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How a Fantastic Novel Constructs the Enemy Figure

The Untamed Other and the Role of Fantasy in *Life of Pi*

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to bring out the aesthetic means of constructing the enemy/foe figure in the fantasy novel entitled *Life of Pi* by the Canadian author Yann Martel, published in 2001 and screened in 2012 by director Ang Lee. The main focus is on the literary, fantastic, configuration of the Bengali tiger, Richard Parker, a fictional character often minimised by literary criticism with reference to its cultural meanings. We posit that even though *Life of Pi* is a postmodern novel, the way in which the author constructs the character contrasts with contemporary postmodern paradigm through which the Other is fully interpreted as a positive value. Our perspective will be based on different methodological instruments, combining diverse fields like literary critique, cultural studies or social anthropology.

KEYWORDS

Yann Martel; Ang Lee; Postmodernism; *Life of Pi*; The Other; Enemy/ Foe.

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Introduction. The life of Pi, the life of the tiger

The fantasy novel *Life of Pi*, written by the Canadian author Yann Martel, was published in 2001 and adapted for the screen in 2012 by director Ang Lee. The book portrays the story of an Indian adolescent, Piscine Molitor Patel (whose nickname will become Pi). Pi is the son of an important Zoo owner in Pondicherry (French India). Raised a vegetarian Hindi, Pi is very much passionate about religion and he approaches Hinduism, Christianity and Islamism, in order to understand God, by using the benefits of all three religions. He is passionate about the animal life and, from the very first pages, we find out about the fierce and frightening Bengali Tiger, Richard Parker, whose name comes about due to a printing mistake which mixes up the tiger's name with the owner from which Pi's family makes the purchase.

Unhappy with the political regime of Gandhi's wife government, Pi's father decides to immigrate to Canada, with his entire family and the animals from the Zoo. After travelling for a couple of days aboard a Japanese ship, a powerful storm sinks the ship and Pi loses his entire family (mother, father and brother). Pi is the only one who manages to survive on a lifeboat where four



other animals get saved as well: a hyena, a zebra, an orang-utan, and Richard Parker.

The hyena kills the zebra and then the orang-utan, after which the tiger eats the hyena. Pi will travel with the tiger for 227 days in the Pacific waters. In the beginning, he builds a device, a raft from scraps where he lives and sleeps. The raft is tied to the boat which enables him to keep a distance from the boat proper, so that he should not become the tiger's food. Taking advantage of the tiger's seasickness and other domination and communication strategies (whistling, yelling etc), Pi will give up the raft gradually and will live with Richard Parker on the same boat.

Pi fishes and eats tortoise, manages to feed the tiger with fish, and suffers from delirium and intense weakness. They reach an island which is apparently very welcoming, an island full of meerkats. Pi is forced to leave the island, though, because of the carnivorous vegetation growing there and he takes the tiger with him. A couple more days go by and storms unleash, so that both man and animal suffer from severe dehydration until they finally reach Mexican shores. The tiger disappears in the jungle, while Pi is found more dead than alive by locals and rushed to the hospital.

The last part of the novel presents the interviews Pi gives the Japanese officials who arrive to find information on the fate of the ship. The officials do not believe Pi's story. A different interpretation is given to the entire event, one in which the tiger is Pi's imaginary projection, the orang-utan the mother and the hyena the cook.

Aims of this study. In search of the enemy

Our research is by no means exhaustive, a goal that would be hard to attain, given the complexity of Martel's work. Our research seeks to bring out the aesthetic means of constructing the enemy/ foe figure. We will thus focus on the literary configuration of the Bengali tiger, Richard Parker, a fictional character that literary criticism tends to label as either a fantastic animal¹ or as an element of a shrouded religious allegory², therefore limiting its literary outreach to narrative mechanisms and anchoring the character within the *fantasy-Realism* tension. However, our research is not strictly limited to its literary consequences, a subsequent objective being to identify the social and cultural outreach of the way in which the character of Richard Parker is constructed.

Starting from the observation that the tiger clearly occupies the position of the Other, we set out to show that the way in which the author constructs the character contrasts with contemporary paradigm scope and aim, namely the drive to diminish the distance between I and You. It is the same paradigm which presupposes a discursive, ideological exaltation of the difference between the two anthropological instances, the same paradigm through which the Other is fully interpreted as a positive value. The Postmodern non-typicality of the Other is all the more interesting and investigation worthy from both a literary and cultural perspective, as Martel's work is clearly anchored in Postmodernism.

On the same line with these research aims, our perspective will be based on different methodological instruments, combining diverse fields such as literature/ literary criticism, cultural studies and social anthropology. The following section will briefly analyse some of the social mechanisms of



cultural Postmodernist imagery which lead to the positive portrayal of the Other. The fourth section investigates the unique way in which the enemy figure is articulated, by taking into account the two ways in which the novel can be interpreted. This will show that, despite being different as literary substance, these two views converge towards the same social imagery of the Other, an imagery which will be examined in relation to fantasy in the 5th part of the paper part of the paper. The last section, the conclusions, insists on the positive cultural significance of the untamed Other, frequently portrayed as negative entity.

**Some major postmodernist ideological tendencies of configuring the Other.
A critical perspective**

Despite the fact that diversity is an implicit Postmodernist desideratum, Western contemporary culture stands out in the various discourses about the Other, by massively exorcising the problematic difference that it poses. In this respect, Gary Cox³ notices how, nowadays, under the *politically correct* imperative, an individual's insufficiencies, irrespective of the type, are always motivated by putting the blame on circumstances and the socio-cultural context. Strategies of the "politically correct" type seem to lessen the intensity of the reality according to which the Other cannot be always good. This is because the Other cannot always be credited by their individual existence standing against a social background. The same strategies, of a more culturally discursive, rather than political nature, show that if Postmodernism tries to appease differences it is only in order to accept all differences as qualitatively equal.

However, as Jean-Paul Sartre explains it in multiple ways⁴, the true problem lies not in differences but in resemblance. To be

more exact, the problem of meeting the Other does not go away by taming differences, as this encounter is an ontological matter. Placing the Other in positive spotlight, a specific Postmodernist technique, is natural or rather explicable up to a certain point. At a certain point, however, it becomes the fundamental underpinning of the social mechanisms which manipulate and discipline individuals. The immediate consequence is that the Other becomes stereotypical. The Other is given a positive portrayal on two layers: at the level of the Other's content and at the level of engaging with the Other. In the first case, the Other is labelled positive, irrespective of its specificity, while, in the second case, positivity is given by virtue of one's engaging with the Other, irrespective of the specificity of the two participants. The mere existence of a relationship is a good one, it is desirable and can only be pacifying.

We stop to discuss these aspects for a while. After humanity has finally learned, as a consequence of the two world wars, that the myth of Cain and Abel is valid, on a symbolical level, as the recurring story of inter-human hate, it is no wonder a series of non-discriminatory politics and discourses have flooded commercial and mass-media spaces alike. These types of discourse have moral and philosophical consequences⁵, which stress for the need for harmony and brotherhood within a community, as well as for the necessity to accept the Other. Within the fertile soil of victims and victimization, the Other acquires an intrinsic value, leaving aside or discrediting older discourses like the ones of Girard, Hobbs or Sartre, which focused on less favourable aspects of the Other. Pier Paolo Antonello, in his introduction to the dialogue-book between Girard and Vattimo, makes an interesting point:



The entire ideological horizon of contemporary culture is indeed built around the central role victims play: Holocaust victims, victims of Capitalism, victims of social injustice, war victims, politically persecuted victims, victims of ecological disasters, racial/ sexual/ religious discrimination victims⁶.

Postmodernism has the tendency to avenge the evil of Modernism, since Modernism makes intense use of post-Christian portrayals. As Vattimo explains, this Postmodernist tendency adds to the postmodern hyper-consumerism. After all, Vattimo is an Italian philosopher who has contributed, in some degree, to the cultural portrayal of the Other in a positive manner through his concept of “weak thought”. Lipovetsky notices, in his work *Le bonheur paradoxal (Paradoxical Happiness)*⁷, that the generalised access to consume weakened the tension of inter-human relations, diminished the force of Nemesis – implicitly contradicting, a portion of the assumptions of *La critique de la raison dialectique (The Critique of Dialectical Reason)* (specifically Sartre-like in nature) which develops the idea of an inevitable fight for food, resources leading to inter-human conflict. By the same token, Lipovetsky, in *Le Crépuscule du devoir (The Dawn of Duty)*⁸, explains how the Other is more and more easily acceptable since Postmodernist ethics sweetened the idea of sacrifice and self-abandonment for another being. Narcissism means lesser attention to the needs of the Other and no matter how bizarre it would seem, a greater tolerance for it, precisely because the subject is too turned on itself to become truly worried by the problems the Other may have. In addition, Lipovetsky believes that the relationship with the Other steps away from ethics because it enters the zone of a hyper-consumerism show. However, as Lipovetsky also

notices, man’s happiness with his own Self and with the Other always leaves traces and eventually generates a feeling of void and emptiness.

The Other seems to pose fewer problems for Postmodernism, at least in some of its areas, alongside its ontological relaxation. The Other, often a *tele-visual* figure of non-problematic distance, is easier to accept. But it is not a flesh and blood Other which is accepted, but its shadow, precisely because the ontology of the Other is setting, it is coming to an end.

In *La mélancolisation du sujet postmoderne ou la disparition de l’Autre*⁹, French psychiatrist Serge Lesourd notices one important feature of Postmodernist imagery and discourse is to get rid of the Other, a fact which has dramatic individual consequences. Disappearance, abandonment, and the destruction of the Other must be understood in a positive sense, even though the author does not use this precise word. The positive view begins by pooling the Others together under the overarching umbrella which Lesourd calls Man, mediator of the I-Other relationship. The author also reveals the way in which the Other, demoted by being reduced to object, becomes a continuous source of *jouissance*, in the good tradition of a consumerist age, a frustrating sort of *jouissance* since the subject which is looking for fulfilment cannot go beyond the inherent incompleteness of his being. This is a truth which the great religions understood and translated into morality and narrative, as Lesourd says. Happiness exists, the Other can be good and fully accessible on condition that the individual who is apt at participating in perfect relations be already dead. The Paradisiacal brotherhood images Christianity promises are based on such mechanisms. It is an aspect Postmodernism is intent on playing with its cards in sight, but which it now fails to understand.

The Postmodernist paradigm of portraying the Other in a positive way is a



deficient paradigm. And, indeed, it is strange to think that, while we speak of the Other in positive terms, terrorism, intolerance and massive discrimination are just as present, even if it seems like denying them, at first sight¹⁰. From this point of view, Cyrille Deloro's words are all the more profound:

The Other has become a commercial slogan: love one another, the Other 'is good for you'...but this is not true. The more we pacify our relations, the less the Other exists. We have become "human, too human"! We thus see the other break in abstract and terrifying manners, which make the world a place of horror and transform subjectivity in a battle field. And all these others are radical Others: terrorists of the outer world, metastases of the inner world¹¹.

Deloro describes the way in which schizophrenics are incapable of mentally or imaginarily configuring the concept of Other. There are only Others, too many, too real, impossible to pin down under a theoretical label. Deloro explains that what is damaged in Schizophrenia is the impersonal nature of the Other, leaving the infinite and overwhelming instances of the Other untouched. The paradigm of the positive Other risks to suffer from a sort of anti-Schizophrenia, so that the Other is not portrayed as much happier. By focusing too much on the Other as an inner-impersonal structure and by applying the necessary positive corrections to it, the contemporary world risks to paralyse the free, unpredictable, difficult, cumbersome relationship with the Other. It is the same relationship which has given rise to art, culture. The Other is not an indisputable value since its meaning resides little in morality, but heavily in Ontology.

Starting from the end: two literary constructions of the enemy

We will first tackle the way in which the enemy/ foe figure is configured, starting from the fantasy nature of the book, challenged only at the end of the novel by Pi Patel. By the end of the book, Pi Patel demotes the story to a mere figment of imagination by failing to assume it as narrative. If Richard Parker were an animal, a tiger, an aggressive, unpredictable animal, then it would represent not only the Difference (as qualitative diversity) we discussed earlier, but also Distance. In contrast to Piscine, Richard Parker instantiates the Distance which incorporates radical Difference. This Difference is impossible to abolish socially and ontologically, in spite of the entire range of discourses which claim to make it null. Distance is no longer established between an I and a You whose meeting possibilities are socially prescribed. We refer to a Distance type which is poorly assumed by the community. Actually, strictly speaking, community consent would be insufficient, as it would also need the consent of the animal community. The man-animal perspective can only be anthropocentric and, therefore, no matter how well intentioned (which is not always the case), it is flawed, incomplete and unilateral. Diverging a bit, in order to clear some aspects, it must be noted that Hollywood's boundless appetite for scripts in which men discover their affinities with the animal kingdom are proof not only of the reciprocal desire of getting closer to a fundamentally different Other, but also of an exotic view which produces interest in assimilation and interpretation. Such exotic views, structurally, are nothing more than a subtle, narcissistic self-mirroring¹². It is why, most of the times, the Animal-Other is



a domestic animal, an animal over which man has already shown supremacy and domination.

To return to Richard Parker, we notice that it is the *enemy* throughout the story. Richard Parker carries death and murder. It is equally empowered and driven to take life. Irrespective of how man-tiger relations develop, Pi is constantly threatened by Richard Parker. This will not change throughout the story, not even after the storm, when the two are thrown at the bottom of the boat and they share a brief, semi-voluntary moment of tenderness. We made reference to the positive portrayal of the Other, which is actually equivalent to its assimilation as *friend*. Positive portrayal implies the denial of the dual character of any relation and, ultimately, of any human reality. However, a dissipation of the dual register would also occur whenever the Other is fully equated as a negative element. Richard Parker is not the nihilistic enemy/ foe type. There is a positive thread which goes across the conflicting relationship of Pi and the tiger, a thread which cannot bring back equilibrium and cannot continually adjust the relationship towards the negative pole¹³.

Pi's relationship with the tiger develops under two contrastive signs on the boat where they manage to survive, namely through socially ontological bonding and through separation. These two means of bonding come in succession, cyclically, from the beginning of the boat experience until the tiger reaches Mexican shores and disappears without a trace. As a result, the bond between the tiger and Pi is partly social, partly ontological. It is social because it is contextually-driven, triggered by the overall social resettlement, from a normal situation in which the animal was locked in a Zoo or on the ship where both Pi and his parents kept a secure, comforting distance from the animals. After this normality is

shattered as a result of the boat sinking, the chance cohabitation of Pi and Richard Parker allowed for, or better said led to an atypical form of man-animal social bonding, where the bonding process is not option-based, but context-based and mandatory.

The bonding process is ontological as well (triggered by social factors) because, once social space is reconfigured, there are major changes for the two protagonists: Richard Parker develops a greater tolerance for its urge to devour Pi's flesh, settling for the fish offered by his boat mate and for the flesh of the fisherman they encounter at large, where the latter, the fisherman, adopts an animal-like behaviour by regressing to a non-cultural, or a cultural, restrictions-free state where survival, feeding and thirst quenching are of the utmost importance. Seen as a structure built on subjective-objective rendering processes, reality¹⁴ becomes diluted. What remains are the things in the nearby proximity which can be touched. It is quite understandable for Pi to keep memories of the more complicated structures of reality, a fact which is very clear when he daydreams, when he thinks of his mother or he remembers symbols or has visual religious glances. When he loses the diary in which he jots down his experiences and activities, he, in fact, loses his cultural Other and sits face to face with the radical, unknown, untamed, non-human Other. Among others, bonding with the tiger illustrates the human need for relations, outside Christian ethics. There is also a slight undermining of this ethics, because the man gets closer to the animal, not to one of his fellow beings. In addition, it does not bond in a paradisiacal afterlife where differences serve a decorative, non-functional purpose, but in a fantastic life, alternative to the real one, where differences do not matter so much anymore since they are contextually-driven (tiger and man live together, eat and sleep together). However, differences are



still threatening, tensed, despite being diminished on a first level of interaction.

As far as the tiger is concerned, even before the destruction of the classic man-animal habitation space, the tiger is drawn towards his human side by the Indian boy in several ways (the animal goes through a process of humanization). First, the tiger bears a human name: Richard Parker (even if everything starts from a transcription error). It is worth noting that names and naming are two important aspects for Pi Patel, as the first pages of the book show. In these initial chapters, the character names himself Pi, instead of Piscine. The name is not a simple etiquette, but an extra-personal history which gets attached to personal history, almost becoming an integral part of it. Second, this is highlighted by Pi's attempt to bond with the tiger, an attempt punished by his father, who teaches him the lesson of the insurmountable difference between man and animal and the inherent *evil* nature of the tiger. Above all, his father's lesson refers to the necessity of knowing one's enemy, as this is a vital issue. The ultimate lesson is to mistake the Other with Another, as this sometimes poses life risks.

In any case, it is quite hard to distinguish between a strict social bond and a strict ontological one. Instead, we can consider that they intermingle as a unity, as a linguistic sign which, in its pragmatic dimension, is simultaneously the expression as well as the expressed content, the *signifiant* and the *signifié*, to use a Structuralist framework.

As one can deduce from the issues so far discussed, Distance is the other side of Pi and Richard Parker's relation. This is present when we notice Pi's vigilance while being with the tiger on the boat. Pi is always aware of the death the tiger might bring him. Pi, therefore, engages the tiger in domination, befriending and taming strategies¹⁵. Distance, as a relational mechanism,

manifests itself quite strong when the tiger eats the hyena, when the fisherman they meet by chance¹⁶ in the Pacific, is disembodied by the tiger, but even more when Richard Parker disappears without a trace.

That bungled goodbye hurts me to this day. I wish so much that I'd had one last look at him in the lifeboat, that I'd provoked him a little, so that I was on his mind. I wish I had said to him then—yes, I know, to a tiger, but still—I wish I had said, “Richard Parker, it's over. We have survived. Can you believe it? I owe you more gratitude than I can express. I couldn't have done it without you. I would like to say it formally: Richard Parker, thank you. Thank you for saving my life. And now go where you must. You have known the confined freedom of a zoo most of your life; now you will know the free confinement of a jungle. I wish you all the best with it. Watch out for Man. He is not your friend. But I hope you will remember me as a friend. I will never forget you, that is certain. You will always be with me, in my heart. What is that hiss? Ah, our boat has touched sand. So farewell, Richard Parker, farewell. God be with you”¹⁷.

Practically, the end is proof of the fact that Pi's relation to Richard Parker could never go beyond the man-tiger matrix relation and that Richard Parker did not become Pi Patel's friend, despite their bond. Distance alternates with bonding, as noted earlier, but the first is always stronger, exerting its effects on its counterpart. Pi's bond with the tiger will never become a full fusion, so that they may be indistinguishable. The distance between the two is irreducible. The tiger leaves without being engaged in gestures which might suggest an



anthropomorphic interpretation – the tiger is never aware that the jungle which opens up

in front of him brings the freedom he never had, neither at Pondicherry Zoo, or at sea. On the other hand, Pi is too tired to behave in accordance with a typical novel-like manner. Pi does not tell the tiger *good-bye*, since all the tender words that he addresses the tiger are said after Pi parts with the tiger (“I wish I had said”), which makes these words to be words about the tiger. The true Other, the interlocutor, the one who is the *You*, is, at this point, the book’s reader. The savage nature of the Animal-Other is highlighted once again. At the same time, this *goodbye* which is a form of discursive regret and of the “what if” philosophy, is a corollary of Pi’s withdrawal from his relationship with an unknown and uncomfortable Other. On a Freudian note, relational libido is re-cast onto the Similar-Other figure, a situation in which death lurks less. And yet, the one who comes back from the sea voyage is not the same with the one who embarked on the voyage. The untamed Other becomes an integral part of Pi’s self, because it is an element which Pi overcomes and which is reciprocal.

If, however, we take into consideration the interpretation of the two Japanese who interview Pi, and therefore consider the entire story to be Pi’s invention and the tiger his personified Self, an imaginative by-product crated by Pi to cope with the dire life conditions on the ocean, the man-tiger relationship appears to be an internal relationship which has no roots in material reality. Regression is more of a psychical, rather than social nature and brings back a part of the reality which Pi knew until the tragic accident: the fact that there was a tiger called Richard Parker, reticent, by its own nature, to human bonding, a tiger which is tied to the Pi’s father life lesson. According to this lesson, man must not consider all

animals as friends, but must, instead, know his enemy, for the sake of personal safety.

There are many examples of animals coming to surprising living arrangements. All are instances of that animal equivalent of anthropomorphism: zoomorphism, where an animal takes a human being, or another animal, to be one of its kind. The most famous case is also the most common: the pet dog, which has so assimilated humans into the realm of doghood as to want to mate with them, a fact that any dog owner who has had to pull an amorous dog from the leg of a mortified visitor will confirm¹⁸.

If dogs and domestic animals can function as a childish alter-ego or as a mirror which flatters the one who looks in it, the tiger is not an Idealistic rewriting of the Self, but an identification with and an awareness of their negative sides, namely of those that fear and weakness regulate. No matter how necessary, knowing the tiger imposes distancing oneself from it, according to Pi’s father’s advice. Therefore, if we accept that Pi is closely connected to Richard Parker being a psycho-existential emanation of the first, it would be too simple to reduce Pi to Richard Parker. Despite sharing the same ontological substance, they are separate from one another, as there is an unsurpassable intra-ontological distance. The reason why Richard Parker exists, even if we see it as an image of the Self, is because within one entity there are distances, fractions, there is the enemy. The enemy can be the evil one, the one who saves itself in the detriment of others, the cannibal (the one who ate the hyena/the cook), but also the one which invalidates the expectations about the routine-eroded Self, the one built in accordance to a culture which imprints its traits onto those it



subdues. Men are the most dangerous animals from the point of view of animals (“We commonly say in the trade that the most dangerous animal in a zoo is Man”¹⁹), but interpreting everything through the same chart, one might say that men are most dangerous, not only for animals, but for men as well. On the same page, Richard Parker articulates the inherently human nature of the enemy²⁰ on all levels: a generic level, a meta-literary level, in artistic creations and human stories alike.

The untamed other and the role of fantasy. Counteracting death

No matter if we choose the first interpretative key of Pi and Richard Parker’s relationship, according to which the tiger is a flesh and bone animal, or if we accept the second one, according to which Richard Parker is Pi’s *untamed other*²¹, which Pi gets rid of once he ends his voyage at sea, Richard Parker remains a symbol-like figure of the enemy/foe, of the Other which cannot possibly be tamed²². In the first case, we speak of a perfectly External Other, whereas, in the second, of an Inner Other which still engages in ongoing tendencies to become external. Critics consider that the first variant is more likely to be chosen by readers with a developed religious spirit, who do not need proof and who do not hesitate to distance themselves from what is considered normal by common sense while the likelihood of choosing the second variant is higher for atheists or agnostics, as these rationalise everything and are more prone to believe in the miracle of a tiger-man sharing the same space for 227 days. From the point of view of the relationship with the Other, aside from the fact that there are only nuanced differences between the two possible enemies, there is a factor which is overlooked. Admitting that Richard Parker died

after the boat sank, his place being taken by Pi’s illusory Self, we cannot say that the novel ceases to be a fantasy novel by becoming a realistic one which shares some fantasy elements. Realism, in this case, would be a meta-Realism, a *fantasy* subordinate element and nothing more. In other words, the *fantasy* break or rupture gives rise to the possibility of Realism, and not vice-versa. In fact, we might ask ourselves what might go best with Realism, a tiger and a boy that manage to survive together or a boy who resorts to cannibalism, who creates an imaginary enemy, becoming a schizoid, both a good and a bad person, a bad Self for which the character longs unconditionally. It might be the case that the difference between the two possibilities is less severe, especially if we put an equal sign between Realism and Rationalism. At the end of the novel, Pi is quite ironic about the Japanese opting for the Realistic interpretation of the story. “You want a story that won’t surprise you. That will confirm what you already know. That won’t make you see higher or further or differently”²³.

We ask ourselves how much does such profound doubling meet the reader’s expectations, since it triggers the birth of the enemy/foe from within, it accepts it and admits to the invested love which makes people human. Yet, in the end, whether an animalistic or psychological emanation (criminal and irrational compared to normality) of Pi, Richard Parker is the untamed Other which proves necessary, paradoxically or not, to the character-narrator. Pi stands in front of another enemy, a stronger one, a complete one, an enemy which does not preserve the face of the one he hates (like the tiger does, in any of its two instances, by virtue of the alert state it maintains), but rather destroys and erases it. This enemy is death. Hiding death and stimulating one’s will to live (by virtue of an action-reaction response) are



Richard Parker's main merits and main reasons of the absurd love Pi carries for it, at

first sight.

I will tell you a secret: a part of me was glad about Richard Parker. A part of me did not want Richard Parker to die at all, because if he died I would be left alone with despair, a foe even more formidable than a tiger. If I still had the will to live, it was thanks to Richard Parker. He kept me from thinking too much about my family and my tragic circumstances. He pushed me to go on living. I hated him for it, yet at the same time I was grateful. I am grateful. It's the plain truth: without Richard Parker, I wouldn't be alive today to tell you my story²⁴.

It is easier to see now that the main fantasy entertained by the novel is that the Other, irrespective of its friend or foe quality, more of a friend rather than foe, can counteract death²⁵, going beyond ethics. One can even claim that the foe/ enemy figure is saved from death, and what saves the foe/ enemy from death is fantasy (fantasy as genre, by extension, or even literature, by an even more generous extension), fact which discretely opposes, the entire range of positive discourses regarding the Other.

**In Lieu of conclusion: the untamed
Other is also good for your health**

Life of Pi is proof of the fact that the untamed Other, without being "good" in the ethical sense, may be "good for your health". In relation to Postmodernist discourses which exalt the intrinsic value of the Other and exorcise problematic differences, Martel's novel imbues a subtle pedagogy, which can be resumed as follows: literature cannot afford to lose its authentic enemies and cannot, under the imperative of humanistic ideology (drifting from classical and modern humanism), transform the Other exclusively in the friend figure, and tame it till making every tension null. By the two available readings (actually, taking into account that they are revealed at the end of the book, it would be more fair to call it re-reading), the novel praises freedom of interpretation in general, but even more so the story's freedom which is a religion for itself and on its own, and which manages to overcome any ideological discourse. As James Wood notices, this appraisal is one of the major elements which make the novel a Postmodernist one.

Nothing marks *Life of Pi* as a contemporary Postmodern novel more strongly than its theological impoverishment (for all that it seems to scream theological richness): instead of being interested in the theological basis of Pi's soul, it is really interested only in the theological basis of storytelling²⁶.

It is worth noting that, in spite of everything, the Other, in *Life of Pi*, is not, in its essence, built on the Postmodernist pattern of positive portrayal and taming. However, it is Postmodernist if we think of it as a consequence of destroying the religious imperative of vision coherence. It should be



noted that Pi embraces more than one religion (Hinduism, Christianity, Islamism). An approximate way of explaining the cultural substance of the Other, as represented in Martel's novel, would be to say that it is Postmodernist, literarily speaking, and anti-Postmodernist, ideologically speaking.

Indeed, *fantasy* literature and, by extension, literature, might be one of the best (and maybe the last) standpoints where the Other is concealed as a fresh, cruel, authentic, surprising and ontologically reinforced entity. It is the kind of standpoint which might offer the discrete energy that can reinsert the Other in the culture circuit, because stories do not avoid contrast and are based on their own laws. The aesthetic dimension is not a decorative mirroring of ethics necessarily, since ethics is all too often socially manipulated.

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Notes

¹ Justine Jordan, "Animal magnetism", in *The Guardian*, 25 May 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/may/25/fiction.reviews1>, last time consulted in 20.02.2014.

² Paul-André Proulx, *Vision chrétienne de la vie*, 2003, <http://www.litterature-quebecoise.com/oeuvres/lhistoiredepi.html>, last time consulted in 20.02.2014.

³ Gary Cox, *Sartre and Fiction*, London, New York, Continuum, 2009, p. 31.

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1943, p. 328, p. 336.

⁵ Emmanuel Lévinas, *La Mort et le temps*, Paris, Le Livre de poche, 1992.

⁶ René Girard and Gianni Vattimo, *Adevăr sau credință slabă? Convorbiri despre creștinism și relativism [Truth or Weak Thought? Conversations about Christianity and Relativism]*, edited by Pierpaolo Antonello, translated from Italian by Cornelia Dumitru, București, Curtea Veche, 2009.

⁷ Gilles Lipovetsky, *Le bonheur paradoxal. Essai sur la société d'hyperconsommation*, Paris, Gallimard, 2006.

⁸ Gilles Lipovetsky, *Le Crépuscule du devoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992.

⁹ Serge Lesourd, "La mélancolisation du sujet postmoderne ou la disparition de l'Autre", in *Cliniques méditerranéennes*, N° 75, 2007/1, p. 13-26.

¹⁰ Andre Glucksmann, *Le discours de la haine*, Paris, Plon, 2004.

¹¹ Cyrille Deloro, *L'Autre. Petit traité de narcissisme intelligent*, Larousse, Paris, 2009.

¹² For instance, the words uttered by the owner who euthanizes his old dog, at the end of the movie *Marley and Me* (2008, David Frankel) are memorable: "A dog doesn't care if you are rich or poor, clever or dull, smart or dumb. Give him your heart and he'll give you his. How many people can you say that about? How many people can make you feel rare and pure and special? How many people can make you feel extraordinary?" Therefore, the ultimate benefit of one's relationship with a dog is improving one's Self image.

¹³ Similarly, in the case of friendship, negativity must be surpassed to restore balance.

¹⁴ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1966.

¹⁵ Cf. Jeruen Dery, *Book Review: Life of Pi by Yann Martel*, <http://blogcritics.org/book-review-life-of-pi-by-2/>, nov. 2011, last time consulted in 05.02.2014. On the *disturbing* effect survival tactics may have on the reader.

¹⁶ It should be noted that the fisherman is referred to as *brother*. Killing the *brother* indicates once more that the Tiger is an evil, death-bearing Other.

¹⁷ Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*, Random House LLC, 2009, p. 317.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 93. See also: "I learned the lesson that an animal is an animal, essentially and practically removed from us, twice: once with Father and once with Richard Parker. (...) "Tigers are very dangerous," Father shouted. "I want you to understand that you are never-under any circumstances-to touch a tiger, to pet a tiger, to put your hands through the bars of a cage, even to get close to a cage".

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

²⁰ Cf.: Gary Krist, "Taming the Tiger", in *New York Times*, 7 July, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/07/books/taming-the->



tiger.html, last time consulted in 05.02.2014. Krist sees the relationship between the tiger and Pi as existential rather than realistic or fantastic. The story seems to be existential because the Other must be accepted in its negative dimension.

²¹ Cf.: Silvia Dumitrache, “Supraviețuirea cu sinele sălbatic. Yann Martel *Viața lui Pi*” [*Surviving the Savage Self. Yann Martel “Life of Pi”*], *bookaholic.ro*, 2012, <http://bookaholic.ro/supravietuirea-cu-sinele-salbatic-yann-martel>, last time consulted in 05.02.2014.

²² Cf.: W. R. Greer, “*Life of Pi* is a masterful story”, *ReviewsOfBooks.com*, http://www.reviewsofbooks.com/life_of_pi/review/, 2002, last time consulted in

05.02.2014. (“Martel doesn’t allow Richard Parker to be anything more than a dangerous Bengal tiger and Pi never to be more than a desperate boy lost at sea”)

²³ Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*, p. 336.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ Cf.: Justine Jordan, *Animal magnetism*. (the tiger “saved his life by coming between him and a more terrifying enemy, despair, leaps ashore and disappears into the jungle, denying him an anthropomorphic goodbye growl”).

²⁶ James Wood, “Credulity”, in *London Review of Books*, Vol. 25, No 22, 14 nov 2002, p. 24-25, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n22/james-wood/credulity>, last time consulted in 05.02.2014.