

إدوارد سعيد: دروس فتح قراءة النص الأدبي

ملخص

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يتناول هذا العرض الموجز طريقة إدوارد سعيد في إضاءة جوانب من نصوص عيون الأدب الأوربي، وخاصة الأعمال الروائية، وذلك من خلال قراءته للعلاقة بين الثقافة والهيمنة الاستعمارية. ففي كتابه «الثقافة والإمبريالية» ١٩٩٣م، يضطلع سعيد بمهمة الكشف عن تناول كبار كتاب الرواية البريطانيين بصفة خاصة، والأوروبيين بشكل عام، من أمثال: جين أوستين، وتشارلز ديكنز، وأندريه جيد، وألبير كامو - للعلاقة بين التوسع الاستعماري الأوربي، وما أسماه سعيد «الأرشفيف الثقافى» لهذه الثقافة الغربية، إذ يرى سعيد أن المعركة من أجل امتلاك الأرض ومواردها كان لها أبعاد ثقافية واضحة. وهو يحاول من خلال قراءته الخاصة للنصوص الروائية أن يوضح الدور الجوهرى الذى لعبه الكتاب والمفكرون والباحثون الأوروبيون فى دعم هذا التوسع الاستعماري.

ويعرض البحث لجانب من كتاب إدوارد سعيد «الثقافة والإمبريالية»، وهو الجانب الخاص بقراءة وتحليل سعيد لرواية «جين أوستن» الشهيرة «مانسفيلد بارك»، فمن خلال قراءته يحاول سعيد الإفصاح عن المسكوت عنه فى الرواية، وهو ما يعتبره سعيد من صلب فهمنا الصحيح للرواية. ذلك أن سعيد يرى أنه يصعب فهم هذه الرواية - كما هو الحال فى عديد من الروايات الهامة كرواية «روبنسون كروزو» مثلاً، أو «قلب الظلام» لكونراد - بمعزل عن حقيقة التوسع الاستعماري الذى يفسر لنا كثيراً من عناصر الرواية السردية.

إن مفهوم سعيد للنص الأدبي الذى يراه مفتوحاً على الواقع السياسى والتاريخى والاجتماعى - قد فتح المجال أمام مدارس نقدية وأدبية ظهرت فى الثمانينات من القرن العشرين، مثل المدرسة التى تعرف باسم «النقد ما بعد كولونيالى»، وكذلك ما يعرف بالنقد الثقافى، أو الدراسات الثقافية التى تربط بين النص الأدبي والثقافى فى كل تجلياتها.

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instead of doing away with the canon altogether, or at least before doing so, a thorough and conscientious research and analysis of what is problematic about that canon remains a prerequisite.

If we clearly understand Said's project, we would not see any irony in the fact that Said's work has itself been consistently grounded *in* the literary canon. His first hand experience and access to the culture of imperialism had made him intimately familiar with the culture of the Occidental "other", and this, I daresay, has been a major factor in the essential "genuineness" of his deconstructive philosophical position. It is mainly through an understanding of the literary and cultural discourse generating the canon that Said could question the legacies of imperialism and jingoism, and expose the conventional authoritarian narrative that engendered Western Europe.

My sketchy report unfortunately leaves out many subtleties of Said's approach, but this is the hazard of all overviews. Let me nevertheless conclude that Said has, against all odds, managed to secure himself a renowned place within the apparatus of higher education in the humanities in the United States and has, with remarkable success, managed to restructure the teaching of the humanities in general, and take the study of literature out of the restricted domain of studying the works of a major "author", and bring it into the more intriguing area of cultural studies.

propounds in *Orientalism* with the intent of formulating a postcolonial approach to *Mansfield Park*; thereby, staging a critique of the established canon. On the other hand, a cogent reading of the novel allows him to trace the figurations of the Other, thus widening the scope of critical interest in the work, extending it from being solely part of the English literary canon to the wider area of cultural studies. In so doing, Said demonstrates the advantages of such wider conception of critical practice as cultural critique wherein the interplay of political, historical, social and literary concerns can be seen at its best.

It may be redundant to reiterate here what has become almost a commonplace: that Said's brand of cultural criticism has been fundamental in the development of postcolonial studies. Concepts such as the "centre" and the "margin" or the "Self" and the "Other" have been crucial in both his theory and practice. For him, the "marginal" East helps define the "central" colonial West as much as the Oriental "Other" is a projection of the Western view that constructs it. Such terms played a major role in the development of postcolonial studies. In fact, it is thanks to Said's work that postcolonial literary criticism has recognized the importance of looking into the work of the "other", i.e., the subaltern, the marginalized or the minorities, scrutinizing them with the same kind of rigour that the "major" writers of the English literary canon had been studied. Yet, Said takes a firm stance against those voices that belong to what he characterizes as "the rhetoric of blame". (115) He in fact has no sympathy for those who call for discarding writers like Austen, dismissing them as "white, privileged, insensitive, [and] complicit".(115) It is here, I guess, that Said's hidden message lies. I cannot actually see any exaggeration in the claim that Said's *Culture and Criticism* is, and will remain, at the heart of the debate in Western universities concerning the teaching of the Anglo-Saxon canon. Said seems to be saying that

“essential moral interest offered by Jane Austen’s art”, as well as in his allusion to Austen’s concern with “essential human issues”, and further in his reference to her “essential problems as novelist.” (Leavis, 10)

Said’s main concern is with such pillars of the English literary canon as Jane Austen, Kipling and Conrad. However, a real appreciation of his work remains impossible without a careful study of his reading strategies. His article entitled “Jane Austen and Empire” seems to be a response to the aforementioned mainstream interpretations. It is in pursuing those strategies that Said’s reading of those canonical texts culminates in a deconstruction of the critical perspectives of critics like Arnold Kettle, F.R. Leavis, Q.D. Leavis and Ian Watt. Indeed, Said does not seem to mince his words in the process of spelling out his intentions:

We must not say that since *Mansfield Park* is a novel, its affiliations with a sordid history are irrelevant or transcendent,...Having read *Mansfield Park* as part of the structure of an expanding imperialist venture, one cannot simply restore it to the canon of “great literary masterpieces” _ to which it most certainly belongs_ and leave it at that. Rather, I think the novel, steadily, if unobtrusively, opens up a broad expanse of domestic imperialist culture without which Britain’s subsequent acquisition of territory would not have been possible.(Said, 114)

Said’s strategies of reading can be traced back to the poststructural practice of deconstruction. This practice involves a critique that examines and tests the assumptions supporting colonial discourse in order to question the premises from which it proceeds. However, Said’s contribution is two-fold. On the one hand, he uses the theory he

of the turn of the eighteenth century, could scarcely be expected to analyse class society in modern terms. We must make a certain allowance, reading the book with a willing suspension of our own ideas and prejudices. (Kettle 95)

Such readings of Jane Austen by mainstream British critics do not lose sight of a tradition that insists on viewing the works of "major" English fiction writers as constituting what F. R. Leavis calls "The Great Tradition". The passage on Austen is worth quoting in full, because it is mostly representative of the idea of the greatness of the English literary canon:

Jane Austen is one of the truly great writers, and herself a major fact in the background of other great writers...In fact, Jane Austen, in her indebtedness to others, provides an exceptionally illuminating study of the nature of originality, and she exemplifies beautifully the relation of "the individual talent" to tradition. If the influences bearing on her hadn't comprised something fairly to be called tradition she couldn't have found herself and her true direction; but her relation to tradition is a creative one... for us she creates the tradition we see leading down to her. Her work, like the work of all great creative writers gives a meaning to the past...Jane Austen, in fact, is the inauguration of the great tradition of the English novel □ and by "great tradition" I mean the tradition of which what is great in English fiction belongs. (Leavis 5)

No clever reader could miss here Leavis's unmistakably essentialist bias which is explicitly stated later in his reference to the

In his analysis of *Mansfield Park*, Said offers an approach to the understanding of what he calls "the structure of attitude and reference". (114) He points to Austen's obvious tendency, recurrent throughout the novel, to legitimize Sir Thomas Bertram's exploitation of the colonies in Antigua as a source of catering for the extravagance of his Mansfield Park estates. Said moves on to affirm that such a tendency to legitimize exploitation is in fact typical of the general traits of a colonial discourse that attempted to justify what was regarded as the inevitability of maintaining the British colonies in the Caribbean and elsewhere, as these colonies were the indispensable source of wealth for England. Said also affirms that such insight, rarely found in "mainstream interpretation" (114), necessitates a careful reading capable of discerning "how ideas about dependent races and territories were held both by foreign-office executives, colonial bureaucrats, and military strategists and by intelligent novel-readers educating themselves in the fine points of moral evaluation, literary balance, and stylistic finish." (Said 114)

However, an understanding of Said's strategies of reading cannot be fully appreciated without a consideration of those "mainstream interpretations".

In his attempt to exonerate Jane Austen from the limitations of her moral consciousness, which limitations are understandably dictated by the fact that she belonged to a privileged social class that takes for granted the injustices of a class society, Arnold Kettle gives those readers who "want to have their novel and yet eat it" (Kettle 95) a lesson in a 'proper' reading of Austen's novels:

But after all we must remember when Jane Austen was writing, we must approach the novels with sympathy in their historical context. Jane Austen, a genteel *bourgeoise*

Both books, then, are parts of the same project in which Said shows how “a very large mass [of Western] writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between the East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind”, destiny, and so on.” (*Orientalism*, Intro. 2) It is my intention here to consider the lessons Said offers to Western and non-Western readers alike through his thorough reading of how Western culture operates in the service of imperialism. In this book he examines Western culture, from Jane Austen to Salman Rushdie in an attempt to account for the roots of imperialism in European culture. What follows is a sample of Said’s analysis of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* as exemplifying his investigation into literary and cultural representations of imperialism.

In the introduction to his famous collection of Critical Essays on Jane Austen, Ian Watt argues that “Jane Austen's works have certainly provoked those who have written about them to reveal as much about themselves as about the novels.” (Watt 1) Watt's subtle observation seems to be most pertinent to Edward Said's reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Literary opinion on Jane Austen has generally shifted from regarding her as that popular eighteenth century English writer whose major concern was the portrayal of provincial middle class society to the perception that Austen is a writer who relies on irony to drive home specific moral judgments. Traditional scholarly attention is, in the case of Jane Austen, marked by two divergent attitudes: one views her as “auntie” Jane, that untutored genius with a flair for telling stories about love and marriage, whilst the other considers her a very serious writer.

Said enumerates Western writers, notably in the nineteenth century, who represented Orientalism's asseverations. To these one may add the views of the American military and political analyst, Samuel Huntington who purports that the world remains caught up in a "clash of civilizations" among large cultural groups and that Islam seems to be the most threatening of these to Western civilization today. Alongside this view, we have witnessed today the re-emergence of this "fixed status" (Said, *Orientalism Revisited* 16) of Islam and the Muslims. The following words by Francis Fukuyama published in an American newspaper commenting on the September 11 explosions reflect this idea: "But there does seem to be something about Islam... that makes Muslim societies particularly resistant to modernity". However, another academic trend has always maintained that the representation of what is Arabic or Islamic has always been determined by the contemporary political and economic forces. The efforts of scholars who attempt to defy traditional Orientalist scholarship that wear the masks of neutrality and objectivity like R.W.Southern, Norman Daniel, Maxime Rodinson, Yves Lacostes and Jackie Kaye, belong to the second trend. On the other hand, we have the work of Arab scholars who have attempted to dispute the authority and apparent objectivity of an "Orientalism" deeply rooted in the practices of the European colonial powers. Among these, Edward Said, Abdallah Laroui, Anwar Abdel Malek, Amine Maalouf and Nasr Hamid Abouzeid stand out as prominent contemporary figures who themselves have suffered the havocs of imperialism and colonialism.

While Said's *Orientalism* is mainly concerned with the representation of the "Oriental" Arab in Western academic tradition, his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) offers a more general meaning of Orientalism as a style of thought based upon an epistemological and ontological distinction made between the "Orient" and the "Occident".

Edward Said and the Lessons of Reading

Faten I.Morsy

The pursuit of knowledge is mainly a historical act. Our selection of certain 'past' texts is done for certain strategic reasons, for we are continuously involved in a process of re-producing the 'meaning' and 'value' of literary texts in the 'past' to forge our present and future times. Thus, notions of 'objectivity', 'impartiality', and 'disinterestedness' should be given up altogether in studying 'the past' and 'past meanings', in favour of an analysis of the process and institutions of reproduction in which such 'timeless essences' are given material form. Thus, the meaning of a given text depends on its value and use, i.e. what that text means to us now, how it is read now or produced in the culture of the new millennium. For example, we study texts like medieval folk war epics to discover that what the meanings of such texts *were* are what they *are* now and what makes them still valid is to view them in relation to contemporary discourses of power, coercion and imperialism, on the one hand, and confrontation and resistance on the other.

In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said's primary aim was to demonstrate that the image of the Arab in the eyes of the Occidental European had never been a unified or clear-cut one. He brilliantly tried to explain that the image had been in a constant act of reshaping depending on political, economic and ideological 'realities' of the particular historical moment. Indeed, a look at the corpus of literature dedicated to the study of Arabism or Islam would conclude that there has been traditionally two main scholarly attitudes. The first, is supposedly practiced by mainstream academic thought who confined their views of what is Arabic or Islamic in terms of a fixed status of an object to be passively perceived by Western eyes. In his famous *Orientalism* Edward