

Irony in "the guest" essay sample



**ASSIGN
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In “ The Guest” Albert Camus uses irony to convey the existential theme of making what you believe to be the moral choice regardless of the consequences. This theme reflects Camus’ existential philosophies, stressing free choice and responsibility for one’s actions in addition to the inevitability of death. This philosophy plays a major role in the theme and structure of this story, and stresses the individual’s unique position as a self determining agent responsible for the authenticity of his or her choices. In the short story, Daru has several choices to make. He can either deliver the Arab to prison, obeying the government’s orders but angering and isolating himself from his community, or he has the choice to set the Arab free, pleasing his community but going against the orders of his government. Both of these choices will most likely result in Daru feeling guilt and angst. However, not making a choice is also an option for Daru. He could allow the Arab to make the choice for himself resulting in, theoretically, no angst and no conflict. The irony within the story lies within these choices and the choice Daru ultimately makes.

There are three ironies of situation. The first one occurs when Daru makes his decision. He gives the Arab money and food, and opts to allow the Arab choose his own fate, giving him two choices: “ Now look,” the schoolmaster said as he pointed in the direction of the east, “ there’s the way to Tinguit. You have a two-hour walk. At Tinguit you’ll find the administration and the police. They are expecting you.” The Arab looked toward the east, still holding the package and the money against his chest. Daru took his elbow and turned him rather roughly toward the south. At the

foot of the height on which they stood could be seen a faint path. " That's the trail across the plateau. In a day's walk from here you'll find pasturelands and the first nomads.

They'll take you in and shelter you according to their law." The prisoner, reflecting existential values and realizing that he will eventually die anyway, morally chooses to go to prison and pay for his crime of murder. The irony is that Daru expected the prisoner to choose freedom. In Daru's mind, this would have meant that Daru carried out his orders, in a sense, while at the same time leaving the Arab unharmed and allowing him to return to the village. Daru would then have avoided the consequences of angering his government and also the consequences of angering his community.

However, Daru's expectations did not correspond with the actual consequence, and this is irony. The prisoner chose to go to prison, rather than obtain freedom. In the prisoners mind, he knew he could not escape justice and death, and so made the most moral choice, not because he was forced to do so, but because it was right.

The second situational irony occurs after Daru permits the Arab to choose and then realizes the consequences of his choice. Allowing the Arab to choose his fate was probably the most moral choice Daru could have made, yet it did not change anything. The Arab still went to prison. Daru expected his moral choice to change how hisMontgomery 3consequences would turn out, but it did not. When the Arab arrives at the prison unescorted, Daru will probably be punished by his government. Also, when he returns to the schoolhouse, villagers have written on the chalkboard a message " You handed over our brother. You will pay for this." So despite the fact that Daru

made the moral decision, he must still face punishment; a fact which greatly helps convey the theme of the story.

The punishment for the choice he did make is also worse than any of the outcomes of the other two choices. Instead of only angering one entity, Daru angers both his government and isolates himself (and probably faces punishment) from his community.

The third example of irony concerns the characters themselves. At the beginning, Balducci, a government worker, delivers the Arab to Daru. Because the prisoner is bound and led by Balducci, the author makes it seem as if Balducci is the 'bad guy', taking freedom away from the Arab and forcing him to go to prison. However, Balducci makes a comment which challenges the first impression the author creates. When Daru expresses his disgust of the whole situation to Balducci, Balducci responds, saying: "I don't like it either. You don't get used to putting a rope on a man even after years of it." This response is not what most would expect, making it ironic. The first impression of Balducci causes the assumption that he is unkind and cruel: the use of the rope around the Arab's neck, his possession of weapons, and the commanding, authoritative tone he uses. Despite all of these things, Balducci expresses his true feelings and reveals what he truly feels in his conscience, which does not correspond with what is expected of him.

These three examples of irony offer more support to the story's theme than any other literary device the author uses. Without these ironies, the Arab would have chosen the predictable path towards freedom instead of embracing the inevitability of his punishment, and Daru would have escaped

punishment as well. Also, neither of these choices would have been the most moral ones for the characters, and this situation would not uphold the theme. In "The Guest" irony is absolutely essential to the development of the theme and Camus' larger message of loneliness, alienation, and exile. Thrust into a difficult situation despite his reservations, Daru is forced to make an impossible moral choice, and ultimately finds himself exiled within his own home, regardless of his efforts to evade this consequence.

Work Cited

Arp, Thomas. Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense. Thomson Learning: June 2005.