T37 England in 1819

1819 was a remarkable year for Percy Bysshe Shelley in many ways: it was the year of the Ode to the West Wind and of the so-called Peterloo Massacre (\rightarrow 4.3), a watershed in English political history. Shelley, exiled in Italy but following the news from England, summarised his nation's ills in the following sonnet.

An old, mad, blind, despised¹ and dying King: Princes, the dregs² of their dull³ race, who flow Through public scorn⁴, – mud from a muddy spring⁵; Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,

- But leech-like⁶ to their fainting country cling⁷
 Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow⁸;
 A people starved and stabbed on the untilled field⁹;
 An army which liberticide and prey
 Makes¹⁰ as a two-edged¹¹ sword to all who wield¹²;
- Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay¹³; Religion Christless, Godless – a book sealed¹⁴; A Senate, Time's worst statute¹⁵ unrepealed¹⁶, – Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.
- 1 mad ... despised. Pazzo (si riferisce alla pazzia di re Giorgio III), cieco, disprezzato.
- dregs. Feccia (riferimento al principe reggente, il futuro Giorgio IV).
- 3 dull. Ottusa.
- 4 scorn. Disprezzo.
- 5 muddy spring. Sorgente fangosa.
- 6 leech-like. Come sanguisughe.7 cling. Si aggrappano.
- 8 blow. Colpo.
- stabbed ... field. Pugnalato in un campo incolto
- (riferimento al massacro di Peterloo del 1819).10 liberticide ... Makes. Fa liberticidio e bottino.
- 11 two-edged. A doppio taglio.

Percy Bysshe Shelley The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1839)

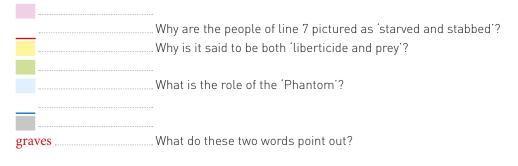
12 wield. Brandiscono.

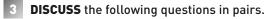
- 13 slay. Massacrano.
- 14 sealed. Sigillato.
- 15 **Time's worst statute**. Il peggior statuto di tutti i tempi (riferimento alla legge che escludeva i non anglicani dai pubblici uffici).
- 16 unrepealed. Non abrogato.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

READ the text and identify the two sections. Then write a heading for each section.

LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents and answer the questions.





- 1 Who does the poet address?
- 2 Who is the 'old, mad, blind, despised and dying King' (line 1)?
- 3 Who/what is the subject of the verb 'Are' in line 13?
- 4 Pick out all the linguistic images which Shelley employs for political exponents and institutions. Then write them down in the grid below.

$King \to$	
Princes ->	
$Rulers \rightarrow$	
Army →	
Senate \rightarrow	
Laws →	
$Religion \rightarrow$	

- 5 Which expressions does Shelley use for English people?
- 6 What is the tone of the whole sonnet?
- 7 What is the role of the poet?

COMPLETE the summary with the words from the box.

scorn	revolution	despised	religion	political	corrupt	interests
oppressed	Massacre	liberty	attacks	protect	hope	Catholics

 England in 1819 is a (1)		loo
(2) in Augus	st 1819.	
The poem (3)	England, as the poet sees it, decadent and ruled by a king	, George III, who
is dying, old, blind, insane, an	d (4)	re objects of
public (5)	nd his ministers run the country for their own selfish [6]	•
The people are hungry, (7)	and hopeless. Meanwhile, the army is (8)	:
it is used to destroy (9)	and collect booty. The laws are harsh and useles	ss because they
are manipulated to (10)	the rich and enchain the poor. (11)	is in a state
of apathy and Parliament den	ies Roman (12) their civil rights. But out of	f this unhappy
state of affairs, the last two li	nes express the (13) that a 'glorious Phant	.om',
a (14) , may	spring from this decay and 'illumine our tempestuous day' l	by destroying all
wrongs.		

5 FIND similarities and differences between Byron (\rightarrow 4.13) and Shelley as regards political activity, reputation, life abroad, attitude to democracy, key ideas of their works. Write not more than 10 lines.

REFER to the Romantic writers you have studied and write a short essay (20 lines) about the topic of rebellion. Remember that central in works about rebellion is the sense of powerful external forces – the state, the Church, tradition – which can be obeyed only at the expense of conscience and humanity.

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