Schrödinger's Tiger: Names, Stories, Belief and Truth in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*

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Summary

Although scholarship has reflected on aspects of spirituality and postmodernism in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, the curious and colourful names of the characters have not yet been investigated in any depth. This study links the names and (re)namings to the novel's thematic concern with storytelling and truth, arguing that names go to the heart of one of the novel's main thematic concerns, namely the dichotomy between what things are and what they are called. Truth and lies become just different ways to describe phenomena whose deepest reality exists beyond language. The novel casts doubt on the ability of words and stories to capture truth, actual events and actions. I examine ways in which names and the characters they denote are emblematic of stories and the events they denote. But *Life of Pi* is not merely a book about truth, it is also about spirituality, which, like truth and lies, is premised on the existence of something beyond language. The protagonist, Pi, experiences his world and God through opposites that make up a whole. The analysis of names in this novel illuminates the intersection between, stories, truth and spirituality.

Opsomming

Aspekte van geestelikheid en die postmodernisme van Yann Martel se *Life of Pi* is reeds in die literatuur ondersoek, maar die eienaardige name van die karakters in die boek is nog nie in enige diepte ontleed nie. Hierdie artikel lig verbande uit tussen die name en die herbenaming van karakters, en die roman se tematiek ten opsigte van vertelling en waarheid. Ek voer aan dat name in die roman verband hou met 'n digotomie na aan die hart van die roman, naamlik wat dinge *is*, en wat hulle *genoem* word. Waarheid en leuens is bloot verskillende maniere om te verwys na verskynsels wat taal ten diepste transendeer. Die roman wys dat woorde en stories nie die waarheid kan vasvang nie. Ek illustreer hoe name en die karakters waarna hulle verwys emblematies is van stories en die gebeure waarna hulle verwys. Maar *Life of Pi* handel nie net oor waarheid nie, dit ondersoek ook geestelikheid. Geestelikheid – soos waarheid en leuens – verwys na iets wat taal transendeer. Die hoofkarakter, Pi, ervaar God en sy wêreld deur teenoorgesteldes wat 'n geheel daarstel. 'n Ontleding van name in die roman werp lig op die koppelvlakke tussen stories, waarheid en geestelikheid.

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Introduction

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (first published 2001) explores suffering and survival through storytelling and belief. The novel features an assortment of characters with interesting names, and two significant renamings, that have not yet been considered in criticism.

Scholarship on the book traced its generic development (Smit-Marais [2012], Dwyer [2005], Duncan [2008] & Tsai [2015]), Martel's influences (Ketterer [2009] & Stratton [2004]), the book's representation of faith (Cole [2004] & Stephens [2010]) and aspects of its postmodernism (Stratton [2004] & Cloete [2007]). Florence Stratton (2004) and Elsie Cloete (2007: 330) touch on names (focusing on the intertextual significance of "Richard Parker"), but do not explore names in depth.

This article considers the nature, significance and function of names and renamings with reference to the novel's thematic concern with truth, storytelling and spirituality. I draw an analogy between names and the characters they denote and stories and the reality they denote. Essentially, I explore the novel's dichotomisation of real-life phenomena and what they are called.

The dichotomous relationship between what things are and what they are called is analogous to other opposites in the novel, such as mundane and profound, atheist and believer, science and faith – all of which are accommodated under the opposition of unity and division, whole and parts. The dichotomy of whole and parts is a vehicle that Martel uses to explore both world-creation and spirituality, as the protagonist experiences his world and his spirituality in terms of opposites that make up a whole. Tsai (2015), in an exploration of Otherness in the novel, discussed unity and division, showing how Pi's move from a Eurocentric language (characterised by division) to what Kenneth Burke calls the rhetoric of identification (characterised by unity) shifts the travel literature genre to a more ethical position. I show that the names in the book are in various ways indicative of the relationship between whole and parts, and hence, provide a way to probe the link between storytelling, truth and spirituality.

Names

Names are peculiar words. These proper nouns, with which we denote ourselves and others, are, according to the *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, directly connected to the soul; they are "an inherent part of a person's life-power" (De Vries 1976: 337). Names possess a mysterious quality: in magic and the occult, it is essential to know the name of the being one fights (De Vries 1976: 337) and of the evil spirit one exorcises. When Jesus drives out the demons from the possessed man, he first asks: "What is your name" (Mark

5, 9). Not only must you know the name, you must also pronounce it (De Vries 1976: 337). One must know the name of the deity one wants to invoke, and if one knows the name of a god, one has its magic power at one's disposal (De Vries 1976: 338).

Felecan (2019: viii) states that "[i]n the mentality of the Semitic peoples, naming a place or person meant determining the role or fate of the named entity, as names were considered to be mysteriously connected with the reality they designated."

In certain religious traditions and in folklore, the naming of a child is of utmost importance, and is associated with ritual – like baptism – and superstition. Naming a child after someone means that the child will inherit that person's qualities, thereby influencing the child's destiny. Sometimes holy texts are opened at random, and the first gender-appropriate name is chosen for the child – so as to leave the choice of the name to God (De Vries 1976: 338). Giving a name thus shapes the name-bearer's destiny.

Characteristics of names in religions and the occult carried over into folklore: the queen saves her child after she learns Rumpelstiltskin's name in the well-known, eponymous folktale.

In conservative Jewish traditions, the tetragrammaton is not pronounced, because it is considered too sacred (*Encyclopedia Britannica*); it is replaced with "Adonai" and other respectful terms.

According to Gafton and Chirilă (2019: 60) "Divinity conceals its ineffable essence", and reveals itself partially to man through metaphor, because man is limited and incapable of grasping God's wholeness and complexity. These metaphors refer to attributes or parts of His essence, such as Almighty, Provider, Refuge, Everlasting, etc. Humans know and may name these parts, but not the entirety of God.

So as not to invoke evil spirits by calling their names, people use circumlocutory names instead (Gafton & Chirilă (2019: 59-66). Gafton and Chirilă (2019: 59-67) cite colourful Romanian examples, such as "the one who lives in swamp", "the filthy one", and "may the incense kill it". These names are reminiscent of JK Rowling's "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named", in the *Harry Potter* series.

Underlying these alternative names for God and evil being is the idea that transcendent beings have true names and indirect names. Knowing and using true names is believed to have real-life consequences.

Similarly, fear guides people to speak of "The Big C", rather than to pronounce the name of the disease and thereby invoke it. Names invoke and evoke being.[1]

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1.   Outside the realm of religions and the occult, Russian formalists believe that "language […] is a formative, rather than reflective […] system of representation, [proposing] that the structure of reality is effectively determined and shaped by language: form predetermines content" (Bradford 1996: 527). Language, what we call things, thus creates reality.

This is reminiscent of the demiurgic power of words in the creation story of Genesis: God speaks words to bring reality into being; more accurately, God speaks words to separate opposites: light and darkness, sky and earth, water and land, et cetera (Genesis 1).

The idea that God creates the world by naming the constituent parts leads to the idea that between name/word and reality exists a direct link; that words shape reality. Gafton and Chirilă (2019: 59) interpret the commandment "you shalt not bear false witness against your neighbour" as a directive to align words and reality directly.

Renaming marks a new stage of life (De Vries 1976: 338) or a spiritual transformation (Gafton & Chirilă 2019: 63) and may indicate a changed perspective of reality, an altered reality or a yearning to change reality in accordance with the new name (Gafton & Chirilă 2019: 63-65).

The idea that names create reality found an interesting expression in the pseudoscience of nominative determinism. *The New Scientist Journal* (1994) coined the term to describe "the hypothesis that authors tend to gravitate towards the area of research that fits their surname" Paige Nick (2012: 5) adds that it is the theory whereby a person's name plays a significant role determining the choices they make and the character they develop. She notes that this is the inverse of the tradition whereby one's profession (Baker Taylor) determined one's name (Nick 2012: 5). Whichever comes first, there is a link between name and destiny.

Names are also linked to division and to power, and so is language (Tsai 2015: 97). The Tower of Babel story relates that "the whole world had one language", and the people decided to build "a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that [they] may *make a name* for [them]selves", lest they be "scattered over the face of the earth". This angers God, who causes division among them by confusing their language (Genesis 11: 2-9; my emphasis).

In their mysterious sense, names are thus closely connected to belief, and attribute qualities and powers to the people that bear or know them. In contrast to their mysterious properties, names mundanely distinguish one person from the next.[2] The mysterious link that ancient religions saw between name and

This is also the premise of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which postulates that language enables and limits one's perception of the real world. Whorf's term "linguistic relativity" – the notion that language influences thought and world views – went in and out of fashion as neuroscientists, linguists and psychologists refuted and revived it. See Hua (2019: 183-196).

2.   The story of Lilith, as told in *The Alfabeth of Ben Sira*, illustrates the mystery of names: She knows the name of God, and impudently pronounces it to gain the power of flight. She also kills babies, but amulets with (in some versions) the names of three angels or her name (in other versions) placed around babies' necks protect against Lilith (Gaines 2018).

essence, word and reality is in direct contrast to poststructuralists who problematise any obvious link between signifier and signified.

One Event: Two Stories

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* is a story about the survival of the spirit through storytelling. It traces the adventures of Piscine Molitor Patel, or Pi, an Indian boy who grows up in the Pondicherry Zoo that his father owns. Pi is utterly captivated by spirituality and god, and subscribes to Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

The novel is divided into an author's note and three parts. The author's note (pages ix-xiv; 5½ pages long) recounts how the author happened upon this story: a man in a coffee house said to him "I have a story that will make you believe in God" (Martel 2003: xii). The note reads as referring to real life, and the author appears to be Martel, but Part Three of the novel destabilises this real-life handle that the note provides.

Part One (pages 3-93; 90 pages long) deals with Pi's formative years while living in the zoo and is narrated from his perspective. This part is light and often humorous. Early on, Pi relates how he came to be named Piscine Molitor, and why and how he renamed himself Pi. This Part ends with the Patel family, and a substantial amount of zoo animals, leaving India for Canada on the Japanese cargo ship, the Tsimtsum.

Part Two (pages 97-286; 189 pages long) starts with the words "The ship sank" (Martel 2003: 97). This part, although not devoid of humour, is dark and outlines how Pi survived at sea for 227 days. Pi recounts how he, a hyena, an orang-utan named Orange Juice, a zebra and a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker made it to the lifeboat, how the animals killed each other until only Pi and Richard Parker were left. On the lifeboat, Pi recalls how the tiny tiger cub received the name Thirsty, and came to be renamed Richard Parker. He describes his hardships as a castaway, how he fed and negotiated with Richard Parker, until, at last, they made it to the coast of Mexico, where – to Pi's sadness – Richard Parker takes off "unceremoniously" into the jungle without so much as a glance over his shoulder (Martel 2003: 285). Pi presents a believable version of unlikely events, often giving long scientific explanations for strange animal behaviour or weather phenomena.

Part Three (pp. 289-319; 30 pages long) is mostly an interview that Japanese employees of the Maritime Department of the Japanese Ministry of Transport, Mr. Okamoto and Mr. Chiba, had with Pi to determine how the Tsimtsum sank. Pi gives two accounts of his ordeal: First he relates the events of Part Two; after that he narrates a much more plausible story where each of the animals is a human being. In this version the zebra is a Taiwanese sailor, Orange Juice is Pi's mother and the hyena is a cook. Pi is both himself and

Richard Parker;[3] the story of the innocent boy lost at sea with a Bengal tiger becomes a story of a cannibal. Pi is prompted to give this second plausible account of events after Mr. Okamoto tells him: "Mr. Patel, we don't believe your story" (Martel 2003: 292).

Emphasising the rift and the link between story and truth, both versions are frequently referred to as "stories" in Part Three; events that were presented as real in Part Two are now "a story". Seeing as neither story tells the Japanese what they want to hear, namely how the ship sank, Pi asks them which version they prefer, specifically "[w]hich is the better story […]?" (Martel 2003: 317). Both interviewers agree that the story with the animals is the better story. Yet, it is not the one that they believe. It seems that the good story trumps truth.

The entire novel endears the reader to Pi and leads them to invest emotionally in his unlikely tale. In approximately 7½ pages (pp. 303-311), in Part Three, this story gets revoked and replaced by a more disconcerting, yet far more likely one, in which Pi survives because he eats people. A second ontology is created through fiction; or the first version is rendered fiction by the second more plausible account. If Part Two speaks to the heart, Part Three speaks to the head. A reader is left unable to decide which to believe. It is noteworthy that in postmodern fiction, doubt normally comes from ontological instability (McHale 1996: 10-11); in *Life of Pi* doubt comes from the ontologically more stable story.

The second ending can be read as Pi creating the Richard Parker story to survive, compartmentalising his sweet, spiritual self and his survivor cannibal self through a story. An important dichotomy is created between reality and stories, when Pi places truth and lies on the level of fiction. He asks the two interviewers "Doesn't the telling of something always become a story? To this, Mr Okamoto responds "Uhh … perhaps in English. In Japanese a story would have an element of *invention* in it. We do not want invention. We want the 'straight facts', as you say in English" (Martel 2003: 302). Pi then creates an important rift between stories of any kind and the reality they denote when he answers: "Isn't telling about something – using words, English or Japanese – already something of an invention? Isn't just looking upon this world already something of an invention?" (Martel 2003: 302). Not merely using words, naming, storytelling, but their predecessor, perception, for Pi, is separate from this world, from first-hand experience and event. There is the thing, then there is the word or the story for the thing. Truth and lies share the same relation to reality; both comprise invention; both are to an extent a lie.

There is an analogy between the one set of events and the two stories describing it, and the one boy with two names. The idea of the self splitting into two through a story for the sake of survival links to themes related to

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3. Stratton (2004: 13) illustrates that, due to "inter-story scrambling of […] identities", the correspondences are not as simple as the Japanese think they are.

spirituality in the book. There is a link between what things are called and what they are and how Pi views god. Without his modern, non-religious parents or his religious gurus knowing, Pi becomes Hindu, Muslim and Christian. One day, while out walking, Pi and his parents coincidentally meet Pi's priest, pandit and imam – to whom Pi refers as "the three wise men" (Martel 2003: 64), and an uncomfortable and hilarious conversation follows, which ends with the adults deciding that Pi must choose one religion (Martel 2003: 69). Pi is persistent and sticks with all three religions, saying: "Bapu Gandhi said, 'All religions are true.' I just want to love God" (Martel 2003: 69). He sees unity where the adults see division. It is interesting that whereas he dislikes division when it concerns God, he divides himself, in one version of the story, into Pi and Richard Parker to survive.

  Pi expresses his spiritual experiences often with reference to unity and division and through the symbolism of circles and divided circles, which in turn, allude to his renaming. Once, after meeting the pious Mr. Kumar, Pi has a profound religious experience that creates within him a feeling of unity. He relates:

> Whereas before the road, the sea, the trees, the air, the sun all spoke differently to me, now they spoke one *language of unity*. Tree took account of road, which was aware of air, which was mindful of sea, which shared things with the sun. Every element lived in harmonious relation with its neighbour.
>
> (Martel 2003: 62; my emphasis)

Then significantly he adds: "I felt like the centre of a small circle coinciding with the centre of a much larger one. […] I felt God so close to me." (Martel 2003: 62). Pi suddenly perceives the same reality as before in different terms. The "language of unity" is a silent language, an awareness, rather than an utterance. It is perceiving reality as it is, and as undivided. As was the case with the meeting with the three wise men, Pi sees wholeness as spiritual intactness. He describes his experience of the wholeness above saying: "I suddenly felt I was in heaven" (Martel 2003: 62). The entirety of this feeling is paradoxical, made up of opposites: "pulsing energy and profound peace" (Martel 2003: 62). Here and elsewhere he expresses it with reference to circles. Unity, for Pi, is God. Language tends to divide this wholeness.

  Pi returns to this idea of intersecting circles when he is lost at sea: Calculating the radius of what he can see from the lifeboat, Pi asks: "what chance was there that a ship crossing the whole great big Pacific would cut into such a tiny circle? Not only that: that it would cut into such a tiny circle and see me – what chance was there of that" (Martel 2003: 199). Whereas above he was a small circle intersecting with a larger one, here he is a small circle unto himself. He perceives separation. Later he ponders his situation, thinking:

To be a castaway is to be a point perpetually at the centre of a circle. [...] Your gaze is always a radius. The circumference is ever great. In fact, the circles multiply. To be a castaway is to be caught in a harrowing ballet of circles. You are the centre of one circle, while above you two opposing circles spin about. […]. Otherwise, to be a castaway is to be caught up in grim and exhausting opposites

(Martel 2003: 215-216)

Unity and division relate to the idea of God being simultaneously one and many that is prevalent in many religions, including Christianity and Hinduism. The idea of opposites forming a whole reminds of the yin yang that, in Tao and in Chinese philosophy, symbolises opposites that form an indivisible whole. The symbol is useful for the discussion below on the relation between parts and whole. The yin yang's well-known symbol (☯) is a circle divided.[4]

While shipwrecked, Pi ponders the opposites that he encounters: light and dark, openness and claustrophobia, hot and cold, wetness and dryness, abundance and unavailability of food, the opposition of the tides (Martel 2003: 216). He mentions each in the context of yearning for the opposite of what is present and concludes that the worst pair of opposites is boredom and terror (Martel 2003: 217). Other opposites in the novel that add to Pi's experience are the mundane and the profound, atheists and believers, and science and faith. After his ordeal, Pi sees Richard Parker in "nightmares tinged with love" (Martel 2003: 6) These oppositions make up the totality of his experience and evoke the notion of unity and division.

Yin Yang: Mr. Kumar and Mr. Kumar

The yin-yang principle is linked to names in the characters of Mr. Kumar and Mr. Kumar.

Two men by the same name deeply affect Pi during his formative years. The first is his biology teacher at Petit Seminaire, the other a baker. They are both called Satish Kumar. Pi acknowledges that "[t]hese were common names […], so the coincidence is not so remarkable" (Martel 2003: 61). The two men could not be more different: the biology teacher was a Communist, a scientist and an atheist, and the baker was pious, had no learning, and saw God in all; he even "knew the ninety-nine names of God" (Martel 2003: 61). Pi recalls: "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" (Martel 2003: 61). Mr. and Mr. Kumar are, like the yin and yang, complementary opposites of Pi's

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4. Lilith balances good and evil, life and death: she kills human babies, but births demon babies by the hundreds each day (Gaines 2018).

education. Their names, Tsai (2015: 100) writes, signify "the unity of opposites".

When Mr. Kumar and Mr. Kumar meet one day at the Pondicherry Zoo, the narration is carefully wrought so that a reader cannot deduce who's who, as Tsai (2015: 100) notes. Not coincidentally, the two men with the same name and two very distinct characters meet at the zebra enclosure: a zebra is one animal with two opposite colours. Pi relates:

> I broke the carrot in two and gave one half to Mr. Kumar and one half to Mr. Kumar. "Thank you, Piscine", said the one; "Thank you, Pi", said the other. Mr. Kumar went first, dipping his hand over the fence. The zebra's thick, strong, black lips grasped the carrot eagerly. Mr. Kumar wouldn't let go. The zebra sank its teeth into the carrot and snapped it in two, it crunched loudly on the treat for a few seconds, then reached for the remaining piece, lips flowing over Mr. Kumar's fingertips. He released the carrot and touched the zebra's soft nose. It was Mr. Kumar's turn. He wasn't so demanding of the zebra. Once it had his half of the carrot between its lips, he let go. […] Mr. and Mr. Kumar looked delighted.
>
> (Martel 2003: 83)

The narration hides each Mr. Kumar's identity, and their names do not distinguish them. (Having been acquainted with both of them, a reader can guess who is giving the zebra a hard time.) They share the same carrot with each other (and with an animal), as they share a name. The name combines the two men that individually represent mutually exclusive principles in Pi's life. The names create unity from opposites. Tsai (2015: 100) suggests that they are also united in their admiration for the zebra.

The two men with the same name are the inverse of the boy, Pi, who has two names, names that encompass the opposites that he embodies. A mysterious link exists between essence and name. Three names in the novel illustrate the complex and mysterious relationship between name and essence, they are I am, Tsimtsum and the hairless Christians.

I am

Pi aligns himself with God through a name. In Montreal, Pi orders pizza and relates: "I couldn't bear to have yet another French speaker guffawing at my name, so when the man on the phone asked, 'Can I 'ave your name?' I said, 'I am who I am'. Half an hour later two pizzas arrived for 'Ian Hoolihan'" (Martel 2003: 20).

The "I am who I am" passage (Exodus 3:14) is among the most important 'naming' passages in the Bible. God reveals His name and essence to Moses with these mysterious words that are the basis of the tetragrammaton. "I am" is a name that suggests expansiveness, unity between God and all of creation,

between the "I" and that which follows the "am" – potentially everything (see Gaines 2018). It is thus a name aligned with pure unity. Here God promises Moses to be with the Israelites – a gesture that suggests unity between God and humans. Pi adopts the name, aligning himself with God's mysterious name, but the name is lost on the pizza seller who expects a mundane, straightforward name.

Tsimtsum: I Am *Not*

Tsimtsum is the name of the ship that carries the Patels, and sinks; it is also probably the subject of Pi's fourth-year thesis in religious studies, for which he investigated aspects of the cosmogony of Isaac Luria, "the great sixteenth-century Kabbalist from Safed" (Martel 2003: 3). An important part of Luria's cosmogony is the *tsimtsum*.

Stratton (2004: 14) explains that Luria addresses a cosmogonical paradox: "if God is infinite and omnipresent, how could the universe have been created?" In other words: If God is complete unity, how can he create what he is not. Stratton (2004:14) explains:

> Tsimtsum is Luria's answer to the question, a Hebrew word that means God's contraction or withdrawal into self in order to make room for the universe. Having first created a space where God was not, God then tried to fill the space with emanations of divine energy, but material vessels of the world were not strong enough to hold them and they scattered.

Stephens (2010: 50) contends that the void that God creates by contracting thus is a circle, and Horan (2012) explains that in this void God is hidden; "[w]ere He to be revealed, we would cease to exist, melting back into the infinite Oneness of His essence".

Tsimtsum is the opposite of the all-encompassing I am; it is the creation of the I am not, the genesis of the original division, and the introduction of oppositions. According to Luria "the major task of humanity from the time of creation has been to repair the broken vessels and overcome the separation between divinity and materiality" (Stratton 2004: 15).

As in Genesis, God creates by separation – separating himself from a void in which he creates all of creation. God creates all that is not God. I am and *tsimtsum* are inversely connected, and analogous to name and essence.

Just as Luria's notion of *tsimtsum* refers to a world of division, away from God, the Tsimtsum ship symbolises in Pi's life division and chaos.

The Inverse: The Hairless Christians

Martel shows how, as in Genesis, a word can bring a thing into being. How things are perceived and what they are called have an element of invention *and* the capacity to change reality, and by implication the story. Pi reflects:

> I know a woman here in Toronto who is very dear to my heart […] her French-speaking mind still slips on occasion on the understanding of English sounds. And so, when she first heard of Hare Krishnas, she didn't hear right. She heard "Hairless Christians", and *that is what they were to her* for many years. When I corrected her, I told her that in fact she was not so wrong; that Hindus, in their capacity for love, are indeed hairless Christians, just as Muslims, in the way they see God in everything, are bearded Hindus, and Christians, in their devotion to God, are hat-wearing Muslims.
>
> (Martel 2003: 49-50; my emphasis)

Pi's response alludes to a pre-linguistic unity and truth, a harmony that exists beyond words, similar to what he experiences after his meeting with the pious Mr. Kumar and that he holds on to after his meeting with the three wise men. For him the familiar division between God's worshippers implies a step away from the unity that Pi perceives as indicative of God. This example makes clear Pi's contention that all manner of perception and language contains an "element of invention" (Martel 2003: 302) and it shows how naming and language create division.

The nomenclature "hairless Christians" creates reality for this woman ("that is what they were to her"). The word shifts the world, just like a new story may create new understanding of an event. The new word fundamentally changes this woman's perception of an aspect of reality, almost like Pi who saw the same reality differently as he left Mr. Kumar.

Incorrect names, like incorrect stories, are ways of creating a reality. This anticipates Pi's two versions of events on the Pacific. The name Richard Parker, and the shipwreck narratives too create the represented reality for the reader.

A Rift and A Mysterious Connection

When Moses, an individual separate from God, asks Him His name, God gives him His pre-division name, I am. I am – God – exists beyond and before all division and all names. Tsimtsum is the introduction of division, where an all-encompassing God creates a space separate from himself in which to create creation. It alludes to a mysterious link between the divided parts. In a world characterised by division, the hairless Christians show Pi's yearning for pre-division, pre-linguistic unity. The hairless Christians also show how language creates reality.

These names highlight aspects of the relationship between reality and nomenclature and are indicative of unity, division and a post-division yearning for lost unity that feature in other names in the text.

Other Names

An instance where naming is directly related to unity and division is evident when the teacher takes attendance. Pi relates:

> The class started the way all classes start, with the stating of names. […] We called them out from our desks in the order in which we happened to be sitting.
>   "Ganapathy Kumar,' said Ganapathy Kumar.
>   "Vipin Nath," said Vipin Nath.
>   "Shamshool Hudha," said Shamshool Hudha.
>   "Peter Dharmaraj," said Peter Dharmaraj.
>   Each name elicited a tick on a list and a brief mnemonic stare from the teacher […].
>
> <div align="right">(Martel 2003: 22)</div>

The list continues in a similar manner, the narration revealing the symmetry and structure of "I am who I am" – each boy stating who he is, his name, his essence. Unlike the I am that has open reference, their names have specific reference, each denoting a particular identity.

Naming fundamentally changes the group: the names divide the unit of boys into individuals. Each new name brings about a new division as each boy responds with the name that denotes him. Reminiscent of God's creation of the *tsimtsum*, each boy separates himself from the group when stating his name. It is in this context that Pi changes his name.

To distinguish one has to divide. This recalls Lacan's symbolic phase where loss of unity comes about as a result of language (Barry 2002: 114). But for Pi, unity and division have to do with spirituality and God, more than with a world of language. The scenario above is juxtaposed with Pi's lack of regard for what God is called during the meeting with the three wise men, and with what worshippers are called in the hairless Christians scenario. Here, names grant identity and concomitant separation within a group.

The idea that names grant identity is shown negatively when the author and Pi look at a photo album and consider the identity of an unnamed man, standing "next to the minister, with horn-rimmed glasses and hair very neatly combed. […] I don't know who that is" (Martel 2003: 87), says Pi. Without a name, the man has no identity.

The book complicates the idea that names divide wholes. While lost at sea, Pi playfully names the whales, the "gentle behemoths" of the ocean, Bamphoo, Mumphoo, Tomphoo, Stimpoo, Pimphoo and Lamphoo (Martel 2003: 229-230). Here the naming does not divide the group into individuals.

Their names remain interchangeable. The whale-naming creates a sense of companionship for Pi; he makes up a story about how the whales care about him and "the pussy cat", and "understood [his] condition" (Martel 2003: 230). In naming them, Pi thus gains some power; he feels a sense of companionship and unity as the invented story lifts his spirits (Martel 2003: 230). The whales are imaginary companions in a very different way than Richard Parker is an imaginary companion.

An Unholy Unity

Pi's father believes that humans are the most dangerous animals in the zoo. There is only one animal more dangerous and he invents a name for this animal, a name that denotes a dangerous unity. Through this new name a new "species" comes into being: the "redoubtable […] *Animalus anthropomorphicus*" is "the animal as seen through human eyes" (Martel 2003: 31). This species can be cute, friendly or devoted, or it could be vicious, bloodthirsty and depraved.

When we see an animal as human, the animal stops being animal and becomes something else. A new being is created. Pi's father warns against the human tendency to look at an animal and observe unity rather than difference.

Pi significantly describes *Animalus anthropomorphicus* as "we look at an animal and see a mirror" (Martel 2003: 31) This instance too has Lacanian resonances. Lacan's symbolic order is catalysed by the mirror stage – when a baby realises that it is an entity separate from its mother (Lacan 2006 [1966]: 75-79, Barry 2002: 114). Pi does the opposite of what his father warns him about: he projects, in a Freudian sense, an aspect of himself as animal, and this saves him. Whereas *Animalus anthropomorphicus* is dangerous, Richard Parker creates safety for Pi.

With these considerations in mind, I turn to the two principle renamings in the novel.

Renamings

Pondering his own renaming, Pi links names to life-power. He thinks: "it is true that those we meet can change us, sometimes so profoundly that we are not the same afterwards, even unto our names" (Martel 2003: 20). He then lists Biblical renamings: "Witness Simon who is called Peter, Matthew also known as Levi, Nathaniel who is also Bartholomew, Judas, not Iscariot, who took the name Thaddeus, Simeon who went by Niger, Saul who became Paul" (Martel 2003: 20). Pi relates essence to names. In his view, if essence changes, names change. Saul's essence changed, therefore he became Paul. Reality changed, then names change. The change is presented as inevitable.

The Naming: Piscine Molitor

Pi explains how he came to be named Piscine Molitor Patel: "I was named after a swimming pool." This bizarre christening ensues when a family friend, whom Pi calls Mamaji, "a champion […] swimmer" (Martel 2003: 8), entertains Pi's parents with "[s]wim lore" (Martel 2003: 10). Significantly, Mamaji "is a great storyteller", and his recollections of the pools in which he swam as a student in France lead Pi's parents to name their last son after the best pool of them all: The Piscine Molitor.

Pi is the only swimmer in his family, and Mamaji becomes Pi's swimming instructor. Both Pi and Mamaji use religious terminology to talk about swimming pools and swimming lessons: Pi declares that, as a swimmer, he "remained faithful to his aquatic guru" and calls himself Mamaji's "willing disciple" (Martel 2003: 9). He thinks of these lessons as an "early morning ritual" (Martel 2003: 9). After initial training on the beach and in the ocean, Mamaji moves this ritual to a swimming pool at a place associated with worship – the ashram swimming pool. As he becomes a better swimmer, Pi describes the water in alchemical terms: it turned from "molten lead to liquid light" (Martel 2003: 10).

Pi explains that "[b]eyond the activity of swimming, there was the talk of it" (Martel 2003: 10); there is reality and story, and Mamaji's stories elevate the mundane to the spiritual. Mamaji tells stories of many, many pools, but "no swimming pool matched the glory of the Piscine Molitor" (Martel 2003: 11), which Mamaji describes as "a pool the gods would have delighted to swim in" (Martel 2003: 11). He describes the Piscine Molitor with the reverence with which one would describe a cathedral, saying "'[e]very bit of tile, brass and wood gleamed. It was – it was …'. It was the only pool that made Mamaji fall silent" (Martel 2003: 12).

Piscine Molitor's name alludes to a pool that is described in religious terms. Significantly, both the indoor and the outdoor pools of the Piscine Molitor "were as big as small oceans" (Martel 2003: 11), and interestingly, he gets this name seven years before his first swimming lesson. It is almost as though a mysterious connection exists between boy and name, as though his name determines and anticipates his identity, as Tsai (2015: 99) notes, and his future – not only his love for swimming and his later adventure in the Pacific Ocean, but also his love for religion. Pi's name thus suggests much about him and his destiny.

The Renaming: From Piscine to Pi

Having been called "Pissing Patel" once too often, Piscine Molitor Patel decides to change his name to Pi. Pi's renaming, which is wrought with religious allusions, coincides with his transition to secondary school. He

aligns himself with Jesus when he names the boy that calls him Pissing Patel "my Roman soldier" (Martel 2003: 20). He then turns to Islam iconography when he says: "I spent my last years at St Joseph's School feeling like the persecuted prophet Muhammad in Mecca, […]. But just as he planned his flight to Medina, the Hejira that would mark the beginning of Muslim time, I planned my escape and the beginning of a new time for me" (Martel 2003: 21). Not only does he align his renaming with the experiences of Jesus and Muhammad, but his renaming also marks a new phase in his life.

On the day of his renaming, Pi acknowledges that he "was terribly nervous", and he psyches himself up by aligning himself once more with Muhammad. He thinks to himself: "Time to put down Satan. Medina, here I come" (Martel 2003: 22). He then describes his renaming: His teacher was taking attendance, asking each boy his name. When it is Piscine's turn, the boy hurries to the blackboard, grabs a piece of chalk and writes Piscine Molitor Patel on the board; he underlines the "Pi", and adds "for good measure […] $\pi = 3.14$". While doing so, he draws "a large circle, which [he] sliced in two with a diameter, to evoke that basic lesson of geometry" (Martel 2003: 23). The religious allusions continue: "I was saved", says Pi, when his new name catches on (Martel 2003: 23).

Pi (π) is the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. It is often explained by drawing a circle, and then cutting the circle to show its diameter. The formula anticipates Pi's experience of wholeness after visiting the pious Mr. Kumar, and Pi's ruminations about intersecting circles on the Pacific Ocean. Pi's sketch of a circle divided by a line alludes to wholeness and division that relate to both spirituality and to his name. His name thus contains an opposition: it has an elevated and mundane meaning. The name refers to a boy and it has religious allusions and seemingly magical, future-predictive properties.

The Significance of Pi's Renaming

After his renaming, Pi ponders: "And so, in that Greek letter that looks like a shack with a corrugated iron roof, in that elusive, irrational number with which scientists try to understand the universe, I found refuge" (Martel 2003: 24).

Pi assesses here the significance of his new name, and two things are important: first he sees the name as a type of home that gives him a sense of belonging; he calls it a "shack with a corrugated iron roof" where he "found refuge". Second, he thinks of pi (π) as a means to understand the universe. Tsai (2015: 99) states that the number is infinite, boundless and irrational. Pi's new name is thus simultaneously linked to his identity and to the mystery of the universe.

His name changes from Piscine Molitor – a denominator for a contained, divided and controlled artificial body of water – to Pi, the symbol for "that elusive, irrational number with which scientists try to understand the universe" (Martel 2003: 24). His names are emblems of small scale and large scale human control over nature and are juxtaposed with the lack of control that Pi will have over nature, just a few years later.

So, in Pi's naming and renaming, one finds names that point to essence and to destiny, to notions of unity and division that also describe his view of God. Pi's naming and renaming are almost nominatively deterministic in that both names suggest aspects of his identity and future. Richard Parker's naming and renaming evoke mystery for other reasons.

Richard Parker

Whereas Pi's naming and renaming are well-thought-though, carefully planned and rendered in religious terms, Richard Parker's are due to a comic clerical error. Pi explains how a hunter named Richard Parker, in an attempt to free a village of a "man-eating panther" (Martel 2003: 133), catches a mother tiger and her cub, who are not the culprits the hunter is looking for. The hunter, remembering how the cub "rushed to drink in the river", baptized it Thirsty. Because the two tigers are too close to "human habitation" (Martel 2003: 133), they are sent to the Pondicherry Zoo. Pi recalls the renaming:

> the shipping clerk at the Howrah train station was evidently a man both befuddled and diligent. All the papers we received with the cub clearly stated that its name was Richard Parker, and that the hunter's name was Thirsty and that his family name was None Given. Father had a good chuckle over the mix-up and Richard Parker's name had stuck".
>
> (Martel 2003: 133)

Pi muses: "I don't know if Thirsty None Given ever got his man-eating panther" (Martel 2003: 133).

Thirsty denotes what the tiger is; its essence and truth. On the surface, Richard Parker's naming and renaming appear mundane, and yet, in this renaming the man becomes the tiger and the tiger becomes the man. There is a dichotomization and a switching of identities; there is an anticipation of the future.

Readers learn Richard Parker's name before they learn that he is a tiger, as Cole (2004: 29) mentions. Truth for the reader shifts in relation to the name: because of his human name, the reader is led to think that Richard Parker is human, and the reader remains under this illusion until Richard Parker is about to get on the lifeboat and Pi who endeavours to save him suddenly "[wakes] up to what [he] was doing" (Martel 2003: 99). Then only does the story shift

for the reader. In our conceptualization, Richard Parker is human, then animal, and later once more (probably) human.

In the light of the second, plausible ending, Richard Parker is an aspect of Pi's identity. If changing his name to Pi is Piscine Molitor's first renaming, adopting the name of Richard Parker can be seen as a second 'renaming'. Giving the cannibal aspect of himself a separate name compartmentalises an aspect of Pi that he wishes to hide. Pi becomes divided into an innocent boy and the cannibal. Yet, this name, and what it represents, make it possible for him to survive; Richard Parker is the part that makes it possible for Pi to continue loving God. The division is Pi's saving grace. Pi indeed says he would not have survived if it weren't for Richard Parker (Martel 2003: 285 & 286).

Richard Parker's disappearance into the Mexican jungle, sad as it was for Pi without the closure of a proper goodbye, may be seen as Pi being restored to unity. Richard Parker is gone, yet Pi ponders what he would have wanted to say to the tiger: "You will always be with me, in my heart" (Martel 2003: 286). This is a poignant way to indicate that the part of himself that he externalised remains inside of him. Pi becomes whole beyond the division that kept him alive.

An innocent memory and a clerical error attribute to the name mundane and profound qualities, and Richard Parker's (re)naming, like Pi's, points to essence and to the future. It also alludes to unity and division. These similarities between the functions of the names of Pi and Richard Parker are significant for obvious reasons.

The boy (Piscine Molitor Patel, Pi, Richard Parker) exists beyond and before all the names that denote him.

Conclusion

Life of Pi shows how the human spirit survives trauma through storytelling and through spirituality, and this study reveals the value of names in unlocking these themes.

The characters' names and the protagonists' renamings foreground and problematise both the rift and the link between person and name, and point towards the rift and link between event and story. Names allude to the intricate connection between whole and parts that constitute both world-creation and shape spirituality in the book.

There exists an analogy between how a person gets a name, and an event gets a story. A story "breaks up" reality into multiple truths. These truths may be mutually exclusive, yet are intimately connected to the reality they describe and to each other. The book reflects on the nature of storytelling and its ability to create versions of a world we want to believe and to which we want to belong. Through its use of names, *Life of Pi* shows how people use stories,

not only to understand and survive this world, but also create it. After all, whether you call something a tiger or a cannibal matters when the something eats a human being, and Pi must have been Thirsty at sea.

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