

The role of religion
and god in Yann
Martel's *Life of Pi* as
influenced by Poe's
t...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Yann Martel, a Canadian writer has published many literature works in course of his writing career. Life of Pi happens to be one of his literature works and was published in the year 2001. It is a fantasy novel focusing on adventure, spirituality as well as practicality.

Although there are many themes discussed in the novel, religion is a major theme. The main character or the protagonists known as Pi used to practice three religions during his childhood which were inclusive of Hinduism, Christianity as well as Islam. All religions that he practiced were important to him and none was inferior to the other.

However, the role of religion in the Life of Pi has been illuminated by Allan Poe in The Narrative of Arthur Grogon Pym of Nantucket. Based on that, this paper shall discuss the role of religion and God in Yann Martel's Life of Pi as influenced by Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Grogon Pym of Nantucket.

It is important to discuss the plot of the story before discussing the main idea. The story has been subdivided in to three different parts based on the life of the main character Pi (Piscine Molitor Patel). The main character is named after a swimming pool in France but changed latter to Pi during his secondary school life. He was brought in a well up family since his father not only owned but also used to run a zoo. Religion was introduced to him in his early childhood as he was born a Hindu.

However, when he was a teenager, he was introduced to other religions such as Christianity and Islam. Instead of choosing one, Pi was practicing all the three religions and used them to try and understand the nature of God. The

<https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-religion-and-god-in-yann-martels-life-of-pi-as-influenced-by-poes-the-narrative-of-arthur-grogon-pym-of-nantucket-explicatory-essay/>

second part illustrates the journey through the ocean while the last part focuses on the interaction of Pi and the two officials who wanted to know to more about his adventure.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket by Poe is also similar to the Life of Pi as it focuses on a story of a young person Pym. The main character in the story decides to go on a sea adventure where he encounters several issues like cannibalism, ship wreck as well as mutiny.

It is a strange and an adventurous story which features religious symbolism among other themes. The story also discusses the theory of the Hollow Earth as well as some of the life experiences of the author especially concerning the sea adventure. It is considered as one of the influential works in the field of literature especially as an adventurous story.

As highlighted in the in the introductory part, religion is one of the themes that stand out in the Life of Pi. Moreover, even at the beginning, the author points out that the story can make someone believe in God. One is left to wonder how a story of one human being with a number of animals can turn out to be spiritual or even religious. However, looking keenly at the life of Pi reveals the importance of God and religion as well.

Despite the fact that Pi grows up in a secularized society, he ends up becoming too religious. Apart from Hinduism which was his first religion, Pi goes to the extent of embracing Catholicism as well as Islam. Surprisingly, Pi chooses to practice the three religions at the same time but chooses to keep his spirituality as a secret, not only to his family but also to his three

<https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-religion-and-god-in-yann-martels-life-of-pi-as-influenced-by-poes-the-narrative-of-arthur-grogon-pym-of-nantucket-explicatory-essay/>

religious leaders. All the three religions were important in his life since he found something important in each (Greer).

According to Pi, Hinduism was an important religion as he was introduced to it early in life-it was part of him. He did not consider leaving Hinduism after discovering other religions because it formed the basis of his spirituality.

He embraced Christianity and Islam out of curiosity not out of dissatisfaction of the other religions. Despite the fact that he was comfortable with his three religious beliefs, his religious leaders were dissatisfied with his stand as they believed that it was impossible for him to practice all the three religions at the same time.

He was unable or unwilling to choose a single religion. Although he was quick to embrace other religions, he found it quite hard to embrace atheism even if it was presented to him by his favorite teacher. He believed in the existence of a supernatural being and that is why he was afraid to explore or learn more about atheism. It is clear that the religious life of Pi forms the basis of the whole story and can inspire the reader to believe in God as the author illustrates (Quilty).

Religion has been discussed in the beginning and the idea is revisited towards the end of the story when Pi asks the Japanese officials to choose the story they preferred. Pi concluded that it is the same case in life because human beings chose between religion and science or fantasy and reality.

The religious people chose to believe in the uplifting issues rather than in the believable issues which may be less entertaining. In that case, it is clear that <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-religion-and-god-in-yann-martels-life-of-pi-as-influenced-by-poes-the-narrative-of-arthur-grogon-pym-of-nantucket-explicatory-essay/>

the whole story is more on application of religion in the life of human beings. For instance, to illustrate the application of religion in various life circumstances, Pi gives an illustration of two men who give different interpretations after seeing white light before them.

While the religious person believes that the white light represents God in a different form, the other person who believes in science concludes that the light is a scientific phenomenon caused by lack of enough oxygen in the central nervous system. In that case, Pi does not oppose either of them but highlights that the only difference between them is how they take life. According to Pi, the scientific person only lacks imagination and therefore “misses the better part of the story” (Quilty).

As NikoRad illustrates, religion in the life of Pi is effectively used to pass the main idea of the story to the audience. The author illustrates that in every situation, human beings have got a choice on how to perceive reality.

According to Pi, human beings can chose to take the advantage of religion, engage their imagination and obtain the best out of it. In that case, even though religion may not be true, it is more exciting to believe in the same than to live as an atheist. Therefore, the protagonist has used the idea of religion in the whole story to effectively communicate his mind the audience.

Religion has also played a great role in developing the character of Pi. Right from an early age, the author introduces Pi as a religious person since he is able to observe three religions at the same time. More specifically, the

author presents Pi as a person who has got a religion of his own based on the fact that he is able to embrace three religions at the same time.

The issue of religion in the life of Pi is very important as it makes him to have faith in himself. Consequently, due to the faith in self, Pi is able to carry out his role effectively through out the whole story. For instance, it is observable that Pi speaks so firmly not only concerning religious issues but also concerning other life issues like a person who has had a lot of experience in life.

The background information concerning Pi religious beliefs not only develops his character but helps the audience to accept and appreciate Pi as he is, bearing in mind that children can also see things in their own perspective. Most importantly, religious belief and the faith that Pi has makes the audience not to doubt his survival even after going through very dangerous circumstances during his journey through the ocean.

The story of Pi is one of the unbelievable tales in the field of literature. However, incorporating religion adds value to it. This is based on the fact that religion also contains a lot of stories which look fictional.

For instance, some of the biblical stories like the story of Jonah and the whale and the story of the fall of man can only be read by someone who is able to suspend disbelief and similarly, the story of the life of Pi can only be read by someone who can do away with disbelief and embrace some faith. Instead of having doubts, religion helps the reader to become eager to read a story that is supposed to make someone believe in God. Therefore, the issue of religion

does not only create harmony in the story but also makes it interesting to read.

Similar to religion, God also plays major roles in the life of Pi. From the very beginning, the protagonist Pi is faced with a lot of challenges. Religion happens to be a major challenge in life since other people cannot understand how he can manage to practice the three religions at the same time. Surviving a shipwreck for two hundred and twenty seven days is also a major challenge.

His religious beliefs and believe in God enables him to overcome all the challenges that he goes through not only during his childhood but also during his journey through the Pacific Ocean. Pi is a believer because he states that " I just want to love God" (Martel pp. 69). In the view of the fact that the life of Pi is characterized by danger, loneliness and doubt or uncertainty, his belief in God helped him to overcome all the challenges. Through out his journey, Pi continued to perform his religious rituals such as prayer.

Yann Martel once indicated that it is natural to be influenced and inspired by other writers. In the life Pi, it is clear that the author has been greatly influenced by the Poe's Narrative of Arthur Grogon Pym of Nantucket. To begin with, Martel names the tiger Richard Parker after a character in the Poe's narrative. As much as there is a difference between the two characters, it is clear that Poe's work was influential.

For instance, the issue of cannibalism features greatly in the two stories and may have influenced Martel in naming the Tigress 'Richard Parker'. In the Poe's narrative, Richard Parker is human being who becomes a victim of cannibalism since he is eaten by the captain and his two friends who survived a ship wreck for sixteen days. However, it is ironical since in the life of Pi, Richard Parker who represents the tigress ends up eating other animals like the zebra and the hyena.

According to the studies of Buchinger (pp. 73), the life of Pi is not just an adventurous journey but also a religious metaphor as 'Tsimtsum' which is the Japanese name for a cargo ship suggests. Further studies illustrate that the tzimtzum concept illustrates that God created the finite world by contracting himself and ended up leaving a space for human beings to develop. To reunite with God, Pi explains that human beings are supposed to live lives that are free from evil.

Although Pi often used to feel that God had forsaken him, the tigress Richard Parker helps him to overcome all the obstacles and is hence seen as a helper from God. Therefore, it is clear that the life of Pi illustrates the importance of religion, Faith and God as well. Similarly, the Work of Poe is also characterized by religious symbolism especially in the last chapters.

Although both themes have been discussed differently, it is clear that Marten was influenced greatly by the work of Poe especially in discussing religion.

Poe's Narrative of Arthur Grogon Pym of Nantucket and the Life of Pi are very similar since both of them are adventurous stories involving similar issues

such as cannibalism and shipwreck. However, the main aim of the essay is <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-religion-and-god-in-yann-martels-life-of-pi-as-influenced-by-poses-the-narrative-of-arthur-grogon-pym-of-nantucket-explicatory-essay/>

not on the similarity of the main themes but on the influence that Poe had on Yann Martels work.

Nevertheless, the similarity of themes is one of the important factors that can illustrate how the work of Poe was influential. Although there are many issues such as ship wreck and cannibalism that are similar, religious symbolism is the most important factor in the whole story.

In the life of Pi, a supernatural being or God helped the main character to survive the difficult situations and to overcome all the obstacles. Religious symbolism in the Poe's work which features greatly in the last chapters influenced the role played by God and religion in the life of Pi. Therefore, it cannot be an understatement to conclude that Poe greatly influenced Yann Martel in writing the life of Pi not only in bringing out the idea of God and religion, but also on the presentation of the whole story.

Buchinger, George. The Tiger in the Angolphone Literature. 2009. Web.

Greer, W. R. Life of Pi is a masterful story. 2002. Web.

Martel, Yann. Life of Pi. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002.

NikoRad. Religion and spirituality in Life of Pi, by Yann Martel. 2009. Web.

Quilty, Susan. Religion and spirituality in Life of Pi, by Yann Martel. 2010. Web.