

## LEAD IN

Shelley, like Byron, had a rebellious spirit and attacked injustice and corruption in early nineteenth-century England. In the following poem he paints a very negative picture of political and social life in the year 1819. Does he believe that this situation can ever change?

England In 1819 Text E16

An old, mad, blind, despised<sup>1</sup>, and dying king<sup>2</sup>, –  
 Princes, the dregs<sup>3</sup> of their dull 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<sup>6</sup>-like to their fainting country cling<sup>7</sup>,  
 Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow, –  
 A people starved and stabbed<sup>8</sup> in the untilled<sup>9</sup> field<sup>10</sup>, –  
 An army, which liberticide and prey  
 Makes as a two-edg'd sword to all who wield<sup>11</sup>, –  
 Golden and sanguine<sup>12</sup> laws which tempt<sup>13</sup> and slay<sup>14</sup>,  
 Religion Christless, Godless – a book sealed<sup>15</sup>,  
 A Senate – Time's worst statute unrepealed<sup>16</sup>, –  
 Are graves<sup>17</sup>, from which a glorious Phantom may  
 Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.



A scene from *The Madness of King George* (1994).

## GLOSSARY

1. **despised**: hated
2. **An old ... king**: George III, who was blind and mentally ill. He died in 1820
3. **dregs**: the lowest forms of human life who deserve no respect
4. **scorn**: the feeling that someone is stupid or useless
5. **mud ... spring**: these people are corrupt (**mud**: wet, dirty earth) like their

ancestors were (**spring**: a place where water comes up naturally from the ground). Lines 2 and 3 are also a reference to George III's disreputable son, who was Prince Regent from 1811 to 1820

6. **leech**: small soft creature that sucks blood from animals
7. **cling**: hold very tightly
8. **stabbed**: killed with a knife
9. **untilled**: not cultivated
10. **A people ... field**: this is a reference to the Peterloo

Massacre in August 1819, when troops attacked peaceful protesters (► p. E107)

11. **An army ... wield**: the army is like a sword with two edges. With one it kills freedom (**liberticide**), while with the other it hunts down and kills (**prey**) people (**wield**: hold the sword)
12. **sanguine**: stained with blood
13. **tempt**: lead into temptation
14. **slay**: kill

15. **Religion ... sealed**: the state Protestant religion is all-powerful and intolerant

16. **Time's ... unrepealed**: the statute is the law which prevented Catholics and Dissenters from holding office (► p. E108) (**unrepealed**: not abolished)

17. **graves**: where people are buried when they die