

Dryden as a Satirist

Dryden was a poet and satirist. He had a very wide canvas of satires, consisting of three kinds - political, personal and religious. Mac Flecknoe is a very good example of personal satire. In this satire, we find a direct protest of a fellow poet of that time. Shadwell has been portrayed as a satirical character. Similarly, Absalom and Achitophel is a very nice composition of Dryden which depicts the political condition. In this poem, Shaftesbury is the main object of satire. His Religio medici is an argument in verse on the credibility of Christian religion and merits of the Anglican form of a doctrine and Church Government. The Iliad and ^{the} Panther is a difference of his religion with an admixture of satire on the opposite creed through the medium of a best table. The superiority of Dryden lies in his political expression in all these satires. He could not rise superior to the faults of the age consequent on fragment corruption in Church, State and Society.

Like Burns, Dryden, ~~was able~~ to some extent, ~~at least~~ ^{was able} to weave in "with the satire such poetic beauty as no satirist had ever mingled with it before and only Byron combined with it afterwards". Dryden showed that it was possible to write satirical verse without being either inflated or harsh. His native gifts and his extensive practice in playwriting made his use of the heroic couplet ~~as~~ as natural ~~as~~ a vehicle as possible with a varied cadence and subtly disposed music which invariably frees his verse from the charge of monotony and tanniness.

Dryden's characters are not merely the men as they lived, moved and had their being in his age as individuals but had some of

the permanent and essential attributes of the classes they belong to. Dryden, like an artist and craftsman, imparted to his wonderful character sketches something of universality. The method of presenting characters by exhibiting the universal in particular while at the same time differentiating them by means of their easiest and most obvious distinctions and differences in clothes habits, humours and follies is quite an innovation in satirical writing which proves Dryden's original genius. His satire never degenerates into scurrilous abuse.

Dryden is very intelligent in his gallery of satirical verses which are really remarkable for what they do ~~not~~ contain. He understood the importance of moderation in detail as well as in tone: He takes every care at the time of selection which is needed. He is imbued with true sense of justice and fair play.

Dryden has a singular faculty of verse argument. His satirical portraits reveal a spirit of a true scholastic logician. He is very fertile in the art of allusions and concealing the weakness of an argument in the most convincing way. Though belonging to the age of classical satire, his classicism is set off and enriched by romanticism of the imagination.

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