

Introduction: Ozymandias

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Somewhere between the 26th and 28th of December 1817, Percy Shelley and the writer Horace Smith agreed to indulge in a bit of friendly competition. They had been reading descriptions of a colossal statue of Ramses II, the Egyptian king who had given himself the grand, poeticized name Ozymandias; now, they each decided to compose a sonnet that would express their imagined views of the stone sculpture. Though both sonnets were published the following year in Leigh Hunt's periodical, *The Examiner*, only Shelley's survived the test of time and became a standard of English Romanticism. Despite the status of "Ozymandias," it has not inspired much critical inquiry, except for the continued quest for Shelley's archeological sources. Readers generally find a readily apparent message in "Ozymandias" about the vanity and futility of human ambition in the face of eternity. The poem also suggests that texts or statements can be analyzed from more than one perspective. The words carved into the base of the statue, for example, come to the reader through many different points of view, including the poet, the traveller, the sculptor, and Ozymandias himself.

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