**John Dryden (1631-1700)**

**Mac Flecknoe  
A Satire upon the True-blue Protestant Poet T.S.**

[1](http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/745.html#1) All human things are subject to decay,

              2 And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey:

              3 This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young

              4 Was call'd to empire, and had govern'd long:

              5 In prose and verse, was own'd, without dispute

              6 Through all the realms of Non-sense, absolute.

              7 This aged prince now flourishing in peace,

              8 And blest with issue of a large increase,

              9 Worn out with business, did at length debate

            10 To settle the succession of the State:

            11 And pond'ring which of all his sons was fit

            12 To reign, and wage immortal war with wit;

            13 Cry'd, 'tis resolv'd; for nature pleads that he

            14 Should only rule, who most resembles me:

            15 Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,

            16 Mature in dullness from his tender years.

            17 Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he

            18 Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.

            19 The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,

            20 But Shadwell never deviates into sense.

            21 Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,

            22 Strike through and make a lucid interval;

            23 But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,

            24 His rising fogs prevail upon the day:

            25 Besides his goodly fabric fills the eye,

            26 And seems design'd for thoughtless majesty:

            27 Thoughtless as monarch oaks, that shade the plain,

            28 And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.

[29](http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/745.html#29) Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,

            30 Thou last great prophet of tautology:

            31 Even I, a dunce of more renown than they,

            32 Was sent before but to prepare thy way;

            33 And coarsely clad in Norwich drugget came

            34 To teach the nations in thy greater name.

            ……………………………………………………..

          114 So Shadwell swore, nor should his vow be vain,

          115 That he till death true dullness would maintain;

          116 And in his father's right, and realm's defence,

          117 Ne'er to have peace with wit, nor truce with sense.

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          139  Heavens bless my son, from Ireland let him reign

          140 To far Barbadoes on the Western main;

          141 Of his dominion may no end be known,

          142 And greater than his father's be his throne.

          143 Beyond love's kingdom let him stretch his pen;

          144 He paus'd, and all the people cry'd Amen.

          145 Then thus, continu'd he, my son advance

          146 Still in new impudence, new ignorance.

          147 Success let other teach, learn thou from me

          148 Pangs without birth, and fruitless industry.

          149 Let Virtuosos in five years be writ;

          150 Yet not one thought accuse thy toil of wit.

**Notes**

[Line 1] The first edition of *Mac Flecknoe* appeared in 1682 but the badness of the text makes it unlikely that it was authorized by Dryden. Consequently, the present text follows that of the "authorized edition" first published in *Miscellany Poems*, 1684.  
  
The sub-title, "A Satire upon the True-blue Protestant Poet T.S.", refers to Thomas Shadwell. In Dryden's text, the name of Shadwell is indicated throughout by Sh.., and although it is tempting to see a scatological reference in this abbreviation Dryden's metre gives the name the value of two syllables. The Shaftesbury plotters made much of being the "true-blue Protestant party," and armed their bullies with "Protestant flails." Dryden's satire on Thomas Shadwell (1642-1692) would appear to have been written as early as 1678, when the two dramatists were, on the surface at least, on fairly friendly terms.  
  
The particular occasion of their quarrel is unknown but it was probably brought about by personal dislike and jealousy aggravated by the political fever of the years following the Popish Plot. Shadwell was a staunch adherent of the Earl of Shaftesbury, and Dryden's dislike of his Whiggish opinions is sufficiently indicated in the title-page to this poem. Shadwell answered Dryden's attack on Shaftesbury in *The Medall* with an abusive satire entitled *The Medal of John Bayes*, published in May, 1682; *Mac Flecknoe* appeared in about October of the same year. Dryden also pilloried Shadwell in the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*.

**The idea of *Mac Flecknoe* was suggested by the death of the Irish priest and poet Richard Flecknoe (d. 1678). Dryden imagined Flecknoe, the monarch of the "Realms of Non-sense," immediately before death, appointing Shadwell as his worthy successor.**

[Line 29] Thomas Heywood (d. 1650?) and James Shirley (1596-1666) were both voluminous dramatists but hardly deserving of this disparagement.