

Chapter One

Said and Cultural Margins

Edward Said's magnum opus, *Orientalism* (1978), inaugurated a paradigm shift in postcolonial critical practices. The discursive world of the phenomenon of Orientalism was based on an ontological and epistemological distinction "made" between the East and the West by many writers. In addition to its academic and imaginative meanings, Orientalism was also a corporate institution, which enabled the West to have authority over the Orient. Said tries to document this process by showing how "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (*Orientalism* 3).

Many nations were involved in the Orient, like the French, the British and the American enterprises. Said analyzes the historical generalizations which formed the backbone of Orientalism, and points out that it was never "just an idea" with no corresponding reality. Paying close attention to the configurations of power, Said cautions that one should not assume Orientalism to be a mere "structure of lies or of myths," nor, "an airy European fantasy about the Orient," for it is instead, "a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations there has been a considerable material investment" (*Orientalism* 6). He identifies Orientalism as a form of cultural hegemony, extending domination through consent.

Knowledge is always embedded in the author's own circumstances, never pure, always tainted with political actualities. Said argues that Orientalism is not just a political subject matter, reflected passively by culture, nor a "nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot . . ."

It is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world. (*Orientalism* 12)

The methodology underlying the study of Orientalism involved the delimiting of an unmanageable archive, yet without following a facile chronological order. Said admits that he has not exhaustively discussed the German developments in this direction (*Orientalism* 18). One of Said's reasons for this is that the "German Orient" was a textual subject rather than an actual one, unlike the Anglo-French one. He succinctly points out that works like Goethe's *Westostlicher Diwan* (*West-Eastern Diwan*, 1819), and

Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (*On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, 1849), "were based respectively on a Rhine journey and on hours spent in Paris libraries" (*Orientalism* 19). Thus this was a kind of Orientalism largely prone to intellectual authority.

The works about the Orient "affiliate" with other works across time, discourses, and institutions, forming a formidable and authoritative ensemble. They do not circulate "truth" but representations (*Orientalism* 21). The whole network, frequently referring to each other, becomes a system for "citing works and authors" (*Orientalism* 23). It is an intellectual genealogy bent on cultural domination, whose unraveling would begin from the Gramscian dictum of "knowing thyself" (*Orientalism* 25).

Said's project sets out to compile an inventory of the traces left behind by the historical process up to date (*Orientalism* 25). The process of growing up in two British colonies—namely Palestine and Egypt, and in the United States—shaped his upbringing. The disheartening and almost invisible existence of an Arab Palestinian in the West is what prompted him to author the book. In addition, Said's identity as an Arab Christian bears a deeper and significant minority status.

Lord Cromer was the representative of England in Egypt from 1882 to 1907. His personal canon of Orientalist wisdom was based on the belief that "accuracy is abhorrent to the Oriental mind Want of accuracy, which easily degenerates into untruthfulness, is in fact the main characteristic of the Oriental mind" (*Orientalism* 38). "Irrational," "depraved," "childlike," and

“different” were some of the other stereotypes used to set off the Oriental against the “rational,” “virtuous,” “mature,” and “normal” European (*Orientalism* 40). The Oriental was thus created, contained, and represented by dominating frameworks.

Said points to a curious strategy of the British Raj. Once they attained the age of fifty-five, their administrators in India and elsewhere were sent into retirement by Britain. The reason; no Oriental would ever see the Westerner as “aged and degenerated,” nor would the Westerner see himself “mirrored in the eyes of the subject race, as anything but a vigorous, rational, ever-alert young Raj” (*Orientalism* 42).

The Christian West seems to have initiated Orientalism in 1512, with the decision of the Church Council of Vienne to establish “a series of chairs in ‘Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca’” (*Orientalism* 50). The Orient was turned into a geographical, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic unit, and Orientalism into a project with “considerable geographical ambition” (*Orientalism* 50). “Orientalia” became a “virtual epidemic” which affected every major poet, essayist, and philosopher of the period (*Orientalism* 51). It created logbooks of practically “everything of note,” and maxims about “civilizations” which the Orientalists, while travelling to their countries of specialization, were bent on proving right. Arbitrary geographical distinctions made familiar spaces “ours,” and unfamiliar spaces “theirs.” This is essentially what Said terms as “imaginative geography” (*Orientalism* 54). It helped in dramatizing the distance and

difference between “what is close to it and what is far away.” Through Gaston Bachelard’s “poetics of space,” Said points out that such spaces acquire “emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning” (*Orientalism* 55).

Interestingly, the Orient had already been explored by Herodotus and Alexander, and this prompted the Orientalists to divide the Orient into realms previously known, visited, and conquered, and those not previously known, visited, and conquered. Subdivisions like “near Orient,” “far Orient,” “familiar Orient,” and “novel Orient” were set up (*Orientalism* 58). There were also moves to dub the Orient as something like the West; for instance, “Indian religion” was touted to be essentially an Oriental version of Germano-Christian pantheism (*Orientalism* 67). Said opines that philosophically, Orientalism is “a form of radical realism,” rhetorically speaking, it is “anatomical and enumerative,” and psychologically it is “a form of paranoia” (*Orientalism* 72).

The systematic discipline of Orientalism designates a “collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies” employed to enunciate what “lies east of the dividing line” (*Orientalism* 73). Codifying, tabulating and comparing, the Orientalists domesticated the Orient, and turned it into a province of European learning. Scholars like William Jones excelled in subduing the “infinite variety of the Orient to ‘a complete digest’ of laws, figures, customs, and works” (*Orientalism* 78).

Said clarifies that Napoleon's conquest of Egypt germinated from the "realm of ideas and myths culled from texts, not empirical reality" (*Orientalism* 80). In fact Napoleon was accompanied by a full-scale academy in his conquest and Egypt was considered to be the "focal point of relationships between Africa and Asia, between Europe and the East, between memory and actuality" (*Orientalism* 84). De Lesseps' the Suez Canal was regarded as the logical conclusion of Orientalist thought and Orientalist effort, which created "one" world (*Orientalism* 92).

The danger of the essentialist conceptions of Orientalism is that it proceeds through "ethnist typology," straight into racism (*Orientalism* 97). It sometimes acted as a bin into which all traditional Western notions about the Orient could be dumped, unthinkingly. Oriental life was depicted as one of ease, sensuality, despotism, and fatalism. The Orient is always "watched," and the European is always the "watcher" of this "living tableau of queerness" (*Orientalism* 103). Said censures the humanities and humanists who have generally confined themselves to specialized and departmentalized topics of research, and rarely try to learn from the disciplinary breadth of Orientalism, which had the ambition to "master *all* of a world" and not some tiny part of it like a single author, or a few texts (*Orientalism* 109).

Orientalism tried to classify nature and man into types: the American—"red, choleric, erect," the Asiatic—"yellow, melancholy, rigid," and the African—"black, phlegmatic, lax" (*Orientalism* 119). The Semitic race was declared to be incomplete in comparison to the Indo-European

family—as a pencil sketch to a painting—lacking the “variety,” “amplitude,” and “abundance of life” (*Orientalism* 149). Most of the time it was an ethnocentric race prejudice that disguised itself as comparative scholarly necessity, treating the Orient to be a “derangement” of the European spirit (*Orientalism* 150). While on the one hand the Orient was overprized for its pantheism, spirituality, stability, longevity, and primitivity, it was blighted on the other as “underhumanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric, and so forth” (*Orientalism* 150).

Said criticizes Marx for validating the colonial rapacity of England, and claiming it to be the “unconscious tool of history” in bringing about “social revolution in Hindustan” (*Orientalism* 153). The Orient, by the middle of the nineteenth century, had become a career to remake and restore “not only the Orient but also oneself” (*Orientalism* 166). It was characterized with “exotic spatial configurations,” and “exuded dangerous sex, threatened hygiene and domestic seamliness” (*Orientalism* 166-167). A Western conquest of the Orient was considered as “no conquest” at all, but “liberty” (*Orientalism* 172). More than a place, the Orient became “a *topos*, a set of references . . . that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation . . .” (*Orientalism* 177). Pilgrims preferred the descriptions of the Orient to what their eyes really saw.

Said dwells in length on the association of the Orient and sensuality. He discusses Flaubert’s encounter with Kuchuk Hanem—an Egyptian dancer and courtesan, from the mid-nineteenth century guild called *Alemah*, which in

Arabic, during the eighteenth century, etymologically meant “a learned woman” (*Orientalism* 186). Kuchuk Hanem, exuding “learned sensuality, delicacy, and mindless coarseness,” became the prototype of several of Flaubert’s female characters including Emma Bovary. The Orient, for Flaubert, was an escapist sexual fantasy. It became a place “where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe” (*Orientalism* 190).

Said elaborates that there has been no strong movement in the reverse because the movement of Easterners westwards, while compared to that of the Westerners eastward, since the end of the eighteenth century, was comparatively weak (*Orientalism* 204). While Eastern travellers had gone to gape at an advanced culture in the West, the Westerners had landed in the Orient with a different purpose (*Orientalism* 204). Around 60,000 books dealing with the Orient were produced between 1800 and 1950, while Oriental books about the West were negligible (*Orientalism* 204).

Said distinguishes between “latent,” and “manifest” Orientalism: while the former is unconscious in nature, the latter pronounces stated views about Oriental society. Orientalism joined hands with ideas about biological bases of racial inequality, and “‘second-order Darwinism,’ which seemed to accentuate the ‘scientific’ validity of the division of races into advanced and backward, or European-Aryan and Oriental-African” (*Orientalism* 206). Orientals were looked at as not human beings but as “problems to be solved,” always linked to lamentably alien elements of Western society—delinquents, the insane, women, and the poor (*Orientalism* 207). Orientalism was an exclusive male

province with sexist blinders, frozen and immobilized in a “bad sort of eternity” (*Orientalism* 208).

Said argues that imperialists like Lord Curzon had a pedagogic view of the Empire, and considered Oriental studies not as an intellectual luxury but a “great Imperial obligation” (*Orientalism* 214). The East was a University from which the scholar never took a degree, where knowledge, power, and geography converged (*Orientalism* 215). Geography became the handmaid of history, which could mask the frank covetousness of imperialism with the “moral neutrality of an epistemological impulse” (*Orientalism* 216). Their passion for maps, and its blank spaces, never gave a moment of thought to the natives who inhabited those spaces. Geographical societies sprung up in abundance and very soon “scientific geography” gave way to “commercial geography,” channeling national pride and civilizational achievement into a “fairly rudimentary profit motive” (*Orientalism* 218). Colonization became a multiplication through space. The Orient was viewed as something that invited “interest,” “penetration,” and “insemination” (*Orientalism* 219). The actual colour of the White Man’s skin did set him off from the sea of natives, but behind the mask of amiable leadership, lurked a tacit willingness to use force, to kill, and to be killed.

Said points out that Orientalism failed to see and identify with human experience (*Orientalism* 328). The discourses of power and the ideological fictions under the rubric of Orientalism warn us of the seductive degradation of knowledge and the dangers of mind-forged manacles. On the other hand, an

ideal humanistic study should be one that goes “beyond the coercive limitations on thought towards a non-dominative and non-essentialist type of learning” (*Orientalism* 337).

An examination of some of the critiques of this foundational text would be illuminating. Ella Shohat points out that Said’s *Orientalism* initiated the decolonization of the academy in a “postwar seismic shift,” and was influential in consolidating the fields of postcolonial and multicultural studies, profoundly influencing the academic formations of “area studies,” and “ethnic studies” (“On the Margins” 44, 45). While area studies had a “top-down” approach based on the cold war geopolitical perspectives and needs, ethnic studies burgeoned under a “bottom-to-top” activism of communities of colour (Shohat, “On the Margins” 45). The book treats “culture” as embedded in the political realm but not reducible to it (Shohat, “On the Margins” 47).

Shohat notes that Said operated “within the anti-culturalist and anti-essentialist assumptions that mark the field of cultural studies associated with the Birmingham school, for whom culture was not unified but rather a contested, heteroglossic and dissensual arena” (“On the Margins” 47). For Said, political critique could not be separated from cultural critique; they were mutually constitutive. Cross-border movements and cross-border analyses, which have now become increasingly visible, must owe their thanks to Said’s opening up of this interdisciplinary space. An intersection of “regions and cartographies of knowledge” provide the opportunity to “redraw static maps of

scholarly terrain, stretching and broadening the field” (Shohat, “On the Margins” 49).

Carl Davila praises *Orientalism* for having challenged and continuing to challenge “the nature of cultural discourses in the West,” in an “era of globalizing information systems, an era that bears witness to the proliferation of a hybrid, corporatized, globalized cultural system—a veritable machine for the production of pre-digested cultural discourses” (239). Said’s work “challenges the basis of the information system itself, and so cannot be easily commodified for profit or power” (Davila 241).

Davila comments that teaching Said is a “highly relevant and unavoidably political act,” but most undergraduates do need a guide who knows the ground well, and is able to accompany them on this journey (242, 243). In the rare occasion of Said being included in the curriculum, there are only cursory gestures at comprehending thoroughly the vastness and richness of the details he articulates; most of the time it is a beeline towards the gist (Davila 243). Davila admits that Said’s theoretical frame does pose difficulty to undergraduate students, but it is “the heart of *Orientalism*, the tool that opens the whole Pandora’s box of cultural critique” (245).

Rasha Ramzy, illuminating the role of “otherization” in Said’s cultural critique, comments that, “Orientalism or otherization has long plagued communication efforts between the polarized worlds of East and West” and has generated “devices for stereotyping and misunderstanding for some and defensiveness for others” (87). While travelling from one land to another,

those who “create” truth, information, and knowledge, do often profess details of “others,” from their vantage point of power, which later get inscribed as “facts,” furthering “otherization” (Ramzy 93). These misconceptions are then reaffirmed by cultural artifacts, creating an arrogant and false superiority of the West over the East.

Lidan Lin points out three gaps with regard to Said’s text—one is that it omits the pre-Enlightenment Western contacts, like Dante’s or Spenser’s, with the Orient; secondly, it has left out the experiences of the nations other than those in the Muslim Orient, Africa, and the Caribbean, for example, that of China, Japan, Korea; and thirdly, it deals with Orientalism in literature and not with other cultural forms like painting, music, and philosophy (130). Lin points out that “Western painters such as Sam Francis, Paul Klee, Andre Masson and musicians such as John Cage, Maurice Ravel, and Claude Debussy all incorporated Eastern elements in their arts, not to mention Eastern influences on such Western philosophers and thinkers as Francis Bacon, Voltaire, Arthur Schopenhauer, Jacques Lacan, G. W. F. Hegel, and Carl Jung” (130).

Lin proposes the notion of “post-orientalism” to broaden the scope of Orientalism, where the West’s non-domineering dialogues with the East would also find place. Authors like Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Tennyson and Thackeray, appreciated and appropriated Eastern elements. American Transcendentalism also benefitted from Eastern philosophy. The Orient should be expanded to “include all of Asia which lies geographically to the East of

Europe” (Lin 131). Post-orientalism is thus a move that seeks to illuminate the “hybrid and multicultural constituents of literature” (Lin 132). This would help to re-evaluate all those authors considered canonically Western.

Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg point out that Said’s investigation of Orientalism seems to appear as an entirely European phenomenon, with the Orientals or natives having no role in it, being mere “objects of scrutiny” (5). On the contrary, in the case of India, an important role was played by the Brahmin pundits and urban elite in the production of Orientalist discourse. Warren Hastings—East India Company’s first Governor General of India—had invited ten pundits to Calcutta to codify the Hindu law, which had hitherto not been so (Mani and Frankenberg 5). Said is also criticized for the monolithic, undifferentiated and uncontested Western imposition of Orientalism, which emerges from his text, seemingly unaware of the complex, interactive, and dialogical processes that constituted it, especially the instances of indigenous resistance (Mani and Frankenberg 5).

Does one look at Orientalism to discover the real Orient? Mani and Frankenberg reply in the negative: “One does not look to Orientalism to learn about the Orient any more than one looks to discourses of racism to learn about peoples of colour” (13). They also point out that the term “Orientalism-in-reverse,” coined by Jalal al-’Azm, is sometimes used to describe the instances of Arab nationalism and Islamic revivalism (14).

James Clifford points out that the field of Orientalism is “genealogically distributed in two ways: synchronically (constituting in a

unified system all Western textual versions of the Orient) and diachronically (plotting a single lineage of statements about the East, running from Aeschylus to Renan to modern political sociology and ‘area studies’)” (29). Genealogy makes sense in the present by “making sense selectively *out* of the past,” but here, instead of a legitimation of the present, there is a radical de-legitimation, embracing anachronism openly (Clifford 29).

Clifford finds the omission of the Far East, India, the Pacific, North Africa, and Maghreb, and the ruling out of the Italian, Spanish, Russian and German Orientalisms, highly crucial (29,30). He calls Said’s method a “hybrid perspective” (31). While Foucault would believe that individual authors count very little in discursive formation, Said asserts the power of individual works on the ideological field. Said’s “methodological catholicity” is summed up by Clifford in these lines:

If he is advancing anthropological arguments, Orientalism appears as the cultural quest for order. When he adopts the stance of a literary critic, it emerges as the process of writing, textualizing, and interpreting. As an intellectual historian Said portrays Orientalism as a specific series of influences and schools of thought. For the psychohistorian Orientalist discourse becomes a representative series of personal-historical experiences. For the Marxist critic of ideology and culture it is the expression of definite political and economic power interests. Orientalism is also at times conflated with Western

positivism, with general definitions of the primitive, with evolutionism, with racism. (32-33)

Deliberating on the seditious life and iconoclastic effect of *Orientalism*, Gyan Prakash points out that the book crackled at the “hallowed image of the Orientalist as an austere figure unconcerned with the world and immersed in the mystery of foreign scripts and languages,” and toppled him down from his exalted space (233). While the text indulges in a lot of boundary crossings and contrary positions, its authority as critique derives from this very “subversive violation of borders” (Prakash 234). Its immense transgressive energy has been felt on the borderlines of politics and knowledge. Said was indeed harshly reviewed for this crossing of scholarship and politics. But Prakash is doubtful as to whether the inquiry of every scholar, dead or living, while studying the Orient, was tainted with the “Western will to power” (235).

Said’s methodology of crossing disciplinary boundaries fostered the growth of cultural studies, feminism, and postcolonialism, which navigate between literature, history, philosophy, and anthropology. *Orientalism* enabled a powerful postcolonial “writing back,” being a seditious, text, which seizes the apparatus of Western knowledge and re-inscribes it in the interstices of disciplinary knowledge (Prakash 238). Said’s project enables an analysis of the relationship between imperial rule and gender politics. He offers examples of the Orient being considered as a woman to be ravished, and of the sexual politics of conquest and penetration of the East. But Prakash points out that

critics like Jane Miller upbraid him for not going far enough in this exploration, and press for the “inclusion of women’s histories in the analysis of Orientalism so that its functioning as a hegemonic discourse can be understood” (243).

Timothy Brennan adds that the postcolonial moment had its significance in interstitial effects and it involved “a new marketability for the arts of Africa, Latin America, and the Indian subcontinent” (313). The identitarian aspects of postcolonial studies found its reverberations not only in academic seminars and graduate classrooms, but also in the “programme notes of local theatre companies, church sermons, feature articles in *Rolling Stone*, and the VJ banter on MTV” (Brennan 313).

Said ushered in a theoretical turn with his capacity to bridge the separate realms of “the public and academic, the Eastern and the Western, the belletristic and the sociological” (Brennan 315). Moreover, Said knew how to speak to his audience in an appropriate language. The battle that poststructuralism had abdicated, in the 1980s, with the “politics of government, of network news, of political parties, of media exposes, of liberation wars” was brought back to the humanities by Said (Brennan 325). Despite demolishing disciplinary etiquette, Said’s book was warmly welcomed in the academy.

One of the most virulent attacks on *Orientalism* has been by Aijaz Ahmad. Ahmad admires Said, and proclaims solidarity with him, but he does register his disagreements. He declares that *Orientalism* is a “deeply flawed

book” (79). He distinguishes between Foucault, who observes the forms and boundaries of discourse, and Said, who does not observe any of these austerities (84). Ahmad criticizes Said for treating the whole of European/Western history as one unified seamless whole, which is immanent in its canon of great books (84-85).

Culture and Imperialism (1993) was Said’s additional exploration into the historical resistance against Empire. Said puts together all practices that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms under the rubric of “culture.” Another theoretical framework that he relies on while trying to define “culture” is the Arnoldian dictum—the “best that has been known and thought.” But in this process, “culture” becomes aggressively associated with the nation or state, harbouring xenophobia and drawing boundaries between “ours” and “theirs,” and religious and nationalist fundamentalisms soon following with culture metamorphosing into a theatrical battleground, sans “Apollonian gentility” (*Culture* xiv).

Many hallowed British and French writers had repugnant notions of “inferior races,” and though the novel is primarily read for pleasure, it has insidious connections with the imperial process. For instance, a contrapuntal analysis of Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* would reveal the significance of Australia as the penal colony of imperial Britain. Said depicts how the prohibition placed on Abel Magwitch’s return “is not only penal but imperial: subjects can be taken to places like Australia, but they cannot be allowed a ‘return’ to metropolitan space” (*Culture* xvii).

The book tries to analyze individual works both as products of “creative or interpretative imagination” and also as a part of “the relationship between culture and empire” (*Culture* xxiv). Said concentrates on the British, French and American imperial endeavours, and does not discuss most other empires like the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian, the Ottoman, the Spanish and the Portuguese (*Culture* xxv). Interestingly, he attributes the mixing of cultures today to the empire. Thus, “none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” (*Culture* xxix).

The whole experience of imperialism is one that is based on land—a struggle over geography. More than eighty five percent of the earth’s surface was once controlled by the European powers (*Culture* 6). Behind imperialism, there lay ideological formations that believed in the necessity of dominating certain territories. In fact this was more important than the attractions of profit and commerce. Said criticizes that, while a huge amount of time is spent for elaborating Carlyle’s and Ruskin’s aesthetic theories, sufficient attention is not paid to their notions of “the subjugation of inferior peoples and colonial territories” (*Culture* 12). He foregrounds William Blake’s annotations to Joshua Reynold’s *Discourses*: “Empire follows Art and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose” (*Culture* 13).

Said calls for a more nuanced reading of works of art, especially the novel, by paying more attention to its worldliness, and national, international and historical context, instead of just focussing on their internal coherence.

This increases their value as works of art, as the complex network of affiliations are revealed. To “connect” is what Said tries to do; rather than to separate. Lines between cultures are “benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote” (*Culture* 15). Said asserts that we are unable to be unitary autonomous entities today; alterities and cross influences have permeated us to so deep an extent.

The “business of empire” has a curious history of becoming the “empire of business” (*Culture* 25). Even after decolonization, the locales which the Westerners left continued to be markets over which they ruled morally and intellectually, ensuing in the wave of neocolonialism (*Culture* 27). The taking of the earth from those with “darker complexions and flatter noses” was no benign process (*Culture* 70). Any act of reading should thus be perspicacious enough to uncover this. Reading Jane Austen should thus be necessarily accompanied by a reading of Fanon and Cabral too (*Culture* 71). Astute attention has to be paid to the interpellation of culture by empire so as to convey the interdependence between things. A perspective of secular human history is essential to perceive the “overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future” (*Culture* 72).

Unlike Britain, France had suffered “reverses of policy, losses of colonies, insecurity of possession, and shifts in philosophy” which consequently reduced the influence of French empire on French culture. This

led to a lack in the weighty philosophical sense of “imperial mission” of France, as against what one finds in Britain. Imperial possessions were always useful as anonymous collectivities, just as the transient workers, migrant populations, and seasonal artisans, whose “existence always counts, though their names and identities do not,” and Empire was being continuously dependent on these “people without History” (*Culture* 75).

Reading the canonical texts would also require the teasing out of these marginalized, silenced voices. Said’s technique of “contrapuntal reading” does exactly this—talking back to the Empire. It shows, for example, as discussed below, how a colonial sugar plantation becomes important in maintaining a particular lifestyle in metropolitan England. The novel, with its regulatory social presence in West European societies, participated in an extremely slow, infinitesimal politics that reinforced perceptions about the Empire (*Culture* 87, 89). It is intriguing to note that a whole corpus of humanistic ideas co-existed comfortably with imperialism, with very little resistance at “home”—England.

Said shifts focus from temporality to space in his analysis of the novel. He points out that “Like many other novels, *Mansfield Park* is very precisely about a series of both small and large dislocations and relocations in space” (*Culture* 101). The British were actively involved in the Caribbean and in South America, mainly Brazil and Argentina, when Austen was writing her novel. She makes a few references to Antigua, which has a definitive function in the novel. Said opines that Austen meant to convey that “no matter how isolated and insulated the English place (e.g. Mansfield Park), it requires

overseas sustenance” (*Culture* 107). The Caribbean sugar plantation of Sir Thomas Bertram had to be maintained by slave labour, which was not abolished until the 1830’s. The Anglo-French competition for the monopoly of sugar markets was a historical reality; these new empires wanted long-term concerns, unlike the earlier Roman, Spanish or Portuguese ones which were bent on loot (*Culture* 107).

Interpreting Jane Austen would need paying attention to the questions of by “whom” “when,” and “where” it is done. Said explicitly states that “the Bertrams could not have been possible without the slave trade, sugar, and the colonial planter class” (*Culture* 112). In order to examine the moral geography of Jane Austen, it is essential to keep this in mind. All routine aspects of the slave trade were inevitably cruel. But everything about Austen and her values, as known to us, is diametrically opposite to cruelty. Her “little bit (two inches wide) of ivory” fiction becomes problematic when read in this light. Said avoids the “rhetoric of blame” and urges us to see “complementarity and interdependence” in her works which allowed the “hybridizing intrusions of human history,” instead of dismissing them as “trivial exercises in aesthetic frumpery” (*Culture* 115).

The views of enforced imperialism are embedded in almost all similar texts of the nineteenth century. Ignoring these signposts would be like “describing a road without its setting in the landscape” (*Culture* 126). They were not some rhetorical flights of fantasy; nations were expanding their global reach at an alarming pace. The language of imperialism also carried

within it the images of growth, fertility, and motherhood (*Culture* 128,129). The rise of ethnography furthered the codification of difference and enabled the domination of the West, accompanied by the rhetoric of “*la mission civilisatrice*” (*Culture* 130). British education in India had a curriculum and pedagogy, which transmitted ideas about unequal races and cultures in the classroom, to further their mission (*Culture* 130,131).

Said’s analysis of the Italian composer Verdi’s opera *Aida* (1871) points out that one major thing it does for European culture is to “confirm the Orient as an essentially exotic, distant, and antique place in which Europeans can mount certain shows of force” (*Culture* 134). Unlike his earlier operas which addressed Italy and Italians, it was the Egypt and Egyptians of early antiquity which Verdi had to engage with in *Aida*. The work has historical and cultural experiences of overseas domination penetrating deep into it. Verdi was given 150,000 francs in gold to write it and he was flattered, being the first choice instead of Wagner and Gounod, and the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette had supervised its “Egyptian” scenarios (*Culture* 139).

Said criticizes that “Egyptology is Egyptology and not Egypt” (*Culture* 141). It was Egypt as reflected through the imperial eye, and transported to Europe for use there. Mariette in fact traversed three different worlds—“archaeology, grand opera, and the European universal expositions” (*Culture* 144). Verdi converted some of the priests into priestesses, following the European practice of making Oriental women central to exotic endeavours, thus displaying feminine eroticism.

Cairo during the times of Khedive Ismail was central to Africa, Islam, Arab and Ottoman worlds. Europeans had found it inaccessible. At the end of the nineteenth century, as part of the modernization drive, the city was divided into two distinct physical communities, widening its cultural cleavage. To the east of the little single street that marked its borders lay the “native city,” with its pre-industrial, unpaved roads, and water peddlars, with darkness at nightfall, no parks and street trees, and traversing possible only on foot or animal back; while to the west lay the “colonial city,” with its European identification, fast-paced life, and macadam streets, with water delivered through conduits, and having gaslights, formal gardens, and railroads (*Culture* 154, 155). Despite physical contiguity the two cities were, “miles apart socially and centuries apart technologically” (*Culture* 155). The Opera House built for Verdi, by Ismail, was exactly at the centre of the north-south axis, facing the European city. Both the Opera House and *Aida* were later viewed as “antinomian symbols of the country’s artistic life and its imperialist subjugation” (*Culture* 156).

Despite the notion that imperial power would “rule the waves forever,” alternatives arose, persisted, and prevailed. Said notes that the resistance and opposition to Empire was not born out of a vacuum. Churches, the United Nations, Marxism, Pan-African, Pan-Arab, and Pan-Asian congresses, and many other global forces spurred it. This led to a dramatic redrawing of the world’s map. An opposition to Empire in London and Paris resonated in resistances put up at Delhi and Algiers. Contrary to the notions that propound

the exclusive influence of Western ideas of freedom in the fight against colonial rule, Said sheds light on the reserves in cultures like the Indian and the Arab, “that always resisted imperialism” (*Culture* 240).

A nation trying to decolonize itself can imagine its past in three different ways: being like Ariel, the willing servant of Prospero, untroubled and bourgeois; being like Caliban who accepts his mongrel past; or being like a Caliban who sheds the servitude, and discovers the pre-colonial self (*Culture* 258). The third mode did spur and produce many nativist and radical nationalisms. Though this nationalist consciousness may easily degenerate into frozen rigidity spurring chauvinism and xenophobia, the initial insight of “people being conscious of themselves as prisoners in their own land,” says Said, is of paramount importance, in puncturing the history of Empire (*Culture* 258).

The process of decolonization insists on viewing the history of a community as an integral whole. For instance, slave narratives, spiritual autobiographies, and prison memoirs form a counterpoint to the “monumental histories, official discourses and panoptic quasi-scientific viewpoint” offered by the Western powers (*Culture* 260). Resistance becomes an alternative way to conceive human history. Said puts forward the neologism “voyage in,” and defines it as a “conscious effort, to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories . . .” (*Culture* 260). It bears the hallmark of a more “integrative view of human community and human liberation,” instead

of a separatist nationalism. Curiously, the “history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings,” with no culture being impermeable (*Culture* 261). The “panacea” called nationalism can sadly deteriorate into a situation of “not dealing with economic disparities, social injustice, and the capture of the newly independent state by a nationalist elite” (*Culture* 262).

Imperialism’s complex nexus with geography requires further attention. Wherever they went, the Europeans tried to change the local habitat, introducing new crops, animals, plants, and building methods. This led to the advent of new diseases, ecological imbalances and the dislocations of natives. Land was integrated with external rule, and commercial geography differentiated zones, territories, climates and peoples. Colonial space was transformed in such a way as to not appear foreign to the imperial eye. The renaming of land and the redrawing of boundaries was followed by a redevelopment of the native language (*Culture* 273).

Said talks of “border wars” in which one has to join the primordial group or be relegated to a subaltern status, fighting to death. These wars are “an expression of essentializations—Africanizing the African, Orientalizing the Oriental, Westernizing the Western, Americanizing the American, for an indefinite time and with no alternative”(*Culture* 376).

Cultural nationalism tries to distinguish a national canon and maintain its eminence and aesthetic autonomy. But no longer can the world be conceived using linear models of history and Atlantic-centred geographies. The experience of “exile” becomes a norm, crossing boundaries and charting

new territories, defying canonic enclosures. Said powerfully clarifies that reading and writing are never neutral activities—“texts are protean things; they are tied to circumstances and to politics large and small, and these require attention and criticism” (*Culture* 385).

Said advocates a contrapuntal analysis, in which Dickens and Thackeray are read in tandem with the colonial enterprises in India and Australia. It should be modelled not on a symphony—as earlier notions of comparative literature were—but “rather on an atonal ensemble” (*Culture* 386). Subversive cultural theories, when placed in the university’s academic canon, are most of the time wrenched away from their immediate content, and thus defanged. They become like items on a menu card, procreating professional expertise and guild mentality, severed from affiliations with the real world. Debates mostly centre round “what” books should be read, and not “how” they should be read (*Culture* 397).

Said adds that in a new map of the world, more and more people want to eat better, and want to move, talk, sing, and dress (*Culture* 398). Democracy and ecology provide new contexts for combat zones, set against a cosmic backdrop (*Culture* 400). Struggles between “domestic tyrants and idealist oppositions, hybrid combinations of realism and fantasy, cartographic and archaeological descriptions, explorations in mixed forms (essay, video or film, photograph, memoir, story, aphorism) of unhoused exilic experiences” make the new order (*Culture* 400).

Said advocates that, a new critical consciousness, unleashed by a revised education, which traverses the “geography of other identities, peoples, cultures” is crucially required to deal with the new challenges (*Culture* 401). New states and boundaries have produced homeless wanderers, nomads, vagrants. These decentred energies find incarnation in the migrant, whose consciousness is that of “the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages” (*Culture* 403). Survival is all about the connection between things, and “reality cannot be deprived of the ‘other echoes [that] inhabit the garden’” (*Culture* 408). Thinking not about oneself but rather about others, not constantly considering one’s own culture as number one, and not trying to rule others or classifying them can make the world a better place.

Said is taken to task by Ahmad for exalting the work of Ranajit Guha in *Culture and Imperialism*. While Guha had his origin in the Indian upper class, he later relocated to the metropolitan university. Ahmad accuses Said of “autobiographical self-referentiality” here (90). In addition to Guha, Said also discusses C. L. R. James, George Antonius and, S. H. Alatas. There were writers like D. D. Kosambi and Irfan Habib, who started writing at roughly the same time, but it is curious why Said picked up Guha and not the others. Ahmad points out that Said is silent about these other trajectories and “simply inflates differences of individual formation and attitude into meaningless global typologies” (93). Said’s “voyage in” would thus mean the movement of the non-Western superior scholar from the non-West into the Western

metropolis. Though Said characterizes this movement with an “adversarial internationalization,” Ahmad is quick in pointing out that rarely do the “voyage in” and “adversarial activity” go together (95).

Ahmad is doubtful whether Said has read Guha’s work *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (1963) fully, for he seems to have used only its introduction and biographical detail while writing *Culture and Imperialism* (96). Ahmad tries to differentiate strongly between a personal “immigration” and forced “exile,” which Said seems to erase (96). By choosing Guha, Said was portraying a typical upper-layer bourgeois, who had privileged access to technique and discourse, a case of “self-exile,” followed by subsequent professionalization and hybridization in the Western academy.

Despite this, *Culture and Imperialism* has been a highly influential work which has asserted

the indispensable role of culture as the vital, enabling counterpoint to institutional practices, demonstrating how the aggrandizement of territory through military force and the bureaucratic exercise of power in the colonies was sustained by the ideological invasion of cultural space, while at home the fact of empire was registered not only in political debate and economic and foreign policy, but entered the social fabric, intellectual discourse and the life of the imagination. (Parry 340)

Though Susan Fraiman praises Said's analysis of slavery in *Antigua* as the dark underbelly of *Mansfield Park*, and remarks that this has made it "one of the best chapters" in *Culture and Imperialism*, she opposes Said's critique of Austen, as one tied to imperialist wrongdoings (17). Fraiman notes that "the yoking of gentle Jane to sex, subversion, or slavery still has the power to shock, registering thus the persistence of Austen's reputation for piety" (18). She also adds that it was Q. D. Leavis who first pointed that scholars try to perceive Austen's unworldliness, lifting her out of her social milieu, removed from the contingencies of history. They allowed her "gorgeous sentences to float free, untainted by the routines of labor that produced them and deaf to the tumult of current events" (Fraiman 18). This facilitated the creation of the myth of Austen's feminine nearsightedness.

Fraiman points out some fissures in Said's analysis. One is the singling out of the text *Mansfield Park* from the corpus of Austen. She opines that Sir Thomas Bertram should have been analyzed in line with the other deficient fathers running from *Northanger Abbey* through *Persuasion*. Said's attention to *Mansfield Park* seems to be cursory because he mistakenly refers to Maria Bertram as "Lydia" (possibly confusing her with Lydia Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice*) (19). Austen requires a further close analysis due to her status of an "unmarried, middle-class, scribbling woman," who was arguably a kind of exile in her own country, "lacking the franchise, enjoying few property rights (and these because she was single), living as a dependent at the edge of her brother's estate and publishing her work anonymously" (Fraiman 19, 20).

Fraiman argues that *Mansfield Park* is a representative text in the project of feminizing Europe and that Said's citation of Lady Bertram's request that Fanny's brother William sail to India so "that I may have a shawl. I think I will have two shawls," demonstrates an image of Europe, "as the leisured consumer of more than one shawl, kept in luxury by the backbreaking labour of colonial workers . . . an inverted sexual metaphor in which the recumbent feminized East rises to its feet, and the veil that once symbolized its mysterious allure reappears as a shawl, a figure for the consumerism of a pampered and feminized West" (28-29).

Mary Louise Pratt terms Said's method in *Culture and Imperialism* as "achronology" (Robbins et al. 35). Said's contrapuntal reading tries to read the past through the present—"retrospectively and heterophonically" (Robbins et al. 35). The text has myriad powerful phrases and a wealth of aphorisms like "the cultural argument for empire," "the microphysics of imperialism," "an alternative way of conceiving human history" and so on (Robbins et al. 35-36). Pratt calls for a radical expansion of the term "imperialism" to contain present-day realities too (Robbins et al. 40, 41). The "global scale upward transfer of wealth," and the "sex tourism industry that brought the AIDS virus to between 10 and 20 percent of the youth of Thailand, a country that has never been colonized by anyone" are some of the signs of our bewildering times (Robbins et al. 41).

Jonathan Arac lauds *Culture and Imperialism* for magnanimously refusing the "rhetorics of blame," and notes that "the book's practice of

‘connection’ rejoins the realm of pain (empire, slavery, war, etc.) to the realm of pleasure (the separated aesthetic sphere)” (Robbins et al. 45). R.

Radhakrishnan opines that the book is “profoundly conjunctural in nature,” situated on the border, between several discourses, employing “complex and uneven combinatorics” (Robbins et al. 46). Its “contradictions and incommensurabilities are deeply symptomatic of the divided times we live in” (Robbins et al. 46). All attempts to separate Said’s critical agency into disparate areas,—the literary theorist and Palestinian activist—disallowing dialogue in between, should be resisted. Such a division would only ghettoize his work, depoliticize it, monumentalize the schism between real political and professional activities, and associate solidarity only with “real” politics, and “mercenary opportunism and a lack of worldliness” with professional projects (Robbins et al. 46).

Nailing Said down to one methodology or school of thought would be a poor way of understanding the complexities of his project. Radhakrishnan notes that in disregarding theory as “strategic, situated, and nontotalizable practice, there is a danger we may dehistoricize or decontextualize the nature of Said’s engagement . . .” (Robbins et al. 47). He adds that Said was a cosmopolitan critic, who traversed the asymmetry of divided spaces and histories, using his universalist imagination, always acknowledging overlaps, and soliciting coevalness (Robbins et al. 47). His was the border task “that is neither all metropolitan nor all peripheral,” and his readings professed the

“peripheralizing of the center and not an act of capitulation to the metropolitan center” (Robbins et al. 47).

There were many authors who influenced Said profoundly. Out of all of them it was Joseph Conrad towards whom he constantly gravitated. Conrad was always like a firm and steady ground to Said. The striking similarities in both their lives could be one of the reasons for this. Andrew N. Rubin points out in his Foreword to Said’s *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* that they were both born under foreign or colonial rule, were forced to move out of their native lands, and wrote in a language which was not their mother tongue; exile became a common denominator, which enabled them to comprehend the world critically, and with fresh eyes (ix). The book is in fact a revised version of Said’s dissertation written at Harvard University, and tries to explore, phenomenologically, the consciousness of Joseph Conrad, by examining his short fiction and letters (*Joseph x*).

Throughout the book Conrad comes out as a writer with an “embattled self conflict from which he is entirely incapable of deriving any meaning at all” (*Joseph x*). Said identifies three phases in Conrad’s mode as a writer: (1) from 1896 to 1913—which saw his decision to become a writer and the recognition as one, (2) from 1914 to 1918—which saw the turmoils of war, and (3) from 1918 to 1924—when both Conrad and Europe passed through an uneasy reconciliation (*Joseph xii*).

Rubin further comments that Said depicts Conrad as being able to provide the “conditions for an ‘imagined’ and alternative consciousness while

preserving the text's autonomy as work of art. . . . he [Said] does adduce that *Heart of Darkness* provides the literary conditions of possibility for *imagining* another space or geography that is not subjected to imperial domination and conquest" (*Joseph* xiv). Conrad enlivens the possibility of "representing and knowing the world in nondominating and noncoercive ways," which was in fact the prime concern in Said's critical enterprise (*Joseph* xiv-xv).

Said points out that Conrad created a public personality to camouflage his internal unrest, and that his letters coincide with the fulfillment of his self-discovery and the period of World War One, which was a culminating phase in European history (*Joseph* xix-xx). Conrad believed that short fiction would allow him more artistic control, and that life itself "was like a series of short episodes" (*Joseph* xx). He was many things at once: a Pole, an Englishman, a sailor, and a writer who effectively employed the "retrospective mode" in his tales (*Joseph* xx).

"Pain" and "intense effort" characterize Conrad's letters and life. Said points out that these letters slowly unfold Conrad's mind, temperament, character, and spiritual history (*Joseph* 5). Each letter tries to comprehend his past and present. He wrote in order to create an "imperishable monument against the flood of time" (*Joseph* 16). He was gifted with faculties of both the mind and heart—an acquired English reason, and a restive Polish sensibility (*Joseph* 23-24). In his letter of March 10, 1896, written to Charles Zagorski, Conrad reveals that "only literature remains to me as a means of existence" (*Joseph* 26).

Conrad preferred the iotas of difference in each particular individual, over the easy and uniform state of consistent character. He believed that “the poignancy of things human lies in the alternative” (*Joseph* 36). He was on the lookout for eccentricities in man, which invigorated the individual, something which mere consistency could not do. He believed that subjects constantly lay around for writers to pick up, and always preconceived the end of a story before it was begun (*Joseph* 42). He describes the process of story writing thus: “My story is there in a fluid—in an evading shape. I can’t get hold of it. It is all there—to bursting, yet I can’t get hold of it no more than you can grasp a handful of water” (qtd. in *Joseph* 49). Labouring against an anxious and uncertain future, a finished page used to give him immense satisfaction.

It is interesting to note that Conrad had to master the English language to produce his fictional corpus. Had he remained a Pole in Poland, maybe the novelist would never have been born. Said presumes that Conrad the foreigner was strained to overcome his laziness and incompetence to produce something of literary worth. Life, for him, was not a tour from cradle to grave, and writing and life were “journeys without maps, struggles to win over” (*Joseph* 63). Conrad saw his personal struggle reflected in the political and historical changes around. Said remarks that “as the physical and moral geography of Europe changed, he changed too” (*Joseph* 63).

Conrad was bold enough to proclaim that his attitude to subjects and methods of composition would always be changing, not because he was unstable or unprincipled, but because he was free (*Joseph* 74). Conrad saw his

private disorder laid bare on the stage of Europe. He wrote in 1918 that idealistic compromises such as the League of Nations “were like sketching out a tennis court while the ground was moving underfoot” and that “peace” and “felicity” had become words which had “an air of the packed valise,” ideally suited for the “frozen silence of the North Pole” (*Joseph* 79).

The writer and the sailor intertwined in him, and he felt revolted by the cynical indifference of the sea to human suffering and courage. In 1902 he had almost brought his work to a stop, being a sailor and knowing well enough that all voyages must end. “Navigating a way across an ocean of ink with pen instead of oars . . . implied a port and a place of rest” (*Joseph* 151).

Beginnings: Intention and Method, first published in 1975, was Said’s critical book which tackled the genre of “uncanny criticism”—“criticism not primarily based on the traditions, common-sense conventions and . . . pieties of historical or philological scholarship” (*Beginnings* xi). Indeed Hillis Miller would argue that for the uncanny critics, “the moment when logic fails in their work is the moment of their deepest penetration into the actual nature of literary language, or of language as such” (qtd. in *Beginnings* xi). Said in this work tries to isolate and study “beginnings” and the huge efforts made at “historical retrospection,” “to describe things from the beginning, *in history*” (*Beginnings* xi-xii).

The terrain of “uncanny criticism” was also known as the New New Criticism (*Beginnings* xii). Said contrasts the notions of “beginning” and “origin.” While the former is “secular, humanly produced and ceaselessly re-

examined,” the latter is “divine, mythical and privileged” (*Beginnings* xiii). He revives attention to the philosopher Vico, and tries to deal with suppressed histories, and the association between narrative and textuality. In fact, Said attempted this work during the period of transition from modernism to post-modernism.

One of the central arguments of the *Beginnings* is that “modernism was an aesthetic and ideological phenomenon that was a response to the crisis of what could be called *filiation*—linear, biologically grounded process, that which ties children to their parents—which produced the counter-crisis within modernism of affiliation, that is those creeds, philosophies, and visions re-assembling the world in new non-familial ways” (xiii). The book also has a sense of uncertainty hovering over it, which is emblematic of “uncanny criticism,” with a “hybrid language expressing a number of different things” (*Beginnings* xiv). Said affirms that the book tries to constantly re-experience beginning, not to give rise to authority nor to promote orthodoxy, “but to stimulate self-conscious and situated activity, activity with aims non-coercive and communal” (*Beginnings* xiv). In fact, throughout his writings, Said tried to disseminate these views admirably.

For Said, the “beginning” was the first step in producing meaning intentionally. Just as it denotes a moment in time, it also designates “a place, a principle, or an action” (*Beginnings* 4). Besides a practical or theoretical interest, the idea of a beginning, points toward an “aboriginal human need to . . . locate a beginning” (*Beginnings* 5). The writer often encounters the

dilemma of “how should he begin to write”? Questions of training, choice of subject, directions to be taken, and requisite literary study, all accompany this query. Said describes the writer as “a wanderer, going from place to place for his material, but remaining a man essentially *between homes*” (*Beginnings* 8). Said adds that, the critic does not undertake a complete revolutionary destruction of the canon, with a view to replacing it with one’s own, though he seldom stays within a tradition; instead a notion of “in-betweenness” is foregrounded (*Beginnings* 8).

Said notes that the true relationship between writers and their works is one of “adjacency,” rather than a “sequential” or “dynastic” one, and texts stand to the side, or next to each other, rather than in a line, or in a line of descent (*Beginnings* 10). A “beginning” initiates a discontinuity with the normal course of action, and involves a reversal, change of direction, and authorization (*Beginnings* 34).

A beginning has to be “thought” possible, before it can be one, and for the writer, historian, or the philosopher, it emerges reflectively (*Beginnings* 35). Said notes that literature has umpteen instances of the “lore of beginnings,” despite “the tyranny of starting a work in *medias res*, a convention that burdens the beginning with the pretense that it is not one” (*Beginnings* 43). Milton’s Satan is “the beginning . . . the *arche* in response to which the continuities of human history and destiny are arranged” (*Beginnings* 46). Said deciphers the purpose of a “beginning” as a chance to bring order to the tumbling disorder of brute reality (*Beginnings* 50).

Said distinguishes two kinds of beginnings—the temporal and transitive one, and the intransitive and conceptual one. The former “foresees a continuity that flows from it” and “is suited for work, of polemic, discovery,” while the latter is “a creature of the mind” which “belongs more to silence than it does to language,” a “necessary fiction,” and an “ungraspable absolute” (*Beginnings* 76-77).

Said finds in the institution of narrative prose fiction, the desire of writers to modify reality by creating a new beginning (*Beginnings* 82). The author is “a person who originates or gives existence to something, a begetter, beginner, father, or ancestor, a person who also sets forth written statements” (*Beginnings* 83). Said notes that truth generated by narrative fiction is mediated, and “because of its falseness, makes the truth truer” (*Beginnings* 90).

Another special condition that Said considers as necessary for the generation of novelistic fiction is what he calls the “fear of the void that antedates private authority” (*Beginnings* 92). This is the reason why there are a large number of characters in fiction who are “orphans, outcasts, parvenus, emanations, solitaires, and deranged types whose background is either rejected, mysterious, or unknown” (*Beginnings* 92-93). The novel produces an alternative life for the heroes “who are otherwise lost in society” (*Beginnings* 93).

Covering Islam first appeared in 1981. It is Said’s third book in a series and it tries to decipher the relationship between Islam, Arabs and the Orient,

and the West namely France, Britain, and the United States. *Orientalism* (1978) and *The Question of Palestine* (1979) were the first two books in this series. The third one tries to deal openly with the Western responses to the “world of Islam,” perceived mainly through the media during the 1970’s. Some of the events that kindled an avid interest in the “return of Islam” were “the shortage of energy supply, with its focus on Arab and Persian Gulf oil, OPEC, and the dislocating effects on Western societies of inflation and dramatically expensive fuel bills. In addition the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis [of 1979] . . .” (*Covering* 1).

Said’s argument is that there exists no “direct correspondence between the ‘Islam’ in common Western usage and the enormously varied life that goes on within the world of Islam, with its . . . dozens of societies, states, histories, geographies, cultures” (*Covering* 1). The word “Islam” is used indiscriminately as a homogenous entity, without paying attention to its specifics, diversities, pluralities and even contradictions. It is made a scapegoat and synonym, most of the time, for things unpleasant and disliked by the Western world. Said comments that “For the right, Islam represents barbarism; for the left, medieval theocracy; for the centre, a kind of distasteful exoticism” (*Covering* 1v). Though very few know sufficiently enough of Islam, they all readily agree that there is not much “to be agreed” in it.

Said’s endeavour in writing this book was “to disentangle sense from nonsense, by asking the right questions and expecting pertinent answers,” and thus allowing anyone to learn “about either ‘Islam’ or the world of Islam, and

about the men, women, and cultures that live within it, speak its languages, breathe its air, produce its histories and societies” (*Covering* lix). Said would like to see a compassionate viewing of the Other, gained out of a respectful understanding of the human experience. This would reduce confrontation and hostility to a large extent and do away with the “offensive generality of labels like ‘the Muslim,’ ‘the Persian,’ ‘the Turk,’ ‘the Arab,’ or ‘the Westerner’” (*Covering* lxx). An open mind towards the Other, and the acceptance that change does occur on both sides, namely “the West” and “Islam,” is what he prescribes for changing unsavoury situations.

In the “Introduction to the Vintage Edition” which came out in 1997, Said looks back onto the fifteen plus years that has passed since the publication of *Covering Islam*. He points out that there has been “a strange revival of canonical, though previously discredited, Orientalist ideas about Muslim generally non-white, people” and that “[m]alicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West; what is said about the Muslim mind, or character, or religion, or culture as a whole cannot now be said in mainstream discussion about Africans, Jews, other Orientals, or Asians” (*Covering* xii). This has become truer about the present world which has lost Said.

Said harshly condemns the strategies adopted by Western media to automatically equate “Islam” with “fundamentalism,”—a word which itself has an “elided relationship with Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism” (*Covering* xvi). He virulently attacks the methodical ploys to reduce Islam to

mere crude generalizations and stereotyped representations about its faith, founder and people, and the incessant reinforcement of anything negative associated with it, be it “violence, primitiveness, atavism, threatening qualities” (*Covering* xvi). Western media disregards the atrocities committed by “the West,” and instead strongly repudiates every act of aggression by a Muslim, and ascribes it to the “flawed nature” of Muslims or Arabs (*Covering* xxii).

Said cautions that political Islam has generally not fared well, as in the case of Sudan, Algeria, and Afghanistan, while Iran maybe an exception. The process of creating imaginary border lines between “us” and “them” is what Said tries to resist in this book. He hopes that the “sensationalism, crude xenophobia, and insensitive belligerence,” which has become “the order of the day,” will be done away with, to mitigate the enormous “accumulation of negative effects” (*Covering* xlvi).

Said places the fear of Islam in the West within the distrust of “Orientalist” thought. The Orient is generally considered as inferior by the West, yet at the same time endowed with greater size and more “potential for power (usually destructive) than the West” (*Covering* 4). The hostility springs from considering Islam as “a late-coming challenge to Christianity” (*Covering* 5). The West views Islam as a unified, homogenous, monolithic entity, and the year 1978 saw Iran occupying the centre stage of world politics with its Islamic Revolution, which surprised the West and the United States in particular.

Said notes that while trying to define the “Islamic mindset,” Western media relies on academic experts on Islam who maybe well versed on “jurisprudential schools in tenth-century Baghdad or nineteenth century Moroccan urban patterns,” but sadly unaware about the “whole civilization of Islam—literature, law, politics, history, sociology and so on” (*Covering* 15). Political crises have always fuelled the interest in Islam. Rarely does an academic or informative study on it occur, when there is relative peace all around. A bomb blast or threat of violence, on the other hand, would witness an onslaught of “critical opinions” with terms like “the crescent of crisis,” “the arc of instability,” or “the return of Islam” abounding in gargantuan proportions (*Covering* 16).

Most of the time, discussions on Islam do not focus on a rational contemporary history, but on archaic philological and jurisprudential codes, from the seventh to the ninth century, and Said observes that most of modern Islamic studies in the academy belong to “‘area programs’ generally—Western Europe, the Soviet Union, Southeast Asia, and so on. They are therefore affiliated to the mechanism by which national policy is set” (*Covering* 19). Said cautions that while the religious fanatic nature of Islam is always alluded to by the Western press, rarely does the same apply to any discussion on Israel (*Covering* 34).

Said points out succinctly that till the OPEC price rises in 1974, scant mention was made of “Islam” as such in media or culture: “One saw and heard of Arabs and Iranians, of Pakistanis and Turks, rarely of Muslims” (*Covering*

36). The higher cost of imported oil soon changed things and the world was divided into “the West” and “the rest.” Some of the events that became “news” were the Ramadan war in 1973 which sprouted the new Islamic assertiveness, the PLO appearing at the UN in 1974, Sheikh Yamani from oil rich Saudi Arabia and the Shah of Iran becoming figures of authority, and the countries of Indonesia, Philippines, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkey, the Gulf states, Algeria, and Morocco metamorphosing into names that disturbed the United States, moving beyond the status of ignored identities, and suddenly occupying “general consciousness” (*Covering* 40).

Said notes that this created the mad onrush to treat Islam as something “without a history of its own”—prone to violence, fanaticism and despotism with space, time, democracy, socialism, secularism, and moral restraint all being eliminated and easily done away with (*Covering* 41-42). Soon followed Samuel P. Huntington’s infamous thesis “The Clash of Civilizations,” featured as an article, in the summer 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Said points out that the title of Huntington’s essay is taken from Bernard Lewis’ essay, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” published in the September 1990 issue of *The Atlantic* (*Covering* xxxii). Said blames Huntington’s project for portraying Islam, as the primary “enemy of any Westerner, as if every Muslim and every Westerner were watertight little containers of civilizational identity,” despite millenia of peaceful exchange and dialogue (*Covering* 43).

Said observes that one should understand Islam, and in fact any religion, as “communities of interpretation”—which are “acts of will and

interpretation that take place in history, and can only be dealt with in history as acts of will and interpretation” (*Covering* 45). He opines that “no one lives in direct contact with truth or with reality;” we all live in a “world actually made by human beings,” and that things such as “‘the nation’ or ‘Christianity’ or ‘Islam’ are the result of agreed-upon convention, of historical processes, and, above all, of willed human labour expended to give those things an identity we can recognize” (*Covering* 45).

The world of media is governed by corporate identity which is bent on promoting a homogenized image of both America and the West. They shape news, they decide “*what* is news and *how* it is news” (*Covering* 52). This is extremely crucial because the United States is a complex society made of innumerable subcultures, but the media uses the sphere of culture to impose one standardizing norm. The hostage crisis in Iran was important to the United States only to the extent of what happened to the hostages; nothing concerning Iran’s “political processes, its daily life, its personalities, its geography and history,” was important (*Covering* 54). Iran and its people “were defined in terms of whether they were for or against the United States” (*Covering* 54). As an example, Said points out that the first Gulf War between the U.S. and Iraq saw the proliferation of CNN to such an extent that the Islamic world was “learning about *itself* by means of images, histories, and information manufactured in the West” and it was even rumoured that Saddam Hussein watched it as the principal source on war (*Covering* 56).

Said argues that “all knowledge is interpretation, and that interpretation must be self-conscious in its methods and its aims if it is to be vigilant and humane, if it is also to arrive at knowledge” (*Covering* 172). He concludes the book with prophetic caution by warning that unless the tie of the West’s knowledge regarding Islam as one that is intimately connected to conquest and domination is not severed, the world will be facing an “Islam” which will be “fully ready to play the role prepared for it by reaction, orthodoxy, and desperation” (*Covering* 173).

The World, the Text, and the Critic (1983) contains essays which were first presented by Said as lectures at various universities, and others which were published in various journals during the course of twelve years (1969-1981). The effort in the book has been to deal with the shift in American literary theory during the late seventies, which receded into “textuality,” drawing inspiration from European revolutionary apostles like Derrida and Foucault. Textuality had become an “antithesis” to history, a “mystical and disinfected subject matter,” something that does take place, but not at “anywhere or anytime in particular” (*The World* 3-4). Said tries to identify the cause of this shift in the historical and political context due to the “ascendancy of Reaganism . . . a new cold war, increased militarism and defense spending, and a massive turn to the right on matters touching the economy, social services, and organized labour” (*The World* 4). Texts do have a material context, born out of the actualities and realities of human life, societies,

events, power, authority, movements and resistances. It is these realities that criticism and critical consciousness should take into account (*The World 5*).

Said points out Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1953) as an example of how material conditions affect the creation of a text. It was his exile into Istanbul that enabled Auerbach to create this brilliant book on the "representation of reality in Western Literature" (*The World 5*). In Istanbul, Auerbach had no access to libraries equipped for European studies, and was exiled from the whole of Western civilization itself. Being a Jewish refugee from Nazi Europe, and also a scholar in the German Romance tradition, Auerbach was performing "an act of cultural, even civilizational, survival of the highest importance" (*The World 6*).

Auerbach's accomplishment problematizes the notion of "home," and he cites Hugo of St. Victor: "The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; but he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land" (*The World 7*). It was his exilic distancing from the traditional home that moulded Auerbach. In fact, a "willed homelessness" would be a fertile climate for creativity. Said notes that it was the "Oriental, non-Occidental exile and homelessness" which made *Mimesis* a "massive reaffirmation of the Western cultural tradition," curiously "built upon a critically important alienation from it . . . built rather on an agonizing distance from it" (*The World 8*).

In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said uses the word "culture" to suggest "an environment, process, and hegemony in which individuals . . . and

their works are embedded” (*The World* 8). It designates “something to which one belongs . . . something that one possesses and . . . also . . . a boundary by which the concepts of what is extrinsic or intrinsic to the culture come into forceful play” (*The World* 8-9). “Culture” has the power to authorize, dominate, legitimate, demote, interdict, and validate. Nineteenth-century European thought abounds with binary discriminations based on “what is fitting for us and what is fitting for them, the former designated as inside, in place, common, belonging, in a word *above*, the latter, who are designated as outside, excluded, aberrant, inferior, in a word *below*” (*The World* 13-14).

Discussing “filiation” and “affiliation,” Said notes that the failure of the generative impulse is a characteristic feature of early twentieth century writing, and its “world of high modernism” is populated with “childless couples, orphaned children, aborted childbirths, and unregenerately celibate men and women,” forcing the necessity of “new and different ways of conceiving human relationships” (*The World* 17). Filial ties are thus replaced by the bonds of affiliation. For T. S. Eliot, the church replaced the family. His filial affinities—Republicanism, Romanticism, and Protestantism—shifted to the set of affiliations—Royalism, Classicism, and Catholicism (*The World* 18).

Said draws attention to Georg Lukacs’ suggestion that, only class consciousness as “an insurrectionary form of an attempt at affiliation could possibly break through the antinomies and atomizations of reified existence in the modern capitalist world-order” (*The World* 19). While a filial bond invites “obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict,” an affiliative

relationship fosters “guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class, and the hegemony of a dominant culture” (*The World* 20). Filiation belongs to “life,” while affiliation to “culture and society.”

Said does not agree with the concept of a text existing within a hermetic universe of its own, with no connection to material actuality. He believes that texts place themselves in the world, and thereby solicit the world’s attention, but in a manner that places “restraints upon what can be done with them interpretively” (*The World* 40). He advocates a “worldly criticism” which opposes both monocentrism and ethnocentrism, that allows one particular culture value and domination over others.

Said firmly asserts that “literature is produced in time and in society by human beings, who are themselves agents of, as well as somewhat independent actors within, their actual history” (*The World* 152). This is in sharp contrast to the functionalist criticism which directs attention towards technical vocabulary and the “impossibility of political and social responsibility” (*The World* 162). Said comments that dominant culture has tried to neutralize the skills of critics and intellectuals, “because that is where the money has been” (*The World* 173). He laments that “‘literature’ as a cultural agency” has become blind to “its actual complicities with power” (*The World* 175).

Said interrogates the role of “critical consciousness,” and thinks aloud whether it is to describe and deliver insights about texts and writers, disseminating information about the monuments of culture, or to preoccupy

itself with “the intrinsic conditions on which knowledge is made possible” (*The World* 182). He picks up Derrida and Foucault as models, “not only to describe but to produce knowledge of the sort that will fall neither into the prepared moulds provided by the dominant culture nor into the wholly predictive forms manufactured by a quasi-scientific method” (*The World* 182). Their originality rests not in their outlandish vocabulary, but in “their rethinking of . . . techniques” (*The World* 183).

For instance, Foucault explicates how cultural modes of domination, effectively wrap themselves in the guise of “truth, discipline, rationality, utilitarian value, and knowledge” (*The World* 216). Said points out that Foucault’s “microphysics of power, ‘is exercised rather than possessed, that it is not the ‘privilege,’ acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions’” (*The World* 221). Foucault, in fact, elides the tensions between classes, the rulers and the ruled, wealth and privilege, and monopolies of coercion, and his notion of power as “unmediated domination” nullifies the “central dialectic of opposed forces in society,” which continue to exist, despite all methods of “technotronic control” (*The World* 221). Said cautions that a “fascinated description of exercised power is never a substitute for trying to change power relationships in society” (*The World* 222).

In his widely anthologized essay “Travelling Theory,” Said astutely observes that “like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another”

(*The World* 226). There is a point of origin, a distance traversed, a set of conditions in which they are accepted, and then the transformation of these ideas. Discussing Lukacs, Said mentions that theory was not “an avoidance of reality” but “a revolutionary will committed to worldliness and change” (*The World* 234).

Said advocates a literature and criticism that breaks all shells of isolation, brushing aside the delight in an autonomous existence, and exploring the historical and political contexts in which texts are embedded. It is this contested cultural space that is the domain of criticism. The network is prioritized over the solitary cell. Cultures are to be understood as interrelated systems “over whose activity the individual critical historian holds the bridle of a vigilant historical understanding and a moral judgment” (*The World* 267).

Said’s trenchant critique on “religious criticism” merits serious consideration. In contrast to “secular criticism,” “religious criticism” is “an agent of closure, shutting off human investigation, criticism, and effort, in deference to the authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the other-worldly” (*The World* 290). It gains followers through implicit obedience and subservience. Collective passions are flared up which often turn disastrous. Solidarity and communal belonging are beneficial, but Said prefers one that is backed with a “secular attitude,” “a sense of history” and “healthy skepticism” (*The World* 290). He chides the trends in criticism to mix mystical and magical elements, veering towards the religious. This enables only the “secure protection of systems of belief,” and promotes no critical activity or

consciousness (*The World 292*). The growth of such a world order only helps to bestow a quasi-divine status to the marketplace. Said cautions that this kind of criticism fails to see the “affiliations with the political world it serves,” and alters the critic from an intellectual into a cleric (*The World 292*). Recapturing the secular spirit of criticism is the uphill task, the onerous challenge ahead.