

Prompt: Pi cannot live without Richard Parker, just as Richard Parker cannot live without Pi. Discuss with close reference to the text.

In Yann Martel's vivid work of fiction titled 'Life of Pi,' the protagonist, an adolescent Indian boy, is shipwrecked in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He is in the company of what appears to be a "400 pound Bengal tiger," an orang-utan, a zebra and a vicious hyena. Piscine Patel is bombarded with trials of endurance and survival. He is tested to a physical and mental extreme; in which he responds to in a bold and seemingly heroic way. Martel has created a novel that is post modernistic as it explores the concept of truth and its validity. However, 'Life of Pi' also lies deep within the realms of a psychological novel. The 'tiger' also named Richard Parker is Pi's saviour, without Pi, Richard Parker cannot live. Without each other, they both die. This is a tale of strong companionship, where Richard Parker and Pi save each other's lives on a physical and mental level. Martel also incorporates the themes of appearance vs. reality and the power belief and faith have in Pi's miraculous survival.

In times of adversity and trauma, a human being requires companionship to help prevail and triumph over darkness. Colours are a motif in 'Life of Pi' that symbolise safety, purity and psychological trauma. Martel has constructed a tale that touches on the psychological effect a terrifying ordeal can have on such a young mind. Pi believes that Richard Parker "saved" his life, physically, by killing the French chef, otherwise known as the hyena. Richard Parker, a fearsome creature "ripped flesh" from the cook's body as he attempted to literally take Pi's organs "your heart and liver are mine." However, Richard Parker may not have existed, that he was merely a construct in Pi's mind, and illusion. Martel has deliberately constructed 'Life of Pi' in two alternate stories, which contradict one another. In the second story, Richard Parker is revealed only to be a metaphor for the animalistic nature of humans, a basic instinct. Despite this revelation, Richard Parker still remains that saviour for Pi's life. On a different level, without Pi, Richard Parker wouldn't have been able to live so freely. Without Pi's brilliant imagination, Richard Parker would have remained buried deep within Pi's mind. It wasn't until Pi's life was at risk did Richard Parker break free from his shackles. Ultimately, Martel created Richard Parker to show Pi's duality, to show his animalistic, rageful side. As Pi becomes delusional, he is "elated to be on speaking terms with a tiger," Martel has used anthropomorphism to make Pi's experience more realistic and factual. The motif of colours becomes relevant when Pi loses his vision. The tiger carries the bold colour of orange, symbolising safety, he also has a white belly, symbolising purity. Most importantly, the deep black stripes represent Pi's psychological trauma. Richard Parker is Pi, and Pi is Richard Parker. Without each other, they are nothing. Perhaps Martel is saying that as humans we must lose ourselves in the depths of our despair, our own darkness of the mind before we can find ourselves again. Richard Parker is Pi's reformatted self, are birth of something greater from within. Both Richard Parker and Pi need each other.

'Life of Pi' questions the nature of truth, it explores how sometimes the lines that divide reality become blurred. Appearance vs. reality is one of Martel's main thematic concerns. Perhaps Martel is questioning the reader's ability to define where reality ends and imagination begins. While to some, Richard Parker physically existed, others may believe that Richard Parker only appeared real due only to clever personification and anthropomorphism. This blurred logic was deliberate on Martel's

behalf. He intended for the reader to be confused by the distorted image he had created. Pi and Richard Parker come across a “carnivorous” island that appears “sweet” on the outside, but is actually “bitter on the inside.” The island is made of algae, a “floating organism” which Pi and Richard Parker seek refuge on. The likelihood of an island actually existing like that is most improbable, yet through the use of magic realism, Martel manages to transform the impossible into the possible. This means that Richard Parker could have existed, not just in Pi’s mind. In appearance, Richard Parker was merely a construct, a holy figure that endorsed life. However, Martel’s clever construction of Pi and Richard Parker’s relationship allowed appearance and reality to blend and morph into truth, that without each other, they would not be as powerful or as strong to fight each other’s demons.

Lastly, belief and faith within yourself or another being may be enough to pull a person out of a tragic end. Pi, a deeply religious boy, follows three faiths; Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. While the family around him believes this to be nonsense, Pi ignores the outrage of others and continues to believe in all three religions. The concept of such a young boy deciding to believe in all three faiths so harmoniously is strong point of view Martel endorses. Martel is alluding to the fact that discrimination of the ‘God’s’ is pointless, perhaps he is encouraging the reader to love every faith unconditionally, as they all stand for the preservation of human life. It is stated that Pi’s miracle journey “will make you believe in God,” to which ‘God’ it doesn’t specify. The ambiguous nature of religion, belief and faith are meant to allow a person to incorporate whatever they desire into their life. Pi and Richard Parker have belief and faith in one another, essentially they only need each other to get through this ordeal. Pi tells Richard Parker, “Richard Parker... thank you for saving my life.” Martel juxtaposes Pi’s belief in a God with his belief in himself. He questions what belief is stronger, was it a God that saved Pi’s life, or was it Richard Parker, Pi’s internal God. Either way, Martel endorses the belief in yourself to fight through times of adversity. Without Pi, Richard Parker would never have lived, just like the Christian God, without believers he could cease to exist. Without Richard Parker, Pi would have ceased to live, physically and mentally.

‘Life of Pi’ by Yann Martel follows the journey of a young Indian boy who defied against all odds and logic to survive at sea for 227 days. During this period, Pi encounters a tiger named Richard Parker whom he owes his life to. Essentially Martel is endorsing the faith and belief in yourself, whether that be in the form of a ‘God’ or a 400 pound Bengal tiger. A human being is powerful enough to blur the lines between reality and appearance, our psychological abilities are endless, just as is our ability for faith and belief.