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# Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's Modern Girls: Reversing the Role of *Moga* in Japanese Literature

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## Abstract

This research explores *moga's* (Japanese modern girl) representations in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's (1886-1965) literary texts. Examining *moga's* position within Tanizaki's writings, the study supports the idea that although *moga* was portrayed negatively by the Japanese media Tanizaki's descriptions of *moga* can be approached differently. In the 1920s and 1930s *moga* drew attention due to her Westernized looks and the way she took an active part in the public space. For these reasons, she became an inspiration for many authors. This paper presents an overview of Tanizaki's portrayal of modern girls. It looks into modes of objectification and types of women in Tanizaki's earlier novels and short stories. This study surveys the following works: *The Tattooer* (Shisei, 1910), *Kirin* (1910), *Professor Rado* (1928) and *Naomi* (Chijin no ai, 1925). Through context-based analysis of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's selected literary works this study reveals the common patterns in the protagonists' relationships with the modern girl analyzed within the theoretical framework of objectification, drawing on Martha Nussbaum's idea of positive objectification and Sandra Lee Bartky's concept of narcissism and the male gaze. Tanizaki introduces various types of the modern girl in his early novels and short stories, thus this research argues that *moga* in real life was a complex figure that cannot be simply categorized as a product of mass culture.

**Keywords:** Japanese modern literature, the modern girl, representations of women in literature, gender, literature and media, objectification.

## Introduction

The figure of *moga* has been a controversial figure both in the times she lived in and even after her disappearance. Most of the scholarly articles of Western origin tend to depict her as a victimized or a passive figure, whereas there has not been much Japanese research done about the subject. It is difficult to come across a scholarly work that mentions *moga's* descriptions in literature. The main question of this study is "In what ways do the 'real' modern girl, as portrayed in Tanizaki's female characters, differ from male-biased representations that turned *moga* into a fantasy object?" This question is significant in not only obtaining a better understanding of the identity of *moga*, but also in assessing tendencies of the modern girl regarding gender politics and the process of the rapid modernization of Japan between the World Wars. It aims to bring a new perspective regarding the role of *moga* by turning an analytical eye to the male voice and the female gaze in Tanizaki's works. As this study deals with representation in literature, the analysis of the literary texts takes place through the theoretical framework of objectification, a less-biased neutral-leaning feminist approach supporting the idea that women's objectification may work both ways; it may be sexually liberating, but at the same time it could mean women's sexuality being controlled, and that female desire is more complex than it is imagined by the male gaze.

Several female figures, such as the school girl and the New Woman, were born during Japan's process of modernization. The term *modan gaaru* モダンガール (modern girl) or *moga* in short was first mentioned by the writer Kitazawa Shūichi in 1923 while referring to the young working women in England. She appeared as a fashionable young woman with European style clothes, bobbed hair and rouged lips. Her style was a mixture of the Japanese and the West. In most of the photos from the 1920s, she stands proudly in her kimono, but her hair and make-up give her away. In other mass media representations as a café waitress, she wears a Western style uniform. After her emergence, *moga* was frequently commented on as an 'imitation' of the West. At first, she was merely seen as a fashion icon, a Western 'wannabe' or *taihaitaki* (decadent). However, as she challenged the male-centered Meiji ideologies that focus on creating



the ideal Japanese woman with decent amount of Western values, she turned into a social threat. Thus, in her later representations in the 1930s, her identity was reduced to a degenerate figure, her physical aspects were sexualized. In other words, she was constructed primarily on her physical aspects. She was constantly exposed to people looking or gazing at them:

The café waitress, the dance hall girl, the stage actress, the movie actress and the artist's model were gendered occupations in the service industries, involving embodied work which often included an element of sexualization. These occupations also took women out of the home and into public or semi-public spaces, where they became a spectacle to be looked at.<sup>1</sup>

Getting out of the house meant being directly exposed to people's reactions and gazes. The modern girl was among these women, who were brave enough to take an active role in public spaces. This situation, coming together with her flashy and Western-like looks, made *moga* even more exposed to people's stares.

### **Reactions to *Moga***

*Moga* played a significant role in Japanese literary texts of Taishō (especially mid-1920s) and early Shōwa literature (1926-1945), immortalized by popular authors. In literary texts, she became a symbol through which authors gave voice to their fears and desires directed towards the modern times. She was portrayed as an apolitical person, who indulged in the Western fashion and degenerate lifestyle. In sum, modern girls appeared on ads and magazines as fashion idols, yet they were also criticized because of their style, caused by fear of anything Western during the process of Japan's modernization. Even *atarashii onna* 新しい女 (New Woman), who was an influential figure of the 1910s, starting women's resistance against the Meiji Government's ideal Japanese woman, shunned any woman who identified herself with *moga*. In the following quotation, which was taken from an article dated January 1927, published in *Fujin koron*, some of the group of New Woman's ideas concerning the figure of *moga* are revealed:

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<sup>1</sup> Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 6-7.

Whenever I hear the popular word modern girl, I recall the time people were interested in the word new woman. Although I was quite disappointed with the new woman's behavior, at least I thought of them as kindred spirits because of their fresh way of thinking. But I wonder if there is anything to be discovered in the modern girl's thinking. I suppose that in these uncertain times, their way of expressing themselves is inevitable, but is it possible for anyone not to notice how vapid their lifestyles are?<sup>2</sup>

"Vapid lifestyles" pointed to *moga's* so called scandalous lives. According to many, modern girls and boys spent most of their times partying and exploring freedom that is mainly sexual. A leading figure of New Woman, Yosano Akiko also remarked: "These girls in their Western dress and short haircuts just copy whatever comes from abroad".<sup>3</sup> In the light of these suggestions, it is possible to conclude that the women groups of the 1920s and 1930s did not have the aim of coming together and creating a feminist movement, simply because the image of *moga* was not perceived as an influential figure.

On the other hand, it is important to point to the fact that whereas in the 1920s *moga* emerged as a fashion icon, in the 1930s she changed into a participant of social circles, working in various positions, such as *jokyū* (the café waitress). The term was usually associated with *moga*. They were working-class women, taking care of themselves without depending on a husband or a father.

Before the emergence of *moga*, and even in the first examples after her emergence, Japanese women's portrayals in literature were either positive or negative; the good wife and the temptress were among the common stereotypes. There was nothing in-between. For instance, in Tayama Kaitai's *Futon* (1907), the protagonist is forced to choose between the traditional Japanese woman and the young schoolgirl. The 'mistress' alternative causes suffering because of the impossibility of being together. Tanizaki's contemporaries, such as Yasunari Kawabata attempted to describe their fascination with *moga*, but their descriptions tend to be stereotypical or pessimistic. Hirotsu Kazuo's *Café Waitress* (*Jokyū*, 1932) tells the story of

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2 Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media and Women in Interwar Japan*, p. 55.

3 Sohō, "Seinen no fuki," p. 56.

a single mother who works at a café to support her baby son. She sacrifices things for the sake of her son, whereas the older sister from the novel *Woman of Tokyo* (Tokyo no onna, 1933) secretly works for her brother's sake. She becomes a part of Tokyo's nightlife, which causes so much shame that her brother commits suicide. Takeda Rintaro's *Ginza Hacchome* also deals with a waitress who lives with a novelist and then is abandoned by the man she loves. As seen in these examples, the traditional literary approaches to the modern girl always express pessimism and displeasure arising from her liberal lifestyle.

### Representations of Moga in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's Literary Works

In many of his earlier short stories and novels, Tanizaki uses *moga* as the main character with distinct personalities, and gives her various roles; in his stories and novels she is a powerful woman, sometimes affectionate, but always 'dangerous' in means of manipulating others, and extremely attractive, but not in a traditional way. Desires of different types exist in his novels, fueled by both his personal life and fantasies. Tanizaki infused a good deal of autobiography into his earlier fiction in a subtle way. In his novel *Kami to hito no aida* (Between Humans and Gods, 1923-24) a friend murders a husband to be with his wife, a brutal version of Tanizaki's own love triangle. His women characters seem to be based on people he knew or observed, the real-life modern girls.

Tanizaki was a Japanese novelist, who became inspired by Western authors like Edgar Allan Poe. He wrote about eroticism and aesthetics. His earlier novels focus on Western concept of beauty, whereas the ones he wrote later refer to Japanese traditional beauty. *Naomi*, his first long novel is considered as the novel that made *moga* famous in literature. The novels Tanizaki wrote in the 1910s and 1920s focus on the Japanese fascination with the West, whereas the texts he wrote after these years express Tanizaki's interest in Japanese tradition.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is not to say that he stopped exploring the depths of desire; even at an old age he published *Diary of a Mad Old Man* (Fūten rōjin nikki, 1961-62), in which he explores love in an old age. Japanese society

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<sup>4</sup> Ito, *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki's Fictional Worlds*, p. 2.

has clear cut divisions between the public persona and private life, *tate-mae* 建前 (outward expressions) and *honne* 本音 (what is actually thought and felt), yet in Tanizaki these terms get tangled with another, due to his intimate writing. Tanizaki's fame arose from his choice of words, his understanding of aesthetics, and his giving an honest voice to his desires. Women play an important role in his giving voice to his love of Western things as well as obsession with fantasy play, yet Tanizaki's women characters cannot be categorized as stereotypes, since they take part in instances in which they manipulate their partners. In other words, there are numerous hierarchies present in the protagonists' relationships with female characters. In Tanizaki's literary texts, the figure of *moga* manifests herself in many shapes and femininities. In his works, we see her in the roles of a mother, savior, sadist, vixen/temptress, housewife, working woman, lesbian lover, narcissist and the Westernized beauty.

What these women have in common is that they participate in public spaces and have modern relationships. For instance, the housewife transgresses boundaries by engaging in extramarital relationships. Tanizaki's female characters are given more than one role, unlike novels written in the Meiji period, which depict women as either good (the ideal wife) or bad (the temptress). First of all, the maternal figure plays an important role in Tanizaki's texts as the source of an antagonizing dilemma. The protagonist wants to love her, but at the same time he fears her:

Tanizaki's fantasies of maternal regression typically erase the maternal line, melting mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, and grandmothers into the same "eternal woman" whom the boy protagonist is encouraged, often by his father, both to worship and to fear.<sup>5</sup>

The mother symbolizes the ultimate feminine and the object of desire. However, she has more sides to her, as seen in the case of Queen Nanshi from the story *Kirin* (1910). The story revolves around a Chinese Emperor and his Queen. In the story Nanshi controls her lover, it is as if she yields all the power. She is a combination of an evil temptress, a narcissist as well as a motherly figure. She is described as a manipulative person throughout

<sup>5</sup> Long, *This Perversion Called Love: Reading Tanizaki, Feminist Theory, and Freud*, p. 70.

the story, trying to defeat Confucius' wisdom and reason with her beauty and earthly desires. Confucius' reactions towards her echo the Japanese society's fear and desire directed at the modern girl. The Chinese Empress first presents Confucius her beauty, then moves onto showing him expensive commodities, what she believes will change him or his perceptions regarding the world, so that her husband will stop listening to Confucius and continue to do what his wife tells him to do. When the modern girl first emerged, she was recurrently associated with capitalist values and threats to tradition. She was a temptation that invited people to become a part of a more liberal new Japan. The Empress' encounter with Confucius is Tanizaki's way of portraying this situation. In this portrayal, Nanshi is the powerful one; she has a say in everything, and she is highly aware of her powers, namely, her beauty and the way she manipulates words.

Another cruel temptress appears in one of Tanizaki's earliest stories *The Tattooer* (Shisei, 1910), in which Seikichi, the tattooer, is attracted to a girl due to his foot fetishism. He stalks her and when she enters his store, Seikichi drugs her and then paint a huge spider on her back. She is afraid at first but discovers her powerful side after this encounter. The girl enslaves Seikichi, despite the fact that he regards her as an object of desire first. The story includes all levels of objectification: The protagonist first dreams of finding the most beautiful woman of the world:

Such a woman had to meet various qualifications of character as well as appearance. A lovely face and a fine body were not enough to satisfy him. Though he inspected all the reigning beauties of the Edo gay quarters he found none who met his exacting demands. Several years had passed without success, and yet the face and figure of the perfect woman continued to obsess his thoughts.<sup>6</sup>

Although the passage shows most of his obsessive thoughts dwell on voyeurism, he gives importance to personality. The imagined woman is to endure pain and be full of herself. After waiting five years he sees her, objectifies her by drugging her and performing his art on her, turning her into a piece of art. However, the level of objectification does not heighten

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<sup>6</sup> Tanizaki, *The Tattooer*, p. 2.

in the end, he simply lets go of her so that she can enslave more men. Different modes of objectification are at play here as in Tanizaki's other novels. The Lacanian idea of desire is played with; normally the subject desires the object in order to complete their identity through the other, but the object is unreachable. As opposed to this, Seikichi gets his hands on the person of his obsession and pours his soul into the art piece on her body. Seikichi's obsession is based on aesthetics. Rather than degrading the lover, he deifies her.

According to Sandra Lee Bartky, objectification takes place when there is lack of consent and a body part takes the part of the person's whole identity.<sup>7</sup> This situation serves the purpose of maintaining male dominance, but it can be also seen as a part of healthy eroticism. When read in align with this idea, Seikichi's treatment of the female character distorts her image as woman literally and figuratively. He paints a spider on her body without her consent, which will stay with her for the rest of her life. On the other hand, he brings out the hidden desires that slept within the woman before her encounter with Seikichi. When Seikichi shows her the painting of a Chinese princess, gazing at a man who is about to be tortured, the girl's face changes and starts to resemble the cruel princess' face. The text reads "In the picture she discovered her secret self" and in another picture, she finds "something long hidden in the darkness of her own heart."<sup>8</sup> Seikichi thus forces her to discover her sadistic side, through the act of looking, the gaze does not belong to masculine voyeur anymore. She loses her timid personality, having it replaced with a new one. Seikichi becomes her victim.

Tanizaki's novel *Quicksand* (Manji, 1928-30) is another example of complex relationships, various gazers and fantasies performed as games. What distinguishes this novel from Tanizaki's other novels is that, in *Quicksand*, Tanizaki "abandoned Westernism once and for all."<sup>9</sup> In any case, *Quicksand* is a significant work to gain a better understanding of Tanizaki's way of depicting modern girls and modern lifestyles. Moreover, the narrator of the text is Sonoko, the housewife, which distinguishes it from most of

7 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, pp. 26-27.

8 Tanizaki, *The Tattooer*, p. 2.

9 Tyler, *Modanizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan*, p. 9

Tanizaki's novels. As the readers we get to empathize with the female protagonist and listen to her desires. She is the voyeur, reversing the male gaze. At the beginning of the novel, we witness her voyeurism during the art classes. In another instance, she looks at Mitsuko's body and calls it "a treasure."<sup>10</sup> She is so affected by her beauty that her eyes are filled with tears. She is a woman, objectifying another woman, without doing her harm at first. However, the level of her obsession with Mitsuko's body and its beauty gradually rises to an extreme level. When Mitsuko wants to get dressed, Kakuichi goes crazy and starts threatening her. She glimpses at her white shoulders with the desire to rip it off violently. In the end Mitsuko surrenders: "Ah, how maddening!" she cries, "Such a beautiful body! I could kill you!"<sup>11</sup>

Death and the act of killing becomes a common subject of their dialogues. They swallow pills together to fake their suicide, they do not take a fatal dose, but enough to deceive the husband into thinking they cannot live without one another. Moreover, towards the end of the novel, Mitsuko wants both Kakiuchi and her husband to swallow the pills she gives them. Both of them are suspicious that the pills are poisonous. The concept of dying together manifests itself as the highest level of obsession, and Mitsuko's manipulation puts them in danger.

The lesbian lover Mitsuko is seemingly the object of desire, but she also objectifies other characters including the protagonist. Hierarchies in these relationships never stay the same. The characters start off by one dominating the other, they play a passive role and an active role, but in the next chapter we see the reversal of roles and the shift in the dynamics of power. After Kakuichi and Mitsuko become lovers, they deceive the husband. Then Mitsuko finds a male lover and the plot thickens. In the first half of the novel Kakuichi is the manipulator, but then Mitsuko manipulates her through acting as if she is going to die. In another example, Kakuichi tries to make sense of her relation to Mitsuko and her lover by saying "Only yesterday I'd been convinced they were using me as their plaything, and now, suddenly, everything had changed."<sup>12</sup> Throughout the novel, it is

<sup>10</sup> Tanizaki, *Quicksand*, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

difficult to point at who objectifies whom or who is in charge, as it is in constant change.

In addition to posing a threat to the male authority, these two women discuss the difference between love and marriage, their ideas are too progressive for the times they live in. Marriage is compared to “a bird in a gilded cage.”<sup>13</sup> “I don’t consider myself married to that man. I’m still my own woman,” Kakuichi dictates, seeing marriage as something disposable.<sup>14</sup> Through her relationship with Mitsuko, Kakuichi is liberated, and she asks for more freedom as their relationship deepens. When Kakuichi spends time with Mitsuko, she is reminded of her affair. Looking at her husband, she says:

He seemed so cheerless that I was a little sorry for him. Although I hadn’t done anything wrong, I felt a twinge of guilt when I saw that he had just finished dinner, after waiting such a long time for me. Of course, when I was meeting my lover, I often used to come home after ten o’clock. But that was all in the past. So maybe he was a bit suspicious. Somehow, I myself felt just the way I did in those days.<sup>15</sup>

Kakuichi thus challenges the housewife type in Meiji era novels. Instead of being a victim, she victimizes the husband and feels pity towards him. When things do not go well between the two women, Kakuichi swears she will not be subject to “wicked fantasies” and promises to become a proper housewife, which consists of shutting oneself up at home “like a person dead to the world”, as Kakuichi puts it, throwing oneself into housework, washing and cooking.<sup>16</sup> If the novel ended here, it would be an example of an ideologically Meiji “good wife”. However, Kakuichi refuses to ignore her desires, taking an active role in public space.

What makes these women modern, aside from all the attributes and challenges they bring? Mitsuko is a *moga*, in that she is frequently associated with West. The housewife is depicted in a non-traditional way, that is, as the author puts it:

<sup>13</sup> Tanizaki, *Quicksand*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.



The widow Kakiuchi seemed unaffected by her recent ordeal. Her dress and manner were bright, even showy, just as they had been a year before. Rather than a widow, Mrs. Kakiuchi looked like the typical young married Osaka woman of good family...<sup>17</sup>

Flashy dresses were another signifier of *moga*. They were known for their colorful Western style dresses. Kakuichi becomes one of them through her fashion sense as well as her lifestyle. She is also knowledgeable about things that were not discussed or not allowed to be discussed by women, such as birth control. When she lends an American book on birth control to Mitsuko, it causes an uproar. She is a woman who both challenges the idea of marriage and the stereotypical representation of the modern housewife.

Tanizaki might be using the male gaze while describing his fantasies about women, yet women are not exposed to one-way objectification. In other words, fetishism is not restricted to men alone. They also involve turning the masculine into an object or a slave. Women are gazers as well. This situation validates the late discussions about objectification and gaze:

Men can be looked on with pleasure and desire by men or women. Although pleasure in looking may be strongly tied to one's sexuality, we may take pleasure in ways that do not strictly conform to the codes of our respective sexual identities. Pleasure and identification are not dictated by one's biological sex, or even by one's sexuality.<sup>18</sup>

As seen in these examples, regardless of their sexual orientation, figures of *moga* in Tanizaki's novels are portrayed as the masters, turning men into slaves, whereas the male characters are mostly fond of this situation. This is not to say Tanizaki does not completely objectify women, but he presents other types of objectification, in which women are in control most of the time. By doing so he draws attention to the complexity of the modern girl figure. In another example of this situation, Tanizaki's *Professor Rado* (1928) points out to the way the protagonist's masochism is fed by

<sup>17</sup> Tanizaki, *Quicksand*, p.22.

<sup>18</sup> Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*, p. 130.

their partners' sadism. The arrogant academic is punished by his doll-like mistress, and this situation gives Rado pleasure:

Soon the girl, still sitting on top of him, picked up little rattan cane and sent several strokes swishing through the air onto his fat buttocks, while firmly gripping by the hair with her other hand. It was then, for the first time, that a somewhat livelier look came into the professor's eyes, and he let out a kind of moan.<sup>19</sup>

The details Tanizaki gives to the reader suggest that the voyeur can be turned into an object. Rado enjoys looking at women (especially their body parts) each time he gets a chance, but the roles get reversed when one of the dancers he formerly objectifies turns him into a plaything. The real voyeur in the story is the reporter, peeping through the window to witness the couple's private lives.

Tanizaki thus changes the dynamics of objectification, and *moga* is not degraded as a mere desire object, but she is portrayed as a woman surrounded by different kinds of relationships in which she is free to choose what she wants. The portrayals of the modern girl also signify that she does not belong to a category. The line between the housewife and the temptress or other roles blurs in Tanizaki's novels. It is also possible to say that Tanizaki gives a positive meaning to the trope of *dokufu* (poisonous woman) as well as objectification. Here, the "dangerous" women dominate men, but men are open to exploration of fantasies that are controlled by women. The characters' relationships that are woven with desire and fantasy games do not point to degradation of women. Objectification depends on the context, and it may consume the subject even more than the object<sup>20</sup> and in some cases the objectified can be the objectifier, the objectified enjoys being an object.<sup>21</sup> These statements are proven true in Tanizaki's writing.

Masochism, lesbian sexuality and fetishism in Tanizaki's novels offers a non-phallic model of feminist fantasy.<sup>22</sup> There were also those who were critical of Tanizaki's portrayals of women, such as Saegusa, according to

19 Tanizaki, *Professor Rado*, p. 150.

20 Nussbaum, "Objectification."

21 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*.

22 De Lauretis, "The Practice of Love Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire."

whom Tanizaki was unable to treat women as fellow subjects.<sup>23</sup> However, this kind of negative comment does not take the complex nature of fetishes and relationships into account, whereas Margherita Long's feminist analysis of Tanizaki's authorship and subjectivity in his novels within the psychoanalytic paradigm in *This Perversion Called Love* (2009) proves otherwise. Tanizaki contributes to the feminist debate by creating the masculine masochist, such as his character Hōshimaru from *The Secret History*, who is "already a masochist before he becomes a masochist."<sup>24</sup> The masculine is represented as a person with almost no autonomy, they "lack autonomy without being owned", which is, according to Nussbaum, another mode of objectification.<sup>25</sup> The male protagonists are overwhelmed with desire to the point of letting their personalities be manipulated.

What makes Tanizaki's female characters modern? It is not commodities, nor their physical appearances, but their behavior, and ability to choose and to reject being turned into an object. They reverse the gaze directed at them. Thus, it is possible to say that, when read in alignment with the concepts of gaze and objectification, Tanizaki promotes the modern girl and destroys the stereotype in his novels, which becomes even more clear in his famous novel *Naomi*.

### ***Naomi*: Reversing the Male Gaze**

Although Tanizaki gave life to various kinds of moga, *Naomi* or *Chijin no ai* is one of the most discussed novels in regards to *moga*. One of the reasons is the way Tanizaki starts the novel. At the beginning of the novel, he refers immediately to Western fashion becoming popular in Japan, and to foreigners and Japanese mingling together. He praises Western values and aesthetics, especially women who look Eurasian. A core source for understanding the male desire directed at the sexually liberated femininity in Japan's modern times, Tanizaki's *Naomi* was serialized in 1924, in the same year the term *watakushi shōsetsu* (I-novel) was first used.

The protagonist Joji is described as a voyeur from the beginning. He is a well-off engineer, spending time at Ginza most of the time by secretly

<sup>23</sup> Long, *This Perversion Called Love: Reading Tanizaki, Feminist Theory, and Freud*, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> Nussbaum, "Objectification," p. 260.

using “every opportunity to observe women closely.”<sup>26</sup> The protagonist Jōji first encounters Naomi at the Café Diamond in Asakusa. She draws his attention because of her name that sounds Western, and her similarity to the actress Mary Pickford. After these first impressions, the narrator talks about Naomi’s body, saying “even her body has a distinctly Western look when she’s naked”.<sup>27</sup> Objectification of the female body takes place through reverse-Orientalism. Jōji often uses phrases, such as, “like a Westerner” while referring to Naomi, which pleases her. Her Western qualities are exoticized:

What shapes Jōji’s desire for Naomi is not the West as a geopolitical and cultural reality, but the “West” as he envisions it – powerful, sensual, replete with possibilities unavailable in his own culture. For such a character the actual West is no more accessible than the past is to those whose yearnings center upon the “past.”<sup>28</sup>

According to Ito’s comment, it is possible to say that Jōji imagines the West, and *moga* becomes an embodiment of this imagined West. In other words, Naomi is the epitome of possibilities that did not exist before the process of modernization in Japanese society.

Susan Napier, who talks of the fantasy genre as a subversion of modernity, argues that writers like Tanizaki use female characters to symbolize a cultural harbor of the past and tradition. During the prewar years, woman characters represented the uncanny other, against which the protagonist could act out his desires. Male writers used female characters to symbolize the inhumanity of modern society, as “all forms of love, from maternal to sexual, seem to become grotesque parodies of themselves, emphasizing the lack of connection between human beings.”<sup>29</sup> Naomi as a café waitress is an embodiment of this ambiguity of modern times and the café as a space of both pleasures and drinking.

He does not promote the degraded version of the cafés; in fact, he adopts a critical tone when it comes to the ambiguous set up of such plac-

<sup>26</sup> Tanizaki, *Naomi*, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ito, *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki’s Fictional Worlds*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> Hemmann, “The Female Gaze in Contemporary Japanese Literature,” p. 59.

es. The concept of *chabuya* チャブ屋 (chop shops), in other words, pleasure places, occupy an important place in *Naomi*. *Chabuya* is what Asakusa's bar scene is to Kawabata in terms of space as a medium for describing one's desires. According to Atkins, a *chabuya* woman was the model for Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's vixen Naomi in his serialized novel *A Fool's Love*; and the 1937 hit "Separation Blues" was conceived in a *chabuya*.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Tanizaki's Naomi is based on a socially sexualized woman figure. Jōji's attitude towards Naomi is a representation of Japanese society's fascination with the modern girl, whereas Tanizaki's novel contains other kinds of reactions towards *moga*. For instance, Jōji's co-workers think that Naomi is a fallen woman, since she is associated with dance halls and Westernized looks. She is said to be "playing fast and free with some of Keio students."<sup>31</sup> As seen in the previous chapter, the figure of *moga* was seen as a degenerate figure due to the influence of dance halls and what took place there. Jōji's friends from work highlight this way of thinking. Other male characters, such as Hamada are the representations of *mobo* (modern boy). They are depicted as more open minded, but with a tinge of dislike coming from Jōji. Regardless of the nature of the male characters' approach of Naomi, she is always the object of desire.

Voyeurism turns the modern girl into a Western beauty, but also condemns traditional values. *Moga* is central to anxiety arising from fear of the unknown, in other words, modernity. On the other hand, objectification functions as a tool to try and contain her. Jōji's descriptions of Naomi are as follows:

When she appeared on the beach at Yuigahama, wearing the dark green cap and bathing suit that we'd bought on the Ginza the evening before, I rejoiced at the beautiful proportions of her limbs. Yes, I rejoiced: from the way a kimono fit her, I'd already speculated on the curves of her body, and I'd been right. My heart cried out, "Naomi, Naomi, my Mary Pickford! What a fine, well-proportioned body you have. Your graceful arms! Your legs, straight and streamlined like a boy's!"<sup>32</sup>

30 Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan*, p. 71.

31 Tanizaki, *Naomi*, p. 207.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

The gaze directed at Naomi only sees her as an object of desire and these descriptions define her identity. When Joji thinks about her background he starts to panic and feel pity towards her. Therefore, he tries to see her through the lens he created, established mainly on Naomi's physical aspects. Joji's obsession with Naomi grows gradually. From not being certain whether he is in love with her to keeping a diary about changes that draws his attention. Most of these changes focus on Naomi's body. Joji looks at Naomi, then bathes her, and worships her. According to Bartky, fetishism functions as a tool that serves the purpose of maintaining dominance.<sup>33</sup> Whenever Joji fears Naomi is drifting away from him, he watches her body even more than usual. For instance, after hearing rumors about Naomi's possible affairs, he comes home, and a long description of Naomi's body fills the next page. She is described as "an object lying in the depths of pellucid water", which enchants Joji.<sup>34</sup>

However, there are times, in which Joji's efforts to mold Naomi into a Western woman faces challenges. When he tries to teach Naomi English, he becomes angry at her mistakes. This is also when Joji faces the real Naomi, and the truth that she is a character that is purely based on his imagination, desire and dreams. It might seem as if Joji wants to educate Naomi and provides her with an opportunity to live freely and learn. However, Joji limits her by doing so. He forces Naomi to accept the role he gives her, among which, 'remaining as a girl' in the sense of chastity and being young, is emphasized. This situation can be read as Naomi's victimization as well as her 'silent' resistance towards the male authority. Joji threatens her by saying he will not let her go if she does not do it right. However, Naomi resists, making mistakes on purpose and tearing her notebook apart. As a result, her personality is commented on as "getting worse" and "more than I could handle" by Joji.<sup>35</sup> Not behaving properly is associated with loose morals, as seen in the approach of Japanese society of the 1920s and 1930s to *moga*. In Tanizaki's novel, this situation manifests itself in Joji and Naomi's relationship. Joji cannot accept her rebellious behavior while being intimidated by her reactions and angry glance. Because of her

33 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, pp. 26-27.

34 Tanizaki, *Naomi*, p. 218.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

inability to learn English, Jōji thinks Naomi is stupid and abandons his hope of turning her into an intellectual woman. He sees her as a body to be appreciated; "It was her skin, teeth, lips, hair, eyes—the beauty of her entire form—that attracted me. There was nothing spiritual about it," he says.<sup>36</sup> The image he creates becomes more and more sexualized.

Despite being portrayed as a fantasized image through objectification, does Naomi challenge the male gaze? In the previous examples, a different reading of the character Naomi presented her actions as resistance against the male gaze. Despite Jōji's efforts, Naomi does as she pleases. Even while he is keeping a close eye on her, Naomi puts on showy clothes and wears make-up, ready to meet her lover. According to Jōji, clothes and make-up are extremely important for Naomi, which points to the stereotypical assumptions about the modern girl figure. She destroys this stereotypical thinking by abandoning all her things. She chooses freedom over luxury. Jōji kicks her out due to her infidelity, but she does not look unhappy at all, moving from one place to another.

In addition to this, Naomi is modern in the sense that she engages with life outside home. Presented merely as a waitress at first, Naomi transgresses social boundaries by playing various roles in public spaces. At the beginning of the novel she is recurrently referred as "docile" and "quiet", with a childlike innocence. She is poor, a woman of "bad birth" as Jōji puts it.<sup>37</sup> Her family ends up sending her to a café to stop her from playing around. Secondly, she becomes Jōji's maid in exchange for education. They live together in a Western house, wearing Western clothes, eating Western food. Right after Naomi's lifestyle changes, people make comments on how "modern" she is, her modern hairstyle being "much better than doing it Japanese style."<sup>38</sup> When she becomes Jōji's wife, they decide to call each other by their names instead of husband and wife. As much as their relationship seems modern, Jōji wishes Naomi to spend her time with him in their "fairy-tale house", yet she is bored of such a life. Naomi, the wife defines their relationship. Normally, the husband has the say in marriage (as seen in the Meiji Civil Code), but in Tanizaki's novel, the

<sup>36</sup> Tanizaki, *Naomi*, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

wife does not remain loyal and suggests they become friends rather than sharing a romantic bond. Naomi's joining to the dance club started by a foreigner marks her severing the bonds with domesticity. For instance, she starts getting more and more materialistic, asking for flashy dresses, orders food instead of cooking, and pays for laundry. The dance hall allows her to socialize with her peers, whereas the place provides Joji with the chance of meeting a real Western lady.

After Naomi exits the boundaries of home, she refuses to play the roles that are given to her. Joji plan of transforming her into an ideal woman faces failure because of Naomi becoming conscious of her free will. She gains such confidence that she beats Joji at games and they reverse roles in their relationship. Naomi undergoes character development, which Joji lacks. Joji aims to bring her into his home and watch her grow, and then take her as a wife. For Joji, she is a mission; a woman to be educated and turned into the idealized Western beauty. She is described as a diamond or an ornament recurrently. However, Naomi rejects being an ornament by taking action and discovering herself. When Joji asks her to pay attention to spending too much money, she replies: "What is it you called me? Your treasure? What will you do if my hands get all fat?"<sup>39</sup> She uses Joji's words for her own advantage. Whereas formerly Joji wanted to dress Naomi properly so that she would not cause embarrassment, after Naomi discovers her potential, she starts to criticize Joji, saying she cannot go anywhere with him looking as he did.

The last transgression takes place after Joji tells her to get out. She moves from place to place, from one man to another. She spends the night at a Westerner's house. Joji's inability to recognize the woman he built his life on points out his alienation as well as Naomi's distinctive transformation and transgression. Naomi in her current state is an epitome of perfect beauty according to Joji, but at the same time he rejects the real Naomi by thinking she is an apparition, a ghost. Joji's following statement supports the idea that Naomi as a *moga* is capable of becoming more than one thing:

Naomi of tonight was a precious object of yearning and adoration, utterly incompatible with Naomi the filthy harlot, the whorish Naomi, given

<sup>39</sup> Tanizaki, *Naomi*, p. 127.



crude nicknames by so many men. Before this new Naomi, a man like me could only kneel and offer worship. If her white fingertips had touched me even slightly, I'd have shuddered, not rejoiced.<sup>40</sup>

Reality gets mixed with fantasy due to desire and what it makes to the protagonist. In this case, objectification works in favor of the object of desire; she is liberated from her former duties as Jōji's wife, and she has him under control. Objection functions as a double edge sword. Jōji's obsession consumes him. The image of a person, in other words, a fantasized version of the real persona exceeds reality. Delirium turns into hysteria, but Naomi continues to play with him. Her character is based on duality: the feminine and the masculine, the innocent and the temptress. Her power comes from her performative personality. If things do not work out, she immediately changes her attitude from submissive to dominant. After their fight, Jōji marks that her angry face was so powerful that he was struck by her beauty. The male gaze turns Naomi into a beautiful ornament, and she gets used to such a situation and does not question whether it is she who takes pride in her body. Her body is referred to as "merchandise". In another case, it appears as an art object, exposed to Jōji's gaze. However, Naomi always puts a barrier between them so that Jōji cannot touch her despite his hopes and remains merely as the gazer.

In the end Jōji surrenders to Naomi. He agrees with her lifestyle, that she can do what she pleases. Passion possesses him, thus reversing the former gaze that was directed at Naomi. She mocks the male gaze by saying "I'm not obliged to satisfy your curiosity. If you want to know so badly, then follow me. You're good at playing private eye."<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

In Tanizaki's selected literary works, the reader comes across different types of objectification. The most recurrent pattern is the male protagonist's surrender to the powerful female. Tanizaki's female characters are not to be played with; they choose what they want to do and follow their desires. Each literary text mentioned in this research contains the point

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<sup>40</sup> Tanizaki, *Naomi*, p. 382.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.387.

of realization, which is the most evident in Naomi's case: The objectified woman discovers a part inside her that liberates her and allows her to resist against the male gaze. In Tanizaki's literary works, female characters are not the victims. They are the heroines. Rather than adopting a sexist approach, Tanizaki's portrayal of the female characters provide the reader with an understanding of what the figure of *moga* meant for the Japanese society during the process of modernization, which was both exciting and fearful. Another important point revealed in the findings of this research is that the figure of *moga* has many faces; we see her in the roles of the mother, the lesbian lover, the queen and the independent woman, who take an active role in public spaces. Tanizaki thus changes the idea of *moga* as a stereotype and plays with the idea of gender roles, the male gaze and objectification. The analysis of Tanizaki's literary works provide a significant discussion in that *moga* did not have a one side to her, she was a complex individual, who challenged male dominance and addressed important issues, such as marriage and sexual freedom that had not been explored before.

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