

# Daniel Defoe, William Hone, and *The Right Divine of Kings to Govern Wrong!* A New Electronic Edition

KYLE GRIMES

IN 1821, WILLIAM HONE was one of the most widely known and widely read writers in England. In 1817, his successful self-defense against the Attorney General's *ex officio* charges of blasphemy and sedition had made Hone famous as a champion of the free press as well as a popular parodist and political satirist. Then from late 1819 into 1821, Hone published his extremely influential series of Cruikshank-illustrated pamphlets —*The Political House that Jack Built*, *The Man in the Moon*, *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder*, and others—which sold, by Richard Altick's count, as many as 250,000 copies (382).<sup>1</sup> On the heels of this popular success and personal notoriety, however, Hone published a short and now rarely read book entitled *The Right Divine of Kings to Govern Wrong!*<sup>2</sup> This is a decidedly topical, political work, but unlike the popular squibs and satires (and despite the title that Hone borrowed from Pope's *Dunciad*), this text is an updated, reorganized, and sometimes completely rewritten version of a received model: Daniel Defoe's *Jure Divino* of 1706.<sup>3</sup> *The Right Divine* is an unusual publication for Hone, one that is well worth examining not only for what it reveals specifically about Hone's politics and his publishing practice, but also because it exemplifies Defoe's place in a genealogical strand of radical politics and publicity that has gone largely unnoticed in discussions of the writing of post-Waterloo England. The aims of this short article are (1) to introduce a newly edited electronic edition of *The Right Divine* to readers of *Digital Defoe*, (2) to provide some contextual and historical backgrounds that will clarify the significance of these long-neglected publications, and (3) to suggest that Defoe had a kind of “underground”—or at least unacknowledged—influence on the radical writers and publishers of the

Romantic period.

During the period in question (roughly between the publication of George Chalmers's *Life of Daniel De Foe* in 1785 and Walter Wilson's more comprehensive and, for a time, definitive *Memoir of the Life and Times of Daniel De Foe* in 1830,<sup>4</sup> dates that neatly bookend the Romantic period itself), Defoe's reputation rested chiefly on his novels—he was preeminently the author of *Robinson Crusoe* and of a handful of such “secondary novels” (Hazlitt's term) as *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, *Captain Singleton*, and *Colonel Jack*. It was with this view of Defoe that Walter Scott published his 12-volume edition of *The Novels of Daniel De Foe* in 1810, the first large scale collection of Defoe's works to establish his canonical status within English literature and simultaneously to cement his reputation specifically as a novelist. While, during the Romantic period, *The Journal of the Plague Year* and occasionally *The True-Born Englishman* were sometimes identified as important works in Defoe's portfolio, prominent discussions of, or even references to, Defoe's journalism, to his political pamphlets, or to his poetry were scarce in the mainstream press. *Jure Divino* is almost completely ignored, despite the fact that Defoe expended more time and effort on this monumental verse satire than on any of his works, novels included.

Given the relative neglect of Defoe's poem among the Romantics, it is perhaps somewhat surprising to find an 1819 letter to Hone from the activist dissenter and Bungay printer John Childs claiming that

The plan [of Hone's *Bank Note* parody] is worth the copy right of fifty folio volumes and will I trust raise such a cry against the Bugbear, that some real good may arise from it—future ages will say of it as Daniel Defoe said of legitimacy—  
'Posterity when Histories relate this passive sham, will ask what Monsters that——'  
You have seen his Jure Divino? 'tis a famous old book—<sup>5</sup>

The quotation in Childs's letter is from Book 4 of *Jure Divino*. In the original, Defoe ridicules the theory of divine right, arguing that the notion—untenable both practically and philosophically—is little more than a hypocritical attempt to enforce the “Sham” of passive obedience: “Posterity when Histories relate / This Passive Sham, will ask, *What Monster's that?*” What is most important in the immediate context however is Childs's claim that *Jure Divino* is “a famous old book.” Certainly there is good reason on aesthetic grounds to slight the poem—even the typically sympathetic P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens, for example, refer to the poem's “lumbering and grotesque” verse (135). It is also true that there is scant evidence in print to suggest that Defoe's poem was much remembered in late-Regency England, let alone “famous.” And yet there is a sense in which the poem *is* famous—*Jure Divino* exhibits a Defoeite mode of political criticism and writing practice that, as

Hone's (re)publication attests, could be rhetorically useful even when far removed from its immediate topical reference in the first decade of the eighteenth century.

Because the works in question are likely unfamiliar even to some Defoe scholars and Romanticists, it will be helpful to describe the poems. *Jure Divino* is a long poetic "Satyr" consisting of several significant elements. First, the work has a double dedication: to the "Most Serene, Most Invincible, and Most Illustrious Lady REASON: First Monarch of the World," and then to Queen Anne, whom Defoe must identify (rather awkwardly and perhaps ironically) as "a just Exception to the General Rules here laid down." Next, the work presents a long and rather rambling "Preface" that, in Defoe's characteristically emphatic prose, ranges over a considerable number of the historical moment's social, political, and ecclesiastical issues and that presents the key thesis in two different aspects. First, Defoe contends that the notion of divine right as used in contemporary political discussion is really little more than a specious attempt to justify tyrannical behavior on the part of the regent or those who are acting in the name of the regent. Defoe argues that a monarch, like any other citizen of the regime, is subject to legal and moral constraints, and that therefore, "Kings are not Kings *Jure Divino* .... [W]hen they break the Laws, trample on Property, affront Religion, invade the Liberties of Nations, and the like, they may be opposed and resisted by Force" (v). Second, in an ecclesiastical context, Defoe sees that a proliferation of dissenting sects—Presbyterians, Catholics, Quakers, etc.—has bred an uneasiness within the Church of England about its own preeminence and has prompted some High Church advocates to embrace a doctrine of divine right, despite the manifest impossibility of the principle. Writing of this anxiety about the growing array of dissenting religious orders, Defoe asserts,

For this, the Doctrine of *Jure Divino* is Calculated, Civil and Ecclesiastick Tyranny universally pleaded for, and all sorts of Liberty run down and oppos'd: Let those that plead for Tyrannts of any sort, submit to their Power; for my part, I esteem the liberty of Estate and Religion equally with our Lives, every Man's Birth-right by Nature; no Government ever received a Legal Authority to abridge or take it away: Nor has God ever vested any single or confederated Power in any Hand to destroy it; and 'tis in Defence of this Common Right that I have wrote this Book. (xxxviii)

Thus Defoe's Preface emphasizes the nefarious function of divine right, *jure divino*, in both political and ecclesiastical institutions.

Finally, Defoe presents the poem itself—a set of twelve books in rough heroic couplets that range over several interrelated topics in order to trace the implications of *jure divino*. The overall argument is too varied and diverse to summarize here,<sup>6</sup> but among its several claims Defoe contends that unexamined fealty ("passive obedience") is a form of sin that causes people to neglect the liberty and reason bestowed upon

them by their creator, that prerogatives of governments are (or should be) subject to the rights of property, that the hereditary transmission of power is inherently flawed (“how can that Descent be call’d Divine / Where *Whores* and *Bastards* interrupt the Line?” [bk. 9]), and so forth. These points are illustrated with numerous descriptions from biblical, historical, and literary sources. The effect of the whole is that of a complex encyclopedia of political philosophy and political / ecclesiastical history that nonetheless forwards a clear and decisive thesis about the poisonous absurdity of appeals to divine right.

In pointed contrast to Defoe’s more popular novels, *Jure Divino* was long since out of print by the early nineteenth century, but Hone would quite likely have encountered the work in any number of contexts. By 1810 Hone had established a name for himself as an expert antiquarian bookseller and auctioneer; from early 1818 he was an avid reader in the British Library, with access to that collection made possible by a letter of introduction from William Godwin;<sup>7</sup> and perhaps most important, Hone was closely acquainted with others who were great admirers and collectors of Defoe’s work. This circle included John Childs (mentioned above), William Hazlitt (whose *Political Essays* Hone published in 1819 and whose son would become a major Defoe editor in the mid-nineteenth century), Charles Lamb (who had written “On the Character of De Foe” as the Prologue to Godwin’s 1807 drama *Faulkener* that was itself based on Defoe’s *Roxana*), and the antiquarian and soon-to-be Defoe biographer Walter Wilson. This last association is especially telling. Hone and Wilson had been acquainted at least since 1813, and by mid 1818 Hone was serving as Wilson’s London agent for the acquisition of materials by and about Defoe.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it seems likely that, even while Hone was producing his popular and influential set of illustrated squibs during the Peterloo controversy and the Queen Caroline affair, he was already deeply steeped in the work of Defoe—the novels, of course, but also the political journalism, the poetry (including *Jure Divino*), and that Defoe trademark, the energetic use of a free and critical press to effect changes in public policy. Hone claims as much in his reply to Childs’s passing query of February 1819 about whether he was familiar with “that famous old book” *Jure Divino*. Hone’s decisive response: “Old De Foe is a man after my own heart, respecting whom and his works I know more, perhaps, than any other living admirer of him—his ‘*Jure Divino*’ is indeed a famous old book, and yet I fear would not (I wish it would) bear reprinting.”<sup>9</sup> In this context, and given his circle of friends and companions, it is perhaps not so peculiar that Hone would identify Defoe’s otherwise neglected poem as an important precursor to his own presswork.

Clearly Hone’s view on whether to republish Defoe’s poem would change by 1821 when he revised, retitled, and reprinted the satire. The immediate motivations for Hone’s *Right Divine* were the recent actions and statements of William Howley,

the Bishop of London, who, in the wake of the Prince Regent's coronation as George IV, had claimed it impossible for a king to do wrong either morally or physically and who accordingly lent his enthusiastic support to the "Bill of Pains" against Queen Caroline. Hone, of course, had famously ridiculed the Prince Regent—now George IV—as the "Dandy of Sixty" and had written several of his popular tracts in support of the controversial Queen.<sup>10</sup> But now, in Bishop Howley's statements about Queen Caroline, Hone saw the reemergence in England of a theory of divine right; furthermore, this movement of English conservatism seemed related, in Hone's view, to the recently established "Holy Alliance" of Austria, Prussia, and Russia with support as well from Louis XVIII in France and even the Prince Regent in England. To a religiously skeptical and politically radical writer like Hone, the situation in England in 1821 called for an intervention. Defoe's poem provided the perfect vehicle.

After the title page, with its striking Cruikshank image of a ferocious-looking king being anointed with "oil of steel" and "discord" by two clergymen, Hone's *Right Divine* begins like Defoe's poem with a dedication, this time to "The Visible and Invisible members of the Holy Alliance."<sup>11</sup> The brief dedication is a good example of Hone's comic *double-entendre*: the author claims that it is the responsibility of any "honest man," when he sees a gang of "desperate ruffians disguise themselves, and take the road armed," to "raise a *hue and cry*." Then: "With that view, I dedicate to you this little book"; whether the members of the Holy Alliance are the "desperate ruffians" or the authorities who need to be notified is not immediately clear—the statement is deliberately readable either way. Similarly, the dedication closes with a short prayer: "I pray God to take your ROYALTY into his immediate keeping." The statement is paraphraseable as either "May God bless you" or (more likely) "I pray you'll die soon." Such word play is characteristic of Hone's writing, and, if there is any doubt about exactly how we are "supposed" to read these ambivalent statements, Hone signs himself, in all capitals at the bottom of the page, "THE AUTHOR OF THE POLITICAL HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT." The parodic, irreverent discourse of the *The Political House* was still very much in public circulation in 1821, and Hone's signature is thus as much the mark of a distinctly comic, anti-government satirical genre as it is the attribution to a particular writer.

In his Preface, Hone drops the comic mask and argues instead with an indignant energy reminiscent of Defoe himself. Initially, the argument takes a specifically religious line as Hone condemns what he sees as Bishop Howley's self-serving hypocrisy. Having dispensed with Howley, Hone sets forth his own claim:

The Doctrine of *Divine Right*, or '*the King can do no wrong*,' is the evil genius of Liberty, the vital spark of Legitimate right, the very soul of Despotism. It demands

the prostitution of moral principle, sophisticates scripture, and converts the peace and good will of Christianity into envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness. (par. 6–7)

Hone develops this argument on decidedly legalistic, rational terms. Quoting Blackstone's statement about the limitations of royal power, Hone eventually places ultimate authority on law itself (in contrast, by the way, to Defoe's emphasis on property rights): "The law is Sovereign, or paramount authority; hence, a king of England is a subject; and in this respect, he and all the people are upon a level before the law—they are all his fellow-subjects; though, as chief magistrate, he is the *first* subject of the law" (par. 8). Finally, Hone offers a critical homage to Defoe. In explaining the purposes of his revision and republication of *Jure Divino*, Hone argues that Defoe was "the ablest politician of his day, an energetic writer, and, better than all, an honest man; but not much of a poet" (par. 10). Hone then explains his editorial / compositional process in producing the *Right Divine* as an effort to "separate the gold from the dross" (par. 10), always with an admiring eye on the "energetic thoughts, forcible touches, and happy illustrations" of Defoe's original.

Hone's Preface is followed by his redaction of Defoe's poem. In Hone's version, the work consists of just three books (instead of Defoe's 12) and a total of just under 900 lines. Because *The Right Divine* is very much a topical Romantic-era satire rather than a philosophical "verse essay" with generic epic machinery, much of *Jure Divino* was cut in the production, and many lines were altered or added. While a survey of the whole of Hone's revisions is beyond the scope of the present essay, a sense of the purposes and methods of those revisions is evident in a brief parallel reading of a selection from the opening book. A study of these parallel excerpts reveals several significant elements within Hone's revision. In the opening lines (*JD* 1–18, *RD* 1–16), the *Right Divine* adheres quite closely to the language of the original, altering only a few words or phrases and omitting a single couplet which, as Defoe's own note (c.) points out, is chiefly autobiographical. After this opening, Defoe offers an extended invocation to the muse "Satyr" and then presents a series of historical examples in answer to the generically formal request to the muse to explain "*What Thing's a Tyrant*" (*JD* 41). For the most part, Hone simply omits this generic and historical background, though with a couple of telling exceptions.

First, Hone alters Defoe's couplet ("He that can levy War with all Mankind, / Can cut his Father's Throat, and fell his Friend" [*JD* 60–61]) to "He that can levy War with all Mankind, / Retard the day-spring of the human mind" (*RD* 17–18). The result is to insert Defoe's early eighteenth-century poem into the spirit of the Romantic period, a period marked by a self-conscious sense of the revolutionary transformation of human life and culture. One thinks, for instance, of Wordsworth's famous "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive" (*Prelude* [1805], bk. xi, l. 108) or of

Keats's "Great spirits now on earth are sojourning" as relevant Romantic contexts for Hone's occasional emphasis on the emerging "day-spring of the human mind." While Defoe's poem tends to look backward, scouring the historical record for exemplary precursors through which he can mount his critique of contemporary politics, Hone's poem occasionally looks forward, suggesting a forthcoming social and political ideal whose emergence is being hampered by the present political order.

Second, from Defoe's long and heavily footnoted list of historical figures Hone includes just one: Peter of Castile (*JD* 68–69, *RD* 21–22). At first glance, it would appear that Hone simply copies Defoe's couplet into his poem, slightly rearranging the lines in the process. But the crucial difference here lies in the footnotes. Defoe's note (n.) supplies a simple gloss on the text, explaining the historical basis for his linkage of prayer and murder in his portrayal of Peter. Hone's note, by contrast, focuses on Peter's marital infidelity: Peter, writes Hone, "married the daughter of a Duke of Bourbon, whom he divorced, in order to renew his connexion with a former mistress. His excesses occasioned the people to dethrone him. He affected piety, and to govern by divine right!" (*RD*, n1). When Hone published his *Right Divine* in 1821, the public political discourse had been dominated for several months by the scandalous efforts of the recently anointed George IV to justify his own libertine habits by denying the legitimacy of his long-estranged wife Caroline of Brunswick.<sup>12</sup> It would seem that Hone's rewritten footnote offers an oblique commentary on the present "tyrant," and in so doing, Hone brings Defoe's historical survey into the service of a very contemporary, early nineteenth-century political critique. In effect, in Hone's revision "Peter the Cruel" becomes the figure of the new English king.

The revisions to these opening verse paragraphs of Defoe's poem exemplify in microcosm the key purpose behind Hone's poem: a consistent effort—through revisions of individual lines, through strategic selection and omission, and through extensive and often ingenious use of footnotes—to bring the literary and political energy of *Jure Divino* into a more modern and immediately relevant context. Certainly the energy of Defoe's writing is very much evident in Hone's redaction, and this is perhaps the most significant point of all. Appearing in the post-Waterloo years during the extraordinary social, economic, and political stresses that culminated in the passage of the Great Reform Bill of 1832, the *Right Divine* demonstrates the continuing influence of Defoe as a poet and political journalist among the radicals and dissenters of the day. While the general readers of the early nineteenth century knew Defoe almost exclusively as the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, it was Defoe's great example that provided a model for writers—like Hone and Childs, by the way—who endured prison terms for publishing what they saw as the abuses of institutional power, for writers who mastered not only the language but the technologies of the printing office so that they might more effectively disseminate their work, and for

writers who advocated for the rights of individuals over the passive obedience to the traditions and customs of ideologically partial institutions.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/hone/contents.htm> and <http://honearchive.org/etexts/ManMoon/ManMoon-intro.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> See <http://honearchive.org/etexts/right-divine/right-divine-home.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> *Jure Divino* is available in *Google Books* at <http://books.google.com/books?id=pE0JAAAAQAAJ> and in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO).
- <sup>4</sup> Chalmers's book was the first biography of Defoe to be produced according to recognizably systematic research. Virtually all the biographical accounts of Defoe over the subsequent four decades—including the 1809 Ballantyne / Walter Scott *Biographical Memoir*—rely on Chalmers. Chalmers's *Life* was not supplanted until the 1830 publication of Wilson's painstaking three-volume *Memoir*, and Wilson himself acknowledges his debt to Chalmers in his introductory paragraphs: "Some important facts connected with [Defoe's] history would probably have been lost, had it not been for the timely discoveries of Mr. Chalmers; the admirers of De Foe are therefore under considerable obligations to that gentleman, for the zeal and perseverance which enabled him to produce such successful results" (vii). For a detailed consideration of the development of Defoe's reputation, with brief chapters on Chalmers and Wilson, see P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe*. It should also be noted that we are here dealing with a period prior to the 1864 discovery and publication of the letters revealing that Defoe had been, in effect, a government spy in the employ of Robert Harley.
- <sup>5</sup> Letter from John Childs to William Hone, February 1, 1819, British Library, Add. MS 40120, ff. 116–17. Childs became acquainted with Hone after the latter's famous trials in late 1817. The two maintained a life-long friendship and correspondence which, though still unpublished, is remarkable for its wit, humor, and insights into the aims and methods of the radical and dissenting publishers of the day.
- <sup>6</sup> Among the most useful modern accounts of *Jure Divino* are Paula Backscheider's "The Verse Essay, John Locke, and Defoe's *Jure Divino*" and John Richetti's *The Life of Daniel Defoe*, esp. pp. 103–10. See also Michael Austin, "Saul and the Social Contract: Constructions of 1 Samuel 8–11 in Cowley's *Davideis* and Defoe's *Jure Divino*"; chapter 3 of Katherine Clark, *Daniel Defoe: The Whole Frame of Nature*; D. N. DeLuna, "*Jure Divino*: Defoe's 'Whole Volume in Folio, by Way of Answer to, and Confutation of Clarendon's



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*History of the Rebellion*”; and chapters 10 and 11 of Andreas K.E. Mueller, *A Critical Study of Daniel Defoe’s Verse: Recovering the Neglected Corpus of His Poetic Work*.

- <sup>7</sup> Letter from Godwin to Joseph Planter, February 1, 1818, Adelphi University, Hone Collection, Series 1C, bx. 4, fol. 2.
- <sup>8</sup> See also the letter from Wilson to Hone, July 1818, British Library Add. MS 40120, ff. 102–103
- <sup>9</sup> Letter from Hone to Childs, February 1819, reprinted in Hackwood, 212. Interestingly, the letter goes on to describe a dinner that Hone had just shared with William Hazlitt. Hone concludes his comments about his dinner and his recently concluded contract to publish Hazlitt’s *Political Essays*: “Hazlitt is a De Foeite.”
- <sup>10</sup> See, for example, the Hone / Cruikshank pamphlets *The Political House that Jack Built* (1819), *The Queen’s Matrimonial Ladder* (1820), and *Non Mi Ricordo!* (1820).
- <sup>11</sup> See <http://honearchive.org/etexts/right-divine/right-divine-front.html>.
- <sup>12</sup> For a more detailed explanation of this context, see paragraph 2 of the “Editor’s Introduction” at <http://honearchive.org/etexts/right-divine/right-divine-intro.html>.

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