Coming together: Embodied and pre-reflective interaction in *The Plague*

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**Abstract**

Albert Camus’s *The Plague* has often been investigated as a moral deliberation on humans’ responsibilities in the face of a deadly threat, be it as an allegory of World War Two or in a more general fashion. In this article, I argue that by looking at the pre-reflective and embodied aspects of the interaction between the protagonists, the novel can be read in a new light. Seen from the perspective of contemporary cognitive science, especially what is known as "enactivism," I argue that central cognitive and interactive processes in the novel seem to be running below the level of explicit dialogue. Thus, we can understand the moral process of *The Plague* more accurately if we take into account new insights into the important role that the body, our surroundings, and the interaction itself play when humans come together and interact. Finally, I argue that an analysis of *The Plague* should pay special attention to how Rieux, the narrator and main protagonist, operationalizes these embodied and pre-reflective mechanisms through his use of narrative techniques.

**KEYWORDS**

Albert Camus, cognitive literary studies, enactivism, interaction, second-generation cognitive science
In *The Plague*, Albert Camus tells the story of a deadly plague that strikes the Algerian coastal city of Oran. The novel depicts how its citizens respond to this disease and how they struggle together to repel it. First published in 1947, *The Plague* has often been read as an allegory of World War Two, where the plague would represent the atrocities of the Nazis. Thus, in the first decades after its publication, the discussion of *The Plague* revolved mainly around questions regarding the novel’s relationship with these events, and the moral implications of this allegoric relationship. Recently, the novel’s allegoric qualities have gained a new and unexpected relevance with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite differences in mortality and geographical scale, Camus’s novel relates directly to the contemporary crisis with its story of a deadly and contagious disease. I will not make any direct suggestions as to how Camus’s novel can better our understanding of the current crisis nor how the novel relates to its historical context. Rather, I will investigate how Camus’s novel relates more generally to humans’ cognitive and social capacities and argue that adapting a perspective from today’s cognitive science can open up to new ways of understanding this novel. That being said, my argument can potentially provide an entry point into how fictional literature connects to human interactions in real-life settings, both in current and historical contexts, although how exactly this research would be carried out lies beyond the scope of this article. My goal is to examine how *The Plague* can be read as a portrayal of how humans can come together and cooperate in the face of a devastating crisis. The perspective from cognitive science will allow me to investigate aspects of this cooperation that can be hard to spot at first sight. My emphasis will be on the parts of the interaction between the citizens of Oran that are not explicitly stated by the protagonists, that is, their embodied and pre-reflective forms of coordination.

Although the allegoric framework of interpretation was important in the decades after the novel’s publication, in more recent years, much work has been done that goes beyond strict allegoric interpretations. John Krapp has suggested that what is interesting in Camus’s novel is the ongoing interpersonal process of reflecting on right and wrong: “On this reading, *The Plague* illustrates less a thematic moral lesson than a paradigm for the way in which moral consciousness may be developed and nourished aesthetically in the conflict among moral voices” (Krapp, 1999, 675). I will follow Krapp in reading Camus’s novel as a sort of moral process, that is, a dialogue between many characters that shows how a common moral outlook can be developed through their interaction. However, Krapp construes this dialogue from the level of each character’s individual utterances. I will argue that by doing so, he misses two crucial aspects: the influence of the interaction itself on the protagonists and the embodied and pre-reflective forms of coordination that serve to draw them together.

Shoshana Feldman has approached *The Plague* in a different manner. According to her, the plague allegory enables the novel to describe that which goes beyond our normal frameworks of understanding, namely Holocaust. In order to bear witness to this horrible crime, Camus is forced to represent it through something else. Although this article will not investigate *The Plague’s* relationship with World War Two, Feldman’s emphasis on the importance of physical presence for bearing testimony is still relevant. For Feldman, the “task of testimony” is to enable a certain bodily knowledge of the event, that is, “a firsthand, carnal knowledge of victimization, of what it means to be ‘from here’ […]” (Feldman & Laub, 1992, 111). However, Feldman does not develop in any detail the nature of this knowledge but is more interested in its testimonial value. In what follows, I will investigate how this “carnal knowledge,” seen from the perspective of second-generation cognitive science, might provide an entry point for expanding Krapp’s reading of *The Plague* as a moral dialogue. I will argue that embodied and pre-reflective mechanisms, linked to Rieux’s physical presence during the events of his story, can serve to elucidate new aspects of such a dialogue.

Colin Davis has pointed out how Rieux’s double role of narrator and protagonist complicates his role as a witness. Rieux’s stated goal of testifying in an objective manner to the events in Oran is undermined by his attempt to level out any disagreement between the different characters. According to Davis, as part of Rieux’s strategies for telling a tale with a unified moral value without any counter-voices, he states throughout the novel several
aphorisms that give off the impression of containing the moral message of the novel. However, these moral aphorisms, despite claiming to be clear and unambiguous, are in fact almost meaningless:

It is hard to argue against such a statement because, while apparently offering a moral principle, it actually says next to nothing. The tautological “il fallait faire ce qu’il fallait faire” asserts that there are duties and obligations, but says nothing about what they might be. (Davis, 2007, 1017)

Although Davis is right to point out the seemingly tautological nature of these aphorisms taken on their own, I will argue that there are more to them than an attempt to smooth out any voices that run counter to Rieux’s moral authority. I will rather suggest that the aphorisms are filled with content if we pay attention to the embodied and partly pre-reflective aspects of the interaction that emerges between the protagonists in Camus’s novel. Read in this light, the moral process of The Plague cannot be sufficiently investigated on the level of individual utterances.

I will argue that this process is not only an exchange of words, but also of coordinated movements and of participation in an interaction that takes on an autonomy of its own. The perspective from cognitive science allows us to discern this stratum of interaction, located below the level of explicit dialogue, that has gone relatively unnoticed in the literature on The Plague so far.

2 | LITERATURE, MIND-READING, AND ENACTIVISM

In recent years, the number of cognitive approaches to the study of literature has been growing. One important direction in this field has been to look to what is known in the cognitive literature as “mind-reading” for ways of conceptualizing and understanding the interaction of fictional characters. Mind-reading designates the human capacity to deliberate on the mental content of other human beings. In her influential Why We Read Fiction: Theory of the Mind and the Novel (2006), Lisa Zunshine uses detective novels as her main example and compares the reading of this kind of novels to going to the gym. She suggests that “detective stories ‘work out’ in a particularly focused fashion our ability to store representations under advisement and to reevaluate their truth-value once more information comes in” (Zunshine, 2006, 123–124). Zunshine considers that the tracing of the mental content of fictional characters is crucial when we read fiction. Although I do not deny the relevance of mind-reading in literary analysis, I suggest that in the case of The Plague, a too strong focus on mind-reading would run the risk of overlooking that which lies between the individual characters and their mental deliberations, namely the interaction itself.

In a recent article, Timothy Chesters argues for a more interactional approach to literature than mind-reading centered approaches such as Zunshine’s. He claims that these approaches fail to capture many of the pre-reflective aspects of social interaction. According to Chester, even if mind-reading makes up a certain part of social understanding, we use it only in special cases, such as when comprehension is interrupted:

That only interruptions in this natural course should provoke us into mindreading lends support to IT’s [interactional theory] claim that, most of the time, our ability to act in concert with others depends on forms of interpersonal awareness that are largely pre-reflective. (Chesters, 2014, 71)

This is especially the case with The Plague. In a detective novel, Zunshine’s favored example, any one thought about a character’s intention is constantly interrupted as the plot twists and turns, and so a mind-reading approach proves highly useful for understanding this genre. As for The Plague, I will argue that such an approach would leave many of the pre-reflective aspects of the moral interaction between the main characters in the dark.

In order to spot these aspects, I suggest turning to second-generation cognitive science and in particular, although not exclusively, to what is known as “enactivism.” The term “second-generation,” coined by Lakoff and Johnson (1999, 77–78), groups together several different directions of cognitive research which all have in common
the rejection of the brain-centered conception of the human mind held by the first-generation. Rather than understanding cognition as exclusively located in the brain, second-generation cognitive scientists see human cognition as spread out into its physical and cultural surroundings (for overview, see Kukkonen & Caracciolo, 2014). One important way of approaching such issues has been the concept of the extended mind. In a much-cited article, Clark and Chalmers (1998) claimed that there is no principal reason to separate between the parts of our cognitive activity that are taking place inside the brain and the parts that takes place outside it. They use a notebook as an example and claim that there is no functional difference (although there are of course procedural differences) between using the notebook to remember and storing the same information within the brain. The result remains the same: The information is successfully retrieved. In another important work within extended cognition, which precedes Clark and Chalmers’s article, Edwin Hutchins (1995) investigated similar issues in a more practical setting: the navigation room of a naval cruiser. He found that during navigation, the crew members can be said to extend their cognition into the environment through the use of different tools, training regimes, and social interaction. The main idea of Hutchins and of Clark and Chalmers then is that human cognition cannot be limited to only that which goes on within the skull, and that the study of the mind must also include the external aspects of our thought that make up an important part of our thinking.

Enactivism has been another important direction within second-generation cognitive science. Although proponents of extended cognition would disagree with enactivists on several issues (although, for connections between the extended mind and enactivism, see Gallagher, 2018), all commit to a view of human cognition as somehow spread out into its environment. For the enactivists however, the real issue is not to define what would be counted as part of human cognition. Rather, they conceive of all cognition, internal and external, as the result of the lived experience of the entire organism (see Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 2016; Thompson, 2010; Di Paolo, 2018). Human cognition is in no way exclusively located in the brain, rather we make use of our body, our surroundings, and our brain to make sense of the world we inhabit. This view has some important implications for human interaction which will be crucial for my analysis of The Plague. In line with the enactivist emphasis on the role of the body and the environment for cognition, human interaction cannot be understood as relying primarily on guessing the mind states of others, thus drastically reducing the importance of mind-reading:

Our experiences of other people, even when we observe them remotely, are grounded on embodied intersubjectivity, and are thus an inherently social aspect of personal experience, as opposed to a rationalization that internally supplements the image of the other with inferences about their presumed mindedness. (Di Paolo et al. 2018, 63, italics removed)

For the enactivists then, human interaction consists less of explicit thinking on mental states, taking place exclusively in the brain, than it does of different embodied and pre-reflective ways of connecting to others.

Further, this “embodied intersubjectivity” can result in interactions between its participants that end up becoming autonomous and thus influencing them without anyone being in control. According to De Jaegher and Di Paolo, all living things tend naturally to adjust to each other: “Coordination is a ubiquitous phenomenon in physical and biological systems” (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007, 490). Coordination (together with its breakdowns and subsequent build-ups) functions as the base for what the authors have termed “participatory sense-making” (p. 497), that is, when the process of interaction itself takes on an autonomous character:

We must go beyond a view that defines interaction as simply the spatio-temporal coincidence of two agents that influence each other. We must move towards an understanding of how their history of coordination demarcates the interaction as an identifiable pattern with its own internal structure, and its own role to play in the process of understanding each other and the world. (p. 492)
The coordination between two or more agents can (and often does) become so strong, that the interaction itself can influence the agents involved. Thus, this view differs substantially from the mind-reading account. Where mind-reading would see human interaction as a sort of turn-based game of guessing intentions and mental content, the enactivists see human interaction as a largely embodied coordination which is often influenced by the interaction itself.

In their original article, De Jaegher and Di Paolo primarily discuss face-to-face encounters, although they do not limit participatory sense-making (henceforth PSM) to only these kinds of interactions (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007, 486). Elsewhere, they have used what is called the Flogsta scream to exemplify what an autonomous social interaction could look like on a bigger scale. This phenomenon takes place in the Swedish university city of Uppsala, in the student-dominated neighbourhood of Flogsta. Every day at around 10 p.m. during the exam period, someone begins to scream out of their window and is soon followed by a large number of others, “triggering a collective howl that can go on for minutes, with its own rhythms and turn-taking” (Di Paolo et al., 2018, 70). From an enactivist perspective, this would be an example of large-scale PSM in which no mind-reading would need to take place. In this article, I will discuss both interactions on a grand scale as well as face-to-face encounters. In my analysis, I will draw on enactivist thinking, and particularly the concept of PSM. I will also connect my investigation to Edwin Hutchins’s seminal work within extended cognition, Cognition in the Wild. Taken together, the view of social interactions as extended and enactive, will allow me to spot the embodied and largely pre-reflective processes that run in the background and provide the foundation for the explicit dialogue in The Plague.

Within literary studies, enactivist views have recently been operationalized by Yanna Popova (see also Caracciolo, 2014). In her book Stories, Meaning, and Experience. Narrativity and Enaction (2017), Popova argues that literary studies must take into account the interpersonal nature of human interaction: “[S]tories do not happen in individual minds; they occur in the interaction between minds […]” (Popova, 2017, 4). Further, as we, according to enactivism, always understand the world from our embodied perspective, Popova stresses how the fictional world must be understood in the same way, that is, from the viewpoint of the narrator:

[A] reader does not just enact narrative events and experiences but events and experiences already filtered through somebody else’s consciousness. Achieving this, most of the time, depends on the assumption that another consciousness has imposed a casual frame on a set of related experiences. Understanding narrative involves, then, enacting the experiences of characters (that is, the content of a story), but equally, and perhaps even more importantly, enacting the reasons for those experiences to be the way that they are. (p. 124)

The reader enacts the fictional world evoked by the narrator and understands this world through his or her eyes. This is especially interesting in the case of The Plague since the main protagonist, Doctor Rieux, is revealed at a later point to be the narrator. This gives him an embodied presence in the fictional world that arguably strengthens the importance of his perspective on the events that are recounted. Popova’s proposal of seeing stories as an interaction between the minds of different characters and as filtered through the perspective of the narrator will guide us in this investigation of The Plague. This will allow us to see how paying close attention to certain details of Rieux’s narration might serve to shed new light on certain embodied and pre-reflective mechanisms that, in my reading, are of great importance for the moral process of The Plague.

Early on in the novel, just before the plague becomes known to the public, Rieux hurries to his laboratory together with Grand and Cottard. His description of their fast stroll through the streets of Oran can serve as a first example of how Rieux understands the fictional world in a manner that points to the embodied interaction he takes part in:

Ils se dirigèrent vers la place d’Armes. Cottard se taisait toujours. Les rues commençaient à se charger de monde. Le crépuscule fugitif de notre pays reculait déjà devant la nuit et les premières étoiles apparaissaient dans l’horizon encore net. Quelques secondes plus tard, les lampes au-dessus
As Rieux hurries through the streets of Oran, on his way to verifying that the mysterious disease is in fact a plague, he seems to connect to the city as a whole. The streets are filled with people and Rieux takes care to underline the coming of dusk and the starlit sky which frames the rhythm of the city, marking the time of leisure for all of Oran's citizens. Some seconds later, we assume still walking, Rieux notices how the lamps seem to help in keeping the rhythm, when their lights seem to cause the crowd to raise its volume. This initial example provides a good entry point to understanding the embodied interaction that I argue is at the heart of *The Plague*. In the capacity of doctor and as an important leader in the volunteer medical organization, Rieux is at the centre of this interaction. In addition, being both the main protagonist and narrator, he also functions as an embodied viewpoint. When Rieux traverses the city, on his way to work, his attention seems to be drawn to how the city moves in a coordinated fashion, and he emphasizes how its inhabitants tune in to ambient factors (sky, stars, twilight, and streetlights). Although, throughout the novel, Rieux makes several claims to neutrality, I will argue that his story of the plague of Oran is Rieux’s *lived* and *embodied* experience of the events. Popova considered the perspective of the narrator as key to understanding the events at plot-level. Read as such, Rieux's embodied perspective can help us understand how the largely pre-reflective aspects of the interaction between the inhabitants, taking place all the way from city-level down to face-to-face encounters, can be seen to fill out and explain their often understated dialogue. Thus, a new way of understanding the moral process of *The Plague* emerges. Here, explicit dialogue, the narrative techniques of Rieux, and embodied forms of coordination come together to form interactions that often go beyond words.

3 | WORKING TOGETHER

In recent years, much research on human interaction has turned towards its self-organizing aspects (see Dale, Fusaroli, Duran, & Richardson, 2013). To investigate such aspects in *The Plague*, I will turn to Edwin Hutchins’s pioneering study *Cognition in the Wild*. Not only does Hutchins address human interaction, he does so “in the wild,” that is, by studying it outside the laboratory, in a very real workplace: the navigation room of a naval cruiser. Hutchins understands this work as an interaction whose cognitive processes often extend beyond the individual participant. As previously noted, Hutchins would disagree with the enactivists on key issues, such as the importance of mental representations and computation for human cognition. However, they share the view of the mind, and as a consequence, social interaction, as extending beyond the individual mind. In this article, I will consider Hutchins’s account as a concrete example of how interactions can become self-organizing, going beyond the individual participants’ control. This will allow me to analyze the fictional organization of medical volunteers in *The Plague* in a way coherent with the enactivist conception of PSM. I will argue that Hutchins’s analysis will provide me with a concrete case that describes processes similar to those of PSM, thus allowing me to bring this enactivist concept into play in the analysis of *The Plague*.

Hutchins studies the interactions of the navigation crew of a gigantic naval helicopter transport called *Palau*. This being before the implantation of GPS systems, the navigation process is complicated and requires a variety of technologies, tools, and techniques both mental and physical. Hutchins’s overarching claim is that human cognition is spread out into its physical, social, and cultural environment. Therefore, the navigation team is not simply the sum of its crew members: “It is possible to describe the computations performed by the navigation team without recourse to the cognitive abilities or activities of the individual members of the team” (Hutchins, 1995, 170). For Hutchins, the limits between each crew member and the navigation room cannot be clearly drawn when it comes to assessing their share in this process.

At one point during his stay on the *Palau*, Hutchins reports, the propulsion motor stopped working, causing a dangerous situation, since the large vessel was near a port and lacked the capacity to maneuver and to stop...
drifting forwards. As a consequence, the power failed, and the gyrocompass, one of the most crucial instruments for navigation, failed with it. As Hutchins describes how the crew handled this, he raises some questions as to how an organization can learn from its mistakes and improve its organizational structures (Hutchins, 1995, 317–351). Hutchins’s main point is that a lot of this organizational learning does not reside in any one of the minds that make up this organization. Rather, he argues that “several important aspects of a new organization are achieved not by conscious reflection about the work but by local adaptations to the emerging conditions of the work itself” (p. 317). For Hutchins, there is no one in control of this interaction.

In order to understand this, Hutchins draws up a difference between design and evolution. Both can be conceptualized as a form of searching. In the case of “design,” an organization is imagined as a mental representation in the head of someone, who then searches this representation for possible improvements. One can implement these changes once the design work has been done. The case of “evolution” occurs when the organization itself does the searching and continuously implements the adaptive changes: “The evolutionary search is the process of adaptation [...]” (Hutchins, 1995, 349, author’s italics). For Hutchins, organizational learning is a combination of these two procedures. The different subsystems (agents belonging to the bigger system) design local changes and implement them, while the results of these changes on the organizational level are unforeseeable for the individual agent:

>[L]ocal designed change may have undesigned and unanticipated consequences for other parts of the system. It may thus provoke local adaptations by other parts of the system as all the parts seek (either by design or not) to satisfy the new environment of constraints produced by the changes in the behaviors of other parts. Ultimately, this process may produce a change in the behavior of the system as a whole. (p. 350)

The joint effort of many individual agents may produce an organization that takes on a logic of its own. In what follows, I will argue that Hutchins’s ideas can be usefully extended to the fictional volunteer organization in The Plague and help us to a better understanding of how many of its aspects function outside any individual member’s understanding.

All the major characters (with the exception of Cottard) in The Plague work, in a very concrete sense, against the plague. Each one performs an important function in the organization that helps the medical workers, and they all expose themselves to the risk of deadly infection. Despite being central in the medical effort to slow the plague, when telling the story, Rieux does not concern himself much with any details of how the volunteers work together. However, by drawing on Hutchins’s account of the navigational team, an investigation of the functioning of the volunteer organization will reveal important aspects of its role in the moral process of The Plague. I will examine this organization with the aim of shedding light on two aspects. Firstly, following Hutchins as well as the enactivist concept of PSM, I will examine how this organization seems to work independently from its individual participants, and how this affects them. Secondly, I will investigate how this in turn might shed light on Rieux’s moral outlook and fill his seemingly tautological aphorisms with content.

Despite its importance, the volunteer organization has, according to Rieux, nothing to do with heroics. In fact, it is only normal to do one’s bit during a crisis: “Ceux qui se dévouèrent aux formations sanitaires n’eurent pas si grand mérite à le faire, en effet, car ils savaient que c’était la seule chose à faire et c’est de ne pas s’y décider qui alors eût été incroyable” (Camus, 2013, 575). In a similar manner, after Tarrou has succeeded in recruiting the deeply religious priest Paneloux into the ranks of the volunteers, he underlines in conversation with Rieux that it is very common to do good when given the opportunity: “Je suis content de le [Paneloux] savoir meilleur que son prêche. –  Tout le monde est comme ça, dit Tarrou. Il faut seulement leur donner l’occasion. Il sourit et cligna de l’œil vers Rieux. C’est mon affaire à moi, dans la vie, de fournir des occasions” (p. 586). In his capacity as the founder of the volunteer group, Tarrou simply provides the opportunity to do what everyone would do if given
the chance. The organization of volunteers is not made up by individual heroes, rather, it provides the possibility of doing what is normal in an abnormal situation, namely, to work together for the common good.

Rambert, the journalist, gives us a good example of the way that this organization functions when he gets stuck in Oran because of the plague. He has a girlfriend back in Paris and he is willing to do anything to be reunited with her. In the course of the novel, Rambert goes from persistently looking for a way to escape from the city, legally or illegally, to deciding to stay and dedicate himself fully to his work in the volunteer group. In conversation with Rieux, Rambert refuses traditional forms of individual engagement, akin to war heroism: “Eh bien, moi, j’en ai assez de gens qui meurent pour une idée. Je ne crois pas à l’héroïsme, je sais que c’est facile et j’ai appris que c’était meurtrier. Ce qui m’intéresse, c’est qu’on vive et qu’on meure de ce qu’on aime” (Camus, 2013, 594). In fact, Rieux approves of Rambert’s wish to be reunited with his love, even if it means escaping from Oran illegally. Yet, he underlines at the same time that to stay and fight the plague is not about heroics: “[I]l faut cependant que je vous le dise: il ne s’agit pas d’héroïsme dans tout cela. Il s’agit d’honnêteté. C’est une idée qui peut faire rire, mais la seule façon de lutter contre la peste, c’est l’honnêteté” (p. 595). This idea of “honnêteté” seems to strike a chord with Rambert:

- Qu’est-ce que l’honnêteté ? dit Rambert, d’un air soudain sérieux. – Je ne sais pas ce qu’elle est en général. Mais dans mon cas, je sais qu’elle consiste à faire mon métier. – Ah ! dit Rambert avec rage, je ne sais pas quel est mon métier. Peut-être en effet suis-je dans mon tort en choisissant l’amour.

(p. 595)

As Rambert is starting to doubt his resolution to leave the city, Rieux seems to provide him with an alternative: To do one’s job. After this dialogue (and after finding out that Rieux also is separated from his loved one), Rambert decides to join the volunteer organization, at least while he looks for a way out. Rieux’s idea of doing good, not as a hero but by doing what is normal, that is, performing the task at hand as a part of a collective, will eventually make Rambert abandon permanently his intentions of leaving and convince him to stay in Oran and work alongside Rieux, Tarrou, and the others.

Some time later, Rambert makes his decision final when he tells Rieux that “je ne pars pas et je veux rester avec vous” (Camus, 2013, 620). An interesting aspect of this choice is Rambert’s absence of reasoning around this decision. Admittedly, the narrator Rieux does not have access to Rambert’s inner thoughts, but even though Rambert discusses his decision with Rieux and the others, he still does not formulate any extensive weighing of pros and cons. When Rambert explains to Rieux that he will stay, this does not really imply a change of mind:

Rambert dit qu’il avait encore réfléchi, qu’il continuait à croire ce qu’il croyait, mais que s’il partait, il aurait honte. Cela le gênerait pour aimer celle qu’il avait laissée. Mais Rieux se redressa et dit d’une voix ferme que cela était stupide et qu’il n’y avait pas de honte à préférer le bonheur. “Oui, dit Rambert, mais il peut y avoir de la honte à être heureux tout seul.” (p. 620, my italics)

I suggest that Rambert’s explanation for staying points to his participation in the volunteer organization. The team of volunteers provides Rambert with the possibility of doing his part, his “métier,” by becoming involved in a large autonomous organization. When he chooses to stay, belonging has become more important than his personal sentiments and convictions, but, as we see from the italics, this does not imply a change of mind. I suggest that, read in the current framework, Rambert’s choice to stay is in large part motivated pre-reflectively and arises from the effect of participating in a self-organizing group such as the volunteers. His participation in the volunteer organization seems to create motivation to stay by offering an occasion to do good as part of a bigger collective, something that competes with the explicit motivation of being united with his girlfriend. Even though Rambert’s decision seems to be made pre-reflectively, in the end, being part of something bigger is more attractive than the explicit desire for a more individual fulfillment.
This allows for a new perspective on the aforementioned aphorisms of Rieux. My claim is that the words of Rieux are simply one part (and a quite small one) of his moral outlook. To understand this outlook, we must understand Rieux as deeply situated in his world. It is worth looking at how one of these moral aphorisms arises in its narrative context:

Le docteur ouvrit la fenêtre et le bruit de la ville s'enfla d'un coup. D'un atelier voisin montait le sifflement bref et répété d'une scie mécanique. Rieux se secoua. Là était la certitude, dans le travail de tous les jours. Le reste tenait à des fils et à des mouvements insignifiants, on ne pouvait s'y arrêter. L'essentiel était de bien faire son métier. (Camus, 2013, 520, my italics)

By opening a window, Rieux is stimulated to reflect. First, the sounds of the city enter, then the rhythmic sounds of the nearby workshop. I suggest that this zooming in serves to fill his aphorism (in italics) with content. It is being part of a community, an entire city, where everyone does their part, that gives meaning to each task. Doing one's job is what is important, for by doing that, one makes possible a large and autonomous organization such as a big city.

At the very last page of the novel, Rieux places his story of Oran during the plague in a larger frame. Rieux signals again this need to work and to fulfill one's function in something that is bigger than oneself:

[C]ette chronique ne pouvait pas être celle de la victoire définitive. Elle ne pouvait être que le témoignage de ce qu’il avait fallu accomplir et que, sans doute, devraient accomplir encore, contre la terreur et son arme inlassable, malgré leurs déchirements personnels, tous les hommes qui, ne pouvant être des saints et refusant d’admettre les fléaux, s’efforcent cependant d’être des médecins. (Camus, 2013, 681, my italics)

The sentence in italics can be read as pointing to Rieux’s intuitions regarding the organizational structures that lie behind the medical work. As we have seen, Davis thought aphorisms such as this almost meaningless as moral content, but I propose that what Rieux points to is the need to let go of one’s own full individuality and let the interaction itself take part of the control. The last sentence connects this moral outlook with Rieux’s profession. To do his job in the large organization that arises from Oran’s battle with the plague, there is little need for individual soul-searching. Rather, he simply needs to perform the task at hand: in his capacity as a doctor, to reduce human suffering as much as possible. Thus, we see how Krapp’s considerations of the moral process of The Plague can be fruitfully extended to include the pre-reflective and interactional aspects. If we grant that the volunteer organization functions autonomously, in a way similar to Hutchins’s navigation crew and to the mechanisms of PSM, we can understand Rieux’s aphorisms anew. Considered from the perspective of the interaction itself, not only from each individual character’s explicit statements, the aphorisms seem to be filled with content.

4 | SEEING THE PLOT. RIEUX’S NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Following Yanna Popova’s enactivist account of narrative previously discussed, I will now examine how Rieux’s descriptions of the fictional world are crucial for understanding the nature of the interaction between the inhabitants of Oran during the plague. When we now turn to Rieux’s narrative techniques, I will look into interactions on very different scales, ranging from involving the city as a whole, down to the very intimate interaction between Rieux and his friend Tarrou. However, I will argue that a common trait to all the examples is how Rieux’s narrative techniques serve to emphasize the embodied and pre-reflective workings of these interactions. One caveat however. When we now turn to Rieux’s narrative techniques, it is important to underline that I am not claiming that he, nor for that matter any of the other characters, should necessarily be read as being consciously aware of how the volunteer group functions. Rather, what I suggest is that Rieux perceives the world from his embodied viewpoint.
at the center of the joint effort to battle the plague. Consequently, the way Rieux describes the city of Oran and its inhabitants should not necessarily be seen as a deliberate narrative strategy but rather as the result of Rieux’s being drawn to the aspects of the fictional world that relate to his role in the volunteer organization.

Early in the novel, Rieux claims to be a “chroniqueur,” one who simply writes down what has happened without adding anything on his own account: “[U]n chroniqueur ne peut tenir compte de ces contradictions. Sa tâche est seulement de dire : ‘Ceci est arrivé’ lorsque’il sait que ceci est, en effet, arrivé [...]” (Camus, 2013, 499). Despite this claim that he is sticking to the facts, Rieux often dwells quite extensively on ambient descriptions. The sounds and the smells of the city, as well as the weather and nature are often thoroughly described. These descriptions, which occur throughout the novel, often start from atmospheric phenomena, such as sounds or the weather, and then zoom in on the citizens. One example of this is when Rieux describes the summer heat early in the novel:

Le soleil se fixa. Des flots ininterrompus de chaleur et de lumière inondèrent la ville à longueur de journée. En dehors des rues à arcades et des appartements, il semblait qu’il n’était pas un point de la ville qui ne fût placé dans la réverbération la plus aveuglante. Le soleil poursuivait nos concitoyens dans tous les coins de rue et, s’ils s’arrêtaient, il les frappait alors. Comme ces premières chaleurs coïncidèrent avec un accroissement en flèche du nombre des victimes, qui se chiffra à près de sept cents par semaine, une sorte d’abattement s’empara de la ville. (p. 562)

By describing first how the sun drowns the city with heat, Rieux underlines how not a single corner escapes its scorching rays. Then, he closes in on the inhabitants as they try to avoid the sun. This serves to underline the common fate of the citizens of Oran. Then, describing how the plague’s ravages intensify at this point, Rieux creates an embodied feeling that all the inhabitants of Oran endure the same fate. In our example, we see how the weather influences everyone, no one can escape from the burning hot sun. Thus, these descriptions can be read as portraying an embodied feeling of being trapped in the same confined space and being haunted by the same deadly disease.

However, these kinds of embodied descriptions are also in play at a more personal level. By slightly different means, Rieux also creates a sense of coordination and of unity between himself and Tarrou as the two have a conversation on a rooftop, followed by a swim in the sea. When at this point the plague is slowly receding, Rieux and Tarrou step out on a terrace with a view of the city. Here, Tarrou tells his life story of why he has come to Oran, and how he has dedicated himself to fighting on the side of the victims. However, for our purposes, his story is less important than what precedes it. Just before he decides to tell Rieux his story, the two look out over the rooftops of the city where they can just spot the ocean blending with the sky: “[P]ar-dessus quelques rues et le port invisible, le regard plongeait sur un horizon où le ciel et la mer se mêlaient dans une palpitation indistincte” (Camus, 2013, 642).

Then, they look for some time at the light coming from a lighthouse, when, finally, Rieux breaks the silence: "Il fait bon, dit Rieux, en s’asseyant. C’est comme si la peste n’était jamais montée là.” Tarrou lui tournait le dos et regardait la mer. “Oui, dit-il après un moment, il fait bon.” Il vint s’asseoir auprès du docteur et le regarda attentivement. Trois fois, la lueur repartit dans le ciel. Un bruit de vaisselle choquée monta jusqu’à eux des profondeurs de la rue. Une porte claqua dans la maison. “Rieux, dit Tarrou sur un ton très naturel, vous n’avez jamais cherché à savoir qui j’étais ? Avez-vous de l’amitié pour moi?” (p. 642, my italics)

In this quotation, Rieux’s descriptions can be read as linking ambient factors to Tarrou’s decision of opening up. Seen from Rieux’s perspective, Tarrou’s decision arguably takes shape in two key moments (in italics). First, Rieux chooses to emphasize how Tarrou turns away from him and looks at the ocean which surrounds all of Oran before starting to talk. He then gets up and takes a seat beside Rieux. They sit in silence for some time, looking at the lighthouse which lights up the sky and listening to the sounds of everyday life coming from Oran. The ocean, the sky, and the sounds of the city are described by Rieux in a manner that seem to connect them to Tarrou’s strengthened bond to Rieux.
Then, just after these descriptions, Tarrou begins his tale with the two questions included in the quote. From Rieux's embodied viewpoint, the ocean and the sky, and how they embrace the entire city, then the noises coming from its inhabitants, seem to strengthen Tarrou's sense of being connected to something beyond his individual existence, and thus encourage him to reach out to his friend Rieux. Although there is a certain distance from the conception of PSM in De Jaegher and Di Paolo's original article to connecting with each other through ambient factors, I suggest that the example previously discussed of the Flogsta scream points to how PSM can also be relevant for more indirect and large-scale forms of embodied interaction such as those Rieux seems to describe in the quote above. Also, as we shall see, the ambient factors discussed here are tightly connected to more concrete instances of physical coordination later in the novel, something that further strengthens my argument for connecting them with PSM.

In the scene that follows, the same type of mechanism is in play as they descend from the rooftop terrace and decide to go for a swim in the sea. As they are high up in the medical organization, their papers allow them to pass the guards and exit the city. It is night, and the moon lights up the sky. Behind them lies the city as Rieux jumps in the water. I will quote this scene at length:

Il nageait régulièrement. Le battement de ses pieds laissait derrière lui un bouillonnement d’écume, l’eau fuyait le long de ses bras pour se coller à ses jambes. Un lourd clapotement lui apprit que Tarrou avait plongé. Rieux se mit sur le dos et se tint immobile, face au ciel renversé, plein de lune et d’étoiles. Il respira longuement. Puis il perçut de plus en plus distinctement un bruit d’eau battue, étrangement clair dans le silence et la solitude de la nuit. Tarrou se rapprochait, on entendit bientôt sa respiration. Rieux se retourna, se mit au niveau de son ami, et nagea dans le même rythme. Tarrouavançait avec plus de puissance que lui et il dut précipiter son allure. Pendant quelques minutes, ils avancèrent avec la même cadence et la même vigueur, solitaires, loin du monde, libérés enfin de la ville et de la peste. Rieux s’arrêtait le premier et ils revinrent lentement, sauf à un moment où ils entrèrent dans un courant glacé. Sans rien dire, ils précipitèrent tous deux leur mouvement, fouettés par cette surprise de la mer. Habillés de nouveau, ils repartirent sans avoir prononcé un mot. Mais ils avaient le même cœur et le souvenir de cette nuit leur était doux. (Camus, 2013, 650)

First, we are told how Rieux establishes a rhythm, swimming at a regular pace, as he hears the sound of Tarrou jumping in. He waits for him, lying on his back looking at the stars and the sky. As we have seen, in Rieux's narrative logic, looking at the sky that eclipses the whole of Oran is something that is connected with a feeling of belonging. In this way, Rieux frames this scene within indicators of a very strong coordination with the city of Oran; as the two swim, they are surrounded by the ocean and the sky, which, from Rieux's perspective, connects them to the city. Then from this framework of belonging to a larger unit of coordination, Rieux focalizes on the two friends.

In our discussion of PSM, we saw that embodied coordination is thought to play a crucial role in human interaction. One of De Jaegher and Di Paolo's main examples of PSM is of an everyday encounter between two people in a narrow corridor. Sometimes these encounters end up like a little dance, where each participant is trying to get past the other, but as they move sideways at just the same moment, they effectively block the other. This type of coordination is typical for PSM: “[T]he coordination maintains a property of the relational dynamics that forces the individuals to keep facing each other and consequently to remain in interaction (in spite of, or rather because of, their efforts to break from this situation)” (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007, 493). Although the example of the hallway is one of an unwanted coordination, I suggest that it allows us to read Rieux and Tarrou's swim as portraying how the two friends enter into an embodied and coordinated interaction.

First, Tarrou approaches and we see that Rieux can hear him breathe. They swim some time at the same pace, but as Tarrou is physically stronger, Rieux must adapt. Then, for some minutes, they establish the same rhythm. At this point, the two forget about everything but their communion: “[S]olitaires, loin du monde, libérés enfin de la ville et de la peste.” Now their common rhythm is so well established that when they enter a cold current, without a word, they adjust their pace together. Once dressed, they leave, again without saying a word, underlining
the embodied communication of the scene. Lastly, Rieux tells us that they have the same heart. This last part is interesting, especially considering that just before, when they coordinated their swim, Rieux described Tarrou’s breathing. Having the same heart works of course as a metaphor, but I suggest that it could also point to a physical coordination of breathing and heart rhythm patterns. It has been shown that the heartbeats and respiration of participants in social interaction can coordinate (see Müller & Lindenberger, 2011; Konvalinka et al., 2011). It is therefore possible that the two friends have coordinated their heartbeats and breathing during the swim. Taken together, I propose that this nightly swim can be read as depicting how the two friends gradually reach a coordinated rhythm and, through this, an understanding of each other that goes deeper than words. As this scene is placed just after their friendly talk this confirms its importance, and so does the short but effective summary: “[L]e souvenir de cette nuit leur était doux.” However, if we grant that Rieux and Tarrou coordinate and connect through embodied mechanisms, how exactly does this work?

In her book *The Feeling Body. Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind* (2014), Giovanna Colombetti criticizes theory of mind approaches to the affective sciences. She claims that, most of the time, we understand other people with the help of very basic skills, such as imitation and responding to others people’s bodily signals: “These skills, it has been proposed, already manifest, or better embody or constitute, a pragmatic form of understanding others” (Colombetti, 2014, 172, author’s italics). Her point is, that instead of explicitly interpreting the signals of others, “in the concrete encounter it is more often the case that the other’s mental states are picked up ‘directly’ by the observer, namely, without the need to engage in theorizing or pretend states” (p. 175). As Rieux and Tarrou synchronize their movements through the water, slowly creating a joint rhythm, they feel connected. I suggest that no mind-reading needs to be present for this to happen. Rather, Rieux’s use of textual images shows how a feeling of interconnectedness is created and depicts how the characters are drawn closer to one another. Colombetti claims that this direct understanding of others can happen through mimicry, which functions as a form of “social bonding” (p. 194, italics removed). Although the evidence is not conclusive, Colombetti claims that mimicry makes up an important part of our pragmatic way of interacting: “It may well be that an important function of mimicry is precisely to make our experiences converge via phenomenal contagion, so that we feel more connected to one another” (p. 195). I propose that Rieux and Tarrou’s swim can be understood to do exactly that: They connect simply by coordinating their bodies while swimming at the same pace in the sea.

A similar type of embodied coordination can also be read as making up an important part of Rieux’s motivation for writing down the story of the plague. Throughout the novel, we have seen how Rieux connects the citizens of Oran by his descriptions of the sea, the sun, the sky, and the sounds of the city, elements that are present to all and thus pointing to their mutual fate. As the plague comes to an end, and the city gates are reopened, we shall see how all these elements come together to shape Rieux’s decision to write down the story of what happened in Oran. In the last scene of the novel, Rieux again ascends to the same terrace where he and Tarrou, now tragically dead from the plague, had their talk. From this vantage point he looks out on the city and reflects on what has happened there:

Cette nuit n’était pas si différente de celle où Tarrou et lui étaient venus sur cette terrasse pour oublier la peste. La mer était seulement plus bruyante qu’alors, au pied des falaises. L’air était immobile et léger, délesté des souffles salés qu’apportait le vent tiède de l’automne. La rumeur de la ville, cependant, battait toujours le pied des terrasses avec un bruit de vagues. (Camus, 2013, 680–681, my italics)

As in the earlier examples, the sea, the sky, and the sounds of the city are present. Interestingly, the urban noise (in italics) seems even to merge with the sea, when it takes the form of waves that beat up against the terraces.

This merger is continued in the next paragraph, where Rieux decides to write the story of the plague. Notice how Rieux seems to describe two different cognitive processes going on in his mind. The first one is a type of mental representation, thinking of lost friends and of an aphorism (a quite trivial one) told by an old patient. The
second (in italics), I argue, consists of a pre-reflective and embodied feeling of coordination, similar to those I have discussed so far:

Du port obscur montèrent les premières fusées des réjouissances officielles. La ville les salua par une longue et sourde exclamation. Cottard, Tarrou, ceux et celle que Rieux avait aimés et perdus, tous, morts ou coupables, étaient oubliés. Le vieux avait raison, les hommes étaient toujours les mêmes. Mais c’était leur force et leur innocence et c’est ici que, par-dessus toute douleur, Rieux sentait qu’il les rejoignait. Au milieu des cris qui redoublaient de force et de durée, qui se répercutaient longuement jusqu’au pied de la terrasse, à mesure que les gerbes multicolores s’élevaient plus nombreuses dans le ciel, le docteur Rieux décida alors de rédiger le récit qui s’achève ici [...]. (Camus, 2013, 681, my italics)

In this scene, Rieux details to his readers the exact moment he decides to write down the story. His decision is undoubtedly influenced by the first reasoning. However, this reasoning, as is often the case with Rieux, is quite vague. After his initial reflection, the pre-reflective coordination (in italics) takes over. Significantly, Rieux feels that he joins his fellow man, and I suggest that it is at this moment that the decision takes shape. Just as for Tarrou, when he decided to tell Rieux his life story, it is the sounds of the city, the ocean, and the sky that form Rieux’s decision to tell his story. First, we hear the cries coming from the city. Then we are told how these sounds ring back and forth up against the terraces. If we remember the sentence in italics from the previous quotation, placed just one paragraph before in the novel, we saw how the sounds of the city and the waves of the ocean merged. With this relationship established, Rieux does not need to be explicit, we still feel the sounds splashing up against the buildings as waves. Then lastly, Rieux describes how the fireworks break loose and light up the sky. I suggest that what this passage shows is how the effect of the embodied coordination can be said to be stronger than the more explicit reasoning. Just as with the swim in the ocean, a more explicit reflection (in the case of the swim; Tarrou telling his story) is followed by embodied coordination. And, here as well, the latter seems to be given priority. By hearing the sounds of the city splashing as waves and looking to the sky which lights up in fireworks visible for all the citizens of Oran, Rieux brings up and merges the most important elements of his descriptions; the city, the sky, and the ocean. And through these, Rieux coordinates with the whole of Oran. It is at the moment when he feels this coordination that he forms his decision to write down his story of human interaction and cooperation against a deadly plague.

By his style of writing, his descriptions of the sea, of the sounds and smells of the city, and of the weather, I claim that Rieux strengthens what I have suggested as the main theme of the novel. Through the medical effort of the volunteer group, the characters can partake in something bigger than the single individual. Thus, Camus’s novel, through the embodied perspective of Rieux, draws up a portrait of the embodied and pre-reflective mechanisms of a large-scale autonomous interaction.

5 | CONCLUSION

In this article, I have examined The Plague by Albert Camus through the lens of second-generation cognitive science. I have found that an investigation of the interaction between the characters can be usefully informed by examining different embodied and pre-reflective forms of coordination as well as the interaction itself, as they are understood by recent research within cognitive science. Thus, what is uttered by the characters needs to be understood in interplay with the embodied and interactional processes that support and inform the explicit conversations. This would have been difficult to spot without the perspective from second-generation cognitive science, which has allowed me to investigate how an autonomous interaction is formed, but also how the narrative techniques of Rieux highlight the different forms of coordination central to this interaction. This article, then, has sketched out some of the implications of extended and enactivist views on literary studies. If human social interactions go beyond the individual brain, are embodied, and can turn back to influence its participants,
literary scholars would profit from paying close attention to such embodied and pre-reflective mechanisms as I have investigated in this article. In the case of *The Plague*, this has allowed us to see the complex processes that undergird the explicit moral deliberations of Rieux and the other characters. Thus, a richer and fuller account of the interaction and moral process between the inhabitants of Oran emerges.

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**ENDNOTES**

1 A well-known example is Roland Barthes’s criticism of the novel. Barthes claimed that through allegorizing the Nazi crimes of the plague, the novel could lead to de-historicizing evil and its very real representatives. Camus’s response to Barthes was that, while he admitted that the Nazi-occupation of France was central to the novel, he denied that *The Plague* could be reduced to a one-to-one allegory of these events. Camus argued that his novel was also the story of humankind’s timeless battle against all forms of evil, whatever form it assumes (for an introduction to the debate between Barthes and Camus, see Smith, 2016, 193–195).

2 In addition to work on *The Plague*’s relations to World War Two, there is also a strain of post-colonial criticism of the novel that investigates its relations to French colonial politics in Algeria (see Said, 1994; Lund, 2011).

3 The limits between pre-reflective and reflective cognitive processes are complicated to draw. I will not venture here into the discussions on the distinction between these (for a phenomenological account of some of the major issues, see Zahavi, 2011). My subsequent use of “pre-reflective” will remain on the textual level and refer to thought processes that are found to be, through close readings, unnoticed by the fictional characters.

4 They walked in the direction of Place d’Armes. Cottard was silent. The streets began to fill with people. The fleeting twilight of our region was already withdrawing before the night and the first stars had appeared in the still clear horizon. Some seconds later, the lamps above the streets lit up and obscured the sky. The noise of conversations seemed to rise a tone. (This and all subsequent translations are my own.)

5 Actually, those that dedicated themselves to the health teams had not such great merit from this deed, because they knew that it was the only possible thing to do, and, at that point, it was not doing it that would have been incredible.

6 I am pleased to know that he [Paneloux] is better than his sermon. – Everyone is like that, said Tarrou, you just have to give them the opportunity. He smiled and winked at Rieux. That’s my job in life; to provide opportunities.

7 Well, as for me, I’ve had enough of people willing to die for an idea. I don’t believe in heroism; I know that it’s easy and I have learned that it’s murderous. What interests me, is to live and die for what one loves.

8 But I have to tell you this: all this is not about heroism. It’s about decency. It might seem like a ridiculous idea, but the only way to fight the plague is through decency.

9 – What is decency? said Rambert, suddenly serious. – I don’t know what it would be in general. But in my case, I know that it consists in doing my job. – Ah! said Rambert, furiously, I don’t know what my job is. Perhaps I really am wrong to choose love.

10 I am not leaving, and I want to stay with you.

11 Rambert said that he had given it even more thought, and that he continued to believe what he believed, but that if he went away, he would feel ashamed. That would interfere with his love for the woman he had left. But Rieux sat up and said with a firm voice that this was idiotic and that there was no shame in preferring happiness. “Yes, said Rambert, but it might be shameful to be happy all alone.” (My italics.)

12 The doctor opened the window and the sounds of the city suddenly burst forth. From a nearby workshop came the short and repeated whistling noise from a mechanical saw. Rieux pulled himself together. Out there was certitude, in everyday work. The rest holds onto threads and insignificant movements, one can’t dwell on that. *The most important was to do one’s job well.* (My italics.)

13 This chronicle could not be one of total victory. It could only be the record of *that which it had been necessary to do*, and that, no doubt, would have to be done again, against terror and its unwearying weapon, despite their personal hardships, by all the men who, unable to be saints and refusing to give into pestilence, try hard to be doctors. (My italics.)

14 These facts will seem quite natural to some and, to others, on the contrary, unlikely. But, after all, a chronicler cannot take these contradictions into account. His task is only to say: “This happened,” when he knows that this in fact did happen.
The sun settled in the sky. All day long, unceasing waves of heat and light flooded over the city. Except the streets with arcades and inside the apartments, it seemed that there was no place in the city that was not exposed to the most blinding glare. The sun pursued our fellow citizens at every street-corner and, if they stopped, struck them. As this first heat coincided with a drastic increase in the number of victims, which now counted almost seven hundred a week, a sort of hopelessness seized the city.

Above a few streets and the port, which was invisible, the eyes fell on the horizon where the sky and the sea blended in an indistinct trembling.

"It feels good, said Rieux, sitting down. It’s as if the plague had never come up here." Tarrou turned his back to him and looked at the sea. "Yes, he said after a moment, it feels good." He came and sat down next to the doctor, looking at him attentively. Three times the light reappeared in the sky. A sound of crockery came to them, all the way from the depths of the streets. A door slammed in the house. "Rieux, said Tarrou, in a very natural voice, have you never wanted to know who I am? Do you consider me as a friend?" (My italics.)

He swam regularly. The beating of his feet left behind him a trace of bubbles and foam, the water ran down his arms to stick to his legs. A heavy splash told him that Tarrou had jumped in. Rieux turned on his back and held still, facing the inverted sky, full of moon and stars. He took deep breaths. Then he noticed more and more distinctly the sound of water being beaten, strangely clear in the silence and the solitude of the night. Tarrou came close, soon his breath could be heard. Rieux turned around, placed himself alongside his friend, and swam in the same rhythm. Tarrou advanced more forcefully than him, and he had to increase his pace. For some minutes, they advanced at the same rhythm and with the same strength, solitary, far from the world, finally free from the city and the plague. Rieux was the first to stop and they returned slowly, except a moment where they entered a cold current. Without a word, both increased their pace, driven by this surprise of the sea. Once dressed again, they left without having said a word: But they had the same heart, and the memory of this night was sweet for both of them.

This night was not so different from the one where Tarrou and he had come out on this terrace to forget the plague. Only, the sea was more boisterous than it had been then, at the foot of the cliffs. The air was still and light, relieved from the salty gusts of wind brought by the tepid weather of autumn. The noise of the city, however, still beat against the terraces with a sound as of waves. (My italics.)

From the dark port came the first fireworks of the official celebrations. The city greeted them with a long and muffled exclamation. Cottard, Tarrou, those that Rieux had loved and lost, all dead or guilty, were forgotten. The old man was right, humans were always the same. But this was their strength and their innocence, and it is here that, above all the suffering, Rieux felt that he joined them. It was in the middle of the cries that intensified in strength and duration, and which echoed for a long time, all the way to the foot of the terrace, as the multicoloured sparks appeared increasingly numerous in the sky, that Doctor Rieux decided to write the story that ends here. (My italics.)

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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