

# Appearance vs. reality – was piscine (pi) patel's journey essay sample

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Most members of a society experience a tragic event; for example, the loss of a friend, loved one, etc. Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi* tells the story of Piscine (Pi) Patel, an Indian boy named after a pool in France, who sets sail with his family towards Canada, with their father's collection of zoo animals. As soon their boat reached the open Pacific, it sank. Pi managed to get aboard a lifeboat where he was stranded for 227 days, with a wounded zebra, and orangutan, a hyena, and a 450-pound Royal Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. But the question is, did Pi Patel imagine the whole ordeal? Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD) can cause people to have a loss of time, place, or person orientation, or even an increased or decreased awareness of surroundings<sup>1</sup>. Did he imagine being aboard the life boat with a tiger named Richard Parker? Was the second story Pi told real? Or is this just a story for Pi to tell to get people to think twice about religion?

Pi Patel seems to be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or (PTSD). Over 600, 000 Vietnam veterans suffer from PTSD<sup>1</sup>, because of the tragic and traumatic events they went through for the 16 years that the war lasted. After the ship Pi was on sunk, Pi started to imagine the animals on the lifeboat. What had happened was so terrifying to Pi that he imagined the whole experience or came up with characters to fill in roles of a story. People who experience traumatic events often try to avoid reminders about that event. Sometimes these people are aware of the fact that they are avoiding reminders, but in other instances survivors do not know that their actions are caused by a need to avoid reminders<sup>1</sup>. To further prove the point that Pi's subconscious is avoiding reminders, in chapter 90, page 269, right as Pi says:

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"...Farwell. Dear Father, dear Mother, dear Ravi, greetings. Your loving son and brother is coming to meet you. Not an hour has gone by that I haven't thought of you. The moment I see you will be the happiest of my life. And now I leave matters in the hands of God, who is love and whom I love."

His subconscious creates yet another fictional character, another person stranded in another lifeboat. Pi at this particular moment in the novel, is blind, and conveniently enough, so is the other person; therefore neither one can see the other. This makes it difficult to believe that there was even another person there at all. Pi and this other character quickly strike up a conversation, only to be ended when the character Pi created comes onto his lifeboat and Pi imagines Richard Parker striking him down and eating him, erasing any evidence that he may have existed. Next when they (Pi and Richard) arrive in Mexico, Richard Parker ran off into the forest and disappeared forever from Pi's life. And when Pi was found there is no evidence that Richard Parker ever existed.

In Pi's case, it is a very serious problem. Pi's subconscious created an event that would take his mind off the death of his family. It created Richard Parker (the 450-pound Royal Bengal tiger). Pi also had to feed Richard Parker. So he wasted large amounts of food when he thought he was "feeding" him. The food that Pi thought he was feeding Richard Parker could have potentially been thrown overboard; this could also be why Pi was able to catch sea animals every now and then.

The second story Pi tells to the two Japanese men interviewing him, is much more believable than being stranded on a life boat with a tiger and traveling

across the Pacific Ocean. It also explains a few of the things described in his first story. When the cook threw himself on the sailors face and scalped it off, both Pi and his mother vomited. This would explain the vomit that Pi found in the lifeboat and thought was Richard Parker's. Also, as Mr. Okamoto noticed that the two stories Pi told match. The wounded zebra had its leg bitten off by the hyena just as the Chinese sailor that had his leg cut off from the cook to be used as bait.

The orangutan was killed by the hyena as well, and Pi's mother was killed by the cook. The fight was similar as well, the orangutan hit the hyena, and the hyena killed the orangutan, just like how Pi's mother hit the cook, and then the cook stabbed his mother. Mr. Okamoto came to a conclusion that the hyena represented the cook (the cook is also the blind Frenchman who admitted to killing a man and a women), the orangutan represented Pi's mother, the zebra represented the Chinese sailor and as for Richard Parker, he represented Pi, because he killed the hyena.

You can find a few aspects of Pi's journey within Christianity. The challenges that Pi was put through can be depicted as the strenuous challenges that a Christian God puts his followers through to make sure they are faithful to him<sup>2</sup>. Because of Pi's faithfulness and devotion to the Lord, Pi is given a good life in Canada at the end of the novel. At the end of Pi's interview with the two Chinese men, Pi asks them a question. He asks which out of the two stories they like more, because both the stories tell them the same thing, he left on the same day in both stories, arrived on the same day in both stories. Neither one of them makes a factual difference to them, nor do they explain

how the Tsimtsum sank (which is why they were questioning him in the first place). They both tell a tale of how Pi suffered and they cannot prove that either story is true. This is similar to either taking the side of (believing in) science or religion.

Both the science and religious sides are theories, yet they both claim to be true. In response, Mr. Okamoto tells Pi that he likes the story with the animals more than the other story. The second story, which is just a plain story of what happened, could represent the scientific version of the tale. The other version with Richard Parker and the animals is more of a biblical tale, or any religious tale for that matter. So essentially, Pi has just proven to us the basic foundation of religion. Believing in a God, trusting in a story that has no proof of being true, but you believe it to be true because you trust in it. It is believed that the two men preferred the religious representation of the tale, because the story gives you something to believe in, Pi put his faith in his gods and he was delivered to safety. Whereas in the other version, it was all suffering then he arrived in Mexico.

Life of Pi appears to be a front for religious beliefs. Pi appears to be telling the story to get people to think twice about their religious choices, or to strengthen their existing beliefs. This is evident at the final part of the novel where Pi asks which version of the story they prefer. He is asking them if they would trust him based on his word; which is the basis for all religion: believing something based on trust. It is strongly believed that Pi did imagine being on the boat with Richard Parker, and the second story most likely is the truth without any religious aspects in it.

“ Believe nothing just because a so-called wise person said it. Believe nothing just because a belief is generally held. Believe nothing just because it is said in ancient books. Believe nothing just because it is said to be of divine origin. Believe nothing just because someone else believes it. Believe only what you yourself test and judge to be true.” [paraphrased] -Buddha 3