

# Life of pi: the contrast between words and visuals



Uniqueness is a struggle to find throughout literature, especially within recreations of previously published stories. Once a story is told, the originality begins to dissipate and the audience skews the story. Popular novels transforming into films can be altered as well. This is specifically noticeable in the critically acclaimed story, *Life of Pi*, originally written by Yann Martel and then produced into a film by Ang Lee. *Life of Pi* focuses on the life of an intelligent and charismatic man named Piscine Molitor Patel, however, he goes by the nickname of Pi. His family and himself owned a zoo, but sold it to move to Canada, they traveled through a freighter and brought along a few of their animals; however, a storm had hit the sea and the only survivors were Pi and a Bengal tiger, known as Richard Parker. After the devastating storm, Pi and Richard began to learn about survival. The transformation of the novel being produced as a film has minor similarities and significant differences, hence Ang Lee's theatrical version of *Life of Pi* does not reflect Yann Martel's original artistic vision well. For instance, the film includes a lover associating with Pi, excludes a distinctive introduction to his life, the tone set, and his discovery of a new religious study.

To begin, Yann Martel avoids introducing a character that is infatuated with Pi, although the expression of love still exists in his life. Throughout the entire novel, it is evident Pi has love to share, but not towards a female figure. He expresses love towards his family, with respect, also to animals, with interacting, and of curiosity, by taking all opportunities to learn. For example, in the introduction Pi confesses his opinion of life, "Life is so beautiful that death has fallen in love with it, a jealous, possessive love that grabs at what it can" (Martel, 6). He acknowledges that life is extremely

desirable that even a horrid matter, such as death, wants it. Thus, the only love clearly shown in the novel is Pi's admiration for what is in his life.

Dissimilar to the text, Ang Lee's film creates a character that infatuates with Pi for a short period. During one of his drumming lessons, there is a dance class occurring as well and he meets a young female. They form an intimate relationship with each other, yet he breaks up with her before he leaves India with his family. However, Ang Lee kept the presence of Pi's admiration towards Richard because their relationship is the most significant one in the story. Despite the inclusion of Pi's love that is noticeable within the text, the inclusion of a romantic aspect was not necessary. The moral of the story regards Pi and his interaction with life, specifically with the environment and animals. Therefore, the addition of a romantic aspect does not reflect the original story of Life of Pi since it is irrelevant to the moral.

Furthermore, Yann Martel incorporates a descriptive introduction to Pi's life, which is entitled as part one. Within part one, his childhood is brought upon and the life of him that occurred prior to the family's flee. In particular, the narration includes details of his study of three-toed sloths, the teasing of his name, the zoo his family took care of, his arrival in Canada, and his religious studies. Hence, part one is to describe his life in Pondicherry, India and Toronto, Canada. The details support who Pi Patel is as a person, such as his characteristic traits, beliefs, and facts. It helps to build the character of Pi. Yet, this was not taken into consideration by Ang Lee.

The film's introduction of Pi's life is too vague and consists of unnecessary detail. For instance, the film excludes the details of Pi's study of the three-

toed sloths that is significant evidence of his intelligence, yet the film only includes the scene of a class teasing his name to show the life of education in reference to Pi. With the lack of detail of his education, the audience is absent to his brilliance and determination. In addition, an unnecessary detail that was mentioned previously, such as the romantic aspect of Pi having a girlfriend, is not definite to express his childhood in India. Thus, Ang Lee's consideration of major details did not positively influence the original story.

Moreover, the tone of the book and movie were very dissimilar to each other. The tone is the representing mood within a story, and the tone of the book is quite sad because of the numerous experiences of suffering, specifically when the storm hits and he loses the lives of his family members. The dialogue in the book includes the thoughts of Pi, which creates a stronger acknowledgment of his suffering and feelings towards what occurs in his life. Despite the film having minor similarities in scenes, it did not set the same tone.

The movie sets a tone of glory and beauty, regardless of the suffering that Pi experiences. The tone is positive because the Pi's thoughts are not in consideration and the special effects, such as the hallucinated whale that jumps out of the water at night. The involvement of modern technology enlightens the mood of the audience, especially with the whale because it is astonishing graphics and helps the audience to disregard the bitter moments. Therefore, the tone enlightens as well. Due to the tone having disparity from the original tone set in the book, it clearly does not display Life of Pi correctly.

Finally, a significant discovery is found by Pi, which is his acceptance of the Catholicism, religion; however, it is found differently in the novel and the film. For instance, in the text, Pi, and his family travel to Munnar and visit the Catholic Church. Pi is exposed to Jesus Christ and continues to have sessions with the priest, Father Martin, to increase his knowledge of the religion. Pi respectively considers the religion and learns of it with an open mind; this reveals positive personal attributes of him, such as tolerant and charitable.

Contradicting to the text, the film acknowledges Pi's Christianity from his brother daring him to trespass into the Catholic Church and to drink the holy water, which he does. He then meets with the priest and learns about Jesus Christ. Hence, there is a significant dissimilarity and Ang Lee's version forms a negative image of Pi, such as being a foolish and quite repulsive person for trespassing and accepting a childish dare from his brother. Considering Pi was a scholar and a prestigious man, the scene did not express the life of him from the novel appropriately.

Overall, Ang Lee's abstract version of Life of Pi did not display the authentic written version created by Yann Martel. This is due to the differences that occur between the two literary works, which is evident throughout an addition of a romantic element, the description of Pi's life before and after the incident, the general attitude that the audiences can create, and lastly, Pi's approach towards the religious study of Catholicism. Hence, the creation of visuals can ruin the authenticity of the words.