that you’re in your twilight,” Durito says, rather cuttingly.

“It would be ‘We are in our twilight’ because, may I remind you, we are in this together. If we rise, we rise together, and if we fall, we fall together,” I respond, while I make the last knot (for now).

“Alright already, the only thing left for you to say is ‘Till death do us part.’ Besides, may I remind you that the intellectuals are repeating their criticism of your pretentiousness, and that’s even without any mention or postscript about spring, and that reiteration has occurred to you in March for two years in a row,” Durito says, while settling himself at his desk.

“Is that an attempt at censorship?” I say, standing up and stomping the ground with my boot, to see if the patches held and to remind Durito that the war, that is, the nightmare of boots, has not ended. Durito doesn’t even notice, spreads a long parchment out on his desk and looks at it through the smoke from his pipe. After a bit, he says to me,

“Ah, my pale and haggard squire! You don’t understand anything! It’s not a question of censorship, but of good taste. Understand that you shouldn’t confuse them: the wall that separates the pretentious from the sublime is thinner than the web of that spider that you have on your cap.” The spider had already, in effect, woven an irreverent hammock between the faded, yet respectable, stars on my cap. I put up with it for a bit, but when it wanted to extend its domain to my nose, I said my “*Ya basta!*” and with a sublime sneeze, I sent it flying. Durito laughs.

“And, besides reading intellectuals, how am I going to know whether I write pretentiously or sublime things?” I asked, between repeated sneezes.

“It’s veery simple. When you write, you write pretentiously. And when I write, I write sublimely. If you write ‘love,’ you accompany it with a pennant from Irapuato.⁴ And if I, the great and sublime Don Durito de la Lacandona, write ‘love,’ I accompany it with one of those lightning bolts that announce storms and shipwrecks. It’s elemental; it’s in all the treatises on aesthetics,” Durito says, while scribbling on the parchment.

4 Irapuato, a city and municipality in the Mexican state of Guanajuato, is sometimes seen as a symbol of Mexican provincialism.

I sneeze in response and hide the little piece of paper where I had written, “It is not to mark the beginning of the hips of the moon, or to promise the wheat that your womb announces, nor to swell up soon with the life to come. Your waist exists only because of and for my embrace . . .”

Above, the rain purrs . . .

P.S. that fulfills the promise.

Durito sent a cartoon to Naranjo and another to Monsiváis.⁵ And the parchment? I found it a little later. In it could be read the . . .

Preliminary, provisional, dispensable, predictable preconceived and premature instructions for solving the riddle of “Durito and the Mirror”:

First. Take the pages of *La Jornada Semanal*, where that delirium of anarchy appears which the Sup disguised as a letter to Carlos Monsiváis, and spread it out on the floor, being careful that the four corners are turned towards the four cardinal points, according to the following instructions: the top right pointing to the South, the lower left corner pointing towards the North, the top left corner pointing towards the East, the bottom right corner pointing to the West.

Second. Take off your shoes (that is if the crisis hasn’t already removed them for you), and, barefoot, stand right in the middle and on top of the spread-out newspaper.

Third. Now, dance, whistling that tango that says, “In my tumble downhill, illusions of the past, etcetera.” (No, it doesn’t matter if you have a bad voice. We’re solving a riddle, not doing an audition to play a well-known ex-president.)

Fourth. That done, and if the newspaper hasn’t been torn, make a little paper boat or a little airplane out of the same material.

Fifth. If you made a little paper boat, then take a pill for seasickness, and embark through the dampness of your choice.

Sixth. If you made a little paper airplane, then close your eyes to avoid getting vertigo, and hang from that odor which your dampness of choice tends to have.

Seventh. Now, turn on your computer and start to play the game that you most enjoy. (Note: if you don’t have a computer, you can replace it with an abacus.) Yes, I know that the riddle won’t be solved this way but, instead, you’ll have some fun for a while.

Good, that’s all for now. Don’t forget to send your solutions to our address for intergalactic correspondence: Little Huapac Leaf #69, Mountains of the Mexican Southeast, Chiapas, Mexico.

5 Naranjo, a prominent Mexican political cartoonist regularly published in *Proceso* and *La Jornada*. He is also mentioned in Marcos’ letter to Monsiváis included in this collection as “Of Trees, Transgressors, and Odontology.”

Last minute note. Due to the tumult of protests we received at the prospect of having to listen to the ex-gentleman Del Valle's "witticisms," we have changed the prize for solving the riddle.⁶ Now the reward is a voucher for a drink and a sandwich (so that Mr. Zedillo no longer fails you in economy), which can also be cashed in if you mention that the PAN, the PRI and the PRD will succeed in becoming "centrist" parties, and that you, my dear reader and permanent candidate to take an unusual exam, realize that you are at the very . . . bottom.

Who would say that '97 is being decided in the spring of '96? Quirks of the calendar, I believe.

* * *

6 See note in "Durito's May Day Postcard."