Andrew Sobanet

Chapter 4

François Bon's

Prison

On Tuesday, December 10, 1996 the following article by Jean-Paul Vigneaud appeared in Bordeaux's daily newspaper, *Sud-Ouest*.

"Pour un motif futile"

'Carcasse,' un SDF de 21 ans, a reconnu avoir frappé d'un coup de couteau son compagnon d'infortune. Il ne voulait pas le tuer, il voulait le repousser.

Grand et sec, âgé de 21 ans, Frédéric Miremont est surnommé 'Carcasse' par ses amis SDF. C'est lui qui, dimanche après-midi, s'est spontanément présenté au commissariat de police de Bordeaux sur les conseils de ses camarades pour dire qu'il était l'auteur du coup de couteau mortel dans le squat de la rue des Douves [...].

Tout s'est déroulé au milieu de la nuit de samedi à dimanche, devant, puis à l'intérieur de l'immeuble du 28, rue des Douves, entre la place André-Meunier et le marché des Capucins. Cet immeuble est squatté depuis une dizaine de jours par une vingtaine de personnes [...].

Le drame s'est déroulé au milieu de la nuit. Entre deux hommes seulement: 'Carcasse' (Frédéric Miremont est connu essentiellement sous ce nom-là) et un SDF originaire de Metz portant le même prénom et nommé Hurlin, âgé de 39 ans.

Une querelle pour une question de 'territoire', semble-t-il, au départ. L'un des premiers à s'être installé rue des Douves, 'Carcasse' n'appréciait pas que Frédéric Hurlin vienne traîner par là. 'Carcasse' ayant trouvé une opportunité pour fair un tour dans l'île d'Oléron, Frédéric Hurlin voulait apparemment aussi profiter du voyage.

D'un échange de mots un peu vifs, l'un et l'autre seraient vite passés à un échange de coups de poing, Frédéric Hurlin perdant ses lunettes dans la bagarre. 'Carcasse' aurait alors préféré s'enfuir, en gagnant la chambre qu'il s'était octroyée dans les étages du squat. Frédéric Hurlin l'aurait alors rattrapé. C'est là que les choses se seraient définitivement gâtées. Craignant des représailles sévères, 'Carcasse' aurait récupéré un couteau dans son sac,

> et, au moment où son poursuivant allait franchir la porte, s'en serait servi. Pour le repousser, seulement. Hélas, la longue lame du couteau a atteint Frédéric Hurlin en plein abdomen. Le blessé s'est effondré. 'Carcasse,' pris de panique, a quitté les lieux.
>
> Malgré la rapidité des secours et les soins qui lui ont été prodigués, Frédéric Hurlin est décédé à 3 heures du matin à l'hôpital. [...]
>
> L'intéressé et la victime étaient déjà connus des services de police. Le premier pour des actes de violence, le second venait juste de purger une peine de prison. L'arme ayant servi à la bagarre a été retrouvée, et hier, en fin de journée, une autopsie a été pratiquée pour établir précisément les causes de la mort.

The first chapter of François Bon's 1997 'Récit,' *Prison*, bears the same title as the above *Sud-Ouest* article, and opens with the head prison guard alerting the anonymous narrator — who is free to walk out of the prison after yet another Tuesday directing a writing workshop in the detention center — to the event. "Et vous avez su que Brulin a été planté? [...] C'était dans le journal ce matin. Dans un squat, un nommé Tignasse, que nous connaissons aussi" (7).[1] Stunned, the narrator seeks out the article documenting the death of his former workshop participant, who had just been released from prison a few days prior. "Le journal *Sud-Ouest*. [...] C'est à la gare que j'ai acheté le journal et trouvé tout de suite l'article, page 5 en haut à gauche, deux colonnes approximatives (les âges étaient faux et on croyait en dire assez sur chacun en les disant *compagnons d'infortune*)" (8). While the individuals' names have been changed, the events treated in the first chapter of *Prison* mirror those recounted in the *Sud-Ouest* article: the murder of a young ex-prisoner (Jean-Claude Brulin) by another, Tignasse, in a fight over territory in a 'squat' not far from the heart of Bordeaux. While he is only mentioned in passing after the text's first chapter, Jean-Claude Brulin — or at least his real-life counterpart — is the *raison d'être* for Bon's 'récit.' The murder of Frédéric Hurlin was the driving force of the composition of the work as a whole. Bon, when

discussing the reasons for which he chose the simple, universalized title for his book, remarks "Je crois que moi aussi j'étais dans une prison — la prison où m'avait mis physiquement et mentalement la mort de Jean-Claude Hurlin (sic). Je n'ai jamais appelé ce livre autrement ni cherché un autre titre" (Interview 1). Bon's own incredulity vis-à-vis the death of Frédéric Hurlin resurfaces in *Prison*'s first chapter. The anonymous workshop director expresses his sadness over the death of the thinly disguised Jean-Claude Brulin and ends the ex-prisoner's story on a particularly poignant note: "Avoir ajouté un nom à la si longue liste qu'on se fait chacun des absents au monde" (29).

Just as Jean-Claude Brulin's murder has its basis in a real-life occurrence, the context of the writing workshop established in *Prison* is based on Bon's own personal experience. The author was invited by the Association culturelle et sportive de la Maison d'arrêt de Gradignan to conduct a writing workshop in their Centre de jeunes détenus (CJD) for the entire 1996-97 academic year. In the end, Bon directed the workshop only from October 1996 to April 1997, and during that time, he conducted twenty-one separate sessions with a total of sixty-two inmates. His premature departure was directly linked to the appearance in the workshop of Frédéric Miremont, who had been incarcerated in the CJD as a result of Hurlin's murder. In his correspondence, Bon comments on the effects Miremont's arrival had on the workshop:

> Nous avons continué cependant cet atelier, mais, malgré mes mises en gardes orales, le service socio-éducatif du centre de jeunes détenus a inscrit à mon atelier culturel un jeune dont je ne pouvais ignorer, et eux non plus, qu'il était lié à cette disparition. J'ai pris le parti, pour deux séances, de me contraindre à un rapport anonyme, purement technique. Je n'ai jamais échangé une seule parole d'ordre privé avec ce détenu. (Correspondence A2)

During the third session, Miremont produced a text that alarmed François Bon to the point that he decided he could no longer continue his efforts in the workshop. "[J]'ai

reçu de ce détenu, sans lien aucun avec la proposition de travail que j'avais faite, un texte dont la gravité m'a alerté" (Correspondence A2). In a book which discusses his methodology for conducting writing workshops, *Tous les mots sont adultes* (Fayard, 2000), Bon notes that, as a rule, he saves all the texts produced in his sessions with the workshop participants.[2] In the case of the workshop at the CJD, Bon compiled all the texts composed by the prisoners in an unpublished document entitled "Parfois je me demande: un atelier d'écriture au CJD Gradignan."[3] On the final page of that document appears Miremont's fragment of a text, isolated from the other texts which, for the most part, are organized neatly into thematic or chronological sections. A sample of the text, which is nearly unintelligible due to the haphazard spelling and the peculiar flow of ideas, is as follows:

> je ma répli un époque ou j'ai ter dans la misère est tout les jen qui pase devans moi est qui me regardé est qui me docle lenvi de me oder la more et il a ver une personne que j'ai conu par la désonse s'est une fille on avé le méme délire elle esr de lespagne est moi je maver ren avoire avec elle elle me di que javé des afaire a lavé ou a faire je pouver conter sur elle mé il a un jour on ma coucher tou les deux sa sé fait par un asare paque on été tout les deux défonsé et de plui de se jour je me voi plui les soghe de la mème horme est quand je pense a elle j'ai pluto lenvi de me doné la fin de ma vi et je vou jure que s'est la vériter c'ette itoire. (PJD 178)

In his state of alarm, which was most certainly brought on by the inmate's expression of suicidal thoughts ('me oder la more' and 'lenvi de me doné la fin de ma vi'), Bon sent a copy of Miremont's text — and a recommendation for psychological treatment for the inmate — to a ranking member of the administration at the CJD. With that letter, he also sent his resignation. Bon's departure is mirrored in *Prison*, as the anonymous workshop director is confronted with the same problem. Upon reading a text by Tignass that included the sentence, "l'envie de me donner la fin de ma vie," the director comments, "[E]t moi j'avais décidé de ne plus revenir parce que rien de cela ne me

regardait et que c'était trop" (21). Again, as in the case of the description of the murder of Brulin, a real-life occurrence serves as the basis for the events that transpire in Francois Bon's *Prison*.

There is nothing exceptional about the use of real-life events as fodder for artistic or literary production. But what is worthy of note in Bon's text is the fact that the author freely uses material from his own personal experience in a text whose generic status is remarkably blurred. The difficulty in assigning a single, unambiguous generic category to *Prison* arises from a variety of textual and paratextual factors. Markers in the text and in the work's publication information point in the directions of both fiction and non-fiction, and the boundary between the two is deliberately blurred; the fictional and non-fictional elements of *Prison* are not only intertwined, but presented such that fiction can take on the guise of factual information, and vice versa. Degrees of fictionality vary greatly among the work's different sections, and shifts between fiction and factual information are sometimes obscured. The result of the artful combination of fact and fiction in the *récit* is an ambiguous — and sometimes duplicitous — contract between text and reader. Fictional information is used to fill in the details of stories that are based in, and presented as, fact; and authentic factual data is used to enhance the documentary effect of fictional stories. Somewhere in the middle of this confusion, the reader attempts — with some difficulty — to determine how to read *Prison*: as a work of fiction, as a work of non-fiction, or as some hybrid of the two.

François Bon's conflation of reality and fiction in *Prison* has resulted in a lawsuit which, at the time of this writing, remains unresolved. The case centers around the thinly fictionalized textual representation of Frédéric Miremont. Hurlin's murderer alleges that the presence of his fictional alter ego in Bon's narrative constitutes an "atteinte à la vie privée," and he is suing both Bon and the Editions Verdier on those

grounds. Miremont claims that Bon included details in his narrative that were "révélés confidentiellement" (Correspondence C2), which Bon denies, stating "Je n'ai jamais échangé une seule parole d'ordre privé avec ce détenu" (Correspondence A2). The court's preliminary ruling accurately states that the "degré d'intimité des éléments révélés est faible, un mode de vie sans originalité dans un cas de ce type et que tout un chacun peut imaginer, une histoire banale et un vécu qui, pour être intime, n'en révèle pas pour autant de grand secret" (Correspondence C1). Although, once having read the *Sud-Ouest* article, one can plainly recognize Miremont in *Prison*, Bon's first chapter merely tells the same story that was recounted in the mass media. Bon's re-telling of the crime is complemented by two short quotes from Miremont's prison writings, as well as physical descriptions of the murderer (such as his hair style and his sweaty palms). Bon claims that confidentiality was not breached in his revelation of those details, since the hair style he described (partly bleached spiked hair) and the sweaty palms of the inmate could have applied to any number of detainees at the time. As for the writing of the prisoners themselves, Bon defends his use of Miremont's text by asserting that he informed his workshop participants that they were not required to give him their work, and that confidentiality of their writing would not be breached (which explains the pseudonym, 'Tignass'). Bon also notes that the penal administration knew that he used the prisoners' texts in contexts outside of the workshop itself. He writes,

> [L]es responsables du centre socio-éducatif ne se sont jamais opposés, tout au long de l'année, à ce que j'emmène avec moi ces textes, les considérant donc effectivement pour ce qu'ils étaient: textes de création...J'ai fait état de ce travail hors de l'établissement, par exemple lors d'un séminaire régional des services socio-éducatifs de l'administration pénitentiaire, et, au mois de mars, une lecture des textes de l'atelier a été proposée dans la salle de spectacle de l'établissement pour l'ensemble du public des détenus, en

> présence de surveillants et de personnalités extérieures.
> (Correspondence D2)[4]

Miremont appealed the initial court ruling and another court date was set, but his lawyers failed to appear for the scheduled hearing on January 23, 2001. The final ruling will be issued in March, 2001.

While one must keep in mind that Miremont has his own agenda — most probably financial gain — in suing Bon and the Editions Verdier, his claim raises important questions around the issues of fictionality and referentiality in *Prison*. Bon strategically maintains a generic ambiguity in his narrative that continually emphasizes — in spite of the strong presence of fictional elements — the referential nature of his work. Miremont's case also implies claims about the verifiable nature of Bon's text, as questions of referentiality and verifiability are intertwined. In "The Autobiographical Pact," Philippe Lejeune writes that referential texts "[C]laim to provide information about a 'reality' exterior to the text, and so to submit to a test of *verification*. Their aim is not simple verisimilitude, but resemblance to the truth. Not 'the effect of the real,' but the image of the real" (22). The interpolation of authentic prisoners' writings *as such*, and the precise depictions of the context of the writing workshop and the city of Bordeaux constitute attempts at establishing referentiality in *Prison*. While the fictional aspects of *Prison* are as essential to the movement of the narrative as the documentary aspects, the *récit* still ultimately makes a claim that it is a referential text. Thus, however flimsy Miremont's case may be, there is no contesting that Bon has created a work in which the contract between text and reader is such that the former inmate's reading of the narrative as a referential, verifiable text is perfectly understandable.

GENERIC AMBIGUITY — GENERIC HYBRIDITY

The first chapter of *Prison* is, in many ways, emblematic of the conflation of fact and fiction in Bon's text.[5] The story of Jean-Claude Brulin is heavily steeped in real-life events. A comparison of the details found in the novel and in the *Sud-Ouest* newspaper article reveals that the story recounted in the first chapter of *Prison* is remarkably representative of what happened to Frédéric Hurlin after his release from the youth detention center. References to the actual newspaper article (such as the use of its real title, accurate quotes from the article itself, as well as the newspaper's real name) serve as a prime example of the author's attempt to document real-life events in his book, as does the inclusion of actual text written by workshop participants, which is quoted as such. Yet, in spite of the roots in reality that Bon clearly attempts to highlight, the author resorts to fiction — that is, the substitution of pseudonyms for real names and the use of fictional monologues — to fill in details of the story. Fictional production is an element of fundamental importance in the telling of the Hurlin-Brulin story. In spite of the importance of fiction in his work, when discussing *Prison*, Bon refers to it as a 'livre' and denies vigorously that it is a novel. "Aucune motivation pour un 'roman' - d'ailleurs il n'y a pas eu 'roman,'" asserts Bon in elaborating on his intentions with the work's composition (Interview 1). But to avoid dubbing his work a 'novel' is not tantamount to a denial of fictionality. Indeed, if there were any doubt regarding the degree to which fiction and reality are intertwined in the text, Bon's slippage in conflating the names of the real-life murder victim and his fictional counterpart ("Jean-Claude Hurlin," quoted above on p. 3) is telling. While Bon asserted in an interview that "Il n'y a rien, strictement rien de fictif dans *Prison* , tout est attesté par la réalité," he did reluctantly admit — in the same interview — that there are elements in the text that are fictional.[6] Regardless of his latent admissions of fictionality, Bon's phrase 'tout est attesté par la réalité,' however categorical, does not preclude the presence of fiction in

the work. Bon freely plays with his source material (i.e., his own experience in directing the prison workshop, as well as the vast number of texts composed in that workshop by the prisoners themselves) in order to construct a coherent — albeit non-linear — narrative that recounts numerous stories of incarceration, criminality, and marginality.

When considered within the context of twentieth-century French literature, the term *récit*, is loaded with a wide variety of meanings and connotations. The term, no doubt, evokes the numerous *récits* of André Gide, who used the designation 'roman' only for his 1926 *Les Faux Monnayeurs*. In his *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, J. A. Cuddon writes that a *récit* is "A form of fictional narrative which is related to the *novella*, the *Novelle*, the *roman* and the *nouvelle*," but acknowledges that debate as to what exactly a *récit* is and is not continues (778). Cuddon writes that Gide considered a *récit* to be highly compressed and concentrated and related from one point of view. A Gidean *récit*, Cuddon continues, also has a single theme and very few characters, apart from the central character (779). Bon's text cannot be designated as a *récit* in that sense, due to its polyphony and non-linear structure. Gide's use of the term would also be a misapprehension of *Prison*, as Bon's work relies heavily upon the blurring of the boundary of fiction and document in its depiction of the carceral universe. In *Discours du récit*, Genette acknowledges that there are a number of widely accepted meanings of the term, the most applicable of which for Bon's text would be "[L]a succession d'événements, réels ou fictifs, qui font l'objet [d'un] disours, et leurs diverses relations d'enchainement, d'opposition, de répétition" (71).[7] That meaning is mentioned in both the *Grand Larousse* and the *Grand Robert*, as both dictionaries define the term as a piece of writing that depicts either real or imagined events.[8]

Due to its sheer indeterminacy of meaning and its wide variety of connotations, Bon's choice of the term *récit* is an appropriate generic designation for his work, as it

reflects the singular mixture of the real and the fictional found in *Prison*. Under the guise of the ambiguous *récit*, Bon weaves a coherent and sometimes purely fictional narrative based on the real-life events involving not only the Hurlin-Miremont fracas, but also around the author's own perception of the events that took place around his writing workshop in the CJD. By choosing such a fluid term to define his narrative, Bon is able to transcend generic constraint, while remaining focused on literary production, "écriture." He remarks, "La démarche littéraire est indépendante du genre: il y a écriture — le mot *récit* est juste un état minimum de définition même si ce genre-là a aussi sa tradition en France" (Interview 1). As Christian Molinier commented in his brief review of *Prison* in *Le Matricule des Anges*, "Ni roman, ni récit, ni témoignage. La dénomination qui convient sans doute le mieux à cet écrit est celle qui figure dans l'avertissement: travail littéraire" (2). 'Ecriture' and 'travail littéraire,' like *récit*, are terms that encompass the broadest of connotations simply due to their lack of specificity. Moreover, Bon's emphasis on writing and the act of writing is revelatory, as it is consistent with his workshop project in the CJD. *Prison* would not have the same documentary and sociological implications were it not for the dominant presence of the voices of prisoners, whose own texts are interpolated in the narrative in a variety of forms and contexts. *Prison* is, above all, a text that seeks to bear witness to the experience of the workshop participants within both the prison and a variety of urban contexts. The texts of the prisoners themselves are heavily laden with sociopolitical significance, as they offer the reader a rare glimpse into the minds of those who have no voice in mainstream cultural discourse. Bon remarks, "Ces textes me semblent aujourd'hui encore d'un apport capital pour comprendre notre propre société" (Correspondence C2). The focus on the importance of the written word, as well as the process of writing itself, has a leveling effect on the textual production of the prisoners

and the portions of the text that originated in Bon's own imagination. In two of the book's six chapters (chapters three and five), the prisoners' writings — included in the text as such — make up the vast majority of the text, and Bon's own writing plays a subordinate role. And in three of the remaining four chapters (specifically, chapters one, two, and six), the writing of the inmates — again, included as such — plays a central role.

While text-based witnessing plays a key role in *Prison*, Bon takes the centrality of witnessing to another level in *La Douceur dans l'abîme* (1999), which consists mostly of the musings of homeless people, who, unlike the young detainees in *Prison*, have been provided with by-lines. Pictorial portraits are also included opposite their narratives. Bon's own writings are clearly designated as his own: underneath each of his texts, the initials 'FB' are included to avoid any authorial ambiguity. In *Prison*, on the other hand, Bon's own personal experience, the authentic textual production by the prisoners in his workshop, and the author's purely fictional creations are deliberately conflated; and it is that mixture of fictional and documentary elements that is at the root of the cagey nature of the work's generic status. Real-life elements of the text bolster the documentary effects of the fiction, and fictional production is used to provide a context for the display of the authentic texts of the prisoners. The result is a representation of the carceral universe that is, on one level, true to life in that it exposes the reader to the perspectives of numerous marginal individuals, and, on another level, fictionalized by the presence of the creative contributions of the author. Bon writes that the re-creation of the carceral environment in *Prison* results not just from his experience in the CJD-Gradignan, but from other experiences with the French penal administration as well. "La recomposition fictive que j'ai faite dans mon récit est un travail sur la situation, sur

la ville, sur ces stéréotypes, tient à tous ceux-là. Non pas un modèle, mais au moins six, peut-être sept" (Correspondence 4D).

From both formal and thematic standpoints, the first chapter of the work — which deals exclusively with the death of Brulin — is representative of the remainder of *Prison*. Bon fills in the details of the situation summarized in the *Sud-Ouest* article using a variety of strategies, and he employs those same strategies in the book's five remaining chapters. From the use of italicized text, to the fabrication of imaginary monologues, to the inclusion of text written by prisoners in Bon's writing workshop (spelling and grammar mistakes included), all of the prominent formal characteristics of the *récit* as a whole are represented in the work's first chapter. Also further developed in the remainder of the work are the first chapter's major themes, such as the universality of the prisoners' experience, the carceral milieu as a manifestation — and limit — of urban and suburban space, and the marginal and transient nature of the lives of the young men who are, or have been, incarcerated. Thus, by using the story of Jean-Claude Brulin as a point of departure, Bon is not only able to create a curious mixture of fact and fiction that renders the *récit* difficult to classify more specifically from a generic standpoint, but he is also able to introduce the major topoi and narrative techniques found throughout his work.

Just as the text as a whole is obscured by the non-descript designation 'Récit,' the narrator of the first chapter — the writing workshop director — hides behind an anonymity that reinforces *Prison*'s ambiguous generic status. Unlike Genet and Sarrazin who take the added step of conflating fiction and autobiography by including their own proper names in their novels, Bon chooses the same strategy as Victor Serge in not naming his narrator. As is the case with *Les Hommes dans la prison*, the narrator of *Prison*'s first, third, fourth, and fifth chapters (he also makes a brief appearance at the

end of chapter two) is an anonymous, first-person narrator whose experience is closely linked to that of the author. So closely does the experience of the narrator mirror François Bon's activities, that Molinier, in his critique of the work, refers to the first chapter's narrator as "l'auteur" (1).[9] Yet, however tempting it may be to make that type of narrator-author link between the anonymous workshop director and Bon, it simply should not be done, as it constitutes a mis-reading of the text. Bon's omission of his own name in the text, combined with his failure to give his narrator a fictional name other than his own (as he did with Brulin), maintains the deliberate generic indeterminacy that is created by the designation 'récit.' That indeterminacy is further reinforced by the narrative strategies intended to give the work a pronounced documentary slant or to exhibit overt signs of fictionality. Bon himself even refers to his narrator as "le protagoniste fictif du récit" (Correspondence A4).

In the first chapter, alongside precise, documentary descriptions of Bordelais urban space, authentic prisoners' writings, and quotations from a real newspaper article, Bon interpolates four overtly fictional monologues. The narrators of the speeches are 'Le fantôme de Brulin' (who is actually a young beggar spotted in the train station who simply reminds the narrator of Brulin), Tignass, and a young woman whom the narrator imagines as Tignass's sister. The four monologues are the only instances in the entire book in which the distinction between the imaginary and the real is unambiguous: the fictional narrative voices are clearly demarcated from the remainder of the text. The narrator introduces Tignass's first monologue with the phrase, "[C]elui que j'aurai désormais face à moi n'a jamais écrit ou parlé ainsi" (12) and the murderer's next speech is described as the "second monologue imaginé de Tignass" (19). In his correspondence, Bon evokes his methodology in composing Tignass's fictional monologues: "[I]l ne s'agit pas d'éléments qui m'auraient été communiqués

par mon adversaire [Miremont], mais d'une recomposition totalement fictive à partir d'une connaissance plurielle" (Correspondence D4). The remaining two monologues are introduced in equally unambiguously fictional terms, as one is pronounced by Brulin's ghost, and the anonymous narrator introduces the fourth with the comment, "[L]es paroles qu'on imagine sont forcément des paroles fausses" (26). As is the case with the fantasies of Genet-narrator in *Miracle de la rose*, the imagined monologues of *Prison*, within the grammar of the narrative, are presented as fictional departures from the "reality" of the remainder of the story. Bon uses them as a complement to the "reality" of the remainder of the narrative, as they provide perspectives other than those provided by the newspaper article and the first-person narrator.

The distinction between the fictional and the non-fictional made in the first chapter (and in the work's paratextual information as well) is a primary source of the generic confusion surrounding Bon's text. Autobiographical readings of *Prison*, such as Molinier's in *Le Matricule des Anges* cited above, are understandable, given the fact that a number of Bon's strategies convey both the referential and verifiable aspects of his narrative. In establishing the reality-fiction dichotomy, the first chapter creates a problematic and deceptive expectation for the remaining five chapters of the work: that unless there is an overt signal to the contrary, the reader should interpret the text as non-fictional. The remainder of the narrative does not follow the same principle established in the first chapter, as there are passages in the remainder of the narrative that are fictional and that are not explicitly designated as such. The reader thus may be duped into interpreting stories that originate in Bon's imagination (such as the Ford Cosworth story in chapter two) as referential narratives. Like *Les Hommes dans la prison*, *Miracle de la Rose*, and *La Cavale*, in spite of its referential leanings and the fact that

the events depicted in the narrative are based in reality, *Prison* is a work that conveys a fictional representation of both urban and carceral reality.

The murky generic status of *Prison* exemplified by the designation *récit* is further obfuscated by the narrative's paratextual information. Initially, given the publication information found in the opening pages of Bon's volume, it would seem that *Prison* resolves to be a non-referential work of fiction. The book's 'Avertissement' is as follows:

> Les faits, lieux et personnes évoqués dans ce livre résultent d'un travail littéraire et ne sauraient donc témoigner ou juger d'événements réels présentant avec le texte des similitudes de personnes ou de lieux. Les textes cités sont anonymes. (6)

Given the indisputable resemblance between the *Sud-Ouest* article and the events that are described in *Prison*'s first chapter, the 'Avertissement,' in its categorical rejection of non-fictional status, seems more than a bit hollow. Moreover, the following note of thanks is found immediately beneath the disclaimer: "Remerciements à la DRAC Aquitaine, la Coopération des bibliothèques en Aquitaine, le service socio-éducatif du Centre de jeunes détenus de Gradignan et à Kasper T. Toeplitz" (6). Strangely enough, Toeplitz makes an appearance in the book's fifth chapter (83), thereby further tarnishing the credibility of the 'Avertissement.' The disclaimer is also incongruous with Bon's extratextual declaration about the non-fictional nature of his text ("Il n'y a rien, strictement rien de fictif dans *Prison*. Tout est attesté par la réalité."). The text's content, as well as the narrator's extratextual commentary, seem to be more compatible with the note at the back of the book, which is found immediately preceding the table of contents. It reads,

> Je veux rendre ici hommage à tous ceux — Laurent, David, Christian, Djamel, Damien, Frédéric, Sefia et les autres — qui ont permis qu'écrire ensemble soit conquérir cette très haute

> égalité, égalité responsable dans le lien défait de la ville et ceux qui la constituent. (122)

The 'Je' is François Bon and the individuals listed all took part in his writing workshop, and their texts — by-lines included — are found in "Parfois je me demande." Some of their names are even found in the main body of *Prison*. While the 'Avertissement' deliberately attempts to steer the reader away from a referential interpretation of *Prison*, the note of homage at the end of the text seems to encourage that very type of reading. Toeplitz's presence in the narrative also shows that there are elements in the text — beyond simple autobiographical details — that are legitimately verifiable. Thus, the contradictory paratextual information surrounding Bon's text not only exemplifies the blurred contract between text and reader, but further distorts it.

Prison most closely resembles other prison novels in its generic hybridity and ambiguity. As in *Les Hommes dans la prison*, *Miracle de la rose*, and *La Cavale*, there is a problematic and blurred boundary between document and fiction in François Bon's narrative. *Prison*, like the other works examined in this study, attempts to leave open the possibility of both referential and non-referential interpretations, and fiction serves as a complementary device to well-established documentary underpinnings. Despite its strong and categorical protest to the contrary in its 'Avertissement,' *Prison* purports to be a documentary text, especially in its treatment of the texts produced by prisoners in the writing workshops. As we shall see in a later section of this chapter, while emphasizing the documentary nature of his work, Bon concurrently weaves the prisoners' writings into narratives that are fictional, but not overtly so. In spite of the fact that he alters the ideas and material found in the prisoners' texts, Bon uses the same strategies in fictional portions of the text that he employs to highlight the authenticity of the prisoners' writings in non-fictionalized sections of the book. In doing so, the author takes advantage of his work's generically ambiguous status — he has the freedom to

play with his source material — to depict a more cohesive, thematically balanced version of the intra- and extramuros experiences of the young detainees. *Prison*, when compared to "Parfois je me demande," gives a more complete, if partly fictionalized, picture of the inmates' experience in prison and in the city and suburbs. The youth detention center being an all-male universe (there are no female administrators and the only female inmates mentioned live in another building), Bon also diversifies the scope of his work by integrating a fictional monologue told by a woman (Tignass's imagined sister) into his text. Bon uses that character to include the perspective of a family member of an inmate, which is absent from the rest of the work. Most importantly, without interpolating fiction into his narrative, Bon would not have been able to explore daily living conditions in the prison (which he does in chapter six). Since he never asked his workshop participants to write about their imprisonment ("Jamais je n'ai fait écrire sur la détention elle-même" [Correspondence C2]), the author was forced to resort to fictional writing to depict daily life in a prison cell and thereby complete his portrayal of the carceral universe.

In spite of the similarities *Prison* has with the other works in its subgenre in terms of the intermingling of fictional and non-fictional elements, there are important structural differences between Bon's narrative and the other texts examined in this study. Unlike *Les Hommes dans la prison*, *Miracle de la rose*, and *La Cavale*, *Prison* is not a linear narrative that recounts the story of an incarceration of a single narrator-protagonist. There are multiple narrators in *Prison* and a large portion of the narrative consists of, and is based on, nearly two hundred pages of text composed by prisoners in Bon's writing workshop at the CJD. As a result of these basic structural differences, *Prison* — at first glance — appears to be incongruous with the other prison novels examined in this study. Even in their treatment of the carceral milieu, the works

initially appear be divergent. For example, in what appears to be an emblem of the gaping rift that exists between Bon's text and the vast majority of other prison novels of the Western tradition, *Prison* begins not with the traumatic process of entry into the carceral universe as it is experienced by a single — yet exemplary — inmate, but with the narrator freely exiting the prison. Upon his departure, he finds himself in the wasteland of suburban Gradignan, amid abandoned shopping centers and undeveloped plots of land tended only by grazing sheep. The opening scene of *Prison* is indicative of the thematic content of the remainder of the work, for the narrative is as concerned with questions of urban (and suburban) space as it is with the prison and life behind bars. Indeed, one of Bon's overriding intentions with the work was to continue his literary investigations into the city — or in his words, "Les représentations limites de la ville" — and working with the prisoners not as inmates per se, but 'en tant que citoyens' (Interview 1). Critics and book reviewers have observed that the carceral, in spite of the work's title, is not the primary concern of Bon's work. Molinier asserts, "Le titre du livre ne veut pas dire que son sujet est la prison." And Pierre Lepape wrote in his review in *Le Monde des Livres* shortly after the text's publication, "*Prison* n'est pas un livre sur la prison; ni même sur une prison. Le centre des jeunes détenus de Gradignan [...] dont il est ici question n'est pas l'objet du récit de Bon, ni son décor." Lepape and Molinier are correct in their assertions to a degree, as *Prison*, unlike the remainder of the novels examined in this study, does not concentrate hermetically on carceral conditions and relations. Yet, in spite of its more diffuse focus and non-linear structure, incarceration — as is the case with the prison novels of Serge, Genet, and Sarrazin — is the concept that unifies the entire work. Even though Bon sought to work with the incarcerated young men as 'citoyens,' the defining characteristic of his workshop participants is that they have experienced life behind bars, and have crossed (and

recrossed) the blurred boundary — as it is represented in the text — between the prison and the city.

Italicized Text

The world depicted in *Prison* is saturated with language. From the texts the prisoners compose in their writing workshops, to the stories, phrases — even the solitary words — pronounced by the wide-variety of narrators, language is not only used as a tool for description and narration, but is also a primary concern of the *récit* itself. *Prison* is a polyphonous text in which narrative voices change so rapidly and with such frequency that, at times, it can be difficult to discern between one narrator's voice and another's. Bon's use of italicized words and phrases plays an integral role in the work's polyphony and narrative dynamism. Italicized text is found scattered throughout the work, and depending on both their context and content, the highlighted words perform a broad spectrum of functions. While the italicization can be limited to a single word or a short phrase, Bon also italicizes entire paragraphs of varying lengths. *Planté*, *squat*, *autopsie*, *compagnons d'infortune*, *couteau*, *depuis ma garde à vue*. That is only a small sampling of terms and phrases that appear in italics in the first chapter of *Prison*, and in that representative sampling, the highlighted text originates from a wide variety of sources. The terms *planté* and *squat* were both mentioned by the head prison guard to the narrator upon his exit from the prison. *Autopsie* comes directly from the *Sud-Ouest* article, as does the expression *compagnons d'infortune*. *Couteau* and *depuis ma garde à vue* both originated during the narrator's interactions with prisoners themselves, the former coming from a prisoner's writing, the latter coming from an oral interaction with Brulin, who explained that his glasses were broken while he was in special

detention. In each case, the narrator emphasizes that the language cited was produced by an agent other than himself, and highlights the importance — indeed, the primacy — of language in the universe constructed in *Prison*.

The function of italicized text in the narrative is as diverse as its sources. In his work *Tous les mots sont adultes: Méthode pour l'atelier d'écriture*, Bon explores a number of the strategies he uses to elicit specific forms of writing from his workshop participants. One method he uses is to distribute excerpts written by any number of authors — for the most part, major writers of the western tradition from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — ranging from Nerval to Kafka to Perec. Once the participants have read the excerpt (which is explicated by Bon in his role of workshop director), they then compose their own text, imitating the technique or techniques found in the sample texts. Bon's use of italics in *Prison* resembles the technique employed in Thomas Bernhard's *La Cave* — a work Bon uses as a model in his writing workshops.[10] Bernhard cites a specific word or phrase in italics, then proffers a meditation on his citation, and integrates that meditation into the remainder of the narrative. Bon imitates such use of italics in *Prison*. Words that have a particular resonance that helped form the experience of the narrator-protagonist are highlighted and serve as the basis for reflection and understanding of the world evoked by that term. Language itself thus becomes an integral part of the narrator's experience. The narrator does not always immediately comment on the italicized text, and the words or phrases are simply interjected into the narrative, thereby imitating the way in which the words are an isolated part of the narrator-protagonist's experience. Within the context of the narrative, language becomes a means of discovering the world. As Bon comments in his correspondence, "[S]'appuyer sur une phrase, ou quelques lignes

anonymes, pour chercher à comprendre un monde en mutation trop rapide pour avoir bâti ses propres représentations" (C2).

In an effort to cover the same ground Brulin did in his final moments, the narrator takes a journey through Bordeaux to the exact address where the young man was killed, 28 rue des Douves, the same address indicated in the newspaper article. Throughout his voyage towards the squatters' dwelling, the narrator makes note of minutiae such as the bus lines one can take, as well as easily recognizable Bordelais reference points (la Place de la Victoire, le marché des Capucins). The crispness of his tone and the brevity of his descriptions evoke the language of a detective on the prowl: "Je suis allé rue des Douves. C'était trois semaines après, le matin en arrivant. De la gare, c'est le 7 ou le 8, vers la Victoire. Un matin d'hiver, beau et sec, le pas résonnant sur les trottoirs" (8). The narrator emphasizes the centrality of the written word on his journey by claiming to take notes at the scene in a 'carnet' (10). The use of italics further underscores the importance of writing and lexical detail on the narrator's quest, and plays an integral role in his documentation of the urban setting and the crime scene. For example, he mentions details such as the writing on street signs : "le panneau *établissement public stationnement interdit accès pompiers*" (10). The information on the sign is useless in terms of the progression of the narrative, but the inclusion of the detail shows on the one hand the narrator's attempt to document the space around him and, on the other hand, that language is an integral part of his experience. The italics draw attention to the language written on the sign, rather than just the sign's function.

"Le mot *autopsie*" (10). After he has located the squatter's dwelling, the narrator opens a paragraph with that short phrase, which constitutes the first mention of both the term itself — the narrator fails to note that he was exposed to the term in the *Sud-Ouest* article — and of the notion that Brulin's corpse was subjected to an autopsy. The

remainder of the page-long paragraph that follows has nothing to do with either an autopsy or Brulin, but is a precise, realistic depiction of urban space (the names of streets, stores, and restaurants are provided). It is not until the final sentence of the paragraph — nearly a full page later — that the autopsy is mentioned again: "L'autopsie c'était ici, pour venir à l'Institut de médecine légale Brulin il n'avait pas eu trois cent mètres à faire" (10-11). The term is evoked and then suddenly dropped; but in spite of its absence, the word 'autopsie' hangs over the paragraph and the spatial description, thereby allowing the reader to experience how the idea of an autopsy is a motivating factor in the narrator's walk through the city. By citing the word 'autopsie' *as a word*, Bon emphasizes the importance and the power of a single lexical item. The urban journey is determined by language and tainted by associations with language. The term 'squat' makes a second appearance in italics — after the first chapter's second paragraph when it is introduced, like 'autopsie,' as a word "Le mot *squat*" (7) — during the narrator's urban investigation. When he reaches the street upon which the murder took place, he comments "La rue des Douves, qu'à cause du mot *squat* je m'imaginais étroite et sombre, commence par des entrepôts aux larges portails" (9). Here again, language is conveyed as if it is a formative aspect of the narrator's experience. The semiotic capacity of a single word is accentuated by isolation and italicization.

Italics are also used to mark a change in narrative voices. For example, the narrator cites and then comments on text written by Frédéric Hurlin — as if it were composed by Brulin — within the context of the writing workshop: "De la phrase: *Le rejet est venu très tôt pour moi*, et cette manière de repousser tout au bout ce qui relève du sujet et aurait dû, dans la tradition de la langue française, initier la phrase et non pas la conclure" (17). The narrator reads the grammatical construction of the prisoner's phrase and infers that his ordering of words is a manifestation of the manner in which

the young man sees his place in the world. The young man marginalizes himself in his own phrase, which is dominated by the idea of rejection, and the use of italics allows the reader to perceive the voice of the prisoner independently of the narrator's. Bon also uses italics to allow the reader to experience language as the narrator experiences it: as distinct from his own linguistic production and experience. The use of italics allows Bon to create a polyphonic text without the use of either the free-indirect style and/or quotation marks. For example, while discussing his interactions with Brulin, the narrator comments, "Nancy et Metz les villes de Brulin, même la Manufacture à Nancy il connaissait, enfin il *voyait très bien où c'était*, et la voie de chemin de fer quand on part de la gare de l'Est" (19). Without the italics, the phrase 'voyait très bien où c'était' would blend in entirely with the narrativized discourse, and Brulin's voice would not be heard as a distinct element in the text. The italics indicate that 'voyait très bien où c'était' is Brulin's expression, and the reader is given an opportunity to experience the inmate's language without the use of dialogue (an anterior, but unrepresented, dialogue is presupposed in this case).

Just as italics document language the narrator witnesses on the street, they perform the same function with lengthy passages written by prisoners in the workshop. To emphasize the documentary character of the italicized text, in some instances Bon leaves grammar and spelling mistakes untouched as the texts pass from his own workshop to the narrative's fictional writing workshop. For example, while still attempting to cope with the murder of Brulin, the narrator cites the following text in order to attempt to convey his mood just before learning of Brulin's death. "*Et pourquoi je suis en prison s'est que il me fallait de l'argent pour le commerce que je voulait ouvrire et l'or d'un Bisnesse avec un copain sa sais mal passer et on a n'est venue au main et il a trébucher et il ma tirer ver lui est le couteau que je portée et tombée de ma poche et il la*

ramassé [...]" (15). The writer of the text kills his 'copain' and attempts to justify his action by writing '*car il mavait menacer et il avait jurer que sétait moi ou lui*' (15). Like the text allegedly written by Brulin, this text is authentic and was composed by a prisoner in Bon's writing workshop. Bon uses italics to distinguish the prisoner's writings from the rest of the narrative. As is the case with the language on the street signs, the italicization creates the impression that the text is somehow more authentic and that it is transferred from the real-world to the text, untouched by the influence of an intermediary. Bon's use of italics for the purpose of underscoring the authentic and referential nature of a quotation is never more apparent than in the paragraph in which the workshop director cites a prisoner's text and immediately juxtaposes the original text — which is riddled with spelling mistakes — in order to show the readers how the text allegedly first appeared. He writes,

> Et celui qui s'étonne d'un seul élan sur sa feuille blanche: 'Un jour j'étais tellement agressif que j'ai frappé ma femme devant les enfants et je le regrette beaucoup car ça ne se fait pas devant les enfants [...] *Un jour j'aitait Telement agressif que Jai frapper Ma femme devant Mes enfants et je le regrete beaucoup car sa se fait pas devant les enfants*.' (62)

Italics, in that example, are used to enhance the documentary effect of the narrative.

To be sure, Bon frequently uses quotation marks to delimit spoken and written language. On one level they perform the same function as italics: they enable the reader to distinguish between distinct narrative voices, and to differentiate between narrativized discourse and dialogue. However, in *Prison*, quotation marks do not draw attention to the words as distinct lexical items. Take, for example, the response to the workshop director's inquiry about Brulin's absence during one of his sessions. States the narrator, "J'ai insisté, on m'a répondu: 'Transféré à la *grande maison*.'" The use of italics within the citation itself illustrates that the quotation marks alone, while they do mark a change from narrativized discourse to dialogue, do not perform the same

function as italics. The italicization of the term 'grande maison' creates the impression that it is a fixed expression within the culture of the prison. The iterative nature of the expression is conveyed by the italics, and the reader gets the impression that the notion of the 'grande maison' is a commonplace in the CJD. Without the italics, the terms would simply convey their most basic meaning: that Brulin had been transferred to a different prison. But with the italics, the term appears to the reader to be an authentic glimpse of prison culture.

Degrees of Fictionality

Typically, prison narratives recount the basic elements of incarceration: entry into the prison, basic living conditions (food, sleep, work, and so on), inmate relations, the functioning of power between the administration and the detainees, and, at times, what the prisoners experience upon their release from captivity. On a thematic level, Bon's narrative does not differ from most penological novels, even though it may appear to diverge greatly from its subgeneric predecessors because it lacks their classic from-arrest-to-release schemata. Indeed, *Prison* does not treat the basic elements of daily life behind bars until its final chapter, entitled 'Isolement.' In the book's first five chapters, Bon only cursorily treats a number of themes that are mainstays of prison literature, such as the universality of the prisoners' experience, the dehumanizing nature of carceral life, and relations among the prisoners. The sixth chapter — which counts among the work's most fictionalized sections — tells the story of a single prisoner who has been forced to spend time in solitary confinement and whose voice is based on, according to François Bon, the impressions the author garnered from his interactions with a workshop participant named Laurent. Bon notes that he used the

first person "en se plaçant dans la peau de L[aurent] au mitard" (Correspondence E1). As in the other prison novels examined in this study, emphasis is placed — through similar techniques — on the exemplary character of the experience of this anonymous protagonist. Pronouns again are used to highlight the universality of the prison experience. "On," for example, is used nine times in one short paragraph describing the routine and the conditions of the solitary confinement cell.[11] The final chapter of *Prison* also shares a feature with the other novels examined in this study in its treatment of the carceral milieu: the inclusion of a number of broad generalizations about life in prison. For example, the narrator comments on the sensory shock that can be experienced in the outside world upon release, a notion that is a commonplace in fictional and non-fictional prison narratives.[12] He states, "On sait combien on sera choqué des couleurs (c'était mon premier séjour et ma première sortie, je m'étais arrêté dans cette petite rue des marchés près des Capucins et j'avais regardé la couleur exacerbée des fruits, pommes et bananes et puis tous les tons du vert jusqu'au rouge)" (121).

Bon resorts to two of his principal fictionalization techniques to create the story of the anonymous 'je' in the isolation narrative. First, he mines for material produced — by more than one inmate — in the texts produced in the writing workshop, and he conflates the experiences of those inmates into the background of one fictionalized prisoner. While the stories told in *Prison* may indeed be, to use Bon's phrase "attesté par la réalité," the author does permit himself creative freedom in conflating multiple voices into one single, coherent voice. Bon uses at least six different texts, composed by three different prisoners in the writing workshop, to create the voice of the anonymous 'je' in the sixth chapter.[13] Unlike the clear underlining of the fictionality of the monologues in the first chapter, there is no indication that the personal history of the main character in "Isolement" is the result of cutting and pasting of excerpts from

"Parfois je me demande." Second, Bon uses multiple narrative voices in "Isolement," moving from third-person omniscient to first-person narration frequently and sometimes ambiguously.

In order to effect shifts in narrative voice, Bon often resorts to using the free-indirect style, and consequently, shifts between narrative voices can be difficult to distinguish: at times, neither italics nor quotation marks are used to delimit the voice of a prisoner from that of the narrator. Take, for example, the following exerpt from four successive paragraphs in the sixth chapter. The first paragraph begins with the third-person narrator describing the inmate alone in his cell, watching the images on his television with the sound turned down. "Finalement il éteint. § *Quand j'ai pris mes dix jours de mitard c'était peinard ça fait du bien ça repose.* § Ça aussi on saurait pas dire pourquoi. Là-bas on sort pas, le matin arrive, et les heures du jour défilent dans les ombres de la fenêtre [...] Ensuite, on revient là. § Le bruit. Il est devant la fenêtre ouverte [...]" (102). Between the first and the second paragraphs, there is, without doubt, a shift in the narrative voice from the third-person to the first-person narrator. The use of italics emphasizes this change in narrative voice, even though the shift would still be manifest if they were not present. Between the second and third paragraphs, a reversion to the third-person narrator is possible, but is by no means certain. That paragraph describes, in fairly detailed terms, the daily routine of solitary confinement.[14] Finally, the fourth paragraph marks an unambiguous shift back to the third-person omniscient narrator. What is most interesting in that excerpt is the unidentifiability of the narrator of the penultimate paragraph. Italicization, as we have seen, is a technique Bon uses to highlight the purported authenticity of a word, phrase, or paragraph. In this instance, Bon uses the free-indirect style to preserve the guise of authenticity that results from the use of italics. The uncertainty regarding the speaker of the paragraph

on how the days pass in solitary confinement highlights the importance — indeed, the primacy — of the multiplicity of voices in Bon's 'récit.' There is no dominant narrative voice in *Prison* and the voices of the multitudes of inmates are heard. The unverifiability of the speaker also accentuates the universal nature of the solitary confinement experience and of the experience of incarceration in general. The third-person narrator of the sixth chapter uses "on" at other points in the narrative to emphasize universality; and the fact that it is impossible to determine who is describing the conditions in solitary confinement shows that, on some level, it does not matter who is speaking, since the carceral experience is so standard and uniform.

Fictional production affords Bon the opportunity to explore elements of the carceral environment not treated in his writing workshop (such as the conditions of confinement), and it allows him to harmonize the final chapter thematically with the remainder of his 'récit.' One theme that is relevant not only to the remainder of *Prison* but to Bon's literary project as a whole is the examination of urban space, and how it can act as a determining factor in human behavior and relations. Unlike the remainder of the incarceration narratives examined in this study, *Prison* concentrates on the experience of the inmates behind bars and in the city; and the narrative emphasizes the blurred boundary that exists between the inside and outside worlds. In the sixth chapter, Bon is able to address the problematic nature of the border that exists between the city and the prison from the perspective of an inmate. Contemplating the possibility of recidivism, the anonymous first-person narrator states "Je serai dans la ville et la ville et le lieu me sont indifférents parce que ce qui compte c'est seulement le temps: qu'importe si ici je reviens" (121). The chapter ends on a note that conflates the two social spaces, illustrating that — for the young detainees — there is no distinct boundary between the two. The issue of a porous boundary between prison and city

takes on a different social significance when it originates in the thoughts (even if they are fictional) of an inmate. That inmate's statement serves as a point of access to sociopolitical issues that are explored throughout *Prison*, especially the ineffectiveness of "reinsertion" plans set up by the penal administration (that were already exemplified by the murder of Brulin, who was forced out into the streets far from his home in the east of France). By using the fictional 'je,' Bon is able to place his readers in a position to attempt to understand the rationale of an individual who has first-hand experience with recidivism.

From a literary historical perspective, it is also fitting that in the sixth chapter — the most fictionalized chapter of the book — Bon underlines, however subtly, links with literature of incarceration in the French tradition. In describing his routine in the prison yard near the "panier de basket," the anonymous narrator comments, "[J]e mets mes mains dans mes poches et j'ai mon visage droit qui regarde le ciel par-dessus le filet anti-hélicoptère" (116). The tongue-in-cheek reference to Verlaine's classic poem "Le ciel est par-dessus le toit" would not have the same relevance were it uttered by an individual other than an inmate. The reference to the modernization of the penal environment highlights the incongruity of the hostility of the late-twentieth-century prison space with the nineteenth-century poet's "happy prison" in which peaceful reflection and introspection are the natural by-products of incarceration. Inmates — fictional or non-fictional — in François Bon's *Prison* are forced to contend with a more brutal and less idealized form of carceral reality.

In terms of the degree to which it is fictionalized, the second chapter of *Prison* is nearly comparable to the "Isolement" narrative. As in the sixth chapter, Bon weaves authentic prisoners' writings into a fictional narrative. *Prison*'s second chapter, entitled "Au bord des villes," tells the story of three young men who cross paths by chance, are

linked by a crime (driving together to the beach in a stolen Ford Cosworth), and eventually find themselves in prison, writing in the workshop of the CJD. The prisoners' stories, which are allegedly reproduced in the writing workshop, depict their daily lives in the city and suburbs as well as their brushes with criminality. There is no indication whatsoever that the three experiences the reader is privy to in the second chapter are fictional. On the contrary, the integration of the stories of the young prisoners into the workshop's context underlines their alleged authenticity. Given the pre-established and overt generic hybridity of the first chapter, it is only natural for the reader to assume that the stories of the three prisoners in the second chapter are intended to be read as authentic, since their fictionality was not underlined. Yet, the stories recounted in the second chapter are indeed fictionalized, and, as we have seen, the fiction/non-fiction relationship established in the first chapter does not apply to the remaining chapters of *Prison*.

Comparison of the three prisoners' narratives in the second chapter and the source material found in "Parfois je me demande" illustrates that Bon uses his work's ambiguous generic status to his advantage, using fictional production as a means of complementing and bolstering the documentary aspects of the depiction of carceral reality and life on society's margins. Each of the second chapter's three stories is told by different narrators, and together they encompass a wide variety of techniques and strategies. The strategies Bon employs to recount the stories of the three prisoners resemble those he used in both the first and sixth chapters (such as the use of italics, multiple narrator shifts, the interpolation of authentic prisoners' writings into the narrative). The first prisoner's story is told by an unidentified, third-person omniscient narrator and is based primarily on a text entitled "Tôt le matin" (PJD 138-141) composed by an inmate at the CJD named Damien (who was, incidentally, named in *Prison*'s

endnote). In his own text, Damien recounts how he spent a typical day in the city of Mulhouse in 1992, milling around in more or less idle fashion, and searching for diversions to pass the time. Bon alters Damien's text by adding a number of details that render it consistent with the reminder of the chapter and the *récit* as a whole.[15] First, the author places the young man in Bordeaux, rather than in Mulhouse; and second, he writes two crimes into Damien's narrative: the theft of a video camera from a FNAC store, and, more significantly, the automobile theft (which eventually lands the young man in jail). Bon alterations to Damien's story do not constitute a remarkable occurrence, given the fact that the author took greater liberties in the first chapter by projecting imaginary monologues onto random individuals. But it is the manner in which Bon places this inmate's story (as well as the stories of his two partners in crime) within the context of the writing workshop that is most significant. The chapter ends with a section — narrated by the writing workshop director, who appears in every chapter but the sixth — that is clearly demarcated from the three previous stories by a blank space. The narrator notes that, in the workshop, he presents excerpts from Cendrars' *Prose du Transsibérien* and the participants are told to imagine a situation in which they are traveling. The director, after describing how he seeks to elicit writing from his workshop participants, notes "Et le même mot Cosworth (moi je ne savais même pas qu'il s'agissait d'une voiture) dans la nuit de la ville avait ce mardi-là surgi de trois feuilles séparément" (44). While there is no contesting that part of the prisoner's story is based on a real-life occurrence, or to use Bon's terminology "attesté par la réalité," the simple fact remains that Damien's narrative has been fictionalized by the author. Without the benefit of the examination of source material, the reader is given absolutely no indication that the stories of the prisoners have been altered and that the entire context of criminality was invented by the author. Both the murder of Jean-

Claude Brulin and the stories told in the second chapter have some basis in reality, but while both are fictionalized, the degree of fictionalization is much higher— and paradoxically, less overt — in the second chapter.

The techniques employed in the narratives of the two other young men implicated in the theft of the Cosworth reinforce the documentary effect of the narrator's comments at the end of the chapter. After the theft of the car is described in the first prisoner's narrative, there is a clear section break in the chapter, and another story begins in a markedly different style. Whereas the first narrative is told by a single narrator and entirely in the third person, the second narrative is noticeably more of a hybrid text. The techniques Bon uses in this second narrative, which is based on the writings of an inmate named Christian (PJD 137-138), closely resemble those employed in the first chapter. As in Damien's story, Christian's original text recounts the routine of a typical day in his life in a low-income housing area of the Garonne river's right bank. Bon elaborates upon Christian's short text, and complements it with his own fictional writing. There are two distinct narrative voices heard in the section: an unidentified fictional homodiegetic narrator, and a first-person narrator that is partly fictional and that partly originates from direct quotes of Christian's story. Italics, once again, enhance the narrative's quality of authenticity. Lengthy portions of italicized text are interpolated into the story five times, and on each occasion, it appears as if the underscored text represents an unfiltered, unadulterated form of witnessing. The manner in which Bon adds to and transforms Christian's original text illustrates the extent to which source material and fictional writing are intertwined in *Prison*. In "Parfois je me demande," the prisoner's narrative reads,

> Mais notre cité est divisée en deux parties, il y a la Californie 1 et la Californie 2. La cité ne fait qu'une, mais au milieu il y a un rond-point. Ce rond-point est la limite, personne ne vend du shit sur le territoire de l'autre, c'est une règle qui a été

> décidée il y a plusieurs années par les anciens. A part ça, le soir c'est un peu c'est à peu près pareil, à part qu'il y en a un qui met de la musique dans sa voiture, ouvre les portières et nous voilà repartis à la chasse aux clients, on fume quelques joints, on boit quelques bières, et on attend. On discute de choses et d'autres, et quand un pote part faire une course, il est remplacé par un autre. Des fois on est une quinzaine à délirer, car on attend les clients, mais on délire en même temps sinon on s'ennuierait. Et voilà comment se passe une journée à la cité. (PJD 138)

In *Prison*, Christian's text resurfaces with a few noteworthy changes: "La cité est divisée en deux parties, il y a Californie Un et Californie Deux. La cité ne fait qu'une, mais au milieu il y a un rond-point. *Ce rond-point c'est la limite, personne ne vend sur le territoire de l'autre, c'est une règle qui a été décidée il y a plusieurs années par les anciens.* Alors on reste en bas des escaliers, on attend" (38). After adding in his own brief spatial description and a few more fictional insights into the routine of the drug dealers, Bon includes a lengthy, direct quotation (delimited in the text with quotation marks) from Christian's text that encompasses the remainder of the above text (from "A part ça..." to "Et voilà comment se passe une journée à la cité"). The changes made to Christian's original text are extremely subtle, as the author does very little to change the inmate's actual words. Yet, from a formal and contextual standpoint, it is clear that Bon uses his source material to ultimately enhance the documentary feel of his final, fictionalized product. Formal changes to the original text stand out most clearly. The use of italics and the lengthy passage that is presented as a direct quotation create the impression of both authenticity and a multiplicity of voices. The anonymity of the narrator(s) in the numerous quotations contributes to the polyphonic guise of the narration, for the brief texts could constitute instances of witnessing by any number of individuals. Bon also enhances the documentary effect of the speech of the primary narrator by *not* italicizing part of his direct quote from the inmate's text. Bon includes the first two phrases of Christian's text without any distinguishing markers, as if Christian's own writing (the

first two unitalicized phrases of the quotation) and Bon's fictional writing originated from the same pen.

The story of the third individual involved in the joyride in the stolen Cosworth serves as yet another instance in which Bon weaves the writings of more than one prisoner — in this case, texts by workshop participants Olivier and Djamel — into his own fictionalized passages. Olivier's text, "Bière ou sandwich" (PJD 138-39), recounts three events, all of which are found in *Prison*: eating at McDonald's, purchasing some beer, and finding (and absconding with) a bag containing forty-two hundred French francs. Djamel's text, entitled "Immeuble" (PJD 141-43), is more detailed and concerns the young man's daily routine and family life. Bon weaves Olivier's story into Djamel's lengthier, more complex narrative. In the final *récit*, the unidentified youth, instead of listening to Tracy Chapman, smoking marijuana and going to sleep (as Djamel does), decides to hop into a car with some strangers and take a ride to the beach. He ends his narrative, "Moi avec le reste de la sacoche j'avais bien envie d'aller à Lacanau aussi alors on est partis. Aujourd'hui je le sais bien, qu'on est là tous les trois et pourquoi" (43). Here again, Bon alters the story written by a participant in his workshop so that the fictional inmate's actions fit into the remainder of the imaginary Cosworth story. As in the sixth chapter, the seamless conflation of the stories of two different prisoners into the voice of a single inmate constitutes a fictionalization on the part the author. That fictionalization contrasts with the claims of referentiality represented by the context of the writing workshop and the formal techniques employed by the author, especially the use of italics. Throughout *Prison*, Bon continually uses techniques specific to fiction writing in tandem with strategies that emphasize a process of documentation. In the second chapter, he contructs narratives to fit within the context of the writing workshop, giving them the guise of referentially grounded stories, when in fact they

are artfully constructed fictional narratives. The theft of the Cosworth — which is Bon's fictional creation — appears to be as grounded in referential reality as the murder of Brulin.

Prison and "Parfois je me demande"

Chapters three ('Cinquante-trois fois la faute') and five ('Solitude des errants') deal entirely with the writing workshop, its textual production and its methodology alike. The third chapter serves, in the words of François Bon, as "un inventaire" (Interview 1) that provides the reader with excerpts from a significant portion of the texts produced in the writing workshop. The prisoners' writings are either presented by the workshop director in the form of direct quotes or are re-told by the workshop director with remarkable fidelity to the original versions, with a few noteworthy exceptions. The fifth chapter's events, which takes place on "mardi 18 mars 1997, dans la salle de spectacle de la prison" (83), involve the workshop director as he performs dramatic readings from the prisoners' texts — accompanied by Toeplitz on bass guitar — in front of a group of young detainees who participated in the writing exercises. That context provides Bon with yet another opportunity to showcase the writing of the prisoners *as such* in the narrative, and to emphasize the referential qualities of *Prison*. Yet although the third and fifth chapters do serve as a kind of inventory for the textual production of the inmates in Bon's real-life writing workshop, comparisons of *Prison* and the relevant portions of "Parfois je me demande" show that the author does alter some of the prisoners' writings that are presented as direct quotes. Thus, while referentiality and verifiability are emphasized by the documentary and autobiographical aspects of the narrative, Bon takes advantage of his work's

ambiguous generic status and alters his source material. A broad spectrum of degrees of manipulation of the source material exists in the narrative. Whereas some changes are minor and do not affect the primary meaning or the main thrust of the citations, other changes transform the inmates' texts in important ways. Analysis of the subtle — yet significant — transformations of the source material reveal how Bon tailors the prisoners' writings to fit within the context of the fictional workshop and also how the author promotes a specific sociological message through his editing.

Many alterations made to the prisoners' writings in the third and fifth chapters of *Prison* are very minor and appear to have been made strictly for cosmetic purposes. Bon tightens some narratives, eliminating extraneous information that would hamper the flow of his own *récit*.[16] On other occasions, however, Bon's editing proves more substantial, as is the case with the following text that is presented as a direct quote in *Prison*, despite the fact that it has been modified. In "Parfois je me demande," the inmate writes, "J'ai passé une nuit au commissariat de ma ville, Saint-Denis, 93, qui m'a marquée car toutes les demi-heures environ j'étais réveillé pour être interrogé et frappé, les flics étaient énervés car j'avais frappé leurs collègues avec mon petit frère, alors cette nuit d'enfer je m'en rappellerai" (PJD 119). In *Prison*, the text is as follows: "'Toute une nuit, toute la nuit ils rentraient toutes les demi-heures parce que moi et mon petit frère on avait abîmé un de leurs collègues, une nuit d'enfer'" (49). While the substance of the prisoner's authentic writing is scarcely modified in Bon's *récit*, the omission of the Parisian geographic details gives the impression that the prisoner had the "nuit d'enfer" in context of the youth detention center where the writing workshop takes place. While that omission is a minor detail, the change lends a certain intensity to the atmosphere of the Bordelais workshop that would be missing if the crime and punishment episode took place in another city and in a more distant past. Such subtle

changes abound in what are allegedly direct quotes from the prisoners' writings, proving that the referentiality of *Prison* is, at times, nothing more than an illusion. Take, for example, another citation (presented within quotation marks) in which a sentence was omitted to give the impression that the crime scene led to the inmate's current incarceration. The scene is at a birthday party that has gotten out of hand: "Les flics sont arrivés, et moi je me suis échappé. Je ne suis pas resté, parce que la musique était trop forte. Et puis après, je me suis retrouvé en garde à vue et j'ai cassé un chaise sur le flic. Et j'ai passé devant *la* juge" (56). The final sentence of the inmate's text, "Et j'ai passé devant la juge, et ils m'ont relâché" (PJD 22), has been modified to give a finality to the episode in *Prison* that it does not have in the original text. It appears as if that 'juge' sentenced the inmate in question to a term in the CJD. Both changes give the false impression to the reader that the inmates are describing events that have resulted in their current period of incarceration. Interestingly enough, Bon's changes in both excerpted texts eliminate the question of recidivism, a widespread social phenomenon that the author prefers to treat through his own fictional writing at the end of the sixth chapter. Instead of allowing the question to surface in the texts that are allegedly real, Bon expresses the indifference and apathy of the prisoners regarding their status as prisoners and the potential loss of their liberty through fiction ("qu'importe si ici je reviens" [121]). Bon examines the question of recidivism — a fact of life for the inmates with whom the author worked — from a first-person perspective in a fictional narrative. In *Prison*, the fictional depiction of the recidivist mentality has an introspective quality that is absent from the writing of the inmates.

Other changes to prisoners' writings are loaded with more significant ideological implications. Indeed, one episode in the sixth chapter is altered such that it takes on a whole different meaning in *Prison*. Given the fact that the sixth chapter is the most

fictionalized chapter of the entire work, it does not seem surprising that Bon would substantially change an interpolated narrative in that context. But in this specific instance, his editing — which dramatically changes the text — contrasts with the fact that the narrative in question is italicized. And as we have seen, italics are used to emphasize the authenticity of a text, and that the contract with the reader is subjected to a shift when a prisoner's text is italicized. The original text, which was written by Laurent J. (the inmate's whose voice Bon tried to re-create in the 'je' of the sixth chapter), concerns the relationship of the inmate with an 'éducateur' who served as a kind of mentor and helped the young man temporarily pull his life together. In the version included in *Prison*, two references to drug usage are eliminated. The first deals with the young narrator's first interaction with the mentor, stating "*J'ai commencé à le baratiner, pour de l'argent. Là il m'a bloqué. Il m'a dit: 'Moi, je ne te donnerai pas d'argent*'" (112). Whereas, in the original text, the final sentence reads "Moi, je ne te donnerai pas d'argent pour te droguer" (PJD 58). The second instance in which Bon omits a reference to drug usage deals with the young man's rehabilitation. In *Prison,* the inmate remarks, "*Pendant un an je ne me suis pas reconnu, j'avais tout arrêté*" (112). The original text reads quite differently: "Pendant un an je ne me droguais plus, à part le joint. Mais j'avais arrêté les cachets, l'héroïne, cocaïne, à cette époque je ne buvais pas d'alcool, c'est venu par la suite" (PJD 58). The inmate's transformation appears to be more dramatic in *Prison* than in "Parfois je me demande" due to the fact that the reference to continued marijuana consumption is eliminated. The omission of the indications that he experimented with a variety of hard drugs makes the inmate more palatable, which may enable the reader to empathize more with his experience. The most significant omission involves how the young man's relationship with his mentor comes to an end. In "Parfois je me demande," their relationship ends due to a combination of bad luck

and bureaucratic forces: "Et un jour cet éducateur était malade, il a dû être opéré, et après ça il a été muté comme directeur dans un foyer. Après, on a mis un autre éducateur, mais ça n'a pas du tout accroché, et je suis reparti dans mon ancienne vie" (PJD 59). In *Prison*, the relationship ends only because of bureaucratic forces: "Et un jour cet éducateur a été muté comme directeur dans un foyer" (112). The inmate, who appeared to be on the road to a dramatic recovery, seems to be a victim of an inadequate social infrastructure. The young man appears to have been abandoned by a social service that was only temporarily effective. In "Parfois je me demande," the fault does not lie entirely in the social services system, but that the illness of the mentor played a key role in the ending of the relationship with Laurent. That modification, combined with the fact that Laurent's recovery is by not as clear-cut in real life as it is in *Prison*, shows that Bon alters his source material to criticize the social services system for its neglect of a person in need.

The two references to drug use in Laurent's narrative are by no means the only instances in which Bon omits comments about drug dealing or consumption from excerpts of "Parfois je me demande." While he does not eliminate all of the prisoners' comments on drugs — one does get the impression from *Prison* that a good number of the inmates have had some kind of contact with drugs — Bon does establish a pattern of omitting references to drugs.[17] Whereas, for the most part, Bon's recycling of the texts composed in his writing workshop is loyal to and representative of what was actually produced, his tendency to eliminate references to drugs, combined with sociopolitical narrative commentary, does reveal a definite sociopolitical bias in the *récit*. It appears that Bon chose to eliminate such references to drug consumption (no other type of activity was subjected to such a pattern of editing) for two reasons. The first reason appears to be due to stylistic concerns. The narrative is already burdened with a

number of references to drug usage and drug dealing, and even though such editing constitutes a slight departure from reality and the truth, Bon's omissions, from a purely literary perspective, seem prudent and logical. Second, part of Bon's project in *Prison* was to give readers an idea — through both fictional production and the interpolation of authentic texts written by inmates — of the first-person perspective of young inmates. Readers are exposed to a number of brief *témoignages* that deal with any number of situations and contexts, from the first experience in a Codec grocery store for non-French speakers, to what it is like to stab someone. But in his consistent elimination of references to drugs, Bon seems to be attempting to tone down what appears to be a dominant factor in the lives of marginal young people in the 1990s in France. The inmates' experiences are made more consistent with the lives of those whom Bon imagines his readership to be: the law-abiding bourgeoisie. Readers can more easily identify and empathize with individuals whose experience more closely resembles their own. This attempt to normalize the experience of the inmates is most apparent in the manner in which Bon uses his work's ambiguous generic status to give readers an idea (through fiction) of what it is like to steal a car in the middle of the night. "Il a commencé à regarder les voitures, comme ça, sans autre idée, et il a trouvé celle-ci qui était ouverte, juste à monter dedans. Une fois dedans seulement il a pensé que ce serait mieux s'il l'emmenait plus loin, il pourrait dormir plus longtemps." The future inmate then starts the car with the help of his pocket knife and "La voiture avait démarré comme d'être bien contente qu'on s'intéresse à elle, prête à partir dans la nuit, et même [...] au bout de trois rues lui offrant sa chaleur" (34). And, just like that, the feminized car seduces the passive and sleepy young man into theft. This is not to say that Bon is condoning criminal behavior, but the manner in which he constructs the fictional car theft attempts to disabuse his readers of the notion that a car theft is

necessarily an act of premeditated evil. When broken down into its incremental stages, the theft appears to be merely a matter of circumstance rather than a result of actively criminal behavior.

Bon discusses his experience in the CJD in an unpublished text, composed in January 1997, just after Hurlin's murder and before the entry of Miremont into the writing workshop (although Bon was already aware of his presence in the prison). In that text, entitled "Ecrire en prison," Bon sheds light on some of his sociopolitical motivations involved in his work in the writing workshop. He writes,

> Les textes [...] ne rejoindront principalement leur importance que dans le traitement social qui les ferait rebondir sur la cité, loin en amont de la détention. Connaissance des franges sombres de lui-même du corps social, mais utilisation de cette connaissance comme traitement même de ces ombres : ce matériau est privilégié pour son côté concret, et justement d'être imbibé, même par son envers, de signifiant moral. Interrogation de notre monde sur lui-même, à sa frontière, pour déplacer ou contraindre cette frontière, on en est loin. (13)

The citation explains the hybridity of Bon's text and the sociopolitical motivations behind the author's attempt to establish a referential pact in his work. The direct quotes, used in tandem with the fictionalization of the writing workshop and the urban context, enable Bon to publish the *témoignages* of the underprivileged young men without extracting the texts from their relevant social milieu. The readers are exposed directly to the inmates' points of view and the prisoners' attempts to concretize their experience on city streets, in foster care, and in prison. The process of fictionalization allows the author to exploit the full sociological implications of their writing.

Interestingly enough, "Ecrire en prison" provides a glimpse of the author before he had conceived of *Prison* as a book. However, Bon already saw a 'livre' as a possible solution to the sociological questions he raises. The author contemplates the effects that a book might have towards shedding light on life on margins of urban society.

> Un livre pourrait y contribuer, mais un livre qui ne pourrait rejoindre ses auteurs, d'autant dissous et invisibles dans la société qui les réabsorbe, qu'ils y sont les plus mobiles, les plus fragiles : voir l'endroit où est mort Hurlin. Et à qui reverser les droits d'auteur d'un tel livre : au service socio-éducatif lui-même ou son association culturelle, à sa bibliothèque, à une association de soutien aux détenus ou d'aide à leurs familles? Ou bien seulement dans l'écho que ce travail aura forcément dans le mien, mais alors qui écrit : celui qui a donné la matière à réfléchir, ou celui qui l'organise et la produit comme esthétique? (EP 13)

The generic hybridity of the text contains, in itself, a sociological message. The multiplicity of voices upon which the vitality of the workshop depends is reflected in the narrative. *Prison* allows Bon to create a forum in which the voices of those on the margins are not only heard but understood and contextualized. Even in its attempt to document the living conditions and the death of Frédéric Hurlin, the mass media were unable to represent the situation of the young victim in all its complexity. Not only are the readers exposed to Hurlin's own text in Bon's narrative, but the *récit* also provides information to the reader that complements details provided in the Sud-Ouest newspaper article. That information is vital to the understanding of Hurlin-Brulin as a person, and not simply the victim of an everyday, urban *fait divers*. Through the fictionalized voice of the workshop director, Bon comments on the condition of the victim while he was incarcerated. "[S]ans chaussettes et un pantalon qui brillait aux genoux [...] avec son pull de lain informe et ses cheveux trop longs sur son visage tout en os et surtout ses lunettes: la monture cassée d'un côté *depuis ma garde à vue* [...] lui une main aux lunettes pour vous parler, myope et parlant de trop près" (11). Just that description lends a more poignant quality to the phrase in the newspaper article that plainly described the fight between Hurlin and Miremont, with Hurlin "perdant ses lunettes dans la bagarre." The workshop director also points out that the age of Hurlin

is incorrect and subtly takes issue with the designation that lumps Hurlin and Miremont together as "compagnons d'infortune." In re-telling the story of Frédéric Hurlin, Bon attempts to show that despite the regularity of their occurrence, such events need to be stripped of their banality in order to be comprehended by society at large. In describing his reaction to the murder, Bon writes about "La responsabilité qu'elle induit pour notre société en général," railing against the prison administration for releasing a young man into the streets in the middle of winter with no money, no warm clothes, and no train ticket home. Bon writes that the conditions in which the squatters were living implicate society as a whole and the death reminded him "si brutalement la dureté de la ville, et les précarités de conditions qui sont les leurs hors des murs de la détention" (Correspondence A2). Bon's humanization of the single murder should also speak to the social conditions in an American context in which mass killings that take place on one shining sea no longer make front-page news on the other.

---

[1] The inmate in *Prison* writes his own nickname 'Tignass' at the bottom of his workshop texts.
[2] "Je me suis constamment astreint, depuis dix ans, à numériser et mettre en page moi-même les textes produits lors de mes ateliers successifs" (*Tous* 17).
[3]The document "Parfois je me demande" was provided to me by the author and includes, according to Bon, the young detainees' entire body of work.
[4] That "lecture" is re-told in chapter five of *Prison*.
[5] *Prison* is broken up into six chapters. The chapters do not follow a single linear narrative thread, and their subject matter, while always revolving around the CJD and the workshop, is extremely diverse. The first chapter focuses on Brulin; the second chapter deals with the theft of a Ford Cosworth (told from three different perspectives); the third chapter gives a large sampling of the variety of texts produced in the workshop; the fourth chapter is a text about a young man named Ciao who is not a prisoner in the CJD, but who has contact with the workshop director on the outside; the fifth chapter treats the dramatic reading of texts (performed by the workshop director) in the CJD; and the sixth chapter is about a single inmate's experience with cellular isolation.
[6] Bon also refers to his narrative as "fictif" in his correspondence surrounding the Miremont lawsuit. He writes, "Ces éléments, dont je suis conscient qu'il ait pu paraître douloureux à mon adversaire de les voir évoqués dans un récit, même fictif, sont ceux qui ont été portés sur la place publique" (Correspondence C3). One also must keep in mind that Bon is more willing to set aside generic ambiguities when defending his position within the context of the lawsuit.
[7] For the purposes of his study, Genette confines the term *récit* to a very restricted meaning: "le signifiant, énoncé, discours ou texte narratif lui-même" (72). The other two meanings he evokes are as follows: first, as "l'énoncé narratif, le discours oral ou écrit qui assume la relation d'un événement ou d'une série d'événements"; and second, "l'acte de narrer pris en lui-même" (71).

[8] The *Grand Robert*'s primary definition is as follows: "Relation orale ou écrite (d'événements vrais ou imaginaires). The *Grand Larousse* defines the term thus: "Oeuvre littéraire relatant des faits réels ou imaginaires."
[9] In telling the story of Jean-Claude Brulin, Molinier writes "[L]e surveillant-chef informe l'auteur que 'Brulin a été planté' (1).
[10] Bon used this text in a workshop conducted on April 26, 2000 at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (site Richelieu). All the participants were school teachers.
[11] "Ça aussi on saurait pas dire pourquoi. Là-bas on sort pas, le matin arrive et les heures du jour défilent dans les ombres de la fenêtre, il fait chaud, il fait froid, on entend vaguement des bruits, les autres étages, on a une heure pour se retrouver dans une cour encore plus nue que cette pièce et voilà, on n'attend rien, on ne compte pas les moments du jour mais on attend seulement la fin des dix jours, tout est silence, on attend, on se vide et c'est ça qui repose. Ensuite, on revient là."
[12] That observation is consistent with other prisoners' experiences upon release, most notably that of Breyten Breytenbach, the former South African political prisoner. Breytenbach comments generally on how one seems more sensitive to the nuances of everyday life upon release from incarceration. Breytenbach was quoted in an interview on the NPR program *This American Life*, episode 119, entitled "Lock-up" (originally broadcast on January 8, 1999).
[13] Three texts by Laurent J. (PJD 44, 58, 148); two by Samir S. (45, 46); and one by John C. (168-169).
[14] Please consult endnote number *** for the entire text of that paragraph.
[15] Bon also incorporates minor details from other prisoners' narratives as well, simply for added realism. For example, the name of a dog 'Billard' is mentioned (32), and that same name is found in a narrative in "Parfois je me demande" (168) that bears no relation whatsoever to Damien's writing.
[16] The editing performed by Bon on the following text, entitled "En costume Lacoste" serves as a fine example. The narrative is as follows: "Je m'étais mis avec ma femme. Mon père m'a dit : Elle est trop vieille pour toi. Pareil quand je lui ai dit que j'allais me marier, il m'a dit la même chose. Il m'a dit que ça ne pourrait pas marcher. Je ne l'ai pas écouté. Je n'en ai fait qu'à ma tête. Et je me suis marié et actuellement j'attends un enfant. Je ne l'ai pas écouté parce que j'aimais ma femme. Mais en revanche, quand il me disait d'arrêter de voler je ne l'ai pas écouté, et en revanche là il avait raison. Car c'est une vilaine manie qui me suit encore actuellement. Et qui est en train de pourrir ma vie, car j'ai fait prison sur prison. C'est un vice que j'ai, je ne peux pas m'empêcher de voler. Si je n'ai pas les moyens de m'acheter, je ne peux pas me dire : il faut que tu attendes d'avoir de l'argent pour l'avoir. Une fois que ça me plaît, il me le faut de suite. C'est parce que je n'ai pas les moyens de me l'acheter et que je le veux absolument. Dès que je vois un truc, il faut que je le vole. Surtout des vêtements, parce que j'aime bien toujours être bien habillé. Je vise la marque. Quand j'étais petit ma mère elle ne m'habillait pas en Lacoste, en Nike ou en Adidas, on n'avait pas les moyens. Quand j'étais au collège, que j'étais mal habillé, je subissais. Pour moi, pour ma femme, pour mon petit, mais pour nous. Je continuerai pareil, il y a des chances, mais peut-être que pour mon petit ce coup-ci. Vu que je veux faire éducateur sportif, dès que j'aurai un salaire fixe, que je serai rémunéré, je n'aurai plus la nécessité de voler. Dès que je sors, je reprends la formation. Des vêtements j'en ai un paquet déjà. Les chaussures, ma femme le sait, elle ne m'achètera jamais des chaussures d'elle-même. Je suis très spécial pour les chaussures. Nike en principe. En tennis. En principe je les achète les chaussures. Ce que je voulais surtout c'était survêtement, complets Lacoste, ça vaut cher, un simple polo, un simple survêt c'est 800 F, le polo à 480 F. Je suis pas voiture. Je suis pas grosse voiture, on a une Renault 5, assurance pas trop chère, on ne cherche pas. Ce qu'on voudrait c'est une 205 diésel. Quand avec mon frère on était parti, déjà j'arrêtais pas de voler des habits. Ou je volais des voitures, je les revendais et j'allais m'acheter des habits. Je calcule pas. Il me le faut, ça me plaît, si je vois que c'est faisable je le vois. J'ai ça dans la peau, donc c'est un vice quelque part. Tous les jours il y a un nouveau truc, donc l'ancien il ne te plaît plus. J'ai toujours aimé ça depuis tout petit. Ou pour mon gosse des cassettes vidéo, des jouets. Ou je changeais les prix. Je découpais et je recollais par dessus avec le cutter et la Super Glue 3, et comme ça je peux en prendre plus. Des jouets on en a plein la cave. Ça ne lui rend pas service, mais ça lui fait plaisir. Quand je vois qu'il est content, je suis content. Il faisait des petits caprices. Mais c'est pas lui qui me demande, c'est moi qui vois ça, qui pense : ça, ça lui irait super bien, et je lui prends. Il a un bon survêt Nike ou Lacoste, il est bien dans sa peau, il est présentable" (PJD 72-74). In Prison, only the context of crime is higlighted (Bon eliminates the

introductory portion about the young man's father), and Bon merely acts as a good editor, removing superfluous and redundant text from the passage to render it more concise. The final version included in Bon's work is as follows: "Celui qui aimait tant les habits mais se payait ses chaussures de ses sous, ne supportait que les vêtements qu'il disait de marque, en fait toujours les trois mêmes, commentant lui-même: 'Une manie qui est en train de pourrir ma vie.' Et comme je l'interrogeais sur ce mot de manie, sur les moyens qu'on disposait pour surmonter ou continuer: 'Si je n'ai pas les moyens de m'acheter, je ne peux pas me dire: il faut que tu attendes d'avoir de l'argent pour l'avoir. Une fois que ça me plaît, il me le faut de suite. C'est parce que je n'ai pas les moyens de me l'acheter et que je le veux absolument. Parce que j'aime bien toujours être bien habillé. Déjà, avec mon frère, j'arrêtais pas de voler des habits. Ou je volais des voitures, je les revendais et j'allais m'acheter des habits. Je calcule pas. Ça me plaît, si je vois que c'est faisable je le fais. Tu vois un nouveau truc, donc l'ancien il ne te plaît plus.' Et reproduisant le cycle pour des jouets à l'enfant de sa compagne, on en a une pleine cave, marchant dans les Toy's O Rus et autres grandes surfaces de l'imagination marchande avec son cutter et sa Super Glue pour changer très vite les codes barres et passer à la caisse automatique. 'Des jeux vidéo, voitures à télécommande, c'est pas lui qui me demande, c'est moi qui vois ça, qui pense: ça, ça lui irait super bien, et je lui prends'" (59).

[17] For example, Bon eliminates references to drugs from "Parfois je me demande," in Djamel's narrative (PJD 143) that is recycled in the second chapter (41); in an anonymous narrative from chapter five (86-87) Bon cuts out the line " En ce qui concerne le luxe, pour moi c'est pas important, car avec cinq ou six shoot dans les veines par jour plus le *bédo* on ne fait pas attention à ce qu'il y a autour de nous mais ce que je me rappelle c'est que tous les soirs c'est *Bamboulet party* et les *djumbé* pour mieux délirer" (PJD 128); and in another anonymous text from chapter five (88) which discusses the pleasant community formed in an abandoned basement, Bon eliminates the line that shows how unpleasant sleeping in 'caves' can become: "Mon meilleur souvenir c'est les caves car on se sentait vraiment chez nous et formions une vraie communauté tous ensemble. Jusqu'à ce jour où les toxicomanes venaient y dormir et se shooter et forcer les caves pour fouiller, là le squat était grillé, tous les quatre matins les flics débarquaient" (118).