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Ray Bradbury's October 2026: A Million Year

Picnic; a Posthumanist Study

Abstract: Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* written in 1950, which chronicles the invasion and colonization of Mars by humans who have fled a distressed life on Earth, is a popular piece of Science Fiction. In this paper, I attempt to analyze a short story, 'A Million Year Picnic', from *Martian Chronicles* based on the Posthumanist Theory which became popular in the mid of 1990s.

Paper:

'The Million Year Picnic', one of the short stories in *Martian Chronicles* written by Ray Bradbury talks about humans that have fled Earth as a result of the colossal devastation done to earth by mankind. The story is told from the perspective of the eldest son, Timothy, who has landed on Mars along with his parents and two younger brothers on a 'family rocket' from Earth. It is revealed to the readers that earth has been completely eradicated and is no longer a place where mankind can survive. Timothy and his family are lucky to have escaped on a space rocket to Mars. The children have been told that this trip is like a 'picnic', a 'fishing expedition' when actually they were in search of habitable environment. The family,

being the first to colonize Mars, has the freedom to choose any dead city they wanted to live in. As Timothy's father, William Thomas says 'The whole darn planet belongs to us, kids. The whole darn planet.' (169) They were the ones who were to start afresh, begin a new generation based on their beliefs and morals – 'They stood there, King of the Hill, Top of the Heap, Ruler of All They Surveyed, Unimpeachable Monarchs and Presidents, trying to understand what it meant to own a world and how big a world really was.' (169). As it is essential that reproduction should take place for a humanism to survive, it is mentioned in the story that they are awaiting another family – Bert Edwards, his wife and daughters. It is subtly implied that his daughters and William's son will carry forth the next generation on Mars.

In order to understand Posthumanism, it is first essential to understand what humanism is. The most basic definition of humanism as found in Wikipedia states 'Humanism is a broad category of ethical philosophies that affirm the dignity and worth of all people, based on the ability to determine right and wrong by appeal to universal human qualities—particularly Rationality. Humanism entails a commitment to the search for truth and morality Through human means in support of human interests.' Though the roots of posthumanism date back to 1960s, it became popular in contemporary discourse only in 1990s. In the general sense, 'posthuman is a speculative being that represents or seeks to re-conceive the human'. In Million Year Picnic, we see that this is exactly what Timothy's father tries to do. For him, humanism in the usual sense has ended on Earth, and now a new life – post the humanism on earth, is to begin for them on Mars.

The term 'anthropocene' was developed by Nobel Prize winner, Paul Crutzen to describe our current geological era. This term emphasizes on the technologically mediated power of mankind which can ultimately have a deadly consequence upon mankind. This is what we see

in *A Million Year Picnic*. It is the year of 2026 and the author has envisioned that a lethal change will occur on Earth leading to humans having to find a life outside of Earth's humanism - "I'm burning a way of life, just like that way of life is being burned clean of Earth right now. Forgive me if I talk like a politician. I am, after all, a former state governor, and I was honest and they hated me for it. Life on Earth never settled down to doing anything very good. Science ran too far ahead of us too quickly, and the people got lost in a mechanical wilderness, like children making over pretty things, gadgets, helicopters, and rockets; emphasizing the wrong items, emphasizing machines instead of how to run the machines. Wars got bigger and bigger and finally killed Earth. That's what the silent radio means. That's what we ran away from' (170). Posthumanism considers the possibility that historical phenomena (such as advances in technology) are leading to basic changes in the human species and its relationship with the world

Posthuman predicament urges us to think deeper about human subjectivity, ethical relations, norms and values. Humans take their life on earth as granted. Earth is seen as a commodity to be consumed. A sustainable environment, which guarantees that our children get to enjoy all the privileges of nature that we did, is no longer on the cards for the human race. The human subjectivity, which puts man above everything else, is one of the main reasons for this. This in turn causes them to alter their norms and values, along with their ethical relations to such that anything is done for the greed of man. Robert and Alice chose to think differently. Even while the earth was a habitable planet, Timothy's parents disagreed with the norms and values that mankind were inculcating. Their dream was to create a commune where their children and the future generation can live in an ecocentric planet. Robert says 'Your mother and I will try to teach you. Perhaps we'll fail. I hope not. We've had a good lot to see and learn from. We planned this trip years ago, before you were born. Even if there hadn't been a

war we would have come to Mars, I think, to live and form our own standard of living. It would have been another century before Mars would have been really poisoned by the Earth civilization (171).

According to Nayar, *Critical Posthumanism* treats the 'essential' attributes of the human as always already overlapped with other life forms. The human features that are supposedly considered as the core features of man, whether physiology, anatomy or consciousness, have co-evolved with other life forms. This means that man's essential nature is anthropocentric. Even though Timothy's parents were tired of life on earth and retaliated against the government they belonged to, it is seen that on Mars, they wish to create an empire of their own. Instead of believing in the web of life, they begin to create a hierarchy, placing themselves at the top – 'They stood there, King of the Hill, Top of the Heap, Ruler of All They Surveyed, Unimpeachable Monarchs and Presidents, trying to understand what it meant to own a world and how big a world really was.' (169). Even in a new planet like Mars, the humans were excited about "owning" the space and being the 'rulers' and 'monarchs' of this new habitation they have found. It may be true that they are the only living beings on Mars which makes it inevitably theirs, but instead of trying to be eco-centric about their life, they are keen to place themselves at the top of the hierarchy they have created for themselves. According to Wolfe (47), posthumanism tries to understand this new reality- the reality which places humans in a new place in the universe, a universe which may be populated by non human subjects. Thus posthumanism means not overcoming a particular situation (Timothy's family escaping alive from Earth), but being vigilant, responsible and humble, to live in a world which may be inhabited by different humanisms.

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