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| **Literature Paper 2 Section B: Anthology Poetry****Learning compendium****‘Ozymandias’ Shelley** |
| Key ideas\*The speaker of the poem tells the tale told to him/her by a traveller. The traveller had seen a broken and lonely statute which was the once-powerful Ozymandias. The traveller saw the statute in the desert.\*The poem is based on the real life pharaoh Ramesses II, who ruled from his teens until his nineties. He was obsessed with building statutes, monuments and cities to show his great power. The British Museum was acquiring parts when Shelley was inspired to write the poem.\*Rameses II during his reign built more temples and monuments, took more wives (8) and had more children (over 100) than any other pharaoh. However, he used slave labour to build them and the slaves suffered hardship under his control.\*In the poem Shelley teaches the reader a moral message about how tyranny and human power is only short lasting in comparison to art and nature. It can be described as an analogy: time will challenge any great civilisation or ruler.\*Shelley was a Romantic poet (late 1700s and early 1800s) because of this he was interested in emotion and the power of nature. He disliked the concept of a monarchy and the oppression of ordinary people. |
| Form and structureThe poem tells the story through a second-hand account. The speaker hasn’t seen the statute himself and may emphasise how unimportant Ozymandias is now.The poem is a sonnet and is written in iambic pentameter. Some suggest that the sonnet form has been used to mirror Ozymandias’ egotistical love of himself.The first eight lines (octave) the statue is described in its different parts to shows its deterioration over time.Lines six and seven make reference to the sculptor and the enduring nature of his art work.The final two lines: The poet has described the huge and timeless desert to emphasise the insignificance of human power and pride.Its sonnet structure is unconventional and has features of the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet. It is partly a Petrarchan sonnet as it has an octave (8 lines) followed by a sestet (6 lines) There is a turning point/volta at line 9 (similar to a Petrarchan sonnet) ‘And on the pedestal these words appear’. This reflects how human structures can be destroyed and/or decay.The sonnet also begins by following the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet: abab but then changes at line 5. This may be used to draw attention to the ruined and forgotten leader and his civilisation.The iambic pentameter is also disrupted in lines 11 and 12.‘Look on…’‘Nothing’The change in meter draws focus to the arrogant voice of the once powerful Ozymandias (line 11) and line 12 is used to reflect the poet’s message that human power and civilisation with be defeated by time as ‘Nothing beside remains’ meaning that the structures built have decayed and faded with time. Similar to a Petrarchan sonnet, Shelley doesn’t finish his poem with a rhyming couplet (as is usually the case with a Shakespearean sonnet). However the poet also adapts the form to use enjambment. This could be used to represent the statute which is broken in half.Some suggest that Shelley’s refusal to conform to one style of sonnet could be a way for the poet to break traditions and defy establishments. |
| LanguageRepresentation of the statuteUse of adjectivesThe condition of the statute is described.‘Two vast and trunkless legs of stone’ ‘Vast’ and ‘trunkless’ are juxtaposed. The size of the statute is shown to be in contrast with the fact that it is broken in half. The statute has been decayed by nature and time.It is also described as a ‘colossal wreck’. The use of the adjective ‘colossal’ suggests that even the most powerful human force is no match for nature and time.Use of noun and alliterationThe speaker also describes the face of the statute as having a ‘sneer of cold command’. The noun ‘sneer’ depicts the condescending, haughty and arrogant look on Ozymandias’ face. The use of alliteration also reinforces his attitude as callous and sympathetic.Representation of Ozymandias/ Ramesses IIHe was a cruel and tyrannical ruler of a past civilisation. This is shown through the inscription on the pedestal. ‘…king of kings:Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!’The use of the imperative sentence (‘Look…’) conveys the dead ruler’s commanding and arrogant nature. He challenges other powerful leaders and claims that he is the most powerful and feared. The verb ‘despair’ could be viewed as a threat or warning to those who consider challenging his power and/or could also suggest that other powerful leaders may yield and surrender when faced with the immensity of his power. Both interpretations reflect the egotistical nature of the dead leader.The statue is symbolic of the power of rulers, and therefore the fact that the arrogant boast of its inscription is belied by its ruined state can be seen as ironic, underlining Shelley’s message that nature is more powerful than man.Significance of the title/ name of the leader. In Greek ‘Ozy’ comes from ‘Ozium’ – to breathe; ‘mandias’ comes from ‘mandate’ – to rule.Representation of the sculptor/ artThe sculptor is described as creating an accurate statute of Ozymandias which reflected his true nature. (‘its sculptor well those passions read’).‘Tell that its sculptor well those passions readWhich yet survive, stamp’d on these lifeless things,The hand that mock’d them and the heart that fed;’The accurate description of Ozymandias through the statue may also be reflected in ‘The hand that mock’d them and the heart that fed’. Here it could be suggesting that the sculptor successfully created a statute which resembled Ozymandias’ terrible and cruel treatment of his people.*It may be suggested through the use of the verb ‘mock’d’ that the artist mocked Ozymandias by depicting him (‘The hand that mock’d them), perhaps in a way that the ruler could not himself perceive (presumably he was satisfied with his portrait). The verb is a pun as it means either to make a copy or model or to make fun of something.* *‘The heart that fed’ is an odd, slightly lurid phrase, apparently referring to the sculptor’s own fervent way of nourishing himself on his massive project. The sculptor’s attitude might resemble—at any event, it certainly suits—the pharaoh’s own aggressive enjoyment of empire. Ruler and artist seem strangely linked here; the latter’s contempt for his subject does not free him from Ozymandias’ enormous shadow.*Representation of the desertThe desert is vast, lonely and has a timeless quality showing it as having a greater significance than the short, temporary power of humans.‘The lone and level sands stretch far away’Use of alliteration (repetition of ‘l’ consonant sound) and sibilance (repetition of ‘s’ consonant sound) combine together to create the feeling of the extensive empty space. It is almost beyond our comprehension and again reinforces the insignificance of humans. The desert is also symbolic of death/ the passing of time. Eventually even all traces of the statute will be gone and there will be no physical record of Ozymandias. |
| Feelings and attitudesThe speaker of the poem describes the feelings and attitudes of Ozymandias and of the poet.Pride- The ruler was proud of what he’d achieved. He called on other rulers to admire what he did.Arrogance- The inscription shows the ruler believed that he was the most powerful ruler in the land. He also believed he was superior to those who he ruled.Power- The poet suggests that human civilisations and achievements are insignificant compared to the passing of time. Art has the power to preserve elements of human existence, but it is also only temporary. |
| Themes Death and mortality: no human is powerful enough to escape death.Power: The speaker explores different types of power in the poem. Shelley’s own radical political beliefs led him to reflect on the transient (short lived/ temporary) nature of power. |
| Compare with… ‘London’ (Power of establishments/civilisations e.g. the church, education and power of people)‘The Prelude’ (The power of nature/ a greater force over humans)‘My Last Duchess’ (Tyrannical, arrogant display of power) |
| Key quotations ‘Two vast and trunkless legs of stoneStand in the desert’‘sneer of cold command’‘…king of kings:Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!’‘colossal wreck’‘The lone and level sands stretch far away.’ |
| GlossaryOzymandias- another name for Ramesses II, a ruler of Ancient EgyptAntique- ancientTrunkless- without a torso/bodyMocked- 1. Made or copied 2. Made fun ofPedestal- base of a statuteColossal- very largeBoundless- without borders |