

Dossier :

***Edouard Saïd:
l'intellectuel et le critique***

Knowledge, Power and Fear: *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said and the “Mainstreaming” of Postcolonial Literary Thought⁽¹⁾

Valérie Orlando

*“The moment you begin to aspire, not just to talk to power,
to speak the truth to it, but to try to become part of it, then you lose your bearings”.*

E. Said, Interview with Bill Ashcroft, 1996

The 20th-21st Century French and Francophone Studies International Colloquium held in 2004 brought together scholars from the four corners of the globe to discuss the theme “Diversity and Difference in France and the Francophone World.” During the conference, pressing issues concerning the fate of the Humanities, French Studies and, in general, the well-being and vitality of French departments were topics of debate⁽²⁾. One of the most well attended sessions, entitled “Edward Said (1935-2003): Legacies for French and Francophone Studies,” was dedicated to discussing Said’s impact in particular on French Studies and, more generally, on university Humanities programs⁽³⁾. What was

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2. The conference was held at the Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies, Florida State University, Tallahassee, April 1-3, 2004.

3. “Edward Said (1935-2003): Legacies for French and Francophone Studies.” The chair of the session, Panivong Norindr (USC), brought together five prominent scholars for an open panel discussion. These scholars included: Peter Bloom, (UC Santa Barbara), Charles Forsdick (U of Liverpool, UK), Cilas Kemedjo (U of Rochester), David Murphy (U of Sterling, UK), and Jane Winston (Northwestern U). This round table discussion was held on April 3, 2004.

most significant for me, and attests to the importance of Said's legacy, was the fact that the panel represented exactly what French departments (and other disciplines across the Humanities) have become *because of* thirty years of Saidian influence. Our present day conception of the Humanities has been shaped by a Saidian oeuvre that began with his 1975 book *Beginnings*, in which he dedicated himself to exploring the connection between "history and [the] coherence of social reality" (19). The members of the panel of speakers represented Film Studies, Women's Studies, Postcolonial Studies and Literary Theory⁴. These disciplines are now generally housed under the auspices of any viable French or English department, or are connected to them through interdisciplinary links that have fostered "multifaceted" tenure lines (i.e. the tenure-track hire who teaches courses in French and also Women's Studies). Looking around the room at colleagues, old and young, I determined that Said's influence has not only transformed the French canon, it has also given birth to "the multi-ethnic globalist establishment" we know as the post-modern/post-colonial contemporary American University. Education is now defined by, as well as has fostered, a countrywide "multi-culturalism" that has permeated mainstream society in America; our art, culture, media and politics (Dirlik 286).

However, Said's work and that of later Saidian influenced scholars have also taught us that multiculturalism and the dissolution of canonical modes of thought have not come without a price. This fact has been aptly noted in Charles Taylor's volume entitled *Multiculturalism* in which Amy Gutman states in the preface: "Accompanying... pluralism [and ideas about multiculturalism] is a widespread skepticism about the defensibility of any moral principles or perspectives" (XIII). Multiculturalism and pluralistic ideologies entreat a plethora of ethical questions that any diverse community must face: "The ethical issues of our time pose a challenge to any university committed to an educational mission that encompasses more than the development and dissemination of empirical knowledge.... Can people who differ in their moral perspectives nonetheless reason together in ways that are productive of greater ethical understanding?" (XIII) Although greater understanding is the result of multicultural communities, the mainstreaming of postcolonial thought and multiethnic studies has often fostered what Edward Said defines as a "clash of cultures." In *Reflections on Exile* he writes:

[F]ar beyond the boundaries imposed by language and nation...[in] comparative literatures there is an epistemological commitment to the relationships between literatures, to their reconciliation and harmony, despite the existence of powerful ideological and national barriers between them. And this sort of cooperative, collective enterprise is what one misses in the proclamations of an undying clash between cultures: the lifelong dedication that has existed in all modern societies among scholars,

4. Panel: "Edward Said (1935-2003): Legacies for French and Francophone Studies," Round Table discussion.

artists, musicians, visionaries, and prophets to try to come to terms with the Other, with that other society or culture that seems so foreign and so distant (*Reflections* 583).

Said's contribution to non-canonical thought has been non-paralleled in postcolonial studies. Academics in the Humanities would agree that he is the father of "the movement." The very discourse of postcoloniality is counter-hegemonic as scholar C. Vijayasree contends: "[Said's] postcolonial discourse is primarily a counter-discourse not only because its thematic concerns register a violent protest against the structures of hegemony, but also because its formal and structural configurations and linguistic innovations question, subvert and undermine the basic assumptions of 'mainstream' critical theories" (107). Further, Said's philosophy of secular criticism has also aided in breaking the chains of literary canons in English and French because it "vehemently opposes the totalitarianism implied in...Eurocentric models of cultural/economic production" (Vijayasree 108). Therefore, Said's legacy is felt not only within the confines of literary criticism across the Humanities, he also has influenced the very nature of cultural thinking outside the walls of academia. In the case of French Studies, Said's legacy has totally transformed the discipline. Recently published works such as Tyler Stovall and Georges Van den Abbeele's *French Civilization and Its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race* analyzes the dissemination of the French language into the multicultural domain. For the editors of this volume of collected works on various aspects of French studies by numerous academics in the field of French studies, "French... [has achieved] universalist aspirations but only at the cost of its becoming something very other than the preserved and controlled language of the Académie française [it has become] something much more protean, changeable, and diverse, something able to cross linguistic and cultural boundaries precisely because of its ability to assimilate an ever-increasing diversity of speakers" (9). Within the realm of postcolonial studies, Stovall and Van den Abbeele's study demonstrates that French language and literature have transgressed national boundaries to include the multifaceted francophone diaspora, bringing together diverse regions from the four corners of the globe.

Contrarily, just as we have been strengthened by postcolonial theory in French and elsewhere across the disciplines of the Humanities, and even though there is more equitable exchange within the study of canonical and diasporic literatures because of Said's legacy of "re-writing of the past" (Dirlik 287), we also are increasingly confronted with a conservative, right-wing backlash against the tenants of postcolonial study. Multiculturalism has proved to be problematic for Western societies outside the walls of academia. Why? Because when homogenous societies are confronted with Otherness, just as Said predicted, these societies feel threatened by the perceived "danger of being lost" (Taylor 30).

Today, anti-Said rhetoric is propagated on two fronts. First, by those within the academy who abhor what is viewed as the dissolution of the pureté of French departments

(and any other discipline for that matter—English, German, Psychology— that has been deemed “tainted” by multiculturalism). Second, our multi-faceted academy in the United States is now under fire by the more insidious, external conservative-Christian-Republican front which has, since George W. Bush took office in 2000, succeeded in gagging freedom of speech on university campuses and threatening interdisciplinary scholarship dealing with topics determined to be menacing to the security of the United States.

This article explores how Edward Said’s seminal works, most particularly his early works *The Text, the World and the Critic* and *Orientalism* followed by the later *Reflections on Exile*, have influenced entrenched views that promoted canonical programs of literary study in higher education and externally in mainstream politics. In 1978 when *Orientalism* was first published, literary theory was transformed forever. Edward Said boldly exposed “traditional Western hostility to and fear of the Orient” which had fueled political policies as well as cultivated a whole way of writing in the Anglo-European world for centuries (*Orientalism* 237). Suddenly, great works of the Anglo-European canon by Lawrence, Conrad, Hugo, Gide, Flaubert and others were scrutinized through a new, untraditional (some would say “threatening”) theoretical lens. For the first time, an academic scholar asked how can we “study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective”? (24) Although in *Reflections on Exile* Said claims not to have totally achieved his task in *Orientalism*, he brought to the forefront one very important point that remained the driving force of his work for the next twenty-five years: rethinking how we analyze literature means we also have to rethink “the whole complex problem of knowledge and power” (*Orientalism* 24). In the words of Foucault, who was a resounding influence on Said: “Power and knowledge directly imply one another” (Foucault 27).

In *Reflections on Exile*, one of his last works, Edward Said offers a retrospective analysis on his many years of academic writing, research, and public intellectualism. In this often humble self-assessment in which he characterizes his rise to fame as “an attempt to impose a narrative on a life that I [have] left more or less to itself, disorganized, scattered, uncentered” (*Reflections* 556), not only does Said ponder his own paths to a notable career in American academia, he also reflects upon the shaping of the post-colonial narrative and the academic theory and criticism that it engendered. Said is perhaps the most influential pundit (although he most assuredly would have denied it) of postcolonial literary studies and is largely responsible for its slow assimilation into literature programs in both French and English departments within the American academy.

In *Reflections on Exile*, Said analyzes the rise in popularity of postcolonial literature and his own unflagging efforts over the years to rendering “acceptable” non-canonical works of literature within academic departments in Anglo-American institutions. Indeed, the merger of the Other with Us is at the heart of much of Said’s work. In *Reflections on Exile*, his autobiographical accounts meld with his studies of fiction. Reflecting upon

the school years of his youth endured in the British school system, Said notes that "the line separating Us from Them was linguistic, cultural, racial, and ethnic" and that his eventual understanding of the "Other" (in his case British classmates), meant a clearer understanding of himself (558). Clearer understanding of the Us/Other dialectic is now an ideology eagerly employed by most professors of postcolonial literary study in the American academy. We have, for the most part, embraced the idea that "equal dignity is based on the idea that all humans are equally worthy of respect" (Taylor 41).

Said's self-reflection on his own otherness set in motion an entire body of writing dedicated to refracting the gaze of the West with all its exotified mythology, rooted in an early colonial fascination with foreign "eastern/Arab/Other" lands. Today, thanks to this introspection and a lifetime of dedication to literature, authors' voices from around the world such as that of V.S. Naipaul, Nawal el-Saadawi, Edwidge Danticat, Malika Mokeddem, Mongo Beti, to name just a few, reverberate within academic literature courses as much as the writing of Conrad or Hemingway. Where once "Third World Literatures" were viewed as lesser or not as good as that produced by the West, today these Others are included on every American university's reading list. Edward Said has taught us that "minor," (marginalized) literature could indeed move into the "main"/canonical-stream. Said helped the literary world see, as French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari maintain in their pivotal work, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, that "[m]inor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it. In this way, the family triangle connects to other triangles—commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical—that determine its values...[a] characteristic of minor literature is that in it everything takes on a collective value" (Deleuze, Guattari 17).

Today, establishing connections between western-canonical and non-western-Other has become customary, certainly in the American academy. For example, no viable French program exists without a Francophone literatures component, fostering the study of literature written in French produced by writers from the Francophone African, Caribbean, Asian and North American diasporas. Said moved us from the coloniality of one-sided, hedonistic-centered readings of traditional, white-Anglo-Saxon texts to the "connected triangles" that are the works of the multi-faceted Other. He promotes "the connections [that] emerge from their explicit places in ... various texts, with the enveloping setting, empire, there to make connections with, to develop, elaborate, expand, or criticize" (Said's *Culture and Imperialism* [14] as qtd. in Hildreth 70). Diasporic literatures promote the importance of non-western languages and differing, appositional views filled with non-Western meanings. Said shaped our profession - the world of contemporary literary scholars and theorists - by exposing the importance of looking at literature, our own and that of others, from all angles. Yet, at the same time, he states, these multi-angles have caused turbulence in the American academy.

[I]n the United States many college campuses have been shaken during the past couple of decades over what the canon of Western civilization is, which books should be taught, which ones read or not read, included, or otherwise given attention. Places like Stanford and Columbia debated the issue not simply because it was a matter of habitual academic concern but because the definition of the West and consequently of America was at stake. (*Reflections* 577)

Such statements have not only uprooted the structure of departments in the Humanities, but also the function of higher education in American society. Now that “minor literatures” are no longer minor, or at least less so, what happens to the mainstream? Where do we go from here in literary study and multicultural thought? In the closing pages of *Reflections*, Said himself wonders what will be the outcome of the multiple connections we have made in our attempts to codify a new global view of the world.⁵ One could argue that Said’s political views transit so easily to literature programs because they strive to discover “sentiments [that] prepare the way for a dissolution of cultural barriers” (*Reflections* 590). Yet, at the same time, dissolutions of cultural barriers and canonical modes of thought in the academy will, if we are not vigilant, lead to miscomprehension and “misrecognition” outside the Ivory Tower. Like Said, Charles Taylor warns that “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (25). Sadly, dissolution of cultural barriers and their often misrecognition have led some academics to believe that they are now ghettoized within the academy. Certain university professors in the Humanities and Social Sciences now feel united in their dedication to multiculturalism, yet also stratified into disciplinary camps trying to hold onto their respective turfs. In the last chapter of *Reflections*, entitled “The Clash of Definitions,” Said cogently exposes some of the pressing questions facing academics in the Humanities. How to dismantle cultural barriers, yet keep some discipline specific integrity is the issue now facing professors: “In both the colonial and the post-colonial context...rhetorics of general cultural or civilizational specificity went in two potential directions, one a utopian line that insisted on an overall pattern of integration and harmony among all peoples, the other a line which suggested that all civilizations were so specific and jealous, monotheistic, in effect, as to reject and war against all others” (*Reflections* 586).

5. Particularly interesting is Said’s work *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983) in which he explains how English departments were radically altered due to “internal and external challenges” in the 1960s. These included, on the “internal” front, New Criticism, the Frankfurt School, and new Marxism. On the “external” front, the Vietnam war and its ensuing protests on campuses across the country melded politics, literary theory and basically moved literary studies from the Ivory Tower to the streets (166).

Our own fear over the dissolution of disciplinary integrity has also generated debate outside the academy. Said incessantly warned us up to the time of his death that if we did not explain what multiculturalism is and does, it would be misinterpreted by politics and the wielders of power and, in turn, be co-opted by a chaotic "globalism" rooted in fear. Fear, explains Said, results from the realization that the potential of cultural dis-homogenization/dissolution exists: "One of the major crises affecting countries like France, Britain, and the United States has been brought about by the realization now dawning everywhere that no culture or society is purely one thing. Sizeable minorities - North Africans in France, the African and African elements in the United States - dispute the idea that civilizations that prided themselves on being homogenous can continue to do so. There are no insulated cultures or civilizations" (*Reflections* 587). In recent years, this fear has caused a backlash against non-Western societies, cultures and histories. As if predicting the cultural backlash aftermath of 9/11, Said maintained that if Western fear is left unchecked, it will manifest into "a clash of civilizations" (taken from Samuel P. Huntington's essay of the same title) and will risk undoing the positive literary, political, and cultural meanings that scholars, intellectuals, and human rights activists have sought to define for years, both within and outside the Ivory Tower.⁶ As I write this during the darkest months of the American war in Iraq, I can only speculate on how Said would, yet again, recontextualize his theory on the Fear of the Other and how this fear can, and always will, become the driving factor of conquest, genocide and war "increasing the rifts between peoples in order to prolong our dominance" (*Reflections* 589).

The fact that Edward Said changed the face of the American academy and certainly the canonical structures of literature departments, both French and English, has been a primary focal point of discussion since his death. Indeed, Said's legacy of change is now heatedly debated both in and outside the American Academy. In April 2004, one of the most pressing issues brought up at the panel on Said at the 20th-21st French and Francophone Studies Conference was the impact of conservative politics on Humanities programs across the United States, both at private and public institutions. The discussion centered on how fear of multiculturalism and the study of the non-canonical within the Humanities have become for the Bush administration synonymous for anti-patriotism and pro-Arab terrorism. Bill HR 3077, currently being debated in Congress, proposes reductive legislation to be attached to Title VI which provides government funds to the Humanities (most particularly International Studies and foreign language programs).

6. In Chapter 46 entitled "The Clash of Definitions" in *Reflections on Exile*, Said scrutinizes Samuel P. Huntington's essay "The Clash of Civilizations" which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in the summer of 1993. Said takes issue with academics such as Huntington and Bernard Lewis (author of *What Went Wrong?* and *The Crisis of Islam*, among other books) for proposing reductive conclusions about Arab peoples. Their conclusions are often appropriated by mainstream politicians who then make policies based on gross generalizations about Arab peoples and the Middle East.

The bill has been designed to more closely “monitor” governmental funding for Middle Eastern and other area studies’ programs. More egregious, this bill proposes a “panel” of congressional, non-academic members to oversee how government funding for Middle Eastern programs is used. According to an open letter submitted to its members by the Executive Council of the Modern Language Association, HR3077 proposes an “International Education Advisory Board....with powers to monitor grant recipients under Title VI that exceed its advisory role. Under the proposed legislation, the Advisory Board will be authorized ‘to study, monitor, appraise and evaluate a sample of activities supported under [Title VI].’” The MLA argues against the bill, stating that “Title VI programs are already evaluated through a rigorous process of academic and governmental peer review. Adequate accountability procedures are in place when grant applications are reviewed, when activities funded by the grant are evaluated annually, and when the re-authorization of grants is considered.” The MLA has repeatedly emphasized that there is, thus, no need for further governmental, partisan surveillance of the American academy.⁽⁷⁾

Proponents of the bill (such as Martin Kramer author of *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle East Studies in America*, published by the pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy) argue that “Middle East studies [have become] a cesspool of error, fuzzy thinking and anti-Americanism. Due to stifling political correctness.... the output of scholars in the field is no longer of much use to the state or to the cause of national security”.⁽⁸⁾ Most repugnant, however, is that the conception of “fuzzy thinking” extends beyond area studies to encompass basically anything redolent of the Left or what is viewed as the promotion of “liberal leftist” views. Edward Said is named as one of the principal instigators of postcolonial, pro-Middle Eastern and, thus, anti-American views. In a report printed by the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education on the right-wing take-over of public intellectualism “critics also charge that post-colonial theory, ‘developed primarily by Edward Said of Columbia University’ [has] permeated Middle East Studies extensively, infusing it with a pervasive anti-Israeli, pro-Arab bias that is contrary to American interests” (Internet source <<http://www.nitle.org>>). In June 2003, right-wing pundit and writer for the *National Review*, Stanley Kurtz, further fueled the fire by testifying before a House subcommittee “investigating charges of bias in academic programs of area studies (including Middle East Studies) funded under Title VI of the Higher Education Act.” In his article, as before the House, he repeatedly accused Edward Said along with “Marx [and] Foucault” of having “taken over whole sections of

7. The letter from the MLA was sent to all members by acting director of the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages, David Goldberg in March, 2004. MLA members were encouraged by Goldberg to send the letter to their representatives in Congress.

8. Zachary Lockman, Behind the Battles Over US Middle East Studies, January 2004 in Middle East Report On-Line http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/lockman_interv.html

our universities, intentionally excluding views that they consider to be mere masks for unjust oppression” (Kurtz, Internet source).

The idea of the menacing left is not a new concept as revealed over the years in Said’s writings. In *Reflections on Exile* he ponders the make-up of the “oppositional”, counter-culture we intellectuals for the most part enjoy. These rebel groups challenge the mainstream of American politics. In brilliant prose, Said explains the contours of this “leftist” culture. The questioning of authority and the prevailing, oppressive political decisions made by the Bush Administration (in 2004 this meant the Iraq War, the Patriot Act, and HR3077) has been one of the principal reasons the current government has lashed out, seeking to manipulate mainstream fear while accusing liberals of being “Anti-American.” In the closing pages of *Reflections on Exile*, Said characterizes the clash between counter-culture and authority, stating: “[in opposition to] mainstream, official, or canonical culture there are dissenting or alternative unorthodox, heterodox cultures that contain many anti-authoritarian strains that compete with the official culture. These can be called the counter-culture, an ensemble of practices associated with various kinds of outsiders—the poor, the immigrants, artistic bohemians, workers, rebels and artists. From the counter-culture comes the critique of authority and attacks on what is official and orthodox” (*Said Reflections* 578). Fear of the left is the driving force behind the current Republican hard-line whose mission is to dismantle the “leftist university” which, it contends, has been co-opted by postcolonial theorists and multiculturalists; the direct descendants of Edward Said. The debate has resulted in the very name “Said” evoking either extreme reverence if one is on the Left, or eminent disdain if on the Right. The mainstreaming of all that is postcolonial has given rise to a new area of McCarthyism actualized through right-wing groups such as Campus Watch⁹ and full throttle legislation such as HR3077. Knowledge as a commodity now traded on American university campuses has become the prize of Power, coveted by the Left and the Right. Knowledge and Power are now ensconced in Cultural Fear, well defined by Said in *Reflections on Exile*. This Power-Knowledge-Fear triptych has led to, as the scholar rightly suggests, the United States extending “the mind-set of the Cold War into a different time and for a new audience” (*Reflections* 589).

The Title VI- HR3077 legislation is a testament to the American government’s fear of the potential discourse (vague and ill-defined by governmental authorities) that could be generated within the parameters of Middle Eastern Studies. The legislation

9. Campus Watch is an organization whose members are primarily students who feel threatened by what they view as too much “leftist liberalism” on American campuses. They particularly feel that academic specialists in the areas of Middle Eastern Studies have created an insular environment that only allows a pro-Arab viewpoint. Campus Watch has its own website on which university professors are continually “outed” for creating what CW members deem as hostile, liberal classroom environments in which the views of more conservative students have been disregarded.

also proves that certain freedoms we thought were inalienable in academia (like tenure and freedom of speech) are easily discountable and have, in fact, become null and void. What is so disconcerting is that Said's predicted "clash of civilizations," described in *Reflections on Exile*, is now playing out before our eyes. The very Fear of The Other which we thought we had dismantled through cogent Saidian analysis in almost every discipline in the Humanities and Social Sciences in American universities -- from the late 1970s to the late 1990s -- is now being re-cultivated by the conservative, right-wing which has as its mission to topple anything and everything that is remotely associated with postcolonial, "liberal" intellectualism. Yes politics, power, and knowledge are now debated in conjunction with literature, political science, sociology, history, etc., and questions on the national level have arisen as to what "should be taught" in the American university classroom. The impact of the legislation on the academy is revealed in the Modern Language Association's forced transformation into a political agent. The Association presently must organize politically to combat infractions of academic freedom in a diverse range of areas from postcolonial studies in English departments to Arabic language taught through the auspices of Francophone Studies. As the MLA's open letter to Congress states, provision HR3077 of the Title VI legislation "is too broad [and solicits] surveillance of course content and academic and professional activities unrelated to the purposes of the grant itself."⁽¹⁰⁾

We in Academia can partly blame ourselves for the fear that has been generated outside our ivory walls as well as the backlash against the left that is currently taking place on American campuses. As early as 1983 in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Edward Said criticized literary studies on the Left for not having produced "work to challenge or revise prevailing values, institutions, and definitions." In fact, he states, we have succeeded in "confirming [these same institutions]" (168). Therefore, it is no wonder that our lack of vigilance and failure to promote such a thing as public intellectualism in the United States, have led to academic ghettoization and disconnect from American mainstream culture.

In her pivotal early work, Asha Varadharajan explains that Said was responsible for opening up that "shadowy place between text and world" (221). This "shadowy place" constitutes the heart of liberal thinking today, certainly in the Humanities. Said's politics are synonymous with the power of the Other and, in today's right-wing context, this Other is equal to the Iraqi-Arab-Terrorist a.k.a. Liberal-Intellectual; there is no distinction made between the two. Said's "secular criticism" that "entails a consciousness that is always situated... skeptical [and] reflectively open" is presumed dangerous to the conservative American mainstream (Varadharajan 225). Whether private or public in nature, universities that practice "secular criticism" will, inevitably, challenge power.

10. Model letter offered to MLA members.

Postcoloniality, which embodies multiculturalism and the power of diversity within the Ivory Tower, basically went unchallenged until 9/11. It is only in our post-9/11 era, that fear has risen up against us in the form of governmental legislation to regulate how university professors teach their courses. In many respects multiculturalism has become synonymous with terrorism. We could say that we "made our own bed" in Academia. Said warned us that if texts were not culturally linked and connections made between us and Other in the larger, societal context, then we would fall victim to our own hermetically sealed, intellectual prison. "Texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (*The World...* 4). Recognizing the openness of the text and its potential to bridge the gaps across cultural barriers and political conundrums between Left and Right will allow fruitful debates both in and outside the Ivory Tower. Rereading Said's 1983 work *The World, the Text and the Critic*, I am struck by the parallels that can be drawn with today's Iraqi war era as we academics try to figure out our political role in and outside of the classroom. What has really changed in the last twenty-three years?:

Literary theory, whether of the Left or the Right, has turned its back on these things. This can be considered, I think, the triumph of the ethic of professionalism. But it is no accident that the emergence of so narrowly defined philosophy of pure textuality and critical noninterference has coincided with the ascendancy of Reganism, or for that matter with a new cold war, increased militarism and defense spending, and a massive turn to the right on matters touching the economy, social services, and organized labor (4).

The beauty and rarity of Edward Said's work is that it made connections between high and low cultures. His theories did, to some extent, become syntheses "overriding the petty fiefdoms within the world of intellectual production" (*The World...* 3). He brought "minor" literatures of the Other into the American classroom and succeeded in fostering new manners in which to view our Western relationship with the non-Western world, both in and outside the American university. Sadly, however, in today's world, and as Said predicted in *Reflections on Exile*, there are those who still rely on ruling this same, multicultural, world through dialectical politics. These are fed by contention and by promotion of the rhetoric that fosters that constant "clash of civilizations" he loathed until the moment of his death. "To people who speak solely of the clash of civilizations," Said writes in the closing pages of *Reflections on Exile*, "there exists no inkling of [another] possibility. For them cultures and civilizations may change, develop, regress, and disappear, but they remain mysteriously fixed in their identity, their essence graven in stone" (*Reflections* 584). These civilizations are portrayed as we see them on CNN; the unnamed faces of those who make up the masses of the Other. It is hoped that American

society will eventually come to the conclusion that Said's proposed ideology fostering a "return to the community of civilizations" is a more fruitful plan for all concerned—one that "prepare[s] the way for a dissolution of cultural barriers as well as the civilizational pride... already to be found, for instance, in the environmental movement, in scientific cooperation, in the universal concern for human rights, in concepts of global thought that stress community and sharing over racial, gender, or class dominance." Such a plan is so much more productive than the "wasteful conflict and unedifying chauvinism" which defines our present American reality (*Reflections* 590).

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