John Dryden

Annus Mirabilis

(1667)

edited and annotated by
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Introduction

Jacob Rabinowitz

Annus Mirabilis

This poem was written when Dryden was thirty-six, when he had already written four plays, but none of those that would establish him as the foremost dramatist of his time. *Annus Mirabilis* was an ambitious and successful bid for public notice and royal patronage—a year after it was published, he was poet laureate.

It is an audacious masterpiece, and unique in English as a successful epic poem in a contemporary setting. Indeed, the only parallel, where achievement keeps pace with ambition, is Lucan's Latin epic on the Roman Civil War.

Dryden combined Greco-Roman and Christian mythology, political propaganda, and journalistic observation to produce a poem which falls short of true epic only in size: it is about the length of a single book of the *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost*.

With sufficient, but not overwhelming, annotation, the poem comes to life—and an equivocal, opulent, surreal life it is. It should be remembered that Dryden matured as a poet in the shadow of Milton, and so he is aesthetically as much a son of the seventeenth century as a father of the eighteenth. Numerous passages are flatly spectacular, late blooms of the baroque sensibility, monstrous, strange and twisted as an Amazonian orchid. Perhaps the oddest of these is the stretch that begins at stanza 25 with a beaver's anus view of the causes of the war with Holland, and climaxes in stanza 29 with cannonballs making havoc of spice-ships, promiscously inflicting aromatic death.

In the sea battles that occupy most of the poem, Dryden succeeds to admiration in his stated goal of imparting Virgilian epic grandeur to seventeenth century wartime facts and actions.

Stylistically, the poem is a hybrid. There are curious learnèd digressions and grotesquely twisting phrases native to the days of Donne, alongside the sparkling epigrams and mirror-bright verse we associate with Pope.

There are interesting glimmers of the scientific advances already afoot. Dryden poetizes in passing on the nature of tides (stanza 4) and comets (stanzas 16-18), and he considers the advances in navigation (stanzas 155-164) with enthusiastic confidence. Very different from Milton's engagement with the new astronomy of his day, which his commitment to a poetic cosmos closer to Dante's than to Newton's prevented him from endorsing.

The last third of the poem (stanzas 209-287) is given to the Great Fire of London, for which witches, ghosts, angels, classical gods and animate flames appear as actors, ending with God himself extinguishing the blaze from on high with a celestial candle-snuffer! These are one thousand two hundred and sixteen lines of sustained amazements at which one can only gasp.

The particular the naval battles Dryden describes were so indecisive that both sides claimed them as victories, but Dryden's heroic tone was not misplaced. These are episodes from the beginning of England's maritime and colonial ascendancy, the empire on which the sun never set. And it was in this Anglo-Dutch war that New Amsterdam was taken from the Dutch and renamed New York. To the American reader this poetic record gives a taste of a conflict that was particularly full of fate.

Dryden

John Dryden (1631–1700), poet, playwright and translator, was born in Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, to a large family of landowning gentry. He was sent to Westminster School,

where he received a thorough grounding in the classics. He took his BA at Trinity College, Cambridge.

The rule of the Puritans closed the theaters for nearly twenty years. After they were reopened by Charles II in 1660, Dryden began writing plays, and this became his principal source of income. He distinguished himself with sparkling and somewhat libertine comedies, featuring strong female leads, which greatly appealed to the king, as they would later to the king's mistress, the actress Nell Gwyn.

He also inaugurated and perfected English "heroic" plays. These were animated by exalted conceptions of love and honor, and usually entailed extravagant costumes, exotic settings, drums, trumpets and derring-do.

Dryden's drama reached its apogee in the 70s, when he wrote his best-remembered plays, the 1672 comedy *Marriage A-la-Mode* and the 1677 tragedy *All for Love.*

Poetry had always been Dryden's passion. He made a name for himself as a poet in 1667 when he published *Annus Mirabilis,* a brilliant historical poem which described the English defeat of the Dutch naval fleet and the 1666 Great Fire of London. Then, for more than a decade, he devoted his best energies to the theater. In 1681, he again showed himself to be England's most formidable living poet with *Absalom and Achitophel*. A political satire set in Old Testament times, this work offers a febrile and devious defense of absolute monarchy, pitiless caricatures of the king's principal parliamentary opponents, and a scathing account of Titus Oates and his Popish Plot.

In 1682 Dryden published *The Medal*, a further point-blank broadside into the ranks of the king's political opponents. In the same year he gave to the printer *Mac Flecknoe*, a memorably contemptuous lampoon of the playwright Thomas Shadwell. In the annals of English invective, Dryden

towers over his rivals with the terrible serenity of an Aztec deity.

With the coronation of James II, a Catholic, Dryden found the Church. His thoroughgoing and uncritical identification with Stuart rule cost him patronage when the 1688 Glorious Revolution ushered in the reign of William and Mary. Public taste followed that of the court, and Dryden's plays now met with indifferent success. In the final decade of the century Dryden turned his hand to translation, of which the most notable product was his 1697 *Works of Virgil.* Dryden's *Aeneid* remains unsurpassed by all its English language successors.

Dryden was the greatest English poet between the time of Milton and that of Pope. Like Pope, he fell out of favor with the rise of Romanticism. His elegant, measured neo-classical creations were regarded as artificial, trivial and immoral. Nor did the twentieth century, with its drive for authenticity at any price, have much use for him.

In the post-modern age we are better able to appreciate the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for their splendid and precarious achievements. Since the early-music movement has revived the operas of Vivaldi and Handel, and eighteenth-century fashion has been quoted with admiration by the likes of McQueen, Westwood and Lagerfeld, it might not be too optimistic to suppose that Dryden's work may find a readership once again.

Those exhausted by the rigors of modernity may find much to admire in Dryden. His heroic dramas with their exotic landscapes gratify our taste for fantasy and escape. His zero-gravity wit and ever-present sense of measure may serve as an antidote in a time when people earnestly believe that all their feelings must be shared in detail, regardless of anyone else's. Even Dryden's anger offers a tonic for our times. His sharpest remarks cut, but do not tear. He skewers,

but never hacks. His wars are formal and mannerly as a game of chess.

Note on the Text

I have followed the text of the University of California edition of Dryden's works, modernizing the spelling where this added to clarity. The most significant change is in the punctuation. In the early days of printing, periods, commas, colons and semicolons were used idiosyncratically, to show pauses of various duration. They did not have their present-day well-defined meaning, and so offer an unnecessary obstacle for the modern reader. Dryden writes in what we would now call "run-on" sentences. Despite their python length, and the remarkable number of clauses they swallow between their head and their tail, they are structurally simple enough creatures, and simple commas usually suffice to articulate them.

So then, the spelling and punctuation have been modernized and rationalized in the manner that is standard for annotated Shakespeare texts used in college courses.

Other Editions

The mission of the this edition is to provide free, fully annotated, helpful and welcoming editions of Dryden's plays and poetry. Such do not at present exist. In the following survey I may seem to describe uncharitably the available options. I am not motivated by ill will towards the admirable scholars who have produced the works listed, which I have myself consulted with profit. My first duty, however, is to the student, who must choose carefully how to apportion limited funds, the student who comes to Dryden, not in possession of wide literary culture, but in order to gain it.

The Plays

There are no editions of Dryden's plays that fully explain archaic language, slang, historical references, *and also all the perplexing syntax employed by Dryden, who wrote in English but often thought in Latin.*

The only annotated editions of Dryden's complete dramatic works are the aforementioned University of California Press edition, which sells for an indefensible $100 a volume, and the 1931 Montague Summers' *Dryden, The Dramatic Works*, out of print for nearly a century. These editions, while essential for the specialist, will be for the most part irrelevant to one who reads for pleasure. They also, for all their pains taken, leave much unexplained, so one must hoist to desktop one's own two ponderous volumes of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and peer through a magnifier. Even then, unless one has a background in Latin, one will sometimes be at a loss to see how the words all go together.

The most famous of the plays, *Marriage à la Mode* and *All for Love,* are frequently found in anthologies of Restoration drama, and can be had in the reasonably priced Norton New Mermaids series, with annotations that are unfortunately far from adequate.

Walter Scott edited a complete works of Dryden, with sparse, perfunctory notes for the plays. This is available on the internet, and has been appropriated by various unscrupulous reprinters.

The Poems

As regards Dryden's poetry, the same difficulty obtains. Though the California *Works* remains the indispensable standard, it is a reference work, not a convenient annotated reading edition. Routledge/Longman's has published Dryden's complete poems in five volumes, at a staggering $256 per volume. A premier academic publisher, Routledge has

decided its mission is not to educate or inform but to rob libraries, who can and must purchase these. They also offer a selected Dryden, asking a reasonable $56 for the 588 pages, but the reader may be disappointed by the content. In terms of editing, and apparatus to contextualize the poems, it is beyond compare, but it does not always condescend to provide the basic glosses a student will need, and when it does, these must be winnowed from mounds of scholarship irrelevant to the nonspecialist. The Penguin *Selected Poems* provides little annotation, and that tucked inconveniently into endnotes.

Annus Mirabilis,
The Year of Wonders,
1666,
A Historical Poem.

Containing the progress and various successes of our naval war with Holland under the conduct of his highness Prince Rupert and his grace the Duke of Albemarle, and describing the Fire of London

Multum interest res poscat, an homines latius imperare velint.
Trajan Imperator ad Plin.[1]

Urbs antiqua ruit, multos dominata per annos.
Virg.[2]

1 **ad Plin.** Pliny, *Letters to the Emperor Trajan*, 10: 22. "The validity of a course of action depends very much on whether the circumstances truly warrant it, or whether it is simply a matter of grasping after power."

2 **Virg.** Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2: 363. "The ancient city, having reigned for ages, falls."

To
The Metropolis of Great Britain,
the most renowned and late flourishing
City of London,
in its representatives the Lord Mayor and
Court of Aldermen,
the Sheriffs and Common Council of it.

As perhaps I am the first who ever presented a work of this nature to the metropolis of any nation, so it is likewise consonant to justice, that he, who was to give the first example of such a dedication, should begin it with that city, which has set a pattern to all others, of true loyalty, invincible courage, and unshaken constancy. Other cities have been praised for the same virtues, but I am much deceived if any have so dearly purchased their reputation. Their fame has been won them by cheaper trials than an expensive though necessary war, a consuming pestilence, and a more consuming fire. To submit yourselves with that humility to the judgments of heaven, and, at the same time, to raise yourselves with that vigor above all human enemies, to be combated at once from above, and from below, to be struck down, and to triumph—I know not whether such trials have been ever paralleled in any nation; the resolution and successes of them never can be.

Never had prince or people more mutual reason to love each other, if suffering for each other can endear affection. You have come together, a pair of matchless lovers, through many difficulties; he, through a long exile, various traverses of fortune, and the interposition of many rivals, who violently ravished and withheld you from him, and certainly you have had your share in sufferings. But providence has cast

upon you want of trade, that you might appear bountiful[3] to your country's necessities, and the rest of your afflictions are not more the effects of God's displeasure (frequent examples of them having been in the reign of the most excellent princes) than occasions for the manifesting of your Christian and civil virtues.

To you, therefore, this *Year of Wonders* is justly dedicated, because you have made it so, you, who are to stand a wonder to all years and ages, and who have built yourselves an immortal monument on your own ruins. You are now a phœnix in her ashes, and, as far as humanity can approach, a great emblem of the suffering Deity. But heaven never made so much piety and virtue to leave it miserable. I have heard, indeed, of some virtuous persons who have ended unfortunately, but never of any virtuous nation. Providence is engaged too deeply, when the cause becomes so general, and I cannot imagine it has resolved the ruin of the people, at home, which it has blessed abroad with such successes. I am therefore to conclude that your sufferings are at an end, and that one part of my poem has not been more a history of your destruction, than the other a prophecy of your restoration. The accomplishment of which happiness, as it is the wish of all true Englishmen, so is it by none more passionately desired, than by

the greatest of your admirers,
and most humble of your servants,

John Dryden.

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3 **want of trade, that you might appear bountiful** commercial reverses, to give you an opportunity to demonstrate your generosity to your countrymen.

An Account of the Ensuing Poem, in a Letter to the Honorable Sir Robert Howard

Sir,

I am so many ways obliged to you and so little able to return your favors that, like those who owe too much, I can only live by getting farther into your debt. You have not only been careful of my fortune,[4] which was the effect of your nobleness, but you have been solicitous of my reputation, which is that of your kindness. It is not long since I gave you the trouble of perusing a play[5] for me, and now, instead of an acknowledgment, I have given you a greater, in the correction of a poem. But since you are to bear this persecution, I will at least give you the encouragement of a martyr—you could never suffer in a nobler cause.

For I have chosen the most heroic subject, which any poet could desire. I have taken upon me to describe the motives, the beginning, progress, and successes, of a most just and necessary war; in it, the care, management, and prudence of our king; the conduct and valor of a royal admiral, and of two incomparable generals; the invincible courage of our captains and seamen, and three glorious victories, the result of all. After this, I have, in the Fire, the most deplorable, but withal the greatest, argument[6] that can be imagined, the de-

4 **careful of my fortune** Howard was instrumental in obtaining for Dryden's wife Elizabeth (who was Howard's sister) a £3,000 dowry through the Treasury, out of a grant from the King to her father, the Earl of Berkshire.

5 **a play** Dryden's 1667 play *Secret Love.*

6 **argument** topic, subject.

struction being so swift, so sudden, so vast and miserable, as nothing can parallel in story. The former part of this poem, relating to the war, is but a due expiation for my not serving my king and country in it. All gentlemen[7] are almost obliged to it, and I know no reason we should give that advantage to the commonalty[8] of England, to be foremost in brave actions, which the nobles of France would never suffer in their peasants. I should not have written this but to a person who has been ever forward to appear in all employments whither his honor and generosity have called him. The latter part of my poem, which describes the Fire, I owe, first, to the piety and fatherly affection of our monarch to his suffering subjects, and, in the second place, to the courage, loyalty, and magnanimity of the city, both which were so conspicuous that I have wanted words to celebrate them as they deserve.

I have called my poem historical, not epic, though both the actions and actors are as much heroic as any poem can contain. But, since the action is not properly one, nor that accomplished in the last successes,[9] I have judged it too bold a title for a few stanzas, which are little more in number than a single *Iliad*, or the longest of the *Æneids*.[10] For this reason, (I mean not of length, but broken action, tied too severely to the laws of history), I am apt to agree with those, who rank Lucan[11] rather among historians in verse, than epic poets, in

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7 **gentlemen are almost obliged to it** members of the nobility are almost obliged to render military service.

8 **commonality** common people.

9 **properly one . . . last successes** the narrative is episodic rather focused on a single action, and it is not completed by the last succession of events ("successes") narrated. According to classical literary theory, these failings prevented the work from achieving the highest dramatic grandeur.

10 **Iliad . . .Aeneids** books of the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*.

11 **Lucan** (39-65 AD) poet under the reign of Nero, author of *The Civil War*, an epic on the wars between Caesar and Pompey .

whose room,[12] if I am not deceived, Silius Italicus,[13] though a worse writer, may more justly be admitted.

I have chosen to write my poem in quatrains, or stanzas of four in alternate rhyme, because I have ever judged them more noble, and of greater dignity, both for the sound and number, than any other verse in use amongst us, in which I am sure I have your approbation. The learnèd languages[14] have certainly a great advantage of us, in not being tied to the slavery of any rhyme, and were less constrained in the quantity of every syllable, which they might vary with spondees or dactyls,[15] besides so many other helps of grammatical figures,[16] for the lengthening or abbreviation of them, than the modern are in the close of that one syllable,[17] which often confines, and more often corrupts, the sense of all the rest.

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12 **room** company.

13 **Silius Italicus** (26-201 AD) author of the enormous *Punica*, a 12,200 verse epic on Rome's second war with Carthage. A prose translation by J. D. Duff of this interesting and underrated epic may be found free online.

14 **learned languages** Greek and Latin.

15 **spondees or dactyls** Greek and Latin, like French poetry, depends on quantity (how long it takes to pronounce a syllable) rather than stress (the placement of accent in a word) to make up a line of verse. English is a stress language, not a quantitative one, so I can only approximate here the effect of quantities by English examples, using stressed for long, and unstressed for short, syllables.

In Greek or Latin, a dactylic word (long-short-short, as in the word *bartender)* could be exchanged for a word that was a spondee (long-long, like *dead-drunk*), because two short syllables (*tender*) were the equivalent in length of pronunciation to one long (*drunk.*)

16 **grammatical figures** being highly inflected languages, the length of a syllable could be changed by the word's relation to the rest of the sentence. Thus *aurum,* "gold," is long short, but *auro* "by means of gold" is long-long.

17 **the close of that one syllable** the rhyme.

But in this necessity of our rhymes, I have always found the couplet verse most easy (though not so proper for this occasion) for there the work is sooner at an end, every two lines concluding the labor of the poet. But in quatrains he is to carry it farther on, and not only so, but to bear along in his head the troublesome sense of four lines together. For those who write correctly in this kind must needs acknowledge that the last line of the stanza is to be considered in the composition of the first. Neither can we give ourselves the liberty of making any part of a verse for the sake of rhyme, or concluding with a word which is not current English, or using the variety of female rhymes,[18] all which our fathers practiced. And for the female rhymes, they are still in use amongst other nations, with the Italian in every line, with the Spaniard promiscuously, with the French alternately, as those who have read the *Alaric*, the *Pucelle*,[19] or any of their later poems, will agree with me. And besides this, they write in Alexandrines,[20] or verses of six feet; such as, amongst us, is the old translation of Homer by Chapman—all which, by lengthening of their chain, makes the sphere of their activity the larger.

I have dwelt too long upon the choice of my stanza, which you may remember is much better defended in the

18 **female rhymes** endings where the rhyming final syllable is unstressed. Poe's *Raven* provides the most dramatic examples. There all the verses except those that rhyme with *nevermore* end in an unaccented syllable, making female rhymes. The "male" *nevermore* rhymes have, by contrast a tone of thrilling finality.

19 ***Alaric*, the *Pucelle*** Alaric is a 1654 poem by Georges de Scudéry, *La Pucelle* a 1656 poem by Jean Chapelain.

20 **Alexandrines** the best illustration of an alexandrine in English is that provided by Pope (The alexandrine is the second line here). "A needless alexandrine ends the song,/ that, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along." (*Essay on Criticism,* 356-357)

preface to *Gondibert*,[21] and therefore I will hasten to acquaint you with my endeavors in the writing. In general I will only say I have never yet seen the description of any naval fight in the proper terms which are used at sea, and if there be any such, in another language, as that of Lucan in the third of his *Pharsalia*,[22] yet I could not prevail myself of it[23] in the English; the terms of art[24] in every tongue bearing more of the idiom of it than any other words. We hear indeed among our poets, of the thundering of guns, the smoke, the disorder, and the slaughter, but all these are common notions. And certainly, as those, who in a logical dispute keep in general terms, would hide a fallacy, so those, who do it in any poetical description, would veil their ignorance:

> *Descriptas servare vices, operumque colores,*
> *Cur ego, si nequeo ignoroque, poeta salutor?*[25]

For my own part, if I had little knowledge of the sea, yet I have thought it no shame to learn, and if I have made some few mistakes, it is only, as you can bear me witness, because I have wanted opportunity to correct them, the whole poem

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21 ***Gondibert*** William Davenant's 1650 epic poem set in medieval Lombardy, in which he defends his use of exactly the stanzas Dryden will employ here.

22 **the third of his *Pharsalia*** the third book of his epic poem on the Roman Civil War.

23 **prevail myself of it** avail myself of Lucan's Latin vocabulary of Roman nautical technical terms.

24 **terms of art** the technical terms specific to a profession.

25 ***. . . poeta salutor*** Horace, *The Art of Poetry*, 86-87. "How could I claim to be a poet if I didn't know and couldn't adhere to the established rules and technical fine points of the profession?" Horace is referring to the art of poetry, but Dryden makes the observation of more general relevance.

being first written and now sent you from a place where I have not so much as the converse of any seaman.

Yet though the trouble I had in writing it was great, it was more than recompensed by the pleasure. I found myself so warm in celebrating the praises of military men, two such especially as the prince and general, that it is no wonder if they inspired me with thoughts above my ordinary level. And I am well satisfied, that, as they are incomparably the best subject I ever had, excepting only the royal family, so also, that this I have written of them is much better than what I have performed on any other. I have been forced to help out other arguments,[26] but this has been bountiful to me. They have been low and barren of praise, and I have exalted them, and made them fruitful, but here—*Omnia sponte sua reddit justissima tellus*.[27] I have had a large, a fair, and a pleasant field, so fertile that without my cultivating, it has given me two harvests in a summer,[28] and in both oppressed[29] the reaper. All other greatness in subjects is only counterfeit, it will not endure the test of danger:[30] the greatness of arms is only real.[31] Other greatness[32] burdens a nation with its weight, this supports it with its strength. And as it is the happiness of the age, so it is the peculiar goodness of the

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26 **help out other arguments** use my ingenuity to adorn the other topics.

27 ***justissima tellus*** "the ground itself, more than fair to me, yielded all I could wish, without my prompting her." This verse is Dryden's invention, though it sounds like a proper hexameter line by Virgil or Ovid.

28 **two harvests in a summer** the major battles of the Dutch war were in June and July.

29 **oppressed** weighed down with its plenty.

30 **it will not endure the test of danger** no other achievement a poet might celebrate stands comparison with poems about war.

31 **the greatness of arms is only real** only the greatness of arms is real.

32 **other greatness** other achievements (in the sciences, in architecture &c.) must be supported by public investment.

best of kings, that we may praise his subjects without offending him. Doubtless it proceeds from a just confidence of his own virtue, which the luster of no other can be so great as to darken in him,[33] for the good or the valiant are never safely praised under a bad or a degenerate prince.

But to return from this digression to a farther account of my poem, I must crave leave to tell you, that as I have endeavored to adorn it with noble thoughts, so much more to express those thoughts with elocution.[34] The composition of all poems is, or ought to be, of wit,[35] and wit in the poet, or wit-writing, (if you will give me leave to use a school-distinction)[36] is no other than the faculty of imagination in the writer, which, like a nimble spaniel, beats[37] over and ranges through the field of memory, 'till it springs the quarry it hunted after, or, without metaphor, which searches over all the memory for the species or ideas[38] of those things, which it designs to represent. Wit written is that which is well defined, the happy result of thought, or product of imagination. But to proceed from wit, in the general notion of it, to the proper wit of an heroic or historical poem, I judge it chiefly to consist in the delightful imagining of persons, actions, passions, or things. It is not the jerk[39] or sting of an epigram, nor the seeming contradiction of a poor antithesis,[40]

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33 **darken in him** put his virtues into the shade.

34 **elocution** eloquence.

35 **wit** imagination.

36 **school-distinction** a formal distinction made in scholastic philosophy. Wit here is imagination, wit-writing is imagination verbally expressed.

37 **beats** hunts through woods or underbrush in search of game.

38 **species or ideas** *species* and i*dea* are the former a Latin, the latter a Greek word meaning "image."

39 **jerk** quick thrust.

40 **antithesis** a figure of speech that contrasts ideas by parallel arrangement of words, clauses or sentences. For example, "Ask not

the delight of an ill-judging audience in a play of rhyme, nor the jingle of a more poor paronomasia,[41] neither is it so much the morality of a grave sentence, affected by Lucan, but more sparingly used by Virgil, but it is some lively and apt description, dressed in such colors of speech that it sets before your eyes the absent object, as perfectly, and more delightfully than nature.

So then the first happiness of the poet's imagination is properly invention, or finding of the thought; the second is fancy, or the variation, deriving, or molding, of that thought, as the judgment represents it proper to the subject; the third is elocution, or the art of clothing and adorning that thought, so found and varied, in apt, significant, and sounding words. The quickness of the imagination is seen in the invention, the fertility in the fancy, and the accuracy in the expression.[42] For the two first of these, Ovid is famous amongst the poets, for the latter, Virgil. Ovid images[43] more often the movements and affections of the mind, either combating between two contrary passions, or extremely discomposed by one. His words therefore are the least part of his care, for he pictures nature in disorder, with which the study and choice of words is inconsistent. This is the proper wit of dialogue or discourse, and consequently of the drama, where all that is said is supposed to be the effect of sudden thought which, though it excludes not the quickness of wit in *repartées*, yet admits not a too curious election of words, too frequent allusions, or use of tropes, or, in fine, any thing that shews remoteness of thought, or labor in the writer. On the other

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what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

41 **paranomasia** word play or pun.

42 **invention . . . fancy . . . expression** the concept, the image that represents the concept, and putting these into words.

43 **images** represents in images.

side, Virgil speaks not so often to us in the person of another, like Ovid, but in his own. He relates almost all things as from himself, and thereby gains more liberty than the other, to express his thoughts with all the graces of elocution, to write more figuratively, and to confess as well the labor[44] as the force of his imagination. Though he describes his Dido well and naturally, in the violence of her passions, yet he must yield in that to the Myrrha, the Biblis, the Althæa, of Ovid, for, as great an admirer of him[45] as I am, I must acknowledge, that if I see not more of their souls[46] than I see of Dido's, at least I have a greater concernment for them, and that convinces me, that Ovid has touched those tender strokes more delicately than Virgil could. But when action or persons are to be described, when any such image is to be set before us, how bold, how masterly, are the strokes of Virgil! We see the objects he presents us with in their native figures, in their proper motions; but so we see them, as our own eyes could never have beheld them so beautiful in themselves.

We see the soul of the poet, like that universal one of which he speaks, informing and moving through all his pictures. *Totamque infusa per artus mens agitat molem, et magno se corpore miscet*.[47] We behold him embellishing his images, as he makes Venus breathing beauty upon her son Æneas,

> *—lumenque juventæ*
> *Purpureum, & lætos oculis afflarat honores:*
> *Quale manus addunt ebori decus, aut ubi flavo*

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44 **confess as well the labor** in Virgil, the narrator's voice predominates, so however vividly he tells his story, we are always aware of *his* narrative skill..

45 **admirer of him** of Virgil.

46 **of their souls** of the souls of Ovid's characters.

47 **. . . corpore miscet** *Aeneid* 6: 726-727 "Permeating the entire body through all its limbs, mind animates the matter, becomes one with the enormous form."

Argentum, pariusve lapis, circumdatur auro.[48]

See his tempest, his funeral sports,[49] his combat of Turnus and Æneas; and in his *Georgics*, which I esteem the divinest part of all his writings, the plague, the country, the battle of the bulls, the labor of the bees. And those many other excellent images of nature, most of which are neither great in themselves, nor have any natural ornament to bear them up, but the words wherewith he describes them are so excellent, that it might be well applied to him, which was said by Ovid, *materium superabat opus*:[50] the very sound of his words has often somewhat that is connatural to the subject, and while we read him, we sit, as in a play, beholding the scenes of what he represents. To perform this, he made frequent use of tropes, which you know change the nature of a known word, by applying it to some other signification; and this is it which Horace means in his Epistle to the Pisos,

Dixeris egregie notum si callida verbum
Reddiderit junctura novum—[51]

But I am sensible I have presumed too far to entertain you with a rude[52] discourse of that art, which you both know so

---

48 **. . . circumdatur auro** *Aeneid* 1: 590-593 "Venus, with a breath, imparted to Aeneas the rosy glow of youth, and made his eyes sparkle, gloriously glad, just as the hand of the artist makes ivory splendid, or a border of gold sets off silver or marble."

49 **funeral sports** his description of the funeral games in honor of Aeneas' deceased father.

50 **superbat opus** *Metamorphoses* 2:5 "the workmanship outdid the material it worked upon."

51 **junctura novum** "If you use a commonplace word in a way that makes it brand new, you can be sure you have spoken wonderfully well."

52 **rude** unskilled, imprecise.

well, and put into practice with so much happiness.[53] Yet before I leave Virgil, I must own the vanity to tell you, and by you the world, that he has been my master in this poem. I have followed him everywhere. I know not with what success, but I am sure with diligence enough. My images are many of them copied from him, and the rest are imitations of him. My expressions also are as near as the idioms of the two languages would admit of in translation. And this, sir, I have done with that boldness, for which I will stand accountable to any of our little critics who, perhaps, are no better acquainted with him than I am. Upon your first perusal of this poem, you have taken notice of some words, which I have innovated (if it be too bold for me to say refined) upon his Latin,[54] which, as I offer not to introduce into English prose, so I hope they are neither improper, nor altogether inelegant in verse; and, in this, Horace will again defend me:

> *Et nova, fictaque nuper, habebunt verba fidem, si*
> *Græco fonte cadunt, parce detorta—*[55]

The inference is exceeding plain, for, if a Roman poet might have liberty to coin a word, supposing only that it was derived from the Greek, was put into a Latin termination, and that he used this liberty but seldom and with modesty, how much more justly may I challenge that privilege to do it with the same prerequisites, from the best and most judicious of Latin writers? In some places, where either the fancy or the

---

53 **happiness** good fortune, success.

54 **refined upon his Latin** words which Dryden has used in accord with their Latin etymology rather than their present-day English meaning.

55 ***. . . parce detorta*** *Ars Poetica* 47-48 "You can mint new expressions and have them accepted as current coinage if you judiciously borrow them from classical languages, changing them enough to be useful, but not so much as conceal their lofty origin."

words were his, or any other's, I have noted it in the margin, that I might not seem a plagiary, in others I have neglected it, to avoid as well tediousness as the affectation of doing it too often. Such descriptions or images well wrought, which I promise not for mine, are, as I have said, the adequate delight of heroic *poésie*,[56] for they beget admiration,[57] which is its proper object,[58] as the images of the burlesque, which is contrary to this, by the same reason beget laughter, for the one shows nature beautified, as in the picture of a fair woman, which we all admire; the other shews her deformed, as in that of a lazar,[59] or of a fool[60] with distorted face and antic[61] gestures, at which we cannot forbear to laugh because it is a deviation from nature. But though the same images serve equally for the epic *poésie*, and for the historic and panegyric[62] which are branches of it, yet a several sort[63] of sculpture[64] is to be used in them. If some of them are to be like those of Juvenal, *stantes in curribus Aemiliani*,[65] heroes drawn in their triumphal chariots, and in their full proportion; others are to

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56 ***poésie*** Dryden often prefers the French word for poetry. At this time France was universally acknowledged as the leader of culture, as it is today for fashion.

57 **admiration** in the sense of the Latin root, *admiratio*, "wonder."

58 **object** goal.

59 **lazar** properly, a leper, but Dryden uses the term to mean a person of the lowest social class.

60 **fool** a retarded person.

61 **antic** fanciful or grotesque.

62 **panegyric** formal public praise or eulogy.

63 **several sort** different kind.

64 **sculpture** artistic representation.

65 ***Aemiliani*** Dryden himself provides, immediately after the Latin, as much translation as this line needs. The *Aemilians* were members of an extremely distinguished ancient aristocratic family (Juvenal, *Satires* 8: 3). The sense is that some are to be depicted in heroic, monumental style.

be like that of Virgil, *spirantia mollius æra:*[66] there is somewhat more of softness and tenderness to be shown in them. You will soon find I write not this without concern.[67] Some who have seen a paper of verses, which I wrote last year to her highness the Duchess,[68] have accused them of that only thing I could defend in them. They said, I did *humi serpere*,[69] that I wanted not only height of fancy, but dignity of words, to set it off. I might well answer with that of Horace, *Nunc non erat hic locus.*[70] I knew I addressed them to a lady, and accordingly I affected the softness of expression, and the smoothness of measure, rather than the height of thought, and in what I did endeavor, it is no vanity to say I have succeeded. I detest arrogance; but there is some difference betwixt that and a just defense. But I will not farther bribe your candor,[71] or the reader's. I leave them[72] to speak for me and, if they can, to make out that character, not pretending to a greater, which I have given them.

Verses to her Highness the Duchess
on the memorable victory
gained by the Duke against the Hollanders,
June the 3, 1665, and on her journey
afterwards into the north.

---

66 ***mollius aera*** *Aeneid* 6: 847 "sculpted in so lifelike a way that they seem to breathe."

67 **concern** a personal interest.

68 **to her highness the Duchess** these verses are given immediately after this essay.

69 ***humi serpere*** Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 28, "crawl along the ground," said of a poet who does not dare to attempt a truly elevated treatment of his subject.

70 ***hic locus*** *Ars Poetica* 19, "this was not the right place for it."

71 **bribe your candor** attempt to influence your honest judgment.

72 **them** the verses themselves.

Madam,

When, for our sakes, your hero you resigned
To swelling seas, and every faithless[73] wind,
When you released his courage, and set free
A valor fatal to the enemy,
You lodged your country's cares within your breast,
(The mansion where soft love should only rest)
And, ere our foes abroad were overcome,
The noblest conquest you had gained at home.[74]
Ah, what concerns did both your souls divide!
Your honor gave us what your love denied,[75]
And 'twas for him much easier to subdue
Those foes he fought with, than to part from you.
That glorious day, which two such navies saw,
As each unmatched[76] might to the world give law,
Neptune, yet doubtful whom he should obey,[77]
Held to[78] them both the trident of the sea.
The winds were hushed, the waves in ranks were cast,
As awfully as when God's people passed;[79]
Those, yet uncertain on whose sails to blow,
These,[80] where the wealth of nations ought to flow.
Then with the duke your Highness ruled the day:
While all the brave did his command obey,
The fair and pious under you did pray.

---

73 **faithless** untrustworthy, unreliable.

74 **had gained at home** by overcoming your natural anxiety on his behalf.

75 **denied** would have denied to us.

76 **unmatched** independently.

77 **obey** yield the victory to.

78 **Held to** offered.

79 **when God's people passed** at the parting of the Red Sea.

80 **Those . . . These** two different groups of winds deliberate which navy to favor.

How powerful are chaste vows! The wind and tide
You bribed to combat on the English side.
Thus to your much-loved lord you did convey
An unknown succor, sent the nearest way.
New vigor to his wearied arms you brought,
(So Moses was upheld[81] while Israel fought),
While, from afar, we heard the cannon play,
Like distant thunder on a shiny day.
For absent friends we were ashamed to fear,
When we considered what you ventured there.
Ships, men, and arms, our country might restore,
But such a leader could supply no more.
With generous thoughts of conquest he did burn,
Yet fought not more to vanquish than return.
Fortune and victory he did pursue,
To bring them, as his slaves, to wait on you.
Thus beauty ravished the rewards of fame,
And the fair triumphed, when the brave o'ercame.
Then, as you meant to spread another way
By land your conquests, far as his by sea,
Leaving our southern clime, you marched along
The stubborn north, ten thousand Cupids strong.
Like commons the nobility resort,[82]
In crowding heaps, to fill your moving court.
To welcome your approach the vulgar run,
Like some new envoy[83] from the distant sun,
And country beauties by their lovers go,[84]

---

81 **so Moses was upheld** Exodus 17: 11-13. When the Israeli forces fought the Amalekites, they prevailed as long as Moses kept his arms raised. When he grew weary, others supported his extended limbs.

82 **like commons the nobility resort** they go to join you, with no thought for dignity or reserve.

83 **like some new envoy** as though you were an ambassador from.

84 **country beauties by their lovers go** the rural belles abandon their suitors.

Blessing themselves, and wondering at the show.
So, when the new-born Phœnix first is seen,
Her feathered subjects all adore their queen,
And, while she makes her progress through the east,
From every grove her numerous train's increased,
Each poet of the air her glory sings,
And round him the pleased audience clap their wings.

And now, sir, it is time I should relieve you from the tedious length of this account. You have better and more profitable employment for your hours, and I wrong the public to detain you longer. In conclusion, I must leave my poem to you with all its faults, which I hope to find fewer in the printing by your emendations. I know you are not of the number of those, of whom the younger Pliny speaks; *Nec sunt parum multi, qui carpere amicos suos judicium vocant*.[85] I am rather too secure of you on that side. Your candor in pardoning my errors may make you more remiss in correcting them, if you will not withal consider, that they come into the world with your approbation, and through your hands. I beg from you the greatest favor you can confer upon an absent person, since I repose upon your management what is dearest to me, my fame and reputation, and therefore I hope it will stir you up to make my poem fairer by many of your blots.[86] If not, you know the story of the gamester who married the rich man's daughter, and when her father denied the portion,[87] christened all the children by his surname, that if, in conclusion, they must beg, they should do so by one name, as well

85 ***. . . judicium vocant*** Pliny, *Letters to Trajan*, 7:28, "there's no shortage of people who like to show the excellence of their judgment by criticizing their friends."

86 **blots** deletions, corrections.

87 **denied the portion** refused to pay her dowry.

as by the other.[88] But, since the reproach of my faults will light on you, it is but reason I should do you that justice to the readers, to let them know that, if there be any thing tolerable in this poem, they owe the argument[89] to your choice, the writing to your encouragement, the correction to your judgment, and the care of it to your friendship, to which he must ever acknowledge himself to owe all things, who is,

Sir,

the most obedient,
and most faithful of your servants,

John Dryden.

From Charlton, in Wiltshire,
Nov. 10, 1666.

88 **. . . as well as by the other** as if to say, "If you're going to reduce my children to beggary, they can beg in your name as well as in mine."

89 **argument** topic.

Annus Mirabilis,[90]
The Year of Wonders,
1666.

90 ***Annus Mirabilis*** Dryden provided some footnotes for his poem. They are introduced as his, and given in italics. All footnotes in roman letters are my own.

1.

In thriving arts[91] long time had Holland grown,
Crouching at home and cruel when abroad;[92]
Scarce leaving us the means to claim our own,
Our king they courted, and our merchants awed.

2.

Trade, which like blood should circularly flow,
Stopped in their channels, found its freedom lost;
Thither the wealth of all the world did go,
And seemed but shipwrecked on so base a coast.

3.

For them alone the heavens had kindly heat,
In Eastern quarries[93] ripening precious dew; [10]

---

91 **thriving arts** tolerant Holland had the first modern economy, in the creation of which a not negligible role was played by the Jews who settled there after their expulsion from Spain and Portugal. A global mercantile force, Holland was famed for its fisheries, shipbuilding, textiles and of course its art and tulips.

92 **crouching . . . awed** England and Holland were trade rivals ("cruel when abroad," "our merchants awed") and this was the prime source of conflict between the two nations. At the same time the France of Louis XIV was expanding its power in Europe, particularly into the Netherlands possessions of the moribund Spanish empire. Holland naturally looked to Protestant England as an ally against Catholic France (thus "crouching," that is, servile and doglike, and "our king they courted.")

93 **In Eastern quarries** Dryden's footnote: *Precious stones at first are dew condensed, and hardened by the warmth of the sun, or subterranean fires.* The notion that gems are condensed liquids (which accounts for their transparency), can be traced to classical antiquity. The concept may seem less fantastic from the perspective of the four element theory, which holds that all matter is a form or mixture of earth, air, fire or water, and that one element can turn into another, as when water becomes earth by freezing or air by evaporation. The "eastern

For them the Idumæan balm[94] did sweat,
And in hot Ceylon spicy forests grew.[95]

4.

The sun but seemed the laborer of the year;[96]
Each waxing moon[97] supplied her watery store,
To swell those tides, which from the Line did bear
Their brim-full vessels to the Belgian shore.[98]

---

quarries" are India, which supplied the Old World with gems as the New World did with gold. The Dutch East India Company had been active on the Indian Subcontinent since 1605.

94 **Idumean balm** Idumea a region of southern Israel, here is used to suggest the middle east generally, where the balsam tree yielded a sap famed for its aromatic and (purported) medicinal properties. Dutch trade embraced this region as well.

95 **spicy forests** Ceylon was, and is, famous for its spices, such as cinnamon, pepper and cloves. Here too the Dutch were active traders.

96 **the laborer of the year** in contrast to the moon, which controlled the tides, the sun simply ran its ordered course.

97 **each waxing moon** Dryden's footnote: *According to their opinion who think that great heap of waters under the Line, is depressed into tides by the moon towards the poles.*

This refers to a theory, current at the time (and advocated by Descartes) that the full moon caused the tides to flow from the equator ("the Line") towards the pole, through its pressure on the atmosphere rather than by its attractive force. Thus the waxing moon pushed away from the equator an increased amount ("store") of water to urge on those tides flowing northwards towards Holland. Bear in mind that Newton would not publish his *Principia* till 1687, so the theory of universal gravitation had not yet been plausibly propounded.

98 **Belgian shore** in the geographies of the seventeenth century, the name Belgium was used to refer to the region now divided into Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg. Thus Dryden will use Belgian to mean Dutch.

5.

Thus, mighty in her ships, stood Carthage[99] long,
And swept the riches of the world from far;
Yet stooped to Rome, less wealthy, but more strong;
And this may prove our second Punic war.100 [20]

6.

What peace can be, where both to one pretend[101]
(But they more diligent, and we more strong)?
Or if a peace, it soon must have an end,
For they would grow too powerful, were it long.

7.

Behold two nations then, engaged so far,
That each seven years[102] the fit must shake each land,
Where France will side[103] to weaken us by war,
Who only can his vast designs withstand.

---

99 **Carthage** a Phoenician colony in Tunisia, settled in the ninth century BC, which became a major commercial power from the seventh century, and clashed with Rome in a series of wars in the third and second BC centuries, which destroyed Carthage. To anyone educated in the Latin classics, the Carthaginians were the "bad guys" in this conflict.

100 **Punic war** Punic = Phoenician = Carthaginian. The Romans fought three wars in all against the Carthaginians. England had already fought one, successfully, against the Dutch, in 1653-1654 under Cromwell.

101 **both to one pretend** where both parties lay claim to the same object (in this case maritime and trade supremacy).

102 **seven years** a figurative expression for the periodic conflicts between England and Holland.

103 **where France will side** Dryden represents France as allying with Holland whenever this would weaken England, and England alone as able to stand up to France In fact France played *both* countries against each other, to further its own "vast designs."

8.

See how he feeds th' Iberian[104] with delays
To render us his timely friendship vain,
And while his secret soul on Flanders preys,
He rocks the cradle of the babe of Spain.[105]

9.

Such deep designs of empire does he lay
O'er them, whose cause[106] he seems to take in hand,
And prudently would make them lords at sea,
To whom with ease he can give laws by land.

10.

This saw our king, and long within his breast
His pensive counsels balanced to and fro;
He grieved the land he freed should be oppressed,
And he less for it than usurpers do.[107]

104 **Th' Iberian** Dryden's footnote: *the Spaniard.*

105 **the babe of Spain** Louis XIV keeps Spain ("the Iberian") out of the conflict by promises of support in the Spanish Netherlands, effectively keeping Spain from an alliance with England. But those same Spanish Netherlands ("Flanders") are the real object of Louis' ambitions. Thus he keeps beguiles the Spanish government, which is as naive as a newborn.

106 **o'er them whose cause** the Dutch, who he promises aid in their nautical quarrel with England with the real intention of annexing part of their territory.

107 **oppressed. . . than usurpers do** The Dutch did not in fact do anything to oppress the English and provoke the war—they had enough to fear from France, and were not seeking a quarrel with England. The war was inspired, on the English side, by the greed of English mercantile interests, an ill-considered sense of adventure on the part of Charles II, and above all the adroit manipulations of Louis XIV. The "usurper" referred to is Cromwell, who laid the real foundations of English sea power.

11.

His generous mind the fair ideas drew
Of fame and honor which in dangers lay,
Where wealth, like fruit on precipices, grew,
Not to be gathered but by birds of prey.

12.

The loss and gain each fatally were great,
And still his subjects called aloud for war:
But peaceful kings, o'er martial people set,
Each other's poise and counterbalance are.

13.

He first surveyed the charge[108] with careful eyes,
Which none but mighty monarchs could maintain,
Yet judged, like vapors that from limbecks[109] rise,
It would in richer showers descend again.

14.

At length resolved t' assert the watery ball,[110]
He in himself did whole armadas bring;[111]
Him agèd seamen might their master call,
And choose for general, were he not their king.

---

108 **Charge** task, responsibility.

109 **limbecks** an alembic is a distilling device used in alchemy, permitting a liquid to be heated in a pot, and its vapor condensed in a specially designed lid, from which the distillate is drained through a downward tube to be collected in another vessel.

110 **assert the watery ball** to claim dominion over the portions of the globe covered by water.

111 **whole armadas bring** he himself was as good as a fleet. This much is true: Charles was an enthusiastic yachtsman.

15.

It seems as every ship their sovereign knows,
His awful summons they so soon obey—
So hear the scaly herd when Proteus blows,[112]
And so to pasture follow through the sea. [60]

16.

To see this fleet upon the ocean move,
Angels drew wide the curtains of the skies;
And heaven, as if there wanted lights above,
For tapers made two glaring comets[113] rise.

---

112 **when Proteus blows** Dryden's footnote: *When Proteus blows or "Caeruleus Proteus immania ponti armenta et magnas pascit sub gurgite phocas."*

Loosely translated, "Blue-skinned Proteus leads huge seals and all the scaly great livestock of the sea to their seaweed pastures" — a concocted line made from images in Virgil, *Georgics*, 4: 387-389, 394-395.

Proteus was a sea god, whom Virgil pictured a kind of underwater oxherd. Dryden blends the image of Proteus with that of Triton, another son of Poseidon. Triton is represented with a conch-shell, which he blows through like a trumpet to raise or calm the waves.

113 **comets** were sighted in November and December of 1664, remained visible for about a year, and excited considerable astrological comment.

In the following lines Dryden offers several theories about comets. First, that they may be flammable gas, "unctuous exhalations"—unctuous properly means oily. Dryden did not have our understanding of, or familiarity with, gasses. For him, if they were flammable, they had to have something palpable that could burn.

The notion that comets are burning gas goes back to Aristotle. Tycho Brahe discovered that comets are higher than the moon, and inferred that they might be "fired (that is, ignited) by the sun."

Galileo suggested in 1623 that comets might be optical illusions ("seeming so alone.")

The next theory, that they are unstable stars that lose their footing in the sky, out of stage fright, when mortals see them, is

17.

Whether they unctuous exhalations are,
Fired by the sun, or seeming so alone,
Or each some more remote and slippery star,
Which loses footing when to mortals shewn,

18.

Or one,[114] that bright companion of the sun,
Whose glorious aspect sealed[115] our new-born king [70]
And now, a round of greater years begun,
New influence from his walks of light did bring.

19.

Victorious York[116] did first, with famed success,
To his known valor make the Dutch give place,
Thus heaven our monarch's fortune did confess,
Beginning conquest from his royal race.

20.

But since it was decreed, auspicious king,
In Britain's right that thou shouldst wed the main,
Heaven, as a gage, would cast some precious thing,

Dryden's poetic fancy.

In 1630, the year of Charles II's birth, a comet was visible in daylight, and was taken to be a propitious sign. Dryden suggests the same comet has cycled around through the skies to bless the war against Holland.

114 **Or one** or perhaps one of the comets was . . .

115 **sealed** legitimized. Anointed.

116 **Victorious York** the king's brother James, Duke of York, was Admiral of the Fleet. Though he did not actually conduct the battle, for which he had not the training, he fought with the showy bravery of one for whom war is a novelty. Though losses were severe on both sides, the English won the day.

And therefore doomed that Lawson[117] should be slain. [80]

21.

Lawson amongst the foremost met his fate,
Whom sea-green Sirens from the rocks lament;
Thus, as an offering for the Grecian state,
He first was killed,[118] who first to battle went.

22.

Their chief[119] blown up, in air, not waves, expired,
To which his pride presumed to give the law;[120]
The Dutch confessed heaven present, and retired,
And all was Britain the wide ocean saw.

23.

To nearest ports their shattered ships repair,
Where by our dreadful cannon they lay awed, [90]
So reverently men quit the open air,
Where thunder speaks the angry gods abroad.

---

117 **wed the main . . . Lawson** Allusion to the Venetian tradition of having its Duke or *Doge* "marry the sea" each year on Ascension Day. The state galley, the Bucentaur, was rowed out to the Adriatic where the Doge, after certain ceremonies, symbolized the Venetian Republic's indissoluble dominion over the sea by casting a gold ring into it.

The "gage" (object given as a pledge or security) was Sir John Lawson. He was an admiral under the Cromwell and the Parliament, and fought with distinction in the Dutch war of 1653. An advocate of the Restoration, he was knighted and continued as a naval commander, falling in the action described.

118 **he first was killed** Protesilaus, the first Greek to leap ashore on the Trojan expedition, was the first to be killed (*Iliad* 2: 695-702).

119 **their chief** Dryden's footnote: *The Admiral of Holland.* This was Jacob van Wassenaer Obdam commander of the Dutch fleet, whose ship blew up while engaging the Duke of York's ship.

120 **. . . to give the law** he presumed to rule the waves.

The Attempt at Bergen[121]

24.

And now approached their fleet from India, fraught
With all the riches of the rising sun,[122]
And precious sand from southern climates[123] brought,
The fatal regions where the war begun.[124]

25.

Like hunted castors, conscious of their store,[125]
Their waylaid wealth to Norway's coast they bring,
There first the North's cold bosom spices bore,
And winter brooded on the eastern spring. [100]

---

121 **Bergen** a port on the eastern coast of Norway, is that country's second largest city. Norway and Denmark were politically united from the fourteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Thus Dryden will refer to Bergen as part of both Denmark and of Norway.

122 **riches of the rising sun** these would include spices, the scent of which will play an important role in the following lines.

123 **Southern climates** Dryden's footnote: *Guinea*. The precious sand is gold dust from Africa's gold coast.

124 **where the war begun** Dryden acknowledges here that the prime motivation for the war was a contest for eastern trade.

125 **castors, conscious of their store** Castor is Latin for beaver. Its "store," that is, its possession, is *castoreum*, the contents of scent glands located near the beaver's anus. Castoreum is still used to produce the "leather" scent in men's colognes, and is occasionally employed to give a sweet smell to candies, distilled liquors and ice-creams, particularly vanilla and raspberry flavored. The FDA categorizes castoreum as "generally recognized as safe," and so allows it to be noted merely as a "natural ingredient." No list of products containing castoreum is readily available. Castor sacs sell for approximate $4 per ounce.

26.

By the rich scent we found our perfumed prey,
Which, flanked with rocks, did close in covert lie,
And round about their murdering cannon lay,
At once to threaten and invite the eye.[126]

27.

Fiercer than cannon, and than rocks more hard,
The English undertake th' unequal war;
Seven ships alone, by which the port is barred,
Besiege the Indies, and all Denmark dare.[127]

28.

These fight like husbands, but like lovers those;
These fain would keep, and those more fain enjoy, [110]
And to such height their frantic passion grows,
That what both love, both hazard to destroy.[128]

29.

Amidst whole heaps of spices lights a ball,[129]
And now their odors armed against them fly;
Some preciously by shattered porcelain[130] fall,
And some by aromatic splinters die.[131]

---

126 **threaten and invite the eye** the cannons pose a military threat, though they are unconcealed and draw the eye.

127 **seven ships alone . . . all Denmark dare** a small number of ships ("seven" is figurative) seal off the port, and threaten the Indian cargo, in defiance of Denmark (that is, Denmark-Norway).

128 **hazard to destroy** run the risk of destroying.

129 **lights a ball** alights a cannonball.

130 **porcelain** in the seventeenth century the Dutch took over from the Portuguese as the principal importers of Chinese porcelain.

131 **aromatic splinters** of sandalwood and other aromatic wood imports.

30.

And though by tempests of the prize bereft,
In heaven's inclemency some ease we find;
Our foes we vanquished by our valor left,
And only yielded to the seas and wind. [120]

31.

Nor wholly lost we so deserved a prey;
For storms, repenting, part of it restored;
Which as a tribute from the Baltic sea,[132]
The British ocean sent her mighty lord.

32.

Go, mortals, now, and vex yourselves in vain
For wealth, which so uncertainly must come.
When what was brought so far, and with such pain,
Was only kept to lose it nearer home.

33.

The son,[133] who twice three months on th' ocean tossed,
Prepared to tell what he had passed before, [130]
Now sees in English ships the Holland coast,
And parents' arms, in vain, stretched from the shore.

34.

This careful husband had been long away,
Whom his chaste wife and little children mourn;
Who on their fingers learned to tell the day,

---

132 **tribute from the Baltic sea** Some sixty merchant ships set sail for home from Bergen, convoyed by the Dutch Admiral De Ruyter. His force was scattered by a gale, and the English were able to capture a number of the dispersed merchant vessels.

133 **The son** Dryden pictures the discomfiture of Dutch prisoners of this English expedition.

On which their father promised to return.

35.
Such are[134] the proud designs of human-kind,
And so we suffer shipwreck every where!
Alas, what port can such a pilot find,
Who in the night of fate must blindly steer! [140]

36.
The undistinguished seeds of good and ill,
Heaven in his bosom from our knowledge hides;
And draws them in contempt of human skill,
Which oft, for friends mistaken, foes provides.[135]

37.
Let Munster's prelate[136] ever be accursed,
In whom we seek the German faith[137] in vain;

---

134 **Such are** Dryden's footnote: *Si bene calculum ponas, ubique fit naufragium.* (Petronius, *Satyricon* chapter 115.) "If you reckon correctly, shipwreck is everywhere."

135 **foes provides** provides us with enemies whom we mistake for friends.

136 **Munster's prelate** Bertrand Von Der Ghalen, Bishop of Munster, elector of Brandenburg, was Charles II's only continental ally against the Dutch. In his edition of this poem, Walter Scott notes, "He burst into the United States (that is, the United Provinces) at the head of a mercenary army of 20,000 men. With this force, he over-ran the province of Overyssell, where his soldiers distinguished themselves less by military valor, than by an exorbitant license, rapine, and cruelty, which did little honor to their reverend general. But his progress was speedily checked by a French army; and, as they threatened his states with invasion, he found himself compelled to make a separate peace . . ."

137 **the German faith** Dryden's footnote: *Nullos mortalium fide aut armis ante Germanos esse.* (Tacitus Annales, 13: 54) "No men living excel the Germans when it comes to keeping one's word."

Alas, that he should teach the English first,
That fraud and avarice in the church could reign!

38.

Happy, who never trust a stranger's will,
Whose friendship's in his interest understood,
Since money given but tempts him to be ill,
When power is too remote to make him good.[138]

War Declared by France

39.

Till now, alone the mighty nations strove,
The rest, at gaze, without the lists[139] did stand,
And threat'ning France,[140] placed like a painted Jove,
Kept idle thunder in his lifted hand.

40.

That eunuch guardian of rich Holland's trade,
Who envies us what he wants power to enjoy,
Whose noiseful valor does no foe invade,
And weak assistance will his friends destroy,

41.

Offended that we fought without his leave,
He takes this time his secret hate to shew,

---

138 **Happy . . . to be good** Fortunate is he who never trusts the good will of a stranger whose friendship depends on what is profitable to himself. Any money given such a person only confirms him in his venal disposition, as will become apparent the moment he is not absolutely compelled to deal honestly.

139 **without the lists** in front of the place of combat.

140 **threatening France** France threatened England with war if English ships continued to harry Holland, and finally declared it in January of 1666.

Which Charles does with a mind so calm receive,
As one that neither seeks nor shuns his foe.

42.

With France, to aid the Dutch, the Danes unite;[141]
France as their tyrant, Denmark as their slave.
But when with one three nations join to fight,
They silently confess that one more brave.

43.

Lewis had chased the English from his shore,[142]
But Charles the French as subjects does invite; [170]
Would heaven for each some Solomon restore,
Who, by their mercy, may decide their right.

44.

Were subjects so[143] but only by their choice,
And not from birth did forced dominion take,
Our prince alone would have the public voice,
And all his neighbors' realms would deserts make.

45.

He without fear a dangerous war pursues,

---

141 **the Danes unite** Denmark was being courted by both sides when English violation of Danish sovereignty at Bergen drove them into the arms of France and Holland.

142 **English from his shore** Pursuant to the declaration of war, France announced that all Englishmen residing in France were to leave. Charles on the other hand announced that French residents in England might become English subjects. Dryden, wishes that both sides were lucky enough to have a king as wise as Solomon, to judge, as did Charles, according to mercy and fairness.

143 **were subjects so** If nationality were a matter of personal choice rather than birth, language and culture, then everyone who rush to England to become Englishmen.

Which without rashness he began before;
As honor made him first the danger choose,
So still he makes it good on virtue's score.[144] [180]

46.
The doubled charge[145] his subjects' love supplies,
Who in that bounty to themselves are kind,
So glad Egyptians see their Nilus rise,
And in his plenty their abundance find.

Prince Rupert and Duke Albemarle Sent to Sea

47.
With equal power he does two chiefs[146] create,
Two such as each seemed worthiest when alone,
Each able to sustain a nation's fate,
Since both had found a greater in their own.[147]

48.
Both great in courage, conduct, and in fame,
Yet neither envious of the other's praise; [190]
Their duty, faith, and interest too the same,
Like mighty partners equally they raise.

---

144 **on virtue's score** Charles' generous conduct vindicates his brave decision to go to war.

145 **the doubled charge** Parliament repeatedly and gladly appropriated huge sums for the Dutch war, feeling the expenditure was in their own best interests.

146 **two chiefs** Prince Rupert of the Rhine, Duke of Cumberland, a German-English professional soldier who had commanded the royalist cavalry in the English civil war. The second was general George Monk, the Duke of Albemarle, who had commanded the Commonwealth Navy under Cromwell.

147 **a greater in their own** both these had already proven themselves to be "men of destiny."

49.

The Prince long time had courted fortune's love,
But once possessed, did absolutely reign;
Thus with their Amazons[148] the heroes strove,
And conquered first those beauties they would gain.

50.

The Duke beheld, like Scipio, with disdain,
That Carthage, which he ruined, rise once more,
And shook aloft the fasces[149] of the main,
To fright those slaves with what they felt before. [200]

51.

Together to the wat'ry camp[150] they haste,
Whom matrons passing to their children show;
Infants first vows for them to heaven are cast,
And future people151 bless them as they go.

52.

With them no riotous pomp, nor Asian train,[152]

---

148 **with their Amazons** as one of his Twelve Labors, Hercules had to get the magic belt worn by Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. The task was complicated by Hera's machinations, which resulted in an armed conflict in which Hercules was assisted by Theseus, who married Hippolyta when peace was concluded.

149 **Scipio . . . fasces** Scipio Africanus defeated Carthage, the great maritime and mercantile rival of Rome, in the Second Punic War (218-201 BC). A *fasces* is a bundle of rods bound around an axe, carried by Roman magistrates as a symbol of their authority. Originally it indicated a magistrate's ability to inflict corporal punishment or the death penalty.

150 **wat'ry camp** the harbor

151 **future people** Dryden's footnote: *Examina infantium futurusque populus.* (Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric to Trajan* 26) "Crowds of children, the future citizens."

To infect a navy with their gaudy fears,[153]
To make slow fights, and victories but vain,
But war severely, like itself, appears.

53.

Diffusive of themselves, where'er they pass,
They make that warmth in others they expect,
Their valor works like bodies on a glass,
And does its image on their main project.[154]

54.

Our fleet divides, and straight the Dutch appear,
In number, and a famed commander,[155] bold;
The narrow seas can scarce their navy bear,
Or crowded vessels can their soldiers hold.

55.

The Duke,[156] less numerous, but in courage more,
On wings of all the winds to combat flies;
His murdering guns a loud defiance roar,

---

152 **Asian train** a retinue of non-combatants to provide the command with comforts, luxuries and diversions. Dryden evokes the Persian invasions of Greece in the fifth century BC. The Greek historians record with amazement and contempt the unnecessary luxuries of the Persian ("Asian") host.

153 **infect a navy with their gaudy fears** to inspire fear in the opposing navy by their dazzling appearance.

154 **Diffusive . . . project** The admirals fraternize with the troops, inspiring their courage ("warmth.") As a physical form sends its image into a mirror ("glass"), they impart their courage to all their men ("their main.")

155 **famed commander** Michiel De Ruyter, (1607-1676), one of the greatest admirals in history, beloved by his men, to this day revered by the Dutch as a folk hero. He is the subject of the entertaining and informative 2015 film *The Admiral.*

156 **the Duke** of Albemarle, the Commonwealth Admiral, George Monk.

And bloody crosses[157] on his flag-staffs rise.

56.

Both furl their sails[158] and strip them for the fight,
Their folded sheets dismiss the useless air;
Th' Elean plains[159] could boast no nobler sight,
When struggling champions did their bodies bare.

57.

Borne each by other in a distant line,
The sea-built forts in dreadful order move;
So vast the noise, as if not fleets did join,
But lands unfixed,[160] and floating nations strove.

58.

Now passed, on either side they nimbly tack;
Both strive to intercept and guide the wind,
And, in its eye[161]more closely they come back,

---

157 **bloody crosses** the red crosses of St. George.

158 **furl their sails** the sails in the front of the ship (the jib and staysail) and those in back (the mizzen) would be furled, leaving only those near the middle of the ship (the foresail, mainsail, and fore topsail). Full sail was not needed for a naval battle, in which lines of ships sailed slowly past each other discharging cannon.

159 **Elean plains** Dryden's footnote: *where the Olympic games were celebrated.*

160 **land unfixed** Dryden's footnote: *from Virgil: "Credas innare revulsas Cycladas, &c,"* (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7: 691-693).The full citation, which would have been familiar enough to Dryden's readers, is *alta petunt: pelago credas innare revulsas/ Cycladas aut montis concurrere montibus altos,/ tanta mole viri turritis puppibus instant.* "They make for the deep. You'd think the Cycladic Isles, torn from their foundations, had swum off, and now their mountainous bulks were crashing against one another, so vast were those towering ships on which the heroes stood."

161 **nimbly tack . . . in its eye** Typically, a vessel is propelled by wind

To finish all the deaths they left behind.

59.
On high-raised decks the haughty Belgians[162] ride
Beneath whose shade our humble frigates go,
Such port the elephant bears, and so defied
By the rhinoceros, her unequal foe.

60.
And as the build,[163] so different is the fight,
Their mounting shot is on our sails designed;
Deep in their hulls our deadly bullets light,
And through the yielding planks a passage find. [240]

61.
Our dreaded admiral from far they threat,
Whose battered rigging their whole war receives;

---

filling the sails from the side. To tack is to turn the ship around 180 degrees so that the wind may fill the sails anew as the ship moves back in the opposite direction. Here both sides in the battle attempt to "guide" the wind to fill their sails. The "eye of the wind" is the direction from which the wind is blowing. When a ship faces directly into the wind, it halts, since the wind goes past the sails without filling them. One can however continue to harness the wind's power as long as one doesn't face *directly* into the wind. Sailing, at need, *almost* into the wind, so as to gain maximum freedom of motion, is sailing "close to the eye" of the wind. And of course, when making a full 180 degree turn, a ship faces into the wind for a moment, before catching the wind again, now from the other side.

162 **Belgians** Dutch.

163 **build** structure of the ships. The Dutch ships, flat-bottomed, rode high on the water, exposing their hulls to cannon fire. The English ships, heavier and built low, were most vulnerable in their masts and rigging, particularly to chain-shot, two cannon balls chained together, which could send as much as six feet of chain sweeping through a target.

All bare,[164] like some old oak which tempests beat,
He stands, and sees below his scattered leaves.

62.

Heroes of old, when wounded, shelter sought,
But he, who meets all danger with disdain,
Even in their face his ship to anchor brought,
And steeple-high stood propped upon the main.165

63.

At this excess of courage, all amazed,
The foremost of his foes awhile withdraw;
With such respect in entered Rome they gazed,
Who on high chairs the god-like Fathers saw.[166]

---

164 **all bare** General Monk's breeches were shot off during this action, though without serious injury to his flesh. He continued the battle without pants. It must be understood that men's breeches in the 17th century extended from waist to knee, and were cut full, gathered at the waistband and knee. In general outline, they resembled bloomers or culottes. The shot must have caught the cloth at its fullest. Men's "underwear" at the time consisted of the shirt, which was as long as a modern nightshirt, tucked up around the groin. Thus we should imagine the General stripped of his baggy shorts by a close shot, continuing to fight in what looked like a night shirt.

165 **propped upon the main** cool and calm in his unexpected undress, Monck brought his ship to anchor while he replaced the sails that had been shot off,

166 **the godlike fathers saw** recalling a memorable scene in Livy's *History of Rome* (5: 41) After the Romans were routed by the Gauls in the battle of the Allia (390 BC), Rome lay undefended. While the people fled, some older aristocratic men decided to await their death with dignity, in their ceremonial robes. Livy's description, well familiar to Dryden' readers, runs:

"The houses of the plebeians were barricaded. The halls of the patricians stood open, but the Gauls felt greater hesitation about entering the open houses than those which were closed. They gazed with feelings of real veneration upon the men who were seated in the

64.

And now, as where Patroclus' body lay,[167]
Here Trojan chiefs advanced, and there the Greek,
Ours o'er the Duke their pious wings display,
And theirs the noblest spoils of Britain seek.

65.

Meantime his busy mariners he hastes,
His shattered sails with rigging to restore;
And willing pines[168] ascend his broken masts,
Whose lofty heads rise higher than before. [260]

66.

Straight to the Dutch he turns his dreadful prow,
More fierce the important quarrel to decide;
Like swans, in long array, his vessels show,

---

porticoes of their mansions, not only because of the superhuman magnificence of their apparel, but because of their grand bearing and demeanor, the majestic expression of their countenances. They had the dignity of gods. Thus they stood, gazing at them as if they were statues, till a Gaul, as if to test whether these being were entirely real, stroked the beard of one of the patricians, Marcus Papirius. (In those days all men wore long beards). Papirius, enraged by this liberty taken with his person, rapped the Gaul on the head with his ivory staff. Papirius thus became the first to be killed. The others were butchered in their chairs. After this slaughter of the magnates, no living being was thenceforth spared; the houses were rifled, and then set on fire."

167 **as where Patroclus' body lay** a scene from the Trojan war. When the Greek hero Patroclus was slain, both Greek and Trojan warriors converged upon it, the former to take the body back to camp for burial, the latter to despoil it of its armor and weapons. The "pious wings" are a figure of speech for "loyal protection." The spoils the Dutch seek are in this case the ship itself.

168 **willing pines** ready replacement masts.

Whose crests advancing do the waves divide.

67.

They charge, recharge, and all along the sea
They drive, and squander the huge Belgian fleet;
Berk'ley alone, who nearest danger lay,
Did a like fate with lost Creusa[169] meet.

68.

The night comes on, we eager to pursue
The combat still, and they ashamed to leave,
Till the last streaks of dying day withdrew,
And doubtful moonlight did our rage deceive.[170]

69.

In th' English fleet each ship resounds with joy,
And loud applause of their great leader's fame;
In fiery dreams the Dutch they still destroy,
And, slumbering, smile at the imagined flame.

70.

Not so the Holland fleet, who, tired and done,
Stretched on their decks, like weary oxen lie;
Faint[171] sweats all down their mighty members run,
Vast bulks, which little souls but ill supply.

71.

In dreams they fearful precipices tread,
Or, shipwrecked, labor to some distant shore,

169 **Berk'ley . . . Creusa** Vice Admiral Sir William Berkeley (1639-1666) was lost in the day's fighting. Creusa, the wife of Aeneas, was lost in the flight from burning Troy.

170 **deceive** disappoint**.**

171 **faint** cowardly.

Or in dark churches walk among the dead;
They wake with horror, and dare sleep no more.

Second Day's Battle

72.

The morn they look on with unwilling eyes,
Till from their main-top[172] joyful news they hear
Of ships, which, by their mold,[173] bring new supplies,
And in their colors Belgian lions bear.

73.

Our watchful general had discerned from far
This mighty succor, which made glad the foe; [290]
He sighed, but, like a father of the war,[174]
His face[175] spake hope, while deep his sorrows flow.

74.

His wounded men he first sends off to shore,
Never, till now, unwilling to obey;
They, not their wounds, but want of strength, deplore,
And think them happy, who with him can stay.

75.

Then to the rest, "Rejoice," said he, "today,
In you the fortune of Great Britain lies;

---

172 **main-top** platform near the top of the main mast, used as an observation post. Dryden's hyphenation of the word is kept here, contrary to modern usage, for the sake of the meter.

173 **by their mold** judging by their shape and structure.

174 **father of the war** one who shows paternal care for his troops.

175 **his face** Dryden's footnote: *Spem vultu simulat, premit alto corde dolorem. (*Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1: 209) "He feigns hope in his face, hiding his woe deep in his heart.".

Among so brave a people, you are they,
Whom heaven has chose to fight for such a prize. [300]

76.

"If number English courages could quell,
We should at first have shunned, not met, our foes,
Whose numerous sails the fearful only tell;[176]
Courage from hearts, and not from numbers grows."

77.

He said, nor needed more to say; with haste,
To their known stations, cheerfully they go;
And all at once, disdaining to be last,
Solicit every gale to meet the foe.

78.

Nor did the encouraged Belgians long delay,
But, bold in others, not themselves, they stood; [310]
So thick, our navy scarce could shear their way,
But seemed to wander in a moving wood.

79.

Our little fleet was now engaged so far,
That, like the sword-fish in the whale they fought;[177]
The combat only seemed a civil war,[178]
Till through their bowels we our passage wrought.

---

176 **tell** count.

177 **the swordfish in the whale** the folk belief that swordfish are fierce and will attack whales goes back as far as Pliny. The image here is of a swallowed swordfish fighting its way out a whale's belly.

178 **only seemed a civil war** the opposing forces were so close packed that it seemed like one fleet struggling against itself—until the British ships broke through the Dutch line.

80.

Never had valor, no not ours before
Done aught like this upon the land or main;
Where, not to be o'ercome,[179] was to do more
Than all the conquests former kings did gain. [320]

81.

The mighty ghosts of our great Harries rose,
And armèd Edwards[180] looked with anxious eyes,
To see this fleet among unequal foes,
By which fate promised them[181] their Charles should rise.

82.

Meantime the Belgians tack[182] upon our rear,
And raking chase-guns[183] through our sterns they send;
Close by their fire-ships, like jackals,[184] appear,
Who on their lions for the prey attend

---

179 **not to be o'ercome** against such overwhelming odds.

180 **Harries . . . Edwards** Edward III, Edward the Black Prince, and Henry IV, V, and VI, who fought France in the Hundred Years' War. Since Holland was allied with France in that conflict, these martial shades would feel themselves engaged.

181 **By which fate promised them** by which (unequal contest), fate (paradoxically) promised them.

182 **tack** If a sailing vessel points directly into the wind, it comes to a halt, because the wind, moving parallel to the sails, passes them. To move forward in the direction from which the wind blows, the ship must *tack*, that is, take a zig-zag course, moving forward always at an angle to the wind. Catching the wind obliquely, the ship achieves an indirect, piecemeal advance windward.

183 **chase-guns** cannon mounted at ports in the bows, used to attack a fleeing enemy.

184 **fire-ships, like jackals** fire-ships were ships set ablaze and sent among the enemy, a standard tactic of the time. It was supposed that jackals assisted lions like hunting dogs, finding and flushing out the prey. In actuality, jackal's follow hunting lions in hopes of getting the scraps.

83.

Silent, in smoke of cannon, they come on;
Such vapors once did fiery Cacus[185] hide;
In these, the height of pleased revenge[186] is shewn,
Who burn contented by another's side.

84.

Sometimes from fighting squadrons of each fleet,
Deceived themselves, or to preserve some friend,[187]
Two grappling Ætnas on the ocean meet,
And English fires with Belgian flames contend.

85.

Now, at each tack, our little fleet grows less;
And, like maimed fowl, swim lagging on the main.
Their greater loss their numbers scarce confess,[188]
While they lose cheaper than the English gain.

86.

Have you not seen, when whistled from the fist,
Some falcon[189] stoops at what her eye designed,

---

185 **Cacus** an ogre in Latin mythology, slain by Hercules. Cacus breathed fire, thus he "hid" flames within himself.

186 **pleased revenge** content to be destroyed so long as one's enemy is slain as well.

187 **or to preserve some friend** sometimes both sides send forth, on a collision course, a volcano-like fire-ship (Aetna is an active volcano on the east coast of Sicily). This is either unintentional, or to protect their own ships from the approaching menace.

188 **their numbers scarce confess** the Dutch are so much more numerous that their greater losses are not apparent, while the English pay more dearly with their smaller fleet.

189 **falcon** at the falconer' whistle, the bird leaves its perch on the man's gloved fist; once well aloft, it may it fly down ("stoop") after some prey that has caught its eye ("at what her eye designed"), but which

And with her eagerness the quarry missed,
Straight flies at check, and clips it down the wind?

87.
The dastard crow, that to the wood made wing,
And sees the groves no shelter can afford,
With her loud caws her craven kind does bring,
Who, safe in numbers, cuff[190] the noble bird.

88.
Among the Dutch thus Albemarle did fare:
He could not conquer, and disdained to fly;
Past hope of safety, 'twas his latest care,
Like falling Cæsar,[191] decently to die.

89.
Yet pity did his manly spirit move,
To see those perish who so well had fought,
And generously with his despair he strove,
Resolved to live till he their safety wrought.

90.
Let other muses write his prosperous fate,
Of conquered nations tell, and kings restored,
But mine shall sing of his eclipsed estate,

---

the falconer did not intend. This distracted flight is called flying "at check" —the bird is "checked," that is, stopped or hindered, in the course intended by the falconer. To "clip" means to move rapidly, as with a cutting motion. For Dryden's "clips it" we might say "moves at a brisk clip."

190 **cuff** strike at. It is here a crow that the falcon abandons its quarry for. The cowardly (dastard) crow will only fight back if it has superior numbers.

191 **falling Caesar** Dryden has in mind Caesar's death in Shakespeare; where the Roman dies with dignity, expressing no fear.

Which, like the sun's, more wonders does afford. [360]

91.

He drew his mighty frigates all before,
On which the foe his fruitless force employs;
His weak ones deep into his rear he bore,
Remote from guns, as sick men from the noise.

92.

His fiery cannon did their passage guide,
And following smoke obscured them from the foe:
Thus Israel, safe from the Egyptians' pride.
By flaming pillars, and by clouds[192] did go.

93.

Elsewhere the Belgian force we did defeat,
But here our courages did theirs subdue; [370]
So Xenophon[193] once led that famed retreat,
Which first the Asian empire overthrew.

94.

The foe approached, and one for his bold sin

---

192 **by flaming pillars and by clouds** Exodus 13: "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them . . . through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea: . . . .And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light . . ."

193 **Xenophon** The Belgian (that is, Dutch) force is compared to that led by Xenophon (430-354 BC) — a large army of Greek mercenaries hired by Cyrus the Younger to seize the throne of Persia. They were victorious in battle, but Cyrus was killed. Without support from the various Persian contenders, they retreated, fighting, through difficult terrain, north to the Black Sea which they hailed with the famous cry *Thalatta, thalatta!* (*"The sea, the sea!") Anabasis* is Xenophon's account of the expedition.

Was sunk, as he that touched the Ark[194] was slain.
The wild waves mastered him, and sucked him in,
And smiling eddies dimpled on the main.

95.

This seen, the rest at awful[195] distance stood
As if they had been there as servants set,
To stay, or to go on, as he thought good,
And not pursue, but wait on his retreat. [380]

96.

So Libyan huntsmen, on some sandy plain,
From shady coverts roused, the lion chase;
The kingly beast roars out with loud disdain,
And slowly moves, unknowing to give place.196

97.

But if some one[197] approach to dare his force,
He swings his tail, and swiftly turns him round,
With one paw seizes on his trembling horse,
And with the other tears him to the ground.

98.

Amidst these toils succeeds the balmy night;

---

194 **he that touched the ark** 1 Chronicles 13: 9-10. When the Ark of the Covenant was being taken to Jerusalem by King David, and the wagon which carried it tilted, a man named Uzzah reached out to steady it. None but priests were technically allowed to touch the Ark, and God struck down Uzzah for his presumption.

195 **awful** respectful, full of awe.

196 **unknowing to give place** Dryden's footnote: *Vestigia retro improperata refert.* (Virgil *Aeneid* 9). Virgil's line describes a lion retreating from a band of hunters, who "draws back, in so calm and leisurely a manner he hardly seems to retreat."

197 **some one** this word is divided for the sake of the meter.

Now hissing waters[198] the quenched guns restore,
And weary waves, withdrawing from the fight,
Lie lulled and panting on the silent shore.199

99.

The moon shone clear on the becalmèd flood,
Where, while her beams like glittering silver play,
Upon the deck our careful general stood,
And deeply mused on the succeeding day.200

100.

"That happy sun," said he, "will rise again,
Who twice victorious did our navy see,
And I alone must view him rise in vain,
Without one ray of all his star for me.

101.

"Yet, like an English general will I die,
And all the ocean make my spacious grave.
Women and cowards on the land may lie,
The sea's a tomb that's proper for the brave."

102.

Restless he passed the remnant of the night,

198 **hissing waters** all firearms become extremely hot with repeated use. Cannons, being thick barreled, retained their heat for a long time, and were cooled with seawater after a battle. To describe them as hissing is no exaggeration.

199 **on the silent shore** Dryden's footnote: . . . *nec trucibus fluviis idem sonus: occidit horror/ aequoris, et terris maria adclinata quiescunt.* — Statius *Sylvae* 5: 4: 5-6 "the terror of the savage waves abates, nor roar the seas as heretofore, but sleepily they lave the shore."

200 **the succeeding day** Dryden's footnote: *The third of June, famous for two former victories.* The succeeding day is the anniversary of two victories over the Dutch, June 3, 1653, and June 3, 1665.

Till the fresh air proclaimed the morning nigh,
And burning ships, the martyrs of the fight,
With paler fires beheld the eastern sky.

Third Day

103.

But now his stores of ammunition spent,
His naked valor is his only guard,
Rare thunders are from his dumb cannon sent,
And solitary guns are scarcely heard.

104.

Thus far had fortune power, here forced to stay,
No longer durst with fortune[201] be at strife;
This as a ransom Albemarle did pay,
For all the glories of so great a life.

105.

For now brave Rupert from afar appears,
Whose waving streamers the glad general knows;
With full-spread sails his eager navy steers,
And every ship in swift proportion grows.

106.

The anxious prince had heard the cannon long,
And, from that length of time, dire omens drew
Of English overmatched, and Dutch too strong,
Who never fought three days, but to pursue.[202]

---

201 **fortune . . . fortune** Fortune now no longer has power over Albemarle's personal destiny.

202 **. . . but to pursue** the Dutch only persist in fight when they are chasing an enemy they outnumber.

107.
Then, as an eagle, who with pious care
Was beating widely on the wing for prey,
To her now silent aerie does repair,
And finds her callow[203] infants forced away;

108.
Stung with her love, she stoops upon the plain,
The broken air loud whistling as she flies,
She stops and listens, and shoots forth again,
And guides her pinions by her young ones' cries.

109.
With such kind passion hastes the prince to fight,
And spreads his flying canvas to the sound;
Him, whom no danger, were he there, could fright,
Now absent, every little noise can wound.[204]

110.
As in a drought the thirsty creatures cry,
And gape upon the gathered clouds for rain,
And first the martlet[205] meets it in the sky,
And with wet wings joys all the feathered train;

111.
With such glad hearts did our despairing men

203 **callow** immature.

204 **every little noise can wound** Rupert is alert for every sound which might indicate trouble for the English fleet.

205 **martlet** the swift, a bird that does almost everything, even sleeping, on the wing, only landing when it returns to its nest. It bathes, not by fluttering in puddles, but by flying slowly through rain, hence its wet wings would be a sign of coming showers.

Salute th' appearance of the prince's fleet;
And each ambitiously would claim the ken,[206]
That with first eyes did distant safety meet.

112.
The Dutch, who came like greedy hinds before,
To reap the harvest their ripe ears did yield,[207]
Now look like those,[208] when rolling thunders roar,
And sheets of lightning blast the standing field.

113.
Full in the prince's passage, hills of sand, [209]
And dangerous flats, in secret ambush lay, [450]
Where the false tides skim o'er the covered land,
And seamen, with dissembled depths, betray.

114.
The wily Dutch, who, like fallen angels, feared
This new messiah's[210] coming, there did wait,
And round the verge their braving[211] vessels steered,
To tempt his courage with so fair a bait.

115.
But he, unmoved, contemns[212] their idle threat,
Secure of fame[213] whene'er he please to fight;

---

206 **ken** power of vision, look, gaze. The sailors argue about who was the first to see this rescue coming.

207 **hinds . . . ripe ears did yield** the deer ("hinds") come greedily to feed on the wheat which offers its ripe ears.

208 **now look like those** the Dutch now look like those same deer when they are frightened off by a sudden storm.

209 **hills of sand** Prince Rupert discerns the dangerous shoals.

210 **messiah's** Rupert is the savior of the imperiled English fleet.

211 **braving** challenging, defiant.

212 **contemns** views with contempt.

His cold experience tempers all his heat,
And inbred worth doth boasting valor slight. [460]

116.
Heroic virtue did his actions guide,
And he the substance, not th' appearance, chose;
To rescue one such friend he took more pride,
Than to destroy whole thousands of such foes.

117.
But when approached, in strict embraces bound,
Rupert and Albemarle together grow;
He joys to have his friend in safety found,
Which he to none but to that friend[214] would owe.

118.
The cheerful soldiers, with new stores supplied,
Now long to execute their spleenful[215] will [470]
And, in revenge for those three days they tried,
Wish one, like Joshua's, when the sun stood still.[216]

Fourth Day's Battle

119.
Thus reinforced, against the adverse fleet,
Still doubling[217] ours, brave Rupert leads the way;

---

213 **secure of fame** he is confident he will vindicate his reputation for courage.

214 **but to that friend** Albemarle would not wish to be rescued by anyone else.

215 **spleenful** angry.

216 **when the sun stood still** The Book of Joshua chapter 10 recounts how God made the sun stand still so Joshua could complete the rout of his enemies in the valley of Ajalon.

217 **doubling** outnumbering.

With the first blushes of the morn they meet,
And bring night back[218] upon the new-born day.

120.

His presence soon blows up the kindling fight,
And his loud guns speak thick[219] like angry men;
It seemed as slaughter had been breathed[220] all night,
And death new-pointed his dull dart again. [480]

121.

The Dutch too well his mighty conduct knew,
And matchless courage, since the former fight,
Whose navy like a stiff-stretched cord did shew, [221]
Till he bore in, and bent them into flight.

122.

The wind he shares, while half their fleet offends
His open side, and high above him shows;
Upon the rest at pleasure he descends,
And, doubly harmed, he double harms bestows.[222]

---

218 **bring night back** with cannon smoke.

219 **speak thick** with little interval between shots.

220 **been breathed** had rested and recovered its energy.

221 **like a stiff stretched cord . . . double harm bestows** In the course of the fighting the Dutch fleet, initially in an unbroken straight line, was separated into two groups.

222 **. . . double harm bestows** At this time the old naval tactic of grappling the enemy ship, boarding it, and essentially fighting a land battle on the decks, was obsolete. Ships now fought in lines, one fleet parallel to the other, firing broadsides as they went.

Rupert has broken through the Dutch line, and now half of their ships are on one side of him and half on the other. Since the lines of battle are parallel, they all "share the wind." However, the line that is upwind has the greater maneuverability. Thus Rupert's is more vulnerable to the line upwind of him, which can "offend his open side," and he can "at pleasure descend" upon the Dutch line that is

123.

Behind, the general mends his weary pace,
And sullenly to his revenge he sails; [490]
So glides some trodden serpent on the grass,
And long behind his wounded volume trails.[223]

124.

Th' increasing sound is borne to either shore,
And for their stakes the throwing[224] nations fear;
Their passions double with the cannons' roar,
And with warm wishes each man combats there.

125.

Plied thick and close as when the fight begun,
Their huge unwieldy navy wastes away;
So sicken waning moons too near the sun,
And blunt their crescents[225] on the edge of day. [500]

126.

And now, reduced on equal terms to fight,
Their ships like wasted patrimonies[226] show,

---

downwind of him. Although Rupert is being fired upon from both sides, he is so skillful that he can give as good as he gets.

223 **his wounded volume trails** Dryden's footnote: *Quum medii nexus, extremæque agmina caudæ/ solvuntur; tardosque trahit sinus ultima orbes.* (Virgil *Georgics* 3: 423-424). Albemarle (General Monk) follows Rupert. His advance is compared to that of a wounded snake. The Latin reads "Slowly he unwinds his coils down to the furthest curve, and writhes himself extensively along."

224 **throwing** the image is of dice being cast.

225 **blunt their crescents** the image is of a crescent moon fading from view at daybreak; ships typically battle in a crescent formation.

226 **wasted patrimonies** inherited estates where the forests have been thinned to sell off the timber. The remaining trees are so far apart that their shadows do not fall upon one another. Here the sparse

Where the thin scattering trees admit the light,
And shun each other's shadows as they grow.

127.

The warlike prince[227] had severed from the rest
Two giant ships, the pride of all the main;[228]
Which with his one so vigorously he pressed,
And flew so home,[229] they could not rise again.

128.

Already battered, by his lee[230] they lay,
In vain upon the passing winds they call; [510]
The passing winds through their torn canvas play,
And flagging[231] sails on heartless sailors fall.

129.

Their opened sides receive a gloomy light,
Dreadful as day let into shades below;[232]
Without, grim death rides barefaced in their sight,
And urges entering billows as they flow.

130.

When one dire shot, the last they could supply,

---

masts of the enemy ships are compared to the few surviving trees.,

227 **the warlike prince** Rupert.

228 **main** though this could mean "open ocean," it is better construed as the main body of their forces, that is, their entire fleet.

229 **flew so home** he attacked the two ships he had separated from the Dutch flee with such precision that they were disabled.

230 **lee** the side that could not make use of the wind..

231 **flagging** drooping. The limp sails hang down over the dispirited ("heartless") sailors.

232 **as day let into shades below** as if the earth had been torn open to reveal the ghosts in the world of the dead. The image is from Virgil (*Aeneid* 8: 195 ff.)

Close by the board the prince's main-mast bore,
All three, now helpless, by each other lie,
And this offends not, and those fear no more.[233] [520]

131.
So have I seen some fearful hare maintain
A course, till tired before the dog she lay;
Who, stretched behind her, pants upon the plain,
Past power to kill, as she to get away.

132.
With his lolled tongue he faintly licks his prey,
His warm breath blows her flix[234] up as she lies;
She, trembling, creeps upon the ground away
And looks back to him with beseeching eyes.

133.
The prince unjustly does his stars accuse,
Which hindered him to push his fortune on, [530]
For what they to his courage did refuse,
By mortal valor never must[235] be done.

134.
This lucky hour the wise Batavian[236] takes,
And warns his tattered fleet to follow home,
Proud to have so got off with equal stakes,
Where 'twas a triumph not to be o'ercome.[237]

---

233 **offends not . . . fear no more** the main mast, shot down, no longer helps in the fight ("offends not"). the other two masts, shot down before, have nothing more to fear.

234 **flix** variant of *flax*, meaning down or fur.

235 **never must** cannot be.

236 **Batavian** Dutchman.

237 **not to be overcome** Dryden's footnote: Q*uos opimus/ fallere et effugere triumphus est.* (Horace *Odes* 4: 4: 51-52) The image is of deer; the line

135.

The general's force, as kept alive by fight,
Now not opposed, no longer can pursue;
Lasting till heaven had done his courage right,
When he had conquered, he his weakness knew. [540]

136.

He casts a frown on the departing foe,
And sighs to see him quit the watery field;
His stern fixed eyes no satisfaction show,
For all the glories which the fight did yield.

137.

Though, as when fiends did miracles avow,[238]
He stands confessed e'en by the boastful Dutch;
He only does his conquest disavow,
And thinks too little what they found too much.

138.

Returned, he with the fleet resolved to stay,
No tender thoughts of home his heart divide;[239] [550]
Domestic joys and cares he puts away,
For realms are households which the great must guide.

139.

---

means it is "a rich enough triumph if they can by stealth evade" the pack of wolves.

238 **did miracles avow** in the New Testament, demons confronted with Jesus, confess him, as in Mark 1: 23-24: "And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God."

239 **his heart divide** unfocus his purpose.

As those, who unripe veins in mines explore,
On the rich bed again the warm turf lay,
Till time digests the yet imperfect ore,
And know it will be gold another day.[240]

140.

So looks our monarch on this early fight,
Th' essay and rudiments[241] of great success;
Which all-maturing time must bring to light,
While he, like heaven, does each day's labor bless. [560]

141.

Heaven ended not the first or second day,[242]
Yet each was perfect to the work designed;
God and kings work when they their work survey
And passive aptness in all subjects find.

His Majesty Repairs the Fleet

142.

In burdened vessels first, with speedy care,
His plenteous stores do season'd timber send;
Thither the brawny carpenters repair,
And as the surgeons of maimed ships attend.

143.

With cord and canvas from rich Hamburg[243] sent,

240 **gold another day** according to ancient geology, gold ripened in the earth out of base metals.

241 **essay and rudiments** first attempt and basic instruction.

242 **first or second day** God's plan for the world was not achieved on the first or second day of creation.

243 **Hamburg** with its natural harbor opening on the North and Baltic seas, is still Europe's third largest port, and is notable now as then for

His navy's molted wings he imps[244] once more; [570]
Tall Norway fir, their masts in battle spent,
And English oak, sprung leaks and planks restore.

144.
All hands employed, the royal work grows warm;[245]
Like laboring bees on a long summer's day;
Some sound the trumpet for the rest to swarm,
And some on bells of tasted lilies play.

145.
With gluey wax some new foundations lay,
Of virgin-combs, which from the roof are hung;
Some armed within doors, upon duty stay,
Or tend the sick, or educate the young. [580]

146.
So here some pick out bullets from the sides,
Some drive old oakum[246] through each seam and rift;
Their left hand does the caulking-iron guide,
The rattling mallet with the right they lift.

147.
With boiling pitch another near at hand,
From friendly Sweden247 brought, the seams in-stops;

---

its shipyards.

244 **imps** grafts new feathers onto.

245 **work grows warm** Dryden's footnote: *Fervet opus. The same similitude in Virgil.* (Virgil *Aeneid* 1: 430-36) This Latin phrase, "the work is carried on with earnest warmth" is part of an extended comparison of the building of Carthage to the labor of bees, which Dryden adapts in the succeeding lines.

246 **oakum** loose hemp or jute fiber, treated with tar or creosote, and used to calk seams in wooden ships.

247 **friendly Sweden** Britain's only continental ally during this war.

Which well paid o'er,[248] the salt sea waves withstand,
And shakes them from the rising beak[249] in drops.

148.

Some the galled ropes with dawby marline250 bind,
Or cereclothe masts with strong tarpawling coats;[251] [590]
To try new shrouds,[252] one mounts into the wind,
And one below their ease or stiffness notes.

149.

Our careful monarch stands in person by,
His new-cast cannons' firmness to explore;[253]
The strength of big-corn'd powder[254] loves to try,
And ball and cartridge sorts for every bore.[255]

150.

Each day brings fresh supplies of arms and men,
And ships which all last winter were abroad,

---

248 **paid o'er** technical term: sealed with hot pitch.

249 **beak** or beakhead, the protruding part of the foremost section of a sailing ship.

250 **galled . . .dawby marline** they reinforce the abraded ("galled") ropes by wrapping them around with untwisted rope (marline) that has been rendered sticky (dawby) by having been dipped in pitch.

251 **cereclothe . . tarpawling** they *cereclothe,* that is, wrap the masts in cloth that has been steeped in wax and resin, to waterproof them. *Tarpawling* (tarpaulin) is heavy-duty waterproof canvas, originally made so by treating with tar. The phrase means" "They water-proof clothe the masts with coats of treated canvas."

252 **shrouds** fixed lines that support the mast, running from its top to the sides of the ship.

253 **firmness to explore** to test the cannons' ability to withstand discharge.

254 **big-corned powder** gunpowder that has been dampened and formed into pellets, a process which increases its combustive force.

255 **bore** the hollow part of the cannon's barrel.

And such as fitted since the fight had been,
Or new from stocks,[256] were fallen into the road.[257] [600]

Loyal London Described

151.
The goodly London, in her gallant trim,
The phœnix-daughter[258] of the vanished old,
Like a rich bride does to the ocean swim,
And on her shadow[259] rides in floating gold.

152.
Her flag aloft, spread ruffling to the wind,
And sanguine[260] streamers, seem the flood to fire;
The weaver, charmed with what his loom designed,
Goes on to sea, and knows not to retire.[261]

153.
With roomy decks, her guns of mighty strength,
Whose low-laid mouths each mounting billow laves, [610]
Deep in her draft,[262] and warlike in her length,
She seems a sea-wasp flying on the waves.

---

256 **stocks** the timber frame that supports a ship during construction.

257 **fallen into the road** took their place in anchorage.

258 **goodly London . . . phoenix-daughter** the Loyal London was a ship built to replace another, the London, that had burned in an accidental fire.

259 **shadow rides in floating gold** her shadow is her reflection, in the Thames; "gold" is used here, unusually, to mean "splendor."

260 **sanguine** red; their reflections in the water look like flames.

261 **knows not to retire** the weaver, enchanted by the look of his handiwork, follows the ship seawards along the shore.

262 **draft** the depth of a vessel's keel below the water line, especially when loaded.

154.

This martial present, piously[263] designed,
The loyal city give their best-loved king;
And, with a bounty ample as the wind,
Built, fitted, and maintained, to aid him, bring.

Digression Concerning Shipping and Navigation

155.

By viewing nature, nature's handmaid, art,
Makes mighty things from small beginnings grow,
Thus fishes first to shipping did impart,
Their tail the rudder, and their head the prow. [620]

156.

Some log, perhaps, upon the waters swam,
A useless drift,[264] which, rudely cut within,
And hollow'd, first a floating trough became,
And 'cross some riv'let[265] passage did begin.

157.

In shipping such as this, the Irish kern,[266]
And untaught Indian, on the stream did glide;
Ere sharp-keel'd boats to stem the flood did learn,
Or fin-like oars did spread from either side.

158.

Add but a sail, and Saturn[267] so appeared,

---

263 **piously** loyally.

264 **drift** piece of drifting wood.

265 **riv'let** for rivulet, a small stream.

266 **Irish kern** originally, a light-armed medieval Irish foot soldier. By Dryden's time the word had come to mean "yokel."

267 **Saturn** according to a historicizing legend from antiquity, Saturn was

When from lost empire he to exile went, [630]
And with the golden age to Tiber steered,
Where coin and commerce first he did invent.

159.

Rude as their ships was navigation then,
No useful compass or meridian[268] known;
Coasting, they kept the land within their ken,
And knew no north but when the Pole-star shone.

160.

Of all, who since have used the open sea,
Than the bold English none more fame have won;
Beyond the year,[269] and out of heaven's high way,
They make discoveries where they see no sun. [640]

161.

But what so long in vain, and yet unknown,
By poor mankind's benighted wit is sought,
Shall in this age to Britain first be shewn,
And hence be to admiring nations taught.

162.

The ebbs of tides,[270] and their mysterious flow,

---

a Greek king deposed by his son Jove; he fled to Latium in Italy, bringing with him the arts of civilization. The reign of the Saturn is pictured as a golden age.

268 **meridian** line of longitude (from pole to pole).

269 **beyond the year** Dryden's footnote: *Extra anni solisque vias.*—Virgil. *Aeneid*, 6: 796. Literally "beyond the paths of the year and of the sun." This hyperbolic expression means "beyond the known or (astronomically) knowable world."

270 **the ebbs of tides . . . as art's elements . . . as by line** the tides were a matter of considerable interest in that age of exploration, (and they would soon be explicable in terms of Newton's universal law of

We, as art's elements, shall understand;
And as by line upon the ocean go,
Whose paths shall be familiar as the land.

163.
Instructed[271] ships shall sail to quick commerce,
By which remotest regions are allied,
Which makes one city of the universe,
Where some may gain, and all may be supplied.

164.
Then we upon our globe's last verge shall go,
And view the ocean leaning on the sky;
From thence our rolling neighbors we shall know,
And on the lunar world securely pry.[272]

Apostrophe to the Royal Society

165.
This I foretell from your auspicious care,
Who great in search of God and nature grow,
Who best your wise Creator's praise declare,
Since best to praise His works is best to know.

---

gravitation). These shall be understood, Dryden prophecies, as clearly as the most rudimentary principles ("elements") of science ("art"), and navigation shall be carried out with undeviating precision ("by line.")

271 **Instructed** Dryden's note: *By a more exact measure of longitude.*

272 **securely pry** Dryden pictures explorers arriving at the edge of the flat earth, where sky meets the limit of the river Ocean that encircles the land mass. From here one can look into outer space and spy ("pry") on the moon and planets ("our rolling neighbors.") The shift from modern to ancient cosmology is a little giddy-making, but well within the bounds of poetic license.

166.

O truly royal![273] Who behold the law,
And rule of beings in your maker's mind,
And thence, like limbecs,[274] rich ideas draw,
To fit the leveled[275] use of human-kind.

167.

But first the toils of war we must endure,
And from th' injurious Dutch redeem the seas;
War makes the valiant of his right secure,
And gives up fraud[276] to be chastised with ease.

168.

Already were the Belgians[277] on our coast,
Whose fleet more mighty every day became [670]
By late[278] success, which they did falsely boast,
And now, by first appearing, seemed to claim.

169.

Designing, subtle, diligent, and close,[279]
They knew to manage war with wise delay;
Yet all those arts their vanity did cross,
And by their pride their prudence did betray.

---

273 **truly royal** the Royal Society had just received its charter from Charles II. Dryden was one of the first members, though he was finally expelled for non-payment of dues.

274 **limbecs** alembics, retorts. Vessels used for distillation, particularly in alchemy.

275 **leveled** sober and practical.

276 **and gives up fraud** in war, false pretensions to courage and power are quickly exposed and reproved.

277 **Belgians** the Dutch, who once more threatened England's coastal waters.

278 **late** recent.

279 **close** secretive.

170.

Nor stayed the English long, but, well supplied,
Appear as numerous as the insulting foe;
The combat now by courage must be tried,
And the success the braver nation show. [680]

171.

There was the Plymouth squadron now come in,
Which in the Straits last winter was abroad;
Which twice on Biscay's working[280] bay had been,
And on the midland[281] sea the French had awed.

172.

Old expert Allin, loyal all along,[282]
Famed for his action on the Smyrna fleet;283
And Holmes,[284] whose name shall live in epic song,
While music numbers,[285] or while verse has feet.

173.

Holmes, the Achates[286] of the general's fight,

---

280 **working** agitated, tossing.

281 **midland** Mediterranean.

282 **loyal all along** Sir Thomas Allin (1612-1685) officer of the Royal Navy, who rose to the rank of admiral, fought on the royalist side in the Civil War..

283 **the Smyrna fleet** the Dutch convoy protecting merchants returning from Turkey.

284 **Holmes** Sir Robert Holmes (1622-1692) admiral of the Royal Navy, famed for his aggressive campaign against Dutch traders on the West African coast, in which he won territories for Britain.

285 **while music numbers** while music has notes ("numbers").

286 **Achates** was a companion of Aeneas in his maritime wanderings after the fall of Troy. A shadowy, peripheral figure in the Aeneid, he is generally give the epithet *fidus*, "loyal," and so he became an emblem of faithful friendship. The general to whom Holmes was a

Who first bewitched our eyes with Guinea gold,
As once old Cato,[287] in the Roman sight,
The tempting fruits of Afric did unfold.

174.

With him went Spragge,[288] as bountiful as brave,
Whom his high courage to command had brought;
Harman[289], who did the twice-fired Harry save,
And in his burning ship undaunted fought.

175.

Young Holles[290] on a muse by Mars begot,
Born, Cæsar-like, to write and act great deeds;
Impatient to revenge his fatal shot,
His right hand doubly to his left succeeds.

176.

Thousands were there in darker fame[291] that dwell,
Whose deeds some nobler poem shall adorn;
And, though to me unknown, they sure[292] fought well,

---

loyal Achates was Prince Rupert, whom he had served on his pirate expeditions.

287 **Cato** Cato urged the Roman Senate to begin the Third Punic War against Rome's trade rival Carthage, a coastal city-state in North Africa, in part by suggesting how profitable it would be.

288 **Sir Edward Spragge** (1620-1673) a naval officer distinguished for his valor.

289 **Harman** Sir John Harman (1625-1673) saved the ship *Henry*, which had been set ablaze by fire-ships, twice.

290 **Holles** Sir Frescheville Holles (1641-1672), commanding the ship the *Antelope*, and had his left arm shot off in the fighting, but, bandaged, fought on. His father Gervase Holles ("Mars") fought staunchly for king in the civil wars. Holles is descried as the son of a muse because he is reported to have kept up his courage during a storm at sea by lustily reciting poetry.

291 **darker fame** whose names and acts are less well known.

Whom Rupert led, and who were British born.

177.
Of every size a hundred fighting sail;
So vast the navy now at anchor rides,
That underneath it the pressed waters fail,
And with its weight it shoulders off the tides.

178.
Now, anchors weighed, the seamen shout so shrill,
That heaven and earth, and the wide ocean, rings;
A breeze from westward waits their sails to fill,
And rests in those high beds his downy wings.

179.
The wary Dutch this gathering storm foresaw,
And durst not bide it on the English coast;
Behind their treacherous shallows they withdraw
And there lay snares to catch the British host.

180.
So the false spider, when her nets are spread,
Deep ambushed in her silent den does lie,
And feels far off the trembling of her thread,
Whose filmy[293] cord should bind the struggling fly,

181.
Then, if at last she find him fast beset,
She issues forth, and runs along her loom;
She joys to touch the captive in her net,
And drag the little wretch in triumph home.

---

292 **sure** without a doubt.

293 **filmy** airy, insubstantial.

182.
The Belgians[294] hoped that, with disordered haste,
Our deep-cut keels upon the sands might run;
Or, if with caution leisurely were past,
Their numerous gross[295] might charge us one by one.

183.
But with a fore-wind[296] pushing them above,
And swelling tide that heaved them from below, [730]
O'er the blind flats[297] our warlike squadrons move,
And with spread sails to welcome battle go.

184.
It seemed as there the British Neptune stood
With all his hosts of waters at command,
Beneath them to submit the officious flood,[298]
And with his trident shoved them off the sand.299

185.
To the pale foes they suddenly draw near,
And summon them to unexpected fight;
They start like murderers when ghosts appear,
And draw their curtains in the dead of night. [740]

---

294 **Belgians** Dutch.

295 **gross** military term meaning the main body (of a fleet or army).

296 **fore-wind** a wind that pushes the ship forward (Dryden's coinage, not a nautical term).

297 **blind flats** hidden shoals.

298 **beneath them . . . officious flood** to make the only too eager waters do as the English fleet would wish.

299 **off the sand** Dryden's footnote: *Levat ipse tridenti,/ et vastas aperit syrtes.* Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1: 145-146 "'He himself (Neptune) raises Aeneas' ships with his trident as a lever, and speeds them into the open seas from the vast sandy shoals where they were stuck."

Second Battle

186.
Now van to van[300] the foremost squadrons meet,
The midmost battles[301] hastening up behind,
Who view far off the storm of falling sleet,
And hear[302] their thunder rattling in the wind.

187.
At length the adverse admirals appear,
The two bold champions of each country's right;
Their eyes describe the lists[303] as they come near,
And draw the lines of death before they fight.

188.
The distance judged for shot of every size,
The linstocks[304] touch, the ponderous ball expires.[305] [750]
The vigorous seaman every port-hole plies,
And adds his heart to every gun he fires.

189.
Fierce was the fight on the proud Belgians' side,

---

300 **van to van** the vanguard (leading) forces. The two fleets are pictured as two crescents approaching one another, horns foremost.

301 **midmost battles** the central portions of the fleets.

302 **who view . . . and hear** the ships coming up see and hear the battle ahead, dark as a sleet-storm (from cannon smoke) and loud as thunder (from cannon-fire).

303 **describe the lists** perceive the trajectory of the approaching enemy ships. Actual lists are barriers enclosing an area for a jousting tournament.

304 **linstocks** long poles used to hold matches for firing a cannon.

305 **expires** meaning from the Latin etymology, *exspirare*. "to breathe out."

For honor, which they seldom sought before,
But now they by their own vain boasts were tied,
And forced, at least in show, to prize it more.

190.
But sharp remembrance on the English part,
And shame of being matched by such a foe,
Rouse conscious virtue up in every heart,
And seeming to be stronger, makes them so.[306] [760]

191.
Nor long the Belgians could that fleet sustain,
Which did two generals' fates,[307] and Cæsar's bear;
Each several ship a victory did gain,
As Rupert or as Albemarle were there.

192.
Their battered admiral too soon withdrew,
Unthanked[308] by ours for his unfinished fight,
But he the minds of his Dutch masters knew,
Who called that providence, which we called flight.

193.
Never did men more joyfully obey,
Or sooner understood the sign to fly; [770]
With such alacrity they bore away,
As if, to praise them, all the States stood by.[309]

---

306 **makes them so** Dryden's footnote: *Possunt quia posse videntur.* Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5: 231. "They can, because they believe they can."

307 **fates** the influence of the generals' and the king's ("Caesar's) star-determined destiny.

308 **unthanked** the English would have preferred to complete his destruction.

309 **States stood by** as if all the States (Holland's provinces) witnessed their flight with approbation.

194.

O famous leader of the Belgian fleet,
Thy monument inscribed such praise shall wear,
As Varro,[310] timely flying, once did meet,
Because he did not of his Rome despair.

195.

Behold that navy, which, a while before,
Provoked the tardy English close to fight;[311]
Now draw their beaten vessels close to shore,
As larks lie dared,[312] to shun the hobbies'313 flight. [780]

196.

Whoe'er would English monuments[314] survey,
In other records may our courage know;
But let them hide the story of this day,
Whose fame was blemished by too base a foe.

197.

Or, if too busily they will inquire
Into a victory, which we disdain,
Then let them know, the Belgians did retire,
Before the patron saint[315] of injured Spain.

---

310 **Varro** Gaius Terentius Varro, one of the generals who presided over the catastrophic defeat of the Roman forces by Hannibal at Cannae. For reassembling his shattered troops after the battle, instead of simply running, he was thanked by the Romans "for not having succumbed to despair."

311 **close to fight** that provoked the English, who are slow to anger ("tardy") to fight hand to hand ("close").

312 **lie dared** hide, in a state of terror or amazement at another's daring attack.

313 **hobbies'** a hobby is a kind of falcon,

314 **monuments** records, memorials.

198.

Repenting England this revengeful day
To Philip's *manes* did an offering bring, [790]
England, which first, by leading them astray,
Hatched up rebellion to destroy her king.[316]

199.

Our fathers bent their baneful industry,
To check a monarchy that slowly grew;
But did not France or Holland's fate foresee,
Whose rising power to swift dominion flew.

200.

In fortune's empire blindly thus we go,
And wander after pathless destiny,
Whose dark resorts[317] since prudence cannot know,
In vain it would provide for what shall be. [800]

201.

But whate'er English to the blessed shall go,
And the fourth Harry[318] or first Orange[319] meet,

---

315 **patron saint** Dryden's footnote: *St. James, on whose day this victory was fought.* The date was July 25. In this and succeeding lines Dryden deprecates England's traditional policy of aiding Holland against Spain.

316 **Philip's *manes* . . . destroy her king** Dryden's footnote: *Philip the Second of Spain, against whom the Hollanders rebelling, were aided by Queen Elizabeth.* "Manes" is a Latin term meaning the spiritual essence of a dead ancestor, which may be prayed to by living descendants. Dryden suggests that the Dutch fleet was sacrificed as offering to the soul of Philip II of Spain. Elizabeth I supported the Dutch in their revolt against Spanish rule.

317 **dark resorts** the mysterious means it has recourse to.

318 **fourth Henry** Henry IV, France's first Bourbon king, (1553-1610) was in conflict with Spain, and thus on good terms with England during

Find him disowning of a Bourbon foe,
And him detesting a Batavian fleet.

202.
Now on their coasts our conquering navy rides,
Waylays their merchants, and their land besets;
Each day new wealth without their care provides;
They lie asleep with prizes in their nets.[320]

203.
So close behind some promontory lie
The huge leviathans[321] to attend their prey, [810]
And give no chase, but swallow in the fry,
Which through their gaping jaws mistake the way.

Burning of the Fleet in the Vly[322] by Sir Robert Holms

204.
Nor was this all; in ports and roads[323] remote,
Destructive fires[324] among whole fleets we send;

---

the Dutch Revolt. Thus he would have been horrified to see his grandson Louis XIV "a Bourbon foe" to the English.

319 **first Orange** William the Silent (1533-1584) led the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish Hapsburgs, which finally resulted in Dutch independence. He is here shown deploring the naval action of the Dutch (the "Batavian fleet") against his allies, the English.

320 **with prizes in their nets** The English fleet preys on Dutch shipping, which brings them booty without their having to seek it; they are like fishermen whose nets fill while they sleep.

321 **leviathans** whales.

322 **Vly** Vlieland, an island off the Dutch coast, just above Amsterdam, used by the Dutch as a supply depot.

323 **roads** sheltered inlets where ships may anchor.

324 **Destructive fires** fire ships.

Triumphant flames upon the water float,
And out-bound ships at home their voyage end.

205.
Those various squadrons, variously designed,
Each vessel freighted with a several load,
Each squadron waiting for a several wind,
All find but one—to burn them in the road.[325] [820]

206.
Some bound for Guinea, golden sand to find,
Bore all the gauds the simple natives wear;
Some for the pride of Turkish courts designed,
For folded turbans finest holland[326] bear.

207.
Some English wool vexed[327] in a Belgian loom,
And into cloth of spongy softness made,
Did into France, or colder Denmark, doom,[328]
To ruin with worse ware our staple trade.
208.
Our greedy seamen rummage every hold,
Smile on the booty of each wealthier chest;
And, as the priests who with their gods make bold, [830]
Take what they like[329], and sacrifice the rest.

---

325 **to burn them in the road** the one that will fan the fire when they are set ablaze in their own ports.

326 **holland** Dutch linen.

327 **vexed** literally "troubled, harassed." The idea is that Dutch weaving, compared to English, constitutes an affront to the wool.

328 **doom** assign. By sending English wool, shoddily worked, for a lower price, they undermine English exports.

329 **take what they like** of the offerings of the faithful.

Transitum[330] to the Fire of London

209.
But ah, how insincere[331] are all our joys!
Which sent from heaven, like lightning, make no stay;
Their palling taste the journey's length destroys,[332]
Or grief, sent post, o'ertakes them on the way.

210.
Swelled with our late successes on the foe,
Which France and Holland wanted power to cross,
We urge an unseen fate to lay us low,
And feed their envious eyes with English loss. [840]

211.
Each element his dread command obeys,
Who makes or ruins with a smile or frown,
Who, as by one he did our nation raise,
So now he with another pulls us down.

212.
Yet London, empress of the northern clime,
By a high fate thou greatly didst expire,
Great as the world's, which, at the death of time,
Must fall, and rise a nobler frame by fire.333

---

330 ***Transitum*** section to serve as a transition.

331 **insincere** impure, mixed, alloyed. An archaic sense, based on the Latin *sincerus*, "clean, pure, sound, uninjured, whole, entire."

332 **their palling taste the journey's length destroys** on the long way from heaven to us, the joy loses its keen flavor.

333 **frame by fire** Dryden's footnote: *Cum mare, cum tellus, correptaque regia caeli ardeat &c."* Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1: 256 ff. "There will come a time when sea and earth and the very palace of the gods shall burn." This is the Stoic belief that all things arise from the element of fire and periodically return to it in a cosmic conflagration..

213.

As when some dire usurper heaven provides,
To scourge his country with a lawless sway,
His birth, perhaps, some petty village hides,
And sets his cradle out of fortune's way

214.

Till fully ripe his swelling fate breaks out,
And hurries him to mighty mischiefs on—
His prince, surprised at first, no ill could doubt,
And wants the power to meet it when 'tis known.

215.

Such was the rise of this prodigious fire,
Which in mean buildings first obscurely bred,
From thence did soon to open streets aspire,
And straight to palaces and temples spread.

216.

The diligence of trades and noiseful gain,
And luxury more late, asleep were laid;
All was the night's, and in her silent reign
No sound the rest of nature did invade.

217.

In this deep quiet, from what source unknown,
Those seeds of fire their fatal birth disclose
And first, few scattering sparks about were blown,
Big with the flames that to our ruin rose.

218.

Then in some close-pent room it crept along,
And, smoldering as it went, in silence fed [870]
Till th' infant monster, with devouring strong,
Walked boldly upright with exalted head.

219.

Now, like some rich or mighty murderer,
Too great for prison, which he breaks with gold,
Who fresher for new mischiefs does appear,
And dares the world to tax him with the old,

220.

So 'scapes th' insulting Fire his narrow jail,
And makes small outlets into open air;
There the fierce winds his tender force assail,
And beat him downward to his first repair.[334] [880]

221.

The winds, like crafty courtesans, withheld
His flames from burning, but to blow them more;
And, every fresh attempt, he is repelled
With faint denials, weaker than before.[335]

222.

And now, no longer letted of[336] his prey,
He leaps up at it with enraged desire,
O'erlooks the neighbors with a wide survey,
And nods at every house his threat'ning fire.

---

334 **repair** dwelling.

335 **weaker than before** Dryden's footnote: *Hæc arte tractabat cupidum virum, ut illius animum inopia accenderet.* Terence, *Heautontimorumenos*, 2: 366-367. "Deftly she managed the man who burned with lust: the fact that she supplied so little fuel, fed his flames the more."

336 **letted of** hindered from.

223.

The ghosts of traitors from the bridge descend,[337]
With bold fanatic specters to rejoice;
About the fire into a dance they bend,
And sing their sabbath notes with feeble voice.

224.

Our guardian angel saw them where they sate,
Above the palace of our slumb'ring king;
He sighed, abandoning his charge to fate,
And, drooping, oft looked back upon the wing.

225.

At length the crackling noise and dreadful blaze
Called up some waking lover to the sight,
And long it was ere he the rest could raise,
Whose heavy eyelids yet were full of night.

226.

The next to danger,[338] hot pursued by fate,
Half-clothed, half-naked, hastily retire,
And frighted mothers strike their breasts too late,
For helpless infants left amidst the fire.

227.

Their cries soon waken all the dwellers near,
Now murmuring noises rise in every street,

337 **from the bridge descend** Traitors' heads used to be displayed on spikes on London Bridge, at the Stone Gateway on the south bank. This practice began around 1300 and continued until about 1660. The "fanatic" specters are those of the radical Puritans, who had executed Charles I, a few of whom were duly executed by Charles II.

338 **next to danger** threatened next.

The more remote run stumbling with their fear,
And in the dark men jostle as they meet.

228.

So weary bees in little cells repose,
But if night-robbers lift the well-stored hive, [910]
A humming through their waxen city grows,
And out upon each other's wings they drive.

229.

Now streets grow thronged, and busy as by day;
Some run for buckets to the hallowed choir,[339]
Some cut the pipes,[340] and some the engines[341] play,
And some, more bold, mount ladders[342] to the fire.

230.

In vain, for from the east a Belgian[343] wind
His hostile breath through the dry rafters sent;
The flames, impelled, soon left their foes behind,[344]
And forward with a wanton fury went. [920]

---

339 **choir** though properly the part of a church, at front, where the choir and clergy stand, here the word is used for the church as a whole. Fire buckets were kept in churches.

340 **cut the pipes** wooden water mains. The Romans favored lead pipes (and our word "plumbing" comes from their word for lead, *plumbum*). Large scale management of the water supply was lost until the 17th century, when wooden pipes were introduced. These continued in use until the twentieth century. Here, the wooden pipes were cut, since hydrants had not yet been invented.

341 **the engines** these were tanks with pumps, often unwheeled and mounted on sleds, that had a discharge spout but no delivery hose. They had little effect.

342 **mount ladders** that is, they climbed ladders set against the burning buildings with buckets to pour on the flames.

343 **Belgian** from the East, where Holland lay..

344 **left their foes behind** outstripped the fire fighters.

231.

A quay[345] of fire ran all along the shore,
And lightened all the river with a blaze,**346**
The wakened tides began again to roar,
And wondering fish in shining waters gaze.

232.

Old father Thames raised up his reverend head,
But feared the fate of Simois would return,347
Deep in his ooze he sought his sedgy[348] bed,
And shrunk his waters back into his urn.[349]

233.

The fire, mean-time, walks in a broader gross,350
To either hand his wings he opens wide, [930]
He wades the streets, and straight he reaches 'cross,
And plays his longing flames on the other side.

234.

At first they warm, then scorch, and then they take,
Now with long necks from side to side they feed;
At length, grown strong, their mother-fire forsake,

---

345 **quay** (pronounced to rhyme with "be"), a wharf or dock.

346 **with a blaze** Dryden's footnote: *Sigæa igni freta late relucent.* Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2: 312. "The blaze of fallen Troy shone far along both shores of the Dardanelles."

347 **Simois** in the *Iliad*, Book XXI, the river Xanthus, (also called Scamander) was nearly dried up by the fires of Vulcan, for having attempted to drown Achilles. Dryden has confused Xanthus with the adjacent river Simois,

348 **sedgy** overgrown with grassy water plants.

349 **his urn** in classical art, rivers are depicted pouring their waters from an urn.

350 **gross** military term for main body of the troops.

And a new colony of flames succeed.

235.
To every nobler portion of the town
The curling billows roll their restless tide,
In parties now they straggle up and down,
As armies, unopposed, for prey divide. [940]

236.
One mighty squadron with a side-wind sped,
Through narrow lanes his cumbered fire does haste,
By powerful charms of gold and silver led
The Lombard bankers and the Change[351] to waste.

237.
Another backward to the Tower would go
And slowly eats his way against the wind,
But the main body of the marching foe
Against the imperial palace is designed.

238.
Now day appears, and with the day the king,
Whose early care had robbed him of his rest; [950]
Far off the cracks of falling houses ring,
And shrieks of subjects pierce his tender breast.

239.
Near as he draws, thick harbingers of smoke,
With gloomy pillars, cover all the place
Whose little intervals of night are broke
By sparks, that drive against his sacred face.

351 **Lombard bankers and the Change** the bankers on Lombard street, and the Royal Exchange, London's financial center.

240.

More than his guards his sorrows made him known,
And pious tears, which down his cheeks did shower;
The wretched in his grief forgot their own,
So much the pity of a king has power.

241.

He wept the flames of what he loved so well,
And what so well had merited his love,
For never prince in grace did more excel,
Or royal city more in duty strove.

242.

Nor with an idle care did he behold,
Subjects may grieve, but monarchs must redress;
He cheers the fearful, and commends the bold,
And makes despairers hope for good success.

243.

Himself directs what first is to be done,
And orders all the succors which they bring;
The helpful and the good about him run,
And form an army worthy such a king.

244.

He sees the dire contagion spread so fast,
That where it seizes all relief is vain;
And therefore must unwillingly lay waste
That country, which would else the foe maintain.

245.

The powder blows up all[352] before the fire,

352 **the powder blows up all** gunpowder was used to demolish houses in the path of the fire, to contain it.

Th' amazèd flames stand gathered on a heap
And from the precipice's brink retire,
Afraid to venture on so large a leap.

246.
Thus fighting fires a while themselves consume,
But straight, like Turks forced on to win or die,[353]
They first lay tender bridges of their fume,
And o'er the breach in unctuous[354] vapors fly.

247.
Part stay for passage, till a gust of wind
Ships o'er their forces in a shining sheet;
Part creeping under ground,[355] their journey blind,
And climbing from below their fellows meet.

248.
Thus to some desert plain, or old wood-side,
Dire night-hags come from far to dance their round,
And o'er broad rivers on their fiends they ride,
Or sweep in clouds above the blasted[356] ground.

249.
No help avails, for hydra-like the fire
Lifts up his hundred heads to aim his way,
And scarce the wealthy can one half retire
Before he rushes in to share the prey.

---

353 **to win or die** it was believed that Turkish cavalry would kill their own foot soldiers who retreated.

354 **unctuous** properly, this means oily or greasy; Dryden uses it to mean flammable.

355 **creeping under ground** military metaphor, suggesting sapping a wall.

356 **blasted** blighted, barren.

250.
The rich grow suppliant, and the poor grow proud,
Those offer mighty gain, and these ask more,
So void of pity is the ignoble crowd,
When others' ruin may increase their store. [1000]

251.
As those who live by shores with joy behold
Some wealthy vessel split or stranded nigh,
And from the rocks leap down for shipwrecked gold,
And seek the tempests which the others fly,

252.
So these but wait the owners' last despair,
And what's permitted to the flames invade;
E'en from their jaws they hungry morsels tear,
And on their backs the spoils of Vulcan[357] lade.

253.
The days were all in this lost labor spent,
And when the weary king gave place to night, [1010]
His beams he to his royal brother lent,
And so shone still in his reflective light.358

254.
Night came, but without darkness or repose,
A dismal picture of the general doom
Where souls, distracted when the trumpet blows,
And half unready, with their bodies come.

357 **Vulcan** god of blacksmiths, hence of fire.

358 **reflective light** the king charging his brother James with continuing the fight is compared to the sun lending his light to the moon.

255.

Those who have homes, when home they do repair,
To a last lodging call their wandering friends,
Their short uneasy sleeps are broke with care,
To look how near their own destruction tends.

256.

Those, who have none, sit round where once it was,
And with full eyes each wonted room require,
Haunting the yet warm ashes of the place,
As murdered men[359] walk where they did expire.

257.

Some stir up coals and watch the vestal[360] fire,
Others in vain from sight of ruin run,
And while through burning lab'rinths they retire,
With loathing eyes repeat[361] what they would shun.

258.

The most in fields, like herded beasts, lie down,
To dews obnoxious[362] on the grassy floor,
And while their babes in sleep their sorrows drown,
Sad parents watch the remnants of their store.[363]

259.

While by the motion of the flames they guess
What streets are burning now, and what are near;

---

359 **murdered men** (the ghosts of) murdered men.

360 **vestal fire** Vesta was the Roman goddess of the hearth and the home. The vestal fire here is that which smolders where the home used to be.

361 **repeat** experience again.

362 **obnoxious** exposed to. This is the meaning of the Latin root *obnoxius*.

363 **store** possessions.

An infant, waking, to the paps would press
And meets, instead of milk, a falling tear.

260.
No thought can ease them but their sovereign's care,
Whose praise th' afflicted as their comfort sing;
E'en those, whom want might drive to just despair,
Think life a blessing under such a king.

261.
Meantime he sadly suffers in their grief,
Outweeps a hermit, and outprays a saint,
All the long night he studies their relief,
How they may be supplied, and he may want.[364]

King's Prayer

262.
"O God," said he, "Thou patron of my days,
Guide of my youth in exile and distress!
Who me, unfriended, brought'st by wond'rous ways,
The kingdom of my fathers[365] to possess,

263.
"Be thou my judge, with what unwearied care
I since have labored for my people's good,
To bind the bruises of a civil war,
And stop the issues of their wasting blood.

264.
"Thou, who hast taught me to forgive the ill,

364 **and he may want** and how he can pay for it.

365 **the kingdom of my fathers** Charles had spent his entire adult life in exile while Cromwell ruled England.

And recompense, as friends, the good misled,
If mercy be a precept of thy will,
Return that mercy on thy servant's head.

265.
"Or if my heedless youth has stepped astray,
Too soon forgetful of thy gracious hand,
On me alone thy just displeasure lay,
But take thy judgments from this mourning land.

266.
"We all have sinned, and thou hast laid us low,
As humble earth, from whence at first we came;
Like flying shades before the clouds we show,
And shrink like parchment in consuming flame.

267.
"O let it be enough what thou hast done,
When spotted deaths[366] ran armed through every street,
With poisoned darts, which not the good could shun,
The speedy could out-fly, or valiant meet.

268.
"The living few, and frequent funerals then,
Proclaimed thy wrath on this forsaken place,
And now those few, who are returned again,
Thy searching judgments to their dwellings trace.

269.
"O pass not, Lord, an absolute decree,
Or bind thy sentence unconditional,
But in thy sentence our remorse foresee,

366 **spotted deaths** the outbreak of plague in the preceding year.

And in that foresight this thy doom recall.

270.
"Thy threat'nings, Lord, as thine, thou may'st revoke,
But, if immutable and fixed they stand,
Continue still thyself to give the stroke,
And let not foreign foes oppress thy land."[1080]

271.
Th' Eternal heard, and from the heavenly choir
Chose out the cherub with the flaming sword
And bade him swiftly drive the approaching fire
From where our naval magazines were stored.

272.
The blessèd minister his wings displayed,
And like a shooting star he cleft the night,
He charged the flames, and those that disobeyed,
He lashed to duty with his sword of light.

273.
The fugitive flames, chastised, went forth to prey
On pious structures, by our fathers reared, [1090]
By which to heaven they did affect the way,
Ere faith in churchmen without works[367] was heard.

274.
The wanting orphans saw, with watery eyes,
Their founders' charity in dust laid low,
And sent to God their ever-answered cries;

367 **faith in churchmen without works** the "pious structures" are pre-Reformation churches, and "faith without works" is the doctrine of Luther and Calvin, that salvation does not depend of outward acts but on inward faith.

For he protects the poor, who made them so.

275.
Nor could thy fabric, Paul's,[368] defend thee long,
Though thou wert sacred to thy Maker's praise,
Though made immortal by a poet's song,
And poets' songs[369] the Theban walls could raise .[1100]

276.
The daring flames peeped in, and saw from far
The awful beauties of the sacred choir;
But since it was profaned by civil war,[370]
Heaven thought it fit to have it purged by fire.

277.
Now down the narrow streets it swiftly came,
And, widely opening, did on both sides prey;
This benefit we sadly owe the flame,
If only ruin must enlarge our way.

278.
And now four days the sun had seen our woes;
Four nights the moon beheld th' incessant fire, [1110]
It seemed as if the stars more sickly rose,

368 **Paul's** The 12th century Norman St. Paul's Cathedral. Gutted by the fire, its ruins were replaced by the present structure designed by Christopher Wren

369 **and poets' songs** The poet's song intended here is Edmund Waller's 1664 *Upon His Majesty's Repairing of Paul's* The other reference is to Amphion, the mythical founder to Thebes, who by the music of his lyre, caused the stones of the city to assemble themselves.

370 **profaned by civil war** during the Civil War the Puritans stabled their horses in the church, regarding it as a monument to Popish superstition.

And farther from the feverish north retire.

279.
In th' empyrean heaven, the blessed abode,
The Thrones and the Dominions[371] prostrate lie,
Not daring to behold their angry God,
And a hushed silence damps[372] the tuneful sky.

280.
At length the Almighty cast a pitying eye,
And mercy softly touched his melting breast,
He saw the town's one half in rubbish lie,
And eager flames drive on to storm the rest.[1120]

281.
A hollow crystal pyramid[373] he takes,
In firmamental waters dipt above,
Of it a broad extinguisher he makes,
And hoods the flames that to their quarry drove.

282.
The vanquished fires withdraw from every place,
Or, full with feeding, sink into a sleep;
Each household *genius* shows again his face,
And from the hearths the little *lares*[374] creep.

---

371 **the Thrones and the Dominions** various classes of angels, named here to indicate the angels in general.

372 **damps** dampens, muffles.

373 **a hollow crystal pyramid** God makes a vast candle-snuffer out of transparent ("crystal") air and atmospheric ("firmamental") moisture.

374 ***genius . . . lares*** Roman household gods. The Romans were very animistic and had an immense repertory of minor deities which, like these, we now understand only in broad outline.

283.
Our king this more than natural change beholds,
With sober joy his heart and eyes abound,
To the All-Good his lifted hands he folds,
And thanks him low on his redeemèd ground.

284.
As when sharp frosts had long constrained the earth,
A kindly thaw unlocks it with cold rain,
And first the tender blade peeps up to birth,
And straight the green fields laugh with promised grain,

285.
By such degrees the spreading gladness grew
In every heart which fear had froze before,
The standing streets with so much joy they view,
That with less grief the perished they deplore.

286.
The father of the people opened wide
His stores, and all the poor with plenty fed,
Thus God's anointed God's own place supplied,
And filled the empty with his daily bread.

287.
This royal bounty brought its own reward,
And in their minds so deep did print the sense,
That if their ruins sadly they regard,
'Tis but with fear the sight might drive him thence.

City's Request to the King not to Leave Them

288.
But so may he live long, that town to sway,

Which by his auspice[375] they will nobler make, [1150
As he will hatch their ashes[376] by his stay,
And not their humble ruins now forsake.

289.

They have not lost their loyalty by fire;
Nor is their courage or their wealth so low,
That from his wars they poorly[377] would retire,
Or beg the pity of a vanquished foe.

290.

Not with more constancy the Jews, of old,[378]
By Cyrus from rewarded exile sent,
Their royal city did in dust behold,
Or with more vigor to rebuild it went. [1160]

291.

The utmost malice of the stars is past,
And two dire comets, which have scourged the town,
In their own plague and fire have breathed their last,
Or dimly in their sinking sockets frown.

292.

Now frequent trines[379] the happier lights among,
And high-raised Jove, from his dark prison freed,[380]

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375 **by his auspice** under his patronage.

376 **hatch their ashes** cause new growth to emerge from the ruins.

377 **poorly** meanly, abjectly.

378 **the Jews, of old** the Jewish people, defeated by the Assyrians in the 6th century BC, were deported *en masse* to Babylon. They were restored to their devastated homeland by Cyrus of Persia.

379 **trines** planets in a trine aspect to one another (120 degrees apart) are thought to be astrologically propitious.

380 **from his dark prison freed** the planet Jupiter takes up a more fortunate position.

Those weights took off that on his planet hung,
Will gloriously the new-laid works succeed.[381]

293.

Methinks already from this chemic[382] flame,
I see a city of more precious mold,
Rich as the town[383] which gives the Indies name,
With silver paved, and all divine with gold.

294.

Already laboring with a mighty fate,[384]
She shakes the rubbish from her mountain brow,
And seems to have renewed her charter's date,
Which heaven will to the death of time allow.

295.

More great than human now, and more august,[385]
Now deified she from her fires does rise,
Her widening streets on new foundations trust,
And opening into larger parts she flies.[386]

296.

Before, she like some shepherdess did show,
Who sat to bathe her by a river's side;
Not answering to her fame, but rude and low,
Nor taught the beauteous arts of modern pride.

297.

---

381 **succeed** cause to take the place of the old.
382 **chemic** alchemical, transformative.
383 **Rich as the town** Dryden's footnote: *Mexico*.
384 **laboring with a mighty fate** bringing to birth a great destiny.
385 **august** Dryden's footnote: *Augusta, the old name of London*.
386 **flies** extends her range and influence.

Now, like a maiden queen, she will behold,
From her high turrets, hourly suitors come;
The East with incense, and the West with gold,
Will stand like suppliants to receive her doom.[387]

298.

The silver Thames, her own domestic flood,
Shall bear her vessels like a sweeping train,[388] [1190]
And often wind, as of his mistress proud,
With longing eyes to meet her face again.

299.

The wealthy Tagus,[389] and the wealthier Rhine,
The glory of their towns no more shall boast;
And Seine, that would with Belgian rivers join,[390]
Shall find her luster stained, and traffic lost.

300.

The venturous merchant, who designed more far,
And touches on our hospitable shore,
Charmed with the splendor of this northern star,
Shall here unlade him, and depart no more. [1200]

301.

Our powerful navy shall no longer meet,[391]
The wealth of France or Holland to invade;
The beauty of this town, without a fleet,

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387 **doom** judgment.

388 **train** retinue.

389 **Tagus** a river in Spain, reputed in classical poetry to have gold in its sands.

390 **And Seine, that would with Belgian rivers join** France, that wishes to appropriate territory from Holland.

391 **shall no longer meet** our navy shall not need military engagements to defend commerce against the interests of France and Holland.

From all the world shall vindicate her trade.

302.

And while this famed emporium we prepare,
The British ocean shall such triumphs boast,
That those, who now disdain our trade to share,
Shall rob like pirates on our wealthy coast.

303.

Already we have conquered half the war,
And the less dangerous part is left behind, [1210]
Our trouble now is but to make them dare,
And not so great to[392] vanquish as to find.

304.

Thus to the eastern wealth through storms we go,
But now, the Cape once doubled,[393] fear no more;
A constant trade-wind will securely blow,
And gently lay us on the spicy shore.

392 **not so great to** not so much to.

393 **the Cape, once doubled** a metaphoric. To sail around the Cape of Good Hope (at Africa's southern extremity) is to finish the most difficult part of a voyage to the East Indies.