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A Journal of the Plague Year

Daniel Defoe (1660 - 1731)

Read by: Denny Sayers Language: English
 Length: 12 hours 1 minute Style: Solo
 Genre: Historical Fiction

Product Formats and Options				
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A Journal of the Plague Year is an eyewitness account of the events and the experiences of one man during the year 1665, in which the bubonic plague swept through London, an epidemic that came to be called the Great Plague of London. Written in the years preceding its publication in 1722, its author was identified only as “H.F.”, a saddler living in the Whitechapel district of East London, who is likely based on Defoe’s uncle Henry Foe, who kept a journal. Defoe intended the book as a warning that the plague in Marseilles might make its way to London and as a handbook about what and what not to do in that event. The account proceeds in a generally chronological sequence, with frequent digressions and repetitions and tables of casualty statistics, then known as bills of mortality. At first the book was thought to be a non-

fiction work, largely due to the scope and accuracy of its details and anecdotes, and it is often compared to the accounts of the plague in the diaries of Samuel Pepys. By the 1780’s critics came to realize that Defoe had combined a wealth of research that conveyed a verisimilitude with his own inventions, so much so that his biographer Walter Wilson wrote that “that it is impossible to distinguish one from the other; and he has given the whole such a likeness to the dreadful original, as to confound the sceptic, and encircle him in his enchantments”. As such, it stands as one of the first examples of an historical novel.

Daniel Defoe (1660 – 1731) was an English novelist, journalist and spy known for his wit and keen sense of irony. Prolific and versatile, he wrote more than 500 books, pamphlets and journals on various topics and was a pioneer of economic journalism. Born Daniel Foe in London of Presbyterian Dissenter parents, he was educated at Dissenting Academy. Forsaking the ministry, he first became a merchant dealing in various goods, married, fathered a family, and had a variety of colorful experiences before beginning to publish in the early 1700’s. He added “de” to his surname to give it an aristocratic flourish. In 1703 he was convicted of seditious libel for his pamphlet “The Shortest Way With Dissenters”, which comically argued for the extermination of all dissenters from the Church of England. He secured his release by becoming a spy for the Crown. He established his periodical *The Review* in 1704, at first publishing political propaganda but soon including articles on religion, fashion, society and the arts, publishing three times a week until 1713. Addison and Steele cited *The Review* as an influence for the *Tatler* and *Spectator* decades later. He turned to fiction in 1719 with *Robinson Crusoe*, the bestseller and masterpiece which put him at the top of the literary world. He wrote several more novels, including the two more classics written in 1722, *Moll Flanders* and *A Journal of the Plague Year*. After *Roxane* in 1724 he returned to writing essays and journalism until his death 1731.