



SVENSKA AKADEMIEN

Biobibliographical notes

Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio was born on April 13, 1940, in Nice, but both parents had strong family connections with the former French colony, Mauritius (conquered by the British in 1810). At the age of eight, Le Clézio and his family moved to Nigeria, where the father had been stationed as a doctor during the Second World War. During the month-long voyage to Nigeria, he began his literary career with two books, *Un long voyage* and *Oradi noir*, which even contained a list of “forthcoming books.” He grew up with two languages, French and English. In 1950 the family returned to Nice. After completing his secondary education, he studied English at Bristol University in 1958-59 and completed his undergraduate degree in Nice (Institut d’Études Littéraires) in 1963. He took a master’s degree at the University of Aix-en-Provence in 1964 and wrote a doctoral thesis on Mexico’s early history at the University of Perpignan in 1983. He has taught at universities in Bangkok, Mexico City, Boston, Austin and Albuquerque among other places.

Le Clézio received much attention with his first novel, *Le procès-verbal* (1963; *The Interrogation*, 1964). As a young writer in the aftermath of existentialism and the *nouveau roman*, he was a conjurer who tried to lift words above the degenerate state of everyday speech and to restore to them the power to invoke an essential reality. His debut novel was the first in a series of descriptions of crisis, which includes the short story collection *La fièvre* (1965; *Fever*, 1966) and *Le déluge* (1966; *The Flood*, 1967), in which he points out the trouble and fear reigning in the major Western cities.

Even early on Le Clézio stood out as an ecologically engaged author, an orientation that is accentuated with the novels *Terra amata* (1967; *Terra Amata*, 1969), *Le livre des fuites* (1969; *The Book of Flights*, 1971), *La guerre* (1970; *War*, 1973) and *Les géants* (1973; *The Giants*, 1975). His definitive breakthrough as a novelist came with *Désert* (1980), for which he received a prize from the French Academy. This work contains magnificent images of a lost culture in the North African desert, contrasted with a depiction of Europe seen through the eyes of unwanted immigrants. The main character, the Algerian guest worker Lalla, is a utopian antithesis to the ugliness and brutality of European society.

During the same period, Le Clézio published the meditative essay collections *L’extase matérielle* (1967), *Mydriase* (1973) and *Haiï* (1971), the last of which shows influences from Indian culture. Long stays in Mexico and Central America in the period 1970 to 1974 were of decisive significance for his work, and he left the big cities in search of a new spiritual reality in the contact with the Indians. He met the Moroccan Jemia, who became his wife in 1975, the same year *Voyage de l’autre côté* was published, a book in which he gives an account of what he learned in Central America. Le Clézio began the translation of the major works of the Indian tradition, such as *Les prophéties du Chilam Balam. Le rêve mexicain ou la pensée interrompue* (1998) testifies to his fascination with Mexico’s magnificent past. Since the 90s Le Clézio and his wife share their time between Albuquerque in New Mexico, the island of Mauritius and Nice.

Le chercheur d'or (1985; *The Prospector*, 1993) treats material from the islands of the Indian Ocean in the spirit of the adventure story. In later years the author's attraction to the dream of earthly paradise is apparent in books such as *Ourania* (2005) and *Raga: approche du continent invisible* (2006). The latter is devoted to documenting a way of life on the islands of the Indian Ocean that is disappearing with the advance of globalization. The former is set in a remote valley in Mexico, where the main character, the author's alter ego, finds a colony of seekers who have regained the harmony of the golden age and laid aside civilization's ruined customs, including its languages.

The emphasis in Le Clézio's work has increasingly moved in the direction of an exploration of the world of childhood and of his own family history. This development began with *Onitsha* (1991; *Onitsha*, 1997), continued more explicitly with *La quarantaine* (1995) and has culminated in *Révolutions* (2003) and *L'Africain* (2004). *Révolutions* sums up the most important themes of his work: memory, exile, the reorientations of youth, cultural conflict. Episodes from various times and places are juxtaposed: the main character's student years during the 1950s and 60s in Nice, London and Mexico; the experiences of an ancestor from Brittany as a soldier in the army of the revolution in 1792-94 and his emigration to Mauritius to escape the repression of revolutionary society; and the story of a female slave from the beginning of the 1800s. Embedded among the childhood memories is the story of the main character's visit to his grandfather's sister, the last mediator of family tradition from the lost estate on Mauritius, who passes on the memories that he as author will carry into the future.

L'Africain, the story of the author's father, is at once a reconstruction, a vindication, and the recollection of a boy who lived in the shadow of a stranger he was obliged to love. He remembers through the landscape: Africa tells him who he was when, at the age of eight, he experienced the family's reunion after the separation during the war years.

Among Le Clézio's most recent works are *Ballaciner* (2007), a deeply personal essay about the history of the art of film and the importance of film in the author's life, from the hand-turned projectors of his childhood, the cult of *cinéaste* trends in his teens, to his adult forays into the art of film as developed in unfamiliar parts of the world. A new work, *Ritournelle de la faim*, has just been published.

Le Clézio has also written several books for children and youth, for example *Lullaby* (1980), *Celui qui n'avait jamais vu la mer suivi de La montagne du dieu vivant* (1982) and *Balaabilou* (1985).

Literary Prizes: Prix Théophraste Renaudot (1963), Prix Larbaud (1972), Grand Prix Paul Morand de l'Académie française (1980), Grand Prix Jean Giono (1997), Prix Prince de Monaco (1998), Stig Dagermanpriset (2008)

Works in French

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- Terra amata.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1967
- Le livre des fuites : roman d'aventures.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1969
- La guerre.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1970
- Haï.* – Genève : Skira, 1971
- Mydriase.* – Montpellier : Fata Morgana, 1973
- Les géants.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1973
- Voyages de l'autre côté.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1975
- L'inconnu sur la terre.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1978
- Vers les icebergs.* – Montpellier : Fata Morgana, 1978
- Voyage au pays des arbres.* – Paris: Gallimard, 1978
- Mondo et autres histoires.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1978
- Désert.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1980
- Trois villes saintes.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1980
- Lullaby.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1980
- La ronde et autres faits divers.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1982
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- Voyage à Rodrigues.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1986
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- Onitsha.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1991
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- Pawana.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1992
- Diego et Frida.* – Paris : Stock, 1993
- La quarantaine.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1995
- Poisson d'or.* – Paris : Gallimard, 1996
- La fête chantée.* – Paris : Le Promeneur, 1997
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- Révolutions.* – Paris : Gallimard, 2003
- L'Africain.* – Paris : Mercure de France, 2004
- Ourania .* – Paris : Gallimard, 2006
- Raga : approche du continent invisible.* – Paris : Seuil, 2006
- Ballaciner.* – Paris : Gallimard, 2007
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Terra Amata / translated from the French by Barbara Bray. – London : Hamilton, 1969 ; New York : Atheneum, 1969. – Translation of *Terra amata*

The Book of Flights : an Adventure Story / translated from the French by Simon Watson Taylor. – London : Cape, 1971 ; New York : Atheneum, 1972. – Translation of *Le livre des fuites*

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Raga : att nalkas den osynliga kontinenten / översättning av Ulla Bruncrona. – Stockholm : Grate, 2008. – Orig:s titel: *Raga : approche du continent invisible*

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- Onitsha : Roman* / Aus dem Französischen von Uli Wittmann. – Köln : Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1993. – Originaltitel: Onitsha
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- Fliehender Stern* : Roman / Aus dem Französischen von Uli Wittmann. – Köln : Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1996. – Originaltitel: Étoile errante
- Ein Ort fernab der Welt : Roman* / Aus dem Französischen von Uli Wittmann. – Köln : Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 2000. – Originaltitel: La quarantaine
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