**Our Feeble Ephemerality**

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A mundane visit to a museum isn’t often described as an epiphanic experience, albeit such a notion may seem ludicrous to anyone who has assimilated the hefty weight of history’s burden. Therefore, I found myself falling down a rabbit hole of astonishment upon a prosaic visit to the Fossil Halls of the American Museum of Natural History. The imposing might these ancient creatures exuded was the culprit of the aforementioned wonderment; had we not found their fossils as effigies of their existence, we would instinctively refute the idea of such otherworldly creatures roaming the very planet that we so endearingly call home. Their scale alone—and the childlike amazement it casts upon our inquisitive minds—is more than enough to paint these creatures as mythos from a timeless fantasy tale; one which even J.R.R. Tolkien himself would struggle to envision. Yet their monumental presence proved to be frivolous against our universe’s mighty whims; on one seemingly ordinary day, their larger-than-life existence suffered an abrupt end. It began quietly with the sudden appearance of what initially seemed to be a new star on the night sky, becoming the size of the moon in a matter of weeks, and, well, the rest is history.

Ironically, history—the not so objective interpretation of the past since history is written down by the inevitably biased pen and ink of the victor—is the one thing humanity prides itself in the most. And rightfully so, for history is the living embodiment of our achievements. It’s the effigy that solemnly promises that the world will not unveil its most apathetic face and forget about us, or so we would like to believe. If the story of the Tyrannosaurus rex can be reduced to a mere set of fossils, then what can humanity expect from the future? How will history remember us if it’s subject to time? History is the unstoppable force that obscures the most minute details of everything and everyone, and just like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe once said: “God is in the details.”

To put our history into perspective, humanity, as we know it, has existed for approximately 200,000 years while our earthling predecessors, the dinosaurs, lived for approximately 165 million years. In other words, our time on earth accounts for a measly 0.1% of theirs, and yet, all that’s left of them are their petrified remains. Furthermore, humanity has lived free of any celestial threat for as long as we can remember, which naturally soothes our innate existential dread, but, consequently, we don’t seem to realize how incredibly minute our time on earth has been compared to that of the dinosaurs, and they’re long gone except for birds, but that’s beside the point. The vast resources of the Merriam Webster could masterfully paint the vivid illustration of this perspective, but no piece of literature does it more justice than Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem, “Ozymandias:”

*I met a traveller from an antique land,*

*Who said—“Two vast and trunkless legs of stone*

*Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,*

*Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,*

*And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,*

*Tell that its sculptor well those passions read*

*Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things, The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;*

*And on the pedestal, these words appear:*

*My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;*

*Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!*

*Nothing beside remains. Round the decay*

*Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare*

*The lone and level sands stretch far away.”*

The towering speech of a king of kings—whose derelict remains are but a broken set of legs which have become one with the scorching grains of sand, now long lost to everything and everyone—speaks volumes to the ephemeral nature of our achievements, suggesting that not even a demigod is grandiose enough to impose himself above the nature of life: a nature whose silver lining is disproportionately adverse to blossoming compared to how easily it can be derailed.

If fictional figures like the great Ozymandias and almighty creatures like the Mesosaurus match up as mere ants against the whims of our universe, then what does that make of us? Ordinary humans who go about our lives on the search, be it actively or passively, for something tangible in an existential plane so massive that our aspirations seem astoundingly inconsequential. What assures us that our achievements, our history, won’t end up in the burning back end of an olden library or a long-forgotten (perhaps inaccessible) corner of the internet? Or worse, what if —in one of the many ways humanity could be derailed— another asteroid were to crash on Earth?

There is no shortage of asteroids flying across the Milky Way. Despite all this, the lack of foreseeable substance in our future only backtracks to a positive remark: the present. If the apathetic future refuses to substantiate the essence of our lives, then we must wholeheartedly rely on the present to make the most out of the ephemeral palette of sweet and sour nectars that life has to offer. It may be the only way to assure ourselves that once we draw our last breath, we’ll close our eyes, and bid eternal farewell under the bliss of the sweetest of aftertastes.

To some, it may seem silly to ponder such things, but it does the mind no wrong to engage in such “trivialities” now and then. Why? Because what are we, if not destined to become whatever history makes of us? And if the future fails to maintain the fire of our lives, then, at the very least, we can find solace in centering our lives in the solemn appreciation of the great equalizer: this very moment.

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