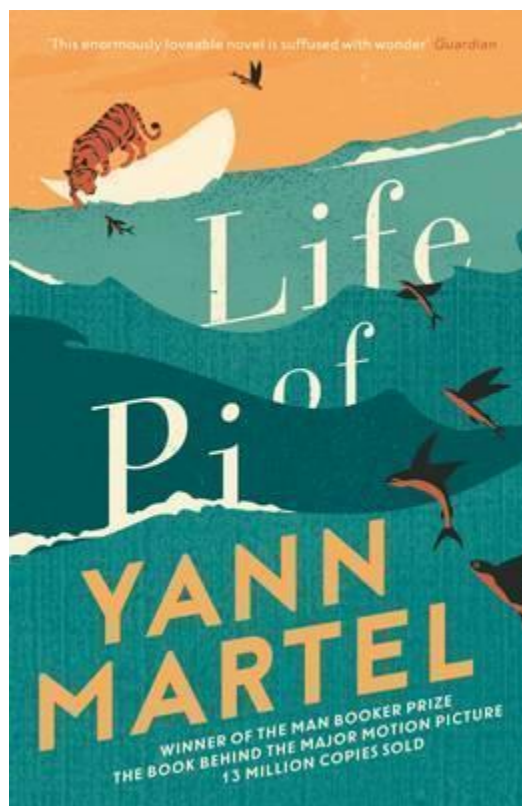


## The Theme of Isolation in Yann Martel's *Life Of Pi*

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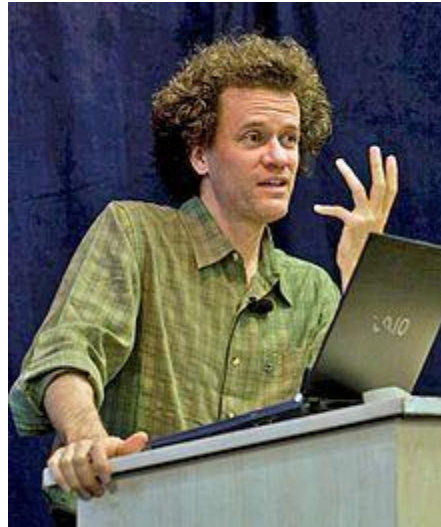
### Abstract

The novel *Life of Pi* is a Canadian fantasy adventure novel, written by Yann Martel. He was exposed to many different cultures as a child, something that would show in his works, later in life. The novel *Life of Pi* won him the “Man Booker” prize in 2002. The novel *Life of Pi* is all about an Indian boy Pi and his survival at sea with only a tiger as his companion on a life boat. The paper deals with

how Pi survives at sea for 277 days with Richard Parker, the tiger at sea and the many struggles he went through.

**Keywords:** Survival, Struggle, Yann Martel, Life of Pi, Canadian Literature

### **Yann Martel**



Yann Martel

Courtesy: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yann\\_Martel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yann_Martel)

Yann Martel was born in 1963 in Spain to Canadian parents who were part of the diplomatic corps. As a result of parents' work, he was exposed to many different cultures as a child, something that would show in his work later in life. Martel's family eventually returned to Canada, and he attended high school and college there. He majored in Philosophy but was not sure what his path in life would be. He tried various jobs, including landscaping and working in restaurants. Eventually, Martel decided to devote himself to a writing career. Martel traveled the world, visiting countries like India and France, to gain inspiration for his writing. Yann Martel wrote several books, including a book of short stories and a feminist novel, both of which were commercial flops. So, he decided to travel the world to experience life and gain inspiration. After traveling in India in 1999, and reading Moacyr Scilar's *Max and the Cats*, Martel was inspired to write his most famous novel, *Life of Pi*, a novel about an Indian boy, Pi, and his survival at sea with a tiger on a lifeboat. The novel won him the Man Booker Prize in 2002. Yann

Martel's *Life of Pi* is a story within a story. The "frame" of the novel involves the incredible story that is told by the narrator (Pi), to the Author while living in India.

### **A Survivor of Ship Wreck**

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* is the story of a young man who survives a harrowing shipwreck and months in a lifeboat with a large Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. The beginning of the novel covers Pi's childhood and youth. His family owns and runs a zoo in their hometown in India, and his father is emphatic about being aware of the wildness and true nature of animals, namely that they are not meant to be treated like or thought of as people. Early in Pi's life, his father realizes that his son's naiveté about the tiger in their care may put Pi in danger. To illustrate how true and real the threat is, he forces the children to watch the tiger kill and eat a goat. When Pi is a teenager, his family decides to sell the animals and immigrate to Canada on a cargo ship named Tsimtsum. A terrible storm occurs during the voyage, and when Pi was excited to see the storm, goes onto the ship's deck, he is was forced to enter into a lifeboat by the crew. The next morning, he finds himself in the company of a badly injured zebra, a hyena, and an orangutan named Orange Juice. Hiding out of sight, under the canvas of the lifeboat, is the tiger Richard Parker. The hyena wounds and eats the zebra, then goes after Orange Juice. The orangutan puts up a good fight, but the hyena ultimately kills her. Richard Parker finally makes himself known by killing and eating the hyena. Now only Pi and Richard Parker starts to survive on the lifeboat.

### **Pi and Richard Parker**

Pi and Richard Parker survived together, for 277 days. Following the deaths of the other animals, Pi identifies the stocks available in the lifeboat and uses what he finds. He identifies thirst as his greatest danger: Drinking water is his—and Richard Parker's—greatest need. And was able to survive himself temporarily on the lifeboat's supplies. He also slowly transfers from a devoted vegetarian to a hunter and a carnivore. He at first thinks that the lifeboat's food supplies contain animal fats, but he eventually begins killing, murdering, and eating sea turtles and fish without any thought. Pi also challenges the reality of trying to share the lifeboat with Richard Parker. All of Pi's efforts, then, become focused on finding a way not just for himself to eat, drink, and sleep, but also for Richard Parker. In his first step toward this goal, Pi uses the lifeboat's oars and lifejackets to construct a mass that he chains to the lifeboat and begins to inhabit, putting him out of the immediate reach of Richard Parker, who remains on the lifeboat. Pi keeps a paper as a way to mark the days and weeks. He follows a careful daily

schedule to maintain his stability, humanity, and self-respect. And he also writes down what has happened to him on a small piece of paper that he seals in a bottle and casts into the water. Pi thinks of a plan to train Richard Parker, both for his own protection from the tiger and to mark the territory. He maps out a training method in a list of steps, all of which he centers on using Richard Parker's own seasickness and an orange whistle which he finds in the lifeboat. Over time, the tiger begins to associate just the sound of the whistle with his seasickness, allowing Pi to maintain his own territory. They both become occupants of the lifeboat, with Pi maintaining his territory. Upset at not being rescued, Pi is somewhat comforted by Richard Parker's apparent indifference and expresses great love for the tiger, realizing that they are all each other has.

### **Managing the Fear of the Tiger and Other Odds**

Pi cannot give in completely to his fear of the tiger; doing so would cause him to panic and either dive into the shark-infested water or lose his concentration and become open to the tiger. One way that Pi manages with his fear of the tiger is through language. Another way that Pi manages with his situation is by constantly making lists. He makes a list of supplies in the lifeboat, a list of possible plans to conquer Richard Parker, a list of steps for train Richard Parker, and a daily schedule list. Making lists is also a means by which Pi can retain his humanity and self-respect—and not give in to acting like a wild animal. His constant focus is on the difference between Richard Parker and himself. He recognizes that his two potential downfalls will be forgetting that he is a person and acting only on nature and fear, and forgetting that Richard Parker is an animal and allowing affection, the projection of human traits, and innocence to compromise his ability to protect himself.

Pi also uses writing to manage with his situation. He writes the facts of his journey in a diary and also writes the specifics of his situation, his name, and who to contact about his nightmare on a small piece of paper that he places in a bottle and trowes into the water. Pi's awareness that he needs to ignore his fear for the sake of his own self-protection features heavily in this novel. He says that fear is uncivilized and has no morality, and he cements his decision to no longer allow fear to affect how he relates to his current situation. He rejects fear and dismiss it, in part by personifying it and deciding that he wants nothing to do with such a "person."

## Credit for the Tiger and Richard Parker

After choosing Richard Parker as his companion instead of fear, Pi goes on to credit the tiger with relieving his anxiety. Pi can identify, analyze, train, and control Richard Parker, all of which he can't do with fear or his own base natures. His concentrated effort on training, feeding, providing for, avoiding, and working with Richard Parker is the main reason Pi remains watchful and focused, which is what eventually saves his life. This irony—focusing on a Bengal tiger in order to save oneself—is one of the novel's countless natural contradictions. Once he has become an active hunter, a supplier of water and comfort, and the main force controlling Richard Parker's actions and life, Pi sees himself, truly, as the god of the boat and Richard Parker's divinity. He pronounces Richard Parker his partner in an imaginary circus performance, his complete dependent, and a being separate from but knotted with his own fate—all of which make Pi the overseer and commander of the tiger's existence.

## Pi, Tiger and the Fish

The two become truly united in a moment of pain and experience. Pi realizes this and declares his incredible and undying love for the animal. Pi's forced break from his lifelong vegetarianism is a major contradiction of his identity. His belief that taking another's life is wrong is the foundation of his life's philosophy. It is naturally tested when he has to not only feed himself, but also satisfy Richard Parker's hunger—and thereby keep himself alive. The change occurs when a flying fish literally delivers itself to Pi. Although Pi realizes he must end the fish's life, he wrestles with the decision, describing his unwillingness, empathy, disgust, sorrow, and the eventual automatic-twisting act of killing it. At the end of this section, he confirms that a person can get used to anything. He makes good on this declaration: After killing the fish, he no longer fights with or appears troubled by killing animals. His hunting and killing continue throughout the journey, and he remarks only on the volume, the variety, the methods, and other practical matters, such as when he tries to sooth his feet with the blood of several meerkats that he kills on the carnivorous island. Although Pi becomes very casual about his killing, he occasionally changes between pride and dislike as he becomes a talented and skilled hunter. At one point he even kills a turtle and drinks its blood, becoming literally blood-thirsty.

## Color Orange

In *Life of Pi*, the color orange symbolizes hope and survival. Just before the scene in which the Tsimtsum sinks, the narrator describes visiting the adult Pi at his home in Canada and meeting his family. Richard Parker, who helps Pi to survive during his 277 days at sea. As the Tsimtsum sinks, Chinese crewmen give Pi a lifejacket with an orange whistle; on the boat, he finds an orange lifebuoy. The whistle, and tiger all help Pi survive, just as Orange Juice the orangutan provides a measure of emotional support that helps the boy maintain hope in the face of horrific tragedy.

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