**OZYMANDIAS By P.B.Shelley**

CENTRAL THEME

The meaning or **themes** of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem “**Ozymandias**” are fairly straightforward and are also highly traditional. Basically, the poem reminds powerful people that their power is only temporary. However much powerful people may wish to think that their power is immortal, they are only deceiving themselves.

**Form**  
The poem is a sonnet - a fourteen-line single stanza form that originated in Italian love poetry and that was popularised in England by Shakespeare. Most sonnets break into two parts: an 'octet' (the first eight lines) and a 'sextet' (the last six lines), with the second part commenting on the first.  
  
In this sonnet, the first part sets up the**frame narrative** and then describes the statue and the second part ironically relates the king's words and adds the final description of the desert setting. The poem is written in iambic pentameter, but there are several variations in the pattern, including reversed first feet ('Nothing beside remains' and 'Tell that its sculptor…').  
  
**Language**  
Ozymandias calls himself 'king of kings' - a phrase taken from Biblical language - which smacks somewhat of arrogant pride. It could imply that his subsequent obscurity was a punishment from God - a subject that Shelley considered in several of his other poems.  
  
Shelley coined several other powerful phrases in this poem and the final lines have entered the language and have been used for the titles of several books and games. Both 'boundless and bare' and 'the lone and level sands' use alliteration to remain memorable - as does the sneer of 'cold command'. The 'colossal wreck' simply refers to the statue again; 'colossal' means 'giant', with a particular reference to giant statues like the Colossus of Rhodes and 'wreck' means anything that has been broken or ruined.  
  
**Caesurae**  
A caesura is a break of meaning and rhythm within a line. Shelley uses several within the poem and each one has significant effects.  
  
The first falls after 'Who said:' in the second line. The pause here mimics the traveller's intake of breath before telling his story, dramatising the moment as well as creating distance between the description of the statue and the poet's retelling, almost as if recalling from memory.  
  
The second caesura comes after 'Stands in the desert.' The very final full stop and ending of the sentence reinforces the sense of isolation surrounding these strange, ruined legs. The final caesura repeats this effective trick, following 'Nothing beside remains.' This short, grammatically complete and isolated sentence stands within the poem like the statue in the desert.  
  
By contrast, much of the rest of the poem is formed of long, complicated sentences that stretch on and on, like the desert or time itself.  
  
**Context**  
Ozymandias is the Greek name for the Egyptian Pharoah Ramesses II. Interest in Ancient Egpytian history was fashionable in the period and the importation of statues to British and French museums was beginning in earnest. It isn't clear whether Shelley would have seen statues himself and whether he was inspired by a real piece of sculpture.  
  
**Irony**  
The statue is of course ruined - the legs remain but the body has fallen. The face ('visage') lies on the sand, 'half-sunk' and 'shattered', making it hard to recognise. According to the inscription, which has survived, the king Ozymandias set up the statue to draw attention to his 'works' - but his own face has not survived, let alone the empire he may have once ruled.  
  
The stretching of the 'lone and level sands' in every direction cover any buildings or rich farmland that may have flourished here. However, one survivor beside Ozymandias' words is the sculptor's skill: it is witnessed by the success of the statue in capturing 'those passions' of the king, even when partly ruined. Nameless, it is the sculptor whose works are still valued, just as Shelley's poem survives from his own day.  
  
**frame narrative** - a story within which the main story happens: in Ozymandias the narrator claims to have met a traveller (story 1 or 'frame narrative') who tells of his own experience in a distant desert.