

In joy we prepare our lessons': reading Camus' *Noces* via their reception of the Eleusinian mysteries.

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'In joy we prepare our lessons': reading Camus' *Noces* via their reception of the Eleusinian mysteries

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Abstract

Nobel Prize winning author Albert Camus situates his meditations in both the opening and closing essays in his 1937 collection *Noces* by referring to the

classical Eleusinian mysteries centring around the myths of Dionysus and the goddesses Demeter and Persephone. *Noces* ' closing piece 'The Desert' directly evokes the two levels of initiation involved in the classical Eleusinian cult in a way which prompts us to reframe the preceding essays beginning at Tipasa as akin to a single, initiatory trajectory. The kind of 'love of life' the opening 'Nuptials at Tipasa' had so marvellously celebrated, we are now informed, is not sufficient by itself. The entire round of these four essays, whose framing suggest four seasons (Spring in Tipasa, Summer at Algiers, then Autumn in Florence), are intended by Camus to enact just what the title, *Noces* , suggests in the context of the mysteries: namely, that *hieros gamos* or sacred union of man with nature or the gods at the heart of the ancient cults, tied very closely at Eleusis with reverence for the fecundity of nature, reborn each year with the return of Persephone from Hades to her grieving mother Demeter.

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