



More Milk of Human Kindness Than Battery Acid...And No Joke

Politics

Tony Broadbent Mon, 01 Jul 2019 19:56 GMT



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The purpose, nay, mission of stand-up-and-be-counted comedians in these parlous times as opposed to, say, the mythical blue pigs-bladder wielding, cap 'n' bells capering court jesters of Merry Olde England, is not just to speak truth to power, but to jolt the senses of the 'hoi polloi'—the masses, the common people, the populace, the public, the people, i.e. us—and to shock us out of our collective blindness and lazy indifference to mendacity, mediocrity, and the morally repugnant actions and/or inactions of those who would seek to rule over us.

Any and all thus purposed jokes; regardless of whether they're attuned to one's own particular funny bone or not; permit us, even if only for a brief moment or two, to see the world as it really is and/or could be. New insights calibrated in peals of laughter and shrieks of startled recognition; sometimes, even, vivid self-realization.

All part of a much-loved tradition, certainly, in the UK, of pushing boundaries and pricking political balloons. And in every way an act of kindness that helps keep us all a little bit more human and just that little bit more awake to current events than we'd otherwise have been. "The peoples' army of private eyes" battling on behalf of all those who don't get to read the satirical magazine 'Private Eye'. (A big shout out for the magazine's long serving sainted editor, Ian Hislop, fearless court jester that he is.)

So let sleeping dogs lie? "Not on your Nelly." Jolt the buggers awake with a bloody good joke.

Just as I was jolted into action by a recent piece in 'The Spectator', a political, cultural, and current affairs magazine of an entirely different British striped-tie: 'How to tell a joke in 2019'. Very much a joke in itself, given its context, made all the more so as it sought to school the comedian Jo Brand and her kind in how best to construct a successful joke in today's disunited Kingdom.

I should cocoa.

You may well remember the controversy triggered by the "heretical" comment Brand made on BBC Radio 4's 'Heresy', a long-running 'comedy' panel show that invites guests to challenge "received wisdom" on any number of current topics. Where panellists are encouraged to say, "deliberately provocative things that go against societal norms, but are not intended to be taken seriously." (BBC statement issued in response.) The key takeaway from it all: it's all about producing 'comedy' and laughter.

The episode of 'Heresy' said to have caused such offense included a segment on the continuing divisiveness of 'Brexit'. And Jo Brand, a much loved 'comedian', writer, presenter, and actress on British radio and TV, cut to the proverbial jugular when she made passing reference to the May 20th "milkshake moment" that saw a disgruntled 'Remainer' throw an ice cold milkshake over the UKIP "Brexit Party" leader Nigel Farage, while he was out and about, campaigning, in Newcastle.

The act of "milkshaking" quickly then becoming a symbol of protest.

Jo Brand: “Why bother with a milkshake when you could get some battery acid? I’m not gonna do it, it’s purely a fantasy, but I think milkshakes are pathetic, I honestly do. Sorry.”

What else can you do but crack a joke to help mitigate the outrage felt by sane people everywhere at the political farceur that is Nigel Farage and his very fishy band of Ukippers?

Anything, at all, that might help attenuate the seemingly endless misery of the current political situation, other than everyone taking to the streets looking to put heads on sticks.

Even, so, a full-face photo of Farage, suitably overlaid and negated with a red diagonal stripe within a ‘No-Go’ roundel nailed to the end of a stick and hoisted above the heads of the crowd for all to jeer at, has an obvious appeal.

I’ve been a fan of Jo Brand since the days of ‘Through The Cakehole’, ‘Like It Or Lump It’, and ‘Hot Potatoes’. Her inspired take on the UK ad business, ‘Commercial Breakdown’, a favourite for obvious reasons.

Seems to me, though, she’s always been unafraid to talk truth to power, which in her case has usually meant the elephants and hecklers in the room: the entirely self-absorbed male of the species.

Yet, I’ve always found her to be entirely good-natured even when at her most acerbic. And her gloriously timed, slow burn, self-deprecating manner, aside, for the moment, she’s oftentimes been harder on herself than she’s ever been on any one or any group she’s taken aim at in relation to the revelations about her own true-life experiences. And in that, I think, lies her true greatness as a comedian. She’s unafraid to put herself or any aspect of the female condition under her microscope. Tell it like it is. And let the devil take the hindmost.

As fate would have it, I was there. On 13 June. Happily listening to ‘Heresy’—courtesy of the BBC’s most excellent iPlayer Radio app—and heard Jo Brand’s devilishly clever retort, live, as it happened, as it were; even if 8 hours behind, as the proverbial crow flies.

And I laughed along with the studio audience as we all processed the thinking behind the joke. A joke, I'm sure, Jo Brand never for one moment thought any of us would take literally. Being, as it was, more a considered plea for more mindful action, within the Realm, so as to help counteract the farrago that is Nigel Farage and his United Kingdom Independence Party. It was never code for: "Action This Day."

But Farage, past master media manipulator that he is, milked it for all it was worth. He summoned the police to come to his aid. Calling Brand's comments: "an incitement of violence." And loudly demanded that the police must act. Thereby guaranteeing himself even more media coverage, as well as even more tea and sympathy from his base.

Intent on taking even more umbrage, Farage then telephoned 'The Telegraph' to ensure everyone was made fully aware of the fact he's now so important a figure in British politics that he—i.e. his main financial backer Aaron Banks—has to spend tens of thousands of pounds a year on security. Adding: "I'm going to ask Jo Brand and the BBC whether they would like to contribute to the costs of keeping me safe."

Yet, once the media kettle had fully gone off the boil, so to speak; and as he later admitted, when pressed on the matter; he never did actually get around to making a formal complaint. Funny that.

Nigel Farage as victim? Now there's a joke.

Nigel Farage has done more than "come the old acid." He is by far the most corrosive of the self-serving bombasts that have come to beset the good people of Great Britain. I can't refer to him as a 'politician'. A populist scaremonger of the very worst sort, maybe, but not an honest to goodness, dyed-in-the-wool politician.

My only advice to Mr Farage, until all the present kerfuffle of dissent has more fully abated, is that he should definitely ask whoever he has run up his suits, to have them redone in a suitably drip-dry cloth or better yet a 'milkshake resistant' shiny synthetic sharkskin fabric; all the better for him to be seen and marked for what he is.

Jo Brand; in my humble opinion, a national comedic treasure; did what she does best. She made you laugh while she made you think: the hallmark of any truly great “observational” comic.

One final observation: I was most happy to see that the police had sufficient sense of humour when they later released a statement saying they’d be taking no further action against Jo Brand and the case was now closed.

All of which means the country can continue to sleep safe in their beds...at least for now. Everyone dutifully tuned into the BBC and whatever Jo Brand and the rest of Britain’s army of comedy writers, comedians, and court jesters can now come up with to help render the looming Boris Johnson premiership less of a horror show.

Send in the clowns.

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