

Wither, Waller and Marvell: Panegyrists for the Protector

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GEORGE WITHER'S feelings about Oliver Cromwell are understandably less familiar than those of his noted contemporaries, Andrew Marvell and Edmund Waller. Much less poet than moralist, Wither responded to crucial events during the Protector's years of supreme power in an idiosyncratic manner consistent with his prophetic mission first proclaimed in that epic-like work on the plague, *Britain's Remembrancer* (1628). Five publications from 1653-9 tell us little new about this poet's endless claims against the government; these works do give us provocative insights into the controversial statesman Cromwell and the confused social problems of the age from the viewpoint of a sincere, if disenchanting independent. How do the attitudes of Waller and Marvell, formal eulogists and surely superior poets by almost any measure, differ from those of Wither on thorny political and religious crises shortly before the Restoration? Some brief observations on content and style of selected Cromwelliana may help to clarify this question.

A single prose piece, *A Cordial Confection* (1659), supplies little known facts about Wither's brief personal relationship with Cromwell late in the Protectorate. After the army had dissolved Parliament in October 1659, the indefatigable old poet presented the nation yet another prophetic tract seasoned with personal complaint. Once again MP's have failed to dispense justice and mercy to long-suffering servants like himself. By detailed exposition of the military regime's steady encroachment on subjects' rights (by arbitrary powers granted during the Civil Wars), he laments Cromwell's failure to heed his recent advice. After approving provisions of his Declaration in manuscript, the Protector and Secretary Thurloe summoned him to discuss it with them informally. As a mark of personal regard, Cromwell gave

Wither a key to his private closet at Whitehall Palace, invited him several times to dinner at the royal table.¹ The poet was naturally disappointed when Cromwell and Thurloe ultimately neglected to publish his advice on how to cope with national crises. At the same time Wither does formally thank the Protector for his gift of the clerkship in the Statute Office held from 1655-8.²

Wither's four earlier poems, *Vaticinium Causale*, *The Protector*, *A Suddain Flash*, and *Salt upon Salt*, all stem from political events after Cromwell consolidated the military government and became its head. Along with some uneasy approval of his leadership, all these works teem with portentous caveats from the Remembrancer's anguished private study. *Vaticinium* (1655) the poet calls 'a Rapture occasioned by the miraculous Deliverance of His Highness'. Its theme recalls Marvell's interpretation of Cromwell's near-fatal accident in *The First Anniversary* (ll. 175-220). On Michaelmas Day 1654, he invited Thurloe for a ride through Hyde Park in a coach drawn by six grey Frieslands, a recent gift of the Duke of Oldenburg. A life-long enthusiast for fine horses, the Protector eagerly drove four-in-hand from the box. When his postillion lost control, the team bolted pitching Cromwell on to the pole. Catching one foot in the traces, he was dragged a short way when a pistol exploded from his pocket. In this narrow escape from sudden death, he nursed a badly bruised leg for more than a fortnight.³

In successive publications of the 1640s, Wither emphatically contends that true poets are *nothing* if not prophetic. The coach accident thus served his turn nicely as a favoured occasion for admonition and prophecy. Cromwell's fall has indeed been fortunate, a true *felix culpa*! By suffering and/or providing it, God has plainly exalted our leader's stature. The poet's paradoxical misgivings about this hour of national crisis are actually familiar in the broad context of his work during this interval. If he will only minister divine power given in trust, he shall win fame as 'the first who made a people truly free'. Still, the Protector must recall that even divinely chosen soldier-kings like Alexander have sometimes destroyed themselves unwittingly. God never bestows

¹ *A Cordial Confection*, 1659, pp. 6-8.

² J. M. French, 'Four Scarce Poems of George Wither', *HLQ*, No. 2, Nov., 1931, 94-5.

³ John Buchan, *Oliver Cromwell*, 1934, pp. 451-2; Maurice Ashley, *The Greatness of Oliver Cromwell*, 1957, p. 301.

power on princes merely 'to act their pleasure or fulfill their lust'. Thus, his fall from the coach is not so much portent as sanction for Cromwell's providential, heroic leadership. Wither rejoices for having once again thrust Minerva's shield between scurrilous wags' 'Bowes of Malice'.¹

Marvell's *First Anniversary of the Government under O. C.* celebrates the old warrior's successes at the close of his first year as Protector. It was truly his finest hour. By contrast to Wither's preoccupation only with the moral implication of the accident, Marvell incorporates into his ceremonial eulogy several themes, as we might expect: Cromwell's building a relatively peaceful state (the Instrument of Government), his recognized skill in foreign affairs (the recent defeat of the Dutch), the coach accident in particular relation to his apparent role in advancing the Millennium if he can but settle dissenting factions. Marvell resorts to familiar heroic analogies. Like the sun god, C. has won light from darkness; like Amphion, he has charmed heaps of marble into a palace of state. This frightful fall, his only lapse from steady, providential guidance, shows up the precariousness of mortal statesmanship. With 'winged Fear' and 'leaden Sorrow' the runaway horses symbolize contentious factions (Fifth Monarchists along with other schismatics) savagely clamouring for freedom only for dominating others. Cosmic metaphors ('vain Curlings of the Watry maze' along with 'weak Circles of increasing Years') reinforce further Marvell's reflection that even a favoured scourge-and-deliverer's ambitions are relentlessly defeated by time and change. The massiveness of imagery and intensity of panegyric tone in this poem strikes one as a bit overworked. At the same time, Marvell handles archetypal allusion, paradoxical subtlety, and inner monologue with a sophistication and sureness of control that Wither can hardly begin to match.²

By 1653 Cromwell had almost completely defeated opponents of Parliament. He now faced the more frustrating task of

¹ *Miscellaneous Works*, Spenser Society, Manchester, 1872, I, 4-16. Buchan, op. cit., p. 452, cites W. Scroggs's 'A Jolt on Michaelmas Day', where this poet hopes to see Cromwell drop from a hangman's cart.

² *Poems and Letters*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, Oxford, 1962, 103-13. Early editors (for example, Edward Thompson, 1776) attribute this poem to Waller. For the historical context of *The First Anniversary*, along with perceptive analysis of its topical organization which shows Marvell's loyalism and millenarian hopes for Cromwell, see John M. Wallace, *Destiny His Choice*, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 106-44.

weakening those within who exaggerated dissenting religious doctrines, Fifth Monarchy Men, for example, or those who quarreled over make-up of the new Instrument of Government. Wither completed *The Protector* (1655) between Cromwell's dissolving his first parliament and subsequent accepting the title Lord Protector. The poet lauds it as the most honourable of titles because it connotes divine mercy, paternal affection, and unselfish, enlightened rule. It comprehends every attribute of the ideal Christian *pater patriae* more precisely than pejoratives like monarch, king, or grand seigneur. Our possible reversion to King (despite partisan advocacy) cannot really honour Cromwell's divine *virtu* or worldly fame as soldier-statesman. As defender of subjects' rights against royalist tyranny, we owe him our very existence as a nation, not to mention our renewed social order, respect of foreign powers, and profitable sea trade. His intuitive distrust of the royal title (and its prerogatives) we must believe inspired by divine Grace. At this very time our 'World's new Northern Star' must keep his 'circle' true lest hostile forces ('constellations of some might') loom 'opposite' to our enviable sea trade.¹ Do these cosmic images, unusual for Wither, suggest that he had been impressed by *The First Anniversary*?

Tone and content of *The Protector* make an apologia of Wither's motives for writing and a defence of the troubled status quo under Cromwell as divine agent. The poet denies serving up versified advice for mere wealth or position, vanity or poetic fame. Instead, a restless conscience prompts his prophetic 'genius' to rouse readers—and himself—to renounce their sinfulness. They can best aid their Protector by patient industry at 'inner reform'. Though hardly a great poem, *The Protector* has some biographical interest. It voices a recurring compulsion of this poet's total work after roughly 1625: unstinting, if admittedly fumbling, services to a thankless, unregenerate nation as a patriotic duty.²

¹ *The Protector*, 1655, pp. A2-50.

² This work typifies almost all Wither's work of the 1650s. His earnest, if not fulsome, offerings of unsolicited advice and millenarian prophecy began with *Britain's Remembrancer* (1628) and continued well past 1660 (see for example *Ecchoes from the Last Trumpet* and *Vaticinia Poetica*). He habitually denounces crises of the day by rambling tirade in blank verse or pentameter couplets. His flood of petitions to Parliament from the late 1640s through the early 1660s however excusable do reflect his life-long tendency to identify personal with public grievances. See the present author's *The Later Career of George Wither*, the Hague, 1969, pp. 65-72.

Cromwell's famous cousin, the former royalist Edmund Waller, returned from France in 1653. Laudatory verses, for which he received a 'grave, modest compliment' on 13 June 1655,¹ apparently reinstated the poet in the Protector's favour. *A Panegyrick to My Lord Protector* (1655) is an evenly sustained encomium in majestic style. Waller employs retrospective survey. He focuses our view on Cromwell through Roman political worthies somewhat like Marvell's *Horatian Ode* (1650) had done (and as Dryden's *Heroique Stanzas* would do in 1659). Thus, 'Our Mars' is Cincinnatus, a Julius Caesar fully maturing into Augustus. He is also a prototype for the tame British lion sheltering friends and frightening enemies. Waller then gracefully unwinds a string of paradoxes to honour Cromwell's leadership in sonorous heroic couplets. Welcoming the oppressed, he ought to be celebrated as the world's (and not just Britain's) Protector! By fostering overseas trade, our country now enjoys tempting foods and goods from southern climes without their intemperate heat. Mistress of the seas, she no longer allows foreign vessels to visit her shores uninvited. Even the Scots and Irish (wonder of wonders) shall become civilized in defeat:

Preferred by conquest, happily overthrown,
Falling they rise, to be with us made one;
So kind dictators made, when they came home,
Their vanquished foes free citizens of Rome.²

While longing for rural domestic peace, our Protector has yet suffered many painful years of military and civil strife. According to John Buchan, the *Panegyrick* was not 'remote from a substantial part of the nation',³ in its unqualified praise. Was Waller's timing deliberate or merely fortuitous? Perhaps Cromwell did believe that he had at last found a laureate worthy of his divine sanction. Certainly he found in Waller more genuine poetic talent than paraded by the notorious Latin scribbler-sycophant, Payne Fisher,

¹ Ashley, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

² *Poems* ed. G. Thorn-Drury, 1901, II, 14, ll. 93-6.

³ Buchan, *op. cit.*, p. 101. Clear evidence for the popularity of Waller's tribute is the full quotation of his *Panegyrick* by W. Winstanley, *Lives of the Most Famous English Poets*, London, 1687, p. 184.

who literally dogged his heels with bombastic, epic-like verses.¹

Almost from the start of the Protectorate leaders urged Cromwell repeatedly to assume full prerogatives of kingship. Because roughly half of his military colleagues opposed the title of king (such a petition had been offered him as early as August 1655), he refused an offer of the crown on 3 April 1657. Wither wrote *A Suddain Flash* only four days later and clearly approves this hard decision. Sir Charles Firth's statement that 'opposition came from the rank and file of militant puritanism, from writers of psalms and sermons',² characterizes Wither's response and convictions exactly. The Protector has obeyed God's will by refusing this supreme tribute; he has at the same time sincerely obeyed his conscience and thereby reassured impatient followers. If Parliament presently force him to accept the crown, he shall thereby dishonour himself and disgrace the whole nation.

Wither takes a querulous tone toward those opposed to his views. How can Cromwell's assuming the crown render the laws more valid or vigorous? If MP's now change his title from Lord Protector, their action will smack of gross wilfulness and self-interest. Deploring military rule, the poet hastens to contend that kingship can only worsen present troubles. He does grant Cromwell to be the ideal candidate for that signal honour. Still, Parliament's mere proffering the crown hardly proves this *reversion* best for the public weal. Why should not Sovereign Protector or

¹ By all odds the most tireless, and tiresome, eulogizer of Cromwell was the Latin poet and renegade-royalist Payne Fisher (or Paganus Piscator), 1616-1693. As self-styled laureate, Fisher heaped praise not just on Cromwell but on his leading generals such as Ireton. We cannot be sure how well Wither knew Fisher; however, we do know that W. wrote flattering dedicatory verses for F's *Panegyric on the Protector* (1656) according to Sir Sidney Lee, *DNB*, XXI, 738, 1922 ed. Typical of this irrepressible sycophant's eulogy is *Veni, Vidi, Vici, The Triumphs of the Most Excellent and Illustrious O. C.*, 1652, in Latin, then translated by Thomas Manley, Jr. In more than 1,600 feeble heroic couplets Fisher celebrates C's victories at Dunbar and Worcester, singles out generals for bravery, describes battle scenes at far remove from Lucan's *Pharsalia*. He contends that Cromwell's valour far exceeds that of Caesar or Hannibal. He is at once 'Britaine's Alicides bold' or England's 'new leading Joshua', and the 'unwearied Atlas of our State'. After pages of such pretentious comparison, Fisher ends by noting that although C's superhuman qualities exceed even *his* talents for eulogy, he will later treat C's whole public career in verse. He will die content once 'made happy by thy smile'. The *DNB*, VII, 69-70, 1922 ed. points out that F's fulsome tribute got him only derision. After doggerel like this, one feels he deserved to live poor and out of favour.

² *The Last Years of the Protectorate, 1655-1658*, 1900, pp. 153-5.

Protector Imperial satisfy factions still haggling over the inconsequential matter? Everything considered, he plainly exhorts readers to trust Cromwell's ultimate choice:

The *Supream Person*, always the same
 In *sovereignty*, whatever him you *name*:
 And, they who do pretend, our *Lawes* to bring
 Advantages, to him that's call'd a *King*
 Which other *titles* give not, do well know
 If he be their *Supream*, it is not so:
 For ev'ry thing within our *Lawes* exprest,
 Wherein our former *Kings* had interest,
 Is virtually, ev'n by those *Lawes*, derived
 To him, who for our *Sovereign* is received.¹

Not the mere title, but vital leadership *behind* the title, affects the public good. Wither logically concludes that rulers abusing God-given power for personal ends are tyrants irrespective of title.

Historians report that the Protector, at the urging of Thurloe and other high-ranking leaders, scrupulously weighed the advantages of the crown as a hallowed, traditional symbol. After five weeks of anguished soul-searching, Cromwell finally refused the crown on 8 May 1657. Grave misgivings and his enduring loyalty to military colleagues changed his mind. After all, what could true kingship mean to him nearing the end of his mortal toil? The title was really circumstantial, not fundamental. Still, the ironic result hardly pleased zealots like Wither completely. When the significant clause was deleted from the Humble Petition and Advice, Cromwell had himself reinstalled Protector² with a lavish and spectacular ceremony lacking only the crown! Robed in ermine and purple velvet, the massive gold sceptre in his right hand, 'the greatest of English monarchs', observed John Buchan, enjoyed that 'one hour of royal ceremonial'.³

Wither completed the elegy, *Salt upon Salt* (1659), some three months after Cromwell's death on 3 September 1658. Waller's *Upon the late Storm and the Death of His Highness* stimulated Wither

¹ *Misc. Wks.*, II, 36.

² *A Suddain Flash*, *Misc. Wks.*, II, 11-41. In lauding Blake's and Stainer's capture of the Spanish galleons, Waller advises that the captured gold be melted into a crown for the Protector in 1657. See *Of the War with Spain and a Fight at Sea*, *Poems*, ed. Thorn-Drury, II, 27, ll. 107-10.

³ *Oliver Cromwell*, p. 479.

to a fit of versifying even more than real personal grief. He prefaces *Salt* with full quotation of his fellow poet's formal elegiac lines.¹ *Salt upon Salt* refines the balm other poets frantically apply to the nation's wounds. Wither questions whether such fulsome tributes flow from distracted wits knowing not what they write? He insists that, even when sincere 'such knacks, sportings of their Author's Muse' really do great harm. It is indeed blasphemous (allowing for lofty hyperbole) for Waller to treat nature as disoriented at the Lord Protector's death. Only our Lord Jesus Christ's crucifixion convulsed nature so devastatingly! Heroic parallels his rival has evoked for Cromwell — the deaths of Romulus and Hercules, the cluster of paradoxes dramatizing Britain's supremacy in foreign conquests, trade, material and domestic comforts — are simply nugatory! He dismisses such hollow praise for corrupting morality and bringing on tyranny. Worse still, panegyrists like Waller are promoted for falsehoods, he petulantly cries, while truth-sayers like himself are roundly ignored if not treated with contempt. In typical prophetic strain, along with the usual disclaimer about style, Wither defends his obligation to reveal truths regardless of reprisals. Britain's servile dependence on Cromwell as providential agent is shocking. To him have been accorded 'Attributes which unto none / Belongs but the Dietie alone'. Even God's favoured prophets and servants like Moses have been recalled from the world when they failed to heed divine commands. At the conclusion we are relieved to learn that even an inspired *vates* like Wither cannot judge the Lord Protector's merits as our former 'Instrument of Safety'.²

The old poet then becomes confidential. He freely confesses having concealed his eminent leader's failings since during social

¹ The violent hurricane coinciding with C's death on 3 Sept., 1658, seemed portentous to many poets (see, for example, S. Butler, *Hudibras*, III, ii, 215-16). It wrecked forests and harvest fields, sank ships, tumbled steeples and roofs in the City. The worst storm in over a century, it marked an end of round-the-clock vigils in Cromwell's sickroom at Whitehall. Waller's smoothly turned elegiac couplets, less familiar than his *Panegyrick*, likely became popular. In conventional fashion, this poet cites Roman (and by extension) mythological precedent for this ominous event.

On Octa's top thus Hercules lay dead,
With ruined oaks and pines about him spread;
The popular, too, whose bough he wont to wear
On his victorious head lay prostrate there;

(*Poems*, II, 34, ll. 9-12)

² *Misc. Wks.*, IV, 1-49.

chaos 'tyranny is somewhat better than an Anarchy'. After recalling Cromwell's personal favours, he reasserts a proud boast declared in almost every publication of the 1650s — prompt obedience to every government he has so far served. During six parliaments he has sadly noted members working harder for belly-cheer than the public good. Despite the Lord Protector's keenest efforts, the welfare of the common man has actually worsened. For Wither one fact is clear: disorders and sufferings of the time reflect a national spiritual malaise of no mean proportion.

As Remembrancer (if self-appointed and neglected), he has been startled at ominous coincidences falling during this interim of Cromwell's supreme power. Ironically enough, his death has occurred on anniversaries of victories at Dunbar (1650) and Worcester (1651), on the very day (mirabile dictu) he had agreed to accept the crown one year before, and exactly a year after he had solemnized a public fast against the plague! Wither's righteous anger does not cool here. He then condemns Britain's palpable hypocrisy of warring with Spain and winning Dunkirk (here one learns much by comparing Waller's treatment of these same events) while professing peace and Christian charity. Another irony is even more shameful. The nation has just now buried Cromwell, who bluntly voiced dislike for the vain, pretentious ceremony of princes, with even more elaborate funeral pomp than any previous King.¹ Wither brings his rambling elegy to a climax (but does not conclude it) with an uncommonly terse tribute cast in his 'plaine as a pack-saddle style' style:

¹ *Ibid.*, 19–26. Wither thought the funeral rivalled the costly, vain obsequies of Philip II of Spain. His indignation matches Cowley's royalist feelings which were more succinctly expressed: 'Much noise, much tumult, much expense, much magnificence, much vain-glory; briefly, a great show, and yet after all this, but an ill sight'. See 'A Vision Concerning the Late Pretended Highnesse Cromwell, the Wicked', *Essays and Other Prose Works*, ed. Alfred B. Gough, Oxford, 1915, p. 49. Godfrey Davis, *The Restoration of Charles II*, San Marino, 1955, pp. 40–4, details the elaborate organization of the ceremony actually modelled on that for James I. Embalmed and cased in lead, the body was buried on 20 September. From 3–23 November mourners viewed the wax effigy clad in purple velvet and resting on a catafalque fenced off by pillars hung with military banners and trophies. Memorial rites concluded with a long procession to Westminster Abbey. Hosts of foreign dignitaries marched between black and red coated infantry and government officials draped in yards of black cloth. Wither's scorn for these costly, protracted, and popish ceremonies hardly seems unreasonable. See *Salt upon Salt*, pp. 18–20.

Here *Dead* he lies; who, *Living* here,
 Was Britain's greatest *Hope and Fear*.
 And, by what was on *Him* bestrown,
 Had all His Equals over-grown;
 His *Predecessor's* Sins and our
 Made way for Him to *Sovereign Power*;
 By rendering that an Act of *Reason*
 And Justice, which else had been *Treason*.
 No Prince, was ever heretofore
 More *praised*, or *dispraised* more.
 Advantages, few ever won
 So great: none lost so great a one.
 This *World* afford no *Pattern* can
 Which better shews what is in *Man*.
 His *Vertues*, were enough to do,
 So much as *GOD* design'd Him to,
 He Failings had; But when liv'd any
 That had not every way as many.
 If he (whilst here abode he made)
 Such *Tempters* and *Temptations* had?¹

Marvell's loyalist sympathies understandably held fast after he finally secured the post of Latin Secretary and assistant to Thurloe in 1657. His 'Poem on the Death of O. C.' reflects yet a gleam of that fascination for Cromwell as scourge and deliverer first noted in the *Horatian Ode* of 1650.² This elegy does not quite manage to conceal the poet's reservations about Cromwell the military dictator. It seems to express public (or official) rather than private grief on the significance of the Protector's death for the nation. Along with Wither and Waller, Marvell is much startled by ravages of the portentous thunderstorm. Heaven (ll. 161-4) as herald attended by the mourning elements pays her last respects to the mortal hero:

Which with more Care set forth his Obsequies
 Than those of *Moses* hid from humane Eyes;
 As jealous only here lest all be less,
 That we could to his Memory express.³

This poet was also struck by singular coincidences already noted, such as the anniversaries of Dunbar and Worcester. In rather

¹ *Misc. Wks.*, IV, 38.

² J. B. Leishman, *The Art of Andrew Marvell's Poetry*, New York, 1968, pp. 12-13.

³ *Poems*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, I, 127, ll. 161-4.

conventional terms he too lauds Cromwell's valour, selfless ambition, skill in foreign affairs (the conquests of Jamaica, Florida, and Dunkirk), and piety that redound to national honour. With its paradoxes overstrained, its declamatory rhetoric hollow, and metres overloaded (note ll. 247-60), Marvell's elegy seems rather perfunctory. Only the extended sympathy that the poet lavishes on the Protector's love of his favourite daughter, Elizabeth Claypole, who predeceased him on 6 August 1658, is notable.¹ If the poet became disenchanted with the public leader who failed to satisfy his millenarian hopes, he clearly warmed a bit more to Cromwell the devoted father.

What other poets responded to panegyric or elegy after Cromwell's death? Did young John Dryden's royalist sympathies prompt him to emulate Waller with sonorous bravura in *Heroique Stanzas* (1659)?² Buchan reports that besides Cowley's *Vision*, that 'impenitent royalist' was rumoured to have composed memorial verses now lost.³ Despite modest claims for praising so pre-eminent a hero, Thomas Sprat did fashion a laboured pindaric eulogizing yet another time Cromwell's having restored Britain's continental military fame and world-wide sea mastery.⁴

Wither's blunt assertion, 'I must stand or fall as I discharge my conscience' (*A Cordial Confection*, p. 41), typifies not just his courage but often petulant individualism. It accounts also for much difference in content, style, and tone of his four poems and those of Waller and Marvell. Their carefully measured, reserved praise of Cromwell springs not from strict sectarian views of their great worthy's accomplishments. They tend to focus broadly on the hero's *colossality* in the context of vast religious and political change. Wither focuses rather on *events* that try and test the mortal hero against strict puritan ethics. His anguished voice and

¹ *Ibid.*, I, 124-8, ll. 29-78; ll. 209-12. Wallace, p. 143, refers only briefly to Marvell's elegy. The weak, tacked-on tribute to Richard Cromwell at the close he considers a 'pathetic gesture' but does note the poet's stressing Cromwell's love of family, piety, and efficient government.

² While Dryden charges his paradoxes with more intellectual substance, *Heroique Stanzas* follows Waller's *Panegyrick* in formal ritualization of Cromwell's piety and valour by classical historical parallel. Composed in heroic quatrains, Dryden's more strenuous verses contrast audibly with Waller's smoother, more opulent lines.

³ Buchan, *op. cit.*, p. 540.

⁴ *Three Poems Upon the Death of the Late Usurper Oliver Cromwell* by Mr Jo. Drydon, Mr Sprat of Oxford and Ed Waller, 1659, reprinted 1682.

tactless reminder stemming from compulsive prophetic insights do make his poems more individual. On the other hand, these very traits do greatly limit the literary as opposed to historical appeal of these works.

Eulogizers and especially poets laureate for famous warrior-kings have in every age been suspect. William Winstanley's judgement on Payne Fisher, which applies almost equally well to Wither, Waller, and Marvell, plainly holds true not only for the seventeenth century:

. . . it must be considered (saith Mr. Phillips) that Poets in all times have been inclinable to ingratiate themselves with the highest in Power by what Title soever.¹

Except for Fisher (along with other deservedly forgotten scribblers of his ilk), Cromwell seems to have been served more fairly than most. If Waller can be dubbed his official Virgil, and Marvell at some remove his rather detached Horace, then Wither can only qualify as his perversely relentless Cassandra!

¹ *Lives of the Most Famous English Poets*, 1687, p. 193.

Comment

The old ones
measure time
in minutes wrapped
for mailing.

Their days are
little parcels
never sent.

VIRGINIA BRADY YOUNG