

ing school in New England, where I experienced for the first time the beauty of snow. I'd never seen snow before.

*But the school was disastrous?*

It was terrible. I should note, by the way, that all along I was very clever at school, and got good grades, so they couldn't completely banish me. At the school I went to in New England—I'd rather not mention the name because it's quite a well-known school—you had to get up at an ungodly hour and do things like milk the cows, and there was a lot of evangelical stuff. I had been so fantastically well trained in the English system that when I came to the United States, it was academically a lark. But the rest of it was quite bad. And there, too, I fell afoul of the system. My impression of it was that I was frowned on for my character or absence of it, something of that sort. So, although at the end of two years I graduated as a senior with the highest average in the school, I still wasn't named either salutatorian or valedictorian. When I tried to inquire, I was told that I didn't meet the moral requirements. And I've never forgiven them that particular infringement on my achievement.

*You describe your book, Culture and Imperialism, as an exile's book. So you're really a creature whose current interest is very much controlled by the conflict between the culture in which you were born and the culture in which you now live. Do you think that in a sense we should all be intellectual exiles? You seem to see exile as a salutary thing.*

I don't know any other condition, to tell you the truth. I'm fifty-seven years old. I went back to Palestine last year, after forty-five years. I took my children and my wife came along, and the four of us trudged bravely around and visited the West Bank and Gaza and all the rest of it, and then we went and saw the house where I was born. And you know, it was patently clear to me that I could never go back. It was nice to be able to visit it after all these years; it wasn't so nice to see what's become of it, from my point of view, because it's irrecoverable in some ways. What must it be like to be completely at home? I don't really know. I suppose it's sour grapes that I now think it's maybe not worth the effort to find out.

*Initially, I think you tried to keep literature and politics relatively separate. On one side would be academic study of English literature and on the other your political concerns. I think you led what you called a "very schizophrenic life." How did you find a way to bridge these interests?*

The fact is that all of us live in the world. I suppose it was just a matter of time and the right event. In my case it was during the 1967 war. I'd been this well-behaved academic; I'd done all the right things—gone to college, gone to graduate school, got a Ph.D., got a job, had fellowships, written books—and then in 1967 the world I knew completely fell apart. More of Palestine, or the rest of Palestine, was taken by the Israelis—the West Bank and Gaza—and I suddenly found myself drawn back to the area. I've never taught the literature of the Middle East—I've taught some Arabic books in translation, but basically all my work has been in Western literature. So I started to accommodate myself to the somewhat repressed or suppressed part of my history which was Arab. I did several things: I started to go back to the Middle East more often; I got married in the Middle East to a Middle Eastern woman; and then in 1972-73 I took a sabbatical year in Beirut, and for the first time in my life undertook a systematic study of Arabic philology and the classics of the Arabic tradition. By that time the Palestinian movement had been involved in a catastrophic clash with the Jordanians. Because a lot of my family lived in Jordan, I had been in Amman visiting relatives in 1970. When I was there I saw some friends of mine from college, Palestinians, who had gone back and joined the movement. It was quite a shock to see them there and realize that they, too, had gotten involved. Gradually, after the movement moved to Beirut—my family lived in Beirut by that time, in the seventies—I got more and more involved in the politics of the Palestinian struggle. That naturally honed my interest in issues of dispossession, exile, the political struggle for human rights, the struggle to express what is inexpressible, and a whole set of things that since that time have molded my work. My book *Orientalism* really came out of that experience.

*Orientalism is one of your most influential books, and what you do there is look at how the Arab or Eastern world is represented in and by the West. And basically it has been misrepresented.*

All representation is misrepresentation of one sort or another, but I argue in *Orientalism* that the interests at work in the representation of the Orient by the West were those of imperial control and were the prerogatives of power. I tried to show that the invasion of the Orient, beginning with Napoleon at the end of the eighteenth century but continuing as Britain and France spread into the Orient, colored and in-