THE KEEPERS AND REAPERS OF
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PRISON WRITING

by

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A thesis submitted to
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in partial fulfilment of
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Abstract

The writings of American convicts have always served as horrific reminders of a justice system's penchant for duplicitous barbarism. Interdisciplinary in scope and structure, this work demonstrates that through their usage of both real and fictitious 'jailhouse' chameleons, prison writers illuminate patriarchal distortions by revealing the clear interchangeability of roles such as 'lawmaker' and 'lawbreaker.'

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THE KEEPERS AND REAPERS
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PRISON COMPLEXES

The man hailed by Holloway House as “America’s most read black author” points a dubious finger at the pantomime perfected by his country’s penal system before disseminating his beliefs. “I have become ill,” he vows, “insane as an inmate of the torture chamber behind America’s fake façade of justice and democracy” (*The Naked Soul of Iceberg Slim* 17). Iceberg Slim, who, before embarking on the life of a hustler went by the name of Robert Beck, was incarcerated during the early 1960s and housed at the infamous Chicago House of Corrections. He would spend years raging and writing from within the modern cage, regularly transferred between conflicts and institutions, a common breed of criminal tuned into patriarchal consequences well before accepting the undeniable restrictions imposed by countless state-sanctioned cells.

Upon his release from prison at the age of forty-three, Slim bid only a temporary farewell to the faceless anxieties that somehow seek out perpetually suspicious minds. Though never again would he actually serve government-time, two legitimate questions are posed by the end of his best-selling autobiography, a testament first published in 1969 and fittingly entitled *Pimp: The Story of My Life*. “I have been in a deadly trap,” he promised. “Have I really escaped it? Does fate have grimmer traps set?” (309).

In *A Reader on Punishment*, Duff and Garland charge that all investigations into the prison system must comprehend the mindsets that have paved the way for authoritative disciplines; and all truly thoughtful works will have to put forth credible claims of their own (2). Accordingly, opposed to examining the ultra-masculine penal system by dissecting the traditionally questionable character of ‘lawman’ or administrator, one must probe prison writing’s perpetually institutionalized convicts,

habitual criminals and incessant wards who resemble precisely what their patriarchal models continue to manifest. An inescapable reflection indicates how interchangeable terms like ‘keeper’ and ‘reaper’ can be, for whether nurturing the captive or imitating the captor, an enduring prisoner must always be prepared to act as a jailhouse chameleon in either roll.

“Relations among men and women in patriarchal institutions are hierarchical. Male hierarchies abound, and their day-to-day operations makes prison life work” (Sabo, Kupers, London 8). Insomuch that all atoms serve as building blocks for molecules, all ‘distortions of masculinity’ – innate instincts driven by testosterone, machismo and anxieties surrounding ‘losing face’ – will eventually bond into *something*. In America, armies of ‘male distorters’ have already been responsible for ensuring an astonishing statistic: there are as many American inmates as there are American farmers (Chevigny 97). Criminologist Neil Boyd locates *the* root of deep-seeded masculinity in *The Beast Within* when he claims: “From the archaeological record of nomadic peoples [...] up to the global empires and [...] world wars of the recent past, male *violence* has been a ubiquitous underpinning of political and social organization” (40).

History, moreover, indicates that ‘prison,’ ‘masculinity,’ and ‘violence’ remains one threesome that need not concern itself with contraception. Which is to say that safety precautions are futile, as reverberations are imminent when these entities fuse together. “If we want to understand and respond to this problem we will have to recognize that in all important respects men are male apes. We no longer live in bands or tribes but in nation-states that carry their own risks of global annihilation” (Boyd 57). If ‘distortions of masculinity’ could somehow be eliminated from the aforementioned trio, ‘prison’ and

‘violence’ would undoubtedly remain closely related, but, perhaps not *incestuously* so. “In fact,” concedes Boyd, “if [...] not included in these criminal justice statistics, crime would hardly be an object of social concern and the percentage of the global population in jail would be less than one-tenth of what it is today” (22).

Outside of violence, undoubtedly the most effective device to eternalize humankind’s tyrannous nature has arrived in the form of surveillance. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault notes that the use of surveillance itself can be traced back to the nineteenth-century introduction of Bentham’s Panopticon, a prison system where cells were situated around one central watchtower from which a supervisor or guard could observe the inmates yet the inmates could never be exactly sure when or where they were being watched (202). Beyond abetting as a sanctioned regulator of prisoners’ minds and bodies, the implementation furthermore contributed as an “architectural programme of most prison projects” while demanding “security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency” (249).

Contending that a strong percentage of violent acts are carried out as a result of perpetual surveillance, Foucault charges that a conflicted individual must ultimately convert his or her environment into a theoretical battle zone before taking a stance (308). “This stance is *attitude*,” elaborates Bell Gale Chevigny, editor of PEN’s *Doing Time* anthology, “the immemorial resource of the slave, of anyone whose dignity is threatened by wanton power” (xxv). Upon displaying “attitude,” only two courses of action remain viable: defend or concede. Foucault opts for the former by stating that “power produces knowledge [...] that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any

knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (27).

Conceivably, if the prison subculture’s first systematic reapers had produced knowledge and distributed power proportionally, prison writing, itself an inevitable genre, would not maintain its need to be a cultural staple. In *Prison Masculinities*, penal-experts Sabo, Kupers and London explore “contemporary trends” in punishment, and in doing so embrace one of Foucault’s core concepts, that advancements in the ‘penal’ field are simply imaginary (308). “The idea,” contends Boyd, “that men are violent by their very nature has been around in science for at least one hundred years, and there are many less direct references in literature to this phenomenon during the past two thousand years” (97). A legacy sprouted from the earliest of slave narratives, themselves interlocked as literature’s first unofficial genre, Iceberg Slim and a host of other rebel-artists submit that these “references” cannot be any more straightforward or literal than they are already are.

Graphic violence will continue to serve as an unwavering companion to dark inclinations and literatures since “the climate of pervasive menace makes physical violence the first burden of doing time” (Chevigny xxiv). Investigative journalist Wensley Clarkson, who has spent the bulk of his own life probing human degradation, guarantees that a threat of violence dictates all penal situations. Dismissing any of Hollywood’s renditions of caged Americans, Clarkson asserts: “The fortunate adjust by using whatever currency is available. The others suffer unimaginable humiliation” (1).

Ultimately, prison writers have little choice but to perforate their various stories with raw depictions of brutality. If they do not, how else can we be expected to legitimize artistic intentions?

By citing prison as a gauge of endless ills, Foucault locates the penal structure as the purest microcosm, a matrix of absolute authority and corruption where those with vested interests rule supreme over infinite others. The French theorist accuses the police-prison system of preserving a myriad of history's disciplinary techniques (fortunately, methodologies that have been encountered by an onslaught of extremely combative forces). Iceberg Slim showcases resistance by exposing the reapers' true identities. "The irony," he writes, "is that the cynical clique of ruthless men who masquerade as champions of justice and humanity are really the architects of repression and murder at home and abroad. Cops and Prison guards are the ruthless slaves and shields and the victims themselves of these viciously cold-blooded men who perhaps become emotional only when their power is threatened" (*Naked Soul* 136).

Both Slim and Foucault recognize that only veritable victims of unforgiving worlds have the authority to comment on how merciless *grim* becomes. The homeless, the neglected, the abused, and the mentally disabled have all earned the right to challenge society's ironfisted headmen; whereas in prison, while the inherited evils of a patrimonial legacy intensify under corruptible microscopes, only philosopher-inmates shall pass judgement. One of Slim's contemporaries, Malcolm X, certainly probed suspects systems of justice within America's power cosmos in the 1960s. (As did Angela Y. Davis, the feminist theorist who still indicts an overtly masculine "prison industrial complex" for perpetuating racist ideologies and ignoring genuine rehabilitative opportunities). Eldridge

Cleaver's 1968-classic, *Soul on Ice*, would inspire insolvent American inmates to advocate personal pride and renounce overwhelmingly systematic manipulations.

In a chapter entitled "A Day in Folsom Prison," Cleaver shares the effects of simultaneously embracing and rejecting his governmental archetypes by unveiling a perpetual criminal proportionately reared and outraged by bureaucratic duplicities:

I felt that I could endure anything, everything, even the test of being broken on the rack. I've been in every type of cell they have in the prisons of California, and the door to my present cell seems the most cruel and ugly of all. However, I have grown to like this door. When I go out of my cell, I can hardly wait to get back in, to slam that cumbersome door, and hear the sharp click as the trusty snaps the lock behind me. [...] Once inside my cell, I feel safe: I don't have to watch the other convicts any more or the guards in the gun towers. (63-64)

Momentous events including the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement had been simultaneously rejected and embraced by imprisoned radicals. "The movements for peace," writes Professor H. Bruce Franklin, "the liberation of people of color, women's equality, gay rights, and economic democracy were all on one side of the culture wars of late-twentieth-century America. A major front in these wars was and is literature" (*Prison Writing* 13). During the 1960s and 1970s, George Jackson, Mshaka, Piri Thomas and Etheridge Knight were merely a few notorious penmen of conscience who chose to reject widespread corruption. In turn, the undeniably intense circumstances of the Western world's cultural composition, mirrored by similarly savage conditions within the U.S. penal subculture, proceeded to spark an unprecedented demand for even more politically charged commentaries, actions and convicts (*Prison Writing* 12).

America's foremost prison writing expert, Franklin pays homage to his nation's trapped artists by freeing a great number of their marginalized stories and essays in two anthologized collections. In 1978, Franklin's *The Victim as Criminal and Artist* would present itself as the first serious piece of academic work to simultaneously defend and promote prison writing as a feasible literary genre. "Historical events have forced certain choices upon all of us students of American literature," he explained. "Surely it is no longer possible to use the term 'American literature' to encompass no more than belletristic writings by a select handful of white authors" (xxi). Franklin's anticipated update to his first installment, *Prison Writing in 20th Century America* (1998), voices analogously timeless concerns while inquiring: "Are complexity and ambiguity the hallmarks of literary excellence, or are simplicity and accessibility literary virtues? Does the meaning of a work reside inside its text or does its context shape its meaning?" (13).

These questions are not merely rhetorical. They are notable and necessary for the academic who struggles with extracting legitimacy from works of popular culture, or, in prison writing's case, anti-popular subculture. In their survey of fringe literature in *Cultural Studies and Critical Theory*, even Fuery and Mansfield concede that the "outside is not easily disputed as a focus of belief, but it is similarly not delineated as a basis for analysis" (xx). Nevertheless, one specific passage from *Prison Writing* demonstrates that Franklin sympathizes with the criminal artist and unquestionably pities narrow-minded individuals who cannot find merit in daring works resting outside – nay beyond – an expired canon:

One of the most extraordinary achievements of twentieth-century American culture is the literature that has come out of the nation's prisons. True, there have

been many eminent individual prison writers from other countries, such as Boethius, Cervantes, Campanella, Thomas More, Walter Raleigh, John Donne, Richard Lovelace [...] Leigh Hunt, Oscar Wilde, Maxim Gorky, Chernyeshevsky, Dostoyevsky, Solzhenitsyn, Francois Villon, Voltaire, Diderot, the Marquis de Sade, and Jean Genet. 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. (*Prison Writing* 1)

“Some of the authors are prominent figures in American letters while others are virtually unknown. The power of their writings comes from their lives as dropouts, rejects, criminals, and rebels in American society and as inhabitants of America’s prisons” (*Prison Writing* 1). It has been argued that O. Henry is the greatest known American ex-convict author, despite never recording any of his prison-based experiences. That his penname endures as an abbreviated reminder of the *Ohio* State Penitentiary, however, clearly indicates that government time left its mark (Chevigny xi). In 1894, celebrated convict-author Jack London, who before his death would author fifty-five novels, had adamantly indicted guards and administrators of New York’s Erie County Penitentiary for perpetuating cutthroat ideologies (1).

In the 1907 story “‘Pinched’: A Prison Experience,” London prescribes a premeditated blend of venom and confusion by swearing vengeance on *our* keepers. Moments after being spit on and shoved by one of his less sympathetic guards, London appears to locate a minimal amount of relief through fantastical plans of revenge after reviewing his immediate circumstance:

I was dazed. Here was I, under sentence, after a farce of a trial wherein I was

denied not only my right of trial by jury, but my right to plead guilty or not guilty [...] But I'd show them. They couldn't keep me in jail forever. Just wait till I got out, that was all. I'd make them sit up. I knew something about the law and my own rights, and I'd expose their maladministration of justice. Visions of damage suits and sensational newspaper headlines were dancing before my eyes when the jailers came in and began hustling us out into the main office. (41)

After World War II, equally unforgiving laws and economic conditions had dictated that the majority of literary works by condemned authors remain suppressed. In turn, very few notable modern prison narratives, including Nelson Algren's "El President de Mejico" in 1947 and Robert Lowell's "Memories of West Street and Lepke" in 1959, made it out of their respective settings alive and ready for public consumption (Chevigny ii). Then, upon its initial publication in 1964, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* would change everything. Transcribed by celebrated author Alex Haley, the controversial memoirs are hailed as *the* first pivotal contribution to contemporary prison writing, since inspiring a solid corpus of confinement narratives dedicated to and inspired by the fallen author. "After the assassination of Malcolm," writes Franklin, "prison writers acknowledged him as both their political and spiritual leader; he is conventionally compared to Moses, Jesus, even Allah" (*Prison Writing* 148).

"In a sense," reinforces Davis, "the feeling that Malcolm had conjured in me could finally acquire a mode of expression – collective, activist, and, I hoped, transformative" ("Meditations" 290). Initially, a pre-converted Malcolm did not unveil spectacular credentials. Franklin reluctantly reveals as much when he recalls that: "In 1941, at the age of sixteen, [Malcolm] enters the "life" of Harlem, soon becoming a drug

addict and a typical zoot-suited hustler, pimping and pushing dope. Four years later he returns to Boston, sets up a burglary gang, and is eventually trapped, with a piece of stolen property, by a jeweller” (*Victim as Criminal* 238). Condemned to seven years in the Norfolk Prison Colony and referred to as “Satan” by the other prisoners, Malcolm X addressed mass transformation by warning all Americans about a super-masculine world ideology that continues to pride itself on concealment and brutality:

You never heard your name, only your number. On all your clothing, every item, was your number, stenciled. It grew stenciled on your brain [...] Any person who claims to have deep feeling for other human beings should think a long, long time before he votes to have other men kept behind bars – caged. I am not saying there shouldn’t be prisons, but there shouldn’t be bars. Behind bars, a man never reforms. He will never forget. He will never get completely over the memory of the bars. (155)

Upon his release from the Norfolk Prison Colony, Malcolm X would acknowledge the prison system for providing him with the time and ammunition to strike back. Initially, it had been the deplorable living conditions that had provoked the infamous leader: “In the dirty, cramped cell, I could lie on my cot and touch both walls. The toilet was a covered pail; I don’t care how strong you are, you can’t stand having to smell a whole cell row of defecation” (155). In time, a perpetually institutionalized convict named Bimbi manages to capture Malcolm’s attention. Serving as a legitimate keeper *and* a fraudulent reaper, Bimbi concerns himself with Malcolm’s rehabilitation and teaches him how to seek out knowledge with a discerning eye. On the other hand, Bimbi flagrantly shadows patriarchal prototypes, both promoting and permitting

illegalities such as racketeering, behavior that deters Malcolm from achieving restoration even sooner.

A chameleon in every sense, the older habitual convict is best contextualized as paradoxical in that he is a necessarily detectable shape-shifter, a character consistently locatable within prison narratives as systematic legacy. In a commendatory account of the old inmate, Malcolm unintentionally divulges how difficult it becomes to demarcate such a man – a representation simultaneously good, evil, and somewhere in between:

Bimbi seldom said much to me; he was gruff to individuals, but I sensed he liked me. What made me seek his friendship was when I heard him discuss religion. I considered myself beyond atheism – I was Satan. But Bimbi put the atheist philosophy in a framework, so to speak. That ended my vicious cursing attacks. My approach sounded so weak alongside his, and he never used a foul word (157) [...] Under Bimbi's tutelage, too, I had gotten myself some little cellblock swindles going. For packs of cigarettes, I beat just about anyone at dominoes. I always had several cartons of cigarettes in my cell; they were, in prison, nearly as valuable a medium of exchange as money. (158)

Although time-already-served indicates that Bimbi cannot self-reform, the man still plans to impart everything he knows to an eager-to-learn Malcolm. That the seasoned veteran of the penal system received his own education at the hands of government-appointed officials confirms that any quest for 'enlightenment' cannot possibly take on a traditional meaning. That Malcolm praises Bimbi, the chameleon, for tuning him in to both reverent philosophy *and* jailhouse thievery suggests that keepers and reapers – with distortions of masculinity revved and ready to go – can be just as heroic as they are sly.

Of course, that lesson ultimately arrives too late, as Malcolm himself prophesized near the end of a memorable life and story: “Yes, I have cherished my ‘demagogue’ role. I know that societies often have killed the people who have helped to change those societies” (389).

“*El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz – May 19, 1925 – Feb. 21, 1965*” (Haley 450). Paying one of countless tributes, Franklin solemnly locates the explosive forces brought about by the assassination of Malcolm X, a transformed herd of charging activists-turned-captives-turned-writers proceeding to inspire a half-century’s worth of prison literature written by and about incensed criminal artists. In *Prison Writing*, Franklin memorializes merely a handful of the notable contributors, their reactions, and subsequent publications:

In a chapter entitled “Initial Reactions on the Assassination of Malcolm X” in *Soul on Ice* (1968), ex-convict Eldridge Cleaver argues that Malcolm reinforced the belief of the majority of black prisoners, including himself, that they were not so much “criminals” as “prisoners of war.” Bobby Seale begins *Seize the Time* (1970), a book written in jail, with these words: “When Malcolm was killed in 1965, I ran down the street,” threw bricks at a police car, “cried like a baby,” and vowed, “I’ll make my own self into a motherfucking Malcolm X.” *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, the 1971 collective autobiography of twenty one Black Panthers prosecuted for criminal conspiracy in New York, has an entire section about how Malcolm changed the thinking and lives of its authors. Among the countless poems about him by convicts, “Black Thoughts ’71 (malcolm)” by Insan (Robert Preston) sums up the core of Malcolm’s message in the thought “what he was I am/ capable of being plus some”. (148)

MASCULINITY AND PRISON WRITING

The ill-received political forces awakened by the assassination of Malcolm X, as well as what Franklin labels “the Vietnam War epoch,” would influence the emergence of two other contemporary self-taught prison writers who peaked during the 1960s and 1970s – California-State convicts Malcolm Braly and Edward Bunker. Both writers connect with imaginations of patriarchal victims still eager for the American justice system to dismantle before attempting a long-overdue resurrection. Braly, who before his death in 1980 had concerned himself with distributions of power amongst his semi-fictional inmates, and Bunker, whose collections of novels, essays and articles continue to capture the debased and racially motivated incarcerated experience, were equally branded official ‘government property’ before either man had reached the age of consent.

Abandoned by his parents as a teenager, Braly spent the majority of his adolescent years in juvenile facilities and by the age of forty had spent seventeen years behind bars (Lethem xii). Deserted by his mother when he was four, Bunker still holds the distinction of being San Quentin’s youngest convict upon his entrance at age seventeen (Styron x). While Kurt Vonnegut once hailed Braly’s 1967 classic *On the Yard* as America’s most important prison narrative, Bunker has won unanimous acclaim for screenwriting such films as *Straight Time* in 1978 and *The Animal Factory* in 2000 (the latter based on his own controversial prison-novel from 1977). Bunker has also appeared in Quentin Tarrantino’s 1990-crime-classic *Reservoir Dogs* as the felonious character Mr. Blue.

The perpetually institutionalized convicts controlling the subculture accept prison’s intestinal composition as a genuine reflection of their own ferociously masculine natures. Such long-serving convicts have been awarded positions of power and respect

within the confines of the prison complex and have also achieved favorable standing with the prison officials; through corruption, as Braly asserts in *On the Yard*; and through common biases, as Bunker alludes to in *The Animal Factory*. Indeed, authenticated concerns ignited by the 1960s and 1970s deem both men correct, for while Braly and Bunker had suffered on the inside, a number of other prisoners-in-waiting were forced to endure countless clusters of FBI surveillance adamantly perpetrated upon American political groups and activists. An official rendition of Panopticism revisited.

Braly and Bunker themselves are two undeniable authorities on life-long institutionalized convict-characters, or, the programmable beings that mimic their immediate patriarchal models through maladjusted osmosis. And whereas each writer offers his own individually convincing perspective, both men concede that resentment and mistreatment shall continue to reign supreme within caged spaces. “Prison,” remarks Sister Helen Prejean, is “a world without privacy, a world of frequent strip searches, a world where the “shakedown crew” swoops down upon you and throws all of your stuff out of your “box” into a heap [...] A razor-wired world where you never sit under a tree because the yard is stripped bare for security reasons, where security governs everything” (xi). A consoler at American correctional facilities for twenty years and the author of *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen, in the spirit of Foucault, contends that once caged, violence (power) and control (knowledge) cannot be detached from one another. Braly and Bunker contend that keepers and reapers dictate precisely where violence and control reside.

Braly’s chief character in *On the Yard* is Chilly Willy, an oxymoron in that he is a ‘young veteran’ of the prison system at twenty-six and a seemingly permanent convict

intent on replicating the violent routines he has observed. Chilly conjures a sad sketch when he declares: “I’ve still got nine years to the board and they’ll automatically deny me three more before they even start talking parole. You’re looking at the only man in this state who ever got hit with the big bitch before he was twenty-three years old” (95). That he is at least a decade younger than most of his fellow convicts, including the men “on the yard” under his employ – the runners, bookkeepers, prostitutes, dealers and enforcers – only adds to the validity of Chilly’s presence as the quintessential jailhouse chameleon.

Though protocol for most fictional exercises demand that author and work remain totally isolated from one another, prison narratives have little choice but to serve as true exceptions to the rule whether autobiographical parallels are intended by the composers or not. “The writers are locked away from you,” admits Prejean, “but you’ve already opened a door to their world. Step inside” (xii). Braly certainly suggests that we do a lot more than that after a presentation of the problematic Convict Oberholster (aka Chilly Willy). After locating familiar patterns, in *The Victim as Criminal and Artist*, Franklin draws out the similarities between ‘character’ and ‘creator’ with details from their criminal careers:

Chilly, like Braly, had been involved with crime from his youth, beginning with the burglary of a store. A few months after his release from reform school, he “staged a string of armed robberies with two other boys,” covering three states and ending in a running gun battle, not totally unlike Braly’s own youthful spree. Like Braly and his two companions, Chilly and the other two boys “were sent to prison in the state of their arrest, and upon completion of that sentence they were

extradited home in chains to be tried for the robberies they had committed before they left" (193). Chilly is paroled at age twenty-four, "a two-time loser with almost seven straight years of reform school, county jail and prison behind him. He had never held a job. He had never had a girlfriend" (193). When he is sent back to prison, he is classified as a "habitual criminal". (199)

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault formally ponders why prison has been allowed to serve as society's fundamental form of punishment. In *On the Yard*, Braly does not tackle this issue directly, although he does present the consequences of prison's value system. He promises that after an individual is institutionalized, regardless of whether that character is a convict or a guard, he or she will undoubtedly go through a viscous transformation before learning to assimilate. Chilly Willy is a self-sufficient gangster, a prison magnate who "defly controls a small empire of cigarettes, pharmaceutical narcotics, and petty bureaucratic favors, orchestrated by a routine of minimal violence and, as his name suggests, maximum cool" (Lethem viii). In equal parts young, ambitious and intelligent, Chilly happens to be in charge of the same illegalities that government officials and transnational corporations have been accused of promoting and controlling, albeit from respectable office-desks rather than enclosed gravel yards.

Angela Davis is outraged at the true barbarians at the gate, the ultra-capitalistic American prison complex and its penchant for misery and big business. "Ironically," she flouts – indeed capturing vested systematic interests – "prisons themselves are becoming a source of cheap labor that attracts corporate capitalism – as yet on a relatively small scale – in a way that parallels the attraction unorganized labor in Third World countries exert" (*Prison, Repression, and Resistance* 67). Davis notes how California specifically

prosper: “Under the auspices of the Joint Venture Program, work now being performed on prison grounds includes computerized telephone messaging, dental apparatus assembly, computer data entry, plastic parts fabrication, [...], security glass manufacturing, swine production, oak furniture, manufacturing, and the production of stainless steel tanks and equipment” (68).

For the rest of the prisoners, the man known as Chilly Willy has reached the status of prison-yard millionaire. In reality, his profits are a pittance in comparison to the funding American detention stations procure on an annual basis. Upon her own release from the insufferable vortex, Davis would indict the lucrative double standard in a lecture at Colorado College: “Prisons are becoming an integral part of the U.S. economy, which means that there are stakes other than anti-crime stakes that keep the prison industry expanding. It’s acquiring its own momentum which, if we don’t intervene and stop it now, we will be into the next millennium an increasingly incarcerated society; and that scares me, because I have been there” (*Prison Industrial Complex* Track 13).

Braly’s captive falls victim to the “cold-blooded men” that Iceberg Slim denotes as the perpetrators of all institutionalized disharmonies. That is an inherent truth applying to all semi-savvy prisoners, and a fact that Braly conveys through a bleak and sometimes subtle account of the prison compound’s farcical charade of justice and restoration: “He wasn’t comfortable, but neither was he giving anyone the satisfaction of appearing uncomfortable” (80). In Chilly, readers are granted a look into keeper and reaper alike, one who protects himself and his criminal clique, yet a man who needs to take power away from feeble inmates outside of his protection. Ironically, when Braly’s warrior is at

his most brutal, he resembles the very system that has sworn to restore his soul (Lethem viii).

Criminologist James Messerschmidt elaborates on repercussions of masculinity gone awry by claiming that after men gain entry into the prison world they engage in various practices to prove that they are vigorous enough to survive: “The only way that others can judge their conduct as masculine is through their behavior and appearance. For many men, crime may serve as a suitable resource for showing that they are ‘manly’” (68). Kann locates the interconnectedness of these distorters in a historical think-piece entitled “Penitence for the Privileged.” An advocate of resistance, the scholar reports that from “the first protests against British authority in the 1760s, through the Revolution, and into the turbulent politics of the 1790s, patriot leaders wondered whether most American men would ever consent to be governed and comply with legitimate political authority. Once the rhetoric of liberty and equality was unleashed, many men used it to justify rebellion against parents, masters, teachers, ministers, and magistrates” (22).

Conformably: If a criminal such as the fictional Chilly or the factual Braly has always lived life within the confines of a hegemonic prison structure, can the inmate not blame the patriarchal keeper for a painstakingly non-rehabilitative miseducation based on emulations of warped masculinity? The officials and legislators continue to breed incarcerated subjects who are nothing short of oversized ferocious children lacking direction and palpable role models. Thus, ‘biology’ – not always merely a difficult subject itself – does not necessarily serves as a way of understanding why this ferocity exists:

Men are more likely to be in jail to some degree because they are more likely to

do harm when physical conflicts occur [...] Crime, and especially violent crime, is not concentrated among the strongest and largest of men but among men of limited abilities who tend to be poorly educated, relatively uncivil, intolerant, and disadvantaged. (Boyd 70)

Not always accountable for *his* own actions, Braly strikes back at *his* unqualified educators by sticking up for *his* favorite subject: “Chilly Willy wasn’t corny. He created an impression of taut, finely drawn, but elastic strength, and with it there was a contrary suggestion of denseness as if he would be difficult to move from any spot where he had chosen to stand” (220). After Chilly manages to manipulate his way in and around the prison/power dynamic, he is seen as a direct threat by the patriarchal forces officially in control. Not about to be upstaged, the administration proceeds to overthrow “the cool one” by installing an extremely amenable homosexual prisoner in Chilly’s immediate space. “The new cellmate serves as Chilly’s mirror,” clarifies Lethem, “not for a repressed homosexuality, but for the fact that his manipulations had always concealed within them a grain of solicitude, perhaps even disguised family feeling. The men Chilly command are under his care, however apparently dispassionate a form this care has taken” (viii).

Chilly ultimately treats his men with the same amount of respect and loyalty they bestow upon him. However, consistency of character(s) remains scarce, for placing a receptively gay convict in Chilly’s close proximity carries the same consequences as dangling raw meat in the face of a Rottweiler – the mad dog will bite and when he does there will be blood. In his work *On War, Sex, and Neurosis*, Sigmund Freud’s warning speaks to the prisoner’s dilemma: “There is usually little refinement in the ways of

obtaining erotic pleasure habitual to people in whom the tender and the sensual currents of feeling are not properly merged; they have remained addicted to perverse sexual aim which they feel it a considerable deprivation not to gratify, yet to such men this seems possible only with a sexual object who in their estimate is degraded and worth little” (208).

Even the men under their leader’s control become doomed when “sex becomes the means of Chilly’s self-destruction” (Lethem viii). The officials have always kept true intimacy at bay, tucked far from the consciousness of prisoners like Chilly and his cohorts. To finish them, the prison-heads drown Braly’s martyr in a flood of unfamiliar affection and stimulation, stealing his makeshift masculinity and dethroning him as the monarch of San Quentin’s “big yard” in one fell swoop. The repercussions of shackled sexuality have been explored by Mumia Abu-Jamal, a co-founder of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panthers and a death-row inmate since 1982. Abu-Jamal has written on countless prison issues, including the aftermath of removing a prisoner’s rights to unhampered visitation privileges. In *Caged and Celibate*, he asserts that self-serving officials intentionally place sexually active inmates in harm’s way by alleging:

that prison is a hotbed of homosexuality, which, in turn, is intricately linked to a system of dominance among men. Although all prisons have rules that prohibit homosexual contact, it continues unabated, fanned by bans against conjugal visitation and implicit administrative acceptance. At one level, homosexual relations reflect and reproduce pecking orders of dominance and submission among the prisoners themselves. At another level, savvy administrators look the other way on such couplings, because they can utilize these relationships to

extend their control. For example, in any macho subculture homosexuality is extremely stigmatized. An official may threaten a closeted homosexual with exposure, thus triggering certain violent retribution and potential rape. The [...] prisoner may inform on other inmates, thus enlarging the web of interprisoner conflict and distrust while solidifying centralized administrative control. (140)

Abu-Jamal's research has been vehemently challenged by government bodies and embarrassed prison heads, despite the fact that recent investigations into the disharmonious relationship between homophobic prison-administrators and jailhouse sex reiterate at least one of Nietzsche's intrinsic conclusions: *Distrust anyone in whom the desire to punish is powerful*. Stephen "Donny" Donaldson, a former Director of the National Stop Prison Rape Organization, claims that while in prison he had been coerced into the role of a submissive "punk," the perpetually kept and reaped (122). He warns that most of the prison officials demonstrate disgust and hatred towards sexual behavior taking place whether acts are consensual or not. "The uniformed guards," he charges, "who are more likely to come from the same economic class as the prisoners, often have a different set of attitudes from the civilian staff [...] Some display considerable homophobia and engage in private witch-hunts, trying to catch someone 'in the act'" (124).

In *On the Yard*, Lieutenant Olsen is one guard that Chilly does not have to worry about. Olsen is Chilly's immediate prison boss and a man who expresses his indifference towards the safety of the weaker and ostracized prisoners under his – and often Chilly's – provisional care. In exchange for information and fiscal compensation, Olsen is happy to allow the entrepreneurial convict to get away with whatever will be profitable all around.

However, when Chilly's carnal urges overtake his day-to-day business affairs, Olsen promptly covers his own tracks. As razor-edged as anything else in prison, the men's long-standing relationship has always been contingent upon Olsen's satisfaction with the power *he* permits. Even when the self-complacent hack instructs Chilly to slow things down, the convict's response must fall short of an extended middle finger:

...you can't expect a man to straighten up his hand if you don't give him any room to hope in. Now, that's me. You show me where I can make an A on that great report card in the sky, and I'll listen. I won't like it because it's not my game, but I'll listen, and if you can make sense maybe I'll play. But you can't do that. I don't see any light and there aren't any windows you can open for me. But I'm not crying, so why should you care how I amuse myself? (96)

Edward Bunker's habitual criminal in *The Animal Factory* is Earl Copen, a middle-aged convict resembling Braly's Chilly in the respect that Earl too must play both the legitimate keeper and the geared reaper after he unexpectedly meets a striking young convict named Ronald Decker. Moreover, as Decker himself quickly learns, Earl's demeanor depends exclusively on the danger affiliated to his immediate circumstance: "Earl had several vocabularies and selected the one he wanted according to whom he was talking to and what it was about. He could use this soft, twangy voice and exaggerate it to buffoonery – or, he could give off the obscenely vicious radiations of a rabid doberman" (74). The seasoned Earl and his shape-shifting skills are finely tuned and fully honed (undoubtedly, bleak benefits of an utterly impoverished life confined to equally dreary disciplinary facilities). Bunker confirms the suspicion by supplying the sordid history:

Earl Copen was serving his third term in San Quentin, having come the first time when he was nineteen, and he sometimes felt as if he'd been born there. If he'd ever conceived eighteen years ago that he'd be in the same place at thirty-seven, he would have killed himself – or so he thought sometimes. He was as comfortable as it was possible to be, and still he hated it. (19)

Home is where the heart is? Not when home is a 6'x8' cell, for as Bunker reminds us, “although Earl was at home, it was in the way that the jungle animal is at home – cautiously” (25). No stranger to anxiety and comparable to the characters he creates, Edward Bunker has wasted the bulk of his own adult life inside of California's penal system. Resembling Earl specifically, Bunker's youth was initially corrupted behind the hardened – and sometimes padded – walls of faithless makeshift orphanages. The distinct similarities only serve to reinforce the authenticity of the author's “fictional” characters:

Bunker was in and out of foster homes and military schools, from which he began to run away with determination augmented by an obstinate antiauthoritarian streak well developed even at that early age. At eleven he was committed briefly to Camarillo State Hospital for observation, and a year later he was sent to juvenile reform school at Whittier [...] Twenty-nine days into freedom he was caught trying to rob a liquor store and was shot (though not seriously wounded) by the owner. This crime gained Bunker a sentence to the youth prison at Lancaster, even though he was considerably younger than the legally mandated age of eighteen to twenty-five. (Styron x)

Unlike his creator, Earl manages to locate warmth and even love within specific aspects of the prison subculture; however, for all intents and purposes, he remains a

caged magnet being violently sucked into the hereditary transgressions forced on him by America's soiled justice system. It is an undesirable patrimony to say the least, and Bunker's anti-hero has no choice but to accept. As Earl finally erupts on an unnecessarily tormenting keeper: "What're you going to do? Kick my ass? Assholes have been doing that even since I can remember. You can't kill me...and if you do, you can't eat me...it's against the law" (145). In the end, the man and his reputation are spared, though only inasmuch as their reigns over San Quentin's yard and its frequenters remain perfectly intact. Earl's final words in *The Animal Factory* reveal how ludicrous any idea of 'winning' or 'losing' would be: "Aw, fuck it. I run something around here. I'd probably starve to death out there" (202)

In his essay "A Million Jockers, Punks and Queens," Donaldson relays the fact that most men behind bars, especially those serving a long stretch, "are often looking for a companion to do time with" (121). Although such men are likely willing to go to almost any length to snare their respective prey, Earl does not bother with coercion. When his feelings for Decker are questioned, first by the other men and then by Decker himself, the old convict's explanation reveals a snarled yet composed grasp of intimacy – ultimately, the one strategy that Chilly forgets to keep for himself in Braly's *On the Yard*:

Earl looked off, thinking, and then when he spoke the laconic twang and grammatical barbarisms were gone. "All right, I'll explain...as well as I can. There's some kind of homosexuality involved, psychological if not physical...if you want to call it that. It's the need for feelings – to feel – that might be given to a woman. Frankly, if you were ugly, I probably wouldn't be interested. (108)

Despite the fact that the relationship remains conditional upon the boyish appearance of the “fresh fish,” the law of the yard dictates that Earl is well within his right to step in and reap Decker for all that he is worth. The fact that Earl does not exploit Decker’s vulnerability suggests that he is not only honest with his young companion but also extremely generous. Franklin pays tribute to Bunker’s morally-fueled accounts by asserting that they “unconsciously reveal the psychological core of a body of literature by and about criminals stretching all the way back to the origin of the bourgeois novel” (*Victim as Criminal* 266-67). Though Franklin’s claim remains accurate, the historically thin line separating ‘lawmaker’ and ‘lawbreaker’ had been tampered with long before middle-to-upper class contributions left their respective marks. In which case, Bunker’s true purpose in creating a long-standing somewhat privileged character like Earl Copen is to illuminate praetorian ties to the penal officials rather than the prisoners themselves.

After posing as a *newjack* (a rookie guard) in New York’s Sing Sing Prison, undercover journalist Ted Conover maintains that funding becomes thrown away on facilities “that few would argue leaves the people who go through them – inmates and officers alike – worse off in many ways” (318). Through Earl’s interactions with San Quentin’s guards, one receives a pass into the behind-the-scenes show illegitimately controlling the prison system and subculture alike. The relationship between Earl and Lieutenant Seeman, a high-ranking official and the convict’s direct jailhouse supervisor, reveals how two men on different sides of the law mirror one another without necessarily intending to do so. “It was an odd friendship,” writes Bunker, “the former submarine bos’n who epitomized Middle America and the hard-core convict so ravaged by moral confusion that he believed in nothing except personal loyalty” (*Animal Factory* 43).

When Decker becomes a target of harassment by a psychotic sexual-offender named Buck Rowan, both Earl and the Lieutenant involve themselves in the conflict: Earl attacks Rowan before being held responsible for both his stabbing and hospitalization. Seeman – whose name does speak to the man – proceeds to look the other way while Rowan’s IV becomes *mysteriously* spiked. Since the Lieutenant owes Earl old favors, although particularly due to the fact that Rowan has been convicted of a sex crime, the lawman feels entirely comfortable in playing the part of a convict. Accordingly, if Seeman’s peers bother to question him about the tainted IV, he will maintain status quo by denying involvement regardless of culpability. Bunker certainly knows that score and provides a jailhouse staple in *Education of A Felon*: “I didn’t see nuthin’; I didn’t hear nuthin’; I don’t know nuthin’” (263).

What Bunker does know is that given enough time, a state official’s underhanded behavior will be parroted by the convict. Famed Chicano-American prison-artist Jimmy Santiago Baca, the ex-convict-artist responsible for the acclaimed prison-based film, *Bound by Honor: Blood In, Blood Out*, explains why the duplication is inevitable: “Treated like a child by the guards, forced to relinquish every vestige of dignity, searched at whim, cursed, beaten, stripped, deprived of all privacy, he has lived for years in fear; and this takes a terrible toll” (“Past and Present” 362). In *The Animal Factory*, Bunker both indulges and takes solace in the amount of power he himself has bestowed upon Earl. While an inexperienced guard badgers the author’s institutionalized lead about a pass, the ultimate jailhouse chameleon arrives as Earl Copen dons the unlikeliest of caps:

Eighteen years of prison had made him hate authority worse than when he was a rebellious child. And he was unaccustomed to scenes like this. He thought of

having the guard transferred to Lieutenant Seeman's evening shift by talking to the convict clerk of the personnel lieutenant; and then he would put the fool in a gun tower on the Bay for a year. Some guards had been around too long for such things, but this one was a fish and it would be easy [...] He learned that some convicts are more equal than others – that even though a convict couldn't win a direct confrontation with a guard, when that convict had worked as a clerk for a supervisor for years, he had influence. (21-22)

Conover, who remains unaware as to which side his prison-related sympathies rest, conveys that affinities between convicts and keepers are crucial, not just in dictating their levels of comfort, but for reinforcing our faith in humanity. The journalist notes:

Any true progress in the workings of a prison ought to be measurable in changes in the tenor of that relationship. The guard is mainstream society's last representative; the inmate, its most marginal man. The guard, it is thought, wields all the power, but in truth the inmate has power too. How will they meet, with mutual respect or mutual disdain? Will they talk? Will they joke? Will they look each other in the eye?" (207)

Lieutenant Seeman's devotion to Earl within Bunker's analysis of practice, and Lieutenant Olsen's reliance on Chilly within Braly's own piece of work, suggest that both inmates and guards end up subscribing to the same infamous prison code. Entrenched in warped loyalties involving protection, rejection and horror, this enclosed rendering of *omerta* arguably remains the most savage ill-spawned legacy the patriarchs and conglomerates have handed down. Iceberg Slim cannot help but single out the culprits as the two-faced administrators and "politicians" with "talents and morals inferior even to

those of admitted hustlers and con men in the street” (*Naked Soul* 236). The Clinton Corrections Facility – fittingly dubbed – houses a convict thinker named Derrick Corley, a man who contends that the contemporary prison setting molds all relationships forged within.

Corley warns that the “code says mind your own business, defend yourself and those you hang out with, and don’t snitch [...] The manly code says carry yourself like a man, be hard and tough, and don’t show weakness” (106). Jack Henry Abbott’s *In the Belly of the Beast* manages to simplify at least one of jail’s unofficial dictums: “This is the way it is done. If you are a man, you must either kill or turn the tables on anyone propositioning you with threats of force. It is the custom among young prisoners. In so doing, it becomes known to all that you are a man” (94). A timeless inheritance, the unsanctioned rules and distortions of penal living have always followed the same protocol. In *On the Yard*, the interplay between Chilly and the men under his employ reveals that even when not being vocalized, the code remains firmly intact at all times.

The crew’s behavior furthermore reveals the unmistakably thin line that separates a chief and his subordinates. The magnitude of a prison’s hierarchies and mindsets are exposed when one of Chilly’s right-hand men, Society Red, begins to agonize over his designated ‘rank’ after sitting down to break bread with the rest of the troops:

They squatted down on their heels like Yaquis, the open package of rolls in the center. There were eight rolls, two apiece and two left over. This arithmetic was of vital interest to Red. He wasn’t able to enjoy the roll he was eating because he was afraid he was going to have to settle for two rolls while the others ate three apiece. It wasn’t just his hunger, and he was hungry, but each time he sloughed

off with the short end of the goodies his place in the group was clearly defined for that moment – a mascot, or a pet. Under this pressure he remembered an entertainment he had planned, and he took a coverless magazine from his pocket [...] Opening it to a photograph, he passed the magazine to Chilly. (89)

A fake façade of justice itself, Red's fear is compensated for with a wrinkled poker face and a raunchy gift for his master. His alleged reputation (masculinity) gets salvaged only when Chilly's premier enforcer, a mentally deranged monster named Gasolino, shows up and finishes the leftover rolls. Without a spoken word, Chilly's power becomes illuminated by Red's insecurities. Transcending age – Red is at least twenty years older – the characters' respective compositions reveal the most important distinction between their designated roles: Chilly as conditional keeper, and Red as unconditional "mascot" or "pet." Nonetheless, what legitimately sets these men apart remains the disproportionate amount of knowledge distributed between them. Whereas Red can command respect over the newer or unconnected inmates, Chilly reserves the unhampered right to manipulate his subordinate and, if need be, silence him permanently.

The men's differentiation can be located in Foucault's claim: "It is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge" (28).

Red "had been jailing for thirty of his forty-five years and was now a five-time loser" (*On the Yard* 4); Chilly "was born old [...] that's why they tied him down with so much time" (39). Braly's words are deliberate and premeditated; but his descriptors reveal which of the men remains the dupe and which remains the czar. Despite legitimate opportunities,

Red has bypassed an informed life, as the “five-time loser” seeks out a percentage of the yard-profits without taking the time to adopt his own feasible strategies. Ultimately, Red must rely on Chilly for both his employment and protection.

Like Malcolm X, a fictional Chilly learns to reflect upon various works of literature, philosophy, and critical theory. Whereas he has entered a “domain” (Foucault) of knowledge before his inevitable dismantling, those such as Red linger in the corridors of ignorance while at the true beck and call of those possessing the power. Chilly stays true to Foucault’s contention, that the “process” is viewed as the bridge to enlightenment — or, in effect, the pathway to “power-knowledge” (26). Contemporaneously, an underlying “micro-physics of power” assumes the same identity as the habitual chameleon Chilly embodies. In Foucault’s words: “The study of this microphysics presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to merely ‘appropriation’, but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings” (26).

In *The Animal Factory*, Bunker locates the masculine prison code through the relationships Earl shares with the members of his own clique. In light of Earl serving as his gang’s makeshift father figure, familial affinity actually ends up serving as both an asset and a curse. It is a double-edged shank, albeit one that Earl has always been prepared to wield. The weapon unsheathes itself when Earl finds himself trying to calm down T.J. and Bad Eye, two young soldiers unwilling to follow orders unless curiosities about an impending drug shipment are entirely satisfied. Potential repercussions are delicately sidestepped when Earl, who surmises that his young allies have entered their own ‘distortions of masculinity’ into the heated debate, wisely chooses to back off:

Earl fell silent, knowing that although he and Paul had as much influence as anyone over the two young men, it wasn't enough. Conditioned by a lifetime of violence, he was willing to use a knife if he felt threatened, or if it was a question of saving face, but he didn't believe in revenge unless it was necessary to avoid ridicule. He was capable of violence as the first answer to any problem. T.J. was less quick but more relentless; Bad Eye was more explosive but could be reasoned with after the first blaze of temper [...] Earl did care about his friends. (34)

Earl's patience and affection for the young men are fathomable considering that prior to acquiring his own grasp of knowledge/power, he too had been a chameleon-in-training, undeniably loyal while ruled by a quick-draw temper. In Bunker's 1981-novel *Little Boy Blue*, a work recognized by Franklin as "perhaps the finest dramatization of how society turns troubled children into professional criminals" (*Prison Writing* 259), readers are introduced to Alex Hamilton, the spitting image of what Earl must have been twenty-one years earlier. Barely a teenager, Alex is a habitual offender in and out of juvenile homes and detention centers for the entirety of a relatively short life. Bunker decides to set the boy up as an overtly masculinized symbol, clearly portrayed as too young to be a man. Nevertheless, as Braly's Chilly affirms in *On the Yard*, a man's age remains no different than a harsh sentence handed down to a seasoned convict – yet another number. From the beginning, Alex proves to be as miseducated as any other incarcerated American beast entangled in the fray:

Alex Hamilton spent the next six weeks in Juvenile Hall while the wheels of the unseen bureaucracy turned, processing his commitment to the California Youth Authority. This time he got along better because he'd learned how to fight.

Rather, he'd learned how to *cop a Sunday* – strike a sneak, full-force punch and follow the advantage with a volley of feet and fists (155) [...] Even the fact that he was going to reform school, the worst punishment the state possessed, gave him added status in Juvenile Hall. (157)

Boyd alleges that “the tendency to commit crime at a very young age (typically between the early teens and early twenties) is a cultural constant that flows from male biology” (112); whereas Freud’s analysis of adversarial illusions (*On War, Sex and Neurosis*) presents a luxury young captives such as Alex Hamilton cannot afford. The psychoanalyst contends: “Countless people have exchanged their native home for a foreign dwelling-place and made their existence dependent on the conditions of intercourse between friendly nations” (248). Whereas any prison might serve as a “foreign dwelling-place,” “intercourse between friendly nations” has become a limited concept, proven to be more dangerous and constant than a number of American outsiders are prepared to admit.

Do common sense and intuition predict that young habitual offenders are doomed to shape-shift into ominous jailhouse chameleons? Boyd does not argue the notion, reporting that “the greatest risk of re-offending is to be found in a male under the age of 24 with a previous record of crime, poor school performance, [...] who is living in a single-parent family subsisting on social assistance, mixing with delinquents and criminals, and spending most of his leisure time aimlessly” (112). Jackson Katz, a lecturer at American correctional facilities and an expert on youth’s affiliation to gender and violence, contends: “What gets lost in this movement to instill “discipline” into the lives of these young boys by punishing them even more severely for their misdeeds is

that subjecting them to the harsh masculine prison subculture – juvenile or adult – is more, not less, likely to exacerbate the problems that led to their criminal acting out in the first place” (210).

By the end of the novel *Little Boy Blue*, any signs of Alex Hamilton’s previous “rehabilitation” have totally vanished. Unfortunately, the young offender manages to fit both Boyd’s and Katz’s criteria to a tee: a sad, angry, beaten-down, decrepit spectacle, as Bunker’s final glimpse of the ill-fated juvenile unsympathetically conveys:

So he lay in the gutter half under an automobile. The lament of other sirens peaked as they arrived. He could see the dark shapes of onlookers. He was going back to jail. It would be even longer this time. ‘Jesus!’ he muttered, made sick by the thought of the cage. (311)

Quentin Tarantino proudly admits to being influenced by Bunker’s hard-hitting works on the criminal psyche, although particularly by *Little Boy Blue*, the unique novel the director has hailed in many interviews as his favorite first-person account. Inscribed on the 1995-re-release of John Carpenter’s screen-classic *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), an equally affirmative review proudly heralds: “One of Quentin Tarantino’s favorite films.” Withstanding the praise of a celebrity, the ultimate motivations behind Bunker’s novel and Carpenter’s film were each ignited by the unbearable conditions atop America’s urban battlefields. In the film, irreconcilable differences between state authorities and the battlefields’ young activists are intensified after the slaughter of approximately fifteen gang-members in Anderson, California sets the stage:

As Police Commissioner of Los Angeles County I have called this emergency news conference. We have a crisis. The juvenile gang problem is completely out

of control and we are unsure as to what else can be done [...] It is true that law enforcement has been driven to deplorable extremes. (Carpenter)

One especially revealing moment in *Assault on Precinct 13* occurs when one of the convicts receives an elbow to the back of the head by one of his attending officers. The ferocity of the strike causes the shackled prisoner to crumble immediately. “Slipped right out of the chair,” laughs the officer, who commits the act for nothing more than a nod from his peer. A non-fictional victim of such treatment has been Sanyika Shakur, an ex-juvenile-offender-turned-convict-philosopher who eagerly admits to the implications of coping with the prison code’s deadly reign at all levels. In his memoirs entitled *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Member*, Shakur indicts the system for creating an army of young throwaways by reiterating that at any age institutional living equals *repression at its best*. He draws out and personalizes the archetype responsible for rampant machismo gone awry, throwing down the proverbial gauntlet and charging:

So it goes that American youths tried as adults [...] stayed in juvenile hall. The few that trickled into our wardom had simply been thrown away by the system. Because of our youth and political immaturity we would vent our anger, frustration, and hatred of the system – whatever that was – on them. It was totally beyond our overstanding that they were just like us: castaways condemned to an existence outside of the system. Potential allies were torn to shreds like bloody meat in a shark tank. Not one walked out, and few live today unscarred. (139)

By the end of Malcolm Braly’s own life story, *False Starts: A Memoir of San Quentin and Other Prisons*, the conditioned convict regrettably confirms: “I was out, but they still had me. My file, that idiot double of my life, was not destroyed, but held in

limbo in some basement room in State Office Building Number One” (374). In *On the Yard*, Chilly Willy realizes that a healthy dose of affection is a foreign good that even he cannot acquire. His prison yard services end up as makeshift and short-term as the concocted ‘manly’ reputations Braly builds into all of his characters. Chilly remains manipulative because he has no choice, whereas the prison administrators play the same role simply because they can. Justice remains nowhere in sight and divine retribution is not applicable. In the end, Braly’s “criminal professionals are not so different from the middle-class murderers after all – they are united in self-destruction” (Lethem xi).

Bunker opts for a more optimistic approach by concluding his memoirs with the sentiment: “A lotus definitely grows from the mud” (*Education of a Felon* 294). Armed with its own brand of hope, the pledge remains to be seen. Earl Copen hangs on for dear life when his masculinity becomes threatened. Whereas affection and love are achieved without resorting to sexual coercion, the seasoned convict has been extremely fortunate in that he has intercrossed with a young man desperate to connect on a similar wavelength. If Earl and Decker – like Chilly and his cellmate – would have remained in close contact for a longer stretch of time, there is no telling what would have ensued. An animal’s relationship only becomes solidified when Earl, *the* bona fide prison chameleon, proves to be as ‘legitimately corrupt’ as any of the prison-guards or administrators after helping Ron Decker successfully escape from San Quentin without any reverberations.

MASCULINITY AND WOMEN'S PRISON WRITING

Malcolm Braly and Edward Bunker lock and load. Upon firing, their ideas reinforce that contemporary prisoners can be as righteous as they are evil. The authors, moreover, agree with a great number of Neil Boyd's biologically based arguments on man in *The Beast Within*. However, whereas Braly and Bunker clearly indict their respective environments as often as they do their inherent natures, Boyd addresses more "liberal" concerns by reluctantly admitting that science on its own cannot explain everything. This truism certainly applies to any and all thoughtful investigations into variances between men and women, for even Boyd himself will acknowledge that "the academic culture demands discussion and analysis of socially constructed 'masculinities' and 'femininities, rejecting talk of biological influences as regressive or reactionary' (64).

Boyd, nevertheless, distorts science into his justification and sword, wielding them both while dismissing any serious conceptions of aggressiveness in women (thereby demoting an entire gender to one unthreatening entity). "It is one thing," he scoffs, "to ask male and female subjects to administer an electric shock at a distance, to honk, or to make a rude gesture; it is quite another to commit violent acts such as assault, robbery, homicide and sexual assault" (65). Tellingly, as Boyd too becomes a chameleon, the 'masculinist' proceeds to eliminate social constructions from any of *his* analyses and opts instead for solace within "biological influences." Of course, his groundless reluctance to put women's tempers to the test does not necessarily discredit his work on men; however, a refusal to accept 'female masculinities' as breathing entities and equivalents to 'male distorters' disqualifies Boyd as a reliable commentator on women's potentials. He insists:

“It would be unethical to construct experiments in which such extreme behaviours would be triggered, but without such dependent variables in place, any claims about gender equality and the tendency to use physical aggression are without foundation” (Boyd 65). Ask and you shall receive...for there exists no better setting for such an “experiment” than the contemporary American woman’s prison, itself a dark netherworld where “extreme behaviours” are veritable and deadly. For while Malcolm Braly and Edward Bunker were battling distortions of masculinity in their respective realms, notorious women from the 1960s and 1970s such as Angela Davis and Assata Shakur (Joanne Chesimard) had to contend with the same injustices.

As with men’s penal writing, incarcerated women’s narratives are an American legacy that can be traced back to the primary slave narratives. Franklin specifically lauds 1861’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Linda Brent, deeming the autobiography a true asset to American literature (*Victim as Criminal* 24). In the early 1920s, two other ‘kept’ women, Agnes Smedley and Kate Richards O’Hare, pursued the same trends as Jack London after indicting their respective institutions’ keepers, codes and conditions. Smedley, who “was arrested in 1918 by U.S. government agents who brutally interrogated her for several days (Franklin *Prison Writing* 62), and O’Hare, who was “convicted of violating the Espionage Act of 1917,” had each maintained socialist ties while vehemently objecting to America’s involvement in World War I (74).

Genders notwithstanding, Agnes Smedley and Kate Richards O’Hare were manhandled and presumably tagged ‘public enemies,’ undeniable precursors of what would occur forty years later when female activists protested America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Verified by the all-out exclusion of women and their writings from

both of Franklin's anthologies (as well as Chevigny's one collection), the three decades proceeding World War I had to accept the suppression of literary works by caged females. However, as the 1950s metamorphosed into the 1960s, metaphorical shackles would unclamp and mindsets – as the effects of Malcolm X's autobiography reaffirm – would begin to change. As for Boyd's contention, that males "have had much more difficulty coping with the cultural changes of the late 1960s and early 1970s" (151), the well-documented criminal charges brought against notable female activists by the likes of Angela Davis and Assata Shakur unquestionably dictate otherwise.

In *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, the former writes: "I had just been captured; a trial awaited me in California on the charges of murder, kidnapping and conspiracy. A conviction on any one of these charges could mean death in the gas chamber" (29). In *Assata: An Autobiography*, the latter similarly conveys: "I am a Black revolutionary woman, and because of this I have been charged with and accused of every alleged crime in which a woman was believed to have participated. The alleged crimes in which only men were supposedly involved, I have been accused of planning" (207).

Indeed, anyone who believes that masculinities and their affiliated hierarchies exist solely within men and their institutions has either forgotten or ignored what Sabo, Kupers and London have already conveyed – that relationships between the genders in patriarchal institutions remain hierarchical. "Male hierarchies abound, and their day-to-day operations makes prison life work" (8). In "Gender and the Politics of Punishment," Sabo, Kupers and London (a sociologist, psychiatrist, and convict) explain that while structure and not anatomy dictates the behaviours prevailing behind bars, "hierarchies stretch well beyond prison walls to include city officials, county executives, state

governors, and the federal government” (8). Angela Davis structures her own work accordingly. In a prison-set incident from her autobiography, she conveys precisely what every imprisoned memoir divulges, a dismal life that is further obscured by degradation:

The entire jail was shrouded in darkness when I finally reached the cell in 4b. It was no more than four and a half feet wide. The only furnishings were an iron cot bolted to the floor and a seatless toilet at the foot of the bed [...] I didn’t want to be paranoid, but it was better to be too distrustful than not cautious enough. I was familiar with jailhouse “suicides” in California. (29)

During the time of her incarceration, very “little had been written on enslaved black women from a feminist perspective” (James 12). Although Davis’s account of an unsanitary “seatless toilet” scours straight to the truth, Assata Shakur’s own memoirs (that upon its release would sell “ten thousand copies [...] in the first month alone” (Franklin *Prison Writing* 201)), only reinforce the “prison industrial complex” and its unisexual mentality. Fruitlessly seeking out answers from one of the female guards, Assata illustrates that playground rules never change even when the players’ genders do:

“When are you going to unlock me and let me go out there?” I asked, motioning to the other women. The guard looked surprised.

“I don’t know. You’ll have to ask the warden.”

“Well, when can I see the warden?” I pushed.

“I don’t know.”

“Well, why am I being locked in here? Why can’t I go out there with the other women?”

“I don’t know.”

I saw it was useless. “Would you please tell the warden or the sheriff that I would like to see him?” I requested.

The guard locked the door and was gone. (203)

Whereas Davis and Shakur have been specifically recognized for theoretically informed pieces of non-fiction, a solid handful of American women prison-writers showcased in the 1960s and 1970s have not only contributed self-portraits, but prose and poetry. Chevigny, a Soros Senior Justice Fellow and long-time supporter of the Pen American Center, claims that works by institutionalized women in the twentieth-century reiterate that distortions of masculinity run rampant anywhere and everywhere they choose. Proving that eloquence can indeed find a voice within the most remote of circumstances (xxv), Chevigny’s message moreover serves as a cruel *déjà vu* by reinforcing a fact that most Americans already know: chameleons remain alive, well and breeding within the walls of women’s correctional facilities.

Convict#59900, Judee Norton, would spend the 1970s behind the barbed-wire fences of the Arizona State Prison in Perryville after shouldering a “legacy of addiction, poverty, low self-esteem, and a general sense of bewilderment about the business of living” (Chevigny 341). In her poem “Arrival,” distortions of masculinity are abound when a rendition of Freud’s phallic female presents itself in the caged artist’s delineation: “wide leather belt/ snug about my waist/ chains dangling seductively/ between my legs/ I am captured/ but not subdued” (22). Abiding by the model of the female equivalent to the ‘Oedipus Complex’ (renamed the ‘Electra Complex’ by Jung), Norton’s narrator’s assimilation has been achieved through a symbolic identification with the father figure (patriarch; reapers) and a symbolic rejection of the mother figure (nurturer; keeper).

To clarify this adaptation, one turns to Freud's observations on the female Oedipus Complex. He concludes: "Analysis very often shows that a little girl, after she has had to relinquish her father as a love-object, will bring her masculinity into prominence and identify herself with her father (that is, with the object which has been lost), instead of with her mother. This will clearly depend on whether the masculinity in her disposition – whatever that may consist in – is strong enough" (*The Ego and The Id* 28). "Likewise," reports renowned analyst Calvin S. Hall, "her identification with the father compensates to some extent for the missing genitals and preserves the cathexis for the mother. The strength and success of these identifications influence the nature of her attachments, hostilities, and the degree of masculinity and femininity in later life" (112).

Although in time Freud would rethink much of what he had originally declared on women, the fact remains that despite any theoretic renegotiations his core comprehension "of sexual development in humans was always predominantly phallic, or penis-centered" (Knowles 107). Norton's phallic female in "Arrival" resurrects the female Oedipal Complex by transforming it into a contemporary Caged Electra Complex. After substituting Norton's prisoner for Freud's "little girl," the patriarchal reaper for "her father," and the nurturing rehabilitative keeper (culture, education, faith) for "her mother," the stage is set: after abandoning patriarchal rule out in society, the convict "will bring her masculinity into prominence" and choose to embrace these 'distortions' while foolishly rejecting admittedly less-accessible rehabilitative outlets (nurturers). Consequently, the image of the phallic female in "Arrival" successfully manifests the result of siding with the patriarchal system and its stagnant, unlawful methodologies.

While Norton's narrator locks away her own traces of femininity – "I hold the small and sacred part of me close/ like a royal flush/ my poker face" (22) – she allows her own adaptation of the masculine model to appease her reapers while camouflaging her true self. Alas, Norton's phallic female attempts to reach out and connect with all jailhouse chameleons as she closes her eyes and reaffirms: "I am light and air and fire/ I slip through their clutching fingers/ like the night/ even as they grasp my puny wrist/ of simple bone/ and blood/ and flesh/ body here/spirit there/ I/ am still/ free" (22-23).

Susan Rosenberg's prison-based poetry and prose from the 1960s and beyond reaffirm that prison identities are indeed on the move, in and out of shadows and nightmares, quicker and sharper than bullets. In *Doing Time*, Chevigny remains true to Franklin's layout in *The Victim as Criminal and Artist* as she traces Rosenberg's criminal past: "Targeted by the FBI for her support of the Black Liberation Army, she went underground [...] was convicted of possession of weapons and explosives and sentenced to fifty-eight years" (Chevigny 342). In the footsteps of Malcolm Braly and Edward Bunker, Rosenberg herself would become a begrudging authority on the convicts, guards and administrators who seek out power and control not merely to survive, but in order to escape the dangerously blinding pretenses that stare them in the face day in and day out.

In the hard-hitting prison-story "Lee's Time," Rosenberg puts knowledge to work by presenting a character named Jane, a woman who despite being in her thirties has been inside for as long as the story's narrator (Lee) can remember. Jane, who is white, has been engaging in sexual activity with one of the institution's black guards, a man she will later press charges against despite the fact that their relationship has been consensual. Lee's reflections on the prohibited interaction reveals both her disapproval and the

potential explosiveness of the situation, as “the prisoners are women and the issue is the highly charged one of interracial sexual contact between a prisoner and a corrections officer” (Chevigny 176). Situated just one cell over from Jane, Lee illustrates that her neighbor’s mix of carnal urge and strategy has the potential to destroy *everyone* involved:

Jane was a strange one. She threw herself at any man who walked in the door, but night after night woke up screaming from some internal terror. Ain’t this a bitch, I thought. I did not want to hear her fucking Wilson. I did not want to be there.

Somebody would peep it and the fallout would be heavy. I closed my mind and drifted. After you do time for a while, you learn how to build your own wall. You learn to hear nothing and show nothing. (Rosenberg 206)

There appears to be as much at work in this passage as there is at stake. Lee’s thoughts on the inter-lawful relationship recognize how integral a role surveillance plays as prison’s ultimate keeper. Lee’s assumption, that the sex between Jane and Wilson will undoubtedly be observed and subsequently reported, strongly suggests that not knowing when or if you are under surveillance proves to be one of the hardest things to accept about prison. Systematic intentions become abundantly clear after siding with one of Foucault’s most important notifications in *Discipline and Punish* – that we have glided straight into a disciplinary culture (308) “in which the subject is not merely placed in relation to an external power that attempts to dominate and repress it, but, instead, becomes a form of the operation of that power, the point where the dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable, normal and abnormal behavior operates and is policed” (Fuery and Mansfield 181).

Rosenberg, who has spent over ten years of a double-life-sentence in isolation (Chevigny 342), utilizes her time and writing as implements of war against her captors while metamorphosing words and truths into her own salvation. In a candid interview with Chevigny, Rosenberg explains that wearing multiple identities has helped her sustain three decades worth of hardships by patriarchal reapers. “I watch and listen and struggle with what I see in order to write about it,” she avows. “This forces me to remain conscious of the suffering around me and to resist getting numb to it” (342).

The systematic misdirection of the 1960s and 1970s would effortlessly pave a path into the American penal subcultures of the 1980s and 1990s. In turn, Rosenberg’s thoughts on prohibited acts of sexual contact between convicts and guards have proven to be a justifiably never-ending issue and has been followed up by countless first-hand accounts by equally enraged (and ensnared) women. One such prisoner has been Patricia McConnel, whose collection of semi-fictional stories from 1989 entitled *Sing Soft, Sing Loud* truly cuts to the quick. In a moment of contemplation, McConnel’s narrator weighs the pros and cons of sporting “jailface,” an undaunted guise and attitude perfected by the institutionalized chameleon – a look that simultaneously manages to warn and protect. “Jailface ain’t necessarily a bad thing to have,” she claims, “‘cause the minute a screw knows you’re scared or weak she’s got the upper hand, and she jumps on you with both feet and don’t let up ‘til she’s had her satisfaction” (297).

The discernible differences between men and women’s prison writing are peripheral; in the end, distortions of masculinity, whether labeled “jailface” or anything else, surface to the top of each genders’ works and respective characters. Yet another confined writer, whose contributions during the 1980s and 1990s radiate with authenticity

even today, is Kim Wozencraft, who initially dedicated her life to defending the law and as a result has been battling patriarchal evils on both sides ever since. “Rather than allowing her to attend the police academy,” writes Franklin, “her department assigned her to work as an undercover narcotics agent. Like many narcs, Wozencraft herself became an addict while conducting a long-term investigation in the drug underworld” (*Prison Writing* 306). Sent to the Federal Correctional Institution in Lexington, Kentucky upon her indictment, the college-educated all-American fallen-from-grace had already perfected her own version of McConnel’s “jailface” while under the tutelage and employ of the Dallas Police Department.

Although Wozencraft remains best known for *Rush* (the semi-autobiographical novel from 1990 based on her time as an addicted undercover agent), her lesser known fictionalized work from 1993, *Notes from the Country Club*, recounts harrowing incidents from within the walls of the Forth Worth Federal Corrections Institution. Stocked with the dangerous characters we have grown to simultaneously love, hate, and mistrust, once again authenticity prevails as the protagonist’s description of penal living in the facility’s psychiatric ward echoes every other American inmates’ unfavorable exposé:

Within the walls of my room are a stainless steel locker, a stainless steel sink-toilet combination and two beds. All of these are numbered. The gray metal stand next to my bed has an engraved aluminum plate attached to its left rear leg. Government issue, therefore numbered and periodically accounted for. There is criss-cross green wire over the window, which looks out onto a courtyard formed on three sides by the red brick walls of the hospital. The fourth is a thick wall of the same brick topped off with chain link and concertina wire. Nina is fond of

saying that it looks like a goddam war zone around here. (313)

Ironically, as a result of being an officer of the law, Kim Wozencraft would receive a state-sanctioned (chameleon's) training in order to understand the habitual criminals she had been paid to put away. As a result of being an addict breaking the law, Wozencraft would then receive a second installment of state-sanctioned training in order to survive as a criminal behind bars. As the pendulum swings, if any "naked soul" comprehends both the importance and implications of donning perpetual distortions of masculinity in an institutional setting, sadly, it must be her.

In *Notes from the Country Club*, Wozencraft moreover proves that in any capitalistic society, even a state's mentally deranged prisoners have to earn their keep. The novel's confined hero, Cynthia Mitchell, has been accused of killing her husband after years of enduring both his mental and physical abuse. The post-traumatic stress affiliated to the situation has not even begun to sink in, however, a month into her confinement the prison industry has already placed Cynthia hard at work. "We are employed by Federal Prison Industries, Inc. (trade name UNICOR)," she reports, "a 'wholly owned, self-supporting Government corporation' that 'maintains 80 industrial operations in 37 institutions, providing goods and services for sale to Federal Agencies'" (311). In *The-Prison-Industrial-Complex*, Angela Davis probes the mentalities of money-hungry administrators and legislators, who, as the numbers themselves indicate, have increased profits for their respective states by manipulating women into the same prison-house labor formerly reserved for male prisoners alone.

Davis asserts that the iniquitous cycles these American administrators and legislators make women take part in are nothing short of criminal offenses themselves. In

her lecture at Colorado College, she specifically identifies how a slanted justice system “targets women” to be American penitentiaries’ next wave of cash cows. Virtually all minority groups have been caught within the deep pockets of America’s grand prison vortex; therefore, the irate feminist directly interrogates bureaucratic intentions before inevitably predicting what lies in store for the majority of impoverished women. As she attempts to hold back her disappointment and rage, Davis asks and answers for herself:

Where are they going to find a job? And if they have children, how are they going to pay for childcare in order to guarantee the conditions which will allow them to work? So what’s going to happen with so many of these women? Well, many of them are going to have to look for alternative modes of survival since they can no longer depend on welfare. And they are going to be lured into the drug economy and the economy in sexual services, which are two of the major alternative economies available to people who are not allowed to participate in the mainstream economy; and that’s going to send them straight into the Prison Industrial Complex. So, if things do not change, we will be seeing even larger number of women going into the prison system. (Track 08)

Davis’s outspoken critiques of the prison complex prove that the patriarchal structure, and its ultra-masculine hierarchical attitudes, have ignored conventional means for rehabilitation and have chosen to follow where the money goes. “Monday through Friday,” drones Wozencraft’s leading lady, “from nine to eleven A.M. and again from noon to four P.M., I think of myself not as a prisoner or a lunatic, but as an employee of the United States” (311). At this stage of an apparent ‘game,’ the systematic reapers simply cannot *afford* to legitimize the penal business, or in fact *treat* habitual offenders,

and shall therefore continue to handle inmates and citizens as nothing more than potential profits- and prisoners-in-waiting. Indeed, apparent inconveniences such as ‘rehabilitation’ or ‘justice’ have become as non-existent as our collectively impotent attempts to deter cutthroat rule.

In the end, the knowing words of none other than a prison writer reinforce the heart of the matter by excluding systematic sugar coating: “Repression is not change,” echoes Abu-Jamal. “It’s the same old stuff” (*B-Block Days and Nightmares* 354). Criminality immediately becomes a relative entity after watching the mimetic interactions between prison’s convicts and guards, not knowing who will strike first or how the other side will respond. As suspected, Chevigny’s research on American women’s prison writing unmask all of the structured ills that only engrained ultra-masculine states of mind can conjure. Concerning masculinity’s affiliation to prisoner/guard sexual interactions, law-professor Nancy Levit’s gender-sensitive investigation into manliness and penal code clarifies one inherent truth about institutionalized roles. The Professor openly distrusts self-control levels of male penal officers by contending that:

Simmering under the surface are assumptions about the motivations of the viewer: Female guards would not view men as sex objects, but male guards might be inclined to lascivious leering. The tacit assumption is that male guards would perform their jobs with malevolent motives, whereas female guards are more likely to gaze benignly. [...] Again, the cultural assumptions about characteristic features of males – men are invulnerable, autonomous, and they can build their own walls – are reflected in legal doctrines determining their rights. (97)

Sadly, and for these precise reasons, ‘distortions of masculinity’ easily endure as the Western world’s foremost patrimonial legacy while showing no visible signs of ending its own damaging cycle. Chevigny reports that “physical violence by staff and guards against women prisoners is rising and [...] public contempt for poor female prisoners [...] apparently legitimized by their more severe sentences, sanctions, in the minds of their keepers, more brutal treatment. The incidence of sexual violence and molestation by corrections officers has also increased, drawing human rights protests” (xvii). Nothing short of “fake façade[s] of justice” (Iceberg Slim) themselves, these allocated infractions eventually become the answers to one basic, yet obligatory question:

Why does the onslaught of reality-based narratives conceived within the tainted wombs of the American Justice System continue to indict at such a vehement pace?

TODAY'S KEEPERS AND REAPERS

Although every individual writer maintains his or her own personal vendettas, ask Sister Helen Prejean and she will candidly list the reasons why caged artists express themselves. “To bear witness,” she explains, “to stay sane, to keep their heart pumping, to not be eaten up by rage or despair, to figure out how they got there, or to discover what truly matters – these are just some of them” (xii). In *The Victim as Criminal and Artist*, Franklin correspondingly asserts: “Many of these authors were civil-rights workers, antiwar activists, and revolutionaries imprisoned for their political crimes. But many more were common criminals – burglars, armed robbers, drug addicts, rapists, pimps, prostitutes – who became authors because of what they learned while in prison” (181).

Chameleons, keepers, reapers...all of us? In *Prison Writing in 20th Century America*, Franklin encapsulates the collective message of imprisoned souls by deeming their works manifestations of “the protean nature of human beings that can turn almost any object into either an instrument of death or a symbol of love” (234). Separating prison writers from their fictionalized accounts has not only proven to be impossible, it has proven to be detrimental. Thus, as Sir John Gelfund once put forth that “poetry is truth dwelling in beauty,” prison writing, for all intents and purposes, must be recognized as naked truth locked inside despair.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, institutionalized keepers and reapers, formerly embodied by those characters depicted within the contemporary prison narrative, would change once again – this time, from ‘individual characters’ into ‘individual issues.’ Whereas Malcolm Braly’s Chilly Willy and Edward Bunker’s Earl Copen might have been in charge of San Quentin’s fictional penal subcultures, two

factual chameleons, ‘AIDS’ and ‘mental health,’ direct many of the mindsets working within American prisons today. In her collection *Inside Rikers: Stories from the World’s Largest Penal Colony*, Jennifer Wynn, who appropriately refers to AIDS as ‘The Monster,’ captures the despair currently being experienced by an ever expanding number of infected convicts, a percentage that as of 1999 “(0.60%) was five times the rate in the U.S general population (0.12%)” (*HIV in Prisons and Jails*). In a vignette featuring a middle-aged convict who has contracted AIDS after years of sharing needles, Wynn proceeds to paint the sad reality for so many incarcerated bodies:

All eyes were on Charlie, but he had no dreams to present. That morning he had learned that he was HIV-positive. He told the group he didn’t know how he would find a foothold in society once he was released [...] “I am an outcast four times over,” he said. “Ex-con, ex-junkie, black and HIV-positive. I’d be lyin’ if I told you I had any dreams” [...] Silence. Open mouths. Staring at the floor. I prayed someone would reach out to him. (17)

Although gay and lesbian prison writers are by no means the exclusive victims of AIDS behind bars, literary works by homosexual convicts have always been particularly tuned in to such issues. Consequently, these men and women receive even more hostility at the hands of their watchers for detailing the burdens that no straight inmate’s works can fathom. “For instance,” elaborates Sabo, Kupers and London, “some masculinities may be subordinate to hegemonic masculinity (for example, gay, bisexual, or transgendered men)” (5). In the 1960s and 1970s, Paul Mariah, the ex-convict poet and founder of *ManRoot Magazine*, “continually struggled for recognition of the rights of both gays and prisoners” (Franklin *Prison Writing* 234). Whereas many of the characters

in his poems withstand the very same ‘miseducation’ that has been handed down to heterosexual prisoners – as demonstrated in Mariah’s poem “Shakedown & More” from 1971 – there are other players who fall victim to the phallic tools amorally instituted and implemented by the prison heads.

Such a character appears in Mariah’s 1970-ode entitled “Quarry/Rock: A Reality Poem in the Tradition of Genet.” The imprisoned victim’s name is Stevie, a man who pays for the ignorance and insecurities forced on him by those ironically in charge of his well being. Ultimately, their relentless brutality endures for those same motives that had once driven Bentham’s Panopticon – to discipline, transform, and penetrate an environment’s ‘dissatisfied’ inhabitants, in this case, American prisons’ homosexual populations. Mariah’s narrator recalls the horrors perpetrated upon Stevie after guards proceed to torture and sodomize him for being in love with another man. Holding nothing back, Mariah’s narrator unleashes a shocking image of degradation and humiliation by incessantly chanting:

The broom became you.

The broom became the strength of you.

The broom became the anal worship of you.

The broom became the regular stroke of you.

The broom became the reality of you (235)

Immediately conjured are images of a phallic sword, specifically, Judee Norton’s makeshift phallic female with dangling steel between her legs. Norton’s chain has become Mariah’s broom; and while both are indeed weapons, one remains symbolic and the other brutal. ‘Fictional’ correctional officers treat Stevie as though he has somehow

become subhuman after they learn of his sexual preferences while ‘distortions of masculinity’ reign supreme once again. For as Sabo, Kupers and London are quick to maintain: “...prison culture breathes masculine toughness and insensitivity, and it impunges softness, caring, and femininity. Men do ‘hard time’ in prisons, not ‘soft time’” (7). After the actions of wielding officials, it become abundantly clear that incarcerated homosexuality can only equal weakness, as it runs contrary to archaic versions of masculinity. Incidentally, considering Neil Boyd’s investigation into man’s nature does not even *mention* the words “homosexual” and “gay,” perhaps these notions are not as antiquated as we would like them to be.

Mariah’s Stevie remains trapped in an enclosed world where old-fashioned hierarchies dominate. Whether systematic abuse will ever be paid back in full remains an enigma. In his hard-hitting autobiographical-essay “Deliberate Indifference,” the HIV-Positive convict-artist O’Neil Stough, who “passed away in January 2000 following his release only two months before, after serving over twenty-five years in Hawaii and Arizona state prisons” (Sabo, Kupers and London 272), echoes Mariah’s exact claims from twenty years prior. In one passage, Stough specifically recalls a personal attempt to reach out to an unpopular convict named Roland Dotson, a man unwilling to accept the fact that he has contracted ‘the Monster’. Although eager to make Dotson accept his fate, Stough nevertheless sympathizes after learning that stronger habitual criminals and prison-yard honchos have been beating and extorting the infected man upon learning that he has tested HIV Positive. No stranger himself to that brand of hostility, Stough recalls:

Besides his vulnerable stature, the main reason he’s been fair game for such mistreatment was because he had AIDS, and there were some wild rumors as to

how he got it. Inside, like outside, there is quite a bit of prejudice against those who have HIV. And, also like outside, the emphasis is on how the person may have contracted it. The consensus is that if a person acquired it via a blood transfusion or birth, then it's a sad and awful tragedy. In all other cases, however, it's seen as getting what they deserve. [...] "I'm having some troubles with Medical," he hesitantly began as we headed around the track. He was very nervous, and I could tell he was being selective in his choice of words. (184)

Stough argues that the appearance of a situation supersedes the actuality of a situation, a fact that applies to all prisoners and a statistic often accompanied by death or more unimaginable outcomes. This certainly includes Stevie's brutal rape in "Quarry/Rock: A Reality Poem in the Tradition of Genet," a defilement that ultimately leads to the prisoner's dissolution – "he was visited by red horror/ he was visited by red horror/ not withstanding, not waking" (235). And while Stough's recollections of Roland Dotson may not entail the vivid or frightening images oozing from Mariah's 'in-your-face' poetry, they do cleverly reveal the prison officials' culpability regarding the ill treatment of AIDS-infected convicts.

Prison administrators do not penetrate Dotson with a broom. However, they certainly pierce him with medical neglect and indifference – cutting costs, and in the process, procuring more funding for the state. Stough informs the 'proper' authorities that Dotson has been continually abused, for while he primarily contends with AIDS as a perpetual keeper and reaper, the convict must moreover deal with spiteful prisoners and biased guards duplicating the exact same treatments. Stough places himself at risk for

systematic retribution – as neither side enjoys being ‘snitched’ on – by bravely confirming:

It has come to my attention that Roland Dotson-377440 is receiving less than adequate medical care. He was diagnosed with HIV five years ago. In recent months he has experienced consistent weight loss, body aches, chills and fevers. He specifically requested supplemental food [...] vitamins and extra blankets to combat the bitter cold. These are quite reasonable requests in my view. The quality and quantity of regular food provided is insufficient for one with such a condition as Mr. Dotson. Obviously maintaining his body strength is very important. Likewise, blankets for warmth to guard against cold or flu is essential to his health. The medical department, specifically Dr. Bernard Sorenson, denied all of these requests and in my view exhibited a deliberate indifference toward the legitimate health needs of Mr. Dotson. (186)

“Deliberate Indifference” serves as an appropriate title and indictment for Stough’s autobiographical-sketch, as it embodies everything wrong with the American Justice System from yesterday, today, and undoubtedly tomorrow. However, just as Stough’s title accurately captures the essence of American double standards, the title of penal historian Mark E. Kann’s essay, “Penitence for the Privileged,” certainly provides some insight as to why patriarchal mentalities sustain.

Dr. Bernard Sorenson, who Stough immediately discredits due to his blatant maltreatment of AIDS patients, becomes no different than any perpetually institutionalized convict character. Thereby staying true to the argument that whether nurturing the captor or imitating the captive, one must always be prepared to act as a

chameleon in either role. Malcolm Braly's Chilly Willy and Edward Bunker's Earl Copen perform these oddly related tasks by literally monopolizing the prison economy while metaphorically freeing their intimate companions. Dr. Sorenson might theoretically be the AIDS patient's state-sanctioned keeper; however, behind-the-scenes corner cutting proves him to be nothing more than a government-groomed reaper. Once again, 'deliberate indifference' metamorphoses into 'deliberate illegality,' while a hypocritical 'Hippocratic Oath' takes on a completely neoteric meaning.

In his 1998-anthology of prison writers, Franklin elects to include predominantly poetry and prose. However, two non-fictional essays serve as exceptions to this unofficial rule – the first, being Robert Beck's *The Naked Soul of Iceberg Slim*, and the second, Dannie Martin's highly-acclaimed piece "AIDS: The View from a Prison Cell." Martin, aka "Red Hog," has been a habitual criminal and institutional ward for more than three decades. While his articles, stories and novels have won respect from fellow activists, journalists and inmates, Martin's account of incarcerated AIDS treatment "swiftly brought down upon him punitive sanctions authorized by Title 28 of the Code of Federal Regulations Section 540.20 (b): 'The inmate may not receive compensation or anything of value for correspondence with the news media'" (337).

Franklin elaborates on Title 28 by noting how "New York State led the way in mounting a legislative attack on prison writings with its 1977 "Son of Sam" law. Almost every state soon followed in passing similar laws making it illegal for convict authors to collect money from their writings" (*Prison Writing* 14). Although money had never been the motive behind Martin's AIDS commentary, he would violate federal regulations and as a result be "thrown in the hole, deprived of his writing materials, and then transferred

to a remote prison in the Arizona desert” (*Prison Writing* 337). Whereas legal actions by government officials would ensure that Martin did not profit monetarily, they could not ebb the tremendous wealth of information that subsequently informed millions of American citizens about the highly charged issue of AIDS behind bars. Specifically, the lack of medical treatment for infected prisoners and onslaught of systematic abuses.

Martin’s essay chronicles two infected patients from California’s Lompoc Correctional Facility, a duo of middle-aged sexually active homosexual convicts referred to as ‘Honey Bear’ and ‘The Greek.’ That each man before his respective death and prison sentence had been a drug addict prone to sharing needles, certainly only increased the probability of contracting the disease. Whereas works by theorists such as Foucault or scientists such as Boyd have proven that ‘conflict’ and ‘environment’ remain dangerously inseparable, ‘health’ can certainly be substituted for the former and the same rules will apply. “The prison system,” agrees Carol Polych, an activist and registered nurse, “acts as a whirlpool of risk for many men who, upon arrest, reside in structurally disadvantaged communities, where poverty, unemployment, and racial oppression already yield high rates of tuberculosis (TB), hepatitis, and HIV/AIDS. Because of unhealthy prison conditions, they are yet again exposed to heightened risk for illness” (173).

Honey Bear has been described by Martin as “one of the most voracious homosexuals in the federal prison system” (338), while “The Greek’s sexual shenanigans would go a good way toward filling a book the size of a Sears Roebuck catalog” (339). By no means does Martin excuse the arguably frivolous nature of the men’s actions; however, he does take extreme issue with the contemptibly small number of options made available to such individuals while they are behind bars. Considering the fact that

“all the lies have been told and all the jokes have been heard” (340), Martin proceeds to provide the backstage realities of a perpetual horror, itself the farthest thing possible from a laughing matter. He familiarizes his audience with the fact that bureaucratic practice freely revokes human life by pessimistically penning the following certainty:

It isn't likely that the canteen will soon be selling condoms for safe sex or alcohol to sterilize needles. The only safe sex and drugs in prison will be no sex and no drugs, and so far no one who indulges in either is considering that option. The attitude in here seems to be that life goes on for the living and that the chances of contracting AIDS are about the same as being hit by gunfire during the commission of a felony or dying of an overdose. So what? (340)

Dr. Terry Kupers, who beyond serving as a contributing editor of the *Prison Masculinities* anthology has been recognized as one of America's foremost forensic psychiatrists, picks up on Martin's thesis from 1986. Kupers demonstrates that, at least in regards to AIDS and patriarchal attitudes, the American Justice System has been stuck in a time warp. In his 1999-work *Prison Madness*, he unintentionally mirrors precisely what Martin had proposed fifteen years earlier by asserting: “Most states refuse to provide condoms to prisoners, as though supplying condoms would signal support for sexual activities. And educational programs, which have proved very effective at decreasing high-risk sexual behaviors on the outside, are not a priority in most departments of corrections” (152). While Kupers has shared his viewpoints on an infinite amount of physically related health concerns, his area of direct expertise concerns yet another timeless issue hard at work behind bars – the pressing mental health crisis.

Kupers reports that a “deinstitutionalization” of the public mental health system “has put an unprecedented number of Americans with major psychiatric problems in the criminal justice system” (*Prison Madness* xv). Perhaps history’s most relentless and antiquated jailhouse chameleon, ‘mental illness’ has furthermore been the most depicted and delineated issue prison writing has seized. Yet another of Dannie Martin’s acclaimed essays, “A Prescription for Torture,” concludes by stating that prison officials have been awarded with the state-sanctioned right to “chemically sedate [prisoners] but they will be pulled off those drugs before release, and their rebound – not to mention their hatred and lust for revenge – will be acted out in the arena of unsuspecting citizens. One can only hope they don’t get their hands on a weapon before entering a convenience store late at night” (344).

According to the Bureau of Justice, approximately one in ten inmates is on “psychotropic medications” while one in eight remains either in “therapy or counseling” (Mental Health Treatment in State Prisons, 2000). “A Prescription for Torture,” written by Martin in 1990, illustrates how the American system consistently decides on treatments that appear to be more concerned with “preserving zombies” rather than making true reparations. While the mental health debacle certainly supersedes AIDS (and many other health issues) by a few million years, as recently as the 1960s and 1970s, this hazardous topic was being addressed by relevant convict authors whose literary works continue to quietly scream out for mass reformation. Alas, to authentically comprehend the current status of mental illness behind bars, we must turn back to a somewhat relevant and applicable beginning. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Malcolm Braly’s *On the Yard* and Edward Bunker’s *The Animal Factory* possess mentally disturbed convict-

characters who not merely exist as threats to themselves, but to all of the institutionalized mortals within close proximity.

In *On the Yard*, mental illness plays both ‘keeper’ and ‘reaper’ not to the habitual Chilly Willy, but instead to a nineteen year-old offender named Sheldon Wilson (who has been nicknamed Stick since “he was over six-foot-three and under one hundred and sixty pounds” (Braly 16)). While his deluded actions and mentality lead to irreparable physical damages to San Quentin by the end of the novel, Stick would be classified ‘mentally deranged’ long before entering prison. After informing readers that the youngster once vandalized school property, Braly demonstrates how warning signs evolve into trouble while ‘deliberate indifference’ prevails as the patriarchal status quo. He writes: “Following this incident, a school psychologist characterized him as “seriously disturbed” and recommended treatment in an institutional setting, which Stick knew in plain words meant he should be stashed in some nut house, and, in his own phrase, he cooled it. He became quiet, withdrawn, and normal enough if one ignored the large swastikas on the cover of his binder” (16-17).

Sadly, an academic institution disregards the situation by turning an evident blind eye. After duping school officials by donning a chameleon’s guise with very little effort, Stick graduates – not from academia but into a true life of crime, as he is not quite twenty and already off to a long stretch at one of California’s most dangerous correctional facilities. In the midst of prison orientation, Stick refuses to have his naked body probed by any of the Lieutenants. As a result, officers proceed to drag him off and throw the youngster into an isolation chamber. “I think that boy’s sick,” comments one of the prisoners as they drag him off. “He’s subject to be considerably sicker before he gets

out,” replies another (36). With nothing but dangerous time on his hands, Stick’s inevitable delusions arrive and proceed to best him, as contrived details from the first of many jailhouse dreams foreshadow his impending evils and escape:

After a while his immediate awareness began to blur and he felt better. He sensed he was growing stronger and stronger and the indication of his increasing strength was the poised glow of well-being in the pit of his stomach. [...] He stood up and, moving with a polished coolness suggestive of the floating grace of an athlete caught on slow-motion film, he broke the metal door from its frame, crumbling it as if it were cardboard, and stepped into the corridor. A bull came running towards him, clearly running from pure reflex. The stunned amazement in his eyes was delicious. Deftly Stick swooped and seizing the officer by the ankle he spun around in a half-circle and pitched him the length of the corridor. His scream printed itself in Stick’s mind as EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE – the first E an enormous yellow capital which funneled off, smaller and smaller, until the final E vanished in a tiny star at the point of impact. A second officer sat at a metal desk. He was swooning with terror. (63-64)

‘Distortions of masculinity’ run rampant in this fantasy while the young man’s name – ‘Stick’ – serves as a direct reference to male genitals. The clear aggression locatable within his delusional account suggests that “testosterone is strongly implicated in the excess of male sexuality and [...] violence” (Boyd 119). If one opts to embrace a Freudian analysis of Stick’s dream, a need for unprecedented fortitude and domination over his guards (the “bulls”) becomes “a vein of dreamy masturbatory fantasy, a childishness, which our fear of criminals and prisoners usually conceals from us, but

which Braly doesn't want concealed" (Lethem xii). Indeed, the supernatural strength conjured by Stick as he utterly destroys one of his captors conveys Freud's notion that "a child's idea of being 'dead' has nothing much in common with ours apart from the world. Children know nothing of the horrors of corruption, of freezing in the ice cold grave, of the terrors of eternal nothingness – ideas which grown up people find it so hard to tolerate, as is proved by all the myths of future life" (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 287).

That Stick remains leader of 'The Vampires,' a suitably dubbed gang of cold-blooded hoodlums adverse to conformist 'mortals,' confirms Freud's contention. Furthermore, Stick experiences a symbolic ejaculation when he literally discharges his systematic reaper into oblivion. The jailhouse-caricature of a shackled 'Superman meets Dracula' promises inevitable hazards while grotesque imagery and grandeur certainly suggests that blood will pave the way. In contemplating the relationship between dreams and mental sickness, Freud confirms Stick's detached mental state by contending:

A man tormented by physical and mental suffering obtains from dreams what reality denies him: health and happiness. So too in mental disease there are bright pictures of happiness, grandeur, eminence and wealth. The supposed possession of property and the imaginary fulfillment of wishes – the withholding or destruction of which actually affords a psychological basis for insanity – often constitute the chief content of a delirium. (*Dreams* 122)

"In an eastern prison," reflects Lethem, "Stick might more likely have been drawn into some preexisting gang or mafia: thirty years later he'd be a Crip or Blood. Here he's free to self invent, and so becomes a prognostication of Charles Manson or Jim Jones" (xii). Since Stick's delirium has clearly stood out from the very beginning, the prison

doctors end up being no different than the school officials who are fooled when the youngster pretends to be miraculously cured. Whereas the former has been guilty of passing the problem along to another American institution, the latter remains even more culpable for being either extremely underqualified or unbelievably apathetic to the young convict's serious dilemma. By the end of *On the Yard*, Stick breaks into the prison gymnasium after deciding to escape in a hot-air balloon secretly constructed by his former cellmate. Confirming a phallic interpretation of wish fulfillment, Braly's image of Stick rising up and abruptly down solidifies how a deranged convict's fantasy realm, real world and penal 'complex' will ultimately conglomerate:

The balloon had swollen to straining erectness, pulling against the taut ropes. Stick watched in awe. The balloon was marvelous. Almost humbly, as if he were attaching himself to the base of a giant erection to participate in its massive copulation with the air, he tied himself to the harness. When he felt secure, he took a small knife from his pockets and began to cut the ropes. They parted, singing with relieved tension, and when he severed the last tie, the balloon seemed to plunge. (318)

Stick's airborne journey from San Quentin ends up lasting only as long as the young man's sanity. After immediately plummeting to the ground – causing him a broken back and paralysis – “Sheldon Wilson had slipped around a corner in his own mind. He never did return from his flight” (*On the Yard* 325). While the prison warden is left to wonder how a “defective” inmate could reek such havoc, Stick remains doomed to an existence on the psychiatric ward. Comically, previously ill conceived medical dosages hardly alter while the ‘Head Vampire’ and his invisible army of darkness diminish into a

final pathetic image: “He had pieced together a uniform – a Sam Brown belt of twisted sheet, epaulets from Bull Durham bags, medals of washers and bottle tops. From somewhere he had acquired a necklace of toothbrush handles” (Braly 325).

In *Prison Madness*, Kupers elaborates on a setting that both Malcolm Braly and Edward Bunker are only too familiar with. He writes: “In one class action lawsuit concerning conditions for the general population at San Quentin Prison (*Wilson v. Deukmejian*, 1983), I testified that the noise in the general population cellblocks at San Quentin was deafening, and proceeded to explain the detrimental effects of constant noise on an inmate’s mental functioning. A correctional psychiatrist took the stand and disagreed, claiming that the men get used to the noise and cease to be bothered by it” (6). In *The Animal Factory*, Bunker presents a mentally deranged inmate that has deteriorated to the point that he perpetually experiences “the detrimental effects of constant noise” at all times, even when institutionalized voices are not actually being projected.

In an unanticipated moment of excessive maniacal rage, the unbalanced convict nearly sparks a full-scale race riot between San Quentin’s black and white prison populations after he suddenly attacks Earl Copen in the stomach “with a sharpened bedspring, a piece of wire similar to an icepick, though not so straight or sharp” (183). The seasoned chameleon (Copen) diffuses the situation after being told by “other blacks that the assailant was deranged, and thought that whites were trying to put a radio in his brain” (183). No stranger to the padded walls of San Quentin’s mental wing himself, Bunker sets a slippery stage: “When word came from the yard that the White Brotherhood planned to retaliate by indiscriminately stabbing blacks, Earl sent T.J. a long note, telling him that such stupidity would make him want to stop talking to them; that it

would start a race war needlessly; that just one crazy man was responsible, and Earl wouldn't even take revenge on him because he was crazy" (183).

Whereas the actions of the unnamed paranoid-schizophrenic who almost kills Earl primarily speaks to the highly charged issue of race inside American justice, the deranged man's accessibility proves to be yet another tactic implemented by the patriarchal reapers. Consistent with Foucault's hypothesis, that the human body acts as both an "object" and a "target" of power, the placement of a mentally-ill inmate within the general prison population serves as a systematic strategy, as it is a time in American history that in a three year span (1968-1971) would see forty-eight racially motivated prison riots (Chevigny xiv). Rehabilitation and true connotations of justice are never truly considered – by now the status quo – as Foucault asserts: "It was certainly not the first time that the body had become the object of such imperious and pressing investments; in every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (136).

In *The Animal Factory*, the violent psychotic has obviously lost the ability to make rational decisions for himself. Therefore, the prison heads can manipulate him into any form that they want by wielding his sickness as a weapon (reaper) against the other prisoners, and a shield (keeper) for the behind-the-scenes men and women donning badges and name tags. Opposed to treatment, such a man's purpose in prison becomes a medicated double agent who has been programmed unbeknownst to him alone. Beyond being at risk due to his illness, such a man will surely receive deadly retribution by someone less forgiving than Earl Copen. Whether prison officials will display dismay or concern once an unstable liability like Earl's attacker disappears can be answered

immediately – absolutely not. The patriarchal powers will simply find a new psychotic prisoner to take his place, to suffer out in the open.

A conversation between Earl and his men prior to the incident manages to convey underlying ‘male distorters,’ the prison officials’ loyalties and Foucauldian adaptations of strategic manipulations – “the meticulous control of the operations of the body” (137):

“Typical shit,” someone said. “Let the niggers go in while we freeze our asses off.”

“Sheeit!” Paul said. “What you bet them redneck bulls ain’t clubbin’ the shit out of ‘em?”

“The bulls’re scared of ‘em,” Bad Eye said.

“That’s where hate come from, baby – fear.”

“And Whitey’s slicker,” Earl said bitterly, thinking how the officials had turned a strike against them into a race riot by the simple expedient of separating the two groups and letting nature run its course”. (64)

An ageless issue remains just that when no feasible solutions are put forth. “It is sheer folly,” Kupers insists, “to continue locking up a large number of people, brutalizing them, and throwing them into the same institutions as people who are suffering from serious mental disorders. Only by envisioning a society that solves its social problems as a whole, without “disappearing” a large number of its members and canceling their citizenship, can we proceed to enact a rational, cost-effective, and humane plan to run our prisons and to distribute mental health services to people who suffer from psychiatric disorders” (*Prison Madness* 273). Undoubtedly, until an installation of penal officials

authentically willing to make valid changes, ill prisoners will remain as warped and futile as the programmable distortions fueling the contemporary American mindset.

PRISON COMPLEXES REVISITED

Subsequent to their study of the American penal system in 1831, two French aristocrats, Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville, had submitted to the people of France: “To sum up the whole on this point, it must be acknowledged that the penitentiary system in America is severe. While society in the United States gives the example of the most extended liberty, the prisons of the same country offer the spectacle of the most complete despotism” (79). A century and a half later, the statistics speak for themselves. America’s unforgiving reinstatement of the three-strikes-law, super-maximum facilities, chain gangs and capital punishment (Wynn xiii) indicate that manly impulses do not belong to designated captives alone.

Incidentally, over forty percent of adult convicts remain functionally illiterate (Chevigny 97) while “grants enabling prisoners to pursue higher education have been wiped out” (xvii). In his underestimated film, *Blood In, Blood Out*, one of Jimmy Santiago Baca’s fictitious shape-shifters, Pedro Santana, explains why systematic savagery continues to make more than *cents*:

To them you’re just a number. Everyone who enters the joint thinks he a man. But do you know what he really is? A number, worth thirty grand a year... They *want* us to come back. And what’s worse, they have us lining up to get in [...] We got to turn the system around. We got to outthink them. Now concentrate.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault chooses not to engage in a direct debate on gender relations. However, his subsequent clarifications on the links between politics, punishments and culture present evident “ramifications” for gender theory (Kann 19). Indeed, prison writings illuminate all of the contradictions breeding within ‘the

masculine' way of life. Writers such as Malcolm Braly and Edward Bunker reinforce that prisoners have warped individual pursuits of machismo by reinventing what it truly means 'to be a man.' "The irony here," reminds Sabo, "is that these scripted quests for power led, in part, to incarceration and loss of freedom and dignity. For lots of prisoners, and countless men on the outside, adherence to traditional pathways to masculinity turned out to be a trap" (65).

Furthermore, women's prison writings reinforce that both genders have become victims of the "trap" propagated by the attainment of masculinist imperatives. These characters, authentic and fictionalized, have been forced to play the roles of seasoned chameleons and have unwillingly numbed themselves to the hardships thrust upon their fellow convicts. Gay and lesbian prison writers, whether a poetic Paul Mariah or a blunter Dannie Martin, illuminate more of prison's designations by signaling their readers as to who remains perpetually at fault and/or in charge.

Perpetrating and penetrating for power – through the contemporary prison narrative these motives are not located for the first time. Rather, we are reminded that whether a complex has been dubbed 'penal' or 'penile,' the affiliated distortions will inevitably reflect on all of us.

In his most important proclamation to date, Monster Kody Scott, heralded by many as a modern-day Malcolm X, announces that unlike convicts or guards, the realities of masculinity gone awry shall continue to expose evident truths. Furthermore, the reformed gangster implicates all citizens as co-conspirators perpetuating patriarchal protocols. He proclaims:

Without a doubt, I was engaged in criminality. But my activity gravitated around a survival instinct: kill or be killed. Conditions dictated that I evolve or perish. I was engaged in a war with an equal opponent. I did not start this cycle, nor did I conspire to create conditions so that this type of self-murder would take place. My participation came as second nature. To be in a gang in South Central when I joined – and it is still the case today – is the equivalent of growing up in Gross Pointe, Michigan, and going to college: everyone does it. Those who don't aren't part of the fraternity. And as with everything from a union to a tennis club, it's better to be in than out. (138)

Is it possible for the institutionalized chameleon to survive society's ultra-masculine reapers? Ask Iceberg Slim and he will tell you: "But there is solace and joy in my determination to build instead of destroy during the sunrisings left to me. I feel such pride at my survival, for the miracle is that I am not a marooned wreck on some gibbering mental reef" (*Naked Soul* 248). A breed rarer than the habitual convict, there are those such as Slim who do set sail from metaphorical shackles. Nevertheless, for the millions who have lost their votes due to felony disenfranchisement, the American penal system remains a firmly anchored world where habitual preoccupations edge out all individual quests for resurrection.

"By sorting through the gendered aspects of punishment today, we will be in a better position to change ourselves and the institutions that hem us in" (Sabo, Kupers and London 17). *All* systematic deceptions aside, let us take a final leap of faith by identifying with the perpetually institutionalized characters and confined rebel artists who create

them. Perhaps then we can finally combat distortions of masculinity by genuinely challenging the most caged evils of all, our own personal fears and hypocrisies.

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