

**Tanizaki and Vogel's Urban Love:
A Reading in Modernist Japanese and Hebrew Literatures**

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Abstract:

Modernist writers of the early 20th century such as the Japanese novelist Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and the Jewish novelist David Vogel had to face a world in which the impact of modernity seemingly isolated them from their own tradition and put them in a situation that was both exciting and dangerous. In this environment, both novelists wrote novels that feature a disturbing love affair between a domineering woman and weak-willed man. Reading these two novels together, this paper will explore the implications of these love affairs and the way the novels connect them to modernity. At the same time, this paper will also demonstrate that reading Japanese and Hebrew literatures together can open up new and exciting pathways into literary studies.

Keywords:

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, David Vogel, Modernism, European Jewry, Taishō Japan

谷崎とフォーゲルの都会恋愛 —モダニスト日本文学とヘブライ文学の一解釈—

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要旨

20世紀初頭の日本人小説家谷崎潤一郎やユダヤ人小説家のダヴィッド・フォーゲルのようなモダニストの作家達は、モダニティーが彼らをその伝統から切り離れた世界に立ち向かわなければならなかった。これは、彼らを刺激的であると同時に危険な状態にさらした。この環境の中で、この二人の小説家は横暴な女性と気弱な男性の間で繰り広げられる不穏な恋愛関係を題材とした小説を書いた。この二つの小説を共に読むことで本論考はこれらの恋愛関係の暗示することや、これらが小説の中でどのようにモダニティーに関係するかを考察する。同時に、本論考はまた日本文学とヘブライ文学を併せて読むことで文学研究への新たな道を切り開くことが出来ることを示す。

キーワード

谷崎潤一郎、ダヴィッド・フォーゲル、モダニズム、ヨーロッパのユダヤ人、大正日本

1. Introduction

Writing in 1933, the Japanese literary critic Kobayashi Hideo stated the following about the literature of his generation: "It is a fact that ours is a literature of the lost home, that we are young people who have lost our youthful innocence."¹ And writing some decades earlier, the Hebrew author M. Y. Berdyczewski portrayed the definitive image of the Jewish youth of the early 20th century, describing him as follows: "He is a foreigner there and here; he is a foreigner in the world and in life."² Both writers perceived their time as one of loss and alienation, one in which a sense of innocence and belonging that defined the past has been irrevocably lost. And it is this feeling of loss and the anxiety which also defines the literature of the time. But how is this actually reflected in the literature of this period?

In their novels, both the Japanese writer Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and the Jewish writer David Vogel express this sense of loss and anxiety by translating it into an abusive, sadomasochistic relationship. Set in the urban landscape of 1920s Tokyo and Vienna respectively, Tanizaki's *Naomi* (1925) and Vogel's *Married Life* (1929-31) both follow the fraught relationship between a dominant, foreign (or foreign-like) woman and a weak-willed man. The setting of these novels, and the extreme way in which these relationships are depicted seem to imply that they are a direct product of their modern urban environment. But is this truly the case? And if so, do these writers present a resolution to this anxiety? Can the lost innocence of the past be regained? By analysing the two novels, this paper aims to explore these questions and to understand how the writers' experience of the rapidly changing world of the early 20th century informed their literary works. And by reading Tanizaki and Vogel together, this paper will also show that writers from different parts of the world were often facing similar issues to which they reacted in ways that were often more alike than different, and thus studying their work together can lead to a more insightful look into literature.

2. Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and David Vogel

At first glance, comparing these two writers, the Hebrew poet and novelist David Vogel (1891-1944) and the Japanese author Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965), is not a self-explanatory endeavour.³ One was a Jewish writer who operated on the margins of the literary establishment during his lifetime and only gained recognition long after his death, mostly in the context of Hebrew Modernism, while the other was the most celebrated Japanese writer of his time, who continues to enjoy favour as a writer who embodied the "Japanese essence" in literature. However, although the reception of the works of these two authors was very different, and while the two lived and worked in very different social and cultural environments,

they do share some characteristics which make them suitable for this study. Namely, both lived at a time when modernity had become an undeniable part of life, and both of their works deal with the consequences that this had on their environment. For both the Japanese and the Jews the transition into modernity was experienced as something fraught with anxiety and danger. The process of modernization during the 19th century brought European Jews new rights and emancipation, allowing them to integrate into gentile society, but this came at the price of their own tradition, and also often brought them into increased contact with anti-Semitism.⁴ While for the Japanese, modernity was always mixed with the concept of Westernization and the danger that this posed towards their tradition and safety, an idea which is embodied in the image of the Black Ships that forced Japan to abandon its selective isolation in 1854.⁵

By the time both Vogel and Tanizaki were born, these developments had been decades in the making, and modernity was a fact of life. David Vogel was born in Sataniv, a small town in the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. Emancipation was slow to come to the Jews of Russia, and thus Jewish traditions had held more strongly there, but modernity had become a part of life even there. Vogel himself was raised according to Jewish traditions, even going to study at a Yeshiva in Vilnius as a youth, but after moving to Vienna shortly before WWI, he became more or less assimilated into European society and city life.⁶ Still, he remained unsettled and in conflict with himself throughout his life, moving from place to place, including a fleeting attempt to settle down in Palestine. Tanizaki Jun'ichirō was born in Tokyo and grew up in the *shitamachi* ("lower town") area of the city, which during the Edo period was the city's commercial and entertainment centre, and had still kept some of its Edo characteristics during Tanizaki's childhood. Still, as the capital of the Japanese Empire, Tokyo was already in the process of modernization. As such, the West and the modern were already a fact of life for Tanizaki who, as he grew up, became fascinated with everything Western or modern, especially with the cinema, which became a life-long obsession. And while later in life, especially after moving west to the Kansai region following the earthquake of 1923, he became increasingly interested in Japanese culture and traditions but as Ken Ito shows, this did not mean that he abandoned all of his interests in the West, for by that time it was impossible to create a clear dichotomy between what was Japanese and what was not.⁷ As such, on the one hand, both authors thrived in the modern urban world in which they lived, yet on the other hand, they were also subjected to a continued sense of anxiety. The following sections will look at how this contrast was expressed in their novels, and in what way the two attempted to deal with it.

3. Tanizaki's *Naomi*

Tanizaki's first novel *Naomi* was serialized in the Ōsaka Asahi Newspaper between 1924 and 1925. The original Japanese title, 痴人の愛 (*Chijin no Ai*), translates as *A Fool's Love*, referring to the protagonist and narrator Kawai Jōji and his eccentric and abusive relationship with the heroine Naomi. The choice of the English translation to use the heroine's name as the title is an interesting one. It highlights Naomi's position as the object of Jōji's desire, yet at the same time it also obscures the double connotation of the original Japanese title, which can be read differently according to the readers' understanding of the novel. For "a fool's love" could indeed refer to the object of that love, namely, Naomi, but it could also refer to the love affair itself, which implies that it is this love, and not Naomi, which is the focus of the novel. For this affair, as will be shown, is closely intertwined with issues of modernity.

3-1. *Naomi* as an Allegory of Westernization

The narrative of *Naomi* is framed as a retelling by Jōji of his relationship with Naomi to whom he is now married. Jōji presents this retelling as a kind of confession which he believes will have instructive value for his readers. Jōji, like many other protagonists in Japanese literature, has come to Tokyo as a teenager to study. But unlike the typical literary protagonist who comes to study art or literature, Jōji had studied engineering, and at the beginning of the story is gainfully employed and earns a good salary which allows him to indulge in his Western fancies, including going to the cinema and to cafes in the gaudy Asakusa district, then the centre of entertainment in Tokyo. It is in such a café that he first meets Naomi, then 15, who catches his eye due to her Western looks, as her face reminds him of the film star Mary Pickford, and because of her distinct name which sounds to him sophisticated and thus as though it could be a Western name.⁸ Jōji then decides to take custody of Naomi, whose family belongs to a lower stratum of society (we later find out that they run an illegal brothel and that Naomi herself had been destined to become a prostitute), and educates her to become a lady. His aim, he says, is to add "a little colour and warmth" to his life, by having Naomi be a kind of bird that will be both an adornment and companion (p. 6, p. 8).⁹ However, contrary to his expectations, Naomi turns out to be spoiled, expensive, and manipulative, conducting multiple affairs with an array of men behind Jōji's back. On discovering the scope of Naomi's deception, Jōji initially sends her away, only to quickly realize that he cannot live without her. Naomi, who in turn requires Jōji in order to maintain her increasingly expensive and Western taste, eventually agrees to remain with Jōji but on condition that she be allowed to do as she pleases. Jōji agrees, and the novel ends on a seemingly "happy" note, with the two protagonists found residing in a great Western mansion in Yokohama, living a life of parties, self-indulgence, and

decadence.

Because of Jōji's fascination with all things Western and his eventual suffering at the hands of the "faux-Western" Naomi, this novel is often read allegorically as offering a criticism or a parody of Japan's Westernization and modernization.¹⁰ However, this reading simplifies the novel too much, ignoring the different nuances that it contains. To begin with, the novel does not fully equate westernization with modernization, for while Westernization was part of modernization during the Meiji Period, by the Taishō Period, Japan had developed its own modern culture. This is exemplified by the novel's urban setting of Tokyo as well as by its engagement with *bunka* ("culture"). Tokyo in Naomi is very much a modern metropolis in which people ride in trains and trams, eat beef, frequent cafés, revues, and dance clubs, and altogether live a life that is already self-evidently modern. This is further highlighted by the boom of *bunka* that swept the Taishō Period, creating a new consumer culture around all kinds of product labelled *bunka* products (and thus seen as "modern" and "cool") from *bunka* houses to ovens to magazines.¹¹ Seen from this perspective, Jōji and Naomi are the quintessential Taishō couple: they dress in Taishō fashion (Jōji in suits, Naomi in a variety of bold, new kimonos), live in a so-called *bunka* house,¹² eat beefsteaks, and go to dances. Their obsession with the West is merely an extension of their Taishō lifestyle, with Westernization seen as something that the truly modern can engage with. Hence, rather than dismissing modernization, the novel presents it as something that is already there.

3-2. The Danger of the West

Even so, the novel still presents criticism of certain aspects of modernity, particularly an overt craving for Westernization that lacks understanding. This is most clearly apparent in a scene around the middle of the novel, in which Jōji and Naomi, having taken dancing lessons with the Russian emigree Madame Schlemkaya (who appears in the novel as a kind of embodiment of the ideal refinement which Jōji and Naomi appear to attribute to the West), go to their first dance party at a club. While there, they encounter several young men from their dance lessons (all of whom turn out to be Naomi's lovers later on), as well as two Japanese women, Inoue Kikuko, a regular of the dance halls, and Haruno Kirako, an actress. Kikuko, we are told, had become so dance crazy, that her husband ended up divorcing her. Her appearance is described as being comical, as she wears heavy make-up and unbecoming Western clothes, and is later described as looking like a "Western doll with the head of a Kyoto doll" (p. 93-4, p. 122). These traits (which prompt Naomi to call her a "monkey") set her up as a figure of ridicule and criticism. Yet, what is being ridiculed is not her obsession with Western things in itself, but the way in which she adopts them without fully understanding

them or harmonizing them with herself. In contrast to her is the actress Kirako. Dressed in a beautiful kimono, Kirako is described as an almost ideal woman – elegant, refined, sensitive – everything that Jōji wishes Naomi was. But just like Kikuko, Kirako too is a connoisseur of all things Western. Not only is she a regular attendant of dance halls like Kikuko, but we are told that she is an actress at the Imperial Theatre, which at the time was the most prestigious Western-style theatre in Tokyo producing a variety of performances including operas, ballets, and the plays of European playwrights such as Shakespeare. Furthermore, in describing her, Jōji compares her to European ladies (she was like “a subtle beauty from Italy or France,” p. 92, p. 120), creating another association between her and the West. Despite all of these overt connections to the West, Kirako is not criticised or ridiculed like Kikuko, but is in fact admired, even by Naomi who sees her as a rival. Kirako is perceived as being harmonious with herself. That is, her adoption of Western things is not seen as disruptive, but as adding to her seeming perfection. When dancing with her, Jōji finds an enjoyment in dancing that he has only experienced while dancing with Madame Schlemkaya during his lessons, where he was mostly just in awe being so close to a Western woman.

As for Naomi, in this scene, she seems to be placed in the midpoint between Kikuko and Kirako. Compared to Kikuko, she better understands Western things. Yet, compared to Kirako, she is still described as being rough and somehow incomplete, making her supposed knowledge of Western culture seem put on and inauthentic.¹³ This, however, does change in the course of the novel. After she is kicked out of the house by Jōji, she finds refuge with an American man, who dresses her in Western clothing. When Jōji first sees her dressed in that way, he takes her to be a Western woman (p. 207, p. 267). And the more she associates with Westerners, the more she herself seems to become one, so much so that by the end of the novel she begins to call Jōji “George” like all their Western friends. Naomi’s transformation throughout the novel, from a poor, uneducated Japanese girl, to a lady steeped in Western culture and life, shows that the novel still sees Western culture as something that can be elevating. But at the same time, as the figure of Kikuko shows, danger is also there, a danger of appearing ridiculous and being compared to a monkey (a racist image often used to describe Japanese and other Asian people).

3-3. A Cure for Modernity?

Still, even though the novel presents modernity as self-evident and Westernization as something added to it, bringing either elevation or ridicule, it does not mean that there is no sense of resentment towards modernity. For despite the novel’s celebration of modern urban life, it still carries a sense of loss of what was before modernity. This sense of loss in the novel

turns to an idealization of “traditional” Japan. An example of this happens towards the end of the novel, after Jōji discovers Naomi’s affairs. Blaming Naomi’s behaviour on their untraditional lifestyle, Jōji decides that they must move to a traditional Japanese-style house. “We’d move to a pure Japanese-style house, suitable for a middle-class gentleman”, he declares (p. 166, p. 216-7). For Jōji, moving to a Japanese-style house represents a return to a lost innocence, to a time before modernity when he believes things were simple and pure. If he could only get Naomi away from the influences of modernity, all would be well, and Naomi would turn into the “little bird” he always wanted her to be. The plan is ultimately discarded because Jōji discovers that Naomi had not ended her affairs and throws her out of the house, but even without this, such a plan could never have worked. For in a world where modernity is already so present as to be self-evident, a return to a state before modernity is impossible. A house such as Jōji imagines, a “pure-Japanese” house, no longer exists, for it would be impacted by modernity in one way or another, and even if such a mythical place did exist, it could not right the wrongs of modernity.¹⁴

As the author, Tanizaki is well aware of what his narrator is not, highlighting the futility of Jōji’s efforts through the means of irony. Yet, Tanizaki, too, suffers from the yearning for what was lost, but he understands that the only way to bring it back into modernity is through parody, which he demonstrates by the use of intertextuality. This he does by referencing the classic Japanese novel *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tales of Genji*) written in the 11th century by the courtier lady Murasaki Shikibu. *Genji*, which is seen as the masterpiece of classical Japanese literature and the ur-text for intertextuality in the literature that followed it, chronicles the life and numerous love affairs of the prince Hikaru Genji. Genji’s most significant love interest is the Lady Murasaki. In one of the most famous scenes in the novel, Genji sees the child Murasaki while peeping through the hedges of the house where she is being raised by her grandmother and is struck by her resemblance to his first love, Fujitsubo, who in turn is said to be the living image of Genji’s dead mother. Genji decides to take the orphaned Murasaki under his wing and raise her to be his ideal wife, later marrying her. The similarities between the plot of *Genji* and *Naomi* are rather obvious. Like Genji, Jōji takes in Naomi to raise her to become his ideal woman, and she eventually becomes his wife. Yet, the differences between the two make the latter novel a kind of parody of the former. Although Jōji’s first attraction to Naomi is her resemblance to women he adores, unlike with Genji, it is not some ideal first love, but foreign actresses like Mary Pickford (who was famous for playing vamps). And contrary to the virginal Murasaki who is raised by nuns, Naomi was raised in a brothel, destined to become a prostitute, and conducts multiple affairs, boldly exhibiting her sexuality even after her reconciliation with Jōji. Far from attaining his ideal woman, then, Jōji’s attempt

to emulate Genji ends in a farce, making him fall in love with a manipulative, spoiled woman who dominates and controls him.

However, it could be argued, as Ken Ito does, that Jōji's masochistic tendencies in fact mean that in the domineering Naomi he got exactly what he wanted.¹⁵ Interpreted in this way, far from being catastrophic, Jōji's relationship with Naomi is the ideal relationship for the two of them (as Jōji says in the opening pages of the novel, theirs is a modern relationship), and the modern Murasaki can no longer be the virginal saint of the past, but a vamp. Seen either way, however, one thing remains constant: modernity has changed everything, and no amount of yearning for a perceived simpler time can turn the clock back. The one question that still remains, though, is if Jōji and Naomi, the "ideal" modern couple did indeed get the relationship they wanted, are they satisfied with modernity? The answer to this remains ambiguous. In the last chapter of the novel, Jōji describes his and Naomi's life as they now live in Yokohama as part of the foreign community there. Their life is one of luxury and idleness, with both having what they most desired: Naomi has the Western lifestyle she always craved, and Jōji has Naomi. Yet, the tone throughout this chapter is one of exhaustion. Jōji himself admits that he is running out of energy ("I've grown so docile," he says on p. 236, p. 304), and the atmosphere of the conclusion is gloomy rather than "happily-ever-after". The last sentence of the novel is rather enigmatic. Jōji concludes his narrative by stating: "Naomi is twenty-three this year and I am thirty-six" (p. 237, p. 305). What is this statement meant to indicate? On the one hand, it seems to show that both Jōji and Naomi are still young, and that their life may yet bring new excitements and that their story is still far from being over, on the other hand, Jōji's age suggests that he is soon to become middle-aged, when one is supposed to settle down and leave behind the high jinks of youth. This can also be another signal of Jōji's exhaustion, telling the reader that he is not certain he can continue in this way much longer. Jōji may indeed have got what he yearned for, but the cost may have been too much. The toll which modernity exacts can be a dear one, one that Jōji may always regret having to pay.

4. Vogel's *Married Life*

Vogel's *חיי נישואים* (*Chayei Nissuim*), or *Married Life* in English, was originally published in three volumes between 1929 and 1930, during the author's brief sojourn in Mandate Palestine. The novel received very little notice when it first came out, but gained renewed interest after being reissued in 1986, and has since come to be seen as one of the most important works of Hebrew Modernism. The title "Married Life" aptly describes what the novel is about, as it traces not only the abusive and abnormal marriage of the protagonist, a

Jewish writer named Rudolf Gurdweill (who shares many characteristics with Vogel himself) and an Austrian baroness named Thea von Takow, but also the life, and especially marriage, of the people who surround Gurdweill such as his friends, co-workers, and many random persons he stumbles upon. In fact, despite its somewhat straightforward plot, the many interludes and random encounters by accident described give the novel an episodic and decentred character, contributing to its depiction of an unstable modern world. Due to its European setting and sensitive themes (such as a marriage between a Jewish man and Christian woman), the novel has received various interpretations, from ones that focus on its European characteristics ignoring the Jewish ones,¹⁶ to ones focusing solely on the Jewish elements and emphasising the predestined tragic nature of the protagonists' relationship.¹⁷ The variety of interpretations is a testament to the complexity of the novel, though in order to better understand the story, it is necessary, as I will argue, to look at both elements together.

4-1. A Novel of the Lost

The story itself begins as Gurdweill, who after a brief courtship of a few days, is convinced by Thea to get married. Thea had declared a sudden wish to convert to Judaism, and despite the warnings of his Jewish friends, especially Lotte Bondheim who is in love with him, Gurdweill agrees to the marriage as he believes he is in love with Thea. The marriage, however, quickly grows tense as Thea proves to be manipulative, sexually promiscuous and abusive, and constantly taunts and even physically humiliates Gurdweill (for examples, she takes to calling him "rabbit", and often picks him up like a child highlighting his physical weakness in contrast to her). Their relationship somewhat improves after Thea becomes pregnant, exciting Gurdweill with the idea that his dream of having a son will come true, although Thea continues to taunt him with the idea that the baby might not be his and that she might decide to have an abortion. The baby, Martin, is born, and Gurdweill dedicates himself to caring for him, but despite his efforts, Martin soon falls ill and dies. This, combined with Lotte's suicide that deprives him of the only person who truly cared for him, sends Gurdweill down a dark spiral, and when one night, Thea brings home one of her lovers and sleeps with him in their bed, Gurdweill snaps and stabs her to death.

Compared to *Naomi's* light irony, the tone of this novel is more like that of a dark comedy, bringing together sarcasm with truly dark imagery. This is already apparent in the opening scene of the novel in which while walking to a job interview, Gurdweill passes by the river where a young woman's body is being fished out after she had presumably committed suicide. This darkness also extends to the atmosphere of the setting of the novel, the city of Vienna. In the 1920s Vienna was still recovering from the horrors of WWI and its loss of status as an

imperial capital. It was a city of many contrasts. On the one hand, there are the places of entertainment, the countless cafés which Gurdweill and his friends frequent, the Prater, etc., and on the other hand, are the dark corners, the mental asylum which Gurdweill visits at one point, the hospital in which his son dies, and the homeless shelter full of criminals and wounded soldiers. The elements of illness and death seem to stick to everyone around. As Gurdweill comments at one point while looking at the people around him, “they, too, were sick themselves ... sick without knowing it... [*sic*]” (p. 176, p. 124).¹⁸ For Vogel, then, the modern urban space was an unhealthy one, something that also characterises the marriage of the two protagonists, a marriage that is distinctly modern.¹⁹

4-2. Being Jewish in Modernity

But what exactly does modernity signal in this novel? If modernity in Naomi was something foreign in origin yet now self-evident, modernity here is similarly self-evident but simultaneously natural and unnatural. The city of Vienna with its trams and cafés is the epitome of a modern centre and at the same time is somehow still ancient, even medieval, with the presence of fossil-like leftovers such as fallen aristocracy among other things. Thea, with her aristocratic title and appearance that is compared to the Wagnerian heroine Brunhilda, is both such a fossil and at the same time a modern woman with a job and complete sexual freedom. This contrast becomes more apparent and even sinister when looking at the Jewish characters. Gurdweill, Lotte, and their friend Dr. Astel, for all intents and purposes, appear to be completely assimilated into their modern gentile environment, the only indication of their Jewishness being their names. In that sense, modernity appears to be self-evident for them, too. At the same time, their being Jewish and thus excluded from the society around them is never fully forgotten as can be seen from the incident towards the latter half of the novel when Lotte and Dr. Astel are harrowingly harassed on a tram by an anti-Semitic labourer (p. 212, p. 301-2). This brings to the fore the fact that no matter how adapted to modern life these Jewish characters are, their presence in the modern urban space is always full of danger and the potential for conflict.

If modernity is full of danger, then could going back to the past perhaps provide refuge? As is the case with the Japanese-style house in *Naomi*, Vogel, too, denies the possibility of such relief. For a Jewish character like Gurdweill, forsaking modernity would mean a return to Jewish tradition and to the life of the Jewish shtetel in the Pale of Settlement. Although it is never clearly stated in the novel where Gurdweill is originally from, his references to his childhood in a rural town and the parallels between him and Vogel suggest that he, too, comes from the Pale of Settlement where he had a traditional Jewish upbringing. But unlike the sense

of loss and yearning directed toward the past in *Naomi*, in *Married Life*, the past is just as disturbing as modernity. In the course of the novel, Gurdweill reminisces about two events in his childhood, both of which are touched with a threat of violence. The first event concerns Gurdweill's reflection on his youthful fascination with Christianity, symbolised by his awe of the church in his town. Looking at the church, the young Gurdweill is frightened by the memories of past violence which were inflicted on the Jews in the name of Christianity such as the Inquisition and the Crusades, yet at the same time, he also finds himself attracted by this sense of danger (p. 149-50, p. 221). Even in the midst of the supposedly comforting memories of childhood, the menace of Christianity and the violence that it could bring is present. The second recollection, which Gurdweill recounts to Thea, is of how he lost his virginity to his family's gentile maid in his teenage years. This maid, who is a kind of precursor to Thea, seduces the fifteen-year-old Gurdweill in an act that can be described as rape (p. 152, p. 224). At first, the young Gurdweill is terrified by the maid's action, yet slowly grows accustomed to it (p. 153, p. 227). Therefore, already at a young age, Gurdweill was subjected to the threat of violence from the gentile/Christian world both in his imagination (as he looks at the church) and in physical reality by the maid.

4-3. Modernity Conquered?

According to Vogel, there is in fact not much difference between modernity and the past in terms of the danger posed to Jews. And Gurdweill is in a way stuck between the two and is thus a classical representation of the *talush* figure, which was a dominant trope in Hebrew literature of the early 20th century. The *talush* was usually an intellectual or artist who left his Jewish roots behind in the pursuit of various artistic and intellectual goals.²⁰ However, failure in these goals and disenchantment with the modern world leaves the *talush* drifting and caught in a state of limbo as he is also unable to return to his previous life. However, unlike the classical *talush* who accepts defeat, Gurdweill, despite the dangers in modernity, still attempts to find meaning in it through his relationship with Thea, made possible because of modernity. In marrying her, and more importantly, in having a child with her, Gurdweill believes that he could unite Christianity and Judaism, and by doing so, perhaps nullify the danger to which he is constantly subjected. He imbues the union with a sense of idealism, viewing it as the union of "two ancient races", and sees it as an achievement of everything he has wished for because the marriage will give him "the dream he had been cherishing in his heart for so long", namely, his own child (p. 37, p. 50).²¹

Yet, ultimately, the union fails miserably. The child he so hoped for dies prematurely, and instead of nullifying the violence, the marriage seems to aggravate Thea's sadistic tendencies.

“From the day she met Gurdweill,” we are told, “she had felt an urge to hurt him, to make him miserable in any way she could. And this urge had not faded over the course of time but had grown stronger and stronger the longer they lived together” (p. 147, p. 207). As an oxymoron (she is a modern aristocrat whose title has no meaning anymore in an Austria that has turned into a republic), Thea herself is a kind of *thusha*, and thus cannot be the solution to Gurdweill’s problems. This impossibility is further highlighted by the fact that Gurdweill and Thea can be compared to a more ancient couple, namely, Samson and Dalilah. In the biblical Book of Judges, the Philistine/gentile Dalilah seduces the Israelite Samson in order to find a way to defeat him, ultimately leading to a destructive end to both him and the Philistines. In *Married Life*, the similarly gentile Thea seduces Gurdweill, a seduction which seems to leave him completely depleted. Yet, Gurdweill is no modern Samson, but a pale replacement to the biblical hero. The modern world has completely formed Gurdweill into a weakling, making him a parody of Samson. At the end of the novel, the violent tension created by Thea and Gurdweill reaches its boiling point as Gurdweill murders Thea. This ending can be read in several different ways. On the one hand, it is an ending that shows that the anxiety brought on by modernity has no resolution but always leads to violence. On the other hand, it shows that modernity in fact changes nothing, and that the violence of the past is simply repeated, that the same way Samson brought down the temple of Dagon in revenge to what was done to him, so does Gurdweill stab Thea in revenge. Furthermore, this act of violence also becomes another link in the chain of Christian-Jewish violence. Either way, it is a very nihilistic ending, though this nihilism is somewhat relieved by the absurdity of the parody which Gurdweill as Samson enacts.²²

5. Tanizaki and Vogel, Again

In reading these two novels together, several striking points are evident. Beyond the obvious similarities in the erotic relationships described in the novels, it is clear that the authors were preoccupied with similar issues. Both authors sense that their experience of living in modernity involves a certain sense of discomfort despite its many attractions. Modernity incites both pleasure and anxiety, for although it is inescapable, it still contains a threat of humiliation and even physical harm. In Jōji’s case, this is because modernity pushes him towards Westernization which may bring him humiliations due to his inadequacies, and Gurdweill’s case, it is because modernity has brought him to live in the midst of gentile society where as a Jew, he is in constant danger. What is most interesting is that both authors choose to translate this sense of anxiety into literature by having their protagonists be in a

sadomasochistic relationship that borders abuse. Both Naomi and Thea behave in a domineering and manipulative way towards their husbands, yet that very behaviour is what seems to draw Jōji and Gurdweill to them. It is as if in a modern world ruled by anxiety, what seems abnormal is now normal and what appears dangerous is what brings pleasure. Yet, unlike Jōji and Naomi who manage to fulfil their desire vis-à-vis their sadomasochistic relationship, Gurdweill and Thea in fact make each other worse, turning their married life into a living hell, signalling that just because danger may bring pleasure, it does not mean that this is something sustainable. Looking at Jōji and Naomi's relationship through the lens of Gurdweill and Thea, it is very tempting to conclude that Jōji's growing exhaustion from his life with Naomi may eventually, like Gurdweill, lead him to an act of violence. If so, does one have to conclude that modernity inevitably leads to violence? Perhaps. But the optimism and light-irony that characterises Tanizaki's narrative seem to suggest that at least for him, this is not so, and that Jōji is not likely to end up like Gurdweill. This, then, is a point in which the two writers' experience seem to lead them to different conclusions.

Another point in which the two novels appear to differ is in their understanding of pre-modernity. As explored in section 3, *Naomi* presents the past in an almost Romantic way as a time of innocence that was lost and cannot be regained, only parodied. However, as shown in section 4, *Married Life* shows that the only difference between modernity and the past is in the veneer, and that in essence, nothing has changed. Gurdweill may be a parody of Samson, but his encounter with Thea, like Samson's interaction with Dalilah, leads to violence and catastrophe. This point, unlike the previous one, can and should be brought to bear on the Japanese novel. There is something rather naïve in the way that Tanizaki's novel cast the past.²³ But even here, it is possible to see that the past was not very different, but what is different is how we perceive it. Genji may appear to someone like Jōji and many other Japanese people as a romantic hero, in contrast to whom a modern man like Jōji appears both pitiful and perverse. And yet, Genji, too, in his multiple exploits and the poor way in which he treated women can be seen as perverse and even pathetic. Ultimately, then, there is no point in trying to return to the past, because the past is not very different from the present. Jōji and Naomi are the modern Genji and Murasaki not because their relationship is new, but because it isn't. Yes, their relationship parodies the older one, making some changes in the dynamics, but the very fact that the one relationship imitates the other shows, like the relationship between Gurdweill and Thea, that there is no change, instead there is repetition. In a way, then, what these novels show is that the tension of modernity can be resolved by showing that it in itself, is a creation of modernity, and that the past that people yearn for cannot be regained because it never existed.

6. Conclusion

For writers like Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and David Vogel, then, the experience of modernity was both full of pleasure and anxiety. And even though the tension that modernity brought with it may have been created by modernity itself, it nonetheless deeply informed their writing, as their novels, in a sense, were an attempt to explore and understand it. As a result, what their novels demonstrate is not necessarily that modernity creates new dangers or abnormalities, but rather it heightens the danger and abnormalities that already existed, bringing them to the fore. This, then, may be the reason why modernity can be experienced as both pleasurable and full of anxiety. By allowing free-range to things such as sexual freedom, it can provide much pleasure, yet at the same time, this very freedom can also bring greater danger as was the case for Gurdweill, a situation that can even lead to violence.

In fact, it seems that the dangers of modernity were much more potent for the Jews than for the Japanese, who in the confines of their own country at least could exert some control over their interactions with modernity. This was not the case for the Jews who were scattered across the world, and for whom modernization often meant isolation from their community. This isolation coupled together with the fact that modernity also brought with it the rise of anti-Semitism based on racial ideologies as well as political extremism made the dangers of modernity often eclipse its benefits for the Jews resulting in very dark narratives such as was the case with Vogel's novel. This relationship between modernism, Judaism, and danger, however, requires more attention than can be given it here.

In addition, there is, of course, much more that can be said about these two novels in relation to each other. Firstly, the way they deal with modernity and the sense of anxiety and loss that inform their authors puts them in relation to the European and American writers of their time including Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, and others, and a comparison with the works of these writers is naturally called for. And secondly, there is more that can be derived from the comparison between Thea and Naomi. As some scholars have pointed out, although Thea is a member of the aristocracy and thus supposed to be a lady, her behaviour is more akin to a prostitute,²⁴ while Naomi was raised to become a prostitute, and their sexual promiscuity plays an important part in the two novels' narratives. So, does this mean that Tanizaki and Vogel are both sexually free and sadistic? Is it simply an extension of male anxiety of female sexuality, or is there more? These, however, are questions that require further looking into. Still, this paper had demonstrated the potential of reading Hebrew and Japanese literatures of the early 20th century together despite their lack of direct connection during this period. For as the analysis has shown, both Tanizaki and Vogel were informed in their writing by the same senses of anxiety, an anxiety which their novels show to be a mirage

created by modernity.

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Notes

- ¹ Kobayashi Hideo, *Literature of the Lost Home: Kobayashi Hideo – Literary Criticism, 1924-1939*, ed. and compiled by Paul Anderer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 54.
- ² M. Y. Berdyczewski, “Menachem,” *Project Ben Yehuda*, accessed July 22nd, 2021, <https://benyehuda.org/read/4481>. The translation is my own.
- ³ Both Tanizaki and Vogel have been the subject of vast scholarly attention. For some important works on Tanizaki, see: Ken K. Ito, *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki's Fictional Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Margherita Long, *This Perversion Called Love: Reading Tanizaki, Feminist Theory and Freud* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009); Nakamura Mitsuo, *Tanizaki jun'ichirō ron* (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1956); Hosoe Hikaru, *Tanizaki jun'ichirō shinsō no retorikku* (Osaka: Izumi Shoin, 2004). For similar works on Vogel, see works mentioned in endnotes 6, 16, and 17.
- ⁴ For more on this, see for example: Arthur Hertzberg, “Introduction,” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, Arthur Herzberg, ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 1-40. It must also be noted that the experience of Jews living outside of Europe, mainly in Muslim countries, was rather different, and followed a different historical trajectory. For more on that see: Stillman, Norman A. *Sephardi Religious Responses to Modernity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).
- ⁵ For more on this topic, see for example: Sukehiro Hirakawa, and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi. “Japan's Turn to the West,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 5, edited by Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 432-98; and Najita, Tetsuo, and H. D. Harootunian. “Japanese Revolt against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 6, edited by Peter Duus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 711-74.
- ⁶ Overall, there is still much that we don't know about Vogel's life, including his tragic death during the Holocaust. However, for a general outline of what is known see for example: Itzhak Bakon, *David fogel: ha-meshorer ke-'aman "nistar"* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2005), 13-27 [Hebrew Publication].
- ⁷ Ito, *Visions of Desire*, 102-3.
- ⁸ There is even speculation that Tanizaki was in fact the first to introduce this name into Japanese use, and that he was intentionally using a Western name for his heroine, but whether this is true is not clear.
- ⁹ Regular page numbers of *Naomi* refer to the English translation: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Naomi*, Vintage International ed., Anthony H. Chambers, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 2001). Italicized numbers refer to the Japanese original: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Chijin no ai* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1947).
- ¹⁰ For example, see: Shamoan, Deborah. “The Modern Girl and the Vamp: Hollywood Films in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's Early Novels,” *Asia Critique* 20, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 1067-93.
- ¹¹ For more on this, see: Elise K. Tipton and John Clark, *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society*

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- from the 1910s to the 1930s* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000).
- ¹² *Bunka* houses, which incorporated elements of European building styles, became popular during the Taishō Period. For more on this subject, see: Elise K. Tipton, and John Clark, *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s*.
- ¹³ This is made even more apparent in this scene when an American guest at the dance hall asks her to dance in English, and she appears incapable of answering or reacting to him in any coherent way.
- ¹⁴ It is interesting to think about this in relation to Tanizaki's later essay, *In'ei raisan* ("In Praise of Shadows", 1933), in which Tanizaki praises the aesthetic of the Japanese home in contrast to Western houses, though many of his comments there can be taken to be ironic.
- ¹⁵ Ito, *Visions of Desire*, 100.
- ¹⁶ See for example: Gershon Shaked, "David Vogel: A Hebrew Novelist in Vienna," in his book *The New Tradition: Essays on Modern Hebrew Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2006); David Averbach, "David Vogel's *Married Life*: A European Novel in Hebrew," *Jewish Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (1998), 36-7.
- ¹⁷ See for example Gabriel Moked, "David fogel ke-mesaper." *Moznaiim* 19, no. 1 (1964): 51-8 [Hebrew Publication]; or Aharon Komem, *Ha'ofel ve hapele: 'iyunim be-yetzirato shel david fogel* (Haifa; Tel-Aviv: University of Haifa/Zmora Bitan Press, 2001), 173 [Hebrew Publication].
- ¹⁸ Regular pages of *Married Life* refer to the English translation: David Vogel, *Married Life*, Dalia Bilu, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 1988). Italicised numbers refer to the original: David Vogel, *Chayey nisu'im: roman* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1986).
- ¹⁹ In that a marriage between a Jewish man and a Christian aristocratic woman (who also converts to Judaism) would have been unthinkable before modernity.
- ²⁰ For more on this see: Heddy Shait, *Lifaneycha drachyim: metlishut bagola letlishut yelidit besafrut ha'ivrit bame'a ha'esrim* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2015), 21-44 [Hebrew Publication].
- ²¹ In Hebrew literature, in general, babies often appear as a symbol of hope as they contain the possibility of a different future. Examples include Noah and Marinka's baby in Bialik's *Behind the Fence*, and several babies in the writings of Agnon including Herschel's second son in *A Simple Story*, Tirza's baby in "In the Prime of her Life", and many more. Whether or not these babies will fulfil the hope that they represent, however, is never revealed but rather left vague.
- ²² This parodic contrast can also be seen as a commentary the idea of the "New Jew" that was being promoted by Zionism at the time. Many Zionists felt that the Jews in exile have become weak and effeminate, and that it was necessary to create a "new" Zionist Jew who would be strong and able to fight, much like the biblical Samson. While Vogel's protagonist could be understood as another caricature of the effeminate exilic Jew, he can also be understood as criticising the "New Jew" by showing that the emphasis on violence cannot take the Jews far. For more on the "New Jew" and the debates surrounding it, see: Mikhal Dekel, *The Universal Jew: Masculinity, Modernity, and the Zionist Movement* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010).
- ²³ The romanticisation of the past becomes even more distinct in Tanizaki's later works in which the past becomes an almost exotic place, functioning similarly to how the West did in his earlier work. See: Ito, *Visions of Desire*, 156.
- ²⁴ See for example: Ilana Szobel, "'Light in the Darkness': Prostitution, Power, and Vulnerability in Early Twentieth-Century Hebrew Literature," *Prooftext* 34, no. 2 (2014): 170-206.