

The life of pi: an analysis essays examples

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The novel *Life of Pi* tells of an interesting story of a boy who survived a shipwreck after being in see for months with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. As a young boy, Pi grew up in Pondicherry, India with his family. His father is a zoo owner who taught Pi and his brother Ravi about the true nature of animals. Seeing how friendly Pi sometimes gets with the animals, his father taught them not to think or treat animals as people. Through his formative years, Pi subscribed to three different religions, namely Hinduism, Catholicism, and Islam, which his family did not really understand but eventually accepted. The religious leaders were not as understanding, though, and went on to discourage his plural religions. However, he remained a devout follower of all three religions his entire life. Although there were several mention of Atheism in the novel, *Life of Pi*'s author Yann Martel illustrates his religiosity through his continuous practice and belief in the three religions.

Just like how people view animals in the zoo, people also misundertand religion. As Mr. Patel, the grown-up Pi, tells the story of his boyhood, he shares how he understands people's negative perception of zoos. Although he is not inclined to agree with them, he listens to people saying that zoos rob animals of their freedom and enforces in them domesticated lives. This observation he also relates to religion. According to him, like zoos, " religion also faces the same problem," wherein " certain illusions about freedom plague them both" (Martel p. 12). As a graduate of both zoology and religion at the University of Toronto, Pi's belief about these two ideas are closely related to each other. Mr. Patel states that people do not have a semblance of understanding about how it is to be free from any religion. Like the

agnostic, or the people who do not know whether god exists or not, they don't accept any form of faith. This idea may lead them to believe that they have the freedom to choose to believe or disbelieve anything, but in reality, what they are are people who are too scared to take imaginative leaps. An animal in an enclosure, much like a person of faith, is secure in the fact that it is surrounded on every side by a version of reality which is a lot better and safer than reality itself. The character of Pi, who embraces religion the same way he recognizes the security provided by the zoo cages, believes that religion is there to make life less difficult and more enjoyable.

As Martel suggested through Pi's belief, religion is something that is imaginative. Martel further strengthens this point by emphasizing on the differences between facts and imagination. With his allusion to a dying atheist, who might utter "love" and "God" before his last breath, an agnostic who chooses to stay faithful to his "dry, yeastless factuality" will interpret the presence of warm light shining upon him as an effect of "a failing oxygenation of the brain" (Martel 36). An agnostic's lack of imagination will lead him to missing the better story. This is where the whole story of the novel centers. With his two different stories, one involving animals while the other does not, Martel is giving the readers a simple explanation of how faith is connected with imagination, while the absence of it is about exact observation and rationalism. Like a storyteller himself, religions for him offer tales which may not necessarily be literally true, and atheists, with their ability to form their own belief, choose to believe that God is not real. Unlike the agnostics who live in uncertainty, they do not have these wonderful stories to guide them and make their lives exciting.

Martel presents the two versions of Pi's stories, with one involving the Bengal tiger Richard Parker, and the other wherein Pi himself was the tiger. As Pi introduced this story, he says that "without Richard Parker, I wouldn't be alive today to tell you my story" (Martel p. 89). Being with a tiger on a lifeboat is a terrifying experience, and for him to attribute his being alive to the said tiger is rather unbelievable. However, according to Pi, the presence of Richard Parker took his mind off from his family and his "tragic circumstances." He was grateful and at the same time resentful of the tiger's presence on the boat. These conflicting ideas of Pi was also the same reason why in his second story, he chose a tiger to represent himself. A tiger, like human, possesses conflicting qualities, where there is violence and nobility, grace and brute force, as well as instinct and intelligence. However, living in the city where there is comfort, the idea of brute, violence, and intelligence are not as strong. Fish is bought wrapped, while Pi in the sea had to catch what he will eat. He was forced to go back to man's aggressiveness and animal instincts, and embrace aggression. This is where his belief in religion is fully displayed, where he emphasizes that religion is something imaginative. It gave him comfort and security from the otherwise harsh reality of the real world and his tragic circumstance.

While there are people who see the book as a way of teaching atheism, Martel ends the story with Pi turning to God as he reached hopelessness. He states, "The lower you are, the higher your mind will want to soar." (Martel p. 154). At first, Pi recognized his situation and learned to live with it as he found new activities to occupy his time. However, as he continues to stay in the water, the novelty started to wear off. He reached his lowest point and

experienced hopelessness, and this is where he turns to God and made the story about the tiger. His body wanted so much to escape the boat and the water, but his mind knew that he should continue to live. Through his mind, he embraced faith and imagination, and brought himself to the world of fiction. Either stories can't be proven, and if one is to attempt to provide an explanation, it will only be subjective. He was left with no other but the illusion, and ultimately it was the faith and the imagination that it brought which gave him the self-preservation that kept him alive. The religion of storytelling provided Pi with a haven from the misery and hopelessness of his situation, thereby enriching his belief of finding a safer and far more kinder world than what the reality offers.

Although some people may see the story in a different view, with some accusing it of teaching atheism, Martel's magical and empirical versions of his time at sea shows the depth of his religiosity. When he asked the officials from the Japanese Ministry of Transportation, " Which is the better story, the story with animals or the story without animals?" (Martel p. 295), he recognizes the possibility that the story wherein he himself was the tiger, was just an illusion.

Despite being unreal, it was able to save him and keep him alive. Pi's story teaches people not of atheism, but instead of believing what is right or what feels right for a person instead of what other people tells one to believe. This is clearly a story about God, for during his time of extreme difficulty and despair, it was God he turned on to. With his surrender, he was offered a respite from his burden, and was eventually freed from it. However the

readers wish to interpret the whole story, the stories presented by Pi teaches how one's faith will guide a person and help them survive in life.

Work Cited

Yann, Martel. *The Life of Pi: A Novel*. Orlando, Florida: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2001. Print.