

What do the words on the pedestal signify?

Generated: Jan 26, 2026

What do the words on the pedestal signify?

In the poem "Ozymandias" (1822) by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), the words on the pedestal are very important. They show the pride and power of a king named Ozymandias. The inscription reads:

"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;

Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

At first, these words seem to show the

king's confidence

. He believes he is the greatest king ever. He wants everyone to admire his achievements. The words "King of Kings" mean he thinks he is more powerful than anyone else. He challenges other mighty people to look at his great works and feel hopeless because they will never achieve what he did. This shows his arrogance.

However, there is a twist in the poem. The king's works no longer exist. All that remains is a broken statue in the desert. The words on the pedestal now sound very ironic. Instead of feeling awe, people see nothing but ruins. The message changes from one of power to one of warning. It reminds us that even the greatest kings and empires will eventually fall. Time destroys everything, no matter how powerful it seems.

Through this, Shelley teaches us a lesson. Human pride is useless because time can erase everything. The words on the pedestal show the king's belief in his power. But the ruined statue shows that power, like everything else, fades away in the end.