

## LIT 6934: The Carcerai Imaginary

Dr. Jodi Schorb



*The Prisoner's Companion* (New York: American Tract Society, 1827)

### Contact Info & Office Hours:

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Drop in Office Hours Thursday,  
Period 9+ (4:00-5:30...)  
Additional meetings, Tuesdays  
Period 8 (2:45-3:30pm).

If these times conflict with other  
classes or if you need further help,  
additional meetings at alternative  
times are available with 1-day  
advance notice.

### Course Description:

In his influential work of cultural studies *Imagining the Penitentiary*, John Bender argued that early modern fiction enabled the construction of the prison in the late eighteenth century, in essence claiming that the development of the English novel and the modern prison were intertwined. This seminar posits Bender's hypothesis as a launching place to investigate the carcerai imagination in modern literature as well as the literary effects of the modern prison.

The seminar begins by tracing the "transformation of punishment"—the shift from what Foucault described as the "spectacle of the scaffold" to the development of the penitentiary. This backdrop provides the class with detailed knowledge on the development of the prison and foregrounds its wider social and cultural effects.

We will then read a range of fiction (novels, novellas, short stories) designed to help us more fully consider literature's role in the transatlantic and hemispheric development of the modern prison—and the prison's shaping role in our cultural imaginary.

### Required Texts:

The following **Books** are required; the first 5 are stocked at the **Campus Bookstore**; if acquiring elsewhere, please use these ISBNs to locate this edition.

1. Michel Foucault, *DISCIPLINE & PUNISH: THE BIRTH OF THE PRISON* (Vintage); 9780679752554
2. Norval Morris and David Rothman, eds. *OXFORD HISTORY OF THE PRISON* (Oxford); 9780195118148
3. John Bender, *IMAGINING THE PENITENTIARY* (U Chicago); 9780226042299
4. Daniel Defoe, *MOLL FLANDERS* (Penguin); 9780140433135
5. Henry Fielding, *JONATHAN WILD* (Oxford Classics); 9780192804082
6. Reinaldo Arenas, *BEFORE NIGHT FALLS* (Penguin); 9780140157659
7. Manuel Puig, *KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN* (Vintage); 9780679724490
8. Angela Davis, *ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE?* (Seven Stories); 9781583225813

### Assignment Breakdown:

40%, Final Seminar Paper or Conference Paper  
10%, Exploratory Analysis 1 (4-5 pages), see syllabus for description  
10%, Exploratory Analysis 2 (4-5 pages), see syllabus for description  
40%, Regular preparation, engagement and participation, including required presentations\*  
100%

\*This includes 1 Mini Presentation on syllabus readings, 2 Mini Presentations of your Exploratory Analysis pieces, one Mini Presentation concerning your final project.

**Final Project (40%), based on ONE of the following:**

- A **seminar paper** with outside research, 15-20 pages; arrange a conference by April 11 to flesh out the viability of the project.
- One 20-minute **conference paper** (9-10 pages), along with a 500-word abstract and "cover letter" (I can supply examples); arrange a conference by April 11 to flesh out the viability of the project. In addition, you will schedule 30-minute session with me the final week of classes to deliver your 20-minute conference paper orally. If you want to pair up with someone in seminar and hold a mock panel (delivering your papers back to back in my office), that is welcome, too.

**Attendance Policy, Participation & Engagement:**

I expect you to be at all sessions, since the success of a seminar requires your active presence. **Missing one session is allowable**; if you miss seminar, I expect you to follow up with me in the interim. Missing two seminars will lower a borderline grade, especially if semester participation is borderline. Missing three seminars will lower your final grade at least one letter grade.

I expect you to be prepared for all sessions. Having an off night is understandable. But if you have a pattern (i.e. consecutive weeks) of unpreparedness, or you seem to be relying on others to carry the weight of the seminar discussion, expect to talk to me in office hours; we can usually find solutions to boost confidence or engagement, but if your participation doesn't improve, expect your grade to be lower than that of your peers. A strong class doesn't just happen: it involves each of us committing to creating a learning community attentive to each other's ideas and attentive to the readings. For this reason, participation and preparation are essential. I expect you to be here on time, having thought about the readings, ready to speak about things you noticed or thought about as you read, and ready to listen and respond to care with others. Be conscious of what you can do to facilitate your peers' discussion and your peers' engagement.

Please speak to me if you are having issues that are affecting your attendance or performance. Please speak to me if there is something about the seminar that is bothering you and you feel it could be productively addressed or modified. I welcome a constructive exchange of ideas and your input.

**Grading Expectations:**

A-range: Papers marked excellent are thoughtful, careful, developed, and clearly presented. They show clear engagement with the course (or units) themes and contexts, strong engagement with your chosen text(s), and they offer sustained and original close reading that successfully illuminates your ideas and thinking.

B-range: These are very competent and capable, but would benefit from *either* more complex development, fuller explanation or examples, increased risk-taking (including subtler or more original examples), clearer significance, or clearer presentation (structure, prose style, etc).

C-range: Promising, but has *multiple* areas that require improvement: more rigorous engagement with the assignment, stronger development of ideas, improved focus (in identifying the issue, its relevance, or guiding the reader through your analysis), fuller explanation of examples, increased risk-taking, and/or clearer presentation (structure, prose style, clarity).

D or below: Off track or inadequate, either because it is too brief, lacks comprehension, is carelessly composed, or presents a superficial response to the topic.

**Late work:**

Late work is accepted, but will not receive detailed comments. Late work that has not been negotiated in advance tends to be graded 1/3 grade lower each calendar day it is late (i.e. A- becomes B+, etc.).

**Additional policies:**

- The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>
- UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/>
- All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

**UT 6934: The Carcerai Imagination**  
**Weekly Schedule of Readings**

1/7,

**Week 1, Course Intro: Imagining the Carcerai,**

- Benjamin Rush, "An Enquiry in to the Effects of Public Punishment upon Criminals and Upon Society" (1787)

1/14

**Week 2, The Transformation of Punishment, Foundations: Theory**

- Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975; trans. Alan Sheridan, 1977), Part One, 3-69 and Part Three, 135-292. Note that the first section of Part One serves as a snapshot of the entire book and its (denser) ideas will be repeated and elaborated upon in subsequent sections.
- Sample brief "gallows speeches" from Rachel Wall (1789) Thomas Mount (1791), on ELS.

Foucault, Reflective Questions: How and why did punishment shift from the public, collective, culture of spectacle (i.e. public execution) to coercive, solitary, secret carcerai culture (i.e. the penitentiary)? What new ideas mark this shift? What is the aim of the prison? Overall, what ideas most resonate for you to help you articulate the reasons and motivations for (or the impact of) the birth of the penitentiary?

Gallows speeches, Reflective Questions: These speeches occur right around time that Rush was proposing that public punishment was falling. Do these speeches encourage social order or social unrest? How might we read them as a window into an era that was not only seeking new alternatives to public punishment, but was grappling with how "criminal speech" was circulating prominently via print?

1/21

**Week3 The Transformation of Punishment, Foundations: History**

- Oxford History of the Prison, Ch. 3: Randall McGowen, "The Well Ordered Prison: England, 1780-1865"
- Oxford History of the Prison, Ch. 4: David J. Rothman, "Perfecting the Prison: United States, 1789-1865"
- Optional (as a means of review), Ch. Two, Peter Spierenburg, "The Body and the State: Early Modern Europe." Also, take note of what else the Oxford covers, for future reference.
- (Get started on *Moll Flanders*, since the week's reading load is light)

Preparation: This week is designed to familiarize you with the most influential and/or most distinguishing traits of early prison reform: its foundations, areas of emphasis, its fundamental assumptions and philosophical underpinnings, its main controversies and debates.

**Presentations,** Four seminar members will briefly (10 minutes max) distill down for their classmates why the following (most of which are discussed on this week's readings and/or In Bender) were such influential works of transatlantic reform and select one or two sample quotations that help illustrate an influential idea from the piece:

- Cesare Beccaria, *Essay on Crimes and Punishments* (1764)
- Jonas Hanway, *Solitude In imprisonment* (1776)
- John Howard, *The State of Prisons In England and Wales* (1777)
- Jeremy Bentham, *Introductions to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (c. 1770s; 1789)

1/28

**Week 4, The English Novel and the Birth of the Penitentiary**

- Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (1722)
- Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary*, pages 1-51 ("The Prison and the Novel as Cultural Systems" and the *Moll Flanders* arguments from Chapter One). Bender argues that specific novelistic conventions, some illustrated in Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, anticipated and enabled the penitentiary. Try to summarize his core argument, and weigh its value and its persuasiveness.

**Presentations,**

2 seminar members will serve as discussants (15 minutes each), suggesting *other* ways that we might foreground some aspect of punishment, the prison, or the law as useful critical framework for interpreting *Moll Flanders*. (Ideas can be your own or distilled from a work of secondary criticism that you found compelling.)

2/4

**Week 5, The English Novel, continued.**

- Henry Fielding, *Jonathan Wild* (1743)
- Bender, "Narration and Civil Power" along with his broader arguments about Fielding in "Fielding and the Juridical Novel" in *Imagining the Penitentiary*.

**Presentations,**

2 seminar members will serve as discussants, foregrounding some *other* ways that we might foreground punishment, the prison, or the law as useful critical frames for interpreting *Jonathan Wild*.

2/11

**Week 6. Literary Aftereffects: British Romanticism vs. the American Gothic**

- Karen Haltunnen, from *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (33-90), on ELS
- Victor Brombert, "The Happy Prison: A Recurring Romantic Metaphor," on ELS (from *Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities*, edited by David Thornburn and Geoffrey Hartman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973): 62-79, on ELS.

**Presentation,**

1 seminar members will serve as discussant, choosing a text of interest to help us further engage with some core ideas of your choice from the week's readings.

2/18

**Week 7 Literary Aftereffects: Buried Alive in America.**

Read (suggested order), on ELS:

- Charles Dickens, from *American Notes: For General Circulation* (1842), on his tour of Eastern State Penitentiary on ELS
- Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Pit and The Pendulum" (1842) and "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether" (1850)
- Joan (Colin) Dayan, "Poe, Persons, and Property." *American Literary History* 11.3 (1999): 405-25 (linked on ELS)
- Caleb Smith, from *The Prison and the American Imagination* (Yale UP, 2009), on ELS
- optional: Jason Hasiam, "Pits, Pendulums and Penitentiaries: Reframing the Detained Subject," *Texas Studies In Literature and Language* 50.3 (2008): 268-284 (linked via ELS)

2/28

**Week 8. Exploratory Analysis, Assignment #1 :**

- Choose something of interest from Weeks 1-7 and compose a 4 to 5-page analysis (double spaced).  
In your piece, lay out (without a longwinded set up or introduction) your interpretive question, discovery, or central idea of interest, then use the remainder of the piece to flesh out your thinking for the reader, guiding them through your ideas, showing them what interests you and reflecting on the implications of your observations. In short, use this assignment to engage with any ideas thus far from the course - claims from secondary work that intrigued you, a primary text that you want to read or spend more time on, an idea from your presentation research, etc. You haven't been given any chance yet to sustain any ideas in written form, so use this assignment as a way to go back selectively and sit with something of interest from thus far in the course. This is *not* an essay; it is less formal, more exploratory. It could, however, germinate into a potential essay or project.
- You will present your issue of interest in class, overviewing what interested you and what you did or plan to do (but *not* reading your whole piece); think of class as show and tell (10 minutes each). There is no assigned reading this week.

**Your 4-5 page exploratory analysis is due by Friday 2/28 by 10pm to ELS**



**SPRING BREAK, no class 3/4**

The burning, plundering, and destruction of Newgate by Rioters on the Memorable 7th of June, 1780. Many popular prints commemorated the Gordon Riots, during which several prisons were sacked and the inmates liberated.

3/11

**Week 9, *La Penitenciaría: The Penitentiary Across the Americas***

- "The Birth of the Penitentiary in Latin America Toward an Interpretive Social History of Prisons," Ricardo D. Salvatore and Carlos Aguirre, in the *Birth of the Penitentiary in Latin America* (1-43)
- *Prisons and Prisoners in Modernizing Latin America (1800-1940)*, Carlos Aguirre, from *Cultures of Confinement* (pp. 14-54), ELS (this repeats some arguments of the earlier piece and works as a good overview and reinforcement piece)
- excerpt, Miriam Williford, *Jeremy Bentham in Spanish America* (Louisiana UP, 1980).

As you read, work to distill down the strongest overlaps in the origin and development of the prison in Latin America, while staying mindful of the key areas the authors highlight as different/distinct.

3/18

**Week 10, *El Presidio Político en Cuba***

- Jose Martí, brief selection from *Political Prison in Cuba* ( 1871 )
- Mario Mencia, from *The Fertile Prison, Fidel Castro in Batista's Jails* (1993)
- Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls: A Memoir* (English trans, 1993), book

We will use these three texts (two primary, one secondary) to think about how the prison and its symbolic associations shift across successive political generations in Cuba.

3/25

**Week 11**

- Manuel Puig, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1976; English trans. 1979), book
- Secondary reading, TBA

**Presentation:** 1 (remaining!) seminar members will serve as discussant, suggesting a useful critical framework for interpreting Puig's work, which was influenced by his experiences of censorship and his encounters with political prisoners.

4/1

**Week 12**

**Exploratory Analysis, Assignment #2**

Students will choose a work of prison literature and present (10-15 minutes) on its significance and utility to their research agenda. See the following page for some possible choices of potential literature.

**Your 4-5 page exploratory analysis is due by Friday 4/5 by 10pm (similar to the first round).**

4/8

**Week 13, *Carcerai Aftereffects:***

- Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, book

We'll use this to return to Foucault's argument that we are so entrenched in the prison/carcerai imaginary that we can think of no alternatives.

**Week 14, Self directed theoretical analysis**

4/15

Modeling what we did in Week 12 (minus the written analysis), students will choose a piece engaging with carcerai theory/legal theory and discuss its influence and relevance to their class interests.

Possible choices: *PM LA* special issue on the prison; Monika Fludernick, "Carcerai Topography: Spatiality, Liminality, and Corporality in the Literary Prison"; Michael Hames-Garcia, *Fugitive Thought* (2004); Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages* (2006); Colin Dayan, *Story of Cruel and Unusual or The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons*, Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy*, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*: etc.

4/22,

TBA, possible makeup session.

Some possible prison literature of interest, depending on your historical field of interest:

John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* ( 1678)  
Alexandre Dumas, *Count of Monte Cristo* (1844)  
Charles Dickens, *Utile Dorrit* ( 1855-57) or *Great Expectations* ( 1860-61 )  
Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" ( 1898) and "De Profundis" ( 1905)  
Jack London, *The Star Rover* (1915)  
Franz Kafka, *In the Penal Colony* (1919)  
Agnes Smedley, "Cell Mates" (1920)  
Jean Genet, *Our Lady of the Flowers* ( 1943)  
Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (1942, English trans. 1946)  
Camilo Jose Cela, *The Family of Pascal Duarte* ( 1942, English trans. 1946)  
Malcolm X, *Autobiography* (1965)  
Chester Himes, *Yesterday will Make you Cry* ( 1998; bowdlerized version called *Cast the First Stone* published in 1952)  
Nawal el Saadawi, *Women at Point Zero* (1975, English trans. 1973)  
Carlos Franqui, *Diario de la Revolución Cubana* (Paris, 1976)  
John Cheever, *Falconer* (1977)  
Jack Abbott, *In the Belly of the Beast* (1981)  
John Edgar Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers: A Memoir* (1984)  
Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School* (Argentina, 1986, English trans. 1986)  
Ana Rodriguez, *Diary of a Survivor* ( 1995)  
Daniel Alarcon, "Collectors" (2013) and *A Night We Walk in Circles* (forthcoming)  
Stendhal, Dostoyevsky, etc.