

ON THE MIGRATION OF PI: TOWARD A RHETORIC OF IDENTIFICATION

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94 FOREWORD

“We’ll sail like Columbus!” (111) announces Pi’s father to his family in the book *Life of Pi* by Canadian writer Yann Martel. His plan is to migrate from India to Canada for the sake of fleeing from the political mayhem in India in the mid-1970s. Gloomily, Pi counters: “He was hoping to find India...” (111). This contrast between excitement and nonchalance, shown by father and son, points right away to the identity complications experienced by subalterns. More indicative of this is the fact that Pi and his family should embrace the agency of European travelers, and assume the hegemonic pose that has fashioned Western imperialism. “Travel” then becomes a convoluted concept that is anything but neutral or romantic; it instead implies negligence and dominance over differences. It is, so to speak, a master-slave narrative. However, as diasporic conditions inform common experiences in the postmillennial chronotope, moments of encountering differences *vis-à-vis* the consequent problematics of addressing the Other bespeak the exigency of the need to consider an ethics capable of reaching commonality. In light of this, with *Life of Pi* released following the turn of the second millennium, Pi’s migration is a timely reflection on the language of conquest inherent in journeys documented in the long tradition of travel literature. This reflection is immediately clear because, not long after Pi’s family sets out on their journey, the cargo ship they depart on sinks in the Pacific Ocean, thus proving his father’s Columbian expedition to be untenable. The study that follows will argue that Martel’s novel, through its reflection on the tradition of travel literature, exemplifies Kenneth Burke’s idea of rhetoric, a rhetoric of identification that better tackles ever-changing differences in the postmillennial context.

PI'S MIGRATION: BEYOND CONVENTIONAL MODELS

Based on the analytical model used in Barbara Korte's study of English travel writing from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, travel literature can be viewed from two major perspectives. In the first, some writers explore travel by using an object-oriented approach. They claim to represent the world "authentically" and "empirically" (Korte 17); and, if necessary, the object of travel can be verified under the aegis of "a credible eyewitness account" (31). This approach is readily discernible in accounts by explorers with anthropological and scientific concerns. The first chapter of Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, as discussed in Korte's study, serves as an example of such focused attention to objects observed on expeditions (38). In the second major perspective, some writers adopt a subject-oriented approach, highlighting the traveler's own experiences, feelings, growth, enculturation, and so on (17). The Grand Tour exemplifies this self-exploration (or self-empowerment) of subjects during travel. This kind of tour, as Korte explains, means "to add—after the traveller's student years—the finishing touches to his education and the process of his socialization" (42). Subject-oriented travel writing, therefore, is self-reflective and aims to complete the traveler's selfhood.

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In Korte's criticism, these two approaches are nonetheless problematic because they do not actually signify negotiations with the Other. Objects of travel can be identified and recorded in their pristine state, but one may question just how "pristine" that state can be. The complacent traveler wields the overarching instrument of reason and thinks he is able to present the genuineness of objects. Yet, he glosses over the fact that truths derive from constructions "on the part of the perceiver, who defines the country's Otherness against his or her own sense of identity, his or her own familiar contexts" (20). Foreignness is therefore, at best, the traveler's own projection. The objects logged remain "slippery," "relational," and "relative" (20).

Likewise, the subject-oriented approach displays a similar specious concern for the Other. Korte indicates that subjects of the English Grand Tour travel in order to collect "all kinds of knowledge that could be potentially useful for England or Britain and its relationship with other nations" (43). Thus, the purpose of the tour is plainly political. What is more, foreignness is unimaginable. Because the tour is "designed to safeguard the traveller from being led astray," it is carefully choreographed to subvert any sign of difference: it leads "its travellers on paths well-trodden and well-depicted in numerous accounts and other texts" (46). As a result, it is impossible to reconcile differences. It is also interesting to note that knowledge of the Other in this case has already been constructed. Travelers do not undertake the trouble of creating what is foreign; they are simply receivers of knowledge (probably the knowledge manufactured in object-oriented explorations).

Accordingly, the two approaches in travel literature imply a language of conquest: differences are subjugated and repressed to fulfill the imperial projects of expansion and exploitation. To speak against this subsuming language, feminine, postmod-

ern, and postcolonial travel writings have aimed to problematize Eurocentric travel, showing the travelled world to be a false construction and matrix of differences that can hardly be summed up. However, this problematization does not quite address the postmillennial fabric within which transnational movement is keen enough to stage a fluidity that makes differences a matter of the here and now. Therefore, an ethics in relation to the Other is more urgently needed than ever.

This study holds that *Life of Pi* is singular in this regard. For one thing, imagery associated with the novel's setting strongly suggests an ever-present fluidity. Pi spends 227 days at sea without ever settling on solid ground. He lands on what seems like an island only once, but that island is soon found to be an ungrounded and unstable floating mass of algae. And so, Pi is adrift on a journey bereft of any specificity or stability. He is also forced to confront differences given that he is situated in an unnatural "ecosystem" on a lifeboat that is "decidedly baffling" in that both a hyena and an orangutan inhabit it simultaneously (153). The ecosystem is even more unnatural if one also takes into consideration the Indian boy Pi, a Bengal tiger, and a zebra, all of whom are on the boat as well. Such unnaturalness is intrinsic to postmillennial conditions whereby technology, mass media, and transnational enterprises facilitate the coming together of differences. In this "space of flows,"¹ Pi is thus obliged to seek an ethics based on the language of commonality so as to both coordinate Self and Other, and learn the "grammar of life"² that governs this ethics.

RHETORIC: FROM PERSUASION TO IDENTIFICATION

To demonstrate that *Life of Pi* moves away from the language of conquest to the language of commonality, thus testifying to a rhetoric of identification in the face of differences, this study considers the nature of rhetoric first.

In the West, rhetoric was first made a systematic study by Aristotle. With a more practical mindset than Socrates', he observes that although knowledge is itself prevailing, certain speakers are simply incapable of producing belief, and certain listeners are just as incapable of being instructed—so that rhetoric has its utility (Aristotle 1.1.12). He then lays out the range whereby rhetoric can be applied and be the means through which persuasion can be effective. Obviously, and unlike his philosophical forerunners, Aristotle considers the *episteme* to be incapable of making its way forward unless it is properly inscribed in a social context. Logos is assertive only when assisted by ethos and pathos, the latter two being human factors related to character and personality, and feeling and emotion, respectively. Thus, Aristotle's rhetoric is from the outset an ethical study in how to look for the common and how to arrive at social cohesion.

Furthering the Aristotelian tradition of rhetoric, Kenneth Burke argues for a new rhetoric that expands the former ("old" rhetoric) instead of questioning its discursive efficacy. Burke now proposes "identification" to be the keyword associated with rhet-

oric, and not “persuasion” (“Rhetoric” 203). For him, identification can be a means to an end, which might indeed be persuasion, “as when the politician seeks to identify himself with his audience” (203). It can also be an end unto itself, “as when people earnestly yearn to identify themselves with some group or other” (203). With such a sense of “belongingness” as rhetorical, Burke’s reimagination of rhetoric includes more than the purposeful design of argumentation prominent in Aristotelian rhetoric. Moreover, he believes identification can include “a partially ‘unconscious’ factor in appeal” (203). Again, this means no conscious efforts, as seen in purposeful design, are involved. So far, Burke’s attempt to emphasize that overtly persuasive oratory is not necessarily there for rhetorical situations is clear. The domains where rhetoric can be practiced become more general, and no longer confined to the three specific areas of application in Aristotelian rhetoric: deliberative, for politics; forensic, for law courts; and epideictic, for ceremonies.

As a matter of fact, for rhetoric to be instrumental in achieving social cohesion, there is something epistemological intrinsic to it. For Burke, rhetoric refers to “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (*Rhetoric* 43). The goal may not be hard to understand, but when it comes to language, Burke considers it more than an instrument; that is, it fundamentally conditions what humans know. As a “symbol-using animal” (*Language* 5), a human uses language to fashion his/her own reality, but this reality falls only within the realm of his/her care in response to the dissonance between himself/herself and the outer world. This dissonance is *a priori* since humans are born into a divisive state (*Rhetoric* 23). As a consequence, and to overcome separateness, a human uses certain words in relation to his/her particular situation to construct a reality reflective of his/her own care. Yet, to the extent of one’s own care, these words are merely “a selection of reality”; and since they are partial, they are also “a deflection of reality” (*Language* 45; emphasis in the original). The nature of language, in that it both represents and deviates from reality at the same time, is thus symptomatic of human relations. Hence, the application of language is justly rhetorical, calling for both alliance and collaboration. Successful identification would, in the end, transcend differences and divisions (“Rhetoric” 203).

One has to bear in mind, however, that the transcendence achieved through identification is in no way subjugation of the Other. Burke argues that as long as two persons’ interests are joined, the one is identified with the other (*Rhetoric* 20). Namely, one may identify with the Other without catering to all his/her thoughts and wishes. Insofar as the two act together, one way or another, and have the same sensation, concept, image, or attitude, they become “consubstantial” (Burke’s synonym for “identical”) to each other (21). Paradoxically, each one of the two is “both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another” (21). To become identical with another is then implicative of division, as evidenced in “that ultimate disease of cooperation: war” (22). Burke’s rhetoric is thus a hybrid of contradictions: in identification, one finds division, and vice versa.

Therefore, underlying Burkean rhetoric are three implications. First, the parties involved in the process of persuasion do not form a hypotactical, but a paratactical, relationship. No one's language is victorious. Second, differences can be addressed, but never subsumed. They may be peaceful and negotiable; yet, they are always there to offend the eye. And third, commonality results from intersubjective processes wherein no one has the final word for what is to come. In the final analysis, what distinguishes persuasion from identification is whether or not the Other is acknowledged. Consequently, in expanding Aristotle's rhetoric, Burke creates a new language that allows for the presence of differences, which is unseen in the old paradigm.

PI'S RE/FRAMING OF ALTERITY: TOWARD IDENTIFICATION

98 A zoo aptly symbolizes the enclosure in which differences are allowed to coexist, but their coexistence is embedded in a disciplinary structure. There is the grand narrative of the zoo runner that keeps animals in order to avoid conflicts and impose unanimity. Zoo management, moreover, points to the project of modernity practiced in explorations and adventures that aim to depict objects of travel authentically. However, as the object-oriented approach in travel literature shows, knowledge of these objects is at best constructed so as to merely serve the interests of the empire. Differences are thus deflected and ossified into utilities. In Martel's *Life of Pi*, the confidence entertained by Western travelers is first displayed in Part 1. As his father settles on the business opportunity of running a zoo, Pi is gleeful in announcing: "...lo and behold—India had a brand new zoo, designed and run according to the modern, biologically sound principles" (15). One might wonder whether Pi is aware of the imperialism resident in the modernization enterprise he delights in. Apparently, he is not. For him, the zoo is an earthly "paradise" with "the fondest memories of growing up" there, as well as a place where "I lived the life of a prince" (17). Yet, to be a prince is to regard one's Self as an overriding master; the endearing memories are, in a sense, the dream of the empire. Here, Pi indulges himself in the utopian myth of order and homogeneity.

Pi's self-indulgence is particularly evidenced in his view of zoo animals. He contends the claim that animals are freer in the wilderness. With regard to their need for food and security, he explains: "In the wild, animals stick to the same paths for the same pressing reasons, season after season" (21). And since change brings about uncertainty: "They want things to be just so, day after day, month after month" (20). The compulsive and routine work inherent in animal behavior thus dismantles the notion that animals can be truly free in the wild. Pi then uses the metaphor of chess to reinforce the confined nature of animals' lives: "There is no more happenstance, no more 'freedom,' involved in the whereabouts of a lizard or a bear or a deer than in the location of a knight on a chessboard. Both speak of pattern and purpose" (20-21).

And while zoo animals are now well-tended to in terms of provisions and shelter, thereby leading a “better” life in their enclosures, Pi fails to see the idea that zoo management does not involve engaging differences in dialogues, but translating them into referents of the master’s language.

The utopian myth romanticized by Pi is nevertheless destabilized after he and his family set out on their journey to Canada and are thwarted by the tragic shipwreck. Pi is the only survivor (save for the animals that share the lifeboat he is in) and adrift at sea.

Before moving on to see how he comes to address differences, an important point regarding the shipwreck must be addressed. Symbolically, this event signifies the dissolution of boundaries. For Pi, it is “paradise lost” in the sense that the well-managed zoo for partitioning and organizing animals is no more. Now, animality at large is an issue, and a thorny one, for Pi must coordinate differences and reexamine his master status. What is more, he has to rethink whether animal behavior can be patternized under such circumstances. Also at large is Pi’s selfhood. If one recalls, Pi’s name was originally “Piscine,” the name of a swimming pool (Piscine Molitor) beloved by a family friend (Mamaji) and then given to Pi as his first name (14). Thus, the image of a swimming pool resides in, and is reflective of, the construction that is Pi’s identity, so that when he is set alone upon the ocean, and his identity is tested, the symbolic boundaries of the pool also disappear. Later, the name “Piscine” is changed to “Pi” because the Indian boy could no longer stand his name being abused as “Pissing” by other children (27–28). Unfortunately, Pi’s avoidance of the abuse poses yet another challenge to his identity. As an irrational number in the realm of mathematics, π (pi) “expresses the inability to find a common measure—an exact ratio—between the circumference and the diameter of a circle” (Mensch 146). That is, however useful the number is, it is infinite and boundless. Pi, the Indian boy, is therefore obliged to admit later that there are always differences to disrupt his apparently self-sufficient identity. To believe “I” to be omnipotent and omniscient is, after all, *ou-topian*.

With the confines of his Selfhood dissolved in the wake of the shipwreck, Pi’s language of conquest, observed in his former prince-like state, loses its persuasive effect. It can dictate neither borders nor limits. What π , or pi, suggests, as mentioned above, is embodied in Pi’s reflection on his own *modus vivendi*:

To be a castaway is to be a point perpetually at the centre of a circle. However much things may appear to change—the sea may shift from whisper to rage, the sky might go from fresh blue to blinding white to darkest black—the geography never changes. Your gaze is always a radius. The circumference is ever great. (*Pi* 272)

The circumference is, at most, imagined; and even if it exists, it is never exact due to the irrationality of π . In the more tangible terms of his own experience, Pi relates earlier in the novel: “All about me was flatness and infinity, an endless panorama of blue. There was nothing to block my view” (201). These reflections indicate that Pi can never pin down any reference point to define himself or locate where he is. In

terms of temporality, he forfeits reference points there, too. The only two dates he can remember are the dates when his suffering begins and ends (242). In between these two days, the life of Pi is a life of fluidity: he is always at the center of a circle, but that center is never fixed. Self and Other become two overlapping concepts he has to reexamine and revise. Deprived of any cognitive framework, the master now fails to sustain his sovereignty.

One potent symbol that disillusiones the validity of the master's governance is the wounded zebra on Pi's lifeboat. Before his family's attempted migration, Pi's biology teacher and his Muslim friend, who introduced him to Islam, chance upon one another unexpectedly in the zoo. There, they encounter a zebra and feed it carrots. Having never seen this kind of creature before, the Muslim friend asks: "The stripes don't melt?" (105). The answer is, of course, no. What is signified here is that the stripes—looking so opposite to one another—coexist on the same being. Such coexistence is also projected onto the relationship between the friend and the teacher.

100 One is a Muslim while the other is an atheist who once said: "Reason is my prophet and it tells me that as a watch stops, so we die. It's the end. If the watch doesn't work properly, it must be fixed here and now by us" (35). The two, one believer and one rationalist, do not engage each other in a debate over reason and faith. Instead, they are "united" in admiring the wondrousness of the animal. Another signifier of the unity of opposites is the fact that both the Muslim friend and biology teacher are named Satish Kumar, so that references to them in the zoo scene where they meet are sometimes almost indistinguishable in the text. To apply Burke's terminology, the two become identical, or consubstantial, with each other; they have reached a commonality and possess a joined interest. Yet, it is to be remembered that they are still in the princely domain where differences are tended to with care.

What happens to the symbolic zebra on the lifeboat after the shipwreck is an appalling sight: "It had badly broken a rear leg. The angle of it was completely unnatural. Bone protruded through skin and there was bleeding" (136). Therefore, it is ironical for Pi to observe that "It was a lovely animal. Its wet markings glowed brightly white and intensely black" (136). Eventually, the utopian coexistence of differences will be undermined by the hyena on the boat as it preys on the wounded zebra:

It plunged head and shoulders into the zebra's guts, up to the knees of its front legs. It pushed itself out, only to slide back down. It finally settled in this position, half in, half out. The zebra was being eaten alive from the inside. (157)

In the process of this, its "being eaten alive from the inside," the zebra no longer lives up to its capability of being a symbol of coordinating differences as it did when it was alive in the zoo.

Differences are indeed unbound on the lifeboat, without borders or limits to secure a Cartesian subject. It is interesting to note that the biblical story of Noah's ark is also problematized. At one point in time, Pi entertained the thought of a "sweet reunion" with his family when rescued (150). He imagines his brother Ravi would

tease him: “You find yourself a great big lifeboat and you fill it with animals? You think you’re Noah or something?” (50). Ravi’s allusion to the Christian allegory is not ungrounded, for Pi has previously been baptized and is quite devout in his religious pursuits.

What is more, with a castaway accompanied by a menagerie of animals on a boat lost at sea, it is indeed plausible to associate the image with that of Noah’s ark. Yet, one finds that while harmony and the productivity of life characterize the Noah myth, Pi is anything but a ruler who could impose order and hierarchy on the animals he is accompanied by. Besides, these animals, instead of being in pairs, are individual creatures that prey on one another. They are a matrix of differences with no unified alterity. In a sense, the very idea of such a disparate collective is the ultimate eruption of alterity. This implies that to regard differences as a homogeneous entity in contrast to the Cartesian subject is also to gloss over them with a generalizing definition and, hence, construction of the Other.³

From another angle, Yann Martel’s novel also exposes the danger in over-homogenizing differences. The floating island episode is a striking example. As mentioned earlier, the “island” of algae is ungrounded and unstable, thus contributing to the image of fluidity that forms the novel’s prominent motif. In fact, the island trope is itself simultaneously a utopian myth and signifier of what can become of excessively harmonized differences. Its mythicality is implied by Pi’s first impression of it: he believes the island to be a “chimera” (323). It is, so to speak, a place defined by illusion. Moreover, the island is inhabited by a great number of meerkats characterized by an uncanny sameness. Pi describes their distinctive behavior when surveying their world:

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When it is on the lookout, the meerkat has the peculiarity of standing perfectly upright on the tips of its back legs, balancing itself tripod-like with its tail. Often a group of meerkats will take the stance collectively, standing in a huddle and gazing in the same direction, looking like commuters waiting for a bus. (335)

Here, “collectively” is the key word. Meerkats appear to be beings innately circumscribed by a highly disciplined and communal social structure distinguished for its instinctive show of conformity.

Their remarkable performance of conformity does not just define the unique animal nature of meerkats but also relates to the human world. For example, when the creatures start upon seeing Pi for the first time:

After a few seconds, they went back to doing what they had been doing before I appeared, which was either nibbling at the algae or staring into the ponds. To see so many beings bending down at the same time reminded me of prayer time in a mosque. (335)

Pi’s observation that they appear like Muslim worshippers strongly conveys the idea that if they were human beings, they would simply be followers. It is apparent that, for them, Otherness is nonexistent because they live in a utopia where a communal struc-

ture of similitude commands and regulates differences. This structure takes shape in the carnivorous environment of the island. Pi notes: “At night, by some chemical process unknown to me but obviously inhibited by sunlight, the predatory algae turned highly acidic and the ponds became vats of acid that digested the fish” (356). Thus, the pervasive docility among the meerkats is fathomable: they even appear excited in their passive non-resistance to Richard Parker’s (the Bengal tiger) killing of them one-by-one for food, and in the indiscriminate release of his madness (339). In this vein, Kristina Kyser argues that “through not choosing—or moving—one becomes assimilated into the whole and ceases to survive as an individual” (92-93). As noted, the meerkats do not demonstrate alterity and are thus exposed to the danger of social unity. The island, with its cruel and brutal ecosystem, becomes an “impossible representation” antithetical to the Garden of Eden-like utopia (Burns 142).

102 So far, this study has attempted to reveal the untenability of Pi’s original hegemonic worldview and paradigm of identity in the earlier pre-migration part of the story. He can no longer resort to the language of conquest: the hypotactical relationship between master and slave in the hegemon’s imagined utopia is conditional in the sense that “the perfect place” is enclosed by boundaries that are elusive and contingent. The wish to maintain the status of a subject becomes daunting in the face of differences, and especially so in a world predominantly characterized by fluidity. If the rhetoric of persuasion that results in the language of conquest forfeits its validity, with all its implications of regularity and compulsiveness, Pi must oblige himself to seek a redemptive rhetoric to better negotiate differences. As he drifts along in the boundless sea, he must consider how he can truly recognize the Otherness of what is other than himself. This is to say that he must embrace differences as they are: not translate them into the master’s language and create knowledge, or an understanding, of them that solely serves the prince’s interests.

In reimagining his journey toward an “ethics of the common,” which addresses differences in the postmillennial fluidity, Pi comes to realize that he must give up the subject-object framework. His new *modus operandi* must aim for parataxis, which turns away from hierarchy and looks to intersubjective processes. Pi’s approach is to be all-inclusive. In this way, he takes stock of what is available in the lifeboat and makes a list of items. On this list are not only objects but, surprisingly, “a boy,”—Pi himself (*Pi* 184). He is not simply the Cartesian subject who considers what he has readily available for use; he is also an object to be used. To survive, Pi is aware that he must also collaborate with those he is with for a common cause. His approach finds its counter-example in a Frenchman he meets at sea. Both are blind at that point in the story, so at first, in what appears to be the dying vision of man who is about to be devoured, Pi believes the Frenchman to be Richard Parker personified. Curious, Pi asks the tiger whether he ever kills and, if so, why. The Frenchman, that is, Richard Parker, in Pi’s mind, explains that “It was them or me” (312). Noteworthy in particular is the conjunction “or”: it suggests a mode of thinking that is closed and exclusive, and indicative of the master-slave narrative in travel literature. All that exists is envel-

oped in the subject-object framework of dominance and submission. The disjunctive “or” eventually bodes ill for the Frenchman. In a bid to kill Pi for food, and thus ensure his own survival, he employs the mode of exclusion—a reiteration of “It was them or me.” He is instead killed by Richard Parker. Pi later laments: “He [Richard Parker] gave me a life, my own, but at the expense of taking one” (321). In such a case, docility and conformity come to signify the taking away of life, making this a parable of the consequence brought about by not thoughtfully taking differences into account: ultimately, it can very much be a matter of life or death.

Pi’s experimentation with the new, more inclusive, approach is essentially at the heart of his confrontation with Richard Parker. Being that the tiger is the main inter-actant with Pi, one can view it as the ultimate symbol of alterity elaborated on in the novel. The two are fundamentally embodied in the relationship of “to eat” and “to be eaten,” very much a graphic expression of the utopian disciplined structure. In the past, Pi has conceived of various plans for terminating the predator. However, he gradually comes to understand that he cannot possibly kill Richard Parker, the ultimate difference, in an environment symbolic of fluidity, which, like the Bengal tiger, can hardly be disciplined. He concludes:

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I had to tame him. It was at that moment that I realized this necessity. It was not a question of him or me, but of him *and* me. We were, literally and figuratively, in the same boat. We would live—or we would die—together. (206-207)

Note that the conjunction “and” is emphatically italicized by the author to connote the need for an all-inclusive thinking like that discussed earlier. In giving up plans to kill Richard Parker in order to assert his princely status, Pi therefore arrives at his conclusive solution: “Plan Number Seven: Keep Him Alive” (209). What the “unnatural ecosystem” on the lifeboat requires now is not a life-or-death *modus operandi*, but an approach that allows representation of differences.

One may be reserved about Pi’s apparent attempt to tame the tiger, but Richard Parker, the ultimate symbol of difference, is in no way tamed in the sense that he develops no attachment for Pi and does not become allied with him. Survival for both is certain, but tension is always present in that the fluid and ever-changing boundaries between Pi and the tiger are continually being negotiated. That is, differences remain differences. When they finally reach the shore of Mexico, Richard Parker jumps out of the boat and immediately heads for the nearby jungle, parting without any backward glance to indicate goodbye, which upsets Pi immensely: “I was weeping because Richard Parker had left me so unceremoniously...I am a person who believes in form, in the harmony of order” (360). The tiger’s manner of departure points to this animal’s being symbolic of the Other in that it is to be considered and respected but never normalized. Pi’s utopian dream of form, harmony, and order can only be mythical in nature. When he arrives in Canada to live out the rest of his life, he is immediately disillusioned by the myth of multiculturalism there. The first time he goes to an Indian restaurant in Canada, he uses his fingers instead of utensils

and the waiter gives him a disapproving look, saying to him, sarcastically: “Fresh off the boat, are you?” (8-9). Such intolerance of differences means that Pi’s life moves forward but with what Steven Burns calls “divided consciousness,” which is characteristic of Martel’s writings (188). The Other remains, be it the tiger or he himself, a challenge to his earlier self-righteous “harmony of order.”

Pervasive in Pi’s travel odyssey is a search for the common. However, in a new era, with all its socio-cultural changes, the common cannot hold if it is based on the rhetoric of persuasion. Because it employs the language of conquest, it imagines a world of order and harmony to be possible. Pi’s experience teaches that the common relevant to here and now in the postmillennial period is founded on the rhetoric of identification. It appeals to an ethics that promotes commonality without sacrificing differences, echoing the logic of hybridity: union in division, division in union. Inherent in this logic is the joint effort integral to intersubjective processes, forming a parataxis whereby unity is not purely the creation of the master’s language.

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CODA: A REFLECTION ON CRUSOE

Here, in the concluding section, this study touches on the story of Robinson Crusoe for readers’ reference. Many a critic has compared Pi with Crusoe (Kyser 83; Aldea 79). They are remarkably similar to each other because both are protagonists of shipwreck narratives planted in a Christian context. Other factors also contribute to the similarity. For example, both try to be realistic in their narration: devices such as “the practical details of the ordeal” and “an eyewitness” account are used (Aldea 79). Pi and Crusoe also have the propensity for making lists (Kyser 84). In particular, both are devoted to “world-making” (Kyser 86). Nonetheless, Crusoe is the traveler whose language is to conquer: the objects of travel are the differences he can tend to and tame. Apart from this, he encounters a stable world, an island that is grounded and fixed, so his utilization of objects makes him a colonizer and stand-in for Western imperialists. By contrast, Pi lives in a world of fluidity. The proper ethics for him to employ lies with the rhetoric of identification propounded by Kenneth Burke. To survive, recognition of differences in commonality, and the ability to transcend the subject-object framework is critical in the postmillennial quest for effective and successful human relations. Accordingly, the novel *Life of Pi* ponders the tradition of travel narratives and proposes a new paradigm of, and path toward, commonality *via* the Burkean rhetoric of identification.

On another note, whose story is more convincing? Crusoe’s or Pi’s? Martel is, in this regard, careful not to deify Pi the traveler. Toward the end of the novel, two investigators from the Japanese Ministry of Transport interview Pi for insight into the cause(s) of the shipwreck because the Ministry is in charge of the cargo ship. Pi’s account of the animals and his companionship with the tiger for more than 200 days does not make sense to Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba, who ask for material facts about

what happened. Pi recounts his journey with humans as characters in it instead of animals, but this second version sounds horrendous with its tales of explicit murder and cannibalism. He then follows up with the question as to which story they prefer. Indeed, both accounts are just that—stories—since all that is mediated by language is fiction. Pi's riposte here is significant since language interprets reality and no interpretation can be unproblematically factual. This brings one back to Burke's view on the symbolicity of language. What signifies is not the factuality of stories but how they appeal to others. If any story appeals, "identification" occurs. Pi's challenge to "the representational notion of language" (Pedersen 163) suggests that his story is just a story. It is told in a language that does not set out to conquer: it merely offers a vision for one to aspire to but never dogmatize.

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1. "Space of flows" is a term used by Manuel Castells to mean "the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows" (442). By it, he refers to digital society's capacity for inducing interchange and dialogue "between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political, and symbolic structures of society" (442). This is historic since interaction is chiefly delimited by geographical conditions. Now, digitalization of information allows for far more possibility of synchronous exchange. Such synchronicity intimates that differences are *de facto* ever-present in the space of flows, thus properly reflecting Pi's predicament of having to confront Otherness.
2. When Martell thinks back on his own reading experiences, he asks: "What I read gave me the grammar of life—for what is grammar but a sort of ethics?" (7). Being a writer, he also presents a "grammar of life" (proposing an ethics on how to lead a life) for rumination in his *Life of Pi*. This study maintains that the "grammar" in the novel is a revision of the conqueror's grammar in former travel literature. As an aside, one may find it interesting to note that Martel relates reading to sea adventure in describing his reading experiences: "In fact, when I was a child reading, my arms became the shelter of a harbour, the pages of the book in my hands became the furling waves of the sea, and my mind became a vessel that left the shelter of the here and now and set forth on the high seas of imagination" (7). The novel then embodies the writer's own view on reading.
3. The use of the Noah story in *Life of Pi* to deconstruct the myth of harmonized differences is similarly identified by Kristina Kyser. Her starting point is in seeing the lifeboat as a metaphor for Canada, a nation glorified by its "unified national vision" (100). However, due to "doubts about the new world promised to Noah" in the novel (Kyser 69-70), what remains is merely "the myth of multiculturalism" (Kyser 100).

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