

*Allegorical Representation of Holocaust in
Yann Martel's Beatrice and Virgil*

Chapter V

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Beatrice and Virgil

“Allegory is a method of representation in which a person, abstract idea or event stands for itself and for something else” (Harry Shaw¹²).

The word allegory has been taken from the Greek word ‘allegorein’ meaning to speak in other terms. Allegory is an extended narrative which carries a second meaning along with its surface meaning. In an allegory, characters, events and ideas are used in a larger concept of political, religious, historical and social concept. In a deeper context allegory conveys ideas which consist of morals, social, religious or political values.

M. H. Abrams describes allegory as, “A narrative fiction in which the agents and actions sometimes, the setting as well, are contrived to make coherent sense on the literal or primary level of signification and at the same time to signify a second correlated order of agents, concepts and events” (4).

Theologians use myth as an allegory to emphasize the Christian doctrine of redemption or salvation. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* allegorizes the Christian doctrine of salvation, by narrating the manner in which the character named Christian flees the city of destruction and makes his way to the Celestial city. On his way to the city he encounters many allegorical characters called Faithful, Hopeful and the Giant Despair and passes through places like the Slough of Despond, the Valley of the Shadow of Death and Vanity Fair. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a moral, religious, historical and political allegory. Allegory is defined as:

An extended narrative in prose or verse in which characters, events, and settings represent abstract qualities and in which the writer intends a second meaning to be read beneath the surface story. The underlying meaning may be moral religious, political, social, or satiric. The characters are often personifications of such abstractions as greed, envy, hope, charity or fortitude. (Morner 4)

Allegory is an extended metaphor. Good allegory will not give detail explanation about the image or concept. These images and concepts give insight into the process of life through imagination. Thus like the metaphor, allegory also expresses spiritual, psychological concepts and ideas.

Allegorical fiction deals with complex realities in order to convey powerful, emotional, or psychological truth. Perfect example of the best allegorical fiction is *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. It is an allegory of twentieth century Russia. It can be read as a story about animals' riot in order to take over their farm. It also refers various types of governments and historic events. Orwell explores the theme of oppression using animal characters. The story has an advanced level of allegorical meaning which is a warning against the totalitarian government. In *The Lord of the Flies*, William Golding portrays the boys' adventure on a desert island. It is understood allegorically as a flight to establish a civilized society. Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* is another good example of allegory. There are good and bad kinds of characters in the *Faerie Queen*. Good characters symbolize virtues whereas bad characters refer to the vices.

In Yann Martel novel *Beatrice and Virgil*, the protagonist named Henry is a novelist who has won much acclaim for his second novel which featured wild animals.

The protagonist Henry has just completed his novel, on the Holocaust. After five years of research he has produced a flip book which consists of both an essay and a novel which is bound together. Being rejected by his publisher, he stops writing and moves to a new city. One day he receives a mail which consists of a philosophy of Flaubert's short story *The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator*. The story is accompanied by a dialogue between two characters, Beatrice and Virgil. The story is about a Saint who in his youth had tortured various animals. Henry is so enthusiastic to know about the author of the story Beatrice and Virgil. He discovers that the story is sent from a taxidermist's shop, where he sees two specimens of a monkey and a donkey in the workshop. The taxidermist, also called Henry, is trying to write a play about the monkey named Beatrice and the donkey named Virgil, circling around the horrors. According to the taxidermist, this horror refers to the extermination of animals. Later the author comes to know that the taxidermist is trying to describe the Holocaust like him. Actually the taxidermist was one of the Nazi supporters who was involved in tormenting victims in the concentration camp.

Beatrice and Virgil is a novel which has been connected to several different allegorical representations of characters, themes and symbols which is Biblical, political, and psychological. The two animals resemble the allegorical images of guilt the perpetrator of the vice undergoes in the aftermath of the crime. Their roles primarily fulfil the theme of psychological allegory. The taxidermist's rendering of the story is a reaction of this guilt ridden psyche. His sense of guilt urges him to re-create the dead animals and infuse life into them.

My book is about representation of the Holocaust. The event is gone; we are left with stories about it. My book is about a new choice of stories.

With a historical event, we not only have to bear witness, that is, tell what happened and address the needs of ghosts. We also have to interpret and conclude, so that the needs of people *today*, the children of ghosts, can be addressed. In addition to the knowledge of history, we need the understanding of art. Stories identify, unify, give meaning to. Just as music is noise that makes sense, a painting is colour that makes sense, so a story is life that makes sense. (BV 14)

Martel's use of allegory is grounded on the Holocaust. His novel *Beatrice and Virgil* allegorizes the Holocaust, a genocide that happened throughout Europe during the 1930s and 40s. Martel represents the agony of victims as 'the Horror' in his novel. "Apart from some artists, historians and survivors learning about the Holocaust in more of a weary duty than a part of our daily way of being" (Sielke 19). The novel is a symbolic representation of a historical event to illustrate the horrors of that period of time.

To allegorize the Holocaust is to make the event a larger metaphor for genocide, deliberate and extensive persecution, a unaccountable suffering-will denigrate the death of six million Jews and the torment of countless survivors, so as to victimize them yet again. (Hasewell 30)

Usually the Holocaust story is approached in a historical way bearing witness through the eyes of the victims. This novel represents Holocaust through the perspectives of the victimizer. There are very few allegories about the Holocaust. Yann Martel mentions about the Holocaust in his interview named Big Think.

My feeling is that the literary arts, because they are tethered to fixed meaning... after all, words are highly conventionalized sounds. The word “table” has a fairly standard meaning. Well, if you increase that, words are tethered to specific meanings and if you string them together, you start being tethered to narrative, to narration. And once you’re tethered to narration, when it comes to the Holocaust, you very quickly end up on a train going to hell, you end up on a train going to Auschwitz, you very quickly end up in that narrative trope. So it’s hard to escape talking about it in the very literal, historical manner. (np)

The Holocaust was a devastating issue that happened during World War II. Approximately six million Jews were murdered by the Nazi regime. The word ‘Holocaust’ came from the Greek word ‘Holokauston’, meaning sacrifice from fire.

What need was there to talk about the Holocaust here? If he found some Jews amidst this peaceable gaggle, would they care to have him gore their beautiful day with talk of genocide? Would *anyone* care to have a stranger come up to them whispering, ‘Hitler ausch witz six million in can descent souls my god my god my god’? (BV 18)

Holocaust began in 1933 when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. When Hitler came to power, he developed the first concentration camp to kill anybody who criticized him. Germans thought that they were racially superior and Jews were treated as inferior. The Nazi’s believed that Jews were the major threat to the German community. The Holocaust involved killing many people such as the gypsies, homosexuals, the disabled, mostly the Jews. Innumerable Jews were physically attacked and were taken to

concentration camps, extermination camps, labour camps, prisoner-of-war camps or transit camps by train. Life in the camps was terrible. The Jewish prisoners were forced into hard physical labour and were tortured to the core. Deaths were common in the concentration camps. Some prisoners were killed in the gas chambers. Their lives in the concentration camps were filled with terror, horror, fear and pain.

The allegorical representation of Holocaust has been used to study the present condition of life in the postmodern world. Lawrence Langer warns thus: “If we use the Holocaust for something else then the intolerable might seem more tolerable through the sheer invocation of patterns or analogies and it is precisely this impossibility of comparison that nullifies any metaphor, application or allegorical representation” (15).

The Holocaust is undoubtedly a horrific experience with a severe impact for the survivors. “The force of this experience would appear to arise precisely... in the collapse of its understanding” (Caruth 7). This kind of psychological trauma keeps haunting not only the victim but also the victimizer either in the form of dreams or flashbacks. Cathy Caruth describes:

There is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (4)

There has been extensive discussion about the use of metaphor to express trauma. Trauma originally means wound; psychological trauma is the consequence of an agonizing experience with a severe impact registered in the brain. The only way for the

people to overcome the traumatic experience, is by talking about it to someone else.

“The history of trauma in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another” (Caruth 11). The taxidermist as a victimizer often carries a big burden of guilt on his shoulders.

Narration and telling one’s story has been widely recognized as one of the best ways to try to work through a trauma. “Narrative is a way of making sense, of putting one’s life in order, doubly difficult after the Holocaust left blanks and disorder” (Sicher 6). This novel is an attempt to make a narrative memory of a traumatic victimizer of the Holocaust who tells his story as a fragmented memory in the form of allegory. Martel neglects to write about actual event of Holocaust in this novel, instead he uses allegory by depicting stuffed animals to portray the actual event.

The author and the taxidermist keep discussing the story and it becomes part of the narrative itself. Yann Martel constantly mixes past with present action to bring about the action of the story and to connect it with the impending truth of the holocaust. “Our concept of the human condition has been badly shaken, and it should not be surprising that postmodernism refers to the Holocaust a theme and argument for the loss of meaning, loss of faith, and loss of humanity” (Sicher 305). Martel through this novel conveys that the Holocaust is passed on and remembered forever as a postmodern condition that emphasizes upon absurdity of human life. The theme of trauma resonates from the beginning of the novel. “Trauma is absolutely full of metaphor” (Winslow 593). The protagonist stops writing novels to overcome his trauma of failure whereas the taxidermist starts writing a play to overcome the trauma experienced due to his guilty conscience.

Telling the story is a form of working through trauma, which ideally ends with the separation of the second generation from the dead and their connection to a real past, to a family and people in which they are a living link, transmitting a heritage to future generations. It is storytelling above all that shapes collective and personal memory in that transmission, and the way the story is told, the issue of narrativity itself, therefore must be central to any discussion of the situation of the post-Holocaust generation, which is positioned between history and memory and is removed from the experience by fifty years and more. (Sicher 13)

Henry receives a large envelope from one of his readers which contains three things in it. The first is a photocopy of a short story by Gustave Flaubert's short story in which animals are slaughtered in great numbers. The second is the scene from a play, where two characters discuss the qualities of a pear. The last is a brief notes asking help to improve his writing skills. Though Henry keeps receiving such notes, he became interested in the play and decided to meet the budding author in person. Henry traced the sent address and found the author of the play to be an old man who was a taxidermist by profession.

After Henry meets the sender in person they regularly meet and discuss about the progress of the action in the play. Henry finds the taxidermist's shop is filled with all kinds of animals from predator to prey. Henry identifies two stuffed animals, monkey and donkey in the taxidermist's shop as Beatrice and Virgil in the play. These two characters discuss about food, hunger, love and violence. Beatrice and Virgil have survived through the unspecified mass killing of animals called 'The Horrors'. They try to find ways to express the unbearable pain while they have experienced while witnessing the mass

killing. Like the taxidermist whose profession is to preserve animals, Beatrice and Virgil's play also deals with the theme of survival. These animals communicate drawing pattern in Beatrice's fur and hand gesture to express their trauma.

After many discussions and after reading many scenes at random, Henry suspects that the play deals with the themes of Holocaust. Henry discovers that the taxidermist was a Nazi collaborator. After the discovery the taxidermist stabs Henry and sets fire to his own shop, burning up everything along with the stuffed replica of Beatrice and Virgil. The taxidermist by writing the play tries to reconstruct the life of Beatrice and Virgil who were the victims of the horror during the Holocaust.

Henry has spent five years for writing a new book which addresses Holocaust in two parts: the first is an essay that discovers the Holocaust's representation in fiction; the second part is a novel. "He was representing the Holocaust differently" (BV 168). When Henry was rejected from publishing the novel and the collection of essays, he comes up with the idea of the flip-book wherein he could publish the two side by side with two front covers and no back cover. They rejected the idea by telling that though it is innovative it is not practical, so he turned down from publishing the unique book. "No such poetic licence was taken with- or given to- the Holocaust. That terrifying event was overwhelmingly represented by a single school: historical realism." (BV 8).

The story is written by the taxidermist featuring animals as central characters. The old man informs Henry thus: "The play is titled as, 'A Twentieth Century Shirt- A play in Two Acts'. The setting is in "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 101). Henry is puzzled by the setting as all these

words are related to Holocaust. The old man says that he has selected the word Shirt to name his country, as it is found in every country and has a universal resonance.

It should be mentioned, because it is central to the difficulties Henry encountered, to his tripping and stumbling and falling, that his flip book concerned the murder of millions of civilian Jews-men, women, children-by the Nazis and their many willing collaborators in Europe last century, that horrific and protracted outbreak of Jew-hatred that is widely known, by an odd convention that has appropriated a religious term, as the Holocaust. (BV 7)

This novel reads as an allegory about the Holocaust in which the tragic fate of the Nazi victims are brought out through the title characters - a donkey named Beatrice and a monkey named Virgil, who are stuffed animals in the taxidermy shop. Initially the taxidermist seems to mourn for the dying of animals around the world. The two characters discussing about the shape of a pear and this conversation resembles the absurd play of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Henry becomes involved in the taxidermist's play fascinated by the life-like displays in the shop. The taxidermist is an old man who is in his eighties and looks lonely and alienated. While Henry asks the reason for choosing these two animals for his play, the old man replies: "Because monkeys are thought to be clever and nimble and donkeys are thought to be stubborn and hardworking. Those are the characteristics that animals need to survive. It makes them flexible and resourceful, able to adapt to changing conditions" (BV 98). Later it is revealed that he has been a Nazi collaborator. Henry deciphers the crux of the play in his subsequent visits. The extermination of human

being and the suffering of the Jesus is expressed through the suffering of speechless creatures and their subsequent death.

Holocaust was an extermination campaign prosecuted against Jews. Martel did not deny the fact, but he treats the fact with his imagination using allegory. “It’s simply easier to write in vague, metaphoric shorthand than to create art from the reality of millions of gassed and burned Jews. Martel glanced at the darkness of the Holocaust and then quickly averted his gaze to the far more comfortable sight of his own novel” (Sacks 83-85).

Henry understands that the taxidermist is using the Holocaust as the theme of his play. Beatrice and Virgil are the names of Dante’s guides through heaven and hell respectively in his *Divine Comedy*. Martel uses animal imagery to comment upon the hell like torture that happened in the Nazi regime. The taxidermist like Julian in the story *The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator* by Flaubert raises many questions regarding humanism through his play. The taxidermist says:

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)

Yann Martel emphasizes the need to convey the trauma of Holocaust victims through the allegoric characters Beatrice and Virgil. “To exemplify and argue this supplementary way of thinking about the Holocaust, Henry had written his novel and essay” (BV 9). Martel explores the burden and legacy of traumatic memory through this allegoric representation of animal characters in *Beatrice and Virgil*. He uses a monkey

and a donkey as metaphor to depict the plight of the victims. Henry the protagonist is an acclaimed writer like Yann Martel. The success of his novels does not change him, but he loses hope when his third book about the Holocaust is rejected by the publisher and so he gives up writing.

Henry realized then what answer he should have given the historian. His flip book was about having his soul ripped out and with it, attached, his tongue. Wasn't that what every Holocaust book was about, aphasia? Henry remembered a statistic: fewer than two percent of Holocaust survivors ever write about or testify to their ordeal. Thus the typical approach of those who do speak about it, so precise and factual, like a stroke victim who's learning how to speak again and who starts with the simplest, clearest syllables. For this part, Henry now joined the vast majority of those who had been shut up by the Holocaust. His flip book was about losing his voice. (BV 18)

Henry moves to a new city along with his wife and involves himself in various activities of his interest. His failed book on the Holocaust keeps troubling him and the taxidermist's play satisfies his creative thirst. Taxidermist says that he has chosen animal characters, because earlier writers have produced stereotyped version of the Holocaust. The taxidermist gives reason for employing animal character in his story thus:

If I tell a story about a dentist from Bavaria or Saskatchewan, I have to deal with readers' notions about dentists and people from Bavaria or Saskatchewan, those preconceptions and stereotypes that lock people and stories into small boxes. But if it's a *rhinoceros* from Bavaria or

Saskatchewan who is the dentist, then it's an entirely different matter.

The reader pays closer attention, because he or she has no preconceptions about rhinoceros dentist- from Bavaria or anywhere else. The reader's disbelief begins to lift, like a stage curtain. Now the story can unfold more easily. There's nothing like the unimaginable to make people believe.

(BV 28-29)

Martel uses the animal allegory to signify the human condition. The animal characters are the allegorical representation of the Holocaust victims. "There are animal characters- a monkey and a donkey- and they live on this very large shirt. It's all quite fanciful, yet there are elements that remind me, well, that remind me of the Holocaust" (BV 111). There are two animals portrayed in this novel namely Beatrice a donkey and Virgil a howler monkey "The two characters are animals?" "That's right, like in your novel. Beatrice is the donkey, Virgil is the monkey" (BV 72). These two characters are talking about their experiences at random. Beatrice and Virgil are travelling across a country in the shape of a Shirt. This Shirt signifies twentieth century Europe during the Second World War. "The Holocaust? You see the Holocaust in everything.' 'I knew you'd say that. Except in this case there's an emphatic reference to striped shirts, for example.' 'So?' 'Well, during the Holocaust' Yes, I know about striped shirts and the Holocaust" (BV 111). When they were moving across the Shirt they experience horrors which signify the Holocaust. "Virgil and Beatrice- my guides through hell. Hell? What hell? Henry wondered. But at least now he understood the connection to *The Divine Comedy*. Dante is guided through inferno and purgatory by Virgil and then through paradise by Beatrice" (BV 73). Beatrice is described as a gentle kind of a person. Virgil is a very aggressive

kind of a person. There are three look up notice for Beatrice and Virgil put up by the authorities. This indicates a description of a man who has undergone lot of horrors.

FELLOW CITIZENS!

Large monkey of surely disposition. Eyes, voice, tail and gait indicative of cunning temperament. Clings to life tenaciously. Characterized by antisocial behaviours.

Ugly. (BV 73)

Yann Martel employs allegory to narrate the pain and absurdity of the Holocaust in his novel *Beatrice and Virgil*. The two animals discuss about a pear in the opening scene of the play. “A play featuring two animals that have an extended conversation about a pear” (BV 72). Virgil goes on to show Beatrice that in a pear, there is an apple, a banana, an egg, a gourd and what not because things are not always just what they seem to be. Virgil describes various food items their discussion will always end up in a conversation about food because starvation becomes a symbol of their trauma.

BEATRICE: Describe a pear for me. What is a pear like?

VIRGIL: (*settling back*) I can try. Let’s see... To start with, a pear has an unusual shape. It’s round and fat on the bottom, but tapered on top.

BEATRICE: Like a gourd.

VIRGIL: A *gourd*? You know gourds but you don’t know pears?

How odd the things we know and don’t. At any rate, no, a pear is smaller than an average gourd, and its shape is more pleasing to the eye. A pear

becomes tapered in a symmetrical way, its upper half sitting straight and centred atop its lower half. Can you see what I mean?

BEATRICE: I think so. (BV 42-43)

Symbolism is one of the main elements of allegorical fiction which involves the fictional representation of a historical object or place. The animal characters in the story are the representation of actual people during the Holocaust, thus proving it as an allegory. “The monkey [Virgil] and the donkey [Beatrice] try to find what I’m calling a portable metaphor, a metaphor that can be applied not only to their situation, but to other situations that are Holocaust like” (Sielke 31). The final element of allegorical fiction is that the events in the story are parallel to the actual events.

The taxidermist highlighted Julian’s slaughter of animals and eventual redemption in neon yellow in the pages from Flaubert’s book he has posted to Henry. Julian’s mother is visited by a hermit who prophesized that her son would be a saint. “She meets a gypsy who foretells that Julian would be a conqueror, the cause of much bloodshed and glory” (Flaubert 32-33). Later Julian develops an insatiable appetite for slaughtering animals as a solitary hunter; he accidentally murders his own parents. Being haunted by his act of patricide, he is isolated from others and suffers. Julian is finally visited and redeemed by a leper who is Christ in disguise. Henry says, “Two modes of seeing the world are juxtaposed by Flaubert” (BV 42). The killing of animals in this story is juxtaposed with the killing of Jews in the Holocaust.

It is set straight by the end of the story. Julian takes in a horribly disfigured leper who is cold and famished, giving him not only food and shelter, but his own bed, lying naked on top of him- ‘mouth to mouth,

breast to breast' –to give him all the warmth he Christianly can. The leper proves to be Jesus Christ. When the Lord rises in the sky, taking with him the redeemed Julian, what is being represented is the triumph of Julian's blood-spattered moral compass point true north. (BV 40)

The taxidermist is unsociable, humourless and silent. He is described by his neighbour as a crazy old man. He used to get into fights with the neighbours. The taxidermist took up taxidermy in 1945 at the age of sixteen and is now eighty one. His workshop is a dark old building addressed No.1993 in the street. He has hundreds of stuffed and mounted animals of every kind in his shop. Many are rare specimens, some now extinct. The taxidermist is deeply disturbed by the indiscriminate killing of animals by humanbeings. The population of animal has been reduced over the years. He has special association with two of his mounted animals, a howler monkey and a donkey. The play he has been working is set during Second World War and he seeks help from Henry who is a successful author.

The play talks about the nature of survival in the face of evil. The animals struggle to survive the cruelties after suffering through the worst atrocities of inhumanity. The taxidermist is doing the hard and careful work of preserving species that have been exterminated. In the beginning Henry is unable to understand the reason for which the taxidermist wants to record and remember the cruelty of humanity. Yann Martel emphasizes the importance of recording the truth about the extermination of people during Holocaust to ensure that humanism survives.

The taxidermist believes that redemption from the psychological trauma that has been tormenting him is possible for him only through writing. Guilt is a personal feeling

resulting from a wrong or immoral deed one has committed in his life. Guilt is a universal phenomenon. It implies the psychological and mental condition of a person who has committed sin. Every human being in this world consciously or unconsciously commits mistakes. They feel guilty conscious when their conscience questions them about the mistakes. He feels guilty conscious due to his act as Nazi collaborator. Later, throughout his life, he is trying to portray in his writing the traumatic incident that he had witnessed. He commits suicide for the sin he has committed.

The setting of the play happens in a country named Striped Shirt such shirts were worn in concentration camps. Henry interprets that the play is about Holocaust, but the taxidermist insists that his work is about the animals. “Exterminated, wiped out forever... this irreparable abomination” (BV 135). Henry comes to realize that the play is a different kind of allegory, “Using the Holocaust to speak of the extermination of animal life” (BV 173). ““I would never harm an animal,” the taxidermist insists. “They are my friends”” (BV 96). His career as a taxidermist comes from his desire to save something. “Once the irreparable had been done. That is why I became a taxidermist to bear witness” (BV 98). When Henry brought his dog Erasmus, the taxidermist doesn’t smile, greet or even glance at it. So Henry understands that the taxidermist has no adoration for animals. “He never smiles; his face is expressionless; he has no sense of humor, he is a control freak; one look from him sucked the life out of laughter” (BV 122 - 23). The taxidermist is the one who kills Beatrice and Virgil at the end of the play. Henry unveils the truth that the taxidermist is one of the, “...main instigators in some terrible deeds” (BV 182) when he was sixteen years old, during World War II. The play recounts the fact of the barbarous

killing that ever happened in history. The preserved shapes of Beatrice and Virgil provide the evidence of the killing. “The fact that someone had cut off Virgil’s tail” (BV 22).

There is a connection between history and taxidermy. “Skinning an animal must be the taxidermist’s first perfection. If it is not done well, there will be a price to pay later. It is like the gathering of evidence for the historian. Any flaw at this stage may be impossible to fix later on.... The evidence can be so ruined as to prevent a proper interpretation of the event, to use the language of the historian” (BV 90). The evidence appears on the form of the animals. The thread, the pose, the setting, the skull and tongue which is preserved can either suggest that the animal had a natural death or if it was brutally murdered. “What I am actually doing is extracting and refining memory from death. In that I am no different from a historian” (BV 96). The address mentioned in the play is not original. “It’s an imaginary address where every trace of the Horrors would be filed away and saved, every memoir, account and history, every photograph and film, every poem and novel, everything” (BV 166-67). “The address was actually the house where historian Emmanuel Ringelblum preserve his documents describing life in the Warsaw Ghetto between 1940 and 1943” (BV 173). Carr defines history as, “... a hard core of interpretation surrounded by a pulp of disputable facts” (23-24). With a few survivors and witnesses of holocaust, the present society is assuming the impact of it. Regarding postmodernism George Steiner says: “We come after, and that is the name of our condition” (72).

Yann Martel makes the readers empathise with the victims of holocaust through his novel *Beatrice and Virgil* which is presented as a historical fiction. The allegorical representation of history has subverted the violence and brutality that actually happened. “Art as suitcase, light, portable, essential-was such a treatment not possible, indeed, was

it not necessary, with the greatest tragedy of Europe's Jews?" (BV 9). The taxidermist play 'Beatrice and Virgil' is an embodiment of personal experiences of two victims but narrated by the instigator of the crime.

Doomed creatures that could not speak for themselves were being given the voice of a most articulate people who had been similarly doomed.

He was seeing the tragic fate of animals through the tragic fate of Jews...

Hence, Virgil's and Beatrice's incessant hunger and fear, their inability to decide where to go or what to do. (BV 173-74)

Representation of animal characters as human being expresses the tyranny that happened during Holocaust more poignantly. These animals represent the Jewish people who were brutally tortured during the Holocaust. Martel expresses the oppression underwent by the Jews during the Nazi regime through the animal imagery. Thus Martel has portrayed Holocaust in a unique manner.

He was seeing the tragic fate of animals through the tragic fate of Jews.

The Holocaust as allegory. Hence, Virgil's and Beatrice's incessant hunger and fear, their inability to decide where to go or what to do. And when Henry remembered the drawing the taxidermist had shown him with the Horrors hand gesture, it was not what Virgil did with his fingers once his hand was right in front of his chest that struck Henry now-it was the initial position of the arm: something very close to a Hitler salute, wasn't it? (BV 168)

The story succeeds in making the horrors of Holocaust more evident. For instance, there is a scene on the road where the animals marvel at the beauty of the landscape;

suddenly a blue and grey striped shadow which they have seen before is projected over everything; it is the shadow of striped German officers. The striped shirt makes Henry to comprehend that the play is an allegorical representation of the Holocaust. The next few scenes emphasises Henry's doubt. The taxidermist reads the scene in which Virgil recalls the miseries. There is a scene in a café where Virgil hears the official announcement that his class of people have been declared non-persons. The taxidermist has designed the propaganda posters defaming Virgil.

It's the expulsion from Eden! The Fall! In an instant, the newspaper is transmogrified into a giant finger floating in the air, pointing at him. Virgil is filled with apprehension that other patrons at the café, many of them reading the same newspaper, will notice him. Why, over there and over there, didn't they just glance at him? That's how the events entered his life, he laments, as they had entered the lives of so many others, a vast and varied group that included him and Beatrice and others and others and others: with a single moment of realization. (BV 125)

After Virgil flees the city, he reflects on various forms of pain of the knee or the back, of thirst and hunger, of the pairs "... that injures no particular organ yet kills the spirit that links them" (BV 128). Pain is signified by a red cloth that Virgil finds along the way. In a powerful soliloquy, Beatrice reflects the death like experience and torture thus:

Someone is dying and as they are dying they grab at the red cloth of suffering... nothing before in their life has involved them so completely emotionally or overwhelmed them with such crushing intellectual totality ... the red cloth of suffering clings to their body like clothing, only tighter,

then clings like a shroud, only tighter, then clings like embalming bands,
only tighter. (BV 164-65)

The only emotion that engulfs Virgil is fear and isolation and he feels like, “a wandering corpse” (BV 131). Beatrice advises Virgil that prayer is their only solution. “Beatrice says think in right measure... then break into prayer. And after you’ve prayed, get back to the building work of goodness” (BV 108). The torture that Beatrice has endured makes her depressed and distrustful: “... battering, near boiling, boiled water poured into her ear, an iron bar inserted into her rectum, her hoof nailed to the floor while her tortures pulled on her tail (BV 177-79)”. Beatrice recounts her ordeals to Virgil, she remembers most clearly the first casual violation of modesty.

I remember the first slap, just as I as being brought in already then something was lost forever, a basic trust... with that first blow, something akin to Porcelain shattered in me ... A single blow is dot, meaningless. It’s a line that is wanted, a connection between the dots that will give purpose and direction. (BV 174-75)

There are scenes where the two animals try to find a term to explain the manner in which they are abused; they settle on the word “the horrors”. They work on devising a wider language that includes gesture and symbol through which “the horrors” can be represented.

One of the most thought-provoking sections of the taxidermist’s play is that on language. The language that has been used to convey the truth proves that the play is an allegorical representative of Nazi Holocaust. “‘I didn’t get the last one,’ Henry said, at length. ‘Aukitz, a-u-k-i-t-z.’ ‘It sounds like German, but I don’t recognize the word.’ ‘No, it’s not. It’s a kind of onelongword.’”(BV139). “...the pity of it all when so much

was possible” virgil’s “...evill iv in groom an erroneously”” (BV 141). While waiting for deliverance from suffering, the two animals wonder about the merits of silence, but silence always allows other distracting sounds or thoughts to be heard. There is “aukitz,” a variation of onelongword, to “... be printed in every book, magazine and newspaper, in a spot conspicuous or discreet, depending on the wish of the author or publisher- to indicate that the language within is knowing of the Horrors” (BV 147). “The one opposite from where the noise came from. I’m not sure where it came from. We’re surrounded! Shhh, be quiet!” (BV 140).

Beatrice finds the alternative silence behind the loud noise as, “Thousands of shadows pressing on me” (BV 141). Beatrice and Virgil are frightened of inviting the attention of their tormentors, so they device gestures to communicate. One of the gestures is a Nazi salute which clearly indicates Henry that the taxidermist’s play has reference to the Holocaust. “The hand was brought in front of the chest, two fingers were pointed down and then the hand dropped down” (BV 137). Henry wonders, “Why two fingers?” (BV 137). Beatrice and Virgil come up with the idea of explaining the hand gesture, which again reinforces Hitler’s cruelty against the innocent victims.

As the two friends move from known peril into the unknown, they find it difficult to keep faith and to be optimistic for, “There’s evil every day of the week” (BV 107). Their emotional turmoil, hunger, fear, agony and injuries, can be associated with all the victims. Faith is belief but for the victims faith leads to disbelief as they are dejected because they succumb to the torture and the expected redeemer never appears. There is a scene where Virgil dances with the red cloth of suffering. The two animals talk about religion and decide that the most they can manage is to be believer on three days of the

week, hesitation on the fourth before disbelief sets in on the remaining three days. The problem is that neither Beatrice nor Virgil is sure which day of the week it currently is. Their discussions are symbolic representation of the real incident. Retaining faith in an atmosphere devoid of milk of human kindness becomes a challenging task to the victims. The taxidermist had attached symbolic significance to the sewing kit and considers it as a technique employed in the play. Sewing kit is a symbolic of literary work published on the theme of Holocaust.

BEATRICE: Fine. Have your godless days. Why don't we say Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays? Hesitate on Thursdays, and then embrace on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Does that sound good? (BV 103)

Only people like Job who had unstinted faith in God can remain a believer in God's bountiful mercy in such a demoralizing situation. Beatrice and Virgil work on assembling a survival kit for themselves, a list which they call the sewing kit which will make it possible to speak and live truthfully both in the world of "the horrors" and in future post-horrors world. The taxidermist believes that sewing kit is his "... greatest literary achievement" (BV 143). "Words are all he has to put together his life's walk" (BV 100-101). Because through the various linguistic devices, Beatrice and Virgil are able to capture, communicate, and decode what life is like for them in the Country called Shirt. The purpose of the Sewing Kit is "... to make things knowing" (BV 147). It is a way they might talk about the Horrors in the future, "To remember and yet to go on living ... to know and yet to be happy- or at least content, productive" (BV 137). The Sewing Kit consists of "... images (like a black cat) of sounds (a howl, a speech, a song) an ideal (plain truth common nouns

like “murderers,” “killers,” “tortures,” “brutes,” and “defilers”) and a linguistic code heavy with meaning to these victims of trauma” (BV 138 - 39).

The lives of people in the concentration camps are filled with terror, fear, and pain. They play games to forget the harsh circumstances they were enduring. Sometimes they get involved in a day dream in order to escape from their agonizing lives. Fear and hunger constantly threaten them. In the concentration camp people were no longer treated as human beings. Weak and useless people were sent to the gas chambers. The prisoners were forced to live in harsh, terrifying conditions.

All the various amusing toys and noise makers- harmonicas, hobby horses, rattles, building blocks, etc- are things our youngsters must, of course, do without. In other ways as well, as ghetto dwellers, they are excluded from all the enchantments of the child’s world. And so, on their own, they invented toys to replace all the things that delight children everywhere and are unavailable here. The ghetto toy in the summer of 1943: two slabs of wood-hardwood if possible! (Heberer 294)

Henry understands that it is not an absurd play but an allegory with multilayered meaning. Martel tries to portray the Holocaust through allegory to give greater insight into the historical event. This reminds Henry of his own failed manuscript in which he had tried to capture the Holocaust and upon which he has spent more than five years of his life. He accepts that major event like Holocaust which has been portrayed in an effective manner through allegory than through any other realistic narration. The taxidermist has been working on his play since the end of the war. It is understood clearly that this play is a confession of his crimes. This play is an evidence of a perpetrator who tries to redeem

himself off his sins by recording the cruelty meted out to the innocent people. His taxidermy job is in turn a result of his guilt. The taxidermist has devoted the rest of his life to preserve the memory of rare and extinct animals. After knowing all the details, Henry rejected to help the taxidermist accusing him of “... wanting redemption without remorse” (BV 189). The taxidermist understands, “Life and death live and die exactly the same spot, the body” (BV 96). The description of torture, the evasion about the Nowolipki address, the keen interest in Julian as killer would be attractive “... to a man who had something to hide” (BV 189), such phrases lead Henry to understand the true colour of the taxidermist thus “A stinking old Nazi Collaborator, now casting himself as the great defender of the innocent” (BV 190).

The taxidermist is a Nazi collaborator and is the one who had killed Beatrice and Virgil. The Nazi's follow the two Jewish women and the taxidermist is one among them. Women out of fear they cover their babies with the clothes and they enter into a pond and drown themselves along with the babies in the pond. Mothers kill their own children to save them from further pain.

The taxidermist says, “The howler monkey was collected by a scientific team in Bolivia. It died in transit. The donkey came from a petting zoo. It was hit by a delivery truck” (BV 72). When the two friends Virgil and Beatrice are finally caught by the boy and his gang, Virgil desperately addresses Beatrice: “Not a moment to be lost. Be happy right now. Be happy. I'm so happy with you. So very happy... I'm smiling and laughing and happy. I'm full of joy [sic! sic! sic!] (BV 182-83). When Henry refuses to take the pages of the play with him, the taxidermist says, “Well, in exchange, take this ... then stabs his guest with a short, blunt knife” (BV 191). Actually the taxidermist's choice of

weapon is significant. The taxidermist does not attempt to kill Henry. He just wanted to wound him in order to experience the terror, the pain felt by Beatrice and Virgil. "Once you've been struck by violence. You acquire companions that never leave you entirely. Suspicion, fear, anxiety, despair, joylessness. The natural smile is taken from you and the natural pleasures you once enjoyed lost their appeal" (BV 193). The murderous violence during the Holocaust can be comprehended through literary works that "...can come to embody and transmit the trauma of the actual life" (BV 109).

The taxidermist was sixteen when he commits such atrocities. He asks help from the protagonist, who is an established writer to edit his play. The taxidermist reacts to the horror in a different way. He was, as it turns out, a dangerous madman who later turned round and stabbed his visitor and then condemned himself to death. Henry is of the opinion that the taxidermist is not a mad man but an unrepentant murderer. The taxidermist regrets for not having saved Beatrice and Virgil. Henry wishes that he could have taken the taxidermist's manuscript. The taxidermist was blind with anger. "As he turned after being stabbed, he must have laid a hand on the counter and unintentionally grabbed one of the pages from the taxidermist's play. Somewhere along the way, half of it had been torn off and lost" (BV 189-90). The taxidermist stabbed Henry and sets fire to his shop. "Their eyes met. He smiled at Henry. It was a full smile that lit up his face. He had beautiful teeth. Henry barely recognized him. Was this the taxidermist's version of empty good cheer expressed in extremis?" (BV 193). Because of the lack of faith, hope, morality and humanism people like the taxidermist lead a meaningless empty existence during the Second World War.

At the end of the play the taxidermist has attached thirteen Games for Gustav. It deals with the unspeakable horrors which happened during the Holocaust. Last one is left empty, probably the person is dead. There is no one left to play the game. These are games played by Beatrice and Virgil to entertain them when they walk across the horrors throughout the country named the Shirt. Games were also a form of entertainment in the concentration camps. These games included the brutal reality of the environment around the camp. Children played the kind of games that they had experienced themselves. They played “Camp Elder and Block Elder”, “Roll Call”, with “caps off!”. They played the ailing prisoners who would faint during roll call and receive a thrashing, or the “Doctor” who took away patients’ rations and who refused to give treatment if they could not give anything in return. Once they even played the game “Gas Chamber”. They made a trench into which they pushed in one stone after another. “They were supposed to be people who went into the crematorium, and they imitated their cries” (Heberer 300).

In the hospital Henry was given a blood-stained piece of paper that was found in his clothes. It contained a further fragment of the play.

Virgil: We did what we could. We wrote to newspapers. We marched and we protested. We voted. After that, why not be cheerful? If we stop being cheerful, we give in to them.

Beatrice: Next to a dead body?

Virgil: Let’s give him a name. We’ll call him Gustav. Yes, next to Gustav, for the Sake of Gustav, let’s play games.

Beatrice: Gustav?

Virgil: Yes, games for Gustav. (BV 190)

The taxidermist asks Henry to come up with the number of games for Beatrice and Virgil to play before the dead body of Gustav. He had earlier asked Henry to help him with the invention of games for victims represented in the play. These games powerfully express the horrors of the Holocaust. Some examples are: “GAME NUMBER ONE: Your ten-year-old son is speaking to you. He says he has found a way of obtaining some potatoes to feed your starving family. If he is caught, he will be killed. Do you let him go?” (BV 193). Gustav Lahusen was a pastor in Sydney during World War II. He started preaching against the Nazi troupe. He was immediately arrested and sent to a concentration camp. These games foreshadow the predicament of the victims during Nazi regime. Death was part of their everyday reality during Holocaust. Most of the time they were crying over their lost families. The taxidermist’s art is an evidence to the past violence.

Understanding the Holocaust by reading and imagining is the only way to bring to lime light the suffering and trauma of the Jews. “To remember and yet to go on living ... to know and yet to be happy – or at least content” (BV 137). Martel has succeeded to realistically portray the experience of the Holocaust in his novel. “Life goes on” (BV 165). Virgil tells the non-existing audience of the play, “... until the day the red cloth flutters into your view and you realize it’s coming your way” (BV 165). This brings us to the core of Martel’s message that the past faults of humanity should not be forgotten so that such disaster will not be repeated.

Flaubert’s story *Saint Julian the Hospitator*, tells the story of slaughter of hundreds of animals. Apart from being a hunter, he is a great warrior who kills great number of men in the wars for various kings and rulers. Eventually he gets cursed which leads to a crime

of killing his own parents whom he has mistaken as his wife and a lover. He eventually achieves salvation by compassionately sleeping with a leper. St. Julian's story is an allusion to the major story. Julian repents for his crime, so he is redeemed but the taxidermist expects redemption without repending. The two animal characters talk like humans. They are very kind, gentle and intelligent and they are tortured and murdered by Nazi's brutally. The taxidermist is one among the perpetrators of the crime. In the final scenes of the play is enacted by three human characters, a boy who is the ringleader plays along with his two friends. This boy seems to be responsible for forcing two young women to drown their babies and themselves in a village pond. It is the boy who tortures Beatrice and Virgil to death. Henry understands that the boy is none other than the taxidermist.

Later in the novel Henry asks the taxidermist about the meaning of the play. The taxidermist replies to that question that it is all about the animals that are being mercilessly killed by the uncaring humanity. Henry comes to know that the play is about the horrors of holocaust. In the later part of the novel, Henry realized that the old man is a Nazi who has no feelings of remorse over his past cruelty. The story of *The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator* comes to his mind. Just as Saint Julian seeks redemption over his killing of innocent animals, the taxidermist expects redemption but has no remorse. His violence is portrayed in his play through the animal characters of Beatrice and Virgil who died at the hands of the taxidermist and bear witness to countless bloodshed. Henry thus says,

But the murder of the animals made no sense. It found no resolution, no reckoning, within the framework of the story, and religiously it fell into an embarrassing void. Julian's pleasure in the pain and extermination of

animals-described at greater length and in far more detail than the killing of humans- is only tangentially involved in his damnation and salvation.

(BV 40)

At last Henry realizes that the true nature of the taxidermist, who is a Nazi war criminal, wishes to attain salvation without remorse and so he refuses to help the old man. He throws the manuscript and walks away. The taxidermist tries to kill Henry and sets fire to his shop and kills himself.

Beatrice and Virgil is a novel which has been connected to several different allegorical representations of characters, themes and symbols which is biblical, political, and psychological. The taxidermist resembles the allegorical images of guilt experienced in the aftermath of the crime. His role primarily fulfils the theme psychological allegory of the novel. The taxidermist's reaction is the result of his direct reaction to his guilt ridden psyche. His sense of guilt urges him to re-create reality. It is clearly understood from taxidermist narrative that he as a victimizer enjoyed the physical and psychological trauma of his victims through the allegorical characters of Beatrice and Virgil. Martel has visualized the unspeakable cruelties towards innumerable Jews who were persecuted through the allegorical characters Beatrice and Virgil. The play has the characteristics of an absurd play where the donkey and a monkey keep talking without any motive. They strive to realize their purpose in a world which is already meaningless. This novel is a useful allegory that can help people to know about the Holocaust in order to prevent another disaster from ever happening again. Martel's approach to guilt is not only subjective, but it also carries the element of universality and objectivity. Martel's intention is to throw new light on the Holocaust trauma through this fiction is thus justified.