



## Miedo (Cuadernos del Acantilado nº 85)

*Stefan Zweig , Roberto Bravo de la Varga (Translator)*

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Irene Wagner lleva una vida acomodada y sin preocupaciones junto a su marido y sus dos hijos. Sin embargo, tras ocho años de matrimonio, los bailes, el teatro, la ópera y otras actividades sociales se le antojan predecibles y anodinas. Así, más por fantasía novelesca que por auténtico deseo, inicia una relación con un joven pianista. Pero pronto una mujer la descubre cuando sale del apartamento de su amante e Irene se ve obligada a ceder a un terrible chantaje. El terror de ser descubierta por su marido y de perder todo lo que posee y, ahora descubre, tanto necesita y ama, la sumirá en una tormentosa pesadilla. Escrita en 1913 y publicada por primera vez casi una década más tarde, "Miedo" es una de las "nouvelles" más sobrecogedoras de Stefan Zweig, con un final tan sorprendente para la protagonista como para el lector.

"Fontcuberta nos sirve la virtuosa prosa de Zweig de un modo tan vívido que el texto rejuvenece y se torna contemporáneo".

Màrius Serra, *La Vanguardia*

"Zweig logra transmitir toda la angustia de una mujer que logra apreciar lo que tiene justamente cuando está a punto de perderlo".

Carmen Delia Aranda, *Canarias 7*

"Una nueva joya de Stefan Zweig, donde vuelve a demostrar la habilidad y elegancia narrativa que caracteriza al autor, que engancha al lector desde la primera línea".

*Cinco Días*

## **Miedo (Cuadernos del Acantilado nº 85) Details**

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## From Reader Review Miedo (Cuadernos del Acantilado nº 85) for online ebook

### Jibran says

It seems there is an inexhaustible supply of writers who devote their literary powers to investigate the deepest recesses of the minds and souls of respectable married women cheating on their dear husbands, taking on lovers, or simply committing adultery.

The names are well-known, be it Anna Karenina or Madame Bovary or others, so let's just say that the persona of an unfaithful woman provided (and still provides) perhaps the best vantage point from which to observe the follies of human society amid all its complacence and contradictions on full display, and also because of that inscrutable, inexpressible, ineffable fascination with female sex which does not get replicated for its male counterpart.

Either by conditioning or by instinct, to this modern day readers grab books that promise another story of transgressive women in the throes of passion, and in the process become the cause of their own ruination and those related to them, destroying the tender fabric from which social life is knitted and families are formed.

Even though I have read only two novels, I think of Stefan Zweig as one of the finest writers to explore with great éclat the deep psychological multiverse of his characters, the gaping hole of the self, the hidden iceberg of human emotions, in a measured prose wherein the apparent complements the hidden (and vice versa) in a flowing stream of words that makes it hard for the reader to put the book down.

And so, here too, Zweig explores the inner workings of the mind of one Irene Wagner, who takes on a lover without there being a pressing need, without an emotional hole to fill. Her perfectly happy marital life is not an impediment for her seeking "extra happiness," so if a reader is looking to make pop psychological connections about Irene's transgressions, she'll have none! Irene is bored and she wants to experience the adventure of the verboten. As simple as that. But then *fear* strikes soon, and everything threatens to come crumbling down. She isn't the angry, raving, intrepid, couldn't-care-less heroine of the latter-day literature, a template that gets repeated in fictions with a feminist label; she is an ordinary woman who fears for her secret to be out in the open.

Zweig has a flair for theatics, and there's a good helping of the same in the story. Aside from this he's employed - I would say - a cheap plot device to resolve the conflict in the end. It's fine if it's done to solve some minor plot issues, or to give credence to a character's thoughts and actions but in this case it is as though he's opted for an easy way out of Irene's conundrum and resolved the tension simply by an awe-inspiring revelation. I think it does not behoove a writer of Zweig's calibre to succumb to this weakness, and this is my biggest criticism of the novella.

All in all a fine piece of writing full of drama, excitement, passion - and a lot of *fear*.

August '16

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## Nada EL Shabrawi says

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## Ça?da? T says

Zweig okumak oldukça keyifli. Psikolojik tahlillerine hayran kalıyorsunuz. ?ster istemez kitap karakteriyle hemhal oluyorsunuz. Yakın arkadaşları "muhtemel" demi?lerdi. Bence muhtemel de?ildi fakat okumaya de?er !

## FeReSHte says

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**karen says**

ZWEIG!!!

this is my second dip in the zweig pool, and i'm pretty much sold. i do wish someone would publish a volume of his collected works so i don't have to keep buying these tiny, albeit beautiful, pushkin press editions. they can be read in the time it takes to eat a box of crackers. and then you are left with no crackers and no more book. and that is a heavy-souled feeling.

ya know what is also a heavy-souled feeling?? the guilt of infidelity. a seamless transition into the book by ms. brissette (2 points). bored by a "perfect" life into an equally boring affair, and then blackmailed by the ex-lover of her current lover, irene experiences *fear*. seamless name-drop of title (4 points). what follows is 100 pages of slow psychological breakdown as she pays off her blackmailer and fears exposure. overcome by *angst* (mention of the german title: 5 points), she contemplates suicide (naturally; it is zweig, after all) and homicide as she tries to find a way out of the hole she has dug herself into.

there is the usual poking at the bourgeoisie, and an ending that i half-expected, but it was completely satisfying. zweig does character so well - all the false starts and crazy notions and deliberations of this woman are crystallized into impressive and taut prose that makes the story more of a thriller than you would expect considering that it is mostly hand-wringing consciousness of her *burning secret* (name drop of another zweig book: 5 points), and not the big explosions of a more modern thriller.

i have earned many points here tonight.  
my work is done.

go read some zweig.

**tyranus says**

\* ?nsanlar?n (homo sapiens) da ait oldu?u memeliler s?n?f?n?n sadece *yüzde 3* kadar? tek e?lidir, ve insan bu küçük gruba ait de?ildir; yani çok e?lidir. Do?as? gere?i deyim yerindeyse "*serbest a?k*" ya?amas? gereken insan, içinde ya?ad??? toplumun yasal, kültürel ya da dinsel kurallar?na/dayatmalar?na ço?u zaman boyun e?er ve tek e?lili?i seçer. Bununla da yetinmez, evlilik dedi?imiz -kutsall?k da atfedilen- yasal ve dini bir rituelle bu zorunlu seçimini belgeler. Art?k hayat?n?n geri kalan?nda e?ine sadakatle ba?l? kalmas? gerekmektedir; ve bunu da, insan? insan yapan en temel unsurlar?ndan biri olan "*ıçgönüllerini kontrol alt?nda tutma / içgönüllerine kar?? koyma*" mekanizmas?n? devreye sokarak ba?armaya çal???r. Bu durum herkes için geçerli de?il elbette; "do?as? ile ya?ad??? toplumun normlar?" aras?nda s?k??an ve gel-gitler ya?ayan kimi insanlar, "do?as? gere?i ya?amas? gereken bu hazlar?n?" e?lerini aldatarak gizliden gizliye ya?amay? tercih eder. Peki tüm bu "*ihlaller*", yapanlar?n yanlar?na kâr m? kal?r; elbetteki hay?r.

\*\* Zengin kocas? ve iki çocu?uya mutlu mesut bir hayat ya?ayan ?rene, sahip oldu?u tehlikesizli?in ve mutlulu?un verdi?i ayart?c?l?kla, merak duydu?u bir maceraya at?l?r ve e?ini aldat?r. ?lk ba?larda yasakl? ve ay?p olan?n verdi?i hızla güzel geçen günler, gizli-sakl? ili?kiden haberdar birinin ?antajlar?yla yerini kêbusvari günlere b?rak?r.

\*\*\* Olay?n aç??a ç?kmas?n?n getirece?i korku ve utanc?n bir kad?n? sürükle?i psikolojik ve gerilimli atmosfer, Zweig'in muhte?em analizleriyle anlat?lm??. Korku, pi?manl?k, utanç, d??lanma gibi sosyolojik ve psikolojik terimler, Zweig'in yaratt???"aldataن kad?n?" karakteriyle ete ve kemi?e bürünmü?.. ?ayet korku, toplum taraf?ndan ay?planma /d??lanma, utanç ve pi?manl?k gibi duygular? daha önceden yeterince ya?amad??n?z? dü?ünüyorsan?z, eseri okuman?z? öneririm. Yap?t bu haliyle bu duygular?n simülasyonu gibidir, hepsini ?rene'le birlikte ya?ayaca??n?za eminim. ?yi okumalar...

"*Tokluk, tahrikte açl??a e?ittir.*" (**kitaptan bir al?nt?**)

"*Korku, cezadan daha berbatt?r, çünkü ceza bellidir, a??r veya hafif; bilinmeyene, s?n?rland?r?lmam??a k?yasla ceza, daha az ürkütür*". (**kitaptan bir al?nt?**)

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**Özgür says**

*Gözünün görübildi?i her ?eyi incelikle tasvir edebilmesini yeni sindirmeye ba?lam??ken bir de korku gibi aktar?m? zor bir duyguyu nas?l yani...!!*  
*Zweig yine bildi?imiz gibi..*

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**BlackOxford says**

**Coming Out of the Proto-Feminist Closet**

Zweig was a close friend and confidant of Sigmund Freud. And this little novella is clearly influenced by psycho-analytic theory. However it suggests to me at least a nod to the concepts of Carl Jung in its development and resolution.

Who is this Frau Irene Wagner really? Merely a bourgeois socialite who decides to engage in a little adultery out of boredom with her established matronly routine? A hedonist pushing for that extra frisson of pleasure? A neurotic housewife trying to escape the horrible fate of relationships without apparent meaning? Or perhaps just a selfish bitch? What fundamental motivation lies behind her behaviour?

If nothing else, Frau Wagner is certainly what Carl Jung termed an Objective Introvert. She lives mainly in her own head as indicated by the scarcity of dialogue throughout. But almost nothing exists in that head of her own making. She is defined but the people she is with, her 'set', those others who have apparent regard for her, and particularly by her husband. She mounds herself to this society, as she does to her family's expectations of her. Even her children can command that she not deviate from their expectations for their care-taking.

Woe to the Objective Introvert who intuitively can see the limits of their own psychology. The only thing they can do to, as it were, broaden their perspective on life is to expose themselves to contradictory external demands. If they are within a sedate, stable society, they purposely but unconsciously seek out passion and danger as a corrective environment. Their life then, of course, becomes miserable, not because of the passion and danger but because of the radical conflict in the demands upon their personality.

Frau Wagner, therefore, becomes dissociated, two separate selves, so that *“All that had passed and been forgotten was no longer her crime at all, but that of another woman whom she could not herself understand and whose mind she could no longer even enter into.”* In fact each aspect of her personality feels guilt about the other. Whether she turns to her husband or her lover for solace she will be judged inadequate.

Like all of us, according to Jung, Frau Wagner wants to have her psychological cake and eat it. She wants what the Jungians call ‘integration’, that is, the acceptance of both parts of herself into a coherent whole. She in fact wants to be ‘found out’ and thus healed: *“Deep inside her she longed for what she had hitherto been afraid of: the lightning flash of redemption that would come when she was caught.”*

The only resolution to this fracture in the self appears to be annihilation of both aspects of her personality, *“She considered all routes to death that she was familiar with, weighing up legion possibilities of self destruction, before she suddenly recollected with a kind of joyous terror that the doctor, on account of her insomnia during a painful illness, had prescribed morphine.”* The internal contradiction is simply overwhelming.

But the solution isn’t actually in her hands. It is the environment that has to change to accommodate her. This is precisely what happens. While I find his resolution a bit too much deus ex machina and abrupt, I am not entirely dissatisfied with Zweig’s resolution of Frau Wagner’s dilemma. She has at least learned that it is not she who is always required to adapt to the demands of the world.

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### **Irmak says**

Zweig sa? olsun yine iliklerime kadar hissetti?im bir kitap okuttu bana. Hangi kitab?n? okuduysam bütün duygular? kendi içimde hissederek okudum bu zamana kadar. Ama san?r?m içlerinde en iyi yans?tt??? duyu 'korku' olmu?. En az?ndan bana göre.

Irene'nin korkular?n? okumak o kadar tan?d?k geliyor ki insana. Korkuyu ancak bu kadar iyi anlatabilirdi bir yazar. Ve bu sadece Irene'nin de?il ayn? zamanda bizim de korkumuz. Mutlaka birisine söylemekten korktu?unuz ?eyler olmu?tur ve dahas? bu ?eyi onun ö?renmesinden korkmu?sunuzdur. ??te o zaman hissetti?iniz ?eyleri bu kitapta elle tutulur ?ekilde önünüze koymu? Zweig.

Irene kocas?n? aldatmas?n?n bedelini bir ?antajc?yla kar?? kar??ya gelerek öder. Irene bu ?antajc? kar??s?nda hem ailesini kaybedecek diye hem de hayat?nda asl?nda ne kadar güzel ?eyler oldu?unu fark edip bunlar? yitirecek diye büyük bir korku duymaya ba?lar.

Kitap boyunca Irene kocas?na olanlar? ne zaman itiraf edecek diye bekledim. Ve sonu ile büyük bir ?a?k?nl?k ya?ad?m.

Kesinlikle yine tad? dama??mda kalan bir Zweig klasi?i okudum. Denecek çok fazla bir ?ey yok asl?nda.



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## Magdalen says

If you had the chance to pick any author to write your story or to write a character based on you whom would you pick? I'd pick Stefan Zweig for sure.

His ability to analyze the human psyche will never cease to impress me. He is by far one of the best novelists who walked on earth. I will make it a personal life goal to read everything that he has ever written.

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## PGR Nair says

### Fear Eats the Soul

Literature is replete with great works of art dwelling on extra-marital relationships. As a single story , perhaps Chekhov's *Lady with the lapdog* may be considered as the Taj Mahal for extramarital love. We then have masterpieces like Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Flaubert's *Madam Bovary* and Fontaine's *Effi Briest* . Zweig also deals with the same theme but he chooses to concentrate his entire drama on the angst or fear that clutches the doer when someone witnesses her secret rendezvous and later tries to blackmail her.

Hardly had I read ten pages of the novel and I realized that Zweig bears striking comparison with another giant of Austrian Literature, Arthur Schnitzler, who handled psychological drama with fine finesse. I was particularly reminded of the story "The Dead are Silent", which in a recent discussion I mentioned as one of my favorite short stories. Zweig was Schnitzler's junior by twenty years. Both shared a liking for psychological themes and often used the bourgeoisie world of contemporary Vienna for their observations. Both treat the theme of marital infidelity. The basic situations in both the stories are similar. In each story, a married woman is placed in a situation which could lead to the discovery by her husband of her infidelity.

Leaving the apartment of her young lover, Irene, the wife of a wealthy lawyer is seized by a sudden sense of foreboding. At the bottom of the stairs a woman is waiting, a woman who will stalk, blackmail and intimidate her into a state of suicidal despair. "Fear", a 1920 novella of just 59 pages charts every fluctuation of its heroine's inner turmoil and ends with an ingenious twist.

There is always a plateau in married relationships. The truth is that man is seldom contented with one relationship and many people know that they cannot make a contract for love to last lifetime. He always carves for multiple relationships (needn't be sexual alone) to fulfil the gaps and to complement his inner needs. There is often a thrill and excitement in a new relationship even when the existing one is satisfying. This is the case with Irene:

*She was perfectly happy with a prosperous husband whose intellect was superior to hers, two children, contentedly and even lazily at ease in her comfortable, calm, middle-class existence. But a kind of languor in the air may arouse sensuality just as sultry or stormy weather can, a sense of temperate happiness can be more provocative than outright unhappiness, and for many women their contentment itself proves more disastrous than enduring dissatisfaction in a hopeless situation. Satiety can be as much of an incitement as hunger, and it was the very safety and security of Irene's existence that made her feel curious and ready for*

*an adventure.*

Irene confesses that she was ‘attracted by the mysterious magnetism of adventure’ than a real urge when she started the affair with a young pianist she had met in a theater. The issue is that even a new relationship too after a while becomes jejune and trips into torpor and Irene is aware of that fact:

*Soon her lover made no difference at all to the comfortable mechanism of her existence, he became, as it were, an additional source of temperate happiness, like the idea of a third child or a motor car, and her adventure soon seemed to her as ordinary as her lawful pleasures.*

Irene’s problem is that though she loves adventure, she isn’t a woman trained to tackle adventure and the risk it entails. This is her failure. The moment her rendezvous with her lover is discovered by someone, and that too by a former consort of her lover, she runs into panic. Though she initially sops her with money, it is just the beginning of her entry into the realm of ‘fear’. Irene first tries to cloister herself in her house for some days to escape a second encounter with the woman. This is all the more frustrating as she isn’t used to spending all the time at home. Her relationship with her children lacked care and affection and all the inmates become uncomfortable when she stays at home. This further frets the matter and makes her aware of her deep alienation:

*Whenever she tried to do something actively useful she came up against the interests of others, who resisted her sudden attempts as an intrusion on their own customary rights. There was no place left for her; for lack of contact with it she herself had become a foreign body in the organism of her own household. She did not know what to do with herself and her time, and even her approaches to the children failed, for they suspected that her sudden lively interest in them meant the introduction of a new kind of discipline, and she felt herself blush in shame when, during one of her attempts to look after them, her seven-year-old son asked outright why she wasn’t going for so many walks these days.*

Soon the witness woman turns out to be a stalker blackmailing Irene for more and more money and even dares one day to step into her house and she is forced to give away even her engagement ring in panic. Irene knows that ‘The ring itself was not her chief anxiety—recovering it would mean only postponement, not release’ from the fear of revelation. ‘Fear’ is a riveting tale of how Irene steadily submits to the terrors and humiliation of blackmail in order to preserve the innocence of the husband she adores, but whom she systematically undercuts at home and in his career. The devouring fear builds up to a crescendo and Stefan Zweig splendidly succeeds in its gestation:

*“Corrosive fear had eaten into her life like nitric acid, separating its elements. The weight of everything was suddenly different, all values were reversed, all relationships confused. She felt as if until this moment she had merely been groping her way vaguely through life with her eyes half closed, and now everything was illuminated with terrible clarity.”*

There are many illuminating moments and clever connecting incidents in the novel to illustrate the state of mind of Irene. One such is when her husband questions their daughter for stealing and destroying a wooden horse they had gifted to their boy. The daughter lies initially but when the lawyer probes further to extort the truth, the girl break down and cries incessantly. He says to Irene: *Don’t let her tears lead you astray; yes, they came pouring out, but they’d been dammed up inside her before, and they hurt worse there than on the surface.* The husband by this incident indirectly indicts Irene and ask whether she has anything to confess to him, putting her to embarrassment and shame.

The novel is a good examination of many themes like guilt, shame, trust, indifference in relationship,

extortion and suicide and the narration gains power like that of sweeping cyclone. Zweig beautifully captures the emotional state of the protagonist with sensitivity and subtlety. Irene's own surgical analysis of her soul in the light of past actions and her superficial relationships with the members of her family produces cathartic revelations (Like that of the Judge in Tolstoy's Death of Ivan Illyich):

*She felt coffined in endless silence, and the darkness of the invisible sky weighed down on her breast. Now and then the hours chimed a number in the darkness, and then the night was black and lifeless, but for the first time she thought she could understand the meaning of that endless, empty darkness.*

*Fear* is not especially concerned with what went wrong in the marriage. Its subject is the depth of a bitterness that can pass for love. It is possible that some critic may view this novella as a suffocating banal bourgeois melodrama. I didn't feel that way. I would have been tempted to give it 5 star had it not been for the formulaic approach and the element of Viennese theatricality evident towards the end of this novella.

I have read only one work of Zweig and hence it is too premature to form an informed opinion about him. I intend to read soon the 'Chess Story' as recommended by my GR friend Seemita Pooja.

There is also an interesting film titled "La Paura" (1954) based on this novel directed by Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman stars as Irene. In my case, it is the film that directed me to the novel.

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### **Quike says**

?nsan psikolojisinin "korku" kar??s?nda verdi?i reaksiyon bundan daha iyi anlat?lamazd?.

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### **Rowena says**

I felt the inner turmoil of Irene, the married bourgeois wife and mother of two who was being blackmailed by her lover's former mistress.

I couldn't help but read this novella through a feminist lens.

Irene has similar feelings of discontentment to a lot of the literary heroines who lived before our more emancipated times and felt trapped in their lives: Irene certainly feels trapped in her marriage and this leads her to having an affair with a young talented pianist. Irene has everything society deems she could possibly want, yet she still feels suppressed. In fact she rues the fact that she is living in the lap of luxury and wants for nothing:

***"A sense of temperate happiness can be more provocative than outright unhappiness...Satiety can be as much of an incitement as hunger."***

A quick read. Highly recommended.

