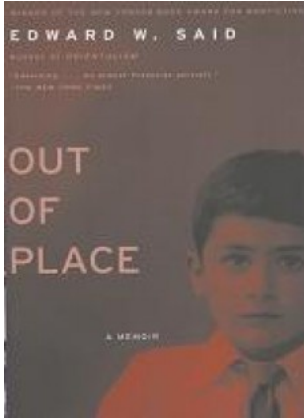


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An influential literary critic (Culture and Imperialism, etc.), writes movingly and honestly about his life of dislocation and exile. Prompted by a diagnosis of leukemia in 1991, Said's new book is infused with a desire to document not only a life, 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.