

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF  
**POETRY**

SIXTH EDITION

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W · W · NORTON & COMPANY  
NEW YORK · LONDON

2018

Which after held the sun and moon in fee.<sup>o</sup> *possession*  
 But this is got by casting pearl to hogs,<sup>3</sup>  
 That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,  
 10 And still revolt when truth would set them free.<sup>4</sup>  
 License they mean when they cry liberty;  
 For who loves that must first be wise and good:  
 But from that mark how far they rove we see,  
 For all this waste of wealth and loss of blood.

1645/46

1673

### To the Lord General Cromwell<sup>5</sup>

Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud,  
 Not of war only, but detractions rude,  
 Guided by faith and matchless fortitude,  
 To peace and truth thy glorious way hast ploughed,<sup>6</sup>  
 5 And on the neck<sup>7</sup> of crownèd Fortune proud  
 Hast reared God's trophies, and His work pursued,  
 While Darwen stream, with blood of Scots imbrued,<sup>o</sup> *stained*  
 And Dunbar field, resounds thy praises loud,  
 And Worcester's laureate wreath:<sup>8</sup> yet much remains  
 10 To conquer still; peace hath her victories  
 No less renowned than war: new foes arise,  
 Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.<sup>9</sup>  
 Help us to save free conscience from the paw  
 Of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw.<sup>1</sup>

1652

1694

### When I Consider How My Light Is Spent<sup>2</sup>

When I consider how my light is spent  
 Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
 And that one talent which is death to hide<sup>3</sup>

3. I.e., I receive this response because I gave something valuable to those who could not appreciate its value. Cf. Matthew 7.6: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

4. Cf. John 8.32: "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

5. Oliver Cromwell (1599–1655), successor to Sir Thomas Fairfax as commander in chief of the Parliamentary armies. Because of its subject, this poem could not be published in Milton's 1673 *Poems*.

6. In 1651, Parliament issued a coin bearing the words "Truth and Peace," to express confidence in the results of Cromwell's victories over the Scots at Preston on the banks of the Darwen (line 7) and at Dunbar (line 8) and Worcester

(line 9).

7. King Charles I was beheaded in 1649.

8. I.e., as in the garlands of laurels bestowed on victors in ancient Greece.

9. A possible reference to the clergy who in 1652 asked Parliament to establish the English Church on broad Protestant principles but with a state-salaried and state-controlled ministry.

1. Indicating a voracious appetite; see Christ's warning to "beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7.15).

2. Milton had become totally blind in 1652.

3. An allusion to the parable of the talents, in which the servant who buried the single talent his lord had given him, instead of investing it, was deprived of all he had and cast "into outer darkness" at the lord's return (Matthew 25.14–30).

Lodged with me useless,<sup>4</sup> though my soul more bent  
 5 To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
 My true account, lest he returning chide;  
 "Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"<sup>5</sup>  
 I fondly<sup>6</sup> ask; but Patience to prevent *foolishly*  
 That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need  
 10 Either man's work or his own gifts; who best  
 Bear his mild yoke,<sup>6</sup> they serve him best. His state  
 Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed  
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest:  
 They also serve who only stand and wait."

ca. 1652

1673

### On the Late Massacre in Piedmont<sup>7</sup>

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones  
 Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,  
 Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old  
 When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,<sup>8</sup>  
 5 Forget not: in thy book record their groans  
 Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold  
 Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled  
 Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans  
 The vales redoubled to the hills, and they  
 10 To Heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow  
 O'er all th' Italian fields where still doth sway  
 The triple tyrant:<sup>9</sup> that from these may grow  
 A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way  
 Early may fly the Babylonian woe.<sup>1</sup>

1655

1673

4. With a pun on *usury*, or interest.

5. Alludes to the parable of the vineyard (Matthew 20.1–10) and to John 9.4, Jesus's statement before curing a blind man: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

6. See Matthew 11.30: "My yoke is easy."

7. Some seventeen hundred members of the Protestant Waldensian sect in the Piedmont in northwestern Italy died as a result of a treacherous attack by the duke of Savoy's forces on Easter Day 1655.

8. In Milton's time, Protestants thought the Waldensian sect dated from early Christian times rather than (as historians now think) from the

twelfth century. "Stocks and stones" echoes the prophet Jeremiah's denunciation of the Israelites' worship of idols made of wood and stone (Jeremiah 3.9); Milton's phrase could encompass both pagan and Catholic forms of idolatry, and is appropriate in a lament for members of a heretical sect known for rejecting materialist tendencies in the Catholic Church.

9. The pope, whose tiara has three crowns.

1. Babylon, as a city of luxury and vice, was often linked with the Papal Court by Protestants, who took the destruction of the city described in Revelation 18 as an allegory of the fate in store for the Roman Church.