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Power and Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*

By Lene Renneflott

A Thesis Presented to
The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages
In partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Master of Arts Degree

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Thesis supervisor: Rebecca Scherr

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Abstract

The main objective in this thesis is to point out the mechanisms that govern, and have governed, identity formation in the United States as played out in the novel *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides. Looking more closely at how the characters are influenced by the powers and norms that govern their options, their place in society and their possibilities for a fulfilling life of personal freedom, the analysis in this thesis has concentrated on three main areas as these are portrayed in *Middlesex*:

1. Gender identity and sexual categorization
2. Race and whiteness
3. Immigration, class and the American Dream

For a most part, this is a close reading of *Middlesex*, dwelling on the identity possibilities of the intersex protagonist Cal/lie, and especially his/her quest for self-identification. Employing the theories of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Louis Pierre Althusser, Emmanuel Levinas and Anne Fausto-Sterling, this thesis seeks an understanding of mirrored oppressions as they are rendered within the novel and as they exist in Western society at large.

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I must thank my university teachers through the years. First, in memory of Professor Lorna Sage of the University of East Anglia, her MA teachings and discussions in Postmodern literature in 1996 and for asking me to write on the autobiography of Christine Brooke-Rose, a fellow bilingual of hybrid nationality. Secondly, Professor Jacob Lothe for his endless patience and wonderful Masters class on the brilliant Virginia Woolf.

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Introduction

The novel *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides touched me the first time I read it and I have truly relished the deep dive into the text that writing this thesis has allowed me. Imagine being born a girl, everyone is convinced you are a girl, until one day in the middle of your teenage becoming, you discover that you are a boy; or worse, you find out that you are neither and both at the same time. This is the personal crisis of the protagonist Cal in *Middlesex*. This is the defining premise of the novel, revealed on its very first page, and the continual dilemma of our protagonist as s/he struggles to come to grips with a definition of self that will make life livable. On a universal level, this struggle to understand oneself in a way to make life livable, and the protagonist *lovable*, is the nature of all existential drama and as such it should resonate with any reader who has suffered an identity crisis at some point in their life. The profundity of *Middlesex* therefore does not lie in the intersex of Cal; it lies in the universality of the individual's struggle to be "normal" and intelligible to others; to be humanized. Taking the reader on a journey of *othered* and marginalized minorities, Eugenides successfully undresses the constructs of power that separate the entitlement of the majority from the struggles of the oppressed.

The academic influences in writing this thesis have been many, but I would like to name the most important ones. Firstly, though this is not a thesis of post-colonialism or Orientalism, Edward W. Said's writing on these subjects has inspired me, not least because his preface in the 2003 edition of *Orientalism* gave me new confidence as a student of comparative literature to question the makings of "culture, ideas, history and power" and the university as an institution "where reflection and study can take place in an almost utopian fashion". (Said xii) More than anything Said's ability to make visible and comprehensible the Western ideological apparatus for *othering* the East has been instrumental in my understanding of the mechanisms and powers of ideology from a cultural perspective, as these are still employed in European and North American discourse today. My application of literary and cultural theory has evolved through the years, but I wish to pay homage to the feminists who first opened my mind to new perceptions of self, body and voice(s) in the early 1990's: Torill Moi, Elaine Showalter, Héléne Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Like Said, the feminist academics

mentioned above have also been instrumental in teaching me that to truly understand the possibilities open to a person, I must first understand the power structures that reign the discourse within which this individual exists. I would also like to mention my research of humanistic psychology (and which is influenced, as I am, by the writings of philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Sartre and Levinas) as applied to creating sustainability in the modern workforce (another ideological structure closed to those who are marginalized). Lastly, I must mention my unwavering faith in humanism and the individual's ability to connect with others and thereby succeed. The combined aforementioned background, along with my own research, and in combination with the teaching and discussions of gender, sexuality, race and power at the University of Oslo, is the backdrop for my interpretations of identity and power in *Middlesex.*

I will look more closely at the possibilities of self-identification and sexual categorization in *Middlesex*. By this I mean that I will look at how Cal, the individual, is interpellated and how the internalization of this interpellation plays a role in his/her[1] choices of self-definition throughout the book.

What roles are truly open to Cal? Does s/he ever really get to choose his/her own gender? Most importantly, what gender options are *actually* available to a modern intersex individual? If we go by the novel all is seemingly revealed at the very beginning and resolved in the simple binary:

> I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August 1974. (Eugenides, *Middlesex*, 3)[2]

There are several things to take hold of in this extremely potent opening line. Not only does it set some of the key scenes of the story we are just dipping into, in terms of both time and place, it also reveals what seems to be the entire surface plot of the book: how does someone born a girl turn into a boy? For someone who is not entirely new to the realms of intersex determination there are other layers to wonder about too. Is this a book

---

[1] I will use combined pronouns his/her and s/he to denote Cal/lie unless s/he has specifically identified as one gender or the other at the life-stage I am commenting, at which point, in keeping with the intersex individual's right to self-designated gender identity, I will use the gender s/he has specified.

[2] From here on, I will reference the novel only by page number for the rest of the thesis as it is my primary source.

of the standard binary definitions of sex and/or gender? Does it argue the effects of nature over nurture? Is Eugenides writing from a clean-cut heteronormative perspective or does *Middlesex* also hold relevance to a queer perspective? To top it all off, we are from the beginning dealing with a narrator who seems less than reliable.

The subjectivity of *Middlesex* is rich. From our protagonist's first person perspective, we find the story sometimes fast-forwarding to the future, other times lingering on things that happened long ago, even before his/her own birth. Cal tells his story mostly in the present tense, but sometimes also in the past. At times it is the voice of a grown man, at others s/he is in the act of "becoming" or still just an innocent little girl. Our narrator takes omniscient liberties in relaying to us the thoughts and feelings of many of the other characters, thereby giving the reader a polyphony of eye-witness accounts, with all the benefits of hindsight and seemingly multiple perspectives. Though we must never forget that, though omniscient and however unreliable, there is one teller of this tale. Sometimes it is just a little difficult, in the postmodern asides and meta-commentaries to know when it is Cal and when indeed it may be the author himself peeping through. Like many postmodernist novelists there is an underlying tone of irony here and there, though never in the detached generation-X way. Eugenides' tone is emotional and engaged, with a sense of urgency to it. I would say he balances the tone(s) beautifully, with enough variation in register, with a great deal of humor and an intelligent self-irony always shining through; Eugenides paints a full and complex picture of the novel's interweaving plots with the necessary social and historical commentaries on the subject of who decides what we are and what we may be in modern society.

The style of *Middlesex* is loquacious, verbose and eloquent, all at once, and spattered with meta-commentary. As demonstrated here, as the book's narrator confides in the reader both his preferences of literary style and his own subjectivity in the telling:

> Emotions, in my experience, aren't covered by single words. I don't believe in "sadness", "joy", or "regret". Maybe the best proof that the language is patriarchal is that it oversimplifies feeling. I'd like to have a my disposal complicated hybrid emotions, Germanic train-car constructions like, say, "the happiness that attends disaster." Or: "the disappointment of sleeping with one's fantasy." I'd like to show how "intimations of mortality brought on by aging family members" connects with "the hatred of mirrors that begins with middle age." I'd like to have a word for "the sadness inspired by failing restaurants" as well as for "the excitement of getting a room with a mini-bar." I've never had the right words to describe my

> life, and now that I've entered my story, I need them more than ever. I can't just sit back and watch from a distance anymore. From here on in, everything I'll tell you is colored by the subjective experience of being part of events. Here's where my story splits, divides, undergoes meiosis. Already the world feels heavier, now I'm a part of it. I'm talking about bandages and sopped cotton, the smell of mildew in movie theaters, and of all the lousy cats and their stinking litter boxes, of rain on city streets when the dust comes up and the old Italian men take their folding chairs inside. Up until now it hasn't been my world. Not my America. But here we are, at last. (217)

The richness of language and imagery, prone at times to the hyperbolic, serves as a vehicle of language to carry this story of epic proportion: "Sorry, if I get a little Homeric at times. That's genetic too." (4) Borrowing freely in style and content from classical Greco-Roman literature (and his own Greek heritage) Eugenides interweaves the story and style of *Middlesex* with Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, even casting Cal as the God Hermaphroditus in an aquatic turning point in the novel. In structure, like *Metamorphosis*, *Middlesex* consists of four sections: Books One through Four; that are again divided into chapters. Structure then mimics the classics, but also serves as a division of the many parts and plots in the novel. As multitudinous almost in plots as in tone and style, Eugenides performs a balancing act of richness that few novelists pull off. In interviews the author has divulged some of his many stylistic choices and influences:

> "Since it's about genetics, I thought the book should be a novelistic genome; that is, it should contain some of the oldest traits of writing and storytelling — it begins with epic events, old fashioned, almost Homeric ideas — and as it progresses it should gradually become a more deeply psychological, more modern novel." (Eugenides, *Jeffrey Eugenides Has it Both Ways*)

In terms of genre, therefore, *Middlesex* is a pastiche. It has the makings of a truly Great American Novel as it is a unique portrait of contemporary America and hence a sociological novel. Playing with other genres such as magical realism, family saga and, not least, the epic, it is also a Bildungsroman due to its focus on the coming of age of our protagonist. For those prone to categorization *Middlesex* could also easily fall into the realm of "ethnic" novels. In view of its subject matter it may also hold water as a queer novel, though it has been widely criticized for its heteronormativity. As most Bildungsromanen through the ages it balances on the desire to be "normal", or at least as normal as it is possible to be for an intersex man who was once a teenage girl. It is this

desire for acceptance and the universal teenage need to be told “you are ok” that I wish to pursue when I look at the harm harsh categorization can do, especially to those of dubious or indefinable sex. Focusing on the journey of Cal/lie from pre-birth, conception, childhood, adolescence and finally adulthood I will list some of the restraints on intersex individuals today.

Doing a close reading of *Middlesex,* I have chosen to write mainly in discussion with the text itself. I have sought theoretical backing for my interpretations and claims directly from the critical thinkers of philosophy, history, and literary, as well as, gender theory, and whose theories I have applied to the best of my ability. This is not in blatant disregard of other critiques or interpretations of the novel, but rather because of a lack of good and cohesive text analyses that address the same themes in the novel. *Middlesex* was first published in 2002 and received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2003, but despite this there are still few secondary texts that analyze the novel. The ones I have succeeded in tracking down look at the novel from other perspectives or other premises than my own. Therefore I will only dwell briefly on them here in my introduction (with the exception of Rachel Carrol’s discussion of the heteronormativity of the novel that I will include in my concluding analysis on gender (Carroll 2010)). I have omitted Leland S. Person’s article “Middlesex: What Men Like in Men” (Person 2005) because he claims similar disappointment to Carrol’s in the heteronomativity of the novel. I have looked, unsuccessfully, for ways of incorporating Francisco Collado-Rodríguez’s article ”Of Self and Country: U.S. Politics, Cultural Hybridity, and Ambivalent Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex”* (Collado-Rodríguez 2006) into my discussion, but his text poses a great many questions at once and succeeds mostly in skimming the surface of the issues I am trying to deal with in depth. Taking a postmodern view of hybridity and claiming the narrator’s role as evidence, Collado-Rodrigues argues inconclusively against Butler’s theory of gender performativity, and as he also adheres to the binary understandings of gender and sex in his conclusion, the basic human rights that are denied intersex individuals hardly seem to register with him. Though I have thoroughly enjoyed reading academic psychoanalytical evaluations of Cal’s relationship with his father and studies in the cultural sociology of sight and gender in the novel, I have not found these arguments applicable to my discussion either.

Similarly, the reviews *Middlesex* received are mixed. Many of the literary critics seem obsessed with form and are determined to catch the inconsistencies of Eugenides' writing. Other critics verbosely boast of the richness of the text, the family saga especially. It is interesting to take in the semantics of these reviews, as the terminology may give away the point-of-view of the critic, like John Homan's review "Helen of Boy" in *New York Books*:

> Cal's condition is, patently, intended as a metaphor for otherness, for bifurcated personhood, for (Greek) nature versus (American) nurture, for the shadows that old-country village life still can cast over American suburbs. But the image is so potent -- or impotent -- that it overwhelms the story's other half. (Homan 2002)

In the very binary and ethnic othering of the novel in this short excerpt, Homan is unwilling to see *Middlesex* or Cal as anything but constructs. Few critics admit their discomfort with Cal's indeterminate gender as openly as David Gates: "Cal eludes us. He/she is more a construct than a character, apparently existing to make a point about gender [....] Will he/she get the girl/boy? If you end up giving a Smyrna fig, you're a better man/woman than I am." (Gates 2002) Although feigning indifference, Gates acknowledges the project of compassion and humanity that some readers (myself included) believe to reside at the core of this novel. Of all the reviews and critiques I have read, however, it is Laura Miller's celebratory review "My big fat Greek gender identity crisis: in Jeffrey Eugenides's novel, a hermaphrodite of Greek descent learns the power of heredity" in *The New York Times Book Review* that resonates most with my own:

> […]the book's length feels like its author's arms stretching farther and farther to encompass more people, more life. His narrator is a soul who inhabits a liminal realm, a creature able to bridge the divisions that plague humanity, endowed with "the ability to communicate between the genders, to see not with the monovision of one sex but in the stereoscope of both." That utopian reach makes "Middlesex" deliriously American; the novel's patron saint is Walt Whitman, and it has some of the shagginess of that poet's verse to go along with the exuberance. But mostly it is a colossal act of curiosity, of imagination and of love. (Miller 2002)

By addressing the book's project of love, its reach for utopia, its humanism and the colossal act of imagination that has gone into the creation of this novel, I feel that Miller "gets it" like I hope to have "got it". By "it" I mean the sociological project of the book:

the writer's effort to let us see the mechanics of our contemporary western world from the viewpoint of someone who lives in constant fear of being left out.

My main objective in this thesis is to point out the mechanisms that govern, and have governed, identity formation in the United States as played out in the novel *Middlesex*. More than anything, I have looked for loopholes or possibilities where the individual might have the freedom to define him- or herself beyond the inhibitive binaries that seem to govern America and our Western world at large. In pursuit of "unthinking" structures of intelligibility and a place where this might be possible for Cal I constantly return to the love scene between Cal and Julie Kikuchi. Though the novel does not leave us with a great landscape of possibility for the complete emancipation of Cal's intersexual self, the novel's answer seems to lie in the private space first and foremost of being free in the loving gaze of your partner. On one hand this seems satisfactory, for in *becoming* together and being loved, neither will have to be alone, but I still struggle to understand why this must be one of the few places where a seemingly indefinable or deviant *other* can escape the discriminant stare and potential persecution that so many are subjected to simply because they do not adhere to the majority? Looking more closely at how the characters are influenced by the powers and norms that govern their options, their place in society and their possibilities for a fulfilling life of personal freedom, I have concentrated my analysis on three main areas as these are portrayed in *Middlesex*:

4. Gender identity and sexual categorization
5. Race and whiteness
6. Immigration, class and the American Dream

Though I will, for the most part, be doing a close reading of *Middlesex*, I think it important to say something about the theory I will apply. In my reading of gender and sexuality, I wish to apply the theory of performativity as put forth and argued by queer theorist and philosopher Judith Butler. As Butler comes from a school of discursive thinkers, I will also apply the theories of Anne Fausto-Sterling. Fausto-Sterling's foundation in the cross-disciplinary realm of biology, history *and* queer theory, lends many perspectives to the physical and scientific understandings of sex and gender, as well as to the historical and social constructs, not only of gender, but also of sexuality. On the concepts of power, I will apply the theories of Michel Foucault as one cannot delve

into discussions of defining sexuality or gender identity without first addressing the powers at play. If one does not understand the risks of intersex acceptance on our modern power constructs, then one will never truly understand the struggle for the emancipation of intersex individuals. For a further understanding of how powers govern the discourses of how we are signified within existing ideologies, I will apply Althusser's theory of hailing. In pursuing the project of humanizing others, in the project of love and ethical responsibility for the other, I have applied the philosopher Levinas. To clarify my discussion of whiteness in the novel, I have applied the theories of Peggy McIntosh and Robyn Wiegman. Likewise, for a greater understanding of the racial and immigrant discourses I have looked to Franz Fanon, Omi and Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States* and Desmond King's *Making Americans*. In the cross-section of gender *and* immigration, I have found Eithne Luibhéid's book *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, useful.

Focusing my interpretation of *Middlesex* on the interpellation of the protagonist within the constructs and powers that govern him/her and how this impacts his/her possible life choices and freedom to define his/her self, I will show how mirrored oppressions of gender, race, class and ethnicity (more specifically, what is an *American*?) all function by similar principles and hierarchies. I am hoping to find a loophole or two, where through the cracks of the structures of power, we might see a less subversive future for Cal.

Chapter 1: Gender Identity and Sexual Categorization

The Roles of "Science" and Desdemona's Spoon in Cal's Conception

In order to examine the possible gender identity options available to the book's main character and narrator Cal, let us first address the matter of plot in *Middlesex*. The entanglement of plots and storylines is extremely intricate and holds the polyphonic journey through generations of a well-laden family saga. In Eugenides own words: "*Middlesex* was where I taught myself how to plot. It's an extremely heavily over-plotted novel at most." (Eugenides, A Conversation with Jeffrey Eugenides)

In my opinion, it is this melting pot (or is it salad bowl?) of plots and perspectives that creates the necessary climate to deal with matters of such complexity as the intersex theme represents. Thus the multitude of stories in *Middlesex* all play a part in the creation of Cal in different ways, some from an historical perspective, others from a biological or genetic one, some from a social, educational or experiential viewpoint and even quite a few from a questionable quasi-scientific perspective.

"I can only explain the scientific mania that overtook my father during that spring of '59 as a symptom of the belief in progress that was infecting everyone back then." (9) Because of this time-appropriate belief in "scientific truths", Cal's parents take it upon themselves to play god. Meanwhile, in the background, we may have our narrator setting up science to fail right from the beginning, as we will see when we recognize Dr. Luce's similarly thin claims to so-called "scientific evidence" after Cal's second birth. From the beginning, the reader is being primed to understand that science is also a construct, a narrative like any other created to serve certain means.

To prove this point our narrator tells the story of how Milton convinced Tessie that they could choose to conceive a girl child, all backed up by "hard" scientific evidence. "Popular science" had become a force to be reckoned with. Therefore Milton turns to "science", with the help of his chiropractor cousin Uncle Pete to find the correct and methodological approach to making a baby girl. In a less than subtle manner our narrator ironically points out that Uncle Pete has studied something pertaining to the body (though nothing of gynecology or fetal medicine) and he subscribes to *Scientific*

American. These two "facts" in common are enough to make him a verifiable source of scientific evidence in the eyes of Milt:

> Though the topic had been brought up in the open-forum atmosphere of those postprandial Sundays, it was clear, that notwithstanding the impersonal tone of the discussion, the sperm they were talking about was my father's. Uncle Pete made it clear: to have a girl baby, a couple should "have sexual congress twenty-four hours prior to ovulation". That way, the swift male sperm would rush in and die off. The female sperm, sluggish but more reliable, would arrive just as the egg dropped. (8)

At the very beginning of the book, under cover of relaying the humorous story of Cal's conception, Eugenides begins to build his case of science versus culture, belief or instinct. This is also one of the great ironies of the book, the fact that Cal's parents went to such trouble to have a baby girl, only to end up with someone who chose to live as a son. They did everything they could to make a girl, using science to help them, while all along the science of their own recessive gene was working against them. Here Eugenides lightly plants the moral dilemma of genetics and fetal selection.

By telling the reader so much in the opening pages of the book, hinting at several of the books' plots and possible outcomes, Eugenides secures himself a curious reader who reads the entire story with the back-drop of Cal's first revelations in mind. The reader *knows* that the main character will have some kind of sex change, that as such Cal has already undergone two *births* and that s/he may soon be reborn for a third time: "But now, at the age of forty-one, I feel another birth coming on." (3) Narratively this is a stroke of genius. The anticipation of a foreshadowed turning point reminiscent of the sex-changing one in the opening line should be more than enough to entice and secure the reader's attention for the rest of the story. Cal/lie's journey calls for a great deal of reflection and self-reflection, not only on the part of Cal/lie and his/her co-characters and the seemingly reliably *un*reliable narrator of the novel, but also on the part of us as readers. The web of this particular silkworm glows with existential and ethical dilemmas, and just when the reader thinks she understands, the story spins out another perspective:

> To tamper with something as mysterious and miraculous as the birth of a child was an act of hubris. In the first place, Tessie didn't believe you could do it. Even if you could, she didn't believe you should try. (9)

Here we see Milt's infatuation with science and the potential moral dilemmas of such reflected in the ethics of Tessie. In a book that looks at the genetic history of its teller and pairs this with the mythology and various superstitions and religious beliefs of the Stephanides clan, the reader is hurtled to the center of all that may clear and cloud the understanding of our selves and how we are constituted in this world.

For all of Milton's scientific endeavors, his mother Desdemona had her own means of deciding a baby's sex:

> All this led up to the day Desdemona dangled a utensil over my mother's belly. The sonogram didn't exist at the time; the spoon was the next best thing. […] That night, my father said, "Twenty-three in a row means she's bound for a fall. This time, she's wrong. Trust me."
> "I don't mind if it's a boy," my mother said. "I really don't. As long as it's healthy, ten fingers, ten toes."
> "What's this 'it'. That's my daughter you're talking about." (17)

The buildup to the complications of Cal's sex go beyond the act of foreshadowing, entering the domain of magical realism. Desdemona and her spoon have never been wrong, and the reader knows that she is right; according to his own first-person narrative Cal will inevitably become a boy. At the precise moment of birth, Cal's grandfather "collapsed right after overturning his coffee cup to read his fortune in the grounds" (17). The stroke rendered *papou* speechless. This must surely have been taken as another bad omen by Desdemona along with the fact that despite Desdemona's never failing spoon Cal/lie had been born a girl.

> What was I to Desdemona but another sign of the end of things? She tried not to look at me. She hid behind her fans. […] Maybe something in my expressions set off an alarm. Maybe she was already making the connections she would later make, between village babies and this suburban one… Then again, maybe not. Because as she peered distrustfully over the rail of my crib she saw my face – and blood intervened. (223)

The fact that Cal becomes Desdemona's favorite is in keeping with her grandmother's character. Tormented by guilt for her past sins throughout the novel, there is hardly a one so adept at suppressing the skeletons in her closet or keeping secrets, as Desdemona. Perhaps it was a strike of fate that *papou* should be rendered mute at the precise moment that the chromosomal result of their sibling incest was borne, lest he would have let the cat out of the bag. Later he does, of course, in his regression to

childhood in senile dementia, but by then everyone just thinks he is wildly confused when he begins to call Desdemona, “sis”.

> And so before it’s too late, I want to get it down for good: this rollercoaster ride of a single gene through time. Sing now, O Muse, of the recessive mutation on my fifth chromosome! Sing how it bloomed two and a half centuries ago on the slopes of Mount Olympus […] how it blew like a seed across the sea to America, where it drifted through our industrial rains until it fell to earth in the fertile soil of my mother’s own mid-western womb. (4)

Mixing mythology, science and superstition with the urgency of expressing his/her own story, our narrator prepares us for a tale of many possible truths, where like in society today, we must sift through the information we are given and piece together our own interpretation, our own truth, forever questioning the validity of our sources. We are dealing with a knowledgeable and well-researched narrator who elegantly and simply foreshadows, then back-peddles, telling and re-telling the fragments of his/her complex family saga, and thereby the creation of him/herself. Cal the narrator is profoundly self-reflective with a sense of humor, of self-irony even. Therefore, Cal as narrator is extremely likable! Who wouldn’t like someone who dares to invite us into the parlor of his/her inner existence, and at the same time has the ability to laugh at him/herself?

“Sorry if I get a little Homeric at times. That’s genetic too.” (4)

Puns like this paired with fluent self-reflexive meta-commentaries flow naturally throughout *Middlesex.* This wit and these voices advertise to us the rollercoaster ride of not just one recessive gene, but of a mind-blowingly intricate and incestuous drama of epic proportions. Feeding it to us morsel by fragmented morsel, Cal succeeds in preparing us to take in, to make natural almost, to begin even to comprehend perhaps, this tale of profound *otherness.*

Sex versus Gender and the Intentions of Dr. Luce

In order to look at the possibilities of self-identification and sexual categorization in *Middlesex*, we must first look at how this realm is understood, and even dealt with, in society at large. First of all, I wish to look at the biological classifications.

There seems, by many, to be a general understanding of sex, in other words biologically classified and determined gender, as something that is fixed and natural. In

this view there are two “normal” classes, male and female. Anything indeterminate or in-between is also biologically possible, but is deemed a deviation or something abnormal. Thereby it seems that the human impulse towards normalization reigns in the field of biological classification also. Because the sciences are held in such high regard, few find it necessary to dispute this view. It seems simple, there are two sexes, male and female. Any semblance of hermaphroditism or intersex is abnormal and can, in most cases, be medically altered to resemble one or the other of the given binary. The medical industry calls this “sexual correction of ambiguous genitalia”. In recent years more and more research has been done on the effects of sexual correction. A great deal of the research shows that many struggle for a variety of reasons, but the reason that seems to be the most prevailing is the fact that a great number of those having undergone genital corrective surgery suffer sexually and socially later in life.

The theme of sexual correction of ambiguous genitalia is highly relevant in *Middlesex.* Though most of these surgeries (at least the preliminary ones) are performed in infancy, it is Cal’s refusal to undergo adolescent surgery that spurs her/him to run away.

In order not to get too caught up in the tail-chasing discussions of nature versus nurture, I wish to apply the theory of biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling:

> Our theories of sex and gender are knitted into the medical management of intersexuality. Whether a child should be raised as a boy or a girl, and submitted to surgical alterations and various hormonal regimes, depends what we think about a variety of matters. How important is penis size? What forms of heterosexual lovemaking are “normal”? Is it more important to have a sexually sensitive clitoris – even if larger and more penile than the statistical norm – than it is to have a clitoris that visually resembles the common type? (Fausto-Sterling 77)

In asking these questions, Fausto-Sterling does two things at once, first she collides with the ideas of Dr. Luce (or rather the infamous Dr. Money poorly disguised in *Middlesex*), secondly she, from a biologist’s perspective even, undresses the discursive bastions of gender science. “Thus we derive theories of sex and gender (at least those that claim to be scientific or nature-based) in part from studying intersexual children brought into the management system.” (Fausto-Sterling 77) She goes on to argue that like all discourses, the discourses of sex and gender are also changing and much like Judith Butler she calls for a further investigation into the binary system of sex: ”We inhabit a

moment in history when we have the theoretical understanding and practical power to ask a question unheard of before in our culture: 'Should there be only two sexes?'" (Fausto-Sterling 77)

Having followed the logic of a renowned biologist right to the heart of our novel, I will turn now to the intentions of Dr. Luce. Firstly, it is important to keep in mind that the good doctor himself represents one of the key collision points between fact and fiction in the novel. By simply pseudonymizing Dr. Money, Eugenides adds another ”real” voice to his narrative, a voice that was influential to the point of monopoly in the debates and discourses on sex and gender identity formation in the 1970's. Thus in rebelling against Dr. Luce, in trusting in his/her own interpretation of self, Cal/lie rebels against much of the gender identity establishment, bringing the actuality of his/her situation into a context that goes beyond the narrative of the novel. The real Dr. Money was one of the first researchers to pursue scientific studies of intersex individuals for the sake of understanding the formation of gender identity. It is imperative to understand that this research was conducted in order to get a better understanding of *normal* gender identity formation. Therefore, the novel's Dr. Luce seems determined to re-classify Cal/lie to a healthy "natural" norm. Working from a binary and heterosexual perspective, believing that in order to have a good life, an individual must be identified as either male or female, Dr. Luce strives to prove his own theories in the battle of nurture over nature. In the words of our narrator:

> In a decade of solid, original research, Luce made his second great discovery: that gender identity is established very early on in life, about the age of two. Gender was like a native tongue; it didn't exist before birth but was imprinted in the brain during childhood, never disappearing. Children learn to speak male or female the way they learn to speak English or French." (411)

Treating Cal/lie like a rare specimen, a "complicated case" (413), *othering* him/her and often forgetting to treat Cal/lie as a human being, Dr. Luce performs a "complete psychological assessment" (414). Much as Dr. Luce loves showing off the *unnatural* biology of Cal/lie, not least by inviting fellow scientists to invasively probe and examine the private parts and cavities of our young protagonist, he is much more interested in Cal/lie's gender identity than his/her mixed biological sex. Questioning Cal/lie about his/her "life and feelings" (417) and getting him/her to write a "Psychological Narrative"

(417), Dr. Luce makes his fatal mistake. He fails to realize that far from all narrators are reliable, that the *true* inner self may just as well be an assembled and fictional one, especially when hammered out on a typewriter:

> But on that Smith Corona I quickly discovered that telling the truth wasn't nearly as much fun as making things up. I also knew that I was writing for an audience – Dr. Luce – and that if I seemed normal enough, he might send me back home. (418)

And thus our protagonist, our very own muse of epic poetry, offers Dr. Luce the opportunity to learn to question his sources, as well as the biases and the intentions of his own scientific hypotheses. Unwilling to take any of this into consideration, however, Dr. Luce (mirroring the discursive battles within the fields of gender studies and medical science) continues stubbornly to create his own narrative for Cal/lie:

> ”Easter '62” was the home movie Dr. Luce talked my parents into giving him. This was the film he screened each year for his students at Cornell University Medical School. This was the thirty-second segment that, Luce insisted, proved out his theory that gender identity is established early in life. This was the film Dr. Luce showed me, to tell me who I was. (226)

Imagine the shock of being told that you are something that you have only worried about in the fuzzy edges of your own conscious mind. When Cal/lie was ”discovered” in Petoskey, s/he was already aware that s/he was different and frightened about a lot of the things that were happening to him/her. This is the reason that she undressed secretly in the girls' changing rooms, this is the reason that she had faked her periods and avoided the gynecologist, not least this was the reason that she did not delve too deeply into the questions of her “crocus”, even after her forbidden couplings with the seemingly somnambulant Object:

> Through all this I made no lasting conclusions about myself. I know it's hard to believe, but that's the way it works. The mind self-edits. The mind airbrushes. It's a different thing to be inside a body than outside. From outside, you can look, inspect, compare. From inside there is no comparison. (387)

So it seems that for lack of knowledge and for fear of understanding, Cal/lie creates a story of self that will be believable to Dr. Luce, that will “prove” to him what Cal/lie senses he wants to be true: namely that his/her gender identity is that of a girl. Though

s/he senses that something is not right, Cal/lie writes her fiction hoping: “that if I seemed normal enough, he might send me back home.” (418)

At this point in the novel, Cal/lie is not only beginning to wonder what is wrong with her physically, what is wrong with her body or more specifically, her sexual organs, s/he is also wondering about her sexual orientation. For all his professionalism and seeming objectivity in the questioning of Cal/lie, Dr. Luce (as well as her upbringing) does not succeed in creating an atmosphere for Cal/lie to confide her confusing sexual experiences with the Object and the Object’s brother Jerome. The semantics of the mere name “Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic” hold a foreboding warning to anyone fearful of being deviant. In Dr. Luce’s clinic for sexual disorders homosexuality was not only considered pathological it was illegal. Sex between people of the same sex was not legalized on a federal level in the United States until 2003.

Cal/lie’s fears of being unnatural at this point in the novel seem to lie not so much in her fear of a deviant biological sex, but rather in the indefinable abyss of complex and confusing intelligibility. It seems that intuitively, as described in the quote above, Cal/lie seems to sense that her “inner freak” is more fuzzy than most. Distrusting Dr. Luce, not least because he is always trying to outwit her with his clever questions and degrading examinations, Cal/lie puts her expensive private education to good use and heads for the library.

Simultaneously as her parents are being told the “good” news of Cal/lie’s impending corrective surgery, s/he is following the research trail of “hypospadias” to “eunuch” to “hermaphrodite” and finally to “monster” in the enormous Webster’s dictionary at the New York Public Library. “Fear was stabbing me. I longed to be held, caressed, and that was impossible.” (431) This first and instinctual impulse of Cal/lie’s, the need to be held and to be comforted, is emphasized by the juxtaposition of this need in relation to his/her epiphany. Simultaneously as s/he realizes how the world defines him/her, s/he realizes that to be caressed and wholly *understood* is impossible. This precise moment and turning point in the novel, is the terrifying revelation that humankind has battled with for centuries, the understanding that one is irrevocably alone. Thus Cal/lie in the mirror image of the defining authority of the written word sees him/herself dehumanized, objectified, othered and alone. This is a naked and defenseless state for any

person, perhaps especially an intersex teenager in the impossible *middle* of self-recognition. In the words of the philosopher Levinas:

> A concern for rigor makes psychologists, sociologists, historians, and linguists mistrustful of an Ego that listens to itself, questions itself, but remains defenseless against the illusions of its class and the fantasies of its latent neurosis. (Levinas, Humanism of the Other 58)

Levinas worked from a necessity of addressing what he pertained to be our ethical responsibility to humanize others. His philosophy was on the wisdom of love and the importance of forgiveness. Levinas advocated that in order to understand ourselves, we must look at how we understand others. By realizing and acknowledging the humanity of others we come closer to an understanding of self, in fact we may happen upon new opportunities of self-understanding, self-definition or self-realization on such a journey. If we apply Levinas' insights to social scientists such as Dr. Luce, this means that the more Dr. Luce objectifies and others Cal/lie the less he will be able to truly understand her/him and the less he will be able to relate to him/her personally, on a basic human level. Hence Dr. Luce will never see what it is like to be Cal/lie and will never understand the utter loneliness he has thrust him/her into. For Cal/lie this othering, this lack of humanity signifies his/her lack of power, as Dr. Luce *blocks* any opportunity of identity transcendence for Cal/lie as an intersex person, by trying to force him/her into an *acceptable* gender category instead of what s/he is or has the potential to be. Therefore Cal/lie's discovery of how the world categorizes him/her also reveals the powers at play and the reason why s/he, in this *condition* of in-between sex, always will be in danger of being dehumanized and difficult to accept or love by almost anyone. Therefore Cal/lie runs away. Though not before taking one last detour of hope in hearing Dr. Luce's side of things.

> The adolescent ego is a hazy thing, amorphous, cloudlike. It wasn't difficult to pour my identity into different vessels. In a sense, I was able to take whatever form was demanded of me. I only wanted to know the dimensions. Luce was providing them. My parents supported him. The prospect of having everything solved was wildly attractive to me, too, and while I lay on the chaise I didn't ask myself where my feelings for the Object fit in. I only wanted it all to be over. I wanted to go home and forget it had ever happened. So I listened to Luce quietly and made no objections. (434)

Trying to be deceived, trying to open his/her mind to some other definition than that of "monster", Cal/lie listens to Dr. Luce. However, reading Dr. Luce's actual files while he steps out of the office for a moment, having seen all the alienating remarks and stereotypical misconceptions pressed between the lines of his report, not only of the gender identity and femininity of Cal/lie (as opposed to her "core" biology as XY male!), but also of the "ethnic identity" (436) of his/her parents, Cal/lie realizes that much as s/he wants to be deceived by Dr. Luce, it will be just that, deceit.

> Dear Mom and Dad,
> I know you're only trying to do what is best for me, but I don't think anyone knows for sure what's best. I love you and don't want to be a problem, so I've decided to go away. I know you'll say I'm not a problem, but I know I am. If you want to know why I'm doing this, you should ask Dr. Luce, who is a big liar! I am not a girl. I'm a boy. (439)

Wise beyond his years, Cal realizes the impossibility of any simple diagnostic claim to who or what he is or may be, so he makes a personal decision of self-definition based on biology and takes a giant leap towards self-identification in his own re-gendering as a boy.

Attending the Intersex and Hermaphrodite "School" of Zora in San Francisco

Hopping a Greyhound night bus to Chicago, Cal stops first at the Salvation Army shop for a suit, before proceeding to a barbershop for a haircut.

> I opened my eyes. And in the mirror I didn't see myself. Not the Mona Lisa with the enigmatic smile any longer. Not the shy girl with the tangled black hair in her face, but instead her fraternal twin brother. (445)

Having transformed himself into a slightly strange-looking boy in a Beat-like suit (paying homage perhaps to Jack Kerouac?) Cal sets out *on the road*, hitchhiking his way to freedom. Here the symbolism of the American dream and the Bildungsroman melt into one as our teenage runaway, reminiscent of settlers before him, heads West. Only Cal has no wagon train to keep him safe; he is a lost and lonely cowboy on the trail. Traveling with many different kinds of people, fear subsides as Cal sees himself with their eyes and comes to realize that he can *pass* quite easily. "Myron and Sylvia are treating me like a

son. Under this collective delusion I become that, for a little while at least. I become male-identified." (450)

For a large part this travelling section holds a commentary on how little people notice and how unaware we are of those around us, unless we are looking of course, then we may catch the hint of difference that resides within. On the road, some were obviously looking, but even they saw what they wanted to see. There was never any indication, for instance, that Ben Scheer thought Cal might be anything other than a very young boy. Despite his naivety and obvious predator-like qualities, however, Cal manages to come unscathed from his rather sad encounter with Scheer. Picked up a little later by Bob Presto who has noticed Cal and has his own ideas about what Cal may be, he finds himself confronted finally with the question he has dreaded all along: "Can I ask you something, Cal? What are you anyway?" (463). Taking Cal for a transsexual, Bob asks him about operations and gives him his phone number in case he wants a job saying he "could use a kid like you." (463)

All alone in San Francisco Cal camps out with the other runaways and Deadheads in the park. "A few times I walked out to the beach to sit by the sea, but after a while I stopped doing that, too. Nature brought no relief. Outside has ended. There was nowhere to go that wouldn't be me." (473) The ocean signifies the end of the road for Cal, there is no further west to go. Though nature is beautiful, it brings no relief to Cal who at this point is still struggling with his own situation as "a freak of nature". The end of the road for now, it isn't Hollywood, but there is an underlying sense in his choice of San Francisco (the queer capital of the world) that this should be the place where Cal would think "if I can make it here, I can make it anywhere". Instead our narrator says "It is said: San Francisco is where young people go to retire." (483) Although this is an indication that Cal has come to the end of the line, San Francisco of the 1970's is where gay rights were being pressed onto the agenda.

When there seems no relief, no way to further understanding of self and how he can be in this world, Cal is finally pushed out into the open in the worst possible way. In a brutal and attempted rape scene, Cal is robbed and beaten to a pulp. As the scene turns first one way and then the other, Cal is robbed as a boy, a kid in the park, before the muggers discover from his school id that he is in fact a girl and rip Cal's clothes off to

rape "her". As the invisible truth of Cal's identity becomes visible, the brutes discover that "she" is not anything recognizable to them: "It's a fucking freak! […] I'm gonna puke, man. Look!" (476) Kicked until he blacks out, Cal is finally befouled in the most demeaning way as they piss on his crumpled body.

With absolutely nowhere to turn for help when he comes to, Cal calls Bob Presto: "Presto was an exploiter, a porn dog, a sex pig, but I could have done worse. Without him I might never have found myself." (483) Here Cal's experiences echo those of intersex people and others of indeterminate gender across history. First he is brutalized as the rage of his robbers echoes the basic instinct and strange entitlement to physically harm someone that is outside the norm, the reaction that subjects so many "freaks" to grave physical danger. This danger is very real and a large part of the narratives of many people of indeterminate sex or gender.

Having tried first to live as a boy, Cal begins to live as a hermaphrodite, at least by night. If we apply Judith Butler's theory of performativity here, we see Cal beginning the narrative of combined or vascillating gender that is to come. According to Butler the performance is always true to the performer and it is in the act of doing that we become. This is why the concept of performativity fits so well with the saga-like narrative of Cal in *Middlesex* as the entire novel is a journey, an act of becoming. On the way, Cal moves through one gender performance after another. It is on this journey of performativity that s/he embodies and evaluates the possible identities available to him/her. What constitutes Cal is always true to the moment in which s/he resides in the novel, sometimes *he* is on one end of the scale and at times *she* is on the other. Much of the time, it seems *s/he* is somewhere in between: "performativity has enabled a powerful appreciation of the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes." (Parker and Sedgwick 2) Linking performativity to language is crucial in that language is such a powerful part of how we are understood and how we may be constituted in the world. This is why Cal's time with Zora plays an important part in the formation of Cal's understanding of self.

In a space that resides like a parallel universe in the novel, Cal becomes a student at the intersex and hermaphrodite "school" of Zora in San Francisco and learns:

"Remember, Cal[3]. Sex is biological. Gender is cultural." (489) Ironically, through the intellectualization of gender, biology and culture, as taught by Zora, Cal comes to feel safe in the exploitative sex industry. It is here that s/he meets others that are similar to him/herself. By comparing and contrasting him/herself to Zora, an intersex person also, though with AIS (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome), Cal realizes the scarcity, and importance, of kinship in his/her situation:

> I wasn't the only one! Listening to Zora, that was mainly what hit home with me. I knew right then that I had to stay in San Francisco for a while. Fate or luck had brought me here and I had to take from it what I needed. (489)

Cal takes all the learning he can from Zora, becoming her apprentice of philosophy almost, realizing that her understanding of gender is profound and far ahead of its time. On a narrative level, the teachings of Zora appear parallel, though chronologically separate, to Cal the 42-year-old's struggles to re-define his self and as such function as a sub-text or meta-commentary to what is going on with grown-up Cal. Hence the Bildungsroman plots of teenager and grown man begin to grow ever closer to one narrative climax.

As s/he learns about the historical accounts of hermaphrodites and the medical diagnoses in modern times, Cal is simultaneously going through a catharsis in the sex club watertank where s/he performs as Hermaphroditus:

> I opened my eyes underwater. I saw the faces looking back at me and I saw that they were not appalled. I had fun in the tank that night. It was all beneficial in some way. It was *therapeutic*. Inside Hermaphroditus old tensions were roiling, trying to work themselves out. Traumas of the locker room were being released. Shame over having a body unlike other bodies was passing away. The monster feeling was fading. Along with shame and self-loathing another hurt was healing. Hermaphroditus was beginning to forget about the Obscure Object. (494)

It seems that in becoming visible and seeing the reactions of his/her voyeurs, Cal realizes that s/he may be something other than a freak or a monster. His/her body and the

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[3] As Zora uses Cal, and as Cal has chosen this name him/herself at this point in the novel, I will here abandon the combined Cal/lie that signifies the inbetweenness of narrator and girl. I will, however, use the combined pronoun s/he here as I wish to emphasize that though Cal performs boy during the day, s/he performs intersex or hermaphrodite at night.

discourse of his/her body does not necessarily have to be one of loneliness or freakish otherness. This act of coming to inhabit his body, as it is, paired with the reading material and the ontological and defining discussions with Zora begin to set Cal free. In keeping with the dangers and possibilities of emancipation that lie within the act of becoming visible, Cal asks Zora (an invisible XY male biology in a perfectly curvaceous female body):

> "Why did you ever tell anyone?"
> "What do you mean?"
> "Look at you. No one could ever know."
> "I want people to know, Cal."
> "How come?"
> Zora folded her long legs under herself. With her fairy's eyes, paisley-shaped, blue and glacial looking into mine, she said, "Because we're what's next." (490)

Similar to the arguments of Judith Butler in *Undoing Gender*, Zora argues for a future of more self-designated gender possibilities, where the performativity of gender is not only true to the performer, but where it might also be acknowledged by others. She could be speaking of Cal's (or Zora's for that matter) body at this point in the novel when Butler writes about David Reimer: "This body becomes a point of reference for a narrative that is not about a body, but which seizes upon the body, as it were, in order to inaugurate a narrative that interrogates the limits of the conceivably human." (Butler, Undoing Gender 210) The conceivability of humanness is imperative to the oppression of intersex individuals. If they are continuosly *othered* beyond humanity, they are in danger of remaining unintelligible not only in terms of sexual categorization, but as human beings altogether. It is precisely this fear that makes Cal's choice of gender identification so profound and the climax of the novel so significant.

Eugenides practically re-constructs the many influences and views that play a part in the creation of anyone's identity in our modern western world. I feel that within this book resides a great awareness of the many discussions about intersex today, the politics, for instance, of the intersex movement and the modern medical "problems" in dealing with the sexual "correction" of children born with "dubious" sex. It seems obvious that Eugenides not only knows his Fausto-Sterling, he knows a great deal of the historical interpellation of intersex individuals as well.

As Rachel Carrol writes, quoting the novel:

> If the parallel between sexed and cultural hybridity were to be pursued, this might seem a promising location from which to explore a post-sexed identity: ‘‘This once-divided city reminds me of myself. My struggle for unification, for Einheit. Coming from a city still cut in half by racial hatred, I feel hopeful here in Berlin’’ (106). (Carroll 201)

This constant struggle for a unified self of multitudinous hybridity within the novel is compelling. It seems that despite a great deal of evidence to the contrary, the hybrid possibilities of gender, race and nationality that the novel is saturated with, our protagonist is constantly and contradictively pulled towards a binary understanding of sex and a unitary understanding of self. Always struggling to be one or the other, even when performing as the in-between, Cal seems ever wary of the un-intelligibility that may reside in settling somewhere on the margins. As such, I feel the novel is an accurate sociological mirror image of the fears and norms that govern an intersex person in America today. Therefore Carroll’s (and other critics’) disappointment in the heteronormativity of the novel may be unwarranted.

Because this is the narrative of one voice, the intersex individual Cal/lie, and his/her struggles for self-definition despite the powers that construct his/her possible understanding of self within a pre-dominantly straight white world (straight middle class WASP America, in fact), the gay theme, like the racial one functions as a sub-theme. I agree that the narrative of *Middlesex* is heteronormative, but that does not mean that *Middlesex* cannot hold relevance as a queer text. Could Carroll’s argumentation stem from a desire for the novel to endorse a gay project or a gay narrative that the novel itself does not set out to do? Although she argues, “the ways in which a nominally transgressive narrative can nevertheless remain captive to normative discourses” (Carroll 188), Carroll seems to avoid the primary project of the book as I see it and as I feel she touches on when she speaks of the “post-sexed identity”. It is precisely the protagonist’s (and therefore the book’s) struggle with normative discourses that makes it recognizable and also palatable to a larger audience. This Pulitzer winning work of fiction has successfully reached a large audience, a representative number of the majority one might say. As such, to those of us already engaged in the political battles of minority emancipation as a whole, and gender oppressions in particular, the novel may merely lend a narrative that for a large part we nod and agree with. For the larger audience, who may

be wholly unaware of the suffering on the fringes of intelligibility, as well as their own privileges as a majority, this novel holds the potential to blow their minds.

Middlesex awards the reader the opportunity to be faced time and time again with our own mainstream prejudices and (mis)understandings of the world, and parallels this with a process of self-perception that leads to new ideas of being (and becoming). To open the door for Oprah Winfrey's book club[4], for instance, to ponder the identity options of gender and sex seems not only an important political project, but a queer project, no matter how heteronormative the discourse may be. "Though we looked nothing alike, Zora was always emphatic about our solidarity. We were up against the same prejudices and misunderstandings." (492) This sense of solidarity registers with Cal and probably many readers as well. As Cal himself puts it: "it's amazing what you can get used to." (520) By the novel's mirrored oppressions and rich gallery of characters, the novel is many-faceted enough for most readers to find something to identify with.

> When we ask, what are the conditions of intelligibility by which the human emerges, by which the human is recognized, by which some subject becomes the subject of human love, we are asking about conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all. […] This is what Foucault describes as the politics of truth, a politics that pertains to those relations of power that circumscribe in advance what will and will not count as truth, which order the world in certain regular and regulatable ways, and which we come to accept as the given field of knowledge. (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 203)

Butler has brought the need of human recognition to the forefront of gender politics and, like Levinas, advocates humanism and the philosophy thereof as a project of love. This project of acknowledging the humanity of others seems core to our narrator, Cal, as the need to be understood, humanized and held seems core to most people. Feeling acknowledged, therefore, by Zora and through educating him/herself in Zora's tranquil shrine-like house that served as "a refuge for me, a halfway house where I stayed, getting ready to go back into the world", (491) Cal is finally ready to call home and present

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[4] Eugenides appeared on Oprah Winfrey's famous talk show January 1, 2006 (Harpo Productions, Inc. 2006). In the summer of 2007 *Middlesex* was chosen for Oprah's book club. America's most popular talk show for more than two decades, famous for her confessional interviews and large fan base of American housewives, Oprah is extremely influential and a tabloid advocator of tolerance and understanding of race, sex and gender.

*him*self to his family, hoping, like all teenagers at the culmination point of their Bildung and becoming, to be loved.

> It was a lucky thing that my brother had taken as much LSD as he had. Chapter Eleven had gone in for early mind expansion. He contemplated the veil of Maya, the existence of various planes of being. For a personality thus prepared, it was somewhat easier to deal with your sister becoming your brother. There have been hermaphrodites like me since the world began. But as I came out from my holding pen it was possible that no generation other than my brother's was as well disposed to accept me. (514)

Thus Chapter Eleven leads the family's way to accepting Cal as what he is: an intersex person, as well as what he performs and chooses to identify as at this point in the novel: a man. Tessie takes her cues from Chapter Eleven and even Desdemona gives Cal her blessing in a moment of clarity in her haze of dementia, admitting her own sins and regrets, and is thus finally free as Cal the cat is out of the bag at last.

As for the project of deeper romantic and sexual love, this surfaces in the climactic moment of older Cal's Bildungsroman. It is in his love scene with Julie Kikuchi that Cal finally exposes himself completely. Despite his performance as heterosexual man, Cal's body is still intersex and therefore potentially repulsive to a binary-adhering lover. It seems however that he and Julie manage to transcend this together. Though we do not know how they fare in the end, there is a feeling of optimism in this scene that is further highlighted through its juxtaposition with the scene of Cal guarding the doorway for his father's funeral. As both Cals move forward, performing what they themselves feel to be true, it is under the covers with Julie that Cal is born for a third time; reborn not as a girl or a freak, but as a human being, a being that is deserving of love. It is in this final love scene that Eugenides' project seems to melt into Butler's project:

> I continue to hope for a coalition of sexual minorities that will transcend the simple categories of identity, that will refuse the erasure of bisexuality, that will counter and dissipate the violence imposed by restrictive bodily norms. I would hope that such a coalition would be based on the irreducible complexity of sexuality and its implication in various dynamics of discursive and institutional power, and that no one will be too quick to reduce power to hierarchy and to refuse its productive political dimensions. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxvii)

Or as Cal puts it: My life exists at the center of this debate. I am, in a sense, its solution. (479)

Interpellation and Self-Identification

In order to fully comprehend the (im)possibilities of being available to Cal in *Middlesex* I will discuss the powers that govern his/her identity options in the context of queer and intersex individuals today, as well as how this is discussed by key academics devoted to gender studies. First I feel it is important to state the heteronormativity and the sexual binary of our Western society at large. Though this is a simple given to any student of contemporary queer theory, I feel that it must be mentioned, because, especially in Norway with our recent passage of laws to ensure the equal rights of homosexuals with those of the heterosexual majority, many of us tend to think that the work here is done. We do so disregarding whether there is any guarantee of equality in the simple passing of laws. Also, on any level, legal or otherwise, this is not the situation for the world at large. Using the example of gay marriage rights to exemplify the discrimination of people based on their gender or sexual identification, I must mention that not only do the marriage rights of same-sex couples vary from state to state in the United States, but that, upon writing this paper, nineteen states actually *outlaw* gay marriage.

To begin to understand what is meant by unintelligible genders let us first look at intelligible genders. Citing Judith Butler:

> "Intelligible" genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the "expression" or "effect" of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23)

In keeping with Foucault's understanding of sexual repression in society, it is this repression that at once denies and constitutes it, perpetuating the fear of the unknown *other* that lies at the base of the need for repression in itself. As such, in order to understand the continual denial of the rights of the "dangerous" unintelligible individuals to choose how they wish to be named or defined, we must understand the fear that it inspires. As we are all governed by the norms, taboos and institutions of our society and

our understanding of the world, the possibilities and impossibilities therein, humans seem dedicated to suppress anything that might cast out of balance the powers at play. It is dangerous because it mirrors our fear of a collapsed worldview. Judging by the violent persecutions such individuals may be subjected to in our world, it seems that humans often have a desire to go beyond suppression, to destroy that which they do not understand and which taunts them with its despicable "freakishness".

It is this fear of having a child that falls beyond the margins of intelligibility that gives precedence to the primary argument of the medical industry for the need to "correct" intersex individuals. The fear of a child being bullied or persecuted, thereby deriving severe psychological damage and hence being doomed to an unhappy and distressful life is the primary reason for infant genital surgery today. This is also the winning argument of Dr. Luce as he convinces Cal/lie's parents that surgery and hormone treatment are necessary.

> "[…] The surgery will make Callie look exactly like the girl she feels herself to be. In fact, she will be that girl. Her outside and inside will conform. She will look like a normal girl. Nobody will be able to tell a thing. And then Callie can go on and enjoy her life." (428)

By promising to "conform" Cal/lie and help her to look "normal" (though the subtext reads that she will never truly *be* normal), Dr. Luce plays his winning argument of Cal/lie's right, as a human being, to a good life, thereby insinuating that the alternative would of course be the opposite. The insinuation in itself, a mere hint, calls into action all the powers of Foucault's theory of sexual taboo: that which is so powerful, that which is so devastatingly fearful that it must not be named, and certainly not investigated, is the dark abyss of the *unknown* that Cal/lie must be salvaged from. Not least does Dr. Luce insinuate his own innate benevolence in helping to restore Cal/lie to the gender s/he herself self-identifies as. Fausto-Sterling writes at length of medical practitioners' dilemmas and arguments against giving "confusing" or unnecessary (though biologically accurate!) information to parents or intersex children themselves, even after they reach the age of majority:

> In their suggestions for withholding information about patients' bodies and their own decisions in shaping them, medical practitioners unintentionally reveal their anxieties that a full disclosure of the facts about intersex bodies would threaten

> individuals' – and by extension society's – adherence to a strict male-female model. (Fausto-Sterling 65)

Following this bold statement, Fausto-Sterling feels further obligated to specify that she is not suggesting any form of malintent or conspiracy within the medical industry, but that she believes "doctors' own deep conviction that all people are either male or female renders them blind to such logical binds" (Fausto-Sterling 65).

For precisely this reason it is important to see what the institutions of science and biology have done to the understanding of intersex individuals. In intersex studies, Cal is a rarity. Most children of dubious or deviant sex are immediately "fixed" or "corrected" at birth.

> By the middle of the twentieth century, medical technology had "advanced" to the point where it could make bodies that had once been objects of awe and astonishment disappear from view, all in the name of "correcting nature's mistake". (Fausto-Sterling 37)

It should be emphasized that because of modern medical practices, if Cal had had any other intersex condition than 5-alpha-reductase-deficiency, it would have been caught at childhood and "corrected", simply because the medical industry for the most part still navigates from the binary of male/female, even for children that at birth are obviously somewhere in between. Thus it is how we are perceived in the eyes of others (in the medical practice of most post-natal wards as abnormal and unnatural, in need of "fixing"), that first denotes what we may become. In Althusser's theory of hailing it is when we are first hailed as something that we did not know that we are, that we truly become aware of the limitations on our options. When we are hailed as something, we suddenly see what we are or signify to others, and we may experience a moment of insight as we recognize ourselves in the hailing as something we always-already were, and become aware of the limitations of our own options. As a small child, most of us, until we are corrected at least, may believe that we have the world at our feet; that we are a clichéed blank slate, blessedly free of the societal constructs and constraints that limit the true options of our self-realization. As we grow and learn, even the most optimistic of us will *wisen* to the social, cultural or biological restraints on all our potential futures.

The fact is that though a biologist will hold that intersex or hermaphroditism is "natural" in that this is a condition that occurs on its own in nature and is readily observed in a variety of creatures, we fear the consequences that such an unintelligible sex (or indeed unintelligible sex*es*, for who is to say that there is only one middlesex: the intersex, when there are a variety of manifestations of pseudohermaphroditism and hermaphroditism) will do to *us*. Will it upset the balance or just stretch the boundaries of our understanding of sex and gender? Are some parts of the world more open or ready for this kind of new gender identity? Is not waking up like our protagonist, born again as an intersex boy in an emergency room near Petoskey in 1974 potentially less dangerous than other places in the world, both in time and space, historically and culturally? Is this why the cultural revolution of Cal's self-identification for the most part takes place in the safety of Detroit's suburbs? By adhering to the majority in so many ways and by taking place in the recognizable American suburb of everyday life, the novel seems to normalize the alienness of Cal leaving this reader at least hopeful that one day all people, no matter how they deviate from the norm, may be intelligible and lovable to others.

I will not fall for the temptation of adhering to another old binary; namely the one of nature versus nurture, but simply ask why does it have to be one *or* the other? Also, when we do accept that both perspectives may be relevant to our formation of self *and* outward identity, not least because: "politically, the nature/nurture framework holds enormous dangers." (Fausto-Sterling 26); why do we feel compelled to then put a percentage on each of the binaries? Fausto-Sterling explains this by pointing to the "scientific" classifications of gender and demonstrates that these narratives, like all others are constructs of the powers and ideologies that constitute them: "Of course, nature has not changed since the 1950s. Rather, we have changed our scientific narratives to conform to our cultural transformations." (Fausto-Sterling 73)

> As we grow and develop, we literally, not just "discursively" (that is, through language and cultural practices), construct our bodies, incorporating experience into our very flesh. To understand this claim, we must erode the distinctions between the physical and the social body. (Fausto-Sterling 20)

Here Fausto-Sterling, like Butler calls for a transcendence of the binary understanding of body and the formation of body, and thereby sex and self. The utopic erosion of distinction she reaches for here is similar to Cal's struggle for self-definition; as long as

s/he cannot see any sustainable intelligibility for him/herself, s/he does not know how to become intersex and continues to perform man (or woman).

As the philosophers of power remind us time and time again, we are constituted by the powers and ideologies that govern us. Concepts of hailing and intelligibility, and the impossibilities of traversing these invisible boundaries are relevant to the discussion and emancipatory struggles of all oppressed others and thereby to identity at large. In order to truly understand the discourses of oppression, we must look at the mirrored oppressions of other similar discourses, of other minorities also struggling for intelligibility in society at large. In many ways the discrimination against queer people today parallels the segregation of African Americans practiced throughout much of the 20th century, the suppression of women throughout history, and finally the struggles of the Intersex movement today.

In the next two chapters of my thesis, I will demonstrate that race and ethnicity are constituted of similar constructs and ideologies, commenting on the mirroring or shadowing of these themes within *Middlesex* and how they, in combination, succeed in lifting the universal themes of discriminative categorization and *othering* to the surface in such a way that we may catch a glimpse of utopia through the haze; a future where the marginalized people of our world might have a greater say in their own definition. (Porter 1997)

Chapter 2: Race and Power in *Middlesex*

Race and Whiteness in *Middlesex*

The narrative of *Middlesex* crosses many boundaries; boundaries of nationality, gender and race. These many boundary crossings are echoed not least in the crossings of genre that we find in *Middlesex*. Amongst other things (Bildungsroman, epic, literary pastiche etc.) it is thematically and craftily on par with any "great American novel". By definition then, it must also hold some weight as a sociological novel, and like any serious societal portraiture of contemporary America, *Middlesex* includes racial themes and sub-themes. Depicting Detroit and the racial issues of Detroit over time includes spanning the evolvement of its all-black neighborhoods as well as the riots of 1967. What makes *Middlesex* particularly interesting in this respect is the complexity of the novel, due largely to Eugenides' plotting skills and ability to deal with multifarious issues on multiple levels. In the end a much fuller picture of not only the racial struggles and differences of post-war Detroit shine through, but the complexity of it goes right to the heart of "whiteness".

Though whiteness studies are well represented in many academic institutions today, this phenomenon is still unknown to, or ignored by, the white Western world at large. Much like the patriarchy, where men had little reason to become aware of their power historically and socially over women until their position was articulated and threatened, issues of white privilege have been willfully or ignorantly suppressed and hence disregarded by the white majority. Some theorists, like Peggy McIntosh hold that the white population is *taught* not to recognize their privileges. Thus it remains largely hidden as the unaware continue to enjoy the daily privileges they take for granted. While those who are left in the shadow of whiteness see it all too well.

> Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. *(McIntosh 2)*

In dealing with whiteness specifically and interpellation in general, it heeds to keep in mind McIntosh's differentiation between active racist acts and ignorantly reaping the benefits of white privilege. The latter seems less harmful, but when examined more closely is a powerful mechanism that subliminally ensures the continual suppression of the black population. I will return more specifically to this theme in the section about Desdemona and the Black Bottom ghetto.

I wish to address the portrayal of whiteness in *Middlesex* as much as the "racial issues" of the novel. When someone such as myself (of white middle-class Norwegian stock (though of expatriate upbringing)), writes of the reasons for (or the reasoning behind) the suppression of black Americans, we oftentimes fall prey to the rather simplistic tale of their triumphant uprising. Slavery abolished, equal rights, oppression gone, end of story. This is a common, though gross simplification of American racial history, and in complete ignorance of the powers still at play today. Thus we uphold the contemporary myth of racial equality in "the greatest nation on Earth".

So why is this wrong? As long as the privileges of the white population remain upheld, as long as they remain un-voiced or worse, only voiced *to* and *by* those who suffer by it, then it is very difficult for a *true* equality of rights to exist in multiracial America. For precisely this reason; the voicing, the showing and the telling, of the social inequalities in America that still exist today *Middlesex* is a truly great sociological novel. Between the covers of this book resides a project of social responsibility. One of the main reasons perhaps that the book was picked up and so strongly advocated by American talk show host and famous advocator of black rights Oprah Winfrey and her nationally and internationally broadcast book club is that within this book is a great deal of history and guidance for anyone who is new to understanding the mechanisms of racial inequality, as well as in-depth information about discrimination in general for those that want to understand more. The fact that the different narratives of oppression within the novel mirror each other brings the core problems of oppression to the forefront and onto the agenda. Instead of many standard over-explicit tales of racial inequality, *Middlesex* deals with gender, class and immigration identities as well, giving the reader ample opportunity to see the power of discrimination at play from many angles. As such, when we are reading about gender discrimination in *Middlesex*, these narratives also signify race and

class, bringing the overreaching theme of identity oppression and the *im*possibilities of self-identification to the forefront. I will show how many formulations or stories of whiteness within the novel tell the tale of what has been possible, what is possible and what should be possible if the machinery of inequality did not run so smoothly and if humanism were more prevalent in America and in the Western world at large.

One could say that *Middlesex* teaches the hierarchical structures of America through addressing some very difficult questions that go right to the heart of tolerance, discrimination and ethics. Eugenides lends us his story as a canvas for the perusal of our own role and the role of *others* in the multiracial hierarchy of America. Literature has always awarded the reader an opportunity to travel, whether inward for a greater understanding of the human psyche or outward for a greater understanding of the mechanisms of the world. By allowing white readers to experience: through Cal; through the personal insights of the other characters; and not least through the change in perspective that comes with the understanding of self when acknowledging one's own white privilege, Eugenides makes this theme not only known, but also palatable to us as we sit reading and gently accused of being *the man*. Just as Cal, in choosing a male identity realizes that he is seen differently than before, we the reader can think more deeply on our own role, our own place in the hierarchy of oppression where *the man* in many contexts signifies the white male oppressor, the power of the patriarchy and the dominant white race in one. In creating awareness of whiteness, and the unfairness of the principle of it, many white people (unaware that they are any color or that color holds any significance for them, racial or other wise) tend to feel falsely accused, uneasy, guilty or enraged. It seems that much of this emotional response is due to a conflicted new understanding of self. At a safe reading distance, these emotional reactions are played out for the reader in Cal's sadness at becoming "The Man", Desdemona's guilt at being a "blue-eyed devil" and Milton's rage at being accused of being "what is the matter" with the black population, in other words the cause of the riots and racial problems at large. Therefore, I will look at racial themes and incidents in the novel in isolation (as much as is possible at least) as well as how these play with the mirrored themes of gender and immigration.

Being the Man

I hold and will argue, that it is impossible to say anything meaningful about the true or realistic opportunities open to the black American population today without acknowledging the privilege that still resides in the white skin of the majority. I am well aware that I sit writing this thesis in the third year of office of the very *first* black American president. Ever! Granted, black people have come a long way since the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, but the scales of equality are still tipped in favor of one man. And that man is still the white man. As the French-Martiniquan philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon puts it:

> For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. (Fanon 120)

It is precisely this interrelation of black and white together, where *one* would not, could not exist without the other, that makes it so important to not only address the suppression of black people, the *othering* within all racial inequality, but to also look closely at the other end of this spectrum. One cannot, in my opinion at least, say anything of the dichotomy or binary systems of black versus white, without also commenting on the power relation between them: the power in this case of *whiteness.*

For this very reason it is so significant that Cal is savvy to the privilege of being white and especially the power of being (and *becoming*) a white *man.* Here we see implicit commentary on Eugenides' part not only of the racial distinctions in America, but also on the implications of the patriarchy. In terms of power relations, therefore, it is important that on the day of his homecoming as the newfound long-lost and newly father-bereft *son* of the Stephanides family, that Cal reflects upon *his*[5] reflection of *himself* in the eyes of a black man on a street corner of Detroit:

> That was when I realized a shocking thing. I couldn't become a man without becoming The Man. Even if I didn't want to. *(518)*

This single moment, where the eyes of two people lock into one stare, reflects deeply how the hierarchies and power structures of America function and what it means to be interpellated as something you did not know you were until you automatically

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[5] I use the male pronoun here, because at this point in the novel, Cal him/herself as the main character (not the narrator Cal) has made an active decision to designate *him*self as male.

respond to its hailing. This encounter brings to mind not only the hailing of Althusser, but the scene may also call to mind the gaze between two passers-by in the philosophy of Levinas where the humanity of one may not be recognized. Though this scene strongly represents Althusser's hailing, where we do not choose our own hailing, we are what the other perceives us to be at the very moment when they see us as that which we are to them. Though this is the major revelation to Cal here, there is also the deeper theme of suddenly being the one in power, suddenly being the one with the responsibility as Levinas would have held it, to acknowledge the humanity of the other, even as they see us as something we do not wish to be. In this direct, though brief, locked gaze where the black man is stuck on the street corner of the old destitute neighborhood, as Cal is driven by within the safety and distance of his car, Cal becomes aware of two things simultaneously: *the humanity of the other* (in this case the black man on the street corner) and his own role in the event as it always-already was, as well as his own powerlessness to do anything but simply respond and acknowledge that the hailing is correct. No matter how much Cal acknowledges the humanism of the man on the street corner, there is a gulf between them because nothing can change until there is proof that it already has changed. So until proven otherwise, Cal is *the man.*

Because both the issues of gender and racial identity are constituted by structures of how these are viewed in society, just the same way that class constitutes certain schemas for those that belong to the lower or middle classes, looking at the role played by race and racial commentary in *Middlesex* should lead us to a discussion of how these themes mirror or shadow each other. In the social economy someone is always *above* someone else and hitherto black still means bottom in many instances. In her analysis of the films *Far from Heaven* and *Transamerica* Rebecca Scherr holds that "…identity is only understandable in a relational economy" (Scherr 18) and she discusses "mirrored oppressions".

When examining the quote about Cal "becoming *the man"* it is important to look at it in context and in comparison to the other themes of the book. McIntosh's linkage of racial oppression to the patriarchy is in direct accordance with Eugenides' mirroring of these themes here. As Cal takes another step forward in the possible identity choices available to him (as he rides in the car on this particular afternoon) he is on his way home

as a man, a role he has self-identified as and hence more or less chosen for himself, a role which his brother has accepted as a true performance. The juxtaposition then of being hailed as a white man is extremely potent, pointing somehow to the unfairness of having the freedom to choose some things and the restraints to choose anything else. Thus Cal can no longer hide behind his former little white girl innocence in the racial economy. He has suddenly, in his choice of gender and successful *passing* there of, gone from the bottom of one hierarchy – the bottom rung of indeterminable gender on the margins of intelligibility – to the top of the racial ladder. On the very day he is teasingly, yet lovingly accepted as his brother's brother, he must simultaneously stand up and accept the social responsibility of being a white male. Though this interpretation of the role is not of his own volition, the role is simply constituted by the power and hierarchical structure it automatically signifies, that of whiteness and patriarchy in one. Thus Cal is at once free to be *him*self *and* held responsible for it.

Desdemona *Passing* in the "Black Bottom" Ghetto

A significant period for the Stephanides family, Detroit, America and the world at large, was the Great Depression. This was also the time when Desdemona went to work for the first time since she had been a *pure* young silk farmer in Smyrna.

Here again we find a wonderful teller within the tale of *Middlesex*. The omniscient narrator briefly steps aside for the full dramatic impact of Desdemona's breast-clutching voice. In one short paragraph, in one short burst of emotion, Desdemona sets the entire scene for the Great Depression historically and personally.

> […] "Mana! The Depression! So terrible you no can believe! Everybody they have no work. I remember the marches for the hunger, all the people they are marching in the street, a million people, one after one, one after one, to go to tell Mr. Henry Ford to open the factory. Then we have in the alley one night a noise was terrible. The people they are killing rats, plam plam plam, with sticks, to go to eat rats. Oh my God! And Lefty he has no working in the factory then. He only having, you know, the speakeasy, where the people they use to come to drink. But in the Depression was in the middle another bad time, economy very bad, and nobody they have any money to drink. They no can eat, how they can drink? So soon, papou and yia yia we have no money. And then" – hand to heart – "then they make me got to work for those mavros. Black people! Oh my god!" (136)

Desdemona's exclamation illustrates the most common *other*ing of blackness. Here it is in full view, classically constituted in class, color and casual thoughtless everyday discrimination. *Naturally,* Desdemona alienates black people and sees them as beneath her. This is white privilege clearly articulated and acknowledged before our own modern day of educated political correctness and quasi-equality. Desdemona would have known nothing else or any other way. This was the norm for her and those around her. *Mavros* to her, though derogatory, is probably *just* the term she was taught and always used to categorize people of African heritage. Though Desdemona and Lefty themselves are lowly destitute immigrants on the social ladder of America at this point in the novel, the black population of Detroit, especially those of the Black Bottom ghetto, are obviously beneath her. This is a truth of the typical socio-economic and racial categorization of the time. It would have been strange if there had been any reflection over this in Desdemona's mind prior to going to work for the Nation of Islam.

Having first endured the terrifying tram ride where the narrator plays at "imagining" what she would "have seen on the streets of Detroit in 1932" (140), Desdemona lands in the most twisted of all the plots in *Middlesex.* Firstly, the narrator sets the scene for racial collision in several ways. One of these is the continual scene-turning technique of portraying one group, then another and yet another, all the while running a meta-commentary of how they affect each other:

> She would have seen men in floppy caps selling apples on corners. She would have seen cigar rollers stepping outside windowless factories for fresh air, their faces stained a permanent brown from tobacco dust. She would have seen workers handing out pro-union pamphlets while Pinkerton detectives tailed them. In alleyways, she might have seen union-busting goons working over those same pamphlets. She would have seen policemen, on foot and horseback, 60 percent of whom were secretly members of the white Protestant Order of the Black Legion, who had their methods for disposing of blacks, Communists, and Catholics. (140)

To me this passage, in translation, says that Detroit in the Depression was a city of workers and overseers all pushing against each other. The WASPs were in power and letting everyone else suffer for it. At the end of the line and at the very bottom is Black Bottom ghetto, despised and feared by everyone else.

To quite visually illustrate this very fact, Eugenides shows the trolley car's passengers "all of whom were white" (141) patting their wallets and clutching their purses in automatic unison as they enter the black ghetto:

> There was no roadblock, no fence. The streetcar didn't so much as pause as it crossed the invisible barrier, but at the same time in the length of a block the world was different. (141)

Casually, though explicitly, the reader is made aware that this is a boundary crossing of the ever-present color line. Here begins a journey into an area that we know incites certain reactions and actions (check your wallets!) in the white population. Cal does not pretend that this is an objective historical account of the black neighborhoods in 1932, but he does make sure he shows us the implications of one race on the other. He does make sure that we are aware of what emotions (particularly fear) and prejudices any white person of the time would have travelling through the neighborhood even in the "safety" of their streetcar (just as Cal will be "safe" in the car passing through the old neighborhood a generation later). So the narrative goes on, giving us a continuous running commentary on the Black Bottom.

In between the narrator's historical information, asides and vivid portraiture, we hear the exclamations of Desdemona. Her interjected italics add dramatic effect, reminding us that this is actually her subjective adventure (only retold and imagined by Cal), and awakens us to her fear of the unknown in general and of black people in particular. It is her alienation from the African Americans that makes her *passing* so absurd and therefore effective as a means of drawing attention to her whiteness.

The narrative techniques used in the construction of Desdemona's adventures in the black ghetto are deliciously twisted and funny. Here hyperbole and humor go hand in hand to drive the topsy-turvy points of racial passing and hierarchy home. Firstly I would like to comment on her interview with Sister Wanda, Supreme Captain, Temple No. 1. Here race and ethnicity obviously matter and the only way Desdemona can land the job is to be either Muslim or black. Preferably both!

"So you probably mixed up a little bit, right? You not all white." (145) As Sister Wanda interrogates Desdemona, we the readers know that Desdemona is Greek (though Turkish in passport) and that she is neither Muslim nor black. However we are privy to

the absurd turntable event of Sister Wanda trying to “work it” so that Desdemona can make silk for the Nation of Islam. We watch the two of them grapple with the dilemma of re-defining Desdemona. Desdemona on her hand struggles with whether or not she can allow herself to be defined as all those things that is she not, and, that to her, represent something oppressive (Turkish), something blasphemous (Muslim) and, probably, something beneath her (black).

> Again Desdemona hesitated. She thought about her children. She imagined coming home to them without any food. And then she swallowed hard. “Everybody mixed. Turks, Greeks, same same.” (145)

Thus, swallowing her pride, heritage, ethnicity and religion, Desdemona’s journey of *passing* as black begins. There are many accounts of blacks passing as white (usually they look white enough to pass for white), not least in Nella Larsen’s famous novel by the very title *Passing.* The concept of the opposite, however, seems almost ludicrous and would in most cases probably be dismissed by the derogatory colloquialism of “slumming”. By playing with this juxtaposition of social and racial climbing, Eugenides sets the scene for a questioning of the mechanics within such social structures:

> “This is the new lady gonna teach us how to make silk. She a mulatto like Minister Fard and she gonna bring us back the knowledge of the lost art of our people. So we can do for ourself.” (148)

Though Sister Wanda is happy to accept Desdemona if she is at least mixed, I would like to draw attention to the well known, though no longer legally valid one-drop rule of American racial categorization. The one-drop rule comes into play when there is a mix of race or socioeconomic distinction. According to the “rule” the person in question is always addressed to the identity category of lower status. Hence Barack Obama (50% white and 50% black) is the first *black* president of America. In other words he is simply the nearest thing to a black American president there has ever been. Even today, there are really no in-betweens. Everything still refers to a binary. Either you are black or you are white, though self-identity does come more into play in the definition of those with more indeterminate racial traits. Similar to the determination of gender, if you are something in between, you are in danger of not being defined at all or of being interpellated as something other than that which you self-identify as, and hence you find yourself categorized according to popular opinion or other societal factors. To remain indefinable

or in-between is still unthinkable for most. The irony in *Middlesex* of course, is that Desdemona is being allowed in on the one-drop rule. She is allowed to pass as black, though they all know she is white and therefore of lower status in this particular context.

In the temple of Black Bottom, everything is the opposite of the world around them and Cal the narrator takes great care to underline this. Therefore, much as Desdemona has been categorized as Mulatto (i.e. black enough) by Sister Wanda she is still not quite black enough to pass through the front door:

> The temple's front doors, in a sweet reversal of most American entrances, let blacks in and kept whites out. (149)

According to Althusser […]: an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material. (Althusser 45) In other words, for an ideology to define or impact the possibilities within a system, it must be at work within that system. As such, following the logic of Althusser's theory, it is the social structure and the systems of the Nation of Islam that allow for another definition of self to its patrons, a definition of self that is not the same as on the outside of the temple walls where the people of Black Bottom suffer daily on the bottom rung of Detroit's ladder. By narrating this space where the otherness of the black men and women of the Great Depression is dispersed (at least within the temple walls) Eugenides not only lends intellectual truth to Althusser's theory, he also demonstrates the transience of self-understanding and how strongly it is influenced by the system within which it resides. It would, of course, be absurd if Desdemona came to think of herself as black, but she does in the course of her personal development process at the temple become more aware of the humanity of her black employers, her own white privilege and hence her role as "a caucasian devil" (152).

> And riding through Black Bottom didn't help. Desdemona realized now why there was so much trash in the streets: the city didn't pick it up. White landlords let their apartment buildings fall into disrepair while they continued to raise the rents. One day Desdemona saw a white shop clerk refuse to take change from a Negro customer. "Just leave it on the counter", she said. Didn't want to touch the lady's hand! And in those guilt-ridden days, her mind crammed with Fard's theories, my grandmother started to see his point. There were blue-eyed devils all over town. (161)

Eugenides manages to take full advantage of Desdemona's newly discovered "white guilt" and lets it echo the theme of guilt and fear that she has carried since she married her own brother. What within the temple is it that touches Desdemona so deeply that it perpetuates her self-loathing and the demonization of herself? The answer it seems is the voice and teachings of Minister Fard that in a godlike manner sermonizes and serenades her as she kneels before the heating grate.

At first glance the Minister Fard's sermons seem fantastical and may therefore be dismissed as mere fiction by many readers. Even when Eugenides takes great care to cite his sources within the text, notions such as "tricknology" and the "scientist Yacub" may seem far-fetched to those unacquainted with the Nation of Islam and its importance to the Civil Rights Movement. *Middlesex* is, however, historically accurate (apart from the fiction, of course). There was indeed a Minister Fard who ran an identical temple to the one that Desdemona entered daily through the back door. The sermons of said minister in *Middlesex* may well be word for word transcripts of many such speeches held by the Nation of Islam. These are also readily available in transcript or as audio-pieces through the World Wide Web.

Eugenides has craftily woven actual people and known historical events of Detroit into his work of fiction. This technique of storytelling on a factual historical backdrop lends an authenticity that permeates the novel. There should be no doubt of the historical reality of the Nation of Islam, its existence, its booming business of silk sales, its schooling of young black Muslims and its historical impact on the Black movement of America in the years to come. Eugenides' reiteration of this is accurate, in so far as any historical account ever is accurate. I will not dwell on the objectivity or subjectivity of historical "fact" here, but I will emphasize the importance of historical accuracy for any sociological novel. If a Great American Novel is to carry any weight it must capture the Zeitgeist of its age. In the case of *Middlesex*, this added dimension is what ensures the novel as a *mimesis* of American society. Like American society itself it is complex and can be seen from many perspectives simultaneously. It also serves as a potent stage for several of the novels recurring themes. There is the theme of whiteness, black oppression and passing, of course. There are also the themes of ethics and popular science. Fard after all, preached a great deal of science-like *facts* and used these as evidence of his moralistic

points. These themes combined, and seen holistically, also say a great deal for the themes of power and identity. Through the multitude of voices within the temple walls we see how differently many of the followers identify with their newfound religion and religious leader:

> Outside, the Muslim Girls Training and General Civilization Class installed silkworm trays. They worked in silence, daydreaming of various things. Ruby James was thinking about how handsome John 2X had looked that morning, and wondered if they would get married someday. Darlene Wood was beginning to get miffed because all the brothers had gotten rid of their slave names but Minister Fard hadn't gotten around to the girls yet, so here she was, still Darlene Wood. Lily Hale was thinking almost entirely about the spit curl hairdo she had hidden up under her headscarf and how tonight she was going to stick her head out her bedroom window, pretending to check the weather, so that Lubbock T. Hass next door could see. Betty Smith was thinking, Praise Allah Praise Allah Praise Allah. Millie Little wanted gum. (155)

This passage illustrates the multiple perspectives that Eugenides opens up to his reader. A greater number of voices creates a greater understanding both of the collective identity of the Nation of Islam as conformist and homogenous from the outside, but still heterogeneous (though self-policing) on a singular level, echoing in this way the complexity of any social apparatus. The girls are impacted by the power and the rules and regulations of the temple in different ways, some more than others. We already know that the sect's impact on Desdemona was enormous and in accordance with Foucault's panopticism as she adopted Fard's moral accusations and applied them to her self-flagellating self:

> We are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism. (Foucault 217)

According to Foucault, we reside within the machinery of the panoptic machine, we cannot see ourselves clearly from a distance or by the help of any Greek chorus, we become caught in the act of self-policing as we are aware of the restraints of the intangible and invisible power constantly watching us. Desdemona, seeing society and her own role as portrayed by Fard, takes it upon herself to inflict the responsibility of self-punishment. For the most part, this means tormenting herself with dramatic guilt.

> She kept waiting for something to happen, some disease, some abnormality, fearing that the punishment for her crime was going to be taken out in the most

> devastating way possible: not on her own soul but in the bodies of her own children. (157)

This is not just a direct allegation to Cal's biology, it is also a view of the panopticon within which Desdemona had come to reside. She would remain forever guilty and fearful of the repercussions of her sins.

Casting Jimmy Zismo as Wallace Fard Muhammad, therefore, makes for a double-whammy of a punch line when Desdemona sees his face for the first time. Suddenly the preachings of the Prophet could potentially lose their weight and subsequently stop perpetuating Desdemona's guilt. Standing here before her is no longer an emancipatory god among men, he is just her "brother-in-law" (164) and she suddenly holds the potential to be his equal. Here they both are, caught almost equally red-handed: *passing* as black. They embark on a name-calling of interpellations where both hail each other as something that they have absolutely no desire to be. In cinematic turnings of the scene, line by line, first one on top, then the other, there is a battle of power over definition each of the *other* and their own self.

> "Much that is hidden has been revealed to me."
> "What is hidden?"
> "My so-called wife is a woman of, let us say, unnatural appetites. And you and Lefty? Do you think you fooled me?
> "Please, Jimmy."
> "Don't call me that. That isn't my name"
> "What do you mean? You are my brother-in-law."
> "You don't know me!" he shouts. "You never knew me!" Then composing himself: "You never knew who I was or where I came from." With that, the Mahdi walks past my grandmother, through the lobby and double doors, and out of our lives. (164)

Thus Jimmy's second dramatic exit of the novel leaves us as clueless to who or what he is as his hazardous disappearance into the ice with his bootlegger's truck. He does however still leave us his biology and heritage, for if he really was black or "mixed" then that means that according to the one-drop rule of one-sixteenth, so is Cal, as Zismo was his/her maternal grandfather, thus adding yet another dimension of in-betweenness to Cal's already fragmentary identity.

In the end what did Desdemona learn in the Black Bottom ghetto and the Nation of Islam? She learned that the *mavros* were not so different from herself, that they

suffered much unjust discrimination, that she herself was part of it all and that seeing is not always believing:

> "Why don't you like white people? Why you call them devils?"
> "Look at the evidence. This city. This country. Don't you agree?"
> "Every place has devils."
> "That house on Hurlbut, especially." (164)

It is interesting that the social commentary and moralization here come from Zismo. Being dis-veiled, so to speak, Jimmy could easily have lost all authority in the eyes of Desdemona, but just because he is or may be a fraud, does not mean that he cannot hold some moral power or validity. The fact that he may not even be black does not deter him from feeding into her white guilt. The powers at play are simply too effective and have taken on a life of their own. They do after all exist within a larger perspective.

Minister Fard was similar to Zismo in many respects. Not least were they both charismatic and of dubious background, racially, morally and nationally, but they both had *some* socially valid points in their preaching. There was a great deal wrong in Detroit in the early thirties. America at the time was a nation suffering a great Depression, racial discrimination and segregation was still prevalent and white privilege was still ignored by white people. (Let us not forget the proximity in history to such incidents as the march of 35,000 members of the Ku Klux Klan to Washington D.C. in 1924.) That is not all, however, that Zismo hints at in his designation of the house on Hurlbut as a place full of devils. It seems, after all, that it is the lack of morals in combination to the oppression of blacks that defines the white devils. To him, the lesbianism of Sourmelina is as immoral and unnatural as the incestuous relations of Lefty and Desdemona. Thus, these immoral sexual preferences serve as "evidence" for Jimmy of the inherent immorality and demonism of the white population.

According to our narrator, in the end it was Desdemona's final meeting with Fard that caused her to have her tubes tied so as not to produce any more *sinful* or *unnatural* offspring. Thus Fard (or Zismo) still held great moral power over Desdemona even after he was revealed as an impostor. As such the impostor theme mirrors the theme of passing. Did not Jimmy Zismo in the end point out that Desdemona had been passing all along? Passing as Lefty's wife and not his sister. In keeping with his theme of nothing

being simply black or white, Eugenides demonstrates here that ethics too can dwell in a middle plane. Even in the economy of right and wrong, the binary will not do for long. Though someone may be seen and identified as immoral or capable of unethical acts at one point in time, they are not forever locked on one side of the scale. It is in fact possible to be immoral, an impostor, and morally righteous, a Mahdi even, simultaneously. How it impacts other people, in this case Desdemona, and her understanding of self, in terms of being sinful and guilty of racial passing and incestuous relations, is what matters in the end.

In the end it is Zismo, the one who had created an entire system, a society where blacks could rule despite their localization within a society of whiteness, who is the only one who holds the true power to define him self. Perhaps it was his complete disregard or rebellion against the mechanics of racial hierarchy and social systems at large that gave Zizmo (or whoever he was) the power of self-invention. In summary, in a book that deals largely with the issues of identity, having touched on the idea of performativity in terms of gender, it seems ironic that the one character that has the transcendent power and divine freedom to be anything he likes is Jimmy Zizmo. It seems that the act of inventing an institution of power to counteract the destructive hierarchy of America gave Zizmo both the understanding of and the performative power to transcend the systemic suppression and white power of post-segregationist America.

Black Interaction and Discrimination in the Stephanides Family and the Riot of Detroit

In terms of historical knowledge, Jeffrey Eugenides is well researched. He knows just what happened in Detroit, not only on the Sunday evening of July 23 in 1967, but in the prelude and aftermath as well. Here we see a shift in voice, much like at the beginning of the novel as we are told the tale of Smyrna and how the Stephanides' were caught in the middle of the Turkish and Greek war. Eugenides manages to pack these passages, not only with highly relevant and accurate historical information, but he does it with novelistic ease and from multiple perspectives. Here, it seems, the omniscient narrator

holds court, paired with the present-tense eyewitness account of the young girl child, Callie.

Much like the director of a well-edited feature film Eugenides keeps turning his scenes. He shows first a clip from one scene before cutting smoothly to another. He jumps backwards and forwards in time. We are moved swiftly from the narcissistic self-depiction of "real-time" storyteller Cal trying to impress Julie Kikuchi in Eastern Europe with his wanna-be upper-class Anglophile tendencies and expensive shoes, to the grim foreboding of the pre-riot goings on at the Stephanides residence. Like any master dramatist the author pans out and zooms in, capturing all at once the significance of what is going on, of what is about to happen from a wider perspective and foreshadowing the devastating drama to come, all at once. Simultaneously, we see the theme of racism, discrimination, whiteness and denial of such expanding and shrinking in the storyline to suit as a subtheme to whatever else is on play in the main story line at the time. This allows for showcasing the multiplicity of both the precarious whiteness of the Stephanides' and the racial problems of Detroit.

On the subject of Milton's gun, Eugenides even toys with the clever meta-commentary of your typical postmodern behind the scenes, unreliable narrator (or is it *just* 42-year-old Cal showing off his knowledge of the makings of canonic literature? Not that it really matters, they are both equally postmodern and show offish):

> Chekhov's first rule of playwriting goes something like this: "If there's a gun on the wall in act one, scene one, you must fire the gun by act three, scene two." I can't help thinking about that storytelling precept as I contemplate the gun beneath my father's pillow. There it is, I can't take it away now that I've mentioned it. (It really was there that night.) And there are bullets in the gun and the safety is off…(236)

Here again we see the wit, the pun or perhaps the tongue in cheek of, what I suppose is our omniscient postmodern narrator as he assures us that the gun *real*ly was there, thereby applying an extremely thick coat of foreshadowing significance to said gun. It is so explicit that this reader, at least, began to wonder if there might not be some double-twist here, some hidden irony or perhaps just a build-up to an enormous anti-climax. In terms of technique, no matter whether you are irritated by the over-explicit: keep your eye on the gun! or whether you love the humor of this grasp, you are irked on,

curious all the same. For in fabrications of American life, guns generally hold significance no matter what. America is, after all, a nation renowned for its lethal gun-toting tendencies and its staunch insistence on the right of each American to carry a gun of his or her own.

We have also encountered another *American* gun in *Middlesex.* The Detroit race riot of 1943 serves as a racial sub-theme in the tale of Lefty's speakeasy's transformation to an above-ground bar & grill. As his patrons in large part were white autoworkers, Lefty chose to "listen, nod, refill, smile" (169) and take their money, rather than take any sides in their discussions.

> But when a group of men came in, boasting of having beaten a Negro to death, my grandfather refused to serve them.
> "Why don't you go back to your own country?" one of them shouted.
> "This is my country", Lefty said, and to prove it, he did a very American thing: he reached under the counter and produced a pistol. (169)

Here is a crossing of themes again. Obviously the racial theme crossing a moral theme, how uninvolved is it actually possible to remain when racial discrimination crosses the line to racial violence and murder? There is also the theme of Lefty's own American-ness as an immigrant. The underlying definition of American is still white and in this particular context Lefty's origin in Asia Minor does not render him white enough. This scene serves as a much less explicit foreshadowing and linking of the themes of the race riots, guns, and the racial and moral dilemmas of the Stephanides' men wielding them behind the counter of the Zebra Room.

Prior to the riot and Milton's diner going up in flames, there are several interactions between different members of the Stephanides clan and their black neighbors. There is also a build-up to the racial theme in the narrative through comments such as: The four grand streets of Burns, Iruquois, Seminole, and Adams (even in Indian Village the White Man had taken half the names)[…](204)

As Milton and Tessie have started their ascent of the social ladder, they have moved out of the family home in Hurlbut to a larger house in Indian Village. The theme of class ascension serves as a strong contrast to that of the black rioting to come. Lefty and Desdemona are at this point in the novel literally left behind, both in Hurlbut and in the immigrant working class as Lefty is unwillingly pushed into retirement. In his

desperation caused by idleness, he returns to the gambling that had filled the emptiness of his soul in his youth.

> He walked past the startled customers (who weren't used to seeing white people; he strode past the props of aspirin bottles, corn plasters, and laxatives, and went up to the pharmacist's window at the rear. (205)

Here we see Lefty entering another world closed to whites. Though unlike the temple of the Nation of Islam, there is no real hope here. It is a devil's den and though Eugenides plays with the sad joke of Desdemona's dream book (Dare to dream?!) being adopted by the black community, there seems to be no real hope here:

> This led to the only contribution Greeks ever made to African American culture (aside form the wearing of gold medallions), as the blacks of Detroit began to buy dream books for themselves. (206)

Thus Lefty embarks on his own road to hell and in the end it leaves him penniless and dishonored, echoing the plight of his gambling patrons. No dream book could help any of them. As Lefty's second spiral into the sin of gambling comes to an abrupt and undignified halt (this very weakness had after all first befallen him as a young man in Smyrna), Milton was enjoying the privileges of middle class whiteness. Though the house on Hurlbut was lost, there was no question that Milton and Tessie would not take Lefty and Desdemona in.

As Desdemona and Lefty settle into the attic, perched much as they had been growing up on Mount Olympus, Cal is conceived and the novel moves on to Book Three, bringing us closer to the riot and climactic point of the book's racial commentary. Growing up in an extended family, Cal enjoyed the doting care of her grandparents and Lefty used to take her down to the diner on Saturdays. The diner's best days were gone and Milton was struggling to make ends meet as the neighborhood changed.

> Through the front window (over Athena olive oil tins) my father looked out day after day at the changes on Pingree Street. The white family who'd lived across the way, good customers once, had moved out. Now the house belonged to a colored man named Morrison. He came into the diner to buy cigarettes. He ordered coffee, asked for a million refills, and smoked. He never ordered any food. He didn't seem to have a job. (228)

Morrison is introduced here as a kind of personification of the black population that had gradually been moving in and "taking over" the old neighborhood. How Milton views

him from the outside is both an act of *othering* and an echo of Desdemona's first ride into the Black Bottom ghetto in the 1930's. The general feeling is that the black population is somehow to blame for their poverty, the disarray of their houses and their unemployment. This is concurrent with most un-reflected middle class ideas of ghettofization. Perhaps it is too close to home to see that as the labor class immigrant population that originally inhabited this area move up and out, the *lower classes* of the African Americans are free to take over the tattered hand-me-downs of their old neighborhoods.

Another character that serves as a personification of African Americans is the rioter-to-be Marius Wyxzewixard Challouehliczilczse Grimes. Callie's well-educated young friend treats her like a queen as she sports the luxury of her young girl innocence in his company: "Milton considered Marius to be a troublemaker, a view in which many Zebra Room patrons, white and black both, concurred." (229)

Marius is a great many things at once and our omniscient narrator does not hesitate to tell us of his childhood asthma, his bookishness and his history of being bullied at school. He is also named after a contemporary of Fard Muhammad and as such automatically carries the pride and insolence of the Nation of Islam. He plays with the ideas of identity and racial mix-ups by telling her she looks like Cleopatra who was a Greek Egyptian and toys with his own heritage saying that therefore they may well be related. On the surface all of this is mostly innocent banter between a local eccentric and a little girl, though there is always a chilly ironic undertone in all of Marius' communication with Callie. He is after all a beret-wearing guy who preaches about segregation and the evils of white privilege from a broken chair across the street from her father's diner:

> In beret and glasses Marius stood on the corner waking people up to things. "Zebra Room," he pointed a bony finger, " white-owned." Then the finger went down the block. "TV store, white-owned. Grocery store, white-owned. Bank …" Brothers looked around… "You got it. No bank. They don't give loans to black folks." Marius was planning to become a public advocate. As soon as he graduated from law school he was going to sue the city of Dearborn for housing discrimination. (230)

Marius is also the one who points out to Cal that her father is afraid of black people. Echoing Desdemona several decades before him, Milton is caught in his own "Depression", he fears the unknown, has a stereotypical view of black people and feels

stuck, demeaned somehow to their unfortunate level. Milton cannot move up the social ladder he has begun to climb with a diner that will not sell.

In the power struggle between Marius and Milton we have two mirrored, yet different viewpoints. Milton on his side of the street is still clamoring to keep his diner going, on the inside looking out, whilst on the other side of the street we see Marius literally pointing his finger from the outside to get in. In a sense this sums up the racial dilemma at this point in the book. Milton is scared and depressed on the inside, and Marius is getting angrier on the outside; they replicate each other on the stereotypes and the notion that they are both socially immobile in the present situation. The obvious symbolism of black people being held on the *outside*, while the white population is *inside,* serves as a constant reminder of the state of American racial affairs as a whole.

Juggling all the narrative voices in the chapter *Opa!* as well as the historical angle, Eugenides captures the emotions of not just one character, our (at the time, at least) hero*ine* Cal, but he catches the emotions of the people on the Detroit streets as well. As it all builds up to the impending riot on one level and the scene of Milton and his gun on another. In almost every rendition of the "cause" of the Detroit riots of 1967, the lack of affordable housing for the black population ranks high. In view of *Middlesex* this ironically parallels the move of the Stephanides family almost immediately following the riots. Ironically, the riots supply the economy that allow the Stephanides' the luxury of buying their way up the property and social ladder. Thus they escape into the safety of the middle class suburbs, leaving behind them a black population who they are further alienated from then ever before, whilst they have the luxury of moving away from any social responsibility to help their old neighborhood.

Here it is time to admire the historical specificity of Eugenides' again. He has captured the heat of the moment, both in temperature and tempers rising as the police harass the black population in those summer months that lead up to the incident at the Blind Pig and the subsequent riot. It is a jumbled polyphony that reaches out to the reader at this point:

> […] … and you can feel it in the air, the way the air has somehow been keeping score, and how at this moment in July of 1967 the tally of abuses has reached a point so that the imperative flies out from Watts and Newark to Twelfth Street in Detroit, as one girl shouts, "get yo' hands offa them, motherfucking pigs!" … and

> then there are shouts, and pushing, and a bottle just misses a policeman and shatters a squad car window behind… and back on Seminole my father is sleeping on a gun that has just been recommissioned, because the riots have begun… (237)

The style of this section is reminiscent of the chaos that ruled in Detroit at the time and that the authors of *Black Rioters* found when they examined the social factors and communication preceding the riots. In conclusion, they found this profiling of rioters:

> Physical and social deprivation, isolation from the mainstream of society and stimulus from the culture and its major carrier – the mass media – combine as they did in Detroit, Newark and Watts and all the other cities that have experienced such disturbances, to produce the potential rioter. In summary then, our data seem to indicate that the individual who is deprived, who comes to know he is deprived, who is isolated from normative social structures, who is made aware of violent methods and the rewards they provide and who is informed of a disturbance with the breakdown in law eforcement which accompanies it, will take the role of the rioter. This assertion is not unusual or unexpected. In a sense it recapitulates the obvious. (Singer, Osborn og Geschwender 116)

Ironically, this could, derogatory as it may be, easily be a description of Marius Grimes and his rise to rioting. In *Black Rioters*, sociologists and social psychologists found that few of the rioters seemed to have premeditated or organized motives in their behavior. Though Marius may have been preaching a revolution and hoping for it, his final behavior suggests more an act of passion than contemplative military strategy. Also, the role of the mass media that was greatly questioned as an instigator of riots at the time plays a role in *Middlesex* as Cal and her family watch the whole thing on *Papou's* and *Yia Yia's* little black and white screen.

In his pre-determined role as white male and family caretaker, Milton takes his stance to protect the diner, gun in hand, behind the counter as his neighborhood is torn apart. He is uninterested and unconcerned with any reasoning or righteousness behind the riot. He is solely subjective and terrified of losing the family livelihood. The plights of the rioters are not his problem, they are just making his life miserable. When Morrison from across the street rattles the doorknob, wanting cigarettes and warning Milton to go home, Milton does what members of the indignant white race does when inconvenienced by racial uprisings, we make one person of a minority answer for their entire race:

"What's the matter with you people?"

> Morrison took only a moment. "The matter with us," he said, "is you." And then he was gone. (246)

Not only does Eugenides here call Milton (and the reader) on the simple facticity of whiteness, he plays with the meta-commentary of it all as well. Ironically, Milton does not get it. For years to come he completely misses the point of this statement and holds it as absurd.

> As the years went on, Milton used it as a shield against any opinions to the contrary, and finally it grew into a kind of mantra, the explanation for why the world was going to hell, applicable not only to African Americans but to feminists and homosexuals; and then of course he liked to use it on us, whenever we were late for dinner or wore clothes that Tessie didn't approve of. (246)

The racial discourse here is at once complex and sadly simple. Milton is in complete denial of any responsibility on his shoulders for the plights of any *others*. Cal illustrates this point specifically in the narrative above. What purpose does this numbness to power and possibility of anyone but himself serve the novel? It is hard to say for the novel, perhaps it just shows a white male indignant of the riot interrupting his life. To his defense we could say that in the actual situation and in fear of losing his livelihood and the family business it is perhaps natural for Milt not to be open to any other perspective, but it hardly excuses him, especially as he continues to hide behind his own ridicule of it for the rest of his life. In the end this numbness serves Milton pretty well as he collects the insurance money and rises up and out into the suburbs, literally on the backs of the black rioters.

Though the Stephanides's are soon to rise into the upper middle classes, it is imperative to dwell on the climax of the riot first. Cal is on her bike, the lone American cowboy riding into battle to help her father and as such we have the privilege of a first person account and commentary:

> A sniper, by definition acts alone. A sniper is cowardly, sneaky; he kills from a distance, unseen. It was convenient to call them snipers, because if they weren't snipers, then what were they? The governor didn't say it, but I who watched the entire thing on my bike, saw it clearly: in Detroit, in July of 1967, what happened was nothing less than a guerrilla uprising.
> The Second American Revolution. (248)

This paragraph has the defiant tone of someone determined to share *his/her*[6] side of the story. By lifting the status of the Detroit Riot (or indeed the rioting at the time in all America) to nothing less than a guerrilla uprising, to a revolution in fact, Eugenides lifts the significance of the riot and causes the people of color were fighting for to a new level. By renaming the riot, not as an act of aggression and meaningless upheaval, but as a planned strategic revolt, our narrator (and author!) gives the riot new significance. Historically this was close to the culmination point of the African-American Civil Rights Movement and at the very beginning of the Black Power Movement. There was rioting all over America and the connotation of these events was paramount to the reception they would have in American society. Look at how the Canadian research project *Black Rioters* defined said rioters above. Though validating the black lack of rights, the narratives of history tend to paint a picture of disorganized and random uprisings, rather than the movement, the revolution that Eugenides here calls attention to.[7]

A year after the riot of Detroit, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. His plea, though always more eloquent and palatable to the white population than the savage lootings and shootings of the riots, was the same as theirs:

> I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. (King Jr.)

The dream book of Desdemona that figured only as a pun on the hopelessness of the gamblers as Lefty veered off the path earlier on, seen in the greater picture, could now be said to have foreshadowed, named and contrasted the two most famous dreams in American culture, two dreams that will forever be at odds and intertwined: the American Dream on the individual level and King's dream of equality in post-segregationist America. Hence Eugenides is always at work behind the scenes of his novel on his social project for equality, self-determination and self-identification. As such the riot holds great

[6] Feeling that our narrator(s) comes into one here with the obvious benefits of hindsight, but from a first-person visual and in knowing of the social project of this book, I felt it difficult to attribute one certain gender at one single stage in Cal's development to this voice.

[7] As such the racial revolution may also mirror the sexual revolution of the time and even the intersex movement that Cal will later have the option to partake in, as the themes of race and gender continue to intertwine in *Middlesex.*

significance in this novel. It is perhaps restating the obvious, but it is something that it seems cannot be voiced enough on the road to change in America:

> Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek. (Obama)

So with the campaign words of the current president in mind, words that could very well have spurred the riots of the late sixties on if they had been articulated then, let us take a final look into the face of the black rioter, or at his back rather, as he flings his Molotov cocktail into the Zebra Room: "As flames erupt within the diner, the arsonist shouts in an ecstatic voice: "*Opa*, motherfucker!" (249). By using the "well-known cry of Greek waiters" (249) Grimes (if that is indeed who the arsonist was) classifies Milton as the white immigrant servant that he always-already is in America. As such we are again at a crossroads of themes where the racial theme mirrors the immigrant theme and where in a machinery of whiteness neither of them have the necessary power to break free of their yokes.

Like all wars there were casualties and meaningless deaths in the Detroit Race Riot of 1967. Eugenides drives the irony of this home, not least by Morrison being shot in the head while lighting a cigarette (smoking kills!). The neighborhood was shot to pieces and ruined at last. In the end, Milton's gun did not even fire. It was, however, fire that saved him as he made his split-second decision to let his diner burn to the ground. As such it was perhaps Grimes that set him free at last. Free to rise like a phoenix from the ashes and collect on the insurance money! In keeping with the theme of unfairness that always resides so closely with whiteness, it is the whiter man that wins by sheer luck (and business sense) in the great land of opportunity in the end.

The Economy of Likeness at Last

Summing up the focal points of racial issues and whiteness in the book, we have followed the Stephanides clan in their encounters of whiteness, passing and white privilege until Cal finally "comes home" with Julie Kikuchi in the racial economy by default of his deviant gender. By always dealing with the well-known issues of racial inequality, especially whiteness, with a twist, Eugenides, within a book of historical

accuracy, gives his reader the opportunity to re-think what it is all about. Though there seems to be a project of opening the reader to an understanding of the differences in the America's racial economy, none of the Stephanides family members seem eager to take any great responsibility. Therefore the racial theme is ever present, but never resolved within the book. It could almost be called a passive theme. In leaving it as a passive theme, a story forever present beneath our main storyline, the passivity illustrates the very dynamics of whiteness. Following this logic it makes sense then that the indigenous people of America, who are the very lowest in the hierarchy of race and ethnicity, are hardly given a mention in the book. The Native Americans are, as so often in American society at large, forgotten despite the fact that the Stephanides live in *their* land; they live, after all in Indian Village, an obvious pun on the American nation as unacknowledged "occupied" Native American territory. Except in the telling asides about the whiter man's majority, like the sarcastic commentary on the street names of Indian Village being mostly white men's names there are just a few mentions of indigenous American stereotypes within the novel. For instance, the commentary on Dr. Phil's wife Rosalee's knowledge of how to take advantage of the welfare system: "Her Appalachian childhood had acquainted her with government assistance, and she was a whiz with Medicaid forms" (283) and the truck driver Cal hitches his first ride with when he runs away: "I pick up a lot of Injuns when I drive out west. Those are some of the craziest motherfuckers I ever heard." (447). So despite the echo of the white man's fear of "Injuns" as he treks west (reminiscent of the settlers' fear of the Indian savages), Native Americans are practically invisible in *Middlesex* demonstrating the barely visible blip of their existence on the radars of white middle-class Americans like the Stephanides'.

The Stepanides family brushes shoulders, or locks horns even, with the issues of whiteness at key historical points in the book, but the family members never take any action to do anything about it. *Middlesex* deals with whiteness in much the same way that it exists in our society. Eugenides acquaints us gradually with the concept, always careful not to pin us down to redundant white guilt, but rather letting us experience the reactions of the characters at our safe reading distance. By distancing ourselves, the reader can bear the silent accusations of white privilege and social responsibility that seem to hover beneath the surface of our story as we watch Desdemona's displacement of her own guilt

and her martyred embrace of being a "blue-eyed devil". Similarly we can watch the injustice of Milton's collection of the insurance money without ever thinking about the seesaw of this situation as he himself teetered to the top while the black rioters fell right back down to the bottom. Milton's self-involved denial is absolute as he for the rest of his life purposely swerves clear of the insight so readily available to him in the mantra he adopted from Morrison: "The matter with us is you." (246) All of this insight is then the readers' to incorporate and carry, as whatever points we may have missed are readily available in the meta-commentary of our well-educated narrator.

In my opinion, Eugenides manages to steer clear of the problems of whiteness studies that have been pointed out by academics such as Robyn Wiegman.

> Far from operating as the opposite or resistant counter to the universal, then, the particular is the necessary contradiction that affords to white power its historical and political elasticity. In this context, the political project for the study of whiteness entails not simply rendering whiteness particular but engaging with the ways that being particular will not divest whiteness of its universal epistemological power. (Wiegman 149-150)

Essentially, Wiegman holds up a necessary looking glass to whiteness studies lest we all get carried away that there is a place for the white role in the field of minority studies, saying that it is important that whiteness studies resists becoming self-involved to such an extent that it forgets its origin in the field of ethnic studies. Whiteness after all exists in a relational economy adjacent to blackness. Though Eugenides plays with the boundaries and the crossings of these through opposite notions of passing and identity plagiarism, he never forgets the binary aspect of these relations. Neither does he ever let us forget that the teaching of our parents (and our grandparents) is the starting point of all our racial understanding:

> Up until that night, our neighborhood's basic feeling about our fellow Negro citizens could be summed up in something Tessie said after watching Sidney Poitier's performance in *To Sir with Love*, which opened a month after the riots. She said, "You see, they can speak perfectly normal if they want." That was how we felt. (Even me back then, I won't deny it, because we're all children of our parents.) We were ready to accept the Negroes. We weren't prejudiced against them. We wanted to include them in our society *if they would only act normal!* (240)

This blatant othering, this ignorant act of well-meaning everyday racism as displayed by Tessie is the heart of not only whiteness, but of the gendered oppression of the novel as well. As Cal/lie admits "even me back then", we sense his/her kinship with the minority that must endure the majority's exasperation at why indeterminate *others* cannot just be *normal.* Here again, Eugenides problematizes the economics of mirrored oppressions always struggling in a hierarchy based on inequality, discrimination and social immobility.

Having introduced the gun in the beginning of this chapter, I cannot leave the racial theme without saying where in the novel "the gun" finally fires. Eugenides set the gun theme up to be one of race and violence and instead it turned out to be one of gender. As I demonstrated in the first chapter of my thesis, fear and brutality are important instigators in the suppression and "sexual correction" of intersex persons hence these methods mirror the acts of suppressing non-white people as well.

> Chekhov was right. If there's a gun on the wall, it's got to go off. In real life, however, you never know where the gun is hanging. The gun my father kept under his pillow never fired a shot. The rifle over the Object's mantel never did either. But in the emergency room things were different. There was no smoke, no gunpowder smell, absolutely no sound at all. Only the way the doctor and nurse reacted made it clear that my body lived up to the narrative requirements. (396)

Yet again, the mirroring of themes in *Middlesex* tie the themes of oppression ever closer together, as this act of transporting the awaited *climax* of the racial theme to the one of gender demonstrates. The two most blatant acts of foreshadowing in *Middlesex* then, the novel's first sentence and the paraphrasing of Chekhov, lead to the same moment, the moment where Cal/lie must finally face that there is something different about his/her biological makeup and his/her gendered self.

The final love scene between Cal and Julie Kikuchi functions like a coming of age scene in the Bildungsroman of 42-year-old male Cal, as we have gathered a great deal of information about Cal's personal thoughts and feelings about the racial history of America. We also know of the kinship between gendered and racialized identity options. As long as the majority holds the power of definition, the road to self-definition is not yet fully open. Therefore it is within the safety of private spaces or minority communities that one can dare to fully unveil oneself as a true subject of multiple and/or indeterminate

identity. It seems somehow more *natural* and equal then that the final acceptance of Cal as a whole and sexual person comes in melting together with Japanese-American Julie. Cal's insecurity of gender, with the entire underlying history of oppression of intersex individuals, mirrors Julie's insecurity about the significance of her racial *otherness*, as her otherness is potent with the subsequent underlying themes of oppression that Asian Americans have been subjected to, especially in the 20th century and especially Japanese Americans in the war camps of World War II. In the end they cling together in the safety and economy of being each other's "last stop".

Leading by example then, Cal plunges into the unknown territory of love, thereby dispelling all the boundaries of race, gender and sexuality in his shared "unthinking" of all these structures with Julie Kikuchi:

> It was like jumping into cold water. You had to do it without thinking too much. We got under the covers and held each other, petrified, happy.
> "I might be your last stop, too," I said, clinging to her. "Did you ever think of that?"
> And Julie Kikuchi answered, "It crossed my mind." (514)

This is where we leave Cal at last (in the present tense of the tale at least), finally able to experience the love of an*other* without fear. Though it is not explicit, the final intertwining of two themes with the bodies of the protagonist and his beloved, leave us hopeful and empowered to understand the mechanisms that govern and inhibit them, and therefore us. There may well be a place beyond the pre-determined definition of minorities (both racial and gendered) that can open itself up to the experience of not only the humanity of the other, but also the humanity of oneself. Even if one will not yet be accepted by the majority or the world at large there can exist private spaces where one will be accepted and therefore may also be better equipped to accept oneself. For in the end is that not why they cling together, Cal and Julie, as they in the loving gaze of each other both try to release their own self-discrimination; the internalized panoptic *othering* of their own self? Of the idea that one of them is the other's last stop?

Chapter 3: Immigration Identity and Americanization in *Middlesex*

In the Stephanides family saga, the theme of immigration is ever prevalent, creating an important echo of Cal's main theme of identity migration:

> My grandparents had fled their home because of a war. Now, some fifty-two years later, I was fleeing myself. I felt that I was saving myself just as definitively. I was fleeing without much money in my pocket and under the alias of my new gender. A ship didn't carry me across the ocean; instead a series of cars conveyed me across a continent. I was becoming a new person, too, just like Lefty and Desdemona, and I didn't know what would happen to me in this new world to which I'd come. (443)

This citation from the book represents the most overt connection of these themes. By being so direct in the mirroring of emotion and possibilities of identity formation, or re-formation rather, that exists throughout *Middlesex*, these more than parallel themes open up to be interpreted from a similar perspective. Thus, much as he creates correlations between the experiences of his characters, Eugenides also opens up to the interpretation of the similarities in the power plays and structures that govern identity formation as a whole in modern American society. Through the mirrored events of grandparents and grandchild fleeing, becoming refugees in order to reinvent themselves, in order to live simply as they *are*, we are made aware not only of how powerful the constructs that govern *possible* or acceptable identities at any given time are, we are also made aware of how this is connected to geography, government, societal norms and laws. History, of course, also plays an important part here, as we must not forget that what turns out to be available to one generation would never have been possible for another.

Drawing on Althusser's work on ideology and his belief that societies always try to create individuals in their own image, I will try to show the mechanics of making *Americans* as it has existed in America throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, and as the characters of *Middlesex* are subjected to it. I will also comment on the hierarchies and structures that interpellate who, at any given time, is befitting the title of American and who is not.

In my interpretation and close reading of immigration and how it pertains to identity formation in *Middlesex,* I will concentrate on the prolonged process of immigration through assimilation as experienced by the Stephanides family through three generations. I will comment on the larger picture of American immigration and assimilation policy and the enforcement of such, as there is much social commentary in *Middlesex* on these subjects. Thereby linking the theme of immigration to the American Dream and question the true possibilities of *self-made* success that this is meant to represent, connecting to the overarching theme of self-invention and self-identification in the novel and the questions and hindrances of such. Furthermore I will come back to the class theme that I touched lightly on in my chapter on race and whiteness, as transcendence of class (especially for immigrants like the Stephanides) seems ever linked to the wishy-washy term of ethnicity and an unfortunate hurdle in the pursuit of true American-ness.

The Re-Invention of Immigrant Brother and Sister as American Husband and Wife

More than anything it was the chaos and dire circumstances of the Greek refugees of Turkey that caused Lefty and Desdemona to embark on their journey to America. However, it was these very circumstances that awarded them the opportunity to create new identities, making it possible for them to lead a long married life despite being siblings. Though their need for re-invention surpasses that of most refugees or immigrants, it does simultaneously emphasize the necessity for many of circumventing the categorization that dominated the immigration laws of the time.

Despite the occasion for someone's emigration, there was no guarantee of being accepted into America when you first arrived. According to Foucault, it is the constructs of power within a given society that determine what is sexually deviant and what is not, what is acceptable and what can not be tolerated. Incest is still *not* tolerated in most countries.[8] In *Entry Denied* Eithne Luibhéid "identifies the immigration control apparatus

[8] I wish to state that I do not think that Eugenides on any level is trying to make a case for the acceptance of incest as something that should be ethically normative in our society. I think he

as a key site for the production and reproduction of sexual categories and identities, and norms within relations of inequality." (Luibhéid x) Following this logic, it is precisely on the doorstep to America that the definitions of what is *acceptable* within America are most specifically enforced. On the surface it seems simple enough, especially if you belong to a *safe* majority; if you fit in, you get in. However it is important to remember that the actual requirements are shaped by the policies that make them, as well as the interpretation of these by immigration authorities. According to Luibhéid then, it is the enforcement of these categorizations, the interpretations and activation of such categories, that determine how they will be further perpetuated within the society they govern. If you are stamped or turned away in immigration, you are not only hailed as something you may not wish to be, an undesirable of some kind, you also risk becoming an outcast of not only said society, but all further societies that you attempt to enter into. In short you risk damage from which you may never be able to redeem yourself. Not only does this branding burn the individual that is turned away, it carries with it the contagious disease of interpellation where others like you or similar to you risk being categorized in the same way.

The Stephanides family, as such, exemplifies several of the many different categories of persecution that lead to forced emigration and subsequent denied immigration: ethnicity, gender and sexual preference. Contextualizing this within the novel: cousin Sourmelina fled to heterosexual marriage in America with her over-generous dowry, having brought shame on her family by luring a mother of two into an adulterous lesbian relationship. It is important to note here that though the radars of immigration were not yet on the lookout for female sexual deviants (female sexual categorization was still largely undermined and ignored at the time), if Sourmelina had been identified as a lesbian upon entry to the United States, she would not have been allowed in. However sweet the courtship between Lefty and Desdemona, through their incestuous relations, they are engaged in an act of sexual deviancy that has been condemned in most societies and certainly all religions since the beginning of time. If

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simply allows for the complexity of conditions that can lead to such choices. In the case of *Middlesex* this choice echoes much Greek drama and causes great torment to several of the novel's characters and lays the premise for such themes as Desdemona's guilt, Lefty's fall from grace, Zizmo's rage and, of course, Cal's biology.

they had ever been found out they would have been in violation of not only moral but judicial laws as well. Thus they lived in fear, especially Desdemona.

If we view Cal's expatriate diplomat life in a similar light, then we must first remember that most modern immigration points and passport issuers only accept two genders, male or female. This means that despite a growing number of intersex and trans people in the world, many of who are "between" genders and some who wish to remain so, one still has to qualify for the binary when travelling. Hence without the chosen "maleness" of Cal and his passport designation, he would not have been able to have his career, much less enjoy the luxuries of expatriate living. It would be safe to assume also, that without the diplomatic immunity of his passport that further protects him from any unwanted investigation or probing, it would have been very difficult for Cal to travel to the extent he does.

Beyond the subject of immigration policy and sexual indeterminacy or deviancy dwells Lefty and Desdemona's origin in Asia Minor, a cradle as it were of the Orientalism made famous in critical theory by Edward W. Said. Smyrna was a prosperous harbor largely colonized by various Western European expatriates who idealized the Orient as they "civilized" it and reaped its shippable produce. Citing T.S Eliot's poem "The Waste Land", Eugenides sets the mood, as well as the historical significance and, through the mention of his own last name in the poem, the meta-significance and echoing of the author's presence as well as the story's autobiographical tendencies. Hence, Smyrna comes alive for us as "the most cosmopolitan city in the Near East" (50), that hybrid of Western and Eastern civilizations (echoing, of course, the hybrid gender and ambassadorial class of Cal him/herself):

> Homer was born there, and Aristotle Onassis. In Smyrna, East and West, opera and *politakia*, violin and *zourna*, piano and *daouli* blended as tastefully as did the rose petals and honey in the local pastries. (50)

Though Desdemona seemed little more than a silk-farming peasant girl on the side of Mount Olympus, she and Lefty were of good family. Had their parents not been killed in the Greek invasion a few years earlier, Lefty would have finished his university education. It is his carriage as an educated man, rather than his shaky knowledge of French, that secures their passage out of Smyrna as it burns. Though the author does not

dwell on it for long, these scenes include commentary on the colonialist lack of initiative to help the Greeks being slaughtered. As the Stephanides brother and sister slept on the docks with the other refugees, the British officers drank brandy and talked about them from the on-deck safety of their warships:

> "Will we be evacuating refugees, sir?"
> "Our orders are to protect British property and citizens."
> "But surely, sir, if the Turks arrive and there's a massacre…"
> "There's nothing we can do about it, Phillips. I've spent years in the Near East. The one lesson I've learned is that there is nothing you can do with these people. Nothing at all! The Turks are the best of the lot. The Armenian I liken to the Jew. Deficient moral and intellectual character. As for the Greeks, well, look at them. They've burned down the whole country and now they swarm in here crying for help. Nice cigar, what?"
> "Awfully good, sir."
> "Smyrna tobacco. Finest in the world. Brings a tear to my eyes, Phillips, the thought of all that tobacco lying in those warehouses out there."(52)

The "note of sarcasm" in Phillips voice a moment later could just as well belong to our narrator or author even, as the British Major's ability to look right past the humanity of the suffering masses on the docks, while tearing up at the idea of the loss of fine tobacco, captures the nature of colonialism *to a tee*, as they say. The whole idea of colonialism was a worldwide search for resources and trade possibilities, after all. The romanticism of oriental carpets and arts was only as deep as the firm belief that these *others* were less civilized and lesser human beings than the colonists. Thus, the unabashed and discriminating *othering* by Major Arthur Maxwell of His Majesty's Marines simply serves to set the book in the greater context of post-colonialism, placing the colonialist's impact on the categorization of the world and the importance of race, ethnicity and citizenship in times of war within the semiotics of the novel.

As a consequence, on their way to America, Desdemona and Lefty put on one performance after the next, some out of necessity and others to fool themselves. First they fake French citizenship to get out of the burning city. This is followed by Greek citizenship "granted under the condition that [sic] [they] leave the country immediately". The Greek government at the time would be trying to dissuade as many refugees as possible, better to send them away with as little fuss as possible, rather than deal with the indeterminacy of their citizenship as Greeks under Turkish rule. On board the ship to

America, Desdemona and Lefty play out the first scenes of the greatest performance of their lives, as the enactment of their romance and new identities begin:

> Travelling made it easier. Sailing across the ocean among half a thousand perfect strangers conveyed an anonymity in which my grandparents could re-create themselves. The driving spirit on the *Giulia* was self-transformation. Staring out to sea, tobacco farmers imagined themselves as racecar drivers, silk dyers as Wall Street tycoons, millinery girls as fan dancer in the *Ziegfield Follies.* Gray ocean stretched in all directions. Europe and Asia Minor were dead behind them. Ahead lay America and new horizons. (68)

America as a land of opportunity seemed eminent to all as they travelled to the land of dreams where anyone could be anything. This idealist view of America seemed to be largely upheld by all the immigrants aboard the ship, though they were simultaneously aware of the legislations of immigration rules as, "They spent what remained of their honeymoon on deck, learning how to finagle their way through Ellis Island". (73) As they prepared to re-invent themselves and fulfill their dreams, the passengers also crammed in a great collective effort to pass the immigration exams of literacy, health and qualified determinacy. The fine lines in *Middlesex's* between innocent deceit and necessary finagling past port authorities draws attention to the potential redundancy of many of the rules and categories of immigration.

Luckily, Lefty and Desdemona passed all the health and literacy exams, no one caught a whiff of incestuous relations and if it had not been for the restriction of parasites and the well-meaning assimilative hair cuts taking place in the YWCA tent, Desdemona would have come through customs unscathed. Instead she had been de-braided and forced to dump the silkworm eggs that she had carried so carefully all the way from Bithynios and that could have awarded them a livelihood in America.

In sharp contrast to her very americanized and scandalously car-driving cousin Sourmelina, Desdemona does not "want to look like an *Amerikhanidha*". (82) The contrast in personality and pursuit (or lack thereof) of American freedom does not deter the cousins' close friendship (they are after all the keepers of each others scandalous secrets and as such risk similar persecution if found out) as Lefty and Desdemona settle in to American life with Lina and her dark-skinned husband, Jimmy Zizmo.

The Melting Pot of the Detroit Automobile Industry

As Lefty takes his first streetcar ride to work at the Ford factory, it is a ride through Detroit of 1922. Racial segregation was a part of the American way and though race is not an explicit theme in this chapter, Eugenides takes great care to make sure to depict the African American workers riding on the outside of the tram and having the most dangerous and detrimental jobs at the factory. In the introductory paragraph of the chapter "Henry Ford's English-Language Melting Pot" the history of Detroit has been casually recounted along with the matter-of-fact mention that "way, way back, when the city was just a piece of stolen Indian land […]" (79). Though the main theme of this chapter is industrialization and the consequent assimilation practices as they were practiced on immigrants wanting to work in the factories, this story is conceptualized in the greater picture of traditional discrimination and subjugation of *others* as it has been practiced throughout American history. The assimilation and industrialization practices of the 1920s, therefore, fall into a long line of acts of dehumanization defined by the coercive and discriminatory manners in which they were carried out.

Even before Lefty and Desdemona arrived in America, our narrator had shared with us the "inferiority" of the Southern and Eastern Europeans, preparing us for the hierarchy of America as it would impact them. Little could prepare anyone for the belittlement of the melting pot at Ford's factory. It is important here to contextualize the immigrant identities of our protagonist's grand parents. They would have counted as "new immigrants". In 1911 (just 11 years prior to their arrival) The Dillingham Commission had "advanced a conceptual dichotomy that had profound influence in the ensuing debate. It characterized northern and western European immigrants as constitutive of 'old immigration', reserving the appellation 'new immigration' for migrants from southern and eastern Europe; these categories were grounded in the significant shift in the source of immigrants from the nineteenth century." (King 59) Essentially this meant that to be American was being defined as culturally "white" and in keeping with the colonialist powers of old Europe. Ensuing this, the "new immigrants" were succumbed to an assimilation process destined to purge them of deviant cultural (often mistakenly referred to as racial at the time) heritage. Hence Lefty and his

generation were treated as less intelligent and believed to be unable to conform to true Americanism as this "[…] rested on a model of the United States' dominant ethnic identity as an Anglo-Saxon one, traceable to the English settlers and subsequent northern European immigrants. It was not a melting-pot assimilationist model – despite rhetoric to the contrary – since there were clear views about who should be assimilated and who not." (King 81)

Thus Lefty's journey, despite his excellent grades in English class, through the assimilation factory of the Ford melting pot was doomed from the beginning. The only one truly savvy to the futility of Lefty's efforts to become Americanized was Jimmy Zismo: "They want to turn you into a Protestant. Resist!" (102)

As readers we are taken through the "dehumanization" of Lefty on the factory assembly line[9]; to the grueling assimilationist schooling after hours in the melting pot English classes; followed by the demeaning and un-scheduled home visits and "hygiene instruction" from the Ford Sociological Department:

> Now the short one was climbing the stairs. He invaded my grandparents' bedroom and inspected the linens. He stepped into the bathroom and examined the toilet seat.
> "From now on, use this," the tall one said. "It is dentrifice. Here's a new toothbrush."
> Disconcerted, my grandfather took the items. "We come from Bursa," he explained. "It's a big city."
> "Brush along the gum lines. Up on the bottoms and down on the tops. Two minutes morning and night. Let's see. Give it a try."
> "We are civilized people."
> "Do I understand you to be refusing hygiene instruction?" (101)

The lack of communication here is typically patronizing and in keeping with the power structures of the situation. It does not even behoove the hygiene instructors to contemplate whether Lefty could have the intelligence or human decency to already know how to brush his teeth. Furthermore the inspection is obviously designed to find fault, to do what they can to prove their system right. As such this is yet again a

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[9] I find these early *Modern Times* type scenes, especially with the narrator's commentary on the de-humanization of workers of that era, in keeping with the idea of Lefty as a movie star type with his thin moustache and baggy suits. Though he did try his best as an industrial worker, this connotation is further enforced throughout the novel as Cal/lie several times refers to his/her silent grandfather as Chaplinesque.

commentary on the ever-returning theme of systemic categorization and the subsequent discrimination it carries out. This echoes the segregated system of “separate but equal” that was enforced on the black population throughout the 20th century, as well as echoing the system of so-called “scientific” categorization that Dr. Luce used in his confident categorization of Cal as indisputably female many years later. I will return to these themes later on and turn first to the coinciding conception of Cal’s father Milton with his/her grandfather’s rebirth as an American in the giant melting pot of his English class pageant.

As the acuteness of smell becomes ever more ubiquitous to both Desdemona and Lina, their coinciding pregnancies offer an important sub-theme to the melting pot enactment of immigrant men shedding their cultural origins as they are stuffed together and stirred around by the giant spoons of their English teachers. As Lefty *thinks* he is becoming an American: “feeling thoroughly American as he pulls on his blue wool trousers and jacket. In his mouth: thirty-two teeth brushed in the American manner. His underarms: liberally sprinkled with American deodorant” (104), his wife is bearing their son who will be *born* automatically into American citizenship.

Just as the American Dream seems within grasp, the wool is unrolled from Lefty’s eyes. The Sociological Department finally found what they needed to designate Lefty undesirable: his relationship with Jimmy Zizmo. Using Jimmy’s police record as their excuse, Lefty is handed the pink slip and fired from the Ford factory. It is after all, not for Lefty to decide whether he is or can be American; this game of chance is left up to the ones wielding the rulebook.

There are several turning points of unfairness in *Middlesex*. Echoing perhaps the futility of raging against the machinery of power and the discrimination of their categorizations and enforcements of such, throughout the novel Lefty continues to fall to the bottom every time it seems he is on his way to the top. This linked to his gambling weakness seems to designate him from the very beginning as not only unlucky, but also destined to fail.

At the opening of this chapter of Book Two in *Middlesex*, there is a quote by Calvin Coolidge: “Everyone who builds a factory builds a temple.” (79) This can be seen as an echo of the institutionalization of power and the panoptic control mechanisms they

entail. The Ford factory, after all, is just as much an advocates of ideology and Americanism as it is a shining example of industrial success and splendor. Thematically the Coolidge citation also foreshadows the temple and silk factory that will be invented by Jimmy Zizmo as Fard later on. As the only one truly and contemporarily aware of the systems of power in American society, Jimmy never hesitates to take advantage of them.

Cast out by the system and facing fatherhood, Lefty subsequently risks his American citizenship and joins Jimmy in his “rum-running operation”. The American ideal of the self-made man hardly refers to illegal opportunists like Zizmo, though it well could. Where else does one find such entrepreneurial skill, such determination to succeed, as in the necessary rule-bending enterprises brought on by need? It is this same enterprise (interlocking with his old dream of opening a casino) that spurs Lefty to open the Zebra Room speakeasy in the basement of the house on Hurlbut Street after Zizmo’s dramatic disappearance: “Just like ice cracks, lives crack, too. Personalities. Identities. Jimmy Zizmo, crouching over the Packard’s wheel, has already changed past understanding.” (125) As Zizmo hurtles over the ice to reinvent himself yet again, Lefty takes full advantage of his legacy and the American Prohibition period.

It seems all too easy to interpret this as commentary on the opportunism at once purported (if it is done right) and condemned (if it is done wrong) by advocates of the American Dream. Is there not much shady history in the stories of many self-made men of America? The rise to power does, in most fiction at least, all too often entail cutting some corners and even stepping over a few corpses. Though Lefty himself (to use the film jargon of American mobsters) keeps his nose clean and his business small, making sure to “go legit” as soon as the opportunity arises, the fact remains that it is his *Americanization* at the hands of the ruthless Jimmy Zizmo that ends up paving his way into American society.

Milton of Hercules Hot Dogs™: An All-American Self-Made Man

Even in the courting scenes of Milton wooing Tessie our narrator does not hesitate to poke fun at Milton’s capitalist streak: “It’s impossible to imagine my father, who in my experience was aroused mainly by the lowering of interest rates, suffering acute,

adolescent passions of the flesh." (173) Our narrator takes great pains to define the Americanisms of both Milton and Tessie. Not only is Milton a full-fledged capitalist, he also "possessed a flinty self-confidence that protected him like a shell from the world's assaults". (174) Like the recessive genes that would make Cal what s/he is, the Greek "genes" of Tessie and Milton seem to have skipped a generation, making them the first breed of wholesome American teenagers in the Stephanides family: "Tessie had so-called all-American looks, and this was certainly part of what attracted my father." (174)

No other character in the book seems quite as determined to epitomize the cliché of the American man as Milton. From his Boy Scout uniform to his service uniform he seems dedicated to incorporating the American Spirit in every way. In this he perpetuates more than most the negative myths of dangerous *others* and therefore his own heritage. Categorizing Father Mike as pretty much an old world schmuck and mocking him for his old-country choice of joining the clerical profession, Milton boasts:

> "I mean that over in the old country people aren't too well educated," Milton said. "They'll believe whatever stories the priests tell them. Here it's different. You can go to college and learn to think for yourself." (179)

Ironically, Milton is oblivious to his own indoctrination at the very hands of his American education. He is completely unaware that like the orthodox institution that governs Father Mike, he himself is subjugated to the powers of the American institutions that govern him. Though he joined the Navy to get away from his broken heart, Milton remains oblivious to the institutionalization that he undergoes first in his initial training and later at the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Our ever-present narrator, however, is well aware of how the G.I. life-style shaped Milton:

> The Navy gave him his love of sailing and his aversion to waiting in lines. Even then his politics were being formed, his anti-communism, his distrust of the Russians. Ports of call in Africa and Southeast Asia were already forging his beliefs about racial IQ levels. From the social snubs of his commanding officers, he was picking up his hatred of Eastern liberals and the Ivy League at the same time as he was falling in love with Brooks Brothers clothing. (200)

In many ways this passage on the formation of Milton captures his very essence and all that he symbolizes in the book. With the self-assured knowledge of knowing what is what, who is who and what they mean to him, Milton feels set out to take on the world.

Leaving the army, he sets out to accomplish his dream. With little or no regard for the fact that he is casting his own father to the curb in early retirement, or Lefty's very lucid warnings that the neighborhood is no longer a good starting point for anyone's business, Milton takes over the Zebra Room and turns it into a diner. With his G.I. loan he gives the place a complete makeover and giddy with initial success, Tessie and Milton make their first move up the social ladder into their big middle-class home in Indian Village.

Sadly, as Milton takes his family up into the whiter reaches of American society, Lefty is already spiraling downwards as he starts his gambling in the dark and musty backrooms in the old neighborhood. This obvious allusion to the destinies of black and white, paired with the mirrored dichotomies of loss and gain, sets the scene for the riots to come. Soon Lefty and Desdemona will be as destitute as their black neighbors and wholly dependent on their great white American son. Milton, on the other hand, stops for no one, in his egoistical pursuit of his own chain of restaurants.

Though Hurlbut was middle-class and "white" when Desdemona and Lefty arrived there, it no longer is, and had they not had to move in with Milton and his family, they would have been left back in the working class once more. It seems ironic that as Milton becomes more and more American, his parents seem to counteract this by embracing their Greek memories: "Up in the attic, Desdemona and Lefty came back to where they started." (209) In keeping with our narrator's love of the circular, especially in storytelling, so are also Desdemona and Lefty, on their way to coming full circle to their attic mountaintop, surrounded by the breeze and colorful birds of their childhood.

As Cal is born and moves into childhood, Milton becomes entrenched in his business. Parodically, he plays out the distant American father figure of the 50's and 60's, always thinking about work from behind his newspaper. A thorough believer in the American identity, Milton forgets "the United States's self-image as a white nation, unenthusiastic about nonwhite immigrants and with a particular conception of assimilation, derived from the Americanization idea of the Anglo-Saxon identity" (King 224). On his staunch road to self-realization, Milton seems unconcerned about the fact that he is denouncing most of his heritage on the way.

I will not dwell on the Detroit Riot of 1967 here as I dealt with it extensively in my chapter on race and whiteness, but I will bring to attention yet again, the irony of Milton's luck:

> Shameful as it is to say, the riots were the best thing that ever happened to us. Overnight we went from being a family desperately trying to stay in the middle class to on with hopes of sneaking into the upper, or at least upper-middle. (252)

As our narrator points out, Milton was not singularly responsible for his rise to wealth. He would never have had the funding to start his chain of Hercules Hot Dogs™ if it had not been for lady luck and two of the people he hurdled over on his way up the social ladder, namely Marius Grimes who torched the diner and Lefty who, having survived an inferno once, had made sure never to come out of another one penniless. Because of this, we are reminded, as we were with Lefty's first illegal speakeasy, that there are many skeletons in the closets of the American Dream. Most of the time we are standing on someone else's shoulders.

There are several allusions to Milton's "hard shell" in *Middlesex.* This could simply be a euphemism for pig headedness, though it is almost admirable how Milton managed even to take what he proclaimed the absurdity of Morrison's accusation and "used it as a shield against any opinions to the contrary, and finally it grew into a kind of mantra, the explanation for why the world was going to hell, applicable not only to African Americans but to feminists and homosexuals" (246). Milton's stubborn shell is what keeps him moving forward and at the same time it is what protects him from the complexities of the world. To Milton the world exists in simple binaries of right/wrong, white/black and American/un-American.

Even when faced with the discriminatory "point system" while house viewing in Grosse Pointe: "they found that the houses suddenly went off the market, or were sold, or doubled in price." (254), or when the "old immigrant" (i.e. Mayflower-type) ideals of the realtors work against him, Milton self-satisfyingly pulls his all-American trump card and pays cold hard cash.

Real estate has been a theme throughout the history of America, since the first settlers laid claim to the first land. Since then it has been employed as a means of suppression in the segregation that made it so difficult for the black population to become

land owners, as well as in the home ownership demands put on "new immigrants" on their road towards citizenship. Therefore as Milton moves up the social ladder by acquiring the least desirable home in Grosse Pointe, he is well aware of the discrimination of him and his family, he just chooses to ignore it, bullying his way past as he always has. Our narrator's comment on "the dark, cypress shrouded house where the one Jewish family lived (having also paid cash)" (262) creates a connection in the mirrored oppressions and ascensions into whiteness between the Greek American family and their Jewish neighbors. This juxtaposition of the Jew as oppressed, yet white, is reminiscent of Fanon's commentary on the racial hierarchy of interpellation:

> The Jew and I: Since I was not satisfied to be racialized, by a lucky turn of fate I was humanized. I joined the Jew, my brother in misery. […] It was my philosophy professor, a native of Antilles, who recalled the fact to me one day: "Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you." (Fanon 132)

Though Fanon goes on to say that it was not until later that he became aware that as a black man, because of his blackness he would never equal the Jew, who for all time, though *othered,* dehumanized and persecuted on so many occasions could still always, when weighed on the binary scales of black and white, have the benefit of being some shade of white. Thus the Stephanides' are climbing the sticky web of whiteness. They will never be quite white enough, but in the end the neighborhood will rub off on them, securing them, by association with the Anglo-Saxons, not with the Jewish or other "ethnic" families, the opportunity of more white privilege than ever before. As for the Grossingers of Grosse Pointe: "Though faithful to their religion, the Grossingers were midwestern Jews, low-key and assimilationist. They hid behind their wall of cypresses and at Christmas put up a Santa Claus along with lights." (281) In the privilege of this upper middle-class neighborhood it seems even the Jews were determined not to dent the façade of faux protestant piety. Hailing the "old immigrants" for the frauds they were, with their "secret wish […] to be not Midwesterners but Easterners" (296), would have done them all harm as it would have disturbed the norms.

Milton, persistent as always, does become a financial success with his chain of hot dog stands. As such, he epitomizes the capitalism of the American Dream. He becomes a wealthy self-made man. Though Milton's flaws cost him as well. A true American, as the

Turks invaded Cyprus: "Forced to choose between his native land and his ancestral one, he didn't hesitate." (363) As a consequence the ties to the old neighborhood were almost severed as Milton took the American side, his American way, forsaking many old friendships. For the rest of his life, Milton remained first and foremost a businessman, taking care of business even after Callie disappeared. It is perhaps in homage to his capitalism that he clings to the false hopes of "buying" his daughter back for a ransom. The car chase after Father Mike to Canada, reminiscent of the border-crossing possibilities of freedom and criminal re-invention fully exploited by the generation before them, fills Milton only with dread and fear of the unknown: "He had been confident of bringing Father Mike to justice in the U.S. courts. But who knew what would happen once he got to Canada? Canada with its pacifism and socialized medicine!" (507) As a final pun on the Republican American pride (or vanity) of Milton he dies in vain in Canada on a wild goose chase to secure his daughter, the only way he knew how. Financially. As Milton dies our narrator tells us:

> He got out before Chapter Eleven, taking over the family business, ran it into the ground in less than five years. […] He got out before the draining of the bank accounts and the jacking up of credit cards. Before Tessie was forced to sell Middlesex and move down to Florida with Aunt Zo. […] Milton got out before many of the things that I will not include in this story, because they are the common tragedies of American life, and as such do not fit in this singular and uncommon record. (512)

In a way, Milton dies at the peak of his American Dream. Paradoxically, Milton's run-away daughter returns (irrespective of his struggles to retrieve her) as his prodigal son just in time to guard the doorway on the day of his funeral. Hardly anyone turns up at the service and like so many men dedicated to capitalism he is laid to rest with few friends, unable to take any of the worldly goods he has fought so hard for with him. In his comment on Milton's death above, our narrator addresses the irony that for the ever normative-seeking Milton even the American Dream turns out to be binary. Coming full circle, Milton represents, not only the American Dream, but also its inevitable darker side, the American Tragedy, as he was always-already materialist, lonely and destined to fall, even post-humously.

The Prep-School Education of Callie and How Finally it Classed Cal

In the family epic of the Stephanides clan, Cal/lie[10] is the last evolutionary step from refugee and immigrant identity to becoming a true American. Much as *Middlesex* is a historical drama, it is also a Bildungsroman and the coming of age of Cal/lie entails more than the sexual or gender issues s/he goes through in his/her act of becoming. In keeping with the fluidity of identity as expressed in the gender chapter of this thesis, I will discuss Cal/lie's performativity of class.

It is Milton's fear of the *other,* his idea of the nameless, but destructive consequences of Judge Roth's active desegregating of Detroit schools by busing that puts Callie in a private all girls' school in the first place. Here our narrator takes us on a rambling grand tour of this wannabe English prep school of the American Midwestern suburbs, taking time for asides and snide remarks on all that bubbled beneath the pristine surface of this faux antiquarian educational facility. The closeted co-habitating school founders of Miss Baker and Miss Inglis are poignantly mentioned, as well as the "taxonomy" of the school's locker room. Here we find the Charm Bracelets at the top of the hierarchy. These girls were "the rulers of my new school. They'd been to Baker & Inglis since kindergarten. Since pre-kindergarten! They lived near the water and had grown up, like all Grosse Pointers, pretending that our shallow lake was no lake at all but actually the ocean." (296)

These grandiose delusions, as the Charm Bracelets pretend to be Mayflower descendants, rather then of "thrifty industrialist" stock, are upheld by all, and like all ridiculous societally constructed norms, everyone plays along. Next in line are the unremarkable Kilt Pins, who lack the glamour and grace of the Charm Bracelets and hence Cal "cannot remember any of their names" (298). Callie, it turns out, belongs to the "ethnic" girls. As such, it seems her so-called ascension of class has cost her whiteness. Here again we are reminded that the American ideal is WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant). Anything less, and you belong to the *other*.

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[10] I revert here to the combined gender denomination of our protagonist as in the act of becoming there is movement through a series of gender identities. I will, however, maintain the singular gender where Cal/lie him/herself is clear in his/her gender at the time.

> Until we came to Baker & Inglis my friends and I had always felt completely American. But now the Bracelets' upturned noses suggested that there was another America to which we could never gain admittance. All of a sudden America wasn't about hamburgers and hot rods anymore. It was about the *Mayflower* and Plymouth Rock. It was about something that had happened for two minutes four hundred years ago, instead of everything that had happened since. Instead of everything that was happening now! (298-299)

Here, in *Middlesex* we finally find the ruling class of America. Ironically, the perpetrators and coercers of the "true" and "real" American ideal are schoolgirls brought up on a false romanticized version of the first settlers. Much as these British pretenses in the boring suburbs of Detroit are hilarious, however, these girls have the bearing and power reminiscent of the colonialists themselves. Hence they rule the school, like they rule much of American society and continue to keep the *others* safely at bay.

Paralleling Callie beginning her new life at the posh school, her brother Chapter Eleven goes off to college, avoids the war draft, has a sexual awakening, does drugs and renounces all that his father stands for. In the secure revolt of only well-adjusted and secure middle class kids, Chapter Eleven plays out his role as Callie's all-American draft-dodging brother. Except for Chapter Eleven's invention of the trademark sausage of Hercules Hot Dogs™, he and Milton have nothing but a clichéd stereotypical father/son relationship. As a story-telling device the normality of Milt and Chapter Eleven even out the shroud of magical realism and Greek drama that lies so thickly over the stories of Lefty and Desdemona, as well as Callie. How would we know when anyone was vacillating to or from the norm if we had no norm to navigate by?

Going through her rather unique puberty, Callie's awkwardness and sense of not fitting into her body or school echoes that of many other teenagers. Being a bright and eager pupil, Callie is quick to adapt and soon enough pulls off the necessary polite conversation to blend in with the best of the Grosse Pointe lot. In keeping with this theme of immigration and assimilation, our narrator takes great pains to inform us of the heritage of the people that impacted Callie. Take her wonderful English teacher, for instance, the Brazilian born Mr. da Silva: "The Latin details of his childhood (the hammock, the outdoor tub) had been erased by a North American education and a love of the European novel. Now he was a liberal Democrat and wore black armbands in support

of radical causes.” (321) Like virtually everyone around her, Mr. da Silva has re-invented himself in the North-American protestant white middle-class ideal. As English teacher and dreamer, however, he is more than aware how the early Greeks impacted the Western Canon and classical education. Having visited Greece, he has fallen in love with and idealizes olive trees and extravagant mythology. Acting like a smitten Orientalist, Mr. di Silva encourages Greek pride in Callie as they read *The Iliad*.

On the theme of mythology and theatrical performances then, before Callie steps into her role as Tiresias in the school play, it seems fitting to apply Judith Butler’s concept of performativity. For is not the transcendence of class also about performativity, is it not the very ideals of performativity that allow the bourgeoisie to keep up their pretenses, that allows someone to occasionally *pass* into another class than the one they were born into? The concept of performativity, though unnamed until recently, describes a way of self-invention or of making true that which is not. As a group mechanism in normative polite society, it seems that class construction and transcendence must not be named or spoken out loud, that as long as everyone keeps up pretenses, then the construction of a person’s (or indeed group of people’s) class is and will be what it always-already was, namely “true”. If someone who has transcended class is, however, hailed in public for what s/he once was, in other words, what s/he was when not *passing,* then s/he stands the risk of being synonymously denounced by all: “For the least glimmer of truth is conditioned by politics.” (Foucault, We "Other Victorians" 294) We must not forget that according to Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* that it is in the collective silence, in the space where its existence can be denied, that sexuality and how it signifies the other, the freak or the class changeling has been allowed to walk freely amongst the norm: “as it is in the nature of power – particularly the kind of power that operates in our society – to be repressive, and to be especially careful in repressing useless energies, the intensity of pleasures and irregular modes of behavior.” (Foucault, We "Other Victorians" 298) Though he is speaking specifically of sex here, as the taboo of sex and class transcendence seem to mirror each other in the novel, it is relevant to the collective repression of truth about class. As long as you play the part convincingly and *perform* to the satisfaction of the Charm Bracelets, they may let you into their *class*. It bears to keep in mind that, like the norms and definitions of sex, the norms of class are always

changing, but we pretend for a large part that things have always been the way they are. This collective repression and secrecy is extremely relevant in the "wannabe Easterners" class performativity of Grosse Pointe. Hence, invisibility is an important factor in this kind of performativity, leaving class transcendence open only to white people, because if you cannot pass visually, then you will never pass at all.

Callie's road to *passing* into polite society goes via the Obscure Object. Like most other novels in the Bildungsroman genre, Callie too must experience the impossibilities of young love. As if in a dream, the Obscure Object walks into her English class one day. A rare occasion to mix, as Callie's was an advanced English class and the Charm Bracelets notoriously did not study, this was left up to the Kilt pins and the "ethnic" girls, the ones that needed to be good at school to keep moving up in the world. Soon enough though, the Obscure Object proves her elocutionary skills and Calliope comes to her house to practice lines for their school play, thus she enters into the secret world of the Charm Bracelets:

> At school we would have felt funny talking together, but here no one could see us. In the bigger scheme of things, out in the world, we were more alike than different. We were both teenagers. We were both from the suburbs." (333)

In this space, a secret sanctuary beyond the ideology of their school, Callie and the Obscure Object can begin to make friends across the cultural divide of their suburban eighth grade: "This was the form of the pact we made that day: I would handle the deep intellectual matters, like vibrators; she would handle the social sphere." (334) Having clear-cut roles from the beginning helps them to remember that they are not the same, and never will be. For one thing, Cal finds it extremely difficult to relax at the Object's house, being waited on by the black maid. Though the Object's admittance that she would "never have talked to a kid like you" (335) is meant as a compliment to Callie, it is yet another reminder that they are still on different sides of the class divide. Luckily for Callie, like her old *papou* she has a knack for fitting in. In fact she fits in so well, that the Object's brother falls in love with her, before everything comes crashing down in sexual disaster as she and the Object are called "carpet munchers". (391) Suddenly the hidden freakishness sets Calliope a world apart from the Charm Bracelet life of the Object and as she comes to in the hospital, she knows that they will never see each other again.

The spell of secrecy is broken, now that their relationship is out in the open and Callie is *visible*. Much as Callie had been assimilated into the circle of the Object's family she now stands on the outside, never again to come in, at least not the way she was.

Next on Cal/lie's class journey is the clinic of Dr. Luce. The impact of Dr. Luce on the development of Cal/lie's identity addressed, for the most part, the gendered identity of our protagonist and as such had little direct impact on the classed self. It is, however, worth mentioning that merit should probably be given to Callie's upper middle class education as she chooses to take an academic approach and research the allegations of Dr. Luce herself. It is the findings of his/her research that help Cal/lie to conclude that s/he is a boy, not a girl, subsequently running away.

The subsequent part of Cal's journey is the beatnik road trip out west. Cal's push west echoes the plight of many American settlers looking for new territory and a new identity, similar to the ideals of reinvention from his grandparents' immigrant boat trip. Plummeting to the bottom of American society, first on the road then sleeping on the streets and in the park, Cal follows the road of many young American runaways and like them s/he too suffers the dangers of such living. As an educational sequence in the Bildungsroman perspective, this homage to the American beats, finally takes Cal/lie into the dark underworld of sex workers. Ironically it is here that Cal/lie first finds kinship with someone like him/her self and the possibility of a life on the margins of intelligibility, begins to form:

> And so a strange new possibility is arising. Compromised, indefinite, sketchy, but not entirely obliterated: free will is making a comeback. Biology gives you a brain. Life turns it into a mind.
>
> At any rate, in San Francisco in 1974, life was working hard to give me one. (479)

At the feet of Zora, Cal/lie receives the first lessons on the possibilities of living life as a hermaphrodite. Zora is dedicated to the emancipation of intersexuals: "And, during the months I lived with her, in educating me, in bringing me out of what she saw as my great midwestern darkness." (488)

All of a sudden a whole new world, a new America, of opportunities and possibilities of self-definition and life-choices begins to open up for Cal: "I wasn't the

only one!" (489) In feeling connected to someone at last, Cal's final transition from child to adult begins to take place. Simultaneously in the futuristic teachings of Zora, s/he begins to envision a future for her/himself. "When you travel like I did, vague about destination and with an open-ended itinerary, a holy-seeming openness takes over your character. It's the reason the first philosophers were peripatetic." (488-489) Like the first philosophers, it seems Cal the expatriate diplomat is also peripatetic, in fact, the novel may well be a consequence of just that.

As previously stated, the defining moment of *manhood* seems to be Cal's homecoming for his father's funeral. Here is Cal's first coming of age scene. As Cal ascends with newfound worldly wisdom (street wise, albeit a tad futuristic) from the American underworld, he makes a quick sojourn back into the middle class suburbs before he and his mother move away. It seems he has kept moving ever since.

As an expatriate Cal seems to outclass almost everyone, though exactly how he came to be formed into such a well-educated gentlemen we know little about. We are aware of a twenty-six year gap in the narrative, a time where our information limits itself to the fact that Cal went to college and had a girlfriend or two and that he must have undergone diplomatic training. If I have to guess, I would say that it is a combination of education, life lessons, performativity and intermingled with an air of class (inherited from his old *papou*). In the end Cal is more than the American his parents and immigrant parents had hoped he would be. He is a world-class metrosexual. 42-year-old Cal recites to us the brands of his hoity-toity hand-made shoes, his double-breasted suits, his premium champagnes and big fat cigars, admitting: "they're a little too much. I'm well aware of that. But I need them. They make me feel better." (41). A product of our time, the ironic connoisseur of cultural affairs in the diplomatic realm, Cal is in a class of his own: a hybrid at last, a true individual of the lonely kind:

> In another year or two I'll leave Berlin, to be posted somewhere else. I'll be sad to go. This once-divided city reminds me of myself. My struggle for unification, for *Einheit*. Coming from a city still cut in half by racial hatred, I feel hopeful here in Berlin. (106)

This statement seems an acknowledgement from Cal on the transitory of being and that as he keeps moving, so will everything else. It is in the international realm, in the artsy Berlin of the 21st century that Cal succeeds in finally classing himself, transcending more

than gender and class, going beyond nationality as well. Pulling free and leaving his family history behind him at last, just as Desdemona did in her old age:

> "My heart skipped. "*Papou* was your brother?"
> "Yes, honey," Desdemona said with infinite weariness. "Long time ago. In another country." (527)

If we dwell not on the incestuous part of Desdemona's confession here, but look at the *articulation* of what is and has been, at what took place in another world, in another time, we may start to believe that it is possible to leave something behind. That confessing and making visible the invisible can do that. Cal's situation holds up to Foucault's claim to how the emancipation of sexual taboos may come about, not when they are silenced, but in fact when they are articulated. Reminiscent of the teachings of Cal's one time mentor, Zora, Foucault writes:

> But there may be another reason that makes it so gratifying for us to define the relationship between sex and power in terms of repression: something that one might call the speaker's benefit. If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom. (Foucault, *We "Other Victorians"* 295)

Just like his grandparents Cal has fled his homeland to reinvent himself, to repress his sexuality, and just like them his dream for a better life lies not in assimilation or in being American or upper class enough. It lies in creating for himself the possibility of being loved. Perhaps it is his false etiquette learned at the hands of the Charm Bracelets, his knowledge of "polite society" or self-righteous "old immigrants", or perhaps in the end it was only fear itself, that taught him to repress his rightful self and his own sexuality. By taking the plunge, by opening up to the scrutiny of an*other*, by daring to enter into a relationship with Julie Kikuchi, he might also transcend solitude, feel loved and embrace his own humanity. Is not the American Dream, in its purest sense simply a dream of a better life, for anyone to interpret as it suits him/her?

Conclusion

Like the novel itself, my discussion of power and identity has jumped forwards and backwards in history, time and storyline. Similar to the circumambulation of this narrative, I too have kept coming back to the love scene between Cal and Julie Kikuchi. This moment in *Middlesex* signifies the much awaited "third birth" of Cal. As I have shown, this is also the single defining moment where the novel's intertwined themes of gender/sex, race and immigration (a cross-section where the categories of ethnicity, class and Americanness) all meet. Together, Cal and Julie signify all these *others* at once, and therefore they become free to explore new territory *together*.

I hold no illusions that, by the simple reading of a novel, intersex people or other oppressed individuals will become free from the norms that define them and that, for a large part, determine their lives. I only hope that writers such as Eugenides; theorists like Butler and organizations like the Intersex Society of America will continue to voice their struggles. Creating awareness is a large part of working for change. When we have the opportunity to understand the concept of *otherness* (and how it impacts those that we *other*), when we reflect about our own role and take the responsibility that Levinas urges us to, that is the defining moment when we can take an active part in the precipitation of change. The more people become aware of how we are all the upholders of oppressive systems, and that we are all responsible for humanizing each other (and ourselves), the more we can work to change these systems of power that govern us and marginalize those that do not categorically fit "the norms".

Categorization is a structure of oppression, whether it is categorization of sex, gender, biology, race, immigration or any of the other boxing systems we use to subjugate others. It is a tangled web, where as we move out of one category, we may quickly be defined into another. For although, in the literature and genre of love stories, all is won when the boy/girl gets the girl, in the case of Cal, this is the only place s/he can safely escape the hailing of freak or monster or *other*. Then again, as Butler concludes in *Giving an Account of Oneself*:

> […] we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our

> chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient "I" as a kind of possession. (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 136)

Though Butler is speaking of the individual's right (and sometimes need) to share a narrative of oneself, more specifically in order to partake, as a subject, as a human, in the discourse that defines him/her, this also captures the essence of the risk involved in the pursuit of self-definition. Butler could very well be speaking of Cal's plunge into space with Julie here. From an ethical viewpoint it is only when Cal dares to come out of hiding (when of course s/he is safe to) that s/he can award him/herself the opportunity to move forward. As s/he takes on a new form in the eyes of Julie and recognizes the reflection of this new possible self, Cal can finally begin to create a new understanding of self, and thereby new possibilities of being in the world. Though Cal may continue to perform *man*, with Julie s/he can be Cal. The same is, of course, true for Julie. With Cal, she can be Julie, not someone's "last stop" as an Asian American. The hyphenated form of Japanese-American is oppressive in itself as the hyphen and its prefix forever signifies someone *other* than a *true* American. Therefore the space Julie and Cal inhabit together is also significant on a national level. The fact that they are both expatriates in Berlin, makes them more American, than they can be in America, where the hyphenated form of denomination will always hail them as 'new immigrants'. The fact that ethnicity must almost always be voiced is a symptom of whiteness and representative of the white American ideal that is still prevalent, despite the diversity of Americans both on the North American continent and abroad.

Middlesex is many things, though not utopian, for the novel cuts too close to reality, but it does hold the hope of a utopian ideal at its core; a world where Cal (and Julie) can be free. In keeping with Butler's theory and citation above of risking to "come undone in relation to others" and how this "constitutes our chance of becoming human" the novel celebrates these risk-takers all along. Zora is one of these hero/ines and risk-takers (as are Sourmelina, Fard and Marius Grimes). In many ways Zora and San Francisco represent hope and daring for the emancipation of people of indeterminate sex or gender: "It's no surprise that ISNA was founded in San Francisco and nowhere else."

(488). The Intersex Society of North America, after all: "is devoted to systemic change to end shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries for people born with an anatomy that someone decided is not standard for male or female." (Intersex Society of North America u.d.) Characters like Zora function as catalysts of change; a change that Cal believes will come:

> So I think Zora Khyber as an early pioneer, a sort of John the Baptist crying in the wilderness. Writ large, that wilderness was America, even the globe itself, but more specifically it was the redwood bungalow Zora lived in in Noe Valley and where I was now living, too. […] Before movements emerge there are centers of energy, and Zora was one of these. (488)

Here, in the extension of his/her dream, Cal shows at once the universality of his/her dream and his/her awareness that, for now it takes place in America, or more specifically in the security of Zora's private sanctuary: in the future, however, it may be global, it may be huge. Having transcended class and gender in his/her lifetime, Cal is well aware how hierarchically these systems are stacked, the structures of which s/he knows all too well, and s/he knows that the road to "in-between" will be a bumpy one, but when s/he is optimistic, s/he is oh so hopeful!

Cal (or Eugenides?) seem to have an inexhaustive desire to right and redefine certain things; so also with the riots of Detroit. Determined that they are indeed a revolution, a noble uprising, Cal/lie links Detroit's motto to her dream of a justified revolution for the black population:

> It turned out that when it finally happened, the revolution wasn't televised. On TV they called it only a riot.
> The following morning, as the smoke cleared the city's flag could once again be seen. Remember the symbol on it? The phoenix rising from its ashes. And the words beneath? *Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus.* "We hope for better things; it will rise from the ashes." (251)

It seems then, that even young Callie holds hope for the future, for a better future for the black population of Detroit; a future where their justified revolution will *not* be redefined as a riot and thereby thrown into a discourse that at once denies precisely the revolution's very existence and therefore its effort and significance.

Eugenides has been historically accurate in facts, dates and incidents throughout the novel. He does, however, take wonderful emancipatory liberties in his interpretation

of some events. Obviously dissatisfied with the interpretations of the riots of the early sixties, Eugenides helps to elevate these incidents in the reader's awareness and, hopefully, understanding. By re-assigning the WASP's city creed to the black population, he justifies their rights. As long as covert segregation in America continues, there are still differences between black and white. For as long as the so-called colorblind politicians of America pretend that white privilege does not exist: change is still a-comin'.

There have, of course, been life-altering incidents of change in the course of the novel. Spanning close to a century, the Stephanides family members have (like human beings generally?) been extremely adaptive to new challenges and surroundings, every generation has transcended some categorization; whether it be gender, nationality, class or race. Desdemona's response when learning that Callie is no longer a boy, but a girl: "Desdemona was still looking at me but her eyes had gone dreamy. She was smiling. And then she said, "My spoon was right." (527) In *Middlesex* it seems "the truth will set you free", whereas a life in secrecy will bring mostly misery. *Yia yia*'s life has indeed been miserable, especially the last ten years in bed waiting to die. This explains the weariness of her response: "Long time ago. In another country." (527) when Cal realizes that she and papou where once brother and sister. Here again the themes of gender, nationality, re-invention through immigration and the ethical responsibility for others (the guilt that has weighed Desdemona down for three generations), come together in this final mutual confession:

> "I like my life," I told her. "I'm going to have a good life." She still looked pained, so I took her hand. "Don't worry, yia yia. I won't tell anyone."
> "Who's to tell? Everybody's dead now."
> "You're not. I'll wait until you're gone."
> "Okay. When I die, you can tell everything."
> "I will."
> "Bravo, honey mou. Bravo." (529)

Desdemona and Cal "dare to come undone" together in this scene, though they make a pact of secrecy before Cal one day will take the risk to tell it all, for both of them. Here Cal foreshadows, not only his hope and belief that he will have a good life, but also his role as narrator as the reader knows that he one day does tell it all in the novel *Middlesex.*

A symbol that I have not mentioned in my interpretation of Cal's identity and possible performative identities is Middlesex, the house. In a way it is both Cal and the entire family saga at once:

> Middlesex was now almost seventy years old. Though we had ruined it with our colonial furniture, it was still the beacon it was intended to be, a place with few interior walls, divested of the formalities of bourgeois life, a place designed for a new type of human being, who would inhabit a new world. I couldn't help feeling, of course, that that person was me, me and all others like me. (529)

These are Cal's thoughts as he stands on the threshold of the house he grew up in, guarding the doorway for his father's funeral; the new man of the house. It is at this at once devastating and elatory moment where Cal has taken his first risk as a person of hybrid sex. By coming home as a son, though unaltered physically and therefore still in-between genders/sex, his family must find ways to accept both what he is and what he performs; boy. It is here then that the novel ends, in the intersex intersection of Cal's homecoming as a teenage man and his rebirth as a human being in bed with Julie Kikuchi.

Like Tiresias, Cal seems torn in terms of gender, but his dreams seem sound. There is a great hope for further change, good change, in the final pages of *Middlesex*. It seems right therefore to end on the words of the great Mahatma Ghandi: "We must be the change we want to see in the world." (Ghandi u.d.) It seems finally, Cal, who has chosen a passive and secretive path for most of his adult life, despite his vision from the doorway of Middlesex, is ready finally to make a change. With Julie, Cal knows s/he will no longer be alone. Like when she was with the Obscure Object, like Tiresias, Cal knows what reality is and what it can be:

> ”The only way we know it's true is that we both dreamed it. That's what reality is. It's a dream everyone has together." (343)

The tale of *Middlesex* is a dream of the transcendence of categorization; of humanism, love and understanding. By daring to dream a dream, by pulling the reader into his dream and by allowing the reader to see her ethical responsibility for others, as well as, her role in upholding the powers of oppression; Eugenides creates a vision of how things might be, of what we might be: if we all worked against the ideologies that inhibit our abilities to see beyond the power structures and our fears of them.

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