



## Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone without a body  
Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown, face, appearance  
5 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:  
10 My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; Greek for Ramses II  
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."

*Percy Bysshe Shelley*

## General

In this sonnet a speaker met a traveller who told him about Ramses II (Ozymandias) and his great deeds, yet the only thing that remains of his empire are the stern look on his face and the ruins of his empire.

## Line-by-Line

### Lines 1-2

I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said—

This is a frame-story, which means the teller is told a story by somebody else. A well-known frame-story is Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The "I" is told a story. Such word of mouth tales are often used to tell about great deeds of kings, yet this poem will tell the opposite. The idea of something curious coming up is enforced by the word "antique".



### Lines 2-4

“Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies,

The traveller gives the “I”-person a description of the statue he saw of Ozymandias: two feet without a body and a damaged stone face half buried in the sand.

### Lines 4-7

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,

These lines tell what kind a leader Ozymandias was. The “wrinkled lip” and “sneer of cold command” show a ruthless pharaoh. The sculptor who created the statue, made it exactly like Ozymandias (“well those passions read”). These features survived the damage done by time. It is how we remember Ozymandias. It is the hand of the artist that survived this callous leader.

### Lines 7-9

The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:

Here the sculptor and the ruthless pharaoh are juxtaposed. On the one hand we have the creation of the artist, which has stood the decay of time, as the features on the ‘visage’ are still readable. “The heart that fed [them]” refers to Ozymandias. Ozymandias’ heart ‘fed’, other words, gave the ‘frown’, ‘wrinkled lip’, and ‘sneer’. Not only do Ramses’ features connect the pharaoh with the artist, also the alliteration in ‘hand’ and ‘heart’ creates a relation between the two, of which the latter, the artists, triumphs.



### Lines 10-11

My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!

These iconic two lines form the heart of the irony in this poem. In his days Ozymandias was a very mighty pharaoh and even today he is still regarded as one of the most successful pharaohs ever lived. However, nothing of his empire survives today. If we look on his 'works' now, we see 'trunkless legs' and a half buried 'visage', so nothing mighty and nothing to despair.

### Lines 12-14

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

These lines enforce the image that those words in lines 10-11 and the legs and face are the only things left of the Egyptian empire of Ozymandias. These ruins are open to the forces of nature (and time). The desert sands that stretch far and wide add to the forlorn feeling. You can almost hear the wind howl and blow sand against the ruins. The broken Ozymandias is quite lonely.

We say the 'pen is mightier than the sword', or this case the sculptor is mightier than the King of Kings. Art is timeless, whereas empires only last for a certain amount of time. We still can 'read' the hand of the sculptor, we still see his art, his perception of reality, whereas Ramses II has no empire anymore.

## Romanticism

The Romantic movement was characterized by its emphasis on individualism, nature, emotion and the medieval past (as opposed to the classical past like the Renaissance). It is said Shelley was intrigued by a fragment of a statue's head and torso acquired by the British Museum of the pharaoh's temple.

In "Ozymandias" Shelley focuses on the artist, the individual to be able to stand the test of time.