
Thematic Views And Critical Analysis Of Ozymandias

Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem Ozymandias was first published in the year 1818. As in the year, 1817 news came up that archeologists had discovered fragments of the statue of Ramesses II and sending the pieces to Museum. Another name of Ramesses II is Ozymandias. Ramesses II was born in 1314 BC and ruled Egypt for 66 years. Ramesses was a warrior king and he built up many temples, statues, and other monuments in his lifetime, though his exact age of death remains uncertain. According to the second book of the Bible, "Exodus", Ramesses was a pharaoh at the time Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. After the discovery of fragments of statues of Ramesses II, Percy Shelley and his friend, the poet Horace Smith, challenged each other to write a poem on the same discovery, on the same subject, title, theme, and form. Thus, there were two sonnets published with similar title Ozymandias in Leigh Hunt's Examiner, among the two Shelley's Ozymandias was two one to gain popularity. Thus, the discovery of statue fragments inspired Shelley.

Thematic analysis of Ozymandias

With the starting up of the 19th century a great interest developed in ancient Egyptian culture which marked the beginning of modern Egyptology. In the 1820s when Jean-Francois Champollion deciphered one of Egyptian writing engraved on Rosetta stone awakens an interest in this ancient culture. When Egypt was invaded by Napoleon in 1798 and Mohammad Ali in 1806 more and more artistic works established in Egypt. Shelley's own interest in Egyptology reflected in his poems like Alastor, or, The Spirit Solitude. Ancient Egyptian culture is obsessed with the belief in death and the afterlife. There was a concept of how a person will survive afterlife, so Ancient Egyptians used to bury resources, jewels, wealth, and things of daily use like comb and spoons according to their status and position in the society. There is always an inscribed construction of funerary monuments like pyramids and tombs. Thus, the poem Ozymandias is concerned with such themes and whether the efforts will be remembered or not.

Shelley used the verb "to mock" in Ozymandias in the sense of a 'pun' meaning- using a word with a similar sound for a multiplicity of meaning. To 'mock' also means to treat an object, thought or person as worthless. Shelley begins the poem by writing "I met a traveler from an antique land" which creates doubts in the readers that whether the traveler is a tourist or a time traveler from the original inhabitant, as the traveler refers to the land as "ancient", not with its original "name". the use of the word "visage" in the poem Ozymandias also plays differently. The actual meaning of the word is "face" but here it is used as an aspect to represent a person's true character and emotions. The multiple meanings of these words used by Shelley can be who was arrogant, mean, and tyrannical. Another meaning of "visage" indicates the brilliant job done by the sculptor who has made the outward reality and falsehood of Ozymandias on a stone statue. Thus, art remains the storage of truth despite Ozymandias's obsession with showing his achievements the artists captured his real character. The decaying statue of Ozymandias is a representation of the same sand clock that is used to measure time. Even though time passed and the statue of Ozymandias ruined, the characterization of a tyrant king one gets from Shelley's poem remains the same.

Critical views on Ozymandias

There are certain critics who looked upon the thematic concepts like Egyptology and art and sculpture in Shelley's poem Ozymandias. Anne Janowitz in her article "Shelley's Monument to 'Ozymandias'", discussed the poem within the context of the 19th-century interest in Egyptology. Anne wrote that "Shelley deftly evokes both the pride and the fall of this Egyptian ruler.....". Shelley used the span of time to locate both the pride and fall of Ozymandias. While Ozymandias was alive he was respected and his architecture and other works were celebrated just only because of his pride no one can stand and dare to talk before him, but after his death even his statue ruined, it was "rotten" in the sand like a corpse in a "grave". But still his "frown" and "sneer of cold command" survive through time. Shelley also linked "to the theme of the perseverance of art overtime" as Anne Janowitz wrote.

Another critic Albert C. Labriola in his article "Sculptural Poetry: The Visual Imagination of Michelangelo, Keats, and Shelley" Labriola discussed Ozymandias as a poem concerned with the theme of sculpting and discussion of the art of interpretation. Albert wrote "Interpreting Shelley's 'Ozymandias' as sculptural poetry enhances our understanding of the sonnet while enriching our awareness of the tradition". As there are two narrators in the poem first the narrator, second the traveler who is narrating. The statue of the Ozymandias was not seen by the immediate narrator but the distant narrator did view its ruined form. Even though the statue is ruined, the carved letters on the pedestal "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings, Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair" give a whole sense of Ozymandias as an individual. If the carved letters would have been destroyed then no one will be able to find out whose statue is this? And visitors might pity the broken statue. But the letters changed the whole perception. Like sculpted art, poetry never fades away even centuries and time passes by but the letters never lose their sense, meaning, and value.

If Shelley would not write about Ozymandias in his poetry this art (the sculpture) will remain negligible and "the hand that mocked them and the heart that fed" will never be appreciated. It is not the statue of Ozymandias that keeps him alive but the power of Shelley's pen is what made his pride and arrogance alive forever. At last, Shelley successfully made out her point that there is no difference between the king and common man, all are puppets in the hands of time, death is the ultimate reality that presents physical and mental decay of time.

Bibliography:

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