

## Rites of Passage in an English Class: Auto-ethnography and Coming of Age stories in Cross-Cultural Contexts

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### Abstract

This essay draws lessons from implementing a new Freshman English curriculum in a Middle Eastern university. Three inter-related areas of emphasis are outlined: 1). Universities as a rite of passage; 2). Auto-ethnographies as an effective means for students to reflect critically about and narrate their own coming-of-age process (or movement between worlds); 3). Stories from *Coming of Age around the World* were used to model relevant themes in the coming of age process, such as diversity and gender. These included stories from the Middle East and the Caribbean, such as “The Veil,” “The Women's Swimming Pool,” “Shoes for the Rest of My Life,” and “Man-Self.” Here I will concentrate on two stories in which gender roles and the rewriting of scripts are foregrounded (“Man-Self” and “Shoes for the Rest of My Life”). A subsequent paper will develop a comparative perspective on teaching two stories set in the Middle East (“The Veil” and “The Women's Swimming Pool”).

**Key Words:** rites of passage, auto-ethnography, coming of age stories, Middle East, Freshman English

### Prologue

This essay about implementing a new Freshman English curriculum at a Middle Eastern University draws on personal experience, as well as composition theory. The use of “I” in this essay is grounded in current scholarship about the utility of sometimes including personal experience, or defining positionality, especially in intercultural contexts where the researcher’s subject position unavoidably shapes the dynamics of the research.<sup>1</sup> This was certainly true in my case, as a North American tasked with teaching American English to Muslim students in a conservative kingdom, yet warned to excise all references to potentially controversial themes such as “freedom” which appear routinely in American culture.

When I began restructuring Freshman English at my university in the Persian Gulf region in Fall 2013, I had two different arguments in mind. In the U.S., debate about the role of literature in composition, and the value of the humanities in higher education, had been short-circuited. While teaching writing in the U.S. 2008-2012, I watched support for the cultural component of English writing courses evaporate. Part of this was a result of a political witch hunt: conservatives held it as an article of faith that Humanities and social science professors were conspiring to indoctrinate students.<sup>2</sup> Working with largely conservative students, I knew this notion was laughable. Still, students were worried about their job prospects, so they were opting for courses like Professional Communication or Technical Writing over literature and cultural studies courses.

The second debate, in the Middle East, was bipolar. There was a determined effort to Americanize higher education, yet many administrators—often Arab-Americans recruited from the U.S.—were terrified of offending local sensibilities. Humanities faculty were told to adhere to U.S. “benchmarks,” yet we were also pressured to strip culture from the curriculum. Administrators arrived in the Middle East already shaped by U.S. higher-ed culture wars. English, psychology, political science, and anthropology were under attack; only STEM subjects deserved funding.<sup>3</sup> An animus towards the humanities and social sciences was strengthened by the conservative Middle Eastern context. Yet experience teaches language and critical thinking can’t be taught without culture. My students were learning English through American movies, YouTube, and social media. But their vocabulary had huge gaps, and they were emerging from a cultural context that repressed critical thinking. Most students could not write a coherent paragraph, faculty agreed. A consensus emerged between faculty and administrators: students needed so much work in basic vocabulary and reading skills that actual researched writing was going to have to be deferred.

I was tasked to redesign Freshman English, emphasizing basic reading and writing skills. That syllabus was implemented in the Spring of 2014. What follows is a reflection on my efforts to implement a curriculum for ESL students meant to spark critical thinking in cross-cultural contexts for multinational students soon to enter a global information economy.

### PART ONE—University Life as a Rite of Passage

In the first week of the semester students were introduced to the idea that their time in the university is itself a rite of passage (Hanson 2013). When they take ownership of this concept, it comes alive for them, and they apply it to their first assignments--a personal narrative in the form of an auto-ethnography, and analyses of short coming of age stories.

Rites of passage are choreographed initiation rituals (Bell, 1997, p. 152) that mark *a transition from one stage of life to another* (Turner 1967; 1973). They can mark many sorts of transitions—

birth, the military, sorority rushes, marriage, and death—but the most common rites of passage are those which guide the transition from adolescence into adulthood. Such rites of passage into adulthood/ professional roles require changes for both the person and the social collective. Thus, such rites are an essential step or component for the growth—and indeed the rejuvenation or rebirth—of both individuals and communities (Van Gennep, 1909/1960).

At my Middle Eastern University, the “Vision” of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences provides legitimation for what I attempted in the revised Freshman English: *To create critical-minded, free-thinking students with the support of modern pedagogy and technology who will positively contribute to the workforce and a knowledge-based economy*. The rite of passage framework, followed by an auto-ethnography, provides a structured path for students to connect their own growth as critical thinkers with the transformations of a global information economy they will soon enter. This process begins with an outline of the three-part schema of a rite of passage, which to a degree separates students from their prior world, trains them in a new role or status, and then leads to a re-integration into larger social networks.

Rites of passage occur in *most* cultures. However, students in traditional Islamic cultures have had less chance to separate from mainstream society than perhaps in any other culture. One could say that their liminal phase has historically been truncated. However, young people in the Middle East are now achieving a greater degree of separation through travel and digital technologies. This means in practice that they are moving through a “digital liminality” virtually 24/7. That is the subject of a research project I am conducting in second semester English.

For now, I want to observe that the Middle Eastern context for teaching rites of passage is unique. One must define terms carefully. When an Instructor observes that rituals can be both secular and religious (Myerhoff, 1997), this may require elaboration for Muslim students. I point out that secular—often interpreted in a negative way in an Islamic context—does not mean anti-religious. It just means a *non-religious domain*--a reflection of the separation of church and state that most Westerners take for granted, but that is far from obvious in Islamic contexts.

Religious rituals include the Hajj (Muslim pilgrimage), or Christian pilgrimages. Secular rituals can include everything from brushing teeth, to a graduation ceremony. Rites of Passage, one of the most important rituals, are important for university-age students. Here is the three-part typology proposed by Arthur Van Gennep was later popularized by British anthropologist Victor Turner (1969; 1973):

- 1) Separation (“cutting away” from the former self)
- 2) Transition (a *liminal* or threshold phase, re: the state of being between worlds).
- 3) Re-Incorporation (re-integration) – re-entering society with a new status.

An interesting question for discussion is: What happens without Rites of Passage? (Scott, 2012). Part of the answer is that the line between childhood and adulthood is blurred; “Child adults” act without regard for how their behaviour affects their community. Such perpetual adolescents take from society but do not give back support. One can see this phenomenon in the extended adolescence which consumer society seems to encourage. This led Joseph Campbell to remark:

Modern society has provided adolescents with NO rituals by which they become members of the tribe, of the community. All children need to be twice born, to learn to function rationally in the present world, leaving childhood behind. (Cohen, 1991, p. 45)

Students are asked to reflect on their own process of being “twice born,” through culture. This self-exploration is pursued through an auto-ethnography, through which students critically examine how cultures shape them. Scholars from Edward Tylor to Edward Hall to Raymond Williams have noted that cultures, as “complex wholes” (Tylor, 1871/1920, p. 1), or “a whole way of life” (Williams, 1958/2002, p. 93), are largely invisible belief systems. They are “an invisible structure of life” (Reynolds & Valentine, 2011, p. xvii), or as Hall (1990) put it, “underlying principles that shape our lives” (p. 3), molding us in a largely unconscious way.

The task of the auto-ethnography assignment is to make culture visible. I give students tools to consciously reflect on their relationship to the cultures which structure their way of thinking and living. As a noun, cultures are structures which house us, in which we move and have various sorts of interaction. But as a verb, culture *structures* us and the way we move and think. Put another way, our way of life is structured by culture, like the way water structures how a fish swims. We swim in underlying culture, unconsciously. The objective is to become conscious of how “in [culture] we live and move and have our being.”<sup>4</sup>

### **PART TWO—Auto-Ethnographies as a tool to teach post-process writing**

Hanson (2013) argues that “we need a social and cultural conception of colleges and universities.” He quotes B.F. Skinner’s maxim: “*Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.*” That sense of education as molding is a perspective that is often forgotten, or never understood to begin with, by those who imagine that universities are factories to turn out technocrats. Whether we intend it or not, university life forms character. If we shortchange students on cultural literacy, and a sense of connectedness to those outside the bubble of their specialties, then they will likely carry those handicaps for life. Already, those who do the hiring for corporations lament that recent graduates lack the language skills to write a simple memo, or speak persuasively to a non-specialist audience.

Because character-formation is part of a university’s function, and because a socially situated sense of self is a cornerstone of character, Hanson suggests that students need to learn basic narrative skills. In other words, knowing how to tell a story should be a building block of the university experience—in written, oral, and arguably in visual forms. Thus, argues Hanson (2013): “To understand the change that students undergo, we need to solicit stories from them.”

This is not merely an idealistic perspective. When employers complain about the post-literacy of many graduates, they are telling us that students have lost the capacity to tell a story. After all, job interviews “are exercises in storytelling” (Hanson 2013). If we merely “supply the workforce with a corps of single-minded technocrats,” then the pragmatic skills of self-presentation, and construction of narrative (storytelling) will atrophy or remain stillborn.

Starting Freshman English students with a personal narrative not only makes good pedagogical sense (Barnawi, 2011), it is also an eminently practical skill. This skill has been sorely neglected, between students’ over-investment in their digital media,<sup>5</sup> and an all-too-common conviction that all they need to succeed is technical information.

By week two, I have students engaged in the pre-writing activities necessary to begin imagining and drafting an auto-ethnography, and also exploring the story-telling techniques of other young people who have written coming-of age stories.

We start with a definition (my wording): “An auto-ethnography is one’s own life narrative, set in a socio-cultural context.” That is, you are writing a story about your relationship to culture. Understanding an auto-ethnography requires first defining Ethnography –i.e. research resulting in a narrative about the life-ways of a specific culture. Ethnography is “the study and

systematic recording of human cultures; *also*: a descriptive work produced from such research” (Websters). If an autobiography is writing one’s own biography, then in an auto-ethnography, you engage in a systematic study of your own cultures. “*Put yourself at the center of a narrative about culture,*” I remind students as the project evolves. It differs from an autobiography, because the story is about the inter-relationship between you and your socio-cultural context.

It’s an effort to achieve some critical distance from one’s experience, and to see it whole. Constructing a narrative in which they discuss how components of socio-cultural contexts have shaped them, students try to take the odds and ends of their lives, and weave them into a unified life story. The emphasis is on how they are situated in their socio-cultural contexts.

I begin introducing students to the concept of *rewriting scripts*. Writing an auto-ethnography is, to some degree, an effort to rewrite one’s life script. When you construct that narrative, you are deciding what parts of those socio-cultural contexts have worked for me, and what needs to be jettisoned. This means that you must *de-familiarize yourself*. The easiest way to explain this is a classic example: a fish knows only water, and takes it for granted. For the fish to see water more objectively, you have to take the fish out of water. Then you defamiliarize the relationship of fish to water. So students seek to defamiliarize the cultures which structure them. I get students started with an activity about group affiliations, with these instructions:

- 1) Make a list of several groups you are associated with (whether born into, or chosen).
- 2) For the two groups that you are most interested in, make a list of stereotypes and/or outstanding features commonly associated with these groups.
- 3) Write a separate list about those two groups listing the rituals, common practices, and artifacts (or objects) are associated with your group.

A follow-up activity also functions as pre-writing, and part of the defamiliarization process:

- 4) Interview someone outside of your group. Ask them the following questions:
  - A). What first comes to your mind when I say the name of my group?
  - B). What is something you have always wondered about members of my group?
  - C) To what extent have you spent significant time with members of my group?
  - D) Come up with your own questions to ask.<sup>6</sup>

After submitting typed versions of those pre-writing assignments, the next step is:

Write one 200-word paragraph in narrative form – a sustained analysis--about the implications of one of the lists you have written.

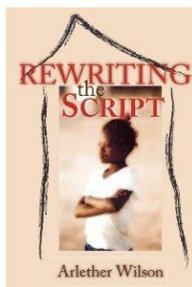
Through this de-familiarization process--envisioning socio-cultural contexts in which they are enmeshed--students learn a core idea of the “post-process” school of composition. This perspective insists that “writers and readers are always conditioned...by networks of social relations; and the goal of composition is in part about raising students’ awareness of their own discursive formations” (Fraiberg, 2002, p. 1). The process approach is valuable, yet there has been a tendency to treat the “product” approach as a straw man. (It may be appropriate in areas such as technical writing). But in Freshman English, writing an auto-ethnography is a useful way to move students towards post-process objectives such as imagining audiences, and mapping inter-relationships with socio-cultural networks.

As students give shape to narratives about their relationship to culture, we use two other analytical concepts. We review Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. Then we emphasize rewriting

scripts. I won't say much about Plato here, other than to note that the conclusions are timely: telling the truth can be dangerous. But all students can relate to the idea that since truth-telling is risky, it may be more effective to work with allegory, and humor. Nobody wants to be told that they are living in the dark. But they can be made to see a different light through humor, and allegory. These are ideas that are later explored in more detail through allegories such as "The Emperor's New Clothes," and through a close reading of Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

The notion of rewriting scripts can be framed as a variant of escaping mental slavery.

The idea of rewriting scripts comes from screenwriting/ playwriting. Actors follow roles defined by a script. Breaking away from a script—improvising--can lead to great art, but most often it is disruptive--seen as reflecting a lack of discipline or preparation on the part of the actress. The idea has been applied more broadly to psychology, interpersonal relations, or social settings. It has been popularized via "family script theory"--the notion that "it is never too late to re-write your life script -- the script that has been passed down for generations."<sup>7</sup>

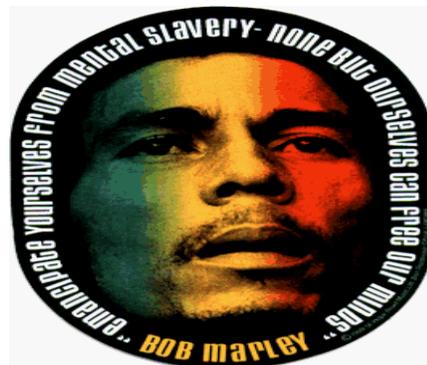


But most often, the idea is used as in Arlether Wilson's memoir, *Rewriting the Script*. Backgrounds of abuse or dysfunction have a *toxic afterlife*<sup>8</sup>; to escape repeating this pattern, there is a need to name the old script, and to create a new direction and a new ending to this narrative.

Human beings all follow scripts: roles are passed on to us in various settings: from family, church, schools, politics, popular culture, etc. Most people remain largely unconscious of those scripts, but full development as a human being (or as a culture) requires becoming conscious of those scripts, and then deciding which ones work for us, and which ones must be jettisoned. Those that are counterproductive or confining must be rewritten.

This is the message of Bob Marley's famous line:

"Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery /  
none but ourselves can free our minds."



Sometimes these old scripts we attempt to rewrite are forms of "mental slavery," with a toxic afterlife. Students at first tend to think of an afterlife literally as life after death. But by discussing the afterlife of nuclear wastes, they grasp the concept that habits take on a life of their

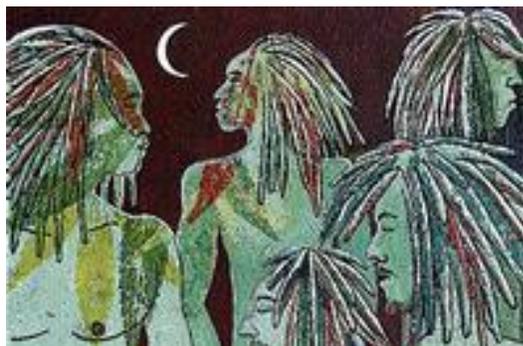
own. This can be personal or cultural. Following Marley's lead, we could name toxic afterlives (mental slavery) which originate in slavery and colonialism: racism, mis-education, health issues (dis-ease resulting from improper diet), poverty ("destruction of the poor is in their poverty"), homelessness/fatherlessness; co-dependency; killing of prophets, war to war, etc.

### **PART THREE—Using "Coming of Age" stories as models for personal narratives**

While students are still revising their auto-ethnographies, we discuss two mini-stories which bring to life several concerns which are typical in coming-of-age stories, specifically gender, diversity, and the rewriting of scripts.

The two stories are "Man-Self" by Oonya Kempadoo, and "Shoes for the Rest of My Life" by Guadalupe Dueñas, both from *Coming of Age around the World*. The title "Man-Self" is one that I have applied to an untitled excerpt from Kempadoo's novel *Buxton Spice*. Kempadoo grew up near the Caribbean coast of Guayana, and spent most of her life in the Caribbean—with stays in St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Grenada. The mixed-race status of her family and community will be familiar to anyone from the Caribbean or Latin American world. But it is the female narrator's fascination with masculinity which provides the unifying theme here.

I provide study guide questions that relate "Man-Self" to rites of passage, such as: "What does the concept of 'man-self' mean to the female narrator?" But I also ask a meta-narrative question: "What is the subtext in this story about the *socially constructed* nature of gender?" These provide openings to define socially constructed, and look at instances of man-self in the beginning of the story. The opening of the story has the pre-pubescent narrator comparing the man-self of brothers and friends, with the more threatening (but clearly also attractive) masculinity of "the hard black-black Rastas silhouetted in the streetlight" (p. 119).



'Moonlight Dreadlocks' by Andy Jefferson.



Dreadlocks in moonlight, or in profile, is a widely circulated trope both in reggae music, and in the world of popular culture and advertisements, so I put iconic images on the screen.

With the visuals at hand, it is easy even for students who have not encountered Rastas to begin to grasp what the young narrator is observing, from the safety of an upstairs window:

They were slinky cats moving into the night, their bodies liquid, rolling on to one foot and then the other, cool. They held their man-self tighter inside them, coiled, ready to spring. I gauged how much of that cool I could really get right, practiced the walk. But all that really came off was the stance—legs apart, bounce-me-nuh look (p. 119).

The young tomboy practicing the wide-legged “don’t mess with me” stance of well-cool Rastas is ripe for comic effect. This becomes apparent when we are told that this girl studied local varieties of the man-self “All the nights”—such as the way the Rastas  
 ...swung down the hand, grab the crotch, shift to the other leg. That stance was all I could honestly imitate. But I could do it anytime I wanted to, even in a dress, and feel my man-self standing like that (p. 120).

These stories encourage a dramaturgical approach to textual interpretation (Pettengill, 2010). That tomgirl in a dress, looking down on the silhouetted Rastas, and imitating their wide-legged, crotch-grabbing manselves, is comic. Yet the narrator gives no indication that she wants to shed her dress. She just wants to enjoy the liberties that young men enjoy. This is evident in that opening paragraph: the narrator’s sister Judy is a co-conspirator in trying on “man-selves,” while other sisters give her models of femininity (“Rachel and Sammy, with their eye-blinking selves”) against which she defines herself.

I could climb trees as high as any boy. Had corns across my palms from swinging on branches. Judy had a man-self too. Could climb good. She could hang on for longer with her strong arms and pull herself back up (p. 120).

Another study guide prompt is: “Describe several of the varieties of ‘man-self language’ and behavior that she finds attractive, or repulsive/repellant.” The narrator describes the man-self of some bigger men, such as a watchman nicknamed Night Helicopter, as “sloppy” and “puffed up.” Then there is a character named Look-Back who “had his man-self so covered up it was confusing” (p. 120). Look-Back took “small mincing steps...Bird movements, his long neck swiveling, his hands jerking everywhere when he talked, eyes darting” (p. 121). Here a comparative perspective is employed: “The Rastas had a different name for him. They called him ‘Anti-man’ and he’d scuttle past them fast...” (p. 121). Lest there are any doubts that the narrator is suffering gender troubles, the Rastas are there to police properly gendered behavior.

Along with admiring imitation, and some contempt, there is also envy. Her brother Yan is given many liberties unavailable to girls. She imagines that she can see Yan’s man-self better than he can, since it was “just beginning”: “It was wobbling around in his voice sometimes.” (“Wobbling” provides another opportunity for dramaturgy, along with the mincing steps of Look-Back). She says, in Caribbean-inflected English: “Dads...let him go to the cinema any time he wanted, by himself. We had to go with one’a *them*.... I began to hate Yan’s man-self but wanted to stick around him all the time to do the man-things with him” (p. 121).

Her relationship with Yan illuminates some “subtexts in this story about the *socially constructed* nature of gender.” There is a neighbor, the mechanic Mikey, who repairs their van while Yan translates. Aside from where the spanner goes, what else is he translating? Our tomgirl relates: “Yan took his time to teach me how it all went together” (p. 121). On a literal level, this refers to the engine, and the traditionally masculine domain of mechanics. But on a symbolic level, this has been worded in such a way as to suggest a doubled meaning. Masculinity is complicated. It has a lot of moving parts. The man-self may seem attractive, but it is not easy learning to be a man. Yan is also teaching her, metaphorically, lessons about how all the parts of someone’s man-self “went together.”

This subtext surfaces when our tomboy confesses: “I enjoyed my man-self with the boys. Bits of their man-selves soaked into me and I learnt then how to understand the man-self language” (p. 122). This became a theme in my class. My female students are segregated: they

sit behind smoked glass in a balcony. When a female student had to climb over the class to retrieve the quizzes that I had tossed up (and short-armed), a student observed that something of the “man-self had soaked into her.”

Another study guide prompt asks: “Why does she find in Sammy a version of the ‘she-self’ which she finds unattractive?” When Judy and the narrator climb trees—as good or better than the boys—and then play Dungs War “like one of the boys pelt it” (p. 120), Rachel and Sammy howl in protest. The latter girls have learned a different set of lessons about gender, and the different kinds of power that it can endow to practitioners. Sammy had “no man-self at all.” But she had other, more traditionally feminine attributes: she had “turned-up mouth and eyes that could blink good. She had a way that could make you give her anything she wanted” (p. 123). Sammy is learning feminine wiles to bend men to her will. But our tomboy, having soaked up the best of available man-selves, draws a different conclusion: “If that was what she-self was all about, I go keep my man-self till I old” (p. 123).

Before ending with a brief glimpse at the metaphorical language of “Shoes,” I want to pause to observe that these coming of age stories provide numerous means of getting students to think critically about their own incipient script-revisions. After teaching “Man-Self,” I discuss the concepts of subtexts and meta-narratives with students. I ask them: “*Can you locate a subtext in the narrative you are beginning to formulate about how your cultures have shaped you?*”

The biographical sketch of Guadalupe Dueñas (“Shoes for the Rest of my Life”) in *Coming of Age around the World* describes her as “the mistress of the metaphor.” Metaphors are figures of speech relating un-like objects (as in *drowning in money*). But students take ownership of such concepts more effectively when they see them illustrated in mediums they know—film, or music. A famous quote from Shakespeare serves well here:

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
—William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2/7

Students understand the inter-relationship between metaphors, and masking or personas, very well. They readily acknowledge that they do not act the same at a mosque, as at a party. Every social setting requires a different script, or persona. All of us, to some degree, are “players” in life, performing different parts, in different contexts.

I encourage students to look beyond the literal, to an underlying metaphorical subtext. Three study guide questions are designed to help students unpack this metaphor: 1). The father gives his family an heirloom / inheritance. Explain why this provokes such fierce resistance on the part of his daughter. 2). What could “piles of little coffins reaching up to the sky” symbolize? (p. 293). 3). What is the story saying, symbolically, about the expectations of our parents? This Mexican *Palm of the Hand* story<sup>9</sup> shows that young people invariably try to deface the scripts of their parents, or other authorities. Giving a girl shoes for life is a cultural death sentence. They are *coffins* because these unfashionable shoes are ‘dead’ within their boxes, and also because they confine the girl within a deadening script. The story becomes a sort of black comedy in which the girl empathizes with barefoot Indian children, and dreams of getting run over by a truck so that her father “would have to atone for his sins” (p. 294).

To plan for a child so far ahead surely *is* sinful. The girl inventories the artifacts she uses to destroy the shoes—a list that is familiar to students, since they have compiled a list of artifacts

in their culture. But these artifacts constitute not so much the tools of a culture, as the “weapons of the weak” in an anti-cultural resistance.<sup>10</sup> Her effort to lose, destroy, or give away the un-“reasonable-looking” shoes becomes “the overriding obsession that dominated my life” (p. 294). By the end, when she repeats a second time, “There’s just no end to it,” we may ask ourselves: Has she admitted defeat? Or does she find meaning in what is like a labor of Sisyphus?

The shoes, as parental scripts, are like a “tradition....transmitted from the past” which, Marx once wrote, “weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” It may be an “unequal combat” (295) without end, but the sheer inventiveness of the narrator’s resistance is itself clear evidence that the seeds of a new script have already begun to germinate.

### Conclusion

Student response to the rite of passage and coming of age material was enthusiastic. Middle Eastern students were able to use this theory to make sense of their own liminality. They are spending a great deal of time *between worlds*—whether through travel, or digital devices—but are being given little guidance about how they will incorporate that knowledge when they re-integrate into a conservative society. The cross-cultural coming of age stories also helped students to understand basic challenges of their own transition into adult identities, such as the socially constructed and performed nature of gender roles. Thus, my female students take ownership of the notion of a “man-self” and repeated this idea in class, as a way of making sense of the manner in which they were now learning to become more at home in places and activities which had traditionally been reserved for men (such as speaking in class). Such curriculum, in my view, needs the support of administrators so that the students they produce will not be culturally and intellectually handicapped as they enter a global information economy.

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Gregory Stephens is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez. Stephens has taught film, literature, and media/cultural studies at the University of South Florida (2010-12) the University of West Indies (2004-08), and the University of California. He is the author of *On Racial Frontiers: The New Culture of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley* (Cambridge UP, 1999). From 2013-2014 Stephens was an Assistant Professor of English at Alfaisal University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Publications drawing on experience in/study of the Middle East include “Recording the Rhythm of Change: A Rhetoric of Revolution in *The Square*,” *Bright Lights Film Journal* (May 2014). Currently, Stephens is finishing a book project: *Real Revolutionaries: Revisioning the Romance of Revolution in Literature and Film*.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> On use of the “I”: Ken Hyland, “Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse,” *Discourse Studies*, 7(2) (2005), 173–191; Kate McKinney Maddalena, “I need you to say ‘I’: Why First Person is Important in College Writing,” in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, ed. Charles Lowe and Pavel Zemliansky (Parlor Press, 2010), 180-190.

<sup>2</sup> Re attacks on the humanities, and “useless” disciplines, see Jeremy Wallace, “Rick Scott no fan of anthropology,” *Miami Herald-Tribune* (October 10, 2011). For an academic response see Scott Jaschik, “Florida GOP vs. Social Science,” *InsideHigherEd* (October 12, 2011). On the value of an anthropological perspective in assessing education, and specifically rites of passage as a framework for understanding the broader contribution of higher education, see Scott 2014.

<sup>3</sup> The campaign by Florida Republicans was directed not only against the humanities, but against social science disciplines such as psychology and political science. Shannon Colavecchio, "Lawmakers stress need for higher ed but warn of cuts," *Tampa Bay Times* (Feb. 26, 2010). Then anthropology became a particular target.

<sup>4</sup> In keeping with the view that scriptures are also a form of culture which often invisibly structure our thinking, I have adapted this from Acts 17:28.

<sup>5</sup> Diane R. Dean and Arthur Levine, "Is There an App for That?" Autonomy and Dependency in Today's College Students," *HigherEdJobs* (November 11, 2013). Howard Gardner and Katie Davis, *The App Generation: How Today's Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World* (Yale UP, 2013); Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books, 2012. See Turkle's TED Talk "Connected, but Alone," or this profile: Jeffrey R. Young, "Programmed for Love: In a skeptical turn, the MIT ethnographer Sherry Turkle warns of the dangers of social technology," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Jan. 14, 2011). See also the still-timely essay by Nicholas Carr, Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is doing to our brains, *The Atlantic* (July/August 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Although I studied and conducted / wrote autoethnographies as a graduate student at the University of California-San Diego, many of the specific pre-writing activities I use now were adapted from Matt Hollrah, who designed an innovative Freshman Composition curriculum at the University of Central Oklahoma. I taught at UCO in the Fall of 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Irene Watson, *The Sitting Swing: Finding Wisdom to Know the Difference* (Plain View Press, 2005). Quoted in book synopsis at: <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4386504-the-sitting-swing>. See also Lilianne Desjardins, Nancy Oeklaus, and Irene Watson, *Rewriting Life Scripts: Transformational Recovery for Families of Addicts* (Life Scripts Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Uses of "toxic afterlives": Jeffrey Herf, "Hate Radio: The long, toxic afterlife of Nazi propaganda in the Arab world," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Nov. 22, 2009); Terence Cave, *Mignon's Afterlives: Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford UP, 2011); George R. Trumbull IV, "On Piracy and the Afterlives of Failed States," *Middle East Research & Information Project*, Vol. 40 #256 (Fall 2010); Jon Mooallem, "The Afterlife of Cellphones," *New York Times Magazine* (January 13, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Yasunari Kawabata, *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale UP, 1985).

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