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## UNIT 4 *MAC FLECKNOE*: THEME AND POETIC DICTION

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit will examine various aspects of John Dryden's poem *Mac Flecknoe*. By the end of this unit you will be able to understand the theme and analyse the diction, imagery, figures of speech, narrative etc. in this poem, and evaluate it as a classic of English poetry. You will be able to appreciate the mock-heroic design and the verse-form of the heroic couplet.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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Our intention in this unit is to show how far whatever Dryden wrote was almost automatically suggested by events in his contemporary life. We will study *Mac Flecknoe*, a poem which goes beyond critical sniping to a rage at human stupidity; from the aspects of the autobiographical, social, historical, literary and poetic elements which inspired the poem. We will explore the mock-heroic form and poetic techniques that have been used by the poet to convey his thoughts.

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### 4.2 THEME

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*Mac Flecknoe* was published anonymously in October, 1682. The date of its composition and its authorship remained uncertain for ten years after publication.

Thomas Shadwell, the target of satire in *Mac Flecknoe*, was born in 1642, and younger by more than ten years to John Dryden. He was a dramatist and professed imitator of Ben Jonson. His witty talk and amusing writing made him popular.

But the real or historical Shadwell is less important, at least in this context, than Dryden's Shadwell. It is more relevant to know Dryden's relations with him. Dryden had been friendly with Shadwell during the first decade of their acquaintance as dramatists from 1668 to 1679. He had praised Shadwell's genius

in an *Epilogue to The Volunteers*, a play by Shadwell, written a Prologue to another play by him, *A True Widow*. They had worked together in preparing the critical comments on Settle's *Empress of Morocco*. But, during this same period, Dryden had also been engaged in a literary debate with Shadwell on rhyme, wit, humour and other issues. In Dryden's view, Shadwell had no understanding of true wit or the merit of Ben Jonson whom he professed to imitate.

Professional rivalry between Dryden and the younger Shadwell is also easy to imagine. Dryden's appointment as Poet Laureate in 1668 may have made Shadwell envious. Ironically, Shadwell succeeded Dryden as the Poet Laureate in 1685.

The Exclusion Bill of 1679 brought about a change in social life. The revelry and entertainment of the Restoration court and society which had lasted for about two decades ceased. The political turmoil that ensued with the Bill divided society and separated friends and turned them into enemies as in the case of Dryden and Shadwell. *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) was published a week before Shaftesbury (*Achitophel*) was released. The Whigs felt triumphant, and struck a medal in his honour. Dryden made a second attack in *The Medal* which he subtitled 'A Satire against Sedition'. One of the immediate replies was *The Medal of John Bayes*. This was attributed to Shadwell. *Mac Flecknoe*, Dryden's reply, is far greater poetry. John Bayes is associated with Dryden as it is the name of the satirical character in the *Rehearsal* (1671). Shadwell is believed to have contributed to this as well. Shadwell had also criticised rhyme in Dryden's plays and the Tories including Dryden (their champion) and often sneered at Dryden, a senior and superior poet. But the Shadwell of *Mac Flecknoe* is fictional or mythical. Its derivation from real experience is like all other derivations of fiction from fact.

The analogy in *Mac Flecknoe* has Biblical undertones that deal with divine selection which add an unexpected dimension to the incongruous setting and characters. The two rulers, father and son, are at various times compared to Augustus, to Arion, to Romulus, to Ascanius, to Hannibal, to Elijah, to John the Baptist, and by implication to Christ Himself. This ridiculous magnification is offset by a contrasting system of analogies in which the king and his son are compared to little, insignificant people - to earlier minor poets and playwrights such as Thomas Heywood, James Shirley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ogilby; to Simkin, a foolish character, and to an oxymoronic Maximin.

*Mac Flecknoe* can be regarded as a highly entertaining though abusive attack on Shadwell, light in weight, concentrated in its venom, devastating in its capacity to hit by means of its satirical thrusts charged with a vision after the epic manner. Dryden, in *Mac Flecknoe*, emerges in a relaxed, uninhibited mood attacking Shadwell in a burlesque lampoon which is purely, even at times surrealistically, comic. *Mac Flecknoe* can be rightly considered as a striking example of the mock-heroic in English Literature. A burlesque is a literary, dramatic or musical work intended to cause laughter by caricaturing the manner or spirit of serious works, or by ludicrous treatment of their subjects while lampoon is the term used for a short satirical work or to a passage in a longer work, describing the appearance and character of a particular person in a ridiculous way.

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### 4.3 THE TITLE

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The full title of *Mac Flecknoe* is *Mac Flecknoe or a satire upon the True-Blue Protestant Poet T.S.*: 'Mac' is a Gaelic word meaning 'son': '*Mac Flecknoe*'

means 'Son of Flecknoe'. Flecknoe is the historical Richard Flecknoe, believed to have died in the same year (1678) as *Mac Flecknoe* was composed. Flecknoe was an Irish Roman Catholic Priest who had been satirised by Andrew Marvell in a poem entitled 'Flecknoe, an English Priest at Rome', Dryden found the connection between a bad poet and Flecknoe natural. The name had become a literary or fictional synonym for a poetaster and dullard. And so Dryden chose it. The analogy of Augustus, the Roman emperor, for Flecknoe is a stroke of the mock-heroic genius. The elevation of a bad poet to the status of a monarch 'called to Empire' young, and governing long, seems more serious than comic in the opening pair of couplets. The implicit analogy of the kingdom of letters to the kingdom of Augustus is the standard against which this monarch 'Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute' is to be judged. The anti-climax in the second line of the third couplet is the first of the surprises which make the poem 'exquisitely satirical'.

To return to the rest of the title, 'True-Blue' means an extreme Whig, and its collocation with 'Protestant' is remarkable. Religion was mixed with politics in Dryden's England. The Reformation had divided Christianity and loosened the grip of the churchmen over politics and statecraft. Dryden stood peculiarly for the State, 'betwixt the Prince and Parliament'.

T.S. is Thomas Shadwell, the primary target, the 'hero' of the poem. 'He never was a poet of God's making'. At his nativity, the midwife had prophetically blessed him, 'Be thou dull'. She saw that "Treason botched in rhyme will be thy bane", and "Rhyme is the rock on which thou art to wreck,/'Tis fatal to thy fame and to thy neck."

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#### 4.4 FORM

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*Mac Flecknoe* is constructed in a mock-heroic epical framework with all the solemnity and grandeur in the Homeric style. Its scheme is highly ingenious. It can be interpreted as perhaps the best expression of the various forces which served to diffuse the satiric spirit in the age of Dryden. In his ready-made frame, Dryden displays all the classical power of form which has all the features of a mock-heroic fantasy. The development is masterly from the very opening in which the aged monarch of Dullness, Flecknoe, is represented in the epic manner down to the closing speech in which he bids his heir – the supreme dullard (Shadwell) to trust nature and not labour to be dull (meaning that he is naturally dull and does not need to make any effort to be so).

The mock-heroic epic framework of the poem means, among other things that, unlike Pope, Dryden could give his satire a narrative form. If he could not write an epic, it was partly because the mock-epic expressed the spirit of his age better. Moreover, Augustan satire prepared the ground for the rise of modern realism and the novel.

The poem is written in rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter, also known as heroic couplets. They rhyme in pairs: aa bb and so on. This description was used in the latter seventeenth century, because of the frequent use of such couplets in heroic poems and plays. Clarity, precision, balance and antithesis are characteristic of the diction and rhythm of the verse. This verse form was introduced into English poetry by Geoffrey Chaucer and since then it has been used widely. From the age

of Dryden through that of Dr. Johnson, the heroic couplet became the predominant English measure for all the poetic varieties. Each line is comprised of five iambs - one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Penta means five. Let us understand how it works by taking just two lines from the poem:

**And pond'ring which of all his sons was fit**  
**To reign, and wage immortal war with wit**

The sections in bold are said with greater emphasis or stress as it is called. You can see that each line has five such stressed sections and you can also see that the last word of the first line sounds similar to the last word of the second line. This is called rhyme. The entire poem is made up of rhymed couplets (a pair of lines that rhyme), which combined with iambic pentameter, gives us the classic heroic couplet. This is typical of epic poetry. But we know that *Mac Flecknoe* is not an epic but a satire which employs the meter, rhyme, and elevated language of the epic to make an ironic point - it is a mock-epic, or mock-heroic.

The story of the succession of the state by the retiring king has political overtones. Where *Absalom and Achitophel* dealt with the real topic of political succession, *Mac Flecknoe* presents the imaginary coronation in the pseudo-literary sphere. The selection of the successor, the 'happy' auguries, the prophecy of the future of the prince, the farcical and fleeting coronation, are all ingredients of a heroic plot. Satirical fantasy transforms a non-event into a seemingly real event.

Shadwell is found the fittest of the sons 'to reign, and wage immortal war with wit'. Notice how 'reign' and 'wage immortal war' are playfully misapplied to create a mock-heroic effect. A hero reigns, wages and wins immortal wars. A mock-hero wages 'war with wit', and the poem of his creator makes him 'immortal' as actually a villain.

Dryden's scorn is dramatically masked as Flecknoe's praise for Shadwell. The first speech of Flecknoe is a storm of twenty two couplets culminating crushingly in a triplet. Then the satirist-narrator takes over. The art is at once narrative, dramatic and descriptive. The poetry of statement is amply suggestive or densely poetic.

The Barbican and the Nursery, obscure spots in a corner of London are the setting for the mock ceremony. The nations meet here. But 'the scattered limbs of mangled poets', instead of Persian couplets, lie in the 'imperial' way. Here the elderly prince 'in Majesty appeared High on a throne of his own labours rear'd.' The King, the Prince, the throne, the nations, are all there, the 'sacred' unction is travestied in 'a mighty Mug of potent ale'. The augury of the owls, the acclamations of the 'admiring throng', the prophetic speech of the sire, the sacrosanct mock-heroic manner of the abrupt end and the farce of the mantle' falling 'to the young Prophet's part' are all stage-managed with great skill. A farce assumes the air of a ceremony through the art of the poet.

Allusion means a brief reference, explicit or indirect to a person, place or event or to another literary work or passage. Allusions play a vital role in *Mac Flecknoe*. For the modern day reader, *Mac Flecknoe* is a very obscure poem as Dryden here uses contemporary allusions and even brings in phrases about John the Baptist.

Literary allusions, cartoon, caricature, parody, burlesque, lampoon are the poetic devices used.

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## 4.5 POETIC DICTION

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The term diction signifies the selection of words in a work of literature. The poetry of almost all ages has been written in a special language, a poetic diction, which includes words, phrases, a stylized syntax, and types of figures, not used in the ordinary conversation of the time. The poem is a performance. Its narrative design has a purpose - to create comedy and satire, to laugh at a fellow-dramatist in a mock-heroic manner in sweet verse. Let us attempt an interpretation of the diction, and then rhythm, to see how the purpose is attained. Dryden, the classicist, protested against pretension and unimaginativeness, and appealed for the use of polite idiom and educated speech.

Dryden was always careful in his choice of words. In this poem, since the primary aim was to create a mock-heroic effect, the choice of words was made with this in mind.

The most important words are taken from the register (style of language, grammar, and words used for particular situations) of royalty, to turn the unheroic or contemptible into mock-heroic. The poem is full of them. Some are mentioned here:

**Nouns and noun-phrases denoting royalty:** Monarchs; Augustus; empire; subject; realms; prince; State; majesty; King John of Portugal; Commander; Prince of thy harmonious band; Throne; Empress; coronation; the Nations; Sceptre; Captain of the Guard; Ascanius; Hannibal; Romulus; Dominion; Kingdom; mantle; triumph; rule of sway; province

**Verbs:** summons; governed; to reign; to wage war; rule; reign

**Adjectives:** absolute; royal; imperial

The poem is literary satire and the vocabulary of poetry and rhetoric is most prominent. The literary field is made parallel and comparable to the heroic in a comic vein. The Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of Letters are comic parallels.

**Nouns and noun phrases:** prose; verse; non-sense; wit; dullness; stupidity; meaning; sense; thoughtless majesty; tautology; paper; rhyme; actor (acting); plays; buskins; socks; vanished minds; clichés; muse; war with wit; war with words; peace with wit; truce with sense; oblivion; pen; ignorance; write; author; writer; false flowers of rhetoric; oratory; quill; learning; farce; scenes; humours; tragic; comic; satire; inoffensive satire; iambics anagram; acrostic; word

**The Superhuman and the Religious:** Fate; immortal; bless; perfect; soil; solemn; prophet; celestial; muse; prophecy; prophetic; martyr; relique; altar; the sacred action; priest (by trade); consecrate; omen; Heaven; the raging God; Amen

**Nature:** Nature; beams; fogs; oaks; fishes; Thames; shore to shore; poppies; mountain

**Light and darkness:** beams; day; night; shade

**Farming:** threshing; flail

**Roman myth:** Ascanius; Romulus; Hannibal

**Roman History:** Augustus.



**Arts:** music - the lute; song; harmonious; band; treble; bass; dance (feet keeping equal time)

**Image:** Dryden described 'imaging' as 'the very height and life of poetry'. An image, he said, "which is strongly and beautifully set before the eyes of the reader, will still be poetry, when the merry fit (of comedy or satire) is over, and last when the other is forgotten". The comic imagination of Dryden created the poetic image in *Mac Flecknoe* in this sense. The narrative is dramatic. The scene and the action are set before the mind's eye.

Father-son and king-prince: The story of coronation is all figurative.

Other figures of speech:

**Archaisms** (a thing that is very old or old-fashioned, especially a word or style of language or art):

Whilom; hight; thou; methinks; thy; sire; of yore

**Clichés** (a phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought): warbling lute; silver Thames

**Similes** (the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid using words such as 'like' and 'as'):

'like Augustus'; 'as oil on water'; thoughtless as monarch oaks

**Alliteration** (the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words)

Worn out with business, did at length debate

To settle the succession of the State

To reign, and wage immortal war with wit

And coarsely clad in Norwich drugget came

**Assonance** (resemblance of sound between syllables of nearby words, arising particularly from the rhyming of two or more stressed vowels, but not consonants (e.g. sonnet, porridge), but also from the use of identical consonants with different vowels (e.g. killed, cold, culled). Remember, it is not the spelling but the pronunciation which matters here:

Like mine thy gentle numbers feebly creep

Thy Tragic Muse gives smiles, thy Comic sleep" (lines 197-198)

**Anaphora** (the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses)

i) **Shadwell** alone my perfect image bears,  
Mature in dullness from his tender years.

**Shadwell** alone, of all my sons, is he  
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.

ii) **Where** queens are form'd, and future heroes bred;

**Where** unfledg'd actors learn to laugh and cry,

**Where** infant Punks their tender voices try

**Hyperbole** (exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally):

And torture one poor word ten thousand ways (line 208)

**Irony** (the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect):

From time to time in the poem, Shadwell receives the acclamation of crowds for his matchless stupidity; the realm of Nonsense is compared to the great Roman empire; Flecknoe is so proud of someone who is dull and has no sense; the dull and corpulent Shadwell is compared to Greek heroes like Arion; the setting for the coronation is in a disreputable area filled with brothels and bad theaters

**Metaphor** (a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable):

Beams of wit; rising fogs; play of light and shade; mountain belly

Comparison of: Shadwell's intelligence to night and to fog; creativity to a ray of light; Shadwell's writing to a pen; love's kingdom; false flowers of rhetoric

**Personification** (the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form):

Empress Fame; Fate summons; the treble squeaks for fear, the basses roar; numbers feebly creep

Dryden's poetry is the 'poetry of statement'. The language of Dryden does not have the illumination, the magic, of Shakespeare's language, because the vision is less spiritual and more social in focus. Dryden's attempt to combine the heroic with courtly wit was the product of a specific perspective - life in society and the state interested the poet. The heroic for Dryden was the imperial dream of England and he inspired the dream. But the attainment of this dream appeared to be far distant in the future and so his immediate focus was on culture, poetry, social institutions, and particularly the political state. Wordsworth was prejudiced against the 'unpleasant' poetic material of Dryden, but his love for England was similar.

Moreover, the line of wit turned to the concrete reality of life and experience. Since reality is both pleasant and unpleasant, the material of poetry includes the beauty as well as the horror and the ugliness of experience. For Dryden, what was imbued with beauty and eternal joy was a poem rather than a person. The transitions from Shakespeare to Keats via Milton and Dryden and Wordsworth is significant. Dryden alone was dramatic, Milton and Wordsworth were not. His serio-comic vision was sound and whole. It was not the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth. Milton did not separate religion from literature, but Dryden did, though not completely. God, to him, was that UNIVERSAL HE who is 'Unmade, unmov'd; yet making, moving All'. But he was aware that finite reason could not reach 'Infinity'. The Divine was replaced by the Imperial.

Interpretation is the translation of a text for an audience. Our interpretation of *Mac Flecknoe* leads us to aesthetic (concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty) evaluation of the text. The form of Dryden's experience was social, and the form of his poetry reflects that. His own ethical (relating to moral principles) or didactic (intended to teach) purpose is doubtful but how is it possible to separate the ethical from the aesthetic in a single piece of work? Any attempt to do so would result in a flawed conclusion since Dryden's ethical humanism was inseparable from moral, cultural and religious reflection.

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## 4.6 SATIRE AS POETRY

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Satire is the art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation, or scorn. It differs from the comic as comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself, while satire derides, i.e. it uses laughter as a weapon. It attempts to juxtapose the actual with that of the ideal. The use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues is the hallmark of satire. It was frequently used to hold up the mirror to follies and weaknesses in an attempt to reform. According to Dryden, the function of satire is moral; the true end of Satire, is the amendment of vices by correction.

The poetry of Dryden at its best is satirical, and it is generally held that satire cannot be great poetry. Moral criticism is mixed with the literary and aesthetics, and the high expectation that a poet should be a seer or saint is used as a critical value. This is a romantic and unrealistic approach.

Literary Satire, of which *Mac Flecknoe* is the first example in English, is judicial and demonstrative. The satirist protests in public, addressing an audience and trying to persuade it to accept his point of view. Dryden had acquired the art of oratory from his school teacher Richard Busby at Westminster and he regarded rhetoric (the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques as an art). Dryden claimed for the poet the liberty of poetic license, the license to use tropes and figures. 'Imaging', according to him, is 'the very height and life of poetry'. In *Mac Flecknoe*, John Dryden's contempt for his literary contemporaries is evident in every line. Why does this arouse laughter in the reader rather than anger or sympathy? The answer is that the descriptions are evoked in a satiric mode which employs wit and humor as a device of ridicule by transforming the meanings of words. To be more specific, a sudden imbalance in diction generates a sense of confusion as the reader tries to place familiar words within a different context. What was respectable becomes disreputable; what was once praised becomes condemned. As the new meanings of the words become clear, the realization of the mockery produces laughter.

The tradition of the serio-comic, serious and cheerful by turns, is predominant in English poetry. Chamber, Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Byron are the most prominent poets of this line. Besides, Comedy and Satire have a moral purpose. Pope said: Satire 'heals with Morals what it hurts with Wit'. But Comedy is different. The writer of Comedy accepts the imperfections, follies and vices of life and is alive to the eccentric, the abnormal, the imperfect, as well as to the



regular, the normal, the perfect. The comic poet tolerates, even accepts, while the satirist judges and punishes, wishing to restore balance and correct errors. The intention is to expose or deride. The satirist deliberately distorts, looking at only one aspect of the truth, not the whole truth.

The comic imagination of Dryden created, in *Mac Flecknoe*, a mock-heroic fantasy. Shadwell is almost an excuse for the poem. Maynard Mack (1951) described the Muse of Satire and regretted that the fictionality of Satire is overlooked in criticism. According to him, whereas tragedy exhibits the inadequacy of norms, satire asserts their validity and necessity. And the satirist assumes the authority of a hero who transforms the historical into the rhetorical. Above all, satirical poetry is poetry which is attempting to understand what society is doing. *Mac Flecknoe* is one of the best verse-satires in English, ‘and the first literary satire. His political satire has ‘public’ themes, but *Mac Flecknoe* is personal satire which the poet wrote to please himself.

Dr. Johnson compared Dryden and Pope as poets: ‘If the flights of Dryden are higher, Pope continues longer on the wing. If of Dryden’s fire the blaze is brighter, of Pope’s the heat is more regular and constant. Dryden often surpasses expectation, and Pope never falls below it. Dryden is read with frequent astonishment and Pope with perpetual delight’.

If satire cannot be as great as tragedy or the epic, nor can the lyric. In fact, realism rather than romance makes poetry modern, Dryden is the first modern English poet in a sense in which neither Milton nor Pope is. Remember that Pope wrote criticism in verse and called it ‘Essay’. His literary mode and manner were more traditional than Dryden’s. The modern tradition has no doubt gone far beyond Dryden, but the change that the English language underwent in his leadership was to last.

The mock-heroic technique of *Mac Flecknoe* has its source in the analogical vision of the poet. The amplification of the exploits of Shadwell, and Flecknoe, draws indifferently upon the example of past and present rulers. The individual was related to the State organically in Dryden’s vision and the coronation of Shadwell should be appreciated in this light. The kingdom of letters was analogical to the kingdom of England in Dryden’s witty imagination.

**Check Your Progress**

- a) Briefly explain the context of Dryden’s poem.  
.....
- b) Why did Dryden single out Richard Flecknoe, a relatively obscure writer at the time?  
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- c) In the last section, what is the prophesy about the successor to the throne?  
.....
- d) Say briefly what you understand by the term ‘mock heroic’.  
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e) Do you think that Dryden attacks Shadwell directly?

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f) Can this poem be considered a personal satire?

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g) What are the allusions that Dryden makes in the poem?

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## 4.7 LET US SUM UP

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We have closely examined John Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* through relevant extracts from the text and seen how the mock-heroic epical framework has been artistically used by Dryden to write the lampoon on Shadwell. *Mac Flecknoe* finally emerges as a striking example of the mock-heroic in English Literature. Competition, reputation, respect, literature, writing, cleverness – are all themes that have been spun into this poem. We know he was extremely critical of many of his contemporaries, and skeptical of the cheap, unimaginative nature of many of the day's popular poems and plays. *Mac Flecknoe*, it seems, is at least in part Dryden's clever way of critiquing not just Shadwell, but the entire English literary scene.

Narrating in the style of the third-person omniscient narrators of classical epics like *The Iliad* and *The Aeneid*, we soon realize that our speaker actually refers to himself in the first person, briefly inserting himself in the story.

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## 4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- a) This is a satire on the poet, Thomas Shadwell, a former friend with whom Dryden had been engaged in a literary dispute.
- b) Shadwell is portrayed as a complete dunce, a worthy successor to Richard Flecknoe a poet and dramatist of whose work Dryden had a very poor opinion.
- c) The prophecy was that Shadwell would write weak verse, bad plays and ineffective satires and poetry will sink to even further depths as he would torture one word in ten thousand ways.
- d) A mock-heroic poem uses formal elements which form part of an epic - heightened poetic diction, elaborate similes and metaphors, archaic words and spellings - to depict an insignificant situation or person. It creates a contrast between the form and the content which results in a satire with an absurd effect as it ridicules the characters and their actions.
- e) Dryden never directly attacks Shadwell, rather he obtains his result of mocking him by exaggerated and exalted descriptions of his ignorance and bad writing.
- f) This poem can be considered a personal satire because it highlights and attacks the shortcomings of a specific individual, namely, Thomas Shadwell.
- g) The poem is filled with topical allusions to the literary world of Restoration England.

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## 4.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Why do you think that *Mac Flecknoe* has survived, when Shadwell's own poetic critiques of Dryden have been largely forgotten?
2. Explain with examples, the mock-heroic elements in *Mac Flecknoe*.
3. How does the mock-epic style contribute to the poem's humour and success?
4. What do you understand by satire, and in what specific ways is Dryden satirizing his rival Shadwell here?
5. Write a few lines on the following:
  - a. Heroic couplet
  - b. Poetic Diction
  - c. Satire
  - d. Illusion
6. Discuss the fun and humour in the story of *Mac Flecknoe*.
7. Write a note on the poetic devices used in *Mac Flecknoe*.
8. What is Dryden's intention in writing *Mac Flecknoe*?
9. What are the ways in which Dryden utilizes irony in the poem? What is the effect of its use?
10. Show how the following are used to reinforce irony in the following passages: the comparison of Flecknoe with Augustus (3-6), the likening of Shadwell to Arion (43-50), the comparison of Shadwell to Hannibal (112-17).

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## 4.10 SUGGESTED READING

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1. Frye, B.J. (ed.) *John Dryden : Mac Flecknoe* (A Merrill Literary Casebook, 1970)
2. Hamilton, K.G. *John Dryden, and the Poetry of Statement* (1969)
3. Hart, Jeffrey. "John Dryden: The Politics of Style"  
<https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2014/02/john-dryden-the-politics-of-style.html>
4. Oden, Richard, L. 'Dryden and Shadwell, The Literary Controversy and *Mac Flecknoe* (1668–1679) by John Dryden (Author), Thomas Shadwell (Author), Richard L. Oden (Editor) Scholars Facsimiles & Reprint (November 1, 1977).
5. Swedenberg HT et al (ed.) *The Works of John Dryden, Poems 1681-84* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1972)