

685 Shakes in its last decay, were the true law
Of this so lovely world! But thou art fled
Like some frail exhalation;³ which the dawn
Robes in its golden beams,—ah! thou hast fled!
The brave, the gentle, and the beautiful,
690 The child of grace and genius. Heartless things
Are done and said i' the world, and many worms
And beasts and men live on, and mighty Earth
From sea and mountain, city and wilderness,
In vesper³ low or joyous orison,^o
695 Lifts still its solemn voice:—but thou art fled—
Thou canst no longer know or love the shapes
Of this phantasmal scene, who have to thee
Been purest ministers, who are, alas!
Now thou art not. Upon those pallid lips
700 So sweet even in their silence, on those eyes
That image sleep in death, upon that form
Yet safe from the worm's outrage, let no tear
Be shed—not even in thought. Nor, when those hues
Are gone, and those divinest lineaments,
705 Worn by the senseless^o wind, shall live alone
In the frail pauses of this simple strain,
Let not high verse, mourning the memory
Of that which is no more, or painting's woe
Or sculpture, speak in feeble imagery
710 Their own cold powers. Art and eloquence,
And all the shews o' the world are frail and vain
To weep a loss that turns their lights to shade.
It is a woe too "deep for tears,"⁴ when all
Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,
715 Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
Those who remain behind, not sobs or groans,
The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;
But pale despair and cold tranquillity,
Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
720 Birth and the grave, that are not as they were.

1815

Mont Blanc¹

Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni

I

The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—

3. Evening prayer.

4. From the last line of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality": "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

1. This poem, in which Shelley both echoes and argues with the poetry of natural description written by Wordsworth and Coleridge, was first published as the conclusion to the *History of a*

1816

Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
5 The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters,—with a sound but half its own,
Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
Where waterfalls around it leap forever,
10 Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.

2

Thus thou, Ravine of Arve—dark, deep Ravine—
Thou many-coloured, many-voiced vale,
Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail
15 Fast cloud shadows and sunbeams: awful^o scene, *awe-inspiring*
Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
From the ice gulphs that gird his secret throne,
Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame
Of lightning through the tempest;—thou dost lie,
20 Thy giant brood of pines around thee clinging,
Children of elder^o time, in whose devotion *earlier, ancient*
The chainless winds still come and ever came
To drink their odours, and their mighty swinging
To hear—an old and solemn harmony;
25 Thine earthly rainbows stretched across the sweep
Of the ethereal waterfall, whose veil
Robes some unsculptured² image; the strange sleep
Which when the voices of the desert fail
Wraps all in its own deep eternity;—
30 Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion,
A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;
Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
Thou art the path of that unresting sound—
Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
35 I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
To muse on my own separate phantasy,

Six Weeks' Tour. This was a book that Percy and Mary Shelley wrote together detailing the excursion that they and Claire Clairmont took in July 1816 to the valley of Chamounix, in what is now southeastern France. That valley lies at the foot of Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in the Alps and in all Europe.

In the *History* Percy Shelley commented on his poem: "It was composed under the immediate impression of the deep and powerful feelings excited by the objects it attempts to describe; and, as an indisciplined overflowing of the soul rests its claim to approbation on an attempt to imitate the untamable wildness and inaccessible solemnity from which those feelings sprang." He was inspired to write the poem while standing on a bridge spanning the river Arve, which flows through the valley of Chamounix and is fed from above by the melt-off of the glacier, the Mer de Glace.

In a letter to Thomas Love Peacock drafted in the same week as "Mont Blanc," Shelley had

recalled that the count de Buffon, a French pioneer of the science we now know as geology, had proposed a "sublime but gloomy theory—that this globe which we inhabit will at some future period be changed to a mass of frost." This sense, which Shelley takes from Buffon, of a Nature that is utterly alien and indifferent to human beings (and whose history takes shape on a timescale of incomprehensible immensity) is counterposed throughout "Mont Blanc" with Shelley's interest, fueled by his reading of 18th-century skeptics such as David Hume, in questions about the human mind, its powers, and the limits of knowledge. "All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient," Shelley would later write in "A Defence of Poetry" (p. 881). In "Mont Blanc" the priority that this statement gives to the mind over the external world is challenged by the sheer destructive power of the mountain.

2. I.e., not formed by humans.

My own, my human mind, which passively
 Now renders and receives fast influencings,
 Holding an unremitting interchange
 40 With the clear universe of things around;
 One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
 Now float above thy darkness, and now rest
 Where that° or thou° art no unbidden guest, *thy darkness / the ravine*
 In the still cave of the witch Poesy,³
 45 Seeking among the shadows that pass by
 Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
 Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
 From which they fled recalls them, thou art there!⁴

3

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
 50 Visit the soul in sleep,—that death is slumber,
 And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
 Of those who wake and live.—I look on high;
 Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
 The veil of life and death? or do I lie
 55 In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep
 Spread far around and inaccessible
 Its circles? For the very spirit fails,
 Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep
 That vanishes among the viewless° gales! *invisible*
 60 Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,
 Mont Blanc appears,—still, snowy, and serene—
 Its subject mountains their unearthly forms
 Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
 Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,
 65 Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
 And wind among the accumulated steeps;
 A desert peopled by the storms alone,
 Save° when the eagle brings some hunter's bone, *except*
 And the wolf tracts° her there—how hideously *tracks*
 70 Its shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high,
 Ghastly, and scarred, and riven.°—Is this the scene *split*
 Where the old Earthquake-dæmon⁵ taught her young
 Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
 Of fire, envelope once this silent snow?
 75 None can reply—all seems eternal now.
 The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
 Which teaches awful doubt,⁶ or faith so mild,

3. I.e., in the part of the mind that creates poetry.
 4. In these difficult lines (41–48) Shelley seems to be recalling Plato's allegory in the *Republic* of the mind as cave. Plato describes human beings' sense of reality as if it were based only on the shadows cast by firelight on the walls and we remained ignorant of the light of reality outside the cave. The syntax in the passage blurs the distinction between what is inside the human viewer's mind and outside in the world that he views: the thoughts (line 41) seek in the poet's creative faculty ("the still cave of the witch

Poesy") some "shade," "phantom," or "faint image" of the ravine of the Arve, and when the ravine is thereby remembered (when "the breast" from which the images has fled "recalls them"), then the ravine exists.

5. A supernatural being, halfway between mortals and the gods. Here it represents the force that makes earthquakes. Shelley views this landscape as the product of violent geological upheavals in the past.

6. Awe-filled open-mindedness.

So solemn, so serene, that man may be
 But for such faith⁷ with nature reconciled;
 80 Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
 Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
 By all, but which⁸ the wise, and great, and good
 Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

4

The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams,
 Ocean, and all the living things that dwell
 85 Within the dædal⁹ earth; lightning, and rain,
 Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane,
 The torpor of the year when feeble dreams
 Visit the hidden buds, or dreamless sleep
 90 Holds every future leaf and flower;—the bound
 With which from that detested trance they leap;
 The works and ways of man, their death and birth,
 And that of him and all that his may be;
 All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
 95 Are born and die; revolve, subside and swell.
 Power dwells apart in its tranquillity
 Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
 And *this*, the naked countenance of earth,
 On which I gaze, even these primæval mountains
 100 Teach the adverting° mind. The glaciers creep *observant*
 Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,
 Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice,
 Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
 Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
 105 A city of death, distinct with many a tower
 And wall impregnable of beaming ice.
 Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin
 Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
 Rolls its perpetual stream; vast pines are strewing
 110 Its destined path, or in the mangled soil
 Branchless and shattered stand: the rocks, drawn down
 From yon remotest waste, have overthrown
 The limits of the dead and living world,
 Never to be reclaimed. The dwelling-place
 115 Of insects, beasts, and birds, becomes its spoil;
 Their food and their retreat for ever gone,
 So much of life and joy is lost. The race
 Of man, flies far in dread; his work and dwelling
 Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream,
 120 And their place is not known. Below, vast caves
 Shine in the rushing torrents' restless gleam,
 Which from those secret chasms in tumult welling¹

7. I.e., only through holding such a faith. Drafts of the poem support this reading: Shelley also wrote "In such wise faith with Nature reconciled" and "In such a faith."

8. The reference is to "voice," line 80.

9. Intricately formed; derived from Daedalus,

builder of the labyrinth in Crete.

1. This description (as well as that in lines 9–11) seems to be an echo of Coleridge's description of the chasm and sacred river in the recently published "Kubla Khan," lines 12–24.

Meet in the vale, and one majestic River,²
 The breath and blood of distant lands, for ever
 125 Rolls its loud waters to the ocean waves,
 Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air.

5

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there,
 The still and solemn power of many sights,
 And many sounds, and much of life and death.
 130 In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
 In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
 Upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,
 Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
 Or the star-beams dart through them:—Winds contend
 135 Silently there, and heap the snow with breath
 Rapid and strong, but silently! Its home
 The voiceless lightning in these solitudes
 Keeps innocently, and like vapour broods
 Over the snow. The secret strength of things
 140 Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
 Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
 And what were thou,³ and earth, and stars, and sea,
 If to the human mind's imaginings
 Silence and solitude were vacancy?

Mont Blanc

1816

1817

Hymn to Intellectual Beauty¹

1

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
 Floats though unseen amongst us,—visiting
 This various world with as inconstant wing
 As summer winds that creep from flower to flower.—
 5 Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,²
 It visits with inconstant glance
 Each human heart and countenance;
 Like hues and harmonies of evening,—
 Like clouds in starlight widely spread,—
 10 Like memory of music fled,—
 Like aught that for its grace may be
 Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery.

2

Spirit of BEAUTY, that dost consecrate
 With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon

2. The Arve, which flows into Lake Geneva. Nearby the river Rhone flows out of Lake Geneva to begin its course through France and into the Mediterranean.

1. "Intellectual": nonmaterial, that which is beyond access to the human mind.

intellectual beauty is something postulated to account for occasional states of awareness that lend splendor, grace, and truth both to the natural world and to people's moral consciousness.

2. Used as a verb.

15 Of human thought or form,—where art thou gone?
 Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
 This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?
 Ask why the sunlight not forever
 Weaves rainbows o'er yon mountain river,
 20 Why aught³ should fail and fade that once is shewn, *anything*
 Why fear and dream and death and birth
 Cast on the daylight of this earth
 Such gloom,—why man has such a scope
 For love and hate, despondency and hope?

3

25 No voice from some sublimer world hath ever
 To sage or poet these responses given—
 Therefore the name of God and ghosts and Heaven,
 Remain the records of their vain endeavour,³
 Frail spells—whose uttered charm might not avail to sever,
 30 From all we hear and all we see,
 Doubt, chance, and mutability.
 Thy light alone—like mist o'er mountains driven,
 Or music by the night wind sent
 Through strings of some still instrument,
 35 Or moonlight on a midnight stream,
 Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream.

4

Love, Hope, and Self-esteem, like clouds departed
 And come, for some uncertain moments lent.
 Man were immortal, and omnipotent,
 40 Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,
 Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.⁴
 Thou messenger of sympathies,
 That wax and wane in lovers' eyes—
 Thou—that to human thought art nourishment,
 45 Like darkness to a dying flame!⁵
 Depart not as thy shadow came,
 Depart not—lest the grave should be,
 Like life and fear, a dark reality.

5

50 While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
 Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,
 And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
 Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
 I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed;⁶

3. The names (line 27) represent nothing better than the feeble guesses that philosophers and poets have made in attempting to answer the questions posed in stanza 2, but these guesses also delude us as though they were magic spells.

4. I.e., "man would be immortal . . . if thou didst keep."

light.

6. Lines 49–52 refer to Shelley's youthful experiments with magic and conjuring. In one manuscript version this line reads "I called on that false name with which our youth is fed"; the next line continues, "He answered not." This version would have clinched Shelley's scandalous reputation for atheism.

I was not heard—I saw them not—
 55 When musing deeply on the lot
 Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
 All vital things that wake to bring
 News of buds and blossoming,—
 Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
 60 I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!

6

I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
 To thee and thine—have I not kept the vow?
 With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now
 I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
 65 Each from his voiceless grave: they have in visioned bowers
 Of studious zeal or love's delight
 Outwatched with me the envious night⁷—
 They know that never joy illumed my brow
 Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
 70 This world from its dark slavery,
 That thou—O awful LOVELINESS,
 Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express.

7

The day becomes more solemn and serene
 When noon is past—there is a harmony
 75 In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,
 Which through the summer is not heard or seen,
 As if it could not be, as if it had not been!
 Thus let thy power, which like the truth
 Of nature on my passive youth
 80 Descended, to my onward life supply
 Its calm—to one who worships thee,
 And every form containing thee,
 Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind
 To fear⁸ himself, and love all human kind.

1816

Ozymandias¹

I met a traveller from an antique land,
 Who said—"Two vast and trunkless⁹ legs of stone
 Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
 Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 5 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,

7. I.e., stayed up until the night, envious of their delight, had reluctantly departed.

8. Probably in the old sense: "to stand in awe of."

1. According to Diodorus Siculus, Greek historian of the 1st century B.C.E., the largest statue

in Egypt had the inscription "I am Ozymandias, king of kings; if anyone wishes to know what I am and where I lie, let him surpass me in some of my exploits." Ozymandias was the Greek name for Ramses II of Egypt, 13th century B.C.E.

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
 Which yet survive,⁹ stamped on these lifeless things, *outlive*
 The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;²
 And on the pedestal, these words appear:
 10 My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,
 Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
 The lone and level sands stretch far away."

1817

1818

On Love¹

What is Love? Ask him who lives what is life; ask him who adores what is God.

I know not the internal constitution of other men, nor even of thine whom I now address. I see that in some external attributes they resemble me, but when, misled by that appearance, I have thought to appeal to something in common and unburthen my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood, like one in a distant and savage land. The more opportunities they have afforded me for experience, the wider has appeared the interval between us, and to a greater distance have the points of sympathy been withdrawn. With a spirit ill-fitted to sustain such proof, trembling and feeble through its tenderness, I have every where sought, and have found only repulse and disappointment.

Thou demandest what is Love. It is that powerful attraction towards all we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own; that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood:—this is Love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us, which from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness. It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its mother; this propensity develops itself with the development of our nature. We dimly see within our intellectual nature, a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all

2. "The hand" is the sculptor's, who had "mocked" (both imitated and satirized) the sculptured passions; "the heart" is the king's, which has "fed" his passions.

1. Shelley's essay, likely composed in the summer of 1818 just after he translated Plato's *Symposium*, first appeared in print in *The Keepsake for 1829*—a miscellany of poems, stories, and engravings, edited by Frederick Mansel Reynolds. The *Keepsake*

belonged to the group of publications that, debuting in Britain in the 1820s, were known as the literary annuals: sumptuously produced, bound in silk, these books were promoted as especially appropriate and tasteful gifts to be given to young women. Mary Shelley, who supplied Reynolds with her late husband's manuscript, was herself a frequent contributor to *The Keepsake*: see "The Mortal Immortal," p. 1036.

that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent and lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed:² a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our own soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise, which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble and correspond with it. The discovery of its antitype; the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating our own; an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret, with a frame, whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres, strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own; and a combination of all these in such proportion as the type within demands: this is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends; and to attain which, it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that, without the possession of which, there is no rest nor respite to the heart over which it rules. Hence in solitude, or that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings and yet they sympathize not with us, we love the flowers, the grass, the waters, and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring, in the blue air, there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart. There is eloquence in the tongueless wind, and a melody in the flowing brooks and the rustling of the reeds beside them, which by their inconceivable relation to something within the soul awaken the spirits to dance of breathless rapture, and bring tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic success, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone. Sterne says that if he were in a desert he would love some cypress.³ So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes a living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was.

1818

1829

Stanzas Written in Dejection—
December 1818, near Naples¹

The Sun is warm, the sky is clear,
The waves are dancing fast and bright,
Blue isles and snowy mountains wear
The purple noon's transparent might,
The breath of the moist earth is light
Around its unexpanded buds;
Like many a voice of one delight
The winds, the birds, the Ocean-floods;
The City's voice itself is soft, like Solitude's.

2. These words are ineffectual and metaphorical. Most words are so,—no help! [Shelley's note].

3. Paraphrase of a passage in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), in which the narrator contrasts his approach to traveling with that of travelers less easily pleased: "was I in a desert, I would find out wherewith in it

to call forth my affections."

1. Shelley's first wife, Harriet, had drowned herself; Clara, his baby daughter with Mary Shelley, had just died; and he was plagued by ill health, pain, financial worries, and the sense that he had failed as a poet.

10 I see the Deep's untrampled floor
With green and purple seaweeds strown;
I see the waves upon the shore
Like light dissolved in star-showers, thrown;
I sit upon the sands alone;
15 The lightning of the noontide Ocean
Is flashing round me, and a tone
Arises from its measured motion,
How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion.

20 Alas, I have nor hope nor health
Nor peace within nor calm around,
Nor that content surpassing wealth
The sage² in meditation found,
And walked with inward glory crowned;
25 Nor fame nor power nor love nor leisure—
Others I see whom these surround,
Smiling they live and call life pleasure:
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.

30 Yet now despair itself is mild,
Even as the winds and waters are;
I could lie down like a tired child
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear
Till Death like Sleep might steal on me,
And I might feel in the warm air
35 My cheek grow cold, and hear the Sea
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

Some might lament that I were cold,
As I, when this sweet day is gone,³
Which my lost heart, too soon grown old,
40 Insults with this untimely moan—
They might lament,—for I am one
Whom men love not, and yet regret;
Unlike this day, which, when the Sun
Shall on its stainless glory set,
45 Will linger though enjoyed, like joy in Memory yet.

1818

1824

Sonnet [Lift not the painted veil]

Lift not the painted veil which those who live
Call Life; though unreal shapes be pictured there
And it but mimic all we would believe
With colours idly spread,—behind, lurk Fear

2. Probably the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (2nd century C.E.), Stoic philosopher who wrote twelve books of *Meditations*.

3. I.e., as I will lament this sweet day when it has gone.

5 And Hope, twin Destinies, who ever weave
 Their shadows o'er the chasm, sightless and drear.
 I knew one who had lifted it. . . . he sought,
 For his lost heart was tender, things to love
 But found them not, alas; nor was there aught
 10 The world contains, the which he could approve.
 Through the unheeding many he did move,
 A splendour among shadows—a bright blot
 Upon this gloomy scene—a Spirit that strove
 For truth, and like the Preacher, found it not.¹

1818–20

1824

The Mask of Anarchy On August 16, 1819, a crowd of sixty thousand, men, women, and children, gathered on St. Peter's Field in Manchester to support reform of the system of political representation. The event had been in preparation for months: the organizers aimed to make the gathering a display not just of the people's numerical strength but also their discipline. On the day, the magistrates sent in the local militia, backed up by a force of saber-wielding cavalry, to arrest one of the speakers, Henry "Orator" Hunt, and to disperse the peaceable, unarmed crowd. In the mayhem, eleven died, and hundreds were injured. The opposition press quickly circulated eyewitness accounts of the events, which came to be known as the Peterloo Massacre. The name invited a comparison to the Battle of Waterloo: that had been viewed as a national glory, but this was a national shame.

Shelley began this protest poem shortly after the news reached him in Italy, writing, as he reported, in a "torrent" of "indignation." In September he sent it to Leigh Hunt for publication in Hunt's journal *The Examiner*. Justifiably fearful that he would be charged with libel, Hunt postponed its publication until 1832. At that point, with the passage, at last, of a bill reforming Parliament, the concluding vision (in Hunt's words) of the "rise and growth of the Public Enlightenment" seemed prophetic, and the poem read as a call for peaceable reform, not violent revolution. In the 1832 printing the title was *The Masque of Anarchy*. That allusion to the masque, the performance genre celebrating aristocrats' class identity and authority, compounds the poem's ironies. Through the pageantry of the court-masque, seventeenth-century aristocrats had enacted their transcendence of the disorder personified by the vulgar performers of the anti-masque. In the upside-down world of role reversals that Shelley envisions, Anarchy—a term the British government used to stigmatize democratic reform—plays host to aristocratic revels.

The Mask of Anarchy

Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester

As I lay asleep in Italy
 There came a voice from over the Sea,
 And with great power it forth led me
 To walk in the visions of Poesy.

1. Cf. Ecclesiastes 1.2: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

5 I met Murder on the way—
 He had a mask like Castlereagh—
 Very smooth he looked, yet grim;¹
 Seven bloodhounds followed him:

All were fat; and well they might
 Be in admirable plight,
 For one by one, and two by two,
 He tossed them human hearts to chew
 Which from his wide cloak he drew.

Next came Fraud, and he had on,
 15 Like Eldon, an ermined gown;²
 His big tears, for he wept well,
 Turned to mill-stones as they fell.

And the little children, who
 Round his feet played to and fro,
 20 Thinking every tear a gem,
 Had their brains knocked out by them.

Clothed with the Bible, as with light,
 And the shadows of the night,
 Like Sidmouth, next, Hypocrisy
 25 On a crocodile rode by.³

And many more Destructions played
 In this ghastly masquerade,
 All disguised, even to the eyes,
 Like Bishops, lawyers, peers^o or spies.

nobles

30 Last came Anarchy: he rode
 On a white horse, splashed with blood;
 He was pale even to the lips,
 Like Death in the Apocalypse.⁴

And he wore a kingly crown,
 35 And in his grasp a sceptre shone;
 On his brow this mark I saw—
 "I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!"

1. Viscount Castlereagh, foreign secretary and parliamentary leader of the governing Tory party. His bloody suppression of rebellion in Ireland in 1798 and his role, following the peace of 1815, in engineering the restoration of Europe's autocrats made him a hated figure for liberals.

2. Baron Eldon, the Lord Chancellor, head of the judiciary, who in the court of Chancery denied Shelley access to Ianthe and Charles, the children born to Shelley's first wife. Fraud sports the ermine-trimmed gown customary for chief justices.

3. Henry Addington, Viscount Sidmouth, England's home secretary, responsible for policing and internal security and so overseer of a network of spies who infiltrated radical organizations and betrayed their members to the forces of the

law. Hypocrisy rides a crocodile, an animal legendarily said to weep over his human prey before devouring it. With the mention of the Bible, these lines may also allude to the huge investment in church building that in 1818 Parliament made at Sidmouth's instigation: a project of pacification targeting the industrial towns that were hotbeds of political unrest.

4. Cf. Saint John in Revelation 6.8: "And I looked and beheld a pale horse; and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him." Benjamin West's apocalyptic painting *Death on a Pale Horse*, which Shelley could have seen in London in 1817, may inform his description of Anarchy's destructive army in the next four stanzas.