The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright

Camilla Power
Royal Wedding Arrests
The Guillotine Three and the Zombie Wedding
July 7 2011

Retrieved on Oct 29 2026 from https://libcom.org/article/royal-wedding-arrests-guillotine-three

Camilla Power tells the story of her arrest for attempted street theatre on the occasion of the royal wedding. An edited version of this article was previously published in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement,* under the title 'By royal decree: the zombie orgy is off'.

theanarchistlibrary.org

Royal Wedding Arrests

The Guillotine Three and the Zombie Wedding

Camilla Power

July 7 2011

ARREST FOR ATTEMPTED STREET THEATRE

by Camilla Power

On Mayday morning, I'm wondering whether to head to Clerkenwell on the day when pagan, anarchist and socialist hope springs eternal. If I step onto the Green, I am liable to arrest under bail conditions imposed after 25 hours detention in Lewisham Police Station from around 6 pm on the eve of the royal wedding.

What did I do to be banished from the sacred Mayday space? Nothing…yet. I was picked up in one of last week's preemptive raids during what's become known in 'activist' circles as the Great Royal Wedding Purge. The police have begun to arrest people whom they suspect of thinking of doing something.

These arrests have been written about in terms of democratic rights to free speech. From my perspective, it's about the human right to ritual participation. My work as an anthropologist combines Darwinian and Durkheimian models on the evolution of ritual as the necessary condition for language. Performative deeds precede and provide the necessary scaffolding

for speech. In activist mode, I put theory to empirical test, helping create ritual street theatre to move into and around politically contested spaces, at ritually charged 'cracks' in time, establishing symbolic presence. As part of a motley crew known as the Government of the Dead, I've worn silly costumes, devised ways to hang and decapitate effigies, spilt fake body fluids, committed cannibalism, cast spells, bodypainted, sung and danced badly.

On the eve of the wedding, several cars and a van load of police – maybe twenty odd officers of the law – swooped on a south London street corner to round up a theatrical troupe. Suddenly I was in the midst of the most extraordinary street theatre yet; what's so exciting is you never know who is going to turn up and take part. The police were the ones in costume, apart from the detective and shifty undercover surveillance; we were distinctly underdressed. We'd been moving theatrical props – some quite heavy. And the police knew the drill of the choreography, stringing themselves into a line between us and the suburban street, backing us steadily against the London brick walls behind. Slyly, they ringed around a white van which they suspected we were walking towards. We just waited expectantly to be auditioned while the detective in the suit flashed his badge and pointed to some of us, denying others – 'no, he's alright' – as if he were casting us for roles. The only one who happened to be wearing some fancy dress got picked on; as did my close friend and colleague Chris Knight, a Professor of anthropology – best known for his top hat, dark glasses and vampire blood Baron Samedi look – but now in a motheaten jumper. By a stroke of fortune, a Channel 4 documentary team and an independent filmmaker were on hand to film the whole episode. A friend pointed out later, more police officers were needed to arrest us than for the Krays!

I was under suspicion of conspiring to cause a public nuisance. But what had I done? No ritual had yet been performed. The police wanted to know about a superbly crafted guillotine,

ancestors, can they be trusted. To join the Government, you must be dead. We agitators are mere agents, our comings and goings governed by lunar time and tide. The Government of the Dead seeks to restore lunarchy – rule by the Moon – to humanity, with ritual, sexual and economic exchange switching by lunar phase. Let the shadow world Government take the power for one phase, say waxing moon, the official world in waning.

When the Government was informed of the date set for William Wales and Catherine Middleton's marriage, it was aghast. The dying days of the moon of April prior to Mayday was cosmologically catastrophic! No truly royal couple can marry fruitfully except at full moon, the honeymoon time. Dark moon conjures menstrual blood, kinship, witchcraft – all antithetical to marriage. Mayday is the time of popular fertility rite, not sex between newly weds, but group sex of the lads and lasses in the woods and fields. The Government realized it had a cosmic duty to supply the necessary erotic elements to avert this threat to fecundity. We scribbled down the ritual formula: *Royal Wedding + Mayday holiday = Right Royal Orgy.* How this was to be achieved, the agents weren't certain, but it had compelling logic. In the event, the Zombie Group Wedding, Queer Resistance Flashmob and fertility rites around the statue of Eros promised a solution.

Except the event was prevented; the agents of zombie orgy chucked in a dungeon; the guillotine impounded under counter-terrorism laws. The Government of the Dead is now gravely displeased.

decked with red and red-and-black flags either side of the legend 'Some Cuts Are Necessary' and louchely associated with a cariacature dummy Prince Andrew, adorned with a cardboard Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order. This august decoration was in fact pinned onto the flesh and blood Andrew by his mum in an investiture on March 26. No one noticed the goings on that Saturday at Court. Some royal rituals are best kept under wraps, it seems.

After the ritual drama on the street, the procedural boredom of the booking in, and then, the royal dungeon: perpetual fluorescent glare which never acknowledges circadian rhythm, the hard and sticky plastic mattress, steel loo, 'cushion' on the ledge which can never be angled right to rest your neck comfortably…even a numb doze is rudely disturbed by random clattering checks through the cell door aperture and callouts for inedible meals. With the demeaning requirement to ask humbly for every petty comfort, this had a special character of intermingling Monarchical and Disciplinary Punishment

As Victor Turner tells of such liminal states of sensory deprivation, you enter 'the realm of primitive hypothesis', where you have power to take apart and put together the world as you know it in novel combinations. Could it be that the Royal Household, amid all the Kate/Wills mania, images plastered ubiquitous as maoist icons of young love, felt challenged? Could they be sufficiently challenged in their pageantry by our cardboard cutout, straw-stuffed constructions held together with cable ties and gaffer tape that they let fall to their inner cabal, they would not be amused by any rival rebellious spectacle? The police, smarting from the anarchist poke breaching Charles and Camilla's body politic, would have scrambled into action.

The Government of the Dead is versed in lowdown mummer's tricks for transforming corpses into the stuff of feasts. It regularly rehearses a Rabelaisian carnival of bloodshed and dismemberment, ruthless slaughter 'transformed into a merry

banquet', as Bakhtin puts it: 'bloodshed, dismemberment, burning, death, beatings, blows, curses and abuses – all these elements are steeped in "merry time", time which kills and gives birth'. EAT THE BANKERS was the slogan under which top-hatted Chris Knight/Mister Mayhem zombie-walked, urging fellow zombies to 'snack on bankers' brains' at the April 1 G20 Financial Fools Day Banquet at the Bank.

The Government of the Dead's fearsome Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse first galloped out at Canary Wharf, Hallowe'en 2008 on the pavement outside Lehman Brothers. Financial wizards scuttled home for the afternoon. While a new moon set over Canary Wharf dock, witches cast an opening ceremony amid a circle of pumpkin candles, summoning the Horsemen from four directions to gyrate wildly to a samba band – Dancing on the Grave of Capitalism. But capitalism keeps rising from the grave, compelling us to bury it in a lunar infinity of revolutions .

Mardi Gras 2009, again dark moon, zombies went window-shopping down Oxford Street in a New Orleans-style funeral jazz procession to Hang a Banker at Tyburn Tree/Marble Arch. Being indigenous London zombies, they also tossed bankers' brains in frying pans in the Zombie Pancake Race. The zombies kept trying and failing to haul the shop-dummy, bowler-hatted banker up onto Marble Arch. Police egged the zombies on, 'ner, do it properly!' they cried. Their good humour on this occasion starkly contrasts with the cruel persecution of the zombie folk who turned up on Soho Square looking for breakfast.

On Mayday, 2010, the Saturday before the general election, the righteous justice of the Government of the Dead was visited on the party leaders. Processions came from each Party HQ to occupy Parliament Square. Cameron and Clegg were hanged, presciently side by side, from a sturdy gallows, while Brown was decapitated, blood spurting onto the lenses of press cameras. The longest fourth procession came all the way from Clerkenwell; black bloc anarchists escorted a pint-sized

Nick Griffin to be hung, drawn and quartered, then hurled to the crowd. After Death, miraculous new Life: a Maypole was erected on Parliament Square and we danced in a wild whirl. The heavens opened. Two, three, five, ten tents were hurriedly pitched for cover and suddenly a camp mushroomed. This became Democracy Village, a tented premonition of Tahrir Square and Democracia Real Ya which held the ground until forcibly evicted on 20 July 2010.

On Democracy Village, the Government of the Dead had its initial brush with royal power at the State Opening of Parliament on May 25. As the royal carriage rolled by, Queen Tracy, a homeless woman of regal bearing, dressed in Elizabethan costume, delivered an Alternative Queen's Speech, drowned out by the tolling of Westminster Abbey's bells.

This was truly a 'world turned upside down' with those lying in the gutter looking at the stars. Royalty channels cosmic alignment between heaven and earth, ensuring that monarch and people move in step through cycles and seasons to keep the cosmos turning, bring the rains, and make the kingdom fertile. According to Max Gluckman's thesis on rituals of rebellion in traditional sacred systems, where the system itself is not in dispute, dramas of rebellion and role reversal turn the world upside down only to return it right back to where it was before. The implication is that if the rebellious ritual is not tolerated, as ours wasn't, the system does not at all feel sure of itself.

As the medieval lower strata of grotesque revelry mirrored and symbolically destroyed the authority of officialdom, the ritual shadow world demands its fair share of power. The Government of the Dead as Rabelaisian agitprop asserts its rites in polarity to the rigid ceremonial of royal protocol. The slogan of the Government of the Dead – 'the only good government is a dead government' – sounds fundamentally anarchist. Yet it derives from an idea common to many cultures across the world. Those who live in the world, eating, drinking, having sex, are susceptible to the temptations of the flesh; only once dead, as