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**DEFOE’S AUTHORSHIP OF A HYMN TO THE MOB (1715)**

Hitherto overlooked external evidence for Defoe’s authorship of the 735-line poem, A Hymn to the Mob (July 1715), means that work can now be treated as Defoe’s with greater certainty. Attributed to Defoe by a bibliographer for the first time in the nineteenth century, it was retained for the Defoe canon by Furbank and Owens as ‘probable’, on the principle that external and internal evidence together may support a ‘certain’ attribution, but internal evidence alone may produce at best a ‘probable’ attribution.[[1]](#footnote-1) A letter in Baker’s News: or, The Whitehall Journal, number XIX, for Tuesday 25 September 1722, invites readers to ‘hear what de Foe says to the Mob’, and quotes four lines of A Hymn without naming it:

Thus Senates, and Assemblies of the State,

Who formally usurp the Judgment-Seat;

Thy Flesh and Bone out of thy Loins they grew,

Just as our Parliaments do now.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The external evidence of an unknown person’s casual attribution is not by itself definitive, but although this comes seven years after the poem’s first publication it is within the author’s lifetime and is not a malicious act (unlike some of the first attributions of works to Defoe). In combination with the internal evidence of parallels of phrasing, allusion or ideas offered by Furbank and Owens – and by Owens in the notes to his edition of Defoe’s poetry – it is trustworthy enough to upgrade the degree of certainty. Item 176(P) in Furbank and Owens’s Critical Bibliography should be simply 176. Perhaps because of the idea that Defoe left off poetry after 1706, or that A Hymn to the Mob was merely re-purposing lines he had written in 1710, or else that he may not have written it, this poem attracts little critical attention. Hopefully it will attract more notice and hopefully further evidence will turn up to help decide issues of Defoe attribution that remain doubtful.

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1. P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, A Critical Bibliography of Daniel Defoe (London, 1998), 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Daniel Defoe, ‘A Hymn to the Pillory’, ll. 98–101, The True-Born Englishman and Other Poems, ed. W. R. Owens, Satire, Fantasy and Writings on the Supernatural by Daniel Defoe, 8 vols, gen. eds P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens (London, 2003), I, 421. The issue of the newspaper is available at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, in the Nichols Newspapers collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)