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The Plague (Albert Camus)

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Abstract

Albert Camus' allegorical novel *The Plague* provides meaningful insight into the process of death and dying. As with other literary masterpieces the author shares with his audience his concern with and knowledge of the vicissitudes of the human condition. In *The Plague* Camus employs their actions and responses of a community and its citizenry to an epidemic of the bubonic plague as a symbolic representation of the individual's grappling with death and dying. His main themes are those of separation and exile, despair and despondency, and helplessness and hopefulness.

Keywords: Allegorical Novel, Masterpieces, Vicissitudes, Bubonic plague, Epidemic, Grappling.



Introduction:

The novel 'The Plague' was written by 'Albert Camus'. It was published in June 1947. 'Albert Camus' was a French philosopher, author and journalist. He was born on 7th November 1913 and died on 4th January 1960. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature at the age of 44 in 1957. He was born in Algeria to French Pieds Noirs parents. He was the representative of non-metropolitan French Literature. He studied philosophy at the University of Algiers. Camus's

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first publication was a play called ‘Revoltedans les Asturies’ written with three friends in May 1936.

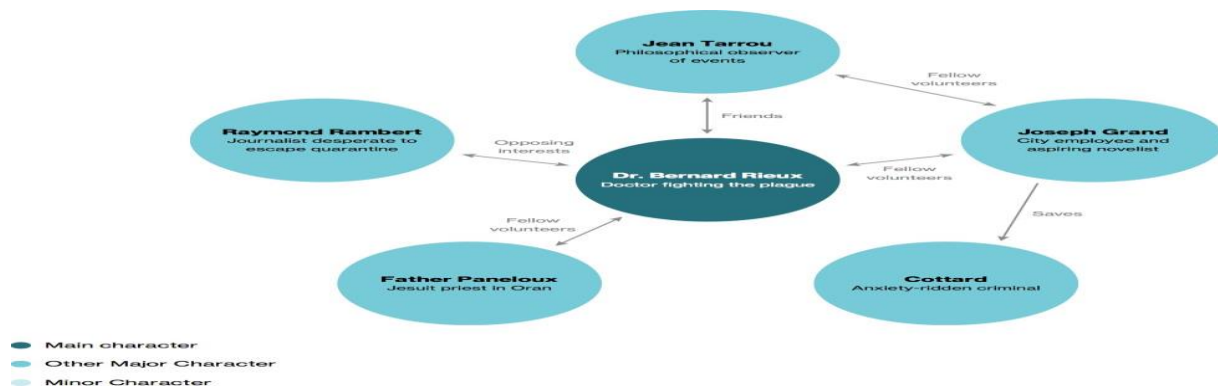
Notable Works:

- The Stranger / The Outsider
- The Myth of Sisyphus
- The Rebel
- The Plague

The Novel ‘The Plague’ tells the story of a plague sweeping the French Algerian city of Oran. The novel has been read as an allegorical treatment of the French resistance to Nazi occupation during World War II, pointing out the futility of human aspirations and the inevitability of suffering. His writing is greatly influenced by the poverty and illness of his youth. He also wrote extensively about the conditions of poverty in Algeria while working as a journalist for a colonialist newspaper.

Theme:

The Central theme of the novel is ‘Suffering which crushes human beings both physically and spirituality’. The plague, which is described as an irrational force and depersonalized evil, is the main cause of the suffering. It kills without regard to age or social status. It also causes exile and separation.



The novel is set in the 1940s in the Algerian city of Oran. A strange thing has begun happening in Oran. Rats are emerging into the streets, where they move awkwardly in a sort of dance, then bleed profusely and die. At first there are just a few. Then their numbers grow. Soon rats are dying this way by the thousands, so many that they have to be piled and burned.

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Dr. Bernard Rieux, a physician, recognizes the way the rats are dying is odd and know it is probably not a good sign.

After a while the rats stop dying. But before anyone can breathe a sigh of relief that the rat episode is over, people start showing disconcerting symptoms. They begin to die in much the same way as the rats. Dr. Castel, who works with Dr. Rieux, comes to believe the symptoms are those of the Black Plague. However, the city leaders are reluctant to acknowledge what is happening, even as the death toll grows, apathetic to the human suffering taking place under their noses.

Eventually, the city leaders are forced to take the situation seriously, and they quarantine the city. No one can enter or leave. Several things happen as a result. The city's residents are plunged into despair and spend all their time talking about how bad off they are and how they miss those who are far away. Raymond Rambert, a journalist visiting Oran from Paris, attempts to leave the city. When he is unsuccessful using normal channels, he pursues illegal ones. This leads him to strike up an acquaintance with Cottard, a smuggler, who recently attempted suicide and was saved by Joseph Grand, a man who is unsuccessful in job, marriage, and writing. Father Paneloux, a priest, believes the plague is God's punishment for sin and says as much in a sermon.

Jean Tarrou, a visitor confined to the city when it is quarantined, observes and keeps a journal of what is happening. He also recruits Dr. Rieux, Joseph Grand, and others to help fight the spread of the plague. Yet the plague continues to ravage the city, filling hospitals and cemeteries as it becomes increasingly contagious. A serum is developed but turns out to be a failure. More people die, including the young son of a magistrate, Jean Tarrou, Dr. Rieux's wife, and Father Paneloux. Eventually plague deaths begin to decline, and a new version of the serum seems to be effective. The quarantine is lifted, and the gates of the town are opened.

The Plague Plot Diagram

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Conclusion:

The novel ends as a tragic comedy. Although the protagonists finally overcome the plague, many lives, including Tarrou, have been lost to the antagonist. There is also the certainty that the plague will appear again, whether in Oran or some other town. Dr. Rieux is revealed to be the narrator of the story, telling readers his motivation for writing this "true account" was to document the "common suffering" he witnessed so that it would not be forgotten.

References

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