

The relationship of power and futility in Shelly's Ozymandias: A new understanding for modern people

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Abstract

This paper extracts the relationship between power and futility with the perspective of modern people. It unfolds a new understanding to evaluate the human life with poetic justice. After describing the poet's images, it defines symbolic explanations. Those explanations are discussed with connotative meaning. Finally this research recommends the approaches of life that are to be adopted in modern people in the search of real humanity.

Keywords: Ozymandias, futility, relationship

1. Introduction

Shelly's Ozymandias, a famous poem is discussed and widely studied in English Literature. It was first written by him on 1817 and later on published in 1818. It left a significant mark in the thoughts of critics and educators. The problem is that there has been little work done on the philosophy of Shelly's unique discovery human boasts with power and the ultimate futility with time. Modern people are today also in dilemma with pride and vanity, what to do and what not to do, even sometimes with the passage of time, indifferent towards human feelings with existence. In Ozymandias, Shelly has drawn graphical tools to describe the state of mind in several situations.

2. Literature review

'Ozymandias' is the name for the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II. Aaron Biterman says, Ozy comes from the Greek 'ozium' which means to breathe, or air. Mandias comes from the Greek 'mandate', which means to rule. (Biterman 2000) ^[1]. He also mentions, 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. (Biterman 2000) ^[1]. The sonnet was inspired by the announcement of the British Museum's acquisition of a large fragment of a statue of Ramesses II from the thirteenth century BC. Ozymandias is an alternative name for the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II. In 1816, the Italian adventurer Giovanni Battista Belzoni recovered the 7.25 ton fragment of the statue's head and torso from the mortuary temple of Ramesses at Thebes. (Krishna Daiya, 2014). The poem is almost being ironic, pointing out that now all that remains is an arrogant boast on a ruined statue. Perhaps the poet feels sorry for him or is laughing at his expense. Either way it looks about the inevitable downfall of all rulers and tyrants, and how nothing not even power, lasts forever. (Power and Conflict, 2015) ^[3]. Ozymandias is a reminder of the fragile nature of every system—be it biological, institutional, or galactic in character. As we are learning from the advanced course in history in which we seem now to be enrolled, this uncertain existence also applies to so-called civilizations. (Shaffer, 2012) ^[6]

3. Methodology

This is a secondary research with qualitative analyses. It

discusses the inner meaning of the poem thoroughly. Then the thoughts and discussions of different renowned critics have been applied for the understanding of the real phenomena. It also brings the thoughts of literary personals for a better conclusive understanding.

4. Discussions

4.1 The status of power

Shelly tells us about a 'traveller' whom he entitles as person 'antique' land. The land represents the Egypt. In Egypt there is a long history about pyramid and deserts. It was a land which has been ruled by many kings. The story of Musa and Faraw is also known in the worldwide with different cultures, religion and caste. King Faraw was a stubborn and proud king which led him to the destruction of his reign in the blue water. The king that is Ozymandias here is indicative to the king Rameses II. He was a very proud and boastful king. The poet discusses the present pitiful condition of the king. He draws the images of:

*Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command*

Here we can clearly perceive the poor condition of the statue. Even the full statue is not there, it is broken and the face is lying beside the statue. But Shelly is special here that he didn't forget to draw the mark of vanity in the face of king. Rather he describes very minutely every detail. There was frown in his face and lips were not in easy smile. It was wrinkled that means a showing of futile power and it reflected with order that are really cruel and inhuman. The king marks definitely the pride of absolute power. History made the statue a part of understanding. The sculptor of that time surely tried best to reflect the power and aggressiveness of the king in his best way. He left the mark of cruelty in the statue so that the people of that time could fear the king. "The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed". The status of the power is no more in reign with the process of time. King used to invite other kings and subordinates and show the statue to them by mockery and anger.

The poet cites from the pedestal of the statue:

*My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings
Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair*

4.2 The futility

When it is found that the sculpture bears the resemblance of works which actually no longer exists, futility of power then starts. The word 'mighty' and 'despair' are antagonists with each other. But they are put together to prove the futility of tyrant king's power. Shelly was very much radical in his ideas. He actually brought the ideas of futility to show the status of the England of the time. He wanted to people understand the clutches of kings and priests of the time of England who are very boastful about their status and power. Shelly marked that nothing of human is absolute in the reign of time. He mentions in the poem:

*Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away*

The poem is a sonnet and in octave, the speaker introduces the power of the kings or the subject in a very graphical language. The in the sestet, the speaker concludes with a reflection of futility of human power.

4.3 Recommendations for modern people

The French Revolution (1789-99) had a significant mark on the thoughts of European and English Society. It brought the message of liberal minds against the tyranny and oppression of many kings. Shelly as a poet of that time was greatly influenced by those ideas. He actually brought a very universal truth of human life. The king of the sculptor though powerful once upon a time could not remain his glory for everlasting period of time. It has just faded away with time and now only his broken statue is remaining which signifies vanity of human being. Shelly's poem never lost its universal appeal. It is still applicable for the present day time. People have experienced World War I in 1921 and World War II in 1945 which has killed so many innocent people. There were also many autocratic and tyrannous rulers who were boastful about their power and with passage of time many of them lost their glory. So modern people have an opportunity to take lessons from Shelly's poem and lead their life without tyranny and futility.

5. Conclusion

Shelly has ionized the sculptor of king with present condition of the statue. He has shown how the king has lost his armies, cities, wealth etc with the passage of time. Ozymandias become symbolic expressions of futile power which is mostly used by the tyrant rulers. The poet has drawn these meaning to make the modern people understand about the reality of power and vanity. Thus Shelly left a golden mark by portraying universal theme at his poem.

6. References

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