

The Plague: Historical Journey

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Albert Camus was a famous writer of various novels and fictions. The novel "The Plague" written in 1947 is one of his remarkable novels related to a biological and historical event. Stuart Gilbert translated the novel "The Plague" from "La Peste", a French novel. Albert Camus was born in a small working class family in Algeria in 1913. However, he spent his early life in North Africa. He did various kinds of jobs in this place to recover his courses at the University of Algiers. From this university he graduated as a journalist. Later, his report on the "Unhappy State of the Muslims of the Kabylie Region" made him a popular public figure. Later from 1935 to 1938, he started to work on the theatre. Then during World War II, he became one of the leading writers. He became very active in the theater activities and published several plays and fictions like "The Stranger", "The Plague", "The Fall", and "Exile and the Kingdom". These are the examples of his good philosophical creation. The novel "The Plague" is a historical journey through the aspect of humanism and existentialisms.

Most of his works are directly or indirectly concerned with death and mortality of human population. "The Plague" has also a direct relation between human, death and mortality. This novel transposes the experience of his occupation into a work of art and philosophy. Later, his journalistic work as editorial writer for Combat, the underground newspaper, brought him to Paris. The readers of this novel must appreciate his courage. Sometime the situation created in this novel makes as if it were a fable. Albert Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. In 1930, signs of tuberculosis were found in his body and in the month of January 1960, the Western Literary World lost him in his sudden death.

After 1943, Camus's philosophy changed and he started to think about individualism and he became a successful humanist. The Plague is also about humanism. It is an idea of community versus that of an individual. The effort of the doctor to find the microscopic enemy to suppress the plague is another example of humanism. Because of this humanist idea, we can see lot of situations that is

relied on logic, moral, evidence and fact of why and what is wrong and what is right. The novel is self-explanatory and it says human is the greatest threat to him. Camus did not want the reader to investigate into the plague thinking that it was about the holocaust.

“In any case His business is only to say: This is what happened (p. 6).” Here the narrator left the conclusion to the reader because he did not want to make conclusion or want to be bias about the situation and fact about the plague epidemic. At the end of the novel, he leaves us with a ray of hope. Therefore, the readers themselves have to decide what is wrong and what is right or what ought to be.

The Plague tells the story of a terrible disease that descended upon Oran, Algiers, in a year unknown. After rats crawled from the sewer to die in the streets, people soon began perishing from terrible afflictions. Camus also treated German soldiers as coming like these rats. How the main characters in the book--a journalist, a doctor, and a priest--face humanity in the wake of the plague presents one of the important lessons to the reader. There is hero and humanist, there is existentialism and somewhere

feminism as well. The pandemic in the plague represents a worldwide catastrophe, both past and future. It is also similar with Aids epidemic of 1980. In this difficult situation, everyone must save them as first. In this sense the heroism is also the logic to guide the scared society.

“Naturally, a historian, has three data: first what he saw himself, secondly, the account of other eyewitness, and lastly, documents that subsequently came into his hands (p 6 & 7)”. The narrator is factual and realistic about the situation. Rats are the main cause of spreading of the plague. In addition, the environment of Oran city may be responsible to spread out the plague. This is the fact and apparent. If the scientific method is able to explain everything, it is quite absurd to believe in God or myths rather we should believe on our own experience and study, reason and cause to solve the epidemic like the plague.

Dr. Rieux and the father Paneloux are two symbols humanism and existentialism. “Father Paneloux has already made History of the period (p 92 & 93).” Humanists do not believe in God because they think

everyone is based on self. Rather working with similar people, some people in this novel are trying to do the job as a leader. This idea is somewhat useless in this massive destruction of this human society where nearly seven hundred people died within a week. "There were now nearly seven hundred deaths a week (p. 111)". Not only that, the same situation also helps to promote the sense of existentialism. In this worst situation, the God may be the last straw of hope to immune oneself. Perhaps the situation is a good lesson for human beings to know the importance of God. "Many of you are wondering ... I wish to lead been telling you (p 98)". It is a good idea for those who believe in God to understand the punishment given by Him to them. If all of them were guilty, what their sin was to get that punishment from God?

In this novel, the quality and the classification of the people is an important aspect to describe human society. "At Oran, as elsewhere, for lack of time and thinking, people have to love one another without knowing much about it (p 5)." Mainly there are two sides, one is upper class and next is lower class. There are many distinctions between these classes. Lower class is fighting against the

plague and the upper class is trying to be apart from it. However, on the other side, they are connected together to fight with this social problem with their own interest or without their interest.

The novel has some scenes of human suffering in their defenseless struggle against an enemy they cannot see. In this part, Dr. Bernard Rieux is a symbol or existential hero, like Tarrou who believes in human effort to solve human problems. He is the man who finds rats dying all over town that ultimately results into an outbreak of bubonic plague. Leadership is very important in the teamwork structure, which we can say heroism. "Tarrou set to work and enrolled a first team of workers, soon to be followed by many others." " Hence the sanitary groups, whose creation was entirely Tarrou's work, should be considered with objectivity as well as with approval (Parker, 1965)." This type of heroism could be also a good effort to achieve human welfare through effective teamwork.

"On the morning of 16 April, Dr. Bernard Rieux left his office and come upon a dead rat lying in the middle of the landing." Being kept apart from the rest of the world, the people of Oran feel

trapped, doomed to die. Even in this severe condition of Oran, the Doctor tries his best, which is not ironic because if the individuals are free to choose how to respond their own life.

It is also an existentialist novel. Because it explores how the problem of natural evil is apparently no longer answered satisfactorily by the Judeo-Christian tradition. "On the whole, men are more good than bad; that, however, isn't the real point. But they are more or less ignorant (p. 131)." People are in habit of suffering of this disaster. "But you can get through the days there is without trouble, once you have formed habits (p. 5)." On the other hand, sympathy to the humankind is one characteristic humanism aspect.

The journalist from France thinks it is unfair for him to be kept apart from the rest of the locals. Instead of having him caged for his intentions, the doctor actually encourages him to escape. This type of action is good humanism to isolate a disease so that it does not spread to other cities and countries. As a physician, his intention to go along with this aim is ironic ethics of the doctor. "No longer were there individual destinies; only a collective destiny, make of plague and the

emotions shared by all (p. 167)." This type of the idea is, in fact, the whole idea behind the novel "The Plague".

The Plague also reveals the complexity of Camus's heroes. Who is Tarrou and who is Rieux? "No longer were there individual Emotion shared by all. That is why and the plight of parted lovers (p. 167)". Readers have often very wrongly taken Tarrou's formula "to be a saint without God" as a password. One must restore it to the context of the novel (p. 230). On the other side of this novel, there is a common goal and interconnection between these characters. It explores the idea about communism, as well. However, communism also does not believe in God existence. If they do not accept the existence of God, they should not believe in punishment given by God, too. "Many centuries ago Eternal life (p.98)." Therefore, regarding the humanism, it is very ironic that the God has sent the warning bell to the people to make them wake up as a punishment.

This novel is focus mainly in humanist versus existentialism, however some of the parts of this novel also reveal some feminism aspect of the human life. "On the enquiry... .. succumbed to

plague (p. 115).” It tells the role of the women of this society to help the injured people equally to the man.

“Albert Camus identifies civilization’s biggest problem is our omnipresent ego. “First they came for the Jews, but we were not Jews so we said nothing Then they came for the homosexuals, but we were not homosexual so we said nothing Then they came for the gypsies and the blacks and the Asians and the old and the handicapped, but we were none of these so we said nothing Then one day they came for us, and no one was left to say anything (Unknown).” The first to anticipate existentialism's major concerns was 17th -century French philosopher Blaise Pascal, who denounced a systematic philosophy that presumes to explain God and humanity. Freedom of choice, through which each human being creates his or her own nature, is a primary theme. Because individuals are free to choose their own path, existentialists have argued, they must accept the risk and responsibility of their actions. In terms of moral choice, existentialists have argued that there is no objective, rational basis for decisions; they stress the importance of

individualism in deciding questions of morality and truth. Most existentialists have held that rational clarity is desirable wherever possible but that life's most important questions are not accessible to reason or science. Existentialism has been a vital movement in literature, particularly in the works of Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Austrian writer Franz Kafka, and French writer Albert Camus.

The plague was spreading by air and it was deadly. “And I, too, I’m no different ... Death means nothing to men like me. It is the event that proves them right (p.121).” This kind of courage to face the death is a typical inspiration any one can obtain from Albert Camus. “You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life (notebook).” This part of sentences, from his notebook, is a very good logic to be brave enough to encounter death. It promotes the sense of fact about the human life. As we born, one day we should die, so that there is no way to escape from death. It persuades human courage to challenge the death while doing something for betterment of the society.

Still, the interesting part of the novel is the question about man's existence, the belief in God, and the heroism, and sympathy to the ignorant of human civilization. It generates lots of effort to reduce the impact of plague in the innocent area or in the remote cities where the plague is not yet transferred. "Thus, while it is true that all who were parted came ultimately to this state, we exiles a younger, keener sensibility (p 182)." The narrator felt that the exile is important to other people for inspiration as an optimistic concept. Camus presumes the absence of any logic or direction generally associated with the idea of divinity. He does not even miss God or desire God. Albert Camus, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, always refused the existentialist label with which he is usually associated. Camus takes the nonexistence of God and finds meaning in self.

The Plague is like a tale of human resilience of the Nobel prizewinner Albert Camus. It is his existentialist novel of epidemic and death of human because of deadly virus that dispassionately sweeps a vast percentage of the population in Algiers, in northern Africa. It is a story about suffering people from disease and

random death. It is a story about lack of compassion and yet somehow survival. It is an introduction of human life in the meaning of one of the injured society. "Do not walk in front of me, I may not follow you; do not walk behind me, I may not lead you; walk beside me, and just be my friend (Notebook)." This kind of humanity represents a vital conclusion about Albert Camus to know about the humanism. Not only the Plague is one of the most important literary outcomes of the twentieth-century literature, but it could also be the similar sociological lesson like Aids of 1980. Both; the Plague and the Aids, has same society, some of them are humanist and some of them are existentialist to achieve their common goal to increase the betterment of human life fighting with social and biological enemies.