

How is a loss of power explored in 'The Prelude: Stealing the Boat' and one other poem?

In *The Prelude* and *Ozymandias*, both Wordsworth and Shelley explore a decline in and eventual loss of power. Both poems belong to the romantic period, and therefore share similarities in the way that power is presented to the reader, but also contrast in the way that decline in power is explored.

The subject's reaction to the realisation that man is insignificant alone in the grand scheme of nature is presented entirely differently in both poems. In the prelude, the boy takes the boat in 'an act of stealth And troubled pleasure' this emphasises the juxtaposition of emotions experienced by the boy, the noun 'stealth' implies a furtive, premeditated idea which sits uncomfortably with the oxymoron 'troubled pleasure' the adjectival troubled alongside the abstract noun pleasures explores the confused and undermined expression of Wordsworth's interaction with nature. This contrasts with the words of arrogance carved into the pedestal, about the now deceased and forgotten emperor Ozymandias 'my name is Ozymandias, King of kings' Shelley's biblical allusion within this line mimics the religious lexicon allowing himself to appear as a god on earth. The romantic ideal of examining 'The Sublime' (nature, society, the individual, abstract ideologies, that are verging on the incomprehensible/magnificent/awesome) is debated in both Shelley's and Wordsworth's poems, however the contrast comes as Wordsworth is humbled by the enormity of nature, whereas Shelley is exploding the abstract idea of power whilst introducing an argument for the permanence of art.

The Prelude is written in blank verse; this natural free flowing exploration of Wordsworth's complex relationship with nature is conversational with the reader allowing an engagement and insight into the presumed power and then paradoxical decline into guilt and disturbance. The enjambment encourages, through a lack of pauses, a continuity of form to occur in the ideas throughout the poem signifying an unrelenting shift into the disturbance of feeling and the rhythmic movement of the boat through the still waters of the lake. The content of the poem can be found in the form; the rolling emotions, cascading and changing. Shelley uses the sonnet form which is usually assigned to a

poem based on love, however by contravening the usual structural conventions of a sonnet he manages to emphasise the broken/self love that Ozymandias has for himself thusly outlining the destructive nature of oppressive regimes and the seeking of adoration in a religious manner.

In *The Prelude*, once the boy has encountered the 'grim shape' and returned from the lake he experiences a reflective period, 'huge and mighty forms, that do not live like living men, moved slowly through the mind' the personification of the forms which move through the speaker's mind reinforce the idea that nature is a separate entity, one which is more powerful than man and with the adverb 'slowly' conjures the image of a relentless barrage of pessimism; a realisation of a coming of age. There is an objectification of 'the mind' separating his body from his consciousness and therefore finding a deity in nature; a collective consciousness. This convergence of man, nature and God epitomises the Romantic Movement. Wordsworth promotes nature to a sentient being 'do not live like living men' highlighting the consciousness of an evolution of nature. Shelley uses a violent semantic field of destruction, 'shattered, sunk, stamped' in the past tense as he relates the tale of the symbolically decapitated dictator. Similarly to Wordsworth, Shelley separates the physical from the metaphysical; the body from the mind. His use of enjambment brings into focus the harsh alliteration of the 'cold command' of the 'colossal wreck', the hyperbolic description of the statue only further shows how empty an abstract notion like power is, and can be.

Wordsworth was an early romantic, whose work was largely based on nature and awe of nature, whereas Shelley was a later romantic, known for their confrontational verse and subversive lifestyles. These two poems perfectly thematically relate to one another whilst also showing the contextual differences within the period. Wordsworth's loss of power is in the way he interprets nature and how he recalibrates his own place on earth, whereas Shelley finds an impotency of power in lost archaic language and ideas, in which he presides over a once powerful symbol that has become a faded memory.

