EXAM STASH

WORLDS AND LIVES POETRY

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

ENGLAND IN 1819

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY



MONARCHY & POWER | **INJUSTICE & SUFFERING** | **CHANGE & RENEWAL**

WHAT HAPPENS?

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

THE BIG IDEA

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

POEM BREAKDOWN

Three stages, one sonnet

1 King and princes
(lines 1–4)
The opening catalogue strips royal rank of dignity and presents government as parasitic.

2 People and institutions
(lines 5–12)
Starvation and violence connect public suffering to army, law, religion and parliament.

3 Final possibility
(lines 13–14)
The brutal image is reworked into a possible source of renewal rather than certain despair.

4 KEY QUOTATIONS

'An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;'	**Method:** Literal and figurative adjective	**Key word (Zoom):** 'dying'	**Effect:** The accusation extends from physical decline to a failure to perceive suffering.
'But leechlike to their fainting country cling'	**Method:** Simile	**Key word (Zoom):** 'leechlike'	**Effect:** Rulers depend upon and weaken the country they govern.
'A people starved and stabbed in th' untilled field;'	**Method:** Alliteration	**Key word (Zoom):** 'starved'	**Effect:** Linked verbs join material deprivation to direct violence.
'a glorious Phantom may'	**Method:** Modal verb	**Key word (Zoom):** 'may'	**Effect:** Political renewal remains a possibility, not a guaranteed prediction.

FORM & STRUCTURE

- A 14-line political sonnet, which compresses a wide attack into a tight, forceful form.
- An unconventional rhyme arrangement creates a less orderly, unsetlled feel that matches its criticism.
- The main sentence delays its hopeful possibility until the end, making it more striking.

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.



STORY, PACE & FEELINGS



STORY
A blistering catalogue of corrupt power and suffering, ending with a conditional hope for renewal.

PACE
A forceful, building pace through accumulation, followed by a slowing, reflective ending.

SPEAKER
A politically engaged critic who speaks with moral anger and a vision of change.

TONES
Scathing and indignant, then cautiously hopeful.

CHANGE IN FEELINGS
From contempt and outrage to a measured sense of possibility at the end.

RECALL QUESTION: *How does the ending differ from the catalogue that precedes it?*