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25 October 2018

Memory Moments in *Life of Pi*

The novel *Life of Pi* is a world-renowned title, it even won the Man Booker Prize in 2002 (CBC 2018). The book begins with Pi sitting in a hospital room in Mexico after his family’s boat sank, and the book thereafter is a compilation of memory moments. Yann Martel uses memory moments in a unique way in order to help the reader connect to the main character Pi and understand the meaning behind his life. When the book begins Pi is at the farthest point on the timeline, then soon after the book changes perspective to when he was a boy growing up in Pondicherry, India. While the book focuses on Pi growing up there is emphasis placed on Pi’s connection to various gods and to his family. The effect is that while you are reading you wonder how he ended up in a Mexican hospital, and later have the ability to understand his feelings when his family ship sinks, and his family is killed. Some questions this memory moment leaves about Yann Martel’s life are as follows; is he is a man of various faiths and does he have any connection to zoology or behavioral science?

At the first memory moment, Pi is laying in a Mexican hospital bed and he reminisces about his life as a child, exploring his family zoo. When Pi was growing up in Pondicherry India he lived a very non-traditional life, his family owned a very large zoo, and he grew up learning about the different behaviors and habits of the zoo animals. These behaviors are referred to quite often throughout the novel, and Pi often compares his life and the life of other people to the animals in his family zoo. He ultimately uses his understanding of behavior to control Richard Parker, the Bengal Tiger, when they are trapped on a liferaft in the Atlantic ocean.

Another significant memory moment in *The Life of Pi* is when Pi is remembering his childhood and he remembers learning to swim. When Pi was growing up there were very few opportunities for his family to experience swimming, so when his close family friend Mamaji - whom Pi referred to as an uncle - took Pi swimming for the first time it was a life changing experience. Mamaji was a champion swimmer, and Pi spends a whole summer with him learning various swimming methods, and becoming closer to him. This memory has significance later on in the novel when the boat Pi’s family bought sinks, nobody else in his family is able to swim, and Pi thinks about Mamaji and the gift of life he bestowed upon Pi, in his first few weeks on the raft.

Another significant memory moment in *Life of Pi* is when Pi remembers feeling out of place because of his spiritual beliefs. Pi’s family was not religious, but during the summer months when Pi had free time, he would visit various temples and churches, learning about the various faiths they believed in. Pi began to believe in three religions at once, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, and the various preachers he listened to disapproved of his multiple faiths, saying that their religion was the one true faith and that the others are wrong. One night Pi asked his father for a prayer rug and begrudgingly his father purchased a plain and simple rug for Pi, this became one of his most prized possessions and a strong symbol of his faith. This memory has significance later on in the novel when Pi is floating on a raft in the middle of the ocean and remarks that he wished he had his prayer rug with him while on the raft to comfort him.

This signpost leaves many questions about Yann Martel’s life, some of these questions are if he is a man of various faiths, and if he has any connection to animals or behavioral science. Many of the memory moments in the novel *Life of Pi* are related to Pi’s connection to his god or gods, he believed in three different faiths, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, and he has many well-developed reasons for believing in the various religions. This leads to the question of if Yann Martel himself believes in these three faiths, or has had experience feeling out of place for having certain beliefs. The other question this signpost leaves is whether or not Yann Martel has experience with zookeeping or behavioral science. Throughout the book Pi has memories of his life growing up in a zoo in Pondicherry, he has deep insight into the minds of the animals and knows how to control them. This leads me to wonder if the author has experience with either zookeeping or psychology, or if he is assuming the behaviors of people and animals in stressful situations. This question is challenged during Pi’s experience on the carnivorous island in the middle of the ocean, not only is it impossible that an island could be carnivorous, but the animals on the island also act very strangely. When Pi arrives on the island there are thousands of meerkats that ate fish out of a water hole in the island, meerkats are native to the Kalahari desert in Botswana and would not be able to survive in the middle of the ocean.

The memory moment signpost was the most significant signpost throughout the novel because without the context of Pi’s life experiences and background it is impossible for the reader to understand why certain moments throughout the book are significant. For example, when Pi decides to kill and eat a fish for the first time in the novel he says “you may be astonished that in such a short period of time I could go from weeping over the muffled killing of a flying fish to gleefully bludgeoning to death a dorado“ (185). Because this is accompanied by a memory moment explaining Pi’s connection to god which resulted in his vegetarianism, you can see how desperate he has become and why him killing a fish is such a big deal. This stop was significant enough for the writer to include because it connects Pi’s actions to the rest of his life, and provides insight into their significance.

Works Cited

“The Prize That Put Yann Martel's Life of Pi on Millions of Bookshelves | CBC Archives.” *CBCnews*, CBC/Radio Canada, 22 Oct. 2018, www.cbc.ca/archives/when-yann-martel-s-life-of-pi-won-the-man-booker-prize-1.4872938.