4Horror's Effect on Identity in *Life of Pi* and *Arthur Gordon Pym*

Alyx Steensma

> I imagine a child who has swallowed up his parents too soon, who frightens himself on that account, "all by himself," and, to save himself, rejects and throws up everything that is given to him—all gifts, all objects. He has, he could have, a sense of the abject. Even before things for him are—hence before they are signifiable—he drives them out, dominated by drive as he is, and constitutes his own territory, edged by the abject. A sacred configuration. Fear cements his compound, conjoined to another world, thrown up, driven out, forfeited.
>
> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (15)

Imagine two boys from two very different eras, both stranded from all they know and ever cared about. One boy rejecting all he ever knew and suffering the consequences and one boy embracing all he ever could yet still suffering similar consequences. Both are stranded in the middle of the ocean. Both experience a span of the basest of all human emotions: fear, horror, and hunger triggering primal survival instincts. In order to survive, the boys have to forfeit their most cherished beliefs, beliefs central to their identity. They are lost, no longer knowing who they are, but they must come to a decision: I must survive. It is through the catalyst of horror, the very moment the abject breaks their character, the sight of corpses, death, and their own mortality, that Arthur Gordon Pym and Piscine Molitor Patel solidify their adult identities and the paths they will proceed to forge.

Yann Martel, author of *Life of Pi*, acknowledges that his story of a young Indian boy stranded on the Pacific is reminiscent of other castaway narratives throughout history, particularly Arthur Gordon Pym's narrative. Specifically, Piscine's encounters with the horrific, a theme much loved by Edgar Allan Poe, connects the two boys separated by time and culture. As the world around them shifts into unreality, the two

characters are forced to determine and perform the identity of the survivor. David Ketterer analyzes the similarities in the characters Pym and Pi and their subsequent journeys. He says of their overall structure "in both cases, the fantastic and the allegorical increasingly overwhelm the plausible" (Ketterer, 2009: 82). On a higher level than most fictional novels, both Poe and Martel strive to convince the reader that Pym and Pi are real people outside of the novel; that these boys and their stories are more relevant to the world than other characters of fictional novels. Why is this claim important to both the authors? Are they trying to claim truth to persuade the readers of the universality of their behaviors and motivations while castaway? David Ketterer claims that "plot and character elements in Poe's fiction involving deception build to an overall metaphysical sense that accepted reality is itself deceptive" while Martel's strategy is similar in scope (83).

What is later notable in the horror the two boys experience is Ketterer's observation of the intertextual connection of "thirty-two teeth. A complete human set" in *Life of Pi* and the shore-party that accompanies the natives in *Pym*, "consisting of thirty two persons in all…armed to the teeth" (Ketterer, 2009: 84). Both numerical observations lead to the same allusion: the ever close proximity of horrifying death, an abjection that Pi and Pym share. As Julia Kristeva points out, "because it occupies its place, because it hence decks itself out in the sacred power of horror, literature may also involve not an ultimate resistance to but an unveiling of the abject: an elaboration, a discharge, and a hollowing out of the abjection through the Crisis of the Word" (Kristeva, 1982: 217). In both these novels, Pym and Pi grow into their adult selves surrounded by the abject, enveloped in it, sometimes accepting it to survive physically, while other times rejecting it to survive psychologically.

Pym from Edgar Allan Poe's only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket,* and Pi from *Life of Pi* are separated by almost two hundred years and different nationalities. But Pym and Pi are both adolescent boys influenced by outside forces such as peer pressure and adult pressure to either rebel or conform. Neither wants to conform to the dominant culture in their societies. Pym chooses to rebel and run away with his

friend Augustus, throwing off all familial ties. Pi rebels from his family's agnostic lifestyle and experiments with three different religions: Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. While Pym rebels wholly, Pi only rebels spiritually, still desiring a belonging to his family. Regardless, any notion of going back to their former lives is thought impossible and improbable because of the enormity of natural disaster they experience at sea. Pi is left with a tiger named Richard Parker, who could devour him and Pym is stranded with a man named Richard Parker who harbors the notion of cannibalism as a last resort.

The shared character of Richard Parker is noteworthy because both Poe's Richard Parker and Martel's Richard Parker embrace their survival instincts before the protagonist, which motivates each young boy's individual reactions to their situations. Richard Parker comes to represent the survival instinct in either its failure or success in both the boys' narratives. Richard Parker is well-known throughout the progression of survival narratives as an unfortunate character who resorts to cannibalism, dies of disease, or who is eaten by other men, never surviving the story himself (Duncan, 2008: 167). Thus, Yann Martel in a post-modern twist takes the character and transforms him into not only one who lives, but one who encourages the survival instinct in others by his perseverance (167). Richard Parker's role in *Life of Pi* is expressly imperative towards the future well-being of Pi. Pi Patel says, "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" (Martel 286). With Richard Parker keeping Pi on edge throughout his survival narrative, Pi is able to endure the horrors he encounters on the sea and on the carnivorous island. Richard Parker's presence allows Pi to strengthen the ideals central to his identity when tested.

While surviving the sea, Pi and Pym experience extreme physical fragility because of their comparable lack of food and water. Julia Kristeva asserts "the abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states, where man strays on the territories of animal" which directly relates to the hallucinogenic scene where a blind Pi

meets another blind castaway in the middle of the Pacific (Kristeva, 1982: 21). Reality is distorted both by their blindness and the fact that Pi believes the other stranded man is actually Richard Parker talking to him (Martel 246). The two humans are fragile because of intense starvation, which results in the cannibalistic death struggle the unknown French man initiates. Richard Parker attacks the stranger, ripping his flesh. Although Pi is blind, the smell and sound sensations fill him with the horror of the abject and he admits, "something in me died then that has never come back to life" (255). He acknowledges the fact that the tiger saved his life, much in the way Kristeva says the abject "kills in the name of life" and "lives at the behest of death" (Kristeva, 1982: 21). Pi lost a piece of his identity (or humanity) because of the horror of the scene and his understanding of its necessity for his survival. The disillusionment of the man's character aided in Pi's entrance into the abject when "[he] found he had lied to [him]" both during his choking struggle and when Pi searched his boat and found food and water (Martel 255).

In accordance with the horror that Kristeva presents, Arthur Gordon Pym experiences life-changing horror when the death ship crosses their half-sunken ship's floating path. His horror is also initiated by an olfactory smell of rotting corpses as the ship floats closer. In one sublime moment, the grinning man at the helm changes into a corpse being picked apart by a large carnivorous bird (Poe 133). "The eyes were gone, and the whole flesh around the mouth, leaving the teeth utterly naked. This, then, was the smile which had cheered us on to hope!" (133). Like Pi, Pym also experiences a moment of disillusionment. He no longer trusts that he and his companions will be saved; his hopes are dashed as the bodies reveal themselves on the death ship. The result of the horror revealed accumulates into Pym's conscious decision to die in his own way especially when Richard Parker proposed, "that one of us should die to preserve the existence of the others" (141). Pym had "secretly made up [his] mind to suffer death in any shape or under any circumstances rather than resort to such a course" (142). Richard Parker is fully willing to be enveloped in the abject, survive at the sake of death, while Pym resists.

A difference between the characters Pi and Pym is discovered here: Pi never secedes to the idea of his death, but Pym is willing to die, as long as it's in his own way. This seems to adhere to the strength of identity of each character. One with a strong sense of purpose, motivation, and identity wouldn't think of death as an option to the horrors life hands out. Pi embodies this idea of a strong character through his unshakable devotion to serving Richard Parker and his threefold spirituality. Pym doesn't have anything to hold onto anymore, by the time his Richard Parker offers cannibalism as a way to survive: Augustus, his only friend from the past, is dying and Pym earlier rejected his family when he denied his identity to the inquiry of his grandfather in an unexpected encounter. The strength of character and motivation to survive is integral to the two boys' reactions to the horrific sights and smells they face.

The thrill Pym experiences with the disastrous contact with The Penguin foreshadows Pym's action to shed his culture identity and indulge his voracious nature. In this scene, Pym is still a child growing into an adult; he lacks experience with the world so he depends heavily on his older friend Augustus' judgment. Pym admits he "depend[ed] entirely upon the nautical skill of [his] friend" because he lacks stability in his adult identity (Poe 49). At this moment, Pym is toeing the line between his Christianity and Augustus' risk seeking drollery. When the Ariel is "going through the water at a terrible rate—full before the wind—no reef in either jib or mainsail—running her bows completely under the foam", which illustrates the affect of their 'overbearing passions', Pym finally resorts to his patriarch's Christianity by "recommend[ing] himself to God, and [making] up [his] mind to bear whatever might happen with all the fortitude in [his] power" (50, 51). Their deaths seem imminent up until Pym calls on God, not to save him, but to give him peace. Once he supplicates himself to a faith-based belief, nature works in favor of his survival. Still in the moment, Pym decrees that "inconceivable pieces of good fortune which are attributed by the wise and pious to the special interference of Providence" was the saving grace for Augustus and himself (53).

His tremulous connection with the notion of 'Providence' does not endure for long though. Once the boys are safe, Pym has the destructive longing for more wild adventures. He no longer wishes to walk the narrow path between his Christian and Yankee identity; instead, Pym longs for a vision of utter despair as a seaman: shipwrecks, cannibals on islands, and frightening storms (Poe 57). He feels that it is his destiny, and Pym is very right in that regard. He longs for Augustus' purported lifestyle for eighteen months without action until he finally discards the last familial tie, the most important tether he has to his identity: his grandfather, Mr. Peters. When they accidentally meet, Pym is deceptively disguised. His grandfather recognizes him and proclaims, "bless my soul!"-- a Christian phrase that links Mr. Peters to that specific belief system (59). Pym's response is his prolonged deception finally manifested in order to sever ties once and for all with his patriarch, and thus his identity. Not only does Arthur Pym deny his identity to his grandfather, but he delights in ridiculing his grandfather, which marks the metamorphoses of Pym's character. Once Arthur Pym stows on The Grampus, the death of his original identity becomes resolute. He enters a coffin-like room that he stays in until Augustus signals him the 'all clear'. The time he slothfully spends in his box signifies his rejection of his Christian ideals (Poe 63).

What follows in his time alone at the bottom of The Grampus is the foundation for the many disasters that ensue. Slothfulness and gluttony overtakes him until he doesn't even know how many days he has spent alone and he is out of food (Poe 63). A succinct description of Pym's choice to dwell in the darkness of the ship's belly rather than follow the precepts of his grandfather concludes that "Blackness or darkness is therefore associated with the desire to live in man's present condition on earth; it is the life wish—but a wish for "the primitive life of Earth" rather than "the ultimate life of Heaven"" (O'Donnell, 1962: 87). Pym chooses the unsympathetic and dangerous workings of nature rather than the safety of his Christian principle, a cultural practice that purports to insure life eternal.

Both Pi and Pym reject the notion of cannibalism initially, but extreme starvation belittles their ideological beliefs into momentary unimportance. They enter into the animalistic realm with their principles corrupted by the abject. After Pi loses a part of himself, he confesses that he used pieces of the French man to lure fish while occasionally eating pieces of his flesh due to "the extremity of [his] need and the madness to which it pushed [him]" (Martel 256).

What is truly contradictory to Kristeva's "territories of animal" notion that human frailty leads to horrific animalism is Gregory Stephen's observation that Pi's zoo in Pondicherry sets up the idea that the most dangerous animals in the zoo are the humans that traverse the paths (Stephens, 2010: 41). Humans are the ones to cause the most destruction and issue forth the most abject actions, not animals. Although Richard Parker attacks him, the Frenchman is the first being to initiate violence. In all the time that Pi occupies the boat with the tiger, Pi goes unharmed (though not without much caution!). A human is the first being to violate Pi's trusting heart, an action that changes Pi's psyche for the rest of his life. Also contrary to Kristeva's abjection, Stephens believes:

> In these [castaway] narratives, something is always lost of one's humanity, but a new dimension of humanness is also gained. The thing gained (new vision) is intimately connected to the loos(en)ing of the imagination, a setting adrift of the moorings of reason that only happens to the castaway because s/he is cut off from humanity, or known human community. This facilitates, or necessitates, a reimagining of kinship and community. In Pi's case, the imaginary conversations and the revisioning of kinship and community take place primarily with animals. (Stephens, 2010: 46)

Pi loses his family and his life in a human community, but he gains a relationship of respect with a Bengal Tiger. It seems as if the horrific scene traumatizes him, yet he holds fast to his principles. His starvation drives him to eat the corpse out of necessity, but only dry pieces he would use for bait, and only until he caught a fish (Martel 256). The older

version of Pi asserts, "I pray for his soul every day" (256). His association with the abject continues with his humility (abjection of self) in his servant relationship with Richard Parker and his spirituality, but is brief in regards to cannibalism.

In contrast to Pi, Pym doesn't appear to have any strong connections to religious ideologies. There's no account of his praying to God or holding fast to moral principles regarding any religion. When he encounters the horror of the abject in the death ship's appearance, Pym holds fast to his survival instinct and nothing else. He has the same reaction when Richard Parker offers the resort of cannibalism. He remarks:

> Such things may be imagined, but words have no power to impress the mind with the exquisite horror of their reality. Let it suffice to say that, having in some measure appeased the raging thirst which consumed us by the blood of the victim, and having by common consent taken off the hands, feet, and head, throwing them together with the entrails, into the sea, we devoured the rest of the body, piecemeal, during the four ever memorable days of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth of the month (Poe 146).

Pym does not offer any other emotionality, does not utter regret when they almost immediately find a way to achieve sustenance, but the narrative continues without another reference to his moment of cannibalism. Perhaps Pym does not hold the horror of the act close to his heart because he has already let go of his humanity or perhaps he suppresses the moment because he does not have a strong enough identity to absolve or categorize the cannibalism as merely an act of survival. Pym has truly obtained what he longed for before his journey: "My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown" (Poe 57). It's a moment of 'careful what you wish for' because Pym truly did receive an onslaught of horror which stunts his social development and even makes him regress. As O'Donnell explains about Pym's exodus from his nation, "To depart, yet live. The question, then, is

how the "exciting knowledge," the "never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction," can be gained without loss of identity. The explicit answer is that it can't, but that we have something even more satisfying: the self as God" (O'Donnell, 1962: 85). Thus, Arthur Pym achieved what he wanted, but at a great loss. After he passes the strange white shroud to get back to the nation and ideals he rejected, Pym cannot survive. He is reported to die soon after he "relates his story" to Edgar Allan Poe (Poe 270). He can no longer grow into an adult, but is stunted by his experiences and his previous destruction of self.

What seems to be the case for Pym is that the "unspeakable acts" he endures later manifest into a substantiated death instinct. Marita Nadal notes that Poe "explores the threat to bodily integrity and identity by exploiting the disgusting physicality of death" specifically in regards to "the unspeakable" of horror and the sublime (Nadal, 2000: 383). Pym describes the height of the horror he experiences as indescribable which reasons why he cannot dwell on his experiences and their affect on his identity formation. As a threat to the identity of self, horror "contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them [the faculties of the subject]" which is shown in Pym's disregard for his cannibalistic dining on Richard Parker just as soon as the ordeal is concluded (Nadal, 2000: 383). Perhaps Pym doesn't consciously articulate his personality transformation and feelings, but subconsciously a later moment of self-destruction on the island of Tsalal may be the manifestation of his trauma. Marita Nadal notes, ironically, that Pym's survival instinct kicks in throughout the novel only for him to want to self-destruct when he is climbing in the abyss. He considers letting himself fall to his death, as his survival instinct becomes a death instinct.

Arthur Gordon Pym and Piscine Molitor Patel both experience moments when they symbolically re-enter the womb to be re-birthed with healed identities. In continuation of the resolution of Pym's death instinct, Pym does let go "his grasp of the peg" after much anxious deliberation of his fall, but his companion Dirk Peters catches him in time (Poe 229). Their entire stay in the abyss (the same abyss that took the lives of

all their shipmates) reminisces with the restorative womb because they are protected from the Wampoos, nourished from the flesh of a bittern, and allowed to rest. As Julia Kristeva notes "the desirable, terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body" is synonymous with the abyss because the abyss is also the site of prior death (Kristeva, 1982: 63). His desire to self-destruct is both a manifestation of horror's affect on his psyche and his desire to stay within the womb, protected from future horrors. As Jacques Derrida writes in "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," an abyss lies between the Self and the "I". Pym is caught in that abyss, no longer identifying as an assembled Self because of the fracturing horrors he has exposed himself to; Pym cannot save himself when he falls because there is no Self to save.

Pym must exit the abyss in order to be reborn and to escape further abjection. After his fall and Dirk Peter's rescue, Pym articulates, "On recovery, my trepidation had entirely vanished; I felt a new being, and, with some little further aid from my companion, reached the bottom also in safety" (Poe 229-30). Marita Nadal observes that, "some critics have interpreted Pym as a narrative of rebirth into psychic or spiritual wholeness" because of his reaction after recovering from his fall. How can that be when he doesn't seem to appeal to any higher power though, precisely because his thoughts remain centered on self then centered on mere physical action and occurrences throughout the text? In other words, he doesn't recognize or acknowledge verbally or internally the intervention of a higher power. The power that saves him seems to reside in his physical companion's saving embrace.

In *Life of Pi*, Piscine's restorative womb is the carnivorous island his boat happens upon. The island is covered in algae-like roots that have a cushion to them, pools of fresh water where saltwater fish float up dead, meerkats that have no fear of predators and cuddle with Pi at night in the trees, and an absence of insects. Pi relearns how to walk, gathers strength by consuming the roots, trains Richard Parker to new levels of obedience, and renews his spirit. But the island deceives him: he cannot live in a place that turns into a horrific monster at night, burning and consuming all that touches its

deadly acidity. The same quote that is synonymous for Pym's abyss: "the desirable, terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body" describes the carnivorous island that heals Pi's mental and emotional wounds and restores his physical strength.

Pi finds out the deception of the nourishing mother island when he sees the only fruit on the whole of the island in a tree and investigates. With biblical undertones of the forbidden fruit, Pi discovers what he wishes wasn't the truth. He obtains a knowledge that he says, "Ah, how I wish that moment had never been! But for it I might have lived for years—why, for the rest of my life—on that island" (Martel 279). In a moment of horror Pi peels the fruit, much like an onion, until it goes from the size of an orange to the size of a cherry:

> And then it came to light, an unspeakable pearl at the heart of a green oyster. A human tooth…the feeling of horror came slowly. I had time to pick at the other fruit…Thirty-two teeth. A complete human set. Not one tooth missing. Understanding dawned upon me. I did not scream. I think only in movies is horror vocal. I simply shuddered and left the tree (280-81).

After the horrific moment passes, Pi cannot shed the turmoil that it puts him through. He knows that he cannot keep his identity if he accepts the island for what it is.

In concerns with confronting the maternal, Kristeva notes, "the hope for rebirth is short-circuited by the very splitting: the advent of one's own identity demands a law that mutilates, whereas jouissance demands an abjection from which identity becomes absent" (Kristeva, 1982: 64). When he discovers the island's true nature, he cannot assimilate that nature into himself, but must reject it to maintain a hold on his self-identity. Much like Pym's aborted fall, Pi's experiment of dropping to the acidic floor during the night is the deciding factor in his motivation. He feels the searing pain of what the island's horrifying acidity can do to his body and can only imagine what it can do to his soul. Pi inwardly

states, "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). He chooses his human identity over the false identity the island would give him.

These decisions to leave behind the fascinating yet terrifying protection of the abject mother space are what save Pym and Pi, eventually bringing them back to human society. They are two very different experiences though, even if they do parallel in certain aspects. Pym's way of getting home is mystical and completely unrealistic as the giant white figure envelopes his boat into complete whiteness (Poe 239). In the "Note", chapters were assumed lost because Pym makes his way back to the Americas only to die fairly soon after he fictionally relates his story to Poe. While the "Note" remains vague about Arthur Gordon Pym's return to the United States, the only way the reader knows he did not get lost in a blaze of white is actually in the beginning of the novel. The preface begins, "Upon my return to the United States a few months ago…" and is signed by A.G. Pym, signifying that he did return only to relate his story and die not very long after (43). Pi washes up onto the shore of Mexico after he leaves the carnivorous island in a much more time-sequential fashion than Pym's narrative. Piscine relates his narrative to a journalist after much time has elapsed: he has a family, is middle aged, and lives as a professor in Canada. The end results seem to imply that Piscine's motivation of survival was much stronger than Pym's which can also be confirmed in the comparison of his lack of death instinct throughout the novel. Horror affected both boys traumatically, but it seems that Pi had more strength of identity and psychical wholeness to overcome what occurred in the waves of the Pacific.

Much like Julia Kristeva's quote addressed at the very beginning, Pym retains the sense of the abject because he has rejected all he ever knew: his family, his ideologies, and the path he would have followed if he had not denied his identity when he was afraid his grandfather would recognize him on the eve of his ever-fateful trip to sea. He drives out the notions of his heritage and forms "his own territory, edged in the abject" without ever knowing a true sense of self (Kristeva, 1982: 15). This is why he cannot survive

when we comes back to the nation of his birth. He dies because he had already forfeited that part of himself, his familial and national identity, and cannot achieve it again. This doesn't happen to Pi because he never truly loses his sense of familial and spiritual self. His family may be gone, but he never denied them outright. Pi flirts with the abject, but he does not commit. His family's destination would have been Canada, so he continues his life in Canada: close to his parents' intention.

Perhaps a large difference between the two boys is the role horror plays in their nautical experiences. The horrors they experience are all propelled by external factors, factors placed upon their bodies, but what of their minds? How do their minds handle the outside trauma? Do they allow the trauma to seep into their minds, soaking their abilities to cope with a deep heaviness or let the waves wash over them, untouched because of the defenses they have put in place? Pym is consciously present in his physical world and his story is portrayed as a truthful account. There is no confusion about what really happened to him because of the preface that his experience happened exactly the way he told it, no matter how absurd it may seem. Because there is no one questioning the veracity of his story, the interpretation is of an honest first-hand account of a boy that absorbed all that occurred. Pym did not visibly use any defense mechanisms to distance himself from the murder, cannibalism, and disaster around him, which may be why he couldn't succeed in civilization at the end of Poe's novel. He died as mysteriously as he arrived back in the United States. One of the main differences between the two boys is the use of self-reflection in determining identity. Pym allows his external environment to shape who he is, but Pi questions everything that happens to him. He questions the physical, the mental, and the spiritual occurrences inside and outside of him during his castaway experience.

But if you have ever read *Life of Pi*, you know that the truly horrifying part is not all that business with the tiger, but the possibility that Piscine was alone on that small boat for the better part of a year. Pi says to the Japanese insurance agents who interview him, "…which is the better story?" (Martel 317). Of course, the one with the animals, the

men reply, because the story that Pi tells them is traumatizing to hear much less live. But the men insist that Pi tells them a story without animals:

> I know what you want. 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. You want a flat story. An immobile story. You want dry, yeastless factuality."
> Uhh…
> You want a story without animals.
> Yes! (Martel 302-3)

It is possible that the story without animals is what really happened to Piscine Molitor Patel; that his mother was the orangutan who died protecting him, the zebra was a sailor eaten by the hyena who was actually a cannibalistic Frenchman with a disregard for humanity, and that Pi was really the tiger.

That would mean that Pi survived on a boat by himself for 227 days, without company or external motivation to survive not only physically, but psychologically and spiritually. It would make perfect sense that Richard Parker was a delusion that Pi created in order to motivate his survival and provide a defense from self-destruction (or death-instinct to use a familiar phrase). But why imagine a Bengal tiger, a dangerous creature, in order to survive? Because of his ferocity. Pi needed an instinctual ferocity added to his more calm and harmless demeanor. A Bengal tiger can defend itself; it can sense danger and has the natural equipment to survive an attack.

Situating Piscine's Tiger and Arthur Gordon Pym's Tiger as symbolic animals rather than real ones offers a different avenue to understand the two boys' methods of survival. The treatment of the two animals reflects the way Pi and Pym survive, what they know to be true, and who they are. When Pym's dog Tiger first appears, there is a loss of recognition. Tiger is poised to attack his owner and Pym lies helpless to "the paws of some huge and real monster…his white and ghastly fangs were gleaming upon me

through the gloom" (Poe 66). It is not until he "breathed a faint ejaculation to God" that Tiger recognizes his master and demonstrates his joy by licking him (66). Pym stipulates that he loves his dog more than anybody else in the world, but accounts of this beast were not aforementioned and neither is Tiger mentioned after the great storm kills him in Chapter nine.

The dog Tiger symbolizes the last tether to civilization and Pym's old life and values. He does not recognize the dog at first because he has cut ties with his landed identity, yet Pym still does not scoff at the companionship Tiger has to offer at the moment he believes all is lost. He has been left in the belly of the ship much longer than Augustus had promised and is hallucinating because of the percolating gases and lack of food and water. Tiger symbolizes a tie to humanity that Pym thought he had lost completely. Tiger becomes a tool to reunite Pym and Augustus by the letter he carries. Once his communication is fulfilled, this last tether can be severed. Pym ultimately never mentions Tiger after he disappears (other than the hallucination after the storm that Richard Parker was really the body of Tiger). Because the last tether to Pym's original identity is an animal, a favored pet, Pym ultimately accepts his presence. Derrida claims that animals aren't ashamed of nudity or in other words they have no consciousness of good, evil, or cultural constructs that man has created (Derrida, 2002: 373). Pym may have discarded his cultural identity, but he is still the same being that fed and loved Tiger.

Piscine confronts his Richard Parker in an opposite manner than Pym's confrontation with Tiger. Pi recognizes Richard Parker as a being of the life that he just lost, not a dangerous beast that may kill him, which signals a momentary loss of reason. Pi's initial acceptance of Richard Parker's presence suggests his openness to the cultural identity of his birth. He sees a symbol of his previous life and tries to save it even though there is the possibility that the symbol can ultimately overtake his Self. Both boys attempt to save these representations of their past: Pym by placing Tiger into the hull while the mutiny and storm rage around him and Pi by throwing the lifebuoy to Richard Parker, then training the tiger. While Pym loses his animal and that is perhaps why he

experiences both a death instinct and ultimately a mysterious death at the end of Poe's novel, Pi follows Richard Parker's lead in order to survive. As a symbol, the tiger represents the animal (a generality that Derrida despises yet builds upon) that Pi follows to bridge the abyss between Self and "I" (Derrida, 2002: 417). The horrors they experience together (whether determined physically or psychically by the reader) cannot extinguish the ultimate survival instinct. Derrida proposes:

> On the other hand, animality, the life of the living, to the extent that one claims to be able to distinguish it from the inorganic…is generally defined as sensibility, irritability, and auto-motricity, a spontaneity that is given to movement, to organizing itself and affecting itself, marking, tracing, and affecting itself with traces of its self (418).

Because Piscine retains this animality in the form of Richard Parker, he has the animal instinct that leads him to his salvation. Richard Parker saves him from the cannibalistic Frenchman, communicates that there is something wrong with the algae island by his nightly action of running to the boat (the meerkats running to the trees as well), and by remaining a wild and dangerous companion that keeps Piscine alert and alive. It is this movement and affectation amongst the horrors of the natural sea that guarantee Pi does not fall into apathetic or symbolic death much like Pym does in the beginning of Poe's novel when he lies in his coffin-like room in the belly of the ship.

If Richard Parker was merely a construct in Piscine's mind, imagined merely for survival, does that mean that Pi became less of a human and more of an animal? Derrida points out that there isn't a linear limit between the "animal" and the human. It isn't that simple. This is another reason why the horror of the abject isn't as simple as it would seem. Much like the animal, the abject isn't an opposite of the culturally accepted. The abject remains outside of civilization, surrounding it, edging around the acceptable, ready to absorb the fragile at all times. While Kristeva asserts "the abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states, where man strays on the territories of animal," it is Pi

who follows Richard Parker's lead that survives because of his reliance on animal instinct (21). So is the thought of Pi alone on that boat more horrifying? He is able to survive whether he was truly alone or not. Is he less of a human because he relied on animal instinct in order to survive, or is that distinction too simplistic? As a reader, the fear of being alone is greater than the fear of the tiger due to the inherent need for companionship. We are social by nature. But perhaps this is not the reason, but one of many. What horrifies us, as humans, will always remain knowledge unattainable, shifting, evolving, yet present.

Works Cited:

Derrida, Jacques. "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)." *Critical Inquiry*. 28. 2 (2002). Web. JSTOR. 30 May 2014.

Duncan, Rebecca. "*Life of Pi* as Postmodern Survivor Narrative." *Mosaic : A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature.* 41.2 (2008). Print.

Ketterer, David. "Yann Martel's *Life Of Pi* And Poe's *Pym* (And 'Berenice')." *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism: History, Theory, Interpretation* 42 (2009): Wiley Online Journals. Web. 4 Nov. 2013.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Colombia University Press. 1982. CSU Stanislaus Website. 4 Nov. 2013. Web.

Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi.* Toronto: Vintage, 2002. Print.

Nadal, Marita. "Beyond The Gothic Sublime: Poe's *Pym* Or The Journey Of Equivocal (E)Motions." *Mississippi Quarterly* 53.3 (2000). *Academic Search Elite*. Web. 18 Nov. 2013.

O'Donnell, Charles. "From Earth To Ether: Poe's Flight Into Space." *PMLA: Publications Of The Modern Language Association Of America* 77.1 (1962). *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. JSTOR. 4 Dec. 2013.

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. London: Harper and Brothers, 1838. Print.

Stephens, Gregory. "Feeding Tiger, Finding God: Science, Religion, And 'The Better Story' In *Life Of Pi*." *Intertexts* 14.1 (2010). Web. MUSE. 4 Nov. 2013.