

WORD CHOICE, TONE, AND POINT OF VIEW IN THOMAS HARDY'S "THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWAIN"

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Abstract: *Titanic* was the most famous ocean liner in its time. It became more famous when it sank in April 1912. It inspires many authors to write literary works. One of them is Thomas Hardy who wrote "The Convergence of the Twain." It portrays a tragedy of human pride in the sinking of the ship. Through analysis of word choice, tone, and point of view, some lessons are found: man can build and develop modern and sophisticated technology, but he will not be able to control his fate. The force of fate owned by the Almighty God is above everything.

Key words: word choice, tone, point of view, tragedy, fate, destiny.

Introduction

The sinking of the ocean liner *Titanic* in April 1912 inspired Thomas Hardy to write "The Convergence of the Twain". This poem was published in 1915, three years after the tragedy. The title indicates that Hardy tries to compare the tragedy to a meeting of the two, in this case the iceberg and *Titanic*. There will be a question then: what happens with the comparison. This paper reveals the secret through a discussion on word choice, tone, and point of view in the poem.

Discussion

Some readers may find Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" a portrayal of a tragedy in general sense. In a more serious analysis, however, some philosophical points are found. By examining the choice of words that Hardy uses to convey the tone of the scene, it can be seen that beneath the tragedy in the poem is a philosophical atmosphere. The true point of view of "The Convergence of the Twain" is that of a fate created absolutely by the Almighty God. Below is the poem.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

***The Convergence of the Twain* 1912**

Lines on the Loss of the "Titanic"

I

In a solitude of the sea

Deep from human vanity,

And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres

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Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrud, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls-grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV

Jewels in joy designed
To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?"...

VI

Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII

Prepared a sinister mate
For her - so gaily great -
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

VIII

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,

X

Or sign that they were bent
by paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years

Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

(Kennedy, X. J. and Gioia, Dana, 2005: 486-487)

The title gives the first clue that the poem talks about philosophy. The author did not title the poem "The Sinking of *Titanic*" or "The Tragedy of *Titanic*," either of which would set an initial tone for readers to expect a moody sentiment. The title specifically implies that there is something secret in the tragedy. Since a tragedy normally triggers disaster, while it is portrayed as a meeting of the two, in this case the iceberg and *Titanic*, it can be reasoned that the tragedy gives not only information but also some profound lessons, especially philosophy.

The poem, obviously, isn't about a nice event; hence there are a lot of references to death. There are eleven stanzas in the poem, making it feel almost unfinished, or cut short, like the people's lives who died on the *Titanic*. There are only three lines per stanza, which basically carries on the same idea of incompleteness. The eleven stanzas of three lines follow a *a a a* rhyme pattern.

Each stanza, even each line, of the poem offers numerous examples where the choice of words sustains the tone implied in the title. The first and second lines, "In a solitude of the sea/ Deep from human vanity, " give us the idea that the ship was in a place where it was forgotten, where no human eye could see, and where it wouldn't be disturbed by nosy humans. These lines describe a condition in which no one and nothing is around it. A condition that makes anyone frustrated of being alone. The choice of "vanity" was purposefully used to convey an intended image in which no one can boast himself in front of others forever. Today someone maybe successful, but later he can be a loss.

"And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she" becomes the third line of the poem. Hardy used "Pride of Life" to mean technology. The latest and most modern marine equipment available went into the designing of the "unsinkable" *Titanic*. Hardy emphasized "Pride of Life" because of the overconfidence man had in his advancement in technology at the time. This overconfidence led to the deceptive believes that the *Titanic* was unsinkable thereby challenging fate and coincidence. This is a show of foolish human pride. The fact that the words "pride of life" have capital letters is ironic. It gives the impression that there was nothing there to be proud of, that this great plan had failed. The second phrase in line three "...stilly couches she..." is the idea of the ship under the water, far from humans. It lies undisturbed. It was once full of life and now there is a quietness.

In stanza two, it talks about how her great steel chambers, which once burned with bright red fires, now, have the cold currents of the sea running through them. "Steel chambers, late the pyres/ Of her salamandrine fires,/ Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres." This stanza reminds of imminent death. The word "pyres" is like cremation and even the reference to "fires" serves as a warning that this poem won't be pleasant. The choice of word "pyres" also implies a funeral pyre, therefore giving connotations of death. The tactile image of steel chambers

suggests that nothing is stronger than God Himself. How strong a substance will not be able to confront His power.

Stanza three "...over the mirrors meant/ to glass the opulent/ The sea-worm crawls-grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent...." gives the idea that the mirrors are only there to reflect the vanity in people, to let them see what they want to see. The "mirrors" mentioned represent the vanity of the rich and yet the contrast is that now a "sea-worm crawls" over them not caring about his look. He is "indifferent." These words (used to describe a sea-worm) all give connotations of something ugly, meaning the event that happened was ugly in itself.

The following stanza 4 also continues with the theme of vanity. The expensive jewels that were so important are worthless. It describes how the jewels that now "Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind." The use of alliteration in this line is very effective. The "b" sound is a hard sound, almost harsh. This fits into the nature of the poem in the way that it is hard and isn't trying to sugar-coat the truth. This symbolizes the fact that possessions can't save someone. The whole idea of putting faith in jewels is ludicrous. The word "blind" tells about the shallowness of the people who bought them. When the jewels were purchased they may have seemed precious but the people were blind to assume the jewels were really worth happiness. Now the jewels are just rubbish under the ocean.

Stanza five is ironic in the sense that all of the "vaingloriousness." This is once again giving the idea that jewellery is here to please the rich. The use of the word "vaingloriousness" is interesting as it gives connotations of boasting, giving the impression that people of a richer class are trying to out-do each other with their fineries. They take hedonism as a way of life and believe that properties are the most important thing in life.

Hardy was a believer in the force of fate and once destiny has been prepared, man cannot control his fate. Hardy shows this in stanza six that while man was "fashioning" the *Titanic*, fate was also making the *Titanic's* fate—the iceberg. "Immanent Will" is used in stanza six; line 3 as a personification of the force of fate. Hardy used the personification of the force of fate to emphasize it and human destiny which man is unable to control. An impression can be caught here that because humans thought they were doing such a great thing, and were being dismissive that anything could go wrong, fate couldn't help but intervene and put them back in their place.

It was something out of man's control. Verse 7 refers to the iceberg being formed described as a "sinister mate." Here, the poet is describing the iceberg. The use of the word "mate" refers to a kind of relationship between the iceberg and the *Titanic*, but not the kind of romantic relationship. It refers to a relationship between two different substances which cause disaster for human civilization. The words "far and dissociate" are just reinforcing the fact that nobody knew what would happen to the ship.

Stanza 8, in contrast to stanza 7, discusses how the ship growing in "stature, grace and hue". There is the difference between the "smart ship" and the iceberg which will cause disaster. Yet both will have equal importance in verse 10 because it is told they are "twin halves of one

august event" They will be two halves of the tragedy. The word "august" means something highly important. The sinking of the ship was very important, but for all the wrong reasons.

In the last stanza, fate is personified as "The Spinner of the Years": and once fate says "Now!" it is the time, nothing can change it. It is a master plan. The last line "..consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres..." gives the idea that human pride was shattered when the ship sank. The "two hemispheres" would refer to either side of the world (i.e.: the families and friends that had seen their loved ones leave from Belfast, and the families and friends who were waiting for them to arrive in New York). The word "jar" could be the news filtering through, and the families being devastated, and also human pride being jarred because of those proud to see the ship leave and those waiting for it to arrive gloriously.

Conclusion

The poem shows the tragedy of man's overconfidence. The builders of the *Titanic* were so confident in their ability that they have capacity to build and develop a very modern ship and believe that the ship is totally perfect and safe. Apart from its controversy, Hardy's poem ended in wisdom: Prepare ourselves for the forces of nature we cannot control and learn from our mistakes, not taking fate and coincidence for granted. One may be optimistic of his future, but remember that finally fate decides everything.

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