

HOBBEA AND THE CASKS

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In October, 1668, Ruisdael was a witness to the marriage between Hobbema and the cook of the Burgomaster of Amsterdam. This marriage marked the end of Hobbema's artistic career, for through the position and influence of his wife he received a municipal appointment. He had henceforth to gauge the casks, in which wine was imported into Holland, and estimate their contents in the Amsterdam measure; and he had no more time for painting.

(“Hobbema”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th Ed.)

Wine in this cloudy north could change the still,
Pale, amber light that flows upon the mill
And tinge those mossy lanes where cattle graze.
Yes, wine might be a token of the days
When dampness blooms against your cellar wall.
The air is thick. The shadows shift and fall.
Rain and the mist lay wreaths against the rock,
And death strikes in you deeper than a clock
Which chimes the choice, the bribe, the tedious task
Of passing time by peering in a cask.

Is wine for sleepy-heads? The best of wine
Is madness bottled with a secret sign
That warns dull eyes of danger, makes them look
Beyond the tulip patch, the ledger book,
The quiet music lesson that your brush
Reduced to paint. Wine is the sweep and rush
Of storms that whipped you, and of blood that shot
From stricken veins when war rode hard and hot.

The kitchen calls you now. The feast is spread.
The ample cook you claimed is decked for bed.
Put down your gauge, and climb out of your tomb
To the world's body in the dusk's wide room,
To poisoned cups, and voices flexed in rage
That urge your canvas sheep to axe and cage.