

## The Masque of Anarchy

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

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 look'd, 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,  
Which from his wide cloak he drew.

4.  
Next came **Fraud**, and he had on,  
Like Lord 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.



A painting depicting the Peterloo Massacre by Richard Carlile (1790–1843). Shelley's poem was written on the occasion of the massacre which occurred at St. Peter's field at Manchester, which became known as the Peterloo Massacre in ironic comparison to the Battle of Waterloo.

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.

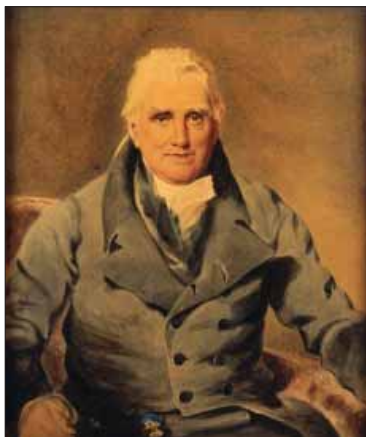
9.  
And he wore a kingly crown;  
In his hand a sceptre shone;  
And on his brow this mark I saw—  
"I am God, and King, and Law!"

10.  
With a pace stately and fast  
Over English land he passed,  
Trampling to a mire of blood  
The adoring multitude.

11.  
And with a mighty troop around  
With their trampling shook the  
ground,  
Waving each a bloody sword,  
For the service of their lord.

12.  
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.



In his opening stanzas Shelley refers to members of Lord Liverpool's government: the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, and the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth.

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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 Law, 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 grey  
With waiting for a better day;  
See how idiot-like he stands,  
Fumbling with his palsied hands!



"Death on a pale horse", by Benjamin West.

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 like 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—and 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 splen-  
dour,  
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 cried out aloud.

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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!

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 his 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;

50.

“Horses, oxen, have a home  
When from daily toil they come;  
Household dogs, when the wind roars,  
Find a home within warm doors;

51.

“Asses, swine, have litter spread,  
And with fitting food are fed;  
All things have a home but one:—  
Thou, O Englishman, hast none!

52.

“This is Slavery!—Savage men,  
Or wild beasts within a den,  
Would endure not as ye do:  
But such ills they never knew.

53.

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

54.

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

55.

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

56.

“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!

57.

“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.

58.

“Thou art justice: ne’er for gold  
May thy righteous laws be sold  
As laws are in England; thou  
Shield’st alike both high and low.

59.

“Thou art wisdom: freemen never  
Dream that God will damn for ever  
All who think those things untrue  
Of which Priests make such ado.

60.

“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.

61.

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

62.

“Thou art love: the rich have kissed  
Thy feet, and, like him following Christ,  
Given their substance to the free,  
And through the rough world fol-  
lowed thee.

63.

“Oh! 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.

64.

“Science, and poetry, and thought,  
Are thy lamps; they make the lot  
Of the dwellers in a cot  
Such they curse their Maker not.

65.

“Spirit, patience, gentleness,  
All that can adorn and bless,  
Art thou. Let deeds, not words,  
express  
Thine exceeding loveliness.

66.

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

67.

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

68.

“From the corners uttermost  
Of the bounds of English coast;  
From every hut, village, and town,  
Where those who live and suffer moan  
For others’ misery or their own;

69.

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

70.

“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;

71.

“Lastly, from the palaces  
Where the murmur of dis-  
tress  
Echoes like the distant sound  
Of a wind alive around—

72.

“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;—

73.

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

74.

“Let a vast assembly be,  
And with great solemnity  
Declare with ne’er-said words that ye  
Are, as God has made ye, free!

75.

“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.

76.

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

77.

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

78.

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

79.

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

80.

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



A painting of Shelley by his friend, Joseph Severn.

81.

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

82.

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

83.

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

84.

“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.

85.

“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.

86.

“With folded arms and steady eyes,  
And little fear and less surprise,  
Look upon them as they slay,  
Till their rage has died away.

87.

“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.

88.

“Every woman in the land  
Will point at them as they  
stand—  
They will hardly dare to  
greet  
Their acquaintance in the  
street:

89.

“And the bold, true warriors  
Who have hugged danger in  
the wars  
Will turn to those who  
would be free,  
Ashamed of such base com-  
pany:

90.

“And that slaughter to the  
nation  
Shall steam up like inspira-  
tion,  
Eloquent, oracular,  
A volcano heard afar:

91.

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

92.

“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!”