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Narrating the crisis of Constantinople 1908–1922: A lost world in Greek, Armenian, Turkish and Russian

Helena Bodin

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Constantinople (today's Istanbul) was still the capital of the Ottoman Empire: a multiethnic, multilingual and multireligious cosmopolis, claimed not only by several rival empires but also by emergent nations. Among its inhabitants were Turks, Greeks and Armenians, as well as resident and visiting Westerners and, after the Russian Revolution, Russian refugees.

Consequently, the linguascape of the city was multifaceted: although literacy was low, partial oral fluency in several languages was common, and phrases and expressions in Ottoman Turkish were widespread in all the city's languages. Polyglot interpreters and brokers – dragomans, governesses, middlemen, guides – were of salient importance to make daily life and interlingual communication possible. This complex linguistic situation has often been described as cosmopolitan, but when it comes to literary works created in its response, it would be more precise to regard these works as guided by a multilingual and vernacular poetics. In travelogues, novels, short stories, poems and reportages from and about Constantinople around 1900, there is no single cosmopolitan language that is sufficient on its own. Instead, the city's many vernacular languages, together with its heterolingual and multiscriptal (heterographic) features, contribute to the crafting of an immanent literary or aesthetic world in which features of linguistic difference and asymmetry precondition communication and mediation (Bodin 2020: 786).

On the whole, however, the early twentieth century was a period of falling empires. For Constantinople, this meant a protracted political crisis – a situation that cannot be sustained, but has to be resolved in one or another direction. A

well-known metaphor casts the Ottoman Empire in the role of the sick man of Europe. It was picked up by the American journalist Solita Solano, who developed it further in her reportage from Constantinople in 1922: 'Byzantium is dead. New Rome is dead. Constantinople is ill. Soon this one-time Queen City of the East will be replaced by a modern European center of business and commerce' (Solano 1922: 647). This was after more than a decade of political turbulence, beginning with the Young Turk revolution in 1908, after which the Ottoman Empire, and Constantinople as its capital, were involved in a number of wars: the two Balkan wars (1912–1914), the First World War (1914–1918) – which at that time was still called the Great War – and the continuing Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922).

Thereafter, not only did the Ottoman Empire fall in 1922 but the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian Empires had already fallen, while the British Empire occupied Constantinople from 1918 until 1923.¹ As to their interests in Constantinople, each empire had aspired to supremacy over the city and its straits, and supported in different ways the Turkish, Greek and Armenian nationalistic groups' conflicting claims of territory and independence from the Ottoman Empire. More than once, potential new or extended nation states were trialled. The Turkish Republic was eventually proclaimed in 1923 – that is, after the Armenian genocide of 1915–1917, the flight of the majority of Asia Minor Greeks in 1922 and the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923. In the same year the former cosmopolis, Constantinople, changed its official name to Istanbul, and Angora (today's Ankara) was proclaimed the capital of Turkey. In addition, in 1928 the Turkish state launched a radical reform of its language and script, which meant that the Arabo-Persian script of Ottoman Turkish was abandoned and the Roman alphabet instituted (Lewis [1999] 2010, Göknar 2008: 473–4). Due to these rapid and thoroughgoing changes and the new monolingual language politics in favour of Modern Turkish, the multilingual features of Constantinople were substantially altered in the 1920s.

Against this background, the present chapter sets out to explore the narration of the crisis of Constantinople as an instance of literary world-making in a multiplicity of languages. This is done by positing the city's particular narrated

¹ For these 'falling empires' as part of a larger narrative, often with melancholic or nostalgic overtones, see Chovanec and Heilo (eds) 2021, with further references.

site as a Bakhtinian *chronotope*, or, more precisely, as what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981: 248) names ‘the chronotope of threshold’, instantiated as ‘the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life’. But in contrast to Bakhtin’s examples, which principally concern the narration of individual lives, the Constantinopolitan chronotope involves a number of ethnic groups which are affected in different ways by the city’s ongoing crisis.² For this reason, I look at four novels in Greek, Armenian, Turkish and Russian, which are all set in Constantinople in the years leading up to 1922 and describe the city – its cityscape, linguascape and soundscape – from the various inside perspectives of their protagonists and in their different languages. The order I have chosen for the analyses of the novels is chronological with respect to the novels’ stories, and takes us from approximately 1909 to 1922.

– The novel in Greek, *Leonis: A Novel* (1985; *Leōnēs: Mythistorēma*, 1940), is a retrospective, partly autobiographical and partly fictive novel about a boy’s childhood and early youth in Constantinople, including his first time in exile in Athens. Its author is the Greek writer Yiorgos Theotokas, who was born in Constantinople in 1906 and died in Athens in 1966.

– The novel in Armenian, *My Soul in Exile* (2014; *Hogis ak’soreal*, 1922), tells of a female artist who returns to Constantinople to launch an exhibition. It is by the Armenian feminist writer and literary scholar Zabel Yessayan, known for her many works in the format of short novels (like this one), essays and articles in daily Armenian newspapers. She was born in Constantinople in 1878, but the circumstances of her death in exile in the Soviet Union are unclear and disputed; she may have died in Siberia in 1943.

– The novel in Turkish, *The Shirt of Flame* (1924; *Ateşten Gömlek* 1922), is a popular and much distributed lost-love-in-war novel from the time of the Greco-Turkish War by the Turkish feminist writer, later literary scholar and politician Halide Edib Adivar. She was born in Constantinople in 1884 and died there (in Istanbul) in 1964, after having spent long periods in France and the United Kingdom and travelling frequently to the United States and India.

² As to this particular Constantinopolitan chronotope of crisis, Sibel Erol’s study of Orhan Pamuk’s memoir *Istanbul* is as important as it is inspiring. She focuses on Pamuk’s construction of the ‘association between Istanbul, melancholy [*hüzün*], and loss of empire by creating a literary genealogy of his claim’, which she dubs ‘the chronotope of Istanbul’ and ‘the chronotope of *hüzün*’ (Erol 2011: 655, 669, 673). Given the scope of her study, Erol does not, however, engage in other literary texts than those Pamuk himself refers to, that is, travelogues by French writers from the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Nerval, Gautier, Flaubert and Gide) and novels by Turkish modernist writers (Beyatlı and Tanpınar).

– The novel in Russian, *Philosophy* (*Filosofia*, 2008), is a posthumously published work that was begun in Marseille in 1930 by the avant-garde writer Il'ia Zdanevich. He was born in Tbilisi in 1894 and died in Paris in 1975; in 1920–1921 he stayed in Constantinople on his way to Paris.

Although all these writers – Theotokas, Yessayan, Edib Adivar and Zdanevich – lived in Constantinople for long periods, at least a few years, none of them was resident there for their whole life. Only Edib Adivar was born and died there. The stories of their lives are to a great extent stories of exile, migration and various kinds of transit. As regards their literary oeuvres and scholarly professions, particularly Edib Adivar and Yessayan can be described as bilingual in Turkish and English, and Armenian and French (see Göknar 2014: 323), but yet more relevant would be to emphasize that they were all representatives of the multilingual and heterolingual milieu of Constantinople. In addition, Theotokas was particularly attentive to linguistic issues concerning the emergent official national language of Greece, and Zdanevich to experimental poetry.

Originally, each of these novels was composed in a different language and alphabet – in Greek, Armenian, Ottoman Turkish (using Arabo-Persian script, later intralingually translated into Modern Turkish and transcribed into its Roman script), and Russian (using Cyrillic script). With the exception of Zdanevich's novel, all have been translated into various languages besides English: the Greek and Armenian novels into French, and more recently also into Turkish; and the Turkish novel into German and French (under the title *La fille de Smyrna*, emanating from the English adaptation *The Daughter of Smyrna*, which found its way to India). Moreover, the novels in Greek and Turkish were quickly translated into Swedish (Theotokas 1945, Adivar 1928), my mother tongue. Perhaps for that reason, they were the first to spark my interest. There are also single examples of translations into yet other languages, such as Croatian, Serbian and Russian. With the exception of the Russian novel, I have read them in English translations – the Turkish novel in its author's self-translation – and, when possible, in Swedish translations (and for the Greek and Turkish novels, with an eye on their source texts).

Before turning to the analyses of the novels, I begin by presenting Constantinople as a threshold, which is a recurring spatial metaphor when the city is described in literature. In the period under discussion (1908–1922), the threshold is furthermore closely associated with crisis. I also introduce two concepts, both of which are relational: chronotope and world.

Constantinople as threshold and chronotope

Long before the crisis of the early twentieth century, cosmopolitan Constantinople had already challenged the limits of description and narration in the languages of its Western visitors. To mention only a few examples, Constantinople was ‘the more than I could dream, / Far less describe’ of Lord Byron’s ([1819–1824] 1986) *Don Juan* (Canto V: 3), composed a century earlier, and the widely translated Italian traveller Edmondo De Amicis, visiting the city in 1874, had to look for comparisons in outer space to describe the chaotic world he encountered in Constantinople (De Amicis 1877: 31). Moreover, ever since Byzantine times Constantinople had been eulogized as the ‘city of cities’. It was called by endonymic as well as exonymic names in numerous languages, such as *Konstantinoupolis* (Greek for Constantine’s city), *Kostantiniyye* (Turkish, an adaptation of the Greek name), *Bolis* (Armenian, an adaptation of Greek *polis*), *Rûm* (Persian and Ottoman Turkish, relating to Byzantine perceptions of the city as the new Rome) and *Tsar’grad* (Russian, the emperor’s city). There were also affectionate and honorific metonymic names in Arabic, for example *Der-i Saadet* (Abode of Felicity) and *Der-i Devlet* (Abode of the State) (see further Criss 1999: 20–1, İnalçık 2012).

As another of Constantinople’s names with Persian origin – *Asitane* (Threshold) – suggests, the city’s function as a threshold is of special importance, geopolitically as well as metaphorically in literature. In the early eighteenth century the Ottoman Turkish poet Nedîm perceived Constantinople as a ‘jewel beyond compare / Seated astride upon two seas’ (Orga 2007: 40), and perhaps Swiss-Swedish Stéphanie Beyel, who lived in Constantinople in the 1910s, alluded to Nedîm’s famous words when she, writing in Swedish, described the city as ‘the pearl on the threshold of the Orient’ (quoted in Bodin 2018b: 55). In literature and other aesthetic representations the threshold often functions as an ‘in-between and transitional space of waiting’ (Schimanski and Wolfe 2017: 164), and in Western European narratives from around 1900 Constantinople is seen to represent qualities that are transitional, such as vicissitude, unpredictability and changeability.³ As these examples show, the threshold is an established, recurring

³ Virginia Woolf’s modernist novels are in many ways a late example of that trend. In *Orlando* (1928: 138), the male protagonist woke up in Constantinople to find out that ‘he was a woman’. Another well-known example is E. M. Forster’s novel *A Room with a View* where ‘a comfortable pension at Constantinople’ would mean ‘a pension with magic windows opening on the foam of perilous seas in fairylands forlorn’ (1908: 272).

spatial metaphor when Constantinople is named or described in literature, and more generally the threshold combines temporal and topographical borders (ibid.). Of particular importance for my exploration of Constantinople in the crisis of the early twentieth century is, therefore, the Bakhtinian chronotope of threshold, which (as mentioned above) Bakhtin (1981: 248) has also described as ‘the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life’.⁴

As to the concept of world, it is operationalized as an analytic tool in this and other explorations of literary world-making and literary or aesthetic worlds. Naturally, *world* is much older than Bakhtin’s coinage of chronotope from the 1920s, and its polysemic character is evident (see further Stefan Helgesson’s Introduction to this volume). While we generally understand *world* as a spatial phenomenon, it must be noted that the English word *world* is etymologically based on the notions of man and time, which together make up the space named ‘world’ (Apter 2013: 180–1, Hayot 2012: 53, Spira 2019: 27). *World* is thus a relational spatial notion which implies a certain position in time and a certain perspective, in a similar way as the chronotope does. Moreover, and most importantly, *world* (as well as chronotope) can designate both the whole and parts of it, simultaneously. Consequently, as to the situation of Constantinople, there has never been any single Constantinopolitan world, only several different ethnic, linguistic and religious worlds. By means of various multilingual strategies, these worlds have been represented in literary texts published in different languages (Bodin 2020).

In this case the chronotope therefore provides the concept I need to explore the crisis of Constantinople, since it comes to its head not only in literature but also in historical time as *if it were* literature (Bakhtin 1981: 253–4; see also Kuusisto 2018: 211). Eric Hayot has observed how in Bakhtin’s writings *chronotope* may occasionally coincide with or substitute for *world*. He finds that ‘world’ for Bakhtin ‘names a chronotope-containing discourse, one that applies equally well to the representational sphere as the actual one’ (Hayot 2012: 14).⁵ Bakhtin even regards the mutual exchange between the literary work and the world it represents as ‘chronotopic’, as he writes: ‘The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its

⁴ For a discussion of the more general interrelations between literature and crises, see Kovach, Nünning and Polland 2017, with a thorough bibliography.

⁵ Hayot affirms how close Bakhtin comes to describing what he himself means by an aesthetic world. Yet Hayot argues for the advantages of using *world*, instead of *chronotope*, because of its ‘special relationship to problems of totality, of self-enclosure, and of spatiotemporal relations’ (2012: 15).

world as part of the process of its creation’ (Bakhtin 1981: 254). In this way both these concepts, world and chronotope, allow for studies of the interrelation of worlds and texts – that is, of ‘worlds in texts’, as is the purpose of this chapter and this part of the present volume.

In the chronotope, indicators of time and space are fused with those of language and agency (ibid.: 84, 251 *passim*; Kuusisto 2018: 193, 219–20), with priority given to certain typical actions that stand out as possible, preferred and prioritized (Steinby 2013: 116–22). One such action of particular interest for the exploration of Constantinople in crisis, and its narrated site as a chronotope of crisis or threshold, is writing. As Subha Mukherji (2012: xvii–xviii) has emphasized, the threshold is ‘so urgently the place of writing’, and especially processes of writing and reading are ‘activities that negotiate thresholds’. The chronotope of crisis is, furthermore, particularly instrumental in highlighting the significance of a crucial time at a certain place: ‘In this chronotope [of threshold, of crisis], Bakhtin (1981: 248) writes, ‘time is essentially instantaneous; it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time’ (see also Steinby 2013: 115–16, 120, on ‘*kairos*’ as the right point in time and of action).

Thus what matters for the chronotope of crisis (or threshold) is not a continuum of chronological time, but an experienced time which has instantaneous qualities. Yet if time is instantaneous, it may still have duration in a narration. This problem has been addressed by Susan S. Lanser and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in a narratological study of occupation narratives in various languages from Israel and Palestine – a situation and body of material which have striking similarities with the novels from Constantinople selected for analysis in this chapter. Lanser and Rimmon-Kenan (2019: 252) introduce a new term, *displaced narration*, by which they gain a more specified understanding of Bakhtin’s chronotope, as they ‘analyse the formal interaction between space and time by charting duration in tandem with location’. Displaced narration refers, thus, ‘to events that *did* take place but could not be narrated within the story, and yet are reported later to a different, usually external narratee’ (ibid.: 255).

By positing the narrated site of Constantinople as a chronotope of crisis, my intention in the subsequent analyses is to explore the interaction of time and space in the novels, and how the fusion of time and space with language and agency prompts certain actions. I particularly look for cases of displaced narration, guided by Lanser’s and Rimmon-Kenan’s study of occupation narratives, and for acts of writing, in accordance with Mukherji’s suggestion that they are typical of thresholds. As is demonstrated, the particular features of this

Figure 1.1 Title page of Theotokas's novel *Leonis* in Greek, published in Athens in 1940. Photograph by Helena Bodin.

Constantinopolitan chronotope characterize the literary world-making of the four selected novels in their different languages – Greek, Armenian, Turkish and Russian.

Leonis's lost Byzantine world

Yiorgos Theotokas's novel *Leonis* narrates, in a 'more or less standard demotic [Greek] throughout' (Mackridge 1986: 79), the childhood and teens of Leonis, a Greek boy who is born and raised in Constantinople in a bourgeois family who are 'genuine Phanariots' (Theotokas 1985: 27), which implies that they have close bonds to the Orthodox Christian Ecumenical Patriarchate and the city's Byzantine past. Leonis's undertakings are mostly described from his perspective by an extradiegetic narrator, but stylistically the novel follows the development of the eponymous little boy from a simple and naive to a more mature and complex perception. An effect of the perspective of the growing child is that no exact year is ever mentioned in the novel.⁶ Instead, the historically informed reader comes to know about the outbreak of the First World War by way of Leonis overhearing and misunderstanding the cook's gossip (ibid.: 5–6). A little later, Leonis experiences how his friends' games change from one day to the next: 'instead of playing "thieves" or "slavery" or any of the usual games, they would play "the Great War"' (ibid.: 19). Other episodes concern Leonis's schooling in French, Greek and Turkish; his training in art at the Zographeio school; his engagement in a Boy Scout troop; his earliest feelings of love – at an early age for his Boy Scout leader Paul Proios, and later for a somewhat older girl, Eleni Phoka.

Theotokas worked on the novel in 1940, at an early phase of the Second World War (ibid.: xii, xiv, Doulis 1975: 80). Through the eyes of Leonis, he tells in retrospect about an earlier period of war in a still-cosmopolitan Constantinople with its many ethnicities and languages, including the armies of different nationalities passing by due to the war and the occupation of the city. In Chapter 5 there are German and Austrian soldiers in the streets, and in Chapter 10 the soldiers are French and British. The novel's focus is in Pera

⁶ Chapter 1 includes some of Leonis's earliest memories, and when the First World War starts in Chapter 2, it is clear that his first narrated recollections are set earlier, perhaps as early as 1908 or 1909 (which seems to be likely, according to the author's birth in 1906).

(today's Beyoğlu), where Leonis's grandfather lives near Galata Serai, and there are several passages with long enumerations of the many peoples and languages in these quarters, for example the Russian refugees (Theotokas 1985: 66), the many nationalities of the pupils at school (ibid.: 79) and the cosmopolitan market place in the Skalakia (ibid.: 115).

In spite of its retrospective and internal perspective, Theotokas's novel is narrated with a sense of timelessness and a simultaneously temporal and spatial nostalgia (Mackridge 1986: 75–81). This nostalgia 'for a lost world and great historic moments' (Theotokas 1985: xii) was emphasized by the author in his note to the novel. These features – the loss of a world, in combination with a breaking point – are also characteristic of the Constantinopolitan chronotope of crisis. Furthermore, as we will see, the world of Leonis is often associated with his writing, which is thematized and sometimes even represented directly in the novel.

Leonis is described as exceptionally sensitive to his place in history and the idea that he has a fate. He can be overwhelmed by being a part of 'what the newspapers called History', as when the war is over and the British and French conquerors parade through the streets of Constantinople, a 'strange enchantment' grips him: 'the feeling that the City, Europe, the world were all just an endless theatrical scene, just as the Garden of the Taksim had once been, a scene in which nations moved, and armies, and commanders astride large parade horses' (ibid.: 61). As this passage suggests, Leonis regards the City – spelled with a capital C (or, in Greek, with a capital P, *Polis*) – as *a* world as well as *the* world, and it houses *his* world (Gr. *kosmos*). From his early years, Leonis's world is equivalent to the Taksim garden, the public park which forms his playground. Later, when the end of the Great War is celebrated in Taksim (ibid.: 59), the younger generation is saluted for 'opening a way towards a new and better world, a world of freedom and joy' (ibid.: 75). However, thoughts about the end of the world are also introduced from early on. They characterize Leonis's life in Constantinople and shape a recurring motif in the novel. Thus one of Leonis's memories from his earliest years, again from overhearing the cook's chat, is how he asked himself: 'Why was the world lost?' (ibid.: 6).

Yet another aspect of Leonis's world is its appearance when it is filled by and equalled to love, as when Leonis is overwhelmed by his love for Eleni Phoka. He writes her name several times in block letters on a new, white sheet of paper. While he reflects on the name, the letters and their sounds, his thoughts are soon directed to the strange process by which the letters make the girl become real to

him: ‘How was it possible for such a creation to exist in the world?’ (ibid.: 78). At the same time, he asks himself if he is perhaps experiencing ‘a vision, a self-deception, a fiction’, but:

Then something happened on the paper. Nothing changed and yet everything changed. The whiteness of the paper, the strange line of letters, everything became transfigured; their essence, their flavor, their fragrance altered. This name, this warmth, this brilliance, was not only something which existed, but it was the only thing that did exist. Without it the world was without substance and empty, with no meaning left ... It was the world; it was life; it was Leonis’s great ideal; the world and the reason for his existence was love ...

(Ibid.: 78–9)

This episode is rendered almost pictorially, as if an illustration had been pasted in the novel. Both the narration and the main text are interrupted by the girl’s name, which is recorded three times and then once again, separately, with a question mark. Thereby this particular part of the page imitates, as in a picture (or, from a semiotic perspective, iconically) the white sheet of paper on which Leonis is printing the girl’s name in block letters and listening to the letters’ sounds. It goes without saying, but Leonis was obviously not printing Roman letters, as in the English translation, but Greek ones – ΕΛΕΝΗ ΦΩΚΑ – so the picture of her printed name appears differently in transcription and translation.⁷ The empty space around Eleni Phoka’s name in block letters announces her importance to the novel’s readers, but at the same time this episode and layout points to the importance of writing for Leonis. It stands for love, and it both changes and forms the whole world. This is only one example of how the novel draws readers’ attention to the ways in which the crucial acts of Leonis, acts that change his world, involve writing.

In a somewhat later episode, Leonis is dreaming about Eleni Phoka, and when he awakes, still in the night, he begins to speak aloud, not to himself but to ‘Her’: ‘speaking in rhythm, as in a song, a rhythm which he had not chosen, a rhythm which had come upon him from elsewhere, alien to his will’ (ibid.: 87–8). Then he asks himself what he is doing, and replies: ‘I’m making a poem’ (ibid.: 88). It is his French teacher’s reciting of French prose (for example Chateaubriand) and poetry (particularly Verlaine) which has inspired him. Later, the French teacher encourages Leonis to cultivate his ‘inclination toward literature’ and recommends

⁷ For further analyses of heterographics in literary texts, see Bodin 2018a.

that he write in French, because ‘this language has about all the characteristics needed for playing the same role in Europe today that in another time Latin or Greek has played’ (ibid.: 126). Leonis does not agree and counters, in defence of the language of his country, which literally happens to be Greek, although it is a new kind of Greek: ‘I have no difficulty understanding an international ideal. I believe that I am up to a point sufficiently cosmopolitan, but there is one thing that binds me very tightly to my country, and that is precisely its language’ (ibid.). He continues by describing his great joy when ‘touching upon a fresh, new, unformed language ... that this new language is just as much Greek as the language of Homer!’ (ibid.: 127). Their conversation addresses, plainly, the problems of the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic within literature, between languages (French and Greek) as well as within one single language over time (Greek, with its Ancient and Modern varieties).⁸ At the same time it is typical of the Constantinopolitan chronotope of crisis in which the novel is situated.

Chapter 20 presents Leonis’s notes in his diary from 1 March to 1 June. As when his repeated writing of Eleni Phoka in block letters was rendered directly on the book page, the novel appears for almost ten pages in the shape of the actual diary written by Leonis, since there is no intermediary narrating instance.⁹ For three months the diary interweaves the personal crisis of Leonis with the political crisis of Constantinople. It reflects his juvenile but genuine attempts to justify his role in the world, ‘My God, when will I find the composure I need to create a work of art, to justify at last my existence in the world?’ (ibid.: 123), as well as his great feeling of love for Eleni Phoka (ibid.: 128), side by side with reports from the war in Asia Minor (the Greco-Turkish War). The latter entries point to the year 1922.

Other diary entries tell about Leonis’s friends Paul and Stasinós, who have volunteered as soldiers in the war in Asia Minor, as Leonis names it. He copies into his diary an excerpt from a letter he has received from Paul, who is in despair in Kiutahya (Kütahya) but is consoled when thinking on his fatherland (Gr. *patrida*): ‘Whatever she is, she is my Country, and has sent me here to these wild plains, with the death that lurks all around, because she has need of

⁸ In his chapter on ‘the possible openness of World Literature as a mode of literary study’, Gregory Jusdanis has examined Theotokas’s modernist manifesto, *Elefthero Pnevma* (Free Spirit), with special regard to how it rethinks Greece’s relationship to Europe (2020: 137, 142). See also Krikos-Davis for Theotokas’s ‘life-long commitment to demotic’ (1995: 140–1, at 141).

⁹ For the similarities between on the one hand Leonis’s fictional diary and on the other Theotokas’s pocket diary from 1922 and letters from Athens in the early 1920s to his friend Sophoclis Dimitriadis, see Krikos-Davis 1995.

me' (ibid.: 128–9). Through this copying of the letter, Paul's words and love for Greece become repeated and shaped by Leonis's hand in a manner that serves to demonstrate their importance for Leonis. As the diary in this way enfolds the letter, layers of writing are stacked in the novel. Only two weeks later, though, on 1 June, Leonis ends his diary abruptly because of another message concerning his friend Paul: 'Paul Proios was killed. / I stop. I cannot write' (ibid.: 131). For a whole chapter the extradiegetic narrator has stepped aside and the words are Leonis's, represented by his writings in the diary. When Leonis cannot write any more, there is only silence left. The event of his friend Paul's death cannot be narrated at this point of the story, and this impossibility is expressed by Leonis as he stops writing. As will be demonstrated, this passage forms the beginning of the final part of the story, which deploys displaced narration.

When the next chapter, 21, opens, the extradiegetic narrator is back again, and the narration in the third person from the perspective of Leonis is resumed: it is autumn, and the city, described as 'a dull whiteness strewn untidily on the plain' (ibid.: 132), is no longer Constantinople but Athens. The break of the Asia Minor front and the fall of Smyrna in September 1922 are presented as having occurred recently, with the result that 'a whole population had fled to the Kingdom' (Gr. *Basileio*, i.e. Greece) (ibid.: 134), and crowds of refugees and Leonis's exile are mentioned in passing (ibid.: 133). In this way, Leonis's flight to Athens is passed over in silence, just like the circumstances of Paul Proios's death. This silence is without any narrative duration, although it seems to cover at least three or four months of Leonis's life. When the narrative resumes, Leonis is in Athens. It is stated that he is avoiding his art tools, and before the chapter ends Leonis has three times tried to paint again but failed: 'Something had been ruined in the process' (ibid.: 140). The Greek text uses in this case the same word (*chalasei*) for 'ruined' as when it was mentioned that the world 'is lost'. Leonis's world, Constantinople, and his art are both aspects of the same loss, or ruin. He concludes, 'I've lost my art', and realizes that his art was 'a bit of life which was becoming memory' (ibid.). What cannot be narrated verbally – Paul's death and Leonis's flight – is expressed as the loss of another medium (in this case visual art), as the loss of Leonis's painting and his identity as an artist. Also, when the crisis of Constantinople forces Leonis to leave his City and world, it implies that he leaves visual art for verbal art. As he has declared earlier, the language he chooses is Greek, not a modern cosmopolitan language such as French.

When Leonis runs into his friend Stasinos, who is in Athens following his medical discharge from the army, Leonis asks him: 'Why was Paul Proios

killed?’ (ibid.: 137). They discuss possible reasons for their friend’s death – perhaps Paul died not ‘for ideologies’ but because of his love for Eleni Phoka or for his country – but Stasinós closes: ‘What can I say? Perhaps all this is a creation of my imagination. In the war, you know, the imagination goes haywire’ (ibid.: 138). In this episode, Stasinós enters as the narratee – or rather as the interlocutor – who provides an occasion for Leonis to address the previously unnarrated event of Paul’s death in the war. When Stasinós instead refers to his confused imagination, Paul’s death presents itself as possible to narrate only in a (traumatic) fantasy.

A similar impression, that all their earlier life has been imagined, is presented by Leonis himself when he climbs the hills of Athens and remembers the Byzantine past across the sea, his friends and his early feelings of love in the Taksim garden. Suddenly it appears to him ‘that nothing had intervened, that everything happening then was but a vision’ (ibid.: 135). Instead, Leonis sees clearly what has actually happened, ‘that great rending apart,’ in which his love had died. When climbing another of Athens’s hills, Mount Hymettos, he repeats three times what his father had said on their arrival in Athens: ‘we’ve lost whatever we had’ (ibid.: 142–4), but he remembers also the next phrase: ‘Now let’s see how we come out of this’ (ibid.: 142). The narratee, to whom Leonis addresses a speech, almost a prayer – ‘Make of me whatever you want, to be a slave to serve you’ (ibid.: 143) – is in this case an invented personification, whom he apostrophizes as ‘Lady’ (Gr. *Kyria*). In this situation, Leonis also concludes on the particular contradictions of his fate and place in history, and what these conflicts have done to him:

I am two-fold: I am two I’s and I don’t know which of the two is the more genuine.
I am a yes and a no ... I am something that is dying and something that is trying
to be born. ... I am marked by the contradictions of my era. I am a child of the
era, an offshoot of History.

(Ibid.: 144)

Leonis is generally described as a typical example of a bourgeois novel, or as a *Bildungsroman* or a *Künstlerroman* based on the author’s fictionalized autobiography (see, for example, Doulis 1975: 79–80, Tziouvas 2003: 111–19). However, by being attentive to its chronotope of threshold, another story emerges, straddling that very threshold in space and time as it moves from *the City*, Constantinople, to the new (though yet more ancient) city, Athens, from which the final two chapters are narrated. The novel tells, then, not primarily a

linear story about a patriotic homecoming to Greece or about the artist-to-be. Rather, it narrates ‘the great rending apart’, to refer to Leonis’s phrasing; it tells about entangled and conflicting cosmopolitan and nationalistic milieus, about contradictions (both historical and personal) and about resorting to writing when visual art is lost together with the world. In contrast to painting, writing unfolds in time as well as in a language.

Although the story about Leonis is often summarized as including his flight from Constantinople to an exiled life in Athens, we have seen that there is no such episode narrated in the novel. Instead, after Chapter 20, which presents the diary of Leonis in Constantinople, there is a narrative ellipsis before Chapter 21 begins in Athens. When Leonis stops writing his diary because of Paul Proios’s death, it is also the end of the narration of his life in Constantinople. Thus the final part of the novel (Chapters 21 and 22), set in Athens, provides a case of displaced narration. Events that did take place but could not be narrated within the story are reported later, to different narratees – as in the conversation between Leonis and Stasinos, or in Leonis’s prayer to an invented ‘Lady’. Lanser and Rimmon-Kenan (2019: 255) pointed out that displaced narration usually involves three temporalities: ‘the occasion when something happens, the occasion when it is not told, and the occasion when it *is* told and, further, is presented as something previously unspoken’. In the case of the novel *Leonis*, situated in the Constantinopolitan chronotope of crisis, it is significant that the displaced narration and its temporalities depend precisely on writing, as when Leonis writes in his diary that Paul Proios is killed (in the first temporality) but cannot tell about it (in the second temporality). On the occasion when the previously unspoken is told (in the third temporality), it is dismissed as a piece of imagination, as when it is stated that the discussed reasons for Paul Proios’s death may just be invented, or when Leonis’s recollections of his life in Constantinople appear as a vision.

‘Constantinople fever’ in springtime

Constantinople was one of the Armenians’ intellectual and artistic centres, furthering many women writers, and in the early twentieth century Western Armenian dialects spoken there were gaining ground as a modern literary language (Rowe 2003: 17–21). Zabel Yessayan’s short novel *My Soul in Exile*, regarded as a central work in her oeuvre (Beledian 2014: 48), was published in

Vienna by the Mekhitarist Press in 1922, the same year as Leonis in Theotokas's novel left Constantinople for Athens. Both of these Greek and Armenian novels, set in Constantinople, have in common that they refer to a shared Christian heritage (as well as to internal conflicts between Christian groups of different denominations) and to Byzantine history and practices. Moreover, artistry and painting play a salient role in the protagonists' selfhood. Theotokas's novel ends in Athens in 1922, when Leonis, after his exile from Constantinople, is no longer able to paint. Yessayan's *My Soul in Exile* opens with the return of an artist to Constantinople, about one decade earlier – perhaps while Leonis was still listening to the cook's gossip and playing thieves with his friends in the Taksim garden. No exact year is mentioned, but the novel is set in springtime, from April to May, after two events that are mentioned in passing – the Young Turk revolution of 1908 (Yessayan 2014: 4) and the Adana massacre of the Armenians in 1909 (ibid.: 13) – but still before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 (Merguerian 2014: ix).

In Yessayan's novel the artist who returns to her home in Constantinople is the protagonist-and-narrator, a young Armenian woman called Emma. She enters her father's almost deserted house in the well-known Armenian district of Bağlarbaşı on the Asian side of Constantinople (in Scutari, today's Üsküdar), with the intention of launching an exhibition of her paintings. As this short novel of no more than forty pages evolves, Emma hangs her paintings in the big room of her father's house; she encounters her previous old teacher, Hrant Cherkezian, and remembers the beauty of his reading of 'a passage in Classical Armenian' (Yessayan 2014: 10); she happens to make the acquaintance of a famous Armenian poet, Mrs Siranush Danielian; she goes to a soiree at her friend Sophie Varvarian's house, which the poet also attends; she enjoys watching her aunt making rose jam; and she experiences a short love affair with Vahan Diran Bey, who is the president of the organizing committee of her planned public exhibition at the Alliance Française in Constantinople.

However, this is a story where, effectively, almost nothing happens or is ever accomplished, at least not in the sense of bringing about any change. One could say that there are very few events (in a narratological sense) and the absence of action, or even agency, is striking, akin to what Lanser and Rimmon-Kenan (2019: 248–9) describe as non-action and stasis, for example during long periods of waiting. There is, definitely, 'a lack of any plot' (Beledian 2014: 46). In Yessayan's novel, time is narrated as a continuous flow in which Emma's endless

introspective reflections take place. In front of her paintings, she finds them all to be ‘shrouded in mist’ (Yessayan 2014: 5). They seem to render her ‘yearning and longing for a homeland’ (ibid.), and she reflects on their ‘helpless sorrow’ (ibid.: 27). Mostly, Emma stays for entire days in the big room where she has hung her paintings, and this room forms the backdrop for parts of the continued narrative. Visitors come to see the exhibition, but as they sit down to rest a little, a few more friends come by, and eventually they all seem to forget why they actually came. Neither is the public exhibition of Emma’s paintings at Alliance Française ever accomplished.

More than once, Emma is feverish and shivering in the evenings. On these occasions she experiences how boundaries of various kinds are dissolved, for example between herself and the surrounding garden; between the actual sensing of sounds and perfumes, and the memory of them; between the contours of the city’s valleys, the islands’ hills and the surrounding Marmara Sea; between a room, its flower decorations and her guests’ features, faces and smiles – ‘as if in a confused dream’ (ibid.: 23). Open windows and doors, often facing towards the garden, signal transitional conditions and an in-between state, for example when Emma stands ‘at the open window’ and finds herself in a state where it is ‘neither night nor day’ (ibid.: 3), when in her memory ‘closed doors are opening and past moments are reawakening’ (ibid.: 4). She identifies with the motifs of her paintings, so that she herself encompasses the cypress, the spring, the boat adrift on the sea, as well as ‘this woman waiting expectantly at a window’ (ibid.: 27). The dispersion of Emma’s self is in this particular case mirrored by the dissolved boundaries between the paintings and their artist. Thus it is Emma’s fluctuating mood, her volatile emotions, her reflections and recollections that form the core of this narrative, not her actions. This is a story of evasive dreams, floating time and the potential disintegration of Emma’s, the narrating I’s, self (see Rowe 2003: 227–8).

The surrounding city of Constantinople reflects Emma’s emotional state of mind. It is April when she returns there, and every transitional, weakened and confused state she experiences seems in one way or another to be connected with the spring nights, which are characterized by a certain instability, when everything ‘becomes a dream, wild emotion, or nightmare’ or ‘mingles with everything else’ (Yessayan 2014: 9). Emma regards the spring as a diffuse illness, which brings fever and unrest: ‘In no other city in the world, perhaps, does the unrest of spring invade people’s inner being in this supremely subtle, unhealthy

way' (ibid.). She even mentions the spring's affliction by the city's name – what is at stake is 'Constantinople fever, a sort of physical agitation inseparable from the city's spring nights' (ibid.).

The frequent in-between states which the novel describes and narrates situate *My Soul in Exile* within the Constantinopolitan chronotope of threshold. In spite of the narrated timelessness and Emma's and her friends' lack of agency, there are numerous examples of the particular kind of instantaneous time that is associated with the chronotope of crisis. The novel often narrates time by means of adverbials (and adverbial phrases) which express sudden changes, such as 'At this very moment' (ibid.: 6), 'Abruptly' (ibid.: 11, 24), 'I was startled' (ibid.: 11), 'Just when' (ibid.: 13), 'Unexpectedly' (ibid.: 15), 'But just then' (ibid.: 22) 'All at once' (ibid.: 25), 'Today' (ibid.: 30), 'At just that moment' (ibid.: 37) and 'suddenly' (ibid.: 39). Although they signal rapidly changing situations, change never occurs. Instead, phrases expressing iteration, such as 'in those hours' (ibid.: 30), 'Every day and every hour' (ibid.: 40) or the repeated mentions of sundown or sunrise (ibid.: 9, 14, 26, 41), underline that the suddenness is not singular. Rather, it should be regarded as *recurring* instances of the ceaseless flow of time which constitutes Emma's perception and self-narration (cf. Lanser's and Rimmon-Kenan's (2019: 250) proposal of 'the term "recurrent" to account for the multiple narration of multiple occurrences'). Hence the novel's many time adverbials serve the continuous volatility and unreliability of Emma's emotions as well as of the city in springtime, agitated by 'Constantinople fever'.

One episode that is narrated as happening 'unexpectedly' is Emma's encounter on the landing in Scutari with the famous Armenian poet Mrs Siranush Danielian, who is described as 'one of the most influential women in Constantinople' (Yessayan 2014: 15), a person whom Emma admires and whose book she is keen to discuss. Though they have never met before, the poet declares immediately how close they are to each other, since they are both Armenian artists: 'It's as if we were exiles in a remote foreign country. We're exiles in the land of our birth'. She continues: 'But we artists, at least, can become comrades in exile' (ibid.: 17–18). At first, Emma would prefer to become 'comrades in struggle', but soon she changes her mind and feels instead 'not just similar to her [the poet], but the same' (ibid.: 18). It is if they were 'two soul sisters: companions in exile' (ibid.). Again, Emma's person and self seem to commune with her surroundings – in this particular case, she equates herself with the poet as a woman and artist in exile. The poet's appearance in the novel points to the importance of artistic endeavours for the Armenians, as well as of the work of

women – as comrades and soul sisters. This motif is emphasized even more the next time the two female artists meet, at a soiree at the Varvarians'. When Mrs Danielian speaks about poetry at the soiree she appears to Emma as 'a self-assured, poised intellectual', and Emma reflects to herself on the dispersion of her people's potential aesthetic life: 'What richness, what magnificence has here remained infertile!' (ibid.: 25). The writing of poetry is thematized as not only an aesthetic but also an intellectual endeavour with a political goal.

Mrs Danielian has undertaken the formation of the organizing committee for Emma's exhibition at the Alliance Française, and although Emma becomes overwhelmed by emotions 'verging on fright' (ibid.: 23), she foresees a rapid change: 'I may become a leading personality in the nascent, resurgent Armenian community from one day to the next ...' (ibid.) She finds herself to be the centre of the guests' attention: 'At present, my artist's pride overrides everything else. ... Art embellishes me and sets a halo over my head. It seems that from now on, every step I take will be a step on the road to glory' (ibid.). Emma envisages at this moment how she and her contribution become 'one of the cries of liberation' for the Armenians, and 'a new revelation' (ibid.). Yet before the soiree ends, Emma 'all at once' feels tired and drained, 'on the verge of tears' (ibid.: 25). In this way, Emma's strong but momentary and often volatile emotions frame the whole evening at the Varvarians'. Still, nothing really happens at the soiree, except Emma's intense emotions.

Not even Emma's love story with Diran Bey is narrated. When Emma has announced it as 'one of the stormiest, most beautiful, and most painful chapters of my life' (ibid.: 40), there is a narrative ellipsis after which their love for each other is mentioned as having ended many years ago. Emma's reflections in this last section of the novel (after the ellipsis) witness her extensive dependence on her memories: 'Every day and every hour, I relive those bygone moments' (ibid.); 'Memories invade my soul' (ibid.: 41); 'I feel that I am returning to my inner prison, which now is decorated with nothing but memories and desires' (ibid.). Thus it has been proposed that the story, as a whole, 'is recounted as her remembering her return to Constantinople' (Rowe 2003: 231). I would rather read the main part of the novel as a relatively straightforward narrative, after Emma's initial return to Constantinople, and its last section as an instance of displaced narration, in which Emma remembers and hints at what has not previously been narrated within the story – that is, the love between Diran Bey and herself. It is still springtime, and her friends – Hrant Cherkezian and the poet, Mrs Danielian – are waiting for her, and they remain 'companions in

Figure 1.2 Cover of Yessayan’s short novel *Hogis aksoreal* in Armenian, published in Vienna in 1922. Available online at Union Catalog of Armenian Continuing Resources, <http://tert.nla.am>. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 3.0.

Figure 1.3 Cover of Edib Adıvar's novel *Ateşten Gömlek* in Ottoman Turkish, published in Istanbul in 1922. Available online at Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/tedengmlek00advauoft/page/n4/mode/2up>.

exile' (Yessayan 2014: 41). Eventually, though, Emma decides not to pay Mrs Danielian a visit but to 'remain alone', as she makes her way 'to the remotest recesses of the garden beneath the blossoming cherry trees' (ibid.). Although it is never explicitly mentioned from where Emma narrates this period of her life, beginning with her return to Constantinople in springtime, it seems as if this is the point from which her story is – fictively – articulated. Emma's garden functions in this novel as a miniature of the chronotope of crisis or threshold; she never leaves it but remains in her in-between stasis.¹⁰

The Shirt of Flame as a disease

In 1922, the same year as Yessayan's short novel was brought out by an Armenian publishing house in Vienna, Halide Edib Adivar's melodramatic, patriotic and romantic novel *The Shirt of Flame* was published in Ottoman Turkish. Only a few years later it was self-translated into English by the author, and after the script reform it was intralingually translated into Modern Turkish. It is structured as a frame narrative which uses several written, although fictive, sources – a diary and letters. Its main story begins in Istamboul, as Constantinople is named in the Turkish novel, focusing on the events of 1919–1920 which led to the shutting down of the Ottoman Parliament. After the first four chapters it evolves further towards and into Anatolia during the Greco-Turkish War in 1920–1921. The frame story represents the continuous writing of the diary in the present tense, with entries added between 3 November and 17 December 1921. The main story is therefore narrated as the diarist's recollections of Constantinople and the war in Anatolia. He is a Turk named Peyami, thirty-six years old, a former scribe and civil servant at the Ottoman Foreign Ministry. As an interpreter who knows Greek and can take photographs and read Greek papers (Adivar 1924: 193, 197), Peyami is sent to the western Anatolian front.¹¹ Thereby he is able to follow two of his friends, Ihsan and Ayesha (Tu. *Ayşe*) in the war, where Ihsan serves as an officer and Ayesha as a nurse.

¹⁰ See also Rowe, who regards *My Soul in Exile* as part of a larger trend, as 'the beginning of a post-Genocide trend in which the figure of the Armenian passes through life, alone and alienated from the world' (2003: 232).

¹¹ The Swedish translation by Hjalmar Lindquist names in this case the Greek papers, 'Rizospastis' and 'Kathimerini' (Adivar 1928: 190), and translates their names as, approximately, The Radical and The Daily (Sw. "Radikalen" och "Den dagliga", Adivar 1928: 265).

The novel's title, *The Shirt of Flame*, refers to the particular fervour for the Turkish people and nation that at times grips Peyami and his friends and fellow officers (on the further symbolism of the title see Seyhan 2008: 55). However, when Peyami notes down his memories from the war he is lying in hospital in Angora (today's Ankara) waiting for surgery, since he has lost both his legs in the Battle of Sakarya and still has a bullet in his head (Adivar 1924: 192). Eventually, as we will see, the story forms a tragedy in which all its heroic characters, including the wounded scribe-and-narrator, die. This is also how Peyami describes his life, in terms of a tragic opera: 'We are walking continually through a decorated background, talking, gesticulating and shouting, even falling here and there and dying' (ibid.: 171). His friend Ihsan uses a similar metaphor, as he compares his earlier life in Constantinople, before the war, to 'the overture to the Opera, the light and mixed melody before the real music of the tragedy' (ibid.: 207).

In this nexus of time, space and significant actions (such as writing a diary) in the novel's representation of the chronotope of crisis, Ayesha in particular appears as a symbol with national pretensions. She enters the narrative and the Constantinopolitan scene with injuries from Smyrna (today's İzmir), her native city, and she plays the symbolic as well as political and ideological role of personifying the suffering of the Turkish city of Smyrna under its Greek occupation. At the same time she contrasts herself, a simple Anatolian woman, with the Europeanized women in the city – 'They are fashionable people and I am only an Anatolian woman in mourning' (ibid.: 226) – and to Peyami she also represents the whole of the nation: 'a symbol of love, strength and pity, a symbol of my suffering country, in the midst of fire and blood' (ibid.: 236). In this way Ayesha has a triple function, symbolizing Smyrna, the Anatolian countryside and the Turkish nation. Azade Seyhan (2008: 52) dubbed Ayesha 'the walking symbol of a national trauma', a trauma which no doubt includes the contrasts between the cosmopolitan cities of Smyrna and Constantinople and the vernacular Anatolia, with its heavy dialects – though these are rendered in English in the translation (Adivar 1924: 128, 137).

As is well known, the novel's feminist author, Halide Edib Adivar, is herself represented, although anonymously, in one of the novel's episodes. The novel narrates the particular demonstration in which she gave a famous speech in May 1919, and one of her pithy phrases, 'The people were our friends and the government our enemies', is quoted by Peyami in his diary (ibid.: 39, Seyhan 2008: 53). From a narratological perspective, this implies a metalepsis; it is as if the author's invented characters had been present at the real meeting, listening

to her grand speech, or as if the author was a minor character in her own novel. Without doubt, Edib Adivar has been eager to demonstrate her political importance in the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish nation. When Peyami in his diary describes the huge Sultanahmet demonstration in the centre of Constantinople, he deliberately emphasizes the difference between the actions of the former empires and those of the new nation. According to Peyami, the Turks were instituting a new kind of observance instead of triumphal parades: 'on this white and eternal Hippodrome no review or race either of Byzantine splendour or Ottoman grandeur had been sanctified by the tears of a whole nation. Is it the new and divine Spirit which has begotten Turkey, teaching the Turks this wonderful observance of the spirit?' (Adivar 1924: 37–8).

On the other hand, ethnic antagonism is expressed in a peculiar passage where Peyami views his own people, the Turks, through the eyes of their enemies, so that 'the victor's world' is contrasted to 'us':

All mankind put a black mark on our faces, and spat at it. They, the victor's world, considered us not only as the assassins of the Armenians but also as enemies of civilization because we went into the war with the Germans, destroyers of civilization. We were barbarous and tyrannical and it was the duty of civilized men to exterminate us.

(Ibid.: 20)

In a critical phase of the story, in March 1920, Peyami as its scribe-and-narrator cannot take part in the events, since he has fallen seriously ill with typhoid. Instead, he has to rely on what Ayesha, from her female perspective, relates about the British occupation of Constantinople in four letters addressed to him, dated 18, 20 and 25 March and 1 April 1920 – letters which he quotes in his journal a year and a half later. The use of Ayesha's letters as a source text, copied into Peyami's diary, underlines both the novel's reliance on epistolary and diary genres and the attention it pays to women's experiences.

Among many other things, Ayesha describes a situation which involves the conflicts between Turks, Greeks and Armenians in Constantinople and their prejudices about each other's poor knowledge of languages. An Armenian interpreter, who helps the British soldiers evacuate Turkish houses in Constantinople, presupposes that Ayesha 'does not speak any language', that she is 'ignorant and not used to good treatment' (ibid.: 74). As a matter of fact, Ayesha is as fluent in French as the many Constantinopolitan Turkish ladies who arrange salons from which they spread propaganda, intended to reach European newspapers. As Peyami describes in his diary, his mother is one of these ladies.

In another episode, where an English journalist is invited to such a salon to listen to Ayesha, he has to reveal his bad French in conversations with his Turkish hostess and her guests (ibid.: 45).

As Peyami's recollections move from Constantinople to the battlefield, and eventually to the hospital in Angora from which he writes his diary, the main story and its narrative frame begin to converge in both space and time. The story's direction – from the capital of the falling Ottoman Empire, Constantinople, to the Anatolian city, Angora, which will soon be proclaimed the new capital of the coming Turkish Republic – is characteristic of the Constantinopolitan chronotope of crisis. While the novel in this respect narrates the movement from empire to nationhood, it also explicitly thematizes acts of writing, since the frame narrative is composed in the diary genre (including letters, as well), and the diarist himself is a professional scribe and interpreter.

At the hospital, Peyami is waiting for surgery, which eventually causes his death and leaves the reader with his unfinished diary as of 17 December 1921. The novel ends with a short dialogue between two doctors, who discuss Peyami's case and mention the diary he has left behind. A few months after Peyami's death, their investigations have surprisingly found that no such persons as Ihsan and Ayesha exist. The doctors thus conclude that Peyami's notes are due to 'the effect on his mind of the bullet' (ibid.: 267), and they decide to assign a medical diagnosis in Latin to the phenomenon of Peyami's 'shirt of flame' (signifying his devoted commitment to and enthusiasm for Constantinople's and Turkey's coming sovereignty). What he has recounted in this diary are, then, only hallucinations, the effects of his war wounds. If Peyami's friends, as we know them from his diary, are fabrications, then his diary is a piece of fiction and equal to the novel we read. Since Peyami's diary at this moment is paradoxically presented as pure imagination, the end of the narrative may be regarded as one more metalepsis (in this case from Peyami's diary to the published novel). As a further consequence, it may also be the novel itself which is diagnosed as a deadly war wound, since the doctors assign their medical diagnosis in Latin – literally – to Peyami's 'shirt of flame', that is, to the novel with precisely this title, *The Shirt of Flame*.¹²

As we have seen, *The Shirt of Flame* is a narrative where space functions both literally and symbolically (see Lanser and Rimmon-Kenan 2019: 254–5): it names

¹² For other perspectives on the ending of *The Shirt of Flame*, see Göknaar 2014: 334 and Seyhan 2008: 55.

several places in Constantinople and Anatolia, and both Smyrna, occupied by Greece, and the emergent Turkish nation are personified by Ayesha. Furthermore, the novel exemplifies an intriguing case of displaced narration: its frame narrative presents itself as composed in a situation of long waiting (when Peyami is to undergo surgery in the hospital), which forms rather a non-action than an action (see *ibid.*: 248, 263), although Peyami uses his time to write his diary. The main story Peyami tells (in the first temporality of the displaced narration) is of the Constantinopolitan occupation and the early phase of the Greco-Turkish War. Yet what he does not say in the battlefield (in the second temporality of the displaced narration) is that he loves Ayesha (Adıvar 1924: 249). His love remains unspoken until he actually writes his journal (in the third temporality of the displaced narration). But by that time Ayesha has already died in the war.

If *The Shirt of Flame* is regarded in this way as a displaced narration, it is possible to tie its political, patriotic and ideologically nationalistic aspects together with its love story. The characters who symbolically represent the new nation state and its Anatolian foundation are all killed in the battles. Peyami, the scribe-and-narrator, who represents the cosmopolitan, Europeanized milieu of Constantinople, does not tell about his love for Ayesha, personifying the new nation, until it is too late (cf. Gökner 2014: 334). His explicit wish, recorded in his diary, is to be buried at the feet of Ayesha and Ihsan, his friends from Constantinople and from the battlefield. According to Peyami's account, nothing is left – neither the characters, nor the result of their struggles. What remains is the novel with its particular use of writing (in the form of distinctly written genres such as a diary and letters), a significant act within the Constantinopolitan chronotope of crisis, but in this case it has been labelled as a disease and assigned a medical diagnosis in Latin. By means of metalepsis, the novel ends by regarding itself as a war wound.

A Russian revolutionary blast

During the same period as is narrated in *The Shirt of Flame* – a few years after the end of the First World War and the Russian Revolution – Constantinople had become flooded with Russian refugees. In 1920–1921 Il'ia Zdanevich (also known as Il'iazd) was one of the avant-garde Russian poets with a revolutionary agenda who stayed temporarily in Constantinople. He was on his way from Tbilisi to Paris, from one to another of these three influential cultural centres of

the early twentieth century: Tbilisi, Constantinople and Paris. Unlike Zdanevich, many of the Russians in Constantinople had supported the White Army against the Red Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War (1917–1923). Solita Solano, the American journalist reporting from Constantinople in June 1922 (as quoted above), described the rapid shift in their fortunes from nobles to beggars, from wealth to homelessness:

A few Russians have been lucky enough to find positions in restaurants as waitresses or coatboys. A princess may bring the patron's coffee and a general hand him his stick. Professors, ex-millionaires, women of high birth, beseech one to buy cigarettes or paper flowers. A small colony in Pera has taken possession of an embankment and hung up two blankets to make it seem homelike.

(Solano 1922: 654)

Descriptions and enumerations of the many people of various ethnicities and languages crossing the Galata Bridge over the Golden Horn is a topos in travelogues from Constantinople (Tekdemir 2017, Bodin 2020: 787). When Solano describes this scene, she mentions first of all – before people of Armenian, Greek, Western European, American, Chinese, Japanese and Persian origin – the Russians, since they are so many; she notes 158,000 as of October 1920 (Solano 1922: 655). Escaping from one war, they had arrived in Constantinople at the time of the Greco-Turkish War. When the Russian Empire falls, the Russian refugees contribute to intensifying the crisis of Constantinople, narrated as situated within the chronotope of threshold.

This is the case in Zdanevich's novel *Philosophy (Filosofia)*, which, though it is certainly a piece of avant-garde aesthetics, is set in an accurately depicted Constantinople with its districts, important streets and waters in place. The novel presents nearly 300 pages or twenty chapters of intricacies and absurdities which are often associated with communication problems, and in particular with the problem of writing (Biryukov 2008). For example, there is the hope of being cured and regaining health by dissolving in water the name of the disease, written on a piece of paper; moreover, there is an alphabet of flowers to be deciphered. Among the characters, called by more or less absurd names, there is an Ethiopian eunuch, formerly at the sultan's harem and now serving as attendant of a library, an insane Jew who knows astrology and predicts the end of Christian culture in a few generations, and a group of Russian refugees who reclaim Hagia Sophia as a Christian cathedral (as was demanded by the Russians during the First World War, see Zdanevich 2008: 812, n. 17, Kudriavtsev 2016: 124–7). Last but not least, there is also the planning of a revolutionary conquest

of Stambul (the old town of Constantinople), in which the novel's protagonist, Il'iazd (namesake of the author), is involved, and this plot includes blowing up Hagia Sophia (Kudriavtsev 2016: 128).

The last chapter of Zdanevich's novel opens abruptly: 'Constantinople was no more' (Zdanevich 2008: 464; my translations from here on). What has happened is the revolution, presented as a magician, as 'the sole marvel on the earth' (ibid.: 465). At this point it is articulated several times that 'Constantinople has ceased to exist' (ibid.: 464–5), but at the same time it is clear that everything is new – 'the world is new' (ibid.: 465). The city has been 'called to life according to the will of the northern philosopher' (ibid.: 466) – that is, by Lenin. Thus Constantinople is renamed Leningrad, a name which at that time was still available, since Petrograd (former Saint Petersburg) was not called Leningrad until the death of Lenin in 1924 (see further ibid.: 814, n. 1). Walking the empty streets of the city after the blast, Il'iazd understands that 'it's all over' (ibid.: 468). By this sudden turn, the city is no longer crowned by the emperor or tsar (as in Constantinople, referring to Constantine the Great, the first Byzantine emperor, and *Tsar'grad*, the city's Russian name). Instead, it bears the name of Lenin: 'Leningrad! Finally, it was right before Il'iazd, the great city' (ibid.: 466).

Since it is an avant-garde work, Zdanevich's novel is a hard piece to examine properly as regards its narrative strategy. Nevertheless, I propose its last chapter as an instance of displaced narration. After Il'iazd, in the penultimate chapter, is informed about the revolutionary intrigue and its complicated plans, he is away for some twenty hours, and then Constantinople has suddenly ceased to exist. However, neither the blowing up of Hagia Sophia nor the revolution is narrated. In the last chapter the blast and the revolution are presented as accomplished facts as Il'iazd walks the streets of the new city and new world. The novel's absurdist and utopian programme seems, though, to displace even the displaced narration: what actually happened remains obscure – as so often before in Constantinople.

One literary world in different languages

In this chapter I explored the narration of the crisis of Constantinople in the protracted breakdown between 1908 and 1922, when empires were falling and the extension of new, emergent or extended national states was trialled. The crafting of Constantinople as an immanent literary world has been examined in

four novels in Greek, Armenian, Turkish and Russian, all set in Constantinople during this period. I posited the city's narrated site as a Bakhtinian chronotope, and more precisely as a chronotope of crisis or threshold, to explore this particular crisis of Constantinople between the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Turkish nation.

As the literary analyses have indicated, there are several features of this chronotope of crisis or threshold between 1908 and 1922 which particularly characterize Constantinople as a literary or aesthetic world. The selected novels describe definitely one and the same real city (although with a focus on different districts), often the same historical events or disasters (although from disparate perspectives) and several similar experiences of being in an in-between state, perhaps of waiting, fever or malady, sometimes articulated in the form of perceptions of a surrounding world that is illusive and evasive (as in *Leonis*), unreal and dreamlike (as in *My Soul in Exile*), theatrical or operatic (as in *The Shirt of Flame*), or just absurd (as in *Philosophy*). Moreover, the novels recollect or reclaim 'a lost world' and deploy displaced narration as a prominent narrative strategy. Acts of writing are constitutive of the novels and seem to be self- and meta-reflective, as they are thematized on different narrative levels, and issues of writing appear in narrated critical discussions of artistic and literary works. Sometimes writing has proved to be of decisive significance for the novels' subgenres, as when they are entirely or partially diary novels with embedded epistolary sections. Consequently, protagonists and characters who are (or aspire to be) writers, poets, artists, interpreters, scribes or agitators have been the focus of attention.

In none of these respects, however, has the author's ethnicity (or nationality) or language been decisive. Rather, the novels appear as strikingly congruous in spite of their different national and linguistic domains – traditionally, they are included in Modern Greek, Western Armenian, Turkish or avant-garde Russian literatures, respectively. Yet there are differences, in particular concerning the point or place to which the novels take their readers, and consequently also as regards the various perspectives of the metaphorical Constantinopolitan chronotope of threshold from which their characters are speaking. Thus the Greek novel takes us from Constantinople to Athens, where its exiled young protagonist Leonis is about to begin a new life. The final lines of the Turkish novel, pronounced by doctors at a hospital in Angora, invalidate its entire story by assigning a medical diagnosis to the deceased protagonist-and-narrator's endeavour for his nation and, by extension, to the entire novel which wears the shirt of flame as its title.

The Russian novel makes Constantinople completely new, into a new world, by a revolutionary marvel, and renames it Leningrad. While these three novels leave Constantinople behind, because of exile, tragedy or a revolutionary explosion, the Armenian novel remains in Constantinople, where Emma, the artist, stays in the garden of her father's house, alone with her memories – she does not even go to see the poet, her soul sister and comrade in exile.

It has been emphasized that 'border fictions change dominant conceptualizations of who inhabits and can speak for the border' (Rosello and Wolfe 2017: 13). If applied to our analysed novels (and their authors and characters), it is clear that all inhabit the border zone or metaphorical threshold of Constantinople in crisis between 1908 and 1922 and *can* speak for it, in their various languages – at a time when the city's multiplicity of languages and scripts will soon be set aside in favour of national Turkish monolingualism and its Roman alphabet. Ever since then, the city, be it named Constantinople or Istanbul, has continued to be narrated in novels composed in its former vernacular languages (of which some, at that time, were emerging as national and literary languages) or in the European languages of its Western visitors and residents.

About three generations after the 1920s, after the birth of the Turkish Republic and the Turkish script reform, Orhan Pamuk – writing in Modern Turkish, of course – was awarded the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. Concerning the relation between Istanbul and his works, Pamuk declared in his address to the Swedish Academy:

For me the center of the world is Istanbul ... because for the last thirty-three years I have been narrating its streets, its bridges, its people, its dogs, its houses, its mosques, its fountains, its strange heroes, its shops, its famous characters, its dark spots, its days, and its nights, making them part of me, embracing them all. A point arrived when this world I had made with my own hands, this world that existed only in my head, was more real to me than the city in which I actually lived.

(Pamuk 2007: 414)

Pamuk credits his novels for having instituted Istanbul as the centre of the world, which he earlier saw as far away from his city and its lives (ibid.: 413): 'there was a world literature, and its center, too, was very far away from me' (ibid.: 410). Clearly, Pamuk's talk is a strong vindication of literature's world-making power. But, contrary to Pamuk's view that this has been accomplished by his novels, my aim in this chapter has been to demonstrate that the four analysed novels reveal that

Pamuk's home city was certainly already the centre of the world a century earlier, while the crafting of this earlier Constantinople as a literary or aesthetic world has been scattered in the literature of several different languages (Bodin 2020). As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, three of the selected novels were also circulated in translation into various (Western) languages – in the case of the novels in Greek and Turkish from quite early on, while the Armenian novel was translated only recently (and the Russian novel remains a non-translated and posthumously published avant-garde work). These translations have basically enabled – and conditioned – my reading of them as examples of narratives situated within the Constantinopolitan chronotope of threshold. In this respect, another important point is that more recently Turkish translations of both the Greek and Armenian novels have appeared, so that readers of today, with their various connections with today's Istanbul, may share each other's stories from and about the city's former life, originally composed in different languages.¹³

In Zdanevich's novel, Hagia Sophia was blown up and Constantinople was renamed Leningrad, but in reality the city has endured as an immanent literary world crafted in various languages and as parts of various national literatures. Still, many years after the resolution of the historical crisis, readers of different languages may experience Constantinople before 1922 as a multilingual literary world from the various perspectives of the city's different ethnicities and languages, with or without aid from inter- and intra-lingual translations, and *they can live there imaginatively* (for this expression see Ekelund 2021). As this chapter demonstrates, readers may experience Constantinople as a literary (or aesthetic) world in which writing itself is challenged, questioned or interrupted, irrespective of whether the language and discourse are Greek, Armenian or Turkish, or in which writing, as in the Russian case (as a means of communication and signification), is driven to the extreme by its revolutionary creation of a totally new and renamed city.

In political and social reality, the multilingual cosmopolitan city, which historically had been the capital of two empires, came to an end and its official name was changed to Istanbul. Our four examined novels trace this break-up but do not give in to it, as they narrate the crisis in each of their languages. As

¹³ *Leonis* was published in Turkish in 2008, translated by Damla Demiröz. Yessayan's works are published in Turkish by Aras, an Istanbul bilingual publishing house with books in both Armenian and Turkish, which regards itself as the present-day representative of the long history of Armenian publishing legacy (<https://www.arasyayincilik.com/hakkimizda/>).

a literary world, Constantinople keeps transgressing single national literatures, and the narration of its crisis makes a linguistically multifaceted contribution to world literature.

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