

# The Masque of Anarchy

Percy Bysshe Shelley

1832

1

As I lay asleep in Italy  
There came a voice from over the Sea,  
And with great power it forth led me  
To walk in the visions of Poesy.

2

I met Murder on the way—  
He had a mask like Castlereagh—  
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;  
Seven blood-hounds followed him:

3

All were fat; and well they might  
Be in admirable plight,  
For one by one, and two by two,  
He tossed them human hearts to chew

4

Which from his wide cloak he drew.  
Next came Fraud, and he had on,  
Like Eldon, an ermined gown;  
His big tears, for he wept well,  
Turned to mill-stones as they fell.

5

And the little children, who

Round his feet played to and fro,  
Thinking every tear a gem,  
Had their brains knocked out by them.

6

Clothed with the Bible, as with light,  
And the shadows of the night,  
Like Sidmouth, next, Hypocrisy  
On a crocodile rode by.

7

And many more Destructions played  
In this ghastly masquerade,  
All disguised, even to the eyes,  
Like Bishops, lawyers, peers, or spies.

8

Last came Anarchy: he rode  
On a white horse, splashed with blood;  
He was pale even to the lips,  
Like Death in the Apocalypse.

9

And he wore a kingly crown;  
And in his grasp a sceptre shone;  
On his brow this mark I saw—  
'I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!'

10

With a pace stately and fast,  
Over English land he passed,  
Trampling to a mire of blood  
The adoring multitude.

11

And a mighty troop around,  
With their trampling shook the ground,  
Waving each a bloody sword,  
For the service of their Lord.

12

2

And with glorious triumph, they  
Rode through England proud and gay,  
Drunk as with intoxication  
Of the wine of desolation.

13

O'er fields and towns, from sea to sea,  
Passed the Pageant swift and free,  
Tearing up, and trampling down;  
Till they came to London town.

14

And each dweller, panic-stricken,  
Felt his heart with terror sicken  
Hearing the tempestuous cry  
Of the triumph of Anarchy.

15

For with pomp to meet him came,  
Clothed in arms like blood and flame,  
The hired murderers, who did sing  
'Thou art God, and Law, and King.

16

We have waited, weak and lone  
For thy coming, Mighty One!  
Our purses are empty, our swords are cold,  
Give us glory, and blood, and gold.'

17

Lawyers and priests, a motley crowd,  
To the earth their pale brows bowed;  
Like a bad prayer not over loud,  
Whispering – 'Thou art Law and God.' –

18

Then all cried with one accord,  
'Thou art King, and God, and Lord;  
Anarchy, to thee we bow,  
Be thy name made holy now!'

19

And Anarchy, the Skeleton,  
Bowed and grinned to every one,  
As well as if his education  
Had cost ten millions to the nation.

20

For he knew the Palaces  
Of our Kings were rightly his;  
His the sceptre, crown, and globe,  
And the gold-inwoven robe.

21

So he sent his slaves before  
To seize upon the Bank and Tower,  
And was proceeding with intent  
To meet his pensioned Parliament

22

When one fled past, a maniac maid,  
And her name was Hope, she said:  
But she looked more like Despair,  
And she cried out in the air:

23

'My father Time is weak and gray  
With waiting for a better day;  
See how idiot-like he stands,  
Fumbling with his palsied hands!

24

'He has had child after child,  
And the dust of death is piled  
Over every one but me—  
Misery, oh, Misery!'

25

Then she lay down in the street,  
Right before the horses' feet,  
Expecting, with a patient eye,  
Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy.

26

When between her and her foes  
A mist, a light, an image rose,  
Small at first, and weak, and frail  
Like the vapour of a vale:

27

Till as clouds grow on the blast,  
Like tower-crowned giants striding fast,  
And glare with lightnings as they fly,  
And speak in thunder to the sky,

28

It grew – a Shape arrayed in mail  
Brighter than the viper's scale,  
And upborne on wings whose grain  
Was as the light of sunny rain.

29

On its helm, seen far away,  
A planet, like the Morning's, lay;  
And those plumes its light rained through  
Like a shower of crimson dew.

30

With step as soft as wind it passed  
O'er the heads of men – so fast  
That they knew the presence there,  
And looked, – but all was empty air.

31

As flowers beneath May's footstep waken,  
As stars from Night's loose hair are shaken,  
As waves arise when loud winds call,  
Thoughts sprung where'er that step did fall.

32

And the prostrate multitude  
Looked – and ankle-deep in blood,  
Hope, that maiden most serene,  
Was walking with a quiet mien:

33

And Anarchy, the ghastly birth,  
Lay dead earth upon the earth;  
The Horse of Death tameless as wind  
Fled, and with his hoofs did grind  
To dust the murderers thronged behind.

34

A rushing light of clouds and splendour,  
A sense awakening and yet tender  
Was heard and felt – and at its close  
These words of joy and fear arose

35

As if their own indignant Earth  
Which gave the sons of England birth  
Had felt their blood upon her brow,  
And shuddering with a mother's throe

36

Had turned every drop of blood  
By which her face had been bedewed  
To an accent unwithstood, –  
As if her heart had cried aloud:

37

'Men of England, heirs of Glory,  
Heroes of unwritten story,  
Nurslings of one mighty Mother,  
Hopes of her, and one another;

38

'Rise like Lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number,  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you –  
Ye are many – they are few.

39

‘What is Freedom? – ye can tell  
That which slavery is, too well –  
For its very name has grown  
To an echo of your own.<

40

“Tis to work and have such pay  
As just keeps life from day to day  
In your limbs, as in a cell  
For the tyrants’ use to dwell,

41

‘So that ye for them are made  
Loom, and plough, and sword, and spade,  
With or without your own will bent  
To their defence and nourishment.

42

“Tis to see your children weak  
With their mothers pine and peak,  
When the winter winds are bleak, –  
They are dying whilst I speak.

43

“Tis to hunger for such diet  
As the rich man in his riot  
Casts to the fat dogs that lie  
Surfeiting beneath his eye;

44

“Tis to let the Ghost of Gold  
Take from Toil a thousandfold  
More than e’er its substance could  
In the tyrannies of old.

45

‘Paper coin – that forgery  
Of the title-deeds, which ye  
Hold to something of the worth  
Of the inheritance of Earth.

46

'Tis to be a slave in soul  
And to hold no strong control  
Over your own wills, but be  
All that others make of ye.

47

'And at length when ye complain  
With a murmur weak and vain  
'Tis to see the Tyrant's crew  
Ride over your wives and you–  
Blood is on the grass like dew.

48

'Then it is to feel revenge  
Fiercely thirsting to exchange  
Blood for blood – and wrong for wrong –  
Do not thus when ye are strong.

49

'Birds find rest, in narrow nest  
When weary of their wingèd quest;  
Beasts find fare, in woody lair  
When storm and snow are in the air,<sup>1</sup>

50

'Asses, swine, have litter spread  
And with fitting food are fed;  
All things have a home but one–  
Thou, Oh, Englishman, hast none!

51

'This is Slavery – savage men,  
Or wild beasts within a den  
Would endure not as ye do–  
But such ills they never knew.

52

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<sup>1</sup> 'Horses, oxen, have a home, When from daily toil they come; Household dogs, when the wind roars, Find a home within warm doors.'



'What art thou Freedom? O! could slaves  
Answer from their living graves  
This demand – tyrants would flee  
Like a dream's dim imagery:

53

'Thou art not, as impostors say,  
A shadow soon to pass away,  
A superstition, and a name  
Echoing from the cave of Fame.

54

'For the labourer thou art bread,  
And a comely table spread  
From his daily labour come  
In a neat and happy home.

55

'Thou art clothes, and fire, and food  
For the trampled multitude–  
No – in countries that are free  
Such starvation cannot be  
As in England now we see.

56

'To the rich thou art a check,  
When his foot is on the neck  
Of his victim, thou dost make  
That he treads upon a snake.

57

'Thou art Justice – ne'er for gold  
May thy righteous laws be sold  
As laws are in England – thou  
Shield'st alike the high and low.

58

'Thou art Wisdom – Freemen never  
Dream that God will damn for ever  
All who think those things untrue  
Of which Priests make such ado.

59

'Thou art Peace – never by thee  
Would blood and treasure wasted be  
As tyrants wasted them, when all  
Leagued to quench thy flame in Gaul.

60

'What if English toil and blood  
Was poured forth, even as a flood?  
It availed, Oh, Liberty,  
To dim, but not extinguish thee.

61

'Thou art Love – the rich have kissed  
Thy feet, and like him following Christ,  
Give their substance to the free  
And through the rough world follow thee,

62

'Or turn their wealth to arms, and make  
War for thy belovèd sake  
On wealth, and war, and fraud–whence they  
Drew the power which is their prey.

63

'Science, Poetry, and Thought  
Are thy lamps; they make the lot  
Of the dwellers in a cot  
So serene, they curse it not.

64

'Spirit, Patience, Gentleness,  
All that can adorn and bless  
Art thou – let deeds, not words, express  
Thine exceeding loveliness.

65

'Let a great Assembly be  
Of the fearless and the free  
On some spot of English ground  
Where the plains stretch wide around.

10

66

'Let the blue sky overhead,  
The green earth on which ye tread,  
All that must eternal be  
Witness the solemnity.

67

'From the corners uttermost  
Of the bonds of English coast;  
From every hut, village, and town  
Where those who live and suffer moan  
For others' misery or their own.<sup>2</sup>

68

'From the workhouse and the prison  
Where pale as corpses newly risen,  
Women, children, young and old  
Groan for pain, and weep for cold–

69

'From the haunts of daily life  
Where is waged the daily strife  
With common wants and common cares  
Which sows the human heart with tares–

70

'Lastly from the palaces  
Where the murmur of distress  
Echoes, like the distant sound  
Of a wind alive around

71

'Those prison halls of wealth and fashion,  
Where some few feel such compassion  
For those who groan, and toil, and wail  
As must make their brethren pale–

72

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<sup>2</sup> 'From the cities where from caves, Like the dead from putrid graves, Troops of starvelings gliding come, Living Tenants of a tomb.'

'Ye who suffer woes untold,  
Or to feel, or to behold  
Your lost country bought and sold  
With a price of blood and gold–

73

'Let a vast assembly be,  
And with great solemnity  
Declare with measured words that ye  
Are, as God has made ye, free–

74

'Be your strong and simple words  
Keen to wound as sharpened swords,  
And wide as targes let them be,  
With their shade to cover ye.

75

'Let the tyrants pour around  
With a quick and startling sound,  
Like the loosening of a sea,  
Troops of armed emblazonry.

76

'Let the charged artillery drive  
Till the dead air seems alive  
With the clash of clanging wheels,  
And the tramp of horses' heels.

77

'Let the fixèd bayonet  
Gleam with sharp desire to wet  
Its bright point in English blood  
Looking keen as one for food.

78

'Let the horsemen's scimitars  
Wheel and flash, like sphereless stars  
Thirsting to eclipse their burning  
In a sea of death and mourning.

12

79

‘Stand ye calm and resolute,  
Like a forest close and mute,  
With folded arms and looks which are  
Weapons of unvanquished war,

80

‘And let Panic, who outspeeds  
The career of armèd steeds  
Pass, a disregarded shade  
Through your phalanx undismayed.

81

‘Let the laws of your own land,  
Good or ill, between ye stand  
Hand to hand, and foot to foot,  
Arbiters of the dispute,

82

‘The old laws of England – they  
Whose reverend heads with age are gray,  
Children of a wiser day;  
And whose solemn voice must be  
Thine own echo – Liberty!

83

‘On those who first should violate  
Such sacred heralds in their state  
Rest the blood that must ensue,  
And it will not rest on you.

84

‘And if then the tyrants dare  
Let them ride among you there,  
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew, –  
What they like, that let them do.

85

‘With folded arms and steady eyes,

13

And little fear, and less surprise,  
Look upon them as they slay  
Till their rage has died away.

86

‘Then they will return with shame  
To the place from which they came,  
And the blood thus shed will speak  
In hot blushes on their cheek.

87

‘Every woman in the land  
Will point at them as they stand–  
They will hardly dare to greet  
Their acquaintance in the street.

88

‘And the bold, true warriors  
Who have hugged Danger in wars  
Will turn to those who would be free,  
Ashamed of such base company.

89

‘And that slaughter to the Nation  
Shall steam up like inspiration,  
Eloquent, oracular;  
A volcano heard afar.

90

‘And these words shall then become  
Like Oppression’s thundered doom  
Ringing through each heart and brain,  
Heard again – again – again–

91

‘Rise like Lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number–  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you–  
Ye are many – they are few.’

14

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