EXAM STASH

POWER & CONFLICT POETRY

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AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE



POWER | ARROGANCE | DECAY

WHAT HAPPENS?

A traveller finds the ruined statue of a once-powerful king in the desert. The king's boasting words remain, but his empire has vanished.

THE BIG IDEA

Human power is temporary, Time and nature are stronger than even the greatest rulers.

POEM BREAKDOWN

One stanza, three stages

1. The traveller describes a vast, broken statue in the desert.
2. An inscription reveals the king's pride and belief in his power.
3. The final image shows only ruins, emphasising the power of time and nature.

4 KEY QUOTATIONS

'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone'	**Technique (Zoom):** juxtaposition – 'vast' and 'trunkless'	**Explain:** The huge size contrasts with the lack of a body, showing that his power is now broken.
'sneer of cold command'	**Technique (Zoom):** adjective – 'cold'	**Explain:** Suggests the king's arrogance and lack of compassion for others.
'Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!'	**Technique (Zoom):** imperative – 'Look'	**Explain:** A direct challenge that reveals the king's extreme pride and belief in his lasting power.
'Nothing beside remains'	**Technique (Zoom):** contrast – 'Nothing'	**Explain:** Emphasises the total destruction of the king's empire and the power of time.

FORM & STRUCTURE

- **Sonnet (14 lines):** a compact form contains the king's huge claims to greatness.
- **Framed story:** the traveller's account distances us from the ruler.
- **Ending:** the focus moves from the statue to the desert, making human power look small.

CONTEXT

- Written in 1818, during a time of political upheaval and debate about the power of leaders.
- Inspired by ruined Egyptian statues, which symbolised absolute power.
- Reflects Romantic ideas about the strength of nature and the passage of time.

COMPARE IT WITH...

- **London** – the abuse of power and its impact on people.
- **My Last Duchess** – pride, control and the desire for a lasting legacy.
- **The Prelude** – the power and sublimity of nature.

VOICE, TONE & FEELINGS



LINE 1 • OPENING SPEAKER

MATTER-OF-FACT

Introduces a traveller's story. We hear about the king second-hand, which distances us from his power.

LINES 2–9 • TRAVELLER

OBSERVANT → CRITICAL

The description builds detail. The broken statue and cold expression make us question the ruler's greatness.

LINES 10–11 • KING

PROUD & COMMANDING

The inscription briefly interrupts the account. 'Look' is an order: the king expects admiration.

LINES 12–14 • TRAVELLER

BLEAK & IRONIC

'Nothing beside remains.' cuts the boast short. The final view widens to empty sands.

Reader response: the ruined statue makes the boast ironic; the vast desert can leave us awed by time and nature.