

Shooting at Hurricane Irma: The Seriousness of Humour

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It has all the ingredients of screwball stand up comedy, the necessary corrective to end-of-the-world scenarios. "And there she was, Irma, blowing herself through the room... And I shot her." But humour is in scant supply for authorities who have been paying attention to the relentless movements of Hurricane Irma. Irma, who sounds like a gentle, tea sipping teetotal passing her days on a patio, is keen to make an impression.

Certainly she has for those at the Pasco County Sheriff's office, based in the Tampa Bay area. The good sheriffs got wind of a Facebook event titled "Shoot At Hurricane Irma" on Saturday, immediately sending out fitful warnings.[1] The barb of humour had struck. People had to be warned about the madness of directing weapons at Mother Nature's finer furies in case her temper turned.

"DO NOT shoot weapons @ #Irma. You won't make it turn around [and] it will have very dangerous side effects." This warning is in the order of death being bad for your health. Bullets, warned the office, come back. "Don't shoot." [2]

The Facebook event itself, which took place on September 10, received over 80,000 responses. (And if you do care for the breakdown, 29 thousand went; 55 thousand were interested.) The "windy headass named Irma" would be shown a thing or two by the invitees. Well one thing at least: "Let's show Irma that we shoot first."

Responses to the event, hosted by Ryon Edwards and Zeke Murphy, were more interested in the humour of it than any intended physical, let alone literal effects. But it has generated a quarry of hysterics to mine, many focused on gun culture, gallows humour and Florida. These are the follies and foibles of shooting, not necessarily related to hurricane-induced disaster.

For those happy to get into the jocular spirit of things, this was their chance at some light entertainment before the brute winds, and inevitable flooding, that Irma will bring. Links and posts to articles about Florida proliferated. Images of weapons and armaments, including infants placed beside rocket launchers, were posted showing firm resolution in the face of gloom.

Even an international dimension was injected into proceedings. "Breaking news," posted Raghavendra Rao,

"North Korea has decided to stand by the US during hurricane Irma, and as a

gesture of solidarity, it has decided to drop its h-bomb on Irma to make it turn around.”

Then there were the errors, the home video incompetents, the plain foolish to remind participants what happens in that state.

“A Florida man accidentally shot himself in the penis when he sat down on a gun in the driver’s seat of his car,” goes one post from Mike Hunter, featuring the Orlando Sentinel from July. “The sheriff’s office said the 38-year old man has a previous conviction for cocaine possession and may now face charges of being a felon in possession of a firearm.”[3]

There are others:

“Florida man shoots python that attacked family goat”; “Man robs store, then shoots himself”.

All these snippets have a certain underlying scorn to them, the upturned nose at hick madness. Humour can, after all, do its fair share of wounding. But it can just as well lighten and heal, soften impending and existing cruelties.

Not so, for the literal minded, fearful that wells of intelligence and caution were running dry. “Are you an idiot?” raged Janet Konst Wilson on the Facebook invitation wall.

“I hope no one actually follows your ‘sarcastic’ post.” Such angst, it seemed, was justifiable, because, “Not everyone recognizes sarcasm, especially when they are afraid of their lives.” Think about those law enforcement warnings, wrote Janet with priestly gravity. “You could be bringing a lot of hurt down on you [sic] own head.”

Another post from Jeff Cobb makes an assertion verging on the tone of an anti-book fatwa. If the author insults holy edicts, he should die.

“If someone dies from this,” claims Cobb, “@ryon should go to prison.”

The absurdity of adding such seriousness to the occasion diminishes on realising how Liberty Land can be so averse to the ironies of the human character. Special warnings must be issued; nothing eccentric or contrarian can be left to chance. People might just do it! And just as there are certain old jokes about the Floridian resident going troppo, there are always those who think that shooting at a natural disaster might just help.

Transforming the comic into stone serious panic amongst authorities was not confined to the US quarter. True, this is the land where biblical literalism banishes humour from discussion in the wake of fire and brimstone solemnity, but there was concerned Jiří Palička, who insisted that everyone part of “this silly happening should return his weapons and report himself to the nearest mental situation.”

As Edwards subsequently noted,

"It was cool to see the response this got from facebook. On another note, I've learned that about 50% of the world could not understand sarcasm to save their lives. Carry on." As, indeed, they shall.

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Notes

[1] <https://www.facebook.com/events/126766931320280/>

[2] <https://twitter.com/PascoSheriff/status/906712903868469249>

[3] <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/breaking-news/os-ap-penis-shot-20170702-story.html>

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