

## Inside Looking Out: Writers in Prison

*Bob Gaucher*

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**T**he cumulative wealth of prisoners' writing over the centuries constitutes a firmly established and highly influential body of work within western literary and intellectual traditions. Ioan Davies (1990) in *Writers in Prison*, argues that the prison has served as an important symbol and metaphor throughout the recorded (text) history of Western thought, and its material realities have formed the immediate context and crucible for a influential and celebrated group of intellectuals and writers. Indeed, Davies (1990:3) states that:

Much of the influential literature of Judeo-Christian civilization was composed under conditions of incarceration or involuntary exile. Indeed the Bible itself is a product of both prison and exile; and the Platonic dialogues, notably the **Crito**, the **Apology**, and the **Phaedo**, are centered around the trial, imprisonment and execution of Socrates. It is arguable that it is impossible to understand Occidental thought without recognizing the central significance of prison and banishment in its theoretical and literary composition.

In his broadly comprehensive and theorized account of writing from prison, Davies (1990:3) directs us to go beyond the mere recognition of the literary and intellectual significance of "writing that owes something to imprisonment" and its classification. He directs us toward theoretical issues that help us to understand "the forms that prison writing takes, its content and how the prison experience might be read". To do so we must locate these texts within their age; the political, social/cultural and intellectual context of their production, and within the confining carceral culture that frames their production and against and through which they are written. This is an analysis of prison produced text; what it carries, how its ideas have been universalized, its penetration of and integration into western intellectual/political and literary/cultural life, past and present. Prison culture is still characterized by an oral tradition of songs and ballads, storytelling and "dead time" conversations. The continuous written narrative (text) Davies refers to as traversing the ages, is largely provided by incarcerated intellectuals and prisoners of conscience. It is this group of writers and their text which he relies upon

to ground his analyses so as to “understand how the incarcerated imagination has become part of Western ideas and literature” (1990:7). In is within the text of the incarcerated intellectual, those he refers to as writing from the margins of both their society and the prison, that he discovers the universals of the carceral experience. While recognizing the importance of the “common criminal” prison writer “who operates directly out of a prison culture” (1990: 4), as exemplified by Villon and Genet, Davies’ primary interest in their work is as an entry to reading the prison itself.

Davies (1990: 4) discovered that on one level “the writings merge in a collectivity of epic and self critical ur-epic\* where oral stories and songs become part of a folk-history of incarceration, exile and slavery.”<sup>1</sup> For Davies, the writer’s relationship to the prison, margin versus centre, informs the perspective of the text/writing and the carceral experience it assesses and portrays.

We might argue that the nearer the writer is to the ur-epic, the less his story will be about himself and the more it will be about the folk-memory of the collectivity, while the further he is from the collectivity, the more he will see the prison as alien and the story as his own or related to another (external) collectivity. (1990:15)

The particular conjunctures and dialectical relationships of the “incarcerated imagination”, the prison, and the society that imprisons, form the foundations of Davies’ focus and analysis. The writing and expression that flows more directly from the centre of carceral culture has also produced a notable legacy. H. Bruce Franklin (1978, 1989, 1998), has provided the most thoroughly documented and scholarly analysis of the writings of common criminals, though his focus has been exclusively on the USA. Franklin largely denies the scope of the collective unity and universals of the occidental prison tradition that Davies proclaims, as applied to the particular history of prison writing in the USA. The specificity of the history, content and intention of American prison writing he discovered leads him to reject Davies’ (1990:8) more universal “community of prisoners-across the centuries”. Franklin (1998:1) argues: “But unlike the works of these

individuals, modern American prison writings constitute a coherent body of literature with a unique historical significance and cultural influence.”

Franklin (1978, 1989) identifies two formative traditions, the Afro-American and Euro-American, that have (dialectically) produced the extraordinary volume and variety of prison writing that is particular to the USA. In his first major work *The Victim as Criminal and Artist* (1978) Franklin exposes the carceral roots of the broad and significant cultural contributions to US society of Afro-Americans. He identifies an oral tradition composed of the songs and poetry of slavery and penal servitude that provides an historical location for the current “great internment” and the contemporary literary expression of Afro-American prison writers. Within this unique carceral history, Afro-Americans share the circumstances, understandings and community of a people.

It is within this context that Franklin identifies the collective consciousness of Afro-Americans which frames and gives meaning and significance to their past and current penal experiences. Like Davies concept of the ur-epic, Franklin identifies and explores an Afro-American epic that traverses the centuries. In distinguishing this tradition Franklin (1978; 1989) largely denies the “collective folk memory” or ur-epic of Euro-American writers, arguing that their work is characterized by an individualistic perspective, experience and style (ie., autobiographical narrative). From his location of the emergence of autobiographical narratives of criminals’ lives in the 16th and 17th centuries, Franklin defines this basic form of the genre as intuitive to the era of mercantile capitalism and ensuing colonialism. The singular voice of the alienated individual, acting against his people and his society. For Franklin, it is this long and often dominant form, moving through the picaresque/carnavalesque<sup>2</sup> to contemporary “convict fantasy fiction”, that best characterizes Euro-American prison writing.

Franklin (1978, 1998) notes another style within the latter tradition, that of politically conscious prisoners, ranging from late 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchists to the socialists and marxists of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>. He (1989: 133-38; 244) also identifies a “white convict” perspective emerging at the turn of the century, that adapts and reorders the dominant biographical narrative form, focussing its narratives on and against the prison and its containing society.

Franklin (1978, 1989, 1998) argues that the oral and written expression produced over the centuries from within the American gulag

constitutes a highly significant (culturally) body of literature. This literature is composed of the dominant and more culturally significant collectively represented works of Afro- American prisoners and the less important, largely individualistically framed expression of Euro- American prisoners.

Franklin's focus upon literature and especially that written by "common criminals", directs him to pay scant attention to the significance of the work of Euro- American intellectuals and political prisoners, social reformers and prisoners of conscience, who play an important part in this tradition and in the framing and understanding of the prison in the containing societies. Their significant contribution to the development and definition of the collective ur-epic of the Euro- convict tradition is lost in his analysis.

The tight focus on America<sup>4</sup> also blinkers Franklin's analysis and distracts him from considering the unity of prison/carceral experience that interconnects the colonial empires of Britain, France and Spain. This includes the experience of transportation and penal servitude, stretching from Van Diem's Land and Devil's Island, to Canada and the USA. The domination of colonial empire, with its movements of peoples and ideas provided the context for narratives addressing this shared experience of incarceration and penal servitude. This lacuane serves to substantiate his argument concerning the lack of collective identity of Euro- American convicts as exemplified in their written text.

Similarly, though Franklin (1989; 133-138) acknowledges the emergence at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of a "convict" perspective (i.e., the self identified subclass-prisoner) he does not see in it the collective ur-epic theorized by Davies (1990). It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the prison became the dominant form of punishment, and therefore, it is not surprising that a prison centred culture had emerged by its end. This collective memory and consciousness embodied in the ur-epic is focussed in and on the prison, arising from the very centre of prison cultural life and custom. Much the same place where Franklin finds a wealth of song and literature produced by common criminals.

Franklin's location of the American prison as one link in an historical chain of changing forms of oppression of the Afro- American people casts the prison and prisoner in a different relationship. Here the centrality of the prison is first submerged in the continuous history of Afro- American penal repression, and secondly, the prison itself becomes

a metaphor for the containing society. Now the prison is represented as “maximum security” confinement, and the containing American society within which Blacks were “conditioned to accept the inevitability of prison” (Jackson, 1972: 9), minimum security. For Rubin Carter (1974: 210) the USA was “a penitentiary with a flag”. This framing of the prison seems to dissolve the prison walls. However, though Davies (1990) may be charged with stretching his -- unity of thought shared over the centuries merging into the ur-epic of prison life -- thesis, there can be little doubt that with the advent of the prison as the dominant form of discipline and punishment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a shared convict perspective developed. This was the great research discovery of sociologist Donald Clemmer. His study of the hidden world of the penitentiary, published as *The Prison Community* (1938) showed that behind the prison walls there existed a prisoner culture played out through primary group affiliation and informal institutional relationships. Later, Cressey (1961) and Goffman (1961, 1964) refashion this analysis of “total institutions” arguing for the determinant role of institutional structures and organizational processes in the creation and maintenance of institutional culture and the “inmate” that inhabits it.

The specificity of the carceral experience is such one must take into account the actual prison conditions under which the expression was produced. Through much of the history of the penal oppression of Afro-Americans, the dominant carceral form (slavery, penal servitude) generated a sense of collective experience. The experience of most other convicts between 1850-1950 was constrained by prison regimes based upon close individual confinement and silent systems<sup>5</sup>. This produced a different response, one more directly focussed upon the carceral institution itself, as experienced through the forced solitude of the prison. With the reformation of penal custom in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup> and the liberating effects this had upon the prisoner and prison life, the convict perspective and prison ur-epic more clearly emerged.

Davies and Franklin provide frameworks for locating and assessing the significance of prison writing and literature. In doing so they illuminate the interconnections and specificities of societal context, the prisoner, and the prison. South African political prisoner, Breyten Breytenbach noted:

When you are interested in prison accounts as a genre you will soon see that prisons are pretty much the same the world over.

It is rather the peculiar relationship of power-repression which seems immutable, wherever you may hide. (1984: 339)

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The relationship of a society to its penal institutions is also evident generally, in the attention given to prison writing, and specifically, in the popularity of a particular style of the genre. For example, the new international order that arose in the aftermath of the second world war significantly changed the societal context of the production of prison writing. The cold war alignment and the developing strength of anti-colonial movements produced a new roster of internationally recognized dissident intellectuals and writers imprisoned for their beliefs and work. The writing of Soviet block political prisoners and dissidents such as Koestler, Solzhenitsyn, and Djilas were celebrated in the cold war hype of the west<sup>7</sup>. However, under the blanket of cold war anti-Soviet ideology and McCarthyism a different type of domestic prison writing was popularized in Western Europe and North America. There the work of “common criminals” such as Jean Genet (France), Frank Norman (England), Brendan Behan (Ireland)<sup>8</sup>, Chester Himes, Nelson Algren, Carl Chessman (USA), and Frank Anderson (Canada) predominated.

This is also apparent in the 1950s celebration of the international penal press in the USA, Canada and to a lesser extent Britain and elsewhere. For example, Tom Runyon, a 1930s bank robber serving a life (homicide) sentence in Iowa State Penitentiary, was celebrated as the editor of *Presido*<sup>9</sup> and as a writer. His work and biography *In For Life* (1954) was lauded for its insights into the hidden world of the prison and convict, by major newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*<sup>10</sup> and by established writers like Earle Stanley Gardner<sup>11</sup>. The newly created Canadian penal press (1950) also received public support, and was a solid player in the international network of penal press editors and writers. Its late start meant that it was not until the 1960s that contributors like Glenn Hjalmarson (1961) with *Just Call Us Bandits* and Harvey Blackstock (1967) with *Bitter Humour* emerge as writers with a broader public audience<sup>12</sup>.

The first penal press magazines in Britain were produced at Feltham Borstal in 1935. The *South House Review* (later the *Scrutineer*) proclaimed that it would be the “eyes and ears of Borstal” (Maxwell,

1956). By 1960 there were 30-35 publications being produced in British prisons (Brandseth, 1972:81). The first outside directed/distributed magazine was *New Venture* (1956 or 1957) from HMP Wakefield. Like most of these publications, *New Venture* started as a prison wallsheet, which had become widespread in the 1930s. A few months later, Peter Baker (a former Conservative Member of Parliament) transformed the wallsheet at HMP Leyhill into a monthly, *New Dawn*, which gained national prominence in 1957 (Baker, 1961:181-84). The second issue of *New Dawn* included a penal exchange with *New Venture* (Wakefield) and its editor, Cecil Bertram, the convicted communist spy. Scientist "convict" Klaus Fuchs contributed a science column (Baker, 1961: 171-85). These high profile contributors provided a significant impetus for the considerable public interest in prison writing and the prison in the U.K. in the 1950s and 1960s<sup>13</sup>.

In the context of the emerging radical politics of the 1960s, the institutional censorship that dominated prison writing and the penal press in the past, increased<sup>14</sup>. The resulting conflicts led to the demise of the international penal press network and many of its outstanding publications. Within this context a new type of politically and socially conscious prison writing arose, especially and most significantly in the USA. Stan Cohen (1972: 447) notes the significance of this change.

Since the end of the fifties. ... A steady stream of new political prisoners began moving into the American jails: civil rights workers, antiwar militants, black liberation activists and articulate middle class offenders, such as students and those on drug charges. And above all, the boundary line -- never very clear -- between political or non-political crime, started blurring. A generation of American prisoners, especially blacks who form the majority of the prison population in many States, began thinking of themselves in ideological terms.

The reformulation of carceral identity and therefore the meaning of its prison location, as played out in the carnivalesque and comic of Genet and Norman, is revisited in this broader recasting of the 1960s. The alternative understanding of the being and identity of the "common criminal", taken for granted and celebrated by Genet and Norman<sup>15</sup>, is

now extended to a political identity that consciously locates the convict and the prison within the constraints of imperialist ideology and practice.

In his analysis of contemporary prison writing Franklin (1978, 1989) also comments on the new conjuncture of this period, which he later refers to as “The Movement and The Prison” (1998).

There is no longer such a clear demarcation between the criminal prisoner-author and the law abiding citizen-reader. ...

Now we have two overlapping groups of prison authors: the political activist thrust into prison, and the common criminal thrust into political activism. The distinction between the two groups tends to dissolve as the definition of crime, from both sides of the law, becomes increasingly political (1978:242).

This process of relocation and redefinition of the convict and the prison also occurred in Canada in the 1960s, especially amongst its over-represented aboriginal minority<sup>16</sup>. In Britain, considerable agitation on prisoners’ issues took place on both sides of the prison wall (see Fitzgerald, 1977). The Irish internment of the 1970s further established that at least in some instances the demand for political status was undeniable<sup>17</sup>. The international penal press network and its focus on penal custom and criminal justice issues was also displaced by political solidarity and association with revolutionary, anti-imperialist/anti-colonial struggles, nationally and internationally. The analyses of the revolutionaries and intellectuals of these struggles, often written from the solitary confines of the prison, confirmed and encouraged the new temper of domestic rage and resistance that was growing outside the prison walls.

This coming together is clearly illustrated in the lives and work of American “common” prisoners such as Malcolm X, George Jackson and Sam Melville. In Canada, aboriginal prisoners’ were involved with and informed by the American Indian Movement from its formative stages, as illustrated in the organizing of prison Native Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods, their newsletters, magazines and public pronouncements, and their involvement in the institutional tensions that swept through the Canadian penitentiary system in the 1970s.

Within the prison writing genre a rich mix of perspectives and styles mingled with the radical politics of resistance and rebellion that swept across the West and throughout its colonial properties. In the USA, the Afro-American collective understanding and broad location of the prisoner and the prison, further extended by reference to international anti-colonial struggles, merged with the perspectives and stylistic forms of the Euro-American tradition<sup>18</sup>. In the prison writing of the 1960s and 1970s we see a coming together of the traditional collective perspective of oppressed minorities (Afro-Americans, Aboriginal Peoples), the Euro-American tradition of radical dissent and class struggle, and the prison focussed convict (as a subclass) perspective. By the 1960s the convict narrative with its focus on the prison had to some extent already displaced the picaresque or carnivalesque style of the traditional prison autobiographical narrative. It was this form which carried the new literature into what Franklin (1998) has called the literary renaissance of American prison writing.

This coming together is exemplified in the initial appropriation of the autobiographical narrative by Malcolm X (1965), and subsequent use of this form by George Jackson (1970, 1972) and the New York Panther Twenty-One (1971) who transform it via the collective consciousness and sense of resistance and rebellion of a people. The writings of George Jackson exemplifies the emerging understanding and collective spirit of resistance to racial and class oppression as played out in the realm of penal justice. Jackson carries the prison ur-epic tradition into the heart of this new account of the Amerikan gulag. Jackson's accounts address modern penal conditions: cell, isolation, repression and rebellion. In writing against and through the prison, he focuses his critique on prison culture and relationships, and in so doing reaffirms the prison ur-epic and prisoners' collective tradition of resistance and rebellion. Jackson reaffirms the universals of the carceral experience that drive prisoners. This is illustrated by the international interest and applaud his work received.

The volume, richness, and significance of prison writing during the 1960s and 1970s left an important legacy that continues to evolve in face of the changing penal conditions of the "great internment" of the past 15 years. The increase in prison populations across the West, especially in the USA<sup>19</sup> is also heightening public awareness and involvement, though often negatively. Censorship has increased at the

institutional and societal levels: in the form of institutional restrictions on correspondence, and prohibitions on carrying on the “business” of being a writer (Franklin, 1998: 14); and through national or state legislation aimed at seizing profits and therefore curtailing publication<sup>20</sup>. Franklin’s work indicates that this trend in the USA can be traced back to attempts by the courts to muzzle imprisoned writers in the late 1960s.

In fact, the judge who sentenced Reddy, like the judge who sentenced Imamu Amiri Baraka in 1968, explicitly cited his poetry as a reason to not lower bail. The judge claimed that the purpose of Reddy’s poems was ‘to mould people’s minds to malicious ends’. This is literary criticism with a vengeance. (1989: 243)

When the US Federal Regulation (Title 28: Section 540. 20b) constraining prison writers’ relationships with the news media “was challenged in court by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, testimony revealed that it had been drafted in the 1970s specifically to ensure that federal prisoners with ‘anti-establishment’ views would not have access to the media.” (Franklin, 1998: 15; ft19)

This trend in the USA towards censorship as part of the court sentence, and the definition of the writing, past or future, as part of the offence, has been graphically illustrated in the recent muzzling of Katherine Power and her family<sup>21</sup>. The attempt to pass (Son of Sam) Bill(s) C-205/C-220 in Canada (1996-1998) clearly established that the intentions of the bill’s supporters was to prevent the criminalized and incarcerated from publishing by including such prohibitions within the sentence. In this instance, the precipitating moral panic and subsequent legislative response to it, was driven by the public and political involvement of the organized and punitively oriented crime victims lobby in Canada. During the considerations of this bill by the Canadian House of Commons, **the only type** of prison writing mentioned and considered by Members of Parliament and during testimony to the House Committee (supposedly) studying the matter, was “true crime” depictions of the “gory details” of “heinous criminal acts”. The political utility of masking the real issues in this way was later revealed in the Canadian Senate Committee hearings, where a much broader consideration of the writing of the criminalized and incarcerated led to

the rejection of the bill<sup>22</sup>. However, despite institutional and legislative constraints on the public availability of prison writing, the growth and development of the prison literary genre has continued worldwide.

The considerable volume of prison writing of the past 30 years is richly varied in form, style, content and intent. This wealth of writing ranges from poetry and fiction, through autobiography, ethnography, social and political analysis. Its significance has been affirmed by the growing body of academic analysis focussed upon it<sup>23</sup>; by “Writers in Residence” programs<sup>24</sup>, and creative writing classes in prison; by *PEN*, *Koestler*, and *Prison Arts Foundation* awards; by the continued and important role it plays in the work of political activists and their analysis<sup>25</sup>, and in its availability on information/resource centre websites<sup>26</sup>.

Though the fringe press has been an outlet for prison writers and prisoners’ causes throughout this century, especially the international anarchist ABC network, this relationship has grown and developed in the past twenty years. *Prison News Service* (1980-1996), a semi-monthly newspaper produced in Toronto by the ABC-Bulldozer Collective, had a distribution of over 10,000 copies per issue, many going “gratis” to American and Canadian prisoners. Its broad coverage of the politics of imprisonment and prisoners’ accounts of the repressive actuality of criminal justice and carceral practices deems it an excellent representative of such publications<sup>27</sup>. Another important variety of fringe magazine, now well established, is written and edited by prisoners but produced and distributed by a group of outside supporters. *Prison Legal News* (1990-) has established itself as one of the most successful of this type (see Wright, this issue). Publications like *Prison Writing* (1992-99) in the UK, *PrisonLife Magazine* (1994-1997) (see Stratton this issue) and the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (1988-) illustrate the variety and development of this new form of prisoner publication.

In the current “radical politics” fringe press publication the strong ties between prisoners and outside political activists reestablished in the 1960s and 1970s is apparent. Their many magazines, newsletters, information bulletins and polemical tracts routinely feature the writing and art of prisoners.

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The absolute scope and volume of prison writing, past and present, demands some type of approach to its broad categorization. Cohen (1972: 447) argues that wealth of writing emerging from US prisons by 1972 could be roughly categorized on the basis of the type prisoner author: (1) prisoners entering the penal system for ideological offences, (2) prisoners who became politically minded in prison, (3) prisoners without political motivation. Davies (1990: 4) places more emphasis upon the prison and whether or not the prisoner writes from the centre or margin of that culture and community. He alerts us to the need to understand the prison writer as more than participant observer, ethnographer, or one writing through the prison. For the prisoner is also a dialectical product and producer of the prison itself, ideologically and materially; for both the prison community and society. Therefore he categorizes prison writing (text) on the basis of its relationship to the ur-epic of carceral life and our desire to read the prison. He distinguishes: (1) work written by the longtime criminal, (2) work written by the long time non-criminals (prisoners of conscience; many convicted of homicide), (3) work written by short time criminals and non-criminals.

As previously noted, this sense of folk-memory and epic is also evident in Franklin's work, especially in his tracing of the carceral roots of Afro-American cultural (oral and written) expression. Franklin's categorization of contemporary prison **literature**, focuses upon the presence or absence of a political and collective consciousness which frames the work. He argues that the contemporary body of prison literature consists of works flowing from the collectivist Afro-American tradition and the individualistic Euro- American tradition, intertwining in one complex dialect (1989: 262). Thus, this body of prison literature can be classified on the basis of: (1) prison writers who accept the collective Black definition of crime in America; (2) prison writers who see themselves primarily as victims of class oppression; (3) prison writers who, lacking a collective perspective, usually replace it with an "I did it to myself" framing of their account (1978: 270).

These rough groupings of prison writers/writing allow us to give some order to the rich variety of contemporary work. They are representative of the specificities we might bring to the consideration of prisoners' accounts and their utility in other arenas of debate. From Franklin's (1989: xxiii-xxxiii) engagement in academic "cultural wars" to radical political action, the creative expression and analyses of

prisoners serve as entry points and bridges to much broader philosophical, sociological, and political concerns and discourses.

In the past two decades prison populations have grown across the world (Christie, 1993; Weiss and South, 1998). In some jurisdictions, especially the USA, the rate of growth and expansion of prison populations and penal institutions has been astonishing. The prison is presently expanding into a world wide gulag of "correctional facilities", refugee and internment compounds, prisoner of war and concentration camps. In light of the increasing utilization and centrality of the prison as a means of control and subjugation of targeted populations, the role of the writer in prison is of increasing importance. As the relations of power and repression shift so will the intent, form and content of the prison writing of the future. As a means of resistance and struggle, prisoners will continue "to map routes out of the prison" so as to expose and contest the injustices and repressions that characterize their prison and their society. In doing so they will continue the long tradition of contributing to the political, intellectual, social and cultural life of their society, and to the swirls of international discourse.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Davies (1990: 18) states: "By 'ur-epic' I mean the epic of the collective consciousness, not written but told. The prefix 'ur' is used because it comes from the beginning of human history."

<sup>2</sup> In locating the roots of the tradition of "carnival" Davies (1990: 10-12) notes its juxtaposition to the "solemnity of official culture" and its exteriority. I use "carnavalesque" to describe prison writing that focuses upon the prison and represents this exteriority, expressed as "laughter of all the people", "directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants"; "gay and triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding". Franklin (1989, 1998) applies the concept of the "picaresque" novel to the Euro-American tradition of "autobiographical narrative" too broadly. I rely upon its traditional usage as referring to the relating of the "adventures of rogues and villains"; often parodies of dominant social values and goals, told through mock confession or bravado success stories. With the development of forms and styles of prison writing these basic distinctions are problematicized. For example, Franklin (1989) locates some contemporary fiction, such as the work of Edward Bunker (convict fantasy fiction) within the picaresque tradition.

<sup>3</sup> Though noting their appearance over the centuries, Franklin does not consider the role and influence of the articulate, middle-class prisoner both within the prison and beyond the wall. For example, Dr. O.C. Withrow's *Shackling The Transgressor* (1933: 3), written after spending two and a half years in "that horrible pit labelled K.P.", was a bombshell in Canadian society. It had a direct influence on public

awareness and concern over prison conditions, and was an important influence on the creation of the *Canadian Prison Association*, a reform body whose initiatives led to the *Archambault Report* (1938) and subsequent major changes in prison regime and custom. See also Anderson (1997). Since the 1960s the influx of middle class drug users and occasional criminals has produced an abundance of what I call “you what?” accounts; most of which are lost in letters and or fringe publications. For an example, see Ferranti in this issue.

<sup>4</sup> It is surprising Franklin largely ignores significant minorities such as First Nations, Hispanic, Canadian/French Canadian prisoner writers in America.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to take into account the specificity of penal custom in different jurisdictions; for example the rural Southern U.S. States’ reliance upon chain gangs and work camps, and the urban Northern States and Canada’s reliance upon the penitentiary.

<sup>6</sup> There is considerable commentary and analysis on the penal reform movement that commenced in the USA in the last two decades of the 19th century. In reference to its effect on prison writing, see Morris (1998) and Wright’s review (this issue). Of major importance was the easing of restraints on prisoners’ interaction and relationships produced by penal reform. Though the strict “lock step, silent system” order applied in Canadian penitentiaries until the end of World War II, its tight application was already badly eroded by the 1930s (Anderson, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion see Davies (1990) pp.6-8.

<sup>8</sup> Though Brendan Behan was incarcerated (when a teenager) for his involvement in IRA political struggles, and this “Irish” location of the “English” borstal or prison informs his writing, his most celebrated work is focussed upon the prison, prison culture and routine. The collectivity best represented in his work is that of prisoners.

<sup>9</sup> *Presido* is the award winning penal press magazine started in 1934 at Iowa State Penitentiary. For a discussion see Morris (1998) especially Ch.14.

<sup>10</sup> Excerpts from the reviews in these newspapers are included on the dustcover of the book. The comment from the *New York Times* captures this response: “Runyon must seriously be regarded as a remarkably gifted convict observer of the passing penitentiary scene”.

<sup>11</sup> Earle Stanley Gardner was a major supporter of the penal press and often featured prison writing/writers in his column “The Court of Last Resort” in *Argosy* magazine. He started a nationwide campaign aimed at securing Runyon’s release, with his piece “The Big House”, in *Argosy* (April, 1955). In the early 1960s, Gardner tried to rescue the penal press (see Gardner, 1963: 1964).

<sup>12</sup> For a short history of the Canadian penal press see Gaucher (1988).

<sup>13</sup> Philip Priestley (1985; 1989) has done extensive research and documentation of prison writing from English prisons over the past two centuries. See also Brandseth, (1972).

<sup>14</sup> For discussion of censorship in USA see Runyon (1959); Franklin (1989: 161-62, 261; 1998: 14-15); Morris (1998: 147-186).

<sup>15</sup> See for example, J. Genet, *A Thief’s Journal* (1949) and *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1964), or F. Norman’s *Bang To Rights* (1958).

Norman’s work was the basis for the B.B.C. Television comedy *Porridge*, which celebrated the wiley recalcitrance of the seasoned convict.

<sup>16</sup> The over-representation of First Nations' Peoples in Canada's penitentiaries and jails has been particularly evident in the western provinces since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1950s, Aboriginal prisoners started to use the penal press to campaign for the creation of Native Brotherhood groups. These groups focussed upon cultural identity and education, and have been a reality in penitentiaries across the country since the late 1960s. An examination of their many newsletters and penal press magazines produced over this period indicated that the "status" Indian preceded and redefines that of prisoner. The writing of First Nations' prisoners presents the prison as a secondary level of confinement and oppression relative to the invasion of their territory and the cultural genocide of forced residential school attendance and reserves. A commonly shared conclusion is that the penitentiary has replaced the residential school as the pivotal institution in the suppression of Aboriginal culture (see Reed, 1990).

To a lesser extent this relocation and redefinition of the prison also took place amongst other Canadian prisoners as exhibited in their penal press writing and political activities. The 1970s was the most tumultuous decade in Canadian penal history (see Culhane, 1979; 1988; McNeil and Vance, 1978). During the height of the system wide disturbances in 1976; which marked the fifth year of continuous staff violence and brutality that started with the riotous opening of the control unit prison at Millhaven, Ontario in 1971; a group of politically conscious, long term "common" prisoners formed the **Odyssey Group**. One of their many initiatives was the establishment and observance of a **National Prison Justice Day** (August 10) inside and outside Canada's prisons (Gaucher, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> In the past 30 years, Irish political prisoners in Britain and Northern Ireland have significantly added to the already rich body of political analysis, biography and literature produced by imprisoned and banished Irish nationalists. See for example: Adams, (1990); South Yorkshire Writers, (1991); JPP, (1997: Vol. 7:1). Mac Lochlainn (1990) illustrates the continuity of these writings with Ireland's history of political resistance and struggle.

<sup>18</sup> The USA has been a world leader in penology since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Christie (1993) argues that within the new parameters of the "crime control industry" the USA's international leadership and influence has increased significantly. This was also the case during the exceptional conjuncture of the 1960s-70s, when the writing and analysis of USA prisoners (especially George Jackson and Angela Davis) was read by prisoners and informed their resistance, across the world.

<sup>19</sup> Prison populations have steadily risen across the world since 1980 (see: Christie 1993; Weiss and South, 1998). The increase in the USA has been explosive growing from approximately 300,000 prisoners to the current 1,800,000. This has resulted in massive prison construction and overcrowding, both of which have major impacts on prisoner/prison culture.

<sup>20</sup> See also: Morris, (1998: chapters 15-18); Gaucher and Elliott, (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> See Timmons, (1995: 15-18).

<sup>22</sup> See Gaucher and Elliott, (forthcoming).

<sup>23</sup> See Franklin (1989, 1998); Davies (1990); Morris (1998); Murphy and Murphy (1998).

<sup>24</sup> The most extensive program I am aware of is in England, where the **Writers in Residence in Prison** program is supported by the Arts Council of England and the Home Office. The Writers in Prison Network has produced numerous anthologies of the work of the writers in residence and of prisoners (see Hadaway, 1987; Hopwood, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> For example; in the USA see Churchill and Vander Wall (1992); in England see Scraton, Sim and Skidmore,(1986; 1991).

<sup>26</sup> There is a large and growing number of websites devoted to prison and related political issues. See for example, **Prison Activist Resource Center**, HTTP://www.prisonactivist.org.

<sup>27</sup> See for example *North Coast X-Press*.

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