



Ozymandias

by Percy Shelley

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.

19th century photograph of Ramses II ruin in Egypt

Two Monkeys by Brueghel

(trans. from the Polish by Magnus Kryski)
by Wislawa Szymborska

I keep dreaming of my graduation exam:
in a window sit two chained monkeys,
beyond the window floats the sky,
and the sea splashes.
I am taking an exam on the history of mankind:
I stammer and flounder.
One monkey, eyes fixed upon me, listens ironically,
the other seems to be dozing--
and when silence follows a question,
he prompts me
with a soft jingling of the chain.

*Pieter Brueghel the Elder
Two Monkeys (1562)
Oil on canvas, 8" x 9"
Dahlem Museum Berlin*



More ekphrastic poem examples at <http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/>

American Gothic

by John Stone

Just outside the frame
there has to be a dog
chickens, cows and hay

and a smokehouse
where a ham in hickory
is also being preserved

Here for all time
the borders of the Gothic window
anticipate the ribs

of the house
the tines of the pitchfork
repeat the triumph

of his overalls
and front and center
the long faces, the sober lips

above the upright spines
of this couple
arrested in the name of art

These two
by now
the sun this high

ought to be
in mortal time
about their businesses

Instead they linger here
within the patient fabric
of the lives they wove

he asking the artist silently
how much longer
and worrying about the crops

she no less concerned about the crops
but more to the point just now
whether she remembered

to turn off the stove.

Grant Wood, American Gothic (1930)
Oil on composition board, 30" x 25"
Art Institute of Chicago

