

OTHER WORLDS: EDWARD SAID AND CULTURAL STUDIES

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The development of academic professionalization and critical self-consciousness is undoubtedly providing new methodological orientations in the field of literary studies today. In the current background of «rethinkings,» «reconstructions,» «reconfigurations» and «reassessments» of the institutions and concepts of sociology, philosophy and literature, it is often hard to recall what we really had before all these «re»s, just as it is also hard to recall exactly how different the nature and purpose of academic teaching and writing were not so long ago. It may often look like contemporary criticism has brought new light and favorable prospects to the humanities by dismantling the received notions on which literary studies were articulated. Listening to the spokesmen of the postmodern academy since the 1960s, one might well think that poststructuralist theory has (or will, or should) put an end to the injustices, inequities and abuses that traditional humanism has perpetrated on humankind.

In this sense, the relevance of literature to social and political commitment is one of the aspects of literary studies on which revisionist tendencies seem to exert the hardest pressure. The activity of the contemporary intellectual and literary critic seems to lie in posing challenges and unsettling all our received ideas rather than a truly comprehensive and recuperative work of revision of, say, the self (in any of its aesthetic manifestations) and its place within culture and society – a field in which fiction, especially modern and postmodern, has played a significant role. In our century, a brand of rhetorical analysis has replaced the historically committed work of critics, transforming their task into a radical version of linguistic criticism alien to notions of social change. In many ways, the «rhetorical dismantling» for both literary and critical traditions has become an imperative of literary studies. Yet often, after carefully deconstructing an established institution or tradition, most critics do not know what to do with the remaining pieces. In other words, useful and constructive agency is still far from the agenda of much contemporary criticism.

Not all critics endorse a strongly deconstructive stance as the only possibility of intellectual honesty. Figures such as Edward Said, Martha Nussbaum, Charles Altieri and Paul Ricoeur have variously argued that ethical responsibility can be furthered within the framework of traditional «humanism,» particularly when this abstract concept is opened up to the participation of other disciplines and interpretive strategies and to the fundamental consideration of human «otherness» as the precondition of any democratic criticism. A genealogical exploration of the humanistic tradition and its secular establishment, on the one hand, and of the recent emphasis on the politics of cultural reproduction, on the other, can offer a valid reformulation of literary studies which retrieves its worldly nature while at the same time freeing criticism from the usually egotistic, normative and coercive politics of textuality (and identity and professionalism) so characteristic of our age.

Intellectuals of various kinds play significant social roles. The field of academic literary study is no less disciplinary than political, scientific or social inquiry. In the aftermath of «revolutionary» methodologies, these same literary studies seem to me no less disciplinary now than they were in earlier decades. Normative concepts such as the canon or the curriculum, as well as institutions such as the university or the academic publishers, contribute decisively to shaping our opinions about the eminence and value of (certain) literary texts. The establishment and transmission of value within the academy, therefore, seems to appear as a primarily circular and self-sustaining task. That literary studies are self-contained so as to have political hegemony is the assumption of much contemporary American theory and criticism since the 1960s. It follows from that assumption that strong notions of authority, intention and impartiality need to be deconstructed in order to unveil the power/knowledge relations that all cultural achievements mask –achievements that the university is entitled to discriminate and classify as either worthwhile or useless.¹ But not all aspirations to committed critical activity and academic freedom (especially in Europe, I would say) have followed this ideological path. In recent years, there have been different attempts to adjust the heritage of humanism –traditional, modern and critical– to contemporary criticism, that is, to accommodate such demands of postmodern criticism as decenteredness or relativism and the (urgent) necessities of ethical engagement and social significance in the same critical discourse.² The result

1. To apply Marshall Sahlins's terminology, the university would be the «dominant site of symbolic construction» from which emanates a «classificatory grid» imposed on literary texts. On the relation between culture, nature and production from an anthropological point of view, see his *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 205-21. For a critique of this normative character as it acts on the university in modern critical humanism, see William Spanos, *The End of Education: Towards Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

2. Many recent debates about the concept of the literary canon are illustrative of confusion in this sense. The unsolved problem whether the question of canonicity resides in the object or in the critical method, or if it is established either by the reading community or by some academic authority, tends to result in the generally accepted view that a revolutionary change in the works we read will necessarily foster a more democratic, impartial and cooperative critical agency –a position about which I have strong reservations. It should be clear, in the first place, that every reading strategy

of this new alliance, now being carried out only in part, is a more comprehensive view of literature and literary studies, one in which they appear as: (1) fields of inquiry in which we can recognize ourselves and others as agents of cultural change, and (2) performative entities in which we can see the functioning and effects not only of literary texts, but also of other systems of thought and their discourses.

One attempt at reconciling humanism and political criticism arises in the critical writings of Edward Said since the publication of *Beginnings* (1975) and then more fully in such recent works as *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). In this essay I want to read Said's work in two different ways: on the one hand, as a test-case of what effective intellectual activity can be and, on the other, as a response to the dangers of professionalism in academic thinking. By reading a selected group of his writings, I want to show how cultural genealogy (preferably without the typically postmodern deconstructive pose) can provide us with some grounds for a theory of the intellectual and call into question the almost oppressive weight of academic professionalism.

Since the appearance of *Beginnings* in 1975 and until the recent publication of *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), each one of Edward Said's books has been taken up in scholarly reviews and articles, symposia and, more recently, in several collective volumes. His work on the role of the intellectual in the modern world, together with his analyses concerning the relevance of literary studies to our understanding of the constitution and working of the social body, is today as influential as R. P. Blackmur's or Lionel Trilling's books were in earlier decades, different though their aims and methods clearly are. This prominence is enhanced by Said's own active study of public and international conflicts involving social, political and cultural representations, the Palestinian question being the most significant one. This active involvement in politics, similar to that of other contemporary figures such as Michel Foucault, is a symbol of how literary studies and public intellectual life are interconnected and provide each other with valuable insights when it comes to analyzing the political and social interests of cultural formations. This engagement is especially useful at a time when literary studies have been increasingly sinking back into the formalist vein of the early 20th century through myriad deconstructive practices –an ahistorical tendency only loosely restored by the so-called New Historicism. Both the comprehensiveness of Said's work and his philosophical and theoretical affiliations testify to the importance that intellectual independence has for literary criticism. In general terms, his view of literature is based on the undeniable existence (and sometimes the aggressive

created (by transfiguration) its own object of analysis, and thus every approach to literature highlights its own canon. Today, however, there seems to be more emphasis (and attack) on the canon as a fixed set of texts and not as a question of different cultural tactics and interest –which in many senses contravenes the spirit of the so-called Cultural Studies– and therefore there is an endless war between competing readings-recommendations whose defenders seem to be unaware of their necessarily complicitous part (as literary theorists and critics) in their own accounts of, and claims to, a reform in canon-formation. Edward Said has referred to this question in his essay «The Politics of Knowledge.» *Raritan* 11 (1991): 17-31.

supremacy) of a complex network of interests, from racial and political to disciplinary or «civilizing,» which conditions the way in which authors represent their world. The literary text is another witness to its occasion, sometimes supporting but always serving as a living instance of the ideology of its own age. Said's analyses have therefore retrieved, in the first place, the essential role of «external» factors in the production of literary meaning and therefore rescued literature from pure self-reflexivity and metacommentary. This alliance between literature and institutional power is in fact the core subject of his work.

One of the main public goals of literary criticism is, as Martha Nussbaum has recently pointed out, to call into being our responses to the lives and the progress of others. Such a call constitutes a mode of ethical responsibility that encourages personal improvement.³ As part of their content, one of the aims of fictional texts is to compel readers to become aware of the historical conditions of social development in the particular characters and situations they describe, regardless of how remote or different from us their imaginary lives may be. In other words, the primordial value of literature lies in its bringing to awareness our understanding of and response to certain states of «being in society.» The work of literature is, therefore, one of recognition and response, fostering as it does a continuous disposition of critical engagement toward reality and its organization. As Theodor Adorno put it in his *Notes to Literature*, committed literature –and, I would add, literary criticism– «works toward an attitude.»⁴

Within this general context, the question of Said's philosophical affiliation is revealing enough. His preference for Foucault's genealogical method over Derrida's stylized deconstructive practice for the articulation and defense of his own (and any coherent) project of oppositional criticism is basically a statement in favor of historicism and against formalism.⁵ It implies a concern more with the disclosure of the power structures at work in literary texts than with the exposure of their rhetorical inconsistency or with their textual figuration. This is also a statement of faith against the myriad deconstructive practices that, in his eyes, appear to be «impenetrable, deliberately obscure, willfully illogical» (*WTC* 292). Therefore, in order to trace the development of power/knowledge relations in any text, it is necessary to bring into interplay not only our historical or diachronic knowledge, but also a whole range of practices of cultural representation. This is not to say, of course, that purely textual criticism cannot offer any methodological grounds for an analysis of such power structures, although without a sense of historicity many of its final results turn out to be as reified as the object they want to dissect.

3. See especially Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) and her more recent *Cultivating Humanity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

4. Theodor W. Adorno, «Commitment» in *Notes to Literature*, 2 vols., trans. Shierry W. Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 2:79.

5. See Edward W. Said, «Criticism between Culture and System» in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 178-225. This book will be cited hereafter as *WTC*.

Along these lines, a literary text is not only part of that secular, long-established institution called «Literature,» but also a new possible horizon of intelligibility within social, political and ethical positions which *always* have a historical dimension. Novels reflect and complement the course of life within history because they imply a process of imaginative recreation that brings plurality to our understanding. Said puts this idea, as it is developed in the Western novel, in the following terms:

[A] central purpose of the Western novel is to enable the writer to represent characters and societies more or less freely in development. Characters and societies so represented grow and move in the novel because they mirror a process of engenderment or beginning and growth possible and permissible for the mind to imagine. Novels, therefore, are aesthetic objects that fill gaps in an incomplete world: they satisfy a human urge to add to reality by portraying (fictional) characters in which one can believe.⁶

According to Said, novels fill our need for order, hope and freedom in those areas of human life in which inequality, imbalance or disorder tend to prevail, no matter whether this chaos is metaphysical, psychological, racial, sexual or otherwise. The role of criticism is not only to analyze these chaotic situations as they are incorporated into the text, but also to use the text as an instance of a worldly reality—that is, as a case in which some actual response to chaotic situations can be solicited in the reader’s creative imagination. The epistemological scope of this theory is so large that it requires not only a disposition to criticism, but also a comprehensive knowledge of the humanistic disciplines in their historical development. In short, it demands that the critic overcome the locality and the «micro-politics» of contemporary theory in order to place any specific form of knowledge (in Foucault’s sense) in relation to the different disciplines that constitute it, both synchronically and diachronically. This is the kind of rationale that links Said to the class of «representative» or «universal» intellectuals so emblematic of the modern tradition of critical humanism that some critics have attacked as self-congratulatory, although Said is also far from that tradition in other ways.⁷ In his

6. Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 82. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *B*.

7. A significant study in this sense is Paul Bové’s *Intellectuals in Power: A Genealogy of Critical Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), esp. chapters 1 and 6. Bové’s ideal intellectual should unravel traditional humanism’s conception of man as «the condition for perpetuating its own often totalizing and always normalizing and exclusionary subjugating violence» (243). In this sense, Said fails in his attempt «to adjust the figure of the ‘organic’ [intellectual] to the contemporary fact that resistance is not ‘simply’ (or perhaps primarily) class-based but forms along other lines of nation, sex, and class fraction as well» (277). For Bové, there is no organic intellectual anymore. Although he has produced an important work on Said, I believe that Said’s recent books do

own words, Said's interest is to study the «interaction between universality and the local, the subjective, the here and now.»⁸

This contrapuntal analysis of literature and society is not necessarily a statement in favor of critical organicism. In fact, authority and representativeness should not preclude an explicit, substantial agency against the grain of external factors. One of the reasons why a substantial agency should matter is that the disciplinarity that has become so powerful in literary studies today is not always a consequence of authentic representativeness. One must bear in mind that a certain authority is nearly always a precondition of the intellectual, whether universal or specific. That the critic makes a political use of his/her preeminence to impose a certain worldview, or to establish a specific canon, is a different question. In any case, the normalizing and disciplinary self-righteousness that calls for ethical and intellectual intervention in literary studies and other disciplines today –and which, paradoxically, tends to use relativism as a tool for a sort of «absolutism of vision»– can be best fought against from within, from the knowledge (and not the lazy ignorance or rejection) of the institutions and figures that have established our received values throughout history. This is basically what it means to work «between culture and system.» In this sense, one can find striking similarities between Said's early remarks on the existential function of the European novel and what happens in other fields of humanistic inquiry. In his own words,

a novel *begins* in a particular way and moves according to a logic of development implicitly acknowledged by both author and reader. For the critic, however, this beginning and this development are not simply duplicated over and over during the course of the genre's history. Rather, the critic regards them as investigative instruments that not only contribute to the ideas of beginning and development but also change those ideas. The more those ideas change, the more radically (by definition) the novel can be seen as a reinterpretation of its own beginning and development, as well as those of man, the novel's protagonist. (*B* 157-58)

not uphold the idea that being trained in the humanistic tradition necessarily makes you a universal intellectual. However, reading Arnold, Pater or Babbitt against Achebe, Conrad or Rushdie is the strategy that can best enlighten our understanding of the relevance of literature to history. As I see it, what Said proposes is a cultivated thinker conversant with the humanist tradition as much as with contemporary modes of thought, and it is true that it is probably the humanistic critic who can be the most accurate genealogist. For Said's brief but timely consideration of his ideal cultured intellectual, see «An Interview with Edward W. Said,» *Boundary 2* 20, no. 1 (1993): 16-17. And for a study of Said as an organic, non-specialized critic, see Tim Brennan, «Places of the Mind, Occupied Lands: Edward Said and Philology,» in Michael Sprinker, ed., *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 74-95.

8. Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), xi-xii. Hereafter cited in the text as *RI*.

This revising nature of fictional emplotment can be an adequate symbolic example of how authority and originality work in other human activities. The expansion of a text's beginning in order to force the reader to believe that it is an ontological necessity for any system of thought to be self-sustaining, is as true of literature as it is of political and scientific codes. (Literature, in this sense, is always self-conscious. Furthermore, given the assumptions of so many postmodern theories of knowledge and agency, this «fictionality» can be applicable to literary criticism as much as to philosophy or social thinking.) According to Said, however, the role of the critic is analogous to that of the intellectual in that the critic can use the history of beginnings as an instrument to analyze how institutions, including literature, «authorize» their ideologies and gain self-referentiality and circularity as a result. The critic, therefore, can use the different fictions of «authentic» or «pure» origins to explore the inner constitution of theory as an explanation and justification of those same origins, thus turning the epistemology of literature and aesthetics into a fundamental analytical method. This Foucault-inspired tendency to radical formalization is an essential part of Said's version of the ethics of criticism, an ethics stemming from genealogy as a reversal of authority and institutional control.⁹ In so doing, the critic can reveal how origins create a narrative that contains all data, events and interpretations of reality in an always-closed system. The text, therefore, acts «in two directions: toward the past, which gains actuality, and toward the present, which gains in knowledge. In these instances the material existence of a text . . . has a unique intellectual and historical value» (*B* 198). Between actuality and knowledge there is the text as materiality and textual practice. This is what I would call the inner or *hermeneutic* rendering of contrapuntal criticism, that is, the analysis of the literary text that confronts its thematic substance with its own origins. This is the genealogical task in its formal or rhetorical dimensions.

On the other hand, Said's books and essays on imperialism from *Orientalism* (1978) to *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) have provided this basically textualist standpoint with the socio-historical scope that *Beginnings* lacked. This constitutes the external or historical side of contrapuntal criticism. In these works, the authorizing influence of reading communities (through institutions such as the university) becomes more perceptible, notably in the form of a tendency to reify the text and turn it into a «narrative of socialization.» In colonized countries, for instance, literary writing appears as another «civilizing» tool intended to disseminate the principles of imperialism and to cast native culture as the «other» of metropolitan refinement. In this sense, literature is a discursive form of (imaginative) social thinking, always politically laden. This is why Said proposes to regard the literary text as another instance of cultural colonization, as an author's «choice of one mode of writing from among many others, and the activity of writing as one social mode among several, and

9. For Foucault's influence on Said, see the latter's review of the former's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in «An Ethics of Language,» *Diacritics* 4, no. 2 (1974): 28-37. The parallels between Said's interpretation of Foucault's research and Said's own project in *Beginnings* are, I think, striking.

the category of literature as something created to serve various worldly aims, including and even perhaps even mainly aesthetic ones.»¹⁰

Contrapuntal criticism has therefore two complementary stages. On the one hand, it looks for the origin of a text as the constitutive «point of departure» of a narrative which idealizes that text as a privileged embodiment of knowledge. In certain domains of culture other than literature, this originality also tends to correspond to a transition from fictionality to reification. One of criticism's objectives in this first stage is to find the epistemological boundary between a text and the reality it tries to contain. On the other hand, contrapuntal criticism attempts to confront literary representation with knowledge from those disciplines which cooperate in making literature a cultural institution. This second stage looks at the constituency of literature and the instrumental use of texts in order to unveil how certain fictions gain –or are provided with– the status of historical documents.

Between author and reader, as well as between these two forms of contrapuntal criticism, there is a middle ground: the working of the social body, the institutionalization of the content of aesthetics and literature –and later, along with these, the professionalization of criticism– both of which play a crucial role in the canonization of a text in terms of its alleged freedom and objectivity of representation. This universalizing process is what must keep intellectual work alive, although largely in the terms described in *Beginnings* –that is, as a form of investigation into the (mythical) origin of ideologies, intended to unveil their discursive nature and normative aims. In Said's own words, «the focus in the destabilizing and investigative attitudes of those who work actively opposes states and borders on how a work of art, for instance, begins *as* a work, begins *from* a political, social, cultural situation, begins *to do* certain things and not others» (*CI* 316). This is the sort of genealogical work that Said privileges over other forms of poststructuralist textual investigation, and which was the basic method of *Beginnings*, later enlarged in his work on imperialism: to look at texts as performative materializations of a certain culture which produce effects –such as discrimination, exclusion, acceptance or even canonization– both in the private and public spheres. Again,

a novel exists first as a novelist's effort and second as an object read by an audience. In time novels accumulate and become what Harry Levin has usefully called an institution of literature, but they do not ever lose either their status as events or their specific density as part of a continuous enterprise recognized and accepted as such by readers and other writers. But for all their social presence, novels are not reducible to a sociological current and cannot be done justice to aesthetically, culturally, and politically as subsidiary forms of class, ideology, or interest. (*CI* 73)

10. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 316. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *CI*. For a recent defense of the project undertaken in *Orientalism*, see Said's «*Orientalism*, an Afterword,» *Raritan* 14, no. 3 (1995): 32-59.

Echoing Oscar Wilde, Said proposes a conception of the intellectual, the academic educator and the literary critic in which their very existence is in an inextricable symbolic relation to their time. This relation, which contemporary thinkers tend to perceive as the dismantling of traditional humanism, is again one of commitment and criticism as well as of erudition and representativeness: the intellectual is «an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public» (*RI* 9). In literary studies, the message derives from confronting the tradition and its «other» (non-canonical) texts in all their material specificity, *both* of them as actual instruments of power, supremacy and knowledge-production.¹¹ (In postmodernity, this relation, which frequently ranges from textual deconstruction to what Said has called «the rhetoric of blame,» has usually taken the form of increasing academic professionalization.) Said, on the other hand, prefers to follow the tradition of modern writers –Conrad, Yeats, Kipling, Forster– who explore the overwhelming weight of authority (and more specifically, of imperialism) in terms of its self-referential, fragmentary and discontinuous nature (*CI* 188). In doing so, he furnishes his whole plan of intellectual life with a historical openness that prevents the almost endemic ineffectiveness of contemporary criticism.

That Said has chosen the question of imperialism for much of his recent investigations is revealing enough of the authorizing power of cultural and literary representation and their public reception, for it is in occupied territories that institutions such as literature or the university can incarnate or symbolize the imperatives of colonization.¹² In other words, literature can make effective the visibility of domination by turning it into a cultural dogma. This basic identification between literature and reality takes place at different levels. The features that support imperialism in literature and culture are: (1) organic continuity from one generation to the next in the (conscious or unconscious) support of imperialistic attitudes; (2) importance of novels as documents and not as mere segments of a huge grid of social, political and cultural interests; (3) dialectical globalization in world-view: imperialism is the necessary complement of the commodities of domestic life (they support and justify each other); and (4) artificial union of the views of different authors into one «coherent» scheme which serves as an ideological mainstream: for the public, if imperialism is not rejected by novelists there must be a reason (*CI* 75-77). There is, therefore, a complicitous alliance between different institutions and novelists. And although they usually become indistinguishable in practice, political and cultural

11. For an appreciation of Said's conciliatory project, see Paul Bové, «Hope and Reconciliation: A Review of Edward W. Said.» *Boundary 2* 20, no. 3 (1993): 266-82. See also the essays collected in *Edward W. Said*, a recent special issue of the same journal (*Boundary 2* 25, no. 3 [Fall 1998]) also edited by Paul Bové.

12. William Spanos has criticized the lack of ontological basis of Said's idea of cultural representation in his essay «Culture and Colonization: The Imperial Imperatives of the Centered Circle.» *Boundary 2* 23, no. 1 (1996): 135-75. However, Bruce Robbins had already explored the complex relations between representation, criticism and political value in his book *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (London: Verso, 1993), esp. 152-60.

institutions play different roles in this process, the latter supporting the former by becoming consensus-makers.

The cultural-ideological sustenance given to imperialism can be summarized in a chain of four points or stages: organicism, generalization, false dialectics (between «home» and «abroad»), and liquidation of individuality in its representation. These four principles imply the creation of a globalizing perspective capable of neutralizing any «deviation» from the norm or any intellectual disapproval and replacing them with consent, thus preventing significant dissent from being communicated to the reading public. The four principles require analysis not only from a literary or formal point of view, but also from historical, social and political theory. And they all entail, to put it briefly, confronting aesthetic and socio-political knowledge. In cases such as the colonization of lands and minds, the work of the critic and the intellectual is one of commitment and clarification. One of its central functions is to indicate the terms of our present cultural debates and to trace historically the formation of the institutions which support those debates. In other words, this means that the critic has «to provoke partial realizations of a common ground obscured by the controversy itself.»¹³ Reading *Culture and Imperialism* according to *Beginnings*, most controversies concerning imperialism and notions such as representation, power or authority are prompted by the acceptance of origin –or purpose, universal validity and ontological necessity– as pre-conditions of knowledge in a more or less transcendental sense. The common ground is the shared history and principles on which that cultural experience (imperialism) is built and which the critic brings to awareness in dialectic form. (In a highly professionalized university, at least as far as the humanities are concerned, the social relevance of literature and criticism seem to be our «obscured common ground.»)

This four-fold outline provides a general scheme of the object of a contrapuntal criticism which, in the case of Said, is intended to unveil the normative and sovereign power of 19th-century novels in the dissemination of imperialistic doctrines. And it also provides us with a genealogical path to unveil ideological interests in the representation of reality and in the self-validation of the content of novels –a feature against which many postmodern «metafictions» have fought, sometimes in wider contexts, with relative quality and mixed success. The role of criticism is not only to work backwards in order to discover and establish this pattern, but also to assess the ethical implications of its existence and functioning. Criticism is, therefore, an attempt to situate literature in its place within the chain of intellectual and historical progress: neither as pure form (as a rhetorical construction), nor as pure and real content (as morally universalizing or as a historical document to be taken at face value). If there is a middle ground between detachment and commitment, between aesthetic pleasure and sociology, between disinterestedness and pragmatism, that is the space of literature and, in general, of art.

13. Edward W. Said, «Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World,» *Salmagundi* 70-71 (1986): 52.

What remains partially unexplained in Said's writings is whether or not intellectual work can, in time, become as reified as the ideology under its scrutiny. A disposition to endless criticism—that is, to secularity, skepticism and reflectiveness—does not guarantee independence of thought. Similarly, not many critics today are willing to explore genealogically their own affiliations and the institutions they support as part of their work, since professionalization demands a narrower knowledge and more uniform group-thinking—in terms of both epistemology and method—instead of a larger, historical perspective. Investigation into the origins of «us» and «them» separately, as well as the discourse of vindication and blame, seems to be the fashion in town.

To conclude, we can say that the recent appropriation of Said's work by the so-called «postcolonial» (or «decolonizing») critics in several books and collections of essays—sometimes characterized by misreadings of Said's writings as some sort of «liberation» from the tyrannies of «humanism,» whatever this term is taken to mean—has shed some additional light, dialectically and «contrapuntally,» on the general necessity for his theory of democratic social engagement in the arena of «postmodern» critical inquiry. His career can be read as a fundamental (even foundational) point of departure for an ethical consideration of professionalized literary criticism as an academic *discipline*. In the current scene of academic literary inquiry—whether in the form of self-contained textualist formalism, pseudo-philosophical analyses of the politics of community-building, or impressionistic celebrations of postmodern decenteredness—, Said's project offers not only a renewed perspective on the problem of sociopolitical representation in literature, but also a constructive conception of literary theory as an exercise both in pluralism and in ethical engagement, one whose scope supersedes the relativism, blindness and self-interest of the profession today. In his own words, Said's is the kind of criticism «in which one can believe.»