Concrete, Steel, and Whispers in the Dark: Society and the Prisoner Explored through Prison Literature

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INTRODUCTION

- In 2014 nearly 7 million Americans were incarcerated in correctional facilities and on parole (Glaze, Kaeble, Minton, & Tsoutis 2015).
- There were less people on active duty in the military than in prisons in 2014. (militaryonesource.mil)
- The majority of what is studied in relation to the prison experience are conducted on prison literature rather than within the worlds of prison and other forms of legitimized subjugation by torture, surveillance, and other forms of legitimated and illegitimate punishment to dominant powers.

DEFINITION AND REASON

- Using theories of Foucault, Derrida, and Nehamas, prison literature can be defined as a genre
- Prison literature defined as texts written by the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated about prison
- Experiential because of the way the author has been shaped by prison
- Larson, Greenberg, Chivigny, and Franklin insist that the works of prison literature should be read.
- There is a scarcity of textual/critical analysis conducted on prison literature
- Prison literature typically treated as historical or examinations of prison literature remain historical/sociological
- Many secondary texts insist on a relationship between prison literature and the panopticon

TYPES OF ANALYSIS

1. Value propositions
2. Sociological/historical
3. Critical/textual analysis

METHODS OF INQUIRY

- Searches conducted using: JSTOR, Literature Online (LION), Literature Resource Center, Google Scholar
- Keywords used included: Prison writing, prison literature, narratives of confinement, prison poetics, pinta poetry, and the names of authors of prison literature
- Began creating an archive of prison literature, performed close readings of prison novels, short stories, and memoirs

EVALUATION AND EVOLUTION

- The body of criticism developing around prison literature adhering to the methods of a sociology of literature
- Examinations of prison literature remain historical/sociological
- Sociological/historical analysis does little to work upon gaining an understanding of the realities of each text on their own terms. This work outside of the literature rather than within the worlds of prison literature.
- There is a need for textual/critical analysis

SELECTED REFERENCES

- See power-point and research proposal for additional references

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