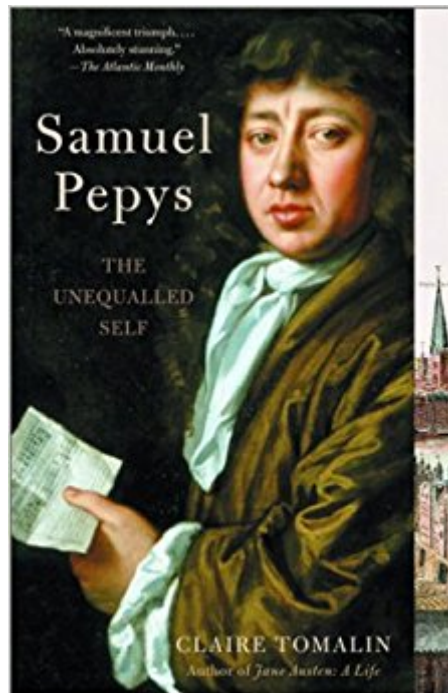


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Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self



Synopsis

For a decade, beginning in 1660, an ambitious young London civil servant kept an astonishingly candid account of his life during one of the most defining periods in British history. In Samuel Pepys, Claire Tomalin offers us a fully realized and richly nuanced portrait of this man, whose inadvertent masterpiece would establish him as the greatest diarist in the English language. Against the backdrop of plague, civil war, and regicide, with John Milton composing diplomatic correspondence for Oliver Cromwell, Christopher Wren drawing up plans to rebuild London, and Isaac Newton advancing the empirical study of the world around us, Tomalin weaves a breathtaking account of a figure who has passed on to us much of what we know about seventeenth-century London. We witness Pepys's early life and education, see him advising King Charles II before running to watch the great fire consume London, learn about the great events of the day as well as the most intimate personal details that Pepys encrypted in the Diary, follow him through his later years as a powerful naval administrator, and come to appreciate how Pepys's singular literary enterprise would in many ways prefigure our modern selves. With exquisite insight and compassion, Samuel Pepys captures the uniquely fascinating figure whose legacy lives on more than three hundred years after his death.

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Customer Reviews

Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) is the most famous diarist in English letters. From 1660 to 1669, he penned an unforgettable day-by-day description of Restoration London, with its disasters (the Great

Plague of 1665, the Great Fire of 1666), its tumultuous politics and its amazing cultural fervor. Pepys's diary also describes his eager womanizing, as he makes passes, often clumsily, at barmaids and shop girls and the wives of his associates. It is Pepys's intermingling of the public and the private that makes his diary so remarkable. Tomalin (Jane Austen: A Life, etc.) really knows her man, following him closely through some of the great events of English history. As a young government clerk, Pepys allied himself with his cousin Edward Montagu, who turned away from Cromwell to help Charles II become king in 1660, and the Restoration made Pepys's career. Highly organized, intelligent and a savvy political infighter, as Tomalin portrays him, he became a leading navy official and helped build the British navy into a world power. Tomalin also brings us inside Pepys's personal life: his tempestuous marriage, his romantic liaisons, his private, quite negative feelings about King Charles II. Tomalin writes brilliant chapters on all aspects of Pepys's life, relying not only on the diary but also on impressive scholarship. Tomalin clearly admires her subject, whose energy she constantly praises. For those who have already enjoyed the diary, Tomalin's learned and entertaining work admirably fills in the gaps. 16 pages of photos. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Tomalin, biographer of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, goes beyond Pepys's diary years to examine his entire life. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It is a bit unfortunate, but most Americans (unless they have taken a bus tour of London... or at least visited London) have never heard of Samuel Pepys. His diary is one of the most brutally honest assessments ever written - Pepys stated things based on his perceived accuracy with a very limited filter. The result is a real-life account of life in the 1660s... not just life in the 1660s, but life as a Londoner in the 1660s. Pepys documented a firsthand experience of the Plague and the great fire of 1666. This is what makes the diary valuable, not so much because Pepys was a great human or a great leader of men (although he was a high level official) but because the diary paints a clear picture of an entire era. Let me be clear - I have never read the diary nor do I ever plan on reading the diary. While it is an important work I really don't have the time or the patience to wade through all six volumes. That is why I am so happy with Claire Tomalin's biography on Pepys. Tomalin is able to deliver not only key passages of the diary, but also brings a sense of perspective. What you get is a telling of both the diary and the life of Pepys that tells the entire story. Readers of the diary can get lost in the details of secondary and tertiary acquaintances who briefly appear and then fall

back in to obscurity. Tomalin is able to fully explain the importance of main figures in Pepys' life and give us the "back story". This is what I mean by adding perspective. We are able to see how all of the significant people and events tie together under the watchful voice of a historian. However, to call this a simple explanation of the diary is completely wrong. "Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self" is full biography - a biography that uses a six volume diary (that covers a 10 year period of his life) as a primary source. To read just the diary is to understand the years 1660-1669, but by reading Tomalin's work we are able to understand Pepys and his country's entire life. Final Verdict - a very interesting read for all fans of history and a MUST read for all fans of English history. While parts do move a little slow, and by no means is this a "fast read" it will help give you a better appreciation for both the time period and Mr. Samuel Pepys. 4 Stars

I wish Claire Tomalin had had an opportunity to meet Samuel Pepys. Her affection for this flawed and gifted man shines through every page, even as she moves between his private and public life. He was an extraordinary civil servant, ahead of his time and a man whose conscience ran apace of his many transgressions. His popularity has never wavered as he manages to remind us all of our humanity. To her credit Tomalin's portrait of Pepys feels authentic and like all great biographies teaches us something about the current times. What would Pepys be doing today if he were set loose to reform some of our major institutions? Would his intellectual clarity and knack for informal deal making move us forward as a society? Even now, the deep engagement of a top civil servant with the best scientists of the day would be seen as forward thinking and possibly transgressive. Would he be quarreling with his wife and chasing the modern version of Betty Lane round the bedpost? This is a superior biography and worth checking out.

Having read the entire diary without any supplementary data whatsoever, I found myself wishing for more, and this book delivered exactly what I was hoping to see. For starters, I wanted maps of 17th century London, a family tree, and a "cast of characters", and they were all there (tho I must add that the first two were too small to see properly on my 6" Kindle screen). An extra attraction was the rather extensive gallery of portraits and other pertinent items. Next, I wanted the background filled in, and the author obliged with just the right amount of detail. Issues large and small were clarified. Well and good. What truly made the reading experience a superior one for me was the way the author organized the data. Instead of repeating the chronological sequence of the diary, a prospect I'd been expecting but not relishing, she grouped her data into categories like marriage or war so that each could be fully explored. Her insights were penetrating and thorough, and this approach

allowed me to see things more comprehensively. My interest in the topic is unabated, and I plan to re-read this book. And the diary. While I'm not at all sorry to have read the diary first, I know that my second reading of it will be a very different and much more enjoyable one because of this book.

This book should be read by anyone interested in accessing the Pepys' diaries. It provides neither a full biography nor description of the diaries, but instead provides a framework on which both can be understood. As someone who plunged into the original diaries notionally prepared (knew the period, the general biography of Pepys and the relevance of the diaries), I found myself drowned in anecdote without enough detailed context. This book neatly rectifies that trouble, and should be read first by anyone who wishes to get value from the famous original text. It is also very clearly written by an author with obvious sympathy for the writer as litterateur. The book does not attempt to extensively map the diaries to British Naval history, but makes it clear that this can be done. The footnotes and references are thorough and useful. While I believe I noted one or two minor historiographical errors, this is as solid a book of biographical history as anyone could ever expect to read with enthusiasm and pleasure. Biography is perhaps the most digestible form of history, and this book is a particularly tasty bite. This specific printing is also nice, with a good binding and design. Pepys had the fortune, good and bad, of living through tumultuous times. This book gives us a highly readable and yet scholarly context to his diaries and his times.

If you were an English major in college, you probably read a few excerpts from Pepys diary. He was quite a colorful character and important to the study of 17th-century English literature. This bio deserves the wonderful accolades it has received. Well worth reading.

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