

The vanity of immortal: ozymandias and a satirical elegy on the death of a late f...

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In Hamlet Act I, Shakespeare wrote: “Thou know’st ’tis common; all that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity.” Time is relentless. Despite those are selfless or cynical acts, the person is a nonentity or monarch, time evanishes everything vestige as the waves sweep the coast and left nothing remains but sand. That is the main perspective of the death of those two poems Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley and A Satirical Elegy on the Death of a Late Famous General by Jonathan Swift have in common. The main character in Ozymandias is a traveler who encounters an enormous statue broken in half. Another traveler told him that the statue belongs to the king Ozymandias. On the other hand, the poem by Johnathan Swift portrays the death of a General who does not have much respect from the people he governs. Both poems point out that death is merciless, and nothing is permanent.

First, no matter how great or sinister you are, the ruthless stream of time will destroy your status. In Ozymandias, the statue of the king described as “Two vast 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” (Shelley 2). With the use of imagery, the author creates a devastating scene for the poem by depicts the contrast image of an enormous statue which broken in half. The sculpture represents for the ambition, pride, and absolute power of the king. From those four lines, the readers can imagine this area used to be a prosperity kingdom, where the Ozymandias was a dictator who could control everything. However, now, the only thing remaining is “colossal Wreck, boundless and bare” (Shelley 13). As Ozymandias, the General in Jonathan poem is also a tyrant. He is a

corrupted military leader who “ had those honors in his day/ True to his profit and his pride/ He made them weep before he died” (Swift 22). Although the duke was the most powerful man in his lifetime, he succumbed to death. His funeral described as “ Nor widow’s sighs, nor orphan’s tears/ Wont at such times each heart to pierce/ Attend the progress of his hearse.” (Swift 18).

Moreover, not only their legacy faded as the time elapses to the end, but their pride also be conquered by the strength of nature. Ozymandias is a very complacent and arrogant king. He called himself the King of Kings. On the pedestal of his statue, there are words said, “ My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings/ Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!” (Shelley 10). The statement shows Ozymandias is satisfied with his achievement.

Sarcastically, pride comes before the fall, “ Nothing beside remains. Round the decay/ Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare/ The lone and level sands stretch far away.” (Shelley 12). The use of irony emphasizes the idea that the states of his glorious now become meaningless, standing alone in the middle of nowhere. The same pride of self-satisfied also can be found from the General in the poem A Satirical Elegy on the Death of a Late Famous General by Jonathan Swift. He lives in the “ bubbles raised by breath of kings/ Who float upon the tide of state” (Swift 27). The victories he has accomplished turns him into a corrupted leader who lines his own pockets with the expenses of the people. After he passed away, the author describes that “ This world he cumbered long enough/ He burnt his candle to the snuff/ And that’s the reason, some folks think/ He left behind so great a stink” (Swift 13).

Overall, those two authors Jonathan Swifts and Percy Bysshe Shelley have a similar perspective about the death. It will erase everything, regardless of the person's social status or how great the empire one has built. Besides that, two poems also comment on the human vanity who seek for immortality and permanence.