

Life of pi critical essay

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



"Life of Pi" is a novel about a sixteen year old boy named Piscine Patel who survives for 227 days on a lifeboat at sea after he loses his family in a shipwreck. Pi is interviewed at the end of the book by two men from the ship's company who do not accept his first story which involves a number of animals on the lifeboat with him. He then tells a much more brutal, realistic story where the animals are now metaphor for humans.

The reader is then left to decide which story is the "true" story, and in the process, understand Martel's message about the need for us to address difficult truths through the medium of storytelling, and the positive effect that faith has in our lives, allowing us to transcend reality. The novel involves a disagreement between Pi and the men from the Japanese Ministry of Transport in Part Three. The men not believing his initial story angers Pi, which causes him to tell them that there doesn't always have to be a rational story. Whether it is imaginative or logical, they are both stories with the same concept.

When Richard Parker first appears from under the lifeboat, he is a dangerous and aggressive creature. Pi is initially terrified of him but soon realizes that Richard Parker is essential to his survival out at sea. He has to train him and learn how to work together. Pi grows to love and care for him. Through this we can see the power that Richard Parker holds: "I love you, Richard Parker. If I didn't have you now, I don't know what I would do. I don't think I would make it. No, I wouldn't. I would die of hopelessness. Don't give up, Richard Parker, don't give up." Pi survives.

Some of the most difficult conditions imaginable, yet he endures. More than that - his spirit remains unbroken, his mind intact. Faith and companionship

gave Pi the strength he needed to keep going. His love for God gave him faith that he could survive. And his love of Richard Parker gave him the reason to hope for something greater, a reason to survive - for if Pi died, Richard Parker surely would as well. Richard Parker provides a distraction from the ordeal. In Part Three of the novel, Pi tells us of a new story, in which the animals in the first have been replaced by humans.

In this story, Richard Parker could be seen as Richard Parkers savage side, where he has to reign in his savage side and ruthlessness in order to survive. The theme of storytelling comes into play as in Pi's less believable first story he is still as truthful as the second story. This results in a clash of beliefs between the Japanese men and Pi where he argues that something doesn't need to be fully factual to contain the whole truth in it: " That's what fiction is about, isn't it, the selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence?"

The argument the Author presents is that when we transform reality, we present it more truthfully. That any form of fiction was once reality that has been modified. This later on in the novel becomes key to Pi's survival. Martel shows us how important it is to tell stories. Pi's allows him to maintain morality and integrity, even though he must become a murderer and cannibal in order to survive. However, the effects of such an experience linger on and cannot be completely forgotten. We see this at the very start of the book at older Pi's home in which the Author sees a " small mongrel mutt" and " orange cat".

Through the contrasting characters of Pi and Richard Parker, who symbolizes his savage side, Martel shows us that in order to survive; we have to allow

our more animalistic and instinctive attributes to coexist with our more enlightened, spiritual sides. Pi needs to 'train' his savage nature, just as he must do so with Richard Parker in the first story, so that his own spiritual nature remains dominant. This is why it is important for Pi to become the 'alpha male' in Part One: "Repetition is important in the training not only of animals but also of humans."

Every day that Pi survives is a miracle alone. Essentially, Pi is saying that just as his daily routine consists of praying, he is saying that surviving the day will also become his routine. Pi is intelligent, religious and peaceful. He was once a vegetarian but was forced to eat meat in order to survive at sea. Richard Parker could be seen as Pi's more primitive nature. Richard Parker is not introduced to us until after the sinking of the ship, just as Pi's savage side does not appear until he is at sea. In the first story, the tiger killed the hyena, in the second Pi killed the Frenchman.

Thus Richard Parker represents the more savage nature of Pi, while Pi himself represents his own intelligent and rational side. Pi has to use both these aspects of him in order to survive. It is easy for Pi to reconsider his views on vegetarianism as he has no option unless he is willing to die, and as reader we support him in his decision to do so. There is a great deal of symbolism in the novel, not only Pi's savage side as the tiger but Pi's full name, Piscine means pool in French and fish-like in English. Martel does not offer any more of his opinion in Part Three; he wants the reader to make their own decision.

But he includes the conversation between the officials from the Tsimsum to ask the questions any skeptical reader may ask. After Pi offers the more

realistic story he asks the pair which they prefer: " Pi Patel: 'So tell me, since it makes no factual difference to you and you can't prove the question either way, which story do you prefer? Which is the better story, the story with animals or the story without animals? ' Mr. Okamoto: 'That's an interesting question? ' Mr. Chiba: 'The story with animals. ' Mr. Okamoto: 'Yes. The story with animals is the better story.'

Pi Patel: 'Thank you. And so it goes with God. '" It does not prove or disprove anything for Mr. Chiba and Mr. Okamoto, but Pi wants to know what they think. Pi is pushing the skeptical pair to choose after hearing the story they wanted to hear. Pi is saying that if you have the choice to have a story filled with faith and hope, then why not believe it? Pi tells Mr. Chiba and Mr. Okamoto that everything in life is a story, any form of facts are perceived differently by people, so how can anyone ever be sure of the truth? There is no absolute truth.

They prefer the first story but we do not know whether they believe it or not until the very final lines of the novel: " As an aside, story of sole survivor, Mr. Piscine Molitor Patel, Indian citizen, is an astounding story of courage and endurance in the face of extraordinarily difficult and tragic circumstances. In the experience of this investigator, his story is unparalleled in the history of shipwrecks. Very few castaways claim to have survived so long at sea as Mr. Patel, and none in the company of an adult Bengal tiger. "

" As an aside" is an indication that from then on these are Mr. Okamoto's own opinions. Okamoto chooses to believe the story with the animals. He takes the leap of faith with Pi and by extension, God. Just as the outcome of both Pi's stories are the same, only one is captivating and enchanting, so too

as we cannot prove the existence or non-existence either way, why would we not choose to have faith and hope for the chance of eternal life? The final line has so much impact on the whole novel; it is proof that humanity prefers to accept the less harsh version of reality even if it includes believing in a story that is not entirely authentic.

It is interesting to note that Pi uses the exact same words “ as an aside” in Part One of the novel, Martel cleverly uses this collection of words to highlight “ the aside”. It is important and should not be looked over. Pi needed to be able to ‘ train’ Richard Parker in both stories so both of them will survive in the first story, but it is essential in the second metaphorical story for the civilized, enlightened Pi can survive. Martel writes that he has a story “ that will make you believe in God”. He successfully portrays why people choose to live a life with God. Because a life with God is the better story.

Yet while the second telling of the story may cast doubt for the reader on the first story, it is not meant to do so for more than a moment. “ And so it goes with God” is showing that whether God is real or not, living a life with God will always be better than one without faith. Even the highly skeptical Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba in the end choose to believe the first - the better story. That when we’re pushed to the ends of our physical and mental limits, we want God even if he’s cruel, vicious and indifferent. That the belief in God is what gets us through this life.