

In Yann Martel's novel, *'Life of Pi'*, an Indian boy on the cusp of adulthood named, at request, Pi Patel finds himself stranded aboard a lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean after the sinking of the ship which he and his family had been aboard. The ensuing ordeal takes the young man not just on a physical and psychological journey, but also to true spiritualisation. The resulting trauma causes Pi to invent a series of possible events that the reader is free to interpret however they want, eventually coming to question the nature of truth as proposed by Martel. The vast majority of the novel entails Pi's harrowing recount of his struggle for survival with only the company of a "royal Bengal tiger", which might be deemed unrealistic to most readers. However, Pi is coerced to retell his story in a more realistic manner, devoting a single chapter to the "true" tale of his isolation and psychological decline. Ultimately, Martel positions the reader to decide which of the stories is not only more believable, but which is "the better story". Such is the nature of truth.

The human mind comes to terms with tragedy by replacing true events with those that are easier to handle. Such was Pi's own crime as the number of occupants in the lifeboat dwindled and the fear of isolation set upon his young mind. From this fear, animalistic qualities were adopted to his human companions that complimented their personal traits. Martel's use of anthropomorphism was perhaps a way of placing the reader in Pi's position, whereby tragic events distort the truth for the sake of comfort; better known as "the better story". The reality of Pi's situation, as in his sharing of the raft with four animals, is supported by Martel's explanations of animalistic behaviour in the first part of the novel. The reader who questions Pi's relationship with a "450 pound royal Bengal tiger" will no doubt recall Martel's description of the alpha-omega relationship in a pack of animals. This information, apparently meaningless at the time, foreshadows future event in order to manipulate the reader's understanding of the truth. Therefore, it is solely up to the reader's interpretation of the events proposed by Martel to discover their own vision of what is the truth.

More often than not the drama and spectacle of a story must be sacrificed for the underlying truth of the events. This is epitomised in the original story by the "floating... acidic island" and the doubt it creates in the reader's mind. However, the neglect to make any mention to this island in the recount turns the coin the other way, proving that certain events were inflated by Pi in order to tell a better story. It can be assumed, therefore, that had Pi found land during his voyage that the reason to leave was not its apparent "carnivorous" nature, but instead by his own free will or resolve to reach the mainland. This is far more realistic, tying in with the trend of the second story of "dry, yeastless factuality", and directly opposed the mafic realism of the original tale. Furthermore, Pi's religious belief is a prominent part of his identity and, as intended by Martel, plays a major role in his voyage. However, he also relies heavily upon science as a "means of explaining the [true] nature of God", as is shown in the second story. In most religious texts certain events, although based on truth, are built upon to strip the deeds done of any mortal achievement and replace them with divine attributes. Martel has done the same through use of Biblical allusion in the first version of the story. Pi is linked to Jesus Christ in his struggle, foremost as he is forced to wait for "three days and three nights" to enter the lifeboat, as Jesus had done between his death and resurrection. Also, the presence of Richard Parker, embodied by the tiger, is metaphoric of the Devil in his attempts to persuade Jesus. In this way, Martel has created the first story as a kind of Bible, wherein a young heroic figure committed what was thought to be impossible. Therefore the second story is simply a

bare version of the Bible, as though Christ was not the son of God, but merely a great man. The reader is offered these allusions and is free to decide for themselves whether the truth lies in Pi's heroism, or rather his will to survive.

The truth is not simply a goal to be reached along a linear path, but instead is found to be holding the weight of each and every factor that might effect its very existence. Martel's construction of 'Life of Pi' convolutes the search for truth to the point that even when found it remains inexplicable. Through use of a clever author's note prior to the novel itself, Martel immediately positions the reader believe the story he is about to tell. The major contribution to the following question of the truth is the conflict between science and religion that resonates throughout the story from the first page. However, Martel further divides the readers by creating a protagonist who follows three separate religions as well as accepting scientific fact. The conflict within the first part of the novel foreshadows what is to happen later as the ship sinks into the Pacific Ocean. Such allusions to tragedy, however brief, come in forms such as the mention of Pi's thesis on sixteenth-century Kabbalist Isaac Luria, who developed the cosmological theory entitled "Tsimtsum". Martel deliberately refers to this, furthermore in the name of the ship that takes Pi and his family across the Pacific Ocean. Luria's theory ties in with the motif of religion, as it dictates that prior to creating the universe, God contracted to make room for what came to be five planes of existence, all borne upon vessels of light. This is translated into Martel's work as the *Tsimtsum* sinks in order to make room for Pi o invent his own version of such an event and those to follow. Also, the five occupants of the lifeboat (according to the first story) are metaphoric of the five vessels of light. Accordingly, Richard Parker is a part of Pi, meaning that two separate planes of existence exist within him – hence, two separate stories, Martel's construction of each aspect of the novel allows each reader to question what they personally see to be the truth of the story, inevitably resulting in a never-ending amount of interpretations of the life of Pi.

The question of truth permeates Yann Martel's 'Life of Pi' by means of a multi-faceted explanation of a single person's struggle to survive. However, the answer to what actually occurred on the 227 days at sea lies within each reader in the open-ended tale, resting solely upon the desire to remain with the stale reality or to expand into the magic realism of Pi's ordeal. Martel left the answer to the reader by offering two separate stories that equally propose the question of the truth. The first version of Pi's voyage involves inflated events in which humans were anthropomorphised to reflect true embodiments of their animalistic natures. Conversely, the second story offers a stark reality that blatantly retells the same account but with the spectacle and drama whittled down to bare truth. Finally, Martel allows the reader to accept aspects of both stories as the truth and form their own idea of what is real. By leaving an endless trail of possibilities for the reader to navigate alone, Martel has proven that truth only exists in the eye of the beholder.