

4-15-2013

## *Life of Pi: Perspectives on Truth*

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### Recommended Citation

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*Life of Pi*: Perspectives on Truth

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15 April 2013

Narrative and story predicate perspective. Stories that frame narration change perspective into a literary device. This narrative form enriches as it challenges the reader's perspective on truth, often confronting readers with an ageless dilemma: is this narrator trustworthy? Framed narration also introduces the idea that truth is multi-faceted. Truth manifests itself through multiple perspectives. This is not to say that every perspective tells the truth, but it is to suggest that multiple perspectives provide a more comprehensive understanding of the truths embedded in a story. Perspectives give stories, life, and truth dimension.<sup>1</sup>

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* is a story on perspectives. Martel utilizes framed narrative to relate one boy's castaway experience on a lifeboat with a 250 lb. Bengal tiger. The author-narrator introduces Pi's story in the author's note, which resembles a brief literary essay on failure and writing stories more than it does a traditional author's note. To understand the author's note is to understand Pi's story, because the note introduces the central, story-shaping themes: hunger, perspective, faith, and truth.

The note also functions to frame Pi's voice within the author-narrator's life story. The biographical details of this story bear a striking resemblance to the actual author's life. Author and fictional narrator, Yann Martel was experiencing a midlife crisis in India when he was inspired to write *Life of Pi*. During this emotional low the fictional author-narrator met Francis Adirubasamy, Pi Patel's childhood swim instructor. This chance meeting introduces the truth that perspectives create stories. From the perspective of Adirubasamy, Pi's story "will make you believe in God" (*Life of Pi* x). From the author-narrator's restless and hungering perspective, "That's a tall order"(x).<sup>2</sup>

This order was not as tall as the author-narrator originally assumed. At the end of the novel Martel concludes with Adirubasamy "that this was, indeed, a story to make you believe in

God” (xi). This conclusion is accompanied by a literary twist that alters everything—the reader is told a second story that challenges Pi’s original survival narrative. Upon finishing the book, the reader discovers that Pi’s story is not about the author or author-narrator’s perspective, but rather it is about the reader’s concluding perspective.

Pi tells two stories, and he leaves it up to the reader to test, weigh, and choose between them. The first story is the story of Pi’s Pacific journey on a lifeboat with a zebra, a hyena, an orangutan, and a tiger. This first story consumes the bulk of the novel’s text. The fantastical nature and unlikely coincidences that occur in this version of Pi’s story make it difficult for the Japanese men interviewing Pi at the end of the novel to believe his story.<sup>3</sup> From their perspective, the story with the animals does not align with reason. Frustrated with their disbelief, Pi tells the men a second, reasonable story, allegorically substituting the animals for people: a cook (the hyena), his mom (the orangutan), and a sailor (the zebra). The second story is cold, brutal. Pi relates the second story in terse rational rhetoric. The tragedy of the second story is that it is not difficult to believe,<sup>4</sup> but the brutality of the second story encourages the Japanese men to conclude that the story with the animals is “the better story” (317).

The interviewers’ initial, concluding reactions to Pi’s story model skepticism and acceptance, the two most common reader responses to the novel. These responses raise interesting questions on truth: what is truth? And, how do we determine truth? Upon finishing the novel, most readers are suspicious that Pi and Martel have been bamboozling them all along.<sup>5</sup> They commonly ask, with dramatic and exasperated intonation: “Which story is true?” On the other hand, a small minority of readers do not finish the novel feeling duped by Pi and the author-narrator. These readers intuitively sustained a higher degree of “poetic faith” as they read.

Poetic faith is a temporary “aesthetic suspension of disbelief” (Wolf 118), and Pi’s two stories illustrate that poetic faith mirrors religious faith. The term “poetic faith” comes from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Biographical Literaria*. In this work, the poet “theoriz[ed that] truth inheres even in depictions of the impossible” because a reader’s imagination willingly suspends rational disbelief in order to engage the truths of fiction momentarily (Cole, par. 4). According to Martel, “religion operates in the exact same way as a novel operates...A good religion makes you suspend your disbelief” (Interview by Steinmetz). In Martel’s novel, Pi asks readers to have poetic faith in the story with the animals because that story is “the better story” (317).<sup>6</sup> Pi parallels poetic belief in the better story with religious faith through the words, “And so it goes with God” (317). This statement, “And so it goes with God,” is what literary critic, Steven Burns refers to as “the punch line of the novel” (185). This punch line is a deliberate, direct narrative challenge.

Martel intended for his novel to aesthetically and linguistically challenge readers to give faith a chance by allegorically linking religion and story together. In an interview with Andrew Steinmetz, Martel explains: “[*Life of Pi*] is in no way a defense of organized religion. It is an argument that faith, or what’s at the core of religion, is something that should definitely be considered.” This challenge calls into question what we intuitively perceive as rational truth. From a philosophical perspective truth has been on trial for a timeless while, but over the past century, eras of existential, naturalistic, and postmodern thought have severely prosecuted truth.

Existentialism, the philosophical framework that evolved and modernized into naturalism taught us that the subject can glean truth through experiencing nature. The truths that a naturalistic worldview offers are as incomplete as they are sinister. Naturalistic truth is hopelessness wrapped in a neat and tight smiley face: as subjects destined to face the

disparagement of postmodernism, we should seek to live with as much compassion and care for others as possible, while striving to keep ourselves stable in an unstable world. Through a process of truth-erasure, postmodernism decentered the subject. Preceding the postmodern movement, the father of modern philosophy and the founder of God's death, Friedrich Nietzsche would perhaps argue that truth has never been erased—it has just never been perceived.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless, recent literary critics such as Werner Wolf suggest that we have reached a philosophical plane that we can begin to label post-postmodernism (108). Whether or not we are now entering a time of post-postmodernism, the decentered subject has been seeking a sense of equilateral rest for decades. Yann Martel's complexly simple novel, *Life of Pi* speaks to this philosophical vacuum. Martel's survival advice is as follows: "The spirit above all else counts" (*Life of Pi* 167).

Perhaps it was the wisdom of this survival advice, along with other aspects of realism in Pi's first survivor narrative, that caused me to respond to *Life of Pi* differently than most other readers and scholars that I spoke with soon after finishing the novel for the first time. The more I discussed the novel with others, the more I came to realize that my initial response to *Pi* was unique because I sustained a large degree of undaunted poetic faith even as I neared the end of the novel. This "faith" led me to think that it was rather unfortunate that Pi had to lie to the Japanese interviewers and tell them a second story. I found it irritating when people asked me, "Which story is true?" upon finding out that I was lecturing on *Life of Pi*. From my perspective, asking this question was asking the wrong question. It is not that the question, "Which story is true?" is an invalid reader response question, it is just that this question leads readers into a gyre of circular-thoughts-and-answers that do not directly lead them to understand the meaning of the

overall text. And, the whirlwind of doubt that results from this question is akin to the culture of doubt that postmodernism has injected into the western subject.

As a theoretical limb of postmodern thought, deconstruction introduced a large strain of doubt into western culture.<sup>8</sup> Together environmentalist, Jack Robinson and literary critic, Werner Wolf argue that *Life of Pi* reacts against deconstruction with reconstructivist arguments. Robinson primarily argues that *Life of Pi* is an example of “ecological reconstructive postmodernism” (126). Wolf takes a more metaphysical approach and argues that *Pi* “reacts against postmodern depthlessness” with the post-postmodern suggestion that people return to religious belief (120).

In philosophical contrast to Robinson and Wolf, literary critic, Florence Stratton argues that “*Life of Pi* is organized around a philosophical debate about the modern [western] world’s privileging of reason over imagination, science over religion, materialism over idealism, fact over fiction or story” (par. 5). Stratton centralizes her argument around the contrasting philosophical stance of the two Japanese interviewers, Mr. Okamoto, who holds a positivist view, and Mr. Chiba, who leans towards a romantic perspective. With their contrasting worldviews in mind, Stratton argues that the purpose of *Pi* is to deconstruct the “reason/imagination binary” (par. 7). To deconstruct this binary is to replace the god of Enlightenment reason with the redemptive, “transforming power of story” (par. 35).

While it is clear that Martel does push and challenge this binary, the novel’s purpose is not, as Stratton compellingly argues, to deconstruct the binary between reason and imagination. A year after his book was released, Martel stated, “[M]y novel is about the line between fiction and fact. It is about how we interpret reality, right? Reality isn’t just out there; it’s how we interpret it” (Interview by Ray Suarez). To this Stratton may reply that it is not reasonable to

interpret reality relatively; therefore, Martel's purpose does privilege imagination over reason. However, if one considers the insights of Ray Jackendoff, a philosopher and specialist in cognitive studies, it becomes clear that there *should* be no reason/imagination binary. When one applies Jackendoff's insights to *Life of Pi*, one will find that Martel's intent is not as relative as it seems.

In his most recent work, *A User's Guide to Thought and Meaning*, Jackendoff explores and exposes a binary analogous to the model Stratton used: rational thinking/intuitive thinking. Speaking from a cognitive perspective, Jackendoff explains that rational thinking is intuitive thinking clothed in language (243). Language cannot be "hollow at the core" (Stratton, par. 36) because it is the tool we use to reason and translate our imaginings and intuitive thoughts into a structure. Jackendoff argues that rational and intuitive thought are inextricably linked, and this, in a sense, is the same argument that Pi makes to the Japanese interviewers. Pi believes that both reason and belief (rational thinking/intuitive thinking) are important. One does not outweigh the other, and if reason or intuition is thrown out with the bathwater, than the subject doing the throwing is in dire straits.<sup>9</sup>

The cognitive/neural perspective clearly explains how rational thinking is inseparably intertwined with intuitive thinking,<sup>10</sup> but one needs perspective, multiple perspectives to understand meaning. Jackendoff names the theoretical framework that holds all perspectives together the *perspectival perspective*. Perspectival perspectives is about perceiving truth through rational and intuitive thinking. According to this theory, multiple perspectives are essential to understanding the meaning of words, of stories, and of meaning. When working from the perspective of perspectival perspectives it is important to keep two rules in mind. Know what perspective you are in, and do not mix perspectives because "if you start mixing perspectives,



you end up with weird assertions: There are no sunsets. There is no such thing as a language...There is no such thing as truth...And so on” (Jackendoff 246). If these cautions are respected, then Jackendoff’s theory can equip the subject to combat deconstructive doubts and gain insights into the meaning of Martel’s story.

From an ordinary perspective, Martel’s author’s note raises some intriguing thoughts on truth, bamboozling, and fiction. As I held this note like magnifying glass above the actual story, my research question began to take shape: How does *Life of Pi* help readers to understand the nature of truth more deeply? If one applies Jackendoff’s theory perspectival perspectives to *Life of Pi*, there are four perspectives that make the greatest and most comprehensive contribution towards revealing the nature of truth to readers:

1. The ordinary perspective
2. The cognitive perspective
3. The thematic perspective
4. The authorial perspective

Sifting the novel through these perspectival sieves reveals the truth that multiple perspectives create stories and imbibe stories with life because a story, like faith, is communal: truth is conversational.

### **The Ordinary Perspective**

The ordinary perspective is one’s intuitive interpretation of what is true. Jackendoff coined the term in order to explain how people interpret language and define words. According to Jackendoff, the ordinary perspective asks of language, “What makes sentences true?” (246). The ordinary perspective would likely ask of *Life of Pi*, “Which story is true?” It is possible to logically answer this question, but the answer is not satisfactory because it is paradoxical. A logical answer will weigh inadequate, because there is no way to empirically prove that either one of Pi’s stories is true.

Since inadequate answers are unsettling, readers subjectively judge the validity of Pi's stories based upon their aesthetic or rational preferences. Readers who believe the first story believe out of intuition, imagination, and poetic faith. Rationally thinking readers believe that the second story is true because it does not betray reason, science, or psychology, even though it does betray ethics. The rationally thinking reader is correct. The second story is true according to a reasonable, scientific, and psychological context. The intuitively thinking reader is also correct. The first story is true according to a literary, religious, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, and allegorical context.

Literary critics who write from their ordinary perspective argue for the validity of the story that they believe. Believers of the first and second story have both supplemented their perspective with knowledge from the field of trauma psychology. In favor of the second, rational story, James Mensch uses psychoanalytic theory to suggest that Pi substitutes, or projects the evil within himself onto Richard Parker as a way of suppressing the unacceptable horrors that he really experienced and committed (140-147). Likewise, Steven Burns argues that Richard Parker was Pi's *doppelganger*, an unconscious projection himself (187). In contrast to the perspective of these critics, Dina Georges suggests that the unbelievable first story serves as a model through which one can understand the "emotional reality" of trauma, because emotionally, "the line between history and fantasy is not so significant" to the reality of a traumatic experience (170). It is not difficult to get a sense for which story these critics initially believed, or wanted to believe, based upon which story their analysis favors.

Remember the moment you first finished reading the novel? Were you a first story believer or a second story believer? Your ordinary perspective guided you to an intuitive or a

rational opinion as you read. Unfortunately, your opinion probably does not adequately answer the question, “Which story is *really* true?” But, logic will answer this question.

Logically both stories are true. One can apply the truth statements that Jackendoff developed about Sherlock Homes to *Life of Pi* in order to visually understand this logic:

Sherlock Holmes was British.

Sherlock Holmes didn’t exist.<sup>11</sup>

Both of the above statements are true, but “how can [they] both...be true?” (Jackendoff 194). How can Sherlock Holmes have a nationality and also have never existed? Judging these two sentences true, like judging Pi’s two stories true, is not a matter of objective or subjective opinion. Both Sherlock Holmes statements are objective truths. We understand that even though Holmes never existed “in [our] ordinary world,” he was British based on the “(unmentioned) context” from which he comes: the literary world of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (193). Readers who detach their imagination from the ordinary world to engage Doyle’s literary world would judge the sentence, “Sherlock Holmes does not exist,” as false because he does exist in the literary context of many stories. You and I intuitively judge either sentence to be true or false based on whichever context we are engaging.

We can apply Jackendoff’s method of logic to *Life of Pi* by creating two similar truth statements:

Richard Parker was an adult Bengal tiger on Pi’s lifeboat.

Richard Parker didn’t exist.

In the context of the first story, Richard Parker really was a tiger on Pi’s lifeboat. In the context of the second story, Richard Parker did not exist.

Logically analyzing *Life of Pi* from the ordinary perspective is inherently problematic. The problem is that both of Pi's stories have a different, independent context, and these contradictory contexts exist within one metanarrative/metacontext. When Jackendoff spoke of Sherlock Holmes it was clear that his statements each belonged to two separate contexts, but this is not the case with *Life of Pi*. Both truth statements about Richard Parker belong to Martel's literary world. Richard Parker exists in one story, but not the other—and both stories belong to one grand narrative. In the context of this grand narrative, both stories are made true by the fact that they speak to differing, specific truths about human nature, and our relationships with the natural world, other people, and the divine. For this reason, critics like Mensch, Burns, and Georges can speak from the ordinary perspective and truthfully argue that the first and the second story reveal insights to readers about psychological trauma.

How do we know if a story is true? According to Jackendoff, “a sentence is true if it corresponds to the way the world is...” (193). If sentences are true because they correspond to the way the world is, then stories also must be true if they correspond to the way the world is. Sherlock Holmes taught us to ask “*which* world is?” (193). Since there are two stories, two contexts, two worlds within one story, *Life of Pi*, critics like Stratton ask *which* story is? The reasonable or the imaginative? If we accept the paradox that both stories are true, then it appears that Martel's novel does seek to deconstruct the reason/imagination binary, as Stratton suggested.

Or, we can consider the lesson of the author's note: multiple perspectives create a story. The ordinary perspective is not right for understanding which story is true. We would make much more progress if we considered what Jackendoff calls the cognitive perspective, which asks, “[H]ow [do] *people judge* stories to be true?” (246).

### The Cognitive Perspective

We judge stories true the same way that we judge sentences true, rationally and intuitively. We judge sentences rationally true through intuitive thinking: “[T]he conscious sense that one sentence logically flows from another—that your reasoning is rational—is itself an intuitive judgment. So rational thought isn’t an alternative to intuitive thought—rather, it rides on a foundation of intuitive thought...rationality is intuition enhanced by language” (Jackendoff 243). We intuitively recognize a sentence or story to be true if it rationally corresponds with reality, or if it rationally speaks to how a system of thought operates within the world. Speaking from the cognitive/neural sense, reason and intuition are never independent of one another. They are always dependent on one another.

Pi makes this argument in his interview with Mr. Chiba and Mr. Okamoto. The interviewers complain that they cannot believe Pi’s story because they are “just being reasonable” (*Life of Pi* 298). Pi rebuts their faithlessness and poor imaginative powers by exclaiming, “So am I! I applied my reason at every moment. Reason is excellent for getting food, clothing and shelter. Reason is the very best tool kit. Nothing beats reason for keeping tigers away.” Pi values reason just as much as his interviewers’ value reason, but Pi also knows that excessive reason has a cost. Excessive reason will cost you “the universe”—faith, ethics, and love (298).

Since Pi believes that reason and faith (rationality and intuition) are equally important, he harmoniously blends them together in his intellectual and personal life. His nickname, as well as his lifelong interest in religion and biology evidence this formative aspect of Pi’s worldview.

Pi’s full name is Piscine Molitor Patel. He decides to be “known to all as Pi Patel ... $\pi$  = 3.14,” to escape the cruel slurring of his aquatic name into *pissing* (23). Students and

mathematicians know Pi as an irrational number; “It expresses the inability to find a common measure—an exact ratio—between the circumference and the diameter of a circle. It is a number that goes on forever” (Mensch 146). Pi is an infinite, unreasonable number that is used to reason. As Pi states, “in that Greek letter that looks like a shack with a corrugated tin roof, in that elusive, irrational number with which scientists try to understand the universe, I found refuge” (*Life of Pi* 24).

Pi is not the only nickname that Piscine uses to escape ridicule. On a humorous note, as a hungry university student living in Montreal, Pi told the pizza delivery service that his name was: “‘I am who I am.’ Half an hour later two pizzas arrived for Ian Hoolihan” (20). Pi’s Montrealean pseudonym works the same way as his mathematical pseudonym. “I am who I am, Ian Hoolihan” blends religious allusion into reality the same way as “ $\pi$ ” blends the irrational with the rational.

Pi’s nicknames illustrate his lifelong interest in religion and the sciences. As an adult, Pi earned a double-major Bachelor’s degree in religious studies and zoology. This is the first fact that readers learn about Pi. During his university years, he would “sometimes [get his] majors mixed up,” which seems difficult to do (5). But, he explains that studying the three-toed sloth reminded him of yogis, and the “miracle of [a sloth’s] life” reminded him of God (5). He stereotypes many of his fellow religious studies students as “muddled agnostics...who were in the full thrall of reason,” and his fellow scientists he calls, “a friendly, atheistic, hard-working, beer-drinking lot” (5). Since Pi views atheism as a religion, he does not perceive his fellow scientists as unimaginative or faithless.

Pi’s interest and ideas about religion began at an early age, and his foundational religious interests tell us something about *how Pi judges* stories or religion true.

At sixteen years old, Pi Patel was a practicing Hindu, Christian, and Muslim. Pi's unusual interest in these religions was motivated by one noble desire, "to love God" (69). Pi believes religious narratives based upon their ability to teach him how to love the divine and love other creatures of the earth. Pi syncretizes the religious doctrines of these different religions down to one concept: love, love for God and love for others.

Love is the standard through which Pi judges religion true. Krishna, the "loving, merciful, [and] frightening" Brahman saguna, introduced Pi to Jesus. Jesus is a God who did not "leave death to mortals" but died a real death because of love (54). Soon after Pi became a Christian, he met Satish Kumar, a Muslim mystic who told him that Islam is about "the Beloved" (60). Therefore, it is not surprising that the first story is about a boy who learns to love his neighbor, Richard Parker. If Pi judges stories true the same way that he judges religions true, then the first story that Pi tells is the true story.

Pi is not so naïve as to believe that all Hindus, Christians, and Muslims love others all the time. He knows the stereotypes. Christianity "had a reputation for few gods and great violence. But good schools" (51). Islam was worse. It had "fewer gods, greater violence, and [he] had never heard anyone say a good thing about Muslim schools..." (58). Pi is lovingly willing to see past stereotypes to find the truths that each religion offers. Sadly, this humble attitude is not modeled by Pi's religious leaders during Pi's "introduction to interfaith dialogue" (70). The priest, pandit, and imam made many malicious remarks against each other, illustrating how the flaws in each religion critique one another. These critiques collapse in Pi's refusal to choose between his three faiths.

Religions are full of mysteries. Pi does not mind this. It is difficult to understand deep doctrinal truths within a religion. For example, Pi says that many have asked him about the

relation between Brahman and atman, and he answers that they relate “in the same way the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit relate: mysteriously” (49).

The mind also works mysteriously. We know that rational thoughts are intuitive thoughts first, and that intuitive thoughts are thoughts without language (Jackendoff 241). Some intuitive thoughts are not meant to transform into rational thoughts. They are supposed to remain mysterious, because there is truth within the mystery that is lost when it is rationalized.

How do we judge which world is within *Life of Pi*? If we judge intuitively with Pi, then the first story is. There is no way to explain how we judge the first story true, because intuitive judgments cannot be rationalized. When we rationalize intuitive judgments that should retain an element of mystery we grossly misunderstand the mystery. For example, it is difficult to rationalize the value of the arts, and when we try to rationalize the arts we miss the point. It is like “Louis Armstrong said about jazz, “If you have to ask what it is, you’ll never know” (qtd. In Jackendoff 240).

If you judge the first story rationally you will miss the truth beneath the irrational, and you will never know what makes the first story true. If you judge rationally, perhaps the second story is true, or perhaps Martel bamboozled your fare (*Life of Pi* viii).

Hopefully, if you are feeling bamboozled, the perspectival perspective will continue to give you fresh insights into *Life of Pi*. Readers should not be fooled by Jackendoff’s theory. Even though Jackendoff primarily focuses on the ordinary and cognitive perspectives, his theory of perspectival perspectives goes beyond the ordinary and the cognitive. The perspectival perspective is a perspective on how to use and understand perspectives, all of them. To better understand truth relative to stories, there are two additional contexts to consider apart from the



ordinary and cognitive perspective. I call them the thematic perspective and the authorial perspective.

### **The Thematic Perspective**

The thematic perspective is the textual context. It is a New Critical reading that privileges themes above all other literary elements. The thematic perspective is concerned with whole narratives, so it assumes that both stories within *Life of Pi* are true. At the beginning of this essay, I wrote that the author's note is the key to understanding the novel. This statement is true from the thematic perspective. If you hold the authors note up against the novel like a magnifying glass you will clearly see the themes that shape Pi's story, hunger and faith. These two themes reveal that we are physical and spiritual beings who should not separate what is true from what is ethical as we apply truth to our lives. Outside of philosophy, ethical models can be found within story. Stories speak to other stories, to culture, and to politics as a conscience, like a Jiminy Cricket reminding us to speak truthfully and act virtuously. As physical and spiritual beings, we are always hungering *for* something. Stories create and assuage our hunger to know more of truth applied to ethics.

### **Hunger**

Hunger permeates the beginning, middle, and end of the novel. The author's note opens with a word on hunger: "This book was born as I was hungry" (vii). Hunger reduces Pi to "a level of savagery [he] never imagined possible" (197). Hunger prompts Pi to tame Richard Parker, it motivates his conversation with the blind French castaway, it tempts him to stay on the algae island forever, and it humorously causes him to eat Mr. Chiba's and Okamoto's lunches.

Hunger is not just a word used to describe our physical need for nourishment. It describes our physicality as well as our spirituality. Hunger is a sign of our very physical need to assuage

unease or pain, but linguistically hunger is a verb that describes longing, strong desires, or spiritual needs (“Hunger, v.”).

The author’s note specifically indicates that the author-narrator was hungering after three things as he wrote *Life of Pi*: literary recognition, stillness, and a Story with emotional life. Both the fictional author-narrator and the real author-author satisfy those three longings through the writing and publication of Pi’s story. Martel’s aesthetic hunger preludes Pi’s spiritual curiosity and search to love God. His “aching hunger” also parallels to Pi’s physical starvation, and this parallel reveals that aesthetic and spiritual starvation is just as dehumanizing and “soul-destroying” as physical hunger (ix).

From Martel’s biographical information we know that Yann Martel’s hunger for literary recognition was more complex than a desire for superficial success. Like the author-narrator, Martel held a Bachelor’s in philosophy. After he earned his degree the real Martel “held various odd jobs—tree planting, dishwashing, working as a security guard—before he began to write” (Interview by Sielke 12). These life details are “the humble bruised truth” (*Life of Pi* ix). Martel would have liked to tell people that he was a doctor because “doctors [are] the current purveyors of magic and miracle” (ix). These humble biographical truths were made more humble during Martel’s restless and lonely trip to India. One night during this trip, he realized that he was thirty-three years old and “nothing about [his] life seemed to have started or added up to much” (“How I Wrote...”). Beyond literary success, Martel, the author-author was hungering for a meaningful legacy, a life with a family or a career that was worth something. Just before meeting Adirubasamy, the real and fictional authors were wandering through restless uncertainty.

The author-narrator complains twice at the beginning of the note that he was feeling restless, suggesting that he was hungering for stillness. The real author is a strong advocate of

stillness. He explains that he was chose to go to India, not only to write a novel about Portugal in 1939, but also because “a stint in India will beat the restlessness out of any living creature” (*Life of Pi* vii). If stillness can be found in literature, then stillness, like hunger, must be a physical, as well as a mental and spiritual discipline.

The author-narrator’s physical and emotive restlessness thematically parallel’s to the stillness that Pi finds within the grand narratives of religion. Stillness is a spiritual discipline in all three of the major world religions that Pi practices. For the Hindu, meditative silence is a virtue. For the Muslim, prayer is a pillar. For the Christian, Sabbath rest is a command. We can glean from this foundational religious principle that we have been created to hunger for a stillness that can only be satisfied in God.

Even though stillness is a spiritual discipline as well as a physical and emotional state of being, Martel likely struggled to find stillness on a physical and emotional level because he is a third culture kid (TCK). TCK’s are children who grow up in cultures outside of their parent’s home culture, and many of them struggle with a sense of rootlessness and restlessness. According to Pollock and Van Reken, TCKs tend to struggle more than others with a “migratory instinct” because “an unrealistic attachment to the past, or a persistent expectation that the next place will finally be home, can lead to [an] inner restlessness that keeps the TCK always moving” (125). Even though Martel’s parents were Canadian, his father’s position as a diplomat meant that Martel was born in Spain and “grew up in Alaska, British Columbia, Costa Rica, France, Ontario and Mexico” (Interview by Sielke 12). As an adult Martel “spent time in Iran, Turkey and India” (12). In a sense, Martel writes the “migratory instinct” into Pi’s character by forcing Pi into a sense of rootlessness. Martel takes Pi from his home in India to the Pacific, then

to Mexico, and finally has him settle in Canada, where he longs for the home that he had with his family. But this home does not exist longer.

Beyond stillness, the author-narrator ached for a story with emotional life. Martel brilliantly ties the theme of hunger and the ache of a ravished spirit together in four simple sentences: “Your story is emotionally dead, that’s the crux of it. The discovery is something soul-destroying. I tell you. It leaves you with an aching hunger” (ix). At the moment of his bitter disappointment over the lifeless manuscript he had been working through, he meets Francis Adirubasamy who promises a story full of emotional life, because “a story that will make you believe in God” must have emotional life (x). Adirubasamy’s fulfilled promise implies that stories create and assuage our hunger for truth.

Beyond spiritual and aesthetic longings, Pi is most afflicted with physical starvation. This sixteen year old boy and his father’s tiger suffer the agony hunger during their 227 day castaway experience on the Pacific.

Pi’s experience illustrates that starvation is a physical sensation with emotional and metaphysical consequences. Initially, Pi is reduced to weeping over the first fish that he kills.<sup>12</sup> Hunger and the desperation that results from starvation quickly alter Pi’s attitude. He shifts from a timid vegetarian, respectful of all sentient life, to a vicious pescetarian, a vegetarian who eats seafood. Two pages after he weeps over the death of his first kill he explains: “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). Pi attributes this dramatic shift in his behavior to the “simple and brutal” truth that “a person can get used to anything, even to killing” (185). This moment in Pi’s journey is one of the clearest indicators that Pi’s stories are about ethical truth.

Hunger, especially hunger to assuage pain, can lead to irrational behavior that is inhumane or barbaric. When the body is in a state of severe starvation “it begins to eat itself” (Cloete 328). It is a slow process of self-sabotage, during which time the body is fixated on keeping the heart and brain functioning. At advanced states of starvation, the cerebral cortex will shut down. This is “the part of the brain that is responsible for higher thought pertaining to notions of beauty, love, and ethics. None of these [are] considered essential for survival” (328). With ethical thought processes shut down, the survivor is able to engage more easily and readily in unethical acts like cannibalism. Even though Pi engages in cannibalism, the second story cook descended to this level of savagery much faster than Pi.

Hunger quickly reduces the Cook to a “beast” and a “monster” (*Life of Pi* 310). He goes too far, “even by his [own] bestial standards” (310). There is no need to rewrite the gore, but Pi makes two very important statements as he concludes the story of how he murdered and then cannibalized the Cook: “Why do we cling to our evil ways?”(310), and “A knife has a horrible dynamic power; once in motion, it’s hard to stop” (310). His rhetorical question, “Why do we cling to our evil ways?” draws his stories back to the theme of faith and the struggle that our “animality” and our “divinity” create within us.<sup>13</sup> Regarding Pi’s second statement about the knife, one could easily substitute the words “sin,” or “terrible deeds,” or “evil, terrible thoughts” for the word “knife.” Evil has a horrible dynamic power in all its forms, in thinking and in action, and it is for this reason that “one can get used to anything, even killing” (185).

The hunger of a castaway is insatiable. During Pi’s castaway experience his animality is drawn out, and he describes certain moments as “moment[s] of insanity brought on by hunger.” Pi continues to say that in these moments, “I was more set on eating than I was on staying alive” (222). This is significant because it means that Pi was more set on eating than he was on

retaining his humanity. The insane hunger that drove the cook and Pi to cannibalism equates humanity with morality, love, and ethics. It is, arguably, only through his faith that Pi is able to maintain this sense of what it means to be human.

Pi's faith sets him apart from the cook even in his moments of insanity. Unlike Pi, the Cook approaches hunger from a selfish, morally corrupt worldview. The cook's worldview permits lying as long as it ensures his individual survival. The cook does not have the wisdom or the foresight to know that his lies will later eat him like a vicious hyena, from the inside out. His lies destroy the lives of those around him, next his own spirit, and finally his will to live. The cook justifies his lies in the name of starvation and ravenous hunger, but his deception kills him faster than his hunger does.

Severe hunger creates desperate fear. Fear steals your ability to reason ethically, especially when you are starving. This is true of both physical and spiritual starvation. But, hunger is not always a negative concept.

There are two different ways that Pi experiences hunger positively. Most obviously, Pi hungers for God. His desire to love the divine is as peculiar as it is noble. Pi also nobly hungers for literature. Illustrating this, Pi begins chapter 73 with the words, "My greatest wish—other than salvation—was to have a book. A long book with a never ending story. One I could read again and again, with new eyes and a fresh understanding each time" (207). Pi's literary longing indirectly parallels to the author-narrator's hunger for a Story that has a spark of life to it.

Believers would say that their respective religious texts are like the book that Pi wishes to have. The Christian could read the Bible over and over with new eyes and a fresh understanding each time. The stories within the Bible are never ending in the respect that they are eternal (Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:18). Pi and Martel's hunger for a Story connects story to religion.

Hunger is so important because it is a road-sign theme that points towards faith, the central theme of the text. Hunger reminds us that we are physical and spiritual just as we are both intrinsically creative and rational. To sacrifice or deny our creativity or our faith is to sacrifice or deny a part of ourselves—the part of ourselves that cares about love and hope in the face of a world full of immense suffering and evil. Faith demands our physicality and our spirit, so a story that teaches you to hunger is a story that has the potential to expand your capacity for faith.

### **Faith**

The theme of the “better story” and the climatic retort, “So it is with God,” undeniably make faith the crowning motif of the text. The guiding principle to Pi’s poly-religious identity is the following word from Mahatma Gandhi: “All religions are true...” (*Life of Pi* 69). Pi’s faith journey is closely associated with secondary motifs like suffering and love. We can glean a more comprehensive understanding of Pi’s faith by understanding it in the context of his thoughts on suffering and love.

Pi’s story begins with a word on suffering. The first chapter of the novel opens with the sentence: “My suffering left me sad and gloomy” (3). Pi suffers for many reasons. He suffers because he lost his family, and he had to endure hardships on the Pacific for 227 days. He suffers from the fact that he and Richard Parker did not say goodbye. He suffers because the Japanese men did not believe his story. He suffers hunger and then grief after he kills his first fish. Pi suffers because he watched the zebra die, watched the sailor die, watched his mother’s murder, and then he murdered and cannibalized the cook himself. To bring himself back to a sense of life after so much suffering, Pi seeks refuge in “academic study and the mindful practice of religion” (3). His faith and his studies provide him an escape from brutal memories.

The most brutal and poignant moments of suffering in Pi's story are found in his second narrative, the story without the animals. These brutal moments are directly foreshadowed by events in the first story.

The moment that Pi acted most brutally was the moment that he killed and butchered the second story cook. This act is foreshadowed by Pi's interaction with the first story, blind French cannibal. When Pi converses with the Frenchman he tells him that the man is "The very definition of an animal" (247). The blind man challenges Pi with a statement that alludes to Christ's words in John 8:7, "So you would throw the first stone, would you?" (247). This provocative religious allusion directly foreshadows the moment that Pi is reduced to the "very definition of an animal" by killing the cook. Pi's diction shows little remorse as he remembers indulging in the momentary and soothing nature of revenge. His matter of fact narrative almost hints sensations of sadistic pleasure. When he concludes this brief second story narrative, Pi does not excuse it as anything other than evil, and this evil clearly still lingers in Pi's words. The scary truth about evil is that "one can get used to anything," even to becoming comfortable with evil (185).

Pi's encounter with the blind Frenchman is a pertinent example of extreme suffering and hunger. It is an example of the absurdity of human suffering too, because the Frenchman is "Beckett in the middle of the Pacific" ("How I Wrote..."). The Frenchman is a symbol of the death man's spirit through his complete regression into the most evil senses of his animality. Pi's encounter with the Frenchman is directly followed by his exceptional botanical discovery: the carnivorous algae island. The island appears to be a reprieve from Pi's suffering because it answers the desperate scarcity that he was experiencing with physical comfort and plenty.



The pleasures that the algae island offer are a mirage. The pleasures are latently murderous. Pi realizes the murderous capacity of the island and grimly decides, “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” (*Life of Pi* 283). The island of comfort privileges a philosophical worldview that is only concerned with maximizing pleasure and mitigating pain. To stay on the island was to enjoy a sort of pseudo-safety, the company of meerkats, and the joy of training Richard Parker for a circus. The algae Island is an unbelievable encounter, just as Pi’s encounter with the Frenchman is unbelievable. They are supposed to be unbelievable. Symbols do not need to be believable. Both the Frenchman and the Island are symbols of spiritual death. One is obviously grotesque on the surface, and the other is just as grotesque underneath the surface of appearances.

There is, as Pi states, a “measure of madness that moves life in strange but savage ways” (85). This measure of madness turns Pi into an animal on a lifeboat, killing to survive. It also turns Pi into an animal on an island, living lonely to survive. There is, also, a measure of madness that moves life in strange but loving ways.

In the midst of his suffering on the lifeboat there were moments that Pi found it difficult to have faith in God because “sometimes it was so hard to love” (208). Pi explains: “God’s ark was a jail. God’s wide acres were slowly killing me. God’s ear didn’t seem to be listening” (209). These statements are common despair statements. Though Pi never actually asks this, despair tends to ask, “Where is God in the midst of my suffering?” Despair is a turning inward. Despair forgets to love because “despair [is] a heavy blackness that let[s] no light in or out. It is a hell beyond expression...” (209). Pi’s finds it natural that in the midst of his despair—in his bereft and desperate state—that he should turn to God (284). Pi acknowledges that God is

sovereign over suffering and that he is present always. In contrast to Pi's faith, Martel believes that secularism does not make sense of suffering: "subject to disease and to suffering, suddenly reason is just a tool that doesn't help you...[but faith makes] suffering a small part of the canvas of a bigger picture that you do not see" ("Big Think Interview...").

Pi responds to suffering with faith and love, and his response contrasts with that of his biology teacher, Mr. Kumar. Mr. Kumar was a childhood polio survivor, and when he was a young boy, "he lived in a bed, racked with polio. [He] asked himself every day 'Where is God?' 'Where is God?' 'Where is God?' God never came..." (28). The difference between Pi and Mr. Kumar is that Pi is not troubled by God's absence, he is troubled by God's silence. The difference is slight, since many consider God's silence to be a sign of his absence. But the difference is important enough that it is worth noticing, because Pi considers polio to be a terrible disease since it can "kill God in a man" (28). Mr. Kumar did not have the perspective that Pi had, that his suffering was taking place on in a grand setting—that he is finite and insignificant—that his suffering did not fit anywhere (177).

Pi's statement, "I would go on loving," (209) is charged with multiplicity in meaning. It not only means that he would go on loving God and loving Richard Parker, but it also means that he would continue to have faith and hope. Pi's hopeful suffering enabled him to keep faith in God and faith in life alive. His faith allowed him to hope in salvation. To love, according to Pi, in a sense meant to have faith.

Pi's firm grasp on his faith in the first story taught him to love his neighbor, Richard Parker. Pi's loss of hope in the second story leads him to destroy his neighbor. When truth is applied to ethical actions then the first story is true. When truth is divorced from ethics, then the second story occurs. Our actions, ethical or unethical, reflect our faith or lack thereof.

Martel indicates that without faith, our dreams are worthless and our imaginations will die on the “alter of crude reality” (xii). The authorial perspective enhances the thematic by placing *Life of Pi* in dialogue with other texts. The authorial perspective is a model of reflective action that Martel establishes beyond his novel. It is his solution to creating a culture with faith and dreams worth living.

### **The Authorial Perspective**

*Fiction, art in general, is the forum of all possibilities, the agora where ideas of every kind assemble. And so the essential need [is] for the thinking person to dip into art regularly, because in art all of life is discussed and displayed, from its blandest, most conventional manifestation to its most heinous to its most idealistic. The seed of wisdom is planted from contemplating this vast display not only of what life should be but of what life is. To shun art, then, is to shun living beyond the narrow confines of one's own experience. To plunge into art, on the other hand, is to live multiple lives. Art is a microscope or a telescope, either way making other realities, other worlds, other choices clear to us. –Yann Martel (“Book Number 67...”)*

The authorial perspective comes from the idea that literature is conversational, and to plunge into that conversation is not only to live multiple lives, but to see unity and differences from multiple perspectives. By its nature, this perspective illustrates that truth is conversational, and multiple perspectives create a story. The authorial perspective is not a biographical reading. It is an intertextual analysis between an author's novel and his literary criticism. This perspective promises to reveal Martel's literary values and how these values translate into *Life of Pi*.

On Saturday 14 April 2007, Yann Martel made a vow to mail Stephen Harper, the (now former) Prime Minister of Canada, one book every two weeks until the end of his term “to make suggestions to his stillness” (“The Story Behind...”). With every book that Martel sent, he also enclosed a letter explaining his selection of the week. Martel faithfully recorded every letter, inscription, and response on a blog entitled, *What is Stephen Harper Reading?* Altogether, Martel sent Mr. Harper one hundred and one letters critiquing and praising literature that is loved around the globe. For the purposes of this argument, we will explore “Letter 67: *Waiting for the Barbarians*,” and “Letter 14: *The Little Prince*.” The themes that these books impressed upon

Martel are simple and profound, and the literary values reflected in the praise Martel gives these books are evidenced in *Life of Pi*.

### **Book Number 67: Waiting for the Barbarians**

According to this letter, J.M. Coetzee is Martel's "favorite living writer." Martel's letter briefly summarizes and praises Coetzee's story. The stylistic choices that Martel praises Coetzee for are evident in Martel's own writing style. Both strive for deliberate minimalistic diction, and they both employ vivid descriptive imagery, even of the grotesque. Coetzee characterizes with the macrocosm of National, Empire ethics in mind, but Martel primarily focuses on the individual ethics of his characters. *Barbarians* reveals that broken, evil empires are made of morally broken individuals who brutally break others in acts of senseless evil. *Pi* reveals that individuals are morally broken from the start, whether or not they live within the political system of an empire or the smaller hierarchy of a lifeboat.

Martel's critique of Coetzee's *Barbarians* reveals three of Martel's literary values: the morally engaging aspect of stories, the wide berth of literary conversation that writers develop their ideas within, and the importance of originality.

In this particular letter, Martel's summary was quite thorough. He focuses on the barbarism of the nameless Empire, especially in the way that the officials from the Third Bureau treat the un-barbaric barbarians. The text morally engages readers over matters of torture—*torture*—and man's "descent into moral (and physical) hell" ("Book Number 67..."). This descent is not unlike the struggles and descents that Pi suffers on his journey, though his struggles are very different. Even though the brutality of Pi's second story resembles the terror of *Barbarians* more than the first story does, the first narrative does what the second does not—it makes Pi realize how close to the brink of hopelessness he comes. Pi says, "I love you, Richard

Parker. If I didn't have you now, I don't know what I would do. I don't think I would make it. No, I wouldn't I would die of hopelessness" (*Life of Pi* 236). Whether readers are engaged with the literary world of *Barbarians* or *Pi*, they are engaged in stories that tug the imaginative powers of one's empathy. These stories dwell in moral complexities, and the questions that these stories raise do not have straightforward right and wrong answers.

After Martel summarizes *Barbarians*, he begins to tell Mr. Harper about "where writers get their ideas." Martel, like Cotezee, got his idea from another book. According to Martel, *Barbarians* is very much like Buzzati's *The Tartar Steppe*. Martel drew the premise of *Pi* from Moacyr Scliar's *Max and the Cats*. All four stories are unique, and though they have basic similarities, they are essentially different because the authors communicated different messages to their audience. Like any exemplary writer, Martel did not stop with Sclair. He drew inspiration from "other books, on religion, on animal behavior and zoo biology, on survival at sea..." and autobiography; "but, there's something grander afoot in fiction than mere autobiography" ("Book Number 67..."). Many stories, many factual perspectives, and much research went into the fabric of *Life of Pi*. *Pi*'s story is a great conversation made out of many stories and many hours of research.

This creative conversation fosters communities of originality. One of Martel's highest literary and civic values is the artful life, because "the cost of an artless life is that in being fed no originality, [a] person's sense of individuality is eroded. Which is not only sad, but dangerous, since the citizen whose precious individuality is not nourished is more subject the claims of demagogues and tyrants" ("Book Number 67..."). In *Barbarians* this meant that men like colonel Joll were given the unspoken authority by unnourished individuals to torture others. In *Life of Pi*, this value is not reflected in the actual story as much as it is reflected in the author's

note. At the very end of the note, Martel charges his readers to support their country's artists. As his close friend, Alice Kuipers explains, Martel makes this civic charge because "like Charlotte the spider [from *Charlotte's Web*], he believes that the written word can shape lives and save lives."

One life-shaping literary influence on my life was *The Little Prince*. Now that we've discussed one of Martel's favorite authors, his thoughts on one of my favorite authors will expand our insights into the abstract, metaphoric, and intuitive values that literature cultivates.

#### **Book Number 14: The Little Prince**

Martel's fourteenth letter to Stephen Harper is short and heartfelt. He focuses his letter on the theme of taming, since Saint-Exupéry's novel is partly a story about taming, or "creating ties" (Saint-Exupéry 59). The little prince meets a fox, who teaches him about what it means to tame and be tamed. It is a lesson in friendship. This lesson is very similar to the lesson that Pi learns with Richard Parker. Just as the little prince tamed the fox, so Pi tamed the tiger.

As both the little prince and Pi learn, one of the hardest aspects of creating ties is the inevitable goodbye. The fox provides the prince with an important secret to help him through their separation, and Martel alludes to this secret in his letter: "Le renard fait cadeau d'une très importante leçon au Petit Prince, mais je ne vais pas la répéter. Je vous laisse la redécouvrir." ("Book Number 14..."). The secret of the fox is "quite simple: One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes... You become responsible forever for what you've tamed" (Saint-Exupéry 63). Martel imparts this lesson of taming into *Life of Pi* through Richard Parker. The memory of Richard Parker haunts Pi. He has become responsible for that which he has tamed.

The literary value that this letter reflects is the importance of proper conclusion. Pi's goodbye with Richard Parker makes him weep, like the fox wept, because there was no opportunity to say goodbye. Pi believes in form, in meaningful shape, and in the importance of "concluding things properly" (*Life of Pi* 285). He hates that his name represents the infinite and opposes rational values. So, he gives his story firm form through other means, like telling the story through precisely one hundred chapters.

Martel and Saint-Exupéry give form to mysterious stories, but they leave the resolution of these mysteries with their readers. The mystery of *The Little Prince* is in the sky. Everything changes depending on the answer to one question, "Has the sheep eaten the flower or not?" The mystery of *Pi* lies in the sea. From the ordinary perspective, everything changes depending on whether or not the tiger survived in a lifeboat with a boy.

### **Conclusion**

Multiple perspectives create a story. The reader's ordinary and cognitive perspectives contribute meaning to the text. The thematic perspective shows how the text itself is a nexus of meaning. The authorial perspective moves beyond the scope of the text, and the reader to show how the text belongs to a larger network of stories that have shaped the author's literary values. These values explain what the author was trying to accomplish through his text and in what ways he was trying to challenge the reader's perspective. All four of these complete perspectives are themselves incomplete perspectives on truth. Truth is not flat. It is dynamic, like a sculpture that can be viewed from different angles. In order to understand the sculpture more completely you need to walk around it and see it from multiple perspectives.

The ordinary, cognitive, thematic, and authorial perspectives each look at this statue from a different angle. These angles are in dialogue with one another, speaking from opposite sides of

the statue. For example, the ordinary perspective may only be able to see a boy on a lifeboat, but the thematic and authorial perspectives speak from a different angle informing the ordinary that there is a Bengal tiger behind the boy. Let's say the authorial perspective sees the profile of this large statue that depicts the entire narrative of *Pi*. This profiled perspective sees both the boy and the tiger in the lifeboat, and is able to confirm that both the ordinary the thematic speak truth. The authorial perspective may look at the statue a little bit closer and see the inscriptions that the author made on the base of the statue explaining why he sculpted two stories into one lifeboat. Furthermore, when the authorial speaks to the thematic he will see a more complete connection between the visual text and the inscription. The conversation between the various perspectives continues. Each perspective enriches the conversation of the other perspectives. You need to look at the metaphoric statue of *Life of Pi* from all of these different angles to understand the truths that lie within the text.

It is important to pause here and remember Jackendoff's caution, do not mix perspectives because "if you start mixing perspectives, you end up with weird assertions" like the Gulf War never happened, and "there is no such thing as truth...and so on" (246). Jackendoff does not state a practical example of what it would look like to mix perspectives, but mixing perspectives seems to resonate with reductionism or the slippery slope fallacy. If you were to mix perspectives when interpreting *Life of Pi* you might say that the tiger does not exist at all; therefore, all the factual details that Martel includes about tigers and taming tigers are untruths that really function as metaphors for something else. You can avoid committing this aesthetic error by remembering which perspective lens you are looking through and which perspective lens you are talking to as you interpret a text.



The perspective on perspectives that is offered in this paper adds to the conversation of perspectives that have already been established on *Life of Pi*. Unlike other literary critiques, this analysis considers the problems with the ordinary perspective that most critics write from. One can typically tell which story a critic believes based upon which story their argument favors. There are even some critics who avoid entering the debate over which story is true altogether. This analysis reveals how all of these different critical perspectives can coordinate together in the midst of a literary art gallery in which *Life of Pi* is the current exhibition. The ordinary, thematic, and authorial perspectives all work together to create a story and infuse that story with life. After that story is published it is surrounded by a conversation of literary critics, readers, and sometimes movie goers who all converse over the truths they see within the story from the angle that they are standing at, and this is important because it reveals that truth is conversational. There are times when it is appropriate to consider that truth is not always defined by error, sometimes it is more complex.

Viewing truth as complex through many perspectives can opens up new opportunities for further research on *Life of Pi*. One such important perspective that has not been explored on an academic level from a literary point of view is the Biblical perspective. Pi believes that “religion is about our dignity, not our depravity” (*Life of Pi* 71), but the Biblical perspective begins in Genesis with man’s depravity. Pi’s perspective on God and religion is incomplete. Many Christians would probably say that Pi’s religious beliefs are dangerous. However, danger presupposes fear. From the biblical perspective, Christians should not fear to engage with Pi’s faith. Pi’s faith is incomplete because it lacks truth, the complete truth of the Gospel of Christ.

The syncretism of Martel’s text also gives Christian’s a unique literary opportunity. It allows the Christian voice in the literary conversation by recognizing that a Christian’s unique

faith perspective has truths to offer. This opportunity should not be taken lightly, and more analysis and research explicating *Life of Pi* from the biblical perspective is necessary for the Christian community to fully engage with this text. As research is produced in this area, it is important that Christians keep the perspectival perspective in mind, and let that perspective remind them to approach the conversation with humility. The biblical perspective should have an advantage, because it *should* presuppose humility, even though Christians are notoriously hypocritical in this area. A humble attitude is one that engages the conversation by listening to the perspectives of others without destroying them with presuppositions and stereotypes. All perspectives considered, those who wholeheartedly seek for truth will find truth by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Artists like Yann Martel imbibe culture with dreams and a longing for faith. Martel warns readers in his authors note, “If we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar of crude reality and we end up believing in nothing and having worthless dreams” (xii). The longings and dreams that artists give us make life come alive and worth living in the midst of a second story world filled with an immense amount of suffering, cruelty, and injustice.

Dreams and belief go hand in hand, because dreams have to do with hope, and you have to hope in something. And, that is why the primary message of the overall text is, give faith, God, and the Better Story a chance. As Pi’s survival guide advises, “The spirit above all else counts” (167). And, only faith can grow our spirit to a capacity for love beyond our animality, for truth beyond our reason, for humility beyond our pride, and for a perspective beyond our ordinary.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Jackendoff, especially pages 245-257 in chapter 43, for insight into understanding how multiple perspectives enable us to comprehensively understand the meaning of a word.

Jackendoff uses the word “sunsets” as an example.

<sup>2</sup> The author’s note also briefly alludes to other important perspectives that go into the creation of the novel—Pi’s perspective: “It seemed natural that Mr. Patel’s story should be told mostly in the first person—in his voice and through his eyes;” The official and professional perspective on Pi’s story from the Japanese ministry officials: “I am grateful to three officials of exemplary professionalism: Mr. Kazuhiko Oda, lately of the Japanese Embassy in Ottawa; Mr. Hiroshi Watanabe, of Oika Shipping Company; and, especially, Mr. Tomohiro Okamoto, of the Japanese Ministry of Transport;” The real author-author’s perspective and his philosophy on inspiration: “I am indebted to Mr. Moacyr Scliar, for the spark of life;” National perspectives: “Lastly I would like to express my sincere gratitude to that great institution, the Canada Council for the arts...;” and, lastly, the reader’s perspective: “If we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination...” (*Life of Pi* xii).

<sup>3</sup> Even if the story had no fantastical or coincidental occurrences, it is difficult to believe that a sixteen year old boy could survive on a lifeboat with an adult Bengal tiger for 227 days,

<sup>4</sup> *The Raft of the Medusa* (Salon of 1819) by Theodore Gericault is a real life example of the brutality that occurred in Pi’s second story. According to art historian, Severine Laborie, Gericault was inspired to paint this work after hearing survivor accounts from the wreck of a French Royal Navy frigate that “ran...aground on a sandbank.” Due to a shortage of lifeboats 150 souls were left behind to build a raft, and only ten survived the next thirteen days at sea. Cannibalism was one of the brutalities that ensued during these thirteen castaway days.

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<sup>5</sup> The word *bamboozle* was the one “preparation” that the author-narrator had “for the rich, noisy, functioning mess of India” (vii).

<sup>6</sup> Literary Critic, Werner Wolf argues that the word “better” has “three meanings” in the context of Pi’s narrative: Psychological, Philosophical/Religious, and Aesthetic (115-118).

<sup>7</sup> According to Nietzsche, Man is stuck in a web of lies and is unable to honorably pursue Truth, let alone know Truth: “In Man this art of dissimulation reaches its peak: here deception, flattery, lies and deceit, the talking behind someone’s back, the representing, the living in borrowed glory, the wearing of masks, the euphemistic convention, the playing out of roles for others and for oneself, in short the perpetual fluttering around that *one* flame of vanity is so much the rule and the law, that almost nothing is more inconceivable than that human beings could ever be subject to a pure and honorable drive towards Truth” (50).

<sup>8</sup> Originally conceptualized by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). See the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* entry for the noun “deconstruction.”

<sup>9</sup> Pi says, “Reason is the very best tool kit. Nothing beats reason for keeping tigers away. But be excessively reasonable and you risk throwing out the universe with the bathwater.” (*Life of Pi* 298).

<sup>10</sup> For a more comprehensive explanation of this process see Jackendoff, chapters 29-31. These chapters introduce discourse on cognitive metaphysics and our neural organizational system, which is ordered by reference files.

<sup>11</sup> See Jackendoff, chapter 33, for a more comprehensive explanation about the “problems for an ordinary perspective on truth” (191). For more details on the Sherlock Holmes example, pay special attention to page 193.

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<sup>12</sup> Pi says, “I wept heartily over this poor little deceased soul. It was the first sentient being I had ever killed. I was now a killer. I was now as guilty as Cain. I was sixteen years old, a harmless boy, bookish and religious, and now I had blood on my hands. It’s a terrible burden to carry. All sentient life is sacred. I never forgot to include this fish in my prayers” (183).

<sup>13</sup> See Mensch for a detailed analysis on the division between animality and divinity in *Life of Pi*.

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