

## 'Mac Flecknoe': A critical Appreciation

:- 'Mac Flecknoe' is cast in mock-heroic framework. Its setting is heroic; it partakes of the style of epics while describing trivial things in a grandiloquent language and dignified manner in order to expose the follies and foibles of Shadwell. Shadwell is the butt of ridicule and the style of this poem is that of exaggerations. Dr. Ian Jack's remark that 'surprise after surprise and wit from line to line' is noteworthy as far as 'MacFlecknoe' is concerned.

If Dryden emulated anyone, he emulated Horace to design 'MacFlecknoe'. Dryden displays all the classical power of form. Aided by a clear and well thought-out plan, the framework of his construction acquires an almost architectural equality. It has all the features of a mock-heroic fantasy. "The development is masterly from opening in which the aged monarch of Dullness is represented in the epic manner: ~~and pondering~~

~~which~~

"And pondering which of all his sons was fit  
To reign and wage immortal war with wit,"

'MacFlecknoe' is divided into four parts — the deliberation, the selection of the successor, the site-selection and the Valedictory speech. It may as well be called an epic 'fragment'. It is a multi-jewelled piece of work, rolled in one. It is a great mock-heroic poem; a lampoon and a gay-comedy as well.

Besides being a personal satire, it is also a criticism of the literary art of his adversary and contemporary writers, involving questions of partisan and literary interest. It also transcends the individual and particular in that the satire is equally applicable to all ambitious aspirants to literary fame without merit.

The satire is poetry of a half spurious kind and a low form of literature which can only be of ephemeral interest to his own generation and Dryden knew it well. Hence, to save his satire from being consigned to oblivion, he imported into it universal element. He sank the greater part of his scorn in the humour of the conception so ~~that~~ as to enable the readers enjoy the fun without



thinking of the individual whose leg is pulled. Just as Pope magnifies meanness in his 'Dunciad', so does Dryden magnify ~~magnify~~ stupidity rising stage by stage, from mockery to epic proportions. There is also an exquisite of equivalence between thought and image.

The outstanding merit of 'MacFlecknoe' lies in its underlying humour. Wit, admittedly the most dreadful weapon in the armoury of a satirist, lies here in 'MacFlecknoe' in plenty. For example:

"Shadwell alone of all my sons in he  
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.

The best to some faint meaning make pretence,

But Shadwell never deviates into sense."

Besides, the good humoured raillery, Dryden's serene contemplation of his victim; his amused detachment, his almost unconscious superiority are also its admirable ~~portures~~ aspects.

Every bit of praise <sup>rings with</sup> its contrary effects of ridicule? verification of English satire before Dryden had been harsh, rugged and uncouth and even grotesque. Dryden's couplet has force, the rapidity of moment, the colour and variety of cadence.

THE END Prakash