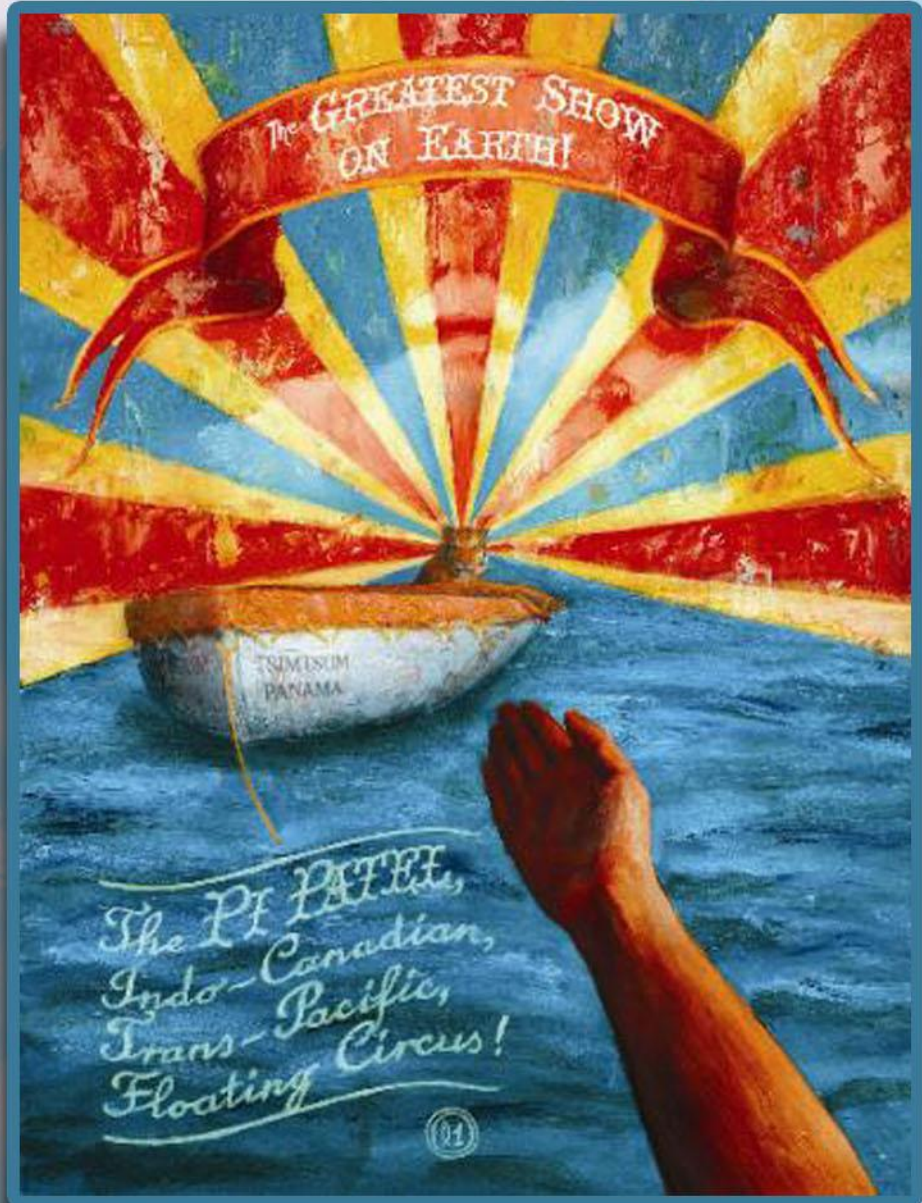


# Life of Pi

by Yann Martel

*"...a hybrid of an adventure story  
and a fable about belief."*

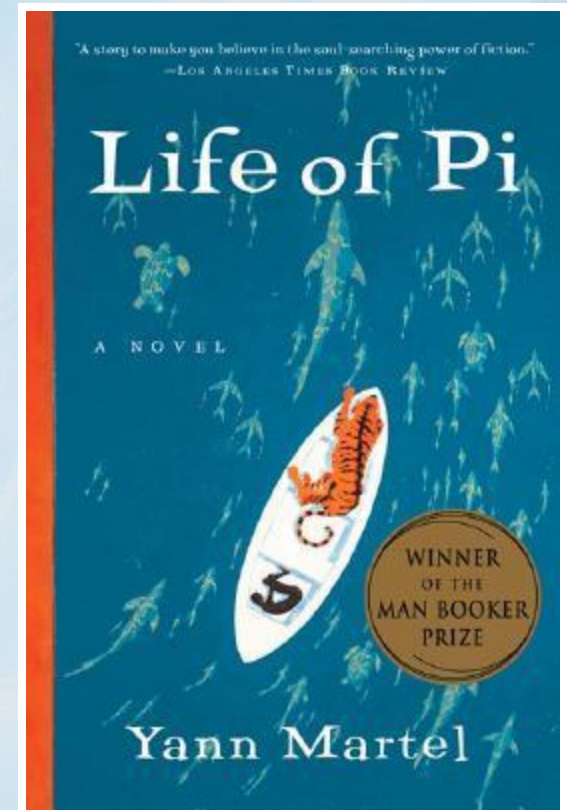
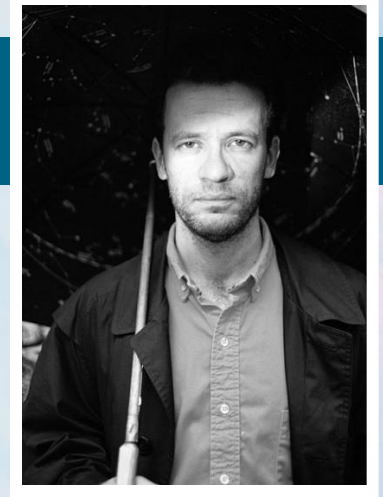
**\*Life of Pi illustrations by  
Tomislave Torjanac from Croatia  
and can be seen in the illustrated  
version of *Life of Pi*.**



# A review...

**“An astounding and beautiful...The book is a pleasure not only for the subtleties of its philosophy but also for its ingenious and surprising story. Martel is a confident, heartfelt artist, and his imagination is cared for in a writing style that is both unmistakable and marvelously reserved.”**

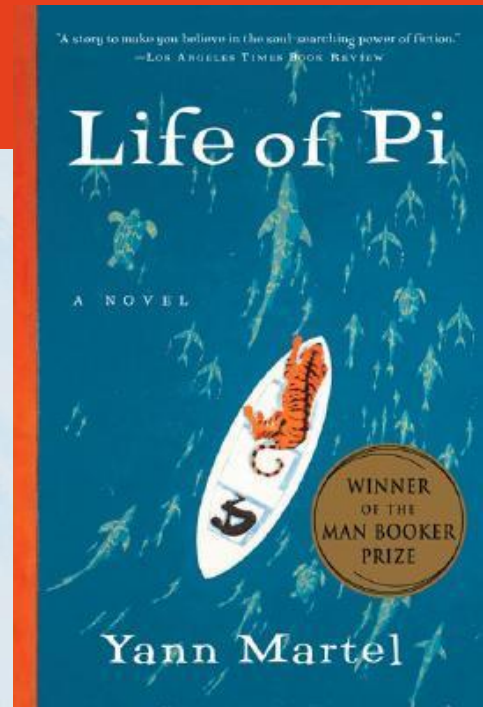
*The Vancouver Sun*



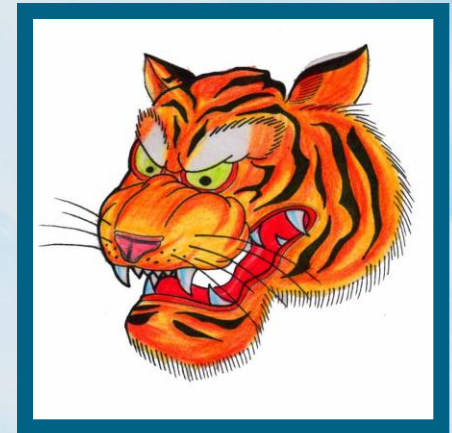
# Student Response to Lisa

Lawrence:

It is pretty early in the a.m. and I just finished my essay, but I was just wondering...do you realize how many tangents this book has? Our circle discussion was absolutely insulting to this book. I know that *Beloved* is probably like your favorite book, but this one is just unreal. *This book just had layers upon layers, and then when you think about Yann's motives for doing certain things... more layers!* It is like a never-ending onion. If I were to sit in my recliner and follow every tangent that popped into my head, I probably wouldn't get up for months. Yann is one crazy dude! There was so much to write for the essay, but I simply just lacked the vocabulary and the ability to put my thoughts into words. Anyway, I will see you in eight hours. It may take you that long to get through this e-mail. So good morning!

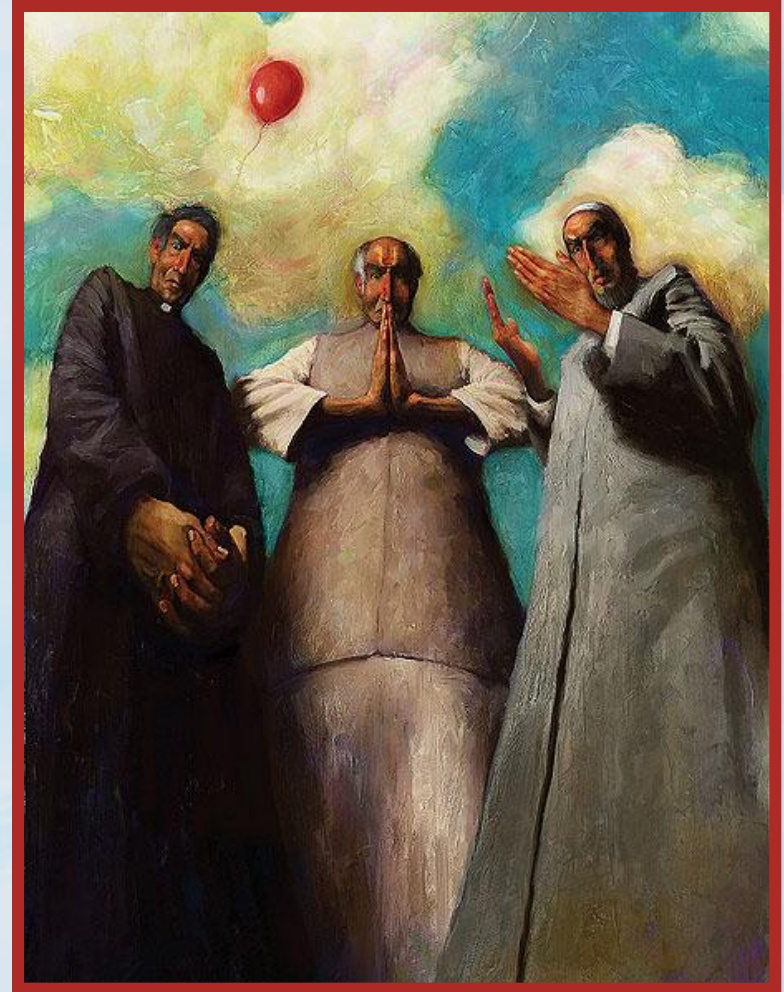


- **Born in Spain in 1963 to Canadian parents**
- **He grew up in Alaska, British Columbia, Costa Rica, France, Ontario and Mexico,**
- **Has lived in Iran, Turkey and India, now in Canada.**
- **Studied philosophy at Trent University**
- **While doing various odd jobs--tree planting, dishwashing, working as a security guard--he began to write.**
- **He recently spent two years at University of Saskatoon as a scholar-in-residence.**
- **Martel has been living from his writing since the age of 27.**
- **He the author of a collection of short stories, and two novels.**
- ***The Life of Pi* won the Booker Prize in 2002, the Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction 2001, and was shortlisted for the 2001 Governor General's Award for Fiction.**
- **Another project - <http://www.whatisstephenharperreading.ca/>**



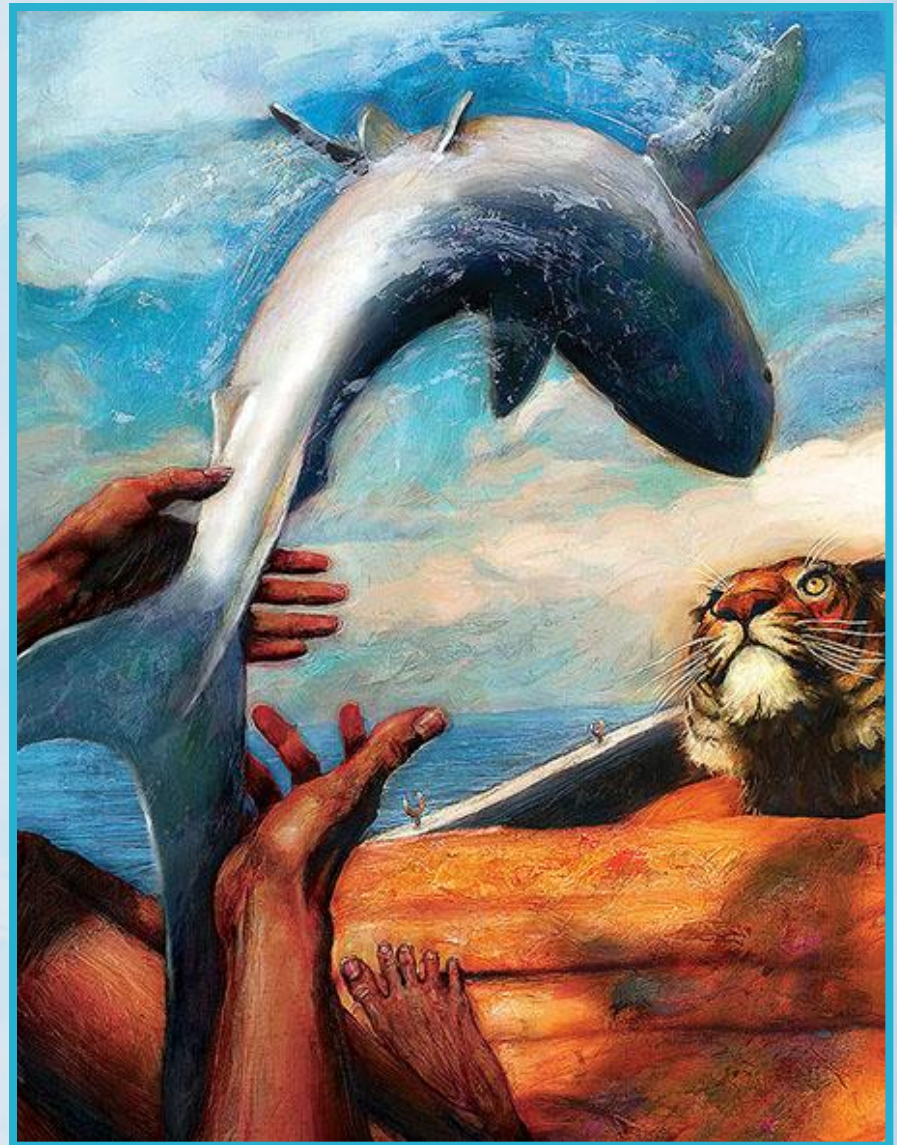
The Setting:  
Pondicherry  
*Life of Pi*  
*Mid-1970s*

- For over four years, Yann Martel researched and wrote *Life of Pi*.
- He spent six months in India visiting mosques, temples, churches and zoos.
- He then spent an entire year reading religious texts and castaway stories.
- The writing took another two years.



**Martel describes the book as a...**

**”...competition between two stories, one secular and one requiring a leap of faith. One part is rooted in the animal condition of fear, jealousy and hunger, and the other looks at how high we can go as humans.”**



## **Structure:**

- **3 parts**

- **Three distinct narrative voices:**

- 1) the voice of the author (italicized first person in intro and in parts of the first section). The use of this voice helps “ground” the novel in reality, effectively blurring fact and fiction.**

- 2) Part 1 and 2 are narrated in 1st person by Pi himself. Limited subjective perspective. Blurring fact and imagination (like Martel’s intro and inserts). No objective evaluation of story.**

- 3) Objective narrative structure due to use of “transcript” interview with Japanese businessmen.**



## **Structure continued:**

- **Part One:** foreshadows the trials and tribulations Pi will face in Part Two. Anchored by family relationships, zoological discussions, lessons by his father, and of course, his embracing of the three major world religions: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.
- **Zoomorphism:** understanding how different species react. Pi's own reconciliation to his animal instinct and his aspirations to seek the divine.
- **Part Two:** calls on all of Pi's understanding of faith and zoomorphism to survive the Pacific alone with only animals as companions.

## THEMES:

- **Name as identity. Who am I?** Pi=the irrational number that goes on for eternity.  
Pi=geometric symbol of eternity and therefore, of God. Alpha and Omega. Beginning and End.
- **The big one: meaning of life.** Everything is gone--what is left?
- **Stories as a means to make sense of life.**
- **Religion and the quest to know God.**
- **What separates us from the animals?**
- **Adaptation**
- **You can even throw in the zoo debate**





# Christianity

**Christianity is the world's largest religion (33%). It is a monotheistic, Trinitarian system of beliefs and practices based on the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) and the teachings of Jesus as embodied in the New Testament, which emphasizes the role of Jesus as co-equal with God and savior of humanity.**

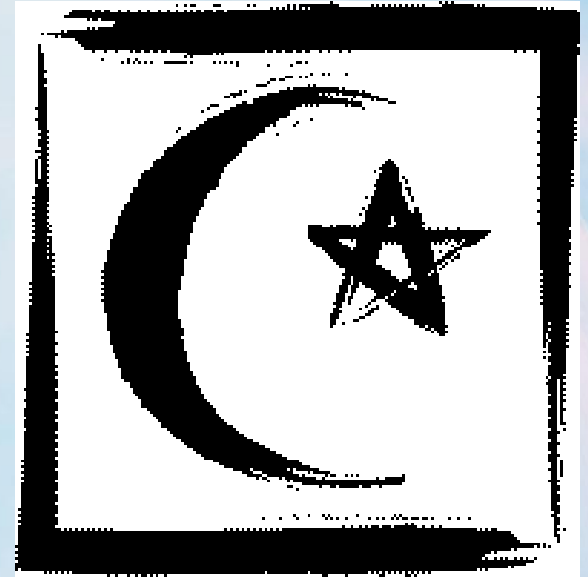
**{ Religion is a philosophical subtext in *Life of Pi*.**



## Hinduism

The world's oldest organized religion (12.5%), existing for at least 4500 years. The ancient gods (especially the triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) are commonly interpreted as representations of the various aspects of the divine (Brahman). Hinduism recognizes multiple gods. Human beings progress to the ultimate realization of their oneness with Brahman (often called Nirvana) through Reincarnation according to the law of Karma.

**The second largest category of religions in the world (21%). Based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad in the 7th century and considered to be the last message of God to all humanity, contained in the Qur'an (Koran). The Arabic word Islam means the submission or surrender of one's will to the one true God worthy of worship. The five pillars of Islam: declaration of faith, prayer, giving of alms, fasting (especially during the holy month of Ramadan) and pilgrimage to Mecca (for those physically and financially able).**



**Islam**

## **Martel on Faith and Writing:**

**"Fanatics do not have faith - they have belief. With faith you let go. You trust. Whereas with belief you cling."**

**"One of the things I discovered, reading the founding texts of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism - a good religion works like a good novel: it makes you suspend your disbelief." --from an interview with *The Guardian***

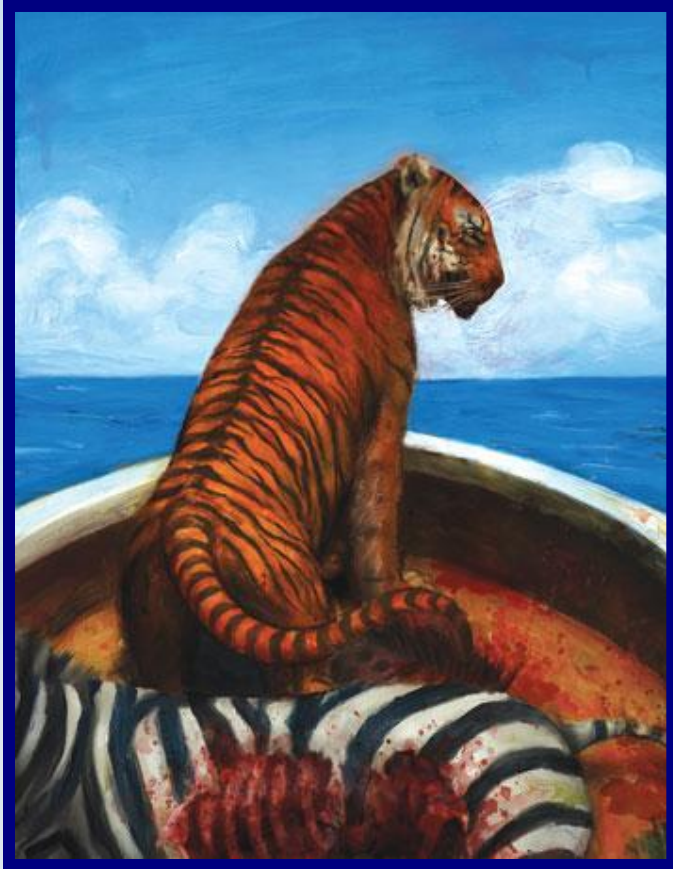
**“Christians--part of this is based on my personal experience, and part of it is based on my intuition--don’t read fiction...That otherworldliness of the Bible stimulates their imagination enough...Ardent Christians are not novel readers...The Hindus have a different approach--everything is an incarnation of the divine, whether it has a Hindu name on it, or whether it’s called Jesus, Buddha, or Allah...I suppose a Muslim would probably react in the same way as the Christian. Islam is more tolerant, not many people know that...” from interview with A.V. Club of *The Onion*.**



# Protagonist

## 16-year-old Piscine (Pi) Patel

**Named after a swimming pool, Piscine Molitor pool in Paris. Raised on the premises of his father's zoo in Pondicherry, India until his father decides to move the entire family to Canada. Life defined by internal factor: his passion and dedication to religion. External factor: the shipwreck that kills his family and strands Pi in a lifeboat with only a few animals for company.**



## **Antagonist**

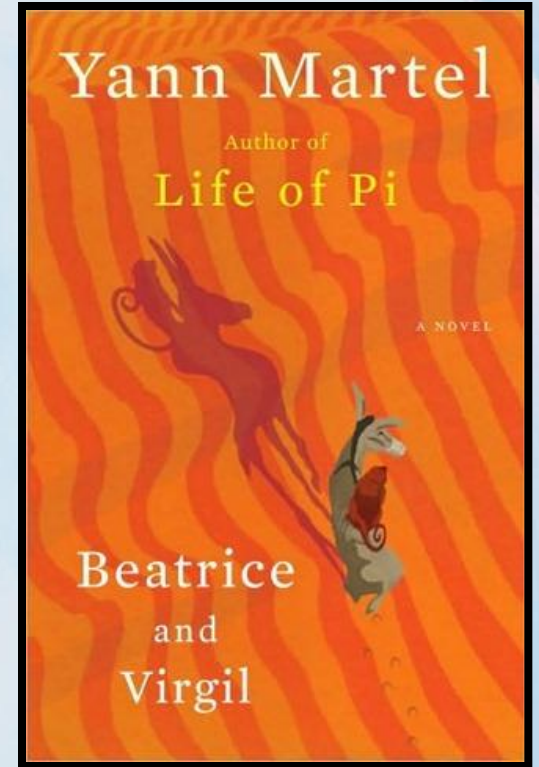
**Richard Parker:  
a 450-pound Bengal tiger**

**Trapped on the lifeboat  
with Pi when the TsimTsum  
sinks. Richard Parker  
received his name through  
a clerical error; this was  
the name of the hunter  
who captured the tiger and  
his mother.**



## Most Recent Novel

***Beatrice and Virgil: A Novel:*** Megaselling Life of Pi author Martel addresses, in this clunky metanarrative, the violent legacy of the 20th century (the Holocaust) with an alter ego: Henry L'Hôte who meets a taxidermist named Henry who insists that Henry-the-author help him write a play about a monkey and a donkey. Henry-the-author is at first intrigued by sweet Beatrice, the donkey, and Virgil, her monkey companion, but the animals' increasing peril draws Henry into the taxidermist's brutally absurd world. (from Publisher's Weekly) This novel is very controversial and not well-received due to its treatment of the Holocaust.



## Life of Pi Movie

**IMDB reports 2012 release from director Ang Lee**