UGC-CARE LISTED AND PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL
ISSN: 2320-4842 (Print) ISSN: 3049-2688 (Online)

ARIMAA NOKKU
ISSN: 2320 - 4842 (P)
ISSN: 3049-2688 (O)

19 - 4 Oct - Dec 2025

Published on 14, Oct-Dec 2025 ISSN:2320-4842 (P) 3049-2688 (O)

Rethinking Humanity in Crisis: Posthuman Perspectives on Technology and Control in Hanya Yanagihara's to Paradise

M. Sruthi Sriee *

Dr. M. Kannadhasan **

Abstract

Hanya Yanagihara's *To Paradise* (2021) spans centuries to probe human fragility, survival, and shifting social orders, with its 2093 dystopian narrative offering a sharp critique of technology, biopolitics, and control. Set amid recurring pandemics, the novel envisions a future where biomedical innovations and pervasive surveillance safeguard life at the cost of autonomy, dramatizing the paradox of technologies that extend existence while constraining freedom. Through Cary Wolfe's critique of liberal humanism and Rosi Braidotti's notion of the posthuman subject, the text emerges as a critical intervention in debates on technoscience, inequality, and ecological vulnerability, underscoring how progress is inseparable from systemic domination and the redefinition of agency and community. Yanagihara portrays humanity not as sovereign but as precarious, interdependent, and enmeshed in technological and ecological networks, positioning *To Paradise* as a vital site for rethinking humanity in crisis and illuminating the contours of the posthuman condition.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Biopolitics, Technoscience, Surveillance, Hanya Yanagihara, *To Paradise*

The 21st century has seen unprecedented advancements in surveillance, health, and technology, altering human existence in ways that make it more difficult to discern between autonomy and control. The advent of algorithmic governance, biotechnological interventions, and ubiquitous monitoring has sparked difficult discussions about what it means to be human in an era of both possibility and precarity. This new posthuman state emphasizes the elasticity of identity, the vulnerability of the human body, and our interdependence with technological and ecological networks. Because it offers innovative frameworks for examining the ethical, political, and social ramifications of technological advancement, literature thus becomes a crucial resource for researching the implications of posthuman futures.

* PhD Research Scholar, Department of English Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu

** Assistant Professor, Department of English Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu

The ambitious and multifaceted novel *To Paradise* (2021) by Hanya Yanagihara takes place in three different centuries (1893, 1993, and 2093), each set in a different version of America. Yanagihara is able to explore issues of identity, love, belonging, and survival in the face of changing social, cultural, and political contexts thanks to this tripartite structure. The story from 2093 most glaringly addresses the circumstances of human existence in crisis, while the earlier parts wrestle with the intricacies of sexuality, kinship, and social hierarchy. The novel's final section imagines a dystopian future where technological advancement promises longevity and safety but also erodes personal freedom and agency, all set against a backdrop of ecological instability, widespread pandemics, and a totalizing surveillance state.

The story of 2093 offers a rich environment for examining how biopolitical governance and technology reshape human limits. The bureaucratic controls, algorithmic monitoring, and biomedical advancements are portrayed as both tools of dominance and protection. When survival depends on ceding autonomy to systems of technoscientific regulation, the conflict between protection and oppression begs the important question of what it means to be human. "The plan was that the car would be mostly Nathaniel's to use, but as it happened, I was called down to NIAID on Monday (a bureaucratic check-in as part of this new cross-institutional effort, unrelated to Bariloche), so I took the car and spent the night there and drove up from Maryland on Tuesday" (Yanagihara 471).

This paper uses Michel Foucault, Cary Wolfe, Rosi Braidotti, and Donna Haraway to analyze the novel through the lens of posthuman theory. Braidotti sees the topic as dynamic and interconnected, whereas Wolfe challenges the ideal of human autonomy. Foucault's biopolitics exposes how governments control life through medical power, whereas Haraway's cyborg questions established human/nonhuman divisions.

The main contention of this paper is that *To Paradise* examines technological inconsistencies through its dystopian future, demonstrating how monitoring and control infrastructure are inextricably linked to guarantees of safety and survival. The study demonstrates how literature may critically address contemporary issues regarding pandemics, technology, and the precarious state of humanity in the twenty-first century by situating Yanagihara's story within the framework of posthuman discussions.

To Paradise can be analyzed critically using posthumanism, especially in light of its futuristic plot that challenges conventional ideas of what it means to be human. According to Cary Wolfe, the liberal humanist subject, an independent, logical person who is seen as distinct from and superior to nonhuman life, is the starting point for posthumanism. Rather, Wolfe calls for a shift away from anthropocentric presumptions by highlighting the interdependence of people, animals, technologies, and systems. ""Why would we stop giving people medicine? This isn't like how it was six years ago—there's plenty of medicine available. And why even have the stopgap of—what did you call it, a 'middle-stage' building? Why not just send everyone straight to the end-stage building?"" (Yanagihara 484). Accordingly, Yanagihara's 2093 society, in which technological and medical infrastructures are essential to human survival, illustrates how the self-contained subject is eroding. "It's here that Yanagihara levels the playing field … suffering is doled out equally for the first time, and no longer meted along on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, or gender." (Nicholas). With her idea of the nomadic subject, a view of posthuman identity as malleable, relational, and constantly evolving Rosi Braidotti expands on this viewpoint. Braidotti suggests an adaptive subjectivity that is ingrained in ecological and technological networks, challenging static definitions of the human.

Totalizing technological dominance is countered by Donna Haraway's seminal idea of the cyborg. According to Haraway, the cyborg offers a hybrid identity that defies authority and opens the door to new modes of existence by upending the strict dichotomies of human/machine and natural/artificial. "A cyborg is a

hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine" (Haraway 1). This speaks to the ambiguities in Yanagihara's depiction of technology as both oppressive and protective.

Yanagihara imagines a future America governed by a totalizing state apparatus in which technological regulation of life is not only ubiquitous but indispensable for survival. In this setting, ordinary existence is mediated by constant medical checks, restricted movements, and mandatory compliance with state-sanctioned health protocols. The pandemic, far from being a temporary crisis, becomes a permanent condition that justifies unprecedented forms of control.

And then they moved to America and never returned to live at home again, not even before the illness of '50. And then it was too late, because everyone in Hawai'i had died, and by this point, all three of them were American citizens. And then, after the laws of '67, no one was allowed to leave the country anyway. The only people who remembered other places were older, and they didn't talk about those years. (Yanagihara 529)

The paradoxical role of technology, which both protects against disease and imposes oppression, is central to this imagined society. To protect life, biomedical advancements like frequent testing, regulated settings, and stringent health regulations are implemented. However, these same policies restrict people's freedom by tying them to a system that controls and observes every part of their bodies. In return for security, citizens are forced to give up agency; bureaucratic systems now control their identities and futures instead of them being decided by them.

A key framework for comprehending Yanagihara's dystopian vision is provided by Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics. According to Foucault, biopolitics is the ability of the contemporary state to 'make live and let die,' managing populations through surveillance, health regulations, and body discipline. Human life is positioned as something to be maximized, watched over, and managed in *To Paradise*, where the state's control over health turns into a biopolitical necessity. "Broadly speaking, at the juncture of the "body" and the "population," … of a power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death." (Foucault 147). The fact that survival itself depends on deference to institutional authority is concealed by the promise of protection.

The novel also highlights how agency is diminished when adherence to technology becomes an integral part of daily life. In the world of 2093, the distinction between coercive control and voluntary care is blurred, and individuality is absorbed by collective regulation. "They're abandoned storefronts (this one had been—irony of ironies—an ice-cream parlor) that the government's taken over and fitted out with industrial-grade air-conditioning, as well as, typically, ten to twenty air showers, which is a new technology they're testing out…" (Yanagihara 412). Once presented as instruments of advancement, technologies now determine the terms of life. This change undermines the humanist concept of autonomy by implying that, in this situation, being human means being bound to systems that both protect and limit.

Yanagihara's portrayal of a society engulfed in a pandemic emphasizes how unstable life is, with ecologies, technologies, and viruses interacting to determine survival conditions. The recurrent pandemics are presented as reminders that the human body is always porous, vulnerable, and inextricably linked to nonhuman agents rather than as external threats to an otherwise stable humanity. By presenting the human as one actor among many in a larger network of life and matter, this interdependence undermines the humanist fiction of autonomy and self-sufficiency. "humans are both exposed and vulnerable to new diseases, like bird flu and other epidemics, which they share with animal species. Obviously, a response to the new pandemics that have emerged in the global era," (Braidotti 161)

Cary Wolfe's critique of liberal humanism provides a helpful perspective. According to Wolfe, the independent, logical subject at the heart of Western philosophy is a myth that crumbles in the face of interdependence and

connectivity. This collapse is dramatized in Yanagihara's future world, where people are unable to claim their independence when their survival is reliant on ongoing technological mediation and government-managed medical interventions. "structure of communication extends beyond the human to nonhuman animals and indeed exceeds, as we are about to see, the boundary between the liv ing and the mechanical or technical" (Wolfe 6). Human life is always dependent on nonhuman processes, whether they be ecological conditions, technological infrastructures, or viral mutations, undermining the liberal ideal of freedom.

By redefining subjectivity as a state of becoming rather than a fixed essence, Rosi Braidotti expands on this viewpoint. According to her, the posthuman subject is relational, flexible, and a part of networks that are larger than humans. The limits of human potential are frequently questioned in *To Paradise*. The characters in 2093 must navigate their lives within networks of ecological instability, infection, and surveillance rather than existing as independent entities. This representation supports Braidotti's contention that humans are dynamic beings co-shaped by ecological and technological forces rather than being isolated sovereigns.

In the novel the year 2093, humanity is shown to be malleable rather than stable, identity is controlled rather than self-determined, and freedom is contingent on compliance. As a result, the book challenges the concept of 'the human,' revealing its artificiality and susceptibility to changes in biology, history, and technology.

Power, bureaucracy, and social hierarchies act as intermediaries in the unequal distribution of access to safety, health, and survival. As *To Paradise* demonstrates, technological advancement is not just about innovation but also about politics-of who gains, who is subjugated, and who is left exposed.

Conclusion

Hanya Yanagihara's *To Paradise* culminates in a dystopian vision of 2093 that critiques technological domination and reveals the fragility of human existence. By depicting a society where biomedical innovations and surveillance preserve yet restrict life, the novel dismantles the myth of progress as liberation, showing instead its entanglement with inequality, bureaucracy, and the erosion of agency. In the context of pandemics, ecological instability, and accelerating technologies, the novel frames survival as inseparable from ethics and governance, offering not utopia but a critical reflection on the costs of progress and contributing meaningfully to posthuman debates on technology, vulnerability, and uncertain futures of humanity.

Beyond posthuman theory, *To Paradise*'s socio-political, ethical, and ecological aspects can be examined in future studies. In view of current pandemics and international crises, scholars may study its commentary on governance, public health policy, and the ethics of surveillance. While interdisciplinary approaches could link the text to climate fiction, bioethics, and futurist studies, literary studies could examine how it addresses intergenerational trauma, migration, and inequality. Understanding the novel's thoughts on societal structures, human resiliency, and the ethical conundrums of social and technological advancement would be enhanced by such analyses.

Works Cited

* Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.
* Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1990.
* Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991.
* Nicholas, Elizabeth. "Hanya Yanagihara's to Paradise Transcends Time to Deliver an Ethical Tale." *Vanity Fair*, 10 Jan. 2022, www.vanityfair.com/style/2022/01/hanya-yanagiharas-to-paradise-transcends-time-to-deliver-an-ethical-tale.
* Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
* Yanagihara, Hanya. *To Paradise*. Doubleday, 2021.