

THE INTELLECTUAL WITH A MANDATE

If Said's lifelong intellectual work has been a labor of love, excruciation, delicacy, deliberation, asceticism, pride, worry, commitment, and hope—and I think it exhibits such pressures all across its verbal landscape—it also has achieved tangible results in the world that few university intellectuals aspire to or accomplish.

—Jim Merod, “*Sublime Lyrical Abstractions of Said*,” 119.

The story of Edward Said's life reads like a fairy tale. The son of a prosperous Palestinian American businessman who headed an office equipment company and published books, by the time he graduated from Princeton, Said had already studied at Harvard and passed all examinations as a senior with the highest average in Mount Hermon School (Massachusetts) (Nairn, 1997: 169). A scion of the Arab *haute bourgeoisie*, Said is a tireless dissident figure but a learned entrepreneur, a sort of *homme de lettres* destined to become lord mayor of literary New York through the judicious deployment of quick-witted prose and decisive critical dicta. From *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975) to *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999), he has disguised himself in what Virginia Woolf once termed a “four-piece suit,” while arming himself with a remarkable talent and a mordant irony; accurate insights and revealing detail are his speciality. At the same time, to many, he is a profoundly hybrid writer who is never shy about his aspirations. Indeed, if Said resembles anyone, in his clean, combative prose and unfeigned heart, it is Raymond Williams.¹ And whereas Williams had a sense of social and emotional nuance, Said starts where society ends. Williams, in fact, was so close to his world that he was content merely to record it; Said, by contrast, continues to peel the surface or الظاهر (the outside) of any given text—what might be considered its once-and-for-all sense uttered for and during a specific occasion as opposed to its hidden meanings الباطن (the inside) (1983: 35). In the process,

he does not try to satisfy our expectations; he simply takes us into the heart of the matter and—caught in his strange exile (he seems to live in constant displacement)—makes fewer compromises than any cultural critic around, except perhaps for Terry Eagleton.² If we consider the sheer weight of his ambitions, it seems that Tolstoy might almost have been running interference for him in *War and Peace*: “One step beyond the boundary line, which resembles the line dividing the living from the dead, lies uncertainty, suffering and death. . . . You fear and yet long to cross that line” (1950: 97). In this, he may show an inkling that Tolstoy’s idea of causation is not the same as his. That Said’s stance is so much more is a judgment that should be defended against simpler, more obviously appealing defenses of the oppressed, against sympathetic denials of the claim that they have often contributed to their own oppression.

In the days when Said was growing up, European genteel tradition held sway over all Cairo. Much of the city was captive to Western high art: an annual opera and/or ballet season; recitals; concerts by the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics; regular visits of La Comédie Française and the Old Vic; all the latest American, French, and British films; cultural programs sponsored by the British Council and its continental equivalents (*Reflections on Exile*, 2000). Culturally speaking, then, he was the unfortunate, unwilling heir of European imperialism: the building of the empire had been sanitized for him by his schoolbooks, extracurricular activities, teachers, and language. Said wrote:

The moment one became a student at VC one was given the school handbook, a series of regulations governing every aspect of school life—the kind of uniform we were to wear, what equipment was needed for sports, the dates of school holidays, bus schedules and so on. But the school’s first rule, emblazoned on the opening page of the handbook, read: “English is the language of the school; students caught speaking any other language will be punished” (*Out of Place*, 1998: 3).

The factual fog was pretty thick. He knew that Napoleon Bonaparte led the first French expedition in 1798. This was enough to whet the French appetite for empire: Paris dispatched the army to Egypt, and an expedition turned into conquest. Later, in secondary schools run by the British, even the most liberal history masters underplayed the gruesome details of that and other conquests that followed as they evolved into full-scale colonization. Textbooks were apologetic and pious: on the one hand, the White European and American men behaved atrociously; on the other hand, roads and hospitals provided the natives with. . . . Well, even Marx saw some positive aspects to colonialism. If it could be “constructive” as well as “destructive” in India, why not in Egypt or anywhere else in the colonies?

In this context of Western high art on the one hand and imperialism on the other, it is quite extraordinary to come upon someone like Said, who, even though schooled in the foreign masters' classroom, remains fearlessly Arab at heart, right down to his scorn for the West and of some of its values. Of his relationship with Cairo's Victoria College, the supposed "Eton of the Middle East," Said merely notes that "it was a really mongrel atmosphere. . . . All the masters were English, and they treated us with contempt. . . . It was the last days of the British presence in Egypt and they were the last remnants of this rather scraggly empire."³ Against this turbulent background, the British were free to apply their authority as they wished. Said confides to Eleanor Wachtel that "prefects in those schools were allowed the privileges of masters. There was a lot of beating, caning. I got caned the first day I was in school for talking in prayers or something equally horrendous" (Wachtel, 1977: 77). In the end, he found little difficulties in meeting the West on its own turf. Today he stands as one of a select band of superstar academic literary critics in the United States (The others are Stephen Greenblatt, Stanley Fish, Henry Louis Gates, Cornel West, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak).

Said is the hero of quite another fairy tale—the kind of quest-romance in which the only son in a family of seven sets out as a traveler, rooted nowhere and moving endlessly on in order to disprove the illusion of home, seeking a prize he can barely define. Home for him is a metaphysical place—a meditation on space, a sermon on our estrangement. "Which country?" he once asked, and replied: "I've never felt that I belonged exclusively to one country, nor have I been able to identify 'patriotically' with any. . . . Thinking affectionately about home is all I'll go along with."⁴ Yet the fact remains that in recent years his traveling has assumed more the aspect of a quest, and while remaining an observer, he is an increasingly shrewd witness. As he grows older, his pointed comments on literature, politics, music, theory, and culture acquire a greater sense of moral urgency, and his sympathy for embattled peoples including his own has turned into a voluble indignation on their behalf. In recent years, the focus of this anger has been aimed at the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leadership. Said has always opposed injustice (the result, perhaps, of being the single skeptic in a Middle Eastern household of dictators and potentates, kings and sultans); and he does not conceal his frustration and disappointment.

I regard Yasser Arafat as a Pétain figure who has taken advantage of his people's exhaustion and kept himself in power by conceding virtually everything significant about our political and human rights. What he did after he came to Gaza in July 1994 has worsened the effects of the twenty-nine-year occupation (which still continues), and over months I have reminded my readers, of whom he seems to have been one, that cronyism,

The questions that most preoccupy those who take him seriously can therefore be put as follows: What made Said, the Palestinian American intellectual possible? What are the enabling conditions for this consummate intellectual, active on many fronts, as *agent provocateur*? These are typically anti-Saidian questions. Said, who created the intellectual, not as a Bohemian or a café philosopher, but as a figure representing many different kinds of concerns and constituencies, continues to assert his capacity for exhaustive knowledge of his own truth, as a citizen and as an intellectual. In doing so, he rules out, as reductive, any attempt to circumscribe the uncircumscribable, to classify the unclassifiable. More important, one wants to know: What if Said were only the ideologist of the intellectuals, confident that they would recognize themselves in the image he reflects back to them, that of the dissident intellectual, and at the same time someone of sufficient weight, practical exposure, and political acumen to be qualified to travel the world as an emissary for justice? What if Said, who reigns supreme, were dominated by what he dominates? What if the free intellectual were actually the most determinate of intellectuals, unaware as he is that the will to power attaching to his social position lies precisely in the illusion of the absence of will to power? Why does Said think serious damage has been done to the communication of the truth and to the expression of opinion? But before I deal with these issues, I want to discuss how Said has compiled a hermeneutics that attends to the stark violence and Manichean oppositions of imperialism (American in particular) by teasing out for examination the hesitations and uncertainties that colonialism has produced.

I

It is too often the case that the dark smolderings of the most impassioned artist are rewarded primarily by the pale fire of scholarship, and the treatment of Said by a number of essayists proves him no exception to this rule. While the subject matter of Michael Sprinker's meticulously researched *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (1992) is enthralling, the interview with Said appended to the book tells us about the complexity of the man. The interviewers have scrupulously accumulated some fascinating details that illuminate for us the writer's life from his early days in Jerusalem and Cairo to his writing practices, from his infamous quarrels with his critics to the symptoms signaling the onset of his struggle with leukemia, but never manage to shape what seems like clinical data into a lively portrait. To be sure, the raw material the essayists have to work with is often so electrifyingly interesting that this book is a good read, at times even compelling. It ends with this insight: "I still feel," Said tells Jennifer Wicke and Michael Sprinker, "even with regard to the Palestinian movement, and certainly in the context in America in which I find myself—I still feel, finally, somehow *misplaced*." But this is not all. The interview as a whole has a narrative coherence that others lack. Said confides by way of explanation: "I don't feel that I really have found or can ever find

a solid, unchanging mode in which to work. For me it's too shifting. That's a tremendous limitation, but one I'll have to live with" (Sprinker, 1992: 264). The upshot is that Edward Said plays a uniquely influential role in American intellectual life. Undaunted by normal constraints of time and energy, he simultaneously pursues three consuming careers, as a literary critic, political gadfly, and accomplished musician. Remarkably, he also teaches English, writes monumental books of cultural history (*Orientalism* was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award), and helps to salvage the rich but dying *تراث* (heritage) of an oppressed homeland—namely, Palestine, where two-thirds of the population live below the poverty level of two dollars a day.⁶ In none of these realms does he make any concessions to political correctness or literary fashion.

In a period that sees a steady decline of the Left and an almost unanimous acceptance of market capitalism, Said persists in calling himself a man of the Left, not because he expects "Leftocracy," in Wole Soyinka's celebrated formula, to revive and succeed but because he wants to reiterate the urgent moral need for a fairer, more fraternal, more egalitarian society. He expounds:

The net effect of "doing" Marxist criticism or writing at the present time is of course to declare political preference, but it is also to put oneself outside a great deal of things going on in the world, so to speak, and in other kinds of criticism.

Perhaps a simple way of expressing all this is to say that I have been more influenced by Marxists than by Marxism or any other "ism." If the arguments going on within twentieth-century Marxism have had any meaning, it is this: as much as any discourse, Marxism is in need of systematic decoding, demystifying, rigorous clarification.⁷

This is the point to note, because it is based on the same logic that Said himself employs by writing and being politically active. Over the years, he has attracted a youthful following drawn to his tough-minded idealism, itself traceable to such incorruptible forebears as C. L. R. James and Raymond Williams, leftist intellectuals of a more innocent and hopeful age.

Quite apart from his remarkable range of political essays, letters, travel writings, and literary/cultural analyses, most by now the fodder for endless deconstruction, Said is a figure of extraordinary fascination, even for those sitting on the opposite side of the fence from him. "He has become," Bruce Robbins observes, "a public figure in a sense that would apply to very few literary critics, however respected" (1994: 2). Paradoxically, then, to contemplate works by the author of that famous critical maxim "*contrapuntal* reading" is more often than not to marvel at the "life-rapidity"—another Lawrentian phrase—of the vehement "distinguished appearance . . . [of the] . . . well-tailored" artist himself. Indeed, one might say of Said, as Keats said of Shakespeare, that he "leads a life of Allegory.

His works are the comment on it.” (1992: 251). Except that Said transmutes Shakespeare, by contrast, into an avatar of his own antipathies toward the “State.”

To the critic, Said’s almost allegorical charisma is of special interest because both his popular and critical reputation have fluctuated dramatically since 1967, when the entire map of the Arab world changed. For the first time, Israel, which had been largely confined to the small boundaries of the 1948 state, had overflowed into Jordan, taking the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai desert and the Golan Heights. It came to be known as the النكبة (1967 Defeat) for it marked both a crushing defeat for the Arabs and a huge disaster in their Realpolitik. For Said, however, 1967 had one salutary effect: it heralded new beginnings.

I remained in New York and continued teaching, but beginning in 1968 I started to think, write, and travel as someone who felt himself to be directly involved in the renaissance of Palestinian life and politics. Those of us who were concerned sought each other out across the oceans and despite years of silence. On the cultural and intellectual level, the appearance of an organized Palestinian movement of resistance against the Israeli occupation began as a critique of traditional Arab nationalism whose ruins were strewn about the battlefields of 1969. Not only did Palestinian men and women take up arms on their own behalf for the first time, but they were part of a national experience that claimed primacy in modern Arab discourse by virtue of openness, honesty, realism. We were the first Arabs who at the grass-roots level—and not because a colonel or king commanded us—started a movement to repossess a land and a history that had been wrested from us (*The Politics of Dispossession*, 1994: xv).

The whole idea of being an Arab and then beginning to discover for himself what that meant, as a Palestinian, all really came to the fore in 1968. “That was,” Said continues, “the great explosion and it had a tremendous effect on my psychological and even intellectual processes because I discovered then that I had to rethink my life and my identity, even though it had been so sheltered and built up in this completely artificial way. I had to rethink it from the start and that was a process that really is continuing. It hasn’t ended for me” (Ibid., 43). In some respects, indeed, the heart of the matter is that an author has a self out of which he or she writes, a private self, a self that no one sees and that he or she keeps jealously to himself or herself unless he or she chooses to write about it. It is a self, by definition, very different from his public face, just as my face, lost in this sentence, is different from the one I put on as soon as someone enters the room. In 1968 Said recovered his other self. Yet even those authors who like him know how to reclaim their identity become its victims. Too often, reality cannot keep pace with the imagination. To be sure, the embattled author of *Orientalism* is not

alone among writers in having been labeled a Palestinian polemicist, an anti-Western and anti-Semite, an elitist (and no doubt in a range of other formulations it would be better not to recall), a paradigmatic bad boy. And that Said has been at one time or another, in one way or another, most of these things, besides being in some sense “*un-English*,” “*un-American*,” “*un-Western*,” is not irrelevant to any discussion of his long-term ascendancy as a man of letters. As the appearance of a number of essays and books attests, he continues to enthral readers and writers alike. Perhaps it is precisely his intellectual as well as his political incorrectness that intrigues us; perhaps—as scholars of his life along with his art—we are bemused, even bewitched, by the ways he *does not* fit into our current systems of interpretation. He remains “out of place,” as he aptly put it in his memoir (*Out of Place*, 1999: iv).

Said is the critic of the present in what has become a kind of cultural afterword, an era of postmodernity. He is the godfather of the discipline called “post-colonial theory and practice” in an age when late capitalism is pervaded with spectacular crises and catastrophies: world wars and revolutions, including counter-revolutions (the failure of the socialist projects in the former Soviet Union and China, among others), tribal warfare, the rise of nationalism. Said is also the priest of spontaneity in an era of irony and parody; the acolyte of intuition, of blood wisdom, of Sufi-like “lappings” from consciousness—the impassioned enemy of wholesale knowledge—in a thought-tormented, digitized, hypertextual, capital-driven *début du siècle*. And most important of all, he is the paradigm of authorial energy, the proponent of authorial *authority*, in an age when that mystical being once known as the “author” has sickened, failed, faded, been pronounced dead, and been buried with considerable deconstructive fanfare. It is what Žižek, writing about the postmodern superego, calls the “world turned upside down” (1999: 3). As we all know, postmodernism is a series of arguments, not a way of life or a recipe for action.

It could be said that I have summarized here the negative and unpleasant features of postmodernism, without mentioning the well-nigh irrepressible virtues of survival and resistance that characterize the various communities of authors. This is because I want to emphasize that the absence of a historical consciousness or collective memory is no longer tenable. What is decisive is the way historical and humanistic discourses are fashioned—either to reproduce hegemonic racial politics or to subvert it. Since I have already dealt with *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, I now want to reflect on the scholarly mapping of the Said *story*. To do so is definitely to avoid postmodernist indeterminacy and aporia and to emphasize instead the historical determinations of the subaltern’s passage from an intransitive to a transitive consciousness on the way to full awareness. The pivotal meditation between one stage and another is praxis, the authentic union of action and reflection.

In his insightful *Letters to Cristina*, Paulo Freire reads the world as an integration of multiple objects and events in social existence. This dialectical epistemol-

ogy synthesizes object and subject, means (technique) and ends (value): "In the education and training of a plumber, I cannot separate," he observes, "except for didactic purposes, the technical knowledge one needs to be part of the polis, the political knowledge that raises issues of power and clarifies the contradictory relationships among social classes in the city" (1996: 115). Ethics, pedagogy, and politics are joined in the practice of socially accountable freedom. In this, Freire echoes Gramsci's elevation of human work as the fundamental educational principle that can equip every citizen with the skills of governing:

The discovery that the relations between the social and natural orders are mediated by work, by man's theoretical and practical activity, creates the first elements of an intuition of the world free from all magic and superstition. It provides a basis for the subsequent development of an historical, dialectical conception of the world, which understands movement and change, which appreciates the sum of effort and sacrifice which the present has cost the past and which the future is costing the present, and which conceives the contemporary world as a synthesis of the past, of all past generations, which projects itself into the future (Gramsci, 1978: 52).

Instead of exacerbating the fragmented, schizophrenic condition of the subaltern, Said, like his *maitre à penser*, Gramsci, employs a radical critique of the ideological mechanisms (schooling being one of the most crucial) that reduce the hybrid, exotic "Other" to repetition or silence. In this enterprise, he charts the limits of the possible on the uncertainty of what is practical, committed to challenging a Euro-American hegemony "forged in the crucible of patriarchy and white supremacy" (McLaren, 1995: 34). Thinking about the West and its intellectual rapacity Said finds it impossible to return to clarifying first principles.

II

It is doubly fitting that some of the fairest words on Said are those by Michael Sprinker himself, praising Said's intellectual legacy: "No single volume can do full justice to the rich and voluminous treasure of Edward Said's intellectual endeavor. [*Edward Said: A Critical Reader*] is an interim balance sheet drawn up to assess a career whose future may hold even more brilliant accomplishments than those to date" (1992: 4). In another no less handsome tribute, introducing Edward Said in 1986 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, Salman Rushdie announced that Said "reads the world as closely as he reads books" (1991: 166). Orphaned by Israel's annexation of what was Palestine, Said is the minority Christian whose fate has become nomadic because it cannot accommodate itself to the exclusionism that the Christians share with other minorities in the Cairo-Jerusalem-Beirut triangle. That process of instability is summarized in the following excerpt:

I didn't spend a huge amount of time in Palestine or, for that matter, anywhere really, we were always on the move. We would spend part of the year in Egypt, part of the year in Palestine and another part of the year in Lebanon where we had a summer house. In addition to the fact that my father had American citizenship, and I was by inheritance therefore American and Palestinian at the same time, I was living in Egypt and I wasn't Egyptian. I, too, was this strange composite (1977: 75).

In 1948, Said's family moved to Cairo, "a city of innumerable adjustments and accommodations made over time; despite an equal number of provocations and challenges that might have pulled it apart" ("Cairo and Alexandria," 1990: 3). But Cairo proved to be *not* the place; in fact, the Saids never belonged there in the true sense of the word, even though they were, and remained, close to the city. In 1963, the Saids relocated to Lebanon where they lived the rest of their lives.

Said has undoubtedly dominated his generation of cultural critics and has no successor. Those victims of their adolescent dreams who are now canvassing to succeed him as the preeminent Third World intellectual, fail to see that the historical and structural conditions that made a Said possible are now disappearing. The pressures of globalism and professionalism, governmental bureaucracy and the glittering prizes of the media, the cultural goods market and consumerism are combining to reduce the autonomy of the figure of the intellectual. They are threatening what is perhaps the rarest and most precious element in the Saidian model and the element most truly antithetical to traditional attitudes of mind—namely, the refusal of worldly power and privilege and the affirmation of the strictly intellectual daring of saying *no* to all its airs and graces, charms, and witcheries. Said sums up the argument thus:

Several times . . . I have been asked by the media to be a paid consultant. This I have refused to do, simply because it meant being confined to one television station or journal, and confined also to the going political language and conceptual framework of that outlet. Similarly I have never had any interest in paid consultancies to or for the government, where you would have no idea of what use your ideas might later be put to. Secondly, delivering knowledge directly for a fee is very different if, on the one hand, a university asks you to give a public lecture or if, on the other, you are asked to speak only to a small and closed circle of officials. That seems very obvious to me, so I have always welcomed university lectures and always turned down the others. And, thirdly, to get more political, whenever I have been asked for help by a Palestinian group, or by a South African university to visit and to speak against apartheid and for academic freedom, I have routinely accepted (*Representation of the Intellectual*, 1994: 87).

In this sense, Said echoes Sartre, who went so far as to refuse *La Légion d'honneur* given to him by the then President de Gaulle, the Nobel Prize or to enter *Le Collège de France* or any other *grande école*, maintaining that a writer should not be turned into a monument.⁸

Or, to put it another way, it is the intellectual's intention and method as scholar and critic to resist the lures of power that other intellectuals have consistently side-stepped or simply embraced with open arms. Said makes the point with force.

Politics is everywhere; there can be no escape into the realms of pure art and thought or, for that matter, into the realm of disinterested objectivity or transcendental theory. Intellectuals are *of* their time, herded along by the mass politics of representations embodied by the information or media industry, capable of resisting those only by disputing the images, official narratives, justifications of power circulated by an increasingly powerful media—and not only media but whole trends of thought that maintain the status quo, keep things within an acceptable and sanctioned perspective on actuality—by providing what Mills calls unmaskings or alternative versions in which to the best of one's ability the intellectual tries to tell the truth (Ibid., 21–22).

While Said reads writers in order to voyage toward community, his critics harp on about a writer who is difficult to reconcile with what is known of his life. He is complex. Anyone who tries to describe him finds himself stringing together a number of seemingly incompatible labels and phrases. He is a Protestant, Palestinian Arab whose father served in the American army during World War I. An academic who has lived in the United States for the past fifty years, Said is also a political activist, yet he mistrusts nationalism, criticizes Arab dictators, and defends Salman Rushdie. A professor of English and comparative literature, a talented pianist and music critic for *The Nation*, Said teaches us to look below the surface so that we may discover the folly of a Bernard Lewis or a Daniel Pipes, who have traditionally tended to imagine the rest of the world as a checkerboard sprawl of underworld sinners. He can, in fact, be seen to be spinning out a vision, a vision of how literature can change lives, and vice versa. Thus the dialectic goes on, as Said seeks out a course between traditional conventions and cutting-edge clichés. On the one hand, he is an omnivorous intellectual whose writing spins effortlessly from *Aida* to poststructuralism to Tayib Salih (as a post-modern Conrad); on the other hand, he is a man of the people seeking a literature in which abstract ideas are as beside the point as they are in lovers' talk or prayer. Sprinker sums up the point with epigrammatic forcefulness: "We are far from having seen the end of the 'Said phenomenon'" (1992: 4). This is his verdict in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*. It is not for me to agree or disagree with the

finding; I must take the verdict for what it is, that is, an indisputable *social fact*, and to endeavor to account for it, to make it intelligible.

III

Much the best way to convey appreciation of Said's rousing and combative critique is to be aware of his darting, brash, and unsparing wit. It shines brilliantly from the pages of his books, in learned journals and periodicals like *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *London Review of Books*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *الحياة*, week after week. But few people have the courage to accumulate enemies the way Said has. Starting with the political leaders, whom he twists remorselessly, he has been on the wrong side of the entire U.S. establishment, of *The New Republic*, of *Commentary*, of the Ajamis, the Lewises, the Pipes, the Makias, the Safires, the Huntingtons, the Lipmans, of nearly every journalist of note, Left, Right, and Center, of the *Lehrer Report*, of most academics, and of all TV networks, of the rich and the famous, of the State Department, the military, of Israel, the Jewish League, of Kissinger, Mubarak, Arafat, and many other Arab and non-Arab leaders. Instinctive suspicion of authority has been his dominant trait as a writer, and books such as *Orientalism*, *Culture and Imperialism*, and *Out of Place* miss no opportunity for settling accounts with the powerful, great and small: Miss Clark, a teacher who sided against him at the Cairo School for American Children; Michael Chalhoub, head boy at Victoria College, a dashing and utterly sadistic older student who grew up to be famous as Omar Sharif; Harry Truman, who had the effrontery to favor the establishment of a Jewish homeland; Jim Murray, a counselor at Camp Maranacook in Maine, who upbraided young Edward for sneaking an extra hot dog at a cookout; Eleanor Roosevelt, who excluded the Palestinian refugees from her wide embrace; Martin Luther King Jr., for expressing too great a satisfaction at the outcome of the Six-Day War; Sartre for siding with the Jewish State and ignoring the Palestinian quest; I. A. Richards, who had the bad grace to lose his marbles before Said arrived at Harvard for graduate school—all these get their due.

There is, however, another side to the Edward persona, and since it is an essential characteristic of what distinguishes Said in the United States from so many intellectuals, columnists, pundits, and media personalities, it should be spelled out: he is a committed intellectual, not simply a man of letters or a witty writer. It is difficult to imagine an intellectual today sounding an equally electrifying call to justice. In the Anglo-American world, the very word *intellectual* arouses among the general public at best a faint sense of irony. Outrage has otherwise retreated to the academy, whose alchemy produces professors with transgressive discourses. I think there is something to be learned from Said's stance on restoring honor to the profession of the engaged intellectual as represented by Zola, Russell, and Sartre before him and by the late Pierre Bourdieu. Said has

the intellectual's restlessness, an eager erudition, a delightfully fresh and innovative style, a learned knowledge of history, and a commitment to social change. The single thing one cannot get from him, however, is a blueprint or a master theory. The subordination he critiques is not an object, or in the strict Marxist sense an ideology, but a collection of modes of deceit and cruelty presided over by experts in manipulation. Against these people, Said's method is the essay, the short article, the biting phrase: hit-and-run tactics rather than a war of position.

Said, has, it should be added, his softer side, which emerges occasionally in commendatory remarks about family, friends, figures of stoic calm and moral truthfulness (Eqbal Ahmad), poetry (Mahmoud Darwish), politics (Noam Chomsky), music (Glenn Gould), literature (Raymond Williams), friendship (Pierre Bourdieu and Ibrahim Abu Lughod). Paying homage to Bourdieu, he writes:

I was always struck by his unassuming manner, and the cordiality of his regard for a potential friend and ally. Always serious, he was never solemn, and quite charmingly he rarely resisted the chance to say something witty or deflating. He never posed or took on airs. Directness and sincerity were the hallmarks of his intellectual presence, even though he could be scathingly ironic in his attacks on imposture and fraud (2002: 1).

There is nothing pro forma about the feelings of affection, admiration, and kindness Said has for his friends. As the passage above shows, he gratefully acknowledges individual talent and generosity of heart when he sees them in a person as humane, warm, and inspiring as Bourdieu.

Edward Said may be the last of a special breed of wide-ranging literary-political-aesthetic New York intellectuals, who are grouped around *Raritan*, one of America's most prestigious and influential voices of high culture. Its special tenor is provided by a small group of regular contributors. They include avant-garde intellectuals such as Marina Warner, Jane Miller, David Bromwich, Michael Fried, Stanley Cavell, Frank Kermode, George Kateb. However, no one has been more relentless in his analyses of topics varying from literature to history, politics to music, and none more celebrated of the group than Said, an early comer and postmodern savage. In a sense, he epitomizes the portrait Irving Howe drew of the New York intellectual in the 1950s. The New York intellectual "[has] a fondness for ideological speculation; [he] write[s] literary criticism with a strong social emphasis; [he] revel[s] in polemic; [he] strive[s] self-consciously to be 'brilliant'" (1979: 211). Said lives up to the expectations of the New York intellectual that Howe describes. In a way, these expectations could be seen in the two conflicting impulses of his own literary career. As I indicated in my introduction there are at least three Saids. For my purpose here, I want to consider two of the three. One is a literary scholar and critic, cultivated, knowledgeable, urbane, and, despite his interest in the literature of the Third World, a traditionalist in taste.

The other is a spokesman for the Palestinian cause and an adherent of the PLO for about two decades, polemical and sometimes, as happens in political disputes, strident. There is not necessarily a contradiction here, it ought to be possible for one person to pursue two or even three or more callings. But in the bruising course of actuality, it is often hard to avoid confusion and the blurrings of roles (Howe, 1994).

On the one hand Said strives for a tone of high moral seriousness and an elevated language that earlier legitimized his ambition to be accepted as a significant critic. On the other hand, he wants to avoid academic stuffiness and to preserve elements of the blunt style of polemic, sardonic, fast-paced, at times merciless criticism—that he has mastered in the sectarian alcoves of New York City. I cite two examples to elucidate. The first from *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, an essay that delves heavily into poststructuralism language games, pastiche, fragmentation, textuality, and difference; the second aimed at Russell Jacoby for his narrow and chauvinistic view of American culture that does not take account of the interesting role played by ethnic, nonnative intellectuals who have lived and worked in the country.

For in isolating *beginnings* as a subject of study my whole attempt was precisely to set a beginning off as *rational* and *enabling*, and far from being principally interested in logical failures and, by extension, ahistorical absurdities, I was trying to describe the immense effort that goes into historical retrospection as it set out to describe things from the beginning, *in history* (1985: xi–xii).

Today, according to Jacoby, whose book [*The Last Intellectuals*] has been much celebrated by the Right (even though he is himself a sort of Left intellectual), intellectuals are highly specialized, jargon-mongering academicians, who eschew public debate for the cushy world of highly-paid and insulated academic discourse. The curious thing about Jacoby's book is that he not only excludes non-native-born Americans from his assessment (as if you can't be born in Ireland or Pakistan and still become an American intellectual), but also non-literary critics, and people who, while part of the Academy, still function outside it as public figures—Chomsky, for instance, or Christopher Lasch . . . , José Martí, C. L. R. James, Alexander Cockburn and others (“Alexander the Brilliant,” 1988: 17).

This association of apparent opposites—poised and meditative on the one hand and polemical and combative on the other—intrigues Said. The two Saids alternate and sometimes fuse throughout his *oeuvre*, even if at times they seem a little uncomfortable with one another. This is pertinent, but it would be more so had Said acknowledged that the values he espouses are essentially those of the Enlightenment, a historical contribution of the very West that he seeks to censure.

Notwithstanding his reflexivity, I find Said's limitations much less severe than the anarchy of his *bien pensant* Noam Chomsky with whom he claims affinity. Said's espousal of the idea of "liberation" following independence in those territories that were once under Western tutelage seems attractive in this time of soured expectations. It presents a nourishing and serviceable example, despite his apparent conversion to a merely discursive articulation of Marxist theory, because he deals with institutions and concrete practices of domination, subordination, and racism within specific historical formations and plateaux. His sense of place, or misplacement and repertoires of cultural positions where identities are enunciated, is rooted in the reality of the Palestinian diaspora. Precisely because Said emphasizes the structural determinants of historical *un*-belonging, he cannot be associated with a ludic, performative post-age stamp obsessed with dismantling the intelligibility of modernity. Speaking of exile, he announces that it "is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss" (*Culture and Imperialism*, 1994: 336), a reality one cannot disagree with no matter how hard one tries.

Said's Marxism (or its articulatory version), his implicit compromise with the Left, refutes the metaphysics of liminality, the sterile formalism and aestheticism that can only reinforce the status quo in a saturated center. What is at stake in his counternarrative is the future—justice for the oppressed, equality for the deprived, liberation for the subaltern whether they be "Black in South Africa . . . , Asian in Europe . . . , Chicano in San Ysidro . . . , Palestinian in Israel . . . , Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal . . . , artist without gallery or portfolio . . . , pacifist in Bosnia," or "housewife alone on Saturday night in any neighborhood in any city" (San Juan Jr., 1998: 19). For Said, out of necessities and limited possibilities, oppressed people the world over must endeavor to shape a future freed from the nightmare of colonial history. Such endeavors are central, not marginal, to any attempt to renew humanist learning. He calls for a rupture of the "centrality of imperial culture," which has insinuated itself into the post-colonial claim to speak for the subordinate, who is languishing to find the stable and set his or her energy free. This is how he outlines his view:

A huge and remarkable adjustment in perspective and understanding is required to take account of the contribution to modernism of decolonization, resistance culture, and the literature of opposition to imperialism. Although the adjustment has still not fully taken place, there are good reasons for thinking that it has started. Many defenses of the West today are in fact defensive, as if to acknowledge that the old imperial ideas have been seriously challenged by the works, traditions, and cultures to which poets, scholars, political leaders from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean have contributed so largely. Moreover, what Foucault has called subjugated knowledges have erupted across the field once controlled, so to speak, by

the Judeo-Christian tradition; and those of us who live in the West have been deeply affected by the remarkable outpouring of first-rate literature and scholarship emanating from the post-colonial world, a locale no longer “one of the dark places of the earth” in Conrad’s famous description, but once again the site of vigorous cultural effort (*Culture and Imperialism*, 1994: 243).

Said knows that we are at the crossroads of tradition and modernity in the far-flung margins of the empire. Obviously this trope of a journey insinuates a meta-narrative biased against fixity and stasis, a “totalising” figure suspect to postcolonial theorists. But what is the alternative? For Said, mapping the contours of the recent past may help prefigure the shape of what is to come in the controversy over the internationalization of late capitalism, which, with the help of neoclassical economic theory, seeks to break down nation-state barriers (or what remains of them) to the encroachment of capital—in fact, the most widespread myth is that market forces released by uninhibited trade have made nation/nationality obsolete, residual, or inutile. One may ask: Are Japan, Germany, and the United States no longer enjoying nation-state sovereignties?

At this point, I can think of no better illustration of what Eqbal Ahmad says about the necessarily ethicopolitical function of the Third World intellectual than Said’s life-long engagement in the cultural and political transformation of the Third World consciousness, which presents itself as a complex of narratives juxtaposing movements of empowerment, resistance, rupture, and convergence. “Dedication to universalism in politics, culture, and aesthetics serves for Said as a counterpoint to sectarian options. It is a question, he once asked, of whether you enter history with open arms or a tight fist. The roots of his universalist beliefs lie, I think, in Arab civilization; in his upbringing in Jerusalem and Cairo; in the Western tradition of Enlightenment; and in the Palestinian experience” (Eqbal Ahmad, 1994: 19). There is no doubt that the Saidian mode of critical inquiry challenges the official paradigm that divides “us” from “them.” Its criterion of social practice unsettles the colonialist stereotype, made not to pause, always impelled to *further* action. In the process, Said deconstructs concepts such as “Arabs are rapacious” or “Blacks are lazy,” which have been constructed by the West over the past five hundred years. He has performed this operation of untwining by faithfully and generously acknowledging his predecessors, from C. L. R. James to Frantz Fanon, from Baldwin to Malcolm X. To be genuinely marginal, out of place, his own person and alive, is what drives Said forward.

IV

Contemporary emphasis on the participation of literature in the social matrix balks at acknowledging how important the essay remains as “a comparatively

short, investigative, radically skeptical form—the principal way in which to write criticism” (1983: 26). For Said, the essay is the antigenre that mimes the performance of the mind in solitary speech. In its normative form it deliberately strips away most social specification (age, location, sex, class, even race). In the meantime, the soul of the writer that is Said becomes a subject woven—more or less obviously—throughout the fabric of the subject of the essay itself. And if the essay can be encouraged to shed its penal associations, it can, paradoxically, suggest exactly the opposite: an enterprise taken up at leisure, a moment of peace, of the absence of strife, words set down by the writer in the solitude of his or her room, far from (or maybe because of) the pressure of the outside world, with its demands, its hatreds, and its rages. No one brings this aspect of the essay so to mind as does Said, who writes from the seclusion of his apartment in New York’s Upper West Side. But he writes in a troublesome period, a period torn apart by religious wars in the Middle East, distorted by fanaticism, the lineaments of which he dislikes intensely, and by nationalism, which can quite easily degenerate into chauvinism and xenophobia.

Said also writes in an America that is more and more fragmented. For despite the media’s unending stream of patriotic talk about “America,” one occasionally has a sense of the country’s immensity, its unmanageable extremes. “There is,” Said intones, “. . . a stratum of monotonous sameness in the country, of regimented, mass-produced uniformity, of a pervasive unchanging pallidness . . . , which communicates a tremendous loneliness and anonymity to be found in American life” (“Miami Twice,” 1987: 3). For Said, the nightmare of America today is the substitution of public relations for civil rights. It is the trend of not discussing serious issues and artificially imposing happy endings. If you have a problem, it must be *your* problem—everything is reduced to personal psychology. If you have a “dysfunctional psychology,” you are not allowed to suggest that it may, in fact, be a systemic problem. “Above all, [‘we’] cannot go on pretending that ‘we’ live in a world of our own,” he writes; “certainly, as Americans, our government is deployed literally all over the globe—militarily, politically, economically. So why do we suppose what we say and do is neutral, when in fact it is full of consequences for the rest of the human race?” (Said, 2002: 74). Said wants us to move beyond personal psychology in order to address and look for the expression of *different* kinds of human experience and to equip society so that it can begin to discuss the structures that determine the lives within it. He seems to be hinting that in the United States, with their highly sophisticated techniques, they intentionally keep people structurally illiterate—they are not interested in educating them about the structural forces that are shaping their lives. And that, of course, is the glory of capitalism—as long as you keep celebrating individuals, you can say that some people are lucky, and some people are not—whereas the fact that 12 percent of Americans own 78 percent of the wealth of the country may be a structural question, not just an accident (Hitchens, 1999).

Since the 1960s, we have seen the failure of the melting pot ideology, which suggested that different historical, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds could be subordinated to the larger ideology or social vision which is "America." This concept obviously did not work, paradoxically because the United States encourages a politics of contestation. (The recent Inspector Clouseaulike performance of Bush and his psychopathic team over President Chavez of Venezuela shows, perhaps paradoxically, that the confidence of the establishment in such methods has not yet been regained.) We saw this during the civil rights struggles, where the prevailing notion of the state was contested by a group that had been oppressed, marginalized, and largely forgotten. This was an attack on the concept that Black history could be disregarded and suppressed. The melting pot metaphor suggested that Blacks could put their history behind them and become part of the larger society. Of course, that did not happen. Blacks had to fight to change laws, social practices, patterns of perception, and ideological structures. Their struggle encouraged other marginalized voices—women, ethnic minorities, and subaltern groups, gays and lesbians—who are now fighting for their rights.

Said praises this America, the one he calls the "New America," which is a great deal less provincial and regimented than the "Old" one. Much of this is, of course, due to the emergence of a mass counterculture of the Left in the sixties, a counterculture whose affiliation with non-American currents of thought, "lifestyles of radical will," in Susan Sontag's phrase, has continued well beyond that now excoriated decade. When he describes this "New America" and its people, Said is really dealing with subjects such as ethnicity, education, the university, the curriculum, and more challenging ideas such as inequality, injustice, and racism, most of which seem to defy ordinary conceptions of what a nation is or what time and space are. Take the "empire within the empire" in Miami, for example, where there is a Cuban Miami, an Anglo Miami—a considerably less interesting place—and finally the "volcano that is Black Miami," seething with unsettled social and economic problems. In the end, Miami often turns out to be what David Rieff calls an "anthology"—a word suggesting coexistence but not unity (1987: 147).

Said gives examples of ghetto gatherings in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Miami and discusses how each minority plays its part. Miami stands at the pinnacle of massive migratory movements. It is, in Said's words, "a mirror city to Havana." In bringing their "old" lives with them, the new instant exiles also dislocate the previous inhabitants. Thus the more Miami comes to house Chicanos—London (Indians) or Paris (Arabs)—the more the process dislodges and discomforts the (White) American, English, and French population respectively. Hanif Kureishi, another no less dislocated writer, put it in mordant terms: "If someone says, 'You fuck off home, you Paki,' you have to laugh about it. The levels of irony—you would get lost in them" (Quoted in Wilson, 1994: 102). This stringent reality of the uprooted experiences is captured in an even more profound way by Homi Bhabha in the following passage.

I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in nations of others, becomes a time of gathering on the edge of “foreign” cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafés of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retrospectively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also the gathering of the people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statutes, immigration status—the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man (1990: 291).

For Said, there is now a precarious balance in American society between the so-called melting pot, with all its ideological, economic, and social appurtenances, and the disruptive flooding into the pot of new arrivals from abroad, whose purpose is to find prosperity and to form a functioning unit within America.

In New York City, for example, most of the fruit and vegetable shops are Korean, the news-stands Indian or Pakistani, hot-dog carts and small luncheonettes Greek, street pedlars Senegalese; a large population of Dominicans, Haitians, Ecuadorans and Jamaicans have made inroads into proletarian domains once populated by Blacks and Puerto Ricans, just as Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese children play the role once reserved for bright, upwardly-mobile and professionally-inclined Eastern European Jews (“Miami Twice,” 1987: 3).

There is, of course, value in pointing this reality out. New ages need new displacements, and writing on immigration, itself often, but not always, a function of America’s overseas policy intervention, is as urgent a task as critiquing the culture that receives the immigrants. This would not be the only time that Said influences the way we look at Western culture: the invention of typography alone, as Neil Postman writes in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, “created prose but made poetry into an exotic and élitist form of expression” (1985: 76–77). Karl Marx, no less a cultural figure, once pointed out that the *Iliad* would not have been composed the way it was after the invention of the printing press (1975: 23).

Said, however, is one who accepts the responsibilities of being a critic of cultures. “Were I to use one word consistently along with *criticism*,” he writes,

[i]t would be *oppositional*. If criticism is reducible neither to a doctrine nor to a political position on a particular question, and if it is to be in the world and self-aware simultaneously, then its identity is its difference from other cultural activities and from systems of thought or of method. In its suspicion of

totalising concepts, in its discontent with reified objects, in its impatience with guilds, special interests, imperialized fiefdoms, and orthodox habits of mind, criticism is most itself and, if the paradox can be tolerated, most like itself at the moment it starts turning into organized dogma (1983: 29).

Yet none of this is enough to suggest that Said wants to do away with America. As Joseph Maguire has noted, “cultures and peoples are responsive and active in the interpretation of the global flow of people, ideas, images and technologies” (1993: 310–11). Said, the last person anyone can call an apologist for cultural imperialism, makes the same point (and with a sly allusion to Marx and Engels): the “history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings” (1993: 217). His point is—as even White Americans have learned to say—“right on,” even if the United States is now carrying the narrative of imperialism in many different forms into the twenty-first century. Think of the brutal invasion of Iraq and the idea will be clear enough.

A good illustration of the way globalism, having transformed the structure of social dominance, operates is provided by the following instances. Take the public image of Bill Gates, who has been described not only as “a genius just like Edison or Ford” but also as a “terrorist that doesn’t use bullets,” and the matter will be quite obvious.

Gates is not a father-master, nor even a corporate Big Brother running a rigid bureaucratic empire, surrounded on an inaccessible top floor by a host of secretaries and assistants. He is instead a kind of Small Brother, his very ordinariness an indication of monstrousness so uncanny that it can no longer assume its usual public form. In photos and drawings he looks like anyone else, but his devious smile points to an underlying evil that is beyond representation. It is also a crucial aspect of Gates as icon that he is seen as the hacker who made it (the term “hacker” has, of course, subversive/marginal/anti-establishment connotations; it suggests someone who sets out to disturb the smooth functioning of large bureaucratic corporations). At the level of fantasy, Gates is a small-time, subversive hooligan who has taken over and dressed himself up as the respectable chairman. In Bill Gates, Small Brother, the average ugly guy coincides with and contains the figure of evil genius who aims for total control of our lives. In early James Bond movies, the evil genius was an eccentric figure, dressed extravagantly, or alternatively, in the grey uniform of the Maoist commissar (Žižek, 1999: 5).

In the case of Gates, this ridiculous charade is no longer needed—the genius turns out to be the boy next door.

Another aspect of this process of U.S. domination lies in the charged status of the narrative that followed the events of September 11 and that reminded us