

Amin Nash
M.A. – English
Claremont Graduate University

Reading the Arab in American Literature: Imagery in Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* and
F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

My study primarily looks at what Edward Said refers to a “static imagery” of the Arab, which is a fixed assumption of the Arab identity through the Western lens. The central issue I try to tackle is the problem of inclusion of an “appropriate” Arab identity, and I try to prove this issue by looking at cultural and historic assumptions deriving from the metaphoric imagery within the novels *The Innocents Abroad* and *The Great Gatsby*, in respect, reflective of American culture during the 1890's and 1920's.

The initial approach to this question is by analyzing the first-person narrations of both *The Innocents Abroad* and *The Great Gatsby* via the language imbued in explaining the minority: that is, I looked to see how did the narrators of Twain and Fitzgerald describe minority cultures and race during their respective times. I tried to adapt these angles with the critical analysis from Edward Said's *Orientalism* as well as essays by Louise Cainkar, Michelle Hartman, and Evelyn Alsultany in *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*.

These critiques allowed me to investigate the primary problem exposed by Twain and Fitzgerald in that the context of the Arab is one that has been based on assumed imageries and allegories without any significant pedagogical challenges from Western scholars.

My implications to this study is to argue that Arab Americans have been essential part of society and culture, but it has been one under a context of subjectivity and observation instead of cultural engagement. I wish to promote an engagement with Arab American scholars and challenge these “assumed” images that appear in historic culture. I also wish to argue that Arab American and ethnic studies need to promote an investigation into philological epistemologies, as literature provides an equal window into history and society just as much as the social sciences and qualitative investigations supply.