

**Dehegemonizing the Canon of American Literature for Arab
University Students**

إزالة الهيمنة من منهج الأدب الأمريكي للطلبة العرب في الجامعات العربية

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Abstract

The sociopolitical realities in the Arab World and their relationship with the United States require that Arab professors of American literature at Arab Universities revise their syllabi and textbooks so that they do not serve the American hegemony on the Arab World. The researcher calls for preparing an anthology of American literature that responds to the national aspirations of Arab students without compromising quality or the inclusiveness of the American canon. The anthology that the researcher envisions is that which would include the giants of American literature along with a significant representation of ethnicity and gender; it would introduce American literature to students in an authentic and critical manner that revises the standing canon in favor of reconstructing a canon that is more relevant to Arab students in Arab universities and that prepares them to be citizens of the world.

Key Words: The American literary canon, American literature at Arab universities, hegemony and literature, Twain and the Arabs, the politics of canon formation and deformation.

ملخص

تستدعي الوقائع السياسية والاجتماعية في العالم العربي وعلاقتها بالولايات المتحدة الأمريكية من أساتذة الأدب الأمريكي في الجامعات العربية مراجعة خططهم الدراسية ومقرراتهم التعليمية بحيث لا تخدم الهيمنة الأمريكية على العالم العربي. يدعو الباحث في هذه الدراسة إلى اعداد انثولوجيا للأدب الأمريكي بحيث تستجيب للطموحات الوطنية للطلبة العرب دون المساس بالجودة أو الشمولية لمنهاج الأدب الأمريكي المعروف. الأنثولوجيا التي ينشدها الباحث تحتوي على عمالقة الأدب الأمريكي إلى جانب تمثيل للعرقيات والنوع الإجتماعي. ويمكن أن تقدم هذه الأنثولوجيا الأدب الأمريكي بثوب حقيقي وناقد، يقوم بتقويض المنهاج المتداول بغرض إعداد منهاج اخر يكون أكثر تمثيلاً للمتطلبات الثقافية، لطلبة الأدب الأمريكي في الجامعات العربية، ناشداً بذلك اعدادهم لمتطلبات المواطنة العالمية.

كلمات مفتاحية: انثولوجيا الأدب الأمريكي، الأدب الأمريكي في الجامعات العربية، الهيمنة و الأدب، مارك توين و العرب، سياسة الإقصاء و الإستحواذ.

Introduction

The formation of any canon in the curricula of schools and universities can be responsible for forming the future of a nation. Editors of major texts usually decide for us what to learn and what to unlearn and our knowledge of the world is influenced by their biases and prejudices. In most cases students do not question texts that are given to them and teachers find it convenient to assign a ready-made textbook, even if they disagree with its content, rather than compile their own material for their students. While it may not be possible for each teacher to write, edit or prepare his/her own textbook for his/her students, it is always possible for teachers to combine efforts to prepare a textbook that responds to their students' needs, expectations and ambitions. It is also important for professors to periodically update their textbooks so that they continue to offer to their students what agrees with their educational needs.

Canon formation is generally influenced by a myriad of factors related to the political, social, economic and other educational realities. There is no doubt that the political, social and economic developments that the Middle East is experiencing are sources of concern that compel academics to revise their syllabi and the textbooks that they assign to their students so that the offered information can be conducive to the

intended learning outcomes. Arab professors need to be alerted to the need for introducing to their students the texts that are congruent with their national aspirations and biases without obliterating any vital information that would deter them from catching up with the international educational challenges.

This study tries to show that the present available anthologies of American literature that we put in the hands of our students are not necessarily the best that we can offer. The researcher calls for preparing an anthology of American literature that can be both representative of the major trends and literary figures and responsive to the needs of Arab students without compromising quality and inclusiveness. The Anthology that the researcher envisions is that which would include the giants of American literature along with significant representations of ethnicity and gender. It would introduce American literature to students in an authentic and critical manner that deconstructs the standing canon in favor of reconstructing a canon that is more appealing to Arab students in Arab universities and more responsive to the needs of integration in world culture. This study focuses on 19th century American literature since it informs the following century while retaining links with the Puritan past. After reading Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Hemingway wrote "All American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn* ---- it's the best book we've had --- -- There was nothing before. There has been nothing so good since." (Mailer, retrieved on 12/6/2010 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/09/books/mailer-huck.html>). Nathaniel Hawthorne was obsessed with the Puritan past; his novels and short stories capture a sense of belonging to a heritage that Hawthorne longed to dissociate himself from while clinging to its powerful dictations on the American collective subconscious.

The writers and works that are treated in this study are only meant to be a representative demonstration of the disadvantages of the American canon and its anthologies that we use in our American literature courses at Arab universities that confer undergraduate and graduate degrees in English and/or American literature.

The Teaching of American Literature at Palestinian Universities

Since the introduction of English literature as a discipline in Arab universities in the early part of the 20th century, American literature has been listed among the compulsory courses on the syllabi of the majority of Departments of English that grant the BA degree in English language and literature. In addition to American literature as a survey course, American literary works are integrated in other courses that deal with different literary genres such as poetry, drama, the novel and the short story, in addition to some general introductory courses on literature, modern literature, 19th and 20th century literature, to name only few.

Educators at that time showed much enthusiasm for a literature which was to be recognized as an independent canon separate from British literature. To them American literature introduced a variety of themes and topics such as the Afro-American experience which appealed to Palestinian students. Palestinian students as well as many other students in the Arab World looked up to American literature since it connotes the virtues of self reliance, originality, democracy and freedom. The cult of self reliance that was implanted by the founding fathers of the American republic such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson and was reiterated in the dogma of the transcendentalists of the nineteenth century appealed to young people in every part of the world.

After the Beirut War in 1982, the Palestinian Intifada in 2000 and the war on Iraq in 2003 nemesis fell; American political leaders lost credibility in the eyes of both the average Palestinian person and the educated elite at universities. Enthusiasm for the literature, the culture, the language or anything American has been reversed, so much so that instructors of American literature are in a dilemma. On the one hand they want to keep the programs of study at their universities intact, and on the other they share the worries and repulsions that their students have with the conviction that it is not possible to overlook the great values that American literature contains.

In their search for a compromise, some professors of American literature at Arab universities began attempts to deconstruct the current American canon in favor of reconstructing another one that would suit the preference of their students and restore their interest in American literature. Professors of British and American literature in Palestinian universities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip often deliberate the standing canon used in their departments. Basem Ra'ad a professor of English literature who served in more than one Palestinian university reiterated his concern regarding the teaching of not only American literature but Western literature in an Arab context as well. Ra'ad shows his dissatisfaction with the way Western literature is taught at Palestinian universities in a paper that he circulated among colleagues in different Palestinian universities in March 2005 describing it as "very traditional" and he opted for developing "an eclectic and composite approach that benefits from the new trends in some respects but that is able to provide introspective relevance to my students and to myself also. So that even in standard courses such as period surveys, I now try to restructure and update course outlines in such a way as to draw out actual implications, parallels, lessons that relate to our identity and to developments that are now forming our history and transforming our culture"(2005, 2). Ra'ad as and many of his colleagues in Palestinian universities agree that there is a need to reconsider syllabi and textbooks if Palestinian students are to integrate in world culture without losing sight of their national aspirations.

The Politics and Poetics of Canon Formation

Canon formation and deformation of American literature has stirred hot debates since the civil rights movement and it gained momentum during the rest of the second part of the 20th century. The canon of the antebellum sensibilities and biases continued to hold for several decades in 20th century anthologies of American literature. The rise of ethnic literature with its new realities and the emergence of postcolonial and feminist literature in different parts of the world brought about new perceptions and more daring calls for reformations in the American

female writers and Afro-American writers from his critical canon; not even Emily Dickinson is mentioned in Matthiessen's book.

Calls for canonizing gender and ethnic literature on the bases of its sensibilities and its representation of a world culture and not on its descent came at a later stage. While *The Norton Anthology* stands as the most prominent anthology of American literature, it pays casual reference to ethnic literature. American editors have always been engaged in hot debates on canonizing certain American writers and there are serious trends that attempt to incorporate a good number of ethnic writers. Paul Lauter's *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1990) is one of the latest successful anthologies of the kind. Paul Lauter, however, denies the existence of any significant Arab American writer who may be worthy of being anthologized; his anthology does not include any Arab Americans, not to mention Palestinian writers. This deliberate or indeliberate effacement of the representation of Arab writers as an ethnic group in America will certainly shake the credibility of the anthology itself since the existence of Arab American writers was recognized a century or more before the publication of *The Heath Anthology*, particularly through the works of Gibran K. Gibran, and the other émigré Arab writers of the 19th and 20th centuries. The *Grape Leaves Poets* (1988) anthology of El-Mosa and Orfelea's was another fresh source that was published only two years before the *Heath Anthology*. One should not be in the position of defending the recognition of Arab American writers as part of an ethnic canon or any other canon of American literature because any literature should speak of itself and Arab American writers have remarkable and conspicuous presence in the American literary scene. What is interesting is that after being criticized by many professors, scholars and students for the absence of Arab American writers, Paul Lauter included Naomi Shihab Nye in the fifth edition of the *Heath Anthology*. But Naomi Shihab is an established Palestinian American writer whose poems were popular as early as the 1980s.

Since *The Heath Anthology* includes writers from almost all cultures regardless of how significant or insignificant that literature is to the

writers as Israel, the United States and England. The Arab average person finds himself both a victim of the colonizer's greed for his resources and the cruelty of his US backed regime. This reality continues until resistance and freedom fighting were nakedly and viciously dumped as acts of terror by the 1990s. In order for the super power (the USA) to "tame these Arabs" and help them out of their 'heathen' misery the American government needs to export American democracy to them while supporting their dictator regimes: a very uncanny paradox.

While Arab people are unable to come to terms with their rulers, anguish and loss continue. The Arab is walled in and out in different ways and any attempt to end his siege is aborted by outside and inside tactics. Egyptian migrant workers swarm the Egyptian cities famishing for food and shelter. Moroccan's borders "bleed" with illegal immigrants who sneak through the Mediterranean to the coasts of Spain seeking some seasonal employment in olive cultivation in the same way Palestinian Arabs sneak through Israeli borders seeking a job that in some cases costs them their lives. The survivors from among Egyptian migrant workers, Moroccan illegal immigrants and the Palestinian workers recount stories which are unmatched in their capturing of the agony, molestation and abuse of such free men and women. What Kanafani captures in *Men in the Sun* (1999) of Palestinian illegal immigrants "bleeding" through the borders of Kuwait and Iraq is an authentic example of the suffering of these workers who are displaced by the cruel hand of their colonizers. "Why didn't they knock on the sides of the tank" (Kanafani, 1999:74) Abul Khaizuran, the main character of Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* ejaculates after he discovers and disposes of the bodies of the "baked" men in his tank while trying to cross them the borders from Iraq to Kuwait. What knocks and what shouts would awaken the dead conscience of the proud gods of this earth?! Arab American writers lie uneasy while they hear of their countries being ransacked by the tyranny of occupiers.

In "Blood" the American Palestinian poet Naomi Shihab monitors with her father the news from the beleaguered homeland and laments 20th

century civilization which permits such atrocities against the helpless and the innocent:

Today the headlines clot in my blood.
A little Palestinian dangles a truck on the front page.
Homeless fig, this tragedy with a terrible root
is too big for us. What flag can we wave?
I wave the flag of stone and seed,
table mat stitched in blue.

I call my father, we talk around the news.

It is too much for him,
neither of his two languages can reach it.
I drive into the country to find sheep, cows,
to plead with the air:
Who calls anyone *civilized*?
Where can the crying heart graze?

What does a true Arab do now? (Naomi Shihab in Orfalea & Elmusa, 1988: 273)

Arab American writers do respond to their surrounding realities, but not without a frequent declared allegiance to their home towns and countries. Their literature is, therefore, excluded. Moreover, the stereotypical image of the Arab in the West is that which does not encourage Western editors to consider anthologizing. The orientalist of the previous century created the orient as a different ‘other’ that they enjoyed hating. They, as Said, notices in his *Orientalism* (1979) placed themselves at the center of the universe and saw and created an “other” with reference to their logocentric vision that is both hegemonic and exclusive.

For Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them'). This vision in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived. Orientals lived in their world, 'we' lived in ours. The vision and material reality propped each other up, kept each other going. A certain freedom of intercourse was always the Westerner's privilege; because his was the stronger, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape to the great Artistic mystery as Disraeli called it. (1979: 44)

American readers need to unlearn several things about the orient before they can commit their memories to new realities. The unfair exclusion and alienation of an ethnic minority from the American literary canon led to serious consequences. Not only is the American canon exclusive, it is somewhat antagonistic and stereotypical. The call is not for a special ethnic anthology that counters the hegemony of the West with similar antagonism and stereotyping; the call is for a sound integration on the basis of merit of all ethnic groups into the American canon. It does not sound fair and sound to see the epigrams of Gibran K. Gibran on every post card and wall hanging, to have a memorial garden for him in Washington D.C., and not have him included in an anthology that claims an ethnic approach to American literature.

Xenophobic Attitude towards Arabs and Foreigners in 19th Century American Literature: the Examples of Mark Twain and Herman Melville

During the 19th century American travel literature served to acquaint people with the foreign cultures and countries that seafarers visited and reported from to the people of their countries who were eager to know about the outside world and particularly the Holy Land. Several 19th century writers including some of the giants of the period such as Herman Melville, and Mark Twain, visited the Holy Land with the intention of acquainting themselves first and their readers second with the birthplace of the Savior. Their reports were published either in books or in the newspapers of the time. Melville, for example wrote *Clarel*, an

epic that captures his epiphanies about the Holy Land and Twain's participation in the *Quaker City* journey to Europe and the Holy Land in 1867 was actually sponsored by the *Alta California*, a San Francisco paper that aimed at publishing the reports that Twain sent periodically to quench the thirst of readers for such information about the outside world and particularly the Holy Land.

After his visit to the Holy Land in 1867, Mark Twain went back to America with a set of stereotypes about Arabs and particularly those who lived in Palestine that are now offending to Arabs and now insultingly comic leaving little room for an Arab (particularly a Palestinian Arab) to appreciate. Twain's prejudice against Arabs climaxes in his popular novel *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In one of the episodes of the novel, the two racketeers, referred to as the Duke and the King, go in one of their excursions into an American village on the banks of the Mississippi river. Their racketeering business requires them to leave Jim (the fugitive slave) in the boat alone until they come back from their adventure. In order for them to avoid passersby's doubts that Jim is a runaway slave, the Duke dressed Jim up in King Lear's outfit – it was a long curtain-calico gown, and a white horse-hair wig and whiskers; and then he took his theatre-paint and painted Jim's face and hands and ears and neck all over a dead dull solid blue, like a man that's been drowned nine days. Blamed if he war'nt the horriblemest looking outrage I ever see. Then the duke took and wrote out a sign on a shingle so –

Sick Arab – but harmless when not out of his head. (1985:1210)

Twain puts the words in the mouth of one of his characters, the Duke. But we "commonly do not remember", to put it in Thoreau's words, "that it is the first person that is always speaking." (2003:1808) Twain succeeded in marketing his stereotypical ideas to 19th century Americans who were thirsty for knowledge about the Holy Land and whose source of information was mainly through the travel literature the like of that which was produced by the pilgrims of the Holy Land. A little exercise in discourse analysis of the above quotation from *Huckleberry Finn* leads to the following conclusions: An Arab according to Twain's stereotyping is harmful and in most cases he is out of his mind. An Arab

is a source of danger; getting close to him would be an unnecessary risk that one should avoid. Playing with the color prejudice of the time, Twain makes the Duke paint "Jim's face and hands and ears and neck all over a dead dull solid blue." In addition to the image of madness which is informed by the character of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (the play that the Duke and the King fake in *Huckleberry Finn*), Jim's black color was not representative enough of an Arab according to Twain; he chooses to paint him with a "dull solid blue" color preparing for the later "sand nigger" stigma that is attributed to Arabs in twentieth century America.

In their travel to the Orient, Western scholars and pilgrims came to know the Orient so that they own it. These pilgrims developed a "Holy Land Mania" in their frequent attempts to discover the Orient with its "voluptuous" and "exotic" charm. Knowledge of the Orient was power since these travelers came to the Orient at a time when the Ottoman Empire was dying and when Western countries began to compete to its usurpation. They also came with ethnocentric feelings that were charged with hegemony and a sense of power that is both condescending and defiling.

It is with this hegemonic attitude that the orientalist approached the Orient and its people. In his 'pilgrimage' to the Holy Land as recorded in *Innocents Abroad*, Twain and his group were charged with blind religious prejudice that made them only see through a narrow perspective, leaving no room for the "other". While in Nain, a village in the Galilee, the pilgrims (Twain's group) take license to profane a mosque and deplore Arabs' tolerance simply because they felt that they and their faith is superior to that of the Arabs:

A little mosque stands upon the spot which tradition says was occupied by the widow's dwelling. Two or three aged Arabs sat about its door. We entered, and the pilgrims broke specimens from the foundation walls, though they had to touch, and even step, upon the "praying carpets" to do it. It was almost the same as breaking pieces from the hearts of those old Arabs. To step rudely upon the sacred praying mats, with booted feet--a thing not done by any Arab--was to inflict pain upon men who had not offended us in any way. Suppose a party of armed

from goatskin which we polluted with our Christian lips, except by filtering the water through a rag which they put over the mouth of it or through a sponge! I never disliked a Chinaman as I do these degraded Turks and Arabs, and, when Russia is ready to war with them again, I hope England and France will not find it good breeding or good judgment to interfere. (1976: 268)

It seems that the epiphany that 19th century American pilgrims, including, of course, Twain, experienced as they visited the Holy Land was so extreme that it led them to reevaluate their faith and their adherence to their religious symbols. Twain had great expectations of the Holy Land that amounted to ignorance. He says that he had to unlearn so many things about Palestine before he committed his memory to the new realities that he encountered. The new realities are unpleasant epiphanies:

The commonest sagacity warns me that I ought to tell the customary pleasant lie, and say I tore myself reluctantly from every noted place in Palestine. Everybody tells that, but with as little ostentation as I may, I doubt the word of every he who tells it. I could take a dreadful oath that I have never heard any one of our forty pilgrims say anything of the sort, and they are as worthy and as sincerely devout as any that come here. They will say it when they get home, fast enough, but why should they not? They do not wish to array themselves against all the Lamartines and Grimesses in the world. It does not stand to reason that men are reluctant to leave places where the very life is almost badgered out of them by importunate swarms of beggars and peddlers who hang in strings to one's sleeves and coat-tails and shriek and shout in his ears and horrify his vision with the ghastly sores and malformation they exhibit. One is *glad* to get away. (1976: 359)

Herman Melville was trapped in his ambivalence and his search for faith when representing the Orient such as the cases of *Clarel* and *Moby Dick*, but he unfortunately does not refrain from displaying a similar prejudice, if only incidental, in one of the most culturally neutral of his novels, *Billy Budd*. Billy Budd in the novel is Christ-like, a peacemaker, a romantic hero and idol, and a character whom we admire for all the physical and spiritual beauty that he possesses. Billy is English by birth

century Western readers who are already conditioned to accept such phraseology without questioning.

The cases of Twain and Melville are not the only ones. The interest in the Orient was manifested in different ways. Washington Irving wrote *Life of Mohammad*, and the *Lives of Mahomet and His Successors* which are based on several misconceptions about the prophet and his life. Despite the fact that Irving demonstrates familiarity with Islam, the Quran and the prophet and his successors, he does not give credit to his knowledge of the Quran in his “Rip Van Winkle”—a short story whose plot is centered on Rip who sleeps in the Kaatskill mountains for 20 years and who, after waking up goes to his village confused and puzzled at his strange surroundings. In the postscript of the story Irving claims that he found the story among the manuscripts of a (fictitious) German historian by the name of Diedrich Knickerbocker when we know that the story is a typical imitation of the Quranic story “The People of the Cave”

Such prejudice and narrow stereotyping condoned and perpetrated by significant writers, critics and editors were to a great extent responsible for the xenophobic attitude of the 20th century. In the twentieth century stereotyping and prejudice increased to immeasurable levels especially after World War II which bequeathed the holocaust and its hegemonic consequences. One may not underestimate the impact of Twain’s stereotyping of Arabs because in *Innocents Abroad*, Twain’s expected humor is replaced with an ethnocentric attitude mixed with lack of religious tolerance and unjustified antagonism.

Twain and the Question of Palestine

Mark Twain’s prejudice is generally pardoned by virtue of his humor especially that he does not spare any race of his mockery. What may not be pardoned is the prejudice in canonizing Twain. Twain’s “Concerning the Jew”, for example, is hardly heard of or anthologized, but certain chapters from the different works of Twain that mock Arabs are somewhat highlighted. *Innocents Abroad* became a very popular book; by the year 1910 more than half a million copies were sold (Obenzinger, 1997). Twain's xenophobic attitude towards Arabs and Muslims entailed

impartially critical of Jews but such episodes are seldom highlighted or canonized. Here is where our role as educators lies; we are invited to counter the hegemony of the American canon by restructuring it. Twain is one of the Major American writers that one cannot avoid including in any American canon. But we have to acquaint our students with what he says against and in favor of Arabs. The aim is, of course not to alienate Arab students from American literature, but to boost their appreciation by making it more appealing through fair presentations.

We do not know whether we should count on Twain's opinion which was highly impressionistic and aimed at mixing memory with humor. But even if we think that Twain was serious about his claims, the following excerpts deflate and debunk claims that examples from Twain's literature can be used to support Jewish claims. In his article "Concerning the Jews", Mark Twain cautioned the Sultan of Turkey of his time against the Zionist plots to occupy Palestine and take it from its indigenous people.

Speaking of concentration, Dr. Herzl has a clear insight into the value of that. Have you heard of his plan? He wishes to gather the Jews of the world together in Palestine, with a government of their own--under the suzerainty of the Sultan, I suppose. At the Convention of Berne, last year, there were delegates from everywhere, and the proposal was received with decided favour. I am not the Sultan, and I am not objecting; but if that concentration of the cunningest brains in the world were going to be made in a free country (bar Scotland), I think it would be politic to stop it. It will not be well to let that race find out its strength. If the horses knew theirs, we should not ride any more.

(Twain, retrieved on 12/3/2010 from: <http://www.twainweb.net/filelist/jews.html>)

In *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, Twain was more explicit in his refusal to accept giving Palestine to the Jews. Again in his known humorist style and in a dialogue between Tom Sawyer, on the one hand and Huck and Jim on the other, Tom defines the crusade to Huck and Jim as the attempt

of Christians and Jews to take the Holy Land from the “paynim” (None Jews; Muslims).

- "A crusade is a war to recover the Holy Land from the paynim."
- "Which Holy Land?"
- "Why, the Holy Land--there ain't but one."
- "What do we want of it?"
- "Why, can't you understand? It's in the hands of the paynim, and it's our duty to take it away from them."
- "How did we come to let them git hold of it?"
- "We didn't come to let them git hold of it. They always had it."
- "Why, Tom, then it must belong to them, don't it?"
- "Why of course it does. Who said it didn't?"

I studied over it, but couldn't seem to git at the right of it, no way.

- I says: "It's too many for me, Tom Sawyer. If I had a farm and it was mine, and another person wanted it, would it be right for him to--"
- "Oh, shucks! you don't know enough to come in when it rains, Huck Finn. It ain't a farm, it's entirely different. You see, it's like this. They own the land, just the mere land, and that's all they DO own; but it was our folks, our Jews and Christians, that made it holy, and so they haven't any business to be there defiling it. It's a shame, and we ought not to stand it a minute. We ought to march against them and take it away from them."
- "Why, it does seem to me it's the most mixed-up thing I ever see! Now, if I had a farm and another person--"
- "Don't I tell you it hasn't got anything to do with farming? Farming is business, just common low-down business: that's all it is, it's all you can say for it; but this is higher, this is religious, and totally different."

- "Religious to go and take the land away from people that owns it?"
- "Certainly; it's always been considered so."

Jim he shook his head, and says

"Mars Tom, I reckon dey's a mistake about it somers--dey mos' sholy is. I's religious myself, en I knows plenty religious people, but I hain't run across none dat acts like dat."

It made Tom hot, and he says

"Well, it's enough to make a body sick, such mullet-headed ignorance! If either of you'd read anything about history, you'd know that Richard Cur de Loon, and the Pope, and Godfrey de Bulleyn, and lots more of the most noble-hearted and pious people in the world, hacked and hammered at the paynims for more than two hundred years trying to take their land away from them, and swum neck-deep in blood the whole time--and yet here's a couple of sap-headed country yahoos out in the backwoods of Missouri setting themselves up to know more about the rights and wrongs of it than they did!"

(Twain, 1982, 6-7)

A fair canon of American literature may include works of Mark Twain the likes of the above. Twain's "Concerning the Jews" and *Tom Sawyer Abroad* are rarely anthologized. It is not fair for our students to be left to be fed with biased information about American literature when it is possible for us to acquaint them with the two sides of the debate.

Moderate Voices

There were moderate voices in 19th century American literature that were impartial in the undertaking of social and political issues. Among these were the American transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. They spoke against the war in Mexico and against slavery. Emerson advocated originality, self-reliance and simplicity urging American people to imitate and embrace nature since it connotes happiness equality and charm. Emerson, himself an ex-

Students need to know that alongside the optimistic voices of the 19th century writers there are some less optimistic ones that are now exuberantly humorous the likes of Mark Twain, now pessimistically idiosyncratic the likes of the two American giants of the American Renaissance, Nathaniel Hawthorn and Herman Melville. They need to know that some of the 19th century American writers share condescending and xenophobic attitudes towards foreigners and, particularly the Orientals.

Students also need to know that there are some shameful parts in American history that cannot be overlooked such as the blight of the Native Americans and Afro-Americans and the Hiroshima catastrophe, and that these parts are usually obliterated either intentionally or unintentionally from the textbooks of the young generation and lapse in the memory of adults due to time factors.

In restructuring a fair American canon, we are invited to defy the hegemony of the Holocaust as a theme that has been dominating the minds of scholars, creative writers and students of literature during the last century. In doing so we are not, by any means, undermining the horror of the Holocaust, nor are we calling for ignoring it as a phenomenon that is both shocking and horrifying. Rather, we are asking for some acknowledgement of other similar genocides in our modern history that are being ignored even when they are treated in marvelous literary texts by Arab American writers in general. But how can we proceed in constructing our new canon?

Our endeavors to create a canon may not be separatist in nature; we do not aim at alienating our students from world culture and intimacy. We want our students to be participants in a world culture that is dominated by tolerance, peace, democracy, cooperation and mutual understanding. We like our students to be brought up on the values of accepting others without compromising their ideals or their national aspirations. Our endeavors are guided and illuminated by calls such as that of Henry Gates:

Once a canon with the above features is established, it would be suitable for students of all cultures including the citizens of the United States. If Americans learn to be fair and if they are able to live together despite the cultural differences, why can not the whole world find peace in the same way and by adopting the same Jeffersonian concepts and ideals of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?”

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