

THE ETHICAL AMBIGUITY OF THE MONSTER

Good and evil as human possibilities in Michel Tournier's *Le Roi des Aulnes*

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Monstrosity and human evilness are central themes of *Le Roi des Aulnes* (*The Erl-King*, 1970), a celebrated novel by one of the most prominent contemporary French novelists, Michel Tournier (b. 1924).ⁱ At the very beginning of the novel, the protagonist Abel Tiffauges reflects on the meaning of being a monster, as his girlfriend has claimed him to be one:

To begin with, what *is* a monster? Etymology has a bit of a shock up its sleeve there: 'monster' comes from 'monstrare,' 'to show.' A monster is something which is shown, pointed at, exhibited at fairs, and so on. [---] If you don't want to be a monster, you've got to be like your fellow creatures, in conformity with the species[.]ⁱⁱ

In other words, monstrosity refers to something inhuman, unnatural, abnormal, and freakish. The reader also knows that those who do terrifying, evil deeds are designated as monsters. The question concerning the relation between monstrosity and evilness becomes acute as the novel proceeds to deal with the historical events of the Second World War. In the above cited reflection on the meaning of "monstrosity", there is implicit a critical question that accompanies the reader throughout the novel: On what grounds do we divide people into "us", that is, the so-called normal, good people, and the "monsters", that is, our evil "others"? What are the ethical implications of the role that monsters play in our mythological imagination? In the following, I will examine how the novel deals with these questions by making use of the ambiguity of the monster and giant imagery of mythology and world literature.

Tiffauges as a descendant of mythical Child-Bearers

The novel tells the story of a car mechanic who believes to be "an ogre", "a fabulous monster emerging from the mists of time".ⁱⁱⁱ His story is narrated from a double perspective, that is, both from an external third person perspective and from an internal first person perspective – through

excerpts from his diary “Sinister writings of Abel Tiffauges”. At the beginning of the novel, Tiffauges runs a garage in the pre-World War II Paris, and tries to figure out who he is in relation to his childhood experiences in St Christopher’s boarding school. Then the war breaks out, and after working with carrier pigeons at the communications branch of the army, Tiffauges is captured by the Germans and is taken to a prisoner of war camp. As time goes by, the Nazis offer him more demanding duties, and eventually he assumes a leading role in Kaltenborn, a Prussian fortress that has been converted into a *napola*, a Nazi elite military training school for young boys.

Tiffauges has always felt like an outsider, someone with difficulties in finding his place in society. He interprets his “abnormality” in terms of being “an ogre”, a descendant of mythical monster and giant figures. This is part of “building up his own culture”, a process that he has started already as a schoolboy:

But here and there, leafing through dictionaries, picking up what I could in textbooks, watching out for fleeting allusions to what really interested me in French or history lessons, I started to build up a culture of my own, a personal Pantheon which included Alcibiades and Pontius Pilate, Caligula and Hadrian, Frederick William I and Barras, Talleyrand and Rasputin.^{iv}

Later he attempts to construct his identity by assuming various mythical, historical and literary giant figures as his predecessors and models. These include, for example, Atlas, the Greek titan who carried the whole sky on his shoulders: “But the more I think of it, the more it seems to me that Atlas uranophorus, Atlas astrophorus is the mythological hero towards whom my life must tend, and in whom it must at last find its fulfilment and apotheosis.”^v But as his ultimate model he elevates the mythical carrier figure of St Christopher. According to a medieval legend, preserved in Jakobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend*, St Christopher was a giant who wanted to serve the greatest man on earth. He worked as a ferryman, and one day he carried across the river a child who weighed like a lump of lead on his shoulders and turned out to be the Christ Child. Accordingly, Tiffauges undertakes child-carrying as his ultimate mission and vocation. He unravels the etymology of the word ‘euphoria’, and asserts that it means literally “carrying with happiness” as

the Greek word 'eu' refers to happiness and 'phoria' has its origin in the verb meaning carrying.

Following this insight he re-interprets his whole life in a new light:

At this, a shaft of light suddenly falls on my past, my present, and, who knows, perhaps my future too. For this fundamental idea of portage, of *phoria*, is also found in the name of Christopher, the giant Christ-bearer [---] and yet again it is embodied in the cars to which I reluctantly give the best of myself, but which even in their triviality are nonetheless instruments for the bearing of men, anthropophoric and therefore *phoric* par excellence.^{vi}

There are numerous variants of carrier-figures in *Le Roi des Aulnes*, and one of the most important ones is the Erl-King who represents a kind of “negative inversion” of St Christopher. The Erl-King is a death-figure best known by Goethe’s “Der Erlkönig” which, according to Tournier, “has always been *the* German poem par excellence for every French school-child embarking upon the study of German literature, a symbol of Germany itself”.^{vii} As its title suggests, *Le Roi des Aulnes* can be read as a re-interpretation of this ballad, which Tournier has attached to the end of his novel in his own translation. In the novel, a Nazi Professor names a man whose embalmed body is found in a peat-bog as the “Erl-King”, and Tiffauges identifies strongly with this mythical figure; for him Goethe’s ballad appears as “the very charter of phoria”, which is “lifted to a paroxysm of incandescence by hyperborean magic.”^{viii} And when Tiffauges rides about Prussia on a horse named Bluebeard recruiting children for the napola, it becomes evident that he is not so much a St Christopher carrying children safe but more like an Erl-King wrenching children from their parents arms.

At the end of the novel, Tiffauges takes care of a Jewish boy called Ephraim, who has escaped from a concentration camp. From him, Tiffauges learns to see the terrifying affinities between his personal mythological worldview and that of the Nazis. As the Red Army attacks Kaltenborn, he takes Ephraim on his shoulders and tries to carry him safe from the burning fortress, but he ends up sinking into the peat-bog. Thus the novel preserves a fundamental ambivalence in its “phoric” imagery until the last scene, which entwines the images of St Christopher and The Erl-King.

The ethical ambiguity of the monster imagery

Tournier maintains that different variations of “phoria”, that is, the theme of carrying, form the architecture of *Le Roi des Aulnes*,^{ix} and what interests him most is its essential ambiguity:

Thus, the good giant who becomes a beast in order to save a small child is not so far from the predatory hunter who devours children. He who carries the child carries him away. [---] In other words, the ghost of Saint Christopher, bearer and saviour of children, is the erlking, abductor and murderer of children. All the mystery and profundity of phoria lies in this ambiguity.^x

The ambivalent character of Tiffauges is emphasised already by his name: Abel refers to the biblical nomad who was murdered by his brother, whereas Tiffauges is the name of the castle where Gilles de Rais, a child-murderer who is regarded as the historical model of Charles Perrault’s Bluebeard, committed his hideous crimes.^{xi} In order to highlight Tiffauges’ ambiguous nature, Tournier makes use of the long tradition of ogre imagery that has played a central role especially in the history of French literature. As Mikhail Bakhtin states in his famous Rabelais-study, giants are typically ambivalent figures in folk legends and medieval literature: they are not clear-cut good or evil, and their grotesque corporality manifests metamorphosis, an ambiguous state of becoming.^{xii}

Tournier sees Tiffauges as an offspring of this Rabelaisian tradition of ogres:

[Tiffauges] is an ogre type. He is big and fat. All signs are that the digestive function is dominant. His enormous hands serve as intermediaries between the external world and his mouth; they are predatory, murderous hands, but at the same time obliging, supportive, and caressing. They combine all the characteristic features of what I call phoria. Like many mythological giants, his vision is poor. [---] The ogre has a keen nose [---] Jovial, the ogre is much given to telling scatological jokes but relatively reluctant to tell erotic ones. His personality is of the anal rather than phallic type, as can be seen from his two greatest literary exemplars, Gargantua and Pantagruel. [---] The ogre is a magus and a predator.^{xiii}

In *Le Roi des Aulnes* the images of phoria are images that Bakhtin would call grotesque. They intertwine two bodies, and their ambivalence consists of their dual allusion to both life and death, as Bakhtin explains:

Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. [---] One of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born. [---] The body stands on the threshold of the grave and the crib.^{xiv}

According to Bakhtin, ambivalence and “the relation to time” are two determining traits of the grotesque image, that is, an image that “reflects a phenomenon in transformation”.^{xv} These traits characterize pertinently the way Tiffauges is presented to the reader in an ambivalent process of becoming. By making use of the tradition of grotesque ogre imagery, Tournier’s novel also opens up a new perspective into the ambiguity of monstrosity. This has to do with the way Tiffauges’ identity is constituted in a temporal process of interpretation.

Tiffauges’ ethical ambiguity pertains to the fact that he lacks a pre-given, substantial, and unchangeable essence that would determine his identity. On the contrary, his identity is continuously constituted anew in a temporal process in which he interprets the situations he faces and acts in them. The reader has to participate in this interpretative process by constantly re-evaluating whether Tiffauges is a “good” or a “bad” carrier, a St Christopher or an Erl-King figure. Different aspects of Tiffauges manifest themselves in different situations, and there is no privileged point of reference available for the reader from which he or she could categorize him. For example, the third person narrator refrains from commenting or evaluating Tiffauges’ views. As a consequence, the reader has difficulties in knowing whether to believe Tiffauges as he utters, “I’m a gentle, harmless giant, who thirsts for affection and stretches out his great hands joined in the shape of a cradle,”^{xvi} or to take his word for it when Tiffauges speaks of the “dark power of which I am the bearer”.^{xvii} But as the novel proceeds, it becomes increasingly evident that this tension cannot be resolved by deciding whether he is “truly” a “good” or a “bad” character. In the end, the reader must accept Tiffauges’ ethical ambiguity, which means that he is not inherently good or bad, but, instead, he has the potential for both good and evil, like all of us.

The ethics of interpretation and application myths

In fact, what makes Tiffauges into an Erl-king or St Christopher figure is the way he follows and applies these myths. Accordingly, a central theme of Tournier's novel is the problem of interpretation and application of myths passed down by the cultural tradition. For Tournier, man is a "mythological animal": "He becomes man – he acquires a human being's sexuality and heart and imagination – only by virtue of the murmur of stories and kaleidoscope of images that surround him in the cradle and accompany him all the way to the grave."^{xviii} Tournier sees myths as "fundamental stories" that provide us "models through whom we give shape, form and feature" to our experiences and aspirations.^{xix} In other words, we are in the world through a reflective interpretive process in which we make sense of our lives on the basis of and in dialogue with culturally transmitted sense-making models.^{xx}

However, *Le Roi des Aulnes* emphasises that myths do not provide ready-made identities but only material for their construction.^{xxi} Tiffauges is constituted in the dialogical, hermeneutic process in which he applies mythical models into the concrete, particular situations that he encounters in the present. As a result, he is dependent on cultural meaning systems but is not a mere product of them. The novel shows that since meaning systems cannot themselves determine how they will be applied, all meaning-constitution depends on the active and creative interpretation by the individual: therefore, the repetition of the past is never mechanical, and what is repeated cannot remain exactly the same. As Gadamer writes, "we understand in a *different way, if we understand at all.*"^{xxii}

A central theme of *Le Roi des Aulnes* is the idea that there are potential dangers in the application of myths and that people have to bear responsibility for their mythical constructions. This idea is delineated against the historical background of Nazi Germany. The way Tiffauges builds his own mythological universe is paralleled by the way the Nazis build their ideological universe on the basis of myths and rituals that resemble religious ceremonies.^{xxiii} Just like Tiffauges assumes himself mythical predecessors, the Nazis teach their young boys to identify with ancient war heroes, such as Alexander the Great.^{xxiv} However, what crucially unites Tiffauges and the Nazis

and what is troubling in Tiffauges is not the fact that he uses myths as sense-making models, but rather the fact that he does not see them as cultural constructions. Both Tiffauges and the Nazis reify their mythological systems by believing that they reflect some pre-given divine order or inevitable destiny for which they are not responsible. Reification is a Marxist term which, as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann explain, refers to the “apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly suprahuman terms”.^{xxv} Precisely this is the case with the Nazis and Tiffauges: they do not see their mythological systems as products of their own interpretative work but as part of the objective order of things.^{xxvi} Berger and Luckmann maintain that when an identity becomes reified, it is apprehended “as an inevitable fate, for which the individual may disclaim responsibility”.^{xxvii} Accordingly, both Tiffauges and the Nazis try to evade responsibility by believing that they simply repeat the deeds of their mythical “predecessors” and thereby carry out their special destinies.^{xxviii} This belief leads them to constant self-deception and a tendency to see in the world only what they want to see.^{xxix}

In Tournier’s terms, what Tiffauges lacks is the experience of the ultimate relativity of all human orders which Tournier describes in his intellectual autobiography *Le Vent Paraclet* (*The Wind Spirit*, 1977) with the concept of “white laughter”. It stems from the insight that “everything human is transient, relative, and doomed to disappear”: “The man who laughs white has glimpsed the abyss between the gaps in reality’s fabric.”^{xxx} In *Le Roi des Aulnes* Tournier’s white laughter manifests itself as an ironical lighting surrounding Tiffauges most poignantly when he speaks of his divine destiny. Such declarations frequently produce a comical impression that escapes his notice but not that of the reader, for example in the following: “Only I, Abel Tiffauges, otherwise known as Child-Bearer, microgenitomorph and last scion of the race of phoric giants, only I know, and with good reason...”^{xxxi} Tiffauges is a sad and pathetic but also a dangerous figure precisely because he presents such self-characterizations as if they were absolute: he fails to see his own status and role as an active constructor of his own identity and world-view.

Tournier thinks, like Ricœur, that we cannot live without myths, but our relation to them should be as conscious and critical as possible.^{xxxii} By reminding us of our active role in the interpretation and application of myths, Tournier's novel can help us avoid dangerous reification of symbolic systems, as well as enhance our sense of responsibility in our interpretative activities. The novel also calls for recognizing that this problematic concerns us all. Tiffauges is a monster comparable to the Nazis, but he is also a next-door garage mechanic. As Tournier puts it in an interview, "the ogre is a character that exists in our neighbourhood and perhaps in everyone of us".^{xxxiii} Accordingly, Tournier's novel questions our tendency to stigmatise certain people as monsters, thereby identifying them as Others, who represent unknown threats from the "outside". The novel challenges the reader to understand that Nazism is not something that we could deal with by thinking that the Germans were monsters – unlike the civilized rest of us.^{xxxiv}

Since the Second World War, the monster myth has occupied a central place in Western political mythology and has been frequently used to represent people like Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic, or Osama bin Laden as monstrous incarnations of pure evil.^{xxxv} Tournier's novel renders problematic this tendency by demonstrating that evil is not an intrinsic property of some men, those designated as "monsters", but rather a possibility that resides in every human being. People are not divided into monsters and saints on the basis of their inherent essence, but, on the contrary, their evilness or goodness is largely social in its origin.^{xxxvi} As Hannah Arendt shows in her classical study *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, there was nothing mystical in the evilness of the Nazis: in the end, it was quite banal, and inextricably wedded to the instrumental logic of modern, Western society. As a consequence, the society as a whole is responsible for engaging in critical reflection concerning its myth-making practices. All in all, Tournier's *Le Roi des Aulnes* challenges us to work on our mythological imagination so that our ways of reinterpreting old myths and creating new ones would promote the goodness in us and help us deal with evilness in all its complexity.

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ⁱ *Le Roi des Aulnes* won the Prix Goncourt and many scholars consider it to be Tournier's major novel. See e.g. Kibedi Varga 1988, 38; Davis 1995, 103; Cloonan 1985, 101. Gratton (1997, 249), for example, regards it as "worthy of inclusion in any history of postmodern fiction".

ⁱⁱ EK, 11. "Et d'abord qu'est-ce qu'un monstre? L'étymologie réserve déjà une surprise un peu effrayante: *monstre* vient de *montrer*. Le monstre est ce que l'on montre – du doigt, dans les fêtes foraines, etc. [---] Pour n'être pas un monstre, il faut être semblable à ses semblables, être conforme à l'espèce, ou encore être à l'image de ses parents." (RA, 11-12.)

ⁱⁱⁱ EK 11, "émergeant de la nuit des temps" (RA 11).

^{iv} EK 17. "Par bribes, en feuilletant les dictionnaires, en glanant ce que je pouvais dans des ouvrages de compilation scolaire, je commençai à me constituer une culture en marge, un panthéon personnel où voisinaient Alcibiade et Ponce Pilate, Caligula et Hadrien, Frédéric-Guillaume Ier et Barras, Talleyrand et Raspoutine." (RA 18-9.)

^v EK 76. "Mais plus j'y pense, plus il me semble qu'Atlas uranophore, Atlas astrophore est le héros mythologique vers lequel devrait tendre ma vie pour trouver en lui finalement son aboutissement et son apothéose." (RA 92.)

^{vi} EK 74. "Et là, un trait de lumière illumine soudain mon passé, mon présent et, qui sait, mon avenir peut-être aussi. Car cette idée fondamentale de portage, de *phorie*, elle se trouve aussi dans le nom même de Christophe, le géant Porte-Christ, de même qu'elle était illustrée par la légende d'Albuquerque, de même encore qu'elle s'incarne à nouveau dans ces automobiles auxquelles je consacre en renâclant le meilleur de moi-même, mais qui n'en sont pas moins dans leur trivialité l'instrument porteur d'homme, anthropophore, *phorique* par excellence." (RA 90.)

^{vii} WS 97. "Ce poème de Goethe [---] a toujours été pour l'écolier français abordant la langue et la littérature allemandes le poème allemand par excellence, le symbole même de l'Allemagne." (VP 115.)

^{viii} EK 258. "[C]'est la charte même de la phorie qu'elle élève à la troisième puissance. C'est le mythe latin de Christophe-Albuquerque porté à un paroxysme d'incandescence par la magie hyperboréenne." (RA 318.)

^{ix} WS 106/VP 126.

^x WS 102. "Ainsi le bon géant qui se fait bête de somme pour sauver un petit enfant est-il tout proche de l'homme-déproie qui dévore les enfants. Qui porte l'enfant, l'emporte. [---] Bref l'ombre de saint Christophe, porteur et sauveur d'enfant, c'est le Roi des aulnes, emporteur et assassin d'enfant. Tout le mystère et la profondeur de la phorie se trouvent dans cette ambiguïté." (VP 122.)

^{xi} See Cloonan 1985, 47-48.

^{xii} Mikhail Bakhtin: *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, 24-27. On the ambivalence of the ogre myth see also Bouloumié 1988b, 1099-1105.

^{xiii} WS 95-96. "Il est vrai que le type auquel il appartient pourrait être décrit par la caractérologie sous le symbole de l'Ogre. Il est grand et gros. Tout indique chez lui la prédominance de la fonction digestive. Ses mains énormes servent de relais entre le monde extérieur et sa bouche, mains prédatrices, assassines, mais aussi serviables, porteuses, caressantes. En elles se rassemblent déjà tous les attributs ambigus de la *phorie*. Comme beaucoup de géants mythologiques, il voit mal. [---] L'ogre est un olfactif [---] Jovial, l'ogre se répand volontiers en plaisanteries scatologiques, mais d'autant plus rarement en histoires érotiques. Il relève du type anal, et non pas du type phallique, comme le montrent ses deux grands avatars littéraires Gargantua et Pantagruel. [---] L'ogre est mage et prédateur." (VP 114-115.)

^{xiv} Bakhtin 1984 (1965), 26.

^{xv} *Ibid.*, 24.

^{xvi} EK 114. "Je suis un géant doux, inoffensif, assoiffé de tendresse, qui tend ses grandes mains, jointes en forme de berceau." (RA 140.)

^{xvii} EK 71, "la force ténébreuse dont je suis le porteur" (RA 86).

^{xviii} WS 158-159. "L'homme ne devient homme, n'acquiert un sexe, un cœur et une imagination d'homme que grâce au bruissement d'histoires, au kaléidoscope d'images qui entourent le petit enfant dès le berceau et l'accompagnent jusqu'au tombeau." (VP 186.)

^{xix} WS 156, 158/VP 184-185. The way Tiffauges chooses his models from the cultural tradition resembles Heidegger's (1988 [1927], 437) view of "the authentic repetition of a possibility of existence that has been – the possibility that Dasein may choose its hero". Heidegger and his hermeneutic followers think it is characteristic of our temporal being that we are always oriented towards the future in relation to the past and to the possibilities handed down to us by the cultural tradition. See e.g. Gadamer 1997 (1960), 257-264, 282; Ricœur 1988 (1985), 60-96.

^{xx} In the novel the individual subject is not a self-sufficient source of meaning, but neither is it reduced into those meaning systems that form the basis of its constitution. Rather, the relationship between the individual and the cultural system appears as *dialogical*. Such a dialogical conception of subjectivity has been developed by hermeneutically oriented thinkers, such as Charles Taylor, who has written about the "dialogical nature of the self" with reference to the

way we are constituted in a conversation with “significant others”. See Taylor 1996 (1989), 35; Taylor 1991, 311-314. Tiffauges’ significant others are mythical characters that he has chosen as his interlocutors (see e.g. EK 60).

^{xxi} In this sense, Tiffauges is a (post)modern – that is, a post-traditional – individual for whom self-identity is a continuous task or, to use Giddens’ (1991, 32) expression, “a reflexive project”.

^{xxii} Gadamer 1997 (1960), 297.

^{xxiii} This religious dimension is expressed clearly, for example, in the following scene: “Finally, when the Führer steps on the monumental altar, a hundred and fifty search-lights suddenly spring alight, raising over the Zeppelinwiese a cathedral of pillars a thousand feet high to attest the sidereal significance of the mystery being celebrated.” (EK 262.) “Enfin lorsque le Führer s’avance sur l’autel monumental pour officier, cent cinquante projecteurs de D.C.A. flambent d’un seul coup, et édifient au-dessus de la Zeppelinwiese une cathédrale de lumière dont les piliers de huit mille mètres de haut attestent la portée sidérale du mystère célébré.” (RA 324.) Nazism is described in the novel as a mythological system that endeavours to establish the special destiny of the German people and the inferior status of the so-called Jewish race. E.g. the sociologist Norbert Elias (1996 [1989], 316) has analysed Nazism from a similar perspective, that is, as a religious movement whose “leader believed from early on in his messianic mission, his mission for Germany”, and whose members’ “certainty that their beliefs were true, their methods justified and the success of their mission preordained became absolute and unshakeable”.

^{xxiv} See e.g. EK 228-9, 266/RA 280-281, 329.

^{xxv} Berger and Luckmann 1966, 106.

^{xxvi} As Habermas (1984, 47-48) has noted, a mythological conception of reality is typically characterised by “a peculiar confusion between nature and culture”: “From this reciprocal assimilation of nature to culture and conversely culture to nature, there results, on the one hand, a nature that is outfitted with anthropomorphic features [---] and on the other hand, a culture that is to a certain extent naturalized and reified and absorbed into the objective nexus of operations of anonymous powers.” *Le Roi des Aulnes* depicts this process of mythologization that took place in Nazism, which involved, as Count Hermann von Kaltenborn explains to Tiffauges, the reification of its underlying symbols: “For there is a terrifying moment when the sign no longer accepts being carried by a creature as a standard is carried by a soldier. It acquires autonomy, it escapes from the thing symbolized, and – this is what is frightening – it takes over that thing. [---] The truth is that ever since it began the Third Reich has been the product of symbols, which have taken over control. [---] As far as Germany was concerned, man was irrelevant from then on.” (EK 259-261.) “Car il y a un moment effrayant où le signe n’accepte plus d’être porté par une créature, comme un étendard est porté par un soldat. Il acquiert son autonomie, il échappe à la chose symbolisée, et, ce qui est redoutable, il la prend lui-même en charge. [---] La vérité, c’est que dès son origine, le IIIe Reich est le produit des symboles eux-mêmes qui mènent souverainement le jeu. [---] Dans tout ce qui touche désormais à l’Allemagne, l’homme est accessoire.” (RA 321-323.)

^{xxvii} Berger and Luckmann 1966, 108.

^{xxviii} For example: “Fate was on the march and had taken in charge my poor little personal destiny.” (EK 111.) “Le Destin était en marche, et il avait pris en charge ma pauvre petite destinée personnelle.” (RA 136.) As Davis (1988, 36-37) points out, Tiffauges’ frequent use of the word ‘certitude’ reflects his deluded understanding of the world and his inability to engage in a “liberating reflection upon his own pre-understanding”.

^{xxix} For example: “He’d forgiven Ernest for his share in the sacrifice of the pigeons; in this, as in almost all the events in his life, he had come to recognize a kind of fatality which made it both innocent and understandable.” (EK 142.) Similarly, the Nazi professor Keil totally ignores the yellow star on the forehead of the man buried in the swamp in order to be able to declare that he is an ancient German forefather, the Erl-King. Thereby Tournier shows how arbitrarily the Nazis used the German cultural heritage for their own purposes.

^{xxx} WS 165. “L’homme qui rit blanc vient d’entrevoir l’abîme entre les mailles desserrées des choses.” (VP 193.)

^{xxxi} EK 114. “Moi seul, Abel Tiffauges, dit Portenfant, microgénitomorpe et dernier rejeton de la lignée des géants phoriques, moi seul le sais, et pour cause...” (RA 140.) It seems to me that some scholars have not recognized clearly enough the critical distance between Tiffauges’ and Tournier’s “worldviews”. For example, Arlette Bouloumié (1988a, 242) argues that the phrase by Paul Claudel that is cited in *Le Roi des Aulnes* (“All that passes is raised to the dignity of expression; all that happens is raised to the dignity of meaning. Everything is either symbol or parable.” EK 140 “Tout ce qui passe est promu à dignité d’expression, tout ce qui se passe est promu à la dignité de signification. Tout est symbole ou parabole.” RA 170) “shows that Tournier’s *oeuvre* is oriented towards revelation”, although Tournier explicitly denies this in the interview published in the end of her book: “No, this citation of Claudel applies only to Tiffauges and his mania to see everywhere signs.” (“Non, cette citation de Claudel ne s’applique qu’à Tiffauges et à sa manie de voir partout des signes.”) (Bouloumié 1988a, 253.)

^{xxxii} Ricœur 1991, 484-486.

^{xxxiii} Braudeau 1978, 149-150. “Je montre que l’ogre est un personnage qui existe dans notre voisinage et peut-être en nous.”

^{xxxiv} As Platten (1999, 89-90) puts it, “Tournier suggests that the Ogre, far from being an alien force, menacing societies from the exterior, is a creature of immanence.”

^{xxxv} Cf. *ibid.*, 91.

^{xxxvi} See Bauman 1989, 166.