

Man vs. nature in ozymandias by percy shelley

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The beginning of the 1800's in England saw a spark of interest in all things Egyptian; from discovering new monuments to an influence on poetic style. The colossal bust of King Ramses II arrived at the British Museum in 1821, where it remains, and is said to be the subject of Percy Shelly's poem "Ozymandias". It was Ramses II who had declared, in words less rhythmical than Shelley made them, "Should any man seek to know how great I am and where I lie, let him surpass one of my works," which comes from words translated from an ancient bust of the king. In Shelly's poem, inspired by the pretensions of this king of antiquity, the author shows the ultimate morality of personal glory by nature's means through many subtle, yet powerful, literary devices.

When discussing a poem as powerful as "Ozymandias", one must first look at basic components that come together to create the complex. Some important literary elements included are the poet's perception and the unusual rhyme scheme developed throughout the poem. To give a brief insight into the author himself, Shelly once described himself as open to new poetical abstractions, and that concept is shown in the organization and word choice conveying the theme, along with various tones. His persona throughout the stanzas is one of observation and reflection, as if an outsider to the subject is recalling the words of someone familiar with the king Ozymandias himself, "I met a traveler from an antique land/ Who said..." (Shelley 500). This first sentence not only implies the previous inference, but opens the interest of a broad audience who might have felt a connection with a observing view. The rhyme scheme and form focus more on the connotative and structural significance. Combinations of sounds such as "

land/stand, trunkless/sunk, and stone/lone” (Shelley 500) convey a powerful but tightly controlled mood. The predictability of the rhymes also entertain the powerful thought about the inevitability of nature’s terrain over human accomplishment, which is the main theme of the poem. This predictability also makes the sense of downfall seem evident: a climatic build up of words that seem obsolete give the impression that the ending is also to become just as obsolete.

The main theme of “ Ozymandias” may seem obvious once explained, but is highly debated even to today, and no interpretation is considered wrong as long as it can be argued for. Many scholars say that Shelley’s personal life and opinions in his time period also influenced his decision to write this poem with such abstractions. “ Shelley lived in a period when the British government, fearful of revolution, took oppressive measures against radicalism. Habeas Corpus was suspended in 1817. His hatred of tyranny is well-known and was eloquently expressed in much of his prose and correspondence, while political events occasionally prompted him to write a poem.” (Hebron 2). Writing “ Ozymandias” and including the theme that even the mightiest of tyrants are obliterated by time is considered to be a political move on Shelley’s part, and implies that the theme was written not only to enamor the public, but to promote his personal views on the current situations as famous poets and authors have done throughout history and continue to do.

The many interpretative meanings of this poem and its unique poetic sense was recently brought to light in front of a new audience. The television series

“ Breaking Bad” produced an episode titled “ Ozymandias” in one of the final episodes of its series, referencing the show’s correlation to the theme of the original. A simplified version of the show’s intricate and involved plot does not do it justice: the main character rises out of a small name to huge fortune and stature, then slowly begins to fall apart after the deaths of his many partners in crime following this episode, the pinnacle of his downfall. This specific title begins his decline from the pedestal the entire series has lead him on. The use of the title “ Ozymandias” has personal and moral significance in this episode and to the audience. Lines spoken in this episode, though specific to the show, can be compared to the style and impact of the original literary work. By simply correlating the thematic actions of the episode to the abstractions described in the poem “ Ozymandias”, the main concept is open to a new interpretation and a modern portrayal. The psychological impact of this episode is also comparable to the impact the poem had to its audience at the time of its release. Man, tortured by the inevitable, has face ultimately face what is to come, which was a new and intrusive thought to the public in the 1800’s. Today, it still is, but to be portrayed in this way, on television, is comparable to the initial release.

The literary idea of “ man vs. nature” is seen in more than the connotations and context of this poem. Man’s ideal legacy and arrogance leads to his own downfall, and his memory is erased by nature. This is relevant more than ever today: many names in the modern day strive to leave a mark on the world, whether it is good or bad. “ Ozymandias” should serve as not only an

example, but a warning to these people who challenge the forgetfulness of history.