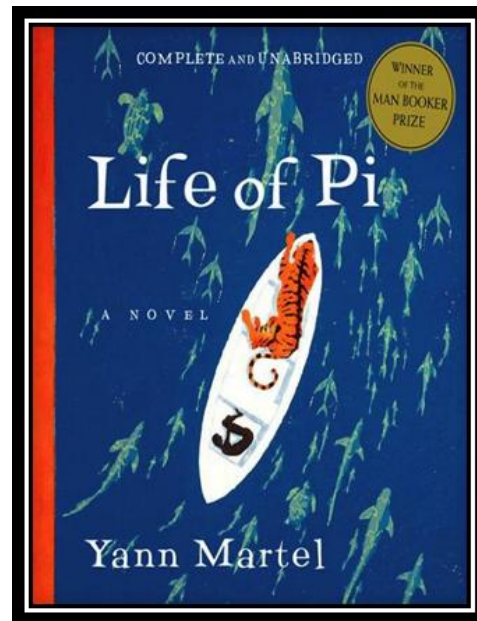**SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE
 IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI***
RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA
                                              UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA
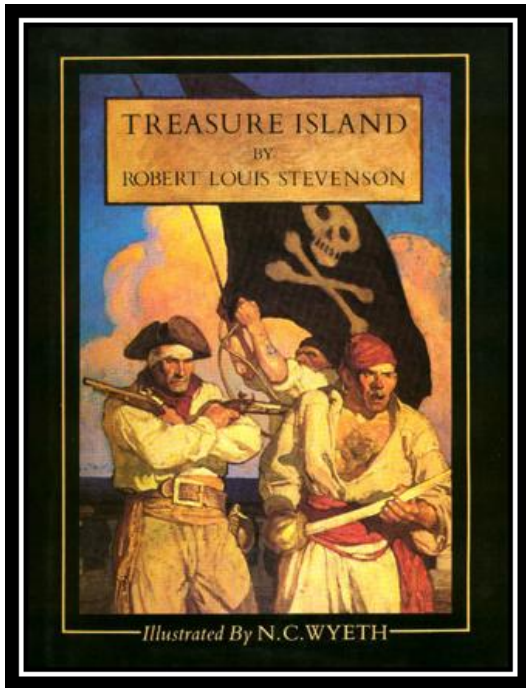
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UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

Introduction

S pace is at the heart of both colonial and counter discourse. As such, the study of fictional islands in general and the robinsonade genre in particular is not only necessary, but imperative. As Baldacchino notes: 'Many fictional characters who travel to islands in the course of a story, whether alone or accompanied, usually return disturbed, broken, refreshed, redeemed, resolute, shaken, or somehow transformed by the experience' (5-6). Thus, when analysing a robinsonade, one should treat it as what Roland Barthes calls a 'writerly' text, more specifically a text which 'makes demands on the reader; [in which] he or she has to work things out, look for and provide meaning' (Cuddon, 725). The *corpus* which will be the object of analysis is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001). The first is a Victorian robinsonade in which Jim, the child protagonist, and Long John Silver, Jim's pirate nemesis, are in a quest to find a great treasure buried in Treasure Island; the second is a modern robinsonade in which Pi Patel, another child protagonist, and Richard Parker, a Bengal tiger, form a pair of castaways, striving for survival, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Both novels follow the same model, however subverted, originated by Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).

The purpose of this article is twofold: first, it will aim to demonstrate that Stevenson's

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1 Ricardo Pereira da Silva is a graduate student from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, NOVA University of Lisbon (FCSH-UNL) with a BA in Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures – English and North American Studies. Co-authorship (with Tiago Runa Dinis) of a paper presented at the *International Conference Youth in/and Literature & Society* (FCSH-UNL/CETAPS/CESNOVA) entitled "Superheroes of Youth: Racial Depictions in American Comic Books" (10/07/2014) and more recently, author of a paper presented at the *Messengers from the Stars -Episode III Science Fiction and Fantasy International Conference* (FLUL/CEAUL/ULICES) entitled "Performing *Call of Cthulhu*: Role-playing Games and Performativity" (19/11/2014). His current research interests include English and North-American Literature, Gothic Fiction, Ecocriticism, Performance Studies, Posthumanism and Postcolonial Studies.

2 This article is dedicated to Professor Teresa Pinto Coelho (FCSH-UNL), who taught me courses on Victorian Literature, English Romanticism Literature, Anglo-Portuguese Studies, and Postcolonial Studies. I am forever beholden for all the knowledge and wisdom to me imparted by such an inspirational Professor. More than an honour, having her as a mentor was a privilege, for which I am truly thankful.

robinsonade can be read as a warning against the emergence of anti-colonial resistance movements, by the end of the nineteenth century; on the other hand, it will show how Martel's *Life of Pi* can be read as a metaphorical account of the process of colonization, subsequent resistance and ultimate fragmentation of the Empire. Secondly, the role of the hybrid character will be examined, as well as, its relationship with space. With this purpose in mind, throughout this article, the spatial boundaries in which the main characters move will be analysed, in order to understand the various phases of colonialism and their relationship with territory.

I – Taming the Wild

The colonization of what later became the Empire began with the 'discovery' and mapping of what the colonizers perceived as *terra incognita*. It would be presumptuous to assume this process as a peaceful one. On the contrary, in many cases there was open conflict between the colonizers and what afterwards became the colonized. However, regardless of any violence or strife involved in the process of colonization, it was through the science of cartography that the Empire began its expansion. According to Ashcroft: 'Colonization itself is often consequent on a voyage of 'discovery', [which] is reinforced by the construction of maps, whose existence is a means of textualizing the spatial reality [by] renaming spaces in a symbolic and literal act of mastery and control' (39). This statement makes clear that the first step towards asserting authority over a territory is its mapping, which assigns to the chart or map, a unique and symbolic meaning of power over territory. By becoming symbols of power and ownership, maps are thus instrumental in the process of colonizing a territory. Therefore, being in the possession of a map is the equivalent to having authority over the charted space.

At the beginning of Stevenson's novel, the map of Treasure Island falls into the possession of Jim Hawkins. The moment when 'the doctor opened the seals with great care, and there fell out the map of an island, with latitude and longitude, soundings, names of hills, and bays and inlets' (33) is of great significance as power over the island shifts from the Other to the Self. If the ownership of Treasure Island's map translates itself into having authority over the island, then the pirates' agreement to work as a crew under the orders of captain Smollett

**SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE
IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*
RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA**

UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

represents an act of submission towards the ones in possession of the map.

Later in the novel, Dr. Livesey gives the map to Long John Silver. However, the map no longer has the importance it once had. By memorizing the map, Jim Hawkins becomes the owner of the island: 'I brooded by the hour together over the map, all the details of which I well remembered. [...]. I approached that island in my fancy, from every possible direction; I explored every acre of its surface' (p. 37); yet, conflict over the possession of the island remains throughout the narrative, even though the reader might easily predict Jim Hawkins' victory (or the Empire's) over the pirates (the Other).

Comparatively, in *Life of Pi*, the idea of spatial authority is shown through a thorough explanation on how to manage animals in a zoo. Pi Patel believes that by defining and controlling an animal's space he is helping the latter to avoid a harsher life. In his idea, an animal in a zoo will lead a better and easier life than an animal living in freedom. According to himself: 'animals in the wild lead lives of compulsion and necessity within an unforgiving social hierarchy [...] where territory must constantly be defended' (16). He further argues that a zoo is a better place for an animal for 'a biologically sound zoo enclosure – whether cage, pit, moated island, corral, terrarium, aviary or aquarium – is just another territory' (17). A parallel can be established between his view of animals and the way a colonizer views natives. Both perspectives are based on an ambivalent relationship, whether the subject of alterity is a human animal or a non-human animal.

SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*
RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA
UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

To better understand this parallel it becomes essential to address the concept of 'Speciesism', as it is fundamental in linking the idea of the 'animal' to the figure of the 'native savage'. As Ashcroft notes:

> 'Speciesism' is the term [...] to designate the belief of most human cultures that they are superior to and very different from other animals. [...]. As Jacques Derrida and others have pointed out, racism is predicated on speciesism. [...]. It is (and was) by marking 'others' (of whatever sort) as 'animals' that conquest and colonization (as well as other forms of domination) have been, and continue to be, justified and prosecuted – on other peoples as well as on non-human animals themselves (243-244).

This analogous effect between speciesism and racism, as described by Ashcroft is only possible through a process of anthropomorphizing the animal figure. In the particular case of Martel's novel, it is to Richard Parker that Pi ascribes human characteristics, therefore permitting us to view the Bengal tiger as a representation of the Other.

It is after realizing his perilous situation as a castaway, and having to share the same space with Richard Parker, that Pi decides that 'it [is] time to impose [himself] and carve out [his] territory' (Martel, 202). Following the idea that man 'will subject, tame, dominate, train, or domesticate the animals born before him and assert his authority over them' (Derrida, 16), the strategy employed by Pi to assert his spatial authority in the lifeboat consists in a training program, devised to make Richard Parker understand Pi's position as the 'super-alpha', and lead Richard Parker to accept that his territory is limited to the floor of the boat – below Pi's upper position on the tarpaulin. (168). The idea of Pi as a representation of the Self/colonizer, and Richard Parker as a metaphorical portrait of the Other/colonized is systematically reinforced by Pi's success in asserting his authority over the tiger. After a while, Pi realizes his victory over the animal. In his own words: 'I had won. [...]. I felt my mastery was no longer in question' (222). The process of colonizing the Other has been completed. It then becomes a relationship of bondage in which the colonized is dependent on the colonizer. This dependency is clear when Piscine remarks that Richard Parker's necessity for food and water, which only Pi can provide, is what grants him the power to control the Bengal tiger.

SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*
RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA
UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

After analysing the relationship between Self and Other, as well as, their roles within the island space, it becomes clear that the actions of both child protagonists (Pi/Jim) towards their respective counterparts (Parker/Silver) and the territories in question, imitate the mechanisms of colonial dominance. By demonstrating their power, be it through cunning and wit, or sheer force (usually the first, since the idea of physical strength is usually associated with the 'savage'), they ascend into a position of hegemony, thus asserting their roles as figures of authority in their respective spaces.

II – Roaring in Challenge

After colonial rule is established, a time of peaceful exploitation of the territory's resources comes along. Meanwhile, it soon becomes clear that the authority exerted by the Empire over its territories and subjects is never completely secure. Sooner or later its authority is bound to be challenged by the colonized, for colonial rule always brings with itself 'the seeds of its own destruction', due to the ambivalent nature of the relationship between colonizer and colonized (Ashcroft, 14).

According to Edward Saïd, the concept of resistance should be divided into two types – 'primary resistance' and 'secondary resistance'. In his words, the 'recovery of geographical territory which is at the heart of decolonization is preceded – as empire had been – by the charting of cultural territory. After the period of 'primary resistance', literally fighting against outside intrusion, there comes the period of secondary, that is, ideological resistance' (Saïd 1994: 252).

SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*

RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA

UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

In *Treasure Island*, the role of resistance is played by the pirate crew aboard the *Hispaniola*. During the period in which Jim's group is symbolically taking possession of the island, the pirates organize themselves under Silver's rule to take back what they believe to be rightfully theirs. Throughout the novel, they adopt a form of 'primary resistance', resorting to violence as they fight over the possession of the map/island. However, the character who fills the role of the pirate crew's leader employs a more dangerous, albeit subtle, form of resistance – an ideological and cultural one.

'Secondary resistance' may be effected through multiple forms, the more common one being the appropriation of the colonizer's culture by the colonized. Long John Silver is a key-figure in this form of resistance. A product of hybridity, Silver is presented to us by John Trelawney's letter as a 'man of substance' since he 'has a banker's account, which has never been overdrawn' (Stevenson, 39). Later, it is through the voice of Jim himself that we acquire a visual impression of Silver's appearance: 'He was very tall and strong, with a face as big as a ham – plain and pale but intelligent and smiling. [...]. I thought I knew what a buccaneer was like – a very different creature, according to me, from this clean and pleasant-tempered landlord' (42). As previously mentioned, Silver is a pirate, although an unique and paradoxical one. The difference between Silver and the rest of his crew is that he 'had good schooling in his young days, and can speak like a book when so minded' (p. 54). By appropriating the colonizer's culture through schooling, Silver acquired a set of traits which made him rise through the ranks of pirate hierarchy until he managed to attain the position of quartermaster in Flint's crew (57).

To understand the reasons for pirates' resistance against and aversion towards authority, it is essential to know the workings of their law and organization. Peter Leeson explains that pirates 'instituted a democratic system of divided power, or piratical checks and balances, aboard their ships' (Leeson, 17) to protect themselves against the threat of captain predation and excessive authority. It was for this purpose that the post of quartermaster, who was to be elected democratically, and to whom 'pirate crews transferred power to allocate provisions, select and distribute loot, and adjudicate crew member conflicts' (17) was constituted. In the *Hispaniola* everyone respects and obeys John Silver, even though he is a crippled cook. This reverence towards Silver can be seen as the acknowledgement of his role as

**SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE
IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*
RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA**

UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

the leading spokesman for the colonized people, whose interests he was supposed to defend earnestly before the colonizer.

Life of Pi's hybrid differs from *Treasure Island*'s in the sense that, in the case of the latter, it is suggested that despite Silver's schooling, he might have been the object of some kind of atavistic transformation or degeneracy, either for having gone through the traumatic experience of battle, supposedly during the wars with France when he served under the 'immortal Hawke' (Stevenson, 38), or for having been too long in Flint's crew, whose reputation for cruel savagery was well known. By comparison, Pi's hybridity is mostly a religious one. His house is described as a temple, decorated with innumerable objects of religious faith, such as, a framed picture of Ganesha, a plain wooden Cross, and an Islamic prayer rug. (Martel, 45-46) As he acknowledges himself not only as a Hindu, but as a Christian and a Muslim, the reader perceives him as someone with a 'shattered self' (3).

In opposition to *Treasure Island*, Martel's novel is a narrative mostly told in the perspective of a former colonized: Piscine Molitor Patel was born in Pondicherry, within the former territory of French India. This is absolutely relevant considering that in *Life of Pi*, what was previously perceived as the Other becomes the Self, thus inverting the robinsonade paradigm. The theme of resistance, then, has to necessarily originate from a new source of alterity which ends up to be personified in the figure of Richard Parker.

We have seen in *Treasure Island* that, at the beginning, resistance is fundamentally territorial. Likewise, in *Life of Pi*, the theme emerges first and foremost associated to space. In the previous chapter it was shown that Pi devises a plan to establish his position as the dominant individual. Despite the success of Pi's plan, Richard Parker eventually resists and openly challenges Pi's authority. This particular moment happens after Pi catches an especially big dorado, over which the Bengal tiger challenges the protagonist. As Pi notes:

> It was the fish in my hands that was the focus of his attention. [...]. It was clear: he was in a crouch and he was making to attack me. [...]. For two, perhaps three seconds, a terrific battle of minds for status and authority was waged between a boy and a tiger. He needed to make only the shortest of lunges to be on top of me. (221-222)

Pi defines this moment as a turning point in his relationship with Richard Parker, after which his

mastery over the tiger becomes supposedly absolute.

However, as the colonized feels progressively cornered and deprived of his necessities and rights, it revolts violently against his oppressor. Like the oppressed people who become 'conscious of themselves as prisoners in their own land' (Saïd, 258), Richard Parker later revolts, committing an act of extreme violence as he kills and eats a man.

In *Life of Pi*, anthropophagy – the act of eating human flesh – has a symbolic meaning. Despite the fact that Pi is a representation of colonial power, it is not Pi, but rather the Frenchman that is eaten by Richard Parker. It can be argued that the reason for the Bengal tiger's choice is based on the idea that between Pi, the hybrid colonizer, and the Frenchman, who is a remnant of the old colonial empire which dominated part of India's territory, Richard Parker chooses to kill the one that represents the former French colonial empire. As such, this act of anthropophagy should be seen as a manifestation of dominance from the colonized over the colonizer.

At the end of both novels, both characters representing the Other leave. According to Jim Hawkins at the end of *Treasure Island*: 'Of Silver we have heard no more. That formidable seafaring man with one leg has at last gone clean out of my life, but I daresay he met his old negress, and perhaps still lives in comfort with her and Captain Flint.' (Stevenson, 190). The Empire is victorious once again. Yet, Long John Silver, as a model of Otherness and hybridity, manages to survive and disappear without a trace, free to once again undermine the Empire's authority elsewhere. At the same time, in Martel's novel, Pi, the representation of both Self and the hybrid, is also abandoned by Richard Parker. As Pi laments: 'He would look at me. [...]. In some such way, he would conclude our relationship. He did nothing of the sort. He only looked fixedly into the jungle. Then Richard Parker, companion of my torment, awful, fierce thing that kept me alive, moved forward and disappeared forever from my life' (Martel, 284-285). Richard Parker's act of abandoning Pi, mirrors the acts of many ex-colonies which, soon after their independence, turned their backs on their former colonizers, after centuries of oppression.

III – Communicating in Freedom

SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*

RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA
UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

Throughout the period of colonization and, particularly, when resistance movements emerge, the hybrid is marked by his Otherness and placed together with the rest of the colonized, being therefore rejected by the Self. Later, after the colonized gains his freedom from the colonizer and the Empire is finally dismantled, the paradigm shifts and the ex-colonized starts to perceive the hybrid as the figure of alterity. In other words, after the period of resistance and subsequent independence, those who are a product of hybridity are rejected by the now ex-colonized and are forced to seek refuge in other places, usually in the former metropole or in another 'Westernized' ex-colony.

Examples of these individuals are intellectuals such as Salman Rushdie, an Indian Muslim, who was rejected by the Islamic world and target of a *fatwa* following the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), situation that forced him to find refuge, first in England, and later in the United States; Jacques Derrida, born in French Algeria, was discriminated, during his youth, for being of jewish origin and later went to France where he stayed until his death; others like J.M. Coetzee and Edward Saïd eventually left their homelands to find solace in other places, though in Saïd's case he was not rejected, but rather exiled himself from Palestine. Most of these intellectuals have long been critics of the West's tendency to divide everything into binaries. Through their *oeuvre*, from fiction to non-fiction, they have tried do dismantle this mark of colonialism. One of the most notable intellectuals is Homi K. Bhabha, author of *The Location of Culture* (1994).

Opposed to an idea of culture as dualistic in nature (as a constant identitary tension between Self and Other), Bhabha perceives culture as a borderline 'Third Space', in constant flux and construction, an emerging phenomenon that stems from cultural difference and interaction (Bhabha, 35-36). In the robinsonade, this 'Third Space' takes the form of an island, a space which 'can be placed right outside the 'real' world and may be an image of the ideal, the unspoilt and the primitive' (Cuddon, 216). However, both novels' geographical islands are associated with conflict, disease, and death. Therefore, the *Hispaniola* and the lifeboat become the places where this ideal space could be located.

Pi's lifeboat is undoubtedly a space where balance is reached, as well as, a place where the Self and the Other take part in a true relationship of interdependence, whereas the *Hispaniola*, despite having an early functional crew, never truly achieves the same kind of

symmetry, as it ends up becoming the stage for the fight between Jim Hawkins and Israel Hands, resulting in the death of the latter. Martel's lifeboat does the reverse path: at the beginning it constitutes the object of territorial conflict, but later enables its passengers to transcend the boundaries of the human animal/non-human animal binary, though this only comes after Pi concludes that it is not Richard Parker only that is in a position of dependency, rather that Pi himself needs Richard Parker, if only to maintain his sanity and thereby secure his survival.

In her article, June Dwyer 'borrow[s] a schematic put forth by Tzvetan Todorov in *The Conquest of America* (1982)' (2) to explain three possibilities in human/animal relationships. Using the same strategy as Dwyer, one can conclude that Pi and Richard Parker went through the following phases:

> In the first, the Other is treated as an object, a creature without subjectivity and unworthy of empathy. The second is the colonial model, where colonized individuals win approval according to their abilities to adapt to the ways of the colonizers. The third allows the Other respect and individuality equal to that of the observing self, no matter how great the differences between the two may be. [Todorov] refers to this state simply as one of communication. (2)

This 'state of communication' is only possible because Pi's father was a zoo manager. Growing up in such an environment gave Pi the tools to understand, or rather interpret the signs and sounds of animal language. (Martel, 163)

Conclusion

Throughout this article, we have observed that in *Treasure Island*, Stevenson appropriates multiple literary tropes from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. What distinguishes *Treasure Island* from the original robinsonade, is that through the subversion of the genre, Stevenson manages to write a novel not about conquest or colonial might, *per se*, but rather about the tragic and alarming understanding that the Other has a consciousness and a voice of its own. The author gives life and voice to the Other, despite portraying it as evil and dangerous.

SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*
RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA
UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

Long John Silver's existence, as well as, his survival at the end of the narrative, are nothing more than Stevenson's drawing on the past to predict the future. The idea of 'piracy as the vanguard of the Empire' (Fuchs, 1) originated in the sixteenth century, however, throughout the decades, 'piracy [grew] uncontrollably, mimicking the English state in ruling the seas, [posing] a challenge to the very powers who had authorized it' (1). It was based on this idea that Stevenson used the figure of the pirate as a metaphor for the colonized, who eventually would rebel against their rulers.

Yann Martel also makes use of history in his narrative. Through the shrewd employment of the animal metaphor, Martel's narrative turns away from conventional realism, and towards the fabulation of the narrative, moving into the domain of fantasy. In *Life of Pi*, it could be further argued that Martel's use of the element of fantasy is not so much an escape from reality as a way of interrogating the narrative's veracity.

Pi's voyage across the Pacific Ocean should be seen in parallel with the history of colonialism. First, the processes of imperial or colonial establishment are portrayed through the assertion of spatial authority in the lifeboat; second, the emergence of resistance among the colonized subjects is exemplified in the character of Richard Parker; at last, the fragmentation of the colonial empire is epitomised in Richard Parker's act of leaving Pi. The animal metaphor is necessary because the truth of colonialism is an ugly one – full of bloodshed and cruelty. Confronted with the choice of telling us a metaphorical story with animals or a realistic one without them, the author decided that the animal metaphor would make a 'better story' (Martel, 317).

If we look at the robinsonade itself as something that can "be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha, 37) we may conclude that the 'Third Space' does exist in these fictional texts. Whether with Jim and Silver, in the *Hispaniola*, or with Pi and Richard Parker, in the lifeboat, the reader himself is invited to enter the 'Third Space', taking part in this unique, albeit fictional, relationship of interdependence, where the Western binary of Self and Other ceases to exist. Although this 'Third Space' might not yet exist outside of fiction, perhaps the robinsonade, and its multiple appropriations and adaptations, might very well be the blueprints from which Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) or Salman Rushdie's idealized Kashmir, in *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), could one day be built from fiction to reality.

SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*

RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA

UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA
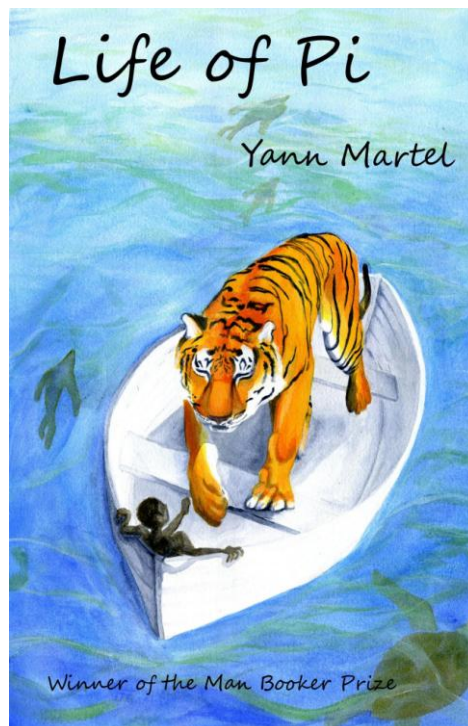
SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*
RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA
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**SAILING WITH TIGERS AND PIRATES: RESISTANCE AND SPACE
IN *TREASURE ISLAND* AND *LIFE OF PI*
RICARDO PEREIRA DA SILVA**

UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

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