

## **Freud's theories of trauma applied to *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha***

Trauma is defined in modern psychology as an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations or other intrusive phenomena. This is indubitably influenced by Freud's theories on trauma, particularly the delayed nature of trauma symptoms. Freud's novel *Moses and Monotheism* addresses this idea of delay, or rather, of departure defining trauma. *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* by Rhea Galanaki exemplifies this idea through a deeply emotional characterization of a real historical figure. Galanaki portrays the historical Greek trauma of the Ottoman invasion through one man's psyche and through this demonstrates that the mechanisms of history and trauma are inextricably intertwined.

In his novel, Freud establishes that trauma is essential to history, and goes further to argue that traumatic events shape our world. Just as an individual's trauma needs a temporal departure to develop significance, historical events themselves follow that same mechanism. This is irrefutably present in *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* by Rhea Galanaki. Ismail Ferik Pasha's firsthand experiences are doubly interesting in that events in the present (within the context of fictional storytelling) later become trauma for him, and much later, become important historical events for the world. This idea illuminates the similarities in the mechanisms of trauma and history in that they do not occur in the present moment and take time to develop their meaning. Freud's theories of trauma are present within the novel in the way that Ismail becomes haunted by a specific traumatic moment for the rest of his life. This moment is when he is forced to march with his brother after his city in Crete is sacked, and after the long march, torn away from his brother and taken captive to Egypt.

The ideas surrounding departure as essential to both trauma and history is eloquently discussed in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* by Cornell's Cathy Caruth. One specific

point addressed in this book is the idea of departure defining culture in regards to Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. As she puts it, "The notion of Jewish history as a history of return might seem unsurprising in the perspective of a psychoanalyst, whose words repeatedly focus on the necessity of various kinds of return--on the return to origins in memory and on the 'return of the repressed'" (14). This is present in Galanaki's novel as well, as return is a largely present theme in Ismail Ferik Pasha's life in the story. Specifically, the fact that when Ismail returns to the location of his trauma, which was developed due to departure from his home island in the first place, he is killed in battle. This creates an interesting idea that returning to the place of trauma ends the traumatic process at hand, even if it be through death. This mechanism is consistent with Freud's theories, where the act of leaving creates trauma and return ends the process itself.

This concept of return ties into Freud's theory of "repetition compulsion", or the return or reenactment of unwanted dreams, sensory fragments, thoughts, or behaviors that are central to traumatic experience. Repetition compulsion is heavily present in *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha*. Ismail is constantly haunted by his trauma from the past, being kidnapped from his home and torn from his family. He constantly sees his brother's face in the face of others, is reminded of his smell, of the feeling of his embrace. He constantly fantasizes about his mother's death and has multiple stories for how she may have died. The multiple endings to the novel serve to exemplify how much Ismail has demonstrated Freud's theory of "repetition compulsion" and fantasized about his return to Crete. Although there are many endings to the novel presented by Galanaki, what remains consistent is that each is an ending to the haunting trauma of being separated from his home. Whether the real ending lies in death or simply in emotional resolution, this powerful idea of return as resolution at the end of the novel is a final demonstration of Freud's theory. That being said, the idea of the theory coming to fruition in an interdisciplinary way, not only through his own field of psychology but also in

Galanaki's mixed realm of history and fiction provides ample evidence of its significance when analyzing stories and histories of trauma.