## Defoe, Swift, and Captain Tom

The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citable link</td>
<td><a href="https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37364235">https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37364235</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms of Use</td>
<td>This article was downloaded from Harvard University’s DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Defoe, Swift, and Captain Tom

In March, 1710, Daniel Defoe was horrified by the spectacle of the London mob as it cheered and applauded Dr Henry Sacheverell on his way to his trial for having preached an inflammatory and, as was said by the Whigs, treasonable sermon on Guy Fawkes Day the preceding November. Defoe's Review asserted that Sacheverell had preached 'against the Queen, and the establish'd Government, the Revolution-Principle and the Protestant Succession'; consequently 'these poor innocent Criminals, the Rabble...know not what they are about' in giving him their support. The mob's conduct puzzled Defoe. Recalling his own experience in 1703, when the London crowd had transformed his public degradation in the pillory into a triumph, he affirmed that 'generally speaking, her [England's] Mobbs have been always in the Right.' Characteristically, Defoe at once set about to educate the people rioting for Sacheverell and to explain to them the true nature of the issues. To this purpose he devoted many numbers of the Review; and, it seems likely, he also penned some brief journalistic pieces bearing in their titles the name 'Captain Tom,' a cant term for the leader of a mob. This note will examine Defoe's claim to the following works, which are listed as nearly as possible in the order of their publication:

A Letter from Captain Tom to the Mobb, Now Rais'd for Dr. Sacheverell. London, Printed for J. Baker at the Black Boy in Pater-Noster-Row, 1710.

Captain Tom's Ballad. A Pleasant New Song, to the Tune of, Peckington's Pound. Printed in the Year, 1710.

The Capt. of the Mobs Declaration: Or, Their New Answer to Dr. Sacheverell, by Capt. Tom. London, Printed for W. Jones, in the Strand, 1710.

A Rod for a Fools Back, in a Letter from Captain Tom, to the Minister of Covent Garden. London: Printed [?] for J. Smith near Aldersgate-Street, 1710.

1 A Review of the State of the British Nation, VI (4 March 1710), 507.
2 Review, VI (18 March 1710), 389.
3 The bibliography appended to Abbie T. Soud's The Sacheverell Affair (New York, 1939), p. 147, is in error in listing St. Paul and Her Majesty Vindicated (London, 1710) as by Captain Tom.
Dialogue between Captain Tom and Sir H——y D——n G——t . . . Printed for the Consolation of Those Who Can Bear a Cross, in the Year 1710.

Captain Tom's Remembrance to His Old Friends the Mob of London, Westminster, Southwark, and Wapping . . . [1711]

Although the Letter, the Ballad, the Rod, and the Dialogue have been attributed to Defoe, they have never been examined for the evidence of his authorship. The Declaration and the Remembrance have not hitherto been noticed; they are apparently unique broadsheets, the former in the possession of Mr F. F. Madan of London and the latter in the Harvard College Library. It must be admitted at the outset that external evidence regarding the authorship of the Captain Tom papers is lacking. Nowhere in his extant letters or acknowledged publications does Defoe refer to them, and none of his contemporaries accuse him specifically of writing them. Yet the internal evidence, which is often the only evidence for the bibliographer of Defoe, suggests the possibility that Defoe did write all except the Dialogue, which, I think, can be proved the work of Jonathan Swift.

One particular circumstance in favor of Defoe's authorship is his fondness for the name 'Captain Tom,' which appears frequently in the Review and always in a favorable context. There was, apparently, no eponymous Captain Tom; he belongs to the same category of beings as John Bull but differs from that worthy in being of popular rather than of literary origin. References to him outside Defoe and the works being considered here are rare. He is a principal character in the Tory Ned Ward's Vulgaris Britannicus (1710), a burlesque that sneers at the notion of the mob as the guardian of English liberties. Later in the century Francis Grose identified him as 'the leader of a mob; also the mob

4 Walter Wilson, Memoirs of the Life and Times of Daniel Defoe (London, 1810), III, 111-112, suggested Defoe as the author of the Letter, a suggestion accepted by all subsequent bibliographers of Defoe. William T. Morgan, A Bibliography of British History, 1700-1715 (Bloomington, Ind., 1937), II, 129-130, assigns the Letter to Defoe, as well as the Ballad, the Rod, and the Dialogue; his authority is either Halkett and Laing, Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous Literature, ed. James Kennedy and others (Edinburgh, 1926-34), VI, 304, which gives Captain Tom as one of Defoe's pseudonyms, or The British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books 1817-1900, which attributes all four works to Defoe under the entry 'Tom, Captain.' It should be noted, however, that the new British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books, XLI (1922), lists only the Letter under Defoe.

5 Captain Tom is not mentioned, for instance, in Robert Ferguson's The History of All the Mobs, Trinmals, and Insurrections (London, ca. 1715) or, so far as I can discover, in any account of the Sacheverell riots.
Defoe, Swift, and Captain Tom

But to Defoe he was much more; he symbolized the mass of English people in their struggle against popery and the pretender; he was the defender of protestantism and parliament. Defoe's offhand manner when he first mentions him in the Review — 'Captain Tom has not often been in the Wrong' — shows that he expected his readers readily to understand whom he meant by the name, but he is careful to distinguish between the 'usurping Captain Tom' at the head of the Sacheverell mobs and 'Old Captain Tom,' who is 'of quite another family.' The Sacheverell mobs, made up of 'Papists, Non-jurors, and Enemies of Her Majesty's Title and Government,' differ from all other 'Rabbles of this Age,' and Defoe challenges his readers to show him 'a Mob of that Composition before.' Perhaps he dwelt on the distinction at such length because his enemies frequently accused him of rabble-rousing. At any rate, he seems to be the only contemporary writer who simultaneously denounces the Sacheverell rioters and defends the privilege of the English common people to form mobs for redressing genuine grievances. As we shall see, all the Captain Tom papers except the Dialogue take a stand identical with Defoe's on the question of mob action.

The style and subject of the eight-page Letter, which had the same publisher as the Review, certainly suggest Defoe's authorship. Captain Tom opens the letter with an accusation Defoe repeatedly made: 'You fight under a Usurper, and in defence of so base a Cause, that your Honourable Forefathers would sooner have dy'd than lift up a Club or a Paring-Shovel for't.' He goes on to tell an anecdote very much in Defoe's manner: 'I went one day to Billingsgate, and was reading [Sacheverell's sermon] with Will. Jobber and Dick. Trumman, and some others; and Will. said, Pray God the Doctor hain't been too free with my Wife. . . .' He then mutters objurgations against 'Passive Obedience' and 'Non-Resistance,' the high-flying doctrines denounced on almost every page of Defoe's writings during this period. Many

2 Review, VI (8 March 1710), 589.
3 The same, p. 590.
4 Review, VI (23 March 1710), 597.
5 Review, VI (14 March 1710), 585.
6 See, for example, the tenth number of Charles Leslie's The Rehearsal of Observer, &c. (9 September-7 October 1704) and The High-Church Address to Dr. Hen. Sacheverell (London, 1710), p. 8. England's Enemies Exposed (London, 1701), p. 31, accuses Defoe of using 'the very same Words with those of Wat Tyler!'
others, of course, found these doctrines hateful, but no other writer that I can find harped so incessantly on the unusual character of the mobs acclaiming Sacheverell, the spokesman for the doctrines. When Captain Tom says (page 3), 'You are the first, and I hope will be the last Mobb, that ever stood up against Liberty and Property, and the Freedom of the Subject,' he echoes Defoe's remark that former 'Mobbs always aimed at pulling down some real Grievance.' 18 The reference (page 6) to the destruction of Dr. Burgess' meetinghouse dates the Letter after 28 February, when that act of vandalism took place, 19 and the absence of any reference to Sacheverell's sentence indicates a probable date of publication before 20 March, when the House of Lords barred Sacheverell from the pulpit for three years. 20

Defoe's claim to Captain Tom's Ballad cannot be established conclusively, but the subject, as announced in the first stanza, is certainly one that obsessed Mr. Review:

Now all you good Britains from Dover and Fife,
Lament, we beseech, our deplorable State,
Since Mob was a Moh, and Promoter of Strife,
she ne'er was imposed upon at such a Rate:
When Popery she saw,
And Slavery near drew,
Up she got in Defence of Religion and Law,
But never till now has she ever been known,
To rise in Rebellion for pulling them down.
O Defend us! from every hot-headed Tool
Of a Priest, that the Jesuitrides like a Mule.

Whether or not the style of the Ballad resembles that of Defoe's acknowledged poems is a matter of opinion; it seems to me quite unlike that of such formal utterances in couplets as The Double Welcome or Jure Divino. Little is known about Defoe as a versifier, but it is reasonable to suppose that the author of A True-Born Englishman possessed enough skill in poetry to pen a street ballad and to adapt his manner to his matter. The third stanza of the Ballad makes the same contrast between the quiet and the loud-mouthed clergyman as the Review of 11 March. Other parallels might be cited. The Ballad is of approxi-

---

18 Review, VI (16 March 1710), 587.
Defoe, Swift, and Captain Tom

mately the same date as the Letter; the allusion in its final stanza to the dispersal of the mob and the arrest of some of its leaders puts it after 2 March.\(^5\)

*The Capt. of the Mobs Declaration*, a prose broadsheet printed on one side only, appears to be a sequel to the *Letter*. In it Captain Tom makes two main points: that it is paradoxical to riot for the principle of non-resistance, and that the Church, Sacheverell notwithstanding, is in no danger except from men like Sacheverell himself. Defoe labored the former point in the *Review* of 4 March and the latter in that of 18 March. Captain Tom admits that the mob has been ‘misled’ by papists and non-jurors, ‘whose Ends we have been ignorantly serving’; Defoe made the same analysis of the mob’s ignorance in the *Review* of 16 March.

In *A Rod for a Fools Back*, a prose broadsheet printed on both sides, Captain Tom makes an *ad hominem* attack on Sacheverell and warns him against meddling ‘with us Gentry, who, though we are the Scum of the Nation, are always uppermost when it is in a Ferment.’ Defoe’s disclaimer, in the *Review* of 2 March and again a week later, of any personal animus towards Sacheverell might seem to disqualify him as the author of the *Rod*; yet the scandalous remarks in his letter to General Stanhope, one of the managers of the trial, show that he readily maligned Sacheverell in private.\(^*\) The *Rod*’s purpose seems to have been the silencing of Sacheverell if he should attempt to preach again. It mentions a ‘Mr. Lloyd’, who is perhaps the man Thomas Hearne referred to in his diary on 30 March: ‘On Sunday Dr. Sacheverell read Prayers, and Dr. Binckes preach’d for him. One M'. Lloyd has presented the D'. to a Living of two hundred Pounds per annum.’ Whether or not by Defoe, the *Rod* resembles his writings in so far as it reminds the mob of its traditional function, the defense of English liberties.

Defoe certainly did not write the *Dialogue between Captain Tom and Sir H[enry] D[udley]n C[olton]*, a broadsheet verse-lampoon on Colton, a Whig candidate for Parliament in the election of 1710. Its political bias is quite contrary to Defoe’s. ‘We are true friends,’ Captain Tom remarks, ‘Of the Church and Sacheverell.’ The author of

\(^{22}\) Boyer, VIII, 267.


\(^{33}\) Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne (Oxford, 1885-1911), II (ed. Charles E. Dohle), 368.
the lampoon makes no attempt to recall the mob to what Defoe considered its time-honored responsibilities. His tone is also unlike Defoe's. Instead of edifying and instructing, he engages in irresponsible punning. One has only to scan the pages of the Review during October and November to see how seriously Defoe took the election, which resulted in an overwhelming defeat of the Whigs. Colt and General, later Earl, Stanhope stood for Westminster; they were defeated by two of the high-Tory persuasion, Thomas Medlicott and Thomas Cross. Both parties allegedly had mobs roaming the streets of Westminster and attempting to coerce the voters."18

On 5 October, while passing through Westminster with a friend, Swift encountered the Whig mob. "In the way," he noted in his Journal to Stella, "we met the electors for Parliamentmen: and the rabble came about our coach, crying a Colt, a Stanhope, &c. We were afraid of a dead cat, or our glasses broken, and so were always of their side."19 Actually Swift was not at all 'of their side'; at this time he was a close friend of the Tory Robert Harley, who had come into power the preceding August. Perhaps with the intention of assisting the Tories Swift wrote a poem that he described to Stella as 'a ballad, full of puns, on the Westminster election, that cost me half an hour: it runs, though it be good for nothing. But this is likewise a secret to all but MD. If you have them not, I will bring them over.'20

Although the ballad referred to here must have been published, since Swift expected that Stella would see it, its identity is a better kept secret than many other secrets of Swift. Sir Charles Firth's suggestion that it might be 'the second part of the Glorious Warrior,'21 an attack on Stanhope, is rejected as unlikely by Harold Williams.22 Firth himself was not overconfident. 'This may be the ballad referred to by Swift,' he remarked, 'unless the contemporary broadsides relating to the Westminster election supply something more evidently written by him.' It seems to me that the Dialogue fits perfectly the description Swift gave of his ballad.

18 Boyer, IX, 249-250.
20 Prose Works of Swift, II, 35. 'MD' is Swift's way of referring to Stella (Esther Johnson) and Mrs Dingley, her companion.
Defoe, Swift, and Captain Tom

After an invocation to the muse of Grub Street, the Dialogue reports Sir Henry's request for Captain Tom's support in the election. Sir Henry puns outrageously on the word 'brewer,' his opponent's occupation, and on 'Cross,' his name. Captain Tom replies as follows:

You had better have been
At your Spade and your Club,
Than take up our Time
With a Tale of a Tub.

You shall be discarded,
I say't to your Face:
We'll play All the Game,
And not bate you an Ace.

Then let me advise you
No longer to stay,
But pack up and Shuffle,
And cut it away.

And tho' you have Wit,
Youth, Beauty, and Parts,
While we keep up our Clubs,
You shall never win our Hearts.

The puns on card playing were suggested by the clubs and spades commonly carried as weapons by rioters; Bishop Burnet describes a man with a spade cleaving the skull of another who would not shout with the mob. The style of the foregoing passage, with its clever rhymes and burlesque tone, is reminiscent of Swift, though hardly of Swift at his best. Captain Tom's use of the proverb 'a Tale of a Tub' invites speculation. Can it be regarded as a secret signature? By so identifying himself, Swift could indulge in characteristic clowning and at the same time give nothing away, since he never admitted having written

*There exists no account of Sir Henry Dutton Colv, who seems to have had a turbulent political career. In the election of 1695 his faction knocked several men down, struck others with whips and sticks, others of them rid on Flanders horses with swords and pistols, others of them threw up cards and dice, sand and dirt, insomuch as that one surgeon had three under care, and another surgeon seven that were wounded* (Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Ambrose Barnes, ed. William H. H. Longstaffe, Publications of the Surtees Society, I, Durham, 1857, p. 226). In 1698 he was put out of the commission of peace at Westminster (Narcissus Luttrell, A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs, Oxford, 1857, IV, 463), and, although he was elected to Parliament in 1705, he was defeated after a bitterly fought contest in 1708 (Luttrell, VI, 324). That the author of the Dialogue should show him requesting the assistance of Captain Tom and the mob seems appropriate.

*History of His Own Times (London, 1840), II, 849.*
his own Tale of a Tub. Whether or not such a jeu d'esprit as the Dialogue is in accord with Swift's political beliefs is perhaps an irrelevant question, but it does seem to reflect his attitude of amused contempt for the antics of the masses, an attitude very different from that of 'the fellow that was pilloried.' John F. Ross has demonstrated that the careers of the two greatest Augustan publicists touch at many points; 29 the Captain Tom papers may be another point of contact.

So far as I can discover, Captain Tom was silent from the time of the elections in October, 1710, to March of the following year, when an attempt on the life of Robert Harley caused him to address his broadsheet Remembrance to the mob. While being questioned at Whitehall, Antoine de Guiscard, a French nobleman and adventurer engaged in espionage in England, inflicted a serious wound on Harley with a penknife. The Remembrance somewhat sensationally interprets Harley's narrow escape from death as England's escape from enslavement to the pope and the king of France. It is a very convincing piece of writing and would be a credit to any propagandist. Again the evidence for Defoe's authorship is purely internal, but whoever wrote the Letter and the Declaration probably also wrote the Remembrance, since it appears to be a sequel to those earlier papers. Captain Tom again charges that the 'free-born Mob of Great-Britain' have 'forsworn their Principles, turn'd Tail, and become arrant Enemies to the Revolution, and to the Memory of the Glorious Prince who was the Instrument of it'—that is, Defoe's favorite monarch, King William. Unless the people wake up, Tom warns, they will become 'Swabbers under French Boatswains' or have their 'Brains knock'd out in the French King's Quarrel.' Instead of 'substantial Beef and Pudding' they will eat 'brown husky Bread, and Herbs, and Rot-gut Soop.' Taxes will increase, churches will be filled with 'Popish Gimeracks,' and trade will decline. This catalogue of calamities includes most of Defoe's favorite bugbears. Defoe did not discuss the Guiscard incident in the Review; he was in Edinburgh at the time and was devoting his paper almost entirely to the subject of trade. But his pamphlet entitled Eleven Opinions about Mr. Harley (1711) makes as much political capital out of the incident as the Remembrance does, and like the Remembrance it depicts Harley as England's principal defense against poverty and Jacobitism. And in 1713 Defoe wrote a pamphlet asking

"Swift and Defoe (Berkeley, Calif., 1941)."
the fearsome question *And What If the Pretender Should Come?* Its list of dire consequences resembles that in the *Remembrance*: loss of liberty, wooden shoes for the people, exhaustion of British blood and treasure to support French aggression in Europe, popery, repudiation of the public debt, and so on.

The best argument, however, that can be made for Defoe's authorship of the *Remembrance* is the presence of the theme that runs through all the Captain Tom papers except the *Dialogue*: the notion that the mob, while often ignorant and misled, is traditionally the safeguard of English freedom. The public humiliation of Defoe in 1703 has been called 'the most significant event in his life.' 26 There in the pillory Defoe gained a respect for the common people that influenced all his later writings and may have motivated the Captain Tom papers.

C. F. MAIN

List of Contributors

HOWARD MUMFORD JONES, Professor of English, Harvard University
ERNST H. WILKINS, President, Emeritus, Oberlin College
ELEANOR WITHINGTON, Instructor in English, Queens College
GEORGE STEWART STOKES, Assistant Professor of English, Temple University.
C. F. MAIN, Assistant Professor of English, Rutgers University
MADISON C. BATES, Professor of English, Emeritus, Rutgers University
WILLIAM POWELL JONES, Oviant Professor of English, Western Reserve University
CARL F. STRAUCH, Professor of English, Lehigh University