Ozymandias And London Comparison

‘Ozymandias’ and ‘London’ both present human power, but whereas ‘Ozymandias’ explores how political power is intrinsically temporal, ‘London’ acts as a fiery critique of the upper class, who despite having the power to end suffering, fail to build a fair society.

Shelley uses alliterative words, ‘boundless and bare’, ‘lone and level’ to describe the environment surrounding the statue to emphasise the emptiness of the desert and compares this to the Pharaoh’s legacy. The repeated consonants suggest that the space around the statue is so ‘colossal’ that it undermines the statue completely, as well as signifying to the reader that no one was worshipping the Pharaoh despite Ozymandias’ challenge to other kings to ‘Look on my works’. Shelley creates irony through juxtaposition by placing Ozymandias' grand claims of his 'works' next to the simple phrase, ‘Nothing besides remains,’ which suggests the fragility of human power, unlike the omnipresent and overwhelming presence of nature that causes the statue to crumble. The use of irony here can be seen as mocking, as there is nothing left in this ‘bare’ desert, except ‘Two… trunkless legs of stone’ indicating that these can no longer support the torso which once symbolised might and power. There is, however, a subtle undertone of sorrow which suggests that the poet pities the false arrogance exhibited by such rulers.

In the poem, ‘London’, Blake unravels the oppressive and corruptive nature of the city that his heart is so deeply connected to; everyone he sees is affected by ‘Marks of weakness, marks of woe’. He is clearly angry and frustrated by the treatment of the rich towards the poor. The repetition of the word ‘marks’ in the second and third verses of the first stanza, and the repetition of ‘every’ throughout the second stanza, emphasises the persistent suffering of ‘every’ poor Londoner. Blake uses the metaphor, ‘mind-forged manacles’ to invoke the idea of slavery; that people have internalised the oppression to such an extent, that they are now effectively holding themselves hostage through psychological chains which symbolises their ideas and beliefs. The fact that Blake suggests that these ‘manacles’ are just creations of the mind, implies that he believes that individuals have the potential to overcome the illusion, and thereby overcome the cruelty invoked upon them, thus sowing the seeds of revolution. Blake addresses the societal ills in eighteenth century London through examples of the 'chimney-sweeper's cry' and 'youthful harlot's curse' highlighting the abhorrent use of child labour and rampant prostitution and its effects on society. By using imagery in ‘black'ning church appals’ and ‘blood down palace walls,’ Blake blames the church and the monarchy for the oppression and corruption in London. He uses the words ‘black’ning ‘and ‘blood’ to imply the colours red and black which refer to the French Revolution and may imply that London could also revolt against the institutions of the Church and State.

Both Blake and Shelley comment on the way power corrupts those that have it and how it is used to create and cause suffering of the innocent. Shelley emphasises that power is temporary and will eventually perish whereas Blake focuses on the individuals’ ability to overcome oppression. Both sonnets illustrate the disparity between the wealthy and powerful and the poor and destitute, but that in the end power is temporary and can be destroyed by nature or revolution; death and nature in the end are more powerful and important than the social constructs that create powerful leaders.