The Convergence of the Twain

POEM TEXT

(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
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, 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.

SUMMARY

The speaker begins by imagining where the Titanic is now. Isolated deep beneath the ocean, far away from the rich, self-indulgent passengers who sailed on her and the ambitious, overconfident engineers who built her, the ship now lies motionless.

Through the steel-plated boiler rooms, where the fires once burned that powered the ship, chilly currents of water now flow, almost turning the wreck into an instrument that is "played" by the moving water.

In the wreck are mirrors where glamorous, wealthy passengers were meant to see their reflections. Now, however, disgusting, slimy sea-worms crawl silently over those mirrors, completely undisturbed by the wreckage and the carnage.

Also in the wreck lie jewels that once belonged to passengers or decorated the ship. These jewels were meant to delight wealthy people who concerned themselves primarily with luxurious material goods. Now, they reflect no light, and instead lie colorless, without any sparkle, beneath the dark ocean.

Nearby, drab fish with dull eyes look at the wreck and the fine materials that once covered its exterior surfaces, as if they are asking themselves, "What is this self-indulgent luxury doing down at the bottom of the ocean?"

The answer is that, while people were building a ship that was

meant to effortlessly pierce the sea's waves as it sailed, something else was also taking action: a supernatural power, like God or Fate, that sets in motion and directs everything that happens.

This supernatural power began creating an object that would match the ship in size and grandeur: an enormous iceberg. These two closely matched objects would meet at a time far in the future, when no one expected them to meet.

As the builders were making their impressive ship greater in size, capability, and beauty, the iceberg, also, far away, was growing silently larger.

The ship and the iceberg would have seemed completely unrelated to anyone watching; no human observer could have anticipated how their futures would ultimately come to be closely intertwined.

Likewise, no human observer could find any clue that the paths of the iceberg and the path of the ship would ultimately cross, making them two equal participants in a single awe-inspiring occurrence.

People only realized what would happen when the supernatural power, who determines how long each human life will last, decreed that the ship and the iceberg would meet at this moment. Both the ship and the iceberg obeyed the decree, coming together in a collision that was both the inevitable outcome of the earlier chain of events and the most fitting and perfect conclusion to the ship's career. The collision physically shook the ship and the iceberg, the two halves that made up the whole event, and emotionally shook the two halves of the planet, shocking the entire world.

THEMES

HUMAN HUBRIS VS. NATURE'S POWER

The poem is about the Titanic, the enormous ship that infamously sunk after smashing into an iceberg in 1912. The speaker contrasts the human-made majesty of the ship with the alternatively "indifferent" and destructive natural environment that now surrounds it beneath the sea. The ship was *supposed* to represent human beings' ingenuity and ability to master the natural world. Now, however, the poem argues that the wreck has come to represent the opposite: it is a testament to the fragility of human creation in the face of nature's might, and a reminder of the perils of hubris.

According to the speaker, the ship was created by "the Pride of Life" and "human vanity." The ship was originally intended to represent human achievement and the pride such achievement inspires. For example, the ship was formerly powered by "salamandrine fires." Salamanders, which can live unharmed in fire according to legend, represent a triumph over the elements. The Titanic, similarly, was meant to triumph over the element of water by being unsinkable.

Such achievements also represented human vanity, the poem implies, as many elements of the ship revealed an obsession with opulence, riches, and appearances. The speaker takes care to mention the "mirrors" and "jewels" that beautified the ship and made it "gaily great." The ship wasn't just a marvel of engineering, then; it was also the height of luxury. The ship's accommodations were designed for rich, "opulent" passengers whose "sensuous mind[s]" were consumed, or "ravish[ed]," by extravagant, expensive material goods, and whose vanity was pleased by being "glass[ed]" (in other words, by seeing their own beautiful appearances reflected back to them).

And yet, all this technology and wealth ultimately proved helpless in the face of nature's might—a fact the poem makes clear by juxtaposing the intentions of the human shipbuilders with the current state of the ship at the bottom of the sea. The ship is now "Deep" in the ocean, far from "the Pride of Life that planned her." It was never part of the shipbuilders' plan that the ship should be found "[i]n a solitude of the sea." But, of course, the sea overcame their plan.

Similarly, the ship's "[s]teel chambers" were built to hold fire, but now they hold only "[c]old currents." The jewels were meant to dazzle the ship's wealthy, glamorous passengers with their "sparkles," as the mirrors were "meant" to reflect the passengers' beautiful appearances. Now, though, the jewels are "lightless" and the mirrors reflect "grotesque" sea-worms.

Nature is portrayed not only as powerful but also as "indifferent" toward the life it destroys. The sea-worms that crawl over the wreckage are totally unaffected by the destruction and loss of life that surround them. The sea even destroys any semblance of honor for all those who died in the wreck. The word "pyre" traditionally refers to a fire built to burn a dead body as a funereal rite. The sea has extinguished the "pyres" and replaced them with "rhythmic tidal lyres." This image suggests that the sea is so unconcerned with human death that it plays music in the wreck.

Finally, the fish that swim through the shipwreck are baffled rather than mournful, asking, "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" Their reaction reinforces the reader's sense that nature is utterly unmoved by human loss—something that, the poem argues, is perhaps an inevitable outcome of excessive vanity and pride.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Lines 2-3
- Line 3
- Line 4
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7

- Line 8
- Line 9
- Line 10
- Line 11
- Line 12
- Line 13
- Line 14
- Line 15
- Line 16
- Line 17
- Line 20
- Line 22
- Line 23
- Line 24

FATE AND HUMAN POWERLESSNESS

The world described in the poem is a fearful one. First, it is both predestined *and* unpredictable: certain events are destined to occur, but humans cannot anticipate them or guard against them. Second, the poem implies that destiny is controlled by a power that does not care about human suffering.

This power, which, according to the speaker, planned the collision of the Titanic and the iceberg, is unconcerned with the death it causes. In fact, it seems to find the wreck a pleasing spectacle. In describing a power that finds such pleasure in destruction and is indifferent to suffering, the poem is designed not to comfort readers after loss but to warn them of their own insignificance and powerlessness—in the face of God, fate, or perhaps death itself.

The poem argues that it was predestined, or planned, that the ship and the iceberg collide. The world is controlled by "The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything." Basically, the speaker thinks that some supernatural power influences all events. Again, this power might be God, fate, nature, or something less specific. In any case, the poem implies that people do not control their destinies.

This power "prepared" the iceberg as a "sinister mate" for the Titanic. As mates are *meant* to go together, this implies that the ship and the iceberg were *meant* to meet. Thanks to this power, the ship and the iceberg were on "paths coincident." If two objects are on paths that coincide, or cross, the two objects cannot help meeting. Likewise, the ship and the iceberg could not help colliding—it was their destiny.

The poem also suggests that this convergence, though predestined, could not be predicted or prepared for by human beings. The ship and the iceberg seemed to human observers to be "[a]lien," or unconnected. "No mortal eye could see" that, according to a supernatural plan, they would ultimately collide. And since they could not predict the wreck, people could not prepare to save themselves from it. If the world is shaped in this way by a powerful, unpredictable fate, then the poem suggests that human beings are ultimately powerless to control events or predict their lives.

What makes this world even more fearful is that the supernatural power regards the collision, not as a tragedy, but almost as beautiful. By emphasizing this power's pleasure in the wreck, the poem offers no comfort to readers and instead warns them of their vulnerability. The collision is described as "august." The term "august' conveys something grand and magnificent that inspires admiration. The power seems to have found this "august event" impressive and enjoyable to watch.

The ship and the iceberg, meanwhile, are described as "twin halves" and "two hemispheres," as though they are two pieces that only make one perfect whole when they come together. The collision is also described as "consummation." Consummation can refer to an inevitable outcome. Perhaps the poem is saying, then, that if people cannot abandon their pride and vanity, then their overambitious ventures will always end in destruction. And no matter how hard human beings try to conquer nature, they will never be able to escape death itself.

Consummation can also refer to a fitting or perfect outcome, or to the accomplishment of an intended goal. The word thus suggests that the "Spinner of the Years"—another name for a supernatural power controlling human lives—meant for this collision to happen because it seemed a perfect ending, something fitting and beautiful. In suggesting that the world is controlled by an unstoppable, unsympathetic power, the poem serves as a stark reminder of how vulnerable human beings are—perhaps most of all when they pridefully overestimate their own power and importance in the grand scheme of things.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 16
- Line 17
- Line 18
- Line 19
- Line 20
- Line 21
- Line 22
- Line 23
- Line 24
- Line 25
- Line 26
- Line 27
- Line 28
- Line 29
- Line 30
- Line 31
- Line 32
- Line 33

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

The speaker begins with a vivid image of the lonely depths of the ocean, with nothing in sight but dark water. But then, in the last three words of the stanza, the speaker suddenly adds, "stilly couches she." ("She" refers to a ship.) It is as if a shipwreck had suddenly loomed up out of the empty darkness. Because the speaker delays introducing the ship, there is an element of surprise in the image (just as there was a great deal of surprise when the ship sank!).

This ship, of course, is the Titanic: the famous ocean liner that stunned the world when it sank on April 15, 1912. The poem was written just a month after the Titanic sank, and Thomas Hardy would have expected his audience to know that the Titanic was the largest and most luxurious ship in operation at the time—and that its makers had designed it to be "unsinkable."

Yet the poem signals immediately that, although it is about "the loss of the 'Titanic,'" it is not simply going to mourn the victims or celebrate the passengers' bravery in their final hour. It will examine the reasons why the Titanic sank and critique the motivations behind its construction.

To that end, the speaker does not refer to the individual engineers or laborers who built the ship. Instead, the speaker says that it was "human vanity" and "the Pride of Life" that "planned" the ship. The speaker suggests that people built the ship out of pride in their own abilities, especially their ability to conquer nature by creating a ship that the ocean couldn't sink. The ship's grand scale pleased the vanity of the builders, while its extravagant luxury appealed to the vanity of the wealthy passengers.

Now, however, the ship has become a symbol of pride and vanity gone too far. It was never "planned" that the ship sink "[d]eep" into the sea, and the poem implies that it was an act of hubris for human beings to think they could conquer the natural world. The poem is thus a critique of such pride and vanity.

The speaker strengthens this critique, and reminds the reader of how widespread these traits are, by using biblical allusions. The word "vanity" would summon to many readers' minds the Book of Ecclesiastes, with its famous line, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." The full verse reads, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" (Eccl 1:2-3).

This verse insists that all things are, in one sense, useless or profitless. In particular, labor (like the labor of shipbuilding) does not profit humans they way they hope it will do. With the word "vanity," the speaker thus suggests that the Titanic does not represent the bad judgment of a few 20th-century individuals, but rather a universal human failing.

The phrase "Pride of Life" is a biblical allusion as well. It comes from 1 John 2:16: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." In this context, the "pride of life" refers to a proud, arrogant assumption of greatness, and the desire that others admire and applaud one's greatness.

Biblical commentators have connected this trio of failings to the three reasons why the forbidden apple appealed to Eve in the Book of Genesis: "the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise" (Gen 3:6). It was "pride of life" that made Eve desire to be as wise as God Himself, and this was partly responsible for the Fall of humankind into sin.

In connecting the Titanic's sinking to humanity's original fall, the speaker makes the ship a stunning symbol of human failing itself and reminds the reader that humans *still* destroy themselves through pride.

LINES 4-6

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

In stanza II, the speaker starts to bring out a key element of the poem: irony. Irony highlights the difference between how things appear to be and how they actually are. The speaker treats the loss of the Titanic ironically by focusing on the stark contrast between what everyone intended and believed the Titanic to be and what the ship ended up *becoming*. This contrast is conveyed through antithesis.

This stanza, for instance, antithetically contrasts fire and water. The "[s]teel chambers" were intended to hold the "fires" that powered the ship; now they hold "[c]old currents" of ocean water. The alliteration of "cold currents" further reinforces the contrast between the hot fire and the chilly waters. By invoking two opposite elements, the speaker reminds the reader that the Titanic's fate was, ironically, the *opposite* of what everyone expected.

The irony is reinforced by other words in the stanza. The fires are "salamandrine." According to popular legend, salamanders are able to live unharmed in fire. They represent a triumph over the elements. The Titanic, similarly, was meant to triumph over the element of water by being able to cross the sea unharmed. Now, though, the sea has triumphed over her.

The fires are also described as "pyres." Pyres are a very specific kind of fire: they are used for funereal rites to burn the bodies of the dead. If the ship, even while its fires were still burning and it was still going strong, was powered by "pyres," it is as if

Titanic was *always* a kind of floating funeral, destined to bring about its passengers' deaths from the moment it left port. (This idea that the wreck was predestined will be brought out even more explicitly in later stanzas.)

It is significant, too, that the sea has now extinguished those pyres. In this poem, nature shows no sign of mourning or honoring the dead. Instead, the sea almost uses the wreck as raw material for artistic creation. The currents "thrid" the ship, like a needle pulling thread through cloth; the metaphorical threads of water become, in turn, metaphorical strings on a lyre. A lyre is a musical instrument whose strings produce sound when they move. The Titanic's chambers are transformed into "rhythmic tidal lyres," as if the moving currents of the sea are playing music on the wreckage. The ideas that nature is indifferent to the wreck and that the wreck is almost an artistic creation are also important in later stanzas.

The poem's rhyme scheme also subtly reflects the idea of inevitability. The poem is written in three-line stanzas (tercets). All three lines rhyme, giving the poem a rhyme scheme of AAA:

> Steel chambers, late the **pyres**
> Of her salamandrine **fires**,
> Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal **lyres**.

The rhyme scheme is highly repetitive and highly regular; the A sound repeats not twice but three times, and the rhymes are all essentially perfect rhymes. The rhyme scheme, then, informs the reader that after they hear the A sound twice, a third A sound will inevitably follow. Each stanza carries this sense of an inevitable end, which reinforces the poem's idea that the collision was the Titanic's inevitable end.

LINES 7-9

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

This stanza continues to use antithesis to bring out the irony in the Titanic's sinking. Irony usually identifies a gap or discrepancy—between what the characters know and what the audiences know, between what is expected and what actually occurs, etc. Here, the discrepancy is between what humans originally intended the Titanic to be and what it ended up becoming.

The reader learns first that the mirrors were "meant," or intended, to "glass the opulent": to provide the wealthy passengers with reflections of their own beautiful, glamorous appearances. But then the reader learns that the mirrors now reflect what is essentially the opposite of beauty and glamor: "grotesque" sea-worms. The alliterated /s/ sound—"glass," "sea," "grotesque," "slimed"—creates sibilance and evokes the sound of slithering or of a slimy creature crawling.

Stanza I critiqued the Titanic's creators for the pride and vanity that led them to build such an ambitious and luxurious ship. The imagery of this stanza extends that same critique. Because they feed on human corpses buried underground, worms are a traditional symbol of mortality. (Shakespeare, for instance, refers to the dead as "food for worms" in *1 Henry IV* and in *Hamlet*, Hamlet says of the dead Polonius that "worms are even at him.") In attempting to build an unsinkable ship, the ship's creators were almost defying their own mortality, believing that in this ship, they could not die. Now, contrary to their expectations, mortality has overtaken them.

The mirror, meanwhile, is a traditional symbol of vanity. Those who are obsessed with themselves and their appearance love to look at their reflection in a mirror. With the image of the worms crawling over the mirror, the speaker presents an image of death conquering this kind of personal vanity. He also reminds readers of the other kind of vanity, the ultimate futility of all human pursuits. No matter what humans accomplish and no matter how proud they are of those accomplishments, they eventually end as "food for worms."

Elegies—poems written for and about the dead—traditionally honor and celebrate those who have died rather than critique them so heavily. In many elegies, such as "Lycidas" and "Adonais," nature itself mourns the dead. In this poem, however, the sea-worms are "indifferent." They show no distress at all over the wreck and those who were killed. They reflect the larger indifference of the natural world to humankind in this poem.

The rhyme of "meant" with "indifferent" highlights the fact that nature, like the supernatural force beyond nature, has no concern at all for human desires or intentions. The word "indifferent" is placed in the climactic position at the end of the line, emphasizing how absolute that indifference is.

LINES 10-12

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

Like stanza III, stanza IV uses antithesis to contrast human *intentions* with real-world *outcomes*. Amid the wreck lie "[j]ewels," which either decorated the ship or were brought on board by wealthy passengers. These jewels were meant or "designed" to delight people. Now, though, the jewels lie hidden in the dark sea where they delight no one.

There is also a contrast here between light and dark, between the light the "sparkl[ing]" jewels were meant to reflect and the "lightless" sea that now "black[ens]" them. In the final phrase, the alliteration of the /b/ sound across three words and the stressed beat on each word strongly emphasizes how the jewels' beauty has been destroyed:

> ... **b**leared and **b**lack and **b**lind

The wealthy passengers with "sensuous mind[s]" found "joy" primarily in material things like the jewels, as the /j/ alliteration of "jewels" and "joy" suggests. These people were concerned entirely with expensive objects and beautiful appearances.

This concern proved self-destructive, as the word "ravish" suggests. To ravish can mean "to fill with intense delight and pleasure, to entrance and captivate." But to ravish something can also mean to spoil, corrupt, or destroy it. The repeated /sh/ sound (consonance) in "ravish" and "sensuous" creates a connection between those two words, suggesting that material concerns can be corrupting.

Too great an obsession with material goods, the speaker implies, can spoil the minds of people like those wealthy passengers who created a market for luxurious, overly grand ships like Titanic. The word "blind" is applied to the jewels, but there's also a hint that it could apply to the passengers and ships' officers as well. Their focus on the ship's speed and comfort blinded them to concerns for its safety.

LINES 13-15

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

This stanza once again juxtaposes human-made artifacts against the natural world to make a point about human pride and fallibility. The Titanic was supposed to represent human achievement, especially humanity's power to conquer the natural world. But the image of the fish gazing at the wreck, like that of the sea-worms crawling over the mirrors, shows how nature ultimately proved more powerful.

Also like the image of the sea-worms, this image of the fish again emphasizes that nature is unsympathetic to humanity. The sea-worms were "indifferent" to the fact that they were crawling over the wreck of a vast ship. The fish notice the wreck; the speaker anthropomorphizes them so that they can see it and comment on it. But instead of feeling sympathetic grief, the fish are simply baffled and uncomprehending, asking, "What does this vainglorious down here?"

To be vainglorious means to be extremely vain and obsessed with oneself. It also means to be excessively proud of one's own abilities. The fish criticize the ship and by extension its makers for being too vain and too proud, which seems to be a valid critique. The ship's makers had prided themselves on building a ship that would not sink. Now it's clear that they were overly proud, since their efforts ultimately failed and the ship lies at the bottom of the ocean.

But it is not only the fish that come across as unsympathetic: the speaker, too, does not seem to have much patience for the kind of hubris that the ship represents. Teh speaker describes the wreck in mocking tones as "gilded gear." The alliteration of the /g/ sound in "Gaze at the gilded gear" makes the line sound almost singsong rather than serious and mournful. "Gilded" suggests that the surface has been covered with a thin coating of precious metal that concealed something less valuable underneath.

The Titanic, the speaker thus implies, looked beautiful on the *outside* but was not sound and strongly built on the *inside*. The ship appealed to passengers' "vanity" and to their "sensuous mind[s]," their concern with beautiful surface appearances, rather than to more profound, less materialistic values. The fish might not understand how the Titanic came to be "down here" beneath the sea, but the speaker suggests that the cause lies in human pride and vanity.

LINES 16-18

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

The stanza begins abruptly: "Well." It is as if the speaker has heard the fishes' question and is now going to answer it, explaining how the Titanic came to be down at the bottom of the sea.

This is a turning point in the poem. In stanzas I-V, the speaker seemed to suggest that the ultimate cause for the wreck lay with human nature and human flaws. It was because human pride and vanity wished to create such a powerful, opulent ship and lacked the humility to take proper safety precautions that the Titanic came to exist and came to sink. But in stanzas VI-XI, the speaker offers another kind of explanation.

As people were fashioning the "creature of cleaving wing," another force was also at work. The speaker names this force the "Immanent Will." The poet, Thomas Hardy, was interested in philosophical ideas about the forces that cause things to happen and change in the universe. The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer inspired Hardy's idea of the Immanent Will. This Will, unlike the Christian God who cares for each person individually, is an impersonal, unthinking force in the universe that controls nearly everything that happens, leaving almost no room for the operation of human free will. Hardy adopted this view in the early 1900s, and it seems to influence the worldview expressed by the speaker in this poem. The Immanent Will "stirs and urges everything," setting all events in motion and keeping them moving.

The power of the Immanent Will is emphasized by the fact that there is no subject for "fashioning." That is, the stanza does not actually mention the human beings who fashioned the ship. The result is that the subject is ambiguous. People played a role in building the ship, but if the Immanent Will "stirs and urges everything," then it too must have had some role in bringing Titanic into being.

This stanza ends with an enjambed line:

The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

The speaker introduces the subject of a sentence, the Immanent Will, but this stanza does not contain the corresponding verb—the reader does not know *what* the Immanent Will was doing while humans were fashioning the ship. The enjambment thus creates suspense, urging the reader to move on to the next stanza to learn how this force influenced the ship.

Calling the ship a "creature of cleaving wing" is significant in several ways. If the ship is a creature, then the human shipbuilders are God-like creators. A ship is a non-living artifact, but creatures are *alive*. This word suggests that human beings have almost stepped into God's place, bringing life into being as God does in the biblical Book of Genesis. The term "wing" represents the ship metaphorically as a living bird, cutting through the water with its bow as a bird cuts through the air with its wings. The alliteration of "creature" and "cleaving" further suggests this sound of cutting.

The word "cleave" is also an allusion to the Book of Genesis, which uses the word in a significant passage. After God creates the first human, Adam, God creates Eve to be Adam's wife. Genesis explains, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen 2:24). "Cleave" means "to cut through," which is the primary meaning of the word in line 17. But "cleave" can also mean "to attach faithfully to something," as a man attaches faithfully to his wife. This secondary meaning is significant for the next stanza.

LINES 19-21

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

In this stanza, the reader learns exactly what the "Immanent Will" of stanza VI was doing. This supernatural force "[p]repared a sinister mate" for Titanic.

The word "mate" could simply indicate the iceberg matches or resembles the Titanic in terms of size and power. The fact that the descriptive phrase "so gaily great" is offset in dashes between "her" (Titanic) and "A Shape of Ice" suggests that the description could apply *either* to the ship *or* to the iceberg, which reinforces the reader's sense of how similar they are. That is, they can both be described as "gaily great," impressively larger and grand. The alliterated hard /g/ sound of "gaily great" creates an emphatic, almost percussive sound, emphasizing how striking both are.

But "mate" could also have a more specific meaning. The word "creature" in line 18 suggested that the ship was almost a living thing. Now, the word "mate" suggests that both the ship and the iceberg are somehow alive and that this force has created them to be a married pair.

In the biblical Book of Genesis, God first creates the human man, Adam, and then says, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen 2:18). God then creates Eve, a help meet, or mate, for Adam. It is just after God creates Eve that Genesis reads, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife" (Gen 2:24). The word "cleave" in line 17 suggests, again, that the poet has been deliberately alluding to this biblical story.

The Immanent Will thus seems to carry out an ironic imitation or dark parody of God's divine action by preparing a "sinister" mate for Titanic. "Sinister" here means suggesting or bringing about misfortune and disaster. This mate will not help the ship, as God intended Eve to help Adam, but will actually prove the ship's downfall—just as Eve, contrary to God's wishes, ultimately helped bring about the Fall for Adam and herself by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

But that downfall is still "far and dissociate" in time. The term "dissociate," meaning to separate or disconnect, suggests not only that the collision would happen far off in the future but also that it was hard to foresee that it *would* happen. The iceberg and the ship appeared to be disconnected. The passengers, in their minds, did not connect Titanic with the possibility of an accident. The fact that the collision was unforeseeable makes the iceberg all the more threatening or "sinister." The link between the collision's unpredictability and its destructiveness is reinforced by the sibilant /s/ sound repeated in "sinister," "dissociate," and "Ice."

LINES 22-24

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

Like stanzas VI and VII, stanza VIII derives much of its significance from allusions to the Bible. The previous two stanzas offer a dark parody of the Book of Genesis and the creation of Adam and Eve. Stanza VIII offers a similar ironic rewriting of the Gospels and the life of Jesus, whom Christian tradition believes to be the Son of God.

The Gospel of Luke contains two similar verses describing Jesus's early years: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40); "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). This translation (the King James version) was well known, and the poet likely expected his audience to recognize that line 23, "In stature, grace, and hue," borrows key words from these verses. ("Stature" refers to size and form, "grace" to excellence that seems to have divine origin, and "hue" refers to color and appearance.)

The effect of the allusion is to represent Titanic, insofar as it was partly created by the "Immanent Will," as a twisted or sinister imitation of the Son of God. If the ship was like Adam

and the iceberg was like Eve in stanzas VI and VII, now the ship is like Jesus—a unique being born of some divine power. In the Christian tradition, the Son of God was born so that he could save humankind through his death. Jesus knew that death would be his fate, and he foretold it numerous times.

Stanza VII foretells the wreck by speaking of the iceberg as Titanic's "sinister mate"; stanzas IX and X similarly represent the wreck as predestined, and stanza XI even alludes to Jesus's death. But the twisted part of the allusion is that Titanic, rather than saving humans, dooms them.

Stanza VII referred to time and the "time far" that separated the ship and the iceberg. This stanza refers to space and the "distance" that separates them. The positioning of the words—"ship" in the first line of the stanza, "Iceberg" almost as the last line of the stanza—reinforces the idea that they are physically far apart. Separated by time and space, the "smart ship"—so attractive and apparently well-built—seems totally disconnected from the iceberg. Nevertheless, the iceberg "gr[o]w[s]" just as the Titanic does, matching it in size (the matched size is emphasized by the repetition of "grew" and "grew"). The iceberg's continued growth means that it continues to be just as great a threat.

LINES 25-27

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

This stanza speaks to what makes the collision, and the larger world of the poem, so particularly unsettling and fearful. The Titanic's sinking was both predestined *and* unpredictable. The "Immanent Will" created the iceberg as a "mate" for the ship, intending that their futures, or their "later history," would be tightly connected, or "intimate[ly] weld[ed]" together. A long time before the collision, then, this supernatural force destined these two entities to meet.

However, this force was the only thing that knew about this predestined event. The ship and the iceberg seemed to human eyes to be "[a]lien," or wholly unconnected in their natures, just as they are unconnected in time and space. The stress on the first syllable of "Alien," the first syllable of line 25, breaks the iambic metrical pattern that the poem has used so far, further emphasizing just how unrelated the two seemed to be. "No mortal eye could see"—that is, no human could anticipate—that the ship and the iceberg would come together. And since people could not predict the event, they were less able to plan for it and protect themselves when it occurred.

This sense of unpredictability adds a new level to the explanation for the Titanic disaster. Stanzas I-V suggested that attempting to design an unsinkable ship was an obvious example of overambitious pride. People should have anticipated that their designs could fail and prepared with humility for that failure. But here, the wreck is presented not as the result of human hubris but of supernatural power. It was the Immanent Will that planned this wreck. Human beings can neither anticipate nor thwart the plans of this mysterious, all-powerful being who controls the world they live in, which makes human lives particularly vulnerable to disaster.

The word "intimate," describing the ship and the iceberg coming together, carries suggestions of a close romantic relationship, echoing the word "mate" from stanza VII. The word "welding" similarly suggests an unbreakable physical joining, like the man and the woman cleaving together to become "one flesh" in the Book of Genesis. The speaker represents the ship and the iceberg metaphorically as two partners in a marriage, continuing the ironic allusion to Adam and Eve's marriage in Genesis.

This metaphor has several important effects. First, it implies that the ship and the iceberg *ought* to come together. Marriages are only completed by a physical encounter between the partners. If the ship and the iceberg are romantic partners, then it is fitting and right that they meet. This view is unsettling to a human reader because it entirely leaves out the human perspective on the event, ignoring the tremendous loss of life to focus only on this odd attraction between the ship and the iceberg.

And second, by alluding specifically to Adam and Eve's marriage, the marriage metaphor represents the collision as part of a divine plan that the supernatural power finds desirable. This is an even more disturbing representation of the wreck, since it implies not only that the supernatural force in this world planned the wreck but that it was *pleased* by it. In Genesis, God is pleased by a marriage, which will be "fruitful" and create new life; the allusion to Genesis is ironic here because the "marriage" of the ship and the iceberg will destroy life. It is an alarming thought that a supernatural force would find pleasure in destruction.

LINES 28-30

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

Stanza X continues the key themes from stanza IX of destiny and unpredictability. The entire stanza is a continuation of the sentence that was begun in stanza IX. The sense here is that "No mortal eye could see ... [any] sign that they were bent," etc. Again, the lines emphasize that no human being could anticipate that the "paths" of the ship and the iceberg would coincide, or intersect. The word "coincide" carries the suggestion of "coincidence." A coincidence is a chance event, one that could not have been predicted. To human observers, that's just what the collision was.

But again, the poem reminds the reader that the collision, though unpredictable, was planned. The ship and the iceberg were "bent ... On being anon twin halves of one august event."

The word "bent" is ambiguous and could be read several ways. To be "bent on" doing something means to desire or be determined to do something. This reading implies that the ship and the iceberg had some will power of their own and *tried* to come together.

But one thing can also be "bent" *by* another person to follow the course that other person desires. In this case, the two were deliberately set on these paths by the "Immanent Will."

The word "twin" echoes the word "twain" in the poem's title. "Twain" can be mean separated, parted, or disunited—just what the ship and the iceberg are from the human perspective. But "twain" can also mean a group of two, a pair, a couple—which is what the ship and the iceberg are from the perspective of the Immanent Will.

The ambiguity in the word's meaning tracks the two perspectives, human and supernatural, in the poem. But the word "twin" here reinforces the second sense of "twain," that the ship and the iceberg are not just a pair of similar entities but *identical* entities. They are matched in "great[ness]" and "stature." This "twin" sense of "twain," the idea that the two objects go together as a pair, ultimately proves the truer sense of the word—as the human beings on the ship soon learned.

The idea that the ship and the iceberg are "twin halves" of one event suggests, furthermore, that each was incomplete or imperfect in some way until the two converged. The collision, then, did not destroy the Titanic; in some strange way, it perfected it.

The speaker's diction suggests that there is something fitting and beautiful about the collision. It is described not as a tragedy but as an "august event." "August" means inspiring respect or admiration, impressive, magnificent. The term suggests that the wreck was thrilling, that it gave great aesthetic satisfaction to anyone who witnessed it. Of course, the human witnesses would have suffered grief and terror rather than pleasure. But there is one witness who, the speaker suggests, did take pleasure in the spectacle: the "Immanent Will" who prepared the iceberg as a fitting mate for the Titanic. The thought that this power not only planned the wreck but found pleasure in it is a chilling one.

The speaker's words are chosen carefully to convey these complex shades of meaning. The speaker's diction is also deliberately archaic and old-fashioned. "Twain," for example, was not commonly used after the 1800s; "anon" is an old-fashioned of way of saying "soon." The syntax, too, is artificial, calling to mind older styles of poetry and prose rather than reflecting contemporary speech. Line 29, for example, reads "paths coincident," with the adjective following the noun, rather than the more usual "coincident paths."

This archaic style removes the poem from the context of the immediate news of the day (the Titanic had sunk only a month before the poem was written) and makes it more of a timeless reflection on humanity's universal condition in a fated, fearful world.

LINES 31-32

Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!"

Stanza XI brings the poem to a dramatic conclusion. First, the stanza completes the sentence that began in line 25 with "Alien they seemed to be." The thought continued across stanzas IX and X before finally finishing in stanza XI, line 33, with "Now!"

This long-delayed completion of the sentence, with several enjambed lines in between, mirrors the long-delayed meeting of the ship and the iceberg, the joining of the "twin halves" of the "one august event." Drawing out the sentence over so many lines builds up suspense, forcing the reader to wonder how it will conclude—what will finally cause the paths to coincide and the "twin halves" to converge?

Ultimately, it is the supernatural natural power's decree that brings the two together: "Now!" Here this power is not named "The Immanent Will," but rather "the Spinner of the Years." This name is an allusion to Clotho, one of the three Fates in Greek mythology. These supernatural entities controlled the lifespan of each human person. Clotho spun the thread of life while her sisters measured and cut it, determining how long each life would be. The allusion to a Greek deity, after many allusions to the Christian Bible, reminds the reader that this is a world of spiritual uncertainty. It is not clear who the supernatural power in the world really is. All that seems clear, from the speaker's representation, is that this supernatural power is not friendly to humankind.

LINES 32-33

And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

This final stanza contains another significant allusion to the Christian Bible. In the Gospels, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is crucified on a cross. John 19:30 recounts, "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished': and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." The well-known Latin translation of "It is finished" is "Consummatum est." "Consummatum" shares the same root as "consummation."

The speaker's use of the word is significant, then, in several ways. First, it sets up a further parallel between the Titanic's wreck and the figure of Christ. Line 23 alluded to the Gospel stories of Christ's early life; now, line 33 alludes to his death.

Christ spoke frequently about how his life—and death—were carried out in obedience to the will of God the Father. In the poem, these allusions further emphasize that the Titanic's "death" was the will of some supernatural power. (Saying that "each one hears" anthropomorphizes the ship and the iceberg, suggesting that they are living creatures, actively obeying the

will of this power.) One meaning of "consummation" is the fulfillment or achievement of a goal or intended purpose. The meeting of Titanic and the iceberg was this power's intended goal.

The word "consummation" is also significant because of the several other meanings it can carry. It can also refer to the act of completing or finishing something, as well as an appropriate or inevitable outcome. So once again, there is a sense not only that the supernatural power intended and planned the collision but also found *pleasure* in it. Just as "twin halves" of something come together to form one perfect whole, the coming together of the ship and the iceberg represented something completed and perfect from this power's point of view. As the adjective "august" suggested something aesthetically splendid about the event, the term "consummation" likewise suggests something aesthetically fitting and satisfying.

The final phrase of the poem, "and jars two hemispheres," reinforces this idea of aesthetic perfection. The image is of two half-spheres (echoing the phrase "twin halves") being jarred, or moved, until they come together and unite as one, whole, perfect sphere.

Consummation can also refer to the physical beginning of a marriage. Traditionally, a marriage is sealed when the partners come together in a physical union. The terms "mate" and "intimate" already represented the ship and the iceberg as a romantic pair. Now, their physical collision is described metaphorically as a marriage. This metaphor suggests, in a further troubling way, that there is something fitting and right about the meeting, that the two belong together. The suggestion may be that if humankind wish to create something so recklessly large and powerful, it is only fitting that nature should respond with something equally large and powerful - powerful enough to destroy what humans have made.

The phrase "and jars two hemispheres" could refer to the ship and the iceberg. But "hemisphere" most commonly refers to the two halves of the globe. The phrase could also mean that the two halves of the planet—in other words, the entire world—are jarred, or emotionally shaken, by the ship and the iceberg coming together. The global reach of the shock and trauma reinforces just how powerful and destructive the event was. It is a frightening prospect to live in a world controlled by a supernatural force powerful enough to shock the whole world and who apparently finds pleasure in doing so.

The syntax of these lines add to their dramatic effect. Line 32 is end-stopped, with a pause after "hears," and line 33 has a caesura after "comes," which slow the reader down to create a sense of emphasis and finality at the poem's very end.

Another dramatic aspect of these final lines is their tense. Stanzas I-V are written in the present tense ("couches she"), signalling that the "present" for the poem is some time after the collision of the ship and the iceberg. Stanzas VI and VII then go into the past tense ("while was fashioning," "Prepared"), as though giving the backstory to this present moment. Even the first half of line 33 is in past tense ("Said 'Now!'"). But the final one-and-a-half lines go back to the present tense ("each one hears," "consummation comes") to describe the actual collision. This unexpected shift in tense shifts the poem's "present" to the collision itself, placing the reader right in that fatal moment.

SYMBOLS

THE TITANIC

The main symbol in the poem is the Titanic itself. Especially in the first half of the poem, the wreck of the once glorious ship represents human vanity, pride, and hubris, and the way these flaws may lead to humanity's undoing.

In the first stanza, the speaker links the ship to "human vanity" and says it was "the Pride of Life" that planned the ship. Later, the fish refer to the ship as "vaingloriousness," reiterating its status as a testament to human hubris. People thought they were building something unsinkable, but nature had other plans.

In describing the ship, the speaker also takes care to emphasize its luxurious features—the jewels, the glittering, "gilded" surfaces, the mirrors—and the way these features pleased vain passengers. The mirror is actually a longstanding artistic symbol for vanity in its own right, so emphasizing the ship's mirrors in the poem help make the ship itself a symbol for vanity.

Similarly, worms are a traditional symbol of morality, as worms devour human corpses in graveyards. With the image of the sea-worms crawling over the mirrors, then, the speaker reminds the reader that all the luxurious goods that feed human vanity cannot save humanity from the powerful forces that govern the world itself, like fate and death.

The speaker also refers to the ship as a "creature" in line 17, which implies that it is a living thing. If human beings have designed and created a living thing, this suggests that they are attempting to play God—again, an act of hubris that the poem insists can only lead to destruction. Indeed, the Titanic now stands, not only in this poem but in cultural memory generally, as a symbol of human ambition overreaching itself.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** " Deep from human vanity, / And the Pride of Life that planned her"
- **Line 3:** ", stilly couches she."
- **Line 4:** "Steel chambers, late the pyres"
- **Line 5:** "Of her salamandrine fires,"

- **Line 7:** "Over the mirrors meant"
- **Line 8:** "To glass the opulent"
- **Line 9:** "The sea-worm crawls — grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent."
- **Line 10:** "Jewels in joy designed"
- **Line 11:** "To ravish the sensuous mind"
- **Line 12:** "Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind."
- **Line 15:** ""What does this vaingloriousness down here?" ..."
- **Line 16:** "Well: while was fashioning"
- **Line 17:** "This creature of cleaving wing,"
- **Line 19:** "Prepared a sinister mate"
- **Line 20:** "For her — so gaily great —"
- **Line 22:** "And as the smart ship grew"
- **Line 23:** "In stature, grace, and hue,"

POETIC DEVICES

IRONY

Irony describes the contrast between expectation and reality as the speaker establishes it throughout the poem. The chief difference between what was expected and what really came to pass lies, of course, in the fate of the Titanic itself. Its makers and passengers expected it to cross the ocean with safety, speed, and comfort; in reality, it sank and killed hundreds.

The speaker brings out this larger irony through a series of smaller images focused on contrast. For example, stanza II features an image of the sea's currents flowing through the ship's boiler rooms. The image contrasts the water that now actually fills the "chambers" with the "salamandrine fires" that the ship's makers intended to fill the chambers. This contrast is made ironic because the opulent fireplaces now hold only the very element that puts fires out.

Stanza III offers an image of sea-worms crawling over mirrors. This juxtaposes the people who were expected to use the mirrors—the ship's "opulent" passengers—with the creatures who have actually ended up using thm, the "grotesque" worms. These images remind the reader of the vast difference between what the ship seemed to be—an unsinkable force, a human-made power greater than the power of nature—and what it actually turned out to be: something for the lowliest of creatures to crawl on.

Irony is also present in the poem's use of biblical allusions. For example, the terms "cleaving" and "mate" present the ship and the iceberg as parallel to Adam and Eve, who came together in the "consummation" of marriage just as the ship and iceberg come together in the "consummation" of a collision. But while God created Eve to help Adam and create *life*, the vague force (that "Immanent Will") in this poem "[p]repared" the iceberg to destroy the ship and cause *death*.

The phrase "stature, grace, and hue" and the term "consummation," create a parallel between the Titanic and Jesus Christ. But again, while Christ was sent by a compassionate God to save humanity, the ship is used by an indifferent deity/force to destroy humanity. It is ironic that the speaker would describe the wreck of the Titanic using the language and figures of the Bible when the emphasis in the Bible is on God's saving love for humankind and the poem depicts a supernatural power who plans and takes pleasure in humankind's destruction.

In describing the wreck from the perspective of this supernatural power, the speaker also adopts an ironic tone. Though describing a momentous tragedy, nothing in the speaker's tone suggests mourning or sorrow. Instead, like the "indifferent" sea-worms, the speaker is dispassionate. Some alliterated phrases ("Jewels in joy", "gilded gear") and the "praise" for the Titanic ("smart ship," "gaily great") even come across as outright mocking. The speaker's tone and implied attitude are ironic in that they violate the reader's expectations for how this tragic subject would be described.

Overall, the poem's irony functions both to chastise and to warn. The ship's makers seem even more at fault when their confidence is set against the ship's actual fate. And if this fate was planned by a supernatural power, the destructive indifference of this power is even more striking when contrasted with the sympathy of God.

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- **Lines 4-6:** "Steel chambers, late the pyres / Of her salamandrine fires, / Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres."
- **Lines 7-9:** "Over the mirrors meant / To glass the opulent / The sea-worm crawls — grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent."
- **Lines 10-12:** " Jewels in joy designed / To ravish the sensuous mind / Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind."
- **Line 14:** "gilded gear"
- **Line 17:** "This creature of cleaving wing,"
- **Line 19:** " Prepared a sinister mate"
- **Line 20:** "so gaily great"
- **Lines 22-23:** "smart ship grew / In stature, grace, and hue,"
- **Line 33:** "And consummation comes"

ALLUSION

The poem is filled with allusions. First and foremost, the entire thing is about the Titanic, and frequently alludes to its status as an ultra luxurious, grand achievement of human engineering. At the end of the poem, the "Spinner of the Years" is an allusion to

Clotho from Greek mythology. Clotho was one of the three Fates who decided how long mortals would live. Clotho would spin the thread of life, which her sisters would measure and cut.

Most of the allusions are to the Bible, however. For example, stanza I uses the word "vanity," which is famously used in the opening of the Book of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" (Eccl 1:2-3). This verse questions whether human endeavors can be ultimately profitable or valuable. This is very much a question in the poem too, which critiques the ultimately failed ambition of the shipbuilders.

The phrase "the Pride of Life" is borrowed from 1 John 2:16: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." Here, "pride of life" refers to an arrogant belief in one's own greatness and a desire to be admired for that greatness. Again, the speaker is making a serious criticism of the shipbuilders and passengers, just as the Bible verse is making a serious criticism of pride.

But if stanza I *aligns* with the original biblical text, other stanzas ironically *twist the meaning* of the biblical text. For example, in lines 18 and 20, the phrases "creature of cleaving wing" and "Prepared a sinister mate" both allude to the Book of Genesis and God's creation of a wife for Adam. Here is Genesis 2:24:

> Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

And Genesis 2:18:

> It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

The Bible says that Eve was created by God as a helper for Adam and to give birth to new life. But in this poem, the supernatural power creates the iceberg as the Titanic's "mate" in order to *destroy* the ship and *destroy* human life. The sharp contrast between the text alluded to and the poem's text underscores how grossly the Titanic failed to be what it was meant to be. There is a similarly sharp contrast between the Titanic and Jesus Christ himself. In lines 25-24, "And as the smart ship grew / stature, grace, and hue" perhaps alludes to the Gospel of Luke, verse 2:40:

> And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

It also echoes Luke 2:52:

> Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

The word "consummation" also alludes to the Gospel of John, verse 19:30:

> When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished': and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

"It is finished" is "Consummatum est" in Latin. Jesus Christ, however, was sent by God to save humanity, and again the poem argues that the Titanic was used by an unsympathetic divine power to destroy human life.

Overall, the allusions serve to strengthen the poem's point. By connecting its critique of pride and vanity to the Bible, the poem reminds the reader that these failings were not unique to a few engineers or wealthy sea-goers in the early 1900s, but are common to humanity as a whole.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "human vanity"
- **Line 3:** "Pride of Life"
- **Line 17:** "creature of cleaving wing"
- **Line 19:** "Prepared a sinister mate"
- **Line 22:** " And as the smart ship grew"
- **Line 23:** " In stature, grace, and hue,"
- **Line 31:** "the Spinner of the Years"
- **Line 33:** "consummation comes"

JUXTAPOSITION

Juxaposition is a key structuring device in the poem. By organizing several stanzas around contrasting or opposing ideas, the speaker emphasizes the conflict between what everyone *expected* the ship would be and what actually became of it.

In stanzas II-V, the speaker specifically juxtaposes elements of the natural world with human-made artifacts to reinforce the opposition between nature and humankind. Humans set out to conquer the natural world, to create something that nature could not sink or destroy. Instead, nature destroyed what they had made.

Stanza II, for instance, juxtaposes fire and water, contrasting the "salamandrine fires" that once powered the Titanic with the "[c]old currents" that now flow through her. This juxtaposition is specific enough to border on antithesis, as is that in stanza IV. Here the speaker opposes light and darkness; its imagery contrasts the way the ship's jewels were "designed" to sparkle and delight the "sensuous mind" of wealthy passengers with the way the deep sea has now "black[ened]" these jewels.

Stanza III, meanwhile, juxtaposes a beautiful object of human craftsmanship, a mirror, with a "grotesque" creature of nature,

a "sea-worm." The sea-worm crawling "[o]ver" the mirror emphasizes how nature as a whole has overcome what humans have made.

Similarly, stanza V juxtaposes "Dim moon-eyed fishes," creatures that are dull and without shine, with the "gilded gear" of the wreck, the once splendidly shining surface of the ship. The man-made object may have looked more magnificent, but it ultimately proved more fragile and vulnerable.

Each of these four stanzas contrasts the ship's present surrender to nature with the original intentions of its human designers. The fact that the ship's fate was the opposite of what its makers intended emphasizes how humans can overestimate their abilities and how vulnerable they truly are.

Juxtaposition is also present, slightly more subtly, in stanzas VII-X. Here the contrast is between what humans could perceive about the Titanic's fate in relation to the iceberg and what that fate actually was. For instance, to humans, the iceberg seemed "dissociate" and "[a]lien" to the Titanic, as if it were completely unconnected and unrelated to the ship. In fact, the iceberg and the ship were "mate[s]," whose futures were "intimate[ly] weld[ed]" or joined together. This kind of opposition, between what is believed and what is actually the case, creates a strong sense of irony. The poem as a whole is deeply ironic, and juxtaposition is the chief device that the speaker uses to achieve that ironic effect.

At other times, however, the speaker uses juxtaposition to present similarity rather than contrast. The ship and the iceberg are placed together to show the reader how these "twain" are also "twin[s]." Stanza VII presents "her," the ship, alongside the "Shape of Ice," and places the phrase "so gaily great" between them, in a way that suggests that *both* the ship and the iceberg could be described as "gaily great."

Stanza VIII similarly presents the "smart ship" alongside "the Iceberg" and notes how both increased in size. Repeating the same word, "grew," for both show again how they could be described in the same way. Juxtaposing these images of the ship and the iceberg, even in stanzas that emphasize how they were separated by time and space, pairs the two together in the reader's mind and makes their convergence seem inevitable—a key theme of the poem.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 4-6
- Lines 7-9
- Lines 10-12
- Lines 13-15
- Lines 19-21
- Lines 22-24
- Lines 25-27
- Lines 28-30

IMAGERY

In the second half of the poem, the speaker presents a series of more abstract ideas. But in the first half, he uses vivid, startling imagery to draw readers into a sensory understanding of the Titanic disaster.

Stanzas I-V each present striking images that appeal to different senses. Stanza I draws an underwater scene in which nothing can be seen in the "solitude" of the sea but the motionless wreck of the ship. Stanza II evokes the sound of "[c]old currents" of water moving through the ship as if they created "rhythmic" music. Stanza III represents the sticky, "slimed" feeling of the sea-worm crawling across the mirrors.

These images contrast strongly with the many descriptions of the ship's former glamour, referenced with"opulent," "[j]ewels," "sparkles," "gilded," "gaily great," "smart ship," and "stature, grace, and hue." This contrast helps readers perceive the shocking reversal of fortune suffered by the ship, going from the world's most luxurious ocean liners to a lonely carcass devoured by worms beneath the sea.

The ship itself is described as a "creature of cleaving wing." This image metaphorically compares the Titanic to a bird and her bow (the sharply angled front of the ship) to a wing, which cuts through the water as a wing cuts through air. Using the image of a light, swift bird to capture an enormous object of steel helps the reader sense some of the beauty and grace of the ship—which again heightens the contrast between its early beauty and its later decline.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "In a solitude of the sea"
- **Line 3:** "stilly couches she"
- **Lines 4-6:** "Steel chambers, late the pyres / Of her salamandrine fires, / Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres"
- **Lines 7-9:** "Over the mirrors meant / To glass the opulent / The sea-worm crawls — grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent"
- **Lines 10-12:** "Jewels in joy designed / To ravish the sensuous mind / Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind"
- **Lines 13-15:** " Dim moon-eyed fishes near / Gaze at the gilded gear / And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" ..."
- **Line 17:** "This creature of cleaving wing"

PERSONIFICATION

The poem makes no mention of specific human beings, but the speaker does attribute human characteristics to both the natural world and the ship itself. This personification helps establish for the reader the kind of world the speaker imagines for the poem.

The fish are personified—more accurately, anthropomorphized—when they are said to "query, 'What does this vaingloriousness down here?'" By imagining that the fish can ask questions about the ship, the speaker does attribute some human quality of awareness to them. The fish do not weep for the tragic wreck, however. They are confused (What is this ship doing here?) and judgmental (the ship represents vanity, a human failing). Allowing natural creatures to have a reaction but making that reaction decidedly *unsympathetic* emphasizes that nature as a whole is either indifferent or actively hostile toward humankind in the world of this poem.

The speaker also personifies the ship and the iceberg. First, they are given the qualities of living things as opposed to objects. The ship is given the pronoun "she" and also called a "creature." Both the ship and iceberg are also said to grow, as living creatures do, and the iceberg is the "mate" for the Titanic. Additionally, when the poem's supernatural power says, "Now!" as a command for action, "each one hears" and seems to obey the command, showing a human power for understanding and intentional action.

Presenting the ship and the iceberg as beings that hear and obey the "Immanent Will" emphasizes how all things in this world, both living and non-living, are controlled by this supernatural power. If this power wills destruction for humankind, it is likely impossible to escape.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she"
- **Line 5:** "Of her salamandrine fires"
- **Line 15:** "query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?""
- **Line 17:** "creature of cleaving wing"
- **Line 19:** "mate"
- **Line 20:** " For her"
- **Line 22:** " And as the smart ship ," "grew"
- **Line 24:** "grew," " the Iceberg too"
- **Lines 32-33:** "And each one hears, / And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres"

CLIMAX (FIGURE OF SPEECH)

Fittingly, the most dramatic example of climax occurs in the poem's final stanza. In lines 31-32, the emphatic, stressed word "Now!" is placed at the end of the sentence to emphasize the very moment of the collision as the moment towards which the whole poem has been building. Lines 32-33 are then built up of three clauses all beginning with "And" (which is also an example of anaphora and polysyndeton), arranged in ascending order of importance and drama.

First, the ship and the iceberg "hear[]" the command; then they collide, in the "consummation" of the Spinner's plan; then the impact of the collision is felt by the "two hemispheres" that refer first to the ship and the iceberg, and secondarily to the two halves of the globe. The poem builds toward its most significant idea by stressing in its final clause how the "convergence of the twain" shook the whole world.

Where Climax (Figure of Speech) appears in the poem:

- **Line 31:** "Till the Spinner of the Years"
- **Lines 32-33:** "Said "Now!" And each one hears, / And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres."

ENJAMBMENT

Stanzas I-V are each stanza self-contained, in that each concludes with an end-stopped line. *Within* each of these stanzas, however, the first and/or second line is enjambed. The thought is not completed at the end of the line but continues on to the next, while the main verb is usually delayed until the second or third line of the stanza. Take lines 7-8:

> Over the mirrors meant
> To glass ...

This means the reader must wait to find out *what* is hidden in a solitude of the sea, *what happened* to the "steel chambers," the "mirrors," the "jewels." This pattern builds a small arc of suspense within each stanza.

In stanzas VI-XI, the speaker uses enjambment to draw out an idea not only across several lines but also *across* several stanzas. This extended enjambment builds up an even greater sense of tension and suspense as the climactic event of the poem, the collision, is delayed.

For example, in stanza VI, the speaker ends with the enjambed line:

> The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

The speaker introduces a mysterious, ominous-sounding subject (that "Immanent Will") without telling the reader *what* this subject is doing. The reader must wait until the next stanza to learn what the "Immanent Will" is stirring: a "sinister mate" for the Titanic.

Similarly, in stanza IX, the line "No mortal eye could see" is enjambed so that the reader, like the mortal passengers in the poem, must wait to "see" what happens to the ship and the iceberg. The enjambed lines 28 and 29 likewise delay the information that the ship and the iceberg will join in "one august event." Finally, line 31, "Till the Spinner of the Years" delays the poem's climactic moment one more time, until "Now!" in the next line.

Enjambment thus creates delays in information throughout the poem. These delays for the reader faintly echo the way that the

passengers' knowledge of the coming collision was delayed until it was too late.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "sea"
- **Line 2:** "Deep"
- **Line 4:** "pyres"
- **Line 5:** "Of"
- **Line 7:** "meant"
- **Line 8:** "To," "opulent"
- **Line 9:** "The"
- **Line 10:** "designed"
- **Line 11:** "To," "mind"
- **Line 12:** "Lie"
- **Line 13:** "near"
- **Line 16:** "fashioning"
- **Line 17:** "This"
- **Line 18:** "everything"
- **Line 19:** "Prepared," "mate"
- **Line 20:** "For"
- **Line 22:** "grew"
- **Line 23:** "In"
- **Line 26:** "see"
- **Line 27:** "The"
- **Line 28:** "bent"
- **Line 29:** "By," "coincident"
- **Line 30:** "On"
- **Line 31:** "Years"
- **Line 32:** "Said"

CONSONANCE

The speaker frequently uses consonance and more specific alliteration throughout the poem. Often the consonance occurs in a pair or group of words to emphasize that they are thematically linked. Alliteration in the phrases "Cold currents" and "Lie lightless," for example, reinforces the connection between the sea and icy coldness, and between the jewels' resting place and the darkness there at the bottom of the sea. In "bleared and black and blind," alliteration joins all three adjectives together. It also creates a strong sense of emphasis as the reader repeats the bold /b/ sound.

Consonance is an effective tool for creating these kinds of sound effects. In stanza III, the sibilance of the repeated /s/ sound—"glass," "sea," "grotesque," "slimed,"-- creates an almost reptilian sense of something slithering, helping the reader imagine the slimy sea-worms. In stanza VIII, the repeated /s/ and /sh/ sounds—"smart ship," "shadowy silent distance"—similarly create a sinister hissing note in a stanza that notes how the iceberg grows ominously in size.

The speaker also uses consonance to convey a certain tone. The poem's attitude towards the Titanic is more critical than sympathetic. In phrases like "gilded gear" and "gaily great," the alliteration of the hard /g/ sound creates a mocking, sing-song effect that conveys the speaker's harsh judgment of the ship and the vanity displayed in the ship's enormous size and extravagant appearance.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "solitude," "sea"
- **Line 3:** "Pride," "planned," "stilly," "couches," "she"
- **Line 4:** "Steel," "late"
- **Line 5:** "salamandrine"
- **Line 6:** "Cold," "currents"
- **Line 7:** "mirrors," "meant"
- **Line 8:** "glass"
- **Line 9:** "sea," "worm," "crawls," "grotesque," "slimed," "dumb," "indifferent"
- **Line 10:** "Jewels," "joy"
- **Line 12:** "Lie," "lightless," "bleared," "black," "blind"
- **Line 14:** "Gaze," "gilded," "gear"
- **Line 17:** "creature," "cleaving"
- **Line 19:** "sinister"
- **Line 20:** "gaily," "great"
- **Line 21:** "Ice," "dissociate"
- **Line 22:** "smart," "ship," "grew"
- **Line 23:** "stature," "grace"
- **Line 24:** "shadowy," "silent," "distance," "grew," "Iceberg"
- **Line 28:** "bent"
- **Line 29:** "By"
- **Line 33:** "consummation," "comes," "hemispheres"

VOCABULARY

Titanic (Before Line 1) - The Titanic was an ocean liner, the largest vessel afloat in its day, that took its first voyage in April 1912. It collided with an iceberg and sank on April 15 despite the fact that it had been designed to be unsinkable.The poem's title, "The Convergence of the Twain," refers to the coming together (converging) of the two (twain) entities: the ship and the iceberg.

Vanity (Line 2) - The quality of being conceited and admiring oneself too much. The word can also refer to something that is worthless, unprofitable, and futile.

Pride of Life (Line 3) - A phrase from the Bible verse "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). "Pride of Life" refers to a desire for status, honor, and admiration, as well as to arrogance, ambition, and pride.

Stilly (Line 3) - In a still, motionless manner.

Couches (Line 3) - Lies, rests.

Chambers (Line 4) - Rooms, especially the boiler rooms that held the fires that powered the ship.

Pyres (Line 4) - Fires. Here the term refers to the fires that powered the ship, but it most commonly refers to a fire used to burn a dead body.

Salamandrine (Line 5) - Resembling a salamander, especially in being able to survive in fire (according to legend, salamanders could live in fire without being burned up).

Thrid (Line 6) - An old-fashioned version of the verb "thread," meaning here to move or pass through.

Lyres (Line 6) - A stringed harp-like instrument that makes music when its strings are set in motion. The moving currents of water pass through the chambers almost as if they are the strings of an instrument.

Glass (Line 8) - Reflect.

Opulent (Line 8) - Wealthy or rich, especially in a showy, ostentatious way.

Grotesque (Line 9) - Repulsively ugly.

Dumb (Line 9) - Unable to speak.

Indifferent (Line 9) - Unconcerned.

Ravish (Line 11) - To fill with intense delight and pleasure, to entrance and captivate (the world also carries a suggestion of spoiling or corrupting).

Sensuous (Line 11) - Relating to the physical, the material, what can be perceived by the senses.

Bleared (Line 12) - Dimmed or blinded.

Gilded (Line 14) - Covered with a thin layer of precious metal, such as gold.

Gear (Line 14) - Machinery.

Query (Line 15) - Ask.

Vainglorіousness (Line 15) - Demonstration of excessive, boastful pride and pompous vanity.

Creature of cleaving wing (Line 17) - The ship here is described as if it were a bird, cleaving (cutting through) the water with its bow as a bird cuts through the air with its wings.

Immanent Will (Line 18) - An impersonal, purposeless, unconscious supernatural force spread through the entire universe that is the cause of all events and that all but overpowers human free will. Hardy's understanding of the Immanent Will was inspired by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. He wrote about its operations, referring to it as "The Spirit of the Years," in his 1904 verse drama *The Dynasts*:

It works unconsciously, as heretofore,
Eternal artistries in Circumstance,
Whose patterns, wrought by rapt aesthetic rote,
Seem in themselves Its single listless aim,
And not their consequence.

In *The Dynasts*, Hardy represents this supernatural force as caring only about "artistries" and "aesthetic" patterns and designs, and not about the "consequences[s]," including potentially disastrous consequences, that these designs could have. The supernatural force in "The Convergence of the Twain" is represented in a very similar way. Its main concern is creating a perfectly matched "twin" or "mate" for the *Titanic* to bring about an "august event" when the twins meet—a "consummation," or a fitting and perfect end. It shows no concern for the suffering this event involves.

Stirs (Line 18) - Sets in motion, moves to action.

Urges (Line 18) - Presses or forces in some direction.

Gaily (Line 20) - Splendidly, in a showy manner.

Dissociate (Line 21) - Separated.

Smart (Line 22) - Attractively neat and stylish.

Stature (Line 23) - Physical form.

Grace (Line 23) - Excellence that seems to be of divine origin.

Hue (Line 23) - Color, external appearance.

Alien (Line 25) - Unrelated, of a different nature.

Intimate (Line 27) - Having a very close connection or union (with romantic associations).

Welding (Line 27) - Becoming so closely united that they could never be separated.

Bent (Line 28) - Directed on a certain pathway.

Coincident (Line 29) - Meeting, intersecting.

Anon (Line 30) - In a short while.

August (Line 30) - Impressive, inspiring admiration, grand, majestic.

Spinner of the Years (Line 31) - Another term for a supernatural force that exercises control over the universe. This term invokes Clotho—in Greek mythology, one of the three Fates who determined how long each mortal would live. Clotho spun the thread of life while her sisters measured it and cut it.

Consummation (Line 33) - The act of completing or finishing something; the act of perfecting or the height of perfection; a fitting or inevitable outcome; the achievement of a desired or intended goal; the physical beginning of a marriage.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

The poem is divided into eleven stanzas of three lines each (tercets). The stanzas are each numbered, making them feel like short vignettes or chapters from a story.

Besides the separation between the individual stanzas, there is also a clear separation between the first and second half of the

poem. The first half of the poem focuses closely on the wreck of the Titanic after it has sunk beneath the sea. These stanzas create a series of distinct images: the crawling sea worms, the blackened jewels, the gaping fish. In the poem's second half, the stanzas zoom out to tell the story of the ship before the wreck, up until the very moment of the collision. The poem's first half thus explains the effect of the collision while the second half explains the cause. (This thematic shift between the poem's two parts is similar to the turn or volta between the octave and the sestet in a sonnet.)

METER

The poem has a mixed meter. Within each 3-line stanza, the first two lines are written in iambic trimeter and the third line is written in iambic hexameter. An iamb is a poetic foot with an unstressed-stressed beat pattern, da DUM. Trimeter means there are three iambs, three da DUMs, per line, while hexameter means there are six. Stanza II is scanned, for example, like this:

> Steel cham- | bers, late | the pyres
> Of her sal- | aman- | drine fires,
> Cold cur- | rents thrid, | and turn | to rhyth- | mic tid |
> al lyres.

Even here it's clear that the poem's meter is frequently irregular. Above, there are a couple spondees (stressed-stressed) and anapests (unstressed-unstressed-stressed). Sometimes these irregularities have no strong effect on the poem, adding simple moments of sonic interest. Other times, though, they add deliberate extra emphasis to words. Line 9, for instance, scans like this:

> The sea- | worm crawls | — grotesque, | slimed, dumb,
> | indif- | ferent.

The stress on "slimed," which creates another spondee, adds extra emphasis to the word, almost forcing the reader to visualize this unpleasant image.

The iambic rhythm is a common one in English poetry. It functions especially to stress important words at the ends of lines, since iambic lines conclude with a stressed syllable. In line 3, for example, the final stress emphasizes "she," the wreck of the Titanic lying at the bottom of the ocean; in line 19, "mate" is stressed, and so is the disturbing claim that the iceberg was *meant* to come together with the ship.

Less common in English poetry is the way the lines vary so starkly in length. One effect of this variation is to build suspense. The first two lines of each stanza are short, with only three feet. The third line, then, with its six feet, forces the reader to wait for what feels like an unusually long time before learning how the stanza ends.

Another intended effect of the short first two lines and the long final line might be to replicate the actual "convergence of the twain" in the poem's form. The two trimeter lines might represent the ship and the iceberg, which the poem describes as evenly matched. The final hexameter line could represent the two coming together. The ship and the iceberg are described as "twin halves" of one event, as two trimeter lines would be the twin halves that make up one hexameter line.

RHYME SCHEME

The rhyme scheme of the poem is simple. The three lines of each stanza rhyme with each other, like so:

> AAA
> BBB

...etc. Essentially all the rhymes are full, clear perfect rhymes. The regularity of the rhyme scheme and the frequency of the rhymes (each rhyming sound appears not twice but three times) contributes to the emotional effect of the poem.

One of the themes of the poem is the way that the ship and the iceberg appeared to be unrelated and far apart but were actually destined to meet. The rhyme scheme almost recreates this relationship in sound. The regularity of the rhymes means that once the reader hears two A sounds, they expect that a third A sound will inevitably follow.

Of course, the final rhyme is delayed because the third line in each stanza is twice as long as the first two lines (a hexameter as compared to a trimeter line). This delay mimics the separation of the ship and the iceberg. The time of their meeting is "far and dissociate," there is "shadowy silent distance" between them. But of course, they are also "bent / By paths coincident" toward one unavoidable outcome. Similarly, the final rhyme is separated from the first two rhymes, but the reader still anticipates it as an unavoidable ending, and indeed, in each stanza, the anticipated ending arrives.

Because the rhyme scheme is so prominent, it gives additional prominence to the words that are the rhyming words. It creates a connection between them, inviting the reader to see how they are thematically related. For example, the terms "meant," "opulent," and "indifferent" are key words in stanza III, and they are fittingly highlighted as the rhyming words. The ship was "meant" to provide safety and power, but it ended up overpowered by natural forces that are "indifferent" to human intentions. The rhyme links "meant" and "indifferent" to highlight the thematic contrast between human desires and nature's unconcern with those desires.

SPEAKER

The speaker is not a character in the scene of the poem itself but more of an omniscient third-person narrator. This speaker

is able to see what occurs in the "solitude of the sea" where no human being could actually be, and knows the movements and intentions of the "Immanent Will," the supernatural power in the poem. Despite this distance, the speaker does express certain definite attitudes in the poem. The speaker is critical of human "vanity" and "Pride," mocks the "gilded gear" of the sunken ship, and withholds sympathy from the human victims by never mentioning them in the poem.

SETTING

Stanzas I-V are set in a specific place and time: "[d]eep" in the Atlantic Ocean, sometime after the Titanic 's sinking. The setting is eerie and inhospitable. The water is "[c]old" and "lightless," and sea-worms "crawl[]" over the wreck like the worms that eat away corpses in graveyards. The poem was published in May 1912, just a month after the ship sank, but it might be imagining how the wreck might look after months or even years on the ocean floor. The ship is already being penetrated by the sea's currents, and sea creatures have taken over the wreck.

Stanzas VI-XI shift location. They move back in time, starting from when the Titanic was first created and going right up to the moment of the collision. There is no one place in which all six stanzas are set, but they do describe the iceberg as sitting in "shadowy silent distance," far from where the ship being built.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"The Convergence of the Twain," like all of Hardy's writings, is shaped by Christianity in that its language is filled with allusions to the Bible. But the allusions do not mean that "Convergence" is a Christian poem. On the contrary, they underscore its decidedly un-Christian outlook—an outlook that Hardy himself shared. Rather than believing that an all-powerful, all-loving God created and guided humankind, Hardy subscribed to the idea, influenced by Charles Darwin, that humans had evolved from earlier species by a natural process in an unconscious, uncaring universe. Hardy's poems and novels—works like *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*—often reflect this worldview.

Hardy's poem was first printed in a 1912 program for an event to raise relief funds for the Titanic's victims. In its bleak worldview and its anti-celebratory tone, Hardy's poem contrasts sharply with several other poems printed in the same program and, more significantly, with other key poems in the English elegiac tradition.

For example, in Herbert Trenche's "Requiem of archangels for the world" (a 1911 poem reprinted in the 1912 program), nature itself acknowledges and mourns for the dead: "All iron stands [Earth's] wrinkled tree, / The streams that sang are stricken dumb." In two other famous elegies, nature similarly weeps for the dead. In "Adonais," Percy Shelley's elegy for the poet John Keats, the speaker declares that "Grief made the young Spring wild, and she threw down / Her kindling buds." Similarly, in "Lycidas," John Milton's elegy for a lost friend, "the woods and desert caves, / With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown, / And all their echoes mourn."

In Hardy's poem, by contrast, nature does not mourn or honor the victims but is simply baffled by the wreck. The victims are not mourned so much as critiqued for the "vanity" and "Pride" that led them so arrogantly to assume that they could escape death by building an unsinkable ship.

More commonly, elegies do not critique but celebrate their deceased subjects. "The Convergence of the Twain" offers no such comforting hope of resurrection or afterlife with God. The supernatural force in this poem actually planned the collision and, far from mourning the deaths, seems to find the collision a pleasing, impressive event. This is a far more disturbing idea for mourners to contemplate. Celebrating the dead and consoling those who mourn are the traditional functions of elegies. Hardy's poem is almost an anti-elegy in how strongly it refuses to do either.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Hardy's poem was first published in May 1912, one month after the Titanic sank. The R.M.S. Titanic was a British passenger liner that struck an iceberg and sank on April 15, 1912, during her very first voyage. There were an estimated 2,224 people on board and over 1,500 of them died. Hardy's poem was printed in a program intended to raise funds for the victims, the "Dramatic and Operatic Matinée in Aid of the 'Titanic' Disaster Fund," which was held in London at the Royal Opera House on May 14, 1912.

Even before the disaster, the Titanic was famous as the largest ship currently afloat and one of the most luxurious ever built, with a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a library, and glamorous cabins and restaurants catering to its many wealthy passengers (there were also many poorer emigrants traveling in third class). The references to "the opulent" and "gilded gear" in the poem register this luxury.

The ship was also popularly believed to be unsinkable. An 1910 advertisement for the Titanic and its sister ship the Olympic stated that "as far as it is possible to do so, these two wonderful vessels are designed to be unsinkable." This belief in the ship's indestructibility may have contributed to passengers' slowness to board the lifeboats. A headline in the *New York Times* on April 16, 1912, read "Manager of the Line Insisted Titanic Was Unsinkable Even After She Had Gone Down." When Hardy refers to "human vanity" and "the Pride of Life," he may well be referring to the belief that people could build something that

could not be destroyed.

After the wreck, relief funds were established to raise money for survivors and families of those who had died. The Matinée on May 14, 1912, was held to raise money for one such fund, and a number of poets, including Hardy, contributed poems to the event program.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Thomas Hardy's Biography — A biography of the poet, with an emphasis on his development as a writer and the themes that run throughout his work. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/thomas-hardy)
- The Poem Out Loud — A recitation of the poem by Ian Whitcomb, a British musician. (https://youtu.be/gC_5MFImK3M)
- Poetry and the Titanic — An article from the Library of Congress on how the public used poetry to respond to the sinking, with links to other poems about the ship. (https://blogs.loc.gov/catbird/2012/04/rms-titanic-the-poetic-response/)
- Timeline of the Titanic — An interactive timeline of the building, sailing, and sinking of the ship. (https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/titantic-timeline-1909-2012/)
- Titanic Relief Efforts — Images of programs from three different fundraising events for victims of the Titanic, including the program in which Hardy's poem was first published. (https://www.momh.org.uk/exhibitions-detail.php?cat_id=5&prod_id=279)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER THOMAS HARDY POEMS

- A Wife In London
- Neutral Tones
- The Darkling Thrush
- The Man He Killed

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