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Turkey and the Turks in Mid-Century British Thrillers

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Abstract

Between 1932 and 1962 six huge successful thrillers were published in Britain, whose action was set at least partly in Turkey. As each of the novels in question also formed the basis for a popular film, one could expect them to play an important role in shaping perceptions of Turkey in the English-speaking world at a time when international travel was still the prerogative of the few and first-hand experience of Turkey was rare. As this article shows, however, this was not the case and there were two main reasons for this: the books featured Turkey as a device to attract readers through exoticism rather than because of any real interest in the country, and the descriptions of Turkey and the Turks relied heavily on older stereotypes inherited from late Ottoman days. That said, there were significant differences between them.

Key words: Turkey, History, Literature

The nineteen thirties are a particularly interesting period in the history of the detective story, or more broadly speaking: the thriller novel in the English-speaking world. On the one hand it is often considered the Golden Age of the classic detective story, the "closed room" detective which is dominated by an intricate plot, or puzzle, and where characterization takes second place. Dorothy Sayers, John Dickson Carr, Ngaio Marsh and, of course, above all Agatha Christie are names associated with this school.

At the same time, the thirties also witnessed the emergence of very different schools of thriller writing. In America, the "hard boiled" thriller was invented by Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler, while in England Graham Greene with the first of his "entertainments" and Eric Ambler created a genre characterized by moral ambiguity and, particularly in the case of Ambler, by the fact that the protagonist was not a professional or even amateur detective but an innocent bystander caught up in a web of crime and espionage.

All of these different currents survived into the postwar era. Agatha Christie scaled new heights of popularity and success in print and on the screen after 1945, as did Ambler and Greene (albeit on a commercially more humble scale). The 1948 hit film The Third Man was based on a script by Greene, but it was a quintessentially Amblerian tale.

From 1953 onwards Ian Fleming joined the fray with his unique blend of implausible plots and very explicit descriptions of action, sex and violence in the series of thrillers built

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around the character of James Bond. While these were clearly indebted to the "Bulldog Drummond" kind of depictions of infallible British heroes that had been popular before the war, the even older novels by John Buchan and certainly also the books of E. Phillips Oppenheim (against which Ambler had reacted), they were very much in tune with the aspirational nineteen fifties (and sixties) in their emphasis on the joys of travel and consumer culture.

Agatha Christie, Graham Greene, Eric Ambler, Ian Fleming – four representatives of very different schools of thriller writing who were, each of them, very successful in the mid-century period from the thirties to the sixties, and who definitely influenced popular culture through their published works, but also, and perhaps even more, through the many successful adaptations of their works for the cinema, both in Britain and in Hollywood. Interestingly, each of them wrote at least one thriller in which Turkey played a role. Eric Ambler even wrote three.

This short article focuses on the six thrillers written by these authors that feature Turkey and askes the question whether we can discern common characteristics. In the way Turkey and the Turks are depicted in them. The six books (in chronological order of publication) are: Graham Greene, *Stamboul Train* (1932)[2]; Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934)[3]; Eric Ambler, *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1939)[4]; Eric Ambler, *Journey into Fear* (1940)[5]; Ian Fleming, *From Russia with Love* 1957)[6], and Eric Ambler, *The Light of Day* (1962)[7]. Interestingly, all six of these books were turned into successful films.

The commercial success of these books and of the films derived from them makes them potentially interesting to those interested in Anglo-Turkish relations. After all: they appeared at a time when international travel was still something that was reserved to a tiny section of society. Two weeks of paid holidays gradually became the norm in western and Central

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[2] Graham Greene, *Stamboul Train*, London: Heinemann, 1932.

[3] Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, London: Harper Collins, 2017 [original: London: Collins, 1934).

[4] Eric Ambler, *The Mask of Dimitrios*, London: Penguin, 2009 [original: London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939]

[5] Eric Ambler, *Journey into Fear*, London: Penguin, 2009 [original: London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940]

[6] Ian Fleming, *From Russia with Love*, London: Vintage, 2012 [original: London: Jonathan Cape, 1957]

[7] Eric Ambler, *The Light of Day*, London: The Reprint Society, 1964 [original: London: Heinemann, 1962]

Europe from the thirties onwards, but the vast majority of people lacked the means to travel abroad. Apart from the issue of cost, travel was also impeded by formal restrictions. After World War I the number of international borders in Europe, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, had multiplied and most countries demanded visa as well as passports to cross them. Customs controls and import restrictions were in place everywhere.

The lack of travel opportunities created a demand for travel literature, which would allow people to become armchair travelers. This is shown by the success of the books by Freya Stark, Peter Fleming (Ian's elder brother), and Wilfred Thesiger among others. These travelogues were widely read among the upper middle classes but they lacked the mass readership (and cinema audience) that the thrillers had. Freya Stark in particular wrote a number of books about travel in and around Turkey (*Ionia*, *The Lycian Shore*, *Alexander's Path*) in the nineteen fifties, but with their strong emphasis on the classical past they appealed primarily to a readership of university graduates (then still a tiny section of society).

Theoretically, therefore, the thrillers could have been an important channel through which a mass Anglophone readership could get acquainted with Turkey and the Turks. As we shall see, the reality was quite different.

The six thrillers

Chronologically, the first of these thrillers is Graham Greene's *Stamboul Train*, first published by Heinemann in London in 1932. It was the first of Greene's "entertainments" (works to which he himself attributed less literary weight), written when he was 28 years old and still waiting for literary success. He wrote it with the express purpose of making money at a time when he was still living on an advance by his publisher that was running out in the near future. The book was very much written with its intended readership in mind and contained the classic thriller elements of violence, sex, and mystery. Greene also wrote it with the possibility of turning it into a film script in the back of his mind.[8]

Unfortunately the book has little to say on Turkey. In spite of its title, Stamboul – or Constantinople as Greene still calls it – hardly figures in the book except as the destination that the travelers refer to during their three-day train journey across continental Europe. Only the last 29 pages of the 307-page book actually are situated in Istanbul. The city merely

[8] Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene. Volume One 1904-1939*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1987, 407-455, partly based on Greene's second volume of autobiography, *Ways of Escape*.

functions as a vague backdrop to the final act in the development of the relationship between the main characters. A few references are made to well-known sights and locations: the Aya Sofia, the Golden Horn, the Blue Mosque (which Greene apparently assumes to be blue *on the outside*) and the Pera Palace Hotel. No Muslim Turks figure in the story at all. The one somewhat rounded local character is Mr Kalebdjian, the Armenian reception clerk of the hotel where the protagonists stay. The "lively Armenian" with his "trim and well-cut morning coat" is a bit of a caricature, but then again: his depiction fits into a book that is riddled with racial and religious stereotypes from beginning to end.

Greene did not write on the basis of his own experience. He did not have the money to make the trip on the Orient Express and only travelled from Ostend to Cologne third class, something which explains why the description of the journey through Belgium is far more detailed and realistic than the rest.[9] He has claimed that he had visited Istanbul very briefly during an Aegean cruise, but it is not entirely clear if and when that trip took place. The final part of Stamboul Train certainly shows no evidence of familiarity with the place.

Unlike Greene, Agatha Christie had actually travelled on the Orient Express and visited Istanbul several times by the time she wrote *Murder on the Orient Express.* She has visited the archeological dig at Ur in Mesopotamia in 1928, 1930 and 1931 as guest of Leonard and Katherine Woolley, and met her second husband Max there, whom she married in 1930. She thus was in a very different position from Greene as regards first-hand knowledge about Turkey.[10] Yet, the book shows very few traces of this.

Where *Stamboul Train* ends in Turkey, *Murder on the Orient Express* starts there, or rather: it starts at the platform of the railway station in Aleppo, where the protagonist, Hercule Poirot, takes the Taurus Express to Istanbul. The "Turkish" part of the novel takes up only 22 out of 274 pages, so in that sense Turkey is as ephemeral to the story as it is in Greene's book. The travel by train through Asia Minor, from the Syrian border to Haydarpaşa Station (which strangely has remained garbled as "Haydarpassar" in the book for nearly a century now) is used by Christie to introduce some of the key characters, but the country outside the train windows goes almost unnoticed. The only reference to the landscape is one that goes back to Christie's own memories of her first trip to Mesopotamia in 1928: "Later they passed through the magnificent scenery of the Taurus. As they looked down towards the Cilician gates,

[9] Sherry, Op. Cit, 409.
[10] Laura Thompson, *Agatha Christie A Mysterious Life*, London: Headline, 2007,292 ff.

standing in the corridor side by side, a sigh suddenly came from the girl. Poirot was standing near them and heard her murmur: "It's so beautiful! I wish, I wish." The Cilician Gates held a special meaning for Christie, as it had been the point at which, in 1928, she had felt that she had entered a new world; where she had felt that she was "standing on the rim of the world and looking down on the Promised Land."[11]

Once in Istanbul, Poirot crosses the Bosphorus and goes straight to the Tokatlian Hotel on İstiklal (not the Pera Palas where Christie herself stayed) and he does not leave it again until he goes to the station to board the Orient Express. The Tokatlian itself only serves as a backdrop to the introduction yet more characters that will play a part in the murder story.

Where Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* offers almost no "couleure locale" from Turkey even though she herself travelled the country, the opposite is true for the next novel to be discussed, Eric Ambler's *The Mask of Dimitrios*. Of this novel only a slightly larger part is set in Turkey (the first 36 of 226 pages) but it offers far more authentic detail on Turkey in spite of the fact that Ambler never set foot in the country.

Ambler's memoirs, *Here Lies*, explain how his familiarity with contemporary Turkey came about. After the publication of his second book had become a success, Ambler decided to resign from his position as copywriter and become a full-time writer of fiction. Partly because he could live there much more cheaply than in Britain, he settled in France, in the ski resort Peira Cava in the mountains above Nice. While there he met what turned out to be members of the sizeable Turkish community in Nice. Ambler describes them thus:

> "A few were royalists, a strange lot whose elders had once been middle-rank courtiers or hangers-on in the retinue of the last sultan… …some were officer-class families headed by ageing Young Turks who had chosen the wrong factions to join or in some way had played their cards badly. Most were families of politicians, lawyers and businessmen in import-export and shipping who had found it simpler to cut and run than to bow to the reforming zeal of the Kemalists."[12]

The idea of the story that would become *The Mask of Dimitrios* was already forming and Ambler realized that to do a serious job on the background he should really go to Istanbul. Yet he decided against this. He knew no Turkish, so he would have had to work through interpreters and he knew no one in Istanbul. Instead he decided to return to Nice "to find out more about the Turkish colony there". He settled in a hotel that was "one of the back-

[11] Thompson, Op. Cit, 292.
[12] Eric Ambler, *Here Lies*, London: Ipso, 2017, 184 [original: London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985].

street Turkish haunts mentioned by the old aunt in Peira-Cava" and there picked up a large amount of information about Turkey. As he says: "Exiles may not always tell the truth about their native lands, but they like to talk about them." [13]After a while he even decided that he was getting swamped with information and removed himself to Paris to work on the material.

The lively descriptions offered by the exiles, as well as photographs of their old life in Turkey, form the basis for Ambler's rendition of Turkey and the Turks in the first 36 pages of *The Mask*. Although there are some factual errors, which we will look into below, Ambler's descriptions carry the ring of truth, both in the setting and in the characters. This is partly due to the fact that, unlike Greene or Christie, Ambler actually introduces a Turk as one of the main characters of the plot. This is Colonel Haki, who is used as a plot device in that he introduces the main character Latimer to the life story of the villain Dimitrios, but who is also a recognizable representative of 1930s Turkey. He is introduced as a man in his early fifties, who has been "one of the Gazi's own particular men in Anatolia in 1919". His appearance, with Prussian hairstyle, cavalry uniform and shining patent leather boots is that of a professional soldier and, although Latimer first gets to know him as an amateur writer of detective stories, he turns out to be an utterly ruthless and effective operator, who commands both respect and fear. In other words: the main Turkish character is not an orientalist caricature but very much a representative of Kemalist Turkey. There is some credible background as well: Haki has been involved with a court martial judging killings in Izmir immediately after the Kemalist conquest of September 1922, and with the investigation of an attempt at the life of Mustafa Kemal Pasha after the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 (probably an echo of the Izmir trial of 1926).

Colonel Haki also plays an important part in the second Ambler novel that is partly set in Turkey, *Journey into Fear*, which appeared in 1940 when World War II was already underway. The first fifty pages of the novel are set in Istanbul, where Graham, a British naval engineer, is waiting to return home, having done secret work for the Turkish government. It is Col. Haki – again introduced as "one of Atatürk's men and a deputy in the provisional government of 1919" – who explains to him that Axis agents are out to kill him. It is Haki who decides that for his own safety the protagonist will need to travel to Genova aboard an Italian ship and thence on to London – the journey into fear of the title. The Turkish colonel Haki therefore is a key character in the book, but the depiction of Istanbul also has a realistic

[13] Ambler, ibid, 187.

feel about it, with "wind blustering down from the Black Sea". The hotel where Graham stays, Adler Palace, may have been invented (probably because it is used as the setting for an attempted murder) but the description of "Le Jockey Cabaret" off İstiklal ("in a street designed by a French architect of the twenties") is very realistic. Ambler sets the story in Beyoğlu rather than in Istanbul as a whole, let alone Turkey, but as such it is a credible depiction of that neighbourhood.

The two post-war novels discussed here, *From Russia with Love* and *The Light of Day*, are different from the pre-war ones in the sense that rather than being just the end or starting point of the story, Istanbul is the place where the main action takes place.

Ian Fleming actually did have first hand experience of Istanbul when he wrote *From Russia with Love*. In early September 1955, while still working for the *Sunday Times*, he was invited to join Sir Ronald Howe, the Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard on a trip to Istanbul to attend the Interpol conference. His visit coincided with the violent pogrom of 5-6 September 1955, in which over a thousand Greek, Armenian and Jewish properties were sacked. Even though the delegates were holed up in spacious and well-guarded grounds of the Hilton Hotel (which had been opened three months earlier), Fleming did see something of the rioting and of the deployment of the army on the 6th. None of that found its way into the novel (although Fleming did write an article about it for the *Sunday Times*) but it did yield Fleming his most valuable contact in the person of Nazım Kalkavan. Nazım Bey was one of the businessmen to whom Fleming was introduced at the Hilton and he took the British guest under his wings over the next few days, anxious to repair the very bad impression the riots must have made, hosting him at his magnificent Yalı in Beylerbeyi on the Bosphorus and showing him different sides of Istanbul.[14]

As all of Fleming's biographers point out, the two men struck up an immediate and intimate friendship. Nazım Kalkavan (1914-1991) was a colourful figure who had graduated from Oxford University and worked in Hollywood as a consultant on Turkey before taking over his father's shipping company after World War II. As some of the biographers mention, Kalkavan probably was a British agent. What they do not mention is that according to the American Federal Bureau of Narcotics he and his sons were key figures in the heroin trade

[14] Andrew Lycett, *Ian Fleming*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1995, 273. Also: John Pearson, *The Life of Ian Fleming,* London: Jonathan cape, 1966, who gives a fuller treatment based on Fleming's notes, from which the quotes here are taken.

from the Middle East to Marseilles.[15] Ian Fleming modelled the character of "Darko" Kerim, the British station chief in Istanbul, closely on the flamboyant Nazım Kalkavan, the "exuberant shrewd pirate" with his "giant vitality and love of life."

His friendship with Kalkavan may explain why the tensions and riots in Turkey play no role in the novel he started to write on the way back (on the Orient Express, which by now was no longer glamorous), but he does seem to have held quite negative, opinions about the Turks in general. The description of Turkish customs officials on Bond's arrival at Yeşilköy Airport says it all:

> "So these dark, ugly, neat little officials were the modern Turks. He listened to their voices, full of broad vowels and quiet sibilants and modified u-sounds, and he watched the dark eyes that belied the soft, polite voices. They were bright, angry, cruel eyes that had only lately come down from the mountains. Bond thought he knew the history of those eyes. They were eyes that had been trained for centuries to watch over sheep and decipher small movements on the horizons. They were eyes that kept the knife-hand in sight without seeming to, that counted the grains of meal and the small fractions of coin and noted the flicker of the merchant's fingers. They were hard, untrusting, jealous eyes. Bond didn't take to them."[16]

In 1962 Eric Ambler once more set a novel in Turkey, 22 years after the publication of Journey into Fear. It was, of course, *The Light of Day*, which formed the basis for the film Topkapı. Where the film continuously oscillates between thriller and comedy, the book is very much a thriller, narrated by the typically Amblerian character of Arthur Simpson, a marginal figure and small time crook, but not the buffoon played by Peter Ustinov in the film. Colonel Haki's place has this time been taken by a younger equivalent, Major Tufan, the "deputy head of the Second Bureau". He displays all of the characteristics of Haki in the older novels: smooth, intelligent, efficient, and utterly ruthless.

None of the other main characters is Turkish, but there is much more description of contemporary Istanbul than in the older novels, or indeed any of the other works discussed here. There are detailed and accurate descriptions of Taksim, of the Park Hotel and the Hilton Hotel. Part of the story unfolds in an old villa near Yeniköy on the Bosphorus, whose architecture is described by Ambler as typical fin de siècle Cote d'Azur. There is a description of the Dolmabahçe Palace that is actually rather accurate: "From the sea it looks like a

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[15] Ryan Gingeras, *Heroin, Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 91.

[16] Ian Fleming, *From Russia with Love*, 161.

lakeside grand hotel imported from Switzerland, but from the road, because of the very high wall enclosing the grounds, it looks like a prison." He even describes a painting in one of the offices of the Dolmabahçe, which turns out to depict the "leaders of the nation demanding the abdication of Sultan Abdul Hamid II."[17]

Every now and then Ambler also uses Turkish expressions, which on the whole are quite accurate. All in all he thus gives by far the fullest portrait of Turkey, or at least Istanbul, and its inhabitants that we can find in these six mid-century thrillers – a remarkable feat for someone who never set foot in the place.

Having gauged to what extent the six novels have something to say about Turkey and the Turks, let us look at a number of shared characteristics, as well as differences.

Liminality

One thing that is striking in all four of the pre- and early war thrillers discussed here is the fact that in each of them Turkey is the place where the story begins or ends. It is the furthest the characters in the novels go. They touch the exoticism of the "East" there but in a hybrid surroundings. Istanbul is not just the place of the Blue Mosque and Aya Sofia, but also of modern hotels, apartments and a railway terminus. The main story is really about their travels to or from Turkey, not about what happens there. Turkey, and particularly Istanbul, therefore becomes a place full of symbolic meaning, the outer limit of the civilized world. This reflects the essential liminality of Turkey itself as it was perceived for much of the twentieth century – on the borders of Europe, or "The West" but not of it.

This is somewhat different in both post-war novels. Here an important part of the action (and in the case of *The Light of Day* nearly all of it) actually takes place in Turkey. Where in the pre-war novels the percentage of the novel (in numbers of pages) that is set in Turkey varies between ten and twenty percent, in the post-war novels it is thirty percent (*From Russia With Love*) and eighty percent (*The Light of Day*). Yet, in essence the liminal character is preserved in that in both of these books the protagonists – Bond and Simpson – go there to do a job and leave again as soon as the job is done, to return home. In other words; Turkey, or rather: Istanbul, is still a *destination* at the outer limit of the world they live in.

Ethnic stereotypes

[17] Eric Ambler, *The Light of Day*, 93.

Although we are discussing cultural products of the mid-twentieth century here, in the way they depict people we detect carryovers of late nineteenth-century stereotypes about different ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire. Greene's Mr. Kalebdjian, the concierge who mans the hotel desk, is such a figure: a neatly dressed, seemingly helpful and subservient Armenian, who at the same time is a wheeler dealer who collects information and uses his position of trust to channel business to his extended family. Ambler's "deunme" (crypto Jew) Sholem who was murdered for his hoard of cash in Izmir in 1922 (in *The Mask of Dimitrios*) is also a recognizable stereotype, as is the "negro fig picker" Dhris who is hanged for the crime. In Fleming's From *Russia with Love* it is the gypsies of Sulukule that are depicted in a very stereotypical way as a people ruled by ancient codes of honour and vengeance. The Turks, in the sense of Turkish speaking Muslims, are mostly invisible, but where they are represented, as by Colonel Haki, Haki's agent Mr. Kuvetli (sic) in *Journey into Fear* or Major Tufan, or indeed by Fleming's Darko Kerim and his sons or the nameless customs officials discussed above, they are depicted as strong and efficient with a hint of cruelty, but not necessarily as a likeable people. This shows that between the thirties and sixties the predominant feeling towards Turkey in the English speaking world was respect rather than affinity.

The Levant

The older perception of the "Levant" as a zone of ambiguity, of uncertain and changing identities and loyalties, that was a legacy of the late Ottoman era, is very much alive in the novels. It is reflected in the depiction of figures who are resident in Istanbul and Izmir, but have a mixed or foreign background and fulfil the function of intermediaries between the European protagonists of the stories and local society. In Greene's book we find the Jewish current trader Stein, who is based in Istanbul and has induced the local representative of a British trading firm to double dealing. In Ambler's *Journey into Fear* the local representative of the British armaments firm who takes the protagonist, Graham, under his wing and brings about the connection with Col. Haki, is a Mr. Kopeikin, a worldly-wise White Russian refugee, who settled in Istanbul in 1919. His equivalent in *The Mask of Dimitrios* is the White Russian refugee Mr. Muishkin, a wheeler dealer, who lives by translating and interpreting (the quintessential functions of the Levantine). He came to Turkey in 1924. In a way, Fleming's Darko Kerim also fits into this category. He is a Turk, but he was born of a British mother and he clearly identifies with both countries. Uniquely among these novels, *The Light of Day* is actually written from the perspective of such an ambivalent figure: Arthur Simpson is the son

of a British soldier and an Egyptian woman, who grew up partly in British-occupied Egypt and partly in Britain, but – having lost his citizenship in both countries – is stateless and, when the story starts, lives in Athens as a not-quite-legal alien.

Factual correctness

As we have seen, of the four authors, Christie and Fleming had actually spent time in Turkey, but it is Ambler who achieves by far the highest degree of realism in his depictions (he is also the only one to incorporate Turkish expressions, which on the whole are correct). Nevertheless, all of them make obvious mistakes.

We have already noticed that Greene thinks the Blue Mosque (Sultanahmet) is blue on the outside and that Christie garbles the name of Haydarpaşa station. But Ambler occasionally slips up as well. In the passage where he describes the Turkish conquest of Izmir in 1922, he situates the battlefield of Dumlupınar "200 miles *west* of Izmir" which would have put it almost in Athens. In *Journey into Fear* Graham takes a train from Gallipoli to Istanbul (impossible then as now); Ian Fleming is not the first visitor to Istanbul to be confused by its topography, thinking that the Golden Horn divides Europe from Asia and he achieves the impossible when Bond sees the Hilton Hotel from Eminönü (even though Fleming actually stayed at the hotel). These are, of course, very minor points in works of fiction, but it is surprising that they are still in the texts after so many decades and so many print runs.

Topicality and awareness of developments in Turkey

Finally, we might ask ourselves to what extent the authors use Turkey as a static backdrop or as a country undergoing change and upheaval. Here we find a clear distinction between Eric Ambler and the others. Greene and Christie show no awareness that anything of importance might be happening in the Turkey of the thirties. An important story line of *Stamboul Train* concerns a failed revolution, but it is set in the Balkans, in Yugoslavia, not in Turkey. Amazingly, Ian Fleming, who actually witnessed one of the biggest upheavals in post-war Turkey first hand, makes no reference to any real political or social events (as opposed to the fictional Cold War intrigues that are central to the story).

Ambler is the exception here as well. He tells us in his memoirs that he made use of *The Times* newspaper archives while writing his thrillers and it shows. In *The Mask of Dimitrios* the events of 1922 are recalled, including the massacres by the retreating Greek army as well as the fire of Izmir and the lawlessness in Izmir after the Turkish conquest. In *Journey into*

Fear there is a discussion of the Armenian massacres, and the contemporary context of the novel (Anglo-Turkish military cooperation on the eve of World War II) is topical. In *The Light of Day* the nervousness of the military regime, the National Unity Committee, after the 1960 coup and the trial of Menderes and the Democrat Party leaders are mentioned.

Conclusion

The six mid-century thrillers by four authors that we have discussed here were hugely successful. In book form and through adaptations for film they reached an audience of many millions, so they could well have influenced the way a mass public in the West saw Turkey. In the event this was probably true only to a very limited extent and this was because of the very limited space devoted to Turkey in these books, both in the sense of a limited number of pages devoted to scenes set in Turkey as in that of the sketchiness and superficiality of the Turkish background. The references to Turkey, Istanbul, or the Orient Express seem to have been functional in creating a certain thrill of the exotic, but the reader is told very little about the country. Where these novels did devote attention to Turkey and the Turks they tended to confirm older tropes about the liminality of the country (on the borders of Europe), the stereotypical characteristics of its ethnic groups, and about the ambiguity of the “Levant.”