

FORGETTING TO REMEMBER: ANAMNESIS AND HISTORY IN J. M. G. LE CLÉZIO'S *DÉSERT*

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"They appeared as if in a dream. . . . They left, as if in a dream, and disappeared."¹ Between these two sentences, the gates of horn of a fictional otherworld, J. M. G. Le Clézio's novel *Désert* (1980) unfolds. Like Le Clézio's previous works, this text presents the theme of suppression of human freedoms, whether in the inner schism of alienation, through the collective experience of prejudice and exile, or in our profound dispossession through language itself. Unlike many of Le Clézio's previous works, however, *Désert* has a historical framework within which the story of collective and personal alienation unfolds.

Two narratives trace a single story from the resistance movements of the Saharaoui people under the leadership of Ma al-'Aynayn in the early years of this century to the contemporary struggle of the Saharaouis for the right to self-determination and the creation of their own republic in the western Sahara. The story of the early struggle is told through the eyes of a young boy, Nour, who follows his people northward toward the territory held by the French invaders of Morocco, without understanding the nature of this holy war against the Christian colonialists. Yet those purposes are clear in the historical record of Saharaoui resistance. A holy man or *marabout*, a scholar of the Koran as well as a charismatic political leader, Ma al-'Aynayn declared his *jihad* on the French invaders in 1906. His sphere of activity was the Saquiet el Hamra where he founded the city of Smara, gathering place for the "Blue Men," the Saharaoui nomads of the southern and western Sahara. In citing Ma al-'Aynayn's leadership and in describing the conditions of his people's migrations, Le Clézio accurately reflects historians'

assessment of the importance of this early resistance movement and its leader: "A warrior saint in the style of the heroes of the Islamic past of the Maghrib, Shaykh Ma al-'Aynayn was already a legend in Morocco and the western Sahara at the time of his death in October 1910."²

The other narrative of *Désert* contains no sustained historical frame of reference: set in present time, it makes no mention of current political activity in the western Sahara. Living in a slum of a Moroccan coastal city, its protagonist Lalla (her name means "lady") attempts to escape poverty and personal degradation by emigrating to the land of the original colonizer. The scene of the arrival at Marseille captures the anticipation of the *émigrés*, as well as the dehumanizing treatment accorded these modern-day nomads. However, Lalla's desire for a homeland persists and she will return to Morocco to give birth to her daughter. Guiding her desire is the knowledge of her people's history, gained from stories of the past, of the Blue Men and their mystical leader. For Lalla, the world of resistance, of Nour and Ma al-'Aynayn, is a world of stories, told by the "old people"; history is, for her, the living witness to the presence of the past in her own life. Her experience reiterates the circumstances that led to the earlier revolt against the colonial powers. Poverty and racial prejudice continue to deny the indigenous population of the Maghreb a full sense of pride and ethnic integrity. Their "evolution" in the post-colonial period has been at best only a surface emergence onto the world scene.

While this connection between the two threads of Le Clézio's text seems evident, albeit implied rather than stated, another historical circumstance not mentioned in the text pertains more specifically to the continuation of the story of Ma al-'Aynayn. This is the story of the contemporary resistance movement, the Polisario, and its efforts to obtain the right of self-determination for the Saharaoui people inhabiting what is currently southern Morocco and the northern portion of Mauritania.³ These two areas were formerly the Saquiet el Hamra and the Río de Oro, territorial possessions of Spain until the treaty of Madrid, signed November 14, 1975, ceding the Saquiet el Hamra to Morocco and the Río de Oro to Mauritania. Circumstances have made this a convenient disposition of the territories for all parties, except the Saharaouis themselves. With the discovery of rich phosphate deposits at Bu Craa in the Saquiet el Hamra, Morocco's desire to retain that area has remained strong. On

the other hand, Algeria has welcomed the Polisario guerillas and allowed them to maintain headquarters and conduct raids into Morocco and Mauritania from within their borders. Spain itself, as signatory to the treaty of 1975, confused the situation by asserting, in the following year, that it had transferred administrative authority over the disputed territories to Morocco and Mauritania but not sovereignty. Moreover, the guiding principles of the Organization of African Unity seem in conflict in this situation: the principle of self-determination for African peoples is the one being invoked by the Polisario and, to a lesser extent, by Algeria and Libya. The principle of the right of nations to maintain territorial integrity seems to contradict the former notion, suggesting that any attempt by a resistance movement such as Polisario to encourage the establishment of an independent state—in this case, the RASD (Arab Democratic Saharaoui Republic)—within the borders of existing nations is an infraction of those nations' territorial integrity.

It might be fairly said, then, that the story of Ma al-'Aynayn's resistance to the European colonial powers continues in the present-day Polisario. The differences, however, are not to be ignored: Ma al-'Aynayn's war was not only a campaign against the colonial powers but also a reformist movement to purify Islam. The current efforts toward independence on the part of the Polisario are of necessity played out on a highly complex global political scene in which the question of the role of the "superpowers" in internal African affairs is at best extremely difficult to assess. While the clear historical framework of the Nour narrative provides the impetus for a discussion of the historical dimensions of a fictional text, no such direct connection can be made with respect to the second narrative thread of Le Clézio's novel, nor is the relationship between the two narratives made explicit in the novel. The task of determining these relationships is precisely that circumscribed in this volume: what is the relationship of history to fiction? of historical narrative to fictional narrative? of the writing of history to the writing of fiction?

These questions, which form the basis of a variety of considerations of historical and fictional texts, have an implicit frame of reference in themselves, for the debate over the differences between history, considered as reference to the reality of past events, and fiction, the recognizedly "unreal" account of persons who never lived, remains perennial. Admittedly, the terms in which I have just characterized history and fiction are exaggerated, but still, these charac-

terizations point to the issue at hand: if history is real and fiction is not, how can we speak of a relationship between them? Contemporary fiction in particular—and by this term, I mean certain writing that has appeared since 1945 in the Americas, Britain, and on the continent—seems most resistant to any connection with the seemingly “realistic” genre of historical writing. Nineteenth-century realism recognized its endeavor to be, at least if not the incorporation of “reality” into the text, then the incorporation of the simulacrum of reality into fiction. Contemporary fiction-writers make no such pretense of presenting even the representation of reality: on the contrary, fiction of the present moment is the “privileged site” of the refusal of history as plot, as story, and as real event.⁴ How then do we account for Le Clézio’s incursion into the field of history? Must we disassociate him from the group of his contemporaries who write with their time, who are truly contemporary in their rejection of order, causality, and transcendence, which they consider to be absent from human experience itself? Has Le Clézio committed a lamentable lapse into “outmoded” nineteenth-century realism? Moreover, if we accept the historical dimension of one part of Le Clézio’s novel as quasi-realistic, how can we define this dimension in that narrative which contains no easily identifiable historical references, but which nonetheless is written in the time, and about the time of the Polisario? In other words, Le Clézio’s text presents a double bind: on the one hand, seemingly conspicuous referentiality and, on the other hand, a coincidence of text and historical phenomena that seems to have no authorized (author-ized) connection.

In recent years, structural analyses have sought to identify a common linguistic deep structure of the so-called “human sciences” (*sciences humaines*): Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, Claude Lévi-Strauss’ codification of myths, Michel Foucault’s “archeology of human knowledge.”⁵ Those philosophers and critics known as “post-Structuralists” have denied the basis of this enterprise by refusing the original definition, proposed by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, of *langue* as a system of language possibilities transcendent to any implementation of them (*parole*). For Jacques Derrida, the philosophical leader of this critical orientation, the interpretation of any discourse leads only to another discourse, another chain of signifying elements.⁶ What Derrida’s work suggests for the present consideration of history and fiction is that history cannot serve as a referential point of signification outside

the universe of discourse. History is already, can only be, a discourse itself, and its relationship to fictional discourse can be established only through isolating the different modes of signification of each.

In sum, Derrida has suggested that the project of interpretation is a chase after an absent signified, what he has called the interpretive *mise en abîme*, engendered by the ego's need to preserve the idea of itself, the idea of a self, against the menace of the non-essential, the Other. The traditional history of interpretation is thus a history of the need to define a subjective essence, and as such, it is a metaphysical enterprise that Derrida rejects. Foucault has also suggested that the notion of a metaphysical ground for history which is, for him as well as for Derrida, the history of interpretation, is false. For Foucault, interpretation itself is the appropriation of certain rules of human organization; its history is thus a history of repression:

Rules are empty in themselves, violent and unfinalized; they are impersonal and can be bent to any purpose. The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them. . . .⁷

For Foucault, history is "genealogy"; it emphasizes development and change as opposed to the false, metaphysical notion of an immutable human nature. Nietzsche's term effective history (*wirkliche Historie*) recognizes discontinuity as the recurring characteristic of the human story. Just as the signification of any discourse is ultimately undecidable, the project of interpretation becoming thus its own history, so too the history of humankind is the chain of repressive substitutions of interpretations. Without a transcendent goal or an ideal human nature, genealogy is a kind of textual history in which the discourse of human events constantly submits to a new discourse, the violence of a new interpretation:

The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. . . . History becomes "effective" to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being. . . . "Effective" history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit

itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. ("Nietzsche," *Language*, pp. 153-54)

In his study of nineteenth-century historical consciousness, *Metahistory*, Hayden White has sought to define the common discursive ground of both historical and fictional narrative by identifying what he calls the tropical foundation of each. The historian, like the novelist, assumes a posture with respect to a field of inquiry that corresponds to one or more of the classical rhetorical tropes:

Each of these modes of consciousness [metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, irony] provides the basis for a distinctive linguistic protocol by which to prefigure the historical field and on the basis of which specific strategies of historical interpretation can be employed for "explaining" it. . . . It is my view that the dominant tropological mode and its attendant linguistic protocol comprise the irreducibly "metahistorical" basis of every historical work.⁸

White thus situates the effect of rhetorical strategy on historical narrative in the prefigural "moment" of the historian's task, that is, at the point where the historian delimits the field of inquiry and identifies those elements of the field that will be interpreted as significant or signifying.

Elsewhere, White has suggested that these rhetorical figures correspond to the stages of cognitive development outlined by Piaget: from the notion of self as co-extensive with objects (metaphor), the child learns to distinguish self and other as occupying the same space (metonymy), then to classify physical objects and determine their interrelationships (synecdoche).⁹ In the fourth and final stage of development, which White sees as corresponding to the trope of irony, the child learns to organize his or her environment without reference to physical objects. Moreover, he or she is aware of *thinking* that organization and that there are other possible ways to categorize the elements of that environment and his or her relationship to them:

Once I have dispersed the elements of a given domain across a time series or spatial field, I can either remain satisfied with what appears to be a final analytical act . . . or I can "turn" once more, to a consideration of the extent to which this taxonomic operation

fails to take account of certain features of the elements thus classified and, an even more sophisticated move, try to determine the extent to which my own taxonomic system is as much a product of *my own need* to organize reality in this way rather than in some other as it is of the objective reality of the elements previously identified. ("Tropology," p. 6) (Emphasis added)

I have emphasized the words "my own need" in order to suggest that White's efforts to describe the common narrative ground of historical and fictional writing—efforts with which I agree in the main—reflect yet another modality of their common basis in narrative. Desire, as both informing and motivating force to discourse, deflects that discourse, be it fictional or historical, away from the self and onto a projected other in order to define the self in its very "otherness." As such a deflection/definition of the thinking subject, desire functions in a fashion analogous to the violent seizure of interpretive authority that characterizes our "genealogy," to use Foucault's term.

The active force of the unconscious functions both as the structure of desire and the field of its dispersion; in Lacan's terms, it is "that chapter of personal history that is marked by a blank or occupied by falsehood: it is the censored chapter."¹⁰ Yet the truth of that censored chapter can be rediscovered by means of psychoanalysis, namely speech. Lacan suggests that the process of speaking the self, in the transindividual discourse of the psychoanalytic transaction, implies precisely the presence or "presentedness" not only of the speaking subject's own past, his or her origins, but also the presence of the analyst who stands, as it were, as the "audience" of contemporary witnesses to the disclosure of the "truth" of the unconscious:

Hypnotic recollection is, no doubt, a reproduction of the past, but it is above all a spoken representation—and as such implies all sorts of presences. It stands in the same relation to the waking recollection of what is curiously called in analysis "the material," as the drama in which the original myths of the City State are produced before its assembled citizens stands in relation to a history that may well be made up of materials, but in which a nation today learns to read the symbols of a destiny on the march. ("Function," p. 47)

In the case of both hypnotic and waking recall, the two forms of

psychoanalytic *anamnesis*, essential to the project of recollection is the task of interpretation that occurs in and through the intersubjective discourse of analyst and analysand. This dialogic nature of the psychoanalytic context points clearly to what Derrida identifies as the ever-receding horizon of interpretation: narrative is interpreted only in and through discourse.

Psychoanalytic *anamnesis* is thus the erection (resurrection) of a self through a symbolic discourse of recollection. For Lacan, "history constitutes the emergence of truth in the real" ("Function," p. 49), yet he asserts that it is immaterial whether the subject has remembered anything whatever from the past. The subject has simply recounted events, or in Lacan's terminology, "verbalized" them, made them "pass into the *verbe*, or, more precisely, into the *epos* by which he brings back into present time the origins of his own person" ("Function," pp. 46-47). The act or process of verbalization is thus not only a recall of the past but the creation of a truth, the truth of the subject's origins, erected on the material of the Real, here verbalized, or in narrative discourse, textualized. The "Real" of Lacanian analysis is the "world of words" which creates the "world of things" ("Function," p. 65).

For those of us who have inherited the positivist vision of history as the recollection and ordering of data from the past, it is difficult to avoid the implication of causality in the sequence of past/present. What Lacanian theory helps us understand, however, is that the past is only constituted as such in its verbal creation, in its presence or "presentedness," what Lacan calls a "primary historization":

What we teach the subject to recognize as his unconscious is his history—that is to say, we help him to perfect the present historization of the facts that have already determined a certain number of the historical "turning-points" in his existence. But if they have played this role, it is already as facts of history, that is to say, insofar as they have been recognized in one particular sense or censored in a certain order. ("Function," p. 52)

There are thus two levels of historization or two modalities of history. One emerges through the process of *anamnesis* or recollection, a discursive process in which the censored chapter embodies the "blanks" of repressed desire in symbolic form and thus gives them the

potential for meaning (interpretation). The other modality of history is what we might call the representation of the past as such, that is, as those events already censored or accepted, but which provide nonetheless the impetus toward interpretation, indeed, necessitate the production of a meaning for them. This latter modality cannot be separated from the prior textualization of the historical material, since the construction of the text of the past and the (re)construction of the past are, at once, the process and production of meaning in discourse.

"Every writer *creates* his own precursors": Borges' comment on the processes of fiction-writing may be equally well applied to historiographic procedure.¹¹ The "pastness" of history seems to be an essential part of our common understanding of the term. Fundamental to the process of establishing one's history in psychoanalysis is the idea of "having forgotten." The unconscious or censored chapter of the story of the self must be uncovered in order for the self to be recovered. But it also has to have been hidden, repressed or displaced, in order to generate the search for the full truth of the self in the process of recollection or *anamnesis*.

In our Western tradition, two terms for memory come to us from the ancient Greeks: *mnemne* or "memory" and *anamnesis*, signifying "recollection"; the former implies a constancy of knowing while the latter suggests the recovery of that which has been forgotten.¹² The past, when forgotten, is homologized to death, and its recall, *anamnesis*, is both a resurrection and a recollection. When assimilated to the Platonic notion of the Ideal, forgetting is equated with the return to life, a descent into the material realm which constitutes a forgetting of the Ideal. Thus, the effort to remember is not a search through time for specific realities, belonging to the material realm: "Philosophical *anamnesis* does not recover the memory of the *events* belonging to former lives, but of *truths*, that is, the structures of the real" (Eliade, "Mythologies," p. 125).

Here the mytho-religious notion of *anamnesis* joins the Lacanian notion of the discursive revelation of the true: history does not have its basis in the facts of the past but in those structures of the past that emerge as having been significant for the self now being constructed. Lacan's assertion that the grammatical time of remembering lies in the future becomes clear:

What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was,

since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming. ("Function," p. 86)

The past only emerges as such, as distinct from any other "time" of personal history, in the present which itself only exists as the ground or moment for the creation of meaning, that is, the projection of the future.

Anamnesis considered as both recollection and interpretation implies a redefinition of the notion of "event" as verbal happening or what Foucault calls "meaning-events." Neither a referent for a proposition (that is, a state of things) nor an attribute of a "fact" or reality, the meaning-event is attached to the verb:

We should not restrict meaning to the cognitive core that lies at the heart of a knowable object: rather, we should allow it to reestablish its flux at the limit of words and things, as what is said of a thing (not its attribute or the thing in itself) and as something that happens (not its process or its state). ("Theatrum," *Language*, p. 174)

The subject who tries to remember actually projects him- or herself at once backward and forward into the origins of the self. In fiction, the "events" of the narrative are present in similar fashion: they propel the story forward by the impetus to produce meaning, receiving their momentum from the ever-receding "past" of that which has not yet achieved meaning. Like history, fiction reaches no conclusion.

Determining the textual status of historical material in a fictional narrative is a task that takes the critic off the ontological ground provided by Lacan's analysis—that history has meaning in the present, in the text—and raises the epistemological question of *how* history has meaning in a fictional text. The novel has been, since its inception, an elastic genre: the *pícaro* as hero, wandering across the boundaries of social classes, leveling the strata of society through the oddities of human adventure, made this form of fiction a field of inquiry into a variety of social/historical concerns. Beginning with the adventures of the knight-errant of La Mancha, another fictional lineage was born whose roots display, too, the same disdain for distinctions between social groupings, historical and personal events. What is striking in the inherited tradition of prose fiction is precisely

the lack of concern for the status of the real in a fictional text. In a sense, the novel has always considered the world its text. Fiction is precisely that literary domain in which symbolic language as the epistemological basis for knowledge has been accepted from the very beginning. But if beginning is, to use Edward Said's phrase, "making or producing difference,"¹³ then the genre of fiction has revealed that the true difference is not between fictional and real, or fiction and history, but between imagination and praxis: the real considered in its problematical but potentially manipulable sense and the real as the intractable knot of historical contradiction, the *aporia* of ideological thought.

According to Fredric Jameson, the task of the critic is not only to "re-write" the literary text as an act of interpretation but also to see it as being itself a re-writing of a historical subtext.¹⁴ Text and subtext stand on the common ground of symbolic language, where neither can be construed as an artifact to be consumed by the other, but rather as mutually informing and interpreting discourses. Subtext, text, and critical text stand in relationship to one another in a kind of narrative "prestidigitation" which conveys the illusion "that there is nothing but a text, that there never was any extra- or con-textual reality before the text itself generated it in the form of a mirage" (Jameson, p. 82). Yet this is an illusion in two ways: first, history is extra- or con-textual to fiction; and second, it is inaccessible to us except by way of "prior (re) textualization" (Jameson, p. 82).

Textualization is really a re-writing of the discourse of historical events engendered by the need to communicate with and about those events. Symbolic thought acts reflexively to produce this re-writing, both constituting the text of the narrative while at the same time pulling back from the narrative and pointing to it as text, as fiction. Symbolic thought, in its very lack of tolerance for the real, thus permits and even necessitates the entrance of the real into the textual, but only as already inscribed:

The whole paradox of what we have here called the subtext may be summed up in this, that the literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction. It articulates its own situation and textualizes it. . . . (Jameson, pp. 81-82)

Thus, while the novel may point out that giants are windmills in

reality, many windmills are, or could be giants in the *aporia* of ideological thought.

The fictional re-writing of history is an attempt to capture the sensed Other, the "reality" of history, through a process of deferred substitution for that being that is ungraspable. While historical or social/historical praxis cannot be known as such, it can be imagined as subject to change, as having the potential for action. Conversely, imagination can only find its truth through the impetus to resolve the contradictions of history experienced as necessity, not in its content, but in the *form* of events which seem to transcend individual desire and freedom: "History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its 'ruses' turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention" (Jameson, p. 102).

In situating the discourse of history in the general category of symbolic language, Jameson, like Hayden White, attempts to avoid the dichotomy of defining history's status either as reality in itself, on the one hand, or as uniquely textual on the other. Moreover, Jameson does not avoid the question of social conflict as a historical property which may be *witnessed to* in fiction. And while the appropriate response to such conflict in the historical sphere is action, textuality's response to the *aporia* of ideology is the symbolic denial of historical necessity. The tension or knot of contradiction in a fictional text is the result of an intratextuality and not of some reference to an historical "cause" or event. The text provides an opening outward, an impetus to continue the *project* of the text beyond the artificial boundaries of its provisional closure by its deferral of meaning both toward the past and into the future. Thus, historical necessity is contravened by the substitution of text for event; the fictional narrative establishes the priority of the production and possibility of meaning over the discovery of meaning. In this manner, the fictional text deflects meaning from the "events in themselves" to its own authorial and authoritative voice, establishing itself as different from any other interpretation or shape of events.

In an article on fiction and history, J. Hillis Miller suggests that the novel is constructed on a series of displacements into a fictional "void." To mask this movement but at the same time revealing it as deliberate artifice, works of fiction have frequently masqueraded as something else: "This is almost always some 'representational' form

rooted in history and in the direct report of 'real' human experience."¹⁵ Miller suggests that fiction seeks, as it were, a justification for itself in this manner. J. M. G. Le Clézio's use of historical reference in his novel *Désert* seems to follow this pattern of resisting the displacement of fiction by its pretense to historical reportage. Through a fictional character, a partially "real" story is told with places and dates that correspond to recorded events of this period. To rescue history from oblivion, the story of Nour, Le Clézio's fanciful narrative of the Saharaoui campaigns of the early twentieth century, recounts the tragic failure of the resistance forces to win their freedom from colonialist domination. This narrative of *Désert* is thus a form of fictional *anamnesis* in which the events of the past are re-written in order to preserve them in memory through the construction of their meaning in the present.

Many features of the Nour narrative are faithful to the circumstances of the early campaigns: Ma el Aïnine (Le Clézio's spelling) is depicted as a holy man leading a holy war; the resistance forces are gathered from the farthest reaches of the Sahara and their presence at Smara is both an act of defiance of the European infidels and a pilgrimage to the place made holy by the *cheikh's* presence. Le Clézio's account of the massacre of Ma el Aïnine's forces is strikingly faithful to the circumstances of such military engagements between the Blue Men of the desert and French troops (Le Clézio, pp. 350-61). One example taken from military documentation conveys the impression of the overwhelming odds which the desert men faced:

. . . on the morning of September 6 [1912], Mangin's [French] force of five thousand, having first drawn itself into the classic square formation with the artillery on the inside, was attacked by the massed tribesmen, more than half of whom were on foot and armed only with rocks and clubs. Confident in the promises of El Hiba [Ma al-'Aynayn's son] that French bullets would turn into water and French shells into watermelons, the tribesmen advanced directly upon the French position. They ran into murderous fire from the French artillery; machine-gun fire and rifle volleys completed the rout. . . . The battle was in effect a massacre: more than two thousand Moroccans were killed outright and thousands more wounded, while Mangin suffered only four killed and twenty-three wounded. One is reminded of

the cynical observation of Commandant Fariau that, "real peaceful penetration consists of putting a thousand with rifles against a hundred fellows with pop-guns." (Burke, pp. 206-07)

The defeat of Ma al-'Aynayn's son signaled the end, for all intents and purposes, of the early attempts of the Saharaouis to achieve freedom from French occupation of their land. Le Clézio has chosen in *Désert* to describe a similar battle, waged by Ma al-'Aynayn himself against the French force of General Moinier on the plain of Tadla, June, 1910. While the combatants differ, the situations are alike. Indeed, an identical phrase occurs in both accounts—"murderous fire," "murderous vengeance"—suggesting that both the historian and the novelist have adopted a stance toward their material, what Hayden White calls a "linguistic protocol" (*Metahistory*, p. xi), based here on the ironic mode. Both accounts make of the story of Nour's people a tale of deliberate suppression if not annihilation, and a disenfranchisement from their birthright, the Sahara itself. In both accounts, the French troops conquer an already devastated people:

The soldiers flush out blue men everywhere, but they are not the invincible warriors that they had expected to find. They are men in rags, unshaven, without arms, who run, limping, who fall on the rocky ground. Beggars, rather, thin and burned by the sun, ravaged with fever, who collide with one another and raise cries of distress, while the Senegalese, seized with a murderous vengeance, fire their rifles, pinning the ragged men to the red soil with their bayonets. . . . Men and women flee in disorder, falling to the ground. Children run into the bushes, mute with fear, and flocks of sheep and goats jostle one another, bleating. Everywhere the ground is littered with bodies of the blue men. The last rounds of fire ring out, then nothing more is heard; once again, scorching silence presses upon the landscape.¹⁶

As in the opening and closing lines of the novel, cited at the beginning of this study, nothing but silence precedes the sound of these warriors' voices, telling their story, and nothing but silence remains to claim the land after their defeat.

Although the Nour narrative constitutes a sort of fictionalized historical record, such historical "evidence" as can be found in it is of an anecdotal sort whose documentary sources can be traced but

whose extra-textual origins are, as it were, immaterial. The matter of history that Le Clézio takes up in this portion of his novel, however compelling as human drama, has no truth-status in the novel other than that which can be conferred by the narrative itself. The account of the young contemporary Lalla and her efforts to survive ensures, however, that the silence of the plain of Tadla does not prevail.

Several thematic and structural ties link the novel's two narratives: both are about children who learn a difficult lesson in reaching adulthood; both belong to the same people of North Africa and both carry the emblem of their disenfranchisement, the one as a nomad, the other as an inhabitant of an urban slum; both inhabit the same land, symbol of a birthright denied them. Published together as a single physical artifact, the two stories also share a common narrative space. Like the inert historical matter that is re-written into the story of Nour, each narrative in Le Clézio's novel is, for the other, a con-textual document which, to use Jameson's term, serves as a subtext for the other. Each narrative is "knowable" for the other, is significant, only insofar as it can be textualized or re-written into the other. In this sense, the novel *Désert* is a lesson in reading for history in fiction, for it contains within itself both story and document, text and con-text.

The relationship of the twin narrative threads of *Désert* is intratextual, that is, each provides "instructions" on how to read the other and what to read in(to) it by a process of similarity or reduplication with difference. This intratextual re-writing occurs in both directions across time: the narrative of Nour and Ma al-'Aynayn provides the paradigm of collective suffering and exile which Lalla's story continues through a personal journey into isolation and loneliness in the "desert" of Marseille. The diachrony of the texts is reversed in that the journey of Lalla is an *anamnesis*, a living, verbal witness to the truth of her people's story. The early struggle of the Blue Men is finally realized—its history emerges as true—by its recollection or re-enactment in the story of Lalla. When she returns to her homeland to give birth, the moment of new life asserts the continuation of her people's earlier struggles; yet, in the order of Le Clézio's text, the scene of birth precedes the account of the massacre of the Blue Men. The significance of history lies thus in the common time-space of verbalization, presence. The birth of Lalla's daughter provides a paradigmatic future that *will have been* fulfilled by the earlier history of suffering and exile.

While the past imposes a story of exile, Lalla's story, the textual

present, resists this historical necessity by displacing the "language" (meaning-events) of the past, whose truth it has established, toward some unspecified new form. As a metaphorical subtext, Lalla's story retells the earlier account: as a metonymy, it defers the meaning of that story by a process of substitution, by posing the question of its own potential for interpretation. In a sense, Lalla's story asserts the con-textuality of history (the story of Ma al-'Aynayn) while at the same time confirming that history is always, already inscribed: here, in the story of Nour. Finally, Lalla's story enters a new con-text, that of its own time-space of production, shared by the implicit subtext of the Polisario independence movement. In this sense, the novel reveals the ironic mode of its writing, for Le Clézio has chosen to represent in his text the possibilities of historization, while at the same time presenting his text as an *aporia*, an emblem of historical contradiction and a refusal of historical necessity.

Thus, Le Clézio's novel both enters history and is entered by it: like the analysand's verbal recollection, this textual *anamnesis* reveals the censored "blanks" of the past, yet only to produce new spaces in which desire (the desire for meaning) is deflected into new interpretations. What the future of the Saharaoui people will be cannot be known: the *aporia* of historical conflict leaves the space blank, however, for the story of possibilities. Lalla's "future" is embodied in her child, a corporeal presence and witness to the necessity of telling the (hi)story.

NOTES

1. J. M. G. Le Clézio, *Désert* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 7; p. 411: translation mine. "Ils sont apparus, comme dans un rêve. . . Ils s'en allaient, comme dans un rêve, ils disparaissaient."

2. Edmund Burke, *Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco: Precolonial Protest and Resistance 1860-1912* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 199.

3. For information concerning the recent situation in the western Sahara, consult: Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The Western Saharans: Background to Conflict* (London: Croom Helm; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1980).

4. Anne Roche and Gérard Delfau, "Histoire-et-littérature: Un projet,"

Littérature, No. 13 (n.d.), p. 27. "Le Nouveau Roman . . . lieu privilégié du refus de l'histoire (intrigue), de l'histoire (récit), et de l'histoire (réel). . ."

5. Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses: Une Archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

6. A critical outline of Derrida's contributions to this new criticism can be found in: Frank Lentricchia, "History or the Abyss: Poststructuralism," in *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 156-210.

7. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, tr. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 151.

8. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. xi.

9. Hayden White, "Tropology, Discourse, and the Modes of Human Consciousness," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 6-13.

10. "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1977), p. 50

11. Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," tr. James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 201.

12. Mircea Eliade, "Mythologies of Memory and Forgetting," in *Myth and Reality*, tr. Willard Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 119-25, et passim.

13. Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. xiii.

14. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 81.

15. "Narrative and History," *Journal of English Literary History*, 41 (1974), 456.

16. Le Clézio, pp. 360-61; translation mine.

Les soldats débusquent des hommes bleus partout, mais ce ne sont pas les guerriers invincibles qu'on attendait. Ce sont des hommes en haillons, hirsutes, sans armes, qui courent en boitant, qui tombent sur le sol caillouteux. Des mendiants, plutôt, maigres, brûlés par le soleil, rongés par la fièvre, qui se heurtent les uns aux autres et poussent des cris de détresse, tandis que les Sénégalais, en proie à une vengeance meurtrière, déchargent sur eux leurs fusils, les clouent à coups de baïonnette dans la terre rouge. . . les hommes et les femmes fuient en désordre, tombent sur le sol. Les enfants courent au milieu des buissons, muets de peur, et les troupeaux de moutons et de chèvres se bousculent en criant. Partout les corps des hommes bleus jonchent le sol. Les derniers coups de feu résonnent, puis l'on n'entend plus rien, à nouveau, le silence torride pèse sur le paysage.