

ESSAY

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MISANTHROPE by J.S. Copeman

People annoy me. No, check that for not being entirely accurate or as nearly definitive enough for my tastes. Let me try that one again--incarcerated men annoy the living shit out of me! There...that's better. Where this great antipathy comes from or just when exactly such feelings began to set in my bones like calcium deposits, I just don't know. But it sure is here now and there's nothing much to do other than accept it for what it is and just get on with the stagnant business of life in the penitentiary. Pushing forward each and every day despite yet another fresh and bothersome encounter everytime I step outside of my cell door. Weakening me to the point where I'm gradually losing faith in our own correctional redemption--ONLY TO BE ANNOYED, as expected, totally and surely--even just that much more.

Or maybe... and out of seemingly nowhere, a polite voice of reason explains: well...there it is, no wonder you're surly all the time, Jacky. You see... you've come to expect it, and therefore you're just consciously looking for reasons to be annoyed. It's self-service at the Pump of Fulfilling Prophecy. The little digital meter ticking ever upward, faster and faster, numbers sprinting by because you're squeezing the handle too hard. It's YOU, Jacky... not them. Ease up, Son. You need to relax. Learn some new coping strategies, a few new tricks and I'm sure we can help you out of the hole you're in. Who knows, might even make you whole again. Heh heh. What do you say, huh? Want to give it a try?

It's the Nice Me, just a sliver of my orange-sliced soul; like the Asian population on a demographic pie chart in America. It's miniscule. All smiles and warm hugs. Patient as a saint. Waiting.

Or maybe this grapefruit segment of myself, with its rationality and counter-arguments, which, I'm pretty sure "normal" people don't have to have with themselves, is simply wrong, and that such ideals and principles cannot be applied in this cold gray world of corrections? After all, "Prisons," sayeth the courts, "were not meant to be comfortable."

And clearly, empirically, they are not.

So with over 24-years in storage, I've lost all touch with any semblance of polite society. Abstract things such as courtesy, respect, patience, good attitude, and most of all manners and kindness--really don't exist behind these fences today. For the most part there's just a growing malignancy; a newborn spirit of ill-will and open contempt for each other that feels... purposeful. Especially with this next generation of miscreants: young, dumb and so full of themselves that they redefine narcissism. Also, rude, shockingly immature and so poorly educated that they couldn't even find an ocean on a globe. Add their street life ethics and misconceptions of what it means to be a man; all muscles, tattoos and threatening violence every ten seconds is all showmanship with little substance. Posturing for their own insecurities because inside and out, that's all they really have in here. It's quite pathetic.

Ultimately such a lifestyle can only promote conflict. And so incidents and acts of stupidity are just bound to happen in here.

And they do.

In fact, nearly two years ago, the MICH DEPT OF CORRECTIONS (MDOC) banned disposable shaving razors in all their male prisons because these new cons thought it was not only the height of fashion to slash each others faces open, like the Joker, but also made quite the literal scarlet letter statement about their own ruthlessness. That's gangsta, yo! Even

giving it the notable term "buck-fiftied" for the amount of stitches supposedly required to close a tattered cheek wound. Which made about as much sense as the act itself.

Or maybe and most of the time, we "old school" guys simply avoid these millenials like the plague that they are. Or we shrug our shoulders at each other, noting their offensive ways as the new normal in our society and go about our daily business without taking it personal.

This laissez-faire approach is surely the best policy if you want to (and can) get out someday. You will avoid adding more time or catching a new case over petty annoyances or for seeming legitimate reasons to attack someone. Anything from a line jumper or a bunky "borrowing" a few store items from your locker to a missing television. It's all relative to your own calculus of importance. Which do you value and want more? Seriously, that's the way you have to think in order to make it through. Otherwise, you're going to be in and out of administrative segregation (as-seg or "the hole); you're going to be charged with restitution for medical costs on any injuries incurred; and you're eventually going to explain yourself to the parole board about your lousy institutional record. Receiving what they call a "flop" (12-24 month continuance) for your trouble. The MDOC calls this "collateral consequences." Prisoners consider it all "part of the bit."

Or maybe we're all just stubborn, as some learn while others never do. It being a quirk of human nature to be obstinate and will ful at times. Criminals just seem to take that word to a whole new level, believe me. So yes, murders do happen in here every now and again. Having witnessed plenty throughout my long enduring sentence. As the greasy blue and orange rats turn on each other with their sharp teeth and claws. Seeking to

dominate, seeking to exploit, seeking to out compete. That's our essence while in the cage. It's pure Michigan survival at the lowest level.¹

Meanwhile, the criminologists, sociologists, penalogists and other social documentarians have become the mortar between the bricks of the prison-industrial-complex. Using psychological labels to identify and explain the science of crime by, for, and to the masses. For example, diagnostically speaking, they say that I am: "Axis-II Antisocial and a Borderline Personality disordered person. Having administered their questionnaire on me many years ago. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (M.M.P.I.-1). Which, I hear the Department no longer uses. Then, later on, I became an avid reader of law and psychology, only to learn that anywhere up to 75% of the prison population is considered antisocial and/or borderline personality."²

And then there is the whole issue of application and the meaningless jargon of their trade that is vague, ambiguous, and severly open to interpretation. To wit:

Borderline personality disorder is characterized by a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self image, and emotional expression, as well as marked impulsivity and manipulation. Charecteristics of the disorder such as sabatoging relationships, poor judgment, making suicidal gestures and feeling despondent.

Self-harming or destructive behavior. Social functioning, impulse control, chronic instability, and attention seeking, all consistent with borderline personality disorder.

Or maybe I just don't agree that one incident of crime (in my case) doth make a personality disorder. Especially when you consider that I'm also an incarcerated veteran, having just returned from the first Persian Gulf War in 1991. As some of these same factors also describe post-traumatic stress disorder. So there's that.

Meh and Whatever...

Besides, I've already traveled and since turned down the Road of Repugnance and found it rather suits my nature to be abrasive and irritable. Hmm...I seem to recall reading somewhere that writers have a tendency to be both as well as an unusually sensitive lot. Actually, you have to be in order to absorb all the wide nuance of living, the pollen of things and ideas floating around. Soaking it all in like a sponge. Everything from A-Z and then realizing that you still don't know shit about the world and have to keep learning it all over again and again. Everyday. All day. Forever. That's where decent writing comes from. Even that is just a part of the process. So it's a hell of a thing, you know. Little wonder so many great writers were also raging alcoholics or prone to suicide.⁴

So there's also that.

Or maybe or more than likely I'm just miserable, wretched, and depressed, and thus can no longer stand my fellow convicts. Conventional wisdom and cheap psychology says it because I can't stand MYSELF and therefore can't stand anything else. It all begins there. Hmm...I ponder the premise. Seems to me that I get along with myself just fine, and am more productive and insightful when there's absolutely no one else around to bother me. "An alone man is a king, albeit his kingdom is small." Don't know who said it but I totally agree. So in my opinion, self-loathing is a bunch of bullshit as I know tens of thousands of the state's worst citizens and trust me, most of them are self-centered egotists. (You can tell by all the little mirrors they own and the extra sink time they require anytime they're in the communal bathroom. Leaving their whisker shavings and water puddles for everyone else to stand in. A classic trademark of the type.)

So I say to myself--screw it. Just embrace curmudgeonry as an acceptable disposition and then get over it. Self, you don't need to do anymore soul-searching or self-analysis. Why should I? No one else seems to be making much of an effort, so why should you?

And there it is, my plan to just let myself go to seed and thereby transform into one long, gangly weed. Ugly on the outside as well as in. Having earned my right to be acrimonious and spiteful from having lived this long life among the various cretins, savages, and sociopaths along the way. After all, that's what happens to you when you no longer matter and have been looking at shadows at the bottom of the Cave for too long. Turning green.

Or maybe I just simply enjoy being an unapologetic asshole?
Hmm...Better give that one some more thought.

ENDNOTES

1. PURE MICHIGAN is the motto of the State's Tourism Industry, so yes, the pun is definely intentional.
2. (a) Winick, Bruce J. Psychology, Public Policy and Law, University of Miami School of Law. 4 Psych Pub. Pol and L. 505 (1998).

(b) The Epidemiology of Antisocial Personality Disorder: Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology 231, 234 (noting that 40% - 60% of male prison population is diagnosable with antisocial personality disorder). See United States v Wilkinson, 646 F. Supp 2d 194, 231-234 (1999).
3. Diagnostic and Statistical Maual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V-TR, 5th ed. 2013) American Psychiatric Association.
4. Read ANYTHING by Charles Bukowski for not only great writing but as a classic illustration of the "tormented writer." Soon you'll wonder how he even made it to be 73 years old?