



Review Article

**Literary Reminiscences in M. Tournier's Novels (On the basis
of "Friday," "The Ogre," "Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar")**

Tamila Davitadze

*PhD, Assistant Professor, Dr. Literary Studies (The History of European and American
Literature), Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, Georgia*

tamila.davitadze@bsu.edu.ge

APA Citation:

Davitadze, T. (2019). Literary Reminiscences in M. Tournier's Novels (On the basis of "Friday," "The Ogre," "Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar"). *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*, 7(13), 338-343.

Abstract

The works of Michel Tournier, the French classic novelist of the contemporary literature, are intertextual. The writer strives for a unity of thought and imagery. For him, the novel is an artistic exploration of the modern world through the Neomites. He uses a variety of postmodern aesthetics. His purpose is not aesthetic play with the text, but the search for the lost truth and the unification of the universe, the universe that collapses. Michel Tournier's writing style is characterized by mixture of philosophical and mythological themes. He transforms the old plots and creates new ones. What are the peculiarities of his writing style, what devices and methods the author uses when he recreates the old scenes, how he interprets the old texts and what role intertextuality plays in his novels are answered in the present article. In other words, the aim of the article is to scrutinize the writing style of Michel Tournier and mark attention towards inter relationships between old and new texts.

Keywords: Postmodernism, myth, philosophy, theology, parable, novel-parody.

Introduction

In Michel Tournier's literary works one can find three main directions: mythological, philosophical and realistic ones. Tournier was inspired by German culture, Catholicism and Gaston Bashliar's philosophy. In Tournier's mythological literary works we come across the following themes: self - identification of a hero, his marginality and fighting against isolation/loneliness. The heroes of his literary works are men eaters, twins, and hermaphrodites. The author creates quite original myths where moral principles are of primary importance. M. Tournier aim is to preach truth. His literary works are lessons of philosophy and theology. According to F. Selie, "term "Myth" can't be defined traditionally; Biblical Myth is a religious tale and it should be differentiated from literary myth" (Selie, 1984).

There is no theory of death in Tournier's literary works. Tournier's heroes revive like the heroes of Ancient epoch. Using myths and the scenes from world literature, Tournier uses in practice the wisdom of philosophy. "Tournier's literary works are the result of transformations of different biblical, mythological themes. Tournier creates new semantic structure of a traditional myth changing it completely" (Benidze, 2011:35). M. Tournier had to solve the problems, like mixing metaphysics with novel, and combining reality with imagined world. At the same time he had to keep traditions of French literature and create the novel that would be interesting for the readers.

Theoretical Background

Many famous scholars have studied M. Tournier's style of writing. One of them is Kirsty Ferguson, who calls M. Tournier's style "edendless ambiguity." Ema Wilson and Michael Worton analyze the style of Tournier from the angle of Freud's Psychoanalysis. Cornelia Klettke in her scientific paper "*Music in Tournier's aesthetics*" (Based on the analysis of "*The Ogre*") analyses the novel structurally and bases her analysis on Claude Levi –Strauss' myths and uses Fuco's structural elements. Marissa Koopman-Turling studies the problem of the double in literary works of M. Tournier. She believes that Tournier's heroes are lonesome and they are in search of their doubles.

According to Elisabeth Alte, there is a special connection between ethics and aesthetics in Tournier's works. She thinks that there are elements of Baroque style in his works. This idea is shared by Colin Davis, who underlines ethical motives in Tournier's texts.

A. Bulomie thinks that Tournier uses "quasi-magic" reprise to make a great impact on the readers. Martin Roberts marks our attention towards Tournier's talent "Creating new artistic forms from the old ones." As for Françoise Merle, she believes that Tournier was inspired by music, German culture and classical religion. Scholar Inge Den studies transformations and mythological borrowings in Tournier's works. A. Smirnov and N. Asanov in their monograph "*Philosophical Novel of M. Tournier*" draw attention towards author's philosophical conception and find mythological plots in his novels. They also underline that the author is founder of a new type of novel called "Novel-Paraphrase."

Discussion

M. Tournier's heroes are mainly males. His male heroes are Robinson from novel "*Friday*" (1967), Castor and Pollux from "*Meteors*" (1975), Biblical magi from "*Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar*" (1980), Bluebeard and Jil de Re from "*Jil and Jan*", and Moses from "*Eleazar or the Spring and the bush*" (1996). It should be mentioned that in Tournier's narratives realistic world is merged with imaginary world. From this angle, it is interesting to study the hero of a men-eater giant from "*The Ogre*" that transforms into St. Christopher and saves the life of many children in the period of the World War II.

Gunter Grass, François Rabelais, Miguel De Cervantes, Lui Ferdinand Selin were the writers who made a great influence on the writing style of M. Tournier. His first novel where the author mixes realism with myths is his first novel "*Friday*" (1967). Novel "*Friday*" (, *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique*) is a story about Robinson and Friday. M. Tournier believes that Friday in Defoe's novel is a victim of Robinson. Tournier changed the history so that Friday becomes a protagonist. Tournier's Robinson decides to stay on the "Island of Hope," in Nature. Novel's first part describes the customs and habits of a hard working person. Robinson decides to teach Friday. Friday is pleased as there appears a person who forces her to

work. Friday becomes civilized. After explosion, situation changes on the island. The island becomes ruled by Friday. She has her own rules. Defoe's Robinson is a strong person, who never gets scared of problems, but Tournier's Robinson is a real person: he is afraid of life, disappointed and uninterested in life. He becomes indifferent. Robinson wishes to get pleasure from life. He gets pleasure from running naked: he dislikes wearing clothes. He does not grow rice; he does not wake up early. All day long he rests and does not speak at all. It appears that Robinson disliked everyday routine, but he was not strong enough to resist it.

As we mentioned above, the roles of Robinson and Friday changed. Friday learns how to fly a kite or shoot arrows. If in the first part priority is given to hard work, in the second part priority is given to getting pleasure from life. When Robinson sees a ship near the beach and sees how hard sailors work on it, he decides to stay on the island, but Friday secretly abandons the island.

In 1970 M. Tournier published novel *"The Ogre"* („*Le Roi des aulnes*“) that was based on Goethe's poem. In the novel the author describes real facts of East Prussia. The plot is based on an old German myth, where the ogre kidnapped children and killed them. The actions develop in the period of Nazi. Main character of the novel is Abel Tiffauges who has transformed into a man-eater. He is the man who has the fate of mythological men eaters like The King of Olkhov, Christopher, Gering and Hitler. The history of a hero serves as a prelude to the travelling to the world of symbols. Abel's narrative structure is based on two mythological motives, which creates hybrid character of the hero. On the one hand, Abel reminds us biblical myth about Abel and Caen, on the other hand it reminds us Goethe's ballad *"The Ogre"* (*Roi des Aulnes*). The author uses three types of intertextuality: Biblical myth, myth of Androgene and myth of the ogre from Goethe's *"The Ogre"*.

In this novel the author studies the phenomenon of Fascism and its magic nature. According to the author, modern civilization is in the danger of destruction and in order to depict it, the author uses myths. It should be mentioned that novel myth was a popular form of literature at the end of XX century.

Using myths for his plots of the novels, M. Tournier created new genres in literature: Novel – Paraphrase and Novel Parody. The author enlarged the understanding of mythological archetype. He depicted not only history, but also made a great influence on the formation of world vision of his contemporaries.

In Abel's character one can find two different individuals the basis of which is binary oppositions of good and evil and soul and body. Making the binary oppositions, the author tries to create the model of so called trans – subjectivity, the aim of which is overcoming the problems with the help of "Logical Model." Abel's double face appears when he becomes Nazi. His victims are the Jewish people. Abel Tiffauges says: "I love meat, I love blood. I love meat because I love animals, and here the main word is "Love". He mixes Life and Death and Love and Destruction in his personality. He kills the people who he loves the most (the scene of children in the bathroom). He dies with them as well. At the end of the novel Abel becomes the protector of the Jewish children and rejects Nazism. Saving a child is saving his own soul.

In Tournier's novel - plots, characters, motives are transformed and as the author himself says, his novel *"The Ogre"* is the theory of education where several meanings hide behind each other.

"*Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar*" („*Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar*“, 1980) is M. Tournier's fourth novel. It is based on the motive of Biblical magi. Tournier shows the travel of the legendary magi. One of the novel's characters, prince of Taor is in search of Rakhat Lukum and his character makes the novel alive. The author uses soft humor to depict his character.

The novel is devoted to the esthetic problems and it is divided into 7 parts, plus postscriptum. Many literary critics believe that it is the collection of short stories. The first five parts of the novel are written in the first person narrative and are didactic in their character. It is like confession.

Tournier depicts the characters of Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar as ordinary people with their everyday problems. They go to the Christ not because they are religious, but they wish to free themselves from cuts of the soul. At Christmas Eve they solved their problem. They are saved because they chose two different ways: gnoseological and the way through the Christ. The kings were the first who witnessed Christ's birth.

Each king has his own problem. Gaspar is a Negro king and is in love with a white woman. The tragedy of the king is in his arrogance. In Bethlehem Gaspar understood what was real love. It was love of the Christ. He guessed that true love is mutual. Newly born Christ taught the arrogant king what was true love.

Continuation of Gaspar's history is the history of Melchior. Young Melchior is the victim of betrayal. He ran away from the kingdom to save his love and his mother's dignity. Melchior leaves the kingdom with the hope of returning his throne, but he gets a good lesson in Bethlehem and understands that ruling the country is painful to the soul. He throws his last golden coin to the feet of the newly born Christ. According to myth, Melchior brought a golden coin to a newly born Christ. It was a symbol of eternal reign. In the novel by Tournier throwing a golden coin to the feet of the Christ can be considered as a symbol of rejecting wealth.

The third king is old Balthazar, king of Nippur who felt like a stranger in his kingdom. He was a lover of art. Tournier uses here the problem of art and speaks about semantic differences between body and soul – “face expression is superficial and can be a mask.” The mission of the Christ is to restore the unity between a person and the God. Here the author uses gnoseological approach in philosophy that lightens the mind and restores the unity. The theme of unity is expressed in the text in dialectical narrative.

The last part of the novel tells the readers about the travel of the prince Taor, who arrived late in Bethlehem and was late for the birth of Christ. This part of the novel differs from the previous ones. It is written in the third person narrative and helps readers to look through the action dynamics of the text. The last part of the novel is written in hagiographic manner and it is a good example of postmodernist style writing. Tournier here uses too many metaphors and irony when retelling the story of Taor. The hero rejects power to rule his country, does heroic actions and sacrifices himself for the happiness others. He tortures himself but enters the heaven after death.

At the beginning of this part the readers see the prince who is indifferent and does not care about anything and anyone. He does not care about his soul, love, politics or art. His favorite activity is eating sweets. He is a sweet-tooth. Travelling has no religious meaning for

him. He travels because he wants to get a recipe of Rakhat Lukum. After having conversation with three kings in Bethlehem, Taor decides to give freedom to his slaves. He abandons the kingdom and spends 33 years in Sodom. Salt is used here as a symbol of torture, and Sodom is the symbol of hell. The theme of eating has symbolic value in the novel. Thus, Christ is a confectioner for the Indian prince who speaks to him with the help of food language. Here Tournier uses traditional symbols denoting Christian food. Taor feels physical and soul hunger. He is the one, who consecrates bread and wine. He dies, but his soul is saved.

The novel “*Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar*” needs the readers who can understand implicit meaning of the text. The readers get life experience from this novel. The novel reconstructs the consciousness of readers as well. This is the peculiarity of Postmodernism style.

M. Tournier brought into practice using philosophy in literary works. His heroes express the author’s ideas. Each scene depicted by the author is like a parable, symbol. Plot and conflict are based on philosophical conception. Realistic descriptions are often changed by philosophical thoughts and ideas; first person narrative is changed by third person narrative; M. Tournier creates experimental situations that make his novel resemble to philosophical parable. His novel is the mixture of realistic and fantastic. Readers are infatuated by writer’s magic narrative and take its fantastic or mystic plot without hesitation. Tournier directs the readers up to a certain point and then leaves them face to face with the characters. The writer tries not to evaluate the scenes depicted by him, but makes the readers be “co-authors.” Tournier’s literary texts are full of quotations, allusions and reminiscences. He uses the plots of famous literary works but does not repeat them automatically. He analyses the plots and transforms them completely.

Conclusion

Thus, M. Tournier’s literary works are based on philosophical, classic - literary, mythological, legendary and symbolic plots. The author mixes up literature and philosophy, real and imagined. His novels are mythological novels (novel myth, novel legend) where the author interprets the famous plots according his taste. Tournier is often called as a “brilliant fairy tale writer” and “creator of myths.” Tournier is a writer - philosopher who is not interested only in his own culture and history. He resembles to French writers of the Enlightenment period. Using intellectual and sensual origins together, he becomes inheritor of Rene Decartes and Pierre Gassendi.

The study of M. Tournier’s literary works revealed that M.Tournier uses different problems of humanity in his novels. He discusses scientific, religious, political problems from different angles, mixes up myth and reality, uses traditional form but transforms the plot and thus shows his unique style of writing. Because of his individualistic writing style he takes his special place in French literature.

“Creating something new from the old ” is M. Tournier’s method. His literary works unite traditions of Philosophical Novel having marks of Voltair, Diderot, Defoe and some existentialist authors: Sartre and Camus’ style. His works are “saturated” with postmodern aesthetics and stylistics.

M. Tournier’s literary works are intertextual, but the author aims at uniting content and form. He uses neomyths to study modern world. Thus, his works are mythocentric and

mythopoetic. M. Tournier uses postmodern aestheticism and his aim is finding the lost truth and uniting the world.

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