

The Magic Realist World of “Mondo” in Le Clézio’s *Mondo and Other Stories*

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Abstract

Born of a French mother, and an English-descent Mauritanian father, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio (Le Clézio for short) often identifies himself as Franco-Mauritanian writer always on the move. In spite of his vehement repudiation of a fixed identity for himself, he has bought himself a home in Mexico, extensively travelled the length and breadth of Africa and wistfully pondered the questions of the other, especially through his representation of the locale, the flora and fauna, and the culture of the world outside Europe. This article singles out “Mondo”, arguably the most important short story of *Mondo and Other Stories*, to investigate how Le Clézio brings to the fore a strange yet tantalizingly familiar world through the characterization of its eponymous protagonist Mondo, a ten-year-old boy of an uncertain provenance, and exotic idiosyncrasies. In order to critique its depiction of the real world with an undercurrent of magical fictionality that shows a strong affinity towards a literary propensity deeply rooted in the so-called peripheral cultures of the world. The article takes recourse to the recent accretions of magic realism, and delves into the author’s magic realistic worldview that denounces the Western rational system of thought.

Keywords: Mondo, Le Clézio, magic realism, the fantastic, mystery, children’s literature, comparative literature

In an online *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry, Serafin (2021) described Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio (1940-) as “[a] French author known for his intricate, seductive fiction and distinctive works of nonfiction that mediated between the past and the present, juxtaposing the modern world with a primordial landscape of ambiguity and mystery” (para. 1). Although the encyclopedia does not evidently purport to be an exhaustive magic realistic study on Le Clézio, and for that matter, on any other authors of the kind, it makes an apt use of such telling epithets as “intricate” and “seductive” to describe the author, and characterizes him as one coalescing the modern with the mysterious. Indeed, through such a juxtaposition, Le Clézio sets in motion in his works of fiction the interplay of opposites in which Martin (2012) remarked there are no indications of “where the garden ends and the forest begins, unsettling the conventional division between culture and nature, civilized and uncivilized as well as the concept of property” (p. 119). The magical worldview strongly influenced by “a denunciation of the Western rational ‘esprit de système’ and of its mechanisms of exclusion” (p. 119) beneath the beguiling simplicity of his works would surely intrigue the curiosity of scholars working on magic realism, invitingly riveting their attention to a prospective exploration of them in the light of the relatively recent field of literary studies.

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The emergence of magic realism

Even though the same encyclopedia defines magic realism as “a chiefly Latin-American narrative strategy” (2019, para. 1), it is generally said to be an offshoot of a confluence of three distinct literary and artistic movements spreading over three different regions of the world, which have afforded the narrative technique three disparate appellations as well. The first place with which its origin is related is Germany in the 1920s when the rise of a discrete form of art during its Weimar Republic “tried to capture the mystery of life behind the surface of reality” (Bowers, 2018, p. 2). The eminent German art critic Frantz Roh (1890-1965) is commonly considered the putative father of the artistic technique *Magischer Realismus*, which set itself apart from its predecessor, the expressionist art movement, through its focus on its accurate detail, enviable clarity and the representation of mystical aspect of mundane reality. The second place associated with its genesis is Latin America during the 1940s when a formidable literary figure Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), a Cuban novelist, essayist and musicologist, identified what he called *lo real maravilloso* or marvelous realism as “an expression of the mixture realist and magical views of life in the context of the differing cultures” (Bowers, 2018, p. 2) of his contemporary Latin American societies. The third place linked with the emergence of the literary movement is again Latin America in the 1950s when it was identified as *el realismo mágico*, especially in relation to Latin American fiction, but it has since then been adopted as the principal term to designate the work of fiction that “undertakes just such a rational investigation into the role that non-rational modes of thought play in human existence” (Hegerfeldt, 2005, p. 32).

Although magic realism has a history of critical use spanning more than three quarters of a century, “the term has”, Hegerfeldt (2005) maintained, “not congealed into a clearly outlined concept” (p. 11). Hume (1986) defined it as “departure from consensus reality” (cited in Hegerfeldt, 2015, p. 31) in the main because magic realism compromises with the truth of mimesis commonly accepted as axiomatic in Western literature. In the same way, McHale thinks it to be “the rhetoric of contrastive banality” (cited in Hegerfeldt, 2005, p. 32) since magic realism focuses attention on an extraordinary admixture of the real and the fantastic. But arguably the most acceptable definition has been posited by Flores (1967) who is convinced that magic realism transforms “the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal” (cited in Hart 1982, p. 37). Despite its diverse appellations, multifarious manifestations and the rivaling chronicles of its origins, magic realism has always been said to be predicated on one single premise which is often epitomized as strangeness infused into ordinary things. Indeed, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry on the definition of magic realism called it “[a] narrative strategy that is characterized by the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction” (2021, para. 1).

Bowers (2018) therefore said that the jamming together of the apparently contradictory terms paves the way for a highly fashionable and often derided oxymoron that encapsulates the quintessence of a complex literary tradition eliciting unimaginably incompatible reactions from all quarters (p. 1). Scholars have over the years underscored the importance of finding out at least a working definition to demystify the complexity of magic realism, to make its indispensable central tenets serviceable to the interpretations

of literary texts and to render its multifaceted nuances easily intelligible even to the uninitiated. As such, Hegerfeldt (2005) put forward a working definition and says a literary text can be construed as an example of magic realism if its settings are lifelike and realistic; its events are not at variance with rationality; the matter-of-fact tone is never forgotten in it; historic contexts and social concerns intertwine with the fantastic; myths and legends pervade its texture, and its time sequence is distorted (pp. 50-59).

In this paper, I adopt the recent epistemic accretions of magic realistic literary conventions and propose an exciting reading of “Mondo”, one of the most engaging stories of the collection, *Mondo and Other Stories*. This critical intervention will allow me to construe “Mondo” as a magic realist text, shed light on the exotic character of its eponymous protagonist and investigate the literary reasons for its acceptance as one of the most prototypical stories of Le Clézio. Throughout the article, I will refer to the original version of the book in French and use my own translations of the text unless otherwise indicated.

Magic realist “Mondo”

a. Realistic setting and its attendant paraphernalia in Mondo

The story “Mondo” is set in a really credible, viable and quotidian context, which is symptomatic of its magic realist ordinariness (Hegerfeldt, 2005). As its eponymous character, Mondo, is the focal point of the story, readers are given to understand practically everything from his viewpoint. Without a roof over his head, he passes most of his nights either on the sea beach depopulated at midnight or in some shady corner of the marketplace deserted with the departure of parishioners. He has to make sure he wakes up at the break of dawn so that he can leave his makeshift beds well before the horde of holidaymakers swarm the sea beach and the flock of townspeople surge inside the labyrinthine roads of the marketplace to buy their household essentials. Throughout the day, he loves either to “sneak through shops and pick up whatever remains lying on the ground, such as potatoes, oranges, dates” (Le Clézio 1982, p. 13) or else he sets out wandering about the places he has never been to before, stuffing his pockets with pebbles and the fruits of the rolling mountains on the way and asking complete strangers to adopt him. Sometimes when he comes across kite fighting, dancing and cultural festivals during his sightseeing, he stays there for some longer period of time. But always at sundown, he hastens back for the public places he has known to be his own. Speaking of how to make a setting realist and conducive to the growth of characters, Calvino (1986) thought it wise to consider representing “the streets and the various districts as *dramatis personae*, each one with a character in conflict with every other; [giving] life to human figures and situations as if they were spontaneous growths from the cobblestones of the streets” (cited in Harding, 2003, p. 1). Although Calvino, through the remark, intended to specifically shed light on the way of evoking realism in urban novels, especially those of Balzac, the comment is just as pertinent to Le Clézio’s understanding of the setting in the story. Indeed, through his inimitably masterful description of the abode, interests and quotidian activities of Mondo, Le Clézio portrays an incredibly thriving city space, creates many realistic characters out of the particularly European town space and molds a story that “speak[s] to a universal longing for a life beyond the confines and trappings of

modern existence” (Anderson, 2011, p. 1). However, the depiction of the setting does not at any point lose touch with reality and gives to the story a distinctive aura of commonplaceness, mundaneness and expectedness so that it does not fall outside the purview of the plausibility of readers.

b. Down-to-earth narrative technique and its concomitant verisimilitude

Just like the setting, the matter-of-fact description of the situations and events that come about in the everyday life of Mondo also lends remarkable verisimilitude to the story. For example, there is a fleeting interlude centering around Ida, the middle-aged bakery woman with a bun of tremendously beautiful hair, often dressed in pitch-dark black and always solicitous about the welfare of Mondo, who gives him bread to eat every once in a while. The author describes the emotionally touching episode with so much care that it turns into what Archambault (2012) dubbed as “a good example of Le Clézio’s finest writing. It is sober, understated, and it combines one of the classic techniques of good visual narrative: an event as seen through the eyes of a character, incorporated into the overall vision of the narrator” (p. 292). Besides, there is also a wonderful description of an avuncular postman who gamesomely rummages through his threadbare mailbag every time Mondo bombards him with questions about whether there is a letter for him. In addition, there are a magnanimous fisherman, who generously shares his bread with Mondo out of exemplary filial piety; an ingenious magician who goes out of his way to teach him how to walk a tightrope; and a lonely Vietnamese woman Thi Chin who discovers him visibly suffering in a delirium in a garden and prepares a homespun potion to cure him of his fever. Archambault (2012) posited that Le Clézio has “a tendency to idealize ‘primitive’ cultures at the expense of the technological cultures of the West. In doing so, he disparages the destructively dynamic features of Western cultures” (p. 283). Indeed, Le Clézio interweaves, cited in a musical fugue, of a multitude of spectacular, memorable and arresting events, as witnessed by the impressionable protagonist, in an attempt to “dig under the surface of reality and search for this web of hidden relationships which give meaning to the world” (Durix, 2002, p. 174). Once asked how he could materialize all this artistry so deftly, Le Clézio famously compared himself to an ever-busy spider, “touching threads to see where the vibrations come from” (Jaggi, 2010, para. 17).

c. Tone of voice and its resultant realistic moods

The realism of the story does not reside only in its setting and in the kind of life it presents, but also “in the way it presents it” (Watt, 2000, p. 11), so we would have to carefully investigate the tone of voice that reveals the truth about the nature of its narrative technique. Depending on the wide variety of moods pervading through its tight weave, the third person omniscient narrator adopts in the main three dominant tones that count towards the artistic realism of the story. In the beginning, when Mondo arrives out of nowhere at a littoral township, tries to integrate himself into the unwelcoming fabric of a new society and cadges free meals from unstinting grownups, the narrator reports all the incidents in a brisk, businesslike, measured and even offhand tone as if it were only normal for the orphan boys of his age to scrounge around. But the tone changes in the middle of the story, when Mondo one day encounters an old gypsy who seems as ruefully derelict as himself but predisposed to commiserate with him over his insufferable pariah

condition, Mondo rushes to the same haunt the next day in the hope of meeting him. But as he does not find him there, he feels his desolation is compounded, and he writes his name as dramatically as possible on a rock, using all the figment of his imagination, so that the old beggar can come by it all an unmistakable testimony of his unfaltering filial loyalty in little Mondo. However, the gentle, sympathetic and sepulchral tone in which the narrator records the event changes once more when Mondo stands grievously helpless in front of Dadi lying on the street, needing an immediate medical attention. This time, the narrator adopts a clipped, contemptuous and biting tone to lash at the strictly stratified society that exhibits a blithe disregard for its forlorn souls. Lindgren (2011) therefore opined that the narrator “replicates their [individual characters’] voices, full of regret and rage and wistfulness, with effortless accuracy” (para. 2), which gives credence to the normalcy of the tone required for the establishment of realism in the story.

d. A mélange of the mundane and the mysterious

If the author deftly engenders *verismo* in the story through the pernickety construction of the readily recognizable setting, the wonderfully engaging storyline and the unmistakably realistic tone, he spices up its humdrum banalities with the fantastic through the consummate portrayal of an admirably befitting protagonist with “the senses of the child, impressed, ...capable of seeing the non-perceptible, of representing the unrepresentable” (Kouakou, 2013, p. 65). For example, while grownups in the discourteous parish hardly converse with each other even when they are in a real quandary on a pressing issue, most of the shopkeepers in the marketplace, le Gitan and le Cosaque, address Mondo as “my friend”. Even though Mondo does not have anything in common with them, such as age, profession and even interest, their befriending him, having a friendly banter with him taking time out of their tight schedule and giving him food out of friendliness have been some of the serendipitous surprises described in a particularly enchanting language that disarms the commonly accepted logics of most realistic story-readers. The place from where Mondo could have arrived at the little township also gives rise to an occasion of the phantasmagoric. No one exactly knows where Mondo is from. Perhaps he has come here after a long voyage in the cargo bunker, or in the last wagon of the freight train that had trundled throughout the country, day after day, night after night before finding his home in this part of the world. His mystifyingly uncertain provenance piques the curiosity in others about the unknown, the distant and the far, plunging them into infinite fantasy. “What is certain”, the narrator tells the reader, “is that he came from faraway, from the other side of the mountains, from the other side of the sea. Nobody has seen it, but everybody knew that he was not from here and that he had been to a number of countries before settling down here” (Le Clézio, 1982/2008, p. 12). For all the immediately recognizable fairytale-like account of Mondo’s incredible everyday experiences, Wilmington (1997) calls the story “magical” and “mesmerizing” and its author an “urban mystic” who has “an almost mystical belief in the beauty of the everyday, the unnoticed” (cited in “Translator’s Note”, Le Clézio, 1982/2008, p. 12). The air of mesmerizing magicity and urban mysticism stemming from the adroit manipulation of such disparate elements will invest in the being of Le Clézio a certain sense of hybridity and poetic license, a prerequisite for the literalization of metaphors and thus the creation of literary pastiche (Hegerfeldt, 2005).

In Mondo's everyday life, too, incredibly strange things transpire at all hours, day and night. In Le Clézio's work of fiction, "the banal elements of everyday life", said Molinité and Viala (1993), "are invested with a particular status, so that [myths] take shape at the very heart of the simplest everyday life" (pp. 239-240). Once, for example, in the morning, Mondo sees the day breaking for the fish and the crab under the sea as for humankind on earth. When everything, under the sea, becomes ruddy and clear at daybreak, the fish wakes up, slowly stirs under a sky similar to a mirror and becomes happy to be among millions of suns dancing on the scintillating waves of the vast expanse of ocean waters. A particular friendly hippopotamus stands on the stem of the algae to have a better sight of the new, penetrating light. Even a curious oyster opens its tremendously agile tentacles ajar to let the gold-spewing fresh morning sun enter inside. On a different occasion, while descending the stairs after helping an elderly woman manhandle her sagging luggage into the fourth floor of a building, he sees all on a sudden that he has shrunken in his height. Therefore, the narrator sets in contrast his little stature with those of the monstrously tall grownups thus:

The people around him have become as tall as trees with distant visages just like the balcony of the buildings nearby. Mondo began sneaking in through the goliaths in long strides. He took care to avoid at all costs the dames in the colossal polka-dot robes, who were as tall as the towers of churches, and the men in blue three-piece suits and white shirts soaring like the precipitous mountain cliffs. (Le Clézio 1982, p. 38, author's translation)

Mondo's perception might be a result of the "spatial vagueness", which is "just a matter of reference" (Baker, 2007, p. 129), but it showcases the unmatched gripping lyricism and spellbinding sensuality of Le Clézio's powerful prose that without a doubt hold his readers in thrall as well as giving unmistakable evidence of his masterful manipulation of magic realism in the story.

e. Myths and their manipulations

In addition to interweaving the real with the fantastic, Le Clézio dexterously orchestrates the myths and legends in a way so that they permeate the carefully knit texture of the story. For instance, he incorporates "the figure of the flâneur—the stroller, the passionate wanderer emblematic of nineteenth-century French literary culture" (Stephen, 2013, para. 1) – in the form of ever-wandering Mondo. He walks throughout the story from the receding sea beach to the lofty mountain heights, from the ever-crowded marketplace to the Thi Chin's secluded House of Golden Light, from the elderly woman's austere house on the fourth floor to the thriving haunt of the social outcasts. He probes life just like the flâneur who "was a figure of the modern artist-poet, a figure keenly aware of the bustle of modern life, an amateur detective and investigator of the city, but also a sign of the alienation of the city and of capitalism," (Benjamin, 2004, as cited in Stephen, 2013, para. 1). It is through walking that Mondo finds an untiring occasion to familiarize himself with Le Gitan, the Gypsy, and with Le Cossaque, the Cossack. Although Le Gitan is not a real gypsy, and Le Cossaque not a real Cossack, the age-old cultural connotations associated with them betray an emanation of gypsy- and Cossack-like nomadic lifestyle. This is how Le Clézio braids the conception of "the flâneur as a vehicle for the

examination of the conditions of modernity—urban life, alienation, class tensions, and the like” (Stephen, 2013, para. 2).

The story is also filled with the lively presence of other characters who impersonate the gypsy way of life. One such gypsy figure is the old Dadi always on the move with his little duffel bag riddled with countless holes through which Mondo can see his companionable doves and pigeons. It is not always easy to find him even after looking for him high and low. But once Mondo can manage to find him out, Dadi recounts him unbelievably strange stories of the unheard-of far-flung countries where there are a lot of luxuriant trees, tranquil rivers, lush green fields and a soft sky. Each of the houses in the strange world has red and green soaring tiled towers home to sociable pigeons and doves at large. His mysterious stories of familiar yet strange lands fill the trusting eyes of Mondo with wonder. The other gypsy is the unnamed strange old man, his expression soft and calm and his cheeks full of deep wrinkles, whom Mondo chances upon one day while walking absent-mindedly on the beach. When Mondo asks him if he could teach him the alphabet, he takes an old blunt pocketknife out of his beach bag, writes different letters on the sand and teaches him: ‘A’ is like a big fly with his wings folded up, ‘B’ is funny because it has two bellies, ‘D’ is like a waxing moon, ‘G’ is like a grotesquely big fat man sitting on the couch, ‘N’ is for names, ‘M’ is for mountains, ‘O’ is like the full moon, ‘Q’ is sitting on its tail and ‘Y’ is standing with his hands up and shouting. Such use of pictographs evokes in readers a certain sense of the distant, the primitive and the remote, and the interest that Mondo evinces in listening to the gypsies metamorphoses him from a ‘flâneur’ to a ‘glaneur’, the gleaner, of wisdom in human life.

As soon as Mondo is initiated into the alphabet, he learns to spell his own name and says, “There is a mountain, the moon, someone saluting the waxing moon and then again the moon” (Le Clézio, 1982, p. 62). He wonders why there are two moons in the same name. In response, the fatherly old man shows him all the stones, and Mondo takes the opportunity to invent his family pedigree and add colour to his nascent ancestry as follows:

-“There is a mountain.”

-“Yes, this is where I was born.”

-“Here is a fly.”

-“I had probably been a fly a long time before I became a man.”

-“Here is a man who walks, a soldier.”

-“I have been a soldier.”

-“Here is a crescent moon.”

-“It is what has been there at my birth.” (Le Clézio, 1982, p. 62)

While the guileful method of manipulating the alphabet gives Mondo a befitting occasion to reinvent for himself an identity he lacks and a past he needs in order to feel accepted in the society he inhabits, it also helps Le Clézio create “an atmosphere that facilitates the implementation of magic in the stories” through “the unreality effect” (Kluwick, 2011, p. 59). Mondo is consumed by the old man’s shrewd manipulation of the alphabet. He begins to feel attached to the old man and asks him if he could accompany him during his

sojourn in other places, but the old man puts his hands on his shoulders, calms him down and assures him that he is going to come back the moment he amasses a lot of money. Conscious of his current impoverished condition, flâneur-like status and self-imposed withdrawal from the mainstream society, the old man seems reluctant to break away from the tradition close to his heart. Through the episode involving the myths, legends and tradition of the periphery of society, Le Clézio meditates on the meaning of disassociation and self-exile through the creation of such withdrawn yet personable characters showing a deep contempt for dehumanizing industrialization and its “accompanying amorality and solipsism” (Stephen, 2013, para. 3). It all confirms the fact that magic realism is deeply entrenched in realism which works as a rock bottom of magic realistic narrative technique (Lehan, 1995, p. 70).

f. Time and its anachronistic tides

As for the time sequence in “Mondo”, there is no chronology to the degree that the narration of events is concerned. The story begins with the sudden arrival of Mondo from an unidentified country and ends with his perplexingly precipitate disappearance towards the close of the book. In between, the events that take place cannot be strictly measured in the pace of time and that for a few important reasons. First of all, there are a lot of unpredictable shifts in the narrative from the past to the present to the future, readers will have a problem “reconciling [their] experience of the dispersal of time in the three ekstases of past, present and future with the notion of time as a unified whole” (Goldthorpe, 1991, cited in Adams, 2011, p. 119). Secondly, the past of Mondo is revived sometimes through the narration and at others through such events as the reinvention of his past by the means of ideogram, so readers experience a certain feeling of wishful fulfillment. Then, the future events in the narrative are foreshadowed in such a way that readers grow wistful and think it is humanly impossible to live those improbable events because it seems to have already happened. The comment that Rogers makes in relation to the time sequence in magic realism is worth noting:

Time does not always march forward in the magical realist world view. The distant past is present in every moment, and the future has already happened. Great shifts in the narrative’s time sequence reflect a reality that is almost outside of time. This accounts for ghosts, for premonitions, and the feeling that time is a great repetition rather than a progression. (2002, para. 11)

However, just because the time sequence in “Mondo” is in a state of utter disarray does not mean that time does not hold any importance whatsoever on the overall configuration of the story. As a matter of fact, the time that witnesses the meteoric rise and transmogrification of Mondo from a completely social outcast to a perfectly congenial company through his social activism, idiosyncrasies and agreeable personality leaves indelible impressions upon the psyche of the fickle narrator, ever-changing characters, and even of unsuspectingly receptive readers. When Mondo finally disappears towards the end of the story, nothing remains the same. The police apprehend Le Gitan in the playful act of prestidigitation and Le Cossaque in the hopelessly lost state of inebriation. Giordan the fisherman has to stop fishing, and he does not go to Eritrea or anywhere else. The old Dadi returns from hospital, recuperated, but he does not have his gregariously pleasant doves and pigeons any more. The father-like old man who has taught him the

alphabet through his artfully mischievous mnemonic pictographs continues to exercise his devious expertise of the mind-blowing ideogram on the coruscating sand of the receding sea beach without leaving for the Ganges of India but not in the same way as before. Years, months and days now pass without Mondo; however, time binds them all, especially with its inefaceable presence through the bewildering inscription of two words, “always a lot”, etched on the furniture in Mondo’s maladroitness that continue to bedeck ordinary events with a touch of the extraordinary, and that Hourihan (1997) would argue is related to “a mental concept which may involve any number of emotional associations” (pp. 12-13). It is therefore worth taking into consideration the comment Rios makes on the importance of time in a magic realist text when he says, “In magical realism, time is often everything, but the clock is nothing. This is probably why scholars have often styled the concept of time in magic realistic fiction as “the third time” contingent on “a play of linear time with a circular time” (Cooper, 1998, cited in Adams, 2011, p. 120) and “a cyclical retardation of the linear time” (Sangari 2002, cited in Adams, 2011, p. 120).

Conclusion

While delineating the implications of the term, Bowers (2018) stipulated that “magic” of “magic realism” signifies “the mystery of life”, “any extraordinary occurrence”, and “anything spiritual or unaccountable by rational sciences” (p. 25). In her opinion, however, magic realism does not have anything to do either with the surrealist commitment of unraveling the ruthless aspects of humankind overpowered by the social order or with the doubt and fear of the supernatural or even with the sustained reference to a simultaneous structure of other ideas and events underlying the groundwork of an allegory (Bowers, 2018, pp. 26-28). It also distinguishes itself from science fiction by rejecting “its requirement of a rational, physical explanation of an unusual occurrence” (Bowers, 2018, p. 28). As a matter of fact, a magic realist writing will have to ground itself in the mimetic representation of reality even while embellishing itself with the accoutrements of miraculous happenstance so that it “can be read as part of a wonderful journey where color, magic, legend and poetry build the expression of the modern and foundational story” (Pérez 2018, para. 1). Indeed, what Le Clézio has said about Henrie Michaux can be just as applicable for himself. “It takes,” said Le Clézio (2016/ 2019), “an entire life, perhaps, to dare to see what is around the unknown territory where the poet has already found his home” (para. 4).

Why has Le Clézio become so enamoured of magic realism at some point in his life, adopted the art of “commingling of the improbable and the mundane” (Rushdie, 1997, p. 9) and devoted the better part of his life emulating this technique? The answer could perhaps lie in his lifelong resistance to comply with the European established literary norms. Although Le Clézio once at an early age contemplated the prospects of writing in English, he is alleged to have spurned the idea as “he finds the language ‘too colonial’” (Archambault, 2012, p. 282). He first spoke the language when he had to spend two years with his English-descent Mauritanian father in Africa in the wake of World War II. Le Clézio also voiced his refusal to defer to European artistic rationalism when he embarked on his literary and creative journey. “The mental vacuum created by this

fundamental refusal,” Archambault (2012) argued, “leads to a totally cerebral, passive-aggressive hatred of the referential world of human experience, coupled with an attempt to transform it by registering in writing the vagaries of the writer’s imagination” (pp. 284-285).

Now in amalgamating realism and magic that well-nigh verge on the irreconcilable, how does Le Clézio fare? To what extent does he keep in step with arguably one of the most baffling narrative techniques in the literature of recent times? How far does he manage to keep pace with “a genre of fiction cultivated mainly by Ibero-American novelists during the second half of the 20th century”? (El Realismo magico y real maravilloso 2005, para. 1). Indeed, the imaginative prowess that Le Clézio exhibits in charting out the hitherto uncharted expanse repudiating the European “referential world” earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2008, and the Nobel Prize committee hailed him as “an author of new departures, poetic adventure and sensual ecstasy, explorer of a humanity beyond and below the reigning civilization” (Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio Facts 2008, para. 4).

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