

# GLORIFICATION OF ARCHAIC ART: A READING OF RAINA MARIA RILKE'S "ARCHAIC TORSO OF APOLLO" AND PERCY BUSSEY SHELLEY'S "OZYMANDIAS"

**Trishna Deka**

*PhD Research Scholar*

*Department of English, Cotton University*

**Sabina Begum**

*PhD Research Scholar*

*Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University*

## ABSTRACT

Writers have always adapted myth, legend and other folk elements to nurture perspectives through literary works. Many a time, folk elements work as a mechanism to develop the motif in literature. Selected poems for this paper are Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo" and Shelley's "Ozymandias." In both the poems, myth of Apollo and Ozymandias have been presented with an objective of uplifting the status of art. It is noticeable that the poems are entitled about two popular figures. But the content of the poems significantly draws attention to a deeper meaning. In both the poems, there are two statues exclusively projected with minute details. Both the statues are in a dilapidated form. Irony is that even in the half broken forms the statues are extremely informative about the artistic exuberance. The artists never fail to inform readers about the intended meaningfulness of the statues. Even a shattered statue is viable of displaying the beauty of the archaic art. This paper attempts to present how the poets of these two poems have highlighted a theme of utmost importance almost in a same way in both the poems. This paper argues that the poems explore the glory of art over the two famous characters.

**Key words:** archaic glory, shattered statue, adaptation

## Introduction:

It is a tradition in literature to adapt myth for recreation. In the literatures worldwide, different literary figures have recreated the myths in various genres. Meanwhile it is important to consider that myths also have categories according to its characteristics. This paper considers to analyze the myth of Apollo as represented by Rainer Maria Rilke in the poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo". One more focus of the paper is "Ozymandias" by Percy Bussey Shelley. Whereas the character of Apollo is a Greek myth, we can name that the popular story of Ozymandias becomes a historical myth. Apollo in

mythology is a Greek God. There are many forms of literatures which have addressed the myth of Apollo from various perspectives. A detailed study of the representation of the myth is offered in the section of literature review. Whereas Ozymandias is a historical myth in the sense that his is not the myth of imagination or religious faith. Rather Ozymandias is a king of history who have marked his presence through fame throughout the ages. Like a historical myth of Maniram Dewan and Lachit Barphukan in Assam; Ozymandias, the Egyptian King becomes a historical myth. A historical myth also becomes a folk element and remains in the heart of people through the genres of folk songs and other folk narratives. Probably this scope of a historical myth enables to incorporate the idea of 'cheating death' with that of the existence of Ozymandias. The religious myth like that of Apollo is not different in this sense. It becomes a belief of folks and they caricature the element through different narratives. But in literature it gets adapted and regains multiple viewpoints. Rilke and Shelley both have written, thus, about the two respective myths and exerted literary perspectives. Writing about the poetry of Rilke, Freeman (n.d) writes that the poetry of Rilke is hued with spiritual and religious faiths. He extends that Rilke's poetry evokes the mystique sense of life and divinity. Daiya (2014) writes about the themes of "Ozymandias" and writes that Shelley's is a search of the alternative world through the vivacious imagination.

This paper attempts to forecasts how the two selected poems "Archaic Torso of Apollo" by Rilke and "Ozymandias" by Shelley celebrates the glorification of archaic creations over any materialistic desires. This paper interprets the two poems and confirms that both the poems though based on myth qualifies comments on the greater aspect of human life. The poems celebrate art over any other things in the surrounding. The styles of writing by Rilke and Shelley pertains to two different genres. Rilke is a transition writer writing both traditional and modern forms and themes and Shelley is a romanticist. This paper considers all these aspects and show how the poems go beyond such treatments and celebrates archaic art over materialistic desires. The paper is based on literary interpretation of the selected poems. To throw light on the objective, description through analysis method has been applied. All sources are secondary sources. Literary construal is the prime method in the paper. through a rigorous literary review research gap is delineated and objective is formulated.

### **Literature Review:**

Wells (2013) writes about the overlapping of literary traditions found in the poem. There is a fluid space of interpretation which allows reader to find out a variety of analysis in the poem. There is also a trace of Russian symbolism in the poem. Freedman (1986), on the other hand, describes the sources of the statue of Ozymandias which inspire Shelley to write elaborately on the shattered statue. The same essay claims this piece of literary work as one of the most 'widely known' poems. There is a mention of Diodorus about a massive art work of a pharaoh in *Bibliotheca Historica*. This shows the

interest of the writer to investigate the realistic source of the poem. Fumo (2010) projects about different versions of apollo as a 'Human God,' as Apollo in the medieval treatment in the hands of the classical authority or as the 'imperial Apollo.' In fact, this essay extends to portray Apollo as shown in the Chaucerian poetics. While showing that, it is noticed that a multifaceted version of Apollo turns out to be the considerations in literary works. Pappas (2014) states the philosophy of Nietzsche behind portrayal of Apollo in the formulation of the ideas like Apollonian and Dionysian. This essay is about Nietzsche's idea explored in the book *The Birth of tragedy*. The essay brings into discussion whether such ideas like that Apollonian directly or indirectly have a link with the myth of apollo. If Nietzsche even maintained the link then how far it is established. What strikes the most is the way Norton () writes in the introduction of the translated version of the letter to Rilke about the characteristics of the poetry of the poet. Norton states that there is rarely a sense of individuality in the porty of Rilke. Writing on the treatment of art and myth in literary forms, Jones (2019) states that Pheidian poetics has an allusion to the sculptural cult. This essay foregrounds the intermingling of painting, sculptural work and 'mytho-religious iconography' in Parthenon's visual program.

Thus, the literature review based on the works of Shelley's 'Ozymandias' and portrayal of Apollo in literature brings home various new dimensions reflected in the literary works of recent times. This paper keeping in mind all the previous discussions on the topics attempt to elaborate the exploration of celebration of artistic work rather archaic work over any other earthly things. Both the poems stand on the same ground to evoke a glorification of archaic elements. It is true that some analysis has already shown the thematic concerns of the selected poems as the elevation of artistic works. But this paper initiates the creative endeavor to discuss both "Ozymandias" and "Archaic Torso of Apollo" on the same basis and thus extends a critical thrust.

#### Discussion:

What brings both the poems "Archaic Torso of Apollo" by Rilke and "Ozymandias" by Percy Bussey Shelley to the same note is the way the poems celebrate the permanence of artistic glory over the impermanence of mundane things. Rilke's "Apollo" ends with a note of claiming to change the purview of life. "Ozymandias" also concludes with the message that everything appears bare near the artistic glory even of the half-broken statue. A torso of apollo stands as bright as the complete statue. It is because of the way the torso dazzles resulting from the artistic excellence. The remains of the statue overpower what is not there. There is a glaze that runs through the hips and other remaining part of the statue. The poet claims that the remains appeal one's imagination for the complete liveliness of the statue. It is ironical that the absence of the head in the statue does deprive one to know about the 'legendary head.' The poet informs the readers that the eyes of Apollo are like 'ripening fruit.' It is the vivid imagination of the poet that

puts adjectives to the absent objects. Poet's such a description also compels readers to go beyond the invisibility in the sight. 'Gaze' of the torso 'gleams.' It is interesting that the third stanza suddenly takes over the thematic concern of the poet to that of the glorification of archaic art. The poet mentions that the torso would have been a mere 'defaced' stone without the artistic magnificence ornamented in the statue. Even the remaining part of the statue appeals anyone to imagine what would have been the complete sight of the statue. It is definitely about the archaic glory, when the poet writes about the statue glistening even from the 'borders.' The words like 'cascade' and 'border' may refer to the limitation to the transitory nature of human desires for worldly things. The poem starts from the statement of the glorification of the face and ends accounting the triumph of the art. Same is the concern of Shelley in "Ozymandias." This poem is designed in a way that a traveler informs the poet about the 'trunkless statue of Ozymandias standing in a desert. This poem is all in all about the victory of art over transitory reign of the king Ozymandias. Even a shattered statue of Ozymandias makes viewers realize that the sculptor attempts to remark the reigning of the king. Yet the glory of powerful regnant is so earthly that it fails to sustain the claws of brutal time. The statue is half sink in the sand declaring merely the gone glory. But the art is overwhelming and perpetually pleases viewers. Following lines from the poem signify the same:

"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," (Shelley, 164)

This stanza is enough to hint at the archaic celebration. Nothing beyond the art sustains. Surrounding the statue there is sand to far distant. Description of the surrounding with stretches of sand only reflect on the transience of kingly pride. Thus, both the poems generate the archaic glory in some way or the other. Rilke's is more of the sentiment of sole glorification of art. However, Shelley's "Ozymandias" furthers the celebration of art over the mundane deeds. But the poems offer enough scope to read on the same range of theme. The poets pair in the approach towards the archaic beauty. Writing from two different trends of literature, both the poet resembles on the sameness of thematic concern. Shelley is a romanticist. As a romanticist, we find abundance of imagination in the literary works of the poet. Rilke's poetry conceives the lyrical beauty. Moreover, Rilke throws light on the modern anxiety of human life. But in the selected poems, these two poets excel beyond the popular critical readings about their works. Here both are visionary and philosophers of the greater meanings of life on the earth. The poems treat the theme similarly in the sense that the victory of art is shown over the glory of Apollo and Ozymandias. Apollo is a Greek god of great worship. Among the Greek gods, Apollo is worshipped highly. Berens (2009) writes that the features of Apollo has the highest influence over the Greek

nation. He again writes that Apollo stands out among the deities. Same is the case with position of Ozymandias in the faith of people. Moore (2019) writes that Ozymandias is thought to be the Pharaoh Ramses II. There is a series of beliefs associated with the character of Ozymandias. Both these two giant figures of myth or history has been satirized to adorn the priority of archaic art. It seems that the figures chosen for both these poems play as an irony to highlight the significance of archaic art only. Thus, the two poets, though writes from two different backgrounds explicitly refer to the ambience of art.

### **Conclusion and Study Forward:**

This paper mainly focuses on the pivotal themes reflected in the chosen poems. There is a sense of mockery in “Ozymandias” to blow up the worth of art. Similarly, “Archaic torso of Apollo” is less about the praise of Apollo, the worthy Greek god. Rather it is about the magnanimous beauty of the torso. One can extend that the poem is about the hidden beauty of the torso. This paper as propounded earlier only emphasizes on the sameness of thematic concern. Future researchers can bring into discussion the relevance of the ideas of myth and legend. Researchers can also amalgamate other poems by these two writers to study broadly about the same theme. Further the theoretical framework of recreation theory can be associated with the study of the myth in the light of the chosen topic. If discussion forwarded there will be argument over to accept Ozymandias as a legend, as a historical figure or as a legend. Future researchers can consider all this grounds to exert an extensive study.

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