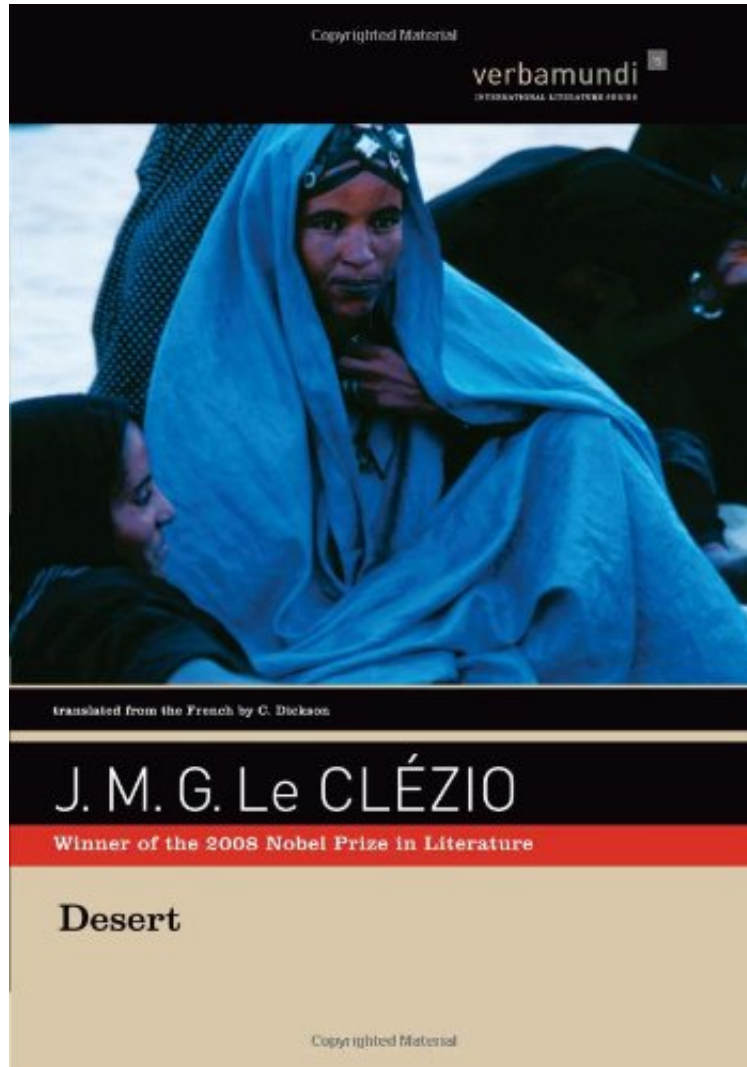


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## **Desert (Verba Mundi)**

**J. M. G. Le Clezio, C. Dickson : Desert (Verba Mundi)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Desert (Verba Mundi):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A desert of loveBy lovevonbeautyvonloveThe desert appeared to me as a metaphor for human misery and emptiness, but also for wholeness and its intrinsic happiness. The human misery and happiness are told through stories of descendants of a man believed to be holy by his North African nomadic people. The story's two main characters are a boy, Nour, and a girl, Lalla. It is such a beautiful story that I read it every time I wanted to escape the daily routine. More on <http://lovevonbeautyvonlove.com/2015/11/23/the-desert-by-jean-marie-gustave-le-clezio/> 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. AweBy James GozaI only glanced at the reviews of this book in passing, while looking for other titles by this author, because it never even occurred to me that

anyone could feel anything about this book but complete awe. In my case, for sometime before picking up 'Desert', (and mostly to avoid the lengthy process of finding another great book by trial and error), I just started down the list of Nobel laureates and, after 10 or 12 other authors, I finally got around to this one. Even amidst a steady literary diet of the greatest of the greats, this book stands alone for the amazingly textual details and textures, the coloration, the essential 'mise en scenes' that Le Clezio creates, and then combine those gorgeous and resoundingly real descriptions with an adventurous, sweeping plot line. So, it actually is a great story, but the literary style alone makes this a towering literary achievement. The main character is an innocent, precocious little girl and her life stands dazzlingly revealed as a time and place of deep, powerful mysticism mixed with a genuine wonder at the changing world around her. The other main character, who exists as thesis/antithesis to the girl, is a Muslim boy headed for tribal war amidst of backdrop against which an ancient way of life is being displaced by more powerful, and modern forces. Either way, even if you take the story away completely, and only look at the words on the page, as one might regard colors on a canvas without regard for their meaning, this is one of the most beautifully crafted literary works I've ever read. I can still see the color of blue on the robes and tattered cloaks of the bedouin warriors as they make their way across vast white washes of shifting sand. Its an unforgettably beautiful book. 13 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

Mauritania, Morocco, and Marseille...By John P. Jones III...to be alliterative. LeClzio won the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 2008, primarily for this work. In the making of such awards, like the premise that the Supreme Court makes its legal decisions based on the results of the last election, there are undoubtedly significant political considerations. LeClzio has written about "The European Dilemma," to play off a phrase originally formulated by his fellow European, Gunnar Myrdal, when he wrote "An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy" in 1944. Each book, in quite different ways, examines the problems of a democratic society with a significant unassimilated minority, which has been brought, or induced to come, for the value of their "cheap labor." LeClzio's book concerns France, a country that is nominally Christian, but largely secular, far more so than the United States; 10-12% of France's population is Muslim, mainly from the Maghreb (Northwestern Africa.) The "assimilation," or lack of same, of the latest arrivals to France is the central theme. LeClzio novel is presented as two alternating stories; the first is of the coming-of-age boy, Nour, and is set in 1909-10, when French forces are hunting down "rebel" leaders and their followers in Mauritania and southern Morocco. The second narrative is of Lalla, a coming-of-age girl who decides to flee her bleak life in a "bidonville" (a shanty town) and seek her "fortune" in Marseille. The author does not give an exact date for her story, but it must be in the late '70's. The author never directly addresses the "cause and effect" aspects of these stories; it is left to the reader. "Desert" isn't an easy read, but then neither is Faulkner or Joyce. I felt the real strength of the novel is LeClzio's ability, as someone coming from an industrialized country, to depict accurately the pre-industrialized outlook. It is fully attuned to the natural world, where awareness of the phase of the moon is intrinsic; a life without watches; a life full of djinns and spirits. LeClzio's novel reminded me of the works of AbdulRahman Al Munif, particularly "Cities of Salt," in which he depicts the pre-industrialized outlook in Arabia as it collides with the foreign oil workers from Aramco. I also found Lalla's experiences in Marseille quite evocative. It is a city that I had disliked for a considerable period, but finally adjusted my outlook; instead of trying to see another Provencal village, I realized it was simply a "sunny New York." However, I did have some problems with the novel. Sorry, I do have a watch, and a calendar, and Lalla's experiences over the nine months of her pregnancy were just too unrealistic. Among other matters, she became fluent in French in apparently four or five months. I also felt that various descriptions of the desert world were too expansive, and at times redundant. And geographically, the depiction of the location of the "bidonville" did not conform with the landscape of Northern Morocco. There could also have been tighter editing; for example, how many times was the reader told about the "bristling hair" on the dogs in Marsaille? And then there is a problem for mono-lingual readers. Books written in English sometimes have non-translated French or German, assuming the reader knows these languages, or inferring the meaning by context. LeClzio ups the language requirements by including non-translated Arabic, such as the words: "majnoon," and "ummi." Ok, so maybe we should be learning, and in these cases its "crazy," and "my mother." Much credit should go to LeClzio for his depiction of one of Europe's central problems, not now, when there is so much focus on the so-called "clash of civilizations," but rather at its very inception, in the '60's and '70's. His novel will remain a seminal work as we seek solutions to the problem. Finally, it was heart-warming to note that Leclzio has chosen Albuquerque as his home, for six months of the year. No doubt the desert environment, similar to Mauritania, is a pull. Unfortunately he seems to be unrecognized in his adopted hometown, which may be the way he prefers it. Still, it is an honor, and he should be much more widely read.

The Swedish Academy, in awarding J.M.G. Le Clezio the 2008 Nobel Prize in Literature, praised Desert as Le Clezio's definitive breakthrough as a novelist. Published in France in 1980, Desert received the Grand Prix Paul Morand from the Academie Francaise, was translated into twenty-three languages, and quickly proved to be a best-selling novel in many countries around the world. Available for the first time in English translation, Desert is a novel composed of two alternating narratives, set in counterpoint. The first takes place in the desert between 1909 and 1912 and evokes the migration of a young adolescent boy, Nour, and his people, the Blue Men, notorious warriors of the

desert. Driven from their lands by French colonial soldiers, Nour's tribe has come to the valley of the Saguiet El Hamra to seek the aid of the great spiritual leader known as Water of the Eyes. The religious chief sends them out from the holy city of Smara into the desert to travel still further. Spurred on by thirst, hunger, and suffering, Nour's tribe and others flee northward in the hopes of finding a land that can harbor them at last. The second narrative relates the contemporary story of Lalla, a descendant of the Blue Men. Though she is an orphan living in a shantytown known as the Project near a coastal city in Morocco, the blood of her proud, obstinate tribe runs in her veins. All too soon, Lalla must flee to escape a forced marriage with an older, wealthy man. She travels to France, undergoing many trials there, from working in a brothel to success as a highly paid fashion model, but she never betrays the blood of her ancestors.

From Publishers Weekly One of the few works by 2008 Nobel laureate Le Clzio to be translated into English, this mythic novel tells two parallel stories of descendants of a holy man called Al Azraq. The novel begins with Nour, a Berber boy who bears witness to the failed rebellion led by Sheik Ma el Anine against the French in the years leading up to WWI. In the cadences of an incantation, Le Clzio renders the dire suffering of the displaced desert peoples who turn to Ma el Anine for guidance. The parallel story, set in the near-contemporary, portrays Lalla, a young woman who lives on the Moroccan coast and spends her days exploring the seashore and listening to the stories of her aunt and the fisherman Old Naman. After escaping an arranged marriage, Lalla lands in Marseille and finds not the gleaming white city of Naman's stories but a cruel place cut off from nature. Le Clzio's vision is cinematic, his language lyrical and the lives he portrays are vivid and convincing. (Sept.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Desert is a rich, sprawling, searching, poetic, provocative, broadly historic and demanding novel, which in all those ways displays the essence of Le Clezio. As a reflection on colonization and its legacy, it is painfully relevant after 30 years. --Elizabeth Hawes, The New York Times (8/30/2009) One of the few works by 2008 Nobel laureate Le Clezio to be translated into English, this mythic novel tells two parallel stories of descendants of a holy man called Al Azraq. The novel begins with Nour, a Berber boy who bears witness to the failed rebellion led by Sheik Ma el Ainine against the French in the years leading up to WWI. In the cadences of an incantation, Le Clezio renders the dire suffering of the displaced desert peoples who turn to Ma el Ainine for guidance. The parallel story, set in the near-contemporary, portrays Lalla, a young woman who lives on the Moroccan coast and spends her days exploring the seashore and listening to the stories of her aunt and the fisherman Old Naman. After escaping an arranged marriage, Lalla lands in Marseille and finds not the gleaming white city of Naman's stories but a cruel place cut off from nature. Le Clezio's vision is cinematic, his language lyrical and the lives he portrays are vivid and convincing. --Publisher's Weekly This work contains magnificent images of a lost culture in the North African desert, contrasted with a depiction of Europe seen through the eyes of unwanted immigrants. The main character, the Algerian guest worker Lalla, is a utopian antithesis to the ugliness and brutality of European society. --from the Nobel citation by the Swedish Academy When French writer Le Clezio was presented with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2008, the response of many Americans was, Who? That's because so few of his stunning works have been translated into English, including this 1980 fever dream of a novel about earth and spirit, war and exile. In poetic language at once piercingly realistic and rhapsodically supernatural, Le Clezio tells the dramatic stories of two mystical, resilient children of the North African desert, members of a nomadic tribe of warriors. Nour endures a horrific forced march across the desert just prior to World War I, as French soldiers invade and a holy sheik struggles to keep the planet's last free people free. Decades later, Lalla, a shantytown seer channeling the hidden life force of the forbidding desert, is forced to flee Morocco for Marseilles, where she witnesses the misery of other despised immigrants. In scenes of shimmering intensity, Le Clezio contrasts nature's stark and majestic clarity, from scouring sand to the incinerating sun and the vast gleaming net of stars, with the chaos, toxicity, and injustice of human life. A long time coming for English-language readers, Le Clezio's incandescent masterpiece couldn't be more relevant. --Donna Seaman, Booklist (starred review) Desert is a rich, sprawling, searching, poetic, provocative, broadly historic and demanding novel, which in all those ways displays the essence of Le Clzio. As a reflection on colonization and its legacy, it is painfully relevant after 30 years. --Elizabeth Hawes, The New York Times (8/30/2009) About the Author Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clezio -- a novelist, essayist, and short story writer -- has published more than forty works of fiction and non-fiction. In 2008, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature and described by the Swedish Academy as an "author of new departures, poetic adventure, and sensual ecstasy, explorer of a humanity beyond and below the reigning civilization."