

G2 Mee thought I walked in a dreame

Notes. This widely-circulated allegorical dream poem by John Hoskyns was written during his year-long imprisonment in the Tower after the dissolution of the 1614 Parliament. Versions of the poem vary in length, up to a maximum of twenty stanzas. The most commonly copied variant, however, is the six-line version “The worst is tould the best is hide”, included as a discrete text below. Some copies of both the long and short versions attribute the verse to Hoskyns’ wife. Colclough offers a brief but acute reading of the poem’s politics in his article on Hoskyns and seventeenth-century manuscript culture (382-84). Colclough notes the thinly-veiled allegorical presentation of the “pathetic spectacle of three generations of Hoskyns’s family—his mother, his pregnant wife, and his son—lamenting in front of the cave in which he is kept prisoner”; and draws attention to the “cutting analysis”, articulated in the voice of Hoskyns’ wife, “of the reasons for Hoskyns’s punishment and the problems in the political realm that it reflects” (383).

“A Dreame”

Mee thought I walked in a dreame
betwixt a caves mouth & a streame,¹
upon whose banckes sate full of ruth,
three as they seem’d, but foure in truth.

For drawing nere I did behold
a Widowe² fourscore winters old,
a wife with childe,³ a little Sonne⁴
but foure yeares old, all foure undone

Out of the caves mouth cutt in stone
a Prisoner lookes, whom they did moane,
he smild (they sigh’d) then smote his brest,
as if hee meant, god knowes the rest.

The widow cry’d, looking to heaven
Oh Phœbus⁵ I thought I had seaven
like Niobe⁶ doe now contest

5

10

15

lend this thy light this sonne my best.

Taught for to speake & live in light
now bound to silence & to night
why is he closd up in this cave
not basely bredd, nor borne a slave.

20

Alas this cave hath tane away
my staffe, & all his brothers stay:
Let that be least, that my gray haire
goe to the grave (alas) with teares.

I greive for thee Daughter, quoth she,
thee & that boy, that babe unborne,
yours though not his, yet others three
he loved as his, but now forlorne.

25

Tis not the rule of sacred hest⁷
to kill the old one in the nest;
as good be killed as from them hidd,
they die with greife (ô god forbidd)

30

True quoth the boy, for Tom my page
did finde a birds nest, & we tried,
& put the old one in a cage,
then my poor birds, poore birds they died.

35

My Father nere was soe unkinde
Who lett him then to speake his mynde,
to speake to men & not to misse
oh Mother, say, who can doe this?

40

Then quoth the Wife, tis Cæsar's⁸ will,
Cæsar can hate, Cæsar can kill.

the worst is tolld, the best is hidd:
Kings know not all, oh would they did.

He Cæsars title then proclaymed⁹ 45
undoubtedly, when others ayemed
at broken hope of doubtfull state:
soe true a man what King can hate.

Cæsar; in person & in purse, 50
he serv'd when better men did worse.
he sware men unto Cæsar's lawes¹⁰
by thousands, when false hearts did pause.

He frawd & violence did withstand,
& helpt the poore with tongue & hand: 55
but for the cause he now lies here
the cuntry knowes his soule is cleare.

Why is he now silent & sadd
Whose words make¹¹ & many gladd;
well could he love, ill could he fayne, 60
it was his losse, it is my gaine.

If Kings are men, If Kinges have wives,
& know ones death may cost two lives,
then were it noe unkinglie part
to save two lives in me, poore heart. 65

What if my husband once have err'd?
men more to blame are more ;¹²
he that offends not doth not live;
He errd but once, once king forgive.

Cæsar to thee I will resort, 70

long be thy life, thy wrath but short:
this prayer good successe may take,
if all doe pray for whom he spake.

With that they wept, the waters swelld,
the sunne grew darke, the darke caves yelld,
it brake my sleepe, I did awake,
& thought it was my heart that brake.

75

Thus I my wofull dreame declare,
hoping that noe such persons are;
I hope none are, but if there be,
god help them pray, pray god with me.

80

Source. BL Harley MS 6947, fols. 252r-53r

Other known sources. Osborn 206; Bodleian MS Ashmole 36-37, fol. 213r; Bodleian MS Ashmole 781, p. 129; Bodleian MS Malone 19, p. 71; Bodleian MS Rawl. B. 151, fol. 103r; BL Add. MS 4130, fol. 92v; BL Add. MS 4149, fol. 211r; BL Add. MS 21433, fol. 145v; BL Add. MS 25303, fol. 162r; BL MS Harley 6947, fol. 252r

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¹ *caves mouth & a streame*: the cave is the Tower of London; the stream, perhaps, the Thames.

² *a Widowe*: Hoskyns' mother.

³ *a wife with childe*: Hoskyns' pregnant wife.

⁴ *a little Sonne*: Hoskyns' son Benedict

⁵ *Phæbus*: god of the sun.

⁶ *Niobe*: Niobe's boasts about the large number of her children (seven sons, seven daughters) provoked Apollo and Artemis into slaughtering them all.

⁷ *hest*: behest; injunction.

⁸ *Cæsar's*: Caesar here is James I.

⁹ *Caesars title then proclaymed*: allusion to Hoskyns' loyalty to the Stuart claim to succession in 1603.

¹⁰ *he sware men unto Cæsar's lawes*: probable allusion to Hoskyns' duties as a lawyer.

¹¹ *make*: probable scribal error; read "make me".

¹² *men more to blame...preferr'd*: in William Davenport's copy of the six-line version of this poem (which includes this stanza as the last four lines), he inserts a marginal note identifying these "men more to blame" as "Lord Howard chamb: / Lord Somersett et multis aliis" (i.e. Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, Lord Chamberlain (until July 1614), and Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, the royal favourite). We treat the six-line version as a separate poem: see "The worst is tould the best is hide".
