

Mac Flecknoe

Or a Satire u-pon the True-Blue-Protestant Poet, T. S.

- All human things are subject to decay,
 And when fate summons, monarchs must obey.
 This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus,¹ young
 Was called to empire, and had governed long;
 5 In prose and verse, was owned, without dispute,
 Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute.
 This aged prince, now flourishing in peace,
 And blest with issue of a large increase,
 Worn out with business, did at length debate
 10 To settle the succession of the state;
 And, pondering which of all his sons was fit
 To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,
 Cried: " 'Tis resolved; for nature pleads that he
 Should only rule, who most resembles me.
 15 Sh ² alone my perfect image bears,
~~Mature~~ in dullness from his tender years:
 Sh alone, of all my sons, is he
 Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.
 The ~~rest~~ to some faint meaning make pretense,
 20 But Sh never deviates into sense.
 Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
 Strike ~~through~~, and make a lucid interval;
 But Sh 's genuine night admits no ray,
 His rising fogs prevail upon the day.
 25 Besides, his goodly fabric³ fills the eye,
 And seems designed for thoughtless majesty:
 Thoughtless as monarch oaks that shade the plain,
 And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.
 Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,⁴
 30 Thou last great prophet of tautology.⁵
 Even I, a dunce of more renown than they,
 Was sent before but to prepare thy way;
 And, coarsely clad in Norwich drugget,⁶ *coarse woolen cloth*
 To teach the nations in thy greater name.⁶
 35 My warbling lute, the lute I whilom⁷ strung, *formerly*
 When to King John of Portugal⁷ I sung,
 Was but the prelude to that glorious day,
 When thou on silver Thames didst cut thy way,
 With well-timed oars before the royal barge,

1. In 31 B.C.E. Octavian became the first Roman emperor at the age of thirty-two. He assumed the title Augustus in 27 B.C.E.

2. Thomas Shadwell. The initial and second letter of the name followed by a dash give the appearance, but only the appearance, of protecting Dryden's victim by concealing his name. A common device in the satire of the period.

3. His body. Shadwell was a corpulent man.

4. Thomas Heywood (ca. 1570—1641) and James Shirley (1596—1666), playwrights popular before the closing of the theaters in 1642 but now out of fashion. They are introduced here as "types" (i.e.,

prefigurings) of Shadwell, in the sense that Solomon was regarded as an Old Testament prefiguring of Christ, the "last [final] great prophet."

5. Unnecessary repetition of meaning in different words.

6. The parallel between Flecknoe, as forerunner of Shadwell, and John the Baptist, as forerunner of Jesus, is made plain in lines 32—34 by the use of details and even words taken from Matthew 3.3—4 and John 1.23.

7. Flecknoe boasted of the patronage of the Portuguese king.

Swelled with the pride of thy celestial charge;
 And big with hymn, commander of a host,
 The like was ne'er in Epsom blankets tossed.⁸
 Methinks I see the new Arion⁹ sail,
 The lute still trembling underneath thy nail.
 At thy well-sharpened thumb from shore to shore
 The treble squeaks for fear, ~~the~~ basses roar;
 Echoes ~~from~~ Pissing Alley Sh call,
 And Sh they resound from Aston Hall.
 About thy boat the little fishes throng,
 As at the morning toast⁰ that floats along.
 Sometimes, as prince of thy harmonious band,
 Thou wield'st thy papers in thy threshing hand,
 St. Andre's¹ feet ne'er kept more equal time,
 Not ev'n the feet of thy own *Psyche's* rhyme;
 Though they in number as in sense excel:
 So just, so like tautology, they fell,
 That, pale with envy, Singleton² forswore i
 The lute and sword, which he in triumph bore, >
 And vowed he ne'er would act Villerius³ more." J
 Here stopped the good old sire, and wept for joy
 In silent raptures of the hopeful boy.
 All arguments, but most his plays, persuade,
 That for anointed dullness⁴ he was made.

Close to the walls which fair Augusta⁰ bind London
 (The fair Augusta much to fears inclined),⁵
 An ancient fabric,⁰ raised to inform the sight, building
 There stood of yore, and Barbican it hight:⁰ was called
 A watchtower once; but now, so fate ordains,
 Of all the pile an empty name remains.
 From its old ruins brothel houses rise,
 Scenes of lewd loves, and of polluted joys,
 Where their vast courts the mother-strumpets keep,
 And, undisturbed by watch, in silence sleep.
 Near these a Nursery⁶ erects its head,
 Where queens are formed, and future heroes bred;
 Where unfledged actors learn to laugh and cry, l
 Where infant punks⁰ their tender voices try, f prostitutes
 And little Maximins⁷ the gods defy. J
 Great Fletcher never treads in buskins here,
 Nor greater Jonson dares in socks⁸ appear;
 But gentle Simkin⁹ just reception finds
 Amidst this monument of vanished minds:

8. A reference to Shadwell's comedy *Epsom Wells* and to the farcical scene in his *Virtuoso*, in which Sir Samuel Hearty is tossed in a blanket.

9. A legendary Greek poet. Returning home by sea, he was robbed and thrown overboard by the sailors, but was saved by a dolphin that had been charmed by his music.

1. A French dancer who designed the choreography of Shadwell's opera *Psyche* (1675). Dryden's sneer at the mechanical metrics of the songs in *Psyche* is justified.

2. John Singleton (d. 1686), a musician at the Theatre Royal.

3. A character in Sir William Davenant's *Siege of*

Rhodes (1656), the first English opera.

4. The anticipated phrase is "anointed majesty." English kings are anointed with oil at their coronations.

5. This line alludes to the fears excited by the Popish Plot (cf. *Absalom and Achitophel*, p. 2087).

6. The name of a training school for young actors.

7. Maximin is the cruel emperor in Dryden's *Tyrannic Love* (1669), notorious for his bombast.

8. "Buskins" and "socks" were the symbols of tragedy and comedy, respectively. John Fletcher (1579–1625), the playwright and collaborator with Francis Beaumont (ca. 1584–1616).

9. A popular character in low farces.

Pure clinches⁰ the suburban Muse affords,
 And Panton¹ waging harmless war with words.
 85 Here Flecknoe, as a place ~~to fame~~ well known,
 Ambitiously design'd his Sh _____'s throne;
 For ancient Dekker² prophesied long since, 1
 That in this pile would reign a mighty prince, f
 Born for a scourge of wit, and flail of sense; J
 90 To whom true dullness should some *Psyches* owe,
 But worlds of *Misers* from his pen should flow;
Humorists and *Hypocrites*³ it should produce,
 Whole Raymond families, and tribes of Bruce.
 Now ~~Empress~~ Fame had published the renown
 95 Of Sh _____'s coronation through the town.
 Roused by report of Fame, the nations meet,
 From near Bunhill, and distant Watling Street.⁴
 No Persian carpets spread the imperial way,
 But scattered limbs of mangled poets lay;
 100 From dusty shops neglected authors come,
 Martyrs of pies, and relics of the bum.⁵
 Much Heywood, ~~Shirley~~, Ogilby⁶ there lay,
 But loads of Sh _____ almost choked the way.
 Bilked stationers for yeomen stood prepared,
 105 And Herringman was captain of the guard.⁷
 The hoary prince in majesty appeared,
 High on a throne of his own labors reared.
 At his right hand our young Ascanius sate,
 Rome's other hope, and pillar of the state.
 110 His brows thick fogs, instead of glories, grace,
 And lambent dullness played around his face.⁸
 As Hannibal did to the altars come,
 Sworn ~~by his~~ sire a mortal foe to Rome,⁹
 So Sh _____ swore, nor should his vow be vain,
 115 That he till death true dullness would maintain;
 And, in his father's right, and realm's defense,
 Ne'er to have peace with wit, nor truce with sense.
 The king himself the sacred unction¹ made,
 As king by office, and as priest by trade.
 120 In his sinister⁰ hand, instead of ball, left
 He placed a mighty mug of potent ale;
Love's Kingdom to his right he did convey,

1. Said to have been a celebrated punster.

2. Thomas Dekker (ca. 1572-1632), the playwright, whom Jonson had satirized in *The Poetaster*.

3. Three of Shadwell's plays; *The Hypocrite*, a failure, was not published. "Raymond" and "Bruce" (line 93) are characters in *The Humorists* and *The Virtuoso*, respectively.

4. Because Bunhill is about a quarter mile and Watling Street little more than a half mile from the site of the Nursery, where the coronation is held, Shadwell's fame is narrowly circumscribed. Moreover, his subjects live in the heart of the City, regarded by men of wit and fashion as the abode of bad taste and middle-class vulgarity.

5. Unsold books were used to line pie plates and as toilet paper.

6. John Ogilby, a translator of Homer and Virgil, ridiculed by both Dryden and Pope as a bad poet.

7. "Bilked stationers"; cheated publishers, acting as "yeomen" of the guard, led by Henry Herringman, who until 1679 was the publisher of both Shadwell and Dryden.

8. Ascanius, or Iulus, was the son of Aeneas. Virgil referred to him as "*spes altera Romae*" ("Rome's other hope," *Aeneid* 12.168). As Troy fell, he was marked as favored by the gods when a flickering ("lambent") flame played round his head (*Aeneid* 2.680-84).

9. Hannibal, who almost conquered Rome in 216 B.C.E., during the second Punic War, took this oath at the age of nine (Livy 21.1).

1. The sacramental oil, used in the coronation.

At once his scepter, and his rule of sway;
 Whose righteous lore the prince had practiced young,
 125 And from whose loins recorded *Psyche* sprung.
 His temples, last, with poppies were o'erspread,
 That nodding seemed to consecrate his head.²
 Just at that point of time, if fame not lie,
 On his left hand twelve reverend owls did fly.³
 130 So Romulus, 'tis sung, by Tiber's brook,
 Presage of sway from twice six vultures took.
 The admiring throng loud acclamations make,
 And omens of his future empire take.
 The sire then shook the honors⁴ of his head,
 135 And from his brows damps of oblivion shed
 Full on the filial dullness: long he stood, 1
 Repelling from his breast the raging god; f
 At length burst out in this prophetic mood: J
 "Heavens bless my son, from Ireland let him reign
 MO To far Barbadoes on the western main;⁵
 Of his dominion may no end be known,
 And greater than his father's be his throne;
 Beyond *Love's Kingdom* let him stretch his pen!"
 He paused, and all the people cried, "Amen."
 145 Then thus continued he: "My son, advance
 Still in new impudence, new ignorance.
 Success let others teach, learn thou from me
 Pangs without birth, and fruitless industry.
 Let *Virtuosos* in five years be writ;
 150 Yet not one thought accuse thy toil of wit.
 Let gentle George⁶ in triumph tread the stage,
 Make Dorimant betray, and Loveit rage;
 Let Cully, Cockwood, Fopling, charm the pit,
 And in their folly show the writer's wit.
 155 Yet still thy fools shall stand in thy defense,
 And justify their author's want of sense.
 Let 'em be all by thy own model made
 Of dullness, and desire no foreign aid;
 That they to future ages may be known,
 160 Not copies drawn, but issue of thy own.
 Nay, let thy men of wit too be the same,
 All full of thee, and differing but in name.
 But let no alien S—dl—y⁷ interpose,
 To lard with wit⁸ thy hungry *Epsom* prose.
 165 And when false flowers of rhetoric thou wouldst cull,
 Trust nature, do not labor to be dull;

2. During the coronation a British monarch holds two symbols of the throne: a globe ("ball") representing the world in the left hand and a scepter in the right. Shadwell's symbols of monarchy are a mug of ale; Flecknoe's drear' play *Love's Kingdom*; and a crown of poppies, which suggest heaviness, dullness, and drowsiness. The poppies also refer obliquely to Shadwell's addiction to opium.

3. Birds of night. Appropriate substitutes for the twelve vultures whose flight confirmed to Romulus the destined site of Rome, of which he was founder and king.

4. Ornaments, hence locks.

5. Shadwell's empire is vast but empty.

6. Sir George Etherege (ca. 1635—1691), a writer of brilliant comedies. In the next couplet Dryden names characters from his plays.

7. Sir Charles Sedley (1638-1701), wit, rake, poet, and playwright. Dryden hints that he contributed more than the prologue to Shadwell's *Epsom Wells*.

8. This phrase recalls a sentence in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*: "They lard their lean books with the fat of others' works."

But write thy best, and top; and, in each line,
 Sir Formal's⁹ oratory will be thine:
 Sir Formal, though unsought, attends thy quill,
 And does thy northern dedications¹ fill.
 Nor let false friends seduce thy mind to fame,
 By arrogating Jonson's hostile name.
 Let father Flecknoe fire thy mind with praise,
 And uncle Ogilby thy envy raise.
 Thou art my blood, where Jonson has no part:
 What share have we in nature, or in art?
 Where did his wit on learning fix a brand,
 And rail at arts he did not understand?
 Where made he love in Prince Nicander's vein,²
 Or swept the dust in *Psyche's* humble strain?
 Where sold he bargains, 'whip-stitch,³ kiss my arse,'
 Promised a play and dwindled to a farce?⁴
 When did his Muse from Fletcher scenes purloin,
 As thou whole Eth'rege dost transfuse to thine?
 But so transfused, as oil on water's flow,
 His always floats above, thine sinks below.
 This is thy province, this thy wondrous way,
 New humors to invent for each new play:
 This is that boasted bias⁵ of thy mind,
 By which one way, to dullness, 'tis inclined;
 Which makes thy writings lean on one side still,
 And, in all changes, that way bends thy will.
 Nor let thy mountain-belly make pretense
 Of likeness; thine's a tympany⁶ of sense.
 A tun^o of man in thy large bulk is writ, *large cask*
 But sure thou'rt but a kilderkin^o of wit. *small cask*
 Like mine, thy gentle numbers feebly creep;
 Thy tragic Muse gives smiles, thy comic sleep.
 With whate'er gall thou sett'st thyself to write,
 Thy inoffensive satires never bite.
 In thy felonious heart though venom lies,
 It does but touch thy Irish pen,⁷ and dies.
 Thy genius calls thee not to purchase fame
 In keen iambs,^o but mild anagram. *sharp satire*
 Leave writing plays, and choose for thy command
 Some peaceful province in acrostic land.
 There thou may'st wings display and altars raise,⁸
 And torture one poor word ten thousand ways.

9. Sir Formal] Trifle, the ridiculous and vapid orator in *The Virtuoso*.

1. Shadwell frequently dedicated his works to the duke of Newcastle and members of his family.

2. In *Psyche*.

3. A nonsense word frequently used by Sir Samuel Hearty in *The Virtuoso*. "Sell bargains": to answer an innocent question with a coarse or indecent phrase, as in this line.

4. Low comedy that depends largely on situation rather than wit, consistently condemned by Dryden and other serious playwrights.

5. In bowling, the spin given to the bowl that causes it to swerve. Dryden closely parodies a passage in Shadwell's epilogue to *The Humorists*.

6. A swelling in some part of the body caused by wind.

7. Dryden accuses Flecknoe and his "son" of being Irish. Ireland suggested only poverty, superstition, and barbarity to 17th-century Londoners.

8. "Wings" and "altars" refer to poems in the shape of these objects as in George Herbert's "Easter Wings" (p. 1609) and "The Altar" (p. 1607). "Anagram": the transposition of letters in a word so as to make a new one. "Acrostic": a poem in which the first letter of each line, read downward, makes up the name of the person or thing that is the subject of the poem. Dryden is citing instances of triviality and overingenuity in literature.

Or, if thou wouldst thy different talent suit,
 210 Set thy own songs, and sing them to thy lute."
 He said: but his last words were scarcely heard 1
 For Bruce and Longville had a trap prepared,
 And down they sent the yet declaiming bard.⁹ J
 Sinking he left his drugget robe behind,
 215 Borne upwards by a subterranean wind.
 The mantle fell to the young prophet's part,¹
 With double portion of his father's art.

ca. 1679

1682

To the Memory of Mr. Oldham¹

Farewell, too little, and too lately known,
 Whom I began to think and call my own:
 For sure our souls were near allied, and thine
 Cast in the same poetic mold with mine.
 5 One common note on either lyre did strike,
 And knaves and fools² we both abhorred alike.
 To the same goal did both our studies drive;
 The last set out the soonest did arrive.
 Thus Nisus fell upon the slippery place,
 10 While his young friend³ performed and won the race.
 O early ripe! to thy abundant store
 What could advancing age have added more?
 It might (what nature never gives the young)
 Have taught the numbers⁰ of thy native tongue. *metrics, verse*
 15 But satire needs not those, and wit will shine
 Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.⁴
 A noble error, and but seldom made,
 When poets are by too much force betrayed.
 Thy generous fruits, though gathered ere their prime,
 20 \$till showed a quickness;⁵ and maturing time
 But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of rhyme,
 (bnce more, hail and farewell;⁵ farewell, thou young,
 Jut ah too short, Marcellus⁷ of our tongue;
 Hy brows with ivy, and with laurels bound;⁸
 25 But fate and gloomy night encompass thee around.

1684

9. In *The Virtuoso*, Bruce and Longville play this trick on Sir Formal Trifle while he makes a speech.

1. When the prophet Elijah was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire borne on a whirlwind, his mantle fell on his successor, the younger prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2.8—14). Flecknoe, prophet of dullness, naturally cannot ascend, but must sink.

1. John Oldham (1653-1683), the young poet whose *Satires upon the Jesuits* (1681), which Dryden admired, were written in 1679, before Dryden's major satires appeared (see line 8). This elegy was published in Oldham's *Remains in Verse and Prose* (1684).

2. Objects of satire.

3. Nisus, on the point of winning a footrace, slipped in a pool of blood. His "young friend" was

Euryalus (Virgil's *Aeneid* 5.315—39).

4. Dryden repeats the Renaissance idea that the satirist should avoid smoothness and affect rough meters ("harsh cadence").

5. Sharpness of flavor.

6. Dryden echoes the famous words that conclude Catullus's elegy to his brother: "*Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale*" (And forever, brother, hail and farewell!).

7. The nephew of Augustus, adopted by him as his successor. After winning military fame as a youth, he died at the age of twenty. Virgil celebrated him in the *Aeneid* 6.854—86. The last line of Dryden's poem is a reminiscence of *Aeneid* 6.866.

8. The poet's wreath (cf. Milton's *Lycidas*, lines 1—2, p. 1806).

A Song for St. Cecilia's Day¹

i

From harmony, from heavenly harmony
 This universal frame began:
 When Nature underneath a heap
 Of jarring atoms lay,
 s And could not heave her head,
 The tuneful voice was heard from high:
 "Arise, ye more than dead." ·
 Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,²
 In order to their stations leap,
 10 And Music's power obey.
 From harmony, from heavenly harmony
 This universal frame began:
 From harmony to harmony
 Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
 15 The diapason³ closing full in man.

2

What passion cannot Music raise and quell!⁴
 When Jubal struck the corded shell,⁵
 His listening brethren stood around,
 And, wondering, on their faces fell
 20 To worship that celestial sound.
 Less than a god they thought there could not dwell
 Within the hollow of that shell
 That spoke so sweetly and so well.
 What passion cannot Music raise and quell!

3

25 The trumpet's loud clangor
 Excites us to arms,
 With shrill notes of anger,
 And mortal alarms.
 The double double double beat

1. St. Cecilia, a Roman lady, was an early Christian martyr. She has long been regarded as the patroness of music and the supposed inventor of the organ. Celebrations of her festival day (November 22) in England were usually devoted to music and the praise of music, and from about 1683 to 1703 the Musical Society in London annually commemorated it with a religious service and a public concert. This concert always included an ode written and set to music for the occasion, of which the two by Dryden ("A Song for St. Cecilia's Day," 1687, and "Alexander's Feast," 1697) are the most distinguished. G. B. Draghi, an Italian brought to England by Charles II, set this ode to music; but Handel's fine score, composed in 1739, has completely obscured the original setting. This is an irregular ode in the manner of Cowley. In stanzas 3–6, Dryden boldly attempted to suggest in the sounds of his words the characteristic tones of the instruments mentioned.

2. "Nature": created nature, ordered by the Divine Wisdom out of chaos, which Dryden, adopting the

physics of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, describes as composed of the warring and discordant ("jarring") atoms of the four elements: earth, fire, water, and air ("cold," "hot," "moist," and "dry").

3. The entire compass of tones in the scale. Dryden is thinking of the Chain of Being, the ordered creation from inanimate nature up to humans, God's latest and final work. The just gradations of notes in a scale are analogous to the equally just gradations in the ascending scale of created beings. Both are the result of harmony.

4. The power of music to describe, evoke, or subdue emotion ("passion") is a frequent theme in 17th-century literature. In stanzas 2–6, the poet considers music as awakening religious awe, warlike courage, sorrow for unrequited love, jealousy and fury, and the impulse to worship God.

5. According to Genesis 4.21, Jubal was the inventor of the lyre and the pipe. Dryden imagines Jubal's lyre to have been made of a tortoiseshell ("corded shell").

30 Of the thundering drum
 Cries: "Hark! the foes come;
 Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat."

4

The soft complaining flute
 In dying notes discovers
 35 The woes of hopeless lovers,
 Whose dirge is whispered by the warbling lute.

5

Sharp violins⁶ proclaim
 Their jealous pangs, and desperation,
 Fury', frantic indignation,
 40 Depth of pains, and height of passion,
 For the fair, disdainful dame.

6

But O! what art can teach,
 What human voice can reach,
 The sacred organ's praise?
 45 Notes inspiring holy love,
 Notes that wing their heavenly ways
 To mend the choirs above.

7

Orpheus' could lead the savage race;
 And trees unrooted left their place,
 50 Sequacious of³ the lyre; *following*
 But bright Cecilia raised the wonder higher:
 When to her organ vocal breath was given,
 An angel heard, and straight appeared,⁸
 Mistaking earth for heaven.

GRAND CHORUS

55 *As from the -power of sacred lays*
The spheres began to move,
And sung the great Creator's praise⁹
To all the hlest above;
So, when the last and dreadful hour
 60 *This crumbling pageant¹ shall devour,*
The trumpet shall be heard on high, l
The dead shall live, the living die, f
And Music shall untune the sky.² J

1687

6. A reference to the bright tone of the modern violin, introduced into England at the Restoration. The tone of the old-fashioned viol is much duller.

7. Legendary poet, son of one of the Muses, who played so wonderfully on the lyre that wild beasts ("the savage race") grew tame and followed him, as did even rocks and trees.

8. According to the legend, it was Cecilia's piety, not her music, that brought an angel to visit her.

9. As it was harmony that ordered the universe, so

it was angelic song ("sacred lays") that put the celestial bodies ("spheres") in motion. The harmonious chord that results from the traditional "music of the spheres" is a hymn of "praise" sung by created nature to its "Creator."

1. The universe, the stage on which the drama of human salvation has been acted out.

2. The "last trump" of 1 Corinthians 15.52, which will announce the Resurrection and the Last Judgment.