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David Macaree

The Flyting of Daniel Defoe and Lord Belhaven



This article originally set out to trace the exchanges in doggerel verse between the English agent, Daniel Defoe, and the anti-Union spokesman, John Hamilton, second Lord Belhaven, during the last two months of 1706 following the Scots peer's melodramatic speech before the last Scottish Parliament on November 2 of that year. Recent publication of the first three pieces in the latest volume of *Poems on Affairs of State*¹ has led to certain modifications, however, and attention is now focussed on the further literary ramifications of this political set-to with some comment on its aftermath as that affected the relationship of these two men so strangely brought into contact with each other.

To recapitulate briefly. Defoe replied to his lordship's oratorical outburst in *The Vision* (*POAS*, Yale, 7, 214-220), a piece in which he makes fun of Belhaven's verbal tableaux by incongruous juxtaposition of emotionally charged terms, most notably in his rendering of the depiction of Caledonia, "our ancient mother," dying, like Caesar in the senate from wounds inflicted by her own progeny. His antagonist's retort to this lampoon, *A Scots Answer to a British Vision* (*POAS*, Yale, 7, 223-226), was to Defoe's evident delight, directed at the wrong persons, his use of such Scots terms as "Frith" (estuary) and "wood" (mad) having apparently misled Belhaven into believing that a fellow-countryman was at least partly respon-

And up wi'd Alie, Alie, Up wi'd
Alie now, etc.³

And now my dear Mob; tis for You,
That his Ballad is set to the Trump,
The Musick is Pleasant and New
And of piece with the Comical Lump.
Refrain.

O! To see how the World's beguiled.
Your Hero was thought to have Mettle,
But sense most disdainfully Smil'd
And the Fool prov'd Knave in a little.
Refrain.

For though in France he was deep in a Plot
And Shamed Us here with another,
And two Thousand Pound he has got,
And merely by Bubling his Brother.
Refrain.

Yet the Syring and Damnable Fluid,
Does rightly Decipher his Riddle,
What hapned to this Vertuos Druid,
When he caught the Lady S-----t⁴
by the middle.

Refrain.

His Speeches the Treaty Knockt down
With *Tu quoque mi Fili Squadrone*,⁵
Will Scotland part with her Crown,
And the Freedom of Drinking Tippone?⁶
Refrain.

The Droget, false Brans, and his Bell,
And all his Ridiculous Prose,⁷
His Lordship a Block-head did tell,
Which his Blunt Heavie Rhyming
now shows.

Refrain.

Was there ever such Rhetorick found?
A Pox on the Villanous Rains;
The Deludge his Reason has drown'd!⁸
And his Lordship must Fish for
his Brains!

Refrain.

That this Hero the Treaty Oppos'd,
 Could neither from Thames nor Tyne,
 But a Message that many suppos'd,
 Come over with Burgundy Wine.
Refrain.

Some had it by Pen and Ink,
 That in the Cause were Keen,
 To Others was Tipped a Wink,
 That had Will to be Seen.
Refrain.

For the other side, two ripostes, both ascribed (with a query) to Belhaven in the British Museum Catalogue, appear to have followed Defoe's *Reply*. In each, he is addressed directly by name, indication that his identity has been revealed to the anti-Union party, and in each his ostensible reasons for being in Scotland are called in question. Of the two, *A Second Defence of the Scottish Vision*, though it continues the title line initiated by Defoe, seems the less likely to have been Belhaven's, if only because it praises him in the third person as "a peer,/Whom for unbyass'd Truth we all admire," and compares favourably his "Ciceronian Stile" with his adversary's smooth "*British Air*," a phrase with strong negative connotations to those of nationalist sentiments.

Its main point, however, is to cast doubt on Defoe's protestations of goodwill towards Scotland and the Scots as well as his statements that he intends to settle in the country. Such doubts must have caused him considerable embarrassment, so close are they to the truth which, on his own testimony, he thought he had kept hidden.⁹

A Second Defence of the Scottish Vision

How Strange's thy Sense! How charming are thy Strains!
 Who by soft Numbers moved our Northern Swains:
 In gently treating with mild Words, a Peer,
 Whom for unbyass'd Truth we all admire.
 But thou so gen'rously dost treat the *Scotch*,
 Ev'n to commend them for their Lice and Botch.
 It seems not strange that thou art turn'd so Bold
 Thy malice 'gainst their Peers now to unfold.
 His *Ciceronian Stile* may well compare
 With all the smoothness of thy *British Air*;
 And his strong Sense in the presaging *Vision*,
 Make wise men have thy Pamphlet in Derision.
 'Tis strange thy gen'rous courtship to their peers
 Puts not thy brain-sick Head in Pannick Fears,

Whilst thou'rt so bold in Verse to make us know
 That to us and our Peers thou art DE FOE.
 Such grateful Things thou of our country tells,
 As that you think none your base Treach'ry smells:
 You in each company are pleas'd to cant,
'Tis here to live, and here to Dwell, you want.
 What change is this! to live 'mongst Lice and Scabs
 And to be serv'd by nastie filthy Drabs.
 But in old *England* thou art not secure
 For which the noisome Vermine you endure.
 Thou to thy Native Country art unkind,
 and the Brave *Scots* thou never did befriend.
 May thou to ev'ry Country Treach'rous be,
 And they prove mortal Enemies to thee:
 No fun'ral Honours unto thee be given
 A friend to Hell an Enemie to Heaven.

Along with the foregoing is *An Equivalent for De Foe*, which covers much of the same ground and uses rhymed decasyllabic couplets also. In addition, however, it retorts on its subject his ironic addressing of Belhaven as "mighty Bard," comments on his "Parts," his incomprehensibility to ordinary intellectuals, and the quality and nature of his muse, almost as though the writer had a copy of *The Reply* by him as he composed. One new element, though, is reference to the "Equivalent," which glances at Defoe's interest in the negotiations over the sum of money to be set aside as compensation for Scotland's loss of internal revenue once her fiscal system is incorporated with that of the United Kingdom on consummation of the union. In this poem his attacks against opponents of union are set against his propaganda essays on its behalf; in fact, mention of his "four Essays" (l. 19) helps to date this effusion as pre-1707, his *Fifth Essay, At Removing National Prejudices* appearing at the very beginning of January of that year.¹⁰

An Equivalent for Defoe

Let banter cease, and Poetasters yield;
 Since famed *De Foe* is Master of the Field.
 What none can comprehend, he understands:
 And what's not understood, his Fame Commands.
 This mighty Bard, more mighty in Invention,
 And most of all in humble Condescension,
 Has left the Pleasures of *Parnassus* - hill,
 And stoops so low as here to draw his Quill
 'Mongst us Rude *Scots*: his Genrous Design
 Flows like the Cat'racts of the Richest Mine.

From hardest Rocks it throws its purest Ore,
 And squanders Treasure on our barren Shore.
 Thus his design is to Surprise the Nation
 With Wealth, Wit, Fame and Bardish Inspiration.

*How can a Feeble Muse his Grandeur raise?
 Let Court Triumph, and Mobb Huzza his Praise.
 For he can serve most equally by Halves
 Either Jehovah or the Golden Calves.*

His *four Essays* do give us Wealth, yea more
 His own vast Stock is added to our Store.
 He is not Servile, nor does writ for Gold.
 Nor is he poor, as Poets were of Old:
 His Parts are Vast not to be bought or sold.
 So wealth, Parts, Rhime and famous Pillorie
 Are all bequeath'd to us in Legacie.
 Was e'er a Kingdom half so great as we?
 Equivalent he gives for all our wrongs,
 His Railings are Compens'd to us by Songs
 Thus *Shimei* like he fondly does pretend
 To Welcome home his injur'd Lord again.
 Got ever Nation such a happy Lot
 As Great *De Foe* and Honest *Logy Scot*?¹¹

With these final flurries, the exchange of pleasantries ceased. Perhaps Defoe felt that he had succeeded sufficiently in reducing the effectiveness of Belhaven's rhetoric, perhaps he was too busy handling other opponents, perhaps the loss of his anonymity and the shrewd guesses at his reasons for being in Scotland made him feel that his best plan was retirement from the field. All the same, recollection of the encounter seems to have stuck in his mind and his verse survey, *A Scottish Affair, A Scots Poem Or A New-years Gift, from a Native of the Universe To His Fellow-Animals in Albania* (POAS, Yale, 7, 233-281), comments of the Scots that

Some talk of *Visions*, Some are pleas'd with *Dreams*,
 While *Fustian Stuff* ejaculates in Streams. (ll. 422-423)

Even now, though, he was not allowed the last word, for a response in decasyllabic couplets, though giving no indication that he had been identified as the author, retorts on him many of the epithets that he himself had earlier applied to Lord Belhaven in his *Reply to the Scots Answer*, so that once more his aspersions return to haunt him, for he is now accused of lack of intelligibility in his "Dogrel Rhime" that goes "Beyond all Laws and Rules."

A Short Satyre On that Native of the Universe
the Albanian Animal

Sir, 'mong your Gifts your Candour's not the least,
In that you thus profess you are a beast:
Albanian Animal shall be thy Name
From hence forth in the Registers of Fame
And you're entitled both in Prose and Verse
An elder *Native* of the *Universe*.
Your Title modestly does thus contain
To save your Reader fruitless Toil and Pain,
Thou hast been grazing sure, among the Flock,
When *Balaam's Ass*; and *Aesop's Cattel* spoke.
Where have you been, or what enchanted Goal
Since that time lodged your base and Mungrel Soil,
Reserv'd a Curse for this our Latter time,
To hammer Albion's Fate in Dogrel Rhime?
O happy Vein, that soars above the Reach
Of our Capacity, and makes a Stretch
Beyond all Laws and Rules: without control
All of a sudden Jumps from *Pole* to *Pole*!
Reproach to Learning, and the Sacred Nine,
Whom neither Sense nor Grammar can confine:
Who maugre *Nature* and in Spight of *Art*,
Didst e'er presume to act a Poet's Part.
Thy Beastly Book be cursed as thy Fate;
Condemn'd by all, but by thy empty Pate.
Fond of thy Product and it's blasted Fame,
The Wish | May'st thou be vain to glory in thy Shame;
| May all thy Actings be of Sense as free
| And Nothing better lik'd be done by Thee
| Excepting the last Jump from Gallow-Tree.

From this time on, however, verse takes a back seat as Defoe in several issues of his *Review* dealing with the Union mentions the famous speech, notably in his articles of March 15 and 18, 1707, following these references with quotation of the opening lines of *The Vision* on March 22. Next, in the following year, in his *Review* of July 10, 1708, he provides an obituary notice of his former adversary in which he traces their dealings from the stormy days of late 1706, indicating his belief that the Scots peer was innocent of the charges of Jacobite conspiracy that had led to his imprisonment in Edinburgh and latterly in London, charges that the pro-Unionists of 1706 had not been slow to make as "Ye Coblers and Taylors" shows.

All the same, he seems to go rather far when, after referring to their dispute and to Belhaven's gentlemanly readiness

to forget their quarrel, he comments on the quality of their argument:

I leave it as a useful observation to those who wanting temper as well as manners, can never dispute without heat, argue without railing or speak to their opponent but in opprobrious, vile, and filthy language.

A far cry this from the full-blooded flyting of eighteen months earlier with its charges and counter-charges of lying and corruption, criminal acts and anti-social behaviour, as though Defoe, feeling that now, surely, he is having the final word, wishes to make amends to the dead, even if he is going to quote the original speech in full in his *History of the Union*, first published in 1709.

But he was apparently not done with Belhaven yet for, if Professor J. R. Moore is correct in his ascription to Defoe of the 1711 prose lampoon [A Speech of a Stone Chimney-Piece],¹² the Englishman paid his erstwhile opponent the ultimate compliment of imitation, the section of that piece of ephemera quoted in *The Present State of the Parties of Great Britain* (1712) being nothing more than a slightly altered recasting of the Scots peer's prophecies of disaster adapted to the circumstances associated with passage of the Occasional Conformity Bill in the House of Lords and "offered in deadly earnest as a protest against the Whig leaders who had betrayed the Dissenters in 1711."¹³ The same speech was to surface at least once more in Defoe's lifetime, fittingly enough in a verse rendering, for the year 1729 saw a printing (or reprinting)¹⁴ of a metrical paraphrase, *Belhaven's Vision: Or His Speech in the Union Parliament, November 2, 1706*, its form: standard habbie. In it, each stanza deals with a single tableau, the paralled between Caledonia and the assassinated Caesar being rendered thus:

Stamp-duties, Customs and Excise,
To a prodigious Sum will rise:
Like Caesar CALEDONIA lies,
 Sub gladio hostili;
And in the Pangs of Gold-birth cries,
 Tu quoque, mi fili!

Perhaps Belhaven had the last word after all.

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NOTES

1. Ed. F. H. Ellis (New Haven, 1975), 7, 208-229. Hereafter cited as *POAS*, Yale, 7.
2. Great Britain, Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report 15, Appendix Part I (London, 1904), p. 351. See also *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 19 (June, 1972), pp. 216-218.
3. For the coarse implications of this refrain, see C. M. Simpson, *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1966), pp. 728-729.
4. Lady S[po]t: venereal disease.
5. This follows Defoe's misquotation of Belhaven's *Tu quoque mi fili*. The *Squadron*, though at first opposing the Union, had come to support it.
6. Twopenny ale. See Defoe's *Letters*, p. 148 for the tax proposals on this beverage.
7. These were the marks of the licensed beggar, in this case, the implication is that Belhaven is simple-minded.
8. The bad weather of 1706 was notorious. See P. Hume Brown, *The Legislative Union of England and Scotland* (Oxford, 1914), p. 121.
9. *The Letters of Daniel Defoe*, ed. G. H. Healy (Oxford, 1955), p. 158.
10. J. R. Moore, *A Checklist of the Writings of Daniel Defoe*, (Bloomington, 1960), p. 57, item 138.
11. An oblique reference to John Erskine, Earl of Mar. This nobleman "Bobbin' Jock," had, according to George Lockhart, made the Tories believe that "he was an honest man," but had since come out in support of the Union.
12. *Checklist*, p. 91, item 223.
13. J. R. Moore, "Defoe's Lamoon, A Speech of a Stone Chimney-Piece," *Boston Public Library Quarterly*, 9 (1957), 139.
14. In *POAS*, Yale, 7, 212, F. H. Ellis mentions this piece as not dated.