


OZYMANDIAS

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Sub: British Literature from Chaucer
to 18th century

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P. B SHELLY

- Major Romantic poet
- A radical in his Poetry as well as social and political views.
- Important influence on Browning, Hardy and Yeats.
- Famous posthumously.
- Important works: Ozymandias, Ode to the West Wind, To a skylark, Prometheus Unbound.
- Married to Mary Shelly –author of Frankenstein.

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- Uncompromising idealism and unconventional lifestyle made him an authoritative figure in his lifetime.
 - He always advocated Non-violence.
 - One of the best lyrical poets of all time.
 - Rebellious stance in life made him less famous during life time.
 - poetry reflects passion, beauty, imagination, love, creativity, political liberty and nature.
 - Being very sensitive and possessing distinctive qualities of hope, love, joy and imagination, Shelley strongly believed in realization of human happiness.

CONTEXT

- Shelley's friend the banker Horace Smith stayed with the poet and his wife Mary (author of *Frankenstein*) in the Christmas season of 1817.
- One evening, they began to discuss recent discoveries in the Near East.
- In the wake of Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798, the archeological treasures found there stimulated the European imagination.
- Shelley and Smith remembered the Roman-era historian Diodorus Siculus, who described a statue of Ozymandias, more commonly known as Rameses II
- Diodorus reports the inscription on the statue, which he claims was the largest in Egypt, as follows: "King of Kings Ozymandias am I. If any want to know how great I am and where I lie, let him outdo me in my work."

CONTINUATION...

- Stimulated by their conversation, Smith and Shelley wrote sonnets based on the passage in Diodorus.
- Smith produced a now-forgotten poem with the unfortunate title “On a Stupendous Leg of Granite, Discovered Standing by Itself in the Deserts of Egypt, with the Inscription Inserted Below.”
- Shelley’s contribution was “Ozymandias,” one of the best-known sonnets in European literature.

POEM SUMMARY

- The speaker recalls having met a traveler “from an antique land,” who told him a story about the ruins of a statue in the desert of his native country. Two vast legs of stone stand without a body, and near them a massive, crumbling stone head lies “half sunk” in the sand. The traveler told the speaker that the frown and “sneer of cold command” on the statue’s face indicate that the sculptor understood well the emotions (or “passions”) of the statue’s subject. The memory of those emotions survives “stamped” on the lifeless statue, even though both the sculptor and his subject are both now dead. On the pedestal of the statue appear the words, “My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” But around the decaying ruin of the statue, nothing remains, only the “lone and level sands,” which stretch out around it.

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.

ANALYSIS

- "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.
- 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.

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- 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.
 - The reader encounters Shelley's poem like an explorer coming upon a strange, desolate landscape.
 - The setting of Shelley's poem, a desert as described to the speaker, is symbolic of bleakness and emptiness.



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- The evidence is of a supreme leader whose legacy consists solely of a ruin, attesting to the transience of his self-declared glory and power. In this world, Shelley's message reads, nothing lasts; nothing has the power to sustain itself. Impermanence rules.
 - Shelley's message is a paraphrase of the scriptural wisdom that those who live by the sword shall perish by the sword.
 - The "frown" and "wrinkled lip" of the king also suggest the power the man held seems not to have achieved for him the happiness or fulfillment he might have expected.
 - In the view of Shelley and his generation, the "second wave" of Romantics, power was meaningless.

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- They came of age during the Napoleonic wars, when the unlimited might of the *anciens régimes* of Europe was destroyed, as was Napoleon's own power when he was finally defeated in 1815. People looked back on over twenty years of violence and asked, what was the point of it all? Ozymandias and his destruction are a metaphor for the events of Shelley's own time. The power Ozymandias held, like that of Bonaparte, was something false, illusory. Or, when it did exist, it was probably not worth having, and those who do seek power over others are contemptible, the worst of mankind.

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- Shelley's subtext is arguably that art survives, even when men and their "power" do not. Everything else has disappeared, but a piece of sculpture, though a ruin, still exists in this vast empty space devoid of anything else. Were it not for the artist who created that statue, there would be no evidence at all of Ozymandias.
 - By depicting the tyrant, the artist has demonstrated his superiority to him. Shelley identifies with the artist of the remote past. It is not merely that an individual artwork survives but that the practice of the arts over the millennia has been maintained. Shelley's poem itself is an analogue to the statue. Just as the sculptor of antiquity created a "record" of his time, Shelley memorialized his own age. "Ozymandias" can be seen as a symbol of the transitory nature of power and command in the early nineteenth century, when much of the old order was swept aside by Napoleon, and Napoleon himself was swept away, just like Ozymandias.

NATURE

- It is not only that Nature is an immense power against which man is nothing, but that the physical bleakness of the desert is an analogue to the emptiness of the vast stretch of time between this ancient despot and the present. Nature is a vast force: the winds and sands have swept away all of Ozymandias's "works" as well as wrecking the iconic symbol of him the sculptor created. But in its infinite reach, Nature is, in some sense, shocking to the human who contemplates it, forcing us not only to acknowledge our powerlessness but to recognize how frightening the immensity and the endlessness of time and space are

