Chapter-4

The Worldly Text and the Critic

*The World, the Text, and the Critic* is a great work of Edward Said that serves as a key to his significance to contemporary cultural theory. The book reveals the emergence of the methodology and the concerns which have underpinned all his works. When we look closely at *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, a more materialist and worldly Said emerges than the Said of *Orientalism*.

The issues which stand out in Said’s writings and which distinguishes his critical identity from the colonial discourse theorists are his concepts of secular criticism. By secular criticism he means a criticism freed from the restriction of intellectual specialisation. He advocates amateurism in intellectual life. He passionately argues for the need for intellectual work to recover its connections with the political realities of the society in which it occurs. The connection with political realities enables the intellectual to “speak truth to power” (Said, *Representations* 63). For Said, the problem with contemporary criticism is its extreme functionalism which
pays too much attention to the text's formal operations but far too little to its materiality. The result is that texts become "a self-consuming artefact [. . .] idealised, essentialised, instead of remaining as the special kind of cultural object it is, with a causation, persistence, durability and social presence quite its own" (The World, 148). The question of worldliness is the question of writers' own position in the world. For any text is constructed out of many available discourses, discourses within which writers themselves may be seen as subjects or may not be seen as the subjects. The author in the text is a textual construction without therefore assuming that nobody speaks to us in the text. Ultimately worldliness is concerned with the materiality of the text's origin. Said says that we should resist the assumption that literature is an inert structure. He goes further to say that to treat literature as a passive structure is to miss the important fact that it is an act located in the world and divorce the text, which is a cultural production, a cultural act, from the relations of power within which it is produced. The real challenge for Said is to negotiate between two attitudes to the text which in different ways
misrepresent how the texts have existence in the world. The classical realist position sees the text as simply referring to the world "out there". Such a view fails to take into account the ways in which language mediates and determines what is seen in the world by framing the way it is represented. On the other hand, the structuralist-inspired position sees the world as having no absolute existence at all but as being entirely constructed by the text. This view would not allow for any non-textual experience of the world nor for any world outside the text. Said negotiates these two extremes in this way:

I put this as carefully as I can—worldliness, circumstantiality, the text's status as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency, are considered as being incorporated in the text, an infrangible part of its capacity for conveying and producing meaning. This means that a text has a specific situation, placing restraints upon the interpreter and his interpretation not because the situation is hidden within the text as a mystery, but rather
because the situation exists at the same level of surface particularity as the textual object itself. There are many ways for conveying such a situation, but what I want to draw particular attention to here is an ambition[...] on the part of readers and writers to grasp texts as objects whose interpretation—by virtue of the exactness of their situation in the world—has already commenced and are objects already constrained by, and construing their interpretation. (The World 39)

This means that the text is crucial in the way we have a world, but the world does exist, that the worldliness is constructed within the text.

The function of the critic and in a broader sense, the public intellectual has exercised Said’s attention throughout his career. The paradox of Edward Said’s location is something which characterises his career. The world and its link to the text and the critic is crucial to his perception of the value of intellectual work. His view of the critics’ role is a radical attack on ivory tower specialisation found in academic
criticism and which removes it more and more from the political realities of contemporary society. He expounds secular criticism with a view to dispense with abstruse specialisation and the retreat of the intellectual from the actual society in which he lives and operates. The secular trinity he espouses-- the World, the Text and the Critic--is in direct contrast to the contemporary theoretical approaches such as poststructuralism. Said says:

We have reached the stage at which specialisation, professionalisation, allied with cultural dogma, barely sublimated ethnocentrism and nationalism, as well as a surprisingly insistent quasi-religious quietism, have transported the professional and academic critic of literature – the most focussed and intensely trained interpreter of texts produced by the culture--into another world altogether. In that relatively untroubled and secluded world there seems to be no contact with the world of events and societies, which modern history, intellectuals, and critics have in fact built. Instead,
contemporary criticism is an institution for
publicly affirming the values of our, that is, European, dominant elite culture, and for pri-
vately setting loose the unrestrained interpreta-
tion of a universe defined in advance as the end-
less misreading of a misinterpretation. (The

World 25)

Criticism has retreated into the labyrinth of textuality, the mystical and "disinfected" subject matter of literary theory. Textuality is the exact antithesis of history, for although it takes place, it does not take place anywhere or anytime in particular. The increasingly complex programme of contempo-
rary literary theory has left it less and less to say to the society from which it emerges. But it has led also to an ex-
tremely sharp break between critics and the reading public because writing and criticism have come to be considered extremely specialised functions with no equivalent in every day experience.

Criticism which takes no account of the situation of the text in the world is an irrelevant enterprise to formerly
colonised peoples. The need for criticism goes beyond specific positions. He takes criticism so seriously as to believe that “even in the very midst of a battle in which one is unmistakably on one side against another, there should be criticism, because there must be issues, problems, values, even lives to be fought for” (The World 28). This is in short the function of the public intellectual. For Said criticism is, by its very nature and function, oppositional as is the function of the public intellectual.

Criticism is important to Said because criticism is the key function of the concerned intellectual. The ultimate function of such a person is not to advance complex, specialised theories but to “speak truth to power”. Despite the proliferation of the ideas of equality and justice, injustice continues in various parts of the globe. The task for the intellectual is to apply these notions and bring them to “bear on actual situations” (Representations 71). Intellectuals, like the texts they produce, are not theoretical machines but are constantly varied with the complexity of their own being in the world. It is this worldliness which gives intellectual’s work its
The postcolonial intellectuals' role is to act as a reminder of colonialism and its continuing effects as well as to clarify and expand the space which postcolonial societies have been able to project for themselves. Exile is, for Said, a profoundly ambivalent state, for it is an almost necessary condition for true critical worldliness. Exile can be a condition of profound creative empowerment.

Over the years in which most of the essays in The World, the Text, and the Critic were written (1969-1981), the pain of exile from origin, tradition and home culture that stirs modern critical consciousness has occupied much of Said's attention. This collection exhibits some remarkably successful treatments of nostalgias old and new. Yet it does not simply teach us to adapt to life without homesickness. As a displaced member of a displaced people Said is manifestly too aware of the psychological and political cost of displacement to exult in unanchoredness. The intellectual adventure of his work sets off from this double and discrepant awareness, which energises the definitions of criticism that is at issue in
almost all of these essays. If criticism is not to be submitted to the interest of the homeland, Said suggests, it can only be located in dislocation itself, in the always shifting, always empty space "between culture and system" (Said *The World* 178). But he also argues that if criticism is not to withdraw into harmless seclusion, it must accept the taint and constraint of placement in the world and even perhaps make a home for itself there. Between homelessness and worldliness there is nothing so satisfying as a choice or a contradiction. *The World, the Text, and the Critic* describes a criticism that is ideally unsituated, both uprooted and uprooting, a new perception of the ease with which the homeless can settle down, generating significant ambivalence in the realm of literary theory as well.

Modernist exile is now at home in the academy: that is the state of affairs that calls for a turn to worldliness. In *Beginnings* criticism was told that its epistemological and narrative paradigms were those of nineteenth century realism and that it should re-tool itself so as to recuperate "the methodological vitality of modernism" (*Beginnings* 376).
In *The World, the Text and the Critic*, criticism is told that it already is modernist, and that it “has achieved its methodological independence by forfeiting an active situation in the world” (*The World* 146).

This conclusion accompanies a new scheme of recent intellectual history hinging on the term “affiliation”. In the careers of modernist writers like Joyce, Eliot, Freud and Lukacs, Said conceives a three step pattern: (1) an initial break with natural filiation—the unchosen, almost biological relationships enmeshing the individual in a given culture leads to (2) a “pressure to produce new and different ways of conceiving human relationships”, artificial and compensatory social bonds which now however assume (3) all the authority of the old, filiative order, becoming—“no less orthodox and dominant than culture itself”. (*The World* 16, 20)

In “Travelling Theory”, a particularly provocative essay, there are voyages in two directions. The first is the passage of theory from Europe to America which usefully expels traditional criticism from its “orderly inhabitable and hospitable structure” and forces it “out in the cold” or “in the
The second, however goes from revolutionary action to scholarly routine. Said makes a visible effort to qualify his impatience with theory that works only to “shake up a few professors of literature” (238). The argument of “Travelling Theory” is that the meaning of theory is situational; ideas cannot be understood as universal or cosmopolitan but only as specific to their location.

Said’s two brilliant essays on Swift pivots on a modest efficacy of the local. Swift’s fairly strict, not to say uninteresting conservative philosophy is declared immaterial and replaced by a picture of Swift the activist. “Too many claims are made for Swift as a moralist or a thinker who peddled one or another final view of human nature whereas not enough claims are made for Swift as a local activist, as columnist, a pamphleteer and caricaturist” (77) Said complains. Said redeems Swift from Toryism using the category of the “local”. As an example of pure localism Swift becomes “perhaps the most worldly” of writers (88). Said’s intense attention to the writing lives of scholars like Auerbach and
Lukacs, Ramond Williams and Foucault, Renan and Massignon which makes up some of the most extraordinary pages in the book seem intended above all to restore the just dignity of intellectual labour.

As William D Hart observes, Said has always been a Trojan horse in the poststructuralist, postmodernist city. Said expresses his suspicion of those who are suspicious of truth, of those who describe themselves as poststructuralists or postmodernists. Said is a high modernist who is neither a poststructuralist nor anti-poststructuralist. He is ambivalent—an in-house critic, an exiled admirer. While sceptical of naive notions of truth he is equally sceptical of the notion that truth is "endlessly deferred" or the notion that the former is a mask for the latter. (116)

Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida are exhibits in Said’s case against repressed religiosity: they re-imprison the secular subject in sacred categories such as “power” and “difference”. To Said linguistic turn in philosophy and theory is the ascendancy of the notion of textuality. On Said’s view textuality is a denial of history, a flight from circumstantial
realities, a descent into the abyss of meaninglessness, paradox and undecidability. Textuality is the antithesis and displacement of history. According to Said contemporary literary theory operates in an ahistorical labyrinth of intertextuality.

Theory "has isolated textuality from the circumstances, events, the physical senses that made it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work" (Said, *The World* 4). In contrast secular, worldly reality based forms of critique foreground the circumstances under which agents produce texts and structures of meaning. In short, secular criticism accents history. Said wants to distinguish the worldliness of secular criticism from the other worldliness of poststructuralism and postmodernism, "from aporias and unthinkable paradoxes of a text" (*The World*, 4). By invoking the reality or history he can highlight the other worldliness of post discourses, where the transactional relations of textuality and the world are denied.

Said acknowledges the contributions of the French inspired critical discourses. They helped American critics to
challenge a university system dominated by positivism, determinism, bourgeois humanism and the rigidities of disciplinary specialisation (Said, *The World*, 3). Unfortunately these theories never took well to American soil but they changed into degraded forms. Said calls this phenomenon "travelling theory." This is the transformation that theory undergoes when transplanted from one set of historical circumstances to another. The distinctive circumstances of post-World War II France, that made structuralist and poststructuralist theories seem appropriate were different from those in the United States. The American appropriation of French theory took place against a cultural backdrop that lacked historical memories of the specific intellectual and social struggles that made these theories seem natural. American appropriation of French theory seems artificial and dismally ineffective.

If textuality, as Said sees it, is the problem then worldliness is the solution. Worldliness, which means roughly the same thing as reality and history, sets constraints on interpretation and reference. Said contrasts this notion with the claim that interpretation is limitless. Secular criticism avoids both
the mindless conformities of culture and the other worldliness of system. This brings us again to Derrida and Foucault who illustrate this point. Said’s position toward Derrida and Foucault has become less enthusiastic and increasingly negative as the essays in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* testifies:

If everything in a text is always open equally to suspicion and to affirmation, then the difference between one class interest and another, and one ideology and another are virtual in—but never crucial to making decisions about—the finally reconciling element of textuality (Said, *The World*, 214).

Said is here making a simple point: that the sceptical play of textuality does not allow us to make the political and ethical distinctions that we want to make. Said’s criticism of Derridean textuality is an analogue to his later criticism of Foucault’s all-encompassing notion of power.

*The World, the Text and the Critic* begins with “Secular Criticism” and concludes with “Religious Criticism”.

This book can be considered as a dossier that contains the spirit and broad outline of Said’s cultural critique. These essays have a special place in analysing Said’s cultural writings.

In “Secular Criticism” Said speaks of the humanist scholar Erich Auerbach and his Nazi-enforced exile in Istanbul. From Istanbul without the benefit of a library, he wrote *Mimesis*, one of the most influential books in Western literature. According to Said Auerbach’s exile, his national and cultural homelessness and the cosmopolitan spirit that it produced made *Mimesis* possible. But the freedom and critical distance that are available in a condition of exile and homelessness are always threatened by dogmatic powers of culture. Culture saturates everything within its purview. But it does so by separating the best from the ordinary, the normal from the abnormal, the insider from the outsider. Culture includes and excludes simultaneously in its operation. Said says:

[. . .] in the transition and persistence of a culture there is a continual process of reinforcement
by which, the hegemonic culture will add to itself the prerogatives given it by its sense of national identity, its power as an implement, ally or a branch of the state, its rightness, its exterior forms and assertions of itself: and most important, by its vindicated power as a victor over everything not itself (Said, *The World*, 14).

This process inspires resistance, the most important of which is offered by the intellectual, the isolated individual consciousness. In this concept Said is torn between the solitary Romantic individualist, Julian Benda like intellectual and Antonio Gramsci’s organic intellectual who is a component of larger social organism. The task of this intellectual is to resist the authority of culture supported by known powers and acceptable values protected against the outside world. Having described the task of the critical intellectual Said then provides a detailed account of “filiation” and “affiliation” which he claims are at the heart of critical consciousness. Filiation refers to those natural or cultural relations such as biological procreation and kinship that are
authoritative and pre-critical. Affiliation refers to those relations that compensate for and criticise the failure of filial relations. Said takes T.S Eliot’s conversion from Protestantism to Anglicanism and the changes that occur in his poetry from *Prufrock*, *Gerontion* and *The Wasteland* to *Ash Wednesday* and *The Four Quartets* as exemplary of the shift from filiation to affiliation. This leads to new direction in his poetry, which is consummated by the essays in *After Strange Gods*. This poetry and these essays and his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism are compensatory affiliations for the failed filial pieties of Eliot’s earlier Republicanism, Romanticism and Protestantism. Now he has changed to Royalism, Classicism and Catholicism. According to Said there are two formidable temptations the critic must avoid: one is the culture to which critics are bound filiatively. The other is a method or system acquired affiliatively. The failure to resist these temptations is what Said calls religious criticism. It is an agent of closure which blocks the road of enquiry. Religion and culture are similar in that both provide systems of authority and canons of order. Said thinks of secularism as
religion abolished. Secular criticism as Said conceives it, is
the other of religious criticism, without the counterpoint of
religious criticism, it has no point. With Said secularism is a
term of approbation and religion is a term of disapprobation.
Thus dogmatism, obscurantism and jargon ridden language
are religious as are ideas and social relations such as national­
ism, orientalism and imperialism. Said construes secular­
ism as public suspicion, exclusion and trivialisation of reli­
gious matters.

In 1993 Said gave the Reith lectures on the subject “Rep­
resentations of the Intellectual”. This prestigious lecture
series was inaugurated in 1948 by Bertrand Russel. Said took
these lectures as an occasion to address the relations between
the intellectual life and society. He takes two extreme
examples of Gramsci and Benda to illustrate the nature and
role of intellectuals in society. Two of the most famous twen­
tieth century descriptions of intellectuals are fundamentally
opposed on the point that intellectuals are a very large or an
extremely small and highly selective group. Antonio Gramsci,
the Italian Marxist, and brilliant political philosopher,
was imprisoned by Mussolini between 1926 and 1937. He wrote in his *Prison Note Books* that "all men are intellectuals, one could therefore say, but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (in Said *Representations*).

Those who perform intellectual function in society, Gramsci tries to show, can be divided into two types: first, traditional intellectuals such as teachers, priests, and administrators who continue to do the same thing from generation to generation; and second, organic intellectuals who are directly connected to classes or enterprises that use intellectuals to organise interests, gain more power and get more control. Thus Gramsci says that the organic intellectual is someone who in a democratic society tries to gain the consent of potential customers, win approval, marshal consumer or voter approval.

Gramsci believed that organic intellectuals are actively involved in society, that is, they constantly try to change minds unlike the traditional intellectuals who do the same kind of work year in and year out. At the other extreme there is Julian Benda’s celebrated definition of intellectuals as a tiny band of supergifted and morally endowed philosopher kings who
constitute the conscience of mankind. The measure of Benda’s intellectual is their willingness to “risk being burnt at the stake, ostracised or crucified” (Said, *Representations* 5)

Said construes Gramsci and Benda as representing the extremes when it comes to identifying intellectuals as a class. For Gramsci an intellectual is anyone who works with ideas. While everyone has intellectual capacities not everyone functions as an intellectual. In contrast Benda describes the intellectual as a member of a learned and moral elite. As Said notes, intellectuals can be organic to reactionary or progressive groups, groups that elaborate the status quo or insurgent groups. In either case organic intellectuals are partisans for a particular cause which makes them very different from Benda’s intellectuals who view themselves as non-partisans serving pure truth and justice.

Said distances himself from Benda somewhat when he claims that Gramsci’s notion of the intellectual is much closer to the reality than anything Benda gives us, particularly, in the late twentieth century. Most intellectuals can fairly be described as functionaries of various types: as academics,
journalists, managers, bureaucrats and so on. He refers to such intellectuals disparagingly as “professional”. Said asserts the following: “it is the intellectual as a representative figure that matters—someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers” (Said, *Representations* 10).

Edward W. Said’s *The World, the Text, and the Critic* gathers essays written from 1969 to 1981 on a wide range of subjects and develops theoretical, critical and political themes that Said has previously treated in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975) and *Covering Islam* (1981). It includes a long introductory chapter on “secular criticism”, a suggestive account of the “worldly” bearing of literary and critical texts, two studies of Swift as “Tory anarchist” and intellectual, several appraisals of contemporary literary theory, a critique of the writing of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, an appreciation of Raymond Schwab’s *La Renaissance Orientale*. But *The World, the Text, and the Critic* is much more than a collection of essays, and its unifying
arguments about criticism, theory literary study and intellectual life are its most provocative feature.

Said contends that literary critics and teachers are disgracefully "silent" about society, history, and politics. They do not relate texts to the urgent concerns of the modern world and thus execute a policy of non-interference. The boom in literary theory should not deceive us into thinking that criticism and pedagogy are now acquiring a new vitality and purposefulness, Said emphasises. "Theory" endorses and exalts "non-interference", for its advocates refuse to connect 'textuality' to the worldly and circumstantial. Said's indictment even extends to the Marxist and leftist theories which he describes as being primarily "academic" specialties, not true forms of political engagement.

Said sees the self-isolating business of literary study to be in complicity with disturbing trends on the American scene - 'the ascendancy of Reagnism', increased militarism and defence spending and a massive turn to the right on social and economic questions. "Criticism" is both powerful and powerless. It is an effective force in furthering the aims of
colonialism, imperialism, and exploitation precisely because it is unable and unwilling to confront and scrutinize them and is content to remain exclusively "textual" in its orientation. In Said's view, criticism today is all too often little more than a privileged encounter between reader and canonical masterpieces. It is basically:

an institution for publicly affirming the values of our, that is, European, dominant elite culture, and for privately setting loose the unrestrained interpretation of a universe defined in advance as the endless misreading of a misinterpretation. The result has been the regulated, not to say calculated, irrelevance of criticism, except as an adornment to what the powers of modern industrial society transact: the hegemony of militarism and a new cold war, the depoliticisation of the citizenry, the overall compliance of the intellectual class to which critics belong. (The World 25)

To counter this sorry state of affairs, Said stresses that we should affirm the relation between texts and the
existential actualities of human life, politics, societies and events. We must also enlarge the domain of the texts that we teach and criticise, recognising that literature is connected to, implicated in, and intersected by many other types of writing. Above all, Said insists that we should uphold and refine "critical consciousness". This "consciousness" is sceptical, secular, alert to its own limitation, and is always seeking to arrive at some acute sense of what political, social and human values are entailed in the reading, production, and transmission of every text. Said's descriptions of this attitude or cast of mind are forthright and his own displays of "critical consciousness" are exemplary. He speaks eloquently, for example, about the essay-"comparatively short, investigative, radically sceptical"-the ideal form for criticism. and he defines Swift with subtlety and precision as a critical spokesman who counters the humanist Matthew Arnold. He also shrewdly assesses the shortcomings of Foucault, whom Said clearly esteems but whose work exhibits a lack of attention to "change", a defective understanding of "power" and a blindness about the constructive role of social classes
and revolutionary movements. In opposition to Faucault’s grandiose vision of totalising systematic power, Said declares that “in human history there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, no matter how deeply they saturate society, and this is obviously what makes change possible, limits power in Foucault’s sense, and hobbles the theory of that power”. *(The World 183)*

*The World, the Text, and the Critic* is forceful and illuminating. But we are also uneasy with Said’s angle of approach and concerned about the implications of the critical stance he outlines. We can agree with Said that critics indeed have crippled their own enterprise, failed to make their work ‘worldly’ and done themselves an injustice and their students a disservice by conceiving of their labour too restrictively. But once one accepts the truth of this verdict, where then does one turn? What a kind of specific projects and recommendations does Said offer? He does allude, for instance, to the shortcomings of the curriculum, but he does not focus on these in full detail nor does he elaborate upon what might serve as a substitute. Said’s account is cogent, but at times one feels
the need for more detail, detail of the kind that he brings forward to amplify and deepen his arguments in *Orientalism* and *The Question of Palestine*. This limitation of the book is connected to the critical ideal that Said embraces, to the 'critical consciousness' that is sceptical, ironic, and anti-systematic. Said does not want to be prescriptive; he does not want to say that we should do this or that particular thing in our criticism and teaching. Rather he celebrates an attitude, a quality of mind, one that is suggestive but that militates against an account of positive recommendations. "Were I to use one word consistently along with criticism", Said explains in a key passage:

it 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, imperialised fiefdoms and orthodox habits of mind, criticism is most itself and, if the paradox can be tolerated, most unlike itself at the moment it starts turning into organised dogma. ‘Ironic’ is not a bad word to use along with ‘oppositional’. For in the main and here I shall be explicit--criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse: its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom. (The World 29)

The difficulty here is that Said identifies his own position with difference and in the process prevents himself from expressing in an open, detailed fashion just what kinds of concrete goals and programmes he advocates. He comes dangerously close to disabling himself here. He defines himself in “opposition” to orthodoxy so adamantly that he does not really allow for a firm statement of an alternative
orthodoxy. Said does mention “non-coercive knowledge” as something toward which criticism should progress. But what is striking about this work is that he does not say much about this knowledge. It is “oppositional” criticism, not “knowledge” that Said foregrounds and keeps returning to.

The danger of underscoring an “oppositional” attitude emerges in Said’s conclusion, “Religious criticism”. Said objects to the rise of new systems of authority and orthodoxies in criticism, a trend he judges to be ‘religious’ in its deference to consensus and canons of order. Commenting on this situation, he says that “theoretical closure” is “anathema to critical consciousness which loses its active sense of an open world in which its faculties must be exercised” (The World 242). What happens here is that Said regards himself in “opposition” and thus saddles himself with a polarity-- “secular” versus “religious”-- that restricts and deforms the free movement of “critical consciousness” he champions. Said runs the risk of committing himself to a theoretical position that obliges him always to be making counter-statements against those announced by the
prevailing orthodoxy. But that does not equip him, at least in the terms the theory provides, to speak in a more detailed, positive, and creative manner. Said's terms trap him into having to advance an argument that he cannot sustain. Said promotes the exploratory nature of the "critical consciousness", yet his oppositional posture inhibits him. The opposition between "secular" and "religious" also masks the real questions that Said is wrestling with. What is the nature of critical authority? How does the critic establish and resolutely draw upon his authority, yet retain his freedom? How does knowledge become "authoritative" without hardening into an inflexible system, an unquestioned authority? Is it possible for the critic and teacher to speak "with authority" without being coercive or prescriptive?

Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic* does not offer a clearly stated method or articulated body of theory. It offers itself, against all these. Criticism, in Said's view, is by its very nature, anti-systemic. Said argues that criticism must turn away from what has become the somewhat mystical and disinfected subject matter of literary theory--textuality. And
it must concern itself once more with the worldliness of texts; that is, their affiliations with power. Even when the texts appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. Said puts it thus:

The realities of power and authority—as well as the resistances offered by men, women, and social movements to institutions, authorities, and orthodoxies—are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of critics. I propose these realities are what should be taken account of by criticism and the critical consciousness. (*The World* 5)

These are the realities, the realities beyond texts but which are none the less incorporated within them. These are the realities with which criticism should concern itself. It should do so, in full recognition of its own worldliness and circumstantiality, of its limitations and interests in a particular time and place. The critic, in restoring to the text its worldly
affiliations, restores to his practice a worldly pertinence in enabling him to speak to and about the worldly realities. As Tony Bennet suggests apparently there is nothing much to be objected here. However, difficulties accumulate if one probes these general formulation more closely, for example:

What type of connection should criticism posit between the text and its worldliness in order to produce, for those texts and for itself, a relevant stake in the worldliness of the present? And how is criticism to order the relations between the worldliness of a text's past 'affiliations' and its affiliations in here and now? To whom should criticism address itself, and how might it best do so? It is not that Said is silent on these questions. There is no shortage of words, but precious few proposals which suggest any specific direction for the conduct of criticism and precious few concepts except for that of affiliation, by mean of which the relations between the textual and extra-textual order of reality might
Criticisms is always “skeptical, secular, and reflectively open to its own failings, a self conscious practice that is constitutively opposed to the production of massive, hermetic systems” (The World 26). Theory, by contrast, is closed on itself: “Theoretical closure, like social convention or cultural dogma, is anathema to critical consciousness, which loses its profession when it loses its active sense of an open world in which its faculties must be exercised” (242).
theory. It is elevated above theory. It serves both as theory's judge and corrective. It is critical consciousness that stands between theory and the world, indicting theory for its closures, measuring its inadequacies and initiating a programme of reform to place it back into contact with the worldliness it has lost sight of. We distinguish theory from critical consciousness by saying that the latter is a sort of spatial sense, a sort of measuring faculty for locating or situating theory, and this means that theory has to be grasped in the place and time out of which it emerges. The critical consciousness is "awareness of the differences between situations, awareness too of the fact that no system or theory exhausts the situation out of which it emerges or to which it is transported. And, above all critical consciousness is awareness of the resistance to theory, reactions to it elicited by those concrete experiences of interpretations with which it is in conflict" (241-49).

As Tony Bennet puts it, this is not merely a retreat from the excesses of theoretical speculation but a determined attempt to reinstate a resolutely atheoretical conception of
criticism's nature and function. (204)