Edward Said's Critical Homage to Erich Auerbach
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An affinity bordering on admiration is what Edward Said felt for the writings of Erich Auerbach from his years as a student to the end of his life (Said, 2004, p. 85). It is therefore the case that the most powerful theoretical critique of Eurocentrism[1] was influenced by Erich Auerbach's apparently Eurocentric humanism. Auerbach's formulation concerning the 'point of departure' (*Ansatzpunkt*), as well as his concern with 'hearing' the voice of the interpreted text had an impact on Said's research methods and general attitude to literature.[2] The huge success of *Mimesis,* according to Said, was due precisely to the questions the author posed to the texts he interpreted.[3]

Said's position regarding Auerbach, but also comparable figures like Louis Massignon and Theodor Adorno, can be defined as one of criticism and respect: "But in some way I admire the efforts nevertheless, somehow to extend their work into areas that interest me. By adopting some of their modes of examination, their attention to texts, their *care* (Said's italics), which I think is a central factor here." (Said, 1992, p. 230)[4] Attentiveness to the text is a basic philological virtue; in Auerbach it is applied not only to the text as such but also to the end of figuring out how it represents 'the conditions of human

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[1] Said's *Orientalism* unveiled before an academic audience restricted within the narrow bounds of their individual disciplines the knowledge of the West's attitude to the East which had existed before the publication of his book but had never been the subject of a similar heuristic concept. Among the factors that turned his book into a bestseller were his explanation of how knowledge functions as a social practice, the language of the exposition and also the simplification of the highly complex problem (Said prefers categorizing the types of 'orientalism' rather than historicizing them). For a thorough analysis of orientalism before Said, of *Orientalism* itself, of the debate around the book and Said's ensuing answers, see Schmitz, 2008, pp. 136-95.

[2] The problem of the voice became topical when several approaches won recognition in social historiography in the 1960s–1970s; among them I would like to mention the 'microhistory' of Carlo Ginsburg and his followers. The historian's social engagement is supposed to restore the living-conditions of people deprived of their voice in society, or of those whose voice has been stifled at one historical time or another. For an investigation entirely dedicated to the voice in literature see Licheva, 2002.

[3] Asking the text questions and 'hearing' the answer is a common hermeneutic practice. Many researchers have discussed this structure in Auerbach – mostly with regard to *Mimesis*.

[4] Adopting modernist concepts for areas for which they were not conceived is a methodical device in Said critical work: "the intention of his [T.S. Eliot's] essay is almost purely aesthetical, one can use his formulations to inform other realms of experience". (Said, 1993, p. 1)

existence' in a particular historical milieu. The ability to hear 'the voice' of texts from different epochs and languages is methodologically important for any literary historian or comparativist. Educated as a comparatist, Said values the ability to interpret texts written in different languages and in different periods. More than once he emphasizes how important it is for the researcher of literature to have substantial linguistic and literary competence. (Said, 1985, pp. 5-9) "A Note on Translations" and originals used by the author in *Beginnings* attests that "every text which was not written in English has been researched in the original language (excluding the Russian ones). In instances where there is no translation available or where the translation in my opinion is inadequate, I have made my own translation." (Said, 1985, xxi)

In this respect Said models his vision and is influenced by the great figures of German Romance Philology – most of all by Erich Auerbach, but to a certain extent also by E. R. Curtius and Leo Spitzer[5], all of whom for him embody the epitome of philological culture. This personal affinity of Said may be attributed to professional training, to the emergence of "the field of comparative literary scholarship within the North American universities during the 1950's and 1960's" (Lindenberger, 1996, p. 202), suggesting that such affinities were, more or less, shared values. Knowledge of different languages and literatures is a condition *sine qua non* in comparative literary scholarship and in literary criticism, too. The uses of this knowledge according to different principles and with different social and political consequences have been critically discussed more than once by Said. His critique of comparative literary scholarship in Europe up until the end of the 1950s does not erase his admiration of the aforementioned Romance scholars. (Said, 1993, pp. 50-52, p. 54) In a way, although his approach is different from that of traditional comparativist scholarship, Said remains attentive to the individual text and its author and thus continues the traditional humanistic attitude of presupposing the importance of the individual subject.

The knowledge that researchers in the humanities can attain even under ideal circumstances is a far cry from being systematic or exhaustive. However, there is something disturbing about the ease with which Said lists the German thinkers that influenced him. Perhaps the audience towards which such statements were directed did not question them (did not ask, for example, why one thinker's basic term was being attributed to another one on the list, etc.)

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[5]   Said mentions Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* a couple of times. The influence probably dates from Said's early years. From Leo Spitzer, Said always quotes the same work – *Linguistics and Literary History*, which was delivered as a lecture at Princeton University in 1945. It is perhaps the most famous of Spitzer's works, but is not among his best.

A more systematic education, however, might not have resulted in making the heuristic connections between knowledge and politics as active in the political environment as Said succeeded in doing. When he proposes the hermeneutics of sympathy and understanding instead of the simplistic hostility to otherness (which is, of course, to the advantage of some), it ceases to matter to whom a certain term belongs. Said applies and shifts the instruments of philology to other areas in order to create new objects of knowledge.[6] Whether this is philology is indeed another question and one that must be answered in the negative. What is philological about it is the basic idea of an attentive, concentrated reading, a practice that not only can but regularly will yield unusual results when applied in non-textual areas (and not only by Said).[7] Salman Rushdie has summed this up in a single comparison: "he [Said] reads the world as closely as he reads books (*The Guardian*, 1999).

I. Secular Criticism

In 1969 Maire A. Said and Edward Said published their translation of Auerbach's article 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*' (Said, 1969, pp. 1-17)[8]. In a short foreword the translators succinctly and carefully characterize Auerbach's philology and the tradition to which he belongs; the foreword contains none of the criticism, which could have been directed at the author, but rather an affinity verging on admiration.[9] At the end of the 1960s Said worked on his book *Beginnings: Intention and Method,* published in 1975. The title, though not exactly a repetition, combines the term "*Ansatzpunk*t" with "*Absicht und Methode*". *Absicht und Methode* is Auerbach's title for the introduction to his last book. In two subchapters Said discusses the most methodical of Auerbach's articles 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*', as well as the

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[6]   In short, Orientalism entails nothing less than the creation of new objects for a new kind of knowledge" (Said, [1985], 1997 p. 129). Said's writings make one accustomed to the translation of humanitarian knowledge into politically valid conclusions; especially striking are the passages where Said declares his respect precisely for systemic humanitarian knowledge.

[7]   The transfer of linguistic terms and devices to non-linguistic areas shows the heuristic potential of the textual approaches of the 1960s and 1970s; the transfer is successful where it takes into account the different material character of the media. A historical event can be 'read' but defining it as a 'language' or describing its 'syntax' remains a metaphor, heuristic or limiting.

[8]   The idea for the translation was undoubtedly Said's. The leading role in the translation itself, however, must have belonged to Maire Ayanus, who is of German-Estonian origin.

[9]   The only critique which I could find in the writings of Said of "Philology and *Weltliteratur*' is in *Culture and Imperialism*: "he [Auerbach] expresses more anguish and fear than pleasure at the prospect of what he seems so reluctantly to acknowledge." (Said, 1993, pp. 52-53)

grounding term '*Ansatzpunkt*', departure point, 'beginning'.[10] For Said *beginning* is opposed to *origin*, because the origin is something divine, mythical and privileged, whereas the beginning is secular and man-made; therefore it can be and it is constantly revised. The departure point or the beginning suggest both future development and interruption, but not, however, the predestination imposed by some transcendental force. Said sees the latter merely in terms of a fraudulent narrative functioning as a manifestation of power and unquestioned authority. He uses Auerbach's term to support his fundamental conviction that the history of empire, imposed through power, should be challenged in order to make space for unheeded forms of life, to give voice to those that have not been allowed into the historical narrative.

Besides Auerbach, Said returns to the works of Giambattista Vico. His interest in Vico is prompted and his reading of him perhaps influenced by the extraordinary impact the Italian thinker had on the writings of Auerbach.[11] The latter worked on the writings of Dante and Vico until the end of his life. Said called Auerbach "Vico's principal and most profound literary student" (Said, 1967, pp. 347; 1985, p. 363).[12] Said defines his criticism as secular in its refusal to lay its foundations on unquestionable, near-divine principles and authorities; no authority or consensus was supposed to guarantee the truth of what it claimed. The qualifier 'secular' itself comes from Vico and Auerbach.[13] It is another manifestation of Said's desire to be associated with a certain Enlightenment tradition. Otherwise he would have called his criticism 'postcolonial', for example. It was in the European Enlightenment that the basic opposition was that of 'secular versus sacred'. With a sense of the new importance the two positions gained by the end of the 1970s Said opposes his criticism to the 'religious' one, by which he means any kind of fundamentalism, be it religious or worldly. To avoid any doubts as to the origins of

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[10]   Methodological reasoning is rather an exception in Auerbach's critical work. Another text of such character is precisely *On Intention and Method* (*Über Absicht und Methode*).

[11]   Auerbach translated into German and wrote the introductory paper to Vico's *New Science* in 1927, before writing his first book on Dante in 1929, which is still in print.

[12]   This characterization is once again a manifestation of affinity. Although he does return to Vico's *New Science* after 1967, Said is not a researcher who knows the history of 'Vico Studies' thoroughly enough to use it effectively to substantiate his high praise for Auerbach (Said, 2000b, pp. 83-92).

[13]   The title of Auerbach's book from 1929 – *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt* (1929) is translated into English as *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*. Its first edition in the USA is in 1961; by that time Said had obtained a Master's Degree and was preparing his doctoral dissertation – a period suitable for adopting conceptions and terms (Said, 2000c, p. 565).

the two terms in Vico and the Enlightenment, the introduction of *The World, the Text, and the Critic* is dedicated to secular criticism, and the conclusion to 'religious' criticism. (Said, 1983, pp. 290-92)[14]

It is in the programmatic article *Secular Criticism* that Said spells out his concept of criticism as a reflection on a culture's mechanisms of ideology and power. (Said, 1983, pp. 1-30)[15] He starts with arguments that reiterate Auerbach's arguments from *Über Absicht und Methode* (*On Intention and Method*). Taking up Vico's basic ideas, Auerbach states his position on the relationship between the literary work and the historical environment (Auerbach, 1958, pp. 9-24; esp. p.14); at the same time he distances himself from methodology, concentrating instead on the analysis of the work. For Said, too, the literary work is part of the social world; it is in itself an event, appearing in a particular time and in a particular place. If the scholar ignores these fundamental grounds and limits himself to the text, he places himself and his analysis outside history.

When Said writes that Auerbach's criticism derives from a profoundly conservative outlook, I ask myself what does 'conservative' mean for him? (Said, 1983, p. 29) The attribute 'conservative' transports a political term into the sphere of the humanities; this and other similar terms insist that every position in the humanities is also a political one. Conservatism, liberalism or any political term whatsoever rarely passes as self-explanatory, even in politics. Motivating their usage is part of critical reflection; when, however, such transpositions become automatic, their uses threaten to become ideologies, i.e. the very thing they criticize. In the foreword to *Beginnings,* Said writes: "My cultural biases are on the whole tinged with conservatism". This refers to the author's preference for reading and analyzing the great masterpieces of high modernism. (Said, 1985, xiii) His intellectual life, Said states, has been dedicated largely to the understanding and teaching of great works of literary and musical art as well as to a career of social and political engagement and commitment (Said, 2004, p. 62) I do not find in Said himself the type of postcolonial criticism which is directed against the classical Western works of literature. For him the literary or musical masterpieces of Western culture share its power but at the same time resist it. He argues that a masterpiece depends on, but can not be reduced to, some kind of history – social, political or economic.[16] Said does not support the existence of any particular canon, but neither does he insist that new works should be included in the list of greats just because they defend a certain

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[14] The best comment I am aware of on Said's attitude to Vico is in Mitchell (2005, pp.465-71).

[15] The collection of articles in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* was written after *Beginnings* and simultaneously with *Orientalism*. It was published in 1983.

[16] See *Jane Austen and Empire* (Said, 1993, pp. 95-115) In *Note on Modernism* he writes: "My account here speaks of a largely unopposed und undeterred will to overseas dominion, not of a completely unopposed one." (Said, 1993, p. 225)

group, sexual or ethnic identity. (Said, 2000e, pp. 381-85) Such 'partisanship' would be incongruous with the individual voice of the secular critic who does not fully belong to any context. Criticism means taking a position *vis-à-vis* power; it does not, however, exclude the solitary work on the artefacts of the past. Leonard Davis successfully characterizes this aspect of Said's activities as 'a long conversation between reader and author about the fate of the world.' (Davis, 2006-2008)[17]

In *Secular Criticism* Said claims that in respect to culture and scientific research he often felt a reasonable sympathy to conservative attitudes like the preservation of the past, the reading of great authors, as well as serious and even utterly conservative scholarship. Perhaps that is the reason why Said does not criticize conservative attitudes as a whole but rather the Eurocentrism of literary scholarship and the disregarding of the social context, especially as the references to social context can be discovered in the structure of the works themselves. (Said, 1983, pp. 22-23) The latter comment does not concern the thinking of Auerbach, although he does not juxtapose literature and reality in the same way as Said does. Both, however, maintain that the basic problem that must be investigated is how reality is portrayed or represented (*dargestellte Wirklichkeit*).[18]

Having stated his position on criticism, Said reflects on Auerbach's exile in Istanbul. Being foreign to one's environment, inhabiting less than fully the place and culture one lives in, being an immigrant in the real or symbolic sense is, for him, the necessary condition for critical study, be it historical or related to the present. Said interprets the exile as freedom from unconsciously or forcefully acquired values, from belonging to a community – a challenge to the power-based authority exerted by culture. Here (as in other of his works) Said once again refers to the article 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*'; he is especially fascinated by Auerbach's final paragraph, which is a quotation from Didascalion III, 20 by Hugo of St. Victor.[19] Hugo enumerates the degrees of perfection, which consists in complete alienation from the world: 'but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land.' (*perfectus vero cui mundus totus exilium est*). (Said, 1983, p. 7)[20] The perfect man following Said's reasoning would be the exile. But Auerbach reverses the logic and says that Hugo's words are a worthy path for him who wants to achieve true love for the world, too (Auerbach, 1967, p. 310). Said's conclusion in

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[17]   The article is taken from the internet, which is why I do not quote any page numbers.

[18]   The subtitle of *Mimesis* specifies that the focus of research is the depiction of reality (*dargestellte Wirklichkeit*), which is therefore part of the issue of realism in literature. Representation is not related to realism, nor is depiction the same thing as representation. We can, however, interpret *mimesis*, 'depiction' as a type of representation, if we take into account its difference from other forms of representation and our own reinterpretation.

[19]   On Auerbach's appropriation of Hugo's concept of philology, see Vialon (2005, pp. 244-46).

[20]   Said likes this passage by Hugo so much that he refers more than once to it.

Secular Criticism resembles the conclusion of Auerbach. To the characteristics of criticism – (not) belonging, oppositional character, irony – Said adds another one, hope: the critic cannot be without hope, even if he does not fully express it. He does not make clear what this hope is for. 'Utopia' and 'promised land' are not his chosen concepts, as they would introduce an element of secular religious feeling. The critic, however, could release his creative energies, thus balancing the danger of depriving his heart of joy as he only undertakes hard tasks. It is not, however, a matter of love for the world, as it is in Auerbach, but of hope and (creative) freedom. The difference is not negligible but Said neither notices it nor wishes to discuss it.

It is with the same quotation that Said ends, in *Orientalism*, his reflection on Auerbach's humanism and his ability to dedicate himself to the study of foreign national literatures and cultures, albeit only within the limits of Europe. The combination of intimacy and distance to one's own culture but also to the world at large creates the kind of immediacy and generosity needed to achieve true insight in knowledge (Said, 1978, p. 272) The generosity and range of knowledge are qualities that Said values and notes, even if he criticizes the author's concepts. It is for this generosity, demonstrated to conservative thinkers as well, that some leftist critics could not forgive him. From the point of view of leftist orthodoxy one cannot quote Gramsci and Benda as equal authorities.[21] Rightist criticism could not forgive him the bare fact of his existence. Care, absence and longing are not in themselves rational procedures but they can become an active motive amplifying the social presence of specialized knowledge.

Said treated exile as a condition for the critical and humanistic outlook. In his 1993 lectures on the BBC Said talked about the social role of the intellectual precisely as a kind of exile. (Said, 1992; 1996; 2000a; 2000b) The critical intellectual does not share the affinities and values of his environment not because he is forced to do so, but because he has chosen not to belong to it. Of course, Said does belong to a certain social and academic environment in the USA, yet this is a critically reflected upon (non-)belonging. Exile means that existence is not defined by relationships that are biological or similar to biological ones. The exile moved from 'instinctive' affiliation to conscious choice. The ability and courage to doubt the values of the environment you live in is the basic characteristic feature of the critical intellectual and secular criticism. The latter is based on individual decisiveness and individual

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[21] Among the critiques I will mention the one by Ahmad, because it is marked with acerbity and penetration. Ahmad criticizes Said for being a "high humanist", which for the Marxist author, who writes from his pill-box in the position of a circular self-defence – is equal to complicity in a crime. For this basic, and "criminal", characteristic of his thinking Said is indebted precisely to Auerbach, to philology and to comparative literary scholarship. (Ahmad, 1992, pp. 162-63)

choice not to enter into any form of collaboration with power. According to Said, Auerbach was related to his culture of birth, but his exile enabled him to distance himself from it and from Europe, to use his critical awareness to see it as a complex social and historical undertaking, as something created by men and women within society. That is why Auerbach's Istanbul writings are secular criticism. Auerbach managed to write a book like *Mimesis* but the result could just as well have been a long silence. Auerbach's own, for example; "at its best, this work also teaches us how to be critical rather then how to be good members of a school." (Said, 1983, p.16; p. 24; p. 29)

This is the reasoning according to which Auerbach's writings in Istanbul (1936-47) were related to the issue of home and homelessness. However, by affiliating Auerbach to his own definition of secular criticism, Said is appropriating his writings for his own purposes, since Auerbach's published works never leave the purely academic sphere; he only comments on contemporary Turkish reality in his private letters. Moreover, it is the case that, even before his migration to Istanbul, Auerbach argued that works of literature are created in a certain historical environment. It is possible that without the years in Istanbul he might not have been able to write a book like *Mimesis,* yet we cannot be certain of that, especially when we take into consideration the works of his contemporaries who remained in Germany. Victor Klemperer's extraordinary diaries were written there in isolation and in a state of constant threat. E. R. Curtius created his *magnum opus* in a much more propitious setting than Klemperer, but still in the Germany of the same period: that of Nazism and the Second World War. And yet Said is right – if not in the concrete case, in the notion of the critical separation and detachment from national identity which the exile has lived with so far. The term that characterizes the exile is 'borderline' – a state of (non-)belonging. Abdul Mohamed relates the definition to Said himself, calling him 'a secular border intellectual' (Abdul, 1992, pp. 96-120).

II. Humanism

In Said's thinking, affinity and critique towards humanism coexist in tension. In the last years of his life the affinity gained priority.[22] Said himself emphasizes the critical attitude, but rereading his texts I see how much the affinity to certain thinkers and concepts is also present. I do not, however, find in his writings a study of the genesis or the presence of humanism in the culture of Europe. For Said,

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[22]   See also *Humanism and Democratic Criticism, Humanism and Heroism* (Said, 2000). Yumna Siddiqi's article motivates in detail the change 'from postcolonial criticism to humanistic interpretation' (Siddiqi, 2005). An almost formulaic confirmation is made by L. Davis: "Said concludes as he begins – with philology" (Davis, 2006-2008).

humanism is not merely an academic pursuit, but primarily a position which confronts the hegemony of a monolithic culture. In its early phase in fourteenth-to-fifteenth century Italy, humanism was also not exclusively academic but could rather be defined as a project for a new – and civic – presence of man in the social world.[23] Said's objective was to rethink the reasons of humanism and relate them to civil behaviours and critical attitudes. The humanistic goal of secular criticism is knowledge which is not in the service of power, does not exert pressure and serves human freedom (Said, 1983, p.15, p.29).

The question is whether the notion of individual action is applicable at all to the contemporary world and especially to cultures outside Europe and North America. In *Orientalism*, Said uses Foucault's anti-humanist concept of discourse. At the same time, however, Said maintains his notion of individual action and the impact of an author or an artefact. Asserting the value of individual existence and studying its relationship to social forces and unquestionable authorities lies right at the core of humanism. 'Yet unlike Michel Foucault, to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism. Foucault believes that in general the individual text or author counts for very little; empirically, in the case of Orientalism (and perhaps nowhere else) I find this not to be so. Accordingly my analyses employ close textual readings whose goal is to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution. (Said, 1978: p.3; pp.23-24)[24]

Said claims that Vico is a philosopher central to *Beginnings* but, of course, the book is also greatly indebted to contemporary philosophical and literary concepts. A central question that Said tries to answer in *Vico: Autodidact and Humanist* is what justifies relating the personal writing (the *Autobiography*) and the research work (*The New Science*) in Vico. Summarizing his answer, Said quotes Croce and Auerbach: "Croce quite aptly says that the *Autobiography* is written in the spirit of the *New Science*; but the converse is no less true". (Said, 1967, p. 347) In this early work by Said I find the

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[23]   Humanism is not, of course, a homogenous school. Apart from its obvious relation to ancient Greece through Byzantium and Rome, another relevant issue is its relation to Arabic philosophical and scientific thought. The question is whether, leaving Arabic thought in the periphery of its interests, humanism does not mark the beginning of the long separation of (Western) Europe and its historical intellectual geography from the East? Whether humanism does not create its identity by appropriating some traditions and eliminating others?

[24]   Said's difficulty in reconciling Foucault's approach to his own humanistic position is noted by Clifford in his review (1980) of *Orientalism.* It is reprinted in Clifford, 1988, pp. 255-76. The relevant passage is pp. 264-69.

motive that will later turn into a conceptual move in Said's writings – that of making the connection between the person, the work of art or critical analysis, and political events.

In the same essay, Said also pays special attention to the fact that Vico is an autodidact (Said 1967, p. 340). The term "autodidact" represents a personal as well as a "structural" characteristic, as can be seen from the fact that Vico's account in his *Autobiography* complements his structural departure in *The New Science*. In *Beginnings,* Said seems to turn the personal characteristic into a wholly structural one, denoting a particular kind of humanistic education and the general way in which knowledge is created in the humanities.[25] Yet at the beginning lies a personal choice which, for Said, presupposes a denial of conceptual and value affiliations with the environment the researcher works in. It is the conceptual faith of Said in the possibility of personal choice, of personal decisiveness and responsibility that testifies to his affinity to the values of humanism. Said discusses several theories of the early 1970s, including those of Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida, without, however, distinguishing his own position from theirs. He is concerned most of all with supporting the argument that a beginning is intentional, discontinuous, a rupture, a construction, that it is either a *type* or a *force* (Said's italics). (Said, 1985, pp.5-9; pp.51-52) At this point Said does not wish to elaborate the basic difference between his humanistic thinking and the anti-individual and impersonal thinking characteristic of Foucault and Deleuze. He tries instead to bind together both positions. (Said, 1985, pp. 72-73)

Auerbach's use of the over-arching concept of *Ansatzpunkt* in "Philology of *Weltliteratur*" entails a discussion of the enormous difficulties faced by an individual scholar in achieving a historical synthesis. Nevertheless, his concept remains within the horizon of humanism, the basic features of which are vast individual knowledge, personal effort, and personal responsibility. This is similar to the stand of Said in his last years: "philology is the fundamental and most creative of all interpretational disciplines". (Said, 2003a)

In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism,*[26] Said defends humanism as the choice of free individual action and the courage to take a position that challenges every form of power. Humanism is the other face of secular criticism. The Fourth Lecture[27] is an introduction to Auerbach's *Mimesis:* 'one that still seems to embody the best in humanistic work that I know […] *Mimesis* is the greatest and most

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[25] The essay from 1967 is included in a different form as part of the concluding sixth chapter.

[26] The book is composed of five lectures, delivered in 2000 at Columbia University, New York (Said, 2004). For a detailed analysis of the relationship between humanism and democracy see Mitchell, 2005, pp.462-64.

[27] The lecture was also published as an introduction to the anniversary edition of *Mimesis* in 2003. *Mimesis* was first published in the US in 1953.

influential literary humanistic work of the past half century […] it may be read as an example of humanistic practice of its highest. […] And to my way of thinking, its humanistic example remains an unforgettable one.' (Said, 2004, pp. 85-86; p. 117)

How does Said characterize Auerbach's humanism? The central thesis is the same as that which he uses in defining his concept of secular criticism: Auerbach stands for the secular and historical approach to literature and reality. Humanism does not isolate literature from the social environment in which it is created and which is influenced by it. The historical world is the world of people, created and altered by their actions; it is the reason for its own existence. Concentrating solely on the analysis of the text disregards history, and the specialized jargon of textual approaches presupposes a limited audience, i.e. an abandoning of any attempt to make a broad social impact. This position cultivates an elitist 'religious' aestheticism. (Said, 1983, pp. 290-92) Auerbach's humanistic knowledge does not create an image of the enemy[28], does not contribute to the 'clash of civilizations', but, on the contrary, seeks connections and interactions between cultures. The humanist believes in the unity of human history and therefore seeks to understand even hostile otherness.

Auerbach studied both the changes and the sedimentations of history in Western European culture with that authentic feeling of humanistic mission which was at once tragic and hopeful. In *Mimesis*, the author made an attempt to rescue the meaning of existence in the contemporary era and suggested a humanistic project for an alternative history of Europe. Auerbach was aware that his interest in the representation of reality in the history of Europe was also part of modernity. His philological critical activity is intertwined with the history of his life, so that the character of his undertaking was defined by personal dedication, specialized knowledge and moral purpose. This combination was the reason for both the triumph and the failure of *Mimesis*, since any subjectivity is limited in its historical perspective, in its competence and values. It may now seem naïve if not downright shocking that Auerbach used concepts like 'the West", "reality", "representation", which are widely contested today, as if they were self-explanatory.

Here as elsewhere Said prefers not to criticize; he even defends Auerbach against existing criticism. He claims, for example, that the book is indeed authoritative but not authoritarian, it has the manifest gravity of the Important Book, but is not heavy-handed and pedantic; it is by no means a formulaic book. (Said, 2004, p. 98, p. 100) On the contrary, Auerbach's charm as a critic came from the

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[28]   In the 1920s-1930s a number of German romance scholars were hostile to France. Auerbach's attitude to France in the 1930s is based on his notion of a shared European *Geistesgeschichte*, created to a substantial extent by French culture, too. This understanding is best defended in the article *Über den historischen Ort Rousseaus* (1932), but also in *Der Schriftsteller Montaigne* (1932) and in *La cour et la ville* (1933).

fact that he shared with the reader both the joy of his discoveries and his own uncertainties.[29] Despite the wealth of knowledge collected in *Mimesis* the book did not pronounce any ultimate truths. Said seems convinced that *Mimesis* could have an impact on a broad readership as it was not written in specialized jargon. In all his books Auerbach retained the same essayistic style. As already mentioned, Said considered the essay a genre that was communicative enough to be accessible and influential for a large readership.

Indeed in *Mimesis* there are reflections that are more general than the academic task which the author has set himself. They are, however, of the kind testify to the subjective opinions of an author whose thought is substantially represented but not exhausted by specialized knowledge. It is the subjective quality of Auerbach that appeals to Said, especially as it is manifested in the afterword to *Mimesis,* in *Philology and Weltliteratur* in *On Purpose and Method.*

Said does, of course, criticize Auerbach's Eurocentrism. On the other hand, he retains the humanistic stance which, being critical to its European origin and limitations, can comprehend the cultures and diversity of the world. (Said, 1983, p. 21) It is Auerbach who said that 'in any event, our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation.' (Auerbach, 1967, p. 310)[30] This transition from West European to the worldwide philological homeland is one of the reasons why Said believes that Auerbach has seen the development of Western culture almost at the last moment of its integrity and coherence as a civilization (Said, 1999, p. 321)[31]

Humanism and philology, including that of Said himself, have been criticized as legitimizing the politics of European hegemony over the non-European world. The problem of humanism and its critical application to contemporary issues occupied Said from the mid-1960s. Said transports basic humanistic

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[29] For the acknowledgement of the limitations of one's own thought as an ethical postulate in Said – see Mitchell 2005, pp. 468-69.

[30] It would be not true to accuse all comparative literary scholarship until the end of 1960s of Eurocentrism. One name at least deserves mentioning here. At the end of 1950s – the same decade in which Auerbach published "Philology and *Weltliteratur*" – and at the beginning of the 1960s some articles appear by Nikolay Konrad, a specialist in Medieval Chinese and Japanese literatures. In his methodological reflection the vast territory between Japan and Spain (especially in the Middle Ages) is presented not only as multiform, which is obvious, but also having equal rights in terms of the communicative (creative and receptive) space of cultural relations. Konrad was neither Eurocentric nor Asia-centric. The title of his book is significant in itself – "Zapad i Vostok (West and East)". Its first edition came out in 1966. (Konrad, 1978:,pp.29-48; pp.49-59; pp. 60-69)

[31] I believe that Auerbach remains, even in 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*', within the boundaries of Roman-German Europe (Angelov, 2008, pp. 90-97), but my point here is to present the views of Said.

and philological patterns to areas beyond the disciplinary framework and/or the domain of the culture they were created for. The contemporary term for this approach would be translatability. Unlike linguistic translation, however, it does not seek correspondence with the original. The application of humanism outside the social and historical environment where it appeared and evolved presupposes a critical stance to its origin and functioning; at the same time, when applied to other cultures, it preserves its fundamental value – the freedom and dignity of man in society. The translation of humanism to non-European cultures raises the issue of its relationship to otherness, not of its imposition by military or economic force. Translatability is close to transformation; the difference is that translation presupposes otherness rather than heritage. Yet, still the question remains whether it is not cognitively more promising to create notions corresponding to the analyzed culture. Said's answer is in the third part of *Culture and Imperialism,* 'Resistance and Opposition' – humanism as a process of self-discovery and encouragement, which cannot end and which is a unifying rather than isolating force (Said, 1993, pp.252-65; 288-316).[32] This understanding, however, makes humanism something close to a utopian concept.

III. Knowledge and Standpoint

Said's (and political)[33] engagement led him to a way of writing intended to reverberate outside the academic domain. The target group of *Orientalism* is supra-disciplinary, but still contained within the boundaries of academia, whereas *The Question of Palestine* and *Covering Islam* are intended for a political and media audience; the 1993 lectures broadcast on the BBC also address a large and diverse audience. The humanistic standpoint here requires a performative quality whose generic vehicle is the essay.

In *Secular Criticism* Said reflects on the social function of the essay that could avoid the compulsion of tradition because it effectively related the private and the political. (Said, 1983, pp. 26-28)[34] The essay is indeed free of disciplinary constraints but nothing guarantees that within the critical *oeuvre* of a single author it will not turn into a slightly varied repetition of several main theses incorporating elements of political (auto)biography. Yet repeating what and how must be researched instead of actually producing the research itself turns essayistic freedom into an ideology - and this is precisely what happens in Said's

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[32] For a presentation of the subject, especially Said's attitude to Fanon see Siddiqi, 2005; the chapter on *Humanism and Secular Criticism*.

[33] Said was a member of the Palestinian National Council from 1977 to 1991; he retired on account of his illness.

[34] For a succinct exposition of Said's views on the essay see (Ashcroft, 1999, pp. 132-135).

later essays. I do not discover a similar preponderance of methodology over research in the texts of Auerbach or Spitzer. In the publications after *Orientalism* Said's standpoint becomes more important than knowledge, which ceases to be its equal. I am also asking myself whether Said, busy with activities that did not leave him enough time and energy for research, did not turn to the essay by necessity rather than being guided by his desire to break the constraints of language.[35] There is no necessary relationship between the essay and secular criticism. The essay can be a suitable genre for certain cases, functioning as a quick intervention or as a respite from research involving a considerable amount of empirical material. However, although the avoidance of what Said calls pedantry, i.e. compulsory research including references of sources and critical literature, is an advantage when one is turning to an audience which cannot and/or will not dedicate a substantial part of its time and effort to researching the issue and the standpoint it is presented with, if the audience is partially acquainted with the issue, the case is different. Such references do not then necessarily mean an inability to present independent thinking and a tendency to hide behind 'facts', but the awareness that you are not the only one out there, even if you have contributed to creating a new research field. The checks and references prevent the simplification of other people's opinions and of the issue itself, as long as the researcher does not wish to do precisely that for his/her own benefit.

Knowledge in itself, without a sense of purpose, is socially powerless and only ostentatiously 'objective' and 'unengaged'. Seeking a broad impact, however, does not necessarily require searching out first-hand sources (visual, textual, musical, objects, relics, etc.), nor the tedious procedure of checking quotations, re-reading and, hopefully, conscientiously rendering other people's concepts and opinions, i.e. the whole time-consuming work which is the basis of academic writing and inevitably limits its social presence and, especially, the speed of writing. In *Culture and Imperialism*, there is a tendency to substantiate the positions held through the use of sources and contemporary literature, but even here the reader can see how the author's general opinions start to outweigh the research itself. This is why the books made up of collections of essays and interviews contain some facile claims, mistakes and certain imprecisions inherent in the essayistic style.[36] Said's public presence is indicative of the pressure exerted by the environment of the media on academic knowledge, even against the will of the

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[35] Ashcroft is quoting Marucci, according to him the move from a genre to an anti-genre (the essay) is guided by a desire to break the constraints of language. (Ashcroft, 1999, p.133) Linguistic constraints, however, are probably better broken by writing poetry. The essay has a rich and varied history (not only) in Europe. To define it simply as "anti-genre" is unfounded.

[36] It would be too petty to point to those I have noticed. Said's thinking is broad-minded enough to make such imprecisions negligible.

participants involved – the impact is broad indeed, but it is achieved at the expense of precision and complexity. The confluence of the two areas seems only briefly possible.

However we may interpret Auerbach's *Mimesis* – as collaborating with the European colonial hegemony, as a sample of European humanistic culture or otherwise, we have to get to grips with the complexity of the book. There is no doubt that Said contributed to making Auerbach known to a large intellectual milieu[37], yet *Mimesis* has remained confined within the boundaries of academia, and the many students have probably read only the chapters they have needed for their exams. The continuing interest in the writings of Auerbach in the USA is largely due to the fact that he taught there and is perceived as part of American intellectual culture.[38] This, however, concerns only the main body of his writings that have been translated into English.[39] Would the impact of *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* have been comparable to that of *Mimesis* if Ernst Robert Curtius had taught in the USA? Or would the non-historical concepts and the sometimes haughty tone would have precluded such an impact?[40] Said's attitude to the great names of German Romance Philology and French Oriental Studies from the first half of the 20th century, but mostly to Erich Auerbach, is, as I already mentioned above, that of a continuous affection. We can assume that this betrays Said's hidden desire to be like Auerbach in the sense of knowledge, breadth of ideas and ability to interpret difficult texts.[41] Both *Orientalism*

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[37] The fact that the publishing house turned to him for an introduction to the anniversary edition confirms his exclusive role for the popularization of *Mimesis*.

[38] An excellent study on the reception (reviews, anthologies, university curricula, emulations) of *Mimesis* in the USA – Lindenberger, 1996, pp. 195-211. The author discusses in particular the inspiration which *Mimesis* gave to Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (pp. 207-11).

[39] Many, though not all, of the American researchers of Auerbach deal only with his translated works. Much is translated in the USA, but not all. Living at the periphery of Europe, I am repeatedly impressed by the extent to which American critics (not only in literary criticism), possessed as they are of an imperial language and culture, behave as if something which is not translated into English, simply does not exist.

[40] In *Orientalism* one can read the following bizarre statement: "Auerbach's example was Curtius, whose prodigious output testified to his deliberate choice as a German to dedicate himself professionally to the Romance literatures."" (Said, 1978, p. 272). Auerbach comments in detail on Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* twice , in 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*' and in a review of the book. (Auerbach, 1967, pp. 330-38), but with regard to the 'example' every German Romance scholar works professionally with Romance literatures, languages and cultures.

[41] As I said in the beginning, Said defines philology not as the publication of texts, but still quite traditionally, as if bearing in mind the work of Auerbach: a detailed, patient scrutiny of and a lifelong attentiveness to the words and rhetorics by which language is used by human beings who exist in history …" (Said 2004: 61)

and *Culture and Imperialism* are modelled upon and seem to compete with Auerbach's *Mimesis* and *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*. They do not achieve their time-span but have another type of breadth and scope, namely – geographical rather than historical (Lindenberger, 2004, p. 50) - "what ties *Mimesis* and *Culture and Imperialism* most closely together is this larger "sense of mission". (Lindenberger, 1996, p. 208) This geography is colonial, which leads to the discussion of the relationship between power, knowledge and representation (Said, 1993, pp. 1-15; 2000r, pp. 453-58). In relation to critical thinking in terms of geography and power, Said acknowledges the influence on him of another (besides Vico) Italian thinker – Gramsci. (Said, 1993, pp. 56-58; 2000d, pp. 464-68)[42]. Said's attempt, however, to prove that Orientalism has existed ever since European antiquity must be attributed to the aforementioned emulation, but is not among the achievements of *Orientalism*.

The affinity to someone's writings is sometimes greater than the affinity to the living man. When Said turned to Auerbach's son – Clemens Auerbach, asking for the rights to edit a collection of the father's articles, he received the following answer: "He said my views were political anathema to him and would have been to his father" (*The Guardian*, 1999).

In Bulgaria Said is considered the main figure of postcolonial criticism;[43] I could not, however, discover any reflection on the humanism in his writing, nor any analysis comparing Said's secular criticism and the anti-humanism of French theory with its emphasis on discursive formations and rhizomatic knowledge.[44] Said's humanistic conviction that works of literature have a meaning and this meaning can be accessed through the texts themselves rather than through any external theory sets him apart from those who believe in the unlimited possibilities of floating signifiers. In this conviction and in

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[42] The fact that Gramsci studied philology at the University (of Torino), and that much of his writings concern literature, theater, and some – grammar and language, gives an opportunity to Said to make once again clear what he understands under philology: "Cutting through …the edifice of his [Gramsci's] work is the never-to-be-forgotten fact that Gramsci's training was in philology, and that – like Vico – he understood the profoundly complex and interesting connection among words, texts, reality, and political/social history or distinct physical entities." (Said, 2000d, p. 465)

[43] I am acquainted with the following publications: Mineva, 2000; Licheva, 2003; Panayotov, 2004; Fadel, 2005. In his article Fadel asks himself "Is not *Orientalism*, despite its negative pathos, a repetition of the acts of the West, against which Said takes his stand?", but prefers not to explore the possible answers nor the validity of the question.

[44] Mineva perceives Said as a follower of Foucault and reduces *Orientalism* to an 'applied archaeology of knowledge' (Mineva, 2000, p. 233). Fadel does the same, without mentioning Mineva's publication.

the moral grounds from which he wishes to 'make heard' the voices of the text and of its historical time we can once again discern the appropriation of Erich Auerbach's way of thinking.

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