

Constructing and Representing Reality

HEGEL AND THE MAKING OF ERICH AUERBACH'S *MIMESIS*

► Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946) was profoundly influenced by George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's idealist philosophy. Hegel held that concepts determine the structure of reality: the concept of freedom in his philosophy of history and, for Auerbach, the concept of history in the representation of reality. For both, reality is inextricable from reason, rationality, consciousness, and vice versa; hence, history signifies the rise and progress of human consciousness. Auerbach also shared Hegel's view that the art of mimesis produces an image of a reality, in contrast to Plato, who thought a work of art is a resemblance opposed to reality. This paper analyzes the influence of Hegel's philosophy of history on Auerbach's conceptions of literary history, reality, and truth, as evidenced in *Mimesis's* famous first chapter, "Odysseus' Scar." Auerbach chose the Hegelian concept of reality (*Wirklichkeit*) as the subtitle of his book to advance its main thesis, opposing realism to myths and legends, rationality to the flight from reason. He refutes the claim that classical Greek myths, legends, and heroes inaugurated Western culture's representation of reality and, hence, conception of history. Instead, he finds their origins in the Old Testament, with its formulation of world, universal history, and "concept of the historically becoming," an important Hegelian concept according to which the temporal becoming and unfolding of the life of human beings is meaningful, intelligible, and should be thought of as evolutionary progress toward a certain goal or end.

[The] history of the world . . . represents the successive stages in the development of that principle whose substantial content is the consciousness of freedom.

Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1837)

The inner history of the last thousand years is the history of mankind achieving self-expression. . . . This history contains the records of man's mighty adventurous advance to a consciousness of his human condition and to the realization of his given potential.

Auerbach, "Philology and *Weltliteratur*" (1952)

Die Wirklichkeit, von der wir sprechen können, ist nie die Wirklichkeit an sich. (The reality we can put into words is never reality itself.)

Ferdinand von Schirach, *Crime: Stories* (2011)

Introduction

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, "We Germans are Hegelians, even if there had never been any Hegel, *insofar as we (as opposed to all Latin peoples) instinctively attribute a deeper meaning and greater value to becoming and development than to what 'is'*" (218; emphasis added). Erich Auerbach (1892–1957), the author of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (*Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* [1946]), was greatly influenced by George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), in whose idealist philosophy, "concepts determine the structure of reality" (Wartenberg 103) and, hence, the framework of history. The concept of freedom dominates Hegel's philosophy of history (Hodgson 7) – "*the spirit in its essential nature, i.e. as the concept of freedom*" (Hegel, *Introduction: Reason* 127)¹ or "*the concept of spirit's freedom*" (*Outlines* 316). For Auerbach, "the concept of the historically becoming" or the "concept of universal history" (*Mimesis* 23, 17) constitutes reality's "very essence" (191).

Hegel and Auerbach believed that concepts determine the framework of reality, or "*the production of a reality which corresponds to them*" (Hegel, *Introduction: Reason* 134). For example, Auerbach argues that the "concept of God held by the Jews is less a cause than a symptom of their manner of comprehending and representing things" (*Mimesis* 8). He assigns its cause to "the concept of the historically becoming." Hence, consciousness of reality or the truth is crucial to historical existence. Further, given that for Hegel "reality is always dependent on the idea" or reason and "not something on its own" (*Introduction and Oriental Philosophy* 242), it is inextricable from consciousness, reason, and truth.

In what follows, my goal is to explore the profound influence of Hegel's philosophy of history on Auerbach's conception of literary history, reality, and truth, as evident in *Mimesis's* famous first chapter, "Odysseus' Scar." There, Auerbach provides not only a long list of the essential characteristics of reality but argues that classical Greek myths, legends, and heroes did not inaugurate Western culture's representation of reality. Rather, he locates its origins in the Old Testament's conception of universal world history or its "concept of the historically becoming" (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 23), Hegel's belief that human evolution is meaningful, intelligible, and progressive. I focus on the first chapter since Auerbach insisted that "the [first] chapter on Genesis and Homer is conceived as an introduction" to the whole study.²

Elective Affinities

Auerbach and Hegel share many ideas. According to Hegel, "*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational*" (*Outlines* 14) meaning that "reason is an actual (*wirklich*) power in the world working to create the institutions of freedom" (326–27). No wonder Auerbach chose the important Hegelian concept, *Wirklichkeit*, which embodies reason, truth, and history, for the subtitle of *Mimesis* and used it to advance its main thesis: the rise of rational, historical representation of reality in European literature. In *Mimesis's* first chapter, he opposes reality to myth, rationality to the flight from reason, or the "Jewish-Israelitish realm of reality" (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 16) to "Homer's realism" (23) and classical Greek myths, legends, and heroes. Hegel thought, "Reason is the Sovereign of the World"; hence, "the history of the world . . . presents us with a rational process" (*Philosophy of History* 9). Likewise, literary history in *Mimesis* is based on rationality or "the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject matter for problematic-existential representation" (491).

Hegel uses the term *concept* to signify a set of "philosophical categories that contain an accurate description of the real," according to which "*the things that there are have reality only insofar as they reflect the structure of these concepts*" (Wartenberg 102–3; Wallace 92–96). Thus, the concept (*Begriff*)³ determines the structure of reality.⁴ In Hegel's philosophy of history, the framework is determined by the concept of *freedom*—the history of the world "*represents the successive stages in the development of that principle whose substantial content is the consciousness of freedom*" (Hegel, *Introduction: Reason* 129–30). Likewise for Auerbach, the concept of "the historically becoming"

(Auerbach, *Mimesis* 23) determines the course and progress of history, or “the records of man’s mighty adventurous advance to a consciousness of his human condition and to the realization of his given potential” (Auerbach, “Philology” 4–5).

Both Hegel and Auerbach were historicists, believing that “human life and society found whatever meaning they might possess in history, not in any metaphysical beyond or transcendental religious realm” (White 135). According to Hegel, “in studying philosophy,” we have “to call to mind” the “character of the age.” He argues that “Philosophy is wholly identical with the spirit of its age” and that “the spirit of an age is immediately this living, actual spirit, the substantial life of the age” (Hegel, *Introduction and Oriental Philosophy* 66–67). Aesthetically, he continues, “every work of art belongs to its own time, its own people, its own environment, and depends on particular historical and other ideas and purposes.” Hence, “to whatever age a work of art belongs, it always carries details in itself which separate it from the characteristics proper to other people and other centuries” (*Aesthetics* 1:14, 264). Auerbach explains that his aesthetic, historicist humanism

is based on historicism, i.e., on the conviction that every civilization and every period has its own possibilities of aesthetic perfection; that the works of arts of the different peoples and periods, as well as their general forms of life, must be understood as products of variable individual conditions, and have to be judged each by its own development, not by absolute rules of beauty and ugliness (Auerbach, *Vico* 183–84; cf. *Literary Language* 6)

Auerbach shares Hegel’s teleological view of history as a unique swath of time revealing human progress; this view is in terms of reason and freedom for Hegel, and self-expression for Auerbach. They both believe that the structure of history, its course and progress, are embodied in a larger project: for Hegel, the evolution of the social and political world is based on the spirit, or its essence, the concept of freedom; for Auerbach, the evolution of literary representation of reality is based on the concept of history:

Imitation of reality is imitation of the sensory experience of life on earth – among the most essential characteristics of which would seem to be its possessing a history, its changing and developing. Whatever degree of freedom the imitating artist may be granted in his work, he cannot be allowed to deprive reality of this characteristic, which is its very essence. (*Mimesis* 191; emphasis added)

Following Hegel, Auerbach believes that the cause of historical change is a gradual awakening of our consciousness of the human condition. Deepening consciousness is what drives history forward; reason, freedom, and truth—the truth of consciousness⁵—culminate in the ideas of the French Revolution for Hegel, or the works of the nineteenth-century French realists for Auerbach. In the midst of the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15), which spread the ideas of the French Revolution throughout Europe, Hegel declared in 1806: “Gentlemen! We find ourselves in an important epoch, in a fermentation, in which Spirit has made a leap forward, has gone beyond its previous concrete form and acquired a new one.”⁶ A year later, he wrote in the same vein: “[I]t is not hard to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation” (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 6–7).⁷ Auerbach argues that the “inner history of the last thousand years is the history of mankind achieving self-expression: this is what philology, a historicist discipline, treats” (Auerbach, “Philology” 4–5).

Auerbach fully acknowledges Hegel’s influence on his work. “I used [Hegelian ideas] as the basis of a study of Dante’s realism,” he writes (*Mimesis* 194), referring to *Dante: Poet of the Secular World* (1929). He finds Hegel’s expression, “changeless existence” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 2: 1103) to describe the experience of Dante’s inhabitants of the three realms, “one of the most beautiful passages ever written on Dante” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 191).⁸

Mimesis can be described as “a modified Hegelian model in which literary discourses play the role of historic-political forces. A humanist ideology of progress is built into this model, with the nineteenth-century ‘realistic’ French novel serving as a provisional end-point” (Brownlee 156). Auerbach closely follows Hegel, who believed that reality is knowable, in clear contrast to Kant.⁹ This belief is the cornerstone of *Mimesis*; namely, that writers in different periods describe the reality, the historical reality, in which they live. Auerbach writes that the French realist Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880) “believes that the truth of the phenomenal world is also revealed in linguistic expression” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 486).

The Art of *Mimesis*

Following Hegel, Auerbach adopts the Aristotelian concept of imitative art as an expression of the universal element in human life.¹⁰ Such a view

stands in clear contrast to Plato, who finds reality only in celestial ideas. Based on his Theory of Forms—the view that nonmaterial abstract (but substantial) forms (or ideas), not the material world of change known to us through sensation, possess the highest, most fundamental reality—Plato denounces “poetry” as “injurious to the minds which do not possess the antidote in a knowledge of its real nature.” Given that the “art of representation” is “a long way from reality,” he continues, “all poetry, from Homer onwards, consists in representing a semblance of its subject” with “no grasp of the reality.” In sum, “Dramatic poetry has a most formidable power of corrupting even men of high character” (Plato 10: 324, 328, 331, 337) and is unsuitable for educating the guardians of his ideal state.

In contrast, Aristotle argues that a work of art is a likeness or reproduction of an original, not a symbolic representation of it, and imitates not nature, but “men in action” (Aristotle, *Poetics* 11). However, it eliminates the transient and particular to reveal the permanent and essential. Its highest form, poetry, “tends to express the universal; history the particular” (35). By imitating the universal, art imitates the ideal. In this sense, the artwork is an idealist representation of human life through character, emotion, and action, forms manifest to the senses. If Plato finds sensible phenomena mere shadows that, at best, remind us of Being, Aristotle stresses Becoming, a process of development, the unfolding of what is already in the germ. Concrete individual things are the primary reality, and art, the manifestation of their higher truth, their expression of the universal.¹¹

Hegel follows Aristotle on the art of mimesis. For him, art’s goal is “to raise itself, in free independence, to the truth in which it fulfills itself independently and conformably with its own ends alone . . . in this, its freedom alone, is fine art truly art.” More specifically, like “religion and philosophy,” art “is simply one way of bringing to our minds and expressing the *Divine*, the deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit.” True art displays “the depth of a supra-sensuous world”; it is “the freedom of intellectual reflection which rescues itself from the *here* and now, called sensuous reality and finitude.” Only “beyond the immediacy of feeling and external objects is genuine actuality to be found.” Here lies art’s important role in Hegel’s idealism: “Art liberates the true content of phenomena from the pure appearance and deception of this bad, transitory world, and gives them a higher actuality, born of the spirit” (*Aesthetics* 1:7–9). Accordingly, “a work of art is such only because, originating from the spirit, it now belongs to the territory of the spirit; it has received the baptism of the

spiritual and sets forth only what has been formed in harmony with the spirit.” For Hegel, “the work of art stands higher than any natural product which has not made this journey through the spirit” (1: 29).

Auerbach agrees that one of the most essential characteristics of imitation of reality, or “imitation of the sensory experience of life on earth,” is “its possessing a history, its changing and developing” (*Mimesis* 191). Both Hegel and Auerbach find reality, not in the static realm of eternal forms, but in the course and progress of human history.

Hegel: History, Reality, and Truth

Hegel’s idealist philosophy seeks “to provide us with the developmental plan for reality”; to reveal “the idea of a self-actualizing reality, just as our idea of a plant allows us to see it as a self-actualizing entity” (Wartenberg 110). He held that the “Idea contains the inner determination of self-knowledge and activity. For the Idea is the eternal inner life of God, the logical nexus which is present, as it were, even before the creation of the world” (Hegel, *Introduction: Reason* 77).¹² Idea, or reason,¹³ “inner determination,” historical “development,” spirit, rationality, and reality are closely connected:

But the principle of development . . . contains an inner determination, a potentially present condition which has still to be realized. This formal determination is an essential one; the spirit, whose theatre, province, and sphere of realization is the history of the world, is not something which drifts aimlessly amidst the superficial play of contingent happenings, but is in itself the absolute determining factor. (Introduction: Reason 126)¹⁴

The history of the world is not based on aimless, “non-rational necessity of a blind destiny,” or “a superficial play of contingent, so-called ‘merely human’ strivings and passions.” On the contrary, it “is the necessary development out of the concept of spirit’s freedom alone, of the moments of reason and so of the self-consciousness and freedom of spirit. This development is the exposition [*Auslegung*] and actualization of the universal spirit” (Hegel, *Outlines* 316).¹⁵ Conversely, history’s “essence is the idea, while its appearance unfolds in contingency and in the field of arbitrariness” (Hegel, *Science of Logic* 44; emphasis added). Hegel’s idealism is “a form of conceptualism, a theory that holds that concepts are the most basic objects in reality and the things that there are have reality only insofar as they reflect the structure of these concepts” (Wartenberg 103; emphasis added).

Within history, the spirit, or freedom, is actualized. Reality is inextricable from reason because it cannot be understood without it: “Reason is the *substance* of the Universe; viz., that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence.” Accordingly, “The only Thought which Philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of History, is the simple conception of *Reason*; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process” (Hegel, *Philosophy of History* 9). Again, “*the history of the world is a rational process, the rational and necessary evolution of the world spirit*” (*Introduction: Reason* 29).

The main thesis of Hegel’s philosophy of history is that “‘Idea’ or ‘Reason’ is the *True*, the *Eternal*, the absolutely *powerful* essence,” which “reveals itself in the World,” and in that “World, nothing else is revealed but this and its honor and glory” (Hegel, *Philosophy of History* 9–10). Hegel believes that “the world looks rationally back” only at he “who looks at the world rationally” (11; see also *Introduction: Reason* 29). Hence, “It is only an inference from the history of the world, that its development has been a rational process; that the history in question has constituted the rational necessary course of the World-Spirit—that Spirit whose nature is always one and the same, but which unfolds this, its one nature, in the phenomena of the World’s existence. This must . . . present itself as the ultimate *result* of history” (*Philosophy of History* 10).

Spirit is the main agent in history, not the mere play of irrational contingencies, but “*the necessary development out of the concept of spirit’s freedom alone, of the moments of reason and so of the self-consciousness and freedom of spirit*” (Hegel, *Outlines* 316). In other words, “history relates the development of freedom” (Kaufmann 260). Seeing that the “spirit in general is the basis of history, in which it unfolds itself in the various forms which we call nations” (Hegel, *Introduction: Reason* 209), it determines the course and progress of history: “world history, as a whole is the expression of the spirit in time” or of “*that principle whose substantial content is the consciousness of freedom*” (128–30). Freedom, then, is not an abstract term but signifies “*a knowledge and affirmation of such universal and substantial objects as law and justice, and the production of a reality which corresponds to them – i.e. the state*” (134).

Behind contingent historical events, changes, and transformations, spirit stands as an “*absolute determining factor*,” directing and regulating the course and progress of history (126). The “spiritual alone is the *actual*” (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 14; emphasis added); hence, “things

gathered from experience” are considered “to be the untrue, to be *appearances*”; “the *actual*” is “the unity of the essence and concrete existence” (*Science of Logic* 89, 236). Likewise, “actuality is the unity of essence and concrete existence” (465). Hegel further analyzes the difference between *appearance* and *actuality*: “it is just as important that philosophy come to understand that its content [*Inhalt*]” turned “into a *world*, namely the outer and inner world of consciousness, or that its content is *actuality* [*die Wirklichkeit*]. We call the immediate consciousness of this content *experience*.” Consequently, “Any sensible consideration of the world discriminates between what in the broad realm of outer and inner existence [*Dasein*] is merely *appearance*, transitory and insignificant, and what truly merits the name *actuality*” (33).¹⁶ Reason “grasps the truth not by avoiding particularity and positivity, but precisely *in* what really is (which also means that it grasps not just the appearance, but rather the reality which forces itself into existence.)” In sum, the “universal has to pass into actuality through the particular” (Welch 1: 93).

To prove this point, Hegel turned to Aristotle’s distinction between potentiality and actuality, or to the developmental process in which “the potentialities of an entity become actualized, thereby *becoming* that which it was not” (Wartenberg 111). More specifically, in nature, “*nothing can intrude between*” an organism’s “*concept [essence] and its realization, between the inherently determined nature of the germ and the actual existence which corresponds to it.*” However, in “*the world of the spirit,*” conscious will intervenes: “*The [developmental] process whereby its inner determination is translated into reality is mediate by consciousness and will.*” For both natural organism and spirit, the developmental process “*involves the realization of an end whose content is determinate*”; meaning, “*it is the spirit in its essential nature, i.e. as the concept of freedom.*” In sum, the “concept of the spirit is such that historical development must take place in the temporal world” (Hegel, *Introduction: Reason* 126–27).

Reason and truth, rationality and history, actuality and reality are inextricable: “Reason is the purposive activity of which the truth is the goal. An event is *rational* if it serves some purpose, attains some ideal” (Solomon 180). This contention is the basis of Hegel’s famous dictum, “*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational*” (*Outlines* 14), and the source of his conception of history or “concept of the historically becoming,” which Auerbach uses in *Mimesis* (23). As Hegel wrote, the “realized purpose, or the existent actuality, is movement and un-

folded becoming” (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 12). Becoming means transformation “from the form of possibility into the form of existence” (*Introduction and Oriental Philosophy* 50–51).

All these important concepts, including spirit, whose goal is freedom, are evolving in history, and history is assigned the crucial role of relating their development (Kaufmann 260) since the “will of the spirit is to fulfill its own concept”; namely, “the concept of freedom” (Hegel, *Introduction: Reason* 127). And seeing that the “concept of the spirit is such that historical development must take place in the temporal world,” the developmental process whereby the spirit’s “*inner determination is translated into reality is mediated by consciousness and will*” (126, emphasis original). Spirit determines the course and progress of history: “world history, as a whole is the expression of the spirit in time” (128).

Auerbach intentionally chose as the subtitle of *Mimesis* the important Hegelian concept reality (*Wirklichkeit*), meaning actuality, the activity of making reason actual, which embodies reason, truth, history, and rationality. For Hegel, the actual (*Wirklich*) or actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) means “fully developed, matured, in the case of Spirit or Truth, explicit,” in contrast to “potentiality, possible.” Hegel’s famous tautology – the rational is actual and the actual is rational – means “what is fully developed according to its own internal principles is rational, and vice versa.” Therefore, rational signifies “necessary, fully developed in accordance with its internal principle” and leads to the concept of the *real*, which is “an object of consciousness.” In Hegel’s developmental plan, truth means “not just the object of science and knowledge, but the *goal* of every human endeavor; in fact, truth means ‘goal.’ The truth of art is beauty, the truth of ethics is right action, the truth of religion is God” (Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* 274–75, 282, 285; see also Geiger).

In the first chapter of *Mimesis*, Auerbach addresses truth as the goal of history. He chooses the Hegelian concept of *Wirklichkeit* to advance the main thesis of *Mimesis*: reality against Aryan myths and legends and rationality against the Nazi flight from reason.¹⁷ He asserts that classical Greek myths, legends, and heroes are not the source of Western culture’s representation of reality and, hence, history. Its origins lie in the Old Testament, with its concept of a universal world history and teleology, or “the historically becoming” toward apotheosis.¹⁸

Two Modes of Representing Reality: Homer and the Old Testament

In “Odysseus’ Scar,” Auerbach compares two ancient epic texts, the Homeric heroic poems and the Old Testament, “and the two styles they embody, in order to reach a starting point for an investigation into the literary representation of reality in European culture” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 23). Based on such Hegelian concepts as reality, history, and truth and “*the production of a reality which corresponds to them*” (Hegel, *Introduction: Reason* 134), Auerbach provides a long and various list of literary strategies for representing reality in both texts, which stand at the roots of Western literature.

Given that “Odysseus’ Scar” introduces *Mimesis*, Auerbach aims to reveal the contrasting modes of comprehending and representing reality in Homer on the one hand, and the Old Testament on the other: “foreground” vs. “background” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 11–12); culture of “heroes” and “legend” vs. “historical reality” (13); “legendary” vs. “historical truth” (14); “legend” and “make-believe” vs. “absolute claim to historical truth” (13–14); “simple ‘reality’” vs. “historically true reality” (15); “simply narrated ‘reality’” vs. “universal history” (15–16); “no development” of characters vs. “more fully developed” figures who had a “distinct stamp of individuality” (17–18);¹⁹ “legendary” characters vs. “historical characters” (18); “legendary” reality vs. “historical reality” (18–19); “legend” vs. “history” (19); “simple and straightforward” description detached from “contemporary historical context” vs. description that runs “contradictorily, and confusedly” (19); “legend” vs. “historicity” (20); “legendary simplification of events” vs. “more concrete, direct and historical impression” (20); “ruling class” vs. “the people” (21); “a smoothing down and harmonizing of events” vs. “profound historicity” and “profound social activity” (20, 22); “separation of styles” vs. the unification of “the sublime, tragic, and problematic” (22); and finally, “few elements of historical development and of psychological perspective” vs. “development of the concept of historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic” (23). These important distinctions greatly contribute to the profound differences between “Homer’s realism” and that of the Old Testament (23), their “comprehending reality” (16), and their radically different presentation and representation of reality.

It is not hard to discern to which style Auerbach attaches more importance in the development of “the literary representation of reality in European culture” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 23). He clearly plays down

the role of Greek classical culture and elevates to the utmost the role of the Old Testament. Further, he sees Greek culture as devoid of history, reason, the real, and truth, which are inextricable in his mind from comprehending and, hence, representing reality.

History actualizes and realizes concepts in time. If real things reflect the structure of concepts, historical consciousness is required to represent the particular in such a way as to show the universal. In light of Hegel's connection between the rational and the actual, history shows the "necessary, fully developed in accordance with its internal principle" (Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* 274–75).²⁰ For Auerbach, too, representation of reality is based on, and inseparable from, historical consciousness.

Auerbach also thinks that history has meaning and evolves toward consciousness of the human condition through the development of rational means to represent reality. The progress of literary history is based on "the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject matter for problematic-existential representation" (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 491). Social and political progress, equality and freedom, are part of "man's mighty adventurous advance to a consciousness of his human condition and to the realization of his given potential" (Auerbach, "Philology" 4–5). Auerbach inherits this teleological view of history from Hegel: "the social world and its evolution" are "embodied within a larger project, in which being itself is supposed to attain a more actual and manifest state." In other words, it is "through historical evolution" that "*being is made actual and known to itself.*" In Hegel's unique ontology, "being is not given at the outset as finished and actual, but rather *evolves* toward actuality." Even God "develops, evolves in stages, mediated by the temporal becoming of the world-spirit, that is, by human history" (Yovel 1–3).

In the context of the concept of the historically becoming, Auerbach emphasizes that the Old Testament stories evolve toward history and, hence, reality. The "Old Testament comes closer and closer to history as the narrative proceeds" (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 19). The Homeric poems in contrast deal with heroes, myths, and legends that do not develop in structure and intrinsic or extrinsic (narrative) time and even rhythmically rely on repeated descriptive tropes. In the Old Testament, reality is not mere appearance—what you see is what you get—as in a Homeric poem, which "exists for itself, contains nothing but itself" (13).

Hegel, too, thought legends inferior to history: "for legends and traditions are but obscure records [of actual events], and are accordingly the products of nations . . . whose consciousness is still obscure."

Likewise, he argues that the “use of myth is generally incapacity, an inability to get a grip on the form of thought,” or reality. To “something not belonging to the thought people readily cling, but this leads to false ideas in regard of the matter in hand” (Hegel, *Introduction: Reason* 12, 158).

Auerbach follows Hegel’s distinction between appearance and reality: “Art liberates the true content of the phenomena from *the pure appearance and deception of this bad, transitory world*, and gives them a higher actuality, born of the spirit” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1: 9; emphasis added). Likewise, Hegel argues and Auerbach concurs that “Greek philosophies” claim “we know appearance only.” In “the background there is not still a ‘beyond,’ something struggled for, a being, a thing-in-itself which would be known.” The Greeks see “nothing outside or alongside appearance,” and their work is concrete: “no knowledge of being or truth is asserted.” In contrast, “modern subjective philosophies”—which hold that reality is the product of human creative activity—are based on the belief that “behind the subjective, behind appearance, there stands another truth.” Greek philosophers had “perfect peace and satisfaction in appearance,” and “the specific naïveté of their thought is that this opposition of thinking and being was not there for them.” According to “the naïveté of Greek philosophy, appearance itself was the entire sphere of knowledge” (Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures* 181–82). Auerbach contrasted the Greek and biblical worldviews. The contrast in Hegel is between an older and a newer worldview.

Based on the distinction between appearance and reality, Auerbach writes, the “Homeric poems,” though “their intellectual, linguistic, and above all syntactical culture appears so much more highly developed, *are yet comparatively simple in their picture of human beings, and no less in their relation to the real life which they describe in general*” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 13, emphasis added). Their world of heroes, legends, and myths “exists for itself, contains nothing but itself” and thus has nothing to do with “historically true reality.” Auerbach is very critical:

. . . we may see the heroes in their ordinary life, and seeing them so, may take pleasure in their manner of enjoying their savory present, a present which sends strong roots down into social usage, landscape, and daily life. And thus they bewitch us and ingratiate themselves to us until we live with them in the reality of their lives; so long as we are reading or hearing the poems, it does not matter whether we know that *all this is only legend*, “make-believe.” *The oft-repeated reproach that Homer is a liar takes nothing from his effectiveness, he does not need to base his story on historical real-*

ity, his reality is powerful enough in itself; it ensnares us, weaving its web around us, and that suffices him. And this “real” world into which we are lured, exists for itself, contains nothing but itself; the Homeric poems conceal nothing, they contain no teaching and no secret second meaning. (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 13; emphasis added)

In contrast, “the Biblical stories” do not aim “to bewitch the senses”; the “moral, religious, and psychological phenomena which are their sole concern are made concrete in the sensible matter of life,” and “*their religious intent involves an absolute claim to historical truth.*” The stories of Odysseus and of Abraham and Isaac are both “legendary,” yet the “Biblical narrator, the Elohist, had to believe in the objective truth of the story of Abraham’s sacrifice—the existence of the sacred ordinances of life rested upon the truth of this and similar stories.” He may also be a liar, “but he had to be a conscious liar—no harmless liar like Homer, who lied to give pleasure, but a political liar with a definite end in view, *lying in the interest of a claim to absolute authority.*” Although his narrative “was not primarily oriented toward ‘realism’ . . . it was oriented toward truth. *Woe to the man who did not believe it!*” Responsible for conveying the revealed Word, the story carries a purpose far beyond entertainment: “*the Bible’s claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer’s, it is tyrannical—it excludes all other claims. The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy*” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 14–15; emphasis added).

Sense of history, then, historical consciousness, is one of the main differences between the Homeric and biblical representations of reality; the first is legendary, content with gestures, while in striving toward truth, the second delves into the human historical, existential condition, richly describing motivation, emotional responses, and context. Hegel’s influence on Auerbach’s elision of history and truth is evident; according to Hegel, “thought is concrete”; the “concrete is truth”; and “this truth is brought forth only by means of thinking” (Hegel, *Introduction and Oriental* 49). History is essential to the discovery of truth because “our true nature is to come to understand ourselves through a process of historical development and to produce a new world in the process” and “because genuinely historical, as opposed to natural, change is generated by our gradual awakening to our true nature.” In sum, “the deepening” of our consciousness of truth “drives history forward” (Houlgate, *Introduction* 21–22).²¹ Auerbach also believes consciousness is essential to any representation of reality, or our gradual awakening to our existential condition.

For this reason, they are suspicious and contemptuous of mythology. Hegel notes that “Plato inveighed against the mythology of the poets, and in the *Republic* he wanted to see Homer’s and Hesiod’s tales about the gods banned from education” (Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures* 140). He claims that Greek “mythology is indeed in general only an idle invention of fables,” and “the stories reported to us” in it “would have to be regarded both as wholly beneath the dignity of the Absolute and as purely inadequate and tasteless inventions” or “mythological productions.” For example, “the twelve labours of Hercules” or when we “hear that Zeus has hurled Hephaestus down from Olympus on to the island Lemnos so that as a result Hephaestus has a limp, *we believe that this is to be understood as nothing but a fabulous picture drawn by imagination*” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1: 309–10; emphasis added).

In contrast, Auerbach finds that “[t]he Scripture stories do not, like Homer’s, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us—they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected, we are rebels” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 15; emphasis added). A different mode of comprehending reality led to radically different modes of representing reality. If Homer “simply narrated ‘reality,’” the biblical stories are totally different: “Doctrine and promise are incarnate in them and inseparable from them” (15). This view leads again to Hegel, who argued that:

Everything existent . . . has truth only in so far as it is an existence of the Idea. For the Idea is alone the genuinely actual. *Appearance, in other words, is not true simply because it has an inner or outer existence, or because it is reality as such, but only because this reality corresponds with the Concept* [essence]. Only in that event has existence actuality and truth . . . a situation in its reality is itself a realization of the Concept. If this identity is not established, then, the existent is *only an appearance* in which, not the total Concept but only one abstract side of it objectified . . . Thus it is only the reality which is adequate to the Concept which is *a true reality, true indeed because in it the Idea brings itself into existence.* (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1: 110–11; emphasis added)

Reality “is always dependent on the idea, [it] is not something on its own.” (Hegel, *Introduction and Oriental* 242, 50–51).

In this light, Auerbach argues that the biblical stories “are fraught with ‘background’ and mysterious, containing a second, concealed meaning.” Unlike Greek gods, the God of the Bible is “a hidden God,” so in contrast to the simple Homeric narrative, the biblical narrative

depicts a complex reality that requires interpretation for “its claim to absolute authority.” While Homer strives “merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours,” the biblical narrative “seeks to overcome our reality: *we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history*” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 15; emphasis added).

The priority Auerbach gives to the biblical representation of reality is based on, among other things, its historicity, or presentation of “universal history.” Homeric poetry does not proclaim universal, absolute historical authority: “before it, beside it, and after it, other complexes of events, which do not depend upon it, can be conceived without conflict and without difficulty.” In contrast, the Old Testament claims “absolute authority”:

[it] presents universal history: it begins with the beginning of time, with the creation of the world, and will end with the Last Days, the fulfilling of the Covenant, with which the world will come to an end. *Everything else that happens in the world can only be conceived as an element in this sequence; into it everything that is known about the world, or at least everything that touches upon the history of the Jews, must be fitted as an ingredient of the divine plan*” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 16; emphasis added).

History, universal history, is an essential part of the Old Testament’s “method of comprehending reality.”

Later, Auerbach continues, “the need for interpretation reaches out beyond the original Jewish-Israelitish realm of reality—for example to Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Roman history.” On the basis of the Old Testament, then, historical “*interpretation in a determined direction becomes a general method of comprehending reality*” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 16; emphasis added). Historical thought, historical consciousness and understanding, became inseparable from the understanding and representation of reality based on the narrative strategies of the Old Testament.

At this moment in history, based on his seminal essay “Figura” (1938; *Scenes* 11–76), Auerbach is arguing that the “Jewish-Israelitish realm of reality,” its understanding of universal history, and its claim to absolute authority were transferred to the early Church:

The most striking piece of interpretation of this sort occurred in the first century of the Christian era, in consequence of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles: *Paul and the Church Fathers reinterpreted the*

entire Jewish tradition as a succession of figures prognosticating the appearance of Christ, and assigned the Roman Empire its proper place in the divine plan of salvation. Thus while, on the one hand, the reality of the Old Testament presents itself as complete truth with a claim to sole authority, on the other hand that very claim forces it to a constant interpretive change in its own content; for millennia it undergoes an incessant and active development with the life of man in Europe. (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 16; emphasis added)

Now, the biblical conception of history became “a general method of comprehending reality” through the figural interpretation of history—the view that Old Testament events and persons are *figures*, or prefigurations, of events and persons in the New Testament—which reaches its culmination in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1308–1321). In this epic poem, which is also the culmination of the Medieval worldview, the individual human drama cannot be separated from God’s overall sacred drama of salvation and redemption or the overarching, teleological theology of divine order in the universe. Man perceives that the “many played-out dramas are combined in one great play, involving his own fate and that of all mankind; they are but exempla of *the winning or losing of eternal bliss.*” In this sense, “*the waves of history do reach the shores of the world beyond.*” “In all cases,” the *Comedy* presents “temporality figurally preserved in timeless eternity. *Each of the dead interprets his condition in the beyond as the last act, forever being played out, of his earthly drama*” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 197–98; emphasis added).

This vision of time and sense of history, or the “concept of universal history and its interpretation,” are the most crucial differences between the Homeric and biblical styles: “The claim of the Old Testament stories to represent universal history, their insistent relation . . . to a single and hidden God, who yet shows himself and who guides universal history by promise and exaction, gives these stories an entirely different perspective from any the Homeric poems can possess” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 16–17). Unlike the glorious Greek heroes, connected to each other horizontally, or in space, the great figures of the Old Testament are generally connected vertically, in time, through God. Within the confines of a theocratic universe, ruled, regulated, and directed by the divine hand, “God chose and formed these men to the end of embodying his essence and will.” For this reason, “the great figures of the Old Testament are so much more fully developed, so much more fraught with their own biographical past, so much more distinct as individuals than are the Homeric heroes,” who “have no development, and their life-histories

are clearly set forth once and for all.” Note that “Nestor, Agamemnon, Achilles . . . appear to be of an age fixed from the very first” (17).

For Auerbach, Homer’s characters lack “a distinct stamp of individuality” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 18). In Hegel’s terms, their lack of historical development and becoming bars individuality.²² In contrast, “it is this history of a personality which the Old Testament presents to us as the formation undergone by those whom God has chosen to be examples.” God is history in these stories: “the stern hand of God is ever upon the Old Testament figures; he has not only made them once and for all and chosen them, but he continues to work upon them, bends them and kneads them, and, without destroying them in essence, produces from them forms which their youth gave no grounds for anticipating” (18). Auerbach stresses their responsiveness; they may be “bearers of the divine will, and yet they are fallible, subject to misfortune and humiliation—and in the midst of misfortune and in their humiliation their acts and words reveal the transcendent majesty of God.” In contrast to Homer’s ever-glorious heroes, Old Testament figures experience “a rich existence, rich development,” which “*gives the Old Testament stories a historical character, even when the subject is purely legendary and traditional*” (18; emphasis added).

From legend to history, from myth to truth and reality, Auerbach cannily interprets the difference between Homer and the Old Testament. Hegel claims that history begins at the end of the heroic age: “What is properly historical . . . takes its earliest beginning at the point when the heroic period . . . is ending.” More specifically, “From no source but Homer, for example, do we learn in such a lively way or recognize in such a simple way the nature of the Greek spirit and Greek history” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 2: 987, 1056). In contrast, Auerbach constantly stresses that “Homer remains within the legendary with all his material, whereas the material of the Old Testament comes closer and closer to history as the narrative proceeds; in the stories of David the historical report predominates” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 18–19). Only in history does the reality of facts unfold and develop.

At this point, the literary Auerbach explains “the difference between legend and history” more technically. Their structure and composition, he argues, are very different. Legend “runs far too smoothly. All cross-currents, all friction, all that is causal, secondary to the main events and themes, everything unresolved, truncated, and uncertain, which confuses the clear progress of the action and the simple orientation of the actors, has disappeared” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 19). In contrast, “the historical event which we witness, or learn from the testimony of those who wit-

nessed it, runs much more variously, contradictorily, and confusedly.” Legend is disconnected from history, historical context, and reality: “legend arranges its material in a simple and straightforward way; it detaches it from its contemporary historical context, so that the latter will not confuse it” (19).

To make a further point, Auerbach cites an example from his own “Age of Catastrophe” (Hobsbawm 6–7), *historia calamitatum*, or “the age of absolute sinfulness” (Lukács 18)—the agonized history of the rise of Nazism in Germany:

Let the reader think of the history which we are ourselves witnessing; anyone who, for example, evaluates the behavior of individual men and groups of men at *the time of the rise of National Socialism in Germany*, or the behavior of individual peoples and states before and during the last war, will feel how difficult it is to represent historical themes in general, and how unfit they are for legend. . . . (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 19–20; emphasis added).

Readers may recall Leni Riefenstahl’s film *Triumph of the Will*, which renders the 1934 Nazi Party Congress as legend. As Thomas Mann wrote, the “total rejection of truth” led to “the German Will to Legend in full flower after 1933” (Reed 378). The reason is clear; “the historical comprises a great number of contradictory motives in each individual, a hesitation and ambiguous groping on the part of groups; only seldom (*as in the last war* [World War II]) does a more or less plain situation, comparatively simple to describe, arise.” The legendary style is based on “simplification of events,” or “a smoothing down and harmonizing of events.” Auerbach acknowledges: “To *write history is so difficult that most historians are forced to make concessions to the technique of legend*” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 20; emphasis added).

He stresses how the Old Testament resists this temptation “to a simplification of motives, to a static definition of characters which avoids conflict, vacillation, and development, such as are natural to legendary structure.” These features do not “predominate in the Old Testament world of legend. *Abraham, Jacob, or even Moses produces a more concrete, direct, and historical impression than the figures of the Homeric world* . . . because the confused, contradictory, multiplicity of events, the psychological and factual cross-purpose, which true history reveals, have not disappeared in the representation but still remain clearly perceptible” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 20; emphasis added).

Furthermore, the type of characters and social classes the texts portray differ. Faithful to his ultimate thesis in *Mimesis*, “the rise of more

extensive and socially inferior human groups” as the subject of “problematic-existential representation” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 491), he draws on his belief in Marxist dialectic, historical materialism.²³ He argues that, in Homer, “life is enacted only among the ruling class—others appear only in the role of servants to that class . . . whose men divide their lives between war, hunting, marketplace councils, and feasting, while the women supervise the maids in the house.” In the Old Testament stories, “class distinctions are not felt”; they deal with “the people.” Therefore, the biblical text expresses “*more profound historicity*” and “*more profound social activity*” (21–22; emphasis added).

The differences between the Homeric and biblical style are also related to “a different conception of the elevated style and the sublime.” Auerbach argues that Homer is closer to “the separation of styles”—the classical view “that the realistic depiction of daily life was incompatible with the sublime and had a place only in comedy” than the Old Testament. The reason is that “the great and sublime events in the Homeric poems take place far more exclusively and unmistakably among the members of a ruling class; and these are far more untouched in their heroic elevation than are the Old Testament figures” like Adam, Noah, David, and Job. Overall, “domestic realism, the representation of daily life, remains in Homer in the peaceful realm of the idyllic, whereas, from the very first, in the Old Testament stories, the sublime, tragic, and problematic take shape precisely in the domestic and commonplace: scenes such as those between Cain and Abel, between Noah and his sons . . . are inconceivable in the Homeric style.” In the Old Testament stories, the “sublime influence of God” reaches “so deeply into the everyday that the two realms of the sublime and the everyday are not only actually unseparated but basically inseparable” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 22–23).²⁴

Auerbach continuously downplays and undermines the importance of the Homeric style and elevates the Old Testament. Here, he departs from Hegel, who accorded great importance to the “Homeric poems,” which, he argued, reveal:

for the first time a world hovering beautifully between the universal foundations of life in the ethical order of family, state, and religious belief, and the individual personal character; between spirit and nature in their beautiful equipoise; between intended action and external outcome; between the national ground of undertaking and the intentions and deeds of individuals; and even if individual heroes appear predominant on the score of their free and living

movement, this is so modified again by the specific character of their aims and the seriousness of their fate that the whole presentation must count for us as the supreme achievement of what we can enjoy and love in the sphere of epic. (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 2: 1098–99)

Auerbach holds to his conclusion that “Homer’s realism” is poor and narrow compared to the realism of the Old Testament; in the first, “fully externalized description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, *few elements of historical development* and of psychological perspective.” In the second, “certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, ‘background’ quality, multiplicity of meaning and the need for interpretation, *universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic*” (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 23; emphasis added).

Auerbach musters his extraordinary comprehension of literary technique to assert that the “development of the concept of the historically becoming” (*Mimesis* 23) is the great contribution of the Old Testament’s realism, or “the Jewish-Israelitish realm of reality” (16), to Western culture and history. Here, we can locate Auerbach’s goal in describing its development in his masterpiece as well as his great debt to Hegel. The realism of the Old Testament is not only much richer in form and content but also, and most important, closer to the truth since it presents and represents the “development of the concept of the historically becoming” (23), a central Hegelian concept according to which history is understood as progress toward freedom: “The History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom” (Hegel, *Philosophy of History* 19). Auerbach traces “mankind achieving self-expression” in a literary history that links the records of our progress toward consciousness of the “human condition” (Auerbach, “Philology” 4–5). That he places the seed of this development in “Jewish-Israelitish” culture and follows its development throughout Western—even German—culture is a sophisticated aesthetic and political rejoinder to the preposterous, pompous mythicizing of the little thugs of the Third Reich. If Nietzsche is correct that “Germans are Hegelians, even if there had never been any Hegel, insofar as we (as opposed to all Latin peoples) instinctively attribute a deeper meaning and greater value to becoming and development than to what ‘is,’” (*The Gay Science* 218) then Auerbach uses it to expose an inherent national contradiction.

Notes

The author would like to thank Ido Geiger, Martin Thibodeau, Gerald McDermott and Robert Wallace, for their comments and suggestions.

1. Unless otherwise stated, emphasis in quotes by Hegel are in the original text.

2. Auerbach, letter to Martin Buber, 12 January 1957, Martin Buber Archive, ARH MS. 350, National Library of Israel, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

3. In *Introduction to the Lectures*, Hegel writes: “Thought is not something empty and abstract, but is determining, self-determining indeed; in other words, thought is essentially concrete. This concrete thought is what we call the ‘Concept’... the Concept is the universal which particularizes itself (e.g. animal as ‘mammal’ adds an *external* determination to the universal ‘animal’). The Concept is a thought become active, able to determine itself, create and generate itself” (68). In *The Science of Logic* (529–49), he describes the meaning of the Concept in his system. J. N. Findlay’s foreword to *Phenomenology of Spirit* notes that Hegel’s “concern is always with the *Begriff* or universal notional shapes that are evinced in fact and history” (vii).

4. Hegel thought that the essential nature of everything is a concept: “the concept is what is truly first and the things are what they are, thanks to the activity of the concept dwelling in them and revealing itself in them” (*Encyclopedia* 238). According to Wartenberg, Hegel believed that “the concept is ‘immanent’ in things and it causes them to have the character that they do.” Given that concepts are “the inner principle of things,” they “determine the structure of reality” (102–03). According to Beiser, Hegel’s concept is based on “Aristotle’s formal-final cause.” The “formal cause consists in the essence or nature of a thing,” and “the final cause is the purpose the object attempts to realize, the goal of its development” (66–67).

5. Hegel’s working title for *Phenomenology of Spirit* was *Science of the Experience of Consciousness*, which appears in the first edition of 1807. He believed that truth means “concept and reality corresponded. For example, the body is the reality, while the soul is the concept” (*Outlines* 42); and “The concept is realized as the soul in a *body*; the soul is the immediate, self-referring universality of the body’s *externality* just as much as it is the body’s *particularization*” (*Science of Logic* 287).

6. Hegel, *Lectures at Jena* (1806), quoted in Kojève (vi). Generally speaking, “‘*Geist*’ refers to some sort of *general consciousness*, a single ‘*mind*’ common to all men” (Solomon 642). Hegel argues that “*nous* [reason], or its deeper determination, *spirit*, is the cause of the world” (*Science of Logic* 36–37). On this point, he follows Aristotle, who believed that the world is governed by *nous*. The “ancients”, wrote Hegel, thought that reason “governs the world” or “exists in the world and [they] mean by it that reason is the soul of the world, residing in it, immanent in it as its ownmost, innermost nature, its universal”

(58). Elsewhere: “Reason is Spirit when its certainty of being all reality has been raised to truth, and it is conscious of itself as its own world, and of the world as itself” (*Phenomenology* 263).

7. See also his “Preface to the first edition” of the *Science of Logic*, where he writes about “the youthful pleasure of the new epoch that has blossomed both in the realm of science [philosophy] and in the political realm . . . [T]his pleasure greeted the dawn of the rejuvenated spirit giddily” (6).

8. “Instead of a particular event it [Dante’s *Divine Comedy*] has for its subject-matter the eternal action, the absolute end and aim, the love of God in its imperishable activity and unalterable sphere, and for its locality Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise; into this changeless existence it plunges the living world of human action and suffering and, more particularly, the deeds and fates of individuals.” In *Aesthetics*, Hegel writes that Dante “made himself the judge of mankind and assigned men to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise” (1: 564).

9. Kant rejects the rationalist and empiricist epistemological positions. Rationalists believe in a world that exists as a limited whole, while empiricists believe the world is unlimited and externally verifiable through proper observation. Kant’s Copernican Revolution rejects both positions by arguing that the world is not an object “out there.” He argues that real things, or “things in themselves” (*Dinge an sich*), are distinct from what we perceive subjectively, which is determined by the mind’s categories; namely, the phenomena.

10. Auerbach discusses the differences between Plato and Aristotle on the art of mimesis in *Dante* 1–23.

11. This discussion on the difference between Plato and Aristotle with regard to *mimesis* is based on “‘Imitation’ as an Aesthetic Term” (*Aristotle’s Theory* 121–62), and Richard Janko’s introduction to his translation of the *Poetics I* (ix–xx).

12. Hegel’s idea is derived from the Platonic form or “idea” but differs by combining both concept and reality. See Knox, “Translation Preface,” in *Aesthetics* 1: 9.

13. “The Idea can be grasped as reason” (*Science of Logic* 284).

14. See also *Philosophy of Mind*: “It is the spirit which not merely broods over history as over the waters but lives in it and is alone its principle of movement: and in the path of that spirit, liberty, i.e. a development determined by the notion of spirit, is the guiding principle and only its notion its final aim, i.e. truth” (281).

15. See also *Philosophy of Mind*: “That history, and above all universal history, is founded on an essential and actual aim, which actually is and will be realized in it – the plane of Providence; that, in short, there is Reason in history, must be decided on strictly philosophical ground, and thus shown to be essentially and in fact necessary” (277).

16. According to Wallace, “Hegel will not interpret actuality as mere factual existence.” Actuality for him is the “unity of essence and existence”; hence, “as the unity of the inner and outer, actuality is not opposed to rationality but

rather is thoroughly rational.” Needless to say, “the essence or ground of existence (the ‘inner’) is fully present; that is, the actual is fully reflected or fully explicable.” What is important is that for Hegel “nothing is actual except the *Idea*,” and, therefore, “the rational” is “synonymous with the *Idea*.” According to Wallace, this means, among other things, that “our attention should really be directed to the *Idea*, as the reality behind the ‘actual,’ rather than to the actual as such” (197, 199).

17. The Nazi, Aryan flight from reason and reality to myths, legends, and heroes can be clearly seen in the works of Alfred Rosenberg, the chief ideologist of the Nazi party. In his infamous book *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*The Myth of the 20th Century*, 1930), he argued: “Today, a new belief is arising: the *Mythos* of the blood; the belief that the godly essence of man itself is to be defended through the blood; that belief which embodied the clearest knowledge that the Nordic race represents that *Mysterium* which has overthrown and replaced the old sacraments” (Rosenberg 96–97). Accordingly, Rosenberg interpreted the German defeat in World War I in light of the dark, legendary, mythical and demonic, powers of Norse mythology, arguing more specifically that the victories of the Allied Powers in that war are evidence of “an age when the Fenris Wolf [‘fame-wolf’] broke his chains, when Hel [giantess and goddess who rules over Helheim, the underworld where the dead dwell] moved over the earth and the *Midgardschlange* [the Midgard Snake, a demonic monster which looped the whole earth with its giant length, whom Thor, the God of the thunder, killed] stirred the oceans of the world. Millions upon millions were ready to sacrifice themselves to attain but *one* result embodied in the phrase: for the honour and freedom of the *Volk*. The world inferno continued to the end; nonetheless, sacrifices were demanded and made by all. All that was revealed, however, was that behind the armies daemonic powers had triumphed over divine ones. Unrestrained, they raged about throughout the world, stirring up new unrest, new flames, new destruction” (96–97).

18. Auerbach’s emphasis on the role of the Old Testament in shaping Western conceptions of history, reality, and truth should be seen in light of his attempt to prove that the Old Testament is inseparable from the New Testament and hence inextricably linked to Western culture and civilization as a whole, contrary to the racist and anti-Semitic claims of Aryan philology and Nazi historiography. For example, Rosenberg declared: “The Old Testament as a book of religious instruction must be abolished once and for all. With it will end the unsuccessful attempts of the last one-and-a-half millennia to make us all spiritual Jews” (Head 69). On Auerbach’s struggle against Aryan philology and Nazi historiography, see Zakai and Weinstein. See also Krystal; and Epstein.

19. *Mimesis* was influenced by, not only Hegel, but the Hegelian views of Georg Lukács. Compare, for example, Lukács’s treatment of the individual in Homer’s works—the “epic hero is, strictly speaking, never an individual” (66)—to Auerbach in *Mimesis* arguing that Homer’s heroes are lacking a “distinct stamp of individuality” (18). Auerbach knew Lukács personally during his

studies in Heidelberg before World War I. Auerbach was also greatly influenced by Italian political philosopher, historian, and jurist Giovanni Battista (Giambattista) Vico (1668–1744).

20. According to Wallace, if “actuality can only properly be understood in terms of the Concept, and if that Concept . . . necessarily embodies itself in something that one can appropriately called ‘rational,’ then the actual clearly must be rational, and the rational likewise (via the same embodiment) must be actual” (245).

21. In a more recent study, *Shapes of Freedom: Hegel’s Philosophy of World History in Theological Perspective*, Peter C. Hodgson, argues that for Hegel, “World history is the outworking of the eternal history of God” (vi).

22. Auerbach’s views above contrast with Hegel’s, who argued that the Homeric poems reveal “the free individuality of all the figures,” and further that “we meet . . . individuals” with “wealth of particular traits” in “Homer’s epic heroes” (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 2: 1053, 1178). In *Outlines* (321), he writes that it was “the principle of individuality arises” with the Greeks. “This [the harmony in the social order] makes the Greek character into *beautiful individuality*, which is brought forth from spirit” (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology* 387 note 23; emphasis original). Elsewhere, inconsistently, Hegel claims that “individuality emerges as the ‘higher principle of modern times’ in the way in which individuals ‘return back fully to themselves,’” which, as he noted, “contrasted modern life with ancient Greek” (Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* 196).

23. Auerbach called dialectic materialism the “most inspired and influential attempt to apprehend modern history as a whole in terms of laws” in “Introduction: Purpose and Method” (*Literary Language* 21). According to Geoffrey H. Hartman, “practicing an urban, undogmatic Marxism,” Auerbach “took the pattern of a unified development characterizing European history more from social and economic realities” (169). Marx’s philosophy of history, or historical materialism, is also based on Hegel’s philosophy of history; for him, history is embodied within a larger project; namely, class struggle.

24. For an analysis of the elevated style and the sublime, see Auerbach, “*Sermo Humilis*” (*Literary Language* 25–66).

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