

INTRODUCTION: CRITICISM AND EXILE

Written over a period of roughly thirty-five years, these essays constitute some of the intellectual results of teaching and studying in one academic institution, Columbia University in New York. I arrived there fresh from graduate school in the fall of 1963 and, as of this writing, I am still there as a professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature. Aside from this abbreviated testimonial to my deep satisfaction for such a long time in the place—the American university generally being for its academic staff and many of its students the last remaining utopia—it is the fact of New York that plays an important role in the kind of criticism and interpretation which I have done, and of which this book is a kind of record. Restless, turbulent, unceasingly various, energetic, unsettling, resistant, and absorptive, New York today is what Paris was a hundred years ago, the capital of our time. It may seem paradoxical and even willful to add that the city's centrality is due to its eccentricity and the peculiar mix of its attributes, but I think that that is so. This is not always a positive or comforting thing, and for a resident who is connected to neither the corporate nor the real estate nor the media world, New York's strange status as a city unlike all others is often a troubling aspect of daily life, since marginality, and the solitude of the outsider, can frequently overcome one's sense of habitually being in it.

For a good part of the twentieth century New York's cultural life seemed to take a number of fairly well recognized paths, most of them deriving from the city's geographical feature as the major American port of entry. Ellis Island, as the immigrant location par excellence, processed the waves of mostly poor arrivals into American society with New York as their first, if not always their subsequent, place of residence: these were the Irish, Italian, East European Jewish and non-Jewish, African, Caribbean, Middle and Far Eastern peoples. From these immigrant communities came a great deal of the city's identity as a center of radical political and artistic life as embodied in the socialist and anarchist movements, the Harlem renaissance (so well documented recently by Ann Douglas in *Terrible Honesty*), and various pioneers and innovators in painting, photography, music, drama, dance, and sculpture. That set of urban expatriate narratives has over time acquired an almost canonical status, as have the various museums, schools, universities, concert halls, opera houses, theaters, galleries, and dance companies that have earned New York its considerable status as a sort of permanent theatrical showplace—with, over time, less and less real contact with its earlier immigrant roots. As a publishing center, for example, New York is no longer the place where experimental presses and writers had once ventured into new territory, and has instead become a prime location of large-scale conglomerate and media empires. Moreover, Greenwich Village has also passed away as America's Bohemia, as have most of the little magazines and the artistic communities that nourished them. What remains is an immigrants' and exiles' city that exists in tension with the symbolic (and at times actual) center of the world's globalized late capitalist economy whose raw power, projected economically, militarily, and politically everywhere, demonstrates how America is the only superpower today.

When I arrived in New York there was still some vitality left in its most celebrated group of intellectuals, those clustered around *Partisan Review*, City College and Columbia University, where Lionel Trilling and F. W. Dupee were good friends and solicitous senior colleagues of mine in the Columbia College English Department (as it was then known to distinguish it from the more professional Graduate English program). Very early on, however, I discovered that the battles the New

York intellectuals were still engaged in over Stalinism and Soviet Communism simply did not have much interest for me or for most of my generation, for whom the civil rights movement and the resistance against the U.S. war in Vietnam were much more important and formative. And even though I shall always retain a great affection for Trilling as an older colleague and friend, it was the altogether more radical and open spirit of Fred Dupee that counted for me as I began to write and teach: his untimely death in 1979 was an event of immense personal loss and regret, which I still feel to this day. Dupee was principally an essayist (as was Trilling to a great degree), and in the intellectual as well as political sense he was also a real subversive, a man of incomparable charm whose amazing literary gifts were, I felt, much less caught up than those of his colleagues in the Anglophilia so endemic to New York intellectual style, among whose worst features were also a tiresome narcissism and a fatal propensity to self-important, rightward-tending shifts. Fred was never like that. It was he who encouraged my interest in the new styles of French theorizing, in experimental fiction and poetry, and above all, in the art of the essay as a way of exploring what was new and original in our time regardless of professional hobbles. And it was Fred Dupee who after 1967, when the great Arab debacle occurred, supported me in my lonely fight on behalf of the Palestinian cause, just as he remained faithful to the radical, anti-authoritarian politics of his early Trotskyist years. It is important to note parenthetically that Dupee and his wife Andy were the only friends from my academic New York life ever actually to pay me a visit in Beirut, at that time (fall 1972) the center of revolutionary politics in the Middle East. I spent my first full year there (since leaving as a student for the United States in 1951) on sabbatical, reacquainting myself with the Arab-Islamic tradition through daily tutorials in Arabic philology and literature.

The experience of 1967, the re-emergence of the Palestinian people as a political force, and my own engagement with that movement was what New York in a sense made it possible for me to live, despite the frequent death threats, acts of vandalism, and abusive behavior directed at me and my family. In that rather more agitated and urgent environment than the one fussed over tiresomely by the New York intellectuals (discredited forever, I believe, by their shoddy involvement

in the cultural Cold War as managed by the CIA and so well exposed by Frances Stonor Saunders in her book *The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*), a wholly different set of concerns from those of the *Partisan Review*—for whom I wrote one of the early essays in this book—gradually surfaced in my work, coming to an explicit statement first in my book *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, then in *Orientalism*, then still more insistently in my various writings on Palestine. These concerns, I believe, were magnified and made clear by the other New York, that of the diasporic communities from the Third World, expatriate politics, and the cultural debates, the so-called canon wars, that were to dominate academic life in the 1980s and after. In the elucidation of this other New York, either unknown or despised by its Establishment counterpart, it was also Fred Dupee who indirectly opened the way for me, not so much in what he said specifically about it but rather in the attitude of interest and encouragement that, as a deracinated, adventurous, and hospitable native-born American, he gave me, an outsider and recent arrival.

The greatest single fact of the past three decades has been, I believe, the vast human migration attendant upon war, colonialism and decolonization, economic and political revolution, and such devastating occurrences as famine, ethnic cleansing, and great power machinations. In a place like New York, but surely also in other Western metropolises like London, Paris, Stockholm, and Berlin, all these things are reflected immediately in the changes that transform neighborhoods, professions, cultural production, and topography on an almost hour-by-hour basis. Exiles, émigrés, refugees, and expatriates uprooted from their lands must make do in new surroundings, and the creativity as well as the sadness that can be seen in what they do is one of the experiences that has still to find its chroniclers, even though a splendid cohort of writers that includes such different figures as Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul has already opened further the door first tried by Conrad.

Nevertheless, and despite the all-pervading power and scope of these large historical movements, there has been great resistance to them, whether in the strident choruses of “let’s go back to the great books of OUR culture,” or in the appalling racism that gives tiresome evidence of itself in attacks on non-European cultures, traditions, and peoples as somehow unworthy of serious attention or consideration.

Despite all this, a great revision has taken place in cultural discussion which in my own way I feel I have contributed to, namely, the critique of Eurocentrism, which has enabled readers and critics to see the relative poverty of identity politics, the silliness of affirming the “purity” of an essential essence, and the utter falseness of ascribing to one tradition a kind of priority, which in reality cannot be truthfully asserted, over all the others. In short, it comes down to the realization that cultures are always made up of mixed, heterogeneous, and even contradictory discourses, never more themselves in a sense than when they are not just being themselves, in other words not being in that state of unattractive and aggressive affirmativeness into which they are twisted by authoritarian figures who, like so many pharisees or mullahs, pretend to speak for the whole culture. In fact no such statement is really possible, despite the many efforts and reams of paper expended fruitlessly for that purpose.

To value literature at all is fundamentally to value it as the individual work of an individual writer tangled up in circumstances taken for granted by everyone, such things as residence, nationality, a familiar locale, language, friends, and so on. The problem for the interpreter, therefore, is how to align these circumstances with the work, how to separate as well as incorporate them, how to read the work *and* its worldly situation. The novelty of our time, to which New York gives special emphasis, is that so many individuals have experienced the uprooting and dislocations that have made them expatriates and exiles. Out of such travail there comes an urgency, not to say a precariousness of vision and a tentativeness of statement, that renders the use of language something much more interesting and provisional than it would otherwise be. This is not at all to say, however, that only an exile can feel the pain of recollection as well as the often desperate search for adequate (and usually unfamiliar) expression so characteristic of a Conrad, but it is to say that Conrad, Nabokov, Joyce, Ishiguro in their use of language provoke their readers into an awareness of how language is about experience and not just about itself. For if you feel you cannot take for granted the luxury of long residence, habitual environment, native idiom, and you must somehow compensate for these things, what you write necessarily bears a unique freight of anxiety, elaborateness, perhaps even overstatement—exactly those things that a

comfortably settled tradition of modern (and now postmodern) reading and criticism has either scanted or avoided.

There is a moment in Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* that has always had for me the startling and completely pleasurable force of a benign epiphany, despite the fact that the novel itself is as much an artifact of late Victorianism as the characters and attitudes it mocks. Butler asks rhetorically about the appalling life of a clergyman's children: "How was it possible that a child only a little past five years old, trained in such an atmosphere of prayers and hymns and sums and happy Sunday evenings—to say nothing of daily repeated beatings over the said prayers and hymns, etc., . . .—how was it possible that a lad so trained should grow up in any healthy or vigorous development?" As the plot goes on to show, young Ernest Pontifex would have a dreadful time because of this strenuously virtuous upbringing, but the problem goes back to the way Rev. Theobald, Ernest's father, was himself brought up to behave. "The clergyman," Butler says, "is expected to be a kind of human Sunday."

This brilliant reversal, by which a person suddenly becomes a day, scarcely needs the preachy explanation given a moment later by Butler. Priests, he goes on, are supposed to live stricter lives than anyone else; as vicars their "vicarious goodness" is meant to substitute for the goodness of others; the children of such professionally righteous individuals end up as the ones most damaged by the pretense. Yet for anyone who (perhaps more frequently in an earlier age) was required to dress up, go to religious services, attend a solemn family dinner, and otherwise face the rigors of a day from which many of the sins and pleasures of life had been forcibly swept, to be a human Sunday is an immediately horrible thing. And although the phrase "human Sunday" is compressed in the extreme, it has the effect of releasing a whole storehouse of experiences refracted in as well as pointed to directly by the two words.

Butler's novel is not very much in fashion these days. He stands at the threshold of modernism, but really belongs to an age in which questions of religion, upbringing and family pressures still represented *the* important questions, as they did for Newman, Arnold, and

Dickens. Moreover, *The Way of All Flesh* is hardly a novel at all but rather a semi-fictionalized autobiographical account of Butler's own unhappy youth, full of scarcely veiled attacks on his own father, his own early religious inclinations, and the pre-Darwinian age in which he grew up, when how to deal with faith, and not science or ideas, was the preeminent concern. It would not, I think, be doing *The Way of All Flesh* an injustice to say that it provides readers with principally a historical, rather than an aesthetic, experience. Literary art, rhetoric, figurative language, and structure are there to be looked for, to be occasionally encountered and admired, but only minimally and momentarily, as a way of leading readers directly back to particular experiences of life at a particular time and place. One neither could nor would want to compare Butler with Henry James or Thomas Hardy, two of his immediate contemporaries: they represent a far more complete encoding of historical experience by aesthetic or literary form.

It would be more appropriate somehow to read *The Way of All Flesh* along with Newman's *Apologia*, Mill's *Autobiography*, and even so eccentric and rousing a work as Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, than it would to compare Butler's novel with *The Golden Bowl* or *The Ambassadors*, works that have been far more influential in setting the standard for interpretation and critical theory in our time than the story of Ernest Pontifex. The point I am trying to make in all this, however, is related to the recent trends in the criticism and study of literature that have shied away from the unsettling contentiousness of experiences like this one, or from exiled or silenced voices. Most of what has been exciting and contentious about the vogue of formalist and deconstructive theory has been its focus on purely linguistic and textual matters. A phrase like "the clergyman is expected to be a kind of human Sunday" is too transparent on one level, too inchoate in its recollection and summonings on another, for the theorists of simile, metaphor, topology, or phallogocentrism.

Looking back from the present, one can discern a trend in much of the great Western criticism of the early twentieth century that draws readers away from experience and pushes them instead toward form and formalism. What seems guarded against in this trend is *immediacy*, that untreated bolus of direct experience, experience that can only be reflected whole or as replicable, dogmatically insistent items called

facts. "If those are the facts," said Lukács contemptuously of immediate reality, "then so much the worse for the facts." This line is really the motto of *History and Class Consciousness*, which perhaps more than any other early twentieth century work is the founding text of an astonishing range of later criticism. Out of the great essay on reification and the antinomies of bourgeois thought in that book there derived most of what is still significant about the work of Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Horkheimer, and Habermas, all of whom are paradoxically steeped in the experience of fascism in Germany and yet who erected immense theoretical and formal bulwarks against it in their writing. In France, Lukács stimulated not only the brilliant discipleship of Lucien Goldmann but also the relentless enmity of Louis Althusser, much of whose work, I believe, can be read as a lifelong project to counteract and finally defeat Lukács and his Hegelian antecedents in the young, so-called humanistic Karl Marx; Althusser does this not by bringing Lukács back to immediacy but by moving theory and theorists *further away* from immediacy. In the United States the work of Fredric Jameson owes a huge debt to Lukács, particularly in *Marxism and Form*, the very influential *The Prison House of Language*, and *The Political Unconscious*.

When we leave the realm of Marxist critical discourse and look at the criticism fostered by some of the modernists, the wish to escape from experience perceived as futile panorama is central. T. S. Eliot is unintelligible without this emphasis on art opposed in some way to life, to the historical experience of the middle class, and to the disorder and dislocation of urban existence. Eliot's extraordinary powers of codification and influence produced the almost too familiar canon of critical practices and touchstones associated with the New Criticism, along with its rejection of biography, history, and pathos in the form of various fallacies. Northrop Frye's giant system took the art of formal combinations as far as anyone would (or could) have, as in his own way did Kenneth Burke. By the time "theory" advanced intellectually into departments of English, French, and German in the United States, the notion of "text" had been transformed into something almost metaphysically isolated from experience. The sway of semiology, deconstruction, and even the archaeological descriptions of Foucault, as they have commonly been received, reduced and in many instances eliminated the messier precincts of "life" and historical experience.

Perhaps the most convenient symbol of what I have in mind here is Hayden White's celebrated book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, published in 1973. The paradox of White's book is, I think, that it really is a remarkably brilliant and ingenious Foucauldian, and even in some ways a Vichian, work and one from which I have derived a great deal of instruction. I have no argument with White's description of what he calls the deep poetical structure of the historical consciousness of Marx, Michelet, and Croce, nor even with the classifications of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. Yet White treats the categories as somehow necessary and even inevitable, arranged in a closed cyclical form rather like Frye's. No attention is paid to other alternatives, or to institutions, or to the constitutive role of power which in Nietzsche and Marx (but also in the others) is crucial, but in White is added retrospectively (very much like the early Foucault). These are difficulties of a relatively minor kind, however. White is totally silent about the force, the passion, the drive to write and invest texts *with* history and not the other way around. Texts are, after all, physical things as well, not just the rarefied emanation of a theory. The result in White's work is that the lived experience, and the geography or setting of that experience, is alchemically transmuted into an unrecognizably slender form, and a totally European one at that.

Critical practice is far from a unified thing, of course, but one can read back into a whole generation of critics and criticism something very much like a Eurocentric consensus only because dramatic changes in that consensus did and do occur. What is most impressive in the general consensus *against* historical experience that I have been describing in the dominant style of twentieth-century criticism that produced Frye, White, and Burke, and the readings of literature they enabled, is first evident when we begin to look closely at the bristling and pretty constant hostility to historical experience as found in work after work, writer after writer. What had linked such unlikely allies as Lukács and T. S. Eliot was a refusal of the capitalist and middle-class order produced by the revolution in capital itself. Lukács's "standpoint of the proletariat," he was at great pains to show, was manifestly *not* the actual empirical experience of grimy-faced workers, any more than Eliot's notion of literature was equivalent to the lives of writers

depicted so memorably in Gissing's *New Grub Street*. Both Lukács and Eliot defined their efforts as establishing a distance between the creative powers of mind functioning primarily through language and immediate history, the former producing a new and daring structure, a "putative totality" Lukács called it, that would stand against the debilitating and darkness of the latter. Both men were very close in rejecting the pain of experience in favor of poetry in Eliot's case, insurrectionary theory in Lukács's.

Yet to be able to see Lukács and Eliot, or for that matter Cleanth Brooks and Paul de Man, as belonging to roughly the same consensus there would have to be, as I said earlier, a strikingly different approach emerging in the study of literature. Signs of this are strongly evident, I believe, in the new voice of feminist writers for whom the world of literature and literary criticism hitherto constituted was premised on the absence, silence, and exclusion of women. One senses the power of this new sensibility in the title of one of the most celebrated of modern feminist works, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. For all the complexity and richness of available literary discourse, their book argues, there is a female presence banished to the attic, by an act of deliberate, programmatic exclusion. Not to take note of that presence, or to take note of it as Charlotte Brontë does in her novel only in passing and by resolutely confining it far away, is to deny the validity of an experience fully entitled to equal representation. And this sense of entitlement has the effect of breaking open the formal constructions of literary genres, as the phrase "human Sunday" is shattered by the experience of pressure and force it alludes to.

With such force in mind then, Joyce emerges as a far more threatening and insurgent a figure than he has usually been taken to be. As a high modernist, he appears to share traits with Eliot and Proust, for example, which everything he actually said about himself and his work contradicts. It was, he said, "the reality of experience" that as an Irish writer he wished to render, not its absence or avoidance. *Dubliners* was to be the first chapter in "the spiritual liberation of my people" and, as no one needs reminding, Stephen Dedalus sought to escape church, family, and nation in order to create freedom and have experience. But we owe *this* reading of Joyce to a new generation of Irish critics—Seamus Deane, Emer Nolan, Declan Kiberd, David Lloyd, Tom Paulin,

Luke Gibbons, among others—for whom the direct, humiliating, impoverishing experience of colonialism, not that of high modernism, was the one that counted. This readjustment of perspective parallels the feminist one in which consensus and centrality are directly and immediately challenged by experiences that may seem peripheral but carry their own freight of urgency that can no longer be denied, either because it isn't male or because it isn't European high art situated at several removes from the perceived debasements of ordinary life.

In my own case I found myself drawn quite early on to writers like Conrad, Merleau-Ponty, Cioran, and Vico who were verbal technicians of the highest order and yet eccentric in that they stood apart from, and were untimely, anxious witnesses to, the dominant currents of their own time. Except for Merleau-Ponty, they were outsiders whose insights were achieved at great expense as they struggled with the impingements of sometimes overwhelming and even threatening circumstances which they could neither ignore nor elude. Nor could they escape to some promontory outside the troubling element of what I call worldliness. So it was Merleau-Ponty who struck me as best understanding the predicament of a reality without absolutes, of language as a synthesis of constantly experienced moments, and of mind as incarnated irremediably in things where, despite all our efforts, “we never see our ideas or freedom face to face.” Moreover, for me Vico's greatness was not just his astonishing insights into the relationship of reciprocity between a history made by human beings and the knowledge they have of it *because* they made it, but his stubborn habit as a philologist of forcing words back into the messy physical reality from which, because of their human uses, words necessarily emanate. “Monuments of unaging intellect” were for him misleading facades to be traced back into the copulating bodies of heroic men and women.

Reading historiographers like Hayden White or the philosopher Richard Rorty, one finds oneself remarking that only minds so untroubled by and free of the immediate experience of the turbulence of war, ethnic cleansing, forced migration, and unhappy dislocation can formulate such theories as theirs. No, you want to say, what a language user registers is not just the pressure of other language users or, as in Rorty's particular case, the goal of having a conversation with other philosophers in which the verification of a sentence is only another

sentence, but also the sometimes horrific pressures that render even the most humdrum and ordinary of sentences both threatening and full of dislocating force. Conrad's writing, for instance, wears its author's existential unsettlement on its surface and in the conditions it always seems to describe: for example, in the story "Amy Foster," the notion of a "death illuminated by unresponsive eyes." Or in Adorno's instance, the thesis that for the displaced person, "homes are always provisional."

Another breach in the formalist construct of language and literature has come from ethnic and minority historical experience, which in work done by African-American, Asian-American, and native American writers opens literature to the claims of raw testimonials that cannot easily be dismissed as irrelevant. It is very important to remember that before the claims of testimonial became the kind of thing parodied and attacked by Robert Hughes as "the culture of complaint," it was and in many cases still is very far from being a laundry list of imprecations attributed to "high" (that is, European) culture. Nor was it at bottom a prescription for separatist enterprises like the Afrocentric dogmas criticized so robustly by Hughes. When you look at the history recounted in Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence* or at the line of writing that is carried from Frederick Douglass to W. E. B. Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston and then into the critical work of Toni Morrison, Houston Baker, and Henry Louis Gates, you see very persuasive and eloquent arguments made for *including* and *remembering*, rather than for merely giving focus to or encoding crucial historical experiences.

It would be wrong to pretend, however, that both feminist and what has been called ethnic criticism did not in fact since lend themselves either to formalism or to an esoteric and jargon-ridden exclusivism. They have and do, but what gathered readers and practitioners to them in the first place was the prospect of integrating experiences into literary discussions that had for a long time left those experiences unacknowledged. This integrative impulse in its finest and truest form is plainly evident in Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Morrison's book is moved not by anger but by delight, as well as from what she knows "about the ways writers transform aspects of their social grounding into aspects of language" (4).

The accent throughout her book is less on aspects of language than on the social grounding that gives rise to inflections and distortions in language; this social principle assumes preeminence and priority for her in the creation of literature. In American literature “what did happen frequently was an effort to talk about [the presence of Africans] . . . with a vocabulary designed to disguise the subject. It did not always succeed, and in the work of many writers disguise was never intended. But the consequence was a master narrative that spoke *for* Africans and their descendants, or *of* them. The legislator’s narrative could not coexist with a response from the Africanist persona” (50).

The drama of Morrison’s charge is best caught in her account of images of punishing whiteness in American literature—Poe’s Arthur Gordon Pym and Melville’s *Moby Dick*, for example—which, she says, “seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness—a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing” (33). For Paul de Man, one recalls, allegory is haunted by the absence and priority of an experience that is excluded from literature, and this, he goes on to argue, leads to a critical aporia for interpreters without apparent means to rectify or treat the exclusion. For Morrison the exclusion is ultimately unsuccessful, and derives from a social and historical experience which, as critic and reader, it is her role to re-include, re-inscribe, re-define. That this role need not, and in fact does not, include an attack on the literature *as literature* itself is part of its extraordinary merit. Morrison makes no sentimental appeal to another, perhaps more accurately representative literature, and no appeal either to a folk, or popular, or sub-literary nativist genre. What she discusses are instances of the master narrative, works by Poe, Mark Twain, Hemingway, Cather, whose significance on aesthetic and historical grounds is granted in a manner that is neither hectoring nor vengeful.

Many readers and professional students of literature in England and America have become so used to the impoverishing terms of an almost purely ideological, and even caricatural, debate about the canon that they have forgotten that readings such as those Toni Morrison offers are, in fact, the historical norm. The Battle of the Books, the debate over the Higher Criticism, over the meaning of philology (as fought out between Wilamovitz and Nietzsche)—these and many more

canonical disputes have always been the antecedents and have set the standard for energetic, unacademic, real-life discussion about the canon, and about how great books should, or can be, read for actual use in actual life. It has been most unfortunate, I think, that the almost total absence of a historical sense allowed the nearsighted, media- and mammon-controlled spirit of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations to control for so long discussions whose true import was never really about how to manage reading lists and codify course requirements but about how the real experience of large groups of people might be grasped, clarified, reinterpreted, and rediscovered in the great works of literature and philosophy. As if such misleading and trivialized phrases as political correctness, or multiculturalism, or William Bennett's grandiose "to reclaim a heritage" really had anything to do with the kind of thing Toni Morrison was talking about! Of course not.

This brings me to the third important approach whose impulse and effect have been to lessen the formalist hold on the study of literature in favor of approaches based on reinstating historical experiences both misrepresented and largely excluded from the mainstream canon as well as its criticism. What gives a special intelligibility and status to the concept of a "mainstream canon" is, of course, the kind of social authority that is crucial to the life of a nation. This has been perfectly clear during the debates about ethnic identity in the United States and abroad as well, during the past few years when it seemed to perspicacious observers that what was at stake could not be comprehended by so unimportant a thing as a school reading list; rather it was the image of America itself, and the coherence of its society, that seemed to be threatened. This fear stands at the center of Arthur Schlesinger's book *The Disuniting of America*: that to press the claims of minorities and other nationalities on the main core of American history (even if it is, after all, an immigrants', diasporic history) is to dislodge traditional authority in favor of a new and possibly fractious one.

Yet never was this sense of a compelling, enduringly stable identity stronger than in the time since the nineteenth century, whose legacy in the contemporary cultural and political discourses I have been discussing is the heightened, and indeed embattled, sense of *national* identity which really appears for the first time on a world scale because of

imperialism which pits one race, society, culture against (or on top of) another. As Eric Hobsbawm puts it, “The major fact about the nineteenth century is the creation of a simple global economy, progressively reaching into the most remote corners of the world, an increasingly dense web of economic transactions, communications and movement of goods, money and people linking the developed countries with each other and with the undeveloped” (*Age of Empire*, 62). Throughout the age of empire a rigid division obtained between the European colonizers and their non-European colonized peoples—a division which, although millions of transactions were permitted across it, was given a cultural correlative of extraordinary proportions, since in essence it maintained a strict social and cultural hierarchy between whites and non-whites, between members of the dominant and members of the subject race. It was this asymmetry in power that Fanon was to characterize as the Manicheism of colonial rule and whose profound cultural effects I have examined in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*.

It is not too simple a formulation to say that the whole concept of national identity, in America as elsewhere, was brought to a new pitch of contested fraughtness by imperialism. Not only did a new discourse of national greatness take hold inside the culture of the colonizing powers, but a discourse of national resistance developed within the culture of the colonized people. To think of the French rhetoric of *mission civilisatrice* and opposing it, the rhetoric of *négritude* and Pan-Africanism, is to gauge how profoundly experienced and how deadly serious cultural identities had become by the mid-twentieth century. Or there was *manifest destiny*, and the many Latin American doctrines of native authenticity. And after the post-World War II dismantling of the classical empires, after the colonial wars and the mass insurrections of decolonization, the exigencies of national and cultural identity did not lessen; they increased. National identity (and very often little else) became the program of many newly independent countries in the Third World, who required an airline, a diplomatic service, and (of course) an army to maintain themselves in the face of poverty, illness, and hunger. In the United States, the postwar period brought the Cold War and, as frequently *not* noted, the taking on by the U.S. and its superpower opposite, the Soviet Union, of the roles once played by Britain and France.

The twentieth century was supposed to have been the American century, and perhaps indeed it was, although it's still too early to prophesy about *this* century. Certainly the great overseas ventures like the war in Vietnam or Operation Desert Storm have made a difference to the more and more heightened, as well as problematic, sense of American cultural identity. But there is also no doubt that the emergence of opposition to the earlier empires has had consequences for the battles around identity all over the world, even if now a weary globalized consciousness has overtaken intellectuals at "the end of history." But their lack of energy is not the only story.

When during the 1980s students and faculty at Stanford, for example, proposed Fanon as an item on the humanities reading list, it was felt that Fanon's engagement in the 1950s on behalf of the Algerian FLN against French colonialism was of some particular relevance to American students in the 1980s. Why? Because his work signified opposition to empire, and empire was a title to which the United States had so unmistakably succeeded. Moreover—and this, I believe, is a more interesting reason for concern with Fanon—writers like him, C. L. R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois, Walter Rodney, Aimé Césaire, and José Martí represented an unusual intellectual trajectory: they were writers and activists whose intellectual pedigree was often entirely metropolitan but whose work could be characterized as providing an alternative consciousness to that of the mainstream, orthodox, or establishment consciousness prevailing in Europe and the United States. Cities like New York, full of immigrants and unaccommodated "aliens," hold a place of honor in this history as housing precisely that alternative intellectual at odds with the city's almost overpowering status as a center of global capital.

The opposition to empire is so important a feature of my work after *Orientalism* that it requires a little more elaboration and historical precision. I think it can be said that the appearance of nationalist and independence parties all across the Third World, and within the already independent countries of North and South America, from the end of the nineteenth century until the period between the two world wars was a massive response to the cultural and political domination of the West. This was the world in which, as a young Arab, I grew up. Many of the Pan-African, Pan-Asian, and Pan-Arab parties took as their man-

date not only political independence but also the need for a new, and often renewed and reinvigorated, sense of independent cultural identity. I believe that many (if not all) of these efforts were seen as making a place in the world's culture for these new cultural identities that were formerly suppressed and excluded. To Césaire and Du Bois, for instance, racial thought and the persecution of the black individual were the responsibility of aspects of white or European mainstream culture, but they did not at all mean that *all* whites and Europeans, or *all* white and European culture, were to be thrown out and rejected. There had to be careful discriminations made between liberation on the one hand, and a sort of reverse racism, by which pernicious theories of racial discrimination were now replicated in a reversed form (blacks hating and discriminating against whites) in the new and emergent black nationalism. Tagore in India nobly undertook a critique of nationalism as containing too much negative force and resentment.

Certainly there was a great deal of nativism and violently separatist thought in the anti-imperialist nationalism of the mid-twentieth century. What is even more sadly ironic is that some intellectuals who were once critical of the separatist nationalism in their liberation movements were later to be transformed into the most energetic and insistent of nativists, those who uncritically reiterated the importance of belonging to the “right” group, and therefore were neither alien nor united. Thus the celebrated Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka attacks Senghor's *négritude* in the early 1960s—attacks it brilliantly and resourcefully for its defeatism, its implicit concessions to European ethnocentrism and supremacist thought—and then thirty years later in his own journal *Transition* attacks the well-known Kenyan political theorist Ali Mazrui for not being enough of a “pure” African. Such divagations as this are all too frequent, particularly in the continued denigration of native and non-Western cultures in the late twentieth century. But what distinguished the great liberationist cultural movements that stood against Western imperialism was that they wanted liberation within the same universe of discourse inhabited by Western culture. As Césaire put it in his greatest poem (in a phrase echoed and re-echoed by C. L. R. James), “no race has a monopoly on beauty, or intelligence, or strength, and there is room for everyone at the convocation of conquest.”

The historical experience of imperialism for the imperialized entailed subservience and exclusion; therefore the historical experience of nationalist resistance and decolonization was designed for liberation and inclusion. Much of what went wrong in the subsequent development of nationalism was the direct result of either forgetting or rejecting this edifying equation—but that is another story that I have tried to pursue in the later essays of this book on the politics of knowledge. It is necessary, however, to add one further thing to the narrative of liberation that concerns me here: that so far as liberation was concerned, the very notion of historical experience itself involved an acknowledgment that both the dominant and the subaltern peoples in imperialism actually shared the same irreducibly secular world. And if so, there was only one worldly cultural space, the common possession of all humankind, and also a universal language of rights and ideals, in which to wage the struggle for liberation and inclusion. To some extent this acknowledgment reflected the national reality, that is, if as a Senegalese or an Indian you were educated under imperialism, English or French culture would perforce be a part of your world. Césaire's language, conceptual vocabulary, and values in his *Discourse on Colonialism* were those of Voltaire and Marx; the object of his polemic was to rescue their liberating ideas from the corruptions forced on poor West Indian natives by empire. To read and interpret meant to read in French (and other languages) for liberation and inclusion. It did not mean throwing out the masterpieces of "Western" culture along with the language of the colonial bureaucrat who claimed to be representing them, and who in the end was forced to leave. Nor did it mean inventing a special jargon to be used only by "natives." If Western humanism was discredited by its practices and hypocrisy, these needed to be exposed, and a more universal humanism enacted and taught.

I have taken so much time to sketch this enormously rich history because it serves as the general background for many of the essays in this book, which have derived both from my own travel and from work being done in England, Ireland, Africa, India, the Caribbean and the Middle East. The noisy debates that now rage around post-colonial and African-American studies, as well as the radical feminism that focuses principally on non-white women, sometimes obscure the well-

spring of hope, generosity, and courage from which those approaches originally derived. Reading Du Bois, for instance, one could hear in his accents, first of all, the sound of an interpreter partly shaped in language and sensitivity by the great European and American poets and novelists, some of whose modern ideological followers unfortunately affirmed only their preferred authors' relatively official and perhaps even authoritarian selves, and scanted what else in the poetry and prose was, or could be interpreted as being, heterodox, subversive, and contradictory. But second, and no less important, one could learn from interpretations such as his, Toni Morrison's, and C. L. R. James's to see in the canon *other* structures of feeling, attitude, and reference, structures that testified to a much more worldly, active, and political involvement by major writers with topics of great importance to non-Europeans—topics such as the limits of colonial penal rehabilitation in *Great Expectations*, the quandaries of imperialism in Tennyson, slavery and racist thought in Carlyle, and outright colonialism in Ruskin. The challenge therefore was to re-read and re-examine, not simply to distort or reject.

Far from rejecting or disqualifying canonical writers because of crudely political considerations, my approach has tried to re-situate writers in their own history, with a particular emphasis on those apparently marginal aspects of their work which because of the historical experience of non-European readers have acquired a new prominence. A prototype for this method exists, of course, in the magnificent historical and cultural studies of E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, which have been especially important to me. Williams's *The Country and the City*, for instance, is such a compelling work because it restores to individual works of literature and art the lived experiences of losers in the social contest, losers whose absence Williams was the first to point to as having an essential part in the aesthetic work's structure and meaning. He shows, for example, that the absence of dispossessed peasants in a picture of opulent country-house elegance is implicitly memorialized by the seventeenth-century arranged landscapes represented by Ben Jonson at Penshurst estate: "a rural landscape emptied of rural labour and of labourers; a sylvan and watery prospect with a hundred analogies in neo-pastoral painting and poetry, from which the facts of production had been banished: the roads and approaches

artfully concealed by trees, so that the very fact of communication could be visually suppressed; inconvenient barns and mills cleared away out of sight (the bourgeois Sterling, in Coleman and Garrick's *Clandestine Marriage* had 'made a greenhouse out of the old laundry and turned the brewhouse into a pinery'); avenues opening to the distant hills, where no details disturbed the distant view; and this landscape seen from above, from the new elevated sites; the large windows, the terraces, the lawns; the cleared lines of vision; the expression of control and of command" (125).

This is not *ressentiment*, nor is it anger at "high culture." Williams is a great critic to the precise extent that his scholarship and criticism are based on the immediacy of connection he can discern between the great literary work and the historical experience—all the relevant sides of it—that gave rise to the work. To read Jonson's *Penshurst* is therefore to appreciate its figures, its structures and fluent accents, but also to grasp the way in which these were earned, achieved, constructed by individual genius *and* by social contest. What one ends up feeling in Williams's work is not so much a sense of his cleverness, or his sophisticated way with a lot of sources and scholarship, but his ability to project himself back into the past, and thereby to comprehend its felt structures and its laboriously wrought works as a sort of inventory or genealogy of the present, in Gramsci's phrase. And thus the great eighteenth-century landscapes and country houses will lead a century later to the "wealthy and class-divided city" of London: "This version [Conan Doyle's representation of London as Sherlock Holmes's domain] of a glittering and dominant metropolitan culture had enough reality to support a traditional idea of the city, as a centre of light and learning, but now on an unprecedented scale. The cultural centralization of England was already at this time more marked, at every level, than in any comparable society" (229).

To speak of the canon is to understand this process of cultural centralization, a direct consequence of imperialism and the globalism we still live with today. The privilege of the great work is that it sits at the center of the center and can therefore either touch or include the historical experience of peripheral, marginal, or eccentric lives, albeit in a reduced or scarcely visible form. Criticism in the global setting spun together by imperialism affords a whole series of possibilities, espe-

cially if we take seriously the historical experience of decolonization, with its enabling perspectives and resourceful readings as an extension of the struggle to be heard, and to be a realized part of what T. S. Eliot calls “the whole consort dancing together.”

I do not want to be understood as suggesting that you have to be a member of a formerly colonized or disadvantaged minority group in order to do interesting and historically grounded literary scholarship. When such notions of insider privilege are advanced they have to be rejected out of hand as perpetuations of the exclusions one should always oppose, a sort of racism or nationalism by imitation, which in this book I have criticized both in supposedly privileged or “objective” observers like Naipaul and Orwell, both of them renowned for the transparency and “honesty” of their style, and in social insiders like Walter Lippmann. Like all style, “good” or transparent writing has to be demystified for its complicity with the power that allows it to *be there*, whether at the center or not.

Moreover, the study of literature is not abstract but is set irrecusably and unarguably within a culture whose historical situation influences, if it does not determine, a great deal of what we say and do. I have been using the phrase “historical experience” throughout because the words are neither technical nor esoteric but suggest an opening away from the formal and technical toward the lived, the contested, and the immediate, which in these essays I keep returning to again and again. Yet I am as aware as anyone that the dangers of an empty humanism are quite real, that simply asserting the virtues of classical or humanistic norms in the study of literature is to feed an agenda that is determined to weed out and possibly eliminate any mention of transnational experiences such as war, slavery, imperialism, poverty, and ignorance that have disfigured human history—and discredited the humanism that left responsibility for those evils to politicians and Others. In a forthcoming book on humanism in America I hope to develop this idea and to affirm the continued relevance of humanism for our time. The point here, however, is that at present the study of literature has gone in two opposed and in my opinion ridiculously tendentious directions: one, into a professionalized and technologized jargon that bristles with strategies, techniques, privileges, and valorizations, many of them simply verbal or “postmodern” and hence

lacking in engagement with the world, or two, into a lackluster, ostrich-like, and unreflective pseudo-healthiness that calls itself “traditional” scholarship. Historical experience, and in particular the experience of dislocation, exile, migration, and empire, therefore opens both of these approaches to the invigorating presence of a banished or forgotten reality which in the past two hundred years has dominated human existence in an enormous variety of ways. It is this general and particular experience that my own kind of criticism and scholarship in this book are trying to reclaim, understand, and situate.

I should add that I have tried to deal with music as a particularly rich and, for me, unique branch of aesthetic experience. Several essays in this book are either about musical subjects or discuss music in ways that are, I think, linked to my other interests. As someone whose life-long association with Western classical music has included performance, musicology, and criticism, I have always regretted that modern culture seems to have isolated music away from the other arts, with the result that most educated people are far more at ease talking about cinema, photography, art, dance, or architecture than they are with Bach or Schoenberg. Yet music’s extraordinary disciplinary rigor, its capacity for plurality of voice, for expressiveness, for a whole range of performative possibilities, for a fascinating though sometimes arcane capacity to internalize, refer to, and go beyond its own history, have compelled my attention and have sharpened as well as deepened my other, more superficially worldly concerns. In this sort of wonderfully problematic cross-fertilization between the musical and the immediacies of ordinary experience my model has been Adorno, an impossible example to follow but one whose brilliant musical intelligence makes him utterly unique among the great philosophical and cultural thinkers of our time.

I must now conclude by being considerably more specific about my own experience, and how that enters into (very often indirectly or unwittingly) so much of what is in the thirty-five years of this book. Elsewhere I have not spared my readers a rather substantial body of writing on the question of Palestine, the fate of the Palestinian people, and of course the whole ensemble of contemporary politics that has

absorbed them and their fate. In this book, however, Palestine appears from time to time as a theme (not until more than halfway through), although its influence is felt earlier, often in an incompletely grasped and formulated way. There is first of all the sheer fact of Palestine as a deeply, some might say inordinately significant geographical territory, a subject for imaginative, ideological, cultural, and religious projection, but also the site of an ongoing conflict for control. In my own experience Palestine has always been identified partly elegiacally, partly resolutely with dispossession and exile, whereas for so many others it is known principally as Israel, an “empty” land returned to according to biblical fiat. At the core, then, there is an irreconcilable, antinomian conflict embodied in the land.

Second, there is the sense of dissonance engendered by estrangement, distance, dispersion, years of lostness and disorientation—and, just as important, the precarious sense of expression by which what “normal” residents find easy and natural to do requires in exile an almost excessive deliberation, effort, expenditure of intellectual energy at restoration, reiteration, and affirmation that are undercut by doubt and irony. I have found that the greatest difficulty to be overcome is the temptation to counter-conversion, the wish to find a new system, territory, or allegiance to replace the lost one, to think in terms of panaceas and new, more complete visions that simply do away with complexity, difference, and contradiction. Whereas the critical task for the exile in my view is to remain somehow skeptical and always on guard, a role I have directly associated here and in my Reith Lectures (*Representations of the Intellectual*) with the intellectual vocation, which also refuses the jargon of specialization, the blandishments of power, and—just as much to the point—the quietism of non-involvement. Those essays in this book that are connected to debates in literary theory, anthropology, area studies (Orientalism), and, further afield, matters having to do with journalistic or artistic narrative, the art of the piano, popular culture, and particularly Arabic literature have drawn on the same kind of intellectual position of affiliation maintained in conjunction with critique.

What I have found myself looking for in our age of the politics of ethnic identity and passionate conviction are alternative communities that have emerged from the experience of exile with a great deal of

their memory and their private subjectivity still preserved, as John Berger and Jean Mohr so beautifully show, despite the extinction of privacy all around them. In this too, Palestine has played a role. Because Palestine is uncomfortably, indeed scandalously, close to the Jewish experience of genocide, it has been difficult at times even to pronounce the word *Palestine*, given that entire state-supported policies by enormous powers were dedicated to making sure that the name, and more so the memory and aspiration—to say nothing of the often startling similarity of namelessness and rejection—simply did, would, could not exist. But we are after all a coherent people, and I have found a universal meaning in the experiences on behalf of Palestinian rights, whether because liberal human rights discourse, otherwise so eloquent about all other rights, has stood in embarrassed silence before Palestine, looking the other way, or because Palestine provides the test-case for a true universalism on such matters as terror, refugees, and human rights, along with a real moral complexity often bypassed in the rush to various nationalist assertions.

It would, however, be a real mistake if this book were read as delivering an extended political message. On the contrary, much of the material here is presented as essentially in contrast to politics, that is, in the realm of the aesthetic, even though (as Jacqueline Rose indicates in her wonderfully suggestive phrase “states of fantasy,” with its emphasis on the notion of a state) the interchange between politics and aesthetics is not only very productive, but endlessly recurring. And pleasurable as well. For how else can one appreciate dancers like Tahia Carioca or film stars like Johnny (Tarzan) Weissmuller except as figures expressing the mobility, the uncoopted and unadministered force, of what political life hasn’t totally absorbed? But it would be disingenuous not to admit that the Palestinian experience seems retrospectively to have predisposed my own critical attention in favor of unaccommodated, essentially expatriate or diasporic forms of existence, those destined to remain at some distance from the solid resting-place that is embodied in repatriation. Therefore the essay form has seemed particularly congenial, as have such exemplary figures for me as Conrad, Vico, and Foucault.

Thus, as a cause, as a geographic, local, original experience, Palestine for me provided affinities with, say, Conrad’s radical exilic vision, or

with the lonely exceptionalism of a Foucault and a Melville. But I should mention also that in the last few years my political experience underwent two major changes, one due to severe illness, which obliged me to leave the activist world of political struggle, and the other due to the defanging and the (in my opinion) terrible transformation of what was a secular, critical, and hopeful movement for liberation and change into a miserably confined, sordidly run West Bank/ Gaza entity as a result of the “peace process.” I have written too much about this journalistically to rehearse any of my arguments here. Suffice it to say that Palestine casts an altered shadow over those later essays in the book having to do with questions of interpretation, education, and what I call “the politics of knowledge.” I wouldn’t at all call the result of the change resignation or even detachment (which I think I’ve always had), though I would say that the change in situation does accommodate my sense of how perspective in the Nietzschean sense is less a matter of choice than of necessity. In any event, I have been so specific here about the influence of Palestine because I have long wanted to acknowledge intellectually its importance and universality that go well beyond the regional and the local. Besides, we all know how concerns from one area of life impinge silently and unasked on others.

I have argued that exile can produce rancor and regret, as well as a sharpened vision. What has been left behind may either be mourned, or it can be used to provide a different set of lenses. Since almost by definition exile and memory go together, it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determine how one sees the future. My hope in this book is to demonstrate the truth of this, and to provide my readers with the same pleasure I derived from using the exile’s situation to practice criticism. And also to show that no return to the past is without irony, or without a sense that a full return, or repatriation, is impossible.