

Lukas Dekan

Mr. Williams

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The Blinding Torch

Under the torch of one's own ego, one is led into a valley of desolation. It's a valley that may seem dark to the naked eye but is still seen by the one who holds the torch. The bearer is blinded, however, for he perceives the valley but does nothing about it: he neither turns away nor does he take a detour. He simply pushes forward, acknowledging the danger that is ahead, but stubbornly determined nonetheless. And suddenly, he falls to his demise: he's seen the pit right in front of him, but he did nothing about it. All this time, he's believed in the lie that he can traverse the area with ease, but he has fallen into his own rabbit hole, an opened box of pandora, waiting for the torch-bearer to plummet down into itself. What trouble, and yet what a bright torch! *Could it not have been the light to give one sight?* No, pride isn't a trustworthy lightsource: it only leads to darkness. It illuminates the path, but the path leads to trouble, to the destruction of many and even the death of oneself, and of his friends, and of his family. Pride kills: this is the central message that Thomas Hardy tries to convey in his poem: *The Convergence of the Twain*, but pride doesn't always kill on its own. A higher power, which sees all the trifles of man, can punish a man's pride, unless the consequence of his ego is already a punishment of its own. And thus, through an intricately constructed poem, written with vibrant illustrations of sea life which later transitions into a detailed description of the back end of humanity (the punishment of God), Hardy tries to metaphorically convey how Pride, the enemy of man, has led the iconic Titanic to its demise.

The poem begins in a cold, isolated setting: “In a solitude of the sea,” where a mysterious object lies hidden “deep from human vanity.” This is where Hardy presents the reader with the central focus of the poem: The Titanic, planned by the “Pride of Life.” The phrase “planned by” is a personification which alludes to the Titanic's captain's words that “even God won't be able to destroy this ship.” Blind, he was: the torch of pride lit his way to a dark path, a path to extinction, which resulted in the Titanic to “stilly couch” onto the seabed, with its “steel chambers” residing in the depths of the sea, where “cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.”

It's important to note how Hardy illustrates the active sea life here, which interacts with the giant metallic beheemoth. For example, “the sea worm crawls” “over the mirrors” of the ship, but the creature seems “indifferent” to it.

Indifference presents itself as an aftermath of the downfall paved by human pride, which has caused the success of the Titanic to fall like the proud Icarus, whose glorious wings were melted by his own rebellion. But what is the predecessor of that downfall? It seems like Hardy's answer to that question isn't just pride, but genuine ambition. Indeed, according to the poet's vivid imagery, the Titanic has been created with “jewels in joy designed” to spark wonder like a fire in the human eye and “to ravish the sensuous mind.” But in vain. Those precious gemstones all “lie lightless” in the deep, “all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.” Ambition may have brought the colossal Titanic to life, but human arrogance has duped what could have been a breakthrough in human history and has brought disaster instead. However, though the spark of wonder has never been lit in the eyes of humans, it still makes the “dim moon-eyed fishes gaze at the gilded gear.” Their curiosity leads them to ask an important question: “What does this vaingloriousness down there?”

It is exactly at this point in the poem that Hardy switches his tone from a lonely illustration of the depths to a supernatural revelation of “the back end” of life, the high power of God, which sees all the practices of mankind. The poet states that while the Titanic, or, as he calls it, “the creature of cleaving wing,” was “fashioning,” the “Immanent Will,” also known as God, “prepared a sinister mate for her.” *Sinister is the mate indeed: it’s what has led the Titanic to its desolation just moments back, the “shape of ice,” the iceberg, prepared by God, “for the time far and dissociate.”* But, though the two giants had not met when the Titanic was still being built, Hardy beautifully and poetically explains how “as the smart ship grew,” in beauty, “stature, grace and hue,” so “In the shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.” The poet clearly states that while they seemed “alien” to each other, nobody, “no mortal eye,” could see for themselves what disaster lay ahead, “the intimate welding of their later history.” Nobody could predict that “they were bent by paths coincident,” but it was no coincidence in the first place, for it was “the Spinner of the Years” who had planned it all. And on his divine signal, when he cried “Now,” the “two hemispheres” jarred together, presenting to the world the result of pride, the epitome of vain glory, and the hallucination of what was meant to be an incredible advancement in the history of man.

It was in vain. It was all useless. *The glorious ambition of those building the Titanic has been pursued in vain. The cutting-edge technology behind it has been planned in vain. The intricate design choices and the jewels used to beautify the **Goliath** of all ships have been made in vain.* Thus, as the great **King Solomon once said**, one can simply state with regard to the Titanic that “**everything is meaningless.**”