



# **PROSERPINE AND MIDAS**

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# **PROSERPINE AND MIDAS**

**TWO UNPUBLISHED MYTHOLOGICAL DRAMAS**

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Proserpine and Midas by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.

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Does he hang down his head, & his ears too?

Oh, I shall die! (*laughs.*)

Asph. He is a queer old dog,  
Yet not so laughable. 'Tis true, he's drunk,  
And sings and reels under the broad, green leaves,  
And hanging clusters of his crown of grapes.—

Zopyr. A crown of grapes! but can that hide his ears[?]

Asph. His ears!—Oh, no! they stick upright between.  
When Midas saw him—

Zopyr. Whom then do you mean?

[44]

Did you not say—

Asph. I spoke of old Silenus;  
Who having missed his way in these wild woods,  
And lost his tipsey company—was found  
Sucking the juicy clusters of the vines  
That sprung where'er he trod:—and reeling on  
Some shepherds found him in yon ilex wood.  
They brought him to the king, who honouring him  
For Bacchus' sake, has gladly welcomed him,  
And will conduct him with solemnity  
To the disconsolate Fauns from whom he's strayed.  
But have you seen the new-fashioned diadem<sup>51</sup>  
That Midas wears?—

Zopyr. Ha! he has got it on!—  
Know you the secret cause why with such care  
He hides his royal head? you have not seen—

Asph. Seen what?

<sup>51</sup> Another halting line. Cf. again, p. [47], 1. 3; p. [55], 1. 11; p. [59], 1.1; p. [61], 1. 1; p. [64], 1. 14.]

Zopyr. Ah! then, no matter:— (*turns away agitated.*)

I dare not sneak or stay[;]

If I remain I shall discover all.

Asp. I see the king has trusted to your care

Some great state secret which you fain would hide.

I am your friend, trust my fidelity,

[45]

If you're in doubt I'll be your counsellor.

Zopyr. (*with great importance.*)

Secret, Asphalion! How came you to know?

If my great master (which I do not say)

Should think me a fit friend in whom to pour

The weighty secrets of his royal heart,

Shall I betray his trust? It is not so;—

I am a poor despised slave.—No more!

Join we the festal band which will conduct

Silenus to his woods again?

Asph. My friend,

Wherefore mistrust a faithful heart? Confide

The whole to me;—I will be still as death.

Zopyr. As death! you know not what you say; farewell[!]

A little will I commune with my soul,

And then I'll join you at the palace-gate.

Asph. Will you then tell me?—

Zopyr. Cease to vex, my friend,

Your soul and mine with false suspicion, (*aside*) Oh!

I am choked! I'd give full ten years of my life

To tell, to laugh—& yet I dare not speak.

[46]

Asph. Zopyrion, remember that you hurt  
The trusting bosom of a faithful friend  
By your unjust concealment.

(Exit.)

Zopyr. Oh, he's gone!  
To him I dare not speak, nor yet to Lacon;  
No human ears may hear what must be told.  
I cannot keep it in, assuredly;  
I shall some night discuss it in my sleep.  
It will not keep! Oh! greenest reeds that sway  
And nod your feathered heads beneath the sun,  
Be you depositaries of my soul,  
Be you my friends in this extremity[:]  
I shall not risk my head when I tell you  
The fatal truth, the heart oppressing fact,

(stooping down & whispering)

(Enter Midas, Silenus & others, who fall back during the scene; Midas is always anxious about his crown, & Zopyrion gets behind him & tries to smother his laughter.)

Silen. (*very drunk*) Again I find you, Bacchus, runaway!  
Welcome, my glorious boy! Another time  
Stray not; or leave your poor old foster-father  
In the wild mazes of a wood, in which  
I might have wandered many hundred years,  
Had not some merry fellows helped me out,  
And had not this king kindly welcomed me,  
I might have fared more ill than you erewhile  
In Pentheus' prisons, that death fated rogue.

Bac. (*to Midas.*) To you I owe great thanks & will reward  
Your hospitality. Tell me your name  
And what this country is.

Midas. My name is Midas—

The Reeds (*nodding their heads*).

[49]

Midas, the king, has the ears of an ass.

Midas. (*turning round & seizing Zopyrion*).

Villain, you lie! he dies who shall repeat  
Those traitrous words. Seize on Zopyrion!

The Reeds. Midas, the king, has the ears of an ass.

Mid. Search through the crowd; it is a woman's voice  
That dares belie her king, & makes her life  
A forfeit to his fury.

Asph. There is no woman here.

Bac. Calm yourself, Midas; none believe the tale,  
Some impious man or gamesome faun dares feign  
In vile contempt of your most royal ears.  
Off with your crown, & shew the world the lie!

Mid. (*holding his crown tight*)

Never! What[!] shall a vile calumnious slave  
Dictate the actions of a crowned king?  
Zopyrion, this lie springs from you—you perish!

Zopy. I, say that Midas has got asses' ears?  
May great Apollo strike me with his shaft  
If to a single soul I ever told  
So false, so foul a calumny!

[50]

Bac. Midas!

The Reeds. Midas, the king, has the ears of an ass.

Bac. Silence! or by my Godhead I strike dead  
Who shall again insult the noble king.  
Midas, you are my friend, for you have saved

And hospitably welcomed my old faun;  
Choose your reward, for here I swear your wish,  
Whatever it may be, shall be fulfilled.

Zopyr. (*aside*) Sure he will wish his asses' ears in Styx.

Midas. What[!] may I choose from out the deep, rich mine  
Of human fancy, & the wildest thoughts  
That passed till now unheeded through my brain,  
A wish, a hope, to be fulfilled by you?  
Nature shall bend her laws at my command,  
And I possess as my reward one thing  
That I have longed for with unceasing care.

Bac. Pause, noble king, ere you express this wish[.]  
Let not an error or rash folly spoil  
My benefaction; pause and then declare,  
For what you ask shall be, as I have sworn.

Mid. Let all I touch be gold, most glorious gold!

[51]

Let me be rich! and where I stretch my hands,  
(That like Orion I could touch the stars!)  
Be radiant gold! God Bacchus, you have sworn,  
I claim your word,—my ears are quite forgot!

The Reeds. Midas, the king, has the ears of an ass.

Mid. You lie, & yet I care not—

Zopyr. (*aside to Midas*) Yet might I  
But have advised your Majesty, I would  
Have made one God undo the other's work—

Midas. (*aside to Zopyr*).

Advise yourself, my friend, or you may grow  
Shorter by a head ere night.—I am blessed,

Happier than ever earthly man could boast.  
Do you fulfil your words?

Bac. Yes, thoughtless man!  
And much I fear if you have not the ears  
You have the judgement of an ass. Farewel!  
I found you rich & happy; & I leave you,  
Though you know it not, miserably poor.  
Your boon is granted,—touch! make gold! Some here  
Help carry old Silenus off, who sleeps  
The divine sleep of heavy wine. Farewel!

Mid. Bacchus, divine, how shall I pay my thanks[?]

(Exeunt.)

END OF FIRST ACT.

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## ACT 2

Scene; a splendid apartment in the Palace of Midas.

Enter Midas

(with a golden rose in his hand).

Mid. Gold! glorious gold! I am made up of gold!

I pluck a rose, a silly, fading rose,

Its soft, pink petals change to yellow gold;

Its stem, its leaves are gold—and what before

Was fit for a poor peasant's festal dress

May now adorn a Queen. I lift a stone,

A heavy, useless mass, a slave would spurn,

What is more valueless? 'Tis solid gold!

A king might war on me to win the same.

And as I pass my hand thus through the air,

A little shower of sightless dust falls down

A shower of gold. O, now I am a king!

I've spread my hands against my palace walls,

I've set high ladders up, that I may touch

Each crevice and each cornice with my hands,

And it will all be gold:—a golden palace,

Surrounded by a wood of golden trees,

Which will bear golden fruits.—The very ground

My naked foot treads on is yellow gold,

[53]

Invaluable gold! my dress is gold!

Now I am great! Innumerable armies

Wait till my gold collects them round my throne;

I see my standard made of woven gold.

Waving o'er Asia's utmost Citadels,

Guarded by myriads invincible.

Or if the toil of war grows wearisome,













Asph. Now we shall tend our flocks and reap our corn  
As we were wont, and not be killed by gold.

[61]

Golden fleeces threatened our poor sheep,  
The very showers as they fell from heaven  
Could not refresh the earth; the wind blew gold,  
And as we walked<sup>52</sup> the thick sharp-pointed atoms  
Wounded our faces—the navies would have sunk—

Zopyr. All strangers would have fled our gold-cursed shore,  
Till we had bound our wealthy king, that he  
Might leave the green and fertile earth unchanged;—  
Then in deep misery he would have shook  
His golden chains & starved.

Enter Lacon.

Lacon. Sluggards, how now I  
Have you not been to gaze upon the sight?  
To see the noble king cast off the gift  
Which he erewhile so earnestly did crave[?]

Asph. I am so tired with the weight of gold  
I bore to-day I could not budge a foot  
To see the finest sight Jove could display.  
But tell us, Lacon, what he did and said.

Lac. Although he'd fain have run[, ] his golden dress  
And heavy sandals made the poor king limp  
As leaning upon mine and the high priest's arm,  
He hastened to Pactolus. When he saw  
The stream—"Thanks to the Gods!" he cried aloud  
In joy; then having cast aside his robes  
He leaped into the waves, and with his palm

[62]

<sup>52</sup> MS. *as he walked*.







