

Analysis of the new colossus and ozymandias

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Comparing and Contrasting “ The New Colossus” and “ Ozymandias”

Emma Lazarus, author of “ The New Colossus,” and Percy Shelley, author of “ Ozymandias,” both wrote poems in which statues were personified. These poems, sonnets about similar subjects, differ in tone. “ The New Colossus” is an idealistic poem about the Statue of Liberty in New York City. “

Ozymandias” is a pessimistic poem about a collapsed and decaying statue that once was very distinguished. To compare and contrast Lazarus and Shelley’s poems exposes how different two seemingly similar sonnets can be.

The subject of both poems is a statue. In “ The New Colossus,” Lazarus is describing the Statue of Liberty. This statue is a powerful symbol of freedom and welcome, and Lazarus describes it as “ a mighty woman” (4). In her poem, Lazarus uses personification as a figurative element to paint a literary picture of the statue. The most prominent way that Lady Liberty is personified is through the use of dialogue. Lazarus writes six of the fourteen lines of the poem as personified dialogue of the statue. The statue’s words are “ cried...with silent lips” (9-10). This method of personification is effective to get across Lazarus’s own opinion about the statue, because the dialogue explains how maternal and welcoming the statue is and what she represents.

The Statue of Liberty is now recognized as a symbol of freedom and refuge for people of all nationalities and homelands. Lazarus herself was part of a family who immigrated to the United States, which explains why she would

have a positive and idealistic opinion of the statue. She describes it as “Mother of Exiles” (6), portraying the statue as a maternal, loving, and nurturing figure that welcomes those who have come to her from places of struggle. The analogy to the Greek sun god, Colossus, relates the statue to a famous figure known for radiance. By titling the poem as “The New Colossus,” Lazarus is comparing this statue of freedom to a statue of light and hope. The statue itself is personified with the dialogue, “Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door” (13-14). This golden door is representative of an ideal America where good opportunities are plentiful and easily accessible. The tone of the poem is idealistic because Lazarus describes a statue that represents a righteous and perfect America.

“Ozymandias” is a poem about a decayed statue. The subject is similar to that of “The New Colossus,” because it is described as a powerful statue. Shelley, similar to Lazarus, uses the element of personification to characterize the statue. The words printed beneath the statue state, “My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair” (Shelley 10-11). Shelley uses this quote to personify the statue itself as if it were coming to life and saying the words, as well as within the poem. This literary choice is useful because it conveys a strong message about the character of the statue, which is egotistical and confident.

This poem is different than “The New Colossus” because it has a pessimistic tone. The tone is brought out in the contrast of the grand figure of the statue with the overwhelming destruction of the land around it. Shelley uses

contrast in the poem to emphasize the destruction of the great king, Ozymandias, and the statue that should have framed his greatness without ruin. It is written after the dialogue of the statue that “ nothing beside remains...the lone and level sands stretch far away” (12-14). This description makes it seem as though the statue is insignificant and has blown away into nothing, as all that remains is a vast desert. The tone of the poem is pessimistic because the statue is represented as decaying and fading away to mean nothing. It is described as “ half sunk” and “ a shattered visage” (4). These descriptions make the once solid and dominating representative of King Ozymandias into a powerless and broken memory. The pessimistic tone of the poem in a way suggests that powerful people will not withstand the years of life down the road and the legacy they intend to have, even when they are long gone from the world.

“ The New Colossus” and “ Ozymandias” are both sonnets about statues that incorporate personification and descriptive language to convey a message of what each statue represents. Although the subject matter of both poems is similar, there is a clear difference in the tone of each poem. Lazarus describes the Statue of Liberty to be a powerful, yet welcoming and maternal figure, while Shelley makes King Ozymandias out to be a once powerful and now lost and forgotten figure in the sand. Comparing and contrasting these poems gives the reader an insight into what power and representatives of power mean for both Lazarus and Shelley.