

Guarding the Novel: *The Stone Country* and Literary Representation¹

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What Marx said of legal institutions applies in wide measure to literary forms. They cannot stand higher than the society which brought them forth. Indeed, since they deal with the deepest human laws, problems and contradictions of an epoch they *should* not stand higher—in the sense, say, of anticipating coming perspectives of development by romantic-Utopian projections of the future into the present. For the tendencies leading to the future are in fact more firmly and definitely contained in what really is than in the most beautiful Utopian dreams or projections (Lukács 1983).

Lukács establishes here a strong foundation for the argument that novels are social formations that echo the dominant standards of a culture, at the same time that they seek to call attention to the paradoxes of those institutions. Cultures and countries that endure great tribulation seem destined to turn to literary realism as a default setting for narrative prose; the crucible that is the prison in such cultures provides a unique glimpse into the ‘real’ that Lukács suggests¹. Many critics have recognized that the prison of Alex La Guma’s *The Stone Country* stands in for South Africa during Apartheid. The quote from Lukács speaks to the creation of the realist novel and the relationship between history and literature, so it would have been interesting to have seen his analysis of the prison novels of the apartheid-period in South African

¹ Due to space constraints this article has end- and not footnotes (Editor).

history. One of his core insights allows us to attribute literary ‘value’ to a text: ‘The “value” of a literary narrative is in this sense to be grasped in terms of its capacity to open a totalizing and mapping access to society as a whole’ (quoted in Frederic Jameson’s Preface to *The Historical Novel* 7). This totalizing tendency is at the heart of the formal and ideological elements of an important La Guma’s text: the novel recapitulates the precise hegemonic elements of the society of the time in the ways in which it defers agency, uses overtly negative characters to control, yet presents a culture that relies primarily on ‘knowledgeable insiders’ to maintain control². There is a consistent attempt to remove the subject from the signification chain, which the subject resists. Further, and perhaps less obviously, this particular text ironizes the binary oppositions³ it presents in two ways: insisting that an urge to narratize is a crucial strategy for the survival of the imprisoned subject, and forcing a focus on the most-easily ignored figure in prison narratives—the guard—as a representative of that least-easily ignored aspect of prison life—a conception of linear time that needs to ‘pass’⁴. Last, the tendency of the narrative to metaphorize, and thereby control prisoners by reducing them to ‘paper’ creates a central paradox: written discourse (paper) will be privileged over speech (orature), yet the narrative grammar of the text creates the seeds of its own dissolution as writing itself escapes from the prison-space. The focus of the present analysis will suggest that the interstices between prisoner and guard, inside and outside, orality and written discourse, and ultimately between narrative grammar and surface phenomenon—between *langue* and *parole*—are the locations that this text investigates. This particular novel is an example of a narrative strategy that deconstructs itself by seeming to invert opposed terms, but is actually engaged in the more subversive tactic of showing that only the prisoners have the possibility of freedom—of escape. In this novel, writing is double-edged, and resists signification: writing must be excluded from the society of this South African prison, yet writing is mechanism of signification by which prisoners attain an ironic subjectivity and, thus, agency.

Several assumptions must be foregrounded. First, that there is a tendency towards binarization in the South African prison novel. J.U. Jacobs and others (see, for example, Roberts, Schalkwyk, Sinha, et al.) have done substantial work on the context and tendencies of memoirs of detention and prison novels that are sometimes predicated upon the real experiences of the

authors of those novels. Although not all critics establish binary modes as the operant reality of the prison novel, it is the dominant tendency⁵. Second, that this tendency towards the reduction of complexity *via* essentializing binaries is at the heart of a narrative strategy that attempts to impose an intersubjective vision of time on the master-clock held by the guard. Third, that the guard-figure serves a role more complex than that of mere stereotype; in other words, there needs to be nuance to a binarized construction that insists upon 'good guard/bad prisoner' or the more usual 'bad guard/good prisoner' Finally, in what ways, if any, does a given prison novel interrogate base assumptions—such as language use, strategies of existence, etc.—so as to provide a bridge to a sociohistorical 'reality' outside of the prison? La Guma's novel is a striking example of a narrative that presents a simple surface, yet fractures the structural certainty of binary codes even while employing those same codes to create the novel itself; the text places conceptions of orature and writing at odds and establishes a struggle whereby the prisoners fight against their transformation into pieces of writing, easily stored by the keepers of the master-clock, the guards—themselves trapped in place, but without the keys to a 'true' existence in the novel. The guards, in a sense, *must* be merely stereotypes if they are to have (ironically) a subtler role in the structure of the novel. The novel's reduction of the guards to stereotypes is subversive because it does to them what they seek to do to all prisoners—elide difference and reduce substance. Time itself, and the temporal indeterminacies of the fictive and the real provide the bridge required to immerse the text in its contextual reality. Thus, those imprisoned must become 'writing' if they are to be controlled, in much the same way that oral narratives become fixed by their transformation into written discourse. A different way of envisioning this dynamic is that the deep structures of the narrative⁶ create a labyrinth with paradox at the center. There is a physical center to the prison in *The Stone Country*, *The Hole*, but more important is the irony of isolation that forces the reflective prisoner, having been created as a text, into a place where all contradictions meet: '[the prison] had been built in the last century ... and because it could not expand outward, it had closed in upon itself in a warren of cells, cages, corridors, and yards' (*The Stone Country* 17)⁷. The physical structure of the labyrinth/ prison, established by switches in time and perspective that constitute the narrative and the narration, recapitulates the internal

movement of initiates into the system (both within and without the prison-space) as they internalize codes. The figure of 'the guard', the most prosaic figure in the text, is the structural key to the text's dynamics.

I

Alex LaGuma was uniquely positioned to present such a problematic text. Born in 1925 in the Cape Town slum, now razed, called District Six (Pointer 2-8), he was a member the Cape coloured community. His personal identity, and the creolized nature of this community, effectively underlines the narrative refusal of what some have seen as 'manichean' tendencies in the novel⁸. Further, at least one critic sees *The Stone Country* as a 'transitional novel' that marks a 'changed focus from the depoliticized ... members of the coloured community ... to the more active and politically conscious' characters seen in his later novels, such as *In the Fog of the Season's End* or *Time of the Butcherbird* (Breidlid 2002: 219). His father was 'one of the founders of the Communist Party of South Africa' (Sinha 1990:16), and young Alex was politicized further by his training and employment as a journalist, joining the progressive newspaper 'New Age' as a young man. In '1956, he was one of the 156 people arrested for high treason; even during the Sharpeville massacre he was imprisoned' (Sinha 1990:16). In fact, La Guma was one of the first 'casualties' of the Sabotage Act, 'which permitted the minister of justice to place anyone under house arrest' (JanMohamed 1983: 226). LaGuma was confined 'to his own house for twenty-four hours a day for five years' (JanMohamed 1983: 226). It was the Sabotage Act, also, that prohibited the oral or written dissemination of La Guma's works, and explains why a novelist essentially concerned with the use of literature for social purposes was forced to publish outside of his own country, outside of the social matrix that needed to be told of texts speaking truth to power. His prison novel shows his awareness of the power of narrative to effect change, as he has the Superintendent of the prison in this novel express concern that few of the 'internal demerits' of the prison make it to the light of public scrutiny (*The Stone Country* 109). La Guma began the writing of *The Stone Country* when he was placed under house arrest in December, 1962 (Sinha 1990: 16). All of his fiction, from the short story, 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' that was to be transformed into a central scene in *The Stone Country*, to his

last novel, *Time of the Butcherbird* (1981) are concerned with remaining true to the necessity of social realism in the novel form⁹. He has been quoted as saying that his novels provide ‘individual “pictures” of South African “totality”’ (Abrahams in Mkhize 1998: 148). It is commonly understood that ‘La Guma’s use of subjects drawn from his journalism is but one indication that it might well have been his intention to “record history”’ (Mkhize 1998: 148). The ‘necessity of social realism’ referred to above comes from the question of the ‘twofold meaning implied when we use the term ‘commitment’: the writer’s commitment to his art and to the society he is living in’ (Moyana in Riemenschneider 1980: 144). La Guma is a writer who presents (journalistic surfaces) so that deeper trends and analyses can be explored:

It seems to me that the depiction of characters whose everyday confrontation with the South African reality is reduced to that of prisoners and warders offers the writer the opportunity to probe more subtly into the interrelationship of the personal and the social because it forces him to stress the interrelationship of black South Africans on one hand and the confrontation of man with himself on the other hand (Riemenschneider 1980: 145).

La Guma was to deal with imprisonment in several of his works, most notably in *In the Fog of the Season’s End* where Elias Tekwane is tortured, ultimately beaten to death because he will not talk to his racist interrogators. Issues of speech, and of refusal to speak, are at play throughout many texts involving power relationships, and La Guma’s are no exception. In his own life, La Guma’s position in a society that did not recognize him as a participant led him to exile. And it is in this internationalist position, writing to an audience receptive to information on South Africa, that La Guma is best known. An ironic analogy suggests itself: texts that are unable to circulate in the system that they represent—like prison novels being mainly read by those not only outside of prison, but also outside of the cultures that spawned them (Davies 1990: 7)—are speaking to audiences often unskilled in the settings they represent. Although prison writing¹⁰ ‘from abroad is a confirmation of the tolerance of this [i.e., the reader’s] society’ (Davies 1990:7), in ‘Russia, for example, or France, or

South Africa, writing from prison is of great importance' (Davies 1990:7). The fact that the 'writings' and even the oral statements of titles of poems were banned in South Africa for much of the Apartheid period is well known, so the censorship of books by those who were imprisoned for political purposes is hardly surprising:

And, of course, with the re-uniting of apartheid South Africa with the 'other' South Africa in exile the two streams of South African writing have also been rejoined, one consisting of texts produced within the country during the past thirty years [he is writing in 1991], the other of texts produced within the country but either banished beyond the borders or else forced underground (Jacobs 'The Discourses of Detention' 1991: 194).

La Guma represents a novelistic part of the 'stream' that has returned to South Africa, one that stands in a precarious relationship to the many tales that tell 'truth to power' in autobiographical accounts of imprisonment¹¹. He is also one of a number of novelists depicting apartheid-era imprisonment in South Africa, including Nadine Gordimer and Breyten Breytenbach, but La Guma differs from Gordimer¹² by virtue of the fact of his having been imprisoned, and from Breytenbach (and many other black, coloured and Indian novelists and memoirists, including Molefe Pheto, Livie Mqotsi, D.M. Zwelonke, Indres Naidoo, and Caesarina Kona Makhoere. Schalkwyk 1994: 43, note 1, gives a list of 'best-known examples') by virtue of his disengagement from autobiography¹³. Finally, La Guma's own enforced enclosure during his house arrest, and during his period in prison—in solitary confinement, 'after the passage of the infamous thirty-day no trial act' (JanMohamed 1983: 226)—led him to a nuanced understanding of his position within a tradition of written discourse that refused to allow him to be recognized. His experience of isolation from the various communities within which an individual exists gives his texts concerning isolation and imprisonment a piquancy difficult to overstate:

... when he was forced to abandon journalism in 1962 because a shortage of funds forced the newspaper to drastically reduce its staff, La Guma became completely isolated from his community; his

house arrest precluded any re-employment and participation in the social and political life of his country, and because he was a banned person, all his novels were published outside South Africa (JanMohamed 1983: 226)¹⁴.

II

The issue of a 'deferral of agency' is an important starting point for an analysis of *The Stone Country*. By this deferral I mean that there is, initially, no apparent source for the dictates that oppress individuals either in the prison or in the South African society as a whole: there is a sense of things merely being the way they are¹⁵. The institutional forces that control individuals are deterministic in their relentlessness. Hence, in the novel, the prison intrudes itself, without the overt presence of any individuals: 'There came the sounds of heavy doors being unlocked, and then the distant mutterings of many voices, like the far-away bleating of sheep ...' (15). The use of the passive voice here, and in subsequent sections, will give way to the figure of the guard as the focus of seeming power in the prison—inevitably using the active voice¹⁶. The guards in the narrative are one-dimensional, and would not merit attention save that they are circumscribed by the pettiness of their duties, while they serve as the primary movers of the plot of the novel. The guards are not all white, either, as colored (mixed race) jailers, though not as viciously presented as some of the Afrikaans guards, are in evidence throughout—perhaps an acknowledgement of the position of the subaltern in a society in which race and class are intermingled¹⁷.

La Guma is ironic in his display of the actual level of control exercised by the warders, and that is the mapping of the apartheid culture we require. He also provides us with an important bridge to the American nexus of prison narratives because the knowing insider is the one who allows the system to operate. At the level of the prison, this means that prisoners who have been initiated into knowledge act as warders over the prison culture itself. As another writer-from-the-inside has put it, 'When you are interested in prison accounts as a genre you will soon see that prisons are pretty much the same the world over. It is rather the peculiar relationship of power-repression which seems immutable ...' (Breytenbach 1984: 339). While the

guards may run the temporal and bureaucratic, knowing prisoners exercise control over almost everything else. LaGuma highlights the connections between the (apartheid) world and prison, guards and prisoners, surfaces and depths by making the prisoners into 'paper': a surreptitious code operates throughout the novel that reduces prisoners to examples of writing, which jailers then get to (de)file. Thus, the protagonist's initiation into knowledge presupposes a relationship of power-knowledge.

A basic plot summary is in order. The text consists of 35 chapters broken into two parts, of 14 and 21 chapters respectively. The novel, at least in this edition, breaks almost exactly in half at page 88, where Part One ends. The overall movement of the novel divides the universe into four parts, and it is deceptively non-linear in the ways in which it displays them. The 'stone country' is, inevitably, a metaphor for the carceral condition of the bulk of those who live in South Africa proper. The outside world is the first and most contentious of the four realms the text inhabits, as we visit it in flashback, referential explanation, and eventual escape. The connection of the jail/prison, which is the physical setting for the entire novel, and South Africa itself is unsubtle: 'This jail is a small something of what they want to make the country. Everybody separate, boy: White, African, Coloured. Regulations for everybody, and a white boss with a gun and a stick' (20). The prisoners are given food and treatment appropriate to their ranking in the apartheid system while imprisoned. Further, as we shall see, the prison identification card functions in much the same way as does the hated 'pass' on the outside: controlling access, restricting even imaginative liberty, providing a measure of arbitrary control and a 'law' apt for easy justification for punishment, and a reduction of individuality.

George Adams moved over to join the others who had already gone through the finger-printing and the issue of ID cards. He looked at his own card. It said: ---*Gaol. Awaiting Trial*. Then a number and his name and the date, and *Charge: Illegal Organisation*. He thrust the card into the top pocket of his coat, and then found Jefferson waiting with the rest of the prisoners.

Jefferson said, 'You got your card? Listen, look after it. Anywhere you go in this place you got to have that card with you.'

You lose it and these Dutchmen give you the works. He added, grinning: 'It's like a pass, hey' (24).

The Remand section, where prisoners await trial or the further disposition of the courts is the second area, and it is a vortex of career criminals, naïve political prisoners (like George), hard cases, murderers, and those who have stumbled into the criminal justice system. In short, it serves as the general population sector would in an American prison novel. The text's various treatments of the events that occur in this section of the novel provide much of the material for our analysis of the power relationships of the actual prison, and the structural realities of the text itself. Here we meet Yusef the Turk, a suave and deadly denizen of the underworld who takes the naïve George's side against the bestial Butcherboy Williams in the central plot event of Part One. Here also we are introduced to Solly, the wizened jester who functions like the Medieval Fool. We meet him as an adjunct to Butcherboy Williams, '[g]ang leader, and incidentally cell boss by virtue of his brutality and the backing of bullied and equally vicious toadies Only the man called Solly showed no sign of nervousness he danced like a marionette, a grotesque jig in front of the savage hulk' (30). Most important, perhaps, is that we meet the one-dimensional—yet structurally crucial—figure of Fatso the Guard: 'This guard was heavy and paunchy and seemed to be constructed from a series of soft, smoothly joined sacs, and he had a plump, smooth, healthy pink face, like a Santa Claus with a blonde mustache instead of a snow-white beard: in the outwardly jolly face the eyes were pale and washed-out and silvery, much like imitation pearls, and cold as quicksilver' (61). We are meant to connect the as-yet-unnamed Fatso to Butcherboy, signaling the dependence of guard upon convict and the complicities of all power relationships, as George falls afoul of Fatso by requesting a blanket:

Behind [George], the guard looked over at Butcherboy, the brute man, who lounged against the rough, stone-constructed wall of one side of the yard, and smiled a wintry smile, saying, 'he's *mos* one of those *slim* men. He's looking for trouble.

And Butcherboy shifted his great shoulders against the wall and grinned, saying, 'old boss, he *is* looking for trouble. A clever' (62f).

The third section of the novel's compass is the Isolation Block, for disciplinary cases as well as those already sentenced to a term but awaiting further charges. The novel begins here, with George and the Casbah Kid—a dehumanized and abused youth who has murdered his father—*in medias res* for offences as yet unnamed. In the limbo of the Reception area, where prisoners have not yet been categorized by having been written about and upon, we also meet a trio of prisoners whose attempted escape from the Isolation Block will constitute the primary plot activity of Part Two of the novel: Gus, Morgan, and Koppe.

They had been brought from [another] prison to the city jail where they were to await trial.

They stood quietly, with the blank faces of prisoners who already knew the ropes, apparently seeing nothing, but all the time as alert as electric meters, ready to move at a flick. One of these men had a knife-scar down the left side of his face from eyebrow to chin, and it gave him a lopsided look, as if his face had been hastily stuffed and sewn up. All had shaven heads and their mouths were still and sullen (28).

In keeping with a refusal of surface interpretation, the case with the deceptive Santa Claus-like appearance of Fatso the guard, here also/always surfaces are deceptively simple and ironically misleading. Prior to the climactic battle in the cell between Butcherboy and Yusef the Turk, we are told that Yusef 'was smiling faintly with drooping lids, but despite the ease and the smile, his eyes were as alert as sparks, and he was now sharp and tough and dangerous as a polished spear (81). Even as the text seems to reduce even the jail itself, the 'stone country', to a set of patterned partitions that reflect the external realities of the society which has spawned it, the text undermines its own reductive simplicity by insisting upon the slipperiness of surface, and perhaps the impossibility of any totalizing that is a representation. The prison is not itself uniform, even when seen from the outside, though our imaginative construction of it reduces and essentializes the physical and imaginative space: 'men were clambering onto outhouses and projections of which there were many inside the old prison' (158). Since there is no uniformity, texts necessarily present samplings that universalize.

Thus LaGuma's choice of a jail, although not strictly a prison, allows the text to interrogate this issue of the apprehension of surface phenomena. By presenting a seemingly simple narrative peppered with seemingly one-dimensional characterizations—usually ironic—we are forced back upon a re-examination of the simplest of these prison-stock characters—the guard—as the text unpacks all the various textures of what it means to be a criminal, a prisoner, a jailer, a society that imprisons as a function of defining itself *as* a society.

The fourth and innermost sanctum is The Hole, and it is not surprising that we have followed a sequence of separations: from society, from the large group in the Remand room, from the small groups in Isolation Block, to insular isolation, at the furthest remove from the 'outside.'

The Hole was on the ground floor; the punishment cell which was a square, windowless box, painted pitch black on the inside. Air came through a narrow, barred transom above the iron door, and that was the only opening in the stygian cell (101).

The metaphor of the labyrinth, with The Hole—*isolation*—as Minotaur is set up by physical descriptions of the warren within which the characters move, but also by the ironic presentation of a Daedalus-figure:

A man, a newcomer who had arrived the previous day now set his bowl aside, leaned forward and made soft, crooning bird-sounds, extending a ragged arm towards the pigeons. He was dressed in tattered jacket, patched trousers and disintegrating shoes, and he had a flabby, liquor-bloated, sagging face, like a half-filled penny balloon. The unshaven, pouchy mouth smiled, and his soft, gentle calling came strangely from it.

'Cooo-rrr. Cooo-rrr', the man called quietly to the birds.

Then, as everybody watched, the pigeons rose on fluttering wings to settle on the ragged arm and shoulders, so that the man...looked like some strange mythological being, half-feathers-half-human (71).

This absurd figure has been transformed by pigeons which the text had just described as if they were guards, and he masters them by crooning and

wheeling, using the language of passivity that lulls warders: ‘the pigeons, blue-grey in the sunlight, sailed from the roof and dropped to the floor of the yard, strutted with smooth-feathered importance among the fallen scraps of food, their sharp beaks pecking skilfully past their pouting breasts’ (71). This master of the labyrinth appears only in this scene, disappearing after awing the assembled prisoners in the yard with his knowledge of all things pigeon. He is, although ‘a newcomer’, emblematic of the fact that knowing prisoners really control prisons, although jailers exert control over the surface elements, and he departs after fulfilling his role, and after foreshadowing the cosmic irony of the escape of the trio in the second half of the novel. The weakest of the trio, Koppe, is the only one able to get away. Morgan and Gus are thrown, each in chains after each is severely beaten, into the blackness of The Hole: ‘A long time afterwards, Morgan came out of the darkness of insensibility into another darkness—the darkness of a sealed tomb...He kept his eyes shut for it hurt him to open them, and in any case he would be able to see nothing there in the womb-like blackness of The Hole’ (161). Here, at the center of the labyrinth, Morgan laughs hysterically at the outcome of their attempt, recognizes that Koppe, the one whom they had had to force into activity—almost dragging him with them—is the only one to succeed: ‘Morgan lay there and filled the darkness with his crazy and painful laugh’ (161). It is deep and true laughter, but it is also the laugh of full play here at the nethermost reaches. This is as far a remove as is possible from the metropolitan realities that all the text’s external references have conjured, but here laughter—edged with insanity—is possible.

But the novel begins with an initiate, George Adams, awaiting trial for being a member of a banned political organization, and The Casbah Kid, already convicted of murder and waiting to be hanged, sharing a cell and looking out. “‘What you reckon the time is now?’” the boy ... asked. ‘I don’t know,’ George Adams said, ‘must be past three.’ And then he remembered that the boy behind him would probably never see the outside world again, or have to bother about time’ (12). Immediately, we are told that a subjective stream of imposed ritual will be the temporal restriction imposed on those—as in George’s case—waiting to ‘serve time.’ The monotony of days punctuated by meals alone lies at the heart of a real prisoner’s conception of prison: “‘Almost bleddy supper time, and we with three meals off’”, the boy

said. He had a cold impersonal voice coming from below a raw and swollen lip' (12). We are reminded here, by way of the mention of the 'three meals off' punishment and the Casbah Kid's swollen lip, that we have entered the text *in medias res*, and will have the necessary linearity of prison time fractured by textual narratives designed to flesh out the subjective lives of those imprisoned. In the 'realest' of narrative senses, we will construct the subjectivity of each actant synchronically. We cycle through anticipation, expectation, partial acknowledgement of our correct guesses, and realization. As we are given a pastiche of events, we construct the subjective existence of characters; we witness the creation of subjects in language in its specific discursive field. Further, a linkage is made almost immediately between the battle for intersubjective control of the temporal environment and the function of orature and written discourse. George is a writer, and we are treated to the first of many allusions to writing as a trope of control:

Around them the walls were grimy, battleship-grey halfway up, and a dirty yellow-white above, all the four surfaces covered with inscriptions scratched into the paint or written in black pencil; the usual prison litany of man's inhumanity to man: *Gus was here for Housebreak and Theft; Johnny Bril you are a pig; I'll never see blue skies again; The Buster Boys was here; Never trust a woman she will make you sorry ...* (12)

The nonlinear nature of the inscriptions is a core structural component of the novel, as the narratives of the prisoners (and the central thrust of the novel) compete with and attempt to displace the rigidity of an imposed temporal order. Two brief comments complete the linkage: the text states that these inscriptions, and the drawings—pornographic and otherwise—are examples of '[t]wentieth century man forced back to the cave' while '[s]omewhere outside, a leaking pipe dripped with *infinite* reluctance' [e.a.] (12). The two-step temporal remove that prisoner must contend with—once from the redolence of external events (like the reference to Christmas), and twice from the linearity and lockstep of meal times and shift changes in the prison—is precisely the nexus that the text establishes. Much later in the novel, the text makes ironic the linearity of even this remove: as if a prisoner could, in fact, distance himself from the outside

world—in the sense of an optimistically romanticized vision of imprisonment¹⁸—by self-creation within. The situation is bleaker than that, because the world itself is a prison:

A hard breeze was blowing *outside* [e.a.], promising to turn into a full-scale southeaster before the day was over. Through it, the sunlight made the usual barred pattern on the floor and on the drab paint where former occupants of the cell had left their epitaphs, salutations and warnings: *Pike is a squealer; God gives us life and the hangman his rope; The Buster Boys was here; Goodbye Molly, I will always remember you* (131) (e.i.o.).

In this section of the novel, reminding us of the carceral reality of the external world, the storm brewing outside symbolizes the coming storm inside as the ‘trio’ (Gus, Morgan, and Koppe) escapes¹⁹. Here also we have a reiteration of the binary codes of orature and writing, contained in the contrast of the evanescence of the ‘leaking pipe [tapping] away at its irregular Morse’ and the semi-permanence of the written word, the graffiti. Further, the deferral of agency, so necessary to the depersonalization and alienation of the situation, is underlined in the recurrence of the hymn-singer, who was ‘in the middle of *While shepherds watched their flocks*, as the door was *relocked* [e.a.] after breakfast. Nobody shouted him into silence; apparently hymns were *allowed* [e.a.] on Sundays’ (131). No guard ‘relocked’ and no prisoner ‘allowed’; the passive voice unites prisoner and guard. The necessary escape from the limbo of this is ironic: writing imprisons (George), yet prison is a space which writes upon the prisoners, inscribing and delimiting them while offering a way to negotiate an identity. Perhaps it is this realization, an unconscious one, which powers Morgan’s ‘crazy’ laughter when he reaches The Hole.

The first, and most obvious way that prisons ‘capture’ prisoners is by the creation of a number and a formal bureaucratic record, and it is, naturally, the functionary who does the job: ‘There was the khaki-uniformed guard looking in at them, one hand holding the door and the other grasping a thick sheaf of admission forms’ (17). The guard here acts as a liminal character, a doorway, through which all must pass as they are captured in the inscriptions to be made on the forms. The prisoners are then counted off, as

trustees—prisoners used as guards—shout ‘to exercise the precarious authority bestowed upon them by their watchful master’ (18). There is a perceptible chill in the air as the prisoners all enter the prison space, physically, for the first time, though they are not yet initiated in either official or unofficial ways. The completeness of the visionary environment of the prison, including the questionable, double-edged nature of the existence of the guard, is clarified:

Guards and prisoners, everybody, were the enforced inhabitants of another country, another world. This was a world without beauty; a lunar barrenness of stone and steel and locked doors. In this world no trees grew, and the only shade was found in the shadow of its cliffs and walls, the only perfume it knew came from night-soil buckets and drains. In the summer it broiled, and it chattered in the winter, and the only music the regulations allowed was composed of the slap-slap of bare feet, the grinding of boots, counterpointed by shouted orders, the slam of doors and the tintinnabulation of heavy keys. Anything else smacked of rebellion (18).

The incoming prisoners are literally desensitized, as the text strips or warps all sensory input. Although it comes quite far along in the novel, this description of the Casbah Kid as a book of photos is a strong realization of the concretizing tendency of text that the prison seeks to impose:

Not being able to indulge in any sort of intricate thought, he accepted an idea, good or bad, and it became fixed in his brain, tightly, like a picture pasted in a scrap-book.

He was nineteen years old and all his recollections of life were a series of pictures They were all there, in his mind ... like filthy postcards ... if he liked, he could stop at some page and look at a particular picture, examine it, and afterwards pass on or shut the book (128).

The ‘book of the mind’ that the text presents is the narrative structure of the oral recitation, relying upon ‘postcards’ to structure reminiscence; the ‘trap’ of written discourse becomes an ironic freedom.

Even though prisoners will be reduced to paper throughout the novel, there is a freedom in having been imprisoned in this way, as the text clearly establishes the priority of written over oral discourse.

The crucial reduction of prisoner-to-paper is a dominant tendency of the text, beginning with the transformation of admissions forms (17) to the ID card. Perhaps it is not too much to suggest that the ID card is the first example of the 'id' card as narrative subjectivity replaces a coherent sense of an individuated self? First the prisoners must be categorized to inhabit one of the four universes the prison encompasses:

'Where are you sleeping?'

'In the Groot Kamer, the Big Room.'

'You can't man. You a admission. Got to go with the others.'

... those who had been sentenced by the courts had been called aside and made to strip, and they stood in a bunch, stark naked, each holding his bundled clothing, waiting for their names to be called off again, and to be moved to where they would receive their convict uniform. Watching them was a young Coloured guard in a washed-out uniform...[another] 'guard came up the steps through the archway into the hall ... he shouted furiously, 'You think this is a --- --bar-room?' (22).

The dialogue references Remand (the 'Big Room'), which transits into Isolation Block, because one of the speakers is 'a admission.' There is a slide from the 'Coloured guard' to the other guard—each a perspective on the paradoxical nature of the guard-figure, inside yet outside, and there is a reference to the world outside of the prison in the barroom reference. The shouting guard is a menacing figure, prodding all around him—prisoners, prisoner-clerks, other guards—so that he doesn't 'waste his time' on the process (23):

'I'm going as fast as I can, mate', another clerk said ... [the menacing guard] shouted again, for no apparent reason, 'You think this is a blerry hotel?' ... The other guards, spurred on by the short one's anger, began to hurry things up. Names were shouted, and men sprang forward, bumping into each other to be in time. The man

writing the ID cards at the table was shouting each name and flinging the card away without lifting his face, as he wrote the next card, so that the prisoners had to scramble for them (23).

It is at this point that George Adams's status as a political activist is highlighted: "Another ---- Communist", the man at the table said. "What, are you a kaffir? This ---- jail is getting full of ---- Communists" (24). The trio who will attempt escape—Gus, Morgan, and Koppe—are also processed: 'in the Reception Hall ... the clerk checked their names from their ID cards against the papers in his hand He signed a receipt and gave it back to the guard who had escorted these men from another prison' (28). J.U. Jacobs has observed this same trope in prison memoir, referring to the fact that Robben Island prisoners Moses Dlamini and Indres Naidoo 'give prior status to their prison numbers as the "name" of the author on the title pages of their memoirs, recognizing that their singularity has been subsumed into the depersonalized plurality of political prisoners ... their South African subjectivity forever attached to a prison identity' (1991b: 195).

We have already observed that Solly, the character of misrule, is a 'memo-sized, yellow duplicate of a man' (30). It is important to note, however, that it is the text that metaphorizes Solly, and not only the processing system of the bureaucracy. Of course Solly, a 'memo' circulates throughout the narrative, eventually using the system to make the transition from Remand to Isolation Block to aid in the coming escape attempt. And the prison's ultimate creation, Butcherboy Williams, is written on in the time-honored tradition of prison inscription. 'He was half-naked, revealing an ape-like torso covered with tattooed decorations: hands holding hands, a skull and crossbones, a Union Jack, a dripping dagger, and various other emblems consistent with his barbarism' (31). Later on, during the build up to the fight between Yusef the Turk and this enforcer of the prison's violent tendencies, we get more detail. 'He flexed his biceps and slapped his chest, grinning with his bad teeth, displaying the pictures needled into his flesh: the skull-and-cross-bones, the flags and crossed daggers, the nude women who wiggled as his muscles writhed...an eagle in full flight, its beak agape and wings spread, eyes glaring and talons hooked and poised for the kill' (83).

The particularity of the designs connects Butcherboy with predation, of course, and also with one of the colonial masters in the body of the Union

Jack. The fight that George Adams and his fellow political prisoner, Jefferson, have is with the South African government, but the nominative reference to other activists against England (as in Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Adams) is just as obvious. Butcherboy is a 'cultural creation' in the sense that he has become the place where text rules. In a discussion of form within his argument in favor of the cultural and historical nexus that gave rise to both the modern (English) penitentiary system and the seventeenth century English novel, John Bender notes that:

Works of art attempt the unified representation of different social and cultural structures simultaneously in a single frame of reference. In literature and art the very attempt to contrive formal coherence out of disparate materials allows us to glimpse—through what have been called eloquent silences—the process of generation and regeneration that drives all cultural formation (1987:6f).

The illustrated man who is Butcherboy is, his own choices of design and reception notwithstanding, a text with structural integrity. We read him as a totality because we are acculturated to grant a *telos* to texts, to grant coherence to the incoherent, to grant meaning to the random. We grant an horizon of expectations (*a la* Wolfgang Iser) to our experience of reading, and our entrance into the reading process snares us in the trap and release of written discourse. It is in this sense that those entering the prison space approach the orderliness of the entrance experience, and it is for this reason that the reduction of prisoners to text must proceed: the bureaucratic role of the guard cannot be fulfilled simply by organizing individuals.

It is no surprise that it is writing itself which has led to the imprisonment of George Adams prior to his reduction to the status of a mobile text in the fictional prison. In a flashback, George, Jefferson, and several committed others create political pamphlets for distribution: he 'thought of the bundles of illegal leaflets on the back seat of the car. He was a little apprehensive about them, and wished that they had done with the delivery, that the bundles were out of their hands...' (47). George is arrested for passing paper, he is to be turned into paper—though he will resist the process—he will inevitably be written on by the process, and the novel itself is concerned with the creation and 'distribution' of text throughout its

entirety. After having received his ID card, George's first interaction with a guard—over the lack of supplies—goes poorly as George refuses to 'be' the ID card, which the guard asks for to reconcile the irreconcilable: a prisoner who has 'talked' back.

To George Adams he said, '*Jong*, here you better not keep yourself *slim*, clever. There's trouble waiting for you if you keep yourself too clever'. Then, as an afterthought: 'Let's see your card'.

George Adams drew the blue card from his hip pocket. Near him he was aware of silence. The silence spread ... you didn't talk back to a guard, and George Adams had done so, even in a small way, and they all waited for the storm of authority which seemed to be building up (61f).

The 'authority' has already been passed from George to Fatso in the party of the ID card; text 'silences' the verbal, and reestablishes the master-slave dyad. The small thing that George had done was to call Fatso 'sir': 'The hard eyes assumed a scratchy quality and seemed to rasp over George Adams. "Sir? You should know that there is no – *sir* in this place. Here you say *Boss*, hear me?"' (61). Fatso asks for the ID 'as an afterthought' because it is the default setting for all verbal interactions, swinging control away from prisoner and back to guard. After Fatso realizes that George is a political, a "Bloody Communist", stocking up trouble everywhere' (62), the guard's face is described as 'immobile as a papier-mâché mask, and only the lips under the blonde mustache moved as he spoke. He handed the card back' (62). In a sense, the text has frozen both the transaction between George and Fatso, but also Fatso himself. The novel here, as elsewhere, gives primacy to written discourse while underscoring the dangers of concretization. George's essential mistake, which will bring on the retributive wrath of the fully-textualized Butcherboy, is to insist upon a real, rather than a textual—and thereby one-dimensional—existence. The eyes that had seemed to 'rasp over him' will gouge him: a painful privilege accorded only to those who have (not yet) been made into texts to be controlled: [George] 'felt rather than saw the fat guard's pale eyes scouring him from above' (63).

The central importance of all this detail is that the text insists upon a homoglossic, one-way, connection to the reader in its focus upon realistic detail in dialogue, catalogue, and interior monologue. The tendency to ‘fix’ the meaning, to create a monologic text in the Bakhtinian sense, is evident throughout. Underlying all of this realistic text’s insistences upon conveying meaning is the mimetic relationship between words and the things to which they refer. But traces, in the Derridean sense, inhabit the interstices of the seemingly placid surface, creating dialogism and polyphony at moments where uniformity seems to reign. As a representative of Fatso the Guard, Butcherboy is initially a symbol of the monoglossic pretensions of writing.

Butcherboy badgers George in the Big Room where all prisoners in Remand must wait. The bestial Butcherboy is described always and only in animalistic terms. He is variously a ‘jackal’, ‘a wolf’, ‘a hyena’ (30), or a ‘boar’ (53) with ‘ape-like eyes’ (66), always observed from an objective perspective. Yusef the Turk takes George’s side, insisting that the animal in Butcherboy recognize that George is not meant for this place they inhabit together, that George is somehow special by virtue of his idealism and the peculiarities of the political place and time. Yusef also has an ‘animalistic’ trait here: he understands instinctually, viscerally, that George is unable to survive in the textualized universe of the prison. In other words, the chronotope of the context is foregrounded—not just in the sense that there is a shared cultural construction of space-time, but also in the sense that George ‘belongs’ to another order, one concerned not with present exigencies, but with future possibilities. The text had first shown us Yusef from the privileged position of George’s consciousness:

George Adams looked at this man...This was the gentleman gangster, a member of the underworld aristocracy...a frequenter of the upstairs billiard rooms along Hanover and Caledon Streets, where plots were hatched against a background of clacking cues and drifting smoke (38).

Yusef asks, ‘What you in for, mate?’ as three card players in the common cell—reminiscent of Kafka’s card-players in ‘The Metamorphosis’—are separated out from the ‘conspirators’ (Yusef and George). The truth-claim that the text makes is noteworthy: both are hatches of plots, the relative

validity of state charges against a political rather than a 'mere' criminal is waived. Each is imprisoned for the abrogation of a code of conduct. George shares his cigarettes with one of the card-players, saying 'We all in this --- together' (39). Although one is meant to guess at the scatological description the ellipsis suggests, the indeterminacy of the *lacuna* is in keeping with the overall arc of the texts negation of monologic certainty at the very moment of its seeming primacy. The necessary equation of George with Yusef continues, as we are given an index of friendship and camaraderie in the cigarette first dispersed, then lit for George:

The lean man [Yusef] produced a lighter and snapped the flame and held it to George Adams's cigarette. As far as he was concerned Adams was an equal, an expert from the upper echelons of crime, but generosity came hard to him as he offered the lighter with reluctance to the card-player (39).

The sense of unity that Adams attempts to instil is a conscious one. The general critical consensus of the novel is that 'Adams's compassion stems from the fact that he is aware that the prisoners are blind and unthinking victims of a vicious system that desires to reduce both the oppressed outside and inside the prison to the violence and lack of compassion of the stone and iron society the regime has built' (for example in Abrahams 1985: 96; JanMohamed 1983: 24f). The essential goal of the revolutionary group to which Adams had belonged is nowhere stated, and must be inferred as a precursor to all dialogues in the prison itself. Certainly, the possibility of organized defiance to the jailers—as a synecdoche for George's out-of-prison activities—is at odds with law of the jungle as it is practiced in the prison. 'The prisoners are preoccupied with how to survive and how to have an easy existence' (Abrahams 1985: 95). And since George refuses to cower to the hulking Butcherboy, an actant²⁰ is required for the violence that is to come: George's importance to the novel is not only

As La Guma indicates ... 'a telescope through which to see what is going around' (9). Adams, however, becomes more than a telescope; he assumes again the role of being a recorder of events but, since he

is an experienced man of the political world, he also attempts to teach the lessons he has learned (Abrahams 1985: 95).

And even if George does not 'teach' Yusef the necessity of abandoning solipsism, the effect is the same. Again the connection is established by way of a shared cigarette—though perhaps casting the passing of the paper-encased tube as an example of the textualizing tendency of the novel is over-determination: 'George Adams was opening his cigarette-box, and he offered one to the other man [Yusef]'. George is distressed that Yusef has taken Butcherboy's gaze on him to keep George safe: "'You stuck your nose in when he was ---- ing around with me, isn't it? If you had not, you would not be in this, *mos*'", says George to Yusef. 'Yusef the Turk said, "So I didn't *mos* like to see a john like you being pulled up by that basket. We got to look after you, Professor" George Adams said, "You and your every man for himself"' (80).

The structural connection—creating of George and Yusef a dyad by way of the connections referred to above—is necessary for the assumption, by Yusef, of George's battle with Butcherboy. Yusef becomes, narratologically, an example of the helper, and he is dispensed with in the text after he serves his purpose: to forestall the danger of Butcherboy Williams by fighting him, taking a terrible beating, but 'winning' because The Casbah Kid surreptitiously stabs and kills Butcherboy.

The ID card is also the passport for movement and the distribution of goods throughout the narrative: 'The escort collected their ID cards and handed them through the grille to the guard who also wore a holstered pistol. After a wait the guard started calling names, and the prisoners went forward' (64). The central tendency of the novel is to attempt to control by textualising prisoners, but the guards are 'traces' that map a continuity that prisoners cannot.

III

Of course guards are 'enforced inhabitants', too; their lack of subjectivity merely makes them unable to reflect on their positionality. As the prisoners are turned into paper, requiring sorting and storage, the guards are re-inscribed, turned from monsters into mere bureaucrats. The guard-function

becomes essentially clerical—especially as they file prisoners—and the condition of employment is thus indistinguishable. They are time-keepers, clockwork characters, measuring out the fractions of the ‘story’ that they will manipulate. Since the distinction between the story and the narrative is at play, it is understandable that the temporal-spatial control of the prison-space lies in the hands of the bureaucrat-guard, and that time reflects space: ‘at five-thirty in the morning a guard stepped out of the Headquarters block, opposite the Awaiting-trial Section, and began to hammer the iron triangle hanging from a sort of gallows’ (50). In this case, the time-marker of the triangle becomes the boundary for a narrative unit for both the story and the narrative. The dynamic function of the guard is also reconfigured as a primarily space-keeping one: they are organizers of the paper prisoners. As Butcherboy smacks Solly and sends him spinning out of a line of prisoners, ‘[t]he column of prisoners, disrupted, eddied and undulated, and a guard came running up...the disrupted center of the column sorted itself and straightened out again’ after ‘the guard caught [Solly] by the collar and pushed him into line ... and everybody became silent as the guards came up the length of the assembly, counting the men off in fours’ (54). Like loose sheets of paper bounced on a desk so that they all face the same way, the guards shape the prisoners into a sortable order. The pretence of control—of a monoglossic world—is comforting, but illusory.

Paper leads them into the labyrinth as the prisoners are led from the truck to the prison: ‘... there was the khaki-uniformed guard looking in at them, one hand holding the door and the other grasping a thick sheaf of admission forms. Another guard, wearing a holstered pistol, stood on the other side of the door.’ Here we have the dual coercions of textuality and violence. As we observed previously with the heavily-inscribed figure of Butcherboy Williams, these two are tied together and reflect the inevitability of the prison experience: written discursive processes are coercive and oppressive. These same admissions forms lead the prisoners into the Reception Area (19) and their categorization into one of the four sections of the prison universe (21). We have already observed that these forms will be transformed, in the truest sense of the word, into ID cards (23), creating a paper-identity for the guards to seize. The reduction of person-to-paper allows the guard-filing clerk to sort prisoners into cells: ‘The two guards, one of them unlocking doors down the row, began allocating prisoners to

cells' (27). And the ironically panoptic vision of the Superintendent requires categorization in order for his pretense of bureaucratic control to be exercised:

Now they were all assembled for inspection, the short ones in front and the tall men behind, everybody in files of four, holding the blue ID cards so that the Superintendent of the jail could read their names in case he had anything to say to anybody (68).

Of course the Superintendent has nothing 'to say to anybody'; he is mute, in charge of a system which works without his knowledge or awareness. Only a menacing guard who 'asked suspiciously, "Any complaints?"' while 'slapping the side of his leg with the strap of his truncheon' (68) gets to speak. And this speech act, intended to ironically forestall speech, guarantees that only the ID cards exist. In a sense, the narrative grammar of the prison structure, the *langue*, has created a matrix within which the only *parole* allowed will be the inscriptions which are the prisoners—and, ironically, the warders and the Superintendent too:

The superintendent arrived and the section-guard unlocked the gate for him, stamped elaborately to attention...and said ...'. Everything all right, Major'.

The Super returned the salute with a gesture of his swagger-stick and started down the line ... [he] was a very tall, thin bony man [who looked as though] he had been roughly carved out of knotty wood ... he had a dry, brittle face like crumpled pink tissue-paper with holes torn in it for eyes, and a horizontal crease for a mouth (68).

He leaves, grunting his apparent satisfaction, and 'as soon as he had disappeared, a mutter of talk broke out and the prisoners relaxed' (69). This structural recognition that the representative of the writing-culture that is the prison system will silence speech (or attempt to) and impose writing on the prisoners is part of the narrative grammar of the institution. But even as the men are arrayed in 'files of four', we are to be led to files that lead to escape: the indeterminacy of the term 'file'—in fact its paradoxical quality—is a

loose thread waiting to unravel. Prisoners are lined up in files; they are literally and metaphorically sorted and (de)filed as paper products, yet files and rasps can free, will free, prisoners from the Jamesonian prison house of language.

The centrality of this issue (the Superintendent's panoptic control) is underlined elsewhere in the text, after Butcherboy's dead body is removed, his inscribed body covered by a blanket. Although he is quoted, it is an unusual kind of speech which we enter in mid-sentence:

The Super was saying, '...they treat this prison like it was a damned bar-room.' He stared at the lines of prisoners who had now fallen silent. He was angry and also worried. The Prisons Department expected him to keep proper order and to run the prison without its internal demerits being exposed too much (109).

The indirection of the ascription ('was saying') comes close to being free indirect speech, relegating the Super and his concerns—that, indeed, narrative/paper will escape—to a back burner. Of course the text will escape: Butcherboy is text and he is out, as Koppe will later ironically escape from the place in which, ultimately, the guards themselves are in many respects more imprisoned than the prisoners:

Locking and unlocking, George Adams thought. All these birds do is lock and unlock. It occurred to him that all guards in prison were practically prisoners themselves, that they lived most of their working life behind stone walls and bars; they were manacled to the other end of the chain (106).

It is not that the text requires sympathy in any simplistic way for the guards; rather, the structural dyad of guard/prisoner is polysemous—many layered. There is the cat and mouse game played between George and Fatso throughout—appropriately symbolized by a real cat playing with a mouse (110f): 'The prison cat came through the bars of the grille into the square and headed towards the kitchen behind the Isolation Block, and [George] watched it sleepily, thinking, Kitty ... you got me into trouble, kitty' (111). The necessary interdependence one expects from such dyads is at play. As

the sentence moves synchronically, we move with the cat, which connects to George and 'trouble.' When George is put into Isolation Block for his back-talk, he dreams of the now-dead Butcherboy, the cat's paw that Fatso had used to try to dehumanize George. In the dream, the *leitmotif* of the dripping water-pipe serves as the connector between the two strands of the narrative: George's story and that of the trio who will attempt escape:

Through the sound of the rising wind, the hesitant drip-drip of the unseen water-pipe played a reluctant counterpoint, and George Adams dreamed that he was in the backyard of the house where he lived, and Butcherboy was saying, 'Somebody got to fix that tap.' Butcherboy had a bundle of pamphlets under his arm and he said to George Adams, 'We got to hand this out by tonight before they lock us in.' 'You can get Jefferson and Yussy to help you', George Adams told him. 'I've got to cut that Yussy's blerry throat.' Then there was Butcherboy being carried away on a stretcher, holding the bundle of pamphlets, saying, 'Who killed Cock Robin?' (113).

In a sense, George's dream both highlights and negates the naturalistic suggestiveness of the narrative's descriptions. The 'drip-drip' of the pipe suggests an incremental erosion of seemingly solid structures (like the stone country itself). But there is the sense also, noticed by several critics²¹, that George Adams rejects a 'naturalistic, fatalistic explanation of human fate' (Mkhize 1998: 159). Whatever his motivations, George, 'albeit to a limited extent, conscientises these characters' (Mkhize 1998: 162). The handful of pamphlets that Butcherboy holds at the end of his dream is powerful evidence that even the bestial are remediable—even in prison.

We have also observed that the guards treat their very jobs as impositions upon them, complaining even about the most ordinary of duties. The ineptitude of the jailers, even as they pretend to control is in evidence everywhere in the novel. In fact, the reduction of the novelistic guard to idiocy is a dominant tendency in most if not all prison novels—unsurprising since guards are the representatives of the oppression of the site and the structure that imprisons. In their attempt to impose apartheid even in the supplies and food given to the different racial groups within the prison, the administration functions erratically and arbitrarily. George and Yusef are

discussing supper, bread and 'cawfee' (73), when Yusef initiates George into one of the ways that the prison works: they will get their bread 'With a dab a jam ... Use to be fat, but the Moslems and Indians had to get ghee. I reckon it was mos too much trouble for them to separate the ghees from the fats everyday, so now every bogger gets jam...' (74). George, about to have a confrontation with a guard who has just insisted that 'no skolly' is going to 'talk to me like he was a white man' (75), refuses to beg for a cup for his coffee. He asks the guard, 'Well, why don't they run this jail proper?' (75). One critic of the novel has developed the redolence of apartheid's hierarchies in *The Stone Country* (Yousaf 2001: 70-74). Others have acknowledged hierarchical separation in prison memoirs (notably Young 1996).

However, with the exception of George Adams' reflection on the events leading up to his arrest and imprisonment, guards function, structurally, as the primary source of exterior-to-prison references. There is a repetitive metaphoric quality to the guards' insistences that prison is not a 'circus' (19), a 'bar' (22, 109), a 'hotel' (23), a 'bioscope' (55), or a 'public meeting' (112). The parodic nature of the prison environment, in all of its rituals and patterns recalls Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, and the need, as some have called it, to see prison as 'world inside out'²². The metaphoric elimination of all that prison is not doesn't clearly establish what it is, but does call attention to the need to negotiate the space.

It is interesting that Solly, the jester-figure, is one of the only exceptions to the guards' textual control over external reference: 'Listen, when I was on the farm, we use to get up two o'clock to drive the cattle, reckon and think He started to fold his own blankets, saying, 'Saturday today. We all going to the big match this afternoon' (122). He also provides the impetus to an external comment by George, and is the key to connecting the otherwise unconnected (political George, prison naïf, and Gus, hard-core prisoner), thereby unifying the two sections of the novel:

Among the group was the little man, Solly, who grinned at him, cackling, '*Hoit*, pally. So they give you a separate room, hey?'
'*Ja*', George Adams laughed. 'Grand Hotel. What happened in here?'

'Law came yesterday afternoon', Solly said. He was trying to gaze past George Adams with wrinkled eyes, trying to catch the attention of Gus who was plodding mechanically around the square ... he caught Gus's eye and raised his hand slightly in an obscure signal and Gus winked at him (115).

The real life of the jailers regularly intrudes upon the patterns established by the jailers themselves, providing an ironic reminder of life beyond 'this half-world, hemmed in by stone and iron' (37): "'Well, I've got to go off duty'", the short guard said. "Jesus, must a man waste his time on these-----?" (23). 'The guard said to the escort: "Jussus, man, I am not going to wait. Going off now, jong. These bastards can wash in the morning, to hell with it. I'm not working blerry overtime"' (27). As a prelude to George's conflict with Fatso over his missing kit, we are told that "'We got in late", George Adams [said]. "I reckon the warder didn't want to open up the store"' (37). A structural connection is made at the heart of the novel, as a change in work shifts underlines the essential absence of language—as speech becomes stilled in writing—and unifies the external and internal prison worlds:

Outside, the sun had dwindled away, leaving the lavender twilight to filter over the stone and iron of the prison. The guards had taken the last count of the day, and had handed over to the night shift. The warders now on duty noticed the silence only casually, the way one noticed a street light after dark, or the sheen on the ground after a rainfall, and it did not bother them (81).

It is this ease with the rhythms of the space which they pretend to control that spirals the banality of the guards through the core of the labyrinth into their roles as plot motivators. The double helix which is the dance of guard with prisoner works in this way: prisoners tunnel inward to the isolate strength of their convictions (whether political or not). They move incrementally through the four stages of the prison to the heart of the labyrinth—The Hole—where Morgan's laughter represents the freedom that springs from a place that folds in upon itself. The prison space, as a result of the narrative grammar that propels this particular *discours*, is (inevitably) a metaphor for the isolate exploration of self—or a society's reflection of its

essential tendencies. On the other hand, the guards cycle in from a place where 'control' is manifested by surface manipulation—counts, orders, and other examples of physical authority—to a place where the paradox of writing banned becomes writing as freedom. The very instrument of control, the ability to make texts of people, releases people for the very exploration of internality which the prisoners 'true' freedom demands. Since knowledgeable prisoners, immersed in the prison culture, really run the temporal realities of all the prisoners in the textual landscape, it is fascinating to notice that the armature of the novel—the discrete narrative units of the text—is controlled by the guards. Guards are necessary and indispensable to the existence of the possibility of liberation within the prisoners' consciousnesses.

As examples of their role as primary motivators of plot, observe that the indoctrination and reduction to paper of the prisoners was necessarily led by those who waived admission forms, that the primary catapult for George's movement from Remand to Isolation Block is the confrontation with Fatso. Fatso goads Butcherboy into George's orbit (62); a nameless guard interrupts Yusef and Butcherboy after Yusef takes George's side (65). The long narrative unit leading up to the fight in the last chapter (the fourteenth) of Part I wavers between guard-induced interruptions to the slowly building scene, as in Chapter 12, where George is awakened by 'the grinding key in the lock' (74), and interventions by groups of prisoners who agitate in favour of an amorphous set of prisoners' 'rules' established by tradition. For example, after George's dangerous retort to Fatso over the inefficient administration of the prison—'Well, why don't they run this jail right?' (75)—a prisoner gives a mug to George so that the confrontation will end. Fatso asks the prisoner, "Who the hell called you to do anything" but he did not object when George Adams took the mug' (76). Butcherboy 'wondered whether he could do the baas a favour by dealing with this clever' (76).

Here, as elsewhere in the novel, we are told that 'the half-world of the prison had its own justice' (150), and that prisoners who have been initiated into knowledge control the deep field of prison life. For example, the internal 'trial' that is referenced during the confrontation between Yusef and Butcherboy establishes the common law of the institution: guards run the clock, but the existence of prisoners is controlled by codes of discursive

conduct that require initiation, absorption, and mediation. In the 'case' displayed in the novel, a prisoner who had 'complained to a guard, an unpardonable crime' (82), is found mysteriously murdered within a packed cell, with no hint of a weapon or any evidence of violence on anyone but the victim. Of course, the variation amongst those imprisoned is a function of how deeply a given prisoner has internalized the actual codes, the narrative grammar or *langue*, of the prison landscape. While the prisoners are walking in the exercise circle, we are given the order of initiation: 'round and round the circle moved, the bare feet of the three convicts slapping the hot tarmac of the square. Behind them walked The Casbah Kid and George Adams' (113). The trio mentioned in this passage is comprised of Gus, Morgan and Koppe. The trio—two of whom will make it to the center of the physical labyrinth—is the most incorporated into prison culture, George least.

This trio will escape, singing covering the sound of their sawing of the bars. These files, hack-saw blades really, are secreted in paper (of course) and hide in the plain sight of a garbage can, as the guards are distracted by the prison cat, who 'had caught a mouse and was in the process of worrying it to death before devouring it'. We are reminded yet again of the connection between guard/prisoner and cat/mouse: 'The three guards were watching, with fascination, the punishment of the mouse, chuckling, as if they felt a natural association with the feline sadism' (124). Gus uses paper to get to the garbage can where Solly has stashed the blades:

And Gus, seeing the attention of the guards distracted, started to saunter slowly past their backs toward the grille [where a crowd of prisoners watched the show]. He picked up a scrap of paper and a peel which somebody had dropped, and held it ostentatiously, so that anybody who happened to look his way would see nothing suspicious in his movement to the bins (124f).

At the end of the novel, three prisoners are highlighted as moving towards 'escape.' Although there is narrative movement to the outside of the prison, the ultimate escape is an escape from signification itself. The Casbah Kid, watched only by a 'Coloured warder' is about to be led to the gallows. He will be narratized as a story told to other prisoners, if he is to be

remembered at all. George moves back to remand from Isolation block, no longer to be menaced by Butcherboy. The impersonality of the prison's events and the depersonalization of the guards are complete: 'The door slammed shut and the lock grated. Leaving him alone again, with the scribbled walls, the smell of tobacco and blankets, and the chuckling sound of the wind. The next morning they moved him back to the Remand Section' (168). Although George is not yet out—indeed it does not matter because there is no escape from either the 'stone country' that is the world or from signification itself—he has maintained his status as a subject within the chain and within the labyrinth.

Conclusions

David Schalkwyk has observed that Afrikaner Herman Charles Bosman's *Cold Stone Jug*, a novel published in 1949 that is based upon his time as a convicted murderer 'remains the classic of South African prison writing' (1994:23). Bosman is, in the words of M.C. Andersen, 'a household name' among Afrikaners for his many short stories set in the Transvaal and because he was an outspoken critic of the Nationalist government's apartheid policies (Andersen 1993: 26). Bosman's had been 'sentenced to death in 1926 for shooting his stepbrother. The sentence was commuted ... and he ultimately spent about four years in the Pretoria Central Prison' (Andersen note 6: 38). That experience provided the grist for his prison novel, a text that is relentless in the ways in which it foregrounds the process of writing as inextricably bound up with the condition of imprisonment. Too, in this text as in *The Stone Country*, the writer becomes co-equal with the guard by virtue of the narrative control of reality exercised by the act of writing. Critics and former prisoners have written about the paradoxical fact that literacy programs on Robben Island created the conditions for ideological awakenings among politically indifferent prisoners (e.g. Buntman 1993; Jacobs 1992; Mandela 1978, 1994; Zwelonke 1973: 60-71). At least one critic sees George Adams in *The Stone Country* as just such an ideological instructor, of at least The Turk (Yusaf 2001: 86). Many others have written widely and well about the prison memoir and its revelatory or cathartic possibilities (including Davies 1990; Jacobs 1986, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c; Riemenschneider 1980; Roberts 1985; Schalkwyk 1994; Sinha 1990; Young

1996). A few have looked, notably Barbara Harlow (1987) and Ioan Davies (1990), at a typology of prison writing. Fewer have looked carefully at the intertextuality of prison novels written by former prisoners (Davies and Jacobs come to mind), and that connection, linking Bosman to La Guma by way of Hugh Lewin is the way in which I wish to close here.

In a limited but very real sense, the writer of a prison novel becomes co-equal with the figure of the guard. The prison writer's ability to create of him/herself a guard is inextricably connected to textuality and narrative: Both the prisoner-as-writer and the prison guard exercise a surface control over events that will eventually do what they will. As in the case of writing and literacy education within Robben Island, where the institutional 'distraction' of reading/writing/study turn against the institutional structure that spawned it (Jacobs 1991b: 196), the prison novelist becomes a carceral figure—one who guards the narrative presented, though more trapped within all prior narratives than he or she might wish to admit. Both are trapped within frames—the guard within the frame of carcerality itself, the writer within the frames of all past narratives. For example, Bosman writes in *Cold Stone Jug* that a 'yearning for culture and scholarship ... infected the prison like a mediaeval plague' as prisoners wrote their memoirs while in prison, creating what he termed 'graphomania': 'And what a lot of lies they wrote, too But there was also a grim realism about the titles of some of these works of autobiography: like "Put in Boob by a Nark", or "Cold Stone Jug"' (1949: 160f). Bosman—the character in the novel—is working in a print shop at that chronological point in the narrative where a

warder named Marman ... who had literary leanings ... had written a novel about prison life ... the hero was a blue coat [a long-term convict] ... it was a very moving story that this warder Marman wrote. It was full of slush and sentiment and melodrama and bad grammar (128).

The convicts surreptitiously set the type for the book in the prison print shop; however, they decide that the redistribution of the letters into their appropriate storage bins will take too much time, so 'Discipline Head-Warder Marman's novel in the form of column after column of loose type set by hand were shot through a hole in the floor' (129). The jail guard's

prison novel serves up sentences that are literally buried in the prison/narrative.

When Charles Bosman's protagonist reads *The Count of Monte Christo* while in Pretoria Central Prison (Bosman 1949: 46), and when Hugh Lewin reads Bosman thirty years after publication and fifty after his incarceration in the same prison, noting that 'very little had changed' in Pretoria Central (Lewin 1974: 109), then the 'wealth of resonances' that astute critics of the prison memoir such as Jacobs (1991b: 199) note must accompany readings of memoirs can become true also of prison novels, especially those written by authors who have faced isolation and longing in a prison setting. Their novels escape, while guards remain behind.

References

¹ See Breidlid (2002), especially pp. 34-41, on representational realism in African contexts. Breidlid surveys Foucault, Said, and ultimately Bhabha as well as South Africans such as J.M. Coetzee, David Maughan-Brown and many others on the notion of the mediated reality of truth.

² Abdul JanMohamed quotes Fredric Jameson's insistence that 'all literature is informed by the political unconscious ... and that the primary function of literary analysis is the "unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts"' in *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (264). Inevitably, the Jamesonian aesthetic, best exemplified in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, is assumed at the outset of this study. Jameson's assumption that the relations between literature and society require narratives to interrogate the paradoxes inherent in social contradictions is especially important (e.g. pp. 82-83, 70, elsewhere).

³ It is the dialectical tension between thesis and antithesis to which I refer here. Abdul JanMohamed's study, referred to immediately above, is an especially useful analysis of the binarizing tendency of (especially) colonial representations in the novel form. In his study, JanMohamed grounds himself in Franz Fanon's belief that 'the colonial world is a Manichean world'. In other words, novels that depict the colonial situation in Africa—and especially novels that treat of racial organization, as in the South Africa of the period—either reduce the native to the embodiment of evil, or invert the situation and demonize the settler. Little subtlety is allowed.

'The Manichean organization of colonial society has reached its apogee in the 'Republic' of South Africa ... where the abusive term for African, 'kaffir', literally means infidel ... [in his fourth chapter, on Nadine Gordimer, 79-150]. D.T. Moodie has traced the theological notions of apartheid back to the Calvinistic notions of predestination, original sin, and its highly polarized views of salvation and damnation. Given the theological sources of this ideology, Fanon's definition of colonial society as a manichean organization is by no means exaggerated. In fact, the colonial mentality is dominated by a manichean allegory of white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and other, subject and object' (e.i.o.). To his list of binaries, we merely need to add master and slave, guard and prisoner, writing and orality. In *The Stone Country*, I feel that the dialectical tension between guard and prisoner is a surface phenomenon which the text deconstructs.

⁴ Although I am here referring to Bakhtin's conception of the 'chronotope', as developed in *The Dialogic Imagination* (84), John Bender and David Wellbery, in their collection, *Chronotypes: The Construction of Time*, present a detailed introduction to research into narratives that focus on temporality. Inevitably, Husserl's phenomenological concepts and Paul Ricoeur's *Temps et Recit*, among many others, are investigated.

⁵ Nahem Yousaf, in *Alex La Guma: Politics and Resistance* (2001), is exemplary in his avoidance of binarization in favour of more complicated narrative presentations. In his chapter on *The Stone Country* (71-89), he explicitly links the 'apartheid structures' and all facets of 'everyday life', including the prison experience (71).

⁶ The distinction that Gerard Genette makes between story, the chronological run of events in the real world and narrative, the shaping of those events into the form we read—regardless of temporal sequence or duration; and narration, the way in which the tenor of those events is relayed to us—is the relevant background for this use of the term. See Genette, *Figures III* (1972); see also the invaluable analysis of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, 'A Comprehensive Theory of Narrative: Genette's *Figures III* and the Structuralist Study of Fiction', in *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976), 33-62.

⁷ All references to *The Stone Country* are from the Heinemann edition (1974).

⁸ JanMohamed, referred to in note #3, is concerned with the dependency relationship inherent in relationships of duality. I am more concerned with the indeterminacy of the liminal space in between the opposed pairs.

⁹ This point is extensively developed by J.J.T. Mkhize (1998) in his *Social Realism in Alex La Guma's Longer Fiction*.

¹⁰ See, for example, Yousaf (2001: note 47, page 89) who points to Barbara Harlow's (1987:120) distinction between 'prison writing' and 'prison memoirs', in *Resistance Literature* (1987).

¹¹ Jacobs, in 'The Discourses of Detention' makes it clear that many of the most powerful of the autobiographical accounts surveyed in his essay do not provide 'the kinds of insights into the internal, organizational hierarchy necessary for survival in a penal world', nor do they probe 'the more problematic "grey" zones between gaolers and prisoners' (196).

¹² Jacobs puts it so: 'More than any other novelist working within the country Gordimer has concerned herself in her works with the theme of political imprisonment: *Burger's Daughter* is the fictional text dealing with imprisonment and life under surveillance in South Africa during the 60s and 70s; and in both *A Sport of Nature* and *My Son's Story* imprisonment for resistance to the apartheid regime is formative in the experience of main characters' (194). The problem lies in the fact that imprisonment is, in all three cases, functional rather than developed as a matrix apart from the needs of the formation of character. For example, in *Burger's Daughter*, the protagonist goes through a revelatory experience while in prison, but prison itself is not explored in ways which get beyond the trope of prison as potentially redemptive, and therefore romantically 'necessary'.

¹³ As J.M. Coetzee (1992:378) notes in his comments on Breytenbach, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* is relentlessly about not merely the prison, but Breytenbach himself: 'What is the difference, he asks himself, between the "true confession" he utters into a microphone in Palermo in 1983 (eventually to become this book) and the "true confession" the interrogators demanded in Pretoria in 1975? Are not both of them answers to the question "What is the truth of your mission to South Africa?" Before the interrogator, before the microphone, before the blank page, Breytenbach

finds himself in the same position, staring at himself. So he develops the mirror as the master metaphor of his book; and the most interesting passages are the dialogues he conducts with the figure in the mirror, which is variously the cruel interrogator, the “true” Breytenbach, and the dark brother-African’.

¹⁴ JanMohamed lists the novels and publications: ‘*A Walk in the Night* (1962) was published in Nigeria, *And a Threefold Cord* (1964) and *The Stone Country* (1967), in Berlin, *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* (1973), in New York, and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1981), in London’ (226). It seems noteworthy that the publications cycle in from the margins of the colonial world to the metropolis, eventually filtering back to the ‘re-incorporated’ (post-apartheid) margins of South Africa.

¹⁵ The literary naturalism to which I refer is particularly appropriate to *The Stone Country* if not to all other La Guma texts. However, La Guma’s *A Walk in the Night* and some of his short stories are consistent with Zola’s preface to his own *Therese Raquin* (1867), where clinical detachment and a dissection of the squalid lives of members of the lowest underclass combine with an overpowering sense of the juggernauts that control lives. Still, characters can express hope even in the face of overwhelming odds. However, some critics, such as Jabulani Mkhize (1998:151, 159) insist that ‘La Guma dismisses any naturalistic reading of [*And a Threefold Cord*] [and in *The Stone Country*] George Adams rejects a naturalistic, fatalistic and idealistic explanation of human fate ...’. I submit that human agency and the hope that struggle engenders are not mutually exclusive of a Naturalistic view of the world. Yousaf (2001: 80f) seconds the notion that persistence ‘against all odds’ is an Althusserian possibility.

¹⁶ As a representative comment on the rhetorical usage of the passive voice, see Coetzee’s (1980a; 1980b) ‘The Agentless Sentence as Rhetorical Device’ and ‘The Rhetoric of the Passive in English’ respectively. In his collection of essays, *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee (1992:149) cites Ian Watt’s conception of the passive voice: ‘Passives ... contribute to texts “many of the verbal and syntactic qualities of abstract discourse; of expository rather than narrative prose”’. This connects with the observation, above, that La Guma is using a socially realistic conception of narrative discourse. Further, Coetzee, in summarizing Roger Fowler, analogizes the

condition of the prisoner we have located: 'By affecting the focus of a sentence, the active form can consolidate the superficial subject as "hero" where the passive would consolidate the subject as "sufferer". If the agent is systematically deleted 'the impression would be given of a central participant "to whom things happened"—as opposed to "who had things done to him"' (150). Coetzee also warns against the "naïve direction", whereby one posits a direct and "necessary relationship between the syntactic pattern and its interpretation" The naïve step is to argue for a neat mapping from syntactic form to meaning. A more fruitful question to ask instead is whether a given form can accommodate *any* given meaning, and, if not (as seems likely), what the *range* of meanings is that a given form accommodates in practice' (148f). The point I wish to make in calling attention to the passive form is its deferral of the active agent, the 'range' of possible sites of power, and the narrative logic of the text's display of the passive in a text where, superficially, prisoner agency is absent in the face of a depersonalized system.

¹⁷ See, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Can The Subaltern Speak?' (in Nelson 1998).

¹⁸ The long tradition of a romantic vision of the prisoner, especially in the French literary tradition, is surveyed by, among others, deWitt (1985); Davies (1990); and Auerbach (1996).

¹⁹ See Abrahams (1985) and Mkhize (1998) for a summary of the critical discussion of La Guma's use of weather as a leitmotif in his fiction.

²⁰ In the sense that A.J. Greimas (1971) uses the term. An actant is a structural element with functional existence.

²¹ Mkhize (1998: 147-165) surveys the criticism of La Guma's work in *And A Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*, highlighting those critics, such as Abdul JanMohammed, who disagree over the degree to which George Adams, and other La Guma protagonists, are social activists.

²² Ioan Davies (1990:10f) gives an extended treatment of the carnivalesque nature of prison, using Bakhtin extensively. He also highlights several core distinctions between a facile assumption of the trope of 'prison as parodic reality': 'Prisons anywhere do not offer a time-limited event in which the carnival parodies extra-carnival life. For prisoners the "carnival" is an episode in which the external power implodes, and the play one in which all

prisoners are compelled to become actors prison culture is not festive and displays no laughter In fact, prison culture is the exact obverse of the carnivalesque: there is little or no spontaneity in the ritual, the social hierarchy is tightened, not relaxed, and if identities are sometimes played with, they are more often negotiated. But the prison culture is in another sense a culture that is set apart from everyday culture, establishing a creative, experiential scheme in dealing with its everyday world'.

Nahem Yousaf (2001:76-80) extends Davies' usage of the prison carnivalesque in his *Alex La Guma: Politics and Resistance*, where he pithily captures Foucault's essence of the 'machinery' of imprisonment insofar as it is related to the Apartheid regime. However, more than one critic has taken exception to the ascription of 'carnivalesque' to any but the most thinly described of phenomena: 'Terry Eagleton, for example, expresses a strong skepticism toward the subversive potential of Bakhtin's carnival, pointing out that carnival is 'a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art' (Walter 148). In addition, Bakhtin's apparent treatment of the carnival as an unequivocal image of emancipation seems to ignore the important fact that carnivalesque violence was often directed not at official authority but precisely at the kinds of oppressed and marginalized groups that would presumably be liberated by carnivalesque subversion of authority' (see Booker 1996: 107).

It is in the sense of this 'darker' side of the Bakhtinian carnival, as Bernstein calls it in *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero* (1994), that I use the term.

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