A Literary Comparison Of Daniel Defoe's Account Of The Great London Plague Of 1665 With Two Contemporary Diarists Concerning The Same Event

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A LITERARY COMPARISON
OF DANIEL DEFOE'S ACCOUNT OF
THE GREAT LONDON PLAGUE OF 1665
WITH TWO CONTEMPORARY DIARISTS
CONCERNING THE SAME EVENT

by

Gale K. Larson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty
of Carroll College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Arts Degree
Department of English

April 1960
This Thesis for the B. A. Degree has been approved for the Department of English by

[Signature]

Date [May 20, 1960]
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to institute a comparison among the contemporary accounts of the Great London Plague. The contemporary accounts shall be taken from the diaries of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, and Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year.*¹ Defoe's work, since it is more complete in its treatment of the dreadful visitation of 1665, shall be used as the basis of the comparison. The comparison shall be developed chronologically; from the inception of the plague to its cessation. The objective of the comparison shall be the demonstration of Defoe's superiority over the other two in both form and content, because of the various facets of his presentation and his fuller treatment of the plague.

These three men are contemporaries, who treat of a common incident which has been considered by scholars to be authentic. Because they treat of the same event, the comparison itself seems justifiable. The comparison consists in pointing out the major differences in their manner of handling their subject.

¹The authenticity of this work has been established in the Appendix pp. 38-41.
By way of exhortation to the reader, the author is not making general evaluation concerning these contemporaries' worth to the literary world. All evaluations of these authors are restricted to an examination of their treatment of the Great Plague of London.

For practical reasons, Defoe shall be considered and referred to as the author of the Journal. The distinction between the real and fictional author shall be made only when the situation demands such. For an understanding of this statement, the author urges the reader to consult the first entry in the appendix before beginning chapter one.
CHAPTER I

FIRST STAGES OF THE PLAGUE

Daniel Defoe in his *Journal of the Plague Year* mentions that the first signs of the plague in London occurred in December of 1664, at which time two men, said to be Frenchmen, died of the plague at the upper end of Drury Lane. Defoe observes a gradual increase of deaths in the weekly bill from December twentieth to January twenty-fourth:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Buried</th>
<th>Increased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 20th</td>
<td>291</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd of Jan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 3rd</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This increase, Defoe points out, abates somewhat in February and March due to the cold weather and sharp winds. However, from the beginning of April the mortality increase was approximately twenty-five, till the week from the eighteenth to the twenty-fifth, when thirty were buried in St. Giles' Parish, of which two died of the plague and eight of the spotted-fever, which at that time was regarded as the same disease.

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This increase during the last week of April and the first week of May, "at first frightened the City, but during the week of May ninth to May sixteenth, there died but three, of which not one within the whole City or liberties."¹

April 30th. Great fears of the sickness here in the City, it being said that two or three houses are already shut up. God preserve us all.²

Pepys' mind must have been eased when not a single case appeared within the City from May ninth to May sixteenth, since he records nothing about the development of the plague until the twenty-fourth of May.

May 24th. To the Coffee-house, where all the news is of . . . the plague growing upon us in this town; and of remedies against it; some saying one thing, and some others.³

Defoe in definite terms points out that from May sixteenth to May twenty-third there died fifty of the plague, and seventeen the following week. It was also during this same week that fifty-three were buried in St. Giles' Parish, of whom only nine were set down as having died of the plague. However, on an

¹Defoe, op. cit., p. 6
³Ibid., p. 314.
examination of the justices of the peace, made at the request of the Lord Mayor, it was found that twenty more had died of the plague in the one parish.¹

Thus it can be seen from Defoe's account that the news Pepys heard in the Coffee-house was correct. The plague was certainly emerging upon the City. According to both Defoe and Pepys the plague seems to have first penetrated the City proper approximately during the second week of June. Defoe mentions that:

Till this week the City continued free, there having never any died, except that one Frenchman,² whom I mentioned before, within the whole ninety-seven parishes. Now there died four within the City, one in Wood Street, one in Frenchurch Street, and two in Crooked Lane.³

In support of Defoe's statement, Pepys records in his diary on June seventh the following:

This day, much against my will, I did in Drury Lane see two or three houses marked with a red cross upon the doors, and 'Lord have mercy on us!' writ there; which was a sad sight to me, being the first of the kind that, to my remembrance, I ever saw.⁴

After reading Defoe's account of the inception of the plague and its gradual increase, and only later

¹Defoe, op. cit., p. 7.
²Note the discrepancy: When Defoe first mentioned this situation, he said that two Frenchmen died not just one.
³Defoe, op. cit., p. 7.
⁴Pepys, op. cit., p. 316.
of Pepys' seemingly awareness of the plague, five months afterwards, the question arises as to why the interim between these two accounts? As far back as June 1664, over seven hundred people had died of the plague in a week at Amsterdam, and certainly the fear of it crossing the sea lay heavily over London.\(^1\) Pepys, therefore, more so than not, was aware of the existing situation, but since it carried no immediate danger, he was at the most unconcerned. Another reason for remaining in the City was that Pepys was a busy man especially during the early months of 1665. It was during this time that he was appointed Treasurer to the Tangier Commission while at the same time keeping pace with his duties as an official of the Navy Office. As an official of the navy office he was especially kept busy, since there was imminent danger of war with Holland, and a Dutch war meant a war at sea. It was his duty to budget for stores and provisions, and inspect the condition of the dockyard.\(^2\) These speculations are offered to account for Pepys' seemingly unconcern regarding the earlier stages of the plague.

\(^2\)Ibid, p. 126
More unconcerned about the primary stages of the plague than Pepys was John Evelyn, who did not record in his diary a single account of the plague until July sixteenth, at which time he merely stated: "There died of the plague in London this week 1100; and in the following week above 2000."¹ The reasons for this unseemingly lack of concern are very much akin to those which were attributed above to Pepys. Evelyn was left single-handed to deal with the vast business of providing for the sick and wounded prisoners during the Dutch and English war. This was a most onerous duty, which caused him much anxiety, not only in providing accommodations and food, but as to meeting the difficulties of obtaining money.² Furthermore, as we have seen, the plague remained outside the city of London until the second week of June, and therefore, was presenting no immediate danger to the people of London.


²*The Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927) VIII, p. 283. Hereafter footnotes to all quotations from this source will be made to CHEL.
The time is now mid-July, and the plague, according to Defoe, which had been concentrated in the western portion of the City, gradually creeping eastward to that section of the City, where the "author" of the Journal lived, Aldgate. Defoe perceived that "the infection kept chiefly in the outparishes, which being very populous, and fuller also of the poor."\(^1\)

Pepys indicates in his diary on July twentieth that the plague "is scattered almost everywhere, there dying 1089 of the plague this week."\(^2\) This slight discrepancy concerning the plague's local concentration can be explained by the fact that Pepys is dealing with general terms, whereas Defoe, whose account is much fuller, is more specific in his viewpoint of the plague.

In order to illustrate this general and specific viewpoint of Pepys and Defoe, we shall compare their handling of the incident of the flight from the City during the plague. Pepys records the following in his diary:

June 21, 1665. I find all the town almost going out of town, the coaches and wagons

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\(^1\)Defoe, op. cit., p. 16.  
\(^2\)Pepys, op. cit., p. 327.
being all full of people going into the country.
June 29, 1665. By water to Whitehall, where the Court full of wagons and people ready to go out of town.¹

These passages are the only references Pepys makes concerning this incident. Defoe, on the other hand, goes into more detail concerning the flight from the City.

... the number of people there were indeed extremely lessened by so great a multitude having been gone into the country; and even all this month of July they continued to flee, though not in such multitudes as formerly. In August, indeed, they fled in such a manner that I began to think there would be really none but magistrates and servants left in the City .... It is true a vast many people fled, as I have observed, yet they were chiefly from the west end of the town, and from that we call the heart of the City, that is today, among the wealthiest of the people, and such people as were unencumbered with trades and business.²

Thus it is quite clear that Pepys was the mere casual observer, dealing always in terms of generality; whereas Defoe was the constant observer, always looking deeper and more fully into the specific incidents of the plague. He even includes in his narrative various advertisements for the plague's cure, the superstitions that the people fell into, and a list of city ordin-

¹Pepys, loc. cit., pp. 320, 322.
²Defoe, op. cit., p. 18.
ances during the plague.\(^1\) Neither Pepys nor Evelyn mention such facets of the plague.

Both Pepys' and Evelyn's overall view of the plague was factual. They accepted it as a mere calamity, without as much speculation and theorization about it as is given by Defoe. He gives a very interesting theory concerning the cause of the plague, which he doesn't fully indorse.

I saw both these stars, and, I must confess, had so much of the common notion of such things in my head, that I was apt to look upon as the forerunners and warnings of God's judgments.\(^2\)

Later in his *Journal* Defoe's speculations reveal a sound theological reasoning that is quite evident from the following:

But when I am speaking of the plague as a distemper arising from natural causes, we must consider it as it was really propagated by natural means; nor is it at all the less a judgment for its being under the conduct of human causes and effects; for, as the Divine Power has formed the whole scheme of nature and maintains nature in its course, so the same Power thinks fit to let His own actings with men, whether of mercy or judgment, to go on in the ordinary course of natural causes as the ordinary means, except-

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\(^1\) Examples of these three phenomena concerning the plague are in the Appendix pp. 41-43. They are listed to bring out the specific nature of Defoe's narrative.

\(^2\) Defoe, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
ing and reserving to Himself nevertheless a power to act in a supernatural way when He sees occasion.¹

Nowhere in the accounts of Pepys and Evelyn on the plague, do we find the workings of a speculative mind. Their accounts in general are fragmentary; merely factual, as can be seen from the following extracts of their diaries:

Pepys --

July 26. Sad news of the death of so many in the parish of the plague; forty last night; the bell always going.
July 27. At home met the weekly Bill, where above 1000 increased in the Bill, and of them in all about 1700 of the plague. . . .
July 31. . . . the plague which grows mightily upon us, the last week being about 1700 or 1800 of the plague.²

Evelyn --

August 2. A solemn fast through England to deprecate God's displeasure against the land by pestilence and war.
August 8. Died this week in London, 4000.
August 15. There perished this week, 5000.³

Before concluding the first chapter on the initial stages of the plague, let us examine the reasons why these three men stayed in London during the pestilence. This examination will reveal and distinguish the character of these three men, which definitely

¹Defoe, op. cit., p. 233.
²Pepys, op. cit., pp. 329-331.
³Evelyn, op. cit., p. 403.
influenced their manner of writing. Although Defoe's "author" is one of invention rather than of history, the reasons given for remaining in London are his own, and therefore they do give us a deeper insight into his character and manner of writing.

Defoe was a man of deep convictions, given to pious reflections, as is evident from his complete trust in the providence of God:

... the intimations which I thought I had from Heaven, that to me signified a kind of direction to venture; and it occurred to me, that if I had what I might call a direction to stay (in London), I ought to suppose it contained a promise of being preserved if I obeyed. ... my mind seemed more and more encouraged to stay than ever, and supported with a secret satisfaction that I should be kept. Add to this, that turning over the Bible ... I cried out, 'Well, I know not what to do, Lord, direct me!' and the like; and at that juncture I happened to stop turning over the book at the 91st Psalm ... 'I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in Him will I trust. ... Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling! ... from that moment I resolved that I would stay in the town, and casting myself entirely upon the goodness and protection of the Almighty, would not seek any other shelter whatsoever; and that, as my times were in His hands, He was able to keep me in a time of the infection as in a time of health; and if His hands, and it was meet He should do with me as should seem good to Him. 

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This sense of utter resignation in the Divine Will permeates the entire *Journal*. It is certainly evident, therefore, that Defoe endeavored to edify the reader, and as a result his manner of expression achieves a didactic purpose or end.

Pepys and Evelyn, on the other hand, are representations of the practical man, whose concern is generally immediate, and therefore, not given to deep seated religious convictions. However, it would be a mistake to say they were not religiously inclined. The point of distinction is that their accounts of the plague do not reveal the deep religious convictions of Defoe. The frequent religious ejaculations of both Pepys and Evelyn do show a religiously inclined mind, for example: "God preserve us all!"; "... the plague is decreased this week 740, for which God be praised."; and, "Now blessed be God for His extraordinary mercies and preservation of me this year. ... ."

Both Pepys and Evelyn were practical men, and therefore, as we have previously seen, were not given to theorizing or speculating as Defoe. Pepys and Evelyn

1Pepys, *op. cit.*, p. 312.
2Ibid., p. 348.
stayed in London because their duties prompted them to do so. Evelyn, while "the plague was raging in London ... was left single-handed to deal with the vast business of providing for the sick and wounded prisoners."\(^1\) Pepys, being an official of the navy office, a duty that kept him especially busy at this time, since England was having naval wars with Holland, "worked on in London through the summer and the fall."\(^2\) Further support of their practicality can be seen in the fact that both Pepys and Evelyn sent their wives out of the City during the raging months of the plague.

Pepys --

July 5. Advised about sending my wife's bedding and things today to Woolwich, in order to remove her thither.\(^3\)

Evelyn --

July 28. The contagion still increasing, and growing now all about us, I sent my wife and whole family ... to my brother's at Worton, being resolved to stay at my house, and to look after my charge. ... \(^4\)

It is therefore evident that both Pepys and Evelyn were practical men whose interests in the plague,

\(^1\)CHEL, op. cit., p. 283.
\(^3\)Pepys, op. cit., p. 323.
\(^4\)Evelyn, op. cit. p. 404.
as we have previously seen, were primarily factual in nature and the application of these facts to the immediate times.

Pepys and Evelyn were officials in the service of the King, and members of the Court. It was their obligation, so they both felt, to stay and perform their services. As members of the Court they could have left London, since the Court itself "shifted to Hampton Court, then to Salisbury, and in September to Oxford."¹ The fact is they remained behind, and the only reason that they give in their accounts for staying in the City was the pressing affairs of the times. Both, as we have seen, were affiliated with the immediate danger of a Dutch and English war; Pepys, the supply agent, and Evelyn, in charge of the sick and wounded prisoners.

Defoe's reasons for staying were not so practical and immediate. His "author" stayed because he felt it was the will of God; hardly a practical reason, but certainly an edifying one. Defoe's "author" was not a man of Court, but rather a commoner, a saddler by trade. The saddler is pictured by Defoe as

¹Hunt, op. cit., p. 56.
viewing the plague not only in its entirety, but from its very midst. Pepys and Evelyn, although present during the plague, seem rather to view the plague as if on a pedestal, slightly removed from the infection itself. They record in their diaries a great deal of what they have read in the Weekly Mortality Bill, especially the numerical aspect of it. It seems that only the basic facts behind a situation are of any interest to them, and as a result of this attitude their manner of writing is permeated with the factual accounts of the plague. Defoe, on the other hand, not only uses facts, but also employs his own speculations that reveal an underlying didactic purpose, which is certainly evident in the reasons he gives for staying in London, as well as his theological speculations that have been previously stated.

It can therefore be asserted that Defoe's handling of the plague is one of fact intermingled with speculations, revealing a didactic purpose; whereas Pepys' and Evelyn's handling of the subject is generally purely factual, arising from the fact that both were practical men.
CHAPTER II
THE PLAGUE AT ITS HEIGHT

The plague, asserted Defoe, "waged in a dreadful manner from the middle of August to the middle of October."\(^1\) In that period of approximately nine weeks, there died nearly a thousand a day, a startling figure that was numerically expressed in Defoe's account based on the weekly bills of mortality:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From Aug. 8 to Aug. 15</th>
<th>Of all Diseases</th>
<th>Of the Plague</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; 15 &quot; 22 &quot; 29 &quot; 29</td>
<td>5319</td>
<td>3880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; 22 &quot; 29 to Sept. 5</td>
<td>5568</td>
<td>4237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Sept. 5 &quot; 12 &quot; 19</td>
<td>7496</td>
<td>6102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; 12 &quot; 26 &quot; 26 &quot; 29</td>
<td>8252</td>
<td>6988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; 19 to Oct. 3 &quot; 10</td>
<td>7690</td>
<td>6544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Oct. 3 &quot; 19 to Oct. 3</td>
<td>8297</td>
<td>7165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; 26 to Oct. 3 &quot; 10</td>
<td>6460</td>
<td>5533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; 26 to Oct. 3 &quot; 10</td>
<td>5720</td>
<td>4929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; 26 to Oct. 3 &quot; 10</td>
<td>5068</td>
<td>4327</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Defoe also observes that "the gross of the people were carried off in these two months; for, as the whole number which was brought to die of the plague was but 68,590, here is 50,000 of them, within a trifle, in two months."\(^2\) Defoe, as is his wont, goes further into detail when he mentions that he "saw it under the hand of one that made as strict an examination into that part as he could, that there really

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\(^1\) Defoe, op. cit., p. 112.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 113.
died a hundred thousand people of the plague in that one year, whereas in the bills, the articles of the plague, it was but, 68,590.  

Pepys entered into his diary on August thirty-first an account of the plague that substantially agrees with Defoe, even to the extent of speculating why the actual account exceeds that recorded in the weekly bills of mortality:

August 31. Every day sadder and sadder news of its increase. In the City died this week 7496, and of them 6102 of the plague. But it is feared that the true number of the dead this week is near 10,000; partly from the poor that cannot be taken notice of, through the greatness of the number, and partly from the Quakers and others that will not have any bell ring for them.  

John Evelyn, in a very succinct entry in his diary, points out the startling number of deaths during the apex of the pestilence: "7th September -- Came home, there perishing near 10,000 poor creatures weekly."  

It is in describing the apex of the plague that we really get an insight into the outstanding feature of Defoe's style of writing, which is far superior to that of Pepys and Evelyn, and at the same time.
time so much alike their styles. This salient feature is what one of Defoe’s critics called "the power to visualize not merely remembered facts, but events existing only in his own imagination."¹ It is this feature of his writing that Defoe employs so successfully that "the reader is totally unable to decide the point at which fact comes to a halt and leaves sheer invention to carry on."²

Defoe was approximately five years old during the plague of London, and therefore, it can reasonably be assumed that, although he could have remained in London during the visitation, the greater part of his information came from secondary sources.³ "Given the facts," says one critic, "he is a master at making truths seem even truer."⁴ The ghastly and fascinating account which Defoe gives of the great pit in Aldgate Churchyard bear this point out. It is so vivid that one is almost driven to believe he must have seen such a sight.

²Ibid.
³These secondary sources are listed in the Appendix p. 43.
... it was about the 10th of September that my curiosity led, or rather drove, me to go and see this pit. ... There was nobody, as I could perceive at first in the Churchyard. ... but the buriers and the fellow that drove the cart ... but when they came up to the pit they saw a man go to and again ... making motions with his hands under his cloak, as if he was in a great agony, and the buriers immediately gathered around him, supposing he was one of those poor delirious or desperate creatures that used to pretend ... to bury themselves. He said nothing as he walked about, but two or three times groaned very deeply and loud, and sighed as he would break his heart.

When the buriers came up to him they soon found he was ... one oppressed with a dreadful weight of grief indeed, having his wife and several children all in the cart that was just come in with him, and he followed in an agony and excess of sorrow. He mourned heartily ... with a kind of masculine grief that could not give itself vent by tears; and calmly defying the buriers to let him alone, said he would only see the bodies thrown in and go away. ... But no sooner was the cart turned round and the bodies shot into the pit promiscuously ... he cried out aloud, unable to contain himself. I could not hear what he said, but he went backward two or three steps and fell down in a swoon.¹

Such a vivid and graphic description as this seems only natural to have come from personal experience. This is precisely the style used by Defoe in making his Journal "a matter of personal recollection."²

Another particular aspect of his style is noted in that

¹Defoe, op. cit., pp. 70-71.
²Sutherland, op. cit., p. 15.
occasionally he will introduce uncertainty about his facts and figures, such as: "So he sat down upon the bedside, and bade the maid, I think it was, fetch him up a pint of warm ale."¹ This employment of uncertainty has the tendency to convince the reader more and more of the authenticity of his account of the plague. We have already noticed his use of details, the trivial descriptions of situations, which is another of his modes of attaining authenticity. One of the most striking devices he employs to achieve this aspect of authenticity is his meditative appeal not to have his work made public:

Such internals as I had, I employed in reading books, and in writing down my memorandums of what occurred to me every day, and out of which, afterwards, I formed most of this work, as it relates to my observations without doors; what I wrote of my private meditations I reserve for private use, and desire it may not be made public on any account whatever.²

Nowhere in the accounts of Pepys and Evelyn concerning the plague, do we find such powerful passages of description. Nor is there the exposition of such a mastery of style. As we have seen previously, both Pepys and Evelyn observe the plague from a fact-

¹Defoe, op. cit., p. 82.
²Ibid., p. 88.
ual point of view, and those facts are more numerical than expository. Evelyn doesn’t even mention the manner of burial practiced during the plague year, and Pepys only expresses his dissatisfaction with the manner of burial, which is manifested in the following:

July 18. I was much troubled this day to hear at Westminster how the officers do bury the dead in the open Tuttle-fields, pretending want of room elsewhere... but such as are able to pay dear for it, can be buried there. ¹

Defoe reaches dramatic intensity in that part of his narrative where he depicts the height of the plague. He achieves this intensity by relating insignificant incidents of the plague. The following passages, while revealing the dramatic in Defoe, gives expression to his ability to select the pathetic, which immediately arouses human interest:

Passing thro' Token House Yard, of a sudden a casement opened just over my Head, and a Woman gave three frightful Screeches, and then cry’d 'Oh! Death, Death, Death!' in a most inimitable tone, and which struck me with Horror, and a Chillness in my very body. There was no Body to be seen in the whole Street, nor did any other Window open, for People had no Curiosity now in any case, nor could any Body help one another, so I went on to pass into Bell Alley. Just in Bell Alley, on the right hand of the Passage, there was a more terrible Cry

¹Pepys, op. cit., p. 327.
than that . . . and I could hear women and children run screaming about the Rooms like distracted, when a Garret Window opened, and somebody from a Window on the other side of the Alley called "What is the matter?" Upon which from the first Window it was answered, 'O Lord, my Old Master has hanged himself!' The other asked again, 'Is he quite dead?' The first answered, 'Ay, Ay, quite dead and cold!' This Person was a Merchant, and a Deputy Alderman, and very rich. I care not to mention his name, but that would be a Hardship to the Family, which is now flourishing again.¹

Evelyn never once alludes to such incidents of the plague. His accounts remain dry and sober throughout. However, the same cannot be said of Pepys. He does give a pathetic incident of the plague, but by a mere perusal one can see it lacks the powerful description and dramatic intensity achieved by Defoe. On August third Pepys entered the following incident in his diary:

... Mr. Marr telling me, by the way, how a maid servant of Mr. John Wright's, who lives thereabouts, falling sick of the plague, she was removed to an out-house, and a nurse appointed to look to her; who, being once absent, the maid got out of the house at the window and ran away. The nurse coming and knocking, and, having no answer, believed she was dead, and went and told Mr. Wright so; who and his lady were in a great strait what to do to get her buried. At last resolved to go to Burntwood, hard by, being

¹Defoe, _op. cit._, pp. 92-93.
in the parish, and there get people to do it. But they would not: so he went home full of trouble, and in the way met the wench walking over the common, which frightened him worse than before; and was forced to send people to take her, which he did; and they got one of the pest-coaches, and put her into it, to carry her to a pest-house. And, passing in a narrow lane, Sir Anthony Browne, with his brother and some friends in the Coach, met this coach with the curtains drawn close. The brother, being a young man, and believing there might be some lady in it that would not be seen . . . thrust his head out of his own into her coach . . . and there saw somebody look very ill, and in a sick dress . . . which put the young gentleman into a fright that had almost cost him his life, but is now well again.

Defoe is more analytic in his treatise of the plague than either Pepys or Evelyn, which quality is more characteristic of a theoretic nature such as his than of the temperaments of Pepys and Evelyn. Pursuing this technique, Defoe presents some of the psychological effects the plague had on the people of London.

People in the rage of the distemper, or in the torment of their swellings, which was indeed intolerable, running out of their own government, raving and distracted, and often times laying violent hands upon themselves, throwing themselves out at their windows, shooting themselves, etc.; mothers murdering their own children in their lunacy, some dying of mere grief as a passion, some of mere fright and

1Pepys, op. cit., pp. 332-333.
surprise without any infection at all, others frightened into idiotism and foolish distractions, some into despair and lunacy, others into melancholy madness.¹

These instances represent the dreadful psychological impact the plague had on some. There were others, Defoe points out, who behaved in a completely different manner, as is evident from the following:

The Government encouraged their devotion, and appointed public prayers and days of fasting and humiliation, to make public confession of sin and implore the mercy of God to avert the dreadful judgment which hung over their heads; and it is not to be expressed with what alacrity the people of all persuasions embraced the occasion; how they flocked to the churches and meetings, and they were all so thronged that there was often no coming near, no, not to the very doors of the largest churches. . . . those people who were really serious and religious applied themselves in a truly Christian manner to the proper work of repentance and humiliation, as a Christian people ought to do.²

Evelyn does not mention the dreadful psychological effects of the plague, nor the Christian aspects; Pepys only implies them. He does make mention of the increase of Church attendance on the twentieth of August: "... to church, where a dull sermon, and many Londoners."³  Pepys also captures in

¹Defoe, op. cit., p. 93.
²Ibid., p. 336.
³Pepys, op. cit., p. 336.
an implicit manner the basic psychological effect in the following statement recorded in his diary of July twenty-eighth: "But, Lord! to see in what fear all the people here do live."¹ He does not describe the various outlets of this fear as did Defoe. However, on August twenty-second he recorded in his diary that: "... this disease making us more cruel to one another than we are to dogs."² This statement is hardly comparable to the psychological observations of Defoe. The analogy of the statement is striking, but the psychological aspect, the point at issue, is weak since the idea is left undeveloped.

It is therefore evident that Defoe attains literary excellence especially in describing the apex of the plague. His ability to achieve dramatic intensity by means of powerful description and his selectiveness of the pathetic which arouses human interest points to this excellence. Evelyn never leaves the beaten path of giving a factual account of the plague. Pepys, however, as we have seen, deviated from his usual factual interest by relating a rather interesting account of Mr. Wright's maid.

¹Pepys, op. cit., p. 330.
²Ibid., p. 337.
CHAPTER III

FINAL STAGES OF THE PLAGUE

The first evidence of a major decrease of the plague came during the last week of September, at which time the bill recorded a decrease of almost two thousand, a great joy overcame the people and replaced the fear that had hung over their heads for so long. The people began to return to society, social gatherings. They began to do business again without any apprehension of danger. The news of the decrease also spread into the country, where many of the Londoners had fled. These people, eager to return, literally flocked into London during the month of October. The consequence of this foolish and rash conduct was a general increase of the bill to four hundred the very first week of November, and according to the physicians, there was above 3,000 fell sick that week, and most of them were newcomers. ¹

It is also during this last week of September that Pepys observes a major decrease in the weekly bill. He recorded in his diary on September twenty-seventh the following:

¹Defoe, op. cit., pp. 258-262.
Here I saw this week's Bill of Mortality, wherein, blessed be God! there is above 1800 decreased, being the first considerable decrease we have had.¹

Throughout the month of October, Pepys records in his diary a general decrease of the plague. He, too, observes during the first week in November a general increase of the plague.

November 9. The Bill of Mortality, to all our griefs, is increased 399 this week, and the increase generally through the whole City, and suburbs, which makes us all sad.²

There is a slight discrepancy in Defoe's account as compared with that of Pepys and Evelyn in regards to the events recorded during the month of October. In his Journal, Defoe mentions that the decrease effected a change of attitude in the people of London; a change from a cautious and fearful people to a rash and foolish lot. The change brought about the re-opening of shops, the return of those who had fled London, and the general mixing again of people in the streets.³ This account of Defoe seems quite logical and plausible, since it fills in perfectly the interim from the time Pepys mentions a decrease in the

¹Pepys, op. cit., p. 346.
²Ibid., p. 355.
plague, the last week of September, and its eventual increase during the first week of November. Neither Pepys nor Evelyn give a single reason why this "new" increase took place. Defoe's account, although very plausible, does not square with the observations of Pepys a month later.

November 27. Few people yet in the streets, nor shops open, here and there twenty in a place almost; though not above five or six o'clock at night.¹

Nor does Defoe's account square with that of Evelyn's account during the very month of October.

October 11. To London, and went through the whole City, having occasion to alight out of the coach in several places about business of money, when I was environed with multitudes of poor pestiferous creatures begging alms: the shops universally shut up, a dreadful prospect.²

In regard to the decrease itself, Evelyn doesn't mention such until the twenty-third of November, at which time he merely states that he "went home, the contagion having now decreased considerably."³ Both Pepys and Evelyn, therefore, leave us in the dark as to why this "new" increase took place.

¹Pepys, op. cit., p. 358.
²Evelyn, op. cit., p. 405.
³Ibid.
This is really the first time that the factual nature of Defoe's accounts does not square with those of Pepys and Evelyn. Defoe, as we have previously seen, was a master in his use of facts to build up his own invention. This discrepancy might well be the result of one of his own inventions. But there must be some reason for the "new" increase, and Defoe's reasons, as we have seen, seem very convincing; presented, as they certainly are, in a very logical and plausible manner. It is certainly conceivable that anyone of the three contemporary authors could have observed a particular situation and made a universal statement concerning it. Be this as it may, the discrepancy itself is slight, and does not distract from Defoe's generally accepted accurate impression of the pestilence.

Defoe drops his day by day commentary of the plague in the last section of his Journal. He employs a flashback manner of narrating the accounts of the contagion, which gives rise to a habit of repetition. This ingenious method of repetition was a device used by Defoe to give his account of the plague a "stamp of
This method "is exactly what one would expect in notes from a journal." This flashback method and its end result for Defoe — repetition, is evident from the following:

This leads me again to mention the time when the plague first began, that is to say, when it became certain that it would spread over the whole town, when, as I have said, the better sort of people first took the alarm, and began to hurry themselves out of town. It was true, as I observed in its place, that the throng was so great, and the coaches, horses, wagons, and carts were so many, driving and dragging the people away, that it looked as if all the city was running away. . . .

Needless to say, Pepys and Evelyn did not use such a device to put a "stamp of truth" on their accounts. Their accounts were personal reflections of the plague during its actual visitation; reflections, as have been pointed out, that were shallow and hardly more than mere facts and figures.

The plague continued to decline during the last months of 1665. In fact, the decline was so noticeable that it warranted Pepys' to record in his diary on December thirty-first that "the plague is

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2Ibid.
3Defoe, op. cit., p. 211.
abated almost to nothing. . . ."¹ However, the plague itself "lingered for some time, about two thousand deaths occurring in 1666. . . ."² Pepys and Evelyn mention periodically in their diaries the lingering nature of the plague.

Pepys --

April 8, 1666. But it looks fearfully among the people nowadays, the plague, as we hear, increasing everywhere again.³
April 27. The Plague, blessed be God! is decreased sixteen this week.⁴
September 13. . . . I hear that this poor town do bury still of the plague seven or eight in a day.⁵
November 20. To Church, it being thanksgiving day for the cessation of the plague; but, Lord! how the town do say that it is hastened before the plague is quite over.
. . . ⁶

Evelyn --

February 6, 1666. My wife and family returned to me from the country where they had been since August, by reason of the contagion, now almost universally ceasing.⁷
July 22. Our parish still infected with the contagion.⁸

¹Pepys, op. cit., p. 363.
³Pepys, op. cit., p. 377.
⁴Ibid., p. 380.
⁵Ibid.; p. 420.
⁶Ibid.; p. 441.
⁸Ibid., p. 8.
August 26. The contagion still continuing, we had the Church-service at home.  
October 28. The pestilence, through God's mercy, began now to abate considerably in our town.

Defoe presents the cessation of the plague as being more sudden and complete than it was in reality, as we have seen from the accounts of Pepys and Evelyn. Defoe undoubtedly did this "for purposes of art, . . . and the great joy of the people furnished him with an admirable closing scene." His abrupt cessation of the plague can be seen from the following edifying passage, a climax of religious intensity:

In the middle of their distress, when the condition of the City of London was so truly calamitous, just then it pleased God, as it were, by His immediate hand to disarm this enemy; the poison was taken out of the sting. . . . The disease was enervated and its malignity spent; and let it proceed from whencesoever it will, let the philosophers search for reasons in nature to account for it by, and labour as much as they will to lessen the debt they owe to their Maker, those physicians who had the least share of religion in them were obliged to acknowledge that it was all the supernatural . . . the very common people went along the streets giving God thanks for their deliverance.

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1 Evelyn, op. cit., p. 9.
2 Ibid., p. 19.
3 Aikin, op. cit., p. xii.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters a comparison has been presented of three accounts concerning the Great London Plague of 1665. By means of recapitulating, a close examination into the superiority of Defoe's account over that of Pepys and Evelyn shall be made, in order to discover what he has given to the literary world.

Pepys and Evelyn wrote their accounts of the plague during the actual visitation of the pestilence. Defoe did not write his account until March 17, 1722. And yet, "the popular knowledge of the plague is derived almost wholly from Defoe." ¹ How, then, does Defoe achieve this stamp of distinction? We know that Defoe was only a boy of five or six during that dreadful year, and although he could have remained in London during the visitation, he could not have possibly remembered all that is contained in his Journal. As has been pointed out in the Appendix, Defoe relied heavily on secondary sources, especially the Weekly Mortality Bill, upon which he based his factual information. That

¹Aiken, op. cit., vii.
alone could not have given his work the distinction of being the popular source of knowledge of the plague. The reason for this popularity lies in the manner in which he handled the situation; a manner that vividly held the interest of his readers. Defoe achieves this vividness by means of narrating various incidents of the plague that arouse the reader's interest and hold his attention. His account of the plague is not bogged down with mere factual accounts as those of Pepys and Evelyn. He takes a fact and builds upon it, giving the reasons behind it that are often times philosophical, psychological, and even theological in nature. His account is a fuller and deeper treatise of the plague without losing the stamp of authenticity.

To achieve this awareness of authenticity in the reader, Defoe mastered what is considered the salient feature of his style. This feature is the fusion of fact and invention without the reader being aware of such. He employs this fusion so successfully that one critic writes that "the reader is totally unable to decide the point at which fact comes to a halt and leaves sheer invention to carry on."^1

^1 Freeman, op. cit., p. 13.
Throughout his account, Defoe employs other devices that "convince" the reader of his authenticity. In the first instance he places his story in the mouth of a citizen "who continued all the while in London." This invention has been treated at length in the Appendix. Another device was his use of trivial details. Defoe is a master of details. He builds up a situation in such a logical and plausible manner that is completely convincing. Pepys and Evelyn completely shunned such trivial details. They of course do not have to "convince" their readers as is the case with Defoe. Another striking device that Defoe makes use of is his objection to having his own meditations made public. Such an appeal it seems would lead the reader to trust such an author. A statement such as this would immediately arouse the reader's curiosity to wonder what truth the author wanted to hide, what it was that he wanted to remain unrevealed to the public. By such a device Defoe was able to arouse the curiosity of his readers. The most popular and frequent device he uses to achieve authenticity is the note of hesitance and doubt concerning certain observations of the plague. He doesn't

1Aiken, op. cit., vii.
indorse everything that he sets down, and he lets the reader know when he is expressing the opinions of others, which he doesn't readily accept. His last major device is that of repetition, which, as one critic stated, "is exactly what one would expect in notes from a journal."¹

These various methods were so convincing, so realistic in nature, that they "caused Dr. Mead, the eminent physician of the time, to refer to the book some years afterwards as an authority."²

Furthermore, we have seen in this comparison that Defoe's account of the plague substantially agrees with that of Pepys and Evelyn, and therefore has a historical value, which is practically the only value Pepys' and Evelyn's accounts have as far as the plague is concerned. But Defoe's value goes far beyond that. We have seen that he is a master of a convincing style, which at the same time appeals to our human interest, and holds our attention. He achieves such a style by retelling the many anecdotes that occurred during the plague year. Another aspect of his style that holds the interest of his reader is noted in his power of

¹Aiken, op. cit., viii.
²Ibid., ix.
description and his achievement of dramatic intensity. Being men of the aristocracy, Pepys and Evelyn, in keeping with their practical nature, depict the plague in a dry and sober manner.

The discrepancies that have been pointed out in Defoe's account are slight and may well be explained by a more thorough study than this one pretends to be. However, they are so slight that they do not distract from the overall consensus of Defoe's authenticity. It is true that Defoe did present the cessation of the plague as being more sudden and complete than it was in reality. But we must also keep in mind that even Pepys recorded in his diary on December 31, 1665 that "the plague is abated to almost nothing."¹ Such a statement as this seems somewhat to justify Defoe's abrupt cessation of the dreadful plague of 1665. However, it seems more plausible that Defoe did this "for purposes of art."² Defoe took advantage of the great joy that abounded in the hearts of the people of London when the decrease of the plague became so widespread. It also gave him a chance to give vent to his religious inclination, and attribute the cessation to the workings of

¹Pepys, op. cit. p, 363.
²Aiken, op. cit., xii.
Almighty God, in Whom he was completely resigned. This resignation to the Divine Will was brought out especially in the reasons propounded for staying in London during the raging months of the plague.

We have therefore seen the major qualities that distinguish Defoe's style from that of Pepys or of Evelyn. Pepys and Evelyn are both diarists, and their accounts of the Great London Plague do not show a literary excellence comparable to that of Defoe. Their value is more historical than literary as concerns their treatment of the plague. This is not to say that Pepys and Evelyn do not hold a literary position in the world. Their diaries as a whole, "besides being of great historical interest as contemporary records, also hold a high position among literary works."¹ Defoe's account of the plague shows a definite literary value over and above the accounts of Pepys and Evelyn. We have seen his mastery of a convincing style, his powerful description and his achievement of dramatic intensity, and finally his ability to tell an interesting story that holds our attention. With this qualities in mind, his Journal of the Plague Year seems to be the

¹CHEL, op. cit., p. 275.
natural development of a future novelist, which genre of writing he later embraced. Defoe had the technique. He certainly showed in his Journal that he could write an interesting account of a factual even, which read like a novel. He had a remarkable ability to employ his imagination in the fusion of fact and invention, which would be a boon to any novelist. In fact, Defoe uses this method of fusing fact and invention in his later novels. His novel Robinson Crusoe "was based on the adventures of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish sailor who had lived alone on the island of Juan Fernandez for over four years until he was rescued by Captain Woodes Rogers in 1709."¹

A certain Walter Bell, "gave it as his considered opinion that Defoe's account should be regarded only in the light of an historical novel, in other words, a fictitious excursion based, but merely based, on actual fact."² However, from the comparison instituted with other contemporary accounts of the plague, we know that Defoe's account substantially agrees, and therefore has an historical value as well. We must therefore disagree with Mr. Bell that Defoe's account

¹Sutherland, op. cit., p. 18.
²Freeman, op. cit., p. 257.
of the plague was a historical novel "merely based on actual fact." The Journal does show the primary stages that gave rise to the development of Defoe as a future novelist. One of his critics points out that:

When Defoe turned in the last decade of his life from fact to fiction, the change was not so remarkable as at first sight it might appear. For one thing, his fiction is remarkably like fact. . . . he found his information in some book he had been reading, and applied it, or adapted it, to his own purposes. The process may be seen at its simplest in his Journal of the Plague Year.  

1Freeman, op. cit., p. 257.  
2Sutherland, op. cit., p. 14.
APPENDIX

Daniel Defoe published on March 17, 1722, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. The account was written by a Citizen who "continued all the while in London"\(^1\) during the dreadful visitation of 1665. Various opinions are given as to the authenticity of this citizen upon whom Defoe based his narrative. At the end of the *Journal* appear the initials "H.F." It has been suggested that these may be the initials of one of the Foe family. Daniel had an uncle, Henry Foe, who was born in 1628, and may very well have been in London in 1665. There is no positive information extant about this uncle. It is known that he had a sister Mary, which fact seems to coincide with the following note made by Daniel Defoe in the *Journal*: "The author of this journal lies buried in that very ground \(^{1}\)Moorfields\(\), being at his own desire, his sister having been buried there a few years before."\(^1\) Beyond this we are told only that the narrator was a saddler, who lived with a housekeeper, maid-servant, and two apprentices, "without Aldgate, about midway between Aldgate Church and White-Chapel Bars, on the left hand, or north side, of the

\(^1\)Aiken, op. cit., viii.
street, and that he had an elder brother who had sent his wife and two children to Bedfordshire, and then followed himself. This last statement is confusing, since Henry's older brother died long before the plague.

This view for the establishment of authenticity for Defoe's work is week and full of loop-holes. The majority of the Defoe scholars maintain that Defoe was using names that were familiar to him, and not historically factual, but employed for the use of local color. The critics hold that the saddler, a citizen of London who is pictured as staying in that City during the plague year, is an invention of Defoe's imagination. By employing such an invention he was more apt to "convince" his readers of the authenticity of his work. His style of writing, which has been treated elsewhere, makes use of other means which points to the appearance of authenticity. It has also been pointed out that Defoe himself was a child of five or six during the terrible visitation of the Great Plague. But still at tender age, he could have remembered some of the striking incidents of the plague. Also as a growing child

\footnote{\textit{Aiken, op. cit.}, viii.}

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}
in London, he could have heard many stories, since the plague "was a common topic for decades afterwards, and there were details that many people living in the 1720's could confirm or amplify from first hand knowledge."¹

It is also generally agreed that Defoe used other sources which he complemented with his own knowledge, personal reports, and his vivid imagination. These secondary sources include: Necessary Directions for the Prevention and Cure of the Plague, 1665; and Medela Pestilentiae, 1664; London's Dreadful Visitation, 1665; the weekly bills of mortality; the Rev. Thomas Vincent's God's Terrible Voice in the City, 1667; and Dr. Nathaniel Hodge's Loimologia.²

It is from these sources primarily that he wrote "an eye-witness account so convincing that it is hard to believe the Journal is not authentic, and that Defoe had not shared in the awful experiences he describes."³ However, Defoe's Journal "really does give on the whole a true account of the times."⁴ The work in its own times was referred to by Dr. Mead, an

¹Freeman, op. cit., p. 257.
²Aiken, op. cit., ix.
³Sutherland, op. cit., p. 15.
⁴Aiken, op. cit., ix.
eminent physician, some years afterwards as an authority. One critic, in defence of Defoe's authentic accounting of the plague, states the following:

... he [Defoe] will occasionally admit to some uncertainty about his facts or figures. ("It is so long ago that I am not certain, but I think the mother never recovered, but died in two or three weeks after.") On such occasions we are expected to admire the honesty and reliability of the narrator: since he is not perfectly sure he refuses to make it up, and so when he does commit himself to a definite statement we may be sure it is accurate.¹

It can therefore be admitted that Defoe's account on the whole is authentic, as will be seen from the comparison instituted between Defoe and his two contemporaries, Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn.

Defoe makes mention in his Journal of the Plague Year of the various advertisements and superstitions, and a list of the city ordinances that were put into effect during the plague year. Examples from these three minor incidents of the plague, will give the reader an idea of the many specific details that Defoe incorporates in his Journal. These examples will also give the reader an idea of how much more specific and rich Defoe was in his accounts of the plague than his contemporaries, Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn.

¹Sutherland, op. cit., p. 15.
Listed below are a few of the advertisements, which Defoe mentions, that occurred during the dreadful visitation of the Great Plague of 1665.

An eminent High Dutch physician, newly come over from Holland, where he resided during all the time of the great plague last year in Amsterdam, and cured multitudes of people that actually had the plague upon them.

An Italian gentlewoman just arrived from Naples, having a choice secret to prevent infection which she found out by her great experience, and did wonderful cures with it in the late plague there, wherein there died 20,000 in one day.1

The fear of the people during the plague expressed itself in many ways, such as superstition among the common people. The people during the pestilence "were more addicted to prophecies and astralogical conjurations, dreams, and old wives tales than ever they were before or after."2 Defoe backs this assertion with various incidents, such as:

Nay, some were so enthusiastically bold as to run about in the streets with their oral predictions pretending they were sent to preach to the City; and one in particular, who, like Jonah to Nineveh, cried in the street, 'Yet forty days, and London shall be destroyed.' . . . another ran about naked, except a pair of drawers about his waist, crying day and night, like a man that Josephus mentions, who cried, 'Woe to

1Defoe, op. cit., p. 35.
2Ibid., p. 24.
Jerusalem! a little before the destruction of that city. So this poor naked creature cried, 'Oh, the great and the dreadful God!' and said no more, but repeated those words continually, with a voice and countenance full of horror, a swift pace; and nobody could ever find him to stop or rest, or take any sustenance, at least that ever I could hear of. ¹

Defoe also gives a very interesting account of an elderly woman who has seen a ghost.

... I think it was in March, seeing a crowd of people in the street, I joined them to satisfy my curiosity, and found them all staring up into the air to see what a woman told them appeared plain to her, which was an angel clothed in white, with a fiery sword in his hand, waving it or brandishing it over his head. She described every part of the figure to the life, showed them the motion and the form, and the poor people came into it so eagerly, and with so much readiness; 'Yes, I see it all plainly,' says one; 'there's the sword as plain as can be.' Another saw the angel. One saw his very face, and cried out what a glorious creature he was!' One saw one thing, and one another. ... I could see nothing but a white cloud.

... The woman endeavored to show it to me, but could not make me confess that I saw it. ... she turned from me, called me profane fellow, and a scoffer; told me that it was a time of God's anger, and dreadful judgments were approaching, and that despisers such as I should wander and perish. ²

A final example of Defoe's fuller treatment of the plague than that given by Pepys and Evelyn can be

¹Defoe, op. cit., p. 24.
seen from the various mandates issued by the Lord Mayor during the plague year. The orders themselves are quite long, but the mere titles will give the reader an insight into the specific nature of Defoe's treatment of the plague.

1. "Orders Conceived and Published by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London, concerning the Infection of the Plague, 1665."
2. "Orders Concerning Infected Houses and Persons Sick of the Plague."2
3. "Orders for Cleansing and Keeping of the Streets Sweet."3
4. "Orders Concerning Loose Persons and Idle Assemblies."4

1Defoe, op. cit., p. 43.
2Ibid., p. 46.
3Ibid., p. 50.
4Ibid., p. 51.
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