

Thesis RMA Comparative Literary Studies

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## *Bodily Metaphors: The Plague and its Carriers*

Narratives of Containment, Invasion, Exile and Migration in the Fictions of Hermann Hesse, Albert Camus, Frank Herbert, and Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer



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## INTRODUCTION

*“AIDS, nanotechnology, outbreaks of the Ebola virus, the Y2K bug ...  
we live in a world infested with images of pestilence”  
- Elana Gomel*

### *Plagues of Metaphor*

In *I is an Other* (2011) James Geary describes an experiment conducted by a group of researchers (C8). The setup of this experiment consisted of two groups both reading articles about airborne bacteria in the human environment. Yet, for one group the article, presumed to be from a science magazine, referred to the bacteria as harmful, whereas for the other it did refer to the same bacteria as being completely safe to human health. After this first article, both groups were again split in half and had to read another article about U.S. history of domestic issues, the only, yet very important difference being the kind of language used: in one article the U.S. was described with bodily metaphors, for example referring to it as experiencing a ‘growth spurt,’ as in the other one, the word ‘development’ was used. In this manner, four types of readings were presented: harmful bacteria – bodily metaphors, safe bacteria – bodily metaphors, harmful bacteria – no metaphors and safe bacteria – no metaphors.

After these readings, the groups filled in two questionnaires, one about their opinions about minimum wage and immigration, and the other about their concerns about contagion or contamination. The group that read about the bacteria as being harmful expressed more concern in this second questionnaire about their own bodies and contagion. Yet, more interestingly this part of the group that read the U.S. history article containing bodily metaphors also expressed more concern regarding immigration: primed by the metaphor of the body-nation, these readers connected two entirely different issues. There was no considerable difference among the groups in their views on minimum wage and the researchers concluded that whereas the body-nation metaphor does not have an influence on the issue of minimum wage, it does have a significant one when opinions about immigration are formed. In evoking concerns about one’s own body and contagion and then connecting the body metaphorically to the nation, views on immigration change – and, this happens without the participants’ awareness. Eula Biss, in her long essay *On Immunity* (2014) notes about this experiment

that “[w]ithout having the metaphor explicitly established for them, those people gravitated toward thinking of immigrants as bacteria, invasively contaminating the body of the nation” (C22).

The metaphor of harmful pathogens or ‘contagion’ is often employed in the most differing situations: regarding computers, internet and viruses, when we talk about how ideas influence people and even how certain behaviours are imitated by others. All instances share the idea that there is a point of contact through which a transfer takes place. In cultural representations the notion of contagion has played a major role and one of the most widespread, infamous, and oldest cultural metaphors in this context is the plague. In his *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault relates to the “plague as a form, at once real and imaginary, of disorder that had as its medical and political correlative discipline. Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of ‘contagions,’ of plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder” (Foucault 198). Contagion, and most notably the ‘Black Death,’ has for centuries inspired the human imagination and fears and as such, images of pestilence have been part of the earliest works of arts and in various canonical texts and have never lost their actuality (see also: Cohn, Gilman, Gomel, Mitchell, Silva, Watts).

Writings about the plague date back to the times of ancient Greece (Thucydides in Periclean Athens) and has left a considerable breadcrumb trail to follow. Of course, ‘the plague,’ though not the bubonic plague, plays an important role in Exodus: the ten plagues of Egypt. Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decamerone* (1350) is a fictional collection of a hundred stories told by those ten people on a patio as they try to stay away from plague-stricken Florence. The plague is most famously employed as a curse by Shakespeare’s Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* (1597). It is also part of the setting for Ben Jonson’s play *The Alchemist* (first performed in 1610). Daniel Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1721) recounts the experiences of the year 1665 during the Great Plague in London. In Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826) the plague is set in an imagined future world and makes for a “series of death vignettes, paring down its considerable cast of dramatis personae first to a small group of refugees, then to a family, a threesome, a couple, and finally to the last man, a tenuous narrative ‘I’ wandering over the depopulated earth and slowly dissolving in its silence,” as Gomel notes in her article “The Plague of Utopias” (2000: 141). Giuseppe Ripamonti’s account of the plague in seventeenth-century Milan,

*De peste quae fuit anno 1630* (1640), was the inspiration for the visitation of the black death in Alessandro Manzoni's historical novel *I promessi sposi* (1827), still one of the most read Italian novels from the Romantic period.

As the bubonic plague ceased to trouble European populations, its recurrence in texts has moved away from witnessed accounts to a more fictional realm and used as a literary trope and a metaphor. The metaphor of the plague, or of contagion more generally, has again gained new ground in our globalized world in which bodies move over larger distances and in larger amounts. It is this particular instance of the plague as metaphor that is of interest to me here, as it is one employed also by the Dutch author Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer in his 2013 novel *La Superba* in which he interweaves contemporary problems of migration with Genoa's history as a plague city. In this manner, as I will argue more elaborately throughout this thesis, Pfeijffer's novel critiques the plague-inspired language used when talking about immigrants. As such, I am interested in the plague in figurative language in discourses about modern issues. Raymond Stephanson argues in his article about plague narratives (1987) that "[l]iterature has reflected the tendency [to make plague a vehicle for allegory]" (225).<sup>1</sup> In this regard, I have selected three literary fictions to read alongside Pfeijffer in order to gain a better understanding about the plague as modern metaphor/figure: Hermann Hesse's *Narziss und Goldmund* (1930), Albert Camus' *La Peste* (1947) and *The White Plague* (1982) by American author Frank Herbert. Each novel connects this ancient disease to a contemporary societal issue. Hesse's late Romantic narrative set vaguely in the Middle Ages uses the plague as allegorical figure connected to the city to convey his concerns with a continually industrialized Germany. Camus' absurdist fiction has been interpreted as an allegory for man's existence and adjustment to a new (godless) view of the universe and his own place in it, but most notably as an allegory of fascism. As Tony Judt notes in the afterword to my translated edition (2001): "Simone de Beauvoir especially disapproved strongly of his use of a natural pestilence as a substitute for (she thought) fascism" as "it relieves men of their political responsibilities, she insisted" (246). Yet Judt points out that it was not fascism in particular, but "dogma, conformity, compliance and cowardice" in general that Camus was after in his plague-novel (246). The plague here is read as a disease of the mind and of community. Herbert's science

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<sup>1</sup> I will provide a more comprehensive definition of both metaphor and allegory and the difference between them in the theoretical framework.

fiction novel provides an imaginative space to investigate questions of biological engineering in relation to IRA terrorism and even capitalism as he conjures the images of the archaic disease through a new man-made bacterium that infects only women.

*Modern Plague Writings, Ancient Imagery*

Hesse's novel, set in Medieval Germany (though the exact time and place remain unknown), investigates the notion of the human as wanderer in a time of a plague epidemic related by a heterodiegetic narrator. The narrative is circular as it begins at the cloister Mariabronn where the young ascetic teacher Narziß grows very fond of one of the new students, the kind and buoyant Goldmund. Narziß recognizes in Goldmund his opposite and convinces him to disregard his father's plans for him to become a monk and instead to remember his mother's nature that is much closer to his own. After Goldmund's first encounter with women and sexuality, he leaves Mariabronn to wander through the country, visiting villages and roaming through the forests. After many adventures and experiences living the life of a wayfarer and lover of women, Goldmund finds himself beholding a beautiful carved Madonna statue and he has an aesthetic experience that brings him to his first goal: wanting to become an artist. He learns that this statue was carved by Master Niklaus and he becomes his apprentice. Though he is very successful, his first statue is the image of Saint John with the face of Narziß, the wandering life continues to be most alluring to him. In his continued wandering, Goldmund meets the plague on his path. Oskar Seidlin notes in "Hermann Hesse: The Exorcism of the Demon" (1950) that the "Black Death, which throws the world around him into a delirious frenzy of lust and greed, only helps Goldmund to strengthen his equilibrium and to withdraw into an idyll, one of the very few that the vagabond finds in his restless wanderings" (333). In this instance, the plague that causes a stagnation, a halt to Goldmund's travelling and the horrific experiences of the epidemic bring him a new goal: carving the image of the primal mother, of death. The plague ceases and he returns to Master Niklaus' city and finds out that the Master has died. He begins a new dangerous affair and gets himself imprisoned. It is in this predicament that he is finally re-joined with Narziß who saves his life and returns with him to Mariabronn. Back home, at the end of his life, Goldmund carves several beautiful images, among them the new Madonna.

Hesse's novel about the unusual friendship between the Apollonian Narziß and Dionysian Goldmund has gained much scholarly attention, just as his other works, most notably in the period after the Second World War up until the seventies, as what Ingo Cornils and Osman Durrani refer to as 'a fevered interest' and 'Hesse-Mania' in their introduction to *Hermann Hesse Today* (2005). The opposition between city and the idyllic rural surroundings is an important aspect of the novel, one that may be seen in the light of Hesse's discontent with the industrial age as Peter Heller has observed in "The Writer in Conflict with His Age" (1954). Yet, the city as place of the plague, and how this ties in with the metaphorical aspects of the plague, deserves more critical consideration. As such, I will develop the argument that Hesse's tale is both a turn back to late Romanticism and a critique on modern society through an aversion of the city, strengthened by narrating the city as a place of plague: the ravages of the plague become a metaphor for the decline in quality of human life in the industrialized city.

Camus' *The Plague*, is set in the Algerian city of Oran in the 1940's. A sudden epidemic causes grave concern as the medical officials recognize the historical bubonic plague and the city is sealed off. The people of Oran thus find themselves suddenly imprisoned and separated from loved ones. The protagonist, Dr Bernard Rieux – who is revealed in the last pages to be the third-person narrator – is separated from the woman he loves and struggles to 'fight back' the epidemic. The narrator, as he claims to be an objective witness, relates the accounts of Rieux, Raymond Rambert (as he conveys his experiences to Rieux) and Jean Tarrou (through his notes) as they roam the city until the epidemic is overcome. Peta Mitchell notes in her work *Contagious Metaphor* (2012) that from the very first pages "Camus asks us to read his plague metaphorically, if not symbolically, by quoting as an epigraph Defoe's reflections upon his Robinson Crusoe," that is: "It is as reasonable to represent one kind of imprisonment by another, as it is to represent any thing that really exists, by that which exists not" (50). As mentioned, the plague becomes an allegory for fascism. My interest here is how this symbolic imagery of the plague is developed in regard to the notions of the nation and its borders, of Algeria as French colony and of fascist discourse. In this instance, Camus presents the most interesting material for comparison with Hesse, Herbert and Pfeijffer.

In Herbert's 1982 science fiction novel it is a troubled human mind that is responsible for creating a bacterium that only infects women with the plague. The protagonist John O'Neill's wife and two children are killed by an IRA bomb during a



holiday in Dublin. A devastated O'Neill returns to the U.S. and produces – as he is a biochemist – a new kind of bacterium that causes a new disease only in women while the men are carriers. This illness is called 'the white plague,' alluding to the historical 'black plague' or bubonic plague. Ellen Feehan notes in "Frank Herbert and the Making of Myths" (1992) that "John's reaction, shortly after the bombing, is as political as it is personal," meaning that it is not just a terroristic act out of personal revenge, but an attack on the violence of the Irish Nationalists (292). O'Neill sends letters to the authorities explaining his revenge and stating his demands: he has aimed particularly at Ireland because of the IRA terrorists, at England because they caused the Irish groups to revolt their oppressive governing of Ireland, and Libya for presumably training these terrorists. The epidemic soon spreads and the narrative follows the medical and political officials in the Western parts of the world (mostly Ireland, England and the United States) in their attempts to inhibit the disease from spreading, to find a cure, and to play out different power struggles. As such, the novel deals with Ireland's Troubles and politics in a globalized world under the ramifications of a man-made plague.

Alternately, the narrative follows the young couple, doctor and nurse, Stephen and Kate who manage to get themselves isolated in time in 'the tank,' and O'Neill's – under the false name O'Donnell – return to quarantined Ireland and his journey alongside Joseph Herity, Father Michael Flannery and a boy who does not speak. Herity, who is a former member of the IRA and was in part responsible for and present at the bombing in Grafton street, has received orders to reveal the real identity of John O'Donnell and to this end Herity guides him on foot through Ireland's countryside for months before arriving at John's desired destination: Killaloe laboratory. O'Neill's split personality – one part of him madly relishing in his revenge, safely covered deep within him, and the other part shrewdly portraying a sane individual to the world, yet also realising the exceptional suffering he has caused – is more and more dominated by the first. When John comes to a full realization of what he has done, O'Neill within resurfaces and he turns insane as his mind suppresses this acknowledgment of his perpetratorship. John's true identity is unveiled, but he escapes punishment and disappears. I will discuss Herbert's text not so much as an allegory, but as a narrative in which the plague is a science fictional tool to make visible the destructive tendencies of nationalism.

Finally, it is Pfeijffer's novel that brings the contemporary problematic of migration together with Genoa's history as a port city and the ravages of the plague. The

novel's first-person narrator and protagonist, autofictionally called Ilja Leonard, conveys his experiences as a Dutch migrant who has come to live in the Italian city of Genoa. The novel is set up as a collection of notes, a novel yet to be conceived. In this manner, the reader is constantly reminded of the fictionality of the text. Yet, the effect is quite the opposite: the problems of migration seem all the more part of our real world in this construction of the future-novel.<sup>2</sup> In his wanderings through the city (which he addresses as though it were a woman, a lover), he encounters many other migrants, more or less like himself, in search of a better future elsewhere. The fellow-wanderers frequently ask Ilja to listen to their stories and, as his narration is set up as supposed letters to a friend back in the Netherlands, he conveys these stories to this faceless narratee in what is presented as a novel still to be written. In this contemporary setting, the narrator interweaves scenes of Genoa's history as a port city that suffered the ravages of the plague.<sup>3</sup> What is of particular interest to me here is that Pfeijffer uses the (travelling) rat as a symbol for disease and that he connects this with the figure of the migrant (himself included). By using this image, Pfeijffer points at and critiques anxieties regarding migration policies in Italy and the rest of the EU, namely: that there are not enough recourses to support ourselves *and* them, but moreover that these immigrants bring along with them ideologies that are not only different, but opposite from Western views on society and these ideas might fester and infect the collective body of the nation.

The comparison between Hesse, Camus, Herbert and Pfeijffer will thus be cross-cultural, cross-linguistic and cross-temporal. Also, the analysis will move between different genres: philosophical fiction, absurdist fiction, science fiction and postmodern fiction. It seems apt to traverse these boundaries of times, languages, cultures and genres in an argument for the porousness of borders. The overall focus is on the language of the plague employed to convey modern issues of industrialization, fascism, terrorism and migration. I argue that the sentiments to keep danger at bay in face of the other/the unknown are not exclusive to our modern times and that the ancient disease

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<sup>2</sup> As such, the narrator states: "mijn roman, die zich, zoals je zult hebben begrepen, zal moeten gaan concentreren op het grote actuele vraagstuk van de immigratie, waarbij ik mijn eigen geslaagde luxe-immigratie zal contrasteren met het betreurenswaardige lot van al die sloebbers uit Marokko en Senegal die in dezelfde stegen zijn verdwaald in hun fantasie van een beter leven (92-93).

<sup>3</sup> One of the first signs of the plague in Pfeijffer's text, apart from the rats that trace through his narrative, is a short retelling of a scene from the *Decamerone* (204).

that has become known as *the* plague plays an important role in our (modern) literatures that concern themselves with several societal issues.

### *Approach, Concerns and a Look on What Lies Ahead*

Methodologically, I will travel in the space between the medical humanities, migration studies, and literary studies in order to see where they intersect; the theoretical framework will mostly be an exploration of these fields. The first part of the theoretical framework will deal with the specific role of narrative and literature in the field of the medical humanities and give an outline of the medical history concerning the plague as well as a sketch of the disease and its transmission before going into plague writing as classification. A connection will be made between migration studies' interest in borders as liminal or third space, movements of people(s) and globalization, and the notion of contagion with a special regard to the plague's history. Hereafter I will move from the literal to the figurative in considering theories that deal with (the distinction between) literal and figurative uses of language. In this regard I will make use of I.A. Richards tenor-vehicle-model of metaphor and of the arguments developed by both Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida: that figurative language (e.g. metaphor) is constitutive of thought and our view of the world. Approaching illness as metaphor has been an important subject of the medical humanities since Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) in which she actually proposes a non-metaphorical view of illness, in particular cancer. Sontag discusses how certain diseases are paradigmatic in certain times and have in a sense become adjectival. I am both interested in disease as metaphor, more specifically the plague as metaphor, and metaphors of disease (the figures used when talking about the sick body and the notion of contagion). To what extent do literatures about the plague make use of, but also possibly critique the use of illness as metaphor?

From a broader perspective, I am concerned with metaphors of the body, that is: with the figurative relationship between the body and the entities of nation and city. In this regard I am concerned with notions of 'Self' and 'Other' and subsequently the need for (bodily and communal) boundaries and the equally important need to transgress them. As I will show, the analogy between the body and the community (the nation, the city) precedes and implies, or is constitutive of, the metaphors of the plague (and illness more generally). In this figure of nation/body, social unrest can be looked upon as a disease, moving across national borders can be seen as a threat to an organism as a

whole. Sontag points at the employment of infectious disease as metaphor for social issues as she notes that epidemics “were a common figure of social disorder” (*Illness* C8).

These issues will be viewed from a perspective informed by biopolitics as first developed by Michel Foucault in which the body becomes the centre of political concern. Foucault writes: “the body is a bio-political reality, medicine is a bio-political strategy” (*Bios* 27; Elden 242). Elden puts forward that Foucault “stresses that this should *not merely be understood metaphorically*, but as depending on the material bodies of individuals, and the material conditions of life” (Elden 248). Elana Gomel points out in her article “The Plague of Utopias” (2000) that “disease is one of the central tropes of biopolitics, shaping much of the twentieth-century discourse of power, domination, and the body” (407). The notion of biopolitics was later taken up by the contemporary Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito as he criticises Foucault and Giorgio Agamben for their emphasis on sovereignty and a state of exception and instead proposes an affirmative biopolitics. Esposito explores, in his ‘trilogy’ *Communitas* (1998) *Immunitas* (2002) and *Bios* (2004) the relationship between human bodies and societies, comparing the body’s immune system to the nation’s law as both being a strategy for survival when faced with a threat (of invasion) and an ongoing relationship between inside and outside, between Self and Other.

As such, Esposito uses the language of immunity, both in the bodily and in the political sense, to describe as well as critique modern notions of power, life and community. Becoming immune, as we tend to think of it, entails a process of closing off, of tightening boundaries. Biss notes that “[o]ur understanding of immunity remains remarkably dependent on metaphor, even at the most technical level” and that this “metaphor of a body at war” is most often not perceived as a metaphor (C11). Esposito argues that contemporary societies have a tendency towards autoimmunity: a self-destructive overreaction of exclusion (in this regard Esposito builds on Giorgio Agamben’s notions of ‘homo sacer’ and the state of exception). Issues of immunity in the medical sense and its conflation with societal issues, in particular in its relation with the border, will be explored in the next sections. Where industrialization in Hesse can be viewed as a disease that has entered the body of society, causing a deterioration in quality of life, Camus taps into eugenic discourse of a diseased society employed by fascist ideologies and brings the plague as symbolic vehicle back into a more ambiguous realm (e.g. Stephanson). Herbert’s explorations of bioengineering and terrorism through

a science fiction of the plague questions human's position of knowledge of bodies, either human or pathogen. In Pfeijffer the plague's imagery culminates in the city of Genoa in face of the contemporary refugee crisis. The metaphorical relation between the rat and the refugee is implicitly composed through the narrator's position as outsider that contrasts with his imagined feeling of belonging.

The 'body' of the thesis will consist of three chapters that will combine philosophical notions, metaphor and literary analysis of the four (post-)modern plague fictions, arguing that the plague is 'still with us' in these texts. The first chapter will deal with the analogies (and differences) between the nation (or the city/community) and the body as they set up the fundamentals of the dynamic metaphor of body-as-nation or nation-as-body (both moving from vehicle to tenor and vice versa). The first question at stake is (how) we imagine our bodies and communities as unitary, and in face of a threat the desire to make them enclosed. In this regard, the national discourses and contexts that are indispensable to read the novels in light of the (critical) figurative language will be described. Moving from the individual to the collective via the notion of contagion, I will consider the plague as 'primordial' calamity that takes place mostly in the city. The second and third chapters will develop these themes more specifically and figuratively. The backbone of the second chapter 'Borders and Membranes' will be the notion of containment and the theme of 'keeping at bay' both actual diseases and things disease-like (to avoid [like] the plague).

In this chapter, themes of the city in lockdown and quarantine are foregrounded and the main question is: how are these sentiments constitutive of a possibly 'unhealthy' version of the body-nation figure, more specifically when it comes to the plague as metaphor? The third and last chapter is, on the other hand, more engaged with movement and transgression and will make an effort to move beyond the negative connotation of 'invasion' and 'contagion' to a more positive understanding of our porous bodies and communities through the notion of 'incorporation.' This is of importance because, as the plague is part of our modern world in its metaphorical figure, we should remain alert to the potential harmfulness of such illness-metaphors and critically reframe them in terms of their contexts. Here, Esposito's reworking of the notion of 'communitas' (and how this relates to immunity) is in my opinion highly valuable. Thus, the following questions are at stake: How does the language of collective fear regarding a devastating illness become tied in with our language of crossing borders? Can the way

the plague has been dealt with in literature throughout several ages teach us something about the way we talk about infectious disease and contemporary issues? (How) is the plague either used as metaphor or as symbol – the narrative in its entirety as extended metaphor or allegory – for issues of industrialization, warfare and migration? And, (when) are metaphors of the body in politics harmful and when are they fruitful?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### **Medical Humanities and Literary Studies**

#### *Medicine and Literature*

The disciplines of medicine and the humanities seem to differ more than just a little bit in their endeavours to gain knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Whereas medicine uses a traditional model of gaining scientific knowledge – employing empiricist experiments and investigations – to research the (human) body, the humanities seek to learn more about the human mind through the arts. However, for several decades now (since the 1980's), an interest has arisen in the intersection between the two, resulting in a new interdisciplinary field of medical humanities (also later called health humanities) (Crawford et. al. 2015, Novillo-Corvalán 2015). What can these two quite opposite practices offer each other and how can this intersection open up a new and fruitful conversation? As Patricia Novillo-Corvalán puts forward in her introduction to *Latin American and Iberian Perspectives on Literature and Medicine* (2015) “[t]he art of medicine is traditionally associated with the Olympic deity Apollo, god of poetry, healing, and prophecy, who stands as an apt symbol for the confluence and reciprocity between medicine and the arts” (1). In this sense, the idea of the humanities and medicine (or even the ‘hard’ sciences in general) as two distinct or even opposite fields seems a modern one. While there are certainly great advantages to be taken from the specialized forms of knowledge, we may ask ourselves if we have lost something along the way. In this regard, I want to contribute to bringing medicine into conversation with literary studies: how can medical knowledge of the plague (and its history) be fruitful in exploring the figurative language concerning the plague as employed by the authors discussed here? But first, I will outline how literature and medicine have formed a new dialogue thus far.

Attention has been focused on the narrative aspect of medicine, taking place mostly between physician and patient: in order for the doctor to make a diagnosis, the patient narrates the (hi)story of her or his ailments; also, narrating one’s story of being ill might be cathartic or therapeutic (literature and medicine in a way becomes literature

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<sup>4</sup> An issue raised famously raised for example by C.P. Snow in his lecture “The Two Cultures” (1959).

as medicine).<sup>5</sup> Presumably, following Anne H. Hawkins and Marilyn C. McEntyre, “literature and literary skills enable physicians to think both critically and empathetically about moral issues in medicine” (Novillo-Corvalán: 5). On the other end of the spectrum, there is the literary genre of pathography: personal experiences of illness and disease put into an autobiographical narrative. Paul Crawford et. al. point out, quoting Anne Whitehead, that for “both writer and reader ... pathography functions as the site of a limit experience, an encounter with (possible) death that engages powerful questions of consciousness, agency, and identity” (C3). This is for example also what Susan Sontag does in her *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), though Novillo Corvalán reminds us that “rather than offering a first-person account of her experience as a cancer patient, Sontag fleshed out an impressive cultural and literary history of the symbolic constructions of illness in Western culture” (12). Hers is not necessarily a pathography in its purest sense, it is also and maybe foremost a critique of culture and its use of metaphor in talking about illness. Literature about illness does however not have to be autobiographical per se, a lot of literary texts are and have been about illness and its correlation with death. As Margaret Healy has pointed out, literature: “has been preoccupied with illness, disease, death and with *social sickness* too – with making sense of more troubling and contested aspects of life” (Novillo-Corvalán 4; my emphasis). In this last addition of ‘social sickness’ by Healy we already find a metaphorical use of illness that has become so normal to us we do not even recognize it as metaphor.

The correlation of narrative and illness is also famously explored by Elaine Scarry in her work *The Body in Pain* (1985). In this book Scarry points at the difficulty of expressing physical pain, of conveying such an intimate bodily experience in language and explains that in experiencing pain we are thrown back into our pre-lingual state of being. Important here is the individual’s relation to others, as “[w]hen one hears about another person’s pain, the events happening within the interior of that person’s body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact” (Scarry 3). Thus, the experience of pain seems ‘unsharable’ as it “resists objectification in language”

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<sup>5</sup> This narrative interest in medicine has been researched for example by Rita Charon who herself was both a physician and a literary scholar. Crawford et. al. state that “Concern with literature, writing or text, and health and illness, can be seen in a multitude of intersecting functional and academic endeavours, from the use of literature in the education of doctors ... to the development of medically-focussed scholarly or literary analysis of specific texts and conditions or traumas ... and the therapeutic uses of constructing narrative” (C3).



(Scarry 5).<sup>6</sup> A patient relating her or his pain to the doctor becomes in this view a potentially unreliable narrator. Interesting to note here is that infectious disease is also referred to as ‘communicable’ disease, as for example Priscilla Wald does (*Contagious* 2008); whereas the pain caused is unsharable, the instigators of pain, either by means of weapons or pathogens, are communicable. Scarry points at the symbolic relation between weapon, wound and pain in stating that people have the “mental habit of recognizing pain in the weapon” (16). In this sense, the showing of a weapon, as part of a threat, as part of torture, the weapon becomes already painful without even putting it to use. In witnessing pain, the issue to speak on behalf of others, of those who are in pain, arises and “the human voice must aspire to become a precise reflection of material reality” (Scarry 9).<sup>7</sup>

A different focal point of studying the interrelation of literature and medicine is presented by the accounts of physician-authors – who seem to be epitomes of the connection between humanities and the sciences – like Freud, Oliver Sacks, Santiago Ramón y Cajal, Alfred Döblin and Anton Chekhov, who have received much attention.<sup>8</sup> In his article “Literature about medicine may be all that can save us” (2016), Andrew Solomon notes that “Chekhov famously quipped: ‘Medicine is my lawful wife and literature my mistress; when I get tired of one, I spend the night with the other’” (np). Solomon notes that indeed language is an important common ground of the two areas, one that specifically authors with a medical background seem to inhabit. In this view, “[l]anguage itself is a physical act; it comes of neurons, of activation of Broca’s area and Wernicke’s area in the brain, of lips and tongues and throats that speak, hands that write or type. To treat it as a distracting adjunct to corporeality is to deny its nature” (np). In

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<sup>6</sup> See: “To witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language; but conversely, to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself” (Scarry 6).

<sup>7</sup> To speak on behalf of someone else’s pain, the utterance of pain in public discourse, for example becomes important in the endeavours by Amnesty International as they “must somehow convey to the reader the aversiveness being experienced inside the body of someone whose country may be far away, whose name can barely be pronounced, and whose ordinary life is unknown except that it is known that that ordinary life has ceased to exist” (Scarry 9).

<sup>8</sup> The Dutch twentieth-century author Simon Vestdijk also was a physician and would be an interesting new object of study in this regard. Also, another branch of the field of literature and medicine is an interest in medical discourse in literary texts, mostly from a historical perspective. Novillo-Corvalán notes that “medical history is bound to literature through language and representation” (2015: 2). For example, Larry Duffy argues that “[b]y articulating in fictional form the recasting of the relationships of pharmacy with other disciplines and professions, [Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*] reconsiders pharmacy’s – and literature’s – disciplinary limits” (71).

relation to her exploration of the unutterable experience of pain, Scarry points out that “though there is ordinarily no language for pain, under the pressure of the desire to eliminate pain, an at least fragmentary means of verbalization is available both to those who are themselves in pain and to those who wish to speak on behalf of others” (13). Especially for psychology, the linguistic aspect seems significant: “communication is the practice, and words are the medicine itself”; and, following Adam Phillips, Solomon notes that the ambition of medicine is to know other people; the disappointing revelation of psychology is that this is impossible” (np). In this view, narrative is a tool to ‘know other people’ just as reading literature is in a way also about wanting to know others.

This thesis is an intersection between medicine and literature because it considers medical and cultural history of the plague in regard to modern fictional plague-writings. Moreover, it views literary texts as possible pathographies, and more particularly the plague fictions of Hesse, Camus, Herbert, and Pfeijffer as pathographies of societies, of nations and even of modernity. In using the tool of metaphor to analyse how notions of infectious disease colour our language of migration, terrorism, and warfare, it is an investigation into fictional narratives of the plague. Moving from the umbrella metaphor of the body as nation (or the nation as body) to the particular metaphor of the plague, this thesis brings together cultural connotations of infectious disease and discourses of the nation-state. In this sense, it inhabits a new territory in the wake of Susan Sontag’s work on illness and metaphor. The plague, I argue, has become a heavily loaded concept through its specific (literary) history and, when used as a metaphor, carries along this imagery and connects it to the issue for which it is a vehicle. In order to gain a clearer view of the illness that is at the forefront of this thesis, I will first give a brief outline of the plague as the disease that has instigated tremendous fear in several severe outbreaks and demanded a whole new way of thinking about and dealing with infectious disease.

### *Infectious Disease: About the Plague*

Even long before understanding of germs was part of the medical practice, there was a notion of ‘contagion,’ of the travelling of illness through bodies and from people to people. The sick body was known as a potential danger to others, to the collective body. It was not, however, until the nineteenth century, as medical knowledge was propelled

by the development of better microscopes<sup>9</sup>, that Robert Koch and Louis Pasteur independently established a 'germ theory'; as Sheldon J. Watts describes in his book *Epidemics and History: Disease. Power. Imperialism* (1998), Pasteur and Koch "discovered that anthrax – a disease of cattle and horses which can jump and attack humans – was caused by a micro-organism too small to be seen with the naked eye but large enough to be detected by a high-powered microscope" (4-5). With this germ theory the first steps were taken towards a better understanding of making a body immune to disease. In *On Immunity* Biss describes the anxieties surrounding vaccination and provides them with a cultural historical background that give a more profound view of the notion of immunity. Biss notes that "[g]erm theory was widely accepted by 1897, the year *Dracula* was published, but only after having been ridiculed earlier in the century" (C3). Biss discusses Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the metaphors that are contained within the novel, most notably that of disease: "Dracula arrives in England just as a new disease might arrive, on a boat" (C3). Vampires became figures for vaccinators, penetrating the skin, as vaccination became a hot topic of discussion in the nineteenth century. Of course, this new metaphor carried with it very negative connotations: Dracula is a monster that instills fear, moves around and as Biss notes, his "monstrosity is contagious" (C3). As the narrative of *Dracula* "unfolds, [it] appeals to fears of immigration as well as contagion" (C27).

Anxieties about contagion are not particular to but play an important role in plague times. Besides the resurgence of a heightened concern with contagion with the invention of the microscope, the discovery of cell-structures and the development of germ theory, it was mainly HIV/AIDS, the paradigmatic disease of the 1980's that "taught us the importance of protecting our bodies from contact with other bodies," as the works of Biss, Mitchell and Sontag illustrate (Biss C24). Moreover, Gomel points out – referring to 'Paula A. Treichler's influential essay "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse" – that the point where meaning is created in language intersects with the

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<sup>9</sup> In "The Corrected Pessimist," part of his *Vacation Stories* (1885-1886), Santiago Ramón y Cajal explores the consequences of a man who is gifted with vision that is magnified a thousand times. It is an interesting science fiction story that could not have existed in this form without the existence of an actual microscope and germ theory as he gives detailed accounts of the germs surrounding us, going into and out of our bodies. In encountering the face of his love interest, the protagonist, with his newly acquired magnified vision recounts: "in the shower of his beloved's breath, once inhaled with such pleasure, he thought he had seen the *capsules of Fränkel's diplococcus*. There, lurking like some threatening shadows, were the terrible infectious agents that cause pneumonia" (154-155).

point of the body through which HIV enters the human body: “the rectum, the vagina, or the puncture of a needle. In a reversal of the medieval iconography of the plague, the *danse macabre*, which foregrounded the commonality of the disaster, the discourse of AIDS focuses on the selectivity of contagion” (418). As such, plague signifies a communal event, whereas HIV signifies a private one. However, as I will illustrate more comprehensively in the second chapter, HIV and plague are more related than Gomel puts forward here: the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* has inscribed itself into the genetic material of certain bodies and as such has generated an immunity in some individuals in regard to the HIV-virus.<sup>10</sup> And, in Biss’ words: the “[b]ubonic plague still exists, but it has ceased to be the Plague” (C26). Our modern day ‘plagues’ are indeed more in the direction of AIDS, Ebola, Zika, influenza or even heart disease, stroke or dementia.<sup>11</sup> The plague thus metaphorically has come to stand for diseases that affect considerable amount of people, or, maybe even more importantly, instigate a certain degree of (global) concern. Biss crucially states that “[p]erhaps the final qualification for what constitutes a plague is its proximity to your own life” (C26). Thus, the important question to ask here is: to whom is the plague a plague? And, subsequently: how can we value the reactions to and measures taken against the plague accordingly?

In the wake of infectious disease always lies the fear of an epidemic: the fear that a dangerous illness spreads to (a larger) part of the collective body. It is, as I will show more elaborately in my later chapters, a fear that often instigates an inhibition of movement. As Esposito writes, these kinds of “events call on a protective response in the face of a risk” (*Immunitas* 1). Epidemics of different kinds have ravaged human populations throughout history, and the meanings attached to it have varied. Sontag connects to the notion of the epidemic a belief in punishment from a higher order, moving from the individual to the collective: “The standard accounts of epidemics ... are mainly of the devastating effect of disease upon character. The weaker the chronicler’s preconception of disease as a punishment for wickedness, the more likely that the account will stress the moral corruption made manifest by the disease’s spread. Even if

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<sup>10</sup> Gilman notes in similar regard that: “Viral or bacterial agents thus have a life of their own – almost, we might say, a mind of their own. Inscribing their own histories in the bodies of their hosts over hundreds of human generations, capable of prolonged retreat to withstand adverse conditions, ‘willing’ to wait, they vary their habits and evolve in their chemical makeup, often combining with other microorganisms to adapt to ecological change and take advantage of new opportunities” (Gilman 10).

<sup>11</sup> Michael B. A. Oldstone’s book *Viruses, Plagues & History* (2009) offers a good biomedical and historical exploration of both historical and modern day ‘plagues.’

the disease is not thought to be a judgment on the community, it becomes one – retroactively – as it sets in motion an inexorable collapse of morals and manners” (1-C5). Samuel K. Cohn on the other hand stresses in *Cultures of Plague* (2010), “that major mortalities and epidemics do not necessarily lead to transcendental religiosity and the weakening of state formations as is commonly generalized across the world history of epidemics” (7-8).

Charles E. Rosenberg notes that “[w]e use the term epidemic in a variety of ways – most of them metaphorical, moving it further and further from its emotional roots in specific past events” (278). Rosenberg argues that the history of the plague and the human responses to the plague have the form of a narrative that is particular to its time and place: “Just as a playwright chooses a theme and manages a plot development, so a particular society constructs its characteristic response to an epidemic” (279). In her article “The Nineteenth Century Quarantine Narrative” (2013), Kelly Bezio discusses the notion of ‘contagionism’ – a belief in that infectious disease spreads from one person to the next by touch, from the individual to “interchangeable victims (or vectors) of disease” (67) – in opposition to a fervent anti-contagionist movement – the belief that infectious disease spreads as a result of ‘poisonous miasmas’ evaporating from a particular place (64). In Bezio’s account, a certain narrative form of travel writing becomes the voice of the latter group: the quarantine narrative – as opposed to outbreak narratives.

The plague, or more specifically the *bubonic* plague was caused by a bacterium now known as *Yersinia pestis*.<sup>12</sup> The bacterium responsible for several horrible outbreaks mostly throughout the Middle Ages travelled through the bodies of fleas who in their turn travelled on the skin of rats.<sup>13</sup> The bacterium enters the body of the rat flea, ‘glues’ its spines together and in this manner blocks its valve which makes it impossible for the flea to move blood into its stomach. The only way for the blood to go is back through the wound into the body of the one who is bitten (a rat or a human), accompanied by *Yersinia pestis* (Scott & Duncan 58). As the “flea is unable to digest its food ... [it] becomes voraciously hungry. After the rat dies of plague, the flea looks

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<sup>12</sup> Shiba Saburo and Alexander Yersin discovered, again independently, the bacillus responsible for the bubonic plague which now carries the name *Yersinia pestis* (Watts 5).

<sup>13</sup> Gilman points out that “epidemiologists have identified three global pandemics of the bubonic plague: the Plague of Justinian, which ravaged the Roman Empire in the sixth century; the Black Death of the fourteenth century; and the outbreak of 1894-1903, which spread from Hong Kong and caused millions of deaths across east and south Asia” (9).

desperately around for food and if a human host is available moves there” (Watts 5). Thus, like Biss’ *Dracula*, the flea transfers the bacterium into the human bloodstream by penetrating the skin and sucking her or his blood. Important to note is that the bacterium does not travel from one human host to another, but moves from a flea host to either a rat or a human one (Gilman, Watts, Rosenberg, Scott & Duncan). As such, the bacterium endlessly moves from host to host, causing disease and death: all hosts are only temporary. Watts points out that quarantines were only effective not because it inhibited the movement of human bodies per se, but moreover of those of their travel companions: rats and fleas (8).<sup>14</sup> In some cases *Yersinia pestis* can develop a pneumonic variation of the disease, in this instance the disease does become infectious through breathing.

Once present in the bloodstream of the human host, the body’s immune system kicks in. However, a particular type of immune-active cell, a tissue macrophage that ‘eats’ the dangerous bacterium in order to break it down, is unable to do the latter and instead forms a protective body for the bacterium to inhabit. Like a brooding machine, the macrophage with the initial function to ‘kill’ bacteria and other dangerous elements, actually becomes a nest for *Yersinia pestis* from which they will regain strength, gain in number and eventually hatch, spreading the infection to other parts of the body: the bacterium travels “through the lymphatic vessels and *invades* the blood stream to cause lesions in the spleen, liver, kidney and other organs of the body” (Scott & Duncan: 70; my emphasis). Thus, against this ‘invasion,’ the human body’s ‘defence’ is often ineffective, or even counter-effective as the bacterium actually makes use of the immune system turning it against itself, and this instance of the plague will become majorly important in view of Esposito. The infected person will develop a fever (part of the body’s normal reaction to an infection/invasion), a severe headache and possibly other pains throughout the body (often in the limbs, abdomen and back). Bubos, painfully swollen and inflamed lymph nodes, are the most notable and distinctive symptom. As the disease progresses, internal bleedings occur, sometimes underneath the skin with black bluish patches as a result (possibly this is the origin of the phrase ‘Black Death’).

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<sup>14</sup> Watts points out that rats even “willingly boarded ships and settled down in the saddle bags of overland travellers” (6). Also the halt in trade was an important factor as “a displaced rat flea might hibernate for up to fifty days in grain (for making bread, for most people the stuff of life) or in soft white things, such as woollen cloth ... transport [of these items] was one of the ways in which humans spread the plague” (Watts 5). The concept of quarantine will be discussed more elaborately in the second chapter.

Heavily ill, the patient will eventually fall into a state of shock, and may appear a bit better at this stage as the fever comes down slightly. Then the fever returns and the illness will be worse, in this stage, pneumonic plague can develop (Scott & Duncan 66).

### *Plague and Pestilence in Daily Discourse*

Regarding 'plague' and 'pestilence' as a figure of speech, it is important first to look at the exact meanings of the two words. The Oxford English Dictionary Online states that 'pestilence' is a "fatal epidemic or disease, affecting people or animals" and that it specifically refers to the bubonic plague. In addition, it can also mean "[t]hat which is morally or socially pernicious; evil conduct, wickedness, sin," or "[t]hat which plagues or troubles; disaster, calamity ... in a weakened sense: a person who or thing which is troublesome or annoying; a cause of annoyance, a nuisance, a pest" (OED). The word 'plague' derived from the Latin *plāga*, originally referred to a stroke or a wound, but later to 'affliction' or 'illness' and "especially one interpreted as divine punishment" (OED). In the English language, 'pest' has come to mean 'a nuisance,' whereas the word 'plague' refers to the actual disease, the bubonic or pneumonic plague, or even any contagious disease that instigates enough fear. Thus, the meaning of plague moves between "[a]ny infectious disease which spreads rapidly and has a high mortality rate" and specifically what has become known as the Black Death, the fierce disease that causes haemorrhages, severely swelling lymph nodes and shock, and probably ends in death. This plague, caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* initially inhabits the body of a flea, then transfers most likely onto a rodent (mostly rats) and can in the next step infect a human being. In German, Dutch and French, the word for 'pest' is used to refer to the disease, as for example becomes evident in the saying 'to avoid like the plague,' that is similar in Dutch ('mijden als de pest'), German ('meiden wie die Pest') and French ('fuir comme la peste'). To call someone or something plague-like, means that this person is bothersome, highly irritating, a nuisance, and even contagious (as she or he may influence others). In short: the plague means trouble to be avoided. This is also signified in the English language when talking about vermin and its professional extermination that carries the name 'pest control.' And, in the Dutch language when said that people (mostly children) are teasing, for which the verbs 'plagen' or 'pesten' are used; the first one referring to a more playful, but annoying instance, whereas the latter is used when the harmful effect is evident. Yet, the division between the two is often subject for

discussion and a matter of point of view. As 'plagen' in Dutch is also the plural of 'plaaq,' noun and verb are connected in form and are only recognisable as either noun or verb in their contexts. Indeed, in English, 'to plague' means 'to bother.'

Thus, the notion of the plague instigates aversion (and maybe even fear), it signifies something to keep at bay, something unwanted. All connotations with the plague are negative and, when analysing its use as metaphor, this needs to be taken into account. This thesis also concerns itself with more positive connotations and bodily metaphors concerning migration. Within the overarching body-nation metaphor, there is an abundance of possible metaphors and figures that may be more appropriate and in the end more fruitful when used in conjunction with migratory problems. The body does and cannot exist in a vacuum, which would be the ideal situation to keep danger out. Yet, it needs external influences: besides food and water, a sick body might be in need of another one's blood. In their own turn, our bodies are complex wholes that harbour a multitude of organisms that we need in order to stay healthy. When we zoom out and view upon human existence as an evolutionary survival of our species, purity in terms of small and tight communities is not the best strategy. A larger gene-pool to tap into, is more productive in terms of creating diversity and exchange and makes for a better ability to adapt to a changing environment and to survive as a species. Thus, crossing the boundaries of our bodies is not always a potential danger, it is rather a necessity. This thesis in a broader sense opts for a better understanding of bodily metaphors in regard to migration. As such, it is at the same time opposing eugenic discourse employed by Nazism that focusses on (genetic) purity.

### *The Plague in Literature*

The plague has been a subject for literary accounts and imagination since early Western history. As one of the most feared contagious diseases, it has become a link to notions of transmission (of evil), imposed quarantines and punishments, and 'the other side of life.' The first notion, that of transmission or contagion is the one that is at stake in this thesis: how does contagion ('touch' or 'contact') interact with the political, social and biological lives of people and how do they come to define (movement between) communities? The experiences of plague-times have inspired written accounts and later also found their way into fictional narratives.



Cohn highlights that the plague tract of 1348 – a piece of writing on preventing the plague written by physicians of the time – itself became “according to the medical historian Arturo Castiglioni ... by the fifteenth century the first form of popular literature in the West” (1). Writing and reading was a means to control and to empower oneself in the face of the plague. Personal experiences with the (threat of the) plague were also documented, Cohn notes that such “authors narrated changes in the landscape and collective psychology of the city along with their own mental anguish as the plague brought civil life to its weakest and darkest moments” (6). Cohn observes a transition in plague-writing in the years 1575-8 in the form of poetry that highlighted the liberation from the plague rather than the horrors of the plague itself: “Instead of grim pictures of corpse-strewn horrors, plague poetry of 1575-8 sung the praises of local heroes from heads of health boards to bell-ringers, celebrating their epic deeds that buttressed communities against imminent destruction and that defeated the ‘hydra-headed’ plague” (6). This is important imagery in considering the plague as metaphor: it is in this instance a monstrous form that threatens the communal body and fighting against it is seen as an heroic act. Such heroism in face of evil is critiqued through Camus’ narrative. Also, there was a “new attention to social causes of the plague” and – in relation to this – a new concern with ‘governing’ the plague (Cohn 7). For the physicians this entailed a shift from individual cases of disease to the (fighting of the) plague in relation to the community as a whole: “Physicians now stressed political organization and public health as the best ‘remedies’ for combating epidemic disease” (Cohn 7). At the same time this meant “a return to apocalyptic notions of the plague (Cohn 7). Cohn describes that:

With new health-board records plague writers of 1575-8 created new forms of plague writing, which wove stories of dark comedy, pathos, and personal trauma into narratives of the plague’s relentless ‘progress’ as measured by its death counts. Similar journals of plague, unknowingly indebted to these sixteenth-century works, would later develop into masterpieces of plague literature, from Defoe to Camus. (8)

Interestingly, Cohn notes that in research in plague writing, “[r]ecent literary historians remain unaware of these sixteenth-century antecedents” (8). Elana Gomel notes in her article “The Plague of Utopias” (2000) that “apocalyptic fictions typically linger on pain and suffering” (405). Gomel relates the apocalyptic imaginings at the turn of the millennium with the history of the plague, using the metaphor of the body politic as it is

'struck' by disease "progressing from the first symptoms of a large-scale disaster through the crisis of the tribulation to the recovery of the millennium" (406). This contagious body, though "the most characteristic modality of the apocalyptic corporeality," harbours at the same time "a counterapocalyptic potential, resisting the dangerous lure of Endism," Gomel argues (406).

Gomel points out that "[t]here is a special narrative voice proper to pestilence," that is the voice of the surviving witness (410). This is for example the case for the voice of Thucydides in his account of the great plague of Athens; as Gomel notes "a clinical, carefully detailed description, strangely detached, despite the fact that the historian was one of the victims of the disease" (410). In this way, the role of the chronicler is foregrounded and the need to narrate the pain of others, of society as a whole is put before the individual experiences of pain which is interesting in view of Scarry's argument. Similarly, Defoe's narrator, a fictional witness of the great plague of London is himself "in mortal danger. But his privileged textual position of a witness grants him immunity. He is not an individual body susceptible to the disease but an incorporeal voice speaking for the dying and the dead" (Gomel 410). Importantly, Gomel explains:

"The position of the plague witness is ambiguous. On the one hand, to fulfill their task the narrators must be granted (at least temporary) immunity. On the other hand, by identifying with the collective body whose dissolution they chronicle, they experience its protracted agony. Writing becomes dying; not so much a means to survive as the endless postponement of the irreversible moment of death. Thucydides recovered; John Clyn died; these are vagaries of infection undeterred by textual considerations. But the fictional chroniclers – Defoe's narrator, Mary Shelley's *Last Man*, Connie Willis's *Kivrin* – are suspended between life and death, historians among the graves" (411)

Gomel brings this analysis to her reading of Camus in stating that "[t]he voice that narrates the agony of Oran is the collective and yet impersonal 'we' that programmatically refuses any restriction of the point of view to the individual perspective" (411). Gomel recognizes this impersonal mode of telling as a paradox considering the pestilence's own disregard for the differences between individual bodies. The position of the 'objective' witness as narrator plays a different role in the other novels: Hesse's narrator is extradiegetic, yet the focalization remains mostly with travelling Goldmund who therefore gains a special overview of the events of the plague. Likewise, the narrator of the *White Plague* remains outside of the narrative world,

alternately focalizing through different characters giving voice to different experiences of the epidemic. Pfeiffer's autofictional narrative is the only first-person account among the novels dissected here. By contrast his is a deeply personal story of belonging, at the same time incorporating experiences of other immigrants in his fragmental account of the issues of contemporary society as he is in a sense a witness to their suffering. Here the plague functions as a means to convey the pain of others.

Both Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) and Albert Camus' *The Plague* have become iconic texts regarding the plague, as Stephanson points out in his analysis of both texts. According to Stephanson, the plague has become analogous to the unknown and hence both readers and writers alike tend to project their imagination and attribute to pestilence a symbolic meaning. He foregrounds that in both narratives, what the characters "come to experience is the social alienation, physical imprisonment, and threat of other [a threat from the outside] that plague entails. Plague means physical separation from lovers and family, quarantines ... paralysis of business and trade, death of husband or daughter, and invasion by a mysterious other" (232). Yet, in Stephanson's argument, Camus' narrative is less clear in what the plague symbolizes. In Camus, 'the sensation of a void within' is caused by the plague and this pestilence in the end also destroys human imagination metaphorically (233, 234).

## **People and Pathogens On the Move**

### *Unwanted Traveller(s) (Companions)*

In relation to the subject of modern plague writing, notions such as migration, transnationality and the given that we are living in a globalized world are important for two reasons: one is that in the face of threat of an infectious disease such as the plague, movement is inhibited, borders are closed and people are kept in quarantine. This is noticeable in the texts by Hesse, Camus, Herbert and Pfeijffer. The other reason, one that might not be as obvious, has to do with the metaphorical aspects that have become connected with the plague: the plague as something to avoid, to keep at bay, and, by association, migrants and strangers that are conflated with images of disease, infiltration, contagion and rats. The two instances are connected in that the first is a reaction to the second: in a means to keep the metaphorical disease at bay a real call for

closing borders is made. Pfeijffer's references to Lampedusa is an example: immigrants are isolated, 'quarantined' on an island as they wait for visas to enter the EU.

Within a globalized world, larger groups of people are on the move than ever before. Borders seem on the one hand to become more porous as it has become easier to travel and work abroad, and to exchange information and stories, but on the other hand seem to become more enforced as nations and peoples define themselves as coherent units, different and separate from others.<sup>15</sup> Thus, a heightened interest in migration and the wandering conditions of humankind has emerged in the humanities and social sciences: a field of migration studies (i.e. Apter 2006, 2014; Frank 2008; Damrosch 2014; Kaiser 2014, 2016).<sup>16</sup> A globalized world in which people move more and over larger distances means that the potential threat of epidemics is also globalized as travellers may carry diseases. As Scott & Duncan note: "the development of modern transport was the key to the widespread dispersal of the 20<sup>th</sup> century pandemic of bubonic plague ... Shipping, with rats and fleas in the cargo, is the easiest way of introducing bubonic plague" (50). So often in the history of the bubonic plague, important port cities were the first to fall victim to the plague (or other infectious diseases). This is also the case in the fictional Oran of Camus and Pfeijffer's Genoa. Also, movements into new territories as effected by war, colonialism and other types of migration, meant an increased risk of infections.<sup>17</sup> Cristobal Silva researches in his book *Miraculous Plagues* how "[t]he histories of smallpox, yellow fever, cholera, HIV/AIDS, SARS, and H1N1 all trace important geopolitical shifts, as well as evolutions in the technologies of travel" (9). As infectious disease is a movement of pathogens (bacteria and viruses) through a (human) host or 'vessel,' migrations are inherently connected with possibility of contagion. Indeed, in his explanation of syphilis, Gilman uses the word 'migration' to refer to the movement of the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*.

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<sup>15</sup> In this sense, it is also important to note that this travelling of information and narratives via the internet also has a major role in forming the public opinion about migrants. The use of the phrase 'going viral' can be traced back to the first use of the contagion metaphor in relation to computers, internet and the body electric. Mitchell notes: "In 1983 ... two computer scientists at the University of South Carolina [Fred Cohen and Len Adleman] ran a computer security seminar in which they described, for the first time, a self-replicating computer program as 'computer virus,' and Douglas Hofstadter published his article on 'viral' sentences, thereby launching the meme-as-virus metaphor" (134-135). Mitchell connects the use of viral metaphors to the age of AIDS.

<sup>16</sup> Søren Frank notes in this regard that we live in a "time of redrawing maps, of intense deterritorializations and reterritorializations: people are passing borders, but borders are also passing people" (2).

<sup>17</sup> See: "it is movement into new, untrodden regions, as in war or mass migration that brings humans most often into direct contact with enzootic bubonic plague" (Scott & Duncan 66).

Because humans have unwanted travel companions, infectious diseases in general and the plague in particular inspire a specific kind of xenophobia and polarise the notions of 'Self' and 'Other.' Borders of nations become more foregrounded.<sup>18</sup> Silva argues that epidemiology's links with politics "are perhaps most visible when a community or nation appears to be under attack from foreign invaders (real or imagined) (Silva 8). He continues to argue, in similar vein as Foucault, that practices to keep infectious diseases from spreading are a concern of the nation-state, and more importantly, that these practices are used to "reassert sovereignty over borders and cultural identity, and to demonstrate the fundamental health of the body politic" (Silva 8).<sup>19</sup> In this regard, the nation-body metaphor is connected to notions of health and illness: "the national imagination aligns itself with normative images of healthfulness, and further represents the security of its borders as a matter of public health policy" (Silva 9). In this imagination, pathogens are the invaders from the outside, whereas the nation-body is under siege that will do all that is necessary to remain in a state of health. In case of the plague, it was often also 'outsiders' that resided within the city walls that became targeted: often the Jews were blamed for causing the plague and were persecuted in order to somehow control the terrible events. A movement in the opposite direction as often made by the richer part of the population as they fled to the countryside, as Watts notes "flee early, flee far, return late" was a well know conundrum (9).

### *Travelling and Infectious Disease*

An illness that is 'infectious' means that it is transferable from one body to the next and subsequently that a person who already harbours the disease, is a potential danger to others in her or his direct surroundings. In this sense, Priscilla Wald refers to contagious disease as 'communicable.' People carry diseases, take pathogens with them wherever

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<sup>18</sup> The notion of a community and of a nation as a whole is an imagined, yet a very persistent one. An argument most famously developed by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, first published in 1983. The notion of a national literature is very much connected to the rise of the nation-state in the early nineteenth century (Damrosch 2014: 3). There seems to be a 'natural bond' between nation and language and it is exactly this 'bond' that is often critiqued by scholars and nuanced by literature (e.g. Jacques Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other* [1996], Emily Apter's *The Translation Zone* 2006).

<sup>19</sup> See also: "But even as these political, economic, and geographic trajectories underscore the poroussness of national borders, time and again giving proof that epidemics behave transnationally, both Patton and Wald demonstrate that pathogens reify the very nationalist impulses they undermine. Herein lies the ideological power of epidemiology" (Silva 9; c.f. Wald).

they go, and possibly infect others. In addition, people nowadays are moving over larger distances and in vaster numbers than ever: the fact that we live in a globalized world, where “the realization that we are no farther from a new infectious agent than the nearest airport,” as Ernest Gilman poses in *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (2009), has led to calls for emergency quarantine preparations reminiscent of those once enforced in early modern Venice or London at the first sign of plague” (8). Likewise, Sontag notes in *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989) that “[p]eople circulate, in greater numbers than ever. And diseases. From the untrammelled intercontinental air travel for pleasure and business of the privileged to the unprecedented migrations of the underprivileged from villages to cities and, legally and illegally, from country to country” (*AIDS*: C8). Therefore, when travelling to foreign lands, the appropriate vaccines are administered to make bodies immune to the diseases that reside there, at least temporarily.

The dangers of migrants bringing ‘new’ or ‘old’ diseases into the countries and unto peoples they migrate to, are of concern not only for medical institutions. Sontag connects the notion of infectious disease and migrants in that “[e]pidemic diseases usually elicit a call to ban the entry of foreigners, immigrants,” and that “xenophobic propaganda has always depicted immigrants as bearers of disease” (*AIDS*: C6). To take it a step further, Roberto Esposito notes that such a presentation of the immigrant as a “potential biological risk to the host country” always implies that this foreigner is not only a bearer of an actual disease, but she or he himself is disease-like: the disease has become a metaphor (*Immunitas* 4). In similar regard one may view the fear of the Islamization of Europe: in many ways this seems to be conceived of also in terms of contagion or disease.<sup>20</sup> Thus, even more importantly, what happens when our language regarding the subjects of travelling and disease gets intertwined like this? When do we start speaking about travelling people, about migrants, as ‘infectious’? What in turn does this mean for travelling, for bodies on the move?

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<sup>20</sup> See for example the article “Islamitische Staat is een auto-immuunziekte geworden” by Christiaan Weijts (NRC July 20, 2016).

## Literary studies: Theories of Metaphor

### *Metaphor: Past the Ornamental*

Metaphor, from the Latin *metaphora* which means ‘carrying over,’ and the Greek *metaphorá*, ‘transfer,’ is a figure of speech in which there is a reference to something else, constructed according to a notion of resemblance, a likeness. Or, as a fictive Pablo Neruda has it in Michael Radford’s movie *Il Postino* (1994): “La metafora... come dirti... è quando parli di una cosa paragonandola a un'altra.” Thus, most simply said, metaphor is when you talk about one thing, meaning another. Though Neruda’s description is a very poetic one, it does not take into account the complex and meaningful relationship between what is said and what is actually ‘meant.’ Moreover, as I.A. Richards argues in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), to describe metaphor as a meaning in disguise is actually wrong. Richards describes metaphor as consisting of two parts: the tenor, that is, “the underlying idea or principal subject” (97) and the vehicle, the words that are actually uttered to construct the metaphor.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in its simplest form, “we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction” (Richards 93). The relation between the vehicle and the tenor is where meaning resides in metaphor. When Romeo states that Juliet is the sun, he means that Juliet is like the sun, bright, warming, a source of life and so on. On the other hand, it also makes clear what connotations we have with the sun.

Thus, metaphor says something about both halves/parts. In using the plague as metaphor, it says both something about the plague and something about that for which it is ‘substituted.’ If I would say in a conversation about the problems of migration that ‘immigrants are a plague,’ I would mean that they are not just a nuisance, but also dangerous and probably fatal to our own community (the town, the nation, Europe, the West). In turn, this would alter the connotations we have with the plague: today’s plague no longer carries along with it only the imagery of the medieval Black Death, it has moved outside of the realm of disease in referring to people instead. In the experiment

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<sup>21</sup> In his article on Richards (2009), David Douglass notes a problem with his tenor-vehicle model. He argues: “In its common usage, tenor denotes meaning, while vehicle indicates a mode of transport; taken together these terms imply that tenor is the meaning of the sentence which a vehicle conveys” (413). Douglass states that this is not how Richards means the terms and thus that these terms might not be the best ones to describe the two halves of the metaphor.

described by Geary issues of migration and language of invading bacteria where connected via an implied metaphor of the nation/community as body, and, as Biss notes “[w]here two issues are metaphorically linked, the researchers concluded, manipulating a person’s attitude toward one can affect how she thinks about the other” (C22). Biss refers to George Orwell’s famous intimate relation between language and thought – ‘if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought’ – stating that in this view “[s]tale metaphors reproduce stale thinking. Mixed metaphors confuse. And metaphors flow in two directions – thinking about one thing in terms of another can illuminate or obscure both. If our sense of bodily vulnerability can pollute our politics, then our sense of political powerlessness must inform how we treat our bodies” (C22).

Metaphor does not only place itself at the level of the word, but gains meaning from its context. As Richards notes, traditional theories of metaphor “made metaphor seem to be a verbal matter, a shifting and displacement of words, whereas fundamentally it is a borrowing between and intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts. Thought is metaphoric and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive therefrom” (94). Comparing the nation with a body for example brings all kinds of possibilities of discourse and thought that make the connection meaningful. In *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975), Paul Ricoeur proposes that “[a]s figure, metaphor constitutes a displacement and an extension of the meaning of words” (3). In Ricoeur’s view, the ‘true’ meaning or value of metaphor is constructed only beyond the unit of the word, where it is no longer treated “as a case of *deviant denomination*, but as a case of *impertinent predication*” (4). Therefore, mirroring Richards, it is not right to view metaphor as merely a substitute, a replacement for the proper: the use of metaphor is affirmative of similarities between the signifier and signified, yet at the same time it is also recognizing that they are different and it is this tension that can be creative. To go even further, Ricoeur argues that “the ‘place’ of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb *to be* (6). In this sense, because metaphor at once points at similarity and difference, metaphor equals truth, “but in an equally ‘tensive’ sense of the word ‘truth’” (Ricoeur 4). Considering the use of metaphor as connected to the narrative as a whole, it is important to note that in Ricoeur’s argument, narrative is also a means to create new meaning. Therefore, in analysing the primary texts, I take into account that the plague is not always used in a proper metaphorical



sense, but that it can be seen in a broader way as a figure connected in different ways the authors address their contemporary issues.

Theories of metaphor, such as Ricoeur's and Richards', move somewhere between the position that 'metaphor is a lie and therefore dangerous' and 'metaphor is constitutive of our understanding and knowledge of our world.'<sup>22</sup> Max Black starts his essay with the first adage "Thou shalt not commit metaphor," asking if indeed metaphor is merely a substitute for the literal, or if it does create meaning in its own way – and if the latter is true, if it is merely a transformation of the literal or if there is no literal equivalent (273). Ricoeur argues that metaphors are not lies or rhetorical ornaments to be avoided, but that they creatively transform language and that, at least for metaphors that we experience as metaphors (because they have not yet become common in their use), there is no literal equivalent. Accompanying Ricoeur and Richards in this argument is Jacques Derrida, who in his essay *White Mythology* asks if there is 'metaphor in the text of philosophy' (6). Derrida sets out to find an answer to this question in relating to a dialogue between Polyphilos and Aristos<sup>23</sup> from Anatole France's *Le Jardin d'Épicure* (1985). Polyphilos compares metaphysicians to 'knife-grinders' who "put medals and coins to the grindstone to efface the exergue" (7). In this figure or metaphor (the philosopher as knife-grinder), the effaced or defaced coin represents the concepts of Western philosophy: they have no specific value or origin, they have been abstracted to become universal and absolute. Faulty, or at least problematic, as both Polyphilos and Derrida have it – this is what he refers to as 'white mythology.' These abstractions are in Derrida's view actually nothing but metaphors, myths. Western philosophers are in this sense 'false poets,' wrongly following the line of Plato's distrust of poetry (and the arts in general) in which metaphor seems to be twice removed from the truth: the idea that metaphor is not what is properly meant, which itself is not as true as the world of Ideas. For Derrida, relying heavily on Nietzsche, "truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions; worn out metaphors" (Derrida 15). In this sense, Derrida moves even further than Ricoeur does in claiming that philosophical discourse

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<sup>22</sup> Richards notes that "metaphor has been treated as a sort of happy extra trick" (90), an ornament. Instead, Richards puts forward by quoting Shelley: "[l]anguage is vitally metaphorical" (90).

<sup>23</sup> At one point, Derrida states that "a misprint wou[l]d have given us *Artiste* in place of *Ariste* in the title" (11); nowadays Google will persuade you to consider the same: when you look for Polyphilos and Ariste, it automatically states: 'Did you mean *Artiste*?'

and the use of metaphor cannot exist without each other, nor can one fully resolve the other.

An important distinction to be made regarding the primary texts is that between metaphor and allegory. As David Punter points out in *Metaphor* (2007), a metaphor can be extended “beyond a single point of comparison and run through an entire passage of text” (27). Punter notes that “The end-point, one might say, of these extended metaphorical processes is allegory” (28). In allegory, the connection between vehicle and tenor is not part of the narrative world itself, the relation and its meaning need to be grasped at least partly outside of the confines of the text itself. Context thus becomes important, though the signposts inside the text are mostly unmistakable, as is for example the case when considering Camus’ imagery of incinerating ovens and tramlines as haunting figures of the Holocaust. Punter also notes that “[s]tories of survival are often allegories,” which is interesting considering plague stories indeed are often stories of survival (59). In the allegorical sense then, what kind of need for survival must be connected to the text’s contexts? In both Hesse and Camus the issues I present as tenors in relation to the plague as metaphor, that is industrialization and modernity and fascism and dogma subsequently, are not part of the narrative world of the texts. The hazards of bioengineering and its relation to terrorism are on the contrary very much part of Herbert’s fictional world. Here I am interested in how the characters use the immediate event of the plague in a metaphorical sense to point at more deeply rooted issues. Interestingly, Gomel recognizes a ‘clash’ in “[c]ontemporary plague narratives, including the burgeoning discourse of AIDS” as they “are caught between two contrary textual impulses: acquiescence in a (super)natural judgment and political activism” (407). In considering Herbert’s use of the genre science fiction as a fictive space to work out the question of ‘what if,’ what if terrorists take biological knowledge at hand, it is not so much the metaphoricity of this novel but more its fictional use of the plague that is what is at stake here. In contrast to Camus, considering de Beauvoir’s critique, Herbert’s plague becomes a tool of ideology, a man-made pathogen that carries with it responsibility. Pfeijffer exposes the harmful language of the plague, the triangle of immigrant-rat-disease and through his own position as immigrant provides a counternarrative to it.

### *Metaphor and Illness*

Whether metaphor is merely a simple substitution or a more profound construction of meaning is an important question at stake here. I take the latter to be true, following both Ricoeur and Derrida in their arguments. This has as a consequence that metaphors have a certain 'power,' or better: that the way they are used is meaningful and constructive of our understanding. The second step then is to consider whether it is possible for them to have a negative and therefore harmful meaning/power. This is definitely what Susan Sontag is aiming at in her argument that illness should be freed of metaphor: "that the most truthful way of regarding illness – and the healthiest way of being ill – is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking" (*Illness* Introduction). Sontag has received critique of this non-metaphorical approach, especially since in her approach she uses metaphorical language herself (e.g. Novillo-Corvalán 12). This is the case already right at the beginning where Sontag imagines every human being as inhabiting two worlds: that of the healthy and that of the sick, a 'dual citizenship' (*Illness* C1). Although we would rather roam in the first world, we are obliged, according to Sontag, at least at certain points in our lives and at least for a brief time, to inhabit the other. Novillo-Corvalán argues that "Sontag conveys a topographical demarcation in which the spiritual connotations of the 'kingdom of the sick' conjure up a purgatorial 'other place' infused with an otherworldly quality" (12). Thus, Sontag herself uses metaphor to understand and convey what being ill is like: *as though* you move from a positive and desired world to the one you would rather avoid, one that is more connected to the other side of life: death. In *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, Sontag acknowledges the constructive power and the essential role of metaphor as she states: "Saying a thing is or is like something-it-is-not is a mental operation as old as philosophy and poetry, and the spawning ground of most kinds of understanding, including scientific understanding, and expressiveness" (*AIDS* C1). In line with Ricoeur and Derrida, Sontag and Novillo-Corvalán note that we cannot exclude metaphor from language, even in talking about illness. However, Sontag continues to argue that some metaphors are harmful and should be avoided. In this thesis, this is certainly an important distinction to be made: which metaphors are harmful and which ones are constructive of our understanding?

The metaphors at stake here are that of the nation as body and the body as nation, and emerging from this, migrants as plague. Thus, there is a connection, a

resemblance between the nation and the body that gives rise to a whole range of metaphors used when talking about both the nation and the body. In this relation between body and nation – one which I will elaborate on to a greater extent in the next chapter – for example, we talk about our bodies as though they were under siege, especially when we try to understand our immune systems. As Roberto Esposito argues in *Immunitas* (2002), this is a too simplistic view of the complex workings of our immunity that is essential to life (staying alive, to be).<sup>24</sup> The image of the military is also often conveyed when cancer is under discussion. According to Sontag, whereas tuberculosis was the Romantic disease par excellence, a physical result of the creative and burdened soul<sup>25</sup> within, cancer is a disease where the body is “‘invaded’ by alien cells” (*Illness C2*).<sup>26</sup> Thus, for Sontag, this military metaphor is hostile and one which we need to retire from. In the next chapters, my aim is to find out to which extent our metaphors surrounding disease are harmful, not in the sense Sontag proposed (as painful for cancer patients), but as an unhealthy, overtly defensive nationalistic discourse pointed towards ‘invading others.’ Regarding the plague as metaphor for migration, this is an important problem to lay bare. However, I also want to consider when the use of metaphor is meaningful: the experiences of exile that are part of the plague narrative may be an apt part of the metaphor in regard to experiences of migration and homelessness. The plague in that sense comes to stand for the reasons why some people are forced to flee their own countries. Considering the role of the immune system may in this regard also be telling: it’s overdefensiveness is only beneficial for the plague to run its course.

### **A Few Concepts Before Moving On**

The concept of community as configured by Esposito, the dual understanding of the *pharmakon*, the etymology of ‘host,’ and the border as third space as proposed by Homi K. Bhabha deserve some special attention here as they form a red thread throughout this

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<sup>24</sup> Note: I will elaborate on this much more in the next chapter, in which I will explain that in Esposito’s view it is not so much the question why the body’s immune system attacks that which is other, but why it does not attack itself (as it does in auto-immune diseases) and how it makes this distinction.

<sup>25</sup> This is also a metaphor, as Sontag notes that “[a] disease of the lungs is, metaphorically, a disease of the soul” (*Illness C2*).

<sup>26</sup> Which seems strange considering TB is actually a contagious disease that travels between bodies and ‘invades,’ whereas cancer is the result of unusual growth of cells that are part of the body (of course, this can be caused by external factors like certain viruses).

thesis. These concepts, however briefly touched upon here, will gain in colour as they are described in the analysis when the need arises.

### *Community: Bound by Debt*

The question of what constitutes a community, of what makes an ‘us’ or a ‘one’ is an important domain of contemporary biopolitics. Rosella Bonito Oliva situates the discussion of community “[i]n a period in which terms like *globalization*, *mondialization*, and *interculturalism* dominate” (70). Such times make ‘a genealogy of community’ seem outdated “until we recognize that such profound transformations as these require new political and anthropological categories; categories that will allow us to rethink the significance and the borders of our being-with-others in the world as an originary human condition” (Bonito Oliva 70). Esposito observes that the shared etymological root of both *immunitas* and *communitas* is *munus*, which in turn moves between three meanings: *onus* (‘burden’), *officium* (‘performing a function’) and *donum* (‘gift’) (*Communitas* 4). *Immunitas* as such, is being exempted from the *munus* – which results, as will be illustrated in the following chapters, in warding off external, potentially contagious, threats. *Communitas* on the other hand is to be exposed to what *munus* entails: a two-sidedness, “two inseparable faces ... gift and obligation, benefit and service rendered, joining and threat” (*Communitas* 13). Community is, as Esposito argues, not a property, something that all the individuals part of the community have in *common*, or an identity, a geographical or cultural space they share, yet it is constituted by a lack: through (*cum*) *munus*, that is, the exchange of the gift that results in an immanent absence constituting the relation of the community.

As such, it is not constituted by territory in need of defending, an inside versus an outside. Community is rather constituted by “an obligation or a debt; not by an ‘addition’ [*più*] but by a ‘subtraction’ [*meno*]: by a lack, a limit that is configured as an *onus*, or even as a defective modality for him who is ‘affected’ unlike for him who is instead ‘exempt’ [*esente*] or ‘exempted’” (*Communitas* 6). According to Esposito *communitas* has an integral relation to immunity (through their common *munus*): immunity is both presupposed by community and negates it. Every community needs to, in order to continue its own existence, incorporate or neutralize its own opposite through the immune system (in failing to do this, such a community would develop an ‘autimmune disorder’). As Timothy Campbell points out in his introduction to *Bios*: “For Esposito,

immunity is coterminous with community. It does not simply negate *communitas* by protecting it from what is external, but rather is inscribed in the horizon of the communal *munus*. Immune is he ... who is exonerated or has received a *dispensation* from reciprocal gift giving" (*x-xi*). It is worth noting that 'gift' is etymologically related to 'poison' (which is still visible in many Germanic languages as for example in the German meaning of 'Gif' and in the Dutch word 'vergif'). Esposito points at this in his discussion of Derrida's exploration of both *pharmakon* and the essence of the gift: "Derrida has argued in a form that reinstates the logic and semantics of the immune lexicon, [that] the *pharmakon* is what is opposed to its other not by excluding it, but on the contrary, by incorporating and vicariously substituting it" (*Immunitas* 127). The *pharmakon* in its own turn is also double-sided.

### *The Janus-face of the Cure*

As Esposito notes in his discussion of biopolitics, a key figure "is the classic one of the *pharmakon*, understood from the beginning of the philosophical tradition in the double sense of medicine and poison" (*Immunitas* 15). This double sense of medicine and poison, makes it an interesting philosophical concept because it entails both opposites inside itself, and it is in that sense undecidable. It is accompanied by a third meaning: that of 'pharmakos' referring here to the ritual of human sacrifice or the exile of a scapegoat from the community. In Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" (1968) *pharmakon* comes to stand for writing. As Derrida deconstructs Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which writing is presented merely as a substitute for speech and as such it is poisonous, he uses *pharmakon* (and the implied accompanied meaning of *pharmakos*) as a trace, a floating signifier, "the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other" ("*Pharmacy*" 127).

### *Of Hosts and Guests*

'Host,' from the Latin root *hospitem*, meaning both guest and stranger, bears resemblance to the Latin *hostis*, or enemy. It is exactly between these two polarities that the sentiments fluctuate when considering both migration and the plague.<sup>27</sup> Also, as

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<sup>27</sup> Derrida has written on hospitality and the question of the foreigner: in his text *Of Hospitality* (2000) Derrida considers pure versus conditional hospitality. Absolute hospitality, he points out, "requires that I

Camus reminds us, 'host' is also part of the Latin *hostia*, or sacrifice, and in this manner related to the body of Christ: "one should not imitate the monks of Cairo who in the epidemics of the last century would give communion picking up the host with pincers to avoid any contact with the moist, warm mouths in which infection might linger" (175). And, as Scarry notes: "the deconstruction of civilization follows in reverse: the protective, healing, expansive acts implicit in 'host' and 'hostel' and 'hospitable' and 'hospital' all converge back in 'hospes,' which in turn moves back to the root 'hos' meaning house, shelter, or refuge; but once back at 'hos,' its generosity can be undone by an alternative movement forward into 'hostis,' the source of 'hostility' and 'hostage' and 'host'—not the host that willfully abandons the ground of his power in acts of reciprocity and equality but the "host" deprived of all ground, the host of the eucharist, the sacrificial victim" (45). The notion of the 'host' is when the guest, or the enemy, has come in the figure of the parasite.

#### *Borders as Third Space and the Plague as Liminal Event*

Within the body-nation figure, which will be further dissected in the next chapters, the border occupies a crucial position as it is both a place of segregation and a place of connection between the inside and the outside. An important term regarding borders is that of 'liminality,' which foregrounds the transitory quality of this particular construction of space (from the Latin root 'limen,' meaning 'threshold'). In this manner it may also refer to a transition in state or a certain stage (as introduced in anthropology by both Arnold van Gennip and Victor W. Turner). It was Bhabha who used the notion of 'liminality' to describe an 'in-betweenness' in relation to (a national) narrative and literature.<sup>28</sup> I will consider the plague as an event of liminality: in this case a calamity that suspends a community in an in-between state of being: between disease and health and between life and death. It is the plague as 'exceptional situation' that Foucault notes as different from panopticism:

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open up my home and that I give not only the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take in the place I offer them, without asking either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names (*Hospitality* 25).

<sup>28</sup> In regard to a national narrative, Bhabha asks: "What might be the cultural and political effects of the liminality of the nation, the margins of modernity, which come to be signified in the narrative temporalities of splitting, ambivalence and vacillation?" (*Location* 211).

against an extraordinary evil, power is mobilized; it makes itself everywhere present and visible; it invents new mechanisms; it separates, it immobilizes, it partitions; it constructs for a time what is both a counter-city and the perfect society; it imposes an ideal functioning, but one that is reduced, in the final analysis, like the evil that it combats, to a simple dualism of life and death: that which moves brings death, and one kills that which moves (205)

The plague-stricken town forms the ideal environment for the experiment of power: an ideally controlled society where every-body is fixed into its proper place. Hesse, Camus and Herbert use the plague as an aberrant event that fuels the character's actions and make the novels a narration about the transition into a new perspective on life and death (Hesse's *Goldmund*), an understanding of the plague's abnormality and the banality of everyday life (Camus) and new understandings of biological warfare, the dangers of medical knowledge and the power relations between men and women when procreation is at stake (Herbert). As such, this liminality of the plague is also what brings to the fore the interplay between *communitas* and *immunitas*.



## CHAPTER 1 – **Bodily Entities: Of Ill Nations, Diseased Cities and Bodies in Distress**

In this chapter I will explore the metaphorical relation between the body and the nation and subsequently the city. In this regard it will deal with the analogies (and differences) between the nation (or the city/community) and the body as they constitute the fundamentals of the dynamic metaphor of body-as-nation or nation-as-body (both moving from vehicle to tenor and vice versa). With the body-as-nation figure I refer to the political and military language used regarding bodies, that is, instances in which the body is rendered as being under attack, white blood cells as soldiers and more. In this metaphorical relation, the nation and its politics become a vehicle for the body. In the figure of nation-as body, the body becomes in its turn a vehicle for the nation: that is, political discourse makes use of biological terms. In both instances (which may be viewed as just a difference of direction), medical and political discourse are conflated. The figure of the nation-body is a very strong one with a long history, as I have briefly touched upon in the introduction. Gilman notes that this analogy runs “from Plato’s Republic to Hobbes’s fundamental assumption in the Leviathan that the commonwealth ‘is but an Artificial Man,’” the head as governing organ (42). In order to gain a better understanding of this entwinement between body and nation, their supposed similarities, but also their differences, I will first set out to understand the notion of unity in both: (how) do we imagine our bodies and communities as unitary, as enclosed wholes?

The body-nation figure is important here because the metaphor carries with it the notions of disease and health, medically intended to describe the body, and applies them to the nation. Rather than just a geographical place of the plague, the plague becomes metaphorically a way to describe issues of the nation: either as an external threat to the collective body, or as an infection already festering within its confines. For Hesse, modernity was such a disease that revealed itself in the increasingly industrialised Germany of his age. Notions of health and illness, of purity and impurity are also very much part of the eugenic discourse employed by the Nazis in the years leading up to and during the Second World War and are as such an integral part of Camus’ allegory of fascism. Here, the use of the plague by Camus is a reversal of the ideologies he critiques. Herbert’s exploration of Ireland’s Troubles, rooting all the way back to ‘her’ earliest experiences of oppression, first by the Vikings, later by the English,

and Herbert's use of the plague as terrorist attack on terrorists, is heavily reliant on the metaphorical figure of Ireland as a woman (more specifically a mother). Ironically, I argue, the plague used as narrative stance by Herbert and as tool of revenge by his protagonist, in attacking the individual bodies of Ireland's women, figuratively dissects the body-nation figure. In regard to Pfeijffer, both Italy and Europe as a body will be discussed in the context of the refugee crisis with the sea as most notable border and liminal space.

The city, as an important space in Hesse, Camus and Pfeijffer, can be both viewed as part of the body-nation metaphor and as such as a part of that body, or as a new metaphor in which the city itself comes to be related to as though it were a person. The relation between these two instances is in a sense also metonymical: the city can stand for the nation as a whole. In the first case, it is important to note that both Oran and Genoa are port cities and that mainly in Pfeijffer the city is addressed as a woman. Within his narration, Pfeijffer interweaves the history of Genoa's port as the place through which the bubonic plague entered Europe from the East. As such it interweaves the narrative as a reversed colonialism, or an exoticism of the disease: the city is ravished by 'foreign men,' Europe is being infiltrated and infected by Eastern ideologies and cultures.<sup>29</sup> Lastly, a short move from the metaphorical to the non-figurative will be made as the experience of being ill, witnessed and voiced by the narrators, will be probed.

### 1.1 Unitary Bodies and Unitary Nations

In his contribution to *Nation and Narration* (1990), Timothy Brennan points out that the word 'nation' "is both historically determined and general. As a term, it refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous – the '*natio*' – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging" (45). This feeling of 'community' (as a specific kind of unity, I would say: together being one) is also what

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<sup>29</sup> As such, it also touches upon the anxieties of miscegenation (mixed relationships and marriages, or even rapes by 'brown men' of 'white women') and the fear of degeneration of the white race. This in turn harks back to a fear stemming from the nineteenth-century of being outnumbered by non-white people, which was extensively used by Fascism and National Socialism as justification for racial laws and exterminations.

Benedict Anderson most famously discussed in his *Imagined Communities* (1983) in which the notion of 'nation' is mostly connected to the rise of the modern nation-state in the nineteenth century. In Anderson's argument, the community of the nation, which traverses that of the family, the neighbourhood and the city, needs to be imagined: we cannot possibly know every individual in our country, yet we somehow (need to) feel related. This fictive bond is enhanced by shared narratives (of origin; in a shared language) and thus the novel as a form has played an important role (e.g. Brennan 49). In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha moves the notion of nation into the sphere of metaphor as he states that "[t]he nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor" (200). Thus, especially when people become detached from their direct homes, the meanings connected to this home become transferred to the 'nation': the metaphor "transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the 'middle passage,' or the central European steppes, across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people" (*Location* 200). The idea that the nation is fictive is widely accepted, yet its consequences are very much real, in the words of Foucault, the nation is a 'discursive formation' and a 'gestative political structure' (Brennan 47). Part of this the fictivity of the nation is the use of metaphors. The metaphor of the nation, the country as a body, as a person is a most used and in many ways an apt one.<sup>30</sup>

In Esposito's understanding of community however, the body-nation figure is improper and untenable: "the community cannot be thought of as a body, as a corporation in which individuals are founded in a larger individual," because the individuals that are part of a community are "[f]inite subjects, cut by a limit that cannot be interiorized because it constitutes precisely their 'outside': the exteriority that they overlook and that enters into them in their common non belonging" (*Communitas* 7). As such, the community is neither a "mode of being" nor a "'making' of the individual subject," it is instead the subject's "exposure to what interrupts the closing and turns it inside out" (7). In this sense it is Esposito's immunitary notion of an internalization of the outside and the ongoing relationship between the internal and external that not negates, but constitutes community.

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<sup>30</sup> In a metonymical sense, a person as part of a nation, mostly the head of state, can come to stand for the nation. As such, in speaking of, for example, president Obama, one might mean the U.S. as a whole. In this sense, a war between countries is also a war between persons. Implied in this figure is that the qualities of the head of state are also those of the country.

### *The Bodily Nation: Prone to Illness*

It is the unity of the nation and its necessary boundaries, or at least the way we address the nation as an enclosed whole, that makes the analogy with the human body so apparent. In seeing the nation as a uniform whole, the border is the place where the separation between self and other becomes most visible. Yet, as a liminal or third space, it is also the point of connection and the space in which there is friction, movement and exchange. The body is a useful vehicle in politics when the governing instance tries to 'move' as though it indeed were one living organism. It is therefore the head that takes an important place in this metaphor, as the governing part of the nation. Gilman points to the early moderns' (e.g. Bacon's) "pervasive analogizing of the body and the body politic [that] turns on both the necessity of maintaining the distinction that makes the analogy possible in the first place (a distinction also reinforcing the due subordination of the one to the other)" (44). Thus, in the analogy of body and body politic (based on structural similarities), the individual body is of less importance than the political structure as a whole (and thus of a 'higher order'). This is also what Watts relates to in describing the ideas of civic humanism which "held that society was analogous in its organization to a living organism and that the oligarchs at the top of the hierarchy owed paternalistic oversight to the lower orders ... In their turn the lower orders owed their rulers deference and obedience" (15). Gilman adds that in this early modern view there is a "threat of dissolution (of the two bodies, and of the distinction between them) figured by [the notion of] infectious disease (44). It is the 'infectiousness' that threatens the collective body and not just the individual body. Contagion makes the body-politic react as though it was indeed a body 'invaded' by foreign elements that threatens its existence. This is exactly what is at stake in Esposito's *Immunitas*:

the risk has to do with trespassing or violating borders. Whether the danger that lies in wait is a disease threatening the individual body, a violent intrusion into the body politic, or a deviant message entering the body electronic, what remains constant is the place where the threat is located, always on the border between the inside and the outside, between the self and the other, the individual and the common. Someone or something penetrates a body – individual or collective – and alters it, transforms it, corrupts it (2)

Similarly to Bhabha, Esposito also pinpoints the border as the place where invasion and contagion occur and thus the place where the disintegration of the body/nation begins. The nation in the bodily metaphor is prone to disease, decay and eventually death.

In this figure of the nation-body, a whole series of diseases are employed to signify evils that threaten it, which for Sontag is precisely the danger of this particular vehicle for metaphor. That is, in employing a certain military language when talking about our ill bodies, we categorize the patient as victim, the ill body as weak and the process of the disease as a defeat. My exploration focuses more on the other side of the body nation figure, on the appropriation of diseases to refer to the wrongs of our society and the dangers that this entails. An example of such an employment of the body-nation figure is stated by Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, quoted by Esposito: "In the end it is not worth asking what kind of place there should be for the privileged classes in the social order. It is like asking what kind of place a malignant tumor should have in the body of someone who is ill, as it devours and ruins his health" (*Immunitas* 117). Esposito notes that "this passage is not only the thorough overlapping between the political lexicon and the medical lexicon, once again connoted by the metaphor of the body, but also the immunitary consequence that directly follows from it: in order for the body to heal permanently, the power of the illness afflicting it must be leveraged, and precisely for this reason, drastically eliminated" (118). Sieyès' utterance also implies the supposed natural state of life: that of health. In the body-nation figure, health is the stage that comes before illness and that is desired and therefore must be defended (to prolong life, to ward off death just a little longer). In Nietzsche, the notion of a 'healthy' nation is connected to power, as Robert C. Solomon points out in his *From Rationalism to Existentialism* (1972), both health and power are defined "as the capability of resistance to disease" (128).<sup>31</sup> Solomon continues by citing a few decrees that are tied to this: "*That which does not overcome me makes me stronger. / An organism is healthy depending upon what diseases it can survive. / The notion of power is also (but not primarily) applied to the state: / A state is strong depending on how many parasites it can support. / Power is thus the ability to overcome...*" (128). Considering the 'parasite,' the notion of the 'host' also plays an important role in the body-nation paradigm.

The plague in particular is connected to 'apocalyptic imaginings' of dissolution (as for example Gomel has pointed out): the disease is disruptive to such an extent that

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<sup>31</sup> This overcoming is connected to the Aristotelian concept of 'potentiality' (Solomon 128).

it is felt at the heart of the collective body.<sup>32</sup> It is therefore no surprise that religious explanations were ventured in order to find the meaning of such a devastating epidemic: the nation as a whole was seen as sinful in the eyes of God and punished accordingly (e.g. Gilman 103). The plague dissolves the structure of the body-politic from the ground up: it creeps from the individual to the local communities of villages, towns and cities. It is in particular “[t]his undoing of the nation,” as Gilman notes, that “is the dark vision that haunts the discourse of national identity” (109). Gilman describes a kind of wasteland that is created by this deadly contagious disease and in particular notes that on broadsheets from 17<sup>th</sup> century England it is the space outside the city wall that is most often depicted: it “tends to be set in a kind of no-man’s-land, a liminal space ... but not yet in view of any refuge in the country” (111). It is also, as is visible in Camus and Hesse, the place where the accumulating dead bodies are buried (e.g. Camus 137, Hesse 213).

## 1.2 Nations in ages of Modernity, Fascism, Terrorism and Migration

*Hesse: Between Modernity and Late Romanticism*

*Narziss und Goldmund* was written in a time when one of the consequences of modern technology had just shown its ugly face. Mark Boulby in his chapter on the novel in Harold Bloom’s collection *Hermann Hesse* (2003) states: “The expansive account of the ravages of the Black Death is in the best Romantic tradition, and one might well think of the wanderings of Renzo and presume influence of *I Promessi Sposi*” (93). Hesse proposed that the interbellum literature was a “literature of an age of transition, a literature which has become problematic and unsure of itself, has a function and value insofar as the writers attempt to confess with the utmost sincerity their own problems, their own misery, and the problems and misery of their time” (Heller 144). Hesse was a known sceptic of the attitude towards “the headlong scientific and industrial ‘progress’ following Germany’s belated industrialization,” Ingo Cornils poses in his introduction to *A Companion to the Works of Hermann Hesse* (2009: 9). Cornils adds that Hesse blamed

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<sup>32</sup> A dissolution of the body, either the biological or the metaphorical one, means a loss of identity. In Herbert the scene in which a priest comes to ask John what to do with the remains. John for a brief moment does not understand what the priest means: “Remains? John thought. He’s talking about Mary and the twins” (C3).

the World War on Germany's (late) industrialization and modern society (9-10). In *Hermann Hesse Today* (2005) Cornelis notes that Helga Esselbom-Krumbiegel, Cornelis thus rightly positions "Hesse at the intersection of competing political, social, and cultural trends during his formative years: trends such as late-Romantic veneration of nature as well as vehement rejection of technological progress and modern civilization" (9). In this regard Hesse's rejection of modern society corresponds to "the pessimistic view of 'civilization' associated with Friedrich Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler" (*Today* 9). Heller argues that Hesse's writing indeed was the result of this discontent with his world, a world changing as a result of the industrial revolution, which he himself called a "'strange transformation' of men and things engendered *like a disease* from the smoke of the first steam engines..." (142; emphasis added). It is important to note that Hesse talks about his nation as being ill, and industrialization as something he wants to cure by averting himself from modern living, for example in his way of travelling, which "remained approximately on the level of the Middle Ages" (142). In this light, the Medieval tale of the wandering Goldmund through the German landscape also becomes a turn back to the late romantic area of German prose and poetry.<sup>33</sup> In the metaphorical figure of the body-nation, Germany is ill and the plague is the vehicle for industrialization which is most visible in the city. As such, the degeneration of the modern industrialized city is made visible in the medieval tale through the imagery of the plague.

#### *Camus: Reversing Nazi Discourse*

*La Peste* has been famously (mis)read as a novel about fascism, and as such it is interesting here to take a look at how fascist discourse employed the metaphor of the ill nation and imagery of the plague. Gomel connects Nazism's obsession with purity and degeneration, the idea that the German Reich was ill and needed to be cured, to the desire for a cleansing or purification that are part of apocalyptic imaginings. Referring to Lee Quinby, Gomel focusses on "the general narrativity of contagion and on the way the plague-stricken body is manipulated within the overall plot of apocalyptic millennialism" (406). This in turn "is a powerful ideological current in the twentieth-century political history, embracing such diverse manifestations as religious

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<sup>33</sup> Of course, romanticism is also deeply linked to the forming of the nation-state, of Germany as Reich and of a national literature. According to Ingo Cornelis, "Hesse had long foreseen the weakness of the Weimar Republic and its ultimate collapse in the face of totalitarian ideologies" (*Companion* 5).

fundamentalism, Nazism, and other forms of ‘radical desperation’” (406). Gomel notes a dual interpretation of the plague narrative or apocalyptic plot, in that it on the one hand may be employed “as a singularly atrocious technique of separating the damned from the saved” and on the other, and in a similar vein as Wald, that the infectious agent can strike any body and “[s]ince everybody is a potential victim, the line between the pure and the impure can never be drawn with any precision” (406). In the first instance, “the plague becomes a metaphor for genocide, functioning as such both in *Mein Kampf* and in Camus’s *The Plague*,” Gomel states (406). Yet, as Gomel fails to point out accurately in this phrasing, the plague as metaphor for genocide is totally opposite in Camus compared to the plague as part of eugenic discourse<sup>34</sup> of purity employed by Nazism. In both very separate instances the vehicle is indeed the plague, yet the tenor is more ambiguous, as Gomel later elaborates.

The metaphor of the plague in Nazism is clearly part of the body-nation figure in which Germany is the body made ill, put into decline and under threat of death by pathogens or parasites present within the bodily confines. However Gomel notes, the plague here is not just simply, as one might suspect, a vehicle to refer to the Jews, the Roma, homosexuals and disabled people or anyone opposing Nazi ideologies, it is actually also proposed as the cure for the Reich’s illness (and as such is part of apocalyptic imaginings): “the plague as a ‘final solution,’ a decisive break with, and purification from, the past, ushering in a genocidal utopia” (409). In this sense, “[t]he Jews are not just any sickness: they are TB, cancer, a slow, creeping, wasting-away malady that is to be combated with the blitzkrieg of the plague” (423). Thus, there is what Gomel calls ‘a curious slippage’ in this discourse employing the plague metaphor: “the conflation of disease and cure. As the victims were made into a pestilence, another kind of pestilence was called upon to do battle with their pernicious influence” (423). In Camus, as I will develop throughout the analysis, the imagery of the plague is employed to reverse that of the plague in fascist discourse: as such, the plague becomes a metaphor for dogma, totalitarianism and even more specifically (though not exclusively) for fascism itself.

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<sup>34</sup> Gomel points out that eugenic discourse is a “reduction of history to a (pseudo)-Darwinian process [which] is a hallmark of the early-twentieth-century biopolitics that eventually mutate into Nazism” (421-422).



### *Herbert: Protecting Mother Ireland*

In Herbert, Ireland is the focal point and described as a nation with a long history of invasion by the Vikings and oppression by the British, the memory of which is in the soil (/soul) of the land. John O'Neill's revenge is "a retaliation against the Celtic extermination of the First People, the Danaans, who had been in Ireland before the waves of invaders from Britain and the Continent" (C5). The motivation for him to take such devastating revenge is the bombing by the IRA, the Irish *nationalists*. Yet, the plague he sets loose unto the world makes it even more divided as each country fights for its own survival. In her article "Madness and Mother Ireland in the fiction of Patrick McCabe" (2010) Ellen McWilliams describes 'the lingering myth of Mother Ireland,' that is "Ireland imagined as a woman, bearing the scars of colonial oppression or the promise of liberation" (391). McWilliams points out that some writers, mostly feminist authors, "share a creatively charged relationship with what Eavan Boland described as the predominance of 'the nation as woman; the woman as national muse' in Irish literature and are driven by the need to counteract the history of the Mother Ireland tradition" (391). Edna O'Brien points out that "Countries are either mothers or fathers, and engender the emotional bristle secretly reserved for either sire. Ireland has always been a woman, a womb, a cave, a Rosaleen, a sow, a bride, a harlot, and, of course, the gaunt hag of Beare" (McWilliams 392).<sup>35</sup>

Herbert uses epigraphs to each chapter to indicate the moral standpoints of the characters and give a broader context to his story. In the epigraph to chapter three, an utterance by Father Flannery reads: "Holy Ireland was just a name, a myth, a dream that had no connection with any reality." On the other hand, nationalist Joseph Herity blames the oppressing and invading by others for Ireland's troubles; again in an epigraph, referring to the Elizabethan age of Shakespeare, he utters: "That's where they began their policy of exterminating the Irish. Back then we learned the bitter truth: England's enemy is Ireland's friend" (C15). As John prepares his revenge, his mind gets split: it is a new other part of him that he considers to be able to commit such a horrible act as revenge and it is this part of him that he connects to Ireland's history. This 'other' asks: "Why should Ireland shoulder it all alone?", upon which John decides to aim his revenge

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<sup>35</sup> Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill states that her writing is: "to free myself of the sense that I as an individual woman am carrying the map of Ireland around my back" (McWilliams 391). As such both writers point at the "recurring and problematic conflation of the national and the feminine," yet, as McWilliams argues, they leave the figure mainly intact (391-392).

also at England because it gave the Irish nationalist cause to become terrorists and at Libya because it provided the training ground (C4). Thus, O'Neill's revenge is aimed at these nations as though they were individual persons, the plague as his weapon. Yet, it is the individual body as well as the collective that is at stake. Via the plague, Herbert critiques the dangerous nationalism of the IRA with their terrorist attacks, yet at the same time the oppressing of Ireland by the Brits. As such, the plague becomes a tool to fictively work out the end of such a political struggle. The plague however does not stop at the borders of Ireland and England, it gnaws at the individual female bodies on all continents: the globalized world becomes highly palpable through the effects of the worldwide pandemic. The severely militarized borders of some of the nations (most notably Switzerland) provide an escape from the white plague (at severe costs), yet it is the international relations of the medical establishment that brings about the cure. As I will develop throughout the analysis, the plague in Herbert is not so much a metaphorical figure as it is a tool to make visible the destructive tendencies of nationalism.

*Pfeijffer: Italy and Europe Facing the Refugee Crisis, Lampedusa as Border zone*

*Mare Nostrum.*

As Pfeijffer's narrator situates himself in Genoa, the Italian host to his own search for 'a better life elsewhere,' there is another place referred to in his narrative that is of interest as border zone: the island of Lampedusa. Lampedusa is situated between the Libyan and Italian coasts and as such is the first stretch of land that immigrants from the African continent are able to reach when crossing overseas. In their 2015 article "Thinking Lampedusa: border construction, the spectacle of bare life and the productivity of migrants," Nick Dines et al. examine the island as a migration 'hot-spot,' a border zone, and discuss the figure of the migrant in relation to Agamben's notion of bare life. As such, they "challenge the common image of a remote outpost that by geographical accident has become a 'natural' destination for irregular migrants arriving from Africa" (431). Agamben's interpretation of bare life, as tied to the figure of the *homo sacer* (that is, being outside the law) is discussed as important considering that it follows a mode of

thinking where “migrants who perish during border crossings are reduced to bare life,” this “insofar as the liminal legal space through which they move – be it the sea or the desert – provides a ‘moral alibi’ that allows authorities to deny responsibility for any casualties” (Dines et al. 435).<sup>36</sup> As such, Lampedusa functions as “a multidimensional space of exception: it is both a border zone that straddles Europe and Africa, as well as the setting for administrative detention facilities” (435).<sup>37</sup>

As Pfeijffer’s narrator meets the Senegalese Djiby, he asks him to recount his story. Metafictionality and unreliability are important aspects of Ilja’s narration as he proposes that ‘all his writings are fake’; yet, at the same time the novel is presented as a bundle of notes and letters he sends to an unnamed friend, and as such they are not yet moulded into a fiction (276). Narrator Ilja worries “dat sommige situaties waarin ik hier verzeild raak en veel van de personen die ik in werkelijkheid ontmoet in dit vervreemdende decor zo kleurrijk zijn, om niet te zeggen grotesk, dat ze gevaar lopen als fictie nauwelijks geloofwaardig te zijn” (207; c.f. 317). Pointing at the issue of conveying reality through fiction in this manner has a candid effect. In this set up, the voices of the people he meets, though narrated through Ilja’s voice, become all the more truthful. Djiby relates the bizarre, unimaginable story of his migration: “Ik vertel gewoon zoals het was. De waarheid” (246). First he recounts his journey from his homeland to the city of Agadez (Niger), “het knooppunt van de verschillende wegen naar het beloofde land,” where travellers stagnate due to a lack of money, weakness, and disease (244, 255). The story continues crossing from the Libyan coast towards Lampedusa, his falling into the hands of human traffickers who then provide his group with a boat that is too small and has barely enough fuel for only half the journey: “Ze zeiden dat we niet moesten zeuren, Lampedusa was vlakbij, en Lampedusa was Italië, en Italië was Europa”

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<sup>36</sup> Dines et al. also point out that Agamben’s discussion of bare life is more nuanced than this formulation, something that many critics fail to incorporate in their work. Bare life is not only the life that exists outside the law; it is also each individual body in a modern democracy that is at stake when political conflict occurs (and as such an inherent part of biopolitics) (437).

<sup>37</sup> There is another border zone present in Pfeijffer’s novel, one that he intensely compares to Lampedusa, that is: Ellis Island at the turn of the twentieth century. “De Amerikanen hadden in 1892 een eiland ingericht om de immigratiestromen uit Italië op te vangen. De passagiers van de eerst en tweede klasse mochten van boord in de haven. De derde klasse werd om te beginnen eerst maar eens in quarantaine gezet, wat gezien de epidemieën aan boord niet eens onverstandig geacht kon worden. En dan de vernederingen. De ondervragingen in het Engels en het medisch onderzoek” (216-217; c.f. 167, 192, 196, 215). Djiby’s experiences and those of the imagined Alessandro are strikingly similar, as the migration regulations that are accompanied by medical measures such as examinations, quarantines and forced treatments show are an example of (see also Dines et al. 431). In these manners the migrant’s body is seen as a threat and must thus be controlled.

(249). Europe is the Promised Land and as both Lampedusa and Italy are part of this soil, they become a metonymical stand-in for Europe.<sup>38</sup> However, there is not much truth in this conflation: Lampedusa can be more accurately likened to a detention camp (or even, as Djiby himself puts it, to a concentration camp) than to the golden European fairy tale (Pfeijffer 260). Yet, even more importantly: in the international waters between Libya and Lampedusa, the immigrants in life-threatening situations are considered to be ‘no one’s responsibility.’ The European boats and ships that spot the immigrants from afar who are waving in desperation, prefer to be blind: to see would mean to help, and to help would result in a trafficking charge (254). And thus, even though the sea is their only way to freedom and a better life, they dwell in a no man’s land between life and death. In Djiby’s story, even after he finally arrives on Lampedusa with the help of a ‘courageous’ Spanish fisherman, the exceptional state of Djiby and his fellow migrants remains a feature of this border zone.<sup>39</sup> It is Berlusconi, as Djiby jokingly points out, who in the end is the porter to Europe’s realm: in order to rid himself of this nuisance, he provides the Lampedusian migrants with a permit to the EU as he knows most of them will only travel through Italy in their journey toward to France (261-262). As Dines et al. propose, the “harnessing of bare life” produces “a Janus-faced image of the migrant as both a threat and victim,” and has “effects that extend far beyond Lampedusa” (438).

What is most interesting here is the addressing of Europe as one, and, as a woman. In Pfeijffer it is mostly Genoa as city that is conflated with the figure of a woman (or rather: there are three female figures in the narrative that at times merge into one another, shifting between Genoa, ‘het mooiste meisjes van Genua,’ and lastly the gender-

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<sup>38</sup> When Ilja becomes indebted, he appeals to his right as a ‘European citizen.’ Yet Parodi, the father of the man who has tricked him into debt states: “Ik weet wat u denkt. U gelooft in Europa en in de gedachte dat Italië een democratische rechtstaat is en in de fantasie dat Genua deel uitmaakt van Italië. U gelooft in uw democratisch recht en in rechtsbescherming” (228). Likewise Cinzia, a woman he meets from time to time at the terrace of the ‘bar met de spiegels’ points out to him: “Jij denkt dat dit Europa is, omdat je met Easyjet binnen anderhalf uur terug kunt zijn in jouw overzichtelijke vaderland. Je vergist je. Je bent in Genua. Dit is Afrika. Deze wereld is jou volslagen wezensvreemd” (84). Thus, Genoa is, in spite of its relation to Italy as nation and Europe as continent, first and foremost an entity in itself.

<sup>39</sup> This act of ‘heroism,’ when considered in similar regard as Camus’ narrator views the acts of the health groups battling the plague, should be a natural act of human compassion, yet through the bizarre circumstances becomes an act that takes courage. And as Rieux points out, he “is rather inclined to believe that by giving too much importance for fine actions one may end by paying an indirect but powerful tribute to evil, because in so doing one implies that such fine actions are only valuable because they are rare, and that malice or indifference are far more common motives in the actions of men” (100).

blurring Ilja himself; e.g. 346). Yet, as the narrator proposes, there is a metonymical relationship between the city, the country and the continent:

Zij verleidt en verdelgt. Zoals ratten in de val worden gelokt met gif dat hun als honing smaakt. In die zin staat Genua La Superba symbool voor Europa als geheel. Achter haar ondoordringbare muur van grenscontroles, asielpcedures, opsporingsbeamten en gedwongen uitzettingen ligt zij onweerstaanbaar te pronken met haar belofte van glinsterend nieuwe Mercedessen en BMW's. Wie hier weet binnen te dringen, denkt alleen daarom al zijn droom te hebben waargemaakt. Hij is in het paradijs. De rest zal vanzelf gaan. En vervolgens zal hij met elf landgenoten creperen in een lekkend tweekamerappartementje en als een rat worden verdelgd. (93)

In Pfeijffer Europe becomes a femme fatale, who is deviously luring immigrants into her confines only to disregard or even exterminate them 'as rats' as soon as they are within her reach. Advances to which Djiby himself is sensitive, and like the narrator, he gets hopelessly infatuated with La Superba, who, in his words, 'spits him out like he were a rat' (262). Djiby notes that this is not an adequate metaphor since a rat is not something you would like to swallow in the first place and points at the narrator's job to contemplate on a better one. As such, the figurative language at work in the novel – most notably the figure of the rat-immigrant, which will be more elaborately discussed in the third chapter – is foregrounded at the same time as the process of comparison is meta-fictionalized.

In regard to the comparison of Europe and Genoa to a woman, what must be considered are the rhetorical consequences of this figure.<sup>40</sup> It is both related to the male/political desire to protect the female body/nation from the other, and conquest the female body/nation of the other *and* viewing the female figure as a source of life and of evil. In Pfeijffer, these instances are at once very obvious effects of the figure, and at the same time diffused as the male figure of the narrator shifts into a female one. At first, this is presented as a mispronunciation of his first name 'Ilja' as 'Giulia' by one of the women he meets at the terrace of his favourite bar (32). It then becomes visible through two sexual experiences with different women who address him as a girl: they caress his long wavy hair and rub his 'pregnant' belly (e.g. 96, 191-192). The act of undressing

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<sup>40</sup> In his polemical collection of essays, columns and even a part of *La Superba*, Pfeijffer's *Gelukzoekers* (2015) starts with a letter to Europe, the Europe of the classical myth who is abducted by Zeus from the coasts of Northern Africa to the island of Crete, but of course this is also the geographical and political Europe that is the continent.

under the gaze of these women is an important aspect: as his figure melts with La Superba and with 'het mooiste meisje van Genua, he lays bare its most intimate truths. In the end, his metamorphosis is completed when he becomes a transvestite prostitute, susceptible to the lusts of men. Thus, instead of invading Europe/Italy/Genoa as a foreigner, attempting to conquer and possess her, the only way to truly belong is to become a 'her,' to be recognized as similar and to be incorporated as such.

### 1.3 The Plague as Calamity and the City as its Place

In all four primary texts, as in all plague-writing, the plague is a major and disruptive event – though in Pfeijffer it is part of the city's history and connected to contemporary problems of migration. As in the broadsheets described by Gilman, it is mainly the city that houses the plague in the texts of Hesse, Camus and Pfeijffer. The fairytale-like quality of Hesse's narrative makes the city almost a symbol of the plague, whereas in Camus and Pfeijffer it is not just any city that becomes central: it is a port city, Genoa in Pfeijffer and Oran in Camus, that becomes the focal point for the plague narrative. A port city is an excellent example of a liminal space since it forms the connection between the land and the sea, between the rest of the nation and the world. In these plague writings, "plague is read as a tragedy played out in the city at large" (Gilman 38).<sup>41</sup> The metaphor of body-nation becomes one of body-city, as Gilman notes, "[t]he analogy between people and cities can fuse into an image of the city itself as a corrupt pestilential body" (47).<sup>42</sup> Or, the city is seen as a part of the body-nation, as part of its neural structure, as the vital organs mandatory for its health and survival or even as its lymph nodes, playing a vital role in its immunitary 'defence.'

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<sup>41</sup> Gilman highlights that in English imaginings of the plague in the Renaissance it is the nation that is at stake, rather than the city as in Italian representation: "plague becomes the lens through which the nation itself comes into focus: [George] Wither imagines it as a single diseased body with enfeebled sinews, poor digestion, and tainted blood, its corporate sins having already weakened its moral defenses. In terms of the metaphor of the state-as-body, the new king is prudently exempt from any responsibility for the national malady" (102).

<sup>42</sup> For Gilman's analysis of the plague and the city, London is a most important figure. London suffered from outbreaks regularly: "[o]n average, plague deaths tended to peak in London every fifteen or twenty years, the infection reasserting itself once its stock of potential victims had been replenished by births and immigration from the countryside with a new (non-immune) generation, and once the density of the city's population had again reached the necessary threshold for a new epidemic to take root" (Gilman 32).

In Hesse's medieval Germany the city is opposed to the country-side, both roamed by Goldmund. It is the face of the Madonna carved by Master Niklaus that first leads Goldmund to the city, that has tellingly transformed from a "schöne heitere Landstraße ... ein festlicher Tummelplatz und bequemer Aufenthalt," to "nur noch eine Straße, war der Weg zur Stadt, der Weg zum Meister" (146). His first view upon the city is coloured by excitement that matches the hustle and bustle that is described: he "sah hinter den Mauern Türme prangen, sah gemeißelte Wappen und gemalte Schilder überm Tor, schritt mit pochendem Herzen hindurch und achtete kaum auf den Lärm und das frohe Gedränge der Gassen, auf die Ritter zu Pferde, auf die Wagen und Karossen" (146). Yet "Ritter noch Wagen, nicht Stadt noch Bischof waren ihm wichtig" (146). The only reason for Goldmund to be present in the city is to learn his art, and as such, a new life begins for him: not as a wanderer through the beautiful countryside, but a citizen of the Bishop's city. The city invitingly envelops him like one of his lovers: "So wie dies Land und diese Stadt ihn heiter, verlockend und üppig empfangen hatten, so empfing ihn diese neue Leben mit Freudigkeit und viele Versprechungen" (156). Yet, as the student surpasses the master and Goldmund has nothing else to learn, he becomes miffed with the city and the people in it: "Überhaupt, was wurde hier in dieser *fetten vergnügten Stadt* nicht Tag für Tag gefressen und vergeudet! Wie faul, wie verwöhnt, wie wählerisch waren diese feisten Bürger, wegen deren jeden Tag so viel Säue und Kälber geschlachtet und so viel schöne arme Fische aus dem Fluß gezogen wurden" (183; emphasis added). He longs for the sober, yet richer life of wandering and leaves the city with no mixed feelings: "als er über die *Schwelle* hinausging und plötzlich Gasse und Stadt ihm mit jenem verwandelten, fremden Gesicht ins Auge sahen, den gewohnten Dinge annehmen, wenn unser Herz von ihnen Abschied genommen hat" (186-187; emphasis added). In this sense, the city resembles his romantic escapades: exciting at first, educative, yet temporary.

It is at the threshold of civilization that Goldmund in his wanderings first encounters the plague (and death). After being banished from the walls of some city by an angry mob, Goldmund and his travel companion Robert find a farmhouse in which they want to spend the night. The house somehow seems too quiet, "merkwürdig still und verschlafen," and Robert hesitates to go in (192). Goldmund's curiosity makes him enter through the unlocked door, upon which he sees a silent figure, apparently asleep, near the fireplace: "Rufen half nichts, das Haus schien verzaubert. Freundlich tippte er

der sitzenden Frau auf die Schulter, sie bewegte sich nicht, und jetzt sah er, daß sie mitten in einem Spinnennetze saß ... >> Die ist tot <<, dachte er mit einem leichten Grausen“ (193). Walking from corpse to corpse, Goldmund comprehends death encapsulated by the house: “Wie war diese kleine Menschenheimat, in der noch ein Rest von Herdfeuer glomm, gespenstisch und traurig, von Leichen bewohnt, ganz von Tod erfüllt und durchgezogen!” (195). Robert and Goldmund continue their journey and are confronted with the plague everywhere. It is death that reigns the land now (198). Yet, Goldmund remains unfearful: “er ging gespannt und duster durch das Todesland, furchtbar angezogen vom Anblick großen Sterbens, die Seele voll vom großen Herbst, das Herz schwer vom Lied der mähenden Sense. Manchmal erschien ihm das Bild der ewigen Mutter wieder, ein bleiches Riesengesicht mit Medusenaugen, mit einem schweren Lächeln voll Leid und Tod” (198).

Once again in the city, Goldmund encounters a girl standing on the doorstep of a house: “>> Noch nicht krank? << fragte er, und sie schüttelte den Kopf. >> Dann kommt mit mir aus dieser *Totenstadt* hinaus, wir wollen in den Wald gehen und ein gutes Leben haben” (200, emphasis added). The city is the place of death, whereas the countryside provides a more sustainable environment for prolonging life. This is especially true considering contagion, when they find a little hut in an uninhabited region, Robert is most content: “man war sicher vor Ansteckung sowohl wie vor Feindseligkeiten; aber es hatte den Nachteil, daß sich sehr wenig zu essen fand” (204). For Robert, the city is the place where one catches the plague, he is very much aware of the possible danger of the bodies of others and the city of course is a place cramped with them. Considering the plague as metaphor for industrialization and modernity, the city is also the place of the factory and of where infectiousness of modern ideas is most noticeable. In this figure, the German cities swell up, like the body’s lymph nodes under the influence of *Yersinia pestis*, harbouring factories with dirty machines and an ever growing class of poor labourers. The question remains if this is a decline towards an end or towards a rebirth in the sense of Gomel’s apocalyptic imaginings. In Hesse’s narrative the plague ceases, but it has also propelled Goldmund’s transient state of being. Cornils points out that Hesse’s “holistic view of a human being as an evolving, struggling, ever-changing individual chimes with modern experience” (*Companion* 13).

In the novels of Camus, Herbert and Pfeijffer the plague seems somewhat out of place: it is not the medieval or early modern world in which the epidemic makes its



victims, but it is our modern day one that becomes its stage. In Camus the plague is met with disbelief at first: "Pestilence is in fact very common, but we find it hard to believe a pestilence when it descends upon us. There have been as many plagues in the world as there have been wars, yet plague and wars always find people equally unprepared" (30). And, this suspension of belief becomes clear as people "continued making arrangements for travel and holding options. Why should they have thought about the plague, which negates the future, negates journeys and debates?" (31). The plague's history is known, but it is therefore even more unbelievable for the people of Oran that this is the reality that they find themselves in, "[t]he word contained not only what science had seen fit to put in it, but a long succession of extraordinary images that had nothing to do with this grey and yellow town ... such peaceful and unthinking tranquillity almost effortlessly contradicted the old images of pestilence" (32). It is not only unimaginable, it is impossible, and though the word 'plague' was uttered, it "would cease because plague was inconceivable, or because it was wrongly conceived" (33).<sup>43</sup> It is such an evil that this could not happen to good people, the people of Oran.<sup>44</sup> When the medical officials gather, among them of course Dr Rieux, a scene quite similar to the one in Herbert, there is discord between them, as one states: "The truth is that our colleague here *believes* in the plague" (41, emphasis added). Another replies: "So we must take responsibility of acting *as though* the disease were a plague" (41, emphasis added). It is not an isolated instance of illness and death anymore, everyone is affected by it and it will reign over their day to day lives for a long period of time: "a quite individual feeling such as being separated from a loved one suddenly became ... the feeling of a whole people and, together with fear, the greatest agony of that long period of exile" (53).<sup>45</sup>

As reality starts to sink in, the authorities decide "to wage war on the plague" (72). However, "many still hoped that the epidemic would end and that they and their families would be spared. As a result, they did not feel any sense of obligation. For them

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<sup>43</sup> See for example also: "you could imagine it happening here," yet "the word 'plague' had been spoken" (33).

<sup>44</sup> See here Grand's reaction to the plague: he "could not believe that the plague might really get a hold on a town where you could still find humble civil servants who devoted their free moments to honourable obsessions. More exactly he could not imagine how such obsessions fitted into the context of the plague, and so concluded that, in practical terms, the plague had no future among the people of our town" (37).

<sup>45</sup> The theme of exile plays a major role in all plague writing. Experiences of plague are also experiences of exile, this somehow also makes the metaphor of the plague-migration in a way very apt (I will set this up in the next chapters, see page 53-58). Such a disruptive event asks something of every individual that make up the whole; "we are all involved" (67); a "dreary struggle between the happiness of each individual and the abstractions of the plague" (71).

the plague was only *an unpleasant visitor*" (72; emphasis added). As the plague rages on, the people of Oran become more and more a collective for which the vehicle of *one* living organism seems increasingly apt. Tarrou relates to Rieux: "the only way to bring people together is to send them the plague" (152). "While up to this point they had fiercely subtracted their suffering from the sum of collective misfortune, now they had accepted it as part of the whole" (140).

The city in Camus, Oran, also plays a major role as the narrative never leaves this place and the narrator (in the last pages revealed to be Dr Rieux himself) constantly reflects on the community of the city. Oran is a port-city located at sea and thus an important place for communication and trade with the rest of the world. "Oran is an ordinary town, nothing more than a French Prefecture on the coast of Algeria" (5); it is not pretty with flowers and trees, it is 'a neutral place.' The narrator speaks of a 'we' and 'fellow-citizens,' placing himself among them as he narrates the events of the plague that happened upon them. He states that what is "more distinctive about our town is how difficult it can be to die there. 'Difficult' is not actually the right word; it is more a question of discomfort. It is never pleasant being ill," strangely pointing ahead at the events about to come (6). Gomel notes that "*The Plague*, with its collective but impersonal narrative voice, the main conflict is between individuality and the community of suffering ... the inhabitants of Oran fuse into a solid mass of aching flesh" (415).<sup>46</sup>

Dr Rieux first encounters dead rats in his building. A little peculiar, but nothing to be really concerned about at first. Yet, as their number increases and people start to fall severely ill, an eerie feeling starts taking hold of him. From somewhere out of the collective consciousness, deep from within the city, images of plague epidemics are conjured up. Illness enters the city, the city itself becomes sick:

More than one person walking at night along the pavement would experience the feeling of the elastic bulk of a still fresh corpse under his feet. It was *as though* the very soil on which our houses were built was purging itself of an excess of bile, that it was letting boils and abscesses rise to the surface, which up to then had been devouring the inside. Just imagine the amazement of our little town which had been so quiet until then,

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<sup>46</sup> In similar regard, Gomel notes, Anthony Burgess points out in his introduction to *A Journal of the Plague Year* "the way in which London is made to appear as a breathing, suffering entity" (Gomel 415; c.f. Camus 129).

ravaged in a few days, *like* a healthy man whose thick blood had suddenly rebelled against!" (15; emphasis added)

The collectiveness of the anguish regarding the plague is strongly expressed through the image of Oran<sup>47</sup> as a living organism. And, like a body invaded by disease, fever sets in: "It was indeed baking, but neither more nor less than a fever. The whole town had a high temperature" (26).<sup>48</sup> This feeling of unity and the collective is again expressed in a bodily metaphor near the end of the novel as Rieux walks through the town and merges himself with it: "the crowd grew around him, the din increased and it seemed to him that the outer districts he was trying to reach were moving further away. Bit by bit he melted into this great bellowing body, understanding its cry better and better because at least in some respects, it was his own" (230). Rieux becomes not only part of, but one with Oran in the collectivity of suffering – as Cottard has already noted "the only way to bring people together is to send them the plague" (152). Gomel notes in this regard that this "moribund but all-embracing body politic" that appears at the end of the novel signals that "[t]he end is indefinitely postponed and the disease becomes a metaphor for the process of living" (406).<sup>49</sup> Rather than viewing disease as a transitory state from the realm of the healthy to the realm of the dead, an imminent decline, Camus proposes the human condition as already 'ill.'

Like Oran, Genoa in Pfeijffer's telling is an important port-city, opening up to the Mediterranean Sea and stage to the contemporary problems of migration. Genoa, outside of fiction, also has a vast history concerning the plague. As Gilman notes, it was at one point the gateway through which the epidemic spread to the rest of Europe: "[t]he Black Death needed almost a year to creep slowly northward from its Italian beachhead in Genoa in January 1348 to Chaucer's England" (7).<sup>50</sup> Pfeijffer, the narrator, finds himself in the Italian city, migrated from 'het koude kikkerlandje' to the warm and inviting Mediterranean city. He wants desperately to belong to the people residing in his

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<sup>47</sup> Note that 'Oran' sounds similar to 'organ,' connecting the city to the body of the nation at large.

<sup>48</sup> See also: "in the midst of the collective fever"(153).

<sup>49</sup> Gomel adds that "The Red Death, entering the masked ball in Edgar Allen Poe's story 'The Masque of the Red Death,' brings retribution to the selfish few who attempt to separate themselves from the suffering many. The hemorrhage that marks the onset of Poe's imaginary disease is the blood flowing out of the individual body and into the phantasmagoric body of the community. The Red Death is the opposite of vampirism, in which the individual selfishly ingests the communal blood supply in order to prolong his unnatural existence" (416).

<sup>50</sup> Genoa is also the city where Christopher Columbus was born (e.g. Pfeijffer 203).

new and self-proclaimed homeland: “ik wil deel uitmaken van deze wereld. Ik wil wonen in het labyrint als een gelukkig monster, samen met de duizenden andere gelukkige monsters. Ik wil mij nestelen in de ingewanden van de stad” (17). As he narrates his story to the reader, he describes Genoa as ‘La Superba,’ the grandiose:

Het beste is om op een schip te arriveren vanuit het zuiden. Dan doemt de stad vóór je op als een ondoordringbare muur van overmoed. Genua La Superba. Natuurlijk kun je ernaartoe. Maar natuurlijk heb ik haar verzonnen. Je zult haar nooit zo zien als ik haar zie, tenzij ik je vertel hoe je haar moet zien. / Ik heb ook verzonnen dat dit mijn stad is, de bakermat van mijn ware ziel, waar ik voor het eerst waarlijk gelukkig ben” (104)

As he imagines himself to be at home among the people of the town, it is at the same time a fantasy of being with a woman: “Ik wandel over de rondingen en tussen de kieren en spleten van deze stad, waar ik de weg ken als geen ander ... Het plaveisel buigt gewillig mee met mijn stappen. Daaronder golft het moeras van pus waarin we allemaal zullen verzinken zodra we de opening hebben gevonden” (64). This inflammation of Genoa’s inner realms is a forebode to Pfeijffer’s references to the city’s history as plague-port, and a gesture towards disease and decline.<sup>51</sup> A gendering of cities and nations as female has a long tradition that is also related to siege and conquest, as already noted above. As such, Ilja imagines a historical scene taking place in Genoa that echoes through into his own time:

Hier lagen adellijke dames te zuchten onder hoge plafonds in een voortdurende koortsdroom dat Genua eindelijk eens een oorlog zou verliezen en dat de invasie zou komen met brute soldaten met bajonetten en barbaarse driften. Sommigen liggen daar nog achter hun verfijnde lambriseringen en zuchten nog altijd in de zinderende hitte van het middaguur die oude geesten tot leven wekt ... de geschiedenis smelt weg in de hitte. Wat vijf eeuwen geleden nog toekomst was, is nu een herinnering aan een droom van gisteren. Alles is veranderd, maar niets is veranderd. De gauwdieven en gevallen vrouwen van toen zijn er nog steeds. De straten zweten. De eeuwenoude muren druipen van het vocht. Hoge hakken tikken op het plaveisel. Ratten schieten weg. De nacht kreunt. (185)

The city as the place of the epidemic here becomes connected to the figure of the woman (c.f. 67, 301). And not only in these fictional texts, the feminine personification of the city was for example also present as a substitute for the figure of the saint during plague-times: Gilman notes that “the saint acts as mediator for those he represents and is

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<sup>51</sup> See in similar regard: “De stad lag erbij als een vrouw met een zware verkoudheid” (54).

himself the sign of a rational means for the negotiation of infectious disease”(248). In the case of London, “the allegorical figure of the city itself” became a stand-in for “powerful female saints” such as St. Rosalia (Palerma) and St. Thecla (Venice) (248). The allegorical figure of the city as female saint seems to resemble Pfeijffer’s experience with ‘the haughty one’ very accurately. Yet, La Superba is both a sinner and a saint, she is a *hoer* and her ‘port’ is the source of disease and other evils. The narrator wanders through her, and in the end even becomes her in a way: under the name of Giulia he prostitutes himself in order to survive his debt, but he also finally ‘belongs’ to her like Camus to the collective body of Oran. The desire to belong is exemplified right at the beginning of the narrative as Ilja Leonard finds a lady’s leg, including stocking and high-heeled shoe, in a dumpster. He takes the leg home with him and caresses it, imagining the whole woman, addressing her as his lover. As such, he fictionalizes a metonymical experience of belonging.<sup>52</sup> The narrator recognizes the figure of the leg as “een treffende metafoor voor het misverstand dat liefde heet” (52).

‘Het mooiste meisje van Genua’ is the host of the ‘mirror bar,’ the place where most of Ilja’s meetings take place. As a host, the girl is obliged to serve him: “ze kon niet aan mij ontsnappen. Ze was serveerster tenslotte” (91). As such, she is mirroring the body of Genoa, of Italy (of Europe) that becomes a host to immigrants. Tellingly, she is wounded. Cinzia, sitting on the terrace, states to Ilja that he has to ask the girl about her wounds (85). And, when the narrator indeed finds himself in her embrace, he caresses these wounds and asks about them (90). The girl replies: “Ik ben gebeten door de ratten” (91). A moment later she explains that this was not the case, that she was pushed down the stairs by her abusive boyfriend. Yet, the image is there: she is violated and contaminated by a Draculean bite and at the same time she is “naakt als een zieke rat” – through act of the bite, the bitten becomes the biter (100). This image is conveyed here by Pfeijffer in relation to immigrant Ilja’s blinded love for both Genoa and the girl; in his male gaze: “Zij is een sprookje,” she is delicate and fragile (106). Mirrored with the ultimate disillusionment of the immigrants, including Ilja’s, this fairy tale of a luring, city, of a seductive Europe is presented as a mere *fata morgana*.

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<sup>52</sup> There are two other instances in Pfeijffer’s narrative in which ‘one-leggedness’ is significant: the first one is importantly a retelling of the story of Chichibio from the *Decamerone* (ik vertel het verhaal zoals het mij ooit verteld is”): Chichibio proposes to the King that the cranes he has served him for dinner were one-legged, as these birds are one-legged – which in a sense is true as they pull up one leg when standing (204). Then there is the Romanian Salvatore who roams Genoa’s streets and begs for money pretending to be limp – Ilja calls him ‘de eenbenige bedelaar’ (46; c.f. 60, 316, 321).

#### 1.4 The Actual Bodies at Stake

Returning from the body-nation figure to the actual ill bodies that inhabit the novels, I ask here: who is ill and by whom is it described? Important to keep in mind here is Scarry's elaboration on the impossibility of narrating pain and witnessing the pain of others; and Gomel's exploration of the plague witness and narrator that foregrounds his immunity. Most notably in Herbert (in which the male body is immune by means of genetics), yet also visible in Hesse, Camus and Pfeijffer it is more often than not the female body that is at stake under the threat of the plague. Of course it is Herbert's fantasy novel in which the female body is most directly attacked as O'Neil designed the new plague specifically to affect only women, a "great many women are sure to die" (C9).<sup>53</sup> At an attempt to limit the spread of the 'white' plague, called so "because of the pallor of its victims and white blotches that appeared on the extremities," to understand the disease and to find a cure, several medical experts gather to discuss what to do (C11). Among them are also two female doctors, however, the male gaze is the one that has attention for the body in a sexualised manner: "Lepikov shifted his gaze to Foss's large, well-formed breasts. Such a body!" (C11). Ariane Foss's body is actually "the largest body present" (C11) and referred to as 'monumental' – in similar vein of La Superba. Foss responds with wit and disapproval. Unfortunately, it does not take long for Foss to catch the disease she is trying to keep at bay and die in a horrific fashion. Beckett, head of the team,<sup>54</sup> is with her in her last moments as she describes to him the progress of the disease – white blotches on her skin, a desire for sex before actually falling ill, high fever, terrible stomach pains and painful nipples – and demands of him "the best damn' autopsy" (C17). These are her last words before slipping into a coma "without waking" (C17). This is the only instance in which a death as resulting from the plague is part of the narrative space, the other deaths are hinted upon, they are stories and whispers the characters tell each other. The death of dr. Foss is focalized through Beckett, who witnesses her final moments of life.

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<sup>53</sup> O'Neill discovers that women and men are differently in their genetic design and that he can use this tool to carry out his revenge" "The genetic information for every biological function—including whether the person is male or female. There is a pattern here into which I can lock a virulent destroyer" (C12).

<sup>54</sup> Beckett is desperately trying to 'fight' the white plague and as a government official has quite a good overview of what is happening in the rest of the world. For example: There was no doubt in Beckett's mind that the authorities had hidden away other female populations. He knew of at least one at Carlsbad. Was the government considering repopulation schemes? How many women were really dying out there in the United States? (C13). The isolation of women in Herbert's novel will be discussed in the next chapter.

It is Goldmund's first experience of lying with a woman that motivates his wandering and free life. It is the encounter of death that provides him with a goal and which transforms his wandering into a journey with a destined end. This also means tying himself to a city or a place for at least some time: this goal is at first to learn how to carve statues out of wood, and then it is the image of the original mother. Femininity is connected to both the beginning and the end of life: "beim ersten Anruf des Lebens an seine Sinne, beim ersten Gruß des Weiblichen unweigerlich gespürt, daß hier sein Feind und Dämon stehe, daß das Weib seine Gefahr sei" (31). It is the ultimate other without whom men could not live, but who is also the beginning of the end. "Zum erstenmal lag die Welt offen vor ihm, offen und wartend, bereit, ihn aufzunehmen, ihm wohlzutun und wehzutun" (87). It is the death of Lene, the girl he takes with him out of the plague-city of which he experiences the death most closely. As they live their quiet lives in the countryside, Lene becomes pregnant, or at least she thinks she is carrying a child. This reverses the negation of the future that comes with plague, suddenly there must be one again, for her, for their child. This is something that bothers Goldmund, who prefers to be untied to her: "Er dachte an sie, halb zärtlich, halb ärgerlich, sie hatte wieder einmal vom Herbst und von der Zukunft gesprochen" (206). He thinks about wandering of on his own again, leaving Lene, their unborn child and Robert on their own, when an intruder attacks Lene, tries to sexually assault her and infects her through a bite – like Dracula.<sup>55</sup> Goldmund is able to step in just 'in time' and strangles the marauder to death. There is a moment during this fight that he looks into Lene's eyes and sees both horror and delight: "Ein merkwürdiger Blick war das gewesen, er wußte, daß er ihn nie vergessen würde: aus aufgerissenen, entsetzten und entzückten Augen hatte da ein Stolz, ein Triumph gestrahlt, eine tiefe leidenschaftliche Mitlust am Rächen und Töten" (209). He realizes that this is the face he needs to give form to, 'das Eva-gesicht' (210). Lene seems fine, but soon falls ill; Goldmund "erkannte ... in ihrem Gesicht deutlich den nahen Tod" (210). He observes her face again with a curiosity, he watches her dying (211). She descends into silence, "sprach nur selten ein Wort ... und suchte die geschwellenen bläulichen Lippen mit der Zunge befeuchten (212). Goldmund is a witness to Lene's death as she cannot speak of her own suffering and death, she dies "ohne zu klagen" (212). Witnessing Lene dying inspires him, it brings him joy for life

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<sup>55</sup> "Goldmund wusch ihr die Brust, sie war zerkratzt, und die eine Brust hatte eine Bißwunde von den Zähnen des Unholds" (Hesse 208).

even as in the last moments before death, the body quivers in a last expulsion of life. Death to him becomes, like a woman, seductive and also motherly. Upon seeing the carved image of death in a cloister, he wishes another picture: “in ihm das wilde Lied des Todes, nicht beinern und streng, sondern eher süß und verführend, heimwärtslockend, mütterlich” (216). For him death is not a warrior, or even a judge, she is both “eine Mutter und Geliebte” (216).

As Camus' narrator is a doctor, the witnessing of pain and death is present in both his accounts of exile as result of the quarantine (of which he himself also suffers) and the illness and dying of his patients. Most notable there is the death of the young boy of the Othon family: “The little body was being eaten up by the infection without reacting ... He was *beaten* from the start (164-165; emphasis added); They were “following the disease as it *advanced and retreated* (165; emphasis added). The illness is described as maliciously taking possession of the body of its host, and the little boy's body as a defenceless puppet for the movements of the plague.<sup>56</sup> “In the hollow of his face, as if fixed in grey clay, the mouth opened and almost immediately a single continuous cry came out ... filled the room with a monotonous, discordant protest, so inhuman that it seemed to be coming from all the men at once” (167). The boy in his agony is thrown back into a pre-lingual state in the sense that Scarry has pointed out. The shrill scream that has come from the “child's mouth, soiled by illness,” a “cry of all the ages” echoes through the novel and resonates with the cries of women heard by Rieux (e.g. 41). Here, the plague resembles an inhuman monster, an abstract form of evil. The other death that is closely witnessed and narrated by Rieux is that of Tarrou. As Rieux looks into his face, Tarrou tries to smile, but this gesture of reassurance “could not get beyond his clenched jaws and lips sealed with whitish foam. But in the stiffened face the eyes still shone with bright courage” (222). Resembling the little boy's suffering, Tarrou is taken over by a “storm that was shaking his body with convulsive shudders ... [he] was slowly drifting in the midst of the tempest” (222). As his face turns into a “still mask” Tarrou's body is “pierced with spears, burnt up with a superhuman fire and twisted by all the malevolent winds of the skies; it was sinking before ... [Rieux'] eyes into the waters of the plague and he could do nothing to prevent its wreck” (223).

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<sup>56</sup> See in similar regard: “The pulse becomes thready and death occurs the result of some slight movement” (32).



## CHAPTER 2 – Borders and Membranes: Of Protection and the Inhibition of Movement

*“the first thing that the plague brought to our fellow-citizens was exile”*  
(Camus 56)

The plague as disruptive event, as discussed in the previous chapter, demands a reaction of the nation’s or the town’s authorities. Preventive measures and precautions are to be taken in order to prevent the disease from spreading, most notably among them is the inhibition of movement: the closing of borders, of town gates, of houses and even separate chambers. Not only the fear of contagion, of a terrible disease and a painful death itself, but also the imposing of quarantines and sanitary measures come to reign over people’s day-to-day lives. As such, borders and boundaries become more intensely visible, more profound, like the cell-structures under a microscope. The discovery of the cell as structuring unit has an interesting connection with the emergence of the nation-state, as Laura Otis proposes: the concern with the membrane not only coincided, but (metaphorically) influenced the heightened concern for the national border. In similar regard, the intensified bordering that comes with the plague, the imposed separation between the healthy and the sick, is voiced through anxieties about penetration (or invasion) that results in a defensive language. This in turn mirrors the language of bordering that is visible in nationalistic discourses: as such the nation is supposedly under threat of invading others (e.g. immigrants) for which the body of the nation must provide an immunitary counterattack.

Expanding this figure of the membrane/border, the metaphor of the body under siege will be explored in regard to Esposito’s arguments about the body’s immune system in relation to (bio)politics. Then, Foucault’s discussion of the plague measurements and its relevance for ‘panopticism’ is discussed in the paragraph on quarantines and a fixing of the individual into place (and time). These war and immunity discourses will be connected to sentiments of xenophobia, experiences of exclusion and exile, and the use of both the cure and the disease itself as a tool in politics or weapon as foregrounded by the primary texts. The sentiment of keeping at bay the plague and the defensive language voicing it, the acts that are understood as waging a war against it, a

counter-attack, will be analysed in Hesse, Camus, Herbert and Pfeijffer. (How) are the defensive reactions and sentiments of exclusion – that are also noticeable in the primary fictions – constitutive of a possibly ‘unhealthy’ version of the body-nation figure? Hesse’s Goldmund experiences under the plague a heightened recurrence of xenophobia. In Camus, the imposed quarantine is paired with an undeniable desire to be together, to communicate despite the dangers of disease: the totalitarian control on the citizens of Oran is unhealthy and unsustainable. Herbert’s narration points at the danger of exclusion and of not being autonomous to a certain degree, as this can lead to an unhealthy form of nationalism that leads in its turn to terrorism. In Pfeijffer, migrants are suspended in their search for a better future, the Italian/European host has become hostile, yet they also are unable to return. As such they are prisoners, viewed as parasites which the hostile body is unable to excrete.

## 2.1 The Membrane as Border

In the previous chapter the body/nation figure was discussed via the notion of unity, a wholeness. Metaphorically, in the body-nation figure, the ‘border’ is related to the body’s transition from self to non-self. The body both ends and begins at the skin; it holds and covers the flesh, it keeps pathogens and potentially toxic materials at bay, yet it is also the place of contact with the world around us, a point of touch. The skin is the outer, but not the only organizing structure of the body. The membranes of numerous different cells make up the interior: organs, blood vessels, nerve and bone structures. It was the discovery of the cell as constituent of the physique that led to a totally different understanding of the body and subsequently to major medical improvements. Moreover, there is a specific “concept of identity that emerges from cell theory and its fictions,” one that “is based on exclusion,” as Laura Otis points out in *Membranes* (3). The emergence of cell theory coincided with that of the nation-state in the nineteenth century. And, as Otis argues, the cell became the paradigmatic metaphor of the Self and of the Nation as it promoted the idea of the boundary. In discussing the writing of four physician-authors,<sup>57</sup> Otis foregrounds that they all “confront their cultures’ demand for borders,

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<sup>57</sup> American neurologist S. Weir Mitchell, Spanish neurobiologist Santiago Ramón y Cajal, Scottish author and physician Arthur Conan Doyle and the physician-author from Austria Arthur Schnitzler. About Cajal, Otis wonders: “What was it ... that drove Cajal to keep looking, determined to resolve boundaries between cells when there appeared to be no boundaries to resolve?” (4).

and [that] they express and challenge them through common metaphors and maneuvers” (3). The visibility of the boundary was foregrounded cell theory, yet, it was germ theory and the concept of infectious agents that rooted this idea of the border and the distinction between an inside and an outside, even further within culture: “If one believes that invisible germs, spread by human contact, can make one sick, one becomes more and more anxious about penetration and about any connection with other people – the same anxieties inspired by imperialism” (Otis 4-5).<sup>58</sup> The cell as structuring element is also important in Herbert’s science fiction, as O’Neill’s, however horrifying, scientific tour de force demonstrates that the “cell is not inviolate,” that its “chemical fragments can be refitted, reshaped to carry out extraordinary processes” (C37). The cell, in the nineteenth century viewed upon as the ‘atomic’ structuring unit, becomes in the twentieth century again a whole world within itself: its borders become more diffused and it’s unity more understood in relation to its internal organisation and its connection to the external. As Herbert’s Beckett excitedly points out: “The living organization in the cell, that system which mediates the cell’s operations, has been solved!” (C37). Though the cell is still understood as an important structuring unit, it is more and more recognized in its permeability and relationality, as Herbert exemplifies.

Importantly, both cell theory and germ theory can be connected with xenophobia and anxieties about penetration.<sup>59</sup> This is also pointed out by Esposito as he states that “[w]hen looked at from the point of view of its protection from a danger that imperils it, whether endogenous or exogenous, the need for life to be included within the confines of the body is all the more pressing. Bodily confines are exactly what acts as lines of defense against whatever threatens to take away life from itself” (*Immunitas* 113). Plague is such a threat, that perils not only the individual body, but also very much the collective body of the nation. The plague, as such, is an event of liminality in which the potentially destructive relation between immunity and community becomes pronounced. As immunity is immanent to community, yet it also negates it, a constant

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<sup>58</sup> Otis strongly relates nineteenth century effects of imperialism with bodily metaphors of the cell and penetrating germs, stating that “Westerners became horrified when the cultures, peoples, and diseases they had engulfed began diffusing, through their now permeable membranes, back toward their imperial cell bodies” (5). In relating to others, in opposing themselves onto others, Western imperialistic culture seemed to have forgotten that a permeable membrane, a crossable border has two directions of transgression.

<sup>59</sup> Biss notes that modern medicine “seems to have left us believing not that we are all vulnerable to disease, but that it is possible to avoid disease by living a cautious life and limiting our contact with others” (C24).

refiguring of the immune system in relation to the body's outside and its incorporation of that outside is necessary. Yet, in the instance of the plague, the body fails to do this: *Yersinia pestis* hijacks the body's tools for defence and the more war-like, defensive and hostile this system reacts, the faster the body falls into a moribund decline. This is also embodied by the plague narratives at stake here: they employ an unmistakable war-language regarding the plague – and consequently regarding the issues the plague stands for. Borders are heavily drawn through the instalment of quarantines, a general xenophobia and fear of contagion; yet the question arises if such measures are not more unhealthy than the disease itself.

Hesse's Goldmund experiences instances of xenophobia during the plague through which the opposition between city and countryside becomes all the more discernable. As he and his travel companion Robert make way for a town, they meet an angry mob: "da empfing sie ein Häufchen Bauern, mit Knütteln, Stangen, und Dreschflegeln bewaffnet, und der Anführer schrie ihnen von weitem zu, sie sollten alsbald umkehren und sich auf Nimmerwiedersehen davonmachen" (192). Robert and Goldmund don't understand the reason for such an aggressive obstruction and ask themselves if there is a war going on. Next "kamen [sie] ... zu einer kleinen Stadt; sie war schwer befestigt, vom Tor lief ein Wehrgang in Haushöhe um die ganze Stadtmauer, aber kein Wächter stand oben und keiner im offenstehenden Tor. Robert weigerte sich, die Stadt zu betreten, und beschwor auch seinen Kameraden, es nicht zu tun (198). It ominous appearance of the fortified city without guards that repels Robert from wanting to enter without understanding why. It is only a day later when they encounter the plague-stricken house described in the previous chapter that and they understand the violent mood of the peasants. And as they go on, they find the plague on their road:

Bei den ersten Höfen und Dörfern begann es und dauerte an und wurde ärger, je weiter er kam. Die ganze Gegend, das ganze weite Land stand unter einer Wolke von Tod, unter einem Schleier von Grauen, Angst und Seelenverfinsterung, und das Schlimmste waren nicht die ausgestorbenen Häuser, die an der Kette verhungerten und verwesenden Hofhunde, die unbegraben liegenden Toten, die bettelnden Kinder, die Massengräber vor den Städten. Das Schlimmste waren die Lebenden, die unter der Last von Schrecken und Todesangst ihre Augen und ihre Seelen verloren zu haben schienen (213)

The plague resides where civilization is situated, and stretches from the cities over the land as a whole. At the threshold of the city, Goldmund meets a Jewish girl, Rebekka. Her

story is one of extreme violent exclusion as her father alongside other Jews were burned at the stake. Goldmund, at a later moment, recounts her story: “ich habe gesehen, wie die Reichen sich in ihre Häusern verschanzt haben oder geflohen sind und wie die Armen ihren Brüder unbegraben haben liegenlassen, wie sie einen andern verdächtigt und die Juden wie Vieh totgeschlagen haben” (222). As Gomel has pointed out, the pogroms on Jewish communities during the times of the Black Death makes for a gruesome link to the ‘bioide-ologies’ of eugenic discourse in which the Jews were not supposedly causing a plague (from which they themselves seemed immune, a sign of their guilt), but themselves became one and “the enemy's extinction is the ultimate proof of its lethal nature” (425). As such, they embody the *pharmakos* in all plague narratives.

## 2.2 The Immune Paradigm: Anxieties about Contagion

Most often when we talk about disease in relation to our bodies it is indeed in terms of war – a ‘military language,’ as Sontag notes.<sup>60</sup> the body is under attack by invading pathogens, foreign and unhealthy to the body and the body defends itself accordingly (it ‘sends’ soldiers in the figure of white blood cells, a “formidable army granulocytes and macrophages” who imprison potentially dangerous microbes (*Immunitas* 158). A raising of temperature is a direct attack on the viruses and bacteria that crossed the outer membranes of the body.<sup>61</sup> The mechanism of division between what is self and what is not-self (and thus, what needs to be ‘attacked’) is a most interesting aspect of the body’s immune system. It is precisely this opposition between belonging and not-belonging, a being foreign, that interests Esposito in this figure of the immune system as military device as he extrapolates it to our modern societies: “The most striking feature is the way a biological function is extended to a general view of reality dominated by a need for violent defense in the face of anything judged to be foreign” (*Immunitas* 17).<sup>62</sup> Yet,

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<sup>60</sup> See: “The controlling metaphors in descriptions of cancer are, in fact, drawn not from economics but from the language of warfare” (Sontag 1-C8), and: “talk of siege and war to describe disease now has, with cancer, a striking literalness and authority ... the disease itself is conceived as the enemy on which society wages war” (Sontag 1-C8). This is for example visible in Camus: “the ecclesiastical authorities of the town decided to wage war on the plague by their own means, by organizing a week of collective prayer” (72; emphasis added).

<sup>61</sup> See: “With the patient’s body considered to be under attack (‘invasion’), the only treatment is counter-attack” (Sontag 1-C8).

<sup>62</sup> See also: Esposito’s “interest lies instead in the immunitary character that the metaphor of the body politic lends to the modern political lexicon as a whole” (*Immunitas* 114; c.f. 154).

Esposito argues that the immune system is actually not best described in military terms, but as an instrument of alteration as it incorporates something of that which is foreign in order to transform itself (*Immunitas* 159-160).<sup>63</sup> In his discussion of the metaphor of the immune system as a vehicle for politics, Esposito argues that contemporary societies have a tendency towards autoimmunity: a self-destructive overreaction of exclusion (*Immunitas* 162-163).

Esposito points out that the most paradigmatic disease of our time, AIDS, “ravages [the body’s] subjectivity because the disease destroys the very idea of the identity-making border” (*Immunitas* 162), it is in this sense “the exact opposite of the immune system not the internalization of the outside, but the externalization of the inside” (*Immunitas* 162). Similarly, the plague makes use of the body’s immune system and its defensive response as it makes a host of the macrophage in which it procreates and travels through the body. Moreover, there is a direct link between the HIV/AIDS virus and *Yersinia pestis*, one that is inscribed in the human body itself (at least in some bodies). As research into immunity – the result of an incorporation – regarding HIV has shown, there is a small percentage of the European population that is indeed immune to AIDS as the result of a gene that has been connected to the plague and smallpox epidemics (as they may be a result from them).<sup>64</sup> Thus not only has the plague inscribed itself into our cultural framework, these diseases have become transcribed into certain bodies and passed along for generations, they are known to these bodies and have ceased to be harmful. Bodies in which the defence reaction of the immune system is low have a greater chance of surviving an ‘invasion’ of the plague bacillus. In Camus we find this understanding when Rieux is thinking about Grand as someone who would survive an infection as “he recalled having read that the plague spared those of weak constitution and mainly destroyed those of a robust nature” (35). And: “Rieux was confronted with an aspect of the plague that disconcerted him. Once more it was devising ways of foiling the strategies adopted against it” (219). The consequences of the defensive measures taken against the plague by the collective body of Oran can be viewed in similar regard, as I will illustrate throughout the analysis. This adds to the

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<sup>63</sup> See for example: a “new interpretation [of the immune system] situates immunity in a non-excluding relation with its common opposite” (*Immunitas* 17; c.f. 18).

<sup>64</sup> See in this regard the article “Evaluating plague and smallpox as historical selective pressures for the CCR5-Δ32 HIV-resistance allele” by Alison P. Galvani and Montgomery Slatkin (2003).

complexity of Camus' text read as allegory: what exactly does the plague stand for when the measures taken against it are worse than the epidemic?

The epidemic in Camus is preceded by the appearance of a dead rat, tellingly inside his building, Rieux notes that "there was something threatening in this phenomenon" (15). As the amount of dead rats soon accumulate and becomes peculiar, people start talking about an epidemic. After a few days the rats seem to have disappeared from the city: "*the invasion of rats had ended*" (18; emphasis added). Yet, it is at this point that the actual danger to the people of Oran becomes visible, as Dr Rieux is called to his first human plague sufferer – though the symptoms are not yet recognized as resulting from the plague. He has a fever and swollen lymph nodes in neck, seemed to want *to keep his head as far as possible away from his body*" (19; emphasis added). "This was where fear began," the narrator notes (20). Suddenly the future seems to be at stake and Dr Rieux experiences "that slight nausea with regard to the future that is known as anxiety" (31) This future oriented anxiety is strengthened by the presence of rats, as becomes visible in relation to Pfeijffer where the nausea is figuratively caused by a sensation of 'gnawing' (*knagen*) in the belly (i.e. 64, 97, 99, 215). The authorities of the town set up a meeting with medical officials to discern if they "are dealing with the plague or not" (38). There is discord among them regarding the subject and how to react.<sup>65</sup> As it is not an isolated case, the community needs to be protected: the microbe has crossed the borders of the town and the membrane of some of the individuals that inhabit it.

Rieux is an important figure in the defensive reaction against the plague as, in being a doctor, he feels responsible for his patients (97). Tarrou asks him 'against whom' this defence is aimed and points out that his "victories will always be temporary" (98). Tarrou puts his finger in the sore spot: there is no clear-cut enemy that can easily be eliminated. "I can imagine what this plague must mean to you," Tarrou states, upon which Rieux replies: "An endless defeat" (98). The plague means different things to Rieux and Tarrou and subsequently point at different issues of Camus' allegory. Rieux' understanding of the plague can be read as a rebellion against an oppressing totalitarian

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<sup>65</sup> The seriousness of the situation is clear to Rieux as he notes that "[w]hen a microbe ... is capable of increasing the size of the spleen four times in three days, and making the mesenteric ganglia the size of an orange and the consistency of porridge, that is precisely when we should rush to do something" (39). The microbe has entered the body and poses an immediate threat to it. The body reacts with a 'defence' mechanism.

regime. The plague carries the face of fascism, the plague sufferers are the victims to this regime and Rieux' aim resembles the noble acts of rebellion, the attempts to save the victims and to 'cure' the community of the oppressive and destructive regime. Collaborators of this regime take the shape of *Yersinia pestis*, of the microbes invading through the skin into individual bodies, betraying them through the manifestation of disease and condemning them to death. The sign 'microbes hate the honest grape' pops up in bars; Rieux recounts: "the idea that alcohol protects you against infection – something that the public already found it natural to believe – became still more firmly anchored in their minds" (62). The hateful bacterium/collaborator is an example of the personification of pathogens, giving them agency and will, and as such highlights the relation between vehicle and tenor: the tenor (collaborator) is hateful, and thus the vehicle (bacterium) in the text is described likewise. In Rieux' view, drinking wine, or alcohol in general, is a soft form of rebellion against these bacteria creeping into the bodies of Oran's citizens and taking them hostage. Such acts, however, are part of a senseless and useless rebellion: a diversion from medical and governing measures such as finding a cure and imposing quarantines.<sup>66</sup> Rieux' only remorse is that they do not have enough weapons with which to fight the plague" (114), as he poses to Rambert and compares his endeavour to a military undertaking: "Generally, in every army in the world, when materiel runs short, it is replaced by men. But we don't have enough men either" (114). As more and more people fall victim to the plague, and people are afraid of infection – as I will illustrate in the next paragraph – there are not enough people left to fight the disease, to rebel against the regime.

Yet, Rieux' understanding of the plague leaves lacunae in reading the novel as allegory: the plague sufferer is both a victim and – as the disease develops to its pulmonary stage – a potential carrier of this disease and as such a danger to others. This conflicting relationship of victim and carrier becomes more visible through Tarrou's understanding of the plague. For Tarrou, the plague is present even before the epidemic and figuratively inherent in society (189).<sup>67</sup> The plague for Tarrou is this thus not so much a vehicle for the totalitarian regime, but more generally for an unjust society with dogmatic fundamentals. As such, every individual is both a victim and a carrier: they are

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<sup>66</sup> See in similar regard: "the peppermints had vanished from chemist's shops because a lot of people sucked them as a *defence against infection*" (87; emphasis added).

<sup>67</sup> The particular scene will be analysed to a further extent in the next chapter.



part of this society that is already diseased. Battling this plague is senseless, the only thing one can do is not consenting but admitting both your victimhood of and part in it (195). It is telling that Tarrou is the last victim of the plague in Rieux' narration. It is symbolic for the ceasing of the epidemic, but moreover a signifier for its uninterrupted presence – however dormant it may be. Rieux describes the moment of Tarrou's death as "a night *liberated from the plague*," and 'admitting defeat' pointing again at its tenor: the fascistic Nazi regime during the WWII from which the annexed nations were liberated (or cured) (220, 223). Yet, whereas the direct medical measures taken against the plague do seem to have had the desirable effect, the "pestilence was no longer threshing the sky above the town with its flail"(220), we come back to Rieux admitting to Tarrou that his fight is also an 'endless defeat': an endless defeat that is inherent to the human condition. The plague has just run its course and will return in one form or another.

In Herbert, the enemy has face other than the microbe; As Beckett, head of the international medical team, puts forward: "First we try to understand our enemy – the man and not the plague" (C11). In order to develop their plan for action to counter the plague, they must first understand why the plague came about: the 'battle' is for information and interpreting the motivations of the other. In this sense they are indeed 'waging a war' against O'Neill and his 'non-human soldiers.' Once set loose however, these soldiers are uncontrollable: they enter the female body and combat with the immune system's troopers. The scene in which Beckett stands besides dr. Foss in her last moments as he recounts to her the case of their colleague Godelinsky is telling of the struggle for immunity: "Every antibiotic we tried on Dorena only worsened her condition" (C17). As with the actual plague, this new plague sets the body's immune system to its own hand and it excels on the defensive reaction of the body. In an attempt to cure Foss, she is given blood with a high white-cell count from a person who has a low-grade infection (C17), to no avail. As the medical researchers make progress in their own battle against the plague, Beckett briefs these findings to the officials as they locate the disease in "part of the body's *first line of defense against bacterial invasion*," neutrophils, and that "[i]t's a disease that can have a genetic origin" (C37; emphasis added). Yet there are two problems that arise here: when the plague is not the actual plague, but a vehicle for something else, the metaphor might become a destructive one (especially in the figure of the plague/rat-immigrant as Pfeijffer illustrates). And the

second issue here is, as Esposito underscores, that the body's immune system is actually not best viewed as a defensive military organization.

Yet, this review of the immunitary reaction by Esposito may just provide the solution for the first issue: the immune system is not based on a structural exclusion of the outside, it is on the contrary in need of the border as space for exchange and the incorporation of external elements. Thus, in adjusting the immunitary metaphor accordingly, the metaphor of the plague that coincides with it, may be nuanced. Herbert's critique of the IRA's destructive nationalism that results in terrorism, via the narrative tool of the plague, can be read accordingly: the body of Ireland fights its oppressor, England. Yet, this happens in such a violent manner and within the confines of the Self – the bombing of Grafton street in Dublin – that it ends up destructing this Self. In this sense it is what Esposito points at in discussing the effect of the auto-immune disease: it overtly excludes and eliminates and does not recognize the Self as Self. This destroying of the Self in a terroristic act is accumulative, a domino-effect, as the bomb kills O'Neill's wife and children and affects O'Neill – as an American with an Irish heritage both an insider and an outsider – to such an extent that he himself turns against *every one*, in particular Ireland. In this sense, the death of the female bodies is also symbolic: as they fall ill and die, the body of Ireland disintegrates.

### 2.3 Quarantines: a Fixing into Place and Time

“DECLARE A STATE OF PLAGUE STOP  
CLOSE THE TOWN.”  
(Camus)

The plague is – both in history and the novels – an intensely disruptive event; one that challenges authorities with exceptional circumstances; an event that instigates fear and chaos among the populace and therefore is in demand of an opposite response from these authorities, that is: order. The response to the plague, as Watts has showed, changed over centuries of human experience with epidemics. Foucault brings together the more and more instigated measures taken against the plague and the principles of panopticism: the correlation between surveillance and control. Especially, as both Watts

and Foucault hold, London's plague of 1665-1666 was met with profound order, whose "function [was] to sort out every possible confusion: that of disease, which is transmitted when bodies are mixed together; that of evil, which is increased when fear and death overcome prohibitions. It lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death" (Foucault 197). Thus, in and from times of plague people learned to fix in place that which was dangerous and that which moves. It is here that Foucault connects the imposing of quarantine to a general concept of discipline as he states that it is "one of the primary objects of discipline ... to fix; it is an anti-nomadique technique" (218). In this mechanism of power, the collective is concerned with regulating the individual's life, disease and death (Foucault 196-199). The ill body is isolated, either in a panoptican structure in which the patient is analysed and kept (the plague victim), or excluded in its entirety from the community (the leper).<sup>68</sup>

It is the plague that provides the head of state with the opportunity to install this power, the plague-stricken town is therefore a "utopia of the perfectly governed city" and thus, "rulers dreamt of the state of the plague" (Foucault 198-199). The technique of the panopticon individualizes rather than forming a collective: patients are isolated (in the panoptican structure), so "there is no danger of contagion" (Foucault 200-201).<sup>69</sup> Foucault notes that though the "plague-stricken town provided an exceptional disciplinary model," it was an extremely violent one: "to the disease that brought death, power opposed its perpetual threat of death; life inside it was reduced to its simplest expression; it was, against the power of death, the meticulous exercise of the right of the sword" (207).<sup>70</sup> In Camus, Foucault's argument about the separation and isolating of the sick, is very much visible: the citizens under quarantine, every individual residing in the town are 'prisoners' of the plague, the town becomes a compartmentalized jail (e.g. 129-131). Dr Rieux and his fellows, as an initial dispute, eventually agree that something should be done, that "the epidemic would not stop of its own accord, it would not be

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<sup>68</sup> See: "The exile of the leper and the arrest of the plague do not bring with them the same political dream. The first is that of a pure community, the second that of a disciplined society" (Foucault 198; Elden 243).

<sup>69</sup> The panopticon "makes it possible to draw up differences: among patients, to observe the symptoms of each individual, without the proximity of beds, the circulation of miasmas, the effects of contagion confusing the clinical tables..." (Foucault 203). See also Elden: "Foucault suggests that whilst 'the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion... the plague gave rise to disciplinary diagrams'" (243).

<sup>70</sup> And, it is here that the Panopticon differs from the quarantines instilled in plague-times: its role is to make containment "it more economic and more effective," yet "it does so not for power itself, nor for the immediate salvation of a threatened society" (Foucault 208).

*defeated* by the measures that the local administration had dreamed up” and that they “must set up a real *barrier* to the epidemic, or nothing at all” (48; emphasis added).<sup>71</sup> This defence mechanism is an arrest: if not obeyed, quarantine becomes imprisonment (c.f. Camus 86). This regime of control is an apt quality of the plague narrative to employ as metaphor for totalitarianism: the quarantined city conveys similarities to the city under the yoke of the fascist regime of the Third Reich in the years running up to and during the WWII. Camus diffuses the imagery of such a utopian version of control by employing the plague metaphor that has a part in the fascist language of defence against the plague (that is, non-Aryan, non-pure others), into questioning if not the measurements against a supposed plague is the actual plague. In this instance, Rieux also becomes inherent to the issue: as he narrates experiences of exile he overlooks his own part in this imposed regime of separation. Is it a necessary evil, or should we turn to Tarrou’s understanding of what the plague *means*: the epidemic as merely a visible peak of what lies dormant in the soil and the battle against it as useless? Both instances seem unsatisfying, yet this is exactly where Camus’ narrative resists the overly simplified narrative of an invasive evil and as such deconstructs the metaphor employed by the instances he critiques.

It is not only an official decree of separation, but also a general fear of contagion that makes people isolate themselves. In the midst of the summer, when the city is hot and feverish and the plague at its peak, “the doors were all shut and the blinds drawn, though no one could tell whether the idea was to protect oneself from the plague or the sun” (Camus 86). The desire for human contact on one end and the fear of infection on the other makes for an ambivalent behaviour, as some of the scenes in Camus strikingly show: In trams “all passengers, as far as possible, turn their backs on one another, to avoid infection” (92); yet they all roam the streets and visit the theatres together, to see one another (152). There is a tension between the fear of contagion and the need to live together that makes for this ambiguous attitude. The tension between fear and socially being with others has again a strikingly suitable metaphorical relation with the experiences of citizens under a totalitarian regime. The fear of contagion corresponds

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<sup>71</sup> And thus, “It remained compulsory to declare the disease and isolate the patients. Houses of sick people were to be closed and disinfected, their relatives put in preventive quarantine and burials organized by the authorities” (Camus 49); and: “At the start, quarantine had been a simple formality; now Rieux and Rambert had organized it very strictly. In particular, they demanded that the members of a family should always be isolated from one another” (164).

with the fear of being found out, of being caught by the the regime and fall victim to it. Here the plague is still a vehicle for fascism (and the punishment for rebellion against it), yet the plague suffer is again an ambiguous figure as it here is both a victim and a carrier. The fear of contagion becomes a vehicle for cowardice: under the influence of this fear you are exempted from your duty to help others that are already suffering. Like the shippers in the international waters between Lampedusa and Libya, you prefer not to notice, to lock yourself inside and be blindfolded. And as such, the totalitarian regime stretches its arms: it counts on fear to control every individual, lock them in place, through fear of one's own skin resulting in a lack of solidarity. Discerning what the plague means in reading Camus' text as allegory is complex, as both Judt and Stephanson also have pointed out (in different manners). Yet, this is also inherent in the use of metaphor, as Richards and Ricoeur have shown: both the vehicle and tenor have a relation of commonality, in employing a metaphor, both are altered in relation to each other. To look for a 'real' underlying meaning in metaphor is nonsense: it is the relational tension between vehicle tenor that is meaningful. And in Camus' allegory, these tensions constantly seem to shift which leaves gaps and foregrounds complexity. This complexity is a feature of the literary text, which makes it different from strictly rhetorical ones and as such enriches Foucault's elaboration of the measures taken against the plague in relation to (bio)political structures of power.

In Herbert, quite similar to the scene in Camus, both medical and political officials are trying to get a grip on the instant calamity that is the plague, it is here that the 'assault on the plague' is planned. Quarantines and barricades are put up, borders are closed and travelling becomes prohibited or outlawed (C8, C10, C11, C18). "The Swiss have cut themselves off, blown their bridges and tunnels, shut down their airports. They've thrown a military cordon around the country and reportedly are killing and burning with flamethrowers anyone attempting to enter" (C13). The world immediately becomes fragmented, divided between plague free areas and 'hot-spots' in need of sterilization.<sup>72</sup> O'Neill, first targeting Ireland, England and Libya, the weapon of the plague at hand, demands of those outside these countries to let the plague roam freely within them and do its devilish work (C18); "You will be permitted to quarantine them,

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<sup>72</sup> Beckett recognizes this global crisis that has already changed the future: "The pattern is already making itself evident. Small local governments with strong borders. Switzerlands everywhere. Suspicion of strangers" (C20). Huls Anders Bergen, president of the UN, in similar vein considers that "everything [is] barriers in this new world"; "[y]ou could be summarily shot for not possessing a valid identity card" (C23).

nothing more" (C19). The tools used against the plague are grave, the plague is a military concern in need of drastic measures. The American president plans a bomb-raid on Rome, and, like the Russians, uses 'Panic fire' to cure the infected areas (C21).<sup>73</sup> The president considers the word 'decontamination' a euphemism, yet, the measures taken are in his view indispensable as he notes that one of his generals "had sent suicide squads [considered to be 'the new SS'] ... against every contaminated pocket his ruthless methods could ferret out" (C35). A war not pointed towards the plague (victims) is a peril to a general cause, which could mean a "final disaster – refugees, loss of central control, no way to impose a tight system of observation and quarantine on the movements of large groups" (C35). In similar vein as in reading Camus, one questions if this defensive reaction is worse than the plague itself. The reactions of the governing heads of the body-nations are so overtly violent that they resemble both the terrorism of the IRA and the counter-terrorism of O'Neill. The violence accumulates while the plague runs its course: the plague is less an abstract evil, it has become a – not less frightening – tool in the hands of a violent person.

While the men are all in a severe mode of defence, the surviving women are protected and contained. The few chapters that are narrated from Kate O'Gara's focal point give, 'the woman in the tank,' an account of this restricted existence: "Everything done here was part of a design to hold the plague at bay for one lone woman – herself" (C28). Kate's lover Stephen is however contained with her, to avoid infecting her and to protect her in case they are attacked by militant groups; they are referred to as 'the two plague-prisoners' in spite of the fact that neither of them harbours the disease, yet the disease stand as a warden at their door (C33). And, "[w]hat a dumpy little prison this was. More than six months confined like this! And when she complained, all Stephen could do was remind her that this chamber preserved her life" (C58). "The most awful part of this confinement was the absence of a door out of it" (C58). This is interesting regarding Scarry's description of the room as "the simplest form of shelter," which "expresses the most benign potential of human life. It is, on the one hand, an enlargement of the body: it keeps warm and safe the individual it houses in the same

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<sup>73</sup> See that the president of the UN states: "'The Flame Wall,' people called it, taking their sense of security from the image of the wide blackened barrier beyond this land, a place where ashes drifted across mounds of ruins and the unburied bodies of those who had perished on that ground" (C23); and: "The Russians wanted a 'ring of fire,' another Flame Barrier. It was their euphemism for a plan to put a linked series of outposts around the land perimeter: flamethrowers, radar, day and night air patrols ..." (C23).

way the body encloses and protects the individual within" (38). Yet, "while the room is a magnification of the body, it is simultaneously a miniaturization of the world, of civilization" (Scarry 38).<sup>74</sup> Because Kate's isolation is imposed, no matter that it is for the sake of her survival, it becomes a a prison. Kate hears the stories of other women in isolation: "Rumors and reports spoke of tiny groups here and there throughout the land, each protected by desperate men" (C28). The means to preserve life become those of inhibition and imprisonment and, in its figurative reading, a merging of how England has imprisoned or imperialised Ireland and the destructive attempts by the Irish men to protect her.

## 2.4 Exile Within Containment

The defensive strategies that are deployed at several kinds of borders are most primarily aimed at an arrest of movement in order to gain control. The body that is contained can be controlled. As Foucault points out in his distinction between treatments of the leper and the plague victim, the figure of the leper was indeed most often a metaphorical or symbolic one, used to refer to people society wished to exclude: the poor, the mad and the disobedient (Foucault 199; Elden 244). The body that harboured the plague however, was not necessarily cast out of the city: it was locked up in its own home resulting in an exile within confines, within control. Both are 'cut off from all human contact' in "projects of exclusion" (Foucault 199). Sontag points at a similar instance in which 'the mad' are institutionalized: "Once put away, the patient enters a duplicate world with special rules. Like TB, insanity is a kind of exile" (Sontag 1-C4).<sup>75</sup> Exile is an inherent part of the plague-narrative: borders and boundaries are foregrounded and bodies that are infected with the plague become excluded (either within the confines of their communities, or outside of them).

In three of the four novels considered here, the experiences of being excluded, of what it means to become a danger to or to be considered a danger by others, is less evident than the defensive, fearful site of the plague. Herbert includes Kate's voice in a

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<sup>74</sup> Scarry opposes these aspects of a room in normal context to torture rooms, being called 'safe rooms' or 'guest rooms' and in this matter becoming itself another weapon as this naming only precludes the inversion of its very meaning (38-42)

<sup>75</sup> "The constant division between the normal and the abnormal, to which every individual is subjected, brings us back to our own time, by applying the binary branding and exile of the leper to quite different objects" (Foucault 199).

narrative that mostly follows O'Neill, the instigator of the calamity, Beckett and others 'fighting' the plague. The painful death of Ariane Foss is described, but from the focal point of Beckett. Kate's experiences of confinement are related to the reader, yet at the same time she is portrayed as quite a mindless and indifferent person, who, like Camus' Cottard, also sees the advantages the plague will bring her once she has survived it. It is the UN president, Bergen, who relates to victims, not of the plague itself, but the measures taken against it.<sup>76</sup> He despairs over what the chief of the Barrier Command has written in his letter: "*If you make physical contact with any person from the Proscribed Areas, your own people will kill you or drive you onto the shore, where the inhabitants likely will do the job for us*" (C23). In counteracting the plague, there is employment of a severe language of violence, a show of power. It is not the plague killing people here, it is the fear of the plague that results in an overly defensive immune reaction that resonates with the violent nationalism of the IRA-terrorists. And, the issue places itself at the border where the internal rejects the external completely. Yet, where bordering is highly intensified, they are "no longer merely national ones" as O'Neill notes when listening to a bulletin listing the new 'hot spots' that needed to be avoided (C34).

In Herbert, exclusion is mostly narrated from an exclusive point of view, an inward gaze: it is not the women (or men) excluded that are given voice, they are described by the men that are being exclusive. In part, this is a consequence of the impossibility of voicing pain and illness, of dying and not being. Yet, it makes Herbert's narration that in essence critiques both the English dealing with the Irish Troubles and the terrorism of the IRA, not a satisfying counter narrative as it leaves out those voices. This is of course a result of mainly focalizing through the gaze of the perpetrator O'Neill. Yet, O'Neill is an interesting figure here: he is what Camus' Tarrou would call a plague sufferer: he is both a victim *and* a carrier the plague. In the first instance, he is the victim of the plague that is terrorism, in the second, this terrorism materializes in an actual plague that is used as weapon. Thus, in using O'Neill as the main focal point, there is a problematic conflation of victim and perpetrator. In O'Neill's witnessing the pain of

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<sup>76</sup> In similar vein, Doheny shudders from the presence of Kevin O'Donnell as he recounts the way "Kevin's people often killed outsiders driven ashore because of plague contamination" and "[t]hen burning the poor fellows in the old Celtic way – confined in wicker baskets over flames!" (C27).



others,<sup>77</sup> this becomes most visible: his split personality – the passionately indulging and vengeful O'Neill, and the strategically calculating biochemist – collapse into each other, restoring his position as victim and comprehension of what he has done. As a result, he turns mad and removes himself from society, wandering Ireland as a 'true' madman.<sup>78</sup>

Witnessing is an important part of Pfeijffer's narrative as well, as already touched upon in the previous chapter. In his conversation with Djiby, the latter explains that part of Europe's fairy tale is its figuration as a guarded 'fort.' The given that "de grenzen zo goed worden bewaakt dat het bijna onmogelijk is om er binnen te komen" adds to its mystification and maybe even to 'her' allure (239-240). And, in a sense, this is not an entirely false conception. As Ilja contrasts his own 'luxe-immigratie' with stories such as Djiby's, the opposition between his European life and the lives of those who come to Europe becomes painfully visible, naked before the reader. The narrator questions in this regard his own position as witness. Djiby accuses him of being more interested in his story as story and not in his story as part of his person (171).

At a later moment, Ilja indeed poses the difficult question of what to do (again building the tension between reality and fiction): "Wat meer kun je doen? Een verontrustend boek lezen over immigratie? (279). In this instance, even the use of figurative language as the main tool of a literary author is dissected. The sentence: "Mediagenieke tragedie en ongedroomde buitenkansjes hebben wel vaker een wrang huwelijk gesloten," is, according to the narrator 'way too pretentious' – "Zo'n zin waarin je als ijdele schrijver eens even rondborstig gaat staan poseren met je unieke vermogen om de werkelijkheid te doorgronden met een rake analogie. Het verbinden van het concrete met het abstracte. Normale mensen zien dat soort verbanden niet ... ik schud ze zo uit mijn mouw" (278). On the surface, the narrator voices a Platonic critique of metaphor as merely a poetic device obscuring the truth (in this instance about the death of the immigrant Babu). Yet, as the narrative as a whole is an abundance of analogies and metaphors, this statement again plays with the tension between reality and fiction. Whereas the utterance is an honest and significantly urgent question of the relevance of literature in face of an actual crisis, his comparisons are nonetheless meaningful. He puts

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<sup>77</sup> Danzas, part of Beckett's medical team, states that "[t]errorists are like bomber pilots who need never look upon their tortured victims, never see the faces of people who pay in anguish" (C13). Yet in O'Neill's case this is somewhat different.

<sup>78</sup> Feehan notes that "Herbert links John with ... the legendarily insane King Suibhne (translated by Seamus Heaney as *Sweeney Astray*), he raced shrieking into the wilderness [a] curse driving him to wander almost without rest throughout Ireland until his death" (305-306).

the discourse of the nation-body in a historical perspective, referring both to the Italian diaspora and the crusades of the middle ages (e.g. 94). The subsequent reluctant or even violent defensive reaction of the European host is mirrored in this history both in their own need for migration and in their aggressive assaults of colonizing. This is present in several layers of narration and it is inscribed in the many bodies that it entails: the body of the text, the body of Europe, the body of Italy, the body of Genoa, the body of Ilja and in the bodies to which he gives voice. As such, the question 'why have you come here?' that is asked to Ilja in several instances and by different people, resonates through to all these bodies (e.g. 86). In this manner, the novel gnaws at the bordering of the national discourses that are at play in issues of migration: it 'uproots' and lays bare. As Ilja states: "Ik heb altijd gedacht dat het onze taak was als literatoren om te ontwortelen" (279).

In Camus, the narrator remarks that "One of the most remarkable consequences of the closing of the gates was, indeed, a sudden separation of people who were not prepared for it" (53). It is not only physical contact that is rendered impossible, there is also a prohibition on written correspondence "to prevent letters from transmitting the infection" (54). And thus, the people of Oran are limited to sending telegrams to their loved ones from which they are separated, they became "[c]reatures bound together by mutual sympathy, by flesh and heart," but "were reduced to finding the signs of this ancient communion in a ten word dispatch, all written in capitals" (54). Yet, the desire to communicate more elaborately becomes a figment of the imagination as some "endlessly dreamed up schemes for corresponding with the outside world" (54). Inspired by a concrete anxiety for infection, even the contagion of the mind is rendered impossible. In viewing the text as allegory, this halt of communication is yet another controlling device at hand of the totalitarian regime. It is also a signifier of the results of dogma: as the communication is rendered to a minimum, there is no space for critical voices.

What becomes most visible in Camus is, in fixing bodies in space, there is also a halting in time: "the whole town seemed like a waiting-room" (140). The plague and the quarantine make for an unpredictable future and in their "status as prisoners," the people of Oran "were reduced to [their] past alone" (56). Gomel calls this a 'narrative entropy' in which duration becomes exhaustive, an "endless chronicle of dying" (412). As Dr Rieux recounts: they endured that profound misery of all prisoners and all exiles, which is to live with a memory that is of no use to them. Even the past which they thought of endlessly, had only the taste of remorse and longing"; "Impatient with the

present, hostile to the past and deprived of a future, we really did *resemble* those whom justice or human hatred has forced to live behind bars (57-58; emphasis added; c.f. 141-142).<sup>79</sup> It is important to question who the plague prisoners are in Camus: they are not necessarily the victims of the plague itself, but also – and maybe more importantly – of the measures taken against it – as also became visible in the discussion of Camus in the previous chapter. The preservation of life becomes an obsession that resembles the fixation of the eugenic discourse with purity. Yet, it is Rieux' own position in the text that in this sense becomes problematic again. He views the plague as the antagonist and his acts as a battle against this enemy: “what is true of the ills of this world is also true of the plague. It may serve to make some people great. However, when you see the suffering and pain that it brings, you have to be mad, blind or *a coward* to resign yourself to the plague” (96; emphasis added). But to whom is the plague a plague? It remains a narrative of invasion from the point of view of the invaded. The doctor dangerously aligns himself with those doctors that nurtured the misreading of evolution in Nazi discourse. Yet it is this tension and postponement of meaning that in turn resembles the anxieties of being in exile. As Rieux remembers the reader, he too was put in exile.

The need to connect makes some families even lock “their doors, preferring a tête-à-tête with the plague to separation – knowing now what that meant” (70). The plague – here personified – though a real threat, becomes more bearable than an imposed quarantine if this means separation: it is a locking-in rather to avoid dissolution. Nevertheless, the plague and fear of contagion still inspires suspicion in some inhabitants. In a conversation with a restaurant manager, upon the arrival M. Othon and his wife, the manager relates to Tarrou: “Quarantine or not, *she is suspect*, and in that case so are they [M. Othon and his dogs]” (89; emphasis added). Upon which Tarrou points “out that , if you considered it that way, everyone is suspect. But the other man was insistent and saw the whole question in black and white. ‘No monsieur. Neither of us is suspect, while *they are*” (89). As the plague in Oran, Like in Goldmund's medieval world and in O'Neill's globalized one, makes people xenophobic, suspecting and keeping at bay others, one can see that it relates to the fear and xenophobia that come with the totalitarianism and dogma. In this way, this scene is related to the one in the tram where people turn their back to each other.

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<sup>79</sup> See also: “While the townspeople were trying to come to terms with this sudden exile, the plague set guards at the gates and turned back ships that were making the port of Oran” (60).

A similar suspicion, especially against strangers, is what Goldmund encounters in his wanderings, even before the plague and especially by other men. He moves into the homes of others in search for food, shelter and warmth, yet the desire to move soon takes the upper hand and as soon as he leaves a place, Goldmund feels relieved: "Eben war sie [the hut] noch Obdach und Heimat gewesen, schon ward sie wieder Fremde" (95). His 'exile' is his own wandering state: never really belonging to someone, never tied to a place. Yet, the arrival of the plague does alter his exile as of free choice into an exile imposed by others. In Hesse's critique of modern existence, in large and impersonal cities, people turn inwards, imprisoned in their regulated lives. Heller notes that for Hesse "the factory is the symbol of the chase after money, of slavery, and sinister imprisonment ... [he] dreams of liberating man by wrecking the stupid, malicious machines which are so utterly devoid of 'folly, and love, dream, music and imagination..." (142). As such, the industrialization is the disease that the romantic and artistic soul of Goldmund is in danger of. Yet, as the plague ceases, Goldmund with the immunity of the narrator, escapes this fate. He dies after fulfilling his goal, the beautiful face of death which is intensively inspired by his experiences of plague and exile. As such, the issues of modernity are welded into art – both at the level of the narrative and in view of the novel in its context – and at least in a way conquered.

## **2.5 The Plague as Weapon**

In dealing with the plague, the response is not just one of defence. The plague itself is also used as a weapon, a tool to impose power and spread fear among enemies. This is most evident in the figure of O'Neill, as he thinks of the pathogens he has sent to Ireland, England and Libya as 'soldiers' (C14); yet a manufacturability of contagious disease as a result from extensive medical knowledge does not make the concept of biological warfare a thing of our modern times or of science fiction. The intentional spread of contagious disease is probably as old as the plague itself. Gilman points at "the paranoia in Italy during plague times, when it was believed that *untori*, 'anointers,' might be daubing some pestiferous liquid on benches and walls" (7). This is also a concern in Hesse, as the narrator states:

jeder suchte für das unerträgliches Elend einen Sündenbock, jeder behauptete die Verruchten zu kennen, die an der Seuche schuld und ihre böswilligen Urheber seien. Teifflische Menschen, hieß es, sorgten schadenfroh für die Verbreitung des Sterbens, indem sie aus den Pestleichen das Seuchengift holten und an die Mauern und Türklinden strichen, Brunnen und Vieh damit vergifteten. Wer in den Verdacht dieser Greuel kam, war verloren ... er wurde entweder von der Justiz oder vom Pöbel mit dem Tod bestraft (214)

Contagious disease thus is dually interpretable: both as danger and as weapon – depending on the one who is aiming and the one that is aimed at.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, biological ‘weapons’ were used in imperialistic strategies in both the Americas (the spread of smallpox among natives who had no change of immunity, maliciously transmitted by handing out infected blanket for cover and warmth) and sub-Saharan Africa (where the ‘cattle plague’ wiped out large parts of herds and “paved the way for the Dutch and English occupation, not only by starving out native peoples, but by unravelling the fabric of cultures whose economic and ritual life was based in the possession of cattle” – Gilman 14). The infected body thus becomes not only something to avoid, to exclude, but also something to impose on others and use as a tool for power.

As Pfeijffer recounts Genoa’s history as both a port-city and a place of plague, there is one scene of particular interest here. Nearing the end of the plot, in between two letters addressing his friend, there is a chapter that recounts the crusades of the year 1347. A fleet of Genoese ships enters the port of Sicily, carrying the white flag with the red cross of the crusades. The ships ‘behave’ strangely: “Ze voeren langzamer dan normaal. De riemen bewogen onregelmatig. Sommige werden helemaal niet gebruikt en omdat het aantal gebruikte riemen aan stuurboord en bakboord ongelijk was, dreigden de schepen bij voortduring uit de koers te raken. ... Zo zwalkten ze als twaalf dronkaards de haven in” (331-332). The Sicilians are suspicious and soon discover that the largest part of the crew is severely ill: “zwarte gezwollen in hun oksels en liezen ... waar pus en bloed uit kwam. De stank was ondraaglijk. Velen hadden zwarte vlekken op hun huid. Ze hadden koorts en leden helse pijnen. Enkele tientallen zeelieden waren al overleden. Ze hingen levenloos over hun roerriemen” (332). The Sicilian port wardens learn from one of the captains that the ships and crew were on their return from Caffa an important

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<sup>80</sup> See in this regard a scene in Herbert with Kevin and Doheny: Kevin demands that “when you [Doheney] find the cure, it’ll be mine as much as yours. You understand?” Kevin put the pistol back in his side pocket. Doheny stared at him, realizing that Kevin saw the plague as just another weapon. With a cure, he would want to use it against everyone outside Ireland” (C27). The cure is the shield, the disease the firearm.

trading partner. During their stay, the town comes under siege by the Tartars. Their most notable weapon to invade: their own deceased men “[d]ie waren gestorven aan een vreselijke ziekte” (332). These lifeless bodies harbouring the plague thus no longer are bodies to be grieved and buried, or to be separated from the healthy; they have become active tools in warfare: a vessel for pathogen-soldiers. Under the notion of ‘the best defence is a good offence’ the immune paradigm is, in a sense, reversed. Not only is the epidemic described with war language (demanding a defensive reaction), the plague is also used as a weapon, a means of attack.

### CHAPTER 3 – From Invasion and Contagion to Incorporation and Community

*“We are not being invaded. The body is not a battlefield”*

- Sontag

*“We are all already polluted. We have more microorganisms  
in our guts than we have cells in our bodies”*

- Biss

The immobile frozen space that is the consequence of quarantines and heightened bordering becomes an isolated island. As such, it is in danger of dissolving from the inside out. As Gilman notes, Shakespeare’s John of Gaunt relates to such a predicament on his deathbed, imagining England as a fortress, a safekeep from “infection and the hand of war,” however “due to Richard’s corruption of his loyal office, the island body, though safe from another foreign plague as from military invasion ... has now been eaten from within” (Gilman 44). This chapter will thus position itself on the opposite of the previous one in order to engage with a movement across, and the fictionality and reality of borders and membranes. As Otis asks: “What are our thoughts and our vision worth if we perceived the world only in terms of boundaries, arbitrarily drawn?” (2). Taking up Esposito’s argument that (modern) societies have a tendency towards a destructive autoimmune reaction, I will reconsider both Biss’ and Otis’ explorations of permeability and selfhood and attempt to move beyond the negative connotations of a transgression of the body’s and the nation’s boundaries; thus probing the other sides of bodily metaphors and the related ones of disease and plague. Themes of exile, separation and dismembering will provide a looking glass for the literary analysis of the four plague novels. In this figure, the notion of ‘contagion’ is, as Wald also notes, primarily understood as ‘touching’ and ‘contact’ and that therefore ‘a contagion of the mind’ precedes the understanding of contagion in the bodily and infectious sense (and thus it was always already a metaphor).

The wandering conditions of the novels’ protagonists, or others they incorporate in their narrative, will be examined first. This will give an insight in the correlation of travelling and the arrest of travels (in plague-times) and their unique position as outsider and stranger (in a place of quarantine). Connected to this are storytelling and

witnessing, relating to one another the experiences of plague and exile, and gaining a certain overview of events while on the move. Pfeijffer's form of the autofictional novel 'under construction' in which his own and other's stories are related to the reader in ~~an~~ ~~immediate way~~, playing with the tension between fact and fiction, is an important tool that foregrounds a certain urgency regarding the non-fictional problems around migration. In Herbert, in which the plague is highly politicized and globalized, people flout the closing of borders and move across them in a struggle to survive, to be with loved ones – a theme also present in Camus – or, as is the case with perpetrator O'Neill, to be a spectator to the disaster and anguish of his own making. Camus' Rambert is the stranger stuck in Oran who schemes to cross the city's walls and re-join with his beloved wife back in Paris. Goldmund, of course, is the most evident portrayal of the human wandering condition; Hesse's narrative is a circular one, starting from the confinements of Mariabronn, followed by a journey through both the countryside and different towns and cities, to end up at the beginning again. Not only these movements *per se*, but also a 'carrying along' and a 'bringing into' are considered in this chapter. In this regard, the figures of carriers and couriers will be examined, in particular in the form of the rat (which becomes a symbol in both Camus and Pfeijffer). Overall, I will consider movement and a (semi)permeability as a prerequisite for life and suggest a healing of the body-nation/city figure. As Otis proposes: "we need to rethink [national] identities, focusing not on the semipermeable membranes that separate us [the 'me' from the 'not me' on all kinds of area's, including the humanities and the sciences], but on our permeability and our mutual connectedness" (2).

### **3.1 On Immunity and Community, Selves and Others, Again**

As became apparent from the previous chapter, the immune paradigm, one of exclusion and warding off, is not entirely accurate. The omnipresence of military language in talking about our bodies and the bodily metaphors regarding infectious disease when talking about our nations, cities and communities, can be destructive and dangerous. Esposito notes that, in a correct reading of the immune system, the incorporating of the foreign, "nothing remains of the incompatibility between self and other. The other is the form the self takes where inside intersects with the outside, the proper with the



common, immunity with community” (*Immunitas* 171). He proposes, instead of viewing immunity as a struggle against invaders, “a discourse of shared specificities in a semipermeable self able to interact with others” (*Immunitas* 165). Biss relates to this as well, extrapolating the notion of permeability from the individual body to multiple bodies in relation to each other, in stating that “we are continuous with everything here on earth. Including, and especially, each other” (C13).<sup>81</sup> Both considering pregnancy and immunity, Biss highlights that “[w]e are not just ‘tolerating’ the nonself within us, we are dependent on it and protected by it” (C28).<sup>82</sup> The term ‘tolerance’ in the context of others is a problematic one, as it “tends to imply that other people are essentially a nuisance, and disguises the fact that we need and depend on each other” (Biss C28). For Esposito, the notion of tolerance regarding the immune system is important, yet misunderstood: it is not a lack of immunity, but a product of it; a ‘reverse’ immunity, one that “far from having a single-response repertoire, that of rejecting other-than-self, ... includes the other within itself” (*Immunitas* 167).

Thus, the immune system does not form an impenetrable border between inside and outside, it rather “acts as a sounding board for the presence of the world inside itself” (*Immunitas* 169). From the moment of incorporation, the body changes and thus the organism and the self is better understood in terms of continuity and relationality. This is also what Alfred I Tauber, a philosopher and historian of (biomedical) science, argues as he speaks of ‘organic integrity’ and selfhood: Tauber, as Esposito relates, points at the defensive function of the immune system as only a secondary one; “its main function is to define the identity of the subject” (*Immunitas* 166). This identity is interpreted by Tauber “as the ever changing product of a dynamic competitive interaction with the environment rather than a definitive and unalterable given” (*Immunitas* 166). Thus, in his view, the body is “far from being a unit closed within blocked, impassable borders,” it rather should be seen “as an ecosystem that has evolved over time into where [Tauber] unhesitatingly describes as a ‘social community’”

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<sup>81</sup> Biss points in this regard at the book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, which, as stated by her biographer, “proved that our bodies are not boundaries” (C8).

<sup>82</sup> On pregnancy: Esposito notes that “only as a stranger can the child become ‘proper,’” as the foetus within the mother’s body, instead of concealing its ‘foreignness,’ needs to be recognized as foreign in order to be contained within the womb (*Immunitas* 170). For Biss it was her own pregnancy that made her experiences porousness and connectedness with other bodies: “My pregnancy, like every pregnancy, had primed me for the understanding that my body was not mine alone and that its boundaries were more porous than I had ever been led to believe” (C14) Yet a pregnancy is also violent: “how many of the metaphors that occurred to me when I was pregnant were metaphors of political violence – invasion, occupation, and colonization” (C14).

(*Immunitas* 166). Likewise, the relationship between the antigen and the antibody is not one of opposition, Esposito points out, it rather is a comparative one. In this view, the immune system is “a continuous exchange, between an internalized outside and an externalized inside” (*Immunitas* 174).<sup>83</sup> As Biss notes, immunity thus “involves an ongoing relationship with the disease” (C20). Camus’ Tarrou conjures up an image of an old man in Persia a hundred years before who kept doing his job of washing bodies right until the end (100). The closeness of these other bodies probably had made the man immune.

The workings of immunity extend from the individual to the collective body in the form of what is called herd immunity: the given that, by vaccinating ourselves, making ourselves immune, we also protect other bodies in our surroundings. An unvaccinated person has less chance of getting ill when surrounded by vaccinated people than a vaccinated person surrounded by unvaccinated people. In this sense, Biss states, “we owe each other our bodies”: “If we imagine the action of a vaccine not just in terms of how it affects a single body, but also in terms of how it affects the collective body of a community, it is fair to think of vaccination as a kind of banking of immunity” (C4). Yet, Biss is concerned with people’s anxiety towards the act of vaccination, the penetrating needle through the skin injecting the body with manipulated pathogens and toxins, as it also “raises some pressing questions about one’s rights to one’s own body” (C5). The sentiments are not of those who view their bodies, as Nadja Durbach opts in *Bodily Matters* (2004), “not as potentially contagious and thus dangerous to the social body, but as highly vulnerable to contamination and violation” (Biss C5). Of course, Biss notes that our bodies are both vulnerable and potentially dangerous and that we have to navigate this tension. Immunity according to Biss is a shared space (C28). Instead of warding off disease and dangerous pathogens, Biss poses that in the future we won’t take up arms, but restore a natural balance by “nurturing desirable bacteria,” she states that “[w]e may fight disease without fighting” (C28).

### **3.2 The Travelling of Pathogens: On Permeability and Porousness**

Our bodies may be more porous than we would care to admit, we cannot live in a bubble and our immune system actually prevails in its ongoing relationship with the external.

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<sup>83</sup> See: “the stranger is acceptable, and accepted, only if it is already part of the proper” (*Immunitas* 173).

So, in order to gain a better understanding of this relationship, let us examine the movement, the current in between. Bodies and materials move and other bodies and materials move with them. Biss notes that “[f]or centuries before the word virus was first used to describe a specific type of microorganism, it was used more generally for anything that spread disease – pus, air, even paper” (C25). The knowledge of germs is something of our modern times, yet before these pathogens became visible under a microscope, there was an idea about what contagion meant. As Biss notes, in Defoe – in the early days of the microscope – the narrator rejects the idea of microbes causing the disease, the notion that “invisible Creatures, who enter into the Body with the Breath, or even at the Pores with the Air, and there generate, or emit most acute Poisons” is to him merely a fiction; microbes are fantastical monsters: strange monstrous and frightful Shapes, such as Dragons, Snakes, Serpents, and Devils, horrible to behold” (Biss C26). In Camus, germ theory being long part of the medical domain, it is doctor Castel who refers to the pathogens under his microscope as ‘those little brutes,’ stating that they “always look different from one another but underneath they’re the same” (44). As the plague in Camus moves closer towards the city centre, to the richer parts of the town, “[t]he inhabitants accused the wind of carrying the seeds of infection” (130). It is telling that Camus here uses the word ‘seed,’ which, as Biss notes, indeed the root of the term ‘germ’: “A germ is an organism that causes disease, or it is part of a body capable of building new tissue. We use the same word for something that brings illness and something that brings growth” (C5). In regard to Hesse, the dual meaning of ‘germ’ in the sense of both that which brings growth and disease is interesting: the ideas that come with modernity and have their practical consequences in industrialization, might on the one hand stand for progress, while on the other for disease (and a decline).

Such microbes are the ones that move, are transferrable from one body to the next and are what constitutes our modern understanding of ‘infectious’ and ‘contagious.’ However, as Wald foregrounds, ‘contagion’ has and still does not always refer to actual diseases. It has always already been used in a metaphorical sense, in its use to refer to the transferability of illnesses, but also of states of mind. This is for example visible in the language of Hesse, stating that “Zu fürchten für Goldmund war eher [Abt Daniel], das sein Freund ihn mit einem gewissen Geisdünnel und gelehrten Hochmut *anstecken* werden” (38; emphasis added). And, in Lydia’s voice: “ich habe dich mit meiner Angst und Betrübniß *angesteckt*” (119; emphasis added). And likewise in Herbert: “Madness is

contagious,' Hupp said, 'as contagious as the plague itself. O'Neill has loosed a second plague upon our world – this madness" (C46). In similar regard, as John has viewed some photographs of the old Irish city of Derry, he realizes that "[s]omething in those photos had *contaminated* him" (C54). And, Bergen thinks that "[h]ysteria is infectious" (C23). Contagion is not only a transferring of disease, it also refers to how we are influenced by our external worlds.

Carriers, bodies that are a vessel to other organisms, pathogens included, form an interesting subject of study. Wald points out that infectious – or what she calls 'communicable' – disease, the travelling of pathogens is of interest because it "materializes the transmission of ideas" (2). Moreover, it is the contagiousness of disease and its disregard for social, hierarchical boundaries that "also constitute us as a community," Wald opts (2). The plague in this view also becomes "a great equalizer" (Wald 12; see also Gomel).<sup>84</sup> The work of epidemiologists is metaphorically a geographical one as they "trace the routes of the microbes, they catalog the spaces and interactions blend together as they animate the landscape and motivate the plot of the outbreak narrative" (Wald 2). In this landscape, the border/membrane is the place that is mostly at stake: in recording the movements of pathogens, through a trace of ill bodies, borders become visible. This outbreak narrative, Wald describes, follows a certain plot in which the outbreak forms the central calamity and motivation for the narrative, and the cease of the epidemic is also the end of the story. Such a story foregrounds foremost "the perils of human interdependence and the triumph of human connection and cooperation, scientific authority and the evolutionary advantages of the microbe, ecological balance and impeding disaster" (2). In Camus it is the "chaotic crowds who queue every day at the cinema" and "fill all the theatres and dance halls" that "spread like an uncontrolled tide through all public spaces" (152). In similar vein as in the scene of the tram passengers, the people in public spaces shrink away "from any contact and yet the hunger for human warmth that draws people toward one another, elbow to elbows and sexual organs to sexual organs" (152). It is this tension, between (imposed) separation and need for connection that is apparent in all four plague texts under examination here.

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<sup>84</sup> Wald refers in this regard to Victorian literature and more specifically to Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826).

The question of how the disease is spread and where it came from, is a major theme in most plague writings. There is an utmost concern with the movement of pathogens and possible carriers of the disease: it becomes a race against the clock, and where the quarantine freezes time and space for citizens, the sands of time for the medical establishment becomes quicksand. In Herbert it is the point of discussion in the first meeting by the medical officials, it is their 'highest priority' (C11). And in their follow up meeting: "We are to concentrate on how he spread the disease,' Beckett said. "They still haven't solved it" (C15). As they contemplate on how O'Neill willingly and specifically infected Ireland, England and Libya, they also gather that he used a virus to infect a bacterium, altering its DNA: "it was the virus's DNA, not its protein, that entered the bacterial cell. Here was *the messenger* he needed to make John O'Neill's revenge heard everywhere" (C12, emphasis added).<sup>85</sup> The plague bacterium thus becomes the carrier not only of disease, but also a message in need to be read – yet, with no intention for a response but submission. The doctors suspect that the plague is transferrable from human to human, that the human body once infected becomes a carrier. The question is if men can be carriers, which would make the epidemic all the more difficult to contain. Insects are made suspicious by one of medical experts as they travel through air and would easily cross boundaries and traverse long distances. They however discover that O'Neill's carrier of choice is more symbolic and less bodily than expected: he has contaminated paper money and used this to pay for orders made at warehouses, sent it to charities and to individuals in the three countries under his attack.<sup>86</sup> Doctor Hupp calls it 'a poetic madness' (C15, C21).<sup>87</sup> In his act of biological violence, O'Neill has at the same time critiqued the Western neo-liberalist and capitalist society. And, because money is paper that is circulated at a rather high pace, the disease has spread very quickly. Part of the quarantine is an inhibition of using paper money, and even after the lifting of these quarantines, money remains suspicious (C21). In this, one can read in Herbert also a critique of capitalism and a concretisation of the 'metaphorical infectiousness' of money. This is a gesture towards commenting on the relationship

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<sup>85</sup> See also: ""There had to be an interlocking virus-to-bacteria line of transmission in the plague" (C33); and: "What O'Neill developed was a viral strain that carried a donor DNA message to the living human cell via an infected bacterial agent" (C37).

<sup>86</sup> This information is shared with the English and the Americans, Bergen stating: "They saved us days in identifying how the plague was spread" (C18).

<sup>87</sup> See also: "Since it was contaminated money O'Neill used to spread his plague, the Swiss escape is remarkable" (C21).

between nations and communities that is based on merely economical and power relations.

### 3.3 On Carriers and Couriers / Rats and Men

*of all the Four Horsemen, the one whose ride begins most intimately, the private travails of individual flesh, and ends in the devastation of the entire community, is the last one, Pestilence - Gomel*

Money, or paper in general, is not the usual carrier of the plague: it is the body of the rat and in some cases the human body that becomes a potential danger once infected with the plague bacterium.<sup>88</sup> Telling here is the scene in Camus in which Tarrou relates to Rieux his own position towards the plague and (in)justice.<sup>89</sup> He states: ““To simplify things, Rieux, let's say that I was already suffering from the plague long before I knew this town and this epidemic” – here the plague is addressed immediately in the figurative sense: not as the actual disease that (189). Tarrou continues by telling about his father, the judge in a red robe, “asking for the death of [a] man in name of society,” a scene which causes a profound change in the young Tarrou’s understanding of society and its injustice (191). He “felt a far more terrifying intimacy with that unfortunate man than [his] father ever could” (191). As such, the young Tarrou takes a “horrified interest in justice, death sentences and executions” and goes into politics himself as he “did not want to be a victim of the plague”(192). Tarrou refers to the judges who impose the death penalty as ‘plague sufferers’ with ‘plague-ridden mouths’ who spread the plague (193, 194). In Tarrou’s understanding, the plague is death, but not natural death, it is a death sentenced by another, in name of society. The figure of pestilence here is not the fourth horseman, it is the judge in a red robe.

The juridical order, supposedly part of the body/nation’s immune system, becomes a bringer of pestilence. Yet, the plague extends to other carriers (members of

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<sup>88</sup> Note here also that Biss refers to Dracula as a figure spreading the plague (C15). And, that Gomel notes “Dracula’s association with rats” which makes him a “plague-bringing vampire” (416).

<sup>89</sup> Ironically, the paper that informs the citizens of Oran “in a spirit of total objectivity, about the *advances or decline in the illness*” and provides “them with the most authoritative accounts of the future of the epidemic” is called *The Courier of the Epidemic* (91; emphasis added).

society) as well, as Tarrou proposes that “we cannot make a gesture in this world without taking the risk of bringing death” and that “[e]veryone has inside it himself, this plague, because no one in the world, no one, is immune... [we] find ourselves breathing in another person's face and infecting him” (194, 195). The plague is a consequence of society, and to immunize yourself is not taking part in it: “I rejected killing, I condemned myself to a definitive exile” (195). As, “one must refuse to be on the side of the pestilence”, one becomes a victim (195). If in saying this I become a pestilence myself, at least I am not a consenting one”, Tarrou continues (195). This again makes it immensely complex to discern the exact underlying meaning.

The rat as bringer of disease is most apparent in Pfeijffer and Camus. It is Dr Rieux' encounter with the dead rat that colours the beginning of the narrative: the rat is a stranger to the environment in which its body is found: “There were no rats in the house, so this one must have been brought from the outside” (8). Later, doctor Castel determines that these “rats died of the plague or something very similar to it” and immediately they are marked as carriers, as Castel notes: “They put tens of thousands of fleas in circulation and these will transmit the infection at an exponential rate if we do not stop it in time” (48). But even before this affirmation the dead rat bodies are met with distrust and are seen as a foreboding for impending disaster: “These rats had been a shock for him and everything would be much better once they had gone” (13). ‘They’re coming out’ from the bowels of the town because of hunger, the concierge notes, it seems like an invasion (10, 18). The presence of these rats is threatening and when the first person, the concierge, falls ill, he screams: “The rats!” (19). They say that ‘when rats leave the ship...’, meaning that something is terribly wrong in the ship, upon which Rieux comments “that this was true in the case of ships, but that it had never been proved bad where towns were concerned” (23). A dead rat's body is also thrown out a tramcar, for which it needs to halt, symbolically preceding the actual inhibition of transport as a result of the imposed quarantine (23). The word ‘rat’ is not supposed to be spoken in polite conversation at the dinner table and this makes the symbolic significance of the rat even stronger: not only the dead rat body itself, but even the word is enough to make bad things happen (24).

In countering the fascist image of the Jews as (bearers of) plague, of contamination, the rats here refers to a ‘ratting out’, collaborating with the regime in pointing at that which supposedly contaminates. Nearing the end of the narrative, the

rats are back, this time not as a foreboding of disaster, but a reminder of one and a message for the future: “the plague will rouse its rats and send them to die in some well-contented city” (238, c.f. 204). Here, the plague and its carriers seem to have a different face yet again: it is unclear if the plague stands here for the Nazi regime that send the Jews to die, which makes sense as such, but renders the possessive pronoun and the aim of the sentence unfitted. Better, it would seem, is to look for the allegorical relation in the broader sense of totalitarianism and dogma as diseases that spread through their carriers and infects people of the ‘well-contented city.’

In Pfeijffer’s narrative, the rats form a trace through the narrative and the connective tissue between the different figures. They are present even before the narrator interludes his main narrative in which he recounts Genoa’s history as one of the portal through which the plague entered Europe, the rat is also presented as a carrier of the disease, one which resided on trade ships, travelled with them and entered a country through its ports. In the scene described in the previous chapter in which a Genoese fleet strands at the port of Sicily is a telling one. The Genoese demanded their ships back, so the Sicilians sail the ships from Sicily to Genoa; no one seemed ill: Maar niemand zag hoe ’s nachts een zwarte rat uit het ruim van een van de schepen naar boven kwam en over de zwarte kabel waarmee het schip lag aangemeerd de kade bereikte om op zoek te gaan naar voedsel. En niemand zag hoe een tweede rat volgde en daarna tientallen andere ... vanuit de haven verdwenen ze in de spelonken van de stad” (333). In Pfeijffer’s narrative, that includes those of migrants traveller in boats over the Mediterranean sea and entering Genoa through the [haven], this becomes a strong image: the rat as ‘gelukszoeker,’ hungry for a better life elsewhere; or the other way around of course, taking the rat as vehicle for the immigrant, the immigrant as rat bringing disease into the country. Interesting here is also the recurrence of the phrase ‘derattizzazione in corso non toccare le esche,’ a phrase the narrator encounters on a plaque on several houses in Genoa, including the place where he lives, without understanding its meaning. It strangely makes him feel at home, a part of a community because more of the buildings in his neighbourhood have a similar one. Yet, this phrase actually, as Djiby ironically points out to him ‘pest-control in progress, don’t touch the rat-poison’ (264; cf. 18, 68, 264, 336). In this sense, the rat is similar to the disease it carries: the rat itself becomes a pestilence in need of extermination and the metaphor of the rat-immigrant becomes a problematic or even dangerous one considering the



narrative as a whole. Pfeijffer uses the image to critique the way immigrants are viewed and treated by their Italian/European host(s): the rat-immigrant is an unwanted visitor.<sup>90</sup>

The narrator's own position as immigrant, though descended from the north and over land, is in this regard a very important one: his dream of going south towards a better life is in direction opposite from those who strand on Lampedusa or most of those who make it to Genoa, but don't find a better life there. Yet, the dream is still the same and lingers on: "En jij, Leonardo Ilja Leonard, blijf je aan wal met de ratten of ga je met de ratten sloop naar het zuiden waar alles nog meer hetzelfde zal zijn als het al is?" (337). Thus, the narrator counts himself among the rats, among the hungry ones coming out of the sewers into the city. In reading Camus and Pfeijffer together – and considering the history of the plague – the image of the (hungry) rat as bringer of disease and as forebode of disaster is construed. The hunger of the rat, as is the result of being infected with *Yersinia pestis*, is present in Camus and gets conflated with Pfeijffer's hunger for a better future elsewhere, also a kind of hunger. The 'hunger' in this instance also refers to an anxiety that the host will not have enough to provide, that he himself will go hungry as a consequence of feeding the ravenous rats/immigrants. In both Camus and Pfeijffer, the rat comes from the outside and does not belong: a pestilence to get rid of. Pfeijffer's use of the rat-image is a metaphorical one, using the rat as vehicle for immigrants: the rat body and the human body both become carriers of disease and thus form a threat to the collective body. In addition, it is interesting to note here that the plague actually was carried by fleas – human's mostly do not become contagious by carrying *Yersinia Pestis* – as is noted by Camus, but the image of the rat remains a more powerful one. *Yersinia Pestis* makes it for both the rat and the flea impossible to digest food and they develop a terrible hunger which makes them desperate to go look for food in places they normally would not go.

*Yersinia Pestis* is a traveller: moving from host to host, even crossing the boundaries of species, and making their hosts move (e.g. Gilman, Gomel). The bacterium can travel from human to human in the instance of pneumonic plague, through the breath, and in the fictional case of O'Neill's reinvention of the plague in which men tellingly become carriers. The scientists disclose that "the growth [of the bacterium] is

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<sup>90</sup> Interestingly there is another animal figure that conflates with the rat/immigrant: the ant. Ilja recounts the Sundays of his youth in which he watched the ants cross the lines in the concrete and he violently reacted to such a regression (56).

explosive in both men and women. To say it is biologically active is to understate the case” (C37). Yet, men don’t become ill themselves: the bacterium transfers the viral DNA it carries onto the female genome in which it interlocks itself.<sup>91</sup> Once infected, “[i]t may take a couple of days for a man to become an active carrier” (C17). Their own body is not afflicted, but they are harbouring from that point onwards a death sentence for every woman they come into contact with. Thus this new white plague makes for a rigorous barrier between the sexes. Females can only survive in isolation from men, or in Kate’s and Stephen’s case: together in isolation to avoid becoming a carrier. It took “[o]ne contaminated man” to infect a female population “in the Mountmellick Mines” (C30). Curiously absent in Herbert – but also in the other fictions – is any reflection on the meaning of being a carrier, of unwillingly being a danger to others, in this case to women.

As the man-made bacterium mutates and moves to other species – it remains unclear if in the animal world too only female specimens are inflicted – the option for using migratory birds as Trojan horse to attack the Soviets is contemplated (C39). This is also a reference to a conversation earlier in the narrative in which Prescott, in speculating about possible carriers, states that “birds don’t check in at the border for decontamination”(C21). Birds and other animals do not consider borders arbitrarily drawn by men and thus are difficult subjects for quarantines. O’Neill’s knowledge, gained through a desire for revenge, thus poses all new questions about the world, most notable the political one that is foregrounded in the novel: the use of biological warfare. The consequences reach much further than John had foreseen; when the split between the persona he is to the outside world and the vengeful O’Neill within starts to resolve, he descends more and more into a traditional kind of madness. In this state, his imprisonment nearing the end, he sees through his window three dark figures on horseback, a “black movement in the fading light” (C58). He contemplates: “Arrival on horseback: Why should that be threatening?” (C58). In this scene, Herbert makes use of yet another image connected with the plague: that of the *four* horsemen of the apocalypse, of which one is pestilence. Carriers are couriers, they carry with them the message of a possibly horrific future and end.

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<sup>91</sup> How exactly this happens remains vague and in a way seems illogical to me as it is men that have a differentiated chromosome (Y), while both men and women have similar sex-chromosomes (X). In Herbert’s telling, ‘hermaphrodites’ also die of the plague; as in most cases intersexual persons have XY chromosomes, the plague reacting to female DNA seems off.

### 3.4 Wandering and a Kind of Exile in Plague Times

Plague times and quarantines bring with them a kind of exile, as already elaborated on in the previous chapter. While I discussed this exile in relation to an inhibition of movement, of exclusion within containment, I here would like to discuss exile in relation to movement, exclusion and wandering. Though most narratives involve a kind of movement, it seems the plague writings examined here seem to share a theme of journeying. Moreover, fiction seems to have an important role in this regard, as the fictional characters in privation, placed in quarantine, have dreams of movement: thus, while the body is fixed into place, the mind is still free to move. Among the four protagonists, Goldmund is the most notable wanderer, that of a homeless and a wayfarer, as it is part of a plague writing, puts him in a position of witnessing different stories and accounts of the Black Death. Not only the story of the Jewish Rebekka as examined in the previous chapter, but he also reads it in the withered face of Lisbeth, Master Niklaus's daughter. In returning to the city when the plague ceases, he also meets Marie again, to whom he first recounts his own experiences, although "davon spricht man nicht. Ich bin gewandert und gewandert, und überall war die Seuche und lagen die Toten herum, und überall waren die Leute verrückt und böse von Angst" (230). Marie provides him with paper and he draws the faces of the women and the plague over and over again and in this sense makes his wandering witnessing of the horrific events concrete. In similar regard, it is worth to look at the other protagonists and their witnessing and wandering.

As Dr Rieux, protagonist and narrator, is a citizen of Oran, the figure that is of interest to me here is that of Rambert who is only a visitor and gets trapped by the plague. As, Rieux notes Rambert's exile is different from his own:

But though this was exile, in most cases it was exile at home. And though the narrator only suffered an ordinary exile, he should not forget those, like the journalist Rambert and others, whose situation was different, and for whom the pain of separation was amplified by the fact that, being travellers surprised by the plague in the town, they were separated not only from the person to whom they could not return, *but from their homes* as well. In the midst of the general exile, they were the most exiled because while time aroused in them, as in all of us, that anguish peculiar to it, they were trapped in a particular space and were constantly running up against barriers that separated this pestilential retreat from *their lost homes* (58; emphasis added)

Rambert and other 'trapped' travellers are displaced and in this sense share experiences of political migrants and refugees who cannot return to their homes, families and communities. Again, Camus and Pfeijffer read well together; though Pfeijffer's narrative is autodiegetic and in first-person, Camus' Rieux relates well to experiences of travellers unlike himself in exile. Like Pfeijffer, Rieux incorporates other's stories of exclusion in which the migrant is not necessarily the bringer of disease, but in which the host becomes a place of quarantine and exile. Rambert does not belong to Oran, but unlike Ilja Leonard, he also does not want to: he tries to be an exception on the quarantine regulation in relating to his position as stranger; he "told him [the official] that he had nothing to do with Oran, that it was not his business to stay there, that he had found himself here by accident and that it was only right that he should be allowed to leave ... 'After all,' Rambert said to the doctor, '*I'm a stranger in this town*" (66; emphasis added).<sup>92</sup>

Rieux points at Rambert's potential to carry the disease, and in his leaving the possibility of carrying it across borders. In his attempts to legally be allowed to leave, Rambert gets his a taste of bureaucracy and at a certain point, he thinks his request will be granted because the town officials enquire for more personal information about him. However, as he later learns, this interest is just in case he dies of the plague and they will have to inform his relatives. Yet, this proves to Rambert "that he was not altogether cut off from the woman who was waiting for him, society was taking an interest in them" (83). As Rambert struggles "to prevent the plague from taking him," he decides, if not by legal means, he would "try the other sort" (106). The quest to get out of the quarantined town becomes his primary concern, so much so that "he noticed that in all this time he had to some extent forgotten his wife, applying his mind entirely to the search for a breach in the walls that separated them" (119). Rieux convinces Rambert to stay and to share in the burden of the plague, to join the struggle to overcome. In this choice of staying is also a choice of belonging. Rambert, states that "there maybe shame in being happy all by oneself" and that he "always thought that [he] was a stranger in this town and had nothing to do with you [Rieux]" (162).

Within the containment of the quarantine, as the plague lingers on, there is more and more space for a certain kind of freedom. At first there is a turn towards religion, a

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<sup>92</sup> See in similar regard: "However, Rambert had put his case to each of them, whenever it was possible. The basis of his argument remained the same: he said that he was a foreigner in our town and that, consequently, his case should be given special consideration" (82).

search for answers and tools to deal with the plague. Yet, as the people of Oran become aware that there is nothing to be done, they comprehend the vastness and seriousness of the situation of the plague and it is at this point that “they remembered pleasure. So, in the dusty, blazing dusk all the anguish imprinted on their faces during the day resolves itself into a sort of crazed excitement, an uneasy freedom that enflames a whole population” (93). This sort of performing a grotesque version of freedom is also present in Hesse, as Goldmund, at the height of the plague, takes part in bacchaeen dances and rites, a dance to defy death, “Feste ... der Lebenslustigen” (214). In his drawings of the faces of the plague, he draws himself: “als Wanderer; als Liebenden, als *Flüchtling* vor dem mähenden Tod, als Tänzer bei den Pestorgien der Lebenshungrigen” (231; emphasis added; c.f. Camus 92). In Heller’s words: “The quiet, gentle, somewhat boring temple of European art ... has been invaded by the painted skulls, the hairy dance masks, the terrifying chimaeras of primitive peoples and ages” (143). This is a return towards a primordial state of being and as such this ‘invasion’ is evidently a sign of decline, but of a ‘healthy’ decline which is at the same time the beginning of a rebirth. It is due to a weariness of the functions of an overrefined organism. The souls of individuals and nations are striving towards an opposite pole” (143).

Goldmund becomes in a sense both participant in the grotesque play of the plague and a witness of this flight from death. Likewise, in Camus and Pfeijffer, the narrators are witnesses of experiences of exile. At the end of Camus’ narrative, Rieux recognizes the the symptoms of exile in the faces of most of his fellow citizens: “For the first time Rieux could give a name to the similarity that for months he had seen on the faces of people passing in the street” (230). In these performances, the people “had eventually taken on the clothing of the role that they had been playing for a long time, *that of émigrés whose faces then, and clothes now, spoke of absence and distant homelands*. From the moment when the plague closed the gates of the town, they had started to live in a state of separation and been cut off from that human warmth that leads us to forget everything” (230; emphasis added). This language of exile, with the use here by Camus of the terms ‘émigrés’ and ‘homeland’ is important in both considering the plague as vehicle for the experiences of WWII *and* those of migration. In Pfeijffer then, the plague does not only entail the figurative language used against immigrants, which he in turn critiques, the plague also becomes an apt narrative to convey experiences of being excluded.

Pfeijffer's choice of Genoa as meeting point for immigrants from different backgrounds and with different stories to share with him, is put into perspective by the narrator's references to the city's history as a place of plague. Ilja Leonard for example meets the Senegalese Djiby, who states to Ilja him that he finds it important to tell his bizarre story of crossing the Mediterranean sea to him, a writer with a pen and a name, so he in turn can convey the story to his readers: "ik vind het belangrijk dat mijn verhaal aan de mensen van het Noorden wordt verteld. Het is het verhaal van mijn volk" (241). And: "Hoeveel *zwarte inkt* is er nodig om onze dromen op te schrijven op *zwart papier*? En wie zal ons lezen? Begrijp je mij, Ilja? Jij hebt een pen en een naam" (250; emphasis added). The black ink writing on black paper would however render his story invisible, unreadable and thus uncommunicable. Moreover, in view of the plague body, one could also see a mirroring in the blackness of his skin and the blackness of the bubo's whereby his experiences of having to migrate and his status as an immigrant configure with the status of a body infected with plague, a body whose agony is unheard.

Pfeijffer's critique is mostly set up as putting migration in an important historical perspective and, in his consistent foregrounding of the fictionality of his text he reaches a quite opposite effect: that is, conveying to the reader that the urgent problems of migration are very much part of our real world. In wandering through Genoa, and being attentive to the echoes of this port city from which the crusades started their journey and from which, much later, a large number of Italians boarded the ship to 'La Merica' in the second half of the nineteenth century, Ilja Leonard contemplates: "Het was interessant material [to set up as theatrical piece] en de artistieke doelstelling, om de huidige immigratieproblematiek een spiegel uit het verleden voor te houden" (164). The Italian diaspora is heavily entwined with Genoa as not only the Genoese, but almost two-thirds of all emigrants ported from here "voor de reis van hun leven, de oversteek van armoede naar de belofte van een nieuw en beter bestaan" (168). The Genoese people:

zagen de mensenmassa's die zich dag in dag uit verzamelden op hun kades met gemengde gevoelens aan. Sommigen zagen hen als een bron van inkomsten, anderen hadden vooral medelijden. En er was ook angst. Ze waren met zovelen en de hygiënische omstandigheden waren abominabel. Ze waren ook vies. Achterlijke boeren uit de binnenlanden die kennelijk nooit hadden geleerd om zich te wassen. Er konden ziekten uitbreken. Dat was al eerder gebeurd. In Napels hadden emigranten in de haven een cholera-epidemie veroorzaakt die veel slachtoffers had gevergd in de stad (214)

Here the moving bodies are interrelated again with the spreading of disease, and, more importantly: these moving bodies are migrants, immigrants into Genoa, but emigrants leaving Italy.<sup>93</sup> This is a rhetorical and critical move on Pfeijffer's part, narrating the Italians as guests from a reluctant host, they are confronted with the consequences of the immigrant-rat conflation.

In relating to the history of the crusades, the conquering of the promised city of Jerusalem, Pfeijffer imagines himself continuing southwards, conflating past and present, as a crusader: "Je bent onderweg. Het avontuur begint. Je leven begint. Eindelijk begint het" (295). Ironically, he presents a crusade as a happy adventure "[m]et een hip harnasje de Moren tegemoet ... De zangers zullen eeuwenlang zingen van de heldendaden van Don Leonardo voor de muren van Aleppo, voor de muren van Sana, voor de muren van de Heilige stad" (337). He imagines this story as resulting in a reversal of the role of invader to the invaded: the crusader falls in love with a woman, with the other and as such becomes part of a new community. As a fresh set of crusaders violently conquers this new home, he witnesses the rape and death of his wife and family members. He wants to revenge himself on Genua as it is "de plek die ik het meest haat op aarde. Ik beloof u, vader, ik zal er terugkeren. Sta mij toe om mij te beroven van mijn eigen leven en er te verschijnen als de geest de wrake van de slachtoffers van het kruis" (302). This becomes Ilja's imagined cause of the medieval plague: it is a revenge, a punishment of the conquering of the other. This past resonates in the present through three horn blows, which is reminiscent of the signal of the arrival of the plague: ze betekenden alles, maar zelfs de oudste zeelieden in de stad konden zich niet herinneren wat. Dat signaal hadden ze voor het laatst gehoord toen hun grootouders kinderen waren en van hun grootouders hoorden dat niemand nog wist wat de hoorn zei die drie keer klonk" (337).<sup>94</sup> Thus, in relating to Genoa's history, Pfeijffer indeed holds a mirror

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<sup>93</sup> In relating to a personal story of an Italian immigrant, Ilja Leonard fictionalizes a certain 'Alessandro' who cannot find a job in La Merica because he is a 'foreigner': "ook al hadden ze hem beloofd dat hij automatisch rijk zou worden als het hem zou lukken La Merica te bereiken en binnen te komen. Maar hij zocht zijn achterlicht niet. Hij wilde geen hulp. Hij was een Italiaan. Hij had zijn trots. Uiteindelijk vond hij een baantje als dagloner bij de spoorwegen. Met een grote groep andere Italianen werd hij ingezet voor de aanleg van een nieuw spoor vlak bij de stad. Het was verschrikkelijk zwaar en gevaarlijk werk voor een hongerloontje *en de opzichters hielden niet van buitenlanders. Ze werden behandeld als uitschot*. Ze werden bespuwd en geslagen. Op een dag viel er een spoorbiel op zijn voet. Hij kon niet meer lopen. Hij werd ontslagen" (194; emphasis added).

<sup>94</sup> See: "Omdat niemand je wilt omarmen, omhels je je eigen arm. Tot het pijn doet van de kramp. Je staat jezelf toe om te huilen. Maar zelfs dat lukt niet. Terwijl niemand kijkt, vaart het zwarte schip met gestreken zwarte zeilen geruisloos uit in de zwarte nacht" (337).

up to the reader, questioning who is a traveller, who is a 'gelukszoeker,' who is a refugee, who is a conqueror and who is an unwanted guest; foregrounding that for a large part this is a matter of perspective and that hosts tend to view those who cross their borders with suspicion.

### **3.5 Dreams of Movement**

While in the bacchaean dances it is the body that engages in a rebellion against the stifling consequences of the plague, it is mostly the mind that fantasizes about movement and freedom. Camus' Rambert tellingly spends long times at the deserted train station: It was forbidden to go onto the platforms. But the waiting-rooms which could be reached from outside remained open ... Rambert came to read old timetables, notices forbidding spitting and the railway by-laws ... On the wall a few notices advertised a happy, free life in Bandol or Cannes" (84-85). It is in these remnants of travelling that "Rambert experienced the sort of fearful freedom that one finds in utter destitution" (85). It is in the pictures of Paris that Rieux understands Rambert to identify "images of those of his beloved" (85). And, as Rieux observes, Rambert is not the only one imagining movement: "in everyone's minds, weeks before the real events, trains were whistling as they left on endless tracks, and ships ploughed through shining seas" (211).<sup>95</sup> It is the sea that is part of the narrator's own movement fantasy, as "[t]he town used to open itself towards the sea and spill its young people out onto the beaches. This summer, however, the nearby sea was out of bounds and the body no longer had the right to enjoy it" (87). In the anticipation to the end of the plague "the whole town shook, bursting out of those enclosed spaces" (211). Similar fantasies are those of Herbert's Kate, confined in the tank that preserves her life, but severely inhibits her movement. As such, she visualizes the plague's spread:

In her diary, she had drawn a crude map and plotted on it the plague's inexorable spread – Brittany, North Africa, Sicily, the toe of Italy, then Rome itself, the citadel of her faith. On her map, she blotted out each new plague place with ink and felt as she did this that

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<sup>95</sup> In this desire to move, traffic soon starts again when the plague has left town: "Although they were not yet authorized to do so, a lot of cars were driving around again. They quickly sucked at the roadway, disappeared, then later reappeared. There were voices, shouts, returning silence, a horse's hoofs, two trams screeching on a bend, vague noises, then once more the breathing of the night" (224). In Herbert, "'There's talk of restoring the canals,' Hugh said. 'Why? What would they carry? From where and to where?'" (C28).



she removed these regions from her world. The plague spots were like the places marked on antique maps – Terra Incognita. They would have to be rediscovered ... if anyone survived. (C28)

In her mind, Kate relates to the outside world and the geographical places blackened by the plague, the panic fire and her ink. “Kate tried to imagine what it would be like to step out of the chamber,” realizing that with no cure available she would only survive a short while and “that it was no longer the world out there that she had known”(C59). The absence of a door in the chamber is what bothers her most, as there is no visible connection with the outside world. As noted before, the room for Scarry is “like the body,” that is “its walls put boundaries around the self preventing undifferentiated contact with the world” (38). However, Scarry importantly notes “in its windows and doors, crude versions of the senses, it enables the self to move out into the world and allows that world to enter” (38). Thus Kate is not only locked into the room, she is also locked inside herself. When the tank with Kate and Stephen inside is being moved from Ireland to England for safety reasons, Kate, almost eight months pregnant, gives birth to their daughter (C59). It is telling that the baby is being born at a moment of movement, more than a month too early. Kate gives her the name Dervogilla, from the myth of Dervogilla and Diarmud, “the two of them to wander Ireland and never find peace, never to be together until one Irishman forgives them” (C59).

In Herbert too, the protagonist is, or rather becomes, a wanderer. In O’Neill’s dedication to witness his retribution at the place where he most intended it, he travels via Paris to Ireland. In his short stay in Paris, he falls severely ill – probably something of his own making, an occupational accident – but recovers: “By the time he was well enough to move around, the world had entered the first throes of his white plague and the cost of everything had mounted at an astonishing rate” (C20). As he arrives at Ireland’s shores by boat, he is intercepted by the Beach Boys. He gets stripped and all his belongings are taken from him – including his fake passport under the name of John O’Donnel: “‘It’s the way we all enter Ireland, y’ know,’ Cohn said. ‘Naked as plucked chickens and them ready for the pot. You’ve no mind for the pot you’re in now, you Yankee devil” (C24).<sup>96</sup> The Beach Boys, under command of *Kevin* O’Donnel let him go, but inform Doheny about the ‘Yankee’ intruder. Doheny suspects that he might be

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<sup>96</sup> In forging his fake passport, O’Neill contemplates: “The passports [he arranged for his children and still has] were real. But how much of the real person was contained in them? If he erased all of them, did that actually make the people unreal?” (C14).

O'Neill, the madman: "the fear ... yes, the panic. The Madman here in Ireland. And what was he doing here? Had he brought an even more terrible plague to exterminate the survivors?" (C25). Thus, because he thinks O'Neill to be both dangerous and valuable, Doheny comes up with the plan to lead him to Killaloe Lab, not the shortest way, but the 'safest,' in order to buy time and see if O'Neill unveils himself (C25, C38). Thus, John's journey in the company of Joseph Herity, Father Michael Flannery and the silent boy begins.<sup>97</sup> John keeps up his masquerade that he is a biochemist who want to help in the struggle against the plague and under this determination has come to Ireland. Father Flannery comments to Herity: "This man has exiled himself here out of goodness. Have you no appreciation for that?" (C26).<sup>98</sup>

At the moment of arrival at Killaloe, John notices the journey, something "in the months of their slow passage," has changed him (C56). In a ravaged world, a lawless state, closer to nature, he finds a certain kind of freedom: "It had been movement like their walking feet. There had been freedom in it. Yes – freedom: their possessions on their backs," and "experiencing a freedom from the things of the world that perhaps only the migratory hordes of the nomad ages had known" (C56). This state of wandering is also connected to the Irish land and the Irish people; in this regard, it is not necessarily a wandering in the sense of an actual movement across land, it is a wandering of the collective mind of a nation and its history of not being influenced and oppressed by others: "The people here had been wandering through their own despairs until John's arrival" (C58).<sup>99</sup> Gannon claims something similar, in his despair that (almost) all women are gone: "The women are gone and nothing ... nothing! will bring them back. The Irish Diaspora is ended. We have all come home to die" (C34). Thus, the structure of Herbert's narrative somewhat mimics Hesse's: that of a journey with an end, a 'coming home to die.' Yet, where Hesse's ending is indeed a closure, Herbert's proves to be a new beginning in a severely changed world.

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<sup>97</sup> In this regard, the words 'wayfarer' and 'wanderer' are used often. See for example: "This place was made to order for a confused wayfarer. Ireland was not at all what he had expected" (C26). And: "This is Joseph Herity, a wanderer like myself. The boy there ... I don't know if he has a name. He'll not speak" (C26).

<sup>98</sup> Gannon says something similar to John: "You have come across the water in our time of need" (C36).

<sup>99</sup> See in similar regard this epigraph: "The stranger came and tried to teach us their ways. They scorned us for being what we are – 'Galway Bay,' an Irish ballad" (C35).

### 3.6 A Community in Crossing Borders

However, apart from suspicion and warding off, there are also sentiments of a community broader than the borders of the nation or city, relating to a more porous understanding of our world and our bodies. Rieux, in the middle of his own exile in plague stricken Oran switches on the radio: “And from distant parts of the world, across thousands of miles, unknown but fraternal voices tried awkwardly to express their solidarity – and did, indeed express it, while at the same time exhibiting the dreadful powerlessness if all men who truly endeavour to share a pain they cannot see. ‘Oran, Oran!’ in vain the appeal crossed the seas” (106). The radio and the voices emitting from it mean to Rieux a sharing of suffering across borders. And, a little while later, health workers and doctors are “brought in from outside” to indeed aid in the struggle to overcome the plague (114).

Such a sharing of medical knowledge is echoed in Herbert, as Peard states that “[o]pen research is the only hope the world has” (C30). In their shared enemy, the Irish even open up to the English, though on a reluctant note, as Doheny comments to Peard: “Why do y’ think we’re being so open with each other, Adrian? They’re still the British, you know” (C30). Doheny conveys a similar view as he relates to his travel companion in an earlier scene that “there should be strategically placed centers around the world, tight communications links, a complete computer interchange without regard to national boundaries, voice and video, no censorship. Scientists should join hands with no regard to nationality” (C22). It is however not only medical knowledge that is at stake, as Doheny continues: “We will find a need to arrange marriages across the new borders. Exogamy is not a new device ... we’ll have to keep expanding the gene pool” (C22). Exchange is needed, or the national boundaries will make for a ‘genetic deterioration.’

This is exactly the danger of the eugenic discourse as Esposito points out (most elaborately in the third chapter of *Bios*). And though *immunitas* is an important aspect of the Self (no body could do without it), it functions most of all through an ongoing relation between inside and outside and through incorporation. The defensive measures taken against the plague need to be reviewed, especially, as Hesse, Camus, Herbert and Pfeijffer show, when the plague is not the plague, but carries something else.

## CONCLUSION

The plague is still with us and it has many faces. The four works of fiction I have taken into account here are not written in plague-times, yet they are immensely indebted to a vast bulk of Western plague-writing that is the result of times in which the Black Death indeed swept over Europe. This disconnection between the times in which the actual historical events took place and the recurrence in more modern fictions makes for a move away from the literal to the metaphorical or figurative. We still have very strong notions of contagious disease that are at least in part indebted to the vast epidemics of the bubonic plague, smallpox and influenza. Contagious disease has a direct link with travelling as travelling bodies might carry illnesses with them. There is a realistic fear of migrants bringing exotic diseases into a country (mirrored by Pfeijffer's narrative of migration that always seemed accompanied by a disease). Yet it was foremost a metaphorical contagion that was at stake in my endeavour. The metaphorical use of the plague, or contagious disease more generally, emanated from a broader metaphor: that of the nation in relation to the body. The body as vehicle for the nation and the nation as vehicle for the body. And, in addition, that the border, or the membrane, was the most important place to consider.

As such I have positioned myself in conversation with Susan Sontag's argument of a non-metaphorical view of illness, using Roberto Esposito's notion of (the relation between) community and immunity as a new framework for looking at the plague as a figurative instance. By dissecting how the ancient plague functioned as metaphorical vehicle for modern societal issues – modernity and industrialization in Hesse, of totalitarianism and dogma in Camus, of a war language and terrorism in Herbert (though more in the figure of a science fiction than of an allegory) and of migration in Pfeijffer – I have unveiled the violent language accompanying body-nation figure. The first question at stake was how we imagine our bodies and communities as unitary, as enclosed wholes. The second was how the body-nation relates to disease: the nation seen as a living organism is also prone to disease and other dangers, even death. The nation became a host to parasites, or invaded by harmful bacteria. As such, the nations at stake here are Germany in its period of late industrialization and the felt consequences of modern warfare; Germany under the influence of eugenic discourse as employed by the Nazis in which the Jews become both the invading pathogen to the

Aryan body and the aiming point of the plague as weapon; Ireland as the imperialised and protected woman and Italy or even more broadly speaking Europe, as host to immigrants from the East and the South.

As such, the city also plays an important spatial role as either part of the body-nation figure (as a smaller structuring part of the body) or as new metaphorical figure on its own (that of body-city in which the plague festers). In Hesse, the city as place of the plague becomes symbolic for the cities under the influence of industrialization and its 'contamination' of the quality of human life. Camus' Oran becomes a place of infection that is isolated. As both Oran and Pfeijffer's Genoa are port-cities they are important liminal places: they form a connection point between land and sea and between nations. These figures of body-nation and city-nation are often gendered with the consequence of a fear of violent penetration: Woman is the body in which life begins and at the same time the beginning of the end. In this sense the plague is also Eve's curse, or something that escaped from Pandora's box and inherent to apocalyptic imaginings.

The aggressive response to the plague resulted in a tightening of and closing of borders, quarantine and the counter-attack of the body's immune system. It is here that I related to Esposito's foregrounded tension between community and immunity most strongly. The language of the plague and that of a protective warfare is difficult to dissect: both result in a xenophobia, bordering and exiles. In taking up Esposito's argument of the over-defensive auto-immune reaction, I have illustrated with the fictional critiques of Hesse, Camus, Herbert and Pfeijffer the need to move beyond the negative connotations of the transgression of the body's and the nation's boundaries. In the imposed exile, the plague as metaphor became an apt vehicle to convey the sentiments of separation, a dismembering.

In Camus and Pfeijffer the rat became a powerful symbol; in *La Superba*, the rat, carrier of the plague bacillus, becomes a vehicle for the immigrant, the unwanted visitor. In Camus the rat is both the victim of a totalitarian regime (most notably the Jews under Nazism) and the carrier of dogma. Pfeijffer's autofictional narrative sets out issues of belonging as the narrator, also called Ilja Leonard, conveys his experiences as a Dutch writer who wants to be accepted in his new homeland. By employing the plague, Pfeijffer points at the use of such a metaphor and its potentially dangerous effects. In this regard, he not only critiques instances in which the plague colours language about immigrants, but provides a fictional space to deconstruct the wider body-nation

paradigm. The medium of fiction is the perfect tool to foreground and move through the tension between fiction and reality. By constantly playing with this tension, Pfeijffer conveys the absurdity of the stories that 'really happened', the stories of crossing the sea, and the lack of a responsible host. This tension also shows, on the other hand, the fictionality, the illusion of a better future elsewhere: the fairy tale of golden Europe with a cruel ending in disillusionment. As such, Pfeijffer lays bare the complexity of reality (and all its vulgarity) via his fiction. This is something that could not have been conveyed in any other genre than literary fiction. And Pfeijffer does so brilliantly. The construction of the text that is inherent in its fictionality, images, metaphorical language

To bring the history of plague writing into conversation with the (post-)modern plague imaginings of Hesse, Camus, Herbert and Pfeijffer, I have aimed to come to a better understanding of the connotations of the plague and infectious disease more generally. To use the plague as metaphor means to conjure up images of gruesome deaths, of the apocalypse, of extinction and correlate these with the tenor of choice: the plague carries violence (as most directly illustrated by Herbert's narrative. Thus, in using the plague as metaphor for relating to problems of modern societies (industrialization, dogma, terrorism and migration), these connotations are carried over. As such, the imagery of the plague can both be apt and dangerous or harmful. In regard to migration, the plague narrative might be an apt tool to convey experiences of exile. Turning towards these aspects and connotations of wandering, exile, may give way to a powerful use of the plague-metaphor. In this instance, the stranger is not viewed upon as a pathogen, a harmful bacteria, but as a victim of the plague.

This renewed framework of plague could lay interesting nuances bare in fictions that confront modern societies with their national discourses and the issues that result from them. Viewing literature as a space outside politics to voice certain issues, to critique and to provide a counter narrative, they play an important part in voicing complexity without necessarily providing direct concrete solutions – which is the task of politics. The violation of the borders of the nation are in no way comparable to the violations of membranes of the body of the individual. The most pressing example is yet another island: the island of Nauru that Australia's Lampedusa. The severe migration policy of the national body imperils the body of the individual, albeit outside of the direct community. In view of permeability and globalization: we have a relational response-ability.

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