

# Ozymandias and the grecian urn paper



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Even though “ Ozymandias” by Percy Shelley and “ Ode to a Grecian Urn” by John Keats sound like very different types of poems, they still share some of the same characteristics. In “ Ozymandias,” Shelley tells a story of how a man found a ancient statue of a king, with the words “ My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,/ Look on my Works, ye Might, and despair! ” The statue was broken into pieces, and the land was bare, with nothing to “ look on” (11).

In “ Ode to a Grecian Urn,” Keats is speaking to an ancient urn and describing the unchanging pictures that are on it. These poems are very different in how their objects interact with the passing of time and in the feelings that they invoke in the reader, but very similar in the romantic characteristics that they represent. “ Ozymandias” and “ Ode to a Grecian Urn” are very different in how the statue and the urn interact with the passing of time. In “ Ozymandias”, Shelley shows how a manmade object is destroyed in time by nature.

Not only is the statue destroyed, but it is also obvious that the town has also been destroyed when Shelley states that, “ Nothing beside remains. Round the decay/ Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare” (12-13). Nature has the ability to destroy everything that a man can make, anything from a simple statue to an entire town. However, “ Ode to a Grecian Urn” is an entire poem about a manmade object that has withstood the passage of time and anything nature threw its way.

Keats states that even “ When old age shall this generation waste/ Thou shalt remain” (46-47). Keats does not even acknowledge the fact that nature could destroy the urn in a split second. Since the urn is a “ Sylvan historian,”

it has been around for a while, meaning it has probably been through some version of a natural disaster or at the very least a rough storm, and nature still has not chosen to destroy it (3). Shelley's poem and Keats's poem also differ in the feelings that they invoke in the reader. "Ozymandias" has a very off-putting sound to it.

Shelley puts words that have negative connotations to them; like when he is describing the king with a "frown/ And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command" (4-5). The poem gives the reader a feeling of loneliness and emptiness by using lines like "The lone and level sands" and "boundless and bare" (14, 13). In "Ode to a Grecian Urn", the connotations of the words that Keats uses are completely opposite. Keats even describes the urn as being able to tell "A flowery tale more sweetly than [their] rhyme" (4).

Keats then goes on to state that the melodies "unheard/ Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on" (11-12). These lines are so light and pretty especially compared to the harshness of Shelley's poem. Keats describes the beautiful pictures on the urn throughout the rest of the poem, even making a sacrifice sound peaceful. Even though the way the poems' objects interact with the passing of time and the feelings the poems invoke in the reader differ greatly, the romantic characteristics that both poems symbolize are very similar.

Ironically, the opposite parallels of the two poems have a way of representing a romantic mindset. For example, the romantics believed that nature is supposed to teach. In "Ozymandias", nature destroys a statue and a town that had arisen from greed and the abuse of power. The king is stated to have a "sneer of cold command" and a "heart that fed" his own desires

(4, 8). The “ trunkless legs of stone” and “ a shattered visage” makes it sound like nature was not very happy with the king’s show of authority (2, 4).

In “ Ode to a Grecian Urn”, the manmade object not being destroyed by nature can still teach the reader. The urn was not made for power and greed, but to show beauty and love. The urn depicts many scenes of nature and peacefulness. Another similarity that both poems share is that they show the insignificance of something that is supposed to be great, like a king, and the value of something that is supposed to be ordinary, like an urn. Once again, in “ Ozymandias”, the king and his great town are destroyed.

This seems like Shelley’s way of rooting for the revolutions, of making a king not so important anymore. After all is said and done, the “ lone and level sands stretch far away” (14). No matter whether one is a king or a peasant, everyone dies, and in the end, being a king does not make you greater than a peasant. In “ Ode to a Grecian Urn”, Keats glorifies the common urn. He makes the urn, which could have probably been found in many homes, seem special to the reader. Like many romantics, he took an ordinary item and turned it into an extraordinary one.

Shelley’s “ Ozymandias” and Keats’s “ Ode to a Grecian Urn” differ in the ways that the statue and the urn interact with the passing of time and in the feelings that they invoke in the readers; however, they still ironically share similar romantic characteristics. The poems may not seem very comparable at first, but once the reader considers what each poet is trying to convey, they do not seem so different after all. Again, it is the ironic and opposite parallels that actually add up to express the same beliefs of both poets.