Introduction

Movie 1 - Rashomon (1950)
● [summary, general reactions]

Movie 2 - The Life of Pi (2012)
● [summary, general reactions]

Talking Points (both pieces)
● narrativity
  ○ There’s a concept of “verisimilitude” in fiction--Plato and Aristotle believed that elements of art needed to have some degree of grounding in reality (mimesis) for them to be persuasive or significant for the audience. As this theory evolved, others suggested that an internal stability is the only amount of “truth” necessary the story to be believable in fiction, so long as it doesn’t violate its own rules.
    ■ Are we more willing to forgive characters who lie to tell us these stories than we are when the story itself is revealed to be a lie (i.e. “it was all a dream”), and if so why?
      ● Do we feel cheated by Pi’s measure of doubt?
  ○ Two kinds of faith are presented in Life of Pi--supernatural and scientific--but the two are presented at odds with one-another. Yet both can be understood as attempts at narrativization (ordering the past to predict the future)...
    ■ What’s the difference between them (science narrative and supernatural narrative) in Pi?
    ■ Is there jeopardy in allowing one into the domain of the other? (What happens when the boundary is breached?)
    ■ Do both “kinds” of faith require dispassionate indifference?
    ■ Do we see the same division between faith and science in Rashomon? (IS there science in Rashomon?)
This boundary also divides between the material and the spiritual (in the asceticism of Pi on the boat, and his psychological role of superego, wrestling between his spiritual faith and the hungry tiger of the body; but also in his father (the materially-concerned businessman) and his mother (the longing faithful--in the book less so)). Does the same divide exist in Rashomon?

Why does Life of Pi implicitly deny us the third option: to conclude that Pi is a liar and not to be trusted at all?
- (Does this imply that the majority of the story is about science vs. faith?)
- Contrasting Rashomon with The Life of Pi - the former starts from a collection of lies and emerges to find a small faith in truth, while the latter constructs a beautiful lie and then juxtaposes it with the ugly reality it conceals
  - The Atlantic points out that having more redemption sequences in a life story is associated with higher well-being, but it barely touches on the role that contamination sequences hold in making one accountable for one’s actions.

Do both films present the balance drawn between optimism and pessimism (on an individual level OR on a social level) as being entirely subjective?

- the individual vs. society
  - There are a number of power dynamics at play in Rashomon (i.e. wealthy vs. poor, nobility vs. commoner, male vs. female)
    - I’m inclined to believe the woodcutter’s story as the “most true” version of events, but as a member of the lower class, should we discount the his story as inherently biased as well?
  - SARTRE A: If we assume the characters in Rashomon are acting in “bad faith” (as Sartre puts it) and are trying to conform to their social roles by creating the narrative of what makes a good (wife, bandit, samurai), and if we take the woodcutter's version of the story to be the most accurate (if only because he has the smallest stake in the trial as such), what can we interpret about the characters, their society, and their perceived roles IN society by the lies they present to the audience?
    - (NOTE: The Atlantic frames social roles as socially-accepted, pre-made narratives to direct one’s understanding and ambition of one’s life: they can be comforting to those who have an easy time of conforming to them, but crushing and destructive to those who are alienated by nature.)
  - Despite his apparently antisocial nature, is Tajômaru inadvertently trying to help maintain social order by playing up his role, or is he simply preying on society’s preconceptions for personal gain?
  - Extending this analysis to the Life of Pi, what would the role(s) be that Pi is trying to present to the world?
  - SARTRE B: “The Look” - in Sartre’s reading, it is a self-alienating phenomenon: in being stared at, one becomes anxious because it creates an awareness of self as an object, outside of the empathic bonds of society, because we immediately recognize our subjectivity to others.
    - How is The Look expressed in both of these works?
  - Comparing the settings of Rashomon and Life of Pi
    - Who profits in an honest society vs. a dishonest society? (i.e. a society with trust vs. a society without trust?)
  - Pi seems to be vaguely aware of the cognitive dissonance of being able to produce both accounts of his shipwreck and yet still prefer one over the other as the one he subscribes to as “his version” of events.
Can someone still act faithfully in society while aware of/believing that its basis is a lie? (i.e. treating it as "make-believe")
- Is the evaluative “faith” in Life of Pi mainly personal (i.e. the decision about how to define one’s own life experiences as a way of approaching the future) or is the “faith” public (i.e. the decision of whether to trust in another person’s belief in and interpretation of themselves) or both?
- Where does personal faith butt up against interpersonal faith?
- There’s a bit in the novel Life of Pi that was not included in the movie where the leaders of Pi’s various denominations discover that Pi’s been working with them and start squabbling amongst themselves, laying blame on one-another for the various crimes and atrocities and bizarrenesses of their scriptures, to which Pi ends up taking a “live and let live” attitude, referencing Ghandi’s words on the subject.

- **truth and lies (our final destination)**
  - Three (non-mutually-exclusive) explanations can account for each story in Rashomon:
    1. The character has intentionally deceived others about what happened
    2. The character has deceived themselves about what happened
    3. The character was mistaken (or had a skewed perspective) about the details of what happened
   Because confabulation isn’t quite the same as lying outright, do we know that any of the characters in either of these works are lying? (i.e. in both cases we are given multiple narratives with sufficient reason to doubt, but do we know for a fact that there’s a lie being perpetrated?)
   Where does the lie end and potential confabulation (due to authoring one’s own life-narrative) begin?
  - RE: both works, looking beyond the Platonic “noble lie” in which the ideal of social harmony is mapped out on the basis of a tomorrow that may never arrive (see: Death’s speech in Hogfather), are lies on an individual level also necessary for the preservation of social order?
  - When do we consider a lie to have been “worth it” after the fact (either of its discovery, or its consequence)?
    And perhaps a revealing question beneath that one: does it have anything to do with what is at stake if the truth is revealed?
    - Were any (or all) of these lies “worth it”?
  - Is it possible for us to do as Pi does and (after identifying our goals and coming to understand our own minds and bodies) construct a narrative for ourselves to best achieve it, in essence creating our own faith?
    Or are we better off doing as Rashomon suggests and throw ourselves onto the mercy of others (even at great personal risk)?
    - What are the tenets of a good faith, as presented in Life of Pi?
    - Is it even practical for each of us to define ourselves? Or is it a sign of our materialistic, modern way of life that I would question the practicality of this spiritual self-becoming?
  - In the film Life of Pi, there’s a line that goes something like: “Doubt is useful, It keeps faith a living thing. You cannot know the strength of your faith until it’s been tested.” In the novel, on the other hand, Pi warns that, “To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation.”
    Are faith and doubt simply two sides of the same wall (to keep secure the Platonic division between world as it is and the world as we perceive it to be)?
    - Did the monk’s crisis of faith in Rashomon lead to a wiser, more nuanced sense of the world (which The Atlantic article suggests is a natural result of such psychic crises—a further complication of the self) or did it simply make his blind spot to reality more acute?
At some point, does judgment run contrary to faith?

John Milton (Paradise Lost) felt the same way: untested faith is no faith at all

As social entities that nonetheless have to maintain their individuality, we can see that there is a threat posed by too much honesty AND by too little. To pit the two movies (and their messages) against one-another:

- What is the risk of too much honesty in Rashomon?
- What is the risk of too little honesty in Life of Pi?

Another kind of real/perceived divide is the split between mind and body, which we find represented in the asceticism of Life of Pi, leading to a “nirvana” of the mysterious island. Why does Pi turn away here?

Is the supernatural necessary for faith in Life of Pi? Is it a bit of sugar to make the medicine go down, or is it a bitter pill required to buy in to the human soul/dignity? (Or is it all a matter of perspective?)

- Is the supernatural necessary for faith in Rashomon as well?
- Is the size of the demon commensurate to the size of the soul it contains?

Media

- The Life of Pi
- Rashomon
- The Atlantic - “Life's Stories: How you arrange the plot points of your life into a narrative can shape who you are—and is a fundamental part of being human.”

  (Secondary Media)

- The Invention of Lying (trailer) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJLeymrMzIk
- True Detective - pessimism: religion and fairy tales https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RfUj09pWfM
- The Hogfather - ‘Belief’ as according to Death https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnaQXJmpwM4
- The Dark Knight - Joker's speech https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7LsBMA-rKg ending scene https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYeF5wM0fYQ
- ANIME STARING https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXi3cYBCR3Q
- BIT FROM THE SOAP OPERA “IT WAS ALL A DREAM”?

Charting Our Course

- For this episode, we’ll be looking at the nature of truth and lies, as described in various pieces of media. Because lies never exist within an individual context, the general arc of our discussion will have to be conducted on several levels of focus as we zero-in on our core subject:
A Brief Philosophical Background on Truth, Lies, and the Human Condition

- **Bentham** - “falsehood, taken by itself...can never, upon the principle of utility, constitute any offence at all" for a lie can never be taken by itself--**lies are always embedded in a social context.** [From this, one might argue that lying’s primary “sin” is that it destroys trust and erodes human relationships.]
- **(Sophists) 5th C. B.C.** - born at the advent of western democracy, Sophists were paid tutors who wandered from town to town, teaching speechcraft and rhetoric, claiming to be able to teach anything (everything and its opposite; thesis and antithesis); their concern was primarily with being able to say things in a convincing manner--the truth being considered irrelevant (after all, the world is wildly inconsistent, full of incomprehensible changes and life and death, etc.). Instead of a pursuit of truth, they focused on altering public perception of what the truth is, shifting the goalposts to correspond to whatever the truth (politically) of the day should be.
- **Plato (& Socrates) 470-399 B.C.** - Socrates was a profound critic of the Sophists; Plato (Socrates' pupil) believed lies were broadly wrong (going so far as to ban poets and playwrights from his ideal community--the Republic--as purveyors of fiction and lies), Plato believed that politicians in his Republic should propagate a “noble lie” (that people are born into their lots by nature) as a way of enforcing a rigid caste structure while still keeping the populace happy with their lot in life. Plato’s ideas stage the philosophical tug-of-war between the individual and society (and between practicality and idealism) that would play out over the millennia to follow.
  - (Plato also pointed out the inherent division of the “world as it is” and “the world as we perceive it be with our limited senses”.)
- **(Relativist / Situationalist) - take a middle-of-the-road approach**
  - **St. Augustine & Thomas Aquinas** - Augustine ranked lies into a hierarchy, with some (i.e. white lies with positive outcomes) more easily pardoned than others, though all being basically wrong. Likewise, Aquinas held that though some lies may be forgiven under specific circumstances, we have a responsibility to tell the truth, whatever the circumstances, difficult though it may be.
  - **Hugo Grotius** - tempered the absolute ban on lies by allowing for equivocation (speaking vaguely and allowing the listener to arrive at incorrect conclusions), and by creating restrictions regarding whether some even have a right to hear the truth (i.e. concealing the truth from children, the insane, and/or one’s enemies)
  - **Locke** - (empiricism) writing at a time when science was first becoming a structured, methodological pursuit, Locke believed in empirical truths, but (promoting religious tolerance) felt that, when the truth is impossible to know (re: the ultimate questions of life and the universe) all should be free to believe whatever they choose.
  - **William James** - (pragmatism) defines “truth” as “whatever it is useful to believe is true”
  - **C.S. Peirce** - (pragmatism) “truth” is whatever the majority of people believe is true (similar to Foucault)
- **(Absolutist / Idealist) - inflexible, hard-and-fast rules against lying**
- **Kant** - proposed the absolute wrongness of lying, based on his categorical imperative (that immorality arises from treating other people as a means to an end); Kant reasoned that the very possibility of lying presupposes the normality of truth, and to lie to people is to fail to treat them as equals and ends in themselves, and that therefore a lie is always a moral wrong.

- **Mill** - (utilitarian) working from a presupposition that what is right/moral is that which leads to the greatest good for the greatest number of people, Mill maintained that lies were better avoided, even when the costs of telling the truth were heavy in individual cases (such as revealing the location of a victim to their would-be murderer), because truthfulness is, in the long run, more valuable to humanity as a whole.

**Existentialism**

- **Sartre** - Though significant portions of his philosophy and psychological reasoning is based on misreadings of other authors, he coined the useful concept of “mau-vaise foi” (bad faith):
  - While “essence precedes existence” in matters of the physical world (i.e. before a knife can be created, there must first be the concept of a knife), man is a spontaneous, self-created creature which takes its own social context and makes of it what it will. It is “bad faith”, then, is to not take advantage of our freedom as individuals, conforming instead to the will of the crowd--“being what you are not” (instead of “being in oneself”)--thus immorally wasting our lives by trying to sustain a socially-dictated role from which we are essentially alienated, while deluding ourselves into believing in coherence: that we live in a tidy universe in which things always end up making sense.
  - Our anxiety or existential guilt in the face of this free choice (Angst, felt as nausea) results from the recognition of the absurd incoherence of reality. Angst is felt in the face of choice; we have “no excuses behind us and no justification before us…[we are] condemned to be free.”
  - Sartre also attacked Kant's ideal of “treating others as ends in themselves” as impossible to achieve, because even as we ourselves perceive the world as a collection of objects, so too are we ourselves perceived as objects (illustrated by “the look”: how being caught in someone else’s gaze can lead to a feeling of alienation and separateness from others).

- **Nietzsche** - disdains the idea of truth vs. lies altogether, proclaiming that the things we call the “true” are just threadbare illusions that society conjured up in time immemorial, compromises of mutual understanding that society has subsequently forgotten the original purpose of. Every statement contains lies of omission, and those lies that we cherish as capital-T “Truths” are the very same ones that fetter us in society from becoming our greatest possible selves.
  - “Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies.”
  - “The lie is a condition of life.”
  - “What are man's truths ultimately? Merely his irrefutable errors.”

**Deconstructionism**

- **Derrida** - attacked presumption that language allows us to readily convey thoughts and refer to the objective world around us. There is no absolute truth to the meaning of words, because meaning changes by context, with total ambiguity in most contexts: the listeners and their culture define meanings of words much more than the speaker does.

**Evolutionary Psychology (citation needed)**

- The individual profits most (reproductively) from surviving, but he who survives best is the one that gets the most for doing the least. (Hence the danger of the parasite on social safety nets, as well as the risk of leadership and “absolute power corrupting absolutely.”)
And I’m Blake and this week…

_I just don’t understand. I just don’t understand at all._
_I have a story to tell you._

- Today on I’m the Host we’re going to be talking out of both sides all about LIES: the white, black, and everything in between.
- As meat for our discussion, grist for the mill, we watched two films about capital-T Truth: 1950’s Rashomon and 2012’s Life of Pi.
  ○ **HONESTLY, EITHER FILM/BOOK COULD HAVE BEEN A FULL EPISODE UNTO ITSELF,** and I felt kind of bad about slapping them together like this, BUT they were too good to pass up, so it goes.
- I also gave my cohosts a brief philosophical survey of the arguments surrounding truth and lies over the last 3000 years which we won’t go into here, but which you should be able to find in the shownotes on Podbean and iTunes.
- Because this is an episode about fact, fiction, and narrative, a warning that massive spoilers will happen here, so if you don’t want these two stories ruined for you, NOW is your chance to hop into the lifeboat, escape into the rain, or stick your fingers in your ears and go “lalalalala” for the next two hours or so.
- We’ll start with a quick synopsis of the two films for those who are less familiar with the works in question before getting into the nitty-gritty of our discussion, starting with 1950’s Rashomon by director Akira Kurosawa and cinematographer Kazuo Miyagawa.

**Movie 1 - Rashomon (1950)**

- Plot was based on Ryūnosuke Akutagawa’s short story “In A Grove”, though the title and setting of the framing narrative were from a different short story, also titled “Rashomon”.
- Rashomon opens on a rainy day in feudal-era Japan (or thenabouts) and centers on two men--a woodcutter and a priest--sitting under a burned-down gatehouse on the outskirts of the city of Rashomon, taking shelter from the rain.

  Both men are dazed by a “strange story” they’ve just heard surrounding the murder trial of a dead samurai, the details of which they relate to a third man, a stranger who arrives also seeking shelter from the rain, who joins them in trying to make sense of it all.

  The trial regards a notorious bandit--Tajomaru--who spots a samurai walking through the woods with his beautiful wife, becomes infatuated with her, and decides to take her for himself. Tajomaru tricks the samurai into following him into the woods, ties him up, and then has his way with the wife before his eyes.

  In Tajomaru’s accounting, the wife is initially full of rage at the bandit’s trick, but eventually succumbs to her desire, and demands after that her husband and the bandit fight to the death for her honor, and that she will go willingly with the victor. The bandit cuts the samurai free and they have a dramatic and honorable duel, that ends with the death of the samurai. The woman flees, and Tajomaru is later captured by the authorities after a mishap on the road.

  While this story seems simple on its face, it becomes complicated when the wife is found and brought to testify, only to give a completely different account of the events following her capture by the bandit. This complication is further compounded by the testimony of the samurai (given through a spirit medium) and the woodcutter himself, each of whom offers another wildly different account of what, why, and how exactly events transpired in the woods, leading to the samurai’s death.
In the end, every version of the story is found wanting and the three men’s faith in humanity is tested when an abandoned infant is discovered at the ruins of the Rashomon gatehouse.

- [reactions]

**Movie 2 - The Life of Pi (2012)**

- An American film shot in 2012 by director Ang Lee. Its plot was based on a novel by the same name, written by Yann Martel, who appears metafictionally as a framing device in both works.
- *Life of Pi* opens on Canadian novelist Yann Martel making the acquaintance of one Pi (Piscine Molitor) Patel. Martel claims to have been directed to Pi by Pi’s uncle, who promised him an amazing story that would make him believe in God. Pi seems skeptical of this promise, but offers his account all the same. Pi begins to recount his life, starting in Pondicherry, India, where his family ran a national zoo. Pi goes through several adventures in Pondicherry, finding faith in several religions (Hindu, Christianity, & Islam), meeting his first love, and a brief moment of reckless danger while trying to get acquainted with the zoo’s Bengal tiger, Richard Parker. This life is abruptly ended by “The Emergency” (a period of Indian authoritarianism characterized by political purges). His family decides to flee overseas, selling the zoo’s animals in America and then immigrating to Canada.
- Pi’s family journey is also abruptly changed as the entire shipliner sinks amid a massive storm, leaving Pi trapped on a lifeboat along with four zoo animals: an orangutan, a zebra, a hyena, and Richard Parker, the tiger. The rest of Pi’s journey is a tale of ingenuity and survival. By the journey’s end, Pi has seen many strange and wondrous things, braved impossible odds, and arrives in Mexico with renewed faith and a story that few can believe, but which few are willing to deny (given the alternative).

- [reactions]

Stability of society matches the need for faith?

Rust-like skepticism is understandable, given that we don’t really have too many people raised totally alienated from modern religious influences.

It’s a bit like how we can surmise the effects of language and perception on cognition, but without case studies we can’t really be sure of what it’s like without it.

**Talking Points (both pieces)**

- **Narrativity**
  - There’s a concept of “verisimilitude” in fiction—Plato and Aristotle believed that elements of art needed to have some degree of grounding in reality (mimesis) for them to be persuasive or significant for the audience. As this theory evolved, others suggested that an internal stability is the only amount of “truth” necessary the story to be believable in fiction, so long as it doesn’t violate its own rules.
    - Are we more willing to forgive characters who lie to tell us these stories than we are when the story itself is revealed to be a lie (i.e. “it was all a dream”), and if so why?
      - Do we feel cheated by Pi’s measure of doubt?
      - Conflict vs. lied to
  - The Atlantic points out that having more redemption sequences in a life story is associated with higher well-being, but it barely touches on the role that contamination sequences hold in making one accountable for one’s actions.
    - Do both films present the balance drawn between optimism and pessimism (on an individual level OR on a social level) as being entirely subjective?

- **The individual vs. society**
- There are a number of power dynamics at play in Rashomon (i.e. wealthy vs. poor, nobility vs. commoner, male vs. female)
  - I’m inclined to believe the woodcutter’s story as the “most true” version of events, but as a member of the lower class, should we discount his story as inherently biased as well?
  - [general talk]
- SARTRE A: If we assume the characters in Rashomon are acting in “bad faith” (as Sartre puts it) and are trying to conform to their social roles by creating the narrative of what makes a good (wife, bandit, samurai), and if we take the woodcutter’s version of the story to be the most accurate (if only because he has the smallest stake in the trial as such), what can we interpret about the characters, their society, and their perceived roles in society by the lies they present to the audience?
  - The thief (Tajomaru) presents himself as a womanizer, a cunning man, a seductor, and also a talented warrior who runs away with the prize. Also a fool?
    - He’s a total individualist in this society, but in a socialized expression of individualism: as a villain, and as the only character with a name. He’s fulfilling a social role by being absurd.
  - The wife cries out over her own lost chastity. She begs him to kill her, and she faints under her husband’s judgment. In the end, her life is her reward, redeemed by her husband’s death (very Christlike in that way).
  - The samurai also retains the wife’s dignity (social responsibility to not judge her?) but then turns it on her, asking the bandit to kill her, to which end the bandit ends up turning on her and offers to kill the wife. She runs away and the samurai kills himself (for his own morality, it seems here?)
    - (male/female power dynamic being wielded by the samurai here: he makes her a villainous manipulator and then a coward.)
  - Samurai and wife versions are pretty close, but with a few small but strong changes. Their behavior is melodramatic, but also seemingly of the upper class (or a projection of their “unflappability”)
  - The woodcutter version makes them all out to be frauds: they face each other like children playing at adults. Samurai falls back on judging her instantly: leaves the moral decision up to social convention and abandons her heartlessly. She turns on the samurai (and social code, which no longer has use for her) by pursuing and pleading with Tajomaru.
    - It’s impossible to say whether she’s telling the truth when she claims to have been excited about Tajomaru or not. It seems like under the circumstances she’s just lashing out by tricking the men into fighting each other, by forcing them to confront their behavior against their identities.
      - Finally treated as HUMANS for the first time.
      - “It’s impossible! How could I, a woman, say anything?”
      - Also note: masculinity as the default in decision-making; this really gives more depth to the finding of the baby: wrapped in a kimono, abandoning this child is her only possible action as a woman in a man’s world.
  - WORTH NOTING THE THIRD OPTION: THEY ALL PRETEND IT NEVER HAPPENED.
  - IS THERE A POLYAMOROUS ENDING (SHE’S GOTTA HAVE IT) THAT SOLVES THIS WHOLE DILEMMA?
  - (NOTE: The Atlantic frames social roles as socially-accepted, pre-made narratives to direct one’s understanding and ambition of one’s life: they can be comforting to those
who have an easy time of conforming to them, but crushing and destructive to those who are alienated by nature.)

- Despite his apparently antisocial nature, is Tajômaru inadvertently trying to help maintain social order by playing up his role, or is he simply preying on society's preconceptions for personal gain?
  - Just a side thought: that he seems to be trying almost TOO hard to be seen as a noble bandit.
  - Does the world need a villain and his nature/inclinations/background make him well-suited for the role?

- Extending this analysis to the Life of Pi, what would the role(s) be that Pi is trying to present to the world?
  - He seems to be willing to be seen as this religious figure/holy man.
  - He makes himself seem larger-than-life with his origin story, which stretches the imagination for the later parts.
  - He wants to not be pitied, I think. He doesn’t want to appear weak or suffering. Child Pi wants to own his identity.

- SARTRE B: “The Look” - in Sartre’s reading, it is a self-alienating phenomenon: in being stared at, one becomes anxious because it creates an awareness of self as an object, outside of the empathic bonds of society, because we immediately recognize our subjectivity to others.
  - How is The Look expressed in both of these works?
    - Rashomon - VERY obvious: camerawork first. We never see the “justices” in charge of the trial because WE are the judges. Even when the woodcutter is giving his account, the camera assumes a fixed perspective, judging him from a position of confidence.
    - We also have the samurai, in the wife’s version and the samurai’s: he stares the woman down, which is torture to her.
    - Life of Pi - we have the eye contact with Richard Parker, but otherwise…? Not as conspicuous. Perhaps in Martel staring at Pi at the beginning, putting him on the spot to tell the story he came to hear.

- Comparing the settings of Rashomon and Life of Pi
  - Who profits in an honest society vs. a dishonest society? (i.e. a society with trust vs. a society without trust?)
    - Rashomon: the third man at the gate seems to be the sort that profits well in a dishonest society. He goes through his days skeptical, but willing to turn on anyone at the first moment.
    - The woodcutter is given a pass by the monk for his theft, though…? It was dishonesty, but for good ends, which seems good enough?
      - Monk: If men don’t trust each other, this might as well be hell!
      - Third Man: This world IS hell
    - Life of Pi: implication is that everyone loses in a 100% honest society—we are denied the freedom to react to the world by being forced to account for ourselves 100% of the time, and simultaneously we lose the illusion of our own free will to some extent, by taking our liberty out of the hands of self-judgment and making it into a colder calculation as to the betterment of the machine of society itself (the insurance claimants).
  - Pi seems to be vaguely aware of the cognitive dissonance of being able to produce both accounts of his shipwreck and yet still prefer one over the other as the one he subscribes to as “his version” of events.
Can someone still act faithfully in society while aware of/believing that its basis is a lie? (i.e. treating it as "make-believe")

- **Pi definitely seems to be able to.**
  
  Both stories (in the monk’s and in Pi’s cases) seem to suggest that faith is an individualistic act, that society is created and maintained through the free association and agency of individuals acting out of the common weal and choosing to trust in one-another, rather than through the creation and enforcement of laws.

  I’ve read from multiple places that this sort of cognitive dissonance creates a more robust personality and identity, that it’s a strong mental exercise in expanding your ability to imagine alternatives, so it’s probably good on an individual level.

- Is the evaluative “faith” in Life of Pi mainly personal (i.e. the decision about how to define one’s own life experiences as a way of approaching the future) or is the “faith” public (i.e. the decision of whether to trust in another person’s belief in and interpretation of themselves) or both?

- Where does personal faith butt up against interpersonal faith?

  - **Collectivist faith (and structured faith) it seems runs contrary to both these works, which seem to suggest that the scriptures and precepts can give you a sense of what faith IS, but ultimately your relationship with faith is wholly individual. That said, faith is social in origin--it’s about social values, so there can never really be a wholly individual faith any more than there can be an wholly individual individual.**

  - *Is faith always a faith in other people, then? But not necessarily SHARED between people. The symbology might be unique, while the practice is universal?*

- There’s a bit in the novel Life of Pi that was not included in the movie where the leaders of Pi’s various denominations discover that Pi’s been working with them and start squabbling amongst themselves, laying blame on one-another for the various crimes and atrocities and bizarrenesses of their scriptures, to which Pi ends up taking a “live and let live” attitude, referencing Ghandi’s words on the subject.

- Two kinds of faith are presented in Life of Pi--supernatural and scientific--but the two are presented at odds with one-another. Yet both can be understood as attempts at narrativization (ordering the past to predict the future)...

  - What’s the difference between them (science narrative and supernatural narrative) in Pi?

    - **Science can teach you how to live at sea; faith can teach you how to die (live yourself) at sea?**

    - **RICHARD PARKER AND EMPATHY - faith**

  - Is there jeopardy in allowing one into the domain of the other? (What happens when the boundary is breached?)

  - Do both “kinds” of faith require dispassionate indifference?

  - Do we see the same division between faith and science in Rashomon? (IS there science in Rashomon?)

  - This boundary also divides between the material and the spiritual (in the asceticism of Pi on the boat, and his psychological role of superego, wrestling between his spiritual faith and the hungry tiger of the body; but also in his father (the materially-concerned businessman) and his mother (the longing faithful--in the book less so)). Does the same divide exist in Rashomon?

  - Why does Life of Pi implicitly deny us the third option: to conclude that Pi is a liar and not to be trusted at all?
● (Does this imply that the majority of the story is about science vs. faith?)
● **Contrasting Rashomon with The Life of Pi** - the former starts from a collection of lies and emerges to find a small faith in truth, while the latter constructs a beautiful lie and then juxtaposes it with the ugly reality it conceals

**truth and lies** (our final destination)

○ Three (non-mutually-exclusive) explanations can account for each story in Rashomon:
  1. The character has intentionally deceived others about what happened
  2. The character has deceived themselves about what happened
  3. The character was mistaken (or had a skewed perspective) about the details of what happened

Because confabulation isn’t quite the same as lying outright, do we know that any of the characters in either of these works are lying? (i.e. in both cases we are given multiple narratives with sufficient reason to doubt, but do we know for a fact that there’s a lie being perpetrated?)

Where does the lie end and potential confabulation (due to authoring one’s own life-narrative) begin?

○ RE: both works, looking beyond the Platonic “noble lie” in which the ideal of social harmony is mapped out on the basis of a tomorrow that may never arrive (see: Death’s speech in Hogfather), are lies on an individual level also necessary for the preservation of social order?
  ■ Some lies keep the social wheels oiled: evasions to protect the privacy of others. **Humans cannot exist without some degree of obfuscation: absolute nakedness equals absolute vulnerability, and even in a 99.99% altruistic world, we run into problems (Galaxy Quest, The Invention of Lying) of contamination, even if it’s only due to profiting from an unintentional lie.**
  ■ **Life of Pi seems to suggest there is a cumulative/general loss of faith that has been created when we deny our individual redemption narratives.**
  ■ **When we lie, we take the wheel of social order into our own hands and spin it whichever way we see fit, which requires a certain degree of egotism AND manipulation**

○ When do we consider a lie to have been “worth it” after the fact (either of its discovery, or its consequence)?

And perhaps a revealing question beneath that one: does it have anything to do with what is at stake if the truth is revealed?

  ■ Danger in Rashomon? Reprisal, loss of esteem, shame… But nothing gained from having the woodcutter’s tale told. Indeed, if he is found to be the thief of the dagger, then it might even run contrary, depriving a large family of their food and a husband. (Doing the wrong thing for the right reasons.)

  **In Life of Pi? A breakdown of the ego (shame, loss of esteem), but also net loss of faith, and moreover with nothing to gain.**

  ■ Were any (or all) of these lies “worth it”?

○ Is it possible for us to do as Pi does and (after identifying our goals and coming to understand our own minds and bodies) construct a narrative for ourselves to best achieve it, in essence creating our own faith?

Or are we better off doing as Rashomon suggests and throw ourselves onto the mercy of others (even at great personal risk)?

  ■ What are the tenets of a good faith, as presented in Life of Pi?
Is it even practical for each of us to define ourselves? Or is it a sign of our materialistic, modern way of life that I would question the practicality of this spiritual self-becoming?

In the film Life of Pi, there’s a line that goes something like: “Doubt is useful. It keeps faith a living thing. You cannot know the strength of your faith until it’s been tested.” In the novel, on the other hand, Pi warns that, “To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation.”

Are faith and doubt simply two sides of the same wall (to keep secure the Platonic division between world as it is and the world as we perceive it to be)?

Father: “Believing in everything at the same time is the same as not believing in anything at all.” - Not an accurate statement: they’re different religions but with the same principles of BEING religions. He makes a categorical statement there that is overly inclusive.

Mother: can tell you a lot about what’s out there, but not what’s in your heart

Kind of a cliche.

I’d say it can’t offer guidance to what SHOULD be, what to DO with science.

Did the monk’s crisis of faith in Rashomon lead to a wiser, more nuanced sense of the world (which The Atlantic article suggests is a natural result of such psychic crises—a further complication of the self) or did it simply make his blind spot to reality more acute?

Wisdom does not lead to happiness. It’s generally a sensitivity to people and how people are around each other.

Pi seems to make a direct correlation between physical desires and the inability to obtain spiritual enlightenment while at their mercy.

At some point, does judgment run contrary to faith?

Every act of (communal) judgment is a denial of our faith in the individual.

Of course, it has also been argued that by judging and sentencing individuals we are in essence respecting them AS beings with agency, and that to do otherwise is disrespectful.

John Milton (Paradise Lost) felt the same way: untested faith is no faith at all

As social entities that nonetheless have to maintain their individuality, we can see that there is a threat posed by too much honesty AND by too little. To pit the two movies (and their messages) against one-another:

What is the risk of too much honesty in Rashomon?

As mentioned, the only one left to punish (objectly) would be the woodcutter. The other stories are all inconsistent and are actions between individuals.

What is the risk of too little honesty in Life of Pi?

I suppose we would end up with a totally meaningless story, then… A hard objective telling of the facts might actually lead to Pi’s self-destruction, or total sublimation into the madness of Id: Richard Parker.

Another kind of real/perceived divide is the split between mind and body, which we find represented in the asceticism of Life of Pi, leading to a “nirvana” of the mysterious island. Why does Pi turn away here?

Is the supernatural necessary for faith in Life of Pi? Is it a bit of sugar to make the medicine go down, or is it a bitter pill required to buy in to the human soul/dignity? (Or is it all a matter of perspective?)

Is the supernatural necessary for faith in Rashomon as well?

Is the size of the demon commensurate to the size of the soul it contains?
The Life of Pi
Rashomon
The Invention of Lying - trailer https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJLeymrMzlK
The Hogfather - 'Belief' as according to Death https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnaQXJmpwM4
The Dark Knight - Joker’s speech https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7LsBMA-rKg ending scene https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYeF5wM0fYQ
True Detective - pessimism: religion and fairy tales https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RfUj09pWfM

Also likely to get brought up: The Usual Suspects, Watchmen, Spaceballs

The Matrix Reloaded Agent Smith on Purpose and Free Will https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=um1Kxewx-_s
The Architect Part 1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHZl2naX1Xk Part 2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LN8EE5JxSGQ

● ANIME STARING https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXi3cYBCR3Q

(Breaking Bad)
Hero
Big Fish
A History of Violence
True Lies

(Tom Waits - Lie to Me Baby)
(The Sex Pistols - Liar)
(Nine Inch Nails - Terrible Lie)
(Endo - Simple Lies)
Tom Waits - Tell It to Me
Tom Waits - Supermarket
Bowie - All the Madmen
The Protomen - The Good Doctor

Plato - The Noble Lie
(Hero - need Chinese philosophy?)

"We are the story we tell ourselves?"

ITH LIES
Hogfather - absurd: "lies" but they have physical form in the world (but then, only death's daughter can help?)
Why do we forgive this conceit more than a dream? Lies always contain the seed of conflict.
usual suspects and watchmen have same endings: lie preserved, but the instrument of its destruction outlives its owner.

> self-risk as act of faith (leap of faith) that bridges gaps: the "supernatural" of the promise of tomorrow

Pi - reduction of self down TO a base animal level, but still retaining the soul?

could have two works: one where it's explicitly a lie, and another where it's ambiguous (Life of Pi) thus employing the audience as a co-conspirator AND/OR raising questions about the validity of narrative itself as an objective role?

Better to stick with stories in which we the audience are lied to? Or that the lie envelops the entirety of the action of the story?

Could do a bit with Arrival - alien perspective that turns what seems like a lie into a truth that we just don't understand yet

IMPORTANT TO DISTINGUISH:

Works where the audience is lied to: we are given no other narrative besides the lie

Rashomon
Hero
The Life of Pi
Big Fish
The Matrix: Reloaded
The Usual Suspects

Works where the lie is constructed IN the story: we have competing narratives or reasons to disagree

Watchmen
The Dark Knight
1984

(Revealing the lie to the audience but not the character is one of the ways of creating dramatic irony.)

(In mysteries, first it telegraphs that there IS a lie, and secondly the audience and the MC are spending the whole story trying to uncover the lie. HERE the lie is AT the characters and the audience.)

Life of Pi
the subjectivity of narrative: maybe even a background reading in Plato (the "noble lie" of democracy)
the experience of "wanting" to believe (and conversely, NOT wanting to believe: bigotry, global warming, etc.)

The Life of Pi doesn't just reveal the lie as a question, it invites us to answer it ourselves.

Life of Pi and Big Fish - similar conceit, the lie that propagates the (emotional) truth when viewed as metaphor?

?(The only way to overcome the tendency to disbelieve a truth about one’s inner state.)

The Matrix Reloaded
Libertarian ish - Reloaded ending, truth exposes you to the harsh elements?
Hero
(as historical figure vs. propaganda device: subjugation of self before the collective will of the nation)

(The Usual Suspects
not sure what there is here... aside from the whole "God" speech)

RASHOMON.
all lying out of self-interest... But to preserve different aspects of society? (Or their appearance of adhering to it anyway.)

> Are they lies to protect the social fabric or just maintain their place in it? Obviously it's bad for society to let such individuals continue acting freely--they'll profit by taking all resources and leaving nothing. They all lie because it would make them look bad. (Meanwhile, the woodcutter says nothing--Grotius/Schopenhauerian attitude--allowing the false conclusion to be made to keep their own peace.)
> final reality is
> a world of absolute truth would be miserable for those trapped on the bottom TRAILER: The Invention of Lying
Are any of these people lying to themselves?
Historeographical Metafiction - doesn't QUITE do that stylistically, but raises the same question: what parts of history are told and which are omitted? (History is written by the victors.) Problem of perspective as well...
In journalism, the facts might be accurate, but their framing, presentation, and decision about "where to cut the story off", what facts to include and which to not, what background to give, what language to use, etc. all colors how the story will be received. There's no such thing as objective journalism: there's always an agenda.

(Breaking Bad - "I'm the one who knocks!" speech - he's lying to himself. Or rather, his reputation is a façade, though he's more than capable of committing to act.)

Hogfather
“Humans need fantasy to be human...as practice you have to start off believing the little lies so you can believe the big ones: justice, mercy, duty, that sort of thing...You need to believe in things that aren’t true. How else can they become?”
> The reality is that none of us are promised a tomorrow. But we need to believe in a tomorrow, for ourselves and for others, or else our social structure collapses. (NOTE: This is a liberating force, not inherently bad, but certainly destabilizing: see another Kurosawa film, *Ikiru (To Live)*)
> Takes a very pessimistic view of human nature: that people always act out of self-interest.
> The setting makes an implicit secondary statement: the adults no longer believe in the Hogfather, but do still generally believe in the virtues (albeit faltering). Is there an implication here that the smaller, constructive lies continue to function even after you stop believing in them? That just by having the experience, one is fundamentally changed for the better?

THE LIFE OF PI
- Named after a pool (to have a clean soul) - Pissing
  - Owns it: reframes his own name (Pi, as in the greek letter of the alphabet) - creates a substitute narrative, by creating a legend around it (Pi)
- Richard Parker (western name? Not necessarily about colonialism, BUT…)
- Mamaji - “A story that would make me believe in God.”
IDENTICAL to Rashomon

- Throws out the novel -
- Catholic Hindu - “None of us knows God before we are introduced to him. First introduced through Hinduism.”
  - father: religion is darkness; as a child had polio, wracked with pain--western medicine saved him (part of the new India)
  - Mother retained religion as the sole link to her past
  - Christ - in the mountains at 12
    - We cannot understand god as he is, as his perfection: but we can understand God as his son, as a human. Approachable.
    - Sending the innocent to atone for the sins of the guilty. That makes no sense.
      - Idea of self-sacrifice: turning the other cheek as the first requirement of faith and social structure. The recognition that we are all imperfect.
    - If we are so imperfect, why make all this? - all you need to know is that he loves us
  - Then Islam (Allah)
  - [[reminds me of The 13th Warrior - In your land one God may be enough, but here we have need of many.]]
  - Father: “Believing in everything at the same time is the same as not believing in anything at all.”
    - Not an accurate statement: they’re different religions but with the same principles of BEING religions.
  - Mother: can tell you a lot about what’s out there, but not what’s in your heart
  - I’d say it can’t offer guidance to what SHOULD be, what to DO with science.
- Doubt is useful, It keeps faith a living thing. You cannot know the strength of your faith until it’s been tested.
- Milton - felt the same way (untested faith is no faith at all)
- Later, dancers - force of faith and life of the world, passing through you and expressing it out into the world
- MISSING SCENE: the various religious leaders meet and squabble
- Prays thanks to Vishnu - as the fish (for coming to them and saving their lives)

- CLUES THAT HE’S RICHARD PARKER and further question: WHO ARE THE OTHER ANIMALS?
  - Richard Parker misnamed for the human that raised him (names got switched)--same for Pi
  - Both have absurd names, and doubled-named
  - Strict carnivore (he is a strict herbivore)
  - Richard Parker only comes out and murders the hyena once he kills the zebra and the orangutan.
    - The cook and the Happi buddhist are both proximal to the boat when he gets thrown off the boat.

- QUESTION OF FAITH: Would Richard Parker have hurt him...if his father hadn’t ripped him away?
  - In the novel, Martel states that lions don’t kill those who fall in their cage because they are hungry--it’s because their territory has been invaded.

- “Animals have souls, I have seen it in their eyes.”
  “Animals do not think like we do. People think they do and they get killed. The tiger is not your friend. When you look into your eyes you see your own emotions reflected back at him.”

- Happi Buddhist - gravy isn’t meat, it’s taste.
- The Boat
  - Essentially life in microcosm - keep busy, but avoid unnecessary exertion, playing card games, 20 questions, or I spy and community singing (lift the spirits (distractions from ennui); TELLING STORIES is highly recommended---above all, don't lose hope
"There are no lines!"

- Training Richard Parker - operant conditioning
  - In the metaphorical interpretation, this is the trick behind the human animal as well?
  - Sardonic humor in this section is throughout the book--less so in the movie
- Richard Parker going for a swim --- parallel with the Woodcutter’s duel? (clumsy, struggling awkwardness, both sides terrified of the outcome?)
- Making a case about mind-body duality? As Pi Patel, he’s the conscious mind, floating freely, attached permanently to Richard Parker, a physical body, vicious and mean and full of hungers.
  - Or even Freud:
    - Richard Parker - Id
    - Pi - Ego
    - Pi’s Father - Super-ego
  - “Richard Parker can’t be tamed. But with God’s will, he may be trained.”
  - Not just that--it’s also a religious experience: the challenge of re-establishing faith after an initial breakup: the scene with Pi and his father rent them apart.
    - Different cynical interpretations of faith? As an existential threat (do this or the community will hurt you? Do this or God will punish you?) etc.
- “Both raised in a zoo by the same monster. Now left on our own to face the same ultimate monster together.”
- Storm takes away his book, but gives him his faith? Begins praying and praising the beauty of the storm and the light thereof?
  - But not really faith--it’s suicidal glee. (He unchains Richard Parker’s shelter--abandons his physical body.)
  - “I’ve lost my whole family! I surrender! What more do you want?”
- Physical disavowal as a path to religious experience: fasting, etc. Here, he transcends the physical (finally being able to touch Richard Parker) by their mutual starvation and thirst.
- After losing everything, he comes at last to the island.
  - Note: he doesn’t freak out this time about Richard Parker eating the meercats
  - Peace, but no real life either. (Transcendence?) Death, eventually, and a long isolated existence in between.
- Richard Parker - terrible, fierce companion who kept him alive
  - Weeps because he left so unceremoniously, broke his heart -- father was correct (he didn’t see their relationship the way he did); never saw him as his friend, didn’t look back. BUT had to believe there was more staring back than just his own reflection.
    - NOTE: story of bear, lion, and tiger that suffered in an abusive enclosure, now pair-bonded for emotional comfort--trauma makes that link.
- Life has become an act of letting go, but what hurts the most is not taking time to say goodbye.
- The Insurance Adjusters
  - “If it happened, it happened. Why should it have to mean anything?”
  - Need a simpler story for their report, one the company can understand, that they can all believe. “A story without things you’ve never seen before? Without animals or islands?”
    - “Yes. The truth.”
  - New version: Cook, sailor, mother, Pi. Cook ate a rat: such a brute, but thought of catching fish w/raft. Sailor had broken his leg, but leg became infected. Cook said we had to do something, but mother and I had to hold the man down. We believed him. I kept saying I’m sorry, I’m sorry, but his eyes were so... I’ll never understand the point of that man’s suffering. I can still hear him. Next day, had more bait. Never seen mother so mad. “You let that poor boy die in order to get bait, you monster!” Cook was furious--mother slapped him hard right across the face. I was
stunned—thought he was going to kill her right then. Cook didn’t stop at bait, either. Sailor—went the same way the rat went. Cook was a resourceful man. Lost the fish—sailor started hitting him. He went to the raft, thought his mother was coming with him. Don’t know why I didn’t make her go first. I think about that every day. I jumped back on just as the knife came out. Wasn’t anything I could do. Couldn’t look away. Rolled body overboard. Then the sharks came. The next day I killed him. He didn’t even fight back—he knew he had gone too far, even by his own standards. He was such an evil man but worse still—he brought the evil out in me. I have to live with that. I was alone in the life boat, drifting across the Pacific Ocean, and I survived.

Similarities to Rashomon - multiple version of the story

No more questions after that. Thanked him and wished him well and left.

I’ve told you two stories about what happened out on the ocean. Neither explains what causes the sinking of the ship and no one can prove what is true and what is not. In both stories, ship sinks, family dies, and I survive. So, which story do you prefer? The tiger.—Thank you. And so it goes with God.

In Rashomon, the stories are all given up as lost. Here, it’s suggested that the choice of story IS the basis of faith?

Is it because in Rashomon, every story has a villain?

So the story does have a happy ending?—well, that’s up to you. The story’s yours now.

Talking Points (both pieces and beyond!)

Narrativization

Storytelling vs. narrative? - is it enough to satisfy the audience that we exercise our sense of narrative cohesion without needing it to be “true”?

Such stories reinforce our social values and sense of human nature?

skepticism of narrative?

As a lie in and of itself - narrativization robs individuals of their agency - they become as automatons, pursing whatever ends they were pointed towards from the beginning. The end of a static narrative indeed justifies the beginning and recontextualizes it as a certainty.

In an uncharitable reading only: the trick of the artistic temperament and experience is to be able to set aside what one knows in favor of experiencing it afresh

When does story begin to override truth?

Society and the Noble Lie
The genesis of the foundational lie: It takes a massive ego to create a new lie. (often communal)

-Pi - doubt is what keeps faith alive; faith without doubt is no faith at all.
“Tomorrow”

religion vs. humanism - the supernatural as the concretization of abstract faith

Evolution: The individual profits most (reproductively) from surviving, but he who survives best is the one that gets the most for doing the least.

Useful Lies
-lying as a social lubricant -- “better to ask forgiveness than permission”; preventing misunderstandings; protecting the individual from undeserving inquiry; preservation of the individual in the face of society; expediting the right
-lying as a relief valve for stress -- when two social roles conflict, how does one choose? (central conflict of Rashomon); when survival conflicts with one’s identity, how do we find ourselves?

Supernatural vs. Scientific faith

The Balance of Truth and Lies -

The lie of filmmaking -

Confabulation -

The Life of Pi and the creation of our own lies

Religion, the religious experience,

The human as individual (animal) and as soul (social identity)

- When is the lie worth it? (And at the root of that question: what is the purpose of the lie?)
  - The Usual Suspects, just propagating his own legend AND staying out of jail
  - Hero - contains a double lie: first, the lie used to exact revenge (a yarn), then the lie behind every empire (a noble lie)
    ■ Hero as a hugely communal story: he's a "hero" because he sacrificed himself to maintain the noble lie and allow the nation to be brought together--hardcore Chinese propaganda at work there.
  - Big Fish - a lie to reveal the truth? (lie vs. parable in question here)
  - Spaceballs - a lie to inspire (same as Hero)
  - The Matrix: Reloaded - a lie to imprison (has the option of propagating it and staying safe, or throwing it off--NOTE that after choosing to throw it off, they lose their ship, are cast out into the wild, into the elements.)
  - The Dark Knight - a noble lie (reminder: Zizek's analysis as a post-9/11 WMD parable)
  - The Life of Pi - a lie to preserve one's sense of humanity? (similar to Watchmen, in the meta?) or just to fend off the outside world?
    ■ is it a lie to himself as well?
True Lies - a lie to make possible the work involved? The problem of needing a lie to act: Lacan's theory of delusions/images necessary as a parataxis for desire

Waits - just expressing the absurdity of the story

the individual vs. society - society as both oppressor and inspiration, social roles, pragmatism, idealism, lying to oneself, the needs of the individual, and acting in “bad faith”

narrativity - finding/defining oneself, how storytelling forms the basis of our identity (and reality), its presumptions, its limitations, and the narrativity inherent in social roles

truth vs. lies (our final destination) - subjective and objective truth, useful lies (individually and socially), evil lies, intention vs. result, the ratio of truth and lies in society, the “noble lie” of society itself, supernatural faith, scientific faith, willful ignorance, faith’s relationship with doubt, and the challenge of keeping faith in a world of promises

PROTOTYPE QUESTIONS

Talking Points (both pieces and beyond!)

Ideally, pick elements from one narrative to use to reveal something about the other: bash the two rocks together, as it were

- narrativity - finding/defining oneself, how storytelling forms the basis of our identity (and reality), its presumptions, its limitations, and the narrativity inherent in social roles

- There’s a concept of “verisimilitude” in fiction--Plato and Aristotle believed that elements of art needed to have some degree of grounding in reality (mimesis) for it to be persuasive or significant for the audience. As this theory evolved, it was hypothesized that internal stability is the only amount of “truth” necessary the story to be believable in fiction, so long as it doesn’t violate its own rules. Today, in a postmodern narrative, it is wondered whether the novel can even go so far as to challenge the need to construct a reality parallelling the rules of our own.
  - How much truth (mimetic, synthetic, or transgressive) is enough truth in a narrative?
  - Are we more willing to forgive characters who lie to tell us these stories than we are when the story itself is revealed to be a lie (i.e. “it was all a dream”)? Do we feel cheated by Pi’s measure of doubt?

- Narrativization can be understood as an orderly arrangement of the past as a means of predicting the future: action A leads to result B, action B leads to result C, and so on. Considering that identifying too strongly with narrative explanations can lead to a fatalist (predetermined, hopeless) sense of identity…
  - Is it possible that in Rashomon we have three people who are suffering from this sort of fatalism?
  - Why does Life of Pi implicitly deny us the third option: to conclude that Pi is a liar altogether and that NEITHER version is true?

- Contrasting Rashomon with The Life of Pi - the former starts from a collection of lies and emerges to find a small faith in truth, while the latter constructs a beautiful lie and then juxtaposes it with the ugly reality it conceals

- Clarence Darrow (1857-1938) - trial lawyer that was extremely good at defending clients by convincing juries of the cumulative effects of their life that led them to their decisions.
Two kinds of faith are presented in Life of Pi—supernatural and scientific—but the two are
presented at odds with one-another, yet both can be understood as attempts at narrativization.

- What’s the difference between them (science narrative and supernatural narrative) in Pi?
- Is there jeopardy in allowing one into the domain of the other?
- Do they require one-another?
- Is the valuational “faith” of Life of Pi personal (i.e. the decision about how to define one’s
own life experiences as a way of approaching the future) or is the “faith” public (i.e. the
decision of whether to trust in another person’s belief in and interpretation of
themselves)?
- Do we see the same division between faith and science in Rashomon? (What happens
when the boundary is breached?)

A challenge to narrativity is that it can be heavily shaped by personal bias, framing, and
perspective. How much bias do we perceive in the framing and details of both stories?

Life of Pi seems to present us with a textbook divide between a contamination and a redemption
narrative: the former indicating a positive interpretation, the latter a ruinous one.

- Pi uses operant conditioning to train Richard Parker into respecting Pi as something like
an equal; conversely, we find the faith of the monk tested in Rashomon in which the lies
told by the various parties has eroded his faith in humanity. Ultimately, the value of
narrativity (in science and in life) is the ability to predict the future.

What makes the difference for these two characters (Richard Parker and the monk) that
one has a positive outcome and one a negative?

In cognitive-behavioral therapy for social anxiety, many of the exercises revolve around backing
one down from seemingly logical conclusions that result from imperfect or imprecise
assessment of the details: by overindulging in predictive behavior or fixating on old negative
experiences, one goes off on an emotional tangent.

Do we feel that the narratives the various characters in Rashomon held helped them?

Regarding Rashomon and Pi, do narratives (such as social narratives) reinforce useful skills in
making sense of the world and provide us with templates for understanding it, or do they just
train us to think that our tools for assessing the world are better than they really are?

Narrativization goes hand-in-hand with metaphor: the lessons of the narrative are assumed to
have broader applications to the world. In Life of Pi, for example, the boat is a kind of
microcosm of life, with struggles to survive, random chance,

RE: the Atlantic article, a narrativized sense of agency has been found to link to more positive
mental health outcomes: while unspoken narratives about ourselves are freely subjective, are
lies used (in life/either of these works) to create a sense of agency when it is society itself that
threatens our sense of agency?

- (i.e. are lies the result from being faced with an unbreachable conflict between yourself
and your social identity?)

There’s an almost metafictional element in each story: when characters in a story lie to us (and
have help from the mechanisms of the story: vignetting, etc.), we have characters who assume
control of the narrative that we are watching, causing reality itself to shift before our eyes
(moreso in Rashomon than in Pi, the latter of which somewhat presumes its case by not
performing the story again with the alternate version of the story, horrible though that would be
to see).
- the individual vs. society - society as both oppressor and inspiration, social roles, pragmatism, idealism, lying to oneself, the needs of the individual vs. the greater good, the need FOR the greater good, social judgment, and acting in “bad faith”
  - What are the power dynamics at play in Rashomon, in gender roles and in social class? (i.e. wealthy vs. poor, nobility vs. commoner, male vs. female)
    - I’m inclined to believe the woodcutter’s story as the “most true” version of events, but as a member of the lower class, should we discount the his story as inherently biased as well?
    - Alternately, we might say the fear and chaos and gracelessness of the characters in the woodcutter’s version is a critique on the wild and upper classes as them all being essentially bad actors playing roles.
  - SARTRE A: If we assume the characters in Rashomon are acting in “bad faith” (as Sartre puts it) and are trying to conform to their social roles by creating the narrative of what makes a good (wife, bandit, samurai), and if we take the woodcutter's version of the story to be the most accurate (because he has the smallest stake in the trial), what can we interpret about them, their society, and their perceived roles IN society by the lies they present to the audience?
    - (NOTE: The Atlantic frames social roles as socially-accepted, pre-made narratives to direct one’s understanding and ambition of one’s life.)
    - Despite his apparently antisocial nature, is THE BANDIT trying to help maintain social order by playing his role or simply preying on society’s preconceptions for personal gain?
    - Extending this analysis to the Life of Pi, what would the role(s) be that Pi is trying to present to the world?
    - Are any of our characters self-defined or are they all existing in the context of society?
    - It seems as if the characters in the woodcutter’s tale in Rashomon are acting not out of their own desires, but out of roles they’re trying to live up to, roles that seem to conflict with each other; by comparison, the other three accounts are all fraught with a sense of agency (or its absolute loss) and purpose. Rather, they seem as children sent off to war?
  - SARTRE B: “The Look” - in Sartre’s reading, it is a self-alienating phenomenon: in being stared at, one becomes anxious because it creates an awareness of self as an object, outside of the empathic bonds of society, because we immediately recognize our subjectivity to others. How is The Look expressed in both of these works?
    - THE BANDIT - the only character with a name
    - The Samurai staring
    - The camerawork: always staring at the various witnesses, never seen themselves. Judgment. EVEN when the Woodsman starts his story: he turns to face us privately and we assume no other character’s perspective.
  - Rashomon and Pi - Who profits in an honest society vs. a dishonest society? (i.e. a society with trust vs. a society without trust?)
  - Pi seems to be aware of the cognitive dissonance of being able to produce both accounts of his shipwreck. Can someone still act faithfully in society while aware of/believing that its basis is a lie? (i.e. treat it as “make-believe”)
    - (where both parties say they know it’s a lie but do it anyway--as Zizek argues, conforming to an ideology/propaganda, in which at some level you really do believe it) instead of just making a big show of it)
truth and lies (our final destination) - subjective and objective truth, useful lies (individually and socially), evil lies, intention vs. result, the ratio of truth and lies in society, the “noble lie” of society itself, supernatural faith, scientific faith, willful ignorance, faith’s relationship with doubt, contextualization, and the challenge of keeping faith in a world of promises

○ Three (non-mutually-exclusive) explanations can account for each story in Rashomon:
  1. The character has intentionally deceived others about what happened
  2. The character has deceived themselves about what happened
  3. The character was mistaken (or had a skewed perspective) about the details of what happened
Because confabulation isn’t quite the same as lying outright, do we know that any of the characters in either of these works are lying? (i.e. in both cases we are given multiple narratives with sufficient reason to doubt, but do we know for a fact that there’s a lie being perpetrated?) Where does the lie end and potential confabulation (due to authoring one’s own life-narrative) begin?

○ RE: both works, looking beyond the Platonic “noble lie” in which the ideal of social harmony is mapped out on the basis of a tomorrow that may never arrive (see: Death’s speech in Hogfather), are lies on an individual level also necessary for the preservation of social order?
  ■ When we lie, we take the wheel of social order into our own hands and spin it whichway we see fit, which requires a certain degree of egotism AND manipulation

○ When do we consider a lie to have been “worth it” after the fact (either of its discovery, or its consequence)?
  And perhaps a revealing question beneath that one: does it have anything to do with what is at stake if the truth is revealed?
  ■ Were any (or all) of these lies “worth it”?

○ Is it possible for us to do as Pi does and (after identifying our goals and coming to understand our own minds and bodies) construct a narrative for ourselves to best achieve it, in essence creating our own faith?
  Or are we better off doing as Rashomon suggests and throw ourselves onto the mercy of others (even at great personal risk)?
  ■ What are the tenets of a good faith, as presented in Life of Pi?
  ■ Is it even practical for each of us to define ourselves? Or is it a sign of our materialistic, modern way of life that I would question the practicality of this spiritual self-becoming?

○ In the film Life of Pi, there’s a line that goes something like: “Doubt is useful, It keeps faith a living thing. You cannot know the strength of your faith until it’s been tested.” In the novel, on the other hand, Pi warns that, “To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation.”
Are faith and doubt simply two sides of the same wall (to keep secure the Platonic division between world as it is and the world as we perceive it to be)?
  ■ Did the monk’s crisis of faith in Rashomon lead to a wiser, more nuanced sense of the world (which The Atlantic article suggests is a natural result of such psychic crises—a further complication of the self) or did it simply make his blind spot to reality more acute?
  ■ Pi seems to make a direct correlation between physical desires and the inability to obtain spiritual enlightenment while at their mercy.
  ■ John Milton (Paradise Lost) felt the same way: untested faith is no faith at all

○ As social entities that nonetheless have to maintain their individuality, we can see that there is a threat posed by too much honesty AND by too little. To pit the two movies (and their messages) against one-another:
  ■ What is the risk of too much honesty in Rashomon?
What is the risk of too little honesty in Life of Pi?

- Another kind of real/perceived divide is the split between mind and body, which we find represented in the asceticism of Life of Pi, leading to a “nirvana” of the mysterious island. Why does Pi turn away here?
- Is the supernatural necessary for faith in Life of Pi? Is it a bit of sugar to make the medicine go down, or is it a bitter pill required to buy in to the human soul/dignity? (Or is it all a matter of perspective?)
  - Is the supernatural necessary for faith in Rashomon as well?

- Does attacking one-another with truth and lies train us as a society to tackle bigger questions of the world itself (i.e. does narrativization in faith teach us better ways of narrativizing science and vice-versa)?

The Atlantic points out that having more redemption sequences in a life story is associated with higher well-being, but it barely touches on the role that contamination sequences hold in making one accountable for one’s actions. While it is absurd to make one responsible for all the outcomes of one’s actions, at some point good intention is simply not enough. (Much of the evil done in the name of organized religion is just such a thing; the greater good can become twisted into an unseen justification for monstrous cruelties.)

- Nietzsche’s sense of lies is twofold: a general distrust of society (and thus, society’s value judgment of truth and lies) and a hardline (Platonic) skepticism towards our ability to know any objective truth about the physical world
  - NOTE: Nietzsche died insane.

- A highly skeptical, antisocial narrative about society might not be healthy in general, but for an emotionally vulnerable person in a highly corrupt society this might be a useful paradigm.
- A life story is written in chalk, not ink, and it can be changed. “You’re both the narrator and the main character of your story,” Adler says. “That can sometimes be a revelation—‘Oh, I’m not just living out this story, I am actually in charge of this story.’” Whether it’s with the help of therapy, in the midst of an identity crisis, when you’ve been chasing a roadrunner of foreshadowing towards a tunnel that turns out to be painted on a wall, or slowly, methodically, day by day—like with all stories, there’s power in rewriting.