

## Book Reviews

**Jail House Blues.** By BRUCE L. DANTO. Orchard Lake, Mich., Epic Publications\* 1973. Pp. xxiv, 325. Price \$8.95.

This book presents a fascinating discussion of suicide in prison. It is a cocktail of eighteen papers, three by actual inmates, the remainder by various professionals. Dr. Bruce Danto is the bartender and, as he informs us, the libation grew out of a meeting of the American Association of Suicidology. Blessedly the papers are short and meaty. Some spice is supplied with comparative papers from Austria and Peru. It is a good mixture.

The papers are basically divided into two groups. Those covering the jail setting, wherein arrested parties are contained prior to trial, and the prison setting, where the actual sentence is served. The authors make you immediately aware that markedly different factors operate in each setting and this is reflected in different stresses and ultimately different suicide patterns.

In our normal non-prison world the average suicide is predominantly male, white, over fifty years old, living alone, may have suffered the loss of a loved one, and probably was drinking at the time. There may or may not have been some violence in the background. On the other hand the jail population suicides are predominantly married, born in the southern states, young, a fair history of mental disease (or at least suspected), and a probable history of violent behavior.

Before we become any further immersed in data it must be stated that almost every author addressed himself to the problem of collecting accurate, reliable data from the prison system. There appeared to be many reasons why such collection was difficult. Prison bureaucrats obviously tend to play them down and undoubtedly cover them up wherever possible, many of these bureaucrats believing little good can be accomplished by their acknowledgment. They more or less accept suicide as they apparently must accept common homosexuality. There are exceptions among the bureaucrats, of course.

Danto isolates four types of suicides. The first can be described as a person who runs out of hope and feels a severe sense of loss by being separated from his family and free society, or, if he is a law-abiding citizen, a sense of overwhelming disgrace at his own conduct and its exposure. The second type is labeled manipulative in which the suicide attempts to manipulate the jail environment and the staff as well as the courts and the mental health agencies working within the court system. The third type is akin to psychotic behavior. Here the dynamics are felt to be designed to serve as punishment for unconscious feelings about masturbation, homosexual behavior, or the use of hands and arms in the commission of a homicide or crime. It is further expressed as a defense against strong feelings of depersonalization. The fourth group would be more accurately placed under the heading of a suicidal behavior than successful suicide and probably expresses itself in self-mutilation as well. This group uses the act to literally drain off lethality or aggressiveness in an unconscious effort to control their homicidal or suicidal tendencies.

Frank Wilkerson, listed as the Director of Administration of the Sheriff's Office of Detroit, outlined three phases of arrested parties' actions he entitled "Traumatic Reception Dynamics." At first, he says there is a sense of disbelief that one is headed for jail. This is accompanied by anger over the precinct house treatment and perhaps a strong feeling of injustice. Phase two begins after the man is "booked" and fingerprinted. His efforts are almost totally devoted to getting out via legal means. He writes letters to his home and attorney. He talks to other prisoners and gets various ideas on what means to employ. When these fail, phase three begins and he thinks of escape, self-mutilation and suicide or he may try to manipulate his environment with bribes of guards, homosexuality, drugs, breaking the rules, etc. Phase three is the most dangerous period in relation to suicide.

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The three "papers" by the actual inmates reveal a very distressful isolated existence in prison. The simple, primitive act of survival becomes horrendous. The options are so few and so definite. Cooperate with the guards and you become a "rat." Run with the prisoners who semi-defy the institution and you become a "problem." Retreat into your own self-world and become an emotional mess. Relatively minor items of normal life are blown vastly out of proportion. A singular cigarette becomes an item of dear value. It obviously is a life that must be lived to be fully understood. Words do not appear to be able to adequately convey the unrelenting misery.

A special commendation should go to Hans Toch, a Professor of Psychology at New York State University in Albany, for his most exquisite use of the English language in describing the "autopsy," as he calls it, of two successful prison suicides. Actually one is a jail suicide and the other a prison suicide. He encompasses a wealth of material in his analysis. Finally, let me praise the prime force behind this book, Bruce Danto, M.D., for compiling this work and forcibly calling our attention to the plight of suicides in the correctional system.

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**Kind and Usual Punishment (The Prison Business).** By JESSICA MITFORD. New York, A. Knopf, 1973. Pp. 297. Price \$7.95.

This book has been selected for review not so much because it deeply touches on psychiatric work in prisons, for it does not, although it does deal with the subject adequately; but because the author's fine reputation will probably ensure a wide reading audience with its attendant effect on public opinion. A *New York Times* book reviewer, David Rothman, extracting thoughts from her book, characterized prison "psychotherapy" (in quotes) as administrative spying, and so disposed of that entire area. Ms. Mitford is more thorough.

In one chapter labeled Treatment she tends to concentrate her research results concerning psychiatry in prisons but, of course, the question of "Treatment" of prisoners runs throughout the book. After presenting the views of Dr. Karl Menninger and ex-Attorney General Ramsey Clark, that most people who commit serious crimes have mental problems; she quotes other sources, including Dr. Thomas Szasz, for the proposition that criminals are no more disturbed than any other sampled population. She caps this off with a footnote accredited to Thomas Shaffer, Dean of Notre Dame Law School, to the effect that the arrest rate among former mental patients is about half that of the general population, whatever that may prove.

After pointing out that nationwide only 5 percent of the prison budget goes for all services labeled "rehabilitation," and that many states make no pretense of giving any psychotherapy, she proceeds to shoot down the argument that insufficient funds and personnel are the reasons for the failure she sees in the programs. Ms. Mitford has the deserved reputation of being a fast-drawing shooter (the undertakers never recovered fully from her disclosures) and inaccurate hip shots are not her style. Here she draws ammunition from at least three sources. The California State Prison for male adult felons, supposedly one of the best; the Maryland Patuxent Institution for "defective delinquents;" and the Draper Experimental-Demonstration Project for youthful offenders in Alabama.

Speaking of the California system she quotes Dr. Bernard L. Diamond, Professor of Law and Psychiatry at the University of California, as saying, "In good prisons, like those in California, physical degradation is replaced by psychological degradation." This is in direct contradiction to Dr. Karl Menninger's earlier high opinion or hopes in his book *The Crime of Punishment*. She talked to Dr. Powelson, head of a psychiatric clinic at University of California at Berkeley, who was resident psychiatrist at San Quentin prison in 1950. It is from him that she primarily got the idea of psychiatrists being used as administrative spies and the punitive aspects of some forms of therapy such as electric or insulin shock. Dr. Frank Rundle, chief psychiatrist at Soledad prison for a short time in 1970-1, endorsed Dr. Powelson's position very strongly. His