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The Plague



Synopsis

A haunting tale of human resilience in the face of unrelieved horror, Camus' novel about a bubonic plague ravaging the people of a North African coastal town is a classic of twentieth-century literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The plague is an allegory, for fascism and totalitarianism. The novel deals largely with individuals' varying reactions to the plague as it emerges and settles in on the city of Oran. Only those who act or are important in the development of the scene are named, and though many of the characters perceive reality differently, we are able to sympathize with where they are coming from. The novel is about overcoming indifference and performing good acts that we are all capable of. Camus makes it clear that there are no heroes in the novel, only people who recognize their responsibility and embrace life. Even though the plague is ultimately "defeated," there is no typical happy ending, for the plague bacillus never dies. This novel is still entirely relevant to our world today. The central point of Camus' writing is "the absurd." The absurd is characterized by the confrontation of "rational man and the indifferent universe." Camus dismisses ideas such as transcendence, or a leap of faith, there is no existential commitment. He looks to embrace the absurd, to keep it alive. Camus is very much a moralist and a pacifist; he deplored one-sided views of any political situation, and broke off relationships with other prominent writers of his time such as Sartre, whose ties to Communism and justification of violence Camus abhorred. He did not wish to take sides in the French-Algerian war. Camus did not seem to identify with a particular people, a belief system or any form of certainty, but

viewed man as being in constant revolt against the powers that tried to enslave him, keeping him from living. Camus would rather embrace the absurdity of life than a frail system.

The Plague is about love, exile, and suffering as illuminated by living around death. What is the meaning of life? For many, that question is an abstraction except in the context of being aware of losing some of the joys of life, or life itself. In *The Plague*, Camus creates a timeless tale of humans caught in the jaws of implacable death, in this case a huge outbreak of bubonic plague in Oran, Algeria on the north African coast. With the possibility of dying so close, each character comes to see his or her life differently. In a sense, we each get a glimpse of what we, too, may think about life in the last hours and days before our own deaths. The Plague will leave you with a sense of death as real rather than as an abstraction. Then by reflecting in the mirror of that death, you can see life more clearly. For example, what role would you take if bubonic plague were to be unleashed in your community? Would you flee? Would you help relieve the suffering? Would you become a profiteer? Would you help maintain order? Would you withdraw or seek out others? These are all important questions for helping you understand yourself that this powerful novel will raise for you. The book is described as objectively as possible by a narrator, who is one of the key figures in the drama. That literary device allows each of us to insert ourselves into the situation. Let me explain the main themes. Love is expressed in many ways. There is the love of men and women for each other. Dr. Rieux's wife is ill, and has just left for treatment at a sanitarium. Rambert, a journalist on temporary assignment, is separated from his live-in girl friend in Paris. Dr. Rieux's mother comes to stay with him during his mother's absence, so there is also love of parent and child.

"The town itself, let us admit, is ugly." So says Dr. Bernard Rieux, the narrator of Albert Camus', *The Plague*. The Plague takes place in Oran, a small Mediterranean town in North Africa. Not only does Dr. Rieux find Oran ugly, he finds its inhabitants boring people with little involvement in the actual business of living. One day, Rieux steps on a dead rat, then another and another. Soon, he sees them everywhere, littered among the bloated corpses of Oran's inhabitants. Rieux and the Oranians ignore the problem at first, blaming the sanitation bureau for neglecting its duties. However, they soon discover that the dead and dying have a far more sinister tale to tell. Although Rieux is the narrator of *The Plague*, several other main characters do exist. Jean Tarrou is a hapless man who has the misfortune of wandering into Oran during the plague. He quickly becomes a friend of Rieux's and his chronicles of Oran's ordeal appear throughout the book. Raymond Rambert is a French journalist who simply ends up in Oran during the time of the plague. Although longing to

return to his beautiful wife in Paris, Rambert is forced to remain in Oran. Joseph Grand is a writer eking out an existence in Oran as he attempts to write the perfect book, while Cottard is a prisoner who is using Oran to hide from the officials who want to execute him. Oran is quarantined and its citizens must find various ways of dealing with this catastrophe. Some simply accept the inevitable and wait for the disease to strike while others turn a blind eye in the hope that if they do not see the plague, the plague will not see them. One problem, however, affects all of the town's inhabitants--money. For the first time, Oran's port is closed.

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