

William Shakespeare

Sonnet 29: When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,

I all alone bewep my outcast state,

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,

And look upon myself and curse my fate,

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,

Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,

Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,

With what I most enjoy contented least;

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,

Haply I think on thee, and then my state,

(Like to the lark at break of day arising

From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings

That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

3. **bootless** – useless,
ineffectual

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Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

Mezzo Cammin

Half of my life is gone, and I have let

The years slip from me and have not fulfilled

The aspiration of my youth, to build

Some tower of song with lofty parapet.

Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret

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Of restless passions that would not be stilled,

But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,

Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;

Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past

Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,—

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A city in the twilight dim and vast,

With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,—

And hear above me on the autumnal blast

The cataract of Death far thundering from the heights.

The title is from the first line of Dante's *Divine Comedy*: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita..." (Midway upon the journey of our life...).

Analysis:

What is the speaker's attitude toward aging, and how do key literary techniques help illuminate the speaker's attitude?

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—“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,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

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10. Ozymandias - Pharaoh Rameses II (reigned 1279-1213 BCE). According to the *OED*, the statue was once 57 feet tall.

Discussion Questions

In your answers to these questions, quote effectively from the poem to illustrate your ideas. Incorporate at least 3 significant quotations from the poem in your answers to questions 1-3.

1. IRONY - There are multiple kinds of irony within this poem. The central example is found in the juxtaposition of (a) the image described by the “traveler” in lines 2-9 with (b) the boast made by the poem’s subject: “My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; / Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!” (lines 10-11). **What is ironic about Ozymandias’ boast, given the specific scene in which the “traveller” encounters it? Moreover, how can readers interpret Ozymandias’ words in a way that is probably the exact opposite of what Ozymandias himself intended to say?**
2. DUAL SPEAKERS & STORIES - Note that there are two speakers in this poem: (1) the “I” who begins the poem, and (2) the “traveller from an antique land” whose story the first speaker quotes. This technique is an example of a framing device—in which an author *frames* an “inner” story (the traveller’s story) inside an “outer” story (the speaker’s story). **What effects does the poem’s duality of the speakers have on your reading of the poem? How would the poem’s impact be different if it had only one speaker who reported this anecdote directly to the reader—and what does Shelley seem to accomplish through this technique?**
3. THE ARTIST - What is the relationship between Ozymandias and the sculptor who immortalizes him? Which specific words does Shelley use to portray their relationship or bond? Based on the poem, what do you think Shelley thought about the relationship between artist and patron? Between artist and the artist’s creation? If Shelley is commenting on the art of poetry, do you think he aligns himself more with Ozymandias or with the sculptor? Why?
4. CRITICISM - Read the Essay by David Mikics on “Ozymandias” entitled “A poem to outlast empires” (click on the link on our MySchool page). Notice how, after Mikics provides the context in which Shelley wrote the poem, he describes the way the poem’s images and complete thoughts unfold, section by section. **What are two or three specific observations that Mikics makes about the poem’s structure, tone, and language that illuminate the poem for you or that help you better understand and appreciate what Shelley does in the poem? Quote at least 2 specific observations Mikics makes in his essay, and for each one, explain why this observation is valuable or illuminating to you.**

John Donne (1572-1631)

Holy Sonnet 14: Batter My Heart, Three-Personed God

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due, 5
Labor to admit You, but O, to no end;
Reason, Your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto Your enemy. 10
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again;
Take me to You, imprison me, for I,
Except You enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor even chaste, except You ravish me.

Notes

1. **three-personed God** – According to some Christian doctrines, God is a “trinity” encompassing Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

3. **That** – So that...

5. **usurped** – conquered

7. **viceroy** - a person appointed to rule a country or province as the deputy of the sovereign

9. **fain** – gladly

10. **betrothed** – engaged to be married

13. **enthrall** – (1) to charm, captivate, or fascinate; (2) to enslave or subjugate (archaic)

14. **ravish** – (1) to seize and take away by violence; (2) to overcome with emotion, especially joy or delight; (3) to rape

ANALYSIS:

In this poem, what is the speaker's attitude toward his *spiritual state* and his *relationship with God*, and what important diction, metaphors, similes, personification, and paradoxes does the speaker use to communicate his attitude and perceptions?