

The listeners by
walter de la mare and
ozymandias by percy
bysshe shelley:
poems ...

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The Listeners by Walter de la Mare and Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley both immediately convey a sense of mystery as they are set in the past. Ozymandias revisits the very distant past and The Listeners revisits the past in the lifetime of a single man.

Shelley uses the technique of a story within a story to create mystery, where de la Mare uses an account. However they both make use of a lone traveller who visits lonely places to evoke a sense of fear, encouraging you to think about what might have happened in these places and that events could have been very sinister.

Both poems have the main focus of an isolated structure:

That dwelt in the lone house then

Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight

(" The Listeners", lines 14 & 15, Walter de la Mare)

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare

The lone and level sands stretch far away.

(" Ozymandias", lines 13 & 14, Percy Bysshe Shelley)

The poets inject both of these inanimate structures with a sense of humanity, which furthers the mysterious aura surrounding them. Shelley uses a human description to do this:

And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,

(" Ozymandias", line 5, Percy Bysshe Shelley)

Where de la Mare instead uses the spirits of the Listeners to give the house a sense of humanity, as if the house itself is possessed and listening to the traveller:

And he felt in his heart their strangeness,

Their stillness answering his cry,

(" The Listeners", lines 21 & 22, Walter de la Mare)

Both poets cleverly use imagery to create pictures in our minds. De la Mare uses very detailed and lengthy descriptions, which build mystery and suspense and make you feel as if you are watching the lone traveler:

Knocking on the moonlit door;

(" The Listeners", line 2, Walter de la Mare)

This makes you feel very apprehensive.

Shelley's descriptions in Ozymandias are more limited and rather abrupt, which I think creates mystery because the reader has to use their imagination to picture events clearly.

The poems differ at this point because in The Listeners, de la Mare's setting is full of life, for example he describes trees, turf, grass and a horse. In contrast to Ozymandias, where Shelley uses bleak descriptions of a setting, which indicates an extremely barren and empty expanse.

The Listeners hints at the enduring quality of the spirits who dwell in the house. Whereas Ozymandias gives a clear message of the ephemeral nature of the effects of power and pride.

The end of each poem has both similarities and differences. Ozymandias has no clear end. There is nothing to sum it up. Shelley has left a gap to use our own imagination. But in The Listeners, de la Mare clearly describes the traveler retreating back to where he had come from. Creating a clear end to the story.

The similarities arise at the end of each poem because both the poets use alliteration to describe distance, space and quiet. Shelley manages to create a large expanse of space, distance and emptiness:

The lone and level sands stretch far away.

(" Ozymandias", line 14, Percy Bysshe Shelley)

But de la Mare creates a feeling of stillness, quiet and distance with:

And how the silence surged softly backwards,

When the plunging hoofs were gone.

(" The Listeners", lines 35 & 36, Walter de la Mare)

By using this alliteration right at the end of the poems and the 'S' sound all the way through, both poets have finished with mystery and quiet foreboding of what might be.

I think that both poems are telling a ghost story. They are quite frightening and very mysterious. Out of the two my favourite is the listeners. I prefer this as I think it is a clear story, which made me feel on edge. Where I found Ozymandias too vague and without a clear ending.