ABSTRACT: The many prestigious literary awards bestowed upon the artist, in addition to the Nobel Prize, beckon French educators to place J. M. G. Le Clézio in the same rich tradition with writers such as Camus, Sartre, Simon, Mauriac, and Gide. For this reason, reflecting upon educational strategies for teaching the Franco-Mauritian author’s varied texts is essential. The purpose of this examination is to identify challenges that teachers face when utilizing Le Clézio in the world language classroom, to propose practical solutions to these issues, and to pinpoint the ways in which the incorporation of the 2008 Nobel Laureate in Literature into the existing curriculum can truly enrich any learning environment.

KEYWORDS: J. M. G. Le Clézio, pedagogical strategies, foreign language teaching methodology, teaching literature, literature-based foreign language curriculum, contemporary French/ Francophone literature, 2008 Nobel Prize in Literature

0. INTRODUCTION

Studying J. M. G. Le Clézio’s complex, diverse, and prolific œuvre is a challenging but rewarding endeavour. Similar to other Nobel laureates such as Camus, Le Clézio’s work resists simplistic categorization and appropriation. In addition to the inherent difficulties involved in classifying an author who has been appropriately described as a veritable ‘writing machine,’ other potential, pedagogical obstacles for implementing Le Clézio in the classroom include constraints of time, selection of appropriate text(s), accessibility of philosophical and experimental works, and student sensibilities. Despite such problems, the 2008 Nobel Prize in Literature has solidified the nomadic writer’s position in the French literary canon for both current and future Francophiles.

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1. IMPLEMENTING LE CLÉZIO’S NARRATIVES IN THE CLASSROOM

1.1 Selecting appropriate text(s)

The first difficult decision that an educator must face is how to implement Le Clézio in his or her classroom. After the painstaking process of selecting an appropriate text from a wealth of possibilities, the instructor must create a theoretical framework that facilitates student comprehension of the author’s work as a whole, and a basic understanding of how specific texts fit into it. Given the diversity of the author’s literary repertoire, this is indeed a daunting task even for a so-called ‘Le Cléziste.’ Although Le Clézio is often oversimplified and misunderstood by both the general public and the literary community, a researcher must confront several fundamental issues.

1.2 Explaining Le Clézio’s literary transformation

The first question to address is how to explain the difference between Le Clézio’s early and later works of fiction. Le Clézio has achieved tremendous commercial success after adopting a more lyrical and poetic style that characterizes many of his narratives beginning with the collection of short stories *Mondo et Autres Histoires*, published in 1978. However, a reader who is only familiar with the latter part of Le Clézio’s literary production is often astounded when he or she discovers the existential suffering of protagonists like Adam Pollo, Beaumont, and Roch.¹ Both the style and tone of the Franco-Mauritian author’s early seminal works differ greatly from that of his later fiction. For instance, the narrator of *Les Géants* fervently reiterates ‘il faut brûler hyperpolis’ ‘We must burn down hyperpolis’ throughout the entire novel. In addition to the obvious foreshadowing that is omnipresent in this experimental text, it is important to note that the tone of the narration is overtly aggressive, hostile, and rebellious. It is a pedagogic responsibility to decide whether the existential and experimental texts represent a stage in Le Clézio’s literary development or a definitive rupture. Is it more accurate to outline

¹ Adam Pollo is Le Clézio’s very first protagonist of the novel *Le Procès-Verbal (The Interrogation)*. Beaumont and Roch are main characters in two distinct short stories that comprise the early collection *La Fièvre (Fever).*
a natural evolution and recurring themes, such as the inauthentic and sterile nature of modern society, or to identify the existence of multiple Le Clézios? This quandary has been the source of much debate in the academic community and the author himself has been asked to offer his personal view. In a 2001 interview with Label France, Le Clézio declares:

First of all, I would answer your question by saying that it does not bother me at all to be unclassifiable. I think one of the main characteristics of the novel is its difficulty to be categorized. In other words, it is a polymorphic genre that is part of a certain mixture of styles, an intermingling of ideas which is ultimately the reflection of our multipolar world. With this said, I also think that the French literary institution, which has inherited the so-called universal thought of the (18th Century Enlightenment) encyclopedia writers, has always had the unfortunate tendency to marginalize all thought from elsewhere as ‘exotic.’ Rimbaud and Segalen suffered the consequences of this during their time. Likewise, even today, writers from the South are only published in France

**Teaching Le Clézio and his forest of paradoxes**
if they accept to limit themselves to the ‘exotic’ category. The example that comes to mind is that of the Mauritian author Ananda Devi, whose work I defended while I was on the selection committee for the publisher Gallimard. They told me that her manuscript was not exotic enough!2

The Franco-Mauritian writer freely admits that his literary corpus is not easy to categorize in its entirety. However, all true novels are impossible to appropriate systematically according to Le Clézio. Although the question posed by the journalist from *Label France* was perhaps intended to be narrower in focus, the author used this opportunity to delve into a larger debate in French literature. Le Clézio harshly criticizes the entire French literary institution and its dogmatic tendency to marginalize writers like Ananda Devi that do not easily fit into the encyclopedic mould. For this reason, teaching the nomadic author facilitates enriching discussions about literary conventions, originality, genre distinctions, and the notion of a masterpiece. Moreover, Le Clézio’s criticisms of the literary establishment are reminiscent of those raised by Alain Robbe-Grillet in his *Pour un nouveau roman*. Who has the right to decide what constitutes a ‘good novel?’ and are the criteria truly objective? Although some so-called exotic writers, such as Rimbaud, undeniably remain part of the French literary canon, other thinkers have perhaps failed to leave a lasting impression because of this label. Only time will tell if Le Clézio’s talent and immense body of work will protect him from the tendencies of an institution that attempts to compartmentalize all knowledge and to create special categories for ‘problematic’ authors that resist this type of assimilation. In other words, both teacher and student must decide if classifications like ‘exotic’ and ‘mystical’ will help to anchor Le Clézio firmly into the canon for future generations or if he will also fall victim to the same prejudices that have haunted other French/ Francophone writers.

Although the author himself is somewhat vague regarding his work in the interview, it is evident that he considers it impossible to appropriate fully his entire literary repertoire into traditional, encyclopedic categories. In a recent public conversation on April 4, 2009, Adam Gopnik from the *New Yorker* asked Le Clézio to decide if it was more accurate to explain

2 All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
the difference between the writer’s initial literary efforts and his more recent narratives as a schism or as phases of a unified project. In response, the author declared:

It’s probably both. When I published *The Interrogation* […] I was twenty-two years old, so when you are twenty-two you want to break doors, you want to be violent, you want to say that you exist […] I am here […] and I want to say something […] but then with passing years you change […] you try to become the passage for something else (Gopnik 2009).

Given the inherent constraints of time in the academic setting it is often impossible to examine multiple Le Clézian texts because of the structure of many academic programmes. Nevertheless, the teacher should at least ensure that the learners possess a rudimentary understanding of the author’s literary transformation.

1.3 Identifying common threads and avoiding definitive affirmations

Despite the evident difficulties that a teacher must confront when creating a theoretical framework for the classroom, it is important to identify common threads that run throughout the Franco-Mauritian writer’s entire career. According to some researchers, Le Clézio’s prose has remained consistently poetic since 1963. As Nadine Dormoy and Lazar posit, “Toute l’œuvre de Le Clézio semble être un long poème où reviennent les thèmes chers: la mer, le vent, le désert, les oiseaux, l’autre côté du monde” ‘Le Clézio’s entire body of work seems to be a long poem with the following recurring themes: the ocean, wind, desert, birds, and the ‘other side’ of existence’ (1990:121). In reference to the same lyrical nature of the author’s prose, Ruth Holzberg claims, “A travers l’œuvre leclézienne règne une profonde joie de vivre qui fait pulser le texte et couler les mots” ‘Throughout Le Clézio’s work a profound thirst for life abounds which makes the text pulsate and the words flow’ (1976-77:89).

Nevertheless, it is virtually impossible to uncover any ecstasy whatsoever when exploring texts such as *La Ronde et autres faits divers* and *Coeur Brûle et autres romances*. Far from lauding the grandeur of life and imploring the reader to live his or her life to its fullest, the Le Clézian
narrator in each of these collections of short stories paints a vivid portrait of searing pain. The reader deeply empathizes with Christine, the protagonist of “Ariane,” who is repeatedly raped by an entire group of male aggressors. The stark realism and graphic detail of this encounter destabilize and disturb the reader. The end of the narrative provides little hope that Christine will ever be able to recover emotionally and her immense suffering is not counterpointed by any euphoric moments of sensory pleasure that are present in other Le Clézian texts. For this reason, an educator is encouraged to avoid definitive affirmations regarding the Franco-Mauritian writer’s works and problematic words, such as ‘all’ and ‘throughout.’ Moreover, a teacher who decides to implement Le Clézio in the world language classroom must be cognizant of the interpretive pitfalls that abound in the field in order to ensure that his or her students do not fall prey to the same traps that have ensnared specialists and lay readers alike.

1.4 Being cognizant of student sensibilities
Not only do texts like “Ariane” pose a challenge in the classroom, given that they counter typical stereotypes about Le Clézio’s writing and his literary project; but they also can easily offend delicate student sensibilities. In reference to the sombre collection of short stories entitled Coeur Brûle et autres romances, Allen Thiher declares that these narratives are “vintage Le Clézio, powerful and disturbing” (2001:189). As Thiher establishes in his review of Coeur Brûle et autres romances, moments of transcendence that momentarily dissipate the intense suffering of the protagonists are indeed rare, if not entirely absent, in these macabre vignettes of the modern world. In an interview with Tirthankar Chanda in Label France, Le Clézio clarifies his choice of the word ‘romance’ in the title; the author reveals that all seven of these novellas are inspired by tragic stories that he discovered in various media sources:

C’était un mot un peu ironique pour décrire des situations qui sont tragiques. Le livre est composé de sept nouvelles, des récits sombres. Dans la romance, le sentiment prime sur la vérité sociologique. Je pense que le rôle de la nouvelle est de mettre en scène ce dérapage constant entre les courants sentimentaux et le monde social, le monde réel.
D’autre part, toutes les nouvelles de ce recueil sont des faits divers que j’ai adaptés. Il s’agit donc d’histoires vraies. Elles possèdent cette part «fleur bleue» qu’on trouve aussi dans les pages «faits divers» des journaux (Chanda 2001).

This was a slightly ironic word to describe tragic situations. The book is composed of seven novellas, sombre narratives. In romance, emotions take precedence over sociological truth. I think that the role of the novella is to represent this constant back and forth between waves of emotion and society, the real world. On the one hand, all of the short stories in this volume are news items that I adapted. Thus, they are based on true stories. They have this rather romantic element that one also finds in the miscellaneous section of newspapers.

Although the gloomy aspects of Le Clézio’s fiction reinforce his realistic worldview and negate oversimplified criticisms of the sublime element in his works, certain passages are profoundly unsettling. The meticulous attention to detail in scenes where protagonists like Christine are victimized creates a deep sense of empathy for human anguish. Even the most insensitive student reader would probably feel tremendous compassion for the plight of certain characters. Moreover, a teacher who decides to implement such narratives given their utility for nuancing classroom discussions must approach difficult subjects like sexual exploitation in a very sensitive manner. The teacher must recognize that students in a world language classroom might have experienced struggles similar to that of the trauma depicted by the author.

1.5 Selecting challenging yet accessible texts

In addition to these concerns, some Le Clézio texts are more easily accessible than others in terms of both style and content. Experimental works, such as *Les Géants* and *La Guerre*, are challenging narratives that defy typical literary conventions. Not only is the plot of *Les Géants* quite fragmented, but the novel also begins with a long series of isolated excerpts related to our consumerist society, iconography associated with the mainstream media, selections from television advertisements,
propaganda concerning the dissemination of (mis)-information, and a strong declaration “Il faut brûler hyperpolis” that occurs throughout the narrative. The text which follows the enigmatic initial pages is as complex as the fragments of information that attack the reader’s sensibilities. Students who are accustomed to a traditional plot will here be exposed to a very different sort of novel that will force them to insert the missing information from their imagination and to make connections between the words and the other elements that comprise this work.

Although some learners will relish their active role in the negotiation of meaning, other students will become easily frustrated without proper scaffolding. If a teacher does not create a solid theoretical framework to contextualize Le Clézian narratives like *Les Géants*, then the pictorial representations, sounds, and words that comprise this novel will befuddle the student. It might sound odd to discuss the role of sounds in a written text, but utterances like “Owi onon sessaoh-wi” can only be understood by being read aloud (Le Clézio, 1973:159). The quasi-phonetic spellings that are present in the text imitate the act of conversation with all its redundancy, false starts, and hesitations.

1.6 Confronting constraints of time

A teacher must also confront constraints of time. Since the publication of his first novel in 1963, the Franco-Mauritian author has been publishing prolifically. A teacher often only has enough class time to implement one text by each respective author in many literary courses. Although Le Clézio’s works are appropriate for genre studies, thematic courses, and basic surveys of French literature, exploring only one text by the Nobel laureate could provide the students with a narrow vision of the author’s inexhaustible *œuvre*. Similar to Camus, Le Clézio possesses a keen awareness of the human condition and all of the anguish from which mortals suffer. However, both authors, when we consider their works in total, also encourage the reader to commune with the natural world and to embrace the ecstasy of the present. Focusing solely on Le Clézio’s existential works like *Le Procès-Verbal* and *La Fièvre* just as reading Camus’s *L’Étranger* could give students a false perception.
In an effort to broaden student comprehension of Camus’s entire repertoire while focusing on a close reading of *L’Etranger*, one could provide learners with excerpts from one of the meditative essays that comprise *Noces*. The implementation of such supplementary passages could be quite useful when the students have a firm grasp of the main text. Returning to Le Clézio, if an educator decides to concentrate on the writer’s so-called more lyrical works of fiction like *Le Chercheur d’or*, he or she could distribute selections from the aforementioned ‘existential’ texts and ask students to identify ontological elements in the principal narrative. This systematic approach should help students avoid overgeneralization and oversimplification in analyzing the prose of a complex writer.

2. ADVANTAGES OF INCORPORATING LE CLÉZIO INTO THE FL CURRICULUM

2.1 Exposing students to simple linguistic structures

Despite the inherent challenges posed by an exploration of the Franco-Mauritian writer’s works, the incorporation of Le Clézio’s fiction into the existing curriculum greatly enriches both the linguistic and academic mission of a programme. Given the author’s multifaceted style, the nomadic writer is a pertinent addition to any level of French studies. The realistic and poignant novella “L’Enfant de sous le pont” “The child from under the bridge” is composed of simple linguistic structures that are appropriate for intermediate learners of French in the world language classroom. A student with very little lexical and syntactic knowledge can understand sentences like “Ceci est une histoire vraie” ‘This is a true story’ and “Le nom de cette ville n’a pas d’importance” ‘The name of this town is not important’ (Le Clézio 2000:6-7). Le Clézio’s diction might not be complicated in “L’Enfant de sous le pont,” but the story itself is a poignant account about homelessness, poverty, indifference, stereotypes, immigration, and discrimination. This atypical ‘children’s story,’ from an American perspective, will improve intermediate students’ reading skills and also force them to reflect critically about issues related to modernity.
2.2 Challenging students with complex narratives

The majority of Le Clézio’s fiction, however, possesses the necessary complexity for a graduate seminar. The profound existential trauma of the protagonist Roch in “La Fièvre” is clearly reminiscent of Roquentin’s legendary “nausea.” *L’Extase Matérielle* is a philosophical essay that will remind initiated readers of pantheistic monists like Spinoza. The Mauritian saga *Le Chercheur d’or* delves into issues related to colonialism, human exploitation, racism, ethnic minorities, and the occidental materialistic obsession for the accumulation of wealth at all costs. The texts, and indeed most of Le Clézio’s works, will challenge even trained readers with their intricacy, ambivalence, and paradoxes.

2.3 Teaching quotidian vernacular expressions

Despite the complexity of the Franco-Mauritian writer’s world view, the linguistic accessibility of his entire repertoire has positive ramifications for the classroom. Although Le Clézio’s prose is descriptive, poetic, and perhaps even musical, it is not as difficult as that of other writers, such as Marcel Proust from a stylistic standpoint. In an interview with National Public Radio (NPR), Jennifer Waelti-Walters after the Nobel award to Le Clezio affirms that the author possesses “a kind of 19th-century facility with words […] He could draw a word painting of a storm, and you’d feel as though you got wet” (2009). The novelist Francois Mauriac boldly referred to the Franco-Mauritian writer as the “meilleur poète contemporain” ‘best contemporary poet,’ in spite of the fact that Le Clézio only writes prose (Dormoy 1990:123). Le Clézio’s sentences do not constitute entire pages or paragraphs like those of Proust. Reading Proust can be frustrating for students who are still trying to master the language. Learners who are studying French literature for the first time do not need a ‘support group’ to help them cope with Le Clézio’s style which contains practical quotidian expressions that are part of colloquial speech. This consideration is important because one of the ultimate goals of literature-based foreign language programmes is to create fluent and confident speakers of the target language.
2.4 Pinpointing natural pairings

The flexibility of Le Clézio’s varied oeuvre is also important. The works of the Franco-Mauritian author can be incorporated into classes dedicated to a specific century, genre studies, thematic offerings, and explorations of contemporary critical theory. In addition to the fact that Le Clézio’s works represent an invaluable component of both 20th-century French/Francophone literature and contemporary studies, a teacher can decide which novels or short stories are the most appropriate for investigations of a specific genre. The varied nature of Le Clézio’s prose presents the educator with many divergent possibilities.

Much of Le Clézio’s early fiction could be paired with that of writers like Sartre, Camus, and Malraux in a course entitled “The Human Condition.” Several researchers have explored the relationship between the Franco-Mauritian writer and so-called existential authors. Le Clézio’s experimental narratives, such as La Guerre and Les Géants, could be linked with the works of writers like Robbe-Grillet, Butor, Perec, and Sarraute in the context of the nouveau roman.

In addition to these evident natural pairings suggested by contemporary criticism, the novel Etoile Errante would be appropriate for an academic investigation of literary and cinematic representations of the Holocaust in French literature. Furthermore, in both his recent public discourses and narratives, the nomadic author has begun to reflect about the challenges, paradoxes, and the pragmatic issues that confront the writer in the modern era. The age-old questions that Le Clézio addresses in his Nobel acceptance speech, “In the Forest of Paradoxes,” are reminiscent of discussions like Sartre’s Qu’est-ce que la littérature?

The cornerstone of any theory course is delineating the difference between literature and other forms of artistic expression. Like many contemporary theorists, Le Clézio blurs this distinction as he dedicates the Nobel Prize to an Amerindian oral storyteller from the Darien region of Panama named Elvira. As Le Clézio affirms, “C’est à elle, Elvira, que j’adresse cet éloge – à elle que je dédie ce Prix que l’Académie de Suède me remet. À elle, et à tous ces écrivains avec qui – ou parfois contre qui j’ai vécu.” ‘It is to her, to Elvira, that I address this tribute—

and to her that I dedicate the Prize which the Swedish Academy is
awarding me. To her and to all those writers with whom—or sometimes
against whom—I have lived.’ Furthermore, the world citizen reiterates,
“Elle était la poésie en action, le théâtre antique, en même temps que le
roman le plus contemporain” ‘She was poetry in action, ancient theatre,
and the most contemporary of novels all at the same time’ (Le Clézio
2008). Although Elvira’s literary production is entirely oral, the Nobel
laureate refers to her as a writer. Moreover, Le Clézio also recognizes
the paradoxical nature of his own writing. The Franco-Mauritian author’s
prose gives a voice to those that have been disenfranchised and
marginalized by modernity, yet he realizes that the unpleasant realities
associated with the complex phenomena of globalization and urbanization
which render his lifestyle possible have been responsible for the
eradication of traditional societies across the world. This observation is
an element of the forest of paradoxes to which the title of this article
refers.

2.5 Connecting literary narratives to contemporary life

The humanistic tone of the Nobel discourse is emblematic of the author’s
profound sensibilities in his narratives. Although many students might fail
to see the connection between older texts written in the French language
and their everyday lives, Le Clézio’s narratives are especially pertinent
in today’s society and in the classroom because they delve into serious
modern day issues. Globalization, immigration, racism, ethnocentrism,
poverty, economic and sexual exploitation, war, homelessness, and the
destruction of the earth’s natural resources are problems that plague
contemporary society. Le Clézio is often denigrated by misinformed
critics as a naïve pantheist, but perhaps no other contemporary writer
possesses a more acute awareness of modernity and its ramifications
than him. As the title of Marina Salles’s recent monograph affirms, Le
Clézio is undeniably a “peintre de la vie moderne” ‘a painter of modern
life.’

Unlike Sartre and other so-called engagé or committed writers, Le Clézio
does not promote a specific political ideology. However, his narratives
and recent public discourses allow teachers to discuss contemporary
issues without alienating sensitive students. Perhaps the best example of
Leclézian humanism is the novel *Etoile Errante*. In this work, the Franco-Mauritian author decries the human toll of political conflicts and genocide from a purely humanitarian standpoint. As Walter Putnam insists in his analysis of the text, “There is no utopia here, whether on the Israeli or Palestinian side” (1998:323). In *Etoile Errante*, Le Clézio compels the reader to empathize with the men, women, and children of both societies who have greatly suffered because of the incessant violence that has scarred this land. Furthermore, the Nobel Laureate does not propose a solution for this complex issue. The realistic and nuanced portraits that concretize the profound trauma of the Holocaust victims at Borgo San Dalmazzo and the Palestinian refugees at the sinister death camp Nour Chams represent an exercise in compassion. Regardless of a student’s political persuasion, he or she can denounce the heinous nature of such crimes against humanity.

Although the mainstream media devotes little time to traditional societies that survive because of their primordial relationship to nature, the Franco-Mauritian author has a predilection to compose narratives dedicated to civilizations like the Embera, Wounaans, Tuaregs, and the Manafs. Such authentic communities might not seem to participate in the dialogue of the global society in which most human beings now reside. However, these societies are not immune to problems caused by modernity, such as global warming, pollution, and the rapid consumption of environmental resources.

2.6 Giving a voice to ethnic and moral minorities

An essential aspect of Le Clézio’s humanistic endeavour is to give a voice to both ethnic and moral minorities all across the globe. As Jean-Xavier Ridon affirms, “Les livres de J. M. G. Le Clézio sont habités par de nombreuses voix marginales, par des êtres qui semblent exclus de notre modernité. Nous y découvrons des présences qui offrent de multiples formes de décalage par rapport à cette identité collective” ‘J. M. G. Le Clézio’s books are inhabited by many marginal voices, by people that seem to be excluded from modernity. Here we (as readers) discover people that are out of step with this collective identity’ (1998:39). Without being overtly didactic, the Nobel Laureate defends traditional civilizations, their thought, and their way of life. Although Western society often uses
adjectives like ‘savage’ and ‘uncivilized’ to refer to indigenous societies, Le Clézio presents a more balanced point of view that summons the reader to listen to marginal voices that have been silenced by the majority. Given that all communities must cope with unfortunate byproducts created by the modern world, the Franco-Mauritian author beckons the reader to be more open to a dialogue related to the ramifications of globalization and the imposition of an occidental monolithic culture around the world.

Le Clézio’s recent public discourses, in which he supports primordial societies, are also relevant in the world language classroom. Although the nomadic writer still remains distrustful of all-encompassing ideologies, he has publicly expressed his concerns related to the exploitation of both the Inuit and the Chagossian communities. Le Clézio’s letter to Le Monde entitled “Quel avenir pour la Romaine?” ‘What future does the Romaine river have?,’ in which he urges others to join the poetess Rita Mestokosho in condemning the electrical company Hydro-Québec’s project, possesses the same apocalyptic tone as the short story Pawana. It is too late for Charles Mellville Scammon and John, de Nantucket to preserve the sacred lagoon that they have forever tarnished, but Le Clézio compels the Canadian government and the Inuits to not make the same irreparable mistake. After referring to the romaine region as “un de ces lieux merveilleux qui ont survécu sur notre planète très maltraitée par la civilisation industrielle” ‘one of these marvelous places that have survived our very badly treated planet by industrial civilization,’ the Franco-Mauritian author summons the reader to “Regardez bien la photo qui accompagne cette tribune, car dans quelque temps, elle ne sera peut-être plus qu’un souvenir” ‘Look at this picture well that accompanies this column because soon it will perhaps only be a memory’ (1994:22). In a lyrical fashion and without accusing specific political figures, Le Clézio appeals to modern students’ ecological sensibilities in both narratives like Pawana and in his public speeches.

In another letter published by the newspaper Le Monde entitled “Lavez l’injustice faite aux Chagossiens” ‘Wash away the injustice done to the Chagossians,’ Le Clézio recounts the tragic story of the Chagossian civilization. According to the author, this small ethnic minority that used to reside on the Diego Garcia archipelago was displaced by the
construction of an American military base on the island. Le Clézio blames the British authorities who sold this supposedly uninhabited land to the American government, “Un mensonge des autorités britanniques apporta cette garantie: les Chagos, affirmèrent-elles, étaient peuplées seulement d’un groupe de pêcheurs qui n’y résidaient que le temps d’une saison. L’installation de la base eut lieu à Diego Garcia, l’île principale de l’archipel, après qu’une milice musclée eut expulsé de leurs îles les habitants, qui en réalité étaient là depuis des générations, pêcheurs et cultivateurs” ‘A lie from British authorities provided this assurance. They affirmed that the Chagos Islands were only inhabited by a seasonal group of fishermen. The base was constructed at Diego Garcia, the main island of this archipelago after a forceful deportation expelled the inhabitants from their island, which had in reality fished and cultivated the land there for generations’ (Le Clézio 2009). Le Clézio implores the American president to empathize with the plight of the Chagossians.

3. CONCLUSION

Le Clézio’s fiction does not correspond to a specific literary category. Moreover, a teacher who attempts to teach the 2008 Nobel Laureate in Literature’s diverse repertoire is confronted by many pragmatic issues, such as the creation of a theoretical framework to guide student comprehension of the text(s), the selection of appropriate, accessible, and inoffensive narratives, and time constraints. Despite such practical quandaries, however, the rewards of implementing Le Clézio in the world language classroom are limitless. The Franco-Mauritian author’s works are applicable to any level and his astute observations of the problems that continue to haunt modernity appeal to student interests and sensibilities. Moreover, exploring both Le Clézio’s fiction and his public discourses allows learners to participate in the larger debate of literature and its conventions. Teaching an author that tends to avoid definitive affirmations in favour of posing questions to the reader fosters the development of essential critical thinking skills and furthers the mission of the humanities in the classroom.
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