In this poem, published in Connecticut in late 1765 during the Stamp Act controversy, the anonymous narrator relates a dream in which public documents that must be taxed and stamped proclaim their usefulness and make a case against the Stamp Act. (The seven groups of documents are bonds, court papers, probate papers, diplomas, licenses, newspapers, and almanacs, ordered by official importance). While not great literature, the poem does suggest how deeply the Stamp Act intruded into the lives of the colonists and how in the eighteenth century poetry was deployed in the service of political persuasion.

A DREAM upon a subject which engages
Men’s Minds very much, when they are awake, as well as when they are asleep.

One night, as I lay slumbering in my Bed,
Dark Images crowded into my Head.
I thought, as through the Town I walk’d alone,
I, at a Distance heard a grievous Moan.
Attention roused; I then approach’d more near,
And found a Croud of PAPERS gather’d there.
To each of them, as to the Prophet’s Ass,
A Tongue was giv’n to tell his wretched Case.
I watch’d their mournful Words with vast Concern,
Hoping the Cause, for which they met, to learn.
They spoke by Turns: In this they all agree,
To plead the Cause of English Liberty:
And deprecate the Woe, which each one thought
Would, by the St—p-A-t, soon on them be brought.
“Our Case, says one, grows more and more distres’d.
None of our Grievances are yet redress’d.
Our sad Complaint, and humble Supplication,
Which, to the highest Powers of the Nation
We long ago address’d, and soon rejected,
And all our Pray’rs and Tears were still neglected.”

The Case of all is hard, each thinks his own
The worst. Then all, with many a piercing Groan,
Expostulate and say “Oh! - - - - -
Must I (the Bond cries) suffer the Abuse
Of being st—pt, when I’m of so much Use
To Men of all Professions, rich and Poor,

The donkey of the prophet Balaam
is given language by God to protest
his ill-treatment by the prophet.
Old Testament, Numbers 22

First document to “speak”: bond
st—pt: stamped

Whose Property I daily do secure?
Those that are honest, honest must remain;
And he that tries to cheat, tries but in vain.
While I exert my Skill the Rogue to catch,
And all his false dishonest Motions watch,
Must I be crush’d and fall a Sacrifice
To cruel Tyr---y? Will none arise,
Of all my Friends, to save me from this Doom
Which will, unless they interpose, soon come?”
Him interrupt the Papers of the Court:
Summons and Writ, and all of ev’ry sort.
Must we be st—pt, when we so much have done
To serve the present and the Ages gone?
We’ve call’d the Debtor to discharge his Debt;
We many Rogues at Justice’ Bar have set.
Into the L----rs Hands, many a Jo—
We’ve slily put, that so their Tongues might go.
And can they find no Tongues to plead our Cause,
Which does appear so just, by Nature’s Laws?
If ne’er before, sure now, without a Fee,
They’ll plead, and seek to Gain our Liberty.

The Probate Papers next, with many a Sigh,
“Must we be st—pt (with tender Accent cry)
We who our Life and Breath so freely spend,
The Fatherless and Widow to defend.
And dare their needy and defenceless State,
So boldly plead against the Rich and Great?
Let not that cruel St--p destroy our Pow’r,
To help the helpless in the needy Hour.”

With Grief and Anger mixt, Diploma now,
Starts from the seat and knits his manly Brow.
“Must I be st--pt (says he) and barely die
Under th’ oppressive Hand of Tyr---y?
When I have bent my utmost Skill and Knowledge
To serve the Cause of Learning and the College?
Will all the Men of Science me neglect,
When I do them so carefully protect
From those Indignities which vulgar Men
Would, otherwise, be bold to cast on them?
When I their Education tell around,
And cause their Reputation to abound,
Shall I no Privilege hereby obtain,
But cry, to those I’ve serv’d, for Help in vain?”

The Licence Paper next, with ruddy Face,
No longer can, in Silence, keep his Place;
But cries (with Spirits high, and Blood inflam’d)
“Think I’ll be st--pt! I’ll sooner much be d---d!
For Ages past I’ve fill’d the generous Bowl,
And pour’d seraphick Pleasures on the Soul
Of old and young, the Statesman and the Priest,
And lull’d their troubled Minds to quiet rest.
I’ve rais’d their drooping Spirits when sunk low,
And dissipated all their Grief and Woe.
But, with unquenched Thirst, they all shall pine,
If they won’t pity such as Case as mine.”

The Paper which retails the weekly News,
Seems also bent the St--p-A-t to refuse;
And cries, “Oh! Hard indeed my Fate must be,
If from the D---l’s Foot I mayn’t be free,
To bear the D---l’s Tails\(^1\) enough for me.
Who, of ye all, has shewn a reader Mind,
At once to please and profit all Mankind?
I travel far and near; the World I range
And carry with me all that’s new and strange.
Advices of Importance I convey;
As well as merry Tales, to please the Gay.
Must I be burden’d with this cruel St--p,
Which will my Speed and Progress greatly cramp?
He sigh’d and said no more. Next him arose
The Almanack, the St--p-A-t to oppose;
And says with heavy Heart, and downcast Look,
(As though, by all his Friends, he’d been forsook)
“I thought I’d Friends enough to keep me free
From being hurt by this Calamity.
Both Men and Women I have fought to win,
And all my Days, a humble Courtier been.
I always dress’d me new from Year to Year,
That I the more engaging might appear.
I try’d, by Turns (as Trimmers do) to please
Both Rich and Poor, and Men of all Degrees.
I talk’d about the Stars and future Scenes;
I us’d a mystick Style, and told my Dreams.
By Signs infallible, I pointed out
Those Days which great Events would bring about.
But yet, sometimes I dar’d not be exact;
For Fear some jealous People should suspect
I us’d dishonest Arts; and was so evil
As, in dark Cases, to consult the D---l.
I’m sure my Faults, which have been very few,

\(^1\) A vulgar Name for the large Handle of a Printing Press. [footnote in original]
Can’t be the Cause of what I undergo.
I beg for Help, which, if deny’d, I fear
I cannot live to see another Year."

The other Papers told their piteous Case,
But with such heart-felt Anguish and Distress
As render’d inarticulate their Voice;
All I heard more, was a hoarse murmering Noise.

A few besides myself, I thought drew near,
The wretched Papers dying Groans to hear.
And all seem’d touch’d with sympathetick Grief,
And to each other said, Can no Relief
At all be found? Come let us all unite
To show the Papers Case in a true Light
To all their Friends (for many Friends they have)
Perhaps ‘tis not too late their Lives to save.

Their wretched Case was soon abroad declar’d;
Which none could help but pity when he heard.
And deep Resentment, first by Few express’d
Against the St--p-A-t, catch’d from Breast to Breast,
Till all did burn with one increasing Flame,
The same were all their Hearts; their Voice the same.

The KING and Parliament vouchsaf’d to hear
The Force of Reason, and the ardent Pray’r
Of those who join’d to plead the Papers Cause;
And eas’d their Burden; and repeal’d those Laws
Which were so grievous.—Oh what sudden Joy
Fill’d all their Hearts! at once they all employ
Their Tongues and Pens to celebrate the Fame
Of KING and Parliament; and all proclaim
Their Wisdom, Justice, Tenderness and Love
Shewn to these Colonies.—May GOD above
Save GEORGE our gracious King, and always smile
On all the Rulers of the British Isle!
I echo’d to this Pray’r and clap’d my Hands,
Which quick dissolv’d the soporifick Bands
That held my sleeping Pow’rs. I op’d mine Eyes
And found, with no small Wonder and Surprize,
The melancholly and the joyful Themes
Which fill’d my Mind, by Turns, were only Dreams.

The END of the DREAM.