

How does Shelley present the theme of power in Ozymandias?

Shelley portrays the transient nature of power continuously throughout the poem, showing how such authority and importance of someone can decay and change over time. The theme contrasts between power and powerlessness, clearly conveying the arrogance and obsession that Ozymandias, once a king, held. With the ominous, short and juxtaposing line, 'nothing beside remains' this reinforces power being lost over time as it proves

it doesn't last forever, though Ozymandias is clearly trying to hang on to his legacy. It also presents a deeper message of while power and wealth are significant in the moment, after death, everything declines, just as it did for Ozymandias. Furthermore, by the poets use of the noun 'nothing', it reinforces how none of the power he once held is significant or evident anymore.

The arrogance of holding power is also shown through the literary techniques the poet uses, conveying how the conceited 'king of kings' saw himself. Where it states, 'colossal wreck, boundless and bare', Shelley is showing how immense power, in the wrong hands, is used in the wrong way. The adjective 'colossal' connotes mass destruction, further reinforced by the verb 'wreck' in which the state of things is left in after power is misused. Moreover, with the use of Plosive B in 'boundless and bare', the harsh sounds portray the brutality in the way power was used by Ozymandias, showing recklessness and chaos and the impact left on the people he held authority over. His power diminishes regularly throughout the stanzas, depicting obvious transient nature and also the way others saw him. His power is dejected and abandoned, stamped out and deserted, just as the statue of him is in a 'lone' desert of 'level sands' that 'stretch far away.' The use of 'far away' ending the poem describes the way nobody or nothing surrounds Ozymandias, almost mocking him because he is ignored, and so he no longer holds power. This is ironic as the once glorious and dominant statue is now barren and lost, sitting in the middle of nowhere.

Ozymandias' power is momentary and fleeting, being already shown by the juxtaposing, reminiscent language and the exchanging between the pride of the king, and the egotism that he fuelled his power with. With the boastful quote, "'Look on my words, ye Mighty, and despair!'" Ozymandias speaks demanding and with such confidence that he expects everybody to treat him with respect, showing his strong vanity and the way he uses power to his own advantage. However, the theme of powerlessness eventually catching up with his once commanding reign is illustrated by the ambiguous line, 'half-sunk, a shattered visage lies'. This is extremely poignant as it holds a literal meaning of a derelict, broken statue that was once stable, yet additionally metaphorical for the way Ozymandias' power deteriorated. By the use of the words 'half-sunk', the poet states that some is still visible, acting as a remnant of what has decayed over time, representing the power that has 'shattered' with half still showing, meaning it is looked upon briefly to demean, not significant in the way Ozymandias would have liked. The adjective 'shattered' connotes that it isn't broken in two, but instead more strikingly a thousand pieces, meaning it can never be fixed or perfect. This battles the King's arrogant need to be perfect, but how his superiority shatters forever, along with his power that has transformed into 'nothing'.

Finally to conclude, structurally Shelley indicates a battle of power within. The rigid, regular rhythm of iambic pentameter is definite and powerful, completely under control with couplets of 'land/sand' and also 'decay/away.' Although, this is juxtaposed with what Ozymandias was like, reinforcing the difference of the power portrayed, but the chaos he so obsessively stood for; a reckless figure who left his lands and people in 'wreck' and conclusively, was left a deserted, broken statue with no authoritative respect to his name.