

potential areas of conflict or harmony, including television viewing. With those outside of the prison, including family and friends, programmes can become shared interests and act as a proxy for being together. In these ways, television becomes integral to social relations inside and outside of prisons.

This research is also concerned with the ways that television intersects with the emotional life of prisoners. As with other viewers, they experience joy, happiness, sadness and anger while watching. In prison, Dr. Knight argues that it can also be a 'package of care' helping men to cope with the pains of imprisonment. Some, however, become concerned about their dependence upon television and how it will affect them in the longer term, particularly after release. Resistance and the assertion of independence comes in different forms, so that some refuse to have a television at all, while others manage the quantity they watch or the type of programmes they consume.

In the final chapter, Dr. Knight speculates regarding the development of in-cell technology including communications and information technology. Such developments may offer opportunities for more flexible family contact including video conferencing, and may also include educational content so that time in cell can be used constructively. The risk, of course, is that technology comes to replace or reduce real interactions and prison activities. This dystopian vision is of a financially-motivated impoverishment of the social life of prisoners. Such polar perspectives reveal that technology does not in itself determine such outcomes, instead it is the social context in which it is used that shapes this.

Dr. Knight's research is an important contribution to the understanding of the social world of the prison. Television has become a greater, even dominating, aspect of this and so deserves the close

attention it is given in this book. It is a work full of new insights into the uses and effects of television in prisons and adds significantly to current understanding of the issue, in particular by exploring the emotional and social context.

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Theatre Review
Through the Gap
York Theatre Royal

In the days when HMP Askham Grange was regarded as significant enough to have a governor in its own right, one of its incumbents was Sue McCormick. Contrary to what one hears in the media, Sue was genuinely the youngest governor both at the time and since, having been appointed at 29. It was with her support and encouragement that Clean Break Theatre Company was formed, in 1979, by two former Askham prisoners, Jenny Hicks and Jackie Holborough. Almost 40 years on, Clean Break continues its ground breaking work in women's prisons and elsewhere.

I became aware of Clean Break's ongoing involvement with Askham Grange some two years ago when attending a presentation by York St John University's Prison Partnership Project on narrative, women and prisons. Regular drama workshops and choral activities were being held in collaboration with the University, Clean Break and the prison's Education Department. Now, third year undergraduates and Askham Grange prisoners have co-created a sensitively crafted yet hard hitting short play, *Through the Gap*, under guidance from the University.

A sparse set. Five chairs against a black background. Five sets of neatly folded clothes as five women enter to a plaintive chant of those

who have been 'so high and so low', one senses in more ways than one. The women don the identical grey shifts which, though female prisoners have worn civilian clothes for decades, serve to represent the depersonalisation inherent upon entry into the penal system. This is reinforced by a skilfully mimed portrayal of the reception process including searching and a frequent repetition of their prison numbers.

During an early sequence, the cast simulate running quickly towards the audience with a cacophony of voices explaining why. All are running from something yet all have distinctive back stories. One, whose addicted mother and absent father mean that prison is the only secure and caring environment she knows. Another who 'didn't go out that morning to kill somebody' but whose careless driving did. Others who are mortified at leaving their children behind. The beauty of a mother's love, once deprived of expressing it, is tenderly expressed.

A recurring image develops when large pillow cases of white feathers are scattered upon the stage which first come to symbolise the white powder for which many of the women crave and for which they must somehow find the money. Later the feathers are bundled together into make-believe substitutes for the babies they have left at home. But there is further symbolism to come.

Case histories are touched upon as are the fears and uncertainties of daily living, relationships and the uncertainties of life on release. Will family and friends see the person as she is and not how the media have painted her? Will the cheerful husband on the telephone be quite so cheerful and accepting on his wife's return home? And what if the husband or partner, house and job have disappeared? What then for the isolated and vulnerable woman whose hopes for the return of her

child may thereby have disappeared too?

The work confirms the eternal penological truths of Gresham Sykes's pains of imprisonment.¹ However the performance is not completely bleak and there are unsentimental but accurate portrayals of the mutual support offered by fellow prisoners in time of crisis. The action stops abruptly. The stories do not have convenient ends for who knows what those ends might be? Who knows?

There followed a lively and informative question and answer session with the cast and, in the audience, the Director of the Prison Partnership Project and senior lecturer in Applied Theatre, Rachel Conlon. The participants held weekly workshops in the prison and whereas many of the characters were based on those at Askham, some had been conflated and others shaped by observation of women's trials over a year in the local Crown Court. The student actors were careful to respect their Askham counterparts' requested confidentiality and this helped shape the final piece.

It was during this discussion that further symbolism became apparent

to me though possibly not to the cast. Juliet Foster, the Theatre Royal's Associate Director, joked about the staff's imminent job of Hoovering up the thick bed of the feathers left behind. How closely that correlated with one of Thomas Mathiesen's functions of the prison: the 'sanitation function' whereby seemingly unproductive elements in society are swept away.² Just like the prisoners and the feathers.

Harriet Walter, who has also worked with Clean Break, when speaking of her recent Donmar Warehouse Shakespeare trilogy using all-woman casts and set in the prison environment, talked of 'giving voices to the voiceless'. Such an aspiration informs and is manifestly achieved in this production. The work won the York Theatre Royal annual graduate prize for final year students of Theatre. This offers the winners professional mentoring to develop their work culminating, in in this case, with performances at the prison, within the University, at the Theatre Royal and hopefully beyond.

Were there shortcomings? Well perhaps some. There was no recognition of the infantilizing of prisoners that was so evident in the

women's prisons of my experience, albeit many years ago. The same might be true of the medicalizing of normality. The poignancy of the absent mother's plight and the influence of dysfunctional parenting were well demonstrated but not the presence, within the prison community, of the cruel or abusive mother. Prisoners' responses to her could be equally cruel often resulting from their own covert 'justice' system. And there was scant mention of staff. However these are slight criticisms set against a production of remarkable maturity from such a talented young team. A full house experienced a challenging evening and responded with fulsome enthusiasm.

York St John University continues to work with Clean Break and with Askham Grange and hopes, in due course, to extend their work into a closed prison. Sue McCormick would have been so pleased.³

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1. Sykes, G.M. (1958) *The Society of Captives*, Princeton N.J., Princeton UP, 65–7.

2. Mathiesen, T. (1974) *Politics of Abolition*, London, Martin Robertson, 77.

3. Sue McCormick's obituary (27th October 2010) containing further details of her work with Clean Break is available on the *Guardian* website.