

on the asshole edge

Y'know, I'm a confused fucking man, stuck in a purgatory between the shining, homogenous world of mainstream society and the antisocial, anarchist, technology-hatin', Unabomber-imitatin' iconoclastic, misanthropic, isolationist hermits that cast off all vestiges of society to live as solitary hunter-gatherers subject wholly to the rules of no-man's land. I just need society - I need the connection, I need the few people I don't forget about in this life like a thirsty man needs water, I need to see and smell and feel fucking *woman* to have any sense of balance and health. Conversely, I can only take so much of you assholes, and probably likewise, too, before I need some distance, before I need to shove off in the non-human world and get what I need, at least in part, vicariously from the trees and the birds and the fishes and the wind and the water.

At times, my life is like trying to push through a murky fucking nighttime fog with no asphalt road under my feet, no concentration of light that signals the sun and hence the possibility of direction. So, like any reasonable fucker would do, I poke around in media to see if there's anyone else, any other purgatory-inhabitin' humans out there struggling with the same dichotomy that have put it into words and thus could help accelerate my own understanding of my place and role. I've luckily found some, such as a couple of Ed Abbey's works (of course *Desert Solitaire*, and *Down the River* is pretty insightful, too) and Freeman House's *Totem Salmon* (though I loathe the author's hippie name), but one especially hit home - an anthology titled *Hunter's Heart* edited by some guy named David Petersen. Many essays in that anthology, all about what it means to hunt in its myriad aspects and colors, struck a chord in me, resonated with many of the same issues I feel when going after fish. Petersen himself had an essay in the book about elk-hunting that was well-written and expressed many of the same sentiments I feel when chasing stripers or lakers or carp. Given that favorable first impression, I picked up a book solely by Petersen called *On the Wild Edge*, which I felt would round out and enhance my understanding of how to balance these two worlds - the human and non-human.

And y'know, well, it *did* crystallize my philosophy a little more, it *did* enhance and expand my horizons a little bit. But not in a typical, an expected way - it made explicit that which keeps me from joining the antisocial grub-eatin' misfits out in the woods because, in general, I fucking *hated* this book, and, perhaps more so, I hate the fucking guy who wrote it.

And I've never met the dude!

I think part of my, well, *disgust* with Petersen is that I actually agree with many of his opinions. The issue, however, is that his arguments frequently suck major, hairy Bigfoot balls: their evidence is flimsy, the links are at times senseless, and, man o' Manischevitz, the guy so easily slides down the slippery slope to only land in, and then spew, bullshit. It also doesn't help that a lot of his observations, his statements, are really fucking trite and cliché. And, finally, at least in the writing, he seems like, well, a *dick*, like a really fucking unpleasant person to be around. And so these faults of the book, I guess, fire up my hatred more since I do resonate in direct correlation to the issues he brings up.

Let me clear some of this shit up. First, his arguments. He states that animals that smell better, such as bears, dogs, and deer, know more (whatever the fuck THAT means) than smaller-schnozzed humans, yet he leaves out the fact that humans have better color vision and image resolution than any of those critters. He states that his cutting of firewood uses no fossil fuels for transportation but apparently misses the fact that the fucking truck, the chainsaw, and the maul he used to process and move the wood all no doubt required fuel for their production and

distribution, not to mention the function of the saw and vehicle. He makes the misanthropic claim that humans are the only species that kill other animals and waste most of the flesh, but don't bears often eat just the fucking brains of salmon and leave the rest for scavengers to pick on? He boldly declares that humans are *meant* to be in wilderness, but, um, if they were *meant* to be there, wouldn't they *be* there? He mourns the fact that the daily work of so few people supports their "spiritual and material needs" since they're not out chopping their own wood and killing their own food, but how the fuck does he know that most people don't meet these needs with the fucking paycheck derived from their work or a well-played game of chess? He states that kids will only be safe outside when the environment contains less concrete, less traffic, and fewer light bulbs, but I'm pretty sure that hunter-gatherer societies such as the Yanomamo fucking killed *all* their enemies' children, and all that without *any* semblance of the artifice of modern civilization. Fuck, man, even gorillas kill, and then *eat*, rival females' babies, and they're not pummeled with either streetlights or the screech of *cholo* low-riders burnin' rubber.

And there are some statements that make no fucking sense at all. He writes that staring into a wood fire "...rekindl[es] that magical human trio of myth, imagination, and utility." Y'know, I think I can imagine all sorts of wild shit just staring at a fucking white wall; if I want some myth, I'll bust out the saga of CuChullain; and if I want utility, blessed be me, I'll pull out a lovely, inexpensive, 1/16-oz black-back/red-belly Hard Time Minnow and bag just about any carnivorous fish that swims in my local waters. Remarkably, none of those things happen when I gaze into a pine split burning on a cold mountain night. And can someone please explain to me what the fuck this is supposed to mean, because I sure as fuck can't figure it out: "...human predation that fails to respect the unity of the global biotic community is a major and growing problem everywhere today." Um, how do I "respect the unity of the global biotic community" when I go kill a few fish for the frying pan? And this is just, well, *nothing*: "...the civilized human animal has lost its deep-time animistic gift of perceiving the intrinsic sacredness of nature dispersed equally through all living things." Man, how do we measure the equality of sacredness in each living thing? Is the sacredness of the cell of a cockroach and the cell of a grizzly bear equal? Or is it the equivalence of the entire organisms, such that each cell of the roach is commensurately greater in sacredness relative to the bear so that they're equal? Wow, this really seems like a math problem requiring some Asian kid!

And the fucking sixth-grader philosophy...dig:

"And what is life, really, but the moment?"

"For life to continue, death must always have a next time."

"We are products of our decisions, minute by minute."

"How I love it so when nature breaks the "just so" shackles we try to force her into!"

"Even by ignoring choices, we are making choices."

"It is only the promise of death that makes our lives worth living."

And perhaps the topper, the icing on the pile of dung, Peterson's asshole-ism. Half a page is blown haughtily quoting a friend showering Peterson with compliments, which he concludes with a one-sentence, painfully inept self-effacing attempt at balancing his smug righteousness by suggesting he's actually full of shit. He derides all his fellow Baby Boomers for remaining within the mainstream and ultimately evading happiness, as if Peterson's the one to judge the definition of happiness for these "millions" of other people. And he remarks how he wishes his wife wouldn't visit a spot with bears - a location *she* wanted to go to - since it'd be unsafe, even though he himself notes how woods-wise she is - that doesn't seem really respectful of the better half. Finally, his writing style is just...*cold*. His jokes are flat, and the sentences, the transitions, they're just really stolid, which, when combined with the litany of trite fucking pseudo-intellectual statements throughout the book, just make him appear like a smarmy, know-it-all fucking high-schooler.

A real fucking *dick*, y'know?

But *I'd* be a dick if I left it at that because there are some worthy insights and quips in *On the Wild Edge*, and I ain't no dick - I'm a fuckin' O'REAR! - and thus the positives. First, Peterson does have wonderful natural-history knowledge of myriad species he lives among, which is especially valuable in this day and age when a greater and increasing proportion of time spent by biologists, by hunters and fishermen, by any type of person with even the remotest interest in Nature is comprised of staring at computer screens and/or numbers rather than actually interacting with the ultimate subject - the plant or animal. Similarly, his in-depth discussion of the physics of chopping wood was remarkably, despite the seemingly boring topic, worthwhile given how small a proportion of people today actually know how and *why* to split firewood a certain way. He softened my cold black heart a bit with this statement about the ol' television set: "...on my deathbed reflecting back on my small life, I doubt I'll exclaim, 'Damn, if only I'd watched more TV!'" He explains eloquently, *logically*, why clear-cutting practices are ultimately harmful to forest ecosystems. Consequently, the book certainly ain't a total loss.

But, in general, I still fucking hated it, and *hate* - yes, that passionate of a word - is appropriate. Why? Because, as I mentioned earlier, I *do* agree with many of the same points that Peterson makes, such as judiciously killing the animals you eat, but feel almost, well, *offended* since he continually debases and fucks up his own arguments with his shitty writing and his spiraling off into senselessness and his frequent descents down the ol' slippery slope. Let me put it another way - birds of a feather flock together, and couching his several valid, sound points among the mountains and mountains of bullshit sullies his good arguments, making it all too easy for too-easily led people to really miss the point.

And *those* fucking people, glued to the screens of their smart-phones, are only increasing. And I still straddle the two worlds.