
The Themes Of My Last Duchess And Ozymandias

In the two poems: 'Ozymandias' and 'My Last Duchess', power is examined by the antagonists of the poems by immortalizing themselves or someone significant to them through art.

Both antagonists have powerful personalities who exert force over their respective areas of control. This exertion of control is evident in Ozymandias as the story, told by "a traveler from an antique land" is told. Using the adjective "antique" offers a sense of authority to the story implying that it has been told through many generations as a fable to prevent society from repeating stupendous acts; this may be Shelley's political message within the poem, which is also reflective of Browning in My Last Duchess where The Duke has power due to his status as an upper-class gentleman with -"my gift of a nine-hundred-years old name" mirroring his arrogance where to which he took deep offense when his wife did not appreciate this resulting in him taking action. This line suggests a connection to a longstanding aristocratic family with power and prestige. The Duke's family has been around for nearly a thousand years, and he thinks this makes him superior to the Duchess, who doesn't have the same heritage or anything that equals his royalty. He believes that the Duchess ought to have valued the social elevation of her marriage over the simple pleasures of life. The word 'gift' connotes the untouchable quality of his name and gives us an insight into his reasoning for killing his ex-wife.

In both poems, 'My Last Duchess' and 'Ozymandias,' Browning and Shelley present pride as a strong emotion that becomes negative due to the arrogance of the main characters whose behavior leads to the pain and suffering of others. In 'My Last Duchess' the duke says 'I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped,' implying that he has murdered his wife. Similarly, Ozymandias says (engraved on the pedestal) 'Look on my works ye mighty and despair' and he is sculpted with a 'sneer of cold command.' This shows the egotism and superiority over his people. Both poets have chosen to use imperatives and the word 'command' to show the characters' power. The duke takes a pause, highlighting his need for attention. Furthermore, the use of sibilance emphasizes his sneaky and manipulative nature, so much so that readers would be concerned for the fate of his next wife who he is now due to meet. Shelley also uses alliteration in 'cold command' to reflect Ozymandias' cold-hearted nature; the 'k' creating a harsh sound. In addition, the use of negative language in 'sneer' and 'despair' highlights how mocking and mean he is, choosing to instill fear into his people. Both poems highlight what can happen when pride is misplaced and show how negative the consequences can be.

Both of the antagonists eventually lose their power in the poems. In Ozymandias, the traveler that regurgitates the information describes the ruins of a famous ruler's statue "Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert"