Edward Said
Key Contemporary Thinkers

Published
Jeremy Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and its Other*
Michael Caesar, *Umberto Eco: Philosophy, Semiotics and the Work of Fiction*
Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction*
Simon Evnine, *Donald Davidson*
Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction*
Andrew Gamble, *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty*
Philip Hansen, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, History and Citizenship*
Sean Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism*
Christopher Hookway, *Quine: Language, Experience and Reality*
Christina Howells, *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics*
Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*
Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Post-Modernism and Beyond*
Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said*
Chandran Kukathas and Philip Pettit, *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and its Critics*
James McGilvray, *Chomsky: Language, Mind, and Politics*
Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*
Philip Manning, *Erving Goffman and Modern Sociology*
Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes*
William Outhwaite, *Habermas: A Critical Introduction*
John Preston, *Feyerabend: Philosophy, Science and Society*
Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Authorship, Autobiography and Love*
David Silverman, *Harvey Sacks: Social Science and Conversation Analysis*
Dennis Smith, *Zygmunt Bauman: Prophet of Postmodernity*
Geoffrey Stokes, *Popper: Philosophy, Politics and Scientific Method*
Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*
James Williams, *Lyotard: Towards a Postmodern Philosophy*

Forthcoming
Maria Baghramian, *Hilary Putnam*
Sara Beardsworth, *Kristeva*
Mark Cain, *Fodor: Language, Mind and Philosophy*
James Carey, *Innis and McLuhan*
Rosemary Cowan, Cornell West: *The Politics of Redemption*
George Crowder, Isaiah Berlin: *Liberty, Pluralism and Liberalism*
Thomas D’Andrea, *Alasdair MacIntyre*
Eric Dunning, *Norbert Elias*
Jocelyn Dunphy, Paul Ricoeur
Matthew Elton, *Daniel Dennett*
Nigel Gibson, *Frantz Fanon*
Graeme Gilloch, Walter Benjamin
Karen Green, *Dummett: Philosophy of Language*
Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell*
Keith Hart, *C.L.R. James*
Fred Inglis, *Clifford Geertz: Culture, Custom and Ethics*
Sarah Kay, Žižek: *A Critical Introduction*
Paul Kelly, *Ronald Dworkin*
Carl Levy, *Antonio Gramsci*
Moya Lloyd, Judith Butler
Dermot Moran, *Edmund Husserl*
Harold Noonan, *Frege*
Steve Redhead, *Paul Virilio: Theorist for an Accelerated Culture*
Chris Rojek, *Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies*
Wes Sharrock and Rupert Read, *Kuhn*
Nick Smith, *Charles Taylor*
Nicholas Walker, *Heidegger*
Contents

Acknowledgements viii
Abbreviations x

Introduction 1

1 Orientalism 14

2 Imperialism in the Middle East: Palestine, Israel and the USA 49

3 After Orientalism: Culture and Imperialism 81

4 Said and Postcolonial Studies 111

Conclusion 147

Notes 150
Bibliography 162
Index 174
Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Susanne Kappeler for initiating this project. I would also like to thank Lester Barber, Stephen Buick, Thomas F. Daughton, Jamil Khadir, Anthony Lake, Hasna Lebbady and Sita Schutt for reading and discussing part or all of various versions of this text, and for their support and encouragement. Thanks to Mohammed Dahbi and Michael Toler for copies of articles and to Francesca Cauchi for reading the proofs and help with the index. I would also like to thank Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey, for some financial support for this project.

I would like to express my most grateful thanks to Edward W. Said for his gracious permission to reproduce material from the following works:

Culture and Imperialism (World English language rights, excluding the USA).


I would also like to thank the following for their kind permission to reproduce material from the following works:

Random House UK and Chatto and Windus for Culture and Imperialism by Edward Said; Faber and Faber Ltd. for ‘Tradition and

I would also like to thank Random House USA for permission to reproduce material as follows:

Abbreviations

Works by Said

Books

ALS  After the Last Sky (1986)
B   Beginnings (1975)
BV  Blaming the Victims (1988)
CI  Culture and Imperialism (1993)
ClS  Covering Islam (1981)
ME  Musical Elaborations (1991)
O   Orientalism (1978)
PandS  The Pen and the Sword (1994)
QP  The Question of Palestine (1979)
RI  Representations of the Intellectual (1994)
WTC  The World, the Text, and the Critic (1983)

Interviews

D  Diacritics interview (1976)
I  Interview with Jennifer Wicke and Michael Sprinker (1992)

Articles

F  ‘Figures, configurations, transfigurations’ (1990)
FW  Foreword to Little Mountain by Elias Khoury (1989)
Works by other authors

Homi Bhabha

LC  The Location of Culture (1994)
Free ‘Freedom’s basis in the indeterminate’ (1995)

Benyamin Netanyahu

APN  A Place Among the Nations: Israel and the World (1993)

Gayatri Spivak

CSS ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ (1993)
HTR ‘How to read a “culturally different” book’ (1994)
IOW  In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (1987)
OTM  Outside in the Teaching Machine (1993)
TWT ‘Three women’s texts and a critique of imperialism’ (1985)
Introduction

Edward Said: a significant figure

As a literary and cultural critic and social commentator, Edward Said is a highly significant and at times controversial figure in contemporary intellectual life. His œuvre is impressive in terms of both scope and importance, and he has exercised a significant influence in the field of cultural and postcolonial studies. His writings on Orientalism and related phenomena have provided the inspiration for a large number of new studies, including many which extend his work in unexpected ways or in ways which implicitly or explicitly challenge his own ideas. A writer of avowedly conservative literary and cultural biases, Said has increasingly come to analyse the complex and vital relationship between literature, politics and culture. This analysis has taken three main forms in his work. First, two of his most important books, Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism, consider the relationship between the West and the East in the colonial and postcolonial contexts. Second, Said has been directly concerned both with Palestine and the situation of Palestinians in the Middle East, and with larger issues related to the Arabo-Islamic world and its relationship with and representation in and by the West. Third, he has devoted considerable time and energy to defining the role and responsibilities of the intellectual in the contemporary world.1

The first main area of his work deals with the political implications of Western colonialism and imperialism and the West’s domination and representation of the East or, more generally, the
non-European world. *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, examines the development of Western conceptions and representations of the Orient from the middle of the eighteenth century to the present. Orientalism is seen as a set of academic disciplines concerned with studying the Orient, but also as a style of thought based on an existential difference between the Orient and the Occident. Both these are related to the development of the institutional and administrative procedures of Western imperialism. The book offers a variety of perspectives on the proliferating discourses of Orientalism in such disparate areas as literature, linguistic and other types of scholarship, travel writing, anthropology and colonial administration. The varying definitions and views of Orientalism are not always completely consistent, but the book’s central argument about the interdependence of the political and the cultural dimensions of Orientalism and their effects on literary works provided a dramatically new insight in mainstream literary criticism. It has since proved to be one of the key sources, if not the key source, of inspiration for much later work by others in the fields of literary, critical and cultural theory, especially in postcolonial studies. *Culture and Imperialism* continues and extends the work begun in *Orientalism* by documenting the imperial complicities of some major works of the Western literary (and in one case, musical) canon. The book’s final chapter looks at the geopolitics of the postcolonial world and pays particular and critical attention to America’s role in it.

The second main focus of Said’s work is the analysis of the situation in Palestine, Israel and the Middle East more generally. His main concern has always been the condition of the Palestinian people, but he has also constantly written about larger political and cultural issues related to the Arabo-Islamic world and its relationship with the West, including the ways in which it is constructed and represented by the West. Said sees his work in this area as being intimately connected to his work on Orientalism. *Orientalism* was quickly followed by *The Question of Palestine* (1979) and *Covering Islam* (1981). The Introduction to *Covering Islam* argues that the three books deal with the relation between ‘Islam, the Arabs, and the Orient’, on the one hand, and ‘the West, France, Britain, and in particular the United States’, on the other.² He has also said, in the Afterword to the 1995 edition of *Orientalism*, that his position on the Palestinian issue has not changed in its essentials since the original publication of *The Question of Palestine*.³ The many essays that he has written since then bear out this statement. Two main concerns emerge. The first is the documentation of Palestinian existence in

**Introduction**
the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with emphasis on the need for a Palestinian narrative to counter the pro-Israeli narrative of events in the Middle East. This is accompanied by the analysis of the distortions, prejudices and racism that all too often characterize the representation of Islam and Arabs, especially Palestinian Arabs, by the Western media and academia. Secondly, Said has consistently provided a critique of US government policy in the Middle East, and of the Israeli and Arab governments and their actions, including those of the recently established Palestinian Authority.

Said’s third central topic is the function of criticism in the contemporary world, especially the role and responsibilities of the intellectual. Two key texts here are *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983) and *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994). In the first, Said puts forward his own theoretical position, provides a commentary on aspects of contemporary critical theory which is often scathing, and offers some perceptive and idiosyncratic accounts of certain individual writers. He proposes a model of secular criticism, criticizes much contemporary theory because of its detachment from the problems and constraints of the real world and explains why Foucault rather than Derrida provides part of the inspiration for his own approach. Said’s later writings show his increasing impatience with Foucault’s work, which he comes to see as more and more detached from real-life political and social issues, and thus as ineffectual, since it fails to challenge the *status quo* or bring about change. For Said, the key words for the intellectual are scepticism, memory and, above all, ‘the critical sense’.* In *Representations of the Intellectual* he develops his argument that the intellectual should not be seduced by power or official approval, but should remain unco-opted if not uncommitted, ready to challenge orthodoxies and received ideas and to change the world.

The interrelation of these three major areas in Said’s work is one reason for Said’s special position in contemporary Western intellectual life. Others are the wide scope and the rich variety of his analyses of literary works and political and cultural phenomena, and the courage he has shown in expressing his political convictions. He is in many ways the restless embodiment of his own ideal of the unco-opted critical intellectual who refuses to accept orthodoxy of any kind. The reasons for this can be found in the way in which Said has assumed the contradictions and conflicts subsequent to the accident of his birth and the events of his life. Said has made the facts of his birth and his experiences a central strand in
his work, uniting the personal and the public dimensions of his life in writing which is compelling and often provocative.⁵

A man of more than one world⁶

Said was born in November 1935 in Talbiya, West Jerusalem, in what was then British Mandate Palestine.⁷ His father’s family, from Jerusalem, was middle-class, conventional, formal and Anglican. His mother’s, from Safad and later Nazareth, was also middle-class but less conventional and more artistically inclined. The family lived mostly in Cairo, but spent long periods in Palestine in 1942 and 1947, and spent their summers in the Lebanese village of Dhour el Shweir for twenty-seven years, beginning in 1943. As a Christian, but a Protestant rather than a member of the Orthodox Church, Said grew up as part of a minority inside a minority. As he says to Imre Salusinszky, ‘Although Palestinians, we were Anglicans: so we were a minority within the Christian minority in an Islamic majority setting.’⁸ He was baptized in the Anglican cathedral of St George, and in 1947 spent some months at St George’s school, where his father had also studied.⁹ In Cairo, he attended Gezira primary school, the Cairo School for American Children and finally Victoria College. The family left Jerusalem for good in December 1947, before the Palestinian–Israeli war of 1947 and the expulsion and dispossession of many Palestinians in the *annakba*, or catastrophe, and returned to Cairo. At the British-run Victoria College, Said was often punished as a troublemaker, partly for speaking Arabic rather than English. Finally he left and was sent to the USA by his father, where he completed his secondary education at Mount Hermon, a boarding school in Massachusetts, before going on to study at Princeton and Harvard. He took up a teaching position at Columbia, where he became University Professor of English and Comparative Literature.¹⁰

From the 1970s onwards, Said has sought to turn his initial sense of alienation in the USA and his growing awareness of a divided allegiance as both a Palestinian Arab and an American citizen into something positive by bringing together the two sides of his experience. As he said in an interview, until about 1967 his career was almost purely that of the literary academic. After that date his two lives as American academic and concerned Middle Easterner began to come together in his work. This was due to the Six Day War of 1967 and subsequent events in the Middle East, and to Said’s
growing awareness of the interrelation of politics and literature and of his own responsibilities. From the late 1960s to the mid-1970s Said moved from being a traditional humanist academic to become one of the most significant Anglophone cultural and political commentators of the later twentieth century.

He has striven for a vision of transnational human interaction avoiding both sectarianism and politics based on divisive notions of ethnic or religious identity. He has written about some aspects of his early life in Palestine and Egypt, his initial feeling of alienation when he arrived in the USA, and the implications of being a man of two worlds, notably in the 1998 essay ‘Between worlds’ and in his 1999 memoir Out of Place. He has also discussed both the current situation and the complex mixture of feelings occasioned by his journeys back to Palestine-Israel in 1992, 1996 and 1998 in a series of articles originally published in the London Review of Books. The more general issue of exile and dispossession is approached in several other essays: Said has come to see his own position as a relatively privileged exile as one variant of the situation of displacement which he sees as a typical feature of the late twentieth century.

Said has returned to Palestine-Israel only a few times since he and his family left in 1947. On the first of these occasions, in 1992, he was accompanied by his second wife, Miriam, his son, Wadie, and his daughter, Naila, aged 20 and 18 respectively. On his second journey, in 1996, he travelled alone, but he spent some time with his son who was then working as a translator for the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre in the Occupied Territories. In 1998 he returned to make a film for a British television channel about the Palestinians. As might be expected, the feelings aroused by these journeys are strong and conflicting. There is the shock of recognition on seeing the Said family home in West Jerusalem again, and then anger and sadness at the discovery that the house is now inhabited by a ‘right-wing fundamentalist Christian and militantly pro-Zionist group’. Generally, Said has a sense of a history finished, places lost, a country where, with the exception of Arab Nazareth, he can no longer feel at home. Moreover, when he visits Gaza, both in 1992 and 1996, he finds conditions worse than those he saw in the South African townships in 1991. Finally, while feeling a sense of solidarity with Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories, Said recognizes that it would be very hard for him to live there, since his own state of exile is relatively liberated and privileged by comparison. The 1996 visit reveals a similar mixture of emotions, with the added detail that by then all of Said’s books
have been removed from bookshops in Gaza and on the West Bank on the orders of Yasser Arafat. The film shown on British television in May 1998 on the anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel covers similar ground. In addition, Said narrates his visit to Hebron and bears witness to the continuing confiscation and destruction of Palestinian land and property by Israeli soldiers acting on the orders of the state, and the continuing encroachments of Israeli settlers on land under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. He notes with some bitterness that the Palestinian Authority seems to be doing nothing to stop this process.

Said’s accounts of these journeys are complemented by several pieces in which he explores the condition of exile more generally as a late twentieth-century phenomenon, notably ‘Reflections on exile’ and ‘The mind of winter: reflections on life in exile’, both published in 1984. These argue that it is part of the contemporary intellectual’s role to speak for the displaced and dispossessed, and to use the freedom of exile for positive ends. Indeed, Said uses the image of exile or migrancy elsewhere in his work to characterize the role of the intellectual in the late twentieth century. He argues that the intellectual should be a marginal or migrant figure who helps to produce new types of knowledge as well as to criticize abuses of power and the obfuscations and distortions of official discourse.

Above all, Said’s work shows a consistent independence of thought, which is his most outstanding characteristic. He has tried to embrace the contradictions and divisions of his position in order to use them for positive ends. Yet if his chosen position as a man between two cultures, worlds and languages has enabled him to make connections which few, if any, had made before, then it also has certain negative consequences. First, despite his desire to allow the marginalized to speak, he is consistently blind to gender, and women are certainly under-represented in his work. Second, there is a potential clash between the detachment of the scholarly humanist and the commitment of the polemicist who argues for Palestinian rights.

Said’s blindness to gender characterizes almost all of his work. It is rare for him to analyse a work by a woman, although there are exceptions to this, and he has shown himself to be aware of his deficiencies in this respect. As he has said to Peter Osborne, there are no ‘heroines’ in Orientalism, and After the Last Sky also comments on its own failure to pay attention to Palestinian women. Said’s neglect of gender is ironic for two reasons. First, his demys-