

*Post-Colonial Healing
Through Environmental
Justice: A Psychoanalytic
Reading of J.M.G. Le
Clézio's Literature*

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“For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.”

(Frantz Fanon)

1. Linking Post-colonialism and Ecocriticism Through Psychoanalytic Theory

According to Pierre Bourdieu, “literary fiction is undoubtedly, for the author and his reader, a way of mak-

ing known that which one does not wish to know” (Bourdieu 1993, 158). Post-colonial literatures seem well positioned to unveil that which we do not wish to know¹. After all, they are products of colonialism, post-colonialism, and globalization and are steeped in issues associated with racism, sexism, and environmental degradation, among others. It seems logical therefore to use an interdisciplinary approach to study post-colonial literatures, especially since different systems of oppression are mutually reinforcing.

It is easy to make the case that post-colonial theory and ecocriticism should be linked at a fundamental level, seeing that our species remains in an apogee of colonialism and environmental exploitation. If in post-colonial narratives, we speak of genocides, in ecological narratives, we speak of ecocides. E.O. Wilson claims in his *The Social Conquest of Earth* that humans are the paradigm of colonizers: “We have conquered the biosphere and laid waste to it like no other species in the history of life” (Wilson 2013, 13). Since humans have been the very epitome of colonizers of the planet, the connection between post-colonialism and ecocriticism is most apparent.

A strong link between ecocriticism and post-colonialism hardly seems universal, however. In the anthology *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, the editors claim that “although ecocriticism overlaps with post-colonial-

ism in assuming that deep explorations of place are vital strategies to recover autonomy, postcolonial criticism has given little attention to environmental factors” (DeLoughrey, Gossen, and Handley 2005, 5). Huggan and Tiffin voice a more nuanced concern: “Ecocriticism has tended as a whole to prioritize extra-human concerns over the interests of disadvantaged groups, while postcolonialism has been routinely, and at times unthinkingly anthropocentric” (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 17). This reading, if indeed true, appears irresponsible, considering that the current global humanitarian migrant crisis is linked to environmental crises.

The need to establish a link between the two fields seems even more pressing in light of T.V. Reed’s critical remark regarding ecocriticism: “The lack of a strong environmental justice component within the field of ecocriticism should be felt as a deep crisis” (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002, 157). This comment does not center on theoretical shortcomings of the field, a critical perspective advanced by Timothy Morton². Reed invites us instead to expand on the concept of environmental justice, which means expanding social justice to include the natural environment³.

Taking my cue from these criticisms regarding post-colonial and ecocritical theories, I examine the work of francophone writer J.M.G. Le Clézio (1940-) to bridge the two fields and cultivate a concept of environmen-

tal justice. In a creative twist, psychoanalytic theories are employed to bridge them and define the concept of justice, since the destruction of the land in colonial and post-colonial contexts accompanies the destruction of the mind and namely, personal identity. (While Frantz Fanon has inspired this position, this article also draws upon the psycho-analytic research of Ernest Becker, Erich Fromm, Viktor Frankl, Homi Bhabha, and Shoshana Felman.) Fanon argues that for colonial empires, a hostile nature was no different from a rebellious people and that colonization was only successful once nature had been bridled with the people (Fanon 2005, 182). To his mind, the intimate connection between nature and the colonized also includes a shared pathology: “Imperialism, which today is waging war against a genuine struggle for human liberation, sows seeds of decay here and there that must be mercilessly rooted out from our land and from our minds” (Fanon 2005, 181).

Le Clézio’s *Desert* (2009) and *The Prospector* (2008) paint a portrait of “the colonized personality,” to employ a Fanonian term (Fanon 2005, 182). The analysis of these novels revolves around three creative arguments: First, while it is standard for wilderness writers (Thoreau, Muir, Carson, and López, among others) to stress the “interconnectedness” between nature and humanity, this research highlights the notion of interdependence⁴. Interconnectedness emphasizes simple relatedness; interdependence accentuates a mutually dependent relationship. This interpretation is novel, not only because

it breaks with the standard reading of interconnect-ness, but also because it defines interdependence from a psycho-philosophical perspective. Namely, the concepts of development and freedom are dependent upon a universal adoption of these principles, including for the natural environment. If those enlightened notions are denied to large swathes—in the developing world and the natural environment—then they remain eclipsed in the developed world. They undermine their loftiness. Second, to develop and define oneself in freedom constitutes justice. This right to personal jurisdiction to “choose one’s own attitude in any given set of circumstances,” to cite Frankl, applies to both the colonized and the natural environment (Frankl 1984, 75). Thirdly, while it goes without saying that a notion of privilege propelled colonizers to advance political, religious, and economic agenda, this investigation focuses on another form of human “privilege” in Le Clézio’s oeuvre. Humans living close to nature are “privileged” or “special”, because they resemble members of a “keystone” species, an animal or plant that determines the very welfare of the rest of a natural environment. Indeed, Le Clézio’s characters living close to the natural world in colonial and post-colonial settings are keen observers of nature and thus capable of defending and speaking out on its behalf. Furthermore, and to return to Fanon, they also hold this special position, as they share the ‘seeds of decay’ that must be ‘rooted out from their land and from their minds’.

2. Defining Justice and Nature

Before expanding upon these three critical suggestions, it is important to define two key terms of this research. What does it mean first of all to speak of “environmental justice”? Though the term “justice” is defined differently according to different contexts, there seems to be a fundamental concept applicable to both humans and the natural environment. The Romans developed their “Institutes of Justinian” in sixth century A.D. in which justice was defined as the “to give every man his due” (Institutes Justinian 2009). This definition begs the question of how to define “his/her/its due”. In his *Discourse on Inequality* (1754), Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that both individual and collective justice is contingent upon one’s freedom to connect with and cultivate the earth. Speaking about paternal authority over children, he argues that once a father grants his children their due, when he “despoils” his legacy (his land), “justice” and “mercy” are rendered (Rousseau 2014, 32). Echoing the core concept that justice consists of what is “due” an individual, including access to land, this research expands to include the concept of agency. Namely, there can be no justice if individuals or collectivities do not have agency to pursue their due. There can be no justice without freedom “to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way” (Frankl 2006, 66). As we shall observe, the two characters examined from Le Clézio’s novels struggle and achieve their own way. Their attitude

and life's choices are intimately related to nature. Their healing from the trauma of colonialism is dependent upon nature and rendering nature's its due.

How does one define nature, in fact? Lest we rely on clichés about nature and nature writing, it is fruitful to turn to Le Clézio. He does not wax romantic about it. Storms strike coast-lines, winds of ill fortune sweep through villages, and insects attack and infest. Nature is the fire grown fierce after indentured workers throw their foreman into the sugarcane furnace; it is the black smoke that rises on all sides, smoke without fire, smoke that kills. It is those pitiful larvae like men crawling on this earth, only to stop and disappear in the mud (Le Clézio 1993, 264). In sum, Le Clézio breaks with other wilderness writers by emphasizing the often-cruel nature of nature itself, as opposed to following a romantic position of humans flourishing psychologically thanks to the aesthetic inspiration and even physical challenges nature provides. Humans are vulnerable to the power of nature and hence, even more dependent upon its laws than might be readily admitted.

He also portrays nature as closer to “home” (both physically and psychologically) to humanity. It is kindred to the concept of the universe. It isn't “out there”. It is everything and everywhere, including ourselves, the sublime, as well as the commonplace and the destructive. Thus, when Le Clézio describes traumatic environmen-

tal destruction, he does not make a distinction between the natural environment and human populations. He seeks to explore how the trauma is shared, especially for those living closely to nature. In short, he disrupts an anthropocentric view of nature, as he attempts to erase boundaries between the natural environment and human communities.

In addition to the themes of the power of nature (and the vulnerability of humans) and the inseparable nature of everything on the planet, Le Clézio offers a most paradoxical reading of the vulnerability too of the natural environment. In his *Le Rêve Mexicain (The Mexican Dream or the Interrupted Thought of Amerindian Civilization)* (1993), he underscores first of all the conflicting views of nature among the Spaniards and New World natives and the issues of stolen and destroyed natural resources. He then nuances this discussion by recounting the historical legend of when the Aztec kings heard of Hernan Cortés's arrival on Mexican shores, they believed that the prophesy of the return of a blond and blue-eyed God, Quetzalcoatl, had been fulfilled and were driven to supply gold to the pseudo-God Conquistador. According to Le Clézio, Cortés's success was due less to his sword and more to *la Malinche*, a native American woman who served as Cortés's partner, interpreter and advisor. She represents the historical fact that Spanish colonizers raped, enslaved, and separated women from their families and cultures. She symbolizes as well abso-

lute denigration, as she threatens her own people with violence and death⁵.

La Malinche also encapsulates what has happened to nature when it betrays itself. Through colonization, nature has been used to destroy itself and others, while the powerful reap the benefits. Malintzin (the original name of La Malinche) and gold both came from the earth and were used to insure the submission and destruction of the natives. Nature, like the colonized, “gives his troubled and partial, but undeniable assent” to the colonizers (Memmi 1961, 88). In a position of vulnerability when confronted with the sword, pick, and axe, nature becomes an accomplice in the destruction of the natural environment, including humans.

To drive home this message, Le Clézio describes how the Spanish used to extract the fat from corpses of indigenous peoples on the battle field to employ it as a balm on injured horses before sending them off again to battle native populations again. In metaphorical terms, just as the small pox virus readily attacked humans by inserting their DNA into host cells on their own, they also benefited from a ride on blankets that Europeans had purposely given to indigenous peoples. If nature appears intrinsically destructive, all-encompassing, and even capable of serving as a traitor to life itself, then how can we begin to define our relationship with the natural environment as one of interdependence? How

can we contemplate environmental justice, if nature doesn't seem to follow just laws? How can we talk about a shared quest for development and freedom, if nature seems to be governed by Darwinian laws red in tooth and claw? These questions might motivate us to ask rhetorically: "Who needs nature?" Still, are these questions a way to "other" nature, to deprive it of its rights and for violence toward it to become normalized?

3. An Interdependence that Fosters Development, Freedom, and Justice

The character Lalla from *Desert* needs nature. She cultivates and luxuriates in a relationship of interdependence with nature in the Moroccan desert and shoreline. This relationship and her own personal development are motivated by a drive to heal from the trauma of colonialism. What does that traumatic experience look like? It is psycho-philosophical, namely existential. It is a wound to one's psyche. It is a "mental decay" to employ Fanon's terms again, that develops after "a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity" (Fanon 2005, 182). This blow to the core of one's being, forces the colonized to constantly pose the question: "Who am I in reality?" (Fanon 2005, 182). Relying on the power of nature and restoring nature in her own way, she seeks to become the active force in her life, to make decisions, and to assume the consequences of her decisions. Her quest to develop

herself, therefore, is not centered on some narcissistic drive, but rather on an attempt to decolonize her mind, to exorcize the Western mind that dominates her and the natural environment. As we shall observe, Lalla and nature receive their due in both Rousseau's and Frankl's sense. Justice has been achieved for both.

Lalla's personal development occurs gradually and consists of benevolent acts towards herself, other colonized people, and toward the colonizers themselves. She refuses, for example, to be married off to a city man who wears a fancy gray-green suit. Fleeing instead to the desert to develop a mysterious intimate relationship with a muted Berber shepherd, she learns to see the sea and the sky (Le Clézio 2009, 265). (It should be stressed that the man in the gray-green suit, kindred to *apied-noir*, represents the colonizer who can stifle the freedom of the colonized.) The narrator describes Lalla as a prowling dog, a cat, a bird of prey, and a wild animal looking for something. When big seabirds pass overhead shrieking, "Lalla thinks of her place between the dunes and the white bird that was a prince of the sea" (Le Clézio 2009, 235). The line between a classical definition of nature—as a sublime pastoral setting "out there"—vanishes in Lalla's mind and body. She is nature and contains nature within herself and neither does she attempt to fight that reality nor to make a Manichaean distinction between nature and herself.

If in Le Clezio's fictive world, nature appears as a wide horizon of "bodyscapes", land-scapes, seascapes and cityscapes, then Lalla's decision to move to Marseille can be understood as a natural step in her self-development. A wide horizon calls her beyond the "comfort" of the ine-briating light of the desert and toward the sorrowful darkness of the city. Her emergence from the desert gives her a sense of dread and anxiety: "Here there are no wasps or flies zooming freely through the air where the dust swirls. There is nothing but people, rats, cockroaches, eve-rything that dwells in holes with no light, no air, no sky. Lalla prowls around the streets like an old black dog with its hair bristling..."(Le Clézio 2009, 234). She allows herself to be trapped by an abysmal feeling of meaninglessness and alienation, for the light of the desert can only fully be understood thanks to the darkness of the city. It is as if she seeks to experience this conflict knowingly. The more she faces it and seeks out her own solution, the more inner freedom and strength she gains.

The narrator describes, for instance, explicitly a process of self-transcendence: Lalla allows herself to "be swept along by the movement of the people; she's not thinking about herself now; she's empty, as if she didn't really exist anymore. That's why she always comes back to the main avenues, to lose herself in the flow, to just drift along" (Le Clézio 2009, 248). Le Clézio has created a fictional character to convey what Ernest Becker describes in psycho-philosophical terms: "And so the ar-

rival at new possibility, at new reality, by the destruction of the self through facing up to the anxiety of the terror of existence” (Becker 1997, 89). Essentially, the self must be destroyed, brought down to nothing in order for self-transcendence to begin. In some respects, Lalla’s self-transcendence is at polar extremes to the classical male romantic hero who seeks himself in nature. Lalla finds herself in the city where she is brought down to nothing.

Her eventual decision to quit her job as a maid in a cheap hotel for vagabonds in Marseille is an act that represents both a cause and a consequence of her striving to define herself. She takes a wad of cash from her earnings and spends it on new clothes. She appears nearly completely transformed. “Her eyes are sparkling with joy. There’s something like a fiery glow to Lalla’s black hair and red copper face. Now it seems as if the electric light has brought the color of the desert sun back to life” (Le Clézio 2009, 268). We are informed by the narrator in fact that she is “drunk with freedom” (Le Clézio 2009, 267). She must feel free, as Frankl reminds us, not necessarily from the conditions that imprison her, but rather because she takes a stand against those conditions, to echo the thinking of Frankl (Frankl 2006, 132).

Fear must also seize her, for she has shed the mask of otherness and poverty that used to hide her personality⁶. Even when she hid herself in “the shadow of rags, her handsome copper-colored face and her eyes were

filled with light” (Le Clézio 2009, 234). Nobody save the hotel's night watchman from Algeria could understand this. Once she redefines herself (ostensibly, at least) as a Westerner, she no longer is simply the foreigner living in poverty. The Western mind must struggle to define her, almost as if she defies a quick label. To combat the fear associated with assuming a new personality, she turns to the sun and wind for strength. “She mustn't hesitate; if she does, the giddiness of the wind and the light will go away, leaving them (her gypsy friend and her) on their own and they won't be brave enough to be free” (Le Clézio 2009, 270). The sun is not a strobe light that only illuminates a chosen few. The winds do not blow one way or another according to the color of one's skin or gender. Both the sun shines and the wind blows freely and restores. “When the sun starts going down in the sky, and the light is growing softer on the waves, on the rocks, and the wind is also blowing more gently, it makes you want to dream, to talk” (Le Clézio 2009, 275). Lalla relies on Terra Mater, the goddess of fertility and growth, to help her grow in strength, to decolonize her mind, and to feel free. She holds this force in her eyes, which is a product of the sea and the clear wide sky of the desert and is sharp-ened by the solitude and emptiness that freezes the face of the urban dwellers. Lalla's experience proves that it is not simply Romantic gibberish to consider nature a balm; it provides a source of solace and strength to those who have been downtrodden otherwise by human inhumanity.

If some may look askance at the new Lalla as she eats at a fancy restaurant, others are struck by her singular beauty. A photographer approaches her, and thus begins her career as a fashion model. It is short-lived, nonetheless, as she still resembles a cat that slips in and out of cracked windows. In other words, she still does not sell herself to the material expectations of the developed world. She wants her identity to float, not to be anchored by the weight of expected “looks” of the developed world. The narrator elaborates on Lalla’s understanding of this: “Maybe it is the other being living inside Lalla, who is observing and judging the world through her eyes...” (Le Clézio 2009, 285). Her eyesight sharpened by the desert sun allows her to understand the world about which so many dream. She no longer dreams like other immigrants do. The dream is really closer to a nightmare and resembles what Bhabha writes in theoretical terms: “The colonized, who are often devoid of a public voice, resort to dreaming, imagining, acting out, embedding the reactive vocabulary of violence and retributive justice in their bodies, their psyches...” (Bhabha in Fanon 2004, xx).

With both a keen understanding of the rude reality of the “developed” world and nature’s source of strength, she returns to North Africa. Once at home between the sea and the desert, she gives birth to a child in a remote space where only a fig tree assists in her delivery. Wrap-

ping first a belt around her waist and the tree, she relies on nature to serve as her midwife. She then takes the placenta and buries it in the ground, as if in repayment to *Terra Mater*. She understands that to exist, one must leave a restoring gift to nature. Our relationship with nature is one of interdependence. Existence and essence are defined by a natural legacy. Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" becomes: "I leave a gift to nature; therefore, I am," and this does not refer to a corpse in the ground upon which the worms can feed, but to a living tissue that will continue to nurture nature. Nature receives its due.

4. Fostering a "Special" Relationship with Nature

Like Lalla, Ouma from *The Prospector* does not view nature as an entity to be attacked, conquered, destroyed or consumed indiscriminately. Nature exists in her and constitutes her very essence. The narrator Alexis describes Ouma, who is from the Island of Rodrigues and an un-documented inhabitant of Mauritius (former Dutch and French colonies), as walking "supplely as an animal" (Le Clézio 1993, 187). He considers her to be "so wild and mobile" while "blending with the environment" (Le Clézio 1993, 191). She resembles a bird in flight that one is unaware of until it briefly blocks the sun (Le Clézio 1993, 202). She sprays herself with water like an animal taking a bath (Le Clézio 1993, 202). In short, to make a

distinction between nature and Ou-ma would be as illogical as saying: 'I take a bath in water,' as one wonders, what else does one take a bath in? It is thanks to this more natural relationship that she is able to speak out on behalf of nature, sharing not only an intimacy with it, but also a shared experience of being colonized⁷.

Ouma hardly seems to be cut from the fabric of Bhabha's colonized subject as described in his *The Location of Culture*. She is not an "Imaginary" (a transformed and immature subject, as in Freud's early formation of the ego) that has assumed a "discrete image" based on similar identities or equivalencies (of colonizers) (Bhabha 1994, 110). Her identity is organically assumed from the natural surroundings. Moreover, if the "Imaginary" is dominated by "narcissism and aggressivity" (dominant strategies of colonizers), we can conclude that Ouma does not correspond to Bhabha's portrait explored above. Nor does she resemble his "alienated" and "confrontational" colonial subject who is plagued by a sense of lack (Bhabha 1994, 110). Erasing her tracks as she walks in the forest, she defines herself freely according to the natural environment and does not suffer from any cravings, as is the case with her partner Alexis, a son of a plantation owner from Mauritius. Her "Otherness", centers on the dichotomy of living in harmony with nature vs. disharmony, which means inhabiting a realm of ignorance of and indifference toward the natural environment. Finally, Ouma offers a new take on Bhabha's

concept of “mimicry”, which develops from a need for the colonized subject to integrate into the colonial and post-colonial world. Mimicry is a “recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha 1994, 122). Ouma’s form of mimicry consists of imitating nature (with no hints of mockery) for the sake of surviving. She has no agenda to exploit it, to prospect the earth for “treasures”, like Alexis, the prospector. Unlike others governed by an inflated sense of self-worth and entitlement to rule over the natural world, Ouma’s special status is one of connection and humility.

While Ouma puts pressure on Bhabha’s concepts of the “Imaginary”, the “Other” and “mimicry” in the colonized subject, these concepts can be applied in a creative way to the character Alexis. This makes sense, since minds of the colonizers have been so profoundly colonized with an imperial ideology that they suffer from seeds of decay. (Far from sounding like an apology for colonialism, this position, as we shall see, is an attempt to understand the colonizer from a psycho-analytic perspective.)

Ouma attempts to teach Alexis in fact how to dwell in harmony with nature. This means remaining cognizant that nature is entitled to its “due”, rather than seeing it simply as a natural resource to be exploited. When colonizers no longer prospect the land indiscriminately,

when they begin to consider nature as a separate entity to be respected, then healing occurs. The mind is decolonized from the narrow paradigm of colonialism. Ouma and Alexis live together in Alex-is's childhood home in Mauritius. From his perspective, this was “an exquisite dream” (Le Clézio 1993, 328). They seem to dwell in a paradise: “Nothing is complicated here. At dawn we glide into the forest, which is heavy with dew, to pick red guavas, wild cherries, and cabbages” (Le Clézio 1993, 328). She brings him heavily scented flowers. She puts them in her thick hair, behind her ears. Again, according to the narrator, she has never been more “beautiful...” (Le Clézio 1993, 329).

There is a caveat looming on the horizon, however, and this is where the psychoanalytic portrait of the colonizer (as opposed to the colonized) begins to unfold. Alex-is resembles curiously Bhabha's “Imaginary” subject. He assumes first a “discrete image” of following Ouma's example of giving nature its due, but slowly realizes that his identity is “alienating” (Bhabha 1994, 110). Two pieces of implicit evidence support this reading of alienation. First, Alexis confesses: “We hold each other for a long time, standing under the trees that shield us from the signs of our fate... Ouma does not want to go back among the rocks. I cover her with the blanket and fall asleep sitting by her, like a useless watchman” (Le Clézio 1993, 331). He is a “useless watchman,” seeing that he knows not how to keep watch with his senses

like Ouma. He still belongs to the other world where the hand and the pan, the pen, the pick or better yet, the bulldozer matter more than the five senses. Secondly, as soon as Alexis realizes that Ouma has gone, as soon as the imprint of her body has disappeared from the mat along with the morning dew, he automatically goes to the stream "to wash sand in the pan", almost robotically, since that is what he is wired to do as the prospector (Le Clézio 1993, 332). By reverting to an automatic behavior, a sense of "lack" will develop in him. This occurs for the "Imaginary", when an identity is only partially assumed (Bhabha 1994, 110). Alexis's line of reasoning might consist of: 'If I feel so alienated in my new assumed identity, then at least I can embellish myself occasionally with nuggets of gold.' In sum, he is imprisoned in colonial thinking that consists of the unwavering belief that the land must be bridled, to return to Fanon's argument.

It can be argued, nevertheless, that a transformation does indeed take place in Alexis's mind. He claims that, "I carefully erase my tracks the way Ouma taught me, brush away the signs of my fires, and bury my waste" (Le Clézio 1993, 336). And upon learning that she has been thrown into a prison camp, he confesses: "I need her; it is she who holds the key to the prospector's secret. Now I have what I lacked before: faith. I have faith in the basalt blocks, in the ravines, in the narrow river, in the sand dunes. Everything here is a part of me" (Le Clézio 1993, 296). These statements lead us to believe

that he has decolonized his mind from the role of the colonizer. He seems to have healed himself, as he has given nature its “due”, its freedom to exist without being prospected by his axe. With a new sense of connection with Ouma and nature, Alexis resolves to leave on a ship with Nada, as she “has shown me what I have to do, told me in her wordless way, simply by appearing before me like a mirage...” (Le Clézio 1993, 314). He explains: “We’ll go to the other side of the Earth, to a place where we need fear neither signs in the sky nor the wars of men. It is an escape. Become one completely with nature, thanks to her. Now night has fallen” (Le Clézio 1993, 338). Alexis’s words should be taken with a grain of salt, especially since “night has fallen” and “Nada” in Spanish means “nothing”. We should question whether he has transformed himself truly. Has he really learned to live in harmony with nature? To give nature its “due”? Since Ouma appears before him like a “mirage”, one has reason to believe that she doesn’t leave with him, and his confessions were disingenuous. Yet more importantly, the fact that he wants to escape with her suggests that he hasn’t learned anything after all. His position is akin to the standard romantic hero who pines to escape into the wild to fuel his own narcissistic needs⁸. Furthermore, if he takes Ouma from the earth, he is taking her as if she were gold, and she has already taught him not to take from the earth. If everything is a part of him (as stated earlier), then why must he escape? He must escape from himself. He must escape from “the feeling of

powerlessness, boredom and impotence which are the necessary results of his failure” (Fromm 1947, 220). He has failed to unite fully with nature, even though he feels deeply compelled to follow the example of his “Nada”. It seems quite plausible therefore that although Ouma might have taught Alexis to understand nature in a new way, he still remains a prospector who searches to reap the physical treasures of the earth. His “faith” in nature is as ephemeral as sand dunes shaped by the ocean winds that lead him away to prospect in distant lands.

5. Final Remarks

If Ouma fails to convince Alexis about living closer to the earth as a way to heal himself from colonialism and to give nature its “due”, then we must wonder about the notion of Ouma’s privileged position. What good does her “special” relationship with nature serve, one might ask, if she cannot even convince her partner to transform his thoughts, feelings, and behavior toward nature? To be fair, one could advance the argument that Alexis might be so warped by colonial-ism that he cannot decolonize his mind. He is so alienated from himself that he fails to grasp how he could reunite himself with himself, that is with nature. Despite Ouma’s inability to convince her partner to change his ways, her portrait remains invaluable. It has the power to play an important role of raising “global consciousness” about “the twin demands of social and environmental justice” (Huggan

and Tiffan 2010, 35). It is also refreshing that the concept of environmental justice (rendering nature its “due”) is linked to a decolonization of the mind (in Alexis’s failed case) and to healing from colonialism (in Lalla’s and Ouma’s case). Finally, it is refreshing that Le Clézio breaks the stereotype of the hierarchy of colonial agents dominating colonized subjects. It is not a question, however, of Ouma and Lalla dominating the “Other”. Still, it is clear that they appear stronger and more enlightened, since they share not only the wisdom of Mother Nature, but also the trauma of colonization. These literary portraits of strong enlightened women also defy some of the psycho-pathologies of the colonized described by both Fanon and Bhabha. From this position of belonging to and understanding the earth more intimately, they are able to guide others—the oppressors caught in a culture of oppression in a materialist world. Rather than fleeing to the desert, where they will be thrown back into their own thoughts, Lalla and Ouma seek the company of others, other animals, as well as the rest of the natural environment. It is this dichotomy that serves as a powerful reaction to E.O. Wilson’s assertion that the next era will be called the Eremozoic Age, “the Age of Loneliness” (Wilson 2016, 19). By “loneliness”, Wilson is referring to an age that is dominated almost exclusively by Homo Sapiens and their domesticated animals and plants. Where are all the other flora and fauna that used to embellish our planet, one might ask? We have pushed them to extinction, that is, those of us obsessed

with bridling nature. Ouma and Lalla, on the other hand, preserve nature in a desperate attempt to bring to life what colonizers sought to destroy, giving us the impression that theirs is the Age of Interdependence. And to return to the beginning of this essay and to the pertinent discussion on the links between post-colonialism and ecocriticism, Lalla and Ouma remind us that the fields are defined by a shared ethical imperative.

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Notes:

1. In his *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton writes in fact: “Indeed, the most flourishing sector of cultural studies today is so-called post-colonial studies, which deals with Western narcissism” (Eagleton 2003, 6).
2. Timothy Morton in *Ecology without Nature* argues: “Ecocriticism is too enmeshed in the ideology that churns

out stereotypical ideas of nature to be of any use. Indeed, ecocriticism is barely distinguishable from the nature writing that is its object” (Morton 2007, 13).

3. While it is true that other scholars (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011) have examined the work of writers who have managed to unite post-colonial and ecological concerns in literature, this re-search focuses on one aspect of this topic: how environmental justice is fostered and namely by those who have been traumatized by the effects of colonialism.

4. For a complete synthesis of this issue, see Michael P. Nelson’s “An Amalgamation of Wilderness Preservation Arguments” in Callicott’s and Nelson’s *The Great New Wilderness Debate*.

5. Albert Memmi describes poignantly this phenomenon in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: “The bond between colonizer and colonized is thus destructive and creative. It destroys and re-creates the two-partners of colonization into colonizer and colonized. One is disfigured into an oppressor, a partial, unpatriotic and treacherous being, worrying only about his privileges and their defense; the other, into an oppressed creature, whose development is broken and who is compromised by his defeat” (Memmi 1961, 89).

6. I am suggesting that this is a daring venture for Lalla, since it separates her out of comfortable ‘beyonds’ to

employ a term from Ernest Becker; she attempts to define herself in new terms, those that go contrary to what society expects from her.

7. By shared psycho-pathology, I am referring to the shared trauma of colonization among her ancestors, people, and the earth.

8. Similarly, Shoshana Felman writes in *What Does a Woman Want?* about a 'woman's duty' to "serve as a narcissistic mirror for her lover and thereby to reflect back simply and unproblematically man's value" (Felman 1993, 4). This points to an underlying rapport between women and nature, for the male mind at least.

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