

**Reflection of Postmodern Reality in the Select Fiction of  
Yann Martel**

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by

**T. Vijayalakshmi**

Under the Guidance of

**Dr. S. Lavanya, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.**



**Department of English  
PSGR Krishnammal College for Women  
College of Excellence  
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*Summation*

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## Chapter VI

### Summation

Literature represents life. Technique is the literary craftsmanship through which the representation of life is communicated efficiently in the form of art. Techniques help the writer to make his writing meaningful and relevant. While creating a story the author ponders over the manner in which he can convincingly narrate the experience, in this regard he has to choose an appropriate narrative voice and effective language. Mark Schorer, a literary critic advocated the importance of techniques employed in fiction in his critical essay *Technique as Discovery*.

When we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything.

For technique is the means by which the writer's experience which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally of evaluating it. (Schorer 387)

Technique is not just an ornament in art. The lack of technique in a work of art will lead the reader far away from the meaning expounded in the writing. If technique is not used then fiction becomes just a rendering of national history. It is only with the help of technique the writer is able to emphasise the content that he wishes to present. The novelist structures the fictional subject with plot, characters, suitable language and employs a distinctive style of narration.

Technique in fiction is, of course all those obvious forms of it which are usually taken to be the whole of it, and many other; but for the present

purpose, let it be thought of it in two respects particularly: the uses to which language, as language, is put to express the quality of experience in question; and the uses of point of view not only as a mode of dramatic delimitation, but more particularly, of thematic definition. (Schorer 388)

Technique is the means through which the novelists tell his story efficiently. It helps the novelists in interpreting and in transforming reality. It is only through techniques, the writer can translate his experiences, thoughts, and emotions into art. The art which a writer creates is one of the important forms of communication through which a writer educates the society. Every writer asserts his own individuality by selecting appropriate techniques to throw light on the theme he is exploring, discovering, developing in order to convey the meaning of life.

Technique is really what T.S.Eliot means by 'convention': any selection, structure or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed upon the world of action; by means of which, it should be added, our apprehension of the world of action is enriched or renewed. In this sense, everything is technique which is not the lump of experience itself, and one cannot properly say that a writer has no technique, or that he eschews technique, for, being a writer, he cannot do so. We can speak of good and bad technique, of adequate and inadequate, of technique which serves the novels purpose, or disserves. (Schorer 388)

This chapter attempts to bring out the manner in which each technique contributes to complement the themes in Yann Martel's novels taken for analysis. The contemporary world is denoted by the term postmodern. Postmodernism is one of the most discussed

topics in the current literary scenario and in other domains of knowledge. The definition of postmodernism given by French theorist, Jean Francois Lyotard in the introduction of his notable work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* where he says, “We no longer have recourse to grand narratives ... But as we have seen, the little narrative remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention ... In addition, the principle of consensus as a criterion of validation seems to be inadequate” (60). It is evident from this definition that postmodern literature does not support grand narratives. Lyotard strongly objects metanarratives or grand narratives. Postmodernism favours mini narratives or stories which explain local events rather than universal concepts. Mini narrative is one of the major postmodern techniques. Postmodern writers create new ideas and formulate new techniques in their writing. Some of the techniques used by the postmodern writers are metafiction, historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, pastiche, parody, fragmentation, non-linear narration, magic realism, hyperreality, temporal distortion, paranoia, maximalism and minimalism.

Postmodern writers often allude to quotations from past literary works. Postmodern writers incorporate those quotations in entirely different context in their work of art. This kind of referencing from one text into other texts is called intertextuality. The term intertextuality was first used by Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian literary theorist in her essays *Word, Dialogue and Novel* (1966) and *The Bounded Text* (1966-67). She defines intertextuality thus:

... an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings.... Developing Bakhtin’s spatialization of literary language, she argues that “each world (text) is an inter section

of other words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read....

[A]ny text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the

absorption and transformation of another. (Kristeva 66)

Pastiche is one of the postmodern techniques. The term pastiche is borrowed from the Italian word *pasticcio*. Literally *pasticcio* means a mixture of things.

The term “pastiche” first occurs at the end of the seventeenth century in French Beaux Arts discourse, a borrowing from the Italian “*pasticcio*”.

Literally, “*pasticcio*” denoted a pate of various ingredients – a hodge-podge of meat, vegetables, eggs, and a host of other variable additions....

A *pasticcio* was highly imitative painting that synthesized- “stirred together” – the styles of major artists. (Hoesterey 493)

In postmodern fiction pastiche means combining different ideas and pasting them together in a work of art. Thus by combining various ideas a new style of writing has been created by postmodern writers. Postmodern writers borrow ideas or just take a line or passage of past literary work and paste it in their work, thus creating new form of literature. Some of the elements from detective fiction, science fiction and war fiction, songs, jazz culture are examples of pastiche incorporated in various new writings.

The term, ‘metafiction’ has been widely used in 1970 to discuss postmodern fiction. Linda Hutcheon in her *Narcisistic Narratives* says, “Metafiction is fiction about fiction, in which the text is self-aware, and the process of writing becomes part of the shared pleasure of reading” (20). Metafiction means explaining the process of creative writing in a novel. Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter Night a Traveler* (1979) is a good

example of metafiction where the reader's attempt to read the novel is dealt with the process of creating a novel.

Historiographic metafiction is a term coined by Canadian literary theorist Linda Hutcheon in the late 1980s. She is particularly known for her influential theories on postmodernism. The term is used for works of fiction which combine the literary devices of metafiction with historical facts. Postmodern historical novels attempt to insert history into fiction to rewrite the history from a different perspective. There are several works which can be considered as historiographic metafiction such as *Ana Historic* by Daphne Marlatt, John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975), William Kennedy's *Legs* (1975), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) and *Running in the Family* and many others. A few of the authors associated with historiographic metafiction are Peter Ackroyd, Kate Atkinson, Don DeLillo, Thomas Wulff, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Wu Ming and many more. Historiographic metafiction attempts to recreate history by filling in the gaps left untold in previous historical records which includes historical chronicles, epics, legends etc. Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* defines Historiographic Metafiction thus:

Historiographic Metafiction is one kind of postmodern novel which rejects projecting present beliefs and standards onto the past and asserts the specificity and particularity of the individual past event. It also suggests a distinction between "events" and "facts" that is one shared by many historians. Since the documents become sign of events, which the historian transmutes into facts, as in historiographic metafiction, the lesson here is

that the past one existed, but that our historical knowledge of it is semiotically transmitted. (122-123)

The postmodern world entered into a new era of mass communication and technology, thus shifting from industrial age to information age. Some of the elements of technoculture are evident in recent science fiction which is termed as cyberpunk fiction. Technology plays a vital role in reproducing the real version. The reality is replaced by the copy. There is no clear connection between which is real and which is not. Baudrillard, a French sociologist and theorist published the book *Simulacra and Simulation* in 1981 where he defined hyperreality as, “A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences” (2-3).

Magical Realism is one of the postmodern techniques. Magical realism introduces unrealistic ideas and fantasy elements such as dreams, myths, time shifts and fairy stories which are mingled with realistic events. Franz Roh is the first person who used the term “Magischer” in an aesthetic way to denote magical realism. Magical Realism originated in the fictional writing of Latin American writers in the mid-twentieth century in 1940s with the publication of two important novels: *Men of Maize* by Guatemalan writer *Miguel Angel Asturias* and *The Kingdom of This World* by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier.

Temporal distortion is a technique used by postmodern writers. Fragmentation, non-linear narration and timelines are central features of temporal distortion. Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* employs the technique of temporal distortion. Novels that employ distortion of time reassert the theme by providing multiple ending to the narrative. Certain postmodern novels are open ended, thereby involving the reader in the narrative



so that the reader might arrive at a resolution. Thus temporal distortion is "... breaking up the text into short fragments or sections, separating by space, titles, numbers or symbols" (Sim 127). Robert Coover's *The Babysitter* is narrated in fragments where the author presents the murder of the babysitter in one section and no such thing happens in another section. Evenson suggests fragmentation is, "... the relation of fantasy to reality without giving one primacy over the other" (91).

Postmodern techniques such as intertextuality, pastiche, historiographic metafiction, temporal distortion, magical realism are analysed in Yann Martel's novels taken for research. Some of the narrative techniques include point of view, story within a story, play within a fiction, unreliable narrator, and use of dialogue have been analysed. Literary devices such as allegory, epistolary narrative, fictional autobiography and typography have been taken into analysis. The literary styles such as simile, metaphor, imagery, word choice are analysed in Martel's novels taken for study. The major postmodern themes such as chaotic conditions, purposeless existence, meaningless life, absurdity, uncertainties, identity crisis, alienation, existential dilemma, and quest for survival have also been analysed in Yann Martel's novels taken for research.

Among the narrative technique foremost importance is given to the point of view. The point of view is the particular angle from which the story is narrated. It also refers to style, figurative language and tone of the story. A narrative can be spoken, written or imagined. A person who is telling the story is called a narrator. There are four types of narration. It includes first person, second person, third person and omniscient narration. Yann Martel has used first-person narration in certain fiction and third person narrators or omniscient narrators in certain novels.

Yann Martel used first person point of view in *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*. The unnamed narrator tells the story of his college friend Paul who is affected by AIDS. The story starts in the past where the narrator announces Paul's death due to AIDS. The story starts with the climax. The reader comes to know that Paul is dead in the very beginning of the story. "I hadn't known Paul for very long. We met in the fall of 1986 at Ellis University, Roetown, just east of Toronto.... Then, hardly into second term, Paul fell ill.... Nine months later he was dead. AIDS. He announced over phone" (FHR 3-5). The narrator recounts his days with Paul in the hospital. The narrator suggests to his friend Paul that by telling stories they can pass time to overcome his sufferings. The narrator directly addresses the reader by telling the purpose of the story in the very beginning. He tells, "But what I really want to tell you about, the purpose of this story, is the Roccamatio family of Helsinki. That's not Paul's family; his last name was Atsee. Nor is it my family" (FHR 17).

The second story is titled *The Time I Heard the Private Donald J. Rankin String Concerto with One Discordant Violin, by the American Composer John Morton*. The unnamed narrator tells his past life using first person point of view. The narrator memorialises a Vietnam War veteran John Morton who works as a janitor in a bank at the time of their meeting. Morton considers music as a therapy to forget his mental agony. Yann Martel represents Morton's past life using capital letters within brackets to differentiate Morton's conversation with the narrator.

"I READ IN A MAGAZINE ONCE ABOUT THIS CHOREOGRAPHER  
WHO LAUGHED-LAUGHED-ABOUT PEOPLE WHO THOUGHT  
DANCE WAS JUST ENTERTAINMENT. HE SAID DANCE WAS A

PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE. I LIKE THAT- A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE.  
 YOU KNOW WHERE I WAS HAPPIEST WITH MY MUSIC? YOU  
 WANT ME TO TELL YOU?" (FHR 146)

In *Manners of Dying*, a prison warden Harry Parlinton's rehearsal of letter writing is given in the first person point of view. A prison warden is consistently rewriting a letter to a recently executed prisoner's mother. The prisoner Kevin's death is described in the letter. The warden writes different versions of his experience to share his feeling of guilt with Kevin's mother. The warden writes:

Dear Mrs. Barlow,

As warden of Cantos Correctional Institution and pursuant to the Freedom-of-Information Act, I am writing to inform you of how your son Kevin Barlow faced up to his execution by hanging for the crimes for which he was convicted. (FHR 190)

In *The Vita AETerna Mirror Company: Mirrors to Last till Kingdom Come*, the grandson tells the story of his grandmother's long widowhood in first person point of view. She recollects her memories regarding her husband. She remembers their first meeting during the summer of 1928 when she was sixteen. The grandson's speech is given in bracket. "(I was visiting my grandmother and I had found this machine in the basement. It looked at first like nothing more than a wooden box)" (FHR 205).

Yann Martel's *Self* recounts the story of a young man's gender transformation. The unnamed narrator tells his story in the first person point of view. The events such as the protagonist's childhood experiences, his graduation and the death of his parents are

explored in a chronological order. The novel covers the first thirty years of the narrator's life. At the age of eighteen he strangely changed into a girl. Eventually the narrator becomes a man again at the age of thirty. The novel *Self* comprises of two parts. The first part has 329 pages and the second part has only one paragraph on a single page which gives personal information. "I AM THIRTY YEARS OLD. I weigh 139 pounds. I am five foot seven and a half inches tall. My hair is brown and curly. My eyes are grey-blue. My blood type is O positive. I am Canadian. I speak English and French" (S 330).

Martel uses multiple point of view technique in *Life of Pi*. *Life of Pi* is divided into three separate parts. The first part of the novel is narrated by the author. The second part is in first person where Pi recounts his harrowing experience as a lone survivor in the ocean. The third part of the novel is a short dialogue between Pi and two Japanese men. "Real author [Martel] -> Implied Author ["Martel"]-> Narrator [Pi, through "Martel"] -> narrate ["Martel," hearing Pi's story firsthand] -> Implied Reader -> [The "you" that an author speaks to, or "Us"] -> Real Reader [Us]" (Chatman 151). Martel uses multiple points of view to foreshadow the ensuing events to the readers.

The story of *Beatrice and Virgil* is told from third person point of view. Henry, a novelist tells the story of the taxidermist whose play is based on the Holocaust. The narrator Henry is a successful author who begins the story with the rejection of his recent book on Holocaust. Due to this rejection he along with his wife Sarah moves to another city where Henry, the writer meets the taxidermist who seeks Henry's help to complete his play.

Martel uses story within a story technique. The characters narrate a story in order to entertain the other characters. The story narrated in the novel has symbolic and psychological significance to the theme exemplified through the novel.

In *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios* both Paul and the narrator start creating a story. “Paul and I would create a story... Yes, to meet as storytellers to embrace the world- there, that was how Paul and I would destroy void” (FHR 18). They mix both the fictional elements of Roccamatio family and the historical fact of the twentieth century. The story is planned to be narrated in hundred chapters, each linked to an event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history thematically. They start the story in 1901 and progress up to 1986. It will be a story in eighty-six episodes. Each episode was designed to resemble one event from a consecutive year of the twentieth century. “It would be a story in eighty-six episodes, each episode echoing one event from one year of the unfolding century” (FHR 19). They alternate in telling the story. The narrator decides to narrate the odd years, and Paul has the even years.

Yann Martel uses story within a story technique in *Life of Pi*. Pi tells his story by recollecting his childhood days, his family’s decision to move to Canada, his shipwreck and his ordeal alone in the Pacific Ocean. After telling his hardships in the Ocean where he coexisted along with the tiger, Richard Parker, Pi is asked by the Japanese officers to tell another story. Pi starts telling the second version of the story which is presented very briefly when compared to the first version. The second version of Pi’s ordeal is given as a conversation between Pi and two Japanese officers. Pi tells the second story thus:

“Here is another story.”

“Good.”

.....

Mr. Chiba: “*What a horrible story.*”

.....

“*And those teeth? Whose teeth were those in the tree?*”

.....

Mr. Okamoto: “*We give up. The explanation for the Sinking of the Tsimtsum is at the bottom of the Pacific.*” (LP 316)

In *Beatrice and Virgil* Yann Martel has incorporated a play within the novel. The taxidermist in *Beatrice and Virgil* is writing a play in two acts entitled ‘A Twentieth Century Shirt’ which is a dark allegory of a European country, which is in the shape of a striped shirt. The taxidermist creates two characters namely Beatrice, a donkey and Virgil, a howler monkey in his play. Beatrice and Virgil talk about the various issues that they face in the country. Fragments of the play are given to Henry for evaluation. The play is revealed in non-linear manner. Understanding that the crux of the play is based on the Holocaust becomes the main narrative of the novel.

## A 20<sup>th</sup> – Century Shirt

### A Play in Two Acts

The second page:

**Virgil, a red howler monkey**

**Beatrice, a donkey**

**A boy and his two friends**

And the third page:

**A country road. A tree.**

**Late afternoon.**

**The province of Lower Back,**

**In a country called the Shirt,**

**a country like any other,**

**neighbour to, bigger than,**

**smaller than, Hat, Gloves,**

**Jacket, Coat, Trousers,**

**Socks, Boots and so on. (BV 100-101)**

Intertextuality is one of the postmodern techniques. The term intertextuality is derived from the Latin word '*intertexto*' meaning to intermingle. The borrowing of text from other work and incorporating it in the present work is called intertextuality. Julia Kristava coined the term, 'intertextuality' in 1966. Intertextuality is an umbrella term which includes parody, pastiche and allusion. Intertextuality is a link between two texts. As Hutcheon points out,

Postmodernism, as I am defining it here, is perhaps somewhat less promiscuously extensive, the notion of parody as opening the text up, rather than closing it down, is an important one: among the many things

that postmodern intertextuality challenges are both closure and single, centralized meaning. Its willed and wilful provisionality rests upon its acceptance of the inevitable textual infiltration of prior discursive practices. (Poetics 127)

Yann Martel uses intertextuality in his novels. In *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*, the narrator takes important events from *A History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* to weave an interesting story. Martel uses italics to emphasise historical facts included in his narrative. They use the history of the twentieth century as the basic structure of their storytelling.

1915- Alfred Wegener, a *German meteorologist and geophysicist*, publishes *The Origin of Continents and Oceans*, in which he gives the classic expression of the controversial theory of continental drift... 1920- publication of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*... 1925- Adolf Hitler Publishes *The Settlement of Accounts*, the first volume of his political manifesto, *Mein Kampf (My Struggle)*... 1929- The comic book *Tintin au Pays des Soviets* is published... 1931- The Austrian-born American mathematician Kurt Godel publishes his *Incompleteness Theorem*, better known as *Godel's Proof*. (FHR 36-55)

In *Life of Pi*, Pi's mother suggests him to read the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, Conan Doyle, R.K. Narayan and Daniel Defoe whenever he troubles her.

It was Robert Louis Stevenson. This was her usual tactic. "I've already read that, Mother. Three times." "Oh." Her arm hovered to the left. "The same with Conan Doyle," I said. Her arm swung to the right. "R.K.Narayan?"



you can't possibly have read all of Narayan? "These matters are important to me, Mother." "*Robinson Crusoe!*" "Mother!" (LP 73)

The intertextual reference to Robert Louis Stevenson, Conan Doyle, R.K. Narayan, Daniel Defoe and Dante is significant in the context of the story. The Pacific Ocean where Pi spent 227 days can be interpreted as Purgatory or the Inferno in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. "The sense of Inferno is strengthened by the tiger's presence. In the ocean Pi finds himself in the situation of great change which always provokes one to reconsider his or her identity" (Carr 76).

Stevenson's *The Treasure Island* narrates overseas adventures. It has a close connection to Pi's adventure in the Pacific Ocean. *Life of Pi* has parallels with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Like Crusoe, Pi survives the cruelties of starvation, isolation, loneliness. Crusoe, the son of a wealthy merchant, initiates a sea voyage of his own decision rather than entering into business, as his father desires. Crusoe is adept at duplicating his father's business practices; he not only survives the shipwreck, but also applies the work ethic he has inherited from his father.

The Robertson family survived thirty-eight days at sea. Captain Bligh of the celebrated mutinous *Bounty* and his fellow castaways survived forty-seven days. Steven Callahan survived seventy-six. Owen Chase, whose account of the sinking of the whaling ship *Essex* by a whale inspired Herman Melville, survived eight-three days at sea with two mates, interrupted by a one-week stay on an inhospitable island. The Bailey family survived 118 days. I have heard the Pacific for 173 days in the 1950s. I survived 227 days. (LP 189)

Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* narrates Robinson Crusoe's survival in a strange land after the shipwreck. In *Life of Pi*, Pi reaches a strange island which is full of meerkats. Pi at last comes to know that it is a carnivorous island. R.K. Narayan's writings are mostly based on daily events. Pi's diary entries are about his daily events in the Pacific Ocean. Doyle is popular for his detective stories. Pi's narration has different clues to understand which version of Pi's story might be authentic. The reference of these novelists and adapting their style has intertextual reference.

Intertextual reference to different religious books such as the Bible, the Quran and also to kabbalah is evident throughout the novel. Pi's spiritual journey is strengthened by stories from different religion. Each religion has its own sets of stories. Pi's shipwreck with different animals has intertextual connection to the story of Noah's Ark. Even the name of the ship, Tsimtsum has connection with religious texts. All religions have stories which make him believe in God. Pi says, "Surely this religion had more than one story in its bag – religions abound with stories" (LP 53). Charlotte Innes noted, "*Life of Pi* is a religious book that makes sense to a nonreligious person and restores the reader's faith in literature" (25-29).

There is the story of baby Krishna, wrongly accused by his friends of eating a bit of dirt. His foster mother, Yashoda, comes up to him with a wagging finger....There is the story of Vishnu incarnated as Vamana the dwarf. He asks of demon king Bali only as much land as he can cover in three strides. Bali laughs at this runt of a suitor and his puny request. He consents. Immediately Vishnu takes on his full cosmic size. With one stride he covers the earth, with the second the heavens, and with the third

he boots Bali into the netherworld. Even Rama, that most human of avatars, who had to be reminded of his divinity when he grew long-faced over the struggle to get Sita, his wife, back from Ravana, evil king of Lanka, was no slouch. (LP 54-55)

Stories make him believe in God. Pi says in the beginning that he had doubts, uncertainties and disbelief about God. It is difficult for him to believe anything without experiencing it. After hearing stories, from Jesus Christ's life narrated by Father Martin he started believing in God. This transformation from nonbeliever to believer happened only because of stories. Pi says,

Father Martin was very kind; he treated me like a grown-up; he told me stories or rather, since Christians are so fond of capital letters, a Story. And what a story. The first thing that drew me was disbelief ... What a downright weird story. What peculiar psychology. I asked for another story, one that might find more satisfying [but] their religion had one Story, and to it they came back again and again, over and over. It was story enough for them... This Son is a God who spent most of His time telling stories, *talking*... Their religion had one Story, and to it they came back again and again, over and over. It was story enough for them. (LP 53-56)

The taxidermist in *Beatrice and Virgil* sent an excerpt from *The Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitator* to Henry. Julian has a passion for hunting and kept killing animals discreetly. Flaubert depicts two aspects of Julian's character; Julian who is a sinner later repents and is redeemed off his sins. At first Julian takes pleasure in hunting animals which leads him to kill his own parents. Later Julian generously accommodates a leper in

disguise who sought food, water and warmth of Julian's own body, later the leper is revealed to be Christ. The passage given below is the excerpt from *The Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitator* which was sent to Henry by the taxidermist.

And here the mother, with the answer to her prayers:

... very fair of skin ... After many prayers, she bore a son... great rejoicing ... a feast that lasted three days and four nights ...

He read on:

One night she awoke and saw in a ray of moonlight... the shadowy figure of an old man ... a hermit ... without moving his lips:

'Oh, mother, rejoice, for your son will be a saint!' (BV 31)

Dante's *The Divine Comedy* is an allusion used in Martel's *Beatrice and Virgil*. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* is divided into three volumes. It includes *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Dante on his way back to God's abode meets several characters. Virgil guides Dante through Hell. The sinners in the hell suffer for the sin they had committed in their lifetime on earth. Beatrice guides Dante through *Paradiso* which is a well-structured world leading to the ultimate abode of God. Martel uses both Beatrice and Virgil as animal characters in *Beatrice and Virgil*. Like Beatrice and Virgil in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Martel's Beatrice and Virgil experience various hellish tortures while they move across the country called Shirt. Henry says to the taxidermist regarding his play thus: "The names of the characters-Virgil and Beatrice intrigued me. Bringing in Dante's *Divine Comedy* added an element of depth to my appreciation of what you've done" (BV 51-52).

Martel makes reference to George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in his novel *Beatrice and Virgil*. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* allegorises Russian Revolution. *Animal Farm* tells the story of the rebellion of animals against human beings. Martel's *Beatrice and Virgil* allegorizes the Holocaust by employing animal characters.

In *Self*, Martel has referred to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Both the novels are based on the concept of transformation. Woolf's *Orlando* is a fictional biography of adventures of Orlando who one night mysteriously changes into a woman. Gender transformation is the main theme of both the novels; Orlando's character has influenced Martel to create the protagonist of *Self*, who happens to be a intersexual person. When Orlando wakes up as a woman, Orlando acts no differently. Orlando feels discomfort because of the way people react at her female attire of wearing skirts when she travels in the English ship. Though Orlando is a man, he acts like a woman by wearing women's attire. Like Orlando, the narrator in *Self* does not feel or act differently when gender changes happens. The psychological and biological problems the narrator undergoes due to gender change makes the narrator feel that he can never conform to the mainstream society. Martel's reference to Woolf's *Orlando* suggests that gender is a concept which refers to the accepted behaviour in society. Gender roles are not biological but societal. Kafka's *Metamorphosis* tells the story of a travelling salesman, Gregor Samsa whose gender transformation is based on the Greek mythological character Tiresias. Tiresias was a blind old man who had the power of foretelling future. Tiresias is a bisexual, he is a man for seven years and transforms into a woman for the next seven years. Tiresias is a character in the Greek tragedy Oedipus Rex and Antigone by Sophocles.

In *Beatrice and Virgil*, Henry's two pets named Erasmus, the dog and Mendelssohn, the cat have significant reference to real characters. In reality Moses Mendelssohn is a German born Jewish philosopher who advocated universal brotherhood to the Nazis. The name of the dog Erasmus is an allusion to the Catholic humanist and philosopher Desiderius Erasmus, who fought for the welfare of the Jews. Mendelssohn, the cat dies due to a contraction of rabies. Erasmus, the dog involves in killing Mendelssohn. The rabies symbolizes the Nazi regime and their attempt to exterminate the Jews. Hitler announced that Jews no longer belonged to this world. Hitler justified the killing of the Jews by giving his brutal plan, a religious overtone by terming it Holocaust. The term Holocaust actually referred to the practice in Jewish religion wherein sacrificial offerings were burnt in the altar.

Pastiche means combining and pasting together multiple elements. Pastiche is an imitation of style. Martel was influenced by Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Joyce *Ulysses*. He imitates the style of Boccaccio and Joyce in his story *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*. In *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios* the narrator is inspired by the narrative structure of Boccaccio's *The Decameron*. The story *The Decameron* is set in Florence, Italy in 1348. It is the time when people were affected by plague known as Black Death. When the world is dying of the Black Death, ten people gathered together hoping to survive by telling each other stories on a chosen theme to pass time. Boccaccio had used the technique of storytelling in *The Decameron* in the fourteenth century. Paul and the narrator adapt the same technique of storytelling in the twentieth century.

Two words stopped me dead in my tracks: Boccaccio's *Decameron*. I had read a beaten-up copy of the Italian classic when I was in India. Such a

simple idea: an isolated villa outside of Florence; the world dying of the Black Death; ten people gathered together hoping to survive; *telling each other stories to pass the time.* (FHR 17)

The novel *Ulysses* takes place in Dublin on a single day in 1904. *Ulysses* is named after an ancient Greek epic called *Odyssey*. Joyce used the ten years' wandering of Ulysses after the Trojan War as a parallel for his story in Dublin. Likewise in *Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios* the historical events will be the parallel story for fictional family story. "Nowadays. The family exists right now. And the historical events we choose will be a parallel, something to guide us in making up our stories about the family. Like Homer's *Odyssey* was a parallel for Joyce when he was writing *Ulysses*" (FHR 20).

The narrator asks Paul to construct a story about a Canadian family whose activities would mirror the historical events of the twentieth century. Paul likes the idea, but wants to make it more interesting. So they invent the fictional story of Helsinki, A Finnish-Italian family named Roccamatios. They plan to narrate the historical events chronologically. The narrator and Paul create a story about a large family to ensure the continuity of historical events. He ensures that everything besides the story is useless only the imagination can count. Their story telling is not a game or discussion about politics. The storytelling starts in the year 1901 with the death of Queen Victoria, and the same year of Sandro Roccamatio, the patriarch of the family dies in the Helsinki story. Paul changes historical events while keeping the same Roccamatio story. Sometimes their stories are short on plot and certain details are left unexplained. When Marco Roccamatio achieves majority control over

Orlando's group of small shareholders, Adolf Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany.

The same year narrator announces the birth of Lars Roccamatio.

The story stumbles along with unexplainable twists and turns based on Paul's condition. On good days, they come out with good events like the discovery of insulin. "1921-Frederick Banting and Charles Best discover insulin, the glucose-metabolizing hormone secreted by the Pancreas. It is immediately and spectacularly effective as a therapy for diabetes. The lives of millions are saved (FHR 41)". On bad days they come up with the incidents like Spanish Civil War. "1936 The Spanish Civil War begins, exceptional in its bloodletting ferocity (FHR 63). While both of them are in a good mood they talk about boxing championship. There is always a connection between the twentieth century history, and the Roccamatios story. Their storytelling has a parallel account of Paul's health condition. This technique of storytelling elevates the story to the greater heights though the subject is sad. They take events necessary to Paul's physical and mental health condition.

Martel imitates Conrad's style of using punctuation in the story, *The Time I Heard the Private Donald J. Rankin String Concerto with One Discordant Violin, by the American Composer John Morton*. Martel uses colons between the composers and the concertos and semi-colons between the musicians and their roles or instruments in Maryland Ensemble.

*Tomaso Albinoni: Concerto in B flat, opus 9, No.1*

*Concerto in G minor, opus 10, No.8*

*Johann Sebastian Back: Concerto No. 6 in B flat major*



.....  
*John Morton: The Private Donald J. Rankin*

*String Concerto with One Discordant Violin*

*(World Premiere)*

.....

*Strafford Williams; conductor*

*Joe Stewart: first Violin*

.....

*Calving Paterson; violins... (FHR 112)*

The typography used in the story resembles Conrad's punctuation in *Almayer's Folly*. Almayer is a white European who is a poor businessman who travels to Southeast Asia hoping to find a hidden gold mine. There he befriends a wealthy business man Languard who wants Almayer to marry his adopted Malayan daughter. He fails in his attempt to find a gold mine. He returns home with a hardened heart. "*He looked at his daughter's attentive face and jumped to his feet, upsetting the chair. "Do you hear? I had it all there; so; within reach of my hand"* (FHR 121). The semicolons of Conrad's sentence draw the readers' attention to wretchedness of Almayer's search for twenty years. Likewise the narrator's use of colons and semi-colons implies the pain that the musicians are going to convey.

In *Beatrice and Virgil*, the taxidermist imitates Gustave Flaubert's short story *The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator*. The taxidermist letter consists of Gustave Flaubert's short story *The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator*. Julian tortured innumerable animals.

Taxidermist's reference to Julian serves the purpose of the novel. The taxidermist tells he chose taxidermy as his profession in order to save the animals which were killed.

I became a taxidermist because of the writer Gustave Flaubert. It was his story 'The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator' that inspired me. My first animals were a mouse and then a pigeon, the same animals that Julian first kills. I wanted to see if something could be saved once the irreparable had been done. That is why I became a taxidermist: to bear witness. (BV 94)

Historiographic metafiction is a technique in postmodern fiction. Historiographic metafiction combines metafiction with historical fiction. Linda Hutcheon coined the term 'historiographic metafiction' to refer to works that fictionalise actual historical events or figures. A real historical personage is therefore, situated in a fictional world. Yann Martel uses historiographic metafiction in his second story *The Time I Heard the Private Donald J. Rankin String Concerto with One Discordant Violin, by the American Composer John Morton*. Martel relates Donald Rankin as a friend of John Morton on whom Morton composed the concerto. In reality, Donald Rankin was a historical figure who was killed during Vietnam War and is honoured in Vietnam Veterans Virtual Memorial. Martel creates Donald Rankin as Morton's friend. "So was Donald Rankin a friend of yours?" (FHR 143). "WAY BACK IN VIETNAM.... THAT'S WHERE I MET DON RANKIN" (FHR 147). "'Is this where you wrote the Rankin Concerto?'" "No, I wrote the Rankin years ago'" (FHR 155). After hearing the story about Morton's relation with Donald Rankin, the narrator goes to the memorial to honour Donald Rankin. "The first thing I did the next morning was to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial... I found him. Donald J.

Rankin. I touched his name gently” (FHR 157). Thus Martel has included historical figures into the fictional story.

In *Beatrice and Virgil*, Henry goes to the address given by the taxidermist. The address, “68 Nowolipki Street” (BV 166) mentioned in the play has historical reference. It is actually the house of Emmanuel Ringelblum, a historian who stored all the documents related to Warsaw Ghetto. “This vast documentation proved to be a chronicle of every aspect of life and programmed death in the Warsaw Ghetto from 1940 until its elimination in 1943 after the Ghetto uprising” (BV 167). It is symbolic at the end that both Erasmus and Mendelssohn die because Holocaust has deeply scarred both the persecuted and the persecutors.

Temporal distortion is a common postmodern technique which refers to discontinuity of time in narrating a story. The author jumps forward and backwards in time. Postmodern texts often shatter the time sequence by providing various overlapping and contradictory situations. Such novels provide multiple ending within which the author demands reader to search for the meaning. Martel used temporal distortion in the story *Manners of Dying*. In *Manners of Dying* the prison warden Harry Parlinton narrates Kevin’s death in many ways. “His letters memorialise the dead man” (Belsey 81). It is not clear whether the warden sent the letter or not. The number of letters written draws the reader’s attention towards the narrator’s inability to adequately describe Barlow’s death.

The prison warden uses repeated cliché. “Please believe that I share in your grief” (FHR 174). He finds difficulty of express Kevin’s death because he suffers from guilty conscious for annihilating a young life. Finally he protests: “This is not the way I would have had it. None of this is the way I would have had it” (FHR 198). The prison is named

“Cantos” to give a poetic touch. The details include the man’s last meal, whether he ate or not, the time he spent with the chaplain, the attitude he showed towards his inevitable death. Each letter has variations of details such as the prisoner has different meals, different reactions to religious counselling.

Kevin’s medical file indicated that he was a smoker, so I offered him a last cigarette. He took it in his hand, but he did not bring it to his mouth. I told him he had a minute to collect and compose himself and offered him a chair. He sat down and started at the ground. After the minute, I asked Kevin if he had any last words or any last message he wished to have transmitted. Short of breath, he said: “Tell my mother I love her.” (FHR 165)

Harry Parlington gives multiple versions to the same incident. The manner in which Kevin faced his death varies from letter to letter. In one letter the narrator writes Kevin accepts his death. In other letter he says Kevin protests against death. He writes, “To the very end, Kevin did not stop laughing” (FHR 173). “To the very end, Kevin did not stop shouting and struggling” (FHR 182).

In *Life of Pi*, Pi tells the story through his memory. He jumps forward and backward in his narration which emphasises temporal distortion. Pi accepts that his story does not have chronological sequence. Pi says, “What I remember are events and encounters and routines, markers that emerged here and there from the ocean of time and imprinted themselves on my memory.... But I don’t know if I can put them in order for you. My memories come in a jumble” (LP 192).

The novel *Life of Pi* provides two alternatives, whether to accept the first or the second version of the story is left to the readers. Open ended narrations are a common

aspect of postmodern literature. Open ended narration gives space for different interpretations. Martel leaves it to the reader to choose whichever version of the story is acceptable.

The literary critic Wayne Booth was first used the phrase “unreliable narrator” in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1960. The unreliable narrator is a narrator of the story who cannot tell his stories objectively. The narrator who commits the worst crimes and tries to justify his action is also termed as unreliable narrator. Their stories cannot be taken at face value. In *Life of Pi*, Pi is an unreliable narrator. Pi tells two versions of his story. After spending 227 days at sea, Pi recounts his story with animals. Pi’s first story is questioned by the Japanese officers. Pi is asked to provide another story. Pi invents human characters for the animals which were in the lifeboat in the second version of the story. Pi imagines himself as a terrible and violent tiger that kills the cook, the Frenchman is imagined as the hyena, Pi’s mother is imagined as the orang-utan, and the sailor is imagined as the zebra. The Japanese officers notice that the animals in the first story are symbols for people in the second version of the story.

[Mr. Chiba:] “So the Taiwanese sailor is the zebra, his mother is the orang-utan, the cook is ... the hyena- which means he’s the tiger!”

Mr. Okamoto:] “Yes. Tiger killed the hyena- and the blind Frenchman- just as he killed the cook.” (LP 299-305)

Pi points out that neither story can be proved. Pi asks his interrogators, “Since it makes no factual difference to you and you can’t prove the question either way, which story do you prefer?” (LP 317). Neither story talks about the sinking of the ship. In both stories, it is Pi who is the lone survivor and others die. The Japanese officers choose the story with animals as the better story.

Mr. Okamoto: “That’s an interesting question...”

Mr. Chiba: “The story with animals.”

Mr. Okamoto: “*Yes*. The story with animals is the better story.”

Pi Patel: “Thank you. And so it goes with God.” (LP 317)

Magical realism introduces fantastic or impossible incidents into the narrative which seems real. Martel used postmodern technique of magical realism in *The Vita Aeterna Mirror Company*. The grandmother has a mirror making machine which makes mirror from memories. ““What’s a mirror machine?” “It’s a machine that makes mirrors. That’s how we used to make mirrors”” (FHR 213). The mirror constructs a speech into a physical object with addition of oil, silver and sand. The grandmother’s memories are about her marriage, loss of her husband and her agony due to loneliness which she speaks into the funnel to create mirror. “I said it runs on memories. On recollections, souvenirs, stories. The past” (FHR 220). The grandmother’s words are faintly printed on the mirror. “The silver surface of the mirror was made of layer upon layer of lines of print, neatly criss-crossing at right angles” (FHR 236). Martel makes impossible events like mirror which is created out of memory.

Yann Martel, the master story teller has cleverly crafted his novel *Life of Pi* with a superb blend of fantasy amidst the backdrop of Pi’s life. Unbelievable and irrational events are explained logically by Pi. Martel has created the island which is filled with meerkats. Pi sees the island’s fresh ponds are full of dead fish. Pi notices that the island burns his feet at night but not during the day. Both Pi and Richard Parker stop in the island for eating the vegetation and drinking the fresh water. Finally Pi comes to the conclusion that the island is carnivorous. By day meerkats are seen and at night, the island becomes

carnivorous. Pi explains that this algae island secretes acid at night that will eat anything left on the land. Even he finds human teeth in the tree which makes him conclude that this island is filled with horror that had killed many castaways in this carnivorous island.

Fictional autobiographical novel is a fictionalised account of an author's own life. *Self* is a fictional autobiography of a young writer similar to Yann Martel. Like Martel, the protagonist in *Self* was born in Spain, in 1963 to student- parents. "In autobiographical narratives the narrator becomes the storyteller who tells stories that delineate the self as part of the story, envisioning alternatives to conceive of other ways of being, of acting, of striving" (Bruner 110). In *Beatrice and Virgil*, Henry, the writer reminds Yann Martel. Martel lives with his wife Alice Kuipers and their son Theo. Theo's name is mentioned in *Beatrice and Virgil*. Henry and his wife have a son named Theo in *Beatrice and Virgil*.

*Life of Pi* can be considered as an allegory. In *Life of Pi*, zebra and tiger are the symbols of human suffering. The animals were fighting for their survival. "The zebra was still alive... Movement was confined to a tremor in the rear leg and an occasional blinking of the eyes. I was horrified. I had no idea a living being could sustain so much injury and go on living" (LP 128). The injured zebra never lost hope and kept struggling for its life. The zebra has a human characteristic of fighting for survival like Pi struggling in the lifeboat. "The zebra came to life to defend itself. It pushed on its front legs and reared its head in an attempt to bite the hyena but the beast was out of reach. It shook its good hind leg" (LP 165). The zebra embodies human suffering. "The victim bore its suffering patiently" (LP 120). The hyena is surrounded by death but still kills the zebra and orang-utan.

Beatrice and Virgil are animals that are the symbols of suffering during the holocaust. The defenceless animals represent them as victims of suffering caused by terror and violence. In *Beatrice and Virgil*, Virgil the howler monkey is the mouthpiece for victims. His cry carries pain which refers to the Jewish cry for help which goes unheard. “Virgil: (rest fallen, placing his hands on the sides of his face) How can there be anything beautiful after what we’ve lived through?” (BV 112).

Typography is the art of making the written language legible. The word “typography” has its roots in Greek word *typos* meaning “impression” and *graphia* meaning “writing”. Martel uses typographical innovation in his novels. Often the grandmother’s narration turns to blah-blah.

In *The Vita AEterna Mirror Company: Mirrors to Last till Kingdom Come* the page is divided into two columns. The past memories are given in bold letters. The grandmother’s narration is given as a narrow column, and her grandson’s reply is given on the other side.

**As he was dying, he told me,**

**‘At least I die knowing that**

**Our children have a good**

**Mother.’**

**His example was a**

**blah-blah-blah-blah-**

This woman. (FBHR 225-26)

.....

**blah-blah-blah-blah-** I want nothing but the human, nothing else. (FHR 234)



In *Self*, the page is divided into two columns. The left column is written in German while on the right column English translation is provided. He uses Spanish, French, German and Hungarian in the novel. The novel juxtaposes English and several other languages in parallel column. The thoughts of the male narrator who wakes up as a woman on his eighteenth birthday are recorded in two parallel columns:

Tout était confus. . . . Je	I was confused. . . . I
savais que je pensais en	new that I was thinking in
français, ça au moins, c'était	English, that much I knew
sûr. Mon identité était liée à	right away. My identity was
la langue française.	tied to the English language. (S 107)

The story ends with the burden of the unforgettable incident of rape. The reader is able to feel what the narrator suffers. The best example is the final scene where the brutal event is given in the left side and narrator's psychological reaction is given in the right side.

I started to protest, to	.....
Plead, I can't remember my	.....
Words exactly. He grabbed	.....fear pain
Me by the throat and	fear pain fear pain fear pain
Slammed me against the wall.	Fear pain fear..... (S 288)

The word epistolary is taken from the Greek word "epistle" which means letter. Epistolary is a literary genre in which writers use letters, journals, and diary entries in

their works. Martel's *Manners of Dying* has epistolary structure. Martel's choice of letter writing allows the reader to hear the narrator's voice more intimately. He attempts to write different letters to narrate Kevin Barlow's execution. Each letter deals with variations, different meals and different reactions to religious counselling and different ways of narrating the death of the same prisoner.

Kevin's medical file indicated that he was a smoker, so I offered him a last cigarette. He took it in his hand, but he did not bring it to his mouth. I told him he had a minute to collect and compose himself, and offered him a chair. He sat down and started at the ground. After the minute, I asked Kevin if he had any last words or any last message he wished to have transmitted. Short of breath, he said: "Tell my mother I love her." (FHR 165)

*Life of Pi* is composed of transcription of interviews and reports. The transcription of the interview with the Japanese investigators contains the second version of Pi's account of his ordeal which is presented by the author in italics.

*As an aside, story of sole survivor, Mr. Piscine Molitor Patel, Indian citizen, is an astounding story of courage and endurance in the face of extraordinarily difficult and tragic circumstances. In the experience of this investigator, his story is unparalleled in the history of shipwrecks. Very few castaways can claim to have survived so long at sea as Mr. Patel, and none in the company of an adult Bengal tiger. (LP 319)*

Dialogue is a literary technique in which writers use two or more characters to converse with one another. Dialogues are used in novel for rhetorical or argumentative purpose. Pi's conversation with Japanese officers is written in the form of dialogues.

Martel's use of dialogue is the perfect vehicle to exchange his ideas to the readers. His dialogue writing is more appropriate as it helps the readers to ponder over the struggle that the animals faced in the novel.

BEATRICE: How's your back?

VIRGIL : It's fine. How's your neck?

BEATRICE: Without Knots.

VIRGIL : How's your foot?

BEATRICE: Ready for another day.

VIRGIL: I didn't find any food.

BEATRICE: Nor did I.

(*Pause.*) (BV 119)

Literary style includes word choice, figurative language, sentence formation, tone and voice. Martel uses figures of speech such as simile, metaphor and imagery in *Life of Pi*. For instance, the meerkats are described as chickens in the farmyard. The lifeboat is a metaphor for the human condition.

Martel aptly used the word "called" in *Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*. The word 'calling' symbolises Paul's calling of death. "Drugs called dapsons and trimethoprim were overcoming Paul's pneumonia, but he was still weak and out of breath" (FHR 10). Martel used words like "'surly,' 'ugly,' 'cunning,' 'grotesque,' 'harsh,' 'disposed to dishonesty'" (BV 76-77) when the Government wanted posters to describe about Virgil in *Beatrice and Virgil*. Martel used the following term to refer to the Holocaust. "'The

Events?,” “The Unthinkable? The Unimaginable?,” “The Unnameable,” “The Deluge?,”  
 “The Catastrophe?,” “The Searing?,” “The Terror?,” “The Tohu-bohu?,” “The Horror?””  
 (BV 131).

Silence speaks more than the words sometimes. Martel purposely uses ‘silence’ in his writing. In *Life of Pi*, Pi remains silent for a long time when he tells the second version of his ordeal. Pi is silent for a long time to control his emotions, to remember what really happened to him or to create a new version of the story. He says:

“Give me a minute, please.”

“Of course. *I think we’re finally getting somewhere. Let’s hope he speaks some sense.*”

[Long silence]

“Here is another story.”

“Good.” (LP 303)

Mr. Chiba: “*What a horrible story.*”

[Long silence] (LP 311)

“*And those teeth? Whose teeth were those in the tree?*”

[Long silence] (LP 312)

Mr. Okamoto: “*We give up. The explanation for the Sinking of the Tsimtsum is at the bottom of the Pacific.*”

[Long silence] (LP 316)

In *Beatrice and Virgil*, Beatrice and Virgil find it difficult to put their sufferings in words. They use silence,

BEATRICE: Difficult to put into words.

VIRGIL: What can we say about what they said?

BEATRICE: My tongue is tied.

VIRGIL: If I were reading it, what would I be reading?

BEATRICE: My pen is dry.

VIRGIL: This isn't working. We need a different approach.

*(Silence.)* (BV 136)

Multilingualism is the use of more than one language by the individual narrator. Among the main languages of English and French, the insertion of Czech, Hungarian and Turkish have been used in Yann Martel's *Self*. The narrator chooses his language based on the situation. When the narrator speaks about his parents' death, he speaks both in Spanish and English because the narrator conversed with his parents in Spanish.

I went to school in England, played outside in Spanish and told all about it at home in French. Each tongue came naturally to me and each had its natural interlocutors. I no more thought of addressing my parents in English than I did of doing arithmetic in my head in French. English became the language of my exact expression, but it expressed thoughts that somehow have always remained Latin. (S 18-19)

When the narrator narrates the conversation between Tito and his mother, translation in English language appears alongside a long conversation in Hungarian. Though the narrator does not understand anything, he is able to feel the emotion from their intimate conversation. “When she spoke to her son, I listened to their voices. Since I couldn’t understand a word they said, it was their emotions I heard and saw. Their manner was easygoing, attentive and respectful. They seemed never to interrupt each other. Clearly, mother trusted son and son trusted mother” (S 261). Yann Martel’s innovative style and technique proves his literary talent.

The devastation of Second World War has brought drastic changes in the society. The postmodern world witnessed the collapse in the established institutions such as marriage, family, religion and politics. People in the postmodern world feel meaningless due to the loss of faith in the established institutions. Life seemed to be meaningless and purposeless. Human beings attempt to find purpose in the absurd world which becomes fruitless. The postmodern world is shattered, disjointed, purposeless and absurd. Postmodern world experiences that they are in a new wasteland. They feel that the world is split into series of disconnected fragments. The postmodern world is full of chaotic, mechanical, fragmented, alienated and absurd. The feeling of despair becomes the dominant feeling in the postmodern era which resulted in melancholy known as paranoia. The loss of faith in established institutions and the lack of religious faith lead to uncertainties. The uncertainties lead to psychological trauma and identity crisis. Postmodern writers tried to portray this fragmentation of self-identity in their work of art. Postmodern writers aimed to emphasise discontinuity and distortions in their work of art. Yann Martel’s novels deal with the postmodern themes of psychological trauma, identity crisis, quest for survival and existentialism.

Psychological trauma is a kind of injury to the mind which arises from the traumatic events. The traumatic events include death of a loved one, war experience, terminal illness and recurrent horrific event. To overcome the psychological trauma people create an illusion of reality which results in paranoia. Paranoia is the major theme dealt in postmodern fiction. In a postmodern world, the trauma of Second World War made people to turn away from reality and results in paranoia. Psychoanalytic criticism is formed by the Austrian Psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Freud has applied some techniques of psychoanalysis in order to treat patients suffering from hysteria. “Psychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorder by ‘investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind’” (Barry 96). Psychoanalysis treatment encourages the patients to talk or recall memories in order to cure the problem.

Trauma means injury or wound. Psychological trauma is an outcome of agonizing experience which has severe impact on people’s mind. All the characters in Yann Martel’s novels suffer from psychological trauma. The symptoms of psychological trauma are excessive fear, feeling of guilt, feeling sad, disengagement, tiredness, confused thinking, depression, anxiety and frustration which is experienced by the characters of Yann Martel’s fiction. In *Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*, the narrator’s friend Paul is affected with psychological trauma due to AIDS that he has contracted during a blood transfusion during an accident. AIDS increases Paul’s stress. His mind is numbed with the fear of death. Paul is found depressed always. He feels no hope for the future. Seeing Paul’s mental health condition, the narrator gets anxious. Paul disengages with society and is depressed. The death of a loved one leaves its trace on the reaction of family

members too. Paul's father finds difficult to control his emotions. Paul's mother is so worried that she suffers from insomnia. Paul's sister gets hormephobia, a fear of electrical shock and tryphophobia, a fear of holes. All the characters in the story suffer from psychological trauma.

In the second story *The Facts Behind Helsinki Roccamatios*, John Morton is affected by post-traumatic stress disorder. His psychological trauma arises from his involvement in Vietnam War. War transforms him into a music composer. Morton's music expresses his loneliness. His psychological wound is revealed in the form of art. The narrator of the story wanders the city as a reaction of his psychological trauma. The narrator's friend also suffered from psychological trauma due to his work environment. In the third story *Manners of Dying*, the prison warden Harry Parlington is psychologically tormented after his continuous execution of death punishment. The warden is uncertain in his decision. He is in a confused state. His uncertainties make him to write the same event again and again. In the fourth story *The Vita AEterna Mirror Company*, the grandmother's loss of her beloved husband makes her undergo trauma. Such irreparable loss of life causes depression. The grandmother is grief-stricken, lonely and in under constant stress. Some of the traumatic events like sleeplessness, anxiety and mental agitation keep occurring in her life. She perceives world through her past memories.

In *Self*, the narrator's intersexed body causes psychological trauma. The unnamed male protagonist transforms into a female during the course of time. The narrator's psychological trauma is directly connected to his gender transformation. The narrator struggles both physically and psychologically. His physical change torments him mentally. The narrator lacks emotional connection with people. The narrator's psychological trauma arises from



two traumatic experiences; his parents' death in a plane crash and the instance when the protagonist is raped by a neighbour. The narrator suffers from fear, anxiety, panic, depression and loss. In *Life of Pi*, Pi's psychological trauma started the moment he loses his parents in the shipwreck. The shipwreck leaves him alone in the lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean. Life on a lifeboat as a lone human survivor brings both physical and psychological challenges. He physically suffered from seasickness, endless waves, thirst, hunger, hot sun, salt water and skin sores. His physical sufferings are more tolerable than the mental struggle he faces. His weariness grows into grief. Yann Martel's *Beatrice and Virgil* deals with the traumatic victimizer of the Holocaust. The taxidermist is psychologically disturbed due to his involvement in the Holocaust as a Nazi collaborator. The taxidermist feels a sense of guilt over the crime he has committed in his life. His trauma makes him eventually to commit suicide.

Identity crisis is a period of uncertainty when people's identity becomes insecure. The term "identity crisis" was coined by German psychologist Erik Erikson. His identity theory is based on the theory of 'ego identity'. He has published two influential books on identity, namely *Childhood and Society* (1950), *Youth and Crisis* (1968). According to Erik Erikson identity crisis arise at every stage of human life from childhood to adulthood especially during adolescent period because adolescent period is a crucial stage for young adults to choose among various choices. "Identity includes, but is more than, the sum of all the successive identification of those earlier years when the child wanted to be, and often was forced to become like the people he depended on" (Erikson 87).

Yann Martel deals with the theme of identity crisis in his novels. In the story *The Time I Heard*, John Morton is a Vietnam War Veteran who was exposed to uncertainties

for many years. He was confused about his identity as he was unable to assimilate in the mainstream society. After returning from the war, Morton works as a janitor in a bank during night to avoid meeting people. In *Self*, the narrator struggles to assert his self-identity. Self-identity develops through the person's interaction with the society. The narrator's self-identity is rooted in his sexual identity. Due to gender transformation from man to woman, the narrator struggles with his sexual-identity. His adolescent period brings uncertainties as he is unable to fit himself into the peer group and the society. In *Life of Pi*, the protagonist Pi was born as a Hindu. Pi was introduced to Hindu culture and is a strict vegetarian. Pi is forced to give up his lifelong vegetarianism which he inherited from his culture in order to survive in the Ocean. Pi expressed his agony to God for being forced to give up vegetarianism.

Existential dilemma is a confused state of moment when the issue of survival arise. Philosophically the term "existentialism" is associated with the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre in his existential theory says "... existence has precedence over essence" (67). "One's existence- the dangers, the risks, the choices- precedes one's essence- the models, theories and concepts of human nature" (Van 54). Of all the creatures man is able to decide his existence. Both existentialism and absurdism talk about human condition. Albert Camus, the French philosopher and writer introduces the philosophy of absurd in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Sisyphus is a character in Greek mythology who was condemned to repeat the job of pushing a rock over a mountain. Absurdism believes that human beings exist in the meaningless, purposeless and chaotic world. Human beings effort to find meaning or purpose in this world is fruitless. Martel used the theme of existential dilemma in *Life of Pi*. The protagonist Pi lost his family in the

shipwreck. Pi tries to understand the purpose of his life and the meaning of his existence. Pi's understanding of life is shaped by various religions. He follows three religions at the same time. Pi's shipwreck causes existential dilemma which makes him to find God and the true purpose of life. Since Pi's faith in God is very strong, he decides to live his life and made it meaningful.

Quest for survival is a difficult act of finding ways to survive in this world. It refers to the physical and mental strength to survive in this world. The phrase "survival of the fittest" originated from Darwinian evolutionary theory. Herbert Spencer, the British philosopher and scientist used the phrase in favour of Social Darwinism. Social Darwinism was used by the Nazis who believed that they were superior to the Jews and decided to exterminate the Jews.

Martel's *Life of Pi* deals with struggle for survival. Pi survived on the lifeboat for 227 days along with Richard Parker. He gives up his vegetarianism and eats animal meats to survive in the life boat. Orange Juice, the peaceful orang-utan becomes violent when the hyena attacks. Richard Parker, a ferocious animal becomes submissive because Pi gives him food. Martel shows not only human beings but also animals are ready to go to extremes to survive no matter that they change their fundamental nature. Pi has the will to live so he decides not to kill Richard Parker but to co-exist. Pi even waits for Richard Parker to come to the lifeboat when they go to the algae island. In *Beatrice and Virgil*, the taxidermist's play talks about the struggle for survival in the face of evil. The two animals Beatrice and Virgil have survived through unimaginable genocide. Their sewing kit is the survival kit. The sewing kit consists of images and sounds which will help to convey to posterity, the horrors that they faced. Thus it is proved that Yann Martel, a

postmodern writer has used themes and techniques deal that with the postmodern reality of human condition in his fiction taken for study. Throughout his fiction he discusses the postmodern reality of purposelessness, defencelessness, mechanical life style, materialistic view of life which results in lack of faith in established institutions, thus proving himself as a representative of postmodern reality.

Yann Martel gives solution to the chaotic condition of the postmodern world through the life of Pi. *Life of Pi* is a metaphor for human condition. Martel uses Pi's experience to enlighten the idea of life as expounded by Hindu philosophy which emphasise that Atman is the eternal soul and Brahman is the world soul. Brahman is the Ultimate Reality in the universe and it is the quintessence of the entire universe. Karma is an aspect of Hindu philosophy which believes that the soul will be born again and again until it attains salvation. Of all creatures Human beings have given the right to decide to live their life according to their perception. Human beings are free to take their own decision either to hold on to faith, as Pi did.

The truth of life is that Brahman is no different from atman, the spiritual force within us, what you might call the soul. The individual soul touches upon the world soul like a well reaches for the water table.... The finite within the infinite, the infinite within the finite.... But one thing is clear; atman seeks to realize Brahman, to be united with the Absolute, and it travels in this life on a pilgrimage where it is born and dies, and is born again and dies again, and again, and again, until it manages to shed the sheaths that imprison it here below. The paths to liberation are numerous, but the bank along the way is always the same, the Bank of Karma, where

the liberation account of each of us is credited or debited depending on our actions. (LP 49)

Pi remains as a lone human survivor after the shipwreck on the Pacific Ocean. Pi's unstinted faith in God, makes his survival possible. He does not give up his faith amidst his ordeals. Pi's faith proves God's presence. The invaluable gift conferred to humanity by God is the power of rational thinking. Pi feels that realising the existence of God makes his survival possible. Only by believing in the presence of God, man can save himself from the chaos and frustration which threaten him.

From Socrates to Osho many writers all over the world have emphasised importance of self- realisation. Present day humanity can find solution for their psychological problems by honouring and respecting their culture and heritage because the past knowledge can be the only remedy for the world which stands fragmented. T.S. Eliot says in *The Waste Land* that spiritual regeneration is the only solution for existential dilemmas faced by humanity; the qualities such as - "Data" (to give), "Damyata" (to sympathise), "Dayadham" (self control) are necessary to attain absolute inner peace in order to reach the path of salvation. Humanity in this contemporary world have detached them from religious faith and so face disintegration and chaos.

Life is so strange and subtle beyond human estimation. Retaining faith in an atmosphere devoid of humanism becomes a challenging task to the postmodern society. Yann Martel shows the contemporary reality through his writing. Human beings are running after materialistic benefits which ultimately lead to loss of identity, alienation and frustration. In the postmodern world people are caught in the whirlpool of everyday trials and tribulations in their search for material comforts, in spite of crossing over the

sufferings by using their spirituality as a means of attaining salvation, they succumb to desolation. The present day humanity tries to master its own destiny because of innovations in science and technology but fail to understand the omniscient presence of the Almighty that can guide them through any kind of ordeal. Yann Martel through the novel *Life of Pi* has imprinted the ideal that instilling faith in God will mould the postmodern society by making people lead a righteous way of life.