Ozymandias

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Analysis by Chris Lockley and Ingle Kwon
Ozymandias

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, stamp’d on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock’d 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.
Ye life of Percy Bysshe Shelley

• Born in Horsham, England, August 4, 1792

• Considered one of the major English romantic poets

• Attended Eton and Oxford – rumored to have attended only one lecture throughout his time at Oxford.

• Married to Mary Shelley – his second wife
History of Ozymandias

- Written in 1817 during a writing contest against Horace Smith

- First published in 11/Jan/1818 in Leigh Hunt's Examiner

- Thought to be inspired by the arrival of the statue of “younger Memnon” in Britain

- A ‘classic’ poem which has been studied and dissected countless times in the subject of English ever since its creation
Personal interpretation

• Central theme is man’s *hubris* (excessive pride)
  – A Greek term: also used as the noun for the cause of the antagonists down fall in Greek plays

• Through use of metaphor of rise, peak and fall of ozy, Shelley condenses all of civilization history

• Shows that all works of human kind, including social structures, will eventually become history
• Much like 1984, Shelley is alluring to the fact that the past doesn’t change the future or even the present, and although ozy’s short sighted pride seems funny, we must realize that all of the lessons are applicable today.

• Ozy refers to Ramses the Great, pharaoh of Egypt during the 19th dynasty.

• In line 7, ‘survive’ is a transitive verb with ‘hand’ and ‘heart’ as its objects, thus meaning that the passions evident in the sneering, arrogant ‘shattered visage’ have out lived both the sculptor and the pharaoh.
• ‘fed’ sounds like ‘the heart the consumed’ as opposed to ‘the heart that gave nourishment’. The pharaohs heart was fed by his passions.

• The lone level sands suggests the desolation the results from humans imposing themselves on the land.

• ‘nothing beside remains’ is both nothing as the space around the ruins but also puns on the ruins as remains and that nothing of those are left either.

• The ‘Nothing beside’ the ruins emphasizes desolation and disconnects them not only in space, but in time: from the busy and important context which they once existed.
• Irony on the fact the ozy says ‘look on my works, ye mighty, and despair’ and there is nothing left of the great kingdom we assume there once was

• ‘Ozy’ comes from the Greek ‘ozium’ which means ‘air’ and ‘mandius’ comes from ‘mandate’ which means ‘to rule’ so Ozymandias is the ruler of air, or the ruler of nothing

• ‘king of kings’ could represent nature itself because nature never disappears and it shows an immortality not shown by kings or kingdoms
• the first 11 lines are one sentence talking about a harsh, demanding, egotistical ruler who culminates in his own arrogant words, so is about pride.

• But since the poem ends without ozy himself it’s not just pride but how pride and human accomplishments are meaningless against the nonceasing march of time

• Interesting to note that the two ideas are linked with the ‘D’ rhyme of ‘things/kings’

• The ‘problem’ isn’t resolved until halfway through the sestet, on the 11th line
Line-by-line analysis

• Group One
  o I met a traveler from an antique land,
  Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
  Stand in the desert...

• Group Two
  o Near them, on the sand,
  Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
  And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
• Group Three
  o 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;

• Group Four
  o And on the pedestal, these words appear:
    "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
    Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

• Group Five
  o Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
    Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
    The lone and level sands stretch far away.
• For Group One the initial scene-setting and "antique" means both old and valuable; it's going to be a meaningful old story, then. "Vast" legs indicate that the man who built them had the power and money to build a huge statue and the ego to drive that building, as well.

• For Group Two, Shelley only revealed the lips of the statue. There are no eyes or other facial parts/features to establish Ozymandias. However, the mouth is all he needs, since Shelley moves from a simply upset "frown," though a more angry "wrinkled lip" to a disdainful "sneer." Moreover, the "cold command" shows us that Ozymandias was unfeeling and gave orders rather than asked questions.
• For Group Three, the story now shifts to the sculptor. He is Ozymandias’ servant so would necessarily depict the all-powerful king the way he’d want; thus when we’re told that the passions were “read” “well” we can be assured that Ozy was really as mean and self-centered as the statue indicates. “Them” in line eight represent “passions,” which means that it was the sculptor’s hand somehow mocking the king’s heart. (There are no “people” in this poem; the “them” is not the Egyptians Ozy ruled.)
For Group Four, it says “my” twice, “Ozymandias,” and “King of Kings.” That’s an awful lot of ego in two lines. “Mighty” is used as a noun there, which means it must refer to other kings who would “despair” because their “Works” would never be as great as his. The comma gives an extra pause before “King of Kings,” something which makes us emphasize it and it’s supreme position. The exclamation point, is the final emphasis of Ozy’s ego
Then in Group Five the ego is undercut by the little three-word sentence which follows. There is “nothing” there now: no Ozy, no works, nothing but sand. Well, not quite. The ruined statue is there, to remind us how earthly power and pride passes. Perhaps it also reveals how the sculptor “mocked” Ozymandias: what is still standing is not Ozymandias’s work but is instead the sculptor’s. Art lasts, not early (political) power. Note the use of alliteration — long “B” and “L” sounds in the last line — to emphasize just how tiny and alone the statue, and Ozy’s reputation, now is.
Language and structure

• Ozymandias is a Petrarchan sonnet written in the form of iambic Pentameter

• However, the rhyme scheme is different, ABABACDC-EDEFEF and links the poem together even between the divisions through D

• The couplets -feet- are not always iambic ( - / ) and contains spondaic, trochaic and pyrrhic couplets, breaking the ‘square’ feeling of sonnets in general and allows the ‘thought’ to flow naturally

• Enjambment is applied to separate the octave and the sestet
• Each division of the poem is one continuous line of thought, adding to the sinuous, intertwining effect.

• The diction is chosen with great care and creates a strong imagery – as you may have noticed in the analysis.

• The notable diction of the poem is combined with alliteration to create even more powerful imagery, such as the “sneer of cold command”.

• Metaphorical uses help carry across the theme of the poem.
According to survey, the name Ozymandias is actually pronounced ozy-MANdias and was based on a statue found in the outback of Australia rumored to have depicted a famous Aboriginal king, hence the pronunciation ozy-MANdias.

JUST KIDDING