

Mixture of Petrarchan (octave & sestet) & Shakespearean (line 1-4 rhyming ABAB) sonnet in iambic pentameter.

Lines 1-5 describe the statue.

Lines 6-8 describe the sculptor.

A pair of huge stone legs with no body standing in the middle of the desert.

It is like the whole statue is "shattered". What happened to the rest of the statue - war, natural disaster?

The sculptor understood & reproduced exactly the facial features & "passions" of the angry ruler.

The "passions" still survive because they are "stamped" on the fragments (face) of the statue.

Lines 6-7: Contrast between life & death: fragments (face) of the statue are called "lifeless things", the sculptor & statues subject is dead. The "passions" still survive.

"Works": Referring to the famous temples he constructed at Abu Simbel & Thebes or huge statues of him, as this one.

Line 12 reminds us that "nothing" remains besides the face, legs & pedestal. Everything lies in ruins & there is nothing else but the encroaching/intruding sand of the desert.

The title refers to a Greek name for the Egyptian king (a Pharaoh), Ramses II, who had a huge statue of himself built as a monument to his power.

# Ozymandias

Percy Bysshe Shelley  
(1792-1822)

I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert...Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage\* lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read\*  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:

And on the pedestal these words appear:  
'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.

Visage\* - face  
read\* - understood

Image: The "visage" (face) of the sculpture is partially buried in the sand, near the legs.

The face is not completely shattered because one can still see a "frown", "wrinkled lip", and a "sneer".

The statue was probably upset about something: he is frowning and sneering.

The "sneer" makes him in "cold command".

The heart that "fed"/nourished the passions of the pharaoh.

Two-fold meaning: example of lexical polysemy: 1) made fun of or 2) copied/imitated.

Line 10 reveals to us whom this statue represents. Lines 10-11 draws the reader's attention to the words on the base of the statue.

He is arrogant, believed that he was so powerful & the greatest of rulers.

His enemies would "despair" - cower (crouch down) in fear - at the sight of all the wonderful works that had been erected in the pharaoh's name and in his honour.

"Colossal" emphasises the scope of Ozymandias's ambitions, thus the "vast" (huge) statue.

**Anastrophe** - The inversion of the usual order of words.

**Enjambment**: The running on of the thought from one line, couplet, or stanza to the next without a syntactical break/punctuated pause.

**Synecdoche** - A figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa.

**Lexical polysemy:** The coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase.

### **What is the poem about?**

#### **What is the subject of the poem?**

🍏 A traveller has told the poet of a broken statue of a great pharaoh which lies half-buried in the desert sands of Egypt. It reminded the traveller of how the mighty have fallen, how a great pharaoh – who believed himself invincible – has become but a distant memory whose statue even has fallen into decay and ruin.

#### **Who is speaking?**

🍏 There are several different voices in this poem that put some distance between us and Ozymandias.

🍏 First there is the speaker of the poem, the guy who meets the traveler from an "antique land."

1<sup>st</sup> person narrative "I".

🍏 Then the traveller's voice occupies the rest of the poem. The traveller tells the story to the poet who tells it to us.

🍏 Most of the poem consists of the traveler's description of the statue lying in the desert, except for lines 10-11 where he tells us what the inscription on the statue says; and while the traveler speaks these lines, they really belong to Ozymandias, making him, in a sense, the third speaker in this polyphonic (or many-voiced) poem.

#### **Who is the narrator speaking to?**

🍏 The traveller tells a story to the narrator who tells it to us (the readers).

#### **What is the location/setting of the poem?**

🍏 "Ozymandias" has two settings.

🍏 The first is the place where the narrator meets the traveler (line 1). We do not know where this encounter takes place. It could be in the speaker's head, in a dream, on the street, or in the desert.

🍏 The second is the setting in the traveler's tale about a crumbling statue of an Egyptian king (pharaoh) in the sands of Egypt.

### **Themes and messages of the poem:**

🍏 "Ozymandias" explores the question of what happens to tyrant kings, and to despotic world leaders more generally. As we all know, nothing lasts forever; that means even the very worst political leaders – no matter how much they boast – all die at some point.

🍏 **Theme of the Octave (lines 1-8):** Describes what the traveller saw: the ruins of the ancient

statue of Ozymandias. He describes the characteristics of the statue, the frown, etc.

🍏 **Theme of the Sestet (lines 9-14):** Dwells on the irony of the downfall of tyranny. The great pharaoh who believed he ruled the entire world, is now dead and long forgotten so that even his statue lies in ruins, sinking into the desert.

### **Attitudes and feelings in the poem:**

#### **Emotions and feelings of the speaker:**

🍏 The speaker feels despair at the impermanence of everything. We all know we are going to die, there is no way of avoiding death, yet whenever something happens which reminds us of our own mortality we cannot help but feel despair too.

#### **Tone of the poem:**

🍏 Ironic, blunt (matter-of-fact) and satirical.

### **Form and structure of the poem (rhyme, rhythm, line length, stanza length, etc.):**

🍏 The rhyme scheme is initially Shakespearean, as the first four lines rhyme ABAB.

But then the poem gets strange: at lines 5-8 the rhyme scheme is ACDC, rather than the expected CDCD.

For lines 9-12, the rhyme scheme is EDEF, rather than EFEF.

Finally, instead of a concluding couplet we get another EF group.

🍏 Rhyme scheme can be schematized as follows: ABABACDCDEFEF.

#### **Type of poem:**

🍏 Mixture of Petrarchan (octave & sestet) & Shakespearean (line 1-4 rhyming ABAB) sonnet in iambic pentameter.

#### **Poetic devices (e.g. metaphors, similes, enjambment, alliteration, personification, etc.):**

🍏 Explained in the following questions and in the poem above.

### **Personal response to the poem (how do I feel, what impact does the poem have on me):**

🍏 When reading this poem I feel a sense of despair at the impermanence of everything. This poem is a reminder of our own mortality and the fact that we all are going to die; there is no way of avoiding death.

🍏 YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSE!

## Questions from knowledge4africa:

*I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert...*

### Which land is the poet referring to when the poet speaks of “an antique land”?

- Ancient Egypt.

### Which pharaoh does 'Ozymandias' represent?

- The Egyptian king, Ramses II, who had a huge statue of himself built as a monument to his power.
- He lived from 1279 to 1213 B.C.E and was some 96 years old when he died.
- He had 200 wives and concubines, with 96 sons and 60 daughters.

### What words tell us that the poet had not personally witnessed the scene he is describing?

- Lines 1-2: “I met a traveller from an antique land,/Who said:”
- The whole story/poem is based on what the traveller apparently told the poet.

### What does the poet mean when he says that the legs of stone were “vast” and “trunkless”?

- The legs were huge and detached from the body of the statue.

*Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,*

### Why should the “shattered visage” be “half sunk”?

- The stone face (“visage”) from the statue of Ramses II was lying in the desert sand. As the wind of ages blew, the sand covered the statue further and further, making it seem as if it was sinking into the sand.
- Before modern times, the Sphinx had to be dug out of the sand regularly as it became covered, and looked as though it was sinking.

### **What words tells us that the sculptor was accurate in his craftsmanship?**

- The poet tells us that the sculptor “well those passions read”.

### **Quote FOUR words or sets of words which tell us that the pharaoh, whose image is captured in stone, had little affection for his people.**

- “frown”
- “wrinkled up”
- “sneer of cold command”
- “the hand that mocked him”

*And on the pedestal these words appear:  
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!'*

### **Comment on the IRONY of the pharaoh's words, “Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!”**

- The pharaoh, in his arrogance, believed that he was so powerful and the greatest of rulers – the “king of kings”.
- His works – public buildings/temples, statues, etc. - were so great that everyone would cower (crouch down) in fear when they observed them.
- The irony, however, is that these great works have collapsed and lie in ruins everywhere, and few can even remember who Ramses II was.
- Such is the fate of the great tyrants.

### **To whom is Ozymandias referring when he speaks of “ye Mighty”? Why should they “despair”?**

- He is presumably referring to all his enemies.
- They would “despair” - cower (crouch down) in fear – at the sight of all the wonderful public works that had been erected in the pharaoh's name and in his honour.
- As soon as they saw these statues and monuments, they would know that such great works would indicate a truly powerful ruler.
- They would then tremble in fear at what he would do to them and their puny enemies.

*Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

**What does the poet mean when he says that “Nothing beside remains”?**

- Nothing remains besides the face, legs and pedestal of the statue.
- Everything lies in ruins and there is nothing else but the encroaching/intruding sand of the desert.

**Comment on these words (lines 12-14) as a conclusion to the sonnet.**

- Notice how the poet stresses the decay of the wreckage.
- The desert has encroached/intrude and destroyed even the last symbols of the pharaoh's power.
- The desert stretches as far as the eye can see. It is so vast (huge) that it has no boundaries/limitless (“boundless”) and nothing grows there (“bare”).
- The sand is devoid/lacking of vegetation and of people (“lone”). This was once a populated land during the time of the pharaoh.
- Even the symbols of the pharaoh's power are vanishing.