
Survey of World Literature II

ENG 204

Belhaven University

Hall # 8

Modern Short Story

Camus's "The Guest"

Introduction to Hall

- This classic short story by Albert Camus will challenge your sense of right and wrong. A teacher must decide to lead a prisoner to certain death or to allow him a chance for freedom. It's a story about man's choices and consequences.
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Topics to be Covered

- Author Albert Camus and his writing style
 - The short story “The Guest”
 - French colonization
 - Existentialism
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Hall Objectives

- Identify key facts about Camus
 - Determine elements of Camus's writing style
 - Analyze "The Guest"
 - Review the effects of colonization
 - Identify components of existentialism
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Historical Connections

- Algeria was colonized by French in 1830s
 - France controlled all aspects of life (government, education, police, economy)
 - Arabs had been there for centuries, and were now considered to be outsiders
 - Eruptions of violence very common in this racially and socially charged climate
 - Algerian independence in 1962
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Albert Camus

- Born very poor to French parents living in North Africa (French Algeria)
 - Brilliant student and excellent athlete
 - Opposed Algerian independence, but didn't approve of French violence either
 - Politically active and socially conscious
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Camus and Existentialism

- Camus is the fiction writer most associated with Existentialism
 - Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre best articulated the elements of Existentialism
 - Camus and Sartre were good friends and represented this modern school of thoughts
 - Camus didn't like labels, and rejected the notion that he was an Existentialist
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Existentialism Defined

- Man is confused in a senseless world
 - Each human gives meaning to his own life
 - Your own reality creates your choices, not anything outside of you (like religion)
 - Life is absurd; whatever happens, happens
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Kierkegaard's Questions

- Who am I?
 - What am I doing here?
 - Where am I going?
 - What does this all mean?
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Irony of the Title “The Guest”

- The word “guest” in French can also translate to the word “host”
- This ambiguous meaning begs the questions: Who is the guest and who is the host? Is Daru the host and the Arab the guest? Or is it the other way around since the Arabs were there before the French occupied?

Importance of Setting

- Notice the details of the setting:
 - ❑ Remote
 - ❑ Isolated
 - ❑ Cold and snowy
 - ❑ Rocky

This story shows how setting and theme are related in literature. This is not a warm, inviting place where people feel welcome and safe, but a stark, barren existence that isolates.

Daru: the schoolteacher

- French schoolteacher born in Algeria
 - Some have compared him to Everyman (remember Ivan Ilyich?)
 - Others have seen him as a Christ-like figure (suffering savior)
 - He is humble and dignified; his goodness would qualify him as the story's hero
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Daru's Geography Lesson

- Note how Daru's lesson favors French history
 - This is perhaps Camus's commentary about French control
 - Shows the four main rivers of France
 - The lesson is highlighted again at the end of story, demonstrating the ongoing conflict
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The Arab: the prisoner

- Accused of murdering a family member
 - His character is a mystery
 - Details of murder are unclear
 - Refuses to speak until he and Daru are alone
 - Daru's warmth and kindness humanize the Arab
 - His final choice is a puzzling one
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“The Guest” Summary

- Daru watches as the men approach the schoolhouse
 - The students have stopped coming to school due to the weather
 - Daru’s existence is an isolated one, but he appreciates what he has and knows others much less fortunate
 - Daru is hospitable to his visitors
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“The Guest” Summary (cont.)

- Daru learns why the men are there and what his duty will be
 - Balducci warns Daru of the threat of violence and leaves him with a revolver
 - Neither Balducci nor Daru feel comfortable handing over the prisoner to certain death
 - Daru is adamant that he will not hand over the prisoner
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“The Guest” Summary (cont.)

- After Balducci leaves, Daru cooks for and serves the Arab
 - The men briefly discuss the Arab's crime and his feelings about it
 - The Arab inquires if Daru will be accompanying him to prison
 - Daru has a fitful night and wishes the prisoner would just run away
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“The Guest” Summary (cont.)

- Daru fixes breakfast and despairs over what he has been required to do
 - He does not approve of the Arab's crime, but he feels that handing him over is dishonorable as well
 - Daru and the prisoner begin their journey
 - When they come to a fork in the road, Daru makes a decision (of sorts)
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“The Guest” Conclusion

- Daru hands the prisoner provisions and tells him to go south to find the nomads where he'll find safety
 - Despite this offer, Daru turns to see the Arab walking slowly down the road to prison
 - Daru returns to the schoolhouse to find the words, “You handed over our brother. You will pay for this” written on the blackboard.
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The Story's Existentialist Ideas

- The conclusion doesn't make sense. Why would a condemned man not choose freedom?
 - Daru's decision shows that sometimes human compassion is more important than civic duty.
 - Each man must make his own choices and live (or die) with those.
 - There is a human bond that transcends right and wrong.
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Final Questions to Consider

- Is Daru a hero?
 - Is Daru a Christ-like figure of sorts?
 - Could Daru's decision be faced by any man in any difficult time?
 - Who is the guest and who is the host?
 - Is it acceptable to break civic law if one is morally opposed?
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Biblical Foundations

- The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

As Christians, we know truth. We don't have to wonder about the meaning of our lives because the Lord Jesus Christ lives in us!

What's next?

- Complete your detailed reading
- Answer the discussion questions
- Complete the writing assignments
- Take the Hall Quiz

References

- *The Norton Anthology of Western Literature*, Ninth Edition, Volume 2, Puchner Ed. et al

This concludes Hall 8