

How the poems you  
have studied show  
the effect of time on  
heroes and kings  
essay ...



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The two poems I have been studying are, Percy Bysshe Shelly's 'Ozymandias' and Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'Ulysses'. Both poems are examples that show us how time can affect heroes and kings. They explore the theme of how human power is transient. I am going to explore this theme by studying and analysing key areas of both poems such as, the content and theme, the imagery that is created, the language used, the structure that both poems were written in and also the overall effectiveness and message of both poems. Ozymandias was the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II and this poem shows that the king faded away unlike his statue. Ozymandias thought that his power was going to last forever but he was proved wrong because even his statue lasted longer than him; to me this suggests that humans are more transient than art. Ulysses also known as Odysseus is more of a mythical figure and fighter. He was the king of Ithaca and was the son of Laertes. He was one of the most prominent leaders in the Trojan war. He was married to Penelope and they had a son together called Telemachus whom he wanted to leave his kingdom to. Unlike Ozymandias he was more aware of the effect of time he was more realistic and therefore decided to live his life to the fullest.

Ozymandias and Ulysses are similar in character because they were both very strong and powerful famous leaders, whom portrayed themselves as arrogant and self-centred people. However they are also different because Ulysses is aware of the effect of time and because of this chose to live his life to the fullest whereas Ozymandias was not and instead thought that him and his legend would live on forever which was not the case because all that

remained was a Broken statue. Another difference is that the poem Ulysses is not about art. The poem ' Ozymandias' is written in second hand narration.

The poem is about the statue of the former king, Ozymandias, which over time has become decayed, after being up for many years. This shows that art is less transient than human life. The statue is now weather-beaten, and is in several pieces, although it is broken up, it is still reflecting the king's ' sneer of cold command'. However, in ' Ulysses' the character is the narrative voice. He has just returned from a war after 20 years, and is no longer attracted to his wife, and does not know his son who was born shortly before he left for the Trojan War.

He has a strong desire to seek adventure and to go back to fighting in wars, but all his mariners are dead or no longer active. In the end, he realises things will never be the same again, and hopes to die in a last battle. The three main themes in ' Ozymandias' and ' Ulysses' are the transience of power and effect of time, the theme of bad ruling and arrogance and how this links to the effect of time; and the power of art and the way it is less transient than human power.

From Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem I have learnt that Ozymandias is a very arrogant character, ' my name is Ozymandias, King of Kings.. this hyperbole shows us how he thinks he is above all the other kings, it also shows us that he exaggerates a lot because of his arrogance '.. Look on my works ye mighty and despair. ' He is also saying that we should look at what he is don't and that we will never be as powerful as him, this is ironic because all that is left is an eroded statue. Like in Ozymandias where " king of kings" is

said, in Ulysses it says " I am become a name" this also shows that he is proud of his name because he is known, this is also arrogant. These two quotes show that the two men are alike in dignity.

The quote " I am become a name" also explores the theme of the transience of power because now he is no more than a name even though it is a famous name. '... round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare the lone and level sands stretch far away' this alliteration of " boundless and bare" and " lone and level" exaggerates that nothing or no-one is even there to take in the existence of the statue. It gives the effect that the man in the statue has simply ended up as a forgotten wreck. This is ironic because he really is forgotten it is not him that we remember but the artists work, the statue.

This reveals the power of art and shows us that it is also more powerful than humans. The effect of the quote " death closes all: but something ere the end, some work of noble note may yet be done" shows that he knows that death is the end and the sentence " death closes all:" is a very powerful sentence because it is short just like death. " Some work of noble note may yet be done" here he saying that although he is old he can still behave in a young manner. " It may be that the gulfs will wash us down it may be that we shall touch happy isles.

This to me suggests that Ulysses is aware that there is a possibility that they might drown and die and go to heaven but yet he still has the hunger for fighting. This shows that he is also a selfish character because of the fact that he knows the consequences of still searching for fighting but he still

does it which means he does not care about his family or kingdom and how it will affect them if he was to die. The repetition of "it may" has been used to emphasise the emotions Ulysses has and to get the reader to emphasize with those feelings.

Ulysses is aware of the effect of time "We are not know that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven" this quote is saying he is not as physically fit as he used to be but he is still young mentally, this is mind over matter. The arrogance that both men have in the poems is linked to the effect of time on heroes and kings. In the quote "wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command" the use of the words "wrinkled lip" and "sneer" shows that the artist saw the real Ozymandias it also shows contempt and shows us that Ozymandias looks down at people.

The use of hard alliteration in "cold command" shows the bad ruling and cruelty that Ozymandias has. On the other hand Ozymandias is not just a cruel ruler. "The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed" this quote shows the two sides to his personality. Shelley also uses the pun "mocked" here. Ulysses is also portrayed as a arrogant character because of the lack of respect he has for his wife. "match'd with a aged wife" the way he uses "match'd" makes it seem that he has been forced to be with her/ he also calls her "aged" this is disrespectful because this word is usually related to old and ugly things.

The use of the word is also ironic and hypocritical because he is also old but is still cursing her for being aged. I think he does this because he doesn't want her to affect his image; this is unfair on his wife's behalf because she

has been a true wife staying faithful to him but despite that he just sees her as an ugly old woman. Ulysses also behaves in a arrogant manor towards his son.

He thinks he is far more talented then Telemachus could ever be. most blameless he is, centred in the sphere of common duties” Ulysses saying that his son is good at those boring common duties this is patronising as he is saying he is better at the fighting parts. Ulysses is arrogant and contempt towards his people as well, just like Ozymandias was. He calls his people “ a savage race” he is showing us readers that he dislikes his own people this is belittling to them. Tennyson uses the literary device repetition in this quote, “.. That hoard, and sleep, and feel, and know not me”, to slow down the rhythm to show just how bored Ulysses is.

His boredom is caused by the effect of time against power, because as time went by he got older meaning he could not do what he used to do when he was young which lead him to his boredom. The quote “.. And know not me” shows just how self centred and childish Ulysses is, he is saying that his people do not know him when it should be him knowing them as a ruler. The power of art and the way it is less transient than human power is another one of the main themes in both poems. This quote shows us that art last longer than the rulers. “..

Its sculptor well those passions read which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things” this is ironic because it suggests that art is lifeless but has more life than people. Personally I believe that Ozymandias and Ulysses are both powerful rulers but I think Ulysses is more aware of the effect of time

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than Ozymandias " when I am gone he works his work, I mine" this shows that Ulysses knows that his time is soon to come and he accepts this; whereas Ozymandias portrays himself as scared of dying which is why I think he persists to hide behind the phrase " king of kings" leading him to believe that he will live on forever as the best.

The language and imagery both poets use to explore the effect of time on heroes and kings are different. Shelley writes about the artist's work on the statue to show us that Ozymandias' power has gone but he still wants it to be there, " two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert" because his body has gone but his legs still stand. I think Shelley is portraying the fact that Ozymandias is dead but his spirit should live on forever but this is not happening and Ozymandias is actually insignificant.

On the other hand Ulysses says " I will drink life to the lees" meaning he will live life to the fullest. He uses the imperative " I will" to show us just how determined he is to live life to the fullest; this is selfish yet ambitious of Ulysses. The imagery and language of these two quotes gives us the impression that Ulysses was much more naturally powerful than Ozymandias. "... And this grey spirit yearning in desire to follow knowledge like a sinking star". Ulysses is talking about himself because he is old but yearning in desire to be young.

Tennyson uses the simile " like a sinking star" to show his yearning desire for knowledge is unreasonable due to time and that he wants to reach the unreachable just like a star. Tennyson uses imagery to compare life to a day that ends fading away just like his life. " The long day wanes; the slow

moon climbs" this imagery is not like the imagery used in Ozymandias because that imagery was based on a statue whereas this imagery in Ulysses is natural. The personification of "moon climbs" gives us the image of night time which Ulysses has no pleasure for anymore, it also shows us his depression and boredom.

The structures of both poems are very different. They have been structured in these different ways so that each author could express each poem in a way that enabled us to explore each poem separately and in comparison with the other. Alfred Lord Tennyson has written Ulysses in a dramatic monologue; this enables us to learn more about the character as he is speaking about himself in his own words it also allows us to emphasise more with what he is saying.

Tennyson also used iambic pentameter this makes the character in the poem more realistic because it sounds like he is talking to us, and it makes Ulysses' speech more natural. On the other hand Shelley wrote her poem Ozymandias in a sonnet structure which was fourteen lines long. Although this is short Shelley has chosen to use this structure to explore the main and important points. She also uses enjambment where there are 5 stresses per line to emphasise important ideas.

The rhyming scheme of the poem is unusual for that period in time because it does not fit the Petrarchan pattern but instead interlinks the octave with the sestet by gradually replacing old rhymes with new ones in the form ABABACDCEDEFEF. I think the message of both poems is that of the transience of power on heroes and kings. However in 'Ozymandias', the



impact of the sonnet's message comes from the double irony. He says " look on my works, ye mighty, and despair! " Yet in the end, nothing remains of Ozymandias' works but the fragments of his statue.

So, ' ye mighty' should despair because they can never hope to equal his achievements and without doubt they will share his fate of death. The second irony is within the ' survival' of the character in the fragments being due not to his own powers but to those of the artist. The irony of the inscription is that it could have been written by Time herself, a warning to all those in positions of power that power on earth is passing by and that only God is immortal. Similarly, in ' Ulysses', the main character exuded pride and was thought to be a very strong man.

Victorians tended to read this poem pretty straightforwardly, as a statement of faith in the necessity of striving ever onward. Even a man as clever as Ulysses could not outwit the Fates, and like everyone else he too grew old. Although many readers have accepted the last lines of the poem as inspirational, it is not clear that Tennyson intended them to be so. Ulysses' final call to action is suicidal and proud. He intends to die in battle instead of in peace with his family.