



Freud's "Uncanny" (Unheimlich) in David Vogel's *Married Life*: Impressionism and Expressionism in a Belligerent Relationship

Heddy Shait

Hebrew and Comparative Literature
University of Haifa

Abstract

Married Life, by the Austrian Jewish author and poet David Vogel, was a provocative novel for Hebrew literature at the time of its publication in 1929. The story is one of sexual pathology in a relationship between a masochistic victimized Jewish man, a writer at the start of his career, and a willful Christian baroness who beats and mentally abuses him, until the inevitable tragic end. This essay analyzes the novel's structure both poetically and thematically, through representations from the contrasting art movements of Impressionism and Expressionism. They are dominant influences that function not only as stylistic modes, but aesthetic cloaks behind which many of the novel's problematical issues hide. The main concern is the complicated relationship between the married couple, viewed here through Freud's concept of the "uncanny." This prompts an additional reading of the influences of the above mentioned art movements through the "uncanny."

To cite as

Shait, H., 2014, 'Freud's "Uncanny" (Unheimlich) in David Vogel's *Married Life*: Impressionism and Expressionism in a Belligerent Relationship', *PsyArt* 18, pp. 164–179.

I

Married Life, by the Jewish author and poet David Vogel, a provocative novel at the time of its publication in Jerusalem in 1929, is still considered a masterpiece of Hebrew literature. Yet, according to Moshe Ben-Menachem, when Vogel, who lived most of his life in Vienna and Paris, tried to publish the novel also in Germany, German Jewry explicitly disapproved of it and the manuscript was rejected by publishers. Their reluctance was, inter alia, fueled by the novel's convention-breaking eroticism (Ben-Menachem, 1954:201).

The story, one of sexual pathology between a masochistic victimized Jewish man and a willful Austrian Christian baroness who rules over him, was too harsh and incendiary for Jewish readers. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Jewish nation was engaged in a revival process and the image of the strong proud "New Jew" was conscientiously fostered. This despite the fact that the 'rootless' character was the prominent protagonist of Modern Hebrew literature at the time. As a result, Vogel's rootless protagonist was not a source of pride to a Middle European Jewish culture that encouraged the inverse image.¹

Married Life describes the disastrously cruel affair and marriage of Rodulf Gurdweill, a Jewish writer at the start of his career, and Thea von Takow, an Austrian Baroness who beats and mentally abuses him, cheats on him, and bears a child with one of her lovers. Gurdweill, who believes the boy is his, takes sole care of him because Thea has no interest in being a mother or changing her freewheeling lifestyle. When the child dies of illness, Thea cruelly tells Gurdweill that the child is not his. She rips his manuscript, castrates his creative powers of production, and banishes him from their apartment to the streets of Vienna. Yet, despite all this, Gurdweill cannot break away from her and always finds excuses for her while ignoring his Jewish friend Lotte's love for him. Only after Lotte's suicide, prompted by this unrequited passion, does he understand that in fact he loves her too. He develops hatred towards Thea because of the child's and Lotte's deaths, a hatred that grows and reaches its climax when he finds her in their marriage bed with one of her lovers. Overwhelmed with jealousy he kills her with a knife.

This essay analyzes the poetic and thematic structure of *Married Life* and suggests a reading of it using Freud's concept of the "uncanny" that is supported by, and revealed through, representations from the contrasting artistic movements of Impressionism and Expressionism. The novel is built on two opposing forces whose relationship to some extent can be characterized by the "uncanny." One is apparent in the struggle between the weak Jewish male and strong Christian female described as "Brunhilda," and the other site of tension can be seen in the aesthetic design, wherein significant

¹ The rootless character was a significant and central figure in Hebrew prose at the turn of the 20th century. It is a metaphor for the precarious existence of the anti-hero protagonist who was characterized through geographical and psychological distances from his family, often because he had a wish to be a cosmopolitan and felt disconnected from the tradition of his ancestors and was therefore 'banished' from his father's table. He was an intellectual, while physically he always felt inferior. His relationship with the other sex was hesitant and never successful, a motif named in the study of Hebrew literature as the "erotic shame" or "erotic failure." His worldly failure could be predicted, because he did not have the ability to cope with life either, or with the disparity between the existing reality and the reality he strove for. The "New Jew" was his opposite image in terms of national revival. He was the figure that Zionist thinkers promulgated, calling for determination, a strong physical presence, and being a man of the land instead of intellectual. The image of the "New Jew" appeared mostly in Zionist pamphlets, rather than in literature.

impressionistic and expressionistic modes of representation are evident. Here, although in limited ways, and as will be discussed later, Expressionism plays the role of the uncanny to Impressionism's unspoken agenda.

The problematic issues that arise in the novel appear through representations lifted from the world of these art movements with their contradictory poetical and philosophical points of view. Each of them brings a distinct artistic language, while the conflict between them influences the shaping of Vogel's characters and their relationships. It especially explains Gurdweill's bizarre and intense attraction to the cruel Baroness, and may shed light on the novel's abrupt ending.

Though Vogel's engagement with both artistic movements has been discussed in the study of his work overall, in my opinion, *Married Life* highlights most clearly the complicated and committed use of these modes of expression. Some critics have pointed out the impressionistic nature of many of his poems and of his fiction, such as his novella *Nochach Ha'yam* ("Facing the Sea"), but others actually notice a German expressionistic influence, especially in his early poetry. Chana Kronfeld, however, points out the dual character of Vogel's work wherein literary Impressionism, especially in its German Viennese mode, simultaneously maintains a dialogic tension, and a critical engagement, with a similarly Germanic Expressionism. Kronfeld indicates that the struggle between these competing models of representation and perception is deliberate (Kronfeld, 1993: 54).

Vogel was truly influenced by these two art movements, and by modern European and Hebrew literature. By the time Impressionism's innovations entered Hebrew writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, its peak influence in European literature had passed. On the other hand, at that time Expressionism was evident and significant in European art, literature and drama. Since Vogel lived most of his life in Europe, he was naturally influenced by it. And while Expressionism was also evident in the works of other Israeli-Hebrew prose writers and poets, in Vogel's writing it lacked the ideology of nationalism apparent in their work. These were ideas he felt alienated from.²

² According to Michael Gluzman, Vogel did not participate, neither biographically nor poetically, in activities connected to the revival of the Hebrew nation, and he had no interest in Zionist narratives (Gluzman, 1993, 22-23). And while the choice to write in Hebrew may seem motivated by ideology, it was not the case. Vogel did not see before him the project of Jewish resurrection. Robert Alter argues that Vogel's attachment to Hebrew was neither sentimental, nor nationalistic, but only a reasonable aesthetic option. On the one hand, Vogel was not at home in any European language, and on the other hand, Yiddish, his native tongue, lacked the aura of literary prestige and was associated with the Orthodox Jewish life he left behind. Alter infers that the reason Vogel chose Hebrew after all was that since Hebrew was an indigenous Jewish language, it could claim its place in high culture (Alter, 1993: 4-5). Barbara Mann also thinks that Vogel's choice of Hebrew was not emotional or ideological. On the contrary, she claims he broke with the traditional attitude to Hebrew by treating it like another Semitic language and divorced it from any Jewish-religious content (Mann, 2006:690).

Vogel then, was engaged both with German Expressionism and with Impressionism. In *Married Life* these two modes of expression are not only used for the benefit of stylistic design, rather they function as representative codes of Gurdweill's split interior psychological world. Thea is the salient performance of his expressionistic nature, his repressed Impressionistic side, and therefore of the "uncanny."

According to Freud (1919), "The 'uncanny' is that class of frightening which leads back to what is known, of old and long familiar" (Freud, 1955: 220). It is an emotional affect, Freud indicates, transformed by repression into morbid anxiety. This repression illuminates Schelling's definition of the "uncanny" as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light. The German word *Unheimliche*, stresses Freud, includes the *Heimlich*, meaning home-like. The prefix *un* is the negative token of repression, the transformation of what was once familiar to a frightening source of anxiety (Ibid, 241-245).

Some critics have tended to see Freud's "*Das Unheimliche*" as an essay more interested in aesthetics than psychology. For example, Helen Cixous reads the essay as a fiction (Cixous, 1976:525-548), while Sarah Kofman as a theoretical novel (Kofman, 1991: 119-128). Harold Bloom considers it to be of great importance to literary criticism since it is an essay that stresses the feeling of uncanniness that literature creates (Bloom, 1982: 101-103). David Ellison indicates that some interpretations of the 1970's and 1980's read the essay as an auto-deconstructing text (Ellison, 2001: 52). One way or another, the main focus is on the rhetoric, and on the style and structure of the essay, rather than on the psychological phenomenon itself. My interest in Freud's theory relates to the psychological aspects that can be applied in Vogel's novel, and not to the uncanniness that might be roused by an aesthetic work in general (since literature often presents familiar situations in new and strange ways and calls it fiction).

To understand the uncanny we must note the complex emotions it arouses stemming from danger and threat. It combines contradictory feelings of attraction and repulsion, fear and curiosity, alienation and familiarity, the mysterious, and the secret, while it awakens a longing for something vague and unexplained. According to Royle, the uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. It is a crisis of the natural. Everything that one thought to be 'part of nature' -- human nature, one's own nature, the nature of reality and the world -- is suddenly questioned. Yet it is not simply an experience of the tension between the familiar and unfamiliar. It also consists of a revelation of something as 'not home-like' at the heart of hearth and home. The uncanny, argues Royle, has to do with a sense of ourselves as doubles, split, at odds with ourselves. Additionally, the uncanny is the experience of something duplicitous and diplopic (Royle, 2003: 1-27). Julia Kristeva's discussion of the uncanny also remains in the realm of the psychological. She sees Freud's essay

as an investigation into the “dynamics of the unconscious” (Kristeva, 1991: 182). Freud, she argues, notes that the archaic, narcissistic self projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making of it an alien double, uncanny and demonic. The concept that arises from Freud’s essay, as Kristeva sees it, is that the uncanny is a crumbling of a conscious defense, the result of conflicts the self experiences both within itself and with others (the “strange”). It is a self-inflicted conflict towards the “other” that at the same time arouses fear of the other and a need for identification with it (Ibid: 182-188). Kristeva actually uses the “uncanny” politically when she discusses the foreigner who makes us feel anguish because of his strangeness. Yet it is the foreigner within us that we flee from when we struggle within our unconscious (Ibid: 191).

Subsequent to Royle’s insight regarding the perception of ourselves as being split and double, and Kristeva’s insight regarding the foreigner with whom we feel intimidated but also attracted to, Gurdweill is enchanted by Thea the Austrian Christian Baroness. On the other hand he is intimidated by that same fact. She is both an individual and a representation of his split persona.

The sense of the “uncanny” that Thea arouses in Gurdweill appears from the moment he meets her when she threatens and tempts him simultaneously:

Gurdweill, who was short and thin, walked beside the woman who was a head taller than he was. From time to time, as they walked down Wahringer Strasse, he glanced at his companion and thought to himself: A tall, handsome woman, but obviously hard. She’ll probably give a lot of pain to anyone close to her. Gurdweill felt a wonderfully pleasant sensation together with a terrifying uneasiness. The girl gave off a vague but definite sense of menace. It was a strange new mood to Gurdweill but at the same time it was clear to him that he had experienced it before, perhaps in his infancy. Certain events, too, connected with his mood trembled at the threshold of his memory. Gurdweill almost touch them, but then they sank back into the depths of his mind, like a fish leaping out of the water and disappearing into it again before you could do more than glimpse it. (25, emphasis added)³

Another time, when he sits on her lap (like a baby, thereby reversing stereotypical gender roles), she taunts him by saying she might kill him in his sleep. This arouses his strong sense of the “uncanny”:

Sitting on her lap began to make him feel uncomfortable. Thea suddenly seemed alien and terrifying, and for a moment he saw her as really capable of committing the act. For some reason he remembered his old fear as a child when, at night, he had to pass the only brothel in the little town. The building

³ All citations are from *Married Life*, translated into the English by Dalya Bilu, New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2007.

stood on a small hill on the edge of the town, set apart, and a dull reddish light shone through the red curtains on its narrow windows. [--]. Gurdweill was then fourteen years old, and had no idea of the true nature of the place but he sensed that something special and extraordinary was going on inside it. [--]. That old fear of houses of prostitution had remained with him to the present day, and for some reason he remembered it now. (281, emphasis added)

Thea, especially in certain situations, stimulates great fear in him which he finds both repulsive and attractive. This feeling is related in part with her being Christian. When he was a boy he was curious to know what went on inside the Church. It was a curiosity mixed with horror and fear:

"All this," he began in a whisper, as if talking to himself, "once had an attraction for me that was both fascinating and terrifying. [--]. My parents weren't orthodox but nevertheless they had nothing to do with Christians. In short: the Christians fascinated me in their strangeness. When I grew a little older, I would hang around the church on their holidays, moved and excited, waiting for something. The singing of the choir, threatening and obscure, would come pouring out into the fresh summer like a slow stream of thick black tar. By then I already knew about the Inquisition, the Crusades, the persecution of the Jews, and I was constantly afraid that they would suddenly seize me and drag me inside and force me to do something terrible. And yet I kept on hanging around outside the church. You might say that in the depths of my soul I was even eager for the thing to happen. (221)

Thea therefore is a figure outside himself who represents his suppressed emotions. Facing her awakens this early emotion of restlessness in him. She functions as a prompt for the "uncanny" in him and therefore, inexplicably, he feels enchanted by her. He lacks all ability to cut himself off from her despite the sense of danger and warning signs. The "uncanny" that defines the relationship between Thea and Gurdweill can be viewed, if we examine the prominent features of each artistic movement and the circumstances under which it appears, as existing implicitly in the 'psychological' connection between Expressionism and Impressionism. In other words, Expressionism acts as the more repressed Impressionism's uncanny. This statement indeed demands explanation and substantiation. However, the extensive discussion of these two artistic movements makes it impossible to cover all their variables and variations. Therefore I will limit myself to the main characteristics that are essential to understand the main idea of how the uncanny is manifest in Vogel's novel through the relationship of these two artistic movements.

Expressionism in art and literature developed in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century in response to the difficult political, social and economic conditions that prevailed before the First World War. After the war's

devastations, it expressed feelings of despair, frustration and protest as well. Nonetheless, its development was driven by earlier artistic tendencies.

According to R. Furness, a more intense concern for human life, for a humanity crushed by pitiless machinery and ruthless cities, demanded more vital emotions, and more dynamic powers of description. In addition, a destruction of the conventional pictures of reality allowed for a more powerful, distorted, and aggressive expression of emotions in reaction to what was really happening (Furness, 1978: 61).⁴ In its basic artistic-philosophical point of view, Expressionism can be viewed as an explicit and reactionary challenge to Impressionism, especially in relation to its concern with observation and empiricism, and the ways in which Impressionism transformed them into elevated values in and of themselves. Maria Kronegger indicates that the Impressionists avoided comprehensive visions and preferred disassembling reality into small atomized units that served their escapist tendencies. Social, political, and economical issues were not at the center of their work (Kronnegger, 1973: 35-49).

Arnold Hauser argues that in the age of Impressionism, aestheticism reached the pinnacle of its development – a passive self-absorbed art that reflected a lack of consideration for everything outside of its sphere (Hauser, 1968:170). Most impressionist paintings are of the landscape and nature, or delightful moments of leisure. The near complete disregard, or denial, of political and social issues derives from repression and escapism, and therefore unintentionally remains with the work. Feelings of nervousness and stimulation are recognizable through the edgy spotted brush strokes, for example.

Expressionism, to a large extent, confronts and pays attention to what Impressionism seeks to escape from. It raises the banner of forceful protest, rebellion, and privileges the externalization of emotions. It does not exalt empiric observation but its opposite: communication that is twisted and extreme, that reflects punishing situations of internal harsh violence and crude sexuality. Women are displayed as strong, dominant torturers, for example, a very different depiction from that of the feminine figures in Impressionism who are styled delicately and are set mainly in domestic situations. Even when naked women are depicted in some Impressionistic paintings, the eroticism is soft and gentle.

In his 1917 manifesto, "Expressionism in Literature," the German writer Kasimir Edschmid defines the goals and aesthetics of Expressionism by unequivocally attacking impressionist aesthetic principles: "Then came the artists of the new movement. They no longer sought the raw facts. For them the moment, the second of impressionistic creativity was simply an empty husk in the mill of time." (Edschmid, 2001:166). Edschmid also stresses that while

⁴ Furness relates to Naturalism and Impressionism, but also to Symbolism, in as much as a new expression of form was needed that would exceed the Symbolist cult of the soul.

the "old" movement (namely Impressionism but also Naturalism) seeks to see and to photograph the passing moment, Expressionism wishes to perceive and create ongoing agitation. The Expressionist, he stresses, "feeling developed in boundless measure" (Ibid). His famous and strong argument is: "The world is there. There is no sense in repeating it" (Ibid).

Though expressed differently, a shared factor in Impressionism and Expressionism is their involvement and relationship to the "city." On the one hand, as Hauser indicates, Impressionism is an urban art because it sees the world through the eyes of the townsman and describes the changeability, the nervous rhythm, the sudden, sharp, but ephemeral impression of city life. Techniques of quivering trembling dots and hasty loose and abrupt strokes of the brush are common. On the other hand, "plain-airism" (the practice of painting in the open air to obtain effects of light and atmosphere), not only reflected the value of not painting inside the studio, but was also part of the trend of painting countryside landscapes (Hauser, 158-159). Because of the aspect of escapism in plain-airism, Impressionism has many paintings of landscape while basically remaining an urban art form. The "city" is an important variable in its essence and a catalyst in producing existential nervousness and tension.

In Expressionism, the anxiety of city life is reflected in a different manner. D. Gur-Arie argues that collective images of fear and anxiety inform the most commonplace depictions of "The Scream." This is of course the scream of the person who has lost all sense of security in a huge megalopolis lacking intimacy and human warmth. It is an urban anxiety: alienation, a sense of going astray, the erosion of human principles to the extent of losing one's identity and living with violence, either suppressed or erupting (Gur-Arie, 1992:139-151).

By examining the nature of these two art movements and the fundamental differences between them, it is evident that Expressionism deals openly, strongly, and deliberately with what Impressionism avoids -- consciously and unconsciously, thematically and aesthetically -- the return of repressed. Here is the concealed familiar, or 'homey' material, or, in other words, the uncanny. The Impressionist's use refined themes that intentionally avoid problematic political and sociological issues though they are unintentionally revealed through what is 'hidden' or through what is not said explicitly. What is concealed cannot be completely silenced. It is transferred into the aesthetic design via edgy brush strokes and in the paint structure itself. Frustration and anxiety are transformed into a productive manner that then becomes an innovative poetics of painting. Here find parallels to Freud's defense mechanism theory of sublimation (1930). It is the transforming of an unacceptable impulses and instincts that according to the norms should not be revealed such as sex, fear, anger, Jealousy, hatred and so, into a form that can be socially accepted. They appear in a new dress through a higher route of expressions and acts, or as Freud states it is "an especially conspicuous feature

of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological to play such an important part in civilized life.” (Freud, 1961 : 79-80).

Impressionism hides what afterwards bursts out in Expressionism. The notable thematic absence of sociological and political subjects that characterizes Impressionism screams out loudly in Expressionism. The sublimated manner of Impressionism is replaced by Expressionism's more primitive style which can be perceived as its uncanny. This helps to explain the critical aesthetic principles of these artistic movements.

The idea of the uncanny forging a relationship between Impressionism and Expressionism should be detailed in a separate study since it has many aesthetic, sociological and psychological aspects worth examining. Here this idea is presented in its preliminary form.

II

Thea, as was mentioned in the introduction, is Gurdweil's "uncanny." The essence of her existence has lain dormant inside of him for a long time. His spirit is split emotionally and psychologically into two mental spaces: the impressionistic and the expressionistic, and Thea is the dominant representation of the latter. The Impressionistic space in *Married Life* is present in various ways. It is evident in Gurdweill's perceptual and sensual consciousness, his sensitivity to the reflected light and illuminated shadows, and his return over and over to the same views and varied circumstances. The language style that reflects his consciousness describes the scenery and sights and an impressionistic stimmung (mood and state of mind). His escapism is particularly striking since it has fundamental importance to the plot development. In keeping with André Gide who revised Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" to "I see, I feel, I hear, I smell; therefore I am" (Kronneger, 1973:35), Gurdweill clings to his five senses when a sense of disaster begins to permeate his consciousness after meeting Thea's cruel family:

And if, God forbid, everything were lost, everything - - he would still have himself, Gurdweill, with all his five senses intact. Five senses in good working order should be quiet enough for anyone, no? The whole world was his. (252)

Gurdweill frequently roams the city streets. Initially this is an escape from home whenever he feels suffocated. But after marrying Thea, he escapes outdoors to avoid conflicts, or because she throws him out perforce. In his vagrancy he pays good attention to the pavements which are described over and over again using a variety of descriptive language, as impressionists paintings repeat in variations the same sights. For example, when he first meets Thea, the pavement looks fresh and shiny (5), but later, with his rising feelings of jealousy, the square paving stones appear torn up, as if lying one on top of

the other (88). Or on the morning of his wedding, the world is reflected upside-down in the glittering wet asphalt like a black mirror (99), and when Lotte commits suicide, a film of snow covers the pavement (472). However, Gurdweill's impressionistic essence, his keen observation and sensitivity to the small visual details, becomes blurred after he becomes involved with Thea:

Gurdweill was tingling with a quiet, buoyant expectation of something which was undefined but wonderful beyond measure. He believed that it was the general expectation of spring pervading all of nature now and welling up secretly in his own soul too, despite the barrier of the city and its agitation. And the fact that he still preserved the ability to sense the upheavals in nature in spite of everything filled him with joy. The inner connection between himself and nature, which had been so strong before, in the small town of his birth, and even when he first came to the city, and which had grown weaker and weaker during the course of years, especially the past year – this connection was still there, it had not been broken off completely, which meant that his instincts were still healthy and had not yet degenerated owing to the influence of city life. (281-282)

Although the expressionistic space gains influence and slowly takes over both Gurdweill's and the novel's text (in style and images), Gurdweill still clings to his ability to sense nature, and to the impressionistic space. He finds refuge from Thea's bullying in Lotte's house.

Lotte indeed is related to Gurdweill's impressionistic space. She is also one of his Jewish friends, since his social group includes both Jews and Christians. It is to her that he escapes often to get away from Thea, but at the same time he behaves callously towards her – ignoring her love for him, even to the extent of being unwilling to listen to her love confession. Distinguished from Thea's wild sexuality, Lotte's is gentle and domestic. Gurdweill sees Lotte's potential motherhood and thinks she could be a much better mother to his son than Thea. Even when she commits suicide, there is nothing messy about it. She kills herself with poison, lying on the sofa in her luxurious fancy living room. Yet Lotte herself has a dual personality. In some moments her rebellious and animal-like side is revealed. It turns out that she has a fantasy about murdering her parents, and that she was almost raped in her childhood. This side of her is not visible to Gurdweill though. In his world she belongs to the impressionistic space where strong emotions and violence are concealed.

The escapism that characterizes Gurdweill is revealed in his absorption and response modes. He refuses to face reality concerning Thea's deeds. He ignores Lotte's love for him and wanders the streets and roams from one café to another. He seeks to blend in with the darkness and to be invisible, and he escapes into sleep many times "as if he were fleeing from some danger" (4).

Throughout the novel there are transitions from the impressionistic mode to the expressionistic by various representations in the plot, language

stylization, and the descriptions of views. The novel opens with a description of a roar disturbing a sleepy atmosphere, and ends in an act of murder whose purpose is revenge and salvation. Between the prologue and the finale there is an impressionistic world that is interrupted over and over by bursts of images and themes of an expressionistic world.

For example, the first time when Thea slaps him after he did not respond to her whims:

Before he knew what was happening, a stringing slap landed on his left cheek. Sparks shot from his eyes and his head felt as if it were being uprooted from his body. For a moment he thought that the house was collapsing and the ceiling was crashing on his head. The precise location of the pain was not yet clear to him. All this took no more than a few seconds. Then he felt a distinct burning on his left cheek and saw Thea, as if through a fog, walking to the door and going out. For a while he went on looking at the door through which his wife has disappeared. The square patch of sunlight lying on the floor at an oblique angle to the door drew his eyes to it. [--] Then he turned round abruptly, and caught sight of his reflection in the mirror above the washstand. His face, usually so pale and downcast, was bright red, as if lit by hidden flame. Overcome by a great weariness he lay down on the couch and lit his pipe, which he had been holding in his hand all this time. (116)

The alternating nature between expressionistic and impressionistic modes is demonstrated in this scene and in what happens right afterwards. The expressionistic theme of the strong and violent woman who bites the man is illustrated by Thea slapping Gurdweill. Indeed he is shocked by this but then shifts his attention to small details, such as the way the light passes through the window and falls on the floor. He lights his pipe so the smoke will camouflage the reflection of his red cheeks in the mirror. The strong impression of this act though is not so easily obscured. Gurdweill escapes into the open air and roams the city streets which provide him once again with more palatable impressionistic views:

Outside Gurdweill felt a slight sense of relief. [--] Gurdweill strolled slowly and aimlessly from street to street and alley to alley. [--] He had always felt a delicate love for this city with its air of faint sadness. [--] He had lived here for twelve years, ever since he came of age. And the autumn in Vienna! The autumn days were wonderful, a little gray and cloudy in the morning and with a mild gentle warmth in the golden, transparent afternoons. The sky was a deep, still azure, and a few above the ground delicate white threads floated aimlessly in the air. (120)

Thea's violent nature is also revealed in erotic situations. Thea, who sexually attacks Gurdweill after proposing to him, is described similarly to the vampire woman in Munch's painting "Vampire" (1895):⁵

Her long, jutting chin twitched spasmodically and her bosom heaved. Gurdweill sat down beside her on the bed. She immediately left her shoes alone and turned to face him. There was a cruel, bloodthirsty expression on her face. She fixed him with eyes flashing like spears, as if to subdue him completely, and with one swift movement she threw herself back and stuck her teeth in his elbow, like a beast of prey. Gurdweill let out a strangled groan. He felt as if he were about to faint with pain and desire at once. He sensed his strength draining out of his body. Flaming red daggers danced before his eyes and sweat burst from his brow. At the same time he wished that it would go on forever, that the pain would increase thousand fold, that it would annihilate him entirely. No woman had ever made him feel like this before. (50)

Thea humiliates Gurdweill and prevents him from his writing. These acts are in synch with the nature of woman in Expressionism who, according to Nurit Hadas, prevents the man from attaining intellectual achievements through her aggression and sexuality (Hadas, 1996: 189-191). Thea not only disrupts Gurdweill's mind and paralyzes his creative powers, but she also rips his manuscript to pieces and threatens to burn it in the fireplace. Thereafter Gurdweill is forced to write secretly.

A lack of peace of mind, and intellectual discontent in violent and industrialized cities, are typical apocalyptic expressionist feelings that appear in the novel. They raise explicit questions about human life and intellectualism's role as well as philosophical Nietzschean ideas, such as the will to power, the super-human (Übermensch), good and evil, immorality, the Apollonian and the Dionysian and more.⁶

Gurdweill's nervousness causes him to wander all over the city and makes him come across expressionist situations that penetrate his impressionistic state of mind. These shock him emotionally and psychologically and shake him up. Examples are the girl who commits suicide by jumping into the river, or the prostitutes, the drunks, beggars, the homeless, the criminals and ex-prisoners who appear on the streets. As his relationship with Thea becomes more fraught and the plot develops, his mental condition deteriorates. He is

⁵ In this painting the woman appears to be embedding her teeth in the man's neck, and her long red hair looks like swarms of blood.

⁶ Nietzsche's philosophy had a great influence on the artists of Expressionism according to Richard Gray, who shows how some of Nietzsche's ideas shaped the Expressionist world view. Moreover, if one were to mentally subtract his ideas and stylistic influences from the intellectual and aesthetic storehouse of Expressionism, stresses Gray, what would remain would be hardly recognizable as the artistic and intellectual-historical configuration we know today as literary Expressionism (Gray, 2005: 39).

given to mood changes and becomes more vulnerable to expressionistic moments of the kind he once ignored and escaped from. He is exposed to perverse sexuality and to new sexual experiences, such as swingers, or quick sexual encounters. If the split between his mental spaces is balanced, or even tends to favor the impressionistic, then as the plot progresses and Thea pushes him into a corner, the more expressionistic space of him is stimulated and the "uncanny" aroused. The more that his repressed expressionistic side is revealed, the more dominant it becomes. He finally defeats Thea's reign over him by putting an end to her existence. The repressed part in him that was held by another person returns to him fully through this instinctive expressionistic action.

In addition, the double is another reflection of the "uncanny" worth considering in the context of the novel. Freud analyzed the "double" as "uncanny" in its essence. Not necessarily as an external double, but as an internal one, a special faculty opposed to the ego whose function is to observe and criticize the self and to exercise censorship within the mind (Freud, 1966: 235-236). This phenomenon is clearly evident in *Married Life* when Gurdweill has a number of conversations with his double that can be read as a dialogue between his two split selves. One of the crucial moments when the double appears is after the child's death. One voice keeps denying Thea's negligence and finds excuses for her. The other sees the truth without embellishment: "She is a bad cruel woman; there isn't a drop of human feeling in her... Enough pretending and covering up for her morning, noon, and night!" (380).

However, Gurdweill's escapist and impressionist side, though much reduced and weakened by the end of the novel, rejects what he is told by his inner voice and by other people's warnings. He continues to rely on visual facts, clinging desperately to his impressionist nature, rather than becoming attentive to intuition and instinct. All this holds together until Gurdweill finds his wife in their shared bed with one of her lovers, with no shame or fear of being caught. At that point he pulls a penknife out of his pocket and stabs her. Though one might expect the jealous husband to kill the lover, Gurdweill must kill Thea, for here he is at last confronting his repressed feelings. His darkest fears, known to him deep in his soul, must be given concrete expression. He is not interested in the lover but in his "uncanny." And only now when his expressionist nature has defeated the impressionist, is he capable of confronting his "uncanny."⁷ Thea's existence therefore is no longer essential to him. His expressionist nature has taken control of his mental and emotional consciousness, and since it is no longer suppressed, there is no need to externalize it via her presence. He eradicates her inside and out using a

⁷ Eric Zakim has already commented on Gurdweill two modes of existence: as a victim and as a victimizer. Both work in tandem (Zakim, 1993:103-107). This point of view coincides with Gurdweill's mental split into an active expressionistic mode and a passive impressionistic one.

penknife to kill her, and frees the writer in him. He needs to be rid of her in order to live and create. Only then can he get his life back in full.⁸

The plot that moved slowly and repetitiously through many scenes of abuse is suddenly interrupted. The reader who saw Gurdweill rage at the child's and Lotte's death, remains unprepared for this act of murder. S/he has not been readied for Gurdweill's capacity to perform such an act. If anything, the clues that are spread throughout the novel imply the opposite – Gurdweill is the one who will probably be killed by Thea. Reading the novel through the "uncanny" and through impressionistic and expressionistic modes, provides a reasonable explanation for this ending as a violent expressionistic burst. Although Thea is the salient representative of this art movement, it is a part of Gurdweill's split nature as well. Slowly Gurdweill becomes more subject to his hitherto dormant expressionistic side and when he kills Thea, he is fully under its influence.

Even so, the last act in the novel is not Thea's murder, but the day after. Early in the morning Gurdweill appears at his best friend, Ulrich's place. He wakes him up and informs him coolly and calmly: "Thea died last night" (501). Eradicating his "uncanny" is not enough of an ending for this story of depravity and suppression. Gurdweill must recognize and acknowledge it. His murder of Thea is not an act of insanity; on the contrary, he has finally come back to his senses.

Summary

Married Life is a novel that contains numerous conflicting forces that reflect the historical and sociological conditions of the period in which the plot takes place. This overlaps the time and place in which the novel was written -- Europe between the two World Wars. Vienna is described as an immoral city and the generation of young people as atrophied, as Gurdweill himself claims: "Our generation prefers the crooked – a symptom of decadence" (397).

Gurdweill has married a woman who represents and stimulates depths of his soul, although the novel's title seems to be dealing with marital issues in a kind of "laboratory" in which other concerns, deep and essential, are being examined as well. Thea, Gurdweill's wife is not only a platinum blonde and a head taller than him. She is also a high-born Austrian baroness and a Christian. She is a typical Expressionist woman -- vampire-like, erotic, torturous and addictive. The impressionistic mode reflects Gurdweill's ethnic originary experience – the weak, passive Jew who does not have an effect on his environment but only watches and observes. Gurdweill the cosmopolitan, who moved away from his Jewishness, cannot really escape being a Jew, nor can he hide his ambivalent attraction to Christianity. The conflict appears also in

⁸ I want to thank Dr. Miriam Sivan, from the Department of English Literature at Haifa University for her comment illuminating this point.

the reversal of the stereotypical gender roles in the novel. Here Gurdweill is the little man, the "rabbit" as Thea names him (280), feminized, and ruled and controlled by the strong Christian "Brunhilde" (54).

The novel presents the dynamics of a marriage, while the murder at the denouement embodies all the problematic issues that arise with this coupling: the ethnic-racial conflict, the battle between genders, provocative sexuality, philosophical ideas about the "strong" and the "weak," anguish and pleasure, repressed and celebrated passions. These conflicts are also present in the novel through representations lifted from the world of impressionism and expressionism. The relation between them, like that between Thea and Gurdweill, can be viewed as manifestations of Freud's "uncanny."

It is not difficult to understand why Western European Jewry disapproved of the novel's explicit depiction of pathological sex and vulgar power relations. As a result, the novel needed to wait decades to be recognized for its thematic, poetic, stylistic, and linguistic innovations.

References

- Alter, Robert. "Fogel and the Forging of a Hebrew Self", *Prooftexts* 13(1), (1993): 3-14.
- Ben Menachem, Moshe. "Before the Dark Gate", *Anach*, Tel Aviv: Ktavim Press, 1954. (Hebrew)
- Bloom, Harold. *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism*, Oxford: Oxford University press, 1982.
- Cixous, Helen. "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's Das Unheimliche ("The Uncanny")", *New Literary History*, vol. 7 no.3 (1976): 525-548.
- Edschmid, Kasimir. "Expressionism in Literature" (1917), in Martin Travers (ed.), *European Literature from romanticism to postmodernism*, London & New York: Continuum, (2001): 166- 169.
- Ellison, David. *Ethics and Aesthetics in European Modernist Literature: From the sublime to the uncanny*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny" (1919), translated into the English by Alix Strachey, in *The Standard edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 1955, London: The Hogarth Press (1955): 217-252.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), translated into the English by Alix Strachey, in *The Standard Edition Of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London: The Hogarth Press (1961): 79–80.
- Furness, Raymond. "The problem of Expressionism", *The Twentieth Century* 1890-1945, London: Croom Helm, (1978): 161-208.
- Gluzman, Michael. "Unmasking the Politics of Simplicity in Modernist Hebrew Poetry: Rereading David Fogel", *Prooftexts* 13(1), (1993): 21-44.
- Gur-Arie, Drorit. 1992, "Expressionist images in pen and brush at the beginning of the 20th century", in: Noy Orna (ed), *Scream: Turn-Of-The-Century Expressionist images in Pen And Brush*, Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, (1992): 139-151.

- Gray, Richard T. "Metaphysical Mimesis: Nietzsche's Geburt der Tragödie and the aesthetics of literary expressionism", in Neli H. Donahue (ed), *A companion to the literature of German Expressionism*, Rochester, N.Y. : Camden House, (2005): 39-62.
- Hadas Nurit. *A Study in 20th Century Art*, Holon: Institute of Technological Education, 1996. (Hebrew)
- Hauser, Arnold. "Impressionism", *The Social History of Art* V.4, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, (1968): 156 – 213.
- Kofman, Sarah. *Freud and Fiction*, (translated by Sarah Wykes), Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to ourselves*, (translated into the English by Leon C.Roudiez), New-York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Kronegger, Maria Elizabeth. "Impressionist Sensibility", *Literary Impressionism*, New-Haven, Conn: College & university press (1973): 35-49.
- Kronfeld, Chana. "Vogel and Modernism: A Liminal Moment in Hebrew Literary History," *Prooftexts* 13(1), (1993): 45-64.
- Mann, Barbara. "Visions of Jewish Modernism", *Modernism/modernity* 13(4), (2006): 673-699.
- Royle, Nicolas. *The Uncanny*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Vogel, David. *Married Life*, translated into the English by Dalya Bilu, New Milford, Conn.: Toby Press, 2007.
- Zakim, Eric. "Between Fragment and Authority in David Vogel's (Re)Presentation of Subjectivity" *Prooftexts* 13(1), (1993): 103-124.