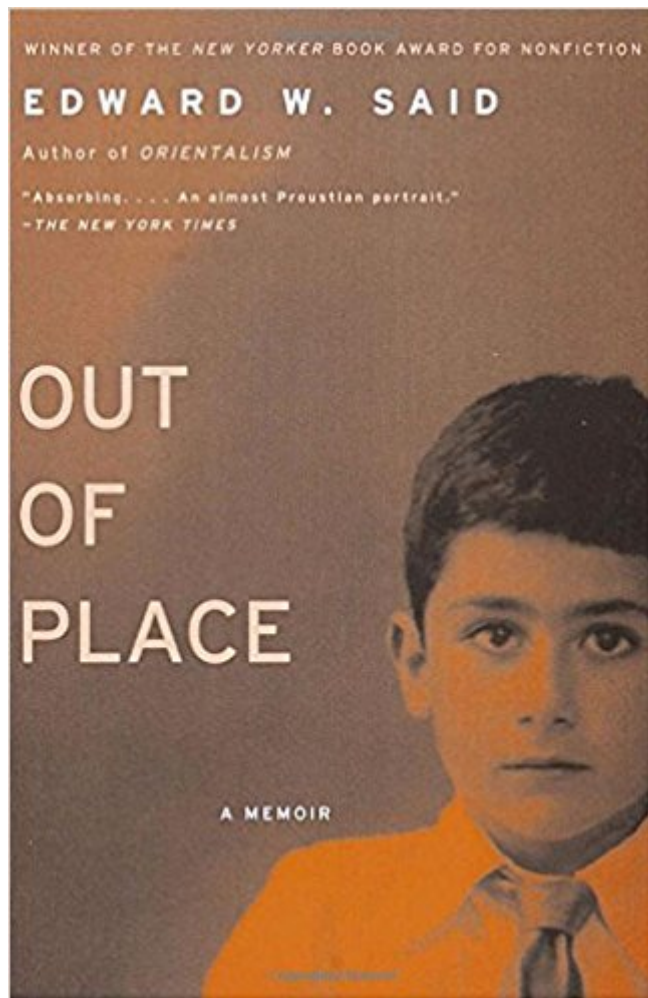


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# Out Of Place: A Memoir



## Synopsis

From one of the most important intellectuals of our time comes an extraordinary story of exile and a celebration of an irrecoverable past. A fatal medical diagnosis in 1991 convinced Edward Said that he should leave a record of where he was born and spent his childhood, and so with this memoir he rediscovers the lost Arab world of his early years in Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt. Said writes with great passion and wit about his family and his friends from his birthplace in Jerusalem, schools in Cairo, and summers in the mountains above Beirut, to boarding school and college in the United States, revealing an unimaginable world of rich, colorful characters and exotic eastern landscapes. Underscoring all is the confusion of identity the young Said experienced as he came to terms with the dissonance of being an American citizen, a Christian and a Palestinian, and, ultimately, an outsider. Richly detailed, moving, often profound, *Out of Place* depicts a young man's coming of age and the genesis of a great modern thinker.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Edward Said is one of the most celebrated cultural critics of the postwar world. Of his many books of literary, political, and philosophical criticism, *Orientalism*--a brilliant analysis of how Europe came to dominate the Orient through the creation of the myth of the exotic East--and the monumental *Culture and Imperialism* are the best known. His books have redefined readers' understanding of the impact of European imperialism upon the shape of modern culture. Said's career as a thinker spans literature, politics, music, philosophy, and history. As a dispossessed Palestinian growing up

in the Middle East and subsequently living in the USA, he has witnessed the impact of the Second World War upon the Arab world, the dissolution of Palestine and the birth of Israel, the rise of Nasser and the PLO, the Lebanese Civil War, and the faltering peace process of the 1990s. As a result, the publication of Said's memoirs, *Out of Place*, is a particularly significant event. The book offers a fascinating account of the personal development of a critic and thinker who has straddled the divide between East and West, and in the process has redefined Western perceptions of the East and of the plight of Palestinian people. However, as the title suggests, Said's memoir is a far more ambivalent and at times personally painful account of his early years in Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon, as well as the often paralyzing embrace of his loving but overbearing parents. Said's memoirs are powerfully informed by his sense of personally, geographically, and linguistically "always being out of place." Born to Christian parents and caught between expressing himself in Arabic, English, and French, he evokes a vivid, but often very unhappy, portrait of growing up in Cairo and Lebanon under the crushing weight of his emotionally intense and ambitious family. The early sections of the book paint a poignant picture of the oppressive regime established over the awkward, painfully uncertain young Edward by his loving mother and expectant, unforgiving father, both of whom cast the longest emotional shadows over the book. Those expecting an account of Said's subsequent intellectual development will be disappointed; apart from the final 50 pages, which deal with Said's education at Princeton and Harvard, *Out of Place* is, as Said himself says, primarily "a record of an essentially lost or forgotten world, my early life." It is this carefully disclosed record that accounts for Said's deeply ambivalent relationship with both his family and the Palestinian cause. Composed in the light of serious illness, *Out of Place* is an elegantly written reflection on a life that has movingly come to terms with "being not quite right and out of place."

--Jerry Brotton, .co.uk --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An influential literary critic (*Culture and Imperialism*, etc.), writes movingly and honestly about his life of dislocation and exile. Prompted by a diagnosis of leukemia in 1991, Said's new book is infused with a desire to document not only a life, but a time and place. Palestine in the 1930s and '40s. That has since vanished. Born in 1935 to a Lebanese mother and Palestinian father who had American citizenship, and raised in Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon, Said has always lived with a divided identity. Even as a child he realized that his first name was British, his last name was Arabic and his nationality was American. In a straightforward, often poetic style, Said charts his family history, his education in British and American schools and his move to the U.S. in 1951 to attend Princeton and begin what was to become a distinguished career as an academic and intellectual. The memoir's

most engaging elements are the little personal details that help us understand his later work: the young Said's love of such Hollywood films as *Arabian Nights*, with Maria Montez, or the novels of Twain and Cooper, offer fresh insights into his later writings about orientalism. Said can be frank about his personal life—whether it's learning about masturbation or his intense relationship with his mother, whom he identifies as Gertrude to his *Hamlet*—which gives the book moments of deep, intimate openness. In the end, this memoir is less a tidy summing-up than an acceptance and exploration of what has been. As Said says, he has "learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place." Agent, Andrew Wylie. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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I very much connected with this book where Edward Said is narrating with great sincerity his feelings and interactions with the details influenced him and his upbringing as an Arab, Christian from rich family yet of Palestinian origin. Said reflects on his family chosen solitude and his own struggle to define himself across different worlds. The complexity of his relationship with his both parents, how he perceived them and how they placed their heavy expectations on his shoulders. The most touching parts for me where Said expresses intelligently the sorrow of losing a country the palace to come back to and how he transfers the sorrow in to creativity maintaining uncertainty and the capacity to question.

This book provides insights into the people, places and experiences that shaped the man and his ideas. I believe he is trying to provide the backdrop for how his thoughts were shaped in the numerous books he produced over the years. This is not a summary or crescendo of the big ideas he worked on or through over the course of his life.

Interesting perspective on an incredible author. The prose is not as compelling as *After the Last Sky*, but if you care for Said's books this memoir is worth your time

Arrived on time at a good price.

This is a remarkable work of a truly fascinating man. Much of the memoir is dedicated to Edward Said's relationship with his mother and father. Said recounts the history of his father, a Palestinian, who went to America and possibly fought for it in the First World War. The father Wadie, later returned to Palestine and then moved on to Cairo to establish a great business success. The father

comes across very typical Middle Eastern conservative authority figure with a rather peculiar but very strong American patriotism. Said's mother, comes across as a truly fascinating woman; a Palestinian Lebanese Christian, who possessed a great passion for music, literature and original thought. In the tradition of the Middle Eastern mothers she had a large presence in the lives of her children. She was an original woman, who felt comfortable amongst the many different cultures of the middle east, yet held on to her views, which at times were at odds with her environment. Said tells of the huge influence his mother had over him during her life and even after her death. The story of the mother's search for a passport, a nationality, her dislike of life in America, her eventual death in America are beautifully told by Said. The mother's early conversion to Nasser's cause is mentioned, it even alienated the mother from her Lebanese family, but Said never tells us where it led. I loved Said's self analysis relating his behavior to his mother: "...I seem to have absorbed her worries, her tireless concern for details, her inability ever to be calm, her way of constantly interrupting herself, preventing a continuous flow of attention or concentration on anything." Said is capable of very vivid language indeed. The school life of Said in Cairo is fascinating. He attended English Colonial schools, American and Egyptian schools in Cairo and eventually moved on to Massachusetts, Princeton and Harvard. Much of his pre college school life was problematic, at times there is too much dwelling and self-pity but it is largely interesting. On a week trip, with his mother, that for some not clearly explained reason left him indifferent to Egyptian Monuments, he says " ....I was relieved of the pressure and the continual anxiety of not getting anything right." The "out of place" theme is repeated throughout the book, at times very eloquently told, " ...the habit of always being dressed differently from the natives, any natives." I do however find it remarkable that Said does not also seem to see how well he did apparently fit everywhere outside of his early Colonial school. In fact, from his stories at the American School in Cairo, Princeton, Harvard and mostly Victoria College in Cairo, you often see a fairly popular kid with many friends. I laughed out loud at the part describing his episode of revisiting Victoria College in 1989. He bribed his way in to show his family his old classroom, and later got thrown out by a woman wearing an "Islamic-style dress". Said proceeds to describe Victoria College in 89 as a "privileged Islamic sanctuary" that expelled him twice. The fact that the first time he got expelled was due to punching a kid and sending him to the hospital for a week and the second through trespassing both by his own admission does not seem to matter, in both cases, to him it was discrimination. Victoria College is a million miles away from being an Egyptian Islamic sanctuary, with a mixed high school. Said's self pity and righteousness is at times reminiscent of the Maggie Thatcher memoir, well no, not 10% as bad but it does detract a bit from the book. There is one thing I hated about the book. Where is part

two? Edward Said gives you so much detail about his early pre political life. I read this book, because I often find myself at odds with Edward Said's political views, I wanted to know more about the man. I thoroughly enjoyed "Out of Place" but it has not satisfied my desire to understand his viewpoint. I often thought that he simply fails to understand Egyptians and Egyptian attitudes but had no idea how much time he actually lived there. This is a great book, very enjoyable and full of reflection. I gave it 4 stars only because as much as I loved it I could not bring myself to give it an identical rating to Leila Ahmed's Border Passage.

fascinating story, good writer, check out his daughter's book "looking for Palestine"

Getting to know amazing Said better. Lovely!

As an Arab living in the West, reading through this book was like a practical guide to de-construct and attempt to reconcile the many conflicting elements of my identity.

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