

Compare the ways poets present ideas about power in 'Ozymandias' and in one other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

[30 marks]

Both 'Ozymandias' and 'My Last Duchess' show the effects of power and how it corrupts. Shelley describes Ozymandias' 'sneer of cold command' as if to suggest that he is a cruel and heartless leader, only concerned with his own power and the immortality it will bring. The Duke in 'My Last Duchess' is similarly concerned with his own power and status. Although the monologue is supposed to replicate a conversation, there is no opportunity for his listener to speak – Browning writes the monologue to show the Duke's self-obsession and that he is not interested in anyone's views other than his own. Ozymandias might have had 'cold command' of his 'lands', just like the Duke 'gave commands'. Both poets are concerned with the effects of power and how in the wrong hands it corrupts. The Duke is shown to be misguided as Browning uses imagery to hint at the Duchess' kindness and gentle spirit (white pony) to prove that she is innocent and has been killed for nothing. Ozymandias is shown to also be cruel: 'sneer of cold command' – however he has been left with nothing: 'the lone and level sands stretch far away'. It could be argued that the Duke has also been left with nothing: he has a statue of 'Neptune' which is made of cold bronze. He doesn't realise this himself however, as he cares nothing for human relationships and is far more concerned, like Ozymandias, with his pride and reputation. Ultimately, both leaders are shown by the poets to be corrupt. Both poets feel that power in the wrong hands has devastating consequences on the innocent. However, although both poets show that this corruption is punished in the end, perhaps it is the Duke who is shown more clearly to be the true despot as Browning uses the dramatic monologue to show first hand how completely self absorbed he is.