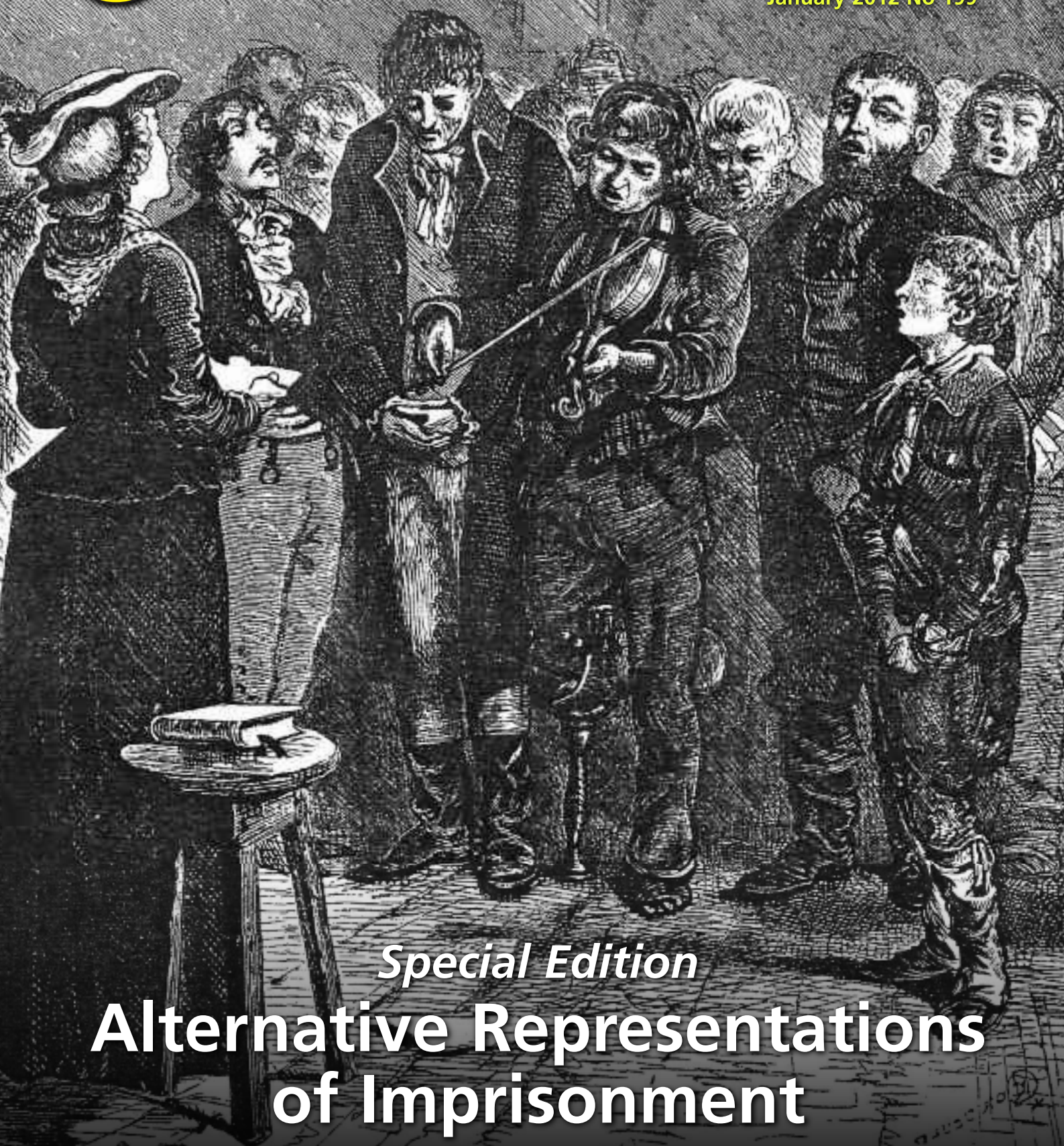


# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

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*Special Edition*

**Alternative Representations  
of Imprisonment**



# Contents

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## 2 Editorial Comment

## 4 Alternative Representations of the Prison and Imprisonment — Comparing Dominant Narratives in the News Media and in Popular Fictional Texts Dr Tony Kearon

## 10 Porridge: 'A Night In' Dr Helen Johnston

## 13 A Short Film About Killing (1988) Jamie Bennett

## 17 Ruth Ellis in the Condemned Cell: Voyeurism and Resistance Dr Lizzie Seal

## 20 Penal Hell-Holes and Dante's Inferno Professor Yvonne Jewkes

## 26 Estação Carandiru Dr Sacha Darke

## 29 A contrast in lives? White-collar offenders in prison Dr Ben Hunter

### Editorial Board

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University of Greenwich

# January 2012

- 32 Sexuality, Criminality and the Women's Prison:  
Pat Arrowsmith's *Somewhere Like This***  
Dr Abigail Rowe
- 35 Singing at Yarmouth Gaol: Christian Instruction  
and Inmate Culture in the Nineteenth Century**  
Dr Helen Rogers
- 44 Dark Tourism and the Modern Prison**  
Dr Alana Barton and Dr Alyson Brown
- 50 'When the prison no longer stands there':  
Donovan Wylie's photographic project 'The Maze'**  
Dr Michael Fiddler
- 54 Book Review**  
**Looking for Laura: Public criminology and hot news**  
Jamie Bennett
- 54 Book Review**  
**Media and crime** (Second edition)  
Jamie Bennett
- 55 Book Review**  
**Public criminology?**  
Jamie Bennett
- 56 Interview: Catherine Yeatman**  
Dr Michael Fiddler

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Cover image 'Sarah Martin Conducting Service in Yarmouth Gaol'. Permission courtesy of the British Library.

The Editorial Board wishes to make clear that the views expressed by contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Prison Service.

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# Editorial Comment

## Alternative Representations of Imprisonment

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Contemporary representations of imprisonment, be they cinematic or literary, tend to be remarkably consistent. There are a series of recurrent characters and tropes that one can reliably expect to see. To give a decidedly partial list, there is the naïf, the kindly old-timer, the threat of (often sexual) violence or the dank darkness of 'the hole'. A useful exercise in this regard is to look at the ways in which a remake of a particular prison film reuses these visual themes. The 1974 film *The Longest Yard* (dir. R. Aldrich) starring Burt Reynolds as a disgraced and subsequently imprisoned American football player was remade in 2001 (dir. B. Skolnick) and 2005 (dir. P. Segal) as vehicles for Vinnie Jones and Adam Sandler respectively. The UK version, renamed *Mean Machine* to match the original UK release title of the 1974 film, owes much to key British television and film where prisons and imprisonment play key roles. The peak-capped officers, for example, are direct relations to *Porridge*'s Mr Mackay. Likewise, there are echoes of *The Italian Job* (1969, dir. P. Collinson) and *Escape to Victory* (1981, dir. J. Huston). *Mean Machine* is clearly located in a British cinematic and televisual tradition of prison drama. It is a fantasy played out within a cinematic fantasy of imprisonment. An unkind critic would argue that the most fantastical element of the film sees Vinnie Jones playing a former England football captain. I digress. The US remake similarly taps into the recurrent themes of American prison drama. Although the 'Big Houses' of the original are gone, instead we have throwbacks to films such as *Cool Hand Luke* (1967, dir. S. Rosenberg). The mirrored sunglasses of the wardens recall the implacable threat of Morgan Woodward's portrayal of 'Boss Godfrey'.

The social theorist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard<sup>1</sup> argued that cinema cannibalises itself. This is no more clearly demonstrated than those cinematic versions of imprisonment outlined above. We see the same ideas plagiarised, repackaged and repurposed. However, what of differing representations that exist outside of popular television and film? The purpose of this special edition is to highlight those readings of the prison, prisoners and staff that exist more on the periphery. To what extent do they too draw upon this standard stock of images? As such, our gaze here will shift from Polish cinema to 'trash fiction', 'dark' tourism to Victorian prison song. Broadly the pieces here can be read in three parts. We initially explore the role of these primary representations as

prompting and reflecting popular understandings of imprisonment. Secondly, we look to the alternatives before concluding with an analysis of the ways in which the signs of 'prison-ness' persist once a prison has been decommissioned.

We begin with **Tony Kearon's** article that explores the puzzle of how fictional accounts of imprisonment intersect with dominant narratives within news media. As the piece suggests, there is a disconnect between fictional and non-fictional accounts. The key question this raises is how the two intersect to produce a seemingly punitive response in the viewing public. One of the key fictional accounts of imprisonment for British audiences over the last 30 years has been the television comedy *Porridge*. It would, of course, be remiss to produce a special edition on representations of imprisonment, albeit 'alternatives', and not refer to it. **Helen Johnston** uses the 'two-header' episode 'A Night In' to examine the place of *Porridge* within the canon of prison representations. For Johnston, its successful evocation of the everyday life of the prison leads to a representation that is at once 'gritty and witty'.

The second part begins with Krzysztof Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Killing*, a classic of international cinema, although it too owes much to its television origins in the series *Dekalog*. It offers a markedly different insight into the carceral world to that of *Porridge*. **Jamie Bennett**, in his analysis of a film which renders the typically invisible practice of capital punishment starkly and uncomfortably visible, places it within a broader context. Looking both to the grainy internet footage of Saddam Hussein's execution and the Technicolour of Hollywood, we can begin to unpack the power dynamics in these representations of a complex and contested reality.

The public reaction to the imprisonment and then execution of Ruth Ellis in 1955 is explored in **Lizzie Seal's** article. Where the practice of execution could be said to have become occluded by this time, it was 'spectacular' in many other ways. One of the vehicles of this was the popular press reaction. As Seal reports, there was a fascination in, to use Ellis' mother's terms, this 'bird stripped of its fine feathers in the cage of a condemned cell'.

The spectacle of punishment is central to Dante's depiction of the hell with its descending circles, each of which offering cruelly and imaginatively 'appropriate'

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1 . Baudrillard, J. (1981/1994) *Simulacra and Simulation* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

forms of suffering for its victims. Since its completion in 1314, the 'Inferno' has provided both a language and set of imagery with which to describe 'Hell'. In this regard, **Yvonne Jewkes'** article argues for its continued importance in discussing the contemporary spectacle and practice of punishment.

It is perhaps facile to make the link, but it is difficult not to be reminded of Dante when reading of the events of 2nd October 1992 in Carandiru prison in São Paulo. Some 111 prisoners were killed in the operation to quell a prison riot. Both the riot and the everyday life of the prison were detailed in the book 'Estação Carandiru'. Written by the prison's doctor and subsequently adapted into a well-received film, the book addresses the complex social world that existed within and around Carandiru's walls. **Sacha Darke** explores this text, which is yet to be translated into English, and its fascinating insight into a radically different experience of working within prison.

**Ben Hunter's** contribution likewise examines the depictions of imprisonment within 'true-life' accounts. In this instance his focus is upon the prison autobiographies of white-collar offenders. Within their descriptions there is a reliance upon the shared language we see in the other representations discussed here. Yet, their writing describes a carceral world that is rather different to the cosiness of *Porridge* or the omnipresent threat of *Carandiru*. For some, prison is a site of refuge distinct from their experiences pre-incarceration. There are some interesting overlaps in this respect with **Abigail Rowe's** analysis of Pat Arrowsmith's novel 'Somewhere Like This' and its examination of the intimate relationships that can occur within a penal setting. Within the novel, the characters find 'a degree of respite from social pressures and normative values that stigmatise and undervalue them'. It provides rather more nuanced depictions of such close relationships than perhaps is the norm.

The transformative power of song within prisons has been explored before in this journal<sup>2</sup>. In **Helen Rogers'** article, however, we are taken back to Yarmouth

Gaol in the nineteenth century to look at the role that singing and song writing (both within and about the prison) could offer in instruction and transgression. The piece goes on to illuminate 'the anomalous status of prisoner communication in the age of silence and separation.'

It is the curious (in)visibility of the prison that **Alana Barton** and **Alyson Brown** address in their article on 'dark' tourism and which begins the final part of this edition. Taking Robben Island and Eastern State Penitentiary, as well as the operational HMP Dartmoor, as examples, they unpack the ways in which both former and current prison sites can be used to inform the public about the nature of imprisonment and define those who are punished.

The photographer Donovan Wylie's images of the decommissioning of HMP Maze allow us to perform a virtual form of 'dark' tourism. His internationally exhibited work<sup>3</sup> depicts the demolition of the prison site. We can 'walk' the empty corridors or trace the inside of the crumbling perimeter wall by studying these images. The project raises a fundamental question: when does a prison cease to be a prison? Or, rather, **Michael Fiddler** asks, does it continue to project the messages associated with prisons and imprisonment within the collective public imagination even when the physical buildings have been removed?

This special edition concludes with an interview with **Catherine Yeatman**, project architect on the Mal Maison Oxford project. This saw the former Oxford gaol and castle site being repurposed as a 'boutique' hotel and restaurant complex. As such, an area in the centre of the city that 'had been locked away from the public for over 1000 years' was given back to Oxford. In many respects this reflects one of the main themes of this edition: the ways in which the invisible is rendered visible. The articles presented here challenge the messages projected by standard representations of imprisonment. They force us to look anew.

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2. Wilson, D., Caulfield, L. And Atherton, S. (2009) 'Good Vibrations: The long-term impact of a prison-based music project' in *Prison Service Journal* 182 p.27-32; Digard, L., Grafen von Sponeck, A. & Liebling, A. (2007) 'All Together Now: The therapeutic potential of a prison-based music programme' in *Prison Service Journal* 170 p. 3-14.
  3. In 2010 Wylie was nominated for the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize.

# Alternative Representations of the Prison and Imprisonment

## — Comparing Dominant Narratives in the News Media and in Popular Fictional Texts

*Dr Tony Kearon is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Keele University.*

### Introduction

During the course of our lives we will see countless crimes being committed, watch police interviews with suspects, observe trials, witness murders and eavesdrop on heated interactions between criminal justice professionals. We will also get to see the inside of the prison on a regular basis, in the process witnessing everything from parole hearings to riots, bullying and sexual assaults. But for those of us who do not work in the criminal justice system or have never been one of its 'clients', these experiences will be vicarious — read on the pages of a book or newspaper, viewed on a screen, and shared in conversations with others. Perhaps not surprisingly, the possible relationships between popular cultural representations<sup>1</sup> of criminal justice and public attitudes and perceptions have been a significant and continuing source of both popular and academic debate<sup>2</sup>. For much of the 20th century there was a significant criminological focus on the possibility of 'media effects' — the assumption that public attitudes, beliefs and behaviour are significantly influenced by cultural representations of crime and criminal justice<sup>3</sup>. While criminologists are increasingly embracing a more nuanced conception of the relationships between popular cultural representations of crime and criminal justice and the attitudes and beliefs of members of the general public, the idea that these popular cultural representations 'do things' to us is one that still resonates with politicians, the media and many sections of the public. This perceived relationship has been used to try to identify significant causal factors for everything from gun and knife crime and other examples of

supposed 'copycat' violence, to increasing levels of fear of crime and punitive attitudes amongst the general public. I do not have space in this article to unpack the complexities of the media effects debate as it has been applied to crime and punishment. However, I do wish to focus on one particular aspect of the representation of criminal justice — the depictions of prisons and imprisonment in popular culture, and the possible relationships between these depictions and wider attitudes to prisons and imprisonment amongst those sections of the public who hold punitive views.

### Prisons and the Punitive Public

There are many reasons for examining representations of the prison and their possible relationships to public attitudes. For most of the developed world imprisonment is the most severe penalty available, and as such has assumed significant symbolic power in public debates about crime and punishment<sup>4</sup>. The last 20-30 years have also seen a significant increase in the use of imprisonment alongside an apparent crisis of public confidence in the rehabilitative ideal.<sup>5</sup> But this is also a period in which a range of ongoing challenges to the certainties and predictabilities of the lives of the socially included have apparently led to the emergence of an increasingly punitive public,<sup>6</sup> associated not just with growing support for the use of imprisonment, but also attracted to the notion that the experience of imprisonment should be as unpleasant as possible. The apparent existence of this punitive public is routinely and regularly reaffirmed in opinion polls suggesting not just widespread support for the use of imprisonment but also for 'tougher' prison regimes.<sup>7</sup>

1. Throughout this piece I use the term 'popular cultural representations' to refer to the broad range of representations of the prison and imprisonment, including both popular news media coverage and fictional representations.
2. For an extensive discussion of these trends, see Jewkes, Y (2011) *Media and Crime* (2nd edition) London: Sage.
3. Ibid.
4. Wacquant, L (2008) 'Ordering insecurity: Social polarization and the punitive upsurge' in *Radical Philosophy Review* 11:1 p.9-27.
5. Garland, D (2001) *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* Clarendon: Oxford University Press.
6. Ibid, see also Wacquant (2008) Op cit; Young, J (1999) *The Exclusive Society: Social exclusion, crime and difference in late modernity* London: Sage.
7. Daily Telegraph (2011) *Prisons must be tougher, says survey*. 2nd April.

To what extent can we demonstrate that these apparent public attitudes to imprisonment are reflected in the (mis)representation of the prison in popular cultural texts? An emerging body of recent literature has linked popular representations with popular public sensibilities regarding imprisonment. For example, the routinely pessimistic representation in prison cinema of the experience of imprisonment as dangerous, brutal, bleak and violent has been linked by a number of commentators to the apparent crisis of public confidence in the ability of prisons to rehabilitate inmates.<sup>8</sup>

The representation of punishment in popular culture, with an emphasis on a narrow range of apparently simple and unproblematic explanations for criminality and solutions to crime has also been associated with the perceived public susceptibility to 'sound bite' politics, with politicians and the electorate apparently locked in a spiral of offering and demanding simplistic 'quick fixes' to the problem of crime.<sup>9</sup>

But the examples outlined above also raise a number of issues about the representation of prisons and imprisonment in popular culture. One of the first challenges to any assumption of an unproblematic relationship between representations of the prison and public attitudes to imprisonment is the fact that, perhaps more than any other aspect of the representation of crime and criminal justice in popular culture, representations of the prison appear to be fragmented and often contradictory. Various attempts have been made to construct typologies that link representations of the prison in particular historical periods with dominant discourses of imprisonment

during that period<sup>10</sup>. As Mason<sup>11</sup> has pointed out, attempts to associate the representations of imprisonment produced in a given historical period with dominant attitudes to imprisonment during that period are routinely problematised by the existence of alternative, contradictory representations of the prison produced during the same time frame. However, there is one set of typologies for differentiating representations of imprisonment which do seem to account for a majority of examples. Rather than

attempting to impose chronological divisions in cultural representations of the prison, I would argue that a significant set of distinctions begin to emerge if we differentiate between the representation of the prison in popular news media and in fictional popular cultural texts.

. . . perhaps more than any other aspect of the representation of crime and criminal justice in popular culture, representations of the prison appear to be fragmented and often contradictory.

### **The Prison in 'fact' and 'fiction' — Alternative representations?**

As Cheliotis<sup>12</sup> argues, while there is an established tradition in 'quality' journalism of presenting a nuanced and complex picture of prisons and imprisonment, this is significantly overshadowed by

the 'culturally poor but economically rich'<sup>13</sup> journalism of mass market populist news media<sup>14</sup>, whose coverage of prisons (in the UK at least) is structured around the repetition of simplified inter-related narratives of prisons and imprisonment<sup>15</sup>. These populist narratives routinely focus on the perceived failure of prison regimes and environments to be suitably *punitive*. In their study of media responses to temporary release schemes, O'Donnell and Jewkes<sup>16</sup> not only chart the pervasive sense of outrage in UK news media coverage of the

8. See for example Cheatwood, D, (1998) 'Prison movies: Films about adult male civilian prisons: 1929-1995' in Bailey, F and Hale, D (eds) *Popular culture, crime and justice* Belmont: Wadsworth; O'Sullivan, S (2001) 'Representations of prison in nineties Hollywood cinema: From *Con Air* to *The Shawshank Redemption*' in *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 40:4 p.317-34.
9. Ryan, M (2006) 'Red tops, populists and the irresistible rise of the public voice(s)' in Mason, P (ed) (2006a) *Captured by the media: Prison discourse in popular culture* Cullompton: Willan.
10. See for example Cheatwood (1998), Op cit; Wilson, D and O'Sullivan, S (2004) *Images of incarceration: Representations of prison in film and television drama* Winchester: Waterside press p.35.
11. Mason, P (2003) 'The screen machine: cinematic representations of the prison' in Mason, P (ed) *Criminal Visions: Media representations of crime and justice* Cullompton: Willan.
12. Cheliotis, L (2010) 'The ambivalent consequences of visibility: Crime and prisons in the mass media' in *Crime, Media, Culture* 6:2 p.169-184.
13. Op cit:179.
14. In this context I am referring primarily to the 'Redtop' tabloid newspapers (cf Ryan, 2006 Op cit) although these narratives can also be found in those elements of popular TV news that take a 'tabloid' approach (eg *Sky News*).
15. Detailed analysis of these trends in tabloid coverage of prisons can be found in Ryan (2006) Op cit and Mason, P (2006b) 'Lies, distortion and what doesn't work: Monitoring prison stories in the British media' in *Crime, Media, Culture* 2:3 p.251-267.
16. O'Donnell, I and Jewkes, Y (2011) 'Going home for Christmas: Prisoners, a taste of freedom and the Press' in *The Howard Journal* 50:1 p.75-91.



prospect of convicted offenders being allowed to spend Christmas with their loved ones, but also identify a number of wider recurring motifs in popular media coverage of the perceived experience of imprisonment; that of pampered, well-fed, leniently supervised prisoners enjoying privileges often denied to their victims and to society at large — a recurring and ongoing popular reaffirmation of the concept of ‘less eligibility’. Popular news media stories of prisons and imprisonment routinely embrace an urban mythology of prisoners who ‘brag’ that the prison is like a hotel or holiday camp,<sup>17</sup> or who allegedly demand luxuries as a right (*‘We’ll sue to get satellite TV sports say convicts’*<sup>18</sup>). Particular ire is reserved for perceived overemphasis on the ‘human rights’ of prisoners (*‘Grinning rapist wins votes for lags by 2011’*<sup>19</sup>; *‘Jail must call gang boss ‘Mr’*<sup>20</sup>) or attempts by prisoners to receive compensation for adverse experiences in prison (*‘Lags want £300K for dodgy egg roll’*<sup>21</sup>). These media narratives are also routinely critical of the perceived willingness of prison authorities to acquiesce with the demands of prisoners and of perceived attempts by prison authorities to improve the experience of imprisonment for inmates (*‘Prison cooks told to spice up meals’*<sup>22</sup>; *‘£500,000 survey to ask prisoners if they like their life behind bars’*<sup>23</sup>). So far, from this brief overview of popular news media representations of the prison, we can see a strong and recurring focus on the depiction of imprisonment as not *sufficiently punitive*. However, when we shift the focus to fictional representations of the prison, an alternative, apparently contradictory, set of narratives can be identified.

In general, fictional prison texts do not replicate or reflect these dominant popular news media discourses about prisoners living lives of comfort and ease. There are examples of individuals or small groups of prisoners

Popular news media stories of prisons and imprisonment routinely embrace an urban mythology of prisoners who ‘brag’ that the prison is like a hotel or holiday camp, or who allegedly demand luxuries as a right.

in fictional crime texts who appear to enjoy a comfortable existence in prison, but as a narrative trope this is routinely used to indicate the status of the privileged prisoner in organised crime networks rather than a more general comment on conditions in the prison establishment — for example, Henry Hill and his fellow ‘wise guys’ serving their first sentence together in *Goodfellas* (1990), who bribe guards, avoid prison work and spend most of their time preparing gourmet meals. The existence of these privileged prisoners is routinely used to highlight both the impoverished conditions of ‘normal’ prisoners and the inherent corruption of a prison system that would tolerate (or even profit from) these inequalities. But the dominant focus of much popular fictional representation of the prison is on the dangerous, violent, atomised experience of imprisonment, and the constant threat of bullying, physical violence and sexual abuse<sup>24</sup> — even if only to create a context against which a ‘prison innocent’ can endure and then overcome the indignities of a brutal prison regime<sup>25</sup>. From *Scum* (1979) to *Dog Pound* (2010), from *Papillon* (1973) via *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) to *Oz* (1997–2003) and *Prison Break* (2005–2009) and in numerous other similar prison texts, the dystopian representation of the experience of imprisonment has arguably become the dominant narrative trope in fictional representations of the prison.

This leaves us with something of a puzzle. It is clear that within the wider frame of popular cultural representations of the prison and imprisonment, there are two sets of alternative representations; two equally well established but ostensibly diametrically opposed ways of imagining, constructing and depicting the prison experience in the popular imagination. Does this suggest the possibility of two differentiated audiences ‘out there’, a punitive public enthusiastically consuming

17. The Sun (2010) ‘Killers pics from ‘holiday camp’ cell’, 30th December.

18. The Daily Express (September 27th 2011).

19. The Sun (24th November 2010).

20. The Sun (6th December 2010).

21. The Sun (13th December 2010).

22. The Daily Express (14th July 2010).

23. The Daily Mail (2nd March 2011).

24. For a much more extensive analysis of the violent, brutal and repressive character of the Prison in popular fiction, see for example Jarvis, B (2006) ‘The violence of images: Inside the prison TV drama *Oz*’ in Mason (2006a) Op cit; Mason (2003) Op cit; Mason, P (2006c) ‘Relocating Hollywood’s prison film discourse’ in Mason (2006a) Op cit; O’Sullivan (2001) Op cit; Hallsworth, S (2004). ‘Make my day: images of masculinity and the psychodynamics of mass incarceration’ in Lippins, R (ed) *Imaginary Boundaries of Justice* Oxford: Hart.

25. Wilson and O’Sullivan (2004) Op cit:44.



tabloid media narratives of ineffectual prison regimes that agonise over the rights of pampered prisoners; and a less punitive public steeped in the fictional narratives of the violent squalid and de-humanising prison (and as a result perhaps more amenable to the idea of prison reform and the use of non-custodial penalties)? If we discount this possibility, how can we explain how (and why) many fictional representations of the prison apparently contradict widely held beliefs (as evidenced by popular news media coverage) about the contemporary experience of imprisonment, yet still remain genuinely *popular*? Is it simply the case that punitive audiences unproblematically recognise that news media narratives are 'real', while prison films and other texts are fictional and therefore have no effect or influence? Wilson and O'Sullivan argue that the consumption of fictional prison texts is a much more nuanced activity than this, and can be regarded as a process of 'discounting and *unconscious acceptance*':

*We do not take fictional representations to be literally true, but once we discount the element in them that we regard to be dramatic licence, what remains unconsciously influences our implicit beliefs.*<sup>26</sup>

As part of a wider research project into punitive public attitudes, King and Maruna examined patterns of consumption of fictional texts by members of the public who held generally punitive views.<sup>27</sup> Echoing the work of Garland, Young, Wacquant and others<sup>28</sup>, they found significant links between personal biographies of anxiety, uncertainty and insecurity, and more punitive attitudes amongst respondents. But they also found some interesting patterns in the preferences for fictional texts amongst this punitive group. Punitive attitudes were in part sustained through engagement with fictional texts which offered the possibility of *order* — a clear distinction between right and wrong and between 'good' and 'bad' characters, an imagined world in

which justice always prevails and the innocent always overcome adversity to ultimately triumph.<sup>29</sup> In the accounts provided by participants themselves about the appeal of particular texts, prison texts such as *The Shawshank Redemption* offered punitive respondents this possibility of order — a sense of ontological certainty and reassurance derived from these texts, *apparently* despite the recurring critical depictions of a brutal and brutalising prison environment that routinely feature in these fictional representations of the prison.

But the use of fictional representations of the prison by punitive audiences raises another possibility—not that these texts are consumed and enjoyed *despite* the brutal and violent portrayals of the prison environment, but in part *because* of them. In his classic work on the sociology of deviance, Erikson argued that the shift from public punishment as a collective spectacle to the privatisation of punishment via its disappearance behind the prison wall 'coincides' with the emergence of increasingly popular crime texts which provided morally simplified tales of transgression, punishment and resolution.<sup>30</sup> For Erikson, the growing popularity of these crime texts was precisely because they offer a surrogate for the collective moral resolution formally provided by public punishment. This theme is developed by Nellis and Hale, who argue that in the absence of public punitive rituals,

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cultural representations of moral transgression and resolution (in this case the prison film) become 'fantasies of punishment'<sup>31</sup> in which audiences are finally able once again to see justice being done.

But if the fictional representation of the prison as a violent dystopian space allows the punitive public to indulge their fantasies of punishment, how can we explain the portrayal of prisons in popular news media, which as we have seen, focus on the contention that prisons are not sufficiently punitive? In order to answer this we need to explore further the possible relationships between cultural representations of the prison and the 'identity work' carried out by punitive individuals.

26. Wilson and O'Sullivan (2004) Op cit:16.

27. King, A and Maruna, S (2006) 'The functions of fiction for a punitive public' in Mason (2006a) Op cit.

28. See n6.

29. The appeal of the simple and certain moral resolutions offered by fictional crime texts is explored in detail by Sparks, R (1992) *Television and the drama of crime: Moral tales and the place of crime in public life* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

30. Erikson, K (1966) *Wayward Puritans. A study in the sociology of deviance* New York: Wiley & Sons.

31. Nellis, M and Hale, C (1982) *The Prison Film* London: Radical alternatives to imprisonment p.62.

## Representing the Prison — Displacing the Punitive Ideal?

One of the themes which runs through the work of King and Maruna discussed earlier is the extent to which, for these punitive respondents, fictional texts offer a reassuring *ideal*, a view of the social which reflects the norms and values of the punitive individual, which portrays the world as they think it *should be*. This theme can also be traced through into the popular prison narratives that emerge after the decline of public punishment — narratives whose violence and brutality (tempered by the inevitable redemption of the innocent) offers a kind of punitive wish-fulfilment<sup>32</sup>.

But the idea that a cultural text or artefact can be the embodiment of an ideal, which can be engaged with through the consumption of the artefact, is one which is well established in the sociology of consumption and material objects<sup>33</sup>. In his work on the relationships between consumption practices and identity, McCracken highlights the tension between the *real* and the *ideal*, between how we think the world around us is, and how we think that it *could* or *should be*.<sup>34</sup> One of the tensions which is most significant in terms of its potential psychological impact on individual identity is the possibility that our ideals, if put into practice, would not have the imagined or desired outcomes. Consequently, a significant component of the mechanisms we use to develop and protect a sense of self-identity is the defence of our ideals from this possible outcome. McCracken argues that there are a number of cultural strategies which are employed to defend the distinction between the 'real' and the 'ideal' in social life, most notably the strategy of 'displaced meaning'<sup>35</sup>. Displaced meaning strategies are employed by individuals or groups to

remove ideals from the problematic daily social 'reality' within which they might be discredited. This is a strategy which:

*... does more than shelter cultural ideals. It also helps to give them a sort of empirical demonstration. When they are transported to a distant cultural domain, ideals are made to seem practicable realities. What is otherwise unsubstantiated and potentially improbable in the present world is now validated, somehow 'proven', by its existence in another, distant one. With ideals displaced, the gap between the real and the ideal can be put down to particular, local difficulties<sup>36</sup>.*

One of the themes which runs through the work of King and Maruna discussed earlier is the extent to which, for these punitive respondents, fictional texts offer a reassuring *ideal*, a view of the social which reflects the norms and values of the punitive individual, which portrays the world as they think it *should be*.

We could, for example, construct the ideal of a society in which crime is an easily controlled, marginal social problem, a society in which the experience of imprisonment prevents re-offending and in which the possibility of imprisonment deters individuals from committing crime in the first place. This ideal can be protected from the messy reality of contemporary life by its displacement into a mythical past (where prison was a 'real' deterrent, before 'do-gooders' started to interfere). Or it could be displaced into a possible future (which could be brought about if only politicians and

policy makers would listen to the public and adopt the right policies). Alternatively it could be spatially displaced (we could deal with crime if we copied some other society which apparently does not have a 'crime problem' due to much more punitive sentencing policies). McCracken suggests that once an ideal has been safely displaced in this fashion it can be *recovered* for use by individuals in the construction and maintenance of coherent self-identities:

32. Mason, P (2006d) 'Prison Decayed: Cinematic Penal Discourse and Populism, 1995-2005' in *Social Semiotics* 16:4 p.607-626.

33. Dant, T (1999) *Material culture in the social world* Buckingham: Open University Press.

34. McCracken, G (1990) *Culture and Consumption — New Approaches To The Symbolic Character Of Consumer Goods* Bloomington: Indiana University Press p.104n.

35. Ibid: 105.

36. Ibid: 106.

*Recovery must be accomplished in such a way that displaced meaning is brought into the 'here and now' without having to take up all of the responsibilities of full residence. When displaced meaning is recovered from its temporal or spatial location, it must not be exposed to the possibility of disproof.<sup>37</sup>*

He argues that the consumption of cultural artefacts or texts which embody this ideal is a common strategy for the 'safe' recovery of displaced ideals into the here and now. This could account for the kind of preferences and readings of fictional texts identified in King and Maruna's work on punitive individuals, and it also helps to contextualise the appeal of violent dystopian prison texts discussed earlier. The portrayal of the prison as a profoundly dangerous and violent environment vicariously satisfies the conception of the harsh prison regime as an effective deterrent. But in the process, the innocent are always ultimately vindicated and the truly bad always punished, so any niggling doubts that justice will ultimately triumph are dispelled.

This notion of narratives which protect a displaced ideal can also help to explain the role (and influence on some sections of the public) of popular news media representations of the prison. The routine media representation of prisons as places regarded as 'holiday camps' by their inmates, as environments overly focussed on the comfort, well-being and rights of prisoners, can be regarded as a subconscious strategy to protect the displaced punitive ideal. If this punitive ideal holds that crime would be reduced if only we used imprisonment for a wider range of offences, then the

fact that this has already happened cannot be acknowledged. If it asserts that criminals would be deterred from re-offending if we sent more of them to prison for longer, then it must ignore rises in both the prison population and in average sentence lengths. If the ideal includes an implicit assumption that dangerous, violent prison environments would act as an additional informal deterrent if only we became less focussed on caring for prisoners, then issues of self harm, suicide, bullying and abuse in our prison system cannot feature heavily in popular news media coverage of the prison. The current situation in our prisons poses a profound challenge to the punitive ideal, because in many respects it is already a manifestation of that ideal in operation. Consequently, recognition of this reality has to be all but absent from popular news media coverage of the prison and imprisonment.

So, while we can legitimately characterise the popular cultural portrayal of the prison as fundamentally an interplay between *alternative* representations, this is not necessarily indicative of *oppositional* representations. Rather, we could argue that these two significant alternative representations have served a unifying purpose in the consumption practices (and the maintenance of defensible self identities) of the punitive public. The assumption that a more punitive approach would solve the crime problem *if only it was tried* cannot really cope with the possibility that in many respects this punitive approach has *already* been implemented. As a result, the punitive ideal has to be represented as a desired *future* alternative to an existing prison regime, which is routinely constructed and presented in these popular news media narratives as stereotypically permissive and ineffectual.

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37. Ibid: 107-8.



# Porridge: 'A Night In'

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**Since the release of *Porridge* in the mid 1970s it has become one of the most well known and loved comedy series and in 2004, it was voted seventh in a BBC Poll of the 100 Greatest British Sitcoms.<sup>1</sup> The central characters have become etched into popular culture as one of the most frequently scheduled programmes about prison and in recent years with the expansion of a large number of channels, it is often repeated on the BBC as well as on channels like Gold.<sup>2</sup>**

Criminologists and media commentators though are divided about *Porridge* as a representation of prison and imprisonment. As Jewkes points out there are three main points of view.<sup>3</sup> The first view is that the success of *Porridge* is nothing to do with the fact that it is set in prison but is related to the 'classic' sitcom set up; a two man double act, one older often quick-witted or sophisticated and the other an often younger, naïve, but likeable dreamer and the scraps they find themselves in. So *Porridge* is no different to *The Likely Lads*, *Only Fools and Horses*, *Blackadder*, or *Yes Minister*. These successful sit-coms also tended to mock authority, and those who wield such power, and *Porridge* fits neatly into the tradition but the backdrop is the highly restricted and controlled prison environment.

The second view is that prison is integral to the show and it has 'grit beneath the wit'.<sup>4</sup> In this view, *Porridge* does have something to tell us about prison life in the 1970s and the changing philosophies of punishment of that period. This is represented for example, in the characterisation of the two main prison officers in the series; Mr Mackay, the strong disciplinarian with military roots who rules his wing with a firm grip, and Mr Barraclough, the well meaning benign officer who sees the potential for reform in all under his charge. The collapse of the rehabilitative ideal and the rise of 'nothing works' is also emphasised in the character of Fletcher, the habitual criminal, who sees prison as an 'occupational hazard' and for whom, rehabilitative efforts are totally ineffective in addressing his recidivism.

The final view, Jewkes points to, is that put forward by authors such as Wilson and O'Sullivan, and this argues that whilst highly successful and influential in terms of people's 'ideas' about prison, *Porridge* has been damaging, presenting prison life as cosy, and is an unrealistic image of prison life. Further, they claim that ultimately *Porridge* has set back prison reform, prevented challenges to prison conditions by ignoring significant features of prison life in the 1970s such as violence, prisoner protests and staff brutality, as well as the poor conditions related to slopping out and long periods of lock up.<sup>5</sup>

Others, such as Erwin James, claimed that during his own imprisonment, '*Porridge* was a staple of our TV diet' and he regards that the 'conflict between Fletcher and Officer Mackay was about the most authentic depiction ever of the true relationship that exists between prisoners and prison officers in British jails up and down the country'.<sup>6</sup> Derek Lewis also stated that his main source of knowledge about prison came from the media and 'the BBC comedy programme *Porridge*' before he became Director General of the Prison Service.<sup>7</sup> My own position is that *prison* is absolutely central to *Porridge*, this is not simply about two characters in a situation of adversity but that the fact they are in prison is the secret to the success of the series as 'both gritty and witty'.<sup>8</sup>

I am neither a film critic, nor a media expert, but I am someone interested in prison life throughout history and today. It is my intention to examine one episode of *Porridge* in detail, probably my favourite episode, although it is difficult to decide, and certainly one which the writers were particularly pleased with. '*A Night In*' is the third episode in the first series of *Porridge* and contains only five scenes. The first features Lennie Godber, a first timer in prison, who has been sentenced to two years for breaking and entering. Lennie is walking through the landings carrying his possessions and heading for the cell of Normal Stanley Fletcher: 'Fletch'. The second scene and remainder of the episode is set in the cell. This is only broken by two potent camera pans

1. 100 Greatest Sitcoms: *Porridge*. ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/sitcom/advocate\\_porridge.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sitcom/advocate_porridge.shtml)) Accessed 14/09/2011.
2. Mason, P. (1996) 'Prime Time Punishment: The British Prison and Television' in D. Kidd-Hewitt and R. Osborne (eds.) *Crime and the Media: The Post-modern Spectacle* London: Pluto.
3. Jewkes, Y. (2006) 'Creating a stir? Prisons, popular media and the power to reform' in P. Mason (ed.) *Captured by the Media: Prison discourse in popular culture* Cullompton: Willan.
4. Ibid, p.139.
5. Wilson, D. and O'Sullivan, S. (2004) *Images of Incarceration: Representations of Prison in Film and Television Drama* Winchester: Waterside Press.
6. James, Erwin (2005) 'Doing time with *Porridge*', *The Guardian*, 5 October. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/oct/05/broadcasting.bbc>) Accessed 14/09/2011
7. The Times, 26 December 1992 cited in Mason, P. (2003) 'The Screen Machine: Cinematic representations of prison' in P. Mason (ed.) *Criminal Visions: Media representations of crime and justice* Cullompton: Willan p.279
8. Vaughan, Johnny — *Britain's Best Sitcom — The Case for Porridge*. ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/sitcom/advocate\\_porridge.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sitcom/advocate_porridge.shtml)) Accessed 14/09/2011. Johnny Vaughan has also served a prison sentence.

across the inside, and later the outside, of the prison as night falls on the wings and as the sunrises. Godber has been moved due to a fire in his cell, lit by his former cellmate, and is to share with Fletch. In the chronology of the series, this is the second time we have met Godber. He appeared in the first episode, a little 'green', arriving with fellow admissions to HMP Slade, Cyril Heslop and Fletcher, the frequent offender who has been moved up from Brixton. Godber only features briefly in the second episode during a kitchen scene in which Fletch is delivering eggs from the prison farm and Ives (an inmate who is frequently pilfering and is regarded as untrustworthy by both officers and prisoners) is discovered with eggs hidden in his pockets by Officer Mackay. Of course, Fletch's ingenuity allows him to narrowly escape discovery of his own involvement in what has occurred.

The third episode then is centred on the evening lock up of Fletcher and Godber and is a dialogue between just the two inmates; no other characters from the series feature and the only interruption to this is the routine of the prison timetable as the prisoners are checked by an officer through the observation hatch in the cell door at lock up and at wake-up call the following morning. The dialogue between the two inmates, one first time younger prisoner and one older recidivist is particularly able to capture and explore Godber's fears about prison life. Whilst it remains a comedy, the dialogue proceeds through the masculine banter of previous sexual conquests and sexualised representations of women. There are a few telling and potent points which *only* work because this series is set in prison, demonstrating the 'grit' behind the 'wit'. After unpacking his possessions and unexpectedly darning Fletcher's sock, the two men settle down for the night. For Lennie, this time of day exacerbates all of his fears about prison life leading him inevitably to thoughts about what he would normally be doing 'on the out'. This episode is all about Godber coming to terms with his imprisonment and it is Fletch's job as the reluctant 'father figure' to help him adjust:

*Bells start to ring and doors start to slam, signalling lock up time. Voices are heard in the distance.*

Lennie: Unnatural in't it, men in cages.

Fletcher: Bide your time.

... [conversation continues]...

*A prison officer appears, gives a cursory check, then slams the door and locks it.*

Fletcher: Goodnight, sunshine ... Charmless nurk. Oh dear I forgot to put my shoes out to be cleaned.

*Lennie walks across to the window.*

Lennie: This is the bit I can't stand though.

Fletcher: What?

Lennie: Lockup. It's only quarter-to-eight. Barely dark. If I was at home now I'd just be going out for the evening.<sup>9</sup>

This is the beginning of the conversation that the two men are to continue periodically throughout the evening and into the night, as Fletch helps to guide

Lennie through the 'entry shock' of his imprisonment. Fletch's response to Godber is that perhaps they should go out; get a couple of *Pan's People* dancers and go for a meal and to a night club, dance until dawn ...

Fletcher: ... But you see I done all that last night and so I'm a bit knackered. Also we'd have to get all ponced up and you'd have to darn me socks. So why don't we just have a quiet night in? All right?

Lennie: If you say so, Fletch.

Fletcher: That's what you've got to tell yourself. You're just having a quiet night in.

*He goes back to The Sun [newspaper]. There is a pause.*

Lennie: (Gloomily) Trouble is I've got six hundred and ninety-eight quiet nights in to go.

Fletcher: Less than some.

*Lennie looks at the picture of Denise.*

The conversation continues as Lennie wonders if Denise (his fiancée) will wait for him. Fletch interjects with various lurid comments relating to pictures in *The Sun* and Lennie explains how he and Denise met in a supermarket in the Bull Ring in Birmingham when he ran over her foot with his trolley, and Fletch regales his own courtship with his wife.

Later, in the middle of the night, a match flares as Fletch lights up a smoke. After earlier praying aloud, Fletch mocks Godber for only wanting something from God now, to which Godber responds:

9. All of the dialogue from the series quoted in this article is from Clements, D. and La Frenais, I. (2002) *Porridge: The Scripts* London: Headline.

Lennie: You're right. But I am in the face of adversity. I hate prison, Fletch. It makes me depressed and it makes me afraid. I hate the air of defeat and the smell of disinfectant. I hate the shouting and the keys. And I hate not having a handle on the inside of that door. *He nods towards the cell door. Fletcher is not unsympathetic.*

Lennie asks about the things Fletch has been talking about in his sleep:

Fletcher: Listen, Godber. No one asked you to eavesdrop on my dreams. It's about the only place you have any privacy inside — your head. You want to remember that, son. Dreams is your escape. No locked doors in dreams. No boundaries, no frontiers. Dreams is freedom.

*This impresses Lennie.*

Lennie: Freedom

Fletcher: No locked doors.

Lennie: That's true, Fletch, that's really true.

Fletcher: Well, I'm getting back to mine and I suggest that you do the same.

Lennie: I will do, I will. And thank you, Fletch. ...

[They settled down to sleep again].

In the morning, Lennie passes Fletch a small bag of Liquorice Allsorts:

Lennie: It's meant as a thank you. 'Cos when that door's locked I am depressed and I am afraid, and you — you know — just make it a bit more tolerable.

Fletcher: You'll get used to it, Len. And the night's not so long, is it? It's your human spirit, see. They can't break that, those nurks. We'll be all right, you and me, son. Here, we'll go out tonight if you like?

Lennie: With those dancers?

Fletcher: If you like. Or I could ring Miss Sharon Spencer, eh? [woman from article in *The Sun*] She'll have a big friend. Bound to. Soft lights, music, night club ...

Lennie: It's discos now.

*He stands up.*

Fletcher: What? Oh well — as you say. Anyhow, think about it.

Lennie: I will, I will. See how I feel. On the other hand, Fletch —

Fletcher: Yeah.

Lennie: If we don't feel like it, we might just have a quiet night in.

Fletcher: Right. Right.

*Fletcher picks up the pot. Lennie picks up the bucket and they move to the cell door. Prisoners are walking along the landing with buckets etc. for slop-up. Fletcher comes out of his cell, followed by Lennie and they join the line. [Episode ends].*

*Porridge is a comedy but this episode in particular brings to the fore the 'pains of imprisonment' and the issues of insecurity, fear, time and isolation that many people confront when sentenced to imprisonment . . .*

The 'night in' is one enforced by the prison system and ordered by the court. Prison is integral to this success of this idea and how it unfolds in the episode; the characters cannot leave, they have no choice as to the circumstances they now find themselves in, they know very little about each other, yet, share intimate aspects of their personal thoughts and lives as Fletcher slowly brings Godber round. Whilst this episode does not say much about the potential violence of prison life or any of the other issues raised by Wilson and O'Sullivan, it does engage with understanding prison life and how people cope. This episode may

only provide a window into the fictional thoughts of one young man but it does demonstrate the way in which both Godber and Fletcher cope with prison and how they confront their own identities and own masculinities in this process of adaptation. To a general viewing public, this is not a 'cosy view' of sanitised 'holiday-camp' prison that Wilson and O'Sullivan suggest. *Porridge* is a comedy but this episode in particular brings to the fore the 'pains of imprisonment' and the issues of insecurity, fear, time and isolation that many people confront when sentenced to imprisonment, especially for the first time, and that most of the audience may not ever have considered. The debate as to the accuracy of *Porridge* as a representation of prison life aside, I'll have to agree with Johnny Vaughan that this episode is probably 'the best ever two-hander to ever appear in a British sitcom'.<sup>10</sup>

10. Vaughan, Johnny — *Britain's Best Sitcom — The Case for Porridge*. ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/sitcom/advocate\\_porridge.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sitcom/advocate_porridge.shtml)) Accessed 14/09/2011.



# A Short Film About Killing (1988)

*Jamie Bennett is Governor HMP Grendon & Springhill.*

***This is a story about a young boy who kills a taxi-driver and then the law kills the boy'*  
— Krzysztof Kieslowski**

Polish film-maker Krzysztof Kieslowski is widely regarded as one of the great modern European directors. He was born in 1941 and graduated from the famous Lodz film school. His reputation was built upon the ambitious ten part TV series *Dekalog* (1988) in which he used the Ten Commandments as his starting point for an exploration of the lives of residents of a Warsaw estate. He followed this with *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), the story of two identical women, one in France and one in Poland, whose lives intersect and are metaphysically linked. His final films comprised the *Trois Couleurs* trilogy and were loosely based upon the guiding principles of the French Revolution; liberty, equality and fraternity. These three films, *Bleu* (1993), *Blanc* (1993) and *Rouge* (1994), were released to great acclaim. However, Kieslowski quickly announced his retirement and died two years later.

*A Short Film About Killing* (1988) was originally one of the episodes in the *Dekalog* series, but was expanded for cinema release along with another episode, *A Short Film About Love* (1988). As was quoted at the opening of this article, Kieslowski was characteristically pithy in his description of the plot. The film follows a disaffected and alienated young man, Jacek, who kills a taxi-driver in a seemingly random attack. The murder scene is brutal, bungled and prolonged, lasting seven and a half minutes as Jacek strangles the struggling man and finally overcoming him, drags him out of the car into a field where he smashes his skull with a rock. The film quickly cuts to end of the court case where a young idealistic lawyer, Piotr, has failed to prevent Jacek receiving the death penalty. The remainder of the film focuses on the build up to and the conduct of the death penalty. During this, Jacek reveals the death of a young sister that may have partially explained his crime. The preparations for the hanging are meticulously conducted and carried out. The execution itself lasts for an excruciating five minutes. At times it

appears systematic and mechanical but at others is confused and messy. The film closes with a shot of Piotr sitting in his car in an empty field, weeping.

As with all of Kieslowski's films, themes of chance and coincidence are woven through as a metaphysical thread. The lives of the three main characters intersect both before and as a result of the attack. Chance is also addressed more broadly through the life stories of the protagonists and in parallel characters in other episodes of *Dekalog*. Such grand themes are absorbed within narratives that are based upon naturalistically drawn characters. This is also reflected in Kieslowski's visual style, which uses documentary-style but also incorporates highly stylised elements, for example in this film the use of heavy green and brown filters that give an eerie and unsettling appearance. He moves between philosophical examination of the human condition and a more grounded concern with capturing the lived human experience. By locating his films between two such contrasting and seemingly incompatible approaches, his strategy has been described as 'liminal', that is:

*They organically illustrate the fault lines between the rational and nonrational, representation and expression, concrete and abstract, universal and particular, physical and metaphysical.<sup>2</sup>*

In general, Kieslowski veered away from overt political statements and instead focussed on the interior lives of individuals and grand humanistic concerns. However, *A Short Film About Killing* is an exception. In making this film, he had a clear and deeply held conviction:

*I wanted to make this film precisely because all this takes place in my name....if someone in this country puts a noose around someone else's neck and kicks the stool from under his feet, he's doing it in my name. And I don't wish it...this film isn't really about capital punishment but about killing in general. It's wrong no matter why you kill, no matter whom you kill and no matter who does the killing.<sup>3</sup>*

1. Stok, D. (ed) (1993) *Kieslowski on Kieslowski* London: Faber and Faber p. 159.

2. Kickasola, J. (2004) *The films of Krzysztof Kieslowski: The liminal image* New York: Continuum p.38.

3. Stok (1993) p.160.

This article will not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of this work, but instead will focus on the strategies deployed by Kieslowski in order to convey his reformist intentions. How did he attempt to expose, challenge and question the use of capital punishment? What arguments did he present? How did he use the medium of cinema and TV in order to communicate those views? The article will also conclude by briefly discussing the effects of this film on public discourse and the development of anti-death penalty media over the last two decades.

## Representing death

The place and function of capital punishment has changed over time. In his seminal analysis of the birth of the prison, Michel Foucault opened by describing the public execution of Robert-Francois Damiens, who attempted to assassinate King Louis XV in 1757<sup>4</sup>. Foucault described that this 'spectacle of the scaffold' was enacted in order to reassert the power of the sovereign through a deliberately visceral and visible ceremony. However, within a century such public displays had been abandoned and instead a 'gentle way in punishment' emerged, with prisons becoming the main form of punishment characterised by routinisation, bureaucratisation and aimed at changing behaviour. This approach was directed towards the soul of offenders rather than their bodies.

The modern capital punishment is carried out away from public gaze, hidden behind prison walls. Rather than being part of everyday experience it has become part of 'abstract consciousness'<sup>5</sup>, accessible only through second hand reports and fictional accounts. As a result, most members of the public have become 'distantiated consumers' of the narratives and images of capital punishment<sup>6</sup>. This retreat from direct experience and visibility has allowed the death penalty to be reinterpreted and its representation recast and packaged by the producers of these narratives and images. For example, Foucault argued that state killing became situated within the administrative approach to justice:

A clear aim of the film was to render the execution visible. Rather than hearing about it through news reports, fictionalised accounts or glamourised depictions, the viewer is confronted with a realistic recreation.

*The guillotine takes life almost without touching the body, just as prison deprives of liberty or a fine reduces wealth. It is intended to apply the law not so much to a real body capable of feeling pain as to a juridical subject, the possessor, among other rights, of the right to exist. It had to have the abstraction of the law itself.*<sup>7</sup>

Whilst, Garland has argued that the use of lethal injection has deployed expert power in order to manage presentation and understanding:

*The killing state kills, of course, but it strives to legitimate these killings by representing them as something other than they are — for example, as painless, sterile medical procedures...executions have become behind-the-scenes bureaucratic procedures in which the offender's life is terminated with a minimum of pain and physical suffering.*<sup>8</sup>

These representations of capital punishment emphasise three points that are directly explored in Kieslowski's film. The first is that the death penalty has become invisible, carried out in private behind the high walls of prisons. Secondly, it has become detached from the body of the punished, it has become an abstraction in which the physical nature is minimised and instead it is recast as a painless and expedient judicial sanction. Thirdly, this has acted to emphasise asymmetry between the crime and punishment, representing them as different in nature and morality. Each of these will be discussed below.

A clear aim of the film was to render the execution visible. Rather than hearing about it through news reports, fictionalised accounts or glamourised depictions, the viewer is confronted with a realistic recreation. By allowing the detail to be seen as the clock ticks towards the appointed hour, an

4. Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* London: Penguin.

5. Ibid.

6. Garland, D. (2010) *Peculiar institution: America's death penalty in an age of abolition* Oxford: Oxford University Press p.298.

7. Foucault (1977) p.13.

8. Garland, D. (2002) The cultural uses of capital punishment in *Punishment and Society* 4 p.459-87 quote from p. 466 emphasis in original.

absorbing sense of time and place is created. The feeling of being there through a documentary style reconstruction is a deliberate strategy. The power of this approach was apparent even on the set, where Kieslowski had to suspend production for a day as the reaction of the cast and crew to the scene was so intense. He described that:

*The sight of the execution is simply unbearable, even if it's only a pretence.<sup>9</sup>*

Whilst the detail of the film illustrates the bureaucratisation and routinisation of the penalty, including the preparation and testing of the gallows, the final cigarette, the last rites and the donning of the black hood, it also focuses on the pain and suffering inflicted. In his final meeting as he awaits his punishment, Jacek tells Piotr the story of his sister's death, revealing the guilt, anger and trauma that has shaped his actions but also revealing his humanity. The execution is a rough and ready affair despite its mechanisation. Jacek is restrained, shoved and wrestled to the gallows as he breaks down in desperation during his final moments. Finally, as he hangs limply from the noose, the film cuts to an almost abstract image of bodily fluids dripping into a grubby tray below his body. Through these representations, Kieslowski places the physical and bodily nature of capital punishment back in the centre stage. This is no painless and sterile process but is brutal, painful and traumatic.

By undercutting the conventional representation of the death penalty, Kieslowski starts to highlight the similarities between the acts. Both become prolonged, painful and messy acts of brutality and suffering. In discussing the film, he describes both acts as 'murder' and drew the links between individual violence and capital punishment<sup>10</sup>. In this way, he attempts to reject the distinctions and instead draw parallels, asserting a moral equivalence. As Beccaria argued, the very

legitimacy of capital punishment is called into question by this mirroring:

*The murder that is depicted as a horrible crime is repeated in cold blood, remorselessly.<sup>11</sup>*

This cycle of violence was described by Foucault himself as recasting the execution as 'a hearth in which violence bursts again into flame'<sup>12</sup>.

Kieslowski's approach is one that embraces both feelings and ideas. Through these images, representations, narratives and devices, he allows the viewer to access a space in which they are confronted with the nature of capital punishment and undergo an experience which engages them with questions about its legitimacy. He places the viewer in a liminal situation. On one hand, they are situated as a 'witness' to a murder and execution that are realistically represented rather than being stylised or glamourised. On the other hand the film provokes the viewer to experience intuitive critical, emotional and moral responses to what is represented. This makes for an uncomfortable and intense experience but also one that seeks to connect with the thoughts and feelings of the viewer, excavating their humane instincts.

Through these representations, Kieslowski places the physical and bodily nature of capital punishment back in the centre stage. This is no painless and sterile process but is brutal, painful and traumatic.

### Challenging the death penalty in film

In the UK, *A Short Film About Killing* might be regarded as a relatively obscure art house film, appealing to a cultural elite. However, such an ethnocentric view would ignore its origins as a mainstream Polish television production. The original *Dekalog* series attracted an audience of around 15 million in Poland<sup>13</sup> and then quickly achieved international success through television and cinema distribution.

The film was released at a time of change across Eastern Europe and at that time debate had arisen in Poland about the death penalty<sup>14</sup>. The film secured a

9. Stok (1993) p. 166.

10. Stok (1993).

11. Quoted in Foucault (1977) p.9.

12. Foucault (1977) p.9.

13. Stok (1993).

14. Ibid.



place in the public discourse supporting the abolitionist perspective. A year later, a five year moratorium on capital punishment was introduced, which later became a permanent abolition. This film is therefore an example of how film can play an important role in public debate and reform.

During the 1990s, Hollywood produced a cycle of anti-capital punishment films, including *Dead Man Walking* (1995), *The Green Mile* (1999) and *True Crime* (1999). These films adopted more dramatic, character and plot-based strategies, including humanising and developing empathy with those who face execution, or presenting them as innocent people, wrongly convicted through a flawed system. It has been argued that these films found a public space to challenge the death penalty<sup>15</sup>. However, these films have adopted a different strategy to Kieslowski, who presented no question about the truth of the conviction or the brutality of the crime; and made no attempt to use sentimentality or emotional manipulation to garner sympathy. Instead his approach relied on authenticity and confronting the viewer with and absorbing them within a liminal space capturing both the actuality and the nature of the death penalty. The viewer is implicated in the execution

and undergoes an experience that draws out an emotional and moral response<sup>16</sup>.

The spirit of *A Short Film About Killing* has been replicated most closely in the new media rather than in later cinema. The execution of former leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein<sup>17</sup>, at the end of 2006 was heralded by Western leaders as an important step in Iraq's progress and was represented in the media as a unifying event in that country. However, surreptitiously captured mobile phone footage of the death was distributed around the world through the internet. This revealed that Hussein had been the subject of abuse and sectarian taunts, was hanged before he completed his prayers and his executioners danced a jig as he dangled from the noose. As with Kieslowski's film, this footage took a hidden practice and made it public, revealing a spectacle that rendered visible the nature of the act and the dynamics of power.

Krzysztof Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Killing* is an outstanding film about capital punishment. It used cinema to engage viewers in critically reflecting upon social issues on an emotional, intellectual and moral level, and has shown that film can play a role in changing policies, practices and perceptions.

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15. O'Sullivan, S. (2003) 'Representing "The Killing State": The death penalty in Nineties Hollywood cinema' in *The Howard Journal* 42:5 p.455-503. See also Garland (2010) for an excellent analysis of the historical, political and social structures within which the American death penalty is situated. This account suggests that the late modern death penalty exists in a chronic crisis of legitimacy as it sits uncomfortably with the liberal institutions and values of the society in which it is situated. This would to some degree account for the continued critical cinema representations during the last two decades.
  16. A similar strategy can be seen in two films that explore non-state violence and its depiction in cinema. Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997) in which a middle class family are terrorised in their holiday home and Gaspar Noe's *Irreversible* (2002), an account of a rape and revenge killing. Both immerse viewers in realistic depictions of violence but also use highly stylised devices (including characters talking to camera in Haneke's film, and in Noe's film the narrative runs in reverse from the end to the beginning). In doing so they raise questions about the ways in which violence is represented and consumed.
  17. For a fuller discussion see Bennett, J. (2007) 'A Short Film About Killing Saddam' in *The Howard Journal* 46:2 p.194-6.

# Ruth Ellis in the Condemned Cell:

## Voyeurism and Resistance

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### Introduction

**When Ruth Ellis became the last woman to be executed in England and Wales in July 1955, execution had long been something which took place in private. It is a well established argument that the ending of public execution in 1868 made the practice mundane and bureaucratic, and 'wrung out of it any trace of the ceremonial and festive'.<sup>1</sup> However, whilst many twentieth-century executions were carried out with little attention from the press or public, there were also 'spectacular' cases which commanded high levels of interest and were intensively reported. These cases demonstrated that the execution audience still existed and craved details about the final, tense days of the condemned, when the Home Secretary's exercise of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy was the only thing that could save them from the gallows. The hanging of Ruth Ellis was one such case.**

Ruth Ellis was found guilty of murdering her boyfriend, David Blakely, whom she shot outside a pub in Hampstead. She received considerable public sympathy for a host of reasons related to her status as the mother of two children; the nature of the killing, which was perceived as a frenzied crime of passion; the physical and emotional mistreatment she had received from David; and concerns that cultural double standards meant that a man in a similar case would be reprieved.<sup>2</sup> It is easy to understand why Ruth's case was high profile and widely reported, particularly in the popular press. The trial offered a melodramatic love story about the stormy relationship between a glamorous, 28-year-old woman from a working class background and a 25-year-old, public school educated 'cad', who liked racing motor cars. Headlines described Ruth as a 'blonde model', and she had been both a nude model and nightclub hostess. As such, it was a story that gave mid twentieth-century newspaper readers a peek into a transgressive, nocturnal, metropolitan world in which the strictures of conventional respectability did not apply. After her guilty verdict and death sentence, she was incarcerated in

Holloway's condemned cell. This provided the next phase of the story, in which a young, attractive mother faced execution for a murder that seemed eminently understandable. Particularly compelling was her insistence that she did not want to be reprieved and was ready to die. This article examines how Ruth Ellis' time in the condemned cell was reported in the popular press. It argues that such newspaper coverage reflected both voyeuristic fascination with the incarceration and imminent hanging of a beautiful young woman, and admiration for her strength and forbearance under grimly adverse conditions.

### Fascination with the Condemned Cell

In high profile cases, the behaviour and experience of the murderer in the condemned cell was a topic of curiosity in the popular press. In contrast with 'serious' newspapers, like *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, the human interest aspects of the story were important in the reporting of papers with a mass readership, such as the biggest selling newspaper of the era, the *Daily Mirror*. Visits to the condemned cell from friends and family were discussed, as was the imputed state of mind of the prisoner. The apparent coolness of mid twentieth-century 'mass killer', Neville Heath, was evidenced through passing the time by playing poker with his guards.<sup>3</sup> It was unusual for a woman to be awaiting execution and her 'out of place-ness'<sup>4</sup> in such an environment was worthy of comment. A column in the *Daily Express* described the conditions that Louisa Merrifield, convicted in 1953 of murdering an elderly woman, would be experiencing at Strangeways. She would be 'watched day and night' but had access to 'cards, chess and dominoes' and was also entitled to a pint of beer with her food.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the reporting of the prisoner's time in the condemned cell was a constituent part of the execution story. However, in Ruth Ellis' case, the fascination with her experience of the death cell was particularly intense. The physical conditions of her incarceration were reported in the *Daily Mirror* as follows: 'The cell is carpeted. A highly polished long table is screwed into the floor. Mrs Ellis is

1. McGowan, R. (1994) 'Civilizing Punishment: The End of Public Execution in England' in *Journal of British Studies* 33:3 p. 281.
2. Seal, L. (2011) 'Ruth Ellis and Public Contestation of the Death Penalty' in *The Howard Journal* 50:5 p.492-504.
3. 'Playing Poker in Death Cell', *Daily Herald* 9.10.46.
4. Worrall, A. (1981) 'Out of Place: Female Offenders in Court' *Probation Journal* 28:3 p.90-92.
5. Hickey, W. (1953) 'No Censor for Mrs Merrifield', *Daily Express* 9 September.

allowed flowers, unframed photographs, and books.<sup>6</sup> The *Mirror* also reported her visits to church on the two Sundays preceding her execution.<sup>7</sup> Both stories explained that she had roast beef and Yorkshire pudding for lunch, with one adding that this was followed by rice pudding. These mundane details offered readers insight into another exotic location as part of the Ruth Ellis story, although in this phase it was the condemned cell rather than a metropolitan nightclub. A pseudo-domestic setting was evoked, with carpets and flowers, and a parody of an ordinary Sunday with church and Yorkshire pudding was related. The strangeness of the condemned cell was enhanced when it contained a woman, but especially when it contained a woman with the kind of spectacular femininity embodied by Ruth Ellis. Unlike Louisa Merrifield, who was 46 and described as ‘plump’ and ‘dowdy’,<sup>8</sup> Ruth was perceived as glamorous and sexually attractive, and consequently even more of an oddity as a condemned cell resident.

Jacqueline Rose describes Ruth Ellis as ‘[t]he object of voyeuristic attention’ and the press fascination with her time in the condemned cell clearly illustrates this.<sup>9</sup> The *Daily Mirror* reported that she was ‘under the care of six dark-uniformed women prison officers’<sup>10</sup> and guarded ‘day and night’.<sup>11</sup> Entering the condemned cell meant being denuded of her femininity, a process depicted by the *Daily Express*: ‘She exchanged the smart black costume she wore in court for a frock of drab grey’.<sup>12</sup> An article by Ruth’s mother, Elizabeth Neilson, in the *Sunday Dispatch*, emphasised the change that had taken place in Ruth’s demeanour, stating ‘I remember the affectionate, smart, vigorous girl I knew. And I think about what I have just seen — a bird stripped of its fine feathers in the cage of a condemned cell’.<sup>13</sup>

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This fascination with Ruth’s appearance and with her surveillance by female guards had a sexual element to it but also evinced a deeper desire to know her inner life. Haebich explores the case of Martha Rendell, an Australian woman executed for the murder of her stepson in 1909.<sup>14</sup> She argues that the popular press exhibited a ‘dark strain of voyeuristic curiosity about the condemned woman’s body, mind and soul’, and in focusing on the ‘rituals of monitoring and surveillance of the prisoner in the death cell [...] promised insights into her innermost secrets’.<sup>15</sup> The *Daily Express* published facsimiles of Ruth’s letters to her friend, Frank Neale, which were sent from the condemned cell and communicated her wish to die<sup>16</sup> and the *Woman’s Sunday Mirror* ran her ghost-written life story in four parts, the final instalment appearing the Sunday after her execution.<sup>17</sup> This covered Ruth’s childhood, her move to London from Manchester as a very young woman and subsequent fall from grace, as well as her relationship with David Blakely and details of his violence towards her. As Rose argues, spectacle, femininity and violence are mutually associated

‘in public fantasy life’.<sup>18</sup> Unsurprisingly, voyeuristic curiosity in the popular press also shaded into fascination with the macabre. A *Daily Express* article on Ruth’s final hours reported that she had asked for ‘candles to be lighted in her cell while she received Communion’ and had requested that a crucifix should hang from the wall of the execution room.<sup>19</sup>

## Resistance and Subversion

In addition to these ‘dark strains’ of fascination, another important theme, that of Ruth’s forbearance and fortitude, emerged from the popular press’s coverage of

6. ‘Ruth Ellis Not to Appeal — Solicitor’, *Daily Mirror* 23.6.55.

7. See ‘Ruth Ellis Leaves Her Cell to Go to Church’, *Daily Mirror* 4.7.55 and ‘2 Days to Go — Ruth Ellis Says: I am Content to Die’, *Daily Mirror* 11.7.55.

8. ‘The One Charm of Mrs Louisa Merrifield’ *Daily Mirror*, 4.9.53.

9. Rose, J. (1988) ‘Margaret Thatcher and Ruth Ellis’ *New Formations* 6 p.8.

10. ‘Ruth Ellis Not to Appeal — Solicitor’.

11. Johnson, H. (1955) ‘Ruth Ellis Turns Down a Chance of Life’ *Daily Mirror*, 23 June.

12. ‘A Light in Holloway’, *Daily Express*, 22.6.55.

13. Neilson, E. (1955) ‘Ruth Ellis: 10 Days to Go. Mother Cries “Why Torture Her?”’ *Sunday Dispatch*, 3 July This is likely to have been ghost-written.

14. Haebich, A. (2001) ‘Murdering Stepmothers: the Trial and Execution of Martha Rendell’ in B. A. Levy and F. Murphy (eds.) *Story/telling St Lucia*: University of Queensland Press

15. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

16. See ‘Ruth Ellis: No Reprieve’ *Daily Express* 12.7.55 and ‘The Last Letter of Ruth Ellis’ *Daily Express* 14.7.55.

17. See Ellis, R. (1955) *Woman’s Sunday Mirror* — ‘My Love and Hate’ 26 June; ‘David Gaspard “I Can’t Live Without You”’ 3 July; ‘The Night David Tried to Strangle Me’ 10 July; ‘The Last Words of Ruth Ellis’ 17 July.

18. Rose (1988), p. 8.

19. ‘And She Had Three Last Wishes’, *Daily Express*.14.7.55. See also ‘MPs Begin Campaign to End Hanging’, *News Chronicle*,14.7.55.



her incarceration in the condemned cell. Forbearance was required due to the circumstances in which she found herself. The *Daily Express* reported how she had to endure hearing the strains of 'a weekend concert and variety show' held in Holloway's D Block, which featured contemporary hits such as 'Shake, Rattle and Roll' and 'Strangers in Paradise'. Ruth was forced to 'sit in silence as the choruses faintly echoed along the corridors. The shadow of death by judicial hanging seemed far from that laughter-filled makeshift concert hall'.<sup>20</sup>

This theme enabled press coverage that was sympathetic towards Ruth, but which also emphasised her strength, and even heroism, rather than feminine frailty. In the *Daily Mirror*, journalist Howard Johnson explained that her 'apparent unconcern' about her plight had surprised 'even the most hardened women officials at Holloway Gaol'. Not only that, she had also 'spent her time cheering up the women officers who guard her day and night'.<sup>21</sup> Ruth's insistence that she wanted to die was key to this portrayal, and also enabled a subversive popular press representation of a woman who would not bow to what the authorities demanded of her — submissive penitence. Her last letter to Frank Neale, reproduced in the *Express*, assured him 'I am quite happy with the verdict'.<sup>22</sup> Two days before her execution, people who visited Ruth were 'amazed at her calmness'.<sup>23</sup> She was grateful to petitioners on her behalf but 'content to die', and also thankful to the 'people attending her in the death cell'.<sup>24</sup> This picture of fortitude and resistance was tempered by the fact that Ruth 'changed her mind about being happy to die' the evening before she was due to be hanged.<sup>25</sup> However, according to the *Mirror*, she was equal to the occasion when it arrived and 'died calmly, a changed woman from the one who broke down and wept the evening before'.<sup>26</sup>

Ruth Ellis' combination of bravery and despair was compelling and dramatic. After a sensational trial, with

its narratives of desperate love, violence and debauchery, her transformation into a stoic heroine who accepted her fate made a good story. But it also rewrote the portrayal of Ruth as a 'fast woman' and rather than redeeming her as a weak, pitiable figure, which might have been the more conventionally acceptable way of favourably portraying a woman awaiting execution,<sup>27</sup> presented her as someone to be admired. Some articles and letters in the 'serious' and popular press decried the sentimentalism that was exhibited for a beautiful woman facing the gallows.<sup>28</sup> However, this criticism missed the subversive elements of the Ruth Ellis story, which highlighted a working class woman's re-appropriation of the state's most potent degradation ceremony. Smith contends that execution 'performances' such as Ruth's 'can trigger narrative shifts' that affect onlookers' perceptions of criminal justice and punishment.<sup>29</sup>

Popular press fascination with Ruth Ellis' incarceration in the condemned cell was complex and multi-layered. On the one hand, articles' discussion of her surroundings and surveillance appeared calculated to appeal to readers' voyeurism and represented Ruth as a novel oddity in the death cell. On the other hand, reports of her forbearance and fortitude transcended gender/class scripts and made her into a heroine. Either explicitly or by implication,<sup>30</sup> this cast doubt on the legitimacy of the state's use of the death penalty, 'help[ing] a little to shift the terms of understanding about hanging law', as Gatrell argues of the 1815 case of Eliza Fenning, a cook executed for the attempted murder by poison of the family that employed her.<sup>31</sup> Popular press representations of Ruth Ellis in the condemned cell can be interpreted as simultaneously reinforcing and subverting readers' fascination with femininity and capital punishment.

20. 'Ruth Ellis in Death Cell Hears Laughter and Song' *Daily Express* 27.6.55.

21. Johnson (1955) 23 June.

22. 'The Last Letter of Ruth Ellis'.

23. '2 Days to Go — Ruth Ellis Says: I am Content to Die'.

24. Ibid.

25. Woods, P. (1955) 'Lawyer's Dramatic Last-Minute Dash to Save Ruth Ellis' *Daily Mirror* 13 July.

26. 'The Last Hours of Ruth Ellis' *Daily Mirror* 14.7.55.

27. See Ballinger, A. (2007) 'Masculinity in the Dock: Responses to Male Violence and Female Retaliation in England and Wales, 1900-1965' *Social and Legal Studies* 16:4 459-481.

28. See Klare, H. (1955) 'The Death Penalty' Letters to the Editor *The Observer* 17 July and Waterhouse, K. (1955) 'If We Hanged Five Pretty Women' *Daily Mirror* 25 August.

29. Smith, P. (2008) *Punishment and Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 54.

30. Some papers, such as the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Herald*, were abolitionist. Others, such as the *Daily Express*, supported retention of capital punishment.

31. Gatrell, V. A. C. (1994) *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People* Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 369.

# Penal Hell-Holes and Dante's Inferno

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## Introduction

*'He's an evil monster... I hope he rots in hell' says sister of murder victim as killer gets life.<sup>1</sup>*

*There are some prison administrators who stress the need to create small maximum security facilities for the most troublesome offenders — 'maxi-maxi' institutions. Their plans read like the design of the inner circles of hell.<sup>2</sup>*

**News reports about crime are replete with the language of otherness; people who offend do so because 'they' are not like 'us'. The media's tendency to differentiate between in-group and out-group is a trend most famously observed by Stan Cohen in his 1972 study of folk devils and moral panics. But as Bauman<sup>3</sup> argues, the folklorist images of devils and demons that formerly soaked up diffuse security fears have recently been transformed into danger and risks and, while the label 'folk devil' still has currency in relation to some offenders (predominantly those who may be regarded as acting collectively rather than individually) it does not adequately convey society's opprobrium for the most serious offenders. For those designated the 'worst of the worst' — an appellation often applied, not because the gravity of their action is deemed most serious in law, but because there was an element of the offence that was judged by journalists to be particularly likely to seize and then revile the public imagination — only the word 'evil' will do.**

'Evil' (like 'Hell') is both a religious and secular concept which gives it added potency. Unsurprisingly, then, when an action is deemed so evil as to occupy a space outside the boundaries of morality, or even of 'normal' human agency, the individual who has perpetrated the action is regarded as deserving punishments of 'mythic proportions'<sup>4</sup>. While the ultimate punishment, the death penalty, is unlikely to ever be reintroduced in this country (despite the most recent newspaper poll finding that 53 per cent would be in favour of a return to capital punishment<sup>5</sup>), eternal damnation finds form in other ways, particularly in the

indeterminate life sentence. The individuals sentenced to life are assigned various levels of demonization and dangerousness both within the criminal justice system and outside it; constructed as fundamentally and essentially different from 'normal' people. For these misfits and monsters, perceived through the lens of the popular media as beyond redemption, complete and final removal from society is a fair and natural response. Little wonder, then, that images of subterranean, tomb-like, penal 'hell-holes' play large in the popular imagination.

While several visual 'texts' could be referenced to illustrate the metaphorical links between prison and Hell — Piranesi's *Carceri* or Hieronymus Bosch's hellscape in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, to name but two — this article will draw on Dante's *Inferno*. Dante is considered to have particular cultural currency for two reasons. First, the idea of good and evil was an intrinsic feature of Dante's universe and is woven into the fabric of *Inferno*, a dualism which finds modern form in the popular media which overwhelmingly reports in binary oppositions: good vs. evil; black vs. white; normal vs. deviant etc. Indeed, Dante's belief that the 'punishment must fit the crime' resonates with contemporary publics and, while harsh from a human perspective, Hell is also the very image of divine justice. Second, the themes and allegorical motifs of Dante's subterranean, multi-layered vision of Hell have arguably seeped into the collective imagination to a greater degree than any other imagining of Hell, becoming part of the common stock of knowledge and informing ideas about justice and punishment, even among those who have not actually read *Inferno*.

## Dante's Vision of Hell

*Now moans, loud howls and lamentations  
echoed through the starless air, so that I also  
began to cry. Many languages, strange  
accents, words of pain, cries of rage, voices  
loud and faint, the sound of slapping hands  
— all these whirled together in that black and  
timeless air, as sand is swirled in a tornado.*

*(Inferno 3: 22-30).*

1. *Daily Record* 25 August 2011.
2. Morris, N. (1974) *Future of Imprisonment* Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press p. 88.
3. Bauman, Z. (2004) *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* London: Polity.
4. Staub, E. (1999) 'The Roots of Evil: Social Conditions, Culture, Personality, and Basic Human Needs' in *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 3:3 179-192.
5. *Mail On Sunday* 8 August 2011.

*I'm not sure I feel safe tonight. It's midnight. The noises from inside the zone are getting louder...It sounds like dogs yelping but it's not. It's prisoners moaning and swearing. Someone was knocking on the door earlier, a few times. I think it was prison officers. It feels really creepy and quiet. I should move the chair to the door for extra security, but actually feel too scared to move.*

(Piacentini, prison research fieldnotes)<sup>6</sup>.

A writer and philosopher who is widely regarded as being as important as Homer and Shakespeare in literary history, Dante Alighieri (c. 1265-1321) wrote *Inferno* as a three-part work (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*) collectively titled *Commedia* offering a vision of Hell and Heaven from the perspective of an observer who lived through a period of almost constant war, political conflict and corruption in his home city of Florence. Revenge and retribution were the stuff of everyday life as the merchant classes battled with the nobility for control of this prosperous and strategically important city. Dante's upbringing in a period of political discord, including a stint of active military service, was followed by a period of relative stability when Church and Empire determined the political structure of the world. As Burge comments, 'peace and harmony could only be achieved if secular and spiritual were kept separate yet constructively interlinked'<sup>7</sup> and the Pope led the way in demanding piousness and pilgrimage while at the same time rewarding religious devotees with lavish displays of indulgence, including a six-week Jubilee to mark the turn of the thirteenth century which Dante is believed to have attended<sup>8</sup>.

Living through a period of turmoil and corruption inevitably shaped Dante's view of the universe and informed his writing. Part satire, part novel and part journal (it is narrated in the first person) the *Divine Comedy*, as it is now usually known, was intended to be read aloud to an audience who would recognise the historical and political allusions that underpin what is essentially a cracking story. For dramatic effect, Dante creates a dialogue by introducing a companion on his

journey to Hell; the Roman poet Virgil (70-19 BC) who fulfils the roles of tourist guide, mentor and protector, leading Dante on the journey to the 'horrid hole of Hell' (*Inferno*, 32: 6). The *Comedy* also contains many irreverent in-jokes and references to controversial figures of the day, some of which are pleasingly prescient, such as 'he who made the 45 minute claim' and the 'the man who loved his duck house more than justice'<sup>9</sup>; an archaic predecessor of the Conservative MP Sir Peter Viggers, exposed as having claimed £1,600 for his duck house in the MP expenses scandal in 2009.

While the Christian tradition had long imagined Hell as the dwelling place of souls who are unforgiven for their earthly misdemeanours and therefore denied entry to Heaven, there had been no consensus on its physical geography until Dante's precisely imagined vision was written at the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Dante specified that Hell is a deep conical indentation, the lowest point of which is precisely at the centre of the earth. The central axis of the inverted pyramid runs directly through Jerusalem, the location of the crucifixion and resurrection and thus a powerful symbol of God's redemptive power<sup>10</sup>. The poor, tormented souls consigned to everlasting suffering occupy nine vast circular terraces which descend, in decreasing size,

down to the earth's core. In addition, at the outer edge of the abyss is an area occupied by those who have committed no sin except that they were morally neutral and did not act or speak out against others' wrongdoings. Illustrating the point later made by Burke (1729-1797) that all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing, the punishment suffered by these 'neutrals' seems harsh to a modern reader. They swirl in their masses moaning into the howling wind, naked and surrounded by attacking flies and wasps as their faces run with blood. Following this is the descent down through the nine circles of 'that profound pit of pain filled with the howl of endless woe'. The souls of the dead are categorised on each level according to which sin they have committed in their earthly lives. First is an area called Limbo where the souls of those who died without the redemption of God's grace live 'in longing without hope'; then there are those who have

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6. Piacentini, L. (2005) 'Cultural talk and other intimate acquaintances with Russian prisons' in *Crime, Media, Culture* 1:2 189-208.

7. Burge, J. (2010) *Dante's Invention* Stroud: The History Press p.85.

8. Ibid.: 86.

9. Ibid. 124.

10. Ibid.

succumbed to sins of weakness such as lust, gluttony or anger who suffer relatively light punishments in the upper reaches of Hell. Between the upper circles and the lower reaches is a river of boiling blood where Virgil and Dante pause to accustom themselves to the awful stench, and then come the circles reserved for the greatest sinners where weeping souls are to be found, tormented and 'wallowing in filth'. These are the (pathologically) angry and violent, deceivers and fraudsters, seducers and flatterers and, finally, in the ninth circle, the treacherous. These might not seem the most serious sins to a modern audience that views spree killers, serial murderers, terrorists and paedophiles as the most 'evil' offenders but they represent the sins of those responsible for the discord in Italy at the time, as illustrated by the comic graphicness with which Dante describes their fate:

*No barrel with a missing  
stave gapes open quite as  
wide as the soul I saw split  
from chin down to the  
place where we fart. His  
guts hung down between  
his legs and I could see his  
innards and that foul sack  
that turns what we have  
eaten to shit.*

(*Inferno*, 28: 22).

In addition, as he descends into Hell, Dante records several unpleasant experiences which resonate with common, cultural ideas about prison: slamming gates, vile odours, ditches full of excrement, mutilations, deviant sexual practices, suicides and a catalogue of degradations too numerous to list. These graphic portrayals of suffering still make gruesome but compelling reading and illustrate why the prison has always lent itself to infernal metaphors; as Nellis comments, Hell 'has been claimed for centuries as the ultimate punishment in Western Christendom...places of damnation even when intended, forlornly, as places of redemption'<sup>11</sup>.

## Reel Prison Hell

The construction of Hell with its nine concentric layers boring deep into the earth's core has found particular resonance with those who seek to provide artistic imaginings of imprisonment. Cultural criminologists have emphasised that ideas about crime and punishment must be understood as an ongoing spiral of inter-textual, image-driven, media loops which draw on years — indeed centuries — of prior references. Novels, films, art, comics, television series and computer games are all 'notoriously self-referential, an accumulating stock of themes, tropes, motifs, stereotypes and conventions'<sup>12</sup> which form public notions, not only of what prisons are like, but what they *should* be like. In particular, cinematic images of the most secure facilities — the super-max or 'maxi-maxi' institutions as Morris described them — frequently employ dystopian penal imagery and draw on 'a rich ideational and iconographic heritage, in which...the spirit of Dante's *Inferno* lives on'<sup>13</sup>. Nellis is concerned with the aesthetic influence of *Inferno* on cinematic images of future punishments; prisons whose whereabouts, perhaps even whose existence, are not known to the populace at large. The sci-fi prisons he discusses include *Leviathan* in the film *No Escape* (dir. Campbell 1994), an industrial installation

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sexual practices,  
suicides and a  
catalogue of  
degradations too  
numerous to list.

described by the governor-warden as 'a multinational business...reprocessing garbage'<sup>14</sup>, and 'the most obvious Dantean environment', *Fortress* (dir. Gordon 1992). The *Fortress* of the film's title is 'the world's largest underground prison, a pit 33 storeys deep, housing both men and women. Inmates descend as though through the circles of Hell, and are employed digging ever deeper levels'<sup>15</sup>. These movies, Nellis says, 'tell us without exception that the American prisons of the future will be hellish places, and that there will surely be villains bad enough to justify their existence'<sup>16</sup>.

11. Nellis, M. (2005) 'Future Punishment in American Science Fiction Films' in P. Mason (ed.) *Captured by the Media* Cullompton: Willan Publishing p. 222.

12. Ibid.: 212.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.: 218.

15. Ibid.: 219.

16. Ibid.: 223.



Films like *No Escape* and *Fortress* might be regarded as cult rather than mainstream works, but Dantean images of Hell have broader aesthetic appeal. To take just a few examples, Fiddler analyses the structure of Shawshank prison in *The Shawshank Redemption* (dir. Darabont 1994) — a film which received seven Oscar nominations and which regularly tops lists of most popular films — noting that juxtaposed against its mighty, vaulted, Gothic exterior, is an interior which appears to bore down deep below the surface, rendering cells chthonic tomb-like spaces<sup>17</sup>. Sylvester Stallone vehicle *Judge Dredd* (dir. Boyle 1995) presents the audience with a prison-within-a-prison depicted as a ‘tomb of the living...a place of darkness’<sup>18</sup> in which over 200 inmates are kept alive because it is decreed that they do not deserve the merciful release of execution. The first two installments of the *X Men* series (dir. Singer, 2000, 2003) feature a character called Magneto, held in solitary confinement in a seemingly impregnable plastic prison built specifically for him, who nonetheless ingeniously breaks free. The remoteness of these prisons, their impenetrability, their oppressively Gothic atmosphere and the unifying justification by authorities that the punishments are harsh but just, all chime with Dante’s vision of Hell.

Even ‘family films’ are not immune to the influences of *Inferno* where Dante’s allegories, themes and iconography may appear in less subtle and more caricatured ways. For example, the Dreamworks animation *Kung Fu Panda* (dir. Mark Osborne 2008) has a scene involving another spectacular escape from a supposedly impregnable prison. Chorh-Gom is an elaborate stronghold located in the inaccessible, snowy mountain peaks of Tavan Bogd in Mongolia built to hold a single prisoner, the evil snow leopard Tai Lung, serving a life sentence for his ruthless crimes against the citizens of the Valley of Peace. Not only fitted with elaborate defenses, traps and self-destruct mechanisms, and heavily guarded by the Anvil of

Heaven, a one thousand-strong elite army of rhinos, the prisoner is chained within the deepest part of the prison, restrained within a tortoise shell and has acupuncture needles along his back, keeping his chi blocked and making him almost fully immobile. The motto of the prison is ‘One way in, no way out’.

### Real Prison Hell

The question is, then, to what extent do Dante’s visions of Hell manifest themselves intertextually and inform ideas about what ‘real’ prisons *are* like and *should* be like. Many of the cinematic penal hell-holes already discussed have clear parallels with actual prisons. For example, new inmates to Leviticus (No Escape) for whom the sentence is natural life with no contact whatsoever with the outside world are told ‘to all intents and purposes you are already dead’<sup>19</sup>, a sentiment echoed by James Aitken, a former US prison official who described the supermax facility at the Florence Correctional Complex in Colorado<sup>20</sup> as a ‘living tomb... under such conditions as time goes by, they rot’<sup>21</sup>. Prisoners frequently refer to their environments as ‘hell’ or ‘hellish’, but some of the most vivid descriptions come from academic prison researchers who bring with them the perspectives of

‘outsiders’ and whose shock at what they experience is palpable, such as the earlier quote from prison researcher Laura Piacentini’s field notes during her stay in a Russian prison. The distressing noises that punctuated the eerie silence and led to her petrification contrast with the different — but also hellish — surroundings of Los Angeles County Jail as described by Loïc Wacquant. The largest detention facility in the ‘Free World’, LA County Jail consists of ‘seven mega-houses of detention’ holding more than 23,000 inmates, or ‘nearly half the total prison population of France or Italy’<sup>22</sup>. The Men’s Central Jail is organised on five floors, two of which are underground, and inmates are crammed in dormitories where up to 150 men live

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17. Fiddler, M. (2007) ‘Projecting the prison: the depiction of the uncanny in *The Shawshank Redemption*’ in *Crime, Media, Culture* 3:2 p.192-206.

18. Ibid.: 222.

19. Ibid.: 219.

20. This ‘Administrative Maximum’ (‘Ad-Max’) facility is where both British ‘shoe bomber’ Richard Reid and Zacharias Moussaoui, the only man charged in the United States over the 9/11 attacks, are both held.

21. Quoted in *The Times* 4 May 2006.

22. Wacquant, L. (2002) ‘The Curious Eclipse of Prison Ethnography in the Age of Mass Incarceration’ in *Ethnography* 3:4 p.371.

cheek by jowl on bunk beds which form a human filing cabinet in 'conditions that evoke the dungeons of the Middle Ages'<sup>23</sup>. Once again, it is his field notes, reproduced in the article, which bring home the Dantean qualities of the prison as he contrasts the darkness of the carceral spaces with the light above and beyond:

*Shock of the daylight, the sun, the fresh air. Overpowering feeling of emerging from a dive into a mine shaft...[a] murky factory for social pain and human destruction, silently grinding away. Emerging back into 'society', from darkness to light, I cannot but be struck by the hypervisibility of the issue of crime in US culture and politics and the total invisibility of punishment, especially when it assumes this industrial form...I am like numb coming out of this long afternoon inside MCJ, and I drive silently straight to the beach [of Santa Monica], to wallow in fresh air and wade in the waves, as if to 'cleanse' myself of all I've seen, heard, and sensed...but my memory is seared by what I've seen...Every time my mind drifts back to it, it seems like a bad movie, a nightmare, the vision of an evil 'other world' that cannot actually exist.*

(Field note from my first day in MCJ, 28 August 1998)<sup>24</sup>.

Wacquant highlights three aspects of the prison which combine to form this nightmare: the noise ('deafening and disorienting'); the filth (both of the trash variety which attracts rats and roaches, and promiscuity which, in this communal living environment, is 'pushed to the point of obscenity'); and the total absence of natural daylight (which leads Wacquant to describe the facility as 'a tomb. A subterranean grotto. A safe for men buried alive far away from society's eyes, ears, and mind'<sup>25</sup>). He

describes how inmates are permitted one outing per week on the caged roof of the jail, which is:

*'the residents' only chance to see the sky, to know whether it's sunny, rainy or windy, to breathe for two hours outside of the cold draft of the air-moving system that operates round the clock (to contain the risk of tuberculosis)... The inmates commonly complain...about the cold: in many tiers, the ventilation is set too high and the units are swept by gusts of chilly air; in the disciplinary cells, the atmosphere is downright frigid'<sup>26</sup>.*

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This truly is the lowest level of Hell; the ninth circle of the *Inferno* is freezing cold, an icy waste in which the atmosphere atrophies the soul. As Dante puts it, 'I did not die but I was not living either' (*Inferno*, 34: 25).

It is not just prisons which are hell-like environments. The liminal spaces of the criminal justice system, including police cells, court cells and prison transit vehicles might be characterized as places of Limbo, the first circle of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*. While not as terrifying as the ensuing circles of Hell, Limbo still makes gruesome reading to the modern observer; indeed its status as the area of everlasting torment to

which the souls of babies who died before they could be baptised proved sufficiently controversial that it was eventually removed from official Catholic doctrine in 2005<sup>27</sup>. It is also the destiny of the souls of people who died before the birth of Christ; that is, those for whom baptism was not available, including Virgil himself. Once again evoking prison movies, Dante entertains the thought that escape might be possible and he even suggests that he may be able to spring his friend from Limbo, but divine justice is immutable and there is no way out<sup>28</sup>.

Similar thoughts may at times occupy the minds of those transported in 'meat wagons' or 'sweatboxes'; the prison transit vehicles run by companies like Serco and GLS. In an article in the *Guardian*<sup>29</sup> Peter Tatchell

23. Ibid.: 372.

24. Ibid.: 381.

25. Ibid.: 373.

26. Ibid.: 374.

27. Burge, op cit: 126.

28. Ibid.: 127.

29. *Guardian* 30 January 2008.

argues that the export of live animals is better regulated than the transport of prisoners, each of whom is locked inside a tiny coffin-like cubicle, approximately five feet high and measuring about 34in by 24in, with a 10in square clear plastic window and a small hard metal seat on which they must remain seated. Many prisoners — including women, children and teenagers — spend long hours in these vans being transported, sometimes hundreds of miles, between courts and prisons. They usually get no fresh air or exercise, no food or water and no toilet facilities. If they urinate in the cubicle they simply have to clean it out on arrival at their destination. For the thousands of prisoners transported in this way, a large proportion of whom are on remand, many of whom are ill, traumatised, mentally unstable or claustrophobic, the experience recalls the barbarism of a previous era's transportation of slaves and convicts. Peter Simon, a black activist arrested following a political protest in December 2007 recalls his time in a Serco transit van, and notes that felt compressed within the cubicle: 'I was now beginning to feel like a black-skinned slave tight-packed (as of old, albeit in a different variation of the hell) out of some kind of sadistic lust for human degradation and profit...a slow panic was beginning to ensue. My chest was getting tighter...the sickness churned again in my stomach...The lack of ventilation. I was feeling so light-headed, tight-packed and boxed. I gasped, lost consciousness'<sup>30</sup>.

### Conclusion

Dante took the justness of Hell for granted, using his work as a kind of rhetorical punishment for his political enemies; a position that seems strikingly 'modern'. Indeed, it has been suggested that the *Comedy* has enduring appeal because we have not really left the Middle Ages: 'Vendetta still rules. Entire foreign policies, not to mention civil wars and terror campaigns, are based on ideas of revenge and polarities

As Bauman notes, 'the sole purpose of prisons is not just any human waste disposal but a final, definitive disposal.

of good and evil just as primitive as anything in Dante'<sup>31</sup>. Dante's vision of Hell is unremittingly and mesmerizingly cruel but in an age of penal populism his vision of eternal suffering is regarded as a 'half-desirable destination'<sup>32</sup> for society's outcasts, and the notion of a benign God who ordains cruel punishment is one that governments of liberal democracies hold dear. As Dante travels downward through the circles of Hell, his responses to the suffering of others is mixed. The plight of some souls who he knew personally in their earthly lives delights him and he cheers on their tormentors<sup>33</sup>. Others genuinely move him to pity, although not to a degree that causes him to question the authority of divine justice.

Vendetta also underpins ideas about crime and justice. A cursory scan of the pages of the popular press on any given day reveals that we appear to have returned to biological explanations of offending; that is, the offender is conceived as resulting, not from defects in society, but from pathological defects in the individual himself. Positivism also underpins popular fictions about crime and punishment and, as this article has discussed, Dante's vision of Hell is attractive to film-makers and others in the culture industries not only for the

medieval Gothic iconography it offers but also for the message it gives about vengeance. Divine justice is immutable and there can be no more graphic and disturbing rendition of 'do the crime, do the time' than *Inferno*. It is this moral absolutism that permeates news reporting of crime. Offenders are beyond redemption; human waste who must be banished to a fitting location. Removal from society is thus a fair and natural response and inhuman(e), Hell-like prisons are accepted as the most appropriate containers for them. But as well as being afforded no possibility of redemption, they are also considered unworthy of forgiveness. As Bauman notes, 'the sole purpose of prisons is not just any human waste disposal but a final, definitive disposal. Once rejected, forever rejected'<sup>34</sup>.

30. Ibid.

31. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2011/may/05/dante-hell-poetry-divine-comedy>).

32. Nellis, op. cit.: 226.

33. Burge, op. cit.: 122.

34. Bauman, op. cit.: 86.

# Estação Carandiru<sup>1</sup>

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According to official statistics, São Paulo state police killed 1,470 civilians in 1992.<sup>2</sup> 111 of these deaths occurred on 2 October, when 300 military police, many armed with machine guns, entered block 9 of Casa de Detenção de São Paulo (Carandiru prison) in response to a riot. The operation took just 30 minutes.<sup>3</sup> Most prisoners died at the hands of the notoriously violent unit Rota,<sup>4</sup> whose 700 officers continue to be responsible for 1 in 6 police killings in São Paulo today.<sup>5</sup> Guards, prisoners and police that witnessed the killings give varying descriptions of the events that led to guards withdrawing from the block, from a fight over space on a washing line, a game of football or unpaid debts on one of the prison's infamous rua dez (10<sup>th</sup> street), corridors where prisoners met to settle scores out of site of guards, that escalated into a brawl between rival groups of prisoners, to a fall out between inmates that commanded the block over a drugs deal. Explanations for why the police responded with such deadly force also vary, from public expectation (Rota could count on the support of the vast majority of the São Paulo public, despite its reputation for summary executions<sup>6</sup>) to prisoners threatening to attack officers with knives covered in HIV contaminated blood, to a systematic attempt to rid the block of its inmate hierarchy. What is broadly agreed is that tensions among the 2,000 offenders in the block boiled over following a routine dispute, that most of the killings occurred on the first floor, where inmates leaders and their associates resided, and that by the time Rota reached the floor prisoners had dropped their weapons and fled to their cells. The police forensics team that examined the crime scene concluded that a number of prisoners had been shot while kneeling or lying down; of the 397 shots that reached their target, 126 were to the head.<sup>7</sup> Carandiru did not

survive the controversy surrounding the operation, and was eventually deactivated in September 2002. In December three blocks, including block 9, were imploded live on TV. The remaining blocks were demolished in 2005. Paradoxically, the final victims of the Carandiru massacre, as the event came to be known, were the director of the prison, José Ismael Pedrosa, and the head of the São Paulo military police, who commanded the operation, Ubiratan Guimarães. Pedrosa was assassinated in 2005 on the orders of the *Primeiro Comando do Capital* (First Command of the Capital), a prison gang formed in the aftermath of the massacre that today operates in over 90 per cent of São Paulo prisons.<sup>8</sup> Guimarães was sentenced to 632 years imprisonment in 2001, only to escape punishment by being elected onto the São Paulo state legislature before winning an appeal against his conviction in 2006. Seven months later he was shot dead in as yet unexplained circumstances.

Opened in 1952, Carandiru was the largest prison in Latin America. In 1992 it held 7,000 prisoners, three times the number for which it had been built. Since the massacre, numerous firsthand accounts of life in Carandiru have appeared in popular music and writing in Brazil. Of these, two stand out as providing particularly authoritative and detailed insight: *O Prisioneiro da Grade de Ferro*,<sup>9</sup> a remarkable documentary filmed by prisoners over seven months the year before the prison was deactivated, which is available with English subtitles, and the subject of this article, Drauzio Varella's *Estação Carandiru*, which is yet to be translated into English. Varella worked voluntarily at the prison as a doctor from 1989 to 2001. His book was reproduced as the internationally acclaimed film *Carandiru*,<sup>10</sup> and adapted for the television series *Carandiru: Outros Histórias*.<sup>11</sup>

The Carandiru massacre highlighted two aspects of life behind bars in Brazil. The first, and the basis of

1. Varella, D. (1999) *Estação Carandiru São Paulo*: Companhia das Letras.
2. Caldeira, T. (2000) *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation and Citizenship in São Paulo* Berkley: University of California Press.
3. Veja, 14 October 1992.
4. Folha de São Paulo, 21 June 2001.
5. Veja São Paulo, 11 August 2010.
6. Caldeira, T. (2000). See n.2.
7. Justiça Global (2001) *Massacre at Carandiru* (unpublished report).
8. Biondi, K. and Marques, A. (2010) 'Memória e historicidade em dois "comandos" prisionais' in *Lua Nova*, 79: 39-70.
9. Sacramento, P. (Director) (2004) *O Prisioneiro da Grade de Ferro* (documentary).
10. Babenco, H. (Director) (2003) *Carandiru* (film).
11. Carvalho, W., Gervitz, R., Babenco, H. and Faria, M. (Directors) (2005) *Carandiru: Outros Histórias* (Rede Globo).



much academic, government and NGO literature, concerns the appalling conditions in which prisoners find themselves, from severe staff shortage and overcrowding to wholly inadequate facilities, legal and medical cover.<sup>12</sup> The second, and my focus today, concerns the means by which Brazilian prisons continue to operate and prisoners manage to survive in spite of such adversity and abandonment: in particular, how inmates are formally recruited to work as janitors and administrators, and how prisoners organise themselves to provide security, discipline and mutual support on the wings. While much has been written about the dominance of criminal gangs, few studies have provided more than a partial picture of the nature of inmate involvement in running Brazilian prisons, or the resultant complexity of relations that have arisen between inmates and prison staff.<sup>13</sup> Though written for a public rather than an academic or government audience, Varella's account of his time working at Carandiru remains the most complete study of Brazilian prison life to date.

Varella's interest in inmate participation is made clear from the first chapter, where he describes the work carried out by prisoners loading and unloading vans used to transport prisoners, food and building materials. Varella goes on to explain that 1000 inmates were formally employed by the prison administration, for instance as porters, couriers, cooks, cleaners, laundry washers, tailors, hairdressers or clerks. At Carandiru the effective inmate-guard ratio (taking into account sickness and work shift patterns) was 100:1 in the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> As in the remainder of the Brazilian penal establishment, where it is not unusual to find just one guard on duty per 200 or more prisoners,<sup>15</sup> prison staff had little choice but to recruit and work alongside prisoners. Most of these collaborating, trustie inmates were housed in block 2, which was located between the entrance to the prison and the administrative

building. All trusties carried identity cards that allowed them to circulate throughout the prison.

Varella devotes several chapters of *Estação Carandiru* to prisoners' health, outlining among other things the devastatingly high levels of drug abuse and serious illness such as tuberculosis, leprosy and HIV. Chapters are also included on the 1000 or so inmates employed by private companies in prison workshops, manufacturing items such as toys, kites, footballs or greetings cards; the prison's thriving informal economy (in drugs, alcohol, clothes washing, even ice-cream); the

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5-6 hours a day that a further 1000 members of the Assembly of God spent in prayer or religious learning; the 2-3000 visits from families each weekend, more at Christmas or on mothers' day, which included hundreds of intimate visits (for which 2,000 wives or girlfriends had registered); the lives of transvestites on the *Rua das Flores* (Street of Flowers) or *Paris*, a corridor that in the past had housed female prisoners; and the plight of over 500 prisoners held on security wings, usually for their own protection, 24 hours a day, 6-7 to a single cell. However, it is Varella's first impression of the prison, of inmate governance and fused staff-inmate functions, that sets the central theme of the book. Having outlined the

functions played by trustie prisoners, whose work was restricted to the communal areas of the prison, Varella moves on to explore the more informal work of prisoners on the wings, sweeping corridors, cooking and distributing meals, and organising in-cell rotas for matters such as cleaning, bathing and sleeping. He refers to these *faxina* (literally, cleaners, as such prisoners are referred to in São Paulo) as the spinal cord of the prison. Even the main cell blocks, 5, 8 and 9, were guarded by no more than 12 prison officers during the day and seven at night. Like many other Brazilian prisons, officers rarely entered the wings but for unlock/lock-up at the beginning and end of the day.

12. E.g. Brazil, Chamber of Deputies (2008) *CPI do Sistema Carcerário* Brasília: Câmara dos Deputados; Human Rights Watch (1998) *Behind Bars in Brazil* New York: Human Rights Watch; Salla, F. et al. (2009) *Democracy, Human Rights and Prison Conditions in South America* São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo; Wacquant, L. (2003) 'Towards a dictatorship over the poor: Notes on the penalization of poverty in Brazil', *Punishment and Society* 5 p.197-205.
13. For notable exceptions, see Biondi, K. (2007) 'Relações políticas e termos criminosos: O PCC e uma teoria do irmão-rede' in *Teoria e Sociedade* 15 p.206-235; Marques, A. (2010) '"Liderança", "proceder" e "igualdade": Uma etnografia das relações políticas no Primeiro Comando do Capital' in *Etnográfica* 14:2 p.311-335; Ramalho, J. (1979) *Mundo do Crime: A Ordem pelo Averso*, Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal.
14. Human Rights Watch (1998). See n.12.
15. Salla, F. (2006) 'As rebeliões nas prisões: Novos significados a partir da experiência brasileira' in *Sociologias*, 8 p.274-307.

In total around 700 prisoners were integrated into the *faxina*, most of which as I have already indicated, managed the wings from their cells on the first floor. Each block had its own *faxina*.

It was simply not possible, Varella stresses, to comprehend life at Carandiru without understanding the role played by the *faxina*. Of particular importance to his analysis, they were not the equivalent of trustie prisoners; they were responsible (and in prisons across Brazil continue to be responsible) for order and discipline as well as prison maintenance. Through organising and enforcing the decisions of ad hoc *debates* when prisoners are accused of breaking inmate codes (which at Carandiru, as elsewhere, included averting your eyes from others' visitors, remaining in your cell and putting on a shirt during mealtimes, maintaining silence during sleeping hours, not getting into debt, not resorting to violence without permission, and sharing food, toiletries and clothing brought in by your family), the *faxina*, set the rhythm of Brazilian prisons.<sup>16</sup> Guards do not interfere with the organisation or hierarchy of the *faxina*, nor with their management of the wings unless prisoners are severely beaten, though at Carandiru even an execution would more often than not be settled by a *laranja* (orange; scapegoat), typically an indebted crack addict, stepping forward to falsely confess to the crime. Moreover, guards would consult senior *faxina* before making their own decisions as to when/how to discipline wayward prisoners. The safety of inmates and staff alike depended on *faxina* and guards maintaining mutual respect and good dialogue.

Of course, all of this depended on inmate and staff-inmate relations remaining reciprocal. The most striking parts of *Estação Carandiru* deal with times when the status quo broke down at the prison. Varella describes two such episodes during the years that he worked there. The first occurred in block 5, when the five guards on duty one night were taken hostage, robbed and assaulted, and the director took advantage

of divisions among prisoners in the block to help install an entirely new *faxina*, headed by a (unknown to other inmates) prison informer. At lockdown a few nights after the initial incident, guards left the 200 prisoners that had been chosen to form the new inmate hierarchy in charge of the block. Masked and armed with sticks and knives, the new command proceeded to remove the old *faxina* cell by cell and hand them over to guards to be transferred to a punishment wing in another part of the prison. The second such episode, dealt with in the final chapters of the book, was the riot in block 9. If Varella's version of the events that led to the police entering the prison with such devastating

consequences on 2 October 1992 is the correct one, it appears the immediate cause of the riot was the *faxina* failing to prevent a relatively minor dispute between common prisoners from igniting. Others, as I alluded to in the introduction, insist that there was a more serious dispute within the *faxina* itself. Common to both interpretations is it was not the entangled lives of trusties, *faxina* and guards but rather inmate governance that broke down that day. Depressingly, Varella finds no rational explanations for the riot.

For this reason, as much as the killings, the last few chapters of *Estação Carandiru* do not make comfortable reading. In contrast to other rebellions in Brazil, the prisoners made no demands and took no hostages. Nor is there anything to indicate that the riot masked a re-organisation of the inmate hierarchy in the block, as was claimed to be the case, for instance, in 2001, when the *Primeiro Comando do Capital* instigated simultaneous rebellions in 29 prisons.<sup>17</sup> Along with other accounts of the Carandiru massacre, Varella depicts the riot as an illogical, disorganised, chaotic affair, and is quick to point out that block 9 was populated by first time offenders, who not surprisingly were renowned for being undisciplined and volatile. Tragically, and in complete contrast to the inexperience demonstrated by these prisoners, Varella concludes, Rota's response was unleashed with military precision.

It was simply not possible, Varella stresses, to comprehend life at Carandiru without understanding the role played by the *faxina*.

16. Marques, A. (2009) *Crime, Proceder, Convívio-Seguro: Um Experimento Antropológico a partir de relações entre Ladrões* Ph.D. thesis, University of São Paulo.

17 Salla, F. (2006) 'As rebeliões nas prisões: Novos significados a partir a experiência brasileira' in *Sociologias* 8:16 p.274-307.

# A contrast in lives? White-collar offenders in prison

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**In comparison to the lives of offenders more generally, the way in which white-collar offenders experience and respond to punishment at the hands of the criminal justice system is not well understood. The term white-collar offender as it is used here emphasises the characteristics of the offender rather than their offence, placing a focus on respectability and privilege as key in identifying who they are.<sup>1</sup> That the lives of such offenders and the impact of criminal justice processes and punishment are rarely explored is at least in part due to the difficulty of recruiting white-collar offenders to take part in research.<sup>2</sup>**

Given these difficulties, alternative sources of data are required to access white-collar offenders' experiences of punishment. The most readily available source of such data are published autobiographical accounts. Such accounts vary in style and form, and are not without potential methodological problems, most typically concerning issues of 'truth' and 'fact' in autobiographical writing.<sup>3</sup> Balanced against this however, such accounts provide a way to understand groups that might otherwise be difficult to access and, more importantly, frequently providing rich accounts of subjective experience. It is autobiographical accounts written by white-collar offenders then that are drawn on here to explore the way in which those who are sentenced to prison represent their encounters.

In general criminological parlance, white-collar offenders are inevitably characterised along lines that separate them markedly from other offenders. This is unsurprising. After all, such was Sutherland's intention in highlighting white-collar offenders in his original formulation of the concept that emphasised respectability and high social status as he sought to draw attention to what he perceived as a most

neglected area of criminology. However, the contrast between white-collar offenders and offenders more generally is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in theorising about when the 'typical' white-collar offender, freshly plucked out of the boardroom, is placed in prison.<sup>4</sup> Merely entering the environment of the prison is suggested as being a particularly severe punishment for those more used to being '...treated as if they are special and encouraged to see themselves as such'.<sup>5</sup>

The writings of white-collar offenders who have served prison sentences do little to dispel such perspectives and indeed echo these sentiments. Feelings of shock and disgust are prevalent in their descriptions of induction, couched particularly in terms of the 'alien' nature of the environment they entered. Consider the following:

*The others in the cell looked miserable, and most of them appeared to be either drunk or on drugs. The cell echoed with their begging and hollering. I could not believe the scene, which was completely foreign to anything I'd ever experienced before.<sup>6</sup>*

Other aspects of induction into the prison way of life exacerbate feelings of isolation, which by their own accounts are particularly pronounced for white-collar offenders. So the reader is told of the dehumanisation of being processed,<sup>7</sup> fears over violence that might be suffered<sup>8</sup> and other assaults on the self. The character of such accounts, however, presents such trials as particularly difficult for white-collar offenders because of their backgrounds of privilege and respectability. The distress engendered by prison is a function of their previous existence and it is emphasised that, upon entering prison the white-collar offender is now

1. Sutherland, E. (1940) 'White-collar criminality' in *American Sociological Review* 5:1 p1-11; Sutherland, E. (1983) *White-Collar Crime: The Uncut Version* New Haven: Yale University Press; Shover, N & Hochstetler, A. (2006) *Choosing White-Collar Crime* London: Cambridge University Press.
2. Shover, N. & Hunter, B. (2010) 'Blue-collar, white-collar: Crimes and mistakes' in W. Bernasco (ed.). *Offenders on Offending: Learning About Crime from Criminals* London: Willan p. 205.
3. Maruna, S. (1997) 'Going straight: Desistance from crime and life narratives of reform' in A. Lieblich & R. Josselson (eds.) *The Narrative Study of Lives* vol. 5. London: Sage p. 59; Hunter, B. (2009) 'White-collar offenders after the fall from grace: Stigma, blocked paths and resettlement' in R. Lippens, & D. Crewe (eds.) *Existential Criminology* London: Routledge p. 145.
4. Mann, K., Wheeler, S., & Sarat, A. (1980) 'Sentencing the white-collar offender' in *American Criminal Law Review* 14 p.479-500.
5. Shover & Hochstetler (2006) see n. 1 p. 136.
6. Laite, W. (1972) *The United States vs. William Laite* Washington: Acropolis Books p. 36.
7. Christensen, N. (2005) *Five Years of Bad Coffee* New York: iUniverse p. 32.
8. Aitken, J. (2005) *Porridge and Passion* London: Continuum p. 30.

somewhere quite alien to them. The rules that they know no longer apply.

To be subjected to the same treatment as any other prisoner marks them as not special any more, removing the status that they previously enjoyed. Robert Berger, who served thirty eight months in prison for corporate income tax evasion and bribery while CEO of Royce Aerospace Materials was still aware of this half way through his sentence:

*I lay here thinking about all the years that I was eminently successful and then look around this cell, and can't believe where I am.<sup>9</sup>*

Comparing the previous life to the 'now' of prison also underlines what white-collar offenders have lost.

They cannot help but contrast the environment of the prison with the lives they had. Through all that it takes away from them, prison puts their successful pasts into stark relief and reminds white-collar offenders of who they once were.

The tone of white-collar offenders' accounts therefore presents them as suffering a cruel and unusual punishment at the hands of the criminal justice system. Not only is the environment unlike any they have encountered before, with sights, sounds and smells that lack familiar frames of reference, but those the environment is shared with — that is other prisoners — reinforce the transition that has taken place. The writings of white-collar offenders in prison remind us that prison is therefore unduly difficult for individuals who have led 'high lives'.

It appears, however, that the horror of imprisonment eventually gives way to a more pressing concern; what to do with the abundance of time. Prison and the concept of time are inextricably linked. Central to one's incarceration is the idea that they will 'do' time<sup>10</sup> and that while they are 'doing' prison time, time in the world outside prison continues unabated.<sup>11</sup> The slow pace of prison life is typically something that prisoners need to 'handle', developing strategies to make time pass quicker and their incarceration more

bearable.<sup>12</sup> White-collar offenders describe their sudden abundance of time forced upon them in far more positive terms, comparing it favourably with the lives before imprisonment. Dennis Levine, convicted of insider trading, describes his feelings shortly after entering prison for the first time:

*Despite the accumulation of aggravations, I came to see that this physical prison could be a disguised blessing. For too many years I had raced through life, too busy to lift my head and either contemplate the past or gaze towards the future. Prison slowed the pace of my life long enough for me to see how I had trapped myself.<sup>13</sup>*

After his release, Robert Berger reflected back on his prison sentence and on what prison meant for him:

*In fact, I think prison was a timely benefit at the time that I was incarcerated. My life then was a living hell. Looking back, I really am amazed that I managed to live through all of my dilemmas and come out of it all in one piece. Prison, when I arrived here, was like a cocoon. Banks, lawyers, Special Agents, creditors, etc*

*couldn't get to me anymore. They couldn't call me or reach me in any way. Here, I began to rest, lose weight, and eventually get my health back. I was totally isolated from the outside in every way. Even the [Internal Revenue Service] left me alone.<sup>14</sup>*

Almost paradoxically given the threats white-collar offenders perceive upon entering prison, their imprisonment comes, for some, to offer a form of protection. The troubles that bedevilled them can be, if not forgotten, at least postponed.

These two brief outlines of what concerns white-collar offenders in prison both emphasise the difference between them and other offenders. We should, however, be mindful of the source of this

9. Berger, R. (2003) *From the Inside: A Prison Memoir* New York: iUniverse p. 28.

10. Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* New York: Anchor Books.

11. Jose-Kampfer, C. (1990) 'Coming to terms with existential death: An analysis of women's adaptation to life in prison' in *Social Justice* 17:2 p.110-125.

12. Meisenhelder, T. (1985) 'An essay on time and the phenomenology of imprisonment' in *Deviant Behaviour* 6:1 p.39-56.

13. Levine, D. & Hoffer, W. (1991) *Inside Out: An insider's Account of Wall Street* New York: Berkley Books p. 362-363.

14. Berger (2003) *ibid* see n. 9 p. 184.



information, and the medium in through which it is presented. That many accounts of imprisonment by white-collar offenders appear to follow a particular narrative, from the horror of induction to the joy of release via the banality of the prison routine and interspersed with colourful descriptions of fellow inmates, may say as much about literary and narrative convention as it does about authentic prison experience. A further consideration is that in drawing upon published autobiographical information we might consider who does and does not gain the opportunity to write an account of their imprisonment. The marketability of different white-collar offenders' accounts of their offending and prison life is likely to be heavily dependent on the details they disclose and the individual doing the disclosing. The 'True Crime' literary genre might be expected to attract only the most salacious stories. Those that get published are clearly marketable for the gruesome tales they tell or, of more relevance when considering white-collar offenders' autobiographies, because of public interest in the writer. It follows from this that only the most sensational and high profile cases and writers are deemed worthy of publication. Some offenders who write accounts of their imprisonment are notorious, there seems little doubt of that. High profile white-collar offenders who have published accounts of their prison

The marketability of different white-collar offenders' accounts of their offending and prison life is likely to be heavily dependent on the details they disclose and the individual doing the disclosing.

sentences in recent times include former British politicians Jonathan Aitken and Jeffrey Archer, as well as Nick Leeson, whose unauthorised trading forced the collapse of Barings Bank. There is little doubt that it was the public interest their stories generated that made their accounts of imprisonment lucrative prospects for publishing houses. The contrast in lives that their accounts present are naturally part of their appeal. We are invited to explore the 'terrible world' of prison by the writer, while insulated from its visceral assault by the medium of presentation. White-collar

offenders are by no means homogenous in this respect though. Some publish with small publishing houses, while others<sup>15</sup> self-published, funding the costs of doing so themselves.

Considerations about narrative form and opportunity to publish notwithstanding, however, autobiographies are a valuable resource for exploring the lives of offenders on their own terms. The more critical reader might frown at white-collar offenders' descriptions of their journey through an 'unknown world' and the contrast in lives that they emphasise in marking prison as particularly cruel to them, but it is worth persevering with such issues to understand something about a group that, for all their

high profile in criminological circles, rarely get the chance (or, perhaps, want the opportunity) to represent themselves.

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15. Berger (2003) *ibid* see n. 9. Christensen (2005) *ibid* see n. 7.

# Sexuality, Criminality and the Women's Prison:

## Pat Arrowsmith's *Somewhere Like This*

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Since the middle of the twentieth century, the women's prison has held its place in one of the darker corners of the popular imagination. A perennial setting for B-movies and pulp fiction, the women's prison of popular culture provides a backdrop for a cast of stock characters and recurring plot motifs: the ingénue first-timer, the sadistic guard and aggressive prison lesbian. Offering a cultural analysis of representations of sexuality in women's prisons, Ann Ciasullo has described this as 'an enduring cultural erotic fantasy: women imprisoned, trapped with one another in a criminal and sexual underworld'<sup>1</sup>. It is also a fantasy with roots in early criminological theory, which connected criminality to sexual inversion. Ciasullo tracks this 'women-in-prison narrative' across genres, including in her analysis psychological and sociological studies of women's imprisonment produced from the 1920s onwards. Here we see the social worlds of women prisoners organised around dyadic sexual relationships and complex pseudo-familial structures. For Ciasullo, it is the figure of the 'prison lesbian'<sup>2</sup> that most clearly unites these disparate genres of the women-in-prison narrative. Appearing with remarkable consistency, she represents a site at which anxieties about sexuality, criminality, race and class play out<sup>3</sup>. Ciasullo's inclusion of psychological and sociological research as examples of the women-in-prison narrative invites a critical re-examination of academic as well as literary representations of the women's prison.

Somewhere on the margins of this crowded field sits Pat Arrowsmith's 1970 novel, *Somewhere Like This*. The novel follows a handful of prisoners and staff over a few weeks at HMP Collingwood, a lightly veiled Holloway of the mid 1960s. This is the Victorian fortress that was the old Holloway. Ringing round the stone walls of the prison microcosm are echoes of the world outside, sharpening

the sense of this as a novel of its historic moment: the long shadow of the Blitz; the pop culture of swinging mid-'60s London; the mores of its gay subculture against a backdrop of wider social taboo; the lopsided gender-relations that populate the women's prison with prostitutes, abortionists, housewives. The Prison Service Arrowsmith describes is recognisably of its moment too: prisoners uniformed in baggy bottle-green dresses and cardigans; an all-female staff clearly stratified by class; the burgeoning reformist ideals that would shortly usher in the Holloway redevelopment project<sup>4</sup> competing with 'old-school' doctrines of punishment; junior officers living in cramped prison residences subject to a discipline scarcely less rigid than that of the prisoners.

The narrative drive of this lightly-plotted novel derives primarily from the successive love affairs of boyish young burglar Lorry, first with, naïve first-timer Mavis, and then with high-living, well-travelled upper-class, thief, fraudster and seasoned prisoner Jan. Beyond this central triad, the prison universe is evoked through a constellation of other characters: young Officer Hewson, struggling to inhabit her role and manage her new authority; her 'old school' senior colleague, no-nonsense lesbian Mac; Borstal girl Rose, convicted of sending poison-pen letters, desperate for affection but deprived by an emotionally impoverished childhood of the tools to elicit it; abortionist Olive who lost her family in the Blitz and has continually sought to recreate it ever since. In the more distant background are more lightly-drawn others: well-meaning but evasive 'head shrinker' Miss Canister; butch-femme couple Rob and Bett; disturbed Polly, who audibly converses with her absent daughter and compulsively fiddles with her pubic hair in public.

With its strong lesbian theme, *Somewhere Like This* superficially follows many of the conventions of the women-in-prison narrative. The cover imagery and text of successive editions hint at titillating lesbian content, and in its meandering course the novel visits many of the tropes and plotlines Ciasullo identifies as staples of the

1. Ciasullo, A. (2008) 'Containing 'Deviant' Desire: Lesbianism, Heterosexuality, and the Women-in-Prison Narrative' in *The Journal of Popular Culture* 41:2 p.195-223.
2. Freedman, E. (1996) 'The Prison Lesbian: Race, Class and the Construction of the Aggressive Female Homosexual, 1915-1965' in *Feminist Studies* 22:2 p.397-423.
3. Ibid.
4. See, *inter alia.*, Rock, P. (1996) *Reconstructing a Women's Prison: The Holloway Redevelopment Project, 1968-88*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

narrative: the invasive examination on arrival by the reputedly 'bent' female doctor<sup>5</sup>; homosexual encounters in cells and laundry rooms; authoritarian governors and lesbian warders; the seduction of feminine first-timer by butch 'prison lesbian'; an attempted suicide. Little is missing from the roll call but the riot and group shower scene. By the time Arrowsmith wrote *Somewhere Like This*, however, she was a veteran both of the prison landings and of the London gay scene, and from this singular vantage-point offers a new perspective on this familiar ground. The co-founder of CND and a dedicated peace campaigner, Arrowsmith had served eight prison sentences<sup>6</sup> for her campaigning activities, and was active in the gay rights movement<sup>7</sup>. As we might then expect, Arrowsmith invites us to an understanding of her characters that is neither salacious, pathologising nor functionalist<sup>8</sup>, consistently evading and subverting the familiar narrative to produce a candid, but deeply humane account of prison life.

As suggested above, the 'prison lesbian' is a lynchpin of the women-in-prison narrative. Arrowsmith's rendering of this central figure is illustrative of her treatment of the narrative more broadly. Ciasullo suggests that the prison lesbian is primarily realised through the binary of the 'real' and 'pseudo' lesbian, posited by Havelock Ellis in 1897<sup>9</sup>. The 'true' invert is masculine, sexually aggressive and homosexual by preference; the 'pseudo' invert in women-in-prison narratives is the new, naïve prisoner — 'jailbent' or 'penitentiary turnout' — seduced or coerced into sexual involvement but resuming her normal and preferred heterosexuality before, or at, release. The prison-lesbian-as-true-invert reflects biologicistic Lombrosian explanations of women's offending, which continue to reverberate among criminologists. Women's offending is a deviation from normative femininity, associated with 'related'

deviations such as masculine physiology and sexual deviance (homosexuality or hyper-sexuality). Both 'real' and 'pseudo' lesbians in women-in-prison narratives, then, speak to normative constructions of women as docile and compliant, giving these representations of women prisoners a more general feminist significance.

For Ciasullo, the women-in-prison narrative offers 'a safe but titillating exploration of female homosexuality' and 'reinscribe[s] the (purported) stability of heterosexuality'<sup>10</sup>. Although this argument is primarily supported by illustrations from popular culture, it equally chimes with functionalist sociological research. Here, lesbianism functions to mitigate the loss of roles and relationships outside<sup>11</sup>; women barter participation in homosexual dyads and 'pseudo-families' for material or physical security.<sup>12</sup> Early US psychological studies presented lesbianism around a racialised binary, arguing that in romances between black and white prisoners, racial difference was a place-holder for gender, the binary later transposed to make class the central signifier of difference<sup>13</sup>. Readings of lesbianism in prison thus remain essentially heteronormative.

As *Somewhere Like This* opens on the first morning of Lorry's sentence, she seems the classic prison lesbian, passing as a man outside and masculinising her prison uniform as far as she can.

Arrest is an occupational hazard and she is comfortable and confident in prison. The place of pseudo-lesbian is filled by 'fluffy, feminine and confused' Mavis, whom Lorry seduces: a first-offender, mother and housewife, wholly ignorant of lesbian sexuality. Their characterisation, however, undermines the lines of power and deviance for which the real/pseudo binary stands: Lorry's youth and boyish charm; Mavis's conviction for violence. Far from the coercion and instrumentalism that characterise other versions of this story, their coming

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5. Arrowsmith, P. (1970/1990) *Somewhere Like This* (Third Edition) London: Gay Men's Press p.28.
6. She would go on to serve three more. Her convictions were for activities protesting against nuclear weapons, the deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland, and the Vietnam war and Amnesty twice adopted her as a prisoner of conscience. Arrowsmith, P. (1970/1990).
7. Blindel, J. (2008) No Time for Battle Fatigue. *The Guardian*, 30th April. Available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/apr/30/6>. (Accessed 30th September, 2011).
8. For a critique of the functionalist treatment of lesbianism in women's prisons, see Howe, A. (1994) *Punish and Critique: Towards a Feminist Penalty*. London: Routledge, p.152.
9. Ellis, H. (1897) *Sexual Inversion*, in Ciasullo (2008), p.200.
10. Ciasullo (2008) p.196.
11. Ward, D. and G. Kassebaum (1965) *Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure* London: AldineTransaction.
12. Note that few of these studies adequately account for when the 'demand' comes from in a market in which sexual intimacy is the currency. For a fuller review of sociological research in women's prisons, see Rowe, A. (2009) *Negotiating Disempowerment: Coping and Social Support in Women's Prisons*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, The Open University, UK.
13. Freedman (1996).

together is tender and tentative. Together they share a first experience of love, and Mavis discovers a newly satisfying sexuality. Working together in the gardens, emotional and physical intimacy grows in secluded shrubberies and unused sheds, under the indifferent eye of the supervising officer.

Their relationship ends with Mavis's abrupt withdrawal from Lorry. An unexpected first visit from her husband brings the worlds inside and outside into collision and the bubble of her romance with Lorry is ruptured. As in other women-in-prison narratives, the dissonance between Mavis's two realities becomes intolerable, but there is an ambivalence here that pulls this back from the classic contours of the women-in-prison narrative. By the end of the novel, Mavis's husband has 'taken up' with a neighbour, leaving their children to be taken into care and Mavis to grieve for them without the comfort of her relationship with Lorry, which had offered an 'unstable shelter'<sup>14</sup> from prison life and her wider unhappiness. Mavis struggles suddenly to account for her rejection of Lorry, and this loss contributes to the despair that leads to her failed suicide attempt towards the end of the novel. Although attempted suicide is common in the career of the imprisoned pseudo-lesbian, distress at the loss of the female lover is well outside its usual compass.

Lorry's second affair confirms the dissolution of the real/pseudo binary. Rejected by Mavis, she allows herself to be seduced by Jan, who has quietly pursued Lorry since her arrival at Collingwood. As a 'basically fem',<sup>15</sup> sexually versatile lesbian-by-orientation, Jan makes the real/pseudo dichotomy untenable. Her relationship with Lorry demands a radical redrawing of the women-in-prison narrative: it is stone-butched Lorry who is now seduced, and confused by being made love to by a woman. Having tied her lesbian sexuality to a masculine persona, the experience destabilises her self-image. To the shocked bewilderment of the wing governor who has attempted to reach out to her, Lorry is troubled not by her homosexuality, but by falling short of her own masculine ideal. Through Jan, and the encounter between disparate lesbian sexualities her relationship with Lorry represents, Arrowsmith questions the conflation of gender and

sexuality. The ordinariness of sexual fluidity in and to the narrative and presence of incidentally gay figures, such as prison officer Mac, supports this. The more-or-less open homosexuality of a number of officers completes the novel's challenge to the association of homosexuality and masculinity with criminality.

Arrowsmith's homonormative re-versioning of the women-in-prison narrative represents a challenge to the assumptions and stereotypes on which the narrative relies. Its disruption of the real/pseudo-lesbian binary through which the 'prison lesbian' is realised undermines the nineteenth-century conflation of criminality and sexual/gender inversion that began to be replaced by increasingly medicalised views of women offenders in the mid-twentieth century, but which still colours both popular and academic representations of

female criminality and life in women's prisons<sup>16</sup>. Disentangling this cluster of associations around female deviance and stripping away the perverse glamour of the 'cultural erotic fantasy' of the women's prison, Arrowsmith frees her characters as convicted and/or lesbian women from their titillating construction as 'deviant'. By presenting her subjects as certainly troubled, but neither passive nor pathological Arrowsmith redirects our

attention to the broader context. What she leaves us with is an insight into the relationship between the prison and the social margins. The women in Collingwood are disproportionately poor, fragile, broken or unconforming. Their punishment is perverse, and this perversity is mirrored by Arrowsmith's observation that the prison, ironically, offers some of these socially marginal women a degree of respite from social pressures and normative values that stigmatise and undervalue them. For Lorry, Collingwood is the only social space in which, as a gay woman, 'she felt normal'<sup>17</sup>; for Mavis, the only space in which she feels fully loved. This issues a broad, and fundamentally feminist critique of both the criminal justice system and the wider society it serves. Although that society has changed dramatically since *Somewhere Like This* was published, the criminal justice system Arrowsmith depicts remains readily recognisable, and the challenge made by the novel continues to resonate today.

## What she leaves us with is an insight into the relationship between the prison and the social margins.

14. Arrowsmith (1970/1990) p.126.

15. Ibid. p.150.

16. For example, a recent article by Diana Fishbein looks for a relationship between aggressiveness, 'masculine' physical traits and homosexuality among women prisoners. Fishbein, D. (2000) 'Sexual Preference' in *Crime and Punishment* 11:2 p.67-84.

17. Arrowsmith (1970/1990) p.60.



# Singing at Yarmouth Gaol:

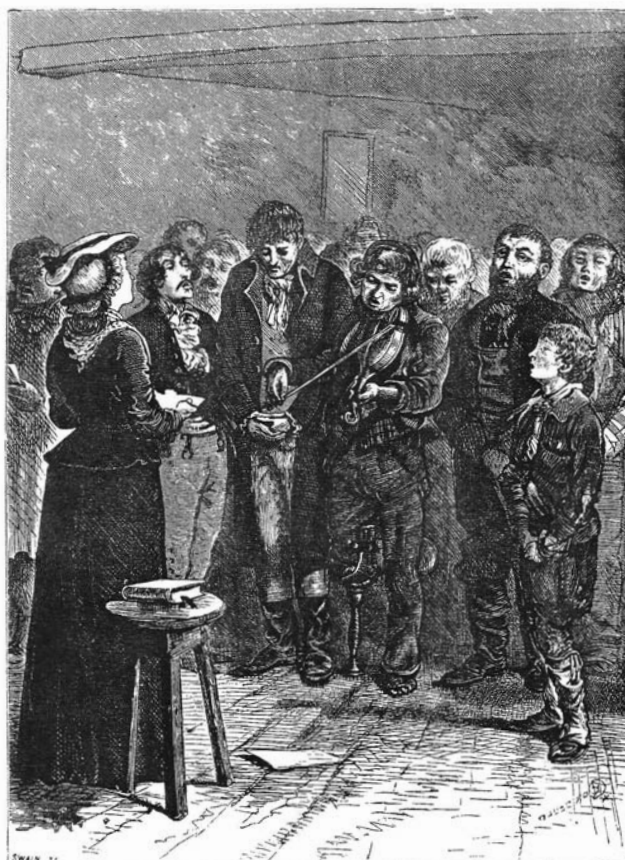
## Christian Instruction and Inmate Culture in the Nineteenth Century

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Leafing through papers at the Great Yarmouth Museum Service relating to Sarah Martin, Christian visitor at Yarmouth Gaol between 1818 and 1843 and a pioneer in prisoner rehabilitation, I came across an extraordinary image of prison life. Taken from a popular history of the 1880s, the illustration depicts 'Sarah Martin Conducting Service in Yarmouth Gaol' (see figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The engraving is highly unusual not only because it shows a woman preaching to male inmates but because it conveys the liveliness and spirit of the prisoners when most contemporary representations portrayed them as silent and constrained. The humble dressmaker stands, hymn-book in hands, right before her gaol congregation to whom she preached each Sunday. In the front row of the informal assembly is a one-legged fiddler accompanying his fellow inmates, who sing heartily, their eyes fixed towards heaven, or bow their heads in silent, but earnest, contemplation. The prisoners are active participants in the service and in singing they find liberation as well as redemption. The fiddler — a traditional figure of organic community — lends the scene a homely, village air while the closeness of the preacher to her flock emphasizes intimacy and fellow-feeling. No bars or guards are shown. This is a community, not just a prison.

With its focus on the fiddler as well as the preacher, the illustration evokes the remedial power of music to humanize and bring about social harmony. However, at Yarmouth there was a far less harmonious and devotional tone to inmates' songs than suggested by the pious and optimistic illustration of Sarah Martin's congregation. Though I have found no evidence of violins or any other musical instrument at the gaol, 'tuning', 'whistling', 'hallooing' and 'singing, shouting and swearing' were among inmates' chief pastimes and the many ways they challenged prison regulations and order. Whatever benefits prisoners derived from communal hymnody, singing was a source of defiance and contest at Yarmouth Gaol.

Ideas about the recuperative effects of music are not new to the prison sector but they have rarely been



'Sarah Martin conducting service at Yarmouth Gaol' (with thanks to Yarmouth Museum Service and with permission of the British Library).

put systematically into practice and they have been studied even less. We know almost nothing of the history of music in British prisons.<sup>2</sup> In this article I seek to sketch out the nineteenth-century experience, first by outlining approaches to prisoner discipline and reformation. Then I explore inmates' responses to devotional singing and verse at Yarmouth gaol before investigating how they continued to participate vocally in their own song-culture. Finally, I examine another alternative representation of imprisonment — a song composed by a ballad singer about his punishment on the tread-wheel — before discussing how historical evidence of the use of sacred and vernacular song by Yarmouth prisoners might inform current approaches to music education and therapy in prison.

1. Illustration by Swain in Hodder, E. (nd) *Heroes of Britain in War and Peace* London: Cassell p. 186. The earliest dated version is 1878-80.  
2. For US studies, see Lee, R. (2010) 'Music Education in Prisons: A Historical Overview' in *International Journal of Community Music* 3:1 p.7-18.

## 1. 'This ain't a music hall!'

The illustration of the Yarmouth congregation accompanied a chapter on the 'Prison Heroines' Elizabeth Fry and Sarah Martin who were frequently paired together in hagiographic studies of the early penal reformers.<sup>3</sup> Famously, in her visits to Newgate Gaol in 1817, Fry had been appalled to find female inmates 'begging, swearing, gaming, fighting, dancing, dressing-up in men's clothes'.<sup>4</sup> Following Fry's lead, the prosecution of singing became part of a sustained onslaught by penal reformers against inmate culture. Christian devotion and instruction moved to centre stage in the 1830s and 1840s as reformers championed the idea that prisons could be sites of moral correction and not just punishment. In order for religious teaching to take effect, however, inmates had to be isolated from the 'contaminating influences' they exerted over each other. By 1835, when the Prison Inspectorate took charge of overseeing local and county gaols and national penitentiaries, two rival systems of prisoner correction were taking hold. In both systems, inmates' only communication, except with their guards, was at the instigation of the schoolteacher, chaplain or religious visitor who solicited their confession and penitence. Under the silent system, prisoners were associated together for work and dining but watched continuously by guards so they could neither speak nor gesture. Under the separate or cellular system, inmates were kept in solitary cells and only came into contact with each other in the chapel and exercise yards where all communication was prohibited.<sup>5</sup>

Music in the Victorian prison, therefore, was confined almost exclusively to religious service in the prison chapel. Former prisoners recalled relief and pleasure in being able to raise their voices to sing during Sunday services and in a few institutions efforts were made to yoke such energies to rehabilitation.<sup>6</sup> At Parkhurst, the juvenile reformatory formed on the separate principle, the chaplain ran a choir

Under the silent system, prisoners were associated together for work and dining but watched continuously by guards so they could neither speak nor gesture.

for boys and found hymn-singing to be 'a powerful auxiliary in softening and preparing the mind for instruction.' The 'first symptom' of a boy's readiness to improve, he claimed, 'was his beginning to join in the singing.'<sup>7</sup> But penal institutions seldom seem to have recognized the reformatory potential of communal singing. As a former burglar recalled, when the revivalist songs of Sankey and Moodie found their way into his prison, 'We sang Sankey's hymns with such gusto as to attract the attention of the prison authorities' who '[c]onsidering such joyous song inconsistent with the sombreness of prison life, they forbade the hymns, and sent us back to the psalms and paraphrases with their plain puritanic tunes.'<sup>8</sup>

For the penal authorities, the prison congregation had to be carefully managed since it threatened the maintenance of both separation and silence. Communal singing presented opportunities for illicit communication. Prisoner memoirs report inmates whispering to each other, for instance, or singing their own ribald versions to the tune of devotional verses.<sup>9</sup> The new-style penitentiaries and gaols were designed, therefore, to instil order and submission, the chaplain raised high above the ranks of prisoners watched closely by the guards, whose attendance, like that of inmates, was compulsory. The architecture of the chapel, as the rest of the penitentiary, was designed to turn prisoners into

'docile bodies', to use Foucault's suggestive term.<sup>10</sup> Some chapels constructed on the separate principle, as at Pentonville, confined inmates in individual wooden compartments like upright coffins, and required them to wear masks on entry so they could not see each other.<sup>11</sup> Yet as Daniel Nihill, governor and chaplain at Millbank, astutely observed in 1839, such arrangements contradicted the very purpose of Christian congregation:

*On the one hand, we bring Christians together for joint sympathetic worship; for the primary*

3. Hodder, pp. 177-190.

4. Corder, S. (ed.) (1853) *Life of Elizabeth Fry* London: W. & F.G. Cash p.219.

5. For classic studies of prison discipline, see Henriques, U.R.Q. (1972) 'The Rise and Decline of the Separate System of Prison Discipline' *Past and Present* 54:1 p.61-93; Ignatieff, M. (1978) *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1950* London: Macmillan; Forsythe, W.J. (1987) *The Reform of Prisoners, 1830-1900* London: Croom Helm.

6. See Priestley, P. (1999) *Victorian Prison Lives: English Prison Biography 1830-1914* London: Pimlico pp. 94-5.

7. *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, 5 September 1840, p. 258; Frederick Hill, *Crime: Its Amount, Causes and Remedies* London: John Murray, 1853.

8. Fannan, D. (1897) *A Burglar's Life Story in Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Crimea etc.*, Glasgow: D. Bryce p. 129.

9. For examples, see Priestley, pp. 94-5.

10. Foucault, M. (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan) Harmondsworth: Penguin.

11. For Pentonville see Mayhew H. And Binny J. (1862) *The Criminal Prisons of London* London: Griffin, Bohn p. 162-8. See the same for illustrations and discussion of various prison chapels in separate and silent regimes, and in the hulks.

*idea, the essential principle, which distinguishes public from private devotion, is sociality — the recognition of brethren — members of the same family — heirs of the same hope — aided by the sight and hearing of each other in a common assembly, where with one heart and one mouth they glorify God. Such is the principle on which the prisoners are brought together in chapel; but on the other hand, whilst so assembled, there is a studious effort to keep all in a state of separation, and to defeat the idea of their communion.*<sup>12</sup>

With its evocation of the restorative and civilizing influences of music, the illustration of ‘Sarah Martin Conducting Service at Yarmouth Gaol’ implies, therefore, a powerful critique of the penal regime that governed inmate life in the Victorian period. From the 1840s onwards, music was actively promoted by musical reformers through choral societies, brass bands and cheap concerts as a means of improving recreation and bringing together the classes.<sup>13</sup> Some of their ideals began to filter into American correctional institutions: the hugely popular Hutchinson family delighted inmates and warders when they sang their four-part harmonies at Sing Sing prison in the 1840s, while a band was established at the Chicago Reform School in the 1860s.<sup>14</sup> There are no reports of similar experiments in musical recreation or education in British gaols before the twentieth century. By the mid-nineteenth century the high-minded ideals that had motivated Christian reformers came under sustained attack.<sup>15</sup> As attitudes towards the ‘undeserving’ hardened and policy swung towards deterrence, inmates’ experience was principally punitive rather than rehabilitative. When prisoners entered chapel at Coldbath Field in the late nineteenth century, their

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music hall!’

warders barked at them, ‘D’you know where you are?’ and ‘This ain’t a music hall!’<sup>16</sup>

## 2. ‘I will learn some out of a hymn book if you like’

Like other small to medium-size prisons, Yarmouth Gaol, usually holding around thirty inmates, was very different from the model penitentiaries that dominate our perception of the Victorian prison. On his first visit to the gaol in 1835 the Prison Inspector complained that no rules were displayed and no proper separation existed between the different classes of inmates — those awaiting trial, first-time and repeat offenders, male and female inmates, and debtors — while communication was carried on easily

between them. Any ‘degree of good order’ among the prisoners was due, he concluded, to the employment and instruction provided for them by Sarah Martin.<sup>17</sup>

Since 1818 the dressmaker had devoted her time to teaching inmates to read and write and, more unusually, to helping them to find work on discharge and assisting their families. Discovering there was no regular minister Martin began a bible reading class for inmates which soon turned into Sabbath worship.<sup>18</sup> When the Prison Inspector attended her service in 1835 he described her voice as ‘melodious’ and reported that the prisoners ‘paid the profoundest attention and the most respect’ to the sermons she preached separately to the male and female inmates. The male prisoners sang two psalms ‘extremely well, much better than I have frequently heard in our best appointed churches’.<sup>19</sup> Martin was a charismatic, forceful character — she had to be to gain the respect of gaolers and inmates. Her reports of ‘Liberated Prisoners’, whose good conduct following discharge proved their reclamation, indicate that some offenders were powerfully affected by Martin’s Christian teaching.<sup>20</sup>

12. Nihill, D. (1830) *Prison Discipline in its Relation to Society and Individual* London: J. Hatchard p. 66.

13. Russell, D. (1997) *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914* Manchester: Manchester University Press

14. People’s Journal. 4 July 1846, p. 6. Hash, P.M. (2007) ‘The Chicago Reform School Band: 1862-1872’ in *Journal of Research in Music Education* 55: 3 p.252-67.

15. For criticisms of the moral reformers, see Johnston, H. ‘“Buried alive”: Representations of the separate system in Victorian England’ in Mason, P. (2006) *Captured by the Media: Prison Discourse in Popular Culture* Cullompton: Willan p.103-21.

16. D.S. [Shaw, D.] (1883) *Eighteen Months Imprisonment* London: George Routledge p. 300.

17. 1836 [117-II] *Inspectors of Prisons of Great Britain II, Northern and Eastern District, First Report, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online* ProQuest Information and Learning Company (2005) p. 71. Hereafter, reports in this series shortened to *Inspectors of Prisons*.

18. Anon. Sarah Martin, (c. 1844) *The Prison Visitor of Great Yarmouth, With Extracts from her Writings and Prison Journals* London: Religious Tract Society, n.d.. Available as a google book, it contains extracts from the Prison Inspector’s reports.

19. Williams attended 29 November, 1835; see (1836) *Inspectors of Prisons* p. 69.

20. 1840 [258] *Inspectors of Prisons, Fifth Report*, pp. 124-30.



Thomas Burgess, for instance, was sentenced in 1829 to seven years transportation for stealing over £100 from his master. His sentence was commuted to a year's penal servitude at Millbank, probably on account of his good conduct. On their departure, Martin frequently presented prisoners with a bible or hymnbook, as she did Burgess, giving him a copy of the *Cottager's Hymnbook* which he surely comforted himself with at the penitentiary. Immediately after his sentence, Burgess called on Martin and returned the money he had stolen. Hearing of the penitent's story, a tailor gave him an apprenticeship and subsequently Burgess set up his own 'respectable little shop as a tailor and salesman' and maintained his family 'by honourable and successful industry.' With the prospect of future assistance from Martin if they proved willing to reform, prisoners like Burgess had much to gain by complying with her Christian programme. No doubt Burgess kept his faith and love of hymn-singing, however, for his wife, who he met after his imprisonment, was one of Martin's former Sunday-school scholars.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, the religious content of Martin's instruction was one of the main sources of dispute between teacher and scholars. Before they were allowed didactic stories or taught to write, inmates had to demonstrate commitment to reform by memorizing scriptural verses. It is telling, therefore, that some prisoners preferred to learn from hymnbooks than the Bible.

William Bachelor could read but was reluctant to memorize scripture though he helped two illiterate scholars learn their verses from Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs*. He rebuffed his teacher's insistence that his character needed improvement but hinted, perhaps, at the assistance she might give him on discharge: 'O I have other things to think about [...] when I am out I have to think about getting my living'. After a long exchange about his confinements in workhouses and prisons, Bachelor sought compromise — 'I will learn some out of a hymn book *if you like*' — but the teacher, who underlined his audacious words, stood her ground. He must first study the Bible for his own sake, not hers. By the following day Bachelor had helped his cellmates with their Bible verses and remembered two of his own, promising to learn the whole chapter before his departure. By way of reward, the teacher lent him the

hymnbook he had requested and promised a writing book 'and he seemed quite pleased'.<sup>22</sup>

Devotional singing in the prison chapel will have helped many inmates develop their literacy skills which they often began to acquire for the first time under Martin's tutelage. Their education was as much aural as it was visual and the prison scholars learned by hearing their cellmates repeating their verses as well as by sounding aloud their own texts. No doubt, the verses they repeated to their teacher and each other often took on a sing-song quality; certainly the rhyme and rhythm of hymns sung in the prison chapel will have aided word recognition and memorization. Though this form of rote-learning came increasingly under attack by educationalists from the mid-century onwards, many prison scholars seem to have embraced its

challenges for repeating their verses helped to while away the tedium of incarceration. Some may even have competed in their learning while others, like Bachelor, took pleasure in helping less able cellmates. Over Easter week 1840, Martin took a short break from the prison. On her return she was delighted to find all the prisoners gave her 'perfect satisfaction' having learned far more than she had required. Two women had outdone each other by learning over thirty verses. The boy John Creach taught a new arrival — a boy who could not read — two scriptural verses and two of

Watts's songs, while memorizing six of his own. The bricklayer James Brown, sentenced to transportation for stealing bricks — his fourth conviction — repeated Luke chapter 23 and nine hymns by Watts.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, just as many had been convicted of opportunistic offences — pilfering, vagrancy, disorderly behaviour, usually involving drunkenness — most inmates, including those just cited, seem to have been opportunistic in their use of the approved education provided by Martin. A few days after Easter James Brown gave his teacher a letter of 1,200 words addressed to 'the Young men he knew before coming to the Jail'. Warning of the evils of drink, swearing and neglecting scripture which had led to his imprisonment, Brown had adopted the confessional tone of the sermons and tracts he heard and read in prison. It is clear, however, that he enjoyed the lyricism and musicality of the hymns he sang in the gaol for the letter

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21. 1840 [258] *Inspectors of Prisons, Fifth Report*, pp. 130-1.

22. Everyday Book, 12-13 December 1839. Martin's surviving journals held by Great Yarmouth Museum include three Everyday Books from which all references to her journals are taken, hereafter EDB.

23. EDB, 31 March, 6 and 11 April 1840.



is littered with references to the psalms: 'if we look in the 51, psalm. . . we shall find it thus written, the sacrifices of god are a brooken spirt, if brooken and a contrite heart, God, will not despise, and so you see by looking in the bible, we find there, what the Lord, has promised he will do for us, if we will but go to him'. Almost certainly, the gaol congregation had recently sung Watts's version of Psalm 51, traditionally sung over Lent: 'O God of mercy! hear my call,/ My loads of guilt remove;/ Break down this separating wall,/ That bars me from my love.' Cries of lamentation and consolation that speak of confinement and the desire for liberation, psalms will have resonated with many prisoners' experience of separation from their friends and families. But Brown also found joy in their uplifting words: 'Give me the presence of thy grace,/ Then my rejoicing tongue,/ Shall speak aloud thy righteousness,/ And make thy praise my song.'<sup>24</sup> Yet James Brown seems to have been equally interested in profane as sacred verse. Soon he was discovered to have sent three pages of verse (perhaps song) to the female prisoners on paper supplied by Martin for copying biblical sentences. The content judged obscene, he was sent to solitary for a week.<sup>25</sup>

In the period 1836 to 1845 only twelve punishments were meted out for misconduct in Martin's lessons and twenty-four for misbehaviour in divine service. In 1837, having 'behaved ill by laughing in the Chapel' James Brown and James Mudd were placed in their sleeping cell until after prayers 'when they promised to behave better in future'.<sup>26</sup> But when confined in the infirmary with illness, Brown begged Martin to be allowed to attend service: 'I observed a strong eagerness to go which told how he desired even the sight of the other prisoners.'<sup>27</sup> The scarcity of incidence in chapel and classes suggest that most inmates derived consolation, pleasure, or literacy skills from worship and religious education. Yet just as many were opportunistic in their use of their devotional instruction, they were opportunistic and strategic too in the ways they negotiated prison time and regulations to engage in their own culture of song and entertainment, as we can see from the Gaoler's disciplinary record.

No matter how rigorous their imposition of silence, prisons reverberated with noise made by the incarcerated.

### 3. 'Frequent ballad-singing and rude-noises'

No matter how rigorous their imposition of silence, prisons reverberated with noise made by the incarcerated. Muffled singing will have been part of the 'low-buzz' of furtive voices and taps by which, according to Michael Ignatieff, prisoners communicated 'sotto-voce from cell to cell', even in the strictest penitentiaries.<sup>28</sup> At local gaols like Yarmouth, where many prisoners had to share sleeping cells and most spent their waking hours together in dayrooms, inmate communication might be more tightly regulated than in the unreformed prison but it could not be eradicated. The Gaolkeeper's Journal listing prisoner infractions suggests that singing was a principle pastime in the cells.

When the Prison Inspector visited in 1835 he found that discipline was 'of a very lax order'. Prisoner wardsmen were paid four-pence a month to watch the dayrooms and inform the gaoler of any misconduct.

Instead, it seems that the current wardsmen sought to defend inmate culture from intrusion and regulation. He could not say who had contraband tobacco, though the air was dense with smoke. The cells were decorated with 'low drawings, prints, and songs' which, no doubt, prisoners sang raucously for the woman in the adjoining dwelling house complained frequently of the noise.<sup>29</sup> The new keeper,

appointed in 1837, did his best to follow the Inspectorate's guidance to stamp out such debasing influences — including singing — and Sarah Martin approved the changes, finding her scholars more responsive to instruction: 'What a beautiful contrast the present change in our prison presents to its undisciplined state six weeks ago. No singing, laughing, bad language, or loud talking is allowed. No gaming, fighting or playing is permitted.'<sup>30</sup> Some prisoners must have taken the Gaoler at his word. The young mother Maria Bowler, sent for being a refractory pauper to the prison for a week, returned to the workhouse 'softened in temper and manner': 'What seems to have had the effect', noted Martin, was that 'She said she did not like being shut up alone and not allowed to speak — if she only sang to her baby', while in her isolation,

24. Watts, I. (1719) *The Psalms of David*. For a longer discussion of this prisoner's writing see, Rogers, H. (2009) 'The Way to Jerusalem: Reading, Writing and Reform in an Early Victorian Gaol' in *Past and Present* 205 p.71-104.

25. *Gaolkeeper's Journal*, 29 July 1840. These (and all subsequent records relating to the gaol) are held by the Norfolk Record Office (Y/L2, 47 [1836-40]; Y/L2 48 [1841-5]), referred to hereafter as GKJ.

26. GKJ, 23 April 1837.

27. EDB, 7 June 1840.

28. Ignatieff, p. 193. See also Mayhew, p. 163.

29. (1836) *Inspectors of Prisons*, p. 70.

30. EDB, 15 May 1837.

Martin 'could to better advantage adapt instruction to her case'.<sup>31</sup>

Songs that prisoners knew by heart, however, were among the few cultural resources that could not be taken from them when they surrendered their meagre property on entering the gaol. The deserter James Watts handed over a printed song along with his sealing wax, knife, and two pocket pieces.<sup>32</sup> That newspapers and songs continued to be smuggled into the gaol along with tobacco and gaming implements demonstrates the prisoners' attachment to the popular culture of the streets and taverns. The newly-wed James and Elizabeth Patterson were committed for stealing a feather mattress. After she was acquitted, Elizabeth smuggled to her convicted husband four notes, a weekly newspaper and some songs, knowing from her confinement how they would be enjoyed by James and his cellmates.<sup>33</sup> The gaol records provide few clues to what inmates sang, though the Inspector's reference to 'low drawings, prints and songs' suggest that many will have been the racy tunes sung in taverns and fairs. But vernacular song, especially the ballads which women prisoners were discovered singing, could be sentimental as well as saucy. Laments about the abandoned lover or the sailor parted from his sweetheart expressed feelings of separation and loss that must have comforted the incarcerated.<sup>34</sup>

Singing was also one of the ways that the small number of female prisoners attracted attention from the men. When Elizabeth Humphreys was confined to the sick room with a feigned pregnancy, Sarah Rands, employed to watch her, was 'heard throughout the prison imitating the mewling of a cat and other noises.' Notably, 'the men were silent' though doubtlessly straining their ears. The following week Sarah Martin reprimanded both women for the 'frequent ballad-singing and rude-noises' made in the men's hearing which showed 'your character is no better than when you entered.' Evidently their singing was sexually provocative. When the dressmaker deprived them of the privilege of sewing, submission was not achieved and the women graffitted insults to their gaolers on their cell walls.<sup>35</sup>

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It is significant, however, that neither of these women was punished by the Gaoler for their bawdy singing. At Coldbath Field, one of the first institutions to implement a widely-publicized silent regime, there was a dramatic increase in prison offences and punishments as inmates stubbornly resisted the new regulations. After all speech and gestures were prohibited in 1834, the number of disciplinary offences rose exponentially from one punishment for every 191 inmates in 1825 to one punishment for every 3.4 inmates in 1835.<sup>36</sup> Yarmouth also saw increases in punishments but nowhere near the rise at Coldbath Fields. Between 1836 and 1845 74 punishments were meted out for illicit communication, either between inmates or with the outside world. In the same period there were 303 punishments for disorderly

behaviour involving any combination of singing, shouting and swearing, by far the largest group of disciplinary infractions. Around 50 prisoners were punished specifically for singing. But given that approximately 300 inmates were committed each year, these are small numbers indeed.

From the Gaoler's records, it appears that inmates were only disciplined for singing, laughing, and talking when these caused significant disturbance or were related to other forms of rule-breaking and defiance, as when Georgina Tunmore, was confined

for ten hours 'for singing and insolent conduct to the matron'.<sup>37</sup> Rowdiness and insubordination, rather than singing *per se*, were disciplined. Many offenders were punished for singing late at night when they will have disrupted other inmates' sleep or early in the morning, interfering with the unlocking routine. Some may even have been disciplined on the complaint of other prisoners. Philip Grudgefield was sent to solitary for three days for 'singing and disturbing fellow prisoners' at 9.30 at night. A week earlier he was one of three boys locked up for 'noisy conduct in the airing room'.<sup>38</sup>

What the gaolers and what inmates considered noise may have been quite different. One boy eagerly split on his mates — 'Them two boys,' he told Martin, 'have been shut up in the cell for behaving ill — for singing' — but according to the Gaoler, they were sent down for 'noisy

31. EDB, 30 March 1840.

32. Index and Receiving Book, 14 May 1839 (Y L2/7).

33. GKJ 11 May 1842.

34. Gammon, V. (2008) *Desire, Drink, and Death in English Folk and Vernacular Song, 1600-1900* Aldershot: Ashgate.

35. EDB, 25 May and 2, 7, 12, 14 June 1837.

36. Ignatieff, p. 178.

37. GKJ 19 August 1840.

38. GKJ 14 and 22 June 1845.

conduct'. Punishment for singing, which many prisoners must have considered a minor infraction, could precipitate deterioration in their conduct. James Smith was sent with another prisoner to the cells for three days for 'singing and making a considerable noise, last midnight'. He refused to go and the Gaoler 'was obliged to take him by force' after which Smith continued behaving 'insolently' for which he lost a third of his bread allowance. A week later, Smith 'who is of a violent and refractory disposition' was confined again for three days for striking another inmate in the face.<sup>39</sup>

Following punishment, singing could be a form of bravado as inmates cockily reasserted their place in the prisoner community and its pecking order. Robert Batley and John Creach (who taught his cellmate from *Divine Songs*) were sent down for three days for fighting each other. Two weeks later they had made up their differences and were confined for twelve hours for singing together after lock up.<sup>40</sup> But the Gaoler appears to have been prudent in policing inmate conduct. As historians of other small and often poorly-resourced gaols have discovered, discipline required a degree of cooperation and discretion between staff and inmates.<sup>41</sup> In 1837 the Gaoler noted that William Sherwood had made a 'very great noise' after lock up and continued until morning, yet he was not punished. The following week Sherwood was confined for 'noisy, abusive and obscene language' and climbing the partition wall to send notes to the debtors. He was released after two-and-a-half hours having promised to be quiet, but confined soon after for throwing his toilet tub at the turnkey.

On his many returns to the gaol, Sherwood became one of its most unruly residents. In 1840 when he commenced singing at five in the morning, the Gaoler tried to make 'an impression in his mind by mild means of the folly of his conduct' only for the prisoner to adopt 'a fighting position' and bite the Keeper when put in handcuffs. 'I'll tell you the truth because I firmly believe and so do other Prisoners', Sherwood protested, 'that it was and is your doing and yours only that singing is prohibited and other restrictions enforced in this Prison and if it had not been for you it never would have been the case.' As he had on previous occasions, the Gaoler

informed Sherwood, 'such regulations were instituted by the laws of this Country and were enforced expressly for the welfare and of himself and other prisoners.' Compromise appeared to be reached: 'The Prisoner expressed sorrow that he had conducted himself so, and promised if I would release him it should not occur again. I released him accordingly.'<sup>42</sup>

Six months later Sherwood was again annoying guards and inmates, and was struck by another prisoner; 'I believe Barrett was urged to the attempt by Sherwood's language and conduct, which is generally reprehensible and exciting', concluded the Gaoler. Sherwood remained defiant: 'I request to know by what authority you lock me up in this Cell. I can tell you whether you know it or no that there ought to be Printed Rules hung up in the prison then I should know what I should do and what I should'n't do for that matter. I can produce the Act of Parliament and shew you, I have not lived in a wood all my life time, now take my life'. This explicit challenge to his authority mystified the Gaoler; 'Restriction fails in keeping the Prisoner quiet, his conduct is altogether very strange.' He must have been thankful to see the prisoner removed to Hoxton Lunatic Asylum in July 1844, and perhaps Sherwood's cellmates also breathed a sigh of relief.<sup>43</sup>

Though the Gaoler was perplexed by Sherwood's complaint about the absence of clarity in the prison rules, the inmate's criticism highlights the anomalous status of prisoner communication in the age of silence and separation. Without the means to physically separate inmates, gaols like Yarmouth could not stifle their voices. When the Gaoler received the long list of 'Regulations for Prisons in England and Wales', these did not explicitly prohibit speaking or singing.<sup>44</sup> Silence was a principle rather than a statutory regulation, and one that inmates continually tested. Knowing that the maintenance of order depended on their compliance, the Gaoler chose only to act when they pushed his tolerance too far.

#### 4. 'Sing my great Deliverer's Name'

Following Sarah Martin's death in 1843 a schoolmaster was employed at the gaol. He expanded the curriculum beyond devotional teaching to

Silence was a principle rather than a statutory regulation, and one that inmates continually tested.

39. GKJ 17 and 24 March 1840.

40. GKJ 8 and 23 February 1841.

41. Forsythe, W.J. (1983) *A System of Discipline: Exeter Borough Prison 1819-1863* Exeter: Exeter University Press; Ireland, R.W. (2007) *"A Want of Order and Good Discipline": Rules, Discretion and the Victorian Prison* Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

42. GKJ 7 March 1837, 24 June 1837, 20 and 22 Aug 1840, 6-7 September 1840.

43. GKJ 2 6 Feb 1841, 4-6 March 1841, 10-11 June 1841, 14-19 July 1841, 29 July 1841, 17 August 1841.

44. GKJ 20 March 1843; (1843) [457] Report relative to the system of prison discipline, &., by the Inspectors of Prisons, pp. 15-29.

incorporate arithmetic. Over the ensuing decade, however, discipline hardened at Yarmouth as at other gaols. Though many offenders were sentenced to hard labour in the 1830s and early 1840s, the gaol had no mechanism to carry out such punishment. In 1845 a tread-wheel was constructed for the purpose, built to work eight prisoners. Within a year, its stairs had worn out. In 1847 the chaplain and schoolmaster complained to the magistrates that the teacher was required to supervise prisoners at the wheel which 'places him in a relationship that involves physical restraint and implicit obedience and so injures his moral influence over the prisoners when called to win them by gentleness and kindness to receive instruction at his hands.' The teacher was relieved of the duty but, consequently, lost over a third of his salary.<sup>45</sup> We now turn to examine how one inmate, a ballad-singer, responded to the schoolteacher's 'moral influence' and how he brought together his own skills in song-making with his devotional instruction to express his experience on the tread-wheel.

In the 1850s another James Brown was committed to Yarmouth Gaol on six occasions for vagrancy, assaulting a policeman and threatening to assault a woman. He was in his late thirties and variously described as a labourer, vagrant, and ballad-singer in the streets and public houses. Following his discharge after serving three weeks for vagrancy in July 1855, the schoolmaster wrote that Brown was a drunkard who had entered the gaol 'in a quite disgusting state of dirt and filth'. Brown's reading and writing were good, however, and he had left behind 'several pages of poetry composed in his Cell about [paper torn] and the Prison'. It is telling that the schoolmaster read the verses as poetry for given Brown's occupation they were almost certainly composed as songs. The schoolmaster appears to have approved their sentiment. Most likely they were penitent lines on the need to mend his ways and abandon drink, for the teacher clearly believed that Brown hoped to reform, though doubting his commitment; 'he owns he is doing [paper torn] but has not the fortitude in withstanding against his propensity.'

## Over the last decade the Good Vibrations project has led investigation into the therapeutic and rehabilitative potential of music in prisons by tracking the immediate and longer-term benefits of participation in gamelan music-making.

Brown's subsequent arrest highlights the incongruity between the world of popular song and the penitent literature promoted within prison. On 13 September 1855 he burst into the New Independent Chapel, his face blackened, and in a state of intoxication threw himself onto the steps leading up to the pulpit where the minister was preaching his sermon. Several women had to be 'removed in a fainting state'. Was his prostration a drunken gesture of remorse for his fall from grace, or protest against the prison piety from which he was now released? Hauled before the magistrates as a 'rogue and vagabond', the culprit said in his defence: 'I am in the habit of getting my living by singing songs, and yesterday I sung among the harvest people.' His blackened his face, which so appalled the religious ladies, will have been part of his entertainment of the harvest workers — a carnivalesque feature of popular festivities and revelries. 'I should be sorry to disturb any religious congregation', he continued; 'I did not know what I was doing.' Brown's plea was to no avail. He was sentenced to three months imprisonment, this time with hard labour.<sup>46</sup>

Once again, Brown employed his time to compose penitent lines on the evils of drink for, on discharge, he printed a broadside verse entitled 'Yarmouth Gaol' on his 'thoughts on the Tread-wheel'. The lines promised abstinence and that Brown will use his freedom to sing of his redemption: 'And I a

brand pluck'd from the flame,/ Will sing my great Deliverer's name,/ While sinners old in crime shall trace/ The wonders of Redeeming Grace.'<sup>47</sup> James Brown did not return to Yarmouth Gaol but it is doubtful that he remained reclaimed. More probably, his brief moment of notoriety — his conviction was one of the few Yarmouth cases to be noted in the press — provided the opportunity to make a little money from an alternative audience to the workers and tavern drinkers he usually entertained. However strong his repentance while treading the wheel, or how consoling the gospel message then appeared, it seems unlikely that he will have refrained from the alehouses and fairs where he made his living.

45. Gaol Committee 1836-50 [Y/TC 3/36], 6 May 1844; 4 February 1845; 20 October 1847; 5 February 1847; 17 February 1847.

46. Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette, 22 September 1855, p. 2; Norwich Mercury, 19 September 1855, p. 3.

47. 'Yarmouth Gaol', Norfolk Online Access to Heritage, Broadside/30129037793537, <http://www.noah.norfolk.gov.uk/Summary.aspx?n=3&pos=0>.



What can we learn from the uses that prisoners like Brown made of approved, devotional verse and their own illicit song-making? Over the last decade the Good Vibrations project has led investigation into the therapeutic and rehabilitative potential of music in prisons by tracking the immediate and longer-term benefits of participation in gamelan music-making. As reported in this journal, the creative music programme in which participants collectively improvise with the Javanese percussive gamelan, has been shown to foster well-being, confidence and desire for personal transformation as well as improving inmates' relationships with each other and with staff. Importantly, given the low levels of literacy among prisoners and widespread antipathy to education, over half of participants have gone on to pursue further educational activities.<sup>48</sup> The Indonesian instrument has been selected for the programme partly because few participants — project leaders as well as prisoners — have prior experience of or expertise in this form of music. With no leader, the music is communal, inclusive and egalitarian. Its very 'exoticness' allows it to 'float above ethnic divisions' and to 'act as something of a leveller'.<sup>49</sup>

Yet prisoners, like those at Yarmouth, possess between them a rich inheritance of song, music and performance, though now far more diverse than in the 1840s and 1850s. Many have considerable musical literacy and facility. If harnessed, this cultural knowledge and creativity might be empowering and transformative, especially for those lacking recognized skills and with poor educational experiences, allowing them to own for once a sense of expertise.<sup>50</sup> Of their own accord, prisoners at Yarmouth frequently strove to help each other learn their verses, a responsibility they enjoyed, while the sociability of their learning was an important factor in the dramatic progress many made in literacy. But they could only legitimately express their feelings and creativity through the approved language of Christian words and verse. Engaging with prisoners' own musical culture today may well enable them to experiment more confidently and open-mindedly with other modes of communication, feeling and expression — written, spoken and aesthetic.<sup>51</sup>



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48. Wilson, D., Caulfield, L. And Atherton, S. (2009) 'Good Vibrations: The long-term impact of a prison-based music project' in *Prison Service Journal* 182 p.27-32; Digard, L., Grafin von Sponeck, A. & Liebling, A. (2007) 'All Together Now: The therapeutic potential of a prison-based music programme' in *Prison Service Journal* 170 p. 3-14.
49. Mendonca, M. (2010) 'Prison, music and the "rehabilitation revolution": The case of Good Vibrations' in *Journal of Applied Arts* 1:2 p. 299.
50. Geidel, M. (2005) 'Supermaxes, Stripmines, and Hip-Hop' *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 17:1 p. 67-76.
51. I would like to thank Michael Allis for kindly advising me on the history of music and song.

# Dark Tourism and the Modern Prison

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It has been suggested that ‘as long as people have been able to travel, they have been drawn...towards sites, attractions or events that are linked in one way or another with death, suffering, violence or disaster’.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon has become known, both within academia and the media, as ‘dark tourism’.<sup>2</sup> According to Seaton<sup>3</sup> ‘dark tourism’ is part of a broader ‘thanatopic’ tradition (ie. a meditation or reflection on the topic of death), hence the term is frequently used interchangeably with that of ‘thanatourism’. Thus, ‘dark’ tourism is travel that is driven by a demand for ‘actual or symbolic encounters with death’.<sup>4</sup> In Stone’s<sup>5</sup> typology, seven categories (or ‘shades’) of ‘dark’ tourist sites are presented. These categories range from those at the ‘lightest’ end of the spectrum, which are normally purpose built attractions, focused purely on entertainment (e.g. The London Dungeon or the Dracula Theme Park in Romania) to the ‘darkest’ sites, which are actual locations of genocide and massacre (e.g. Auschwitz-Birkenau or the ‘killing fields’ of Cambodia), the purpose of which is primarily education and remembrance. In the middle of this typology, and thus representing a combination of education and entertainment, are what Stone refers to as those sites that ‘present bygone penal and justice codes to the present day consumer’<sup>6</sup>, primarily former prisons. This paper will examine the prison as a site of ‘dark tourism’ and, using Stone’s definition, will analyse the ways in which, and the reasons why, former prisons have become popular tourist destinations. However, and further, we expand on Stone’s classification and, using Dartmoor prison as a case study, explore the operational prison as a (previously un-analysed) tourist site. The paper will examine how ‘prison

tourism’ can facilitate the construction of dominant narratives around the politics of punishment that leave little space for critical scrutiny or challenge.

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the ‘birth’ of the modern prison, punishment began to shift from being a very public and visual spectacle to something altogether more private and restricted. However, this move to the imposition of punishment behind closed doors and high walls did not lead to a decrease in public curiosity about the ordeals of offenders and nor was this likely the intention. Indeed Gatrell<sup>7</sup> has suggested that this shift was not about reducing the terrors of the scaffold but rather reigning in the disorders and disrespect of the gallows crowd. In private death became more sanitised and more dreadful in ‘chilly proceedings’ without crowd support. As with the scaffold the public are, and always have been, the intended audience to decipher the messages conveyed by the prison. Indeed, prisons of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were intentionally built to ‘shape public response through direct emotional communication’.<sup>8</sup>

The prison is, by definition, an arena that is founded on segregation and secrecy. It ‘...denotes layered meanings of concealment’.<sup>9</sup> So, unlike public and exemplary punishments which aimed to deter deviant behaviour through visual display and public access, the prison performs this function through a combination of the visible signals emitted by its external structural and a concealment of its inner world. As Wright<sup>10</sup> explains, ‘...the intimidation and deterrence factor of prison is served by keeping it distant, remote, and unknown, but at the same time, nearby, an immediate threat of imaginable evil’. Prisons are at once obvious and familiar yet at the same time they are ‘antipublic’<sup>11</sup> and unknown. This paradoxical symbolism means the reality of prison

1. Sharpley, R. and Stone, P. R. (2009) *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, Bristol: Channel View Publications p.4.
2. Foley, M. & Lennon, J. (1996) ‘JFK and Dark Tourism: Heart of Darkness’ in *Journal of International Heritage Studies* 2:4 p.198-211.
3. 1996, cited in Stone P (2006) ‘A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a Typology of Death and Macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions’ in *Tourism* 54:22 pp.145-160, p.149.
4. Stone (ibid) p.149.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid, p.154.
7. Gatrell, V.A.C. (1994) *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770 — 1868* Oxford: Oxford University Press p.590.
8. Bender, J. (1987) *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* Chicago: University of Chicago Press p.218.
9. Schrift, M. (2004) ‘The Angola Prison Rodeo: Inmate Cowboys and Institutional Tourism’ in *Ethnology*, 43 :4 p.331-44, p.331.
10. Wright, P. (2000) ‘The Cultural Commodification of Prisons’ in *Social Justice* 27:3 p.15-21, p16.
11. Schrift (2004) *ibid*, p.331.

life is 'constantly mystified and mythologized'<sup>12</sup> and thus, when one factors in the extensive (factual and fictional) depictions of prisons in the media, it is little wonder that there exists a public desire to infiltrate the 'backstage' areas of prison life.<sup>13</sup> At the same time this paradox has lent an important flexibility to state discourses around the prison allowing its public façade to be manipulated to evidence and reflect contemporary penal philosophy whether in fact it does so or not.

As noted earlier, much of the literature on 'dark tourism' emphasises the phenomenon as being death-related. In terms of actual deaths, historically only a small proportion of offenders have died in prison. There are of course those who, after 1868 were executed within penal institutions, and some prison tourism focuses on such sites, but in terms of the general population, prison authorities have historically tended to operate early release systems in order to keep deaths in custody to a minimum. Thus 'dark tourism' to prison sites is perhaps *symbolically*, rather than *actually*, death related. Prisoner autobiographies have often evoked an image of prison life as being like 'a living death'<sup>14</sup> or of those serving time as 'dead men'<sup>15</sup> whilst other commentators have described prisons as 'electronic coffins'<sup>16</sup>. Such expressions evoke the timelessness and isolation of prison life and, moreover, imprisonment as a metaphor for the death of civil life, individual freedoms and identity. Prison tourism then may serve to heighten our sense of mortality but it also invokes a shared sense of morality imbued with feelings of relief at our own distance from such an experience. It provides a dramatic space whereby one group of people (the 'law-abiding audience' / 'us') can experience the world of the 'other' (the 'criminal actors' / 'them') whilst, at the same time, remaining untainted by the ignominy and denunciation that normally defines both the domain and its denizens.

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Strange and Kempa<sup>17</sup> have noted that former sites of state-sanctioned incarceration are among the most popular of dark tourist locations and these have mushroomed with the decommissioning of many 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century prison buildings, for example Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Alcatraz in California and Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin, although this is less evident in England where we have continued to make use of most of our large Victorian prisons. Such decommissioned penal institutions are immensely evocative, inducing myths of bygone eras of seemingly greater moral certitude, where punishment was severe and deterrent. They reflect the power to modify or reconstruct the individual through architecture and discipline. There is unmistakable and commanding religiosity about the prison internally and externally and the austerity of these institutions is clearly manifest in their architectural design. Direct contact with prison structures is powerful because they are silent but often imposing monolithic witnesses to history and, as Markus has pointed out, they are architectural structures with double meanings, 'making concrete both power and bonds'.<sup>18</sup> In the case of the prison, architecture can embody the abstraction and isolation of the prisoner and construct, convey and reaffirm 'basic moral-political categories and distinctions'.<sup>19</sup>

Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia is arguably one of the most popular prison tourist sites. It began operating tours in 1994 although it had been attracting up to 10,000 visitors per year from the moment it opened in 1829.<sup>20</sup> As a structure it is undoubtedly impressive as the architect sought to embody the instructions of the Building Commissioners to 'convey to the mind a cheerless blank indicative of the misery which awaits the unhappy being who enters within its wall'.<sup>21</sup> Left deliberately in a state of decay the viewer is guided through a 'haunting world of

12. Wright (2000) *ibid*, p.12.

13. Schrift (2004) *ibid*, p.333.

14. Balfour, J. S. (1907) *My Prison Life* London: Chapman and Hall p.110.

15. Macartney, W. (1936) *Walls have Mouths: A Record of Ten Years' Penal Servitude* London: Camelot Press p.205.

16. King, R. D. and Elliot, K. W. (1977) *Albany: Birth of a prison — end of an era* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul p.227.

17. Strange C & Kempa M (2003) 'Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Island' in *Annals of Tourism Research* 30:2 p.386-405.

18. Markus, T.A. (1993) *Buildings and Power: Freedom and control on the origins of modern building types* London: Routledge p.25.

19. Garland, D. (1990) *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks p.252.

20. Wilson, J. (2008) *Prison: Cultural Memory and Dark Tourism* London: Peter Lang.

21. Johnston, N. (2000) *Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions* Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art for the Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site p.7.

crumbling cell blocks' in an experience that is 'eerily beautiful'.<sup>22</sup> Tourist experiences here are very much aestheticised encounters with symbolic structures rather than authentic, and perhaps uncomfortable, confrontations with the realities of penal history. At Eastern State, like at the former convict settlement at Port Arthur, Tasmania, 'the horrors of the past...have been substantially effaced by the contemporary appearance of the ruins in a romantic landscape'.<sup>23</sup> As Dewar and Frederickson have observed, '[i]n a museum context this creates a visually impressive fabric that frequently overwhelms both interpretation of the nuances of prison life, and public dialogue about that life'.<sup>24</sup> Thus, whilst there may be attempts to develop prison-museums as 'thinking environments which engage with many types of exclusion from the community'<sup>25</sup>, a focus on the fabric and structure of the prison may actually exacerbate, rather than diminish, the real and ideological distance between the prison and the public.

Wilson<sup>26</sup> argues that prison 'tourism' generally centres on prison buildings rather than their inhabitants but the former cannot be extricated from the latter or from ethical considerations in relation to the commodification and commercialisation of the suffering of individuals, whether in the recent or distant past. The prison as a tourist site is flexible and can be constantly reconstructed or distorted depending on the prison, visitor, penal and social context and, in the case of prison museums, the manner in which the site has been represented.<sup>27</sup> Or as Strange and Kempa have articulated, whilst state agencies and other stakeholders of 'dark' tourist sites predominantly manage their presentation and interpretation, 'unofficial storytellers and consumer expectations criss-cross the transmission

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and reception of site representations'.<sup>28</sup> A notable example of this is Alcatraz prison in California. Probably the most famous, and visited, decommissioned institution in existence it opened to the public in 1972 and attracts approximately 1.5 million visitors every year. Although for the last 20 years or so there have been strong attempts to market Alcatraz around the notion of 'freedom' rather than 'confinement' (with tour guides emphasising the island's important role as a nature reserve and as a Native American heritage site — being the birthplace of the Red Power movement), the tourist

interpretation of the prison is fundamentally influenced by media depictions and tourists overwhelmingly visit 'the rock' to envisage the lives of those notorious inmates made legendary via Hollywood movies.<sup>29</sup> The construction of the infamous or 'celebrity' prisoner is a significant aspect of prison tourism yet, like the focus on fabric and structure, frequently serves to simplify and romanticise the harsh and complex reality of prison life in a way that has been evident since at least the early 18<sup>th</sup> century with the public notoriety given to Jack Shepherd's repeated successful escapes from prison. The 'celebrity' or 'folk hero' prisoner (generally male and symbolising masculinity, daring, defiance and autonomy) stands in stark contrast to the mundane,

yet more accurate, image of the prisoner 'stripped of his freedom and individuality, and more often than not, a symbol of social filth'.<sup>30</sup>

Not all prison-museums have succumbed to superficial depictions or public interpretations however. Robben Island in Cape Town for example, has become one of South Africa's most visited tourist destinations but its presentation and reception has been shaped by the country's political struggles rather than fantasy

22. Eastern State Penitentiary [www.easternstate.org](http://www.easternstate.org) (date accessed: 1 July 2011).

23. Garton-Smith, J. (2000) 'The Prison Wall: Interpretation Problems for Prison Museums' in *Open Museum Journal Vol 2* <http://hosting.collectionsaustralia.net/omj/vol2/pdfs/smith.pdf> (date accessed 30 June 2011).

24. Dewar, M and Frederickson, C (2003) 'Prison heritage, public history and archaeology at Fannie Bay Gaol, Northern Territory' in *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 9:1 p.45-63, p.46.

25. Garton-Smith (2000) *ibid.*

26. Wilson (2008) *ibid.*

27. Till cited in McDowell (2009) 'Negotiating places of pain in post-conflict Northern Ireland: Debating the future of the Maze prison/Long Kesh' in W.Logan and K.Reeves (eds) *Places of Pain and Shame* London: Routledge p.215.

28. Strange and Kempa (2003) *ibid.*, p.391.

29. Loo, T. and Strange, C. (2000) 'Rock Prison of Liberation: Alcatraz Island and the American Imagination' in *Radical History Review* 78 p.27-56.

30. Schrift (*ibid.*), p.337. See also Duncan M. G. (1996) *Romantic Outlaws, Beloved Prisons: The Unconscious Meanings of Crime and Punishment* New York: New York University Press.



media constructions. Thus it symbolises 'victory over adversity' and has managed to resist 'the trivializing forces upon public consciousness'<sup>31</sup> that characterise many other prison-museums.

Further, not all prison tourism occurs at decommissioned institutions. There are a number of penal institutions in Britain which have attracted public attention and witnessed high visitor numbers but among the most prominent of these would be Dartmoor Prison. Built at an elevation of 1400 feet above sea-level Dartmoor is the highest and wettest prison in the United Kingdom and also one of the oldest still in use. As Tunbridge and Ashworth have argued, "dark' places are especially marketable if they were notorious, if the perpetrators of death or pain were especially cruel, if the historic regime was manifestly unjust, or if those who suffered were famous or especially sympathetic victims'.<sup>32</sup> Dartmoor prison has long possessed an inglorious reputation as Britain's most 'feared', 'hated' and 'notorious' prison.<sup>33</sup> It has been described as 'a place...the very name of which strikes terror into the most hardened criminal'<sup>34</sup> and, according to Prison Commissioner Methuen (1946), in the public consciousness it was considered 'only one degree better than being condemned to death'.<sup>35</sup> Part of the fascination of Dartmoor is that its structure, purpose and isolated location seem timeless or rather to be without the impetus of time. Indeed, it has been described as the 'prison that time forgot'.<sup>36</sup> Given its location and historical usage, perhaps more than any other prison, is

*a prime example of what Edmund Burke described as the 'Sublime' — an aesthetic which combines qualities of Terror, Obscurity,*

*Vastness, and Silence to produce a powerful effect of awe upon the beholder.*<sup>37</sup>

Dartmoor has been attracting sightseers since the nineteenth century but it was during the inter-war period that visitor numbers appear to have increased significantly. This was in part linked to the expansion of motor car ownership and the increased accessibility of this remote prison. Clayton, a Prison Governor there, describes how, on occasions, roads would be blocked by the sheer number of tourists.

*In the summer charabanc after charabanc would arrive at Princetown about midday and their occupants, having picnicked, would make their way to the prison gate just in time to see the convicts marching out to afternoon labour.*<sup>38</sup>

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Such attention was not welcomed and prisoners and officers alike objected 'to being turned into a peep-show for the mob'.<sup>39</sup> But more significantly tourists began to cause problems for security as 'morbid curiosity...drew crowds of sightseers to the entrance, and...impeded the guards'.<sup>40</sup> In the wake of the large scale riot which occurred at the prison in January 1932 people flocked to

see the 'great prison', including a small army of journalists and press photographers.<sup>41</sup> The problem persisted in the post-war era when Prison Commissioner Duncan Fairn asserted that Dartmoor Prison was becoming a 'zoo' for the 'droves' of tourists coming by car and clambering up the walls. He commented particularly on the number of 'scantly clad young women... [who] hang around Dartmoor' in the summer.<sup>42</sup> So obstructive did tourists become that various steps were taken to shield prisoners from the public gaze.

31. Strange and Kempa (2003) *ibid.*, p.399.

32. Cited in Strange and Kempa (2003) *ibid.*, p.389.

33. Dendrickson, G & Thompson, F. (1954) *The Truth about Dartmoor*. London: Gollancz Ltd p.22. Also see, Rhodes, A.J. (1933) *Dartmoor Prison: A Record of 126 Years of Prisoner of War and Convict Life, 1806-1932*, London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited p.ix.

34. *Times* 26 November 1945.

35. Cited in Simpson, A.W.B. (2005) 'Shooting Felons: Law, Practice, Official Culture and Perceptions of Morality' in *Journal of Law and Society* 32:2 p.241-66, p.244.

36. Anne Owers quoted in *Independent*, 1 February 2002

37. Garland (1990) *ibid.*, p.259.

38. Clayton, G.F. (1958) *The Wall is Strong: The Life of a Prison Governor* London: John Long p.113.

39. *Prison Officers Magazine* (1932) XXI (5) p.136.

40. Rhodes (1933) *ibid.*, p.4.

41. *Guardian*, 28 January 1932.

42. *Times* 14 March 1957.

During the 1930s Prison Commissioners banned sightseers from taking photographs of prisoners.<sup>43</sup> By the 1950s a large canvas screen was constructed between the prison and the quarry 'so that prisoners could go to and from their work unobserved'<sup>44</sup> and the 1959 White Paper *Penal Practice in a Changing Society* even recommended that bands of trees be planted around the prison in order to obscure the view of tourists.

The tourist interest in Dartmoor shows no signs of abating. In recent times the prison has been attracting up to 30,000 visitors each year, supplying a captivating and dramatic combination of '[b]ogs, fogs, dogs and tales of celebrity convicts'.<sup>45</sup> However, unlike earlier decades when prison authorities went to great lengths to keep sightseers away, more recently they have welcomed the tourist interest. Because Dartmoor is an operating prison it could be suggested there need be no consideration of the dissonance, the distortions that can be brought about by heritage reconstructions, except that Dartmoor Prison now has a dedicated museum which clearly embraces the prison's notoriety. 'Genuine cell doors' sell for £50 and visitors can purchase their own 'prison mug shots', using an identity board with the name 'Madman Lee' for the photos.<sup>46</sup> Although, the museum staff do preserve an archive and endeavour to aid researchers where possible, such elements of frivolity obscure the clear ethical issues that this form of prison tourism raises. Therefore, while the Prison's Governor states on the site that he hopes the museum will encourage people 'to think hard about the serious issues of crime, punishment and rehabilitation' opportunities have been lost to facilitate this. Primarily, like other forms of prison tourism concerned with profit, it does little to challenge popular ideologies and commonsense values around punishment and the prison.<sup>47</sup>

Primarily, like other forms of prison tourism concerned with profit, it does little to challenge popular ideologies and commonsense values around punishment and the prison.

The emphasis on the 'celebrity' and 'notoriety' of prisoners serves to simplify the complex realities of the meaning and experience of incarceration. So, whilst on the one hand the prison is gratuitously presented as excessively brutal, on the other the representation is moderated and sanitised (for example stories/images of state sanctioned floggings would be perfectly acceptable but accounts of sexual violence in prison less so). Further, as with its US equivalents, the commodification of Dartmoor's ignominious history and its celebrity inmates arguably nurtures, in the viewer, a sense of nostalgia for a time when punishment seemed excessively severe and the 'criminal' an uncomplicated product of poverty and social inequalities. Whilst this may invoke feelings of sympathy for those incarcerated in years past, it essentially eclipses any space for critical dialogue or concern about contemporary penal practices. This is immensely problematic for a prison that remains operational. For whilst some of the prisoners who feature in Dartmoor's museum are interpreted as 'folk heroes', those who are incarcerated behind the walls remain 'othered'. As Garton-Smith puts it, prisoners in present eras '...are much closer to our contemporary fear and security needs that they

tend not to be regarded as sympathetically and indeed, often to be feared'.<sup>48</sup> Thus, unlike many other 'dark' tourist sites, contemporary prisons are 'possibly the only ones where the mainstream visitors' attitudes by and large endorse the suffering of the victims'.<sup>49</sup>

To conclude, undoubtedly prison tourism may permit the public some insight into the injustices and/or progressive measures of the past and so, like many other 'dark' tourist sites prisons can encourage a sense of personal, if not collective, shame and regret amongst the viewing public. But it also, arguably, creates feelings of comfort and satisfaction that, by comparison to those misfortunate 'others', 'we are the lucky ones, the survivors, the chosen'.<sup>50</sup> It thus communicates an

43. Rhodes (1933) *ibid*.

44. Grew, B.D. (1958) *Prison Governor*, London: Herbert Jenkins p.72. See also Clayton (1958) *ibid*, p.113-4 and National Archives PCOM 9/2.

45. *Telegraph* 1 May 2009.

46. *Telegraph* (2009) *ibid*.

47. Wilson (1008) *ibid*.

48. Garton-Smith (2000) *ibid*.

49. Wilson (2008) *ibid*, p.45.

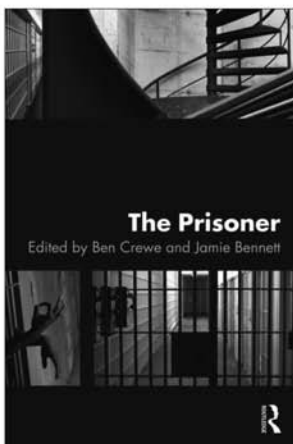
50. Logan, W and Reeves, K. (2009) (Eds) 'Introduction' in *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'* London: Routledge p.3-4 Emphasis added.

impression of inevitability about the prison and its inmates, inferring that 'prisons are there because they exist [and] [p]eople go to prison because that is where they have wound up'.<sup>51</sup>

Strange and Kempa have suggested that, despite the commodification and trivialisation of human suffering that is often the consequence of prison tourism, this should not necessarily 'preclude the presentation of counter-hegemonic stories or tales or injustice'<sup>52</sup> as demonstrated by the penal site at

Robben Island. They go on to argue that to close off these sites to tourists would be a mistake as they can provide an arena on which to 'confront the ongoing challenge of interpreting incarceration, punishment and forced isolation'.<sup>53</sup> They may be right. But to do this successfully requires an 'inclusive integrity' on the part of state agencies, other stakeholders *and* the viewing public and a 'readiness to present and acknowledge the manifold strands of narrative from both sides of the Us-Other divide'.<sup>54</sup>

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51. Wright (2000) *ibid*, p.20.

52. Strange and Kempa (2003) *ibid*, p.387.

53. *Ibid*, p.402.

54. Wilson (2008), *ibid*, p.58.

# 'When the prison no longer stands there':

## Donovan Wylie's photographic project 'The Maze'

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***"Here come the women," she said, without excitement; and we stood and listened as the sound grew loud, then louder, then louder still. It seemed, at last, impossibly loud — for we of course had turned three angles of the floor and, though the women were near, we could not see them. I said 'They might be ghosts!' — I remembered how there are said to be legions of Roman soldiers that can be heard passing sometimes, through the cellars of the houses of the City. I think the grounds at Millbank might echo like that, in the centuries when the prison no longer stands there.'***

In 2002 the photographer Donovan Wylie<sup>2</sup> began visually documenting the decommissioning of HMP Maze, more colloquially known as 'The Maze'. His images map the tearing down of walls and the coiling up of wire fencing: the slow entropy of a now disused site. They share with architectural photographic convention a stark quality. There is a coldness to them. There are no people in these photos. Wylie returned in 2007-8 and the cumulative project resembles a sort of time-lapse photography. This might remind us of Barthes's<sup>3</sup> notion that the earliest cameras were 'clocks for seeing'. In a mechanical fashion they froze in time a visual representation of an object or scene. They fixed that particular instant. This series of images, recorded across six years, depict — in an almost 'flick-book'-like fashion — an accumulation of decay. As the project progresses, the buildings come to have less and less physical integrity. Once intact cells are now exposed to the elements. The early images show buildings that had comparatively recently been emptied. More recent photos show increasing stretches of waste ground. Wild grasses and weeds now grow through cracked asphalt.

To use Marion Shoard's term, by way of Farley and Roberts<sup>4</sup>, Wylie's images reveal The Maze as an

'edgeland'. An 'edgeland' is the sort of abandoned or ignored place that can be found — although often not consciously seen — on society's edges or between other more 'meaningful' sites. They are where 'overspill housing estates break into scrubland'<sup>5</sup>. They are the 'blur from a car window' or the 'backdrop to our most mundane and routine activities'<sup>6</sup>. For them, '[t]o walk in edgelands ruins is to feel absence and presence at the same time'<sup>7</sup>. These photos allow us to virtually walk through this particular space and experience that particular uncanny sensation. They allow us to map the extent to which 'spatial forms [are] ...concretized...through time.'<sup>8</sup> To put this differently, they reveal the ghostly after-effects of the spatial patterns enacted by the site's past occupants: bright patches on sun-bleached cell walls where posters were once tacked up; a pillow just off-centre on an immaculately made bed. My intention here is to discuss both this making (and unmaking) of prison as a place and how the history of a site can be said to persist even 'when the prison no longer stands there'. This also raises the question of how these images of The Maze more broadly feed into the collective understanding of imprisonment. It is useful first though to briefly discuss the history of The Maze itself and its place in the collective social imaginary.

Purbrick<sup>9</sup> provides valuable background on the site in her commentary on Wylie's 2004 collection. Formerly an RAF base, in 1971 Long Kesh had been set up as 'a makeshift internment centre'<sup>10</sup>. Later, with the expansion of the site, it would take the name The Maze. The earlier name is derived from the 'Irish word for the long ditch,' the latter meaning 'the plain'<sup>11</sup>. Purbrick suggests that some 10,000 inmates were imprisoned in Long Kesh and latterly The Maze through to 2000 when the site was finally closed, Republican

1. Waters, S. (1999) *Affinity* London: Virago Press p.20 (emphasis added).
2. Wylie, D. (2004) *The Maze* London: Granta Books.
3. Barthes, R. (1981) *Camera Lucida* London: Vintage Books p.15.
4. Farley, P. and Roberts, M.S. (2011) *Edgelands: Journeys into England's true wilderness* London: Jonathan Cape.
5. *Ibid.* p.5.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.* p.154.
8. Augé, M. (1995) *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of super-modernity* London: Verso p.58.
9. Purbrick, L. (2004) 'The architecture of containment' In D. Wylie (2004) *The Maze* London: Granta Books.
10. *Ibid.* p.91.
11. *Ibid.*



and loyalist prisoners having been released under the terms of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement<sup>12</sup>.

The buildings themselves were notable for both their scale and repetition. Eight H-blocks were surrounded by steriles and inertias. The latter was a 'fifteen-foot wide void' that ran within the two and a half mile long, seventeen foot tall perimeter wall<sup>13</sup>. Between the fences and gates, the steriles and inertias, ran roads allowing passage across the site. Wylie talks of the disorientation that comes with walking a site of this size with such repetitive features. This is mirrored in the 26 images tracking his passage within the perimeter wall through the numbered and demarcated zones of the inertia. This calls to mind Vidler's<sup>14</sup> description of Piranesi's Carceri series: engravings depicting a terrifying carceral world. The uneasiness we feel, especially in the earlier pictures, comes from the sense of absence. As Wylie<sup>15</sup> stated in an interview, 'the images suggest that you don't know whether [the prison] is closing or opening.' There is an uneasy sense of anticipation for a population that will never arrive or never return. Taking the project as a whole, we are confronted with the scale and repetition of the buildings. Yet, it becomes increasingly difficult to orientate oneself as the buildings themselves disappear. The rubble and weeds in the steriles of the 2002 images have inexorably spread by 2008. The 'plain' has reclaimed itself.

### Prison 'edgelands'

There are several points of interest in exploring this decay through Wylie's images. Firstly, there is a strangely perverse quality to seeing the interior of buildings, usually so hidden from view, stripped bare.

There *should* be an invisibility to their deepest levels. Now they are open to our gaze and, increasingly, the elements. Secondly, they draw our attention *as images*. Or rather, we are drawn to them as photographic representations of a particular vision at a particular time. They are records taken from Barthes' clocks for seeing. We will return to this in due course. It is useful through to dwell a little longer on the site's slippage into the edgelands. Returning to Farley and Roberts<sup>16</sup>, they propose that

*Edgelands ruins contain a collage of time  
built-up in layers of mould and pigeon shit, in  
the way a groundsel rises  
through a crack in a  
concrete floor open to the  
elements. They turn space  
inside out, in the way nature  
makes itself at home  
indoors...*

There is a particular resonance here with former prison sites. That which made the prison what it is — the solidity of a wall, the rigorous sterility of an inertia — slowly dissolves in perhaps a more foundational and fundamental way than any other building in decline. Farley and Roberts<sup>17</sup> cite Philip Larkin's (1955) poem Church Going to describe this process:

*A shape less recognisable each week  
A purpose more obscure.*

Yet, in looking at some of the later images, I am also reminded of Andrei Tarkovsky's (1979) film *Stalker*. A bleak, futuristic film that pre-figures a post-Chernobyl landscape, there is a similarity to the eerily empty, crumbling buildings of 'The Maze' series. In the end, do all ruins come to resemble one another? Or, do they still remain tied to the building's original function? In

12. Ibid. HMP Maze holds a particular place in the collective imagination precisely because of its politically charged past. Brevity precludes an extended discussion of this key dimension. However, Wylie offered an interesting comment on responding to this through his photography in an interview with the British Journal of Photography: "It was a very complicated thing, and whatever I did I felt I was taking a position [eg on one side of the conflict or another]. In the end I realised that the prison was a machine, a piece of architecture designed to do a job. Literally and conceptually it was designed to capture men, so I started to shoot it like that." Smyth, D. (2010) *Donovan Wylie on architecture, art and life* Available at: <http://www.bjp-online.com/british-journal-of-photography/q-and-a/1724937/donovan-wylie-architecture-art-life> (accessed September 2011).

13. Wylie (2004) p.5.

14. Vidler, A. (1992) *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the modern unhomely* London: MIT Press.

15. Cited by Beyfus, D. (2010) *Donovan Wylie: Deutsche Börse Photography Prize 2010* Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/6988852/Donovan-Wylie-Deutsche-Borse-Photography-Prize-2010.html> (Accessed September 2011).

16. Farley and Roberts (2011) p.157.

17. Ibid. p.152.

looking at ruins do we see the core of what a building was and what it represented or do we have that understanding fatally undermined? Do these images change, damage or enhance our notion of 'prisonness': that sense of what a prison is? For example, image 1, taken from the series 'The deconstruction of the Maze prison, 2009', is laden with irony. In an echo of the edgelands description of space being turned inside-out, cell doors now open to the elements. A barred window is set in a wall that can simply be walked around. A guard tower finds itself stranded. The perimeter wall anchoring it in relation to the rest of the prison has been knocked away. With a porous perimeter at every level, that which made the prison a prison — its boundaries and barriers — is simply no longer present. The impotence of the tower is echoed in image 2. Similarly taken from the 2009 series, stanchions that once supported wire fencing now stand bare and unconnected. In the foreground, a wall has been half demolished. Reinforcing rods claw out into the air. The whiteness of the exposed concrete contrasts with the stained exterior. The 'collage of time', the accumulated layering of dirt and decay, is laid bare.



*Image 1*  
Taken from The deconstruction of the Maze prison, 2009 (Copyright Donovan Wylie/Magnum Photos).



*Image 2*  
Taken from The deconstruction of the Maze prison, 2009 (Copyright Donovan Wylie/Magnum Photos).

## Images of prison 'edgelands'

In reading these descriptions and looking at the images, we might well be reminded of a quote from a seventeenth century text entitled 'A Journey into Greece' that prefaces Christopher Woodward's<sup>18</sup> elegant 'In Ruins':

*[W]hy does he treat us to descriptions of weeds, and make us hobble after him over broken bones, decayed buildings, and old rubbish?*

Why examine these images that mark a past whose relevance and importance is ever-receding? Woodward's<sup>19</sup> simple reply is that '[w]hen we contemplate ruins, we contemplate our own future.' Whereas that sentiment might be a little self-serving, I would extend it to say that, in regarding such decaying buildings, the past's relationship to the present is brought into sharp focus. There is then an inherent value to looking at these images. As Augé<sup>20</sup> (1995:79) put it, the meaning of a given place 'is never completely erased'. Whilst we do not see people, their marks remain. Vestiges of past practices are visible, as are those being inscribed in the present. The photos reveal not only the evidence/absence of past occupants, but also the industry/presence of those carrying out the decommissioning<sup>21</sup>. The interchange between past and present, absence and presence, plays out in each image.

18. Woodward, C. (2002) *In Ruins* London: Vintage p.i.

19. Ibid. p.2.

20. Augé (1995) p.79.

21. Wylie described the process of demolition as "a very hard job for the crew: crunching reinforced concrete is as monotonous an experience as being a prisoner". Cited by Pulver, A. (2010) *Photographer Donovan Wylie's best shot* Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/mar/10/photography-donovan-wylie-best-shot/print> (Accessed September 2011).

We can draw upon this idea still further by examining a particularly arresting series of photos from the 2009 collection. They show wire fencing in various states of disrepair. In some instances, it has been roughly coiled. In others, the centre point between stanchions has been pulled down. Alongside the bulldozed walls, this stands as another layer of security that has been compromised. There is something intangibly intriguing to these mounds of wire. The authors of *Edgelands* consider perhaps whether

*[f]or those who believe that walls of old buildings can hold 'recordings' of sounds from the past, a metal fence could be equally plausible...[W]hat memories are stored in them?*<sup>22</sup>

Sifting through the ruins gives us glimpses of past practice. This does not, perhaps, quite stretch to capturing a 'spirit recording' from the piles of discarded fencing. However, the metaphor of 'haunting' used here and in the opening quote from 'Affinity' is a useful one. It allows us to unpack the means by which either prison ruins or photos of such ruins inform representations of imprisonment. For Barthes<sup>23</sup>, the photo is a 'bizarre medium'. It allows a particular vision of a frozen point in time: 'false on the level of perception, true on the level of time.' Allen<sup>24</sup> (2003: 130) draws out the analogy to mediumship by highlighting 'the paradox of photography.' Whereas the photographic image 'capture(s) life' its 'true essence is to attest to the reality of death'<sup>25</sup>. It allows us to commune with the past and what 'is therefore lost'<sup>26</sup>. The photo is a record of what-has-been. Wylie's image of a time-lapse state of decay — of *ruins* — both compound and confuse this. There is a doubling. Both the ruins *and* the images of these ruins suggest a haunting. They depict a past event, whilst also continuing to inform the present. Perhaps this most accurately describes what happens when 'the prison no longer stands there'. When buildings crumble or the photographs yellow and fade (and their digital copies become corrupt) their influence can still be felt in the collective imagination relating to imprisonment. They 'haunt' the present mythology of prisons and imprisonment.

I have described elsewhere the way in which this sort of social imaginary of the prison could be said to build up and 'haunt' the present<sup>27</sup>. Shields<sup>28</sup> is particularly effective in describing the process by which place-images accumulate to create a central place-myth that defines a particular type of place, area or building. These place-images can be derived from numerous sources: from popular culture and museums, through to ruins and art projects. The place-myth itself comes to frame our overall understanding of a site. It is both referential and anticipatory in that it provides a framework for our understanding of the past and shapes perception of the future. Wylie offers specific 'place-images' of a particular point in The Maze's history. As such, they feed into the broader place-myths of The Maze and mid- to late-twentieth century imprisonment. They speak to the persistent, on-going collective mythologies of imprisonment even while the physical buildings themselves decay.

### **'When the prison no longer stands there'**

Walls have been knocked through and wire fencing pulled down, rolled up and taken away. That which was The Maze 'no longer stands there'. Wylie<sup>29</sup> has stated that he 'was against The Maze being demolished...because...people should be able to experience it.' We now have his images to 'experience' it. They form part of the 'elaborate play of remembering and forgetting' around its identity as a prison site<sup>30</sup>. Whilst it may be that the site itself provides a 'shape less recognisable each week' and might not echo with the sounds of prisoners as the character in Sarah Waters's 'Affinity' suggested of Millbank, its influence persists. In this regard, it is perhaps best to end with these words from Wylie<sup>31</sup> —

*...flawed as the concept is, I feel that photography does have the capacity to record history. In 20 years' time, I'd like this photograph, and the others, to be seen as a historical record, as well as a metaphor for the peace process.*

22. Farley and Roberts (2011) p.96.

23. Barthes (1981) p.115.

24. Allen, G (2003) *Roland Barthes* London: Routledge p.130.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Fiddler, M. (2011) A 'system of light before being a figure of stone': The phantasmagoric prison in *Crime, Media, Culture* 7:1 p.83-97.

28. Shields, R. (1991) *Places on the Margin: Alternative geographies of modernity* London: Routledge.

29. Cited in Smyth (2010).

30. Pile, S. (2005) *Real cities: Modernity, space and the phantasmagorias of city life* London: Sage p.57.

31. Cited by Pulver, A. (2010).

# Reviews

## Book Review

### ***Looking for Laura: Public criminology and hot news***

By David Wilson

Publisher: Waterside Press (2011)

ISBN: 9781904380 702 (paperback)

Price: (paperback)

Over the last decade, David Wilson has carved out a niche for himself as a media criminologist, exploring how to introduce complex ideas into popular discourse. In this book, Wilson discusses 'public criminology' in terms of engaging with the public through tabloid media, rolling news, TV entertainment and documentary, and popular books. The criminological content of his work is based on controversial and high profile cases, such as serial killers and paedophilia. He uses these to explore complex social issues such as power and inequality, the construction of childhood, consumerism and media representation.

This book does not attempt to provide a comprehensive survey of public criminology. It is neither a critical evaluation of different strategies nor is it a dense theoretical exposition. Instead it is a personal account of "'engaging with journalists who want to ask some toe-curlingly specific and not at all respectable questions'" (p.xv) and a reflexive account of the "'threats and opportunities that using such a strategy entails'" (p.xix).

The high profile cases that Wilson uses here include those on which he has commented, which include the disappearance of teenager Laura Stainworth with a 49 year old man she met on the internet; the serial killings by Steve Wright in Ipswich; the self-inflicted death of Mike Todd, former Chief Constable of Manchester Police; spree killings by Derrick Bird and Raoul Moat; and the production of the TV show *Banged Up*. Wilson uses extracts of articles

and interviews to illustrate his approach and then discusses the ethical and practical challenges presented as well as unpacking some of the relevant sociological issues in each case.

The book is loosely structured and free-flowing. The cases will be sufficiently familiar to readers that they will be able engage with the attempt to move beyond surface media representation into an exploration of deeper ideas about the process of news making, Wilson's particular strategy and approach, and the ethical context.

This book is hard to categorise. It is part academic criminology, part autobiography and part true crime. Such a deeply personal and unconventional publication is likely to illicit different reactions for readers. However, it is full of observations and insights that reward careful reading, but more than a source of reflection, it is also an attempt to inspire, incite and provoke criminologists into action.

**Jamie Bennett** is Governor HMP Grendon & Springhill.

## Book Review

### ***Media and crime* (Second edition)**

By Yvonne Jewkes

Publisher: Sage (2010)

ISBN: 978-1-84860-702-6

(hardback) 978-1-84860-703-3

(paperback)

Price: £70.00 (hardback) £23.99

(paperback)

Yvonne Jewkes, Professor of Criminology at Leicester University, has produced a book that is intended as a "'one stop shop'" for students but also has the ambition to "'move key debates forward, develop existing knowledge and offer new and

innovative ways of thinking about relationships between media and crime'" (p.4).

The book's ten chapters are each helpfully structured with an overview; key terms; summary; study questions; and further reading. The first chapter provides an introduction to the main theoretical approaches including the debates on effects, Marxist analysis and cultural criminology. Next Jewkes discusses the construction of news, including the values and processes of selection and production. This is followed by a discussion of the specific theory of 'moral panics', an overused phrase but one that still has relevance. Chapters four and five focus on the representation of children and women respectively, revealing how these are linked to wider issues of power. The sixth chapter considers the police, offenders and victims in the media, including the symbiotic relationship between the police and the media. This is succeeded by an examination of the enduring popularity of crime and prison films, which interestingly uses as a case study the remake of the film *The Taking of Pelham 123* to illustrate how values change. The eighth and ninth chapters consider the growing role of surveillance and the role of the internet, respectively. Both of these have been added since the first edition and indicate new directions and dimensions in the study of media and crime. The book closes with a chapter that reconceptualizes the relationship between media and crime, conjuring up a virtual world of imagined communities bound together by distorted representations of reality.

This book is an outstanding starting point and source of reference for those with an interest in the subject. The author's effortless command of the material makes this book a joy to read. It is more than a synthesis of existing material, full of bold and imaginative ways of looking



at the issues and encourages a broad, inter-disciplinary approach to the subject. An excellent book that comes highly recommended.

**Jamie Bennett** is Governor HMP Grendon & Springhill.

#### Book Review

##### **Public criminology?**

By Ian Loader and Richard Sparks

Publisher: Routledge (2011)

ISBN: 978-0-415-44549-8

(hardback) 978-0-415-44550-4

(paperback)

Price: £ (hardback) £23.99

(paperback)

This book has been authored by two highly regarded, intellectual heavyweights, Professor Ian Loader of Oxford University and Professor Richard Sparks of Edinburgh University. It is a bold and sophisticated theoretical work discussing the role and purpose of criminology and its intersection with policy and practice.

The book starts by describing criminology sitting in the paradoxical position of being a 'successful failure'. By that they argue that as an academic discipline, criminology has rapidly expanded and has attracted growing numbers of students, however, at the same time, it has appeared that public policy and practice has been becoming detached from such expertise and has instead become more populist and emotive. As a result, there is a particular challenge for how criminologists engage with politicians, professionals and the public so as to inform the debate, without being marginalised, enlisted or having their work misused.

The authors set out five broad models for current approaches to public criminology. The first is that of 'scientific expert', using quantitative research in order to explore the

distribution, causes and costs of crime, the motivations of offenders and the effectiveness of programmes. The second is that of 'policy advisor', which relates to those criminologists who work with agencies to develop their policies and practices informed by research. The third is 'observer-turned player', where academics take up posts with agencies or criminal justice organisations so as to play a direct role in delivering and developing services. The fourth, 'social movement theorist/activist' are particularly concerned with issues of power and inequality and often work directly with marginalised groups in an attempt to empower them and also work with campaigning organisations to highlight their concerns. Finally, there is the 'lonely prophet', who focuses on 'the big picture', understanding, describing and analysing major social changes. Their work is usually focussed on publications, but these are often widely read and influential.

Loader and Sparks go on to discuss how criminologists adopting these various approaches engage more widely in the current climate. As a metaphor, they describe the 'warming' nature of public discourse, as the heat is intensified by emotive, populist and punitive elements. Some take a direct approach, including activists, critics and prophetic interpreters, so addressing this head-on. However, others deploy 'cooling devices' so as to calm and dampen discussion, emphasising issues such as legality and justice, scientific evidence, bureaucratic rationality.

In order to draw together these approaches and suggest an underpinning rationale and strategy for public criminology, Loader and Sparks deploy the notion of 'democratic under-labouring', developed from the work of John Locke. By this they argue that criminology should not be deployed narrowly but should be situated more broadly. They suggest that:

'There are, rather, reasons for thinking that criminology might

engage with public life not only in an effort to reduce crime, or make communities safer, or enhance effectiveness or accountability of the criminal justice system, but also at the same time to contribute to a better politics of its subject matter' (p.121)

There are three major aspects to this notion of democratic under-labouring. The first is that criminology should be directed towards the generation and application of knowledge. The second is that it should be 'institutional-critical', in other words it should have an appreciation of the economic, social and cultural context in which criminal justice is situated and the ways that it intersects with and contributes towards wider social issues. The third aspect is that criminology has a normative task; that is that it is deployed with an understanding that more is at stake than crime alone. The nature of criminal justice is a reflection and a shaper of the community as a whole. The authors suggest that by adopting such an underpinning set of values, not only can each of the five strategies be strengthened but also there is the possibility of a more coherent and pluralistic approach to criminology.

Although this is a short book, at around 150 pages, it is dense and weighty, fired by two powerful intellects. This book is ambitious and challenging for the criminology community asking difficult questions about the uses of criminology and its engagement with the criminal justice system. At the same time, it offers the prospect of a different future with criminology making a more coherent and effective contribution not only to specific policies and practices but also to the wider political landscape. Its arguments deserve careful consideration, reflection and response.

**Jamie Bennett** is Governor HMP Grendon & Springhill.

# Interview: Catherine Yeatman

**Catherine Yeatman** is an architect working for ADP in Oxford. She was the project architect for a large part of the Oxford Castle development which includes the former prison buildings now occupied by Mal Maison. She is interviewed by **Michael Fiddler** — a Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Greenwich.

**MF: Can you take me through your role on the project?**

**CY:** I work for ADP who are an architectural practice with offices around the country including Oxford where I am based. The practice got involved with the project in about 1995 when the prison was closed and the County Council took it over from the Home Office. There was a period of time, of about 4 or 5 years, when opportunities for the site were explored and people were invited to put together ideas of what it could become. Various uses were explored: it was thought it could be used for student housing or for all sorts of things such as an arts centre, museum, etc.. In the end a hotel was seen as the best solution for it. Trevor Osborne, a developer, put together the best case for the County Council, and a joint agreement was reached between them to develop the site. Our practice was involved from very early days with the Osborne Group looking at sketch feasibility options for the site and buildings. Once the joint agreement with the County Council was confirmed, we tendered for the architectural work with the Osborne Group and were successful in being appointed as architects and lead designers for a large part of the site.

My role was as the project architect from summer 2000 onwards. The part of the site we were responsible for included most of the old prison buildings and the construction of new apartments along the eastern wall on the site of the old women's block. That has been demolished in the 1970s when the new County Hall was built. Dixon Jones were the architects for the new building in front of the mound, which has restaurants on the ground floor and new hotel bedrooms with a link to the Victorian governor's house on the first floor. Their building was very controversial in the early days as there was a strong local opinion that this part of the site should be as open to the public as possible, as well as views of the mound. There were a number of quite spirited debates at public meetings about how to handle this space and all this took some of the focus off the work we were doing on the rest of the site. One of the things about Oxford is that it is a city that is all about places that you discover or places that are hidden or that places that you find by going through a door or through an archway. We felt really strongly that although an important part of the development of the site was unlocking this large chunk of land right in the middle of the City that had been locked away from the

public for over 1000 years, it suited the urban form of Oxford to do this in a way with smallish gateways and openings that lead you into a series of places that you can discover behind them.

We submitted planning and listed building consent early in 2001. Until the consents were granted it was difficult for the developers to get hotel users and tenants for the various retail and restaurant units to commit. The set of permissions for the site were made even more complex by the fact that the mound is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). The whole site within the castle/prison walls comes under the cartilage of the SAM. In theory this means that you need consent from central government to do anything under the ground including lift manholes and carry out soil investigations. The logistics of monitoring and ensuring we were complying with all the various statutory consents were very complex, and were managed largely by a series of regular meetings with all parties (archaeologists, conservation officers, English Heritage etc.) present to report on current progress and agree short-term future working programmes to meet everyone's criteria.

After receiving planning consent there was a period of about two years before the project was ready to start on site. The developer was securing deals with tenants, the County Council had to sign off plans and designs, conditions of the various consents had to be agreed and the designs had to be developed. We started on site in 2002/3. I was the key person in our team, designing, drawing, organising and co-ordinating with other members of the design team. Everyone thinks that architects just do drawings, but our role is much more of a facilitator and you need to have a good understanding of where everyone else in the team is coming from to be able to lead the design team to produce a co-ordinated end product. The drawing is a really small part of it actually.

**MF: At that initial stage, what were the key aims for the project?**

**CY:** One of the things about this site is that it is actually the external spaces that make it what it is, and the strong relationship of the buildings to these external spaces is key to making the overall site what it is. Our initial aims were to strip back a lot of the ephemera and let the main form of the buildings speak for themselves with minimal intervention. We had a pretty good brief from English Heritage that, on the

whole, modern interventions could be unashamedly modern and didn't have to be pastiche.

**MF: Is that unusual?**

**CY:** No, it's quite usual now, but 20 years ago it would have been more unusual. It's about preserving stuff of its time so that when you build new, you build what is of its time *now*: so there is an unfolding story of the history of the building or the history of the site. But there is an English tweekness that wants old things to look old. There's this very strong intellectual argument for modern interventions and English Heritage backed that up in documentation about the site and how they felt the development should proceed.

We put together quite early on a very short bullet-point list of development principles. Things like 'only alter where you have to alter', 'use materials that are in harmony or in sympathy with existing materials, but be modern where you need to be modern.' It was about letting the existing buildings do their stuff as much as possible.

**MF: What are the challenges in reconfiguring a space like this?**

**CY:** Fire. It was one of the biggest challenges. To design a building to get people out which is designed to keep them in is a big challenge. To do that we put two new staircases in. We took out a row of cells, a vertical stack of cells at each end of the building. They just take you down and out at each end. In each corner of the main wing there's a staircase that runs all the way down.

**MF: I didn't notice that all.**

**CY:** No, you wouldn't. It just looks like another room door or laundry cupboard at the end of each row. So you just go through a cell door. The other thing was fire escapes and the spread of fire because we had this atrium space with all of the doors opening onto it. The whole thing is operated by a fire-engineered solution for an atrium. There were existing roof lights in the roof and they've been converted to operate with a fire alarm as smoke vents. Luckily they were pretty much exactly the right area that we needed. So, technically, fire was the most difficult thing.

We also wanted to keep all the existing prison doors. They were there! Why not keep them? They were built to be solid. They were good for noise, good for privacy, good for lots of reasons. The main change was to switch the spy holes round so that you could look out and not in. But we didn't want to fit closers on

them because they're arched and they're very small and very low. If you fitted an overhead closer onto them people would have clonked their heads on them. So, again, that was part of the fire engineered solution. Normally fire doors close so that if there's a fire somewhere and you escape from the room, the door closes automatically and seals the fire in the room. So the whole fire strategy had to be based on the fact that if there was a fire in a room, someone would run out of their room and their door would not necessarily completely close and that the fire could break into the atrium. The fire officer would really liked to have had a lobby on the staircases at the end. However, there was no space to do that without either taking out a whole cell to the side or building a lobby into the atrium space that was not possible. So we had to negotiate that they didn't have lobbies on them.

There was a stipulation that there was an hour fire-rating between the ground floor of the atrium and the basement<sup>1</sup>. That caused a bit of a problem because there are two staircases that went down to the basement. At one end, we could box in the stair on the lower level with a lobby at the bottom, as there was space to do this in the bedroom corridor. On the other side, the stair came down into the middle of bar and restaurant area, and an enclosure and lobby would

have eaten significantly into the bar and restaurant space, which was already limited for covers and layout by the cellular construction.

Throughout the whole building the numbers of rooms we were providing were at the bottom limit of what we were told was viable for a hotel to function efficiently. This was the same with the restaurant space where we were trying to squeeze the maximum number of seats into a very constrained space. There was an opinion that retaining the stair, which was not needed for circulation, was not the best option for operational reasons, but the conservation officer was insistent the stair should remain *in situ* as a visual part of the building fabric. The historic significance of A-wing is largely based on the fact that, of the gaols of this period, it is one of the few still left with many of its original internal features still intact. The original circulation and sightlines for surveillance were a key part of the building's design and he felt that the stair should stay, while the fire officer and building control stipulated that we must ensure the fire separation

To design a building to get people out which is designed to keep them in is a big challenge.

1. A one hour fire-rating means that if a fire of average intensity were to break out, it should take in excess of one hour to spread from the basement to the ground-floor and vice-versa.

between the two levels, and the hotel needed a restaurant space that would function. Eventually a solution was agreed that met everyone's requirements: a fire-rated floor was put in at the level of the main atrium and the balustrade and handrails for the stair at this level were left in place. So it is clear to see that there was once a stair going down from here. The stair itself is left as a feature in the basement by the bar rising up and appearing to disappear through the ceiling. This is a good example of the types of problems that the scheme had to overcome, and generally everyone involved understood that, while they needed to represent their own view point, they needed to work with everyone else's requirements as well to reach mutually agreeable ways of moving forward. Without this overriding understanding to make the project happen it would have been easy for it to fall at the first hurdle.

One of the other technical areas that had to be dealt with was the main atrium space itself. The handrails in the atrium were too low and the gaps were too big and they weren't strong enough to meet modern regulations. We all felt it was important to keep the original ones though because they're very much of the defining visual aesthetic of that space. We put in a glass balustrade that sits on a completely different structure that is bolted back to the wall. You've still got the 'X' shape with the big circle in it. You still

read the existing line of the handrail quite clearly, and there is a very clear definition between modern and original.

In the bedrooms, the biggest technical challenge was fitting air-conditioning. The hotel said they could not get their star rating without being able to say that their rooms were air-conditioned. There was an argument to say that they possibly don't need air-conditioning — they've got three-foot thick walls and small openings. The building is incredibly thermally stable and, in fact, we had a heatwave during one of the summers we were on-site and it took — and this was when there weren't doors or windows in it generally because they'd been taken out for repair, so it was open to the outside air all the time — the best part of a week for it to heat up internally to a temperature that might have been considered uncomfortable. Conventional air-conditioning needs a large amount of

ductwork and a flat ceiling. We didn't want to do that in these rooms with an arched ceiling. Each bedroom is made up out of two former cells knocked together with a pair of steel beams supporting the barrel vault to the ceilings where the wall has been removed. This geometry made it impossible to fit a conventional type of air-conditioning system. The end solution was to use chilled panels that were purpose made to fit the curve of the ceilings. They are basically back-to-front radiators. You run very cold water through them and they radiate cold.

One of the things we built very early on was a sample room, which was a planning and listed building condition, but also a condition to sign off for Mal Maison. We used it as a test model to see how easy it was going to be to knock the walls down, what we'd find behind the plaster and what the floor was made out of, etc. and also to look at fittings so that they could be approved and manufacture off-site could be started. It meant that when we did come to do the main construction the principle for the construction methods and also the finishes were already signed off and approved which meant we could proceed quite quickly.

The cold in the building was a real problem at handover because of this very big thermal mass. It took a long time. We handed over at Christmas and it took around a month to warm up properly and for it not to feel like a kind of cold, damp building when you walked into it. Once it had warmed up it was fine.

Originally the furnaces were in the roof and the whole building is built with this network of flues inside the walls that bring fresh air into every single room. In its original use in the eighteenth century there was a whole thing about not being able to communicate between cells and this network of ducts did this. They weren't interested in keeping people warm basically. In the early days it was a kind of hierarchical thing so that if you were privileged you ended up on the top floor. It was warmer because you were nearer the furnaces. Then, once they'd cracked a lot of health and hygiene issues, they moved all of the boilers downstairs and used the same ducts to put hot air through the roof. So, by lighting a fire in the roof they were pulling cold air through to give everyone fresh air. Then they moved all of the boilers downstairs

... generally  
everyone involved  
understood that,  
while they needed  
to represent their  
own view point,  
they needed to  
work with everyone  
else's requirements  
as well to reach  
mutually agreeable  
ways of moving  
forward.



and pushed all the hot air through the same network of ducts. Now we're using the same network of ducts to do the extraction of all the bedrooms and from all the bathrooms. They all have to be separate and not interconnected otherwise you get sound problems between bedrooms. So, the whole original network of ducts to do with air circulation is still being used. It was quite complicated. We had to do a radar survey of the building to find out where they were because there were no records of them. They may have been locked in some prison archive. I think they just built it. Nobody kept records in those days in the same way that we're paranoid about.

The other thing is all the other ancillary bits and pieces. A-wing is the most interesting bit of the building because it's the bit that is most complete in terms of its 'prisonness' (see figure 1).

**MF: What do you mean by 'prisonness'?**

**CY:** It's the bit where you walk into it and you can see that it was once a prison. But, actually, everything else about it was to do with being a prison as well: the former offices at the front, all the rubbish in the gardens, the whole thing. Now, A-wing is the bit that is most fascinating, most obvious. It's easier to forget about the rest because it's not as sexy. There are all sorts of things, the building that is now the site manager's office down at the far end, the members of the local community were terribly interested in because apparently it once had a treadmill in it. There's mixed evidence as to whether it did or didn't. It was called the treadmill building at one point, but then it got its name changed because everyone thought that it was kind of too emotive. They were all for rebuilding a treadmill and using it as an educational opportunity. Perhaps with an eco-thing you could generate your own electricity!

Quite a lot of architecture journalists have been round at various stages and the one thing that everyone wanted to know was where was the hanging cell. In fact we destroyed the hanging cell by installing the staircase that goes down to the new kitchen. I feel that it is appropriate that it's not made a monument or memorial to it. From the start we wanted to say that 'yes, this building was a prison', but not to dwell on that. I mean there were a lot of jokes at the beginning about how everybody would be given striped pyjamas and a ball on a chain when they were 'locked in' on the first night. I think it was felt from really early on that the former use of the building is a part of its past — and you can't deny that — but not to turn it into a theme prison. If you turn it into a theme prison then people come for one night only. It's not Disney World. Actually it's about saying this is about reusing part of the built environment and finding a use for that in a modern context in a modern use. Acknowledging that it was a prison, but not celebrating that in a way.

**MF: There's a risk of it being ghoulish.**

**CY:** Having said that, Mal Maison's publicity for the opening was very S&M based.

There are an awful lot of similarities between a hotel and a prison in some ways. The main difference is about choice: in a hotel you chose to be there, in a prison you don't. But at the end of the day, it's a room that you shut a door on the rest of the world. You want privacy. You want acoustic separation. The reasons are completely different. It comes down to the fact that there are carpets, spyholes the other way round and you have your own key.

It was accepted from very early days that if it was going to be a hotel then the prison bars would come off the windows but a lot of the bars were bedded into the stone and would have cost a lot of money with stone repairs. So we just cut them. There are little stubs of bars everywhere, which we felt was quite nice because it still had that memory of bars without you being in a room with bars on the windows.

**MF: Are there examples of former prison buildings being used in new ways that you looked at?**

**CY:** There are more examples of former mental homes and mental institutions. There are more examples of hospitals. They've generally been turned



Fig 1. A-wing

into residential developments. I think this was unique in all sorts of ways because of its location and because of the other kind of buildings around it. As well as it being a very good example of a site that has got this sort of layering of use and being located right in the city centre.

We didn't really look at prison buildings terribly hard. The County Council let it out as a film set. All sorts of things were filmed here. Most notably *Bad Girls* was pretty much filmed here. Every time we came in to do surveys or look at something, to take photographs, the inside was painted a different shade of grey because every prison set designer seemed to think they needed to paint it in their own particular shade of grey. Which was quite funny because when it was taken over as a building site, English Heritage got frightfully excited about the paint analysis on the atrium walls. I knew in the previous six months, let alone the previous 5 years, it had been completely repainted three or four times with no one applying to English Heritage for the right kind of paint licence.

The biggest stage set was for *Spy Game*, a film with Brad Pitt in it. They decorated the whole thing out as a Chinese jail and wrote Chinese graffiti over all the walls, hung Chinese laundry out of all the windows. It was reasonably convincing actually. It has cameos in all sorts of TV programmes.

**MF: It reiterates that sense of 'prisonness' that does not really resemble prisons as they are.**

**CY:** I don't know. One of the things that always struck me about it, and in fact was a feature of it until the very last week before it opened as a hotel, was that it sounded like the beginning of *Porridge*. That sequence at the beginning of *Porridge* when the doors slam is actually incredibly evocative. It is built into lots of people's consciousness about what prison is about, but also is evocative of what it really did sound like. It was clanky and echoey. Then they laid the carpets and

suddenly it changed. That was the single thing that made the biggest difference. Those walkways clanked when people walked along them, particularly because people were walking along them in heavy site boots. They clanked and the doors clanked. Everything sounded like that opening sequence from *Porridge* and then suddenly they put the carpets down and that changed. And they didn't put the carpets down in the public areas until the very last week.

**MF: Were you hoping that it would have that effect?**

**CY:** No, I think by that stage we'd forgotten. I think you become so used to the sound of it that you had kind of taken it for granted. I think we knew that the carpets would soften the sound in there, but because you were always going with really specific things to look for or to listen to, you kind of took for granted being in that space — and what it sounded like — and you weren't aware of it. I remember the first day I went in after the carpets had been laid and I thought 'oh my god, it's changed'.

**MF: What kind of feedback have you had over the years? Have people used the space in ways that you hadn't anticipated?**

**CY:** Not really, no. They're quite limited by how they can use that space, particularly on the upper levels because of the fire restrictions. They've used it for parties and stuff like that. I think it would be ideal for all sorts of art installations, whether that's live art or static art or whatever.

It was a very hard project. I basically lived these buildings for about five years. Then suddenly I wasn't part of it anymore and the life of the buildings had moved on. I had a mixed relationship with them for a bit and I kind of feel more detached from the emotional highs and lows of that process now, but still incredibly pleased and proud of this place that I had a large hand in making what it is today.

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# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

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The *Prison Service Journal* is a peer reviewed journal published by HM Prison Service of England and Wales. Its purpose is to promote discussion on issues related to the work of the Prison Service, the wider criminal justice system and associated fields. It aims to present reliable information and a range of views about these issues.

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