

**Monika Fludernik (Freiburg/Germany)**

Title: **Dungeons, Retreats and Merited Confinements**

**a) the prison as dungeon:**

(1) [...] yet to die in such a state, is more dreadful and fearful than any man can imagine. [...] for a man [...] to fall into the hands of revenging justice, that will be always to the utmost extremity that his sin deserveth, punishing of him *in the dismal dungeon of Hell*, this must needs be unutterably sad, and lamentable. (Bunyan 1988: 15)

Bunyan, John. *The Life and Death of Mr Badman: Presented to the World in a Familiar Dialogue between Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive* [1680]. Ed. James F. Forrest and Roger Sharrock. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

(2)

But why delate I from my selfe to you?

Its I that mourne, I languish and lament,  
Incarcered [*sic*] in **loathsome Prison** now,  
hard manacled to bide all discontent:

My thoughts disgrast, my hopes linkt to deaths fether,  
My drinke salt teares, because I liu'd no better.

Anon. "Andersons Repentance" [1616]. EEBO (accessed 30/03/2015).

(3) To me every thing was new, the **massy doors, the resounding locks, the gloomy passages, the grated windows**, and the characteristic looks of the keepers, accustomed to reject every petition, and to steel their hearts against feeling and pity. [...] It is impossible to describe the sort of **squalidness and filth** with which these mansions are distinguished. I have seen dirty faces in dirty apartments, which have nevertheless borne the impression of health, and spoke carelessness and levity rather than distress. But

the dirt of a prison speaks sadness to the heart, and appears to be already in a state of putridity and infection. (177)

Godwin, influenced by the descriptions of jails in John Howard's *The State of the Prisons* (1777), initiates "a new and fundamentally different mode of prison reform discourse" (Pitofsky 2004: 307) and "compels his audience to see imprisonment for what it is – a devastating *physical* hardship that precludes the tranquil, undisturbed meditation that is commonplace in previous novelistic prison episodes" (297). The depressing nature of the prison results from the corruption and moral decrepitude of the institution itself rather than merely its literal filth: from the immorality of its inmates (horse thieves, highwaymen, coiners – Godwin 178-80) and from the corruption, indifference and callousness of its keepers. Caleb finds life in jail intolerable: "[...] there is more torture in the lingering existence of a criminal, in the silent, intolerable minutes that he spends, than in the tangible misery of whips and racks!" (180). At night the prisoners are locked up in their cells, which Caleb characterizes as "**dungeons**" (180-1): "**below the surface of the ground, damp, without window, light or air**" (181). [compare Fludernik 2019: ch5]

Godwin, William. *Caleb Williams* [1794]. Ed. David McCracken. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991.

Pitofsky, Alexander H. (2004) "'What Do You Think Laws Were Made For?': Prison Reform Discourse and the English Jacobin Novel". *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 33: 293-312.

### **Use of the trope in the Burke vs. Paine controversy over the French Revolution:**

Paine's reference in *The Rights of Man* to "those who lingered out the most wretched of lives, a life without hope, in the most miserable of prisons" and to "the real prisoner of misery, sliding to death in the silence of a dungeon" (Paine 1995: 102) established a discursive pattern for the depiction of the revolutionary victims of tyranny (compare Broich 2007).

Not one glance of compassion, not one commiserating reflection that I can find throughout his book, has he bestowed on those who lingered out the most wretched of lives, a life without hope in the most miserable of prisons. It is painful to behold a man employing his talents to corrupt himself. Nature has been kinder to Mr. Burke than he is to her. He is **not affected by the reality of distress touching his heart, but by the showy resemblance of it striking his imagination**. He **pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird**. Accustomed to

kiss the aristocratical hand that hath purloined him from himself, he degenerates into a composition of art, and the genuine soul of nature forsakes him. His hero or his heroine must be a tragedy-victim expiring in show, and **not the real prisoner of misery, sliding into death in the silence of a dungeon.** (102)

Paine, Thomas. *Rights of Man* [1791] / *Common Sense* [1776] / *and Other Political Writings*. Ed. Mark Philp. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995.

Broich, Ulrich (2007) "The Politicization of the Prison Motif in the English Literature of the 1790s". *Poetica* 39: 111-33.

vs. Burke:

Is it because liberty in the abstract may be classed amongst the blessings of man-kind, that **I am seriously to felicitate a madman, who has escaped from the protecting restraint and wholesome darkness of his cell, on his restoration to the enjoyment of light and liberty?** Am I to congratulate a **highwayman and murderer, who has broke prison, upon the recovery of his natural rights?** This would be to act over again the scene of the **criminals condemned to the galleys**, and their heroic deliverer, the metaphysic knight of the sorrowful countenance. (8)

Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1790]. The World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993.

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## b) the prison as retreat

(4)

Stone Walls do not a Prison make,  
Nor Iron Bars a Cage;  
Minds **Innocent and Quiet** take  
That for an **Hermitage**. (stanza 4)

Lovelace, Sir Richard. "To Althea, From Prison" [1642]. *The Collected Works of Sir Richard Lovelace* [1930]. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953. 78-9.

(5)

I am (indeed) in **Prison** (now)  
In **Body**, but my **Mind**  
Is **free** to study Christ [...] (st. 5; Bunyan 1980: 43)

The Prison **very sweet** to me  
 Hath been, since I came here,  
 And so would also hanging be,  
 If God will there appear.

Here dwells **good Conscience, also Peace**;  
 Here be my Garments white;  
 Here, **though in Bonds**, I have Release  
 From Guilt, which else would bite. (st. 18-19)

Bunyan, John. "Prison Meditations" [1663]. *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan. Volume VI: The Poems*. Ed. Graham Midgley. Oxford: Clarendon, 1980. 42-51.

(6)

Hail **bless'd Abode! Thou Mansion of Repose!**  
 O falsly stil'd the Seat of Humane Woes!  
 By whose instructive Lessons we are taught,  
 How to **enlarge our Souls and set them free**;  
 How to be **unconfi'd in Thought**,  
 And soar above Mankind's mistaken Liberty. (st. 1)

Welcome Confinement! all the tedious Hours  
 Which Criminals in conscious Sighs employ,  
 And melt away in briny Showers  
 Of Tears shall wing themselves to me with Joy: (st. 4)

**"An Ode upon Imprisonment"** (1717), a Jacobite text included in *The History of the Press-Yard*.

Anon. "An Ode upon Imprisonment". *The History of the Press-Yard* (London, 1717): 22-9.

(7)

[...] let vs loke on our other prisoners enclosid within a castell / and we shall fynd that the straytest kept of them both / yf he get the wisdome & the **grace to quyete his own mynd, & hold hym selfe content with that place** [...] he is I say **at his fre libertie to be where he will / & so is out of prison to** / (xix, 261)

More, Sir Thomas. *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* [written 1534, published 1553]. In *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*. Volume 12. Ed. Louis L. Martz and Frank Manley. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1976.

(8)

Imprisonment, admit it neere so close,  
 Is to a wise man but his **soules repose**;  
 And the lesse roome he hath, his **soul's more free**  
 Then when she had her wanton liberty.

[...]

Were I immur'd so I could see no Sunne,  
 My soule her wing'd horses could out-runne:  
 I could with heaven a correspondence keep,  
 As Ionas did close prisoner in the deep.

**The Prophet in the Dungeon was in heaven,**

John in the Isle had all his visions given:  
 Men in the deepest pits, see best by farre  
 The Sunnes Eclipses; and finde every starre,  
 When sight's contracted and is more intent;  
 (So is mens soules in close imprisonment,)

[...]

**Art thou imprison'd? looke up thou shalt find,  
 Thou hast a strange enlargment in thy mind.**

Th'are more ingaged far, Imprisoned thee;  
 And shall come to accompt, when thou art free.

Wortley, Sir Francis. "Upon a True Contented Prisoner". *Characters and Elegies*. London, 1646. 55-8.

(9)

While I was thus employed I reflected **with exultation** upon the degree in which man is independent of the smiles and frowns of fortune. I was beyond her reach, for I could fall no lower. To an ordinary eye I might seem destitute and miserable, but in reality I wanted for nothing. My fare was coarse; but I was in health. My dungeon was noisome; but I felt no inconvenience. (186)

Godwin, William. *Caleb Williams* [1794]. Ed. David McCracken. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991.

(10)

ETERNAL spirit of the **chainless mind!**

**Brightest in dungeons**, Liberty! thou art,

For there thy habitation is the heart –

The heart which **love of thee alone can bind**;

And when thy sons to **fetters** are consigned –

**To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,**

Their country conquers with their **martyrdom**,

And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.

("Sonnet on Chillon", ll. 1-8; Byron 1986: 3)

Byron, Lord George Gordon. "Sonnet on Chillon" [1816]. *The Complete Poetical Works*. Volume 4. Ed. Jerome J. McGann. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986. 3.

(11)

There must have burned within Marenghi's breast

That fire, more warm and bright than life and hope,

(Which **to the martyr makes his dungeon ... [bless'd?]**

More joyous than free heaven's majestic cope

To his oppressor), warring with decay, –

Or he could ne'er have lived years, day by day.

("Marenghi", st. xviii; Shelley 1971: 567)

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Marenghi." *Complete Poetical Works*. Ed. Thomas Hutchinson. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971. 567.

(12)

Within the **Dungeon's noxious gloom**

The Patriot still, with dauntless breast,

The cheerful aspect can assume –

And smile – in conscious Virtue blest!

The **damp foul floor**, the **ragged wall**

And shattered window, grated high;

The **trembling Ruffian** may appal,

Whose thoughts no sweet resource supply.

But he, **unaw'd by guilty fears**,

(To Freedom and his Country true)

Who o'er a race of well-spent years  
 Can cast the retrospective view,  
 Looks inward to his heart, and sees  
 The objects that must ever please. (Sonnet 9, "The Cell")

Thelwall, John. *Poems written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, under a Charge of High Treason* [1795]. Otley: Woodstock Books, 2000.

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### c) prison as merited punishment:

I think [...] it is highly desirable that criminals should be hated, that the punishments inflicted upon them should be so contrived as to give expression to that hatred, and to justify it so far as the public provision of means for expressing and gratifying a healthy natural sentiment can justify and encourage it. (Sir James Stephen, 1883; qtd. Menninger 1977: 195)

Menninger, Karl A. (1977) *The Crime of Punishment* [1968]. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

### Henry Fielding on bridewells:

[...] all those Poor who shall refuse to labour at that Price, even at the Command of a Magistrate, may properly be deemed incorrigibly idle.

[...] the Legislature have, by several Acts of Parliament, provided a **Punishment**, by Commitment to *Bridewell* either for more or less Time: And a very severe Punishment this is, if being confirmed in Habits of Idleness, and in every other vicious Habit, may be esteemed so.

These Houses are commonly called Houses of Correction [...] where Persons are ordered to be committed to *Bridewell*, it is added, *There to be kept to hard Labour*, [...] and to **punish them**, by putting Fetters on them and by Whipping; nor are the said Rogues, &c. to have any other Provision than what they shall earn by their Labour. (120)

Fielding, Henry. *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers and Related Writings* [1751]. Ed. Malvin R. Zirker. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

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#### d) prisons as houses of reform based on the inculcation of industry and thrift

see William Godwin's *Fleetwood* (1805): Monsieur Ruffigny rescued from Lyon factory by Casimir Fleetwood's father

Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766)

EVANS, Robin (1982) *The Fabrication of Virtue. British Prison Architecture, 1750-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

MERANZE, Michael (1996) *Laboratories of Virtue. Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina Press.

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Byrd, Max (1977) "The Madhouse, the Whorehouse, and the Convent". *Partisan Review* 44.2: 268-78.

Fludernik, Monika (1999) "Carceral Topography: Spatiality, Liminality and Corporality in the Literary Prison". *Textual Practice* 13.1: 43-77.

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Fludernik, Monika (2005b) "Metaphoric (Im)Prison(ment) and the Constitution of a Carceral Imaginary". *Anglia* 123: 1-25.

Fludernik, Monika (2019) *Metaphors of Confinement: The Prison in Fact, Fiction and Fantasy*. Law and Literature, 2 (ed. Robert Spoo and Simon Stern). Oxford: Oxford University Press. 804 pp.

Thompson, Erica, and Jan Susler (1996) "Supermax Prisons: High-Tech Dungeons and Modern-Day Torture". *Criminal Injustice. Confronting the Prison Crisis*. Ed. Eliu Rosenblatt. Boston, MA: South End Press. 301-19.