



## From the Desire of the Character to the Desire of the Reader: an Aesthetic Study of the Fiction Reading Effect across *Desert* of Le Clézio\*

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THE character element has often been the subject of literary studies. However, few studies have examined the aesthetic effect of this element on the reader's reception. Vincent Jouve's research on the character effect helps to overcome this theoretical lack. In his book, *Character Effect in Novel* (2001), he explains that the character can produce three types of effect on the reader: the person effect, the personal effect and the pretext effect. In this article, we looked at the study of this last effect through *Desert* (1980), a novel by J.M.G. Le Clézio. This effect is exerted on the reader when he projects his desires into the character. However, by what mechanism does the reader interact with the pretext character and how does this interaction give rise to the abreaction of the reader's impulses to provoke reading pleasure? And finally, what are the narrative processes that prepare the pretext effect? To answer these questions and in order to better understand the process of readership activity and its effect on the reader, we set out to study first, the three impulsive desires traversing our corpus, namely voyeurism, aspiration for the inhuman and the non-human and the affirmation of 'Me'. Then, we examined the modalities of the narrative preparation of the work in order to create the pretext effect upon reception of the character.

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## I. DESIRE OF VOYEURISME

The transgression of the forbidden is one of the permanent temptations in humans and therefore one of the sources of pleasure. This is what justifies the existence of the desire for voyeurism, also called libido sciendi. The desire to spy on and know the unknown is therefore common to all men. It is provoked in a novel when the reader becomes a witness to what he is not allowed to watch in real life. Each intrusion into the privacy of the characters can be considered an act of voyeurism. In such situations, fascinated by intimate scenes, the reader becomes a "legitimate voyeur" and occupies the status of "read".

In this regard, our study revealed a strong presence of the desire of voyeurism in the two stories of our corpus. This drive of the reader thus finds on several occasions, the opportunity to be satisfied: whether by the privileged position of the reader to penetrate the emotional being of the characters thanks to the romantic alibi or by the exposure of the body of female characters sometimes desired, sometimes desirable. The description of some characters' attempts to protect themselves from unhealthy looks as well as that of the discreet looks on some others, unwittingly or not; act as textual support to fill the drive of the reader. Likewise, the representation of scenes such as Lalla's entry into the bathhouse, her sexual act and also her delivery contributes to activating the reader's desire for voyeurism. The impression of being the only one who can know the interiority of the character without his knowledge would thus stimulate libido sciendi.

## II. ASPIRATION FOR THE INHUMAN AND THE NON-HUMAN

Sex and violence can constitute inexhaustible sources of desires embodied by texts with literary vocation because given their transgressive nature, they remain the most unfulfilled in real life. The reader's confrontation with these two impulses gives him the opportunity to satisfy his own without worrying about the moral aspect or the social consequences of the act in real situations. Literature, therefore, allows the reader to highlight what is reprehensible in real life. Jouve believes that the return of repressed desires by the pretext character goes through two means: "liberation of the inhuman" and "re-assumption of the non-human". The first includes all of the character's relationships to "socially censored forms of money, sex and death" and the second consists of the character's regression "to the animal, plant and mineral kingdoms". According to him, all these impulses of the pretext character come from the libido sentiendi. In this regard, our study shows that in *Desert*, sexual assault is not privileged to represent libido sentiendi. The subconscious outbursts of readers are mostly satisfied by two forms of violence: theft and homicide. In addition, it manifests itself in the two stories of *Desert*, as strongly linked to the scourges of modernity and to the crisis of human values that emanates from it. The embodiment of prohibited desires goes hand in hand with the

remarkable tendency of the characters towards other forms of existence, namely animal and vegetable, which animates the regressive inclination of the reader towards the anorganic state. The characters' exceptional proximity to nature thus favors the reader the opportunity to fulfill their sentient libido.

### III. AFFIRMATION OF ME

The desire to break the laws of society exists latently at the bottom of every human being because by opposing others, he finds the opportunity to assert himself as "I". The aspiration to power is, indeed, what feeds the libido dominandi. This manifests itself in literary texts when the author favors conditions in which the reader gives free rein to his ego while projecting himself into a character-pretext. The fact of investing in the character is worth an attempt to assert Me. The close relationship between the character and the reader allows the latter to enjoy the fictitious status of the character to live in the space of reading, the imaginary experience of asserting himself. The conditions for the release of the reader's desires are optimized according to the distance of the latter from the cultural universe of the story. Indeed, the cultural gap can further legitimize the projection into the character. The cultural alibi can therefore reassure the reader to allow him to immerse further into the narrative and imagine himself far from the lived reality.

This impulse is absent in Nour's story, given the overwhelming conditions of which he and his people were victims, while it expands considerably through Lalla's story. Because not only does the cultural alibi favor it, but also the reader's megalomaniac desires are projected into the character's lucid ambition: the quest for freedom. This quest defines all of Lalla's existence. It translates into the search for direct contact and harmony with nature. Having taken the form of a sought after ideal, it represents the most intense expression of desire in power. The reader can live thus, a drive purge insofar as Lalla by the revolt, makes restore in his life the order which she desires, far from any material enslavement. Indeed, what differentiates Lalla from the man of today is her reluctance facing the unwanted. Lalla does not hesitate to revolt against forced marriage or exploitation in the workplace to regain her freedom. To be validated and to oppose the urban life which deprived her of the euphoria of freedom, Lalla decides to leave Marseille to return to her native land. This freedom, therefore, gives him the strength of an ego opposing others.

### IV. PRETEXTUALIZATION OF THE CHARACTER AND ITS NARRATIVE PROCESSES

Our study shows the important place of narrative processes to erect the fictional being as a pretext character. According to Jouve, the character is received as a pretext character, when he qualifies as delivered and

distanced. Unlike the opaque or retained character, the delivered character exposes its thoughts. These did not reach us in the same way. Hence the need for the second division of this type of character into distant and proximate. The distance that settles down through the narrator, between the reader and the character is so that it does not involve any identification with the latter. In other words, emotionally, the reader does not feel close enough to the character to put himself in his place. On the other hand, the mediation of the narrator to account for the character's thoughts encourages the reader to identify himself rather with the narrator than with the character. In this perspective, our study shows that the treatment both delivered and distanced from the character, the frequent recourse of the author to the psycho-narration, and also to the contextualization of the narration, contribute to creating the pretext effect for the reception of the character.

**Keywords**— Character, Desire, Le Clezio, Pretext-effect, Reception.

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