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Prison experience in the work of some South African writers from Lessing to Cronin

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Sachs adds,

> My need for activity is desperate, but there must be some element of usefulness in what I do. If the work is completely senseless, I feel even more demoralised at its completion than if I had done nothing at all.
> (Ibid, page 53)

First was fortunate to have been allowed to keep her wristwatch. Generally, detainees are not allowed to know what the time is, and lights burn in the cells twenty-four hours a day. James Kantor, accustomed to living by the clock, was particularly distressed when he discovered how slowly time passed in the prison. He relates the following incident. On the first morning of his detention, while in the exercise yard, Kantor asked

> "By the way, what is the time please?" "What's the hurry?" van Eeden asked with a sneer. "You got a train to catch?" (...) So far so good, I reflected, although he had refused to tell me the time, I had worked out that, supposing we had been woken at 5.30 a.m., with the interval before and after breakfast, then the half-hour in the yard, it would bring the time to about 11 a.m. With half the morning gone, I hadn't been too bored and if things kept up at this rate I would certainly be able to cope for a few days.
> (Kantor, page 44)

After lunch and the afternoon exercise period, Kantor discovered by looking at the warder's watch that it was 11.40 a.m.

> "Is that the right time?"
> "Yes, why?"
> "But it can't be, we've had lunch already," I said.
> "Lunch is at 10.45 and supper at 3," he replied. I was absolutely shattered. Could this be true, or was this just a sadistic trick? I joined the others. I was interested in nothing but the time. They confirmed what the warder had told (...) the morning was no more than half over and I had been certain that it was already mid-afternoon.
> (Ibid, page 48 - 49)

First soon realised that there are disadvantages in having a watch, for she could see how time was physically refusing to move faster. She had to work out a new system of keeping time in accordance with prison routine.

> Minutes, hours, days, weeks are measurements of time for normal living. For the prisoner in isolation, hours and days go by too slowly for them to be acceptable measurements of time. Rather, I decided, measure time as the period of musing before and after a meal, before and after a stretch of sleep, before and after exercise, before and after an interrogation.
> (Op cit, page 74)

Albie Sachs viewed time as a series of

> significant fractions, for these are the dimensions of the real world. The day is split up by mealtimes; morning, afternoon and evening further split up by activities. A day is a significant period, as is a week, as is ten days. After ten days, the next target is two weeks, then twenty days, then three weeks, then four weeks, then thirty days and a whole month. Thirty days is already one third of the way to ninety days. (...) Right now I am just over halfway to the first activity after breakfast in the first quarter of the day, the day being the ninth day of the first ninety days, that is one day short of ten days.
> (Op cit, page 58)

For detainees held in solitary confinement, time is at once both totally meaningless and the most meaningful aspect of their lives. By focussing on time, they manage to survive.

At the beginning of her book, First tells how she changed from an active "vertical" person to a "horizontal" person - the bed in her cell was her comfortable sanctuary. Sleep and private thoughts kept her sane. Until such time as the interrogators and fear of the interrogations began intruding on her private thoughts, she was confident of remaining strong and silent. Later, loneliness and frustration led her to engage in anecdotal conversation with her gaolers. With the realisation that

she was talking to them about herself, First began to suspect *that she was losing control of her sanity*. After the police released her and immediately re-arrested her at the expiry of her first 90 days,[68] Ruth First opted to lose control.

> Left to face my second round of ninety days I was filled with loathing and *bitterness*. (...) I sat on the edge of the bed, still in my navy outfit, and shook with sobs.
> (*op cit, page 112 - 113*)

In protest against her redetention, Ruth First decided to embark on a hunger strike.[69] This was different from the type of hunger-strike described by Bosman in Cold Stone Jug and from Lessing's *anorexia*. In retrospect, she writes

> ... this was no time, at the end of ninety days spent in solitary, to embark upon a hunger strike. (...) I did not offer alarmingly overt symptoms to recognize the effect solitary had had on me. I suffered no claustrophobia, no ringing in the ears, no voices coming from the walls, no nightmares, no double vision, no *hallucinations*. *Disorientation* was *calmness* itself, without my knowing the extent of it. I was lonely, I was anxious, I longed for human company.
> (Ibid, page 115)

She could no longer maintain her strength, physical or emotional - she was no longer able to sleep at will, and became ill. The authorities allowed her personal doctor to visit her and he prescribed sleeping tablets. Some time later, when her resistance had worn down even further and she worried that she might betray her comrades by making a statement, she wrote a note to her mother, *children and husband, and swallowed all the tablets*. On his second visit, when he was summoned to examine her after her suicide attempt, the doctor said

> "You don't think I'd be so foolish as to leave you with that size dose?"
> (Ibid, page 132)

First outlines in detail the reasons for her attempted suicide:

> Sleep had been a refuge in the cell; now it had fled. On top of sleeplessness I had nausea, and diarrhoea. It all spelled anxiety, I suppose, but a anxiety that had got out of hand and that I could no longer control with my own resources. (Ibid, page 128)

Shortly before this, First had succumbed to the relentless pestering of the security police, especially Lieut. J.J. Viktor[70] and had made a statement. She had revealed nothing of her political involvement,[71] but felt completely dishonourable. She writes of her feelings with great anger, largely self-directed.

> I had reeled back from a precipice of collapse but I felt worse than ever. I was persecuted by the dishonour of having made a statement, even the start of a statement. Give nothing, I had always believed; the more you give the more they think you know, and the more demanding they become. I had never planned to give anything, but how could I be the judge? It would be impossible to explain such an act, to live it down. [...] was it my arrogance, my concern that pooled experiences and rules of conduct (under interrogation) were for other people, and that I was different and could try my own way? (Ibid, page 129)

She felt enormous guilt at having begun to break down under pressure, and to deal with it

> There was only one way out, before I drove myself mad, and as the truest indication to anyone who was interested that I had not let the Security Branch have it all their own way. (Ibid, page 130)

She is referring of course to her unsuccessful suicide attempt.

First seemed to believe that her suicide would assure her comrades that she had not betrayed them. However, to those outside, her suicide might have meant exactly the opposite: that she had made a statement and could not

live with her conscience. It is therefore very important that she makes this comment. It is commonly speculated that detainees who commit suicide do so as a result of the guilt at having betrayed comrades.

After the failed suicide attempt, known only to First and her doctor, the war on her nerves was intensified. As she knew they would, the Security Police demanded that she be more specific and incriminating in her statement. They constantly threatened to charge her and hinted at danger for her family. They tried to manipulate her into buying her freedom with a statement. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, on day 117, they released her.

> I don't know why I was released. Perhaps they just didn't have enough evidence. Perhaps they had made up their minds that I would not talk after all.
> (Ibid, page 144)

The way in which First describes her release mirrors the way in which the release happened: suddenly and unexpectedly. She was sure, though, that "it was not the end, that they would come again." (Ibid, page 144).

In the closing pages of the book, in describing the events prior to her release, First's tone is increasingly angry and bitter. Phrases like "psychological torture for the benefit of science", "like little Eichmanns", "answerable for nothing" (page 135) reflect her anger.

Her self-disappointment is dealt with honestly: she did not like the idea of her vulnerability and her inability to survive unscathed. But she accepts that it existed and that she was pitting it against enormous brutality. This honesty makes First's book extremely valuable as representative of a genre - it helps readers (and former/future detainees) to realise that vulnerability exists in the strongest, and it has to be admitted. Admitting vulnerability does not mean betrayal or failure, but is an aid to an honest understanding of one's experience.

First ends her book with the words

> When they left me in my own house at last I was convinced that it was not the end, that they would come again.
> (Ibid, page 144)

She left South Africa on an exit permit in March 1964 - three months after her release on 3rd December 1963. She wrote and published 117 Days in 1965, and later participated in a British Broadcasting Corporation documentary based on it.[72]

Ronald Segal writes in his preface to First's book

> Those guards of the South African regime did come again; not swaggering in their uniforms but in a seemingly safe package which had been treated to blow her apart.
> (Ibid, page 8)

Ruth First was killed by a parcel bomb in Mozambique in 1982. It has been speculated that this was the only way in which the South African government could finally silence her - bannings, detention, and ultimately, self imposed exile did not stop her from fighting for freedom in South Africa. Her detention, despite its immediate effect of precipitating an emotional breakdown, strengthened her resolve and gave more energy to her fighting spirit.

Ruth First is only one of several South Africans who wrote of their experiences in detention in the period 1960 to 1963. Myrna Blumberg, a Cape Town journalist, was a sympathiser with the PAC cause. She was detained in Cape Town at the start of the 1960 emergency, and was held in a communal cell with eight other women. Her book White Madam is the only one of all the books in this category not banned in South Africa, and is the only one that deals with detention in communal confinement. Blumberg describes her imprisonment from a far more subjective personal perspective than does First. Her major focus is on the small child she left at home in the care of her

black domestic worker. She was worried that her husband, Ken Mackenzie, also a journalist, had been detained as well.

Blumberg's experiences differ from First's in many ways. She was not held in solitary confinement, which Ruth First was, and she was not allowed access to her own doctor, which First was; the prison doctor ignored her complaints. Blumberg was allowed visits more frequently than was First. But, in many other ways, their experiences were very similar. Both women describe the use of prison labour, the attitudes of their interrogators and the ways in which they received medical help only when on the verge of nervous collapse. They were both given tablets which were ostensibly to help them: First used hers in a suicide attempt.

Blumberg describes the use of convict labour within the prison: coloured women prisoners were humiliated by the wardresses when they came to clear away the food trays of the white women detainees:

> ... she flicked her baton quite smartly at the Coloured woman's buttocks as they leaned down to the ground to pick up our tray, making them jump expressionlessly away from her and try to reach the tray again a little further away. "Come on, move!" she ordered with a gleeful grin ...
> (White Madam, page 69)

First illustrates the differences in the treatment of white and black in her descriptions of how prison labour is used. White women prisoners are not expected to do more than make their beds and sweep out their cells: black prisoners polish the floors and any shiny object that is not shiny enough. They are required to do any jobs the warders deem necessary. First writes of this in despair:

> ... like any white South African madam I sat in bed each morning, and Africans did the cleaning for the "missus".
> (op cit, page 37)

She describes the manner in which the wardresses abused the prisoners, by yelling at them and laughing at their movements as they slipped along the corridors on cloths and polish. Black women detainees are not waited upon. Ellen Kuzwayo was expected to clean her own cell, even after major surgery. Her fellow-detainees offered to help her, to the chagrin of the wardresses.73

One of the differences between First's and Blumberg's books is in their ideological perspectives. But the similarities in their experiences as white South African women journalists who had left their children in someone else's care while they were in detention are remarkable.

Albie Sachs (Jail Diary) and James Kantor (A Healthy Grave) were also detained late in 1963. Both memoirs offer useful comparisons with First's 117 Days, as they deal with the same period. Sachs, a Cape Town advocate, was detained for 168 days from October 1963 and Kantor was arrested soon after Harold Wolpe's escape in August 1963. The three writers communicate with one another through their memoirs: experiences are shared and events are backed up by all three. First knew James Kantor only as the brother-in-law and colleague of Harold Wolpe, and she knew of Albie Sachs through Communist Party circles. Her eventual access to reading and writing materials was as a result of Sachs' application to the courts; First only discovered this on her release, but nonetheless mentions it chronologically in her book.

First was perturbed by Kantor's arrest, as she knew him to be a flamboyant, fun-loving Johannesburg attorney, politically inactive, and very different from his brother-in-law.

> James Kantor, from Monday to Friday attorney, in the courts and corridors of the magistrates' courts, at weekends socialite yachtsman on Hartebeespoort Dam ....
> (117 Days, page 43)

This description matches Kantor's own.

Kantor was arrested and subsequently charged along with the other Rivonia accused. He was in detention at Marshall Square and Pretoria Central, until he was released on bail. The judge in the Rivonia trial, Judge Quartus de Wet, discharged Kantor before the completion of the trial, as he saw no reason to continue holding him. Kantor emigrated to England where he died in 1974. His account of his prison experiences (and the events preceding them) is in some ways as flamboyant as he was reputed to be; it is sprinkled with photographs and copies of newspaper headlines and discloses intimacies of the sort which are absent from other accounts. However, the book is significant in that it contains a first-hand account of the Rivonia trial and brief autobiographical pieces written by each accused. Kantor's presentation of such material is historically very valuable.

Albie Sachs, like Ruth First, was banned under the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, but was nonetheless detained for his activities. (Sachs' father, Solly Sachs, was the chairman of the Garment Workers' Union, and had been banned so often that he eventually exiled himself to England.) Albie Sachs, like Ruth First, had been raised in a communist family, and had strong beliefs about social injustices. He too, went into exile in 1965, after a second term of detention. Jail Diary was written immediately after his release in 1964.

Sachs describes his mundane activities in prison in a chapter entitled "A Day in my Life", a lengthy piece. He would sweep and polish, flush his toilet, fold his blankets, sleep, sing, whistle, and play word games. He discovered that he could make contact with other detainees by whistling, but tells how he would make a point of whistling only at specified times of day, and managed to convey this to the others by refusing to answer their whistled responses until evening. Sachs invented a number of other diversionary games, most of which he derived from

playing with his food parcels. His other major activity was running. Instead of pacing in his cell like the "story-book prisoners", he used his exercise periods to run; on his release, he ran six miles from the prison in central Cape Town to Clifton Beach, where he plunged into the icy water.

Sachs relates how he had become so accustomed to solitary confinement without reading and writing materials that when he received these as a result of the momentous judgement,[74] he was unable to do anything with them:

> the paper is dazzingly white and in my hand is a pencil. The wood feels clumsy between my fingers. I must use it but to do what? I rest my hand on the pad and wait for my fingers to start moving. Should I write my name? But that would be silly. Should I draw something? (...) there it is: a tiny black blob.
> (Jail Diary, page 160)

Sachs was not only unaccustomed to writing, he was terrified that he might reveal something to his interrogators about his thoughts and feelings through his scribblings. He was so overwhelmed by the possibility to read that at first he could not choose a single title.

Like First, Sachs was tempted to spend much of his time asleep; however, he allowed himself this privilege only at night.

> Sleep is a refuge, for my anguish is during the day, and exhausted by constant attempts during wakefulness at self-activation, my mind rests at night. I have few dreams. My emotions, stretched and bereft after vainly seeking engagement for so long, relax when the light goes out. It is night that is normal. Sleep has no geography. I could be at home. That is why each awakening is such a shock.
> (Ibid, page 49)

Where First had her wristwatch, Sachs had audial access to a chiming church clock; Kantor as related above

had no way of knowing [illegible] like First, Sachs divided the day into particular segments, so that "time" made sense. As related earlier, he could only think clearly after doing something goal-directed.

Another similarity in the memoirs of Sachs and First is the desire to write of their experiences. Sachs reveals that he wanted to write a play, First a novel. Where Sachs is unrestrained in his desire to let the world know about his experiences, First is reticent, thinking that if she were to write a novel

> the characters were me and my friends, all cast in heroic mould (...) we were locked up in prison cells and here I was again, grappling with life in a cell
> (117 Days, page 71)

Sachs' diary was rewritten for the stage, and has been performed several times in England. Ruth First played herself when the memoir was reconstructed as a BBC film.

Despite the similarities and the shared experiences, First and Sachs describe their releases in different ways. As already mentioned, First ended her memoir as abruptly and as unexpectedly as she was released. Sachs stretches out the ending to echo his six mile run to the sea. He writes simply "I am free" and goes on to tell how it happened. Unlike First, who knew that she would be harassed again, Sachs believed

> I have won and they have lost
> (Jail Diary, page 277)

He does not end his diary without giving explicit details of his six mile run. His attention to detail is indicative of what he had been forced into doing throughout the 168 days in solitary confinement. His run

and his swim in the icy Atlantic were the first phases of Sachs' catharsis from his imprisonment: writing the book was the next.

All the writers discussed in this chapter, and others not mentioned, wrote their memoirs for both personal and political reasons. The political reasons are clear enough - they aim to inform the world about solitary confinement in South African prisons and to equip future detainees with survival strategies. Th personal reasons are more difficult to decipher. Perhaps writing is cathartic, perhaps it helps ex-detainees to readjust to normal living. There are no simple answers in analysing this kind of writing.

Chapter Four

D M Zwelonke's Robben Island is a fictionalised memoir of life on the notorious prison island just off Cape Town.[1] Zwelonke's book differs from most of the prison material discussed so far in that it makes a conscious claim to be fictitious.[2]

> For various reasons I have written it as a work of fiction. Fiction, but projecting a hard and bitter truth; fiction mirroring non-fiction, true incidents and episodes. The characters are all fictional, including, in a sense, myself. (Robben Island, page 3)

However, as much as Zwelonke tried consciously to produce a work of fiction, Robben Island, like the other works discussed thus far, contains elements of the diary or the memoir, and mirrors the reality of his experience. It is as if he has taken genuine historical incidents and simply written them down, reporting them as accurately as if in a newspaper. Many of the events and incidents he describes are similarly described in other books about imprisonment on the Island, such as Indres Naidoo's Island in Chains[3] and Moses Dlamini's Hell Hole.[4]

Of the available material on Robben Island, Zwelonke's novel has been chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, its claim to be fictitious provides a framework for literary analysis which may be missing in a memoir. Secondly, Zwelonke was a member of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). This is significant in a discussion of Robben Island as many of the prisoners on the Island in the 1960s were members of the PAC, not the African National Congress (ANC) which is the organisation with wider recognition today.[5]

In order to contextualise Zwelonke's novel, an historical overview both of Robben Island and of the PAC is necessary.

1. History of Robben Island

The documented history of Robben Island is at least as old as documented white South African history: Jan van Riebeeck[5] established a trading station on the Island in the 1600s, and since then, until its use as South Africa's most notorious prison, the island has had a varied history of its own. Simon A de Villiers' book Robben Island,[7] is the only available work about the early history of Robben Island. De Villiers, who wrote the book from an allegedly "apolitical" stance,[8] outlines the history of the island from 1652 to 1965.

De Villiers describes how the island has been used as trading station, hospital, lunatic asylum, leper colony and prison. It has always been used in one of two ways: either as a distant location from which natural resources are imported,[9] or as a "dumping ground" for society's unwanted. People who could not be dealt with or accommodated in "normal" daily society - such as lunatics, lepers and convicts - were banished to the island, where they were out of sight.

There are at least two ways of viewing internment conditions on the island: Erving Goffman's "total institution" is one way, Michel Foucault's "panopticon" is another.[10] The physical construction of institutions and staff residences on the island is such that twenty-four hour surveillance of inmates by personnel is always possible, and the isolated piece of land provides for complete control in a complete world.

Goffman describes the "total institution" as an institution where:

> all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority. Second, each phase of the member's daily

> activity is carried on in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and required to do the same thing together. Third, all phases of the day's activities are tightly scheduled, with one activity leading at a prearranged time into the next, the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials. Finally, the various enforced activities are brought together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution.
> (Asylums, page 17)

He describes as well the ways in which institution personnel are affected by their jobs. The total institution becomes a total world not only for the inmates, but for the personnel, especially when they live on the institution premises.

Foucault's view of the institution is that it provides a physical construction in which inmates can be observed at all times, whether they are aware of this or not. The consequence of continual surveillance in the institution is a system that provides the personnel with a means to continue their observation of the inmates even after they are no longer resident in the institution.[11]

De Villiers' history fits best into Goffman's model; although claiming to be presenting an objective social history, he presents the total institution from the point of view of the island's personnel. This seems to be a consequence of his writing about the history of those "heroic" South Africans who made the island institutions possible.

His account is biased in many ways: De Villiers ignores the fact that the island may have been utilised by inhabitants of South Africa before the arrival of the settlers,[12] ignores the existance of those people anywhere on the subcontinent, and gives all the credit for its discovery to the early Portuguese explorers. He credits Dutch and British sailors with the development of

the island's natural resources. Yet in his introduction, he describes a Muslim shrine, the exact history of which is unknown, "buried in the sands of time [and] it stands today as a memory of a bygone age" (page xi).

De Villiers has used archival documentation to describe the island and its status as one of the foundations on which the refreshment station at the Cape was built somewhat prior to van Riebeeck's arrival.[13] As early as 1611, it was decided to send Dutch convicts from Holland to the refreshment station; these convicts left the mainland for Robben Island in the hope of establishing their own community. They survived off the island's wildlife - mainly seals and birds - and began to cultivate their own crops. This community seemed fairly content until the island itself became a refreshment station. He does not reveal what happened to the convict community.

De Villiers hypothesises that had it not been for the island and its natural resources, settlement in the Cape would have taken at least another hundred years to accomplish. From 1652 - 1662, most of the food eaten in the new colony was provided by the island. Sheep and goats were bred there. Strategically, the settlers regarded the island as a potential refuge should the Cape Hottentots attack them. After some years, a lighthouse was built on the island to guide ships into Table Bay; it was built from shells and lime indigenous to the island. In addition, van Riebeeck used the island's lime for building in the Cape.

The greater part of De Villiers' book deals with the two sanatoria established on Robben Island from the middle of the last century: first a leper colony and later a lunatic asylum.

As early as 1662, when van Riebeeck left the Cape, the island's potential as a prison was noted.

> There the prisoners were not in public view, and they could serve their terms of hard labour burdened by chains clamped around their wrists and ankles. The sea surrounding the island not only kept prisoners from escaping, it kept unwanted visitors out. The prisoners worked in the quarries where they collected blue stones and shells for lime.
> (De Villiers, page 25)

At that point, the prison population consisted of soldiers and Hottentot slaves who had violated the rules of the colony.

In its middle years[14] when the island was used as a prison by the British settlers, Robben Island's best known prisoner was Makhana, also known as Nxele ("the left-handed"), a Xhosa prophet from the Grahamstown area, who led the Fifth Frontier War against Lord Somerset. Makhana was incarcerated on Robben Island, from where he escaped. He drowned before he could reach the mainland.

Makhana was regarded as an heroic figure by the Xhosa, not only because of his imprisonment, but because of his escape. In more recent popular consciousness, Makhana and his deeds have become closely linked with the island, and Robben Island has become widely known as Makhana's Island. Makhana's imprisonment, and the reasons for it, are a part of a continual history of resistance in South Africa. His memory gives legitimacy to the continuity of the struggle of black people from the early years of white settlement to the present.

Robben Island has been continuously used as a means to remove unwanted people from society. In 1930, the government removed the sick inhabitants from the island and sent them to Pretoria. By the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the South African Defence Department had taken over the island and was preparing it as a fortress to guard the Cape and Table Bay against attack by the enemy.

In the 1950s, the island was given to the South African navy: a town was developed for navy personnel, who lived there until 1965, when according to de Villiers, the island became the property of the Prisons Department. De Villiers' information is inaccurate as prisoners have in fact been on the island since at least 1963.[15] De Villiers ends his history of the island with the following words:

> No matter what prison it may be in South Africa, the prisoners are rehabilitated, by teaching them a useful trade or occupation, so that when they are released they are able to find work and become useful members of society. Today, we no longer call a man a lunatic, but a mental patient. A convict is called a prisoner and we no longer refer to a kaffir but a Bantu. And so, we return to the mainland.
> (Ibid, page 116 - 117)

One need only read Zwelonke, Naidoo, Dlamini, or Brutus[16] to realise that the extent of rehabilitative skills taught on the island is the breaking of stones in the quarry.

De Villiers ends his history of Robben Island where for most people it only begins. His text is sorely lacking - it would have had infinitely more value had he chosen to explore the concept of the institution in either the leper colony or the mental asylum, or the effects of institution life on the island personnel.

Because of the silence around Robben Island's history and its significance to present day South Africa, it has been left to the memories of island prisoners to write the history of Robben Island from their experiences as inmates. At least two of these "historians" (Zwelonke and Naidoo) include in their narratives extensive references to the organisations to which they belonged: the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the African National Congress (ANC) respectively.

2. The Pan Africanist Congress

In Chapter Three, the policies and activities of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and ANC were outlined. This chapter deals with the history of the PAC.

The PAC was established in 1959 by former active members of the ANC, who were dissatisfied both with the influence of the Communist Party on the ANC and its "multi-racial" membership policy. They were angered by the intervention of white South Africans in black politics, believing that white activists would only subvert and delay the struggle for independence.

Tom Lodge[17] distinguishes the PAC from the ANC in a number of ways. He claims that the PAC was identifiable by its strident rhetoric, an appetite for confrontation and a race-conscious ideology. He postulates that it was a "populist" movement that recruited people from anywhere in the community, irrespective of class. To outsiders they seemed conspiratorial, and espoused values supposedly belonging to a rural, precapitalist social order. They were parochial and circumscribed in their world view, and did not understand the complexities of the state and its societal base, and were naive and simplistic.

The origins of the PAC were in the existing ANC. Its founders were ANC members (e.g. Sobukwe, Mothopeng, Leballo, Raboroko) who, during the 1950s, adhered to the less "acceptable" (within the ANC) ideological trend of racial purity. They regarded themselves primarily as "Africans" rather than "Blacks": their notion of racial purity extended to the exclusion of "other" black members, such as "Coloureds" and "Indians". They disapproved of the "radical" element of the ANC which promoted an all-race class struggle. According to the African "purists", the "radicals" were under the influence of the white dominated SACP.

Initial manifestations of dissent began in the ANC Youth League. Potlako Leballo, Zeph Mothopeng, Peter Raboroko and others were among the teachers who had lost their jobs as a direct consequence of having participated in the Defiance Campaign.[18] Unemployed, they harboured bitter anti-ANC/Defiance Campaign grudges. In 1953, Leballo launched a journal called "The Africanist". As its readership and number of contributors increased, so the Africanist faction within the Youth League gained more support. The 'Africanists' were militant, adventurous and aggressive. They were determined to win over all blacks to their cause and raise popular consciousness so that the black population would act to free themselves of white domination.

Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, a lecturer in African languages at the University of the Witwatersrand, was elected president of the Africanist faction. Sobukwe's racial views were not as simplistic as those of some of the other Africanists, but his commitment was nonetheless to achieve government by Africans for Africans. He believed that it was impossible for whites to owe loyalty to Africa within the prevailing system. He believed that for a take-over to be successful, whites had to relinquish all their rights in Africa.

Throughout the 1950s, there was tension within the ANC between the purist Africanists and those adhering to the policy of non-racialism outlined in the Freedom Charter.[19] By 1959, the situation had deteriorated beyond the point of negotiation, and the Africanist faction left the ANC and formed the Pan Africanist Congress, under the presidency of Sobukwe. The organisation aimed to recruit 100 000 members by the middle of 1959, but by the end of the year they had achieved less than a third of this target.

Initially, membership was low and strategies were confused and poorly administered. They were, however,

adamant that they would resist apartheid through repeated acts of civil disobedience, avoiding any recourse to violence. The PAC's first major resistance strategy was the setting up of a massive anti-pass campaign.

The ANC had also planned such a campaign, but in a different, more organised way: they had planned to conduct anti-government demonstrations on symbolic days such as National Women's Day (9th August) and South African public holidays such as The Day of the Covenant (16th December, now known as the Day of the Vow). They spread leaflets, pamphlets and ran public awareness programmes and aimed ultimately to introduce industrial and trade union action instead of civil disobedience.

The PAC, however, was clear in its aim of promoting only civil disobedience. Their plan was that, on appointed days, all African men were to leave their passes at home and present themselves to police stations for arrest. Worker-stayaways were organised for these days. The aim was to employ such actions repeatedly, so that the organisation would gain increasing popular support. Naively the PAC visualised an independent black South Africa by 1963. Yet their following was significantly large only in Vereeniging (Sharpeville) and Cape Town (Nyanga).

Lodge comments on PAC policy thus:

> The PAC was a populist movement, led by men who had an inadequate understanding of the complexity and strength of the political institutions and social structure they sought to destroy.
> ("Insurrectionism in South Africa", page 111)

The most significant event in PAC history, an event which precipitated widespread bannings, arrests and increased state repression, was the crisis at Sharpeville. An anti-pass civil disobedience action was planned by the men of Sharpeville - the women were instructed to remain at home.20

Sharpeville was a tightly administered 'model' township, housing black workers in the Vereeniging area. As a result of careful state administration, the ANC had not recruited a significantly large following there. However, by 1960, unemployment, forced removals from the older township and general discontent left Sharpeville ripe for politicisation. PAC populist penetration was particularly successful. The recruitment success in Sharpeville was in contrast to their efforts elsewhere, where the PAC were generally overshadowed by the ANC.

Sharpeville's preparations for the anti-pass campaign were extensive. Officially, Sharpeville's PAC membership was only 150, but as preparations for the campaign progressed, support increased rapidly. The campaign took the form of bus boycotts, work stayaways, pickets - all in response to specific local conditions in Sharpeville.

On 21st March 1960, in response to Sobukwe's call for an anti-pass day, a crowd of about 5 000 people gathered outside the Sharpeville police station, prepared to hand themselves over for arrest because they were not carrying their passes.

Approximately 300 policemen were on duty at the scene. They allegedly became frightened at the size of the crowd and began shooting randomly and indiscriminately. Most of the 69 dead and 180 wounded were shot in the back, evidence that the crowd was not attacking the police, but fleeing from them. As an immediate result, Vereeniging was plagued by strikes and stayaways, until after the 30th March mass funeral, when people began slowly to return to work. The police action at Sharpeville and the deaths there assisted in the breaking of PAC activity in the Transvaal.21

The government imposed a state of emergency, invoking the 1953 Public Safety Act, and banned both the PAC and the ANC. In addition, Sobukwe was arrested (he had given himself up to the police as part of the campaign), and effectively, the organisation was leaderless.22

It was at this stage that both the ANC and PAC adopted violence as the only means to continue their protests.

By 1961 - 62, the majority of PAC leadership was in prison, having been convicted of defying pass laws or inciting protest action. Since the organisation's banning in 1960, PAC activists had changed their policy and no longer subscribed to peaceful demonstration - they resorted to violent action. This too resulted in the imprisonment of PAC leaders. In August 1962, several of those arrested during the anti-pass demonstrations were released from prison, as they had not been sentenced to long terms. They fled South Africa, and regrouped in exile in Lesotho, for they could not operate in South Africa while banned.

During 1962, PAC activity became increasingly violent, with attacks on police stations, post offices, power installations and any government buildings. They planned to kill indiscriminately as many whites as possible, until their dream of independence was attained - they believed this would occur by 1963.

Lodge argues that after Sharpeville, the state of emergency which was declared paired on the emergence of a variety of other illegal organisations - all linked either to the PAC or the ANC. One such organisation was Poqo, which is a Xhosa word meaning pure. (Lodge describes Poqo as the PAC equivalent of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC.)

The term "poqo" was originally used in the ANC to distinguish the Africanists from other members of the Congress Alliance. Later, however, it became synonymous with all PAC activity, but was used most specifically for the violent movements operating in the Eastern Cape.

With PAC leadership out of reach in Lesotho, Poqo activity became somewhat anarchic. Inefficient communication between Maseru and South Africa ensured constant interception of strategies and led to many arrests.[23]

Pogo was organised on a cell-basis, where there were supposedly ten men to a cell, each with a leader. In fact, cells were much larger, and the Pogo following grew rapidly. They simply went ahead with perpetrating acts of violence. Lodge claims that they were larger in number than Umkhonto we Sizwe and had gained the dimensions of a mass movement.

Pogo used many slogans - among them "we must stand alone in our land", "freedom to stand alone and not be suppressed by whites" and "amaAfrika Pogo Lwelethu"[24] (our country). They had no identifiable theoretical base and operated according to the popular responses evoked by their slogans.

Pogo activity was at its height by 1963, the year earmarked by the PAC for independence. Insurrectionary activity continued until at least 1966, by which time large numbers of PAC activists were serving terms on Robben Island or had fled the country. Tom Lodge claims that Pogo was the largest insurrectionary movement since the beginnings of black resistance.

Lodge describes Pogo as a "millenarian movement";[25] it took on the dimensions of a cult with strong expectations of what was to accompany the return of "our land". He suggests that Pogo was more of a social movement than a political organisation - he postulates this as a reason for its being ignored in many studies. In addition to its large rural following, e.g. in Pondoland, Lodge also discusses the PAC support in Pearl, in the Cape Province, and in Pretoria, where young educated urban blacks who wanted immediate freedom also became Pogo activists. Of those arrested, most were sentenced to lengthy prison terms which they served on Robben Island.

Subsequent to its history in the 1960s, the PAC has operated in exile, with ever increasing militance.

3. D M Zwelonke's Robben Island

The lengthy historical account outlined above serves as a background against which to examine D M Zwelonke's Robben Island. Zwelonke assumes a knowledge in the reader of the PAC and makes extensive yet indirect reference to its policies and actions.

Near the beginning of his novel, he describes how reading the report of a speech made by Sobukwe alerted him to the situation in the country.

> It seemed to me that the attitude of the Africanist towards people not of African origin had never been so well explained.
> (Robben Island, page 26)

On the island, PAC prisoners shouted slogans and sang songs specific to their organisation. They were firstly paying tribute to the organisation and its leaders and thus distinguishing themselves from the ANC prisoners, and secondly, were expressing their intense nationalism.

> One could not help feeling inspirited and rededicated when such songs were poured out with intense feeling and conviction: songs such as the Zulu one:
>
> We the brown nation
> we are crying for our land,
> we yearn for our land
> that has been taken by the white man.
>
> We, the sons of Africa,
> we are crying for our land.
> Let them leave our land,
> Let them get out.
> (Ibid, page 35)

The loyalty of PAC prisoners to their leader Sobukwe is reflected in the numerous references Zwelonke makes to him. Sobukwe was held separately from the other island prisoners,[26] for he was perceived by the state as a great threat. Although imprisoned for a short sentence

(two years) after the anti-pass campaign, Sobukwe was detained on the island for six years beyond his scheduled release date in 1962.

The separation of different categories of prisoners on the island was not consistent: leadership was isolated from rank and file, but PAC and ANC prisoners were held in the same cells. In addition, common-law prisoners, sentenced for strictly criminal and not political actions, were incarcerated with political prisoners. The physical landscape of the island is such that the architectural lay-out could have allowed for separation of the different groups of prisoners. However, the prison authorities had several intentions in incarcerating all the prisoners together.

Firstly, the island as a prison complex, removed from the eyes of society, impenetrable by demonstrators, impermeable to the smuggling of contraband (or so the authorities hoped) and virtually impossible to escape from, was an ideal location for a prison where an inhumane regime could flourish. Prisoners could be subjected to long hours of harsh physical labour, beatings, torture, isolation, deprivation of food and warm clothing, out of sight - and therefore deliberately out of mind - of a higher authority. (As de Villiers put it, "the prisoners were not in public view, and they could serve their terms of hard labour burdened by chains clasped around their wrists and ankles." [op cit, page 26]) It was not until late in the 1960s that "outsiders" such as the Progressive Party's spokesperson on prisons, Helen Suzman, and representatives of the International Red Cross organisation were allowed to visit Robben Island and inspect the conditions there.

Secondly, the physical construction of the prison complex, the quarry where the prisoners broke stones, the methods of searching for contraband, the isolation cells

and the mixing of common-law and political prisoners enabled the prison personnel to maintain stringent control over the inmates.

Foucault,[27] in his theory of the nature of prisons, claims that the ideal prison - from the perspective of the gaoler - is one where the prisoner's every move can be observed. In addition to the constant surveillance within the prison, Foucault points out that some convicts are won over to the side of the authorities and spy on their fellow-inmates. He suggests that this process continues outside the prison, where some elements of what he terms the "delinquent class" are used by the police to keep watch over others.

On Robben Island, it seems that the concept of using one category of prisoner against another was carefully planned. Dissent between PAC and ANC members was desirable - it avoided resistance. The common law convicts, often notoriously violent and generally not politicised, were used to disrupt the activities of the political prisoners. They often ill-treated the politicals with the sanction of the warders - for example, participating with the warders in the torturing of political prisoners.

However, according to both Indres Naidoo and Moses Dlamini, and to a lesser extent Zwelonke, this particular state strategy did not always work; instead, several of the common law prisoners (referred to generally by the Robben Island writers as "convicts") were in fact prompted to join either the ANC or PAC on their release.

Indres Naidoo sums up the situation as follows:

> Some common law prisoners were specially selected to bully us and inform on us, but we started picking out a few and began talking to them, pointing out that the life they had been leading was not correct, and slowly showing them that they had been victims of the existing society. We even started discussing politics with them, and the authorities realised that their plan to mix us with the common law prisoners was in serious danger of backfiring. (Island in Chains, page 98)

Naidoo describes a number of prisoners who had originally been on the island as criminals but returned there as political activists, until the authorities realised their folly and removed the convicts back to mainland prisons.

In addition to the mixture of convicts and political prisoners, the authorities hoped to create tension between the PAC and the ANC, by placing them in communal cells. In the early years of the island prison, the majority of political prisoners were PAC activists, outnumbering ANC prisoners by approximately seven to one. (Naidoo, Chapter Six.) There was always tension between the two groups, but instead of diffusing the political convictions of either, the system intensified the feelings and the commitment to their struggle of both. As time passed and the PAC became less active (from 1966 onwards) the profile of the prison population became increasingly ANC.

Zwelonke's book covers the earlier period - from the early 1960s. Zwelonke is the pseudonym of Dan Mdluli, now exiled in Canada.[28] He was a member of the PAC during the anti-pass campaign and during the early years of Pogo violence. Robben Island tells the story of his early political awareness and his experiences - as well as those of others - on the island.

Robben Island is a "possession-prohibited" publication in South Africa;[29] along with Indres Naidoo's Island in Chains (but relatively few other publications) it is banned under Section 9, paragraph 3 of the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974, which states

> A committee may prohibit the possession by any person of any publication or object which in terms of a decision of the committee is undesirable.

Both books are further banned under Section 47, paragraph (e) of the same act which states that they are prejudicial to the safety of the state, its general welfare, peace, and order.

Books about Robben Island are thus regarded as particularly dangerous and subversive: one wonders whether this is because they reveal the harsh conditions on the island and the ineptitude on the part of the authorities, or whether it is their information value for potential island prisoners on how to survive and cope with life on the island. There is obviously a realisation that the books will be used as political sloganeering, to convey political messages and promote ideologies abhorrent to the state. Books about Robben Island remain largely inaccessible.

Zwelonke's book begins with an explanation and justification for writing:

> I had never wished to talk about the Island. I did not talk about it even to my family. I didn't say we mustn't talk about the place, yet they avoided any mention of it. That is one wisdom I grant them; they recognised my wish not to talk about my life there. It was a strain for me even to think of talking about it. I always felt as if I was crowded into a corner by a ghost, a vicious monster I could not see holding me spellbound, and like a worm pierced by a pin I writhed helplessly. I remember well the nightmares that hold a man pressed to the floor, while the creature steadily advances. You want to cry out, but no voice comes; you want to kick, but your legs will not move.
> (op cit, page 1)

Of those who constantly asked him about life on the island, he writes:

> He who wants to know about the place, let him go there and find out.
> (Ibid)

Zwelonke's introduction suggests his insecurity at writing about his imprisonment yet acknowledges that the cathartic process would be beneficial. There is as well a sense that he would be able to reach people who were genuinely interested in Robben Island, its history and its inmates.

> I did not know whom I should address. The businessmen, the intellectuals, the clergy, the students or the masses. The student was the person I always respected. I always remembered the number of students on the Island, whisked off there from the classrooms.
> (Ibid)

He emphasises that he was not prompted to write for any reason other than as an outlet for his frustration:

> This is a hell of frustration. I had decided to bar my mouth from telling the story of the place. But I am going to write about it, it is easier that way. It has been a closed book, but now I am opening it.
> (Ibid, page 3)

Zwelonke's decision to write a fictional work exposes his book to literary criticism. As a literary work, however, Robben Island attracts negative comment. It is structurally weak, the language is strained and untidy, the style inconsistent. C J Driver, in his article "The View from Makana Island: Some Recent Prison Books from South Africa", quotes a friend as saying

> as literature it is nothing - but, men, is it something as documentary politics!
> (Driver, page 111)

Driver has listed several failings of the book; it is badly written, is riddled with clichés, the plot lacks continuity, episodes are unrelated. The characterisation is confusing: characters (and the author) assume a number of inconsistent identities. One is never sure who is talking or whose view is being presented. Themes are introduced but not explored: Zwelonke sometimes tells too much and sometimes not enough. The book seems directionless.

> And yet ... and yet ... and yet ... [t]here is a rawness, a direct simple accuracy which neither local failings nor the failings of the book as a whole can obscure. (...) it is not simply in isolated passages that the power resides. It is in the feeling which pervades the whole ...
> (Ibid, page 112)

The narrative is so sad, so painful, so brutal. His writing about the agony of incarceration on Robben Island is clearly more important to Zwelonke than the writing of a work of "literature".

Robben Island has two narrative elements: Zwelonke's personal experience and the historically accurate anecdotes form one element (despite his claim to be producing fiction) and the story of Bekimpi another. The "story" of Robben Island is as follows:

Bekimpi, also known as "Zweli",[30] is a PAC leader who became politicised as an adolescent while serving prison terms for a variety of criminal offences. After Bekimpi joined the PAC he gave up his criminal career and was no longer known as "Bra Black" the toughie. Bekimpi's story is related by Danny, convicted with him of carrying out PAC activities. Danny weaves the story of Bekimpi into the narrative of his own experiences on the island. The two are betrayed by a common friend, Chi, who avoids imprisonment. Because Bekimpi is a leader, he is held separately from the majority of prisoners most of the time, but is occasionally transferred to the regular cells. He and Danny swop tales and share experiences, although the major focus of their exchanges is Bekimpi "teaching" Danny. He has no stimuli apart from the conversations with Danny. After some time, Bekimpi is approached by the warders and offered rewards and reduction of sentence if he betrays his comrades. He refuses and is held in the punishment cells on punishment diet. While serving this term, he begins to have dreams and fantasies about life outside, and soon loses touch with when he is awake and when he is dreaming. The majority of his fantasies are about women, some of whom were genuinely part of his life, others the wives or girlfriends of his comrades. Throughout this period Bekimpi is subjected to brutal torture by the warders, until he dies - hanging by his feet with blood and mucus oozing from his mouth.

Woven in with Bekimpi's story is a wealth of detail about life on Robben Island, the PAC, the convicts and the warders.

The narrative moves uncomfortably between the all-too-conscious fiction of Bekimpi's story and the far less conscious autobiography. The writing style of the book is far less laboured in the autobiographical sections. Compare for example the following two passages about torture:

> I will mention one ugly incident which took place on the Island. Mr Mlambo, a twenty-year-stretch man, a short man, was made to dig a pit big enough to fit him. Unaware of what was to follow, he was still digging on when he was suddenly overwhelmed by a group of convicts. They shoved him into the pit and started filling it up. He struggled to climb out, but they held him fast. When they had finished, only Mlambo's head appeared above the ground. A white warder, who had directed the whole business, urinated into Mlambo's mouth. The convicts tried to open the tight-locked jaws, but could not. They managed only to separate his lips. The warder pissed and pissed; it looked as if he had reserved gallons of urine for the purpose. From far off we could see showers of urine blown from Mlambo's mouth, as he fought off the torrents of ammoniac liquid, trying to prevent them going down his throat. When the warder had finished, his face was covered with piss. The vicious blows of fists and boots rained around the defenceless head sticking out of the ground. Some grazed it, some softer blows landed and some savage ones did not. He tried to struggle free, but the convicts pressed down on the ground round his head. He did not cry out or speak. When they were tired of the fun, they left him to help himself out of his grave.
> (op cit, page 14)

> "Do you know this man?" (...)
> "No," I said. Only then did I look at the man closely. The short, stout man stood at attention in the middle of the cell, looking at me, full of hate. I forgot the stink in the cell, looking at him. He had a black eye, thickly swollen. The other eye was heavily bloodshot. His mouth was swollen like a cow's, each lip cut and inflated like a bicycle tube. One cheek bulged

> cut as if he had pushed a whole peach into his mouth. His head was covered with ugly bumps. I knew that I could not know this man. (...) No I could not know him. How could I know a man disfigured like this?
> (Ibid, page 6)

The passage about Mlambo, verified in both Island in Chains and Hell Hole, is far more credible, not only because the incident actually took place, but because the passage is written in clear, comfortable English. The second passage contains forced, over-contrived images, which make Zwelonke's point too brutally.

Zwelonke's frequent references to police/warder violence and brutality may seem obsessive: the entire novel is structured around the violent behaviour of warders and criminal convicts towards political prisoners. Violence is a theme he sustains throughout the book, from the moment of his arrest, through the years on the island until Bekimpi's death on the final page. In all literature dealing with prison experience, the violence of either the police or the convicts is a common theme.

The issue of violence is however explicated most fully in the Robben Island literature: we see far less evidence of police/prison personnel brutality and violence in the other categories of prison literature, although it is always present in some form or another, most noticeably in descriptions of the gallows in the Pretoria prison and the interrogation of detainees.

Torture of political prisoners is not only brutal in its physical manifestation. Indres Naidoo relates an incident where he and his comrades were summoned to receive their Deepvaali[31] privileges - a large food parcel each - and told that they had exactly three minutes in which to eat. When they complained that they wanted to keep the contents of the parcels with them, hoping to distribute the food amongst their cell mates, they were summoned again, and ordered to eat everything at one

sitting. In addition, Naidoo, who had been a vegetarian since the age of four, was forced through circumstances to eat meat. Had he not done so, he would have become malnourished as a result of the inferior quality of food served on Robben Island.

The poor food is only one aspect of the inhumane conditions on the island; Zwelonke and Naidoo relate at length that they were provided with inadequate clothing. The prisoners had no beds, and worked long hours in the quarry subject to severe abuse by prison personnel. Zwelonke sustains the anguish of the prison conditions throughout the novel.

His trial, conviction and journey to the island are summed up briefly:

> Bekimpi was the first to be sentenced. I, later on, when months of trying to persuade me to be a State witness had failed. I first made the journey to Robben Island in August 1964, after taking part in a hunger-strike in the mainland prison at Kroonstad; only six of us out of three hundred were sent off to the Island. We were joined by newly sentenced men from Leeukop maximum security prison, where we stayed on our way to the Island.
>
> The jerking and swerving, the rolling and pitching of the boat made our intestines rise up in the cavity of our stomachs, leaving a vacuum in their place. We felt like vomiting, but no one was sick. This was the first time I sailed in a ship, and saw the sea.
> (Ibid, page 10)

The unemotional description of the journey conveys a sense that there is worse to come. The apparent difference of experience felt on the journey and the initial arrival on the island is soon altered when the new intake of prisoners is deprived of their first meal for making too loud a noise in their cell.

Zwelonke's description of his emotions on reaching the island serves to convey the symbolic importance of Robben Island for political prisoners.

> We so much loathed being in the mainland prisons, and dreaded being at the Island. But since we were already convicted, and nothing could alter that fact, let us proceed to the place of martyrs. Our anxiety to be there removed any apprehension about this devil island.
> (Ibid, page 13)

The physical layout of the prison is described in fine detail not only by Zwelonke, but by Naidoo and Dlamini as well. Every inch of the terrain, the structure of the cells and the pathways between sections are minutely described.

Early in the novel, Zwelonke introduces the convicts, who often collaborated with the warders in abusing the political prisoners. (The story of Johnson Mlambo, quoted above, is one example of this.)

In Danny's opinion, the political prisoners were extremely different from the "convicts". Convicts were generally regarded as criminals, violent and immoral. The political prisoners, despite gaping differences between ANC and PAC prisoners, were united in their fear and hatred of the criminal prisoners, who were incarcerated on the island to provoke friction. The warders exploited the existence of prison gangs in order to control the political prisoners - in terms of provoking dissent between PAC and ANC, in terms of enforcing discipline and in setting "examples". The extent to which this method of "control" was successful is questionable.

As mentioned earlier, it was not uncommon for common law convicts to be seduced by the politicians: Bekimpi, "hero" of the novel, was politicised in this way. After some years the authorities became aware of the extent of this process, and removed the "convicts" from the island. It is interesting to observe that they never had any fears that the "corruption" might take place in another way: they seem never to have feared that political prisoners would become common law offenders.

The "convicts" on the island were generally feared and hated by the Pogo prisoners. Criminal convicts were in charge of cells, reporting to warders and betraying political prisoners.

> They were liked by the warders because they were the principal spies.
> (Ibid, page 32)

Zwelonke reveals that, apart from the single-cell section where high profile leadership was held, cells were inhabited by approximately 70 prisoners, sleeping on grass-rope mats. (Island prisoners did not have beds for many years.) The cell lay-out and structure was much like any other prison:

> When we entered we were struck by the similarity between Kroonstad New Prison and this one, in shape and everything else, except for the thick walls and the bars. It was a new style of prison building, I suppose.
> (Ibid, page 12)

Foucault maintains that prisons are generally designed, built and maintained in similar ways. It brings uniformity to the surveillance system, and traps the prisoner into a narrow way of thinking.

In his discussion of the cells, Danny (the persona Zwelonke assumes in the book) describes the differences between the various cells and sections. The three cells he describes in greatest detail are the "University Cell", the cell in which he was together with Bekimpi, and the punishment cell, or "kulukuku". He claims that his greatest ambition on the island was to study, and therefore to be in cell C1:

> [T]he University of Makana. This cell was for those who had been granted permission to study. Many others wanted to go there. The craving for education was intense. In the other cells, learning - using the cement as paper - was undertaken by those who were semi-literate, and those who had left school at the elementary level. Those who were better educated helped those who were not. The aim was to wipe out illiteracy among us and build a step to higher education.
> (Ibid, page 15)

It was prior to his transfer to this cell that Danny received many punishments in the isolation section for misbehaving: when the convicts made too much noise, they were sentenced to meal stops and isolation; when they tried to avoid work in the quarry, a similar punishment was imposed. But it was in the punishment cells that Danny first discovered that his friend and former leader, Bekimpi, was on the island.

Zwelonke has not fully explained or explored the relationship of the two men: at first the narrator describes Bekimpi as the township tough, and later as the movement's ideologue. (His conversion from one to the other is not examined.) He does not ever explain how they developed a friendship (instead he dwells unnecessarily on Bekimpi's criminal past), yet portrays their relationship as fairly close and intimate by the time they meet up in the same cell on the island.

From the cells, the prisoners were sent out to work, either in the quarry where they broke large boulders into small stones or in the wandering maintenance group, where they were marched all over the island clearing rubble, weeding gardens and generally working at any task that needed doing. The convicts were sent to the kitchens and the hospital, or assisted the warders in maintaining order at the quarry.

Prisoners on the island speak, think and subsequently write as if their lives are centred on their work. They are forced to work at all times, regardless of the state of their health, the weather or holidays. Contrary to the opinion of Simon de Villiers, labour on the island is mundane and unproductive: it consists of breaking stones or clearing bush.

The quarry, where the majority of island prisoners chop away meaninglessly for years on end, is regarded by Zwelonke as worse than Siberia or a Nazi concentration camp. It is bleak, windy and dusty.

> On our right was a ghastly donga - a ditch - half filled with water. That was the old quarry. On our left, another donga with huge black rock. That was the new quarry.
>
> It was an ominous night. Ominous because of the preconceived notions that had warned their way into our nervous systems, turning them yellow. Ominous because we had thought it daring to place a fork on an ice-block and smile; because the island was no other place but the quarry, not the cells, not the ugly vegetation: the quarry had become symbolical, the graduation centres: torture and the island, *suffering and* the island: we thinking it daring to be there. We had no illusions, we knew there were worse places in the world, worse than Sibeeka, worse than the concentration camps. We had looked forward to the quarry.
> (Ibid, page 30 - 31)

The expectations were met: long, arduous tasks of wheeling heavily laden barrows and hammering unbreakable rock against the sound of sea and wind and jackhammers. When Danny was transferred to the "Hodoshe Span", the wandering labourers, he felt a lot freer.

On one of the marches of the Hodoshe Span, the prisoners passed a small white house guarded by several sentries. It was the house in which Sobukwe was detained for the six years he was on the island.

> Every time our span of twenty approached that place on our way to work an *inexplicable feeling* of joy filled our hearts. (...) We felt revitalised and rededicated, because the man who occupied that house was none other than the one most loved by his fellowmen, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe.
> (Ibid, page 39)

In some ways, Zwelonke's portrayal of the relationship between Danny and Bakinpi, in terms of Danny's hero worship of his comrade, is like that of the rank and file PAC prisoners to their leader. *It is* almost as if Zwelonke, through his characters Danny and Bakinpi, imagines what might occur if Sobukwe was with his supporters.

The narrative of Danny's friendship with Bekimpi contains elements or themes common in tales of imprisonment. In a broad sense, Bekimpi's stories - not quite the anecdotes of a raconteur - are like other prison stories. They aim to teach, and to remember and honour, rather than to entertain. (There are other entertainments on the island apart from storytelling.)

The difference in Bekimpi's tales is that he begins to live the lives of his protagonists. He becomes Mzizi, Soli, Bweli; he dreams of many women, especially of Nompi, who died in an electric chair[32] rather than betray him. The story of Nompi's death gives credibility to Bekimpi's madness.

> This was a bitter memory, one of which the mind and heart of Bekimpi were afraid.
> (Ibid, page 126)

In all Bekimpi's tales - before his removal from the communal cell to the "Kulukudu" - he preaches the ideology of the PAC. He remains to the last Danny's mentor.

In addition to the learning he was doing at Bekimpi's side, Danny was studying formally through a college. Most of the writers discussed in this study raise the issue of furthering their education while in prison. Studies help a prisoner to retain his sanity and alleviate boredom. Education on the island, however, took place informally (as quoted earlier) as well as formally. Political prisoners were often equipped with a theoretical sophistication that they did not have when first arriving at the island. Makana's University, then, is not only in the study-cells, but actually any point on the island where learning takes place. Writing about prison, be it Robben Island or elsewhere, is to a degree an extension of this process - it educates others about imprisonment.

Apart from intellectual stimulation gleaned through constant debate and argument, the prisoners tried to entertain themselves and learn from their leisure. Those

prisoners who attempted studying were often thwarted in their attempts when the authorities constantly denied them permission or withdrew it.

> My lectures were stuck in the receiving office, in my kit. My brother at home was paying the Domelin college for a dead horse. I had begun studying under Domelin when I was at Kronstad, but at the island we had to re-apply for permission to study, and I was ignored. So I went dancing, swinging my legs in ungraceful steps.
> (Ibid, page 65)

Danny replaces intellectual study with cultural activity. At one point, Zwelonke mentions a book he found in the prison library: he was stimulated not only by this book (which he does not name, but describes as a history of Ancient Rome), but also by the Shangani (sic) Bible. His interest in the Bible was not religious, merely curious. He read as much as he could.

> I bought it under scrutiny of the mind, the basic tool of our survival, focusing it on the screen of scientific principles.
> (Ibid, page 77)

His intellectual pursuits kept him sane. Bekimpi, who had been in prisons since the age of 14, although never described as such, was most likely uneducated (formally). There is an unstated suggestion that Bekimpi lost control of his sanity partly because he was denied all access to intellectual stimuli. But one is not sure that he wanted these. He was also denied visits from his family and was mostly detained alone. While other prisoners had either their studies or their "entertainment", he had only his dreams and his fantasies. The other prisoners were able to rid themselves of physical frustrations through physical labour; Bekimpi was not made to work. In addition he was kept alternatively on punishment rations or given specially prepared meals which he declined.

Part of Bekimpi's story is the manner in which the island personnel tried to persuade him to betray comrades. He was removed from the communal cell, placed in isolation and interrogated. Van der Merwe, his interrogator, attempted to bribe Bekimpi with food.

> The man next door got his food: half-boiled maize grains and liquid puzzwandila. The food tray came to his door. Bread and fat and black coffee was placed before him. The convict didn't look at him. Nor the warder with the convict. He looked at them both, and his hand stretched out to take another dish with maize grains.
> "Take this one here," the convict said.
> "You're making a mistake. This food is for Coloureds," Bekimpi said.
> (...)
> It was only when he had finished that he thought more about it. He remembered the special-branch police. This was a trick of theirs.
> (Ibid, page 81)

Bekimpi begins a hunger strike on his own, refusing to be won over with good food. His hunger is clearly one of the explanations for his "mind-drifts".

Hunger strikes on the island occurred at least twice during the 1960s.[33] Both strikes were effective, although after some time victories faded and the situation reverted to its usual pattern. The strike Zwelonke describes was the result of the discovery that prisoners were deprived of adequate food because the warders used the rations to feed their pigs. Their complaints were not listened to, so the prisoners decided to take action. After four days prison officials agreed to listen to grievances and the strike ended. However, "leaders" were sent to the punishment cells. Danny was regarded as one of the leaders - he was sent to the Kulukudu, from where he could observe his friend.

When Danny is in the communal cell, he and his comrades discuss Bekimpi's plight. They analyse as well the illnesses and deaths of fellow prisoners, generally

paying tribute to them in songs. (These songs are distinguished from the songs and music intended as island entertainment.) The praise-songs are about the heroism of comrades against the brutality of the system. Most of the songs sung in the cells at night were nationalist songs, revolutionary songs, songs to mark the end of the day. One thing the warders could not effectively stop was the singing in the cells.[34]

> One could not help feeling inspirited and rededicated when such songs were poured out with intense feeling and conviction.
> (...)
> The note of pain in this song seemed to remain hanging near the ceiling. Its sweet message reverberated in soft echoes in the walls of the prison, and I felt it fill the chambers of my heart. This was our much-needed food. We fed our spirits, fed them to the point where material food did not matter so much.
> (Ibid, page 35)

Bekimpi's plight distresses his comrades in the communal cell to the extent that they elevate him to the status of the PAC leader Sobukwe, and think of Bekimpi while praising Sobukwe in song.

The other types of songs sung on the island were either the "work songs" in which prisoners abused the warders in languages unfamiliar to the latter, or songs sung as part of island entertainment. Island entertainment is linked to studying as a theme of Robben Island; singing and dancing were taught, plays were performed and one prisoner[35] manufactured a saxophone from dry sea-weed, metal, zinc, cork and wire he collected on the island. Study privileges, as already mentioned, were rarely awarded - thus the informal learning taking place through entertainment was vital. The prisoners held dance classes where

> foxtrotting, jump-jumping in the quicksteps, and going sluggishly up and down in the waltz, and jacking my knees dangerously in the violent tango. But it never worked out, and today I am just as good as if I had never started with it.
> (Ibid, page 63)

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> (Ibid, page 65)

At Christmas time, the prisoners tried to create a spirit of good cheer - regardless of their ideological differences, everyone cooperated, pooled their purchases and staged concerts.

The effect of the concerts, apart from entertaining and educating, was to evoke feelings of nostalgia and intense longing for home.

Some of the prisoners escape these feelings by fantasising about life at home; in the other books discussed, many of the fantasies are transformed into stories. Fantasy, dreams and praise songs tend to replace storytelling in Robben Island literature: Dlamini's book is punctuated by imaginary recreations of his life; Zwelonke records the lengthy praise songs that are sung spontaneously in the cells in times of crisis. The songs are substitutes for stories.

Bakimpi's fantasies, however, become obsessive and eventually drive him mad. The structure of Zwelonke's novel reflects - unconsciously - this madness in its tumbled characterisation - we are no longer sure of any of the characters: Danny, Xwali,[36] Bakimpi, Soli, Thabo, Mompi, Thandi. In the composite picture of them all, we see the brutal effects of Robben Island on human beings.

In addition to his portrayal of madness, Zwelonke describes the lack of medical care on the island: several prisoners died as a result of relatively minor illnesses which developed complications. Naidoo's book corroborates this. Appendicitis, asthma and, more serious, tuberculosis were fairly common and often ignored by the island's medical staff. Naidoo devotes much space to the attitude of the island doctor, chiefly describing his cruelty. But he also reveals the doctor as occasionally compassionate in his anecdote of the lashes he received as punishment for refusing to obey an order.

In the meantime the doctor told me not to worry since it would not be too bad and would soon be over but even while he was talking I heard the whistle of the cane. (...) The doctor continued to speak to me, saying that it had not been too bad, and that one stroke had already gone.
(op cit, page 124)

In the case of Bekimpi's torture, no doctor was called in to declare him "fit for torture" nor to examine him. Instead he was suspended from the ceiling by his feet, and completely vulnerable to the beatings and abuse of the torturers. The most "compassionate" comment comes from the colonel, who says

"Do you want to kill this man? Then don't do it here. Take him to Cape Town."
(op cit, page 145)

The following morning Bekimpi was found dead.

Zwelonke's novel, in many ways inadequate by "literary" standards, has nonetheless conveyed its message. It has revealed the extent of the brutality and inhuman practices to which political prisoners are subjected. It is, despite its flaws, and despite the similarities and differences with other such books, the most powerful book depicting prison experience in South Africa.

> Inside, I had to recover a sense of how people outside in South Africa use language and words. A great deal of that I had to do through dictionaries and things like that, just reminding myself. But then I became interested in not only how a sense of South Africa can be reconstructed with one's mouth, but also how the vestiges of lots of liquidated languages - like the Khoin languages - survived in our mouths, like relics. I was quite fascinated by that - the mouth is a very social-historical place.
> (Interview, 9th November 1984, Cape Town)

Jeremy Cronin developed the poems that appear in his anthology Inside while serving a seven-year sentence under the Terrorism Act.[1] A study of his poetry - thematically and technically - provides an appropriate medium for drawing together the various aspects of South African literature written in or about imprisonment.

As illustrated in the quotation above, Cronin was more than a little preoccupied with the concepts of voice, speech and communication - not only within the walls of the prison (the "inside" of his title) but also "outside" in a multi-lingual South Africa.

> I can't actually speak Zulu, but I can read it somewhat and I never had the chance of speaking it. Inside, there was no-one to talk it to, but it was important, just to get a sense of the linguistic wealth of South Africa. I try to get a sense of the spaciness and complexity of outside, especially of South Africa, by playing with words and names.
> (Interview, November 1984)

Cronin, a young[2] white South African academic, was employed at the University of Cape Town when he was arrested and charged under the Terrorism Act in 1976. He

was sentenced with two others[3] to seven years imprisonment for having carried out underground work for the African National Congress (ANC).

1976 was a crucial period in South African resistance history. On 16th June 1976, the youth of Soweto began active protests against the inferior education system to which they were subjected. Their grievances were initially expressed through protest marches, but as the protest grew and spread to other parts of the country, the action became increasingly violent and bitter.[4]

Shortly after the uprisings Cronin was accused, together with David and Susan Rabkin, of printing and distributing ANC pamphlets. Their trial, which took place shortly after the first spate of uprisings, was somewhat of a "show-trial", illustrating through "clear evidence" to what extent white communist agitators were responsible for stirring discontent among black people, through the dissemination of ANC propaganda.

While serving his sentence, Cronin began to write poetry - an activity he had indulged[5] in some time in the past, without much satisfaction. His volume of poetry, Inside, is about being in prison, growing up and living in South Africa, and about being in love in this context.

The anthology is organised in six cycles, titled "Inside", "The Naval Base", "Venture to the Interior", "Some Uncertain Wires", "Love Poems" and "Isiququmadevu". Each cycle contains poems based on a particular motif: the poems in "Inside", for example, refer directly to the physical experience of incarceration. In "The Naval Base", Cronin explores his childhood memories, while "Venture to the Interior" is a spiritual and linguistic journey through the textures of South Africa. In "Some Uncertain Wires" Cronin reveals his links with a colonial heritage. The love poems were written for his wife, and "Isiququmadevu" is a miscellaneous collection of poems recalling the world outside prison.

Reviewers and critics[6] tend to praise Cronin specifically for his love poetry - written for his wife Annemarie, who unexpectedly died of a brain tumour about six months after he went to jail.[7] The personal anguish that Cronin suffered as a result of his bereavement may have contributed to making his imprisonment somewhat more difficult to bear than it would have been otherwise, but Cronin refuses to accept "special treatment" for this. He denies that his imprisonment was in any way extraordinary for a South African - he constantly stresses that

> My gaol sentence, for instance, is something that is far from being exceptional in the South African situation. Like the separation from one family, since as we know, migrant labour, pass laws, influx control and the Bantustan system, separate hundreds of thousands of families.
> (Gardner, page 2)

Cronin claims to have accepted the bereavement as something that could happen to any prisoner or indeed any migrant labourer separated from his family.

Since his release in May 1983, Cronin has stressed his commitment to the development of an emerging national culture in a unitary, democratic South Africa: his poetry is intended as a contribution to this culture. He believes in the socio-political contextualisation of art forms, such as poetry, and also in constructing art that is accessible to all the people in this country, literate or not.[8]

While Cronin insists that his biographical circumstances are not exceptional, he acknowledges the extent to which they influenced his writing:

> I think certain academic modes of receiving literature are precisely uncomfortable with the person, with the biographical, with the historical and social. And while fetishisation of the individual is something I wouldn't want to go with particularly, I wouldn't necessarily be as shy as many academic commentators and critics would be about the personal, historical and social background out of which the poetry emerges.
> (Gardner, page 2 - 3)

Jeremy Cronin was born in Durban, in 1949. His father was an officer in the South African Navy, which he joined during World War II, after having served in the merchant marines since the age of twelve. (Cronin explains that his father's decision to join the navy was "professional" rather than overtly "political". He describes his parents as "apolitical".)

From the time that Cronin was five until his father's death five years later, the Cronin family lived at the Simonstown Naval Base, where he knew

> because learnt by heart, the naval salute, the
> sign of the cross,
> the servant's proper place and our father who
> art
> (Inside, page 39)

These words describe succintly the particular context in which Cronin was reared: politically complacent, religious and belonging to a group wealthy enough to employ servants. In his poetry, especially in the sections titled "The Naval Base" and "Some Uncertain Mines", Cronin remembers his childhood as contented, filled with interesting places to explore and play. Yet he also recalls it with a degree of confusion, for he matured into someone far removed from this context.

The physical imagery in this cycle of poems is that of Simonstown. The physical beauty of the place is marred by the events taking place in the area, such as the demolition of the zinc shacks belonging to black fishermen in response to the implementation of the Group Areas Act of 1950.[9]

Several of the poems in "The Naval Base" section aim to reconcile the adult prisoner-poet with the

> ... string-thin, five-year-old boy
> with big ears and buckled teeth from thumbsucking
> late
> (Ibid, page 39)

The effect of the cycle of poems ("The Naval Base") is that Cronin is able to acknowledge his growth away from his childhood without disowning or denying it.

In the first poem of the cycle, Cronin hints at what he intends to achieve by recalling his childhood: the discovery of a hidden part of himself.

> I check the beach, the old jetty,
> and now into the house:
> the wardrobe, pantry, under the beds.
> These all being the finite number
> of places a five-year-old
> kid would hide
> (Ibid, page 35)

The process employed in this cycle of poems includes a "voyage of discovery" through his childhood years as well as through the outside world of South Africa. It is as if he is exploring his own very deep inside[10] so that he can feel whole, somehow restored amidst the harshness and complexity of his imprisonment.

In addition to searching for his five-year-old self, Cronin links the activity of hiding to his immediate past:

> ... the point
> being not to be found
> too soon,
> nor ever to hide
> where you wouldn't hear
> my feet closing in, despite the precautions
> stepped up in these last years
> (Ibid, page 35)

The hiding child is used as a metaphor for his avoiding security police surveillance.

The metaphor of the hide and seek game is crucial to the poet for an acceptance of his whole being: he may wish to reject his heritage, he may have tried to avoid it all his adult life, but he has nonetheless to accept it as part of himself. The past has been well-hidden, but the time has come to retrieve it and acknowledge that

> [t]here is
> between the two of us, in this
> necessary space, nothing,
> nothing that could be learned,
> or forgotten now
> by backing off.
> (Ibid, page 36)

In the same way, he has to accept the memory of Granma and Grampa Kemp, in the "Some Uncertain Wires" cycle: Grampa Kemp, who had "bothered to speak a few bastardized words of Xhosa - for command" and Granma Kemp "The English Bride ... who still pale and transplanted" would "parasoled, behatted, watering-can in hand/carefully [you'd] tread, down kitchen steps/into Africa". (Ibid, page 62.)

From his prison cell, Cronin acknowledges and owns

> - this five-year old boy, this shadow,
> this thing stuck to my feet.
> (Ibid, page 39)

and accepts that

> this nostalgia
> is thicker than water, my family,
> between generations is all space
> half filled with childhood rhymes, joined
> by some uncertain wires.
> (Ibid, page 64)

Although as an adult Cronin served a prison sentence for his beliefs, he can and does acknowledge where he comes from. Despite his father having been a naval officer, working for a regime abhorrent to the adult Cronin, he retrospectively forgives the dead man whose last words were "Jeremy must play cricket" (page 41). As a conclusion to the cycle, Cronin tries to reconcile himself with his father. He remembers him with affection rather than criticism.

Cronin's political stance differs quite markedly from that of his parents, who were "basically apolitical":

> Obviously in a sense that's a political stand. I grew up in a very typical English speaking, white background, middle class. It wasn't liberal. I don't think they were outright racists in the sort of naked, heavy sense, but of course their whole life-style was predicated on the system in South Africa.
> (Interview, November 1984)

Cronin's parents both came from fairly poor Eastern Cape Afrikaans speaking families. They were the type of people who said "politics is for the Afrikaners and the Blacks". This was the milieu within which Cronin was raised.

He was brought up as a Catholic and was educated at Marist Brothers College in Rondebosch. (After his father's death the family moved to Cape Town.) In his poetry, Cronin reveals (despite no longer practising Catholicism) the extent to which he was exposed to Catholic teachings.

Cronin's mother had always wanted him to write poetry. She encouraged his attempts and in fact later worked through many of the poems in *Inside*.[11] When he registered at the University of Cape Town in 1968, it was mainly with a view to writing. He studied English and philosophy, and for a year or two was writing regularly. Subsequently, Cronin became increasingly involved in student politics and was reassessing his desire to write poetry in the light of his newly acquired political understanding. As he developed politically, so he felt trapped and stifled by his poetic endeavours. He was trying to write a lyrical kind of poetry - but at the time this seemed to him trite and self-indulgent.

> When I was at university in the late 1960s and early '70s, I started out very much with the idea of wanting to be a poet. My own predilections are in the direction of lyrical writing, a quite subjective style of writing, and I was always somewhat unhappy with that and became increasingly dissatisfied with that mode of writing because I felt it was so self-indulgent in the South African situation. Here I was, privileged and white, sitting at University, writing love poems or whatever. The feeling became paralysing, so that I almost stopped writing. I was blocked by this disjuncture between the realities in South Africa on the one hand, and my aesthetic predilections for the lyrical mode on the other. (Gardner, page 9 - 10)

A few of his early poems were published in journals such as "Contrast" and "Ophir". However, from the time he became a political activist until his imprisonment, Cronin virtually abandoned writing poetry.

In the early 1970s, Cronin travelled to Paris, to read for a Masters degree at the Sorbonne. While there, he joined the African National Congress[12] and returned to South Africa to carry out underground work: printing and distributing ANC pamphlets. As related earlier, soon after the June 1976 riots, Cronin, David Rabkin and Susan Rabkin were brought to trial under the Terrorism Act.[13] David Rabkin was sentenced to ten years, Susan Rabkin to one year, eleven months of which were suspended (she was eight months pregnant at the time), and Cronin to seven years. In view of the fact that their trial was intended to prove the role played by white activists in the riots, their sentences were noticeably heavier than those of other political prisoners, convicted for similar offences. The judge's remark to Cronin when passing sentence was

> So far as you are concerned Cronin, I get the impression from the political statement you made from the dock yesterday that you are quite unrepentant. I do not suppose that the prison sentence I am going to give you is going to reform you.
> (Inside, cover notes)

Prior to being charged, Cronin was detained in solitary confinement for about one month. He relates that it was during this period that he began to think about writing poetry again.

> When I was in solitary confinement I was beginning to write again fairly actively, or to think about poetry quite soon after getting arrested and detained. And one of the first poems that I wrote or composed, because I didn't have paper at that stage, was just to kind of lovingly recite the weather forecast. That sort of became an aesthetic in a way. It was very comforting to be able to do that; just with the bare rasources of one's mouth one can kind of reconstruct South Africa.
> (Interview, November 1984)

After his one month in solitary confinement, Cronin was an awaiting trial prisoner with certain privileges.[14] When he joined the other white male political prisoners in Pretoria's Maximum Security prison in September 1976, he began to produce poetry of the type he is most satisfied with: lyrical poetry depicting not only the intense subjectivity of his experience but also the context of the imprisonment in South Africa. Cronin's poetry was, from its beginning, located in the South African context.

As indicated in the quotation above, Cronin was developing a fascination with "the bare resources of the mouth". He began to consider the structure of mouth and tongue, language and sounds in each of his poems; he began particularly to explore the ways in which languages are spoken in South Africa.

His poetry is an oral/aural poetry: the sounds and rhythms of the lines are essential to the meanings of the poems. There are several reasons for the particular oral quality of the poems, chiefly that Cronin was not officially permitted to write in prison; he composed his poems on paper (once he had access to stationery) and learnt them before destroying or hiding the paper to avoid detection. Secondly, because he was eager for his poetry to be accessible to the many illiterate people in South Africa, he designed it for oral delivery.

Because he was writing illegally, Cronin would make many changes to the original poems, not always certain that he had memorised accurately. He claims to prefer working on paper where he can make several amendments before a poem is finalised, thus keeping a record of options. In prison, each time a poem was "completed", it had to be memorised. This was not an easy task, although Cronin thinks it's fairly small in comparison with actors who can recite the lines of several Shakespearean plays.

The opening poem of the anthology, "Poem-Shrike", outlines the creative process of constructing a bird from the available materials: socks, playing cards, paper. The shrike of the poem stands metaphorically for the entire collection of poems, which were made illicitly, painstakingly, until

> out
> over the high walls I launch you now
> (Inside, page 3)

The poem contains in fairly tangible form many of the images which recur repeatedly through the anthology - birds, light, eyes, voice and water.[15]

Cronin's poems are, like much prison literature,[16] filled with images and descriptions of birds. Prisoners often use "birds" to symbolise their plight: jailbird, sing like a canary, caged birds, are common expressions in a prisoner's argot. Bosman, in one of his more serious passages, wrote

> I thought it was said that you could work out how long a man had been in prison when you heard him sing. You could work out the number of years by his repertoire. I wonder if it is the same thing with a caged singing bird: if the bird remembers only the notes that he heard in the woodland, long ago and far away.
> (Cold Stone Jug, page 67)

Cronin describes how in a very real, literal way, birds were a valuable sight in prison. They were sometimes visible in the prison yard and could be heard chirping.

> One of the "bibles"[17] inside was Robert's Book of South African Birds. They were something to watch - you'd sit in your cell and read, then you'd get tired and look out of the cell and all you'd see was concrete and some floodlights and a warder occasionally, marching up and down the catwalk, and every now and again some birds. I would usually spend quite a lot of time watching them.
> (Interview, November 1984)

The symbolic nature of the birds for all prisoners is their freedom and their ability to fly, as well as the

freedom to use their voices - this is one of the major freedoms denied prisoners. The caged prisoner is sympathised with in the lines

> Every time they cage a bird
> the sky shrinks. A little.
> (op cit, page 25)

"Poem-Shrike" launches Cronin's project, the collective voice of the prisoners, out over the prison walls. Before the shrike could be thrown out, it had to be "sharpened on the grindstone", and checked "over again" - like the carefully created poetry.

The technical fussing over the shrike is very much like the fussing over a poem. Once he was sentenced, Cronin had access to stationery, but because he was not prepared to submit his writings to the prison authorities for censorship, he had to destroy the paper with his poems when he was finished writing. As his memorising techniques improved, so Cronin needed paper less and less. Once he received permission to study, however, he would occasionally write the lines of poems in amongst his study notes.

Cronin's memory capacity is fairly large - although he says that it operates selectively; he was able to memorise most of the poetry:

> I basically did memorise them. Which is not a massive feat, because, well, I didn't remember them so I could stand up and recite them. But if you sit a lot of the time - which I do - writing poems, then the lines come back, you forget what the word was there, but by working through, it comes. And ideas, whole lines and chunks - I couldn't always remember the order, but it came back.
> (Interview, November 1984)

Occasionally, he would present his poems to his fellow prisoners for comment and criticism. These were valuable criticisms, for if another prisoner found an image or a piece of a poem inaccessible, Cronin would work on it until he had satisfied his audience.

The effect of having to learn the poems by heart was a growing interest in and knowledge of the workings of the voice, the mouth, the tongue and language in general. Through his own experiments with communicating in prison and trying to capture the aural texture of life outside, Cronin began to wonder at the linguistic wealth of South Africa. He made use of this linguistic wealth to enrich his poetry and thereby make it accessible to a wider range of audiences.[18]

Since his release in May 1983, Cronin has participated in many poetry readings, where he delivers his poetry as if in theatrical performance. In performance, he draws links between the poems he is reading by telling prison anecdotes. There seems to be more than one reason for this: of great importance to Cronin is the fact that most South Africans are illiterate and do not read poetry. If the poetry is contextualised, such people are able to respond to poems that they are unable to read. On another level, in oral delivery Cronin is able to demonstrate precisely how he uses the variety of languages of South Africa in his poetry. On yet another level, he encourages a forum for talking about the experience of going to jail and emphasises that it is not unusual in South Africa.

The anecdote, or yarn, as discussed in Chapter Two, is the raw material from which prison literature is crafted. Bosman built his entire novel around the yarns of the old lags; Cronin uses his own anecdotes in a similar way: especially in a narrative poem like "Walking on Air" or in a piece like "Pollsmoor Sketches". He postulates that the prison yarn (a la Bosman) is a sub-genre of literature from or about prison.

Storytelling is a vital part of culture. People create or produce stories as expression and communication. Storytelling is a normal, healthy cultural process, depicting the well-being of a society. Historically the

need for storytelling arose out of the need for myths of human origin, where people of early civilisations tried to understand why they existed and what meaning was to be found in life. There are many reasons for telling and hearing stories, not least of which is the passing on of experiences or the intention to give sound advice or simply to entertain.

People in prisons are NOT participating in normal life, and they have little control over normalising their lives. One way they have of retaining control over themselves as human beings is through speech and through their private fantasies. In combination, fantasy and speech go a long way towards making a good tale. Prisoners use the anecdotes, the yarns, as a way of retaining their sanity and control over their existences. Stories mediate the brutality and harshness of their isolation from society. They are as well a means of bringing the world of the prison out into the real world - and providing information about how to survive should the audience find itself in a situation described by the storyteller.[19]

Although Cronin describes himself as primarily a lyrical poet, he has in his collection a number of skilful narrative poems, which in oral delivery are accompanied by anecdotes and theatrical gestures, careful timing and interaction with the audience.

One such poem is "Walking on Air", which Cronin wrote as a tribute to a fellow prisoner, John Matthews. In acquainting the audience with the background to the poem, Cronin has become a proficient raconteur. The nature of his poetry, and of his delivery, has necessitated a development of the skills of the raconteur.

> I think possibly I have become more of a storyteller as a consequence, particularly about prison. I haven't really thought about this much, but I think it's probably true that the kind of reality of prison and the ways in which traditions and so forth, and a knowledge of the place is passed down and perpetuated, is

> often carried in the prison yarn type of situation. I was certainly not the most adept raconteur in prison. Even amongst the small community that I was *in* - white political prisoners - there were one or two who were sort of real reservoirs of prison oral culture. (Interview, November 1984)

The fabric of this oral culture has to do mainly with survival and coping within the prison. This is often the intention of literature describing the experience. Cronin adds

> Normally, they'd tell how someone had done this or that, or often, tales against themselves. But it would normally carry that kind of pedagogical effect as well, how one copes with that kind of situation or doesn't cope, or whatever. (Ibid)

Cronin had been aware of this kind of pedagogy almost from the beginning. Before his imprisonment, he had read Hugh Lewin's Bandiet and has commented that it "served as a handbook on how to deal with imprisonment". Subsequently, his own text, and his oral commentary on it, has served a similar function. He has rendered prison liveable.

Consequently, when Cronin talks about prison, it usually takes an anecdotal form. If this is part of a poetry reading, he does it so that he is not bored by re-reading the same poems. Anecdotes also inspire questions from the audience; this often leads him to read particular poems in response, e.g. "Pollsmoor Sketches" or one of the love poems.

Apart from the desire to talk about his imprisonment, either through the printed poems or through reading to an audience, Cronin had other reasons for publishing the poetry. He admits to having learnt a great deal from other prison writings: he had read Lewin, First, Zwelonke, Bosman and several other prison texts before his arrest.[20] Reading other prison writing had humanised

the place" for him. A major reason for publishing was precisely to reinforce his belief that imprisonment is not an uncommon experience in South Africa. Cronin comments

> To share that experience is an important one. Therapeutically for oneself, but also just generally for others and to show that one can make a space in the apartheid prisons and one can actually live there, it's not pleasant but it's not unthinkable or unimaginable and it had better not be, because a lot of people are going to have to confront that reality.
> (Ibid)

A further aspect of publicising his experience is to remind the public that there are many prisoners still inside.

> Quite a lot of the poems are bringing in not just my voice from inside to the outside, but the voices, achievements, heroism of other people, particularly, say, the three people on death row, Johnny Matthews or whatever. The third motivation would be that: to remind us, to honour, to continue pressure that we can bring to bear for the release of and amelioration of the conditions of those people.
> (Ibid)

Although composing his poetry in prison was a "solitary" activity, he conceived of it with a tentative audience in mind - not only those mentioned above - prisoners past, present and future - but the families and friends of these. "Walking on Air", for example, is more than a tribute to Johnny Matthews, it is a tribute to the strength of and support from his wife and seven children; it is also a salute to a particular period of history and the participants in the congress movements of the 1950s.

The storytelling, narrative techniques used in "Walking on Air" are representative of these techniques in all of Cronin's poems.

The poem is about the life of John Matthews, who told his tale to Cronin, who in turn brought it out of the prison in the form of a long narrative poem; in other words, two types of storytelling are in process. The "tribute" to Matthews is hinted at in the words

> John Matthews speaks by snatches, the making and fixing of things he likes, though much, never, mind, you won't catch him speaking
> (Inside, page 6)

Matthews is a humble man, working in the carpentry shop (where all the political prisoners worked until three of them escaped in December 1979, after manufacturing wooden keys).[22] He enjoys the work because

> "I work for myself" - he says - "not for the boss";
> (*Ibid*, page 5)

The two types of story incorporated in the poem sum up - as in Beaven's book - the way prison lore is passed on as well as how the raw material of the "yarn" is crafted into a poem. The poem is at once a story, a puzzle, and a lesson. It tells the story of political choice and its effect on a man's life and his family relationships.

John Matthews is a white working class man who served fifteen years in prison for engaging in Communist Party activity. Cronin met Matthews in prison: Matthews had been there since 1964, working

> In the prison workshop, also known as the seamier room; (...) making contraband posters, boxes, ashtrays, sawdust salt cellars of, oh, delicate dovetailings;
> (Inside, page 5 - 6)

In the prologue to the poem, Cronin comments that the prison workshop was a place to discuss "productive" and "unproductive" labour as well as to engage in all sorts of discussion ranging from political theorising to moaning about "life without women"; it was the best place to get to know one's fellow prisoners, for talk was reasonably freely allowed.

The rhythms of the poem imitate the rhythms of the work - such as the backwards and forwards motion of a saw:

In the prison workshop, also and otherwise named, where work is done by enforced dosage, between political discussion, theoretical discussion, tactical discussion, beckoning of life without women, sawdust up the nose, while raging at bench 4, for a week long, a discussion raging, above the hum of the exhaust fans, on how to distinguish the concept 'Productive' from the concept ... 'Unproductive Labour';
(Ibid, page 5)

Amidst these rhythms Cronin learned the story of John Matthews' life. Cronin reveals that Matthews liked "the making and fixing of things" - he is a craftsman. Cronin uses his own craftsmanship in this piece, to build a poem whose shape fits the narrative of John Matthews - a quiet humble man, totally dedicated to his beliefs.

The middle section of the poem is made up of short, three-line stanzas outlining Matthews' childhood and early working years:

A dependable lad
comm
his spelling is good.
(Ibid, page 7)

who eventually

got a bookkeeping job
with Kobe Silk

On the same block
- John Edward
Matthews

Mondays to Fridays
on that same block
for 37 unbroken years until

The security police
picked him up ... But first
way back to the thirties.
(Ibid, page 8)

The short staccato stanzas reveal how Cronin heard the story "in snatches", which he "pieced together".

Cronin and Matthews belong to different political generations. Matthews belongs to the activism of the

1950s - the defiance campaigns and congress movements.[23] Cronin's political activity began in the 1970s, after a decade of total repression and political silence in the country. They are united as comrades by their adherence to the tenets of the Freedom Charter. Cronin asked Matthews

was he present on the two days of Kliptown ...
1955? ... when the People's Congress adopted
the Freedom Charter?

Actually

No he wasn't

He was there the day before, he built the
platform

(Ibid, page 6)

The pauses in the rhythm of these lines indicate Matthews' reluctance to reveal this fact - either because it disturbs the equilibrium of his humility or because a wander might be eavesdropping.

Matthews' political growth began in the 1930s. He had been a church going man, he went every Sunday, until

to Kobe Silk
there came
a new clerk

Myer Chanes by name
a short little bugger who talked
Economics at lunch-break
(Ibid, page 9)

and had a great influence over Matthews.

in a word
John Matthews stopped
going to church.

His name got inscribed
inside
of a red party card.
(Ibid, pages 9 - 10)

Matthews became increasingly active in South African Communist Party (SACP) activity, during which time

He learnt to fix duplicators and typewriters.
(Ibid, page 10)

After the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950,[24] and ten years later the Sharpeville and Langa massacres,

> it was no longer just typewriters and duplicators to mend.
> (Ibid, page 11)

As the narrative of Matthews' political involvement develops, the lines of the poem get longer and more complex, reflecting the amount of underground work that had to be done, as well as the pressure under which Matthews worked.

In 1964, in a large post-Rivonia security police swoop, John Matthews was detained.

> Whites and 52
> so they treated him nice.
> They only made him stand
>
> On two bricks
> for three days
> and three nights and
>
> When he asked to go to the lavatory
> they said:
> Shit in your pants.
> (Ibid, page 12)

In the poem, Cronin displays enormous admiration for John Matthews and the decisions he had to make. Matthews was pressurised by the security police to become a state witness - the poem illustrates how this temptation was presented to him.

> Think of your career
> (that didn't work)
>
> Think of the shame of going to jail
> (that thought only
> filled him with pride)
>
> You really want kaffirs to rule?
> (like you said)
>
> Think of your wife
> (Dulcie. Dulcie
> 7 kids. Dulcie.
> She's not political at all.)
> (Ibid, page 13)

And Matthews almost thought that was the end - either of his marriage or his political commitment. But when the police allowed him a visit from his wife, he told her:

> - Dulcie, I will never betray my comrades.
> And with a frog in her throat she replied
> - I'm behind you. One hundred percent.
>
> So back they hauled John Matthews then and there,
> back to the cells,
> that was that, then, but
> all the way down the passage
> toe-heel, heel-toe, diddle-diddle
> CRIS HONORED PRESIDENT
> I mean, he was high
> off the ground, man.
>
> He was walking on air.
> (Ibid, page 14)

Cronin admires John Matthews for his decision to sacrifice his life with his family during his imprisonment. The poem illustrates how important one's personal life is in aiding one's political commitments.

> One must write about falling in love .. not that one has to; but it's a duty of political people to enter the diversity of terrains that affect ordinary people'n lives - calling it love or death - which are experienced by everyone, universally and down all time; political people fall in love too. Too often, they're schizophrenic about it, they have compartments in their lives rather than trying to integrate their political attitudes with their personal life and their attitude towards women (if they're males).
> (Interview, November 1984)

In Matthews' case, the state needed witnesses - they tried to bribe him to testify for them - until he agreed. But with his wife's support when he told her he could not betray his comrades he was able to go to jail a "contented" man.

In this long, narrative poem, Cronin achieves two related things: he shows firstly that political people can and do have private lives which mean very much to them, and secondly that these private relationships are very important in sustaining one's political commitment.

More than that, though, is the importance these loved ones have in keeping up the morale of those inside the prisons. Matthews was "walking on air", and fifteen years later, just prior to his release,

> he peeps down at his face
> in a mirror
>
> In a mirror held low, about
> belly-height,
> wondering how he'll seem
>
> To his grandchildren
> from down there
> next year when he comes out
> (Ibid, page 11)

His grandchildren do not know him - they are probably not fully aware of why he has been in jail. Cronin's tribute to John Matthews is aimed partly at assisting his family to reintegrate him into their lives.

In this poem Cronin is at his storytelling best. Prisoners always try to find out about one another - why they're in jail, how long they'll be there, or how they deal with the experience. Out of this develops a sub-genre of all prison writing - the yarn, the Bosman-like tales, fabricated most often from the surroundings and not from truth. In his "Pollsmoor Sketches", Cronin records some of these:

> Listen man, I'm in hoek
> For something
> I hardly didn't do.
>
> Course I knew Braam Fischer.
> He tone me one day straight:
> - Possessess
> Hallos Ginger.
> (Ibid, page 16)

"Pollsmoor Sketches" is one of the titles Cronin reads often to audiences, because it reveals the broad range of people who end up in prison; it is not only the political prisoners who refuse to recognise the state's authority - there is also Johannes Stephanus Februarie, between whom

> And submission, [there is]
> This epic gap.
> (Ibid, page 17)

Another of the poems Cronin always reads to audiences is "Death Row". In this poem he recreates with onomatopoeic and rhythmic sounds the build up to an execution.

> It is rather with your ears that you begin to construct a sense of the place in which you are. During the day, you can sometimes hear the sound of a nearby city, presumably if the wind is blowing right. (...) Sometimes you hear bird-calls. But, it is at night that the sounds inside of the building where you are wall up above the threshold of inaudibility. Way off to your right there must be some 200 people you would guess. They sing mournful hymns a great deal of the time. Judging from the songs, they are mostly Africans.
> ("Academic Freedom Lecture", 1984)

In this poem, Cronin's masterly use of onomatopoeia is microcosmic of the way he learnt through his ears to use language and sound while he was in prison. "Death Row" is a verbal expression of what his ears had taught him.

Before reading the poem, Cronin always contextualises it in "Beverly Hills", reads it and answers questions.

"Beverly Hills" - officially known as Pretoria Maximum Security - is the prison housing the condemned.

> Together with six other white political prisoners, I was held in C section of Pretoria Maximum. There is a great deal of singing in that prison. It was mostly mournful, African chorals singing that we would hear. It came from over to our right, in what we guessed were B and A sections. In those sections there were some two to three hundred prisoners, condemneds on death row. (...) Ten minutes before seven on the mornings of execution we could hear two or three voices detach from the main body of singers. These two or three voices would come, still singing, although constrictedly, slowly down the long, long (but all too short for them) concourse passage of our C section.
> (Inside, International Edition, page 33 - 34)

After some time in Beverly Hills, the white political prisoners noticed a change in the singing: instead of hymns they heard freedom songs. They didn't know why this had happened until they eventually learned that three ANC

guerrillas - Johannes Shabangu, David Moise and Bobby Tsotsobe - were on death row, due to be executed. In final defiance of the state, the three encouraged the other prisoners on death row to sing freedom songs.

The white prisoners never met their black comrades - their only contact was through calling to each other. As a result of this aural contact, Cronin composed the tribute to his comrades on death row.

The majority of sounds in the poem are strong and militant; the rhythms at first fast and angry. In section 2, a different sound, evoking both the physical agony of the hanging and the quality of sadness that surrounds it, is

> A guinea-hen's call - we've been told,
> glass on glass
> a pocketful of marbles weeping
> deep in her throat,
> (Inside, page 28)

which is soon replaced by

> another, a staggered sound
> like bioscope seats flapped
> back.
> (Ibid)

As the poem continues, Cronin, still through sound and rhythm, builds up the frenzy and panic of the three as the hanging date approaches:

> To boil or
> Respond like a
> Ripple like a
> Lurch like a
> Ukuhlabelela
> is to
> Glow like a
> Growl like a
> Glow like a
> Boil like a
> Bean stew like a
> Ripple like a
> Bus queue weaves like a
> Moves like a
> Stalks like a
> Moves like a
> Fighter
> Ukuhlabelela
> Three voices
> Called
> (Ibid, page 29 - 30)

The energy of their resistance and anger was an inspiration to those remaining alive in the prison.

Cronin's extended experimentation with onomatopoeia and sound patterns is sustained throughout the volume of poetry, but is at its most complex and fascinating in section 3 - "Venture to the Interior". The poems all indicate intense exploration not only into the history of the languages of Southern Africa, through the use of such words as "gcm gcm" (page 50) and "-kuil, -pan, -fontein" (page 58), but also a venture into Cronin's personal interior, where he explores his Christian roots. The poems are primarily about the South African interior and its languages, but several of them have strong Christian symbols.

Much of Cronin's poetry reveals his Catholic upbringing. As a child Cronin attended Marist Brothers' College in Rondebosch - a traditional Catholic school. He is no longer a practising Catholic, but elements of his education provide a useful vehicle for his metaphors. Keith Gottschalk suggests that in much of Cronin's poetry, especially the poems employing symbols of light and [illegible] Cronin is intrinsically influenced by his Christianity.

> One layer of richness in Inside's poems is the evocation of secular realities through religious imagery (...) It must be remembered that Cronin is writing in a culture dominated by Christian symbolism, and that religious metaphors, specifically Christian metaphors, will for many readers facilitate empathy. Besides, though a Marxist in his mature years, the stages of Cronin's evolution include a Catholic childhood and contact with philosophy. Thus he on occasion naturally expresses unequivocally materialist ideology through Catholic or Platonic metaphor.
> (Gottschalk, page 56)

Cronin uses the Christian symbolism in a way which indicates his personal "wholeness" rather than any specific religious belief. As in the poems evoking memories of his childhood at the naval base, Cronin's

Christian images in the remainder of the anthology indicate that he has accepted his Catholicism as an integral part of the forces which shaped him.

Gottschalk draws attention for example to Cronin's ideas and images in "For Comrades in Solitary Confinement", where he writes

> Where without appetite
> you commune
> with the stale bread of yourself
> (Ibid, page 25)

- lines which indicate the complexity of Cronin's thought process in relation to his Catholicism. Against an image of taking communion, Cronin describes solitary confinement as particularly uncomfortable. He explains that he did not discover any essential part of his soul while in solitary, but rather that "a person is a person because of other people" (Ibid, page 18). The solitary self soon becomes stale.

In the "Venture into the Interior" cycle, the Christian imagery becomes more noticeably overt, although it is not a mystical or consciously religious process. As mentioned earlier it is simply a manifestation of his total acknowledgement of his heritage, which he makes use of in all his poems.

The first poem of the cycle, aptly titled "Prologue", introduces the themes of the cycle: the tongue and its power to communicate (John's opening chapter in the New Testament is titled "Prologue"). Cronin links his archaeological exploration of speech to a Christian symbol, albeit an inverted one, when he writes

> Then let flesh be made words
> (Ibid, page 45)

- a play on the New Testament's "In the beginning was the word ... and the word became flesh ...". Through the use of this notion, i.e. the links between speech and human existence, Cronin is able to use his Christian knowledge in order to explore language. The poem

elucidates the techniques Cronin employs in all his poetry: by introducing the "tongue" and the way it functions in speech production, he directs us to the potential powers of language.

Cronin's obsession with language arose out of a desire to recreate the texture of the "outside" - the world outside prison. Inside, the only languages he heard were the English spoken by his comrades and the Afrikaans of the warders - none of the other languages spoken in South Africa. One of the ways he could recreate the textures of outside was through sound:

> ... it was very comforting to know that just with the bare resources of one's mouth one can kind of reconstruct South Africa
> (Interview, November 1984)

He was, from the beginning of his poetic endeavours, "striving for an oral kind of poetry". Initially, as already mentioned, he was forced into this means of composing because he was denied writing materials. Later, as he grew increasingly skilled at designing the "oral" poetry, Cronin *taught himself some of* the sounds of indigenous African tongues - like Khoi-Khoi - and wrote that he wanted and was trying

> To learn how to speak
> With the voices of this land
> (Ibid, page 58)

"The voices of this land" are, for Cronin, the fabric of the emerging national culture he envisages. Ironically, the "voices" are both interior and exterior. While depicting aspects of the interior of South Africa, they are very much a part of the outside Cronin is trying to recreate from the inside of the prison.

While educating himself about the various languages and the literature that belong to South Africa, Cronin was developing a more composite sense of South African history. The writings of Olive Schreiner assisted him in understanding

language trekking on
through each of our throats:
koppie, sheepkraal, koppie,
milkbush, the town location, this whole
spanned outscattering dusted
in moon track
(Ibid, page 54)

His tribute to Schreiner is not only for her use of South African English, but for her political awareness, years ahead of her time.

Prior to his imprisonment, Cronin never studied linguistics. Of all the Unisa[25] courses for which he subsequently registered, linguistics was the one he enjoyed most.

> Precisely because it had this application; just as the athlete needs to know about the mechanisms of the body, so the poet needs to know about the mouth and the tongue and the breath.
> (Interview, November 1984)

In the poetry, he explores the sounds made by humans, machines, insects, animals, water; in "Litany" (which, to return to the link with his Christianity, means repeated prayer petitions) Cronin reproduces sounds made in his world; it is a litany to

> Tongue!
> O Ark of Language.
> (Inside, page 47)

Language and sounds come from "the primal swamps") developing beyond mudfish and snakes and hardening palates, until with the tongue came the advent of speech.

> tchareep grartch-grartch
> tchareeep tchareeep tchareeep

and

> kree-kree-kree-kree
> ssssszzz
> (Ibid, page 47)

The tongue, the producer of all oral language, is also important in eating, loving and breathing.

Once he begins this exploration of language, Cronin continues to use it as a tool to examine the landscapes, the land and the country outside of the prison. "Our land holds its hard/Wooden truths like a peach/A pip:" (Ibid, page 50). The philosophical allegory of Plato's cave mirrors Cronin's own imprisonment and longing for the world outside: where Plato's prisoners saw shadows on the walls of their cave, Cronin's "prisoners with strange anatomical names" are

> filled with a deep longing.
> these prisoners who incessantly mimic
> the sounds of their land
> down in the blue-veined stopes
> down in the very confines of their chamber.
> (Ibid, page 48)

Cronin as prisoner is, through his poetry, himself mimicking the sounds of his land from within his "cave". The closing lines of the poem suggest an optimism about outside:

> these outside who a these sounds
> batched in the daylight, may
> someday, grow into words?
> (Ibid, page 48)

Throughout the poetry Cronin uses sound and language to contextualise the imprisonment in a South African jail, as well as in the physical and linguistic territory of his country.

One of the reasons for storytelling in prison and for writing about it afterwards, is an attempt to normalise the experience, to integrate it into one's life. Cronin's poetry goes further than any of the other literature in its examination and analysis of the outside world. Languages and histories of forgotten people contribute to his understanding. The poem, "If you're asking: whose land" (Ibid, page 51) questions, through images of labour, who rightfully belongs in South Africa. The implication is that the country belongs to those who have helped to develop it through their hard work, rather than the colonisers.

In the two tributes to Olive Schreiner, Cronin acknowledges that there was more to early South Africa than the colonial imagination has permitted to survive. On reading Schreiner's work, Cronin realised that it really was possible to write intelligently and critically of South Africa.

When he first read Schreiner's Story of an African Farm,

> it made a huge impact on me, that you could actually write about South Africa - the two poems to Schreiner reflect that a bit - it is enormously enabling as a writer in South Africa to realise that things that are so familiar - like the bloody veld and koppies ... things that are actually named and talked about can form an aspect of literature.
> (Interview, November 1984)

The greatest tribute to Schreiner is that she is the great-great-grandmother of an emerging culture.

> Olive Schreiner, your letters
> still keep arriving.
> (Inside, page 53)

The concluding poems in "Venture into the Interior" explore through natural imagery the "linguistic" wealth of South Africa. From within the prison, Cronin evokes for himself memories of the physical texture of the outside, and works with the less tangible texture of language. The water and the stone which recur in these poems are significant aspects of Cronin's Christian symbols.[25]

In the image of the river "that carries many tongues in its mouth" (Ibid, page 57) Cronin creates a sense of a new heritage - a new language that will draw its strength from the blending of

> ... dental, lateral
> Clicking in its palate like the flaking on stone tools;
> (Ibid)

It is also a language that will be relevant and applicable to the people whose labour built, and continues to build, this country.

And a river that trickles
Down the worker's face.
The salt river that welds tomorrow forward,
Steel girder on girder and concrete.
(Ibid)

Ironically, it was while "inside", away from the multitude of people and languages, that Cronin taught himself

how to speak
With the voices of this land.
(Inside, page 58)

He did it as part of his desire to recreate the texture of outside, but also to acknowledge the strengths of his compatriots. He does so by using their words in his poetry:

I'm telling you,
Stample, stickfast, golcwan,
Songololo, just boombang, just
To understand the least inflections,
To voice without swallowing
Syllables born in tin shacks, or catch
the 3.15 ibwata bust fife
Mwanufabeng train,
(Ibid, page 58)

Although Cronin's poetry has been widely praised for all its technical and thematic merits,[27] it has often been lauded specifically for his love poems, written to his wife Annemarie, who died of a brain tumour about seven months after his imprisonment. The love poems employ all the skills and techniques discussed thus far; the poems blend Cronin's personal feelings with his political ones, and are all the more poignant because of the circumstances under which they were written.

Many interviewers and reviewers have concentrated on the love poetry as remarkably representative of Cronin's style: lyrical, rhythmic and still highly political. Reviewers have accorded the love poems a special, elevated status.

Cronin points out that being political and in love and going to jail is hardly a unique set of factors in South Africa. Nonetheless, he has written love poems of great force while attempting to avoid the sentimentality or cliché of much lyrical love poetry. In "A love poem", for example, he writes

> That's better, she says, but
> Why all this delicate nature stuff? It wasn't
> A flower that taught you how to drive
> (Ibid, page 76)

It is in the love poems that Cronin best achieves the balance between his lyrical poetry and his political conviction. The natural images in the poems belong specifically to the Cape Province, and are written in a particularly South African English.

The relationship between the poet and his wife is presented as very close, strong and supportive, and "equal". Gottschalk goes so far as to describe the love poems as "feminist in their values, questioning roles within marriage" (Gottschalk, page 58). He points to Cronin's use of verbs and activity rather than adjectives as indicative of the values.

Much of the love poetry is lyrical and very beautiful; the general tone is one of mutual worship, faith and respect. Cronin comments that

> a lot of lyrical poetry is actually quite close
> to the prayer - short, an invocation of someone,
> a loved one - to change or help one.
> (Interview, November 1984)

In many ways, his late wife has become a kind of spiritual helper, almost a deity for the prisoner. He relies on her spiritual presence to provide him with strength to deal with his imprisonment and with her death.

Annemarie Cronin's illness was borne with courage, on her part as well as his. He was not permitted to attend her funeral, and could not even share her physical pain with her at close quarters. Her love and support prior to

his imprisonment - knowing all the time that imprisonment was imminent - were clearly very valuable to him.

The poems stand as a salute to her for all she did for and with him and are in a sense a substitute for the physical presence and support that he was unable to give in return.

Annemarie, his "muse", is always associated with light, laughter, irony - and only towards the end of her life, tears. She is the light in the "dark times" of hiding and surveillance.

Inside the prison, Cronin was separated from his loved ones by at least five locked doors and 1 700 kilometres[28]

> nothing unusual in this
> Our country.
> (Inside, page 68)

The only way he could reach those outside was to write letters; in "Tonight is an envelope" Cronin skilfully constructs a sustained metaphor by which he can imagine himself leaving the prison

> ..... flying at last
> As three week old words, behind the inside flap's
> Gummed
> Touch to reach you
> (Ibid, page 69)

The image of the tongue, used as vehicle for language in the "Venture into the Interior" poems, becomes now a vehicle for exploring the wholeness of the self because of the words it uses, or because of speech. Cronin expresses his physical self as if it were "words". Noticeable in this particular poem is, again, the idea of the New Testament word made flesh - in this case

> The letter I, flesh made paper
> (Ibid)

The craft of this poem is effective in several ways: apart from devising a scheme for sending his words out of the prison he explores poetically the notions of inside and outside. In his attempts to send his words into the

outside world, it is as if he turns himself inside out; he encloses a part of himself in the envelope - ensuring that he is still inside something; this time, in order to be taken out.

Cronin reveals in this poem that he attaches as much value to the written word as he does to the spoken, despite his constant emphasis on the oral. For without the written word, he would be completely unable to communicate his inside to the outside world.

In some ways, the poem is an acceptance of the distance between Cronin and his wife; yet in an almost religious way, in a ritual way, it is more. It has its roots in the tradition of taking communion, and is based strongly on these ideas: as mentioned above Cronin has made *a connection* between lyrical poetry and prayer. He says that it is "an invocation of someone, a loved one to change or help one".

In this poem, however, he is not relying on another person to change him, he is effecting the change himself - he is "flesh made paper" and "my tongue turned into paper". In many ways, the taking of *communion is a* taking in to one's body the body and blood of Christ; it is a ritual of taking in. In this poem, Cronin inverts the tradition and turns himself into paper *so* that he can be taken out. The passive is used to emphasise that the letter will be read, censored and sent by prison authorities, and as much effort as Cronin puts into writing it, he still has no real power over how it gets out.

By imagining that the night in which he is thinking is an envelope, Cronin is able to explore a wide ranging communication. He also evokes a sense of freedom, in the words

> ... it's just
> Possible to consider me as flying at last ...
> (*Ibid*)

In addition to the words that are sent out as a part of himself, Cronin plays on the idea that he has to use

his tongue to seal the envelope. His tongue is present in the envelope because "behind the inside flap's gummed touch" is a physical touch of his tongue. In reality, this is all he can send out.

Also rooted deeply in Cronin's lapsed Catholicism is "A Prayer in Search of Beads", in which he reverses the procedure of counting the rosary so that instead of

> ... the circular path
> where the hand was guide to the tongue

he has to hope

> for some reverse palpability to emerge
> (Ibid, page 70)

Predominant in all the love poetry is the strong bond the poet feels with his wife. He often uses images of thread, twine, knitting in order to emphasise their bond. In "Labyrinth II" he writes

> I'm unravelled by day, at night
> I weave now and weave ....
> (Ibid, page 72)

and ends the poem with the image of his wife knitting

> the far end of this twine
> (Ibid)

An aspect of imprisonment described by all former prisoners is the visit. Prisoners receive particular types and quantities of visits depending on their prison-category.[29] Political prisoners, however, are rarely allowed contact visits; they have to see their visitors through a pane of glass for half an hour a month.

> The visits occurred in a small cubicle with no physical contact between prisoner and visitor. We would communicate through a glass porthole. All the while, the visit was monitored by two or more warders, a hidden tape-recorder and, as I learnt much later, a hidden video camera. The most intimate moments were the most closely scrutinized.
> (Inside, International Edition, page 81)

The agony of these visits is portrayed in two poems - "Visiting Room" and "I saw your Mother" - one of which

describes a visit from his wife, the other one from her mother, who came to inform Cronin of Annemarie's death. The cruelty of the visiting system is brought out in lines like

> I couldn't place
> my arm around her,
> around your mother
> when she sobbed
> (Inside, page 77)

and nor she around him.

Cronin was taken back to the prison workshop after hearing of his wife's death. He was denied permission to attend her funeral.

The dominant image of Annemarie is conveyed through references to her eyes and through light - her eyes are described

> As careful as
> a teaspoon of light
> (Ibid, page 79)

Of the visit, he writes

> To admit light,
> that's a window's vocation
> or a man to a wife

- this is the extent to which she brings him light and the outside world.

In contrast to the majority of poems in the anthology, Cronin's love poetry is often connotative and symbolic. It is "non-verbal" and suggestively erotic. It is a successful attempt at retaining the privacy of the intimate relationship while declaring it openly, and at the same time acknowledging clearly that the world exists outside of lovers. The cycle of poems is carefully set out so that the metaphors and images associated with Annemarie (and their relationship) are linked and develop into a complete picture.

Cronin's love poems differ significantly from the words of love written by other writers discussed previously. Bosman fantasised, or imagined, a lover in

the women's prison, and later reveals that the prison was "his first love" in whose arms he slept. Lessing's relationship with Connie, an unusual love-story, is presented with a degree of sentimentality; Ruth First says very little about her husband other than that she was very dependent on him and D M Zwelonke uses the issue of romantic involvement as an important plot device.

Cronin wrote poetry specifically for the object of his love: Breytan Breytenbach also did this. But as Gottschalk explains, Cronin's poems use verbs in place of descriptions. He didn't write about, he wrote to/for, depicting his wife as active and not simply a passive object. He also locates his marriage/relationship within the context of his political involvement, his imprisonment and his wife's death.

Cronin believes that having experienced being in love or living with a partner was of great assistance in learning to survive in jail. Those who had not experienced this seemed to have had a more difficult time adjusting to living at such close quarters with others. For this reason, too, he acknowledges his wife.

The cycle of love poems ends with "Mirror", a poem in which Cronin tries to retrieve the images of his past. But

> ... only your face stares out with its nose
> pressed
> against an impassable glass frontier
> (Ibid, page 82)

The mirror, and images of water, are common images in the anthology. In the "Isiqiqimadevu"[30] cycle, Cronin tells that

> When I first came to prison
> I'd write about rivers
>
> Now my poems
> are all about pools,
>
> Pools and mirrors into which
> I've been slipping it seems ...
> (Ibid, page 85)

The pools are in contrast to the earlier images of water as transfigurative and optimistic. The rivers denoted movement, changes, life as well as purification, cleansing and transfiguration. Rivers are potent and free. Pools, however, are still, stagnant and not as pure. Pools and mirrors are associated because one can see one's image reflected in a still pool's surface, as in a mirror.

This final section of the anthology is technically skilful - thematically it shows Cronin's increasing frustration and sense of futility as his sentence wore on. The sense of futility became so oppressive that he found himself

> run[ning] a length of cotton twine between my teeth
> (...) as I spin out
> the interminable lines of a love poem to no-one
> (Ibid, page 88)

The poems in the final section of the book are the ones in which Cronin's anger at his jailers is most evident. At the same time, however, he uses his imprisonment to fuel his spirit so that he can resume his political activity on his release. He has positioned the poems in such a way that his release seems imminent - "Clothes" and "Second Thoughts" particularly prepare him for his return to the outside.

The first poem in the anthology is "Poem-Shrike". One of the last pieces is "Kwikkie" which also reflects the poet's acute observations of bird life in the prison. The poem is both a bidding farewell to a friend and a looking back over the years spent in prison.

The rhythmic structure of the poem mimics the hopping motions of the kwikkie (wagtail), a meticulous, fussing little creature who moves quickly, almost dancing - with a "penny-whistle walk". It rummages in the yard for food and brings small dots of light and colour to the bleak concrete surroundings. (The poem-shrike had eyes that dripped light.)

Each short line of the poem follows the hopping movement of the wagtail through the yard. The poet has

> ... studied
> your ratchet-work
> your seamstress ways
> stitch and pulley
> (Ibid, page 101)

His familiarity with the bird allows him to imagine that he too could be a wagtail. Now that his freedom is imminent, he can at last imagine himself as a free bird.

Before he prepares himself for release, Cronin looks back into his childhood once again - reminding us of how he would hide in wardrobes

> amongst my solemn
> Ancestral ranks with their wire
> Question marks for heads.
> (Ibid, page 103)

The question marks are still there: Cronin does not claim to have found any answers, except perhaps that "Motho ke Motho ka Batho Babang" (page 10) - a person is a person because of other people.

While in prison, Cronin realised the truth of this idiom. It was through sharing his experience with others that he was able to become a "whole" person: he was able to delve into his own personal "inside" and integrate his childhood memories and his colonial heritage into his present reality. He was able as well, finally, to write the poetry he had always striven to write.

His achievement is reflected in the structure of the anthology. "Inside", the first cycle of poems, resides in the physical inside of the prison. Cronin sets the scene for a journey to a different inside (which he manages to effect in "The Naval Base" and "Some Uncertain Wires"), the inside of his psyche.

His exploration of and experiments with language are evident throughout, but particularly so in "The Venture to the Interior" cycle. There, Cronin demonstrates the power

of language and the potential ability of oppressed people to use this potency to assert their strength. In a similar way, he has shown how he used language to "free" himself in the prison. He did so by learning "how to speak with the voices of this land".

Since his release from prison in 1983, Cronin has resumed his activism as far as possible. He was a prominent member of the United Democratic Front, although since the declaration of two states of emergency he has been hiding from the security police. He has effectively been silenced - but his poetry, <u>never</u> banned, unlike much of the material of a similar nature, continues to speak, not only for Jeremy Cronin, but for all prisoners in South Africa's jails.

Conclusion

In Chapters One and Two, the writing of two common law prisoners, Christoffel Lessing and Herman Charles Bosman, was discussed. Lessing's first autobiography was written while he was still in prison; Cold Stone Jug, on the other hand, was written approximately twenty years after Bosman's release. The two books, although describing a similar topic, are very different. Lessing's tone is serious to the point of melodrama, while Bosman's is humorous and ironic. It seems that Bosman had read Lessing's work prior to writing Cold Stone Jug and drew on several of Lessing's anecdotes in his chronicle. Ultimately, Bosman emerges as the superior writer, partly because he was an experienced writer by the time he wrote Cold Stone Jug and partly because he was looking back at his imprisonment with a degree of distance and maturity. Bosman's mode is the continual recounting of prison yarns. This format recurs in all the texts, but the humorous rendition is uniquely Bosman's.

Ruth First's memoir differs significantly from all the other texts discussed, because it deals with the experience of solitary confinement. Writing about solitary confinement is largely a cathartic experience, but it has other significance as well. Detainees live in a world of virtual silence, punctuated only by prison noises and the voices of warders and interrogators. They are denied all human contact except with these same warders and interrogators. Their experiences are so intensely felt, and so private, that it is often difficult to share the experience verbally when contact with others is resumed. Writing of the detention rather than talking about it, can aid the detainee in re-establishing contact

with the ordinary world. Writing serves as a bridge between solitary confinement and the resumption of daily life; it also provides a means for dealing with the emotional pain of incarceration.

D M Zwelonke, like Bosman, claims to be writing a work of fiction based on his experiences on Robben Island. The book is filled with tales of the island and the prisoners serving their terms there, providing the background for a gruesome story of the torture of one man. The dominant image left by this novel is that imprisonment is a terrifying and brutal experience, resulting in madness and sometimes death.

Cronin's poetry is different from the other four texts in that he wrote it while inside the prison and used it not only as a therapeutic exercise but worked at a serious literary and political project. His particular obsession with language and speech is an extension of the storytelling techniques of the other prison writers. Cronin wrote his poetry about issues broader than his own imprisonment, such as his childhood memories, and the death of his wife. Along with Bosman, he emerges a skilful craftsman over and above being a successful documenter.

There is no single way of responding to incarceration. The five texts discussed reveal this through their similarities as well as their differences. Although all five were written about South African prisons, they reveal that the treatment of inmates varies from prison to prison. This is most obvious in the ways black prisoners are treated differently from white, sentenced prisoners from detainees, political prisoners from criminals.

There are many reasons for writing about the experience of imprisonment, but it seems that most important is the need of former prisoners to share their experience with an audience wider than just family and

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friends. They need to expose the particular functioning of the prison system and explain that it has particular effects on inmates.

In addition, each writer had personal reasons for writing. All express a need for a catharsis, to purge themselves of the experience; the catharsis is achieved through the therapeutic act of writing. This intention is stated most clearly by Zwelonke, who revealed that he wanted to write the island experience out of his system. Writing forces the ex-prisoners to think about and analyse the ordeal of imprisonment and to assess its effect on their personalities, their psyches, and their ways of relating to other people. In the literature about solitary confinement, writing serves as a bridge between prison and re-integration into society, for detainees need to re-learn how to relate to other people.

A further reason for writing is to expose conditions in the prisons - such as solitary confinement or the brutality of life on Robben Island, or the fact that in general black prisoners are worse off than their white counterparts. Bosman and Lessing criticise the system that serves only to punish and not to equip prisoners for a successful community life outside. First condemns both detention without trial and solitary confinement, while Cronin's and Zwelonke's criticisms are located in the broader criticisms of South African society.

One of the most common features of the five texts is the revelation that former prisoners are often talented storytellers. (Most highly skilled in this regard are Bosman and Cronin.) There are at least three reasons for the development of the storytelling abilities of prisoners. These can be broadly categorised as entertaining, pedagogic, and "normalising".

The prison world is practically empty of diversionary activity. It is designed so that prisoners are forced to focus on their imprisonment and the reasons for it. They endure hard labour, separation from their families

and punishment. Over the years, prisoners have been allowed increasing access to books, studies, music and films. These are nonetheless rare stimuli and, in order to entertain themselves, prison inmates construct stories from the raw material of their surroundings. Alternatively, they recall in narrative form their lives outside. As depicted in Cold Stone Jug, criminal prisoners take delight in embellishing their crimes and their arrests with elaborate detail.

A second type of story related both in the prison and after release, is the type that educates people about imprisonment and exposes prison conditions to the public. Some stories aim to teach those inside how to cope with the routines, the personnel and the general environment of hardship. Stories and published texts often serve as "guidelines" for future prisoners about what to expect from imprisonment. The pedagogy of the prison yarn is necessary and informative.

Incarceration is not a part of normal life; storytelling is. As an attempt to normalise their lives within the prison, inmates tell stories. Prisoners relate stories that are hard to match. They pay enormous attention to detail, plan their narratives carefully for the best possible impact and tell tales that are simultaneously gruesome, unpleasant and humorous. Through their stories, they attempt to normalise their world.

A major difference in the themes of the books described is that political prisoners feel no guilt or remorse, for they do not believe that they have committed any crimes. They believe rather that the state is guilty of injustices, and that they were attempting to counter these. Criminal prisoners, however, feel remorse and guilt, and express a desire never to return to prison. Bosman expressed this quite clearly when he discussed the blue-coats and the first offenders, while Lessing's remorse is more that he was deprived of a chance of

proving himself worthy of survival in the real world. He expresses bitterness at a system that refused to show him a means of redirecting his life.

The most common similarities in texts about imprisonment are the themes and images they employ. For example, all the writers refer at length to the tardiness of the passing of time, the tedium of prison routine, and the fear of, or submission to, insanity. Each text outlines in different ways the techniques employed by prisoners to deal with their particular circumstances. Lessing studied and wrote, Bosman listened to stories and broke stones. First designed a number of activities to keep herself busy. Zwelonke, or his persona, Danny, fantasised and learned to sing and dance, while Cronin studied and thought about the linguistic wealth of South Africa, and its role in an emerging national culture. He then crafted his thoughts into his poetry.

All the texts, whether serious or humorous, reveal the intense personal agony of imprisonment. Their differences are more with regard to style, tone and technique than content. Lessing wrote an autobiography, Bosman a chronicle, First a memoir, Zwelonke a novel and Cronin poetry. Both Bosman and Zwelonke claim that their works are fictional, the other three texts are autobiographical. Lessing, First and Zwelonke wrote in a serious tone, while Bosman employed a fairly consistent irony, punctuated with humour. Cronin succeeded in combining humour and seriousness.

Each text deals with the pain of incarceration in its own way. They all have remarkably different endings. Lessing's conclusions were optimistic; he in fact succeeded in remaining out of prison, and eventually prospered as a businessman. Bosman wrote his book so long after his release from prison, that he looks backwards rather than forward to a future, and his ending differs from all the others. Ruth First ended her memoir with

a warning to herself that the Security Police would not leave her in peace. They harassed her until she left the country on an exit permit, and it is widely believed that they were responsible for the parcel bomb that killed her in 1982. Zwelonke's novel ends with the sadistic murder of his friend and leader, Bekimpi, and shows no optimism for a future after Robben Island. Cronin ends his anthology with the acknowledgement that life carries on.

Life does carry on, both in the prison and outside. For many ex-prisoners, the return to their communities outside the prison walls can only be properly achieved once they have externalised their experiences in tales. Until then, they are like the prisoners in Cronin's poem "Plato's Cave" (Inside, page 48), who see the outside world only as a shadow.

Notes

Introduction

1. Although it is normally desirable to avoid racial categorisations, this study employs them because the state separates black and white prisoners and affords them differential treatment.

2. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" in Illuminations. Fontana/Collins, Glasgow, (1973), 1977.

3. The South African system of education is separated on the basis of race. It is widely acknowledged that black children receive an inferior education to that provided for white scholars.

Chapter One

1. An Industrial School in Tokai, in the Cape, in 1927.

2. In July 1940.

3. Ek Kllendige Mens, Gooi My vir die Aasvoëls, and Met 'n Donkere Liefdesgroet. His publishers were Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel (APB).

4. Lessing's articles are all accessible through the Reference Section of the Johannesburg Public Library. The journals in which they appear are listed in the bibliography.

5. Dagbreek, 1956.

6. APB, 1949. The original of this title was the Afrikaans Sk, Ellendige Mens (APB, 1947).

7. The articles written about Lessing in Brandwag and Huisgenoot testify to his popularity.

8. Until the discovery of Lessing's writing, I believed that Bosman's Cold Stone Jug and Hardy's The Black Pavil were the only published books by common law prisoners.

9. Stet, vol 3, 1986.

10. Lessing was appointed to Sonderwater in approximately 1952; his appointment was an attempt by the Department of Social Welfare to show that they believed in the success of their rehabilitation system.

11. His first book was published in 1947. In 1987, two of his books were with a publisher. He has still to decide whether he wants the books to be published. Meanwhile he has donated several manuscripts to the University of the Witwatersrand.

12. APB, 1947.

13. Sonderwater, near Cullinan in the Transvaal was a work colony, accommodating vagrants and alcoholics rather than hardened criminals. It was formerly a prisoner-of-war camp.

14. Dagbreek, Johannesburg, 1956.

15. Lessing's own words.

16. For example, through archival documentation, such as Criminal Record Books and Court Records.

17. For example, as his anecdotes are expanded, one story leads to another, and probing by the interviewer leads to more detail as well as discovery of contradictions.

18. Lessing was declared an habitual criminal by Judge F E T Krause in 1933.

19. Lessing believes that his wife Corrie was the one person in his life who was able to offer him mothering, as well assume the adult responsibility of marriage. This was revealed in Forth from the Dungeon and became even clearer during interviews.

20. Lydenburg is a town in the Eastern Transvaal, near Sabie.

21. Lessing had arrived at the hostel with nothing. The matron there was horrified and instructed his father to provide him with certain items. His father, unaccustomed to such provision, bought the finest quality clothing and toiletries.

22. While at Sondenwater, he and Corrie decided to look after the old man, who was an alcoholic and had been living in poverty in Sabie. He was uncooperative and smuggled alcohol onto the premises illegally.

23. Industrial Schools are institutions for delinquent children who have not committed crimes punishable by reformatories or prisons. These schools have a reputation for cruel treatment.

24. An English clergyman in Lydenburg had been very kind to Lessing and had offered to put him through school. His father wouldn't allow this, believing he was capable of looking after his child.

25. Lessing relates at the beginning of his tale how he was unable to walk until the age of three, when his parents were advised to buy him shoes. He suffered from tender, sensitive feet for many years and could not go without shoes.

26. Ever since the English clergyman in Lydenburg had been kind to him, Lessing went to English churches when he needed help.

27. Rex vs Lessing, in the Bloemfontein Supreme Court, 18th July 1933. The judge's words were "there is no doubt that you are a very plausible scoundrel."

28. Major de Villiers of the Prisons Services Liaison Department was unable to confirm or refute this. The Department first employed a schoolmaster in 1927, but there are no records that any prisoners wrote examinations. The schoolmaster's role was that of librarian.

29. Lessing saw the key in the warder's office. He offered to repair the prison's tin plates, in order to get some metal and a soldering iron, and manufactured a key similar to the one he had seen.

30. The reasons for *Lessing's distress are obvious.*

31. Lessing's story is the first of the case studies in Willemse's book. Some time after publication, Willemse was no longer allowed to visit Lessing because of the professor's criticisms of the syste The authorities believed that Lessing was responsible for prompting these criticisms.

32. The circumstances of Willemse's death were confirmed by a former student of his, Mrs L Goldblatt, who remembers the incident. Mrs Goldblatt also remembers his discussing Lessing with his students. This information was obtained in an informal conversation with Mr Lessing and Mrs Goldblatt in January 1987.

33. Lessing's "boss" in the tailor-shop, the German master-tailor, smuggled the letters by rolling the loose sheets of paper around his baton before putting it in his baton-pocket. He posted the letters to Connie. Sometimes, he would simply post Lessing's letters with his own official correspondence.

34. For example, "How I came to marry Christoffel Lessing" in Outspan, 30th January 1948, and "My Stoffel" in Brandwag, 22nd August 1947.

35. This was published in Die Ruiter, 18th July - 10th October 1947.

36. The title of this manuscript may still change.

37. The extent to which the harassment occurred may have been exaggerated. Lessing, in his writing and in interviews, occasionally seems somewhat paranoid and concerned that people are planning to harm him.

38. This is described in van Onselen's The Small Matter of a House (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1984).

Chapter Two

1. First published in 1947.

2. Bosman was tried and sentenced in the Rand Supreme Court, by Judge Gey van Pittius.

3. The sentence was commuted on 24th November 1925.

4. All his biographers, except for Bernard Sachs, refer to this reticence.

5. Other references are to be found in some of the essays included in the volume A Cask of Jerepigo (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, [1964], 1972).

6. Rosenberg speculates that the tension was a result of English/Afrikaans conflict.

7. He was training to be a teacher at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Normal College.

8. He had been writing seriously since his schooldays.

9. In his My Friend Herman Charles Bosman (Perskor, Johannesburg, 1981).

10. Bernard Sachs relates an incident where Bosman heckled his brother Solly Sachs at a rally, not because Sachs was a communist, but because it was fun to heckle.

11. The annulment took place after Bosman's conviction.

12. Rosenberg, Sachs, Dickson, Abrahams.

13. According to Rosenberg, this was brought up as evidence in court, as proof that Boeman could not possibly have mistaken his stepbrother for an intruder.

14. Rand Daily Mail, 16th November 1926.

15. Rosenberg describes this at length.

16. Lionel Abrahams, interview 1987.

17. Sachs attended school with Boeman, and remained a friend for many years.

18. One of the characters was the notorious "Slangvel", whose real name was Ronald Stewart; the other was a man named Jeff, who told anecdotes about prison food.

19. Rosenberg, Chapter Six.

20. Rosenberg writes "He and Jean Blignaut attacked the penal system at every opportunity in the New LEO and the New Sjambok. Included in the black humour pamphlets he published in 1932 when Daisy de Melker was condemned to death for murder were some sobering recollections of his sojourn in Death Row." (Rosenberg, 1981, page 46)

21. Boeman is usually remembered for his knowledge of Edgar Allan Poe, and not as much for his knowledge of the work of Oscar Wilde and other prison writers whom he mentions at the end of Cold Stone Jug - Villon, Valraine, O Henry, St Paul.

22. Rosenberg (1981) notes that Bosman was contributing Afrikaans versions of the Schalk Lourens stories to both Brandwag and Buitag. Lessing was contributing to both these journals.

23. For example, Lessing's remarks about studying and writing in prison, his relationship with the warders, and less cruelly, his "status" as a blue-coat.

24. Bosman lived at first on his uncle's farm on the outskirts of Johannesburg.

25. He resumed *his own name* in the 1940s.

26. Lionel Abrahams relates that his brother-in-law once asked Bosman a question related to Cold Stone Jug which he refused to answer and *thereafter* became withdrawn and silent. Abrahams suggests that for Bosman, it was not simply a matter of being ashamed, but was rather a deeply ingrained need to protect his personal non-literary identity.

27. One cannot ignore the traditional role played by the fool in, for example, Shakespeare. The literary allusion to the fool as insightful commentator would not have been lost on Bosman.

28. Lessing felt threatened by groups of prisoners, believing that he was somehow different from them. He also wanted privacy for introspection.

29. This could well be a sympathetic response to Lessing, who served two indeterminate sentences.

30. Towards the end of his imprisonment, Lessing describes that *he* had a particular status within the

prison and could move around between sections fairly easily. His sense of his own importance is obviously under attack from Bosman.

31. Foucault's analysis goes far beyond this swing from convict to delinquent, as he is concerned more with the broader notion of surveillance in society, which is not specifically relevant to Bosman's book.

32. If Bosman was not really relating stories he actually heard, he is certainly remembering the mode in which they were related.

33. Mafeking Road, Unto Dust, Jurie Steyn's Post Office, A Bekkersdal Marathon.

34. Ph.D. Thesis, University International Microfilms, 1975.

35. Lessing, Lewin, Cronin, First, Kantor.

36. Bosman was on Death Row only ten days.

37. Pretoria Central Prison is the only place of execution in South Africa.

38. Jeremy Cronin's poetry, and his discussion thereof, recreates the singing prior to execution.

39. Several Bosman critics and reviewers have drawn attention to his notion that art is independent of content; he wrote of this in his several essays.

40. Later writers often mention that they had read Cold Stone Jug prior to their imprisonment. They draw on its images and anecdotal form.

41. The penal section housed blue-coats for the first six months of their sentences.

42. "Tausa" refers to a particular movement that prisoners had to perform: jumping naked in the air, spreading arms and legs, spinning around and landing on all fours with the rectum exposed to the searcher.

43. This refers to the hiding of articles inside the rectum.

44. The tinder box, a small wooden box with a lid is stuffed with a piece of burnt cloth; a small steel disc on a piece of string lights the tinder when rubbed against a stone to produce sparks. See Cold Stone Jug, page 62 for a detailed description of the process.

45. Clifford wrote a series of articles for "The Sjambok" on his release. He had been an actor and radio personality prior to his imprisonment.

46. Bosman does not claim this directly either, but he suggests that there were definitely lighter moments

47. This seems to be a direct reference to Lessing.

48. He refers to Bosman as

> an Afrikander and educated wholly in South Africa. But he has no trace whatever of any Colonial accent. His aspect is a bright and cheerful one; he has clear blue vital eyes. (Sjambok, 5th July 1928)

49. This too seems a reference to Lessing's "Twintig Jaar in die Tronk".

50. Bosman relates that he was taken out one day to repair a bracket on a guard post. He saw the vivid beauty of the world beyond the prison walls, and longed desperately to be released.

51. He writes that he thought about pigs breeding with buck, dogs with horses; roosters with pigs, elephants with frogs. (See Cold Stone Jug, page 186.) These images terrified him.

52. People who knew Bosman said he was a mad, wild sort of man. He leaves us questioning the issue of sanity in our society.

Chapter Three

1. She was registered for a diploma course in librarianship.

2. The "no trial act" refers to the General Laws Amendment Act, No. 37 of 1963, which provided for detention without trial for a period of ninety days.

3. Penguin, Middlesex, 1965.

4. Others include Jail Diary by Albie Sachs (Harvill Press, 1966), A Healthy Grave by James Kantor (Hamish Hamilton, 1967), White Madam by Myrna Blumberg (Victor Gollancz, 1962), and several others from different periods of history.

5. All the other texts discussed were written by convicted prisoners, some of whom lived in "private" cells, but all of whom had contact with other prisoners.

6. See for example Raxel Weiss' The Prison Experience: An Anthology (Delacorte Press, 1976), which contains extracts from prison writing from all over the world. The majority of extracts were written by people who had been in solitary confinement.

7. First describes some of the fantasies she had, for example that she would write a novel. Sachs indulged in fantasy more frequently.

8. All detained in the latter part of 1963 into 1964.

9. The Security Police usually refute claims made against them by detainees. They always assure the public that prisoners are treated in strict accordance with prison laws. Their response to queries effectively silences the detainees.

10. Both of whom were explicit about their treatment.

11. The South African Communist Party was established in 1921/2 under the name of the Communist Party of South Africa.

12. Slovo is known today as a major strategist of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC.

13. Shawn, Robyn and Gillian.

14. Segal was a member of the SACP, a close friend of Ruth First. He also left South Africa on an exit permit in the 1960s.

15. First was particularly well known for the exposé of the cruel labour practices of the Bethal potato farmers.

16. Act No. 44 of 1950.

17. Being "listed" means that one cannot speak in public, write for publication or be quoted. First remains listed even though she is dead.

18. The Nationalist government came to power in 1948.

19. The PAC was a breakaway group of the ANC. It will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

20. Gandhi's policy of passive resistance involved no violence at all.

21. Act No. 8 of 1953.

22. Act No. 3 of 1953.

23. The Public Safety Act was invoked in 1985, 1986 and 1987 when the State of Emergency was declared.

24. The Freedom Charter was banned until 1984.

25. Under the leadership of Robert Sobukwe, in 1959.

26. Act No. 34 of 1960.

27. Myrna Blumberg, author of White Madam, was detained during this period.

28. Nelson Mandela, leader of the ANC, denies that he has ever been a communist. James Kantor quotes from Mandela's courtroom testimony:

> [... although] I am not a communist and have never been a member of the Communist Party, I have been named under that pernicious Act because of the role I played in the Defiance Campaign.
> (Kantor, page 225)

16. Act No. 44 of 1950.

17. Being "listed" means that one cannot speak in public, write for publication or be quoted. First remains listed even though she is dead.

18. The Nationalist government came to power in 1948.

19. The PAC was a breakaway group of the ANC. It will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

20. Gandhi's policy of passive resistance involved no violence at all.

21. Act No. 8 of 1953.

22. Act No. 3 of 1953.

23. The Public Safety Act was invoked in 1985, 1986 and 1987 when the State of Emergency was declared.

24. The Freedom Charter was banned until 1984.

25. Under the leadership of Robert Sobukwe, in 1959.

26. Act No. 34 of 1960.

27. Myrna Blumberg, author of White Madam, was detained during this period.

28. Nelson Mandela, leader of the ANC, denies that he has ever been a communist. James Kantor quotes from Mandela's courtroom testimony:

> [... although] I am not a communist and have never been a member of the Communist Party, I have been named under that pernicious Act because of the role I played in the Defiance Campaign.
> (Kantor, page 225)

29. The events of Sharpeville will be discussed in Chapter Four.

30. James Kantor quotes Mandela's reasons for the adoption of violence:

> All lawful modes of expressing opposition had been closed by legislation and we were placed in a position in which we had either to accept a permanent state of inferiority or to defy the Government. We first broke the law in a way which avoided any recourse to violence. When this form was legislated against, and when the Government resorted to a show of force to crush opition to its policy, only then did we decide to answer violence with violence. But the violence which we chose to adopt was not terrorism.
> (Ibid, page 222)

31. Subsequently, it has become the military wing of the ANC.

32. Act No. 37 of 1963. (i.e. part of the General Laws Amendment Act).

33. Walter Sisulu, also serving a life sentence, was Secretary General of the ANC.

34. Those arrested included Walter Sisulu, Ahmet Kathrada, Govan Mbeki, Lionel Bernstein, Dennis Goldberg, Arthur Goldreich, Hazel Goldreich, Hilliard Festenstein, Bob Hepple, Elias Motsoaledi, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba, and all the servants at the farm.

35. Sisulu had been addressing his supporters over the radio.

36. Now Botswana.

37. Moolla and Jassat.

38. The warder, Greeff, refused to carry out the plan exactly as it was arranged, and was thus easily identified as the warder who helped them. He received a lengthy sentence.

39. The station commander would come in and talk to Sachs every evening. He wanted to show him a more "moral" way of living.

40. He relates many examples of the Security Police joining in family activities while they guarded him.

41. Brutus was shot while fleeing the police. He served his sentence on Robben Island and wrote his Letters to Martha anthology (Heinemann, London, [1968], 1978) as a result of his prison experience.

42. Detained after the Sharpeville shootings in 1960

43. Approximately 65 people have died in detention in South Africa between 1963 and 1985.

44. Marshall Square, on the corner of Marshall and Sauer Streets in central Johannesburg, no longer exists as a police station. It is now a parking garage.

45. As outlined earlier.

46. This was before she had seen Hazel Goldreich - although she suspected that Mrs Goldreich was also in Marshall Square. Mrs Wolpe was detained after her husband's escape.

47. She heard nothing at all while in detention as she had no access to newspapers and during family visits her mother was careful to speak only of family matters.

48. This mode of writing purports to show First as a professional observer rather than someone directly involved in what she was writing about.

49. The Directorate of Publications or the Publications Control Board, which monitor "legal" and "illegal" literature.

50. 117 Days is banned under Section 47, paragraph 2 of the Publications Act, no 42 of 1974, and is not a possession prohibited publication.

51. It has been speculated that one of the reasons First was not charged was that the state wanted to argue for the death penalty for all the accused. It is believed that they thought having a white woman on trial would lessen the chance of the death penalty being imposed.

52. Her fears were totally justifiable - James Kantor, who was completely uninvolved in the activities of the SACP or ANC was brought to trial - there was every chance that she would be prosecuted.

53. Interview, July 1985.

54. Zimbabwe.

55. First was re-detained after the expiry of the first 90 days - she was released and re-arrested within seconds. This was the most traumatic part of her detention and precipitated her near-statement and attempted suicide.

56. Marshall Square was a police station and not a prison. The inmates were usually not there very long and thus had no need of suitcases.

57. Hazel Goldreich was not charged at Rivonia and Anne-Marie Wolpe was of no use to the Security Police, as she had no idea of her husband's whereabouts.

58. 1988 - particularly in the case of detainees held under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act.

59. *The same prison* in which Lessing and Bosman served their sentences. The routine at the prison was different from that at the police station.

60. The interrogations form an important part of First's book - in recalling them she reveals how she was gradually worn down, and that the security police were an exceptionally clever group of people, not to be underestimated as an ineffectual enemy.

61. Since the passing of the General Laws Amendment Act.

62. Such as Amnesty International and the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

63. The hearing is commonly known as Rossouw vs Sachs, 1964.

64. Several detainees verify this. In the insert about Looksmart Ngudle, First tries to demonstrate how the Security Police carry out their torture.

65. An ANC activist from the Eastern Cape, who was banned retrospectively after his death.

66. Such as Sachs and Kantor and Molefe Pheto.

67. Refer to Chapter Two.

68. The no trial law allowed for this practice; detainees were "released" and immediately re-detained.

69. She points out that this was not an intelligent action, and indicates that she was losing control.

70. Now Brigadier J J Viktor, in charge of the Soweto CID.

71. Her statement was very much a personal history, avoiding all mention of other people.

72. The South African government were apparently outraged at the documentary, which they claimed was biased.

73. Interview, July 1985.

74. Sachs vs Rousseau, 1963.

Chapter Four

1. Robben Island is 7 kilometres from Cape Town. It can be seen from several points along the Atlantic coastline.

2. Although Bosman's Cold Stone Jug is commonly referred to as a novel and contains fictitious names and places, he at no point openly claims openly that it is fictitious.

3. The complete title of this book is Prisoner 885/63 Island in Chains Ten years on Robben Island, as told by Indres Naidoo to Albie Sachs, (Penguin, 1982).

4. The complete title of this book is Hell-Hole Robben Island Reminiscences of a Political Prisoner, (Spokesman, 1984)

5. As will be discussed later, the PAC had a short hey-day, and by the mid 1960s, had virtually stopped functioning. The PAC exists today in Zambia and Tanzania. It receives far less publicity than the ANC and acknowledges fewer sabotage attacks.

6. The Dutch settler responsible for colonising the Cape in 1652.

7. Struik, 1971.

8. De Villiers claims to be presenting an unbiased, historically accurate account. He appends documentary evidence to prove his strict adherence to fact. His book is, however, clearly emotive and defends government policy.

9. Such as lime and wildlife.

10. The panopticon is an architectural design which encloses individuals in cells and separates them from other individuals. The person in the cell cannot see anything outside of the cell, but can be seen by sentries or wardens who patrol and observe the inmates through specially designed spy-holes.

11. Foucault refers to a delinquent class, made up of criminals who interact with others and betray them to police, often inadvertently. It is convenient for law-enforcement authorities to ensure that "criminals" form a "class", living in defined districts.

12. For example, indigenous people, Khoi Khoi or Bantu speaking tribes, may have crossed the ocean to the island.

Prior to van Riebeeck's arrival, de Villiers postulates that the island was the home of many birds and seals; "robbe" is the Dutch word for seals: "Robben Island" means the island of seals.

14. That is, during the eighteenth century.

15. All the authors discussed here were on the island from 1963.

16. Dennis Brutus, author of Letters to Martha (Heinemann, 1968).

17. I have drawn on two sources for this information: Tom Lodge's "Insurrectionism in South Africa: The Pan Africanist Congress and the Poqo Movement 1959 - 1965" (unpublished D. Phil., University of York, 1984) and Gail Gerhart's Black Power in South Africa (University of California Press, 1978).

18. Teachers were forbidden to participate in political activity, so those who took part in the Defiance Campaign were dismissed.

19. The document signed at Kliptown in 1955, outlining the foundations for a future South Africa.

20. In general, the PAC did not include women in its activities. This was vastly different from ANC policy, which encouraged woman's involvement in the struggle for freedom.

21. Lodge, (1984), Chapter Three.

22. Most of the leadership had given themselves up for arrest by defying the pass laws.

23. Lodge describes the interception of correspondence and the monitoring of telephone conversations.

24. Lodge, (1984), page 196.

25. "Millenarian movements" are those which believe in an apocalyptic change, brought about by the heroic actions of a particular person or group of people.

26. He was in fact no longer a sentenced prisoner, but a detainee, housed in a room on the island. Mandela, Sisulu and other high-profile ANC leaders were also incarcerated in a different section of cells from "rank and file".

27. Discipline and Punish, (Peregrine, 1979).

28. Little effort was made to contact Miluli, particularly in the light of his introductory statements. Had I managed to contact him, it is unlikely that he would have agreed to correspond with me. In addition, I would have preferred to have spoken to him than to have corresponded.

29. The majority of bannings refer to distribution and importation, rather than possession.

30. "Zwelil" is a derivative of "Izwi elethu" or "Izwelethu", one of the PAC slogans for "our country". It is also a derivative of "Zwelonke", and possibly indicates that the choice of pseudonym refers to his nationalist sentiments.

31. A Hindu festival.

32. South Africa does not execute by means of the electric chair. Zwelonke is either using this term

fictionally, or is referring to electrocution employed as a means of torture, which, in this case, was taken too far.

33. Indres Naidoo documents these at length, outlining their causes and the outcomes of each one.

34. Although it is against prison rules, the authorities could not stop the singing. They were never sure what the songs were about - and were often told that the prisoners were singing hymns.

35. See Naidoo, page 158.

36. There are at least three "Zwelis" mentioned in the novel: "the great African leader" (page 4); Bekimpi; and the man who is to be released. All of these are in addition to the pun on Zwelakhe's own name.

Chapter Five

1. Act No. 83 of 1967.

2. He was 26 at the time of his arrest.

3. David and Susan Rabkin. David Rabkin was killed in a motor car accident in Luanda in 1985.

4. For a detailed discussion of this period, see Kane-Berman Soweto: Black Revolt White Reaction, (Raven, Johannesburg, [1978], 1981).

5. This is Cronin's own word for describing his early literary endeavours.

6. Rumney, da Vos, Schwartz, Crowe, and to a lesser extent Gottschalk.

7. Annemarie was not ill before her husband went to prison. Her illness was sudden and spread rapidly. Cronin was not permitted to attend her funeral.

8. It is for this reason that Cronin has been so willing to participate in poetry readings. He relates that after he reads and tells anecdotes, he is often asked whether he was in prison in South Africa. He claims that several black audiences have found it hard to believe that a white South African went to jail for political offences.

9. Group Areas Act, 1950.

10. As if he were undergoing intensive psychoanalysis.

11. Interview, 1984.

12. One of the reasons for going abroad to study was so that he could join the ANC - which would have been extremely difficult to have done in South Africa.

13. Act No. 83 of 1967.

14. Awaiting trial prisoners are allowed visits, consultations with legal representatives and may receive food parcels and clothing, books and writing materials.

15. These recurrent images will be discussed where relevant.

16. For example the work of Breyten Breytenbach and Boesman. Breytenbach refers to himself as "Mr Bird" and the birdman.

17. The other "bible" referred to is Branford's Dictionary of South African English.

18. That is, not only white English speaking audiences.

19. For example, Cronin himself believes that his reading of Hugh Lewin's Bandiet somehow prepared him for his imprisonment.

20. Among others, Henri Alleg and Nazim Hikmet.

21. Remembered in Cronin's poem "Death Row" - Bobby Tsotsobe, David Moise, Johannes Shabangu.

22. Alex Mouburis, Tim Jenkin and Steven Lee. The story of their escape is recounted in Jenkin's Escape from Pretoria (Kliptown Books, London, 1987).

23. Discussed in Chapter Three.

24. Act No. 44 of 1950.

25. University of South Africa, the correspondance university through which prisoners are allowed to study.

26. See Gottschalk for a detailed explanation of this point.

27. All the reviewers mentioned in the bibliography acknowledge Cronin's skill.

28. 1 700 kilometres is the distance between Pretoria and Cape Town.

29. Prison grading categories are as follows: A, B, C, D.

30. Inkiqumadevu is a mythical water snake.

31. His introduction to the International Edition of Inside describes his post-prison hiding. I have heard recently that Cronin is now in the United Kingdom.

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