They who have best succeeded on the stage
Have still conformed their genius to their age.
Thus Jonson did mechanic humor show,
When men were dull, and conversation low.
Then comedy was faultless, but 'twas coarse:
Cob's tankard was a jest, and Otter's horse.
And, as their comedy, their love was mean;
Except, by chance, in some one labored scene
Which must atone for an ill-written play.
They rose, but at their height could seldom stay.
Fame then was cheap, and the first comer sped;
And they have kept it since, by being dead.
But, were they now to write, when critics weigh
Each line, and every word, throughout a play,
None of 'em, no, not Jonson in his height,
Could pass, without allowing grains for weight.4
Think it not envy, that these truths are told;
Our poet's not malicious, though he's bold.
'Tis not to brand 'em, that their faults are shown,
But, by their errors, to excuse his own.
If love and honor now are higher raised,
'Tis not the poet, but the age is praised.
Wit's now arrived to a more high degree;
Our native language more refined and free.
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit
In conversation, than those poets writ.
Then, one of these is, consequently, true;
That what this poet writes comes short of you,
And imitates you ill (which most he fears),
Or else his writing is not worse than theirs.
Yet, though you judge (as sure the critics will)
That some before him writ with greater skill,
In this one praise he has their fame surpassed,
To please an age more gallant than the last.

1. This epilogue, in which Dryden compared unfavorably the manners, the conversation, and the drama of the earlier 17th century with those of his own time, had provoked such hostile criticism that, when he published the play in 1672, he included a long prose defense of his position.
2. The eccentricities of artisans, as opposed to people of the middle and upper classes.
3. A character in Jonson's play *Every Man in His Humor*; "Otter" appears in Jonson's *Epicocene, or the Silent Woman*.
4. Without weighting the scale in his favor. A "grain" is the smallest unit of weight.
5. The two themes of the rhymed herbic play, of which *The Conquest of Granada* is the most distinguished example.
Prologue to The Tempest

OR THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

As, when a tree’s cut down, the secret root
Lives underground, and thence new branches shoot;
So from old Shakespeare’s honored dust, this day
Springs up and buds a new reviving play:

Shakespeare, who (taught by none)\(^2\) did first impart
To Fletcher\(^3\) wit, to laboring Jonson art.
He, monarch-like, gave those, his subjects, law;
And is that nature which they paint and draw.
Fletcher reached that which on his heights did grow,

Whilst Jonson crept, and gathered all below.
This did his love, and this his mirth digest:
One imitates him most, the other best.
If they have since outwrit all other men,
’Tis with the drops which fell from Shakespeare’s pen.

The storm which vanished on the neighboring shore,
Was taught by Shakespeare’s Tempest first to roar.\(^4\)
That innocence and beauty which did smile
In Fletcher, grew on this Enchanted Isle.
But Shakespeare’s magic could not copied be;

Within that circle none durst walk but he.
I must confess ’twas bold, nor would you now
That liberty to vulgar wits\(^5\) allow,
Which works by magic supernatural things;
But Shakespeare’s power is sacred as a king’s.

Those legends from old priesthood were received,
And he then writ, as people then believed.
But if for Shakespeare we your grace implore,
We for our theater shall want it more:

Who by our dearth of youths are forced to employ
One of our women to present a boy;
And that’s a transformation, you will say,
Exceeding all the magic in the play.
Let none expect in the last act to find
Her sex transformed from man to womankind.

Whate’er she was before the play began,
All you shall see of her is perfect man.
Or if your fancy will be farther led
To find her woman, it must be abed.

1. In 1667 Dryden collaborated with the poet laureate, Sir William Davenant, in adapting Shakespeare’s Tempest to the Restoration stage and the tastes of Restoration audiences.
2. The view of Shakespeare as a natural genius, writing without the advantages of classical learning, was a critical commonplace. Compare Jonson’s To the Memory of Shakespeare, line 31, Milton’s L’Allegro, lines 131–34, and Dryden’s Essay of Dramatic Poesy.
3. John Fletcher (1579–1625), who collaborated with Francis Beaumont (on 1584–1616) in writing plays. During the early years of the Restoration period, their dramas were the most frequently revived plays “of the last age.”
4. Details of the plot of The Sea Voyage (1622), by Fletcher and Philip Massinger, suggest The Tempest.
5. The common run of poets.
Epilogue to *Tyrannic Love*

SPOKEN BY MRS. ELLEN,¹ WHEN SHE WAS TO BE CARRIED OFF DEAD BY THE BEARERS

[To the Bearer.] Hold, are you mad? you damned confounded dog, I am to rise, and speak the epilogue.

[To the Audience.] I come, kind gentlemen, strange news to tell ye, I am the ghost of poor departed Nelly.

Sweet ladies, be not frightened, I’ll be civil; I’am what I was, a little harmless devil: For after death, we sprites have just such natures We had for all the world, when human creatures;² And therefore, I that was an actress here, Play all my tricks in hell, a goblin there. Callants, look to it, you say there are no sprites; But I’ll come dance about your beds at nights. And faith you’ll be in a sweet kind of taking, When I surprise you between sleep and waking. To tell you true, I walk because I die Out of my calling in a tragedy. O poet, damned dull poet, who could prove So senseless! to make Nelly die for love! Nay, what’s yet worse, to kill me in the prime Of Easter term,³ in tart and cheese-cake time! I’ll fit⁴ the fop, for I’ll not one word say To excuse his godly out-of-fashion play: A play, which if you dare but twice sit out, You’ll all be slandered, and be thought devout. But farewell, gentlemen, make haste to me; I’m sure ere long to have your company. As for my epitaph, when I am gone, I’ll trust no poet, but will write my own:

*Here Nelly lies, who, though she lived a slattern,*
*Yet died a princess, acting in St. Cathar’n.*⁵

---

1669 1670

*Song from The Indian Emperor*

Ah, fading joy, how quickly art thou past! Yet we thy ruin haste. As if the cares of human life were few,

---

1. The famous actress Nell Gwynn (“Mrs.”—i.e., “Mistress”—was the title given all young unmarried women); her beauty and wit made her not only a favorite of London audiences, but eventually a mistress of Charles II. As he lay dying he was heard to say, “Don’t let poor Nelly starve.” Her great roles were comic parts, but in *Tyrannic Love* she acted Valeria, the daughter of the wicked Roman Emperor Maximin, who puts to death St. Catharine of Alexandria. Valeria is killed in the general slaughter which ends the play.
2. Pope develops this idea brilliantly in the sylphs and gnomes of *The Rape of the Lock*.
3. One of the four periods of the year when the law courts sit.
4. Punish.
5. The normal pronunciation of *Catharine* at the time.
We seek out new:
5 And follow fate, which would too fast pursue.¹

See how on every bough the birds express
In their sweet notes their happiness.
They all enjoy and nothing spare;
But on their mother nature lay their care:
10 Why then should man, the lord of all below,
Such troubles choose to know
As none of all his subjects undergo?

Hark, hark, the waters fall, fall, fall,
And with a murmuring sound
15 Dash, dash upon the ground.
To gentle slumber’s call.

1665 1667

Song from An Evening’s Love

1
Calm was the even, and clear was the sky,
And the new-budding flowers did spring,
When all alone went Amyntas and I
To hear the sweet nightingale sing.
5 I sate, and he laid him down by me,
But scarcely his breath he could draw;
For when with a fear, he began to draw near,
He was dashed with: “A ha ha ha ha!”

He blushed to himself, and lay still for a while,
10 And his modesty curbed his desire;
But straight I convinced² all his fear with a smile,
Which added new flames to his fire.
“O Sylvia,” said he, “you are cruel,
To keep your poor lover in awe”;
15 Then once more he pressed with his hand to my breast,
But was dashed with: “A ha ha ha ha!”

3
I knew ’twas his passion that caused all his fear,
And therefore I pitied his case;
I whispered him softly: “There’s nobody near,”
20 And laid my cheek close to his face:
But as he grew bolder and bolder,
A shepherd came by us and saw,
And just as our bliss we began with a kiss,
He laughed out with: “A ha ha ha ha!”

1668 1671

¹ Dryden’s enemies ridiculed this line as nonsense. ² Overcame.
To the Pious Memory of the Accomplished Young Lady Mrs. Anne Killigrew
Excellent in the Two Sister Arts of Poesy and Painting.

AN ODE

1
Thou youngest virgin-daughter of the skies,
Made in the last promotion of the blest,
Whose palms,1 new plucked from paradise,
In spreading branches more sublimely rise,
Rich with immortal green above the rest;
Whether, adopted to some neighboring star,
Thou roll'st above us in thy wandering race,
Or in procession fixed and regular,
Moved with the heavens' majestic pace,
Or called to more superior bliss,
Thou tred'st with seraphims the vast abyss;2
Whatever happy region is thy place,
Cease thy celestial song a little space;
Thou wilt have time enough for hymns divine,
Since heaven's eternal year is thine.

Hear then a mortal Muse thy praise rehearse,
In no ignoble verse;
But such as thy own voice did practice here,
When thy first fruits of poesy were given,
To make thyself a welcome inmate there,
While yet a young probationer,
And candidate of heaven.

2
If by traduction3 came thy mind,
Our wonder is the less to find
A soul so charming from a stock so good;
Thy father was transfused into thy blood:
So wert thou born into the tuneful strain
(An early, rich, and inexhausted vein).
But if thy pre-existing soul
Was formed at first with myriads more,
It did through all the mighty poets roll
Who Greek or Latin laurels wore,
And was that Sappho last, which once it was before.4

1. The symbol of victory (cf. Revelation 7.9).
2. Dryden is speculating on where the soul of the dead poet has come to rest: is she the tutelary deity of a planet (“neighboring star”)? or of one of the remote “fixed” stars? or does she enjoy the higher (“superior”) bliss of having joined the “seraphim,” the guardians of the throne of God? (cf. Isaiah 6). Like Milton, Dryden makes use of the Ptolemaic universe of concentric spheres moving around the earth “in procession fixed and regular.”
3. The idea that the soul is transmitted by the father at the moment of conception. Because Henry Killigrew had written a tragedy, his daughter is said to have inherited a poet’s soul from him. Dryden goes on to propose the theory that the soul exists before birth, and less seriously, that through the ages it transmigrates from body to body.
4. Killigrew is said to have been Sappho (the Greek lyric poet of the 7th century B.C.E.) twice: “once before,” when her soul transmigrated into Sappho’s body, and most recently (“last”), when it inhabited the body of the modern Sappho, Anne Killigrew.
If so, then cease thy flight, O heaven-born mind!
Thou hast no dross to purge from thy rich ore;
Nor can thy soul a fairer mansion find
Than was the beauteous frame she left behind:
Return, to fill or mend the choir of thy celestial kind.

May we presume to say that at thy birth
New joy was sprung in heaven, as well as here on earth?
For sure the milder planets did combine
On thy auspicious horoscope to shine,
And even the most malicious were in trine.5

Strung each his lyre, and tuned it high,
That all the people of the sky
Might know a poetess was born on earth.
And then, if ever, mortal ears
Had heard the music of the spheres!

And if no clustering swarm of bees
On thy sweet mouth distilled their golden dew,6
"Twas that such vulgar miracles
Heaven had not leisure to renew:
For all the blest fraternity of love
Solemnized there thy birth, and kept thy holiday above.

O gracious God! how far have we
Profaned thy heavenly gift of poesy!
Made prostitute and profligate the Muse,
Debased to each obscene and impious use,
Whose harmony was first ordained above
For tongues of angels, and for hymns of love!
O wretched we! why were we hurried down
This lubric and adulterate7 age
(Nay, added fat pollutions of our own)
To increase the steaming ordures of the stage?
What can we say to excuse our second fall?
Let this thy vestal, Heaven, atone for all:
Her Arethusan stream8 remains unsoiled,
Unmixed with foreign filth, and undefiled;
Her wit was more than man, her innocence a child!

Art she had none, yet wanted none,
For nature did that want supply;
So rich in treasures of her own,

5. The familiar idea that character and destiny are determined by the position of the planets at the moment of birth (“horoscope”). Killigrew’s horoscope was fortunate (“auspicious”): even those planets that are usually baleful (“malicious”) were “in trine”—120 degrees apart and hence favorable in their influence.
6. It was said that bees clustered on the lips of the infant Pindar, thus foretelling his greatness as a lyric poet.
7. Lewd and corrupted.
8. Cf. Milton’s Lycidas, line 85, “Thy vestal”; i.e., thy virgin. The Roman vestal virgins guarded the fire in the Temple of Vesta, goddess of the hearth.
She might our boasted stores defy:

Such noble vigor did her verse adorn

That it seemed borrowed where ’twas only born.

Her morals too were in her bosom bred,

By great examples daily fed,

What in the best of books, her father’s life, she read.

And to be read herself she need not fear;

Each test and every light her Muse will bear,

Though Epictetus with his lamp were there.9

Even love (for love sometimes her Muse expressed)

Was but a lambent flame1 which played about her breast,

Light as the vapors of a morning dream;

So cold herself, whilst she such warmth expressed,

’Twas Cupid bathing in Diana’s stream.

Born to the spacious empire of the Nine,2

One would have thought she should have been content

To manage well that mighty government;

But what can young ambitious souls confine?

To the next realm she stretched her sway,

For Painture3 near adjoining lay,

A plenteous province, and alluring prey.

A chamber of dependences was framed

(As conquerors will never want pretense,

When armed, to justify the offense)

And the whole fief in right of Poetry she claimed.4

The country open lay without defense;

For poets frequent inroads there had made,

And perfectly could represent

The shape, the face, with every lineament;

And all the large demains which the dumb Sister5 swayed,

All bowed beneath her government,

Received in triumph wheresoe’er she went.

Her pencil6 drew whate’er her soul designed,

And oft the happy draft surpassed the image in her mind.

The sylvan scenes7 of herds and flocks

And fruitful plains and barren rocks;

Of shallow brooks that flowed so clear

The bottom did the top appear;

Of deeper too and ampler floods,

9. A collector is said to have paid a large sum for the lamp of the philosopher Epictetus in the faith that owning it would make him wise. Dryden merely means that Killigrew’s poems would appear pure even if judged in the light of the most severe Stoic ethical standards.

2. The Nine Muses, who preside over the arts of literature, the dance, music, and astronomy.

1. I.e., a flickering flame (cf. Mac Flecknoe, line 111)

3. The art of painting (a Gallicism).

4. In the elaborate figure that dominates these lines, Dryden alludes to recent peaceful annexations by Louis XIV of France, who in 1679 added most of Alsace, Lorraine, and Luxembourg to his realm through his policy of réunions, by setting up Chambres de Réunions. These chambers by quasi-legal means awarded to Louis, as overlord, towns, cities, and estates with all their “dependences” or fiefs, i.e., estates held under the feudal system from overlords, to whom the holders owed services and rents.

5. The muse of painting. “Large demains”: i.e., an estate held in one’s own right, as opposed to a fief.

6. Painter’s brush.

Which, as in mirrors, showed the woods;
Of lofty trees, with sacred shades
And perspectives\(^8\) of pleasant glades,
Where nymphs of brightest form appear,
And shaggy satyrs standing near,
Which them at once admire and fear;
The ruins, too, of some majestic piece,
Boasting the power of ancient Rome or Greece,
Whose statues, friezes, columns broken lie,
And, though defaced, the wonder of the eye:\(^9\)
What nature, art, bold fiction e’er durst frame,
Her forming hand gave feature to the name.
So strange a concourse ne’er was seen before
But when the peopled ark the whole creation bore.\(^1\)

The scene then changed: with bold erected look
Our martial king\(^2\) the sight with reverence strook;
For, not content to express his outward part,
Her hand called out the image of his heart:
His warlike mind, his soul devoid of fear,
His high-designing thoughts were figured there,
As when by magic, ghosts are made appear.
Our phoenix queen\(^3\) was portrayed, too, so bright,
Beauty alone could beauty take\(^4\) so right:
Her dress, her shape, her matchless grace
Were all observed, as well as heavenly face.
With such a peerless majesty she stands
As in that day she took the crown from sacred hands;\(^5\)
Before a train of heroines was seen,
In beauty foremost, as in rank, the queen!
Thus nothing to her genius was denied,
But like a ball of fire, the further thrown,
Still with a greater blaze she shone,
And her bright soul broke out on every side.
What next she had designed, heaven only knows;\(^6\)
To such immoderate growth her conquest rose
That fate alone its progress could oppose.

Now all those charms, that blooming grace,
The well-proportioned shape, and beauteous face,
Shall never more be seen by mortal eyes:

\(^8\) Vistas.
\(^9\) Killigrew’s landscapes are typical of the ideal classical landscape of 17th-century Italian painters: contrasts of fruitful plains and barren rocks, water that reflects trees, vistas, classical ruins, and mythological figures.
1. Noah’s ark, which contained all that survived of created beings.
2. James II, who, as duke of York, had won a reputation for courage and skill while fighting as a soldier with the French armies in the 1650s and serving as an admiral during the English-Dutch wars of the 1660s.
3. Mary of Modena, wife of James II, whose unique beauty is expressed by the reference to the “phoenix,” the fabulous bird, only one of which exists during each thousand years.
4. I.e., take the likeness of.
5. The queen was crowned by the “sacred hands” of the archbishop of Canterbury.
In earth the much-lamented virgin lies!
Not wit nor piety could fate prevent;
Nor was the cruel destiny content
To finish all the murder at a blow,
To sweep at once her life and beauty too;
But, like a hardened felon, took a pride
To work more mischievously slow,
And plundered first, and then destroyed.

O double sacrilege on things divine,
To rob the relic, and deface the shrine!

But thus Orinda died:\nHeaven, by the same disease, did both translate;
As equal were their souls, so equal was their fate.

Meantime her warlike brother on the seas
His waving streamers\(^8\) to the winds displays,
And vows for his return with vain devotion pays.

Ah, generous youth, that wish forbear;
The winds too soon will waft thee here!

Slack all thy sails, and fear to come,
Alas, thou know'st not thou art wrecked at home!
No more shalt thou behold thy sister's face;
Thou hast already had her last embrace.
But look aloft, and if thou kenn'st\(^9\) from far,
Among the Pleiads,\(^1\) a new-kindled star,
If any sparkles than the rest more bright,
'Tis she that shines in that propitious light.

When in mid-air the golden trump shall sound,
To raise the nations under ground;
When in the Valley of Jehosaphat\(^2\)
The judging God shall close the book of fate,
And there the last assizes keep
For those who wake and those who sleep;\(^4\)
When rattling bones together fly
From the four corners of the sky;
When sinews o'er the skeletons are spread,
Those clothed with flesh, and life inspires the dead;
The sacred poets first shall hear the sound,
And foremost from the tomb shall bound,
For they are covered with the lightest ground,
And straight, with inborn vigor, on the wing,

7. The poet Katharine Philips (1631–1664), fanci-
fully referred to by her admirers as “Matchless
Orinda,” who, like Killigrew, died of the disfiguring
disease smallpox.
8. “Warlike brother”: Henry Killigrew, an officer in
the Royal Navy. Pennons (“streamers”) fly from the
mast of his ship.
1. The Pleiades, a cluster of stars (six are visible to
the unaided eye) in the constellation Taurus.
2. Joel 3.12; Ezekiel 37.
3. “Assizes”: periodical sessions of superior courts
held in each county in England. Here, of course,
the Last Judgment—at which some will be alive on
earth (“wake”) and many will have already died
(“sleep”).
Like mounting larks, to the new morning sing.
There thou, sweet saint, before the choir shalt go,
As harbinger\(^4\) of heaven, the way to show,
\(\{\)
The way which thou so well hast learned below.
\(195\)

The Secular Masque\(^1\)

\(\{\)

\([\text{Enter Janus.}^{2}\]\)

**Janus.** Chronos, \(^3\) Chronos, mend thy pace;
An hundred times the rolling sun
Around the radiant belt\(^4\) has run
In his revolving race.
Behold, behold, the goal in sight;
Spread thy fans,\(^5\) and wing thy flight.

\(\{\)

\([\text{Enter chronos, with a scythe in his hand, and a great globe on his back, which he sets down at his entrance.}\]\)

**Chronos.** Weary, weary of my weight,
Let me, let me drop my freight,
And leave the world behind.
I could not bear
Another year
The load of humankind.

\(\{\)

\([\text{Enter momus,}\(^6\) laughing.}\]\)

**Momus.** Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! well hast thou done
To lay down thy pack,
And lighten thy back;
The world was a fool, e’er since it begun,
And since neither Janus, nor Chronos, nor I
Can hinder the crimes,
Or mend the bad times,
’Tis better to laugh than to cry.

**Chorus of all three.**
’Tis better to laugh than to cry.

**Janus.** Since Momus comes to laugh below,

---

4. One who goes ahead to provide a lodging.
1. A masque is a dramatic performance, usually mythological in character, that combines poetry, music, dance, and spectacle. Unlike the court masques of Ben Jonson, this masque was written for public performance as an afterpiece to the revival of Fletcher’s *The Pilgrim*, revised by Sir John Vanbrugh and produced for the financial benefit of Dryden himself. It is a “secular” masque because it celebrates the end of the century, “secular” being derived from the Latin *saeculares*, applied to the games, plays, and shows celebrated in Rome once an “age,” a period of 120 years. It is not certain that Dryden lived to see his masque performed.
2. The god of beginnings, who here presides over the opening of the new century.
3. God of time.
4. The Zodiac. The sun, in the course of a year, passes through all twelve signs.
5. Wings.
6. God of mockery and faultfinding.
Old Time, begin the show,
That he may see, in every scene,
What changes in this age have been.

CHRONOS. Then, goddess of the silver bow, begin.

[Horns, or hunting music within.]
[Enter DIANA.]

DIANA. With horns and with hounds I waken the day,
And hie to my woodland walks away;
I tuck up my robe, and am buskined soon,
And tie to my forehead a waxing moon.
I course the fleet stag, unkennel the fox,
And chase the wild goats o’er summits of rocks;
With shouting and hooting we pierce through the sky,
And Echo turns hunter, and doubles the cry.

CHORUS OF ALL.
With shouting and hooting we pierce through the sky,
And Echo turns hunter, and doubles the cry.

JANUS. Then our age was in its prime:
CHRONOS. Free from rage:
DIANA. And free from crime:
MOMUS. A very merry, dancing, drinking,
Laughing, quaffing, and unthinking time.

CHORUS OF ALL.
Then our age was in its prime,
Free from rage, and free from crime;
A very merry, dancing, drinking,
Laughing, quaffing, and unthinking time.

[Dance of DIANA’s attendants.]
[Enter MARS.]

MARS. Inspire the vocal brass, inspire;
The world is past its infant age:
Arms and honor,
Arms and honor,
Set the martial mind on fire,
And kindle manly rage.
Mars has looked the sky to red;
And Peace, the lazy good, is fled.
Plenty, Peace, and Pleasure fly;
The sprightly green
In woodland walks no more is seen;
The sprightly green has drunk the Tyrian dye.

CHORUS OF ALL.

7. Diana, the virgin goddess of the moon, a huntress. She symbolizes England before the civil wars, an allusion to James I’s passion for the chase.
8. Wearing hunting boots.
9. Waxing (i.e., increasing, because in the first quarter).
1. God of war, who represents the period of the civil wars and the Commonwealth.
2. Breathe into.
3. I.e., the costume has changed from the green of the hunter to the crimson of the soldier (at once the color of blood and of “Tyrian dye,” known to the ancients as “purple”).
 Plenty, Peace, etc.

**MARS.**

Sound the trumpet, beat the drum;
   Through all the world around,
Sound a reveille, sound, sound,
   The warrior god is come.

**CHORUS OF ALL.**

*Sound the trumpet, etc.*

**MOMUS.**

Thy sword within the scabbard keep,
   And let mankind agree;
Better the world were fast asleep,
   Than kept awake by thee.
The fools are only thinner,
   With all our cost and care;
But neither side a winner,
   For things are as they were.

**CHORUS OF ALL.**

*The fools are only, etc.*

[Enter Venus.]

**VENUS.**

Calms appear when storms are past,
Love will have his hour at last:
Nature is my kindly care;
Mars destroys, and I repair;
Take me, take me, while you may;
Venus comes not every day.

**CHORUS OF ALL.**

*Take her, take her, etc.*

**CHRONOS.**

The world was then so light,
I scarcely felt the weight;
Joy ruled the day, and Love the night.
But since the Queen of Pleasure left the ground,\(^5\)
   I faint, I lag,
   And feebly drag
The ponderous orb around.

**MOMUS.**

All, all of a piece throughout:

[Pointing to Diana.]

Thy chase had a beast in view;

[To Mars.]

Thy wars brought nothing about;

[To Venus.]

Thy lovers were all untrue.

**JANUS.**

Tis well an old age is out:

**CHRONOS.**

And time to begin a new.

---

4. Goddess of love and beauty, representing the licentious reigns of Charles II and James II.

5. Sir Walter Scott suggested that this line refers to the exiled Queen Mary of Modena, wife of James II.
From The Preface to Fables Ancient and Modern

[In Praise of Chaucer]

In the first place, as he is the father of English poetry, I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil. He is a perpetual fountain of good sense; learned in all sciences; and, therefore, speaks properly on all subjects. As he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off; a continence which is practiced by few writers, and scarcely by any of the ancients, excepting Virgil and Horace.

Chaucer followed Nature everywhere, but was never so bold to go beyond her; and there is a great difference of being poeta and nimis poeta, if we may believe Catullus, as much as betwixt a modest behavior and affectation. The verse of Chaucer, I confess, is not harmonious to us; but ’tis like the eloquence of one whom Tacitus commends, it was auribus istius temporis accommodata: they who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical; and it continues so, even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of Lydgate and Gower, his contemporaries; there is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect. ’Tis true I cannot go so far as he who published the last edition of him; for he would make us believe the fault is in our ears, and that there were really ten syllables in a verse where we find but nine; but this opinion is not worth confuting; ’tis so gross and obvious an error that common sense (which is a rule in everything but matters of faith and revelation) must convince the reader that equality of numbers in every verse which we call heroic was either not known, or not always practiced in Chaucer’s age. It were an easy matter to produce some thousands of his verses which are lame for want of half a foot, and sometimes a whole one, and which no pronunciation can make otherwise. We can only say that he lived in the infancy of our poetry, and that nothing is brought to perfection at the first.

He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his Canterbury Tales the various manners and humors (as we now call them) of the whole English nation in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations but in their very physiognomies and persons. Baptista Porta could not have described their natures better than by the marks which the poet gives them. The matter and manner of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humors, and callings that each of them
would be improper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious characters
are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity: their discourses are such as
belong to their age, their calling, and their breeding; such as are becoming of
them, and of them only. Some of his persons are vicious, and some virtuous;
some are unlearned, or (as Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learned.
Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different: the Reeve, the Miller, and
the Cook are several men, and distinguished from each other as much as the
mincing Lady Prioress and the broad-speaking, gap-toothed Wife of Bath. But
enough of this; there is such a variety of game springing up before me that
I am distracted in my choice, and know not which to follow. 'Tis sufficient to
say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty. ☼ ☼ ☼