

Musicality of Le Clézio's Novels

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Le Clézio takes his novels as art and imbues his novels with elements of music, which abound in his novels. He strikes to present his novels in an artistic way by combining words and the music, thus showing his great concern for the soul and well-being of human kind. This thesis probes into how musical elements are used in his novel to construct identity, make language of the novels musical, and offer a narrative structure.

Keywords: Le Clézio, novels, music, identity, narrative structure

Introduction

Since ancient times, literature and music have long been closely connected. Literature and music are compatible with each other since their prototypical period and this rule of thumb goes for western literature and music as well as their Chinese counterparts (Liao, 2015). Literature and music have a lot in common, say, the commonalities in language, rhythm, and time. As stating in his thesis, Liao proffers that literature and music can be regarded as the together of possibilities of encoding linguistic signals in an innovative way ..., thus interpretation of a piece of literary work or music is the process of deciphering those codes, in the course of which readers or audiences can make sense of the conveyed meaning (Liao, 2015).

Le Clézio, a renowned French writer and winner of Nobel Prize in literature for his “poetic adventure and sensual ecstasy”, made use of musicality in his novel, thus showing his great concern for the soul and well-being of the whole human kind. Musicality in the novels of Le Clézio has drawn the attention of the critics, centering on the landscape perspective and diction involving musical pattern. Huang Xiyun in his thesis discusses symbolism used in the novel to reflect the current worldly reality (Huang, 2009).

Yet not many theses focus on the musicality that abounds in the novel written by Le Clézio. In this thesis, it discusses how musicality is employed to construct identity, and make language of the novel musical, in this case, jazz.

Construction of Identity

Jazz music, as a melting pot of music that incorporates the influence of different regional cultures, echoes the “identity construction” issues that Le Clézio pays attention to in later writing. Under no circumstance is Le Clézio a writer who only portrays exotic customs. He is more concerned about population migration and cultural integration in the modern international community. Therefore, he has written many novels that concern immigrants.

In Le Clézio's works, jazz appears more and more frequently, and it is associated with the identity

Acknowledgements: This work is the final result of “Research on the Musicality of Le Clézio's Novels” (Project No. Y201636823), supported general research project of provincial educational department in Zhejiang Province. LIAO Banglei, master in English Language and Literature, College of Foreign Languages, Quzhou University, Quzhou, China.

construction problem that is mainly involved in the inclusive and absorbing multicultural culture. Atypical example of this kind is *Desert*, a book by which he won the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2008, which is a work that features “poetic adventure and sensual ecstasy” and centers on the environment, especially the desert. The Swedish Academy, in announcing the award, referred to Le Clézio as an “author of new departures, poetic adventure and sensual ecstasy, explorer of a humanity beyond hand below the reigning civilization”. In *Desert*, Le Clézio attempts to reveal the downsides of modern culture through observation of urban civilization from the perspective of an outsider. The heroine of the novel, Lala, is a descendant of the African Tuareg, descendants of Blue Face. They have lived in the southern Sahara desert for generations, breathing the dry air of the desert, walking on the hot ground, and witnessing every life rhythm of the desert every day. They stayed away from civilization and did not fight with the world until colonists forced them to leave their homes. They kept wandering and fleeing in the desert, but accepted it in a near-detached calm. There is even no anger and no grievances. Because they were born in the desert, starting to trek ever since they were born and never stopped. The desert has become the whole of their material and spiritual world. They “have no desires”, and if so, that is the desire for freedom of existence. In their view, it is

probably the only surviving free land on earth, a country that makes human laws insignificant, a kingdom for sandstone, gale, scorpions and squirrels, a country whose citizens are good at hiding and fleeing in scorching hot days and freezing cold nights. (Le Clézio, 1983, p. 5)

The desert is a paradise for all these outsiders.

In the novel of *Desert*, loneliness, nothingness, and void in the urban steel jungle eventually brought her back to her own desert, a place where she belonged and where her ancestors once wandered. The choice of heroins is also the choice of Le Clézio, and the desire to gain cultural identity eventually leads him and his characters back to their hometowns for they are their roots.

Thus we could see how the writer writes from confusion of original identity to the awakening of identity to the confirmation of identity, which is made possible by incorporating musical element into the construction of identity.

Musical Style of the Language

In the 2008 novel *Ritournelle de la faim*, Le Clézio once again innovated in music, and for the first time merged a complete piece into a novel. This piece is *Bolero*, a masterpiece created by the French composer Maurice Ravel in 1928. In the novel, the author not only refers to this orchestral music many times and portrays it in full details, but also adopts the unique musical features of *Bolero*: repeated melodies and crescendo, which are subtly applied to novel creation. In the middle, readers can feel the long and gradually rising music of *Bolero* when reading.

The narrative repetition of the novel is strengthened by the recurrence of the plot. Take the Sunday salon taking place in the Ayurs' as an example. The family and friends of the Cotangtan Street apartment are always crowded with the big-mouthed, accented Mauritians (forefathers of Ayurs is a Mauritian), sitting in the living room in the warm afternoon and recalling life on the island. The description of laughter mixed with spoons and clangs often appeared in the novel: “The cheers of the aunts, their laughter, the snoring of the small spoon touching the coffee cup...” (Le Clezio, 2009, p. 51). “The noise is coming again... The tea in the cup is steaming, the little spoon hits the porcelain, and the jingle is loud...” (Le Clezio, 2009, p. 58). “Always the same voice.

Some words, some laughter, the small spoon hit the clinking on the mocha coffee cup”.

Besides, as contended by many critics, the end of the deafening two bars of *Bolero* was made by the gradual strong volume for a long time. It is the ultimate end that Ravel can no longer increase the volume of the music and end up suffering. And it is the cry of the composer's despair as well. Just as the Second World War broke out in *Ritournelle de la faim*, it was a summarization for the ugly ideology of Europe at the time. Ayur thought about the cause and effect of this war, and even thought it was “just” (Le Clezio, 2009, p. 162).

Furthermore, while reading the novel *Desert*, readers can by all means feel the writer's ingenuity in the narrative, and can understand the rhythm of music which abounds throughout the novel. *Desert* has a strong sense of music. In the process of reading, readers seem to be listening to a moving movement: a dreamlike mysterious and distant background music, a small meaningful tune by the heroin, sleek and round harmony and symphony of the structure of novel as well as poetic and long musical narrative rhythm. Music is the soul of some novels of Le Clezios, and the text flutters with the notes and rhythms. Le Clezio shows readers the musical charm of the work in the unique way of integrating musical elements into this novel.

From the above analysis we can see how the author incorporate *Bolero* into the novel, making the language used in the novel musical and making the structure of the novel musical. Such genius combination of orchestral music piece and literary creation has really marveled reader around the globe.

Narrative Structure

Apart from the above mentioned, musical elements are also used in the novel to help mould narrative structure of the novel, take *Ritournelle de la faim* as example, and illustrate how musical elements are employed by the author to incorporate into writing of the novel as the narrative structure.

In the main body section, which is before and after Ayur's life story, the author arranged “prelude” and “end”: “Prelude” is the *Ritournelle de la faim* in the memory of author Le Clézio. It tells the feeling of hunger; the “end” is the spectacular scene of the debut of *Bolero* dance music that the protagonist's “future” son heard from her mother, telling the strong rhythm of music to the soul. Shockingly, the “prelude” with the theme of hunger is full of mixed tastes of sweet and sour taste, and the “end of the tail” with the theme of *Bolero* is full of sturdy and beautiful listening experience. Introduced from taste in the sense of hearing, the reader has more sensory experience in the whole novel. In the story of Ayur in the “body” section, the author chose the structure of the set of sounds such as *Bolero*, making the first theme (spiritual hunger) and the second theme (the growth of the girl) combined. Furthermore, travel stories, analytical essays, recollective essays, and eyewitness humanity literature of the novel are employed and incorporated so as to achieve a mixed effect.

The whole novel of *Ritournelle de la faim* is similar in structure to this symphony of *Bolero*. The difference is that the author adds the part of the prelude and the ending, which leads to the collection and convergence of the text, and strengthens the dramatic effect of the novel. The body of the novel is also divided into three parts—the purple house, the fall, and the silence. In the prelude section, the author mainly writes about material hunger, and in the following text, the novel shows another level of hunger—spiritual hunger. In addition, the theme that goes hand in hand with spiritual hunger is the growing up of Ayur.

From some prominent features of the novel *Ritournelle de la faim*, the narrative structure, narrative perspective, and narrative language of the novel are clearly shown. On top of it, I found the author's diversified creating features, which are not only illustrated in the work of *Ritournelle de la faim*, but also in his other works where there are precedents of such narrative features. Le Clézio uses pure and beautiful words to construct a

castle that is secluded from the troubles of the worldly affairs, and renders everyone convinced of the power of words a sure power.

As can be seen from the above mentioned, musical elements are molded into the novel of Le Clézio to help shape narrative structure and foster a lyrical narrative structure of artistic works.

Conclusion

Le Clézio takes his novels as art and imbues his novels with elements of music, which abound in his novels. He strikes to present his novels in an artistic way by combining words and the music, thus showing his great concern for the soul and well-being of human kind. This thesis probes into how musical elements are used in his novel to construct identity, make language of the novels musical, and offer a narrative structure. Themes and narratives of the works can be better understood when readers take into account musical elements.

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