

"ozymandias":  
shelley's investigation  
in permanence  
through the use of  
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" My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;/ Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!" (10) demands the pedestal of the statue of the previously named ancient ruler. Out of context a casual passerby of the king's shattered sculpted likeness might infer that Ozymandias was a powerful presence in the region, and that he had dominion over not only his loyal subjects, but abstract concepts like time and death. In context, knowing that his statue is now primarily rubble, abandoned and forgotten in the desert, one can recognize that it is Ozymandias who is in fact the one ruled by time. In the poem the speaker meets an unnamed traveler who tells of the rule of Ozymandias long ago, a legend which is contradicted by the crumbling statue the speaker stumbled upon in the desert. Percy Bysshe Shelley highlights this theme in the poem through the use of provocative diction and the juxtaposition of unlike things, communicating to the reader that nothing is permanent, and all is eventually lost to the stubborn march of time.

First, through the use of diction, Shelley presents Ozymandias as a concept of power and monarchical glory. This pays off later in the poem when the reader realizes that even the mighty Ozymandias is powerless against time, reinforcing the claim that time masters us all. For example, Shelley chooses in line one to describe the desert where Ozymandias' statue lies in ruins as an " antique land". This attaches to Ozymandias the connotations of the word antique, specifically the idea that something that is antique carries extra value than its less historical counterparts. This imbues the character of Ozymandias with regality and historical worth. It is in these first lines of the poem where the speaker builds upon the image of a powerful Ozymandias, which is next reinforced by the choice of the word " visage" in line four to

describe the king's facial features. Although the visage is one that is "half sunk" and "shattered" (4), the elitist nature the word visage connotes gives the reader a glimpse into the royal pompousness of Ozymandias. Even if the speaker does concede that today this is not the case, and that more relevant to this era is the destruction of the statue, this portrayal of a once-powerful king reinforces the weight of his downfall. If the great Ozymandias now lies in ruins, we truly are helpless against the ticking time of fate. The speaker does provide one last glimpse into what Ozymandias was like as a king, when the speaker is describing the "wrinkled lip" the "frown" and "sneer of cold command" (4-5) which remain in the sculptor's depiction of Ozymandias. Here it is revealed not only that Ozymandias was powerful, but that he was also notably cruel in his subjugation of his people. This choice in depicting Ozymandias as cruel instead of benevolent inspires imagery of a rule with no checks and where the king's full wrath could be exercised. Compared to his current state in the desert, where his likeness is now passive shattered remains, this is a significant shift in characterization, and it supports the speaker's claim that even the most powerful and dominative will fall to the master of time.

Throughout the poem, there is a juxtaposition of Ozymandias as a powerful ruler, and Ozymandias as the abandoned remains of a statue. So while there is diction which portrays Ozymandias as a powerful force in his rule, the word choice which contradicts that idea is similarly important to the overall meaning. For example, in line 12, the shattered remains of his statue is described as "the decay". The connotation of the word decay with dying plant or animal matter is an obvious shift from the Ozymandias who wore a "

sneer of cold command" (5). The result is that while the memory of Ozymandias is that of an active and even possibly abusive ruler, his current condition is revealed to be in complete contradiction with this, as the rubble of his statue sits idly forgotten in the desert. All that is left of Ozymandias at this point is his "frown", "wrinkled lip", and "sneer" (4-5), but even these lose their significance as they were "stamped on [this] lifeless [thing]" (7). Describing the sculpting process as stamping has a connotation of a quick imprint instead of a careful chiseling process, but similarly important is a possible separate meaning. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, another meaning of stamp is, "to extinguish or destroy by or as if by stamping with the foot- usually used with out." Perhaps this additional meaning was unintentional, but within the context of the poem it is not unreasonable to consider this word choice as a conscious signaling of the extinguishing of Ozymandias and his memory by the ever constant march of time. Diction is important to reveal this theme, but it is the juxtaposition of diction describing Ozymandias as a ruler, and the remains of his abandoned statue that highlight the contrast between the power and passivity of Ozymandias before and after he was lost to time.

The core juxtaposition of the poem is in lines 10-12, following the description on the pedestal of his statue "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;/ Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" with "Nothing beside remains.", referring to the barren desert to where Ozymandias' statue has been abandoned. This serves to contrast the two competing narratives which are the basis of the poem: that Ozymandias was a forceful and powerful ruler but that he is now alone and crumbling, lost to the world entirely. Throughout

the poem however, other juxtapositions serve to highlight the theme in a similar way. Another example can be seen in lines 4-7 with "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 juxtaposition of words and phrases such as "frown" (4) and "sneer of cold command" (5) which depict Ozymandias as cruel and controlling in his rule, with the description of his statue as a "lifeless [thing]" (7) and his visage as "shattered" (4) again serves to reinforce these two competing depictions of Ozymandias as powerful and powerless.

Juxtaposition is not used only to compare these two ideas of his character, but is also used to contrast other aspects of Ozymandias. This is used in line 8 with "The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;" where Ozymandias' cruelty and benevolence are juxtaposed in part of the development of the characterization of Ozymandias as a leader.

Juxtaposition is also used to establish setting. In line 13, "Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare/ The lone and level sands stretch far away" the rubble is juxtaposed with the lonely desert to which it had been lost. This reinforces the defeat and abandonment of Ozymandias by time, and supports the theme of the lack of permanence of not just Ozymandias, but everything.

In "Ozymandias" by Shelley, diction and juxtaposition are the formal features most often used to support the theme. Other features like alliteration in "boundless and bare" (13) "lone and level" (14) and "cold command" (5) serve to highlight important descriptive phrases in the poem, <https://assignbuster.com/ozymandias-shelleys-investigation-in-permanence-through-the-use-of-diction-and-juxtapositio/>

but their ultimate purpose is often to serve the overarching formal features of diction and juxtaposition. For example, " Boundless and bare" is juxtaposed with " that colossal wreck" while the alliteration serves to highlight further this juxtaposition. By describing Ozymandias as he was as a leader and as he is, as a pile of rubble in the desert, the poem is able to contrast the two, and this in turn supports the claim that even the powerful Ozymandias who is " King of Kings" (10) is no match for the march of time. Nothing is permanent, time masters us all, and through the use of juxtaposition of unlike things, and diction, Shelley reveals in the poem this great truth of our world.