

# Percy Bysshe Shelley and Leigh Hunt: The publication circumstances of *The Masque of Anarchy*

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The purpose of this study is to review the significance of Leigh Hunt's publication of P. B. Shelley's posthumous poem, *The Masque of Anarchy* in 1832 and 1842. Originally written by Shelley in 1819, it was inspired by what is now known as the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester. The first section of this article discusses the reason why editor Leigh Hunt refrained from publishing Shelley's poem in his *Examiner*. Although the poem promoted universal suffrage and a repeal of the Corn Laws, two sentiments popular at the time, it also viciously satirized several government ministers by name. Hunt decided that the poem would be too difficult to publish under the then-current Six Acts, which prohibited the publication of seditious or libelous material.

The next section focuses on the publication of the first edition in 1832, and reveals the continued difficulty of promoting universal suffrage even in the age of the Reform Bill. Thus, Hunt tried to amend *The Masque of Anarchy* by attaching a newly written preface, and also by concealing the identity of Shelley's political enemies.

The last section discusses the 1842 edition, published by James Watson, the Chartist publisher. In this complete version, and with his preface, Leigh Hunt seemed to also support universal suffrage and the abolition of the Corn Laws.