

# *Ozymandias*

Percy Bysshe Shelley - 1792-1822

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, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked 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."

## **Ozymandias”**

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## **SUMMARY “OZYMANDIAS”**

### **Summary**

The speaker recalls having met a traveler “from an antique land,” who told him a story about the ruins of a statue in the desert of his native country. Two vast legs of stone stand without a body, and near them a massive, crumbling stone head lies “half sunk” in the sand. The traveler told the speaker that the frown and “sneer of cold command” on the statue’s face indicate that the sculptor understood well the emotions (or “passions”) of the statue’s subject. The memory of those emotions survives “stamped” on the lifeless statue, even though both the sculptor and his subject are both now dead. On the pedestal of the statue appear the words, “My

name is Ozymandias, king of kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” But around the decaying ruin of the statue, nothing remains, only the “lone and level sands,” which stretch out around it.

## Form

“Ozymandias” is a sonnet, a fourteen-line poem metered in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme is somewhat unusual for a sonnet of this era; it does not fit a conventional Petrarchan pattern, but instead interlinks the octave (a term for the first eight lines of a sonnet) with the sestet (a term for the last six lines), by gradually replacing old rhymes with new ones in the form ABABACDCEDEFEF.

## Commentary

This sonnet from 1817 is probably Shelley’s most famous and most anthologized poem—which is somewhat strange, considering that it is in many ways an atypical poem for Shelley, and that it touches little upon the most important themes in his oeuvre at large (beauty, expression, love, imagination). Still, “Ozymandias” is a masterful sonnet. Essentially it is devoted to a single metaphor: the shattered, ruined statue in the desert wasteland, with its arrogant, passionate face and monomaniacal inscription (“Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”). The once-great

king's proud boast has been ironically disproved; Ozymandias's works have crumbled and disappeared, his civilization is gone, all has been turned to dust by the impersonal, indiscriminate, destructive power of history. The ruined statue is now merely a monument to one man's hubris, and a powerful statement about the insignificance of human beings to the passage of time. Ozymandias is first and foremost a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of political power, and in that sense the poem is Shelley's most outstanding political sonnet, trading the specific rage of a poem like "England in 1819" for the crushing impersonal metaphor of the statue. But Ozymandias symbolizes not only political power—the statue can be a metaphor for the pride and hubris of all of humanity, in any of its manifestations. It is significant that all that remains of Ozymandias is a work of art and a group of words; as Shakespeare does in the sonnets, Shelley demonstrates that art and language long outlast the other legacies of power.

Of course, it is Shelley's brilliant poetic rendering of the story, and not the subject of the story itself, which makes the poem so memorable. Framing the sonnet as a story told to the speaker by "a traveller from an antique land" enables Shelley to add another level of obscurity to Ozymandias's position with regard to the reader—rather than seeing the statue with our own eyes, so to speak, we hear

about it from someone who heard about it from someone who has seen it. Thus the ancient king is rendered even less commanding; the distancing of the narrative serves to undermine his power over us just as completely as has the passage of time. Shelley's description of the statue works to reconstruct, gradually, the figure of the "king of kings": first we see merely the "shattered visage," then the face itself, with its "frown / And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command"; then we are introduced to the figure of the sculptor, and are able to imagine the living man sculpting the living king, whose face wore the expression of the passions now inferable; then we are introduced to the king's people in the line, "the hand that mocked them and the heart that fed." The kingdom is now imaginatively complete, and we are introduced to the extraordinary, prideful boast of the king: "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" With that, the poet demolishes our imaginary picture of the king, and interposes centuries of ruin between it and us: " '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."

## AN INTRODUCTION ON ROMANTIC PERIOD

“[I]f Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all,” proposed John Keats in an 1818 letter, at the age of 22. This could be called *romantic* in sentiment, lowercase *r*, meaning fanciful, impractical, unachievably ambitious. But Keats’s axiom could also be taken as a one-sentence distillation of British Romanticism—with its all-or-nothing stance on the spontaneity of the highest art, its conviction of the sympathetic connections between nature’s organic growth and human creativity, and its passion for individual imagination as an originating force. This period is generally mapped from the first political and poetic tremors of the 1780s to the 1832 Reform Act. No major period in English-language literary history is shorter than that half-century of the Romantic era, but few other eras have ever proved as consequential. Romanticism was nothing short of a revolution in how poets understood their art, its provenance, and its powers: ever since, English-language poets have furthered that revolution or formulated reactions against it.

In Britain, Romanticism was not a single unified movement, consolidated around any one person, place, moment, or manifesto, and the various schools, styles, and stances we now label *capital-R Romantic* would resist being lumped into one clear category. Yet all of Romanticism’s products exploded out of the same set of contexts: some were a century in the making; others were overnight upheavals. Ushered in by revolutions in the United States (1776) and France (1789), the

Romantic period coincides with the societal transformations of the Industrial Revolution, the rise of liberal movements and the state's counterrevolutionary measures, and the voicing of radical ideas—Parliamentary reform, expanded suffrage, abolitionism, atheism—in pamphlets and public demonstrations. Though Britain avoided an actual revolution, political tensions sporadically broke out into traumatizing violence, as in the Peterloo massacre of 1819, in which state cavalry killed at least 10 peaceful demonstrators and wounded hundreds more.

Emboldened by the era's revolutionary spirit, Romantic poets invented new literary forms to match. Romantic poetry can argue radical ideas explicitly and vehemently (as in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "England in 1819," a sonnet in protest of Peterloo) or allegorically and ambivalently (as in William Blake's "The Tyger," from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*). To quote from William Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the groundbreaking collection he wrote with fellow poet-critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Romantic poets could "choose incidents and situations from common life" as its subjects, describing them not in polished or high-flown diction but instead in everyday speech, "a selection of language really used by men." Romanticism can do justice to the disadvantaged, to those marginalized or forgotten by an increasingly urban and commercial culture—rural workers, children, the poor, the elderly, or the disabled—or it can testify to individuality simply by foregrounding the

poet's own subjectivity at its most idiosyncratic or experimental.

Alongside prevailing political and social ideas, Romantic poets put into practice new aesthetic theories, cobbled from British and German philosophy, which opposed the neoclassicism and rigid decorum of 18th-century poetry. To borrow the central dichotomy of critic M.H. Abrams's influential book *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), Romantic poets broke from the past by no longer producing artistic works that merely mirrored or reflected nature faithfully; instead, they fashioned poems that served as lamps illuminating truths through self-expression, casting the poets' subjective, even impressionistic, experiences onto the world. From philosophers such as Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, the Romantics inherited a distinction between two aesthetic categories, the beautiful and the sublime—in which *beautiful* suggests smallness, clarity, and painless pleasure, and *sublime* suggests boundlessness, obscurity, and imagination-stretching grandeur. From the German critic A.W. Schlegel, Coleridge developed his ideal of “organic form,” the unity found in artworks whose parts are interdependent and integral to the whole—grown, like a natural organism, according to innate processes, not externally mandated formulas. The most self-conscious and self-critical British poets to date, the Romantics justified their poetic experimentations in a variety of prose genres (prefaces, reviews, essays, diaries, letters, works of autobiography or philosophy) or else inside the

poetry itself. But they never wrote only for other poets and critics: the Romantics competed in a burgeoning literary marketplace that made room for the revival of English and Scottish ballads (narrative folk songs, transcribed and disseminated in print), the recovery of medieval romances (one etymological root of *Romantic*), and prose fiction ranging from the psychological extremes of the gothic novel to the wit of Jane Austen's social realism. Romantic poets looked curiously backward—to Greek mythology, friezes, and urns or to a distinctly British cultural past of medieval ruins and tales of knights and elves—to look speculatively forward. Perhaps no pre-Romantic author inspired the Romantics more than William Shakespeare, who exemplified what Keats termed "*Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason." For Keats, "a great poet" such as Shakespeare opened his imagination to all possibilities, limited neither by an insistent search for truth nor by his own egocentric gravity: "the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."

Drawing on unrestrained imagination and a variegated cultural landscape, a Romantic-era poem could be trivial or fantastic, succinctly songlike or digressively meandering, a searching fragment or a precisely bounded sonnet or ode, as comic as Lord Byron's mock epic *Don Juan* or as cosmologically subversive as Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. If any single innovation has



emerged as Romanticism's foremost legacy, it is the dominance among poetic genres of the lyric poem, spoken in first-person (the lyric I) often identified with the poet, caught between passion and reason, finding correspondences in natural surroundings for the introspective workings of heart and mind. If any collection cemented that legacy, it would be Wordsworth and Coleridge's landmark collection *Lyrical Ballads*, first published anonymously in 1798. The collection provokes with its title alone, inverting hierarchies, hybridizing the exalted outbursts of lyric poetry with the folk narratives of ballads. In a retrospective preface added for the 1800 second edition and expanded in later editions, Wordsworth set out his polemical program for a poetry grounded in feeling, supplying Romanticism with some of its most resonant and lasting phrases: "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"; "it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity."

The following poems, poets, articles, poem guides, and recordings offer introductory samples of the Romantic era. Included are the monumental Romantic poets often nicknamed "the Big Six"—the older generation of Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge and the so-called Young Romantics—Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Indispensable women poets such as Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and Felicia Dorothea Hemans; the Scottish poet and lyricist Robert Burns; and the farm laborer–poet John Clare are also represented. But even this collection is only a beginning: no introduction to

Romanticism can encompass the entire period in all its variety and restless experimentation.

### Who Was Percy Bysshe Shelley?

Percy Bysshe Shelley is one of the epic poets of the 19th century and is best known for his classic anthology verse works such as *Ode to the West Wind* and *The Masque of Anarchy*. He is also well known for his long-form poetry, including *Queen Mab* and *Alastor*. He went on many adventures with his second wife, Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*.

### Early Life

Percy Bysshe Shelley, a controversial English writer of great personal conviction, was born on August 4, 1792. He was born and raised in the English countryside in the village Broadbridge Heath, just outside of West Sussex. He learned to fish and hunt in the meadows surrounding his home, often surveying the rivers and fields with his cousin and good friend Thomas Medwin. His parents were Timothy Shelley, a squire and member of Parliament, and Elizabeth Pilfold. The oldest of their seven children, Shelley left home at age of 10 to study at Syon House Academy, about 50 miles north of Broadbridge Heath and 10 miles west of central London. After two years, he enrolled at Eton College. While there, he was severely bullied, both physical and mentally, by his classmates. Shelley retreated into his imagination. Within a year's time, he had published two novels and two volumes of poetry, including *St*

## *Irvyne and Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson.*

In the fall of 1810, Shelly entered University College, Oxford. It seemed a better academic environment for him than Eton, but after a few months, a dean demanded that Shelley visit his office. Shelley and his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg had co-authored a pamphlet titled *The Necessity of Atheism*. Its premise shocked and appalled the faculty (“...The mind cannot believe in the existence of a God.”), and the university demanded that both boys either acknowledge or deny authorship. Shelley did neither and was expelled.

Shelley’s parents were so exasperated by their son’s actions that they demanded he forsake his beliefs, including vegetarianism, political radicalism and sexual freedom. In August 1811, Shelley eloped with Harriet Westbrook, a 16-year-old woman his parents had explicitly forbidden him to see. His love for her was centered on the hope that he could save her from committing suicide. They eloped, but Shelley was soon annoyed with her and became interested in a woman named Elizabeth Hitchener, a schoolteacher who inspired his first major poem, *Queen Mab*. The poem’s title character, a fairy originally invented by William Shakespeare and described in *Romeo and Juliet*, describes what a utopian society on earth would be like.

In addition to long-form poetry, Shelley also began writing political pamphlets, which he distributed by way of hot air balloons, glass bottles and paper boats. In 1812, he met his hero and future mentor, the radical political philosopher William Godwin, author of *Political Justice*.

### **Relationships with Harriet and Mary**

Although Shelley's relationship with Harriet remained troubled, the young couple had two children together. Their daughter, Elizabeth Ianthe, was born in June 1813, when Shelley was 21. Before their second child was born, Shelley abandoned his wife and immediately took up with another young woman. Well-educated and precocious, his new love interest was named Mary, the daughter of Shelley's beloved mentor, Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft, the famous feminist author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. To Shelley's surprise, Godwin was not in favor of Shelley dating his daughter. In fact, Godwin so disapproved that he would not speak with Mary for the next three years. Shelley and Mary fled to Paris, taking Mary's sister, Jane, with them. They departed London by ship and, mostly traveling by foot, toured France, Switzerland, Germany and Holland, often reading aloud to each other from the works of Shakespeare and Rousseau.

When the three finally returned home, Mary was pregnant and so was Shelley's wife. The news of Mary's pregnancy brought Harriet to her wit's end. She requested a divorce and sued Shelley for

alimony and full custody of their children. Harriet's second child with Shelley, Charles, was born in November 1814. Three months later, Mary gave birth to a girl. The infant died just a few weeks later. In 1816, Mary gave birth to their son, William.

A dedicated vegetarian, Shelley authored several works on the diet and spiritual practice, including *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813). In 1815, Shelley wrote *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude*, a 720-line poem, now recognized as his first great work. That same year, Shelley's grandfather passed away and left him an annual allowance of 1,000 British pounds.

### Friendship with Lord Byron

In 1816, Mary's step-sister, Claire Clairmont, invited Shelley and Mary to join her on a trip to Switzerland. Clairmont had begun dating the Romantic poet [Lord Byron](#) and wished to show him off to her sister. By the time they commenced the trip, Byron was less interested in Clairmont. Nevertheless, the three stayed in Switzerland all summer. Shelley rented a house on Lake Geneva close to Byron's and the two men became fast friends. Shelley wrote incessantly during his visit. After a long day of boating with Byron, Shelley returned home and wrote *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. After a trip through the French Alps with Byron, he was inspired to write *Mont Blanc*, a pondering on the relationship between man and nature.

## Harriet's Death and Shelley's Second Marriage

In the fall of 1816, Shelley and Mary returned to England to find that Mary's half-sister, Fanny Imlay, had committed suicide. In December of the same year, it was discovered that Harriet had also committed suicide. She was found drowned in the Serpentine River in Hyde Park, London. A few weeks later, Shelley and Mary finally married. Mary's father was delighted by the news and accepted his daughter back into the family fold. Amidst their celebration, however, loss pursued Shelley. Following Harriet's death, the courts ruled not to give Shelley custody of their children, asserting that they would be better off with foster parents.

With these matters settled, Shelley and Mary moved to Marlow, a small village in Buckinghamshire. There, Shelley befriended [John Keats](#) and Leigh Hunt, both talented poets and writers. Shelley's conversations with them encouraged his own literary pursuits. Around 1817, he wrote *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City*. His publishers balked at the main storyline, which centers on incestuous lovers. He was asked to edit it and to find a new title for the work. In 1818, he reissued it as *The Revolt of Islam*. Though the title suggests the subject of Islam, the poem's focus is religion in general and features socialist political themes.

## Life in Italy

Shortly after the publication of *The Revolt of Islam*, Shelley, Mary and Clairmont left for Italy. Byron was living in Venice, and Clairmont was on a mission to bring their daughter, Allegra, to visit with him. For the next several years, Shelley and Mary moved from city to city. While in Rome, their first-born son William died of a fever. A year later, their baby daughter, Clara Everina, died as well. Around this time, Shelley wrote *Prometheus Unbound*. During their residency in Livorno, in 1819, he wrote *The Cenci* and *The Masque of Anarchy and Men of England*, a response to the Peterloo Massacre in England.

## Death and Legacy

On July 8, 1822, just shy of turning 30, Shelley drowned while sailing his schooner back from Livorno to Lerici, after having met with Hunt to discuss their newly printed journal, *The Liberal*. Despite conflicting evidence, most papers reported Shelley's death as an accident. However, based on the scene that was discovered on the boat's deck, others speculated that he might have been murdered by an enemy who detested his political beliefs.

Shelley's body was cremated on the beach in Viareggio, where his body had washed ashore. Mary, as was the custom for women during the time, did not attend her husband's funeral. Shelley's ashes were interred in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome. More than a century later, he

was memorialized in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.

## Percy Bysshe Shelley's Works

The best known classic poems of Shelley include "*Ode to the West Wind*", "*Ozymandias*", "*Music, To a Skylark*", "*The Cloud*", "*The Mask of Anarchy*" and "*When Soft Voices Die*". There are also other major works which include visionary and long poems like "*Alastor*", "*Queen Mab*", "*Adonais*", "*The Triumph of Life*", and "*The Revolt of Islam*". His visionary poetry dramas include, "*Prometheus Unbound*" and "*The Cenci*".

Shelley contributed several essays on the topic of vegetarianism; two of the most popular works among them include "*On the Vegetable System of Diet*" and "*A Vindication of Natural Diet*".

Uncompromising idealism and the unconventional life of Shelley combined with his powerful disapproving **voice** made him a disparaged and authoritative figure in his lifetime. He became a role model for later generations of writers and poets which include Victorian poets and poets of the Pre-Raphaelite group such as **Alfred Lord Tennyson**, Lord Byron, Algernon Charles Swinburne, **Robert Browning**, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, W. B. Yeats, Edna Saint Vincent Millay and Henry David Thoreau.

Shelley also became a source of inspiration for the poets of other languages including Ranidranath Tagore, Jan Kasprowicz, Subramanay Bharathay



and Jibanananda Das. The nonviolence of Shelley also inspired the passive resistance of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Civil Disobedience of Henry David Thoreau – the reason that Gandhi often used quotes from Shelley’s “*Masque of Anarchy*”. **Thomas Hardy**, George Bernard Shaw, Karl Marx, Bertrand Russell and Upton Sinclair also got inspiration from him.

His short **prose** works include, “*The Assassins, A Fragment of a Romance*”, “*The Elysian Fields: A Lucianic Fragment*”, “*The Coliseum, A Fragment*” and “*Una Favola (A Fable)*”. Shelley published his first Romantic Gothic **novel** named, “*Zastorri*” in 1810 and published a second romantic novel “*St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian*” in 1811.

### Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Style and Popular Poems

Shelley was a **famous** English romantic poet whose poetry reflects passion, beauty, imagination, love, creativity, political liberty and nature. Being very sensitive and possessing distinctive qualities of hope, love, joy and imagination, Shelley strongly believed in realization of human happiness.

“*Ozymandias*” was one of his major contributions to the English Romantic poetry, published in 1818. Shelly often faced criticism due to his outspoken challenges to religion, oppression and conventional politics, “*The Masque of Anarchy*” is one of them. In 1821, Shelley wrote an **elegy**, “*Adonais*” inspired by Keats’ death. Other popular poems of Shelly are: “*A Bridal Song*”, “*A Hate Song*”, “*A Dialogue*”, “*A*

*Lament*", "A Serpent Face", "A Fragment: To Music", "A Dirge", "A New National Anthem" and "Alas! This is not What I thought Life Was".

## More About Shelley

Shelley was the supporter of social justice for the masses. He had strong feelings for the lower classes. He also saw how **animals** were maltreated and slaughtered. Therefore, he became a fighter and an advocate for all those living creatures mistreated or treated unjustly. Throughout his life, most journals and publishers turned down his requests to publish his work due to fear of being arrested for rebellious **activities**.

## CRITICAL APPRECIATION

A critical appreciation of this poem relies on understanding the significance of the setting. The speaker reports a tale that he heard from a "traveller from an antique land," which introduces the theme of decaying and destroyed civilisations that were once great. The story that this traveller tells the speaker goes on to reinforce this theme.

The "shattered visage" that this traveller finds still bears upon it the marks of a complete despot who is secure in his power and reign: his "sneer of cold command" is particularly effective thanks to the very emotive word "sneer" and the **alliteration** of the "cold command" which reinforces the coldness and absolute terror that this figure would have once commanded in his lifetime.

However, the massive central [irony](#) in this poem lies in the juxtaposition of the words on the pedestal to the surrounding landscape:

"My name is OZYMANDIAS, King of Kings."  
Look on my works ye Mighty, and despair!  
No thing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that Colossal Wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The contrast between the confident and arrogant claim of [Ozymandias](#), and his belief in his eternal power and significance is clearly belied by the reality of the "Colossal Wreck," all that is left of his once-mighty empire, and the way that it is surrounded by sands that are "boundless and bare." Again, the alliteration in this phrase seems to emphasise the open nature of the setting and that for all of his power and might, the kingdom of Ozymandias has gone the way of all civilisations, and been destroyed by the ravages of time and weather.

## Analysis

"Ozymandias" is a fourteen-line, iambic pentameter sonnet. It is not a traditional one, however.

Although it is neither a Petrarchan sonnet nor a Shakespearean sonnet, the rhyming scheme and style resemble a Petrarchan sonnet more, particularly with its 8-6 structure rather than 4-4-4-2.

Here we have a speaker learning from a traveler about a giant, ruined statue that lay broken and

eroded in the desert. The title of the poem informs the reader that the subject is the 13th-century B.C. Egyptian King Ramses II, whom the Greeks called "Ozymandias." The traveler describes the great work of the sculptor, who was able to capture the king's "passions" and give meaningful expression to the stone, an otherwise "lifeless thing." The "mocking hand" in line 8 is that of the sculptor, who had the artistic ability to "mock" (that is, both imitate and deride) the passions of the king. The "heart" is first of all the king's, which "fed" the sculptor's passions, and in turn the sculptor's, sympathetically recapturing the king's passions in the stone.

The final five lines mock the inscription hammered into the pedestal of the statue. The original inscription read "I am Ozymandias, King of Kings; if anyone wishes to know what I am and where I lie, let him surpass me in some of my exploits." The idea was that he was too powerful for even the common king to relate to him; even a mighty king should despair at matching his power. That principle may well remain valid, but it is undercut by the plain fact that even an empire is a human creation that will one day pass away. The statue and surrounding desert constitute a metaphor for invented power in the face of natural power. By Shelley's time, nothing remains but a shattered bust, eroded "visage," and "trunkless legs" surrounded with "nothing" but "level sands" that "stretch far away." Shelley thus points out human mortality and the fate of artificial things.

The lesson is important in Europe: France's hegemony has ended, and England's will end sooner or later. Everything about the king's "exploits" is now gone, and all that remains of the dominating civilization are shattered "stones" alone in the desert. Note the use of alliteration to emphasize the point: "boundless and bare"; "lone and level."

It is important to keep in mind the point of view of "Ozymandias." The perspective on the statue is coming from an unknown traveler who is telling the speaker about the scene. This helps create a sense of the mystery of history and legend: we are getting the story from a poet who heard it from a traveler who might or might not have actually seen the statue. The statue itself is an expression of the sculptor, who might or might not have truly captured the passions of the king. Our best access to the king himself is not the statue, not anything physical, but the king's own words.

Poetry might last in a way that other human creations cannot. Yet, communicating words presents a different set of problems. For one thing, there are problems of translation, for the king did not write in English. More seriously, there are problems of transcription, for apparently Shelley's poem does not even accurately reproduce the words of the inscription.

Finally, we cannot miss the general comment on human vanity in the poem. It is not just the "mighty" who desire to withstand time; it is common for

people to seek immortality and to resist death and decay. Furthermore, the sculptor himself gets attention and praise that used to be deserved by the king, for all that Ozymandias achieved has now “decayed” into almost nothing, while the sculpture has lasted long enough to make it into poetry. In a way, the artist has become more powerful than the king. The only things that “survive” are the artist’s records of the king’s passion, carved into the stone.

"Ozymandias" (/ˈɒzɪˈmændi.əs/ oz-ee-MAN-dee-əs) is the title of two related sonnets published in 1818. The first was written by the English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) and was published in the 11 January 1818 issue of *The Examiner* of London. The poem was included the following year in Shelley's collection *Rosalind and Helen, A Modern Eclogue; with Other Poems*, and in a posthumous compilation of his poems published in 1826. Shelley's most famous work, "Ozymandias" is frequently "Ozymandias" is one of the most famous poems of the Romantic era. It was written by Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1817 and eventually became his most famous work. The poem describes the half-buried remnants of a statue of Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II and contrasts the pharaoh's proud words with his ruined likeness. In this guide, we give the background on how "Ozymandias" was created, explain the key Ozymandias meaning, and discuss the poetic devices used in this poem.