

Deciphering Hanya Yanagihara's *To Paradise* as a Postmodern Text

By

Sumaiya Tasnim

ID: 21363008

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that.

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Student's Full Name & Signature:

Sumaiya Tasnim

ID: 21363008

Approval

The thesis titled **Deciphering Hanya Yanagihara's *To Paradise* as a Postmodern Text**, submitted by Sumaiya Tasnim, ID: 21363008 of Spring 2023, has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Examining Committee:

Supervisor:

(Member)

Dr Abu Sayeed Mohammad Noman
Assistant Professor, Department of
English and Humanities
Brac University

External Expert Examiner:

(Member)

Dr Raihan Sharif
Associate Professor, Department of
English, Brac University

Departmental Head:

(Chairperson)

Professor Firdous Azim
Professor and Chairperson, Department
of English and Humanities
Brac University

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Abstract

To Paradise (2022) by Hanya Yanagihara takes the readers into a thrilling adventure in an alternate history of the American map of 1893, a semi-present representation of 1993 and a dystopian future of 2093. With class and social order restrictions, the characters battle the effect of realities to keep their loved ones safe. With a multi-narrative outlook and postmodern traits, the author highlights a perception of loss, friendship, despair and desire. She normalises the effect of same-sex marriage and questions the political spheres and historical otherness prevalent in America. It simultaneously asks what could have been, what is and what could be. This thesis aims to represent this fin de siècle novel's literary effect on emotional reactions towards race, social order, and dystopian effects of diseases and loss. It also discusses the open-ended narratives to understand how the definition of "paradise" is a political paradigm that characters have to chase. Additionally, this study evaluates the misinterpreted notion of postmodernism and its relation to representing history and scientific resolutions.

Keywords

postmodernism, alternate history, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, surveillance society, political identity, class consciousness, postmodern traits, pastiche, Yanagihara

Introduction

From Washington Square to Lip-Wao-Nahele to Zone Eight, the author of *To Paradise* (2022), Hanya Yanagihara, transports her readers into a journey that problematises authority, state regulations and power by restructuring the American map and history. The epic of a novel divides itself into three books, within which some chapters portray overlapping themes and recurring motifs and display temporal distortion. Furthermore, by questioning the authenticity of history, Yanagihara compels to evaluate human relationships in the face of a constantly dismantling society. The essence of this novel strikes to engage the readers, profoundly connecting with the characters at the beginning of this reconstruction. Despite the books being strikingly different based on the spatiotemporal representation of society, what ties them together is the profound repetition of the characters.

The transition of the novel and its underlying messages provides a postmodern outlook. It does so with the multi-layered narrative of letters and temporal distortion through the representation of multiple generations and alternate history of America. Although the author represents realism in Book I to align with the future, as the readers find in Book III, it embarks on a different route from realism and modern writing styles. Through technology, urbanism, loss of space, and portraying the end of humanity, the text states the fate of the characters through postmodern elements such as pastiche, fragmentation, open-ended interpretation of the text and new methods of rejecting postmodern reaction to scientific advancement and criticising the effects of it. By restructuring the American map and its political regulations, she problematises history that undermines the ones who remain as the minority. Postmodern traits in the novel portray the differences between the struggles of the elite and people experiencing poverty, the effects of ageing, the issues of political righteousness, and the disorientation that follows with the journey

of knowing oneself authentically. Therefore, this novel is an excellent example of being postmodern. Although the temporal distortion makes the books jump from one time to the other, it never fails to reduce the anxiety of these revolutions. Hanya Yanagihara shows that in the face of chaos, the repressed emotions of individuals and their relationship with each other unite them with each other.

No research has been elucidated on understanding the novel from a postmodern viewpoint. As a result, this discussion engages postmodern theories inscribed by Jean Francois Lyotard, Linda Hutcheon, and Charles Jencks, their characteristics, and traits from Barry Lewis to show how the novel is a postmodern text and powerfully represents the perils of a realistic postmodern civilisation. The chapters of my study focus on the temporal distortion, revised history of the American map and overlapping themes and pastiche to analyse its postmodern traits. Additionally, I address the debate of women authors portraying homosexual relationships as all her books are centric on American gay men. It is represented to study the lens of freedom of an author to express, alter and create a version of literature for the readers to engage according to their frame of ideology.

Background

Book One takes the readers back to the 19th century, an alternate version of the 1893 Washington Square after the American Civil War. Still, the United States is now called “The Free States,” where homosexuality and free religious practice are legal. Still, it is arranged marriage, systemic racism and disregard for the middle and lower classes that lurk in this so-called liberal society. The main focus is on David Bingham, one of Nathaniel Bingham’s three grandchildren. While his siblings are settled with their partners and have stable jobs, Bingham is single and teaches art at an institution founded by his grandfather. Despite finding an elderly suitor Charles Griffith, his heart follows Edward Bishop, who teaches music at the same institution. However, Bishop’s financial status and questionable past bode multiple errors in their love affair and put David into an unsettling state. It raises questions about privilege, romance and loss and harmonises them with anxiety and fear.

Book Two divides itself in half, where initially David Bingham is a young Hawaiian paralegal who lives with his lover Charles Griffith, an elite senior partner in the same firm. It is 1993, which sheds light on the issues of the AIDS epidemic, fear and stereotypes in America. The story circulates at a party Charles throws for his former lover Peter before his death due to age and poor health. However, David still needs to open an unopened letter from his father. The second part begins with David’s father (the old Wika, also David) addressing David as “Kawika,” his Hawaiian name. He is overthrown by the American colonisation of Hawaii and its effect. Kawika could no longer be the Crown Prince of Hawaii, but also he is unwilling to restore his royal position because of his grandmother’s pride. Wika meets Edward Bishop reasonably young in middle school, but as the story progresses, he becomes integral to Wika’s demise. Edward becomes an anarchist attempting to restore the Hawaiian monarchy and culture from the U.S. colonisation in

1960. The radical notion of Hawaiian independence inspires it. However, he hyper-focuses on reinstating the royal regulations by residing on Wika's family inheritance, Lipo-Wao-Nahele, which translates as "The Forest of Paradise." However, Wika's father believed this land to be "The Dark Forest" because of how barren and non-agricultural the land is. Book 2 speaks of colonisation, the madness to restore power, and the loss of relationships.

The last part of the novel is the most detailed of the three books as it travels to the future as far as 2093 when America has faced multiple pandemics and the world has collapsed due to the plagues. Named "Zone Eight," the author conveys two stories set in two different times. The first is of Charlie Bingham Griffith, who happens to be one of the survivors of a complicated virus that grows up with both physical and mental side effects from the anti-virus Xychor in 2070. Charlie, the granddaughter of Charles, is married to Edward Bishop, but their relationship almost serves as a survival tactic under the state's totalitarian regime. Amidst her mundane and 'safe' lifestyle as a lab technician, she meets a mysterious man named David who changes her life as they try to escape the borders to flee the country and from another terrible virus. Yanagihara changes the state rules and how it regulates relationships and controls the lives of its citizens by monitoring their every move. The other section is a series of letters Charlie's grandfather, a researcher, sends to his dear friend Peter, who is in the same department but working for London. By restating the regulations, the author successfully portrays the dystopian future due to global warming, political control, and the plague that resulted from recurring virus attacks. The letters and the adventures of Charlie's results are evidence of the state of the apocalyptic future of America and other nations.

Literature Review

While defining postmodernism rigidly is impossible as it limits its possibilities, Jean François Lyotard famously defines it as an “incredulity toward metanarratives” (p.167). It must be understood that the “post” here recognises the ruptures of modern narratives. It acknowledges its freedom from constraining and oppressive conditions (as qtd. in Best and Kellner). Steven Best and Douglas Kellner mention that a postmodernist criticises the contemporary while associating with what they portray as innovative and “radical” postmodern discourses and actions. They also generally favour supposed breaks in knowledge, culture, and society (30). Through textual analysis, this study recognises what makes the novel a postmodern text.

Hanya Yanagihara’s previous books, such as *A Little Life* and *People in the Trees*, contain the effect of portraying human emotions and morality in their rawest forms which dwelled on childhood violence and self-harm. However, *To Paradise* shifts from that theme as Yanagihara’s characters show certain arcs. The progress of these three sections shows how people change in this fast pace of America and its questionable history. Despite leading the advancement of a “restructured” American history, the books are open-ended for the reader’s interpretation. Many characteristics define postmodernism and set it apart from other styles and discourses. Ihab Hasan, in “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism,” mentions that postmodernism is a “four-fold vision.” It requires embracing continuity and discontinuity, diachrony and synchrony with a dialectic vision for antithesis and ignoring historical interpretation (p.4). Much of the novel focuses on problematising the state and history. In a panel with The John Adams Institute, Yanagihara mentions that the book does not have fealty to account because it is against it. Although the book is not meant to teach a specific lesson instead, each set of books echoes the Buddhist saying that “whenever you talk about the present, you are talking about the past, and when you talk about the

future, you are talking about the present” (1:11:42). As the book dates back to 1893 to 1993 and 2093, the author takes the readers back to a reformed America and then predicts the plausible outcomes of what being American means.

While dismantling the map and the boundaries, the author includes the colonisation of Hawaii, arranged marriages between elite families to keep the wealth within the wealthy, and deciphers of the effect of an authoritarian state¹ and society controlling the citizens. However, in Book I, unlike the actual history of America after the Civil War, the map resurfaces with the Free States in one corner and the American Unions in the other. New York City falls under the Free States, which is predominantly white. Here the practice of gay marriage and religious practice is accepted in all spectrums. However, the Black community is not welcome. Problematising, the actual aftermath of the American Civil War in this sort brings about two factors: the otherness of the Black community, which is relevant to date, and the increasing privileges of the white elites. However, much debate occurs amongst intellectuals when the postmodern context tends to problematise history.

For instance, Trygve R. Tholfsen’s “Postmodern Theory of History: A Critique” has argued that there are multiple flaws in postmodern historiography, of which one is that he believes that “in actuality, postmodern theory represents only one version-nihilist, anti-historical and Neo-Nietzschean in linguist term” (Tholfsen 208). In addition, “the distinctly historical preoccupation with details of time and location is dismissed by postmodernism” (216). While the paradoxical paradigms of postmodernism as a theory are rational, it is also essential to recognise that problematising history universally is not necessarily a practice that becomes an obstacle but rather an essential one. Firstly, history is constructed by the individuals who represent their prominent

¹ No matter democratic or authoritarian

presence on the timeline. As a result, many minorities remain or struggle to establish their generational identity even after decades of colonisation. Ironically much of the history is reserved by the West, which is recently being dismantled to represent the “unspeakable”. There is a misunderstanding when critics believe that problematising the past makes history unimportant or blurry. Instead, the same doubt reveals us to look at history differently. Kaya Yılmaz, in “Postmodernist Approach to the Discipline of History”, mentions that the nature of history is built upon “theoretical pre-suppositions” (178). Therefore, it would be an error of judgement to consider that history provides only an analytical overview of the past.

To provide a detailed analysis of this observation, Linda Hutcheon’s notion in “The Postmodernism Problematizing History” provides a more precise understanding as she mentions that to speak of indeterminacy and contingency is not necessarily denying historical knowledge (p.367). Indeed, it is somewhat paradoxical, which is in doubt agreeable. However, it is not a distraction that obstructs the advances of theory and practices as Tholfsen closes his extensive denial of the postmodern outlook on history. While he disregards the very notion that postmodernists assert that language defines but does not refer to reality, it has to be acknowledged that it is the mere questioning of the historical narrative that allows postmodernism to approach history through a particular lens that is devoid of boundaries and disregards hierarchal distinction between the “elite culture and academic culture” (Cohen 126). The interrogation of the modern outlook of history redefines how we may question history and family relationships monitored by the state.

The initial postmodern characteristic in Book I portrays a clear indication of pastiche. Inspired by Henry James’s *Washington Square* in 1880, Hanya Yanagihara circulated the three stories around the same house in New York. The Italian word *pasticcio* means “mess.” However,

Barry Lewis in *Postmodern and Fiction* demonstrates that pastiche is a “shuffling of generic and grammatical tic,” and postmodern authors, therefore, tend to borrow “existing styles higgledy-piggledy from the reservoir of literary history” and manoeuvre them with their abilities and methods (2011:115). D.T. Max mentions in “Hanya Yanagihara’s Audience of One” that the author is “toying with an alternative history”. She pays a different homage to the novel, where same-sex marriage is legal. Like James’s novel, Book I reflects on the complicated relationships between an adult and their guardian when faced with the obstacle of a suitor whom they find “unworthy”.

Furthermore, concerning pastiche, the gripping storyline for Book III resembles George Orwell’s *1984*, which critics have yet to reflect upon in detail². Built on the foundation of a totalitarian society, both protagonists attempt to plot their way to freedom. The dystopian societies in “Zone Eight” and “Oceania” contemplates the harsh effects of the government’s totalitarian control of its citizens and defying all rights that exercise free speech. In search of freedom, the protagonists experience a sense of epiphany of themselves and the society they are imposed to live in. Sharing the vision of a dystopian future through the lens of these authors is not simply a text that riddles the readers with anxiety. However, what it does portray is to recognise the visible and invisible control. The authors want the readers to ask themselves whether the surveillance industry promises security or secretly infests our personal space. Shoshana Zuboff’s “The Age of Surveillance Capitalism” analyses the surveillance society and exposes the capitalist presence in their operations. She mentions a division of knowledge between civilians and those in power. This creates a dynamic where the ones in power have access to all behavioural data of the public. It

² Although Elizabeth Nicholas’ article “Hanya Yanagihara’s *To Paradise* Transcends Time to Deliver an Ethical Tale” mentions that the 720 page novel is a tale that “reads like Edith Wharton meets Jonathan Franzen meets Mohsin Hamid meets George Orwell”

creates leverage which aids them in predicting and taking actions in their favour (part 2). Similarly, the Zones in the third book calculate and surveil its citizens. If any citizen were to escape, disregard, or act disobediently to their strict regime, they were taken away from their family and annihilated.

The Free States in 1993 became hesitant about homosexual relationships with an epidemic of AIDS, which also brought about the notion of stereotypes with the birth of this disease. However, unlike the first, the second book recognises colonisation and concentrates on the perils of a society when the Americans overthrow Hawaii. Compared to Books I and III, this section is unpopular as it resonates with too many open-ended attributes to the storyline. However, it is essential to see how the story progresses with similar Davids having different circumstances to face their life in the face of a new century. David (Wika)'s father, David (Kawika), was the prince whom the American government overthrew as they colonised Hawaii to "urbanise" and develop their community. To reclaim the throne from the American colonisation, Edward and David decide to stay back in Lipo-Wao-Nahele to build their society. However, the American state did not take the only piece of land that David owned and the property. The discourse of race and identity flourishes through these characters to portray the rise of capitalism and globalisation as a form of modern colonisation.

The words such as "Oriental" and the discourse of race and nationalism appears in the second section. It takes the readers aback by explaining how identity is formed through social constructs and power changes. Through race, the Davids question their own identity. Shadowed by privilege and royalty, young David (Kawika) does not perceive the knowledge of this true identity through race. He says, "But I had been sophisticated enough to.... that my race compelled me to *be* one way or another at all was so foreign that it would have been like telling me that there

was another more correct way to breathe or swallow.” (Yanagihara 268). “Orientalism” is not a new idea that Edward Said laid down. Still, with Michel Foucault’s and Antonio Gramsci’s philosophies, his notions follow a direct understanding of how the West views the East. It is the idea that the West tends to romanticise and exoticise all the while “other” the East. In Book II, the concept of paradise essentially shows two sides of the result of the American colonisation of Hawaii. The first results from the white elites settling and “urbanising” Hawaii and dissipating the culture and land. On the other hand, she portrays the madness that follows to inherit and restore all these aspects from the Americans.

The notion of Orientalism between America and Hawaii, a country in the west and southwest (outside of America), is relative because without understanding the relationship between knowledge and power, one cannot simply comprehend how the Western culture dominates the Orient sociologically, culturally and politically. This connotation exists in the realms where blackface and mockery of the Hawaiian tribes existed in academic institutions in New York (Yanagihara 86). It is also through the character Edward that the author portrays that she does not pose any empathy towards performative politics. Edward Bishop, in Book II, convinces David (Wika) to bring his son and live in Lipo-Wao-Nahele, their first form of revolt against the American colonisation. However, what is interesting to note here is how David does not compel himself to this revolution because Edward decides to reside in a land where there could be no hope for the monarchy to restore the colonisation that occurred years ago. Postmodern politics can become challenging to understand as it brings various problems within its ideologies. P. Rosenau, in “Once Again into the Fray: International Relations Confronts the Humanities”, characterises postmodernism politics into two categories, sceptical and affirmative, where the sceptics provide a radical uncertainty which leads to despair (1992:16). Silvia Mineva in “Identity, Otherness and

their Postmodern Ethical Discourse” adds that because “our life is now fragmented and more difficult” it cannot be addressed in a typical way. Here is precisely where the author emphasises that searching for “paradise” leads to more destruction because paradise is a myth in reality. Yanagihara adds,

“It is the suggestion that happiness, not contentment but bliss, is something that you can achieve if you believe hard enough, if you work hard enough, or if you try hard enough, and it is a very punishing belief because it suggests that if you are somehow incapable of finding happiness, it is your fault.”

(The John Adams Institute, 2022, 15:53)

Whether the countries or individuals are liberal, radical, or anarchist is an important observation. However, the author stresses that the awareness of a community that has been “othered” for ages is more important than radical righteousness. Therefore, postmodern ethical discourse allows them to render their reality from a multidimensional perspective rather than a one-dimensional one.

The book confines itself to the past and takes the readers into a time travel machine to 2093 New York, where climate change has intensified and affected an unfathomable global change resulting in multiple pandemics. It is a futuristic science fiction outlook on the novel, which splits into two sections where Charles, an influential scientist, writes letters to his best friend Peter in England, later named “New Britain”, showing the readers the changes in America due to plagues, political changes and rise of a totalitarian society. The other half of the section shows Charlie, Charles’s granddaughter, whose health deteriorates after the anti-virus “Xychor” treatment and her adventure to find “paradise”, leaving Zone Eight as it risks the deadliest pandemic the world has

yet to see. Barry Lewis mentions that science fiction is one of the popular genres for postmodernist writers to pursue since it parallels their shared “ontological occupations” (p.115).

Postmodernism hence exposes the issues of global warming and dystopian worldview that the modern world compelled itself to do, which Charles Jencks in “The Origins of Postmodernism” calls the “juggernaut with no reverse gear” (p.16). This resonates when one reads the third section of this novel as we jump from one time to the other the 22nd century does not render towards becoming innovatively utopian but rather an inescapable dystopia surveilled by the system which constricts moral rights and freedom of expression.

Despite one’s misinterpretation that Yanagihara perhaps emphasises the recent pandemic, she states that her book was almost at the end before the pandemic of 2020. Not foreseeing the future but, much like Albert Camus’s *The Plague* (1947), *To Paradise* (2022) whispers the repetition of plagues that affects cultural and social change worldwide. Unlike Camus’s world, here in Zone Eight of 2093, the adverse effects of technology and control of totalitarian regimes perform dystopian catastrophes. Yanagihara amalgamates the impact of disease on America and its political authority. The transition from Book II and Book III is almost how Charles Jencks reflects the condition of postmodernism. The continuing power of the modern world hides a deeper reality because the modernist circumstances depended on colonial exploitations and border expansions.

This economic stress creates more ecological stress. This is why Jencks disappointingly mentions that this global change is not reversible, quoting that society has become a “juggernaut with no rear gear” (Jencks 16). Like postmodernists, the author replaces the metanarrative³ by

³ The author creates an arc for the characters where the readers understand the perspective of repressed emotional desires and despairs. The novel shifts the perception of societal and class order and does not attempt to answer them from any religious or cultural perception. Instead she offers the readers to interpret them.

focusing on individualistic human experiences. Yanagihara creates a future that mirrors the present, where technology has surpassed its evolution, resulting in massive environmental changes. This techno-scientific progress has ultimately distraught the ecosystem and resulted in nature becoming nothing but a commodity. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean Francois Lyotard stresses that in the current phase of capitalism, there will be a redeployment of economic transformation with the shift of “techniques and technology”, equivalent to the change in function of the State (p.14). In the face of crisis, New York is now Zone Eight. Urban spaces with science and technology change with time, and Daniel Ferraras Savoye in “Urban Spaces in Dystopian Science Fiction” argues that dystopian science fiction points to its victory but more so does it to prove the disturbing threat that lies in the centre of the “narrative syntagm is internal rather than external”. He argues that the reality that we reside in shows that rationality is not “against us”. Instead, through manufactured scientific and technological advancements, rationality in all its ruthless grandeur strikes the masses. As the most favourable setting for the growth of enlightened ideals, the city plays a crucial role in the narrative (2011: p.142).

Postmodernist authors reject traditional writing norms, giving them individual freedom to create masterpieces. This allows both the readers and authors to carry their interpretations. Unlike modernism which requires a steady time frame to express the notion of its literature, to give it purpose and motive, postmodernism moves away from its perspective to show that reality is not absolute. Instead, it is individualistic. The characters in the novel are from different time zones. More importantly, within the sections, there is a sense of returning to the past and journeying to the present. In Book II, the history of David’s father is revealed through his letters which brings the readers to the time when America was colonised. Tatyana Fedosova’s “Reflection of Time in Postmodern Literature” believes writers intentionally detach from the chronological order to show

the reminiscence of character or expectations (p.79). The last section of the novel consistently brings the readers to the past. It moves forward to the present to show how different Charlie and her grandfather's struggles have become with the passage of time and various viruses. Barry Lewis advances this idea by saying that postmodern fiction does not disrupt the past but also the present. It "disorders the liner coherence...of ordinary time, chronos" (p.113).

The most valid form of postmodern fiction leaves fragmented aspects to the storylines, which close the chapter of the conclusiveness notion of a storyline. With fragmentation, authors provide an opportunity to recognise the readers. It is up to the reader to identify the ending of a chapter or a book. Barry Lewis mentions that the means to fragment a piece of work is by "breaking up the text into short fragments or sections". Space, chapters, symbols or chapters can separate it (p.114). Roland Barthes, a renowned French essayist, confirms the effect of fragmentation on literature. Ryan Bishop's "A Circle of Fragments: Barthes, Burgin, and the Interruption of Rhetoric" shows an extensive idea of how Roland Barthes acknowledges fragmentation as a utopian method to free oneself from the "language of others" in the form of literature (Bishop). Each section of Yanagihara's book ends with the protagonist chasing "to paradise". However, the readers may never have a conclusive idea of paradise unless they comprehend its version. Like Barthes, Hanya Yanagihara frees herself from a fixed idea of paradise.

In all the chapters, Yanagihara installs power in different dynamics. She does so by normalising same-sex marriage and posing that racism is relevant. Lennard Davis mentions that these postmodern paradoxes of historiographic metafiction exist in genres as they define a "doubled discourse that embodies opposing political and moral functions" (as qtd in Linda Hutcheon p.179). As a result, she argues that novels such as these are deemed potentially "dangerous because it reverses power and then emerges notions of contestation towards it;

therefore, the contradiction remains. The idea of generational wealth and hierarchal privilege is evident in the chapters. Interestingly, Yanagihara reverses or creates different versions of these powers by changing the narrative of the historical political and social construction of New York by being hundreds of years apart.

Through a pluralistic approach to different themes, envisioning the past, present, and future, *To Paradise* acknowledges not one but multiple versions of individuality and reality. It questions if the masses contribute to society or whether it is the society that controls and shapes the groups. Through numerous postmodern characteristics, Hanya Yanagihara questions history, challenges the state and interrogates the constricted idea of happiness or, as a term, it to be paradise. Incidentally, the author mentions that the reinstallation of history in the novel is a postmodern aspect of looking at relationships from a class and social point of view. Yanagihara was interested in writing a “marriage novel” for her next creation after her two famously acclaimed novels, *People in the Trees* and *A Little Life*. This is a sub-genre of literature in all cultures, but one must read Jane Austen to understand the effect of marriage novels. The novels that interrelate with unusual romantic relationships that end in marriages also include the impact of finances⁴. Therefore, the thesis aims to highlight how this text reflects on every aspect of human relationships amidst social and political constriction through the characteristics of postmodern ideologies.

Yanagihara says that her ideas of these different themes and stages of the books came together. However, it took time for her to organise these three sections into books and see how each represents and relates to one another. The readers find the electrifying romance and watch it rupture with tension caused by social and political settings. The Davids in the novel are either constricted under the privilege of familial elitism, or they starve to provide themselves with the

⁴ Let us remember the ever-green romances in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* catered around the hardships of class, finances and hardships

opportunities restricted by the government. Conner Reed, in ‘What We Talk about When We Talk about Hanya’, critiques that the novel “To Paradise” does not hold the general absurdness of her idiosyncrasies, which fails the story to say anything “interesting about the American experiment” (Reed). As mentioned before, shifting the narrative of history in America gives more perspective on the nature of the politicised principles of privilege. To this quoting the author’s view on the book is essential as she says, “All novels are about money. It is a postmodern idea to think the novel is inseparable from money” (19:25). The characters, motivations, possibilities, and worlds were ultimately defined by how much money they had. She stresses that if one were to be a woman, the opportunity in life was directly affected by how much she had or how much money she would marry (19:54). Not only does this show the usage of pastiche, but it also affirms this statement assures the effect of Yanagihara then envisions a 19th-century marriage novel where the concept of money is not gendered. This directly coincides with creating an America not built upon “Puritanism”. Religion places an important part when altering the history of America, given the base of its colonisation and the effects resulting from Christianity itself. She stresses that she finds the notion of Puritanism in Christianity a punishing practice. Changing that aspect also gives new meaning to love and gender. However, the idea of race would not change (20:32). Finding this idea unchangeable is a fascinating remark. In the chapter “Causes of Antagonism”, J. H. Oldham, the author of *Christianity and the Race Problem* (1925), demonstrates how political considerations may be directly related to persistent racial hostility. He mentions that these difficulties and hatred arise from foreign control when reflecting on the past hostility between Indians and the British.

Fostering an attitude of superiority toward the privileged caste (the creation of it) comes from using power. This allows space for arrogance and prejudice that arouses hatred. Again, American colonisation has disrupted the culture and roots of many countries through forceful

domination. With stolen culture and religious authority towards the indigenous, they have built a country that they pride on being the “American Dream”. These may influence and intensify the desire for political independence, utterly different from feelings related to the physical and mental differences between races (Oldham 38). After years of colonisation, America politicises the idea of race and disregards the narrative of history and cultural practices by establishing an inherently white-dominant Christian ideology. It is for that reason that a restructured form of America showcases an ideal gendered structure but cannot establish the freedom of exercising culture and individuality catered towards the communities that have been colonised. Unlike Reed, I believe this “American experiment” speaks of white privilege and the nature of politics quite vividly. Even if the readers were to see the history as an alternate version, according to Reed, the novel might be just “plain”, but it would be undeniable to admit that amongst these alternative histories and social constructions, the question of race, privilege, freedom and religion daunts the masses.

Moving away from focusing on heterosexual relationships, all of Hanya Yanagihara’s novels concentrate on homosexual marriages and romances. In *The People in the Trees* (2013), the author paints the experience of Dr Abraham Norton Perina and his mission at U’ivu as they find a lost tribe which they call the “Dreamers”, that are gifted with existing through eternities but lack the urgency to develop urbanised human-like traits. With time, the readers discover that the child sexual abuse accusation against him becomes true as he had continuously groomed children he adopted from the island. Again, in *A Little Life* (2015), we come across four friends who live in New York pursuing their dreams.

Jude St Francis has a similar storyline, except he survives a chilling kidnapping from the orphanage by one of the Fathers who later groom him for child prostitution. He becomes a victim of kidnapping, multiple violent cases, and trauma, which lead to significant trauma to his mental

health and physical disability. These two books disclose the image of an abuser and the abused. However, with her latest book, *To Paradise* (2022), the readers do not come across characters with gruesome portrayals of child abuse, rape, or physical trauma. Instead, the author designs these characters to portray intimate relationships and many challenges with the social and political settings of the time. This is because of the rising popularity of her book *A Little Life*. Many have dismissed her portrayal of homosexual relationships as they believe it romanticises trauma and child abuse. Andrea Long Chu from “Vulture” writes in their article, “The novelist tends to torture her gay male characters — but only so she can swoop in to save them,” criticises the author writing about the suffering of the elite gay community and her “lifelong fascination” with discrete cases such as diseases, self-injury and violence. Like Long Chu, most critics have similar issues with her portraying the main characters as essentially rich gays who are ultimately doomed.

A critical overview of writings such as Yanagiharas’ is essential to understand what the novel improvises and lacks. While most critics believe it does not spark the intensity it once did when they read *A Little Life*, the reviews often cannot detach the author from her work. Reading articles and studies like this reminds me of Ronald Barthes in “The Death of the Author”, where he argues that a text must not be judged based on the information of the author who created it. He complains that criticisms always echoed in Baudelaire’s work for the man he is, Van Gogh for his madness and Tchaikovsky for his vice (p.143). Finding this approach debatable, he mentions that removing the author from the text “transforms the modern text” as the temporality makes it different (Barthes 145). Affirmatively, the language speaks to the readers from their perception of knowledge rather than what the author derives in the novel. Unlike the traditional sense of criticising a piece of literature where the “Author” has a parental relationship with its creation, Barthes proposes to define the author and the result simultaneously. This helps to form a

performative act that enunciates the text without unity of time and place (p.145). This is not to say that the reviews do not hold a rigid depth when they mention that there could have been more potential for Book II. The relationship between Wika and Kawika, the father and son, seems promising from a perspective that could have represented familial prejudice amongst the elite. However, one must separate the author from her creation to find the drawbacks and confirm the readers' knowledge.

I do not dismiss the critical claims that the reviewers have to offer. On the contrary, these reviews are essential to highlight the vital notions of how a reader perceives postmodernism. This study aims at how the novel blends its plot with the characteristics of postmodernism. These three short novels secured no unity of time to one desire yet share different adventures from different generations. In this journey to seek the idea of "paradise", I believe, like most of Yanagihara's work, the reader can interpret the characters and plots freely as the author herself has been known to write without a filter. This research fixates on proving that the text is postmodern because it is the exact text that offers the readers to question the past, present, and future. It allows us to choose the ending or the essence of "paradise". This postmodernist interpretation requires us to examine the history, class consciousness, and righteousness in revolutions and nationalism. This study then considers postmodernism as a theory and poses the ideology that the nature of "paradise" is a longing that cannot exist despite these revolutions and struggles. The characters with similar names but different generations strive to fight for themselves and their loved ones, only to fail in the face of their drawbacks, environment, or nature of society.

Discussion: Studying the postmodern elements in the text

This study analyses the specific aspects through which the essence of *To Paradise* can be deconstructed through postmodernism. The author, like postmodernists, borrows writing style and narratives of modernity for Book One. Although she seeks a modernist approach to writing, the first book of the novel shares postmodern sentiments such as temporal disorder and fabricated a historical timeline to question authority. For Books Two and Three, she commits her writings and structure of the characters and plots entirely depending on a postmodern outlook. Yanagihara concentrates on the political notions of climate degradation beyond scientific concerns. In Book Two, she speaks of the land, heritage, and Americanization of Hawaii's entire island and culture through David and his father. She highlights an apocalyptic totalitarian future resulting from diseases and climate changes in Book Three. It grasps a post-humanist atmosphere where freedom of the self is secondary as it co-evolves with surveillance machines.

i. Author's Portrayal of LGBTQ characters: A Choice or A Fixation?

While Hanya Yanagihara is famously known for her fixating on self-reflexivity and trauma, she is criticised for representing only gay men. For instance, Dr Norton from *The People in the Trees* was homosexual and a child groomer. The male characters Willem, Jude and Jean in *A Little Life* are homosexual as well. The central character Jude then portrays an abusive past that traumatises his present. All characters in the novel *To Paradise* are also fictionalised as gay men in different generations. This trait of displaying only men or following a trope central to homosexual men has raised questions. Critics from "Goodreads" conclude that this is a pattern of romanticising a particular community and their trauma. In an interview with Claire Armitstead,

one of the reporters from “The Guardian,” she mentions that she has the right to write whatever she wants. The only aspect she provides the readers is to judge whether she has done justice to her story.

Postmodern authors move away from the boundaries of nationalism, sexuality and culture to paint a picture that sometimes seems like a form of appropriation. Despite this, readers and critics buy her books and praise her characters, who are incredibly self-reflexive. Jonathan Alexander, in “Straight Eye for the Gay Guy: Composing Queerness”, mentions that he believed that there is a lot of good in our attempt to understand one another, even if sometimes the conclusions drawn are not very convincing. One need not “get it right” to approach understanding (p.727). Affirmatively, it is through the writer’s freedom and inclusive ideology that there can be a discourse on their ability to correctly represent and improve their writing. That being said, it must recognise that Yanagihara is not speaking for the gay community but instead normalising the existence of individuals. In everyday life of these fictional characters, it is not merely their sexuality that is being highlighted. Instead, their story, emotions and character arc capture the excellence in her novels.

To Paradise is an open-ended interpretation of the readers. The layered narratives, at times, speaks to the readers. However, Yanagihara provides the same freedom to her readers as she does to herself. So the audience of her texts is more than just readers or consumers of her literature. She learns and accepts the interpretation of her readers as well. Ronald Barthes’s “Readers Response Theory” fits well with this argument. He claims in “The Death of an Author” that a text is only a tissue of quotations which authors take from “innumerable centres of culture” (p.146). The multiplicity of the text only depends on the reader because a text lie does not lie “within the origin but the destination” (p.148). Such power to readers is why Yanagihara’s text is critically

acclaimed. There is no solution, no happy ending, and no recuperation. The characters exist as beings that the audience can interpret. Such author-reader independence can create friction where there is room for affirmation and criticism. However, that makes literature and the art of reading an actual skill.

That being said, as Yanagihara ventures to her fictional journey in the future, there should be more representation of women, a tangible outlook on diseases and a recoverable notion of existentialism in general. Most readers demand this hopeful desire. This can also be considered a challenge for the author. To look through the lens of both empathy and devastation.

ii. A Restructured American Map: Representation of Race and Class Domination

As Book One paints a picture of Washington Square, the readers witness the wealthy part of America as “The Free States”. It paints the representation settings typically read in a Henry James book. The author ruffles with history to create a “marriage novel” in the 19th century. The Bingham family is introduced as one of the wealthiest families in the city, well known for its political and social establishment. What makes the writing style familiar is presenting the social setting as inherently a struggle. This struggle often co-exists with class and race. The Free States considered arranged marriages to inherit and share their wealth amongst themselves. This portrayal is not new since, in most modern literature, the notion of marrying “wealthy” has been relevant⁵. However, with the change in American history, where homosexual marriages are relatively normalised, what has stayed unchanged is the recognition of African American citizens. In the Free States, the elites are prohibited from marrying the lower classes. Both the non-white

⁵ Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice” can be applicable as an example

communities and the lower casts are uninvited and unwanted. David Bingham's arrival at a local café introduced by Edward Bishop, the piano teacher at the orphanage under the Bingham foundation. The debate among college students that David overhears introduces this division in the social class. When a student mentions the importance of access to the Black community in the northeastern part of America, another disagrees by saying, "But Negroes are not people like us" (Yanagihara 52). These nuances of conversation by non-essential characters equally portray an elemental analysis. These are reminders that America stays unfazed by the political rights of equality. Looking back at the events of 1893, one notices the rise of capitalism and imperialism that gave rise to various uneven economic developments. The Depression of 1893 occurred from the effects of the Civil War. Through reconfiguring the historical events, Yanagihara, with her book, carries the burden of the past by representing utopia upfront. Undoubtedly, the openness of marriage regarding all genders portrays a liberal notion of society. However, injustice is prevalent for those not of the same race or class. Therefore, this freedom of marriage is simply a bill of rights, a privilege, not a right. Reflecting on the past, the author narrates an overview of American society's condition. For instance, "the white gay privilege" heavily exists in the LGBTQ+ community. The reconstruction of the past and what defines "the American dream" is not simply the opportunity to secure land, capital and independence. Instead, it represents the realisation that the land of opportunities is reserved for those who belong to a particular class and race.

Darren Lenard Hutchinson, in "'Gay Rights' for 'Gay Whites'? Race, Sexual Identity, and Equal Protection Discourse", with the theory of multidimensionality, explains prejudice against homosexual people of colour compared to those who are white and have a particular social class lifestyle (p. 1365). He argues that historically both heterosexual black men and women have been subjected to various prejudices by the dominant white class. Anti-racist theories have not

challenged the racist connotations inside the LGBTQ+ communities. He argues that if an already privileged group with a white heterosexual status can subjugate other races, then it is the same or potentially more happens to those who are already stigmatised by society (p.1367). As a result, despite having a setting where one of the most stigmatised groups in America can legally have the opportunity to marry or adopt children, the state controls individualised freedom through a social and racial hierarchy. The author writes, “America was not for everyone-it was not for them-and yet everywhere, reminders of the careful, constant work that had been and was still being done to appease” (p.127). Book One inquires about the ideology behind “freedom” by portraying an American society that invites specific if not all, sexual orientations. In return, racially and socially “othering” the communities remain. Postmodernism is a progression of “modernism”, inhibiting newer qualities and traits that represent power structure. The very notion is that dominance always exists unless dismantled from the core. However, deconstructing the class system is easier said than done.

The superiority of a particular class, race or government has existed for decades. I should add that when there are opportunities to eradicate such systemic oppression, individuals from minorities often join these tropes. It derives from the desire to be accepted or erase the narrative of being the “other”. For instance, in Book Two, named “Lipo-Wao-Nahele”, the readers encounter two Davids born and raised in Hawaii. The first David (Kawika) is a partner to Charles, who owns the Griffith house and is one of the elites. Therefore, he is much older and more powerful.

The second David (Wika) is Kawika’s father. Again, the readers encounter a setting change as the Davids settle in 1993 Manhattan, assailed by the AIDS epidemic. To better understand my analysis, the Davids shall be referred to as “Kawika” and “Wika”⁶. While Wika comes from a royal

⁶ Amidst the many Davids, it can sometimes become bewildering to trace through the characters from different generations. Fortunately, from Book Two it becomes easier to identify as “Kawika” which is the Hawaiian form of

family, the loss of holding onto this heritage due to the American colonisation of Hawaii and Kawika's emotional breakdown led his son to move away from him to live in Manhattan as an intern at a law firm. His partner is one of the senior partners in the firm.

Kawika's relationship with Charles is a constant reminder of the difference between social class and age. As a result, Kawika is always hyperactive with Charles and his friends. One of the most significant indicators is Kawika's relationship with his only close friend, Eden. Both Kawika and Eden come from a working-class and are highly aware of the indestructible capitalist effects inflicted towards them by the higher social classes. When she is invited to one of the house parties hosted by Charles and David, Eden realises that David has become one of the elites. In Charles's world, her presence at the party would be "a mannish, overweight, short Chinese American woman....someone people ignored or laughed at" (Yanagihara 241). The social class indifference that Eden fully realises affects their friendship. Hutchinson elaborates that it can also be countered that "privileged" members of these oppressed groups take advantage of opportunities through this formal legal equality (Crenshaw as cited in Hutchinson 1369). Agreeably so, this has been noticed as without the existence of Charles; David faces many encounters as he is racialised or "othered" in the streets of New York.

Furthermore, Kawika's childhood unravels as he opens the letter his ill father sent him from the hospital; several indications hold the relentless desire to settle back the land and heritage of Hawaii from American domination. Their first encounter had been when they were children. There are two instances through which cultural heritage and race are encountered in this chapter (Book Two). His father's friendship with Edward opens the space for understanding the Hawaiian cultural heritage and ethnicity. This is primarily the time when Wika recognises that he has been

the name "David". Wika names his son David as well but refers him as "Kawika". Therefore, Wika is "father" and Kawika is "son" in this reference.

different. This difference comes from the narrative that he was not “Hawaiian” enough (Yanagihara 267). To his wonderment, he believes that he perhaps was not sophisticated enough to think the terms where his race “compelled” him “to be one way or the other”. Again, upon being sent to New York for college studies, he faces bullying that is relatively normalised even in private schools, which are exclusive for children from royalty and elite classes. The annual shows create sketches that satirised Professors and administrations. However, upon the arrival of David (Wika) and an upperclassman from Ghana, two international students, the play is based on how primitive and uneducated they are. The character’s name is Prince Woogawooga of Ooga Ooga”. While this was directly based on David (Wika), the student from Ghana is equally mortified by this portrayal of race. The nature of “othering” any non-white race has been prevalent through mockery from a long time⁷. What must be recognised is that the setting for the second book is based on the second generation of Davids in 1993 Manhattan. Therefore, going back to Wika’s experience, such mockery towards race was heavily generalised. The representation of identity takes this multiple-reflective approach. Wika wonders why there must be a definite standard of behaviour or portrayal of a certain race and why others who looked disregarded his culture. The notion of representation is quite tricky as it seems as if Wika confronts with questions riddled with “where he belongs”. For identities to be celebrated, multiple representations must be accepted. R. Rzayeva Oktay mentions that multiculturalism is the freedom to choose cultural samples and has a pluralistic overview. That is postmodern in the present context (p.79). While there was a clear understanding of American capitalisation and its neo-liberal control over “urbanising” Hawaii, there was also the helplessness of revolting against a force that entails recreation.

⁷ The caricature portrayal of Black community in the theatres by white individuals that lasted until as last of 1978.

In 2093, the third book elucidates a look into the future—a totalitarian society formed in the face of multiple pandemics. Here the marriage act changes as well. What was once known as an American that provides a safe space for the LGBTQ community now decides to change that narrative to pro-create. In a letter to Peter, Charles mentions the reasons and effects of this decision. The justice minister claims to respect the pre-existing marital statuses. However, those committed to the Marriage Act of 2077 receive all benefits from the union and society. This means only biologically male and female individuals who marry shall receive all community and state incentives (Yanagihara 620). When the totalitarian government takes over and sets these countries not by name but as Zones to establish a rigid form of discipline to ration food and financial sources, the readers find that these “zones” become hierarchal with time. Out of twenty-one zones, Zone 14 is considered abundant with food, a better environment, successful researchers and a place with bigger units (p.428). By then, virus pandemics have become normalised. American society is dominated by the state and then overthrown by anarchic revolution. In the face of these political changes, the people are the ones whose lives are at cost.

The impact of art culture practised amongst the elite in Book III portrays the effect of Hawaiian culture appropriation. When Charles is introduced to the wealthy couple Aubrey and Norris by his husband Nathaniel, Charles begins to realise the unevenness of their marriage. Charles knew the life Nathaniel envisioned was a mirror that Aubrey and Norris reflect. He mentions how childish the hate for Aubrey and Norris was because he felt disappointed (Yanagihara 475). After the attack on Hawaii and international looters arriving on the island, Hawaii lost most of its art from its museums. These artefacts were taken to be “rescued” by the Alexandria Project, which Charles mentions was a selfish move because what they are doing is “keeping everything for themselves, stored in giant warehouses where it could never be seen

again” (p.475). Charles is of Hawaiian descent; therefore, he could feel the distaste within him when Aubrey and Norris spoke so highly of “preserving culture”, whereas these important art collections become a decoration at their house.

While there are alterations and rejections of the original American history, Yanagihara keeps the notion of American colonisation and racial and social class distinction accurate to what it is presently. This reveals that despite the past or present changes, there are inevitable changes as long as the dominant class prevails. The state controls the power to hold decisions despite the needs of the people. Therefore, these instances remind the readers that. American experiments of “equal rights” and “equal opportunities” cannot be settled through a one-dimensional identity approach.

iii. Righteousness of Revolutions, Politics and Human Relationships

One of the prominent aspects through which the characters seek to better their lives is connected with political status and relationships. It reminds the readers that social and political practices affect every part of one’s life. Moreover, Yanagihara paints a picture of social justice and its internal righteousness can affect relationships. David and Edward from Book I and David and Edward from Book II share similar dynamics. There is a sense of domination that derives from a certain status.

For instance, Edward Bishop comes from a lower-class system in Book I. Eventually, he manipulates David Bingham, one of the elites of New York, with the promise of a happily ever after. This promise of “paradise” affects David emotionally and physically as he forgoes psychosis when Edward disappears for days. The readers, with time, witness that Edward has had a complicated past. Adopted by a family, his sister and Edward had an opportunity to have a normal childhood. However, it becomes difficult for Edward to adjust and move on from his past because

his father leaves him and his sister in an orphanage and runs away as he is accused of money embezzlement and stealing. Growing up, this incident eventually made Edward shadow similar patterns as he frequently stole from his adoptive mother and relatives. Between Edward and David, it is prominent that Edward has more influence in navigating the relationship. David is ultimately disowned by his grandfather and his heritage in the end, fully knowing that there is a chance that Edward might only be with him because of his inheritance and social status. Instances where he compulsively lies to David about his past are one of the indicators. The author intentionally leaves out if Edward's version of the truth or the detective's investigation is his real past. It is up to David and the readers to decide. Despite knowing that there is a chance that Edward may leave him after they move to California, he has to take the opportunity to find his "paradise". David's past is also tainted by the love he had lost to another man. This left him anxious and unable to make romantic connections until he encountered Edward Bishop.

Again, in Book II, Edward and David have a similar resemblance. Here, Edward takes the lead in reconstructing the representation and power of royalty. He believes this would reclaim the power of the Americans. As they reside in the empty, barren land of Lipo-wao-nahele, David is on the brim of physical exhaustion. With no food supply or electricity, David, his son, and Edward continue living with brutal consequences. Driven by this madness and responsibility to take back this legacy, David and Edward create an inhospitable environment on the island. With time, David (Wika), there comes a distance between David and his son. Since the island did not have the accommodation to nourish his son, he borrowed food and housing supplies from his mother. Eventually, David's grandmother decides to take him away from the island. Edward dies due to drowning, and David (Wika) is taken back to a hospital as he is paralysed due to malnutrition.

In search of a life that promises freedom and the ultimate comfort that resonates with a “paradise,” the Davids had to sacrifice their past and present. The love for their significant other becomes the only force of motivation. There is tension, desire and motivation for security and a “happily ever after”. Romantic relationships in this context are interrelated with class division and national righteousness. In this context, the Edwards know their effect on their partner. They want to move to California and restore the Hawaiian monarchy for their sense of accomplishment. Yanagihara represents the notion of these loving relationships with the search for paradise. At the end of each book, the Davids are mistreated, ill and bewildered. The heaven that they sacrificed their familial attachments for comes to a ridiculing end. These relationships were built on love, but the effect of it does not last. With this, the author portrays that “paradise” is not limited to a specific type of freedom. Instead, it differs for each individual. It is a fascination. In “Postmodern Love: Questioning the Metaphysics of Desire”, Catherine Belsey mentions that this fascination stems from an unknown degree of values and meaning which can be personal, cultural investing in the body and their actions (p.688). This dream of paradise is absent, but the desire is compelling enough for the characters to leave their past behind and follow a future they cannot fully comprehend themselves.

Hanya Yanagihara extends this concept of desire from the perspective of the “American dream”. She mentions that many ancestors, including her own, chose to migrate there because they considered it a kind of paradise. Therefore, the idea of paradise is attached to the notion of the “West”. Three of the stories scattered in different generations address this notion ideally through the characters. Again the author portrays the concept of family in a way that does not necessarily constitute “father and mother”. Instead, it should be comprised of who is the essential caregiver (John Adams Institute). The relationship between Charlie and her grandfather, Charles, and Charlie

and her husband, Edward, are instances to understand how it is not always family one may receive the most proper form of love and protection. The author mentions, “These people are generally a unity due to their lack of direct parent-ship”. One of the prominent instances that one can adhere to is the character David in the third book. The son of Charles and Nathaniel: David resonates with the character Edward from Book II. The anarchic revolution against the state had cost them his life. Charlie’s parents, being anarchists, had little to no interest in parenthood. Ironically, when the insurgent revolution comes to power, citizens lose their right to exercise the freedom these revolutions were constructed for. Rejecting the scientific decision to create camps, there is a distinct understanding of how his son David revolts against camps where different races were sent to other camps. For Charles, it is propaganda against science, while for Charles, it is a rejection as it violates the collective humanity of the citizens and their moral rights (p.479). As a result, her grandparents nurtured her through her childhood. These emotions that derive from changing their society for radical notions are not necessarily problematised. However, it is the effect of anger from both the righteous powerful and the revolutionaries that provide an insight into politics and nationalism. The feeling of anger is the passion that drives these individuals to find freedom. The adventure to find this paradise then is almost always political.

iv. Temporal Disorder and Fragmentation: The Tale of Uneven Timelines

While it is quite prominent to see temporal distortion in films and science fiction as it shifts to different timelines, *To Paradise* creates multiple narratives with characters who have similar names. Temporal disorder or distortion is considered one of the characteristics of postmodernism. Postmodern authors use this feature to highlight the irony in their literary work. Yanagihara paints

three different generations in the sections of her novel. She takes her readers on a journey from 1893 to 1993 and moves forward to 2093. The transition of the time is often fragmented with letters or disrupted memories of the past.

Book Two is again split into two parts. The first section explains David's life in Manhattan, who is in a committed relationship with Charles Griffith. This same-sex relationship is at the peak of the AIDS epidemic. The second part is a letter to David (Kawika) from his father, David (Wika). While Book Two illustrates the social class difference between the same-sex individuals of the American elite class, the second part highlights the unending struggle to retrieve the land and reign of royalty from American colonisation. Some factual references are fictionalised to show the irony behind searching for freedom and peace. It questions the dynamics of relationships and social structure. The shattering end to Wika and his son's relationship occurs as Edward and Wika fight against the system. Their motive was to re-create their past, even if it meant living in an inhabitable space called Lipo-Wao-Nahele, Wika's family heritage which was then his. With the delegation of Edward's fabricated idea of a Hawaiian monastery of the past, present and future, the three lived on the island like nomads. This costs Edward's death, Wika's paralysis and ultimately, the loving father-son relationship that both Davids shared. To escape his past, Kawika moves to America, only to discover that he is "othered" because of his social class and skin colour. This "otherness" is internalised by his partner and his elite friends and often confirmed by instances when a homeless man calls him a "Chink", "fag", and a "wop" (p.194).

Book Three is the most extended of the three books. It shifts from the past to the present, showcasing the point of view of Charlie, the granddaughter and Charles, the grandfather. For instance, Part One of the Book is "Autumn 2093", while the second part is fifty years earlier. The author transitions this shift as a form of letters to a particular 'Peter' that Charles sends often.

Consequently, the fall of humanity in the face of a totalitarian regime and an unending pandemic represents a dystopian society that the present world is leading towards. Despite the effect of a threatful surveillance society, the immense desire to protect relationships and love illustrates the unity between the characters. The struggle to find paradise continues.

Tatyana Fedosova, in “Reflection of Time in Postmodern Literature”, states that “writers intentionally break off the chronological narration with reminiscences of characters or prosecutions” as it intrigues tension and unexpected turn of events (p.79). Postmodern authors can change the order, shift the stages with time and keep an open-ended narrative in their world. Fedosova adds that this temporal chaos can sometimes make it difficult for the readers to navigate the reconstruction of this pattern (p.89). Similarly, through the initial reading of the novel, one may assume that the Davids were interconnected through a specific hereditary factor. However, with the book’s progress, the readers realise that the books are divorced. The settings and names of the characters are similar, but with different generations, the characters have different storylines. This is to show that time in itself is a complex phenomenon. Despite similar settings, the struggles may differ. The urge to protect the ones they truly love and the longing for a peaceful life still prevails.

There is an evident temporal distortion in the second and third books. It is done through the detailed reading of letters. Letters in the book play a significant role. It is a message of confession. It is a series of journaling that is only confined to a specific person. Through the opening of each letter from different books, a new understanding clarifies and sometimes confuses the readers. For instance, in the first book, the letters sent by the detective as a report and the ones that Edward sends to David after he leaves for months are significant. The readers find out the truth behind Edward’s family, and his letters confirm that there is a possibility that he (Edward)

compulsively lies about his childhood and present plans. In Book Two, the letters David's father sent him to provide insight into who David is, if not only a young partner of the elite lawyer Charles. His identity and childhood escape are helpless precautions for his future. The letters of Book Three are an intricate puzzle. It travels back and forth fifty years from the current chapter, which highlights the plot of Charlie in 2093 and 2094, the years she spends without her grandfather. These letters prove how the epidemic changed throughout the years, the effect of the antidote, the changes in the Marriage Act and the unending violence between the state and the insurgents. The impact of class, politics and sickness ruptures his family's foundation. However, his efforts to protect the last member of his family, his granddaughter, are prevalent even after his death through these letters he sent to Peter.

v. Tracing Intertextuality and Pastiche

These different timelines in the novel narrate stories of different ages that highlight the conditions of American society. Pastiche in postmodernism refers to pasting various styles from the past. It accentuates the notion of parody or homage to authors, art or writing. While Fredric Jameson finds the practice of pastiche or parody "without vocation" and a "random allusion", Linda Hutcheon in "The Politics of Postmodernism" mentions that there is nothing inherently random at all. The self-aware and parodic elements of contemporary works do not try to hide. Instead, they provide an ideological, social, and historical environment that acknowledges both the past and the present (p.183).

As stated before, Yanagihara's choice to establish a marriage novel is fulfilled through Book I as the readers look into marriage in the 19th century as a sense of security. This constitutional arrangement is arranged between families with similar values and financial stability. As a result, David's grandfather arranged his marriage with a much older widower Charles

Griffith, who comes from a long line of successful shipbuilders. The first book progresses linearly, paying homage to the modernist writing style. It is old-fashioned and realistic. It is a homage to the works of Henry James. David Bingham, the holder of Bingham heritage, lives under the shadow of this grandfather. Comforting as it may, it also increases the sense of shame and guilt as most of his siblings have moved away from the house and built a life for themselves. While America has an alternate history after the Civil War, these changes remind the readers that a country's social and economic orders evolve with time.

The author shows this reality variable from the initial stage of the novel. In an interview with "The New Yorker," she mentions the character "Dr Austin Sloper" in 1880 novel names "Washington Square" by Henry James. The strenuous relationship between the doctor and his daughter inspires her to articulate the dynamic between David and his grandfather. After Dr Slope suspects his daughter's love interest Morris Townsends of financially scheming her, their bitter relationship halts their marriage and ends. He also minimises the fortune he leaves for Catherine Slope as this suspicion of his remains. The representation of the characters and what the novel signifies is equivalent to Book I: family values, tradition, betrayal and the image of refuting these aspects to achieve free will.

Unlike Book I, Book II represents Hawaii and the loss of culture and heredity due to the American capitalist regime. The book's second narrative splits into two sections. The experiences of David's father (Wika) are presented through letters which almost seem like a journal. The historical record of the American colonisation through capital and the royalty being overthrown is based on historical events. David's family is an integral part of the Hawaiian Kingdom, but with time they lose their properties and belongings to the American invasion on January 16, 1893. The monarch of the Hawaiian Kingdom, Queen Lili'uokalani, surrendered due to the threat of an

upcoming war⁸. The history of the Hawaiian heritage is often misrepresented and absent in American studies. Textbook American history has yet to change and recognise their invasion of Hawaiian history. With fables, names of the characters and their struggle to reclaim the account of the land, the author represents a side of Hawaii that is not “Americanised”. Unlike the promises of America to revolutionise and improve Hawaii, the treaties and unities were a process to colonise the country. Yanagihara stresses systemic injustice in history by representing the effects of the events. The author mentions the famous Hawaiian protest song “Kaulana Nā Pua” by Eleanor Kekoaoihiwaikalani Wright Prendergast. A part of the song⁹ roughly translates as

“No one will fix a signature
 To the paper of the enemy
 With its sin of annexation
 And the sale of native civil rights
 We do not value
 The government's sums of money
 We are satisfied with the stones
 Astonishing food of the land.”

The sense of revolution after generations is still firm, yet it is bleak in the face of mass production and rising globalisation. In “The Postmodern Problematizing of History”, Linda Hutcheon reinstates that postmodern history and literature reinstate the importance and even determinacy of

⁸ Historical context taken from the article “The Illegal Overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom Government” by Dr Keanu Sai

⁹ Kaulana Nā Pua (Famous Are The Flowers) translated by “Ocean Folk”

historical context but do so at the expense of problematising the entirety of historical knowledge (p. 367). While there are actual historical references in the novel that highlights

One of the author's postmodern traits is blending the writing style and creating an overarching transition of themes. In this transition from a 19th-century marriage novel to a journalistic storytelling of the past through letters in the 20th century, the readers now open the pages to the extended part of the book: Zone Eight. Reviewed by many, this portion of the book could represent a separate novel. The characters do not share similar dynamics between the Edwards and Davids as seen in Books I and II. The reason behind this because the relationship between Charlie and her grandfather Charles provides an insight into the importance of guardianship, protection and nurture of loved ones in the face of a surveillance society entrapped with unending epidemics. Society's storyline, construction, and rise of censorship and control undoubtedly resemble George Orwell's *1984*.

Looking back at the novel, the following themes are the fall of democracy, free speech, science and technology as a political tool and surveillance. A modern outlook enhances the reader's perception of free will. By reconstructing the narrative of the American map and its society in 2093, the author revisits the issues of control and power in the face of recurring epidemics. When Charlie's grandfather, one of the most prominent scientists and researchers in America, was killed by the insurgents because of his association with the state. The revolutionary party had taken over the state power (p.584). However, the citizens lacked the exercise of freedom. The epidemics from 2054, 2070, and 2076 and again in 2093 would damage minors' and adults' health and cognitive growth. The co-habitation of citizens during these trying times reflects the effects that Albert Camus mentions in *The Plague* as he says, "But again and again there comes a time in history when the man who dares to say that two and two make four is punished with death"

(p.118). Charlie's adventure to seek a life where she can achieve freedom follows in the hands of David, an agent Peter, her grandfather's friend, sent from Britain. However, this sense of freedom seems to be a fundamental right to eat, live and experience nature again. The author brings an unusual perception of space to show the readers that release comes at the cost of what is deprived of the individuals.

With references to Orwell's novel, the author illustrates the dangers of a one-party control which thrives on oppression. In the face of climate change and eternal outbreaks due to viruses, the only yearning remains to be free and loved by the ones who are perhaps not bound by blood but with an empathetic connection to chaos. Looking back into Hutcheon's outlook on the postmodern use of pastiche and references confirms that Yanagihara looks back on these literature and historical events to show the society's unchanged ideological changes and attitudes. However, with these literary effects, she recognises the desire to protect, seek comfort, and react to failure from love, loss, success, and loneliness.

vi. Postmodern Reaction to Climate Change: A Look into Technology and Capitalism

While many are suspicious of the postmodern rejection of climate change values, such conceptions are being challenged with the advent of contemporary authors. The reason behind this is that these traditional postmodern values are challenged. With time the literary effects of the Anthropocene change the postmodern literature is both interrogative and suspicious. That being said, it is not wary of climate change in general. Danique Roozkrans, in his paper, "The Post-postmodern Change of Climate in Contemporary Novels: A Different Perspective on the Environment?" mentions Houghton Conway saying that the environmental issues should never

have been taken seriously or fully covered in that historical period because of the postmodern concepts of irony and relativism (p.16). I cannot entirely agree with this statement because postmodernists are suspicious and interrogative against transformative capitalism and industrialisation.

Nevertheless, they are not in denial. For instance, Serpil Opperman's "Seeking Environmental Awareness in Postmodern Fictions" enlightens the notion that postmodern fiction portrays itself as wholly self-aware books with an environmental concern built into their metafictional constructions. In this light, postmodern novels have a crucial role in spreading ecological values due to their universal appeal (p.244). The second and third part of the book enunciates the issues of climate destruction issued by humanity.

Book Two recognises this effect when David, his son, and Edward are determined to settle in Lipo-wao-nahele. Roughly translated as "The Dark Forest", David's grandfather considers it the "Forest of Paradise" (p.318). The degradation of the environment alleviates through the participation of Edward and David, trying to re-establish the monarchy on the barren island that is devoid of food and shelter. Living under tents and piling dozens of plastic forks, plates, bags and boxes, David realised that "The place was now worse than unloved; it was degraded, and it was Edward and I who degraded it" (p.334). Even the slightest chance to embrace happiness by flying a kite seemed bleak because of the air quality. For David, it felt like the wind had abandoned him and his son (p.341).

With changes in generations, as the book travels towards 2093, the readers are acquainted with a new form of society-a society without nature and abundant with viral epidemics. The readers read the letters sent by Charles to his friend Peter fifty years earlier than 2093 and 2094. With this, they realise that this apocalyptic turn occurs with every epidemic. The state makes changes in

social and architectural decisions. With the shift from a democracy to an authoritarian government, the differences show that America is not a free country. Before the insurgents capture Charles, he requests his friend to rescue Charlie from America. He realises that for a long time, he assumed that the virus would destroy them and that “Humans would be felled by something greater and much smaller” than themselves. However, it was not the case, as humans are responsible for this atrocity. He says, “Some of us will die, but others will keep doing what we always have, continuing on our oblivious way, doing what our nature compels us to, silent and unknowable and unstoppable in our rhythms” (p.641).

Affirmatively, the author represents an awareness of the global crisis that humankind is facing. This is not recent because it has resulted from historically ignoring the factual issues of urbanisation and technological advancement. The representation of the problem in nature represents not only the postmodern urgency to define the causes behind the mortification of nature but also showcases a self-reflexive attitude. Self-reflection in postmodernism is a fundamental trait that shows awareness. Oppermann stresses that the questions of how reality is discursively generated and perpetuated, how language impacts our perceptions of the world, and how it controls how we make decisions about fact are raised by postmodern ecological fiction (p.248).

As the last part of the book represents the dystopian reality, it questions the acts individuals take in the face of the constricted nature of their environment. Charlie is not David from Book I. She is not following a path for love. Charlie is not like David from Book II either. She has no desire to rekindle her past with her heritage. Charlie’s perception of freedom in the most valid form is to free herself from the torment of social constriction and experience nature with a stable life. One prominent acknowledgement from this part of the book shows the effect of surveillance on the masses. In the 21st century, the issues of humans are being treated to an extent as data.

The zones and their civilians represent what is to come when technology under totalitarian control may look like. It is a perception of reality as scientific evolution has put barriers or limits. A promise of urbanisation and an “easier” lifestyle leads to the subjugation of freedom. Postmodernism questions this scientific development. A surveillance society in *To Paradise* carries itself through a strict regime, discipline and effective action against those who believe otherwise. However, one must question how this surveillance is taking control over the masses. Again, it seems that citizens in the Zones have very little to say or even have the chance to protest against. It is as if the power is surveying the zones through a panoptic eye. One of the prominent examples of this very idea of the panopticon goes back to the analogy of Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punishment* when he mentions that surveillance, in general, is not limited to prisoners or criminals. Any and every institution is then under supervision. He adds that this infinite political power is calculative. Since it extended an intermediary network between these various, enclosed institutions of discipline (workshops, armies, schools), acting where they could not intervene, disciplining the non-disciplinary spaces, it had a complex function; however, it filled in the gaps, linked them together, and guaranteed with its armed force an interstitial discipline and “a meta-discipline” (Foucault 215). A surveillance society for the Zones in America becomes arduous since the food supplies, environment and growth spurt are forced or manufactured through the lens of authority.

Therefore, I must add that there is no end to postmodernism yet. Indeed, there are reactions and changes to how postmodernism is seen through the lens of artists, architects and authors. However, the notion that postmodernism rejects science and scientific concerns is changing. Climate change and the very idea of globalisation are almost always political. Postmodern authors

enlighten their readers on the same effect of politics and industrialisation on humankind through literature.

vii. Illustrating Postmodern Self-Reflexivity in the Novel

Hanya Yanagihara's characters in all of her books are quite self-aware. Her characters may not be exponentially heroic because she shows the deepest and darkest desires and traumas that shape her characters. *To Paradise* is a postmodern outlook on the different generations of struggles related to class, politics, society, and relationships. It is an outlook to variable realities. It is a shift to alternate history and facts mixed with familiar narratives that the readers can encounter. This is why I can say that the universes are linked. The generations, however, differ. This shows that despite these changes, the only aspect that remains is the desire to love, protect and search for nothing but peace. One of the fascinating aspects of Yanagihara's characters is that they are self-aware of their surroundings and loved ones. Despite that, they choose to stay and experience the love that they have to offer. This self-awareness is not limited to only love. For instance, the Davids in the books know social and class differences. The reactions of each David differ with generation.

Book One David is aware of his elitism and still fights against traditional values to be with his loved ones. In Book Two, David blindly follows the steps of his partner Edward to re-establish the monarch despite knowing that it may never be resolved in the face of American capitalism. In Book Three, David sacrifices himself to free the people under the regime of the state because of his radical values and criticism of the government. Ironically all the Davids could never accomplish what they thrived for, which is to establish a peaceful life. With every step and realisation, these characters become unreliable narrators to themselves and their readers. The

characters claim the truth but never accept it because reality is blurred with their perception of thought and personal belief. In a part of the letter in Book II, David's father mentions,

He wouldn't know until he was much older that no one was ever free, that to know and love someone was to assume the task of remembering them, even if that person was still living. No one could escape that duty, and as you aged, you grew to crave that responsibility even as you sometimes resented it, that knowledge that your life was inextricable from another's, that a person marked their existence in part by their association with you. (Yanagihara 231)

Therefore, there is no essential "paradise". Each book ends with the character's journey to reach paradise. In the book I, David runs away with Edward to California; in Book II, David fights paralysis to walk to reconcile his relationship with his son. In Book III, Charlie escapes from America to live away from the authoritarian dystopian society. However, the readers do not learn if they accomplished this journey. They are unaware that these struggles blessed them with a happy ending.

In the talk at The John Adams Institute, Hanya Yanagihara illustrates that this book is an inquiry "to understand what it feels like to live in America at present". Interrelating it with the Buddhist saying, "Whenever you are talking about the present, you are talking about the past, and when you talk about the future, you are talking about the present." Therefore, this "present tenseness" is what she wants the book to represent. A history that is not written yet (1:11:36-1:13:00). Self-reflexive traits in the novel has no space for romanticising emotions. It gives freedom to reveal the "inner demons" that modernists often try to question. As a postmodern author, she successfully releases these anxieties deep within every individual and presents them through these characters. It aids in interrelating those emotions instead of villainising oneself.

The characters reflect upon their actions and critique them to understand and distinguish their past from the present truth. As a result, this self-reflexive attitude under an alternate universe with three variable generations poses an important question. It questions how individuals would behave in these circumstances. It examines if society is the tool that shapes these characters. If so, they must find a narrative where their impact changes these social settings. Semra Saracoglu, in her work “Self-Reflexivity in Postmodern Texts”, quotes Thomas Pavel’s notion of ontology to prove that postmodernism as a theory has an ontological look to reality. She says postmodernism represents “a universe and not of the universe” as a work of fiction (p. 4). Agreeably so, Yanagihara is not presenting the readers with reality. She is showing a fictional universe with scrapes of fact to portray how despite the unstable situations in life, there is always a desire that humans strive towards. This desire can be interrelated and changed from the perspective of family values and political and traditional prejudice. The narrative is multi-layered, mysterious, and sometimes bemusing, but it is intentional. However, this bewildering frustration reveals many aspects of emotions that readers may want to hide.

Conclusion

Postmodernism as a theory has transformed through the ages. The revolution that the Beat Generation has left is becoming a narrative in literature. The notion that America is the ultimate place of paradise is now questioned through the lens of politics, race and culture. Hanya Yanagihara's alternate outlook of America makes the readers question the effect of multiple possibilities of the universe and asks themselves if there would have been any possible changes in individuals. The desire to live better and protect their loved ones will be challenged. The novel seems scattered due to the author's unwillingness to correct or rescript this piece of writing which almost portrays itself as a wet painting showcased in an art gallery under challenging circumstances. Love, fear, jealousy, needs, longings and loneliness unite people. While paying homage to authors, writing techniques and Hanya Yanagihara's understanding of desire, the novel has become a true masterpiece. *To Paradise* is then perhaps heaven that is not destined. There is no "ideal paradise"—only spectrums of interpretations of us, the readers.

Illustration References

The illustrations below are the reconstructed American map from 1893, 1993 and 2093, respectively.

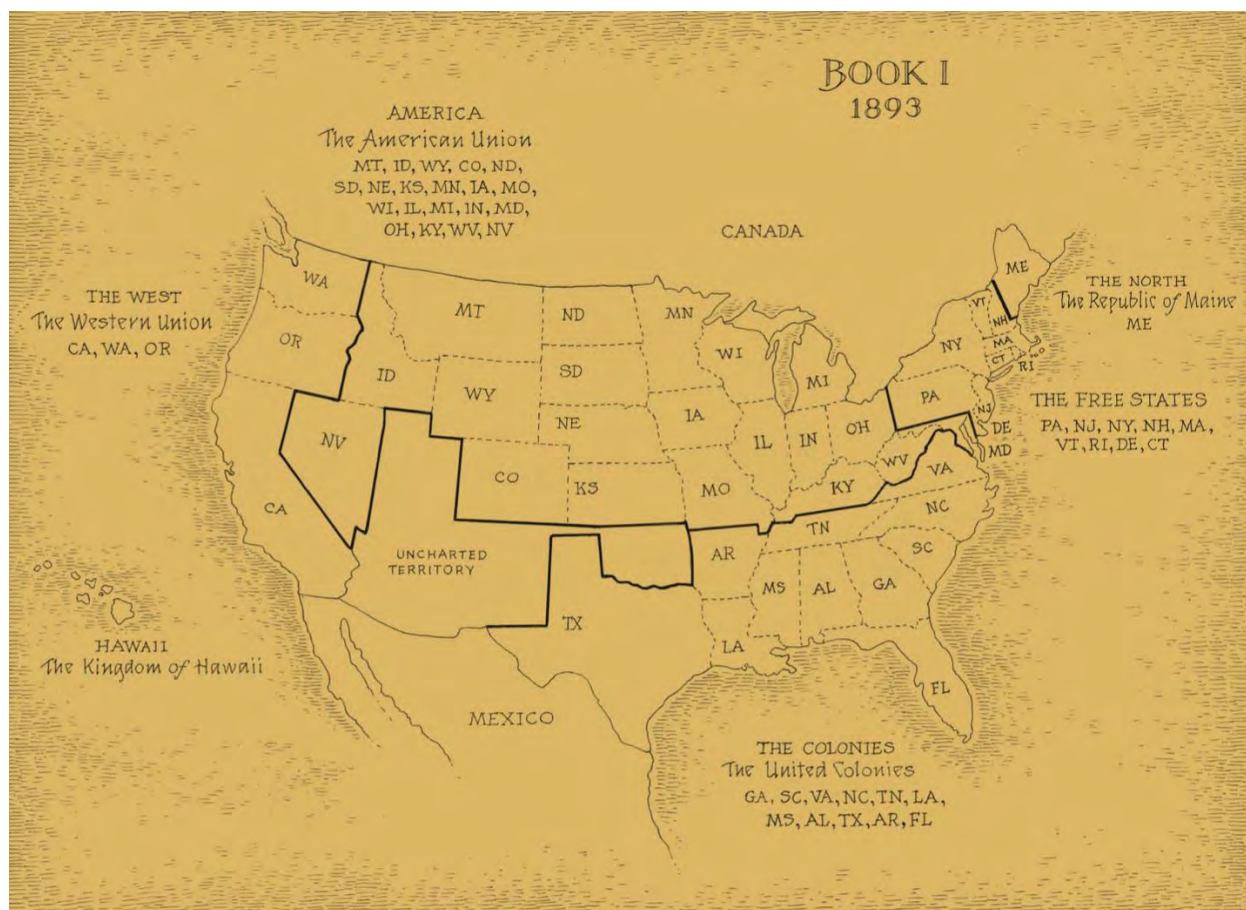


Figure 1. Book One, Washington Square 1893

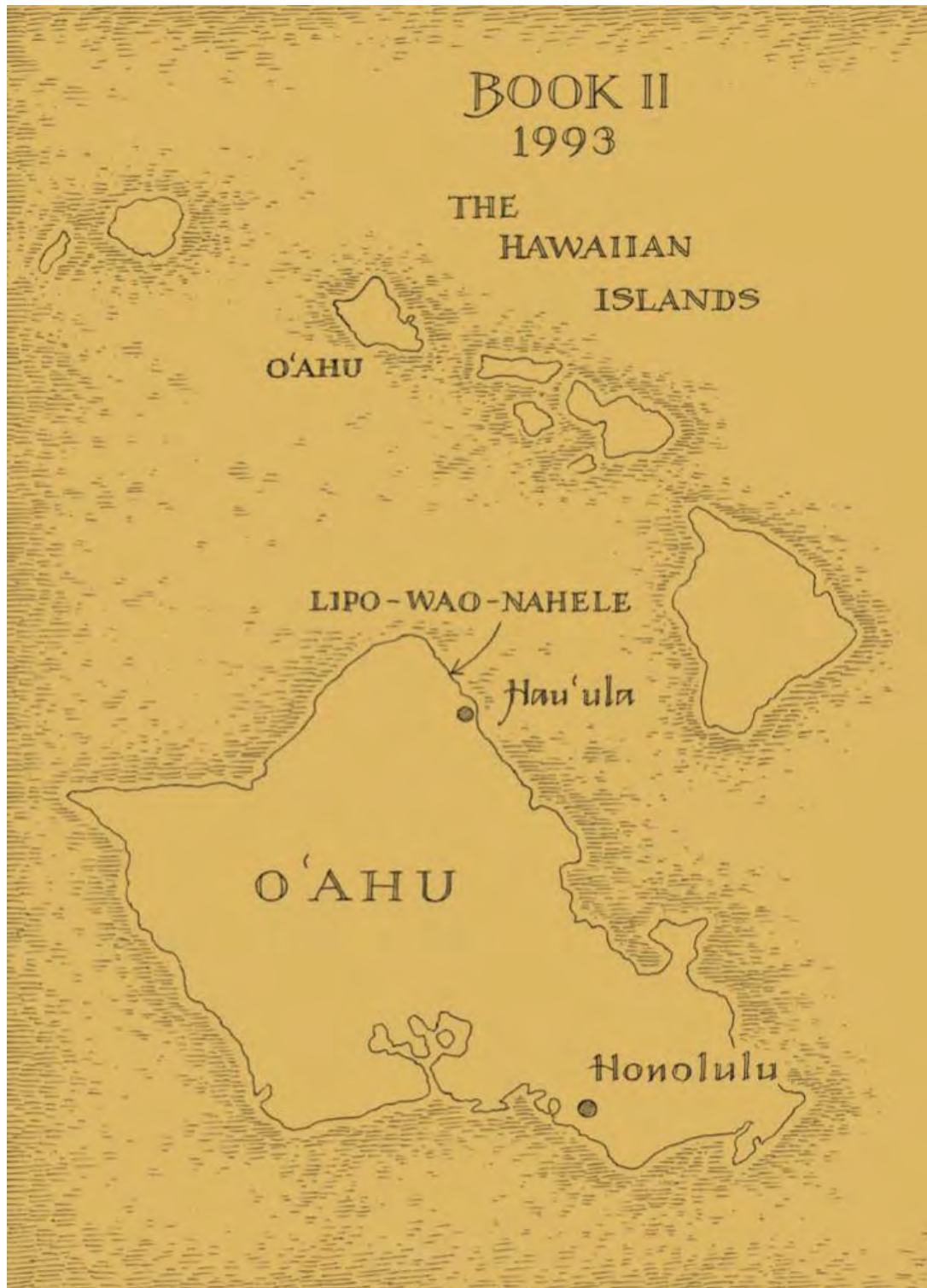


Figure 2. Book Two, Lipo-Wao-Nahele, 1993

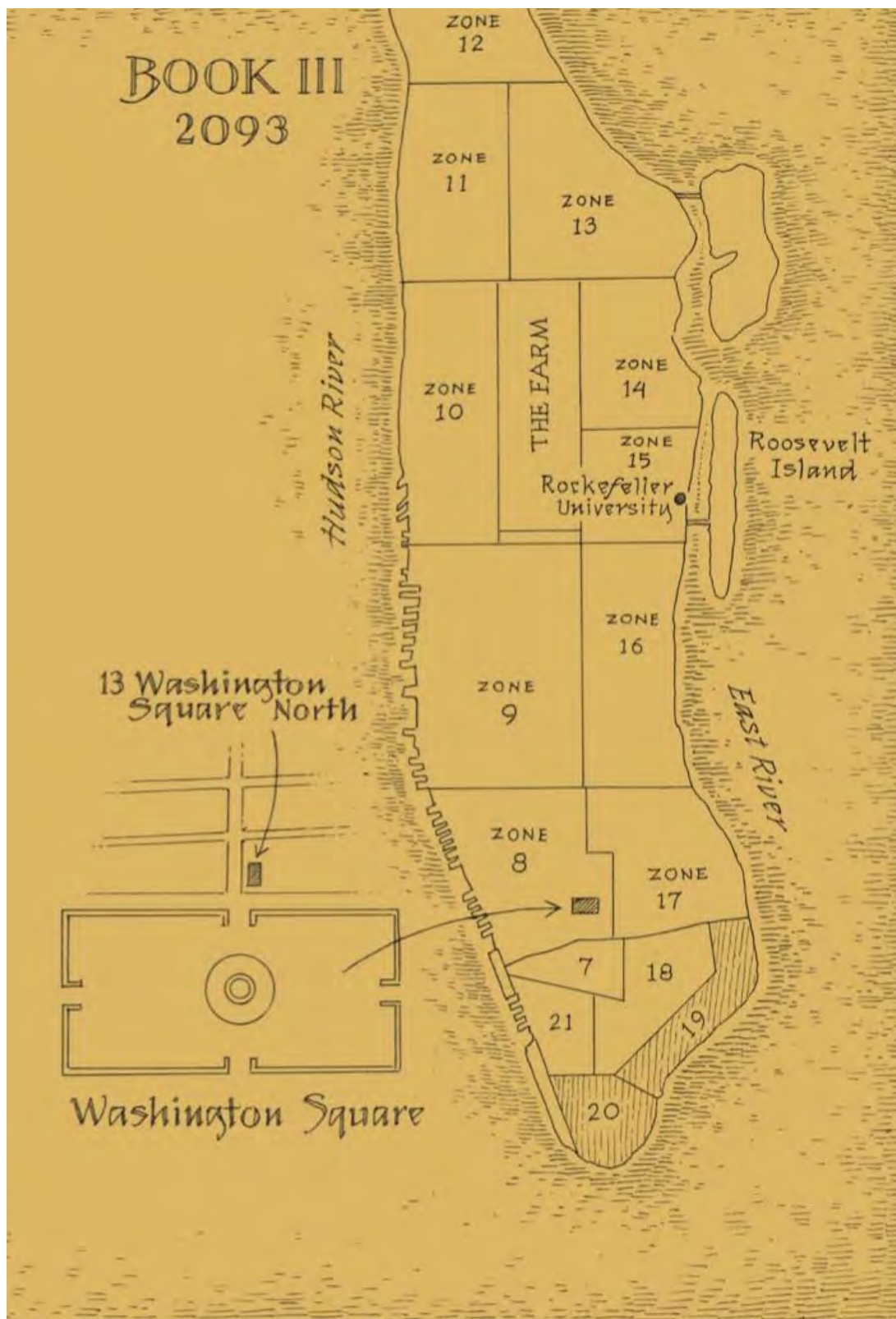


Figure 3. Book Three, Zone Eight, 2093

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