

A7 Where Medway greetes old Thamesis silver streames

Notes. With its pastoral style and focus on rivers, this poem is reminiscent (perhaps consciously) of work by Edmund Spenser, a friend and client of Sir Walter Raleigh who became more closely associated with Essex in the mid-1590s. Spenser's "Prothalamion" (1596) celebrated the double marriage of the two daughters of the Earl of Worcester, a close ally of Essex, at Essex House on 8 November 1596. It was in this poem that Essex was described as "Great Englands glory and the Worlds wide wonder" (Spenser 602; l. 147). However, the animal fable of "Where Medway greetes old Thamesis silver streames" also echoes Spenser's earlier *Prosopopia*: or *Mother Hubberd's Tale* (written c.1580 and published 1591), whose apparent allusion to William Cecil, Lord Treasurer Burghley, as a deceitful fox (and perhaps also to his son Robert as an ape) was picked up by Catholic polemicists attacking the so-called *regnum Cecilianum* in 1592. Although many poetic allusions (including those in Spenser's work) are often difficult to interpret, most of the identifications here are obvious heraldic allusions, and are aided by explicit marginal annotations. Internal evidence suggests that this poem was probably composed in early October 1599, after Essex's return from Ireland and before his replacement as commander there by Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy. The poem is discussed by Marotti (95-98).

"A dreame alluding to my L of Essex, and his adversaries"

Where Medway greetes old Thamesis silver streames¹

There did I sleepe, and then my thought did dreame

A stately HART² did grase on Northerne shore

[m.note: "Earle of Essex"]

of Thamasis, his head full highe he bore

Of feature comelie, and of couradge bold

5

Sterne was his lookes, yet lov'd of young and old.

The LION³ helde him deere, and had cause whie

[m.note: "The Queene"]

He did the lion's throne soe fortiefie

That neither Romish wolfe nor Spanishe beare⁴

The Lion cold hurte or one poore lambkin teare.

10

Me thought I sawe a CAMMELS⁵ uglie broode

[m.note: "Sir Rob: Cecill

That on the other side of Medwaie stood

crookbackt"]

He coule not relishe silver Medwaes foame

| | | |
|---|-------------------------------|----|
| A muddye BROOKE ⁶ pleas'd better mixt with loame. | [m.note: "L. Cobham"] | |
| His meate blood RAWE, ⁷ his salletts all were REWE. ⁸ | [m.note: "Sir Walt Rawleigh"] | 15 |
| Whose Wardes ⁹ he swallowe could, and never chewe. | | |
| The gorged Camell to the Lion came | | |
| God sheilde your Grace, and to your foes bring shame. | | |
| The HART is all to great, he beares the swaye | | |
| The peoples love he hathe, your loves decay | | 20 |
| If a preservative your Grace will take | | |
| Il'e make you stronger, Il'e make proude HARTE to quake | | |
| Of Camels milke you shall twoe spoonefulles take | | |
| Treble as much from fleeringe ¹⁰ Brooke his lake | | |
| To this yow must ad a stalke of bitter REWE | | 25 |
| With sugred lies well altogether brewe | | |
| A leafe wee'le have from Co-oake ¹¹ old his tree | [m.note: "Sir Ed: Coke"] | |
| That planted was of late in Cicelye ¹² | [m.note: "Sir Ro: Cecyll"] | |
| Should I quoth Lion thinke he meanes me ill | | |
| My banners he displaide on Gallian plaine. ¹³ | | 30 |
| And Gerreon foil'd ¹⁴ and did us glorie gaine | | |
| O quoth the Camell Hibernia ¹⁵ let him swaye | | |
| And tame the wolffes which on there foldes doe praie | | |
| Me thought he cheerelie went, yet scarce was there | | |
| But home bredd wolves, our flockes at home did teare | | 35 |
| A thowsand wolves he found and made them stoope | | |
| And all he tam'd, ¹⁶ whoe sicke and doth not droope | | |
| He sicke retir'd, to Lion welcome was | | |
| Till Camell brought a poison in a Glass | | |
| Which scarce had warm'd the Hart but night was daie | | 40 |
| And Lion roard, and th' Hart was sent awaye ¹⁷ | | |
| O that a Camell should a lion leade | | |
| I saide, and thought I dream'd yet did I dreade | | |
| Camell for burthen is, and for the waie | | |

And not for kingdoms sterne and scepters swaye. 45
 By sleight yet Camell swaies, and LION sleepes
 And noble Hart in dampie dongeon¹⁸ keepes
 Wake noble Lion and this Cammell scorne
 And teare him that thy Noble Hart hath torne.
 Your Grace to Ireland should the Camell send 50
 His backe will beare Tirone¹⁹ and never bend
 Or him or els white liverd LION²⁰ sende [m.note: "Char: Howard
 L. Admirall"]
 Poore Hart escape, this Lion soone will mend
 To Ireland (generall) thrice renowned swaine
 That bravelie triump't on St. James his plaine.²¹ 55
 Goodlye thie feature is, thy stature's talle
 Thy couradge foh,²² thie witt God knowes is smalle.
 Sterne Yorke in Irishe broiles sometimes did saye
 Send Sommerset if yow will loose the daye²³
 And send this Lion alwaies pale for dreade 60
 Hee'le take the gold and bless himself from leade
 Honor to wynne to Ireland he would faine
 But that ould fathers²⁴ Ghost doeth him restreyne
 When on his death bedd chardged him eaven soe
 To Ireland (sonne) see that thou never goe 65
 Or send him RAWE whose conscience now is seared²⁵
 That knowes not Jove, nor Plato²⁶ ever feared.
 For he Pithagoras sowle doeth fast enclose
 Within his breast, by Metempsucose²⁷
 But fie he waxeth penitent of late 70
 And sinnes of former daies he now doeth hate
 He will noe more in Court faire Ladass²⁸ staine
 Nor Chimney money beg to Comons paine²⁹
 Nor cease to be one of the dampned Crewe
 Nor paye the score for puddinges that is due 75

Heele swere by God and worship Devill³⁰ for gaine
Tobacco boye or sacke³¹ to swaye his paine
Then I awoke a frighted with the noise
And sawe my frightfull dreames were dreaminge toies.³²

Source. Bodleian MS Don. c.54, fols. 19r-20r

Other known sources. BL Add MS 58215, fol. 46v

A7

¹ *Where Medway greetes...streames*: the River Medway runs through northern Kent to meet the North Sea at Chatham. Its outflow meets that of the River Thames (“Thamesis”) at a sandbank known as the Nore, just north of Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey.

² *HART*: male deer or stag; representing the Earl of Essex, whose crest included a deer. In 1589, George Peele described Essex as “famous by hys Crest: / His Raine Deere racking with proud and stately pace” (*An eclogue gratulatory* A2v).

³ *LION*: Queen Elizabeth, whose royal arms as sovereign of England included lions.

⁴ *neither Romish wolfe nor Spanishe beare*: the twin forces of international Catholicism—the papacy in Rome and the King of Spain—which seemed implacably intent upon the destruction of the Elizabethan regime and the forcible re-Catholicisation of England.

⁵ *CAMMELS*: Sir Robert Cecil, whose deformed back was often cruelly mocked, as in the marginal note; “crookbackt”, like a camel.

⁶ *BROOKE*: Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham, Cecil’s brother-in-law.

⁷ *RAWE*: allusion to the name of Raleigh.

⁸ *salletts all were REWE*: a sallet was a piece of armour, part of a helmet; “rew” is an old-fashioned variant of “raw”.

⁹ *Wardes*: Cecil was appointed Master of the Court of Wards in May 1599, succeeding his father Lord Burghley (who had died in August 1598). Cecil’s appointment was an especially bitter blow to Essex, who had long been mooted as Burghley’s successor in the post.

¹⁰ *fleeringe*: grinning; laughing scornfully or mockingly.

- ¹¹ *Co-oake*: Sir Edward Coke. As Attorney-General, he led the Crown's various legal actions against Essex. He also harboured a grudge against the Earl for very publicly (but unsuccessfully) backing Francis Bacon for the post of Attorney-General in 1593.
- ¹² *Cicelye*: pun on the name Cecil.
- ¹³ *Gallian plaine*: Essex commanded an English expeditionary force to France (Gallia) in 1591-92.
- ¹⁴ *Gerreon foil'd*: in Greek mythology, Geryon was a triple-bodied, winged giant whose famous herd of red cattle was stolen by Hercules as the tenth of his twelve labours. Geryon supposedly lived in the far west, which suggests that he represents here the King of Spain. This interpretation is especially probable because it seems to embody another allusion to the work of Edmund Spenser. In Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Book 5, Cantos 10-11 (published in 1596), the "fell Tyrant" Geryoneo, the son of Geryon, is described as having seized the lands of Belge (i.e. the embodiment of the Low Countries) and assailing Sir Burbon (i.e. Henri IV of France). This is a clear reference to the forces of Philip II of Spain—"th'armes and legs of three, to succour him in fight" of the three-bodied Geryoneo (5.10.8) seemingly alluding to Philip's three chief dominions of Spain, Portugal and either Flanders or the New World. "Foil'd" means trampled under foot, defeated. In 1596, Essex and the Lord Admiral, Charles Howard, led a large amphibious force which destroyed a Spanish fleet, stormed the Spanish city of Cadiz (in poetic terms, situated close to the Pillars of Hercules—the Straits of Gibraltar) and carried off a vast quantity of booty, humiliating and enraging Philip.
- ¹⁵ *Hibernia*: Ireland. Some of Essex's supporters believed that his appointment as Lord Lieutenant in Ireland in 1599 was deliberately engineered by his enemies to keep him away from the Queen and make him dependent upon their good will for the provision of fresh supplies.
- ¹⁶ *And tame the woolfes...And all he tam'd*: the Camel (Cecil) urges Elizabeth to send Essex to Ireland to end the rebellion that was ravaging that kingdom and threatening the Queen's authority there ("tame the woolfes...there"). Essex found the task far more demanding than he had been led to believe (encountering "a thowsand wolves" there), but finally brought the Queen's enemies to heel. However, while Essex was in Ireland, "home bredd wolves" (i.e. Essex's domestic rivals, led by Cecil himself) had taken advantage of the Earl's absence to gorge themselves upon "our flockes at home" (i.e. without Essex's presence to serve as a counterweight, his rivals had been able to amass wealth and authority for themselves, regardless of the harm which this caused to the Queen and her other subjects). In reality, Essex was only able to reimpose a tenuous English authority on the southern half of Ireland and could do no more than arrange a temporary truce with Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone in Ulster. Essex's domestic rivals certainly seemed to benefit from his absence, with Cecil, for example, being appointed Master of the Court of Wards.
- ¹⁷ *He sicke retir'd...sent away*: describing Essex's unexpected return to court from Ireland early in the morning of 28 September 1599. According to one account, the travel-smearred Essex initially found "a sweet calm" with Elizabeth, but after lunch "found her much changed in that small tyme" (Collins

2:127). He was subsequently placed under arrest. The reference to the Camel (i.e. Cecil) bringing poison in a glass is probably not to be taken literally (as in the famous case of Dr. Roderigo Lopez, who was executed in 1594 for allegedly trying to poison the Queen), but in the more general sense that his dissimulation turned the truthfulness associated with glass (or a mirror) on its head, bewitching the Queen into seeing night as day.

¹⁸ *dampie dongeon*: Essex was remanded into the custody of Lord Keeper Egerton at York House.

¹⁹ *Tirone*: Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, leader of the Irish confederation in arms against Elizabeth, and allied with Spain. The plea that the Lion (Elizabeth) should allow the Hart (Essex) to finish his work in Ireland seems to suggest that this poem was written before Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, was appointed as his successor in Ireland on 18 October 1599.

²⁰ *white liverd LION*: Charles Howard, Lord Howard of Effingham, Lord Admiral of England and created Earl of Nottingham in 1597. Lord Admiral Nottingham is called a lion because the Howard crest includes "a lion on a chapeau".

²¹ *bravelie triumph't't...plaine*: Nottingham served as commander of the army raised during August 1599 in expectation of a new Spanish Armada. The mobilisation proved a false alarm (mocked as "the Invisible Armada"), but large numbers of troops briefly massed around London.

²² *Thy couradge foh*: i.e. "Thy courage—foh!" (an expression of scorn for Nottingham's courage).

²³ *Sterne Yorke...loose the daye*: Nottingham is here compared to Edmund Beaufort, 2nd Duke of Somerset (d.1455), who cut a fine figure at the court of Henry VI and was protected by the King, despite consistent military failure and calls that he should face trial for his misdeeds. Somerset was despised as an incompetent coward by Richard, Duke of York (1411-1460), whose own military efforts in France during the early 1440s had been undermined by the diversion of resources to John Beaufort, 1st Duke of Somerset. York subsequently became heir presumptive to Henry VI in 1447, but was forced to serve as Lord Lieutenant in Ireland by his enemies, 1449-1450. This comparison between Nottingham and Somerset implicitly compares Essex to York, who had Somerset arrested during his brief regency in 1453.

²⁴ *ould fathers*: reference to William Howard, Lord Howard of Effingham (1510?-1573).

²⁵ *seared*: dried up, withered, rendered incapable of feeling; a term often applied to the consciences of sinners in religious discourse of this period.

²⁶ *Jove, nor Plato*: Jove, or Jupiter, was king of the gods in the classical pantheon. Plato (427-347 BC) was one of the most famous philosophers of the classical world, but his name here may stand for philosophy itself. Here the author jokingly reverses the fear and knowledge associated with Jove and Plato.

²⁷ *Pithagoras...Metempsucose*: Pythagoras (582-500 BC), the classical philosopher and mathematician, was famous for espousing the notion of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls, by which the human body was only a temporary vessel for a soul which might be reborn into different bodies time and again.

²⁸ *Ladass*: possible scribal error; perhaps read “Ladies”. Raleigh was famously banned from court in 1592 after his secret marriage to the Maid of Honour Elizabeth Throckmorton was revealed when she gave birth to a son.

²⁹ *Chimney...paine*: Raleigh was notorious for his willingness to extract money by any means possible.

³⁰ *swere by God and worship Devill*: the charge of atheism, commonly levelled against Raleigh.

³¹ *Tobacco boye or sacke*: this should perhaps be read as “Tobacco, boye, or sacke”, thereby listing a series of vices associated with Raleigh. Raleigh was a famous pipe-smoker and supposedly introduced tobacco to England from the New World. The new fashion for smoking was seen by many as dangerously decadent and a sign of sheer hedonism. The mention of “boye” suggests the crime of sodomy, which was often associated with atheism, of which Raleigh was so often accused. “Sacke” is white wine from Spain or the Canary Islands and hence suggests drunkenness. This list of vices is notable for representing un-English (or, in the case of sodomy, unnatural and un-Christian) debauchery supposedly practised by Raleigh and his friends.

³² *toies*: tricks; idle fancies.
