A Lesson to Be Learned On the Atlantic Ocean

Was the Titanic destined to sink? In today’s society, due to the vast differences in religion, it is very controversial to say that God has planned for something bad to occur. However, in the twentieth century, this was not a topic that many people avoided. Thomas Hardy was a popular writer during this period of time and he used themes that were similar to saying God controlled everyone’s fate. In “The Convergence of the Twain,” Thomas Hardy writes about the tragedy that happened to the Titanic on April 14th, 1912 and directly questions the significance of this maritime disaster (Whittsitt). In this poem, Thomas Hardy addresses free will and chance, fate and predestination, and the artificially of mankind. Unlike the mournful tone most people posses when talking about the Titanic, his message comes across as a negative perspective against the infamous tragedy and the people who were involved in it.

First, in Thomas Hardy’s “The Convergence of the Twain,” he focuses on free will and chance by beginning with “In a solitude of the sea/Deep from human vanity” (ll. 1-2). This gives off a feeling that everyone who was on the Titanic had a choice to make and unfortunately they wandered upon the path of chaos. A famous German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, is a great example of what the first stanza in this poem stands for. In his book, The Gay Science, Nietzsche sets forth with the proclamation that God is dead (Wicks). With this being said, Thomas Hardy uses the first stanza in “The Convergence of the Twain” to justify that there is no God to make choices for us, we must do them ourselves. “Steel chambers, late the pyres/Of her salamander
fire” are a few things Thomas Hardy writes about in the second stanza (ll. 4-5) The puzzling explanations of the phrase "salamander fires," [is] used to describe the fires that burned in the [steel chambers] of the Titanic (Grant). Ironically, this famous 45,500 ton of steel had a choice to burn or to drown. In the end, we learn that unfortunately the ship born in 1912 chose its path to drown in the Atlantic Ocean.

Second, Thomas Hardy talks a lot about fate and predestination in “The Convergence of the Twain”. As addressed earlier, Thomas Hardy starts this poem with a mood that God didn’t choose for this to happen to the passengers of the Titanic because there is no God. However, in the eighth stanza of this famous work Thomas Hardy writes, “And as the smart ship grew/In stature, grace, and hue./In shadowy silence distance grew the Iceberg too” (ll. 22-24). These lines illustrate the intimate encounter between the "unsinkable" Titanic and the iceberg that rammed and sank her in 1912 (Graves). Ironically, it seems that Thomas Hardy is saying that these two objects were meant to meet and that this catastrophe of 1912 was predestined to happen. In stanza five the fish swimming below the Titanic ask “‘What does this vaingloriousness down here?’” l. 15). In the sixth stanza of this poem, the speaker answers this question, ironically tracing the circumstances leading to the disaster (Whitsitt). [The speaker] points out that just as the ship took time to build, the iceberg that hit it was building also (Whitsitt). This serves as proof that no matter what country or what body of water the Titanic sailed on, this ship and the iceberg were bound to be together. Plato, a Greek philosopher, had a philosophy similar to the one Thomas Hardy speaks about in the middle piece of this poem. Plato said that all things and concepts are eternal and changeless, but enter into a partnership with changeable matter, to produce the objects and examples of concepts, we perceive in the temporal world (Bruce). In
technical terms, Plato supports Thomas Hardy’s idea that the Titanic was predestined to meet the iceberg.

Does the last piece of this poem justify that God controlled the fate of the Titanic? “No mortal eye could see/The intimate welding of their later history” is a famous line due to the word mortal (ll.26-27). Many critics have suggested that Thomas Hardy is reversing what he said in the first two stanzas of this poem and is saying that a supernatural figure had destined for these two objects to meet each other. Thomas Hardy takes a sexual approach in “The Convergence of the Twain” by saying “The intimate welding of their later history” (l. 27). This line implies mating of the ship and the iceberg in the middle of the sea. By relating intimacy to the ship and the iceberg, many wonder if the two objects were bound together in marriage by Christ. Hardy enhanced the likelihood of this biblical allusion by adding the word twain to the title. This term refers to bride and groom in Christ's discussion of marriage and in Christian marriage services (Brown).

Finally, Thomas Hardy addresses the artificially of mankind in “The Convergence of the Twain”. During his early life, Thomas Hardy constructed a philosophical opinion out of his experience of the world and his reading in nineteenth century science and philosophy (Reid). His view later on developed as pessimistic and fatalistic as regards the life of humanity (Reid). In “The Convergence of the Twain,” Thomas Hardy writes, “Jewels in joy designed/To Ravish the sensuous mind” to express the selfishness of the many passengers that boarded the Titanic (ll. 10-11). These lines impose that even in the worst of times, it is the nature in man to care for nothing but the material things that he possesses. The third stanza says, ‘The sea-worm crawls—grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent” (l. 9). The sea-worm represents human powerlessness in
the face of nature and supernatural forces (Whitsitt). Thomas Hardy says man is weak by comparing mankind to a defenseless creature, the worm.

Many critics have said that Thomas Hardy believes the sinking of the Titanic happened out of pride from the passengers. When it comes to pride and punishment, “The Convergence of the Twain” can be compared to the Bible. In Proverbs 15:25, the Bible says, “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud”. Due to the passengers of the Titanic being so prideful about their money, clothes, and jewelry, the Titanic was destroyed by sinking to the bottom of the sea. Thomas Hardy attended church so regularly that he knew the service by heart and [he] firmly believed in a personal God who ruled the universe and took cognizance of the situation of humanity (May). Thomas Hardy could be giving a biblical lesson to be thankful for what you are given in life, but to also remember to keep your pride hidden.

In conclusion, Thomas Hardy’s “The Convergence of the Twain” is about more than just the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. This twentieth century poem talks about free will and chance, fate and predestination, and the artificiality of mankind. Thomas Hardy offers some advice on how to keep a catastrophe like the sinking of the Titanic out of one’s life. Philosophers such as Nietzsche and Plato participate as good examples for Thomas Hardy’s theory of people choosing their own paths and the theory of things happening for a reason. “The Convergence of the Twain” also has great lesson that can be related to the Bible. For example, just like the Holy Bible, this poem preaches against pride. Thomas Hardy does a wonderful job in giving an example of how one should act. In a brief summary, “The Convergence of the Twain” gives advice to make wise decisions, trust in God, and to have confidence, but don’t let it get the best of you.
Work Cited


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