

Commentary on the  
poem "Ozymandias  
King of Egypt" by  
Percy Bysshe Shelley



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The poem "Ozymandias King of Egypt", being a very powerful poem, is generally a poem about power and is written as a short, structured and rhyming story which discusses the meaning of life and the changes going on in the world all the time. "Ozymandias King of Egypt" is actually a sonnet. It has fourteen lines and iambic pentameter and is divided into octet and sestet which makes it a Petrarchian sonnet. The rhyme is present, as it should be in a proper sonnet, but no clear rhyme scheme is used and this makes the reader think that something is out of order. I think that the rhyme scheme represents the difference between the way the king thought future was going to be and the reality, his future was out of order as well as the rhyme.

This sonnet deals with a number of important themes like power, difference between the reality and hopes and the changes in the world which never leave anything the same way it was. It has a lot of irony in it, it sounds like the poet is mocking Ozymandias who was used to be powerful and confident, who thought himself unconquerable and who was in fact conquered and stayed there, with his head lying on the sand and with his shame shown to everyone who passes by. In this poem there are three voices; the author who starts the story as a first person: "I met a traveller ...", the traveller who actually tells the whole story: "two vast and trunkless legs of stone..." and Ozymandias who calls himself "king of kings" and fills this poem with irony. Instead of ruling people and inspiring fear in them, as he was sure he will be, his words are turned into a mockery and instead of being the "king of kings" he turns up to be the king of fools.

The statue is described as a "colossal wreck boundless and bare" and this totally contradicts the reason for which it was built. The condition of the stones described by Shelley only highlights the despair of the king described by sculptor's hand. The sculptor gave us a picture of a powerful king with no reason to smile. The phrase "cold command" portrays him as a militaristic leader that has seen more death and destruction than a whole army but the last destruction connected to him is actually the destruction of his own sculpture which is quite ironic and passes on the theme of possible defeat and failure after being powerful. I also think that one of the major themes of this poem is death because in the case of Ozymandias his death destroyed everything, his power, greatness and glory.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was a revolutionary poet who believed in equality of all people and was against oppression and this poem really talks about equality of all people, from kings to ordinary peasants, in the eyes of death. This poem shows that nothing can be immortal, neither people nor the memories about them. There is a big contrast between the loss of power of Ozymandias and the great power of Shelley's poem. Shelley powerfully underlines the worst parts of the monument "Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown and wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command" and shows that Ozymandias is defeated, has no power at all and "nothing beside remains". In a way the poem abandons the idea of the purpose of the life.

It shows that all our greatest accomplishments and successes in life so important to us now after our death will be covered by sands and probably even mocked over. Maybe some personal problems of Percy Bysshe Shelley are being reflected in this poem. In this poem the great ability and I would <https://assignbuster.com/commentary-on-the-poem-ozymandias-king-of-egypt-by-percy-bysshe-shelley/>

even say talent of a great man are shown as if been wasted and maybe Percy Bysshe Shelley feels the same way about himself. His was definitely a man of great ability and talent so I think that either he felt that his ability was wasted and he had some bad times in his life at that time or he was afraid of ending up like Ozymandias, being forgotten and mocked over after his death with all his accomplishments being buried in the sand.

What makes this poem even more powerful is that this poem is not much more than just a description of a landscape seen by "a traveller from an antique land". There is no personal feedback of whomever in this poem and no additional explanations about the theme. It is amazing how just a simple landscape can pass on an important theme of life death and power if is well written. In every piece of it there is a hidden word for the reader to discover. "Lone and level sands" represent loneliness, "half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies" represents defeat, "the hand that mock'd them" represents power "and the heart that fed" represents generosity and greatness.

In general this poem is a sonnet about life, Percy Bysshe Shelley described the circle of life and death, the rise and the fall, the power and defeat in just fourteen lines and explored the important themes of time and everyone being equal in front of death and if religious in front of the god. He explained by a little sonnet form story that everything changes and that everyone can be defeated. I see the message he was trying to pass on as it is never late to rise and it is never impossible to fall and that "the hand that mock'd them" will once be mocked back. Everyone will get what he deserves.