

TRIBECA
FILM

MARC DU PONTAVICE AND MATTHEW GLEDHILL
PRESENT



VIGGO MORTENSEN REDA KATEB

FAR FROM MEN

(LOIN DES HOMMES)

A FILM BY
DAVID OELHOFFEN



ORIGINAL MUSIC BY NICK CAVE AND WARREN ELLIS

PRODUCED BY MARC DU PONTAVICE AND MATTHEW GLEDHILL, WRITTEN BY DAVID OELHOFFEN, FREELY INSPIRED BY THE SHORT STORY "THE GUEST" FROM THE COLLECTION "EXILE AND THE KINGDOM" BY ALBERT CAMUS, PUBLISHED BY GALLIMARD ©1957, COPRODUCERS VIGGO MORTENSEN, OLIVIER CHARVET AND FLORIAN GENETET-MOREL

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER ROMAIN LE GRAND, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GUILLAUME DEFFONTAINES, EDITOR JULIETTE WELFLING, SET DESIGNER STÉPHANE TAILLASSON, COSTUME DESIGNER KHADJA ZEGGAI, SOUND ENGINEER MARTIN ROUSSAU, DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION PHILIPPE HAGÈGE

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RUNNING TIME
110 MINUTES

DISTRIBUTOR:

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New York, NY 10011

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SYNOPSIS

Algeria, 1954. While rebellion rumbles in the valley, two very different men are thrown together by a world in turmoil, and forced to flee across the Atlas Mountains. In the midst of an icy winter, Daru, the reclusive teacher, is ordered to escort Mohamed, a villager accused of murder, to the nearest prison. Pursued by Arab horsemen seeking summary justice, and by vengeful settlers, the two men are driven into the highlands where they must join forces in their fight for freedom.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

From my very first reading of Camus' short story "The Guest", I visualized a Western. Admittedly, an unconventional Western, being steeped in European history and set against the backdrop of the North African highlands, but a Western all the same. True to the genre, there are colonizers and the colonized, a prisoner to be escorted, and a plot that spirals into violence. A collision between two systems of law is at the heart of the story and its character relationships. We bear witness to two cultures and two moralities forced into co-existence by history. I had dreamed of bringing Viggo Mortensen on board; his singularity made him the perfect fit for the role of Daru. Reda Kateb – mysterious and earthy provided the perfect counterpoint as Mohamed. The desert landscape takes on the role of an additional character in the story. The radiant North African light was a beautiful but unpredictable companion for the film.

"The Guest", by Albert Camus is a stunning text. This short story of 13 pages focuses on one night and three characters: Daru, a schoolteacher; Balducci, a gendarme; and Mohamed, a young Algerian prisoner who has killed his cousin. Overwhelmed by the beginnings of a national insurrection, the gendarme hands the prisoner over to Daru, ordering him to escort Mohamed to the nearest town to be tried for his crime.

Daru is happy in his school on the high plateau, cut off from the world. He tries to save this young villager, despite his crime, at the risk of compromising his position and everything that is important in his life, because he cannot countenance abandoning another man to certain execution by the French. He accompanies Mohamed and offers him a chance to flee; but the prisoner insists on turning himself in to the local authorities. Upon his return to the school, Daru finds a message written on the blackboard that says he will pay for handing Mohamed to the police.

Adapting this story for the cinema meant filling out the characters and providing greater density to the narrative. One of the ways this was done was by including the Algerian context and the start of the war for independence. But the biggest change was altering the nature of the relationship between Daru and the young Algerian, which resulted in a distinctly different ending to Camus's story.

I moved away from the letter of the text, but always with the idea of remaining close to the spirit of Camus, whose concerns seem very current to me: concerns about humanity, the denunciation of injustice, and above all, the difficulty of moral engagement and judgment.



Daru's trajectory is still that of a man who wants to save another, despite him being a criminal, but I wanted to intensify the energy Daru expends to convince the prisoner not to obey the blood feud laws of his community, nor to hand himself over to the equally unjust law of the colonizers. I also imagined a more tortured and battered character than in the original, a man who had been through the Second World War and wanted to flee violence, a man burdened with grief which pushes him to isolate himself. And lastly, a man with a painful identity: the son of Spaniards, he is a European and seen as such by the Arab villagers, but he has not forgotten that a generation ago, his Andalusian parents were considered as "Arabs" by the French settlers of Algeria.

For Mohamed, above all, I didn't want the character to remain the figure of the disturbing Arab throughout the film, mysterious and opaque as he is in the original story, but rather a man who has his reasons, his own moral compass, and who gradually opens up to what Daru is proposing – the possibility of acting for himself, as an individual.

Where Camus had two men hermetically sealed off from each other, two alien worlds that are irreconcilable, I tried to have a bond develop between them, a sort of understanding, which ends up being what saves them both.

Camus's story was written in July 1954, a few months before the outbreak of the Algerian War. It's a text

written by a man who senses that war is on its way, but who doesn't talk about it directly.

Adapting it today, more than 50 years later, I wanted to plunge these two characters into the chaos of a nascent war (in this case, right after the "Toussaint Rouge" attacks in November, 1954), and to immerse them in a situation where the survival instinct takes primacy.

Daru's journey also became that of a man who opens his eyes to the world in which he grew up, and who suddenly feels the pointlessness and compromising aspect of his presence at the isolated school, sensing the violence that's sure to come to this mountain outpost. It is time for him to go, for reasons both personal and that involve the wider sweep of history.

To save the young villager Mohamed, Daru sacrifices his place on the plateau, but it's not a blind sacrifice. Thanks to this young man, something reawakens in him; a will to live, to love, a need to return to the world he originally came from.

* * *

The initial images that came to mind, inspired by the situations and landscapes in the story, are those of a Western: expansive and hostile nature, danger, tension, and men swinging between dignity and savagery, tearing themselves between a craving for life and a craving for death.





I also saw the central figures of the Western: that of the white man bringing civilization and the embodiment of law and order, and of his counterpart, the “savage” tribal figure. This leads to a questioning of how we see the “other”, the outsider, the “uncivilised” Arab, through the mechanisms of fiction, action, and emotional responses. The founding myth which is hidden behind FAR FROM MEN is obviously not the American myth of the conquest of the West. Daru is a teacher, a missionary, a civilizing influence. He is also inevitably the bearer of a myth, that of French universalism, the conquest of the world by European values, with all that brings in terms of contradictions – just as the American myth does.

In FAR FROM MEN, I see a film that is closer to a humanist Western than a historical film. It belongs to that family of Westerns which attacked or subverted the myth, rather than magnifying it, as a distant reference; the pro-Indian Westerns of the 1950s like DEVIL'S DOORWAY by Anthony Mann and THE BIG SKY by Howard Hawks, for example, or, later on, some of the films of Arthur Penn, Sydney Pollack and Clint Eastwood.

Since I thought the story was universal, I imagined someone like Viggo Mortensen in the role of Daru in an abstract way, as if to force myself from the outset to move away from a simple exploration of an episode in French history. He is a chameleon-like actor with multiple identities, and, to my mind, perfect in terms of his intensity and his internalized approach. I knew that he spoke fluent Spanish, but at the time I didn't know he also spoke French.

Once we found that out, we offered him the role. He liked the script. When we met, I saw the character of Daru appear before my eyes. His French is perfect. His multiple identities melded with that of Daru. And beyond his qualities as an actor, no one could better

convey the universal dimension of this story and its affiliation with the Western than him.

For the role of Mohamed, Reda Kateb had been attached to the project for a long time. While Viggo Mortensen had to make a considerable effort to learn Arabic, Reda Kateb had to do huge preparatory work, both physically and linguistically, to master the rural Algerian dialect of the west of the High Plateaus, and to reproduce the credible French of a shepherd who never went to school, which he meticulously put together.

* * *

The shoot took place on the Moroccan side of the Atlas Mountains, a vast, rugged backdrop.

With the exception of the school sequences at the start of the film, we filmed outdoors in natural locations, using mainly natural light, as agreed on with the director of photography, Guillaume Deffontaines. The story lent itself to this treatment, with many scenes taking place at dawn or dusk.

During editing, Juliette Welfling and I wanted to keep the film in a state of tension, with a fairly slow pace broken by occasional surges of action and emotion, moments of rupture like the attack on the school.

The music was composed by Nick Cave and Warren Ellis, who were terrific to work with. They always tried to go with the film's flow, and created an original soundtrack which goes gradually from a dark, brooding atmosphere at the start to more melodic pieces as the intimate aspect wins out over the survival instinct.

NICK CAVE AND WARREN ELLIS ORIGINAL SCORE

We read the script for FAR FROM MEN and immediately signed on.

David discussed what aspects of our music he liked, then left the ball in our court. For the score, we decided that it should mirror the developing relationship between Daru, Mohamed, and the broad landscapes.

Melodies are sparse in the beginning, and develop from atmospheric ambiences built around wind and electronic textures. Strings are gradually introduced as the story unfolds. Thankfully David wasn't looking for local music, as genre music is not something we do.

From the outset it was wonderful to be working with a director with a strong vision, and with a totally sympathetic and encouraging production team. Not always the case in this domain.

It was an honor to be involved.

Nick Cave and Warren Ellis



CAST & CREW

Written and directed by
DAVID OELHOFFEN

VIGGO MORTENSEN
REDA KATEB

Produced by
MARC DU PONTAVICE & MATTHEW GLEDHILL

LOOSELY BASED ON "THE GUEST", A SHORT STORY BY ALBERT CAMUS
PUBLISHED BY GALLIMARD ©1957

Original Music by
NICK CAVE & WARREN ELLIS

Co-producers
Viggo MORTENSEN
Olivier CHARVET
Florian GENETET-MOREL

Associate Producer
Romain LE GRAND

Director of Photography
Guillaume DEFFONTAINES

Editor
Juliette WELFLING

Set Designer
Stéphane TAILLASSON

Costume Designer
Khadija ZEGGAÏ

Sound
Martin BOISSAU
Thomas DESJONQUÈRES
Emmanuel CROSET

Executive Production
Agora
Souâd LAMRIKI & Bénédicte BELLOCO

Director of Production
Philippe HAGÈGE

Director of post-production
Christine BESSARD

Collaborating writer
Antoine LACOMBLEZ

First Assistant Director
Jérôme BRIÈRE

Script
Marie DUCRET

Casting
Stéphane BATUT

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