

**Thematic Abundance of Yann Martel's Novel *Life of Pi***

Student Name

University

Course

Professor Name

Date

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### **Thematic Abundance of Yann Martel's Novel *Life of Pi***

The Yann Martel's philosophical novel *Life of Pi* has become a treasury of human emotions, a colorful tale describing the formation of an adult in a situation of survival. This is a multi-layered story, touching upon a number of philosophical themes, fascinating from the very beginning, and giving the opportunity to reflect on the human nature in its various forms. The novel tells how the basis of an individual's worldview is formed at an early age by various factors, and how in the future, it affects the course of a life.

### **Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* as a Coming-of-Age Story**

For the first time, the readers meet Pi, the main character, when he is a middle-aged man who retells to the author his story and the incredible adventures that brought him near the verge of death. In this way, the author resorts to the literary technique known as a frame narrative in order to contain one story within another (Junfang 44). Young Pi, whose full name is Piscine Molitor Patel, was brought up in the traditions of Hinduism. Nevertheless, the young man continues his religious education by studying Christianity and Islam – he even claims to have encountered Jesus Christ, thus the readers get to know Pi as an impressionable and inquisitive person. The protagonist's spirituality is, in a way, the core of his character for some scholars analyzing the text: Pi's fascination with Gods pushes him into accepting three religions, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam (Palmer 95). However, the young man's interest in spirituality is not approved by Santosh Patel, his father, who is a strong believer in the power of reason and science with the vision of religious text as of fairy tales. Father's disapproval does not hinder Pi's further religious journey when later his faith and convictions are to be put on trial.

### **Main Characters and Anthropomorphism**

The anthropomorphic nature of the novel starts unfolding itself with the beginning of Pi's

marine journey and, to some degree, is interrelated with Santosh Patel's character who owns and runs Pondicherry Zoo. During Pi's early adolescence, Santosh Patel decides to take his family and the vast majority of the animals from the zoo and move to Canada, where the animals could be sold to make a living. After several days of calm and peaceful ocean travel, the ship with Pi, his family, and the animals onboard enters the storm – Pi thinks that he is the only surviving living being. Later when the storm calms down, the protagonist discovers that some animals from the ship found their shelter in the boat with him: hyena, zebra, orangutan Orange, and tiger Richard Parker. Palmer states, "we can see *Life of Pi* as a part of a turn toward a reconsideration of humans' place in the nature – here the shared but diverged animality of a boy and his "other", in this case, a tiger" (95). Accordingly, one of the central points in the novel is the nature and possibility of a bond between humans and animals.

The novel can be regarded as another revision of the old castaway narrative, all the tropes of which are present here – the struggle to survive, violence, and finally madness. Pi finds himself in a limited space with wild animals and spends 227 days at sea having no other company, which forces him and the animal to reach mutual understanding. According Storey, "in this regard, *Life of Pi* is a typical illustration of the monomyth, a model of structuralist inspiration, as Pi passes through the stages of the hero's journey..." (210). Notably, one of the things that help Pi not to lose his sanity is a journal – an allusion to another popular castaway narrative, that is to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Nevertheless, the fight for survival continues with new obstacles that Pi has to overcome to be able to complete his journey.

### **Religious Themes of the Novel**

After long days at the sea, Pi and Richard Parker proceed to the next stage of their survival, which might be considered common for this type of narrative, which is survival on an island.

Subsequently, the biblical theme is investigated further in this story sequence, since a number of things leads to the comparison with Eden. For instance, the paradisiacal nature of this island (even if only at first sight). Biblical references in the novel are part of a larger thematic corps: belief in God is a major thread that goes through *Life of Pi*. God in the novel is viewed in the broadest sense, overcoming the differences and conflicts between variety of religious movements (Palmer 103). Pi states on this occasion that there are thousands of gods in India, and adding three more to them would not be a big mistake.

### **Intersection of Truth and Storytelling Themes**

Finally, having survived together a number of deadly situations, Pi and Richard Parker arrive in Mexico, where the tiger leaves Pi standing in solitude without saying goodbye. The bond that the man and the animal established between them contradicts the words of Pi's father that the hero recalls at that moment, "You think the tiger is your friend, he is an animal, not a playmate" (Martel 28). The scene is cathartic: the emotional charge that has accumulated in the course of the narration reaches its maximum peak there. Later, Pi is found by people, hospitalized and has an appointment arranged for him with the representatives of the Japanese company, on a ship of which he embarked with his family. Naturally, the representatives do not believe in his story, and Pi tells them another one, more believable but darker version of what happened, full of hatred and enmity, cannibalism and violence.

The theme of choice in particular and of storytelling significance more generally constitutes the major theme of the novel alongside the theme of God. The choice between the two stories, the decision about which one is to be considered true, is given to the readers and is supposed to be made based on their own values and preferences. The reader can choose the fantastic version of the story, which is a spiritual adventure full of courage and hope, or they can favor the down-to-earth version,

full of darkness and horror. Yann Martel, whom is a character in the text, chooses the first one.

### **Conclusion**

The novel leaves a strong lasting impression: its ending forces readers to revise the entirety of the text and consider possible clues to the truth, which is, unfortunately, not to be found. From a tale of adventure, it turns into a philosophical novel, abundant with deep psychological characterizations of its heroes. The plot is based on the struggle of a wild beast and a human taking place inside the protagonist, who finds himself in critical conditions, forced to survive. Thematically, *Life of Pi* is about religion and a person's attitude to the world, about expectations, and that not everything in the world should be exactly as it sometimes seems.

## References

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