



The Trumpian Odor

By John Wareham / www.johnwareham.com

Yes, as former Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger has noted, Donald Trump routinely emits a creepy body odor. But who might have imagined that in time for his second inauguration, our putative forty-seventh president would create and market *FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT*—*The Trump Fragrance*, a cologne ‘for patriots who never back down’ that sells for \$199 a bottle? For sure, a fulsome anointment of this perfume will be a *de rigueur* investment for any loyalist, lobbyist, or Cabinet hopeful wishing to mingle within the Trumpian inner circle. But will it change the scent that trails Trump himself?

As a lifetime coach to chief executives and prison inmates my take was that at seventy-nine years of age the personality of this 34 times convicted felon seemed unredeemable. But then a cynical friend said, “Perhaps an exorcism would fix him.” Inspired by this idea, in June of 2024 my inner novelist chose to envision the future and penned *Exorcising the Donald: a metafictional chronicle of evil*.

Fiction is akin to a mirror that reflects real-life. To disclose universal truths a writer must take readers on a coherent and credible journey of the heart and mind within a reimagined world. And, with the reader perched upon the writer’s shoulder, neither is fully aware of where that journey might end. Happily, fiction allows us to reassess and see things anew. And, in a good novel, reality reveals profound insight into our shared humanity. An incident or event may be pure fiction and yet truer than the actual truth. As Oscar Wilde observed, “truth is rarely pure and never simple.”

As a springboard, I opened this story in a New York loft where three fictional protagonists, ‘a failed priest, a Calvinist cleric, and a prison reformer,’ watch the actual Biden-Trump television debate debacle. The rise of Kamala Harris follows, as do other startling real-life events that captivated election watchers. The reader then fully enters world of fiction in a Mar-a-Lago chapel where a gifted diabolist conducts

an exorcism of Donald Trump. In fact, I imagined the story would end right there. But the heart tells truths that the mind cannot carry. And, like Frankenstein's monster, a story has a mind of its own. It insists on pursuing truth to the bitter end and can take a novelist on an unforeseeable journey.

So my surreally satisfying exorcism scene merely opened a basement stairway into even darker denouement that perhaps revealed a buried truth about our shared humanity. My intuitions fell into a hitherto hidden web of inferences that may explain the erratic—some might say bestial—behavior that seems to propel the Trumpian quest for attention, celebrity and power.

Rightly or wrongly, we chose to follow the logic of fiction by publishing *Exorcizing The Donald* in the first week of October 2024, thus hurling time-travelling readers into the tumult of 5 November election day street scenes *after* a presidential winner was announced. Among other prophecies, sitting on the writer's shoulder, readers witness not only the startling fictional presidential election outcome. They also enter the chilly New York courthouse of Federal Judge Juan Merchan and witness what happened before, during, and after his final judgement in the New York 'Hush-Money' sentencing. So the sting is in the tail of the story. *But did these metafictional predictions turn out to be true?* My answer as a novelist is that what readers believe is all that matters. They will either know that it all turned out to be objectively true, or, with luck, even if I got it wrong, they'll merely shrug and perhaps believe that it ought to be true.

One thing to be sure of though, is that the price of entry to inner sanctums of Trumpian Inauguration revelries will doubtless include a generous dousing oneself with *The Trump Fragrance*. Alas, however, the imagined sweet smell of success may merely bear witness to a willingness to kneel and kiss the devil's ring. Indeed, as William Shakespeare noted in his Sonnet 94 on the temptations of ambition,

*“Sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.”*

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