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The Fall



Synopsis

Elegantly styled, Camus' profoundly disturbing novel of a Parisian lawyer's confessions is a searing study of modern amorality.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Soon after publishing *The Fall*, Albert Camus won the Nobel Prize for Literature. On the strength of this book alone, he deserved it. As a novel, *The Fall* improves upon its two predecessors, *The Stranger* and *The Plague*, in almost every way. The writing itself is much more confident, full of scathing wit and eloquent outrage. The intertwining of artistic aim and philosophical conviction is utterly seamless. Neither is compromised, as they were at times in the earlier works. Rather, both art and philosophy are employed here to serve the STORY. In short, *The Fall* delivers on what Camus had always promised- a masterful work of literature that also FORCES the reader to examine his/her life. Jean-Baptiste Clamence is a "good guy." He uses his abilities as a lawyer to protect the poor and weak. When asked, he helps blind people across the street. Wherever one finds a righteous cause, he appears to support it. He is a well-respected member of the community. Could one truly find SERIOUS fault with such a person? Well, as of late, Clamence has had a slight problem: he has felt the need to be honest, both with others and himself. The truth often leads people to strange places, and so Clamence, formerly rich and recently disgraced, finds himself at a sailors' bar in Amsterdam. Here, he finally comes clean about his life and his actions (one and the same, possibly?). He's no criminal, surely not, or not the WORST kind anyway. His crime is much more insidious, and it consists of what we are all guilty of: he is two-faced. His purest acts of

selflessness are actually forms of self-deception, for they mask that in the end, he is really satisfying himself.

Barely more than a hundred pages, "The Fall" represents Albert Camus' ultimate foray into the recesses of psychic anguish. Jean-Baptiste Clamence, a once-respected and successful Paris barrister, sits alone in an Amsterdam bar delivering his stark monologue to an unknown listener. It is a confessional narrative, a tale in which Clamence slowly unravels the spare facts of his life, his deceptions, his inauthenticity, his bad faith. As he sits in the dimly lit bar, Clamence makes the locus of his telling a metaphor for the narrative to follow: "We are at the heart of things here. Have you noticed that Amsterdam's concentric canals resemble the circles of hell? The middle-class hell, of course, peopled with bad dreams. When one comes from the outside, as one gradually goes through those circles, life-and hence its crimes-becomes denser, darker. Here we are in the last circle." It is a metaphor that resonates with existential imagery, reminiscent of Sartre's claim, in "No Exit", that "hell is other people." From this grim place, Camus writes a classic of Existentialist literature, building on this metaphor, writing an extended trope of unremitting self-examination, self-doubt and anguish. Clamence was, by all outward appearances, both a virtuous and a modest man. His courtesy was famous and beyond question. He was generous in public and private, literally exulting at the approach of a beggar. He helped the blind man cross the street and the indigent defendant secure a reduced sentence. He ended his afternoons at the café with "a brilliant improvisation in the company of several friends on the hard-heartedness of our governing class and the hypocrisy of our leaders."

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