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**The ideal place in the novels of J.M.G. Le Clézio
and Michel Tournier**

Summary

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:

PROF. UNIV. DR. RUXANDRA MIHAELA BRAGA

PhD. CANDIDATE:

POPA STĂNUȚA-NICOLETA

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Key-words: “ideal place”, mythocriticism, archetype, *questa*, utopia, *anima*, the path towards the Centre

The present thesis focuses on the mythocriticism and mythanalysis of the imaginary in the novels of the contemporary writers J.M.G Le Clézio and Michel Tournier, and on the configurations of space, so as to identify the means by which the two French authors search for and create an “ideal place”, a concept imposed by Jean-Jacques Wunenburger in *Utopia or the crisis of the imaginary*¹, a refuge in the path of the scientist, monotonous, dull, emptied of sacredness tumult of the modern world, that terrestrial Paradise, where the relativity of space and time is annulled, where the identity is rediscovered by the individual, where the myth is alive, and where the reconnection with the archetypal structures is made possible. It is, in fact, the ontological process, the story of becoming, in reference to space and time, the chronotope with a primordial status (in an archetypal sense, or as the individual being in the material world). The search for the self – meaning, at the same time, a journey throughout the world and a return to the Golden Age – proves that the very rediscovering the Centre of the Being can be associated with the paradisiac space of childhood, regressively recoverable, although it is not the same, in terms of time, moreover, the return becomes impossible and the circle, followed by each initiated character, closes in itself/infinately opens an “eternal return”.

Thus, the configurations of space in the novels of J. M. G. Le Clézio and Michel Tournier are reached by reference to the biography of the two writers and to their essayistic approach, in order to establish how the obsession of the original geography, which became mythical, lead to the definition of the identity of the characters, but, more so, of the auctorial voice itself. The creation of this sacred framework would be understood, according to the theories of Mircea Eliade, known to the above-mentioned French novelists, as the labyrinthic path towards the Centre of the Being itself.

The chapters and the subchapters of the present paper focus on the real space, which became mythical, going through the hypostases of the terrestrial Paradise, with the continuous attempts to bring, once more, sacredness into the world, following the initiations of the neophyte chosen for the access to sacredness and concluding with the mark at textual level, namely at

¹ Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, 2001, *Utopia sau criza imaginarului*, translation by Tudor Ionescu, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia.

structural narrative level, the permanent temptation of the Paradise, lost because the Centre was not reached, thus, ending with the relapse into cyclicity. The memory is the mobile of the regressive path, melancholy is a permanent state of the neophyte unable to find in the world the longed fulfilment, mostly because of the permanent reference to the place haunting the memory, and nostalgia is the constant feeling of missing not only a terrestrial Paradise, but also, more importantly, a celestial transcendent Eden.

The thesis is structured into three chapters and follows this existential periplus, from the fascination of the myth in search of an ideal space-time, to not being able to touch the ideal due to “falling into history” and the *persistence of memory*. The search for the Garden of Eden still is part of the destiny or is understood as a “duty”, as Jean Delumeau calls the search for the Garden of Eden, the attempt to accede to the original Paradise, an act of knowledge possible only through diverse occurrences of a terrestrial paradise, through illusory constructs of a demiurge at a human scale.

The first chapter, following the *Argument*, follows the circumscription of the “ideal place” concept which proves to be a relative space-time by establishing the agreement between theories on the imaginary – myth, utopia – or from the sphere of the philosophy of culture, or the history of religions (Gilbert Durand, Gaston Bachelard, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, Jean Delumeau, Claude-Gilbert Dubois, Pierre Brunel, Jean Libis, Charles Mauron, George Steiner, Mircea Eliade, Corin Braga, Ștefan Borbély, Andrei Pleșu, Ioan Petru Culianu, Sorin Antohi, Alexandru Ciorănescu, Lucian Boia, Constantina Raveca Buleu), psychoanalytical studies (C. G. Jung, James Hillman), quantum physics (Hermann Minkowski’s continuous present). This identity *questa* extends its sphere of meanings in the chapters that follow, by addressing studies on melancholy and nostalgia (Jean Starobinski, Vladimir Jankélévitch, Svetlana Boym, Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl). The actualization of the myth of Paradise in the works of the two French authors analysed in the thesis involves a process of enlightenment, by interpreting in a “diurnal regime” (Gilbert Durand) the archetypes belonging to the “nocturnal regime” of the images (Gilbert Durand), to the “underworld” (James Hillman), or to the “id” (C.G. Jung). These worlds, both in opposition and as part of the same cosmos, represent a *coincidentia oppositorum* which makes possible the materialization of the sacred, in a zero-temporality (after Jankélévitch), through a “hypotyposis of the past and of the future” (Gilbert Durand), presupposing a “cyclical time”, according to Gilbert Durand, from Mircea Eliade’s

perspective as well, for whom sacredness is repeatable. The unity of contraries and the identification of a symbolic structure of sacredness have to do with the human need to regain the Centre of divine origins, and, this way, establish, once more, the communication path with divinity. The reconciliation of the contraries and the transgression of the contingent emptied of sacredness are made possible only regressively, in the original place, namely in the lost Paradise which longs to be rediscovered, the Eden before the fall into sin. Therefore, the “ideal place” reunites the sacred (*Logos*, actualized in the act of creation – the writing), the interiority of the being (*psyche*), and the depths (*the myth*). A series of mythemes illustrate the terrestrial images of the Paradise: the natal house or the island, the insular space being the most frequent materialization of the Paradise in the works of Le Clézio and Michel Tournier, Jerusalem, the double – twins, mirror, photography – as an essential principle in organizing the worlds in all the Tournierian narrative constructions, a double associated with the platonician androgyne, with the idea of totality, wholeness, as an undivided being, as it was in the beginning, before being split by the wrath of Zeus. But even this terrestrial palpable Paradise can be recognized on the outside only after it is known within, in itself, when the reconciliation between intimacy and *extime* takes place (Michel Tournier’s *Journal extime* being a novel that is rather essayistic than diaristic, as it reflects, as supported by the author himself, an interior becoming, a cultural formation). In this nostalgia for the lost paradise, the melancholy and the unhappiness resulted from longing for that perfect something that once was there experience some resemantisations. Melancholy is the mobile-state of the search for the “ideal place”, it is associated with the rediscovery of sacredness and surpasses the negative connotations found in psychology, it is not only a pathological state, but also the chance to happiness, as it is of divine origin.

The second chapter proposes a way of revealing some mirrorings of the ideal. If the ideal nature is inaccessible to the man, the creative act remains at a micro scale in instituting idealized natures. The insular worlds are the most frequent spaces of this kind, but they will prove to be a complete failure due to too much human intrusion into the splendid wilderness of nature. Robinson’s island is given the chance to establish, once again, the myth of Paradise if civilisation is completely given up and rebirth is embraced according to the laws of primitive Friday, or under the sign of the child Thursday, the promise of an Edenic construction by extinction, of utopia from dystopia. Moreover, in the work of the two authors, one can identify the inherent idea of chaos, of monstrosity, of the fall as the source of a new birth. Monstrosity and the

apocalyptic imaginary bears regenerative and resacralized capacities. The four elements, water, earth, air and fire, are for the two French authors the foundation for rising paradisiac constructs, with both of their facets, as presented by Gaston Bachelard, they are components of the being, as well as of destruction. There is the maternal water, with vital potential, the water that enlivens, the sea carrying the neophytes, similar to the maternal cradling, towards distant places where one could find The Isles of the Blessed, as in many of Le Clézio's novels, for example, *The Finder of Gold*, but there is also the flood-water, the deluge which ruins the civilized world, the city is emptied of transcendence, so as to bring about the rebirth of the Paradise from reified objects, as in Le Clézio's novel, *The Flood*. A supra-element in the human creative act is language together with the use of parallelism, analepses and prolepses – as stated by Petr Kyloušek in the analyses of Michel Tournier's novels – or by using “transitional words” – according to Jean-Bernard Vray, also regarding Michel Tournier – or by enumerations which “break linearity” – according to Ruth Amar in reference to Le Clézio's novels –, through name networks and intra and intertextual explanation of the titles, as seen in the case of both authors, revealing the mythical meaning, the profound layer on which, in a palimpsestic way, lies an actual history, a true adventure of the protagonists. The language highlights the true meaning from behind the deceiving appearance, as in the story of the blonde Queen at the end of Michel Tournier's novel *The Golden Droplet*, where the enticing and sickly beauty of the woman is annulled by the deciphering of the image. The sign – even at linguistic level – becomes a priority to the image, it reinvests the image with archetypal figures, with mythical meaning.

The third chapter captures the stages of the initiatory journeys of the neophytes, under the guidance of a shaman, and this horizontal journey, towards distant places from the edges of the world, triggers a vertical journey, a descent into the self. The journey is a path towards the Centre of the Being and towards rediscovering the identity. These stages correspond, in Le Clézio's case, to the initiation in the archaic communities, presented in *Haii*: “Tahu Sa”, “the eye that sees everything”, because the world is created through the sight, the adolescent/the young man looks quietly at the endless sight of the sea and takes over the space – mirror of the sky, then “Beka”, “the celebration which was sung”, a song that takes over the interval between the sound of the bamboo flute and silence (the very silence that is in relationship with the matter, therefore, with the absolute, and towards which gravitate all of Le Clézio's characters – Adam Pollo from the novel *The Interrogation* ends in aphasia, a muteness that simultaneously creates

the self-consciousness that he looked for), and the last stage is “Karwahai”, “the exorcised body”, the body that carries within the drawing, the skin painting, conclusively the writing. The last initiation expression is in and through writing, either at the level of confessions made by the characters – existent in the novels of both of the above-mentioned authors –, or the auctorial writing, where the writing itself is engaged in a self-knowledge journey. A symbolical image of the transfiguration of the characters is represented by the “cocoon” stage, the chrysalis, which promises the free flight into the world, the liberation from the cold rigid space of the artificial city and the chance of a communion with nature, a harmony that brings the man closer to Paradise. The garden-woman, the island-woman, as well as the woman portrayed in degrading stances, the city-woman is an essential *alter* in the initiation process, becomes the shadow, *anima* (according to C.G. Jung), it is what brings to the protagonist the conscience of her identity, and the presupposition “I am Other” becomes the certitude “I am I”. The neophyte is symbolically designated even in the form of number or on its way towards touching the Centre and, implicitly, the sacredness and it is marked by vital signs of completion (1, 2, 4, 7, 12), a numerology of rising, of transcendence. Even monstrosity – in Tournier’s novels – is reinvested with sacred powers during this ontological process. The journey ends with another journey or with the same eternal nostalgia for the Paradise with the “fall into history” (in Mircea Eliade’s terms), through memory.

The remembrance confers the characters a state of sadness, of melancholy, as they had something and no longer have it, they no longer find the harmony, regardless of how much they travel, or how they know love, joy, enthusiasm. All of them are fleeting. Only the existence in sacredness brings true fulfilment, only self-conscience confers a sentiment of harmony, because, in fact, what is sacred becomes the divine spark in the characters created by the two French authors. Young people, monsters, wizards, primitives, masters, wise men – all equally have the chance to encounter sacredness, constantly knowing it through others, through the relationship with the ideal nature, they all look for the celestial Paradise through the terrestrial one.

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