

II. ANNOTATIONS

Ozymandias : a Greek form of an Egyptian name. *Ozymandias* is supposed to have ruled Egypt and conquered a few Asiatic

countries about 4000 years ago. L. 1. *Antique land* : old country; Egypt. Egyptian civilisation can be traced to prehistoric times. L. 4. *Half sunk* : half-buried in sand. the statue. *Frown* : scowl, sign of anger. *Shattered visage* : broken face of led under-lip, sign of pride. L. 5. *Wrinkled lip* : cur- turning up the nose. *Cold command* : expression of contempt, as by *Sculptor* : statue-maker. *Well those passions read* : the sculptor could understand the passions of pride, contempt etc. in his model (King Ozymandias). L. 6. *Which yet survive* : these passions have outlived. *Stamped* : engraved. *Lifeless things* : stone of the statue. L. 8. *The hand that mocked them* : the hand of the artist who showed his dislike for the king's pride. *The heart that fed* : the heart of king Ozymandias who harboured the passions of pride etc. L. 9. *Pedestal* : base of the statue. L. 11. *king of king* : emperor. L. 11. *Mighty* : great people. *And despair* : and feel disappointed because you will not be able to equal me. L. 12. *Nothing beside remains* : except (beside) the broken statue nothing at all remains. *Decay* : ruins. L. 13. *Colossal* : huge (from *Colossus* meaning a huge statue, especially that of Apollo standing at the entrance of the harbour of Rhodes). *Wreck* : broken statue. *Boundless* : unending. *Bare* : without any plants etc. L. 14. *Lone* : with out any living being. *Stretch* : extend.

III. EXPLANATIONS WITH CRITICAL COMMENTS

1. Ll. 4-8. *Whose frown ... heart that fed*. The statue of King Ozymandias wears an expression of hauteur, contempt, arrogance and cruel confidence even to this day. Its face wears a frown and a sneer, and its upper lip is curled as if in scorn. Thus the statue bears a life-like resemblance to Ozymandias, and depicts a distinct personality. It is evidently the work of a skilful sculptor who could impart such life-like resemblance to a mere piece of stone, and could capture such ephemeral (i.e., short-lived) feelings on such a life-less and hard substance as stone. The man who made the statue and made these feelings immortal has been dead these four thousand years. The king whose resemblance the statue bears and on whose face these feelings so vividly captured played for a while is also dead. But these feelings still play upon the face of the statue as a living testimony of the skill of the artist. They remind us that though the heart from which these feelings may arise may stop palpitating, and though the artist who reproduces them on hard stone may also pass away, these feelings have been made permanent on stone. Thus art imparts permanence and continuity to that which in actual life is of a transient, ephemeral nature.

2. Ll. 9-14. *My name is Ozymandias...stretch far away*. These remaining lines of the poem put forth two ideas which form a powerful and emphatic contrast to the idea expressed in the first eight lines. These ideas are : (1) The boastful lines inscribed under the statue which claims greatness and glory for Ozymandias. These words are

powerfully contrasted with the actual condition in which we find the statue today, for where is King Ozymandias now, and who has even heard of him ? (2) The vastness of the boundless desert which surrounds the ruins of the statue. This is contrasted with the smallness of the "colossal" statue, for what is this statue as compared with the great desert ? Thus, these six lines complete the poem and through these powerful contrasts, present the following ideas : (i) The vanity of human pomp and greatness; (ii) the boastfulness of Man and (iii) his littleness in contrast to the vastness of Nature.

IV. INTRODUCTION AND CRITICAL SUMMARY OR DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

Introduction. This sonnet, written in 1817, was first printed in Hunt's *The Examiner* in 1818, and was published with *Rosalind and Helen* in 1819. Shelley appears to have borrowed the subject of *Ozymandias* from the Greek history of Diodorus Siculus, who describes a memorial of a king Osymandias with the following inscription : "I am Osymandias, king of kings; if any one wishes to know how great I am and where I lie, let him surpass any of my works". Osymandias was the Greek name for king Rameses II formed from his by-name Vasimare. Shelley seems to have known that the memorial described by Diodorus was that of Rameses. The shattered trunk of the gigantic statue of Rameses still lies among the ruins of Ramesseum at Thebes.

Critical Summary. A traveller relates how, in a vast, boundless desert there stands the statue of King Ozymandias. Only its legs stand : its broken trunk lies half buried in sand. The inscription on the pedestal shows that Ozymandias thought himself mightier than God. The ruins of the dead king's statue offer a strong contrast to the vastness of the desert and the empty boast inscribed on it, and thus stand as an eloquent commentary on the vanity of human greatness.

V. INTERPRETATION AND CRITICAL APPRECIATION

• **As a Sonnet.** *Ozymandias* is one of the best sonnets that Shelley wrote. Technically the poem conforms to the sonnet form in having fourteen lines in iambic metre, and in having ten syllables in each line. But in its rhyme scheme (*ab ab ac dc ed ef ef*) it conforms neither to a Shakespearean nor to a Miltonic sonnet. William Shairp writes : "Shelley wrote even fewer sonnets than did Byron : but the few that Byron wrote he wrote well, and this cannot be said of Shelley. This imaginative and beautiful (though far from flawless) poem in fourteen lines is so divergent from all accepted rules that it can hardly be styled a sonnet. No writer nowadays could venture to print a sonnet with such rhymes as *stone—frown : appear—despair*. As an imaginative poem it is, as is felt by every reader, very impressive. It is strange that Shelley, the most poetic of poets, should have been unable to write a good

sonnet; probably the restrictions of the form pressed upon him with a special heaviness”.

Presentation of theme. In spite of its technical drawbacks as a sonnet *Ozymandias* is universally accepted as one of the finest poems by Shelley. The theme of his sonnet—ravages of time—is the favourite theme with Shakespeare, and in its presentation with detachment and poetic skill Shelley has indeed come very near the great master. If he had not wriggled out of the fetters of the sonnet form, he would never have been able to attain such magnificence for this poem. To make what he wants to say more convincing he maintains the detached tone throughout the poem. Except the first ten words where Shelley seems to imply that he will merely report and not interpret, the entire poem is fashioned after a traveller's tale. Shelley has employed this device deliberately because he knows that morals preached indirectly and through narration of events by supposed eye-witnesses can be much quicker to get home than plain, direct sermons. The clear visual images at the beginning of the tale are meant to suggest the traveller's reliability and quick observation of relevant details. The crux of the poem, the inscription, seems more convincing because it seems to come from a reliable impartial traveller. This explains why the last three lines of the poem which contain the irony of the inscription as well as the theme seem so poignant, convincing and clear to anyone who reads the poem.

Uniqueness of the poem. *Ozymandias* is different in subject and treatment from all other works of the poet. On this aspect of the poem Desmond King-Hele writes : “No one who was asked to select a typical poem of Shelley's would choose *Ozymandias* : intuitively one feels the poem is completely untypical, and it is not difficult to see why. First there is the subject; Shelley usually wrote about things dear to his heart, while *Ozymandias* is a little remote. Then there is the tone, which, partly because of the subject, is passionless, objective and calm, instead of being passionate, subjective and excited. Last, and perhaps most important, there is the aim. Shelley's habit was to aim high, sometimes impossibly high, and even though he would often turn out the most rewarding type of poem which yields new layers of meaning at each re-reading, his success was rarely complete. In *Ozymandias*, however, he is content with a limited objective, a straightforward piece of irony, and he succeeds completely.”