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Text piece

Poetry Study Reference: Ozymandias, P.B. Shelley

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Resources consulted

How to approach a poem, JSK Publishers

ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE

PRESCRIBED POETRY FOR NSC EVALUATION 2009

Achebe	<i>Refugee mother and child</i>
Banoobhai	<i>You cannot know the fears I have</i>
Cummings	<i>i thank You God for most this amazing</i>
Day-Lewis	<i>Walking away</i>
Dikeni	<i>Love poem for my country</i>
Eliot	<i>Preludes</i>
Ghose	<i>Decomposition</i>
Keats	<i>To Autumn</i>
Livingstone	<i>Sunstrike</i>
Mungoshi	<i>If you don't stay bitter for too long</i>
Plath	<i>Mushrooms</i>
Serote	<i>City Johannesburg</i>
Shakespeare	<i>To me, fair friend</i>
Shelley	<i>Ozymandias</i>
Yeats	<i>An Irish airman forsees his death</i>

Ozymandias
P.B. Shelley

SUMMARY OF THE POEM

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The speaker recalls having met a traveller "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 traveller told the speaker that the frown and "sneer of cold command" on the statue's face indicate that the sculptor understood well the passions of the statue's subject, a man who sneered with contempt for those weaker than himself, yet fed his people because of something in his heart ("The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed"). 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, far away.

Great opposition, irony and sarcasm appears when it is said, "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" Nothing beside remains." This negative connotation shows that there once was a vast kingdom, but now that kingdom has disappeared. Neither property nor the king himself is immortal, the sonnet indicates. When it is said that the "lone and level sands stretch far away" (13-14), the reader realizes that perhaps the sand is more vast now than the empire is. Finally, when breaking down the word "Ozymandas" in the original greek, we realize that the kingdom no longer exists. Ozy comes from the Greek "ozium," which means to breath, or air. Mandias comes from the Greek "mandate," which means to rule. Hence, Ozymandias is simply a "ruler of air" or a "ruler of nothing". It is then obvious that the King of Kings spoken of in the poem is actually nature itself. Nature never disappears and nature represents the immortality not represented by the Ramses or any other individual or possession.

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“He is not of us, unless he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself”

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