

ROUTLEDGE *Critical* THINKERS



Edward  
Said

Bill Ashcroft and  
Pal Ahluwalia

2<sup>ND</sup>  
EDITION

Edward  
Said

Bill Ashcroft and  
Pal Ahluwalia

# EDWARD SAID

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Edward Said is perhaps best known as the author of the landmark study *Orientalism*, a book which changed the face of critical theory and shaped the emerging field of post-colonial studies, and for his controversial journalism on the Palestinian political situation.

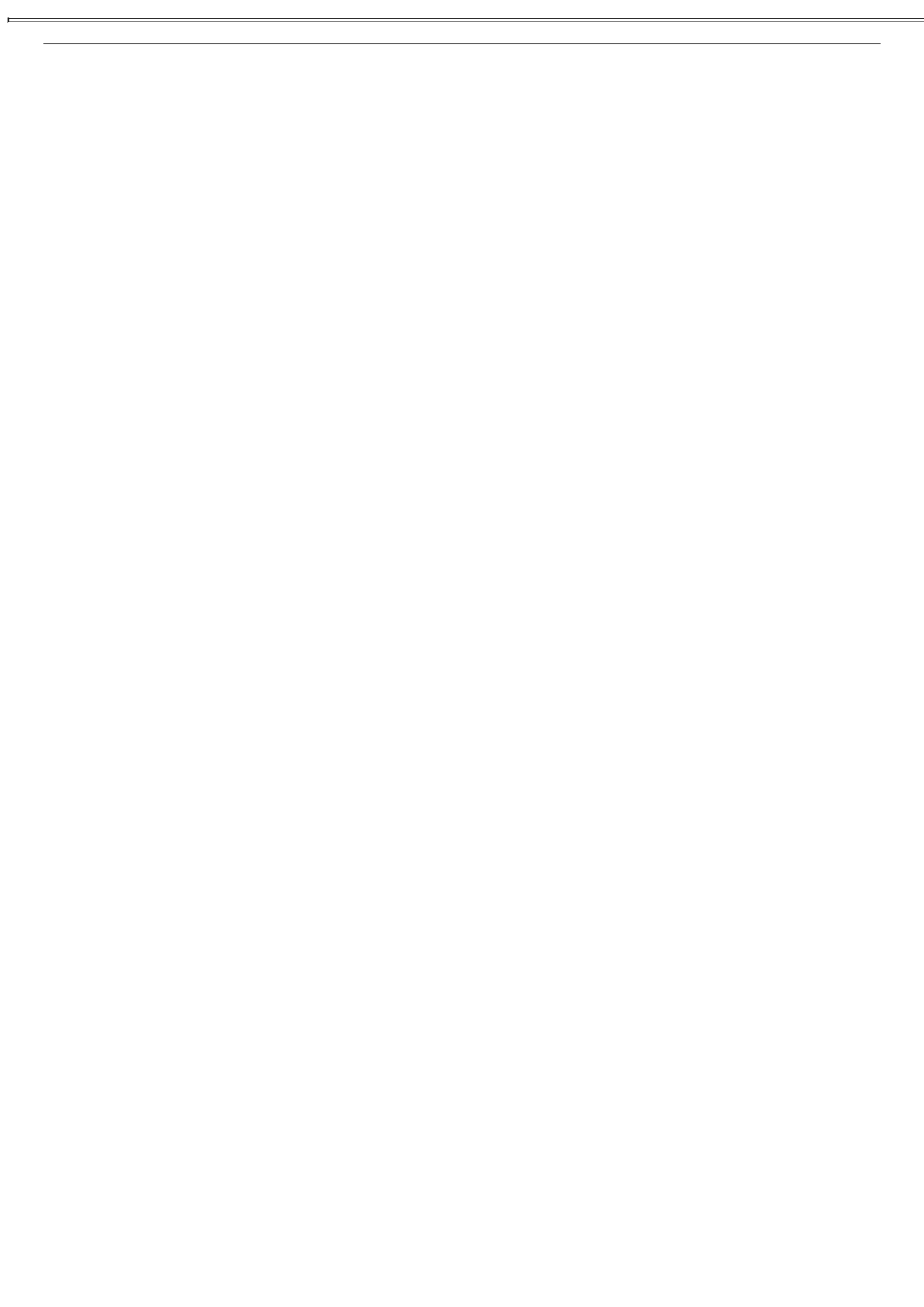
Looking at the context and the impact of Said's scholarship and journalism, this book examines Said's key ideas, including:

- the significance of 'worldliness', 'amateurism', 'secular criticism', 'affiliation' and 'contrapuntal reading'
- the place of text and critic in 'the world'
- knowledge, power and the construction of the 'Other'
- links between culture and imperialism
- exile, identity and the plight of Palestine
- a new chapter looking at Said's later work and style.

This popular guide has been fully updated and revised in a new edition, suitable for readers studying Said for the first time as well as those already familiar with the work of this important theorist. The result is the ideal guide to one of the twentieth century's most engaging critical thinkers.

**Bill Ashcroft** is a founding exponent of post-colonial theory, co-author of *The Empire Writes Back*, the first text to examine systematically the field of post-colonial studies. He is Chair of the School of English at the University of Hong Kong, on leave from the University of New South Wales.

**Pal Ahluwalia** is Pro Vice Chancellor of the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences and the Director for the Centre for Post-Colonial Studies, University of Southern Australia. He is the editor of three Routledge journals: *Social Identities*, *African Identities* and *Sikh Formations*.



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# EDWARD SAID

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*Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia*



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## SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

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The books in this series offer introductions to major critical thinkers who have influenced literary studies and the humanities. The *Routledge Critical Thinkers* series provides the books you can turn to first when a new name or concept appears in your studies.

Each book will equip you to approach a key thinker's original texts by explaining her or his key ideas, putting them into context and, perhaps most importantly, showing you why this thinker is considered to be significant. The emphasis is on concise, clearly written guides which do not presuppose specialist knowledge. Although the focus is on particular figures, the series stresses that no critic or thinker ever existed in a vacuum but, instead, emerged from a broader intellectual, cultural and social history. Finally, these books will act as a bridge between you and the thinker's original texts: not replacing them but rather complementing what she or he wrote.

These books are necessary for a number of reasons. In his 1997 autobiography, *Not Entitled*, the literary critic Frank Kermode wrote of a time in the 1960s:

On beautiful summer lawns, young people lay together all night, recovering from their daytime exertions and listening to a troupe of Balinese musicians. Under their blankets or their sleeping bags, they would chat drowsily about the gurus of the time ... What they repeated was largely hearsay; hence my lunchtime suggestion, quite impromptu, for a series of short, very cheap books offering authoritative but intelligible introductions to such figures.

There is still a need for 'authoritative and intelligible introductions'. But this series reflects a different world from the 1960s. New thinkers have emerged and the reputations of others have risen and fallen as new research has developed. New methodologies and challenging ideas have spread through the arts and humanities. The study of literature is no longer – if it ever was – simply the study and evaluation of poems, novels and plays. It is also the study of the ideas, issues and difficulties which arise in any literary text and in its interpretation. Other arts and humanities subjects have changed in analogous ways.

With these changes, new problems have emerged. The ideas and issues behind these radical changes in the humanities are often presented without reference to wider contexts or as theories which you can simply 'add on' to the texts you read. Certainly, there's nothing wrong with picking out selected ideas or using what comes to hand – indeed, some thinkers have argued that this is, in fact, all we can do. However, it is sometimes forgotten that each new idea comes from the pattern and development of somebody's thought and it is important to study the range and context of their ideas. Against theories 'floating in space', the *Routledge Critical Thinkers* series places key thinkers and their ideas firmly back in their contexts.

More than this, these books reflect the need to go back to the thinker's own texts and ideas. Even an interpretation of an idea, even the most seemingly innocent one, offers its own 'spin', implicitly or explicitly. To read only books on a thinker, rather than texts by that thinker, is to deny yourself the chance of making up your own mind. Sometimes what makes a significant figure's work hard to approach is not so much its style or content as the feeling of not knowing where to start. The purpose of these books is to give you a 'way in' by offering an accessible overview of these thinkers' ideas and works and by guiding your further reading, starting with each thinker's own texts. To use a metaphor from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), these books are ladders, to be thrown away after you have climbed to the next level. Not only, then, do they equip you to approach new ideas, but also they empower you, by leading you back to a theorist's own texts and encouraging you to develop your own informed opinions.

Finally, these books are necessary because, just as intellectual needs have changed, the educational systems around the world – the contexts in which introductory books are usually read – have changed radically, too. What was suitable for the minority higher education system of the 1960s is not suitable

for the larger, wider, more diverse, high technology education systems of the twenty-first century. These changes call not just for new up-to-date introductions but new methods of presentation. The presentational aspects of *Routledge Critical Thinkers* have been developed with today's students in mind.

Each book in the series has a similar structure. They begin with a section offering an overview of the life and ideas of each thinker and explaining why she or he is important. The central section of each book discusses the thinker's key ideas, their context, evolution and reception. Each book concludes with a survey of the thinker's impact, outlining how their ideas have been taken up and developed by others. In addition, there is a detailed final section suggesting and describing books for further reading. This is not a 'tacked-on' section but an integral part of each volume. It opens with brief descriptions of the thinker's key works and concludes with information on the most useful critical works and, where appropriate, websites. This section will guide you in your reading, enabling you to follow your interests and develop your own projects. Throughout each book, references are given in what is known as the Harvard system (the author and the date of a work cited are given in the text and you can look up the full details in the bibliography at the back). This offers a lot of information in very little space. The books also explain technical terms and use boxes to describe events or ideas in more detail, away from the main emphasis of the discussion. Boxes are also used at times to highlight definitions of terms frequently used or coined by a thinker. In this way, the boxes serve as a kind of glossary, easily identified when flicking through the book.

The thinkers in the series are 'critical' for three reasons. First, they are examined in the light of subjects which involve criticism: principally literary studies or English and cultural studies, but also other disciplines which rely on the criticism of books, ideas, theories and unquestioned assumptions. Second, they are critical because studying their work will provide you with a 'tool kit' for your own informed critical reading and thought, which will make you critical. Third, these thinkers are critical because they are crucially important: they deal with ideas and questions which can overturn conventional understandings of the world, of texts, of everything we take for granted, leaving us with a deeper understanding of what we already knew and with new ideas.

No introduction can tell you everything. However, by offering a way into critical thinking, this series hopes to begin to engage you in an activity which is productive, constructive and potentially life-changing.



## WHY SAID?

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Edward Said (1935–2003) became one of the most widely known, and controversial, intellectuals of the world during his lifetime. He was that rare breed of academic critic who also performs the role of a vocal public intellectual, doing more than any other person to place the plight of Palestine before a world audience. His importance as a cultural theorist has been established in two areas: his impact on the growing school of post-colonial studies, particularly through his book *Orientalism*; and his insistence on the importance of the 'worldliness' or material contexts of the text and the critic. This insistence placed him, for a time, outside the mainstream of contemporary theory, but has been soundly vindicated as the political and cultural functions of literary writing have been re-confirmed. Why read Edward Said? No other cultural critic has revealed so powerfully how 'down to earth' theory really is, for it comes to being in some place, for a particular reason, and with a particular history. This is nowhere truer than in Edward Said's own theory. For whether he wrote about English literature or about the complexities of texts and how they are formed, about the ways in which the West exerts its power over the Oriental world, about the functions of intellectuals in society, or even about music, his own place as an exiled Palestinian intellectual remains constantly inflected in his work. A second reason to read Said is linked to this: for a distinguished academic and American citizen, this identity as a Palestinian was extremely paradoxical and demonstrates just how paradoxical and constructed a national identity is, particularly that of people scattered throughout the world away from their homeland. Said's paradox of identity is indicative of the complex identities of diasporic and post-colonial people throughout the world today. Paradoxes linked to this question of identity run throughout Said's work, but far from being disabling, such paradox is a key to the intellectual force of his writings, locating them firmly in a world in which ideology has material consequences and in which human life does not conform neatly to abstract theory.

### SAID'S 'WORLD'

In 1917, the Balfour Declaration confirmed British support for 'the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people' and became the basis for international support for the founding of the modern state of Israel. This declaration, made in a letter to Lord Rothschild, prominent Jewish advocate, by the British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour, was aimed to attract Jewish support for the Allies in the First World War, and became the basis of the movement to create a Jewish state in Palestine. Despite Balfour's expressed intention that 'nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine', the historical effect of the declaration was to deny the previous inhabitants of Palestine their own statehood. From this attempt to win Jewish support for the Allies in the First World War, and its repercussions on the Palestinian people, stem the various issues which have dominated Edward Said's work – the struggles with identity, the focus on imperial power and colonialist discourse, the denunciation of political and cultural oppression, the concerns about the material conditions of thinking and writing, and the dissatisfaction with dominant models of literary and cultural theory.

Edward Said was born in 1935 and grew up in Cairo, where he went to school at St George's, the American School, and later Victoria College, which modelled itself on the tradition of the elite public schools of Britain. Said's experience in Cairo was that of a lonely and studious boy, whose father was almost obsessive about the need for discipline in work and study, and he found escape in reading novels and listening to concerts of classical music from the BBC every Sunday. Said's memoir *Out of Place* (1999) reveals that during that time he was something of a 'troublemaker', and in 1951, after 1

was expelled from Victoria College, his parents decided that he had no future in the British system and sent him to Mount Hermon preparatory school in Massachusetts.

Although school in America was often a difficult time for Said, he was a brilliant student who spoke several languages and played the piano to performance standard. He graduated from Princeton and then attended Harvard, where he completed his Ph.D. on Joseph Conrad, subsequently taking up a position at Columbia University as an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature. Although there was some question in his mind, as a student, whether he should become a concert pianist (he went to the Juilliard School of Music), he decided that he was too cerebral, and thus began a promising academic career (Ashcroft 1996).

Said was well on the way to establishing a distinguished but unexciting career as a Professor of Comparative Literature when the 1967 Arab–Israeli war broke out. According to him, that moment changed his life. He suddenly found himself in an environment hostile to Arabs, Arab ideas and Arab nations. He was surrounded by an almost universal support for the Israelis, where the Arabs seemed to be 'getting what they deserved' and where he, a respected academic, had become an outsider and a target (Ali 1994). The 1967 war and its reception in America confronted Said with the paradox of his own position; he could no longer maintain two identities, and the experience began to be reflected everywhere in his work.

The significance of this transformation in Edward Said's life lay in the fact that for the first time he began to construct himself as a Palestinian, consciously articulating the sense of a cultural origin which had been suppressed since his childhood and diverted into his professional career. The poignancy of displacement is captured in his book on Palestine, *After the Last Sky*, when he says:

Identity – who we are, where we come from, what we are – is difficult to maintain in exile ... we are the 'other', an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus. Silence and discretion veil the hurt, slow the body searches, soothe the sting of loss.

(Said 1986:16–17)

The question of identity for Palestinians has always been vexed, because Palestinians have, according to Said, been excluded from the state of Israel and consequently scattered throughout the world. For him, the Zionist slogan 'A people without land [the Jews] for a land without people [Palestine]' saw Palestine 'as the European imperialist did, as an empty territory paradoxically "filled" with ignoble and perhaps even dispensable natives' (1980:81). This construction of the place and its inhabitants as a *tabula rasa* demonstrated to Said that the British- and Zionist-promoted occupation of Palestine was a further example of the long history of European colonialism, with the difference that this version emphasised the Messianic flavour of the 'civilising mission'. As he says:

Balfour's statements in the Declaration take for granted the higher right of a colonial power to dispose of a territory as it saw fit. Balfour himself averred, this was especially true when dealing with such a significant territory as Palestine and with such a momentous idea as the Zionist idea, which saw itself as doing no less than reclaiming a territory promised originally by God to the Jewish people.

(ibid.: 17)

It was the colonisation of Palestine which compelled Said to examine the imperial discourse of the West, and to weave his cultural analysis with the text of his own identity.

The politicisation of the young Edward Said had a profound effect on his work, for he saw that even literary theory could not be separated from the political realities of the world in which it was written. Ten years after the war he wrote his trilogy *Orientalism* (1978), *The Question of Palestine* (1979) and *Covering Islam* (1981), which located Palestine as a focus of all the issues of textuality and power which had been preoccupying him. The significant thing about Said's work is that we cannot separate this political concern for the state of Palestine, this concern with his own identity and the identity of Palestinians in general, from the theoretical and literary analysis of texts and the way they are located in the world. We can neither relegate his writings on Palestine to a kind of 'after-hours' journalism nor dismiss his theory as merely the professional activity of the Palestinian activist. But neither can we separate the question of Palestine from the history of European imperialism and the contemporary



reality of post-colonial resistance of various kinds in various societies. These things are intimately bound up with each other in the concern with worldliness.

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It is this construction of identity which helps us to understand Edward Said's place in literary and cultural theory during the last four decades. The facts of an individual's life are not necessarily crucial to the direction of their theory, and even mentioning them would be scandalous to some theorists. But not so with Edward Said. The conditions of his own life, the text of his identity, are constantly woven into and form the defining context for all his writing. His struggles with his dislocation, his recognition of the empowering potential of exile, his constant engagement with the link between textuality and the world, underlie the major directions of his theory and help to explain his uncertain relationship with contemporary theory.

## THE PARADOX OF IDENTITY

Whether as critic, political commentator, literary and cultural theorist or New York citizen, Edward Said demonstrates the often paradoxical nature of identity in an increasingly migratory and globalised world. In him, we find a person located in a tangle of cultural and theoretical contradictions: contradictions between his Westernised persona and political concern for his Palestinian homeland; contradictions between his political voice and professional position; contradictions between the different ways in which he has been read; contradictions in the way he is located in the academy. The intimate connection between Said's identity and his cultural theory, and the paradoxes these reveal, shows us something about the constructedness and complexity of cultural identity itself. Said was an Arab and a Palestinian, and indeed, a Christian Palestinian, which in itself, if not a paradox in an increasingly Islamic Middle East, is certainly paradoxical in an intellectual who was the most prominent critic of the contemporary Western demonisation of Islam. The paradox of Edward Said's identity is the most strategic feature of his own 'worldliness', a feature which provides a key to the interests and convictions of his cultural theory. This identity is itself a text which is continually elaborated and rewritten by Said, intersecting with and articulated by all the other texts he writes. Said persistently located himself as a person who was dislocated, 'exiled' from his homeland. But rather than invent some essential Palestinian cultural reality, he insisted that all cultures are changing constantly, that culture and identity themselves are processes. Indeed, his own cultural identity was enhanced rather than diminished by his choice to locate himself in New York. A Palestinian first and an American second, he admitted that he could not live anywhere else but in New York. This says something about the international character of New York, but it also says something about the nature of Edward Said, about his obsession with location, his fascination with cultural diversity and heterogeneity, and his advocacy of the intellectual's detachment from political structures. Because he located himself in what he called an interstitial space, a space in between a Palestinian colonial past and an American imperial present, he found himself both empowered and obliged to speak out for Palestine, to be the voice of the marginalised and the dispossessed, and, crucially, to present Palestine to the American people. Edward Said has had a greater effect than perhaps any other intellectual in the formation of the state of Palestine itself. But much more than that, he had an incomparably greater effect than any other public intellectual in presenting Palestine and the problem of Palestine to the world. Nevertheless, this large body of topical writing on Palestine has receded into the background behind the acclaim for his much-celebrated volumes *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

Ironically, because Said is located in this in-between space, he has been castigated by some critics, in the Arab world and elsewhere, for being overly Westernised (Little 1979; Sivan 1985; Wahba 1989; Said 1994a: x). Yet, on the other hand, his defence of Islam in the West often came under criticism

from liberal intellectuals in the Arab world, who criticised the deep conservatism and fundamentalism of Islam itself (see Abaza and Staught 1990). Whether by accident or design, he found himself excluded by various opposing partisan camps at the same time. Although actively pro-Palestine in the United States, he avoided any particular party line in Palestinian politics, and ironically, his work has been banned in Palestine itself.

## SAID'S KEY IDEAS

For Said, the strategy of repetition is a key feature of a text's worldliness: repetition imposes certain constraints upon the interpretation of the text, it historicises the text as something which originates in the world, which insists upon its own being. Said's work constantly rehearses the features of his own peculiar academic and cultural location, or the 'text' of his own life – exile, politicisation, the living of two lives, the insistent questions of identity, and the passionate defence of Palestine. While the following section of this book divides Said's work into a series of 'key ideas', those issues which drove Said recur in various aspects of his work and similarly will recur in various chapters of this book. The 'Key ideas' section opens, then, with two chapters on worldliness, further discussing the issues already touched upon in this introduction, first in relation to the text and then in relation to the critic. Perhaps the most significant aspect of Edward Said's cultural analysis is that while post-structuralism dominated the Western intellectual scene, he clung to a determined and unfashionable view of the ways in which the text is located materially in the world. For Said, post-structuralists virtually reject the world and allow no sense of the material worldliness of people who write texts and read them, cutting off the possibility of political action in their theory. The importance of his own identity and its construction as itself a kind of text showed him that the text had to be considered as something which maintained a vast web of affiliations with the world. Further to this, he rejected the whole institution of specialised intellectual work, with its tendency towards doctrinaire assumptions and a language of specialisation and professionalism, allied with cultural dogma. For Said, such an academy speaks to itself rather than to the world of everyday life and ordinary need. He advocated what he called 'secular criticism', which contests at every point the confined specialisation of much academic discourse. The literary text, for example, is not simply located in a canonical line of books called 'English literature' but is something which has connections with many other aspects of the world – political, social, cultural – all of which go to make up its worldliness. As we shall see in the following chapters, this insistence on the material concerns of writing has also led to the most vigorous criticism of Said's work, as it seems to imply that a real world exists behind the representation of that world. This has led many critics into the fierce debate over representation and material reality which runs through post-colonial studies, asking just how the material experiences of colonised peoples are to be understood outside the processes of representation. For Said, however, that reality is a feature of textuality itself, of the text's worldliness, and the issue is not so much that of a dominant representation hiding the reality, but that of the struggle between different and contesting representations. Discussion then turns to *Orientalism*, the book and the concept for which Edward Said is probably best known throughout the world. The worldliness which emerges out of the text of his own identity is crucial in his analysis of those Orientalist texts which constructed the Orient and thereby constructed Europe's dominance over it. In a nutshell, Orientalism demonstrates how power operates through knowledge: the processes by which the West 'knows' the Orient have been a way of exerting power over it. Orientalist texts have their own worldliness, their own affiliations, and they are texts which operate to construct the Orient, to become, in a sense 'more real' than any Oriental reality, more real than any experience or expression of that experience which 'Orientals' themselves might make (see 'Orientalism's worldliness', in Said 1978a: 226–54). The crucial discovery of this work on Orientalism

repeated in the two other books of the trilogy, *The Question of Palestine* and *Covering Islam*, is that this process continues into the present in different forms. News, expert knowledge, political commentary about the Middle East are all ways of perpetuating Western, and specifically American, power.

*Culture and Imperialism*, discussed in [Chapter 4](#), is an extension of this idea of the worldliness of imperial texts. What is crucial about the cultural productions of the West is the subtle way in which the political realities of imperialism are present in them. In the British novel, for instance, the issue of empire and imperial dominance is continually, subtly and almost ubiquitously inflected. The significance of the worldliness of these texts is that, in their writing by authors who may have had no conscious idea of the way in which the empire was represented in them, they demonstrate that there is no empire without its culture. *Culture and Imperialism* also rehearses a favourite topic of Said's: how should the post-colonial world react to the dominance of imperialism? Said's concentration in the book on Western classics has misled many critics into the belief that he does not have a theory of resistance. But his position is more subtle. Recognising that a 'rhetoric of blame' is ultimately stultifying, he advocates a process he calls 'the voyage in', where post-colonial writers take hold of the dominant modes of literary writing to expose their culture to a world audience.

[Chapter 5](#) turns to the issue of Palestine. This might seem to be a distinct interest, represented by a coherent body of commentary and analysis separate from Said's cultural theory, but in fact it is constantly inflected in all his writing. His writing demonstrates comprehensively, in works such as *Covering Islam* (1981; re-issued 1997), the extent to which the representation of Islam in the contemporary Western world replicates the ways in which Orientalists constructed the Orient in the nineteenth century. For Said, the way in which Islam, the Arab world and Palestine are represented is deeply indicative of the power of a dominant culture to construct the world in a particular way under the guise of 'knowing' it (1978a: 3). Orientalists in academic fields may now be more subtle and self-critical, but this construction still occurs in various ways – in the media, in 'expert' advice, academic study and intellectual commentary – and it rests upon a deep ground of unexamined assumptions. Such assumptions remain unexamined because they enter into language itself. For instance, the word 'Islam' imputes a unified and monolithic religious and cultural system, from which it is a small step to allude to 'the darkness and strangeness of Muslims, Arabs, their culture, religion etc.' (Said 1994: 373). But as Said repeatedly stresses, Islam is characterised by diversity and opposing positions, and to talk about a unified monolithic Islam is an absurdity (Said 1978a, 1995a). Palestine forces Said to rethink his literary theory, its urgency, its material and political reality. Its ability to construct a world to become the focus of his construction of his own identity means that Palestine is present throughout his theory as a reminder of the location of texts in the world.

Out of the issue of Palestine grows one of the most important themes in Said's theory – the role of the intellectual. From the position of a professional literary theorist established in the elite academic environment of Columbia University, Said has been required to adopt the role of a spokesperson, called out to talk about political issues for which he had no specialist qualifications. This confirmed his belief in the value of amateurism, but much more than that it gave him a vision of the importance of exile in empowering the intellectual to be detached from partisan politics in order to 'speak truth to power' (Said 1994a). The sense of 'not-belonging' has confirmed his own sense that the public intellectual needs to speak from the margin, to distance him- or herself from orthodox opinion and speak things which are denied those locked into partisan and specialist discourses.

Next, in [Chapter 6](#), we consider both the interests and the style of Said's later work. The works he produced in the last years of his life, two published after his death, seem to conform to the 'Late Style' that had so fascinated him in writers and musicians. Like Beethoven, and many of the writers and artists he examines, his final work is not characterised by a 'restful summing up' of a brilliant career.

but by a burst of energy driving him in several directions at once, looking to the past for a way into the future. ~~The phrase that best sums up this style is 'going against the grain' and Said can be seen to go~~ against the grain with his passionate, almost last-ditch advocacy of humanism in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. One thing that had characterised his career – whether speaking out on behalf of Palestine, critiquing contemporary literary theory, or magisterially exposing the pervasive discourse of Orientalism – was a recalcitrant, unruly going against the grain, and this stayed with him in his own late style as he single-handedly strove to raise humanism, which appeared to be an anachronism, to the status of a prophecy for the humanities.

The final chapter of this book, 'After Said', turns to his impact in the field of critical theory and particularly the foundational status of his work in the study of post-colonial literatures and theory. In this introductory chapter, we have suggested why Said should be read, in the final section of the book, 'Further reading', we offer a guide for those wondering where they might begin in the crucial task of reading Said's works and those of his critics.



# KEY IDEAS

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## THE TEXT

Edward Said is perhaps most familiar to readers as the author of *Orientalism* (1978) and as a leading exponent of the growing study of post-colonial literatures and cultures. But we can only fully understand this better-known aspect of his work when we grasp his view of the role of the intellectual in contemporary society and the function of criticism itself. Although *Orientalism* is the book which more than any other has cemented Said's reputation, it is the collection of theoretical essays, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Said 1983), which provides the lens through which his work can be read most profitably, the key to his significance to contemporary cultural theory.

In the main, the essays comprising this volume were written before the publication of *Orientalism* and reveal the emergence of the methodology and the concerns which have underpinned all Said's work. *The World, the Text and the Critic* provides the most systematic and accessible entry to those concerns which had been established in Said's work since 1975 when he published *Beginnings*, a book which, Timothy Brennan acknowledges, 'records that broad-ranging but also limited list of motifs that occupied Said for the better part of his career' (Brennan 1992:75). The consistency of Said's work has been remarkable. But this consistency and the wide-ranging scope of his interests have been obscured by two things: the dominance of post-structuralism in textual analysis over the past two decades, a theoretical movement with which Said's relationship has been one of regular interrogation and disagreement; and the extraordinary prominence of *Orientalism* in his reputation as a cultural critic. *The World, the Text and the Critic*, then, we find a systematic elaboration of those broad interests which underlie and inform these better-known aspects of his work.

Edward Said is often considered to be the originator of colonial discourse theory, a form of theoretical investigation which, when taken up by Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, became sometimes erroneously regarded as synonymous with 'post-colonial theory' (see 'Post-colonialism' Ashcroft *et al.* 2007). But if we look closely at *The World, the Text and the Critic*, a much more materialist and worldly Said emerges, one who reminds us of Italian philosopher (1668–1744) Giambattista Vico's admonition that 'human history is made up by human beings' (cited in Said 1995: 331). Said's employment of Michel Foucault's notion of discourse, which we will talk about in the next chapter, has become widely known and both emulated and criticised for its partial use of Foucault's theory. But Said's analyses cannot be understood properly without a perception of his view of the worldliness of the text, and the function of criticism and of the intellectual. Said took as much of Foucault as he needed, but the great imbalance in power in the world in which texts are produced makes their worldliness crucial.

## DISCOURSE, COLONIAL DISCOURSE THEORY AND POST-COLONIAL THEORY

A **discourse** is a system of statements within which and by which the world can be known. Rather than referring to 'speech' in the traditional sense, Foucault's notion of discourse is a firmly bounded area of social knowledge. For him, the world is not simply 'there' to be talked about, rather it is discourse itself within which the world comes into being. It is also in such a discourse that speakers and hearers, writers and readers, come to an understanding about themselves, their relationship to each other and their place in the world (the construction of subjectivity). It is that complex of signs and practices that organises social existence and social reproduction, which determines how experiences and identities are categorised.

**Colonial discourse theory** is that theory which analyses the discourse of colonialism and



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