

## OZYMANDIAS

### Percy Bysshe Shelley

1. I met a traveller from an antique land
2. Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
3. Stand in the desert... Near them on the sand,
4. Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
5. And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
6. Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
7. Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
8. The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
9. And on the pedestal these words appear:
10. "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
11. Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"
12. Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
13. Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
14. The lone and level sands stretch far away.

*The poet recalls having met a traveler who told him a story about the ruins of a statue in the desert of his native country:*

Incontrai un viaggiatore da una terra antica ("**antique**" means "ancient" but especially belonging to the time of "antiquity" in ancient Greece, Rome, or in this case, Egypt.)

Che disse: "Due immense gambe di pietra senza tronco (**trunkless**: staccate dal tronco) si ergono nel deserto ...Accanto a loro, sulla sabbia Mezzo sepolto, un devastato volto ("**visage**" means "face") giace, il cui cipiglio (**frown**)

E raggrinzito labbro, e il ghigno (**sneer**) del freddo comando, (ci dicono che il suo scultore quelle passioni lesse (**read-understood**: comprese), che ancora sopravvivono, scavate su queste cose senza vita (**lifeless**-pietre) Alla mano ("**The hand . . . and heart**"--this is a very difficult line. To whose "hand" and whose heart does it refer? - Maybe the sculptor's hand and the King's heart?- The word "them" probably refers to the "passions" mentioned in line 6.) che le derise e al cuore che le alimentò.

*Great opposition, irony and sarcasm appears when it is said:*

E sul piedistallo queste parole appaiono:

"Il mio nome è **Ozymandias** (Osymandias, Greek name for the Egyptian king Rameses II), Re dei Re,;

guardate alle mie opere, voi potenti, e disperate!"

*But around the decaying ruin of the statue, nothing remains: this negative connotation shows that there once was a vast kingdom, but now that kingdom has disappeared. Neither property nor the king himself is immortal.*

Nulla accanto rimane. Intorno alla rovina.

Di quel colossale ("**colossal**" means "extremely large"--as large as a colossus, or gigantic monumental statue) relitto, senza confini e nude

Le solitarie e piatte sabbie si estendono all'infinito.

**Theme:** Shelley wrote this sonnet at Marlow during a sonnet-writing friendly competition with Horace Smith (whose own sonnet of the same name was published in 1818).

This sonnet is probably Shelley's most famous and most anthologized poem-which is somewhat strange, considering that it is in many ways an atypical poem for Shelley, and that it touches little upon the most important themes in his oeuvre at large (beauty, expression, love, imagination). Still, "Ozymandias" is a masterful sonnet. Essentially it is devoted to a single metaphor: the shattered, ruined statue in the desert wasteland, with its arrogant, passionate face and monomaniacal inscription ("Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"). The once-great king's proud boast has been ironically disproved; Ozymandias's works have crumbled and disappeared, his civilization is gone, all has been turned to dust by the impersonal, indiscriminate, destructive power of history. The ruined statue is now merely a monument to one man's hubris, and a powerful statement about the insignificance of human beings to the passage of time. Ozymandias is first and foremost a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of political power, and in that sense the poem is Shelley's most outstanding political sonnet, trading the specific rage of a poem like "England in 1819" for the crushing impersonal metaphor of the statue. But Ozymandias symbolizes not only political power--the statue can be a metaphor for the pride and hubris of all of humanity, in any of its manifestations. It is significant that all that remains of Ozymandias is a work of art and a group of words; as Shakespeare does in the sonnets, Shelley demonstrates that art and language long outlast the other legacies of power.

**Form :** "Ozymandias" is a sonnet, a fourteen-line poem metered in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme is somewhat unusual for a sonnet of this era; it does not fit a conventional Petrarchan pattern, but instead interlinks the

octave (a term for the first eight lines of a sonnet) with the sestet (a term for the last six lines), by gradually replacing old rhymes with new ones in the form ABABACDCEDEFEF.