

Notes on Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (YDS 13-199)

Frei first read Auerbach's Mimesis in about 1962, but nothing else in the YDS archive comes from so early, and it may well be that these notes were made on a subsequent reading. After six pages of quotes and paraphrases, Frei finishes with this comment. CPH?1981b.

The temptation here is to do what James Barr has criticized so devastatingly. Since differences in writing appear to be radical, 1) trace them back to differences between Greek and Hebrew mind and 2) Argue for the uniqueness of biblical–literary usage of genres. Neither appropriate, though 2) more tempting than 1). As for 1) that is precisely the temptation of the phenomenologist, which Auerbach has avoided – connecting any particular form or style of writing with a theory of the development of human consciousness through history. Thus his most natural ally, if he were connecting his outlook with a theory of history or of cognition referring to ‘historical consciousness’ or the historical force (‘self’ – end of self – not self theory of cognition) would be to go with Hegel, to be historicist. But he does not; there is no ‘spirit’ as there was for Hegel and Baur, unifying all single movements of style and form by making them aspects of itself. There is no deepening of innocence divested of itself and returning enriched into subjectivity or self-consciousness with depth, to itself from its self-loss in objectivity. There is no comparative study of literary representation and that which is represented by such representation, or that of which literary representation is the representation – Auerbach may well be post-Kantian in his epistemology but realistic in his theory of interpretation. 2) Temptation of ‘uniqueness’ is more severe, but Auerbach argues that what we have here is actually no single, describable genre, but a mixture of things and a mixture of styles.