

Spring 5-2016

Introducing the Prison Writer to Composition: A Multilayered, Many Stranded, Nested, and Textured 3D Metanarrative That Begins to Unfold the Untold Story of Prison Writing

Alva Natalie Ramon

Follow this and additional works at: <http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Ramon, Alva Natalie, "Introducing the Prison Writer to Composition: A Multilayered, Many Stranded, Nested, and Textured 3D Metanarrative That Begins to Unfold the Untold Story of Prison Writing" (2016). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 1367.
<http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1367>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact cclouser@iup.edu, sara.parme@iup.edu.

STUDENT HAS RESTRICTED ACCESS TO FULL TEXT OF THE DISSERTATION.

ONLY COVER PAGES AND ABSTRACT ARE AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME

INTRODUCING THE PRISON WRITER TO COMPOSITION: A MULTILAYERED,
MANY STRANDED, NESTED, AND TEXTURED 3D METANARRATIVE
THAT BEGINS TO UNFOLD THE UNTOLD STORY OF PRISON WRITING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Alva Natalie Ramon

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2016

© 2016 Alva Natalie Ramon

All Rights Reserved

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Alva Natalie Ramon

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Gian S. Pagnucci, Ph.D.
Distinguished University Professor, Advisor

Dennis M. Giever, Ph.D.
Professor of Criminology

Lilia P. Savova, Ph.D.
Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Introducing the Prison Writer to Composition: A Multilayered, Many Stranded, Nested, and Textured 3D Metanarrative That Begins to Unfold the Untold Story of Prison Writing

Author: Alva Natalie Ramon

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Dennis M. Giever
Dr. Lilia P. Savova

This narrative inquiry introduces the rich story of prison writing, by and through highly successful career prison writers that have, and continue to publish their writing behind bars. They narrate their lives, design artistic and expressive works relating to their circumstances and environments, draft various legal and other relevant documents, craft essays and editorials, and write to make change and leave legacies of hope and redemption. While this document is from the point-of-view of a composition student with a zeal for the published prison writer and the *field* of prison writing, portions of it are co-written by these very successful and acclaimed prison writers. It is also the purpose of this research, to present a strong argument that the narrative of prison writing belongs in composition; the two stories (one, from the field of writing, and the second, from prison writing) should be amalgamated into one conjoining grand narrative of the historical discipline of composition.

By first following their *beginning*, or initial journey into the field of prison writing (asking each of the co-authors to write his narrative of how he entered into the process of desiring and learning how to write, then also narrating a history of how prison writing began), then investigating the *sustaining* elements that keep each of the writers writing and developing his skills while in prison (again, asking the writers to narrate the forces at work in keeping them writing, but also narrating what keeps the area of prison writing flourishing), and finally requesting that they also include narration behind the intended *legacy* each flourishing prison

writer hopes to leave, and may have already left (from both the participant's personal writing life, but also from that concentration of prison literature), it is the hope of this researcher, to lobby further inclusion and inquiry of the flourishing prison writer and his writing arena (prison writing) within the field of composition.

Composition students and instructors can gain significant benefits from better valuing these voices, their stories, and a story, albeit brief, of that group's history. Prison writers and prison writing have almost been completely left out. Our field can benefit with nearing a truer grand narrative of itself, by looking toward the prison writer, and prison writing. There is still much for us to learn, and with these particular men and women writers beating great odds to learn how to write well, get published, be nominated for, and win various awards and prizes (Nobel), all behind bars, it should be our duty to uncover what these writers can contribute to composition, especially since they have largely been ignored by academia and their fellow writers. Perhaps they hold the key to unlocking some unknown mysteries that we have failed to fully understand, as researchers and scholars in the field of composition.

Through the history of incarcerated men and women, we can read various accounts of rehabilitation – in their own words, and best captured, in narratives. For most, these transformations were inspired through the arts, and for the participants of this study, it happened through the process of becoming successful writers. Today, there is little funding for art programs inside the prison system; in previous years, there was plenty, and it was during that time that prison writers substantially emerged onto the prison writing scene – learning the craft of composing from professors and other published writers who were allowed behind the razor wire to hone the composing skills of those who were willing to learn. And it is from those previous teachers, at that significant period in prison writing history, that a number of prison

writers, who were willing students, grasped a working pedagogy that they have continued to practice and share, to this day – keeping prison writing in existence in the United States.

More importantly, however, prison writers have etched a story into American writing history by way of that persistence to be heard. There is another story within the grand narrative of our field, and it is there, embedded in the very places we tend to dismiss and purposely overlook. The story deserves to be heard, and also integrated into its partnered, communal story of composition; for this reason, I introduce to you a few acclaimed writers in the concentrated area of prison writing, and in doing so, collaboratively begin the task of unfolding their personal stories, as well as a brief story of their specialized group of writers (prison writing).