

DRYDEN ON SHADWELL'S THEATRE OF VIOLENCE

All admirers of John Dryden can sympathise with H.T. Swedenberg's dream of one day "finding bundle after bundle of Dryden's manuscripts and a journal kept throughout his career....I turn in the journal to the 1670's and eagerly scan the leaves to find out precisely when *MacFlecknoe* was written and what the ultimate occasion for it was."¹ For the truth is that although *MacFlecknoe* can be provisionally dated 1678 the "ultimate occasion" of Dryden's satire on Thomas Shadwell has never been satisfactorily explained.

We know that for about nine years Dryden and Shadwell had been arguing in prologues and prefaces with reasonably good manners, chiefly over the principles of comedy. R.J. Smith makes a case for Shadwell's being considered the foremost among Dryden's many adversaries in literary argumentation, and points out that their discourse had reached the stage where Dryden, in *An Apology for Heroic Poetry* (1677), made "an appeal for a live-and-let-live agreement."² The generally serious and calm nature of their debate makes *MacFlecknoe* seem almost a shocking intrusion—a personally—or politically-inspired attack which shattered the calm of discourse. Surely—so the reasoning of commentators goes—there must have been a *casus belli*. It used to be thought that Dryden was reacting to an attack by Shadwell in *The Medal of John Bayes*, but this theory has been discounted.³ A.S. Borgman, a Shadwell biographer, would like to be able to account for Dryden's "turning against" Shadwell and making him the butt of *MacFlecknoe*:

Had he wearied of [Shadwell's] repeated boasts of friendship with the wits? Had he become disgusted with [his] arrogant treatment of those who did not applaud the humours in *The Virtuoso* and *A True Widow*? Had he tired of

seeing Shadwell "wallow in the pit" and condemn plays? Or did some word or act bring to his mind the former controversy and the threat then made of condemning dulness?⁴

D.M. McKeithan⁵ believes that what set Dryden's teeth on edge was Shadwell's praise of *The Rehearsal* in his dedication of *The History of Timon of Athens* to the Duke of Buckingham in 1678. Dryden had been a chief target of *The Rehearsal*, and perhaps Shadwell's reference to it is not perfectly innocuous:

I am extremely sensible what honour it is to me that my Writings are approved by your Grace; who in your own have so clearly shown the excellency of Wit and Judgment in your Self, and so justly the defect of 'em in others, that they at once serve for the greatest example, and the sharpest reproof. And no man who has perfectly understood the *Rehearsal*, and some other of your Writings, if he has any Genius at all, can write ill after it.

Though we might assume that Dryden had himself issued enough epistles dedicatory to know that no man is necessarily upon oath in that mode of writing, yet it may be that he felt betrayed as well as insulted by the man with whom he had been debating in reasonable amity, and that *MacFlecknoe* resulted—the "greatest example and the sharpest reproof" he could tender to Shadwell.

However, when all the lines of speculation have been followed out, it still remains that the chief reason for believing there must have been an occasion for Dryden's attack lies in the suddenness and vigour of the attack itself. I hope to show that *MacFlecknoe* itself is a better key to its "occasion" than any of the available external evidence can be. Although it violently broke into the debate at a time when sweet reasonableness seemed to be prevailing, the poem nevertheless is not a departure from the terms of Dryden's and Shadwell's controversy, nor is it simply an occasional rejoinder to one Shadwellian insult. *MacFlecknoe* is a continuation, in a satirical idiom, of the critical controversy. The poem also may be seen as Dryden's own *Rehearsal*.

Borgman's questions about Dryden's immediate motive assume that in *MacFlecknoe* Shadwell is attacked as an individual, and this assumption is one we promulgate when we say that *MacFlecknoe* is first and foremost a satire upon Shadwell in particular and secondarily upon bad writing in general. The portrait of Shadwell as Og in *The Second Part of Absalom and Achitophel* is personal satire which mentions Shadwell's writing only as it is whiggish and treasonous. But in

MacFlecknoe the emphasis is the other way around: the poem is a satire upon bad writing or at least bad dramatic writing in general, and exemplifies bad writing by the choice of an author whose works are characterized by everything that Dryden thinks contemptible in literature. This is why I say that *MacFlecknoe* is more of a piece with Dryden's dramatic criticism than is generally realised, and consequently with the Dryden-Shadwell controversy which fuelled that criticism. Dryden has isolated and—in the poem—recreated the mode of Shadwellian drama, which as he sees it is a drama in which robustness reaches to cruelty and vulgarity extends to salaciousness. His satire of Shadwell is thus not merely lampoon, nor does it answer only to his own definition of Varronian satire—a type which he says in *The Original and Progress of Satire* “diverts rather than teaches”. Instead, *MacFlecknoe* concerns itself not only with Shadwell but also with Shadwellian drama and its practitioners to compress and expose those elements which Dryden considers harmful.

Shadwell had initiated the critical exchange between the two writers by attacking Dryden on three fronts in the preface to *The Sullen Lovers* (1668). He criticised the comedy of repartee and the heroic tragedy, in both of which Dryden had enjoyed great success by 1668. Earlier in that year, in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Dryden had written that Ben Jonson seemed frugal of his imagination and wit, and Shadwell, on the curious assumption that Jonson was being attacked by Dryden, now leapt to the defence of Jonson and humours comedy, incidentally accusing Dryden of plagiarism. It is unnecessary to recount the exchanges that followed: Shadwell's renewed attack in the preface to *The Royal Shepherdess* (1669) and Dryden's reply in the preface to *An Evening's Love* (1671), through the preface to *The Humorists* (1671), the *Defence of the Epilogue* (1672), the prologue to *Psyche* (1675) and on to the *Apology for Heroic Poetry* (1677), by which time Dryden's tone at least had become conciliatory.

In general, Dryden's position was that comedy of repartee was superior to humours comedy, and that there was justification and classical precedent for the extravagances of heroic drama, which Shadwell in the *Sullen Lovers* prologue had labelled “boisterous Fustian”. Dryden never changed his opinion about comedy, but by 1677 he seems to have tired of defending heroic plays against Shadwell,

and tired of heroic drama itself. In the *Apology for Heroic Poetry* he makes a last defence and seems to suggest that Shadwell call off the attack. Shadwell's side of the debate had not always been confined to the relatively good-mannered medium of prefatory essays, for he had tried to score off Dryden by introducing into *The Humorists* a character named Drybob. Dryden had been championing "wit" over "humours", and Drybob's humour in the play is to be thought witty: in the list of *Dramatis Personae* he is characterised as "A fantastick Coxcomb, that makes it his business to speak fine things and wit as he thinks; and always takes notice, or makes others take notice of any thing he thinks well said." In conversation Drybob repeats tags and claims they are his extempore inventions. Nor could it have been very pleasant for Dryden, who in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* had presented his own views through the character of Neander, to find early next year in Shadwell's *Royal Shepherdess* another Neander, represented in the *Dramatis Personae* as "A vain, cowardly, vicious, effeminate Lord".

However, after the conciliatory *Apology for Heroic Poetry* Dryden early in 1678 actually contributed a prologue to Shadwell's play *A True Widow*. But apparently before the play was staged *MacFlecknoe* intervened. Dryden afterwards gave the prologue unused and unchanged to Aphra Behn for her tragi-comedy *The Widow Ranter*. It is an all-purpose kind of prologue, with general rather than particular application to either Shadwell's or Aphra Behn's play. It expresses, in fact, bitterness about the stage and about society, and equivocally suggests that although the play about to be seen is an exhibition of vicious behavior society itself is so debauched that the play is tame by comparison; and so the audience is "welcome to the downfall of the stage" (1.2.).

The bitterness is understandable: Dryden's theatrical career was in a difficult transitional stage. By 1675, despite his success, he had been tiring of heroic tragedy—"[growing] weary of his long-lov'd Mistris, Rhyme", as he says in the prologue to *Aureng-Zebe*—and in 1677 he had abandoned the mode in *All for Love* where

His Heroe, whom you Wits his Bully call,
Bares of his Mettle; and scarce rants at all. (Prologue)

He always had been cheerfully ready to admit the shortcomings of heroic plays and their protagonists: in the preface to *Tyrannic Love*

[1669] he calls the hero Maximin "a deformed Piece". It is not easy to decide whether cynicism or embittered realism makes him say in the dedication of *The Spanish Friar* (1680) that when he wrote parts of this play he "knew they were bad enough to please". Finding another theatrically successful line was not easy. In 1678 he changed his allegiance from the King's Company to the Duke's, but his first play for the Duke's, a comedy *The Kind Keeper*, was banned by royal order after three days. During this period 1675-8 when Dryden was turning away from heroic plays (and conciliating Shadwell about them) Shadwell had great success with all his theatrical offerings: *Psyche* (opera, 1675), *The Libertine* (1675), and *The Virtuoso* (1676); and in January 1678 Shadwell's *History of Timon of Athens* achieved another success—all of these triumphs at the theatre where in 1678 Dryden's *Kind Keeper* was abruptly closed. In addition, Shadwell's operatic *The Tempest*, which was an overhaul of Dryden and Davenant's version of Shakespeare's play, had superseded the Dryden-Davenant play. As Aline Mackenzie Taylor has shown,⁶ Dryden's alteration was popular for only one season, 1668, while Shadwell's spectacular version was in immediate and continuing favour from its first performance on April 30, 1674. Not only this: as Miss Taylor explains, Shadwell had the audacity to retain Dryden's Preface and Prologue in the published version of the opera, so that Dryden found "his original sin against Shakespeare...pushed to its logical conclusion at the nadir of nonsense."⁷

The *Tempest* coup by Shadwell might—as Miss Taylor argues—have been grounds enough for *MacFlecknoe*. But we should not overlook Dryden's bitterness at the theatre in general, a bitterness which finds expression in the poem. Certainly Flecknoe's, and Shadwell's, audience are represented as only too eager to respond to the enthusiastic cue: "He paus'd, and all the people cry'd *Amen*" (*MacFlecknoe*, l. 144). *MacFlecknoe* is of course very much a poem about the theatre,⁸ especially in its basic premise about Shadwell's qualifications for empire:

All arguments, but most his Plays, perswade,
That for anointed dulness he was made. (ll.62-3)

Indeed in the poem's dramatic conceit the aged Flecknoe's decision to settle the succession of the state is like King Lear's; and later in the

description of Shadwell's slothful spawning (there is a bawdy play on "pen" here and at 1.43)—

But Worlds of *Misers* from his pen should flow;
Humorists and *Hypocrites* it should produce,
 Whole *Raymond* families, and Tribes of *Bruce* (11.91-3)—

there may be a distant echo of Edmund's scorn, in *Lear* (I, ii, 13-15), at those who

W thin a dull, stale, tired bed,
 Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops,
 Got 'tween sleep and wake.

The emphasis upon plays advises us that *MacFlecknoe* may be enjoyed more as more is known about the theatrical references; but the derivation of such matters as Epsom-blankets and "Whip-stitch, kiss my Arse" can safely be left to explanatory footnotes, for it is not the aptness but the justness of the poem that should concern us. Hence I am going to leave to one side the topics of Shadwell's corpulence and of scatology (in short, much of the fun of the poem) and concentrate upon the, perhaps compensatory, matters of the poem's attribution of lewdness and violence to Shadwell. References to corpulence, drunkenness and personal hygiene centre on the man, as in *Og*, whereas accusations of lewdness and violence involve the playwright, his plays, and theatrical taste and decorum—the last two being subjects which Dryden and Shadwell had been debating for years before *MacFlecknoe*.

Shadwell's theatrical output before 1678 comprised *The Sullen Lovers*, *The Royal Shepherdess*, *The Humorists*, *The Hypocrite*, *The Miser*, *Epsom-Wells*, *Psyche*, *The Libertine*, *The Tempest*, and *The Virtuoso*. *The Virtuoso* figures most prominently in *MacFlecknoe*, as one of the play's chief incidents—in a scene where the Shadwellian wits Bruce and Longvil drop Sir Formal Trifle through a trapdoor while he is making a speech—is recalled when Dryden decides to get rid of Flecknoe. Flecknoe is dropped through a trap, again by Bruce and Longvil, leaving behind his mantle, "Born upwards by a subterranean wind" (1.215)—the same breeze, incidentally, which roars through a song of which Shadwell was very proud, in Act II of the operatic *Tempest*: "Arise, arise! ye subterranean winds."

This violent removal of Flecknoe is appropriate because it typifies Shadwellian drama. The action of the comedies is at its best rather endearingly knockabout—Borgman rightly applauds the "abundant

vitality" of these plays. The names of some of Shadwell's characters reflect this robustness: they are called Huff, Striker, Kick, Cuff, Snarl. The stage-directions often describe what appears to be Shadwell's favourite kind of action, or at least the kind of action that he knew his audiences wanted: *Stanford kicks Huff; Stanford beats Huff; Stanford knocks Huff down (The Sullen Lovers, passim)*. Here are the directions in one matrimonial scene between Mr. Fribble and his wife and Mr. and Mrs. Bisket in the fourth act of *Epsom-Wells: She gives him a dash on the Chaps; Beats her; Fribble strikes her again; [Enter Mrs. Bisket... She] gives him a Douce on the Chaps; [Mr. Bisket] strikes her; She takes away the stick and beats him, he tumbles down; Bisket gets up and runs away as hard as he can drive; She beats Fribble, Fribble runs from her, and Exit*. I have omitted the verbal wallops which this extended action counterpoints. In *The Humorists* Drybob is beaten, Crazy and Drybob *run against one another in the dark* and various other physical misfortunes befall Crazy. But there is more than simple high-spirited comedy of a thud-and-blunder kind. *The Humorists*, whose plot Borgman admits to be "in some ways one of the most indecent in Restoration drama",⁷ hinges upon the amorous adventures of Crazy, a victim of the pox. Crazy, a "walking hospital", is so raddled with aches and disease that he cannot bear to be touched, and the running "joke" of the play consists in his expressions of pain and terror as he is slapped on the back, jogged, tugged and haled by bailiffs, kicked on the shins on two occasions, "laddered" (that is, "lathered" or beaten), forced to jump off a wall, bumped against in the dark by Drybob, and made to stumble and fall. His lines are full of clamant advertisements of his condition:

Errant slaps Crazy on the Shoulder

Crazy. O death! what have you done? You have murder'd me;

Oh you have struck me just upon a Callous Node;

Do you think I have a body of Iron?

(1)

To a great extent the inherent unpleasantness of all this is counter-balanced by the play's vigour; and we should also credit Shadwell with satirical intent, the essence of which, says Michael Alssid, "is to show us a world of fools moving in the dark, in pursuit of the wrong things or those that promise them only unhappiness."⁸ Crazy's career and fate may thus, like those natures in *Measure for Measure*, be to pursue,

Like rats that ravin down their proper bane,
A thirsty evil.

(I, ii, 132-4)

But there is an additional unpleasant twist in that women of the play are both said and seen to "flock about [Crazy] as Ravens do about a sick man for the reversion of Carrion."

Violence, of language and action, is a striking feature of every one of the comedies. On its own terms it can be splendidly comic: there is an especially fine vein of rhodomontade in *The Miser* where, for example, a constable and watchman are subdued after a street brawl and ordered to

Either dance to these Fiddles or we will slice
You into steaks. (IV)

Most violent of all is the vigour run mad in Shadwell's tragedy *The Libertine*, in which Shadwell applies current ideas about "Hobbesian" libertinism to the Don Juan story in the context of an illustration of what can happen to the man who lives by his senses alone. In this play there are at a rough count six rapes, five murders (with many more reported), two orgies, an attempted castration and innumerable brawls, incest, fratricide, and the setting on fire of a nunnery. All this is presented as "philosophical" by the inclusion of occasional "ethical" debates.

The violence in *the Libertine* is eventually either amusing or tiresome; the brisk knockabout of the comedies is good fun at its best and makes Shadwell something of a Tobias Smollett of the stage. We should also, when we consider Shadwell's comedies, give him credit for the integrity with which he puts his "humours" theories into action: he "believed that comedy should represent...a variety of characters clashing in the absurd 'wars' of 'humours', conflicts which exposed most thoroughly the grotesqueness and the silliness of the human spirit."⁹ But still unaccounted-for is a disquieting vein of meanness among Shadwell's characterizations, as when Caroline in *The Sullen Lovers* goes off to "have the pleasure of seeing my Sister worry'd almost to death" (II, i), or when Miranda and Clarinda tease Snarl in *The Virtuoso*.

Miranda. Prithee do thee fling away his cane, and I'll break his pipe which will almost break his heart.

After they have done these things, *While he is stooping for his pipe, one flings away his hat and periwig, the other thrusts him down* (I, ii).

Thus, in some of Shadwell's plays, robustness, comic in itself, can reach to cruelty. In *Epsom-Wells* vulgarity extends to salaciousness—as Dryden recognizes. *MacFlecknoe's* allusion (1.42) to tossing in Epsom blankets has implications of sexual activity rather than practical joking. It is a character in *The Virtuoso*, not *Epsom-Wells*, who actually gets tossed in this way. Dryden knows Shadwell's plays too thoroughly to make a circumstantial error: "The like was ne'er in *Epsom* blankets tost" captures the spirit of *Epsom-Wells* rather than its incidents. The Epsom of the play is a resort where scandal and sexual licence reign, aided by the mineral waters, which are represented as being not so much medicinal as aphrodisiac. To Epsom come the rakes Bevil and Raines to do what they frequently call "business" among the women; and here are Kick and Cuff discoursing on the virtues of the waters:

Kick. Many a London Strumpet comes to Jump and wash down her unlawful Issue, to prevent shame; but more especially charges.

Cuff. Others come here to procure Conception.

Kick. Ay, Pox, that's not from the Waters, but something else that shall be nameless.

Cuff. I have a great mind to run roaring in amongst 'em all.

Kick. Thou hadst as good fling thy self among the Lyons in the Tower when they are fasting. They'll tear thee in pieces.

(I, i)

So much of Shadwell's stage violence is between people of different sex, and there also is a frequently-expressed contempt for female appetites—most notably in *Epsom-Wells* and *The Humorists*. Sex and violence are most intermingled in a sub-plot of *The Virtuoso*, where ancient, hypocritical Snarl and his paramour Mrs. Figgup practise flagellation. Snarl "loves castigation mightily" (III, ii); unluckily (and perhaps cruelly) for him he is deprived of his pleasure by a thunderous knocking at the door.

Though many of these features may be explained by reference to the humours practice of exhibiting aberrations in action, Shadwell's audience is frankly told in the prologue to his comedy *The Woman-Captain* (1690) that the playwright

...made this Low, so to your level fit;
Plenty of noise, and scarcity of Wit.

Dryden would have agreed. An opponent of the humours theory of comedy, he saw or chose to see Shadwell's plays as violent and lewd. Having isolated these characteristics he attributes them in *MacFlecknoe* to Shadwell the man but most particularly to Shadwell the "canon".

The opening of the poem amounts to a robust practical joke—a verbal representation of what would be physical in a Shadwell play; the weighty and ponderous first five-and-a-half lines settle and explode on the sharp word *Non-sense* like ample buttocks descending on a thumbtack:

All humane things are subject to decay,
 And, when Fate summons, Monarchs must obey:
 This *Fleckno* found, who, like *Augustus*, young
 Was call'd to Empire, and had govern'd long:
 In prose and Verse, was own'd, without dispute
 Through all the Realms of *Non-sense*, absolute.

And the practical joke which ends the poem so abruptly is a kind of hilarious fratricide, for Bruce and Longvil, who send Flecknoe to the underworld, have just been shown to be Shadwell's "offspring" and Flecknoe is Shadwell's "father". In *The Libertine* Don Juan is, among many other crimes, responsible for his father's murder and himself sinks into the underworld in Act V.

The puffing-up of Flecknoe and MacFlecknoe is of course related to Shadwell's portliness and vanity and to the preparation of Dryden's satirical balloon. It also suggests monstrous and unsavoury pregnancies in "blest with issue of a large increase" (l.8), "Swell'd with the Pride of thy Celestial charge" (l.40), "big with Hymn" (l.41), and in Shadwell's production of "Whole *Raymond* families and Tribes of *Bruce*" (l.93) or "pangs without birth, and fruitless Industry" (l.148). To Dryden any conception of Shadwell's is scarcely immaculate, and thus as well as the scatological references there are numerous sexual innuendoes in the poem. These are sparked off by the word which Shadwell uses in *Epsom-Wells* to connote sexual activity—"business". Flecknoe is

This aged Prince now flourishing in Peace,
 And blest with issue of a large increase,
 Worn out with business...

(II.7-9)

The recognition of "business" as a sexual synonym casts comic doubts upon the decency of "flourishing in Peace", especially if it be recalled

that Sir Samuel Hearty in *The Virtuoso* is characterized as having a strong urge to "show his parts":

Ay, if the Ladies were but here—you should see how I would shew my parts.
(IV, i)

We must now be alert to the Nursery's *erecting* its head in the presence of infant punks and mother-strumpets to *form* and *breed* future heroes (11.72-5); and may question just what is being practised during the coronation when

Love's Kingdom to his right [hand] he did convey,
At once his Sceptre and his rule of Sway;
Whose righteous Lore the Prince had practis'd young,
And from whose Loyns recorded *Psyche* sprung.

(11.122-5)

The technique here anticipates that of Swift in "The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit", or of Hogarth, who in Plate V of the "Harlot's Progress" shows a preoccupied clergyman surreptitiously fondling a woman at the harlot's funeral and spilling wine from a tall glass balanced on his lap. In Hogarth's "The Bench" one of a quartet of judges, dozing off, clutches a suggestively-placed roll of papers.

Implications of violence are never far away from these *MacFlecknoe* innuendoes: Shadwell wields his papers in his threshing hand (1.52, pronounced "thrashing" of course); he is "Born for a scourge of Wit, and flayle of Sense" (1.89). Nor is his forcefulness misdirected: the lute "trembles" underneath his nail, and

At [his] well sharpned thumb from Shore to Shore
The Treble squeaks for fear, the Bases roar.

(11.44-6)

When it is considered that *Psyche*, the heroine of Shadwell's opera, spends most of the play either actually pinioned or declaiming about the chains of love which bind her, then the personification of London in *MacFlecknoe* may be suggestively worded:

Close to the Walls which fair *Augusta* bind
(The fair *Augusta* much to fears inclin'd).

(11.64-5)

And knowledge of Snarl's aberration in *The Virtuoso* (from which "Whipstitch, kiss my arse" also comes) lends a curious emphasis to the first and last words of the famous line (101) "Martyrs of Pies, and Reliques of the Bum."

In sum, it quickly is apparent in *MacFlecknoe* that moral rather than physical deterioration is meant in the opening line "All humane things are subject to decay"; and the decadence of Shadwell's plays (as Dryden saw them) is, more than Shadwell's personal habits, the target of the satire. Shadwell is characterised in association with, but more particularly as author of,

Scenes of Lewd loves, and of polluted joys—

which is precisely how Dryden would describe Shadwell's drama. After attributing to Shadwell perversities which bring "pangs without birth", the poem dismisses him to "torture one poor word Ten thousand ways" (1.208).

Two passages also afford a clue to Dryden's attitude toward the stage when he wrote *MacFlecknoe*. They are:

And Little *Maximins* the Gods defy (1.78);

and

Where did [Ben Jonson's] wit on learning fix a brand,
And rail at Arts he did not understand?
Where made he love in Prince *Nicander's* vein,
Or swept the dust in *Psyche's* humble strain?

(11.177-80)

Maximin is the protagonist of Dryden's heroic tragedy *Tyrannic Love*, Prince Nicander woos the heroine in *Psyche* and eventually drowns himself when he cannot have her. Shadwell had of course criticised heroic plays and scoffed at their extravagance: "They strain Love and Honour to that Ridiculous height, that it becomes Burlesque", he says in the preface to *The Sullen Lovers*, and no doubt this is the kind of attack dismissed in *MacFlecknoe* as "[railing] at Arts he did not understand." But in the preface to *Psyche* Shadwell, no doubt with tonque in cheek, says that he fears the wrath of heroic-play writers for "having dared to leave his own Province of Comedy to invade their Dominions of Rhyme," and further on in this preface his contentiousness bubbles up in the assertion that "good Comedy [requires] more wit and judgment in the Writer than any Rhyming unnatural Plays can do." Dryden read this preface closely, caught Shadwell's drift, and in *MacFlecknoe* disallows that comedy, let alone heroic drama, is Shadwell's metier: the advice for Shadwell is to

Leave writing Plays, and chuse for thy command
Some peacefull Province in Acrostick land.

(11.205-6)

But Shadwell's prefatory assault on heroic plays may have been as nothing compared with the damage done in *Psyche* itself, for Nicander could be seen as a travesty of the heroic-play protagonist—a humourous character whose humour is to be "heroic". Dryden also had read the opera attentively, for at least one of Nicander's lines is echoed in *MacFlecknoe*:

Nicander. Must we against our own affection fight,
And quite against the bias out will?

(I, i)

This is that boasted Byas of thy mind...
Which makes thy writings lean on one side still,
And in all changes that way bends thy will.

(11. 189-92)

Nicander is an imitation heroic-play protagonist (Don Juan in *The Libertine* is another): could Dryden, or Shadwell's audience, have told whether Shadwell had in mind a serious imitation or an intentional parody? Shadwell's reference to "Rhyming unnatural Plays" may suggest that parody was what he was about. And it could be that Dryden was smarting a little, especially as he coined the phrase "little Maximins". One striking travesty, intentional or not, is all it may take to make a serious genre ridiculous, the more so for its very seriousness: and it makes no difference whether Shadwell deliberately satirised Dryden's heroes or whether Dryden merely thought them satirised. As I have mentioned, by 1678 Dryden had been taking stock of his theatrical career. In the year of *Psyche*'s production (early 1675) he can be found confessing weariness with "his long-lov'd Mistris, Rhyme". And perhaps there is significance in his echo of a phrase of Falstaff's when he dismisses *Psyche*'s note as "prince Nicander's vein". When Shakespeare made Falstaff say, "I will do [a scene] in King Cambyses' vein" (*Henry IV, Part One*, II, iv, 426), he was suggesting that the bombastic tragedy typified by Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* was now out of date and fit only to be parodied. It is possible that Dryden, already losing confidence in the heroic-play currency, recognized that Nicander's vein tended to devalue that currency altogether and to replace the heroic protagonists with "little Maximins".

The question should also be asked whether Dryden recognized that in some of his strenuous knockabout Shadwell had only actualized something of the heroic drama's verbal violence. Could he have seen a

strain of his own work in Shadwell's? Aside from his acute discomfort at being claimed as kin with Shadwell in the fostering of that monster, the operatic *Tempest*, Dryden might also have reflected with some embarrassment upon other possible affinities. Certainly in *Tyrannic Love*—whose extravagances had provided matter for *The Rehearsal*—Maximin dwells very explicitly upon the tortures the heroine's mother will undergo if Catherine does not submit to him.

MacFlecknoe, with its apprehension that little Maximins are likely to pass for the genuine article, may therefore be an extension of Dryden's farewell, in prologues and in criticism, to the heroic play. And the suggestion that the heroic idiom is now Prince Nicander's vein botched up by Shadwell's "suburbian Muse" (1.84) makes us recall that the same kind of muse was satirised in *The Rehearsal* for portraying, among other things, "Two kings of Brentford". In the respect that Shadwell is left "confirmed in full stupidity" as pretender to wit and practitioner of a now-ridiculous kind of drama—indeed, in the sense that the satire is itself "dramatic"—*MacFlecknoe* may be considered Dryden's own version of *The Rehearsal*. It is merely an additional irony that Shadwell eventually succeeded Dryden as Laureate: in *MacFlecknoe* the mantle already has been transferred to another "Bays".

NOTES

1. H.T. Swedenberg, "Challenges to Dryden's Editor." In *John Dryden Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar*, ed. John Loftis (Los Angeles, 1967), p. 26.
2. R.J. Smith, "Shadwell's Impact Upon John Dryden," *RES* XX (1944), 29-44.
3. Cf. A.S. Borgman, *Thomas Shadwell: His Life and Comedies* (New York, 1928), p. 49, and Michael W. Alssid, *Thomas Shadwell* (New York, 1967), p. 19.
4. *Thomas Shadwell: His Life and Comedies*, p. 50.
5. "The Occasion of *MacFlecknoe*," *PMLA* XLVII (1932), 766-71.
6. "Dryden's 'Enchanted Isle' and Shadwell's 'Dominion'," in *Essays in English Literature of the Classical Period*, ed. Daniel W. Patterson and Albrecht B. Strauss (*Studies in Philology*, Extra Series No. 4, 1967), 39-53. See 46-51. Miss Taylor suggests that "the success of Shadwell's operatic *Tempest* had a more profound effect on Dryden than has been heretofore surmised. We might even suspect that it contributes more to *MacFlecknoe* than meets the casual glance" (p. 53).
7. *Ibid.*, 51.
8. Cf. Earl Miner, *Dryden's Poetry* (Bloomington, 1967), p. 80.
9. *Thomas Shadwell: His Life and Comedies*, p. 137.
10. *Thomas Shadwell*, p. 33.
11. Alssid, *Thomas Shadwell*, p. 28.