

Narrative Protocols, Dialogic Imagination and Identity Contestation: A Critique of a Prescribed English Literature Curriculum

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Abstract:

A critique of the prescribed Anglo-American canon for Jordanian Universities, this article utilises narrative protocols and storytelling juxtaposed against my own literary education and a former student of mine. It examines how lived experiences, identity contestations and reconciliations are reflected and reinforced in a dialogic exchange with the study of English literature at undergraduate, graduate levels as well as while teaching. In the 'New Times' of cyberspaces and the Internet accretion, the data used in this study is gathered through email and Facebook message exchange between a former student of mine and myself. After first introducing the English literary curriculum used in Jordanian universities, this article offers a critique of the canon pointing out that the study of English literature. As traditionally conceived in these universities, this tradition reinforces Eurocentrism, monolithic, elitism and particularly, and for the purpose of this article, in the ways it is disseminated, it signifies relations of power in the academy. It further shows how the subject-positions of students of English in this context are contested between repulsion, conformity, and when textual cultural representations are at stake, they pass through a process of an 'imbibing' construction of identity that reconciles warring sentiments of love and agony. The paper concludes by reminding literature educators that some students bring profound experiences of anguish and identity contestation with them to the literature classroom, and that it is therefore our responsibility to challenge the hegemonic and essentialised ideologies and practices informed by the adoption, perpetuation and dissemination of the literary canon in these educational contexts.

Key words: Arab World Literary Education, Anglo-American Literary Canon, Critical Pedagogy, Identity Construction, Literary Criticism

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