

Haunt(ed/ing) Genealogies and Literacies

Romeo García

The article centers on haunting genealogies and literacies. It asks the question, what lurks in the beyond and that is already present in and around? Working at the tension between inheritances and responsibility, I argue that a framework of hauntings invites a modality of a different kind of “scholar.” It calls for a careful reckoning, prompting an ethical injunction, one that demands of the “scholar” to learn how to address oneself to and work towards becoming a scholar of hauntings. Throughout, I assert that future without a place for hauntings is like a responsibility absent of a careful reckoning. The article concludes with a final question, “Are we ready to be a different kind of scholar?”

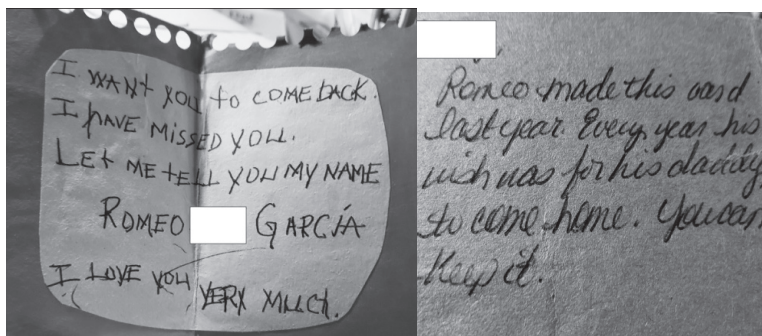


Figure 1: A Card to Him

The words above and to the left are mine, written when I was five years old to a man I only ever knew through letters and pictures until I was in high school. His absence had an effect on me, an obstinate child whose compulsion was to love and feel loved. For instance, the wistful sentiment, “I have missed you,” alongside the coupling of words, “I want you to come back,” gives the impression he once was present. But if we turn to the image on the right, my mom provides five years of perspective: “Every year his wish was for his daddy to come home.” The impact of his absence is illustrated then in the above narrative forged out of a fallacious nostalgic sentimentality since, ironically, I never had him in my presence. The most haunting indication of his effect is captured by my remark, “Let me tell you my name.” The fantasy in the two statements, “I have missed you” and “I want you to come back,” unravels both when I have to ask in one of my letters to him “Are you my daddy?” and with the desideratum of having to record my name in the card above: Romeo García.

What’s in a name? A name is both given and received, like an inheritance of sorts. One of the most important lessons I have learned is that despite the desire to remove or detach the self from a given and received name, something is already at work in it; a name can so often be a reminder of what hauntingly lurks in the beyond and what is already present in and around. I am reminded of Shakespeare’s Romeo who utters, “Henceforth I never will be Romeo” (II.I). He knows a name received, like a body arranged for the coming of the self cannot be given up. Still, Romeo utters the words, “I’ll be new baptized” (II.I), imagining the possibilities of new stories. What’s in

a name? For some, like Romeo who acknowledges he hosts a haunting, a name carries stories of haunting genealogies and literacies that cannot be put to rest and that demand a careful reckoning. And while Romeo dies with that name, unable to solve how to represent hope without death, his utterance attempts to epistemically disobey the given inheritance and epistemically de-link the given name and self. By learning how to address himself to hauntings he becomes part of a living thread of hope, possibilities, and openings. This essay is partly about inheritances; selecting and reading them and interpreting and addressing oneself to them. Part of my inheritance came to me through letters from him, and my signature on them was always a reminder that something is already at work in a name.

Prison letters and cards made up my earliest recollections of literacy development, reaffirming my haunt(ed/ing) genealogies. This concerned my mom. To her, William Wordsworth would be correct in saying, “The world is too much with us” (n.p.). Something was already present, hauntingly lurking in the beyond. As one of a people on the cusp of invisibility, my mom encouraged me to learn how to listen to haunting literacies and how to live, otherwise, in this space of hauntings; I was born to a single mother with little education and raised in a low-income household in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) where poverty, “illiteracy,” and low educational attainment are recycled stories of the hopeful. Grown-folk literacies included words from my mom (“I was not given a manual for how to raise a child.” | “Ni modo, así son las cosas.” | “¡Vergüenza! Embarrassed is when you steal”) and ongoing letters from him (“I don’t love your mom.” | “Don’t be a fuck up like me!” | “Prison is hell.”). If we are, as Judy Rohrer (2016) argues, the “set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories others tell about,” and if stories have “structural underpinnings” and “material consequences” (189), what worried my mom was the impending threat of me becoming part of recycled stories in the LRGV. Teaching me how to be a scholar of hauntings was her intervention into my life story.

This essay invokes hauntings as a framework. Hauntings gesture to that which I could not see, but that stained and coinhabited my memory and body and staged my inheritance; that I so hauntingly saw in the image of him, and like a secret, I didn’t want it to come

to light, seeking to conjure it away from my self. But if the insignia of a haunting is the concomitant of past, present, and future, it will surreptitiously return at the threshold of my self. I continue to know this haunting as I traverse Gringodemia and am lost in translations and deictics: “The Mexican,” who is not of this world and time. Hauntings are not foreign to the racialized and minoritized, inculcating us in a foreign language, thought, and politics (of memory, listening, inheritances) in the face of the historicization of the given. Hauntings force us to be a different kind of “scholar,” the kind hoped for in Hamlet: “Thou art a scholar, speak to it...” (I.I, also see Derrida 1994). Our learning how to unlearn process (epistemic de-linking and disobedience) begins with learning how to address ourselves to hauntings. The failure to recognize hauntings is the biggest difference I see between the scholar of hauntings and the lost savants of the academy. This difference is what drives this discussion on hauntings—and responsibility.

The first part of this essay is dedicated to my own hauntings. Hauntings would seem to suggest a primordial preeminence toward which we are to bend and obey without question, a given, a *subject of* rather than a scholar of hauntings; a being that is a given. Situated between a *a priori* of a given being and the possibilities of new stories, I invoke hauntings because they capture a reference point or a threshold for which I have understood my self in place(s) and time(s) in polylog with past selves and others. I also invoke hauntings to contribute to a wrinkle within the excess of the given and to re-think the haunt as a concept for staging the limits of the given. How, though, do we begin to betray that which we receive and commence to re-think the debt of an inheritance in the face of historicization that masquerades as a given? For me, it is through writing and scholarship. Romeo’s words, “I’ll be new baptized” (II.I.), resonate because they attempt to betray the conscript of the given, they dissent against its rhetoric and carve out a place of possibilities and openings of meaning with and from haunting literacies, discourses, and politics: a modality of a different kind of “scholar.” I write to be part of this living thread of hope.

The second part of this essay is for the academic scholar who inherits an intellectual tradition that is also haunted by that which lurks in the beyond and already present—a tradition, however, that is reluctant

to speak the foreign language of the scholar of hauntings. What haunts this scholar is the pretext of a gift: “What the one does not have, what the one therefore does not have to give away” (Derrida 31). For those who work within the contexts of prison literacies at the intersection of writing and rhetorical studies (WRS), at stake in working with those who cannot be heard and seen in and on their own terms is the translation of a self and narrative that is predicated upon a presupposition that it is possible to hear and see those “inside”: a structure of thought and feeling and praxis historically associated with the extraction of knowledge masquerading as gifts of responsibility and justice to the world. If hauntings are not a given, for “if the readability of a legacy were given...we would never have anything to inherit from it” (Derrida 1994, 18), and, if we “always inherit from a secret,” which says “read me, will you ever be able to do so?” (18), how might hauntings intervene as an ethical injunction, as a call to action for academic scholars to partake in a careful reckoning with what haunts them? This I tease out for a field that extracts from and imposes unto others’ the gift of knowledge.

HAUNTING GENEALOGIES AND GROWN-FOLK LITERACIES

Mom moved us to Skyline on Grimes Apartments when I was five. The move represented a story of hope, the possibility of new stories. But while it was not the *colonias* or the *barrio* that my mom, *tío/tías*, and grandma lived in, the *colonias* and *barrio* had followed; the beyond was already present. Other single mothers who had the same hope moved into Skyline. So, imagine, a section of the apartment complex in which the children came together because they shared a common story-so-far that centered in and around single-parents, a low-income household, haunt(ed/ing) genealogies, and grown-folk literacies. Our mothers, whose similar hope ran together, befriended each other. And so, as kids we stood in lines with one another in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (W.I.C.) buildings, attended each other’s birthday parties, kicked it, and consoled each other. We grew up to be *traviosos* or *caga palos*. The toll was already heavy because so many in the LRGV do not “make it out.” It did not help that we were living in the image of those in the beyond: our fathers in prison. While Skyline on Grimes represented a story of hope, because it was physically separate from the *colonias* and *barrios*, the cycle of struggle persisted alongside

a *colonia* and *barrio* mentality. Perhaps for no other reason did our mothers struggle with the decision to allow us to read prison letters.

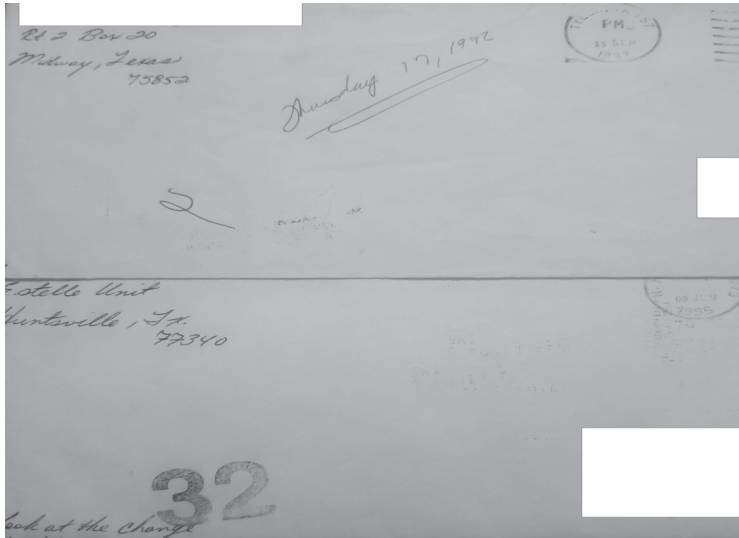


Figure 2: Letters From Different Units

Some children learn about unfamiliar places in the beyond through books, while others, like me, encountered them in prison letters. My earliest memories of reading letters from him started at around five. There were always two letters. Every few months they would come in. Some years they had postage from different places in Texas: Midway, Huntsville, and Gatesville. I'd ask mom to take me to check the mail persistently. I wanted to see those two letters when we'd open the mailbox. They only ever came every few months though. When they did come, I knew what followed. We'd go back to the apartment and sit at the table. Mom would open hers first. I'd sit there patiently waiting, thinking about how he'd respond to my last letter. I always asked a lot of questions. She hardly showed any expression, except for in those times she thought I was too preoccupied with my letter. Mom perhaps felt she needed to remain strong for me. So often, though, I would find her wiping away a tear when my letter was up in my face.

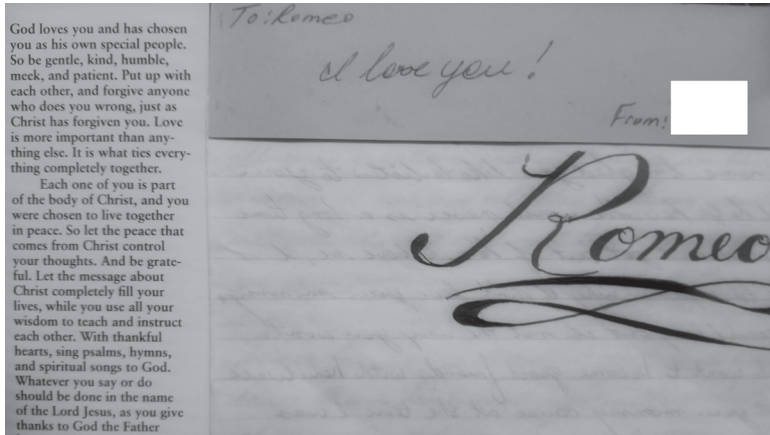


Figure 3: Calligraphy and Bookmark

Mom would hand me my letter. I'd open it up slowly. I'd take out the drawing first. Typically, it was my name or some words in calligraphy with an "I love you" at a corner of a homemade bookmark. The bookmarks sometimes had biblical scriptures on them with a note: "I never knew HIM, but now that HE is in my life, I know I can get through it all." This was a too-often-rehearsed line for us at Skyline on Grimes. The actual letter I saved for last. He was never shy to tell me how it was. In one letter he wrote: "You asked me if I love your mom! Well I can't really say I do! It takes love to be with someone and I don't have that for her." In another he stated, "So you want to know where I am and why I am there? Even though you might not understand everything at this moment in your life, I want to be real with you, I am in prison for doing bad things." He took time, perhaps because time is all he had, to explain to me, hoping, perhaps, that I could indeed understand. I understood the letters as haunting signifiers.

Through his letters, I learned about choices and consequences, selecting good and bad friends, and I learned how to translate meaning from the malaise of secrets. He never blamed being in prison on anyone else except for himself. In one letter he stated, "I was a bad person who robbed, cheated, and hurt people." I understood what all three of those things meant at the time. I stole baseball cards, which mom made me return. I observed undocumented people cheated of humanity, and I bore witness to the emotion of pain and sorrow

with my mom. In other letters, he expressed hope inculcated in the sentimentalities of despair and tragedy. His hope was for me not to be like him:

So next year you'll be in kindergarten huh? Wow! In your last letter you asked a lot of questions. I am going to answer your questions and tell you the truth about everything. I tell you things, I share with you my past experiences, so that you will not make the same mistakes.

I wasn't no good, growing up and now. My priorities were messed up. I was foolish, dumb, and those dumb things got me in prison. I hurt everyone around me. The problem has and continues to be me.

I have some recommendations for you. Stay in school. Education is very important. Never quit!! Remember, everyone gets friends until they mess up. Be careful as you pick friends. Always respect your mom. She has gone through a lot to make it in life and to provide for you. I will rely on your mother to explain all this in terms you'll understand.

I understand that when you get older you might not find it in you to forgive, more less, to love a man who wasn't there. If you make such a decision, I am ready to accept it.

I understood his cautionary anecdotes that reverberated in the words I heard so often from my mom, "I don't want you to grow up to be like me." If I couldn't be like them, although I was already part of their story, who could I be like? It was always an objectified something—a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer. It was never an actual person, much less a person who shared a similar story that of the LRGV. I struggled then with imagining the possibilities of new stories without knowing who to be other than what I was haunted by.

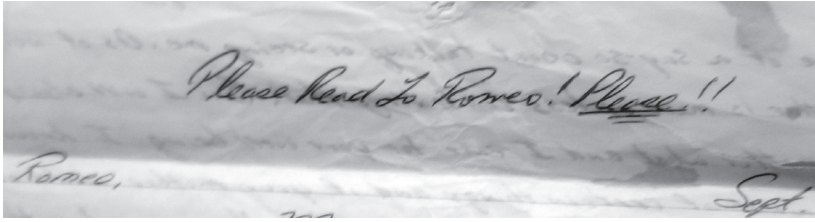


Figure 4: *A Letter: "Please Read to Romeo! Please!!"*

My mom sometimes stopped communication between him and me (Figure 4). But that didn't last. She then would ask me to throw away his letters after reading them, as if dispossessing of them would keep that which lurked in the beyond—and yet present in and around me—away. Somehow, I managed to convince her to let me take them out to the dumpster on my own. Walking towards the dumpster, I'd quickly fold them up, hide them in my sock, and wait till bedtime to take them out. I choose to keep those letters. They were a part of me; I was them. Then, and throughout the years that proved to be difficult for me, I'd turn to them, reading, dissecting, and interpreting them. The words, for me, were not static, and they manifested in meaning with time and learning how to read with care. Soon, the question of "what haunts?" transformed into actional thoughts: how do I live, otherwise?

Late at night, I would open my notebook and write about stories-so-far and the possibilities of new stories. I wrote and I wrote for many nights. And today I am reminded of what Marcellus said to Horatio in Hamlet: "Thou art a scholar, speak to it" (I.I). According to Derrida (1994), this scene is calling on Horatio to select, interpret, and orient himself to a ghost (13). This passage transports me back to my youth, where I learned how to be a scholar of hauntings and ghosts. Every night I still write, feeling the aches caused by carrying the burden of what haunts me still. And I wonder, both about how many scholars in the academy acknowledge hauntings and how our understanding of responsibility is fraught because of an unacknowledgment of them?

Predictably, scholars in the academy do not take the position to speak of or on hauntings. Their privilege is not having to address oneself to hauntings. And consequentially, this leads to a responsibility and a translation of it that is purely academic. Problematic is how the

academic scholar stages the word *responsibility*, both managing and controlling the idea of it and arranging the conditions for which to deliver responsibility as a gift. Herein lies the indelible lessons of hauntology and a de-colonial option. A future without a place for hauntings is like a responsibility absent of a careful reckoning. Responsibility (and inheritance) is what is at stake here and what guides the remainder of this discussion. Below I review three articles on prison literacy work. I offer no solutions but rather a hope that we can begin to talk about and incorporate a language of more hauntings.

THE SECRECY OF THE SECRET

Something haunts the lost savant of the academy. Their intellectual enterprise of inquiry takes them to places and allows them to enter spaces to engage in comprehensive study. There is no doubt that prison literacies are an important site of inquiry. Today, there are studies on prison activism (Hartnett et al. 2013; Torre and Fine 2005) and prison participatory action research (Halkovic 2014), inquiries into the impact that literacy and rhetorical work can have on the incarcerated (Rose 2012), and investigations into hope and despair in prison poetry (Hartnett 2003) and literacy narratives (Berry 2014). Literacy culture in prisons, it is argued, can be of benefit to the academy (see Franklin 2008; Lockard and Rankins-Robertson 2018; Jacobi and Stanford 2014; Winn 2011). In fact, scholars have encouraged stronger ties between institutions of higher education and the incarcerated (Jacobi 2008; Kerr 2004). I wonder, however, about what haunts the literacy educator, both as they work with folks in the “inside” and attempt to hear and see (sound-sight materiality) them in and on their own terms. How might a framework of hauntings and a de-colonial option serve as an ethical injunction for literacy educators, demanding of them to address themselves to inheritances and hauntings and re-think a politics of responsibility?

Listening is important in all human exchange. In “Writing to Listen,” Wendy Hinshaw (2018) draws upon Krista Ratcliffe (2005) to foreground her prison-university writing exchange program. Built around Ratcliffe’s definition (and premise) for rhetorical listening and dialogue between university students and writers in prison, Hinshaw (2018) proclaims that rhetorical listening provides

a productive framework for thinking about the “absences that we are left to listen into” and for “situating ourselves within our partnership” and “identifying ourselves within systems and conditions of criminal injustice” (56). The writing exchange, she notes, provided the “means for noticing, visualizing identification...creating a stance of openness from which to listen to experiences and identifications... and examining the power differentials that shape them” (59). Hinshaw draws upon feminist rhetorical methods to develop the possibility to hear and see those in the inside. She speaks though with a rhetoric of certainty without ever coming to grips with hauntings.

The methodological grounds by which prison rhetorical work is undertaken creates an impasse. While Hinshaw sources strategic contemplation, ironically, she never attends to the non-present present—hauntings nor specters. And that is just one of the limitations of rhetorical listening. Another is that it attempts to solve the colonial problem it created, resulting in a double movement—white guilt and white privilege. My objection is not with practicing listening to cultivate exchange, nor is it with listening to disentangle preconceived notions of where and how literacies circulate. Rather, my dissent is against the very exigency from which rhetorical listening is thought and carried out: (1) white guilt, “listening is rarely theorized or taught” (Ratcliffe 2005, 18) and (2) white privilege, listening should be revived as a “code of cross-cultural conduct” (17). Following the logic, the former statement is an exhortation of the kind of stories white academic “scholars” tell themselves, while the latter reflects the means by which that logic is able to traffic in the normative masquerading as gifts of responsibility. In addition, problematic with Hinshaw’s argument that it is possible to “tune” into the “material conditions of speaking and writing” (57) is that it remains attached to haunting legacies of seeing and hearing the “other” in and on the academic scholars’ terms.

Rhetorical listening is haunted by a colonial memory. The asymmetrical relationship between those who give from the inside and those who receive from the other side of the razor wire is most apparent in Malcolm X’s (1965) poignant observation: “Many who today hear me...think I went to school far beyond the either grade” (354). Strikingly, I am reminded of Hinshaw’s (2018) students

and a haunting passage that captures the privilege of composing environments, wherein she writes that it “made the materiality of these sites harder to hear” (64). Perhaps not intended to read this way, I argue the impasse of hearing and seeing in the passages of giving and receiving is accentuated due in part because her students cannot hear those inside, much less “tune their ears” to their voice. We cannot not assume engagement and “agreement” procures “common ground” or that providing “glimpses of themselves” infers comprehension (60). All this presupposes that the translation of the “experience of incarceration” (58) does not keep its secret even as it emerges as text meant to be seen, read, and heard. While the give-and-receive relationship is fraught, I am reminded of the importance of hauntings. What haunts the educator who believes and the student who purchases that belief that the penitentiary can benefit them?

Scholars in WRS remain interested in prison literacies. Indeed, some have taken up the sentiments of H. Bruce Franklin (2008), who asserts that “the penitentiary can help the academy learn how to read” (648). Like Hinshaw, he is captivated by the “sound” created by those inside. He turns to Jimmy Santiago Baca’s work, which eventually represents for him a “wonderful” corpus of literature worth keeping (a “keeper”). Baca’s work and life, Franklin notes, is a “thrilling testimonial to the power of literacy and language” (644). According to Franklin, Baca, like others mentioned, forces us “to view incarceration, social justice, and literacy from the bottom up instead of from the top down” (648) and reflect the potential to turn people into readers (647). But how are ordinary people supposed to be able to access such work written out of a place where all hope is gone and where the self must be reinvented? Franklin assures us some of his students are indeed able to “read,” “see,” and even “smell” that which was given to them (647). But these cannot be typical students because that connection stems with knowing how to read and listen with care and with having already reckoned with hauntings.

So, what can the penitentiary teach the academy? In “Doing Time with Literacy Narratives,” Patrick Berry (2014) makes note of a disparity in competing notions of literacy and what it can do (138). He provides an account of fourteen men in a writing class at a medium-high-security prison. Berry’s overall interest in the

piece deals with the complex nature of literacy that cannot be easily classified. He uses Juan's (an incarcerated writer) experience of writing to articulate questions related to our literacy classrooms: What can literacy really do and not do? And, what should I teach? Berry argues that the prison writing classroom demonstrates one example of how "little we *understand* the lives of our students and the complex investments they place in writing and literacy—and how their beliefs are often notably different from our own" (138). Back to the writing classroom in the prison, Berry suggests that writing provided the opportunity for the incarcerated writers to carve out a space from which to construct narratives of possibilities (139). Within these narratives of possibility, the incarcerated writers could "recreate" and "re-represent" themselves (141; 143). Berry refers to such as "self making" and "world making" through literate practices (155). So often they did reconstruct their "selves" as they came to terms with what has and continues to haunt them. Writing allowed them to imagine a self becoming in a world inherently different.

An inheritance of being racialized and minoritized haunts prison inmates. This much is observed in Berry's work. For instance, Benny, an African American man from the inner city of Chicago, foresaw himself as a businessman. He was denied this projected identity by a teacher who stated to him, "You'll never be a businessman—a janitor maybe!" (Berry 2014, 145). While Benny, according to Berry, did not fully understand why his teacher had stated this, it is possible to surmise that the school-to-prison pipeline coupled with the prison-industrial complex haunted Benny. It is possible that Benny's teacher was both aware of Benny's inheritance and complicit in normalizing injustices. Berry, throughout his piece, captures various other kinds of hauntings, all of which can be captured by one passage: "Much of his [a student's] writing was linked to a future in which he dreamed that he could remake himself" (150). One has to wonder if Berry himself, who had a father who was in and out of prison, also used writing to imagine a future in which he was no longer haunted by a genealogy and literacy. His account of writing a story that depicts an effort by a desperate "self" [Berry] to "rescue my father" is perhaps most telling that he too was haunted by a genealogy and literacy that lurked in the beyond and yet was present in and around him (151).

The hesitation or concern I have with prison literacy work deals in matters of desire, interest, and power. I have no access to any teachers' or scholars' true motives. It is possible though to apply what William Benoit (1996) refers to as "discourse about actions." If motives are "accounts" or "linguistic devices that function to explain, justify, interpret, or rationalize actions" (70), how might the questions literacy educators ask reveal to us implicit desires and interests? The prompt given to Juan by Berry (2014, 137)—tell the class and me about your experiences—is suggestive of desires and interests to know and understand what one possibly cannot. My concern here is not with Berry, who transparently makes note of contradictions and limitations that take place when educators desire to understand the literacy narratives of others, *per se*. Rather, my concern is with those teachers and scholars who blur the lines between possibility and impossibility; those who desire to "write through the distortion that prevents us from seeing the lives and learning of those incarcerated and the injustices they face" (139). Like with Hinshaw, seeing and learning assumes that incarcerated writers can be heard in and on their own terms.

Berry, throughout his piece, expresses a concern with being able to understand. Yet, perhaps in a slip of the hand, he writes, "I saw the students, I saw my father, and I saw a great faith in the power of language" (151). This may seem inconsequential. But it is precisely this kind of exchange and consultation with incarcerated writers that equivocates seeing with hearing. This is a betrayal of the possible in translation. Perhaps for no other reason does Gayatri Spivak (1994b) pose the question, "Is the subaltern transparent?" (63). This question is expanded upon in her article, "Responsibility," in which we find a "subaltern" making a case in front of the World Bank, who assumingly is responsible to other human beings. Misplaced notions of seeing and hearing, as well as the reality that "no appropriate response" can be "proffered" to the subaltern, (62) Spivak notes:

In order to hear him, "Europe" would need him to represent responsibility, by reflex, in "Europe's" way. In other words, he would have to change his mind-set. That is how the old colonial subject was shaped. When we [educators] do it, we call it education. (61)

How does the above passage relate? As educators and scholars claim to see and hear the “other,” I wonder how much of this seeing is predicated upon seeing the “educator” within the narratives of the “other.” Some might argue it is too easy to say we cannot understand the subaltern. That misses the point. When Spivak writes, “All responsibility is a simulacrum of responsibility, perhaps. But all complicities within this necessity are not equivalent” (59), she is asking us to do two things: (1) to understand the limits of transparent understanding and (2) to not assume that “pure” responsibility can appear “unstructured and unstaged” (45). Thus, the argument here is not that we should quit literacy and rhetorical work within prisons, but rather we must “check” our desires. Spivak (1994a, 68) notes there is a desire to disclose and know the “other”—to imagine an authentic speaking-subject. “Desire and its object,” Spivak writes, “are a ‘unity’” (69). This reality haunts the literacy educator.

Can the subaltern speak? The question is an indictment upon academics and others who profess to understand or to see and hear. I am quickly reminded of my letters from him. The pretext of the statement, “Hello son,” anticipates a level of comprehension that is mitigated by a desire to be heard: “Can you hear me son...can you understand what I am saying”? Cloaked in this aspiration, he proceeds with his exhortation: “don’t be like me.” When he writes, “I will rely on your mother to explain all this in terms you’ll understand,” I wonder how much is lost in translation, from his hands to the letter written, in her interpretation and translation of meaning to me, and in my own malaise of comprehension. What is graspable and not? Now, I wonder, who will the the academic scholar rely upon? If all text must be evaluated, interpreted, and reconstructed, should our trepidation not be the very real epistemic violence that emerges from the inflection of extracting knowledge or even the subject position of the “insider-outsider” informant who translates both the material and body as text? Are the “incarcerated” transparent? They exist as such for they are absent in both forms of the text despite the supposed readability of them. All we have are traces that develop what it engenders—displacements or X-marks (Lyons 2010): writings that mark the incarcerated space from which they neither speak or are seen in and on their own terms.

Can we understand the rhetoric of prison inmates? Invention complicates this. Berry's (2014) piece is telling when he writes: "There is a risk, of course...I did not necessarily understand Anthony any better because of my experience with my father" (151). There is a moment within Berry's article that stands out for me. William, one of the prison inmates, states, "Come on now...I made it up" (137), after Berry asks him how he saw an advertisement without any access to the Internet. The announcement that he "made it up" is significant because it illuminates invention practices; the narrativization of a re-invented self. Indeed, Berry recognizes this when he makes the connection between prison writing and a "renewed sense of self" (137). There is no denying that hope resides within such letters, a hope of being different—narratives of possibility (139). Attentive to Berry's call for a balance between "naïve beliefs" and "realistic possibilities" (140), though, I would like to contend with his statement that by "attending to the work of narrative" we can "move beyond the question of whether a story is true or false" (142). A focus on how the "apparent truth of a narrative is constructed" (142) would inevitably lead us to questions about material constraints that play out in terms of spatial and temporal boundaries. And this is important because there are deceptive stories. It is no coincidence that it is the children of the incarcerated who carry the burden of such stories.

Franklin (2008) is not incorrect in saying that "the penitentiary can help the academy learn how to read" (648). Indeed, what Spivak calls forth is a politics of careful reading and a language that must be learned. But within a field so overdetermined by a history of colonial encounters and interactions, this leaves us in a precarious position between heeding an "ungraspable call," of being answerable for and responsible to, and a "setting-to-work," which are not purely academic (Spivak 1994b). Precarious because prisons are manifestations of good intentions (forcing those inside to contemplate their sins) overshadowing the well-intended work of literacy educators. Because of collective amnesia of this lineage and because desire and its "objects" are a unity, they remain haunted. When Berry (2014, 141) talks about how writing produces narratives that can be read as both *artifact* and activity, I am hauntingly reminded of Western traditions of collecting and preserving artifacts from "othered traditions." Collection and preservation of artifacts train educators and scholars to view them in ways that designate a "dead object,"

whereby the place of the living is marked by those on the other side of the razor wire. Collecting and displaying artifacts creates a haunting predicament—stripping real bodies in real situations and presenting coherent selves and narratives with the image of the academic scholar as the replacement.

Above, I reviewed three articles to illustrate each scholar's own haunt(ed/ing) genealogies and literacies. What is at stake here and what continues to drive this conversation are matters of inheritances and responsibility relating to the academic scholar. As a framework, hauntings would both remind the academic scholar of the inextricable relationship between desire, interest, and power and prompt them to be attentive to how the "secrecy of the secret does not disappear with revelation" (Spivak 1994b, 23) regardless if it says "read me, will you ever be able to do so" (Derrida 18). Most importantly, as a conduit for a de-colonial option, hauntings would ask the academic scholar to learn how to address oneself to hauntings, which would help begin the process of epistemic disobedience and de-linking for them.

HAUNTINGS AND A DE-COLONIAL OPTION

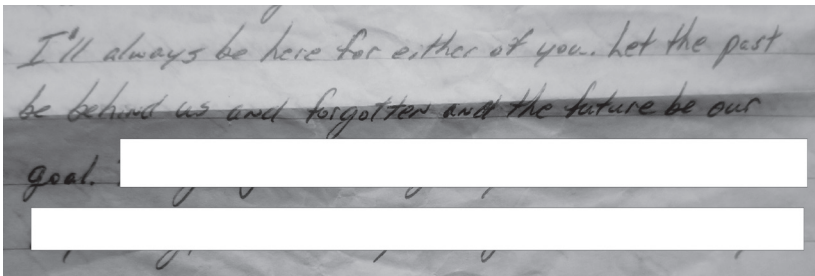


Figure 5: Past and Future

Often, he would express in letters to me that he didn't understand why my mom "decided to stop writing me." Perhaps, it was because she knew the illusion exhibited in his utterances, "Let the past be behind us and forgotten and the future be our goal." "My son," which is how he often started his letters to me, though, gripped and haunted me. Projected onto my body, and internally felt, was my future. And sure, today I am that vision of hope expressed in the past now enunciated

in the present. I “made it out,” as my friends like to say, many of them whose hope ran with mine. But my sense of self was moored by prison narratives at the nexus of an interplay between a past and its calculable arrival in the future. I had to address myself to hauntings, but in the process, I learned how to speak a foreign language and learned to be a different kind of scholar. I choose to allow his letters to survive in the present then because they unveil thoughts and memories and words and literacies that wedged me between stories-so-far and the possibilities of new stories. The dominant trope of my genealogy and literacies is a haunting and thus I refuse to accept a future and a responsibility without it.

I have spoken at length about hauntings. As a framework, I believe it goes hand-in-hand with a de-colonial option. Both would benefit the academic scholar. The struggle of a de-colonial option is changing the terms (concepts) and contents (histories) of conversations (Mignolo 2007). This means denouncing and fracturing hegemonic structures of thought and feeling and shifting towards a re-thinking of the scholar of hauntings as the essential agent of transformative change. It is important to note that I am not suggesting then that prison work is not important or that it should not circulate beyond individuals or facilities. Without such work of learning and disseminating “inside” language, we would not know about the injustices of the “inside” as we do now. Rather, I am arguing we need to learn how to address ourselves to hauntings and be more accountable to how we represent the “incarcerated” and their literacies. A framework of hauntings would work to remind the literacy educator that their past cannot be forgotten (a colonial memory), while a de-colonial option would serve as powerful medium for active de-linking (Cushman et al. 2019) and epistemically disobeying disciplinary knowledge and management of said knowledge. Hauntings and a de-colonial option demand epistemic de-colonization, a learning to unlearn process from all.

The two “scholars” mentioned in this essay share haunt(ed/ing) genealogies and literacies—constellated hauntings. If hauntings belong to the “structure of every hegemony” (Derrida 1994, 46), and if we are truly invested in fracturing said hegemony, we must learn how to select, interpret, and orient ourselves to what haunts us.

The “foreign language” Derrida speaks of, that a de-colonial option demands—which, to be clear, is the language of hauntings—requires a different kind of orientation. Are we ready to be a different kind of scholar?

Perhaps...

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