



## Guests in Albert Camus's "The Guest": Essence in Tartarus

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## Abstract

The present article aims to explore the notion of Existentialist essence in the major and minor characters of Albert Camus's short story "The Guest." It also takes it upon itself to investigate the different implications of the setting of the story. The central questions of this survey, therefore, are: which of the characters of the short story can be said to have developed a sort of personality we associate with Existentialism? What can be inferred from Camus's choice of the setting? To answer the questions, this moral/philosophical study first reviews the basic tenets of Existentialism in a nutshell and then probes them as well as their functions in the characters and the setting of the narrative. The present research argues that the only person who fits into Camus's conception of an Existentialist hero is Daru, even though The Arab, too, develops certain traits which are attuned with the Existentialist mindset. It is also revealed that in "The Guest," there are significant allusions to *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *Inferno*, *Hell*, *Notes from Underground*, "The Waste Land," and *Psalm 23*, which create a gloomy setting and represent Daru as a modern Sisyphus. A possible implication is that Camus is effectively comparing the plateau/Algeria/the world to Hades/inferno/Hell and that he is identifying himself with Daru and the people living in the mid-twentieth century with the residents of Tartarus.

## Keywords

Existentialism, Essence, Choice, Alienation, Sisyphus



## 1. Introduction

Albert Camus (1913-1960) is regarded as one of the most influential philosophers and men of letters of the twentieth century. He was a French-Algerian novelist, essayist, dramatist, journalist, and Nobel laureate, whose observations on the absurd and human revolt address and suggest solutions to the problem of the emptiness of human life in a war-torn world. Camus's life, in Poel's words, "was profoundly affected by the three major tragedies which dominate the history of twentieth-century France: the Great War ... World War II ... and the Algerian War of Independence" (in Hughes, 2007, 13). Camus's novels and plays typically represent characters caught up in circumstances and circumstances well beyond their control as well as the ways in which they cope with despair and futility. Camus's Existential heroes (like Sisyphus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* or Father Paneloux in *The Plague*) rise above life's emptiness by admitting it, confronting it, refusing to be a victim of the circumstances, and creating meaning and virtue in a world seemingly devoid of such ideals, all the while being fully aware of the futility of their endeavours. Aronson has labelled such an attitude "stubborn humanism," which is an outcry "against the Machiavellians, against the golden calf of realism" (2004, 229).

The novel *The Stranger*, the essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and the play *Caligula*, in Richardson's words, are Camus's Absurd works which were "composed in the late 1930s and early 40s" and which "mark the first major phase of Camus' literary career" (2012, 69). Camus has referred to these works as his "three absurds" (1965, 189). In them, human beings are not absurd, and the world is not absurd, but for humans to be in the world is. In Camus's view, humans cannot feel at home in the world because they yearn for order, clarity, meaning, and eternal life, while the world is chaotic, obscure, and indifferent. In Foley's words, "intelligibility purports to be comprehensive, to explain the world as a whole, and crucially, it purports to explain the world ... in ways that make sense ... In Camus's view, neither human existence nor the world are themselves absurd. Instead the absurd arises because the world is resistant to this kind of intelligibility" (2014, 6). Here is Kamber on the same matter: "we want the world to make sense, but it does not make sense. To see this conflict is to see the absurd" (2002, 52).



What Camus dubbed as "The cycle of revolt" is best manifested in the novel *The Plague*, the essay *The Rebel*, and the plays *State of Siege*, and *The Just Assassins*. The concept of revolt in these works extends the philosophy of the absurd expressed in the earlier works. Human beings, recognizing the limitations implied in being human, cannot create a world that can do away with philosophical and existential confines and the absurdity of existence, but they can react and revolt. McBride holds that for Camus, "the authentic man in a world bereft of transcendent meaning ... is the one who lives the absurd in revolt, a revolt that demands not only that he live with a jealous love for physical, sensory existence, but also that he take all actions as morally equivalent" (1973, 58). According to Foley, "Revolt here is an acceptance of the fact of the absurd ... but it is not a meek acceptance. Instead it is an acceptance filled with scorn, defiance and suffering" (2014, 10). On Camus's conception of revolt, Coskren has written that

the confronting of the absurd will demand rebellion, for it is only in rebellion that true anguish is experienced, the anguish which comes from an awareness of the possibility that one may harm a fellow human being. In the absurd universe, one suffers alone; once suffering is recognized as something common to all men, then one rebels against the absurd. In doing so, one sets the limits, establishes the boundaries beyond which the true rebel never moves. This is what Albert Camus' means by his now famous dictum: "I rebel - therefore we exist." To live in the perpetual tension of rebellion, this is the pursuit of happiness, and happiness is the pursuit, the tension, true human existence. (1960, 202)

The present article seeks to analyse the characters of Camus's short story "The Guest" in light of the set elements of Existentialism in an attempt to observe whether or not and to what extent the characters of the story exhibit Existentialistic traits. Also, it endeavours to shed light on the nature and the significance of the carefully selected setting of the story. The novelty of the research lies in its analysis of Existential essence in all the major and minor characters of the story as well as the treatment of such issues as the relevance of the setting of the story to its overall theme, similarities between the protagonist and Sisyphus, and the dual meanings of the guest/the host within the fabric of the narrative. The central questions of the article, therefore, are:



which of the characters can be regarded as an Existential hero? What are the plausible connotations of the setting? To answer the questions, the present moral/philosophical study focuses on such key terms as essence, responsibility, choice, humanity, and futility and probes the various implications of the title word and the setting. In the following pages, first a brief digest of Existential essence is given, then the synopsis of the story is reviewed, and finally the presence and absence of Existential essence in the characters as well as the different overtones of the setting and the title word are discussed.

## 2. Discussion

Essence and existence constitute a major dichotomy in Existential thought; essence is what makes existence meaningful and existence is only a doorway to possible essence. This implies that man should define himself and the world in his own subjectivity through a conscious and responsible life and through the choices he makes. In the Existentialist frame of mind, there are no meanings or structures that precede one's existence; therefore, one must find or create meaning for oneself. Here is a list of the chief notions and principles that can precipitate Existential essence: a) belief in individualism, freedom, and commitment, b) constant and painful struggle against despair, frustration, and angst, as responsibility and freedom inevitably entail anxiety and doubt, c) preoccupation with absurdity, alienation, and the reality of death, d) belief in the Sartrean proposition that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre, 2007, 22) and that authentic and meaningful existence (or Existential essence) is feasible only through deliberation and responsibility, e) emphasis on humanity, morality, and charitable conduct, f) a penchant for the continuous process of "becoming" rather than self-righteous "being," g) the negation of objective or universally accepted values, and h) belief in the inescapable loneliness of man, i) feeling of being caught up in a dilemma or series of dilemmas, and j) the affirmation of life with all its philosophical, social, and psychological ordeals and the negation of capitulation and passivity despite the certainty of the ultimate failure (Farahbakhsh, 2012, 440 - 41). On the relation between Existentialism and Nihilism, Cox has commented that "Existentialists are nihilists because they recognize that life is



ultimately absurd and full of terrible, inescapable truths. They are anti-nihilists because they recognize that life does in fact have a meaning: the meaning each person chooses to give his or her own existence" (2009, 15).

In the same vein, Bolea has observed that "Existentialism emphasizes the inherent creativity of the human subjects, who must find their personal truths and have to invent meaning, even though they are living in a world where absurdity is unavoidable" (2014, 65). On such radical duality, Berguno has written that "Death, suffering, struggle and guilt, these existential situations represent a limit to our power and knowledge. Yet paradoxically, they also represent opportunities for existential self-becoming; they are the foundations of our freedom" (2009, 247). Butenaite et al. argue that such pull and push inescapably leads to "existential crisis," whose emotional symptoms include: "emotional pain, disturbed sense of integrity, emotional vulnerability, anxiety, fear, guilt, and loneliness" (2016, 15). Also important in the Existentialist dialectics is the ontological denial of transcendental absolute since, in Hochberg's words, "to accept an Absolute is to relinquish the search for an explanation since one explains in terms of something that is rationally incomprehensible" (in Lisska, 2008, 534).

Camus wrote "The Guest" (first published in 1957 in a collection entitled *Exile and the Kingdom*) while, in Todd's words, he was "experimenting with new writing styles" (2000, 350). On the narrative excellence of the story, Roberts has commented that "Of all the fictional works published by Albert Camus, his story 'The Guest' ('L'Hôte') is among the most pregnant with possibilities for multiple readings" (2008b, 529). Likewise, Hurley has asserted that the story has attained "canonical permanence" in Camus's corpus of published writings (1993, 79). The story opens as Daru, a schoolteacher, watches two men – Balducci and an Arab prisoner – struggle up a winding mountainous path on their way to his cold schoolhouse. Balducci has been ordered to hand the prisoner over to Daru to be taken to a police headquarters in Tanguit. Daru refuses the task, thereby infuriating Balducci who storms out in anger but leaves the prisoner behind. Daru sympathetically unties the Arab, feeds him, and even gives him a chance to escape over the night. The following day, Daru provides the Arab with food and money and shows him both the way to the headquarters and the way to his native land. Daru feels disappointed when he sees the Arab was on



his way to Tanguit to give himself in. He feels more upset when, upon his return to his classroom, he reads a warning message on the blackboard: "You have handed over our brother. You will pay for this" (Camus, 2005, 35).

### 3. Characters: Construction and Representation

#### 3.1. Daru

In the West, Daru per se has no significant meaning; it is, however, the name of the capital of Western Province of Papua New Guinea. In this sense, the name implies colonisation and Imperialism, here exercised by the French government. In Hinduism, Daru means 'medicine' and a 'medicinal plant.' In the latter sense, the name can connote the village provider and the physician (Daru is a grain-distributor and a school teacher). Daru as the lonely protagonist of the story is evidently entrapped in a series of dilemmas; he has to choose to live and teach in a remote and "high, deserted plateau" (28), even though what he had wished for "was a post in the little town at the base of the foothills separating the upper plateaus from the desert" (31), he has to choose to side with the occupying French forces or with the rebellious Arabs, and most importantly in the context of the story, he has to choose to hand over the prisoner or to set him free. The irony is that he is well aware that no matter what he opts for, the consequence is inescapably the same – the seeming inconsequentiality of action. As an example, he is considered a traitor both by the French government and the native Algerians, even though he was not willing to turn in the Arab. To him, the choices are all undesirable, as he has to go on living among "the rocks" and the unappreciative natives as an alien and as a "monk" in his "empty, frigid" schoolhouse. Despite all these setbacks, he is "satisfied with the little he had and with the rough life" and "feels like a lord" (28). He resolutely carries on what seems to be his futile struggle: he dutifully feels for his students and the miserable villagers who are weighed down by long droughts and blizzards, shows sympathy and kindness to the Arab, and creates his own value system. In other words, he wins his essence and transcends mechanical existence through making deliberate, moral, and individualistic choices and accepting their consequences, fending off despair, and assuming responsibility, all the while seeing himself locked in a vicious cycle.



Daru, meanwhile, he is the only character in the story who can simultaneously be both the guest and the host. This follows that the referent of the title of the story is in fact Daru; Balducci and the Arab are guests, but Daru is both a guest (in the plateau and, on a larger scale, in the world) and a host.

### 3.2. Balducci

According to *Surname Database*, the word Balducci is a pre-seventh century Old French surname, which means “joyful” and “lusty” (2017, 1). Unlike the non-conformist, intellectual, and eccentric Daru, Balducci is a cunning, conservative, and law-abiding person; long years of service in the military had given him whatever it took to be a good gendarme – discipline, obedience, and order. Also, unlike Daru, who is dynamic, round, and unpredictable, Balducci is flat and stereotypical; he is simply a typical police officer serving for a colonising country. In addition, unlike Daru who lets the Arab choose to flee or to walk to the prison on his own, Balducci denies both the Arab and his old friend the freedom to choose, that is why he feels offended when Daru pronounces his refusal: “There’s no use being polite. You insulted me” (31). Ironically, and as an exception, he lets Daru choose to tie or not to tie the Arab: “Balducci, disconcerted, showed him the rope ... The old gendarme hesitated. “It’s up to you. Of course ...”” (30). Furthermore, unlike Daru, he takes both pride and pleasure in his job and does not conceal his sense of superiority over the colonised: “One was on horseback, the other on foot” (28), “Balducci was holding on the end of a rope an Arab who was walking behind him with hands bound and head lowered” (29), or “Balducci was already enthroned on the nearest pupil’s desk and the Arab had squatted against the teacher’s platform facing the stove” (Ibid.). Balducci is “joyful” and “lusty” because he cannot get bothered to make difficult and moral decisions or shoulder any responsibility other than what is dictated to him by his senior officers (it explains why he keeps repeating words like “rule” and “order”). He is loath to take risks and he does not seem to trust anyone: “I have an order to deliver the prisoner and I’m doing so. And now you’ll just sign this paper for me” (31). Balducci, therefore, is devoid of Existentialistic essence; he merely exists without





having achieved an individualistic identity or an idiosyncratic self that can love, choose, shun absurdity, and feel responsible, alienated, or anxious.

### 3.3. The Arab

The Arab is nameless; a judicious inference is that the French colonisers had robbed his original identity and reduced him to a non-being or a slave. He is trudging behind Balducci who is rather carelessly riding the horse before him and forcing him up the snow-covered slope. The image is self-explanatory as it vividly shows the supremacy of the coloniser and the bondage of the colonised: “He recognized the horseman as Balducci, the old gendarme he had known for a long time. Balducci was holding on the end of a rope an Arab who was walking behind him with hands bound and head lowered” (29). Balducci later describes the Arab and his race as sheep: “he killed his cousin with a billhook. You know, like a sheep” (30). But does the Arab exist in the existentialistic sense of the word? We do not know much about his past; however, we do know that he had been a typical farmer and a potential rebel who had killed his cousin in a squabble over grain – nothing is yet even remotely existential. Having said that, within the context of the story, tamed and transformed by Daru’s sympathy and hospitality, he manages to develop a new personality and win an essence: he ‘chooses’ to reciprocate Daru’s kindness, he ‘chooses’ not to make a runner in the dark, and he ‘chooses’ to hand himself over to the authorities, only to meet almost certain death. That is why the meek Arab at the outset of the story, transforms into an Existentialist character at the end of the narrative. Camus underscores the Arab’s metamorphosis by juxtaposing the gloomy and cold afternoon when he first met the bound, shivering, and horrified Arab with the sunny day the Arab was given the chance to flee to safety or to walk to the headquarters of his own free will.

### 3.4. The Natives

Camus’s description of the natives is imbued with sympathy and anger. In addition to colonialism, they have to put up with harsh weather in their God forsaken land – first the drought and then the blizzards. That is why Camus refers to them as “victims” (both at the hands of the French and God) right in the first page: “Actually they had



all been victims because they were all poor ... But it would be hard to forget that poverty, that army of ragged ghosts wandering in the sunlight" (28). We cannot draw any convincing conclusion about the essence of these "wondering" poverty-stricken "ragged ghosts"; we can only surmise that they live like cattle and they pose a constant threat to the authority as the provider and the suppressor: "Things are brewing, it appears. There is talk of a forthcoming revolt. We are mobilized" (30). The only time they are allowed to make their presence felt is when they write the warning message on the board: "You handed over our brother. You will pay for this" (35). Needless to say, there is no deliberate choice, no humanity, and no sense of responsibility in the abrasive reproach. Daru knows, only too well, that the message is simply a natural reaction to the brutality committed by the likes of Balducci. That is why at the end of the story, feeling betrayed by, and at the mercy of, both the insurgent natives and the administration, Daru feels quite dejected: "Daru looked at the sky, the plateau, and, beyond, the invisible lands stretching all the way to the sea. In this vast landscape he had loved so much, he was alone" (35).

#### 4. The Symbolic Significance of the Setting

The setting of "The Guest" plays a key role in the thematic development of the narrative in that Camus has adroitly selected and arranged certain temporal and spatial details to capitalise such dominant motifs as absurdity and futility. Carroll looks upon the setting of "The Guest" as an example for French-Algerian isolation which "is presented as both a punishment and a reward" (1997, 533), that is, both as a prison and an opportunity for redemption/meaningful existence. On the relevance of the desert/plateau in Camus's works, Polanskis has written that

the desert is so often mentioned in Camus' texts because it was one of the most well known landscapes to the writer since his childhood. At the same time the desert evolves together with the author's reflection about the absurd. The literary heritage of Camus is strongly marked by two factors: colonialism and his country of birth – Algeria. But this context does not restrict the importance of his texts. Camus' heroes tend to understand the absurd of their actions thus to realize their existence. (2013, 148)



“The Guest” is no exception; Camus has embedded in his narrative structure passing yet explicit references to Tartarus as well as implicit echoes of Dante’s Inferno and *Hell*, thereby rendering his story an account of a desperate struggle of a cursed protagonist in an inhospitable desert for possible salvation.

#### 4.1. Tartarus

In Greek mythology, Tartarus is the deep chasm in Hades where the wicked souls would suffer eternally. In his the *Iliad*, Homer describes Tartarus as a dungeon “as far beneath Hades as heaven is above earth” (2004, II., 8.1). Having cheated Hades and declined to return to the underworld after his death, Sisyphus was doomed to perpetually roll a huge boulder up a steep slope, only to see in tumble down just before the top of the hill. Punishment, stone, hill, and darkness are all persistent motifs both in Camus’s story and the myth. Ironically, the names Sisyphus and Daru can be claimed to mirror one another; the root of the word Sisyphus (sophos) means “the wise” (Beekes, 2009, xxxiii) and Daru, as said, implies medicine or ‘the physician.’ In a double irony, the names Daru and Camus are rhyming words.

To begin with punishment, all the major characters of the two stories are forced to undergo some sort of retribution. Sisyphus has to roll up a huge rock to the top of a hill, the unnamed Arab has to face death penalty, the natives have to suffer at the hands of colonisers, Balducci has to go on living ignorantly and purposelessly, and Daru has to work and live in a hostile land and await vengeance for having turned in the Arab. However, while it is clear why Sisyphus or the natives or the Arab should suffer, Camus, in his paradigmatic Existentialistic narrative framework, never justifies Daru’s desolation. It explains why Camus’s *Sisyphus* opens with one of the most radical of philosophical concerns: “to judge if life is worth or not living” (1991, 15), on which Raskin has observed that “Early in [*Sisyphus*], Camus states that when comforting illusions are stripped away, life can be seen to be completely devoid of meaning. He asks whether that realization necessarily means that life is not worth living. The entire essay is an attempt to answer that question” (2001, 157).

In literature, the combination of rock and a steep uphill path always brings to the mind Sisyphus’s ordeal in Tartarus. The words “rise” and “stones” both appear right



in the opening paragraph of the story: "They had not yet tackled the abrupt rise leading to the schoolhouse built on the hillside. They were toiling onward, making slow progress in the snow, among the stones, on the vast expanse of the high, deserted plateau" (28). Daru and the Arab, therefore, are modern versions of the mythological hero in the sense that all their toil and trouble in carrying the rock (of responsibility) are ultimately fruitless. Other instances of the recurrence of the word "stone" are: "the earth shriveled up little by little, literally scorched, every stone bursting into dust under one's foot" (28), "When all the snow was melted, the sun would take over again and once more would burn the fields of stone" (30), "A big stone could be heard bouncing down" (31) (here, the analogy simply cannot go unnoticed), "the solitude and the silence had been hard for him on these wastelands peopled only by stones. Occasionally, furrows suggested cultivation, but they had been dug to uncover a certain kind of stone" (Ibid.), "The stones were about to reappear" (34), "They walked for an hour and rested beside a sharp peak of limestone" (Ibid.), "There, rocky walls, green and black to the north, pink and lavender to the south, marked the frontier of eternal summer" (31), "The only plowing here was to harvest rocks" (Ibid.), "bare rock covered three quarters of the region" (Ibid.), "They reached a level height made up of crumbly rocks" (34), "outcroppings of rock that gave the landscape a chaotic look" (Ibid.), and "The rock-fields to the south stood out sharply against the blue sky" (35).

The image of the slope is similarly rampant; in addition to the example in the first paragraph (quoted above), other recurrences are: "they must have tackled the rise" (28), "The two men were now halfway up the slope" (29), "he watched them climb" (Ibid.), "Balducci ... walked toward the little rise without turning around and disappeared" (31), "At the foot of the height on which they stood could be seen a faint path" (34), "The Arab was still there on the edge of the hill" (35), "There was no longer anyone on the hill" (Ibid.), "He climbed it as fast as he could and stopped, out of breath, at the top" (Ibid.), and "Daru looked at the sky, the plateau, and, beyond, the invisible lands stretching all the way to the sea" (Ibid.).

Beside stone and steep slope, another significant motif in the story is darkness; Camus's description of the sky is always tinged with a sense of melancholy, even when the sun is out. Typical examples include: "The morning had opened with a dirty



light ... At two in the afternoon it seemed as if the day were merely beginning ... the thick snow was falling amidst unbroken darkness” (28), “For days, still, the unchanging sky would shed its dry light on the solitary expanse where nothing had any connection with man” (30), “he lay on his couch watching the sky gradually close over, listening to the silence” (31), “the starless sky was stirring gently” (33), “When Daru turned out the light, the darkness seemed to coagulate all of a sudden” (Ibid), “There was nothing but the sky on the horizon. Not a man could be seen” (34), and “In this vast landscape he had loved so much, he was alone” (35). Such loneliness in the “vast” emptiness is reminiscent of Sisyphus’s suffering in the dark Tartarus – an image which in turn evokes *Notes from Underground* by Dostoevsky, who, in Roberts’ words, “was one of the most important influences on Camus’ work” and who for him “was a pivotal figure in contemplating the moral consequences of a Godless world” (2008a, 5).

#### 4.2. *Inferno*

In “The Guest,” allusions to Dante’s *Inferno* are oblique, but poignant. In *Inferno*, hell is shown as nine concentric circles of torment deep inside the earth and as the “realm ... of those who have rejected spiritual values by yielding to bestial appetites or violence, or by perverting their human intellect to fraud or malice against their fellowmen” (Dante, 2009, 14). *Inferno* is characterised by ice, silence, and interminable loneliness; in the ninth or deepest circle of hell, for instance, the sinners, guilty of treachery, are trapped in a lake of ice (Cocytus), which is divided into four rings for four kinds of treachery, namely, the betrayal of family ties, the betrayal of community ties, the betrayal of guests, and the betrayal of God. According to Ciardi, “The treacheries of these souls were denials of love (which is God) and of all human warmth ... As they denied God’s love, so are they furthest removed from the light and warmth of His Sun. As they denied all human ties, so are they bound only by the unyielding ice” (Ibid., 248). The coldness of the plateau and Daru’s incurable loneliness both symbolise infernal plight. Cut off from the rest of the world, Daru has to live among the cursed villagers like a wondering ghost, perpetually ensnared in seclusion, isolation, and silence. Some of the infernal images, which abound in the



story, include: "It was cold; he went back into the school to get a sweater" (28), "He crossed the empty, frigid classroom" (Ibid.), "the delivery truck ... had brought his supplies two days before the blizzard" (Ibid.), "under the weathered skin now rather discolored by the cold, the whole face had a restless and rebellious look" (29), "For a few minutes he heard nothing but his own step resounding on the cold ground" (35), "They were toiling onward, making slow progress in the snow" (28), "the light was increasing over the snowy plateau" (30), "His footsteps were muffled by the snow" (31), "Daru ... threw a pebble that whistled through the air before sinking into the snow" (34), "the Arab might have fled and that he would be alone" (31), "In this room where he had been sleeping alone for a year, this presence bothered him" (33), "In this vast landscape he had loved so much, he was alone" (35), "It was this silence that had seemed painful to him" (31), and "the solitude and the silence had been hard for him on these wastelands peopled only by stones" (Ibid.). Both in *Inferno* and "The Guest," silence and ice can be perceived as symbols for hatred, lack of human relationship, and damnation.

### 4.3. *Hell*

In "The Guest," the frequency of such words as drought, heat, and burn and their equivalents is indicative of the fact that Camus has deliberately tried to give a hellish aura to his tale. Some of the best examples include: "after eight months of drought without the transition of rain" (28), "families had suffered from the drought" (Ibid.), "the plateaus burned to a cinder month after month, the earth shriveled up little by little, literally scorched, every stone bursting into dust under one's foot" (Ibid.), "the sun would take over again and once more would burn the fields of stone" (30), "the sun was drinking up the puddles at once, rapidly cleaning the plateau" (34), "on the plain to the east a steamy heat was already rising" (35), and "The sun was now rather high in the sky and was beginning to beat down on his head" (Ibid.). Camus's "wastelands peopled only by stones" (an allusion to T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland") is utterly and radically different from the valley of the shadow of death portrayed in *Psalms 23* ("The Lord is my Shepherd"): "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (in Mazor, 2011, 589).



## 5. Conclusion

This study has been an attempt to explore the extent to which the major and minor characters of Camus's "The Guest" live essentially or existentially. In the course of the mainstream discussion, it was revealed that Daru is the only person who perfectly fits into Camus's image of an Existentialist protagonist; he is the only character who lives meaningfully, resolutely, and freely amidst doubts, loneliness, and unending gloom. At the end of the story, the Arab, too, exhibits certain traits which are compatible with Existentialist codes of thought and demeanour; he reciprocates Daru's benevolence and makes a fateful decision, consciously and conscientiously. It was also argued that in "The Guest" there are telling and ironical allusions to *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *Inferno*, *Hell*, *Notes from Underground*, "The Waste Land," and *Psalms 23*, whose function is to create a hellish and nightmarish setting and to represent Daru as Sisyphus. Here, Camus is effectively comparing the plateau/Algeria/the world to Hades/inferno/Hell; the bleak analogy indicates that Camus is actually identifying himself with Daru and on wider scale he is identifying the people living in the mid-twentieth century with the residents of Tartarus, who kept tiring themselves out in the dark abyss of a war-torn world. As López-Santiago has put it, for Camus, "Sisyphus's boulder is meant to signify human suffering and our absurd generalized 'death sentence'. We all are Sisyphus" (2014, 58). Similarly, Polanskis has contended that "Like his characters, Camus felt the hostile emptiness of the desert, a place where man feels an alien, a stranger ... and this landscape seemed perfectly fit for the feeling of absurdity and ... a vision ... of man trapped in a hostile universe, without any chance of happiness and hope for the future" (2013, 148). As an atheist humanist, who strove for what he deemed a noble cause, postulating a secular morality which required him to defy suppression and oppression, Daru/Camus is finally left helplessly alone to find some sort of meaning in a God-forsaken land: "In this vast landscape he had loved so much, he was alone" (35).



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