

The World, the Text, and the Critic

By Edward W. Said

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This extraordinarily wide-ranging work represents a new departure for contemporary literary theory. Author of *Beginnings* and the controversial *Orientalism*, Edward Said demonstrates that modern critical discourse has been impressively strengthened by the writings of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, for example, and by such influences as Marxism, structuralism, linguistics, and psychoanalysis. He argues, however, that the various methods and schools have had a crippling effect through their tendency to force works of literature to meet the requirements of a theory or system, ignoring the complex affiliations binding the texts to the world. The critic must maintain a distance both from critical systems and from the dogmas and orthodoxies of the dominant culture, Said contends. He advocates freedom of consciousness and responsiveness to history, to the exigencies of the text, to political, social, and human values, to the heterogeneity of human experience. These characteristics are brilliantly exemplified in his own analyses of individual authors and works. Combining the principles and practice of criticism, the book offers illuminating investigations of a number of writers—Swift, Conrad, Lukács, Renan, and many others—and of concepts such as repetition, originality, worldliness, and the roles of audiences, authors, and speakers. It asks daring questions, investigates problems of urgent significance, and gives a subtle yet powerful new meaning to the enterprise of criticism in modern society.

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Editorial Review

Review

[Said's] book is relaxed and discursive, original, immensely learned, fluently written. (John Bayley *New York Times Book Review*)

This striking book...represents an important contribution to literary criticism as well as suggesting a new direction for criticism to take. (*Publishers Weekly*)

It is a pleasure to read someone who not only has studied and thought so carefully but is also beginning to substantiate, as distinct from announcing, a genuinely emergent way of thinking. (Raymond Williams *The Guardian*)

The intellectual excitement of each essay and the enlightening effect of the brilliant thinking and writing of the book as a whole move the reader to the recognition of Said's major contribution to contemporary literary critical theory and practice. (*English Literature in Transition*)

Provocative and exacting; the essays provoke due interrogation of contemporary literary, and exact from the reader the care and conscientiousness the question at issue warrant... The book issues from a remarkably sharp intelligence, forcing us to face questions and possibilities that literary theorists on the whole prefer not even to raise. (Denis Donoghue *The New Republic*)

A learned, lucid, powerful book. It speaks with a particular and moving urgency to the issues facing criticism today. (Stanley Fisher)

Review

A learned, lucid, powerful book. It speaks with a particular and moving urgency to the issues facing criticism today.

--Stanley Fisher

About the Author

Edward W. Said was University Professor at Columbia University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Betty Young:

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Harold Baughman:

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