The Influence of French Theory on Edward Said's Concept of Worldliness

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Martin Vega has used research to develop three important qualities: his critical-thinking skills, the ability to structure an argument, and an ethical awareness of cultural interplay. His interest in literary critic Edward Said's concept of worldliness inspired Martin to trace Said's development from his early works to the later, more political, works for which he is better known. Martin graduated from UCI in Spring 2005 and plans to work for a year or two before applying to graduate school. He enjoys playing basketball and golf, and likes to critique old films with his roommate.

Key Terms

- *Affect*
- Cosmopolitanism
- Discourse
- Existentialism
- Humanism
- Multiculturalism
- Phenomenology
- Postcolonialism
- Poststructuralism
- Structuralism
- Worldliness

Abstract

This paper tracks the antecedents to Edward Said's concept of worldliness and considers the challenges this concept presents to humanistic assumptions. A literary critic and avowed humanist, Said delivered his signature concept of worldliness in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983). As he developed this concept, Said took part in the critical uptake of "theory" in America in the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, this paper considers Said's use of existentialist phenomenology in his dissertation, published as *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966); his use of poststructuralism in *Beginnings* (1975); and his use of Foucault's Discourse theory in *Orientalism* (1978), a foundational text in postcolonial scholarship. Both phenomenological and Discourse theories contain specific and different notions about being in the world. In taking up these theories, Said works through issues of individuality and textuality that complicated the claims of humanism in the second half of the twentieth century. Said focuses on these issues in developing his concept of worldliness in the 1970s and 1980s. In presenting this concept, Said affirms the need for a more politically aware criticism in the contemporary, postcolonial world.

Faculty Mentor

This project is evidence of Martin Vega's real commitment to taking an innovative and potentially controversial position on the already quite controversial Said, who was best known for his political activities on behalf of the Palestinian people. Rather than going the conventional route of looking to Said's path breaking book, *Orientalism* (1978) for the roots of Said's political criticism, Vega chooses to examine Said's pre-*Orientalism* work for evidence of how the French literary and philosophical theory hitting the United States in the 1960s and 70s gave him the building blocks of his later concepts of "worldliness" and secular humanism. It was as a result of working with Vega that I began to plan a graduate seminar on the role of the humanist critic in politics and to conceptualize a book on the intellectual genealogy of Said's work. This is intersegmental research at its best, linking the work of undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty in innovative ways.

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Introduction: Calling All Critics to a Worldly Perspective

Edward Said, a Palestinian American, was a staunch and well-publicized advocate for Palestinian rights.[1] His book, *Orientalism* (1978), was an important and controversial achievement for the politically active Said and the field of criticism. In *Orientalism*, Said critically examines the misrepresentations of Palestinians and other "Orientals" propagated in the Western world. In doing so, he introduces a postcolonial method into the field of critical analysis. In lieu of twentieth-century decolonization movements, postcolonial authors analyze cultural and literary artifacts from a position critical of Western hegemony. It also calls for the study of those voices traditionally marginalized and silenced in Western discourses. This call for a more inclusive scholarship became associated with multiculturalism in the 1980s. In fact, literary scholars of the time were so divided on the issue of multiculturalism that the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) could not find enough common ground to put together its annual report on Comparative Literature in America (Bernheimer). Postcolonial criticism was deemed too political by many of its opponents.

An overtly political criticism challenges the doctrine of scholarly disinterestedness espoused in literary criticism and the humanities in general. Said poses such a challenge to his peers in his call for what he terms a "worldly" critical perspective. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), he argues that reading critically should involve an awareness of the political circumstances surrounding the reader, the text and the author. Essential to this awareness is a thoroughly secular humanist view of the world. As Said revealed it in his posthumously published *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), "Change is human history, and human history as made by human action and understood accordingly is the very ground of the humanities" (10). Said's humanist stance is cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitanism is receptiveness to new ideas and cultural forms and detachment from nationalist perspectives.[2] In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, a cosmopolitan attitude contributes to Said's critique of humanism, especially literary humanism, as it has been practiced in the American academy since the nineteenth century. Specifically, Said attacks the elitist, apolitical, and exclusively European traditions of literary study in America. In his view, the duty of humanists is to be truly cosmopolitan in their consideration of other cultures and the political realities of cultural interplay. His critique could be read as Said's postcolonial prescription for literary study.

While Said's idea of worldliness was an important basis for his postcolonial method, its development relied on structuralist and poststructuralist debates.[3] In "The World, the Text, and the Critic," he acknowledges his indebtedness to Michel Foucault for his concept of worldliness,

> Foucault's contention is that the fact of writing itself is a systematic conversion of the power relationship between controller and controlled into 'mere' written words—but writing is a way of disguising the awesome materiality of so tightly controlled and managed a production (47).[4]

Foucault's influence is central to Said's point that no text or author may be viewed apart from social and political circumstances. Said's first book, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), also contains substantial theoretical reflection about a text's basis in historical circumstances.

One can track Said's developing concept of worldliness via his reliance on key French theorists who impacted his first three works: Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Michel Foucault. In particular, Said used the phenomenological views of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in his book on Conrad to analyze the links between Conrad's historical circumstances and his fiction. In *Beginnings* (1975), Said engages in an analysis of Conrad's *Nostromo* similar to that found in his own first book, but this time he includes Foucault as a new theoretical influence. In *Orientalism* (1978), Foucault takes a more prominent and problematic role in Said's developing concept of worldliness. Said uses Foucault's Discourse theory, but criticizes it as well. According to Foucault, Discourse encompasses all of society's communicative acts—both verbal and non-verbal—and it is so diffuse in Western society that any human activity is influenced by it. As he developed his concept of worldliness, Said maintained a humanist belief in the power of human will and agency while relying on Discourse theory.

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[1] Said articulates a basis for Palestinian rights in The Question of Palestine (Times Books, 1979). Ella Shohat provides a brief account of Said's political involvement in her essay "Antinomies of Exile: Said at the Frontiers of National Narrations" (1992) in Edward Said: A Critical Reader (Blackwell, 1992).

[2] Said's activism on behalf of Palestinians complicated his cosmopolitan ethic. For an in-depth analysis of this problem, see Benita Parry's "Overlapping Territories and Intertwined Histories: Edward Said's Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism" in Edward Said: A Critical Reader (Blackwell, 1992).

[3] Structuralism can be characterized as positing the fixed centrality of meaning in socially constructed systems, mainly systems of language. In contrast, meaning in poststructuralist theory can be widely dispersed and deferred. Structuralism and poststructuralism both rely a great deal on the ideas of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.

[4] This essay was originally published as "The Text, the World, the Critic," in Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association 8.2 (Fall 1975): 1–23.

Discourse and other theories comprising the wider critical theory boom since World War II in America are largely European, but they nonetheless provide theoretical bases for much postcolonial criticism, including that of Said. His indebtedness to European theory for his postcolonial method is an aspect of Said's work that tends to be overlooked. It is, therefore, meaningful to analyze the influence of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Foucault on Said's concept of worldliness.

Joseph Conrad: Reconciling Individuality with the External World

In an essay presented at the symposium of "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" in 1966,[5] Eugenio Donato writes that a number of critics in America "turned to" existentialism and phenomenology only "a few years ago" for methodological guidance (89). Said, a Harvard graduate student in literature from 1958 to 1963, took part in this critical trend. He lays out the thesis for his book thus:

> We should investigate the idiom of Conrad's rendering of his experience: the words and images he chose to express himself. In philosophical terms, this study attempts a phenomenological exploration of Conrad's consciousness, so that the kind of mind he had, both in its distinction and energy, will become apparent (*Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 7).

Said focuses on personal letters to track how Conrad perceived the world during his literary years, from the 1880s to Conrad's death in 1924. Thus, Said uses contemporary theoretical interventions of European philosophers to interpret Conrad's writing as part of his worldly experience.

The critics Donato refers to include the French philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In general, Sartre's existentialist philosophy proposes that there comes a point at which the conscious recognition of the individual self (the "I") forces one to define one's own being apart from everything else in the world. This situation is both vexing and liberating for individual consciousness, or subjectivity. Phenomenology, on the other hand, attempts to understand the structures of consciousness that account for an individual's experience in and of the world, such that subjective experience goes hand in hand with objective experience. In Sartre's existentialist phenomenology, one such structure is affect (the emotions), which is both

a behavioral response to outside influences and a mark of internal vexation. Yet, affect is still focused on one's subjective reality.

In *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, Said calls for a reading of Conrad's shorter fiction in conjunction with his private letters to understand how Conrad reconciled his subjectivity with his place in the world. According to Said, the outbreak of World War I triggered a change in Conrad that allowed him to enact this reconciliation. To Said, *The Shadow Line* (1917) indicates the point in Conrad's fiction at which this change occurred. In this story, Said sees "the decomposition of Conrad's old individuality—all his personal history of poses, insecurity, fear, and shame—and, with it, the decomposition of modern Europe" (192). Everyone in a postwar Europe would have to construct a personal new order. In Said's reading, this universal need for order galvanized Conrad. Having dealt with an impetus to order his own past, Conrad saw a parallel between his personal history and the history of Europe. He would now be able to see his individuality in the context of his place in the social world. Said sees this development reflected in Conrad's construction of the Narrator in *The Shadow Line*. The Narrator's "shameful insecurity" reflects Conrad's "tortured past" while the Narrator's "time ashore with the venerable Giles" reflects Conrad's "belief in Europeanism" (194). Thus, in *The Shadow Line*, Conrad finally achieves "a full harmony between experience and understanding" (195). In Said's analysis, Conrad finally is able to situate his subjectivity ("understanding") in a mutual relationship with the external world.

His assessment is more reflective of the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty than that of Sartre. For "[i]n contrast to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes mutuality, interdependence, interrelatedness" (Dyson-Hudson 236). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty "attempts to maintain the two contraries which define man—his situational or historical aspect and his inner or subjective aspect" (Oxenhandler 235). In Said's phenomenological reading of Conrad's letters and works, Conrad's main achievement was to reconcile these two contraries. Moreover, as Oxenhandler writes:

> If consciousness, throughout the writings of Merleau-Ponty, might be defined as that which always remains itself while becoming other, the most crucial form of this behavior is manifested in regard to time which is a ceaseless rétention or reaching back coupled with a ceaseless protension or reaching forward (244).

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[5] This was the same year in which Harvard University Press published Said's dissertation, <u>Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography.</u>

According to Said, Conrad's coming to terms with the external world involved the problem of reconciling the past and present in such a way that would not lead to a debilitating over-reflection, or reflection at the cost of meaningful action.[6]

In his dissertation, Said cites the following passage from "The Metaphysical in Man," (1947):

> "Language surrounds each speaking subject, like an instrument with its own inertia, its own demands, constraints, and internal logic, and nevertheless remains open to the initiatives of the subject (as well as to the brute contributions of invasions, fashions, and historical events" (*Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 2).

Said uses the same passage in a more extensive quote in his essay, "Labyrinth of Incarnations: The Essays of Maurice Merleau-Ponty" 1967). In that essay, Said lauds Merleau-Ponty's effort to show in his phenomenological philosophy that "we are in and of the world before we can think about it." This is a move that, rather than being "anti-scientific," seeks "to put science on a proper footing and to restore it to experience" (4). Merleau-Ponty, Said continues:

> "shows how human reality can best be understood in terms of behavior (action given form) which is neither a thing nor an idea, neither entirely mental nor entirely physical. Instead of rushing from one absolute incompatibility to another, torn between them, his mode of thought is dialectical, weaving among realities without absolutes" (5).

Likewise, in his book on Conrad, Said attempts to 'weave' together different realities (Conrad's emotions, his life as a sailor, his life as a British citizen, and his writings) in a dialectical way, each one constitutive of Conrad's worldly circumstances.

Nevertheless, the reference in the 1967 essay is also important because it signals Said's recognition of, and a certain agreement with, Merleau-Ponty's view of language as the primary structure accounting for one's way of understanding and engaging with the world. Said emphasizes Merleau-Ponty's synthesis of linguistics with phenomenology and indicates the connectedness of various continental philosophical movements of the mid-1900s, such as existentialism, phenomenology and structuralism. As Donato asserts

in his essay, phenomenology and existentialism, to which literary critics, including Said, turned for methodological guidance just "a few years ago," gave way to new methodologies by the 1960s (89). That is, literary critics turned from Merleau-Ponty and Sartre to the "anthropological theories" (especially structuralism) of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the "Freudian readings" of Jacques Lacan (Donato 89). Despite this turn, Merleau-Ponty serves as an important precursor to structuralist and then poststructuralist theories.

Problems of Individuality and System in *Beginnings*

In *Beginnings*, Said deals with the challenges structuralist and poststructuralist theories posed to literary-critical ideals about the relationship between authors and their texts. In contrast to the assumption that what an author intends to do determines his/her creative work, the new theories posited the existence of cultural mechanisms that usurp the influence of the author. Foucault, whom Said invokes in *Beginnings*, shifted around the same time from a structuralist orientation to a poststructualist perspective. Said makes particular use of Foucault's ideas of "will" and socially constructed narratives/histories to inform his reading of Conrad's *Nostromo*.

The setting of *Nostromo* is the fictional colonial South American Republic of Costaguana, which is beset by revolutionary activity. The story occurs mainly in the port town of Sulaco, whose economy hinges on the nearby San Tomé silver mine inherited by the British businessman Charles Gould. Gould is consumed with his fortune, to the point that he participates in the corrupt politics of the republic to keep it. Nonetheless, the volatile politics of Costaguana threaten his hold on that fortune, and revolutionaries attempt to seize the mine's silver. The would-be hero of the narrative, Nostromo, is charged with the duty of saving the silver. Accompanied by the lawyer/journalist Martin Decoud, Nostromo takes the silver with him on a boat to keep it out of sight. Decoud does not make it through the ordeal. Nostromo, on the other hand, survives, but the silver is presumably lost. To the reader, Nostromo's integrity seems impeccable until he takes on his most important duty. To the people of Sulaco, despite the apparent loss of the silver, Nostromo's golden reputation remains intact.

Yet, Said is not as concerned with the surface actions of the characters in *Nostromo* as with the intentions informing those actions. As Said explains:

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[6] "Meaningful" implies some kind of hope for the future, something to work towards.

The real action […] is psychological and concerns man's overambitious intention to author his own world because the world as he finds it is somewhat intolerable: this action underlies the historical and political events in *Nostromo* (118).

However, according to the structuralist theory, language is autonomous, carrying more cultural assumptions and meanings than the author intends; this aspect is very much a part of the world. According to Said, in the world of Sulaco the people have collectively constructed a history that elides anything potentially detrimental to the integrity of the state, which contending forces threaten to pull apart. Yet, the people are not necessarily aware of the propagandistic force their discourse has attained. As Said puts it, "[i]n Foucault's terminology one can also say that Sulaco's archives contain rarified versions of its history" (120). The "archives" are the formal and informal historical and cultural records of Sulaco. The evasive and propagandistic qualities of this selective Sulacan history, to Said, "is the way of political life, and Conrad portrays it realistically and 'archeologically'" (120). Thus, where one might think an analysis of characters' "intentions" would be purely psychological in nature, Said puts these "intentions" within a modern political frame. (It may not be a stretch to say that with this move Said anticipates a postcolonial critique of imperialistic ideology.)

Said goes on to argue that the narrative anxieties of the characters reflect Conrad's troubles with his own writing. According to Said, what the people of Sulaco cannot comprehend is the presence of "a devilish process the purpose and logic of which is profoundly antihuman" (133). This process is antihuman in that human action is not determined by human will, but by a system that is already at play in society. Thus, human will is not central to action. As Said says:

> the action at the beginning of the novel seems to wind its confused way forward until a hero appears who can dominate it in order to give it intention and method, whereas it eventually becomes apparent that the action has merely been searching for a hero (Nostromo or Gould) to own, to use, to enslave (133).

The reason is that action resides not in the individual but in a system external to the individual. Thus, Said extracts the following lesson from *Nostromo*: "[m]an is never the author, never the beginning, of what he does, no matter how willfully intended his program may be" (133).

The absence of authority is a crucial issue in theories about the modern condition. In the literary genre of the novel, Conrad's *Nostromo* implies this absence of an authority as the "loss of faith in the ability of novelistic representation directly to reflect anything except the author's dilemmas" (137). Such a stance constitutes a break from previous novels. For example, "[w]hereas in the classical novel there had been both a desire to create or author an alternate life" and have that mimic real life, "the later version of this desire" was a rejection of this very desire and a shifting of concern preeminently with the author's "*scriptive* fate" and "dilemmas" (137). According to Said, Decoud reflects Conrad's authorial situation. As Said says, "Decoud is Conrad's portrayal of himself as […] the author for whom even the simplest sentence was very hard to begin" (130). Thus, Said takes Conrad's case as exemplifying a shift in focus to the problems of authorial intent.

Yet, there is also a marked political aspect to *Beginnings*, which is connected with Said's view of the critic's need to forge ahead in a setting seemingly hostile to the traditional humanistic idea that human cultural production can stand apart from wider societal forces. Said's notion of beginnings, as a reaction to the loss of the influence of the author, is one that legitimates the critic's material in lieu of an expanded view of culture. This notion also serves as a modus operandum for a progressive scholarship that disrupts established scholarly tradition. Among his critical theory contemporaries, Said sees Foucault as best demonstrating this kind of scholarship, despite the seemingly small possibility for individual agency and change Foucault allows in the cultural system he posits. In *Orientalism*, Said focuses on this problem of agency in society.

Orientalism's Reconciliation of Individuality and System within a Postcolonial Perspective

In *Orientalism*, Said undermines the disciplinary assumptions intrinsic to the modern Orientalist tradition and uses Foucault's Discourse theory to describe this tradition. In a review of *Orientalism*, James Clifford provides an analysis of some problems with Said's use of Foucault. In particular, Clifford focuses on Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972). This analysis examines the beginning formulations of Foucault's Discourse theory in *The Order of Things* (1970), formulations tied to a critique of humanistic assumptions. Understanding this critique is useful because it both helps Said's critique of Orientalism and complicates his humanistic assumptions.

Beginnings of Foucault's Discourse Theory

Foucault's Discourse theory arises from his critique of the human sciences,[7] and the need to develop a more accurate account of the human condition in Western society. In *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault rejects the idea of 'Man' as the central factor to cultural understanding. According to Foucault, 'Man' is itself a product of the grand reordering of knowledge in 19th century Europe. Foucault analyzes culture as a network of constructs, such as this one. Accordingly, he proposes to use psychoanalysis, ethnology and linguistics to describe a Western phenomenon he calls Discourse.

The social mechanisms Foucault describes seem to override individual agency. For example, as Foucault argues in "The Discourse on Language," in recent times three particular discursive functions—the author-function, commentary, and disciplines—work to make individuals seem to have a certain amount of power, or authority, when their productivity is more or less determined by Discourse. These conditions of the productivity, or materiality, of Discourse are precisely what it seeks to hide. For Foucault, the rules of governing Discourse are more important than the meaning behind what is communicated through an individual's creative work.

Discourse Theory Explained

As Foucault argues in "The Discourse on Language (1972)," Discourse constitutes a society's rhetorical codes. Discourse determines what is acceptable as knowledge. This "will to truth," as Foucault calls it, relies on social institutions, on:

> the whole strata of practices such as pedagogy—naturally—the book-system, publishing, libraries, such as the learned societies in the past, and laboratories today. But it is probably even more profoundly accompanied by the manner in which knowledge is employed in society, the way in which it is divided and, in some ways, exploited in a society (219).

Thus, Discourse exerts its societal force in an almost all-encompassing network and obtains its greatest force when most diffuse, or "divided," in a society as a whole. Foucault notes the judicial system and the medical field as two examples of discursive systems with wide-ranging influences.

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[7] "Human sciences," at the time Foucault wrote referred mainly to anthropology and psychology, but still fell under the wider category of the humanities.

Discourse, then, is not merely what is exchanged in communication, but has a powerful material effect.

Discourse Theory in *Orientalism*

Modern Orientalism, according to Said, was inaugurated and legitimated by the works of the French anthropologist Silvestre de Sacy and the French philologist Ernest Renan in Europe in the early to mid-nineteenth century. According to Said, Sacy, as an Orientalist anthropologist, substituted the most exemplary, essentialist traits of his supposed subject for its historical reality. Sacy did so within a supposedly objective frame because, according to Said, "Sacy believed that everything could be made clear and reasonable, no matter how difficult the task and how obscure the subject" (125). Sacy's wide-sweeping summation of the Orient is exhibited in the *Tableau historique de l'érudition français*, a work commissioned in 1802 by Napoleon and intended to hold "the whole of human knowledge" (126). Said terms Sacy's work a "Rational Anthropology" because Sacy upheld the objective and scientific legitimacy of his Oriental paradigms.

Rather than merely indicating the essential traits of the Orient, Sacy, in effect, created what Said calls "a sealed space" (125) in which to disseminate knowledge about the Orient. According to Said, Sacy's examples:

> are powerful for two reasons: one because they reflect Sacy's power as a Western authority deliberately taking from the Orient what its distance and eccentricity have hitherto kept hidden, and two, because these examples have the semiotical power in them (or imparted to them by the orientalist) to signify the Orient (125–126).

Thus, Sacy's paradigms, in purporting to deliver what can be known about the Orient, an act Said paints as imperialistic, gain support from Orientalist language.

The effects of language in this sense are not at all immaterial, for they rely on institutions in society. As Said claims,

> In everything I have been discussing, the language of Orientalism plays the dominant role. It brings opposites together as "natural," it presents human types in scholarly idioms and methodologies, it ascribes reality and reference to objects (other words) of its own making. Mythic language is discourse, that is, it cannot be anything but systematic; one does not really make discourse at will, or

statements in it, without first belonging—in some cases unconsciously, but at any rate involuntarily—to the ideology and the institutions that guarantee its existence (177).

Therefore, Discourse becomes a vehicle for ideology—the habits and assumptions that precede consciousness of those same habits and assumptions. Discourse gains its power in societal institutions by propagating within various institutions, such as those listed by Said. This is the relationship Said attempts to depict in discussing Silvestre de Sacy's institutional ties to the College of France, the French Foreign Ministry, and the Asiatic Society, for example (124).

Yet, Said has some trouble reconciling individual agency with Discourse theory. He promptly follows his statement that "one does not really make discourse at will, or statements in it" with the qualification "without first belonging" to the mechanisms (ideology, institutions) that perpetuate it. This leaves open the possibility for human will to enter Discourse, but only after considering one's immersion in society, so that social reality comes first, and human will comes afterward. This idea has clear affinities with Said's secular humanism. To affirm his point, Said mitigates the qualification by stating that "belonging" to an ideology and institutions is "at any rate involuntary." In this manner, Said conveys a qualified acceptance of Discourse theory.

Still, Said diverges from Foucault in allowing a greater role for individual intervention in Discourse. According to Said:

> unlike Michel Foucault, to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like *Orientalism* (*Orientalism*, 23).

Said, however, cannot completely disavow the Discourse analysis driving his critique of *Orientalism*. Using the example of Ernest Renan, Said writes, "Renan was a figure in his own right neither of total originality nor of absolute derivativeness" (130). Thus, Said could discuss Renan's biographical background and its influence on his Orientalist work, as well as Renan's impact on the Orientalist tradition, and nonetheless maintain that Renan's Orientalist "opportunities were already created for him by pioneers like Sacy" (130). A proper worldly perspective, Said argues, should consider both individuality and collectivity as dialectical (24), neither one dominating the other. In this way, Said's worldly perspective retains the phenomenological idea of placing different aspects of reality on par with one another

and in mutual relations. For Said, an individual can have efficacy in society but is also always subject to the forces of society.

For students of literature, this last assessment might raise such questions as: how might an author be influenced by his/her worldly circumstances? For what can we legitimately hold an author accountable? How might my circumstances influence my reading of a given text? What kind of social responsibility does critical analysis entail?

Conclusion: Articulating a Postcolonial Critical Position

Ten years after the publication of *Orientalism*, and five years before the publication of its more literary sequel, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said published a short essay, "Through Gringo Eyes: With Conrad in Latin America," in which he suggests a way of reading that resists imperialist ideologies. Writing from a postcolonial perspective, Said claims that "[a]ll Conrad can see is a world dominated by the West, and—of equal importance—a world in which every opposition to the West only confirms its wicked power" (277). Thus, Conrad's worldview was limited to his Western, European perspective, even if he was pessimistic about Western politics. Still, he exonerates Conrad. To Said, Conrad (1857–1924), having lived as a British citizen at the height of Britain's imperial power, was at last unable to think outside the potent ideology of empire. Yet, authors and critics cannot be let off so easily, for:

> They have done their work after decolonization; after the massive intellectual, moral, and imaginative overhaul and deconstruction of Western representation of the non-Western world; after the work of Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, C.L.R. James, Walter Rodney; after the novels and plays of [Ngugi wa Thiong'o], Wole Soyinka, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez, and many others (281).

Said thus makes reference to the larger context of postcolonial authorship and criticism, which involves consideration of the postcolonial situation in the real world, the historical fact of decolonization. What came out of the postcolonial situation, then, were new perspectives suited to that new situation.

A postcolonial perspective relies on a critical analysis of one's circumstances and the assumptions one has inherited. According to Said, Nostromo affords us such an opportunity to "characterize our own attitudes," specifically as "the

projection, or the refusal, of the wish to dominate, the capacity to damn or the energy to comprehend and engage in other societies, traditions, histories" (281). He would recommend the latter for each dyad. Ultimately, Said's purpose is to make the point that literary criticism can, and should, take into account voices shut out of the academic literary canon as a matter of political and social responsibility.

Acknowledgments

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