Introduction

LEAVING BEHIND THE LIFE he cared about, Erich Auerbach arrived in Istanbul late in the summer of 1936. No one remembers whether he came by ship or by train, but had he taken the northerly route, he would have come on the Orient Express, passing through Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Already, there were Nazi uniforms on station platforms in Munich, as well as other, more heartening sights—peasants beginning their harvest, the Jewish quarter in Budapest, and the medieval architecture of Bucharest. During the three-day journey eastward, the Prussian scholar might have wondered at what point Europe ceased to be Europe and the familiar no longer spelled home. Yet, even at the end of the line, where minarets punctured the sky, it would have been difficult to locate Europe's boundary. In Istanbul, the Orient Express ran parallel to the old walls of Constantinople and came to a stop in the Sirkeci terminal—a rather modern building designed by one of his own countrymen. For passengers arriving from the West, the station represented the city at its best: it was located on the shores of Byzantine Constantinople, where many of the guides and station's clerks spoke French or German.

But perhaps Auerbach sailed via Italy and Greece, the cradle of classical Europe. With his monograph on Dante, the precursor of Renaissance humanism, in his baggage, he would have likely embarked in Genoa, crossed the Mediterranean, and put in at Piraeus, near Athens. This was the route connecting Goethe's land of lemon blossoms to the country that had long been referred to as "the sick man of Europe." While these

were the dominant Western tropes characterizing classical Europe and the Orient, republican Turks saw the connection between the West and the East in different terms. After all, this was the sea route that in Byzantine times had linked Rome to Constantinople. Referring to intellectual émigrés from fascist Europe, the Turkish minister of education liked to invoke the Byzantine scholars who had taken this route to escape the Ottomans after their conquest of Constantinople in 1453. With them went the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine manuscripts that, it is still often said, contributed to the spread of classical education in Western Europe.[1] Metaphorically speaking, this learning was now coming back with the arrival of scholars like Auerbach. As we will see, the Turkish minister would say that their escape from Europe catalyzed the Turkish Renaissance in the twentieth century: European scholars would revive classical education in the city once hailed as the greatest center of learning in the world.

Paul Signac (1863–1935), *Istanbul, Hagia Sophia*. Watercolor. Private collection. Photo: Visual Arts Library. By permission of Art Resource, New York.

There was a splendid view for sea passengers anchoring in the mouth of the Golden Horn. In Galata, between old Constantinople and the city's Genoese quarter, one could take in the culturally and religiously diverse topography of the city. Looking north were the old Christian and Jewish quarters of Pera, with the Galata tower crowning the city's seven hundred-year-old Genoese district, home to numerous churches and synagogues. Close by was also a thirteenth-century Dominican church, where Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII) would provide Auerbach with access to a rich library.[2] On arrival, Auerbach was probably welcomed by a Turkish university administrator or a German scholar who accompanied him to one of the Pera hotels overlooking the Bosporus and the many Ottoman palaces and mosques near the Golden Horn. Were he lucky, his hotel room would have had a view of the Hagia Sophia, the fifteen-hundred-year-old domed Byzantine cathedral, which had been converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest. Just a year before Auerbach's arrival, the Hagia Sophia had been transformed again, this time into a museum that opened its doors to everyone, irrespective of faith. This transformation was indicative of Turkey's latest move toward secularization, but it also signified Turkey's desire to claim the region's classical history as its own.

Of course, Auerbach was no accidental tourist, no ordinary traveler here to enjoy Istanbul's sights and to reflect upon its recent metamorphosis from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. He was a professor of Romance philology and probably would have never left Germany of his own accord. But in October of the previous year, 1935, a university administrator at Marburg University had summoned him to a meeting that he and his wife, Marie, had been dreading for some time. Auerbach knew exactly what was coming. Under the recently introduced Nuremberg laws, he was designated a "full Jew," a category that authorized Nazis to ostracize and disenfranchise him as "non-Aryan." The administrator asked Auerbach to confirm that he fell into this category. According to a decree from the German ministry of education, this was reason enough for Marburg University to terminate Auerbach's employment. For two years, he had hoped he would be spared this moment because of the exceptional status granted to Jews, like himself, who were veterans of World War I. But the following day, the dreaded letter was delivered, sealing his dismissal as the director of the Romance Seminar.[3] Reluctantly, Auerbach now came to accept

that the family's only recourse was to leave Germany: if Marie, his teenage son Clemens, and he were to escape further discrimination and dehumanization—indeed, if they were to preserve their lives—they would have to go into exile.

This book follows the plight of humanist scholars like Auerbach who escaped Nazi persecution by seeking exile in a Muslim-dominated society. As we will find, the exile's itinerary represents a larger set of historical forces, forces that, on the one hand, expelled them from fascist Germany and, on the other, functionalized them for a program of cultural renewal in Turkey. From 1933 on, for the scholars dismissed from German universities (among them Leo Spitzer, Alexander Rüstow, Ernst von Aster, and Hans Reichenbach), Turkey provided a haven where tertiary and governmental institutions offered to hire philologists, philosophers, historians, architects, natural scientists, economists, and musicians in order to support the country's modernization reforms. Istanbul University alone employed forty German scholars from various disciplines to promote the secularization and modernization of higher education. Auerbach joined this cohort in 1936 as the chair of the nation's leading faculty for Western languages and literatures. His tenure in Istanbul lasted eleven years, during which time Turkey implemented significant political, cultural, and educational changes. Coincidentally, these years also witnessed the wartime destruction of Europe.

East West Mimesis asks how a German-Jewish philologist, deemed "un-German" by the Nazis, experienced exile in a predominantly Muslim society. Could a Jew possibly find a home in such a place? There were, of course, historical precedents for this kind of hospitality: the Ottoman Empire of the late fifteenth century had provided a refuge for Sephardic Jews escaping persecution in the Iberian Peninsula. It seems unsurprising, then, that republican Turkey, founded in 1923, drew on this tradition and once again opened its doors to persecuted Jews from Europe. By the same token, we need to remember that the late Ottoman Empire took a hostile stance toward its own ethnic and religious minorities, with more than a million Armenians persecuted, deported, and killed under Ottoman rule during World War I.[4] The ethno-religious nationalism among Ottoman Turks during the early twentieth century also impacted the status of the Greek-Orthodox population in republican Turkey. In 1924, this resulted in the forced exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece: Turkey deported its Greek-Orthodox residents in exchange for Muslims living in Greece.

Parallel to this upsurge of ethno-religious nationalism was, paradoxically, the secularization of political and educational structures. And it was under the umbrella of secularization and modernization that German scholars, many of them Jewish, were hired. Initially, appointees signed contracts in which they agreed to learn Turkish within three years so they would be able to teach and publish in the language. It soon became clear, however, that the émigrés could not acquire proficiency so quickly—most of them continued to teach and publish in German and French.[5] We would expect that this Turkish language requirement was part of a broader program of integration. Yet, as I show in chapter 3, the émigrés were not, in fact, required to assimilate into Turkish society. Instead, they became part of a European intellectual elite: this was a migrant community that was not meant to disavow difference but rather to preserve its distinguishing feature—its Europeanness. In exchange for protection from Nazism, German scholars were meant to help implement Turkey's broad-ranging Westernization reforms. Provocatively, the book suggests that modern Turkish identity was not autochthonous: it was, in some measure, forged with the help of the émigré, that is to say, with the help of privileged outsiders within Turkish society. Émigrés took on special significance when Turkey decided to reclaim the region's classical heritage and re-create modern culture in the image of ancient Europe. Investigating the émigrés' role in wartime Turkey will help us understand the relationship between philology, cultural heritage, and Turkey's modernization reforms.

East West Mimesis addresses another anomaly highlighted by the Turkish reforms: despite the forced population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1924 and an ongoing antipathy between the two nations, leading Turkish intellectuals and government officials were soon promoting Greco-Roman learning as a basis for promoting modern Turkish literature. In this process, Turkey's Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic heritage was not entirely overwritten, but it was now rivaled by the Greco-Roman classics; and where students might once have studied Ottoman poetry, their syllabi soon included works by Plato, Sophocles, and Homer. How, then, are we to explain the anomaly between Turkey's new relationship to the Greco-Roman heritage and the deportation of its Greek subjects? How can we explain its paradoxical relationship not only to its ethnic minorities but also to its own past? We might say that Turkey intended to "purify" the body politic and create unity among its remaining

citizens. But the new heritage politics served an additional function—namely, forging a path to the West and establishing a set of cultural commonalities between Western Europe's ancient heritage and modern Turkey.

Westernization and Mimesis

The Turkish government under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk identified a need for change and was willing to embrace radical cultural and political reform. It was confronted with the problem of how to implement rapid change and where to look for inspiration. Turkish reformers, among them the ministers of education Reşit Galip (1932–1933) and Hasan Ali Yücel (1939–1946), sought earlier models and asked themselves how they could adopt such models without seeming overly derivative. Like the Ottoman Porte, the republican government would seek answers to these questions by looking to the West—to Western legislation, architecture, technology, science, literature, art, clothing styles, and material culture generally. Republican Turks decided to widen the scope of Ottoman Westernization reforms that had marked the cultural, economic, political, and military transformation of the Ottoman Empire during the previous two hundred years. These earlier Westernization reforms arguably were a response to the defeat of the Ottomans at Vienna in 1683, a turning point that denoted the end of the empire's expansion. Alternatively, the Ottoman reforms have been interpreted as part of a longer trajectory of economic and political changes that affected the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe simultaneously.[6]

The first of these reforms began in 1718 and was retrospectively coined *Lale Devri*, the Tulip Era, signifying the mutually dependent relationship between Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire. The tulip bulb, which paradoxically had been imported into Western Europe via Ottoman Constantinople in the sixteenth century, first caused an economic craze in Western Europe before it became synonymous with Ottoman efforts to adopt aspects of Western culture. Sultan Ahmed III set off this tulip vogue with a lasting impact on Ottoman art and garden design and an interest in foreign goods among members of the Ottoman elite.[7] In 1730, a revolt against Ahmed III put a sudden end to what came to be regarded as the decadent Lale Devri. The reforms of the nineteenth

century, in contrast, were less elitist. Established at a time when the empire faced the loss of a number of Mediterranean provinces, most importantly Greece, Algiers, and Egypt, the new modernization efforts encompassed a broader spectrum of Ottoman society. The civilian clothing reform of 1829, which replaced the turban with the fez, robes with frock-coats, capes, and trousers, and slippers with black leather boots, indicated the Ottoman equation of Westernization with modernization.[8] A decade later, a number of decrees called *tanzimat* initiated the fundamental reorganization of Ottoman society, specifically targeting the empire's military, administrative, and educational structures. From a cultural point of view, the nineteenth century may be thought of as a Francophile age. The appropriation of French culture left lasting traces in Ottoman intellectual life as Persian and Arabic influences slowly gave way to French ones. As one would expect, French literature played a particularly important role during this period of cultural reorientation, marking the beginning of the Ottoman newspaper, novel, and short story in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Ottoman Empire was not the only political entity with a predominantly Muslim population to undergo Westernization reforms during the nineteenth century. Khedive Ismail, for example, announced during his reign in Egypt (1863–1879) that his country was "no longer part of Africa. It is part of Europe."[9] This statement would seem to imply that there was a general trend toward Westernization. The differences between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, however, centered on the question of sovereignty. Egypt stood under quasi-colonial Anglo-French control in the nineteenth century and had political reasons for claiming that it belonged to Europe. The Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, was a sovereign empire. It continued to lose its provinces, including Egypt, to Western Europe, Russia, and the Balkans, but it essentially made an autonomous decision to undertake modernization. To see late Ottomans and early republican Turks primarily as a people under the hegemonic influence of Western European powers would thus be too narrow, if not misleading. Rather than adopting a postcolonial studies approach and reiterating Edward Said's generalizing claim that the Orient per se was subject to Western imperialist interests, I am interested in a more nuanced, historically specific study of East West relationships, one that highlights Ottomans and Turks as agents, not victims, of Westernization.[10]

Cemal Nadir, *Hicret!* (Exodus!), December 1, 1928. Reprinted from Sabine Küper-Büsch and Nigar Rona, *Die Nase des Sultans: Karikaturen aus der Türkei/Padişahın Burnu: Türkiye'den Karikatürler* (Istanbul: Dağyeli Publishers, Bilgi University Press, 2008), 17. Source: Dağyeli Press.

Like his Ottoman predecessors, Atatürk believed that modernization necessitated Westernization. However, the founder of the new republic broadened the reach of earlier reforms and made an additional strategic step: he called on Turkish citizens to identify as Europeans, even while seeking political independence from Western European countries like France. In consequence, the reforms of the 1920s and 1930s signified a consistent change in the political, educational, legal, and cultural basis of the republic, with secularization being its main guiding principle. The reforms meant that there would be no more fez wearing, the Ottoman script was erased, religious schools were outlawed, the caliphate and religious courts were abolished, the alphabet was Latinized, and the Islamic calendar was replaced with the Gregorian one.[11] Women gained the right to vote, entered public life, enrolled as students at universities, and themselves became associated with the spirit of progress and modernity.[12]

This book focuses on an important aspect of this watershed moment, namely, the educational reform of 1933, which secularized education, and the humanist reforms of 1939, which instituted a highly influential translation bureau dedicated to translating and publishing scores of Western classics into modern Turkish.[13] The translation bureau (*tercüme bürosu*) was novel in its scope and ambition but had, like other aspects of Turkey's reforms, precedents in Ottoman times. Like the first translation chamber (*terceme odası*) that had been established in the early nineteenth century under Mahmud II, the translation bureau of the 1930s intended to accelerate sociopolitical changes.[14] However, the significant role given

to translating Western classics, among them numerous Greek and Roman works, was completely unprecedented. Hasan Ali Yücel, the minister of education who established the translation bureau, saw in the translation project a way of emphasizing commonalities, not differences, between East and West.[15] Chapter 2 discusses these reforms, which inaugurated a broad translation project and helped secularize education but also staged Western plays, concerts, and operas.

Yet for all this, republican Turkey would be continually plagued by the problem of cultural appropriation. Like any other reform movement, the reform movement in Turkey was suspected of having thrown the baby out with the bathwater and rejected its own generative potential. This fear was felt by Turks, who were concerned about severing themselves from their Ottoman achievements; it was also a charge taken up in the West, where Turks were only too readily dismissed as derivative. This book is about one particular episode in Turkey's process of national renewal and about its worries over copying Western models. If the subject of this book is a historically specific one, it also contains lessons to be learned for the present, when building nations along Western lines is at the top of many foreign policy agendas. Historically, Turkey would address this problem by parsing the definition of mimesis. The Westernization reforms constituted a kind of cultural mimesis because they tried to generate, rather than simply copy, European culture.[16] In this air of change, republican Turks tried to dissociate themselves from the *züppe*, the Europeanized dandy, and from the *kukla*, Europe's marionette—both prominent figures in late Ottoman literature. In place of the insufficiently Westernized Ottoman would stride a modern Turk, someone who could cut a jaunty figure in Europe itself.

East West Mimesis explains how Auerbach could find European culture at home in Istanbul, even while the humanist tradition was being banished from Europe. Paradoxically, Auerbach's own deracination in Europe was, as Katie Trumpener and others suggest, to some extent mirrored in his host country, which tried to substitute the Ottoman past for a new national culture.[17] At the very moment when Europe was being systematically destroyed, Auerbach, while in Istanbul, tried to pinpoint the nature and origins of Western European culture. Confronted by wholesale destruction, the writer and scholar has perhaps two open avenues—to attempt to explain the annihilation or try to salvage what is being lost. Auerbach chose the latter. Which texts, he asked himself, made up the

core of Europe's literary traditions, and how did their narrative styles evolve? What was the relationship between representing reality (or what he called mimesis) and the way in which we think about the past? Between 1942 and April 1945, Auerbach answered these questions with his magnum opus, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (*Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*), a work that would later be foundational for the discipline of comparative literature, particularly in the United States.

Auerbach's book spans the history of Western European literature from Homer and the Hebrew Bible via Dante to Proust and Woolf. Perhaps most importantly, Auerbach argued that "the way in which we view human life and society is the same whether we are concerned with things of the past or things of the present. A change in our manner of viewing history will of necessity soon be transferred to our manner of viewing current conditions."[18] It was an idea of elegant simplicity: history is the product of narration. More than this, our understanding of the present derives from the way we think about what came before. This insight influenced, and continues to influence, a range of fields, including literary theory, history, comparative literature, and cultural history. The pathbreaking book promoted its author into one of the most significant critics of his time. He came to be known for his "characteristic wide horizon, encyclopedic knowledge and artistic sensibility," as his fellow émigré Leo Spitzer would put it.[19] In the postwar period, *Mimesis* also paved the way for his career at Pennsylvania State University, then Princeton, and finally Yale.

We can use Auerbach as a guide to understanding Turkey's humanist reforms and the way in which nation building was approached through changes to literature and philology. I make this claim not merely because of Auerbach's pivotal role in the humanities. Rather, the motivation for focusing on Auerbach is a methodological one. His seminal work provides the key concepts we need for understanding the very context in which he produced the book—most importantly, the idea of Europe, concepts of history, and the function of mimesis within processes of cultural and political reform. We can, in other words, use *Mimesis*, and the critical concepts it exemplifies, as a lens for analyzing the context within which the work arose. In this sense, my book provides more than the *Entstehungsgeschichte* of *Mimesis*, a history of its origins. It represents instead an attempt to read cultural history with literary critical tools and, as such, provides a methodological model that could be applied to other cultural and political

contexts. In using the concept of mimesis, I distinguish between mimesis as a textual practice used for representing reality and mimesis as a form of cultural practice deployed in the Westernization of Turkey as a whole. This bifurcated approach helps us understand the decisive role played by literature, philology, and curricula in the process of nation building. It further shows that concepts of history and practices of representation are neither incidental to polities nor inseparable from each other: Turkey's mimetic appropriation of Western culture was, simultaneously, a realist and historical project.

Westernizing Turkey meant establishing secular education and changing the Turkish habitus; it also meant generating new ideas about the past. *East West Mimesis* focuses on the impact of the humanist movement on the invention of a new Turkish past as distinct from the Ottoman one. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ottoman intellectuals had already reflected upon the changing concept of history and the nature of literature in the course of the Westernization reforms. For example, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, one of Turkey's most important modern authors, reflected on the crisis of realism, history, and literature in his literary and intellectual history of the late Ottoman Empire. The intellectual life in early republican times, he wrote, was also affected by this crisis.[20] The modern turn meant that writers in the 1920s and 1930s were charged with employing greater realism and with showing modern life as it really was.[21] Re-creating the Western habitus not only generated a new sense of reality but, as I have already suggested, also altered the notion of the nation's past. With the new boundaries of the Turkish Republic and the decision to appropriate Western culture in ways that surpassed the earlier Ottoman reforms, the sense of history and cultural legacy were radically altered.

The ways in which the ruins of Asia Minor were viewed is one case in point. It was only during the late nineteenth century that Ottomans began to show an archeological interest in the pre-Islamic Phoenician and Hellenistic past. The Imperial Museum that was founded in Istanbul in 1869 signified a "step in the self-incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into a European-dominated modernity."[22] Abdul Hamid II (r. 1876–1909) is reported to have said: "Look at these stupid foreigners! I pacify them with broken stones."[23] Whether or not this is true, we see that the archeological remains of ancient Europe assumed a prominent place in the national imagination during early republican times.[24] Ruined columns and statuary, which, like the Pergamon altar, had been presented as gifts or sold to European sovereigns during Ottoman times, could now be claimed as the

remnants of an exemplary ancient past, a past that was shared by the middle classes in London, Berlin, Paris, Rome, or Athens, as well as by the peasantry in Anatolia. Atatürk's Turkey was entering the modern age by appropriating Europe's classical heritage.

Exile and the Trope of Detachment

This book tackles two basic questions: it asks how being in Istanbul shaped the writing of *Mimesis*, and how *Mimesis* helps us understand Istanbul. More generally, it inquires into the condition of exile and the status of the outsider in processes of cultural and political change. Many scholars have taken Auerbach as their subject and focused on the first question, asking whether he could have written *Mimesis* anywhere other than in Istanbul or some place equally remote. The assumption has long been that *Mimesis*, like much exilic work, was the product of intellectual isolation—a corollary to the artist secluded in his garret. It is unsurprising that the notion of lonely exile has stuck. After all, early twentieth-century Turkey is associated with a bygone age: we think of old manuscripts and Ottoman scholars in fretted libraries, not the tickertape world of New York and London or the celluloid glitz of Los Angeles. *East West Mimesis* addresses this stereotype, overturning the idea that, during the 1930s and 1940s, Istanbul was hermetically sealed off from Western culture. Yet rethinking the context for Auerbach's scholarship implies more than just questioning the image we have inherited of him. The resulting contextualization of Auerbach's work, and of Istanbul itself, allows us to question one of the important premises of exile studies, namely, that exile is synonymous with isolation and that isolation is, in and of itself, intellectually and artistically productive. For many contemporary critics, exile still represents a state of critical detachment and superior insight that is supposed to arise when intellectuals are expelled from their homes and forced to take up residence elsewhere.

It concerns me, however, that this line of thought too readily reduces exile to a mere metaphor for uprootedness: disconnected from his or her social and political context, the exile is coupled with possibilities for cultural transfer and transnational exchange. Too easily does the exilic condition acquire almost utopian possibilities: the exile is suddenly unencumbered by indigenous tradition, emerging instead as the new mediator between systems, a perspicuous commentator on both the endogenous

and exogenous. I argue that this view of exile distorts the historical re-
cord. This view diminishes the existential plight of those who were ex-
pelled during the war, even as it elevates the individual case to a general
paradigm. Against this view of exile qua detachment, I propose a condi-
tion of multiple attachments. The task of the book is, then, to investigate
these new attachments and tease out their implications both for the indi-
vidual and for the respective societies at large. Rather than salvaging the
positive in the exilic condition, I ask what it meant to go into exile and
what arose therefrom. Moreover, what larger significance did exile have
for its agent—Germany—and for its beneficiaries—Turkey and the United
States? As we will find, the answers to these questions are less straightfor-
ward than we tend to assume.

Over the last decade, Emily Apter, Jane Newman, Selim Deringil,
and Seth Lerer began to question Auerbach's isolation in exile. Apter, for
instance, notes that Auerbach's "jaundiced depiction of his loneliness in the
wilderness" probably presented a "distorted picture" of exilic life in Istan-
bul.[25] I think she is right. We ought to revise this perception of Auerbach—
the legendary figure who was supposed to have written his greatest work cut
off from the very sources and cultural context that lay at its heart. More
than this, together with Angelika Bammer, Sophia McClennen, Anton
Kaes, Caren Kaplan, and Alexander Stephan, I call for a new approach to
the study of exile, one that recognizes both the historicity of exile and the
exile's material existence.[26] The payoff in adopting this approach is a more
differentiated portrait of the individual as well as of the status of exile
within large-scale historical processes.

In critiquing the equation of exile with isolation, I enter a disciplinary
debate about the task of comparative literature as distinct from national lit-
erature. In the United States at least, comparative literature is influenced by
the history of exile, and to this day, exile remains a significant topic within
the field. My intervention is, however, in keeping with recent self-scrutiny
among comparatists. Challenged by violent conflicts between the three
monotheistic religions, globalization, and new forms of imperialism, the
discipline is now attempting to redefine its purpose.[27] By investigating secu-
lar scholarship as the outgrowth of an exchange between German émigrés
and Turkish reformers, I hope to stimulate the interdisciplinary, transna-
tional debate about exile and secularism within the humanities.

In making my case for a contextualized understanding of *Mimesis*,
I take on a number of critics. Abdul JanMohamed, for one, insists that

Auerbach's place of exile was irrelevant to *Mimesis*. The book, he says, "could have been written in any other part of the non-Occidental world without significant difference."[28] Azade Seyhan similarly argues that Auerbach's work exhibits not "even the faintest trace of the exilic experience."[29] Yet, as I show, the evidence for such claims is rather thin. Indeed, they boil down to a remark made by Auerbach himself about the inadequacy of Istanbul's libraries. As I show in chapter 5, this oft-cited remark has been promoted to a generalized condition of insufficiency: at the periphery of the Western world we find not plenitude but lack, not familiarity or even difference but absence. We can trace the genealogy of this view to the critic Harry Levin and, most importantly, to Edward Said. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said regards Auerbach's dislocation and distance from Europe as the enabling condition for the writing of *Mimesis*. According to Said, for a scholar like Auerbach who was trained in medieval and renaissance Roman literatures, Istanbul

represents the terrible Turk, as well as Islam, the scourge of Christendom, the great Oriental apostasy incarnate. Throughout the classical period of European culture Turkey was the Orient, Islam its most redoubtable and aggressive representative. This was not all, though. The Orient and Islam also stood for the ultimate alienation from and opposition to Europe, the European tradition of Christian Latinity, as well as to the putative authority of ecclesia, humanistic learning, and cultural community. For centuries Turkey and Islam hung over Europe like a gigantic composite monster, seeming to threaten Europe with destruction. To have been an exile in Istanbul at the time of fascism in Europe was a deeply resonating and intense form of exile from Europe.[30]

Said conflates Auerbach's view of modern Turkey with an oversimplified Orientalist discourse rooted in the European Middle Ages and the Renaissance.[31] My interest is in disambiguating this Orientalist discourse from Auerbach's exposure to the cultural politics at Istanbul University and in highlighting his role as the spokesman for the humanist idea in a rapidly Westernizing country. Said's view of Auerbach's exile is problematic because it suggests that there was a continuous, homogeneous Orientalist discourse prevailing in Western Europe from the Middle Ages onward and that this prevented the philologist from comprehending the particular situation in which he found himself. Said did not acknowledge that the rapprochement between modern Turkey and Western Europe

was the result of age-long contact and exchange between Ottomans and Europeans.

The "executive value of exile," to use Said's term, lies not simply in Auerbach's alienation from his habitual cultural environment but in the particular cultural, historical, and intellectual environment of modern Turkey, an environment that offered a new home for the humanist tradition.[32] In other words, Auerbach's work was not only "steeped in the reality of Europe," as Said argues; it was also rooted in the reality of Istanbul. As if to anticipate Said's charge, Auerbach wrote that his work was "quite consciously a book that a particular person, in a particular situation, wrote at the beginning of the 1940s."[33] Our first task, then, is to investigate this particular person—the German-Jewish Dante scholar from Marburg University who chaired the faculty for Western languages and literatures at Istanbul University for more than a decade. The other, perhaps more important, task of this book is to explore the particularity of exile in Istanbul, a city that had been the center of Ottoman imperialism for half a millennium and now played a critical role in reviving Turkish culture through humanism. As I show, the relationship between the philologist and this context is precisely what allowed Auerbach to realize his scholarly project. This correlation, in turn, constitutes the structure of *East West Mimesis*.

Said's notion of 1930s Istanbul as a place of "Oriental, non-Occidental exile and homelessness"—a place that was enabling in its very threateningness and remoteness—is a notion that remains pervasive in comparatist scholarship.[34] Exile has been transformed into a theoretical factum and construed as a condition for generating new forms of critical consciousness in the humanities. JanMohamed, for example, draws on the trope of exile for his concept of the border intellectual.[35] Aamir Mufti elaborates on this in his work on secular criticism in a postcolonial framework where he explores the "ethical possibilities" of minority existence.[36] Both of these scholars cleave to Said and see the space on the edge as potentially productive. I, on the other hand, am less interested in tracing the significance of Auerbach to Said. Rather, I investigate how ideas about exile and isolation are connected to the trope of detachment in literary and literary critical discourses of the early twentieth century. Hence, I show how the trope of detachment, central to the aesthetics of modernism, came to assume a different meaning after the onset of mass emigration in 1933.

This book conclusively shows that Auerbach did not see Turkey as the antithesis of European humanism. In fact, Auerbach referred to Istanbul as a "fundamentally Hellenistic city," a city in which the Arab, Armenian, Jewish, and Turkish elements "meld[ed] or coexist[ed] in a single entity."[37] By "Hellenistic," Auerbach clearly meant Western, even if the valence of the term has changed over time. In its five hundred pages, *Mimesis* makes virtually no mention of Turkey: only the epilogue refers explicitly to 1940s Istanbul, and the references to other places in Turkey are merely incidental. But rather than insisting on Turkey as a missing subject within *Mimesis*, as other critics have been inclined to do, we can think about what this omission meant. I would argue that Turkey was neither a blind spot nor an oversight on Auerbach's part. Chapter 5 suggests that Turkey works *ex negativo* in the author's circumscription of the Judeo-Christian world: it is via this lacuna that the Judeo-Christian world first emerges as a bounded one. In other words, through its exclusions, *Mimesis* exemplifies how the West came to think of itself as different and separate from what is now called the Middle East. This chapter also traces the links between the scholarship Auerbach produced while in Istanbul and the location of his exile. Included among my finds are a number of lectures that Auerbach gave to large public audiences. In dealing with this material, my aim is not to reduce Auerbach's exilic scholarship merely to its Turkish context. I use it instead to show how he connected with his new surroundings and how he responded to some of the challenges posed by a rapidly modernizing society.[38]

It is, of course, difficult to quantify the relationship between location and creativity and to prove the influence of Istanbul on Auerbach's thought. Yet simply disavowing such a connection on evidentiary grounds implies that we subscribe to the notion of the romantic genius, whose creativity either is divinely inspired or springs from barren ground. Personally, I have no truck with such a view, but nor would Auerbach have seen himself in such terms. He may have been something of an elitist, but with his interest in historiography, the representation of reality, the role of the vernacular, and humanism as the basis for European culture, Auerbach was not alone while in Istanbul. To the contrary, we will find that these were the very questions preoccupying the Turkish reformers, intellectuals, and students who were in contact with Auerbach at the time. Thus, rather than emphasizing dislocation and difference as catalytic for exilic scholarship, it is the exilic place that concerns us here. This differentiated picture makes it clear

that Auerbach did not stumble into an intellectual and political void when he migrated to Turkey: in some sense, he found himself at home in exile. For a certain class of educated Turks in the 1930s and 1940s, Turkey not only *was* Europe, it housed the origins of Europe. This, as we will see, provoked émigrés in Istanbul and Ankara to reflect on the idea of Europe and the challenges posed by Turkey's Westernization project.

Reading in the Archives

To date, our knowledge about German-Jewish life in Turkey has been rather sketchy, due in no small part to the paucity of archival research on the topic and the difficulty in gaining access to Turkish archives. But for anyone willing to make the trip now, and with knowledge of German, Turkish, and French, there is information to be found in the documents of the German consulate in Istanbul, the German embassy in Ankara, the Foreign Office in Berlin, and the Nazi Ministry for Education, which are archived in the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts and the Bundesarchiv in Berlin. Other sources are held in the Literaturarchiv Marbach, the newspaper archive of the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, and the archive of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin. Research trips to these various institutions unearthed letters, memoirs, newspaper articles, journals, lectures, declassified consular reports, and governmental correspondence that all demonstrate the extent to which Auerbach was, in fact, integrated into a larger émigré community in Istanbul. Turkish sources, above all at the Istanbul University archive, helped complete the picture by shedding light on the nature of the humanist reform movement, the political and social status of Jews in Turkey, and the cultural topography of Istanbul during this period.

How one reads archival sources depends of course on one's disciplinary training. As both a literary critic and a student of cultural history, I am interested in applying literary critical tools to sources not typically associated with literature. However, rather than using archival sources to compile historical facts and attempt an objective view of the past, this book identifies some of the central devices and figures that structure the rhetoric used in these sources. Through the process of interpretation, this book illuminates intersections between the politics and poetics of the modern Turkish nation in its early stages. Among the productive outcomes of this approach is the capacity to discern the tropes of assimilation, imitation, and mimicry

that inform a broad range of contemporaneous Turkish as well as German discourses.[39] What emerges is a thick description of the social and political milieu that informed the encounter between exiled philologists and Turkish humanists. Whether we define this as either cultural studies or cultural history is a question of choice. Decisive, however, is that the literary, social, political, and historical are regarded as intertwined areas of inquiry in this interdisciplinary study.

My overarching approach, then, is not simply to read Turkey into *Mimesis* but to read *Mimesis* against Turkey and render Auerbach's work productive for our understanding of Turkey and East West relations generally. In establishing this relationship between the author's work and its context, I once again draw on Auerbach's own approach. While in Istanbul, Auerbach worked on the concept of the *figura*—a rhetorical device that establishes links between two otherwise unconnected events or persons. The sacrifice of Isaac discussed in the opening chapter of *Mimesis*, for instance, becomes meaningful because it prefigures another event—the sacrifice of Christ. According to Auerbach's reading, the first event is both preserved and fully realized in the latter, and the two historically unrelated events now come to signify each other.[40] Using the concept of the figura, I make a connection between Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the history of Istanbul. The two poles of my figura are, first, the series of Westernization reforms and, second, Auerbach's magnum opus. By reading Auerbach's work against the Turkish Westernization reforms, we gain insights into the spatial and temporal conditions governing education, scholarship, translations, and literary production at the time. We also come to see mimesis not merely as a literary technique but also as a broad cultural strategy informing many aspects of Turkish life.

By invoking the figura as a form of historical parenthesis, I also highlight the differences between the two mimetic projects laid out above—first, mimesis as a cultural mode at work in the Westernization reforms; second, Auerbach's mimesis as a literary mode for representing reality. Both forms of mimesis work to establish the relationship between the present and the past. The cultural mode—imitating European humanism—introduces a new historical legacy to Turkey, namely, the legacy of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. The literary mode in turn shapes—as Auerbach argues—our concept of history itself. Investigating Auerbach in Turkey thus allows me to show that the national and the humanist movements were intertwined at this crucial point in Turkey's

long identification with the West. I argue that the Westernization re-
forms, in fact, prefigure the essentially Eurocentric scope of *Mimesis*.

There is something admittedly risky about arguing for a figural rela-
tionship between Turkey's Westernization reforms and a work like *Mime-
sis*. It is worth remembering, however, that the new Turkey was anxious to
disassociate itself from the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. The Western-
ization reforms of the preceding two centuries were regarded as having
been either too superficial or too inconsistent, and modern Turks were
keen to make a new start. As in *Mimesis* itself, the latest reforms relegated
Islam and the Ottoman Empire to the periphery. If secularization liberal-
ized education in ways unimaginable under the Ottomans, it nonetheless
instituted Europhilia as the new religion. Europhilia—by which I mean a
preference for Western literature, clothing, and other aspects of cultural
and political life—became the norm that reinforced the reformers' divi-
sion of Turkish citizens into two factions—progressive Westerners and
conservative Muslims.

Before considering Auerbach's role as the representative of the hu-
manist tradition, we need to inquire about the politics of humanism and
ask who Auerbach was prior to exile. Auerbach's origins—the "philolo-
gist's heritage," as he referred to it—were naturally formative for his
thinking. Indeed, we might ask whether it would have been sufficient to
trace *Mimesis* to Auerbach's intellectual development during the Weimar
Republic. In what follows, we will find that Auerbach reflected on and
wrote about representation, memory, history, and even exile long before
he faced exile himself. Explaining Auerbach's later scholarship merely by
referencing his philological training in the Weimar Republic does not, in
my view, shed much light on the subject. In summary, rather than follow-
ing a deterministic, biographical model, this book situates *Mimesis* within
its intellectual and geocultural context and maps out how the meaning of
humanism, history, and mimesis was shaped by the transnational encoun-
ter between Turkish and exiled German scholars.

Chapter 1 traces the origins of Auerbach's "philologist heritage,"
comparing his humanist worldview with that of his contemporaries Wal-
ter Benjamin and Victor Klemperer. Here, I situate Auerbach's pre-exilic
work within debates concerning the philosophy of history and inquire
into the fate of humanism during the Nazi era. The schism between bour-
geois and socialist humanism at the international humanist conference in
Paris in 1935 is of particular relevance, for it helps us understand how

humanism served as a capacious umbrella for various cultural, political, educational, and scholarly approaches. Chapter 2 focuses on the particularities of Turkish humanism as a way of renewing Turkish culture. It shows that Turkish reformers in the 1930s drew on the Renaissance model to develop a system of education based on Western classical learning. The chapter asks how Turkish identity was constructed via the outsider. Émigrés like Auerbach, Leo Spitzer, and others played an important role in educating students in philology and providing them with a humanist worldview. Exiled philologists, philosophers, historians, and librarians overhauled disciplinary practices, introduced new academic writing styles, and set up research libraries. The chapter explains why Turkish intellectuals demanded, for example, that Ottoman literature ought to be approached via Shakespeare. In investigating the challenges of re-creating modern culture in the image of ancient Europe, this chapter concludes that Turkey's humanist reform of 1939 was tantamount to a kind of classical humanism with socialist leanings.

In analyzing tropes of authenticity and inauthenticity, chapter 3 argues that anxieties regarding appropriation and assimilation impacted the status of Turkish and German Jews in different ways. Three tropes—the mimic, the *dönme*, and the eternal guest—are shown to have informed notions of Jewishness, Turkishness, and Europeanness during the nationalization and modernization period. By tracing these tropes in a range of sources, including university lectures, newspapers, university contracts, letters, and German consular reports, the chapter discloses how and why Jewish émigrés were granted privileged status in Turkey, even while Turkish Jews were being subjected to discrimination. Against the view that exile in 1930s Istanbul represented "an active impingement of European selfhood," I argue here that Auerbach's Europeanness and in fact his Jewishness were the very reasons why he was hired to help modernize Istanbul University in the first place.[41]

In chapter 4, we find that Auerbach's exile was dictated by the same force he sought to flee—National Socialism. The chapter thus traces the émigrés' path through the topography of German Istanbul, where consular officials impeded intellectual work and Nazis spied in university lecture halls. Hitherto undiscovered documents in the German consular archive, unpublished letters by Spitzer and Auerbach, university correspondence, and Istanbul's first philological journals reveal the difficulties that arose when Nazis intervened in the émigrés' academic and personal

affairs. By examining the hiring and departmental policies at Istanbul University, we find that Turkish university administrators in fact cooperated with Nazis. Chapter 4 goes on to investigate the battle over teaching German literature at Istanbul University: this culture war began with a crisis between Spitzer and the German consulate, continued with Auerbach trying to prevent the hiring of Nazi Germanist Hennig Brinkmann, and ended with Turkey's declaration against Nazi Germany in 1944. Auerbach would respond to the culture war by giving voice to a vision of "international philology." Like émigré comparatist René Wellek in the United States after the war, Auerbach cast himself as a kind of international ambassador with the aim of encouraging productive collaboration among the Istanbul faculty. Having witnessed the havoc wrought by extreme nationalism, he now directed his academic agenda toward transcending the nation as the main organizing principle of Western European philology.

Having left Germany as a Dante-scholar, Auerbach became a comparatist in Turkish exile—partly because he wanted to rescue a world destroyed by the Nazis and partly because his role in Turkey was that of a Europeanist. But, ironically, the idea of Europe that he developed in *Mimesis* came at the cost of denying the very cultural site in which he found himself while in exile. Chapter 5 thus challenges three conventional explanations concerning the originality of Auerbach's authorship, namely, the unavailability of books, the poor state of scholarship and intellectual dialogue, and, finally, detachment as a precondition for critical thinking. We find that the catalyst for *Mimesis* was a vibrant intellectual circle that included prominent cultural historians like Alexander Rüstow and the tremendous weight that humanist scholarship already carried in Istanbul. *East West Mimesis* concludes, then, that Auerbach drew on the modernist trope of detachment when staging himself as an isolated intellectual in exile. Finally, this chapter focuses on a hitherto unknown lecture Auerbach delivered on Dante—one of the principal figures of exile in the Western world—whose *Commedia* had been banned in the Ottoman Empire because of its offensive portrayal of Mohammed in the inferno. In discussing the 1939 lecture, the chapter situates Auerbach in relationship to the new intellectual avenues that opened with Dante's translation into Turkish. It addresses the strange fact that, notwithstanding Turkey's new progressive and secular atmosphere, Auerbach downplayed the affiliations between the Judaic, Christian, and Islamic worlds.

In the 1930s, Turks saw Auerbach not as a Jewish outcast but as a European who could help reintroduce the humanist heritage of old Constantinople. Yet in the 1990s, perceptions would shift: in the wake of the quincentennial commemoration of the Sephardic Jews' exile to the Ottoman Empire, Turkish scholars "rediscovered" the émigrés of the 1930s as "Jews" and depicted them as figures of modernity in Turkish historiography. If we look for Auerbach's place in Turkey today, we find that his minority position as a Jew is woven into the narrative about Westernization. In the epilogue, I argue that the hiring of German Jewish scholars is presented as proof of Turkey's capacity to surpass its Western model: Europe failed its Jewish citizens, yet Turkey displayed humanity toward the persecuted. However, it should be clear that such narratives paper over Turkish anti-Semitism and the country's atrocities against Greeks, Armenians, and Kurds. *East West Mimesis* attributes such revisionism to Turkey's ongoing need to prove itself sufficiently European to warrant membership in the European Union. And it answers this need with a more critical account of the past and a more hopeful view for the future.