## 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, despised<sup>1</sup> and dying King: Princes, the dregs<sup>2</sup> of their dull<sup>3</sup> race, who flow Through public scorn<sup>4</sup>, – mud from a muddy spring<sup>5</sup>; Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,

- But leech-like<sup>6</sup> to their fainting country cling<sup>7</sup>
  Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow<sup>8</sup>;
  A people starved and stabbed on the untilled field<sup>9</sup>;
  An army which liberticide and prey
  Makes<sup>10</sup> as a two-edged<sup>11</sup> sword to all who wield<sup>12</sup>;
- Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay<sup>13</sup>; Religion Christless, Godless – a book sealed<sup>14</sup>; A Senate, Time's worst statute<sup>15</sup> unrepealed<sup>16</sup>, – 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)

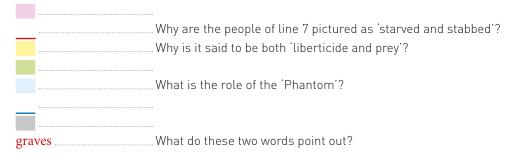
## 12 wield. Brandiscono.

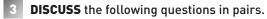
- 13 slay. Massacrano.
- 14 sealed. Sigillato.
- 15 **Time's worst statute**. Il peggior statuto di tutti i tempi (riferimento alla legge che escludeva i non anglicani dai pubblici uffici).
- 16 unrepealed. Non abrogato.

## 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 <b>(1)</b>		loo
(2) in Augus	st 1819.	
The poem <b>(3)</b>	England, as the poet sees it, decadent and ruled by a king	, George III, who
is dying, old, blind, insane, an	d <b>(4)</b>	re objects of
public <b>(5)</b>	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 <b>(12)</b> their civil rights. But out of	f this unhappy
state of affairs, the last two li	nes express the <b>(13)</b> that a 'glorious Phant	.om',
a <b>(14)</b> , 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.

6