

THE MASQUE OF ANARCHY: A POEM

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The masque of anarchy: A poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley

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PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

**THE MASQUE OF
ANARCHY: A POEM**

THE MASQUE OF ANARCHY.

THE
MASQUE OF ANARCHY.

A Poem.

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED, WITH A PREFACE

BY LEIGH HUNT.

Hope is strong;
Justice and Truth their winged child have found.
REVISED BY HUNT.

LONDON:
EDWARD MOXON, 64, NEW BOND STREET.
1832.

PREFACE.

THIS Poem was written by Mr. Shelley on occasion of the bloodshed at Manchester, in the year 1819. I was editor of the *Examiner* at that time, and it was sent to me to be inserted or not in that journal, as I thought fit. I did not insert it, because I thought that the public at large had not become sufficiently discerning to do justice to the sincerity and kind-heartedness of the spirit that walked in this flaming robe of verse. His charity was avowedly more than proportionate to his indignation; yet

I thought that even the suffering part of the people, judging, not unnaturally, from their own feelings, and from the exasperation which suffering produces before it produces knowledge, would believe a hundred-fold in his anger, to what they would in his good intention; and this made me fear that the common enemy would take advantage of the mistake to do them both a disservice. Mr. Shelley's writings have since aided the general progress of knowledge in bringing about a wiser period; and an effusion, which would have got him cruelly misrepresented a few years back, will now do unequivocal honour to his memory, and shew every body what a most considerate and kind, as well as fervent heart, the cause of the world has lost.

The poem, though written purposely in a lax and familiar measure, is highly characteristic of the author. It has the usual ardour of his tone, the unbounded sensibility by which he combines the most domestic with the most remote and fanciful images, and the patience, so beautifully checking, and, in fact, produced by, the extreme impatience of his moral feeling. His patience is the deposit of many impatiences, acting upon an equal measure of understanding and moral taste. His wisdom is the wisdom of a heart overcharged with sensibility, acquiring the profoundest notions of justice from the completest sympathy, and at once taking refuge from its pain, and working out its extremest purposes, in the adoption of a stubborn and loving fortitude which neutralizes resistance. His very strokes

of humour, while they startle with their extravagance and even ghastliness, cut to the heart with pathos. The fourth and fifth stanzas, for instance, of this Poem, involve an allusion, which becomes affecting from our knowing what he must have felt when he wrote it. It is to his children, who were taken from him by the late Lord Chancellor, under that preposterous law, by which every succeeding age might be made to blush for the tortures inflicted on the opinions of its predecessor.

“Anarchy the Skeleton,” riding through the streets, and grinning and bowing on each side of him,

As well as if his education

Had cost ten millions to the nation,

is another instance of the union of ludicrousness

with terror. Hope, looking "more like Despair," and laying herself down before his horses' feet to die, is a touching image. The description of the rise and growth of the Public Enlightenment,

—— upborne on wings whose grain
Was as the light of sunny rain,

and producing "thoughts" as he went,

As stars from night's loose hair are shaken,

till on a sudden the prostrate multitude look up,

and ankle-deep in blood,
Hope, that maiden most serene,
Was walking with a quiet mien,

is rich with the author's usual treasure of imagery and splendid words. The sixty-third