ENGLAND IN 1819

Percy Bysshe Shelley



WHAT HAPPENS? An attack on monarchy and institutions ends with a conditional hope of renewal.

BIG IDEA **Institutions that claim to sustain England are presented as draining its life, yet collapse may create an opening for change.**

FOUR EVIDENCE FRAGMENTS · ZOOM IN, THEN EXPLAIN

“An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;”

Literal and figurative adjective

The accusation extends from physical decline to a failure to perceive suffering.

“But leechlike to their fainting country cling”

Simile

Rulers depend upon and weaken the country they govern.

“A people starved and stabbed in th’ untilled field;”

Alliteration

Linked verbs join material deprivation to direct violence.

“a glorious Phantom may”

Modal verb

Political renewal remains a possibility, not a guaranteed prediction.

FORM

A 14-line political sonnet with an unconventional rhyme arrangement; the main sentence delays its hopeful possibility.

CONTEXT

Shelley’s poem responds to political repression in 1819, the year of Peterloo, when cavalry attacked a reform meeting.

COMPARE IT WITH…

Thirteen: distrust of authority. A Century Later: resistance to oppressive power.

VOICE, TONE & FEELINGS · FOLLOW THE SHIFTS

King and princes

SCATHING

The opening catalogue strips royal rank of dignity and presents government as parasitic.

People and institutions

INDIGNANT

Starvation and violence connect public suffering to army, law, religion and parliament.

Final possibility

CAUTIOUSLY HOPEFUL

The burial image is reworked into a possible source of renewal rather than certain despair.

FULL POEM: use your anthology. Evidence fragments are prompts for close reading.

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