

Acknowledgement

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Chapter No.	Title	Page No.
	Abstract	
I	Introduction	1
II	Theme of Paranoia in Yann Martel's <i>The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios and Other Stories</i>	23
III	Application of Queer Theory to Yann Martel's <i>Self</i>	55
IV	Application of Logocentrism to Yann Martel's <i>Life of Pi</i>	92
V	Allegorical Representation of Holocaust in Yann Martel's <i>Beatrice and Virgil</i>	129
VI	Summation	159
	Works Cited	203

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Abstract

Abstract

The thesis entitled Reflection of **Postmodern Reality in the Select Fiction of Yann Martel** proposes to apply postmodern themes and techniques to reflect postmodern reality. The fiction taken for study are *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios and Other Stories* (1993), *Self* (1996), *Life of Pi* (2002), and *Beatrice and Virgil* (2010). The hypothesis is to prove Yann Martel as a representative of postmodern reality.

Chapter I –The introductory chapter traces the features of postmodernism. The term postmodernism is applied to many areas of human activity, including art, architecture, literature, film and music. Postmodern literature emerged in the post II World War years. Postmodernism promotes plurality of meanings. Postmodernists reject the traditional way of explaining reality. Yann Martel is one of the most influential figures of postmodern Canadian literature. In 2002 he attained universal acclaim when he won the Man Booker Prize for *Life of Pi*. He explores the theme of identity crisis which is a prominent characteristic of postmodern fiction.

Chapter II entitled ‘Theme of Paranoia in Yann Martel’s *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios and Other Stories*’, examines the theme of paranoia and its ensuing effects on individuals in Martel’s four short stories. *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios* is a story of a narrator who helps his friend who is affected by AIDS. The narrator is affected psychologically as he watches his friend succumb to AIDS. *The Time I Heard the Private Donald J. Rankin String Concerto with One Discordant Violin, by the American Composer John Morton*, is about a Vietnam veteran who is traumatized by war. His musical compositions express his loneliness, emptiness, and suffering through the discordant violin he plays. *Manners of Dying* consists of nine versions of a letter that a prison

warden writes to inform a mother of how her son Kevin faced his execution for the crimes, for which he was convicted. The trauma of executing death sentence and witnessing it is brought out through the letter. *The Vita Aeterna Mirror Company: Mirrors to Last till Kingdom Come* is about an antique mirror-making machine that is activated by spoken memories. The mental health condition of the various characters is affected either by undergoing suffering or by witnessing suffering at close quarters. The traumatic suffering creates a kind of delusion that keeps people away from reality and results in paranoia.

Chapter III entitled ‘Application of Queer Theory in Yann Martel’s *Self*’, recounts the story of the protagonist’s gender identity and transformation. According to Judith Butler, gender is performatively constituted. The narrator, at first male transforms biologically into a woman due to the psychological stress caused by the sudden death of his parents. The narrator identifies himself as queer or as intersexual. His intersexual body clearly challenges the social construction of sexuality and gender. The narrator’s sufferings, longings, loneliness, and mental agony erase all traces of happiness once he is aware of his unnatural gender identity which is a biological issue as well as psychological problem. Yann Martel analyses the psychological trauma of people with subverted gender identities through the narrator’s transformation from one to the other sexual identity and orientation. Yann Martel promotes the cause of social inclusion of people with ‘other’ sexual orientation, and biological identity such as transgender, bisexuals, lesbian, and gay who are relegated to the margins of the society by representing their trauma in his literary creation.

Chapter IV entitled ‘Application of Logocentrism in Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi*’, narrates the story of a sixteen year old boy who survives 227 days in the Pacific Ocean as a lone human survivor because of his faith in God. His life in the Ocean is a mechanical

routine devoid of any specific purpose or aim. This purposelessness shakes the solid ground of reason and blows the leaf of faith and makes him desolate. Reality has been established through the centuries by considering God as the transcendental signified. Logos is a Greek word which means as the centre of this world. Derrida terms this desire for center as 'logocentrism'. In *Life of Pi*, God is represented as a logocentric concept because of the protagonist's belief in the presence of God. He tries to understand the true purpose of his life and the meaning of his existence by trying to decipher the enigmatic philosophical ideology of various religions. Retaining faith in an atmosphere devoid of humanism becomes a challenging task to the postmodern society. The protagonist has strong will-power to overcome his depression and psychological trauma only through his faith in the transcendental signified.

Chapter V entitled 'Allegorical Representation of Holocaust in Yann Martel's *Beatrice and Virgil*', analyses the guilty conscience of the Holocaust victimizer who tells his story as a fragmented memory in the form of an allegory. Holocaust is passed on and remembered forever as a postmodern condition that emphasizes upon absurdity of human life. Symbolism is one of the main elements of allegorical fiction which involves the fictional representation of an object or place. Representation of animal characters as human being expresses the tyranny that happened during Holocaust more forcefully. The taxidermist is trying to write a play about the monkey and the donkey, circling around the horrors. According to the taxidermist, this horror refers to the extermination of animals. Later it is revealed that the taxidermist is trying to describe the Holocaust and he is one of the victimizers. The extermination of human being is expressed through the suffering of speechless creatures named Beatrice, a donkey and Virgil, a howler monkey and their subsequent

death. The taxidermist's rendering of the story is a reaction of his guilt ridden psyche as he tries to redeem himself off his sins by recording the cruelty meted out to the innocent people. His sense of guilt urges him to re-create the dead animals and infuse life into them. Understanding holocaust by reading and imagining is the only way to bring to limelight the suffering and trauma of the victims.

Chapter VI - The summation deals with the manner in which style has complemented the themes in Yann Martel's novels taken for study. Postmodernism challenges the traditional narrative technique. Martel effectively uses figurative language, literary devices, tone and different structural techniques. Martel uses various literary techniques to provide unique perspective to postmodern themes. He uses a simple diction. All the novels are in first person narrative. Certain autobiographical elements are also presented in his novels. The postmodern techniques such as fragmentation, non-linear narration, metafiction, intertextuality, magical realism, pastiche are the special techniques employed by Yann Martel. Story telling is a postmodern technique which is presented as one of the healing arts by the narrator of the story. Boccaccio's *The Decameron* is considered as a technique of pastiche which is used in *The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*. Fragmented narrative is employed in his works. At certain places the text is divided in two columns with different typefaces. Martel's narratives have ambiguous endings or multiple endings which are given deliberately for readers to make their choice. The themes dealt with and the techniques employed by Martel in his novels bring out the postmodern condition of sense of purposelessness, mechanical life style, materialistic view of life which is the result of lack of faith in established institutions, thus proving himself as a representative of postmodern reality.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation

FHR	-	<i>The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios and Other Stories</i>
LP	-	<i>Life of Pi</i>
BV	-	<i>Beatrice and Virgil</i>
S	-	<i>Self</i>