

CHAPTER 4

A. OZYMANDIAS – Percy Bysshe Shelley

This sonnet is an ironic poem on the vanity and futility of a tyrant's power. Shelley's "Ozymandias" gives poetic force to the idea that worldly greatness and the tyrant's power will not outlast time. The monuments man builds to vanity all fall to dust. The poem is basically a story told by an unnamed traveller about a strange scene he has come upon in the desert. The force of the irony, however, and the power of the language give universal significance to the story.

The poem presents a vivid picture - the remnants of a mammoth statue half - buried in the desert sand. "Two vast and trunkless legs" still stand in the empty desert. Nearby, lies a sheltered visage." These two legs and a shattered face are all that remain of a monument to a once proud king. The grotesque scene seems out of time and out of place. Lines 5 - 8 say that the sculptor did a good job of putting the feelings of the king onto the stone statue. He seems to have understood this king well. We can still know what kind of a king he was even though he is not alive and the stone the statue is made from isn't alive. The arrogance of the king lives on, however, in the "frown," the "wrinkled lip." And the "sneer of cold command" on the lifeless face tells us he was a commander, a leader, but he was also cold, i.e. unkind, heartless, a cold-hearted tyrant. The sculptors art has made a mockery of vanity. The art of the poet has recreated the mockery through the power of his language.

Paralleling the haughty face of the king are the boastful words on the pedestal of the statute.

My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings.

Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!

In the contrast between this boast and the endless, surrounding sand, the poet had created the basic irony of the poem. He uses time as the major element that destroys the power of Ozymandias and alters the meaning of his boast. The first line tells the king's name: Ozymandias – king of kings, the greatest, most powerful king. The word “despair” has a double meaning in this poem. The mighty ones will despair, not because they see Ozymandias' works, but because they see the devastation of them. So must we all despair if we hope to build lasting monuments to vanity and power.

In the second line he tells other powerful men, other kings (ye mighty) to look on his works and feel despair, i.e. when one stood near the statue he could see the works of Ozymandias, the things he had done. Because it would be silly to build a statue in the desert where nobody would see it, one can imagine that around the statue, there used to be a great city. Ozymandias told the other powerful men to despair because when they look on the great city he had built they would know that they could never be as great and powerful as Ozymandias.

The sonnet moves from a quiet, story-telling beginning to the booming boast of the king. The poetic language is powerful and compressed. The images build in force and power. The element of time is at work, however, on both the power of the king and the statue that was erected to honor him. Time has eroded all. “Nothing beside remains.” The

image is a “colossal wreck.” The poem quickly falls away to a last line whose long vowels convey the feeling of endless waste, endless desert sand. He completes his alliteration with iambic tetrameter in “boundless and bear” and “the lone and level sands stretch far away.” The word boundless stretches out in both sound and sense. The following vowel sounds emphasize length: long *o* in *lone*, broad *a* in *far* and long *a* in *away*.

B. The Ancient Mariner – S.T. Coleridge

In this excerpt the poet describes the speed of the ship before and after entering the Pacific Ocean and also describes the crews' feelings. There is contrast in the first stanza between the motion of the ship which was traveling so quickly that it “burst into that silent sea” and the complete lack of motion which immediately follows: “Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down”. He also uses repetition of the same sound at frequent intervals -alliteration as in the lines:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew

The furrow followed free.

The repeated “b’ s” and “f’ s” make the lines run quickly and give the impression of a ship traveling at high speed.

When the ship had been becalmed the ship stops: “Down dropt” the breeze, the sails dropt down” The rhythm alters and the pace of the poem becomes much slower; the poet does not use internal rhymes as in the first stanza where he used many rhymes in rapid succession to quicken the pace of the poem: blew/flew, first/burst, as internal rhymes and end rhyme is used : free/sea. He exaggerates the heat of the sun as in the third

stanza. The poet makes us see the crew's tiredness by using repetition in the fourth and fifth stanza to emphasize this feeling:

Day after day, day after day

We stuck, nor breath nor motion,

The poet makes us feel how vast the ocean is by repeating the word "water" over and over again. At the same time he helps us understand how thirsty the sailors are. For them, water is something that is everywhere and at the same moment nowhere.

There is also a simile in the fourth stanza:

"As idle as a painted ship

Upon a painted ocean."

By relating the real ship to a painted one, the poet enables us to imagine just how still the ship was. We immediately see it like a ship in the middle of a painted picture, unmoving, and unchanging, destined to stay in the same place for ever.

One poetic license the poet uses is "We stuck nor breath nor motion."

Here a correct construction would be "We stuck neither breath nor motion".