

Mac Flecknoe Character List

Richard Flecknoe

Richard Flecknoe (1600-1678) was an English dramatist and poet. His work was ridiculed by Dryden as well as poet Andrew Marvell (1621-1678). In *Mac Flecknoe*, he is cast in the fictional role of the "King of Nonsense." He is getting older and decides he must appoint a successor in one of his sons. He chooses Shadwell because he is the most like him; he is dull and devoid of wit and sense. At the end of the poem, he drops below the stage and Shadwell assumes his mantle.

T.S., Sh--, or Shadwell (i.e., Thomas Shadwell)

Thomas Shadwell is the target of Dryden's satire and derision in *Mac Flecknoe*. Shadwell was an English dramatist and poet laureate. He was known for his broad comedies of manners and, more significantly, as a frequent target of John Dryden's satire. In *Mac Flecknoe*, Dryden casts him as the heir of the fictional "Kingdom of Nonsense," which is presided over by Flecknoe. Shadwell is a large, proud man who revels in the bombast of his coronation. He has no sense, is dull, and runs roughshod over the work of other, better poets.

Augustus

He is the founder of the Roman empire and the first emperor. Also known as Octavian or Octavius, he was adopted by Julius Caesar.

Thomas Heywood and James Shirley

Heywood (1497-1575) and Shirley (1596-1666) were poets who were not very well esteemed.

Arion

Arion (Ancient Greek: Ἀρίων, gen.: Ἀρίωνος) was a kitharode in ancient Greece, a Dionysiac poet credited with inventing the dithyramb. He is known for his musical inventions and, primarily, for the fantastic myth of his kidnapping by pirates and miraculous rescue by dolphins.

Ascanius

The son of Aeneas, he was the leader of Troy's Dardanian allies during the Trojan War. Ascanius accompanied his father to Italy after the fall of Troy, and fought briefly in the Italian wars. The Julian gens claimed descent from him.

John Singleton

He was a court musician and singer.

Maximins

He was the bombastic hero of Dryden's *Tyrannic Love*.

John Fletcher

The Jacobean playwright John Fletcher (1579–1625), referred to in *Mac Flecknoe* simply as "Fletcher" (l. --), was among the most prolific and influential dramatists of his day. Both during his lifetime and in the early Restoration, his fame rivaled Shakespeare's.

Ben Jonson

Jonson was an English poet, essayist, and playwright. Jonson's enduring reputation rests on his comedies written between 1605 and 1614. Under King James I, Jonson received royal favor and patronage for Jonson's second known play. His most well-known play, *Every Man in His Humour*, was performed in 1598 by the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Globe with William Shakespeare in the cast. The work catapulted Jonson to celebrity status. From this point onward, he became known for "humors" comedy, a kind of comedy involving eccentric characters designed to represent a temperament, or humor, of humanity. Shadwell admired Ben Jonson and tried to imitate his style.

Charles II

Charles II was king of England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1660 until his death in 1685. His restoration to the throne in 1660 marked the end of republican rule in England. The eldest surviving son of Charles I, he was 12 when the Civil War began. After the victory of Cromwell's Parliamentary forces, he was in exile in France. His father, King Charles I was executed in 1649, and England subsequently entered the period known to history as the English Interregnum or the English Commonwealth and the country was a de facto republic, led by Oliver Cromwell. In 1651, Charles II invaded England with a Scottish army (as their king), but was defeated by Cromwell at the Battle of Worcester. He subsequently went into exile again and was not invited back to England until 1660, when he reclaimed his throne. As new king, Charles II pursued a policy of political tolerance and power-sharing. With leanings toward Catholicism, he desired religious toleration and made several attempts to formalize toleration of Catholics and Non-conformists.

Sir Charles Sedley

Sir Charles Sedley, 5th Baronet, was an English wit, dramatist, and politician, ending his career as Speaker of the House of Commons. He contributed the prologue to Shadwell's *Epsom-Wells*.

Thomas Dekker

Thomas Dekker was an English Elizabethan dramatist and pamphleteer. He was a rival of Ben Jonson, who mocked him in his late Elizabethan stage play, a satire called "The Poetaster."

Sir George Etherege (ref. "George")

Sir George Etherege was a contemporary English playwright. The characters mentioned throughout lines 152-153 come from his plays.

Henry Herringman (ref. "H——")

Herringman was both Shadwell's and Dryden's publisher.

Oliver Cromwell

Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) was an English military and political leader. He was the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1653-1658.

St. André

St. André was a French dancing master — an unreputable profession — and did the choreography for Shadwell's *Psyche*.

Villerius

Villerius is a character in *The Siege of Rhodes*, an opera by English poet and dramatist William Davenant.

Virgil

Virgil was an ancient Roman poet of the Augustan period, known primarily for three major works of Latin literature: the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and the epic *Aeneid*.

Thomas Panton

He was a popular punster.

Raymond and Bruce

Characters in, respectively, Shadwell's *The Humorists* and *The Virtuoso*.

John Ogleby

He was a poet, translator, and printer.

Prince Nicander

He was a character in Shadwell's *Psyche*.

Hannibal

He was the Carthaginian emperor who attacked Rome.

Romulus

With his brother Remus, he was one of the co-founders of Rome.

Sir Formal

Sir Formal Trifle was a character in Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*.

Bruce and Longvil

They are the characters from *The Virtuoso* who arranged for Sir Formal Trifle to fall through a trapdoor.

Mac Flecknoe Summary

The poem identifies itself as a satire of which the subject is “the True-blue Protestant Poet T.S.” referring to the poet Thomas Shadwell.

The first line of the poem creates the illusion of its being an epic poem about a historical hero. The next lines talk about [Mac Flecknoe](#), a monarch who instead of ruling an empire, rules over the realm of Nonsense. The king is old and thus must choose a successor to his throne. Dryden wonders whether the king will choose a poet who has talent and wit or if he will choose someone like him, a man with no literary talent.

Flecknoe decides upon his son Shadwell, a man with no talent and who is tedious, stupid, and always at war with wit. Shadwell is also described as a very corpulent man. Through Flecknoe's words, the poet continues to insult Shadwell in a mock-heroic tone, calling him a dunce, the "last great prophet of tautology," and "for anointed dullness he was made."

Shadwell arrives in London, outfitted like a king and lauded by the people. Flecknoe chooses for his son's throne a neighborhood of brothels and theaters birthing bad actors. Inside those places, real drama does not exist; only simple plays are welcome. Dryden also alludes to some of the historical Shadwell's plays, like *Epsom Wells* and *Psyche*, and mocks another contemporary writer, Singleton, who is envious that he wasn't chosen as successor to the throne. It is clear that in this environment, Shadwell will rule over those who have no literary talent. The descriptions Dryden offers only serve the purpose of highlighting the incompetency of Shadwell and create the image of a fool ruling over peasants.

As the coronation begins, Dryden describes the streets as filled with the limbs of other poets, suggesting that Shadwell managed to get a hold on his position at the expense of talented writers. Once more, the poet mentions human waste and links it with Shadwell's writing and compares him with a historical figure, [Hannibal](#), to suggest that Shadwell's purpose is to destroy wit and replace it with dullness.

During his coronation, the oil used to anoint a new king is replaced by ale, signifying the poet's dullness. After the crown is placed on his head, Shadwell sits on the throne and the former king prepares to give the cheering crowd a speech.

The former king begins by presenting the land over which the new king will rule, a territory where no one lives. Flecknoe urges his son to remain true to his writing and to not let anyone make any changes in his work. Flecknoe praises Shadwell's abilities and then ends his speech by telling Shadwell to continue to remain dull and to avoid trying to be like Jonson.

Flecknoe concludes by exhorting his son not to focus on real plays but rather to work on acrostics or anagrams. His last words are cut off and he sinks below the stage. His mantle falls on Shadwell, which is appropriate because he has twice as much "talent" as his father.