Believability on the Axes of Structuralism: Yan Martel's *Life of Pi*

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ABSTRACT

Elaborating on parallel, substitutional and correlated elements of the narrative in Yan Martel's Life of Pi, this study aims at examining Martel's technique for presenting a believable story in his novel. To discuss the way the believability of Pi's narrative gets solidified, this enquiry takes advantage of the organizing principles of structuralism, namely, the metonymical-syntagmatic and the metaphorical-paradigmatic axes. Attributing the various correlating elements of the novel to these axes shows that what actually makes Pi a reliable narrator and simultaneously his narrative believable are the very parallel structures of the novel.

Keywords: structuralism; metonymical-syntagmatic axis; metaphorical-paradigmatic axis; believability

INTRODUCTION

> *...the nicer knowledge of Belief,*
>
> *that what it believes in is not true.*
>
> *(Wallace Stevens)*

Life of Pi is constructed on a key sentence formulated in the preliminary dialogue of the novel when Francis Adirubasamy, Pi Petal's old swimming guru, directly addresses the Canadian anonymous novelist who has come to India due to the failure in his career and his consequential penury: "I have a story that make you believe in God" (Martel 2002, p. x). So the novel turns toward a test of faith for those who read it. The watchword in this statement is *believe* that attracts attention to the underlying significance of all events of the novel, particularly when it is associated with other two key words: *story* and *God*. Philosophically speaking, as Runes puts it, the word "belief" is used in two different senses: "acquiescence in the existence of objects (e.g. external things, other minds, God, etc.) or assent to the truth of proposition (e.g. scientific, moral, aesthetic, or metaphysical statements)." (1983, p. 36). Runes carefully distinguish these two senses: "The belief in objects is frequently immediate and non-inferential; the belief in propositions usually rests on reflection and inference" (p.36). Bearing this in mind, Adirubasamy's opening statement is a witty invitation to both these senses. It foreshadows that the narrator's attempt to sustain the trustworthiness of the narratives through incorporating parallel structures is a means to make his story so immediate that readers accept it readily as the account of some real events. Meanwhile, it suggests that the belief in God, contrary to common expectation, can be immediate and non-referential: the belief in the existence of God is the direct consequence of not doubting the actuality of events in *Life of Pi*.

The direct indication of Adirubasamy's words is that *Life of Pi* stimulates the belief in God through Pi's story. Pi's later introspection in the novel is in this line, "religions abound with stories" though Father Martine corrects him and remarks, "Their religion [Christianity] had one Story, and to it they came back again and again, over and over. It was story enough for them" (Martel 2002, p.53). The importance of story as a link between God and believers has already been forged in the Bible: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Adirubasamy is on the right path, making use of words to usher his reader into the "Word." Such a connection provides him as the extra-diegetic narrator "that spark [which] brings to life a real story" (Martel 2002, p. viii).

The undertone of the biblical celebration of the Word lends much to the thesis of the current paper. It rules out the possibility that stories are just simple frames that never interfere nor affect its content. It implies that stories are not passive and neutral frames, particularly when they address an issue such as 'belief'. According to Lacey, belief is a 'state' (1996, p.31); therefore, it can acquire the form which contains it. As a result, a story can be structured and narrated in a way that an unbelievable issue becomes believable or vice versa. Believability here means the state of convincing the reader of the potential reality of the narrated events, and is attainable if, as Aristotle puts in his *Poetics*, the plot (in his case tragedy) represents plausible characters, situations, and actions. Therefore, story *per se* can have a crucial effect on the believability of an issue.

This potential control of the stories on their believability is one of the underlying issues of *Life of Pi*. By foregrounding the lack of trust in stories, the novel ironically points us to their trustworthiness. For Okamoto, one of the two Japanese investigators interviewing Pi about the cause of the shipwreck, stories are antonyms of 'straight facts': "in Japanese a story would have an element of *invention* in it" (Martel, p.302). The major preoccupation of the Japanese agents is that the story is made-up stuff and consequently unbelievable. Even Pi, as the major character-narrator in his retrospection on his discourse with Father Martine stresses the unbelievability of stories: "And what a story. The first thing that drew me in was disbelief" (p.53). Despite this stress, Pi's major goal both as an adolescent character and a mature narrator is to establish a believable narrative about his survival when he was shipwrecked in the Pacific Ocean. To achieve the 'believability' of a narrative, at least two points have to be met: how far the events and incidents are essentially believable and how they can be portrayed in the form of a story to be accepted and believed. As a narrator, Pi deals with the first premise. On this level, his story easily arouses doubts both from the narrattees (the Japanese agents, for instance) and the readers. On the larger scale, that is *Life of Pi*, the story is more successful since Martel works on two different grounds; he selects a believable content for his story and engineers the structure of its narrative in a way to increase its persuasive power.

To have a believable story does not require working out a realistic novel that offers a simulacrum of the real world; first of all as Roland Barthes notes, a realistic novel "has nothing to do with reality; it is simply a text that is readable because it is composed entirely of what is already known" (Scholes 1982, p. 12). Secondly, believability can be attained through internal consistency within the fictional construction which works according to its own set of constraints that may not resemble external reality; every fictional world has an internal mechanism with a set of rules that governs the possibility or impossibility of narrative events. The possibility or impossibility of actions within a narrative has nothing to do with the believability of the narrative constructed on those internal rules. Those rules and mechanisms are fairly independent of 'realism'; surely they cannot end in a replica of reality; they can only make a story approximate to reality or diverge from it. Indeed, some stories can be utterly and totally 'unrealistic', yet still be 'believable' because the actions within the fictional world hold true to its internal mechanism.

Assuming that the internal mechanism of any fiction, that is, its narrative structure determines the believability or unbelievability of its story, this study concentrates on the analysis of the narrative framework of *Life of Pi* in order to substantiate the integrity between its narrative structure and the principle of believability. To expose the structure through which this narrative has been constructed and its contribution to the increase in the authenticity and reliability of its content, the following hypothetical question is very helpful: Why does *Life of Pi* not restrain entirely to Pi's story with Pi as the sole narrator or a third-person narrator who recounts Pi's extreme circumstances, enduring 227 days of life on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger on board? In other words, why does the story of the Canadian anonymous novelist –who plays the role of the author-cum-compiler of the excruciating details of Pi's life— and the report of the Japanese agents sent to the Canadian novelist in the closing chapter of the novel have to be limited to Pi's narrative? One straightforward answer for this question is that appending these two narratives to Pi's story solidifies the authenticity of his narrative and increases the believability of his story. This speculation can be proved on two levels: first, with a reference to the method of documentation that has been applied in the novel; second, with the help of the structuralist analysis of the novel, viz, underlining the parallel issues, themes and narratives according to the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes.

DOCUMENTATION, BELIEVABILITY AND VERISIMILITUDE

To increase the reliability of Pi's narrative, the first strategy applied is documentation. This technique provides the "straight facts" (Martel, p.302) the Japanese investigators expect from Pi. The reader has to be ensured that first of all such horrific accidents did occur. Therefore, an anonymous novelist who will collect documents is brought in as an avatar of an implied author to add credibility to the narrative on behalf of an out-of-the-text, real author. This anonymous novelist is a Canadian fellow who, due to poverty, comes to Pondicherry, a small city in India, to complete his already started novel. After a while, accidentally in a teahouse he is invited to listen to the story of an Indian youth Piscine Patel (Pi) who miraculously survived from a shipwreck twenty years ago. Anguished over his recently sputtered, coughed and died novel which was about Portugal, he decides to convert Pi's adventures into the very novel of *Life of Pi*.

Out of one hundred chapters of the novel, eleven chapters (2, 6, 12, 15, 21, 30, 33, 36, 95, and 100) are narrated by the anonymous novelist whose presence in the text is announced by italic fonts. These eleven interjected chapters, which are divided into Part One and Part Three, exclusively deal with the anonymous novelist's interviews with adult Pi who lives in Scarborough, Canada. The novelist is more or less a passive addressee who only records what Pi narrates and scrupulously avoids making any comment on the reliability of Pi and the credibility of his narrative. The points that the anonymous novelist highlights at the very beginning of his record, namely, the existence of "the diary he [Pi]kept during the events" and "the yellowed newspaper clippings that made him briefly, obscurely famous" (Martel, p. xi) strengthen the documentary air of his narration that is underpinned by a report of Pi's contemporary life: his family (his wife, his son Nikhil and daughter Usha), his cooking ability and the interior decoration of his house which looks like a temple with numerous religious artifacts representing Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

Moreover, all of the anonymous novelist's recorded conversations and interactions with Pi are narrated in present tense; through attaching such present-tense descriptions to the text, Pi's identity is established for the reader who is going to follow Pi's courses of action in Part Two of the novel. Indeed, by chapter 36, the end of Part One, the reader is equipped with the necessary information about Pi's current status. Besides, through 29 chapters of Part One (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32,

34, 35), Pi himself divulges some information both about his education in Canada after the shipwreck and his family in Pondicherry before the shipwreck so that when Part Two begins, he sticks to an account of the shipwreck and its aftermath from chapter 37 to 94.

The second strategy applied to increase the believability of Pi's story is the very act of enclosing the report of Okamoto and Chiba, two Japanese agents of the Maritime Department in the Japanese Ministry of Transport, who interview Pi about the cause of the shipwreck. Martel artfully does not only bring the text of their report, but he also encloses the short narrative of chapter 95 in the anonymous novelist's pen about how these two agents wrongly, because of "a fold on the map" (Martel, p.289), went to Tomatan while they were supposed to travel to the town of Tomatlan, on the coast of Mexico, where Pi had landed. The function of this small narrative, which consists of Pi's narrative on his shipwreck and his survival, right after Part Two is to increase the believability of the events Pi has already narrated and emphasize the existence of the official records about the sunken Japanese ship Tsimtsum and its genuine survivor.

To attract the trust of the readers in the reality of the incidents, these two structural techniques are accompanied with the presence of Pi who as an eye-witness to the shipwreck is required to narrate a significant part of the novel, covering his life during the 226-day castaway period. His presence is quite meaningful since it indicates the preference of Pi over other choices such as employing a third-person narrator or even making the Canadian anonymous novelist himself read the diary Pi kept during those critical days on the lifeboat. It is to legitimise the narrative that Pi is selected as the narrator and is allowed to recourse to his diary of those days of the twenty years back. In fact, Pi's confirmation in chapter 89 that "it was the pen that ran out" (Martel, p.240) indicates that the novel's documentation more than his written diary depends on his presence as a witness to the terrible events of those days. The artistic juxtaposition of Pi's running out of pen and his semi-blindness due to starvation and malnourishment necessitates Pi's presence for filling in the gaps for those remaining five chapters of Part Two and in this way enhance the credibility of the entire narrative.

Apart from the three techniques of documentation employed in establishing effectively the identity of the major focaliser (Pi) and the 'reality' of his adventures, another significant approach for building up the believability of the narrative is the integration of various parallel themes, incidents, settings, characters, narrators, authors, readers throughout the text. This cluster of parallelism can be explained via the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of structuralism. In other words, structuralism as a method enables the reader to distinguish the parallel components fused in the novel's structure and perceive their role in inviting the reader to accept the novel's world as a real world.

STRUCTURALISM IN LITERARY STUDIES

One of the frequent reproaches to structuralism in literary criticism is that it fails at the level of the individual text. The opponent critics believe that structuralism does not read the text for the reader. A proper answer to these critics can be summarised in Scholes's observation. He clearly rejects such an attitude and remarks that neither structuralism nor any other method will read the text for the reader. Reading according to him "is personal activity, and there are as many readings of any text as there are readers of it. But all readings are not equally good" (1974, p.142). For a critic like Scholes, structuralism is a method with ideological implications which transcends any particular field or discipline like literary criticism. The point of divergence between structuralism and other schools in literary criticism can be explicated more graphically by focusing on Scholes's adaptation of Roman Jakobson's diagram of act of communication for reading a literary text (Figure 1).
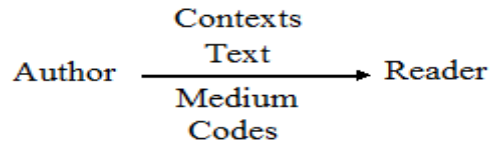
FIGURE 1. Scholes's adaptation of Roman Jakobson's diagram of act of communication

Considering these six components, every school of literary criticism and theory revolves around one of them. The author-oriented criticism privileges the role of the author in the text, and seeks to recover the authorial intention as a key to the meaning(s) of a text. The traditional literary approaches including the Marxist perception of a text pay more attention to the socio-cultural and historical contexts of a literary work. The reader-response theory recognises the eligibility of readers for making any meaning that they intend out of particular text (see Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in Class*) the emphasis of American New Criticism and Russian Formalism is upon the text itself and 'words on the page' (see Brooks and Penn Warren's trio of *Understanding*). The structuralist literary theory puts together these six elements as a unit and scrutinizes either the internal relationship among its components (i.e. assuming the author and the reader and the text on a structural relation and analysing their structural relationship) or attempts to expose the relationship between this unit as a whole and other units of a similar or different genre. Two classic examples of applying a structuralist approach on a particular literary text are Roland Barthes's study of codes in Balzac's short story *Sarasian*, resulting in Barthes's *S/Z*, and Gerard Genette's study of 'figures' in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, resulting in Genette's three books *Figures I, II, III*. Apart from the distinctive approaches applied by these two literary critics, there are two assumptive dimensions in structuralist studies which are often presented as 'axes'. Known as syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes, they are employed here to see how parallelism is the crucial technique of gaining the readers' trust in the reality of story in *Life of Pi*.

SYNTAGMATIC AND PARADIGMATIC AXES

In *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure remarks that "in a language-state everything is based on relations" (1959, p.122) and he speculates two types of axes for this relation: the axis of syntagmatic relation and the axis of associative (paradigmatic) relation. For him, phoneme, which is the smallest basic speech sound or unit of pronunciation, exists in two kinds of relationships: diachronic and synchronic. Diachronic means a horizontal relationship of one phoneme with the other phonemes that precede and follow it in a particular usage, utterance, or narrative, what Saussure calls *parole*. A phoneme has also a synchronic or vertical relationship with the entire system of language within which individual usages, utterances, or narratives have meaning, what Saussure calls *langue*.

According to Saussure, in linguistic discourse, "words acquire relations based on the linear nature of language because they are chained together. This rules out the possibility of pronouncing two elements simultaneously." This type of combination of elements arranged in sequence and supported by linearity is "syntagmatic." According to this axis, "a term acquires its value only because it stands in opposition to everything that precedes or follows it, or to both" (1959, p.123). As Scholes remarks "[t]his is syntagmatic (linear, diachronic) aspect, often conceptualised as a horizontal axis along which the sentence is spread out in its necessary order" (1974, pp. 18-19). Based on this axes, the meaning of a single word in a given sentence is determined partly by its position in the sentence and its relation to the other words and grammatical units of that sentence. The paradigmatic (or associative) relationship among the words, however, for Saussure, combines words "that have something in common."

These words which are associated in the memory of the speaker are "a part of the inner storehouse that makes up the language of each speaker" (1959, p.123). Elaborating on the second relationship, Scholes remarks "[t]he meaning of a single word in a sentence is also determined by its relation to some groups of words not in the actual sentence but presented in a paradigmatic (or "vertical," synchronic) relationship to the actual word" (1974, p.19). The associated words are capable of substituting each other, although, as Scholes explains, "[t]hese displaced words may be conceived as belonging to several paradigmatic sets: other words with same grammatical function, other words with related meanings (synonyms and antonym), other words with similar sound patterns" (1974, p.19).

METAPHOR AND METONYMY

Grounded on a study of language acquisition among children and research on language loss among aphasiacs and in line with Saussure's definition of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, Jakobson observes that the aphasiac suffer from two types of disorder: 'similarity disorder and contiguity disorder' which are related to two basic rhetorical figures: metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor refers to the substitution of a figurative word for a literal one in any context. Metaphorical substitution occurs based on the likeness or analogy between the literal word and the figurative one while metonymical substitution happens when there is an association between the literal word and its substitute. Things which are logically related by cause and effect or whole and part, as well as things that are habitually founded together in a familiar context can be the metonymic substitution to the other. Jakobson discerns that the metaphoric and metonymic processes happen both at the level of individual linguistic expressions and the level of larger discursive patterns (Scholes 1974, p.20).

STRUCTURALIST POETICS and *LIFE OF PI*

One of the central doctrines in structuralism in terms of literary studies is that the significance or the meaning of a literary work is not a kind of core or essence 'inside' it, but it is always 'outside' formed in the relation of a work with other literary work within the same or different genre. From this structuralist perspective, *Life of Pi* thematically aligns with other literary works dealing with the adventures of castaways such as Homer's epic *Odyssey*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Edgar Allan Poe's short story *MS Found in a Bottle*, or Tennyson's poem *The Wreck*. Although there are considerable disparities among these literary works in terms of their genres, their courses of action and historical scopes, there is a certain structural relationship among them which makes them sync with each other despite all their variety: a pattern that leads to the establishment of the 'conventions' of shipwreck narratives which generally consists of descriptions of the survivor(s)'s suffering, the fight for survival after shipwreck, the transformation of the survivor(s)'s attitude towards life, and their arrival to an eccentric island, to name just few of the conventions. This approach in reading *Life of Pi* diverts us more and more from a concentration on the novel as a distinct independent text and slides us towards an attention to the larger, abstract structures the novel lives in.

It is noteworthy, however, that the current structuralist approach in this paper is to project the inner structure, that is, the structural relationships 'within' the novel among its components, in order to delineate how the story's believability is intensified. In other words, this study does not attempt to bring forth the metaphoric intertextual elements such as considering Pi as Odysseus while comparing the algae island with the land of the louts-eaters described in the ninth book of *Odyssey* or even assuming Pi as a modern version of Job from the Old or Hebrew Testament.

As elaborated earlier, two 'simultaneous operations' are at work in any literary narrative. The first one is combination performed along horizontal axis and constructs syntactic links through contexture based on contiguity and juxtaposition. The rhetorical equivalent of this relation is metonymy that, at the narrative level includes time, cause and effect and the chain of successive events. The second operation is selection performed along the vertical axis and it works by choosing among equivalent options. The relation here is based on similarity, substitution, equivalence or contrast. The rhetorical equivalent of this mechanism is metaphor which, at the level of narrative, consists of space, atemporal connection and simultaneity. According to Jakobson on poetry, the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection (metaphor) is used as the major means of constructing a sequence (combination / metonym). This projection, Jacobson believes, expresses itself in rhyme, meter, symmetries, repetitions and motifs hence the defining characteristic of poetry. In prose, on the contrary, the metonymic relations prevail through chains of events, plots, successive actions and the sequence of occurrences.
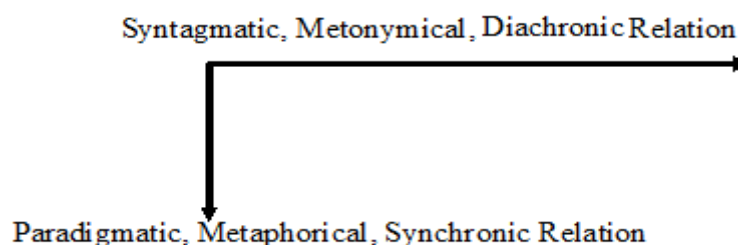

FIGURE 2. Two operating extended axes of Structuralism

To arrange various metaphorical and metonymical parallel elements in the novel along the two structuralist axes, let's start with a general description of the various narratives incorporated in the novel. Indeed, the novel consists of totally four narratives with three separate authors. These narratives can be arranged on a linear chronological axis according to the concatenation of events (that in Henry James's terminology is called plot). Interlinking these four narratives may lead us to postulate a geometrical shape of trapezium for this novel:
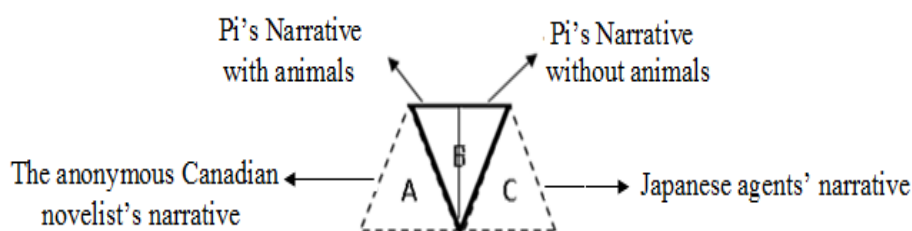

FIGURE 3. The Four interlaced narratives in *Life of Pi*

Arranging the four narratives that construct *Life of Pi* along the syntagmatic horizontal and paradigmatic vertical axes reveals how their integration persuades the reader of the reality of the story. It is in relation to these systematising axes that Martel's technique of frame-story becomes meaningful. In fact, as figure three shows, although each of the narratives individually carries some significances and works to raise certain issues , it is only when they are seen in integration that readers are more willing to take *Life of P*i as an account of an actual person. Each version of the story (A, B and C) contains some information that may eclipse the truth of the others. Pi himself offers two versions of the events that

completely puzzle the Japanese agents and readers. His first account is his 'without-animals' narrative told in Part two and the second one is his 'with-animals' narrative that he tells to the Japanese agents. The source of both of Pi's narratives is the diary that he has kept during those 277 days. Although the four narratives do not agree completely, this kind of linear alignment shows how they contribute to the novel's unity with their perfect interlink. In his theorisation of the development and structure of the intelligence, Piaget regards "wholeness" as the first principle of structuralism (Scholes 1974, p.185). In this light, there is no doubt that some laws of combination control the architecture of *Life of Pi* and its narratives have been merely lumped together as an aggregate in this sense, the novel meets Piaget's definition of structure "a self- regulating system of reversible transformations that forms a totality" (Turner 1973, p.352).

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the components logically related by cause and effect can have a metonymical relationship. Thus, there is definitely some metonymical relationship among these four narratives arranged along the syntagmatic axis. It is this metonymical relation that governs the chain of events in *Life of Pi* and rules the various temporal dimensions of the narratives. The sinking of the Japanese cargo ship called the Tsimtsum as the major cause makes Pi a castaway and ends in different narratives of how he survived, how the agents from Japanese Ministry of Transport investigate the cause of the accident and finally how an anonymous novelist compiles all the incidents while adding his own narrative too.

As separate parallel stories these four narratives can be arranged along the horizontal, paradigmatic axis. The metaphorical logic of this axis necessitates that these four narratives must be potentially capable of substituting each other because of all of them to a certain extent are similar. Throughout the novel, Pi's narrative is repeated four times, though we may read it twice. These four-time repetitions, two times in Pi's accounts of his oceanic wanderings, once in the Japanese agents' report and once in the accumulated information of the anonymous novelist, are relatively similar. Indeed, Pi's story initially is presented in the anonymous Canadian novelist's compilation which exclusively deals with Pi's 'without-animals' narrative of the shipwreck and its aftermath (from chapter 37 to 94). This recorded narrative of the anonymous Canadian novelist differs from his own italicised narrative. The repetition of Pi's narrative for the second time takes place in Pi's 'with-animal' narrative addressed to the Japanese inspectors in Chapter 99. The backbone of his two narratives is his diary though Pi brings only a small portion of it in Part Two where he narrates the story of his survival. Finally the entire story of Pi is re-expressed for the third time in the Japanese agents' report which is encapsulated in two words in chapter 97: The Story (Martel, p.291).

Among these possible metaphorical substitutions of various narratives, the replacement of Pi's first 'without-animals' narrative by his own second 'with-animals' narrative is particularly significant. In fact, Pi's first narrative is substituted by another version since the Japanese investigators do not believe in any of the incidents Pi narrates. For them, the hyena eating a broken-leg zebra on the lifeboat, the Bengal tiger residing on Pi's lifeboat and eating the French cook, the orang-utan floating on a bunch of bananas, and the meerkats populating the algae island are unbelievable. Therefore, Pi replaces the animals of his first narrative with humans in his second narrative in order to make it "believable" for the Japanese agents and he calls his second narrative "the story without animals" (Martel, p.317). The vertical, metaphoric relation between Pi's first and second narratives leads to the vertical substitution of the characters between his former and latter narratives. This metaphorical substitution of the characters is recognised within the text by one of the Japanese agents, Okamoto, who points out the resemblances between the two narratives by Pi:

> Mr. Okamoto: "Both the zebra and the Taiwanese sailor broke a leg, did you notice that? . . . "And the hyena bit off the zebra's leg just as the cook cut off the sailor's." . . . "The blind Frenchman they met in the other lifeboat–didn't he admit to killing a man and a woman?" . . . "The cook killed the sailor and his mother [.]" "Yes. The tiger killed the hyena–and the blind Frenchman–just as he killed the cook." (p.311)

Finally, Okamoto concludes his observation: "So the Taiwanese sailor is the zebra, his mother is the orang-utan, the cook is… the hyena– which means he [Pi] is the tiger!" (p. 311).

Interestingly enough, in addition to the metaphorical relation between Pi and the tiger (Richard Parker) in Pi's second version of the story addressed to the Japanese investigators, there is a metonymical relation between the two in Pi's first version of his narrative presented in the second part of the novel. There is a time when out of prolonged starvation Pi is impelled to get back to the basic nature of human beings and nourish himself, like the tiger, by whatever comes to his hands (fish, turtle, meerkat). In the scene where Pi endeavors to separate his territory from the tiger, he is acting not as human being taming a tiger, but just like a beast struggling for his domain. Indeed, the metonymical association of Pi and the tiger is based on the fact that the tiger provokes Pi's killer instincts and reveals the hidden tiger in Pi's psyche. In this circumstance, expecting a kind of cannibalistic behavior is not unreasonable. At the sight of the horrific actions of the French cook, who kills the sailor, eats his flesh and later murders Pi's mother, Pi takes the life of the cook, as the tiger kills hyena, in an act of self-preservation and revenge.

Although at first glance Pi's double narrative appears to be there solely to contradict or annul the credibility of each other, the complexity of their relationship along the two structuralist axes reveals another fact. On the metonymic level, Pi's 'without-animals' narrative jeopardises the reliability and believability of his first 'with-animals' narrative. Moreover, the metaphorical substitutions that emerge out of Pi's second version of his narrative (Pi as the tiger, his mother as the orang-utan and the cook as the hyena) drastically decrease the trustworthiness of his first narrative. Nevertheless, Pi's second version of story in which there are no animals but four people (Pi, his mother, the cook and the sailor) implies, in effect, a counter discourse which can be as believable as what Pi narrates in his first version of the events in the second part of the novel. In a disastrous circumstance, the French cook kills the injured sailor to relieve him of his suffering and then he eats his flesh and uses it as bait for fishing. Despite his mother's objections, Pi tastes a little of sailor's flesh too. The cook later kills Pi's mother. Pi takes revenge on the French cook and kills him and, crossing the line between man and beast due to unbearable starvation, Pi eats the flesh of the French cook. Perhaps the existence of these barbaric facts on Pi's conscience impels him to create another 'with-animals' parallel narrative.

The manipulation of a few incidents in the first narrative and the replacement of its characters with animals never deprive each version of Pi's account of a possible believability. Although seemingly two different stories, the second narrative has so many knots with the initial narrative that the actions and incidents seem completely reasonable hence greatly convincible and real. For instance, Pi's "state of dying delirium" in his first version of shipwreck (Martel, p.248), due to unbearable starvation and temporary blindness, ends in an imaginative dialogue between him and Richard Parker. In this confabulated dialogue, the tiger affirms that he has killed "a man and a woman," "the man first, the woman second." (p.247). The French cook in his lifeboat appears exactly after this imaginative dialogue and makes his acquaintance with Pi. The simultaneity of the tiger's confession of killing a man and a woman and the emergence of the French cook enables Pi to spin the second version of his narrative in which the French cook kills both the sailor and Pi's mother. In fact, Pi has to create the first version with animals to cover his fall into his bestiality and remain sane in the face of the harsh reality he has encountered. The very of disappearance of the tiger into the jungle, 'unceremoniously' without even looking back, is a metaphor for his willing

ignorance of his barbarity that actually leaves no trace in his record of his survival neither in his diary at the time of the events or twenty years later when he narrates them to the Canadian novelist. In this regard, Pi's second version of the events provides him the means to hide behind the blurred line between fiction and reality.

In addition to the parallel patterns of the four narratives, a metaphorical relationship is discernable between their authors. They can roughly substitute each other due to some obvious resemblance among them. Stylistically, the three authors (the anonymous Canadian novelist, Pi and the Japanese agents) are the narrators of their own stories; moreover, they narrate events from the first-person perspective. Apart from their similarity in terms of their function in their narratives, there are resemblances among the circumstances in which they are entangled. The condition of the anonymous novelist in India somehow corresponds to Pi's during his castaway period and the Japanese agents' during their journey to Tomatlan. The anonymous novelist begins his narrative in Author's note section of the novel with this remark, "this book was borne as I was hungry" (Martel, p. vii) and his starvation, whether literary or figuratively, becomes a leitmotif throughout the novel and connects all the authors in the novel together. The Canadian failed novelist travels to India because "a little money can go a long way there" (p. vii). His hunger and destitute is reverberated in Pi's ravening for food during his 226- day on board encapsulated in his words "I thought I would never stop being hungry" (p.286). The condition of the Japanese agents, moreover, serves the leitmotif of hunger in the novel, particularly when they keep eating Pi's cookies and more conspicuously when Okamoto concludes the interview with Pi with the assertion that "I am starving. Let's go eat" (p. 318).

Another resemblance that enters the three authors in the metaphorical connection is that all of them are 'lost' in their own way. The anonymous novelist is "deliberately" lost in India; he mails the notes of his failed novel to a "fictitious address in Siberia, with a return address, equally fictitious in Bolivia" (Martel, p. ix). The young Pi is lost in the Pacific Ocean due to shipwreck. The Japanese agents are also lost while traveling to Tomatlan, where Pi eventually landed after the shipwreck; again these authors are very similar since all are writing some accounts. The Canadian novelist is completing his novel; Pi is keeping a diary of his castaway period, and the Japanese agents are preparing a written report of their interview with Pi. These three 'grounds of comparison' entitles them to substitute each other along the metaphorical axis.

The parallelism of the four integrated narratives does not end to the author-narrators and the plot but extends to setting and theme. Time and place in both of Pi's narratives are replaceable since they are 'floating' and 'indefinite'. There are some occasions when Pi himself foregrounds this aspect of his narration: "Time is an illusion that only makes us pant. I survived because I forgot even the very notion of time. What I remember are events and encounters and routines, markers that emerged here and there from the ocean of time and imprinted themselves on my memory" (Martel p.192); or in another scene he introspectively claims, "the hours last forever"(Martel p.217). The similarity of Pi's conception of place as a castaway to his conception of time is obvious when he asserts, "[t]he Pacific is no place for rowers, especially when they are weak and blind, when their lifeboats are large and unwieldy, and when the wind is not cooperating" (p.254). Like time, place is for him lost and undefinable. In this way, they may be replaceable along with vertical, metaphoric axis of structuralism. All this is because Pi himself is entangled in such a vague limitless state of consciousness: "You are so bored you sink into a state of apathy close to a coma" (p.217).

Apart from this rare substitution of time and place in Pi's narratives, time and place in each narrative correlates to their correspondence in the other. The locations where the incidents take place are metaphorically correlating. Pi's family's attempt to leave India and settle in Canada foreshadows pragmatic correlation on the larger scale of the novel when the

Canadian novelist hails to India in search of an easy life. The metaphorical parallelism of the settings legitimises the substitution of the swimming pool where Pi is turned into a skilled swimmer by his 'aquatic guru' with the Pacific Ocean where Pi is lost for 227 days. After all, Pi is named after a swimming pool in Paris: "the Piscine Molitor" (Martel, p.11).

The contradictory double role and meaning that characters and incidents acquire in the encompassing narrative of *Life of Pi* point to the excess of parallelism in this novel. Elements can appear at two points in the novel as counterpoints: the tiger, Richard Parker, once enacts as a carnivorous killer and once the saviour whom Pi needs in order to survive. As Pi confesses "if I didn't have you [Richard Parker] 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" (Martel, p.236). In an early scene when Pi's father makes his sons witness the ferocity of Richard Parker devouring a goat in their zoo in Pondicherry to admonish them for forgetting his animosity, Parker appears as a fierce predator but later on when Pi is shipwrecked, he is the companion, the savior who stimulates Pi's passion for life. Indeed, Parker the tiger is not just a source of hope and psychological energy for Pi but actually rescues him from the brutal hungry French cook who attempts to kill Pi. These are the evidence of a different significant metaphorical correlation that exists in *Life of Pi*. This kind of relationship that allows the substitution of counterpoints is traced deep in the narrative when man (out of his sheer selfishness) simply substitutes a predator as we see in case of the French cook and the tiger.

The paradigmatic, metaphorical axis of structuralism is further perceptible in terms of Pi's religious belief. For Pi, there is no difference among Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and they are metaphorically interchangeable. Pi believes that the differences among these three religions are superficial and those differences are only at the level of rites and rituals: "religion is more than rite and ritual. There is what the rite and ritual stand for" (Martel, p.48); for him there is not much difference between doing puja in a darshan, doing prayer in a mosque and attending Mass in a church; disregarding the superficial differences among these three religions, Pi finds the teachings of the priest, the imam and the pandit identical. In fact, since Pi "just want to love God" (p.69) and all of these religions teach people how to love God, these three distinct religions are metaphorically substitutional in his scheme of belief.

Apart from the ultimate goal of loving a prime mover that unifies these three religions in Pi's religious vocation, the animal fables, which literally and symbolically play a significant role in *Life of Pi*, connect these three different religions metaphorically together and make them substitutional in Pi's scheme of thought. Living with animals, as his father owned a zoo, in his childhood has a profound effect on his understanding of the world as an adult. His faith in the value of fables guarantees his belief in all these religions that are replete with animal fables for didactic reasons and makes them replace one another in Pi's viewpoint. Indeed, the very existence of the various animals and insects in *The Holy Qur'an* (some *Suras* are even entitled after them: e.g. The Caw, The Ant), the fifty four types of animals (e.g. calves, cows, bulls or donkeys) in *The Holy Bible* as well as many metaphorical or allegorical animal references in *Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* highlight the centrality of animals for moral teachings in religious discourses. As Pi underlines "there are many examples of animals coming to surprising living arrangements. All are instances of that animal equivalent of anthropomorphism: zoomorphism, where an animal takes a human being, or another animal, to be one of its kind" (Martel, p.84).

The paradigmatic metaphorical axis even explains the existence of namesake characters with totally different religious viewpoints, though Pi believes that "these are common names in Tamil Nadu, so the coincidence is not so remarkable" (Martel, p. 61). A couple of Mr. Kumars are in the story. One is an active communist biology teacher and an atheist who asserts "I don't believe in religion. Religion is darkness" (p.27). Another is a Sufi, a Muslim mystic who seeks "fana, union with God" (p.61). Indeed, Pi's psyche hence

his future is moulded by these two Mr. Kumars: "Mr. and Mr. Kumar taught me biology and Islam. Mr. and Mr. Kumar led me to study zoology and religious studies at the University of Toronto. Mr. and Mr. Kumar were the prophets of my Indian youth" (p.61). The substitutional discipline furthermore direct us to another parallelism that is drawn between the two totally different academic disciplines of zoology and theology. Indeed, Pi's double-major Bachelor's degree in religious studies and zoology connotes that the paradigmatic metaphorical axis is not restricted to homogenous elements but can align essentially different elements, subjects and issues.

Another possible parallel issue that can be aligned with the vertical metaphorical axis is the resemblance between the narrative of the novel and the number pi (π) which is a mathematical constant defining as the ratio of the circumference of the circle to its diameter. Apart from the fact that π is an 'irrational' number and from this perspective is similar to the irrationality of fiction, this mathematical difinition of π can be metaphorically adapted in the literary discourse as the ratio of 'text' to "story."

$$\pi = \frac{\text{Circumference}}{\text{Diameter}} \qquad \textit{Life of Pi} = \frac{\text{Text}}{\text{Story}}$$

FIGURE 5. A comparison between π and the structure of narrative in Martel's *Life of Pi*

According to Rimmon-Kenan's definition, text "is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. Put more simply, the text is what we read," and story refers to "the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events" (2002, p.3); in this regard, in terms of *Life of Pi*, 'text' is the entire novel of Martel which circumferentially includes all the events of four narratives presented by the Canadian anonymous novelist, Pi and the Japanese agents. Interestingly enough, the 'text' of *Life of Pi* is cyclic since chapter 1 which deals with Pi's life after his survival and settlement in Canada, is the continuation of chapter 100; the 'story' of *Life of Pi* is a direct linear chronological representation of all the events occurred to Pi; it can be assumed as a diameter for this circular text. Therefore, a record of Pi's life is nothing but the result of this fictional ratio though the adult Pi abhors uncertainty ("I'll tell you, that's one thing I hate about my nickname [Pi], the way that number runs on forever,") and addressing the Canadian novelist insists that, "we must give things a meaningful shape. For example–I wonder–could you tell my jumbled story in exactly one hundred chapters, not one more, not one less?" (Martel, p.285).

The significance of this metaphorical parallelism between the form of the novel and π is that determining its textual meaning is as impossible as estimating the exact value of π since like any literary text it is capable of producing multiple meaning. In other words, as the decimal representation of π never ends, the ramification of Pi's narrative never settles into a permanent repeating pattern and the reader keeps oscillating between the narrative 'with animals' and 'without animals'.

Pi's 'exceptional botanical discovery' in chapter 92, on an algae island, can also be analysed based on the metaphorical axis of structuralism and it can be assumed as a metaphor for religion and the ground of comparison for this analogy is their fluidity, flexibility and multi-dimensionality. Preoccupied with religious issues, Pi depicts this island in a way that reveals it as an extended metaphor for religion. The floating algae island during the day nourishes the thirsty, hungry Pi and the tiger with fresh water, algae, fish and meerkat; in other words, like religion it saves those who trust it. In this regard, its destructive aspect that

reveals itself during the night when its ponds turn to acid pools that dissolve everything which was given during the day is a metaphor for the misuse of religion that leads to genocidal or homophobia depriving man of his peace.

A well-wrought metonymy that is introduced on the algae island is a good point to conclude this structuralist reading of Martel's *Life of Pi*. A representation of the syntagmatic correlation on the narrative level emerges where Pi finds thirty-two teeth held by "a dense accumulation of leaves glued together in a ball" (Martel, p.280) on the trees of the algae island. These human teeth (according to the metonymical relation of whole and part) stand for human being and connote that a faithless life of man reduces him to the level of animals whose major preoccupation is just hunger. In a sense, it attracts the reader's attention to the quality of life on this island in particular and man's lack of spirituality in general; the island facilitates its settlers with their basic needs and entraps those who have been charmed and deceived by this type of life. Pi remarks, "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" (pp.282-83). This hidden metonymy lays bare the symbolical significance of Pi's departure from the island in the face of all disasters: it is a symbol of his farewell with a faithless life and his trust into God's grace to protect him throughout life.

Considering the new dimensions that such structuralist dissection of the novel have brought into the light, it must be noted that it is only after aligning various narratives, themes, settings and issues with the metonymical-syntagmatic and the metaphorical-paradigmatic axes of structuralism that the whole integrated semantic net is exposed. As has been shown, it is only through such a complicated net that readers can be caught in a series of correlated, parallel narratives and persuaded of the authenticity of Pi's narrative and its reliability. In fact, the demonstration of the substituent elements in the novel according to the structuralist methodology reveals how a well-wrought narrative is able to persuade the reader even when the events sound improbable and implausible. By stifling the sniff of any doubts in the reader and building up the wholeness of the narrative structure, the metaphorical substitutions and the metonymical ones respectively injects more believability into the novel.

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