

琉球大学学術リポジトリ

Edward Said : 文学と政治の狭間で

メタデータ	言語: 出版者: 琉球大学教育学部 公開日: 2007-07-18 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Taira, Katsuaki, 平良, 勝明 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12000/1036

Edward Said : On the Isthmus between Politics and Literature

Katsuaki TAIRA

Edward Said passed away not many months ago. What would those in the professional circle recall when the name is invoked? Politics? Literature? Activism? Or any other activities he had engaged in while he was alive, which by the way were as numerous as the intricate issues the current Middle Eastern situation foregrounds? As anyone who has encountered his books will testify, his so-called literary output is hard to classify. It is definitely not what conventional criticism has been wont to term pure literary criticism; rather it is layered with many discordant ideas and issues that are obviously culled from multifarious genres and fields of academic or non-academic endeavors. What makes Said's work so jarring to some literary students, a phenomenon that is fairly common in advanced classes at academic institutions, is his apparent anti-Western sentiments when interpreting literary history of the West. In fact, he tries to find vestiges of exploitation and subjugation in every nook and cranny of literary output that falls, for instance, in the category of English literature so that one is often dismayed at his approach and the fundamental tenet on which his analysis is based. Is his approach indeed warranted? Or the *modus operandi* he calls into service in truth be called criticism that is equivalent to the various critical endeavors traditional critics had pursued for centuries? Those are some of the typical doubts students are assaulted with when they encounter with Said's work. Trying to contradict and divert students' criticism most of the time proves to be a formidable task even after one reads Said's work rather carefully. There is indeed a strain that rubs against the grain of literary students who are attuned to the puristic and conventional manners of analyzing and amplifying literary work. But what if I suggested that Said was not to be read in that conventional light at all? What if he is to be studied and interpreted as we incorporate and assemble and absorb dissociated and cacophonous ideas and thought processes in an attempt to come up with a phase of understanding that is totally alien and even new? What if the whole output of Said is to lead us to inhabit a completely unfamiliar sphere to help us gain insights that are not only discrepant to what we are inured to but also even antagonistic and yet in the end that somehow enrich the way we comprehend the world and the way we daily engage ourselves with the other, including the way we absorb and reject it as befitting our

needs? That may be over-reading Said, and even overestimating common human capacity, as if alien values could easily be comprehended and palatably presented to the Other as my semi-rhetorical question suggests. But as the world becomes ever more complicated, especially as a result of interweaving global interests as instanced by the recent US intervention in Iraq, it may be apropos to go into his works slightly more in detail and reassess his status as one of the leading liberal activist intellectuals of the late twentieth century. Perhaps some hidden significance may be found in his work that will enlighten us on the arcana of harmonizing cacophonous ideologies, or more simply put, seemingly militating perspectives.

It is instructive to take a look at the Internet sites that are associated with Said to get the bearings as to how he is positioned in the intellectual and other fields today. Not surprisingly, many of the sites seem to be polarized in their orientation. Some, as predicted, are academically inclined such as those linked to the university and other institutions; and others, again as expected, are ideologically slanted such as those support the Palestinian cause and those who oppose it. Needless to say, there are various views in between but generally the Internet sites related to Said are divided into two camps of ideology and academia, although, if I may risk being tautological, even the latter cannot totally escape what the Columbia University site calls "eclecticism", which is rather mildly put. Now his stance being so predominantly politically and ideologically charged, let us plunge into his ideological space through various treatises and pamphlets he wrote for Palestinian and other causes that he deemed were unfairly neglected and eclipsed by the dominant interests of the West. The first article we will go through will surprise most people (except those who already know Said, needless to say) by its blatantly activist timbre. But the late Said was, to be fair to all parties, visibly consumed by political causes of the oppressed, particularly those, as I already mentioned above, in Palestine. The latest one, dated June 17, 2002 and pointedly titled "Palestinian Elections Now" is an article Said putatively contributed to Cairo-based al-Ahram and listed on a site addressed counterpunch.org. It starts off as a belligerent response to Israeli Prime Minister as the latter formulates and plans to implement the so-called reform to bring peace and improvement to the region as a whole. The tone, as I already suggested, is quite acerbic from the beginning. Let me quote a passage from the article.

Sharon wants reform as a way of further disabling Palestinian national life, that is, as an extension of his failed policy of constant intervention and destruction. He wants to be rid of Yasser Arafat, cut up the West Bank into fenced-in cantons, re-install an occupation authority -- preferably with some Palestinians helping out -- carry on with

settlement activity, and maintain Israeli security the way he's been doing it. He is too blinded by his own ideological hallucinations and obsessions to see that this will neither bring peace nor security, and will certainly not bring the "quiet" he keeps prattling on about. Palestinian elections in the Sharonian scheme are quite unimportant.¹

The antagonism Said expresses by the implied and historical references at the inception of the passage immediately positions his stance among the readers as to where his cause lies. Note how he perceives Sharon's meditated election in Palestine. It is hard not to feel the emotional and historical detritus in the bitterness and distrust expressed here. Said not only does not go along with the projected plan but also he sees hypocrisy on the part of the Israelis as they write on the shifting sand, as it were, the future blueprint of the more organized and, to Said more outrageously, more docile Palestinians. The election, or rather the series of elections, proposed by the Israelis, are not only "irrelevant" to his people but actually harmful because it disables the national life of the Palestinians. All of this mishmash, Said claims, is due to the failed policy of the Israeli Prime Minister and it is merely a manifestation of his attempt to sweep his blunders under the rug of Palestine. All the strong sentiments that are already expressed up to this point surge as Said accuses Sharon of "ideological hallucinations and obsessions," which he repeatedly claims is all that is behind an attempted isolation of Palestinians by cutting up "the West Bank into fenced-in cantons," and murderous intent on the Palestinian leader. Said concludes his diatribe by going on an almost personal level that the peace Sharon dangles before his audience is merely an empty promise, which, Said pointedly notes, Israeli Prime Minister has been "prattling on about" for quite some time now. Our author ends the passage by prosaically and matter-of-factly reminding the reader that Palestinian issue is after all not of much significance to Sharon.

The same indifferent disparagement is also manifested, Said continues, by none other than Israel's strongest and staunchest ally, United States. He starts off his argument against the US stance on the premise that Bush and the nation he represents do not truly understand the nature of Palestinian resistance. Their branding the Palestinian struggle as mere "terrorism" is in itself, Said reiterates, a manifestation that the US view on Middle East is jejune and shallow that takes "no account of history,

¹ The quote is from *Counterpunch*, edited by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair and published by Verso Books in 2003. This Said's essay, titled "Palestinian Elections Now," is dated June 17, 2002.

context, society or anything else" (from "Palestinian Elections Now").² Said goes out all the way to expressing his "visceral" antagonist toward the Bush administration and points out that no genuine effort on the part of the administration exists to truly grapple with the real situation daily evolving in the Middle East. It is, Said continues, lack of desire on the part of the US administration to grasp reality in Palestine and as such there is no surprise that all the attempts to placate the Palestinians have been just "a series of spurts, fits, starts, retractions, denunciations, totally contradictory statements, sterile missions by various officials of his administration, and about-faces" and a mere pretense for makeshift peace in the region. That is rather a long list of faults the US administration is accused of. But it is merely a start for Said. He shifts his attention once again to the US-Israel connivance to bring Arafat's career to an end, possibly ending in his demise both figuratively and very much literally. (After all Israel has been quite frank about its intention and how it stands vis-à-vis the Palestinian leader and what the former considers the ad hoc regime on the West Bank.) Because the primary aim of the two "thick" allies in the region is to bring misery and reduce the Palestinian land infinitely "unlivable, whether by military incursions or by impossible political conditions." To be fair with some Jews, both in Israel and the United States, Said concedes that there are a handful who desire for true peace an coexistence with the Palestinians but they are merely a minority, or rather a group whose voice is without exception disregarded by the current leaders in the two countries. If there are even a minority who would possibly yearn for true peace on the Jewish side, Said now turns around and picks on the Arabs, most Arabs are being merely complacent about their status, which is virtually granted by the West, and particularly US. Because those countries vie to maintain and improve their ties with the world's only superpower, which ironically sets their relationship with what they consider Middle East's only democracy above anything else, Said maintains that the utmost those Arab countries could achieve would be the kind of prosperity that depends on their subservience to the US. In fact Arab leaders are so busy with ingratiating themselves with the US, Said

² Said's long residence and tenure in the United States notwithstanding, it is interesting to note that his antagonism to the United States and Israel and the sentiment that runs through the passage is mirrored well by the argument he develops in his famed *Orientalism*. In the book Said impugns the West for essentially hoisting the very existential definitions on the "Orient," despite the fact that there is obviously a "brute reality" that is "greater than anything that could be said in the West." Said, in other words, argues that all the preexisting conditions are distorted and reconfigured in a manner that is convenient to the powerful West. For the related discussion see Said's *Orientalism*, chapter II. The quote is from *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, pp. 132-133.

excoriates, that they are more than well prepared to “accommodate nicely those terrible injustices” Palestinian people have suffered for the past years. Little do they know, Said condescendingly engages in an aside, how contemptuous in truth those officials in Washington are of those Arab chieftains jostling for special grace. Note the bitterness that is hardly concealed beneath the contrived understatement Said musters despite his wonted fierce tone: “Perhaps they are simply unaware of how contemptuous most Americans are of them, and how little understood or regarded is their cultural and political status in the US.”

Seeing that Said finds no consolation in the rule of power administered by Israel and the US, one might be tempted to think he is in perfect agreement with the Palestinian leader and his regime. However, that is simply not the case. Note how sarcastic he sounds when he starts dealing with the Palestinian leader who, Said makes it pointedly clear here, “suddenly discovered the virtues (theoretically at least) of democracy and reform,” as if he and his cohorts all of a sudden realized the convenience of taking up the façade that buzzword of the West offers to the ad hoc regime they formed. (Which is in fact the case, as Said elaborates with impassioned bitterness in the subsequent section of the essay.) Although Said concedes that Arafat has been a figurehead of suffering in the past years as one of a handful of candidates to form a Palestinian front to face Israeli aggression in the midst of the real fray, which he admits he is physically out of, Said perceives the self-interest that is in fact at the bottom of Arafat regime. Being as autocratic as it is, the regime only succeeded in earning itself “a byword for brutality, autocracy and unimaginable corruption.” Said vents to his dudgeon against the Authority by depicting the utter unreasonableness of expecting further reform and optimistic future from the current regime in the region. As he puts it, it simply “defies reason.” What Arafat has achieved so far, Said continues, is bringing “unacceptable” sufferings and pains to his people because of the leader’s haphazard attacks on and concessions to Israel. Why has he been provoking wars, Said deplors, unless Arafat is self-centered enough to think only of his own advantages in disregard of the majority of Palestinians, who are mostly innocent bystanders lost in the brutal impasse the geopolitical condition of the region has dragged them into? Arafat, Said reiterates, is merely playing a game, just as his Israeli counterpart has been for a long time, by manipulating various factions on his side of the West Bank and somehow prolonging internal warfare, both figurative and literal, to detract attention from his own follies. The self-serving policies of the Palestinian leader has time and again resulted in reckless suicidal forays into Israel territories, which, Said once again reminds the reader, simply plays into Israeli’s hands by giving them more excuses to

retaliate against Palestinians, who once again more often than not tend to be innocent ones just trying to make ends meet, and cause havoc on the lives of poor refugees. Not surprisingly by now to most readers, Said does not approve of the means, although not necessarily of the principal cause of, Hamas, as they incite more Israeli brutalities as recent suicide bombings and their consequences illustrate. Said concludes the paragraph by strongly denouncing the opprobrium the shameless Palestinian government brought to the people as a whole, in which he pointedly includes himself as if to emphasize his solidarity with the people without his actual physical presence in the war-torn region. But one of the worst faults Said blames Arafat for is his connivance with the Israeli government (although it is a kind of connivance that results from his self-centered approach, not necessarily for the deliberate attempt at deception for its own sake) for prolonging occupation of the region through the blatantly unfair treaty, or rather agreement to be more exact, concluded in Oslo. All the miseries and ill treatment Palestinians still suffer today, Said hints, all derive from the ill-formulated framework talked over in Oslo. For the miserable failure it either directly or indirectly brought about Arafat deserves to be debunked and discredited and one of the first steps to manifest people's disgruntlement, Said almost reiterates, is to reject the Arafat's "entire programmed of reform, elections" and reorganization of government. In other words, it is high time that Palestinians, innocent and those who have been suffering undeservedly for the past decades, voiced non-confidence for Arafat and all he represents and has created to defend his own interest. It needs to be the actual people, Said continues, who should be the fulcrum and center of the new Palestinian administration because, here Said draws on the past democratic struggles such as those occurred in South Africa in recent times, efficient equitable policies only arise from an organization that is constituted of a body that represents the true will of the people. In that same spirit lies Said's idea of bringing in some open-minded Israelis into such a body who, Said puts in a rather circuitous and nebulous manner, will unhesitatingly form "a common basis of struggle against occupation."³

Mistrust of the US and its greatest ally in the Middle East is further pronounced in an essay titled "A New Current in Palestine." Said looks at the public portrayal of the Palestinian condition in particular and accuses the lop-sided description and coverage the Middle East issues get in the US media. Exuding his bitter resentment our author reiterates by now the familiar theme.

In the United States the government and, with a handful of exceptions, the

³ The quotes so far have been from Said's essay "Palestinian Elections Now" dated June 17, 2002 that is contained in *Counterpunch* published in 2003, as noted above.

independent media have echoed each other in harping on Palestinian violence and terror, with no attention at all paid to the thirty-five-year-old Israeli military occupation, the longest in modern history.⁴

The unfair, unilateral view, according to Said, gives further incentive to Sharon and his government to oppress and prolong the vicious circle the poor Palestinians have been in for decades.⁵ By seizing on a very illogical ratiocination, Said bitterly and yet in an ironically reserved tone reports, Sharon and his government turned themselves into a victim rather than the oppressor while in fact the sufferings of the innocent Palestinians are glaring in their eyes daily as the self-righteous Israelis bomb and persecute the helpless people. The basic infrastructure of a civilized society and all those resources and activities that could help develop an at least decent future for the Palestinians are either destroyed or disrupted such as “olive groves and fields...universities as well as businesses and civil institutions.” Of course, here Said reiterates the theme of illogical complicity many radical groups on the Palestinian side have embroiled themselves in whether unbeknownst to themselves or through tactful manipulation of the Israeli intelligence, the too frequent forays the radicals perpetrate are just giving convenient excuses to the Israelis for further retaliation. Even Arafat, again the same theme Said intones in the previous essay, is wagging his tail to the joy of Sharon because what the former really wants is reciprocation in kind from the Israeli prime minister, which is to prolong his autocratic tyranny over his own people. No matter what the cost Arafat is “willing to make peace” as long as “his unquenchable eagerness to stay in power” remains unabated. In view of such insurmountable obstacle to true independent state and peace in the region, Said suggests an approach to peace demonstrated by such an intellectual (which is not quite surprising in fact considering his own status in the States and the rest of the world as both a famed

⁴ The excerpt, as noted preceding the quote, is from *The Nation*, a weekly magazine that advocates human rights and progressive stances of dynamic individuals all over the world published by the Nation Publishing Company based in New York. The article is from the January 17th, 2002 issue.

⁵ Despite Said's censure of Arab nations and various Palestinian organizations for not truly working together to improve the conditions of the suffering people, his fundamental view of the Palestinian and Israeli issue remains the same. Let him speak in his own voice as it appears in his essay, entitled “An Ideology of Difference”: “...even though Israel was a Jewish state established by force on territory already inhabited by a native population largely of Muslim Arabs, in a part of the world overwhelmingly Muslim and Arab, it appeared to most of Israel's supporters in the West...that the Palestinian Arabs who paid a large part of the price for Israel's establishment were neither relevant nor necessarily even real.” The quote is from *Race, Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., pp. 38-39.

academician and activist) as Dr. Barghouthi who launched the nonviolent International Solidarity Movement that is comprised of approximately 550 European observers and notables. Non-partisan and intellectual approach is the one Said sanctions, as expected. But what Dr. Barghouthi got in return for his call and conference on constructive Palestinian Nation building is broken bones and pseudo-tortures at the hands of the Israeli police and intelligence officers, as Said notes. Obviously there is no easy way out of the current Palestinian predicament. But, Said adds, the fact Dr. Barghouthi earned such harsh retributions, which seems out of proportion to his attempt to form a peace movement, suggests the fears Israeli upper echelons have of a movement centered on the principles espoused by a figure like Dr. Barghouthi and the potential such movement has of bringing the Palestinian struggle to the level no blind bombings of the radical groups with their reign of terror have been able to achieve.⁶

Now let us set aside the purely political diatribe and pursue our author's aesthetic penchant for the time being. Because of its title and the date the essay appeared to the public, thus the rather connotative title of the essay "Untimely Meditations," it is apropos to deal with Said's view on a series of critical works done by Maynard Solomon on Beethoven. Said, even on a cursory look at his writing one notices, is a sort of polymath who had a vast source of knowledge on both Western and Eastern Intellectual history and his writing usually revolves on the nebula of interrelations each thinker is placed in his cultural and intellectual concatenation with another in his socio-cultural tradition. This essay titled (in case the name is already lost in the reader's mind in its untimely introduction above) "Untimely Meditations" truly demonstrates the tenacious attraction Said felt toward social-cultural history with which any living creature, whether an aloof artist or any average individual, has to connect himself in varying manners. The essay is interesting in that Said, despite himself, cannot help revealing his penchant for historicity while he admits the writer he reviews, who is Said generously commends gifted with "sheer interpretive genius and an uncommon gift for rendering in prose the complex, humanly compelling subtleties of Beethoven's music and life," putatively portrays Beethoven as a more or less solitary genius who kept his distance from his time in both aesthetic and historic senses. Note

⁶ Although Said might as well object, his support for intellectually charged movement may be likened to some of the ideological formation suggested by Terry Eagleton. As rather random definition of ideology Eagleton enumerates "the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life," "a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class," "that which offers a position for a subject," "forms of thought motivated by social interests," "action-oriented sets of beliefs," etc. For more on the subject see *Ideology* by Terry Eagleton, pp. 1-2.

the inexorable pull the social-cultural background in its historicity has for Said as he somehow paradoxically develops his argument centered on the aloof nature of Beethoven and Wagner. First he states, rather expectedly to a certain extent, in the following manner, drawing a distinction between the court-patronized composers like Bach and Mozart and those who had left with no choice but make it on their own in a more secularized world.

Thus Mozart expresses in his music a style much more intimately related to the worlds of court and church than Beethoven or Wagner, both of whom emerge from a secular environment in which, by virtue of unreliable patronage and the romantic cult of individual creativity, the composer is no longer seen as a servant (like Bach or Mozart) but as a demanding genius who stands proudly, and perhaps even narcissistically, apart from his time.⁷

Said, however, immediately embroils both Beethoven and Wagner, despite their proud, narcissistic and separate status from the mundane world, in the very socio-historical turmoil they are supposed to be, according to very Said, aloof from in the subsequent segment to the one I just quoted. Let me restate his argument verbatim.

So not only can one often see an easily perceptible connection between, say, a realistic artist like Balzac and his social milieu; there is also an antithetical relationship in the case of artists whose work challenges the aesthetic and social norms of their eras and is, so to speak, too late for the times, in the sense of superseding or transcending them. This relationship is especially difficult to discern in the case of a musician like Beethoven or Brahms, whose art is neither mimetic nor theatrical.

While describing timelessness of Beethoven and Wagner, Said cannot help but not describe them without the temporal, social-historical framework by drawing on an artist like Balzac. That may sound rather sophistic on my part, trying to read meanings that may or may not actually reside in the phrasings Said employs. However, his effort to embed the two composers who, Said mentions, are somehow apart from history and its complications proves the difficulties our author has of completely isolating what he terms the aesthetic norms from the social norms. Regardless of one's penchant, whether you are an artist or critic, Said's argument demonstrates, albeit in a paradoxical and roundabout manner, the inexorable forces of history that carry everyone in it onward at a seemingly differing rate for each and everyone. For those who are still doubtful and skeptical of my interpretation of Said's reading of Solomon on

⁷ The excerpt is from Said's essay "Untimely Meditations" published in *The Nation* on August 14, 2003. The version listed here is from the digital archive posted on the Web at thenation.com accessed on April 15, 2004.

Beethoven you may see the following excerpt from the same essay by the former to be convinced fully.

The masterpieces of Beethoven's final decade are late to the extent that they are beyond their own time, ahead of it in terms of daring and startling newness, later than it in that they describe a return or homecoming to realms forgotten or left behind by the relentless forward march of history.

In his dithering about involving Beethoven in the temporal complications history inevitably develops, as I mentioned, it is evident that Said is not quite ready to buttress his initial argument that Beethoven is transcendent of time and his work somehow exists in its aloofness from the mundane impurities of historical convolutions. Notice that Beethoven and his "masterpieces" are at once ahead of his time, "beyond their own time," and yet they somehow ineluctably hearken back to the "realms forgotten or left behind by the relentless forward march of history" despite Beethoven's lateness. The temporal pull from both directions exemplifies in Said as something that is separate but at the same time inseparable as the unstoppable flow of history barges on. Said's deep interest and fascination with current of history also manifests in his cursory and yet rather pointed references to Joyce and Eliot. In the essay Said connects the two authors with Beethoven and Wagner by focusing upon their asynchronicity with their time. The twentieth century counterparts, Said extemporizes, are both deeply attuned to those chivalric days when myth and reality engaged with each other in a harmonious and heroic manner. In the same tone Said invokes Lampedusa, "the Sicilian aristocrat who wrote only one, backward-looking novel, *The Leopard*," and Nietzsche as great thinkers and writers who both transcended time and, perhaps ineluctably so, existed in it in the sense that their work was not exactly of their time but somehow out of it whether, in its zeitgeist, "late" or "belated."⁸ Once again it may be too facile and opportunistic to enlarge on the remnants of the historic observations scattered, perhaps without much premeditation, throughout the essay but because they suggest possible and I believe evident predilections Said had as he tackled any subjects, be it aesthetic

⁸ It is a bit odd but at the same time suggestive to connect this idea of being in time and out of it at the same time to the relationship T.S. Eliot finds between tradition, literary mostly and by extension pan European civilization ultimately, and individual talent. The latter, because it has to exist in time, at a particular time and place needless to say, logically cannot transcend temporal restrictions but it needs to be in touch, in other words coexist, with tradition to be sustained and be given life to because "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." The quote is from *Tradition and the Individual Talent* by Eliot as appears in *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, vol. II, 1979, p. 1226.

and political, it may perhaps prove, once again I may be just being arbitrary here, useful to bring the reader's attention to our author's historic penchant as it impinges upon the temporal and geographical spatiality, in which interrelated and cacophonous elements jostle with each other for an uneasy equilibrium.⁹

However, historicity in Said does not necessarily manifest itself in a contentious geo-spatial manner. A good example of that proclivity can be glimpsed in an essay the author wrote relatively early in his critical career, dating back to 1966, entitled "A Configuration of Themes," a review Said contributed to the *Nation* magazine on a work produced by J. Hillis Miller. The tone of the review, as of course expected from the kind of work Said engages in, is extremely rarefied and does not presage any contentious diatribe Said became so famous for later on. Writing on Miller's observations on a line of English literary men and women, Said pursues the famed artist to such a dizzyingly abstracted aesthetic realm as only the well-trained critics can by summarily epitomizing the Romantic condition: "the romantic heritage of the nineteenth century leads directly to the unendurable impasse, exemplified in the final tragedies of Arnold and Hopkins, of a solitary ego confronting a disintegrating world from which immanence and God has receded."¹⁰ This is indeed a far cry from his harangue as instanced in the previous essays quoted *in passim*. The question the so-called romantic heritage confronted such as "a disintegrating world from which immanence and God has receded" hardly arises in the later Said when he was too embroiled in the actual politics of the Middle East to think of anything else but to bring about "real change" in the region. But we must come to grips with the real Said who incorporated all those disparate elements, which are almost hard to put together when the temporal flow his biography presents is comprehended linearly and not as a spherical expansive dynamic movement that can be layered over each temporal and biographical phase of a very unique individual. Although whether Said personally felt some resonance within himself as he invoked such emotionally and semio-culturally charged words as God and immanence, especially as they possibly pertain to his academic and activist stances, the critical modus and the tone Said employs in this

⁹ The technique of interweaving and harmonizing cacophonous tempo-spatiality is obviously not of his own invention. It is no wonder that Said rather candidly makes references to a noted English critic Raymond Williams in many of his essays. On implicating and ramifying parallel histories that are always in existence as Williams reads literary work, see his seminal *The Country and The City*, originally published in 1973.

¹⁰ This quote, as already noted, comes from the essay titled "A configuration of Themes," which Said contributed to the *Nations* and was recently reissued in the October 30, 2003 edition of the magazine.

essay form quite a contrast to those he usually assumes later in his career. However, there is a sign, albeit rather inchoate at this early stage, that the kind of writers he feels akin to and finds promising in the sense that they offer layers of literary and ideological significations are the ones who offer fertile ground for dualism that is derived from spatio-cultural discrepancies. Joseph Conrad is one of them, at least to a certain extent as he partly falls under the category I just delineated. Note his, or to be exact his review of Miller's interpretation of the Polish émigré (with whom Said seems to concur, as far as the context allows).

Conrad achieves the seemingly impossible in being able to see the world as it is, as pure quality and without interpretation, but the expense of such a vision is the unpleasant realization that conventional ideas of space and time, matter and spirit, must be rendered as incompatible dimensions. Man, who lives in both dimensions, is the victim of an irreconcilable, even impossible, dualism. (from *The Nation*, October 30, 2003)

Granted that the spheres Said refers to do not necessarily involve the geo-cultural ones, they are enough to adumbrate the future dualism, as indeed the term is inserted craftily in the quoted passage in a sense that could be readily developed into the ideologically charged one Said often puts into use later in his career, seeing that the general pattern that comes out of the passage and the review as a whole could without much stretch of imagination be admitted to form a continuum with his aesthetico-political critical stance that becomes more and more pronounced as he advances in age. I am compelled to enlarge on the quoted passage a little bit more for the expression I just used, "without much stretch of imagination," might be misconstrued to posit heterogeneity, or to be put more accurately complete break, between his earlier and later critical works rather than the opposite. Obviously, the seeds of spatio-cultural dichotomy is already planted in the phrasing Said employs in this very short passage. Note how he seizes upon the ideas of "space and time, matter and spirit" and which he neatly compartmentalizes as "incompatible dimensions." Regardless of the level and depth of concepts Said here deploys and implicitly brings into play, the dualistic terms he juxtaposes are without any undue distortion and exaggeration can be connected to his later East-West interlinkage and with all its ramifications, particularly his concept of subjugational relations that obtains between the two worlds. Although it is undeniably true that the tone and feel that pervades throughout this short essay is predominantly that of pure academia to the extent that the time and space duality tangibly reminds one of Einstein and his famed theories. If one is set to deflect that potentially belittling argument to Said, at least in his early career, then one is forced to

resort to an explanation that the putatively pure academic and scientific slant, which can also be used to attribute to Said the conformist character somewhat subservient to the traditional Western academic protocol, was a mere façade and even a necessary evil for one who was just beginning to absorb and become part of the body academia of the West to launch his own vindication of the rights of the downtrodden which he considered himself, or at least came to consider later on, to represent.

In this light the rest of the argument that is rife with terms and concepts only a person who has fully absorbed Western philosophico-critical tradition can fully develop begins to assume a different nature than might perhaps be first suggested. Said, seizing upon R.P. Blackmur's extremely abstruse phrasing, which he credits Miller of bringing to his attention, notes that "In the movement of modern literature built upon the example of Conrad's bravery, as well as on his sense of the darkness in which objectivity and subjectivity are dissolved, Miller begins to discern what... is a dialectic of incarnation." (from "A Configuration of Themes") Admittedly the excerpt is rather arbitrarily lifted off the main essay but the gist of my argument may still be exemplified by the terms that crop up so persistently and the manner in which Said's review is carried out. Look how Said pursues the dualistic argument. He simply cannot get rid of dialecticism that others have been saying exist or he himself insists reside in Conrad. In the first segment of the quoted passage objectivity and subjectivity are juxtaposed as terms that are somehow "dissolved" in Conrad's "darkness" and this dialecticism is followed by another juxtaposition of what Said calls "a special awareness of actuality and a moment of radical self-consciousness." And this leads to "a series of relative solutions to the problem of reconciling the mind to the world" and lands in an extremely rarefied sphere of "co-presence" where "mind, the world, and an underlying being shine forth." Going in this ontologico-philosophical direction Said must have found his way into the inner circle of Western literary criticism rather too theoretically inclined and his possible impact on reality-bound struggle rather minimal, if he had stuck to the way he started his career as a critic. In a sense his review instantiated in "A Configuration of Themes" indicates the limits of his academic career as it was and the potential for a new path his academic activity, paradoxically enough, at the same time suggested. In fact, the themes Said grapples with throughout the essay become increasingly metaphysical and simultaneously resonant with the issues that can be, with the right kind of impact which he did not lack obviously because of his origin and the deteriorating Palestinian situation, evolved and linked to the concerns that were closer to his heart. Read the passage subsequent to the one I quoted above: "Yeats's early desire to transfigure the present world is achieved when he realizes that appeals to

otherworldly values must fail because the supernatural inheres in every corner of life." How do we make of the deeper current that runs, as it were (although some may accuse me of disingenuousness, perhaps rightly), beneath the superficial or simple contemporaneous relevance as Said wrote the essay in the mid-60's that by extension and careful analysis (serendipity, do you say?) impinges upon the later concerns that almost obsessed our author? In retrospect, how "appeals to other-worldly values" came to fare, as the numerous Middle Eastern talks and negotiations took place and failed in the intervening years? The way the world panned out, as it were, since he started his critical career until he died recently certainly does not bear out what he identified with Yeats' values that the supernatural, perhaps *deus ex machina* or supernatural intervention—that is what is needed in the Middle East now more than ever—, inheres in every corner of life. In fact what actually happened was bitter conflict daubed with blood and sweat as is still continued in the Iraq. What Said recognizes as William's coterminousness with reality and meaning of reality that is contained in poetry—all these seem such a far cry, the more so, the more Said becomes involved in the political conditions of the Middle East. And at the same time, once again for the umpteenth time if I dare risk being verbose, all these conceptual abstruse terms come to signify something that could potentially stand for what is actually happening in "real" world or at least what is actually going to happen out there. That is why a critical panache such as "each particular aspect of a writer's universe expresses the essence of that universe, which is an economics of reality of a very high order indeed" sounds so off-handed in retrospect. No matter what you say about the self-sufficiency of arts, what in the old days were called aestheticism or art for art's sake, that is not the direction and sentiment Said was destined to embrace. Before an overwhelming tangible confrontations between his own people, as he pointedly makes it clear as in the above essays I quoted, and the rest of the Western nations, particularly the US, "the economics of reality" could no longer exist except as the bloody struggles that were daily fought in the Middle East. Whether or not it was the reality of "a very high order" it could not obtain its significance without its relevance to the hierarchical world order as it stood and still stands.¹¹

The dualistic perspective Said frequently underpins his arguments on is also manifestly clear in his critical opus *Culture and Imperialism*, a book initially published

¹¹ It is interesting to note the resonating sentiment Said expresses as he comments on the nature of text and reality in his *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. The pertinent passage includes, "Too many exceptions, too many historical, ideological, and formal circumstances, implicate the text in actuality, even if a text may also be considered a silent printed object with its own unheard melodies" (pp. 49-50).

in 1993. At the outset of the book Said enlarges on the relationship between the concepts of past and present and what they imply. To be put succinctly, although it may sound rather paradoxical, the two hold conceptual positions that are rather ambiguous and at most overlapping. In Said's words,

Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. (p. 3)

To be fair with Said the temporal as well as aesthetical historic concepts of past and present are construed to involve each other and only in their interdependency the two are constituted with their significance. That is a rather off-putting approach to historical flow because we are to regard past and present not in their synchronic now-ness but always in their involvement and interrelationship with other time frames such as past and future. It turns out, however, Said has his precedence in none other than ultra-conservative critic of the early 20th century Anglo-America, T.S. Eliot. As a critical strategy that is meant to undermine the established order of the Western cultural modus the choice Said makes in his resonance of nested concept of historico-traditional time flow is superb, although the tack Said takes definitely smacks of postmodern focal obfuscation and temporal aporization if I dare take recourse to the buzzword of the day. Of course, Said is thinking of none other than the New Critical opus magnum of Eliot's essay on tradition and individual talent. As Said extensively quotes the essay, I might as well delineate the ideas he obviously found resonating with his own.

Tradition...involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year, and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country as a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional... No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.¹²

¹² I referred to *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* to put Eliot more clearly in time flow and historical context of European and Anglo-American literary and critical

Said duly and succinctly summarizes what he thinks is Eliot's main thesis in the immediately proceeding section. But the nagging question that becomes foregrounded through his exegesis, as it always does in Said, is the manner in which the tempo-spatial relationship, as Said seizes Eliot's tradition and individual talent, is treated in his polemic. First, Said expands the target of Eliot's ratiocination to both poets or the creators who initiate the tradition directly involved and the critics or the readers who analyze and keep the tradition alive and grants both parties the active role to participate and formulate the "tradition" on an equal footing, as it were, giving the two enormous power to sway the opinions of such variegated fields as culture, literature, and politics—at least to which Said deems to expand the roles of the parties he enumerates. Second, Said both distances and identifies himself with Eliot as he concurs with the latter in his interpretation of the relationship between the pastness of the past and the presentness of the present while simultaneously throwing subtle divergent nuances between the relational link between the two temporal concepts. Note how Said phrases, or rephrases, the two concepts in their interdependency.

The main idea is that even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of the past, there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other and, in the totally ideal sense intended by Eliot, each co-exists with the other. (*Culture and Imperialism*, p. 4)

It is fairly obvious that Said, in his skillful cooption and development of Eliot's thesis, rechannells and redirects the thrust of the argument to an entire aesthetico-politico-geographical sphere. What initially seemed merely a temporal issue, or at least something that had merely historical relevance only within a limited geo-spatial area, now turns out to have some global or international consequences that are tinged with adversarial nature. The relational structure that establishes, as Said sees it, is only a matter of arbitrary choice for co-existence amid innumerable and oftentimes detracting and cacophonous contingencies. Said, however, emphasizes that the past-present relationship cannot escape the ineluctable signification interdependency each positions the other in. Implications of the past and all the reverberations it gives way to the present determines, Said maintains, the way present political and cultural relations are held. An interesting point is that Said expands the spatio-temporal argument to that of East-West confrontation that is particularly pertinent to him as an intellectual of Palestinian origin. In fact he cites an example.

history, although Said excerpt within his *Culture and Imperialism* would have sufficed as well as a source. The relevant passage appears on page 1226 of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" compiled in the anthology mentioned above.

that, to some perhaps and more likely to a lot of readers, is obtusely resonant with real-politic.

Let me give an example. During the Gulf War of 1990-91, the collision between Iraq and the United States was a function of two fundamentally opposed histories, each used to advantage by the official establishment of each country. (*Culture and Imperialism*, p. 5)

Contrasted to the preceding philosophico-academic argument Said has been employing, this blunt reference to the actual war, and a recent one to the bargain, indeed brings the thrust of our author's argument to a level where one becomes almost befuddled about the relationships between the dovetailed disciplinary fields Said are wont to foray into. Is all the abstruse and theoretical venture into the Western aesthetico-cultural corpus a mere ploy to ready one for the bloody confrontations that is being repeated at this moment and somehow smooth the reader into resigning to view the outcome as an inevitable function of the divergent and diverging historical consciousnesses? That is a question most readers may legitimately ask when he realizes how abruptly he is plunged into the nitty-gritty referent-delineated world in which terms of argument are hardly distinguishable from those of a daily report. I will let Said speak for himself.

As construed by the Iraqi Baath Party, modern Arab history shows the unrealized, unfulfilled promise of Arab independence, a promise traduced both by "the West" and a by a whole array of more recent enemies, like Arab reaction and Zionism. Iraq's bloody occupation of Kuwait was, therefore, justified not only on Bismarckian grounds, but also because it was believed that the Arabs had to right the wrongs done against them and wrest from imperialism one of its greatest prizes. Conversely, in the American view of the past, the United States was not a classical imperial power, but righter of wrongs around the world, in pursuit of tyranny, in defense of freedom no matter the place or cost. (*Culture and Imperialism*, p. 5)

It is obvious how strongly and, I might say, personally Said feels about the issue of imperialism as it fundamentally changed the way Arab world was shaped and ruled since European dominance of the region became conspicuous. Even words such as "unrealized, unfulfilled promise of Arab independence" somehow sound tinged with the hope only a person who has committed his life to the well being of the population in the war torn region could imbue them with. Am I the only one who detects the wistful, wishful note those adjectives carry? If they are not convincing enough, how about the jagged bitterness the phrase, "a promise traduced both by 'the West' and by a whole array of more recent enemies," shouts at the reader? The frustrated sentiment is filled with the bitter disappointment that long overdue settlement of various sorts have not

yet materialized to ameliorate the already subhuman conditions of the people in the Middle East. No wonder Said is tempted to posit a hypocritical stance of the United States as a "righter of wrongs around the world, in pursuit of tyranny, in defense of freedom no matter the place or cost." (p. 5) The unilateral complacency US feels for itself is nothing but due to arbitrary assessment of what constitutes "wrongs" and "freedom" and "democracy," the buzzwords that are much prized in the West and Said hints that which connote entirely different moral-cultural-ethical significance in different parts of the world. The strategy Said employs, if I may repeat the thesis I presented before, is history with its layering of meanings that eventually define the same issues in diverse perspectives and which, Said tirelessly dings into his audience, ineluctably causes the kind of cultural clashes we are seeing in the world. Aptly enough, aptly that is for his argument, Said implicates T. S. Eliot and his meaning of history, with its concomitant relativized values and gaps between the past and the present, in his interpretation of, and signification construction of, imperialism—"a word and an idea today," Said admits, "so controversial, so fraught with all sorts of questions, doubts, polemics, and ideological premises as nearly to resist use altogether." It is indeed just that that since the term connotes so many ideas that need to be questioned and doubted it opens up a space in which an intellectual and activist like Said to work on the material he was presumably and primarily expected to deal with and build new polemical foundations on the old and by now familiar controversy of what constitutes "imperialism" and its consequences and ramifications through history. Not surprisingly, Said in fact admits to the enterprise he somehow managed to adumbrate throughout his circuitous argument immediately following upon this thematic reiteration. In his words, "[t]o some extent of course the debate involves definitions and attempts at delimitations of the very notion itself" (op. cit., p. 5). The terms and conditions, in other words, of what imperialism connotes and implies need to be addressed from every possible conceptual and ideological angle. The approach, as should be obvious by now, our author himself takes is merely one of many possible perspectival forays anyone can make to elucidate the very daunting issue we have at hand. Unlike many of the thinkers who contributed to the discussion of imperialism in the US, mainly with political and economic implications of imperialism, such as Paul Kennedy, William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko, Noam Chomsky, and Howard Zinn—historians and theoreticians who, Said unabashedly impugns, tried to put up "studious defenses or explanations of American policy as non-imperialist," Said's main focus is culture and how it is dovetailed with the concept and practice of imperialism. His proclivity and slant in criticism surfaces time and again. Said notes that "scarcely

any attention has been paid to what I believe is the privileged role of culture in the modern imperial experience, and little notice taken of the fact that the extraordinary global reach of classical nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European imperialism still casts considerable shadow over our own times.” He simply valorizes the potency of culture and connects the consequences of Imperialism with the pervading influence/shadow Culture has cast on the people over the globe. (Needless to say, Culture being understood as all those values and systems Anglo-America and Europe stood and still stand for.) But Said does not forget to name the imperial powers that territorially and administratively ruled a large section of the world until quite recently.

What does the strategy imply? Is our author in fact still teetering between the cultural and actual power issues that keep cropping up in his discussion? Or is it his ploy to conflate the two seemingly discrepant issues to cope with what Foucault called the pervasive nature of power and domination, that all societies are said to be permeated with? In fact he is attempting to make a subtler and yet more sweeping generalization of the power of imperial vestiges. Note how his comment on the “modern imperial experience” is extended and expanded into some of the modern manifestations of imperial implications. His premise is, rather simplistic as it is matter-of-factly presented to the reader, that the contemporary global condition has been precursored by the physical domination of various part of the world that established in the preceding centuries, mostly agencied by the ambitious European nations led by Britain. The current electronic information technology such as the Internet and the weather prediction system, which can be easily turned into a means of leveraging intelligence gathering, are nothing more than, as Said maintains, what has been practiced by the ever expanding “imperial powers” since the European expansion started in the 17th century. That is, to join “together even the most distant corners of the world” (op. cit., p. 6) and bring them under the control of the central power. And it is here that Said resorts to the most unsystematic of his argument, what might properly be termed “Oriental” (a bugbear of his ideologico-aesthetic dissertation) and here used as an excuse and even in praise of unsystematicity of his argument. Needless to say, his aim is to disarm the reader and allow him a modicum, although the whole tone Said adopts makes it even sound like a great amount of, poet and logical license. Read it in his own words once again: “Now I am temperamentally and philosophically opposed to vast system-building or to totalistic theories of human history” (op. cit. p. 6). No wonder because he is, professedly at least, proceeding to dismantle the huge walls of power-hungry imperial system that leaves the less privileged people of the Middle East and elsewhere in the economic and political doldrums and, worse yet, subjugation of all

sorts. However, because of the unsystematic nature of his professed proclivity, he can perceive the expansiveness of imperial enterprise, as it, Said reiterates, gobbles up and interlinks even seemingly unrelated fields of activities in its integrative processes.¹³ In his rather sweeping view, Said considers that Britain and other European and American global ambitions brought about a world in which imperial agencies act to fuse and integrate things under its domination to create one systematic whole, or in Said's words, taking Britain as the epitome of such powers, "the British empire integrated and fused things within it, and taken together it and other empires made the world one" (op. cit. p. 6). Perspectival transposition Said attempts is admittedly rather simplistic and short circuited as he culls such short phrases as "false expectations," "invested beyond its boundaries," and "created illusions" from Patrick O'Brien and connect them with well-established English novels such as *Great Expectations* and *Vanity Fair* and elide from politico-social realm to literary, which by the way Said insists he is mainly interested in; however, his incisive view of the pervasive nature and power of imperialism needs to be regarded as a good indicator as to where our author stands as he readies to proceed in his rather eclectic and yet intelligently comprehensive critique of the power relations that exist in the modern world. Before we actually go on to his professed methodological deployment at its very concrete level, let us remind ourselves one more time that what underpins and what starts Said on to his quest to analyze the imperial pattern in modern world is his conviction that "as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography" and that very struggle, which Said admits fascinates him on its own, "is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" and very importantly the colonial/imperial structures such struggle spawned continue to "exert considerable cultural influence in the present" (op. cit., p. 7). As Said theory has it, the agencies that endorsed and gave impetus to the imperial system and its concomitant subjugation of the native populations are none other than, at least in the field of literature and by extension ideology, such well-known seminal writers as Carlyle, Ruskin, Conrad, and Dickens.

¹³ It may not be apropos to insert his definition of Orientalism at this juncture because of the multifarious and extensive connotations Said grants the term. Although I may be censured for blasphemy if I conjoin unsystematicity of his thought process with his suggestive coinage, I dare append his interpretation of the term for reader's perusal. First of all, the term is the geographical spatiality Orient is usually associated with but what makes it more significantly rife is its linkage with "the European will to domination over the non-European world" and all discursive operations that sever and generate the ruler and the ruled. For more on Said's argument pertaining to Orientalism, see *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, pp. 222-223.

One of the first works Said deals with is Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The center of contention, or rather the foundation on which his interpretation is based is the idea that happens to be iterated in the novella itself that "it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of an given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence....We live, as we dream—alone" (as quoted in *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 23). Of course, such ineffability of "the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence" forces a critic like Said to salvage and recreate the forces and circumstances that gave rise to such sensation. Not surprisingly, then, Said immediately finds a clue in the "redemptive force, as well as the waste and horror, of Europe's mission in the dark world" to reconfigure and reconstruct the professedly inscrutable story that is conspicuously rendered in a direct narrative mode. Once the novella is securely set against Europe's expansionist background Said aligns the story with historical flow, which he has made much of in his argument about the pastness of the present and vice versa in the manner of T.S. Eliot, by defining the main narrative progression within the temporal framework delineated by Marlow's journey inland, or what Said calls "the principal forward trajectory into what [Conrad] renders as 'the heart of Africa'" (op. cit. p. 23). What seems like a thematic legerdemain turns out Said's ploy to excavate the imperial will in the heart of darkness (a pun definitely not intended, although it may inevitably leave a residue of one). Said's relentless search easily locates the authorial intention, or at least one of the many, in the merciless commercial venture the central figure is implicated in and the adumbrative journey inland of our narrator as they are yanked to generate a "common theme: Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa" (op. cit. 23). Said then superimposes what he blueprinted in his abstract critical mission statement over what he deems the ever ramifying implications of the said imperial will. He, that is, seizes the kind of business engagement the figures at the inception of the story are involved in and identifies the empire Britain represented in the late 19th century, for instance, as "the empire of business," which once was "an adventurous and often individualistic enterprise" (op. cit. p. 23). Despite Said's rather ambiguous phrasing the imperial enterprise, which as I said Said identifies as a business empire, resonates with the kind of power relations Foucault was fond of characterizing as plenitudinous. Here is how Said describes the situation that established in the period we are discussing.

Although the almost oppressive force of Marlow's narrative leaves us with a quite accurate sense that there is no way out of the sovereign historical force of imperialism, and that it has the power of a system representing as well as speaking for everything

within its dominion, Conrad shows us that what Marlow does is contingent, acted out for a set of like-minded British hearers, and limited to that situation. (p. 24)

The more closely you read this passage, the more will you be inclined to connect the concept of power relations I mentioned above with Said's sense of imperialistic enterprise. As Foucault has it, although he may as well object considering his post-deconstructive status, the system or the force that represent it is ubiquitous and inescapable. The dominion and the force that enables that very condition leaves no nooks and crannies sheltered from the permeating influences. What an individual example and manifestation of that imperial will does is by necessity "contingent" upon and conditioned by the plenitudinous power relations; in other words, even Marlow is comprehended in the "situation," which obviously ultimately was given rise to by the system what Said's terms the historical process had brought about. Paradoxically—actually his argument turns out consistent with his view of the imperial system in the end—Said makes a point of vacuity "*outside* the world-conquering attitudes embodied by Kurts," meaning everything that evolves in the Marlow's narrative redounds to the sphere that is demarcated by the imperial enterprise Said finds so repugnant.

What seems a little too extreme about Said's approach here is that he tends to put Conrad essentially on the same footing as such imperial propagators and advocates as Cecil Rhodes and Frederick Lugard. Defining the author by his biography may be one thing but identifying and assessing his ideological orientation by his narrative exercise may be going a bit too far. Note Said's matter-of-fact assumption for his statement: "Conrad could probably never have used Marlow to present anything other than an imperialist world-view, given what was available for either Conrad or Marlow to see of the non-European at the time" (op. cit. p. 24). Needless to say, Said obviously cannot deem it possible here for Conrad to have located himself out of the Foucaultian power I referred to above. Since imperialism was in the air, his logic goes, anything that came out of authors who lived in that period had no choice but breathe the air that was tainted...well at least from Said's perspective, and thus the narrator, who after all is Conrad's mere creation or even alter ego, could function as nothing more than Conrad's or imperialist mouthpiece. Arguing along the same line Said seizes upon the relations between Conrad and pervading imperialism and Conrad the author of a narrative and its narrator Marlow and makes a point that both are outsiders for being merely a reporter and observer of unfolding historic events, the former for being an exile and the latter a raconteur. In other words, premised upon the insidious prevalence of imperial structure Said's is everything that is defined by contradictions, confrontations,

and conflicts that result from it. The two possible arguments or “two visions” that Said thinks exist in Conrad simply multiply the ramifications of the imperialistic project Said has been iterating. One view is to see imperialism and the argument around it as something going on, that is, all the effects and vestiges of the now formally defunct imperialistic enterprises still remain in place in the mostly intangible form of culture, philosophy, politics and so on. What actually exists out there in the former colonies of the West are still spheres in which residual and ever potent forces of imperialism pulsate and underpin the fundamental lives of the people, especially those who are at the upper echelon of society. The second view, which Said sees as less malign, limits the influences of imperialism to the limited time and place where the native cultures actually came in contact with the imperial forces at a particular time and therefore the effects of imperialism are neither absolute nor “unqualifiedly certain.” It is in fact this latter version of imperial influences that Said bothers to more meticulously connect Conrad and his work with the plenitudinous and yet localized concept of imperial power. Note how Said tries to define Conrad’s version of imperialistic limitations, although non sequitur in his argument seems to become all the more pronounced as the sentence progresses.

Since Conrad *dates* imperialism, shows its contingency, records its illusions and tremendous violence and waste (as in *Nostromo*), he permits his later readers to imagine something other than an Africa carved up into dozens of European colonies, even if, for his own part, he had little notion of what that Africa might be. (op. cit. p. 26)

A careful reader may easily spot the short-circuited argument Said develops here. What, one might as well counter argue, does dating imperialism, showing its contingency, and recording its “illusions and tremendous violence and waste” have anything to do with the view Conrad putatively held toward imperialism and its effects? That is a rather simplistic question in itself but in its logical clarity may be all the more recommended to the audience. Partly because of the brittle logical foundation on which Said builds his case against colonialism via Conrad he precipitously directs reader’s attention to the first line of argument he introduced previously. That is, imperialism as a living concept and force that permeates the spheres that historically constituted the ruled and the ruling.

As if his localizing strategy was a mere epiphenomenon that needs to be brushed away as expeditiously as possible, Said reverts to his argument that evidence of imperialism is everywhere and most noticeably in the countries that were in direct colonial relations historically and the borders, in various manifestations, between those

two parties. What has changed, Said subtly shifts the center of his argument, is the actual loci where diverging ideologies clash, or rather do not engage. A case in point, Said notes, is the paradigmatic shift that took place among leading intellectuals such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault in the 70's and 80's. These eminent thinkers, who started out as "apostles of radicalism and intellectual insurgency" in the 60's, turn blasé about their egalitarian, democratic stance and, according to Said, lose "faith in ...the great legitimizing narratives of emancipation and enlightenment" (op. cit. p. 26). One takes recourse to post-modernism and ends up seeking meaning only in micro-issues because grappling with grand questions only leads to aporia in a world, which after all consists of games; the other simply reneges on getting involved with "the oppositional forces in modern society," which seemed an only chance to confront and address the question of exclusion and confinement, and instead takes refuge in power as it as far as it only impinges on an individual, although the idea of microcosming his own concept as applied to the individual sphere seems rife with contradictions. This withdrawal from the libertarian forces of such eminent intellectuals coincides, Said maintains, with resurgence of neo-colonialist sentiments among intellectuals in the West, in particular. Thus whatever "voices" that do not concur with white, non-Western, Judeo-Christian ethos is deemed anti-Western, terroristic and inferior. As Said explicitly admits he and others like him, who do not belong to "a wealthy system of interlocking informational and academic resources with newspapers, television networks, journals of opinion," are pointedly marginalized and left to howl in a cordoned out and insulated academic and other spheres. This remark and others linked to the same line of argument Said deploys in the book, obviously intended at those well-connected influences that dominate American media and other industries—particularly those on the opposite pole from Muslim-Palestinian ideology—in a way expresses Said's agonies and struggle to resolve the dead-end he faced no matter which way he advanced his argument to counter the views put forward by the imperialistic "Western" camp. Partly because of the desperation he faced he recurs to the subject of perspective he thought was rife with suggestiveness in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Note how Said is hard pressed to find the alternate discourse to the absolute, power (again in the Foucaultian sense) dominated one advanced by the opposite camp as he once again salvages the "less imperialistically assertive possibility offered by *Heart of Darkness*" (op. cit. p. 28). (It is important too to take note of his subtle yet compromisingly resigned use of "less imperialistically assertive"; after all Said has to yield to the argument that power is everywhere as it permeates every nook and cranny of any given system, particularly the system that pertains to the relationship

he defines as colonial.) The faintest chance Said recognizes to escape from power domination is to open up a space, even though virtual, that is somehow outside, albeit seemingly and inevitably comprehended within such domination, the system, which in its narrative manifestation comes out as "undefined and unclear." The mechanism for such possibility of a world to come about is that since Marlow maintains somehow "dislocated subjectivity" he is enabled to weave a nebulous domination-free world aided by the "consciously circular narrative forms," which are deliberately constructed as self-referential and self-reflexive of its facticity. This obviously needs more explanation, as Said himself admits. However, the way Said tries rings so platitudinous that one wonders if he is trapped himself in a circle. "Conrad's narrators," Said goes, "are not average unreflecting witnesses of European imperialism," (op. cit. p. 29) which seems premised upon the particular narrative structure the novella takes, as the narrator keeps talking for pages, as if his putative audience has infinite patience upon the Nelly where they are supposedly gathered together. The narrator and the characters who draw particular attention from the narrator, Said continues, "do not simply accept what goes on in the name of the imperial idea." As is already indicated in this essay, Said simply cannot get rid of the preconception that every single work that is set against the European expansionist period shares the very ethos imperialism tries to convey as is put forward throughout his argument, tautologically it may well sound. Thus his assumption that "they *do not simply* accept what goes on in the name of the imperial idea" (italics mine). Any imperial discourse, as it were, has to start from a premise that imperialism has left an indelible mark, no matter how subtly and intangibly. If that is indeed the case, then, Said's argument is destined to take a more nebulous and circuitous course, which for the moment seems to actually take place. Said adds, "they think about it a lot, they worry about it, they are actually quite anxious about whether they can make it seem like a routine thing," and responding to that semi-rhetorical question with "[b]ut it never is" (op. cit. p. 29). Before the reader could wave a red flag the tenor of the argument has definitely shifted to something like implications of imperialism and their manifestations in *Heart of Darkness* and no more or no less. The ideological dichotomy moored to such discourse becomes all-engrossing as Said advances his view. Whatever "they" think about and worry about and for that matter whatever they do in the story comes to impinge upon the one comprehensive agenda Said has amassed throughout his essay. Since the imperial idea, which all the characters try to routinize in the novella, in fact turns out defamiliarized it becomes another incentive for Said to implicate the author himself in the grand scheme of waging a counterattack, as it were, on the dominant. The most conspicuous one in

this essay, or rather segment, is dislocation of images and true intent. And it is both the narrator and characters who are comprehended by the narrator--and in complicity with them the author himself, who somehow creates discrepancies between the supposed significance and the actual construction, ultimately generates meaning through the gestalt setup. That is why Said insists and meticulously delineate the space and conditions in which the true intent of the author, or the gist, of the imperial ideas arise. It is not merely the language or the narrative scheme that determines it but as it is implicated and generated through the concoction of narrative device and content, "the quality of [narrator's] voice, the effect of what he says" (op. cit. p. 29). All this because, as I am sure I have already stated before and here now simply rephrasing, the narrator, as by definition a factitious presence, is decidedly not trustworthy to the extent that "what he says" needs to be constantly evaluated: "He alternates between garrulity and stunning eloquence, and rarely resists making peculiar things seem more peculiar by surprisingly misstating them, or rendering them vague and contradictory" (op. cit. p. 29). In other words, that is in Said's other words, Marlow is both (actually Kurtz reported through Marlow, which more or less comes to the same thing as everything arises after filtered out by our narrator's judgment and discretion) enlightening and "fraudulent." At this stage the reader is left totally helpless as to what to trust and judge values of whatever is portrayed in the novella by. However, there is always an absolute certainty amid uncertainties in Said's argument. Although Conrad's novella is hard to comprehend and pinpoint its ideological and moral certainties one thing is implicitly there from the beginning to the end. What then the whole story comes to is, or "what Kurtz and Marlow talk about is in fact imperial mastery, white European *over* black Africans, and their ivory, civilization *over* the primitive dark continent" (op. cit. p. 29, italics Said's). But this time the general thrust is decidedly deconstructive. The wedge that is being driven, by whom I intentionally leave blank here for the moment, between the reader, or their comprehension of what is truly happening, and what seems to come through the novella, such as "the official 'idea' of empire and the remarkably disorienting actuality of Africa," is so amorphous and phantasmagoric that there is no use fixing it to set ideas. But all of this, on the part of Marlow, is to unsettle the reader's complacency and shatter the conventional ideas about how the relationship between imperial dominance and true reality was established and stood during the timeframe being dealt with in the story and, even beyond that, as it establishes today. Said, however, does not stop at the realm being fictionalized and securely, as it seems, quarantined by the author when it comes to destabilizing the imperial relations as he somehow pushes Conrad himself to play the role of a deconstructive iconoclast and foist

on him the burden of universalizing the upturned values, or at least chances of upturning established ideologies.

With Conrad, then, we are in a world being made and unmade more or less all the time. What appears stable and secure—the policeman at the corner, for instance—is only slightly more secure than the white men in the jungle, and requires the same continuous (but precarious) triumph over an all-pervading darkness, which by the end of the tale is shown to be the same in London and in Africa. (op. cit. p. 29)

The deconstructive tack Said takes, it turns out, is nothing but a ploy to make a rupture in the relations replete with contradictions and transmogrifying fluidities so that he is somehow justified to seize on the concept of independence and autonomy that can be linked to resistance and resurgence, on multiple levels, of the conventionally subjugated races all around the globe. Then, rather expectedly, Said comes back to the issue of “darkness” as it pertains to Conrad’s novella and manages to invest it with a positive window of opportunity for a resistant voice like his to rise and counter the dominant discourse that has historically been in the realm of the West, including that of Conrad’s. Said argues that it is the limitations and perspective constraints that force Marlow and others through him to twist and misinterpret the true meaning of darkness in the story. But that very impenetrability of “darkness” is the as yet unleashed resistance of the dominated and failure for Marlow and others to fathom the center of it actually guarantees the promise of independent and culturally autonomous former colonies in the years to come. That is Said’s line of argument. Let me quote: “Marlow and Kurtz are also creatures of their time and cannot take the next step, which would be to recognize that what they saw, disablingly and disparagingly, as a non-European ‘darkness’ was in fact a non-European world resisting imperialism so as one day to regain sovereignty and independence, and not, as Conrad reductively says, to reestablish the darkness” (op. cit. p. 30). Said here just confounds the fictional and ideological realms and arbitrarily attempts to seize the right to discourse, even away from the author of the book he is supposedly reviewing. It could not be only me who feels a little uncomfortable when Said faults Conrad for not being able to draw a conclusion that “imperialism had to end so that ‘natives’ could lead lives free from European domination” (op. cit. p. 30), as if winning that modest concession is the ultimate victory a third world resident could hope for. Since Said cannot find any evidence of the modest concession, he condescendingly forgives Conrad for being subservient to the ideology of the time and failing to come to terms with the objective truth. After all, Said patronizingly observes, Conrad must necessarily have been constrained within the Euro-centric view that dominated the time frame the Polish

expatriate busily plied his trade.

But, as the reader could as well guess who has intuited the drift of Said's argument, what does politicizing Conrad and other fictional writers and characters have to do with the agenda Said seems to have adumbrating throughout his writing? It is nothing other than to confluence the various discursive streams to generate a discourse that is as pervasive and powerful as the one that has been the prerogative of the Western colonial powers through the past centuries. Conrad's instance has been a mere preliminary to broach a subject that tends to be so emotionally charged and confrontational. Conrad, in a sense, has been relied on as a literary figure with a possibility of Colonial ramifications, ambiguously on both ends of the spectrum, to lead a way to an issue that was closest to Said's heart with as little perturbation as possible.

The first strategy for Said at this stage to break the mold of traditional intellectual argument concerning cultural relativism is to non-essentialize each and unique experiences that occurred in both realms of colonizing and colonized, or more pertinently now, imperial and imperialized. However, that does not entail all experiences are reducible to universalist scope in that, as Said stipulates, "there is an irreducible subjective core to human experience" (op. cit. p. 31). Each and every experience, if I may pick up the strain I brought out just immediately before, is inevitably tinged by the unique cultural and social-political milieu that gives rise to it and in that sense it is fair to say that such experience is indeed unique. And it is patently wrong to subject it to a totalizing and homogenizing view that pretends to comprehend everything that befalls within the realm specified by such a vague concept as national. Wait a minute! You might say. "That is contradicting your argument about advocating the uniqueness of each and every experience that an individual has in his own realm, isn't it?" Indeed, that is exactly the line Said seems to be treading in his treatise about confluence of cultural and other realms between imperial and imperialized former colonies. The manner in which he develops his argument involves constant shifting of positions so that the reader is definitely left with the sense of let loose, de-constructed, of his established value judgment. As the reader keeps track of Said's treatise, in fact, he is all the more convinced that our author's prime motive to seemingly meander between the essentializing and non-essentializing polemical wheels is render the reader neutralized about the view he holds about cultural critique. Simple questions such as, "What does literary ratiocination that preceded the present argument have to do with the universalizing argument Said is putting up here? How does the literary history dovetail with uniqueness and non-uniqueness of individual experiences that are said to be thrust to denizens in each realm?"—are in a way deftly

and yet rather, I must say without any rancor, factitiously dealt with in the ensuing argument in Said's book.

What Said introduces, partly to deflect a possible critique of a facile way around for the apparent predicament he forces himself into, is a perspective, or more like a methodology, which he calls a "comparative or, better, a contrapuntal perspective" (op. cit. p. 32). According to which, any seemingly unrelated events that take place in disparate spheres can be yanked together and brought to the homogeneous plane. A case in point is the story of *Kim*, which of course was written by a renowned colonial writer Kipling, and the role it played in Victorian society. The aspect that is usually lacking in conventional argument over the story is that exact contrapuntal perspective the Indian independence movement supplies. By intertwining the two "episodes" the story comes alive with its full significance for the first time. Because of the antithetical relationship the novel and the Indian background are in, particularly the socio-political aspect of the latter in contrast to the genteel prosperous Victorian England, they tend to be circumvented from coming together and forming a confluence of different ideologies and experiences; however, Said stresses, that is not the right mode to assess the true relationship between the former imperial partners that has congealed through history and reflected in the story. All the discrepant experiences have to be juxtaposed with each other and let them "play off each other," Said goes, "to make concurrent those views and experiences that are ideologically and culturally closed to each other and that attempt to distance or suppress other views and experiences" (op. cit. pp. 32-33). Thus, starting with *Kim*, which is after all a preliminary for Said to develop a larger picture of ideological warfare, our author quickly transitions to what materializes between the interstices and clashing points of *Description de l'Egypte* and *Aja'ib al-Athar*, the former written on the occasion of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt and the latter from the other end of the spectrum by one named Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti. It does not take long before the reader realizes that Said is at raising the ante by involving the civilizational clashes in his argument. What initially appeared a simple case of introducing a third world perspective into literary and cultural criticism now turns out to be a gargantuan project to vindicate a civilization which Said considers has been downtrodden and devalued by the whole gamut of disciplines that not incidentally were developed in none other than what might be contrasted to the region that Said often invokes by the conceptual and epistemological complex Orientalism. The theme of the civilizational battle indeed becomes all the more pronounced as Said summarily deals with the French historicizing account of the expedition by such starkly dichotomous remarks as "Fourer [the author of *Description de l'Egypte*] speaks as the rationalizing mouthpiece

of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798" and

The resonances of the great names he summons...transforms conquest from a clash between a conquering and a defeated army into a much longer, slower process, obviously more acceptable to the European sensibility enfolded within its own cultural assumptions than the shattering experience could have been for an Egyptian who endured the conquest. (op. cit. p. 33)

It is indeed on the discursive plane that Said wants to resolve the conflict that has all too one-sidedly been fought throughout modern history. His cursory and yet pointed remark that the "French expedition was accompanied by a whole team of scientists whose job it was to survey Egypt as it had never been surveyed before" etches out his project all the more clearly as the reader realizes for the first and perhaps umpteenth time that the whole gamut of sciences with which the West conquered and subjugated, and even recreated, the East now have to be countered by the means that is as well scientific but that is more subtle and somewhat paradigmatically shifted and relies more on discourse creation in the sphere of none other than Western intellectual bastions. In this light what Said attempts, starting from Conrad and then its deeper implications with its ever-ramifying politico-ideological significance and bearing all human activities and products upon the civilizational conflict between the Orient and the Occident, is to turn the tables on the former "aggressors" and wage a discursive war that is likely to result in deconstruction of all previously held beliefs and value systems and hopefully force them to rethink the way each is positioned with another. If I have succinctly, some people might say too simplistically, summarized Said's gigantic project, then I have not reached any conclusion as to whether he has succeeded in his attempt, even to a modest degree. Seeing his bitter denunciation of the West, particularly the United States and its staunch ally in the Middle East Israel, in the years before his death it may be fairer to say that he after all hit the ubiquitous wall the ascendant had laid down and which he tried so hard to demolish by the power of discourse he believed in with such savage passion. It may be years before proper assessment of Said's work will be made but judgment of a sort may be already there over the horizon. Or am I just dreaming?

Works Referenced

Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair. *Counterpunch*. London: Verso, 2003.

Eagleton, Terry. *Ideology*. London: Verso, 1991.

Gates, Henry Louis, editor. *"Race," Writing, and Difference*. Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 1986.

Gottesman, Ronald, et al. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

----- . *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Edward Said: 文学と政治の狭間で

世界的に著名なパレスチナ出身の評論家 Said をただ単に文学批評家と片付けるのはあまりにも短絡的過ぎる。この論文では彼の特に後期のパンフレットや中期の作品を中心に揺れ動く世界情勢の中で独自の境地を追求したその真の動機を探りつつ批評家 Said の再検証を試みてみた。