01. Hanya Yanagihara's *To Paradise* as Hypertext [1]

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Abstract

The article examines Hanya Yanagihara's third novel, *To Paradise*, by exploring how it is reshaped into a hypertext to reveal historical pessimism. By drawing on the concept of transtextuality by Gérard Genette, it argues the novel does not merely allude to Henry James's *Washington Square* and Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* but rather radically transforms them into something new. *To Paradise* preserves the nineteenth-century marriage plot pattern in James's novel but questions and changes the normative assumptions associated with it. The novel adopts the triptych structure from *Specimen Days* and presents similar patterns in various historical periods across three centuries. In fact, *Specimen Days* is already in an intertextual relationship with Walt Whitman through its title and many references to one of his poems in the novel. Therefore, Yanagihara extends this multi-layered intertextual relationship in her own novel. The characters' names, recurring locations, relationship dynamics, and emotional states like love, dependency, and loss provide a continuity between the different sections of the novel, yet the author refuses the idea of historical progress. The possible alternative historical imaginings create the expectation of change, but they all serve to reveal the same pessimistic patterns and endings. In conclusion, the novel proves that creating a hypertext is not only a formal choice but also a tool to show the limitations of historical imagination. History can be fictionalized in various ways; it might not always repeat itself, yet the characters continue to find themselves in comparable impasses.

Keywords: Contemporary American literature, Hanya Yanagihara, intertextuality, transtextuality, hypertextuality

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Hiper-Metin olarak Hanya Yanagihara'nın *Cennete* Romanı [3]

Öz

Makale, Hanya Yanagihara'nın üçüncü romanı To *Paradise* (*Cennete*) adlı romanının, farklı edebî biçimleri yeniden işleyerek tarihsel kötümserciliği hiper-metin olarak nasıl ortaya koyduğunu inceler. Gérard Genette'in metinlerötesilik kavramından yola çıkarak, bu üç bağımsız bölümden oluşan romanın Henry James'in *Washington Square* (*Washington Meydanı*) ve Michael Cunningham'ın *Specimen Days* (*Numune Günleri*) romanlarına sadece gönderme yapmadığını, bu metinleri radikal bir biçimde dönüştürdüğünü savunur. *To Paradise,* James'in romanındaki on dokuzuncu yüzyıl evlilik olay örgüsünün temel ögelerini korur, ancak normatif kabul edilen varsayımlarını sorgular ve onları değiştirerek tekrar sunar. *Specimen Days*'den ise biçimsel üçlü yapıyı ödünç alır ve farklı tarihsel dönemlerden tekrarlayan kesitlerle benzer örüntüler kurar. Aslında *Specimen Days* de hem ismiyle hem de içindeki göndermelerle Walt Whitman'la metinlerarası bir ilişki içinde olduğu için, bu çok katmanlı ilişkiyi Yanagihara kendi romanıyla devralmış olur. Karakter isimleri, mekanlar ve ilişki dinamikleri sevgi, bağımlılık ve kayıp gibi duygular aracılığıyla bölümler arasında bir devamlılık sağlar, ancak aynı zamanda tarihsel bir ilerleme fikrini reddeder. Alternatif tarihsel senaryolar değişim beklentisi yaratsa da aynı kötümser örüntülerin ve sonların tekrarlandığını göstermek için kullanılırlar. Roman, hiper-metni sadece edebî bir teknik olarak kullanmayarak, onun tarihsel tahayyülerin sınırlılığını gösterebilen bir araç olduğunu kanıtlar. Tarih farklı biçimlerde kurgulanabilir, kendini tekrar etme biçimleri sınırlandırılabilir, ancak tarih, romanın karakterleri için benzer çıkmazlar üretmeye devam eder.

Anahtar kelimeler: Çağdaş Amerikan edebiyatı, Hanya Yanagihara, metinlerarasılık, metinlerötesilik, hiper-metin

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Introduction

To Paradise (2022) is Hanya Yanagihara's third novel. Like her previous two novels, her third novel is lengthy and offers ample opportunity for scholars to analyze it from a generic, historicist, and psychoanalytic perspective, among others. The novel has received some scholarly attention for its speculative qualities, its reimagining of American history, particularly the postbellum United States, and planetary processes (Caracciolo, 2024); for its portrayal of the posthuman condition (Sriee & Kannadhasan, 2025); and for its rewriting of gender through the creation of alternate histories (Nünning, 2025). Other than a few graduate theses and mostly negative reviews in journals and newspapers, the novel has been underexplored in many aspects. Until now, its formal and structural relationship to other fictional works has not been examined. This article aims to address this gap by arguing that the novel is a hypertext in Gérard Genette's sense because of how it transforms Henry James's *Washington Square* (1880) and Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* (2005) so as to present a vision of historical pessimism. This transformation is rendered through the adoption of the triptych form from Specimen Days, the reappropriation of the nineteenth-century marriage plot as it had been represented by James in his novel, and the recurrent use of names, spaces, and emotional states. As she continues her reconfiguration throughout the three sections of her novel, Yanagihara's hypertextuality functions as a structural articulation of the cyclical nature of the lives of individuals, families, and nations.

Although broader theories of intertextuality are applicable to the novel's relationship to other texts, the article primarily draws upon another form of intentionality in textual relationality. Genette's precise taxonomy of transtextuality is realized through the distinctions he highlights between intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, and architextuality. Genette defines transtextuality as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (1997, p. 1). Architextuality refers to the generic or taxonomical relationship of the text to literature in general: "The entire set of general or transcendent categories—types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres—from which emerges each singular text" (p. 1). Yanagihara's triptych novel does not merely allude to other works—most importantly, Henry James's and Michael Cunningham's novels—but uses hypertextual repetition as a structural device to reveal a form of historical pessimism. As used here, historical pessimism can be defined as a cyclical understanding of history that fails to result in genuine progress despite sociopolitical, economic, or technological changes that accompany it. In the novel, history does not necessarily repeat itself, but in all imaginable scenarios, the characters continue to reenact similar psychological patterns of desire, dependence, and loss. Regardless of the socio-political circumstances surrounding them, the characters remain bounded by recurring types of failures.

Before moving into the hypertextual elements in *To Paradise*, the article introduces the intertextual relationship between Cunningham's *Specimen Days* and Whitman's "Song of Myself" because Cunningham occupies an intermediary position between Whitman and Yanagihara. Yanagihara's hypertextual practice can then be analyzed in two main dimensions. First, the article analyzes how the novel adopts Cunningham's triptych structure to foreground repetition, deterioration, and historical failure and explores the recycling of the characters' names and the recurrence of spatial settings that reflect the same emotional states in each section to reinforce historical pessimism. Second, it examines how Yanagihara reappropriates the marriage plot in James's *Washington Square* and similarly uses psychological realism by queering the plot and therefore destabilizing the assumptions related to the genre. This reappropriation serves to shift the pessimistic outlook from the public to the private domain.

The three novels in question can be considered intertextual according to an all-encompassing definition of textual relationality. In this case, however, there is an additional level of intentionality in both *Specimen Days* and *To Paradise*. They should be considered hypertexts because they do not merely refer to a former work but reshape it into something new, thereby signaling continuity and rupture at the same time. *To Paradise* follows a dual process of hypertextuality by transforming the marriage plot as represented in *Washington Square* and imitating the triptych structure of *Specimen Days*.

Literary Inheritance and Hypertextuality

In Genette's terms, two main types of hypertextuality are transformation and imitation. The former is rendered through an alteration or a distortion of a hypotext. Imitation, on the other hand, is an adaptive continuation, and the hypertext reproduces the structure of the hypotext (earlier text) via a sequel or transposition. In imitations, the hypotext is reproduced or extended more faithfully; Genette acknowledges that the hypertext can both transform and imitate its hypotext: "Hypertextuality is not limited to these categories; one text may superimpose several procedures, combining transformation and imitation" (1997, p. 25). While *Specimen Days* alludes explicitly to Whitman's autobiographical account of the same name via the adoption of its title, Yanagihara imitates Cunningham's novel's form and transforms its alternate histories, creating different narratives of the future.

Before a detailed examination of the two main dimensions of hypertextuality in Yanagihara's novel, it is important to highlight the already existing transtextual relationship between Whitman and Cunningham's novel. Specimen Days is the most prominent hypotext that *To Paradise* inherits its structure from, as Yanagihara discloses in an interview; she believes her novel is in conversation with Cunningham's book (Simon, 2022, para. 15). The hypotext's multilayered transtextual relationship begins with its title alluding to Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days* (1882) and continues with many intertextual references through one character's recitation of Whitman's poem "Song of Myself" (1855) as well as an encounter with Whitman himself. Yanagihara expands on this multilayered relationship when she adopts Cunningham's triptych structure. Each section of both novels is set in a different century and reveals many overlaps that are both thematic and stylistic.

The organizational structure is not the only architextural similarity between the novels since *To Paradise* uses the form to showcase how historical recurrences undermine the expectation that historical divergences will result in different outcomes. Moreover, traditional novels carry their continuity through character growth and causality. In this form, continuity is carried by a different pattern of repetition of the characters' names, recurrent locations, and similar relational dynamics between the characters. In both novels, the structure reorients and disorients the reader by rendering form into an argument about the nature of historical progress. In this sense, the form functions as a structural expression of historical pessimism. Both novels converge around emotional patterns such as loss, longing, grief, and dependence despite temporally distinct settings.

Cunningham's *Specimen Days* reworks Whitman's "Song of Myself" intertextually; it embeds quotations from the poem within its narrative tissue. In the first section, Lucas, a young boy, unwittingly recites lines from "Song of Myself," encounters Walt Whitman on the street, and they have a conversation about where the dead go or, rather, that death does not exist at all. In the third section, humanoids of the future are designed to recite poetry, each assigned a different poet ranging from Yeats to Dickinson, and the protagonist, who is increasingly becoming more human-like, recites Whitman. The author also engages in a hypertextual transposition and relocates Whitman's vision of democracy and the self into three

different historical periods, as underscored by his poem and his autobiographical account, also titled *Specimen Days*.

In the novel, the use of Whitman's lines shifts radically across the triptych. In the first section, Whitman's voice through Lucas serves as a source of hope, an attempt at making sense of life and death in industrializing New York. The second section is set in post-9/11 Manhattan. This time the recitation of Whitman becomes an unsettling precursor to random acts of bombing and ensuing violence in the city. When the narrative reaches its third futuristic section, Whitman's words become disjointed fragments randomly assigned to androids, and they are stripped of their original meaning. Therefore, the intertextual presence moves from hypertextual transformation to semantic erasure. According to the author, however, "Whitman functions as, to some extent, the soul of the book, that hard-won, profoundly intelligent optimism that simply won't go away no matter how bad things get" (2005, p. 21). The transformation of the use of Whitman's words throughout the triptych suggests that an idealistic discourse may not survive and remain intelligible across different historical contexts.

One scholar in the novel provides a possible explanation for why Cunningham engages in intertextuality through Whitman. It is because Whitman is very inclusive about his subject matter, and his inclusiveness allows the author to infuse his words into various historical contexts. By having a scholar speak about Whitman's interpretive openness in the novel, Cunningham moves beyond intertextuality into metatextuality:

> But, really, it's impossible to pin a poet like Whitman down this way. Was he writing about industrialization? Yes, he was. Was he writing about family? Certainly. And he was also writing about westward expansion. You can go at him from just about any angle and find something that seems to support some thesis or other. (Cunningham, 2005, p. 322)

The scholar's commentary refers to a poet whose words are repeatedly quoted in the book. Therefore, her commentary addresses both Whitman's primary texts and Cunningham's novel, which is inspired by those texts and is itself a text in which they are directly quoted. For a brief moment, the novel becomes self-reflexive. Thus, transtextuality, hypertextuality, and metatextuality converge in a single dialogue in the novel. As Rosenberg notes, they are not mutually exclusive, and metatextuality and hypertextuality also use intertextuality (2016, p. 17), as in Cunningham's case. From industrial labor and slavery to war and nature, the American pioneer of free verse, Whitman, celebrates diversity in all its shapes. Cunningham depicts Lucas's environment in stark contrast to Whitman's vision of plurality and acceptance. The inclusion of the commentary suggests broader imaginative possibilities rather than societal restrictions that are in place in Cunningham's novel.

The Form and Recurrence

The triptych is a formal term borrowed from visual arts that suggests three separate panels presenting a single work of art. The meaning does not emerge sequentially but through the relationality between separate panels. A triptych offers the artist, or the writer, in this case, a versatility that allows for temporal fragmentation. Cunningham and Yanagihara adopt the triptych as a narrative form and maintain its feature of thematic continuity. The form provides them with the creative space for comparison and recurrence with slight variations in each section. Stories are set in the same sequential centuries, in the same locations, but they are distinctive enough to categorize the end product as an appropriation. According to Sanders,

> ...appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a

> wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations. But the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signalled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process (Sanders, 2006, p. 26).

In this sense, Yanagihara's adoption of Specimen Days' form is not an adaptation but rather an appropriation because she transforms a cohesive form into a pessimistic historical framework and reworks Cunningham's text for a new purpose in a different cultural and historical setting. Her appropriation preserves the recursive and comparative function of the form but broadens the scope of Cunningham's novel by engaging with various phenomena such as trauma, loss, familial inheritance, and colonial displacement. Each section of *To Paradise* reimagines major historical phenomena like the Gilded Age marriage plot, the AIDS epidemic, and a future that is shaped by authoritarianism and a series of pandemics. She creates a speculative historical continuum in which form serves as a vehicle to articulate historical pessimism. In this continuum, the traumas of the protagonists are repeated in different guises.

There is a disorienting stylistic motif in both novels: the recycling of the characters' names in all three sections. This recurrence signals a pattern and continuity across different times and stories. Strictly speaking, within the same novel, Yanagihara is also creating an allusive intertextual link. But since she is also mirroring the recurrence of the names in *Specimen Days*, she is grafting a hypertext. It is unsettling for the reader because the recurrence of the names (David, Charles, and Nathaniel in *To Paradise* and Lucas, Catherine, and Simon in *Specimen Days*) is suggestive of a familial or narrative continuity, but the novels defy this expectation by offering a pattern of repetition without genealogy. When asked in an interview whether the lives in different sections of the novel are separate, Yanagihara answers:

> Well, they are and they aren't. I mean it's a story of three different outsiders and three different people who are trying to find love and they want to be loved. And one of the things that I was really interested in, especially in the third part of the book, which is a kind of American dystopia, is this idea that no matter how bleak a society is or how totalitarian a regime is or a person's circumstances, one of the things that we all want as humans is affection and love and to find some beauty in our lives (Simon, 2022, para. 7).

If, as suggested by the author herself, the recycling of names does not establish literal family lines, but the pattern that binds them together is their quest for love and beauty, then why does she insist on the same names? The recurrence of Nathaniel, Bingham, or Griffith for instance, links patriarchal and ancestral authority to questions of inheritance and legacy. These figures, then, are variations on a shared human condition, making them archetypal recurrences rather than individual characters. They are not descendants of a single lineage, although their lineages are repeatedly referred to as part of their identities. Both novels present a cyclical vision where progress is illusory. Overall, whether or not they are the same characters and regardless of how history actually progressed, societal and individual downfall is inevitable, or at the least, the characters' fates remain ambiguous. Continuities do not lead to growth or a positive trajectory. History's alternative pathways do not prevent the same human longing for attachment and the same failures. The same disorientation signals the readers away from historical realism to the novel's thematic design.

In all three sections of *Specimen Days*, there is a female character whose name sounds similar. She is called Catherine, Cat, and then Catareen in the final section. She is, in each section, romantically or on some level emotionally involved with Lucas, Luke, or Simon. This cycle works allegorically. Just as in *To Paradise*, in the disjointed narratives of *Specimen Days*, the characters become symbols of the human

need for attachment under radically different circumstances. In fact, even when they are not really human but still carry humane characteristics as humanoids or aliens, they possess the same desires. So, the names and the characters mutate to embody the persistence of the same fundamental desires cutting across time and biology. In both novels, there are shifting scales of intimate, societal, and planetary losses. These losses occur at an expansive spectrum ranging from the intimate grief of a fiancé, a parent, or a brother to societal trauma resulting from random acts of terrorism perpetrated by children and to planetary estrangement felt by an alien exiled to Earth. *To Paradise* mirrors these traumatic losses: the first David loses his inheritance when he decides to elope with a con man; the second David loses his claim to the Hawaiian throne and his father to madness; Charlie, in the third section, reflects the precarious survival under an authoritarian state shaped by environmental ruin after the losses of her grandfather and husband.

Yanagihara, by naming her opening section "Washington Square," exemplifies paratextuality and continues her conversation with *Specimen Days,* since the location has a pronounced presence in all sections of both novels. Lucas, the protagonist of the first section of Cunningham's novel, describes the square as bustling with life that excludes him, enunciating his eccentricity as an outsider.

> He didn't come often to the square. It lay beyond the limits of his realm; it wasn't meant for a boy like him. Washington Square, like Broadway, was part of the city within the city, cupping its green and dappled quietude, ringed by the remoter fires—a place where men and women strolled in dresses and greatcoats […] Lucas tried not to be distracted by the beauty of the square. (Cunningham, 2005, p. 133).

Yanagihara's protagonist, on the other hand, lives in a mansion in Washington Square, so it is not a place of exclusion but rather the domestic center of his life, where he belongs as the heir of a wealthy, established family. Eventually, after he falls in love with a con artist, he experiences estrangement and leaves his inheritance, grandfather, and Washington Square behind. In both hypertexts, the location functions as a symbolic locus of both belonging and alienation. The two characters are bound by a shared identity of strange or estranged subjects. They both sacrifice themselves for an emotional connection that only exists in their minds, Lucas for his deceased brother's fiancée, and David for a conman. In the second section of Yanagihara's novel, the protagonist is (again) called David and moves into his wealthy and older boyfriend's house at Washington Square. He also feels out of place since he left his native Hawaii as the Hawaiian prince, a title that is redundant since the annexation of Hawaii, and works as a paralegal at the same company as his boyfriend, Nathaniel. In the third section, the protagonist, Charlie, also lives in a house on Washington Square with her grandfather before her grandfather arranges her marriage since he is unsure about his future. Charlie has survived a viral infection, the pandemic that defines the world of the third section. Therefore, in all three sections of the novels, Washington Square appears and reappears as a paratextual and symbolic motif, yet the protagonists' relation to that space varies. In *To Paradise*, for the first David, it is a place he abandons in his estrangement and pursuit of his own paradise; for the second David, it is an inherited place that underscores his displacement, and for Charlie, it is a fragile refuge in the midst of surveillance and the anxiety about the pandemic in a dystopian future. The third section of the novel is epistolary, and the grandfather recounts the changes that the square has gone through over the decades.

> Washington Square, however, is a different matter […] Over the years, the shantytowns were built, and then destroyed, and then rebuilt, and then re-destroyed… Now the Square sits empty, denuded of trees except for a strip that extends from the northeast corner to the southeast corner. Here, there are still benches, still paths, still a few remnants of the playground… One of my colleagues in the Home Ministry said the space will be converted into some kind of outdoor bazaar, with vendors who will compensate for the loss of stores. (Yanagihara, 2022, pp. 611–612).

The square he describes is markedly different from its earlier incarnations. Unlike the communal space observed by Lucas in Cunningham's novel and the domestic centers inhabited by both Davids in the first two sections of the novel, the future version of the square is hollowed by scarcity and destruction. It is a reminder of the loss of community and inheritance under the weight of authoritarian control and surveillance. The square persists as a recurrent motif and binds the novels and the sections together, but its representations diverge, and each historical context reflects its own anxieties. Washington Square ultimately becomes less a stable setting and more of a space where love, belonging, and loss are negotiated.

The Marriage Plot

The second level of hypertextuality is Yanagihara's transforming the core of *Washington Square* by maintaining the tension between autonomy and dependence in the marriage plot but eliminating the normative assumptions the plot entails. According to Harrison, marriage, as a story, existed before the emergence of the realist novel, but eighteenth and nineteenth-century realist novels naturalized the institution of marriage and traditional gender roles, and that in turn affected people's life stories and how they perceived marriage (2014, p. 112). In the marriage plot, the heroine's perspective is centralized, which signifies that marriage is particularly important for women (p. 117). Conventional marriage plots, when they are resolved in marriage, end with the wedding or soon after it. "Because the events of a marriage are not documented or are only suggested, the fictional ideal of marriage is defined by happiness, not hard work, by constancy, not change" (p. 119). Since the marriage plot is not necessarily resolved in a union, it is possible to argue that *Washington Square* inhabits this tradition. *To Paradise*, on the other hand, complicates the tradition by undermining the heteronormative framework and ending the story without any denouement.

In his *Art of Fiction*, Henry James argues that the value of fiction is closely related to whether or not it is based on personal experience and observation. He believes that in other artistic forms, the creation might be fanciful; fiction's sole aim is to "portray humanity and human character," and he insists that "as the picture is reality, so the novel is history" (1884, pp. 18–19, 55). He refers to the "germ" of a story that is the impression or the anecdote that sparks the author's imagination (p. 35). It is not surprising, therefore, that *Washington Square* is based on an anecdote about a plain but wealthy young woman manipulated into marriage. The novel revolves around Catherine Sloper, described as plain, living with her aunt and her father, a distinguished New York physician. Her suitor is a charming but idle young man, and Catherine's father suspects that he is only motivated by Catherine's inheritance. The father treats human relationships diagnostically, and his scientific mindset is the main source of conflict in the plot. The distinguishing factor in James's marriage plot is his tendency toward psychological realism and complication of the genre by ironizing it by withholding conventional romantic fulfillment. The father is proven right, and love does not conquer all.

Yanagihara pointedly titles the first section of her novel "Washington Square" and reconfigures the plot around a young man whose suitor is also a man, and the paternalistic figure, the voice of reason, is the grandfather. She queers the structure of the Jamesian marriage plot and transposes the nineteenth-century setting in an alternate United States but shifts the axis of desire. So, Yanagihara reproduces the architext, but also destabilizes it. She is not engaging in mere homage or pastiche but transforms something more fundamental within the genre. In both cases, wealth isolates the protagonists and makes them more vulnerable. Both authors use psychonarration through which we hear the narrator's voice rendering the characters' thoughts and emotions. Both balance interiority with irony but also blur

the lines between the narrator and the character. Both novels use the urban setting as a symbol for old money and reputation, serving as symbols for continuity and tradition.

> The ideal of quiet and of genteel retirement, in 1835, was found in Washington Square, where the Doctor built himself a handsome, modern, wide-fronted house, with a big balcony before the drawing-room windows, and a flight of marble steps ascending to a portal which was also faced with white marble. This structure, and many of its neighbours, which it exactly resembled, were supposed, forty years ago, to embody the last results of architectural science, and they remain to this day very solid and honourable dwellings. (James, 1921, p. 19)

The solid, honorable dwellings in James suggest stability and respectability but also foreshadow constraint and rigidity. The architectural science also points to Dr. Sloper's scientific worldview, which will dominate their lives. The house functions as the externalization of paternal authority even after Dr. Sloper dies. Instead of a domestic refuge, it is a place where Catherine's emotional life is regulated. The imposing structure functions as an extension of the marriage plot, an honorable dwelling for an honorable institution that signifies respectability and patriarchal control. The Binghams in the first section of Yanagihara's novel also live on Washington Square in a grand townhouse, imposing, aristocratic, and steeped in tradition. For David, the house is both a refuge and a suffocating prison.

> These things belonged here, in this house: It was as if the house itself had grown them, as if they were something living that would shrivel and die were they moved elsewhere. And then he thought: Was the same not true for him? Was he not also something the house had, if not spawned, then nourished and fed? If he left Washington Square, how would he ever know where he truly was in the world? How could he leave these walls that had stared blankly, plainly back at him through all of his states? (Yanagihara, 2022, p. 19)

The metaphor turns the house into an organic entity, a womb-like environment, but it also highlights David's dependency. True to form, the house becomes an extension of the character's inner world and reflects his frailty and sense of enclosure. Catherine Sloper and David Bingham face the same dilemma of being disowned and loved. There is a grim sense of autonomy in Catherine's silent resistance to her father. David, on the other hand, abandons all moral and familial constraints to set off into a precarious future. Nevertheless, this act of autonomy may as well be interpreted as a different form of vulnerability. The architextual positioning of both the novel and the first section of *To Paradise* points to generic defiance. Traditionally, in domestic fiction and the marriage plot, marriage functions as a telos. The suitor might be exposed or vindicated, but the protagonist's trajectory resolves in a joyful marriage. The genre's promise of closure is replaced by the protagonist's moral and psychological development. Years later, when the suitor comes back in remorse and shame, Catherine refuses him. Catherine's happy ending does not derive from romance but dignified resistance to her father and her suitor, respectively.

To Paradise initially unsettles the genre's heteronormative framework and transforms the marriage plot by replacing legitimacy and love with ambiguity and risk. Despite queering the plot, Yanagihara's section preserves the pessimism prevalent in *Washington Square,* especially regarding autonomy and fulfillment. Love, in both novels, is intertwined with inheritance and betrayal, and the characters' attempts at liberating themselves are thwarted by external circumstances. James's novel upholds the social sanctity of marriage even when a happy ending is withheld. In Yanagihara's version, however, the legitimacy of same-sex marriage does not guarantee emotional fulfillment. Same-sex desire is rendered socially visible by replacing the traditional heroine with a hero, but it nonetheless remains psychologically precarious. Overall, gender norms may shift, but even in an alternate United States, the same emotional patterns of longing and desire persist. In this section of the novel, Yanagihara does not present the reader with wars and political failures but rather relocates historical pessimism from the

public to the domestic sphere. The section condenses recurrent human failures into the intimate realm.

Conclusion

Literary works are never islands of their own but exist as echoes and appropriations of each other. But taken together, *Specimen Days* and *To Paradise* do not merely allude to their hypotexts; they also reappropriate and radicalize them. Cunningham explores Whitman's democratic optimism and transforms the lines from "Song of Myself" into symbols for both consolation and haunting. The lines accompany grief, terrorism, and erosion of meaning. Yanagihara engages both James and Cunningham and binds various movements and traditions together. She destabilizes the marriage plot further and transposes Cunningham's triptych form into speculative and historical fiction. They create an organic continuity through centuries and into the future with their final dystopian section. They both disorient the reader by recycling names and the transformation of places. They demonstrate that transtextuality is not only a critical tool but also a creative strategy to highlight what persists: human longing for love and the illusion of progress. It is also an allegory for human nature, revealing new variations on the same inevitable losses and disasters. Read this way, transtextuality becomes a complementary mode of contemplating historical progress rather than a structural device.

In *To Paradise*, there is a cyclical return to a lack of resolution and disappointment, and it reveals a darker truth about the human capacity for imagination and the tendency to sabotage their attempts at a utopia. Human desires, authority, and traditions reassert themselves under new guises and produce the same adverse effects in radically different historical contexts. Disasters and loss are not accidents but consequences of fundamental structural human features. Due to repetition, tragedies are reenacted, and paradise becomes an unattainable mirage, forever deterred and never reached. The characters' attempts to imagine paradise are inseparable from the conditions that render it impossible.

From the perspective of Genette's transtextuality, this repetition is structural. Hypertexts expose the limits of the hypotexts themselves. Formal originality might be impossible, but so is the fulfillment of a promise of a new vision for the future. Even when the authors reimagine the stories, they are bound by the same illusions and failures. Texts are haunted by their predecessors, as is history by its own repetitions and human nature by its own flaws. When analyzed through Genette's taxonomy of textual relationality, Yanagihara's novel proves to be more than an ambitious attempt at intertextuality. Her hypertext becomes a critique of historical optimism by denying all the protagonists a resolution, and it questions whether alternate histories can really produce alternative outcomes. Through her novel, hypertextuality is redefined as a tool for philosophical inquiry.

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