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### Home and Displacement: The Dynamic Dialectics of 1922 Smyrna

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# Home and Displacement: The Dynamic Dialectics of 1922 Smyrna

Konstantina Georganta

## Abstract

The destruction by fire of Smyrna, a rich port city on the coast of Asia Minor, in 1922, at the climax of the war between Greece and Turkey, and the consequent exchange of populations signed at Lausanne in 1923 are events that have left a lasting mark on Greek national narratives and modern Greek literary production. 1922 Smyrna also marked one of the final acts in the emergence of early-twentieth century nation-states constructed upon the idea of homogeneity. The inheritance of the implications of enforced homogeneity led writers to return to Smyrna to explore the instability of identities behind the traumatised narratives of war and expulsion and to interrogate the narrative production of 'home.' This article examines how three novels originally published in the English language and thus widely available, namely Eric Ambler's *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1939), Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* (2002) and Panos Karnezis's *The Maze* (2004), return to 1922 Smyrna as to a site traumatised by war and create a discursive space lining 1922 to other historical times and to other narratives and modern anxieties. The focus on displacement counteracts the neat arrangement of nationalities designed by the Treaty of Lausanne making Smyrna a real utopia.

In Jeffrey Eugenides's novel *Middlesex* (2002), the protagonist Cal returns to Smyrna and recounts events before and after the fire of 1922 in a constant journey backwards and forwards in time with the ultimate goal of finding the root and resolution of anxieties about who he is. In the several pages dedicated to the events that led to the destruction of the city in 1922, the narrator feels the need to resurrect Smyrna so as to redress the balance that its loss unsettled: "Smyrna endures today in a few *rebetika* songs and a stanza from *The Waste Land*" (*Middlesex* 50), Cal narrates. Eugenides is one in a series of writers who have

revisited Smyrna in either historical or fictional accounts of a city that has become a symbol for either the loss of the pre-1914 aspiration to cosmopolitanism or of the displacement of populations, along with their lifestyles, traditions and memories, as the result of modern warfare.

Ernest Hemingway, who did not witness the events of 1922 himself, wrote the short story “On the Quai at Smyrna” around 1926-27 and included it in the volume *In Our Time* first published in 1930. Earlier, T.S. Eliot had included Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant, in his most famous interwar poem *The Waste Land* (1922) while author of spy thrillers Eric Ambler spun a story inspired by famous arms dealer Basil Zaharoff for his 1939 novel *The Mask of Dimitrios* and had his narrator look for Dimitrios in the ashes of Smyrna. In his 1975 film *The Travelling Players* (*Thiassos*), director Theodoros Angelopoulos had one of his main characters narrate his refugee journey to Keratsini and Piraeus after the breaking up of the Greek front in August 1922 in a scene which ended with him being shot by the Nazis: “I came from beyond the sea, from Ionia. And you?” Finally, in his 2004 novella *The Maze*, Panos Karnezis presented the story of a brigade’s peregrinations in the aftermath of Smyrna’s demise.

In the 1919 Paris Peace Conference after the end of the First World War, Greece was to partake in the territorial rewards decided upon for fighting on the side of the Allies. This was the climax of Greek irredentism after the establishment of the modern Greek State in 1830, a grand scheme that went by the title the Great Idea (*Megali Idea*) throughout the nineteenth century, which included the “unification of territories inhabited by substantial Greek populations” (Veremis 53). The Treaty of Sèvres (20 August 1920) “granted administrative powers to Greece over large areas of the Anatolian coastal region” (Hirschon 5), but the climax in Greece itself of the National Schism between the royalists and liberals and “an ill-conceived military campaign (1919-22),” as Thanos Veremis argues, led to the defeat of the Greek army by Turkish forces under Kemal Atatürk in the war that ensued from the Treaty (53).<sup>1</sup> In 1922 the war between Greece and Turkey ended with the Greek army’s retreat from Anatolia and the destruction by fire of Smyrna in September of the same year. A compulsory exchange of populations between the two countries was decided upon in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 and

so the burning of Smyrna became symbolic of the end of an era as it was one of the final acts that determined the boundaries of the newly formed nation-states in the Balkans. After the First World War, Gerasimos Augoustinos reminds us, the defeat of the imperial idea in the Balkans and the Near East had reinforced the “supremacy of the idea of the nation-state” (85). Hemingway’s story has the look of a “nightmarish surrealist painting,” Matthew Stewart suggests, yet that nightmare was a reality since by the end of the First World War the “displacement of mass populations” had come to “typify modern geopolitical conduct” (36).

Pre-1914 Smyrna was a space of inclusion but post-1922 Smyrna was dominated by the “dialectics of division” (Bachelard 211) directed by the official text of the “Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations” signed at Lausanne on 30 January 1923. This official document identified different “nationals” according to religion and stated that “the emigrants will lose the nationality of the country which they are leaving, and will acquire the nationality of the country of their destination” (Article 7).<sup>2</sup> Additional emigrants involved in the exchange, for whom the same rules of the convention also applied, included “all physical and juridical persons who have been obliged to emigrate or have emigrated since the October 8, 1912,” that is the date when the First Balkan War broke out (Article 3).

Since nation-state, Giorgio Agamben notes (in his essay on Hannah Arendt’s 1943 “We Refugees”), means “a state that makes nativity or birth (that is, of the bare human life) the foundation of its sovereignty,” the refugee is a disquieting element because “by breaking up the identity between man and citizen, between nativity and nationality, the refugee throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty.” The refugee should therefore be considered, Agamben continues, for what he is, that is, “nothing less than a border concept that radically calls into question the principles of the nation-state and, at the same time, helps clear the field for a no-longer-delayable renewal of categories.” The regulations of the Treaty of Lausanne created a division based on an insider/outsider binary upon which homogeneous frameworks serving the emerging nation-states were constructed. The duality was based on the “old certainty” that there is an “immutable link between cultures, peoples, or identities and specific places” (Lavie and Swedenburg 1) and failed to

account for the also emerging instability of identity and the problematic of 'home,' two of the themes that the novels here discussed examine as if taking their cue from Edward Said's "exilic consciousness" whereby the "unhoused, de-centered, and exilic energies [of culture]"—"whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages"—are at the forefront of "liberation as an intellectual mission" (332-33). Despite being engulfed by the supposed certainty of a new 'nationality,' the Smyrna emigrants were also displaced from their origins which were reduced to the few lines included in an official document.

Even though there is a rich tradition of Greek novels on the subject of the 1922 displacement and the trials of war in Anatolia as well as the efforts of the refugees to get integrated,<sup>3</sup> it is not often that we find creative works originally published in the English language, and thus immediately available to a wider audience, that return to 1922 Smyrna and make of it an international symbol of displacement. *The Mask of Dimitrios*, *Middlesex* and *The Maze* focus on 1922 Smyrna as a site traumatised by war, in contrast to the utopian pre-1914 Smyrna, which allows them to present the city as a real space whose inheritance lives on. The novels see Smyrna as synonymous with war, displacement and expulsion but, rather than reproducing traumatised narratives, they alert the readers to make the link to the times in which the novels were written. The financial games behind wars, the effect of displacement on one's identity and the responsibility to accept the diverse societies a movement across borders creates as well as the need to interrogate official accounts of historical events against the backdrop of personal experience are some of the issues the novels raise. Angelopoulos has noted about *Thiassos* that in it he followed a 'dialectical' approach in which he talked about the present while referring to the past. As a result, in the film we often find "two historical times" dialectically juxtaposed in the same shot to create associations which would in turn lead to historical conclusions (Tarr and Proppe 6). I am putting this same approach into practice in this article.

### ***The Mask of Dimitrios***

The 1939 thriller *The Mask of Dimitrios*, which was turned into a film in 1944 and was also an influence on Orson Welles's 1955 movie *Mr Arkadin*, presents a world on the brink of another World War. In this context, Mark Mazower suggests in his introduction to the 2009 edition of Ambler's novel, the real problem is money and the "instability of identity" of the book's arch-villain Dimitrios ("Greek, Muslim, Jew?" Mazower asks), who echoes the real-life figure Basil Zaharoff (vii). A Greek born in Turkey and living in Paris, Basil Zaharoff (Basileios Zacharias, 1849-1936) became "the greatest armaments salesman the world has ever known" (Fielding 53). As John Flynn writes in *Men of Wealth* (1941), Zaharoff was the master of the "principle of incitement," under which "war scares were managed, enemies created for nations, airplanes sold to one nation and anti-aircraft guns to her neighbors, submarines to one and destroyers to another... He did what the cigarette people did, what the liquor industry, the beauty industry did—created a demand for his merchandise. The armament industry became a game of international politics, the arms salesman a diplomatic provocateur" (339).

*The Mask of Dimitrios* presents, Mazower notes, a "journey into the heart of Europe's darkness—reality in the shape of the bloated corpse of a man called Dimitrios laid out on a slab in a stinking Istanbul mortuary" (vi). Like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899, 1902), where "the fugitive nature and indefinite contours of haze are given a special significance by the primary narrator [who] warns us that Marlow's tale will be not centered on, but surrounded by, its meaning" (Watt 169), this "journey into the heart of Europe's darkness" is surrounded by the horror of Smyrna and the chaos of war as the Ottoman empire collapsed; but this story is made both particular to the period in which it was written—as a new war was about to break out—and general by presenting war following the same system as the world's economies. The novel returns to 1922 Smyrna in the third chapter, when university lecturer, writer and amateur detective Charles Latimer begins his search for Dimitrios in the city's ashes:

*Giaur Izmir*—infidel Smyrna—had atoned for its sins.

By the time that dawn broke on the fifteenth of September, over one hundred and twenty thousand persons had perished; but somewhere amidst that horror had been Dimitrios, alive. (*The Mask of Dimitrios* 23)

Latimer follows and re-writes Dimitrios's itinerary through Smyrna, Athens, Sofia, Adrianople, Belgrade, Switzerland, Paris, Zagreb, Lyons and Istanbul, and personally witnesses Dimitrios's death in a Paris room strewn with *mille* notes, the gains from assassinations, white slave and drug traffics (222). Latimer's search for Dimitrios is then narrated by the author himself who describes the story as an "obsession" (101).

By 1919, Zaharoff's donations had produced three Chairs of Aviation in London, Paris and Petrograd and his name appeared frequently in the papers. In July 1922, Conservative MP Aubrey Herbert supported the view in *The Times* that Zaharoff was "reputed to be the richest man in the world" ("House of Commons" 17) while a few months earlier in March Herbert had also criticised the British Prime Minister Lloyd George for his foreign policy; Zaharoff's name was again mentioned: "Would [the House of Commons] cheer as loudly if it were informed that Sir Basil Zaharoff's Council remains, and he will assuredly advise the Prime Minister to pursue a policy of supporting the Greeks, whose interests are not identical with our own?" (6). This "mysterious entrepreneur," Flynn suggests, was a "master-intriguer"; accepted as a citizen of France and enjoying the confidence of its most powerful ministers, he "used France as a base for managing an English trade offensive, trade in arms and in oil in France and the Near East, in direct conflict at many points with the French government's own objectives" (366). Works by Bernard Shaw, Ezra Pound, and Thomas Pynchon have contributed to the fictionalisation of Zaharoff's life and the continuation of the vogue surrounding his name and stature. This "merchant of death" represents, as a 2006 documentary examining his life commented, "an economic system that thinks of war as profitable, a system linking to this day the interests of dominant nations to the interests of arms industries" (Abazoglou).

With his origins lost somewhere in the ruins of the newly erected Balkan states, Zaharoff-cum-Dimitrios was a product of war Western Europe did not want to face and so could easily dismiss as the uncivilised, underdeveloped and prone to violence "Balkan."<sup>4</sup> In 1922, Arnold Toynbee argued in *The Western Question in*

*Greece and Turkey* that the events in Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace were not part of the “Eastern Question” but the “Western Question,” that is, of the principles governing Western Europe’s nation-states; thus, what was considered an Eastern “barbarity,” Antonis Liakos suggests, was in reality the dark side of Western civilisation (13-17). Dimitrios’s image was unsettling to the onlooker because it challenged the Other’s consciousness of their own duplicity; as the narrator of *The Mask of Dimitrios* notes, “the duplicity of others must be always shocking when one is unconscious of one’s own” (200). By the end of the story, Latimer becomes complicit to the disavowal of this image when, despite having gathered enough material for his book, he eventually decides to write a story about “the sort of thing people liked to hear about”—a story in which money is the motive and a murder takes place at a scene with “plenty of fun to be got” (226)—an English country village in the summertime—so as to help the readers distance themselves from the scene of the crime and escape the guilt of having to make an ethical decision.<sup>5</sup>

*The Mask of Dimitrios* is presented as a non-story. Latimer’s decision not to write about Dimitrios in the end cautions the reader to consider the ultimate invisibility of what s/he has just read since the story is eventually censored out of publication. The objectivity and neutrality of the language that constructs the narratives the public receives is the story’s final comment to the readers, an element the story shares with *Middlesex* and *The Maze* since there too we find official texts juxtaposed and counteracted with personal narratives. The protagonist of *Middlesex* lists all the different studies that have focused on his case of pseudo-hermaphroditism when introducing himself to the readers (3); significantly it is in a library—an “heterotopia” according to Foucault of “indefinitely accumulating time” and so a powerful counter-site where utopias are enacted (“Of Other Spaces” 17)—that the tension between who Callie was and who Cal is about to become reaches a climax when the discovery is made that a synonym of “hermaphrodite” is “monster.” That was “the verdict that the culture gave on a person like her,” Callie then thought, as produced and proven in a book that contained “the collected knowledge of the past while giving evidence of present social conditions” (*Middlesex* 431). A war correspondent following *The Maze*’s brigade will capture for future generations one of the concluding episodes in the story (182), adding his



narrative to the dispatches written throughout the war that were sadly inadequate to express the complexity of the events *The Maze* narrated: “the elegant descriptions of battle, the formality of the text, the explicit photographic plates that caused no grief” (183). Official narratives, all three novels seem to imply, create a desired heterotopia for the projection of our desires and, when left unquestioned, these narratives render all other alternatives unthinkable.

### ***Middlesex***

“And now it is all a matter of wind. 1 a.m., Wednesday, September 13, 1922... The smell of jasmine has turned to kerosene” (*Middlesex* 55). Recounting the story of his grandparents’ escape from burning Smyrna, one in the many layers of a story about the emergence of his own identity crisis as a third generation Greek-American and a pseudo-hermaphrodite, *Middlesex*’s protagonist Cal wants to remember what happened in this city because it was “no place exactly...was part of no country because it was all countries, and because now if you go there you’ll see modern high-rises, amnesiac boulevards, teeming sweatshops, a NATO headquarters, and a sign that says Izmir”( 54).

Eugenides’s dive into the past to tell a story of the present shares something of Angelopoulos’s cinematography as he too inserts pieces of information about Cal’s family tree into his narration of present-day events, making the two levels of narration mutually inclusive. Cal, a third generation Greek-American, had to re-experience the identity of a migrant whose meaning was also already socially established in order to resolve his gender identity crisis. The narrator of *Middlesex*, Aristi Trendel notes, is “a ‘grandchild of Byzantium,’ the offspring of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, which brought his-her grandparents to America endowing them with a project”: “Already on the boat they reinvent themselves. From brother and sister, Lefty and Des become husband and wife...thus hosting the recessive gene responsible for Calliope’s hermaphrodisim” (3). And, in this way, something else is forged in the fires of Smyrna: “Some people inherit houses; others paintings or highly insured violin bows. Still others get a Japanese tansu or a famous name. I got a recessive gene on my fifth chromosome and some very rare family jewels indeed” (401).

“The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible,” Judith Butler notes, “requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’” (23-24). This was the case with Michel Foucault’s hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin (a book that provoked the writing of *Middlesex*, as the writer himself has acknowledged), who exposed, Butler continues, “the postulation of identity as a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction” (32).<sup>6</sup> Lefty and Desdemona’s attraction for one another can be read as the perpetuation of a narcissistic image of the self not exposed to the look of the other—or, simply, the result of the fear to change—an awareness of which is necessary for one’s awareness of oneself. Lefty feared what marriage to a woman other than his sister would mean: “He would have children and stop going down to Bursa and little by little he’d change; he’d get older; everything he felt now would fade into memory and then into nothing” (33). Their fear of change resulted in an inability to see and develop themselves, hence remaining stuck to the same silence that enabled the mutated gene, which was the consequence of the “lacerated” narratives they carried along with them.<sup>7</sup> Cal’s journey of self-discovery involves him trying to achieve a holistic awareness of himself, what in R.D. Laing’s terms we could define as “an awareness of oneself by oneself, and an awareness of oneself as an object of someone else’s observation” (106). This is why by the end of the novel, and after he has exposed himself plunging in a pool as “God Hermaphroditus,” Cal eventually opens his eyes underwater: “Inside Hermaphroditus old tensions were roiling, trying to work themselves out. Traumas of the locker room were being released. Shame over having a body unlike other bodies was passing away. The monster feeling was fading” (494).

By re-imagining Smyrna as a place that was “no place exactly” but where the dream of a multicultural co-habitation had come true, the city could become for him a place with unfixed roots, a versatile and mobile entity that breaks the hold of time and space. The gene became for Eugenides not only a device for linking the stories of immigrants, experienced, told, or imagined, but also for following the impact these stories have in the creation of his hybridised hero. Through his physical distance from but also intimate relationship with his grandparents’ trajectory—from the village of Bithynios and through the fire of Smyrna to Ellis

island and Detroit—Eugenides’s hero recounted anew and so reinvented his story and theirs:

Now we know we carry this map of ourselves around. Even as we stand on the street corner, it dictates our destiny... Our throats and voice boxes, formed from the same instructions, press air out in similar tones and decibels. And this can be extrapolated backward in time, so that when I speak, Desdemona speaks, too. She’s writing these words now. (37-38)

Smyrna, Eugenides’s narrator reminds us, was reputedly founded by the Amazons (*Middlesex* 50); heroic in their independence, courage and skill, the Amazons met males “on male terms” and in “transcending their gender” they blurred the boundary between masculine and feminine (Segal 116-17). Finding in the story surrounding the city a paradigm for his protagonist’s development, Cal’s character could explore what Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson term as “the production of difference within common, shared, and connected spaces” (16). The novel presents the middle ground where all identities conflate; “Middlesex” is an idealized Smyrna in Detroit, Michigan, “a place designed for a new type of human being, who would inhabit a new word. I could not help feeling of course, that that person was me, me and all the others like me” (595). If *The Mask of Dimitrios* interrogated the official accounts of war and made the readers complicit with their construction and dissemination, *Middlesex* looks for the language that forms our personal and collective narratives, memories, and eventually, identities.

### ***The Maze***

In *The Maze*, Panos Karnezis makes the aftermath of the Greek army’s evacuation of Asia Minor the starting point of a war novel about the confluence of a Greek brigade, a village massacre and a town seemingly forsaken by war. As Kostas Koukouzelis suggests, the novel presents the defeat of the Greek expeditionary force in tandem with “the defeat of an era of traditional, religious stability”; traumatised voices appear aplenty.

The abandoned town, described in the novel’s preamble as slowly “erased” from the “eternal Anatolian landscape” (*The Maze* 2), alludes to the destruction of the city of Smyrna, and “the massacre” also alludes to the memories of the fall of the richest port in Asia Minor, since the historical note preceding the preamble clearly

locates the story after the summer of 1922. Like any war narrative, the novel is “palimpsestic, self-reflexive, hypertextual” (McLoughlin 8), citing passages from the *Bible* and the *Communist Manifesto* and referring to *Don Quixote*, Greek and Roman myths, Xenophon’s *The Anabasis*, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, and *Das Kapital*. It also follows the new mode of thinking and experiencing time and space created from around 1880 to the outbreak of the First World War when technological innovations, including the wireless telegraph, the bicycle and the airplane, and cultural developments, such as the theory of relativity, founded a reorientation of consciousness (Kern 1).<sup>8</sup> One of the overarching themes of the novel is therefore memory at a time of relativity when a clock is placed “in every gravitational field in the universe, each moving at a rate determined by both the intensity of the gravitational field at that point and the relative motion of the object observed” (Kern 19). Even though seemingly located at a specific time in space, *The Maze* interrupts the linear time-space continuum and instead offers the reader a story both transient and fixed in time as the plot is set in the past but the echoes are modern. The specificity of place is therefore surpassed and *The Maze* can be found anywhere.

The characters of the story seem to be about to experience events already lived, echoing in this both Hemingway’s “non-stories” in “On the Quai at Smyrna” (McLoughlin 150) where an old woman dies and grows stiff at exactly the same point in time and Eliot’s Tiresias who has “foresuffered all” (l.243). We therefore find that Brigadier Nestor has his memory “swallowed up” by the morphia while Chief of Staff Major Porfirio, covered in brown dust from head to toe, resembles “a figure out of an old photograph” (*The Maze* 6, 55). The brigade’s camp looks like “a small forgotten town that existed in a precarious transience, a place which an imminent natural disaster was about to wipe out: no one would notice” (48). Foreshadowed in this is the brigade’s discovery of a false exit from their labyrinth—in the small town they will eventually cause fall into oblivion—but also linking the camp and the town to all places fallen throughout history’s long centuries: “Lit by the moon, the camp seemed no more real than the props of a theatrical stage” (55). It is Brigadier Nestor that reminds us after all that “History is what happens over centuries, not yesterday” (12). The ruins spotted beyond the hills along the brigade’s

circular travels offer a sample of ancient temples littering the Anatolian land and are described as “the scattered pages of a book no one wished to read” (36). An artificial lake, which will eventually submerge Arab Yusuf’s birthplace making his homecoming impossible, whispers the ultimate fate of the town when the wind blowing from the sea makes the roofs of the houses begin to resemble the ocean floor (134, 136). Finally, near the end of the novel, the French woman Violetta remembers how in Pompeii she had seen scattered among the ruins “the remains of hundreds of victims preserved by the rain of ash and cinder; men, women and children, aristocrats, freemen and slaves, gladiators in chains, animals” (179).

The story of the brigade’s wandering through a maze (which in the novel is the wilderness [ 8] and the “labyrinth of sins”[17]) until they reach the sea and, ultimately, the “motherland” (6), is the depiction of a tragic journey because the war has made a return home impossible; <sup>9</sup> the only things aplenty in *The Maze* are “dust and time” (64) and it is only through another Madame Sosostriis, the wife of the Armenian grocer, “a necromancer whose reputation was known across the Levant” (120), that we get the novel’s untold theme: “Will we ever see our homes again?” (123) With no destination visible and even the causes of war surpassed by other events—such as the execution of two soldiers and the rainstorm that followed—what remains is a long row of people heading towards the sea, a “caravan” resembling “the heavy carriages of a train pulling out of a station” (194, 195). Mirroring *The Waste Land*, *The Maze* gives us instead of an answer “a handful of red dust” (184), a church’s floor carpeted with the corpses of rats (148), and a whole town a swamp over-flown with pallets, barrels, cartwheels, drowned animals and the excrement of the open sewer (147-48).

*The Maze* sets us a theatrical stage to talk about the relation between historical consciousness and the sense of belonging one forms out of the relationship with a specific land. The novella builds the space for the creation of a “new word,” like *Middlesex*, and for this it blurs concepts like ‘home.’ One of the final paragraphs of the novel foregrounds the tension created the moment one is confronted with the prospect of meeting an imagined place, which has served until then as the repository of one’s desires:

Ahead of them was the sea. He squinted at the sun. On the shore he saw the standing doorposts of ancient mausoleums, amid pieces of fallen columns, tombstones slipping slowly into the sea and sarcophagi ravaged by the centuries, half sunk in the sand and the waves. In the gulf beyond the coastal necropolis, he made out a small fleet. And far beyond them, he thought he saw the faint shapes of the islands of the homeland.

His joy lasted for only a moment. Soon he began to suspect that the ruins, the sea, the ships and the islands were all a deception of the morphia. He let the flap drop, and in the darkness of the lorry he felt desperately under the covers not for the vial with the drug or his letters from home but for his *Lexicon of Greek and Roman Myths*. (197)

The morphia, which has taken over Brigadier Nestor's memory, deceives him into believing that perhaps they have reached the homeland yet his image of it only exists in the decayed colours of ancient mausoleums and coastal necropolises; Nestor is incapable of imagining a home anymore and, even more powerful than the morphia or indeed his letters of home, are the repetitive readings of his *Lexicon of Greek and Roman Myths* pointing backwards to a time when mythmaking signalled an effort to make sense of the surrounding world. But even here, we do not see Nestor reading the actual myths and engaging in an effort to understand them since he holds on to his *Lexicon* as if obsessed by a desire to safekeep a talisman, or indeed a list of talismanic words, that would resurrect something lost. Still, the Brigadier is haunted by the need to return to these same images and actions again and again as if trying both to revisit and avoid a return home. Like the account of the soldier in Hemingway's "On the Quai at Smyrna" where horror, Kate McLoughlin notes, is "simultaneously tentatively revisited and strenuously avoided" in what ends up being a "lacerated narrative" (149), Nestor's repetitive return to the *Lexicon* also reveals a narrative traumatised and unable to reach its conclusion much like the soldier's narrative in Hemingway's "On the Quai at Smyrna": "That was the only time in my life I got so I dreamed about things" (64). In the *Lexicon* the Brigadier finds the vocabulary of a branch of knowledge—of the way ancient cultures interpreted the world—now lost to him since he has lost the link that connects him to this world the words depict. Brigadier Nestor's predicament is a warning; when a certain vocabulary has ceased to convey its meaning to us then we need to find new ways of approaching it so that new interpretations can breed new meanings relevant to the circumstances of the world today.

### **You remember the harbour**

Even though pre-1914 Smyrna has entered the sphere of myth as a bridge between East and West and it is as such that it is frequently revisited in popular imagination (a 2008 book by Giles Milton, for example, introduced the city as a “Paradise Lost”), post-First World War Smyrna—and in general the area of Asia Minor or the Near East—was also fertile ground for war mongering and war profiteering and a space emblematic of the politics of identity salient for post-war Europe. This was depicted by Ambler in a story woven around the ghost of an arms-dealing celebrity from the First World War who could find in 1939 new markets for his trade. T.S Eliot’s dilapidated metropolises in *The Waste Land* (1922), this most famous poem of the interwar period, were sites where outsiders like Madame Sosostriis stood to make a profit but also places whose citizens turned soldiers turned perpetrators and victims were not exonerated for the values they deified pre-war. These were the projections of cities that witnessed the effects of the warmongering system promoted by figures like Basil Zaharoff, and *The Waste Land*’s Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant speaking demotic French and walking amongst the populace of Eliot’s “Unreal City,” could have been a personification of the unscrupulous ‘Zaharoff system’ that used war as an emerging market. Mr Eugenides could find in the ‘brown fog’ of London’s City—the metropolitan financial centre whose inhabitants were “consumed by a voraciously expanding commercial life” (Rainey 9-11)—an accomplice to his profiteering.

*Middlesex* and *The Maze* explore Smyrna’s inheritance of displacement alongside the narrative production of ‘home’ and this makes Smyrna an imperfect ‘real’ space as contrasted to a ‘utopia’ which is, in Foucault’s terms, an “unreal” space presenting society itself in “perfected form” (“Of Other Spaces” 24). At the same time, by going backwards in time to re-tell events already experienced, the three narratives follow the architecture of history—“memory is oral,” Paul Ricoeur has argued, “whereas in history, everything begins with writings” since history is an accumulation of “various uses of the idea of causality” (Antohi 12)—and focus on a present-oriented (re)creation of historical past. Smyrna becomes thus also a utopia in Jacques Rancière’s terms, that is, a space embodying “the power of mapping together a discursive space and a territorial space, the capacity to make each

concept correspond to a point in reality and each argument coincide with an itinerary on a map” (31). The stories drag Smyrna out of 1922 and into their present moment creating in this way the appropriate circumstances for a rethinking of what Smyrna could mean post-1922.

In *The Mask of Dimitrios*, Western Europe is about to enter yet another war and Smyrna is the spectre haunting the scene as the desired homogeneity of nation-states is about to reach its zenith in Nazi Germany. As Mazower notes, even though *The Mask of Dimitrios* depicted “Balkan drug dealers, unscrupulous Eurasian businessmen and bedraggled refugees drifting across the continent,” Ambler finished the book “moving between London, Paris and New York ...as the Nazis marched into Prague in the spring of 1939” (v). After the invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 it was clear that Hitler “was not merely aiming to unite all Germans, but was embarked upon a policy of unlimited eastward expansion” (Collier and Pedley 83). Hitler’s dream to build his empire on the ruins of the Western nation-states was a direct attack on the image of Europe as “an invention of states” and so his project could unsettle the ground won by a number of Balkan Treaties and the Balkan Pact (February 1934) and unleash a new wave of refugees swarming the Western capitals of Europe.<sup>10</sup>

For Cal Stephanides of *Middlesex*, Smyrna is the beginning of the thread and hence the solution to his identity crisis not only because that city “was no place exactly”—thus allowing one to recreate oneself anew—but also because it marked the continuation of the gene that later led to Cal in the decision of his grandparents to transform themselves from brother and sister to husband and wife. Even though the journey of the gene had been on its way generations before, it is important that Cal dwells on Smyrna because for him this place was a contradiction much like himself. On the one hand, “no place exactly,” which means that one is free from the bondage of a particular identity, national or otherwise, and, on the other, a very particular place haunting his generational line due to the decision of his grandparents to essentially close themselves off from any influence from the outside. This decision was pivotal since it condemned them to recreate their own image again and again until the mutated gene surfaced in Cal’s body. Cal repeated this cycle until the moment he revealed and accepted himself in the pool and was



reborn. As Jacques Nolbantian, an Armenian born in Smyrna, noted in a 2012 documentary about the city, “diversity is beautiful”; “in conclusion, that’s what Smyrna has given me: The challenge of having to overcome the wrong of humanity in a sense of responsibility. That’s what I was given; Smyrna gave me responsibility” (qtd. in Iliou 2012).

The same responsibility echoes in the line of refugees that concludes *The Maze*, a group of people travelling towards the sea—Greeks, Arabs, Armenians, French—and representing any cycle of migration, of people going from one point to another uncertain point, leaving behind a milieu that has become both “amorphous” and “hostile,” and looking forward to their “reterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 419-21). Smyrna is in *The Maze* the prototypical scenario upon which other movements are patterned; like any maze, it offers a network of intercommunicating paths leading in or out and is there to confuse but also challenge one to seek a way out. *Middlesex* and *The Maze* present Smyrna as no longer solely “a site of desire,” a place “physically unapproachable” and hence “a space on which fantasies can be projected” (Mackridge 2003: 235) but one of the opening scenes in an exploration of the role of individual and collective memory in the construction of one’s identity.

“You remember the harbor,” the narrator of Hemingway’s “On the Quai at Smyrna” says; “there were plenty of nice things floating around in it” (64). This narrator, a British officer at Smyrna in 1922, addresses the reader and makes the remembrance of the harbour a prerequisite for the description that follows this statement without interrogating the reader’s direct witnessing of the scene described. The memory of the harbour becomes everyone’s inheritance.

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘liberals’ refers here to the supporters of Eleftherios Venizelos’s Liberal Party with ‘royalists’ being its major political opponents when Venizelos clashed with King Constantine (a clash called National Schism [Εθνικός Διχασμός] over Greece’s stance in the First World War. See Koliopoulos and Veremis 54.

<sup>2</sup> See “Greece and Turkey: Convention concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations and Protocol, signed at Lausanne, January 30, 1923”, in *Crossing the Aegean*, 2003: 281-87. According to Article 1: “As from the 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1923, there shall take place a

compulsory exchange of Turkish nationals of the Greek Orthodox religion established in Turkish territory, and of Greek nationals of the Moslem religion established in Greek territory.” (282)

<sup>3</sup> For example, Elias Venezis’s *Aeolia* (published in 1943 and translated into English in 1949, 1951, 1956) and Dido Sotiriou’s *Farewell to Anatolia* (1962, translated into English in 2008) are emblematic of the literature produced and established as modern classics .

<sup>4</sup> See Scopetea 174. In addition, the term “Balkan” overlapped with “Oriental” acquiring thus, as Maria Todorova suggests, additional characteristics such as “cruelty, boorishness, instability, and unpredictability” while both categories were used “against the concept of Europe symbolizing cleanliness, order, self-control, strength of character, sense of law, justice, efficient administration” (119).

<sup>5</sup> This was, according to W.H. Auden, the driving force in detective stories, namely the desire to get the “illusion of being dissociated from the murderer” to escape guilt ( 157).

<sup>6</sup> See Foucault, *Herculine Barbin*. For the link between Herculine Barbin and *Middlesex*, see Mullan.

<sup>7</sup> The term “lacerated” is here borrowed from MacLoughlin in *Authoring War* who uses this term to refer to narratives broken up because unable to narrate the atrocity of war (149).

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in *The Maze* a reconnaissance mission is conducted via a biplane (43), the brigade’s radiotelegraph is powered by a bicycle (188), and, while Father Simeon, an Orthodox priest travelling with the brigade, fears the theories of Einstein and deplores Science becoming the ‘new religion in the Western world’ (25, 148), the Bolshevik Major Porfirio considers the “century of change” to come with the industrial revolution, the widespread electrification of the countryside and a regular airmail service (161), and all this while a war correspondent uses his Autographic Kodak to “put myths to rest” (96, 156).

<sup>9</sup> The term “motherland” is used with a sense of irony in the novel as the maze has changed the meaning of home; even though the old empires had one by one dissipated—Father Simeon remembers the French, the Hasburgs, the Ottomans—“the motherland had gone to war, looking back with desire to her own long-gone imperial past” (49).

<sup>10</sup> For Hitler’s building of an empire, see Yoram Hazony, “Israel Through European Eyes,” *Jerusalem Letters*, July 14, 2010, quoted in Fonte 178. For Europe as an “invention of states,” see af Malborg and Stråth: “So many meanings of Europe have emerged precisely because there has never been such a thing as ‘Europe’, in an essentialist sense, but only as imaginations. Europe has only existed as an invention of states, before the French Revolution as a group of states, and after the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars by nation states” (3).

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