

History as fiction in Rea Galanaki's *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha**

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The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha by Rea Galanaki was published in 1989. As well as being a best-seller for some time, it has been highly praised by critics and book reviewers,¹ not only for its literary virtues as such, but also because it revives and brings to the foreground the story of an Egyptian general who was born (and remained until the end of his life) Greek. In addition to that, the majority of these reviews treat the book as a modern historical novel.

Things are far from being that simple. What we shall attempt to show in this paper is that *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* is neither a nationalistic and sentimental fictionalization of the life of a little boy, who was abducted and Islamicized by the Egyptian army in the nineteenth century, nor a traditional historical novel of the type of Walter Scott, for instance.²

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¹ There have been several book reviews of *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha*; to my knowledge there are only three proper critical studies of the novel (Thalassis 1991; Maronitis 1992; Sourbati 1992).

² Kotzia (1993) alleges that in both *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* and her latest novel *I shall sign myself Louis*, Galanaki fails to reproduce satisfactorily the style of language that we believe to have been used by people like an Egyptian general and a Greek intellectual of the nineteenth century, as Ismail and Louis were; that would indeed be a requirement if Galanaki actually wrote historical novels. Kotzia says: "Ποιο είναι ωστόσο, το πρόβλημα με τα πεζογραφήματα της Ρέας Γαλανάκη; Το πώς ακριβώς μιλούσε ένας Αιγύπτιος πασάς του προηγούμενου αιώνα δεν έχει και τόση ή για την ακρίβεια δεν έχει καμία σημασία. Διότι εκείνο που μετράει είναι να

But let us first have a brief look at the story of the novel. Ismail, who was born in a village on the Lasithi plateau in Crete, is captured, together with his brother Antonios Kambanis Papadakis, by the Ottomans during the uprising at the beginning of the third decade of the nineteenth century. The two brothers are separated at the port of Heraklion. Antonis goes to Istanbul, and from there, as we find out later in the novel, he escapes to Russia, while Ismail (his Christian name is Emmanuel according to the story, though not according to history) is taken to Cairo. There he studies the art of war, fights against the Turks in Syria under the command of Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Mohammed Ali, who was viceroy of Egypt at the time, and is promoted to the rank of pasha.

It is Ismail Ferik Pasha who is subsequently chosen by the then viceroy of Egypt (the son of Ismail's friend Ibrahim and grandson of Mohammed Ali) to repress the Cretan revolution of 1866-68, which by a trick of destiny is financed by Ismail's brother, Antonis, who now lives in Athens, having inherited the fortune of his Greek protector in Russia. Ismail returns to Crete as a conqueror this time, takes part in the siege of Arkadi monastery as well as in the repression of the revolution in his own homeland, the Lasithi plateau, and dies (possibly murdered by the commander of the Sultan's forces, Omer Pasha, for being a

πλάσει η αφήγηση ένα ιδίωμα το οποίο να ταιριάζει με την - αόριστη - εικόνα που έχουμε σήμερα εμείς για το πώς ήταν ένας πασάς στον προηγούμενο αιώνα. Ή, καλύτερα, να πλάσει η αφήγηση ένα πασά μέσα από την ατομική της (τριτοπρόσωπη) οπτική και μέσα από τη γλώσσα που βάζει τον ήρωά της να μιλάει. Είναι όμως ποτέ δυνατόν να γίνει αυτό με φραστικούς τύπους που περισσότερο από κάθε τι άλλο θυμίζουν τους σύγχρονους μας μεταπολεμικούς διανοούμενους; (Και εδώ δεν εννοώ τις ιδέες του έργου γιατί, όπως κάθε άλλο μυθιστόρημα, το ιστορικό αναφέρεται και αυτό στο παρόν). Εννοώ όμως φράσεις όπως «Δεν μπορούσα να ορίσω καθαρά το αντικείμενο του πολέμου που θα έκανα» (σ. 101) ή «Αν ήταν να πεθάνω, ας έφευγα σωστός, έλεγα. Και ότι το πρόβλημα μπορούσε πιθανώς να αναχθεί σε μια διαφορετική δομή σκέψης» (σ. 135) ή «Κατά την άνοιξη θα έσμιγα οριστικά με το αγόρι του οροπέδιου. Γιατί αυτός ο πόλεμος άλλο δεν ήταν παρά μια σπουδή της απογύμνωσης» (σ. 138)."

crypto-Christian) nine months after his disembarkation on the island.

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The normal function of historical time constitutes a basic convention for a whole category of novels which are in various ways preoccupied with the promotion of certain truths related to the present socio-cultural background or (in the case of the historical novel, for instance) that of another historical period. This promotion is carried out in these novels by means of a linear conception of time as well as an emphasis on the integrity of the individual personality.

History, a powerful invention of realist conventions, involves a neutral, homogeneous temporal medium that extends into eternity and a historical consciousness that constituted it.³ The conception of this temporal medium itself, i.e. historical or representational time, has not only made possible the existence of history but has also been one of the primary conventions and instruments of Western thought and art.

Apart from the linearly causal link of different instants and events in the long life of humanity and consequently the envisaging of the present through the "lessons" of the past which this homogeneous medium makes possible, the convention of historical time implies estrangement from the present and the concrete. As Deeds Ermarth (1992: 31) says:

The rationalization of consciousness that supports the continuity of past and future, cause and project necessarily

³ Historical time has been a construct of Western civilization since the Renaissance. The theocratic and static conception of time in the Middle Ages was replaced by a view that considered time as a neutral, homogeneous medium which allowed for the causal connection of several different instants in the long life of humanity and which, through the interpretation of the past (carried out, of course, from the perspective of the present) made possible the control of the future. Related to this view is also the belief that there exist in the world certain stable and unalterable laws which determine people and events of different periods in human history and thread them together in a controlled and teleological continuum.

supports kinds of thinking that seek to *transcend* the present, concrete, arbitrarily and absolutely limited moment. Considered historically the present requires a future to complete or at least improve it, and consequently a dialectical method for getting there just as this same present has been produced dialectically by the past. By emphasizing what is linear, developmental, and mediate, historical thinking by definition involves transcendence of a kind that trivializes the specific detail and finite moment.

According to Deeds Ermarth (1992), one of the aims of post-modern fiction is the subversion of the function and the ideology of historical time and, in general, of all historical values. If historical time implies, as we have said, the existence of logical sequences that are based on a relationship of cause and effect, post-modern fiction annuls the function of historical time by subverting the logic that sustains it. Temporality proves to be one convention among several others, which needs a collective consensus in order to function, while the "past" is a mere invention of human consciousness. The only time which exists is that of the reader, the phenomenological time.

A critique of historical time means a critique of other conventions related to it in one way or another, and above all of the definition of subjectivity as "individuality". Thus a shift from historical, representational time to the different perception of time which is usually encountered in post-modern fiction also implies a new definition of subjectivity.⁴ Thus the absolute, individualized and integral consciousness of nineteenth-century Realism, for instance, is replaced in Post-Modernism by a fluid, multi-dimensional version of subjectivity which accords with the belief in the absence of a single univocal meaning in the world; the human mind is rendered incapable of conceiving and interpreting reality in a single, totalized and non-contradictory manner, since reality, of which human consciousness itself constitutes a part, is simply a matter of perspective.

In *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha*, history itself is not only the main source of material for the writer, but also the main

⁴ It is not only Post-Modernism that has challenged the integrity of the subject; other movements in the past such as Modernism and Surrealism have done the same.

target of the novel's subversive policy. Apart from both the overt and covert mechanisms by means of which the demythologization of history is achieved, the function of historical time is deeply affected, as is also the integrity of human individuality. Let us start with the first.

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Our text consists of three parts: the first is entitled "Years of Egypt. The myth"; the second part is entitled "Days of nostos and history"; the last part bears the one-word title "Epimythio". The different parts are narrated in different grammatical persons: the second part uses the first person singular, while the first and third use the third person singular.

What one immediately notices in these titles is that the "years" of the first title become "days" in the second; in other words, there seems to be a reversal of the normal track of time, which, however, accords with the fact that the second part gives the account of a limited length of time (nine months only), as compared with the span of the first one which is almost half a century.

The most important thing to note, however, is the fact that the part of the novel which claims to constitute a myth (interpreted either as a fable or as plot, according to the Aristotelian notion of the term) is cast in the third person, in other words the person of a more or less objective point of view – the person employed by an omniscient narrator, for instance. Conversely, the part which claims to be history (or at least to refer to the story of the novel, that is the real events as they happened) is cast in the first person – the person of the subjective and limited point of view. Moreover, the fact that the use of the first person follows that of the third, and not the other way round, indicates a gradual internalization of the story, which certainly accords with the reverse route followed in the novel on one level, as we shall see, but is at odds with the normal development of a person who while growing up acquires a more objective and less emotional perspective.

The third part, which by its very title seems to be related to the first ("Μύθος" – "Επιμύθιο"), and not to the second which it

in fact follows, and whose story-line it continues, is also cast in the third person.

On the other hand, the mode of narration itself does not differ significantly from section to section. Throughout the text, it proceeds by means of an internal focalization on Ismail (and rarely on other people) and of an incessant motion backwards and forwards, that is by means of analepses and prolepses, so that the reader must continually be on the alert to be able to follow the main line of events that develop in time. The procedure of the narration through internal focalizations seems to be at odds with the possible characterization of the book as a historical fiction (though the real historical events in the novel are comparatively very few), in spite of the use of the past tense, the main tense of representation.

However, the fact that our text appears in a form in which interruption and reversal dominate accords with the ideology behind it, which wants things to go back instead of forward, to move in a circular route and not in a linear one, as one would expect from the title of the novel, which claims to be an account of the life and experiences of Ismail Ferik Pasha. The effect of this is, certainly, discontinuity and circularity, two ideas that contradict the basic principle of history (either national or personal) and, by extension, historical time itself.

As on the level of the story, with the life of Ismail Ferik Pasha starting at the middle of the book and going backward instead of forward, our text itself is presented in a similar form, following a similar motion – in fact the text reflects the ideology that dominates on the thematic level.

More precisely, our novel starts as a third-person text, set in the historical past, which, however, in the first part, according to the title, undertakes to relate a myth. It continues in the second part by going inwards and adopting a personal, subjective mode of narration through the use of the first person, although, again according to the title, it purports to talk about history. Finally, it shifts to the third person, though no real change is noticeable in the mode of narration in this part, with the title referring by its etymology directly to the first part.

To pass on now to the function of historical time in the story itself, the normal and physical development of a person from birth to death is juxtaposed with the existence of several births

and deaths of the same person (in fact, one cannot easily tell when birth is implied and not death and vice versa), which happen during the span of one life.

To be more precise, there is certainly one birth at the beginning of the physical life of Ismail, or Emmanuel, as the text wants him to be called before his captivity, but this birth is extra-textual and certainly not of much interest for our story. Then, at the age of seven, Emmanuel is captured by the Ottomans and this fact is considered (retrospectively, of course) as both a death and a new birth for the little boy.⁵ On his return to Crete as a conqueror some fifty years later, our text says that Ismail had started diminishing into a foetus in his mother's womb; its birth (or ambiguously its conception),⁶ however, nine months

⁵ It seems to me that Ismail's death/birth is the result of his mother's sacrilegious union with the enemy at the entrance of the cave: "Ακουσε από τη μεριά της εισόδου τις ιαχές των εχθρών και τις κραυγές των γυναικών. Του φάνηκε πως όλες οι κραυγές έβγαιναν από το στήθος της μάνας του και όρμησε να χωθεί σε εκείνο και μόνο το στήθος. (...) Κάπου είδε μια κόκκινη ανταύγεια και φοβήθηκε ότι έμπαινε στη σπηλιά αντί να βγαίνει. Θυμήθηκε άλλες ιστορίες για μιαν άλικη μαρμαρυγή στα βάθη της σπηλιάς και τις εξηγήσεις για κοκκινάδια παμπάλαιου τοκετού, αίμα λεχώνας και φωτιά για το ζεστό νερό στους λέβητες. Έκανε το σταυρό του για να διώξει το δαιμονικό βρέφος και συνέχισε να βαδίζει προς την ανταύγεια (...).

"Ο Ισμαήλ Φερίκ Πασάς θυμόταν αργότερα πως το διπλό κάλεσμα της μάνας του ακούστηκε χάλκινο, επειδή σήμαινε το σιωπητήριο της πρώτης του ζωής και την έναρξη της δεύτερης, κάτι που ήταν πολύ πιο πρόωρο και πιο σκληρό από μιαν ενηλικίωση. Κι έλεγε ακόμη ότι το παιδί που λιποθύμησε στην αγκαλιά της αλλόφρονης μάνας, κοιμήθηκε αυτόν τον έξοχο θάνατο, που μόνο τα παιδιά μπορούν να απολαύσουν. Και πως η ίδια η μάνα του υψώθηκε πάνω απ' τον κύκλο των ανθρώπων και διαμιάς ξανασυνέλαβε, κύησε, γέννησε και ανέθρεψε το δεύτερό της γιο. Πως βγήκε από τη σπηλιά δεμένος πισθάγκωνα και άρχισε μια καινούργια ζωή σαν αιχμάλωτος." (16-17)

⁶ "Ήταν αλήθεια, μια από τις δικές μου αλήθειες, πλην δεν μπορούσα να κουβεντιάσω γι' αυτήν με τους επισκέπτες μου,

later, corresponds to the physical death of the conqueror Ismail. But birth involves another life to follow, a life after the real death of Ismail Ferik Pasha in Crete, and this possibility makes the circle go round and round without ever closing.

If we now see our story in the light of these successive births and deaths, we can say that the important turning-point takes place between the first two parts, when our story has already come half-circle and now turns back to trace the other half. Ismail's life has abandoned the linear course of the River Nile and has embarked on a journey around the Lasithi plateau.

However, the novel does not end when Ismail's life has already described a full circle, that is after his death at the very place where he was born for the first time. The existence of the "epimythio" seems to reflect, on both the textual and the thematic level, the beginning of a new circle, of a new life, as this latest death/birth requires: Ismail's body travels back to Egypt to be buried, while his soul remains on the island telling his story in the new body of a little boy; Ismail thus remains to the end divided between his two homelands and his two fields of memory.

In addition, the return to his familial home after nine months of life in the womb, the existence of blood, the participation in the ritual first of his mother but also his father as well as the (then still living) older brother, makes me take this last scene (apart from its interpretation as an overt allusion to the Homeric ritual) as another birth.

Going round and round in a circle implies stagnation. Historical time in our novel has been replaced by circular time, that is a continuous motion round a periphery that does not go anywhere, does not move forward, and most importantly does not meet the centre, but repeats and perpetuates the existing status of things. Talking about the subversion of representational time in fiction, Deeds Ermath (1992: 43) mentions the metaphor of a train leaving the rails or a car swerving off the road which seems to recur in several twentieth-century novels that purport to counteract the normal function of historical time.

πως μετά την ανατίναξη τραβούσα τον αντίθετο δρόμο από το έμβρυο και μίγκρινα αντί να μεγαλώνω." (133)

In our novel the dominant metaphor of somebody following the current of linear, representational time, is sailing up and down the river Nile, while going round the Lasithi plateau implies adopting an alternative, non-representational concept of time. When Ismail realizes, however, that he is completely possessed by circular time, that he is trapped within the circle of the Lasithi plateau, he is described by the text as crossing the plateau on his horse in an attempt to escape. Here are Ismail's thoughts:

Στις όχθες του ιερού ποταμού είχα αναζητήσει μαζί με μιαν ολόκληρη χώρα τη μικρή έστω έξοδο από την ακίνητή του ιερότητα, κάποιο συγχρονισμό με τις ιδέες που κινούσαν με ταχύτητα την Ευρώπη. Σωστά έπραξα. Πλην δεν απέφυγα να παρατηρήσω πως η τελευταία μου ευθεία ήταν ο καλπασμός μου μέσα στο τσακισμένο πράσινο, καθώς έσπευδα να βγω από τον κύκλο του οροπέδιου για να μη βλέπω την καταστροφή του. (178-9)

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Along with historical time, human consciousness disintegrates entirely in *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha*. Ismail, the central character of the novel, is a personality that lacks identity and consequently also lacks authenticity and authority, as we shall attempt to show; this lack of a consistent and stable identity is one of the main fields in which Galanaki's artistic wit seems to play; it is also a situation that remains unresolved to the end, as the main character, together with the whole novel, does not manage to reach a kind of totalization but embarks instead on a continuous journey in pursuit of a meaning that always evades him by going round in circles.

Not only Ismail's death but also the mental disorders of Ibrahim and his father, which lead both of them to death, seem to be the result of the realization that no single and stable truth exists. The relativity and arbitrariness of any truth (the realization of which occurs for Ismail mainly in the second part of the novel) constitutes a central axis (possibly *the* central one) on which not only the personality of the main character, but also

the whole novel is built: both the writer and her character turn to history for meaning, use history in their fictions, only to realize at the end that history, too, is another fiction.

Ismail in particular idealizes his past, his personal history as it is related to the history of his lost nation, only to find that history is a thing of the past and cannot be re-experienced; he realizes also that there is no innocence in history, since there are always several perspectives from which to view a situation, as our text claims; and history, like truth itself, is well beyond any simplistic and monosemous notions that could easily be reduced to polarities such as good and evil.

Moreover, along with the relativity and arbitrariness of truth, the procedures themselves that contributed to the creation but also to the shattering of illusions, are exposed and become overt. And it is through this perspective, of both the creation and the shattering of illusions, that our text becomes aware of itself and, moreover, the reader is initiated into the writing process in the form of a co-author.

But let us look at things in more detail. As we have already said, the title of the first part of the novel contains the word "myth". This can be explained by the fact that it is in this particular part that the gradual weaving and preservation of illusions take place, whether these concern the imagination of the character or that of the writer/reader. In this part, Ismail himself is engaged in a continuous effort to mythologize his life on the plateau before captivity;⁷ for her part the writer creates – while the readers decode – a myth which at the beginning seems to differ only slightly from that of traditional novels which give an account of a character's life from birth to the grave.

⁷ "Το αγόρι άκουγε τα ονόματα των ανθρώπων και τις ονομασίες της γης αποτυπώνοντας στο μυαλό του τις εικόνες που του έφερναν οι λέξεις. Άρχισε να υποψιάζεται ότι αυτά που έκανε μπορούσαν να επιμηκύνουν τη ζωή τους, αν εισχωρούσαν στα αισθήματα με την υπόμνηση του ήχου, της μυρωδιάς, της γεύσης, της αφής και της μορφής τους. (...) Ασυναίσθητα είχε στραφεί εκείνη τη στιγμή προς τη μυστική ζωή του κόσμου που χανόταν, προσπαθώντας, αν και πολύ νωρίς, να επιβληθεί στην αιχμαλωσία του." (25-6)

In the second part, however, the demythologization takes place under the impact of reality and historical events. Ismail realizes that the images ("οι εικόνες") which he painstakingly created and preserved for so many years in his mind were simply the product of his over-active imagination. At the same time, the reader of the novel realizes that in spite of its initial pretensions to verisimilitude, which the use of a historical person in fiction implies, the text gradually undermines its truth and reveals itself as simply a fiction that satisfies only the needs of writing.

After the captivity scene, Ismail on the one hand makes continuous efforts, as we have already said, to keep alive in his memory what he believes life is like on the Lasithi plateau, while on the other he tries to cope with the everyday reality of Egypt and succeed in his career. He also tries to keep these two worlds (the worlds of imagination and reality) separate from each other, so that he can preserve a balance between them; he is successful in this, at least until the visit to Egypt of his cousin Ioannis, if not until his return to Crete.⁸

However separate from each other these worlds are kept, Ismail is cast between them; in fact, he does not belong to either of them. While in Egypt, his mind is continually with the Paradise lost, there on the plateau; when in Crete, in the second part, facing the harsh reality of both the war and his thwarted expectations, he yearns for his life in Egypt. Life is always somewhere else for Ismail; it lies in a dematerialized, abstract world that has nothing to do with the present and the concrete.

⁸ In a letter to his brother, Antonis, he writes: "Γιατί είχε αποκάμει, έγραφε, από τις ίδιες εικόνες στο μυαλό του τόσα χρόνια. Από την έγνοια να κουρντίζει το ρολόι του σταματημένου τους χρόνου για να μην τις διαλύσει η ακινησία. Να ανανεώνει τα σημάδια τους ξέροντας πως έτσι στήνει μια παγίδα στον εαυτό του. Να τις αισθάνεται ότι αρπάζουν την αιγυπτιακή ζωή του στα ελληνικά τους νύχια και την κατασπαράζουν. (...) Είχε αποκάμει, επανέλαβε, είχε ωστόσο καταφέρει να τις αφοπλίσει με τα χρόνια, γεννώντας τις ο ίδιος συνέχεια, πανομοιότυπες με τις πραγματικές συνθήκες που τις γέννησαν κάποτε." (71)

Being between these two worlds means at the same time that Ismail is cast between two names, two homelands, two languages and two religions. As soon as he arrives in Egypt, he decides to accept his destiny and make the most of the opportunities that are opened up to him in his new country, while he will keep for himself the memories of his previous life. He changes religion because he has to, without much thought or inhibition, as we can see in the following passage:

Καθεμιά από τις ζωές μου κράτησε τη δική της θρησκεία, χωρίς αντιπαράθεση και χωρίς κραυγαλέα επιχειρήματα, – δεν ήταν άλλωστε η πιο ουσιαστική διαφορά ανάμεσα στους δυο τρόπους ζωής. Το σχεδόν γυμνό αγόρι, που ανοιγόκλεινε με μια τσάπα τ' αυλάκια των περιβολιών μουρμουρίζοντας το «Ελέησόν με», όχι μονάχα για να εξιλεωθεί, αλλά και σαν ξόρκι ή για να θυμάται τα γράμματα, παραστεκότανε συχνά στο μεταξωτό χαλί των αραβικών μου προσευχών. (111)

Similarly the Arabic language came naturally to replace Greek.

However, in spite of the ease with which he accepts his new life, Ismail is aware that he has two names, two homelands, two languages and two religions; he is aware that in essence he lies somewhere between these polar oppositions (Christian and Muslim for instance), and that he does not belong to either of the poles. He is reminded of this when, for instance, his classmates in Egypt never ask him about his origins (33), or when his relatives in Crete do not want to have any contact with him. Comparing himself with his brother Antonis, he says:

Ο Αντώνης δεν θα μάθαινε ποτέ για τον πόλεμο, που έκανε και αντίκρυσε ο αδελφός του επιστρέφοντας σαν εχθρός στα μέρη της πρώτης μας ζωής. Η τύχη τον είχε ακουμπήσει στη μεριά που πατριωτικά ιδανικά την εδικαίωσαν. (...) Δεν θα μάθαινε ποτέ για την πορεία από τον άντρα στο παιδί και από κει στον θάνατο. (...) Ούτε θα μάθαινε ποτέ για την ανομολόγητη, την απαγορευμένη, την αναπόφευκτη συμπάθειά μου στον εχθρό (...) Ο Αντώνης μπορούσε να με κάνει εχθρό, ενώ εγώ δεν μπορούσα να ορίσω

καθαρά το αντικείμενο του πολέμου που θα έκανα.
(100-1)

Ismail Ferik Pasha is a character with no stable, authoritative identity through which he can come to terms with what is foreign or other; he is a character with a negative identity; he is a person without a name, without a nation, without a language, without a religion, in other words with no past and no future, no history; the blood line coming down from his ancestors stops with him, while his memory, as he says, cannot be bequeathed to his children (83). But a person who does not constitute part of or contribute to historical continuity lacks authenticity and, ultimately, authority.

The discovery at the end of the novel of his familial house (170-9), the one he belonged to before the Fall, is Ismail's last attempt to regain authenticity and identity; it is his last attempt to revive the hitherto dead field of memory and attain his lost innocence. This will happen, he believes, by choosing the old, deserted house as the place of his new birth.

But let us summarize this very important scene. Having been on the plateau for some time, helping the Turks suppress the revolution there, Ismail secretly visits his home one night. As soon as he enters, he buries the testimonies of his second life in a hole in the wall, that is the knife he found in the cave a few minutes before his captivity, together with his brother's last letter to him while he was still in Egypt. Finding the house silent and still, he carries out the ritual which is described in the *Nekyia* of the Homeric *Odyssey*, so that the now dead inhabitants of the house are revived. The first to appear is his mother, who tells Ismail that she welcomes him back home unreservedly; then comes his father, who also says that he accepts him, but with some reservations, since Ismail has broken the continuity of the blood line to which he himself, as his father, belongs. With the illusion that he has been restored to his previous position in the house, that he is loved by it, Ismail falls asleep. But the following morning he wakes up to the most traumatic disillusionment:

Οι πρωινές βελόνες της μαγιάτικης δροσιάς με
ξύπνησαν λίγο πριν χαράξει. Άλλωστε, είχα την

έγνοια να σηκωθώ νωρίς για να δω από το μικρό παράθυρο της ανατολής τον ορθρινό ήλιο. Η εικόνα, που θυμόμουν, φωτίστηκε από το πρώτο φως. Αλλά δεν σκίρτησε. Δεν φανταζόμουνα τέτοια σιωπή, σαν τελεσιδική απόφαση της φύσης. Άρπαξα το σιδερένιο κάγκελο και πλησίασα όσο πιο πολύ μπορούσα τα μάτια μου. Η ανατολή έμενε πάντα σαν ζωγραφισμένη στο χαρτί. Περίμενα να διαλυθούν τα ρόδινα και τότε ήρθε να με παρηγορήσει η σκέψη πως, αφού αντίκρισα το πατρικό μου σπίτι, πόσο μάλλον αφού κοιμήθηκα μian ολόκληρη νύχτα στον κόρφο του, αφού τέλος μου μίλησε το ίδιο σπίτι, η φύση που το είχε χρόνια αντικαταστήσει ούτε θα συλλάβιζε πια, ούτε θα μου επέτρεπε να την ξαναρωτήσω. (177-8)

Throughout the period of his Islamicization, Ismail has preserved in his memory images of the scenery on the plateau, images of nature as it was when he left; coming back to Crete, almost half a century later, he expects this scenery to have remained unchanged, as it existed in his memory. Nature, therefore, has acquired here the role of the pure, edenic place that will restore Ismail's lost identity and offer him the certainty he seeks about the existence of a stable centre in all experience; Ismail believes that by returning, by uniting with nature, he will be purified and will regain his lost innocence.

During his years in Egypt, the years of the fictionalization of the past, the natural environment of the plateau was the lost referent which Ismail dreamt that he would sometime regain; when he is in Crete, cast into the living scenery of the plateau and being disillusioned by it, nature comes to be replaced by the idea of the familial house which he has also to regain. Ismail's house is to be the last step in this continuous process of narrativization of his memory and at the same time the last of a series of fatal disillusionments.

According to Docherty (1987: 52-4), in the history of human thought and art the familial house has been seen not only as a place where man can always return to discover security, a stable identity and purification; it has also been thought of as an expansion of the idea of nature herself, which, in Romanticism for instance, was thought to constitute a large, friendly place in which man could feel more "at home" than in his contingent

local situation, which was an artificial deviation from that "pure", natural state of existence. Bachelard (1957: 24), moreover, has seen the first house, the house in which one is born, as symbolizing the womb; he argues also that this first house becomes the archetype that determines and conditions life after birth.

Choosing the house to replace nature after the latter had disappointed him, Ismail, still in the womb of his mother, returns there, as we know, just to be re-born; in this way he will return to the first state of things and will resume what he owned at his original birth, that is the identity and the authority which everybody who belongs to a certain house and family can enjoy; but above all, he will resume his first innocence, which was irreparably lost with his entrance into the cave and the acquisition of knowledge.⁹

However, in the "epimythio", the little boy reveals that it was not only the motionless scene of the rising sun that embarrassed him that morning in the episode of the house which we saw above; it was the realization that his ultimate expectation, innocence, was never to be regained. The little boy says:

Εκείνη τη νύχτα ήθελε ν' αποτυπωθεί αιώνιος, γιατί αισθανόταν πως είχε σηκωθεί πάνω από σχήματα και λέξεις για ν' αγγίξει την έσχατη γνώση. Χρόνια τώρα υπέθετε ότι εκεί θα συναντούσε τη χαμένη αθωότητα· δεν του άξιζε όμως να ευτυχίσει το τέλος των αθώων, αν δεν εξομοιωνόταν. Εκείνη λοιπόν τη νύχτα στο παλιό του σπίτι η αθωότητα χαμογελούσε σαν ο ανευρισκόμενος φύλακας άγγελος της μνήμης. Διστάζοντας να πιστέψει το θαύμα, άπλωσε το χεράκι του ν' αγγίξει τον άγγελο. Τότε μόνο είδε τα μαύρα φίδια, που τυλίγονταν στους φωτεινούς βοστρύχους, κι οπισθοχώρησε. Το μυαλό του έλαμψε ξαφνικά και κατανόησε ότι δεν υπάρχει, ούτε και υπήρξε, κάτι τόσο αθώο ώστε να χαθεί. Άρα, πως δεν υπάρχει, ούτε και ποτέ υπήρξε, επιστροφή. (197)

⁹ The scene in the cave, combined with the frequent reference to the image of apples throughout the novel, seems to recall the biblical Fall and the primordial sin.

This final realization marks the virtual collapse of all the fictions which Ismail Ferik Pasha created for himself to sustain his decentred life; having failed to turn history into reality, to find the paradisaic elsewhere and unite with his pure, natural self, Ismail finally understands that history cannot be repeated in reality; it can only be invented, that is it can be rewritten or repainted on a piece of paper like the stage scenery in Heraklion harbour (148-50). He also understands that innocence, too, has never existed, for it is simply another of those authoritative and monosemious notions that aspire to the supreme truth. What ultimately exists is only Ismail himself (149), who, like everyone, is a finite, decentred being that grows out of contradictions and who vainly pursues a meaning, a stable centre for his life.

Like the novel itself, Ismail remains to the end an untotalized character, for he remains a person with a mobile identity and, therefore, with no authority; he is a character that continually rolls from one status to the other and can be approached only in the same terms, that is in the terms of his fluid personality; he can be received only as a set of versions and assessments ("εκδοχές και εκτιμήσεις", 132), like history itself.

Thus, from another aspect, Ismail, though a historical personage, appears deprived of his referentiality too; by continually undermining the authority of history, our text undermines its own authority, its own truth, its referentiality. Ismail himself, in spite of the expectations he creates in the reader at the beginning, is gradually stripped of all his qualities of authenticity and authority that history would endow him with and remains simply an actor who plays the last act of his life on the stage of Heraklion harbour.

Έλεγα πως κατακτητές και κατακτημένοι είχαν για πολλούς αιώνες μαστορέψει ένα σκηνικό, όπως εκείνα που έτυχε να δω στις ευρωπαϊκές όπερες πριν από πολλά χρόνια, για ν' αρχίσει να παίζεται εκεί μέσα η τελευταία πράξη της ζωής μου. Η ανάμνηση των δυο αιχμαλωτισμένων αγοριών, που χωρίστηκαν για πάντα σ' αυτό το λιμάνι, και χωρίστηκαν ως το κόκαλο από διαφορετικούς δρόμους, μετέτρεψε ξαφνικά το παρελθόν και το παρόν σε διακοσμητικά στοιχεία ενός επεισοδίου. Η εντύπωση του ψεύτικου ήταν τόσο

σφοδρή, που σκέφτηκα μήπως το ήδη παιγμένο επεισόδιο δεν υπήρξε ποτέ σαν ζωή. Τι σήμαινε άραγε ένας αδερφός ξένος και αντίπαλος; Κι ωστόσο είχε παίξει το ρόλο του άριστα, σαν να επρόκειτο για γνήσιο αδερφό. Όμως αν κάποιος μπορούσε να τεκμηριώσει πως είχε υπάρξει σ' αυτήν την εξιστόρηση, αν κάποιος ήταν αληθινός σπαράζοντας ακόμη από τον χωρισμό, αυτός ήμουν εγώ. Τίποτε άλλο δεν μπορούσα να αποδείξω. Αναγνώριζα μόνο τη ζωή μου, καθώς ξαναβρισκόταν στον ίδιο χώρο, σαν ζωή, όχι σαν μίμηση. Αμφέβαλλα για οτιδήποτε άλλο. (148-9)

To sum up, we can say that by questioning the medium of history, that is linear time, as well as the integrity of human individuality, in other words the very creator and receiver of history, our text also questions the authoritative truth of history; historical truth exists only in books; it is the matter and the result of writing, that is of assessing and inventing; truth is the gold that was hidden under the books that contained the ancestors' treasure in Antonis's dream, but Ismail decided that they disperse this gold so that the two brothers do not fight over its possession (85).

"Historiographic metafiction" or "revisionist historical novel" are two terms that are used to designate a trend in post-modern fiction which intermingles historical events with fictional facts. Without embarking on a presentation of the whole ideology that lies behind the choices of post-modern fiction, we can say that one of its basic interests is to reveal, through the exposition of its own fictionality and of its own conventions, the mechanisms that create meaning and value in modern culture; to put it another way, post-modern fiction not only asserts its own fictionality: it claims that our contemporary culture, with its value system and its ideology, is also fiction.

History has undoubtedly constituted a source of meaning for Western societies; the teleological and logical connection of events in a continuous chronology, however disparate and different from each other these events are and however different the social context of these events from the present might be, constitutes a meaning-assigning process for our contemporary culture which justifies its choices by comparing and contrasting

them to the choices of the historical past. This appropriation and narrativization of the past in order to sustain the myths of the present becomes the object of the subversive scrutiny of post-modern fiction.

In order to make clear this use and abuse of history in contemporary societies, post-modern fiction must first demonstrate the use and abuse of real historical events by those who write history by turning events into facts. Post-modern fiction tries to show that in all writing, either fictional or historical, it is the writer who constructs, interprets and evaluates in the way he/she wants, depending among other factors on his/her ideological and social stance. Thus, post-modern fiction that uses history as its subject makes overt the narrativization and meaning-granting of the past that has been made possible by means of the fact-making process of historians of both past and present. As Hutcheon (1989: 36) puts it:

Historiographic metafiction represents not just a world of fiction, however self-consciously presented as a constructed one, but also a world of public experience. The difference between this and the realist logic of reference is that here that public world is rendered specifically as discourse. How do we know the past today? Through its discourses, through its texts – that is, through the traces of its historical events: the archival materials, the documents, the narratives of witnesses... and historians. On one level, then, post-modern fiction merely makes overt the processes of narrative representation – of the real or the fictive and of their interrelations.

The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha is ostensibly using history, though the real historical elements of the novel are limited to the person of Ismail himself and very few events, such as some battles during the Cretan revolution of 1866-68. As we realize, however, the personality of Ismail had to be constructed, to be re-invented by the writer (as the introduction to the novel also reveals), as it has also been narrativized by the historian who "τον κατέταξε οριστικά στην ιστορία με τον αναμφισβήτητο ρεαλισμό των ονομάτων και των τόπων" (106). Consequently, the particular relations of Ismail to the real events as well as to

the other historical persons had to be invented, too, to match this fictional personality.

On the other hand, and by analogy with Galanaki's role, Ismail himself creates history, his own history, through the fictionalization of his past as it is related to the past of the country in which he was born, while at the same time he gradually becomes aware of the fictionalization of the national history in which he is involved through his participation as both actor and witness.

Γνώριζα από παλιά πως η αλήθεια ενός γεγονότος δεν είναι ποτέ μία, και αυτό δεν ήταν ίσως το πιο σημαντικό, όσο ν' ανακαλύπτω ποια ανάγκη επέβαλε την ταξινόμηση εκείνων των αληθειών, που δεν παραμερίζονταν αμέσως από κάποιο άορατο χέρι. Και τούτος ο πόλεμος άρχιζε να γίνεται αληθινός, εφόσον είχε κιόλας αρχίσει να μετατρέπεται σε εκδοχές και εκτιμήσεις. (132)

Thus, by thematizing the arbitrary construction of history in this novel as another fiction within fiction, the text reflects in an allegorical way the equally arbitrary and invented status of meaning and current truth in contemporary reality.

By once again questioning the totalization and mastery of meaning in both history and fiction, our text refuses to conclude in a single ending but instead chooses a multiple one. These versions (four in number) concern the circumstances of Ismail's death on the plateau. This relativized finality accords with Ismail's personality, which is not autonomous and fixed but something in process, as well as with the untotalized status of Ismail's life, as we have already discussed, which describes successive circles. Apart from being an attempt to counteract the processes of mastery of history and of truth in general, this multiple ending of *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* also aims at defying any attempt to decode and interpret a fictional text in a closed, unitary and non-contradictory manner.

The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha is fiction about history but it is also about the fiction of history and more importantly about the fictions that our modern historical culture has created. *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* should be seen, in this respect, as an

allegory of all fictions, illusions, and consequent disillusionment that contemporary man and woman have to go through in their restless, though futile, pursuit of their lost identity.

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