

Requiem for Edward Said

LINDA HUTCHEON

Where can any of us begin to talk about our loss? I was Edward's Vice-President when he was President of the Modern Language Association in 1999, but before that and after, I was lucky enough to be his friend. A few years ago, I had the honour of writing and delivering the citation when Edward was given an honorary doctorate at the University of Toronto where I teach. I began my citation in this way:

"Passion, courage, boldness:" these words—as I can testify from personal experience—are *not* the usual ones used to describe professors of English and comparative literature, either inside or outside the academy. But "passion, courage, boldness" are the words you *begin* with when you try to describe Edward Said. From there, you move on to talk about his fierce intellectual independence and equally fierce integrity, before passing on to his exhilarating originality and creativity. Edward Said is a radically innovative thinker who has changed forever the face of literary studies: by demanding that criticism be "worldly" and therefore acknowledge its investment in the political realm, he has exercised a powerful moral pressure on the academy.

The very thought of now having to put those verbs about Edward in the past tense is a sorrowful thought, but the realization that his impact is still very much in the present tense (as this issue testifies) is a comforting one.

Many others have addressed Edward's impact on the political scene as well as on the academy, and in particular have noted his seminal role in the creation of the field of postcolonial studies. Since a large part of my personal and professional association with Edward centred around music, however, I do not want us to forget that this generous and gifted man was also the music critic for *The Nation*, and, as a professional-level pianist, he could occasionally be persuaded to perform in public. In 1991 he published his Welles Library Lectures as *Musical Elaborations*—a provocative study of the cultural, political, and social implications of performance (for listener as well as performer) in Western music. One of his last published essays (again in *The Nation*) was on Beethoven's late style. His long friendship with the Israeli pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim not only yielded splendid public discussions in places like Carne-

gie Hall, and a new English version of Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* for performance with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, but a few years ago the two of them joined with cellist Yo-Yo Ma to convene a group of 78 Arab and Israeli musicians (aged 18 to 25) for three weeks of master classes and joint performances. This was all in the name of musical—and political—understanding.

Always committed, always passionate, always willing to put himself on the line for what he believed—be it Palestine, literature, or music—Edward Said was always in great demand as a speaker, in person and through the media. He became a familiar face, a familiar voice, a familiar aid to understanding the complexities of the world and of art. When Edward was awarded the Netherlands's first "Spinoza Lens," the citation for this important prize said it all: it was given in recognition of "his vast body of work in the area of politics and culture—work in which he shows his penetrating understanding of the ethical foundations which underlie international relations, particularly those between East and West."

But to stop there—at the public contributions of Edward Said—would be to miss the private man, the human qualities his students and colleagues, family and friends came to value so highly: his warmth and generosity, his deep caring for others—even at times when personal worries should have been uppermost in his mind. The man who taught us so much about the meaning of "beginnings" (the title of one of his most important books) has, in recent years, also taught us even more about the dignity and bravery of endings. That is only one of the reasons why I was able to say in that citation that the name Edward Said quite simply *means* "passion, courage, and boldness."