


“By the time morning came, my grim decision was taken. I preferred to set off and perish in search of my own kind than to live a lonely half-life of physical comfort and spiritual death on this murderous island.”

~ Martel 283

In the novel *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel, a fourteen-year old boy narrates his thrilling misadventures in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. His struggle to stay alive in a lifeboat with a 450 pound male Bengal tiger was as much of a philosophical battle as it was a physical one. Throughout the novel, Pi often pauses the story he is recounting in order to insert his own philosophy and his own beliefs into the text. It is within these moments that the reader gains a strong sense of Pi's personal values and convictions and exactly how they influence his ability to survive a grueling and dangerous voyage. In this passage, Pi recounts how he made the decision to leave the island of acidic algae that allowed him and Richard Parker to nurse themselves back to health. Martel uses metaphor, juxtaposition, and personification to emphasize Pi's resolve to live life properly and to the fullest, rather than surrender to his surroundings, exemplifying the mental strength, determination, and wisdom required of Pi throughout the novel to push away false comfort and take on delayed gratification.

 The metaphorical language in this passage highlights Pi's recognition of the false comfort placed before him as a tempting form of evil. By describing the life that Pi would live on this island as a “lonely half-life,” (Martel 283) Martel depicts the wasting away of a life, the utter meaninglessness that Pi imagines his life would have, were he to stay on this island. He describes this half life as one of “physical comfort.” (283) in recognition of the fact that the comfort offered by the island is but a facade and that it was this facade that would bring him to his downfall. Throughout the time Pi spends on the island, he becomes more and more aware of the destructive nature of the island. Pi observed a phenomena he did not understand, the rapid appearance of dead fish in the island's ponds, by noting, “I found the sight sinister. There was something disturbing about all those dead fish” (277). By pointing out the “sinister” and “disturbing” ways of the island, Pi acknowledges that the very place that has allowed him to regain his strength may just be that which lures him into a “lonely half-life,” a life that is drawn out but slowly wears away. Pi is sharp enough to see past the facade of the island and recognize its potential to harm him, calling attention to his wisdom and ability to think in a matter oriented towards the future.

The juxtaposition of the ideas of “physical comfort” and “spiritual death” (283) showcase Pi's wisdom beyond his years and his resolve to abandon the immediate gratification offered by the island in favor of the delayed gratification he would experience by stepping back into the lifeboat and setting off into the sea. At first, the island upon which Pi and Richard Parker's lifeboat stumbled appeared to be a source of salvation. In fact, immediately after reaching the island Pi exclaims, “Richard Parker! Land! Land! We are saved!” (258). It is an understatement

to say that Pi's first impression of the island was a good one. The island seemed to provide all that Pi needed to live. He was dying out on the lifeboat, but on the island, he found a delicious source of nutrition, he teaches himself to walk again, and he finds a comfortable way to walk about during the day and sleep during the night without a threat from Richard Parker. It is clear that life on the island is one of physical comfort. However, the value of this physical comfort decreases, as it comes at a great cost, that of a "spiritual death" (283). By closely following the idea of comfort with the idea of the deterioration of one's soul, Martel shows Pi's ability to discern between a tantalizing illusion and a harsh reality. A part of Pi's character becomes clear to the reader: Pi wishes to live his life to the fullest rather than have it worn down by external forces. Therefore, Pi reluctantly climbs back into his life boat and sails away from the island out of moral necessity.

The personification of the island is perhaps the most powerful literary device in this passage, making clear Pi's disgust with the way in which the island would detract from his quality of life. Pi makes clear his belief that the island would obliterate his quality of life and take from it so much meaning that it may be well characterized as "murderous" (283). Pi's disturbing discovery of a complete set of human teeth only reinforces his vision of the island as that which wears away at the human body and soul. He wonders about who the lost traveler before him was. He wonders, "How many dreams of a happy life dashed? How much hope come to nothing?...How much hopelessness taken on? And after all that, what of it? What to show for it?" (282). Pi seems to make his "grim decision" (283) shortly after letting himself wonder about the person from whom the set of teeth came. The island wore away at a man or woman like Pi, a person with hopes of a happy life and dreams of safety and security on an island that only seemed to give so much to its inhabitants. The characterization of the island as "murderous" connotes a vicious rival. To Pi, the most vicious adversary he could possibly face is one who takes away the meaning from his life.

Together, Martel's use of metaphor, juxtaposition, and personification reveals that Pi holds dear the idea of the fullest quality of life, the idea of delayed gratification, and the idea of breaking free from illusion in order to move forward in life. This calls to attention the fact that Pi is wise enough to see beyond that which stands immediately before him, he is strong enough to resist the temptation of that which stands immediately before him, and he is determined enough to break through the barriers of that which stands immediately before him, and set off, once again, with hope, into the vast ocean.