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THE RULES OF THE GAME:
THE NOVELS OF J.M.G. LE CLÉZIO
(1963-1973)

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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For My Parents
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Le Proces-verbal .................. PV
La Fièvre .......................... F
L'Extase matérielle .............. EM
Le Déluge ........................... D
Terra amata ........................ TA
Le Livre des fuites .............. LF
La Guerre ........................... G
Hai .................................. H
Les Géants ......................... GS
Mydriase .......................... M
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INTRODUCTION

La force de l'art, c'est de nous forcer à regarder les mêmes choses ensemble.

----J.M.G. Le Clézio

At the age of 35, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio is already the author of six novels (Le Procès-verbal, 1963; Le Déluge, 1966; Terra amata, 1967; Le Livre des fuites, 1969; La Guerre, 1970; and Les Géants, 1973), a collection of short stories (La Fièvre, 1965), a volume of critical essays (L'Extase matérielle, 1966), and numerous articles of literary criticism published in various French and European periodicals. He is also the author of Haï (1972), one volume in the Skira art collection series, "Les Sentiers de la Création." His latest work, Mydriase, which appeared in 1973, ten years after the resounding success of his first novel, Le Procès-verbal (Prix Renaudot), is a surrealist creation, neither novel nor short story but truly texte.¹

During the ten-year period from 1963 to 1973 with which we will be concerned in this study, Le Clézio has worked steadily, producing his writing at regular intervals. His works have been received fairly well by both critics and the general reading public, and translations of his major works are readily available in English, German,
Spanish, Italian, and Flemish. Far from being a meteoric talent whose light quickly burns low or is extinguished altogether by too much attention too soon, Le Clézio during his first decade as a writer has managed both to mature as an artist and yet retain the rather magical and fresh quality of youthful innocence and playfulness which is characteristic of all his work.

But while critical attention of a popular journalistic nature (as evidenced by numerous articles and interviews in *L'Express* and *Le Figaro Littéraire*) has not been lacking in Le Clézio's career, serious critical studies have not appeared about his work in the way they have about novelists like Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, or Claude Simon. Critical interest in the so-called *nouveau roman* has seemed to lead more scholars to study the works of these authors (sometimes called the "Midnight Novelists" since they are published by *Les Editions de Minuit*) and to discuss, too, the formalistic challenge to the novel presented by the writers of the *Tel Quel* entourage including Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Pierre Faye, and others. Critics interested in the perennial *crise du roman* in French literature have limited their attention to Le Clézio to the usual book reviews of each of his publications as they appear and to several analyses of article length (such as Jacques Bersani's
"Le Clézio sismographe" in Critique or Genevieve Bollème's "Le Procès-verbal ou la folie fiction" in Mercure de France. Three American doctoral dissertations have been written about Le Clézio—one considering him in comparison with the German novelist Uwe Johnson, another analyzing his style along with that of four other contemporary French writers, and the third, Kathleen White Reish's "J.M.G. Le Clézio: The Building of a Fictional World" (University of Wisconsin, 1973) treating Le Clézio as the central subject. Yet Le Clézio is such an innovative artist it would seem that he deserves some closer critical attention. It is my purpose in this study to make a contribution to the body of Leclézian criticism by presenting a close reading of his works under the optic of game and play theory. The relation of play to literature, the idea of novel-writing as a type of play, and the game-like interactions thereby set up between author-creator and reader-creator will be the focal points around which the analysis of Le Clézio's novels will be centered.

The recurring themes treated by Le Clézio in all his written work include silence and chaos, the all-encompassing technology of the twentieth century (especially in the decade of the sixties), the impossibility of communication through language alone, the circular search for the center, the innocence of childhood, and the
violence of war. The subject matter of his novels is neither happy nor optimistic; it is deeply serious, important to each of us since we are the current inhabitants of the world which Le Clezio depicts, and it is anything but frivolous. Yet we do not put down a Leclèzian novel with a deep feeling of pessimism or despair. On the contrary, we feel, for one reason or another, that we have somehow "understood" our situation and in that very understanding we have had a positive, enjoyable, "playful" experience.

Jacques Ehrmann, in an introduction to a series of essays published in Yale French Studies, has said that it is now time to treat play seriously. And in fact, the idea of treating serious subjects as if they were games or play activity is not a terribly old concept. It is true that the knowledge that play/work and non-serious/serious, are not perfect antinomies has long been with us. But as members of Western cultural tradition and possessed perhaps with a share of the Protestant work ethic, we are reluctant to accept play as anything "worthwhile." Yet ever since the publication in 1938 of Johan Huizinga's Homo ludens, in which play is presented as the basis for all culture, the literature concerning play and game has multiplied rapidly. Interest in play and game spread from the world of sociology and anthropology to the world of literature in the 1950's with the publication of such
works as Samuel Beckett's *Fin de partie* (1957), a play based to some extent on the idea of a chess problem, and Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommes* (1953), a novel whose "key" involves the unraveling of a puzzle. The number of titles which have to do with play and game has been growing ever since (Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela,* Louis Guilloux' *Le jeu de patience,* Françoise Mallet-Joris' *Le jeu du souterrain,* etc.).

But why play and Le Clezio? At the age of 35, he is a member of the first generation of writers to have been totally immersed in the pervasive influence of play and game theory in Western culture. The theories and ideas presented by Huizinga, Eugen Fink (*Le Jeu comme symbole du monde*), or Roger Caillois (*Les Jeux et les hommes*) are consciously or unconsciously part of his mental baggage and help explain his themes as well as his technics of novel writing. It is in a writer like Le Clezio that we can clearly see the results of a new orientation of man's thinking: that play is serious fun. What is the name of the game then? And how does Le Clezio play it? How do we, as readers, play the game with him? What are the rules of the game? These questions are those which we will attempt to answer in this study.

Chapter One of the study concentrates on Le Clézio—the man, his works, and his critics. A brief sketch of his background along with a basic synopsis of
his major works and the various critical positions taken in regard to them will serve to orient the reader. Le Clézio has been hailed at one time or another as the descendant of the existentialists, the Surrealists, the nouveaux romanciers, and the traditionalists. To sort out these various claims of parentage and the reasons given for them lead to a realization that Le Clézio's approach to literature is eclectic.

Chapter Two will furnish the basic theoretical background in the realm of play and game theory necessary to a study of Le Clézio's novels, concentrating especially on a history of man's interest in play, the crucial Homo ludens of Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois' Les Jeux et les hommes, and tracing the re-emergence in the 1950's of a scholarly interest in play and game theory and history as a vital means for studying Western man's relationship with himself and the world around him (e.g., Piaget's work in child psychology, Mircea Eliade's work in myth and religion, Anatol Rapoport's work in mathematics). Establishing a definition of play as it applies to Le Clézio and ordering Le Clézio's "games" within a typology of games will serve to make this chapter a sort of theoretical bridge linking Chapter One to the four chapters which form the core of the study and which deal specifically with aspects of play and game within the works of Le Clézio.
Four major dimensions of play—the psychological, the ontological, the socio-cultural, and the aesthetic—serve as focal points for Chapters Three through Six respectively. The main focus of analysis in this section of the study will be on the works which Le Clézio himself terms "romans" (Le Proces-verbal, Le Déluge, Terra amata, Le Livre des fuites, La Guerre, and Les Géants) although I will also make reference to more theoretical works (L'Extase matérielle, "Comment j'écris," etc.).

In Chapter Three we will explore the psychological dimensions of play within the Leclézian universe in order to discover why the Leclézian hero plays. In Chapter Four we see that since the hero's feeling of alienation seems to force him into play as a temporal diversion, his favorite game (and the most important one to him) is the definition of exterior reality. Within this ontological dimension of play, we identify the Self as both thinking subject and contemplated object, and we learn that exterior reality (the other) for Le Clézio is "that-which-is seen-as-real." Chapter Five, with its emphasis on the locale for the Leclézian games—the world of the modern technological urban landscape—and the favorite Leclézian playthings—man's machines and man's language—shows us the socio-cultural environment of the play world. Chapter Six presents (in the aesthetic dimension) the problems of the author as player and of the reader as player—
in short, the picture of literature as an example of play
and the novel as an example of game.

The purpose of this study is thus twofold: to
present a basic reading of an author who has not until
now been studied extensively and to offer at the same time
some insights into the possibilities of the application
of ideas about play and game to literature.
NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1 At the time of the writing of this study, Le Clézio published his seventh novel in the Gallimard collection, "Le Chemin," directed by Georges Lambrichs. Entitled *Voyages de l'autre côté*, the novel was reviewed in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, No. 2472 (10-16 février 1975) by Claude Bonnefoy, who described it in his article, "De l'autre côté de l'univers," as "le plus pur à ce jour de Le Clézio." (p. 5) Bonnefoy cites Le Clézio as "un de nos rares écrivains . . . qui sachent dévoiler dans une langue neuve, contemporaine, les signes de la modernité, la présence magique et réelle de la technique, les mythes et les rêves de notre civilisation, les nostalgies éternelles de l'homme." (ibid.)


4 Jacques Ehrmann, ed., *Game, Play, and Literature*, Yale French Studies, No. 41 (1968). My first acquaintance with the application of ideas about game and play to literature occurred with the reading of the essays which comprise this collection. Grouped in three categories— Philosophy, Theory of Literature, and The Practice of the Game—they provide a thought-provoking introduction for anyone interested in game and play as they relate to the world of literary criticism.


One of the great surprises on the French literary scene of 1963 was the appearance and almost instantaneous success of Le Procès-verbal, a first novel written by an unknown 23-year-old student living in Nice. His thesis on the contemporary poet Henri Michaux ("La Solitude dans L'oeuvre d'Henri Michaux") would later earn him his Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures from the Faculté des Lettres at Aix-en-Provence; but the novel, sent on impulse by the young man to Georges Lambrichs, discoverer of Alain Robbe-Grillet and director of the collection "Le Chemin" of the prestigious publishing house of Gallimard, would earn for him not only that year's Prix Theophraste Renaudot but also a second place in the balloting for France's coveted Prix Goncourt. Just as Françoise Sagan's Boujour, Tristesse
(1954) had made its author an overnight sensation, so *Le Proces-verbal* brought instant recognition to Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clezio.

Since the young writer continued to live in Nice and carefully avoided the Parisian literary circles which are the normal environment of a successful working author, journalists were immediately attracted to this new literary "personality." The novel itself provided critics with yet another topic for discussion in the perennial literary debate over the so-called *crise du roman* in France.

This twentieth-century version of the novelistic *crise* can be dated from the early years of the century when the traditional "realism" of the nineteenth-century novelists (Balzac, Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers, and others) was challenged by and in some cases deposed by new concepts of what "reality" as portrayed in a novelistic universe is supposed to be (eg., Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* or Andre Gide's *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*). The 1950's saw still another redefinition of the universe of the novel in the writings of the so-called "New Novelists" (Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Claude Simon, and others). Man, who had formerly held a superior position of organizing consciousness, now assumed a new problematic status as co-participant in a world of things. This new situation was described by some critics as the world of the
"roman objectal," and not all of them were happy with this directional change taken by the French novel.  

Literary critics, generally favorable to *Le Procès-verbal*, remained confused as to the author's place in literary history. The novel itself, very precise in its description of the exterior world and therefore a contribution to the realm of the *roman objectal*, presented at the same time a basic belief in the human values of the novelistic realm. As the critic Louis Barjon said:

> Si la précision minutieuse de certaines analyses qu'on y rencontre rappelle...les procédés d'écriture du Nouveau Roman, du moins *Le Procès-verbal* reste-t-il ouvert à ces perspectives métaphysiques que la myopie de nos prospecteurs de tropismes affecte si glorieusement d'ignorer.  

Le Clézio's prose seemed lyrical, too, to many critics, in contrast to that of the *nouveaux romanciers*; and as Xavier Grall pointed, Le Clézio's incorporation of "chant" and "poésie" seemed to move the novel as genre in the direction of a "roman-épopée." And as Maurice Nadeau stated: "Ce qui nous retient et nous subjugue, c'est que l'écrivain laisse couler de sa plume sans paraître s'en apercevoir, comme on respire, la réalité." Le Clézio was claimed at one and the same time by critics of the traditional novel, who saw in his alienated protagonist Adam Pollo the literary heir of the existential heroes of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, as well as by critics of the
New Novel, who saw in Le Clézio's writing a close affinity with their own concerns with the novel as form and with its new techniques for exploring the exterior world.

Yet even though Le Procès-verbal was linked to several "traditions" of the novel, some critics also made a claim for the uniqueness of Le Clézio's vision in that he had recognized the need to question the fixed cultural and philosophical heritage of Western tradition. For these critics, Le Clézio thereby achieved a certain "innocence" of vision as his hero Adam passes through all the levels of animal and vegetable being, in a sort of ontological regression, to end up finally in the category of mineral, in what the critic Robert Kanters sees as an almost meditational technique of *tabula rasa*, the "technique de la nuit et du rien des mystiques." Adam refuses all social folkways and mores; and in the final section of the novel, during his mineralized state of bliss in the insane asylum, he even refuses to think with or in the everyday world of which he is a member. As Kanters points out:

Enlevons au monde non seulement ses significations morales, mais encore ses significations objectives, c'est-à-dire, celles qui nous font poser l'existence d'êtres ou d'objets... Et, bien entendu, il faut se garder aussi de fausses continuités, de ce qui au-delà des habitudes pourrait se constituer en sentiments ou en idées générales...
Kanters terms the process at work in *Le Procès-verbal* "une mystique provisoire," a process characterized by its annulment of established categories of apprehension, and a process somewhat similar to Descartes' "morale provisoire," indicating that the author refuses to propose the discoveries of his protagonist as constituting the way the novel—or the world—should be. And indeed, for Le Clézio, *Le Procès-verbal* was not a conclusion but rather only the beginning of an ever-growing quantity of literary endeavors.

THE MAN

Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio was born in Nice in 1940 and received his education both in France and in Great Britain. His father is British; his mother, French. He has spent most of his life in Nice where he began writing at the age of eight. As a student and as a teacher, he has always been strongly interested in literature and now devotes all of his time to writing. His favorite authors include Eluard, Michaux, Lautréamont, and Benjamin Constant among the French and the Americans Saul Bellow and J. D. Salinger (with whom he has been compared). Le Clézio is married and a father and has traveled extensively both in South America (his book for the Skira collection, *Hai*, is a study of the art and culture of the Panamanian Indians) and the Far East. He has served as a professor French at Thammasat University in Bangkok and has also taught in Mexico
in order to fulfill his French government military service requirement.

Little else is known of Le Clézio's private life except for tantalizing clues which appear here and there in his writing and in interviews. We learn, for example, that the "story" of Oradi Noir's adventures found in a desk drawer by François Besson, protagonist of Le Déluge is actually a story written by Le Clézio himself at the age of nine, that the young author has a tendency to eat "cette nourriture indifférente de produits congelés," and that he never gives public lectures due to his "incapacité de parler en public . . . . Mes cordes vocales ne fonctionnent plus . . . ." Until recent years he did not grant extensive interviews, preferring to spend his time in actual writing rather than in discussions about himself and his work. But after the publication of L'Extase matérielle, he became more open and willing to talk about his artistic modus faciendi.

In addition to his fictional works, Le Clézio also appears as reviewer and critic—in La Quinzaine Littéraire: "Un livre de libération," a review of Alan Watts' Joyeuse cosmologie, No. 121 and "Mikhail Bakhtine, L'Oeuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen-Âge et sous la Renaissance," No. 111; and in L'Arc, "Un homme exemplaire," No. 30 (special number on Sartre) and "L'extra-terrestre," No. 45 (special number on Fellini). He is now
both an author in his own right and a formative influence on literature as a critic.

A lover of the sea, long walks, solitude, and Oriental philosophy, Le Clezio remains, however, rather an "outsider" among young French novelists. To him literature is "une habitude, un délassement"¹² as well as a game. Le Clezio has described his adolescence thusly: "... les copains jouaient aux billes, j'écrivais un poème. Plus tard ils jouaient aux flippers, moi je faisais d'autres poèmes. Ça continue."¹³ In an age of the author as "scribeur," Le Clezio calls himself "l'écrivant," and we find a lingering element of the personal in everything he writes—the personal, the playful, the fraternal reaching out toward his reader. As he says of himself: "Je ne mène pas une vie normale ... je n'ai pas de métier qui me mette en rapport avec la réalité. J'écris la nuit. Je me lève à midi. Je passe la journée dans ma chambre ... Ne devrais-je pas aussi faire quelque chose de plus sérieux qu'écrire? ... même si ça m'amuse?"¹⁴

THE WORKS

A brief résumé of the major works of J.M.G. Le Clezio will aid the reader of this study in the discussion which follows and will serve also as a guideline to the basic themes of the novelist which occur time and again in his writing. The Leclèzian hero is always the same "person,"
and the Leclézian plots are virtually all re-runs of the same basic scenario.

In Le Procès-verbal (1963), the hero, Adam Pollo, tells us that he is not at all sure whether he has just deserted from the army or escaped from a psychiatric ward. We find him in Chapter One (labeled "A" by Le Clézio) hiding away in a deserted villa located on a hillside high above a large city which closely resembles Nice. The "plot" of the novel—plot being considered as a logically motivated series of events—is almost non-existent, yet Adam does have his story. Like all stories related by and/or about Leclézian protagonists, it is a simple one, linear in movement, without the temporal complexities or spatial difficulties of a Claude Simon or a Michel Butor. Events, however, for the reader attuned to traditional plot development, are few and far between and seemingly illogically strung together.

Adam walks on the beach, follows a dog through the streets of the city, has several rendez-vous with an old girlfriend, Michèle, kills a white rat, smokes innumerable cigarettes, writes in an old school exercise book, follows Michèle and her American date to the park where he and the American fight, with Michèle then denouncing him to the police. Adam is finally discovered the next afternoon haranguing a large crowd of people on the street, Salvation Army style, an act which results in his immediate removal to
a mental asylum where we last see him returned to the meditative state of bliss he has claimed to desire from the novel's beginning.

Le Clezio's second literary effort followed Le Procès-verbal two years later in 1966 with the appearance of a collection of short stories entitled La Fièvre (Gallimard). In each of the nine stories which compose the group ("La Fièvre," "Le jour où Beaumont fit connaissance avec sa douleur," "Il me semble que le bateau se dirige vers l'île," "Arrière," "L'homme qui marche," "Martin," "Le Monde est vivant," "Alors je pourrai trouver la paix et le sommeil," and "Un jour de vieillesse"), a physical or emotional ailment (a toothache, a fever, a morbid curiosity with death) becomes the dominant activator in the life of the protagonist, as the hero confronts the reality of his immense solitude in the world and of his total isolation from it. Alain Jouffroy has called La Fièvre the epic of a consciousness which desires simultaneously the absorption of the world and death. Whereas Sartre's La Nausée portrays man's actual physical disgust with self, his morbid fascination with things, and his idealistic search for Perfect Moments, La Fièvre presents moments of hallucinatory innocence (Beaumont and his toothache or Roch and his fever)—moments which throw both the Leclézian protagonist and the Leclézian reader into the middle of a world they cannot judge.
One wonders, after the success of the first novel, why Le Clézio turned to the short story. As he says in an interview with Pierre Lhoste: "Une autre expérience celle des histories puisque puisqu'il s'agissait de nouvelles. Neuf nouvelles C'était une tentative pour sortir du cadre du roman. Si j'avais commencé par des nouvelles j'aurais continué avec un roman." This concern for continual experimentation with various literary forms and styles will remain a constant in Le Clézio's work. This eagerness to explore is one of the most important playful aspects of the Leclézian creative process.

However, Le Clézio did return to the novel and published with Gallimard in 1966 Le Déluge. Le Déluge is the story of François Besson and his thirteen-day ordeal with natural disaster. The novel is itself enclosed within two lyrical passages describing the arrival of the flood and the total destruction which it brings to the city. Within the novel proper we follow the character of François Besson through thirteen "ordinary" days of his life.

Even the chapter headings in Le Déluge show Le Clézio's playful awareness of what the reader expects from a "novel," as they tell in brief the events which take place during the narrative. For example: "Chapitre Premier: François Besson, François Besson écoute le magnétophone dans sa chambre, Début de l'histoire d'Anna, le Départ de Paul, Conseils de la mère de Besson, la Vendetta." (D,284)
Chapters Two through Nine show us François successively shut up in his room listening to the tape recordings of a suicide, walking through the streets of the city, playing with a pinball machine, sitting in cafés smoking cigarettes and reading the paper, meeting his brother, having a date with Josette, sleeping with a red-haired woman named Marthe, talking to a blind newspaper vendor, working on a ditchd digging crew, talking with Marthe's son Lucas, observing the storm and its attendant wind and lightning, going to church, killing an unknown intruder in the middle of the night, and finally blinding himself by looking directly into the sun after the flood has subsided. There is no attempt to show some events as more "important" or significant than others, no attempt to show a causal relationship between events. The "story" stands ordered only by the passage of the thirteen days, one after the other.

For Le Clézio, Le Déluge was a continuation of Le Procès-verbal. Speaking of the novel, he says: "j'ai l'impression que je ne fais que réaliser ce que j'avais rêvé de faire à douze ou treize ans. J'avais rêvé de faire un livre qui était Le Déluge j'avais rêvé de faire un livre qui ne s'appellerait pas Le Déluge mais c'était un peu cette histoire-là j'avais rêvé d'écrire des petites histoires sur la vie courante de tous les jours." 18

Le Clézio's next work was not, however, a "fictional" one but rather a collection of essays entitled L'extase
materielle (Gallimard, 1967) which he also characterized as another attempt to accomplish a childhood ambition. "Là aussi quand j'avais un peu plus de treize-quatorze ans je voulais écrire un livre philosophique. Je n'y suis pas arrivé mais c'est ce que je voulais faire." L'Extase materielle, subtitled simply "essai," contains three major divisions: the first section, entitled "L'Extase materielle," the central section, called "L'Infiniment moyen" containing subsections entitled "Paysage," "Le factice," "Ecrire," "L'avenir," "Assassinat d'une mouche," "Le piège," "Conscience," and "Le miroir"), and a final section, "Le silence." It is in the second section, "L'Infiniment moyen," where we see Le Clezio's most detailed explanations of what the writer's task is and what exactly the artist tries to accomplish in the act of creation.

L'Extase materielle was followed by still another novel, Terra amata (Gallimard, 1969), called by one critic a game of charades. Terra amata tells the story of Chancelade, who, like his predecessors Adam Pollo and François Besson, ambulates his way through an entire lifetime's series of everyday adventures. Chancelade, however, is determined to drain from life and his environment as many experiences as possible; and he sets out to do so both in the normal course of events and also by playing a series of virtuoso games of language and imagination. We see him as he is—a small boy on the beach playing hooky from school, killing the potato
bugs, playing with a little girl—and then as he sees himself in the future or remembers himself from the past—in a hotel room with Mina, who shares his games, or at his father's funeral. The final games for Chancelade, as they become for all Leclézian heroes, are inevitable death, burial, and putrefaction.

Of both *Terra amata* and *Le Livre des fuites*, Le Clézio says: "Toujours ce même projet d'enfant d'écrire un livre d'aventures tirés d'un livre de Jules Verne de faire un voyage et de le raconter au premier degré Mais ça n'a pas pu se faire non plus." 21

Le Clézio's 1969 novel *Le Livre des fuites* (Gallimard), subtitled "roman d'aventures," is the story of the life and "adventures" of a protagonist named Jeune Homme Hogan. The familiar Leclézian universe (the city, probably Nice, and its surrounding countryside) is here transformed into a global landscape—as Jeune Homme Hogan travels to Indochina, Mexico, and New York. He visits an airport, takes a bus trip, travels through jungles and across the desert in almost a parody of the picaresque novels of the eighteenth century. Jeune Homme Hogan's goal is flight—escape from the city which is the site of war and suffering. Yet flight is inevitably impossible as city succeeds city, and Jeune Homme Hogan—despite ever-changing locales and identities—finds no escape from the technological world he has helped to create.
The Leclézian novel which is perhaps best known to the American reading public is *La Guerre* (Gallimard, 1970). *La Guerre*, yet another in the series of Le Clézio’s adventure-disaster novels, follows this time a pair of protagonists, the ingenue Bea B., and her companion, the motorcycle-riding Monsieur X, in their exploration of a vast wasteland of death and destruction—both on real battlefields (several scenes are reminiscent of actual descriptions of the battlefields of Southeast Asia) and on the battlefield in the heart of the technological labyrinth of the twentieth-century city. Bea B., a true innocent, finds herself literally trapped in a confusing maze of activity and must struggle constantly to survive her exposure to the wonders of civilization.

In 1971 Le Clézio published a volume in the Albert Skira art collection series, "Les Sentiers de la Création," entitled *Hai*. Interspersed amid a collection of popular advertising campaign pictures (Benson and Hedges cigarettes, Henessey cognac, and Motta ice cream) and museum reproductions of Indian art, Le Clézio’s text explores the themes and significance of Panamanian Indian art in its isolation from the rest of modern society.

The book’s title, *Hai*, an Indian word meaning "activity and energy," serves as the thematic center from which Le Clézio moves outward. "Hai" is presented in contrast to "wandra," the Indian word for submission, domination, and possession. The first section of the book, *Tahu Sa* (L’OEil
qui voit tout), treats the encounter between the isolated world of the Indian and the almost totally mechanized world of the modern city. The important thing is to leave the city behind and to explore "le dessin du monde" (H, 19), in short, to read the signs of the exterior world. The beauty of an Indian woman is seen by Le Clézio as the effect of her total liberty and symbolized most eloquently by her eyes which see all. "Le regard n'est rien d'autre que la lecture des signes." (H, 33) In contrast to the man who lives in a plastic, chrome, and glass skyscraper and who spends much of his waking time being bombarded by blinking neon signs and electric guitar music, the Indian keeps his silence. Language is something we cannot always share; silence is universal. To learn to be silent is perhaps a better goal for us—to learn to be silent for new signs, not those written in ink on pieces of paper. The art of the Indian—his music, his painting, his dance, his poetry—shows us the way the Indian society looks at itself. Everything is art: "TOUT EST ART." (H, 52)

Part Two of the book is entitled Beka, ("la fête chantée" and concerns the music of the Indian. Indian music is non-melodic; and with their monophonic instruments, Indian musicians reproduce the animal and bird sounds of their jungle environment in a repetitive fashion which has a trance-like effect on participants. All men are considered worthy music makers.
The final section of *Hai*, entitled *Kakwahai* ("le corps exorcisé") deals with Indian plastic arts—their handicrafts, painting, and sculpture. Once again Le Clézio is intrigued by the differences he discovers between Indian aesthetics and the corresponding artistic interests of the city dweller of the sixties and seventies. *Hai* thus stands somewhat apart from Le Clézio's previously published work, yet it still contains the characteristic free-flowing style and evocative imagery (the imitation of the frogs' croaking, the reproduction of jungle bird songs, etc.) to which his readers have grown accustomed.

In 1973 Le Clézio returned once more to the novelistic genre with *Les Géants*, the fascinating account of the world of Hyperpolis, a supermarché géant. La Jeune Fille Tranquilité, Bogo le Muet, and Tranquilité's male counterpart, Machines, all suffer the same torments as their Leclézian cousins from *Le Proces-verbal* through *La Guerre*. Tranquilité undergoes the horrors involved in shopping amid the enormous crowds of bargain-hunting housewives as she looks for fruits and vegetables or plastic furniture and knick-knacks while neon and painted signs everywhere urge her to buy this, buy that. Machines, resigned to arranging and rearranging the grocery carts and carrying on imaginary conversations with the escalators as they go on their never-ending journeys transporting people to the plastic marvels
of the upper floors, eventually destroys the domain of the Maîtres (the rulers of Hyperpolis) by setting fire to it. Bogo le Muet remains outside the magic world, listens and watches.

*Mydriase,* (the title signifies "dilation permanente de la pupille,) published by Fata Morgana in 1973, with pen and ink illustrations by Vladimir Velickovic, is a 63-page surrealistic text about the experience of birth--both in the physical sense, the birth of a human life into the world, and also in the sense of the arrival of thought--the coming into being of artistic inspiration and the subsequent creation of "texte."

Once we have read all of Le Clézio's work, it is evident that the corpus of material contains several common denominators: a similar type of hero or protagonist, a similar choice of setting, and an overriding concern with the same themes. Le Clézio has not written a social novel followed by a love novel followed by an historical novel. His novels are essentially one novel written six or seven times over. His protagonists are for the most part youthful and innocent of the ways of the world; they remain fairly anonymous, not having closely defined personalities, family ties, or social position. They also remain alienated from whatever group they should nominally be part of. They pass their time in dreaming, playing, and observing the external world around them.
The settings (if they can be called that) for a Leclézian novel are also easily recognizable. Juxtaposed to the turbulent world of the modern city (complete with towering concrete and steel monolithic skyscrapers, blinking neon signs, automobiles, taxis, trucks, Muzak, loud-speakers, exhaust fumes, and sun-glass wearing pedestrians wandering the streets from department store to department store) is the natural landscape—the sea, and the horizon, the world of insects, the world of frogs and rocks, with perhaps a villa perched high on a hill far above the chaotic city.

The themes of Le Clézio are also the same in each of his books: life/death, words/silence, things/people, machines/feelings. The questions he poses are the same: what does it mean to be alive in this age of super technology? What is death; what does it mean to die? What has happened to language? Why are the signs of the world so difficult to decipher? Who am "I"? What is "I"? What is the "Other"—be it machine or person? What is the place of writing in the world of the sixties and seventies?

Yet in the chronological procession of Leclézian novels from *Le Procès-verbal* through *Les Géants*, we do see certain changes. Adam Pollo, the hero of the first novel, is not sure whether he has just left the army or an insane asylum—yet we do know at least that he has a family and friends and that he has been a student. It is true that we do
not learn much more specific information than this in the narrative which follows, but we do know at least that much. In each of the succeeding novels, however, the central character, while closely resembling Adam, seems to grow progressively more anonymous. François Besson in Le Déluge also has a home, a profession, and a family; but Chancelade of Terra amata is never even given a family name and passes through an entire lifetime, from birth to death, without our learning very much which is "factual" about his life. The hero of Le Livre des fuites, Jeune Homme Hogan (named in John Doe fashion), does not even manage to keep a single identity from beginning to end, assuming at one moment a different nationality (Juanito Holgazán), a pseudonym (Daniel Earl Langlois), and finally changing gender:

Quoi, Hogan est devenu une femme? Mais oui, c'est bien lui, on le reconnaît à ce qu'il a deux jambes et deux bras, et un visage inintelligible. Homme, femme, quelle différence? Est-ce qu'ils ne sont pas tous pareils? (LF, 199)

In La Guerre Bea B., the first feminine protagonist created by Le Clézio, and her partner Monsieur X, function as a type of modern-day Everycouple who re-enact representative experiences of the age of supertechnology. The protagonists of Les Géants also retain the anonymity which Le Clézio seems to desire in his characters. Machines has become one with an object; Tranquilité one with a state of mind. And Bogo le Muet knows nothing of his past. Tranquilité's friend who works in the famous Information Booth at Hyperpolis, is
nameless, and the Maîtres themselves are referred to only as "ils."

But as Kathleen Reish points out in her doctoral dissertation on Le Clézio, we must also, in conjunction with the various progressively de-individualized protagonists, speak of the personae of the author himself. For the authorial presence is always in evidence—from Le Procès-verbal, where Le Clézio alternates (with no seeming regard for system) between the use of the narrative "il" and the authorial "je," to Le Livre des fuites, where he intersperses sections of "Autocritique" among pages relating Jeune Homme Hogan's "aventures," and Les Géants, where he addresses the reader directly, warning of the dangers "ils" are preparing for the world.

Leclézian locales also tend to become less specific as we progress chronologically through the novels. While the setting of Le Procès-verbal would seem to be Nice and the surrounding countryside, the city depicted in Le Déluge, and to a lesser extent in Terra amata, is a much more generalized locale, moving totally away from the specific to the representative in Le Livre des fuites. The smaller urban location is also expanded in this novel to a global one, as we follow Jeune Homme Hogan to New York City and through the desert and mountains to cities in Asia and Mexico as well. In La Guerre the city has returned to its smaller dimensions but is interspersed with battlefields which make its exact
dimensions difficult to ascertain. And finally in Les Géants the city has shrunken to one large anonymous shopping center.

The plots of Leclézian novels, while they do not follow the traditional patterns of narration, do proceed in a generally linear form. Yet the "stories" themselves become less and less coherent as the "sujet" (the intrigue or adventure) becomes less and less obvious. If we expect a plot in the traditional sense of the word (ie., a series of events deriving from preceding circumstances, leading eventually to a satisfactory and logical conclusion or resolution of the novel's "problem"), we are consistently disappointed when reading Le Clézio. If the novel is truly a novel only when it tells a story (as some traditional critics would have us believe), then J.M.G. Le Clézio is in a very real sense "putting us on." Within the Leclézian fictional universe, notions of genre in a rigid sense are emphatically rejected. Novel, short story, poetry, journalism reportage—all are combined and intermingle.

THE CRITICS

As I have previously stated, despite the considerable volume of Le Clézio's literary output, serious critical attention to his work has remained rather limited. There are no monographs available; and apart from the normal book reviews which appear with regularity in French, British, and
American literary journals whenever a new work appears, the major body of Leclézian criticism consists of several article-length analyses usually devoted to one major work and three American doctoral dissertations.

Kathleen White Reish, in her dissertation entitled "J.M.G. Le Clézio: The Building of a Fictional World" presents an excellent general introduction to Le Clézio's output from Le Procès-verbal through La Guerre. She distinguishes three axes of creation within the Leclézian "fictional world": the universe of material reality experienced as "other"; man, the conscious subject; and the various types of encounter between the two, among which language is included. Reish's purpose is to examine Le Clézio's understanding of the relationship between "literature" and "life," between fictional reality and lived reality. [For Reish] Le Clézio's construction of a viable fictional universe has seemed to depend on a redefinition of the real as "that-which-is-defined-as real," thus making the author's awareness of 'self' as writer the final criterion of fictional achievement."

The doctoral dissertation of H. J. Salij (University of Washington, 1971) is a comparative study focusing on Le Clézio and the contemporary German novelist Uwe Johnson. Despite their different historical and cultural backgrounds, both Le Clézio and Johnson show great similarity in their sensitivity to the existential dilemma of the
modern individual. Their novels express the idea that values considered absolute are in actuality relative and ambiguous. As a result, individuals are unable to identify themselves in a changed world and are thereby confused and alienated from themselves and from others.

Sister Margaretta Black, in her doctoral dissertation on the writing techniques of five contemporary French novelists, emphasizes Le Clézio's desire to "liberalize form and language" in his writing:

...the free, unhampered flow of his writing, lyrical and dynamic at the same time, reflects the very message that Le Clézio intends to convey: it is time to be free of straightening systems of thought and expression. It is time to quit the too intellectual, overly systematized categories of concepts and significations. It is time to re-examine the marvelous potential of physical sensations, of human intuition, and of free and open interchange with all levels of life and matter.25

In general, most critics have been hard-pressed to find a proper category for Leclézian works. Traditionalists emphasize his interest in presenting the reading audience with a coherent plot without chronological difficulties and in the presenting of a "message": that modern man has condemned himself to an unpleasant, indeed violent, existence because of his own technological follies. Le Clézio's stylistic traits ("quirks" as the traditionalists would have it) are ignored for the most part in favor of the presentation of Le Clézio's loyalty to the old-style novel especially as his heroes relate to the dilemmas faced by heroes in the
Sartrean or Camusian fictional worlds.

Critics interested in the area of the *nouveau roman* concentrate more on Le Clézio's contributions to the breaking down of novelistic "tradition" and on his adherence to the tenets of a "nouveau réalisme." Le Clézio remains, however, an outsider to both groups perhaps because he refuses to be identified with a specific set of theoretical principles, perhaps because he has in fact not gone far enough in his attempts to break away from the world of the traditional novel and move toward something truly revolutionary. He remains, therefore, "lisible" yet challenging.

Critical evaluations of Le Clézio's writings would seem to fall then within two general categories: those which emphasize a "new realism" in regard to theme and style and those which emphasize the purpose for which the author writes and thus speak of his "metaphysical goal"--of his attempt to re-order man's vision of his own condition.

Le Clézio's new realism is concerned not so much with a mimetic presentation of contemporary culture as his fictional "reality" but rather with the use of "immediate, primitive, preverbal contact with objects." The newspaper mock-up in *Le Procès-verbal*, the use of Morse code and descriptive deaf-mute sign language in *Terra amata*, the exact transcriptions of partial, overheard cafe conversations, the habitual use of lists (grocery lists, lists of insults, inventories of bureau drawers or the contents of a room) show
us Le Clézio's ever-present concern with the concrete, "other," material world.

C'est quand les théories et les systèmes se mêlent de vouloir de démontrer la vie que, justement, ils s'en éloignent... Il n'y a qu'une façon d'exprimer une telle évidence... c'est de s'en rassasier, c'est de la répéter... C'est ce que fait la vie elle-même quand elle multiplie l'existence des choses à des millions d'exemplaires; c'est ce que va faire l'écriture de Le Clézio en exhibant inlassablement l'évidence du monde.  

Le Clézio's particular "new realism" has been best explained by Raymond Jean in his discussion of "L'Univers biologique de J.M.G. Le Clézio" in his book, La Littérature et le réel. Le Clézio's exploration of "le réel" is associated with an intended distortion of vision, usually obtained through drugs but which Le Clézio describes, especially in the stories in La Fievre, as arising from everyday reality. Jean describes this technique as a "dérèglement de tous les sens." The obvious delight Le Clézio takes in the material world and its wealth becomes, according to Kanters, a "material ecstasy," an ecstasy which overcomes, in some fashion, the limitations of consciousness in rendering an account of the human condition.

Jacques Bersani, in his article "Le Clézio sismographe," says that Le Clézio's escape into matter shows the author's denial of the "éternel péché de la littérature," its aspect of formalism:
Avant tout rompre le charme, arracher les mots à ce microcosme illusoire tissé de rapports et peuplé d'échos, à ce palais des glaces et des grâces où le langage, devenu son propre objet, sa propre fin, se divinise en littérature.  

Bersani's view is that of a Le Clézio attacking the literature "mensongère...de belles phrases polies" and thereby connects the novelist, through the theme of revolt, to the Surrealist tradition. Gerda Zeltner, however, in her presentation of Le Clézio at the colloquium Positions et oppositions sur le roman moderne situates him in relation to Robbe-Grillet's "nouveau roman" by pointing out the fact that both authors have sought to de-anthropomorphize their respective literary universes but in different ways. Le Clézio, according to Zeltner, achieves this effect through the animation of material reality:

Tout, pour Le Clézio...est formé...de la même matière animée...Le Clézio, en créant... un univers, où tout consiste en la même substance, prive également l'individu de toute souveraineté ou privilège.  

Seen then in this perspective, we can determine that Le Clézio's writing is not considered as closely related to another major trend of contemporary French fiction, the type of writing and criticism associated with the group of novelists loosely allied, at one time or another, with the review Tel Quel. Zeltner defines the attitude of the Tel Quel group as "rationnel et scientifique," whereas Le Clézio's work seems to be based on elements which are "magiques et
She bases her discussion of Le Clézio's work on several hypothetical antinomies—rational/magical, scientific/affective—and concludes that Adam Pollo, François Besson, and the other Leclézian heroes assume an attitude which she defines as "romantique"—an irrational attitude of children before a world that surpasses them by its technical over-development. From the alienation of the hero, Zeltner passes to the attitude of the writer; against the "aggressions" of the world, Le Clézio's only defense is language:

...Ce n'est plus par des pierres ou des tringles qu'il rejette l'attaque [du monde], mais au moyen de mots—qui, pour lui, sont faits de la même substance que la réalité. Pour Le Clézio, écrire représente donc tout d'abord une violente defense.  

This description of LeClézio's work in terms of alienation links it, too, to the main-stream of existentialist literature. In fact, Paoli's malaise in "La Fievre" has been compared to the "contingency sickness that Sartre calls 'nausea' and Camus 'the sense of the absurd.'" We see these suggestions pushed even further in Hendrik Salij's comparative study of Le Clézio and Uwe Johnson. Salij sees Le Clézio's work as the representation of the "postwar reality of chaos and confusion," and suggests that while depicting his heroes' alienation, Le Clézio seeks to impose on his reader a sense of the dislocation of reality, of its revitalization which men experience through their awareness
of death as inevitable fate. To Salij, Le Clézio views
death ambivalently—not only as destructive to man's seek­
ing a stable relationship with his environment but also as
a positive force for moral awareness when it is accepted as
a personal fate. Seen in this light then, as a writer of
"thesis novels," Le Clézio is a novelist whose intention is
to demonstrate through his writing a mode of being in the
world, while exhorting the reader to become conscious of
death as his personal fate and to take action accordingly
in modifying his own existence.

In the various responses to Le Clézio's work (ranging
from the earliest critical reaction to Le Clézio's first
novel, Le Proces-verbal, to what might be termed more mature
judgments of the larger body of Leclézian fiction), Kathleen
Reish discerns a common point of departure for judging Le
Clézio's works: the reaction to the writer as débutant in­
spired suggestions as to what Le Clézio might represent in
terms of literary evolution as the heir of the existentialist
writers or in terms of an imaginary literary "debate."
In the latter case, Le Clézio's writing is presented as a
challenge to the Tel Quel group's formalist "challenge,"
which is itself seen as a reflection of the Nouveau Roman's
dehumanizing of literature. Refining on the notion that
Le Clézio is exploring the anxiety of the alienated hero,
some critics speak of the author's metaphysical quest: Le
Clézio seeks a philosophical basis of existence for himself
and by extension for his reader. In the same vein, Le Clézio's presumed reaction to purist tendencies in contemporary fiction has been viewed as rooted in nostalgia for a "'lost paradise' of sentimental response to the cosmos." Le Clézio would then be seeking a literary haven, a new innocence of vision through what might generally be termed poetic means.

Reish also points out, and rightly so, that the critical mode of these analyses is thematic: it raises the question of Le Clézio's metaphysical stance, attempts to define by what criteria he seeks to reorder his artistic vision, and defines his moral awareness of human attitudes toward the "self" and "other" in modern society. She suggests that Le Clézio should be presented in relation to his predecessors and literary contemporaries not solely in terms of these thematic analyses but also with respect to his attitude toward the act of writing itself.

The importance of the act of writing in Le Clézio's artistic endeavor is vitally connected to the mode of analysis to be used in this study of Le Clézio's novels. For in his unique confrontation with language, we can see game and play patterns at work. And in our study of Le Clézio's novels from 1963 to 1973, we will be looking at both the metaphysical stance Le Clézio adopts and his attitude toward the act of writing through the optic of game and play; for it is through this optic that some of Le Clézio's
ambivalencies can best be reconciled. Le Clézio's heroes, alienated and isolated though they may be, are explorers of the material world of the sixties and seventies just as their creator is an investigator in the realm of fictional "creation." Their search for a "lost paradise" is similar to that of the quest for the innocence of the child's play world, and their nightmarish vision of a world filled with technological monsters and meaningless human "relationships" is often communicated by means of play and game motifs, two vital elements of our culture.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. Le Clézio later commented in an interview with Pierre Lhoste (Conversations avec J. M. G. Le Clézio, Paris, Mercure de France, 1971) on his relationship to the city of Nice and his "privacy": "Je suis né à Nice et j'y ai vécu quelques vingt-trois ans avant d'avoir été publié. J'étais connu comme citoyen de Nice. Nice a deux cent mille habitants. Sur ces deux cent mille, il y en a vingt mille qui bougent comme ça vers le centre de la ville et je suis connu de ces vingt mille. Je bouge avec eux. Je suis gêné par le fait que je suis né ici et connu et pas du tout parce que je suis écrivain," pp. 56-7 (The Lhoste interviews are taped conversations published without punctuation.)

2. For a complete overview of the "crise du roman" in the history of French literature, especially with regard to techniques of the "Nouveau Roman," see the introduction to Pierre Astier, La Crise du roman français et le nouveau réalisme (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Debresse, 1968).


7. Ibid.

8. Le Clézio's version of his family history explains in part his dual affection for French and English: "Ma famille est bretonne et elle a émigré à l'île Maurice. Les Anglais du temps de Napoléon ont fait la conquête de l'île. Tous ceux qui y vivaient sont devenus anglais et ça a
about à une société métissée un amalgame bizarre où on retrouve une affection pour la France et un comportement anglais. Cette société a pris certains caractères du pays dominé et certains caractères du pays dominateur." Lhoste, op. cit., pp. 57-8.


10Lhoste, op. cit., p. 69.

11Ibid., p. 114.


13Ibid.


15When asked by an interviewer why the chapters in Le Procès-verbal were labeled with the letters of the alphabet, Le Clézio replied: "Je voulais aller de A à Z, c'était un jeu. On aurait lu le livre en choisissant l'ordre des chapitres selon celui des lettres de son propre nom," See Chapsal, "Être jeune, c'est un peu repugnant," p. 32. A similar procedure to Le Clézio's had previously been used by Marc Saporta in his Composition n° 1 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962). The pages of the novel, unbound, un-numbered, and printed on only one side are meant to be read in any order. As Saporta tells the reader in his instructions: "Le lecteur est prié de battre ces pages comme un jeu de cartes. De couper, s'il le désire, de la main gauche, comme chez une cartomancienne. L'ordre dans lequel les feuilles sortiront du jeu orientera le destin de X."


18Ibid.

19Ibid., p. 15.

Lhoste, op. cit., p. 15.


Ibid., p. 21.


Ibid., p. 261.


Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 217.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 219.
37 Ibid., pp. 220-1.
39 Salij, op. cit., p. 5.
40 Ibid., p. 10.
41 Ibid., pp. 53-4.
42 Ibid., p. 46.
43 Reish, op. cit., p. 15.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., p. 16.
CHAPTER II

GAME, PLAY, AND LITERATURE: A BACKGROUND

I know of no other manner
of dealing with great tasks
than as play . . . In this
world only the play of
artists and children comes
and goes, builds and des­
troys, with an eternally
even innocence and without
being moralistic.

---Samuel Beckett

---Friedrich Nietzsche

All this, when will all
this have been . . . just
play?

The history of Western literary criticism has not
generally been marked by its adherence to Nietschze's
thought that "great tasks" (for the purposes of this study,
the critical appraisal of a literary corpus of works) should
be approached in a spirit of play. Quite to the contrary,
we have been fairly rigidly programmed over the years to see
the role of the literary critic as that of a somewhat stern,
austere, all-knowing God-figure who passes judgment based on
arbitrary (and sometimes capricious) aesthetic standards on
the artistic creations of writers and poets, painters and
musicians.

In recent years, however, the world of literary crit­
icism, following the lead of many other areas in our soc­
iety--from sociology and economics to philosophy and
theology--has become intrigued with the possibilities offered
by a new, more "playful" approach to the serious business of the literary world, namely the analysis of the novels, plays, and poems produced by literary creators. The possibility of studying literature as if it were some kind of play activity and of examining (or often, re-examining) literary products, not only of the present age but of the past as well, under the game-play theory rubric opens new possibilities of "relecture" and serves to inject a breath of fresh air into the tired clichés and pat formulae of traditional critical writing.

Our culture has been flooded with books in every discipline about play—from Roger Caillois' *Les Jeux et les hommes* and Eric Berne's *Games People Play* to Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (*Rayuela*) and Samuel Beckett's *Fin de partie* and *Play*. Non-fiction books like *The War Game*, *Business as a Game*, *The Ghetto Game*, *The Master Game*, *The Sex Game*, *The Money Game*, *Man at Play*, *Gamesmanship*; movies and television shows like "Games," "The Name of the Game," "The Only Game in Town"; fictional products like *The Rules of the Game*, *The God Game*, *The Winners*, and *The Traitor's Game* are all examples of the resurgence of game and play as structuring principles for Western culture. Game and play have evolved within the period of the post-war years into extremely important metaphors of meaning in contemporary consciousness. They are important and significant because they shift
our traditional way of perceiving the world and ourselves. "Life is just a game" has, of course, long been one human response to the confusion and chaos man has seen surrounding him; yet never before have we taken the cliché so seriously as we have begun to during the very decade (1963-1973) of J.M.G. Le Clézio's first writings.

In this section of our study of the work of J.M.G. Le Clézio, we should like to examine some of the background to this renewal of critical interest in the realm of game and play theory, trace briefly the history of man's interest in the phenomenon which he calls "play," and make some conjectures as to how these ideas and feelings make their appearance in Le Clézio's work. We will also examine two very important theoretical works about play: Johan Huizinga's Homo ludens (1938) and Roger Caillois' Les Jeux et les hommes (1958). Huizinga's work will aid us in developing a working definition of play as it can be applied to Le Clézio while Caillois' classification of games in general will help us to establish a typology of Leclézian games in particular.

Literary critics, as well as their fellow researchers in anthropology, mathematics, and communication and media studies, have begun to take ideas about game and play seriously. In the words of David Miller:

...it would seem from an initial glance at the terminology used in scholarly books and articles that...
academicians today are not playing seriously (which would amount to being serious), but are simply seriously playing (which probably amounts to treating their theories as hypotheses, which they in fact are, instead of real reality, which of course they are not.¹

The name of the game has almost become nothing more complex than "Asking the Name of the Game" (in whatever area of study—literature, sociology, mathematics, political science.) Man began by deciding to try to analyze play as if it had some serious function but soon realized that it is extremely difficult to distinguish play activity from non-play activity. So then, raising the play analysis one step higher, he decided to analyze serious activity as if it were only another bit of play. Of course, a third level then became immediately apparent as man realized that the analysis of his first analysis could in its turn be considered a game.

Following this same pattern, we then see that the idea of analyzing Le Clézio's novels in this study "as if" they show a kind of game-play imagery and/or structure becomes a kind of game in and of itself. The critic rightly or wrongly attempts to prove his thesis about a specific author's works; his own product, the critic's own text, is thus an attempt to play the game of literary criticism—to explain, note, analyze, comment upon a text and communicate with his reader—just as the author has already "played the
The "game" of novel writing or essay writing or short-story writing with his audience of readers. The novelist plays the writing game, the critic plays the analytical game, and the readers of either novelist or critic find themselves caught up as an integral part of the game plan. It is important to remember, too, that within the fictional world created by the author, there are also game players (created characters) and game situations ("plot" or novelistic action) which are analyzed by the characters themselves, by the author, and by the reading audience. The purpose of seeing play as a multilevel concept is certainly not to confuse (however tempting that theory may become after one struggles through the maze of material available about play, games, literary gamesmanship, and the like). Game and play serve rather as a critical tool which provides the ordinary reader as well as the literary critic with a new way of seeing literature.

As Miller points out, once the game and play metaphors have begun to take hold within society, they begin, too, to change man's way of viewing not only situations and events outside himself but also affect his own way of viewing his viewing of those outside things:

The metaphors change him. He now has a new criterion for his insatiable quest for meaning; namely, that the style of the quest be appropriate to its metaphoric content (the game and the play of life); that "the medium be the message"; that the mode and mood of his quest be
itself conceived as a game and be shaped playfully.\textsuperscript{2}

Positivism, literalism, and rigidity in critical writing as well as in creative writing have given way to freer experimentalism, and this freer critical approach is one which lends itself quite well to the study of an experimental exploratory writer like J.M.G. Le Clezio.

Jacques Ehrmann has pointed out that "the time has come to treat play seriously."\textsuperscript{3} The question of play for Ehrmann is situated both in the prolongation of the question of structure ("a logical system which encloses Space in a certain formal area") and in the prolongation of the question of history ("a dialectic reason whose dynamism engenders Time as lived through by the individual or group").\textsuperscript{4}

Space, distorted by history, and time, stabilized by structure, each represent disorder for the other. Yet they are necessary complements. Two of the most important theorists of play deal with these basic questions of history and structure. They are Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois. In fact, it is Huizinga's \textit{Homo ludens}, published in 1938, which was the real impetus for the revival of man's serious interest in play. But before discussing Huizinga and Caillois, it would perhaps be useful to trace briefly the idea of "play" itself from its beginnings.

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David Miller points out that the beginning of the story of "play" is akin to the beginning of John Barth's novel *Lost in a Funhouse*. Barth writes in the book's opening pages a set of instructions for cutting out the page and fashioning an endless Möbius ring, a circle of the cut piece of paper made by twisting the strip once before pasting it together. After following these directions, one possesses a piece of paper which reads, "Once upon a time there was a story which began once upon a time there was a story which began once upon a time . . ." and so on.\(^5\) Barth's self-reflective beginning is the same kind of beginning which one finds for theories about play.

Theories of play begin as theories about beginning; or, in other words, the origin of theories about play is intimately connected with stories of the creation of the world in both Eastern and Western religions. Many creation stories in religion rely on the word "play" as a basic metaphor for man's understanding of the genesis of his world.

According to Vedantic interpretation of ancient Hindu creation hymns, the world as we know it is the result of God's play (or in Sanskrit, *līla*). The world is the Holy Power played out in many names and forms (*nāmārupa*); the world, in short, is the play of God. What we call animal, vegetable, and mineral reality is actually *māyā*, the
divine power of illusion. The trick of the Indian God (viewed thus as a master of illusion) is that he likes to play hide-and-seek with man. Everything in the world is created by God, and he manages the work of creation by spinning himself out in various forms. Both the Bhagavatam Purana (dating from about the eighth century) and the Vishnu Purana (dated somewhat after the Bhagavatam Purana) contain this explanation of the creation of the world as the game of God; and since both works appear to be interpretations of much older ideas, they would serve to indicate that the idea of play as the explanation of the world is not a new one.

Yet it is not only in Eastern religion that early theories of play are to be found. Western religion also makes its contribution, as shown in early Hebrew texts. The Wisdom Literature interpretation of God's creation of man and the world as seen in Proverbs 8:22-31 pictures God as a player, fashioning the world while man enjoys himself in edenic play in the presence of his creator. The only difference between the Hebrew account and the Hindu version given above is that the game players in the Hebrew story (Yahweh and Adam) are seen as distinct while the Hindu God and Self (Brahman and Atman) are one.

The significance of the beginnings of play theory in Hebrew and Hindu interpretations of creation is important, for as Miller points out:
...once upon a time there was an ideal situation, an arcadian perfection, a paradisiacal Eden. This was before the fall into imperfection and before the emergence of ignorant illusions about the unrealities of time and space. The pristine perfection from which we have all fully, but fragmentally, emerged and whose bliss we therefore can no longer enjoy can best be imagined as a state of original freedom unfettered by the bondage of delusion, a freedom like that of an innocent child at joyful play. 6

Indeed the origin for ideas about play for all cultures—Jewish, Christian, Chinese, Indian, etc.—seems to be rooted in religion. All men, like their gods, were once like children playing. And it is to this child's life of play that we seem to again as adults aspire to. The present life we live finds its meaning (if it has any) in the measure that we live it playfully as adults reliving in the present moment the gracefulness of the children we once were.

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Another important aspect in the study of the history of the "play" concept in culture is the problem modern man has in formulating a proper definition for the word "play." A confusion over the long-time (and erroneous) dissociation of play from its "opposite," seriousness, has often stood in the way of the acceptance of play theories as valid contributions to scholarship. It is interesting to note that
in the beginning, play was not at all thought to be the opposite of seriousness. There was no dichotomy.  

The original unity of seriousness and non-seriousness in the concept of play can be found, for example, in Greek biographers' use of the word *spoudogeloioi*. *Spoudogeloioi* is a very significant word since it was composed by joining the word for "serious" (*spoudē*, which also means "haste" or "zeal") with the word for "mirth-provoking," *geloioi*. Diogenes Laërtius used the term in reference to Heraclitus; Strabo attributes the term to the comic poet Menipus. The finest compliment these biographers could pay to their subjects was that they were "grave-merry." Xenophon's ideal type was Socrates and his recommended lifestyle he called *paidzein spoudē*, "playing serious" and "serious playing."  

The etymology of the word "play" also gives us some idea of its original unity of meaning. In English the word "play" comes from the Anglo-Saxon *plegan*, which comes in turn from the Old High German *pflegen*. But *pflegen* gives us also "plight" and "pledge" as well as "play." Thus the ideas of play, plight, and pledge are semantically merged. Their meanings come together into the single concept of "duty" (the German *pflicht*), and we see illustrated the coincidence of the "opposites," seriousness and play.

In the Hebrew word *sahaq*, the notions of play and serious battle coincide as well as in the Greek where
paidia ("play") often connotes its counterpart agon ("strife" or "battle"). These terms are even part of Roger Caillois' terminology for a classification of games. In Sanskrit, serious erotic relationships are referred to by the term kridati ("play"), and kridaratnam (meaning, literally, "the jewel of games") is the popular speech form for denoting sexual intercourse. Even in English the term "foreplay" is used in a much similar manner.

Yet the unity of play and seriousness first began to shift with the Greek philosophers. Plato, who at first glance seems to concentrate on the phenomenon of play, is actually responsible for the confusing dichotomy between play and seriousness with which we are still struggling today. The concept of play may be central in Plato's philosophizing, but it is consistently used to suggest a human activity which is actually non-playful seriousness. Miller terms this the beginnings of the Coca-Cola philosophy of play: man pauses to be refreshed so that he may better perform a life of labor.12

If Platonic idealism represents the beginning of the breakdown of an original unity in seriousness and non-seriousness in the concept of play, Aristotelian substantialism is responsible for taking things one step further. As Aristotle says: "Play so that you may be serious,"13 thereby implying that serious things are intrinsically
better than amusing things and that the activity of a man or some organ or faculty of his is more serious in direct proportion as it possesses a higher excellence. It is not that Plato and Aristotle are not in favor of a playful attitude toward life; it is simply that they subordinate the virtue of play to the higher virtues of seriousness and to the ideal of building a proper republic. The Platonic goal of imitating an Idea and the Aristotelian ethic of realizing a potential essence mark the beginning of a sort of Puritanism in thought and ethics which is still with us today. We tend to view the world in a light which polarizes work and play, good and evil, leisure and work, wisdom and folly. It has become typical of Western thinking that one should feel guilty when one plays or should feel embarrassed every time he is caught "not working."

A turning point in the history of theories of play came during the nineteenth century with the renaissance of contemporary fascination with ideas about games and play. The philosophers' experiments with what would happen to human meaning if they were to make the realm of aesthetics primary provides the major clue. Rationality and will had been primary ever since the time of the Greek philosophers and had failed to produce any kind of "unified meaning" for man. Therefore, philosophers decided to turn things around a bit.
To make aesthetics primary in human meaning, as the term itself implies, is to acknowledge that man's feeling must not be anesthetized if a human sense of coherence, harmony, and significance is to result. Rather, feeling must be seen as primary. Therefore, the attempt was made to revitalize meaning through aesthetics, that is, through the "logic" which inheres in art and thus in the primary human example of creation (poiesis). If an artist can achieve significance in an art-work, why then may we not adopt the dynamic of the art-work as the model for the creation of a meaning in human existence?

This attempt to identify the dynamic at work in aesthetics led to the rediscovery of the concept of play; and this recapitualization of play as an important category of human meaning reached its nineteenth-century maturity in the writings of J.C.F. Schiller.

Schiller identified the problem puzzle which had disturbed Western thought for so long by locating the schizophrenia of the ideas of being and becoming in two fundamental human impulses, the impulse of sense and the impulse of form, "the need to discharge energy and the need to design experience." Schiller claimed that the dichotomous thinking based on these two human impulses leads to a "copy" theory of reality (in Plato, mimesis of the Idea and in Aristotle mimesis of the essential state). This leads man to fragmentation, loss of meaning, and sense of guilt.
Man cannot reconcile his dual need to discharge energy with the simultaneous need to restrict the same energy in an orderly fashion.

Schiller found that serious imitation of Ideas is condemned to failure from the outset; therefore, man is not happy. Mimesis does not facilitate mediation between opposites. And if we are serious about the activity of imitation, we are condemned to eternal frustration.

But the spirit of play can perhaps reunite our split way of thinking. "Hail to the spirit what can unite us, / For we really live in figures." Why does play happen? The reason seems to be found in the simple reasoning that play is what children do. Children, who experience life as characterized by freedom and coherence, experience no real dichotomy between the life of play and the life of seriousness. Play is the unification of the serious and the non-serious, and as Robert Neale says, "To have a play-time and a game to play is to have a life of adventure that surpasses all description . . . What happens to the child in play can happen to the adult. And when it does, paradise is present."16

To Schiller's contribution to the renaissance in play theorizing we must add a brief word about the philosopher who truly wed the idea of play to modern consciousness, Friedrich Nietzsche, whose citation opened this section.
Schiller's struggle to cope with the dual impulses of sense and form are paralleled in Nietzsche by the dichotomy between the tendencies he calls Dionysos and Apollo. Nietzsche, like Schiller, found the clue to the adventure of freedom and unity in a proper understanding of the primacy of play.

I know of no other manner of dealing with great tasks than as play; this, as a sign of greatness, is an essential pre-requisite. The slightest constraint, a somber mien, any hard accent in the voice—all these things are objections to a man, but how much more to his work.\textsuperscript{17}

The story of the history of play is then the story of the movement of an idea out of an originally religious, unified configuration, proceeding through a period of fragmentation, individualization, and breakdown, and ending with a rediscovery of an original harmony which had never been forgotten or lost in some forms of religion, especially in the Orient. If the story of play suggests the story of a paradise regained, then modern man can be seen as nostalgic for a lost paradise, as he attempts to view life once again as a children's game.

Once this exalted viewpoint has been attained all the dissonances of the worlds are... resolved in final harmony... Whoever has, even for a moment, caught sight of this vast cosmic game will thenceforward at all times know that the little life of men and all the seriousness thereof is only a vanishing figure in this dance.\textsuperscript{18}
The spirit of play is then once again with us, and certainly with us in the works of J.M.G. Le Clézio. The current nostalgia fads of the sixties and seventies are prime examples of this phenomenon.

Yet there remains today in the thinking and in the fundamental conceptualization of the world by Western man a deep-seated reluctance to accept play as a viable mode of speaking about life and the meaning of human existence. Be it because of the Protestant work ethic or remnants of Western veneration of the writings of the Greek philosophers, it is not easy to think of the world in terms of play. It is, therefore, one of the more important contributions of J.M.G. Le Clézio that he has, consciously or not, contributed to the contemporary novel and, by extension, to contemporary man and his culture, a fictional world in which play is important, in which play is, if you will, "serious." And in his writing techniques, Le Clézio has succeeded in elevating "playing" to the level of serious artistic enterprise which in turn leads his reader to understand or at least to accept with less pain the unpleasant truths about contemporary technological civilization which he describes.

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To understand the history of theories of play and to realize the importance of considering play as a serious
method of analysis, we have only to look at one major contribution to play theory, the 1938 work written by the Rector of the University of Leyden, Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens*. Since almost all contemporary writing about play and game theory derives at least in part from the work of Huizinga, it is essential that we examine his basic concepts concerning the role of play in culture.

In *Homo ludens* (Man the Player), Huizinga attempts to demonstrate one basic hypothesis: that play is the basis for culture. Play activity, according to Huizinga, is voluntary activity, absorbing to the player yet existing outside the scope of everyday life, proceeding within fixed limits according to fixed rules and promoting socialization in small groups, which have secret regulations and yield no material gain. The meanings of the concept of play are traced by Huizinga through Chinese, Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, and German—showing that not only do some cultures have several words for play but also that there is often an interesting relationship between the nominal and the verbal forms of the word (e.g., in German "spielen ein Speil" but in English "play a game"). Huizinga also demonstrates, as we have seen in the discussion of the origins of theories about play, that play and lovemaking are closely related—and also as we have already seen in our previous discussion, that play is not necessarily conceived as the opposite of seriousness or earnestness.
Huizinga concludes, reiterating the basic conclusions of Schiller and Nietzsche in the realm of philosophy, that the terms play and earnest are not of equal value: play for Huizinga is positive while earnest is negative. The significance of earnest is defined by and exhausted in the notion of play--earnest is simply not playing and nothing more. The significance of play, on the other hand, is by no means defined by or exhausted by calling it not earnest or not serious. Play is a thing by itself. The play concept as such is of a higher order than is seriousness. For seriousness seeks to exclude play, whereas play can very well include seriousness.

After establishing his definition of play and its varying connotations, Huizinga then notes that the beginnings of culture formation in great civilizations such as the Greek are often found in play contests (agon) which are manifested through rituals, heroic feats, or sports. Societies gradually leave the early agonistic-heroic stage and add layer upon layer of system, logical thought, moralities, and other conventions which have eventually lost all touch with play. Yet Huizinga, throughout the rest of his book, attempts to prove that this apparent non-play, seen in cultural activities as diverse as law, war, education, poetry, philosophy, and art does have its base in play, whether the players, who often pretend to be "workers," like it or not.
In short, Huizinga's definition of play is as follows:

a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.20

If we follow Huizinga's argument carefully, we are fascinated by this view of culture sub specie ludi—from the point of view of play. We are not bound to view life as either serious or non-serious; play gives us a new category beyond this too-facile dichotomy.

The problems and puzzles we find as explorers of the literary world of J.M.G. Le Clézio provide the possibility of a modern-day illustration of Huizinga's thesis. To attempt an analysis of a text like "Histoire du château qui explosait . . ." without the liberating effect of Huizinga's ideas on play will not necessarily lead to a wrong reading of Le Clézio; but with the idea of play as a possible tool for literary analysis, the study becomes much richer and perhaps closer to what the author himself intended. With the play idea as a basic element in Le Clézio's forme as well as in his fond, to use two well-known terms
in *explication de textes*, we are here greatly helped in deciphering the "sens" of the text we read.

What we see in the writing of Le Clézio is not, of course, a literal transcription of Huizinga's thought onto a literary landscape, but rather the basic idea or feeling which the reader of Le Clézio carries with him, which is that both the thematic material and the technical presentation in novel or short-story form are involved in a kind of reciprocal game-playing—an interplay of the serious and non-serious, freewheeling yet controlled by a set of restrictions placed upon it by the author by the very fact that he must use the written word and restrictions placed upon the reader in that he must read the text and not simply rely on someone else to tell him the story.

The Leclézian heroes from Adam to Bogo and Machines are involved in a play encounter, in a game situation involving a confrontation between the subject (man) and the external reality which surrounds him and includes him. The heroes' grappling with both their physical and intellectual realities and with the intricacies of life in the modern city and its highly mechanized technology, can be felt in a gamelike pattern. The problems are reducible to identifying the game and the object of the game, discovering who the players are, and the nature of the play area, and delineating the rules involved in playing the game and the strategy necessary for winning.
Le Clézio's writing, at least within the limits of his first ten years, deals with the game of the individual's struggle to integrate himself within the framework of the twentieth-century technological monster he has created. The object of the game is to find one's own quiet spot amid the ever-increasing chaos found in the futuristic cities of the present. The game is played on two levels at all times—the personal and the social. The Leclézian hero plays games with himself as well as with those around him. Yet he is always simultaneously part of a larger game, that of acting out his role in the larger game-structures set up by society. The sophomoric questions "Who am I?" and "Where am I going?" are particularly apt questions for Adam Polio, Bea B., and Tranquilité; and the constant juggling of images, roles, and disguises is indicative of their acrobatic ability as well as that of their creator's.

Play is culture, says Huizinga. And Le Clézio, in writing about a specific culture, at a specific moment—the expanding-economy-Madison-Avenue civilization of the Western world in the second half of the twentieth century—shows us just how accurate Huizinga is.

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In the writings of French sociologist Roger Caillois, especially in Les Jeux et les hommes, we see a definite debt to Huizinga as the thinker who started Caillois on his
way. But Caillois does not agree with the Dutch philosopher on several points. Caillois finds Huizinga's definition of play too broad in that playing and acting in a playful manner vis à vis human activity tends to remove the element of secrecy which Huizinga attributes to play. Caillois also finds Huizinga's definition too narrowly exclusive in that game-playing activity which results in material gain (gambling, for example) does not fall within the sphere of his definition.

Caillois therefore develops in his writing a theory of games and play based on a double set of categories by which we can "type" the games we play. The first set involves a classification of games according to the basic types: Agon (competition), Alea (chance), Mimicry (simulation), and Ilinx (vertigo). The second set is a scale, not of types of games, but of the way in which the games may be played. At the top of the scale is Paidia (characterized by almost total improvisation); at the other extreme is Ludus (characterized by rules and regulations). 21

Games, according to Caillois, must be free, separate, uncertain, nonproductive, ruled by regulations, and made-up. In his own words:

... les analyses précédentes permettent déjà de définir essentiellement le jeu comme une activité:
1°--libre: à laquelle le joueur ne saurait être obligé sans que le jeu perde aussitôt sa nature de divertissement attirant et joyeux;
6°—séparée: circonscrite dans des limites d'espace et de temps précises et fixées à l'avance;
3°—incertaine; dont le déroulement ne saurait être déterminé ni le résultat acquis préalablement, une certaine latitude dans la nécessité d'inventer étant obligatoirement laissée à l'initiative du joueur;
4°—improductive; ne créant ni biens, ni richesse, ni élément nouveau d'aucune sorte; et sauf déplacement de propriété au sein du cercle des joueurs, aboutissant à une situation identique à celle du début de la partie;
5°—réglée: soumise à des conventions qui suspendent les lois ordinaires et qui instaurent momentanément une législation nouvelle, qui seule compte;
6°—fictive: accompagnée d'une conscience spécifique de la réalité seconde ou de franche irréalité par rapport à la vie courante.22

In the fictional universe created by Le Clézio, the Caillois categories, as well as his definition of play, are most appropriate. From Adam's mock-heroic battle to the death with the white rat in the abandoned villa to the terrifying descriptions of battle scenes in La Guerre and Tranquilité's friend's frantic midnight automobile ride through the neon-lit streets, the spirit of competition is always present, and often manifests itself in a violent and brutal way.

Games of chance are also fascinating to Le Clézio. What will happen if I turn left? What would happen if I chanced a visit to an old friend without phoning in advance? Or as Beaumont, racked with pain from his aching tooth, dials at random any number on the telephone just so he can share his aloneness and suffering with a listener, who,
by chance, may understand.

Caillois' third category, that of mimicry, is perhaps Le Clézio's favorite stylistic device as well as the type of game activity which his heroes enjoy and practice the most. The Leclézian hero's fictional world is populated almost entirely by characters who spend much of their time being or pretending to be "Not Me." Adam Pollo visits the city zoo and tries to get "inside" the animals; François Besson tries to "become" the blind newspaper vendor. Chancelade attempts to be the potato bugs' God; and Jeune Homme Hogan, perhaps the most versatile Leclézian mimic, is even permitted to alter his name and sex at will during the narrative.

The highest form of play, according to Caillois, is ilinyx or vertigo, the simple physical feeling of dizziness. Le Clézio's fictional creations are often portrayed as caught up in a whirling vortex and beset with a feeling of spinning round and round in an attempt to find the center, to find a spot which is not moving. They sometimes refuse to make their eyes focus, squinting and distorting what they see; they climb to high places and teeter on the brink. They spin round like children playing statues and then scramble to recover their lost sense of balance.

Caillois also, as we have seen, plots games on a continuum running from paidia or spontaneous play to ludus
or controlled play. We see the same procedure in the works of Le Clézio—a gradation of play activity as pure spontaneous action (the arranging of bits of paper and cigarette butts on the cafe table by Michèle and Adam, Chancelade's stone throwing and face-making, Machines' dialogues with the escalators) to rigidly-controlled game situations like Adam's psychiatric interview in Le Proces-verbal, the pinball machines of Le Deluge, or the complex phenomenon of war in La Guerre. Yet Le Clézio seems to have moved one step further along the Caillois continuum. Spontaneous play and games evolve into ruled social ones and then degenerate into spontaneity again. There is always in Le Clézio the desire to be free of "the rules" and at the same time an ever-present puzzlement on the part of the Leclézian character as to just exactly what the rules are. Once he discovers what he should do to "play the game," he usually decides that the game is not to his liking. He then refuses to take part and turns to a spontaneous non-regulated play activity once again.

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Mathematical game theorizing is used today in business and government in order to find practical solutions to current problems. Literary applications of play and game theory are not so practical, yet they remain extremely
interesting to the student of literature. One of the best-known and most obvious examples of this in American literature is Edward Albee's play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* In Act One (called "Fun and Games" by the playwright), psychological and social games ("Get the Guest," "Humiliate the Host," etc.) dramatize the vicious and truly vacuous nature of unconscious human relationships which unwittingly emerge when traditional principles of order—social, psychological, or philosophical—fail to sustain a sense of meaning in man's life. It is these games which must be "purged" somehow in order to resurrect an authentic selfhood.

These same social and psychological games exist within the fictional world of Le Clezio, and in that sense he is perhaps one of your youngest moralistes.

Two other important literary applications of play and game theory are to be found in the works of two other contemporary writers, the Argentinian-French novelist Julio Cortázar and the Irish-French novelist-dramatist Samuel Beckett, for whom the play metaphor has a special significance.

Samuel Beckett's use of the game metaphor in his play *Fin de partie* is neither accidental nor arbitrary. For as early as 1953, in *En Attendant Godot*, Beckett had been fascinated by the idea of the absurdity of man's attempt to master the games of life in a cultural context
which is failing and which, therefore, cannot support meaning-systems which might give human significance to these life games. One of the characters (named Lucky!), who is otherwise mute during the action, has a long stream-of-consciousness monologue in the middle of the drama which, as Le Clézio will later do in Adam Pollo's impassioned harangue to a crowd of shoppers, parodies and ridicules the psychological-philosophical reasonings of twentieth-century man.

In *Fin de partie* then, Beckett merely expands the metaphor contained in Lucky's speech into an entire play, where the implications of Lucky's monologue are fully explored. The specific game is chess, a serious game par excellence and an image of war, another serious game, which will be the focal point for Le Clézio's *La Guerre*. What sort of humanity is possible when civilization has reached the "end of the game?" Two of the characters spend the duration of the play in trash cans. Two others, Hamm and Clov, are totally dependent upon each other for survival and they fail over and over again as they try desperately to construct a story of their past which might give a clue to their future meaning. Clov, at one point, implores Hamm with the words "Let's stop playing!" But a little later Hamm indicates that in spite of the absence of systems of meaning to support their existence ("Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing"), they must
and they will continue to quest for and celebrate the human enterprise ("Since that's the way we're playing it . . . let's play it that way . . . and speak no more about it . . . speak no more. Old stancher! You . . . remain.")

And this is the way the play; the "end of the game," ends. It is a dramatic symbolization of the contemporary complexities of serious human activities of meaning expressed through the metaphor of "game."

Julio Cortázar does just the opposite with his story "End of the Game." ("Final del juego") He attempts to create a poetic expression of the games of children which will symbolize the complexities of serious adult meaning. Beckett writes about seriousness as if it were a game; Cortázar, about a game as if it were serious.

"End of the Game" has counterpoints in other works of Cortázar just as Fin de partie is somehow prefigured in En Attendant Godot. In 1960 Cortázar published Los Premios (The Winners) which focuses the reader's attention on the ambiguity of "winning" a game. It raises the possibility that some people may win by losing, just as it is more obvious that some may lose by winning. The plot of Los Premios concerns a voyage, a supposedly festive and luxurious cruise which "the winners" have won in a lottery. Yet the scene at departure--complete chaos, 92 degrees in the shade, "the most chaotic hypothesis of chaos paled before
this confusion\textsuperscript{25}—shows that the winners may not have been
so lucky after all.

While the ambiguity of a game's content is the sub-
ject for Los Premios, the form of the game is the subject
for Cortázar's Rayuela (Hopscotch) which he published in
1963, the same year Le Clézio published Le Procès-verbal.
The content of Rayuela is a "game" of hopscotching from
Paris to Buenos Aires in quest of love and life's meaning.
There are even mentions of an actual game; and in this
interesting meeting of hopscotch literally understood and
"hopscotch" as a metaphor of the quest for life's meaning,
we see the meeting of literal and metaphoric content on the
one hand, with style and format on the other. The book has
155 chapter divisions, but the author explains in an intro-
ductive "table of instructions" that the novel may be read
in various ways. It may be read the way one normally reads
a novel, proceeding consecutively from Chapter 1, in which
case, the author informs us, the end of the novel is at
Chapter 56. The rest may be ignored. Or if one prefers, he
may begin reading with Chapter 73 and follow the instruc-
tions at the end of each chapter as to what should be read
next. It may be that he may "hopscotch" through Rayuela's
literal and metaphoric hopscotch game in whatever route is
best for his own quest—his own quest for meaning in life
and for meaning in this novel—which would ultimately be
the same. The novel is itself the game it is about!
In the fictional world of J.M.G. Le Clézio, we can see a combination of both Beckett's and Cortázar's ways of using game, both the desire to treat seriousness as if it were a game and games as if they were serious. The major point would seem to be that in conceptualization and expressions of self, the disorder and conflict to be avoided and the order and harmony to be achieved may both be seen in games and play, especially in the games and play of children.

The child, therefore, or at least the child-like figure, will be of central importance in the Leclézian fictional world. Chancelade, Jeune Homme Hogan, Bogo le Muet, Bea B., Martin—are all children desiring to return to some kind of lost paradise and, in their attempts to find their way back to the beginning, play the games children play.

Every game, to the theorist, has players who must act or make certain decisions. As a result of the behavior of the players—and possibly chance—there is a certain outcome: a reward or punishment for each of the participating players.

There are two basic questions which must be asked about any game: how should the players behave? and what should be the game's ultimate outcome? The answer to one of these questions, or to both, is sometimes called the solution of the game; but the term "solution" does not have
a universal meaning in game theory; in different contexts it has different meanings—just as the word "rational" when used to describe human behavior presents only a relative concept.

These questions lead us quite naturally to others. What is the "power" of a player? That is, to what extent can the individual determine the outcome of a game? More specifically, if the player receives no cooperation from others and is forced to rely on his own resources what is the minimum he can assure himself? Is it reasonable to suppose that the other players will in fact be hostile?

The basic rules of any game include the following five elements: (1) to what extent the players can communicate with one another, (2) whether the players can or cannot enter into binding agreements, (3) whether rewards obtained in the game may be shared with other players, (4) what the formal, causal relation between the actions of the players and the outcome of the game is (what Morton D. Davis calls the payoff matrix), and (5) what information is available to the players.

In addition, the personalities of the players, their subjective preferences, the mores of their society (i.e., what they believe to be a "fair" outcome) all have an effect on the game's end result.

According to Davis, the single most significant characteristic of a game is the number of players, its size.
Generally, the fewer the players the simpler the game. As one progresses from the simplest games to those of greater complexity, theories become less satisfying. In other words, the greater the significance of the game—that is, the more applications it has to real problems—the more difficult it is to treat analytically. In the more complex games, a player is faced with forces that he cannot control. The less control a player has upon the final outcome, the more difficult it becomes to define rational behavior. What constitutes a wise decision when any decision will have little effect on what ultimately happens?

When we ask the question about what a player should do and what the ultimate outcome of a game should be, we are not speaking in a moral sense but in the sense of what actions will most further the player's interests. The question of what people actually do and what actually happens when a game is played takes us out of the realm of the normative (home of the pure game theorist) into the world of the descriptive (the world of the behavioral sciences). In complex games, the distinction admittedly becomes blurred. If a player is not in control, he must be concerned with what the other players want and what they intend to do (e.g., a short-term speculator on the stock market is almost wholly controlled by others; what he should do depends on what he thinks others actually will do).
As the games grow more complex, it is almost impossible to give convincing answers to the questions how should the player behave? and what should be the game's final outcome? We must satisfy ourselves with less. Instead of determining a precise outcome, we often have to settle for a set of possible outcomes that seem more plausible than the rest.

Davis divides games into groups according to their size: the one-person game, the finite, two-person, zero-sum game of perfect information, the general, finite, two-person, zero-sum game, the two-person non-zero-sum game, and the n-person game. In this study we shall be concerned with the first and last in Davis' typology: the one-person game and the n-person game, each of which, interestingly enough, practically defies simple analysis.

The one-person game is the one we usually find played by a Leclézian protagonist. The basic game situation involves one person against nature. The role that nature might play in the game allows us to posit three kinds of one-person contests: in the first, nature remains completely passive and the player simply makes a choice and that choice determines what happens. In the second category the laws of chance come into play. The player chooses first, and then chance operates. Here the player is aware of the relevant probabilities in advance. In the third
category, the player makes his decision without any advance notice on how nature will play. The n-person game category is important, too, within the fictional game patterns in Le Clézio's works since most of the individualized one-person strategies found there (personal isolation, for example) can also be applied to the entire social construct (human anonymity).

In this discussion of the history and background of the concepts of play and game, we have tried to prove the value of using these ideas within the area of literary criticism. The novels of J.M.G. Le Clézio appear to us to be particularly suited to this type of treatment for several reasons. Not only do we find actual games within the novels but we also can trace recognizable game patterns, both socially accepted and corrupted ones, within the narrative texts. Moreover, the artist himself considers the act of writing as a sort of game, calling literature "l'ultime possibilité de jeu offerte." (LF, 41) As Kostas Axelos has said, "'Game' is not a slogan. After you have discovered it, it is no great exploit to find it; the difficulty will be henceforth to forget it. In it everything is constructed and destroyed."
NOTES TO CHAPTER II


2 Ibid., p. 15.


4 Ibid.

5 This kind of circular, endless word-play, or "game," reminds one of similar games in Beckett (Malone sucking his stones, the hat game in En Attendant godot, the song Didi sings at the beginning of Godot's Act II) and in many other "nouveaux romanciers" (Claude Simon, Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras).


7 Ibid., p. 104.


9 Strabo, Geography, XVI, 29. Cited in Miller, p. 104.

10 Ibid.

11 Miller's explanations of the etymology of the word "play" and its historical evolution is extremely useful. See pp. 103-8.

12 Ibid., p. 106.


16 Neale, op. cit., p. 93.


19 Huizinga, op. cit., pp. 8-19.

20 Ibid., p. 13.

21 See Tables 1 and 2. Caillois points out not only the function of types of games but also their "corruption" within the social context. It is in this definition of "game" that we see Le Clézio as a prime illustration.


24 Ibid., p. 84.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Roger Caillois' Typology of Games Repartition Des Jeux*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agôn</strong> (competition)</td>
<td><strong>Alea</strong> (chance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAIDIA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courses )</td>
<td>comptines</td>
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<td>luttes ) non-</td>
<td>pile ou face</td>
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<tr>
<td>etc. ) régélées</td>
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<td>athlétisme)</td>
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<td>boxe</td>
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<td>compétitions</td>
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<td>sportives en</td>
<td>simples</td>
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<tr>
<td>général</td>
<td>composées</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ou à report</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

N.B. Dans chaque colonne verticale, les jeux sont classés très approximativement dans un ordre tel que l'élément paidia décroisse constamment, tandis que l'élément ludus croît constamment.

Table 2*
Roger Caillois' Topology of Games in Relation to Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formes culturelles</th>
<th>Formes institutionnelles</th>
<th>Corruption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>démeurant en marge du mécanisme social</td>
<td>intégrées à la vie sociale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agon (Compétition)</th>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>concurrence commerciale examens et concours</th>
<th>violence, volonté de puissance, ruse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lotenes, casinos, hippodromes, paris mutuels</td>
<td>speculation boursière</td>
<td></td>
<td>superstitition, astrologie, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alea (Chance)</th>
<th>Carnaval, théâtre, cinéma, culte de la vedette</th>
<th>uniforme, étiquette, céramonial, métiers de représentation</th>
<th>alienation, dédouvement de la personnalité</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mimicry (Simulacre)</th>
<th>Alpinisme, ski-haute voltige, griserie de la vitesse</th>
<th>professions dont l'exercice implique la domination due vertige</th>
<th>alcolisme et dragues</th>
</tr>
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CHAPTER III

LECLÉZIAN GAME AND PLAY: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

0 hours of childhood
when behind the figures was
more than merely the past
and before us not the future
....We stood there in the
region between the world and
the play-thing, in a place
created in the beginning for
a pure act.

----Rilke, Fourth
Duino Elegy

...Children's games are only one sort--
and a prefiguration--of the games that
grown-up children play: men, marvelous and
miserable beings, unsuccessful toys, even
when they take themselves terribly seriously.

----Kostas Axelos,
"Planetary interlude"

The psychological dimension of play within the Leclézian world helps the reader to understand two basic concepts:
first of all, the reasons for the play and secondly, the
profile of the Leclézian protagonist. We will see that the
Leclézian character is usually extremely naive and innocent
about the ways of the world and that he (or she) often has
the characteristics of an intelligent, sensitive, rather pre-
ococious child. As an innocent inhabitant of a chaotic tech-
nological world, the Leclézian hero feels alienated and has
the difficult, the nearly impossible, task of attempting to
reintegrate himself within the world from which he feels
completely estranged; and, failing that, to find something else to do in order to pass the time until one of two events comes to pass: either the world itself is changed or the character must find a new manner in which to deal with the world's complexities and his own situation.

The background in the psychological dimension of play involves both theories that attribute to the play of children a serious function and theories that attribute a playful function to adult seriousness. Both kinds of theories are applicable to the works of Le Clézio, since the Leclézian hero functions as a child within an adult framework of life situations. Two of the most important psychological views of play are found in the works of Edouard Claparède and in those of Jean Piaget. The ideas of Sigmund Freud will be discussed in Chapter VI.

Claparède's *Psychologie de l'enfant et pédagogie expérimentale,* first reviews the work done by the nineteenth century's Schiller, Spencer, Hall, and Groos, then posits four basic categories of play theory: (1) a theory of relaxation which holds that men and children play because their minds and bodies need rest in order that they may go on working, (2) a theory of superfluous energy which holds that play is an activity which enables men and children to get rid of excess energy through some acceptable activity, (3) a theory of activism which proposes that play is a
remnant of a basic function not really necessary to adult life, and (4) a theory of preparatory exercise which holds that play is practice for the serious work of adult life.

Claparède supports this last theory and considers the play activity of children to be essentially that of imitation or mimesis. The child, in practicing to become an adult, plays sensory games, motor games, psychic games, wrestling games, hunting games, and family games. And according to Claparède, if children do not play enough, their development will be in some way arrested.

In the novels of J.M.G. Le Clezio, the protagonists can be seen in most instances as children passing from the state of innocence to experience. And like children of normal biological age, they "play games" in order to facilitate their passage into the adult world. The problem which arises for each Leclézian protagonist, however, is that the imitation of the "adult" activity which he observes does not lead him to a successful integration within that world of accepted social patterns. All of his imitative games will lead him eventually back to the starting point—be it the mineralized state of bliss of the aphasic Adam or the mute solitude of Bogo. One basic psychological game pattern of the Leclézian character is thus mimetic play activity—which brings the protagonist knowledge of the world, followed by a subsequent refusal or inability on his part to become
involved in the psycho-sociological game patterns he observes, and an eventual return to his pre-socialized state.

Jean Piaget, a Swiss scholar who is perhaps the leading child psychologist in the world today, has also developed a sophisticated and complex analysis of the serious function of play, an argument informed by empirical observation of children at play in his own school, La Maison des Petits, in Geneva. Piaget has written about the serious function of child's play in many articles and books; but the most important for this discussion is his La Formation du symbole chez l'enfant, written in 1945 and published in English translation in 1951 as Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood.²

According to Piaget's findings, there are three stages of child's play. The first stage, between birth and age two, marks the beginning of play. The second stage, between ages two and seven, is the period of transformation of play into game. And the third stage, between the ages of eight and twelve, is the time of the decline of child's play.

During this third stage there is also an increase in work activity—which Piaget as a child psychologist finds important for proper development and for socialization. The only games that persist at the adult level, according to Piaget, are "socialized games controlled by rules."³

In games with rules there is a subtle equilibrium between assimilation of the ego—the principle of all play—and
social life. There is still sensory-motor or intellectual satisfaction, and there is also the chance of an individual victory over others, but these satisfactions are as it were made "legitimate" by the rules of the game, through which competition is controlled by a collective discipline, with a code of honour and fair play.4

Contrary to Claparède's thesis that play is basically a mimetic procedure by which the child learns to adapt himself to external reality, Piaget's theory of play holds that it is the activity by which the child assimilates external reality to his own internal life. In this function play begins at least as the opposite of Claparède's imitation, the activity by which the child accommodates his own psychic life to external reality. Leclézian heroes tend to fall alternately within the Piaget realm and the Claparède realm as they attempt to establish a psychological equilibrium within their existence.

For Piaget the child begins his life in play, that is to say, he assimilates all external reality to his own pleasure. Only then does he move into an imitation stage where social reality becomes primary. Finally, however, the child desires to achieve a balance, an equilibrium between play and imitation as he integrates himself into his society, into the world of the material other.

The Piaget first stage of play, as we have noted, extends from birth to age two and is characterized by
assimilative play. The baby plays with the sound of his own voice, alternately smiles and frowns at his own hands, kicks his feet. He is also in the process of transforming his artful play into the skill of assimilative make-believe. Without intent, he is nonetheless preparing himself for the playing of games, not simply the playing of play.

In stage two of play (ages two to seven), Piaget finds a characteristic development from practice games to symbolic games to games with rules. At first the child plays at practice games which have neither rules nor symbols (the child is just like a puppy chasing a ball). When he develops the necessary sensory and motor skills, he becomes ready for symbolic games (as when the child jumps up and down on a chair imagining it to be a horse). The more the child is able to master the symbolic games (especially a symbolic game in which a totally absent object is represented), the closer he approaches the ability to play the game which has rules. Games with rules imply a sense of regulation and regularity in play. In games with sensory-motor skills, representational intelligence, rules, and reflective intelligence are required. For Piaget the transition from pure play to imitation is marked by the child's participation in constructional games (hollowing out a piece of wood for a boat instead of substituting the whole piece of wood for a boat-toy). The individual is now able to accommodate himself to external reality.
Then between the ages of eight and twelve, Piaget sees both symbolic play and play in general as on the wane. An increase in work activity marks a necessary step for the child's integration into the social construct. The only pleasures of play which remain are found in the socially acceptable games which have been made legitimate through rules.5

If we examine the development of the Leclézian protagonists following Piaget's three stages, we can make several observations. First of all, the Leclezian hero delights in assimilative play just as Piaget's infants do. Adam crosses his eyes in order to enjoy watching the raindrops splash on his cigarette; Bogo le Muet is completely happy just chewing his bubble gum: "De temps en temps il s'arrête de mâcher son chewing-gum, il entrouvre ses lèvres et il souffle une bulle. La bulle verte se gonfle, se distend, puis elle explode avec un bruit sec." (GS, 36) Chancelade loves to run and François Besson likes feeling the dizziness of heights; and of course all Leclézian protagonists are inveterate walkers.

Symbolic games, too, are an integral part of the Leclézian hero's everyday life as he imagines himself to be an animal (Adam at the zoo) or another person (Jeune Homme Hogan and his aliases) or as he contrives to act out a symbolic social ritual (Bea B.'s visit to the discothèque).
Yet with the advent of the games with rules stage, the Leclézian protagonist feels terribly lost. His rules never seem to coincide with those of the others who surround him; and even when he can manage to decipher the "rules" followed by the "others," he is not usually willing to accept them as valid. We see this clearly in Adam's wry commentary on the activities of the crowds at the beach, in Chancelade's mystification during the socialized rituals of his father's death, or in Bea B.'s bemused commentary on her airplane meal.

Finally, we must note Piaget's finds concerning the waning of play activity and simultaneous increase of work activity in the third stage of play development. This phenomenon remains completely alien to the Leclézian protagonist; in fact, the only Leclézian hero who actually has a job is Machines. Each of the others--from Adam and François to Bea B. and Tranquilité--spends all his time doing nothing but "existing." Work as a necessary step for their integration within the social construct is always rejected by Le Clézio's heroes. If anything, they become fixed at a stage of play activity beyond which they cannot or will not move. And in their constant acting out of childhood game patterns, they eventually forego completely the possibility of finding the equilibrium between assimilation of the ego and social life which Piaget includes in "games with rules."
The Leclézian hero, within the psychological dimensions of play, participates in both mimetic childhood play patterns as well as assimilative or imaginative ones. Since his attempts to adapt to society through imitation are all failure, he is then forced to flee and to create a playground of his own, a private vision of reality.

Two of the basic mimetic patterns we shall examine within the psychological dimension of Leclézian play are those which we call Simon Says (with Follow the Leader as a variant form) and Disguises. An imaginative-mimetic childhood pattern will be seen in Telling Stories (sometimes known as Let's Pretend). Le Clézio's reworking of the Simon Says game pattern within his fictional world provides a structure for many of his protagonists' activities. As all children know, Simon Says is played with a group of children, one child having been selected as the Leader. The leader orders the performance of simple actions preceded by the words "Simon Says" and is then imitated by the others in the group. If the order to act is not preceded by the magic words, no one is permitted to perform the action after the leader. If a player does react, he is out of the game. The end result is a new leader—the one person who has managed to perform all the orders of "Simon" successfully and at the same time not perform what "Simon" has not approved.

The inhabitants of the Leclézian fictional world are all involved in a variation of the Simon Says game. They
typify the members of modern society, who react automatically to imperative slogans such as "Essayez Danon" or "Dégustez Motta." The masters or leaders they listen to and blindly obey (often unconsciously) include Madison Avenue, psychiatrists, and social convention. The Leclézian hero, to the dismay of many of his co-habitants of the Simon Says world, does not play the game according to all the rules and is therefore ultimately forced to endure an even lonelier exile than he had experienced during the time of his innocence of and fascination with the technological world, when he tried to play the game along with everyone else.

Typical of this Simon Says mentality are the people Adam sees as he walks along the beach,

Ainsi, les jours de beau temps, on pouvait admirer en passant une foule de sadiques pensifs qui, dos courbé, les coudes appuyés à la balustrade, admiraient une autre foule de masochistes endormis, nus en bas sur les plages...On faisait son choix; quelquefois en haut, avec les sadiques, on rivait ses deux gros yeux sur un ventre quelconque, habituellement percé d'un nombril...Quelquefois en bas, on avançait un peu en trébuchant sur les galets bouillants, puis on se dénudait, et on se fixait sur le dos, les bras en croix, sous l'avalanche de la chaleur et des regards qui lorgnent...La preuve, c'est, qu'en un jour comme celui-ci, il n'y avait personne d'accoudé à la balustrade, parce qu'il n'y avait personne d'assez fou pour s'étendre nu, sous la pluie, sur la plage. A moins que ce ne fût le contraire.

(PV, 112-3)
The exactness of the observation is typical of Le Clézio and the humor of the passage's closing remark is indicative of Adam's capability of seeing the Simon Says patterns that the masochists and sadists, who do not feel alienated as he does, never seem able to perceive on their own.

The same tendency, only in a much more serious vein, is shown in the novel's Chapter L, which concerns a drowning and the reactions of the onlookers— all of whom show the human need to mimic, to do what "Simon" says as they play out a certain series of actions according to a primitive game style learned as children. As the author remarks, ironically, "... Les noyés, comme chacun sait, constituent un divertissement de choix, pour tous ceux qui errent sans but le long de la mer." (PV, 118)

For Adam and Le Clézio, a drowning contains "l'espèce de décor de drame permanent." (PV, 122) Everyone feels obligated to participate: "ils s'arrêtent, descendent de leurs automobiles, et les voilà qui entrent en jeu." (PV, 122)

What follows is a grisly, blackly humorous account of overheard scraps of conversation during the recovery and attempted identification of the drowning victim whose body has been in the water for two days: "Why did it happen?" What happened to others of their acquaintance who had drowned, Life-saving efforts, Old Wives' tales, parallels with other death scenes, and at least five versions of what actually happened— all wrong. The players stand in the rain
making gesture after gesture, always under the watchful eye of Adam:

La pluie dégloulinait sur leurs mentons, et collait leurs cheveux; s'ils avaient su, ou vu, comme ils ressemblaient de plus en plus à des noyés... C'était leur mémoire humaine qui les rendait solidaires sans amour, et plus que la mort ou la souffrance, leur faisaient redouter ce long voyage de solitaire à travers l'abîme.

(PV, 126-7)

This same human penchant for following along and entering into the childhood game pattern is found in Le Déluge when François is witness to an accident between a car and a bus. This mass-anonymous movement is also seen in the patterns followed by the people at the post office where, "sur le parquet dallé, les pieds des hommes et des femmes marchaient, attendaient, entraient, sortaient," (D, 97) or in the long line of pedestrians walking on the street beneath François' window.

Chancelade as a child plays hookey from school one afternoon; and after swimming and observing those around him at the beach, he experiences an existential moment of aloneness: "Il comprit qu'il était là, sur cette plage étroite, seul au milieu de tant d'hommes, de femmes, d'enfants et de chiens-loups, un cadavre vivant." (TA, 39)

Rather than feeling a sense of community with the others on the beach, Chancelade feels isolated. He decides to swim to a deserted beach, and then follows a path leading along
the coastline in the opposite direction from the beach and its crowds. He meets a little girl about his own age, Sonia Iwaskiewicz, and plays many games with her—cache-cache, chat perché, s'attraper, colin-maillard, mouchoir, gendarmes et voleurs, conduire des voitures, se battre en duel, and bras-de-fer. (TA, 46) The Simon Says behavior Chancelade later learns at funerals (his father's) and the Simon Says behavior he acquires in courtship (his and Mina's) never replaces or recaptures the innocence of the real childhood games he enjoyed with Sonia.

Simon Says game patterns also influence the life of Jeune Homme Hogan and the result of his "playing the game" is his flight from the problems it has brought him. The house he inhabits he lives in because "everyone does." He has possessions because others do. He feels trapped by all this and completely isolated in his entrapment. "Un à un les objets étaient venus de dehors, ils avaient pris possession des lieux." (LF, 38) Jeune Homme Hogan claims he has never asked for these things, that his prison-house is not of his own making. "Qui avait fait cela?...C'étaient les mains des autres, les yeux des autres, qui avaient organisé ces labyrinthes." (LF, 38) In the pattern of Hogan's flight itself we see a reworking of the Simon Says game. As he arrives at the large square where the bus stop is located, Hogan sees the buses stop and the "leaders"
of the crowd giving the cues which are being followed by the more timid, Hogan among them. The result of playing Simon Says has been total dehumanization. "Les visages gras étaient levés, les yeux regardaient avec anxiété, les boucles parlaient fort. Des cris fusent... et des gestes aussi, de grands moulinets des bras, des trépigniments."

(LF, 43) Even simple daily rituals take on a Simon Says character, as Jeune Homme Hogan, after losing his lighter, decides to "jouer à demander aux gens, 'Vous n'avez pas du feu, s. v. p.?' pour voir un peu ce qu'ils répondraient."

(LF, 79)

The best scene in La Guerre to illustrate our point concerning the Simon Says game pattern in Le Clezio's novels occurs when the innocent Bea B. arrives at her first department store. Seen through her naive eyes, this "espèce de temple immense" (G, 48) looking at once like a pagoda, a cathedral, and the Acropolis, becomes the objectified "leader" for a bizarre form of Simon Says. Even entering the front door is a kind of Simon Says variation:

Devant elle, un homme en imperméable poussa le battant de verre et le donna à une femme en manteau à carreaux qui le donna à une femme en manteau de fourrure qui le donna à un homme maigre qui le donna à une femme avec un enfant qui le donna à Bea B. (G, 49)

Bea, of course, has never seen a department store before; but in the style of a precocious child, she learns fast.

"Elle [Bea B.] le prit [le battant de verre] par la poignée
dorée en forme de S et le poussa un peu en avant. Elle passa. Puis elle retint la porte jusqu'à la main tendue d'une femme à lunettes qui la prit sans dire merci." (G, 49)

Once inside the store, Bea discovers the advertisements, the mannequins, the merchandise for sale in the midst of this consumer-oriented labyrinth. Simon Says that one does not make eye contact with others in a department store--so Bea B. dutifully notices "des hordes de visages, glissant en haut des corps, sans expression, sans volonté." (G, 57) She reads the department listings ("c'était le programme. On pouvait partir à l'aventure"--G, 57) and decides to stay and in both the figurative and literal senses of the word, "play,"

On allait suivre les mouvements des autres, et visiter le monde. On se laisserait porter le long des rails, on calerait ses pieds sur les marches de l'escalier roulant, on mettrait sa main droite sur la rampe de caoutchouc, quelquefois on attendrait devant une porte de fer que vienne la drôle de machine en forme de boîte, pleine de boutons et de lampes, qui vous hisserait d'étage en étage. (G, 54)

The actions of the others are equally game-like. Clerks run madly back and forth carrying dresses on hangers. Varicosed-veined ladies stagger as the revolving clothing racks turn slowly while long-haired girls look for price tags in coat sleeves. In the dressing rooms, women dress and undress in front of the mirror, judging the respective merits of red, blue, green, and yellow. They comb their
hair, and Bea watches everything--safe from the war outside.

Hyperpolis, the world of Le Clezio's Les Géants, is very similar to that of Bea's department store. The people who enter through the glass doors equipped with electric eyes, are caught up in a world of obedience to les Maitres--those who control their actions and their language, thereby controlling, too, their innermost thoughts.

Simon Says involves the protagonist in the process of seeing the world and then trying to follow the pattern he observes there. The Leclèzian fictional world abounds with those who play well, but the criticism is implicit in the observations, sometimes naive, sometimes disillusioned, of the player who does not follow the prescribed pattern, who does not "play by the rules."

A variation of the Simon Says pattern is the Leclèzian version of Follow the Leader. For example, in Chapter G of Le Procès-verbal, Adam Pollo follows a dog, imitating carefully all his movements ("il fit exprès de marcher dans l'eau, à mi-jambes"--PV, 25). It is especially important to Adam that he be the follower and not the leader:

À un feu rouge, l'animal s'arrêta et Adam vint se ranger à côté de lui; il lui restait encore un peu de pain dans la main, ... et il pensa qu'il pourrait en offrir un morceau au chien; mais il réfléchit que s'il faisait cela, l'animal risquerait de se prendre de l'amitié pour lui, et c'était dangereux; après, ce serait lui qui le suivrait, il ne savait pas où aller ... (PV, 78-9)
Adam does not only pass his time following the dog; we also discover that ever since the age of twelve, Adam "passait des demi-heures à suivre les gens . . . au milieu de la foule." (PV, 81) He has not followed for any specific reason but rather just to see many different parts of the city without troubling himself as to street names or with being "serious." Yet even at the age of fifteen, Adam had already discovered that most of his fellow human beings ("avec leurs coudes serrés et leurs yeux volontaires") (PV, 81) spent their time doing nothing. He had already begun to discover that "les gens sont vagues, indélicats, en dehors de trois ou quatre fonctions génétiques qu'ils accomplissent chaque jour, ils arpent la ville sans se douter des millions de cabanons qu'ils pourraient se faire construire dans la campagne." (PV, 81)

Within the Leclézian fictional world, walking and following the leader are game patterns which symbolize the individual's quest for meaning in existence. The leaders for the masses are les Maitres (advertising slogans, cliché thinking); the leaders for the Leclézian alienated protagonist, however, are "different" (as Adam's dog). In this way, the Leclézian hero demonstrates the desire he has to order reality according to his own rules.

A second category of mimetic childhood games which appeals to the Leclézian character is the world of disguises.
Simon Says is often too difficult a charade for him to maintain. Therefore, another possibility for "belonging" is presented if he is only willing to put on a mask and pretend to be someone or something other than himself.

In *Le Procès-verbal*, we soon discover that Adam Pollo is a master at disguising himself (at least in his own mind) in order to pass the time or to have something to do. Perhaps instead of abandoning the life of the city, he could have done other things. "Il aurait pu se déguiser en aveugle, avec une canne blanche et de grosses lunettes opaques." (PV, 86) To disguise oneself as blind is yet another way to avoid the confrontation between a society one does not understand or perhaps want to accept.

Adam also undergoes a complete mental play transformation during his confrontation with the white rat who lives with him in the abandoned villa. The billiard table (also the scene of Adam and Michèle's lovemaking) offers Adam an ordinary pastime during the long summer days. His usual excuse for not going into the living room where the billiard table is located is just laziness, but one day he decides to play for awhile. ("...il pourrait passer quelques heures à jouer." PV, 89) It takes him twenty minutes just to find the billiard balls, and he is reduced to using branch of a rose bush as a cuestick. Adam plays for a few minutes but as is the case for most Leclézian heroes does not seem to be
a very good "player": "Ou bien il ratait les boules qu'il visait, ou bien il ne parvenait pas à frapper au bon endroit: la canne touchait la sphère d'ivoire un peu sur le côté, au lieu du centre, et elle s'en allait dans tous les sens, en pivotant sur elle-même, comme folle." (PV, 90-1) Adam then tries pitching the billiard balls on the floor in a parodic imitation of a game of pétanque. He does not seem to be any more talented in this game, but the noise of the thudding balls has attracted the attention of the small white rat. The nature of the game which Adam and the animal then engage in will be discussed later in this study, but for the moment, let us examine the mental metamorphosis which Adam undergoes:

Adam se transformait en rat blanc, mais d'une métamorphose bizarre; il gardait toujours son corps à lui, ses extrémités ne devenaient pas roses, et ses dents de devant ne s'allongaient pas. (PV, 92)

Adam is thus transformed into "rat" not as a child disguises himself (imagining himself truly transformed with a small furry body, sharp teeth, and a pink-tipped tail) but in an adult mental play metamorphosis. His hands still smell of tobacco; his back is still bent as he crouches on the floor ready to attack. Yet Adam becomes the Other, consciously transforming himself into the animal.

... il est devenu rat blanc parce qu'il se disait rat blanc; parce qu'il avait tout d'un coup l'idée du danger que représente la race humaine, pour l'engageance de ces petits animaux myopes et délicats. (PV, 92-3)
Later Adam will imagine himself in mourning ("je pourrais me mettre en deuil, avec une barrette noire sur un complet gris"—PV, 103), as a younger child ("le petit Adam de douze ans"); and we leave him in the asylum in the novel's final pages returned forever perhaps to the state of materiality he has been seeking since the beginning of his "flight" from a society to which he has never been adapted. Having divided the window of his cell into individual portions of a large grid (the bars on the window marking the boundaries), Adam spends his days lost in the contemplation of his new "existence":

...il avait joué à ce jeu-la comme on joue à la bataille navale, au pendu, à la marelle, aux quelle-difference-y-a-t-il? en acceptant à priori les règles de base. Ceci dit, ce n'était plus trop lui-même. (PV, 205)

Adam, enclosed in his hospital room, feels safe surrounded by material—four cold walls, a window with bars, a bed. Yet "il ne détestait pas cette matière, parce qu'il y avait un jeu implicitement engagé: un jeu où il fallait que ce fût lui qui s'adaptât, lui qui se pliait, et non point les choses." (PV, 206)

Chancelade, Jeune Homme Hogan, and Bea B. also play the game of Disguises. Chancelade pretends to be King of the Potato Bugs, and at one point in the narrative he and Mina imitate deaf-mutes speaking to each other in sign language; Machines tries to become an escalator in order to
carry on a conversation; François becomes a beggar. Yet with all their disguises, the Leclézian protagonists still do not feel part of the world around them. They remain as solitary figures, acting out parts but never sure whether their roles are secure.

Adam's "defeat" in the game of Disguises is a prefiguration of the defeat of each Leclézian protagonist who attempts to "be" the Other. The Other within the Leclézian game world remains forever inflexible. The play world there demands that the player adapt; and if he cannot, he is forced to leave the game.

One of Le Clézio's favorite "disguises" is one that is considered completely normal by most people—the human face masked behind the polished lenses of his sunglasses. Sunglasses indeed become portable mirrors in which the Leclézian hero is forced to see himself rather than the Other each time two individuals come together.

During one of Adam's beach walks, a girl gives him a Kleenex as he attempts to clean some mud from his feet—and he notices, immediately troubled by this fact, that he cannot see her eyes. "Il essaya de regarder la jeune femme dans les yeux, mais ce fut en vain: elle portait ce genre de lunettes de soleil très noires, à verres et monture épais, particulier aux touristes new-yorkais sur la côte portugaise." (PV, 27) Adam is too timid to ask the girl
to take her glasses off and yet feels that if she only would, he in turn would feel great relief. He continues to look:

Sentimentalement, il n'aperçut que sa propre image, reflétée en double sans les verres des lunettes, encadrée de plastique, tout à fait semblable à celle d'un grand singe obèse, penché au travail sur ses pieds. Comme si cette posture provoquait, grâce au pliement du corps vers l'avant, la concentration d'esprit nécessaire à l'intuition de vivre, oui, de vivre tout seul dans son coin, détaché de la mort du monde. (PV, 27-8)

Adam's alienation is made even clearer by this confrontation with the strange and distorted ape-man image of himself as seen through the "eyes" of the Other.

In Adam's journal, even his imaginary suicide story contains a sunglasses disguise. His plans involve self-immolation in an automobile; but since he will have kept his sunglasses on, he reminds us that on his burned body will be found "un drôle d'insecte voilaud, caricatural, dont le corps en matière plastique se serait inséré tout bouillant au fond des orbites. Deux tringles de fer, en formes de pattes, se dresseraient sur les côtés et me feraient des antennes." (PV, 167) The mask will have united with the wearer. Even in the asylum Adam keeps a pair of sunglasses with him in his room, and the psychiatry interns who are present at his case review also wear sunglasses. Sunglasses are both disguise and mirror.

In the final pages of *Le Déluge*, amid the chaos "parlant de mélanges et de morts, mais aussi de résurrection"
(D, 268) men still wear their sunglasses; and in Terra amata Chancelade and Sonia spend several minutes discussing the comparative merits of green or rose-colored lenses. Jeune Homme Hogan constantly meets people who wear sunglasses; Bea B. almost always wears hers; and the sole reason that Tranquilité is able to withstand the white, hot light of the sun in the Hyperpolis parking lot is that she is wearing her blue-tinted sunglasses. As she walks down the aisles of the crowded store, "les yeux cachés des caméras. . . regardaient tout . . . alors les hommes . . . les maudits, mettaient des lunettes noires aux verres épais devant leurs yeux, de peur d'être aveuglés par la déflagration." (GS, 58) Tranquilité's friend who works in the Information Booth wears "les lunettes noires . . . encerclées de métal, avec des verres filtrants de couleur vert clair," (GS, 83) and Bogo le Muet recognizes the policemen who patrol Hyperpolis by their "lunettes à monture dorée dont les verres étincelaient en signe de cruauté." (GS, 229)

Sunglasses as a disguise within the Leclézian fictional world serve to protect the hero from the hostile environment which surrounds him. Yet the fact that everyone else within his world is also wearing sunglasses forces him into a situation where mask is only reflected and deflected in an infinite "jeu de miroirs."

Indeed, one of the most significant objects which one utilizes in all mimetic activity is the mirror.
Sunglasses are forms of mirrors, and the mirror itself, as the symbol for all mimetic game playing, is omnipresent within the works of Le Clézio. Just as the young child is fascinated by seeing his image reflected back to him as he waves or smiles or jumps, so is the Leclézian protagonist obsessed with the possibilities presented by the presence of a mirror. The game of mirrors, or le jeu des miroirs, is common within the world of the Nouveau Roman and is defined by Pierre Astier as

*une série ou un complexe de deux ou plusieurs surfaces réfléchissantes (ou à la fois transparentes et réfléchissantes) dont certaines, étant parfois incurvées ... ou comportant des défauts de verre, peuvent refléter une image double ou multiple d'un même objet (vu ainsi non seulement sous différents angles, mais sous différents formes).*

As Michel Butor says "Vitre ou miroir, c'est le symbole du roman lui-même; il a sa propre dureté et à travers lui, je plonge, je découvre autre chose. Et en découvrant cette autre chose, il me renvoie mon reflet et je me découvre moi-même." The mirror game is the game played by the Leclézian protagonist: the novel game, with its reflecting and deflecting qualities is the one we play with Le Clézio himself.

For Le Clézio's heroes, the world often appears to be a mirror-image of "self" comparable to the reflection sent back by the distorting mirrors in an amusement park's
fun-house. In their perpetual search for self-identity, they are often forced to check the reality of their own existence in a mirror. The mirror sometimes replies with a recognizable image; and yet at other times the protagonist receives a totally new view of reality and of his place in it, as witness Adam's discovery at the zoo:

Voilà ce qui arrivait, voilà ce qui allait lui advenir: à force de voir le monde, le monde lui était complètement sorti des yeux; les choses étaient tellement vues, senties, ressenties, des millions de fois, avec des millions d'yeux, de nez, d'oreilles, de langues, de peaux, qu'il était devenu comme un miroir à facettes. Maintenant les facettes étaient innombrables, il était devenu mémoire, et les angles d'aveuglement, là où les facettes se touchent, étaient si rares que sa conscience était pour ainsi dire sphérique. (PV, 71)

For Bea B., one manner of passing time is to sit in front of the mirror in her hotel room taking inventory of the parts of her body:

Elle regardait ses mains posées sur ses genoux, et l'anneau de fer-blanc que Jean-jean lui avait offert autrefois sur la plage. Elle regardait ses genoux, avec ses deux rotules blanches, puis elle regardait ses deux pieds nus aux orteils écartés. Elle regardait son visage avec ses deux yeux bleu-gris-vert et les cernes au-dessous. Elle regardait ses cheveux un à un, les noirs aile-de-corbeau, les bruns, les châtain clair, les roux, les blancs... Elle faisait les grimaces suivantes:
1. La bouche relevée, incisives sorties, un sourcil en l'air, l'autre en bas.
2. Les yeux bridés, mais vers le bas.
3. Les sourcils haussés, avec trois rides barrant le front, et deux au-dessus des yeux.
4. Les joues gonflées, le nez retroussé.
5. La bouche grande ouverte avec, au fond, la luette en train de trembler. (G, 25)

Bea's mirror is a "friendly" one, and she amuses herself by playing in front of it.

The mirror in Les Géants, however, is yet another sort. "Un grand miroir rectangulaire, serré sur le mur droit de la chambre," it is to Machines and Tranquilité "froid et lisse, sans défaut," and "la lumière rebondit sur lui sans laisser de traces." (GS, 253) When the room is dark, the mirror continues to glow faintly, "une drôle de lueur grise qu'on ne connaît pas bien." (GS, 253) During the day, when the windowshade is raised, the mirror is white; and at night, when the fluorescent lights above the bathroom sink and the recessed lighting in the ceiling are lit, the mirror sparkles "pareil à une plaque de cristal." (GS, 253)

The mirror has long been installed in its place in Hyperpolis. When one touches it, it feels like a block of ice; if one watches it, it resembles the surface of cold water. But "on ne peut pas le regarder vraiment: on est de ce côté de lui, à l'intérieur de l'œil, le front appuyé sur le cristallin." (GS, 253)

One of the major problems for Machines and Tranquilité is the invention of ways to forget the mirror's existence. They sit on the side of the bed smoking their cigarettes and wondering what to do. There seems to be no
way for them to communicate with it since after all the mirror does nothing more than reflect the clouds of cigarette smoke. Tranquilité and Machines speak of inconsequential matters ("A quoi penses tu?," "J'ai un peu froid aux pieds"), but the words mean nothing to the mirror. Yet the mirror sometimes makes Machines so afraid that his legs begin to tremble.

Sometimes in order to avoid the treacherous jeu de miroirs, Machines and Tranquilité try to play other games: "Pour ne pas penser au miroir, on peut essayer de jouer... à devenir les pensées" (GS, 255) (a sort of Twenty Questions) or "la transmission de la pensée," (GS, 256) (an attempt at ESP which prevent the mirror's coming between Tranquilité and Machines' efforts at interpersonal communication.) Yet every time Machines turns his eyes away from Tranquilité, the empty mirror remains in place on the wall glowing eerily. Machines feels the mirror's regard even when his back is turned, and each time he embraces the girl, he feels "l'haleine froide" of the mirror in his back and becomes too frightened to move.

Les miroirs ne s'occupent pas des frissons sur le dos des hommes. Ils ne s'occupent de rien, ils sont glacés. Les hommes et les femmes parlent, mangent, se caressent dans les cellules du baraquement, à l'Ouest d'Hyperpolis. Les miroirs ne les regardent pas. Ils ont un regard fixé au loin, vers l'horizon peut-être, et leurs yeux ne peuvent pas se rétrécir. (GS, 258)
This fear of the mirrors' powers ("ils sont plus forts que les visages humains parce qu'ils ont un regard et pas d'yeux" —GS, 258) causes Machines and Tranquilité to have great difficulty even in talking to each other. The mirror thus becomes an all-pervasive influence on their existence, a third member of their game situation. The mirror finally assumes such magnitude that we wonder if "peut-être que réellement tout avait été construit autour des miroirs, autrefois, les cellules n'étaient que les antres de ces animaux-là." (GS, 258)

Of course one is forced eventually to look at the mirror not only as an object in and of itself but also to deal with the mirror in its function of reflector-mimic. Machines and Tranquilité see themselves in the mirror yet are incapable of recognizing themselves as themselves. To both of them, the mirror's reflected image of man, woman, furniture seems "clair et lointain, comme si on l'avait regardé à la jumelle." (GS, 258) The distorted vision produced by the mirror game is a frightening one for Machines and Tranquilité: "C'était vraiment dangereux de voir ces gens dans la chambre, immobiles, sur le lit à une place, qui vous regardaient. C'était pire que la photographie, parce que c'était une image à la fois vivante et morte." (GS, 258-9)

The mirror game not only presents the Leclézian protagonists with a terrifying uncertainty vis à vis their
very existence, but also a typically modern plastic vision of man in the supertechnology of the 1970's. Anyone who has ever been confronted by the strange and ugly reflection of his own face presented to him in a fluorescent-lit mirror after he has had several drinks can attest to the same feelings of horror elicited in Tranquilité and Machines by the cruel lighting of Hyperpolis which allows them to see death in life—"les creux des orbites, les mentons, les creux des joues, la forme des crânes." (GS, 259) The hair in the mirror resembles nylon wigs while the eyes are like marbles ("une paire marron doré, une paire verte,"—GS, 259) and their bodies resemble corpses, "blancs livides, avec de drôles d'ombres grises là où apparaissaient les os, de drôles de taches roses là où affluait le sang." (GS, 259)

The mirror then becomes the ultimate adversary for Le Clézio's second-generation Everycouple. "Le miroir n'aimait pas qu'on vive. Il n'aimait pas la vie, il avait horreur de ça." (GS, 259) The mirror takes and takes ("chaque jour le miroir avait enlevé quelque chose"), destroying language—words of love, pain, pleasure-destroying gestures, and destroying dreams: draining the warmth of human contact. "Maudite vitre! . . . Elle voudra toujours davantage de gestes, de caresses, de mots, de sueur, de sperme?" (GS, 259)

As game strategy, Machines tries not to think of the mirror; Tranquilité tries oblivion. Their resultant sexual
encounter thus becomes the only remaining manner of avoiding the mirror. The two make violent love—through a sort of shared frenzied necessity to unite against the insidious threats of the enemy mirror. Yet they must separate eventually ("alors les deux corps retombaient . . . en faisant de grands ahanements"—GS, 260) but at this moment the mirror glows with an even stranger light than before ("il ressemblait à des yeux étincelants de désir et de haine"—GS, 260)

Les miroirs sont comme cela. Ils laissent les hommes et les femmes s'étreindre sur le lit à une place, et ensuite, ils sont impregnés de chaleur et de lumière. (GS, 260)

Machines tries to talk; but Tranquilité, feeling that they are being watched, writes a note warning him not to speak. Machines asks her to run away with him, but she refuses and finally Machines scribbles in large block letters the words which are at once his words of liberation and certain death: "ALORS JE FERAI BRULER HYPERPOLIS." (GS, 261)

Tranquilité tears the page from the notebook and burns it in the ashtray. In the mirror are reflected two silent people; yet for Tranquilité and Machines, these reflected images are the Other. "L'autre homme et l'autre femme font semblant de dormir. . . . Ils sont des images vides, ils n'ont jamais de pensée, ni de désir, ni de détresse." (GS, 262) When Machines opens his eyes, he sees
This is the eternal problem of the mirror-game: the mirror cannot reflect the world; the mirror reflects nothing but another mirror: "Les miroirs sont ainsi: ils ne servent qu'à créer d'autres miroirs. On est là, allongé devant lui, sans vêtements, homme et femme . . . . Puis, petit à petit, on ne sait plus où on est. A droite ou à gauche du miroir?" (GS, 263) If one is on the left, then it is the mirror which is to the right, and vice versa. In which direction, then, does one really turn his head? "Si on ne rêvait pas, on saurait peut-être ce que c'est que la rêve." (GS, 263) But acts are even more complex than dreams, and it is impossible to identify one's "reality" by using the mirror as guide. "On est pris au piège. On est perdu." (GS, 263)

Machines and Tranquilité lie on the bed together, more and more afraid of the gleaming mirror. Suddenly, without understanding what he is doing ("Mais ce n'était peut-être pas lui qui le faisait, c'était peut-être l'autre du miroir"—GS, 264) Machines rises, picks up the ashtray, and hurls it against the wall. Tranquilité screams as the mirror glass shatters since just at that moment she had seen, on the other side of the mirror, another room and three
men beginning to flee. "Ce qui est terrible, ce n'est pas la conscience, c'est ce qu'il y a derrière. Ce qui fait peur et qui blesse, ce ne sont pas les lunettes, ni les miroirs, c'est ce qu'il y a de l'autre côté." (GS, 265)

The result of the Leclézian protagonists' struggles with the mirror is an overwhelming feeling of alienation—of feeling isolated not only from the other who is present as another human entity in his world (Bea B.'s problems in relating to Monsieur X, the distance between Adam and Michèle or between Chancelade and Mina) but also from this reflected other shown to him by the mirror. He turns to actions which many psychologists would term play—sometimes in order to create a world which he can understand, sometimes to avoid a world from which he feels forever isolated. These activities closely resemble various games familiar to most Leclézian readers as patterned from childhood. The effect of an adult, apparently lucid and intelligent, protagonist's emphasis on childhood play patterns is perhaps a rather odd one. Yet it is in this playful emphasis on a return to childhood that much of Le Clézio's uniqueness can be traced.

The result of the failure of mimetic play activity to integrate the Leclézian protagonist within his environment leads him to another type of behavior, one which approaches Piaget's assimilative play, transforming his own sensory impressions into a reality which then becomes his
own sensory impressions into a reality which then becomes his own personal play world where he finds escape from his failures in the "real" one. With his childlike personality and world-view, and his extremely active imaginative powers, the Leclézian hero flees from imitative play into an imaginary world of "make-believe" where his favorite childhood game pattern then becomes Let's Pretend, a "comme si" mode of thinking about and structuring his existence.

Adam Pollo's world of make-believe is closely allied to his love for story-telling. As he writes to Michèle: "Racontons des histoires. Elles n'ont pas grand-chose à voir avec cette sacrée réalité, mais c'est un plaisir . . . ." (PV, 100). An imaginary garden full of snow-covered pear and cherry trees is the setting for one of his lyrical tales; his amusing plan for a travel game forms the narrative of another. (Rules of the Travel Game: Make only one friend in every city you visit and always be sure not to be able to find him at home when you return. The strategy for this game, which lets the player avoid the "other" involves always choosing a national holiday for the day of the visit, in which case one's chances for success, i.e., not finding one's friend at home, are greatly increased). Adam at one time begins writing a story entitled "Procès-verbal d'une catastrophe chez les fourmis," and during his harangue in front of the crowd, he offers to "inventer des fables sur-le-champ." (PV, 197) Taken away to the hospital, Adam is
there interviewed by a group of doctors who ask him to explain his reasons for leaving home. His answer seems indicative of the Leclézian child-protagonist's efforts to regain a lost paradise through imaginative play:

Alors il arrive que ces enfants aient peur de la société des adultes.... Ils doivent jouer un rôle. On attend quelque chose d'eux. Alors ils préfèrent battre en retraite. Ils cherchent un moyen d'avoir une société à eux, un univers un peu--heu, mythique--un univers ludique où ils sont de pair avec les matières inertes....Même, à la rigueur, ils se transposent. Ils font jouer aux plantes leur rôle d'enfant, et eux, ils jouent le rôle des adultes. Vous comprenez, pour un gosse, un doryphore, c'est toujours plus un homme qu'un autre gosse. (PV, 221)

The world of potato bugs and playing make-believe imaginative games is also familiar to Chancelade, who as creator and ruler of the kingdom of potato bugs in his front yard also finds much pleasure in inventing stories and pretending. In "Les Nuits sont Passées," we enter Chancelade's dream world of black wolves, masked stone statues, murder in a public restroom, and war. Everything within Chancelade's world is transformed by him into a new reality more in keeping with his individualistic imagination.

Bea B. decides that rather than be passively overcome by the terrifying war which surrounds her, she and Monsieur X should actively enter into the game: "'Vous savez ce qu'on va faire?' dit Bea B. a Monsieur X. 'On va passer à l'attaque.'" (G, 34) What follows is Bea's naive, make-believe plan. She will dress as a waitress and Monsieur X
will become a bartender. Or they will become nurse and doctor, nun and priest, prostitute and pimp, widow and corpse, student of molecular chemistry and professor of economic law: "Le tout était de disparaître." (G, 34)

Bea later finds another form of escape through the world of pornographic magazines, imagining the nude women pictured there as "femmes-soldats venues de Vénus ou d'Alpha du Centaure, qui avaient décidé de conquérir la terre." (G, 76) Bea in turn imagines herself among these Amazons:

"Elle aurait son nom ... et son histoire inquiétante sur les pages des albums pornographiques:

Bea de la guerre
la reine très réelle
d'une Ys future
elle
qui veut sauver
le monde
de l'ennui... (G, 76)

Bea imagines what it would be like to find peace within an electric lightbulb and tells stories ("Légende de la Première Cigarette," "Le Mythe de la Conduite Intérieure Noire," and "Le Mythe de Monopol"). But Bea, like Adam, also becomes aware of one of the functions of play within society, as she explains to her friend:

Tu sais, Monsieur X, je crois que j'ai compris maintenant ce qui me gêne, ce qui nous rend aveugles. C'est que les choses sont séparées les unes des autres. Alors nous faisons des histoires; nous inventons des histoires. Nous voulons qu'il y ait un voyage, Nous allons comme ça, d'une bobine à l'autre, et à...
Play corresponds to our constant need to find a pattern within our lives.

For Jeune Homme Hogan, the imaginative play activity involves picturing everything within his head, "brouhaha, éclats, langages mêlés, déclics, tic-tac, glissements, vapeurs, déroulements, fluides, rythmes sourds, rythmes lumineux, blancements, fontes, naissances, hoquets, gongs, gargouillis, vibrations au fond, stries . . ." (LF, 67); but his one desire remains to flee, since, for him:

TOUT EST JOUÉ. Dans mon corps, règne un désir qui n'a son pareil nulle part sur la terre... Je suis au milieu des événements quasiment invisible. Est-ce que par hasard, je ne existerais pas? Est-ce que je ne serais qu'un noeud, le point d'interférence des ondes sonores? Ou alors, est-ce moi qui rêve tout?" (LF, 67)

Even Bogo is possessed by the need to flee as he walks along the beach, imagining that he is no longer on earth: "À l'intérieur de son scaphandre étanche, il se promenait sur la planète Jupiter." (GS, 102)

This flight from the mimetic and imaginative games of reality will be a constant theme within Le Clezio's work. The protagonist will flee, attempting to build a play-world of his own. Yet the very action of flight and the resultant "private vision" of reality only serves to reinforce his alienation and isolation from the world.
The psychological dimension of play within the Leclézian fictional world began then with the Leclézian childlike protagonist in the center of an imaginative world which he creates for his own amusement. He is primitive, childlike, with an immature world-view. Adam Pollo's beginning is a prime example:

Kathleen Reish calls Adam "a new Pan with stolen pipes" and points out that from his music comes an entire world of animated creation—the sea and night air, the insects, and the sun. Adam, like a child, draws a sun picture with a piece of charcoal and the sun seen as a golden spider then becomes a menacing octopus. With his child's drawing, Adam is thus able to create an entire universe of childlike awe—a procedure which each successive Leclézian protagonist will utilize to some extent.

The child's imagination has here produced a play world in which the real Adam (with the symbolism of his name
ever-apparent) must act. As he says to himself, "la terre s'est métamorphosée en une espèce de chaos, j'ai peur de déinotheriums, des pithecantropes . . ." (PV, 19) Adam has recaptured the primitive world-structure of his childhood and has discovered the world as chaos and terror. The task ahead of him, like that of all Leclézian characters, will be to organize his world into a coherent pattern. He will try, by observation and imitation, to find his place--but he will end up defeated.

One of the basic patterns of the Leclézian hero's resultant sense of alienation after his failures to win at the mimetic or imaginative games he attempts is found in the images of entrapment which abound in the novels. One of the most interesting examples of this is the section of Terra amata entitled "Enfermé dans le Dessin." (TA, 48-52) A child's drawing done on lined writing paper is reproduced in the text itself, and the sketch represents the world of the child's imagination at play--and also the child's way of organizing his world and his native, primitive ability to do so:

Ce n'était qu'une vision du monde, après tout, une vision parmi tant d'autres. Mais ici, tout est complet, parfait, achevé, il ne manquerait pas un détail. (TA, 48)

Destiny is present in the form of the sun; death, too, is shown in the man figure's jagged, widely-spaced teeth and in the scribblings which represent his hair. For the viewer,
the drawing is "drôle, grotesque, émouvant, triste, magique." (TA, 48) It is an image of life and more—what Le Clézio terms a "témoignage qu'on avait vécu sur cette terre," a human signature.

L'Épopée, l'extraordinaire épopée réduite à sa plus pure expression, comme cela, ici, par hasard, sur cette seule feuille de papier à lettres arrachée au bloc. (TA, 48)

There is perhaps nothing more to understand about the drawing than the fact of its existence. Theories and words about reality have been amassed in vain. Life has always offered the same spectacle of beauty and ignominity, passion, joy, and suffering. Perhaps the child with his simple drawing has made the best try at understanding.

Il n'y avait rien d'autre à faire que prendre cette feuille de papier à lettres, et dessiner avec un crayon à bille bleu et des crayons de couleur. Juste pour fixer l'histoire pendant quelques secondes. (TA, 50)

Two characters, a boy and a girl, hold hands and "faisaient face au néant." Their eyes stare out from the center of their faces with fear. The boy shows his teeth like those of a skull; above the couple two twisting paths (one green, one blue) link their two houses. Between the houses stands a tree with two large cherries dangling—or perhaps it's a streetlight. The sun, green and blue, resembles an insect and the clouds and mountains are like a row of teeth in the background.
Each Leclézian protagonist sooner or later becomes shut up within the drawing he has made. Engulfed by society and city and bewildered by the mirror disguises, the Leclézian hero is locked within a world of ontological insecurity, and it is this ontological insecurity which will provide the central game object for the hero. The Leclézian hero plays mimetically as he attempts to integrate himself within the urban culture of which he should be a part. He fails in that his mimetic activity seems unreal to him or in that it does not satisfactorily meet the demands society has placed on it. His rites of passage through game activity force him towards further alienation and eventual flight. The Leclézian hero is also, however, an assimilative player, extremely aware of sensory stimuli and imaginative in creating a fantasy world. The transition between assimilative and imitative play, as Piaget understands it, is however, an impossible one for Adam, Chancelade, Bea, or Machines to make. They are plagued by a sense of eternal "apartness," a problematic game situation in which the nature of being and reality are continually questioned. This is ultimately the only game activity which interests the Leclézian hero. Like the Beckett protagonist, the Leclézian protagonist feels that within his world, in which war and total destruction threaten at every moment, all reasons for action have evaporated. Play is then a way of doing nothing. The "other" in Beckett's world
is pictured as player, and Beckett's characters are in the play of that other, who is also pictured as absent. Within the Leclézian fictional universe, however, the Other as player is not experienced as absent but is experienced rather as problematic in relation to self. It is to this basic ontological game that we now turn.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


3 Piaget, op. cit., p. 168.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid. See also pp. 87-212 (Part II) for detailed explanation.


8 Reish, op. cit., p. 42.

CHAPTER IV

LECLÉZIAN GAME AND PLAY: THE ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The question of the ultimate why collides with the ultimate interrogation which encounters only the game. This game with its thousands and thousands of facets is neither sad nor joyous; if man is one of its "poles," the other is Being as time, the game of the World. For man corresponds to the game of the world, one plays with the other in the same game.

----Kostas Axelos, "Planetary interlude"

In an essay entitled "The Oasis of Happiness: Toward An ontology of Play," Eugen Fink tells us that play is an essential element of man's ontological make-up, a basic existential phenomenon, "a clearly definable and autonomous one that cannot be explained as deriving from other existential phenomena."¹ We have already found that the psychological set of the Leclézian hero, his innocence combined with his alienation from the world around him, sets him up as a natural "player." Since we then know why he plays, in this chapter we will attempt to answer the question: what does he play? The basic underlying Leclézian game pattern, through all his psychologically or culturally motivated games,

Il est indispensable dans notre civilisation de savoir que ce qu'on fait on ne le fait pas seul mais par rapport aux autres et avec les autres dans le même mouvement du jeu.

---J.M.G. Le Clézio
comes down to a very simple one: the protagonist is involved in identifying and in defining the nature of his own existence and in describing at the same time the nature of external reality which for him is often a solipsistic entity.

The ontological game of the Leclézian protagonist is thus a game of structuring, then de-structuring "reality."

Le regard est le signe essentiel de la vie. Il n'y a de vie au monde que dans ce qui participe ou est soumis à cet exercice de dissection... (EM, 175-6)

Existence, for Le Clézio, involves feeling and knowing that one feels.

Créer des systèmes, créer des malheurs, créer des paraboles, jouer de la musique divine avec les bruits qui n'existent pas, c'est pour être mieux vivant, c'est pour être debout sur le plateau boueux. (EM, 177)

Fink tells us that the mode of play is that of a spontaneous act. "Play is, as it were, existence centered in itself." The motivation of play does not coincide with other human activity. All activity except play has either doing (praxis) or creating (poiesis) as a means to the final end (telos) of man which is his ultimate happiness (eudaimonia). The present is always seen as a kind of transition state, a preparatory period for future happiness. For unlike plant and animal life, man is not content with a straightforward mode of existence; he seeks to find meaning.
And as Fink reminds us, "every human answer to the ques-
tion of the meaning of life assumes the existence of a
'final goal.'" Play, however, is not for the sake of any
final goal, and in that respect play resembles "an oasis
of happiness that we happen upon in our Tantalus-like seek-
ing and pursuit of happiness." In the autonomy of play,
there is the possibility of human timelessness in time. In
play activity time is experienced as one full moment, which
Fink terms "a glimpse of eternity," rather than a succession
of moments.

Within the ontological dimension of the Leclézian
fictional world, the constant game pattern we see is that
of the protagonist's struggle with the identification and
definition of reality and the difficulties met as he tries
to understand and convey a sense of that which is not a
part of "self." The Leclézian hero possesses an initial
consciousness of self as subject as well as an acute aware-
ness of both a human and material other. His philosophical
position is defined by both a sense of alienation and a
sort of solipsistic doubt. The philosophical boundaries
of the hero's world are direct perception of the exterior
world of objects and human beings to a complete isolation
within self-consciousness. He is continually vacillating
between the recognition of the existence of an independent
reality and a conception of reality which is totally solip-
sistic.
Thus the Caillois category most applicable to play activity within the ontological dimension of Le Clèzio's fictional world is **agon**. Within the ontological game, we see continual competition between man and his world, man and other men, man and himself. Man wants desperately to find a system which will provide him with a satisfactory structuring device for his world. Yet throughout history, his struggle to be better than others at the discovery of "truth" (by producing his "exégèses, commentaires, fatras, mots, mots"—EM, 108) has succeeded only in making the patterns more obscure. It is in this way that Le Clèzio suggests that "l'esprit de compétition est probablement ce qui a le plus entravé la marche de la pensée occidentale."

(EM, 107) The ideal **agon** situation would be not to compete under the rules of old systems (represented by "les générations de philosophes, de mathématiciens, de littérateurs, de poètes, de théologiens"—EM, 107) in one's attempt to identify the real and to invest it with "meaning" but rather to destroy those systems in order to understand one's world in a new way.

Le Clèzio gives us an example:

Un petit garçon jette des cailloux, à la plage sur la manche en fer d'un parasol. De temps en temps il vise juste, et un caillou frappe le métal en résonnant. Quand le jeu sera terminé, pourra-t-on considérer qu'il y avait un rythme dans les jets de cailloux? Qu'un caillou sur douze, par
exemple, devait toucher la cible? Ou bien faut-il seulement dire: "C'était. Puis c'est fini?" (EM, 108)

Are there, then, rules for the game? Is a winning strategy possible? Or is it merely the playing of the game which is important? Le Clézio suggests that life games with strict determinant rules will always lead eventually to "l'agglomération de détritus, rebuts, ordures." (EM, 107) The game, rather than being a closed system, should be permitted to expand, to be open-ended, thereby letting man drop his play-mask and participate completely in Fink's "oasis of play," "a strange oasis, an enchanted rest spot in his [man's] agitated journey and never-ending flight."\(^5\)

Play interrupts the continuity and purposive status of the Leclézan protagonist's normal life; but while seemingly unrelated to it, it relates to that existence in a very meaningful way, namely in its mode of representation. Play confronts all Leclézan themes—death, struggle, love—and absorbs them by representing them.

Two texts of Le Clézio, "La Mer noire" and "Histoire du château qui explosait et renaissait sans cesse," are helpful ones to study if we wish to understand the philosophical and ontological basis of his fictional world.\(^6\)

"La Mer noire," first published in 1970, is a descriptive text in which the description takes the form of a genesis: "En ce temps-là, il n'y avait rien d'autre que
As reader-spectator, we do not discover an already constituted universe, and it is in this way that Le Clézio initiates us into one of the inner mechanisms of his creative process.

The sea-metaphor developed in the text describes an ideal philosophic structure, a "winning" game strategy—an undivided human consciousness:

On traversait la surface de la mer comme un rideau de fumée. On traversait la pierre aussi, et la fonte, et l'acier trempé. On traversait: et de l'autre côté on traversait encore... l'esprit de l'homme.

The vast panorama of sea and uninterrupted horizon suggests for Le Clézio an original state in man's existence in which solipsistic doubt was not present. Man's knowledge both of himself and of others was immediate and direct:

Devant la mer on pouvait tout croire, tout imaginer...le regard entrait dans l'eau, et l'eau entrait par les yeux à l'intérieur du corps, et on savait beaucoup de choses qu'on ne pouvait pas comprendre.

The sky and the sea are here representative of the boundaries of man's philosophical world, "la mer noire sous le ciel blanc: la véritable photographie de soi-même, le seul portrait réel jamais offert." But as Reish points out, this image is, in a sense, a true mirage, a resemblance projected by man's imagining and yet also a real unity of consciousness between man and his world. So in this imagined philosophical world, there is no game to be played,
for there is no separation between "self" and "other." The
world then for Le Clézio is transparent for man, as if he
were looking from the other side of the "mirror" of reality:

Plaque de papier glacé qui est sortie toute
humide de la fente du photomaton, avec ses
signes indestructibles: deux yeux, un nez,
une bouche, un front, des cheveux, des
oreilles. Mais pour la première fois c'est
une photographie qui n'a pas d'envers ni
d'endroit. Pour la première fois, où, l'on
retourne le miroir, et de l'autre côté, il y
a quelque chose. Rien n'est caché. Tout
est écrit, il n'y a plus de mystère...11

However, this period of peaceful, simple coexistence
between "self" and "other" is only temporary ("C'était vrai-
ment une vie exemplaire, extraordinaire, que cette vie-là").12
This symbolic Eden with its transparent vision of man's re-
lationship to himself and to his world is only an ideal to
be set against the second text, "Histoire du château qui
explosait et renaissait sans cesse," which shows man's actual
frustrations in his experience of trying to "know" or iden-
tify the "other" and thereby understand his world.

The image of the sea as an unbroken span of con-
sciousness is replaced by a strange chateau, a barrier which
stands between self and other, between man and his world.
Reality is no longer transparent; it is opaque. The chateau
walls are "gigantesques... des écrans où la lumière dure
se casse, et le vent."13 The building's windows are opaque,
and the huge concrete pillars represent absolute solidity.
The seascape's unified perspective is truly destroyed:
Où qu'on soit, on ouvre un instant les yeux...et on voit ce dessin terrible: le ciel blanc coupé en deux, les nuages crevés, les murailles étincellantes aux vitres opaques pareilles à des dents de fourche, pareilles à des tas de lames Gillette, le vent brisé...frontière intransgressible, [le château] a brisé toutes les vies en deux, il nous a brisé, et aussi les miroirs...14

The chateau represents then the existential split within man's consciousness. Just as the chateau's interior cannot be seen by the spectator because its walls cut off his view, so man's "self" is isolated and prevented from knowing the "other" from the inside, that is, as the latter is for himself. The chateau's windows are like eyes that are directed inward: "des prunelles s'aveugle...des yeux qui se seraient retournés vers l'intérieur de la tête,"15 so perhaps we see here that the individual's consciousness can only turn in upon itself. Equally important is the existence of the "other," meaningful to him in its continuous development, but which remains for the "self" a fixed, inpenetrable block, always a source of agon.

The chateau is solidly rooted in place yet also suggests animation through its sweeping vertical lines. Each individual's relationships to others is equally twofold. He is to others an independent being who escapes their knowledge and control, yet at the same time he enters into their world and affects it:
Le château vertical...plane par-dessus la terre. On dirait aussi une fusée qui ne parvient pas à partir...[le château] est une barre de douleur...espèce de clou de fonte qui a traversé les organes. Il immobilise. Il détruit. Il détruit par sa seule présence, avec sa colonne glaciaire que a trou la chaleur du corps.16

The chateau's violent explosions are indicative of the equally radical nature of man's split consciousness. Yet the chateau is continually reborn and rebuilt, and in this action Le Clézio seems to suggest that the individual's impetus to know the "other" is a constant motif of existence:

C'était un château immortel, voilà ce que c'était...Les bombes fusaient à l'intérieur des crevasses des murs, l'air s'embrasait d'un seul coup...Puis rien. Puis encore...le château renaissait...17

The divisive influence symbolized by the chateau is balanced by a counter-movement, however. The man-made reality of the chateau walled inside the individual consciousness leaves the world forever outside. But the sea will rise again, and in its turn will destroy these walls: "...il y a des marées qui durent mille siècles. ... maintenant la marée monte, et bientôt, il n'y aura plus une terre, plus une île, plus un seul récif visible."18 The tangible obstacle presented to man by the chateau will finally be recognized as nothing more than a mirage of consciousness, "... un rêve que rêvait tranquillement le cerveau de la mer."19
The passage from direct perception of the exterior world to isolation within self-consciousness defines the philosophical limits of the Leclézian protagonist's existence and is the basic play pattern he follows in all his games. In effect, his immediate sense of knowing the "other" yields to the temptation to view that knowledge as a figment of his imagination. He lives, therefore, in a state of continuous oscillation between solipsism and recognition of the existence of an independent reality.

Reish points out, quite rightly, that these two states of existence in the Leclézian fictional world are actually two faces of the same coin:

...the solipsistic fallacy of the individual's projection of himself onto an exterior reality results in the subject's constant doubt that a meaningful social and intellectual reality exists. The reverse view—that the "other" exists irrevocably apart from the "self"—reveals the individual's sense of isolation. In both cases, Le Clézio's hero fails to achieve harmonious coexistence with his human and cosmic environment.20

The hero, then, "plays" with each possibility—that the reality of both things and human beings exists independently of his perception of them or that the "reality" of the Other, be it material or human, depends solely on his perception of them as other. The goal of the game then is to find the possibility of unity or, in phenomenological terms, the being-in-becoming. This, of course, remains an impossibility for Le Clézio's protagonists, yet the game they play
is a game that we as readers implicitly understand and accept; for it is the game of life itself—and death. "Ce jeu-là n'est pas nouveau; en fait, c'est l'ultime épisode d'un jeu qui a commencé il y a très longtemps, il y a si longtemps que personne ne s'en souvient plus." (TA, 221)

Within the ontological dimensions of the Leclézian fictional world, we find three basic game patterns—all serving to further the end goal of defining that which is "real." Each pattern falls into the Caillois category of agon, or competition, and there is a very palpable sense of struggle found in each. The first game pattern is the attempt to define self, the "Who Am I?" game. It is, in Morton Davis' terms, a one-person game against Nature, with nature in a passive role. The Leclézian hero has a double-edged problem: in order to arrive at a unified Self, he must somehow be able to be his own observer, to be conscious of his own Self as Other, separated from the rest of external reality. Once he manages this feat, becoming the self-conscious object of his own game, he must then try to differentiate his personal Other from the multitudinous others of the material world and the world of other human beings. This is the second game pattern we see within the Leclézian fictional world—the self-conscious subject (Le Clézio's protagonist) in a conflict, designed to establish equilibrium with the reality of the material world outside him, with that material itself, a game which in its simplest
terms could perhaps be named "What Is It?"

Once the Leclézian protagonist has managed to some-
how clear this particular hurdle (and with his solipsistic
bent, that is, his propensity for seeing reality made up
solely of those things which he perceives as real, the sit-
uation remains forever unclear), he may then proceed to
the third game, the identifying of the human reality which
is separate from himself, the "Who Are They?" pattern.

The Leclézian protagonist involved in the playing
of the "Who Am I?" game is compelled to play so that he may
feel a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive,
whole, and in the temporal sense, continuous person. As
such he could live in the material world and meet others
who would be experienced by him as equally real, alive,
whole, and continuous. This is not a possible outcome in
his game, however, and he must therefore be termed in the
words of R. D. Laing a victim of "primary ontological in-
security."21

In The Opposing Self, Lionel Trilling illustrates
the difference between an ontologically secure fictional
world and an ontologically insecure one by comparing Shakes-
ppeare and Kafka. For Trilling, Shakespeare does depict
characters who evidently experience the cruel irrationali-
ties of life but who still experience themselves as real and
alive and complete despite their possible doubts or inter-
nal conflicts. Their knowledge of evil co-exists with the
contradictory knowledge of "the self in its health and validity" and they remain ontologically secure. For Kafka's characters this is not the case. The effort of trying to communicate what it is like being alive without a sense that evil is always contradicted by one's own sense of personal identity is characteristic of Kafka as well as Beckett.

When a child is born into the world, the baby appears from our viewpoint as a biological entity complete with its own identity—real and alive. The baby quite rapidly also feels real and alive and has a sense of being an entity with continuity in time and a location in space. If things progress normally, the individual develops a firm core of ontological security. He feels real, alive, whole, and differentiated from the rest of the world so clearly that his autonomy is never in question. He experiences his being as a continuum in time, as having inner consistency, genuineness, and worth, and as spatially co-existent with his body.

However, for another individual in the process of living his life, this course of events may not come to pass. For he may begin to feel more unreal than real, more dead than alive, in Laing's words, "precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question." He feels no real coherence
in his being and he does not assume that what he is is genuine, good, or valuable. He may, in fact, feel partially divorced from his body. Inevitably this individual's world will be no more "secure" than is his ego. He has a "low threshold of security" and is continually occupied with preserving rather than gratifying himself. The ordinary circumstances of every day life constitute a continual and deadly threat to the ontologically insecure protagonist. This is a perfect profile of the Leclèzian hero as shown in this self portrait by Bea B.:

...j'ai toujours l'impression d'être en dehors, je veux dire, que les choses se passent très loin de moi, que je ne comprends pas très bien ce qu'on veut de moi...c'est l'impression aussi que je vois quelque chose de vivant chez les autres, et pourtant je n'ai pasconfiance. (G, 25)

It is impossible for the Leclèzian hero to take the reality, autonomy, and identity of his "self" for granted so he must continually play games in order to prevent the loss of that self.

Laing lists three kinds of anxiety reactions which are the result of ontological insecurity, all of which are felt by a Leclèzian hero: engulfment (the dread of being smothered or submerged by the "other"), petrification and depersonalization (a technique used by the self when the other becomes too troublesome or disturbing: the other is treated as an object), and implosion (the world seen as
ready at any moment to crash in and oblivate identity by completely filling the emptiness the individual feels within himself). The strategy which the ontologically insecure hero uses is flight. Any contact with reality is a threat to whatever identity that individual has tried to hold onto: therefore, reality is to be avoided.

The preferred strategy of the "self" versus "other" is based on the same principle as the attack felt to be implicit in the other's relation to self. Thus the character like Adam, who is frightened of his own subjectivity's being impinged upon by the other (by the rat, for example), attempts in his turn to engulf or impinge upon the other's subjectivity. The more he attempts to preserve his own autonomy and identity by nullifying the individuality of the other, the more he feels it necessary to do so. With each denial of the other's ontologically secure status, his own ontological security is increased. The threat of challenge to the "self" from the "other" must continually be negated.

Within the "Who Am I?" game pattern, the "self" is viewed as the sole player. Each game he plays, be it billiards or hide-and-seek, letter-writing or making love, is an attempt at existence, "a vital experiment that encounters in the plaything the essence of unyielding reality." Within the Leclèzian Self as player, we find a kind of split
personality. The hero participates in game patterns within the "real world," are familiar types; but within the context of the internal meaning of his play, he takes on a role. As Fink points out, we must then distinguish between the real man who "plays" and the man created by the role within the play:

The player hides his real self behind his role and is submerged in it. He lives in his role with a singular intensity, and yet not like the schizophrenic, who is unable to distinguish between "reality" and "illusion." The player can recall himself from his role; while playing, man retains a knowledge of his double existence, however greatly reduced that knowledge may be. Man exists in two spheres simultaneously, not for lack of concentration or out of forgetfulness, but because this double personality is essential to play.26

The Leclézian Self is alienated within the chaos of the urban civilization which surrounds him. And he walks the thin line between "sanity" and "insanity"—sometimes slipping off into the latter, as in the case of Adam Pollo.

The confusing world of the city forces the Leclézian hero to feel a certain sense of isolation; but for each protagonist this alienation from the world results in a different response. Adam flees to the abandoned villa and feels a temporary contentment at blocking out the Other, while Jeune Homme Hogan will feel, as we shall see more clearly in Chapter V, imprisoned within his world of man-made things. Pieces of furniture ("stupides cubes de bois"—LF, 37), blocked squares of linoleum, beds ("couches visqueuses...tas
de plumes mortes"--LF, 37)--all add to his sense of claustro-
tration. Bea B., too, sees everything as "man-made": "La
terre est une plaque de goudron, l'eau est de la cellophane,
l'air est en nylon . . ." (G, 31). There is no escape from
the world, this "forteresse de béton," this "blockhaus." (LF, 265) Each individual is imprisoned within his own
private reality.

To return to one of Le Clézio's favorite images, we
can see that with sunglasses, an ordinary mechanism for
anonymity, Le Clézio has perfectly and playfully symbolized
the isolation of "self." The two opaque lenses act as a
one-way mirror for Leclézian heroes, reflecting exterior
reality back upon itself, deflecting it, thereby permitting
the wearer to see without being seen. We have already seen
how the sunglasses worn by the young girl on the beach
returned to Adam only a caricatural reflection of himself.
The same is true for Martin, the hero of one of the short
stories in La Fièvre. As a child genius, Martin is iso-
lated from others by his mental superiority, and the thick
glasses he wears keep him essentially "apart": "ses
grosses lunettes de myope posées devant son regard comme
une indéfinissable, hypocrite zone de protection." (F, 134)
When Martin tries to play with other children one day and
loses his glasses (which the children then hide in the sand-
pile), the "self" he has protected for so long becomes
vulnerable to an exteriorized "other." The other has become reality.

Bea B.'s sunglasses have a curved lens which cause a distorted reflection of the "other"; "Sur les verres polaroid, les reflets glissent, s'étirent vers les côtés, longues bulles rectangulaires qui naissent et éclatent tout le temps." (G, 141) Bea in her sunglasses can slip through the city's crowds without being noticed; she has a self-contained, independent existence, with no real links to exterior reality.

Fink suggests that the "ontic illusion" (mirror images and the like), which we see in abundance in the world of Le Clézio, is more than a simple analogon of the play world. Playing is a real mode of behavior, which contains, so to speak, a mirror image derived from behavior in the real world: "play behavior structured by the role of play." Man's capacity for creating a play-illusion depends to a great extent on the fact that there exists already a real illusion in nature. Man not only has the capability of creating artifacts, he can also give form to artificial things possessing an element of "real" illusion.

In the magical mirror image produced by the Leclézian playworld, a single object chosen at random--Bea's funny faces, Tranquilité's cigarette--becomes a symbol with representative character. Fink notes that even if it has long since been forgotten, "human play is the symbolic act
of representing the meaning of the world and of life." \(^{29}\)

Many Leclézian protagonists have in common, in their playing of the "Who am I?" game against a turbulent exterior environment, a central immobility which is juxtaposed to an outer force which is constantly in motion. Jeune Homme Hogan exists within the crowd just as Tranquilité exists within the chaotic crowded aisles of Hyperpolis; but the "other" is what defines their isolated stationary being in relation to the movement and agitation around them.

This configuration of motion/stasis presents us with a problem of point of view. Within the individual protagonist's perspective, exterior reality seems to be moving around him, and he seems, therefore, to be at the center of existence. For example, as Jeune Homme Hogan leaves on his first journey, he feels that it is the bus in which he is riding which is stationary while the landscape moves.

Le Clézio thus describes the isolation of self and the search for definition of self, both in terms of perceptual space (the protagonist isolated within a room or behind a pair of sunglasses) and in the motion/stasis configuration, which is reminiscent of Caillois ilinx.

Within the "What Is It?" game pattern, we can see the Leclézian protagonist's desire to encompass the world of exterior objects: to understand their nature and their relationship to him. And, as in almost every other Leclézian
game, these attempts at naming and structuring the external world of objects reflect an ambivalent attitude on the part of the player. The hero is fascinated and attracted by things and objects, yet he is constantly trying to escape the hostility they represent to him.

In order to play the "What Is It?" game, Le Clézio's hero employs still another form of an age-old children's game. Called "Naming" or "Making Lists," it is a standard play activity within the repertoire of early childhood development. The child, in order to establish the separateness of self, makes a game of "naming" all the things in an area which are not like him. He may organize his lists into groups (eg., everything square, everything green, everything edible) or he can allow them to be rambling and all-inclusive (eg., everything in my desk drawer, everything I see in the park). If he plays the game with other children (as a sort of contest), he may compete with them in naming and listing by varying the game pattern slightly with a "count" of objects within a specific group (eg., four Peugeots and three Renaults within the listing of all cars). This simple play pattern is one which aids the child's adaptation to the world around him, and it is a game which the adult hero of the Leclézian novel continues to play.

In Le Proces-verbal, Adam is inclined toward list-making—but not because he is plagued by a faulty memory.
Writing lists, taking inventory of things seems, in fact, to help him in his quest for identification of the material "Other." "Pour mieux comprendre," Le Clézio tells us, Adam scribbles on a piece of paper:

- sèches
- bière
- chocolat
- trucs à bouffer
- papier
- des journaux si possible voir
- un peu (PV, 20)

While he and Michèle talk at the cafe, they spend a few minutes palying with the objects on top of the table, Adam eventually winning the contest by advancing "d'un quart de millimètre une grosse poussière floconneuse qui était tombée du chandail de la jeune fille." (PV, 35) The playing pieces of this game of "déplacement" are carefully documented: "sous-verres, tasse, soucoupe, cuiller, fils de laine, moucheron mort, petit carré de papier de l'addition, cendrier blanc, allumettes, lunettes de soleil, mégot de gaULOise-mais, tache de café (élargie vers la droite), etc. . . ." (PV, 35). Adam later imagines a huge list of all geographic locations in the world complete with their respective latitudes and longitudes and with their names listed in huge directories (PV, 143). As Adam walks along the beach, he counts on his fingers the bits of refuse washed up on the shore by the ocean ("une pau de banane/ une demi-orange/ un poireau/ un bout de bois/ une algue/ un
Lézard décapité/ un tube d'Artane, vide, cabossé/ deux amas bruns, d'origine inconnue/ une espèce d'excrement de cheval/ un morceau de tissu de Bedford Cord/ un mégot de Philip Morris . . ."—PV, 150). While searching for Michèle, he also sketches a map of the city, listing "par ordre d'importance" the places where she could possibly be. (PV, 168) Even in the asylum, Adam finds it necessary to list everything on his bedside table and to take inventory of it every day.

Le Clezio's heroes' propensity for naming, listing, and counting is carried on throughout the adventures of both François Besson in Le Déluge and Chancelade in Terra amata. François takes a complete inventory of everything on his writing table—paper, knife, thumbtacks, keys, matches, overflowing ashtray, a dictionary open to page 383—and counts the cars which pass below his bedroom window, identifying make and model. (D, 123-4) Chancelade, in the section of Terra amata entitled "J'ai joué à tous ces jeux," not only makes lists of objects, but also makes lists of games to be played with them—58 games (everything from dominos to writing a novel) and 54 types of collections. The collection mania involves everyone from the stamp and shell collectors to "les albinéléphantiles qui collectionnent les éléphants blancs" and "les motoroscaphocadillacophiles qui collectionnent les moteurs des voitures américaines adaptés pour les
hors-bord." (TA, 75)

All of this frenetic play activity, which is at the very core of Chancelade's existence, is a necessity within the Leclèzian ontological game pattern. To play all the games, to collect all the "things" of life, defines existence itself:

Il fallait continuer l'aventure commencée
un jour, sans le vouloir, dans la douleur
du déchirement. Donner son nom à chaque
chose, signer chaque événement, chaque pas­
sage, avec toute la haine et tout l'amour
dont on était capable. (TA, 77)

To name and identify the things around him becomes a focal point of Chancelade's daily activity. He lists the things he sees at the beach (Un reflet . . . Un flacon de brill­
lantine . . . Un hélicoptère . . . Une mouette"--TA, 147); he creates, when death approaches, enormous lists of fatal diseases which could kill him ("la maladie de Basedow . . .
la maladie de Woillez, de Morvan, de Nanukayami . . . etc."--TA, 196). And during the final moments of his life, Chancelade even envisages a list ("le jeu ultime des metamor­phoses") of possible "Disguises" played out between himself and death:

Chancelade s'est fait souris,
la mort s'est faite chat
Chancelade s'est fait poisson, la mort s'est faite filet.
Il s'est fait pomme, la mort s'est faite couteau.
Il s'est fait microbe, elle s'est faite sulfamide. (TA, 202)
Jeune Homme Hogan's list of insults, his inventories of city sights, sounds, and odors, his "poems" which involve the simple act of enumeration ("Immeuble/pierre/goudron/plâtre/gravier/fonte/plaques/gaz/eau/réverbère/ordures ménagères/blanc/gris/noir/terre/jaune/brun/peau d'orange/moue/papier/semelle/moteur"—LF, 31)—all fit into the game pattern which forces the "Self," in order to win, to give a name to, and thereby give existence to, the "Other."

Bea B's two-page list of the offerings in the department store (G, 51-3), her listings of the supermarket products lined up in battle formation, her seemingly endless inventory of man-made materials (plastic, nylon, "matières nouvelles...des éléments transuraniens"), machines, types of containers—(cardboard boxes, tincans, bottles), strange-tasting liquids, motors, and tires all indicate that she, too, is involved in a game of identifying the material other. Bea's playing of the naming game is, in fact, exactly that of a child exploring a totally new environment: As she tells her friend, Monsieur X:

Il y a tellement de choses...Tout est tellement là, présent, vivant...Il faut reconnaître tout ce qu'il y a...C'est comme ça que je veux apprendre à marcher dans les rues de la ville...J'ai peur, Monsieur X, mais j'aime tout cela, maintenant je ne suis pas seule. J'ai autour de moi beaucoup d'amis et d'ennemis. Ils me guettent, ils m'épient, tout le temps. Il faut que j'apprenne à les connaître, alors, peut-être je saurai ce qui passe. (G, 189-90)
Bogo le Muet's typology of words and his categorizations of sounds and letters, as well as Tranquilité's efforts to identify all the products glittering on the shelves at Hyperpolis, are still other illustrations of the game pattern of naming within the ontological dimension of play.

In the section of _L'Extase matérielle_ entitled "L'Infinitiment moyen," the narrator pictures himself within a sort of cosmic ballet where all material life joins together to produce a moment of what Caillois would term _ilinx_ and which Le Clézio calls "le moment du délire." (Em, 180)

> La matière dont je suis fait joue son ballet sans raison. Et la terre, et la viande, et les arbres, et l'eau et l'air, le fer, la houille, le pétrole, la lav, le marbre. Ils jouent. ... Et les soleils en boule, et les planètes, et les galaxies sont prises dans le règne, et jouent, jouent, sans trêve ...

(EM, 180)

All things whirl, dance, and spin within this "ballet farouche qui bouge de toutes parts." (EM, 180); and the narrator asks of himself why he also should not dance: "Ils dansent? Alors, ... je serai fou comme ils le sont, vibrant, vivant, brûlant comme eux." (EM, 180) He addresses his reader as well as himself: "Homme, toi, arrache donc ton maquillage grimaçant, toi, clown, fais-nous rire un peu. Maintenant c'est le moment du délire." (EM, 180)

It is the material world which is the source of all play and game within the Leclézian fictional framework:
Monde, jeu multiple et étendu, à la dureté incomparable! Partout où je porte mes yeux, partout où je pense, ce ne sont que les facettes, les éclats, les pointes aigues, multicolores, les cases préparées, les dessins marqués, tatoués! Partout! Les jeux sont inombrables.

Everything is seen as a game by the narrator of L'Extase matérielle—letters on signs, which make imaginary houses, fish, or trees; street plans; television antennas on rooftops; spots of ink or milk; mailboxes with their names; the moment in the movie house when the lights have dimmed but the film has not yet begun. All life—the collision of the ultimate why with the ultimate interrogation—is grounded then in game:

Tous ces jeux minuscules, toutes ces miniatures de la vie, dures, en relief, bien présentées, aux millions de coueurs qui ne sont jamais deux fois les mêmes; tous ces jeux qui jouent chacun sa partie, indépendamment, mais pourtant ensemble, tous ces jeux dont les règles sont cachés, dont les règles changent à chaque seconde, et qu'il faut jouer, qu'il faut jouer tout le temps.

The only hope for existence, for maintaining one's being, one's "self," is to enter into the games of the world. The Leclèzian hero often ends his existence in death or partial withdrawal from the material world (an aphasic Adam, a blind François, a lost Bea); yet the thrust of the novel within which he has "existed" for us as readers has been toward the inevitability of game playing, with death, blindness,
or loss of speech seen as just other strategic patterns for
dealing with "life."


Concurrent with the Leclézian hero's playing of the "What Is It?" game is the constant necessity for him to play "Who Are They?" The "Self" within Le Clézio's fictional world may be seen as isolated within its own transparent "bubble" of existence, and the material "Other" may be viewed as a kind of enormous museum catalog; but the question which remains to be answered is that of the role of the human "Other" in Le Clézio's works. "Who Am I?" and "What Is It?" cannot be fully understood then unless we also play "Who Are They?" The question is how the Leclézian protagonist reacts to the other humans in his world.

Le Clézio's characters do inhabit the same urban-ized universe along with many others, in fact, along with a fictionalized anonymous mass of "Others." As one against many, each hero feels threatened and interprets the danger
to himself as a physical force which will imminently engulf him. For one of Le Clézio's short story protagonists, the human other appears as an indiscriminate mass:

Au fur et à mesure qu'il remontait la promenade...la foule des hommes et des femmes redevenait plus compacte...A gauche et à droite du trottoir, trois rangs de fauteuils et de chaises longues étaient occupés par ces masses humaines, aux faces larges...aux jambes épaisse, lourdes... Au centre de cette viande suante, criarde, bariolée, des yeux vivaient d'une vie presque indépendante, petites bêtes glauques et voraces. J.-F. Paoli passait en revue... cerné par ces murailles de vivants, tenu fixément au milieu du trottoir, attaqué de tous côtés...

(F, 121)

Jeune Homme Hogan calls himself "un naufragé de la terre," (LF, 90); and for Chancelade, the human other is seen as a vast, giant being, covering the earth:

...c'était comme si on marchait sur une peau vivante, dolente, qui frissonnait à chaque passage d'un flot de sang. Les arbres étaient dressés à la verticale, pareils à des poils, et il y avait un peu partout, dans les creux des talus, des flaques d'eau ou de sueur. Cette terre était un corps de géant couché, et l'on circulait sur lui indéfiniment.

(TA, 142-3)

The world appears to Chancelade as one vast, oppressive "Other":

...autour de Chancelade, la vie éclatait... Tous ces coeurs battaient lourdement, et le bruit des coups résonnait à travers le sol. Le sang était caché, le sang rapide, chaud, épais. Dans les outres de peau, là, sur cette plage, il y avait des litres de sang; si on les avait crevés, une par une, elles se seraient vidées sur les galets en pente, et bientôt les
ruisseaux rouges auraient coulé à flots jusqu'à la mer. Après des jours ou des semaines, il y aurait eu cette grande étendue pourpre sous le soleil, et le ciel lui-même serait devenu rose. (TA, 140)

Human relationships, too, remain oppressive within the Leclézian city. Jeune Homme Hogan's prostitute is described as a machine of sorts, and François Besson describes Marthe as if she were a relief map of the world. Adam's sad story of his search for Michèle illustrates the sterility of human contact:

Je me suis trompé du jeu. J'ai voulu faire les choses trop à la légère. Voilà ce que je voulais faire: je voulais suivre cette fille Michèle....Je voulais faire un jeu comme un, deux, trois, ...tu y es?...vingt-huit, vingt-neuf, vingt-neuf et demi, vingt-neuf trois quarts, et, et, 30! et puis chercher partout dans la ville....Tu aurais laissé des indices, bien sûr...et moi, petit à petit, je me serais dit: "Je brûle!" ...
Mais personne n'attend personne; il y a des choses plus graves dans le monde, évidemment. (PV, 141-2)

If the other is not oppressive, the other is "apart."

Kathleen Reish states that the ontological question in Le Clézio's fictional world leads on one hand to doubt concerning the individual's capacity to know an "other" than his own consciousness. Flight becomes imprisonment, and vision is transformed into mirage. But when stated conversely, the problem changes. "Awareness of the 'other' seems to be limited, not by the barrier of self-consciousness, but, paradoxically, by the imaginative power of the 'self.'" Reality, then, seems to be a
carefully structured figment of the protagonist's imagination.

François and Bea B. both construct their own worlds—just as Adam Polio was both creator and "hero" of his private universe—François through a grid-figure and Bea in a pattern of concentric circles. Within these "empty" structures of grid and circle, various elements from exterior reality are placed. But there is always a rupture between the creative structuring process and so-called exterior, "concrete" reality "dès le commencement du jeu, le monde avait cessé d'être et d'avoir été." (D, 11) This moment in the text, as Reish points out, is point-zero: "The individual works in solitude in constructing a reality that will have no verification outside himself." The individual's question always becomes then: "Est-ce que c'est moi qui pense le monde, ou le monde qui me pense?" (TA, 197) The ontological game pattern becomes as circular as the Leclézian novel itself.

During the course of his games within the ontological dimension of play, the Leclézian protagonist realizes two extreme modes of being. One possibility is that he experiences the reality of self as a pinnacle of human sovereignty. In that case, he enjoys almost limitless creativity and is productive and uninhibited because he is not creating within the sphere of "reality." The protagonists--Chancelade
as King of the Potao Bugs or Bea B. as a porno queen--experience the reality of self as being the ruler over the products of their own imaginations. In this way, then, play is a manifestation of human freedom.

But playing the reality game also involves the Leclèzian hero in the opposite pole of freedom, in a withdrawal from the real world. Adam loses his power of speech, Bea B. disappears forever into the subway, and Jeune Homme Hogan continues his voyages. As Fink tells us, "Play can contain within itself not only the clear apollonian moment of free self-determination, but also the dark dionysian moment of panic self-abandon."32

I would suggest that Le Clézio has posited within his fictional universe a perplexing world formula, according to which Being in its totality functions like play. In this sense, then, we should remember that play is no harmless, peripheral or even "childish" thing and that "precisely in the power and glory of [their] magical creativity . . . mortal men are 'at stake' in an inscrutable threatening way."33 Once the essence of the world is viewed as play, then man becomes the only creature in the cosmos capable of relating to and reproducing the workings of the whole of Being. If this is true, then man can find his true essence only in relating to that which transcends him.

In this poetic fragment of Rilke, quoted by Fink to demonstrate the ludic receptivity of human existence to the
play of being, we see perhaps the symbolic expression of Le Clezio's ideal game:

As long as you catch what you yourself threw into the air, all is mere skill and petty gain; only when you unexpectedly become the catcher of the ball that the Goddess, your eternal playmate, threw toward you, toward the center of your being in a precisely calculated curve, in one of those arcs reminiscent of God building bridges: only then is being able to catch the ball an ability to be cherished—not yours, but a world's. And if you were to have the strength and courage to return the throw, nay, even more miraculous, if you had forgotten about strength and courage and had already thrown...as the year throws birds, the migrating flock that an older warmth flings across seas to a younger--only through your daring is your play genuine. You neither make throwing easier nor harder for yourself. From your hands issues the meteor and races toward its place in the heavens.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV


2Ibid., p. 20.

3Ibid.

4Ibid., p. 21.

5Ibid., p. 22.

6Reish, op. cit., pp. 28-53. I am indebted to Kathleen Reish for her excellent analysis of these texts in establishing the philosophical position of Le Clézio.


8Ibid., p. 37.

9Ibid., p. 36.

10Ibid., p. 44.

11Ibid.

12Ibid., p. 40.


14Ibid., p. 70.

15Ibid., p. 72.
16 Ibid., p. 71.
17 Ibid., p. 78.
18 Ibid., p. 75.
19 Ibid.
20 Reish, op. cit., p. 34.
23 Laing, op. cit., p. 44.
24 Ibid., p. 45.
25 Fink, op. cit., p. 23.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 28.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Reish, op. cit., p. 50.
31 Ibid., p. 51.
32 Fink, op. cit., p. 25.
33 Ibid., p. 29.
CHAPTER V

LECLÉZIAN GAME AND PLAY: THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION

Ts'ui P'ên diría una vez: Me retiro a escribir un libro. Y otra: Me retiro a construir un laberinto. Todos imaginaron dos obras; nadie pensó que libro y laberinto eran un solo objeto.

---J. L. Borges, "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan"

They paved Paradise and they put up a parking-lot.

---Joni Mitchell, Big Yellow Taxi

An exploration of the socio-cultural dimension of play within the Leclézian fictional universe leads us to the discovery of two vital elements in Le Clézio's play world: the gameboard itself and an inventory and analysis of the preferred playing pieces. We find that the gameboard is located within the confines of a technological urban landscape and that the basic search to identify external "reality" forces the protagonist-player as well as the reader to follow an ever-twisting spiral pathway through the labyrinth leading to a mythical unobtainable "center" which is for Le Clézio the "winner's circle." We discover, too, that the playthings of the Leclézian hero consist of modern technological inventions--from telephone and tape-recorder to automobile and airplane. Man's language, too, as it appears in overheard conversations, in flashing neon advertisements, in stories
told or written, serves as yet another diversion hidden within the toybox of the Leclézian protagonist's mind.

The games of Le Clézio's child-heroes, unlike the games of Samuel Beckett's tramps, are not played out in a barren wilderness stripped of all reminders of civilization. On the contrary, the Leclézian protagonists' quest for ontological security within his world forces him to play out the game within the boundaries of the city. Even when Jeune Homme Hogan discovers a temporary refuge from his everyday turbulent urbanized life on a beautiful, tranquil island ("le poids de la solitude, l'isolement entêté de ce bloc de terre" LF, 131), he soon discovers that he has not managed to find refuge at all. As the hero explores the mysterious "île flottante," he feels a constant threat of imminent danger ("le danger était intensément présent, invisible, inaudible"—LF, 133) and soon discovers that the island is the home of a leper colony (LF, 135). Man is never free to escape the horrors of "reality."

The city in the novels of Le Clézio has a double role: it is the creation of man by virtue of the concentration found there of machines, signs, and bustling crowds of humanity and it is also the site of the games man plays with himself and others in order to escape the necessity of confronting his own existence. As Reish suggests, the city both represents a physical extension of the individual consciousness, assimilated to the hero and bearing his mark, and also
the site of divertissement in the Pascalian sense—the city thus becoming the locale for the hero's ambulatory avoidance adventures.¹

The Leclézian hero usually attempts to separate himself from the urban environment—although without much success. Adam Pollo's villa is located above the city on a cliff overlooking the sea while François Besson is usually seen as an observer of the city, always describing what he sees but remaining outside his own vision:

Le long des troitoirs, des camions font tourner les roues; à la verticale, le ciel carré, gonflé de nuages s'appuie...
Dans un repaire caché, dans un souterrain, il doit y avoir des hommes prisonniers qui étouffent...Tout est suffocant d'impenetrabilité; et là-bas, cent enfants se bousculent dans la poussière d'un gymnase.

(D, 43)

In much the same manner, Bogo le Muet remains an outsider as he observes the scene from the parking lot of Hyperpolis:

Il regardait le parking, aussi et les carrosseries des voitures étincellantes, et les rectangles blancs peints sur le goudron. Il regardait l'espèce de plaine d'alluvions, avec les petites maisons de ciment, et, de l'autre côté de la route, les trois grands immeubles blancs avec leurs fenêtres...Ce qui l'intéressait c'était d'être assis, sur le pare-chocs d'une voiture, dans le parking d'Hyperpolis, et de regarder. (GS, 37-8)

As we have already seen through our discussion of the psychological dimensions of play within the Leclézian fictional world, the mimetic Follow the Leader type game is almost always played out within urban boundaries of some
kind—be it a specific city (the Nice of Le Procès-verbal) or a space-age imaginary city-substitute (the Hyperpolis of Les Géants). Le Clézio himself is fascinated by cities and yet repelled by them, and this ambivalence is evidenced throughout his work. Let us examine then the various city faces we find in the Leclézian novel.

The city itself is not described by Adam; we know only that he has chosen to live away from it. The abandoned villa overlooks a complicated grid of buildings and streets, however; and when Adam leaves his hiding place, it is to the city (which he equates in his own mind to "la foule et les maisons"—PV, 78) he goes. The center of the grid offers a chaotic spectacle: "... des magasins ouverts, des flots d'odeurs chaudes ou fraîches, des couleurs partout, des parasols en toile effilochée, tout ça était encastré dans les murs..." (PV, 78) In typical Leclézian fashion, Adam, who is at this time playing a combination game of Follow the Leader and Disguises with the dog, does not see the signs of human life all around him. And he wonders, ingeniously "Qui avait tracé des lignes sur le trottoir? Qui avait posé délicatement des plaques de verre sur les vitrines? Qui avait écrit, oui, 'Pyjamas et draps rayés assortis'? ou bien 'Menu du Jour'? Qui avait dit un jour, Tout pour la Radio, Visitez nos Rayons, Achetez nos Bikinis en Solde, Collection Automne, Vente de Vins Gros Détail Mi-gros, etc. etc?"
It is not so much the city itself which disturbs Adam—but rather the difficulty he has in adapting himself, a true Neorealist, to what he finds there.

The city for François Besson is a more integral part of life. He does not live apart from it, and he does not attempt to escape from it as Adam and later Chancelade and Jeune Homme Hogan will do. At the center of the city, François feels that

Ici, on sentait que c'était le point stratégique; les autobus et les voitures débouchaient de tous les côtés, et les trottoirs étaient pleins de monde. Les gens allaient et venaient, sans cesse, comme si c'avait été toujours les mêmes, et il n'y avait pas un coin de silence. (D, 73)

François continues his observations: men and women walking along loaded down with the day's provisions, the garbage cans waiting to be emptied, the tradespeople preparing for the day's work. The pavement becomes more and more crowded with people, and François feels himself caught in a vortex of legs and faces, chaotic movements, bent backs, and hands clasping objects. Bodies brush against his, and faces loom up over him only to swerve aside at the last moment. He lets himself go with the crowd's movement and walks on, "sans désirs, sans rien sentir en lui que cet ordre mystérieux donné par tous les visages et tous les corps: marcher, marcher . . . monter cette espèce d'escalier raide, en spirale, qui ne menait sûrement nulle part." (D, 76) The sounds of
the city ("Coups de klaxons, pétarades de moteurs, grincements de rideaux métalliques qu'on soulevait ... un glissement faible et morne, indéfinissable, fait de pneus sur l'asphalte mouillé, de gouttières en train de cascader, de freins sifflants. Ça ne s'arrêtait jamais vraiment."

(D, 103) become a basso continuo for all the other activity in Besson's life. Sometimes they are comforting, yet at other times the signs of city life are not so calmative:

[François] courba la tête et se voûta sous les attaques du mouvement furieux, du bruit, des lumières. Les feux clignotaient au sommet des pylones d'acier, dans les rues, au centre de la mer; des pointes rouges et jaunes clouées, puis effacées, chassées par les suivantes. On était comme enfermé par un couvercle gigantesque, un couvercle de plomb rabattu sur la terre, et qui pesait de tout son poids sur la peau, sur les tympans, le diaphragme et la nuque. (D, 190)

And later when the flood is truly threatening and the city has become a place from which one wants only to flee, François still takes time to remark that "les kiosques de journaux étalaient leurs paperasses bariolées, les klaxons beuglaient, les vapeurs d'essence montaient dans l'air, et les feux clignotants clignotaient." (D, 232)

Chancelade's walk through the city becomes a journey through Hell itself, but in typical Leclézian fashion, even an infernal city is interesting:

Il avait voyagé toute sa vie pour arriver ici; en enfer, pour brûler avec les autres dans la fournaise hideuse et délectable; oui, c'était bien l'enfer, mais c'était intéressant au-delà de toute espérance. C'était la
vie compacte, le bloc de vie....Les klaxons des voitures beuglaient sans arrêt, les rires grotesques éclataient, les cris, la musique de guitare électrique résonnait dans les boîtes des transistors, et c'était un concert harmonieux et calme qui remuait vos entrailles et vous faisait frissonner. (TA, 134)

It remains, however, for Le Clézio's world-wide traveler Jeune Homme Hogan, to give us the most complete description of the city. The city, "espèce d'immense nécropole aux dalles et aux murs éblouissants, avec le quadrillage des rues, des avenues et des boulevards" (LF, 14), is laid out methodically—neatly designed cement sidewalks, straight trees and streetlights, enormous monolithic sky scrapers and stores, noise and fumes. Everything is bathed in white light as Hogan walks slowly through the streets, imagining himself an underwater explorer from a submarine or an astronaut arriving at the other end of the Milky Way and reporting to his home base: "Je marche dans un labyrinthe régulier. Il y a beaucoup d'objets en mouvement." (LF, 16) Hogan is alternately fascinated and horrified by the signs, sounds, and sights of the urban landscape. The neon signs, the automobiles, buses, and trolley cars are all for him part of an awesome "ville de ciment et d'acier, murailles de verre s'élancant indéfiniment vers le ciel, ville aux dessins incrustés, aux sillons tous pareils, aux drapeaux, étoiles, lueurs rouges, filaments incandescents à l'intérieur des lampes, électricité parcourant les reseaux de fil de..."
Yet when the city has become too much for him and he has decided that he must above all, escape, the tone changes. "Ecrasée, rejetée, piétinée, la ville maudite. Couverte de cendres, de vieux papiers. Oublié le dépotoir plein de pourritures. On avait creusé sa tombe, puis on l'avait recouverte de fumier." (LF, 52) And he finally rejects the city completely:

Ville de fer et de béton, je ne te veux plus. Je te refuse. Ville à soupapes, ville de garages et de hangars, j'y ai assez vécu. Les éternelles rues cachent la terre, les murs sont des paravents gris, et les affiches, et les fenêtres. Les voitures chaudes roulent sur leurs pneus. C'est le monde moderne. (LF, 63)

Jeune Homme Hogan's plan, as we have seen, is to flee—to escape the horrors of what he witnesses in the city. But just as his "île flottante" had turned out to be a deception, so is he eternally condemned, throughout his

"ITINÉRAIRE
de Tokyo à Moscou
via Yokohama, Nakhodka, Khabarovsky, Irkoutsk, Cheliabinsk" (LF, 176)

to discover again and again that the world is full of cities of all kinds: "Et puis voici une autre ville de fer et de verre, de l'autre côté de l'Océan" (LF, 179), "une ville où régnaient les voitures" (LF, 222), "villes râpées étalées sur le sol... cités sans joie, cités pauvres" (LF, 231), "Villes qui dorment, Villes téénias... Villes où l'on ne se
lave pas . . . villes souterraines" (LF, 231-3) And when he arrives in New York, he can only think that "C'était étrange et familier, un spectacle connu qu'on avait oublié, un rêve, une fuite à l'envers. Peut-être qu'on avait toujours été là, dans cette ville . . . " (LF, 192)

The city we find in La Guerre is, of course, a battlefield of sorts. War has already destroyed all, and it is Bea B. who sees the city formed around her head.

Le premier jour, il y avait eu cette chambre d'hôtel, ...Le huitième jour, il y avait eu toutes sortes de rues qui avaient formé comme les bras d'une étoile ...Le trentième jour, elle avait vu des visages...des tas de maisons....Le soixante-treizième jour, les frontières s'étaient encore reculées...Le cent deuxième jour, d'immenses boulevards périphériques....Le cent troisième, un terrain d'aviation....

(G, 23-4)

Yet to play the ontological game, the Lecluzian hero must explore the city; for it is only here that a possible solution to his problem can be found. The game board is constructed of concrete and glass with a maze of sidewalks and alleyways to follow. But the city is the only gameboard possible.

Alors il faut quitter le réseau des contemplations solitaires, les faux plis de l'oubli; il faut se jeter à corps perdu au-dehors, dans l'espoir d'étaler de toutes parts sa substance, dans le désir fou d'envahir chaque espace, de combler chaque attraction. Non plus par l'analyse, mais par l'affolement consenti envers chaque pièce envers chaque homme, chaque arbre, chaque poussière. (D, 37)
In Julio Cortázar's novel *Rayuela*, which we have already discussed in Chapter II, a conversation between two characters, Morelli and Oliveira, is most revealing when we attempt to adapt play-game methodology to an analysis of Le Clézio's novels. Morelli asks Oliveira, "Is it true that there is an Indian chess game with sixty pieces on each side?" "It's possible," says Oliveira. "The infinite game." "The one who conquers the center wins. From that point he dominates all possibilities, and it's senseless for his adversary to insist on continuing the play. But the center might be in some side square, or even off the board." "Or in a vest pocket."  

The labyrinth configuration of the Leclézian game-board implies movement within a restricted area but in typical labyrinthine fashion offers a pursuit that is constantly thwarted, deflected, then renewed as the player attempts to find his way out. For Bea B., the shape of the city's labyrinth is the figure-8, "seul signe vraiment infini," (G, 144), and all her movement within the novel is only a turning on itself. Like the other Leclézian "hommes qui marchent," Bea's direction is inward, toward a center:

"Elle tourne en rond dans la ville à la recherche du centre, et chaque fois qu'elle boucle la boucle, elle sait qu'elle est un peu plus près. La ville aussi tourne en rond sur elle-même, un peu comme une roue, un peu comme une hélice. Il y a un centre sûrement, quelque part, c'est lui qu'il faut trouver." (G, 144)
Bea also looks for "le plan" inside her transistor radio and thinks perhaps the labyrinth's secret is to be found within a wheel she observes one day:

Tu comprends, il, il y avait tant de perfection dans cette étoile d'acier... que c'était comme si--comme si c'était ça le centre du monde... Depuis ce moment-là, je cherche à la revoir dans la rue.

(G, 191)

But circular, spiral, or figure-eight—each configuration dooms the player to a never-ending quest, an eternal game.

The search for the center, or more accurately perhaps, the overwhelming desire to be at the center of things, seems to signal winning for the Leclézian protagonist. While the urban landscape and its labyrinthine contour provide him with an endless game of Follow the Leader, the material reality of the technological twentieth century gives him his playthings: the machines—be they automobiles, radios, telephones, or tape recorders—and the world of mass communication of neon signs and billboards. The Leclézian protagonist moves through his life game surrounded by McLuhanesque messages, and we as readers of Leclézian texts are in turn subjected to a unique type of message which does not fit our accepted notions of what the novel should be.

In the relationships between the Leclézian protagonist and his playthings, we see once again the ambivalent attitude of Le Clézio vis à vis the technology of the modern
world. On one hand, he is utterly fascinated by the "signs" of modern life (he has said of an electric light bulb, for example: "Ce qui me fascine dans l'ampoule électrique c'est la perfection la beauté de l'objet lui-même C'est un travail génial que d'avoir réussi à fabriquer cette bulle de verre si mince dans laquelle il n'y a pratiquement pas de gaz avec cette espèce de protubérance ornée de fils cette ampoule qui est à la fois transparente et opaque on voit les reflets des fenêtres et en même temps on voit ce qu'il y à l'intérieur." It is on the other hand a genuine horror of the technological monster he shows in passages similar to this one from Les Géants:

Maudite électricité, maudite! Je la hais, et j'ai peur. Elle sait déjà que j'écris ce poème, cette lettre, et elle me guette par les deux trous dans la tête de porcelaine, là, à droite de la porte, au-dessous du commutateur. Elle bouge dans tous ses fils, elle tourne en rond, au-dessus de ma tête, comme les mouches quand il va pleuvoir. Elle ne m'oubliera pas. Elle lance ses ondes vers moi, pour envelopper mon corps....Elle voudrait que je perde mon corps, mes pensées, ma vie. (GS, 202-3)

The attitude of the protagonist in turn reflects the author's ambivalence in this area. Since they are often naive observers, as in the case of Bea B. of Jeune Homme Hogan or Machines, they may at first be delighted by the array of things which they observe (Bea's fascination in the department store or Machines' pleasure in the workings of
the escalators at Hyperpolis), but their wonderment turns quickly to frustration when they are forced to "play with" their toys. Sometimes the games are amusing, as in Adams "victory" over the telephone or Beaumont's game with the telephone which involves calling a number, any number, in an attempt to communicate with another human being about the pain of his toothache. For Adam, the telephone game is all a part of his Romantic Hero's quest for Michèle.

The telephones in the Magellan are located, as in many French bars, next to the washrooms; consequently, Adam's game takes place "dans le brouhaha de la chasse d'eau" (PV, 134) as he goes through the game's moves: find the number, give the number to the bartender, who in turn writes it on a scrap of paper. The bartender then dials the number on the counter telephone, transfers the call to the booth at the end of the bar, waves his hand at Adam with a loud "C'est à vous!", and the game is started. The five pages of dialogue which follow as Adam talks with Germaine, Michèle's sister, are a marvelous tour de force in which Le Clézio parodies all the worst clichés of "telephone talk"—the garbled message, the need to "say something," the problems involved in passing a message without garbling it (the equivalent of the American game "Telephone"). Adam hears Germaine in the background yelling to her mother who is in another room:
As a result, Adam must then make another telephone call since he has begun to play the game. "Quand on commencé à jouer avec le téléphone, il ne faut pas hésiter; il ne faut jamais s'arrêter, même quelques secondes, pour réfléchir." (PV, 138) What to say now? Adam, in order to find Michèle, must call Michèle's friend Sonia. What if she doesn't answer? What if Michèle isn't even there? What if it's too late to call? And worst of all, calling Sonia means returning to the starting point and beginning the game all over again. The speed of the narrative increases: "Il faut recommencer, appeler le barman, crier: 88.07.54, et, 's'il vous plaît, c'est très urgent!'; courir vers l'autre téléphone, presser sur le bouton rouge, et se laisser glisser dans le langage fantomatique." (PV, 138) The fear and anxiety which envelop Adam are characteristic of a Leclézian protagonist's contest with a machine. He struggles—and finally loses, since Sonia and Michèle have already left. Beaumont's loss was even more disheartening: the result of one haphazard dialing brought this tape recorded response: "Il n'y a pas de correspondant au numéro que vous demandez. Il n'y a pas de correspondant au numéro que vous demandez,
The problem of communication via machine makes the game into a competition, man versus man's creation, in which the machine seems always to win. What does the telephone game in fact mean to a conscious observer like Adam?

Il faut se dépouiller de méfiance, et sans regard pour le ridicule, doter d'humanité l'instrument noiraud qui dérape dans le creux de la paume moite, qui colle sa bouche en forme de tamis contre l'oreille, et murmure, en attendant de créer des communications nasillardes, son chant de machines: il faut attendre, la tête presque enfouie dans les carapaces de bakélite où règne une tièdeur électrique, que cesse le sifflement, que résonnent les clapotements des étincelles et que du fond d'un abîme, s'élève une fausse voix, dont le mensonge va vous envelopper, vous conduire, au point qu'y croyant ou non, vous allez devoir dire, entendant votre propre voix remonter les fils, et se mêler aux allo lointains. (PV, 138)

Bea B. also must learn to follow the prescribed ritual of the telephone in order to be integrated into city life:

"Tu vois, on a tenu longtemps."
"Ty penses?"
"Oui, je n'ai pas chronométré, mais ça a bien duré cinq à six minutes."
"Pas plus?"
"Mais c'est beaucoup, tu sais, au téléphone."

"Et les gestes? Est-ce que tu fais des gestes?"
"Non, je n'y arrive pas. Il n'y a pas moyen, je ne peux pas gesticuler devant une machine."

"Mais tu ne comprends pas! C'est le téléphone. Le téléphone. Ce n'est pas n'importe quelle machine. C'est comme la télévision, la radio, ou la bagnole. Si tu veux comprendre ce que c'est qu'un rite, il faut que tu croies en lui. Autrement, tu restes en dehors." (G, 154-5)
Bea's trials with the phone, as well as Adam's, illustrate two aspects of the modern-day experience of urban culture. Bea needs to study the art of the telephone; she does not know how to use it "by nature." Adam knows the correct procedure but finds the whole ritual troubling and unsettling. In Bea's "practice" with the phone as if it were some sort of musical instrument and in Adam's acceptance of it despite the terror it inspires in him we see an imperative for conformity to social "games rules" within the Leclèzian urban environment.

Bea's forced conversations and Adam's self-conscious imaginary ones, show them as basically innocent of the ways of the city--Bea as a totally naive ingénue and Adam as the "Beat Outsider." The city is both a strange and fascinating place for them. In using this device of showing the reader a familiar social phenomenon through the eyes of an ingenuous or even slightly "mad" observer, Le Clézio follows in the tradition of authorial social criticism, singling out not only the telephone but the supermarket and department store as well--all established institutions of modern culture--for exploration. Through the heroes' observations, the reader also obtains a portrait of modern civilization, his own civilization. The portrait of this civilization ("a new vision of a familiar reality") can then serve as an impetus for the reader's thinking about the cultural status quo.
The machine which is one of the focal points for *Le Déluge* serves to engender yet another type of modern game: it is the tape recorder. This modern marvel, which also has a prominent role in *Les Géants*, is used in the earlier novel as a means for one of François' friends to tell the story of her suicide. Perhaps communication is aided by the use of the machine (François knows just where to stop and start the tape to hear various portions of the girl's story); but in the end, of course, there is no human communication, the ties of friendship prove incredibly weak, and the tape ends with a shattering noise as the girl Anna dies from an overdose of pills, the glass falling from her hand and splintering on the floor.

The machine itself is very complex with its spools and buttons (Rewind, Forward, Playback) and counters. François adjusts the tape—and with whirrings and clickings, Anna's voice fills the room. Hearing the sound of her voice, François imagines the game of taping the sound of the human voice to be similar to that of trying to catch a bit of wind through an open window and shutting it up in some bare, cube-like room. Or like constructing a small cardboard box lined with mirrors in order to imprison a ray of light. The lid once shut, the ray of light would go on reflecting *ad infinitum* from one side of the box to the other. Words go on and on—bouncing off one another.
Anna is herself an "artist," a creator. She tells François about her disappointing affair with Paul and her decision to write rather than kill herself when things don't work out. The story of Albert the snail and her current disillusionment with literature and writing provide us with further clues as to the writer's inability to cope with language as "communication:

C'est une maladie. Rien que de voir du papier blanc, ça me fout le cafard. Je ne comprends pas, franchement, comment il y a encore des gens qui écrivent. Des romans, des poèmes, et des trucs comme ça. Parce qu'enfin, ça ne sert à rien. C'est idiot, égoïste...puisqu'il n'y a pas de vérité. Je veux dire, on ne cerne rien du tout, on ne découvre pas... J'ai envie de dire les choses, ça oui, mais plus comme avant. J'ai l'impression qu'on les dit aussi bien en—en faisant n'importe quoi, en allant chercher son pain à la boulangerie, ou en discutant avec la concierge. (D, 55-6)

On the other side of the tape, Anna tells François that even in telling him her story, she has lied. "Tu comprends, en te racontant tout ça, je faisais des histoires, je faisais des fables, je mentais." (D, 257) Everything she has said is true, but the telling of it is always a lie. Just as one "lies" by writing a story on the typewriter, one "lies" by dictating a story into a taperecorder. Talking or writing become alibis for Anna, "un alibi, voilà, pour me cacher la vérité, et pour la cacher aux autres." (D, 257) However, it is terrible not to talk—to be silent and not, therefore,
to lie. Anna's last request to François then becomes understandable: "Efface ce que j'ai dit...Remplace tout ça par du silence." (D, 257)

The fascination Le Clézio feels for the spoken word on the tape is paralleled by his interest in the language games played by the inhabitants of his fictional world. Fragments of conversations overheard in a cafe (where one could see "du deuxième étage de l'immeuble, les pions d'un jeu de dames monochromique disposés avant la bataille"—PV, 152) are reported without logical sequence. Bea learns that "il ne fallait jamais parler de choses importantes. Il fallait dire des choses très simples, sans chercher d'explication." (G, 35) Chancelade and Mina's "married" conversations "étaient des dialogues insignifiants vraiment, des dialogues comme on n'en trouve pas dans des livres." (TA, 83)

In the section of Terra amata entitled "J'Ai Parlé Tous Ces Langages," Chancelade leaves the world of words behind and explores the realm of "sign": Morse code, drawings, riddles, charades are all possible. "C'était simple, après tout, de se parler de loin. Il y avait tant de jeux, tant de langages!" (TA, 109) Mina and Chancelade then experiment with silent communication—using deaf-mute sign language in an effort to "speak":

C: Main arrondie. Main vers le bas, deux doigts tendus.—Main ouverte de profil. Main vers le bas, trois doigts tendus.
Main vers le bas, trois doigts tendus.
Main fermée. Pouce replié.
M: Main arrondie. Main fermée de profil,
deuX doigts écartés. (TA, 112)

They return to the spoken word once more with "des mots incompréhensibles" ("Abele m'n poostu' Trix slamoc jdiokgong
denyl, para munok fla monkx felu rezon mana jel siluvgone,
staars hok"—TA, 119) and finish their experiment by trying
to communicate through "les questions indiscrètes."

But it is with Bogo le Muet in Les Géants that we
see the prototype of the language game for Le Clézio—a game
in which language, like everything else within the Leclézian
world, alternately fascinates and terrifies those who play
with it.

Bogo le Muet spends his time every day listening to
words and sounds and repeating them silently in the back of
his throat. The letters seem actually to enter into his body
(as they did with Tranquilité's friend during her night time
confrontation in the car). They are in his lungs, behind his
ears, attached to his hair; and they frighten him with their
force. ("VieEEEns! Vîte! Viîîîîte!" and "C'est çA! çA!"—
GS, 73) Although he cannot seem to shut the sounds out,
Bogo le Muet does become very careful when he approaches
mouths, (their apparent source) which he describes as "tou-
jours en train de bouger, s'ouvrant, se fermant, se dé-
pliant..." (GS, 74) He listens to loudspeakers, jukeboxes,
and televisions but everywhere, "c'étaient des langages étrangers, et il n'y avait pas moyen de comprendre ce qu'ils cherchaient à dire." (GS, 78)

The conversation Bogo is witness to in the elevator (on its way, interestingly enough, "au sommet de la tour de Babel"—GS, 79) shows us the basic problem of the Leclézian player of the language game. This mixture of English (''strue,'' "yer gonner stay long?") and French ("Mafoi Mafoi")—GS, 79—merely serves to convince Bogo that he is right to resist the power of the words: "Tout le monde parlait dans des langues inconnues, en faisant semblant de s'entendre, mais c'était évident qu'ils mentaient." (GS, 78)

Perhaps remaining silent, as Bogo le Muet does, is the answer.

The silence which would come if all ears were deaf to the radio and television litanies and the myriad noises of the city is still not possible. For along with telephones, radios and tape recorders, cars and airplanes, we are blessed with the marvel of twentieth-century: advertising.

Le Clézio's fascination with advertising and mass media begins with the description of Adam Pollo's visit to the Prisunic store as he trails his friend the dog. Adam is struck by the inverted reflection of the Prisunic sign mirrored on the store's shiny linoleum floor, and the consumer atmosphere is evident the minute Adam and the dog enter:
Au dessus, il y avait une espèce de plaque jaune, d’où pendiaient, entre deux tubes de néon, les pancartes sur lesquelles on avait écrit, "réclames," "quincaillerie," ou "vins" ou "articles ménagers." La tête passait très haut au milieu de ces rectangles de carton, et parfois, les accrochait, ce qui les faisait virer longtemps autour de leurs cordes... Tout cela brillait d’un tas de couleurs vives, vous bousculait à gauche et à droite, vous disait: "achetez! achetez!", vous montrait de la marchandise, des sourires, des bruits de talons de femmes sur le sol en matière plastique, et puis posait des disques sur le plateau du pick-up, au fond du magasin, entre le bar et le photomaton. Il y avait une musique générale de piano et de violon qui couvrait tout, sauf de temps à autre, la voix calme d'une femme qui parlait bas, la bouche tout contre le micro: "attention aux pickpockets, mesdames, messieurs." (PV, 82)

In Le Déluge, François Besson's attention is attracted by a huge poster showing an orange "grande comme une voiture, coupée en deux, avec une goutte en train de perler sur la pulpe jaune," (D, 109) and a baby's head, also "gigantesque, monstrueuse, qui s'étalait sur des mètres carrés" (D, 109) Underneath this monstrosity is written in huge block letters: L'ORANGE C'EST DE L'OR POUR LA SANTÉ (D, 109). As night comes to the city, François watches as "des trous de lumière blanche et rouge au bas des immeubles, disaient:

CAFÉ CINÉMA BAR PIZZA MOTEL (D, 149)

and when he continues his walking, he passes a travel agency above which "des mots couraient le long d'une bande faite d'ampoules électriques...PRESSE--STOP--UN AVION S'ÉCRASE À TEL AVIV--18 MORTS" (D, 189). In an unconscious bit of
irreverant irony, François is also attracted by the cathedral's "haute bâtisse...sur lequel il y avait gravé: MARIA SINE LABE CONCEPTA ORA PRO NOBIS." (D, 199) Other signs draw his attention, too, "des signes bizarres, et des chiffres, par exemple: 9 A PESSICART LAS PLANAS
108 FABRON 10 12
6 ISOLA ROQUESTERON
AÉROPORT
SAVONA--GENOA B 444 (D,231)

"un grand mur de briques avec, écrit à la peinture blanche: U.S. GO HOME" (D, 235), "un restaurant garni de lumignons, qui portait son nom en grandes lettres rouges: LA FOURCHETTE," (D, 234), "un grand panneau où était écrit: AZUR" (D, 238), quelques pancartes aussi, qui disaient des choses dans le genre de'' 'camping,' 'La mer,' 'altitude zéro,' 'La Fiesta Beach,' etc." (D, 245) When, during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth days of François Besson's life within Le Déluge, when total destruction is imminent, François predicts that it is the graffiti scratched into the wood of the café tables which will keep the history of civilization intact:

Drum
Molotov
Lolly-pop
Crevette
Elite
Clé
Pied
Sékou Touré
Passion Flowers
Bourbon
Honey-bee (D, 274)
In *Terra amata*, Chancelade and Mina walk hand in hand through a fair, bombarded by signs and "messages":

Il y avait tant de bruit et de mouvement qu'il ne pouvait plus parler. Les éclairs de néon jaillaient de tous les côtés, et les bouches des haut-parleurs accrochés aux poteaux déversaient les hurlements incompréhensibles. Toutes les boutiques miroitaient dans la nuit, jetant en clignotant leurs noms barbares: CASSIDY CASSIDY CASSIDY...

(TA, 104)

Chancelade is aware suddenly of "les soleils de néon [qui] se levai nt un peu partout; puis se couchaient dans des crépuscules rouge-sang." (TA, 104)

The "signs" of life, the letters and the words which are the organic stuff of language itself are to be found everywhere: "Dans les bouteilles de Coca-Cola, ou sur l'envers des tickets de cinéma. Il y avait une lettre par-ci, une lettre par-là. On prenait le V de télévision, le U de Fleurs & Verdures, le Z de Cinzano. Et on construisait soi-même son message." (TA, 109) And no matter where one chooses to look, the words, the signs are always there—"étranges, beaux, violents... disposés comme des pièges." (TA, 130)

Sur les murs des stations-service, au-dessus des bars, au centre des jardins, sur la plage, et même dans le ciel, flottant sur la longue banderole accrochée à l'avion:

CASTROL
CASTROL
CASTROL
Hot Dog Hot Dog Hot Dog
SOLEX
The game which Chancelade plays with these words is a habit. Without being able to stop himself, he pronounces them in the back of his throat, completely overcome by their power and tenacity. "Il les chantait, il les hurlait sans répit, KELVINATOR, disparaissant au fond de chacun d'eux, REMINGTON, avalé par les syllabes, HONDA, épuisé, incapable d'oublier, SALEM, incapable de fermer les yeux et d'éteindre sa voix." (TA, 131) But as Chancelade grows older, he loses the ability to order his own existence by means of the signs, "des espèces de mots qui indiquaient quelque chose":

CIGARETTES--------
BONBONS -------------
JOURNAL -------------
{--------------CAFE

(TA, 211)

The signs have become meaningless, devoid of "message."

Jeune Homme Hogan's "adventures" bring him also into close contact with the world of technological signs and codes: the airport's digital clock with its small shutters flipping over regularly to tell the correct time ("15 05 15 06 15 07 15 08 15 09 15 10 15 11"—LF, 10) and the ads with which the world traveler is confronted in every airport, train station, or bus depot:

Robt BURNS
Cigarillos
If it's not a Robt BURNS it's not THE cigarillo

( LF, 11) And on one of Hogan's walks through the city streets, he even imagines a surrealistic conversation taking place among all the words which are written on the signs, in the windows, and above the doors of the stores.

On disait, par example:
"Caltex?"
Et la réponse venait tout de suite, en beuglant:
"Toledo! Toledo!"
"Minolta? Yashica Topcon?"
"Kelvinator."
"Alcoa?"
"Breeze. Mars. Flaminaire."
"Martini & Rossi Imported Vermouth."
"M.G."
"Schweppes! Indian Tonic!"
"Eva?"
"100. 10 000. 100 000."
"Pan Am."
"Rank Xerox! Xerox! Xerox!"
"CALOR..."

When Bea B. first enters the department store, she finds herself in the cosmetics section, "une zone pleine de parfums écoeurants." (G, 50) One of the "portraits" she sees there is painted on "un grand panneau de carton sur lequel étaient dessinés deux yeux immenses, qui vous suivaient au passage. Deux yeux pareils à deux insectes, espèces de chenilles aux couleurs d'arc-en-ciel, magiques, grands cercles bleu-vert bordés d'une frange de poils noirs, qui flottaient au centre du carton blanc." (G, 50) And underneath the portrait, its "title":

Les petites rides
Qui en disent long
Prévenez-les
Combattiez-les
Avec Skin Dew

RUBINSTEIN (G, 50)

As Bea wanders through the warring landscape of her city, she, like her Leclézian cousins, is virtually attacked by the words around her, "des mots qui explosaient à pleine puissance, qui frappaient à grands coups, qui poussaient des exclamations, qui insultaient, balafraient, poignardaient sans cesse." (G, 148) Bea continues walking, attempting to read the words, to make them "lisible" to herself:

Les mots: STOP-BUS-JUNIOR-NON-PARKING
Les mots: MONTE CARLO
CANNES ----------------------VINTIMILLE
...COMPAGNIE GÉNÉRALE DU GAZ
ET DE L'ÉLECTRICITÉ
Elle les voyait s'allumer et s'éteindre au sommet des échafaudages, ou bien installer dans la ville leurs lettres grandes comme des arcs de triomphe. Tout était écrit, mais il fallait savoir lire.... KAZAKH-Stan

EAGLE PASS POLICE
Nobody
Malikah'orrija O.A.
BICMAN

Et les mots devenaient ivres, ils jetaient vers l'espace leurs rayons, ils éclairaient comme des étoiles, ils faisaient des bruits, ils respiraient. (G, 148-9)

The words of advertising, of "nomination," are at base killers. "Ils jaillissent du fond des vitrines, avec leurs éclairs bleuâtres, BRANDT, Chemical Co., WINSTON, SALEM, Frill, Airbourne, UNITED FRUIT." (G, 195) The words have a
living presence, too, as Bea B. imagines them lined up in the crowded supermarket aisles, all crying out their names simultaneously:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifebuoy</td>
<td>Paic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmolive</td>
<td>Pax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguard</td>
<td>Sumil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lux</td>
<td>Breeze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cologne</td>
<td>Tide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GL</td>
<td>Laden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogne</td>
<td>Persil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajax</td>
<td>Martens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbs</td>
<td>Danone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colgate</td>
<td>Leon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vademecum</td>
<td>Miam-miam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentol NH 4</td>
<td>Balkan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolynos Ice Blue</td>
<td>Gervais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Diamair</td>
<td>Pykovsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanogyl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dolce Finish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isinis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Majorque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saskia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aryun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O.B.A.O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gerbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bafix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le Bourget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sup'hose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top Liberté</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Naturally within the world of Hyperpolis, symbol of modern advertising, the words become even more important.

Le Clézio warns us of the dangers which await Tranquilité inside the giant store:

```
J'ai entendu les voix douces des femmes...
qui répètent inlassablement dans l'ombre....
des mots magiques: kool kool kool kool....
J'ai vu les visages impassibles des jeunes femmes immobiles sur les pages des journaux,
sur les murs, sur les plafonds, sur les ailes des avions, sur les écrans de cinéma, sur les nuages. Les tatouages sur les mains des hommes, les bouches ouvertes des enfants à crème.
```

(GS, 30)

Yet it is difficult to avoid the world of things and its "mountains" of ice cream, fruit, and meat within the supermarket. There are containers of every size, shape, and color; but the real deception is that inside the beautiful
container there is nothing. The entire concept of advertising as described by Le Clézio thus resembles a horrible conspiracy:


There has never before been such power, Le Clézio tells us, or so much war. The game-plan is simple: all the Simple Simon followers will be seduced into slavery by their own greed for things: "Ici est un moteur immense, où chaque engrenage, chaque bielle bouge selon le plan précis.... Les forces de la beauté et du désir traversent la masse en traçant les sillons." (GS, 30) Man has become a marionette which reacts only to the string-pulling of the tyrannical "Maîtres du langage." The basic concept of advertising is seduction through the senses, to direct the consumer's natural taste toward the "correct" desired object. "Les mains étrangères sont entrées dans ma gorge, dans mes yeux et mes oreilles. Les peaux étrangères ont adhééré à ma peau comme du polyamide qui brûle. Les mots étrangers sont entrés dans mon cerveau." (GS, 30)

Tranquilité, as she plays a solitary and frantic game of Follow the Leader on her way to the Information Booth,
hears the loudspeaker:


And later she is seduced by the interiorized "femmes électriques" within her own mind who whisper to her sensuously:

...Jeunesse...Beauté...Votre teint éclatant...
Votre peau...Vinyl votre deuxième peau...Les couleurs diaboliques...Les seins...Les mains douces, douces...Crèmes...Les collants...L'eau pure...Là, la douceur...La musique...Achetez...
Fermez vos yeux...Laissez-vous prendre...
Seduction...Parfum...Les couleurs froides...Les couleurs chaudes...Les couleurs qui brûlent...Beauté...Jeunesse...Beauté. (GS, 60)

Tranquilité arrives at the center, the information kiosque, yet she loses in her struggle against the seductive power of the things and the words which surround her.

When Tranquilité's friend attempts one night to drive her car through "une zone pleine d'écritures," she plays what Le Clézio suggests is one of the constant game patterns of the seventies.

The city is as brightly lit as it would be in daytime because of the hundreds of streetlamps, neon signs, car headlights, and metallic reflecting signs. The cars themselves are frightening to Tranquilité's friend, for they resemble monsters of steel and are for her "les signes apparents de la violence." (GS, 84) The game's object is to drive from the center of town to Hyperpolis where Tranquilité is waiting. But it is not only the other automobiles which are
obstacles for Tranquilité's friend; it is the constant barrage of words which causes her both panic and "émERVEillement." (GS, 85) The letters of the words are "lettres de feu" (GS, 85) which resemble beautiful butterflies attracted to the car by its shimmering headlights. The letters then become "une pluie brûlante" (GS, 86) and Tranquilité's friend can no longer see the sky or houses or people's faces. The rain is like hot acid, burning into the car's metallic surface, blinding the pedestrians "qui n'avaient pas de parapluie" (GS, 86) and seemingly made "pour violer, tuer, ronger." (GS, 87)

Tranquilité's friend recognizes some of the flying letters but some of them ("qui n'appartenaient à aucune écriture au monde"—GS, 86) are completely alien to her. She decides that her strategy should be to see some letters and really recognize them, and in this way the obstacle to her movement will be overcome. She sees a huge red "S" suspended in the air which immediately explodes into millions of tiny letters; she sees a long line of black consonants slowly "walking" across the street in single file. Everything becomes "sign" "dont le texte se métamorphosait sans cesse." (GS, 89) Tranquilité's friend feels overcome by all this:

On voulait parler, avancer, parler, mais rien à faire. On voulait penser, penser, penser, et les cris des lettres et les lumières filantes emplissaient le cerveau... (GS, 90)
She makes a valiant last-ditch effort to "order" the signs:

Elle regarda les lettres, et elle voulut lire à haute voix. Pendant quelques secondes, elle parvint à maintenir les lettres ensemble. Dans la rue noire, on lisait donc:

BAT. WINSTON. REST. GUITAR. RIZZOLI. AIR-BORNE.
Puis: K.I.N.G.S.I.Z.E.
S SC SCH SCHW SCHWE SCHWEP SCHWEPP
SCHWEPPE SCHWEPPES
ES SOS TAN DARD MOTO ROIL
--EL--KSA--TAT--OOZ--RM--LAC
TEL TEL TEL TEL" (GS, 90)

But when Tranquilité's friend blinks just once, everything explodes into a fantastic melange of typed symbols (see GS, 90). The car continues to move forward, "et le réseau des lettres, des flèches et des points s'élargissait sans cesse, et les craquements, les cris et les couinements pleuvaient avec violence." (GS, 91) Tranquilité's friend makes a great effort to follow the path of words, but everything moves at such speed that it becomes impossible for her to keep up. The only solution left is to shut off the motor and give in. When the words enter her, she becomes "un morceau de rue, comme le reste." (GS, 92) But then at last "elle n'eut pas de mal à écrire un poème, sur une feuille de papier, pour raconter cette histoire à son amie." (GS, 92) Tranquilité's friend thus turns the game defeat into a new game--the game of écriture.

On a level of equal importance with the signs of mass communication (the telephones, tape recorder, and "signs" within the urban landscape sketched by Le Clézio) is the
game pattern provided by the area of transportation and the author's fascination with automobiles and buses, planes, and subways. Since the dominant lifestyle of the era Le Clézio is writing about is urbanism in a mass-oriented culture, the super highways and luxury automobiles or the vast, city-like airports with brightly-lit corridors echoing with impersonal loudspeaker voices serve as a perfect environment to illustrate the disparity between the Leclézian protagonist's individualism and this urban lifestyle—which, if he is to play the game as his culture would have him play it, would effectively rob him of his "self." The greatest threat which the telephones, tape recorders, and neon signs of urbanism pose to Adam Pollo, François Besson, and Chancelade is its demand for conformity with the game patterns of human relationships (in family ties, love, or friendship) and for respect for its cultural values.

As we have seen, the mass advertising, the veritable flood of words surrounding the inhabitants of the Leclézian world, provide them with a common heritage: they learn to think and feel as they have been told to feel. Within the Leclézian fictional world, we merely see a French version of Marshall McLuhan's descriptions of modern American culture:

Quand ils avaient mal, ils allaient chez le dentiste, quand ils avaient envie de détester, ils regardaient un match à la télévision, ils pensaient à Hitler ou à Westmoreland, et quand ils avaient envie d'aimer, ils pensaient à Gary Cooper ou à Barbara Steele. (G, 168)
The automobile and the airplane as man's playthings appear to Le Clézio as machines of war, threatening constantly to overturn the relationship \( \frac{\text{Man}}{\text{Machine}} \) into \( \frac{\text{Machine}}{\text{Man}} \).

For Jeune Homme Hogan, the city is no longer truly man's domain; the automobiles have taken possession:

...on ne voyait pas d'hommes, ni d'oiseaux, ni d'arbres. On ne voyait que des rues, des couloirs d'asphalte gris où les automobiles passaient à 100 kilomètres à l'heure. (LF, 222)

The cars have the power to eliminate anyone who does not conform to the socially accepted game patterns (ie., man builds car, buys car, drives car, discards car). Now it is the car which destroys the man after having used him:

Les voitures avaient gagné leur guerre...
Elles étaient là, sur le pays qu'elles avaient conquis avec leur cuirasses d'acier et leur roues de caoutchouc. Elles passaient entre les maisons, par milliers, en faisant leurs bruits de grognement. Elles menaçaient: J. Hombre Hogan longeait les trottoirs en les regardant; il savait bien ce qu'elles voulaient. Elles voulaient le tuer. Un jour, sans doute, elles ne le rateraient pas. (LF, 222-3)

Death and injury in an automobile accident is a very real danger in modern society; and this picture of mechanized warfare suggests that the car's mastery over man is equally as dangerous as an auto crash, indeed an even greater threat to an individual's sense of identity or his independence.

Leclézian protagonists count cars, identify make and model, jump away from them to avoid being hit. The automobile, the bus, all wheeled vehicles, become the enemy--
the competitor in his game of survival in the socio-cultural environment of the sixties.

Airports and airplanes, too, are used by Le Clézio to suggest game motifs within the socio-cultural dimension of his fictional universe. Just as the Leclézian "walkers" ramble on and on through the labyrinthine gameboard of the city streets in search of a center, so Bea B. travels the pattern of labyrinths in airport runways and subways.

Bea begins her airport game, a confrontation with modern civilization, watching the pattern of blue lights which outline the gameboard for her:

La jeune fille regarda avec stupeur les couloirs lumineux dessinés sur le sol, et soudain elle comprit que c'était le plan de la guerre. Dans le bitume on avait vissé les ampoules électriques, tracent les chemins du labyrinthe: c'était impossible d'y échapper. (G, 183)

Accordingly, Bea enters the labyrinth and meets the huge planes:

En bas de la tour, elle vit une porte sur laquelle était écrit: ACCES INTERDIT
De l'autre côté de la porte, l'immense piste de goudron s'étendit, libre...Elle se mit à courir de toutes ses forces sur le sol, luttant contre le vent. (G, 183)

Bea finally reaches the runway just as an oncoming plane is ready to take off. The direct meeting between Bea and this enormous symbol of modern civilization is described by Le Clézio with a sexual vocabulary:
Bea B. and the plane are drawn together almost without a choice on her part. She has been pulled into the violent game through her fascination with the machine.

The labyrinth both fascinates her and renders her powerless. Kathleen Reish has noted that this encounter between Bea B. and the giant airplane can be seen as Le Clézio's depiction of the revelation of Bea's human condition. The "Accès Interdit" sign posted above the door is both a warning and a statement of fact; and through it Le Clézio signals the dangers present in modern civilization to an individual's sense of identity.

The labyrinth of the airport repeats itself in the labyrinth symbolized by the huge Métro map in the subway station—with its tiny lights which trace various routes for the traveler, Bea B. The lights form a labyrinth, and the labyrinth suggests war:

Les fils électriques étaient prêts, tout à fait prêts; ils traçaient le plan de la guerre, ils montraient les mouvements des troupes brutales
Once again there is danger for Bea as she begins to play the game. She enters the subway station and seems to lose herself as she merges with an anonymous group of passengers. She sees the grotesque billboards and is intrigued by the possibility of exploring the underground corridors of the subway: "C'est comme cela qu'on disparaît. Loin sous la terre, enseveli sous les tonnes de rochers et de boue, perdu dans le dédale inconnu, on n'a plus de nom, plus de pensée ni d'âme, plus rien." (G, 282) If she could escape from the ugly reality of the city and the attendant responsibility of existence, she could perhaps win. Her descent into the subway then does carry her always further from reality:

So Bea does manage to disappear from the surface world of reality, but her underground destination remains unclear to the reader. Le Clézio ends his novel leaving her underground:

Le train rapide dévale les couloirs...Il emporte ses séries de fenêtres jaunes à l'intérieur de la terre, il tournoie sur lui-même, il fait de grands cercles...il cherche, mais il ne trouvera jamais de sortie. (G, 282-3)
This ending would seem to suggest that for modern man, the winning of the game of existence within the socio-cultural dimension is an impossibility. Man is dissatisfied with his existence and would most probably like to escape from it (as Bea B.'s subway adventure suggests), but if he does retreat and refuses thereby to play any longer, he becomes anonymous and "self"-less.

The problems encountered by the Leclézian protagonists as they try to structure their existence within the socio-cultural dimensions of play illustrate the broad scope of Le Clézio's central metaphor, la guerre. War is one of the corrupted forms of play within Caillois' typology, and for Le Clézio it signifies the struggle of an alienated individual against an anonymous urbanized consumer culture. On a deeper level, war even signifies man's resistance to his own mortality: "La guerre, c'est cela même: l'acte de naître." (G, 15) The war metaphor refers to all of concrete reality ("...[le mal] n'est plus un état d'âme. Il est IMMENSEMENT EXTÉRIEUR"--G, 14); alienation for modern man involved in playing his life games means flashing neon signs, plastic, "SCHWEPPES," and "DOUGLAS SUPER DC 8-63."

Television has become a dangerous toy which dehumanizes man (for Adam Pollo the sight of a store window full of televisions all with the same picture on their screens is horrifying: "Ils avaient tous l'air terriblement humain..." --PV, 190), and so too the juke box and the discothèque
have evolved into agents of war:

chacque fois que la musique commençait à sortir de la machine, on oubliait tout. C'étaient des chansons de guerre, c'est cela, elles avaient toutes des rythmes pour tuer, ou pour être sauvage. (G, 41)

When Bea and Monsieur X go to a bar where mechanized music blares from a jukebox, they are "beaten."

On était muets. On n'avait plus rien à dire. La machine pensait pour vous... c'était elle qui avait toute la pensée. Rien que des circuits de fils, des lampes à iode... Tout le monde dans le bar était comme ça: assis sur la chaise, devant la table, les yeux en train de voir le rectangle blanc de la fenêtre, et la machine envoyait durement ses ondes dans les cerveaux, animant petit à petit tous les rotors, emballant progressivement les hélices sous les coups alternés du courant électrique, et C'ÉTAIT LA PENSÉE. (G, 42)

War is everywhere.

In Le Clézio's vision of modern urbanized society, each aspect of the modern world becomes a competitor vis à vis the protagonist, and by extension, an enemy: "Tueurs, tueurs, tueurs, tous tueurs, les murs, les plâtres lisses, les plaques d'or cru où grincent les ongles." (G, 223)

War is situated within the urban maze itself: "Le peuple stupide ... croyait que la guerre était étrangère ... mais ils vivaient dans la guerre ... au centre même du massacre ..." (G, 223) Man has become dehumanized through the toys which he himself has created.

Peace, therefore, in the Leclézian universe is always a temporary lull, and the protagonist must ever be ready for a new onslaught:
La paix faite ainsi de conversations entre étrangers, de pourboires et de bouts de soirées connectés sans rime ni raison, pouvait facilement se métamorphoser en hostilités, en pain rassis, en petits morceaux de terreur dans la nuit, et puis, tout à coup, en guerre, en langage secret, mots de passe, plus de pain, et, chronique des explosions, des coups de feu, du sang, des fumées noires. (PV, 41)

Within the socio-cultural dimension of play, the Leclé-

zian hero still plays a losing game:

Être conscient, alors, c'était être dans l'apparence, seulement dans l'apparence. C'était un jeu assez futile au fond, un jeu rien que pour la pensée et les mots du langage....Un jour on découvre des labyrinthes derrière les plans des villes, que l'on suit comme les autres, en mettant ses pas sur les pas des autres. On croyait ne jamais être dupe. On croyait être à l'abri. Mais c'était faux. On était avec les autres, on suivait les mêmes rails, on avançait, on allait continuellement du point x au point y, et retour. (GS, 64-5)
NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1 Reish, op. cit., p. 81.

2 Cortázar, Hopscotch, p. 441.

3 Cf. the important role of the figure-8 (or $ \infty $ ) in Robbe-Grillet's Le Voyeur.

4 Lhoste, op. cit., p. 84.


6 Reish, op. cit., p. 115.

7 Ibid., p. 142.
CHAPTER VI

LECLÉZIAN GAME AND PLAY: THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION

I am not even sure that I play my games for you at all. I think I would play them if I were the last man alive. If I am in any way your benefactor, the benefaction is an accident. I play the games that let me write poems because I find that writing the poem is a better way of living than not writing it. Because I am happiest when I find myself winning a hard game with myself.

---John Ciardi, "Adam and Eve and the Third Son"

We have now explored the psychological, ontological, and socio-cultural dimensions of play in the Leclézian fictional world, establishing successively the Leclézian protagonist's play motivation, principal game, and the locale and "équipement" used by him to establish order in defining himself and his world. In this chapter, however, we move beyond the fictional universe of Adam Pollo, François Besson, Chancelade, Bea B., and Bogo le Muet to the world of their creator—to the aesthetic dimension of play within the authorial universe of J.M.C. Le Clézio himself. We shall investigate three areas: Le Clézio's view of the role of the artist
and the resultant conceptions of the artist-player, the technical playfulness by which he carries through the gameplay motifs, and finally, the role played by the reader in the Leclèzian literary games.

A significant omission from our discussion of the psychological dimensions of play was an appraisal of the theories of Sigmund Freud concerning play. Yet since Freud's ideas on play are closely linked to his ideas on the characteristics of the artist, it seems therefore more logical to present Freud within the aesthetic dimension.

Freud was one of the first to see that understanding the play of children gives one a valuable clue to the proper understanding of the creative "play" of the artist.

In "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," Freud shows the play-function of a child's daydreams. Since the child plays because he wishes to be grown up (in other words, the master of the situation), in his fantasies or day-dreams, the child envisions himself as the hero, the master, the champion. Freud later proved in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, that if the child plays because he has a desire to fulfill an unsatisfied wish for bodily pleasure, then in his daydreams he can fulfill these same desires in another way.

According to Freud, the poet, novelist, or dramatist does the same thing as the child does at play. He creates a world in his imagination. Like the child's play-world, the world of the artist is characterized not by its lack of
seriousness but by its necessary lack of exact correspondence to external reality. The only difference which Freud sees between the daydreaming child and the artist is that the artist displays his fantasizings to others while the child hides his. Freud says that the reason for this is that even if the child were to tell his daydreams, we would not receive the pleasures that the artist's imaginings afford. In Freud's words:

How the writer accomplishes this is his innermost secret; the essential ars poetica lies in the technique by which our feeling of repulsion is overcome, and this has certainly to do with those barriers erected between every individual being and all others. We can guess at two methods used in this technique. The writer softens the egotistical character of the day-dream by changes and disguises, and, he bribes us by the offer of a purely formal, that is, aesthetic, pleasure in the presentation of his phantasies. The increment of pleasure which is offered us in order to release yet greater pleasure arising from deeper sources in the mind is called an "incitement premium" or technically, "fore-pleasure." I am of the opinion that all the aesthetic pleasure we gain from the works of imaginative writers is of the same type as this "fore-pleasure," and that the true enjoyment of literature proceeds from the release of tensions in our minds.

For J.M.G. Le Clézio the artist is essentially an explorer, who through his fictional heroes explores the question of literary reality, its subjective perception and objective existence. As he says of his own role: "J'essaie
Le Clézio has not been completely silent concerning his own personal ideas about the role of the artist, and it would seem proper that we now examine what he has written on the subject. Two sources are probably the clearest: one, the section of L'Extase matérielle entitled, most appropriately, "Écrire," and the other, the seven sections of Le Livre des fuites entitled "Autocritique."

One of the first things we must do, especially in a study based on the tactics of game-playing in literature, is to set up in front of us the warning Le Clézio himself uses in his final "Autocritique":

CRITIQUE DE L'AUTOCRITIQUE
Et puis, que dire de l'écrivain qui ment en écrivant qu'il ment? (LF, 270)

There is always before us the problem which, for want of a better word, we call "sincerity" in an author. An author who uses, as Le Clézio does, an abundance of play words and play ideas, an author who appears to be having a good time with his writing, seems somehow to be "putting us on"—even if the ultimate "message" he imparts (in the case of Le Clézio, the insanity of modern technology, the frightening dominance of machine over man, and the failure of communication in the post-World War II era) is only too serious. There is, of course, no way to prove—or disprove—that Le Clézio is not a sincere writer. Perhaps we are best served if we keep in
mind the history and origin of the word "play" and its original unity of the serious-comic aspects. Le Clézio could very well be the Spoudogeloiois-Man of the twentieth century.

In "Écrire," Le Clézio begins by stating a problem common to all writers: "Écrire, ça doit sûrement servir à quelque chose. Mais à quoi?" (EM, 73) He describes his love for words, "ces petits signes tarabiscotés," and the almost physical pleasure he feels in working with them. He is very much like a child with a favorite set of building blocks, each block dear to him and the infinite possibilities of imaginative structures to erect an added attraction.

Je les aime bien, ces armées de boucles et de pointillés. Quelque chose de moi vit en eux. Même s'ils n'ont pas de perfection, même s'ils ne communiquent pas vraiment, je les sens qui tirent vers moi la force de la réalité....Ils me plaisent, et c'est avec plaisir que je me laisse tromper par le rythme de leur marche, que j'abandonne tout espoir de les comprendre un jour. (EM, 73)

It is irrelevant to Le Clézio whether or not the stories the words form are true or false ("Ça m'est égal. Ce n'est pas pour ça que je les écoute.") (EM, 73); it is in the act of writing alone that Le Clézio finds an aesthetic measuring stick—not in the "truth" or "non-truth" of his finished product. The joy in creation, the free movement, is one of the main characteristics of the aesthetic dimension of Leclézian play.

If writing is to serve some purpose, Le Clézio continues, it must be only to serve as a witness ("témoigner"),
"à laisser ses souvenirs inscrits, à déposer doucement, sans
en avoir l'air sa grappe d'oeufs qui fermeront." (Em, 73)
Yet the writer's "mission" is not to find ultimate causes,
and we sense that Le Clézio is not one to attempt the for-
mulation of rigid "since-then" arguments. If writing serves
a purpose, it is "non pas à expliquer, parce qu'il n'y a
peut-être rien à expliquer; mais à dérouler parallèlement."
(EM, 73) The job of a writer is "simply" that of a story-
teller:

L'écrivain est un faiseur de paraboles.
Son univers ne naît pas de l'illusion
de la réalité, mais de la réalité de la
fiction. Il avance ainsi, splendidement
aveugle, par à-coups, par duperies, par
mensonges, par minuscules complaisances.
Ce qu'il crée n'est pas créé pour toujours.
Ça doit avoir la joie et la douleur des
choses mortelles. Ça doit avoir la puis-
sance de l'imperfection. Et ça doit être
doux à écouter, doux et émouvant comme une
aventure imaginée. (EM, 73)

In Le Livre des fuites, his "roman d'aventures,"
Le Clézio employs a loose episodic structure, interspersing
pages of what he terms "Autocritique" amid the narrative por-
tions of the novel which describe Jeune Homme Hogan's global
travels. He is continually posing the question: Why do I
go on doing this? Why do I write? With his penchant for
capturing reality à l'état brut, he tells us the "facts"
about his writing. We learn that he uses large white paper,
21 by 27, that he writes 76 or 77 lines per page, 16 words
per line, for a grand total of 1216 words per page. Why
write though? "Cela n'a aucun sens, et n'intéresse personne." (LF, 41) The final answer he gives, however, is significant:

La littérature, en fin de compte, ça doit être quelque chose comme l'ultime possibilité de jeu offerte, la dernière chance de fuite. (LF, 41)

The choice of the word "jeu" is not unique in Le Clezio's critical writing about writing. The vocabulary of play and game is used again and again: "Romans comme on joue aux billes," (LF, 56), "Écrire pour se relire ... les jeux de mots, jeux de mémoire" (LF, 114), "C'est qu'il s'agit bien d'un jeu" (LF, 237), "Comédien! ... Il est temps que ton jeu se finisse" (LF, 264), "J'ai joué à mon rôle, comme les autres." (LF, 266) The very essence of play and game, as we have seen through the eyes of philosophers and social scientists, historians and literary critics, makes the idea of play and writing synonymous for Le Clezio. Since writing a novel involves "hiding" oneself behind words or names, the creator is free to choose any means he wishes, even, if he wants, "faire un dessin sur un bout de papier, ou n'écrire qu'un seul mot, à l'encre rouge:

CIGARETTE" (LF, 42)

To Le Clezio the printed red letters of "cigarette" are ultimately the same thing as any other words one could have chosen to write. There are always choices. One could do nothing and remain silent. One could watch a green bean
plant growing in a tin can. Or, as Le Clézio tells us, "J'aurais pu me laver les dents et cracher. C'aurait été la même chose." And then this fascinating piece of logic followed by two Leclézian questions:

N'est-ce pas extraordinaire, cela? 
Pourquoi dans la brosse à dents odorante, il y a le roman, le poème, la phrase déjà prête, tremblante, oscillant au bord de la raison, prête à déboucher à chaque seconde; puisque dans le crayon à bille qui écrit il y a le roman: Pourquoi pas dans le livre, alors? Et pourquoi dans le livre n'y aurait-il pas aussi le verre d'eau, la brosse à dents, le timbre-poste et le crayon à bille? (LF, 42)

Le Clézio seems well aware of the impossible position the author places himself in when he attempts to answer the question "Pourquoi écrire?" Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Joyce, Gide, and Proust, are all classed by him as "menteurs." "Tous, aimant la souffrance, sachant en parler, heureux d'être eux-mêmes." (LF, 55) The apologist's "J'écris pour les générations futures" is ridiculed by Le Clézio ("Quelle farce!"). He also deplores the creation or invention of "reality." Why have some authors decided to write? Not to escape, not to amuse, but simply "pour sauver sa peau, sa médiocre petite vie, et tant pis pour les autres." (LF, 55) Any mask is possible for the author; any disguise is accepted by the reading public: "Je fais de l'analyse," "je fais de la psychopathologie," "[je fais] l'étude de la passion" (LF, 55). Then the catalog explodes:
Romans qui marmonnent, romans qui radotent comme de vieilles femmes. Romans sans aventure, écrits par des gens sans histoires! Romans comme on joue aux billes...
Romans écrits à la première personne, mais l'auteur est très loin, caché par ses murailles de papier. Romans psychologiques, romans d'amour, romans de cape et d'épée, romans réalistes, romans-fleuves, romans satiriques, romans policiers, romans d'anticipation, nouveaux romans, romans-poèmes, romans-essais, romans-romans!

Yet how can the writer not write for himself or not try in some small way (even, indeed, through his refusal to try) to put himself into some kind of generic or stylistic pigeonhole? As Le Clézio poses the question:

Comment aller dans tous les sens?
Comment effacer ses traces, au fur et à mesure qu'on avance? Quel masque prendre, quel faux nez, quelle fausse pensée, quelle fausse vie? Tromper les autres, c'est se connaître soi-même, & vice versa.

In other words, how should the writer "play the game?"

In a half-serious, half-mocking voice, Le Clézio announces near the end of Le Livre des fuites, that he has decided to follow five new writing "guidelines":

a) Dire tout ce que je pense
b) Renoncer aux mots qui font plaisir
c) Ne pas essayer de tout faire à la fois
   1
   Ne plus avoir peur des noms
e) Changer de marque de crayon à bille.

It is his footnote (a tongue-in-cheek reminder to his readers that he does know and understand the accepted procedure for the writing of "serious" literary criticism) that proves to
be the most interesting. The one exception Le Clezio makes to his new-found resolve not to try to do everything at the same time is the act of trying to say everything at the same time (we are reminded of Adam's famous simultanéité). Literature, especially "fiction," in that case, would become for Le Clézio "l'effort désespéré et permanentement mis en échec pour produire une expression unique." (LF, 191) This effort to produce a unique and original utterance would be "dans le genre d'un cri, peut-être, d'un cri qui contiendrait de façon inexplicable les millions de mots de tous les temps et de tous les lieux." (LF, 191) In opposition to "la parole qui classe," "l'écriture ne chercherait-elle que l'oeuf, le germe." (LF, 191)

The role of actor is a difficult one but one that is forced upon the writer, especially the writer with a "message." "Comédien, encore, comédien celui qui écrit des livres pour convaincre. Qu'y a-t-il aux autres, sinon des chaînes davantage de chaînes?" (LF, 267) The writer is not able to liberate himself through his creations; he can bring nothing back from his imaginary travels through a world of dreams. But perhaps, without even knowing it, this is what he has always desired, "à ne pas apprendre, à ne jamais rien apprendre." (LF, 267)

When Pierre Lhoste asked Le Clézio in a 1969 radio interview what he meant by "la littérature. . . comme l'ultime
possibilité de jeu offerte," Le Clézio answered: "Hm c'est-à-dire que lorsqu'on écrit on ne peut pas être soi-même totalement on est obligé d'accepter tout un tas de compromis donc plutôt que de se suicider eh bien il faut écrire." 

One problem within the world of literary criticism may be seen as the traditional opposition between literature and reality, or, as Kathleen Reish posits the two basic questions: what is the valid object of literary discourse? and, can literature define its own existence without reference to any external measure? Le Clézio is part of the exploring tradition which concerns itself with the examination of the act of writing and the nature of the fictional illusion created by the writer.

The writer defines himself through his writing, and Le Clézio's concept of the writer is an active one. Writing for Le Clézio is essentially an activity of creation and as such an ongoing process. He does not write about reality or the role of literature in the seventies, or the human situation of the writer in society but produces a rather self-conscious writing about writing. There is in Le Clézio's game a systematic build-up and destruction. Reality itself must be destroyed in order to be re-created in the text. So, as Reish points out, the writer for Le Clézio actually writes about nothing. Yet in the act of creation in which the writer puts pen to paper, typed words on manuscript, he gives birth to a textual reality which effectively replaces the
reality destroyed. Writing for Le Clézio makes no claim to be mimetic or even to be self-expressive in nature; what the author does is its own story.5

In the section of "Autocritique" in Le Livre des fuites where Le Clézio examines the different reasons traditionally given for literary endeavor, everything from the desire for self-exploration to a conceit of art for art's sake, he rejects these literary poses as so many "masks" which the writer assumes in order to hide, perhaps from himself and from his audience, the only really valid function of discourse. The kind of writing he really seeks is described in a short parable:

Je dois retrouver un jour la jeune fille qui est comme ça:
LA PROPRIÉTÉ: ELLE VOIT UNE POMME
ET ELLE CROIT QUE LE FRUIT
LUI APPARTIENT DE DROIT
ELLE LE PREND À L'ÉTAL
ET ELLE LE MANGE
SANS PENSER
QUE LE FRUIT A ÉTÉ CULTIVÉ SOIGNÉ ACHETÉ
QU'IL A CÔTÉ DE L'ARGENT
QU'IL EST À VENDRE (LF, 116-7)

For the girl in the parable, no other considerations save desire and satisfaction enter into her view of the world. Possession of the apple determines her right to have it. The act of acquiring a thing endows the object with the proper measure of appropriateness. The writer then, suggests Le Clézio, finds the end, the meaning of his act, in the creative process itself. The girl has not followed the accepted
social standard of property rights; she has not "played the game" correctly. Yet through her own unique game pattern, she has evolved a system in which her play activity is appropriate. The young girl's situation is ideal but impossible, however, and through her Le Clézio suggests that the writer's recreation of reality through the text depends, to a certain extent, on the continuous renewal of the act of writing.

Writing is, then, for Le Clézio, an independent system, an independent game, which contains its own end. Writing for Le Clézio also affirms the reality of event and action. According to Reish:

The writer's task as we judge Le Clézio to view it, does not consist only in the creation of a system, an order of being that is its own measure and justification. In that sense, reality must 'disappear' before the text. For Le Clézio, the writer's task extends further to conferring new existence upon the event and act which passes into his text, through the meaningful organization of this reality.6

Writing is often a process of metaphorical blinding, a destruction of vision which paradoxically precedes the ability to really "see."

A new vision destroys the old reality and creates a new one, only to have it destroyed in turn. The circularity of several of Le Clézio's novels illustrates this well. In Le Déluge the final section of the novel, with its description of the gathering storm clouds in preparation for a
downpour, closely resemble the opening pages; the two sections form a kind of prologue and epilogue to the novel, in which Le Clézio steps outside the fictional frame of François Besson's thirteen-day adventure, to speak to the reader directly about his protagonist's world. This convergence suggests the nature of the task of writing as Le Clézio conceives it, writing in which the text is constantly reaffirmed and regenerated:

...un ordre a été rompu; une accélération, qui sait? une attaque électrique a dissocié les atomes, vers la région extérieure, arrachant des parcelles d'énergie...Mais cette dissociation n'est pas sans limite; aussi loin que le regard en forme de chiffre peut voir, l'objet existe encore...Le monde est décomposable et renaissant à l'infini.... (D, 275)

It is the end of François' story, and the writer is ready to begin again; the adventures of one lifetime are comparable then to the creation of one text:

Voilà, tout est prêt...Pour le voyage vers le pays du blanc et noir...La vie va se dessiner toute seule, au hasard d'une quelconque feuille de papier un peu reche et jaune. Le dessin va s'agrandir, s'agrandir...la tête du crayon à bille cherche encore...Elle remplit, elle remplit...La dernière fenêtre de l'imperfection semble disparaître, et il n'y a plus...que cette immense page écrite, où tous les mots et toutes les lettres se sont fondus, l'oeuvre complète du néant, le beau poème monochrome illisible. (D, 276-7)

The writer is here present at both the birth and death of his text; the writing continues to grow and seems to move forward, but in a sense it remains in the same place. The
itinerary from blank paper to completed work is never accomplished, and Le Clézio suggests in this refusal to conclude his narrative that the text's nature lies in its own structure, and not in any reference to an external measure.

Leclézian protagonists are all in one way or another writers themselves and perhaps in that respect show us some other features of Le Clézio's own writing habits. Adam keeps a yellow notebook in which he writes rambling letters to Michèle, and it is through a reproduction of this "journal" that Le Clézio continues the narrative in Chapter 0, giving us the story line through the eyes of his hero:

Voici comment Adam raconta la suite, plus tard; il la relata soigneusement, écrivant au crayon à bille dans un cahier d'écolier jaune, su lequel il avait inscrit en en-tête, comme pour une lettre, "Ma chère Michèle."

(PV, 162)

In Le Déluge, François Besson is fascinated by the physical act of putting pen to paper (one of his favorite pastimes is to write: "Je suis en train d'écrire que je suis en train d'écrire, etc."—D, 126), and it is in Le Déluge where Le Clézio reproduces the story of "Oradi Noir," complete with grammatical punctuation, and spelling errors, actually written by himself at age nine but attributed here to the young François. Chancelade writes a ballad for his dead lizard and also composes this short-short story, ("Ça aussi, c'était une légende des hommes").
La mer est bleue, il y a des vagues. Le lion est dans la cage. La Panthère est en colère. Le Léopard griffe. L'éléphant a une longue trompe. Le Singe mange des cacahuètes. Le loup est très méchant. L'ours nage dans l'eau.

Jeune Homme Hogan writes a poem to the sun (LF, 92-3) while Bea B. keeps an account of the horrors of her "war" existence in her blue plastic Semainier "Pratic" (G, 28, 54-5, 90-2, 132, 249). She is also a letter-writer and a master storyteller, as in her "Légende de la Première Cigarette" (G, 192), "Le Mythe de la Conduite Intérieure Noire" (G, 193), and "Le Mythe de Monopol" (G, 193-4).

The games of writing or storytelling provide one way in which the Leclézian protagonist attempts to structure his world. That structure remains, of course, problematical for him, yet his very act of writing contributes to solidifying the larger game patterns of the author's world into which he fits. "Il y a un jeu à l'intérieur du jeu plus grand."

(GS, 25)

Within the aesthetic dimension of play in the Leclézian fictional universe, the basic game situation involves both author and reader; for as we have seen, in the Leclézian view of "literature" or as Stephen Heath terms it, "the practice of writing," both reader and author share in the artistic process. For Le Clézio, perhaps, as much as for Valéry, the literary ideal is "finir par savoir ne plus
The discussions in previous sections of this study concerning the importance of Caillois' category of mimicry in play apply with special significance within the realm of aesthetics. The author-reader relationship here involves a game pattern which demands that the members of the reading audience react to, i.e., "play with" the author, as they attempt to read the novel and to "understand" it, or gain something from their reading experience. We shall return later to the question of the "rules" involved in the playing of the game we call "Novel-Writing," but for the moment, let us examine the various roles, or disguises, or "Simon" faces Le Clézio as writer shows us. There are three basic authorial positions: the Storyteller, the Critic, and the Poet-Conjuror. Each "mode" involves the reader in a slightly different game pattern, each mode demanding slightly different reading techniques.

The Storyteller-Le Clézio is the young, not-too-experienced writer, who apologizes to us in the preface to Le Proces-verbal for "les impropriétés et les fautes de frappe qui pourraient se trouver dans mon texte en dépit de mes révisions." (PV, 10) He explains that "J'ai du typographier moi-même mon manuscript et n'ai su le faire qu'en me servant d'un doigt de chaque main." (PV 10) The Storyteller is quite open about explicating his work (at least this is what we are meant to believe) and expresses the hope
that the novel will be understood "dans le sens d'une fiction totale, dont le seul intérêt serait une certaine reper-
cussion (même éphémère) dans l'esprit de celui qui lit."
(PV, 10) This expressed desire that the only value of his novel is in the reader's appreciation of something within it is akin to the "genre de phénomène familier aux amateurs de littérature policière, etc." (PV, 10), and is "ce qu'on pour-
rait appeler à la rigueur le Roman-Jeu, ou le Roman-Puzzle."
(PV, 10) The Storyteller lets us know that what he is try-
ing to do is provisional, that things might fall together, but that then again they might not. He is not making any promises that the "immenses régions gelées" (PV, 9) stretch-
ing out between author and reader can be bridged. Yet there is the possibility that this will happen:

Il y a un moment entre celui qui récite et celui qui écoute, où la créance se précise et prend forme. Ce moment est peut-être celui du roman 'Actif' dont le facteur essentiel serait une sorte d'obligation. Ou le texte intervient avec un rien d'anecdotique et de familier. Ou, comme devant une caricature, comme devant le récit-fleuve, le ciné-roman d'un journal à deux sous, n'importe quelle jeune fille est tenue de pousser son 'ah!' et de remplir de cette façon le vide qu'il y avait jusqu'alors entre les lignes, (PV, 9-10)

The Storyteller in his own way encourages the reader to fill the space between the lines. For him, "écrire et communiquer, c'est être capable de faire croire n'importe quoi à n'importe qui." (PV, 10) The Storyteller knows that he is playing a game and that even though he is serious, he must
not seem so ("Bien entendu, tout ceci n'aurait pas l'air
d'être sérieux, s'il n'y avait d'autres avantages, dont le
moindre n'est pas de soulager le style, de rendre un peu
plus de vivacité au dialogue, d'éviter descriptions pouss-
siéreuses et psychologie rancie"—(PV, 10) if he is to win,
which in this particular game does not necessarily imply
a loss to the reader.

The Storyteller must communicate—and it is with this
self-conscious, sometimes self-deprecating pose that Le Clézio
"plays" with us. But as he reminds us, "...ce n'est que par
une suite continuelle d'indiscrétions que l'on arrive à
ébranler le rempart d'indifférence du public." (PV, 10) It
is the Storyteller-Le Clézio who writes in the epilogue to
Terra amata:

Ce que vous avez lu, ce n'est pas moi qui
l'ai écrit vraiment...Je ne suis qu'un acteur
qui ne sait pas qu'il joue. ...J'ai dit ceci,
puis cela. J'ai écrit épingles, tabac, pas-
sions, souffrir, nylon, graine. Vous avez lu,
fermeture Eclair, toupie, beauté, femme, cig-
arette, nuage....Mais j'ai assez parlé. À
vous de jouer, maintenant. (TA, 243)

The camaraderie, the easygoing persona of the Story-
teller disappears, however, when we begin to play with the
Critic. The Critic is a dual role, for the author uses al-
ternately the mask of Social-Critic and the mask of Self-
Critic. The Social-Critic half of the Critic role manifests
itself in two ways: as an angry, pessimistic Prophet fore-
telling war, death, and destruction in modern technology and
as a fascinated Seer finding eternal beauty and peace in
the same phenomena. It is the angry prophet who tells us
in Les Géants: "Je vais vous dire: libérez-vous! ... Si
vous attendez encore un peu, il va être trop tard." (GS, 15);
it is the prophet who describes the war and the flood; it is
the prophet who speaks through Adam Pollo as he harangues
the crowd on the street: "Nous avons inventé des monstres—
des monstres, oui. Comme ces postes de télévision ou ces
machines à faire les glaces à l'italienne, mais nous sommes
restés dans les limites de notre nature ... .La TV, c'est
nous, hommes. ... Frères, je suis la Télé, et vous êtes la
Télé, et la Télé est en nous." (PV, 192) It is the Seer,
however, who writes in L'Extase matérielle:

La culture n'est pas une fin. La culture est
une nourriture, parmi d'autres, une richesse
malleable qui n'existe qu'à travers l'homme.
L'homme doit se servir d'elle pour se former,
non pour s'oublier. Surtout, il ne doit jamais
perdre de vue que, bien plus important que
l'art et la philosophe, il y a le monde où il
vit. Un monde précis, ingénieux, infini lui
aussi, où chaque seconde qui passe lui apporte
quelque chose, le transforme, le fabrique. Ou
l'angle d'une table a plus de réalité que
l'histoire d'une civilisation, où la rue, avec
ses mouvements, ses visages familiers hostiles,
ses séries de petits drames rapides et burlesques
a mille fois plus de secret de penetrabilité
que l'art qui pourrait l'exprimer. (EX, 32)

Or again in L'Extase matérielle:

Tout est trompe-l'oeil. Tout fuit, tout coule,
tout fond longuement....Les paroles ne disent
rien....Souffrance qui n'est pas une souffrance,
désespoir qui n'a pas de nom. Et pourtant, cela
n'appartient qu'à moi. Cela est ma nature d'homme
vivant, Ma nature que m'a révélée une musique vulgaire d'accordéon, jouée pour personne au fond de la cour. (EM, 58)

The other half of the Critic is the Self-Critic, most obviously present in the sections of *Le Livre des fuites* entitled "Autocritique." The tone of the author as self-critic varies from bitterness at his inability to do what he wants to do to just-for-the-fun-of-it glimpses at the way in which he writes, (e.g., the "plan" of *Le Livre des fuites*, pp. 168-72).

In both his Critic roles, Le Clézio sometimes assumes a superior position to his reader, whereas in his role of Storyteller, he remains, as it were, eye to eye with his audience. He becomes, however, in his third role, that of the Poet-Conjuror, a magician of sorts, assuming a position which demands that we search for him constantly behind the words of the text. His hands jerk the strings of our imagination as he shows us a surrealistic-grotesque vision of billboard France. The Poet-Le Clézio delights in visual surprise (the newspaper mock-up in *Le Procès-verbal*, the "cliché" photographs which accompany *La Guerre*, the collages of advertising and computer data technical jargon in *Les Géants*) and finds great satisfaction in using language (which is also paradoxically, his greatest enemy) to evoke a response in the reader. The descriptions of the magical city of automobiles, the rain of letters and words on Tranquilité's friend's car,
the descriptions of a woman's body, are all written by the Poet. Fantasy and imagination and a childlike love of the world all show themselves here:

Dans la réalité contrefaite, avec les atmosphères mélangées, sur ce plan tracé, parfaitement précis, on ne saurait guère plus dire s'il continue à pleuvoir, ou s'il brûle un soleil de feu. Le moment est venu où le rectangle devient de plus en plus vague, de plus en plus ondoyant; en son centre vivent d'autres rectangles, chacun portant dans ses plis son aventure humaine, ou végétale. Seuls restent les bords, comme découpés à l'emporte-pièce dans le velours moelleux de l'ombre. Avec netteté, enfin, tel un tunnel se dépliant lentement autour de la voiture qui roule, la tache de lumière blanche ouvre sa fenêtre infinie. (D, 46)

Underlying all his works, and in each of his authorial roles, is an exposure of what Le Clézio considers to be fraudulent and stereotyped ways of thinking. This knowledge should make us better able to read and appreciate his novels for what they are. And the realization that we are taking part in a highly intellectual game, a jousting of wits, protects us from falling into checkmate on the first few moves. The involvement in gamesmanship that he demands from us is an essential part of Le Clézio's artistic combination.

How then do we as readers fit into the game? If the author assumes various roles or disguises, are we not also forced to adopt new attitudes as we read him? In general, our reactions to Le Clézio may in turn be divided into three basic Reader roles: the Reader as Accomplice, the Reader as Learner, and the Reader as Victim.
The reader roles which we adopt quite naturally when we read Le Clézio are, for the most part, easy to deal with. As an accomplice, we feel that the author is somehow allowing us to enter into the creative process itself, telling us about his personal preferences, his own writing habits, urging us to participate. A unity of author-creator and reader-creator, or better still, of Author-Storyteller and Reader-Accomplice, is the desired goal. This goal remains, however, unattainable since, if nothing else, the physical bulk of the text (the author's words, the author's chronology, the author's omissions) remains a constant barrier.

The Student Role, which the reader takes on when the author assumes his Critic pose, evolves quite naturally from the reading process itself. We are forced to look again, or in some cases to look for the first time, at the world surrounding us and see the technological games we are playing. We learn, because Le Clézio constantly reminds us, of the power of the machine and the power of the word and gesture and of our common psychological need to escape this power. We are sometimes frightened by the prophet's tone, but we learn from it. To read Le Clézio's descriptions of the myriad surveillance devices within Hyperpolis and then to read transcripts of the U.S. Senate Watergate Committee's hearings is to be forced to rethink our cultural status quo. One has the eerie sense of the interchangeability of lived reality and fictional reality.
Our third reader role is that of Victim, not a pleasant word but descriptive of the poetical, stylistic power of Le Clézio in his role of Poet on the reader. The sheer force of his ability to use words to evoke a chaotic reality which each of us shares with him is almost hypnotic. And through the very element he so often condemns within the narrative of his novels, i.e., the seductive effect of the collage-montage techniques in modern advertising, he often succeeds in seducing us. We often admire him for his imagery, for his free-flowing style, for his visual ingenuity—and accept without question the fond which he presents via seductive forme. To be the Poet-Conjuror for Le Clézio implies an attempt on his part to win over his reader. Le Clézio-Storyteller and Le Clézio-Critic will deny this, but in the end the prime motivating force behind any written text is its "desire" to entrap, to snare the attention of the reader's eyes.

Le Clézio describes the encounter between author and reader as a game:

...J'ai l'impression que la littérature n'est pas faite uniquement par ceux qui écrivent mais aussi par ceux qui lisent. Comme un jeu. Un écrivain bouge un pion sur l'échiquier et les lecteurs bougent d'autres pions. Dans ce jeu, il y a des correspondances entre l'auteur et ses lecteurs et ça, c'est important.⁸

As we have seen, for Le Clézio the writer is not the only creator of the text; the reader, too, participates.
"Qu'importe qu'il y ait eu quelqu'un pour écrire, et quelqu'un pour lire? Au fond, très au fond, ils sont le même, et ils l'ont toujours su." (TA, 10)

In the opening section of Terra amata, Le Clézio develops the notion of the book as object. The possibilities for its usefulness are endless: it may serve to protect its reader from the stares of fellow passengers on a train or in a busy modern airport it may become "une arme, un revolver avec quoi vous pouvez tirer sur toutes ces vitrines si propres et sur toutes ces silhouettes agitées et lointaines." (TA, 9)

This concept of the book as object suggests that Le Clézio means us to accept quite literally the idea of a unity between author and reader. Once the writer finishes his task, he in turn becomes the reader of the book-object. And on the other hand, the reader himself is always the creator of his own text, whether it be the text with which the writer has supplied him or not.

Une femme en bikini passe devant vous, et vous la regardez. Puis vous retournez vers ce qui est écrit, et c'est comme si, au milieu de l'histoire, il y avait vraiment eu cette femme en bikini qui traversait. Ici, il y a écrit "table," et la "miroir," mais ç'aurait aussi bien pu être "nuage" et "camion-citerne." C'est justement ça qui est intéressant dans un livre, ce qui est marqué d'une infinie variété de façons dans le seul signe possible. (TA, 9-10)

The reader then creates his own text by combining elements from the book-object (in this case, Terra amata), with other elements from his existence which happen to catch his
attention during the process of reading. The criterion for the act of writing as well as reading, Kathleen Reish tells us, is the structuring or creative attention of writer and reader.9

In Terra amata's "Epilogue," Le Clézio again addresses the reader who has supposedly just finished his reading of the story of Chancelade's life. When the book has been closed, communication between writer and reader is shut off completely, and they lose their common participation in the creative act:

Dans le parallélépipède blanc et noir, il y aura ce monde fermé, caché, cette espèce de paradis tyrannique du langage, ce qui aura vraiment été la vérité au moins une fois dans l'univers. (TA, 240-1)

The sense of the written text seems only valid in the act of writing itself or in the act of reading itself:

Homère est mort, Dante, Dostoïevski, Pirandello sont morts, et c'est vous qui les avez effacés de la vie à chaque fois...Tous ces romans, tous ces poèmes, tous ces films et tous ces tableaux que vous avez faits sans y penser, en étant simplement vivants, n'ont servi qu'à gommer les autres œuvres qui étaient la chair et le sang de ceux-là. (TA, 241)

Writing becomes a system, a game defined by its function as a point of view or perspective. It is an effective game only if a reader, or player, not only sees a meaningful system in it but in a sense puts the meaning there. Thus the writer does not create simply one text but as many texts as there are readers to give it sense and order.
Le Clézio uses the term "chance" (Callois' alea) to express his conception of how a certain piece of writing comes to life. This term signifies not an easy surrealistic "écriture automatique" approach to the task of writing but rather the inability of a writer to retain control of his text. Once the text passes from the writer to the reader, each re-creates it, and the text thus becomes infinitely renewable. Alea describes the writer's initial form as well as the difference between what he writes in his text and what the reader eventually finds there in his own mind. But the idea of chance represents the creative point of view, the separate acts of writing and reading by which author and reader give structure to the text. Yet "chance" also implies that each text is somehow singular: "Le hasard précis est en marche, et chaque grain descend dans la machine selon un chemin qui n'est qu'à lui." (TA, 243) There is no fixed message between author and reader; the text's existence through the act of giving it meaning and order is its own measure of validity.

Jacques Bersani has noted the importance of the exploratory nature of Le Clézio's prose:

...chacun de ses "écrits" développe, sur deux plans parallèles, le thème unique de la recherche...Récits d'un voyage au pays de la réalité, que double, et avec lequel, d'oeuvre en oeuvre, tend de plus en plus à se confondre, le voyage que le récit lui-même entreprend au pays de l'écriture.10
And Sister Margaretta Black, in her study of the techniques of the contemporary French novel, as we have seen, also emphasizes Le Clézio's desire to "liberalize form and language" in his writing.\textsuperscript{11}

Le Clézio himself situates his work in a literary tradition of what he terms the novel of uncertainty. His writing has no preconceived specific goals, and he claims no universal truth in anything that might be contained within his work: "Je ne prétends pas avancer des vérités définitives, je cherche, c'est tout."\textsuperscript{12} Literature is for Le Clézio a dynamic entity which is a process of truth-seeking rather than the presentation of an established set of "truths." As Kathleen Reish suggests, "art is no longer an esthetic object but rather a type of knowledge, and one which is characterized by a refusal to conclude."\textsuperscript{13}

Just as play activities permit the child to investigate and inquire into the nature of his world, so does the practice of writing allow the artist to follow his vocation in a novel way. In his answer to a survey of contemporary novelists' opinions on the current so-called "crise du roman," Le Clézio immediately rejected the question as invalid:

\textit{Excusez-moi, mais je n'aime pas tellement ce mot de 'crise!' Ça me donne l'impression qu'on envisage la littérature comme une sorte de Wall Street où il y aurait des hauts et des bas. Je n'arrive pas à croire que ça se passe comme ça. La littérature n'est pas libre, elle ne choisit pas.}\textsuperscript{14}
The writer's essential lack of freedom, which Le Clezio notes here and which is analogous to the child's lack of freedom as he moves within the boundaries of his play world, reveals itself first of all, and perhaps most obviously, in the themes of the "subject matter" of the author's work. The influence on the writer of both personal experience and socio-cultural factors have been established by modern perspectives of psychoanalytical and sociological criticism. But implicit in Le Clezio's view that literature cannot choose is a concept of the writer's vocation, of the actual gesture of writing, as a kind of blind imperative. 

As he continues his comment on the "crise du roman," Le Clezio sketches for us the plight of the novelist:

Les gens qui écrivent ne savent pas très bien ce qu'ils font. Ils sont un peu semblables à des sous-marins qui sont seulement guidés par le radar et les signaux-radio. S'il y avait une crise, ça serait bien facile, on saurait ce qu'il faut faire. Mais il n'y a que du délire, de la peur, des doutes.

The results of the fictional inquiry, like the results of a game, are not known a priori, and the writer can only operate hesitatingly, hoping that he is proceeding properly. The writer's refusal to conclude, to posit eternal truths, evolves not only from a philosophical unwillingness to do so but also from real inability to do so. The game of writing, at least at the midpoint of the twentieth century, has not the fixed rules of chess; the writer remains a constant novice.
Kathleen Reish points out that the "blindness" of the literary vocation extends beyond an author's uncertainty as to the nature of his writing to a questioning of the value of writing itself.\textsuperscript{17} This is similar to man's perennial inability to place a positive value on the activities of play and his insistence on questioning the utility of play activity as such. Le Clézio describes his own attitude toward literature in this way: "j'écris parce que j'ai un certain déséquilibre et que l'écriture est un équilibre."\textsuperscript{18} In other words, a certain personal sense of uneasiness is alleviated by the act of writing. Yet this equilibrium brought about by writing is only temporary, "... c'est un équilibre dangereux, parce que plus on cherche, plus on se détruit."\textsuperscript{19} The game of writing, then, for Le Clézio, entails two components: the imperative to write and the essential character of the act as self-destructive.

In a sense then, writing as a game tends to be a never-ending one, tending to play itself on into oblivion; but this tendency to be self-destructive is innate in its very existence. As Reish tells us, "The tension of the paradox being/not-being, presence/absence, constitutes the dynamic of the literary act."\textsuperscript{20} And as Le Clézio says in reference to the supposed "faltering" of the novel: "Il faudra bien que la littérature fasse semblant de mourir elle aussi, pour apprendre à vivre."\textsuperscript{21} This regenerative quality of literature
can refer not only to the replacement of one literary style or school by another but also to the very essence of all writing, which defines itself by virtue of what is "not yet."\textsuperscript{22}

If we situate Le Clézio within the aesthetic realm of contemporary French writing, we must always remember two basic characteristics. First of all, he is a writer conscious of the problems inherent in the act of writing; and, secondly, he is aware that the act of writing involves a large element of chance regarding both the nature of the communication established between writer and reader and its very viability.

The Rules of the Game

Much has been written in the realm of literary criticism over the last twenty-odd years about the changing rules of the "novel" game. Whether the literary critic be for or against such changes, he has been obligated at least to signal their arrival. Coherent chronology, unified "characters," and logical plot sequences have been replaced by various "game" methodologies—simultaneous chronology, spatial configurations, riddles or puzzles. Yet for most authors, the game's object remains the same—artistic creation—and the obstacle to this goal—language, the written word—is still ever-present. The primary objective of the novel—
writing game for Le Clézio is, as we have shown, the communication between author and reader in a moment of "perfect" creation.

Since inspiration comes to the writer in the form of language, his text will therefore be a linguistic object. Inspiration, however, is apt to be chaotic and fragmentary whereas the finished text (according to most rules) must be in some way structured, ordered, and continuous. Obviously the writer under the old rules of the novel game was forced to mediate between his unwieldy, given linguistic material and the "language of writing." For a writer with definite poetic tendencies, like Le Clézio, we find that the chaos and fragmentation of inspiration has now simply been accepted as the primary new "rule." His obvious delight in word games, his imaginative visual additions to his texts—advertising collages, drawings, cross-outs, blank spaces—are all indicative of a freedom and openness to play for the sake of playing. If we accept the argument that "transformations in style in the case of a great art form like the novel . . . are not mere external changes but extend deep down into the life of the artist and his period," then we may conclude that our portrayal of Le Clézio as an artist primarily engaged in writing as a form of "play," and through his writing showing the importance of game and play in society, is an accurate one. For man in the second half of the twentieth century, play has become a dominant mode by which he tries
to understand existence in the world. The period of the sixties and seventies has been marked by a new collective feeling for play and game, and Le Clézio as a writer has merely incorporated this playful mode into the world of the novel.

Old and new rules, in the end they are all just words. Metaphorically the difference is between the labyrinth and the mandala: one is a trap that has already closed (but you don't know it); the other is a passageway that is constantly opening (but you can't be certain).

Contemporary art has been forced to involve itself in the direct experiencing of being, the discovery of the "self" in space and in motion, in almost precisely the way an infant learns to know who it is. Art then becomes quite literally an expression of the collective soul of its time: "The forms of imagination that any epoch produces are an ultimate datum on what that epoch is." If we can identify the game patterns within the Leclézian fictional world, then looking at those forms, we have to say that this is truly what our age is, that this is what we truly are.
NOTES TO CHAPTER VI


2 Lhoste, op. cit., p. 16.

3 Ibid., p. 17.

4 Reish, op. cit., p. 217.

5 Ibid., p. 218.

6 Ibid., p. 226.


8 Lhoste, op. cit., p. 51.

9 Reish, op. cit., p. 251.


11 Black, op. cit., p. 224.


13 Reish, op. cit., p. 17.


15 Reish, op. cit., p. 18.


19. Ibid.


22. Reish, op. cit., p. 20.


24. Ibid.
CONCLUSION

Au jeu auquel je joue, bien qu'on finisse gagnant ou perdant, il n'y a pas de règle et je gagnerai ou perdrai sans qu'aucune martingale puisse me permettre de forcer la chance et sans même que je sache si je gagne ou non.

----Michel Leiris, Fibrilles

It has been our purpose in this study of the novels of Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio to present a reading of his work during the first decade of his literary career through the optic of game and play. This method, already used successfully by other literary critics (e.g., Bruce Morrissette on Robbe-Grillet, Mikhail Bakhtin on Rabelais),\(^1\) suggests itself as offering a possible way of reading a difficult novelist like Le Clézio, who, as we have seen in Chapter I of this study, has never been definitively "typed" as a novelist. Especially within the realm of what we call "the novel," where traditional rules of form and content are continually being called into question, ideas on play and game structure can aid the reader in organizing what might otherwise be an unintelligible work of art.

The theory and historical background presented in Chapter II is only a small part of the ever-growing body of
writing which concerns play and game. It was our purpose there to acquaint the reader with several basic principles, which are not only applicable to the novelistic works of an author like Le Clézio, but also to any number of literary forms.  

We have shown, first of all, that play is not the opposite of work, nor, more importantly, is it the opposite of seriousness. True, the playful mode has always been used by some in the analysis of serious subjects, but Western man is still reluctant to accept the possibilities play can offer him in his quest for "meaning" in existence. Secondly, ideas about play and game have resulted in some extremely valuable insights into the nature of culture, of man, and of the various relationships between the two. Huizinga opened the door, encouraging others to take as a working hypothesis the idea of play as the basis for all culture; and theorists like Caillois, Fink, Claparède, and Piaget refined, modified, and expanded that basic assumption.

Caillois' four categories of games—agon, alea, mimicry, and ilinx—have helped us to understand the game patterns within the Leclèzian fictional universe. The basic confrontations we see there—man versus "Self," man versus the material "Other" (i.e., modern technology), and man versus the human "Other" (i.e., an anonymous mass urban society)—are all competitions or agon in which strategy
and "power" play vital roles. Chance, or alea, is, as we have seen, one of the controlling forces of Le Clézio's process of artistic creation; he conceives of the artist as a player who relies on "le hasard" to aid him in the creative act, which, ideally, unites writer and reader. Mimicry, or imitation, is a game category which is applicable both to Leclézian protagonists, who spend much of their time involved in mimetic or imaginative play activity, and to the writer himself, who as Storyteller, Critic, or Poet-Conjuror is forced to play various roles in order to be "complete." Finally, the category of ilinx, or vertigo, serves as the propulsive force which gives a Le Clézio reader the urge to "pousser son 'ah' et de remplir de cette façon le vide qu'il y avait jusqu'alors entre les lignes." (PV, 10)

Within the psychological dimensions of the Leclézian game world, the dominant mode is mimicry or imitation. The Leclézian protagonist is seen as a child, either innocent and eager to learn about the world (Bea B. or Chancelade) or knowledgeable but disillusioned and eager to run away in order to create a new reality for himself (Adam Pollo, Jeune Homme Hogan). The two faces of mimicry, mimesis and imagination, are both presented through a series of childhood game structures: Let's Pretend, Simon Says, Follow the Leader, Disguises, and Telling Stories. The Leclézian protagonist plays because he is alienated from his world. Sometimes he attempts
to adapt to it; sometimes he attempts to flee and to make up new games of his own, thereby setting the old socially accepted "rules" on end. He is not a winner, however; the "Other," whether material or human, seems always more fortunate and more powerful. The Leclézian hero continues, however, to play; for just as it is in the author's act of writing that the text is both created and destroyed, so it is in the protagonist's play that his existence is created, destroyed, and renewed.

Random play is easily found within Le Clézio's novels: Adam Pollo recalls the fun he used to have running along the beach as a small boy, Chancelade skips stones into the ocean, Bogo le Muet builds pyramids of rocks on the beach. Yet even in the most casual mention of play or game within a Leclézian novel, there is a suggestion of a deeper significance, of the ontological dimension of play in which the name of the game is the identification and definition of the nature of reality. Who am I? Who are you? What is real?

In Le Déluge François Besson enters a café where six electric pinball machines stand against white walls which resemble "un couloir éclairé par des barres de néon."

(D, 85) A small boy, sitting on a tall stool and watched by an older man, is the only player; and François becomes virtually hypnotized by the scene:
L'enfant jouait avec une frénésie obstinée; se deux bras serraient les côtés du billard et actionnaient les boutons des flippers. En équilibre sur sa chaise, la bouche fermée, les sourcils froncés, le petit garçon attentif et nerveux secouait le casier de métal de toutes ses forces. Il attendait les coups des bumpers, et surveillait les chiffres qui s'inscrivaient sur le tableau illuminé. (D, 85)

The game is, after all, only a game; yet we see just how serious the player has become, his mouth tightly closed, his eyebrows knit, and how intent he is on winning.

The pinball machine itself is a worthy opponent:

...la balle allait et venait à travers les labyrinthes, se cognait contre les rondelles élastiques, jaillissait avec des bruits d'explosion. De temps en temps, elle redescendait vers le bas du billard, et le petit garçon d'un coup précis, l'envoyait remonter jusqu'en haut. (D, 85)

François continues watching as the numbers mount and multiply; at the first ball the score flashes 1300, and the machine emits a shrill ring. The child continues to play, ever more involved in the game, "inlassablement, avec quelque chose de sérieux et de tragique sur le visage... Une expression féroce, têtue, une volonté d'homme mûr." (D, 85)

The clangings continue, and the score mounts--1600, 1800, 2000. The boy's face is covered with perspiration; he shakes the machine and hits it with the palm of his hand; his legs tremble beneath him. "Son visage penché sur la vitre, il regardait fasciné à l'intérieur du dédale minuscule, et ses yeux suivaient la bille folle, calculaient,
prevoyaient la route à suivre, la retenaient, la possé
daient, avidement." (D, 86)

The last ball finally disappears, "avec un fracas
de mitrailleuse" (D, 86), and the pinball machine lights up
"resplendissant de couleurs vives" with the final score of
9 999. The little boy accepts congratulations from his
older companion, and as they leave the cafe the two discuss
the strategies the boy has used in order to win--and his
disappointment at not surpassing his own previous record.

Then François has a try at the pinball machine, and
it is here that the parallel between life and game becomes
even more obvious. The pinball machine represents part of
the ontological question which the Leclézian hero must
answer: What is the nature of external reality? Just as
the hero finds his environment hostile to him, so the pin-
ball within the machine finds itself destined to continual
hostilities. François and the pinball machine, the little
boy and his "serious play," are both illustrations of man's
attempts to understand the nature of his environment. Once
again, it appears that he is a loser:

Après avoir été jeté avec haine au milieu des
obstacles tressautants, après avoir cogné les
bumpers rouges, après avoir été lancé contre
les bords, être descendu en tournoyant, des
dizaines, des centaines de fois, pour remonter
d'un seul coup jusqu'en haut, après avoir
déchaîné les secousses électriques, les spasmes,
les claquements, les tintements, les bruits de
mitrailleuse, tandis que là-haut, sur le tableau,
prés du visage de la femme en bikini, les
This world of machines and neon signs and crowded city streets forms the setting for the socio-cultural dimension of play in Le Clézio's fictional world. The game-board is the city; and the labyrinthine paths followed by the Leclézian players are spiral, circular, or figure-eight in shape. The players are constantly searching for the center; but like the characters in Cortázar's novel, they find that the center "might be in some side square, or even off the board . . . or in a vest pocket." The machines of the modern age provide the hero with various playthings and by extension "competition" (the telephone, the automobile, the neon signs). He attempts several strategies (Bea B's "telephone practice," Tranquilité's friend's efforts to read all the signs), yet he usually ends up by admitting at least temporary defeat. Social rituals, Eric Berne's "games people play," also fail to provide the Leclézian protagonist with a satisfactory structuring element within his existence. Love, sex, family affection, friendship--
any attempt at human communication becomes a parody.

Within the aesthetic dimension of play in the Leclézian fictional world, we view not the protagonist as player but the author as player. In his roles of Storyteller, Critic, and Poet-Conjuror, Le Clézio plays the "novel game" with his reading audience, in which the reader is alternately Accomplice, Student, or Victim. The old "rules of the game" in the realm of the novel—a narrative told in chronological order, a well-defined set of characters, and a plot with natural and logical motivation all provided by an omniscient author—are upset by Le Clézio in his rather eclectic view of the game played between writer and reader. We discover in his views on writing, expressed within the confines of and very structure of his own novels, an ideal game pattern in which author and reader become a team united in the creative act of giving structure and meaning to letters, sounds, and words rather than single combatants in a contest in which the author attempts to convey the "truth" of life to his reader. It is the creative act itself which is important to Le Clézio. The writer and the reader must both participate in order for the text to become a viable force. Playing for Le Clézio thus involves freedom of imagination and an openness to all the world as "literature."

The question of his own reality, whether it is by nature subjective and necessary or objectified and contingent
is the Leclézian protagonist's central issues. His subsequent attempts to find an order or meaning in existence then serve as a structure for his experiences. The same is true of Le Clézio's deep concern with the nature of writing and its reality. Kathleen Reish says that for Le Clézio writing is a contestation of reality in which the fictional world is posed against the real world, and in fact, is constructed on the very refusal of the "real." "Thus, the Everyman-heroes of Le Clézio's fictions describe, emblematically, the simultaneous gesture of refusal and creation by which the writer defines himself." Reality must somehow be "destroyed" by the writer so that the world of fiction may live.

The failures of Le Clézio's protagonists to find meaning for their existence within the psychological, ontological, and socio-cultural dimensions of their playworld are perhaps attributable to the grounding of their activities within the world of external reality—a problematic reality which represents both seduction and betrayal for them. Yet in passing beyond that reality and in the textualization of the adventures of his heroes, Le Clézio reveals a new type of vision, a private construction of reality through the text itself.

The neon signs of the city which blink on and off in disconnected, meaningless phrases provide the Leclézian hero
with a false promise of a "message": "Les centaines de mots appelaient dans toutes les directions; mais c'étaient de faux appels. Derrière les lettres flamboyantes, il n'y avait rien . . . ." (LF, 71) Words and slogans become the hero's competitors, all managing to defeat him in his words and phrases, which compose the language of the city, can become, Le Clezio suggests, part of a meaningful structure through the text:

A la rigueur, on aurait pu écrire un poème avec ces mots, un poème en lettres fuyantes, en phrases inachevées, en pensées saccadées ... On aurait pu écrire quelque chose du genre de:  
S S SI SI SIL SIL SILEN SILEN SILEN SILEN SILEN MORT  
AIDEZ-MOI AIDEZ-MOI AIDEZ-MOI  
PLEASE  
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APPARAISSÉZ. (LF, 71-2)

These elements of Madison Avenue reality can become part of the writer's universe, but they must first somehow vanish into the text to appear reconstructed by the writer. The usual Leclézian creative pattern becomes then generation, destruction, re-creation in a never-ending cycle.

The reader, too, participates in this creative game pattern. Through the act of reading the text, he not only creates it but destroys at the same time that which the writer had previously created through his "destruction" of the "real" (eg., as he possibly transformed the physical object "apple" into the black-ink symbols "pomme"). Thus
the world of the text contains all the elements of a game of eternal metamorphoses. And it is in the energy this game requires and in the joy of the creative act that both reader and writer achieve their mutual victory.

Reading Le Clézio through the optic of game and play is one manner of accepting the writer's invitation to take part in "le spectacle de la réalité." It is by no means the only way to see Le Clézio, however; and as he continues to write, we may well see a moving away from the themes which have been his main "identifying marks" during this first portion of his literary career. Yet seeing Le Clézio's writing through concepts of play and game does help us to understand the author's conception of literature as "l'ultime possibilité de jeu offerte."

Le Clézio has said this about the game of criticism:

Ces grandes phrases guindées que se lancent des acteurs en armure, dans leurs duel oratoires, nous n'y croyons guère. Elles passent audessus de nos têtes, sans nous atteindre. En voulant trop signifiant, elles ont perdu leur véritable sens, qui est celui de la parole ... 

Is it possible then, he wonders, to put on paper "ce miracle émerveillant qu'est l'instantané de la parole?" Is it possible, he asks, not to lose "en l'imprimant, la beauté de cette aventure où tout était important à l'égal des mots, les bégaiements, les silences, les moments de panique et les moments de bonheur, les bruits de la rue qui entrent dans
la chambre et se mêlent aux bruits des mots, tous les milliers de signaux de la vie?" 7

It is then perhaps a zero-sum critical game to attempt to write a study about an author who defies and denies the possibility of "explication." Yet it is in the playing of that zero-sum game, in an attempt to bridge the gap between writer and reader, critic and reader, that true creation is to be found. "Hésitantes, tâtonnantes, maladroites, toutes de redondances et de lieux communs, les paroles parlent pour ceux qui les écoutent par chacun de leurs signes." 8 As a writer of criticism then, speaking to a reader of that criticism, I shall simply borrow the words of my study's subject: "Mais j'ai assez parlé. À vous de jouer, maintenant."
NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1 See, for example, Bruce Morrissette's article on Robbe-Grillet ("Games and game structures in Robbe-Grillet") and Mikhail Bakhtin's article on Rabelais ("The role of games in Rabelais"), both included in Game, Play, and Literature, Jacques Ehrmann, ed., Yale French Studies, No. 41 (1968), pp. 159-167 and 124-132.

2 See, for example, Ted L. Estess, "Nothing-Doing: A Study of Game-Play Motifs in the Literature of Samuel Beckett," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University, 1971, in which ideas about play and game are applied both to Beckett's prose works and to his dramas. Or, see Michel Beaujour's article on Surrealism, "The game of poetics," Yale French Studies, No. 41 (1968), pp. 58-67.

3 Cortázar, Hopscotch, p. 298.

4 Reish, op. cit., pp. 275-6

5 Lhoste, op. cit., p. 7.

6 Ibid., p. 8.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p. 7.
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