The Plague Study Guide

The Plague by Albert Camus

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Contents

Introduction

Albert Camus's novel *The Plague* is about an epidemic of bubonic plague that takes place in the Al-gerian port city of Oran. When the plague first arrives, the residents are slow to recognize the mortal danger they are in. Once they do become aware of it, they must decide what measures they will take to fight the deadly disease.

The Plague was first published in France in 1948, three years after the end of World War II. Early readers were quick to note that it was in part an allegory of the German occupation of France from 1940 to 1944, which cut France off from the outside world, just as in the novel the town of Oran must close its gates to isolate the plague. But the novel has more than one level of meaning. The plague may also be understood as the presence of moral evil or simply as a symbol of the nature of the human condition. Whatever the plague signifies, the various characters must face up to the situation and decide what their attitude to it will be. Should they accept their condition with a kind of religious resignation? Should they continue to seek their own personal happiness, ignoring what is going on around them? Should they deliberately exploit the situation in order to profit from it themselves? Or should they band together out of a sense of obligation to the community to do whatever is necessary to fight the plague? As the plague rages on, at its peak taking hundreds of victims every week, each of the major characters has his own unique approach to the situation.

Author Biography

Albert Camus was born on November 7, 1913, in Mondavi, Algeria. His French father, Lucien Auguste Camus, was killed less than a year later at the Battle of the Marne in France during World War I. Camus was then raised by his mother Catherine (who was of Spanish descent) in a working-class area of Algiers. He attended the lycée (secondary school) until graduation in 1930, after which he studied literature and philosophy at the University of Algiers.

In 1930, Camus had his first attack of tuberculosis, from which he suffered all his life. In 1933, as Hitler came to power in Germany, Camus joined an anti-Fascist organization in Algiers, and in the mid-1930s he became a member of the Communist Party, helping to organize the Marxist-based Workers' Theatre. But a year after his graduation with a degree in philosophy in 1936, he broke with the communists. Until the beginning of World War II in 1939, Camus was a journalist with a left-wing Algerian newspaper.

It was during the 1930s that Camus published his first books. *The Wrong Side and the Right Side* (1937) consisted of five short stories. *Nuptials* (1939) was a collection of four essays. Both volumes received only small circulation in Algeria.

In 1934, Camus married Simone Hié. The marriage broke up two years later. In 1940, he married Francine Faure.

From 1942 to 1945, Camus lived in Paris under the German occupation. He was a member of the French Resistance and edited an underground newspaper, *Combat*. He also published a novel, *The Stranger* (1942), a philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1943), and two plays, *The Misunderstanding* (produced in 1944) and *Caligula* (produced in 1945). In 1944, Camus met Jean-Paul Sartre and associated with Sartre's group of existentialists, although he denied that he was an existentialist. After the war, Camus received a Resistance Medal from the French government for his wartime activities.

In 1948, Camus published *The Plague*, which was a great commercial success. He became a major literary and political figure in France. *The Rebel*, a philosophical work in which Camus elaborated on some of the issues presented in *The Plague*, followed in 1951. The hostile reception of the work by existentialists led to Camus's break with Sartre, which lasted until Camus's death.

Camus wrote little for several years following the attack on *The Rebel*. Then in 1956, he published *The Fall*, a short novel, followed by *Exile and the Kingdom* (1957), a collection of short stories. In 1957, Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

In 1958, Camus's play, *The Possessed*, adapted from Dostoevsky's novel, was produced, and the following year he was appointed director of the new state-supported experimental theater.

Camus was working on a novel to be called *The First Man*, when he was killed in an automobile accident in France on January 4, 1960, at the age of forty-six.

Plot Summary

Part I

The narrator of *The Plague* announces that he is to relate the unusual events that happened during one year in the 1940s in the town of Oran, a large French port on the Algerian coast in North Africa.

The story begins in mid-April when Dr. Bernard Rieux discovers a dead rat in the building where he lives. Within a week, thousands of rats are emerging from their hiding places and dying in the street. A feeling of unease spreads over the town. Two weeks later, Michel, the concierge of Rieux's building is taken ill with a strange malady. The rats suddenly disappear, but Michel dies within two days.

Rieux is called by Joseph Grand, a former patient, to assist his neighbor, Cottard, who has tried to hang himself. The police call on Cottard, who sees them only with reluctance and who says he has no intention of trying to kill himself again.

The narrative is enriched by the observations of Jean Tarrou, who comments on life in Oran in his notebook.

More victims die. Castel, Rieux's older colleague, and Rieux agree that everything points to the disease being bubonic plague. But the townspeople are slow to realize what is happening; they do not believe in pestilence.

A health committee convenes to decide how to combat the plague. But the measures adopted are halfhearted, designed not to alarm the populace. Rats are to be exterminated, people are advised to practice extreme cleanliness, and all cases of fever (as the plague is officially described) are to be isolated in special wards at the hospital. The number of victims rises to thirty and forty a day. Rieux feels apprehensive and knows that the measures are inadequate. The regulations are tightened, and a serum is sent from Paris. But it will not be enough if the epidemic spreads. Finally, the French prefect sends a telegram instructing the authorities to proclaim a state of plague and quarantine the town.

Part II

The townspeople begin to understand the gravity of the situation. Many are cut off from loved ones in other cities. This includes Rieux, whose sick wife is in a sanatorium. Correspondence with the outside world is forbidden, and people in the town feel like prisoners and exiles, even though they are at home.

Rieux gets to know Grand and hears the story of his life. He also meets for the second time the journalist Rambert, who is in Oran to write a story about living conditions in the Arab quarter. But Rambert is now trapped in the city, while his wife is in Paris. He

wishes to leave Oran at once and asks Rieux to help him, but Rieux says there is nothing he can do.

Rieux runs an auxiliary, five-hundred bed hospital for plague victims. He works long hours, which strains his endurance. The first month of the plague ends gloomily, with the epidemic still on the rise. Father Paneloux, the Jesuit priest, preaches a dramatic sermon in the cathedral. He says that the townspeople have brought this calamity on themselves. Plague is a scourge sent by God as punishment for sin. Paneloux also says that the town should rejoice because the plague works for good by pointing to the path of righteousness. He urges them to pray.

Grand reveals to Rieux that he is writing a novel and that he ponders over every single word and phrase until it is perfect. He shows Rieux the opening sentence, which appears to be all he has written. Meanwhile, Rambert unsuccessfully pesters the authorities to allow him to leave.

The first hot weather of summer arrives, and plague deaths rise to nearly seven hundred a week. A new consignment of serum from Paris seems less effective than the first.

Tarrou visits Rieux and suggests a plan for volunteers to fight the plague. Rieux agrees to help him implement it. He warns Tarrou that his chances of surviving are only one in three. The next day Tarrou sets to work and organizes teams that work to improve sanitary conditions, accompany doctors on their house visits, and drive vehicles transporting sick people and dead bodies. Grand becomes general secretary and keeps statistics.

Meanwhile, Cottard introduces Rambert to Garcia, who can arrange to have Rambert smuggled out of the town. But after a number of frustrating experiences, Rambert tells Rieux that he wishes to become a volunteer until such time as he can leave the town.

Part III

In mid-August, the situation continues to worsen. People try to escape the town, but some are shot by armed sentries. Violence and looting break out on a small scale, and the authorities respond by declaring martial law and imposing a curfew. Funerals are conducted with more and more speed, no ceremony, and little concern for the feelings of the families of the deceased. The inhabitants passively endure their increasing feelings of exile and separation; despondent, they waste away emotionally as well as physically.

Part IV

In September and October, the town remains at the mercy of the plague. Rieux hears from the sanatorium that the condition of his wife is worsening. He also hardens his heart regarding the plague victims so that he can continue to do his work. Cottard, on

the other hand, seems to flourish during the plague, because it gives him a sense of being connected to others, since everybody faces the same danger. Cottard and Tarrou attend a performance of Gluck's opera, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, but the actor portraying Orpheus collapses with plague symptoms during the performance.

Rambert finally has a chance to escape, but he decides to stay, saying that he would feel ashamed of himself if he left.

Towards the end of October, Castel's new anti-plague serum is tried for the first time, but it cannot save the life of Othon's young son, who suffers greatly, as Paneloux, Rieux, and Tarrou look on in horror.

Paneloux, who has joined the group of volunteers fighting the plague, gives a second sermon. He addresses the problem of an innocent child's suffering and says it is a test of a Christian's faith, since it requires him either to deny everything or believe everything. He urges the congregation not to give up the struggle but to do everything possible to fight the plague.

A few days after the sermon, Paneloux is taken ill. His symptoms do not conform to those of the plague, but the disease still proves fatal.

Tarrou and Rambert visit one of the isolation camps, where they meet Othon. When Othon's period of quarantine ends, he elects to stay in the camp as a volunteer because this will make him feel less separated from his dead son. Tarrou tells Rieux the story of his life, and the two men go swimming together in the sea. Grand catches the plague and instructs Rieux to burn all his papers. But Grand makes an unexpected recovery, and deaths from the plague start to decline.

Part V

By late January, the plague is in full retreat, and the townspeople begin to celebrate the imminent opening of the town gates. Othon, however, does not escape death from the disease. Cottard is distressed by the ending of the epidemic, from which he has profited by shady dealings. Two government employees approach him, and he flees. Despite the ending of the epidemic, Tarrou contracts the plague and dies after a heroic struggle. Rieux's wife also dies.

In February, the town gates open and people are reunited with their loved ones from other cities. Rambert is reunited with his wife. Rieux reveals that he is the narrator of the chronicle and that he tried to present an objective view of the events.

Cottard goes mad and shoots at people from his home. He is arrested. Grand begins working on his book again. Rieux reflects on the epidemic and reaches the conclusion that there is more to admire than to despise in humans.

Part 1: Chapter 1

Part 1: Chapter 1 Summary

This story takes place sometime in the 1940s in Oran, a boring, ugly town, which was a French port on the Algerian coast. The town, devoted almost entirely to business and commerce, lies in the middle of a plateau (a flat piece of land that is higher than the land around it). There are no birds or plants except those brought in by peddlers in baskets. The person telling the story is a key player in the actions.

Part 1: Chapter 1 Analysis

An important step in thinking and writing about a work of fiction is to focus on its physical, emotional, psychological or temporal (when it occurred) background, as this provided the backdrop for the action. It is always good to ask this question: why did this author pick this setting (and background) for this work? Sometimes it is difficult to answer, but in *The Plague* the writer answers most of them for us in the very first chapter. We know that we are going to hear a story that took place in a town that is elevated so it can be easily viewed from all sides by anyone who cares to look. It is a barren place without birds and flowers except for those that are brought in from elsewhere. The atmosphere in this town is not a warm, happy, personal one, but an impersonal and busy one where the people are consumed by commercial interests. In addition, we know that it took place in the 1940s, a time when the entire world was dominated by World War II.

Camus also helps us to answer another important question about the story: point of view, which means whose eyes we are looking through when we are listening to the telling of the tale. We do not yet know exactly who that person is, but we do know that he or she plays a part in the actions and is not just an objective bystander.

This story was written in 1948, shortly after the end of World War II, by Albert Camus, a Frenchman who grew up in Algiers. It is useful to know that France was occupied by the German army from 1940 to 1944, and many of the events that take place in *The Plague* are very similar to what happened to the French people during that time. France was in a very visible position—the whole world was watching what was happening. The preoccupation with business and the absence of life and beauty could be Camus's evaluation of life in this country before it was conquered by Germany. This story can be seen as an allegory (a symbolic fictional narrative that conveys a secondary meaning). In other words, at least on one level, it can be said to be about what happened to the French people during that occupation and what life was like during those years.

Part 1: Chapter 2

Part 1: Chapter 2 Summary

On April 16, Dr. Rieux finds a dead rat on the landing in his building and asks the concierge (janitor) to remove it. He thinks little of it although it seems unusual to find a rat there. From that point on, dead rats appear all over town in larger and larger numbers.

The doctor is distracted because his wife is ill of tuberculosis and is being moved to a sanatorium in another area of the country for treatment that day. His mother is to come and help out while his wife is away.

One of his patients, an old Spaniard, is bedridden because of asthma and talks about the rats as the doctor examines him and gives him his medicine. This patient spends his days counting dried peas, moving them from pot to pot to count the time instead of using a clock. The rats are the main topic of conversation in that part of town.

At the end of the day, Doctor Rieux comes home to find a telegram from his mother, who is coming to help out in the absence of his wife. He goes with his wife to the train station to see her off and meets the police magistrate, M. Othon, holding the hand of his little boy. He asks the doctor about the rats, and the doctor assures him that there is nothing to be concerned about; however, a railroad worker passes with a box of dead rats under his arm. Rieux's mother arrives the next morning.

Raymond Rambert, a reporter for an important Paris newspaper, visits the doctor. He is investigating the welfare of Arabs in Oran, he says. Rieux suggests that the reporter might want to do a story on the rats. The concierge in the doctor's building becomes very ill with a high fever, bloody vomiting and swollen knots (buboes) on his body. He is taken to a hospital and dies almost immediately.

Meanwhile, the doctor has been called to treat a Mr. Cottard, who has attempted to hang himself, but has been cut down by his neighbor, Joseph Grand. The rats have disappeared.

Part 1: Chapter 2 Analysis

It is interesting here to note that Camus, himself, was a journalist in the years before the outbreak of World War II and that he wrote a series of articles analyzing social conditions among the Arab Muslims in northern Algeria. So to some extent, Rambert is an autobiographical character. In other words, the writer has shaped the character on himself and his own experiences. Also, Camus suffered from tuberculosis for most of his life, just as the doctor's wife does, and at one time went away to a mountainous area to try to become well. Like the plague, tuberculosis has become almost extinct since the advent of antibiotics, but in the 1940s, there was no cure for either of them.

Chapter 2 introduces several of the main characters in the story we are about to read and we will see later that the rats are foreshadowing what is going to happen to the humans in the city, which will become the focus of the story. Dr. Rieux is already emerging as the chief player in the story. Secondary characters are presented and their roles defined: the old asthma patient; M. Othon, the police magistrate; the doctor's wife and mother; Raymond Rambert, the reporter; the concierge in the doctor's building, who becomes the first victim of the plague; Mr. Cottard, who has attempted suicide; and Joseph Grand, the neighbor who saves his life.

Characterization is the means by which an author reveals character. Sometimes the writer will come right out and tell us "John Smith was a kind man." In those cases, understanding the author's meaning is easy. More often than not, character will be revealed in other ways. For instance, the speech of a character may reveal whether he or she is angry or happy or well-educated or has no education, etc. Another way we can come to know a character is by knowing what he is thinking. If he is resentful towards those around him, we might conclude that he has some unresolved conflicts in his life.

In *The Plague*, Camus uses some of all of these, but mostly we must draw our own conclusions about what a character is like based on what his actions reveal about him. From example, we know what Rieux is like because we get inside his mind, but we also see the things he does. As we read our way through the story, we will find that he loves his wife and feels a sense of responsibility for her well-being, that he works very hard to care for sick people, and that he is driven to relieve the pain and suffering of the plague. He is a good friend, and he suffers when he loses someone he loves. All of these add up to the character that Camus called Dr. Rieux.

The proliferation of rats that were dying with these strange and disgusting symptoms is a commonly accepted precursor to plague. Yet, preoccupied with its many business interests, the city of Oran goes on its way oblivious to the very serious evil not only lurking in their streets but also coming into their homes and making itself abundantly known. Even when Dr. Rieux tries to sound the alarm, the officials are more concerned with maintaining the status quo and keeping the peace than they are with protecting their citizens or eliminating a threat. The same things can be said of France before the Germans invaded. It was a situation where life went on as usual even though the gathering storms of war made themselves abundantly apparent, yet no one took action to protect or prevent.

Part 1: Chapter 3

Part 1: Chapter 3 Summary

As more townspeople sicken and die, panic sets in and the doctor turns to Jean Tarrou, a man of independent means, who is keeping a journal, to chronicle the events since the doctor, himself, is busy caring for sick people. Tarrou notes that a dozen or so cases of the fever have occurred, all ending in death.

Part 1: Chapter 3 Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to move the action to the next stage where the disease moves from the rats to the humans. It also gives a little more information about the narrator. Tarrou is not the narrator, but he provides much of the information that the narrator will use to tell the story.

Part 1: Chapter 4

Part 1: Chapter 4 Summary

The police inspector comes to question Cottard with Rieux in attendance. Cottard explains that his reason for trying to commit suicide is "a secret grief."

The inspector asks the doctor about the danger to the town of the fever that is going around, and Rieux answers that he cannot say. As the number of cases increase, he is lancing the abscesses, which ooze a mixture of blood and pus. Most of the victims die. The news that the disease is plague is kept from the townspeople for fear of panic.

Part 1: Chapter 4 Analysis

Much of the emotion of this novel will come from the ongoing account of the inspector; his exchange with Cottard here gives the writer the opportunity to add flesh to this character. Camus is also building on the suspense surrounding Cottard in this chapter. Camus uses suspense, (uncertainty as to outcome), in many ways in this book. At the larger level, we are never sure how the plague will come out. Will it wipe the town out and take Rieux with it? Or will Rieux in the end win the battle?

But he also uses suspense to reveal the character, Cottard. We do not know why he committed suicide, and we do not know what kind of person this character is.

Suspense used skillfully will add to the reader's interest in the story. It will also keep the reader reading. Then once all is revealed, the reader enjoys a feeling of resolution, which may, in the end, be the ultimate reason why people enjoy reading so much.

Part 1: Chapter 5

Part 1: Chapter 5 Summary

Rieux contemplates the unwillingness of human beings to accept the reality of a pestilence such as plague. He thinks about the history of the disease and its manifestations: "stupor, extreme prostration, buboes, intense thirst, delirium, dark blotches on the body, internal dilatation." He contrasts the tranquility of the cool spring day with pictures he has seen of other plagues in history that come to mind.

Part 1: Chapter 5 Analysis

The narrator is no longer objective. We are now inside the mind of one character—the doctor—and we know what he is thinking. Also, Camus has added another character—the plague itself. At the same time, he is adding another dimension to the setting by giving us the historical background of the plague, which will be a central player in this story.

Part 1: Chapter 6

Part 1: Chapter 6 Summary

Joseph Grand, who is a clerk in the Municipal Office, comes to see the doctor accompanied by his neighbor, Cottard (who has recently attempted suicide). Grand is working on a project that is somewhat mysterious.

Joseph Grand is in a dead-end job as a clerk in the Municipal Office even though he had been offered a promotion when he first took the job. He has never been able to right the wrong because, he says, "He could not find his words."

Part 1: Chapter 6 Analysis

The writer now fleshes out another character, Joseph Grand. We see him as a good man, a concerned neighbor, whose own life is not very fulfilling yet has its own mysteries. Grand's inability to "find his words" will continue to be an important and distinguishing feature of this character.

Part 1: Chapter 7

Part 1: Chapter 7 Summary

A medical committee made up of the doctors meets with the Prefect to discuss what to do about the illness. Rieux believes it is the plague and pressures the others to proceed as if it were the plague to assure that it does not get out of hand and kill half of the community. There is no serum in the whole district, but Rieux announces that he has already ordered it. He leaves without a decision being made to declare a plague and is driving home when he sees a woman coming towards him screaming in agony and dripping blood.

Part 1: Chapter 7 Analysis

Once more, the town's establishment is playing games with the welfare of the community by refusing to accept the reality of the situation, just as the leaders of France did in the years when Germany was building its war machine in preparation for the invasion.

Part 1: Chapter 8

Part 1: Chapter 8 Summary

The following day there are notices in the newspaper and posters put up around town asking heads of households to report any cases of fever. They also announce that there will be a systematic extermination of the rat population and careful observation of the water supply. The number of cases continues to rise, and special wards are designated in the hospital for the care of the victims of the disease. Some people make it to the hospital; others die before they can get there. A shipment of serum arrives, but it is inadequate to meet the needs. At last, the Prefect becomes alarmed and issues the proclamation that there is a state of plague and orders the town closed.

Part 1: Chapter 8 Analysis

The action begins to pick up in this story. The plague, the town's powerful adversary, is coming into its own, and the lack of preparation is becoming apparent, even to the Prefect, who has behaved so irresponsibly up to now. We will see several conflicts in the story, but the major one is the plague vs. the doctor and his little band of combatants.

It is helpful here to know that the life of Albert Camus was devoted to rebelling against established authority. In the years following World War II, the years when this writer was coming of age and making his voice known, there were many people who were so outraged by the tragedy of Nazi Germany's devastation of Europe and the attempt to eliminate a whole race of people, the Jews, that they devoted their lives to trying to prevent such a disaster from ever happening again. They established movements to combat the inhumanity that comes from greed and unopposed domination. Camus became a leader in this movement and one of its most powerful voices.

Part 2: Chapter 1

Part 2: Chapter 1 Summary

The effects of being suddenly shut off from the rest of the world begin to be felt by the citizens. Because the gates were shut before the announcement was made, those who are out of town cannot get back in, and those who are caught inside cannot get out. Many who are separated from their loved ones apply for special consideration, but none can be made. They cannot even write or receive letters.

At first, the telephone can be used to establish contact; however, this leads to such crowding of the phone booths and delays on the lines that even that means of communication is lost except for urgent cases such as death, marriage, and birth. Telegrams become the only means available for exchanging messages.

No one is willing to try to calculate how long the plague will last. The townspeople live in a sort of limbo. They dare not dwell on the past, there is little satisfaction in the present and they are unsure of the reality of a future. True, it is imprisonment in one's own home for most; however, for Rambert the journalist and many others, they were trapped away from home and forced to stay where they are.

Part 2: Chapter 1 Analysis

The theme of isolation runs through much of the work of this writer, and he often focuses on it in *The Plague*. He sees that, while the pain and suffering that come from the plague (or from being invaded by a monstrous foreign army) are real and devastating, it is the isolation that brings the greatest unhappiness. He is also preoccupied in much of his work with loss of identity, and we find him frequently pointing out in *The Plague* that because everyone was suffering, the suffering of the individual became irrelevant.

Part 2: Chapter 2

Part 2: Chapter 2 Summary

Sentries turn ships away and no vehicles are entering the town, changing the commercial nature of the town. The Prefect is under constant siege by those who take their frustrations out on him and seek a softening of the rules.

The statistics are beginning to be published, and at first they do not alarm the public since they have nothing to compare them to. However, as the weeks go on and the reports reflect a constant increase in victims, there is a little more understanding of the grimness of the situation. But they still are not taking their predicament very seriously. They continue to stroll the streets and go to the cafés.

Toward the end of the month, things begin to change. The Prefect begins to control the traffic, ration the food supply, and limit the use of electricity. At first, townspeople seem to be on holiday, strolling the streets and crowding the cafés. The movie theaters are filled; however, soon there are only the same films repeated over and over since shipments to the city have been suspended. The restaurants have a good stock of wine and liquor, and there is much drinking.

Grand unburdens himself to the doctor, telling his life story. He had married a very young girl from a poor family. Because of her, he left college and took his boring job. To make ends meet, she had taken a job also. Eventually, the hopelessness of their situation became too much, and she left.

The young journalist, Raymond Rambert, appeals to the doctor to help him get out of town to return to his young wife. Rieux explains that it is not within his power to do what he wants. Rambert stalks off, saying he will find a way to escape.

In addition to treating patients and participating in the efforts to deal with the plague, Rieux is managing an auxiliary hospital with 500 beds. When one of his patients is found to be ill of the disease, the doctor must make arrangements for evacuation. At this point, the family often objects, so he also has to deal with distraught family members. Eventually, he is accompanied by a policeman to enforce the removal. At first, he must steel himself not to feel pity; but before long, indifference sets in.

Part 2: Chapter 2 Analysis

The brunt of the disaster falls primarily on the doctor. Since our point of view makes it possible for us to be inside his mind, we know what the effects of this burden are. We are able to feel what he is feeling, think what he is thinking. If the point of view were entirely objective, this would not be true; we would only be able to see his actions and hear his words. The writer has deliberately chosen this point of view in order to achieve an emotional connection between the story and the reader, particularly the hero. Many

copies of this book have been sold, read, talked about, and analyzed—the characteristics of a successful work of fiction. The topic is a fascinating one and the writer is famous and very talented as an artist, but the main reason it has been so popular is that readers, partly because of this artistic use of point of view, can *feel* the pain and devastation brought about by the plague

Part 2: Chapter 3

Part 2: Chapter 3 Summary

The church leaders in town decide that a Week of Prayer should be held as a means of resisting the plague. Father Paneloux, a popular Jesuit priest whose specialty is not religion but ancient inscriptions, has been selected to preach the closing sermon at a High Mass. Attendance is heavy at the services during the week although the townspeople are not noted to be very diligent church-goers. The plague, Paneloux preaches, is God's effort to bring them to repentance. He cites the plague that visited Egypt, forcing Pharaoh to release the people of God from bondage.

Part 2: Chapter 3 Analysis

Does God cause plagues (and wars such as the one that devastated France and the rest of Europe in the 1930s and 40s) because of the disobedience of the people? Oran's churches are a prominent part of the life of the people even though many do not take church attendance very seriously. Camus is asking here whether the answers to the questions that torment him can come from God.

We will find the answer to that question, at least as far as Camus is concerned, as the action moves ahead. We have introduced here yet another level of conflict, the conflict of ideology or belief between some of the characters such as the priest and Tarrou. We will also find that there are conflicts within some of the characters, the priest included, about this matter. It is an age-old question and continues to be debated among people who ponder why bad things happen, especially to the innocent and to good people, or even ordinary people who tend to be a blend of good, not-so-good, and bad.

Part 2: Chapter 4

Part 2: Chapter 4 Summary

Reaction to the sermon is mixed. Some applaud the message while others feel that they are being punished for a crime they did not commit. A certain panic bordering on insanity takes over the town after the sermon. There is violence, and every night some attempt to escape through the gates. Grand reveals his project—he is writing a novel. However, he has only written one sentence that he keeps rewriting because the words are not just right.

Part 2: Chapter 4 Analysis

Some agree with the priest that they have been disobedient and are being punished. Others rebel because they feel that it is unjust. All human beings have a comfort zone with regard to how much control over their own existence they need. While it varies from person to person, it is, nevertheless, an important factor in how all deal with their lives and surroundings. The sermon, in its suggestion that they have no control of their lives and well-being, brings on a wave of panic and rebellion.

We get a little more information here about Grand. Camus is revealing his characters by bits and pieces rather than all at once. In some cases, he has told us what a character is like, and in some other cases he has let readers decide for themselves based on actions and dialogue.

Part 2: Chapter 5

Part 2: Chapter 5 Summary

Rambert continues to try unsuccessfully to make his case to the powers-that-be for his own escape from the town. He goes through a phase of despondency, which reflects the atmosphere among the townspeople. They come out to cafés at night wearing expressions of deep depression.

Part 2: Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter adds little to the action except to bring the reader up to date on the ongoing efforts of Rambert to escape. The despondency of the people underscores Camus's feeling that isolation is a major factor in the misery the people are experiencing.

Part 2: Chapter 6

Part 2: Chapter 6 Summary

Following Father Paneloux's sermon, a heat wave sets in, which is followed by a dramatic increase in the number of victims. The townspeople are very discouraged. People are responding to the pain of the victims with either curiosity or sympathy at first, but soon it becomes so commonplace that they do not respond at all. In the past, summer had been a welcome season with the sea at hand for swimming, but even that was closed because of the plague. The radio is now reporting a hundred or more deaths a day.

Tarrou records that M. Othon, the magistrate, brought his two children to a café one evening without his wife, who was quarantined because she had nursed her mother, who died of the plague. The father's policeman role is not left at the office but dictates how he deals with the children. He is very demanding and controls their behavior.

Tarrou describes a day in a plague-stricken town. "Nobody laughs," Tarrou observes, "except the drunks, and they laugh too much." At first, people still hold on to religion, but as time goes on and people begin to understand that their lives are in danger, they seem to give themselves over to pleasure.

Part 2: Chapter 6 Analysis

We are reminded here that the actions are not being reported by our narrator but by a second character, a scribe named Tarrou. We also see the adversary (or antagonist), the plague, gathering strength. The diary will later give a snapshot of a quarantine camp, just as it gives snapshot here of a day in the life of the plague.

In looking at plotting in a work of fiction, the poles of conflict must be identified. These are often called the protagonist and the antagonist. Once that identification has been made, the pattern of the action can be determined. In this story, the protagonist is the doctor (and later a team that assembles to aid him); the antagonist is the plague. We will see that the pattern is what is called "rising" in that it starts at ground level and continues to escalate until one of the combatants becomes the victor—conquers the other. In this chapter, the action has begun to rise.

Part 2: Chapter 7

Part 2: Chapter 7 Summary

Rieux tells his mother that the latest serum from Paris seems not to be as effective as previous ones. The only people being inoculated are those who have family members with the disease since the supply is so limited. The plague has undergone a change and has gone from bubonic (causing boils) to pneumonic (causing pneumonia). Therefore, new regulations must be published to deal with a different source of contagion—the mouth. Rieux's mother is concerned about the long hours the doctor is working.

Tarrou offers to work with Rieux as a volunteer and to recruit and manage a corps of volunteers. He points out that Rieux is near the limits of his capability to manage and that, although the authorities have asked for volunteers, no one has come forth. Rieux gratefully agrees to take the plan to the authorities but he also warns that the workers would be put at risk.

Tarrou refers to Paneloux's sermon and says that he does not believe in collective punishment. He asks Rieux whether he feels that the plague will do good in that it will force people's eyes open and cause them to think. Rieux responds angrily that the same is true of all illness and misfortune. It does help men to change their ways. But, he reasons, it is madness to just yield to the plague and not try to treat it or conquer it.

They then discuss whether or not they believe in God. Tarrou points out that there is a gulf between the priest and Rieux. Rieux protests and says that any priest will believe as Paneloux does until he has a parishioner who is ill and whose suffering can be relieved. Then he will not point out the excellence of the suffering.

Tarrou asks the doctor why he works so hard to alleviate suffering considering that he does not believe in God. Rieux answers that that is the reason he works so hard. If he believed in an omniscient God, he says, he would leave the curing to Him. Even Paneloux does not believe that, he says. Rieux argues that it might be better not to believe in God; otherwise we might not struggle against death. Tarrou tells him that his belief matches that of the doctor. Rieux asks him what prompted him to volunteer to help, and Tarrou responds that it is his code of morals, which he defines as comprehension. The doctor reminds him again that he is placing himself at risk and tells him to go to the hospital the next day to get an inoculation.

Part 2: Chapter 7 Analysis

Rieux's statement that "any priest will believe as Paneloux does until he has a parishioner who is ill and whose suffering can be relieved" foreshadows the death of the little son of the police magistrate, when priest and doctor are united in their grief and pain.

We see a secondary conflict moving to the fore in this chapter—the belief that God is calling the shots as opposed to the belief that man must use his own resources to solve the problems that are thrown at him. Camus believed in choices and possibilities and that individuals need to take responsibility for making choices and pursuing possibilities. He also believed that whatever the choice, it is acceptable, even if the choice is to believe that God does intervene in the lives of people. We will see that Rieux's role in the story is to respect whatever choice is made even if it differs from his own. In Rieux's world, there is room for all.

Part 2: Chapter 8

Part 2: Chapter 8 Summary

Tarrou recruits his workers and decides that men are, as a rule, more good than bad and that the evil that exists in the world comes of ignorance. His work sends the message that, even though there is risk, everyone must get involved in fighting the plague.

Meanwhile, old Dr. Castel is working to create a serum using cultures of the local bacilli, reasoning that such a serum will be more effective. His objective is to have the first batch ready for use in a very short time. Grand takes up the task of general secretary to the squads, working after a full day at his office. Tarrou feels that Grand embodies the quiet courage that inspires the volunteers. Rieux, Tarrou, and Grand become close friends, meeting when they can at the end of long days. All try to help Grand find just the right words for his sentence. People from the outside world express concern and sympathy although Rieux knows that they do not comprehend the work of people like Grand.

Part 2: Chapter 8 Analysis

Camus believed that heroism is not necessarily those who demonstrate extraordinary feats but is in the ordinary lives of people like Grand, and so the hero of this story becomes Grand, not Rieux or Tarrou. The world rallied to express support and concern for France during the occupation, just as it does for Oran in this disaster, yet the French people sensed that no one realized what quiet heroism was happening in the ranks of the citizens of France.

Part 2: Chapter 9

Part 2: Chapter 9 Summary

Rambert has given up on finding a way out of town legitimately, so he begins to look for other possibilities. And now, Cottard, who has become involved in smuggling, reappears in the narrative after being absent for several chapters. He puts Rambert in touch with an underground network that offers to help him.

Rambert goes through a long, frustrating ordeal and finally is ready to escape with the help of some of the guards. Rieux does not condemn him for trying to get away; rather, he encourages him. He assures Rambert that he is not wrong in putting love first.

Father Paneloux volunteers to join the support teams, and Rambert also volunteers to help until the time comes when he can leave Oran. Tarrou reveals to Rambert that Rieux's wife is in a sanatorium in a city at some distance.

Part 2: Chapter 9 Analysis

Camus believed that happiness in itself is a legitimate and worthwhile goal, and our hero, Dr. Rieux, gives voice to that when he supports Rambert's efforts to escape from Oran to be with his beloved mistress even though he was breaking the rules that the doctor had insisted upon to keep the community safe. This adds an interesting dimension to the story because we already know that the doctor has not made that choice. For him, the most important thing is to be a doctor—to be a soldier in the army to defeat this enemy, the plague.

Part 3: Chapter 1

Part 3: Chapter 1 Summary

People have lost all sense of individuality; they think only in terms of the collective interest. The sense of exile and deprivation dominates everything else. The disease, which had been concentrated in the poorer parts of town, now moves to the center of the city. Looting begins to be widespread; martial law is declared and a curfew imposed

Funerals take place with few formalities. Since the family is usually quarantined, they cannot come, and speed has become extremely important because of the numbers that are dying and being buried. What formalities there are take place at the hospital. In cases where the corpse is accompanied by a family member or members, a priest meets them at the cemetery. The priest is already saying prayers as the coffin is removed from the vehicle and carried to one of a series of open graves and deposited. Before the holy water has been sprinkled, the first sod is being shoveled into the grave. Within 15 minutes, the family is placed in a taxi and sent home. At first, people are outraged but soon the demands that go with surviving from one day to the next take over, and it becomes accepted as commonplace.

Then coffins, winding sheets, and space in the cemetery become scarce, and funerals are combined. The corpses are put in a storage area near the cemetery, the coffins returned to transport more corpses. Rieux assures the Prefect that careful records are being kept. Now relatives are no longer permitted to be present at the actual interment. They can only come to the cemetery. Then in the next stage, two big pits are dug, one for women and one for men and then finally only one pit for all corpses.

Many of the workers taking care of the burials sicken and die; however, there are always workers waiting because the pay is high, considering the risk, and many businesses have closed down because of deaths, so there is a steady supply of those who have lost their jobs. Eventually, the number of corpses becomes so great that bodies are piled into ambulances and taken to the pits at night and tipped in. Towards the end, the city must resort to cremation as the only means available to deal with the numbers of dead. Rieux knows that if it becomes any worse, no one will be able to cope with it, and he dreads the prospect of corpses piled up in the streets. Thankfully, it does not come to that.

The pain of separation from loved ones had been intense early in the exile; however, as time goes on, that pain is dulled and life becomes monotonous and has little meaning. They no longer have private, unique feelings and memories; they are only interested in what interests everyone else. The plague has robbed them of their uniqueness, the ability to feel a private joy or pain. In appearance, they become nondescript.

Part 3: Chapter 1 Analysis

Again, we see Camus touching on the theme of loss of individuality. Civilized communities have great respect for the dead that is usually expressed in elaborate funeral practices as they are in Oran. As the plague (our antagonist) gains strength and seems to be winning in this struggle, what happens in the burial of the dead reflects its success in the conflict in the story. The handling of the corpses becomes more and more inhumane until, at the end, they are simply being burned up—the greatest possible loss of individual identity. The success of the plague in winning this battle is seen in the growing indifference on the parts of the townspeople. They can no longer react to the passing of a family member and the inhumane disposal of the body. They are losing their own identities because they are being swallowed up by the common inhumanity of their situation. Individual identity is swallowed up by the onslaught on everyone's feelings and sensibilities. We are never told that the plague is winning the battle, but we are shown in a dramatically graphic way that the score now is plague 1000, Rieux and company 0.

Part 4: Chapter 1

Part 4: Chapter 1 Summary

Through September and October, the town barely makes it through the days, and Rieux and his friends begin to realize the depths of their exhaustion. They simply go through the motions, not reading newspapers or listening to radio, indifferent to what is happening around them. Grand is showing signs of strain. Unexpectedly, even to himself, Rieux unburdens himself to Grand about his wife. He has called the house physician at the sanatorium, who has told him that her condition has worsened. He feels that he might have been able to help her had he been there.

Dr. Castel is also showing signs of extreme fatigue although he has produced the long-awaited serum. Rieux realizes that his job is no longer to cure but only to diagnose. There is no longer any sentimentality left in him. Instead of giving people medications to make them well, now he comes with soldiers to remove their loved ones. With only four hours of sleep, he cannot afford sentimentality if he is to do what must be done. Even more alarming, those who are working so hard to control the disease are too tired to take precautions to protect themselves from it.

Tarrou and Cottard develop a close friendship during this time, and Tarrou devotes much of this part of his diary to Cottard. While everyone else is apprehensive, Cottard is expansive. He has already experienced the dread of being found out and imprisoned. He has also experienced coming close to death in his suicide attempt. So he is not afraid of human contact. He seems to feel that the shared fear with others is preferable to what he endured alone.

Part 4: Chapter 1 Analysis

Cottard provides a contrast to the other characters. The others are responding to the threat of the plague by joining hands to come to grips with it and to reduce human misery whereas Cottard is exploiting the situation and enriching himself with no regard to the pain and suffering around him. His acceptance by the others illustrates Camus's belief that the important thing is to make choices and pursue possibilities; in his world-view, what those choices are is unimportant. In this case, Cottard, who has been a criminal in the past and is so afraid that it would catch up with him and he would be arrested that he attempts suicide.

Now he appears to have gone back to his criminal ways and is exploiting the situation for personal gain. Yet Rieux and the other friends accept him without condemnation. Cottard is an interesting study in himself. He has positive feelings about the plague because he is profiting from it but also because others are now experiencing the same dread and apprehension that he has had to deal with on his own in the past. So he no longer feels so isolated, another theme that recurs in Camus's work.

Part 4: Chapter 2

Part 4: Chapter 2 Summary

At the moment when the possibility of escape becomes a reality, Rambert realizes that he must stay and help fight the plague if he is to live with his conscience.

Part 4: Chapter 2 Analysis

We have already seen that the character of Rambert is to some extent autobiographical. His struggle with doing the right thing as opposed to doing what will give him happiness is a reflection of the struggles that Camus experienced in his own life and career. The fact that the journalist made the choice to join his friends in the fight to overcome the evil of the plague is an indication of the choices that Camus has made in his own life. It also provides an underscoring of the choices theme—Rieux has turned his back on happiness with his wife to fulfilling his duty and responsibilities to the victims of plague and his patients like the old Spaniard with asthma even to the extent of risking his own life.

Part 4: Chapter 3

Part 4: Chapter 3 Summary

Castel's anti-plague serum is available at last. M. Othon's little boy has fallen ill of the plague, and Rieux must quarantine the mother and the little girl in one hospital and the magistrate in a camp. The little boy is taken to Rieux's hospital where the doctor attends him and becomes convinced that the case is hopeless. He tests Castel's serum on him.

All the workers in Rieux's little army are in the room with the sick child watching his reaction to the serum. The only apparent difference as the result of the serum is the longer period of struggle against the disease. All are extremely shaken by the child's death, but Rieux more than any of the others. He and the priest talk about their own positions regarding the death of the child, Rieux angrily protesting that at least that child was innocent. What he hates is death and disease and cannot accept any system where children are put to torture. The priest says they are united, he and Rieux, and "God Himself can't part us now."

Part 4: Chapter 3 Analysis

In the police magistrate, Camus has created a character that represents establishment and law and order. He is unemotional and inflexible but fair in his dealings with everyone, including his family. Camus uses contrast here to present the most emotional, heart-wringing episode in this novel about death, dying, and loss of loved ones.

We have already seen the appealing, fragile little piece of human life, this little boy. We have seen the upheaval the family has already experienced in the quarantining of the mother, the tough and unemotional father managing the family during that time. Now we see the little boy taken in death with our major characters participating in the harrowing effort to save him and we participate through the eyes of our narrator in the final struggle.

The death scene offers the opportunity to examine the role of God and religion in this struggle and all human struggles picking up on a conflict introduced earlier. Priest and doctor, with their opposite motivations and belief systems, come together here, and the priest is aware that the two of them are united in this struggle against the common enemy, the plague. Our antagonist, the plague, certainly seems to be winning the battle at this point. The workers are at the end of their resources, and the adversary has taken the best, the most precious, and the most vulnerable that the town has to offer. And that child's father was the inflexible law-and-order character, the police magistrate.

Part 4: Chapter 4

Part 4: Chapter 4 Summary

During the months he has been helping in the plague relief, Paneloux has worked in hospitals and other places where he has come in contact with the plague. He has had the recommended inoculations; but from the time of the child's death, a change comes over him. He decides to preach a sermon just for men and invites the doctor to attend. The sermon is quite different from the previous one, much gentler and more thoughtful. His point this time: when an innocent child dies, one must choose between losing one's faith and sacrificing himself for it. A young priest is overheard saying that Paneloux has committed sacrilege because he has declared that it is acceptable for a priest to call a doctor.

Paneloux has been moved out of his rooms as are many others at this time, and he goes to stay with an old woman. Their relationship is not compatible, and he becomes ill but, because of his beliefs, will not allow her to call a doctor. By the time she alerts authorities that the priest is ill and he is taken to the hospital, his case is hopeless. His symptoms are untypical, and it is not certain that he dies of the plague.

Part 4: Chapter 4 Analysis

So the story of the priest comes to an end here. The fact that the cause of his death is inconclusive is a reflection of Camus's conviction that the case is still out on whether or not God is playing a role in what is going on in Oran. The reader is left to wonder whether the priest died of the plague or of his struggle to reconcile his own beliefs with the reality he has witnessed.

Part 4: Chapter 5

Part 4: Chapter 5 Summary

All Souls' Day, in normal times a day of visitation to the graves of the dead is largely ignored this year. Cottard remarks that each day is a Day of the Dead. The plague goes on unabated, the only variation being that the daily count is not increasing; at the same time, it is not decreasing. There are now many more cases of pneumonic disease than bubonic. Victims of the pneumonic variety succumb more quickly. Dr. Castel's serums seem to be bringing about some recoveries, and he still works feverishly to produce them. The medical workers are able to keep up with the daily demands but are working long, exhausting hours.

The newspapers are putting out messages of optimism even though there is no evidence to justify that message. They have been instructed by those in control that they must continue to do this.

We have Tarrou's report on a visit to one of the camps where quarantined people are living—a stadium. The people are living in tents but are sitting on the bleachers when the visitors arrive. M. Othon, the magistrate, is in this camp and asks Tarrou whether his little boy suffered; Tarrou assures him that he did not. There is quietness and sadness in the ranks. They do not speak about their misery and distress because each of them has his own story. Mass food distribution from small electric trucks adds to the impersonality of their situation.

Part 4: Chapter 5 Analysis

The antagonist, the plague, has not won yet, but there are signs that it is still ahead of the team. This can be seen in the effect it has had on the town. All Souls Day is an important symbol of the liveliness of the town because it provides a time when those who are alive pay honor to those who have died. Symbolically, this is a striking statement that the plague is winning at this point of the game.

Our narrator uses Tarrou's diary to give us a snapshot of one aspect of the situation, the camps. By painting a detailed picture of one of them, we are able to experience the devastating effects of the disease on the survivors. The narrator chooses the camp where the magistrate is encamped to bring our attention back to this family, which he has already used to touch us emotionally and draw us into what the town is experiencing. We also see another "choice"—this time on the side of the heroes. M. Othon is now joining the ranks of Rieux's little army.

Part 4: Chapter 6

Part 4: Chapter 6 Summary

The camp that Tarrou writes about in detail in chapter 5 is only one of many. Morale is very low, people are concerned and frightened, and riots break out.

It is November now, and Tarrou accompanies Rieux on a visit to the old asthma patient. While there, they go upstairs to the terrace of the house, which gives a pleasing night-time view of the area around the town, including the cliffs where they can see the reflection of a lighthouse that guides ships around Oran's bay. This reminds the doctor and his friend once more of their extreme isolation. It proves to be a brief retreat from the horrors of the plague.

Tarrou takes advantage of the opportunity to reveal the facts of his life to his friend. He tells of a pleasant youthful period as the son of a successful prosecuting attorney, who treated his son kindly. His mother was a shy person, and in retrospect, he recalls that his father was subject to infidelities. Even so, he considers his father a decent person.

The father was obsessed with the railway directory, which he constantly studied as a hobby. He could tell the times of arrival and departure of all the trains in the country. As a child, Tarrou often posed questions about obscure routes to him to test him, and he always had the correct answer. He remembers fondly this father-son game.

The father hoped that the son would follow in his footsteps in the law and once invited him to come and hear him speak in court, which he did. But rather than be impressed with his father's performance, he was absorbed with the defendant, an ordinary man who was appalled at what he had done and frightened of what was happening to him. He was, Tarrou says, "a living human being." He had been jolted by the realization that the purpose of the trial was to carry out the killing of this "living human being." He hardly heard his father's speech except to know that he was no longer the kindly man he knew as a parent but a person spewing out venomous condemnation of this inconsequential little man and pleading for his death.

The experience changed his relationship with his father and led him to understand his mother, who had been poor before she married and had learned her air of resignation early in her life.

While he did not leave home immediately, he did eventually. His father found him and tried to counsel him about how he was living, but he refused to return. Eventually, he began to visit his mother occasionally until his father's death and often saw the older man, who seemed satisfied with the visits. Tarrou says that he has no ill feelings towards his father, just sadness. After the father died, the mother came to live with the son.

On his own, he had a difficult time making a living and eventually joined a group formed to protest the existing social order all over Europe. The revolutionaries with whom he worked sometimes pronounced sentences of death, and he witnessed an execution by firing-squad in Hungary, which caused him to relive the horror of his experience in his father's courtroom. He calls the people who require this penalty "plague-stricken." He feels that he, too, has had this plague when he has supported existing orders, but at the top of the list of those with this plague are the lawyers and the judges. He says that he decided to live out his life trying to avoid being a part of anything that leads to the death of another. This, he says, is why he has fought by Rieux's side. He believes that no one is ever rid of the plague and that those who fight against it must work so hard and feel such a "desperate weariness." He says "There are pestilences and there are victims; no more than that. If, by making that statement, I, too, become a carrier of the plague-germ, at least I do not do it willfully. I try, in short, to be an innocent murderer."

Rieux and Tarrou discuss being a saint without having a belief in God, and Rieux declares that he is not interested in being a saint. He says that what interests him is being a man. To celebrate their friendship and their brief break from the plague, they go for a swim, using their passes. They leave the water and return to the car feeling refreshed.

Part 4: Chapter 6 Analysis

The character of the old asthma patient seems to be a functional one in the story. He does not have the plague; he is insulated from it since he does not go out. He receives and gives out information about what is going on in the community. Rieux goes and visits him every day, and it is a reminder that even in the midst of a disaster, life tends to go on. Perhaps he symbolizes those people who are content to live their lives counting peas while the world swirls around them and disaster is near.

The visit recorded in this chapter is a special one, though. It gives a gentle, heartwarming interlude to the battle that is going on in the streets. It allows us to see the soft and altogether human side of these two characters. Perhaps it is a statement about "stopping and smelling the roses." It touches us emotionally and leaves us with a good feeling about these two men. It also provides a sharp contrast to the accounts we have of them in the rest of the novel in their admirable battle against this vicious monster.

At the same time, it fills in the gaps in the character, Tarrou, and we are given yet one more reason for human beings to resist evil where it is found. Tarrou, who has lived his adult life protesting capital punishment, has found himself once in the position of being party to the execution of a human being. His outlook on life has been forged in the furnace of evil in the name of good. The struggle that everyone must deal with in making the choices that Camus suggests are inevitable are condensed in this one character.

He emerges in this novel as one of the heroes. There are many. This was also true during Germany's occupation of France. A brave and heroic underground emerged in

the fight against tyranny and for freedom. The stories of those heroes were told all over world, and they are still held up as examples of bravery in the fight for good over evil. The camaraderie that existed among Rieux and his little army is reminiscent of the bonds that were formed among those who were a part of the resistance movement in France.

Part 4: Chapter 7

Part 4: Chapter 7 Summary

There is no letup in December although the plague has become almost entirely the pneumonic variety. The only change that Rieux sees is that the patients seem more interested in cooperating in their treatment, asking him what is best to be done for them. This cooperation on the part of the patients eases the burden on the doctor somewhat because he no longer feels he is fighting the disease alone.

M. Othon's release from the camp has been delayed due to a mistake, and Rieux steps in to get him out. However, Othon wants to go back to the camp and work as a volunteer, saying it makes him feel closer to his son. Rieux sees that a change has occurred in the police officer. He is no longer so hard, formal, and inflexible.

Rieux hears that Grand is not doing very well and goes to his home but fails to find him, so he and the friends look for him. Rieux finds him standing in front of a shop window with tears running down his face, and the doctor empathizes with the other man's sorrow and sense of loss. When Rieux tries to get him into the car, he runs away and falls on his face. Rieux finds him burning with fever and takes him home. Since he has no family, the doctor does not order him evacuated, but he and Tarrou resolve to look after him in his home. Rieux must leave, but when he comes back, Grand is sitting on the side of his bed and appears to have rallied. He wants the doctor to read his manuscript, which has grown to 50 pages although it is mostly a rewriting of the same sentence. At the end, however, he has written, "My dearest Jeanne, today is Christmas Day and . . ." He demands that Rieux burn it. The doctor protests, but the old man demands again that he burn it, and he does.

He injects the serum and leaves him with Tarrou to look after him. The next morning, his temperature is down. He says the burning of the manuscript is of no consequence because he remembers it all and will start over. Grand makes a recovery, and the doctor is amazed. There are four more cases of recovery, and the mortality rates are down. Rieux visits the asthma patient, who is jubilant because he is seeing rats again. The doctor, himself, has also seen rats, and neighbors have told him of hearing their rustlings behind the walls.

Part 4: Chapter 7 Analysis

Grand's struggle with the disease is a micro version of the struggle in the town. It seems for awhile that he will lose the battle as the town seems to be doing. However, when he recovers, we see the antagonist vanquished by the protagonist. We see a climax on an individual level that foreshadows the vanquishing of the enemy on the larger level. It is appropriate that the person who has been designated the hero is the one who signals the turning of the tide against the disease.

Just as Grand recovers, so do many others and it appears that Rieux and his valiant little tribe are beginning to win out. Grand's illness and recovery signal the climax of the story—that point when the outcome is glimpsed and when one force overcomes the other one. In this case, the protagonist wins!

Part 5: Chapter 1

Part 5: Chapter 1 Summary

The plague is not gone, but the weekly totals of cases are down. The townspeople are cautiously optimistic. There is a hope that the food supply will improve.

Then there is a sharp decline in the number of cases and a sudden improvement in the success of Castel's serum. A few are still dying, and M. Othon is among them. The disease seems to be leaving on its own as mysteriously as it came.

Little changes in the town although from time to time a smile can be seen, something that has not occurred for a long time. Although the changes are slight, hope is beginning to come alive. So long accustomed to a state of discouragement, many do not trust that they are, in fact, going to be released from the plague's relentless grip, and many still try to escape, most of them successfully. Some are so fired up by the possibility of seeing their loved ones again that they lose all self-control. Prices take a steep dive although the food situation has not changed yet; convents reopen, and the troops return to their garrison.

On January 25, the authorities announce that the epidemic has been conquered but that the gates will remain closed for two more weeks, and the same efforts to avoid infection will be in place for another month with everyone being vigilant about a resurgence of the pestilence.

Then the rejoicing begins, with the Prefect turning the streetlights back on. Not all families, however, rejoice. Those that have lost members do not feel joyful although they do feel a sense of relief. In some houses, there are still family members who are ill with the plague. With mixed feelings, Tarrou, Rieux, Rambert, and their colleagues join in the celebration

Part 5: Chapter 1 Analysis

Denouement (pronounced *day-noo-mah*) is a French term meaning, literally, *untying*, commonly used in English to describe that part of the story where the final outcome of the action of the story is played out. We have seen the struggle between the two combatants, the plague (the antagonist) and Dr. Rieux and company (the protagonist), and we have finally found out who wins the battle. Now we will begin to see what the outcome of that victory is in this chapter and it will continue to unfold for the rest of the story. All the loose ends of the story will be tied up.

The family of M. Othon exemplified for us the devastation of the plague and provided an object lesson. This part of the story is resolved here when he dies of the plague after suffering the devastating loss of his little boy and then joining the forces that were fighting the child's killer.

Part 5: Chapter 2

Part 5: Chapter 2 Summary

Tarrou's account takes on a different character at this point. It is harder to read and is not as well organized and consistent as it has been in the earlier parts. Perhaps fatigue accounts for this change. He writes of Rieux's mother during this portion of his diary. She reminds him of his own mother, who has died ten years earlier.

He writes mostly of Cottard in this closing portion of the diary. Cottard is agitated by the possibility that the plague is ending and that things will be getting back to normal. He insists at one point that Tarrou come home with him. When they arrive, there are two official-looking visitors who want to ask him some questions, and Cottard flees. Tarrou ends his diary on an uncertain note.

Part 5: Chapter 2 Analysis

The denouement portion of the action continues. Tarrou, valiant fighter, shows signs of being overtaken by the disease. He, along with the others, has been in the most dangerous places possible in a plague epidemic—working directly with victims. There were times when the fighters were too tired or too preoccupied to get their inoculations, and it appears that the enemy plague has found an access point.

By contrast, we find that Cottard, who has not taken part in the efforts to defeat the plague, finds his past catching up to him. One is reminded of the brave French resistance fighters who gave up their lives choosing to fight in the most dangerous places in the attempt to save their beloved homeland from the Nazis in the 1940s. At the same time, there were the Cottards who refused to fight or become involved in defending France and rescuing her from captivity and who often profited from the disaster.

Part 5: Chapter 3

Part 5: Chapter 3 Summary

Although he is still working long days, with the end in sight, Rieux is feeling invigorated and is hopeful that the news from his wife will be good. However, when he arrives at his home, his mother tells him that Tarrou is sick. Contrary to established policy, the doctor decides to keep him at home under his own care and that of his mother and gives him the usual round of injections. He tells him that he must live if he is to be a saint.

In the evening, Tarrou has taken a turn for the worse. The only thing Rieux and his mother can do is watch and wait as Tarrou's valiant struggle with the disease runs its course. In the morning, the patient is breathing a little better, but Rieux tells him that it is not necessarily a sign that he is better. Tarrou thanks him for being truthful with him. The doctor tells him they will know more at noon.

At noon, the fever has returned and after hours of struggle, Tarrou dies. Rieux cries as much from his own impotence as from the loss of his friend. As Rieux and his mother sit watch over Tarrou's body, the doctor contemplates the meaning of death and friendship and love and concludes that the only thing that could be won in this conflict between plague and life is "knowledge and memories."

The next day, he receives a telegram telling him that his wife has died. He realizes that this suffering is only a continuance of what he has been enduring since the beginning of the plague.

Part 5: Chapter 3 Analysis

Again, the story is winding down. The aftermath of the struggle is slowly working its way to the end. As if the devastation of the death of his friend as he watches is not enough, he also gets word that his wife has died. We have seen the value of this kind of sacrifice and suffering discussed in many ways: God is seeking retribution; God is bringing men to repentance; Tarrou's conviction that the struggle against this plague is only a continuation of the lifelong struggle against plague in general; or Rieux's own belief that the plague simply symbolizes the hostility of the world and the problem of evil. But he grieves as his friend dies with the acknowledgment that all he has gained from the plague is "knowledge and memories."

Part 5: Chapter 4

Part 5: Chapter 4 Summary

The tale is being told now by our narrator, no longer by Tarrou's diary. The gates are opened and the trains are running. There is jubilation and reunion. Rambert has mixed feelings about seeing his wife, who is coming by train. He is aware of the drastic changes that have taken place in him as the result of his experience with the plague. He has gone from intense longing to be with this woman to a state that comes close to indifference. However, he believes that once reunion is a reality, happiness will be immediate. His feelings reflect those of many others in his position. All grasp the long-absent loved ones to their breasts and return to their homes, oblivious to those who are arriving by train with no one to greet them. For those, the plague has not ended.

The city is celebrating; the streets are filled with cars, guns can be heard from the fort, the cafés are teeming with customers, thanksgiving services are being held in the churches, and the church bells are pealing. Everyone understands that normal life will take over soon, but for the moment they revel in their newfound freedom.

Rieux walks the streets with mixed feelings, thinking about the exile the townspeople have gone through and likening their jubilance to a return to their homeland. For him, it is bittersweet. He reflects on the love that is now lost to him, and he knows now that he has counted too much on time.

Part 5: Chapter 4 Analysis

The rejoicing of the townspeople is a reminder of the bittersweet rejoicing of Paris when it was liberated at last. Just as in Oran, many had reason not to feel joyful because of all they had lost, so in Paris, many had lost those that were dearest to them, and their beloved city was in ruins.

Part 5: Chapter 5

Part 5: Chapter 5 Summary

Dr. Rieux confesses that he, himself, is the narrator, and all the questions about whose eyes we were seeing the story through are resolved. He declares that it is an objective account. He has only recounted what he has seen; he has not attempted to tell what anyone was thinking or feeling although he often shared in and sympathized with those feelings His desire was to speak for all.

On his way to visit Grand and Cottard, Rieux is stopped by a police cordon, which will not let him through, telling him that there is a man with a gun shooting at people. Grand appears, coming toward the doctor. He does not know what's happening except that the shots are coming from his own building. Shots ring out from the house across the street from Grand's building, shattering a shutter at Cottard's window. The policeman says they are firing just to keep him busy until they can get inside. The shooting began, he said, at some people who were celebrating in the street. Shots from Cottard's window kill a dog in the street and bring forth a volley from the house across the street. Eventually, Cottard is dragged from the house and beaten by one of the policemen.

Grand announces that he has written to his wife and is feeling much better. He also tells Rieux that he is getting a fresh start on his writing. Rieux goes to see his asthma patient, who asks about Tarrou, saying that he had liked him because he always seemed to know what he wanted. They discuss a monument that will be erected to commemorate the plague.

Rieux goes up to the terrace where he and Tarrou had experienced a pleasant moment of respite. He can see the fireworks that are celebrating the end of the plague and he thinks of those who were lost to it, particularly those who were close to him. He concludes that he is obligated to write the account so they will not be forgotten, but he believes more firmly than ever that there is more to admire in human beings than to despise.

He knows that his tale will not be a victorious one, only the record of what needed to be done and would certainly be required again at some time or other in the endless fight against terror. It will be a record of those who may not have been saints but were determined to resist and to be healers. He also realizes that such joy as the townspeople are feeling is always under threat—the plague does not go away, it just goes underground.

Part 5: Chapter 5 Analysis

And now we revisit the point of view and everything falls into place. We are able to see into the mind of Dr. Rieux because he, himself, is the narrator. Camus has masterfully manipulated point of view to achieve his ends. Rieux insists that he is objective; that he

has only recorded what he has seen and heard, yet we know that he has also revealed his deepest feelings and thoughts as the key participant in the battle to bring the plague to submission. We can identify with him in his suffering because we have thought his thoughts and felt his feelings.

But did Rieux and his followers truly win? Or did the plague simply go away to fight another day? Rieux is very much aware that the victory is not a complete one. He is not even sure that his efforts and those of the others defeated the plague in Oran. And he certainly knows that it lurks and will one day return somewhere, some place, and once again the rats will come out, lives will be lost, and the suffering will go on.

We have seen this story as an allegory referring to the occupation of France. There are many who say that it can also be read as an allegory of the wider struggle against the evil that is ever present in the world and also as an allegory of the evil that men in their blindness and indifference take out on their fellowmen. Tarrou saw it as a symbol of the death penalty whether carried out in the name of justice or greed or just indifference.

It is a powerful statement of Camus's conviction that the world cannot be transformed but it can be resisted. Rieux exemplifies his belief that one should always serve man in a relative but limited way without aspiring to the eternal or the absolute. "Man's salvation is too big a word for me. I do not go as far as that. It is his health which concerns me, his health first of all," Rieux, speaking for Camus, tells the priest. It is also a statement about suffering, particularly about the suffering of the innocent.

Characters

Asthma Patient

The asthma patient receives regular visits from Dr. Rieux. He is a seventy-five-year-old Spaniard with a rugged face, who comments on events in Oran that he hears about on the radio and in the newspapers.

Dr. Castel

Dr. Castel is one of Rieux's medical colleagues and is much older than Rieux. He realizes after the first few cases that the disease is bubonic plague and is aware of the seriousness of the situation. He labors hard to make an anti-plague serum, but as the epidemic continues, he shows increasing signs of wear and tear.

Cottard

Cottard lives in the same building as Grand. He does not appear to have a job, although he describes himself as "a traveling salesman in wines and spirits." Cottard is an eccentric figure, silent and secretive, who tries to hang himself in his room. Afterwards, he does not want to be interviewed by the police, since he has committed a crime in the past and fears arrest.

Cottard's personality changes after the outbreak of plague. Whereas he was aloof and mistrustful before, he now becomes agreeable and tries hard to make friends. He appears to relish the coming of the plague, and Tarrou thinks this is because he finds it easier to live with his own fears now that everyone else is in a state of fear, too. Cottard takes advantage of the crisis to make money by selling contraband cigarettes and inferior liquor.

When the epidemic ends, Cottard's moods fluctuate. Sometimes he is sociable, but at other times he shuts himself up in his room. Eventually, he loses his mental balance and shoots at random at people on the street. The police arrest him.

Garcia

Garcia is a man who knows the group of smugglers in Oran. He introduces Rambert to Raoul.

Gonzales

Gonzales is the smuggler who makes the arrangements for Rambert's escape.

Joseph Grand

Joseph Grand is a fifty-year-old clerk for the city government. He is tall and thin and always wears clothes a size too large for him. Poorly paid, he lives an austere life, but he is capable of deep affection. In his spare time, Grand polishes up his Latin, and he is also writing a book, but he is such a perfectionist that he continually rewrites the first sentence and can get no further. One of his problems in life is that he can rarely find the correct words to express what he means. Grand tells Rieux that he married while still in his teens, but overwork and poverty took their toll (Grand did not receive the career advancement that he had been promised), and his wife Jeanne left him. He tried but failed to write a letter to her, and he still grieves for his loss.

Grand is a neighbor of Cottard, and it is he who calls Rieux for help, when Cottard tries to commit suicide. When the plague takes a grip on the town, Grand joins the team of volunteers, acting as general secretary, recording all the statistics. Rieux regards him as "the true embodiment of the quiet courage that inspired the sanitary groups." Grand catches the plague himself and asks Rieux to burn his manuscript. But then he makes an unexpected recovery. At the end of the novel, Grand says he is much happier; he has written to Jeanne and made a fresh start on his book.

Louis

Louis is one of the sentries who takes part in the plan for Rambert to escape.

Marcel

Marcel, Louis's brother, is also a sentry who is part of the escape plan for Rambert.

M. Michel

M. Michel is the concierge of the building in which Rieux lives. An old man, he is the first victim of the plague.

Jacques Othon

Jacques Othon is M. Othon's young son. When he contracts the plague, he is the first to receive Dr. relating to the plague and issues the order to close the town. Castel's anti-plague serum. But the serum is ineffective, and the boy dies after a long and painful struggle.

M. Othon

M. Othon is a magistrate in Oran. He is tall and thin and, as Tarrou observes in his journal, "his small, beady eyes, narrow nose, and hard, straight mouth make him look like a well-brought-up owl." Othon treats his wife and children unkindly, but after his son dies of the plague, his character softens. After he finishes his time at the isolation camp, where he is sent because his son is infected, he wants to return there, because this would make him feel closer to his lost son. But before Othon can do this, he contracts the plague and dies.

Father Paneloux

Father Paneloux is a learned, well-respected Jesuit priest. He is well known for having given a series of lectures in which he championed a pure form of Christian doctrine and chastised his audience about their laxity. During the first stage of the plague outbreak, Paneloux preaches a sermon at the cathedral. He has a powerful way of speaking, and he insists to the congregation that the plague is a scourge sent by God to those who have hardened their hearts against him. But Paneloux also claims that God is present to offer succor and hope. Later, Paneloux attends at the bedside of Othon's stricken son and prays that the boy may be spared. After the boy's death, Paneloux tells Rieux that although the death of an innocent child in a world ruled by a loving God cannot be rationally explained, it should nonetheless be accepted. Paneloux joins the team of volunteer workers and preaches another sermon saying that the death of the innocent child is a test of faith. Since God willed the child's death, so the Christian should will it, too. A few days after preaching this sermon, Paneloux is taken ill. He refuses to call for a doctor, trusting in God alone. He dies. Since his symptoms did not seem to resemble those of the plague, Rieux records his death as a "doubtful case."

The Prefect

The Prefect believes at first that the talk of plague is a false alarm, but on the advice of his medical association, he authorizes limited measures to combat it. When these do not work, he tries to avoid responsibility, saying he will ask the government for orders. After this, he does take responsibility for tightening up the regulations relating to the plague and issues the order to close the town.

Raymond Rambert

Raymond Rambert is a journalist who is visiting Oran to research a story on living conditions in the Arab quarter of the town. When the plague strikes, he finds himself trapped in a city with which he feels he has no connection. He misses his wife who is in Paris, and he uses all his ingenuity and resourcefulness to persuade the city bureaucracy to allow him to leave. When this fails, he contacts smugglers, who agree to help him to escape for a fee of ten thousand francs. But there is a hitch in the

arrangements, and by the time another escape plan is arranged, Rambert has changed his mind. He decides to stay in the city and continue to help fight the plague, saying that he would feel ashamed of himself if he pursued a merely private happiness. He now feels that he belongs in Oran and that the plague is everyone's business, including his.

Raoul

Raoul is the man who agrees, for a fee of ten thousand francs, to arrange for Rambert to escape. He introduces Rambert to Gonzales.

Dr. Richard

Dr. Richard is chairman of the Oran Medical Association. He is slow to recommend any action to combat the plague, not wanting to arouse public alarm. He does not even want to admit that the disease is the plague, referring instead to a "special type of fever."

Dr. Bernard Rieux

Dr. Bernard Rieux is the narrator of the novel, although this is only revealed at the end. Tarrou describes him as about thirty-five-years-old, of moderate height, dark-skinned, with close-cropped black hair. At the beginning of the novel, Rieux's wife, who has been ill for a year, leaves for a sanatorium. It is Rieux who treats the first victim of plague and who first uses the word *plague* to describe the disease. He urges the authorities to take action to stop the spread of the epidemic. However, at first, along with everyone else, the danger the town faces seems unreal to him. He feels uneasy but does not realize the gravity of the situation. Within a short while, he grasps what is at stake and warns the authorities that unless steps are taken immediately, the epidemic could kill off half the town's population of two hundred thousand within a couple of months.

During the epidemic, Rieux heads an auxiliary hospital and works long hours treating the victims. He injects serum and lances the abscesses, but there is little more that he can do, and his duties weigh heavily upon him. He never gets home until late, and he has to distance himself from the natural pity that he feels for the victims; otherwise, he would not be able to go on. It is especially hard for him when he visits a victim in the person's home, because he knows that he must immediately call for an ambulance and have the person removed from the house. Often the relatives plead with him not to do this, since they know they may never see the person again.

Rieux works to combat the plague simply because he is a doctor and his job is to relieve human suffering. He does not do it for any grand, religious purpose, like Paneloux (Rieux does not believe in God), or as part of a high-minded moral code, like Tarrou. He is a practical man, doing what needs to be done without any fuss, even though he knows that the struggle against death is something that he can never win.

Mme. Rieux

Mme. Rieux is Dr. Rieux's mother, who comes to stay with him when his sick wife goes to the sanatorium. She is a serene woman who, after taking care of the housework, sits quietly in a chair. She says that at her age there is nothing much left to fear.

Jean Tarrou

Jean Tarrou arrived in Oran some weeks before the plague broke out, for unknown reasons. He is not there on business, since he appears to have private means. Tarrou is a good-natured man who smiles a lot. Before the plague came, he liked to associate with the Spanish dancers and musicians in the city. He also keeps a diary, full of his observations of life in Oran, which Rieux incorporates into the narrative.

It is Tarrou who first comes up with the idea of organizing teams of volunteers to fight the plague. He wants to do this before the authorities begin to conscript people, and he does not like the official plan to get prisoners to do the work. He takes action, prompted by his own code of morals; he feels that the plague is everybody's responsibility and that everyone should do his or her duty. What interests him, he tells Rieux, is how to become a saint, even though he does not believe in God.

Later in the novel, Tarrou tells Rieux, with whom he has become friends, the story of his life. His father, although a kind man in private, was also an aggressive prosecuting attorney who tried death penalty cases, arguing strongly for the death penalty to be imposed. As a young boy, Tarrou attended one day of a criminal proceeding in which a man was on trial for his life. However, the idea of capital punishment disgusted him. After he left home before the age of eighteen, his main interest in life was his opposition to the death penalty, which he regarded as state-sponsored murder.

When the plague epidemic is virtually over, Tarrou becomes one of its last victims, but he puts up a heroic struggle before dying.

Themes

Exile and Separation

The theme of exile and separation is embodied in two characters, Rieux and Rambert, both of whom are separated from the women they love. The theme is also present in the many other nameless citizens who are separated from loved ones in other towns or from those who happened to be out of town when the gates of Oran were closed. In another sense, the entire town feels in exile, since it is completely cut off from the outside world. Rieux, as the narrator, describes what exile meant to them all:

[T]hat sensation of a void within which never left us, that irrational longing to hark back to the past or else to speed up the march of time, and those keen shafts of memory that stung like fire.

Some, like Rambert, are exiles in double measure since they are not only cut off from those they want to be with but they do not have the luxury of being in their own homes.

The feeling of exile produces many changes in attitudes and behaviors. At first, people indulge in fantasies, imagining the missing person's return, but then they start to feel like prisoners, drifting through life with nothing left but the past, since they do not know how long into the future their ordeal may last. And the past smacks only of regret, of things left undone. Living with the sense of abandonment, they find that they cannot communicate their private grief to their neighbors, and conversations tend to be superficial.

Rieux returns to the theme at the end of the novel, after the epidemic is over, when the depth of the feelings of exile and deprivation is clear from the overwhelming joy with which long parted lovers and family members greet each other.

For some citizens, exile was a feeling more difficult to pin down. They simply desired a reunion with something that could hardly be named but which seemed to them to be the most desirable thing on Earth. Some called it peace. Rieux numbers Tarrou among such people, although he found it only in death.

This understanding of exile suggests the deeper, metaphysical implications of the term. It relates to the loss of the belief that humans live in a rational universe in which they can fulfill their hopes and desires, find meaning, and be at home. As Camus put it in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile."

Solidarity, Community, and Resistance

The ravages of the plague in Oran vividly convey the absurdist position that humans live in an indifferent, incomprehensible universe that has no rational meaning or order, and

no transcendent God. The plague comes unannounced and may strike down anyone at any time. It is arbitrary and capricious, and it leaves humans in a state of fear and uncertainty, which ends only in death. In the face of this metaphysical reality, what must be the response of individuals? Should they resign themselves to it, accept it as inevitable, and seek what solace they can as individuals? Or should they join with others and fight back, even though they must live with the certainty that they cannot win? Camus's answer is clearly the latter. It is embodied in the characters of Rieux, Rambert, and Tarrou. Rieux's position is made clear in part II, in the conversation he has with Tarrou. Rieux argues that one would have to be a madman to give in to the plague. Rather than accepting the natural order of things—the presence of sickness and death—he fights against them. He is aware of the demands of the community; he does not live for himself alone. When Tarrou points out that "your victories will never be lasting," Rieux admits that he is involved in a "never ending defeat," but this does not stop him engaging in the struggle.

Rieux is also aware that working for the common good demands sacrifice; he cannot expect personal happiness. This is a lesson that Rambert learns. At first he insists that he does not belong in Oran, and his only thought is to get back to the woman he loves in Paris. He thinks only of his own personal happiness and the unfairness of the situation in which he has been placed. But gradually he comes to recognize his membership of the larger human community, which makes demands on him that he cannot ignore. His personal happiness becomes less important than his commitment to helping the community.

This is also the position occupied by Tarrou, who lives according to an ethical code that demands that he act in a way that benefits the whole community, even though, in this case, he risks his life by doing so. Later in the novel, when Tarrou tells Rieux the story of his life, he adds a new dimension to the term plague. He views it not just as a specific disease or simply as the presence of an impersonal evil external to humans. For Tarrou, plague is the destructive impulse within every person, the will and the capacity to do harm, and it is everyone's duty to be on guard against this tendency within themselves, lest they infect someone else with it. He describes his views to Rieux:

What's natural is the microbe. All the rest—health, integrity, purity (if you like)—is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter. The good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention.

Religion

In times of calamity, people often turn to religion, and Camus examines this response in the novel. In contrast to the humanist beliefs of Rieux, Rambert, and Tarrou, the religious perspective is given in the sermons of the stern Jesuit priest, Father Paneloux. While the other main characters believe there is no rational explanation for the outbreak of plague, Paneloux believes there is. In his first sermon, given during the first month of the plague, Paneloux describes the epidemic as the "flail of God," through which God separates the wheat from the chaff, the good from the evil. Paneloux is at pains to

emphasize that God did not will the calamity: "He looked on the evil-doing in the town with compassion; only when there was no other remedy did He turn His face away, in order to force people to face the truth about their life" In Paneloux's view, even the terrible suffering caused by the plague works ultimately for good. The divine light can still be seen even in the most catastrophic events, and a Christian hope is granted to all. Paneloux's argument is based on the theology of St. Augustine, on which he is an expert, and it is accepted as irrefutable by many of the townspeople, including the magistrate, Othon. But it does not satisfy Rieux. Camus carefully manipulates the plot to bring up the question of innocent suffering. Paneloux may argue that the plague is a punishment for sin, but how does he reconcile that doctrine with the death of a child? The child in question is Jacques Othon, and Paneloux, along with Rieux and Tarrou, witnesses his horrible death. Paneloux is moved with compassion for the child, and he takes up the question of innocent suffering in his second sermon. He argues that because a child's suffering is so horrible and cannot easily be explained, it forces people into a crucial test of faith: either we must believe everything or we must deny everything, and who, Paneloux asks, could bear to do the latter? We must yield to the divine will, he says; we cannot pick and choose and accept only what we can understand. But we must still seek to do what good lies in our power (as Paneloux himself does as one of the volunteers who fights the plague).

When Paneloux contracts the plague himself, he refuses to call a doctor. He dies according to his principles, trusting in the providence of God and not fighting against his fate. This is in contrast to Tarrou, who fights valiantly against death when his turn comes.

It is clear that Camus's sympathy in this contrast of ideas lies with Rieux and Tarrou, but he also treats Paneloux with respect.

Style

Point of View

Point of view refers to the method of narration, the character through whose consciousness the story is told. In *The Plague* this is Rieux. However, Rieux does not function as a first-person narrator. Rather he disguises himself, referring to himself in the third person and only at the end of the novel reveals who he is. The novel thus appears to be told by an unnamed narrator who gathers information from what he has personally seen and heard regarding the epidemic, as well as from the diary of another character, Tarrou, who makes observations about the events he witnesses.

The reason Rieux does not declare himself earlier is that he wants to give an objective account of the events in Oran. He deliberately adopts the tone of an impartial observer. Rieux is like a witness who exercises restraint when called to testify about a crime; he describes what the characters said and did, without speculating about their thoughts and feelings, although he does offer generalized assessments of the shifting mood of the town as a whole. Rieux refers to his story as a chronicle, and he sees himself as an historian, which justifies his decision to stick to the facts and avoid subjectivity. This also explains why the style of *The Plague* often gives the impression of distance and detachment. Only rarely is the reader drawn directly into the emotions of the characters or the drama of the scene.

An allegory is a narrative with two distinct levels of meaning. The first is the literal level; the second signifies a related set of concepts and events. *The Plague* is in part an historical allegory, in which the plague signifies the German occupation of France from 1940 to 1944 during World War II.

There are many aspects of the narrative that make the allegory plain. The town Oran, which gets afflicted by pestilence and cut off from the outside world, is the equivalent of France. The citizens are slow to realize the magnitude of the danger because they do not believe in pestilence or that it could happen to them, just as the French were complacent at the beginning of the war. They could not imagine that the Germans, whom they had defeated only twenty years previously, could defeat them in a mere six weeks, as happened when France fell in June 1940.

The different attitudes of the characters reflect different attitudes in the French population during the occupation. Some were the equivalent of Paneloux and thought that France was to blame for the calamity that had befallen it. They believed that the only solution was to submit gracefully to an historical inevitability—the long-term dominance of Europe by Germany. Many people, however, became members of the French Resistance, and they are the allegorical equivalents of the voluntary sanitary teams in the novel, such as Tarrou, Rambert, and Grand, who fight back against the unspeakable evil (the Nazi occupiers).

Some French collaborated with the Germans. In the novel, they are represented by Cottard, who welcomes the plague and uses the economic deprivation that results from it to make a fortune buying and selling on the black market.

Other details in the novel can be read at the allegorical level. The plague that carries people off unexpectedly echoes the reality of the occupation, in which people could be snatched from their homes by the Gestapo and imprisoned or sent to work as slave labor in German-controlled territories or simply killed. The facts of daily life in the plague-stricken city resemble life in wartime France: the showing of reruns at the cinemas, the stockpiling of scarce goods, nighttime curfews and isolation camps (these paralleling the German internment camps). The scenes at the end of the novel, when Oran's gates are reopened, recall the jubilant scenes in Paris when the city was liberated in 1944.

In some places, Camus makes the allegory explicit, as when he refers to the plague in terms that describe an enemy in war: "the epidemic was in retreat all along the line; . . . victory was won and the enemy was abandoning his positions."

Symbolism

Imagery of the sea is often used in Camus's works to suggest life, vigor, and freedom. In *The Plague*, a key description of Oran occurs early, when it is explained that the town is built in such a way that it "turns its back on the bay, with the result that it's impossible to see the sea, you always have to go to look for it." Symbolically, Oran turns its back on life. When the plague hits, the deprivation of this symbol of freedom becomes more pronounced, as the beaches are closed, as is the port. In summer, the inhabitants lose touch with the sea altogether: "for all its nearness, the sea was out of bounds; young limbs had no longer the run of its delights."

A significant episode occurs near the end of part IV, when Tarrou and Rieux sit on the terrace of a house, from which they can see far into the horizon. As he gazes seaward, Tarrou says with a sense of relief that it is good to be there. To set a seal on the friendship between the two men, they go for a swim together. This contact with the ocean is presented as a moment of renewal, harmony, and peace. It is one of the few lyrical episodes in the novel: "[T]hey saw the sea spread out before them, a gently heaving expanse of deep-piled velvet, supple and sleek as a creature of the wild."

Just before Rieux enters the water, he is possessed by a "strange happiness," a feeling that is shared by Tarrou. There is a peaceful image of Rieux lying motionless on his back gazing up at the stars and moon, and then when Tarrou joins him they swim side by side, "with the same zest, the same rhythm, isolated from the world, at last free of the town and of the plague."

Historical Context

Absurdism

The term *absurdism* is applied to plays and novels that express the idea that there is no inherent value or meaning in the human condition. Absurdist writers reject traditional beliefs and values, including religious or metaphysical systems that locate truth, purpose, and meaning in transcendental concepts such as God. For the absurdist, the universe is irrational and unintelligible; it cannot satisfy the human need for order or fulfil human hopes and aspirations. Human beings are essentially alone in an indifferent universe and must make their way through their bleak, insignificant existence in the best way that they can. As Eugene Ionesco, a prominent French writer of absurd drama (quoted by M. H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*) put it: "Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."

According to Abrams, absurdism has its roots in the 1920s, in such works as Franz Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis*. But it is most often associated with French literature as it emerged from World War II, in the work of writers such as Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Camus's *The Stranger* (1942) was one of the first works that applied an absurdist view to a work of fiction. Samuel Beckett, an Irishman who lived in Paris and who often wrote in French and then translated his works into English, is often described as the most influential writer of absurdist literature. His most famous play is *Waiting for Godot* (1955).

France in World War II

After France capitulated to Germany in June 1940, Marshal Pétain, an eighty-four-year-old World War I hero, was installed as prime minister. The northern half of France, including the Channel and Atlantic ports, was placed under German occupation. French forces were demobilized and disarmed, and France was forced to pay all costs of the occupation. The Pétain government made its headquarters at Vichy, in unoccupied France, where it was granted a nominal independence. General Charles de Gaulle, who had been Undersecretary for War in the fallen French government, flew to England, where he enrolled a French Volunteer Force to cooperate with the British and continue the war.

The Pétain government pursued an active collaboration with the Germans, hoping to find a place for France in what it assumed would be a German-dominated Europe for the foreseeable future. Under the premiership of Pierre Laval, the Vichy government repressed the French underground movement, which was increasingly harassing the Germans by attacking their supply lines. In 1942, the Germans extended their occupation to include all of France, after which the Vichy government had little independent power and declining prestige.

During the occupation, life in France was hard for French citizens. Communication from the occupied zone with family members who were on the other side of the demarcation zone was difficult. The Germans permitted only postcards containing the minimum of information to be sent (just as in *The Plague*, the townspeople can communicate with the outside world only through telegrams). There were many other restrictions, including curfews and food shortages. People waited in long lines for inadequate supplies. There was also a flourishing black market, which involved all levels of French society. As Milton Dank puts it in *The French Against the French*, "The large-scale black market was carefully organized by operators who made fantastic fortunes practically overnight at the expense of their starving compatriots."

Following the allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, the end of the war was in sight. French Resistance forces played a significant role in the battles that followed, sabotaging bridges and railways as the Germans were forced back. When Paris was liberated on August 25, 1944, Camus, who was the editor of the underground newspaper *Combat*, wrote the following:

Paris fired off all its bullets into the August night. In the immense stage set of stone and water, the barricades of freedom have once again been raised everywhere around that river whose waves are heavy with history. Once more, justice must be bought with men's blood.

Critical Overview

The Plague was an immediate success with the reading public, and the first edition of twenty-two thousand copies rapidly sold out. It was quickly reprinted, and in the four months between publication in June 1947 and September, more than one hundred thousand copies were sold. Reviews, including one by the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, were also positive, and the book established Camus's reputation as a major writer. *The Plague* was awarded the French Critics' Prize and was one of the reasons that Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1957.

The book proved to have more than ephemeral success. In 1980, it was still high on the list of best sellers, having sold 3,700,000 copies. Translations had appeared in eleven languages.

Critical approaches to *The Plague* have varied. When it was first published, only two years after the end of World War II, much of the explication was based on the allegorical reading, in which Oran afflicted by plague represents France under the German occupation. But Camus was criticized by some, including Roland Barthes, for making the enemy a disease and so avoiding the moral question of whether people should take up arms against a violent oppressor. In a reply to Barthes, Camus rejected the criticism, saying that since terror has several faces, not just one, by not naming a particular terror he struck better at them all.

The Plague has also been read in the light of existentialism, even though this is a philosophy that Camus did not espouse, and from the point of view of absurdism—the belief that human life has no rational order or purpose. More recent critics have concentrated on the novel's narrative technique, its structure, and its language. There has also been work on how the novel fits in with the overall body of Camus's work. Germaine Brée, for example, following Camus's own statement that there was a line of progression in his works, argues that *The Plague*

appears as the first step in moving beyond the boundaries of the 'absurd,' or rather, perhaps, working within those boundaries to explore the power of human beings to make sense of their lot even in the most stringent circumstances.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses the character of Tarrou in Camus's story, highlighting Tarrou's opposition to capital punishment and comparing this to Camus's arguments in his essay "Reflections on the Guillotine."

Of the main characters in *The Plague*, Tarrou is the only one who gives a long, first-person account of his life and the events that shaped his thinking. It is obvious that Camus attached great importance to Tarrou's story, which occurs toward the end of part IV, in his conversation with Rieux. Tarrou is a central character in *The Plague*, because it is he who organizes the volunteer sanitary teams, which he does because he believes it to be his moral duty. Tarrou's story of how his life had been shaped by his revulsion at the death penalty echoes Camus's own passionate opposition to capital punishment. Much of what Tarrou says about capital punishment can also be found in greater detail in Camus's essay, "Reflections on the Guillotine," which he wrote in 1956 and published the following year. Camus's essay, according to his biographer Olivier Todd, helped to create a climate that eventually led, several decades later in 1981, to the abolition of the death penalty by the French government. Today, the death penalty has been abolished by all member nations of the European Union but remains legal in the United States. Camus's views on the issue, both in *The Plague* and in his later essay, are a fierce contribution to one side of the debate.

In *The Plague*, Tarrou tells Rieux of his father, who was a prosecuting attorney. When Tarrou was seventeen, his father asked him to come to court to hear him speak in a death penalty case. What Tarrou remembered most about the trial was the frightened defendant. Tarrou did not doubt the man's guilt, but he was vividly impressed by the fact that the man was "a living human being" and that the whole purpose of the proceedings was to make arrangements to kill him. Instinctively, he took the side of the defendant.

Tarrou noticed also how his father's demeanor was different in court from his demeanor at home. Normally, he was a kindly man, but in his role as prosecutor he was fierce in his denunciation of the accused and in his call for the "supreme penalty," which Tarrou says should better be called "murder in its most despicable form."

order to witness the executions. It was Tarrou's horror at this that forced him to leave home and begin campaigning against the death penalty. He came to believe that the entire social order was based on the death penalty and that this "supreme penalty" was being applied even in the name of the political causes he supported. He fought against fascism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and admits that his side used the death penalty, but he was told that a few deaths were necessary for the creation of a new world in which murder would no longer happen. He reluctantly accepted this argument until in Hungary he witnessed an execution by firing squad. He tells Rieux that such an execution is far more grisly than the way it is usually imagined. The firing squad stands only a yard and a half from the condemned man, and the bullets blow a hole in his heart big enough to thrust a fist into. Since witnessing that execution, Tarrou has never been

able to sleep well, and he has based his morality on the need to avoid becoming involved in anything that could lead directly or indirectly to the death penalty.

"Reflections on the Guillotine" expands on Tarrou's arguments and also sheds light on some of his more esoteric points. Just as Tarrou told a story about his own revulsion at the death penalty, so also Camus begins with a personal story, although it is not about himself but was told to him about his father. His father supported the death penalty, but on the only occasion when he attended an execution, he returned home and was apparently so disgusted and nauseated by what he had witnessed that he vomited. Camus uses this story to point out (as he had Tarrou do) how the death penalty is deliberately spoken of in euphemisms, such as "paying a debt to society," designed to conceal what really happens. Tarrou had said that all "our troubles spring from our failure to use plain, clean-cut language," and Camus takes up this point in his essay, arguing that if the truth were told, ordinary people would realize the horror of the act of severing a man's head from his body (the method of execution in France) and would no longer support it. According to Camus, society does not in fact believe what it proclaims about the death penalty setting an example for others, since, if it did, it would hold executions in public, show them on television, and publish eyewitness accounts and medical reports on what happens to a human body immediately after execution. (He quotes some accounts of actual executions that make for disturbing reading.)

Camus assembles more arguments against the death penalty, some of which will be easily recognized by those who are familiar with the contemporary debate over capital punishment in the United States. Camus claims, for example, that crime statistics show that the death penalty has no deterrent effect. Given this lack of correlation, Camus argues that the death penalty is merely an act of revenge, based on the primitive urge to retaliate, which, he says, is based on an emotion, not a principle. He also argues that the principle of equivalence (one death for another) does not operate either, for the punishment, since it is preceded by a period of confinement, is worse than the crime. For there to be equivalence, the state would have to

punish a criminal who has warned his victim of the date at which he would inflict a horrible death on him and who, from that moment onward, had confined him at his mercy for months. Such a monster is not encountered in private life.

Camus also adopts the argument of the modern liberal, arguing that society is not entirely blameless for the crimes that individuals commit. He points to the link between crime and poor living conditions, and he also points out that many crimes are linked to the consumption of alcohol and that corporations make healthy profits from the sale of alcohol, some of which benefit members of parliament who have shares in those companies. In other words, the precise responsibility of the killer cannot be measured, since there are other factors involved.

This does not exhaust the arguments Camus marshals against the death penalty in his essay. He points to the possibility of error, which would involve the execution of the innocent, and to the arbitrary nature of the death sentence, since it can be influenced by irrelevant factors like the defendant's appearance and demeanor. He also claims that no

one can ever know for certain that a man is so depraved that he will never be able to make amends for what he has done.

Finally, Camus turns to the question of the death penalty as carried out for political reasons. This is what had such a deep effect on Tarrou in *The Plague*, who appears to believe that taking part in politics of whatever sort makes him an accomplice to murder, since the death penalty is a weapon commonly used by those who wish to impose a particular ideology on others. Tarrou tells Rieux that, given his opposition to anything that results in state-sanctioned murder, he has no place in the world: "[O]nce I'd definitely refused to kill, I doomed myself to an exile that can never end. I leave it to others to make history."

This argument must be understood in the context of the times. During the 1930s and 1940s, Nazism, Fascism, and Soviet totalitarianism were committing atrocities, including mass executions, and justifying them in terms of the new society they claimed they were building. In "Reflections on the Guillotine," written over a decade later, Camus's argument remains essentially the same. He was writing shortly after the Soviet Union crushed a revolt in Hungary, at a time when Spain was ruled by the fascist dictatorship of General Franco; when the Soviets sent political dissidents to slave labor camps; and Algerian nationalists fighting French rule were subject to execution. Memories of Nazism were also still fresh in people's minds. Against this background, Camus argues that the biggest practitioner of crimes against individuals is now the State and that it is the State that individuals must defend themselves against. The abolition of capital punishment would be one major step, he argues, in ending worship of the State as an embodiment of absolute values and reaffirming respect for the individual. It would be an acknowledgement that nothing authorizes the State to carry out a punishment of such severity and finality that it can never be reversed.

This aspect of Camus's argument (which is the same argument he gives to Tarrou in *The Plague*) belongs very much to its time and place. Since the demise of communism throughout the world in the late 1980s and 1990s, few people in the West today are prepared to see the solution to society's problems in terms of increasing the power of the state. But when Camus was writing, in the 1940s and 1950s, the defeat of totalitarian ideologies was not yet in sight, and his work was an attempt to grapple with real problems facing European societies. Curiously, it is in the United States, which historically has been the nation most wary of sacrificing individual freedom to the power of the state, that capital punishment has been retained and vigorously endorsed by politicians of all parties. But as far as Europe is concerned, Camus's dream, as he expressed it in "Reflections on the Guillotine," has come true: "in the unified Europe of the future the solemn abolition of the death penalty ought to be the first article of the European Code we all hope for." Today, no nation that still retains the death penalty can be admitted to the European Union.

Of course, whether abolition of the death penalty in Western Europe has in fact contributed, as Camus's character Tarrou desired, to the lessening of the "plague" in every human being—the tendency, under certain circumstances to do harm to another person—is another matter, less easily decided upon.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *The Plague*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Kirp, Koehler, and Rossi discuss The Plague *and Orwell's* 1984 *and how these works have helped shape the cultural landscape of the last half century.*

In the summer of 1948 an English translation of Albert Camus's *The Plague* was published, and George Orwell's *1984* appeared several months later. During the half-century since, those two books have helped to shape the cultural landscape. Books were weapons and the stakes survival in the politics-soaked late forties, when seemingly every event was viewed through the prism of democracy and its virulent enemies. At a loyalty board hearing conducted at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in 1949, a sheet-metal worker was questioned about what book clubs he subscribed to (shades of Kenneth Starr!). "The Book Find Club," he responded. "Does Dreiser contribute?" a board member queried. "Some of their writers adhere to the Communist Party line They weave doctrine into a story." The worker responded in the manner of someone trying to evade the Thought Police. "I ain't that much of a genius. I read the words, not the weaving."

Literary niceties didn't matter overmuch in such a climate. Reviewers called *The Plague* a sermon and an allegory, and labeled *1984* a diatribe—characterizations delivered as praise, as if justifying the failure of the prose to do the usual work of fiction. So what if neither packed the punch of *Raintree County* or *The Naked and the Dead*, both of which, along with *The Young Lions* and *The Big Fisherman*, appeared on the 1948 bestseller list. Their messages matched the preoccupations of the time.

The Plague conjured in postwar readers' minds the insidious spread of Nazism and underlined the moral authority of resistance. For such a deadly serious book, it was a surprising commercial success, and most reviewers genuflected to its apparent profundity. "*The Plague* is one of the few genuinely important works of art to come out of Europe since the war's end," *Time* trumpeted. "It makes most recent American war novels seem tinny and thin by comparison."

1984 was published just as the Soviet Union was undergoing the fate of Orwell's Eurasia, transformed almost overnight from ally to archenemy. Orwell was renowned as an honest witness to injustice across generations and continents, and his novel was a smash hit—170,000 sold in the first year, another 190,000 of the Book of the Month Club edition. *Life* ran an illustrated, Classic Comics-style version of the novel. "Have you read this book?" a New York shoeshine boy asked English critic Isaac Deutscher. "You must read it, sir. Then you will know why we must drop the atom bomb on the Bolshies!" Writing in *The New York Times*, Mark Schorer was hardly less boosterish. "No other work of this generation has made us desire freedom more earnestly or loathe tyranny with such fulness."

The Zeitgeist shifts like a tectonic plate, and one generation's manifesto often becomes another generation's soporific. The Soviet Union that figures in *1984* ceased to merit its chief bogyman status years before its formal collapse, and the Nazism that informs *The*

Plague has been no more than a political sideshow for generations. Still, these books shape our worldview. They keep selling; some 30,000 copies of *The Plague* and more than 100,000 copies of *1984* are sold each year in the United States. More than 10 million copies of *1984* have been sold, ranking it among the all-time U.S. bestsellers. In recent years each has been packaged as a movie, *1984* for a second time, and there is also a mock sequel, a conservative tract called *Orwell's Revenge*.

That *The Plague* features prominently in discussions about AIDS is understandable, since Camus's story centers on another plague. What's surprising, though, is that the message of the novel creeps into analyses of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—where partisans on both sides have drawn comfort from the text—as well as Swiss money-laundering during World War II. Half a century after *1984*'s appearance, scarcely a week goes by without Big Brother, Newspeak or Thought Police turning up in public argument.

The morals of these morality plays turn out to be more capacious, the archetypes they represent more profound, than their creators could ever have anticipated. The imagery of *1984* and *The Plague* still produces the bile-in-the-throat feeling of utter panic that arises when we are pushed into confronting our absolute powerlessness. Dread nature rising up, the punishing Flood, the helpless individual who becomes the plaything of a malevolent fate: These are what our nightmares are made of.

Critical Essay #4

In 1948 memories of Nazi terror were vivid, and *The Plague* contains scenes that could have been lifted straight from those wartime memories: painful separations from loved ones, attempts to escape the war zone, the formation of isolation camps for the contaminated, the smell of dead and burning bodies. "There will be few readers," a *Herald Tribune* reviewer contended, "who will not see in it a parable of the condition of all mankind, especially during the recent war." *Time* relied on *The Plague* when analyzing the French Resistance: "To continue upholding one's human obligations when there seems the least possibility of fulfilling them is, if not heroism, the best that men can do."

Camus once described himself as committed to "everyday life with the most possible light thrown upon it." Long after the priest's sermons on faith and fatalism have faded from our memory of the book, what remains are those everyday life moments: the journalist's poignant decision to stay in a city where he has found himself by chance, rather than fleeing to his home and his fiancee; the death of the judge's child; the nightly performances of a play brought to town by a troupe of thespians entrapped by the plague, a ritual that ends only when one of the actors falls dead on the stage. Even in times that are truly unspeakable, Camus insists, we constantly construct the normal or else we go mad. "The task is to favor freedom against the fatalities that close in upon it."

The threat of a real plague had seemingly played itself out, medical science supposedly having triumphed over mass contagion, by the time the book appeared. Camus revives the image, and our sense of plague as threat now comes not from tales of medieval London but from his novel. The imagery has often been used to represent a fearsome intrusion, the uninvited guest at the garden party who smashes all the glasses. When a mad killer disrupts the "happy city" of Gainesville, Florida (the reference is to Oran), *The Plague* is summoned, as it is in the context of an outbreak of violence against the children of Bangor, terrorism in the Tokyo subways and arson in Laguna Beach. Even a baseball columnist drew inspiration from the novel: "Albert Camus, a heavy hitter in his own field, might have appreciated slumps as a symbol of random evil . . . The malady speads, too.... But the struggle goes on for a cure."

The literal plague—the slow progression of a deadly, contagious disease and the various attempts to combat it—went undiscussed until the summer of 1981, when a brief story in *The New York Times* brought news of a disease that was killing gay men. With that first press reference to AIDS, *The Plague* became invested with new meaning.

Never mind Susan Sontag's plea, in *Illness as Metaphor*, that diseases be treated as signifying only themselves: Because AIDS especially menaced gay men, the epidemic became a breeding ground for metaphors that had less to do with the disease than the state of society. AIDS was God's judgment on homosexuals, fundamentalist Christian preachers thundered, even as medical science was bent to support this point of view. "If AIDS is the Plague of the Eighties," Michael Fumento insisted in *The National Review*, "then homosexuals are the rats."

On the other side of this great cultural divide, the fight against this disease and the social judgments barnacled to it became the moral equivalent of war. For Randy Shilts, whose *And the Band Played On* is the J'Accuse for AIDS, the preachments of *The Plague* turned into whips to flagellate the AIDS-phobic. But while Camus concludes optimistically that "in a time of pestilence . . . there are more things to admire in men than to despise," the trajectory of AIDS has been less cheering.

Despite all the God-doubting and personal angst that news of the plague evokes among the residents of Camus's Oran, what was required to combat the epidemic was plain enough: universal reporting of infection, quarantine of the infected and the imposition of strict health measures on the healthy. Because the plague struck indiscriminately, maintaining the privacy of its victims was not a worry—indeed, respect for privacy would have meant more deaths.

Dr. Rieux, the main character, is portrayed as brave because of his decisiveness, while the unheroic fret about panicking the populace by acting too quickly. Ironically, during the early years of the AIDS epidemic, the person whose behavior most resembled Rieux's was Lyndon LaRouche, who demanded universal testing and quarantine for those with H.I.V. Those positions made him a hero only to the AIDS-phobic, for reasons that illuminate the difference between these epidemics. AIDS was a condition that initially could be neither diagnosed nor treated. To be infected with the virus was socially devastating, so the call for universal testing spread panic. (When former Georgia governor and segregationist die-hard Lester Maddox was diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma, a form of cancer linked to AIDS, he was mortified; he'd much prefer to die from "straight cancer," he said.) While in Oran the plague ran its course in less than a year, AIDS could conceivably last forever.

"No one was prepared for AIDS," observed one of the first AIDS doctors. "It's like Albert Camus said in *The Plague*: 'Plagues and wars always afflict us but they always catch us by surprise.' " What resonates from the novel is how good people respond in terrible times—not by allowing themselves to be paralyzed or blaming the diseased for their affliction but by acting to contain the harm. "All who attend AIDS victims need to find the grace described in *The Plague*," wrote a journalist in the *Chicago Tribune* who went on to quote a 1986 statement from the American Medical Association. "Though unable to be saints, [health professionals should] refuse to bow down to pestilences and strive to their utmost to be healers."

That reading of *The Plague* sharpens the moral distinction. But the novel also invites the plague victim to contemplate the very different possibility that he has brought this condition upon himself, that the plague is our Flood. This understanding, which turns inward Fumento's diatribe about AIDS patients as rats, resonates with many gay men who live not only with a fatal disease but also with deeply internalized homophobia.

At the end of *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux reveals that he is not just a character in the story but also the narrator, returned to "bear witness in favor of those plague-stricken people, so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done them might endure." In "When Plagues End," a *New York Times Magazine* essay, former New Republic editor Andrew

Sullivan strikes a similar pose. In lieu of the dead rat in the hallway that is the harbinger of plague in Oran, Sullivan describes the suddenly darkened apartment of a stricken friend as signaling the advent of AIDS. He imagines he is seeing the end to this plague, marked by the development of new pharmaceutical regimes—hence the title of his article. But in this he is entirely premature. For AIDS, there is no happy ending, no Rieux on the train station platform, waiting for his wife and the chance to resume his ordinary life, only a disease that resists being domesticated by medical science and the persistent desire to find something, or someone, to blame....

Critical Essay #5

The imagery of *1984* may feel as tired and unimaginative today as the stale metaphors against which Orwell inveighs in "Politics and the English Language," but it is this very familiarity that explains why these symbols endure. The vision of *1984*, so startling half a century ago, has long since become ordinary, just as Freudian categories are taken-for-granted tools in our intellectual kitbag. Imagining a world without airbrushed history or a watchful eye, Big Brother or the computer data-bank is as hard as letting go of repression or sublimation. Fifty years on, *1984* lingers in the air. So too does *The Plague*, with its images of natural and insidious evil.

The idea that one might achieve utopia on earth, so tempting when these novels were published, has vanished except among the maddest of cults, a casualty of the many sins committed in the name of utopia. *1984* and *The Plague* urged against trusting the visionary, because we know that good times are never truly the best of times and worse times are likely lurking around the corner. Always there is the possibility of a clock waiting to strike thirteen or a plague that will "rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city."

Source: David L. Kirp, Andrew Koehler, and Jaime Rossi, "Moral Rorschachs," in the *Nation*, Vol. 266, No. 16, May 4, 1998, pp. 32-36.

Critical Essay #6

In the following essay, Kellman discusses the impact of The Plague *in the 1980s with the widespread emergence of AIDS.*

Even before his narrative begins, Albert Camus offers a cue on how to read *The Plague*. He positions a statement by Daniel Defoe as epigraph to the entire work. Any novelist writing about epidemics bears the legacy of *A Journal of the Plague Year*, the 1722 text in which Defoe recounts the collective story of one city, in his case London, under the impact of a plague, and uses a narrator so self-effacing that his only concession to personal identity is the placement of his initials, H.F., at the very end. Camus's *The Plague* insists that it is the "chronicle" of an "honest witness" to what occurred in Oran, Algeria, a physician named Bernard Rieux who is so loath to impose his personality on the story that he conceals his identity until the final pages. Rieux claims the modest role of "chronicler of the troubled, rebellious hearts of our townspeople under the impact of the plague."

The particular passage appropriated as epigraph to Camus's novel comes from another book by Defoe, from the preface to volume III of *Robinson Crusoe*. And, for the reader of *The Plague*, it immediately raises questions of representation: "It is as reasonable to represent one kind of imprisonment by another, as it is to represent anything that really exists by that which exists not." Coming even before we have met the first infected rat in Oran, the Defoe quotation is an invitation to allegory, a tip that the fiction that follows signifies more than the story of a town in Algeria in a year, "194_," deliberately kept indeterminate to encourage extrapolation. "I had plague already, long before I came to this town and encountered it here. Which is tantamount to saying I'm like everybody else," says a healthy Jean Tarrou, by which he suggests that the pestilence that is the focus of the story is not primarily a medical phenomenon; nor is it, like Camus's adversary, quarantined in one city during most of one year, from April 16 to the following February. "I know positively—yes, Rieux, I can say I know the world inside out, as you may see—that each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it," declares Tarrou. Camus's novel invites its readers to recognize that they, too, are somehow infected, though the diagnosis seems more metaphysical than physical.

In 1941, a typhus outbreak near Oran resulted in more than 75,000 deaths. However, that epidemic was clearly a source not the subject for Camus's novel. *The Plague* is one of the most critically and commercially successful novels ever published in France. It has managed to sell more than four million copies throughout the world and to inspire an army of exegetes. For the generation that grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, it was, like *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Catch-22*, a book that was devoured although and because it was not assigned in school. But its appeal has not been as an accurate case study in epidemiology. Particularly in North America, where Oran seems as remote as Oz, readers have accepted Camus's invitation to translate the text into allegory. *The Plague* offered a tonically despairing vision of an absurd cosmos in which human suffering is capricious and unintelligible. The lethal, excruciating disease strikes fictional Oran indiscriminately, and when it does recede it does so temporarily, oblivious

to human efforts at prophylaxis. As in Camus's philosophical treatise *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the health workers of Oran combat each case from scratch without ever being convinced that their labors accomplish anything.

In a famous letter addressed to Roland Barthes in 1955, Camus attempted to narrow the terms of interpretation. He insisted that his 1947 novel be read not as a study in abstract evil but as a story whose manifest reference is to the situation of France under the Nazi occupation:

The Plague, which I wanted to be read on a number of levels, nevertheless has as its obvious content the struggle of the European resistance movements against Nazism. The proof of this is that although the specific enemy is nowhere named, everyone in every European country recognized it. Let me add that a long extract from *The Plague* appeared during the Occupation, in a collection of underground texts, and that this fact alone would justify the transposition I made. In a sense, *The Plague* is more than a chronicle of the Resistance. But certainly it is nothing less. (Lyrical and Critical Essays . . .

Long after the Liberation of France, readers, particularly those born after World War II, preferred to read *The Plague* as something more than a chronicle of the Resistance, as the embodiment of a more universal philosophical vision. The novel was, in fact, even more popular in the United States, which did not experience the Nazi Occupation, than in France, where Camus's aversion to torture and violence made him politically suspect by both the left and the right. The absence of an immediate historical context encouraged younger Americans to read *The Plague* as a philosophical novel. So, too, did our inexperience with plagues. "Oh, happy posterity," wrote Petrarch in the fourteenth century, when more than half the population of his native Florence perished in the bubonic plague, the Black Death, "who will not experience such abysmal woe and will look upon our testimony as a fable."

Before 1980, The Plague was facilely read as a fable. Polio had been vanquished, and the smallpox virus survived only in a few laboratories. Aside from periodic visitations of influenza, usually more of a nuisance than a killer, epidemics, before the outbreak of cholera in Peru in 1991, had been as common in this hemisphere as flocks of auks. Those of us who first read *The Plague* during the era of the Salk and Sabin vaccines were hard put to imagine a distant world not yet domesticated by biotechnology, in which a lere bacillus could terrorize an entire city. We read *The Plague* not as the story of a plague, an atavistic nemesis that seemed unlikely to menace our own modern metropolises. The story was a pretext, an occasion for ethical speculation, in short an allegory without coordinates in space and time.

However, though published long before the first case of AIDS was diagnosed and thirty-five years before the acronym was even coined, *The Plague* assumed a new urgency during the 1980s, as it became apparent that epidemics were not obsolete occurrences or quaint events confined to distant regions. Not long after a 1981 article in *The New England Journal of Medicine* reported seven inexplicable cases of severe infection, AIDS became a global pandemic. In the United States alone, more than 160,000 have

died from the disease, and another 80,000 have been diagnosed with the deadly disorder. Close to 2 million Americans have been infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, believed to be the precondition for AIDS. At first, AIDS seemed to target homosexual men, Haitians, and intravenous drug users, but, like Camus's plague, it was soon striking capriciously, without any regard to the social status of its hundreds of thousands of helpless, hapless victims. As in *The Plague*, a panicked populace responded in a variety of ways but without any cure. It is no longer possible to read *The Plague* with the innocence of Existentialist aesthetes. Joseph Dewey suggests that, for a contemporary novelist in quest of a paradigmatic AIDS narrative, it is not profitable to read *The Plague* at all—"Camus's use of contagion as an undeniable occasion of mortality that tests whether those quarantined in the Algerian port can find significance in life within an infected geography seems too metaphoric, a luxury when compared to what AIDS victims must confront: the indignities of a slow and grinding premature death."

Laurel Brodsley, however, does not dismiss *The Plague*. She takes it seriously enough to try to demonstrate how Defoe provides a model for it and two other twentieth-century plague books: Paul Monette's *Borrowed Time*, and Randy Shilts's *And the Band Played On*, both of them AIDS narratives. Yet it would be more accurate to say that Camus mediates between Shilts and Defoe—and even between Shilts and the contemporary pestilence whose first five years he recounts. Published in 1987, *And the Band Played On*: *Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* is a detailed report on the onset and spread of AIDS and of the spectrum of reactions to it. What, to a student of Camus, is remarkable about Shilts's book—which, selected for the Book of the Month Club, was a bestseller in both hardcover and paperback—is how much it has in common with *The Plague*. Not only does Shilts document the same pattern of initial denial followed by acknowledgment, recrimination, terror, and occasional stoical heroism that Rieux recounts during the Oran ordeal. But it is clear that Shilts has read Camus and has adopted much of the style and structure of *The Plague* to tell his story of an actual plague. Where Camus appropriates Defoe for the epigraph to his novel, Shilts mines Camus's *The Plague* for epigraphs to four of his book's nine sections: Parts IV, V, VI, and VII. In Part II, describing baffling new developments among homosexual patients, Shilts echoes Camus's absurdist *Myth of Sisyphus* when he states: "The fight against venereal diseases was proving a Sisyphean task." That same Greek myth, for whom Camus is the modern bard, is alluded to two other times by Shilts—flippantly, in reference to AIDS victim Gary Walsh's "Sisyphean task" of renovating his Castro District apartment and, more portentously, in reference to the "Sisyphean struggle" against AIDS directed by Donald Francis, a leading retro-virologist at the Centers for Disease Control. . . .

Early in *The Plague* its still anonymous narrator attempts to establish his credibility by assuming the humble role of historian. He insists on his distaste for rhetorical flamboyance and literary contrivance, assuring the reader that: "His business is only to say: 'This is what happened,' when it actually did happen, that it closely affected the life of a whole populace, and that there are thousands of eyewitnesses who can appraise in their hearts the truth of what he writes." Rather than his own eccentric fabrication, what follows, he assures us, is an impartial account adhering scrupulously to reliable

sources. "The present narrator," says the present narrator, in an attempt at objective detachment even from himself, "has three kinds of data: first, what he saw himself; secondly, the accounts of other eyewitnesses (thanks to the part he played, he was enabled to learn their personal impressions from all those figuring in this chronicle); and, lastly, documents that subsequently came into his hands." . . . .

Camus is of course writing fiction, and his artful prose aspires to the spare eloquence of the solitary sentence that Joseph Grand is forever honing into an economy of eloquence. Shilts's massive book overwhelms his reader with the numbing evidence of actuality. Footnotes would have been an impertinence to *The Plague*, but they are essential to Shilts's claim on the reader's belief. Nevertheless, not every reader has honored that claim. Douglas Crimp reacted harshly to Shilts's deployment of conventional novelistic technique, and James Miller, who contends that "Shilts has artfully mated *Hard Times* with *Oliver Twist* to produce a symphonic opus of public oppression and private suffering", is enraged over the book's Dickensian caricatures and emotional excesses. "I suspect that Shilts is making lots and lots of money out of his *success de scandale*," rails Miller, "by feeding his straight and some of his gay readers exactly what they want: large dollops of guilt." Readers often turn pages because they want to find solutions. *And the Band Played On* is, like *The Plague*, a who-dunit, a book designed to arouse and shape our curiosity about causes. What are the origins of catastrophe? Judith Williamson in fact faults *And the Band Played On* for exploiting the conventions of detective fiction so effectively that it demonizes Gaetan Dugas, Patient Zero, as the primal culprit in the global drama: "While Shilts's book is rationally geared to blame the entire governmental system for failing to fund research, educate the public and treat those infected, he nevertheless cannot entirely resist the wish for a source of contamination to be found, and then blamed."

Whatever the sources of misfortune, Camus leaves us with his plague in temporary remission, but, in Shilts's final pages, AIDS is merely gaining momentum. Neither disease is near a cure. Yet both epidemics and both books leave us enlightened about the limitations of human understanding but the need to act on what we know. William Styron spoke for many American admirers when he praised Camus for his tonic recognition of a bleak cosmos: "Camus was a great cleanser of my intellect, ridding me of countless sluggish ideas and, through some of the most unsettling pessimism I had ever encountered, causing me to be aroused anew by life's enigmatic promise." Stronger on enigma than promise, Shilts has nevertheless created a book designed to arouse.

Topics for Further Study

What is the story told in the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice? What is the significance of the episode in which Tarrou and Rambert attend a performance of Gluck's opera, *Orpheus and Eurydice*?

Research the history of Vichy France, from 1940 to 1944. What were the goals of the French leaders, such as Pierre Laval, who openly collaborated with the Germans? How did they justify their actions?

Reread the first chapter of *The Plague*, in which Rieux describes the town of Oran and its people. Is Rieux really as objective a narrator as he claims to be? What are his main criticisms of Oran's citizens? How does the epidemic change their attitudes?

Why does the narrator say, in Part II, that the "true embodiment of the quiet courage that inspired the sanitary groups" was not himself or Tarrou but Grand? In what sense is Grand a hero?

Imagine a debate between a modern-day Father Paneloux and Dr. Rieux or Tarrou over the modern plague of AIDS. What might each man say and do in response to the epidemic?

Compare and Contrast

1940s: World War II pits the major European powers against each other, with axis powers Germany and Italy, and later Japan, on one side and allied powers Britain, Russia and later the U.S. on the other. The entry of the United States into the war in 1941 tips the scales in favor of Britain and its allies.

Today: The main European combatants of World War II are steadily moving toward more and more economic and political integration through the European Union. In January 2002, twelve European countries, including France and Germany, adopt a single currency, the Euro.

1940s: Radio and newspapers are the media through which people get their information. Communication is via telephone, letters, and, in urgent cases, telegrams.

Today: Television has replaced the newspaper as the principle source of information for most people. The Internet is a rapidly growing resource for news and entertainment. Cheap telephone rates make worldwide communication easy, as does electronic mail and the facsimile (fax). Telegrams are a thing of the past.

1940s: After the devastation of World War II, Europe starts to rebuild. The United States, fearing that an economically weak Europe will allow communism to make quick gains, provides large-scale financial assistance through the Marshall Plan.

Today: An increasingly unified Europe is a powerful economic competitor of the United States.

What Do I Read Next?

Camus's widely known first novel, *The Stranger* (1942), is about an alienated, aimless young Algerian man who gets caught up in bad company and ends up murdering an Arab. His subsequent imprisonment and trial reflect Camus's view of the absurd nature of life.

Vichy France (revised edition, 2001), by Robert O. Paxton, is a classic study of France under the German occupation in World War II. Paxton shows how the Pétain government pursued a double agenda: an authoritarian and racist revolution at home and an attempt to persuade Hitler to accept this new France as a partner in German-dominated Europe.

Alfred Cobban, in *A History of Modern France: 1871-1962* (1965), presents a readable overview of modern French history, including the tragic years of the German occupation and the Vichy government.

Plagues and People (updated edition, 1998), by William H. McNeill, examines the enormous political, demographic, ecological, and psychological impact that infectious diseases have made on human history. Among the topics McNeill discusses are the medieval black death, the epidemic of smallpox in Mexico that followed the Spanish conquest, the bubonic plague in China, and the typhoid epidemic in Europe.

Further Study

Amoia, Alba, *Albert Camus*, Continuum, 1989.

Amoia's book is a lucid introduction to Camus's work. Amoia sees *The Plague* as a depiction of man's struggle against solitude and death, and he emphasizes Rieux's respect for the individuality of each human's personality—a quality he consistently finds in Camus's life and work.

Bloom, Harold, ed., *Albert Camus*, Modern Critical Views series, Chelsea House, 1988.

This text is a collection of essays on all aspects of Camus's work, notable for Bloom's negative assessment of *The Plague* and for the essay on the same work by Patrick McCarthy.

Brée, Germaine, *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, 1962.

This collection of essays was published not long after Camus's death and shows the way contemporary critics interpreted his work. Gaëton Picon in "Notes on *The Plague*," faults the novel for failing to create unity between the two levels on which it operates, the realistic and the symbolic or allegorical.

Luppé, Robert de, *Albert Camus*, translated by John Cumming and J. Hargreaves, Funk & Wagnalls, 1966.

Luppé traces the development of Camus's ideas, which he identifies as dualism (life and death, love and hatred) and the attempt to maintain equilibrium between contrary and exclusive terms.

Merton, Thomas, *Albert Camus's "The Plague": Introduction and Commentary*, Seabury Press, 1968.

This brief introduction to the novel is by a leading religious thinker and former Roman Catholic monk. Merton is particularly lucid in analyzing Camus's attitude to Christianity, and he also compares Camus's thought to that of a modern Catholic thinker, Teilhard de Chardin.

Todd, Olivier, *Albert Camus: A Life*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

This thorough biography presents Camus's life and times but avoids detailed exposition of the works.

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Abrams, M. H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981, p. 1.

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—, "Reflections on the Guillotine," in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961, pp. 173-234.

Dank, Milton, *The French against the French: Collaboration and Resistance*, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1974.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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