

**THE SCATOLOGICAL EFFECTS IN MACFLECKNOE**



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THE SCATOLOGICAL EFFECTS IN MACFLECKNOE

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An Abstract

Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Rachel Loggins Fussell

August 1975



## ABSTRACT

The sharp scatological satire against Shadwell in MacFlecknoe can perhaps best be appreciated through the eighteenth-century concept of the chain of being, not only because the chain-of-being aesthetic generated a rationale of order and place, but also--what was more sustaining to satire--because the chain-of-being rationale gave a security to Dryden's scorn of baseness which a personal attack might not have enjoyed, a security whose reverence for reason and haughty disdain for the banal elevated mere septic images to the status and effect of master metaphor.

Shadwell's association with the scatological is complete, involving most vital phases of existence: sexual love, scato-erotic, mental discipline, scato-mathic, the creative process, scato-artistic, and life in general, scato-generic. Through association with Shadwell everything becomes tainted. Shadwell's continued alliance with the scatological in the poem ties him to all its implications until we involuntarily link the two as identical. Dryden's success in the degradation of Shadwell and his art is apparent in the fact that fame knows Shadwell only through his place in the nonsensical realm of MacFlecknoe.

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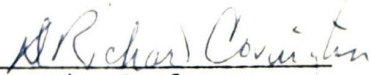
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August 1975





To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Rachel Loggins Fussell entitled "Scatological Satire in MacFlecknoe." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

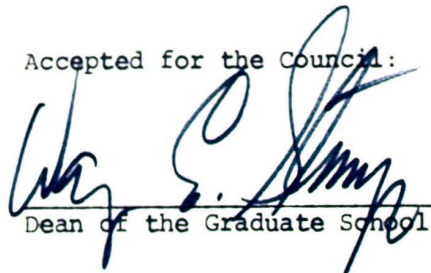
  
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We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance

  
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## INTRODUCTION

The sharp scatological satire against Shadwell in MacFlecknoe can perhaps best be appreciated through the eighteenth-century concept of the chain of being, not only because the chain-of-being aesthetic generated a rationale of order and place, but also--what was more sustaining to satire--because the chain-of-being rationale gave a security to Dryden's score of baseness which a personal attack might not have enjoyed, a security whose reverence for reason and haughty disdain for the banal elevated mere septic images to the status and effect of master metaphor.

The Oxford English Dictionary traces three possible meanings for the term scatology:

That branch of science which deals with diagnosis by means of the feces, that branch of palaeontology which treats of fossil excrement or coprolites, and filthy literature.

Jae Num Lee in his book, Swift and Scatological Satire, restricts the term "scatology" to ". . . the uses of language referring, explicitly or implicitly, to skata and related matters, such as flatulency and privy."<sup>1</sup>

The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary classifies scatology as

". . . the study of excrement: hence, study of the obscene, especially in literature."

Scatology's connection to the obscene, gross, or vulgar expands the scatological metaphor in MacFlecknoe to include allusions to the low,

<sup>1</sup>Jae Num Lee, Swift and Scatological Satire (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), pp. 7-22.



the gross, the offensive. The scatological references to "skata" in the poem clearly connect Shadwell to the bawdy and the base, while the wider meaning, which includes obscenity, ties the numerous allusions to Shadwell's corporeality, dullness, and general grossness into the overall pattern. The motif fits into the even larger patterns of the system of order, of bodily humors, and of the chain of being.

Dryden acted on a sound background of scatological precedent in literature. Jae Num Lee outlines this past in his book on Swift. Lee cites instances beginning with Aristophanes of satire employing scatology as a device of censure and ridicule and continues through Lucilius, Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Dante, and Rabelais. Catullus was the first to employ scatology as a weapon of personal satire in attacking individuals of apparently little public importance, as Martial was to do after him.<sup>2</sup>

Of Juvenal Lee says:

Juvenal also employed scatology for character defamation. His general method is to associate the object of his satire with a scatological detail, linking the two in equation . . . Juvenal also resorted to scatology as a device of harshest condemnation.<sup>3</sup>

Dante used scatology as a literary device to achieve a moral purpose. In Dante's scatological images, excrement serves as a major metaphor for sin.<sup>4</sup>

Lee also traces scatology from Skelton through Pope, mentioning Gabriel Harvey, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Wroth, and Ben Jonson. In his catalogue

<sup>2</sup>Lee, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Lee, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Lee, p. 16.

of the many uses of scatology by English writers, he remarks the satire of personal attack and its criteria of scatology as the ultimate weapon of insult, e.g., the quarrel between Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey; he segregates the intellectual satire of Pope in the Dunciad, which uses scatological allusions to denounce inferior writing and alleged abuses of language.<sup>5</sup> It is amazing that he completely bypasses Dryden's use of scatology for each of these aspects of scatological satire may be seen in MacFlecknoe.

A personal attack on Shadwell resulting from an ongoing quarrel between Shadwell and Dryden,<sup>6</sup> MacFlecknoe also served as the forerunner to Pope's more highly developed Dunciad. Not only do scatological allusions abound within MacFlecknoe, Dryden also uses scatology as a motif in the poem, constantly casting Shadwell as the lowliest of creatures through this imagery of baseness.

Dryden shared the common belief that a cosmic system balanced the universe, creating a place in a hierarchical scale for every individual. This ordered system is said to ". . . have attained its widest diffusion and acceptance during the eighteenth century."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as Lovejoy remarks, the system was widely exploited as a frame of reference:

Nevertheless there has been no period in which writers of all sorts--men of science and philosophers, poets and popular essayists, deists and orthodox divines--talked so much about the chain of being, or accepted more implicitly

<sup>5</sup>Lee, Chapter 2, pp. 23-53.

<sup>6</sup>See Appendix.

<sup>7</sup>Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 183.

the general scheme of ideas connected with it, or more boldly drew from their latent implications, or apparent implications.<sup>8</sup>

Locke adequately and optimistically explains the concept:

In all the visible corporeal world we see no chasms or gaps. All quite down from us the descent is by easy steps, and a continued series that in each remove differ very little one from the other. There are fishes that have wings and are not strangers to the airy region; and there are some birds that are inhabitants of the water, whose blood is as cold as fishes . . . There are animals so near of kin both to birds and beasts that they are in the middle between both. Amphibious animals link the terrestrial and aquatic together; . . . not to mention what is confidently reported of mermaids or sea-men. There are some brutes that seem to have as much reason and knowledge as some that are called men; and the animal and vegetable kingdoms are so nearly joined, that if you will take the lowest of one and the highest of the other, there will scarce be perceived any great difference between them; and so on until we come to the lowest and the most unorganical parts of matter, we shall find everywhere that the several species are linked together, and differ but in almost insensible degrees. And when we consider the infinite power and wisdom of the Maker, we have reason to think, that it is suitable to the magnificent harmony of the universe, and the great design and infinite goodness of the architect, that the species of creatures should also, by gentle degrees, ascend upwards from us towards his infinite perfection, as we see they gradually descend from us downwards.<sup>9</sup>

Lovejoy outlines four implications of the notion of the graduated scale of being dwelt upon by eighteenth-century philosophers and popularizers of philosophical ideas.<sup>10</sup> First there was the implication that every link in the chain existed for its own sake or for the sake of the completeness of a series of forms. The second consequence was drawn from the accepted view that man was the middle link. This positioning of man

<sup>8</sup>Lovejoy, p. 184.

<sup>9</sup>Mary Whiton Calkins, ed., Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1927), p. 243.

<sup>10</sup>Lovejoy, pp. 190-200, et passim.



as the middle link was conceived in the sense that he represented the transitory point from the sentient to the intellectual. This position called for humility, for it placed man lower than the lowest of angels. While man's position called for humility, it also called for pride in his superiority to the creatures below him in the scale. It was man's responsibility to reach a medium of control between the extreme of an overexalted view of himself and a total beratement in comparison to the ranks above him. Another outcome of man's understanding of the chain of being was his recognition of himself in the duality of his constitution. "A member of two realms at once, he hovered between both, not quite at home in either."<sup>11</sup>

Every link in the chain of being must be filled or, the belief was, it would deteriorate. Therefore, it was necessary for man to stay in his particular place. "The good of each being at each link consisted in its conformity to its type."<sup>12</sup> As Lovejoy states it:

There must then be a specifically human excellence which it is man's vocation to achieve.<sup>13</sup>

In a system of such infinite order as the chain of being, the individual felt the need for an ordered life. The order of one's life began with the universe. In Dryden and the Conservative Myth Bernard N. Schilling states the supremacy of this order:

<sup>11</sup>Lovejoy, p. 198.

<sup>12</sup>Lovejoy, p. 200.

<sup>13</sup>Lovejoy, p. 200.

God has established one order for all the universe and all its parts, that the actions of all created things were created by a system of laws, that not only nature but man throughout the whole of his political and social life was subject to an authority from which there was no appeal.<sup>14</sup>

Against this universal principle of order stood the energy of individual men. The dualism of order against energy made necessary the third element: control, or balance.<sup>15</sup>

The order of control applied to works, whose laws resembled the laws of nature and of life. The general need of control over individual excess called for a literary standard to which all would have to conform and by which all might be judged.

Dryden placed Shadwell in the lowest of the human orders of the chain of being. Not only is Shadwell of the lowest order, he is also offensive for seeking to leave his place. Dryden found Shadwell's individual actions most susceptible to attack because of Shadwell's attempts as a playwright. Shadwell's style is accused of being characterized by an affectation rather than by the natural utterance which writers of this period strove for. At the end of the poem Dryden suggests that Shadwell seek his true vocation, word torture, through anagrams rather than plays.

Paul Ramsey stresses the importance of the form of MacFlecknoe. Dryden's choice of form for MacFlecknoe accentuates his assessment of Shadwell:

<sup>14</sup>Bernard N. Schilling, Dryden and the Conservative Myth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 19.

<sup>15</sup>Schilling, p. 19, passim.

By using the mock epic and magnifying trivialities to heroic proportions, it shows them to be the more trivial.<sup>16</sup>

Dryden employs a variety of comparisons and contrasts to accent the inferior position of Shadwell and Flecknoe in the chain of being. The elevation of the characters with which Shadwell and Flecknoe are compared further stresses their position of inferiority.

Dryden utilizes an allusion to a Biblical source in the following selection:

Ev'n I, a dunce of more renown than they,  
Was sent before but to prepare thy way:  
And coarsely clad in Norwich drugget came  
To teach the nations in thy greater name<sup>17</sup>  
vv. 31-34

An excerpt from the Book of Mark, chapter one, directly parallels the previous passage from MacFlecknoe:

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,  
"Behold, I send my messenger  
before thy face  
who shall prepare thy way,  
the voice of one crying in the  
wilderness  
Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight  
vv. 2-3

In verse six of chapter one in the Book of Mark, John the Baptist is pictured in the following manner:

<sup>16</sup>Paul Ramsey, The Art of John Dryden (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969), p. 19.

<sup>17</sup>H. T. Swedenberg, Jr., ed., The Works of John Dryden (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 2, p. 54. Subsequent references to MacFlecknoe will come from this edition of Dryden's works.



Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locust and wild honey. And he preached saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the throng of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."

Norwich drugget, the coarse woollen of Flecknoe, corresponds to the camel's hair and leather girdle which John the Baptist wore, as does John's proclamation of Jesus as mightier than he compare with the following selection from MacFlecknoe:

My warbling lute, the lute I whilom strung,  
When to King John of Portugal I sung,  
Was but the prelude to that glorious day,  
When thou on silver Thames didst cut thy way.  
vv. 35-38

Both John the Baptist and Flecknoe declare themselves as preparers for a more magnificent day when the true master will make his eminence known. John the Baptist prepares the way for Christ; Flecknoe prepares the way for Shadwell, the true savior of nonsense and dullness. The nobility of the efforts of John the Baptist and Jesus make the labors of Flecknoe and Shadwell seem small and ridiculous by comparison.

A comparison between MacFlecknoe and Milton's Paradise Lost serves the same purpose of degradation to Flecknoe and Shadwell:

The sire then shook the honors of his head,  
And from his brows damps of oblivion shed  
Full on the filial dullness: long he stood,  
Repelling from his breast the raging god;  
At length burst out in this prophetic mood:  
vv. 134-138

The corresponding passage from Paradise Lost reads as follows:

He said, and on his Son with rays direct  
Shone full, he all his Father full expressed  
Ineffably into his face received,  
And thus the Filial Godhead answering spake:  
Paradise Lost, VI, vv. 719-22

The basic contrast between the two passages is in the chaos of the first passage and the calm of the second. Flecknoe's brow strains with the nature of his confused mind, before he bursts into speech. In the second passage God's rays are direct, shining fully from father to son in true communication. Flecknoe and Shadwell present the perfect foil for the purity of God and Christ.

Ascanius, a mythological character, Hannibal, the great warrior, and Romulus, another godlike mythological character, serve as contrasts for Shadwell's character. The same effect of emphasis upon Shadwell's lowliness is achieved in each case:

At his right hand our young Ascanius sat,  
 Rome's other hope, and pillar of the State.  
 His brows thick fogs, instead of glories grace,  
 And lambent dulness played around his face.  
 As Hannibal did to the altars come,  
 Sworn by his sire a mortal foe to Rome;  
 That he till death true dulness would maintain,  
 And in his father's right, and realm's defense,  
 Ne'er to have peace with wit nor truce with sense,  
 vv. 108-117

Ascanius, son of Aeneas, the son of Venus, one of the most famous of the heroes of the Trojan war, acts here as Shadwell's incompatible counterpart. "Rome's other hope, and pillar of the State," identifies Ascanius as the son of one of the founders of Rome, a hope for the nation. Flecknoe, the father, is as Aeneas, founder of a realm, and Shadwell like Ascanius holds the realm's hope for a long rule. The intimation indicates that the tenants of the realm of nonsense can hope for the same type of blundering leadership of the father, Flecknoe, to be exhibited by the son, Shadwell.

Hannibal swore eternal hatred for the Romans at the age of nine.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>"Hannibal," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1929.

Shadwell swears an allegiance to dullness and a war with wit and sense.

Hannibal's goal of defeating Rome was one that he never realized, but

Dryden assures us that Shadwell's oath will be successful: "Nor should his

vow be vain." (v. 14) Hannibal, the great Carthaginian general, cannot achieve success; Shadwell achieves his goal with the small effort of being himself.

Romulus appears at Shadwell's coronation in a comparison of the perceptive abilities of the two:

Just at that point of time, if fame not lie,  
On his left hand twelve reverend owls did fly.  
So Romulus, 'tis sun, by Tiber's brook,  
Presage of sway from twice six vultures took.  
Th' admiring throng loud acclamations make,  
And omens of his future empire take.

vv. 128-133

Shadwell views "twelve reverend owls" while Romulus, the son of Mars by the Vestal Rhea Silvia, or Ilia,<sup>19</sup> sees "twice six vultures." In the legend of Romulus he was nurtured by nature; possessing the power to communicate with nature, he perceived his ensuing power from the birds. Shadwell, by the nature of his dullness, perceived little. Shadwell's birds were birds of night, "twelve reverend owls," signifying the darkness of his mind and emphasizing the sinister quality of such a clouded intellect.

The previous comparisons point toward Flecknoe and Shadwell's lowly position in the chain of being. Another concept of the individual existed within the understanding of the cosmic system. This concept involved the idea that the individual possessed an inner order, or harmony, in the form of his bodily humors. This pseudoscientific system can briefly be summarized:

<sup>19</sup>"Romulus," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1929.



The body has four fluids, or "humors" (compare the Latin humere, to flow or be wet), a preponderance of any of which affects the physique and the mind in certain recognized ways; and each of these humors is associated with a certain planet, constellation of the zodiac, hours, day, season, colors, metals, diseases, time of life and special situations and events, professions, vocations, and the like. A happy balance of these four humors was supposed to bring mental poise and perfect health, a sort of golden Aristotelian Mean that was surely rare in an age of violence and primitive hygiene. In order to fit the seven planets of astrology into the four humors, the phlegmatic humor was divided into two complexions, respectively under Venus and the moon; and choler, likewise, into two respectively under the influence of Mars and of the sun, which counted as a planet in the Ptolemaic system of astronomy. This took care of six of the planets; the seventh, Mercury, was thought to produce a wavering instability among all four humors. Thus blood (the sanguine humor) was under the power of the planet Jupiter; black bile (melancholy) was under Saturn; phlegm, under Venus or the moon; choler, under Mars or the sun; and a variable nature under Mercury. Blood, moreover, was hot and wet; and choler, hot and dry. In fitting into this scheme the times of the calendar and of life, the metals, colors, and so forth, some inconsistency was unavoidable; for even the ancients did not entirely agree.<sup>20</sup>

Evidence of the imbalance of Shadwell's humors may be seen early in the poem. Shadwell has been described as stupid, and most fit to "wage immortal war with wit," (v. 12) as having the most resemblance to his father, the ruler of nonsense, and as a grossly large man in the pun on "large increase." (v. 8) In the depiction of Shadwell as he ". . . who stands confirm'd in full stupidity," (v. 18) Dryden extends his victim beyond routine dullness into realms of inspired duncery.

Shadwell's character exemplifies the accented, affected quality of a person with imbalanced humors. While Dryden seems to categorize Shadwell

<sup>20</sup>John W. Draper, The Humors and Shakespeare's Characters (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1945), p. 11.

as suffering from an overabundance of the melancholy humor, he adds aspects of other disorders which lead the reader to believe that Shadwell's humors were generally disordered. Instances of melancholy include corpulence, a direct result of the gluttony caused by melancholy. Too much earth was said to create the melancholic humor. Earth also referred to man's bowel functions, thus connecting the scatological motif as an apt description of a man dominated by the melancholy humor. The characteristic dullness of Shadwell is also phlegmatic.

Referring to the idea that the humors give off vapors, which may ascend to the brain, this allusion to Shadwell's rising fogs evidences the imbalance in his humors:

Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,  
Strike thro; and make a lucid interval;  
But Sh- 's genuine night admits no ray,  
His rising fogs prevail upon the day.

vv. 22-24

The vapors could affect his mind, causing his reasoning and creative abilities to dissipate. He remains in a "genuine night" with no hope for enlightenment.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the poem various references are made to Shadwell's corpulence:

Besides, his goodly fabric fills the eye.

v. 25

<sup>21</sup>Swift explores vapors, their causes and effects, in Tale of a Tub. In satirizing the Aeolists, who ". . . maintained the original cause of all things to be wind," and who found inspiration in the form of wind, Swift alleged that hundreds of Aeolists might be found in a circular chain with a pair of bellows applied ". . . to his Neighbour's Breech," by which they ". . . blew each other to the Shape and Size of a Tub." The following passage describes the disemboquing of the divine wind:



Such an allusion to Shadwell's size characterizes him as grossly overweight; this in turn links him to the melancholy humor, for one of its effects was gluttony.

In the reference to Shadwell as "young Ascanius," which was previously alluded to, Shadwell's humors emanated:

At his right hand our young Ascanius sat,  
Rome's other hope, and pillar of the State.  
His brows thick fogs, instead of glories grace,  
And lambent dullness played around his face.

vv. 108-111

The "thick fogs" and dullness "around his face" refer back to the image of line twenty-four, which alluded to Shadwell's "rising fogs." It appears that the vapors given off by the humors have totally ascended and now obscure Shadwell's mental faculties with the result of heightened dullness.

Dryden worked within the confines of the accepted philosophies of the chain of being and the subsequent order imposed by it as well as in the system of physiological humors. If we consider the context of these value systems, the scatological imagery of the poem takes on a heightened significance. The scatological references become an extended metaphorical motif

By the great Characteristick, by which their chief Sages were best distinguished, was a certain Position of Countenance, which gave undoubted Intelligence to what Degree or Proportion, the Spirit agitated the inward Mass. For, after certain Gripings, the Wind and Vapours issuing forth; having first by their Turbulence and Convulsions within, caused an Earthquake in Man's little World; distorted the Mouth, bloated the Cheeks, and gave the Eyes a terrible kind of Relievo. At which Junctures, all their Belches were received for Sacred, the Sourer the better, and swallowed with infinite Consolation by their meager Devotees. And to render these yet more compleat, because the Breath of Man's Life is in his Nostrils, therefore, the choicest, most edifying, and most enlivening Belches, were very wisely conveyed thro' that Vehicle, to give them a Tincture as they passed.

in the poem, for they place Shadwell in the lowest of the human scale in the chain of being, in the chaos of disorder, and in the imbalance of his humors.



## Scatological Effects in MacFlecknoe

In studying the scatological allusions within MacFlecknoe, I have found a variety of references to the grossness of Flecknoe and Shadwell. Anything associated with the two becomes vulgar: their plays, the names of the streets through which they pass, their throne, their bodies, and their minds. These various associations with grossness and vulgarity tie Flecknoe and Shadwell to a whole system of baseness, insinuating that every detail of their lives reflects offensiveness. This vulgarity encompasses the whole of life within the imaginary realm of nonsense in MacFlecknoe. These various allusions seem to lend themselves to a system of classification according to type. The types include the scato-erotic, references to sexual love, the scato-mathic, references to mental discipline and learning, the scato-artistic, references to the writing of Flecknoe, Shadwell, and some of their contemporaries, and the scato-generic, any reference to grossness whether bodily, architectural, social, or otherwise. Some allusions overlap, spanning more than one category. An example is in the first image of the poem:

All human things are subject to decay  
And when Fate summons, monarchs must obey.  
vv. 1-2

The decaying monarch envelops all categories of scatology. Decay implies a deterioration of values, learning, literature, minds and bodies.

Within the framework of the inverted system of values of the "realm of nonsense" of MacFlecknoe, all references to love and sex take on the

sinister aspects of lewdness and perversity. The description of the site of Shadwell's throne contains allusions to the offensive in an example of the scato-erotic:

Close to the walls which fair Augusta bind,  
 (The fair Augusta much to fears inclined)  
 An ancient fabric raised t' inform the sight,  
 There stood of yore, and Barbican it hight:  
 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 Nursery erects its head,  
 Where queens are formed, and future heroes bred;  
 Where unfledged actors learn to laugh and cry,  
 And little Maximins the gods defy.

vv. 64-78

Close to Augusta, London,<sup>22</sup> ruins of a watchtower give forth brothel-houses, "Scenes of lewd loves, and of polluted joys" (v. 68). Next to these houses of prostitution, sits a nursery, "a place to train children for the stage."<sup>23</sup> The houses of prostitution were unquestionably offensive, while the nursery would most likely also have been considered obscene for its connection with the stage. The scenes of brothel-houses and nurseries offer appropriate surroundings for Shadwell's throne.

Another scato-erotic allusion comes from a prophecy from a punster of Shadwell's time; it accentuates the prolific nature of Shadwell:

But worlds of Misers from his pen should flow;  
 Humorists and hypocrites it should produce,  
 Whole Raymond families, and tribes of Bruce.

vv. 91-93

<sup>22</sup>Maynard Mack, ed., The Augustans (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1961), p. 36.

<sup>23</sup>Mack, p. 37.

The image is one of permissiveness, or lack of control, for the inability in the pen or the penis to discriminate results in the whole lines of illegitimate and unworthy produce, properly named from Shadwell's plays and characters. Dryden again infers a distasteful quality to birth:

Love's Kingdom to his right he did convey,  
 At once his scepter, and his rule of sway;  
 Whose righteous lore the prince had practiced young  
 And from whose loins recorded Psyche sprung.  
 vv. 122-125

In the scatological metaphor the loins of "Love's Kingdom," Flecknoe's play, produces another bad birth in the form of Shadwell's badly written opera, "Psyche."

The scato-mathic is apparent in the poem in the many satiric references to Shadwell's intellect. The characteristic nonsense and dullness of the realm of Flecknoe and Shadwell also reflect the scato-mathic in the lack of mental discipline.

In describing Flecknoe's realm, Dryden declares him: "Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute." (v. 6) A scato-mathic allusion is used also within this description of Flecknoe's monarch:

This aged prince, now flourishing in peace,  
 And blest with issue of a large increase  
 vv. 7-8

"Large increase" conjures up the image of an imbecilic line of descendants, multiplying in numbers until they threaten to overtake the reasoning creatures in society.

A reference to Shadwell's resemblance to his father pictures Shadwell as equally nonsensical:



Sh-       alone my perfect image bears,  
 Mature in dulness 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,  
 But Sh-       never deviates into sense.

vv. 15-20

"Confirmed in full stupidity," Shadwell's character reflects the perfect image of the scato-mathic. "Mature in dulness from his tender years" (v. 16) sets the oxymoronic standard of this mock kingdom. Within the realms of Nonsense, its value system would necessarily appear as contrary to the usual eighteenth-century values of reason, common sense, and the inherent codes of nature. While common sense would be judged of supreme worth in Augustan axiology, the ideal in "the realm of Nonsense" is dullness. Thus Dryden condemns through praise as he labels Shadwell highest in the inverted mores of the realm of nonsense and lowest in the real world.

The following image echoes previous references to Shadwell's ineptitude in clear thinking:

And seems designed for thoughtless majesty:  
 Thoughtless as monarch oaks that shade the plain  
 And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.

vv. 26-28

The oaks and Shadwell rule by sheer bulk in "thoughtless majesty." A similar image occurs in a punning of Shadwell's corpulence in the following lines:

Nor let thy mountain belly make pretense  
 Of likeness; thine's a tympany of sense.  
 A tun of a man in thy large bulk is writ,  
 But sure thou'rt but a kilderkin of wit.

vv. 193-196



Again, the comparison is between the bulk of Shadwell's body and the smallness of his intellect. The wine cask imagery accents this comparison in describing Shadwell as a "tun of a man," a large wine cask,<sup>24</sup> "but a kilderkin of wit," a small wine cask.<sup>25</sup>

Dryden's proclamation of Shadwell as "prophet of tautology" designates the scato-mathic imagery:

Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,  
Thou last great prophet of tautology  
vv. 29-30

"Prophet of tautology" accuses Shadwell of the unnecessary repetition, or redundancy, characteristic of a man grossly lacking in the quality of wit.

The domain which Flecknoe desires for his son reveals the essential qualities for the rule of an undisciplined mind:

Heavens bless my son, from Ireland let him reign  
To far Barbadoes on the western main;  
vv. 139-140

Both Ireland and Barbadoes, a remote and relatively newly acquired island possession of Britain,<sup>26</sup> were considered to be very uncultured and therefore dull,<sup>27</sup> the perfect domain for Shadwell's peculiarly lethargic qualities.

A greater rule of dullness by Shadwell's reign is predicted in the following passage:

<sup>24</sup>Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. XI

<sup>25</sup>Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. V

<sup>26</sup>"Barbadoes," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1929.

<sup>27</sup>"Barbadoes," p. 95.

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."

v. 141-144

Not only is a greater rule of dullness predicted; also a greater throne than the throne "of his own labors reared" by Flecknoe is predicted. Shadwell's throne holds the promise of an even more lofty edifice to the scato-mathic.

Scato-artistic imagery condemns inferior art. Shadwell's writing gains its proper perspective for the poem in the following quote:

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 annointed dulness he was made.

vv. 60-63

In the context of the scatological motif Dryden makes it clear that Shadwell's writing is the most offensive of his flaws.

In an emphasis upon Shadwell's awkwardness in the company of good writers, Dryden mentions Fletcher and Jonson in reference to the site of Shadwell's coronation:

Great Fletcher never treads in buskins here,  
 Nor greater Jonson dares in socks appear,  
 But gentle Simkin just reception finds  
 Amidst this monument of vanished minds

vv. 79-82

These two most admired playwrights of Dryden's age, Fletcher for tragedy (the buskin)<sup>28</sup> and Jonson for comedy (the sock),<sup>29</sup> would not be caught

<sup>28</sup>Mack, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup>Mack, p. 37.

in the company of Shadwell and his companions; only "gentle Simkin," the name for a simpleton,<sup>30</sup> finds a reception here.

The muse, the source of inspiration for the writer, assumes the baseness of Shadwell's art in the following lines:

Pure clinches the suburban Muse affords,  
And Panton waging harmless war with words.  
Here Flecknoe, as a place to fame well known.  
Ambitiously designed his Sh- 's throne  
vv. 83-86

"Clinches" creates an ambiguity, not only meaning puns,<sup>31</sup> but also literally referring to the muse in a clinch with Shadwell. Typically the muse, a sensitive and beneficent creature, served to inspire writers to great works. Shadwell found it necessary to engage with his muse to secure inspiration. For those who seriously contemplated the merits of writing, such a handling of the muse would seem quite vulgar.

The emphasis of the poem is often upon the scato-artistic. At the height of the poem's activity, as the processional moves toward the site of the coronation, the scato-artistic emerges:

No Persian carpets spread th' imperial way,  
But scattered limbs of mangled poets lay;  
From dusty shops neglected authors come,  
Martyrs of pies, and relics of the bum.  
Much Heywood, Shirley, Ogleby there lay,  
But loads of Sh- almost choked the way.  
vv. 98-103

The "nations meet" to view Shadwell's coronation, but instead of "persian carpets," "scattered limbs of mangled poets," line the way. Authors emerge

<sup>30</sup>Mack, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup>Mack, p. 38.

from dusty shops in the form of pie wrappers and paper for the occupants of privies.<sup>32</sup> The privy authors include Heywood, Shirley, and Ogleby, writers of small merit, and Shadwell, the most prolific, whose loads "almost choked the way." Considering the previous reference to privies, "loads of Sh- " carries scatological undertones. This picture of artistic chaos predisposes the intellectual milieu of duncery in Pope's, The Dunciad.

The criterion for the "realm of nonsense" and the artistic achievements of Flecknoe and Shadwell can be found in the following lines:

Then thus continued he: My son, advance  
 Still in new impudence, new ignorance.  
 Success let others teach, learn thou from me.  
 Pangs without birth, fruitless industry.

vv. 145-148

"Pangs without birth, fruitless industry" offers the formula for success in the "realm of nonsense." In the eighteenth century this ethic would have been most offensive in consideration of the beliefs concerning man's place in the chain of being and his responsibility to perfect himself through his vocation.

Dryden pinpoints the "fruitless industry" within Shadwell's artistic endeavor through a prophecy revealed by Flecknoe:

Let Virtuosos in five years be writ,  
 Yet not one thought accuse thy toil of wit.  
 Let gentle George in triumph tread the stage,  
 Make Dorimant betray, and Loveit rage;  
 Let Cully, Cockwood, Fopling, charm the pit,  
 And in their folly shed the writer's wit,

<sup>32</sup>Mack, p. 38.



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,  
 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-y interpose,  
 To lard with wit thy hungry prose.

vv. 149-164

All the names mentioned are examples of the work and the characters of Shadwell's writing, all of which exemplify "fruitless industry." "Fruitless industry" can be seen in the five years that it took Shadwell to produce "The Virtuoso," in the lack of wit of his characters, and in Shadwell's failure to differentiate among types of characters.

Flecknoe's advice to Shadwell affirms his belief in the ability of Shadwell to fill the role of the head of the "realm of nonsense:"

And when false flowers of rhetoric thou would'st cull,  
 Trust nature, do not labor to be dull,  
 But write thy best, and top, and, in each line,  
 Sir Formal, tho' unsought, attends thy quill,  
 And does thy northern dedications fill.

vv. 165-170

Alluding to the affectation of much of Shadwell's writing, this selection makes reference to Sir Formal, a character from Shadwell's "The Virtuoso," who gave a speech "full of affectation."<sup>33</sup> Flecknoe's advice to "trust nature" with no need to "labor to be dull" seems to suggest that Shadwell trusts his own stupidity. Then his writings will reach the affectation of "Sir Formal" every time, as it did in his northern dedications to the Duke of Newcastle.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Mack, p. 40.

<sup>34</sup>Mack, p. 40.

A long reference to Ben Jonson develops into a checklist for Shadwell's writing errors. The premise of this reference lies in Flecknoe's cautioning of Shadwell against following Jonson:

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 Ogleby thy envy raise.  
Thou art my blood, where Jonson has no part:  
What share have we in nature, or in art?  
vv. 171-176

Determined to prove Jonson's ineptitude in comparison to Shadwell's success, Flecknoe questions as to when Jonson has accomplished such deeds:

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,  
Or swept the dust in Psyche's humble strain?  
Where sold he bargains; 'whip stitch, kiss my arse,'  
Promised a play and dwindled to a farce?  
When did his Muse from Fletcher scenes purloin,  
But so transfused, as oil on water's flow,  
His always floats above, thine sinks below.  
vv. 177-182

The questioning contains Shadwell's chronicle of errors: raillery of arts which he did not understand, Shadwell's satire on scientific interests of royal society in "The Virtuoso,"<sup>35</sup> poor love making by his characters, "the selling of bargains," the practice of answering innocent questions with coarse phrases,<sup>36</sup> and the stealing of scenes from other writers' works.

Flecknoe's explanation of the process of identification of Shadwell's works exemplifies that aspect of the definition of scatology relating to the study of skata and related matters. The heavy, coarse, and earthy element of Shadwell's writing sinks it to the bottom, while the borrowed

<sup>35</sup> Mack, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> Mack, p. 40.

writing raises it to the top.

More of the scato-artistic is outlined in Shadwell's shabby writing techniques:

Like mine, thy gentle numbers feebly creep;  
 Thy tragic muse gives smiles, thy comic sleep,  
 With what e'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, and dies.  
 vv. 197-202

Shadwell's writing creates the opposite of the desired effect. His tragedies are funny; his comedies are sad. His satires "never bite." Such ineffectual writing suggests a poor choice of vocations, and Flecknoe suggests a more appropriate pastime for the particularly crude genius of Shadwell:

Thy genius calls thee not to purchase fame  
 In keen iambs, but mild anagram.  
 Some peaceful province in acrostic land.  
 There thou may'st wings display, and altars raise,  
 And torture one poor word ten thousand ways;  
 Or, if thou wouldst thy different talents suit,  
 Set thy own songs, and sing them to thy lute.  
 vv. 203-210

Anagram, "the transposition of letters in a word so as to make a new one,"<sup>37</sup> and acrostics, "a poem in which the first letter of each line, read downward, makes up the name of the person or thing that is subject of the poem,"<sup>38</sup> are the mechanical word tortures which Flecknoe suggests to Shadwell as more suited to his genius.

The scato-generic, any allusion to grossness: bodily, architectural, social, or otherwise, incorporates those references in the poem which

<sup>37</sup>Mack, p. 41.

<sup>38</sup>Mack, p. 41



are obviously scatological yet do not lend themselves readily to any other category.

An example of the scato-generic used continually throughout the poem is the use of Sh- in reference to Shadwell. A common protective device of the satire of the period, this use of the initial and the second letter of the name followed by a dash, proves particularly suggestive in the context of the scatological motif within the poem.

In locating the site of the coronation of Shadwell, Dryden employs the scato-generic:

Echoes from Pissing Alley Sh- call,  
And Sh- they resound from Aston Hall.  
vv. 47-48

A euphemistic style conceals a scato-generic reference in the following lines:

About thy boat the little fishes throng,  
As at the morning toast that floats along.  
vv. 49-50.

Indicative of a being of such supremacy that the dumb creatures of the water recognize his merit, the "little fishes" stop to look as Shadwell's floating processional skims its way to his coronation. The next line explodes this image with the comparison as ". . . at the morning toast that floats along." The fish are attracted to Shadwell as they are to feces floating in the water. The relationship between Shadwell and the "skata" of scatology grows stronger. The location of his coronation connects Shadwell to scatological origins, and the portrayal of the fishes' equal attraction to Shadwell and sewage more closely allies the two.

In the following accusation against Shadwell the image is scato-generic.

While the accusation concerns the use of literature, the resulting image is generally gross:

Sometimes as prince of thy harmonious band,  
Thou wield'st thy papers in thy threshing hand.  
vv. 51-52

The accusation pictures Shadwell, applying the pages of his literary works to an anal process. The "threshing" image makes the passage brutal, for the up and down motion of the beating of grain suggests a vocation more useful than writing. The following lines continue the allusion:

St. Andre's feet ne'er kept more equal time,  
Not ev'n the feet of thy own Psyche's rhyme;  
Tho they in number as in sense excel,  
So just, so like tautology, they fell,  
vv. 53-56

Flecknoe suggests that Shadwell's new-found vocation displays a superiority to the dancing feet of St. Andre, a dancing master, and the poetic feet of "Psyche," a play by Shadwell, in the rhythmic motion of the "threshing hand."

The picture of Flecknoe upon his throne suggests the scato-generic:

The hoary prince in majesty appeared,  
High on a throne of his own labors reared.  
vv. 106-107

The image suggests the scatological, for we have only seen Flecknoe and Shadwell's labors in the ludicrous light of the obscene or offensive. The intellectual references of the poem have all been geared toward the offensiveness of dullness and nonsense, while the physical references to people, places, and things have involved the "skata" of scatology, referring to such places as "Pissing Alley" and "Aston Hall," or to privies where the pages of indifferent authors serve a utilitarian purpose.

Thus the labors of Flecknoe may take on either the intellectual note of the results of his dullness or the physical straining of the labors of the bowel process.

A reference to Shadwell's use of opium implies a dullness inferred from an outside source yet contributing to the grossness of an already painfully dull person:

His temples, last, with poppies were o'erspread,  
That nodding seemed to consecrate his head:  
vv. 126-127

The degenerative quality of Shadwell's coronation typifies Shadwell's ability to taint everything which he associates with:

The King himself the sacred unction made,  
As King by office, and as priest by trade:  
In his sinister hand, instead of ball,  
He placed a mighty mug of potent ale:  
vv. 118-121

Stating that the King made the sacred unction, or oil, Dryden cites the fact that Flecknoe was a priest, qualifying him to make the oil sacred and to annoint his son. The ball was an emblem of power, which Flecknoe forsook for a "mighty mug of ale," an act of impiety designed to offend, or at least render ridiculous, this hallowed rite. "Potent ale" seems a fitting replacement for the ball as a symbol of Shadwell's kingdom inasmuch as the effects of this "potent ale" made its partakers more possessive of the desired dullness and stupidity of the realm.

The poem ends in a literary allusion, employing the shabby trickery of Shadwell's play, "The Virtuoso," yet the lasting effect is scato-generic:



He said: but his last words were scarcely heard,  
 For Bruce and Longvil had a trap prepared,  
 And down they sent the yet declaiming bard.  
 Sinking he left his drugget robe behind,  
 Borne upwards by a subterranean wind.  
 The mantle fell to the young prophet's part,  
 With double portion of his father's art.

vv. 211-217

Bruce and Longvil, characters from Shadwell's "The Virtuoso," play the same trap-door trick which Dryden employs to oust Flecknoe. Appropriately their trick hastens Shadwell's succession to the reign of dullness. It is even more appropriate that a poem that has continually pointed out the failings of its characters in scatological terms end with a scatological reference. In an allusion to the prophet Elijah, who was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire borne on a whirlwind, with his mantle falling on his successor, the younger prophet Elisha (II King, 2, 8-14), Flecknoe is borne downward rather than upward. Dryden subtly implies the word fart as the ending of the poem through the double rime "prophet's part," which requires the parallel father's fart rather than "father's art." Note, finally, the significance of the rime: behind-wind.

From the first line of the poem, "All human things are subject to decay," the reader gradually realizes that all aspects of life within the imaginary realm of this poem are involved in a decaying process. While the treatment of the material may be less than serious at times, the grim picture of a whole society of Shadwells seems to have a sobering effect upon the reader. Shadwell's association with the scatological is complete, involving most vital phases of existence: sexual love, scato-erotic, mental discipline, scato-mathic, the creative process, scato-artistic, and life in general, scato-generic. Through association with Shadwell every-

thing becomes tainted. Shadwell's continued alliance with the scatological in the poem ties him to all its implications until we involuntarily link the two as identical. Dryden's success in the degradation of Shadwell and his art is apparent in the fact that fame knows Shadwell only through his place in the nonsensical realm of MacFlecknoe.

## Appendix

The Dryden-Shadwell controversy offers necessary background material for the understanding of MacFlecknoe, for MacFlecknoe, obviously a personal attack against Shadwell, resulted from the long standing quarrel between Dryden and Shadwell. The argument ". . . at first probably sprung from some temporary cause of disgust, which must frequently divide persons whose lives are spent in a competition for public applause."<sup>39</sup> "Between the politics of the stage and of the nation, the friendship of these bards, which never had a solid foundation, was at length overthrown."<sup>40</sup>

The basic argument between Dryden and Shadwell concerned their differing ideas on the writing of plays, in particular comedy, and the concept and relationship of wit to comedy. Shadwell patterned his life and his plays in the manner of Jonson ". . . partly on the strength of his gross and unwieldy person, and partly because of the analogy between his genius and Ben's."<sup>41</sup>

Ben Jonson developed the comedy of humours in the closing years of the sixteenth century. It derives its comic interest largely from the

<sup>39</sup>J. H. Smith, "Dryden and Flecknoe: A Conjecture, Philological Quarterly, 33 (July 1954), 338.

<sup>40</sup>Smith, p. 338.

<sup>41</sup>K. G. Hamilton, John Dryden and the Poetry of Statement (Michigan State University Press, 1969), p. 112.



exhibition of ". . . humorous characters, that is, persons whose conduct is controlled by some one characteristic whim or humour."<sup>42</sup>

Dryden found this type of drama stifling and much preferred his heroic drama, heavily accented by the use of repartee. While Shadwell's Jonsonian styled comedy of humours dealt with what could be called real life, Dryden's heroic drama was characterized by ". . . excessive spectacle, violent emotional conflicts in the main characters, extravagant bombastic dialogue, and epic personages as chief characters."<sup>43</sup>

The public argument between Dryden and Shadwell manifested itself in various prefaces to their works. These preface arguments continued for years, but a piece entitled "The Medal of John Bayes" is considered to have been the breaking point for Dryden.<sup>44</sup> Shadwell has been accepted as the author of "The Medal of John Bayes,"<sup>45</sup> written in response to Dryden's "The Medal, a Satire against Sedition," which exposed to contempt and reprobation the Whig leader Shaftesbury's political and moral bearings.<sup>46</sup>

In his "Epistle to the Tories," prefacing "The Medal of John Bayes," Shadwell attacked Dryden in the most offensive and personal way, totally without subtlety or wit, as the following excerpt shows:

<sup>42</sup>Clarence H. Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1972), p. 109.

<sup>43</sup>Holman, p. 445.

<sup>44</sup>George R. Noyes, ed., The Poetical Works of Dryden (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1950), p. 134.

<sup>45</sup>Noyes, p. 134.

<sup>46</sup>Noyes, p. 134.

His prostituted Muse will become as common for hire,  
as his Mistress Revesia was, upon whom he spent too many  
hundred pounds; and of whom (to shew his constancy in Love)  
he got three Claps, and she was a Bawd.<sup>47</sup>

Shadwell restated the stock charges against Dryden in "The Medal of John Bayes," including the charge that Dryden, ever prompt to discover dullness in others, was himself dull, Dryden's relationship with actress Ann Reeves, Dryden's frequent habitation of Will's Coffeehouse, the adoration of many young men, his diet in connection with his writing productivity, and the use of other men's work for his wit and plot.<sup>48</sup>

Point by point Dryden had answered Shadwell's accusations, elaborating throughout the years of debate upon the nature of comedy and drama and the role of the poet. But the crude attack of "The Medal of John Bayes" served to infuriate him beyond control.<sup>49</sup> MacFlecknoe vents Dryden's anger in a subtly controlled satire, devastating to the character of Shadwell.

<sup>47</sup>Montague Summers, The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), p. 248.

<sup>48</sup>Summers, p. 252, passim.

<sup>49</sup>Noyes, p. 134.

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