

2. Is the poetry of Shelley, Keats and the Romantics best enjoyed by young readers?
Essayists are free to write about Keats and/or Shelley and/or other Romantic authors.

Adolescence is a transitory stage, one in which a person progresses from childhood to adulthood. The notion of Shelly's ideas being those 'of adolescence' (TS Eliot, 'Shelley and Keats' (1933)) suggests them being simplistic and straightforward, which does not accurately describe his work. While Shelley himself died very young in a boating accident, he experienced many difficulties that would have forced him to develop quickly. However, in his poetry, Shelley wrote about more than just himself and his life. His work is not based solely on his personal experiences; they have messages of great significance that would resonate more with adults. Although younger readers can still enjoy his poetry, the issues he highlights in them are most likely not problems that a younger generation would have to face, and therefore Shelley's poetry is not best enjoyed by younger readers.

Shelley was a radical, romantic poet; he was vegetarian, strongly anti-monarchy, a pacifist, and an atheist. He came from a very wealthy family and was set to have a comfortable life with a large inheritance and a government role from his grandfather. However, his path in life changed after he got expelled from Oxford University and disinherited by his parents for publishing an atheist pamphlet, delivering it to religious figures, and refusing to denounce it. Furthermore, at the age of nineteen, he got married for a second time after leaving his first wife who later killed herself. These challenging experiences are what made his poetry so worldly. Shelley thought above himself; he was a champion for the working class and those who struggled more than him. By taking himself out of the riches of his family, he was able to understand those less fortunate than himself and write about their hardships, something that would be appreciated more greatly by an older demographic.

Shelley thinking outside of his own experiences can be seen clearly in one of his most famous poems, 'Ozymandias.' The poem is about the discovery of a semi-destroyed and decaying statue of Ramesses II, also known as Ozymandias, and shows how power, specifically the power of rulers, deteriorates and will not last forever. It takes the form of a report from a stranger of a statue falling apart in a desert. The King's pedestal claims he was 'king of kings,' which shows his immense arrogance and is contrasted by the reporter's claims that the statue is, rather ironically, surrounded by an endless featureless desert. This poem explores a rather mature theme, as the decay reflects how a leader's exploits, while they may be impressive, are not morally good and will be criticised and later forgotten about after they die.

It is thought that Shelley was making implicit links between Rameses' powerful but violent rein with that of George III. George III reigned during the time the poem was written and engaged in a multitude of military conflicts. 13 colonies rebelled under his rule. George III was oppressive and generally disliked at the time. Moreover, he is now seen historically as a tyrant. Shelley, as a pacifist, positioned himself against George III's military exploits, a radical stance that could be more greatly appreciated by an older audience.

Shelley sculpted 'Ozymandias' to reflect the oppression of strong leaders and the transience of mankind's power. By writing from the perspective of a traveller, he cleverly distanced his voice from that of the poem and could comment on leadership in the country without facing punishment. Shelley mocks rulers of the past, present, and future for thinking they will be any different from the previous one. The King in the poem used his power to oppress others, and Shelley suggests that all power allows for oppression and that the pride of rulers allows for it without guilt. This further suggests that Shelley was criticising all systems of power in which individuals are given so much control over people that, despite their abuse of it, the population are unable to remove them because there is no alternative. This idea is supported by his radical anti-religion and anti-monarchy

views as he is criticising all power being centred on a person who derives their importance from an image and perceived divine right to power.

The ideas present in this poem are not 'young, nonsense,' 'silly' or overly-'sentimental' (Virginia Woolf, 'A Letter to a Young Poet' (1932)), they are in fact, quite removed from childish thought. A young person would be able to study his works and understand them on an intellectual level. However, Shelley discusses mature topics and complex issues that much of the younger generation may not have experienced yet. Shelley's poetry is introspective and contemplative in a manner that only comes with ageing and, therefore, it is not best enjoyed by younger readers.