



'THE BLENDING OF MOCK EPIC, IRONIC TOUCH AND FANTASY IN JOHN DRYDEN'S MAC FLECKNOE'

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ABSTRACT

John Dryden (1631–1700) was an English poet, literary critic, translator and playwright. He received the recognition of England's first Poet Laureate in 1668. He was one of the dominating literary writers of Restoration England which is ultimately known as 'Age of Dryden' among literary circle. Therefore Walter Scott calls him as 'Glorious John'. The prime objective of this paper is to focus on the blending of mock-epic, fantasy and irony in John Dryden's Mac Flecknoe. The researcher has elaborated the several aspects of Dryden and his skill of introducing mock epic genre. 'A mock- heroic poem employs the ceremonial components which characterize the epic genre to depict a trifling situation. It thus creates a difference between the form and content that results in a satiric and absurd effect, ridiculing the characters in the plot and their actions.'

INTRODUCTION

'A mock epic' makes the mockery of the poem and makes the reader laugh by exalting trivial and by treating in a heroic manner who deserves only scorn and contempt.'

'MacFlecknoe' or 'A satyr upon the True-Blew-Protestant Poet, T.S.' (1678) is the first mock heroic poem in English written by John Dryden. This mock epic is a poetic form which uses the epic structure on a miniature scale. It deals with a trivial subject through which the poet makes the subject ridiculous in a framework entirely inappropriate to its importance. It is a

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In imitation of Homer, Dryden includes references to Greek gods and mythology as in his reference to Arion, the mythological Greek poet who was borne across seas by dolphins. Dryden concludes his mock-heroic with a celebratory calling of the Homeric-like champion to arms where Flecknoe passes the mantle and departs. The mock epic and ironic touch follows when Mac Flecknoe is compared to Arion. Basically Arion was a celebrated ancient musician whose music attracted dolphins but MacFlecknoe attracted only 'little fishes'. The name Shadwell was sounded from several localities but the localities named by Dryden were sordid and inhabited by uncultured people. MacFlecknoe is ironically called 'prince of thy harmonious band'. His music excited the jealousy of the famous musician, John Singleton, who renounced the triumph he had won. All arguments led Flecknoe to the belief that his son Mac Flecknoe was the fittest person for anointed dullness, i.e. king of dullness. The phrase anointed dullness contributes to the ironic, mock-heroic effect.

The poet uses ironic style and technique and describes a place which has chosen as the site of Mac Flecknoe's coronation. This was a place where ageing prostitutes lived. The great news of Shadwell's coronation was spread all over the city by 'empress fame'. The news caused a lot of excitement among the nations to witness the coronation. Here the ironic politeness is expressed through high flown phrases such as 'empress fame', 'the renown of Shadwell's coronation', 'the nation's meet' etc. These phrases are used in connection with a dull headed and foolish man and they make him look even more stupid. The ceremony of the coronation is described in inflated language. Flecknoe is rightly called as 'the hoary prince' who appeared 'in majesty, high on a throne.' The mockery is reflected in the lines:

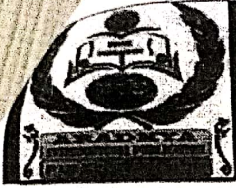
'His brows thick fogs instead of glories grace,

And lambent dullness played around his face.

The example of another epic touch can be described in the form of Hannibal's early life. Hannibal had early in life been made to swear that he would wage perpetual war against Rome. Shadwell swore that he would maintain genuine dullness in his kingdom throughout his life and would never establish any link with wisdom. Dryden tells in a mock epic style that Shadwell held a large mug of strong beer (which makes a man muddle headed) in one hand and a worthless book (Love's Kingdom) written by Flecknoe. Actually, he has to held globe and sceptre in his hands which are the symbols of king's sovereignty. Again twelve aged owls appeared over Shadwell to promise an empire of dullness for Shadwell to rule over. MacFlecknoe's coronation speech is couched in language which befits in epic which conveys mockery when applied to Shadwell:

'Heavens bless my son! From Ireland let him reign

To far Barbadoes on the western main'



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