Mac Flecknoe as a Satirical Poem

About Author

John Dryden was an English Poet, literary critic and playwright born in 1631 in England and died in 1700. He was made English first Poet Laureate in 1663. Dryden has dominated the Restoration period in England to the point that the period came to be known as Age of Dryden. Walter Scott often called him – Glorious John.

Introduction

Mac Flecknoe is a mock heroic poem written by John Dryden sometimes between 1678 and published in 1682. It is a satirical poem of Dryden. The poem is a direct attack on Thomas Shadwell. Mac Flecknoe arouses neither anger nor sympathy but laughter in the readers. In this satirical poem Dryden has treated Thomas Shadwell with humours contempt that drips from every words of the poem.

Theme of the Poem

There is couple of themes in the poem including the theme of competition, respect, reputation and cleverness.

Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dullness from his tender years.
Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he who stands confirmed in full stupidity.
A little bit of friendly competition is neither bad nor hurtful to anyone but unfortunately, there was not a friendly competition in the poem. Also cunning and cleverness are Dryden’s bread and butter throughout the poem.

**Technique of the Poem**

The poem – Mac Flecknoe – is written in heroic, iambic couplet. It evokes classic figures. The poem consists of 217 lines of rhymed iambic pentameter. Dryden uses allusions, parodies and quotations profusely in the poem to ridicule the hero of the poem. It is designed to be a mock – heroic poem. So, the interest is always focused on this aspect.

**Summary**

The poem starts with the following line:

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All humans’ things are subject to decay;
And when fate summons, monarchs must obey.
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Mac Flecknoe is the poet king of the realm of nonsense. After many years as ruler, it comes time for him to step down. Ultimately, he chooses his son Thomas Shadwell, a poet of unparalleled dreadfulness, as his successor. Shadwell is the worst writer in all the land, and thus, the perfect man for the job.

Upon arriving in the city of London, Shadwell is crowned king of the realm of nonsense. Mac Flecknoe himself delivered a short speech on his son’s merits during the coronation. At this point, all the action steps as the poem devolves into a thinly – veiled, full force condemnation of Shadwell’s writing and character by the speaker. In the end, crowned and ready to rule in his father’s footsteps, Shadwell is poised to sink poetry to an every lower level.

**As a Satire**
A humorist said that –

Satire is a Focused Bitterness.

Mac Flecknoe is a fine short satirical poem in which Dryden has treated Thomas Shadwell with humorous contempt. It is both a personal and literary satire. Dryden’s satirical genius is fully revealed in the poem. Dryden uses heroic couplet for satirical purpose. Dryden’s purpose in writing Mac Flecknoe was to expose Shadwell as a mediocre writer who was once a friend of Dryden and to get Shadwell’s offense against him.

**Conclusion**

Mac Flecknoe is a satirical poem which becomes the corner – stone of Dryden’s success in his career. It strengthened his position as a successful poet in his lifetime. Throughout the poem, Dryden exploits the weakness of his opponent, either Flecknoe or Shadwell, in a mock and humorous manner. In Mac Flecknoe, Dryden shows consistency in applying his poetic style – heroic couplet, which was later adopted by several poets in English literary history and now on...

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