

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/32379> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Valk, Francina Cornelia

Title: Exclusion and renewal : identity and Jewishness in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" and David Vogel's Married Life

Issue Date: 2015-03-18

6 ABJECTION AND EXILE: THE TROPE OF THE BORDER IN DAVID VOGEL'S *MARRIED LIFE* (חיי נישואים)

6.1 Introduction

My research on David Vogel's Hebrew novel *Married Life* (*Hayei Nisu'im*, חיי נישואים, 1929-30) in this chapter must be viewed within the wider context of a fairly recent, renewed literary-critical interest in Jewish exile and its implications for the formation of identities.¹⁹⁸ The work of young critics such as, for instance, Shachar Pinsker (2011) and Allison Schachter (2012) has reinstated Jewish exile as a literary critical category. Reinstated, since the previously dominant Zionist-oriented Jewish literary critique had shifted its attention away from dramatizations of Jewish exile and its suffering wandering Jews to focus instead on literature about the militant "New Jew" in Palestine/Israel.¹⁹⁹

Schachter and Pinsker's return to Jewish exile and its implications for the formation of identities has restored to the critical limelight the lives and work of a group of Eastern European and Russian Jewish exiles (including Vogel), who wrote both in Hebrew and Yiddish in the modernist metropolises of interbellum Europe and published their work between 1914 and the late 1920s.

Pinsker views the identities of these exiled writers as "shaped by the highly charged encounter of traditionally educated (Galician and Russian) Jews with modernist European literature and culture".²⁰⁰ Schachter explores how these writers negotiated their "disjointed and diasporic attachments to the traditional world of the shtetl and to the modernist world of metropolis".²⁰¹

The question their critical work raises – and which inspired my research on Vogel's Hebrew novel *Married Life* in this chapter – is whether the logics of abjection can be read in the text's artistic evocation of that experience. And, if so, how does such a reading affect the meaning of the text's artistic production of exile and identity? These are the questions that I will explore in this chapter through the lens of Julia Kristeva's work on identity and meaning.

In my project as in the text itself, the trope of the border plays a powerful role. Firstly, it marks my psychoanalytical critical position: on the border between self and the social, the research field of psychoanalysis. Secondly, it appears as

¹⁹⁸ For bibliographic information of editions used in this chapter, see paragraph 5.1.

¹⁹⁹ Shachar M. Pinsker. *The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. Allison Schachter. *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish literature in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

²⁰⁰ Pinsker. *The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe*. 8-17.

²⁰¹ Schachter. *Diasporic Modernisms*. 87.

Kristeva's imaginary border between the text's semiotic and symbolic registers of identity and meaning.²⁰² Thirdly, it can be seen in Vogel's text as an utterly ambivalent trope returning to the points of the protagonist's life where (archaic, inside/outside) boundaries arise and threaten to break down, and where the abject (the semiotic: what is excluded from the text's symbolic discourse) is named and retched over in fascination and horror.²⁰³

The discerning quality of Kristeva's thinking for my project is that it lifts my discourse on *Married Life* out of the ideological either/or (Jewish or not Jewish) epistemology that has long dominated Jewish literary critique – as I will show later on in the Reception section in this chapter. Her epistemological effort to think in and-and categories (we recall her distinction between semiotic and symbolic as separate, but interdependent registers of identity and meaning) enables me to read in Vogel's text the universal (the logics of abjection as a psychodynamics of identity formation), while allowing room for the particularity of Eastern European Jewish exile in interbellum Vienna.

The question that structures my research is how the artistic production of identity and subjectivity in *Married Life* (which dramatizes a Galician-Jewish exile's subjective experience of Vienna) co-produces the logics of abjection. And since abjection, as we recall from chapter 2, belongs to the world of the semiotic or drives, how can drive produce meaning in a text or, more specifically, in Vogel's *Married Life*?

To answer the last question we can turn to the plastic arts. An intriguing example is the oeuvre of another Russian Jewish exile, a painter who, like Vogel, had fled Russia to avoid conscription into the Russian army: Mark Rothko (Marcus Yakovlevich Rothkowitz, 1903-1970). Unlike Vogel, Rothko emigrated to the United States, along with thousands of other Eastern European Jews fleeing the pogroms, the devastation of war and persecution in their homelands.²⁰⁴

²⁰² We recall that in Kristeva's work the process that structures meaning (significance) in a text is linguistic, but not exclusively: signification also goes back to an affective process that precedes signification, which Kristeva calls the semiotic, or abjection.

²⁰³ The horror and fascination responses must be viewed in the light of Kristeva's (and Freud's) perspective of man as ultimately driven by lust (the lust principle) as a self-destructive drive, namely the urge to surrender to total libidinal pleasure uninhibited by desire and delivered from self. In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva delineates how this possibility fills one simultaneously with fascination and horror. Horror, in this specific sense, simultaneously focuses on, whilst at the same time keeping us at a safe distance from, self-annihilation.

²⁰⁴ James E.B. Breslin. *Mark Rothko: A Biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. 18. Marc Rothko (Marcus Rothkowitz, 1903-1970) was Russian Jewish painter from the city of Dvinsk, in the province of Vitebsk (at the time in the Russian Empire, now Daugavpils, Latvia), in the Pale of Settlement. He emigrated from Russia to the United States, following the path of many other Jews who left Daugavpils in the wake of Cossack purges, with his mother and elder sister Sonia. They joined Jacob and the elder brothers who had already

As in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (chapter 4) in which abjection appears in repetitive visions of the archaic border, Rothko's work in all its rich variety can be viewed as one, collective manifestation of the archaic border, appearing in endless variations of form and colour in his whole oeuvre, which, canvas after canvas, repeats dramatizations of simple, coloured fields.

However, watching those fields weirdly shocks the innocent viewer without him or her having a clue about what is happening. Shifting his or her gaze from Rothko's coloured fields to the in-betweens – the partitions, or borders between them, and back – something curious happens that can best be described as a sensation of a dynamics coming to pass between colour-field and border. Through the lens of Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and the symbolic, these partitions, or borders, suggest a beyond (the semiotic) which seems to reorganise the foreground colours (the symbolic) from the perspective of that beyond.

left and arrived at Ellis Island in the winter of 1913. They emigrated with his family to America, because Marcs' father, Jacob Rothkowitz, feared that his sons were about to be drafted into the tsarist army. Despite Jacob Rothkowitz's modest income, the family was highly educated, and spoke Russian and Yiddish, and his son Marc also read Hebrew. Jacob Rothkowitz returned to orthodox Judaism at Marc's birth..As a result, he sent Marc, his youngest son, to the *cheider* to study Talmud, whilst his elder brothers were educated in the state school system.



No 12, "Mark Rothko/1951".

Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas: Catalogue Raisonné.

By Mark Rothko and David Anfam. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. 347.

Likewise in literature, the semiotic appearing in visions of the archaic border can acquire meaning indirectly: by reorganising meaning-formations on identity and subjectivity in the symbolic discourse of the text, from the perspective of what is beyond.

I will proceed with sections about the plot, the narrative space, the manuscript and the audience Vogel had in mind. I will then analyse the reception of *Married Life*, which has been defined for a long time by a Zionist negation of exile and the suffering Jew, an ideological perspective now problematized in the work of young



UNTITLED, "Mark Rothko/1960".

Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas: Catalogue Raisonné.
By Mark Rothko and David Anfam. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. 532.

Jewish critics, as noted before. In the next two sections I will explore the beginnings of European Hebrew modernism to which the text belongs, and read the logics of abjection in the text's dramatization of the protagonist's subjective experience of Vienna as a Galician (Eastern European) exile and Jew. I will conclude with a summary of my findings and an interpretation of their implications for my understanding of the meaning of the text.

6.2 *Introducing Married Life*

The idea for David Vogel's Hebrew novel *Married Life* (חיי נישואים) was conceptualised during the writer's stay as an Eastern European Jewish exiled writer in Vienna (1912-25) where he found refuge from Russian conscription (see chapter 5). Vogel subsequently turned it into a Hebrew novel in Paris (1929), finished and first published in Tel Aviv (1929-30) during Vogel's stay there. From that perspective it seems plausible to see the novel as an artistic, 1929 impressionist retrospective of Vogel's subjective experience of Vienna (1912-25) as a Russian Jewish exile (derogatorily called *Ostjude*) in that culture.²⁰⁵ The protagonist is Gurdweill, Vogel's literary other or alter ego, who explicitly identifies himself as an Eastern European Jew from Galicia, "and of no mean origin either".²⁰⁶ Gurdweill descends from "an ancient Jewish family. He could trace his descent to a great and famous rabbi from Prague!"²⁰⁷

The Plot: A Marriage Not Intended to Bear Fruit

The protagonist of *Married Life* is Rudolph Gurdweill who, as we have seen, identifies himself as an Eastern European Jewish exile from Galicia. The text's double identification (writer and protagonist) with Eastern European Jewry in exile is of paramount importance for understanding both its dramatization of identity and its meaning as a text, a connection which, as I will show in the section about reception, has not been on the horizon of critics and Western audiences for a long time. Gurdweill becomes inordinately fond of an Austrian baroness, Thea von Takow, a member of the disintegrating Roman Catholic Austrian nobility, a *Brünhilde*-like woman with whom he plunges into a sadomasochistic marriage-relationship in which he assumes the victim-role. The text is divided into five sections, each dramatizing an episode of the marriage relation: "The Meeting", "The Beginning", "Inside and Out", "The Baby" and "The End". Although Thea belittles and deceives Gurdweill, he believes in her and in the marriage, against all odds and with an unintelligible tenacity that sometimes tries the patience of his

²⁰⁵ For the status of the *Ostjuden* in the Austro-German cultural context, see also chapter 4 on Kafka's "The Metamorphosis".

²⁰⁶ Galicia is a region bordering on south-east Poland and Western Ukraine. From 1848 until 1918 it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire under Franz Joseph I. Galicia had been a relatively tolerant country for the Jews since the "Judenordnung" of 1789. Despite increasing institutional tolerance, the hatred of Jews, pogroms and hostilities between Jews and Christians were widespread.

²⁰⁷ David Vogel. *Married Life*. London, Peter Halban, 1988. 50. The rabbi referred to is probably Yehudah Leib ben Betsal'eln (d. 1609), rabbi and scholar, known as the Maharal of Prague. From the online version of *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. Lemma: Yehudah Leib ben Betsal'eln.

Jewish friends (as well as the reader's and critic's). In his friends' eyes, and specifically in those of a Jewish girl, Lotte Bondheim, who secretly loves Gurdweill, it is an impossible marriage.

A son, Martin, is born to the Gurdweills. His care is left entirely to Rudolph, as Thea is not interested in the baby. Despite Rudolph's dedicated care for the child (he is not even certain it is his), little Martin becomes ill and dies, to his father's immense distress. It is clear that the impossible union is not supposed to bear fruit. The relation between Rudolph and Thea becomes increasingly troubled and eventually unbearable. Gurdweill is thrown out of the house and starts roaming the streets of Vienna. He practically lives in the city's coffeehouses, does odd jobs to keep body and soul together, while begging his luckier friends for small amounts of money for cigarettes and coffee. In the end, the truth about his marriage and his licentious wife slowly begins to dawn on him and, unable to bear that burden, he kills Thea.

The Narrative Space

The narrative space in *Married Life* is interbellum Vienna, a city struggling with economic crisis, unemployment and moral disintegration in the wake of the First World War (1914-18), the disastrous Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and the rise of an increasingly political anti-Semitism.²⁰⁸ The protagonist Rudolph Gurdweill, a Galician Jewish exile, lives in Leopoldstadt, at the time Vienna's Jewish quarter around the North Station (Nordbahnhof). *Married Life's* intended Eastern European Yiddish audience must have immediately recognised both the station and the neighbourhood, as most of them had arrived there from the east. Different reasons had prompted them to leave their countries: to escape dire poverty, pogroms, Russian conscription for Jews, and/or the devastations of war and revolution. The Jewish quarter's ironical nickname was *Die Mazzesinsel* (Matzos Island), as most Jews arriving at the Nordbahnhof from the east stayed to live in that neighbourhood.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ After the Great War (1914-18), Austria was reduced from twenty-eight and a half million inhabitants, as the Austrian half of the Austrian-Hungarian double monarchy, to six and a half million as *Deutschösterreich* by the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (6 September 1919). The treaty laid the foundations for interbellum economic depression, high unemployment, and civil unrest, with rival militias on the left and the right, eventually culminating into a civil war in 1934.

²⁰⁹ For a splendid photo-graphic record of Leopoldstadt as Vienna's Jewish quarter, with prose contributions from Joseph Roth, Elias Canetti, Bruno Frei and many others, see *Die Mazzesinsel: Juden in der Wiener Leopoldstadt (1918-1938)*.

The Manuscript

The manuscript of *Married Life* is perhaps the most travelled one imaginable and probably the only one that rose from its grave to travel the world. Written in Paris, brought along by Vogel on his trip to Tel Aviv in 1929 (when and where it was finished and first published), it accompanied Vogel on his way back to Europe in 1930, after which it remained in the writer's possession until 1944. Vogel, who lived in Hauteville, near Lyon, at the time, probably suspected that, as a Jew, the chances he would survive the war were minimal and buried the manuscript of *Married Life* (together with other literary manuscripts) in the garden of his French landlady. After the war it was dug up and travelled, accompanied by various people, to the United States where Vogel's daughter lived. From there it travelled back to Tel Aviv, to be published for the second time by Menakhem Perry in 1986.²¹⁰ *Tahanot Kavot* (*Extinguished Stations, Novellas and Diaries*, see chapter 5) contains a two-page draft for a novel with characters similar to Gurdweill and Thea, the protagonists in *Chayei Nisu'im*. Only in the draft they are not married but landlady and tenant. The draft is named *The Tenant*.

Gershon Shaked quotes Dan Pagis on Ben Menachem's opinion that Jews in Germany postponed the German translation of *Chayei Nisu'im* because they feared trouble when publishing a story of the sexually pathological relationship of a Jew with a Christian baroness.²¹¹

The Audience Vogel Had in Mind When Conceptualising Married Life

It is highly likely that Vogel wrote *Married Life* in Paris with an audience of Eastern European and Russian Jewish intellectual writers in mind he had socialized with in the Viennese coffee-houses, and who were, contrary to assimilated the German Jewish Jewry, able to read (and write) Hebrew. That group, writes Pinsker (2011), consisted in the years around the First World War and in the interbellum of an extraordinary collection of writers, mostly Eastern European and Russian exiles from various places in Eastern Europe, Galicia, Poland, Ukraine and other regions of the Russian Pale of Settlement. Among them were Gershon Shofman, Avraham ben-Yitzchak (nicknamed Dr Sonne), Zwi Diesendruck and Ya'akov Horowitz, who were active mainly in Hebrew. Melech Ravitch, Melech

²¹⁰ For an account of the travels of the text after it had been dug up from the garden of Vogel's landlady after World War Two, see Niels Bokhove's article "Sterven wil ik niet, leven kan ik niet" (I don't want to die, but I cannot live). *Parelduiker* 5 (2003): 2-17. Bokhove was first struck, as I was, by the beauty of Vogel's novel when he read the impressive Dutch translation from Hebrew by Kees Meiling. David Vogel. *Huwelijksleven*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1992.

²¹¹ Gershon Shaked . "A Viennese Author Who Wrote in Hebrew: David Vogel as Novelist". *Modern Hebrew Literature* 12 (1986): 20.

Chmelnitzki, Meir Henish, Meir Wiener, Mosche Ungerfeld, Mosche Zilborg and Mordechai Gottfried wrote mainly in Yiddish.²¹²

Many of them were multilingual and wrote in two or three languages: Hebrew, Yiddish and German. The diaries and memoirs of this period reveal a close and fertile collaboration between the Hebrew and the Yiddish writers, creating a wide-ranging cross-pollination between the two literatures.²¹³

Although some of them had studied at Western universities, they came from an Eastern European Yiddish culture alien to the type of German Jewish assimilation that confronted them in the West: Jews giving up their Jewishness in exchange for the German national identity of a Christian host-country that despised them in spite of assimilation. In Galicia, Gurdweill's country of origin, the protagonist's Jewish assimilation as it happened in Germany and other Western countries was as unthinkable, as in Vogel's own country of origin, Russia. Jews could only get the Russian nationality by converting to Christianity which, among the religious *cheider* and *yeshiva* Jews Vogel originated from, was considered a fate worse than death. More realistic options for social emancipation for Jews in Russia were (at least in the first quarter of the twentieth century) joining Socialism, Marxism, *The Bund* or Zionism.²¹⁴ Martin Gilbert (1976) writes: "Few Jewish attempts at assimilation [in Russia] were successful: government, aristocracy, peasantry and intellectuals, all prevented any relaxation of barriers, or diminution of hostilities."²¹⁵

During the Soviet Union period Jews assimilated on a vast scale. At least that was the consensus among historians until recently. Elisa Bemporad's latest study *Becoming Soviet Jews* (2013), about Jewish life in the city of Minsk (in the former Pale of Settlement), qualifies that consensus by showing that many Jews acculturated to Soviet society in the 1920s and 1930s while remaining committed to older

²¹² For the development of Yiddish literature alongside Hebrew literature in the west see Mikhail Krutikov. *From Kabbalah to Class Struggle: Expressionism, Marxism, and Yiddish Literature in the Life and Work of Meir Wiener*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

²¹³ Pinsker. *The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe*. 88-9.

²¹⁴ *The Bund*, short for the *Algemeyner Yiddisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poylin und Rusland*.

²¹⁵ Martin Gilbert. *The Jews of Russia: Their History in Maps and Photographs*, first published privately and separately in Oxford 1976. 27. This last edition is in remembrance to Simon M. Dubnow (1860-1941), the Jewish historian born in the Pale and murdered by the Nazis. In 2010 Gilbert's *The Jews of Russia* was included in the eighth edition of *The Routledge Atlas of Jewish History*. This edition includes all Gilbert's writings and maps on Jews all over the world, including that of the Russian Pale of Settlement. More recent research exploring the period of the great changes brought about by the Soviet regime, and focusing on the city of Minsk, capital of Belarus, shows that, despite the violent changes brought about by that regime, many Jews succeeded in acculturating to Soviet society while simultaneously remaining committed to Yiddish culture, education, the Jewish workers Bund and other forms of Jewishness.

patterns of Jewish identity such as Yiddish culture and education, attachment to the traditions of *The Bund*, circumcision and kosher slaughter.²¹⁶

6.3 *The Reception of Married Life*

Following translation into seven Western languages in the 1980s, Western Jewish and non-Jewish audiences read *Married Life* as a Viennese urban novel, while ignoring the exile status of the writer, his work and his intended audience.²¹⁷ Also the fact that the novel's original language was Hebrew and that both writer and protagonist were Eastern European Jewish exiles, or *Ostjuden* as they were derogatorily called in German cultures, was hardly relevant to the general appreciation of the novel in the West. The publication of Vogel's translated novel coincided with a hype of public interest in fin-de-siècle Vienna as a cultural, intellectual and artistic centre of European (German) modernism explored in various studies of which Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (1980) is still the standard study.²¹⁸ Vogel's novel captured that city so meticulously, albeit a few decades earlier, that some Western readers used the novel as a glorified travel guide for Vienna: following the protagonist Gurdweill's wanderings through Vienna, novel in hand. The "western audience", wrote the late Israeli critic Gershon Shaked (1929-2006), "derived its pleasure reading *Married Life*, from its beautiful impressionist renderings of Vienna as well as its evocations of the inner stirrings of Gurdweill's mind whose impact lies in their complexity".²¹⁹

Jewish (Western and Israeli) critiques of Vogel's *Married Life* have been structured around three complex issues: (1) the question of literary identity: "Is *Married Life* a Jewish novel?" which begs the question "What does Jewish mean when one speaks of modern Jewish literature?" (2) the question of ideology (Zionism) as a factor affecting the reception of *Married Life*, and (3) the critical equation of European Hebrew literary modernism (covering the period between approximately 1918 and the end of the 1920s-1930s) with German Jewish modernism which appeared much earlier (1890-1910) and consisted of the *Young Vienna* group of writers such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler, Richard Beer-Hofmann, Peter Altenberg, Jakob Wassermann, Franz Werfel, Stefan Zweig and

²¹⁶ Elisa Bemporad. *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.

²¹⁷ For *Married Life* translations, see the Vogel bibliography.

²¹⁸ Schorske. *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*.

²¹⁹ Gershon Shaked. *Modern Hebrew Fiction*. Trans. Yael Lotan. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, 128. *Modern Hebrew Fiction* is a compilation of Shaked's major achievement: the analytic description of Hebrew narrative fiction (1880-1980) in five volumes, published between 1977 and 1998.

Elias Canetti, whose works challenged the Victorian morality of nineteenth-century literature by practising sexual, social and psychological openness in their works. I will now briefly examine these three issues.

The Question of Literary Identity

Hebrew and Yiddish fiction had always been conceptualised within realistic (or positivist) literary conventions since the middle of the nineteenth century when in Russia the first extended novels were written by Jews. Although the realistic tradition was far from homogeneous, the authors as well as the literary critics viewed the novel's literary world from a positivist perspective: as mimetically representing the Jewish socio-cultural reality or individuals in that reality, outside the text.

The historical roots of positivism, in Jewish discourse, lie in the nineteenth-century *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment). Jewish *Haskalah* representatives (*maskilim*) in the west advocated a commitment to reason rather than to religious revelation as the source of all truth. They went as far as to claim that religious (specifically Hassidic) practices, mores and beliefs were not truly Jewish, as they were not in consonance with reason. Their worldview not only covered the realms of science and philosophy but also social behaviour and aesthetics and, consequently, the belles lettres and literary criticism. The positivist literary and critical stance entailed a methodology with objective criteria. In American universities in the 1960s, for instance, literature was considered Jewish only if it met three objective criteria: Jewish language (Hebrew, Yiddish), religion and nationality. The idea of qualifying literature in non-Jewish languages as Jewish was considered outlandish.²²⁰

However, after the foundation of the state of Israel, Hebrew as a national language was no longer spoken and written exclusively by Jews.²²¹

Moreover, as a result of assimilation and immigration, Jews wrote modern fiction in the vernacular of their host countries rather than in Hebrew or Yiddish. The old underpinnings of positivism and its unitary Cartesian subject (associated with fixed national, cultural and ethnic identities) were also questioned in a Western Jewish debate trying to establish new criteria for a canon of modern Jewish literature in any vernacular (alongside the classical Hebrew canon). The question was how to define modern Hebrew and vernacular literature? This unavoidably evoked the old problem (and the object of many Jewish jokes) of

²²⁰ Ruth R. Wisse. *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey Through Language and Culture*. New York: The Free Press, 2000.

²²¹ For instance, Anton Shammas, an Arab writer, poet and translator, born in Israel in 1950 and now living in Quebec, Canada, wrote his novel *Arabesques* (1986) in Hebrew.

Jewish identity. What struck me in the debate was the wide variety of criteria suggested for defining literature as Jewish.

My aim is to set out my own Kristeva-oriented viewpoint of identity and subjectivity in literature against the canon-oriented, and more recent, ideological debates. I will therefore give here a brief overview of those debates, for comparison with my own perspective, starting with the debate of the 1980s and 1990s, which tried to establish criteria for a canon of modern Jewish literature.

The Debate about the Meaning of “Jewish” in Relation to Modern Fiction

An outstanding feature of this debate is its wide scope of differing views as to what constitutes Jewish literature, underpinned by an equally multifarious body of implicit assumptions about Jewish identity. Works by writers who in essence had not been associated with Jewish literature before, such as Kafka and Proust, became objects of lively discussions. Some of the contributors to the debate formulated intimately personal and dazzlingly un-traditional approaches to the question of Jewish identity, whilst others kept to more traditional criteria. Ruth Wisse and Gershon Shaked, for instance, dismissed Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*) (1913-22) from the canon of modern Jewish fiction.²²² Alain Finkielkraut, referring to himself in *The Imaginary Jew* (1994) as “a Jew without God, but a Jew before all else”, wondered whether after the Shoa Jewish identity in life and letters had not become “an empty category, because necessarily defined by absence”?²²³ The French Jewish writer Henry Raczymov (1994) asked if perhaps one should refrain from concentrating on traditional views of nationality and identity and look for entirely different dimensions of Jewishness. As a writer he believed for many years that he had nothing to say as a Jew, but eventually

... came to understand that I did not have nothing to say. Rather I had to say nothing, which is not the same thing. As the years went by, as I wrote more, I discovered that the ‘nothing’ I had to say, to write, to explore – the nothing I turned into sentences, narratives, books – the nothing I could not escape saying as a positive nothing, was my Jewish identity. My Jewish identity was not nothing. It was nothingness: a kind of entity in itself with its own weight, value, stylistic possibilities, contours, colours, moorings.²²⁴

²²² Marcel Proust. *Remembrance of Things Past*. Trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff. New York: Chatto and Windus, 1941. The novel is contemporary with Vogel’s stay in Vienna; it was first published in Paris 1913 but its publication was only completed after Proust’s death in 1922.

²²³ Alain Finkielkraut. *The Imaginary Jew*. Trans. Kevin O’Neill and David Suchoff. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. 35.

²²⁴ Henri Raczymov. *Tales of Exile and Forgetfulness. Discourses of Jewish Identity in*

Or maybe, wondered Michiel Kramer (2001), shouldn't one simply restrict the label Jewish (with respect to modern belles lettres) to the criterion of race, the writer being born a Jew?²²⁵ "Or", as Anne Golomb Hoffman (2001) suggested in her response to Kramer's article, "should we, perhaps, refrain from dichotomous thinking at all" and "work ... towards a dialogical understanding of Jewish literature, one that supports both inquiry into and reflection on the formulations of identity to which we are inevitably drawn?"²²⁶

Dan Miron's Response to the Preceding Debate

More recently, the Israeli literary critic Dan Miron (2010) postulated that discourses such as the preceding presuppose something that is not there. They assume continuity, the belief that all Jewish literature, whether written in Hebrew, Yiddish or another language, forms a continuum which, according to Miron, is now dead. Instead he advocates a view of Jewish literature in terms of time and space, for instance: Biblical verse, or the medieval poetry of Judah ha-Levi, or Chaim Nachman Bialik's poems, or the connectedness of Hebrew and Yiddish letters in the early twentieth century. Miron further postulates that languages such as Hebrew and Yiddish can no longer claim a monopoly to literary Jewishness. Resisting attempts at clearly outlined definitions of the term Jewish in relation to literature, he proposes that any text that evinces an interest in, or is in whatever way and to whatever extent conditioned by a sense of Judesein (Jewishness), is Jewish literature.

Instead of continuity, Miron proposes the term contiguity (proximity), and shows how it can operate as a critical paradigm in his reading of Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye the Dairyman* as contiguous to Kafka's stories, in the sense that, while Sholem Aleichem and Kafka wrote within radically different linguistic and literary settings, both writers "embraced passivity, weakness, wordiness, inertia and minority". Contiguity, Miron argues, is any relation between texts that is more ambivalent, or stranger, less concrete or predictable, than what we refer to as influence.²²⁷

Twentieth-Century France. Ed. Alan Astro. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. 91-98.

²²⁵ Michael P. Kramer. "Race, Literary History, and the 'Jewish' Question". *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 21.3 (2001): 287-332. Race is used as a general term here, that is, without the fascist connotations of superior and inferior races.

²²⁶ Anne Golomb Hofmann. "A Response To: Race, Literary History, and the 'Jewish' Question from Kramer". *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 21.3 (2001): 329.

²²⁷ Dan Miron. *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010. See Chapter 1: "The Prologue", and Chapter 2: "The 'old' Jewish literary discourse" and also chapters 10 and 11 on the contiguity between the works of Kafka (10) and Sholem Aleichem (11). On canon formation, see p. 377 ff. where Miron refers to the postmodern debate problematising canon-formation and exploring, as

In fact, Miron's book ratifies today's status quo at American universities, where Jewish studies programmes have for some time typically increased their reach by including in their list of affiliated faculties professors in German, Russian or Portuguese literature who teach Heinrich Heine, or Isaac Babel or Moacyr Scliar.²²⁸

The Issue of Ideology

Gershon Shaked saw Vogel's *Married Life*

... outside the contours of the modern Hebrew literary canon: ... a Viennese novel that happened to be written in Hebrew, but was beyond the scope of specifically Jewish experience as it addressed neither the Jewish situation, nor reflected social processes [Zionism] experienced by Jews as Jews and by Israelis as Israelis.²²⁹

Shaked, as he takes the Zionist stance, excludes exile as a factor in Vogel's literary dramatization of subjectivity. He criticises Vogel for his "detachment from local issues and national [Zionist] culture".²³⁰ Dan Miron's sense of *Judesein* obviously does not exclude ideology either. Although *Married Life*, according to Miron's criterion, may be regarded as Jewish literature, his devastating comment about Vogel's novel is ideologically motivated. Miron accuses Vogel of political inconsistency, with reference to Zionism. On the one hand, according to a somewhat sarcastic Miron, Vogel "never allows the Jewish collective themes (politics, Zionism) to obfuscate his universalistic vision", while on the other he gives in his novel *Married Life* "the most ferocious anatomy of the failure of the assimilated Jewish intellectual". Miron also takes the view that

... Fogel justified his "lean" Hebrew and the poetics based on a minimalist approach to the linguistic medium, as commensurate with Hebrew having become the spoken language of the new Jewish contingent in Palestine.²³¹

he formulates it: "the complex issue of the aesthetic dynamics and politics of canonization and canonicity; an issue that has attracted scores of scholars critics and literary theorists engaged in the postmodernist dialogue in general, and in minority discourse theory in particular".

²²⁸ Moacyr Scliar (1937-2011). Brazilian Jewish novelist and short-story writer, who wrote existential allegories in which he explored the complexities of Jewish identity in the Diaspora.

²²⁹ Shaked. "A Viennese Author Who Wrote in Hebrew: David Vogel as Novelist". 20.

²³⁰ Shaked. *Modern Hebrew Fiction*. 204.

²³¹ Miron. *From Continuity to Contiguity*. Note 30, 501. See David Fogel, "Lashon vesignon besifrutenu hatse'ira" *Siman Keri'a* 3-4 (1974): 388-91. The article appeared in translation as: David Fogel. "Language and Style in Our Young Literature (1931)". *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*. 1.20 (1993).

In Miron's eyes, therefore, Vogel only feigns indifference to politics, for in fact *Married Life* is politics: a biting, political critique of the assimilated German Jewry's masochist patience with German anti-Semitism, the political solution of which (Zionism), however, Vogel ignores. Besides, Miron qualifies Vogel's Hebrew as minimal and he rejects Vogel's defence, namely that it resembles the Hebrew that just started to be spoken in Palestine, as a feeble excuse.

Miron defends this ideological stance by stating that

in the last decades of the previous century the scholarly studies on and the critical evaluation of the Jewish literatures formed an integral part of the revolutionary (Zionist) projects that informed and shaped the literatures themselves ... That implied a task no lighter than the replacing of the traditional cultural ethos (created and promulgated by the rabbinical Halachic leadership, or by the Chassidic establishment), with a new [Zionist] humanist ethos; thus, literary critics and scholars were self-evidently expected to do their share.²³²

I assume that Vogel's literary creation of Gurdweill, just as the wandering, suffering, exiled Jew, did not tally with the Zionist image of the new Jew in the national home of Palestine.²³³ I will come to that later.

Robert Alter (1988), on the other hand, uninhibited by ideology, carefully probes the uniqueness of Vogel's Hebrew style and language as qualities in their own right while carefully exploring thematic analogies as well as differences from German Jewish modernism:

What concerns us centrally is the degree to which Fogel succeeds in realizing these themes ... in a language that, unlike Mann's German, Lawrence's English, and Nabokov's Russian, was not a spoken language. By 1932 Hebrew had, in fact, become a spoken language in Palestine, but as far as Fogel was

²³² Miron. *From Continuity to Contiguity*. 32-3.

²³³ Gurdweill's reference to himself as "The wandering Jew" (*Married Life*, 401) in turn refers to the Christian legend about a Jew who rebuked Christ as he was carrying the cross to Calvary and who told Christ to go faster; the Jew was condemned to wander the earth until Christ's second coming. The story is of an early date, one version going back as far as the thirteenth-century English chronicler Matthew Paris. However, its popularity dates from 1602, when a pamphlet was published containing the story of a bishop of Schleswig who had met a certain Ahasuerus, who claimed to be the Wandering Jew. The legend was revived in a German pamphlet in 1602, „Kurze Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden mit namen Ahasverus“ („A Brief Description and Narration Regarding a Jew Named Ahasuerus“, 1856). The popularity of the pamphlet may have been due to the anti-Jewish feeling aroused by the belief that the Antichrist would appear in 1600 and be aided by the Jews. The pamphlet was soon translated into other languages of Christian Europe. Appearances of the wandering Jew were frequently reported in various European cities. As late as 1868 he was reputedly seen in Salt Lake City, Utah.

concerned, it was not a vernacular. He was no doubt in touch, through reading with new coinages and other kinds of innovation of the revived Hebrew of the land of Israel, and even his brief stay there, he would certainly have been capable of sustaining a conversation in Hebrew. Nevertheless, his Hebrew came to him through literary sources and has the earmarks of a literary language without a vernacular base. This characteristic is transparently evident in his stilted, artificial dialogue, which is compounded of phrases from classical texts and bears little relation to Hebrew as it was spoken even in 1932.

Given the inadvertent quaintness of the language of the dialogues, the great surprise about the prose of Fogel's narrator is that it is so un-archaic, so supple and precise. Here and there, to be sure, there are certain odd terms for particular garments or objects that have not become part of modern Hebrew usage: it's a bit like reading a contemporary story by E.M. Forster, or Katherine Mansfield and occasionally running into a Middle English word for robe, or slip, or balcony. But these are no more than minor moments of strangeness in a mimetic prose that is more fluent, even more beautifully natural than anything that would be produced in the next generation – the first native one – of Hebrew fiction in Israel after 1948. The potential for artistic maturity in the European tradition of Hebrew writing may be suggested by the fact that Fogel's stylistic achievement would be matched, or surpassed, only in the second and third generations of native Israeli fiction, in the works of writers like Amalia Kahana Carmon, the later A.B. Yehoshua, Yaakov Shabtai, Yitzhak Ben-Ner, and, most recently, David Grossman.²³⁴

My Critical Position in this Chapter

In my exploration of *Married Life* in this chapter, I am not concerned with ideology, or with criteria for canon formation as in the discourse on modernist fiction as Jewish/non-Jewish that I have discussed earlier.

Instead, I place Vogel's novel in the literary tradition of European Hebrew modernism that interrupted the hegemony of the positivist (realist) tradition of *Haskalah* fiction through its predilection for the artistic expression of interiority and subjectivity, and as such an area of research for exploring abjection as defined by Kristeva. In the next part of my chapter I will first uncover the historical roots of European Hebrew modernism in Central Europe. Its emphasis on interiority makes *Married Life* a perfect research object for the logics of abjection.

6.4 The Beginnings of European Hebrew Modernism

European Hebrew modernism was probably born with the work of the Russian Jewish journalist and novelist Micha Josef Berdyczewski (1865, Ukraine - 1921, Germany), whose pen name was Micha Yoseph Bin-Gorion. Berdyczewski was

²³⁴ Alter. *The Invention of Hebrew Prose*. 78-88.

an extraordinary colourful figure who came from a generation of Hassidic rabbis and whose popularity as a modern Hebrew novelist among contemporary young Russian Jewish Hebrew exiles such as Vogel has been attributed to his success in addressing the ambivalence involved in exile, particularly Eastern European, Russian Jewish exile in Europe. On the one hand, there was the connectedness to the traditional *cheider* and *yeshiva* world that had shaped them intellectually and affectively, and which they had left but which refused to go away in their exile, like the abjected mother in Kristeva's theory. On the other hand, as intellectuals, they felt the strong pull of secular Central and Western European culture, literature and philosophy in their new host countries.

Uri Nissan Gnessin (1879, Russia - 1913, Poland), one of those exiles, and his friend Yosef Haim Brenner (1881, Ukraine - 1921, Israel), were among the pioneers of European Hebrew prose modernism. They spearheaded a difficult re-orientation of Hebrew literature, moving it away from its matrix in the positivist (realist) literature of the *Haskalah*.²³⁵ Included in their effort was their wrestling with Hebrew as a medium for modernist literature. In the first place, Hebrew was a language without a vernacular and therefore, unlike assimilated French and German Jewish writers, the European Hebrew modernists could not resort to a tradition of spoken and internal dialogue but had to turn to European literature for examples instead.

There was also the matter of epistemology, as they broke with the Hebrew positivist tradition of literature as representation of the social reality and/or persons in that reality outside the text. Gnessin and Brenner were among the first pioneers of European Hebrew modernism. They were immigrants from Russia who adopted writing interiority, not in interior monologue but in, what the Germans call, *erlebte rede*, the French *le style indirect libre*, and for which Dorrit Cohn has more recently suggested the term narrated monologue:

... the report, summary, description of the movements of thought and feeling in the language of the narrator instead of their immediate rendering in the unspoken inner speech of the character.²³⁶

Traditional, positivist-oriented Jewish literary critique initially failed to understand their attention to interiority. It saw Brenner's protagonists as negative types and as miserable adolescents and loafers (like Vogel's Gurdweill) unable to deal with reality. Brenner's response to the negative critique was that it had not been

²³⁵ Deborah Steinhardt. "Figures of Thought: Psycho-Narration in the Fiction of Berdichevsky, Bershadsky and Feierberg". *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 8.2 (1988).

²³⁶ Dorrit Cohn. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. Chapters 1 and 3.

his intention to show “how things appear to an objective, clearheaded observer, but rather to evoke an atmosphere of the mind”.²³⁷

Berdyczewski – Brenner’s senior contemporary author, friend and critic, writes Fleck – was the first to perceive that the “true object of representation in Brenner’s work was not the mimetic representation of social reality, or persons in that reality, but the act of perception itself, and the ways in which it was problematized by the processes of the mind.” From that perspective, Berdyczewski calls Brenner’s negative types (such as Vogel’s Gurdweill) “not imitations, but sources of an internal reality, or truth that cannot be grasped directly”.²³⁸ Vogel’s affiliation with the work of Berdyczewski, Brenner and Gnessin is apparent from a lecture he gave about these writers Warsaw in 1931.²³⁹

To these Russian Jewish writers who, like Vogel, had spun off from the traditional Eastern European Jewish milieu and tried to forge a new Hebrew fiction in European exile, their Hebrew writing was in a sense, according to Robert Alter, a calling card that gave them entry to the great polyglot salons of European culture, as if to say: “We belong here as equals, and we are proud to display our original address.”²⁴⁰

Together with influences of Western modernist writers, these Jewish Russian exile-writers’ gift for creating psychic interiority had probably also been influenced by Russian writers such as F.M. Dostoevsky (1821-1881) whose work, as Freud wrote to Stefan Zweig, “cannot be understood without psychoanalysis – i.e. he isn’t in need of it because he illustrates it himself in every sentence”.²⁴¹ The Dostoevskyan creation of “uprooted experience” recurs in Vogel’s *Married Life* as in Haim Brenner’s *Breakdown and Bereavement*.²⁴² Brenner actually translated Dostoevsky’s novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and was deeply impressed by the Russian master. Brenner is particularly interesting as a possible influence on Vogel as the latter was familiar with Dostoevsky and Brenner’s work.

²³⁷ Yosef H. Brenner. “The Land of Israel, Genre and its Trappings”. *Character and Context: Studies in the Fiction of Abramovitsh, Brenner and Agnon*. By Jeffrey Fleck. Chico: Scholars Press, 1984. 269-70.

²³⁸ Fleck. *Character and Context*. 63-4.

²³⁹ Vogel expressed his affiliation with these writers and their artistic aims in a lecture given in 1931 in Poland. Fogel. “Language and Style in Our Young Literature (1931)”: 15.

²⁴⁰ Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose*. 71-2.

²⁴¹ Ernst and Lucie Freud, eds. *Letters of Sigmund Freud*. New York: Basic Books, 1960. 331-33.

²⁴² Yosef Haim Brenner. *Breakdown and Bereavement*. Trans. Hillel Halkin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971. Trans. of *Shchol Ve-Kishalon*. New York: Stybel, 1920. The setting is Palestine in the years before World War I, when the tragic pattern of Arab-Jewish relations was taking shape. The hero, Hefetz, is a wanderer in search of a spiritual homeland.

Gershon Shaked writes that it is possibly through the Brennerian tradition that “Russian influence, particularly that of Dostoevsky seeped into Hebrew literature”.²⁴³ Nabokov writes that “Dostoevsky, because he [could] spin a yarn with such suspense, such innuendoes, ... used to be eagerly read by schoolboys and schoolgirls in Russia, together with Fennimore Cooper, Victor Hugo, Dickens, and Turgenev”²⁴⁴ Vogel, at any rate, seemed to know Dostoevsky’s work well enough while working on *Married Life*, for he writes in 1931:

They say that the style of Dostoevsky is not beautiful, that it isn’t polished enough, and it isn’t brilliant. This fact, in and of itself, is of no consequence. What is of consequence is that this style served as a complete and exhaustive expression of his great and deep world; that is the essence of his exalted genius.²⁴⁵

But the matter of “influence” was complex as we can see from Menachem Gnessin’s autobiography. Menachem, who was Uri Nissan Gnessin’s brother, was an actor. In his autobiography he wrote that

Pohep’s [the Gnessins’ home town] young Jews used to follow [alongside their classical Hebrew education] contemporary Russian literature with great interest: they read the works of Tolstoy, Gorki, Chekhov and Turgenev, and compared them to contemporary Scandinavian literature, to the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg, and to the prose work of Knut Hamsun.²⁴⁶

Rachel Albeck-Gidron writes that, according to Menachem’s memoir, these young Jewish writers took patriotic pride in the superiority of Russian literature, no less than the pride they felt when reading the Hebrew writers of their generation, or contemporary Yiddish literature, such as that of the Yiddish writer Y.L. Peretz, which, at that time, was being translated into Hebrew. They were part of a new generation of Russian Jewish modernists. They led a modern nationalistic life and identified with the artistic works of the Russian host culture. They were also just beginning to address the question of their identity and their future as a Jewish ethnic minority, whilst repressing and acknowledging by turns the fact that they were literally persecuted to death by the very culture they adored.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Shaked. “A Viennese Author Who Wrote in Hebrew”: 21.

²⁴⁴ Vladimir Nabokov. *Lectures on Russian Literature*. Ed. Fredson Bowers. Harcourt Brace Yovanovich: New York, 1981. 109-10.

²⁴⁵ Fogel. “Language and Style in our Young Literature (1931)”: 15.

²⁴⁶ Menachem Gnessin. *My Way with the Hebrew Theatre, 1905-1926*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1946.

²⁴⁷ Rachel Albeck-Gidron. Introduction. *Beside & Other Stories*. By Uri Nissan Gnessin. Toby Press: London, 2005. xi.

Vogel's *Married Life* reads as a novel of Viennese exile and testifies to the ambivalence of those young writers' sense of identity I have underlined before. On the one hand they felt the strong pull of Western culture with its modernist philosophy, art and especially literature whose influence in *Married Life* can be discerned in the text's prominence on interiority, and in its rather superficial flirtation with names of Western philosophers (Nietzsche), literature (*Madame Bovary*), art (Rembrandt) and even Freud's talking cure.²⁴⁸ On the other hand there was the inescapable pull of the old, Orthodox Jewish *cheider* and *yeshiva* past from which they had parted, but which refused to disappear in their exile, like the abject (m) other in Kristeva's theory, like something you want to get rid of but which refuses to disappear.

Ambivalence also returns in the form and style of Vogel's *Married Life*. The mimetic descriptions of Vienna, its people, streets, cafés, squares and bridges, the noise of its traffic, all tend to make the reader forget that he or she is dealing, not with the city of Vienna, but with the exiled protagonist's subjective experience of Vienna. The reader's forgetfulness is possibly also the reason why, after the novel's translations into Western languages, the general public enjoyed *Married Life* specifically for its colourful and realistic picture of the city. Focusing on the mimetic aspect of the text *Married Life* can be read as an urban (Viennese) novel, a genre very popular in contemporary European modernist literature (such as, for instance, Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf* (1929) written in German, in the same year as *Married Life*).²⁴⁹ Western audiences have taken that track and understood the meaning of the text accordingly, as I have noted in the context of the reception of *Married Life*. In Kristeva's terms, this means that the focus lies on the text's symbolic discourse, ignoring what eludes that discourse yet resounds in the text's meaning production: the semiotic (instinctive) register of identity and meaning that does not produce meaning itself but seems to suggest a beyond (the semiotic) which reorganises the visible meanings (the symbolic) from its perspective.

This ambivalence in the text's meaning formation raises the powerful trope of the archaic border that occurs in Kristeva's work in her perception of meaning (significance) as a linguistic process, but not exclusively so: signification also goes back to an affective and instinctive process that precedes signification, which is

²⁴⁸ For instance, in a discussion about the possibility of appreciating art on an empty stomach, Gurdweill's acquaintance Perczik calls art absolutely superfluous, and wonders what good art would do to a man who has not eaten for two days. "Will you give him *Madame Bovary* to read? Or show him pictures by Rembrandt?" Vogel. *Married Life*. 23.

²⁴⁹ Alfred Döblin (1878-1957) was a modernist German Jewish writer and psychiatrist. His novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) was burned during the Nazi book-burnings in 1933, the year Hitler rose to power.

conveyed in the meaning formations of the text, as I have shown when discussing Rothko earlier in this chapter. Kristeva, as we recall from chapter 2, calls that process the semiotic. The border in this specific sense positions the two signifying processes as separate (bordered), yet interdependent registers of meaning in the text. In the following sections I will discuss the border trope in relation to the symbolic (exile) and the semiotic registers of meaning and identity with an emphasis on the semiotic. This psychoanalytical research position marks the difference between my work and that of Pinsker and Schachter, who accentuate the socio-cultural perspective of Eastern European Jewish modernist writing and thus, in Kristeva's terminology, the symbolic discourse of the texts. I critically position myself at the border between the socio-cultural and the self, which is the research field of psychoanalysis. From that position I will analyse views of the archaic border within the symbolic productions of identity and meaning in Vogel's *Married Life*.

6.5 *Visions of the Border in Married Life*

Kristeva's approach of the fledgling (pre-Oedipal) subject's archaic struggle to be a self in exposure to the abject resurfaces in *Married Life* in the structures of the text's artistic evocation of Gurdweill's subjective experience of interbellum Vienna, as an exile and a Jew from Eastern Europe.

Both struggles, however different, share what Kristeva views as fragile defences against non-differentiation. In the case of the fledgling subject this defence refers to the stage when, just after separation from the *chora*, the pre-Oedipal child faces for the first time the fearful appearance of otherness (the abject) where there was initially one-ness (the *chora*), and feverishly excludes what is other to strengthen the fragile border that protects him from the threat of collapsing into the abject (loss of meaning, psychosis for the instinctive has no meaning). This is why Kristeva calls this stage border subjectivity, which means that the fledgling subject's very struggle to fortify the fragile border of his budding self against the threat of collapsing into the abject, must be viewed as a fragile defence against non-differentiation, and thus a beginning of identification before his entering into language (Lacan's law of the father).

Back to Gurdweill. His struggle for identity as an exile and a Jew, which is a struggle for identity in terms of belonging (as opposed to abjection which is identity as being), takes place on the border between the old *cheider* and *yeshiva* culture he has left but which refuses to disappear (like the abjected mother), and the new host culture that he aspires to be part of. This is why the trope of the border keeps appearing as a curious symbolic-semiotic double in the text's struc-

tures of meaning and identity as I will show when analysing episodes from *Married Life*.

This leads me to the two significant women in Gurdweill's life who, in my line of thought, function as two different aspects of the abject. But first I should point out again that the notion of the abject in Kristeva's theory has nothing to do with its household meaning as defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary*: as a condition, or estate, of one cast down; abasement, humiliation, degradation, rejection; that which is cast off or away; refuse, scum, dregs. In Kristeva's work the feminine-motherly is associated with that other logic (the semiotic), which challenges symbolic representation, and which she refers to as the semiotic.

The two women in Gurdweill's life can be viewed as two aspects of the abject: Lotte, the Jewish girl who really loves Gurdweill but whose nurturing love he rejects, appears as Kristeva's abjected mother of the *chora*, or the Yiddish mother culture that he has left, something rejected from which one does not part. Thea, the Viennese Austrian Christian baroness appears as another aspect of the abject: the fledgling subject's, and the Jewish exile Gurdweill's, first fascinating and horrific confrontation with Christian otherness, beckoning him to transgress the border as a subject and a Jew, which would destroy him as either. In essence, the two women together artistically dramatize aspects of the abject. When exposed to these, Gurdweill struggles against indifferentiation both as a subject and as a Galician Jewish exile and writer.

Married Life from this perspective is about abjection, which Kristeva refers to as border subjectivity, which is why the border is a recurring trope in Vogel's text. In the following sections I will discuss appearances of the border trope in Vogel's text, which dramatize points of the protagonist's life where archaic boundaries rise up and/or threaten to break down, and where the abject (the semiotic, namely what is excluded from the text's symbolic discourse) is artistically named.

The Border as an Inside/Outside Experience

The first appearance (naming) of the archaic border as an inside/outside experience in *Married Life* occurs at the very beginning of the text where we see Gurdweill, the newly arrived Jewish exile, waking up on his first morning, or at least one of the first mornings, after his arrival in Vienna from Galicia. The scene shows Gurdweill, slowly and half unwillingly waking up to his new status. The city literally dawns on his still half-aware consciousness:

In the passage the tap woke up with a roar. In an instant the noise filled all the space around, penetrating the rooms, which were still steeped in the half-light of dawn, and invading the sleeping body of Rudolf Gurdweill. Perhaps the noise of the tap triggered of an unpleasant dream in Gurdweill a moment before waking, for the first feeling struggling inside him as his senses cleared

was one of reluctance: probably the result of the dream, which remained there inside him, on the other side of consciousness. For a moment Gurdweill lay listening with his eyes closed. But in the meantime the silence had returned and he heard only the click of a door closing in the corridor, picking it up belatedly – in the abstract, as it were – after the sound itself had already faded and died. Then he turned to the windows and opened his eyes. He saw that the windows were already quite pale with the light of the approaching morning, which immediately increased his desire to go back to sleep. And as if he were fleeing from some danger, he quickly turned on to his right side and pulled the quilt over his head. Down below, in Kleine Stadtgutgasse, a heavy wagon trundled past slowly, creaking mercilessly and shaking the windowpanes like an earthquake. “A coal-wagon from Nordbahnhof”, concluded Gurdweill. Now he would never be able to go back to sleep. The creaking narrowed down to two or three maddeningly monotonous sounds, which went on repeating themselves with an idiotic obstinacy in his drowsy mind, although the wagon was quite far away by now, *until it seemed to him that they were coming not from outside but from some corner of his own soul*. In a sudden panic he jumped up and sat on the bed.²⁵⁰

Through the lens of Kristeva’s theory of abjection the text’s poetic evocation of the rhythm of Gurdweill’s unstable, advancing and receding sleep-wake border of consciousness, seems to trigger a deeper, equally unstable, archaic inside/outside border: the one confronting the pre-Oedipal fledgling-subject after separation (from the unity with the archaic mother) and before it enters into language. This is the logic of abjection which, in Beardsworth’s words, “belongs to and is barely distinguishable from that unstable border”.²⁵¹

Thus viewed, Gurdweill’s lingering on the border between inside and outside (of consciousness), or of sleeping and waking, doubly dramatizes a position of uncertainty (where am I?), that of the fledgling subject and of the fledgling exile whose new other. The Western Christian host culture makes itself audible before making itself audible by the sound of its heavy traffic.

The Border as a Trope of Ambivalence

The trope of the border is highly ambivalent throughout *Married Life*. On the one hand it figures powerfully as a definite, historical and religious border between Jews and Christians, for instance as recounted by Gurdweill when telling his Christian Austrian wife after marriage about the Galician Jewish village he came from:

²⁵⁰ Vogel. *Married Life*. 7-8.

²⁵¹ Beardsworth. *Julia Kristeva*. 82.

People seemed to be divided in two separate species utterly different from each other, as different as cats and dogs. In a little village, unlike a city, religion still plays an important role in life. The boundaries are well defined: Jews are Jews and Christians are Christians. You cannot possibly confuse the two, especially in the little settlements of Galicia and Poland. My parents were not orthodox, but nevertheless they had nothing to do with Christians.²⁵²

On the other hand, in that same memory, the image of the border between Jews and Christians, dramatized as immovable and forbidding, begins to move like the reflection of a tree in the water after a stone has touched the surface. The borderlines that only a moment before seemed inexorably closed and definite now suddenly appear to be permeable, uncertain and threatening, which arouses both fascination and horror in young Gurdweill, as we recall from chapter 2, the paraphernalia of abjection. Gurdweill continues:

In short, the Christians fascinated me in their strangeness. When I grew a little older I would hang around the Church on their holy days, moved and excited, waiting for something. The singing of the choir, threatening and obscure, would come pouring out into the fresh summer air 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. If they abducted me, I thought, and forced me to do something (I didn't know exactly what) it wouldn't help them. I would suffer all the tortures of hell and I wouldn't do their bidding. Once I dared to approach the door and look inside. I saw nothing but dense darkness dotted with weak candle flames. From that day on, whenever I thought about Christians, I would see something dark with flickering candles...²⁵³

The preceding section artistically evokes a very young Gurdweill's phobic image of Christians as Jew persecutors in the narrative past, framed, as it were, within an analogous Thea-Gurdweill marriage situation (the analogy escaping Gurdweill's conscious mind) in the narrative present of his Jewish Christian marriage. What is the analogy?

Both the past and the present vividly evoke the border situation between Jew and Christian as forbidding, inexorably fixed, yet permeable yet transgressable (as illustrated by the Gurdweill-Thea marriage situation). The effect of this construction to the targeted Yiddish audience is that the impossibility of a relation between Jews and Christians, as dramatized in Gurdweill's recounted past, works as a kind

²⁵² Vogel. *Married Life*. 211.

²⁵³ *Ibid.* 210-11.

of artistic double of, and a comment on, the marriage situation (between Gurdweill the Jew and Thea the Christian) in the narrative present: as a transgression of the border described in Gurdweill's memory of Galicia as "Jews are Jews and Christians are Christians". A transgression on both sides, as subjectively experienced by the Jewish Gurdweill in horror and fascination: "I was constantly afraid that they would suddenly seize me and drag me inside and force me to do something terrible" he remembers, and "the Christians fascinated me in their strangeness".²⁵⁴

This episode dramatically suggests a deeper permeable border between the archaic past, before the child enters into language and before its first efforts to create space for separateness confronts it with the uncertain border (of a budding I), and the fearsome appearance of otherness, where first there was only oneness (in the *chora*). Here, and in other sections of the text, psychoanalysis meets what Beardsworth formulates as:

narcissism converting its walls into a permeable inside/outside limit, bringing out the archaic arrangement that Kristeva calls abjection. That permeable limit – the abject – paradigmatically the ab-jected mother [the psychic equivalent of Gurdweill's Yiddish roots] appears as: something rejected from which one does not part.²⁵⁵

Back to the Viennese narrative present of the text, to the intimacy of the (in the eyes of Vogel's intended Yiddish exile audience) impossible marriage. The text shows Gurdweill, the Eastern European Jew from Galicia (the cradle of Eastern European ultra-Orthodox Hassidic Jewry), offering to read the New Testament to his Christian wife Thea, just to please her:

If you like, said Gurdweill suddenly, I'll read to you from the New Testament... He read for half an hour, while his wife sat opposite him, her head resting on her hands, smoking without a pause.²⁵⁶

But, while reading, a strange thing happened: something intangible seemed to suddenly blow up the idyllic peacefulness generated by the reading:

... A strange, eerie silence descended. The upper half of the room was shrouded in semi-darkness as before. A feeling, something like shame, welled up in Gurdweill, and he couldn't understand what it meant.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 211.

²⁵⁵ Beardsworth. *Julia Kristeva*. 88-9.

²⁵⁶ Vogel. *Married Life*. 210.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 210.

Terms such as strange, shrouded (reminiscent of death), semi-darkness and shame seem to appear suddenly from an elsewhere or in-between, eerie (fear-inspiring, gloomy, strange: the semiotic), threatening the atmosphere of serenity, peace and quiet created earlier. Like the abject threatening the uncertain border of the pre-Oedipal child's budding self after its separation from the mother, forcing it into a defensive gesture of abjection and exclusion:

Suddenly what he had read seemed utterly naive to him, insipid, and lacking in any poetic spirit. All that was left was the unpleasant aftertaste of over-masticated chewing gum...²⁵⁸

What the text shows compares to my findings following my discussion of Rothko's work. The text's (symbolic) discourse, dramatizing Gurdweill's pleasant experience of the intimacy of the reading moment of the New Testament, is unexpectedly spoiled from the limit or border of the text's symbolic discourse: transformed, as it were, by something beyond (the semiotic). Although not producing meaning itself, this seems to reorganise the visible (symbolic) meaning of the text (a Jew reading the New Testament) from the perspective of that beyond: the abjected *cheider* and *yeshiva* past (the archaic mother) turning (in the subjective experience of the Galician Jewish exile Gurdweill) the Christian New Testament into a watered-down version ("naive, lacking any poetic spirit", "over-masticated chewing gum"), of the beloved, internalised Jewish Scriptures from his homeland Galicia.

Jewish Satire and Laughter in Married Life

An audience cannot identify satire unless it knows what is satirized. This is why Western audiences, seldom mention the literary origins of the satire in Vogel's text, let alone its psychological function: laughter, according to Kristeva²⁵⁹, can be a way to place or displace abjection as she shows time and again in her analysis of Céline's work. In the following historical sections I will attempt to capture the Jewish understanding of satire, which shows most remarkable analogies with Kristeva's psychoanalytical view of laughter displacing abjection.

Jewish Satire: Historical Roots

Whilst Western satire began with the Roman poets Horatio (65-8 BC) and Juvenal (ca. 60-130 AD), the Hebrew tradition of satire is as old as the Bible, as Joseph Chotzner (1911) shows in his inimitable book *Hebrew Satire*.²⁶⁰ Thomas

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 211.

²⁵⁹ Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 8.

²⁶⁰ Joseph Chotzner. *Hebrew Satire*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1911.

Yemieliety (1992) even traces back the origins of the genre to the Jewish prophets who used satire to answer attacks on their credibility.²⁶¹ Friedlander (2008) writes:

Jewish satire reflects 200 years of “culture wars” within the Jewish people; it dates back to the late eighteenth century, was composed in Hebrew or Yiddish, and became one of the most significant genres, if not the most significant one, in Jewish literature, and specifically in Yiddish literature. ... Jewish satire evolved in a hostile environment, and has been involved in a never-ending confrontation between the world of traditional beliefs and views on the one hand and the dynamic milieu of European humanism, with all its trends and periods, on the other hand. ... The contents of satirical works display a great deal of self-hatred and self-accusation, but through a moral platform, this hatred is shaped and presented in a pleasant and aesthetic form. One of the foundations of satirical creation is the convention of finding pleasantness in the horror of the ugly and repulsive.²⁶²

For his satire in *Married Life*, Vogel resorted to the Yiddish and Hebrew traditions of satire in Eastern Europe and Russia, where he had been born and bred, and whose literary sources he had studied during his stays in Vilnius and Lvov before leaving for Vienna. The culture war reflected in that Jewish tradition was waged between Jewish orthodoxy (Hasidism) and the *Maskilim*, adherents of the Jewish enlightenment, or *Haskalah*.

Modern Jewish satire dates back to the late eighteenth century. It was composed in Hebrew or Yiddish and became one of the most significant literary genres, if not the most significant one, in the Yiddish and Hebrew literary traditions of Eastern Europe and Russia. A later telling example, of course, is the work of the great Yiddish satirist Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (1835-1917), also known as Mendele Moykher Sforim. Mendele the bookseller still lived in Odessa when Vogel lived there in the three years before he arrived in Vienna in 1912. Mendelian traditions of Hebrew satire and parody written in the form of short stories always had didactic aims: they were intended to enlighten, warn off or elevate the Eastern European and Russian Jewish masses. In the above quote Friedlander effectively describes its ambivalent symptoms as those of abjection, without using the concept: “One of the foundations of satirical creation is the convention of finding pleasantness in the horror of the ugly and repulsive”.

²⁶¹ Thomas Jemieliety. *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992.

²⁶² Yehuda Friedlander. *The YIVO Encyclopaedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. Lemma: Satire. Trans. Rami Hann. Ed. David Hundert. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 1664.

Satire in Married Life: Laughter Displacing Abjection

In the very first pages of *Married Life*, the text itself announces its satiric bent when one of the characters, the Jewish Lotte Bondheim, who secretly loves Gurdweill but cannot compete with Thea, responds to the idea of a marriage between Gurdweill, the *Ostjude*, and Thea, a member of the notoriously anti-Semitic Roman Catholic Austrian nobility, with the laughter and horror epitomising abjection:

Oh no, she cried, it's too ridiculous for words. I've never heard anything so grotesque in my life! Little Gurdweill is going to marry a baroness! A big blond baroness! Ha, ha, ha! A little baron! One day he'll start a pogrom against us! ²⁶³

The text satirically presents the cultural-religious conflict between Jews and Christians in terms of an unequal match: the incompatibility of the partners, Jew and Christian, provokes laughter in its intended Jewish audience who know better: "Ha, ha, ha!"

The reception of *Married Life*, as we have seen, shows that the satiric element of Vogel's text was lost to Western audiences who did not realise that the novel was written by an Eastern European Jewish exile addressing an Eastern European Yiddish audience for whom, in their homelands, the impossibility of any union (marriage) between them and Christians had been one of the unforbidding realities of Jewish life. The reality they now faced as exiles, namely the possibility of crossing the border by acculturation and assimilation, filled them with both horror and fascination (the paraphernalia of abjection) and to displace abjection there was satire. A telling example in *Married Life* is the poking fun at the horror of the intensifying Western political anti-Semitism in Vienna. One day, whilst wandering through interbellum Vienna, the protagonist Gurdweill, the Jewish exile from Galicia, stumbles accidentally upon a meeting of the fascist Society of Aryan Nature Lovers held in a third-rate Viennese café.²⁶⁴ There he happens to overhear a speech delivered by one of the Aryan members of the Society, Herr Eigermeier:

The great and particular importance, Gentlemen, which cannot be sufficiently emphasized, of the establishment of special branches of our society for the organization and education of Aryan youth to the love of nature and fresh air and a proud, natural, healthy life, in the spirit of the teachings of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and their preservation from the undesirable foreign elements which – hmm – which have penetrated into our midst from the east,

²⁶³ Vogel, *Married Life*. 54-55.

²⁶⁴ Aryan: term used before and during the Nazi regime (1933–45) to refer to inhabitants of Germany and Austria of non-Jewish descent.

and which are taking over everything – I must stress, gentlemen, everything, all the economical and intellectual professions, and, in the end, even the last precious possession remaining to us: the glorious nature of our beloved country... My heart bleeds, my friends... And when he came home Herr Eigermeier would wake his wife and tell her in a casual, nonchalant tone that he had made a speech lasting half an hour at the meeting tonight. He wasn't one to blow his own trumpet, as she very well knew, but all the members of the society had praised the clarity of his ideas and the precise, economical way in which he had expressed them.... His wife would yawn lengthily, listen inattentively, and fall asleep again while he took off his clothes and got into bed with a feeling of profound self-satisfaction.²⁶⁵

Obviously the text deploys here, in Friedlander's words, "one of the foundations of satirical creation: the convention of finding pleasantness in the combination of horror of the ugly and repulsive" (Eigermeier's fascist hatred of Jews), the pleasure derived from Frau Eigermeier's devastating response to her husband's account of his successful Aryan eloquence ("His wife would yawn lengthily, listen inattentively, and fall asleep again.") The latter sentence also shockingly exposes Frau Eigermeier as both an instrument of satire and a satirical portrait of the silent German and Austrian majority who witnessed the outbursts of Fascism but who did not pay attention and fell asleep.

Eigermeier's speech sets out the ideological pre-Nazi discourse (as Christian and nature-loving) on Jews that excluded Jews, but first and foremost it demonstrates the unspeakable in the symbolic order: abjection as an instinctive, drive-oriented process of identity formation, "tapped, rationalized, and made operative by ideologies", in this case Nazism and Fascism, and obviously giving the Aryan Herr Eigermeier "a feeling of profound self-satisfaction".²⁶⁶

Vogel's *Married Life* is possibly satirising here (and elsewhere) the "Myth of a German-Jewish symbiosis" circulating among the German-speaking Jewry.²⁶⁷ The incredible historical longevity of that (German) Jewish fantasy arose from a 1998 interview with Yehuda Bauer, then director of Yad Vashem:

People talk today about a Jewish-German cultural symbiosis that existed before Hitler. There was a love affair between Jews and Germans, but it was one-sided: Jews loved Germany and Germans; Germans didn't love Jews, even if they didn't hate them. One-sided love affairs usually don't work very well. In this case, the so-called symbiosis between Jews and Germans is a

²⁶⁵ Vogel. *Married Life*. 178.

²⁶⁶ Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 155.

²⁶⁷ For an authoritative anthology of German/Jewish writing unmasking that fantasy as a myth, see Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes, eds. *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1996*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

post-factum invention. It never existed. Jews participated in German life, in German cultural life, but to say that they were accepted, even if the product they produced was accepted... They were not accepted, even if they converted.²⁶⁸

This view is not just a contrivance on my side: all the historical material about Russian and Eastern European Jewry that I have seen takes this gap between Jew and Christian as self-evident, as a truth that needs no further explanation. Nor does Vogel's *Married Life* in any way generalise: what strikes the reader is that the symbolic text at least makes no difference between the Jewish and Christian individuals the protagonist meets on his wanderings through the city and some of whom he befriends. Despite a couple of razor-sharp portraits of Austrians utterly humiliating Gurdweill the *Ostjude*, there are also non-Jews who behave as real friends to him. However, in Central and Western Europe, as in Gurdweill's Galicia and Vogel's Russia, the whole culture seemed to be imbued with suppressed or openly hatred to Jews. The history of the Tsars of Russia and the Jews (see chapter 5) testifies to that fact. So did the great Eastern European Jewish novelists before and during Vogel's life. And last but certainly not least, there is the historian Dubnow, one of the few historians explicitly focusing on Eastern European Jewry about whom I wrote in the previous chapter. Vogel's *Married Life* is no exception. Indeed, I postulate that one cannot grasp the drift of the text if one is not aware of Jewishness as affectively (before physically) excluded from Christian humanist European culture. "The love of Jews is even more suspect", as Zygmunt Bauman the sociologist put it. His sociological guess, which seems curiously close to Kristeva's ambivalent notion of abjection, is, as I indicated in chapter 2, that modernity's cultural ambivalence to the Jew has been informed by something

... perhaps, already in place before anti- or philo- sentiments are conceivable, itself not unambiguously determining either hatred or love, but containing the seeds of both, and whichever of the two appears is intense and extreme...²⁶⁹

And ambivalence is in the eye of the beholder:

... ambivalence is ambivalence mostly because the subject experiencing it is unable to contemplate a certain object without ambivalent feelings. It [the object] is simultaneously attractive and repelling, it reminds one of what one would like to be, but is afraid of being, it dangles before the eyes what one

²⁶⁸ The multimedia CD *Eclipse of Humanity* Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2000. Professor Yehuda Bauer, then Director of the International Center for Holocaust Studies of Yad Vashem, in an interview given to Amos Goldberg, on 6 January 1998 at Yad Vashem.

²⁶⁹ Bauman. "Allosemitism". 146.

would rather not see: that the settled accounts are still open and the lost possibilities are still alive.²⁷⁰

Bauman views the European perception of the Jew as a signifier of ambivalence, instilled into the believer by medieval Christianity and subsequently assimilated into the Western cultural consciousness, flaring up during the ordering frenzy of modernity (modernity's either/or epistemology). Bauman's sociological model of ambivalence fuses sociology with undefined, but obviously Freud-oriented, psychology. His perception of ambivalence (love/hate) in the eye of the believer could be seen as, again, an un-theorized sociological variant of what Julia Kristeva formulated psychoanalytically a decade earlier in *Powers of Horror* in relation to her notions of abjection, the symbolic and the semiotic.

As to *Married Life*, Western literary critique, as we have seen when discussing its reception, has been blind to what I see as the text's major theme: its dramatizations of the gap between Jew and Christian, in east and west. This gap is depicted as unbridgeable in *Married Life*. The western reception of the novel, as a charming literary evocation of interbellum Vienna, is a glaring denial of that gap.²⁷¹

Grasping the bite and fun of Jewish satire, or even recognizing it as such, presupposes that the reader shares, or is at least familiar with the writer's cultural and historical frame of reference: consensually held tacit assumptions, background, etc. In order to grasp Vogel's targets of satire the reader must be aware of the Jewish roots of satire which I have examined earlier. Gurdweill the Jew, painfully remembering the many faces of hatred of Jews from his home country, finds to his horror and fascination that, alongside its much-lauded modernist culture, hatred of Jews is as much alive in the West as it was in his home country, only differently. In that light Vogel's *Married Life* could be viewed as an artistic act of abjection, tragically misunderstood by Western audiences as the text's production of masochism. Reading the text as a Russian Jewish artist's disbelief at and satiric exposure of the naive belief in the possibility of a symbiosis between anti-Semitic German and Jewish culture, it seems hardly surprising that Vogel reverts to the traditional Russian Jewish vehicle for social criticism: Yiddish satire. Satire in that case was both a self-critical tool and a source of laughter (displacing abjection of self), indispensable for survival in a hostile environment that offered nothing to identify with. Vogel's artistic dramatization of this experience is more powerful than any theory, such as the threat of psychic collapse or, in Kristeva's terms, abjection of self. Gurdweill, the exile and Jew facing Western culture as alien, experience this in the streets of Vienna:

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ For the relation between Jews and Christians in Eastern Europe and Russia, chapter 5.

In the narrow, shady Tiefer Graben, a quiet street in the heart of the city, full of leather warehouses and textile wholesalers, workers in their shirtsleeves were loading huge crates on to wide, flat wagons. While this was going on, the heavy cart-horses with tufts of hair above their hooves munched steadily and gloomily from the feed bags tied around their heads. A cleaner in wooden clogs with a long pipe dangling from his mouth sprayed the pavement with a rusty hose. In one of the doorways a maid in a white apron stood calling over and over again in a long-drawnout voice: “Flo-ckie come he-eere!” But the little brown dog with his long back and short crooked legs was busy chasing a cigarette butt blown by the wind and showed no inclination to go home. A sturdy labourer called teasingly to the maid from the opposite pavement: “Why don’t you come and sleep with me tonight, pussycat?” Then a heavy truck came roaring down the road and swept Flockie aside.

A pleasant, pungent smell of cured hides and freshly dyed cloth wafted out of the open warehouse doors. All around there was a sense of people busy at work, of quiet, strenuous effort, and Gurdweill felt an urge to go up to the labourers and help them load the crates, to lend a hand and shoulder and overcome the resistance of the heavy load. At that moment he saw himself as an outcast, excluded from the masses of humanity helping to keep the world going. Like all those unfit for crude physical labour, he imagined that it was the only way to achieve perfect fulfilment. Gurdweill stood at a distance and watched the workers enviously. No, of course he could not compete with men like these! He glanced contemptuously at his thin, short body, which seemed to him to be made of nerves and brains alone, and moved away.²⁷²

This long excerpt is a pertinent illustration of Kristeva’s difficult concept of abjection of self as a defence against social and symbolic collapse and throws an entirely different psychoanalytical light on Gurdweill as a masochist, which I will look into now.²⁷³

Misunderstanding in Western Critiques of Masochism in Married Life

Western and Israeli critics of *Married Life* have interpreted the text’s dramatization of the protagonist’s masochist passivity in clinging to a wife that deceives him, to the influence of the German neo-romantic novel.²⁷⁴ Also, Jewish critics

²⁷² Vogel. *Married Life*. 17-8.

²⁷³ For the notion of abjection of self, see Beardsworth. *Julia Kristeva*. 226 onward.

²⁷⁴ Neo-romanticism, as a cultural and literary tendency, was a reaction to positivism and naturalism in fin-de-siècle Central and Western Europe. The three tendencies existed side by side until the early twentieth century. Ellenberger points out that neo-romanticism was “a distorted imitation, almost a caricature of Romanticism...Whereas Romanticism had viewed everything in the process of growth and evolution, Neo-Romanticism was inclined to view it in decay... Where Romanticism had had the peculiar ability or sympathy with almost all periods of history, Neo-Romanticism showed a predilection for the periods of decadence... Decadence, decay and degeneration under all imaginable forms and disguises

have uneasily tiptoed around the issue of masochism by referring to the text as, for instance, a “fascinating novel of psychological aberration.”²⁷⁵ Or they expressed their respectful astonishment at the novel’s construction of “sado-masochism, not as extraordinary, but rather as a universal law.”²⁷⁶

However, in my view *Married Life* artistically dramatizes what those eminent Western critics have overlooked: the fact that, especially for *Ostjuden* such as Gurdweill, masochism had, beside sexual implications, strong existential and survival implications beyond the ken of a Western reading public. That is partly because, until now Western culture has been blatantly unaware of or not interested in the historical conditions the Eastern European Russian Jewry had to live in until, and even after, a relatively small group found refuge in socialism (Bundism) and later Marxism, to be eventually destroyed in the Holocaust. From that perspective, the Jewish historian Dubnow’s study *The History of the Jews in Russia and Poland* (1916) should be compulsory reading for all students of history, in particular the Holocaust.²⁷⁷

Daniel Boyarin (1998) aptly illustrates the fact that even the acculturated children of Eastern European Jewish exiles in Vienna, such as young Freud, had no conception of the impact of hatred of Jews and its role in their Eastern European fathers’ (masochist) passivity in the face of that hatred. The passage to which Boyarin refers is from Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*Die Traumdeutung*, 1900) in which the writer remembers how, as a young Jewish boy born and bred in Western culture, he responded to a story told to him by his pious Eastern European orthodox father Jacob Freud. Sigmund Freud recalls:

I may have been ten or twelve years old, when my father began to take me with him on his walks and reveal to me in his talk his views upon things in the world we live in. Thus it was, on one such occasion, that he told me a story to show, how much better things were now, than they had been in his days. ‘When I was a young man’, he said. ‘I went for a walk one Saturday in the streets of your birthplace; I was well-dressed and had a new fur cap on my head. A non-Jew came up to me, knocked my new fur cap from my head and shouted: ‘Jew, get off the pavement!’’. ‘And what did you do?’ I asked. ‘I went into the roadway and picked up my cap,’ was his quiet reply. This struck me as un-heroic conduct on the part of the big, strong man who was holding the

pervaded the thinking of the time. Neo-Romantics, however, were no less concerned than their predecessors with the irrational, the occult, and the exploration of the hidden depths of the human mind”. Henry Ellenberger. *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books, 1970. 278-82.

²⁷⁵ Alter. *The Invention of Hebrew Prose*. 76.

²⁷⁶ Shaked. “A Viennese Author Who Wrote in Hebrew: David Vogel as Novelist”. 20.

²⁷⁷ Dubnow. *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day*.

little boy by the hand. I contrasted this situation with another which fitted with my feelings better: the scene in which Hannibal's father, Hamilcar Barca, made his boy swear before the household altar to take vengeance on the Romans. Ever since that time Hannibal had had a place in my fantasies.²⁷⁸

Young Freud's inability to grasp his father's masochist passivity is characteristic of the West's inability to grasp the passivity of the Eastern, and sometimes also of Western Jews, instead of instantly striking back in the face of attacks, as Israel does now. This inability is also exemplified by Hannah Arendt's (safely in America from 1938 onward) blaming the Jewish leaders in occupied Europe, at the beginning of the Second World War when the deportations began, for not having more actively resisted and sometimes even co-operated with German measures to exclude Jews. When, as a young girl witnessing both the deportations and that so-called leaderly inactivity and passivity, I asked my Jewish father about it, he unwittingly summed up Freud's father's attitude by answering that "the reeds that bow to the ground are more likely to weather the heavy storms".

I certainly do not mean to generalise: I refer to previous chapters in which I described various forms of Jewish political resistance (Bundism, Socialism, Marxism, Zionism) among Russian and Eastern European Jews. But all these movements were a political overcoming of that passivity, inconceivable to the West, which I have tried to sketch before as a way of emotionally and socially dealing with an endemic Eastern and Western European hatred of Jews, against which Eastern European Jewish exiles, blinded by their deep admiration for modernist Western culture, were unprotected and which contained the seeds of Zionism.

Vogel however a-political, tried as an artist to speak and write revolt through literature in the vein of Jewish satire, the bite and fun of which, even less its psychological function of abjection, was beyond the ken of the general Western audiences who read and commented on *Married Life* after its re-publication and translations in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Vogel's *Married Life* dramatizes the association of Jews with masochism. Vogel dares to portray, as Kristeva writes about Proust, "albeit in an ambiguous and fiercely ironic way, the sadomasochistic dynamic of belonging".²⁷⁹ But unlike Proust, Vogel does so by means of his metaphor of a marriage between a Christian and a Jew, the former playing the sadist dominatrix and the latter, Gurdweill, the

²⁷⁸ Daniel Boyarin. "Goyim Naches, or, Modernity and the Manliness of the Mensch". *Modernity, Culture and the Jew*. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, eds. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. 63-90.

²⁷⁹ Julia Kristeva. "Marcel Proust". *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*. Eds. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb. London: Thames and Hudson, 1995. 140-41.

Galician Jewish exile, playing the passive role. This (impossible) relation between Christian and Jew is in my view the dominant theme in the text. As early as Gurdweill's first meeting with Thea, vague associations about the Jew-Christian relation as structured by sadomasochistic machinery emerge in the text. For instance in the episode of Gurdweill's first meeting with the baroness when he feels that there is something familiar about her:

'You know Fräulein', he said, looking directly into her face, 'it sometimes happens that you meet someone and you immediately feel that there is already a definite, permanent relationship, between you, good and bad, but the kind of relationship only created by years of living together. In these cases the first part [of the relation] is already over, has already taken place in secret. Have you ever had that kind of experience? Meeting someone for instance, and knowing right away that you have to avenge yourself on him for something, or the opposite feeling that you owe a debt of gratitude to some stranger you have just met for the first time in your life? Strange, isn't it?'²⁸⁰

Although the reader is initially inclined to understand this feeling of Gurdweill's as a lovers' experience of kindred souls, it soon appears that something quite the opposite sounds through, corrupting, as it were, that first impression:

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 Währingerstrasse, he glanced to his companion and thought to himself: A tall, handsome woman, but obviously hard. She will 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 for 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 this mood trembled at the threshold of his memory. Gurdweill almost touched 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.²⁸¹

What happened in Gurdweill's infancy and what he is unable to remember, as we can read elsewhere in the text, is that when he was very young he was continually raped and sexually dominated by his parents' much older, experienced Christian Polish maidservant.²⁸² Gurdweill's half-aware association not only links the two incidents but also constitutes two examples amongst many in the novel of the cultural-religious border between Jews and Christians, corrupted by hatred of

²⁸⁰ Vogel. *Married Life*. 28.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* 30.

²⁸² *Ibid.* 213-17.

Jews. For, already at their first meeting, Thea, the baroness, makes no bones about the kind of kindredness that binds her and Gurdweill when, without a hint of shame, she sums up her noble family antecedents: a combination of dignity, tradition and hatred of Jews. Recounting her father's, the baron, caring concern for her welfare she tells Gurdweill, the Galician Jew, with clearly sadistic overtones:

'Dorothea' – he always calls me 'Dorothea', because it sounds more dignified and traditional, 'Dorothea', he says, ridiculous and pompous as an old man, 'you are the scion of an ancient race. Your ancestors were Crusaders, don't forget!' You must be on your guard against the Jews. The city of Vienna has been Judaized from one end to the other. Blood does not matter anymore. They are poisoning the air. But for them, we would never have lost the War'. And all the time [adds Thea] he is running himself after a little Jewess who has turned his head completely.²⁸³

Much later in the text, the reader discovers what happened in Gurdweill's youth and what he cannot remember at his first meeting with the baroness. The memory crops up when Gurdweill recounts an episode from his Galician past to her after the marriage:

'I was fifteen at the time', said Gurdweill quietly, 'but everyone thought I was twelve, because I was so small and thin. I was very naïve too, which also makes you look younger. I had no friends, either in school, or out of it. The boys did not like me, or at any rate, that's how it seemed to me, and since I was shy by nature, and at the same time proud, I made no effort to make friends with them. I took no part in their games and pranks I kept apart, as though I was in an invisible cage. During breaks I would sometimes see them whispering to each other with strange expressions on their faces, as if they were conspiring to commit some terrible crime. Sometimes I would accidentally overhear some enigmatic phrase, which, I sensed, contained a secret that somehow, although I did not understand it, affected me too. I would rack my brains for hours over such phrases, turning them over and over until I was exhausted. Needless to say, it never occurred to me to ask one of them what it meant. I felt obscurely that I would make a fool of myself by questioning them.

... At that time I was once attacked by a gang of Christian boys. I fought desperately, as if I was fighting for my life. But I was alone, and I was defeated. When I came home battered and beaten, I felt a curious satisfaction, a kind of content and peace of mind. Once I was hit by a stone – here you see?' – Gurdweill pointed to his left temple next to the ear – 'There still is a little scar. You can feel it with your fingers. In the course of time, when they saw that I wasn't afraid of them and knew how to use my fists, they left me alone. And I remember too, that I once took a thick darning needle I found at home,

²⁸³ Ibid. 48.

and rolled up my sleeve, and stuck it into the flesh above my wrist, slowly, half a centimetre deep, in two, or three places, and as I did so I felt a strange pleasure and a kind of revenge. Then I washed away the blood and stuck some of my father's cigarette papers on the wounds. I only did this three times, by the way. The sight of the blood made me nauseous, I felt giddy and faint, and I stopped. I threw the needle away and adopted a new, bloodless means of torture. I would light a match and burn the tip of my little finger. I don't know why precisely that one, burnt it till I couldn't stand the pain. Then I would dip my charred finger in ink: a popular remedy for burns.'²⁸⁴

The text's dramatization of the relation between Jews and Christians as impossible, for which *Married Life* is an extended modernist metaphor, is a unique aspect of Vogel's novel. This brings me to the place of Vogel's *Married Life* in European Hebrew modernist literature, as part of that movement and as individual work of art.

6.6 Conclusion

How is it, that Western critique has missed the preceding and many other references to the relation between Gurdweill's masochism and hatred of Jews? I will refrain from further analysing the Western audiences – Jewish and non-Jewish – within that context and conclude this chapter by summing up the uniqueness of *Married Life* as an individual work and as part of European Hebrew modernism.

As I have indicated before, *Married Life* is part of European Hebrew modernism on account of, for instance, its use of the Hebrew language for modernist literature instead of German. The use of Hebrew, apart from providing these modernist writers with a linguistic identity, also entailed practical difficulties: there was no tradition, for example, of interiority in Hebrew literature. Also, as Hebrew was not yet a spoken language, the creation of modern dialogue offered problems, which is why they often resorted to Russian models.²⁸⁵ For Vogel there was an additional, more prosaic reason to write in Hebrew: his command of the German language was insufficient for writing in it.

Robert Alter poignantly formulated the uniqueness of Vogel's work and its relation to the work of the European Hebrew modernists:

They were among the first to introduce psychologically-oriented prose dispensing with a narrator, into Hebrew literature, which Brenner referred to as 'creating an atmosphere of the mind'.²⁸⁶ ... what is truly compelling

²⁸⁴ Ibid. 212-13. Gurdweill attending a Christian school as a Galician Jew is historically correct.

²⁸⁵ Itamar Even-Zohar. "Gnessin's Dialogue and its Russian Models". *Poetics Today*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990. 131-53.

²⁸⁶ David Vogel lectured on Brenner's and other contemporary Hebrew writers' style, during

about Fogel's diary is the palpable feeling it conveys of fashioning a living language, a language that, though not the writer's actual vernacular, is able to trace the twisting contours of his inner life, to body forth a thoroughly modern and European sense of self and other, motive and identity.²⁸⁷

My psychoanalytical reading of Vogel's text through the lens of Kristeva's work has enabled me to explore the (Bakhtinian) polyphony of the text in terms of Kristeva's philosophical notions of the symbolic and the semiotic and their implications for the text's structures of identity and meaning. What I found – and have tried to show in my discourse on *Married Life* in this chapter – is Vogel's horror and fascination as a Russian Jew and intellectual at Western Christian culture (embodied by Thea) and its relation to Jews (dramatized by Gurdweill). Obviously he deemed that relation impossible and the marriage between Gurdweill and Thea became a metaphor for this.

My use of the notions of horror and fascination already points to my view of Vogel's writing the novel as an artistic act of exclusion simultaneously creating possibility for new identities: by the Hebrew word, as he writes in his diaries. Gurdweill appears in this context as Vogel's literary alter ego. Not (quoting Berdyczewski on Brenner's negative types) as one of those loafers who cannot deal with reality, "but sources of an internal reality, or truth that cannot be grasped directly".²⁸⁸ I have read this internal reality through the lens of Kristeva's ultimately ambivalent notion of abjection. From that perspective the text shows itself as Vogel's artistic defence against indifferenciation, as a subject, an exile and a Jew.

a trip in Poland in 1931. David Fogel. "Language and Style in Our Young Literature (1931)". *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*. 13.1 (1993). For an extensive overview of the rise of the Hebrew novel in tsarist Russia see David Patterson. *The Hebrew Novel in Czarist Russia: A Portrait of Jewish Life in the Nineteenth Century*. Lanham: Rowland and Littlefield, 1964. See also the Introduction by Alan Mintz to: Alan Mintz, ed., *Reading Hebrew Literature: Critical Discussions of Six Modern Texts*. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003. 1-20.

²⁸⁷ Alter. "Fogel and the Forging of a Hebrew Self": 2-5.

²⁸⁸ Fleck. *Character and Context*. 63-4.

