

The guest



Bruce Dunlop Academic Research 23 November 08 Albert Camus's "The Guest" What meaning does the story have for me One meaning is an indictment against the French, who occupied Algeria at the time of the story. Camus portrays the region throughout the story as bleak and desolate, a place where ". . . the plateaus burned to a cinder month after month . . . literally scorched, every stone bursting into dust under one's foot" (372-373). This may describe the Muslim population's feeling of suppression by the non-Muslim, foreign government. It demonstrates, too, a contributing factor to the downfall of colonialism: the occupying country's ignorance of and disregard for the culture of the occupied country. In this case, the French did not consider the conflict created by ordering Daru to bring a fellow countryman, albeit an alleged criminal, to French authorities.

Desolation is symbolized by Daru's character. He is from the impoverished region, and as a school teacher there, he was ". . . satisfied with the little he had . . ." (373) and, "Everywhere else, he felt exiled" (373). Camus closes the story saying, "In this vast landscape he had loved so much, he was alone" (383)

A greater meaning was that Daru followed his conscience, instead of following orders, by not delivering the Arab to the authorities. This reflects his contempt for being under the French government's authority; he made it clear to Balducci by saying, "I won't hand him over" (376). However, it was "with heavy heart" (383) that he sees the Arab walking in the direction of prison instead of possible freedom, after Daru shows him the two different directions, gives him provisions for two days and leaves him. This, according to Thomas Arp, is a demonstration of ". . . the unpredictability of the consequences of human choices in unfriendly conditions" (386).

What did I think about the story

Overall, the characters are believable and the plot is realistic; it is well crafted fiction. Its success stems from its historical setting, just before the Algerian War, 1954-1962, when Algeria rebelled against French rule and won independence. This is gleaned from Balducci's statement, " There is talk of a forthcoming revolt" (374).

This convention of injecting characters into history allows a writer to enhance character and plot development since characters are being placed into known circumstances, such as how the fictional Forrest Gump becomes involved in various events in 1960's America. Camus capitalizes on the historic situation to add tension to Daru's character. Daru and Balducci are both employed by the French Government. Balducci is a gendarme, which is defined in the Encarta Dictionary as " a police officer in France and French-speaking countries. In France, gendarmes are part of the armed forces, their responsibility being that of general law enforcement" (741). Balducci, however, is a Corsican. Daru's nationality lends greatly to his dilemma of having to turn a fellow countryman over to French authorities, even though he abhors the Arab for having murdered his cousin.

Daru's reaction, " That man's stupid crime revolted him, but to hand him over was contrary to honor" (381), is believable, in the Arab-under-French-rule context. However, Camus cleverly shows Daru's character when ". . . he cursed at one and the same time his own people who had sent him this Arab and the Arab too who had dared to kill and not managed to get away" (381). These thoughts reveal the complexity of Daru coping with his dilemma.

Works Cited

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