

## Essay-Wettbewerb 2019/20

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### Yann Martel – a novelist

Strong-minded and eloquent, this is how Yann Martel appears in the media, in newspapers and interviews. Determined to write a book as well as he possibly can, he embarks on journeys to foreign countries, as he did with his breakthrough novel “Life of Pi”. But what is it exactly that made this book so intriguing and spectacular? Is it only Pi’s desperate fight for survival, or is there a hidden meaning, a way to see his journey across the ocean in a different light? It seems comical, almost unreal, a tiger and a boy on a boat for 277 days, but it is this sense of sheer willpower to survive which makes this particular book so much more than just your typical cast away story.

The well-known author Yann Martel, born in Spain in 1963, however, having lived in all different parts of the planet, first delved into the world of writing at the age of 27 and started out by composing “some really bad plays and some really bad short stories”, as he himself stated in an interview by The Telegraph. Soon, he started devoting himself to the craft more seriously and published his first novel, “The Facts behind the Helsinki Roccamatios”, in 1993. Only about 3 years later, a fictional autobiography titled “Self” hit the market, followed by “Life of Pi”, which to this day is his most renowned and critically acclaimed novel, with 13 million copies sold worldwide. Many prizes, such as the highly prestigious Man Booker Prize, were awarded to him subsequently. Since then, he has written two more novels (“Beatrice and Virgil” and “The High Mountains of Portugal”), discussing topics such as the nature of human evil and grief, which did not even come close to the enormous reaction “Life of Pi” received at its publication in 2001.

It can also be assumed that “Life of Pi” was such a huge success due to the author’s ability to unite several seemingly opposing aspects of existence, namely infuriating rage and love, the determination to survive and the will to give up at the same time. Pi, a teenage boy whose family is looking to emigrate to Canada, finds himself on a lifeboat with a Bengal Tiger named Richard Parker after a horrible storm in which the ship sank. A strange co-dependency begins to form as the story continues, giving Pi, who at the beginning felt like he was literally just being thrown into the deep end, a sense of purpose. Richard Parker plays a vital role in his life by functioning as an anchor of hope. As they begin their journey of utmost difficulty across the ocean, the reader also discovers that Richard Parker is a symbol for strength and bravery and a tool to add to the whole plot something rather mystifying and godly. Pi’s discovery of Christianity, Islam and Hinduism at a fairly young age help him in times of profound despair, and his faith lastly enables him to reach the shore safely after many days.

All in all, "Life of Pi" is not just your typical adventure story with a foreseeable ending, and that is for numerous reasons. Over the course of 277 days, Pi discovers that he has no place to call home anymore, apart from his little lifeboat. Because of that, Pi must be 100% focused all the time, in order to make sure that the tiger, who also represents Pi's own fear and exasperation, does not overpower him. One might ask - what is propelling Pi forward still, given the fact that his chance to reach the shore alive is incredibly small? In many ways, his struggles and his determination to succeed can be viewed as an interpretation of society with its own obstacles, some of which seem as unconquerable as Pi's. This book encourages everybody to never stop pursuing their goals. Even more so, it tells us that there lies an unbelievable beauty in accepting our own limits, but that nonetheless, there lies an even greater strength in striving to overcome them, as Pi shows us by doing everything in his capacity to stay alive. In fact, the same innate fear which all human beings carry around with themselves is being discussed openly and functions as the part which keeps on appearing throughout the whole book: the fear of not belonging anywhere. To summarise, "Life of Pi" covers several incredibly important aspects of existence and is therefore an essential read for everyone who is seeking to learn more about the complexity of human life and emotions.

Even though "Life of Pi" has been a huge success, simply because of the various topics it explores, it is a very accessible and not overly complex story. In its very essence, this book is an homage to life, in all its beautiful forms, such as Pi himself realises when he first recognises the brilliantly colourful schools of fish underneath the boat. But most importantly, it teaches us about our own inability to exist solely on our own, and our desire for company and connection, which is something pivotal and omnipresent in our every-day lives. "Life of Pi" is invigorating and thoughtful, beautifully written and wise, but most importantly, it is one of the most powerful books about survival and hope ever published.

**Sources:**

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