A MYTHOLOGICAL TITAN: POPULAR CULTURE’S TRANSFORMATION OF TITANIC INTO A REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER

by

Thomas Matthew Mattarocci

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY - PUEBLO
Pueblo, Colorado, USA

December 2013

Master’s Committee:

Advisor: Dr. Cindy Taylor
Dr. Doug Eskew
Dr. Tim McGettigan
STATEMENT BY THE AUTHOR

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at Colorado State University - Pueblo and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under the rules of the library.

Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided accurate acknowledgement of the source is indicated. Requests for permission to use extended quotations or to reproduce the manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the English Graduate Program or the English Graduate Studies Coordinator when the proposed purpose is in the interest of scholarship. In all other instances, however, permission must be obtained from the author.

Signed: _______________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

APPROVAL BY THESIS ADVISOR

THIS THESIS HAS BEEN APPROVED ON THE DATE SHOWN BELOW:

_________________________________________ ______________________
Dr. Cindy Taylor Date
Committee Chair
Associate Professor and Chair of English

_________________________________________ ______________________
English Graduate Studies Coordinator Date
A MYTHOLOGICAL TITAN: POPULAR CULTURE’S TRANSFORMATION OF TITANIC INTO A REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER

Thomas M. Mattarocci

The notion of the representative character has been examined by numerous academics, including S. Paige Baty, Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steve Tipton. In their studies, the scholars assert that, through iconographic rememberings, these symbolic figures become elevated into global icons which represent the aspirations, values, and visions of the societies that interpret them. Sadly, all of these analyses limit the concept to people and fail to take into account that even ships and objects can also become representative characters. Furthermore, the reinterpretations which meld events and individuals into ideals dramatically impact cultural perceptions, with the various depictions crafted through reimages swaying how society comprehends and views the representative character. Through a cultural analysis of the Titanic tragedy, which conducts a wide reading of the varying illustrations of the ship through cultural artifacts produced over the course of one-hundred years, I contend that the Titanic mythos, due to its rapid development and steady endurance, proves a perfect means to expand the definition of the representative character and reveal how the iconographic reinventions at the heart of this notion influence understandings of historic events and figures.

Approved by:

__________________________________________  ____________________________________
Committee Chair  Date

__________________________________________  ____________________________________
Committee Member  Date

__________________________________________  ____________________________________
Committee Member  Date

__________________________________________  ____________________________________
English Graduate Studies Coordinator  Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Kenneth McKenzie in the university’s Interlibrary Loan Department for locating numerous rare sources, Dr. Doug Eskew, Dr. Tim McGettigan, and Dr. Cindy Taylor for their diligent assistance, and Billy Herrington and Larry and Mary Mattarocci for their loving support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>From an Egyptian Queen to a Hollywood Starlet: The Nature of the Representative Character</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Controversial Generals and Glorified Revolutions: Art’s Impact on Our Perceptions of the Past</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Why <em>Titanic</em>?</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The Mythology of a Titan</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>From Instant Books to Blockbuster Epics: <em>Titanic</em> in Popular Culture</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>A Deathless Titan: The Representative Character of <em>Titanic</em></td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Work Cited                                                                                     117
Chapter I

Introduction

It is an image widely recognized: *Titanic*’s sinking stern, every light aboard glimmering brilliantly in the darkened night, towering 150 feet above the glassy sea.\(^1\) A century after the scene occurred, it is still perfectly preserved in literature and film. In fact, as Steven Biel attests in *Down with the Old Canoe*, this occurrence has assumed such a mammoth resonance in popular culture that its story is universally known (7-8). Indeed, interest in the ship has failed to wane during the course of her one-hundred-year history, with her tragedy perpetually retold in countless films, novels, poems, and songs.\(^2\) Likewise, over the century, the disaster has been removed from the confines of an historical event and fashioned into a symbolic image. As a result, *Titanic* has come to signify more than just a massive steamer which sank in 1912. As Biel stresses, from the moment her fantail disappeared beneath the sea, *Titanic* was transformed into an object of cultural significance, which society has shaped into a means to examine and critique contemporary issues of class, commerce, gender, politics, race, technology, and theology (8).

Biel is not alone in his stance. As early as 1990, scholars such as Stephanie Barczewski, Paul Heyer, Richard Howells, Linda Maria Koldau, and Ann Larabee have discussed the mythos encompassing *Titanic*. In

---

\(^1\) Recently, this image has been contested by several scientists. In 2005, naval architect Roger Long, scrutinizing details from the wreck, arrived at the conclusion that, structurally, *Titanic*’s hull would have been incapable of raising forty-five degrees into the air. Rather, Long proposes that *Titanic*’s stern rose roughly eleven degrees before breaking apart (Matsen 220-27). Shortly following the release of Long’s theory, naval architect William Garzke arrived at the same conclusion, asserting that *Titanic*’s stern only rose fifteen to twenty degrees into the air before breaking up (Deitz 27). In fact, Jennifer Hooper-McCarty and Tim Foecke, engineers in Material Science, concur with Garzke and Long, claiming the image recounted by survivors of *Titanic*’s stern reaching a forty-five degree angle was merely the product of optical illusions produced by the individuals’ positions in relation to the ship (183).

\(^2\) It is rumored that, according to the Library of Congress, there are three subjects written about more than any other: Jesus Christ, the American Civil War, and *Titanic* (Biel 234). Although the rumor is an obvious exaggeration, Eugene Rasor’s annotated bibliography on *Titanic* reveals that there may be a thin truth in its assertion. Published in 2001, Rasor’s text catalogs an exhaustive 930 entries, including thirty-two poems, twenty-nine accounts by survivors, and over a dozen staged dramas, films, and musicals (6).
accordance with Biel, these individuals attest that, through drama, literature, and music, *Titanic* has been forged into a mythological construct which undergoes various cultural incarnations of meaning and significance. What these scholars neglect to mention, though, is that, through these incarnations, society has altered *Titanic* into a representative character. In fact, popular culture has, through its depictions of the tragedy, played a major role in this symbolic transformation.

Building upon the scholarship of S. Paige Baty, Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, all of whom discuss the notion of the representative character, I shall reveal how this perpetual retelling and reimaging of *Titanic*’s tale has elevated the disaster to the iconic state of a representative character. However, unlike these scholars, who limit representative characters to humans, I contend that this concept can be applied on a larger scale to include other elements besides people, specifically historic events. Likewise, expounding on the scholarship of Richard Ammon, Ellie Barksdale, Donald Gallo, Robert Toplin, Michael Tunnell, and Trenia Walker, who explore the impact of historical fiction and film on the public’s perceptions of the past, I maintain that not only has popular culture altered *Titanic* into a symbolic figure, but this representation has had a direct effect upon how society perceives and understands the tragedy.

Beginning, in chapter two, with an examination of the representative character, we shall witness how various artists and authors, including George Bernard Shaw and Manson Locke Weems, have, through their imaginative depictions of historic figures such as Cleopatra and George Washington, molded these individuals into cultural icons. Building upon this notion, chapter three explores how these academic and artistic reinterpretations have altered society’s perceptions of not only historic individuals, but historic events as well, including the American and French Revolutions. Having established the scholarly groundwork for the limited definition
of the representative character, chapter four explores why the Titanic mythos stands as the perfect instrument to broaden this concept to include events and inanimate objects. Expounding upon this mythology, chapter five, utilizing the theories of Stephen Cox, discusses how both individual works and the community at large have created, maintained, and reimaged the iconographic figure of Titanic. Through a wide reading of the varying representations of Titanic in cultural artifacts produced over the course of the century, chapter six conducts a cultural analysis which reveals how individual works and societal ideologies have, like Shaw and Weems’ portrayals of Cleopatra and Washington, crafted Titanic into a representative character and significantly impacted the public’s perceptions of the event. Finally, in chapter seven, we see how, unlike many symbolic figures, the emblematic Titanic has maintained a universal and unyielding presence within global consciousness which serves to preserve the historic event for future generations.
Chapter II

From an Egyptian Queen to a Hollywood Starlet: The Nature of the Representative Character

In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton discuss the notion of a representative character. According to the scholars, these figures exist as public symbols which, through their presentation of specific traits and personalities, stand as ideals and depict, for a given group of people, what types of attributes and behaviors are valued and desired (Bellah et al. 39). S. Paige Baty, in turn, builds upon this notion of the representative character in her examination of society’s perpetual re-imaging of the actress, Marilyn Monroe.

In *American Monroe*, Baty explains that culture is permeated with these symbolic figures, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln, and Marilyn Monroe (8). These figures, which embody such human possibilities as success and failure, become representations not only within their own lifetime, but within the eras succeeding their deaths. In fact, it is through these posthumous reinterpretations, Baty stresses, that cultures reshape the “values, histories, possibilities, and identities” of these characters in order to comment upon and make sense of the ideologies and concerns of a given community (9). In the case of Marilyn Monroe, Baty asserts that, for nearly four decades, culture has transformed Monroe from a real person who died in 1962 into a global icon which represents the aspirations, ideals, and visions of the society which interprets her (10). This perpetual reinterpretation, Baty stresses, makes Monroe into a cultural symbol which, through iconographic rememberings, is available for commodification and public consumption (10). Although Baty limits her analysis of the representative character to Monroe, the process of iconographic remembering which converts the actress into a symbolic figure can
be witnessed in cultural representations of multiple historic individuals, including Cleopatra and the participants of the American Revolution.

In his examination of Cleopatra, historian Michael Grant asserts that, beginning with Plutarch, a ceaseless parade of biographers, dramatists, painters, and poets have fashioned the queen into an embodiment of the lascivious temptress (xvii). Through mediums such as paintings, including Guido Cagnacci’s *The Death of Cleopatra* and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, and plays, including William Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* and George Bernard Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*, artists and authors have habitually focused upon elements of sensuous indulgence and hedonistic love to fabricate the Egyptian ruler into a symbol of the *femme fatale*. As Grant explains, art and literature perpetually overemphasizes Cleopatra’s negative attributes and ignores her brilliant treatises on agriculture, her meticulously-planned political endeavors, and her headstrong determination to restore her empire to its former glory (xvii). In doing so, culture has crafted a limited portrayal of the monarch, boiling her down to a seductress who utilizes her wonton sexuality to ensnare male rivals and solidifying her role as a representative character for the sultry enchantress.

While Grant centers his examination on the use of Cleopatra as an illustration of the pernicious vixen, Ella Shohat’s analysis takes a broader perspective, tracing the textual and imagistic depictions of the monarch over the past century. Like Grant, Shohat emphasizes the role society plays in melding Cleopatra into a representative character. Unlike Grant, however, Shohat stresses that Cleopatra has come to signify more than just the prurient temptress. For

---

3 Betsy Prioleau, during her study of the seductress throughout history, argues that this image of the salacious temptress assigned to Cleopatra is patriarchy’s attempt to undermine the political prowess of the queen by belittling her with the archetype of the whore. As Prioleau explains, influential women, including Queen Christina Alexandra, Cleopatra, and Catherine the Great, have historically been transformed by society into representations of political power ruined by female vanity and deviant sexuality (195-97). According to Prioleau, these women become manifestations of the *Machtweiber* (siren-políticas), who is culturally punished for allowing her unwavering influence to challenge male supremacy.
black diasporic nationalists, she symbolizes the Nubian Queen. Through Hollywood productions, including Joseph Mankiewicz’s epic *Cleopatra*, she epitomizes feminine beauty and sexuality. And, through the heated debate over her correct complexion, as expressed through works such as Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena*, she embodies the racial clash between Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism. It is through these depictions that, as Shohat stresses, “each age and each culture seems to project its own Cleopatra, visualizing her in a new way” (196). Like Cagnacci and Shaw, whose works perpetuate the image of the lubricious enchantress, various cultures and time periods, from African nationalists to Hollywood directors, have shaped Cleopatra according to their desires and needs. As a result, the queen “allegorizes highly charged issues having to do with sexuality, gender, race, and nation,” transforming into a representative character for everything from racial conflicts to feminine pride (Shohat167). Likewise, as Shohat argues, these transformations not only provide insight into the historic figure, but commentaries on the diverse societies and periods which reimage her: “Each ‘take’ on Cleopatra unmasks not only a facet of Cleopatra, but also a facet of the representor, and, more important, reveals the nature of the prisms through which Cleopatra has been seen and imagined” (196). Hence, like Marilyn Monroe, Cleopatra has undergone the same process of iconographic remembering which has morphed her into a cultural symbol. And, like Monroe, the Egyptian queen is not the only example of this practice.

In *Founding Myths*, historian Ray Raphael scrutinizes the folklore surrounding the American Revolution. Over the course of his analysis, Raphael studies how the Founding Fathers - which has become a collective term for such historic individuals as John and Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington -
have been cast by American culture throughout the years into representative characters for independence.

Beginning as early as 1797, with Mason Locke Weems’ biographies on Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, American society began a long tradition of romanticizing the Revolution and its participants, specifically the fifty-six delegates of the Continental Congress who signed the Declaration of Independence (Raphael 254-63). For Weems and his endless succession of fellow dramatists, historians, painters, and poets, these figures became principal characters in the nation’s birth and were quickly elevated to godlike proportions. While Alma-Tadema and Shakespeare sensationalized Cleopatra’s faults, Weems suppressed Franklin and Washington’s vices and highlighted their virtues, grandly depicting them as immaculate champions of independence. Artists and authors after Weems, in turn, have followed suit, “conceal[ing] the naked truth of a bloody civil war behind glamorous tales conjured from mere shreds of evidence” (Raphael 4). What emerged, hence, was the creation of a patriotic mythos which clustered Franklin, Washington, and their brethren into a collective category of the

---

4 One of Weems successors, Salma Hale, summarized this demigod image of the Founding Fathers within the Preface to his text, History of the United States: “To exhibit in a strong light, the principles of political and religious freedom which our forefathers professed, and for which they fought and conquered; to record the numerous examples of fortitude, courage, and patriotism, which have rendered them illustrious; and to produce, not so much by moral reflections, as by the tenor of the narrative, virtuous and patriotic impressions on the mind of the reader” (5).

5 Contrary to popular assumptions, Washington was not a remarkable army leader. Rather, the general’s military career was constantly plagued by multiple blunders, both tactically and strategically. In fact, “no successful commander in American history lost more battles than George Washington” (Lengal xi). While scholars such as Edward Lengal dismantle the myth encompassing Washington’s military valor, historians such as Noel Garde, Jonathan Katz, J.V. Nash, and Charley Shively deconstruct Washington’s image as the wholesome American leader by claiming the general had a torrid love affair with his drillmaster, Frederick Steuben (Shively 11).

6 Weems did much to both glorify and mythologize his subjects. Within the fifth edition of his biography on Washington, titled The Life of George Washington; With Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honorable to himself and Exemplary to His Young Countrymen, the author fabricated the famous “I cannot tell a lie” story (Raphael 255). Likewise, while commenting upon the character of Franklin and Washington, Weems remarks that it was these men “whose courage and Abilities, whose patriotism and Exploits have won the love and admiration of the American people” (vix).
Founding Fathers and transformed them into representative characters for freedom. As Raphael explains, American culture has solidified the Founding Fathers’ symbolic representation and utilized this romanticized portrayal as a means to provide “appropriate role models for young Americans” throughout the ages (257). Like Cleopatra and Monroe, who have been molded into global icons to denote the ideologies of their interpreters, the Founding Fathers have become, as Raphael argues, patriotic images utilized during both times of peace and war to reinforce American ideals of nationalism, pride, and virtue.

As Bellah et al. express, these figures have become public symbols both within their own lifetimes and the periods following their deaths. Through the emphasis of specific traits, from Cleopatra’s unbridled extravagance to Washington’s incorruptible integrity, society has reimaged these individuals into representations of cultural ideals and values. Limited by artistic portrayals of immorality and vanity, Cleopatra, as Grant reveals, has been confined to the emblem of the temptress. Likewise, overinflated by patriotic biographies and speeches, the Founding Fathers have been elevated to the lofty icon of American freedom. Furthermore, as Baty articulates, these figures have been reshaped and reimaged in order to make sense of contemporary concerns, from the use of Cleopatra by African nationalists as the persona of the Nubian Queen to Daniel Webster’s lament that the age of the bold and fearless Founding Fathers has died. In each case,

7 In 1826, Daniel Webster, a member of Congress from Massachusetts, delivered a combined eulogy in Boston following the deaths of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Although Webster, born six years following the Revolution, had not witnessed or participated in its events, his oration speaks to the fervent mythology which quickly erupted around the Founding Fathers. During the course of his address, Webster mourns the loss of these “bold and fearless advocates of independence” and laments that men of this character no longer exist in the modern age (386). The Congressman’s only wish, in turn, is that Americans will learn from their forefathers’ examples and help preserve “this lovely land, this glorious liberty, [and] these benign institutions” (Webster 386).

8 For Raphael, this romanticization engenders a pernicious result. According to the scholar, the act of elevating the Founding Fathers to godlike proportions provides the erroneous illusion that only demigods can successfully instigate and obtain revolution. As a result, the American public has become complacent in the notion that, in comparison to these immaculate individuals, they lack the prowess to achieve the same results: the overthrow of an abusive government (Raphael 263-69).
the practice of iconographic remembering has cast these individuals into the role of the representative character.

Although Baty, Grant, Raphael, and Shohat’s uses of the representative character provide enlightening analyses into the cultural representations of various historic figures, their definition of the term - and the definition provided by Bellah et al. - is limited specifically to humans. The concept they present, however, can also be applied on a larger scale to examine such factors as the mythology encompassing historic events. Furthermore, it can help explicate how mediums such as fiction and film have a dramatic impact upon how we envision and comprehend these events. Indeed, Baty’s argument holds strong parallels with Richard Howells’ examination of the *Titanic* legend. 9

Howells asserts that there are two *Titanics*: the physical ship which, along with 1,523 individuals, perished in the North Atlantic and the mythical leviathan (*The Myth of the Titanic*, 19). It is the latter, according to Howells, which continues to carry cultural resonances, with society reinventing and reinterpreting the event to understand current issues (*The Myth of the Titanic*, 19). Hence, like Cleopatra, the Founding Fathers, and Monroe, *Titanic* has been transformed into a cultural symbol. And, like Cleopatra, the Founding Fathers, and Monroe, this transformation, with its iconographic rememberings, has made the event available for public consumption and commodification. It is this public consumption and commodification, in turn, which has removed *Titanic* from the confines of an historical subject and transformed her into a representational figure which, over the course of a century, culture has constantly reimaged.

9 Several of *Titanic*’s passengers and crew have also been molded into representative characters. For example, Kristen Iverson discusses how, through drama and fiction, Margaret Tobin Brown has been distorted beyond recognition into the mythical figure of the “Unsinkable Molly Brown,” who has become an embodiment of perseverance and tenacity (31). Although Mrs. Brown and other individuals have been transformed into symbolic images, this essay will focus specifically on *Titanic*, which tends to be employed more often than those aboard her as a representative character.
Chapter III

Controversial Generals and Glorified Revolutions: Art’s Impact on Our Perceptions of the Past

In *The Story of Ourselves*, Richard Ammon and Michael Tunnell state students’ dislike of history spawns from the fact-riddled monotony of textbooks. As the scholars claim, the incorporation of historical fiction into the curriculum will, due to literature’s relatable and entertaining nature, make the study of history more stimulating (Ammon and Tunnell vii-ix). Ammon and Tunnell, however, are not alone in their thinking. In fact, the authors argue for a pedagogical practice which began in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In 1982, Helen Gardner championed the use of historical fiction to teach children about history, claiming that “literature, of all the arts, has the power to take us back into what it felt like to live in past ages” (45). The following year, Donald Gallo and Ellie Barksdale stressed that, unlike the tediousness of textbooks, historical fiction “allow[s] readers to participate vicariously in the historical period, seeing sights, feeling the emotions, [and] being part of the events as they occur[ed]” (286). Since these early works, the pedagogical practice of utilizing fiction to teach history has become prevalent within the curriculum, with recent scholars expanding the notion to include historical films as well.

---

10 Historian Kyle Ward concurs with this stance, claiming that students and adults alike often view history as “boring, mundane, and unnecessary” (xviii).

11 During their argument, the scholars explain that textbook authors tend to write in short, disjointed sentences, utilize a restricted vocabulary, and limit the elaboration of ideas to allow for greater coverage. Writers of historical fiction, however, employ rich vocabulary, varied writing styles, and, according to the scholars, an engaging narrative which “lends a sense of vitality, reality, and immediacy to the historical events and the people who experience them” (Tomlinson, Tunnell, and Richgels 60).

12 Michael Tunnell cites multiple educators and scholars, from Matthew Downey and Linda Levstik to William Brozo and Carl Tomlinson, who promote the use of historical fiction rather than textbooks to teach history. As Tunnell explains, these individuals champion this practice because “children’s literature [in comparison to academic texts] is better written, provides clearer historical context, offers varying perspectives, and puts ‘real people’ back into the study of history” (Tunnell 88).
In 1988, historian Robert Rosenstone advocated film’s effectiveness in presenting newer possibilities for representing the past and contributing to audiences’ understandings of broad historical issues (1184). In 2010, historian Robert Toplin built upon Rosenstone’s notions and argued that, because historical films reach millions of viewers, “Hollywood’s interpretations of history can make a strong impact on the public’s thinking about the past,” with many assuming these renderings are historic truth (9). Likewise, Trenia Walker critiques the impact this practice has upon society’s envisioning of the past. As Walker explains, these works often exhibit an author or director’s “idealized version of a particular period,” which, although it may be based upon historical fact, often presents a subjective interpretation of people and occurrences (31). Hence, with its ability to reach mass audiences, the romanticized depictions of history portrayed in fiction and film can directly impact apprehensions of the past. Although Ammon, Rosenstone, Toplin, Tunnell, and Walker’s studies are limited to historical cinema and literature, their works speak to the influential power of art.

James Young, in Art and Knowledge, asserts art functions to provide both pleasure and knowledge (19). While pleasure, according to the scholar, is derived from entertainment and enjoyment, knowledge is established through either testimony or interpretation (Young 66). In the case of testimony, knowledge is obtained through the simple provision of data and information (Young 66-67). With interpretation, though, our understanding of an object is impacted by the perspective provided by art: “The representation presents a perspective on, or way of thinking about, the individual in question. More generally, in interpretive illustration, the way in which an object is represented presents an interpretation of [it]” (Young 81). Hence, the act of artistic representation - a process Young labels interpretive illustration - dramatically influences how items are perceived. In the case of Cleopatra and the Founding Fathers, for
example, the interpretive illustrations provided by the art of Alma-Tadema and Weems affects our knowledge of the subjects by presenting a distinct representation of their character.

Furthermore, Young expresses that interpretive illustration employs six techniques to achieve this artistic depiction: amplification, connection, correlation, juxtaposition, selection, and simplification (82). Although Young indicates that all six methods factor into the process of interpretive illustration, the three most fundamental - and those that will be utilized most frequently in this analysis - are amplification, simplification, and selection. Of the three, selection is the most essential.

As Young argues, artists, when constructing their works, actively engage in the practice of selection. Through this process, the creator consciously chooses which aspects of an object he wishes to represent and which he wishes to ignore (82). In doing so, the artist manipulates the audience’s awareness by highlighting certain features and masking others. Indeed, the techniques of amplification and simplification factor directly into this method of selection, with creators either amplifying particular choices to overemphasize their importance or simplifying specific facets to down-play their relevance (Young 83). As a result, “the very selection of objects for representation [and their amplification or simplification] contributes to a perspective of these objects” (Young 82). Returning to Cleopatra and the Founding Fathers, artists and authors have perpetually made conscious decisions in regards to how they portray the figures, selecting particular factors to represent and others to ignore. Likewise, these selections have involved the amplification of certain elements and the simplification of others. As Grant expresses, artists such as Shakespeare and Shaw have repeatedly simplified Cleopatra’s intellectual and political aptitude while amplifying her unbridled indulgences and torrid romances. Similarly, as Raphael stresses, biographers and speakers such as Webster and Weems have suppressed the negative
traits of Franklin and Washington and inflated their virtuous natures. In doing so, these individuals and their works have, as Young argues, developed interpretive illustrations which establish and maintain distinct perspectives of these subjects. While Young’s analysis examines art in general, scholars such as Jèmeljan Hakemulder and Anders Pettersson discuss the decisive influence literature plays in molding our perceptions of reality.

In The Moral Laboratory, Hakemulder stresses that fiction possesses the compelling ability to influence readers’ perceptions of the world and themselves. As the scholar explains, literature typically deals with moral issues, which allows readers to engage in ethical reflection and “learn the behavioral codes of [their] community through the stories [they] hear and read” (Hakemulder 150). These ethical reflections, according to Hakemulder, shape our understandings of the world and impact how we identify and interact within it. Furthermore, the scholar argues that readers’ identification with characters, where they experience the desires, emotions, and thoughts of a fictional being, impacts their self-concept and sways how they see themselves (Hakemulder 20). Likewise, Pettersson arrives at the same conclusion and asserts that, because readers involve themselves in the events described in a literary text through empathy, identification, and simulation, literature has a strong influence upon communities and individuals (46–47). Akin to Hakemulder and Pettersson, who attest to the power of literature, rhetoricians such as Kristie Fleckenstein and Irit Rogoff demonstrate the substantial influence images play within the molding of reality.

Within her analysis of visual culture, Fleckenstein emphasizes the powerful role images serve within our perceptions of reality. As the scholar argues, images, in conjunction with words, actively fashion our understandings of the world: “we construe who we are, where we are, and

---

13 Archaeologist Vergil Noble concurs with Hakemulder and Pettersson, arguing that film, like art and literature, teaches us about ourselves by prompting viewers to question their behaviors and empathize with others (238).
what we are imagistically as well as linguistically” (Fleckenstein 6). Likewise, Rogoff asserts that, through our interactions with images, we perpetually “remake the world in the shape of our fantasies and desires” (383). Hence, as the scholars attest, images dramatically influence our conceptualizations of reality. Fleckenstein and Rogoff, though, are not alone in their stance. In fact, J. Anthony Blair, within his study of visual rhetoric, attests to film’s immense potential by claiming that the medium, with its ability to subject audiences to a plethora of emotions, “can bring us closer to the actual experiential knowledge as it is possible to get, short of living the experience” (361). Likewise, William Costanzo argues that cinema plays a major role in “creating expectations, shaping attitudes, influencing language patterns, and providing a common frame of reference” (86). Similar to Hakemulder, Pettersson, and Young’s discussion of art and literature, the analyses of Blair, Costanzo, Fleckenstein, and Rogoff reveal how the depictions of reality portrayed within films, with their ability to reach mass audiences, can directly impact apprehensions of both ourselves and the world. Furthermore, these scholars’ studies can help explicate how textual and visual mediums, including fiction and film, dramatically impact culture’s envisagement and comprehension of history. A prime example of this is the glamorized portrayal of Paul Revere within Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “Paul Revere’s Ride.”

14 For the sake space and time, this analysis shall focus only on this one example; however, there are a plethora of others. For instance, historian Elizabeth Jenkins, in The Princes in the Tower, remarks that the odious description of the hunchbacked King Richard III given in Shakespeare’s play, while one of the most fearful and enduring images in English history, is nothing more than a falsity. In John Rows’ illustrations for the first publication of Roll of the Earls of Warwick in 1485, Richard III is depicted without any deformity (Jenkins ix). Indeed, in accounts of the time, the king is described as being of medium height, lean, with one shoulder slightly higher than the other (Jenkins ix). The Countess of Desmond, in turn, described him as the handsomest man in the room (Jenkins ix). Likewise, philosopher Edmund Leites, in The Puritan Conscience and Modern Sexuality, states the staid image of Puritans’ sexual repression presented in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter is a dramatic misconception. In his text, Leites examines historical documents to prove that Puritans viewed sex not only as a means of procreation, but an act that could be pleasurable to both husband and wife (12). In fact, historian Edmund Morgan, in his article “The Puritans and Sex,” reaches the same conclusion as Leites, revealing that Puritans saw sex as pleasurable to both marriage partners and actively encouraged the act (as long as it did not interfere with religious services). More importantly, though, Morgan argues that Puritans understood the errors of mankind and, in an effort to enforce the
As Ray Raphael explains, Longfellow’s poem, which first appeared in the January 1861 edition of the *Atlantic*, utilizes extreme poetic license to overemphasize the individual’s role within the American Revolution and falsely depict the success of the rider’s mission (12). Through a process of selection, the poet simplifies Revere’s ride, neglecting the fact that he was detained by British officers and never achieved his final objective, and amplifies his role within the entire endeavor, boldly depicting Revere as a heroic lone rider who held the fate of the nation in his hands (Raphael 19). Despite its romanticized fabrication, the poem quickly impacted Americans’ perspective of the figure and influenced their understanding of his ride. As early as 1888, with *A History of the United States and Its People, for the Use of Schools*, school books began assuredly reiterating Longfellow’s artistic rendering of Revere, ensuring the poet’s valiant portrait solidified itself within the mindset of countless generations (Raphael 23). In fact, in 1891, John Friske, one of the most respected historians of his time, relied heavily upon Longfellow’s re-image of Revere in his examination of the American Revolution (Raphael 24). As a result, the poet’s Revere, who courageously rode alone into the night to successfully warn of the encroaching British, has, as Raphael claims, “become part of our national heritage” and engrained himself into our understanding of both the historic figure and his actions (25). Hence, as Fleckenstein, Hakemulder, Pettersson, Rogoff, and Young argue, art, both textual and visual, has a potent sway over how we perceive the world and ourselves. Similarly, in the case of art

---

15 While Longfellow’s famous poem has solidified Paul Revere’s place in history, two other men joined the rider on April 18, 1775 to warn colonial minutemen of the approaching British forces before the Battle of Lexington and Concord. In *Paul Revere’s Ride*, historian David Hackett Fischer discusses the roles William Dawes, who traveled seventeen miles over the course of three hours to Lexington, and Samuel Prescott, who carried news of the British forces to Concord after Revere was captured, played in the events of that night. In fact, the men’s renowned flights to relay information were repeated by two other Americans during the war. At the age of sixteen, Sybil Ludington rode forty miles, more than twice the distance of Paul Revere, to warn citizens of Danbury, Connecticut, of British invasion on April 26, 1777 (Bohrer 1-20). Likewise, Jack Jouett, a twenty-seven-year-old politician from Virginia, rode the same distance as Ludington on the night of June 3, 1781 to warn Thomas Jefferson, who was then the governor of Virginia, about the British forces sent to capture him (Thornley).
which represents history, the manner in which artists and authors depict their subjects, consciously selecting particular factors and either amplifying or simplifying them, manipulates our comprehension of the past. Artists, though, are not the sole instigators of this process. Indeed, through their own methods of amplification, selection, and simplification, historians play an equal role in molding how we see history.

In *The Landscape of History*, historian John Lewis Gaddis examines the methodology of his field. As Gaddis explains, the actual details of history are inaccessible to historians:

> We cannot relive, retrieve, or rerun it as we might some laboratory experiment or computer simulation. We can only represent it. We can portray the past as a near or distant landscape...we can perceive shapes through the fog and mist, we can speculate as to their significance, and sometimes we can even agree among ourselves as to what these are. Barring the invention of a times machine, though, we can never go back there to see for sure. (3)

Hence, historians piece together primary sources and artifacts in order to form an educated guess regarding events. However, because primary sources can be intentionally or unintentionally tainted and scholars do not know the true context surrounding an artifact, these studious reconstructions have limitations. The true facets of history, then, will never be completely known. As Gaddis eloquently states, history is nothing more than interpretation, with historians “smooth[ing] over the details, look[ing] for larger patterns, [and] consider[ing] how [they] can use what [they] see for [their] own purpose” (7). Like Gaddis, Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier arrive at the same conclusion, stressing that history is nothing more than a process of

---

16 Eric Haugaard, echoing this notion, claims historians can only achieve “a partial resurrect[ion] of events” which is not immune to subjectivity (698-706). Indeed, Haugaard argues “history is what we choose to recall,” with historians “viewing the past from a certain perspective” (698-706). Likewise, Vergil Noble attests to the same limitations in archaeology: “Through scientific investigations we strive to achieve an understanding of the past, but we are limited to interpreting what remains as a reflection of it in the archaeological record - and that record is both imperfect and incomplete” (238).
interpretation (19). Akin to the artists who engage in Young’s interpretive illustration, historians select information from sources and, through a process of amplification and simplification, craft portrayals of the past which provide a particular perspective on history. Indeed, it is through this method that historians not only create history, as Howell and Prevenier attest, but fashion our understandings of it. A prime example of this is the varied historical interpretations of General William Tecumseh Sherman during the American Civil War.

As historian Kyle Ward contends, Sherman and his March to the Sea, which “forever left an indelible mark on Southern memory and Southern history,” is, next to slavery, “the most contentious issue emerging from the Civil War” (188). Indeed, it is the morality encompassing the general’s tactics which has led many historians to fashion the figure into an image of either military expertise or reckless violence.

As early as 1876, with John Andrew Doyle’s History of the United States, historians began venerating the general and his actions. Like Weems’ depictions of Franklin and Washington, Doyle and his counterparts overemphasized the military leader’s positive traits and quickly countered claims of his “merciless severity” by stressing that, despite its harshness, Sherman’s campaign “was not wantonly, or even revengefully, cruel” (376-77). Indeed, Mannin Ferguson Force, in his work Great Commanders, exemplifies this adamant praise for Sherman in his verbose description of the general’s character:

Similarly, Kyle Ward expresses that most individuals do not comprehend “how important the role of bias, interpretations, and perspective are in the study of the fascinating and vital topic of history” (xxvi). In History in the Making, Ward reveals that geography is highly influential in historical perspective. As the scholar explains, California and Texas, due to their massive size and extensive number of schools, prove too influential in the business of textbook publishing. As a result, publishing firms have currently begun writing and marketing their works specifically for the ideologies of these states. Sadly, as Ward highlights, “what is deemed as ‘historically accurate and appropriate’ for these two states usually then affects what the rest of the country learns about U.S. history” (xxiv).

Discussing this varied portrayal of Sherman, historian Randolph Keim stresses the role interpretation plays in historical perspective. In Sherman: A Memorial in Art, Oratory, and Literature, Keim makes the argument that the judgment of historical figures and the labeling of “good” and “evil” rests on the historians themselves and how they interpret the manners, personality, and outcome of a particular figure and their actions (125-6).
General Sherman was the most picturesque figure in the civil war. His character was absolutely pure and spotless. He had a vigorous and penetrating intellect, prompt and clear in comprehension and in decision. While steadfast in his opinions, he was subordinate in conduct; he held to his judgment in issue against President Lincoln, but yielded as unquestioning obedience to McClellan and Grant. He was an omnivorous reader, and was a storehouse of felicitous anecdote. His cheerful disposition and inexhaustible fund of conversation made him always a delightful companion. Frank as a child and outspoken in his likes and dislikes, Sherman was often engaged in controversy. (v)

Similar to the patriotic biographies and speeches which elevated the Founding Fathers to godlike proportions, the interpretations of Doyle and Force helped mold Sherman into an image of headstrong military prowess. By suppressing his faults and highlighting his victories, these historians fashioned an image of Sherman as a brilliant general and helped influence the public’s perception. In fact, this representation continues today with contemporary historians such as Victor Davis Hanson, who paints Sherman as a democratic spreader of freedom who led a motley army across the South, liberated the slaves, demoralized the Confederacy, and vanquished tyranny (123). Despite praise by Doyle, Force, and Hanson, other historians see Sherman as a vile monster, whose actions prove not only questionable, but immoral. And, like Doyle, Force, and Hanson, these scholars utilize their interpretations to influence our comprehension of history.

Just nine years prior to Doyle’s glorification, Virginia French, in her poem “Shermanized,” details Sherman’s sacking of Atlanta, referring to him as the “spectre” who shall forever be associated with “the fierce destruction...of every right we [Southern society] prized” (361-3). Her poem continues by blaming Sherman for transforming the Southern paradise into a brazen hell

---

19 Like Doyle and Force, Henry Elson and Cornelia MacMullan attest to Sherman’s proficiency as a military leader, stressing that he was among the greatest generals of the war. Furthermore, the scholars claim that Sherman’s destruction of Confederate bridges, factories, iron foundries, railroads, and telegraph wires proved a debilitating blow to the Southern army and eventually lead to its demise (Elson and MacMullan 219-23).

20 According to Hanson, many generals can crush their enemies by acquiring massive losses in their own ranks; however, only a select few can waste an entire culture without tarnishing their own forces in the process. It is these individuals that Hanson refers to as geniuses and the scholar includes Sherman among that elite title (Hanson 50).
consumed by “bale-fires of destruction” (French 361-3).\footnote{That same year, William Gilmore Simms, outraged at the treatment of his hometown of Charleston, South Carolina, composed his own poem, “The Fiend Unbound,” which paints Sherman in the same deriding light as French’s work (Aamodt 130).} Although French’s vile depiction of the “fiendish” Sherman, whose name the poet claims will be immortalized with “haggard infamy,” is not academic in nature, it set the stage for a long succession of rebukes, both academic and artistic, against the general. In fact, the bitter sentiments of French find strong parallels in the works of many historians, including John Bennett Walters.\footnote{In addition to Walters, other historians have crafted similar depictions the military leader. For John Blum, William McFeely, Edmund Morgan, Arthur Schlesinger, and Kenneth Stampp, Sherman’s unbridled brutalities, more than any other element in the Civil War, viciously destroyed the Confederacy’s morale (353-54). Likewise, Andrew Cayton, Elizabeth Perry, Linda Reed, and Allan Winkler attest to Sherman’s permanent infamy within Southern society by stressing that the general’s violence inflicted wounds which “would make the hatred between the North and South still more difficult to heal” (215).} Like French, who poetically narrates Sherman’s turpitude, the scholar, in his 1948 article, “General William T. Sherman and Total War,” paints the military leader as a pernicious force whose redoubtable tactics squelched the Confederacy’s determination. For Walters, Sherman’s “orgy of destruction” left in its wake “a trail of terror and desolation, burned homes and towns, devastated fields and plundered storehouses, and a record for systematic torture, pillage, and vandalism unequaled in American history” (479). Furthermore, Walters, examining the aggressive measures of Sherman’s campaign, argues that the general upheld a maniacal contempt for Southerners: “He had come to justify the violations of the rights of noncombatants on the ground that they had brought their fate down upon their own heads and that it was his mission to inflict punishment upon the rebellious South” (473).\footnote{Even today this perspective remains prevalent in Southern society. In 1994, attempts to build a memorial for the general and his troops at Bentonville were met with intense public outrage, with the North Carolina Secretary of Cultural Resources protesting the monument’s dedication to a man “more evil than Ivan the Terrible or Genghis Khan” and the state commander of the Sons of Confederate Veterans asserting: “Monuments should be erected to heroes. These were no heroes. They were thieves, murderers, rapists, arsonists, trespassers” (Grimsley 1). Likewise, in 1998, Henry Ingram, Jr., owner of a restored plantation in South Carolina, sought legal action to stipulate in the property’s deed that no individual named Sherman could set foot on the premise or purchase it following Ingram’s death (Hanson 7).} Akin to the sensationalized portrayal of Cleopatra presented
by Cagnacci and Shaw, which overemphasized the queen’s sensuous indulgence and hedonistic love, French, Walters, and their peers have focused heavily upon the unbridled brutality of Sherman’s character. In doing so, their analyses craft the general into an emotionless tyrant whose bloodied proceedings have permanently scarred the South. Such a representation proves a dramatic contrast to the glorified image presented by Doyle, Force, and Hanson. However, in both cases, historians, like the artists and authors who fashioned versions of Cleopatra, the Founding Fathers, and Revere accentuated distinct elements and crafted a limited portrait of Sherman which boils the figure down to the role of a representative character for either military victory or immoral violence. Indeed, these representations have, just as Force states within his inordinate-loquacious praise of the general, impacted our understanding of Sherman and encompassed him with a storm of controversy.

While the analyses of Grant, Raphael, and Shohat reveal how artists and historians, through their methods of interpretation, convert historic figures into representative characters whose varied portrayals mold our comprehensions of them, the scholars’ examinations, like the definition of the representative character by Baty and her peers, focus primarily on individuals rather than events. And, like the definition of the representative character, this narrowed focus presents a limited perspective. In his study of the concept of the character in fiction, William Glass stresses that, unlike the ephemeral elements of mood and setting, “characters are those primary substances to which everything else is attached” (116). Although, over the course of the narrative, mood and setting appear and disappear, characters maintain a constant presence which anchors the tale. Furthermore, as Glass asserts, characters can be more than people:

Mountains are characters in Malcome Lowry’s Under the Volcano, so is a ravine, a movie, mescal, or a boxing poster. A symbol like the cross can be a character. An idea or a

---

24 Hanson himself explains that his own maternal grandmother, whose family migrated to California from the ex-Confederacy, referred to Sherman as a “satanic monster” (Hanson 7).
situation (the anarchist in *The Secret Agent*, bomb ready in his pocket), or a particular event, an obsessive thought, a decision (Zeno’s, for instance, to quit smoking), a passion, a memory, the weather, Gogol’s overcoat - anything, indeed, which serves as a fixed point, like a stone in a stream or that soap in Bloom’s pocket, functions as a character. (116-17)

Building upon this notion, I contend that, despite the restricted definition of Baty and her counterparts, the representative character can be more than just a person. Likewise, in view of Grant, Raphael, and Shohat’s studies, the process of interpretive illustration which develops the diverse portrayals that influence our understanding is not limited strictly to historic figures. Indeed, historic events can undergo the same transformative procedure and become representative characters which impact our perceptions. Take, for example, the American and French Revolutions.

In *Representing the French Revolution*, James Heffernan examines the multiple ways this event “has been remembered, commemorated, and represented over the past two hundred years” (viii). As Heffernan explains, over two centuries of drama, fiction, film, and poetry have elevated the storming of the Bastille from a minor instance which freed only seven individuals into a dramatic tale of violence and liberation (xi). As a result, this occurrence “has become - in the annals of historiography as in the popular imagination - the one event that signifies the beginning of the French Revolution” (Heffernan x-xi). Furthermore, the academic and artistic depictions which have transformed the storming of the Bastille into a major catalyst for the revolution have solidified its role as a symbol of the liberation which emerged from the dramatic clash between the tyrannical forces of the *ancien régime* and the burgeoning vigor of the new republic. In fact, Mark Cumming explores how two academic texts - Thomas Carlyle’s *The French Revolution*

---

25 Historically, the event of July 14, 1789, was not as dramatic as its later representations. On the infamous date, nine hundred Parisians effortlessly conquered the fourteenth-century fortress (already proposed for official demolition) and successfully liberated four legally-convicted forgers, two lunatics, and one count. The only major act of violence was the decapitation of Bernard-René de Launey, the governor of the Bastille, with a pocketknife (Schama 398-405).
and Jules Michelet’s *History of the French Revolution* - have contributed to this symbolic conversion. Published in 1837, Carlyle’s analysis of the revolution engages in a process of interpretive illustration which recasts particular events into grand dramas that amplify their details and significance. By overemphasizing the struggle between the powers of the old and new world present within the occurrence on July 14, 1789, Carlyle molds the storming of the Bastille into a symbolic gesture of extreme violence “in which obsolete political and ecclesiastical machinery is violently discarded and a new order is cruelly born” (Cumming 64). Ten years following Carlyle’s romanticized depiction, Michelet painted a similar image, describing the event as “the ancien régime and the Revolution meeting face to face and the later [leaving] the former in astonishment” (166). In both cases, the historians, like the plethora of artists and authors before and after them, actively constructed representations of the storming of the Bastille which not only presented an idealized view of the event, but influenced perceptions of it. Indeed, Joel Taxel reveals the same incidence with literary accounts of the American Revolution.

In 1983, Taxel examined thirty-two novels dealing with the revolution published between 1899 and 1976. Over the course of his analysis, Taxel discovered that a vast majority of the texts portrayed the event in an excessively idealized light. As the scholar explains, most of the literary works simplified the complex issues encompassing the conflict and inflated the notion of good versus evil to present a romanticized image of “good idealistic Patriots being opposed by calculating, avaricious Torries” (Taxel 70).²⁶

As the discussions of Cumming, Heffernan, and Taxel reveal, historic figures are not the only objects to experience the representative transformation of interpretive illustration. Through the amplification, selection, and simplification of various details, works such as Carlyle and

---

²⁶ Seven years prior to Taxel’s study, Christopher Collier conducted his own examination of literary representations of the American Revolution. Like his successor, Collier concludes that these works present an idealized image of the event which is “moralistic and pedantic, depicting simple, freedom-loving farmers marching in a crusade” (132).
Michelet’s examinations have fashioned versions of historic events which have both crafted them into symbols and impacted our comprehensions of them. This factor, in turn, raises an interesting notion in regards to Titanic. Not only has fiction and film altered the ship into a symbolic figure, but this representation has had a direct effect upon how the public perceives and understands the event. Due to this issue, it is important to examine how art influences our awareness of historical individuals and occurrences. Fiction and film’s transformation of Titanic into a representative character, thus, provides a perfect means to analyze this process.
Chapter IV

Why Titanic?

In her examination of Marilyn Monroe, S. Paige Baty argues that, while she could have chosen from a plethora of figures to utilize in her study of the representative character, she specifically selected the actress due to her iconic status within culture. As Baty explains, Monroe has been removed from the confines of a popular starlet and molded into a symbolic character of global proportions. From her role as the epitome of femininity and her nostalgic representation of Americana to her embodiment of Hollywood conspiracy and her standing as a mythico-religious figure, Monroe, as Baty stresses, has morphed into a universally-recognized object which varying cultures and time periods utilize as a means to comment upon and examine society (20). More than that, though, Baty claims that Monroe serves as the ideal model for her study because this symbolic transformation has melded the actress into a commercialized product. Through the process of iconographic remembering, culture has fashioned the starlet and her image into a commodity which can be “reproduced and disseminated ad infinitum as towel, food item, book, photograph, 1950s starlet, 1990s corpse, ashtray, Madonna, calendar girl, greeting card, etc.” (Baty 21). Hence, for Baty, the worldwide notoriety and extreme commodification encompassing Monroe makes her an excellent vehicle for examining the representative character.

Building upon Baty’s stance, I argue that the Titanic tragedy proves a perfect means to not only expand the definition of the representative character, but also scrutinize how art influences the way we perceive history. Like Monroe, Titanic has been removed from the confines of an historical incident and shaped into a universal icon. In fact, her image and story are universally

---

27 In addition to these items, Baty lists a ceaseless parade of other commodities centered around the actress, including Andy Warhol’s famous 1964 Marilyn diptych, murals on Hollywood Boulevard, and an uncountable number of commemorative plates, collectable dolls, and special-issue magazines (21).
known and have infiltrated multiple arenas of culture. From political cartoons and sitcom specials to wistful representations of the past and life-insurance advertisements, *Titanic* has become a globally-recognized canvas on which culture paints its concerns and ideologies.

Likewise, akin to Monroe, these iconographic rememberings have transformed *Titanic* into a commodified object available for public consumption. Bath toys, board games, commemorative plates, models, and posters have all cast *Titanic* into a commercial entity which, in conjunction with her role as a symbolic figure, holds deep cultural significance. While *Titanic* possesses the same attributes that, for Baty, make Monroe a superlative case study, the ship also possesses two unique properties which, I argue, further enhance her appeal: the sturdy endurance of her legend and its rapid establishment. To understand this resilience, it is necessary to compare the catastrophe to a similar event: the sinking of *Atlantic*.

On the stormy night of April 1, 1873, White Star Line’s *Atlantic*, one of the grandest and largest ships of her time, found herself steaming unexpectedly to the Canadian port of Halifax,

---

28 In his forward to the updated edition of Wyn Craig Wade’s *The Titanic*, John Chatterton attests to this global proliferation of *Titanic*. While motorcycling in Asia along the Himalayas, Chatterton stopped in a remote village to rest and was startled to discover, hanging upon the wall of the town’s only café, a poster of the ill-fated ship. As Chatterton remarks: “I doubted that anyone in this small village could have possibly ever seen the ocean, yet they were familiar with the story of Titanic” (ix).

29 *Titanic*’s use as a symbolic image runs the gamut. Lisa Ikemoto applies the romanticized depiction of third-class mothers denied access to the lifeboats as a symbolic image in her critique of contemporary revisions of welfare and immigration laws (157-77). George Annas and Sherman Elias utilize *Titanic*, which they claim represents a blind faith in technology, as a metaphor in their discussions of the dangers surrounding the FDA’s decision to put thalidomide back on the market (98-101). Likewise, Pamela Waymack uses the tragedy as an analogy for the dangers that face healthcare financial managers if they do not plan for the unexpected, remain overconfident, and fail to realize that technology is not the ultimate solution (38-41). Phil Landesberg employs the sinking as a lesson in business leadership and the need to question the faulty assumptions behind many prevailing business practices (53-57). Carlos Torres, in turn, sees *Titanic* as an allegory for the fate of the educational system if it continues to reject adult education and lifelong learning programs as beneficial to the empowerment of people and communities across the globe (39-55). And Peter Allen evokes the image of *Titanic*’s gradual sinking as a comparison for the slow demise of medical thinking regarding mandatory surgical drainage after pancreatectomies (595).

30 Like Monroe, the list of commodities centered around *Titanic* is dizzying. Four board games, two computer games, one video game, a collectable doll of Captain Smith, reproductions of White Star Line china, crystal, and silverware, postage stamps, and *Titanic* ice-cube trays comprise only the very beginning of a seemingly-endless procession of *Titanic*-related merchandise.
Nova Scotia, for emergency re-coaling. While the majority of her 957 crew and passengers, including Captain James Agnew Williams, slumbered peacefully in their cabins, the steamer, traveling at full speed, ran ashore on Meagher’s Rock at 3:20 AM. As Atlantic struggled to stay afloat, her startled crew and passengers desperately fought the violent waves to launch the lifeboats. Sadly, their efforts proved futile as, rocked by the savage sea, Atlantic broke in two and slipped beneath the frigid waves, taking 585 souls with her (Flayhart 39-55). The public was mortified by the tragedy and an insatiable fervor quickly erupted. Newspapers graphically recounted the terrifying ordeals of survivors, with publications such as the New York Herald relating the experience of Patrick Leahy who, clinging to the ship’s rigging, watched a blackened comber sweep hundreds of screaming individuals from Atlantic’s sinking decks (Brinnin 251). Other papers, including the Halifax Chronicle, dispatched reporters to cover the grisly recovery of corpses from the sea and describe how local scavenging parties had pulled these bodies from the waves only to rob them of their riches (Brinnin 250-52). Likewise, while the Canadian government instituted a formal inquiry which questioned the command of Captain Williams and the negligence of White Star Line for allowing Atlantic to leave port with insufficient coal, staged reenactments of the disaster toured the Maritime Provinces, their sensational depictions of the sinking playing to packed houses (Brinnin 251).

31 The single-screw, iron-hulled Atlantic, nearly 420 feet in length, was the second ship in White Star Line’s North Atlantic fleet. Built in 1870, she was followed by four sisterships: Adriatic, Baltic, Celtic, and Republic (Louden-Brown 42).

32 At the time, the wreck of Atlantic was the second-largest loss of life in the history of the Atlantic. The first was the death of 800 individuals in 1707 when Association ran aground on the Isles of Scilly (Flayhart 54).

33 Other newspapers published the account of Chief Officer John Firth, who detailed the macabre sight of witnessing the death of numerous passengers: “Her half-naked body was still fast in the rigging, her eyes protruding, her mouth foaming, a terrible ghastly spectacle rendered more ghastly by contrast with the numerous jewels which sparkled on her hand” (Brinnin 251).

34 Like the staged reenactments of Atlantic, Coney Island also produced elaborate recreations of Titanic’s sinking just days following the disaster (J. White 110).
symbolism of corporate greed and navigational neglect vanished like Atlantic’s hull beneath the murky depths. The public grew tired and Atlantic was forgotten.35

When compared to Titanic, the incident with Atlantic holds several striking similarities: both were massive and luxurious steamers which sank disastrously, both incurred substantial losses of life, both prompted immediate public interest, both were sensationalized by popular culture, and both became symbols for capitalist gluttony and nautical negligence.36 In contrast to these hefty parallels, however, there remains one major difference: Titanic’s legacy strongly continues while Atlantic’s has been extinguished. Indeed, outside of the circle of nautical historians, Atlantic has become practically forgotten. It is this point of interest which helps reveal why Titanic makes for a perfect model. Different than Atlantic and other historic events, which have vanished in the annals of history, Titanic remains ever-present. In fact, maritime historian John Maxtone-Graham emphasizes how, over the course of her one-hundred-year history, Titanic’s memory has failed to diminish: “Patently destructible in life, the Titanic has proven indestructible in memory” (9). And it is this steadfast endurance which makes Titanic an interesting case study. Unlike Atlantic and other historic occurrences, she has cheated the pernicious grasp of oblivion and solidified her place within the public’s consciousness. It is this rare act of resiliency which adds to Titanic’s allure as an investigative object. Likewise, the rapidity at which Titanic was altered from an historical incident to an iconic figure also makes the ship into an ideal model. To further

35 Like Atlantic, multiple shipwrecks which prompted substantial public response following their occurrence have also disappeared with the sands of time. For instance, on September 27, 1854, the Collins Line’s Arctic collided with the French steamer Vesta during dense fog off Cape Race. The ship’s panicked crew quickly swamped the lifeboats and left the bewildered passengers stranded aboard the floundering vessel. 346 individuals drowned in the sinking, with the majority of this number consisting of the haplessly-abandoned passengers (Ballard and Archbold 28). The merciless behavior of the crew outraged the public and engendered numerous responses, including the melodramatic illustrations by James Smith depicting the chaotic desertion of Arctic’s passengers (Ballard and Archbold 29). In addition, the press turned Stewart Holland, who remained at his post and continuously fired the distress gun, into a tragic hero, with lithographs depicting him standing firm while the sea consumed Arctic (Miller 52).

36 For nautical historians, the similarities continue: both were White Star Line vessels, both sank in the early-morning hours, and both tragedies occurred in the month of April.
understand this factor, the sinking must be compared to another historic event which, like
*Titanic*, has been transformed into a representative character: the storming of the Bastille.

As previously discussed, Mark Cumming and James Heffernan both reveal how two centuries
of drama, fiction, film, and poetry have elevated the event of July 14, 1789, into a dramatic tale
which has solidified its perception as the catalyst for the French Revolution and grounded it as a
symbol for the new republic’s liberation from the *ancien régime*. In fact, Heffernan shows how
this embellished image of the storming of the Bastille reached a zenith during the event’s two-
hundredth anniversary when an international parade of eight-thousand performers, including two
elephants carrying disk jockeys and two zebras pulling a six-sided glass pyramid loaded with
two-hundred African dancers and drummers, made its way from the Arc de Triomphe to the
place de la Concorde (vii). As Heffernan explains, the “sheer extravagance and artificiality of the
spectacle” summates the sensationalized representation of the storming of the Bastille, a symbol
which took over two-hundred years to achieve (vii). Indeed, as Cumming and Heffernan
highlight, it took two centuries for the minor occurrence on July 14, 1789, to escalate into an
emblematic event celebrated with raucous pomp. The same can be stated for the representative
characters of Cleopatra, the Founding Fathers, and Paul Revere. Like the storming of the
Bastille, their transformation from historic individuals into symbolic figures was a gradual
evolutionary process which matured over the course of centuries, not decades. The image of
Cleopatra as the wonton seductress or Revere as the lone hero developed steadily over the ages,
with artists and authors progressively crafting the portrayals which would sway our perceptions
of the subjects and mold them into representative characters. In the case of *Titanic*, however, this
process of interpretive illustration occurred almost instantaneously, with mass media facilitating
its rapid development.
In his work, *Titanic Century*, Paul Heyer claims that the sinking of *Titanic* stands as “humanity’s first collective nightmare” (ix). As Heyer explains, the twentieth century began with an evolution in mass communication, with industrial technology creating cheaper and more efficient means to print and distribute material. As a result, hundreds of newspapers and journals began to emerge (Heyer 65). In addition to readily-available print, Heyer expresses that this era also saw the advent of wireless communication. For the first time, thanks to the speed of this electronic medium, individuals could easily correspond with each other (Heyer 23-34). Hence, as Heyer stresses, the world was no longer limited and isolated. Rather, societies and nations could converse with one another in short periods of time and rapidly spread information. The *Titanic* tragedy occurred during this communication revolution and, as Heyer argues, it was this progression in mass communication which spread the news of *Titanic* across the globe, forming her into the first disaster experienced by much of the world at the same time (35-48). Indeed, as Heyer states: “news of the plight of the *Titanic* circulated with a rapidity unmatched by any pervious event” (63). Thus, these newer modes of communication made details of the disaster quickly available to the world and, more importantly, swiftly made *Titanic* into a legend of epic proportions.

As Heyer highlights, for over a month, *Titanic*’s sinking dominated the newspapers of Europe and North America and lingered for weeks in the rest of the world’s papers (63). While these

---

37 According to James Hayes, the rapid advancement of numerous technologies during the industrial era “instilled a sense of omnipotence and over-confidence” in Edwardian society (33).

38 News of the sinking quickly overtook national coverage of the arrest of Clementine Barnabet and Joseph Thibodeaux on April 4, 1912. Both Barnabet and Thibodeaux gained infamy as members of the Sacrifice Sect, an underground Voodoo movement which, for months, terrorized the states of Louisiana and Texas by butchering thirty-five individuals in a series of ritualistic ax murders (Stephens 198-201). Likewise, on April 16, the tragedy robbed Harriet Quimby of worldwide fame by pushing her accomplishment of being the first female pilot to fly over the English Channel into the unread recesses of the newspapers’ back pages (Studin 147-51). Finally, in June of 1912, *Titanic* was overshadowed in the papers when news quickly spread about a family of eight in the rural town of Villisca, Iowa, who were bludgeoned to death with an ax while they slept (R. Marshall 7).
sensational accounts match those of *Atlantic*, they, unlike their melodramatic counterparts, possess an intense duration which, even to the present day, has failed to wane. Akin to Monroe, the worldwide notoriety and excessive commercialism of *Titanic* makes her an excellent vehicle for examining the representative character. Furthermore, the potent resilience of her legacy and its rapid establishment - rare occurrences in comparison to other historic events and figures - make the tragedy a perfect means to study art’s influence in molding our perceptions of the past.
Chapter V
The Mythology of a Titan

In their study of the representative character, Bellah et al. claim that these symbolic figures have become mainstays of mythology (40). As the scholars explain, because the representative character exemplifies cultural ideals, societies have the tendency to build powerful myths around them (Bellah et al. 40). Indeed, these myths, according to Bellah et al., become important sources of meaning which ground and reinforce the symbolic role of the representative character (40).

In the case of Titanic, this mythology, as previously discussed, emerged even before her survivors arrived in New York on April 18, 1912. As Paul Heyer attests, the technological revolutions of the era ensured that the tragedy experienced an unprecedented global transmission. Through wireless communication and newspaper accounts, Titanic was swiftly transformed into a symbolic figure and, as Bellah et al. indicate in their discussion of the representative character, this iconographic state quickly engendered a mythology. Likewise, analyses of Titanic’s mythos began almost as quickly as the legend itself was formed.

In May of 1912, just one month following the sinking, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and George Bernard Shaw engaged in a bitter verbal battle over the disaster in the correspondence columns of the Daily News and Leader. Over the course of several responses, the literary giants fashioned a dialogue which examines the tragedy’s depictions within newspaper accounts. While Doyle

---

39 During the course of their discussion, Bellah et al. reveal how the representative character of Abraham Lincoln, who advanced from humble beginnings in a log cabin to the prestige of the White House, has come to symbolize the American self-made man (40). As a result, American culture has crafted a prevailing mythology around Lincoln which reinforces his role as an exemplification of the “American independent citizen” (Bellah et al. 40).

40 At 9:30 PM on Thursday, April 18, Carpathia, carrying Titanic’s 705 survivors, docked at Cunard’s Pier 54. For those aboard the grief-stricken vessel, the scene which awaited them was startling: 150 foot patrolmen, twenty-five detectives, and twelve mounted police manned the barricades running from Fourteenth Street to Eighth Avenue which held back 30,000 people who, in addition to the 10,000 filling the Battery, had braved the strong winds and heavy rain to witness the ship’s arrival (Eaton and Haas, Triumph and Tragedy, 181-82). Furthermore, a bevy of reporters had bribed their way aboard the pilot vessel New York. As the craft pulled alongside Carpathia, they barked questions to survivors through megaphones and some brave individuals even attempted to climb the pilot’s ladder to board the steamer (Eaton and Haas, Triumph and Tragedy, 182).
supports the heroic images of Captain Smith and the ship’s musicians and officers, claiming the reports provided by journalists accurately represent these men’s valor, Shaw lambasts these depictions as nothing more than the product of “ghastly, blasphemous, inhuman, braggingly lying” (“The Titanic,” 216). For Shaw, the press - as well as “churchmen and statesmen” - shaped the sinking into a romanticized tale of human bravery and perseverance by exaggerating the heroic deeds of crew and passengers (“The Titanic,” 216). As a result, Shaw claims that this inflated depiction erroneously paints Captain Smith into a “super-hero,” the officers into “calm, proud, [and] steady” idols, and solidifies the romance of the shipwreck (“The Titanic,” 215).

While Doyle and Shaw publically debated whether or not the press was transforming Titanic into an idealized symbol weeks following the disaster, scholars would not join the conversation until decades after the literary intelligentsia’s animated argument.

In 1969, naval historian Geoffrey Marcus crafted a detailed history of the event in The Maiden Voyage. Beginning with the White Star Line Boat Train from Waterloo Station to Southampton and ending with both the American and British inquiries, the historian recounts the life, death, and aftermath of Titanic. Toward the end of his work, Marcus discusses the mythology which quickly emerged after the disaster. Like Shaw five decades prior, Marcus asserts that the journalists of the time, desperate for “stories of heroism and self-sacrifice,” inflated the actions of crew and passengers (284). In doing so, their fabrications, as Marcus stresses, engendered a legend which “imposed itself upon, and in large measure obscured, the

---

41 In his response to Shaw’s “perverse thesis,” Doyle stresses that Captain Smith had, indeed, behaved nobly after the collision, assuming the role of “an old and honourable sailor,” and, in contrast to Shaw’s “poisonous suggestion,” the officers performed their duties with the utmost valor (217-19).

42 From Lloyd’s Weekly News’ praise of Wallace Hartley and his band for playing until the end to the Reverend Doctor Ernest Stires stirring sermons preaching the quiet valor of first-class passenger Arthur Ryerson, Marcus cites numerous period examples which emphasized the gallant behavior of Titanic’s crew and passengers. It is these romanticized depictions, “overdone in the press and the pulpit” according to Marcus, which the historian claims helped establish and maintain the myth of Titanic (284).
true facts of the case” (284). Furthermore, akin to Shaw, Marcus remarks that this legend is “responsible for a good deal of error and misunderstanding which persists to the present day” (284). Ten years following Marcus’ examination, clinical psychologist Wyn Craig Wade reached the same conclusion as both Marcus and Shaw; however, unlike his two predecessors, Wade extends the originators of the *Titanic* myth beyond journalists and preachers. Indeed, for the psychologist, multiple groups during 1912 were responsible for the creation of *Titanic’s* mythos. As Wade explains, the absence of black crew and passengers aboard the ship allowed the African-American community the freedom to overemphasize elements of corporate greed and fashion the sinking into a symbol of corrupt, white, capitalist society (316-18). Likewise, Wade highlights how antisuffregettes, similar to the journalists and preachers of the time, built upon idealized images of male chivalry to craft the tragedy into a parable for the inherent dangers in granting sexual equality (312-16). Recently, the stances of Marcus, Shaw, and Wade have been revitalized by contemporary scholars such as Stephen Cox.

In “The *Titanic* and the Art of Myth,” Cox, akin to the scholars before him, claims that the origins of *Titanic’s* legend “can be traced to the press coverage of April-August, 1912” (408). Similar to Marcus, Shaw, and Wade, Cox explains that journalists, “looking for good stories of courage and self-sacrifice, or of greed and arrogance,” actively re-imaged details of the tragedy.

---

43 Despite Wade’s claim, there was, historically, one black family traveling on *Titanic*: Joseph and Juliette Laroche and their two daughters, Simonne and Louise. Booked in second class, the Laroches were moving from Villejuif, France to Haiti, where Joseph hoped he could find employment with his engineering degree. On the night of the sinking, Joseph placed his pregnant wife and two daughters into lifeboat 10 before disappearing into the crowded Boat Deck. Following the sinking, the widowed Juliette and her children returned to Villejuif, where they moved in with Juliette’s father and, on December 17, 1912, welcomed the addition of a baby brother: Joseph Lemercier Laroche. (Geller 94-98)

44 Building upon Wade’s analysis of gender roles in the *Titanic* myth, the feminist scholar Ann Larabee, in 1990, argued that *Titanic* is viewed within patriarchal society as a representation of man’s technological failures and, through her portrayal as the raped virgin, she is punished for becoming “a technological golem freed from male control” (6-7). During the course of her argument, Larabee stresses that this image of *Titanic* as the Mechanical Bride perpetually re-emerges within society whenever traditional masculinity is threatened: “In the 1910s, in the wake of the independent, sexually challenging New Woman; and in the 1980s - age of Rambo, Iaccoca, and the Gipper - after second-wave feminism and the Vietnam War had eroded American manhood” (5-6).
and, in doing so, not only fashioned various individuals into depictions of bravery and pusillanimity, but forged the lore which continues to encompass *Titanic* to the present day (408). Furthermore, the scholar emphasizes the evolutionary nature of this mythology. As Cox explains, myths can change over time, altering their purposes and implications: “[they] may assume different functions and may represent different ideas of truth from those that originally gave [them] value” (413). As a result, myths, according to Cox, have the tendency to evolve with cultural progressions, morphing and shifting their roles and meanings. A prime example of this evolution is the shifting connotations behind Benjamin Franklin’s “JOIN, or DIE” illustration.

In his study of rhetorical iconology, Lester Olson reveals how Franklin’s drawing has, through the process of cultural reinterpretation, changed meanings over time. Originally published on May 9, 1754 in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the illustration, which depicts the colonies as a dismembered snake, was intended by Franklin to be a response to the French and Indian War (Olson 339). As Olson argues, this symbol of failed alliance stressed the need for colonies to join together in protection from a battle waged on their soil by a foreign army (339). Over time, however, with growing opposition to the British government’s Stamp Act of 1765, Franklin’s drawing was reimaged by the press into a symbol of sedition. With disdain for Britain progressing among the colonists, the image of the dismantled snake was reshaped into a symbol for colonial unity against the oppressive forces of Parliamentary Sovereignty (Olson

---

45 Two years following Cox’s work, historian Stephanie Barczewski examined how history and society have treated those who perished as heroes and vilified those who used their influence to gain a place within a lifeboat (83). Within her analysis, Barczewski scrutinizes the lives of eight figures, including Captain Edward Smith, bandmaster Wallace Hartley, and White Star Line’s Managing Director J. Bruce Ismay, to reveal how, despite their individual actions during the sinking, the media has crafted a series of sensational depictions for each of these individuals which have transformed them into either heroes or villains.

46 The first use of “JOIN, or DIE” in seditious publications occurred on September 21, 1765 when William Goddard used the image as the masthead on the *Constitutional Courant*. On October 7, 1765, the *Boston Evening-Post* and the *Newport Mercury* of Providence, Rhode Island, followed suit. In each case, and those that superseded them, the illustration became a poignant call for colonial unification against Britain. (Olson 339)
Hence, as Olson highlights, what began as a comment upon “the need for well orchestrated action against an outside threat” became, through a process of reinterpretation, re-envisioned into “a symbol of protest or rebellion within the British Empire” (339). Indeed, this evolutionary process discussed by Cox and exemplified by Franklin’s “JOIN, or DIE” illustration also factors into the transformative nature of the representative character.

In his analysis of character, Seymour Chatman builds upon E.M. Foster’s notion of flat and round characters. As Chatman argues, flat characters are often endowed with a single trait; however, round characters “possess a variety of traits, some of them conflicting and even contradictory” (132). It is this “large range and diversity or even discrepancy among traits,” Chatman stresses, which fashions round characters into “open constructs susceptible for further insight” (132-33). Hence, due to their multifaceted nature, round characters, similar to the evolving myths of Cox’s discussion, become vehicles for perpetual debate and interpretation.

Chatman’s concept can also be applied to the notion of the representative character. Like the flat characters of Chatman’s analysis, representative characters such as the Founding Fathers and Paul Revere possess one distinctive trait which, as Chatman claims, forms them into an easily-recognizable type (132). Representative characters such as Cleopatra, Monroe, Sherman, and Titanic, though, akin to Chatman’s round characters, contain a bevy of varied and even contradictory traits. As a result, the intricate qualities of these representative characters, similar

47 In his discussion, Foster argues that flat characters, referred to as “humorous” in the seventeenth century, rarely have more than one quality to their being and, typically representing caricatures, work best within comedies (35). Round characters, on the other hand, possess varied and multi-leveled elements which evoke deeper human emotions and function ideally within tragedies and other serious works (E. Foster 38).

48 In the case of the Founding Fathers and Paul Revere, this single trait, reinforced by the works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Mason Locke Weems, tends to revolve around patriotic concepts of American idealism.

49 From Sherman’s depiction as either a glorious general or an immoral monster to Cleopatra and Monroe’s roles as the epitome of femininity or the embodiment of the femme fatale, these diverse and even contrasting representations comprise the figures’ multifaceted natures which, as Chatman claims, build them into round characters.
to Chatman’s round characters, transform these figures into instruments for continuous
discussion and reinterpretation. In fact, it is this act of re-envisioning which Bellah et al. testify
to in their assessment of the representative character.

As Bellah et al. argue, representative characters, as previously discussed, become
embodiments of the specific traits and personalities valued by a given society. Furthermore,
through their stories, these figures come to exemplify the virtues and qualities desired by the
community. In order to ensure the continuation of their symbolic nature, Bellah et al. claim that
communities perpetually tell the characters’ stories, guaranteeing that the ideologies they
represent are never forgotten (153). While members of the community listen to and tell these
tales, they also, as the scholars reveal, retell these stories and, in doing so, reshape and reimage
them to fit the current culture (Bellah et al. 154). As a result, the representative character and his
story, like the changing meanings behind Franklin’s “JOIN, or DIE” picture, evolve alongside
society with each retelling. This process, which the scholars refer to as practices of commitment,
holds strong parallels to the creative re-envisioning discussed by literary scholar Tzveton
Todorov.

In his discussion of narrative discourse, Todorov expresses how readers of fiction perpetually
engage in the process of reinterpretation (157). As Todorov argues, these reimages of literature,
specifically a text’s characters, are continuously shifting, with cultural and societal changes
affecting how fiction is perceived and reshaped (157-58). Likewise, George Lipsitz attests to this
practice of reinterpretation in cinema, claiming that historical films, like Todorov’s readers of

50 Bellah et al. stress that these stories can be both positive, in which the representative character gains
acknowledgment and success for exhibiting the culture’s desirable qualities, or negative, in which the representative
character fails tragically due to his lack of desirable qualities and, in doing so, becomes a parable for society (153).

51 Literary scholars such as Peter Brooks also attest to the communal process of narrative, arguing that the listening,
telling, and reworking of stories - acts which begin early in life and have been around since primitive man - assist
communities and their members in explaining and understanding the world (201).
fiction, refashion perceptions of the past through their interpretations of it (164). More importantly, the scholar argues that these re-envisionings become a means for society to employ the past to examine the present. Lipsitz, though, is not alone in this stance.

As Robert Toplin highlights, as early as 1915, with the release of *Birth of a Nation*, filmmakers began using history as a means to investigate the present (5). Over the years, numerous films have employed the details of historic individuals and occurrences to comment upon and examine modern concerns and ideals. Through a process of interpretive illustration, in which filmmakers amplify, select, and simplify attributes of the past, historic films present a particular interpretation of history which becomes a vehicle for Hollywood to explore shifting principles and desires within culture. Toplin emphasizes that, as a result, historical films, which draw lessons by making the past relevant to the present, become cultural artifacts for the age which produces them, revealing, through their reimage of history, contemporary concerns and ideologies (5-6). Indeed, archaeologist Vergil Noble draws the same conclusion, expressing that “films set in the past are likely to tell us more about the social issues and public tastes prevalent

52 In his study, Toplin argues that Hollywood employs four approaches to portraying cinematic history: exercising extreme artistic license for the sake of good showmanship, drawing lessons by making the past relevant to the present, opening debates by revealing current controversies in depictions of the past, and accenting heroism by celebrating the greatness of a single figure (3-8). Through an examination of eight major motion pictures, from *JFK* and *Mississippi Burning* to *All the President’s Men* and *Norma Rae*, Toplin reveals how historic films utilize one or more of these approaches to fashion a distinctive representation of the past. While Toplin stresses that each of these techniques significantly contribute to cinema’s portrayal of historic events and figures, this analysis shall focus primarily upon one: the process of making the past relevant to the present by drawing lessons.

53 The 1941 production of *Sergeant York*, for example, exploits patriotic aspects of World War I to influence the public’s opinions on World War II. According to Toplin, America in the early 1940s was uncertain about its involvement in the burgeoning European conflict. Delivering a powerful story of the titular character’s heroism during World War I, *Sergeant York* provided its original audience with a positive depiction of America’s participation in the first war which endorsed intervention in the second (Toplin 5). In addition to *Sergeant York*, Toplin also examines how *Missing*, which details the case of a young American killed in a Chilean military coup during the 1960s, raised, upon its initial release in 1982, major questions regarding America’s Cold War foreign policies (5).
during the times in which they were made than about the times they depict on screen” (228).  
Likewise, Joan Blos makes a similar assertion about historical fiction, arguing that this literature reveals more about the time period in which it was written than the historic era it presents. In fact, as Blos claims, the “main function of historical fiction is to help us consider the present” (14). Hence, like the multifaceted representative characters who mirror the round characters of Chatman’s analysis, the interpretive illustrations of history crafted by fiction and film become instruments for artists and authors, through their acts of reinterpretation, to discuss and examine the present. By amplifying, selecting, and simplifying details of the past, these individuals and their artworks re-envision historic events and figures and craft them into contemporary re-images which, as Blos, Noble, and Toplin stress, become a means of scrutinizing and studying modern beliefs. Furthermore, these artistic reinterpretations parallel both the progressive retellings of representative characters and their stories discussed by Bellah et al. and the evolutionary process of mythology expounded upon by Cox. As exemplified by the shifting connotations of Franklin’s illustration, representative characters and the legends which encompass them develop and change as societies retell and reshape their stories. In addition, this method of - as Bellah et al. label it - practices of commitment allows cultures to utilize these refashioned depictions to investigate changes within societal ideologies. It is this process which can be seen within the Titanic tragedy.

Over the course of one-hundred-years, the representative character of Titanic and her story have been retold and reimaged by culture. Likewise, over the span of a century, the manner in

54 Scholars such as Steven Mintz, Randy Roberts, and Trenia Walker concur with Noble and Toplin, pointing out that films serve as cultural artifacts which “open windows into American culture and social history [and] provide a host of insights into Americans’ shifting ideals, fantasies, and preoccupations” (Mintz and Roberts 2).

55 Blos reveals that the act of using history to examine the present is not limited solely to artists and authors. Indeed, scholars, according to Blos, are equally guilty of this process: “This tendency to a sociocultural bias affects academic historians as well as writers of historical fiction” (13).
which the disaster has been processed and presented in both fiction and film has evolved with changes in societal principles. As a result, what Titanic means culturally and how she is perceived has shifted over the course of time. In essence, Titanic has become a perpetually-changing canvas on which cultures paint their concerns and ideologies. As Cox highlights, though, this process is not solely a communal act. Like Wade, who extends the originators of Titanic’s mythos beyond journalists, Cox stresses that multiple sources contributed to the mythology’s formation. In fact, building upon the work of Louise Pound, Cox emphasizes the role of both the individual and the community within the practice of myth making.\footnote{In her study of folk music, Louise Pound claims that, despite popular assumptions, folk songs and ballads are not created exclusively by the community. Rather, as the scholar attests, these musical works are the product of individual singers and songwriters as well as the collective community (Pound 4-27).}

Using Greco-Roman mythology as an example, the scholar explains how individual artists and their works greatly impacted the creation, evolution, and perpetuation of these legends: “The Greek myths, as we have received them, were shaped by poets whose names are known and whose individual contributions can be discerned in their different treatments of the same stories” (Cox 406). Hence, as Cox argues, not only do cultural shifts in ideals and perceptions impact the establishment and development of myths, but individual works by artists and authors also play a pivotal role in this evolutionary practice.\footnote{While Greco-Roman mythology, as Cox points out, was molded by the works of poets, the mythology of modern popular culture, the scholar stresses, is engendered and reshaped by a multitude of mediums, including “newspapers, magazines, movies, books, music, advertisements [and] political and governmental propaganda” (407).}

The same can be witnessed with Titanic.

For a century, popular culture and individual works have collaboratively functioned to produce, perpetuate and revise Titanic and her myth into a means to scrutinize modern society. Through a collective system of interpretive illustration and practices of commitment, these forces have shaped our perceptions of the incident and altered Titanic into a representative character. Over the course of the proceeding analysis, in turn, we shall witness how specific artworks -
from Thomas Hardy’s poem “The Convergence of the Twain” and the Nazi propaganda film to Walter Lord’s novel *A Night to Remember* and James Cameron’s blockbuster - and societal shifts - from the suffragist movement of the 1910s and the global economic hardships of the 1930s to cultural upheavals in the 1950s and senses of uncertainty following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 - have facilitated this transformative process.
Chapter VI

From Instant Books to Blockbuster Epics: *Titanic* in Popular Culture

Even before her keel was laid at Harland and Wolff on March 31, 1909, *Titanic* had become a symbol. Born in the zenith of the Industrial Revolution, *Titanic* and her sistership *Olympic* stood as icons for the boundless advancements of the time.\(^{58}\) Technology had, for the better part of half a century, propelled society forward at unprecedented bounds and the world become swept up in this befuddled array of progress.\(^{59}\) Amidst this haze of innovation, the transatlantic steamer came into fruition, with ships becoming larger, faster, and grander as shipping lines fiercely competed amongst each other in a battle for supremacy.\(^{60}\) For Harland and Wolff and White Star Line, the *Olympic*-class epitomized the technological advancements of the era:

The *Olympic* and *Titanic* are not only the largest vessels in the World; they represent the highest attainments in Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering; they stand for the pre-eminence of the Anglo-Saxon race on the Ocean…Consequently, these two Leviathans add enormously to the potential prosperity and progress of the race, and the White Star Line have well deserved the encomiums that have been showered upon them for their enterprise and foresight in the production of such magnificent vessels. (J. Foster 256-57)

By her maiden voyage on April 10, 1912, this symbolism seized the papers, with publications

---

\(^{58}\) *Titanic* was the second vessel in a trio of ships built by Harland and Wolff for White Star Line. Known as the *Olympic*-class, the three sisterships were intended to provide the shipping line with a marked advantage in the North Atlantic route (Green 48). *Olympic* was launched in October of 1910, *Titanic* followed shortly in May of 1911, and *Britannic*, delayed by major redesigns following *Titanic*’s sinking, never saw service as a transatlantic liner (Green 154). Rather, the ship was quickly commissioned by the British government during World War I for use as a hospital ship and was sunk on November 21, 1916 after striking an underwater mine (Green 155). Interestingly, *Britannic* was originally to be named *Gigantic*; however, her name was changed shortly after the *Titanic* disaster because White Star Line felt, due to *Titanic*’s infamy, that *Gigantic* was too inappropriate (Green 154).

\(^{59}\) Historian Jim Rasenberger argues that this zenith of technological progress played a pivotal role in molding America into a modern nation. As the scholar explains, Orville and Wilbur Wright’s flight, President Teddy Roosevelt’s expedition of the Great White Fleet to the North Pole, and Henry Ford’s introduction of the Model T all culminated in 1908 to fashion the country into a modern powerhouse (1-10).

\(^{60}\) The *Olympic*-class was born out of this heated rivalry. In 1897, the German shipping line Hamburg-Amerika, Britain’s direct competitor in seafaring power, introduced *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*, the six-hundred-and-fifty-five-foot steamer which became the first non-British ship to hold the Blue Riband since the demise of the Collins Line (Green 20). In 1907, Britain’s Cunard Line struck out against the German opponent and introduced the seven-hundred-and-ninety-foot sisters *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* (Green 26). That same year, in order to prevent their fellow British rival’s new ships from overshadowing their own, White Star Line began plans for the *Olympic*-class (Green 28).
such as the *Daily Graphic* championing *Titanic* for being “a twentieth century marvel afloat” (Bryceson 7). By April 15, however, this image changed dramatically, with the *New York Herold* describing *Titanic* as a “ship of death” (Caren and Goldman 68). While, as Paul Heyer attests, newspapers were among the first to both recount and reimage the disaster, once journalistic coverage began to wane, *Titanic*’s iconographic state was transferred to much larger works, namely the instant books popular among readers of the era. As Jay White expresses, these texts, all written within months of the tragedy, did much to establish and perpetuate mythic ideologies through their “elements of yellow journalism, devotional literature, dime-novel escapism, and mass-market sales techniques” (118).

Beginning as early as 1610 in England with publisher’s prospectuses, subscription books emerged within the Puritan colonies of America in the form of religious tracts (J. White 96). Originaly devotional literature sold door-to-door in a practice known as *colportage*, these books became widely popular following the American Civil War and evolved into more secular works which examined the lives of the battle’s most influential figures, namely General Ulysses S. Grant (J. White 96). By the 1870s, their subject matter had become highly diverse, covering topics such as “African-Amaricana, women’s health and etiquette, juvenile adventure, the Civil War, election campaigns, polar exploration, world travel, and religion” and featuring the stories of Rudyard Kipling, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Mark Twain (J. White 97). Often, as White explicates, these mass-produced, cloth-bound tomes were intended to turn a profit and, in order to do so, they were “designed to cash in on the notoriety of a recent event” (97). As a result,

---

61 As Frank Luther Mott highlights, the itinerant bookselling of these Biblical texts, encouraged by Puritan leaders such as Cotton Mather, paved the way for the evangelical missionary work of contemporary Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons (156).

62 The popularity of these instant books can be attested to by their sheer number: between 1837 and 1951, thirty-three American publishers and four Canadian firms produced roughly 2,300 titles written by over 700 authors (J. White 97).
“disasters, wars, and other high profile news events made ideal fodder for instant books” (J. White 103). From the 1902 Mont Pelee volcanic eruption in Martinique and the 1906 San Francisco earthquake to the 1903 Iroquois Theater fire in Chicago and the 1908 earthquake in Messina, Italy, tragedies became fashionable themes for instant books during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, with publishers hoping to reap the benefits of the public’s timely interests (Edgette 122). Furthermore, these texts tended to follow a basic and universal structure: laden with photographs and illustrations “accenting the sensational and often gruesome aspects of the event,” these overtly sentimental narratives, often “verging on the maudlin,” were peppered with moralistic sermons and verbose poetry (J. White 104-7). What emerged were dramatic and romanticized retellings of tragedies which, due to their extreme popularity, greatly impacted the public’s perceptions. The Titanic disaster was just one of these instances.

Only months following the sinking, four instant books were released detailing Titanic’s demise: Marshall Everett’s *The Story of the Wreck and Sinking of the Titanic*, Logan Marshall’s *The Sinking of the Titanic and other Great Sea Disasters*, Jay Henry Mowbray’s *Sinking of the Titanic*, and Thomas Russell’s *Sinking of the Titanic* (Edgette 122-23). These works proved both highly popular and profitable and, like their counterparts, they utilized the fundamental format of excessive illustrations and sensational narrations to recount the occurrence. In fact, one of the most prominent aspects within all four texts was the use of the hero motif.

---

63 The 1811 publication of *An Account of the Great Fire in Newburyport*, for example, possessed a cover engraved with a dramatic scene of bedlam swamping the streets of the Massachusetts town as a hand pump crew desperately attempts to fight the inferno (J. White 104).

64 In addition to Titanic, other maritime disasters have also been the topics of instant books, including the burning of the steamboat *General Slocum* on the Hudson River in 1904, the sinking of *Empress of Ireland* in 1914, and the torpedoing of *Lusitania* in 1915 (J. White 106).

65 Although Marshall’s text sold the most copies, all four books found worldwide popularity and were translated into French and German (Edgette 124). Likewise, each text has experienced a series of reprints over the years, with 1998
As White highlights, the hero motif was a common theme in the instant books and dime novels of the era (113). Akin to the journalistic accounts before them, the works of Everett, Marshall, Mowbray, and Russell overemphasized the actions of various crew members and passengers and, as historian Stephanie Barczewski stresses, transformed some figures into heroes and vilified others (83). In doing so, these instant books engage in the method of practices of commitment discussed by Bellah et al. As the scholars attest, representative characters are exemplifications of cultural virtues and possess the personalities and traits desired by a given society (153). Through practices of commitment, where the characters’ stories are recited by members of the community, these figures become reinforcements of these ideologies. Indeed, Jêmeljan Hakemulder concurs with this stance, claiming that narratives play a pivotal role in instructing individuals in the behavioral norms of the community (5). Often, as the scholar explains, communities tell stories where “human values are at stake,” which allows the audience to evaluate “their beliefs about what are right, proper or acceptable ways of behaving” (Hakemulder 6-7). For Everett, Marshall, Mowbray, and Russell, the trauma of the Titanic disaster put the standards of Edwardian society at risk and, by recounting the actions of the ship’s crew and passengers, the tale became a means to reinforce notions of courage, chivalry, and duty. Indeed, the hero motifs of these texts, similar to those within the newspapers, focused upon the same group of individuals, including Titanic’s orchestra.


66 During his analysis, White cites numerous examples of this motif at work, including that of Mrs. H. M. Ogle depicted within Willis Fletcher Johnson’s History of the Johnstown Flood Including all the Fearful Record. Published in 1889, the text fashions the woman telegraph operator, who bravely remained at her post throughout the disaster to send out warning messages, into a symbol of unwavering courage (J. White 113).

67 While the instant books of the era fashioned sensational accounts of the sinking, survivors such as Lawrence Beesley, Washington Dodge, and Colonel Archibald Gracie published their personal experiences as a means to
Already glorified within memorials, newspapers, and sermons, bandmaster Wallace Hartley and his orchestra found additional praise within the pages of the instant books. And, akin to their predecessor, the authors of these texts relied heavily upon romantic imagery to fashion a glamorized portrayal of the musicians. For Everett, their actions conjured images of the unyielding valor expressed by the soldiers aboard the foundering Birkenhead, who boldly played the national air as women and children boarded lifeboats:

Except in the case of the English ship Birkenhead, when the soldiers on board stood at parade after the women and children had been taken to the boats and the band played the national air as the ship went down, we do not recall a parallel to the conduct of the musicians on board the Titanic, who, as all accounts agree, ceased not their inspiring ministrations until they were engulfed by waves. Indeed, it seems even to be a question if the later instance of heroism was not greater than the former, for the bandsmen on the Birkenhead were enlisted men, obeying orders like soldiers, while it is scarcely to be thought that the obligations of the musicians on the Titanic required them to play with death confronting them. (68)

As Everett highlights, though, these soldiers were enlisted men bound by orders to behave with dignity. Titanic’s bandsmen, on the other hand, were under no contractual obligations to nobly “play with death confronting them.” It is this factor which prompts the author to stress that the gallantry of Hartley and his men is unparalleled throughout history and stands as a lone example of true human heroics. While Everett champions the inimitable bravery of the ship’s band, Marshall molds them into heavenly beings whose music was “no less acceptable than the song of

---

68 As Ian Whitcomb reveals, Titanic’s orchestra was honored with more memorials than any other individual from the tragedy: with plaques in Boston, Liverpool, and New York, a commemorative concert at London’s Albert Hall on May 24, 1912, where composer Sir Edward Elgar conducted seven orchestras and five-hundred performers, and over 30,000 mourners attending Hartley’s funeral at Colone on May 18, 1912 (8).

69 Despite its sentimentalism, Everett’s stance accurately highlights the uniqueness of the orchestra’s actions. Contrary to popular belief, the ship’s eight-piece orchestra was not part of the crew employed by White Star Line. Rather, Hartley and his fellow musicians were employees of the booking agency C.W. and F.N. Black, from which White Star regularly commissioned services. Holding second-class tickets, these men were housed in a cramped cabin on E Deck next to the potato washer and occupied a vague position in the ship’s roster: not official crewmembers, but not official passengers either. (Lord, The Night Lives On, 145-46)
songs no mortal ear may hear, the harps of the seraphs and the choiring cherubim” (88). Indeed, the author romantically envisions the musicians as ethereal creatures still playing aboard the wreckage of the sunken steamer: “Under the sea the music-makers lie, still in their fingers clutching the broken and battered means of melody; but over the strident voice of warring winds and the sound of many waters there rises their chant eternally; and though the musicians lie hushed and cold at the sea’s heart, their music is heard forevermore” (88). For Marshall, the music of Hartley and his fellow bandsmen, although silenced in life, continues to resonate within society. More than that, though, as both Everett and Marshall attest, the heroic deeds of these men hold an immortal place within humanity. Through the hero motif, the authors fashion Titanic’s orchestra into representations of Edwardian ideals. Faced with their own mortality, the musicians elect to remain in their positions on deck and continue playing. In doing so, they come to exemplify, for Everett, Marshall and their peers, the virtues of honor and sacrifice valued by Edwardian society. With the distress of the sinking, in turn, these tenets, as Hakemulder stresses within his analysis of narrative discourse, become threatened. In the case of Titanic’s band, these principles were maintained with steadfast resolve; however, with others, they became overshadowed by cowardice and selfishness. And, just as the authors of the instant books used Hartley and his musicians as examples of desired traits, they used these timid individuals as specimens of undesirable qualities.

---

70 Published that same year, Shan Bullock’s biography of Thomas Andrews, the shipbuilder who remained motionless within the first-class smoking room as Titanic foundered, employs the same sensational concept. Within the work’s finale, Bullock depicts Andrews still standing stoically within the submerged wreckage of “the great ship he helped fashion,” his spectral being forever remaining a testament to his heroism (74).

71 Titanic’s musicians are not the only figures the authors of the instant books use to fashion their hero motifs. Like the newspapers before them, Everett, Marshall, Mowbray, and Russell draw upon an extensive list of crew members and passengers who fulfill the role of heroes. For example, Everett praises the piety of Reverend Thomas Byles, who stood at Titanic’s stern and led prayer as the ship foundered, and glorifies Benjamin Guggenheim, who dressed in his evening attire to face death as a gentleman. Everett, Marshall, and Mowbray, in turn, all champion the courage of Major Archibald Butt, President William Taft’s military aid who assisted in loading and lowering the lifeboats. In all
In his account of the sinking, Marshall draws specific attention to the rumored account of a man dressed in women’s clothing gaining access to the lifeboats. Unlike the musicians, who became idealized emblems for bravery, this individual, according to Marshall, set “a new standard by which to measure infamy and shame” (74). For the author, this act stands as a flagrant breach of the desirable virtues maintained by Titanic’s orchestra and operates as an illustration for the types of standards Edwardian society perceived as unwanted and even dangerous. The cowardice of the unknown cross-dresser, though, was not the only example Marshall and his colleagues recount. Like the list of individuals who fulfilled the hero motif, the number of undesirables who violated these idealized qualities proved endless. Among this category were the men shot while charging a lifeboat: “The officer had to assert their authority by force, and three foreigners from steerage who tried to force their way in among the women and children were shot down without mercy” (Marshall 70). While the dignified actions of Hartley and his orchestra serve to reinforce notions of nobility and self-sacrifice, the craven behaviors of the three men emphasize the kinds of qualities undesired by society. More than that, however, the fact that Marshall and his counterparts tended to associate these unwelcome conducts and traits with third-class immigrants also alludes to the growing xenophobia occurring within America at the time of the Titanic catastrophe.

Around 1892, America saw a massive influx of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, including Czechs, Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, and Russians (Brownstone, Franck, and Brownstone 4-5). Unlike the older wave of immigrants from Northern and Eastern Europe, this newer influx was viewed as an undesirable mass of immoral, impoverished, and unlawful refugees (Brownstone, Franck, and Brownstone 4-5). As a result, public disdain for these cases, akin to the orchestra, the authors utilize heightened language to recount the actions of these individuals, with Everett describing Butt thusly: “In all the gallant band of men and gentlemen who went down to glory in the Titanic’s wreck, there is no more knightlier and more chivalric figure than Archibald W. Butt” (186).
individuals increased and numerous attempts were made to prevent their entry. In the spring of 1896, for example, workers at Ellis Island detained 531 immigrants from Southern Italy and locked them within temporary detention cells, where a reporter from the New York Tribune described the clustered mass as: “A forlorn looking group, restless, depressed, degraded and penniless…it is pitiable indeed to watch their longing looks, hoping against hope as they do, for freedom. The most sympathetic, however, could but exclaim, as they look upon the groups, ‘we don’t want them; send them back!’” (Moreno xii). Likewise, in May of 1903, Everybody’s Magazine published a densely-illustrated article titled “Romances of New Americans.” Written by Eleanor Hoyt, the text and its accompanying pictures detailed the immigration process of “these hordes of foreigners who are pouring into their promised land” and stressed the fact that “restriction of immigration is necessary to the welfare of the country” (Hoyt 245). For middle-class readers, Hoyt’s work highlighted the “otherness” of the immigrants in respect to the perceived normalcy of Edwardian America, with the foreign dress, the strange customs, and the primitive belongings fortifying the immigrants’ perceived inferiority.

Everett, Marshall, Mowbray, and Russell’s association of third-class immigrants with deeds of cowardice during the tragedy, like the detaining of Italians at Ellis Island and Hoyt’s article, represents the cultural conflict between America and Eastern and Southern Europeans occurring at the time. For much of the nation, these individuals represented the undesirable attributes of humanity which held no place within civilized society. While immigrant officials at Ellis Island attempted to physically

---

72 The burgeoning xenophobia exhibited by Ellis Island and Hoyt’s article also emerged both during and after the tragedy. On the night of the sinking, steward James Johnson witnessed a group of fellow crew members round up the staff of Titanic’s first-class à la carte restaurant and lock them within their cabins. Being mostly French and Italians, the crew, fearing these individuals would cause panic, attempted to quarantine them. None survived (Pellegrino 70). Likewise, during the inquiries following the disaster, Fifth Officer Harold Lowe remarked that a group of Italians along the ship’s railing led him to fire warning shots into the air as they “glared, more like wild breasts, ready to spring” into his lowering lifeboat (J. Foster 258-60). Lowe’s account sparked a heated controversy and the Royal Embassy of Italy made demands that the officer change his testimonial statement from “Italians” to “immigrants belonging to the Latin races” (J. Foster 258-60).
prevent their entrance into the country, authors such as Hoyt crafted intellectual depictions of their undesirability. By correlating steerage passengers with incidents of pusillanimity during the disaster, the authors of the instant books about *Titanic* only added further fuel to a smoldering issue sweeping through America. Immigration, though, was not the only social commentary situated within the instant books’ portrayal of the tragedy. Indeed, criticism of the modern woman also emerged within the pages of Everett, Marshall, Mowbray, and Russell’s texts.

Among the numerous stories emerging from the catastrophe, the tale of Ida and Isidor Straus, the co-founders of Macy’s Department Store who refused to be parted at the lifeboats, became one of the most prominent narratives cycled through the newspaper accounts shortly following the sinking. On both sides of the Atlantic, the couple’s devotional love served as an epitome of the sanctified loyalty of marriage, with articles such as the one included in the May 7 edition of the *Newburyport Morning Herald* stressing that the Strauses’ actions “splendidly illustrated the fidelity and tenderness of love” (Caren and Goldman 174). Like *Titanic*’s orchestra, Ida and Isidor came to represent the virtues upheld by Edwardian society, specifically the value of matrilineal love. And, like the musicians, Everett, Marshall, Mowbray, and Russell built upon the perceptions of the Strauses established by the press and further solidified their iconic status within the pages of their works.

In his account of the disaster, Everett asserts that Ida and Isidor nobly faced fate together and, in doing so, “died a hero’s death” (185). Similar to the bandsman, who maintained their honor

---

73 The article in the *Newburyport Morning Herald* is just the beginning of a long list of newspaper accounts focused around the actions of the Strauses. From the *Daily Sketch*’s description of their “pathetically beautiful story” to *Art and Progress*’ assertion that a memorial as modest in nature as their devotional love be erected to the couple, Ida and Isidor’s tale found numerous retellings on both sides of the Atlantic (Bryceson 74-75).

74 Like the instant books, Elbert Hubbard, within his publication, *The Titanic*, released just months after the sinking, reconstructs the events of that night with dramatic verbosity. In his sensational retelling, Ida and Isidor Straus become, through their decision to remain together, idealized embodiments of love and loyalty, with Hubbard remarking that only such brave individuals as Mr. and Mrs. Straus “know how to live, how to love, and how to die” (27).
until the very end, the couple displayed an unyielding loyalty which, for Everett and his peers, stood as an example of the qualities preferred by society: “In an age of material absorption they have given a new and gentler illustration of the fidelity and tenderness of love. In an age of domestic disloyalty and divorce they have wreathed a fadeless beauty around the deathless tie of marriage” (Everett 185-86). Yet, Everett’s analysis goes further. For the author, Isidor embodies the perfect gentleman: “a great merchant, a great philanthropist, a clear-headed economist, and a noble citizen” (Everett 185). Likewise, Ida illustrates the “noble mother [and] loyal, loving wife,” who functions as “the serene and indispensable mistress of an honored home” (Everett 185). Hence, for Everett, the Strauses not only characterize eternal love, but also, through Ida’s devotional nature toward her husband, the ideal role of an Edwardian woman. Such a nature, in turn, came to challenge the concept of the modern woman emerging during the era of the *Titanic* disaster.

Across Europe and America, the stifling confines which had entombed women for millennia were beginning to crumble. In 1848, Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cody Stanton, and Dorothea Dix, drawing parallels between the plight of women and the institution of Southern slavery, organized a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, to discuss the question of women’s rights (Brinkley 333). During the gathering, the members composed “The Declaration of Sentiments,” which stresses that women, like their male counterparts, possess certain inalienable rights (Brinkley 333-34). The document, in turn, launched a movement for women’s liberation which continued into the twentieth century. By the time of *Titanic*’s sinking, this crusade had engendered serious changes in the roles of women within society: education came with advanced degrees from Columbia, MIT, and the University of

---

75 Considered one of the founding documents of American feminism, “The Declaration of Sentiments” was patterned on the Declaration of Independence and signed by numerous female abolitionists as well as Frederick Douglass (Brinkley 333).
Chicago, autonomy emerged through positions within the fields of education and nursing, escapes from the restraints of the home arrived with the rise of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, liberation developed through fashion’s abandonment of the corset in exchange for the Empire waist, and social action triumphed with the rise of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (Brinkley 582-87). While some considered this new-found freedom refreshing, others were repulsed and lashed out with criticism. For these individuals, the new woman of Edwardian society, like the feared immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, illustrated the undesirable traits of the culture and a need to return to traditional standards and morals.

In the case of the Titanic tragedy, Ida Straus became a commentary upon the new woman. Unlike her wonton counterpart, who abandoned her domestic duties for self-sufficiency and equality, Ida, as Everett and his peers depict her, remained a solid emblem of the “noble mother [and] loyal, loving wife,” devotedly standing by her husband and facing fate with him (Everett 185). Ida, though, was not the only factor from the catastrophe the authors of the instant books used to critique the modern woman. For Mowbray, the “unwritten law of the sea,” which dictated “women and children first,” illustrates notions of innate feminine inferiority and dependence upon masculine care (58). The fact that this law was enforced and maintained without question during the sinking, for Mowbray and his male counterparts, only reinforces the intrinsic nature of

---

76 Several of Titanic’s first-class female passengers were avid supporters of this cultural shift. The author Helen Churchill Candee, for example, wrote multiple books providing practical advice for women attempting to gain a level of independence, including How Women May Earn a Living published in 1900 (Geller 29). Likewise, Lucile Duff Gordon, the most sought-after dress designer of her time, became the first designer to abandon the corset in clothing (Geller 18). Interestingly, Lady Duff Gordon also collected numerous other firsts within the fashion world: the first to use mannequins in displays, the first to introduce slits in skirts, and the coiner of the word chic (Geller 18).
female inferiority. More than that, though, it stood as a striking blow to both the new-age woman and her suffragist movement. On April 21, 1912, the prominent feminist Emma Goldman, while visiting Denver, submitted an article to the Denver Post which questions intentions of the suffragists in relation to the catastrophe:

The men stood aside to let the ladies go first. What about the ladies? What about their love superior to that of the men? What about their greater goodness? Their demand to equal rights and privileges? Is this to be found only at the poll, or on the statutes? I fear me very much that ladies who have so readily accepted the dictations of the men, who stood by when the men were beaten back from the lifeboats, have demonstrated their utter unfitness and inferiority, not merely to the title of man’s equal, but to her traditionary fame of goodness, love and self-sacrifice. (238)

Like Mowbray and his fellow instant book authors, Goldman finds in this unwritten law’s predominance during the loading of lifeboats a testament to feminine subservience to masculine might and protection; however, unlike the male authors who relish this reinforcement of Edwardian ideals, Goldman laments that, in an age where women are advocating equality and freedom, the rigid manacles which have bound them for centuries continue to prevail. While the authors of instant books crafted sensational accounts of the tragedy which reinforced sexist and zenophobic ideals, the prominent writers of the ear, particularly Thomas Hardy, took a different approach, using the sinking to explore the rise of secular thought in Edwardian society.

Like many of his peers, including Joseph Conrad, Sir Arthur Conan Dolye, and George Bernard Shaw, Hardy utilized his literary talents to construct a reaction to the sinking of Titanic.

---

77 Through a study of maritime disasters, including the sinking of Solway in 1843, Ocean Monarch in 1848, Hanna in 1849, Birkenhead in 1952, and Arctic in 1854, B.R. Burg highlights that, despite popular assumptions, the notion of “women and children first” does not prevail at sea: “In almost all cases, it was ‘every man for himself’” (7). As Burg argues, this popular notion of “women and children first” as a law of the sea is more a product of Victorian romanticism than actual fact (8).

78 Around the same time as Goldman’s article, Clark McAdams published “Enough Said” within the St. Louis Despatch. Within his poem, the author arrives at the same conclusion as the feminist, claiming that, while modern women loudly proclaim “votes for women,” when disaster is eminent, they are quick to cry “boats for women” (McAdams 240). Unlike Goldman, though, who finds this factor disheartening, McAdams views it as a form of comedic irony.
Unlike his peers, who composed staid prose discussing the proper Edwardian response to the catastrophe, Hardy took a more creative approach (Biel 48-49). On May 14, 1912, the writer’s poem, “The Convergence of the Twain,” appeared in the souvenir program of the Covent Garden theatrical matinee (J. Foster 269). In the poem, Hardy envisions Fate willing the creation of ship and iceberg and methodically bringing the two together:

Well: while was fashioning  
This creature of cleaving wing,  
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything  
Prepared a sinister mate  
For her – so gaily great –  
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.  
And as the great ship grew  
In stature, grace and hue,  
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.  
Alien they seemed to be:  
No mortal eye could see  
The intimate welding of their later history,  
Or sign that they were bent  
By paths coincident  
On being anon twin halves of one august event (270)

For Hardy, the tragedy was a product of fate, with the Immanent Will weaving the inevitable union of iceberg and ship. As Richard Lloyd highlights in his analysis of the poem, which contrasts Hardy’s work with Gerald Hopkins’ “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” the notion of pre-destiny resting at the heart of the text parallels the shifting perceptions of divine force in Edwardian society. According to Lloyd, Hopkins’ poem, composed between 1875 and 1876,

---

79 In 1983, marine biologist Richard Brown provided a unique twist on Hardy’s perspective, composing *Voyage of the Iceberg*. Within his fictional narrative, Brown details the life and death of the iceberg which sank *Titanic*, following its creation during the ice ages and oblivion in the tropical waters of the Equator. Throughout the course of his narrative, Brown cuts back and forth between the burg’s journey and *Titanic’s* construction and maiden voyage. In doing so, the biologist mirrors the “paths coincident” of Hardy’s poem.

80 Other literary scholars have drawn additional interpretations of Hardy’s work. Emerson Brown, for example, argues that the two jarred hemispheres of the poem’s final line, a product of the collision between ship and iceberg, are more than just a reference to the two hemispheres of the world shocked by news of the event. As Brown attests, this convergence is a representation of human sexual union, with the ship and iceberg “act[ing] out that mating in their ‘intimate welding’” (234). Hence, for Brown, the iceberg and *Titanic* become symbols of woman and man,
views the death and suffering of those aboard the foundering *Deutschland* as a process which brought them nearer to their faith: “Hopkins, child of the Oxford Movement and follower of J.H. Newman into the Catholic church, was able to find purpose in suffering in that it leads one closer to God” (23). As Lloyd explicates, Hopkins and his Victorian peers saw within the *Deutschland* tragedy the heavenly will of God whose unquestioned actions, although initially prompting anguish, eventually lead to salvation (23-24). In sharp contrast, Hardy, according to Lloyd, “believed that human beings were not subject to a benevolent or malevolent God” and utilized the *Titanic* disaster as an instrument to critique this concept of divine will (23). Indeed, Hardy’s response emerged during a time when society was beginning a gradual shift from devout religion to secular thought. The failed prophesies of Jesus’ second coming by William Miller and his “Millerites” in 1843, spiritualism’s spread of paranormal fever beginning in 1853, the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, the developing roots of psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, and the technological achievements of modern medicine, including Joseph Leiter’s invention of the oesophagoscope and Marie Curie’s use of radiation to treat diseases in 1903, pushed Victorian/Edwardian society away from theological thought and, as James Moore attests, molded the era into “the golden age of secularism” (275). For Hardy and his peers, the concept postulated by Hopkins and his counterparts that the fate of humanity lies completely in the hands of divine providence fell under scrutiny and *Titanic* became a mode to inspect this. Hardy, though, was not the only artist

---

81 *Titanic*’s first-class passenger William T. Stead was a major proponent for the spiritualist movement. The founder and editor of *Borderland*, a quarterly journal on spiritualism, Stead was a gifted automatic writer who established Julia’s Bureau, a group of mediums who met every morning to receive messages from Stead’s spirit-guide Julia. Directly following the sinking, mediums throughout the world claimed the spiritualist communicated with them in regards to his death and elements of the afterlife. (M. Gardner 91-99)
to use the sinking in this examination. In fact, Marshall Everett reaches the same stance within his instant book:

Does Providence directly govern everything that is? And did the Power who preordained the utmost second of each planet’s journey, rouse up the mountain from its sleep of snow and send it down to drift, deliberately direct, into the exact moment in the sea of time, into the exact station in the sea of water, where danced a gleaming speck – the tiny *Titanic* – to be touched and overborne? (14)

In both cases, the notion of pre-destiny within the *Titanic* catastrophe mirrors the changing ideologies of divinity within Edwardian society. For Hopkins, the *Deutschland* disaster represents the absolute control of God within human affairs, with his infliction of pain on the ship’s drowning passengers ultimately prompting heavenly salvation. As industrial progress and the rise of spiritualism weakened this unchallenged power, individuals such as Everett and Hardy began to question whether or not “Providence directly governs everything that is” (Everett 14).

Over the next few years, as escalating conflicts between European nations culminated in World War I, the iconographic imagery of *Titanic* gradually disappeared within the public’s consciousness. Indeed, as historian Andrew Wells explicates: “the horror of death in the icy water was soon supplanted by that of the mud and blood of the trenches” (14).

On November 11, 1918, German forces finally accepted an armistice which brought a long-awaited end to the warfare ravaging Europe. In the immediate postwar years, the crippled nations struggled to overcome the physical and emotional destruction inflicted by the skirmish.

82 Although published in the *Atlantic Monthly* during the 1870s, Celia Thaxter’s poem “A Tryst” details the collision of a sailing ship with an iceberg in the bitter North Atlantic. Like Hardy, the poet draws upon notions of pre-destiny and claims the accident is a product of fate willed into being by higher powers (Armstrong 30). In fact, comparing and contrasting Hardy and Thaxter’s poems, Tim Armstrong asserts that “The Convergence of the Twain,” which possesses numerous similarities to “A Tryst,” was highly influenced by this former work (31).

83 With the Ottomans agreeing to a ceasefire on October 30 and Austria-Hungary following days later on November 4, Germany was the last of the Central Powers to agree to peace (Bentley and Ziegler 994).

84 While Northern France and Belgium suffered most of the physical destruction, epidemic disease, malnutrition, and starvation swept throughout Europe. In addition to severe property damage and the loss of over fifteen million
As an age of anxiety overcame Europe, America entered an era of affluence. Economic prosperity, governmental reorganization, industrial progress, rising consumerism, and urban growth all combined to mold the country into a modern nation (Brinkley 649). Amidst the blossoming fortune, however, America, in the decade of the 1920s, experienced intense cultural conflicts and Titanic reemerged as a means to comment upon and examine these shifts. Similar to the instant books of 1912, songs, particularly African-American toasts and folk music ballads, became fashionable modes in the 1920s of retelling and reshaping the tragedy. And, akin to the instant books, the popularity of these songs and their wide availability through published sheet music made their depictions of the sinking highly accessible to a large percentage of the American public (Edgette 133).

As J. Joseph Edgette points out, the songs written about Titanic between 1912 and 1914 were largely a means for the public to express its grief over the event and reinforce notions of heroism and self-sacrifice (131). By the 1920s, though, themes shifted to examine issues of classism and racism within American society. Indeed, one of the largest purveyors of this emerging change was the African-American toast.

Originating in the antebellum South, toasts became an oral means for slaves to relate information and stories in an age when state laws forbade their abilities to read and write (Weisbord 247). Typically sung, these narratives are often a communal endeavor, with groups gathering together to sing their tales “in front of general stores, on neighbors’ porches, at social people, the war also brought dire emotional scars and shook the confidence in democracy and technological progress. (Bentley and Ziegler 994-1006)

85 As Norm Cohen reveals, in the century following Titanic’s sinking, there have been over one-hundred copyrighted songs dealing with the disaster (103).

86 Songs such as “The Ship That Will Never Return,” for example, tells the fictitious tale of a woman’s fiancé who selflessly gives his life so that women and children may live. Likewise, “Be British!” praises those aboard for displaying bravery and loyalty - attributes associated with British nationalism - in the face of danger (Edgette 131-32).
functions, in taverns and pool halls, in barber shops, and, of course, on street corners” (Weisbord 247). Although these songs discuss a multitude of subjects, as Robert Weisbord attests, *Titanic*, in the months and years following her sinking, became one of the most popular topics for the African-American toast, mainly because the tragedy enables the community to critique white, capitalistic society (247). In fact, this criticism began to emerge during the 1920s.

As Weisbord highlights, the African-American community of 1912, particularly “middle-class, educated blacks,” responded to the sinking with “concern, sensitivity, and respect” (245). By the 1920s, however, this reverence had diminished, especially among the poor and uneducated members of the community. For them, the disaster became an instrument to “vent their animosity toward the white society which held them in contempt” and to lash out against turmoil rising within the decade, namely the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan (Weisbord 247).

Founded during the Reconstruction following the American Civil War, the original Klan died out in the 1870s with the stringent laws of Congress’ two Enforcement Acts (Brinkley 422). In 1915, the organization witnessed a rebirth and, following World War I, it experienced a rapid expansion, with chapters emerging in both rural and industrial areas throughout the Midwest, North, and South and membership reaching over four million in 1924 (Brinkley 666). Fed by rising xenophobia against European immigrants, the Klan began systematically terrorizing blacks, Catholics, foreigners, and Jews (Brinkley 667). Across the nation, the organization made

87 Within a week of the incident, Booker T. Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Institute, personally contacted President William Taft to express his condolences for the loss of his military aid, Major Archibald Butt. Likewise, numerous African-American periodicals, including the *Baltimore Afro-American Ledger*, *The Crisis*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *Solid Rock Herald*, all published articles expressing their sympathies for the bereaved families and friends of *Titanic’s* victims. (Weisbord 246)

88 Passed by Congress in 1870 and 1871, both acts prohibited states from discriminating against voters on the basis of race and gave the federal government power to prosecute violations of these laws (Brinkley 422).

89 By the 1930s, the Klan’s dominance had dwindled. Internal power struggles and a series of sordid scandals rapidly discredited the organization. The final blow came in 1925 when David Stephenson, head of the Indiana Klan, kidnapped, raped, and poisoned a young secretary (Brinkley 667).
its formidable presence known, marching openly down the streets of major cities, burning businesses, threatening families, tarring and feathering individuals, and engaging in public lynchings and whippings (Brinkley 667). For those subjected to their brutality, direct retaliation proved deadly. Hence, individuals and communities turned to more creative methods to express their concerns. For African-Americans, the *Titanic* toast became one option and Bobby Lewis’ version serves as a prime example.\(^9\)

Within his song, Lewis employs an attribute common among most *Titanic* toasts: the fictional, black character known as Shine.\(^9\) Typically a crew member working below decks when *Titanic* collides with the iceberg, Shine, in all his varying retellings, is, as Steven Biel emphasizes, often depicted as the only voice of reason among the ignorant white masses (115). Like the other *Titanic* toasts which utilize the story of Shine, Lewis’ song relates how, although the character is the first to alert Captain Smith of the vessel’s sinking, his warning falls on deaf ears:

> The *Titanic* was sinking down.  
  Shine went below deck, eating his peas  
  Till the water come up to his knees.  
  Shine went up on deck, said, “Captain, I was downstairs eating my peas  
  Till the water come up to my knees.”  
  Captain said, “Shine, Shine, sit your black ass down.  
  I got ninety-nine pumps to pump the water down.” (122)

Over the course of the toast, Shine repeatedly advises Smith of *Titanic*’s impending doom; however, every time, he is ordered to return below deck, where the flooding progresses at a rapid rate. Unlike Shine, who is painfully aware of *Titanic*’s fate, Smith and his brethren of white crew

---

\(^9\) Lewis’ version is just one of many variations of the *Titanic* toast. Others include Huddie Ledbetter’s 1959 rendition involving Jack Johnson, the black heavy-weight champion of the world, an anonymous retelling recorded in Otey, Texas, in 1965, and Etheridge Knight’s modernized account from 1980 which makes reference to Allen Ginsberg and Walt Whitman.

\(^9\) As Weisbord points out, Shine was once a derogatory term for African-Americans (249).
and passengers maintain a pernicious obliviousness fed by their blind faith in technological progress: “I got ninety-nine pumps to pump the water down.” Despite their mechanical advances, though, the pumps fail to keep Titanic afloat and Shine eventually jumps overboard, abandoning the throng of wealthy passengers who passively watch the worker’s actions: “So Shine turned over and began to swim/People on deck were still watchin’ him” (Lewis 123). Like the instant books before it, Lewis’ toast - and those of his peers - features the prominent figures of John Jacob Astor, Benjamin Guggenheim, and Ida and Isidor Straus; however, unlike the instant books, which praised the heroics of these wealthy passengers, the Titanic toasts of the African-American community mold the tycoons into impotent fools whose “enormous wealth could not save them from death in the cold Atlantic” (Weisbord 248). Rather, they cowardly remain motionless upon the decks of the sinking ship and watch as Shine, the only sensible individual, takes action and saves himself. What emerges, therefore, is a reversal of the black-white power relationship prevalent within American culture at the time. With the overbearing force of the Klan spreading across the nation during the 1920s, the African-American community, both within and outside the South, experienced heightened racism which further reinforced the power struggles between black and white society. Incapable of major retaliation, the community sought more artistic retributions. With the Titanic toast and its fictional tale of Shine, blacks utilized the disaster to fashion a form of reprisal where, opposite of what was occurring socially throughout the nation, blacks, through the headstrong perseverance of Shine, gained a formidable dominance over whites who, as Smith and the affluent first-class passengers reveal, proved hampered and ineffectual by both their wealth and complacent trust in industrial progress.

While blacks employed Titanic as a salve for racial oppression, impoverished whites used the sinking as a critique of the growing fissure between the rich and the poor during the 1920s.
Despite the burgeoning prosperity of the decade, “many American remained outside the reach of the new, affluent consumer culture” (Brinkley 649). With the American Federation of Labor making no provisions for unskilled workers, agriculture witnessing a decreased demand, President Calvin Coolidge’s vetoing of the McNary-Haugen Bill in 1926 and 1928, and higher demands in education leading to fewer employment opportunities available for the uneducated, the rift between wealth and poverty increased significantly during the 1920s (Brinkley 652-62). In fact, “more than half the families in America lived on the edge of or below the minimum subsistence level - too poor to buy the goods the industrial economy was producing” (Brinkley 676). Akin to the Titanic toasts, which scrutinized the racial conflicts prevalent in the era, folk music ballads of the 1920s fashioned Titanic into a social critique of class inequality.\footnote{As Norm Cohen points out, in addition to class struggles, folk music ballads, over the course of almost a century, have used Titanic to explore gender issues, overconfidence, and the dangers of placing faith in technology rather than God (104).} Popular among rural and working-class Americans, these ballads, through a process of interpretive illustration, accentuated the fact that more first-class passengers survived the sinking than third-class immigrants. In doing so, songs such as William and Versey Smith’s “When the Great Ship Went Down,” became a form of social protest for the misdistribution of wealth within America:

```
   When that ship left England it was making for shore,
   The rich had declared they would not ride with the poor,
   So they put the poor below,
   They were the first to go. (R. Wells 103)
```

For songwriters such as William and Versey, the mistreatment of third-class passengers developed into a parallel for the toils of the country’s working class during the era. By amplifying the fact that “the segregated poor die first,” William and Versey’s ballad – like those of their peers – found a kinship in the exploitation of immigrants locked below decks and
highlighted their story into a tale where, similar to issues in the 1920s, the rich prevailed over the poor (Stanfield 21).

As American society in the 1920s transformed Titanic into a critique of class and race conflicts, the ill-fated ship and her tragic story reemerged within European culture during the 1930s as, yet again, a symbol of heroism and, with the devastating effects of the depression crippling both the American and European economies, a tale of perseverance.

On October 29, 1929, the American stock market crashed, bringing a sudden end to the nation’s economic climb and sending shockwaves throughout the world.\textsuperscript{93} Highly dependent upon American capital to pay reparations for World War I, Germany experienced an abrupt economic downslide which, by 1932, “resulted in 35 percent unemployment and a 50 percent decrease in industrial production” (Bentley and Ziegler 1012). With the German economy coming to a standstill, those of other European nations, reliant upon the funds provided by Germany as part of the Treaty of Versailles, ground to an unexpected halt. Between 1929 and 1932, foreign trade fell dramatically and, with businesses realizing that they could not sell their products, cutbacks in manufacturing and unemployment quickly ensued (Bentley and Ziegler 1012).\textsuperscript{94} To help alleviate their financial turmoil and achieve a higher degree of economic self-sufficiency, governments began “imposing tariff barriers, import quotas, and import prohibitions” and, across Europe, politicians asked their citizens to bravely persevere through the hardships (Bentley and Ziegler 1013). Amidst this call for courage, Titanic began to resurface within European culture and, building upon the depictions of valor expressed within the instant

\textsuperscript{93} Referred to as “Black Tuesday,” October 29, 1929, witnessed the manic trading of sixteen million shares of stock, many of which became virtually worthless by the end of the day, and the dropping of the industrial index by forty-three points (Brinkley 676).

\textsuperscript{94} The effects of this economic collapse were widespread, with the Japanese economy, greatly dependent upon the American market, experiencing the same financial hardships as much of Europe (Bentley and Ziegler 1012).
books of 1912, artists and authors of the era used the tragedy as an exemplification of the
heroism and persistence preached by their governments.

In 1932, as cutbacks in production and numerous layoffs plagued Britain, Filson Young, a
regular columnist for the Radio Times, submitted a proposal to the BBC for a radio play about
the disaster (A. Wells 15). Within his pitch, Young expressed how he hoped to represent the
event as “a pure heroic tragedy” which emphasized the unyielding courage of Titanic’s crew and
passengers (A. Wells 15). While White Star Line, fearing the radio play would hurt their public
image, vehemently squelched Young’s idea before it could reach production, his work was not
the only piece which aimed to use the disaster as an illustration of bravery during the dismal
economic downfall afflicting the 1930s. Indeed, two survivors’ accounts of the incident
emerged during the decade, each one, like Young’s radio play, highlighting the themes of
heroism.

In 1931, Sir Arthur Rostron, captain of the rescue ship Carpathia, published his experiences
steaming through the night to aid the foundering Titanic. Although the commander attests to
the bravery and perseverance of Titanic’s crew and passengers, he also points out the selfless
actions exhibited by those aboard his ship: “They saw the survivors required dry and warm
clothing, so off they took them to their own cabins to fit them with everything they could. All our
men passengers gave up their cabins and many of the ladies doubled up with others so as to leave

---

95 In 1922, a radio play entitled Maremoto, which depicts the sinking of a transatlantic steamer, met with the same
fate as Young’s piece, with the French government banning its broadcast (A. Wells 15). Likewise, in February of
1947, Cunard White Star stifled the broadcast of yet another Titanic-related radio play on the BBC (A. Wells 17).
While Maremoto, Young’s work, and the 1947 play all failed to air, Stewart Parker’s The Iceberg, which follows the
experiences of two shipyard workers traveling aboard the doomed vessel, did air in January of 1975 (J. Foster 343).

96 On the night of April, 14, Captain Arthur Rostron was awoken by the ship’s wireless operator, Harold Cottam,
with news of Titanic’s sinking. Without hesitation, the captain ordered Carpathia’s course altered and the machinery
and heating systems shut down to divert all steam to the engines, increasing the steamer’s speed to 17.5 knots. At
3:30 AM, Carpathia arrived near Titanic’s reported position, having traveled fifty-eight miles and maneuvered
around six icebergs to reach the survivors. (Eaton and Hass, Triumph and Tragedy, 176-80)
their own quarters free for the distressed. Every officer, of course, yielded his accommodations” (Rostron 15). For Rostron, the benevolence of his own crew and passengers toward the survivors became a testimony to altruism and self-sacrifice. Likewise, in 1935, Second Officer Charles Lightoller published his memoirs, Titanic and Other Ships. In his account of the sinking, Lightoller, like Rostron, praises the stoic dignity of those aboard Titanic, who faced the disaster with restraint: “The quiet orderliness among the passengers, and the discipline amongst the crew, is a thing never to be forgotten” (291). The same year, Newfoundland poet E.J. Pratt published his epic poem on the disaster. Akin to Lightoller and Rostron, Pratt found within the Titanic tragedy representations for the behaviors of courage and perseverance:

   The engineering staff of thirty-five
   Are at their stations; those off-duty go
   Of their own free will to join their mates below
   In the grim fight for steam, more steam, to drive
   The pressure through the pumps and dynamo.
   Knee-deep, waist-deep in water they remain,
   Not one of them seen on the decks again. (306)

Released just years apart, the works highlight the bravery, discipline, and dignity expressed by those aboard both Carpathia and Titanic. For Lightoller, Pratt, Rostron, and Young, the calm and collected nature of those involved in the incident toward disaster proved an ideal model for members of the European nations struggling through the economic hardships of the 1930s. Like the crew and passengers who faced the tragedy with quiet restraint, citizens of the 1930s were called upon to brave the hardship with the same calm dignity. Likewise, akin to those aboard Carpathia, who selflessly tended to the needs of Titanic’s survivors, Europeans were asked to

97 Second Officer Charles Lightoller had retired to his cabin for the night when Titanic collided with the iceberg. Roused by the commotion, he was instructed by Captain Smith to oversee the loading and lowering of the lifeboats on the port side of the ship. Unlike First Officer William Murdoch, who Smith had placed in charge of the starboard side and who was allowing men into the boats once all the women and children had boarded, Lightoller, misconstruing Smith’s orders, allowed only women and children into the lifeboats. Attempting to free collapsible B from the roof of the officers’ quarters, the officer was washed overboard as Titanic made her final plunge. (Barczewski 21)
display a similar benevolence and camaraderie. While some artists and authors in the 1930s were refashioning Titanic into a representation of perseverance, others, specifically filmmakers, were molding the ship into a sensational tale.

On March 4, 1929, Ernest Raymond’s play, The Berg, opened at the Q Theatre in the West London suburb of Chiswick (Peck, “Atlantic,” 111). Centered around a heated philosophical debate between two first-class passengers aboard a transatlantic steamer, the play, set entirely within the liner’s lounge, becomes an examination of the clash between modern secular ethics and traditional religious ideologies as its main characters - the wheelchair-bound John Rool and an Anglican priest - are confronted with death following the un-named streamer’s collision with an iceberg (Peck, “Atlantic,” 115). Extremely successful following its premiere, the play’s film rights were immediately purchased by British International Pictures and rushed into production. On October 28, 1929, the first public screening of Atlantic occurred at the Gloria-Palast in Berlin and was followed shortly by a London debut at the Regal cinema (Peck, “Atlantic,” 114). Like its staged counterpart, Atlantic proved widely popular, rapidly becoming the most commercially successful film of the 1929/30 season (Peck, “Atlantic,” 114). Unlike the play, though, filmmakers had removed the story from its confines within the steamer’s lounge and reduced Rool and the priest into smaller parts. Likewise, they exchanged The Berg’s intellectual assessment of religion with sensational depictions of disaster and eliminated the anonymity of the event by christening the doomed vessel Atlantic and accentuating elements of the fictional

---

98 Raymond’s The Berg is one of four staged plays released over the course of the century which examine the sinking of Titanic. The others include Christopher Durang’s one-act play, Titanic (1974), Jeffrey Hatcher’s Scotland Road (1996), and Titanic: The Musical (1998) which, despite its grotesque artistic liberties, ran for fifteen consecutive weeks on Broadway, broke box office records, and won five Tony Awards (Riffenburgh 65).

99 In addition to its instantaneous success, Atlantic was also the first multiple-language film, with the production shot both in English and German (A. Wells 14).
sinking which held blatant parallels with *Titanic*. As a result, *Atlantic*, through its melodramatic depictions of the tragedy, including dramatic scenes at the lifeboats and a powerful ending which presents those still aboard singing “Nearer My God to Thee,” reinforced “ideals of courage and self-sacrifice, traditional sex roles, a rigid social hierarchy, the importance of religion, and a belief in the innate superiority of the white race” (Peck, “Atlantic,” 119). As Robert Peck argues, although it never directly mentions *Titanic, Atlantic* became the first blockbuster film about the tragedy (111). In addition, the movie also set the stage for the notion of *Titanic* as a cinematic spectacle which would begin to develop in the 1930s with David O. Selznick and Alfred Hitchcock’s failed *Titanic* film.

Originally intended to be Hitchcock’s first American production, Selznick’s film, from its earliest beginnings in 1936, was geared toward extreme showmanship. As production notes reveal, Hitchcock and Selznick had planned to create “a production that would sell through sheer spectacle alone” (Schaefer 58). In fact, in an interview with *Film Weekly* in 1938, Hitchcock referred to the tragedy as “a marvelously dramatic subject for a motion picture” (Barr 100). With the *Hindenburg* disaster of 1937 and the bedlam which ensued on Halloween of 1938 with Orson Welles’ radio adaptation of *War of the Worlds* still fresh in the public’s conscious, the production team at Selznick International Pictures hoped to fashion a cinematic epic of

---

100 While producers never mentioned *Titanic*, the similarities were obvious enough to draw White Star’s attention. On December 9, 1929, and January 8, 1930, the shipping line sent scathing letters to the British Board of Trade demanding the film be removed from every theatre across the nation (Riffenburgh 65).

101 Although the first blockbuster film about *Titanic, Atlantic* was not the first movie which detailed the events of the catastrophe. Indeed, 1912 saw two cinematic retellings of the event: the German-produced *In Nacht Und Eis* and the Éclair Film Company’s *Saved from the Titanic*, which starred first-class passenger Dorothy Gibson, who donned the same dress during the shooting that she wore when she escaped from the sinking ship (Bottomore 105-28).

102 Due to *Titanic*’s failure, Hitchcock’s first American production became a film adaptation of Daphne de Maurier’s novel *Rebecca* (Barr 100).

103 During the production of his own epic on the catastrophe, James Cameron paralleled Hitchcock’s assertion about the spectacle of the sinking: “The story of *Titanic* and her fate seemed a magnificent canvas on which to paint a love story…*Titanic* in all her terrible majesty provides this as does no other historical event” (Marsh xxi).
unprecedented spectacle (Barr 107). By casting unknown actors, Hitchcock and Selznick intended to divert the budget to special effects and plans were made to purchase the derelict *Leviathan* to be refitted as *Titanic* and sunk on screen (Shaefer 58). Problems, though, quickly emerged. Rumored competition from a French film company, legal battles with Howard Hughes over rights to create a *Titanic*-related film, threats of lawsuits by Cunard White Star Line, and production issues with Selznick’s other spectacular epic *Gone With the Wind* ensured that *Titanic* never left pre-production; however, the concept of *Titanic* as a cinematic spectacle set forth by the 1930s production would engrave itself into future adaptations of the event (Shaefer 59-69).

As British authors and artists, including Lightoller, Rostron, and Young, found parallels within the unwavering bravery presented in depictions of the *Titanic* tragedy and the call for courage during the economic collapse of the 1930s, Germans began to reimage the event into a nationalistic symbol which corresponded with the rising presence of the Nazi movement.

Historically, as Gerwin Strobl asserts, *Titanic*, for years following her sinking, held a powerful presence within German cultural history. Because, as the scholar stresses, “a substantial number of victims were in fact German or had ties with Germany,” the nation, more so than other European countries, reacted strongly to the event within both 1912 and the proceeding decades (Strobl 196). Like their Anglo-American counterparts, Germans in 1912 saw the disaster as a symbol for technological failure and criticized White Star and other transatlantic shipping lines for their inability to provide sufficient lifeboats for all those aboard (Strobl 201-214). In 1960, *The Last Voyage* employed Hitchcock and Selznick’s idea, purchasing the decommissioned *Ile de France* and sinking her on screen as the film’s fictional vessel, *Claridon*.

Within his analysis, Strobl contrasts the plethora of newspaper articles, films, paintings, poems, novels, lectures, and children’s toys that emerged in Germany shortly following the disaster with the stark indifference toward *Titanic* expressed by France, where, outside of newspaper accounts, the incident found very little discussion or reaction (199).
However, unlike the press in America and Britain, German society perceived the event as a commentary on class structure and the inequality of wealth distribution. For Germans of 1912 and the years following, Titanic became an icon of capitalistic greed, with White Star and its managing director, J. Bruce Ismay, serving as the pinnacle of avarice (Strobl 203). With the economic collapse of the 1930s, this stance on the sinking reached a zenith.

Like its fellow European countries, Germany found itself reeling during the financial crisis: hyperinflation had decimated the middle class, bitter infighting among the nation’s major political parties had branched out into the streets, white-collar workers were faced with an unending procession of layoffs, agriculture plummeted, and the foundation of Germany’s fragile democracy began to crumble (Bentley and Ziegler 1022-23). As Germany began to teeter, the National Socialist German Workers’ Party began to rise rapidly, recruiting scores of individuals from the disgruntled and impoverished lower-middle classes. In an age of uncertainty, the party promised stability and relief from the economic tumult engulfing the nation. With National

---

106 Had Titanic’s sixteen lifeboats and four collapsibles been filled to capacity, they would have held only 1,178 of the 2,228 onboard, leaving 1,050 hapless souls stranded upon the sinking steamer. Although a disturbing truth, the issue was not unique to Titanic. While the British Board of Trade, which set safety standards for all British ships, had strict guidelines governing the number of lifeboats required for vessels, its rules had not been updated since 1894. Due to the maniacal competition between shipping lines, steamers were quickly growing larger than the board’s rules could keep pace. As a result, the Olympic-class, by law, was to provide lifeboat accommodations for 962 passengers and crew (roughly twenty-seven percent). Contrary to popular belief, White Star Line was not alone in its scant provisions. Historian Walter Lord’s survey of transatlantic steamers in 1912 reveals that, in a sampling of thirty-nine British ships over 10,000 tons, thirty-three did not provide lifeboats for everyone aboard. Indeed, Megantic, Saxonia, and Zeeland had space for less than half and Carmania could only accommodate twenty-nine percent. All, however, were in compliance with the laws of the British Board of Trade. In addition, Lord’s survey also found that ships of other nations maintained the same statistics, with German liners possessing accommodations for roughly fifty-five percent and American steamers fifty-four percent (Lord, The Night Lives On, 83-84)

107 German newspapers of 1912 lambasted Ismay and White Star for “put[ting] profit before safety” (Strobl 203). For example, Münchener Neuest Nachrichten rebuked the shipping line for ceasing the crew’s pay the moment Titanic sank and Frankfurter Zeitung chastised White Star for providing little welfare provisions for the dependents of Titanic’s victims (Strobl 207).

108 National Socialism first appeared in Germany in 1923 when party members, Adolf Hitler among them, attempted to overthrow the democratic Weimar Republic established in 1919. The plan failed, Hitler and his peers were imprisoned, and the movement went underground until its revival (Bentley and Ziegler 1023).
Socialism guaranteeing a release from the hooks of capitalism which had inflicted the financial mess, Titanic as a symbolic representation of greed began to increase within German culture.

In 1940, German novelist Robert Prechtl published Titanic. In his fictionalized recounting of the steamer’s maiden voyage, Prechtl concocts a fictitious subplot in which millionaire John Jacob Astor plans to purchase the ship and her owners, White Star Line, in an effort to increase his personal wealth. Over the course of his narrative, Prechtl, building upon his German predecessors who transformed Titanic into an image of capitalistic gluttony in 1912, slowly fashions Astor into an illustration of materialism:

But what have we done? Lived as kings, but not acted as kings. Sometimes lived as monks, but not acted as monks. We have used power in order to gain more power, but have never held public office. We have bought counts and dukes for our daughters, men whose whole merit consisted in the fact that they had meritorious ancestors. We have pillaged works of art which did not grow on our soil. We have played being Medici without being Medici. (127-28)

Through his depiction of Astor, who utilizes his affluence to purchase the world, Prechtl engenders a critique of not only the business tycoon that Astor embodies, but the precariously-structured economic world that the millionaire and his brethren constructed. For these men, everything is purchasable, from the title of aristocracy to the artistic heritages of other nations. Furthermore, existence itself becomes nothing more than money: “That I shall make money. More money. Everything becomes money under our hands. Only money. Houses become money; factories become money” (Prechtl 128). Through his fictional retelling of Titanic, Prechtl advances the German perspective on the sinking. Similar to Ismay and White Star in 1912, Astor, within Prechtl’s novel, becomes an embodiment for the avarice of capitalistic society and, in light of the economic devastation sweeping Europe and America, a blatant symbol of the gluttonous moguls whose ceaseless hunger for wealth prompted widespread financial ruin.

Prechtl, though, was not the only artistic force in 1940s Germany to expound upon the
interpretation of greed within the tragedy. Indeed, the concept featured prominently within the 1943 Nazi propaganda film, *Titanic*, which had used Prechtl’s novel as one of its inspirations for the screenplay (Peck, “The Banning of *Titanic*,” 437).

In 1940, the Propaganda Ministry, under the guidance of Joseph Goebbels, commissioned filmmaker Herbert Seplin to direct what Goebbels had hoped would be the perfect vehicle to express anti-British ideologies (Poley 7). Filming began in May of 1942; however, heated conflict between Seplin and the film’s writer and assistant director, Walter Zerlett-Olfenius, hampered production and eventually lead to Seplin’s imprisonment and suicide. Despite the obstacles, *Titanic* premiered in Paris on November 10, 1943 and met with instant success, becoming one of the most popular films shown during World War II (Hull 25).

Similar to Prechtl’s novel, the film builds upon German perceptions of greed established by the popular culture of 1912. Indeed, both Astor and Ismay are prominently featured as the movie’s villains who, in an effort to beat speed records, harass Captain Smith into ignoring ice warnings and steaming full speed into an ice field. As a result, the two, akin to Prechtl’s portrayal of Astor, become “unscrupulous rogues endangering the ship for their own financial ends” (Peck, “The Banning of *Titanic*,” 432). Furthermore, at the end of the film, as Ismay is acquitted of all

---

109 Goebbels’ optimism worked well to grant the film a hefty budget and a cast of well-known German actors, including the popular Sybelle Schmitz (Hull 24). In fact, like Selznick and Hitchcock’s failed *Titanic* epic, the Propaganda Ministry had hoped that, with a larger budget, production could transform the picture into a cinematic spectacle laden with special effects (Peck, “The Banning of *Titanic*,” 436).

110 For Seplin, who did not sympathize with the Nazi cause and saw within the sinking a foreshadowing of the Third Reich’s inevitable collapse, Zerlett-Olfenius’ fanatical dedication to Hitler and attempts to use the film as a means to impress prominent Nazi figureheads prompted several confrontations which resulted in his arrest and suicide on July 31, 1942 (Poley 7-8). Following the incident, Zerlett-Olfenius was ostracized by the German film industry and the circumstances surrounding Seplin’s suicide prompted many questions whether the director had really been murdered by Nazi officials (Poley 8). In fact, Robert Peck argues that *Titanic* may not have been remembered had it not been for the controversial circumstances of Seplin’s death (Peck, “The Banning of *Titanic*,” 427).

111 Until 1944, when its exhibition was abruptly terminated by the end of the war, *Titanic* played in virtually every country on the European continent, where it ran, on average, three to four weeks within most theatres and perpetually broke box office records (Peck, “Misinformation,” 60).
liability for the tragedy by the British Board of Trade, the notion of avarice is reinforced when, commenting upon the final scene, the end-title announces: “The death of 1,500 persons went unatoned, a lasting indictment of Britain’s lust for profit” (Peck, “Misinformation,” 60).

Although - like Prechtl’s novel and the other German depictions of the sinking before it - a condemnation of capitalistic greed, the emphasis on American and British thirst for wealth exemplified by Astor and Ismay also serves to support concepts of nationalism at the heart of the propaganda piece. Akin to the African-American toasts distinguishing Shine from Captain Smith and the instant books of 1912, which amplified the actions of Hartley and the Strauses to model the desirable qualities of Edwardian society, the Nazi film contrasts the greedy and duplicitous nature of Astor and Ismay with the bold heroism of the fictitious First Officer Petersen to develop a symbol for German ideology and nationalism.

Like Shine, the German Petersen becomes an emblematic figure for action, reason, and sensibility. The only individual to challenge Astor and Ismay’s orders and attempt to persuade Captain Smith of the dangers facing the ship, Petersen’s warnings, analogous to those of Shine, are unheeded until it is too late. And, akin to Shine, Petersen, following the collision, remains calm and collected throughout the entire sinking. While Astor and Ismay hysterically endeavor to purchase their way into a lifeboat and Captain Smith crumbles under the pressure, Petersen emerges victorious, rescuing an abandoned child from a flooding cabin and overseeing the orderly loading and lowering of the lifeboats. Indeed, as Jared Poley explicates, Petersen, through “critiquing authority, rescuing girls, foreseeing danger, manipulating women, understanding technology, and protecting his community,” becomes an embodiment of the ideal German soldier (25). Hence, through his portrayal of desirable qualities, Petersen, like the instant book depictions of Hartley and the Strauses, comes to embody the valued personalities and traits
of National Socialism. Furthermore, through this representation, the distinction between Petersen and Astor, Ismay, and Smith establishes a sense of German nationalism which champions the superiority of Germany over its American and British rivals.

By 1943, this national pride began to wane. With the Battle of Stalingrad, the spread of German forces lost momentum within Russian territory and, by 1944, they were retreating (Bentley and Zeigler 1050). By August of that year, Italy renounced its alliance with Germany and the Battle of Normandy served a devastating blow to the German army. Finally, on May 8, 1945, Germany, incapable of maintaining the fight, was forced to unconditionally surrender (Bentley and Zeigler 1050).

Following World War II, America, yet again, experienced a booming national prosperity which “profoundly altered the social, economic, and even physical landscape of the United States” (Brinkley 799). Increases in the gross national product, medical breakthroughs, the development of the space program, the rapid resurgence of the middle class, fervent consumerism, and America’s rise to a global superpower marked a turning point in the nation’s history (Brinkley 800-18). While this transitional moment prompted “a widespread sense of national purpose and self-satisfaction,” it also brought budding feelings of doubt and unrest which culminated in the turbulent era of the 1960s (Brinkley 799). Senator Joseph McCarthy’s fearless assault on communism, the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement, the migration of women

---

112 Petersen is not the only figure within the film which becomes a symbol for the ideal German. Like the instant books of 1912, the Nazi propaganda film praises the devotional love between Ida and Isidor Straus; however, as Richard Howells emphasizes, the anti-Semitism of the Third Reich prompted filmmakers to recast the Jews into Jan and Anne, traditionally-dressed German lovers who mirror the factual couple in their desire to remain together as the steamer founders (Howells, “One Hundred Years,” 80).

113 The use of Titanic to reinforce nationalistic ideals is not limited to the Nazi propaganda film. Indeed, Peter Bjorkfors argues that D. A:son Grebst’s Dodsarden and Esko Waltala’s Titanicin Perikato, both believed to be the first novels written about Titanic’s sinking, utilize the event and their fictionalized characters to reinforce notions of Finish/Swedish national pride. As Bjorkfors explains, the fictional Scandinavian characters at the center of both novels are cast against a collection of American, English, and Italian characters, some fictional and others actual passengers. While many of the latter express cowardice and selfishness during the sinking, Grebst and Waltala’s Scandinavian figures come to embody chivalry and selflessness. (Bjorkfors 54-61)
into the workforce, declining agricultural prices, challenges to traditional gender roles, the rise of rural poverty, and increases in inner-city crime revealed the darker side to this transitional moment (Brinkley 818-23). Hence, for Americans in the 1950s, the close of World War II instituted a watershed marked by both promise and insecurity. The representative character of Titanic proved an ideal means to examine and critique this transformation.

The concept of Titanic as a cultural turning point emerged in 1940 with the publication of first-class passenger John Thayer’s memoirs. Within his work, Thayer describes the sinking as a harbinger for modernity:

True enough, from time to time, there were events - catastrophes - like the Johnstown Flood, the San Francisco Earthquake, or floods in China - which stirred the sleeping world, but not enough to keep it from resuming its slumber. It seems to me that the disaster about to occur was the event, which not only made the world rub its eyes and awake, but woke it with a start, keeping it moving at a rapidly accelerating pace ever since. Today the individual has to be content with rapidity of motion, nervous emotion, and economic insecurity. To my mind the world of today awoke April 15th, 1912. (9)

For Thayer, the tragedy stands as a brutal point of transition between the slumbering innocence of Edwardian society, with its staid propriety and blind confidence in technology, and the manic upheaval of the modern age. In 1955, Walter Lord built upon Thayer’s perception of the tragedy within his novel A Night to Remember. Akin to Thayer, Lord views the sinking as a sudden awakening for society, which had spent the better part of a century lazily absorbing the benefits of peace, industry, and “a steady, orderly, civilized life” (114). Furthermore, Titanic, for Lord, marks the end of an era awash with “a general feeling of confidence,” ushering in a modern sensibility of doubt and confusion:

Overriding everything else, the Titanic marked the end of a general feeling of confidence. Until then men felt they had found the answer to a steady, orderly, civilized life. For 100 years the Western world had been at peace. For 100 years technology had steadily improved. For 100 years the benefits of peace and industry seemed to be filtering satisfactorily through society. In retrospect, there may seem less grounds for confidence, but at the time most articulate people felt life was all right. The Titanic woke them up.
Never again would they be quite sure of themselves. (114)

Over the years, as historian Bree Hoskin explicates, Lord and Thayer’s representation of Titanic as a cultural watershed gained momentum, working its way into the public’s consciousness (24). While, through literary texts, Lord and Thayer establish and reinforce Titanic as harbinger for modernity, 20th Century Fox’s film, Titanic, perpetuates this symbolic ideology through visual means, utilizing the events of the tragedy to evaluate the changes emerging during the 1950s, namely the rise of America as a global superpower and alterations within gender roles and the family structure.114

World War II decimated the infrastructure of Europe, prompting the need for major reconstruction following the war. Through the European Recovery Program, commonly referred to as the Marshall Plan, America, beginning in 1948, began providing more than $13 billion in relief to sixteen stricken European nations (Bentley and Ziegler 1064).115 While this recovery plan sparked a substantial economic revival, with European industrial production rising sixty-four percent by the end of 1950, it also dramatically shifted dominance away from Europe, which had maintained this supremacy for centuries, and formed America into global superpower

---

114 Within their studies of the movie, both Richard Howells and Jeffrey Richards draw attention to a unique distinction which sets the 1953 film apart from its brethren of other Titanic-related movies: the failure to employ the tragedy as a means to critique social class systems. In her discussion of the mythology encompassing Titanic, Cheryl Jorgensen-Earp expresses that the societal division between first- and third-class passengers factors prominently into the retellings of the event, with cinematic and literary works emphasizing the extreme fissure between wealth and poverty (54). While Jorgensen-Earp’s observation holds true in a majority of the representations of Titanic, in the 1953 film, as Howells and Richards highlight, “class has been almost vociferously ignored,” with all of the leading characters wealthy passengers and, with the exception of two brief scenes in steerage, the majority of the plot occurring within the opulence of the steamer’s first-class accommodations (Howells, “Atlantic Crossings,” 430). Although this decision to make class division an extraneous issue in the film has prompted criticism from Howells and Richards, it allows space for the work to examine additional concerns removed from the confines of the rich-poor dichotomy.

115 In 1949, the Soviet Union developed the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, which established support for its own satellite nations (Bentley and Ziegler 1064).
It is this shift which the film weaves into its telling of the tragedy, employing the representative character of *Titanic* as a cultural watershed to comment upon the influential transitions occurring globally during the 1950s.

As Jeffrey Richards expresses within his analysis of the film, *Titanic* is “very much an American version of the tragedy” (27). Although the film accurately presents the ship and her crew as British, all of the passengers, including the tale’s main characters, are American. What results from this American predominance, according to Richard Howells, is a film where “Americanness” presides and makes all British attributes of the disaster either subservient or nonexistent (“Atlantic Crossings,” 430).

This notion of America assuming Britain’s place as a global superpower also emerges within the relationship dynamics between the film’s main characters: Julia and Richard Sturges.

In an effort to save her two children, Annette and Norman, from a superficial life of wealth and entitlement, Julia evades her husband and secretly books passage aboard *Titanic* in the hopes of reestablishing a quiet and humble life within Mackinac, Michigan. Learning of her plans, Richard books his own passage and, while on board, confronts his wife about her intents. Over a

---

116 In addition to a significant economic shift, the world also witnessed a major political transfer, with India’s independence from the British empire in 1947, Ghana’s achievement of the same freedom in 1957, uprisings in Cyprus, Kenya, and Malaya, and the failure of the Suez operation forcing Britain, which had sustained international authority for roughly three-hundred years, to reluctantly retire its power to the rising affluence of America (Richards 23).

117 The film also perpetuates the notion of *Titanic* as a cinematic spectacle, with the tagline of the poster boldly describing the movie as “*Titanic* in Emotion…in Spectacle…in Climax…in Cast!”

118 While the movie’s “underlying obsession with America” subtly hints at the nation’s rising supremacy, it also establishes this political and economic shift more concretely through visual cues (Howells, “Atlantic Crossings,” 430). At the beginning of the film, Captain Smith, in a fictitious scene, receives a faded and tattered ensign from the first ship on which he served. At Smith’s request, the ensign is hoisted atop *Titanic*’s mast, where its continued presence throughout the film stands as “a symbol of the faded glories of the British Empire” (Richards 27).

119 In their discussion of the film, Alan Finlayson and Richard Taylor explicate that the narratives of both the 1953 *Titanic* and James Cameron’s blockbuster “contrast a corrupt and decadent European culture with a fresh, optimistic and more egalitarian America” (140). While Cameron’s tale achieves this distinction through the love affair between Jack Dawson and Rose DeWitt Bukater, the 1953 *Titanic* accomplishes this through the Sturges’ struggling marriage.
tense dinner in the first-class dining saloon, their battle over the children comes to a heated climax:

Julia: I’m not kidnapping them, Richard, I’m rescuing them.
Richard: From what?
Julia: From you.

As the argument unfolds, Richard and his aristocratic lifestyle become an embodiment of the staid and archaic world of Europe’s former supremacy. For Julia, then, her attempt at rescuing Annette and Norman from their father is a means to remove them from the fruitless confines of a European culture teetering on the brink of collapse and reintroduce them to the budding affluence of America. Indeed, Alan Finlayson and Richard Taylor assert that Julia’s actions symbolize the global shift occurring during the 1950s. As the scholars explain, Richard and his European existence, once favored by society, has become an unrewarding and even pernicious trap for the developing potential of his children. In order to escape this threat, Julia demands that the children return to America, where the nation’s “middle-class values of ‘realistic’ community and gentle ambition” prove the ideal environment for their healthy development into productive citizens (Finlayson and Taylor 136). In addition to standing as a symbol of the shift from British to American global power, the Sturges’ marriage and the evolution it incurs through the sinking of *Titanic*, speaks to the transitions materializing in the 1950s regarding family structure and gender roles within American culture.

In her examination of marriage’s evolution during the course of history, Stephanie Coontz explicates that, during the 1950s, married women accounted for the majority of the growth in the female labor force, with the decade experiencing a four-hundred percent increase in the number of mothers entering the workforce (235).\(^{120}\) This explosion of working women struck a painful

---

\(^{120}\) By 1952, there were two million more working wives within America than there had been during the apex of World War II (Coontz 235).
blow to the gender roles of the male-breadwinner family. As Jackie Byars states, with the increasing influx of women into the workforce, “the family structure began to change, previously sacrosanct gender roles began to alter, and struggles over the meaning of female and male became particularly evident in the cultural atmosphere” (8). Indeed, a 1956 article in Life magazine summed up the growing fears of the community when it bluntly commented that, for women to be productive members of society, their “primary interest is [with]in the home,” not the workplace (Coontz 236). In order to grapple with this watershed in marriage and gender roles, Hollywood, according to Byars, began “deploying it across a panoply of permutations” (8). The Sturges’ failing marriage within Titanic was one of these permutations.

Akin to her workforce sistren, Julia, through her headstrong determination to return her children to America, upsets the patriarchal structure of the Sturges family. Likewise, Richard, with his passive and genteel manner, further demolishes the gender roles of the male-breadwinner family. As a result, the Sturges’ marriage, poised on the brink of destruction, becomes a symbol for the fluctuation of marriage and gender roles during 1950s America. As Richards argues, though, the film utilizes the sinking as a means to critique this evolution and “stress the unity and sanctity of the American family” by redeeming and re-establishing the Sturges’ marriage and gender roles over the course of Titanic’s demise (25). Following the collision, Richard assumes the patriarchal position within his family, taking charge of the situation and ensuring that his wife and children are safely placed within a lifeboat. Likewise, Julia’s tenacity dissolves under Richard’s command, instituting her stance as an obedient wife who, before entering the lifeboat, reaffirms her husband’s agency: “I beg your pardon, sir. I put you down as a useless man.” Interestingly, as Finlayson and Taylor highlight, while the film

---

121 This upheaval in gender roles and the family structure prompted a rise in divorce rates and the emergence of the marriage counseling industry, specifically the American Institute of Family Relations (Coontz 233).
employs the struggling marriage between Julia and Richard as a representation of changes within
the family structure and gender roles, it uses the sinking as a way to rebuke these changes and
push for the perpetuation of the status quo (141). As a result, the disaster functions within the
film as both a praise for the effects of America’s cultural transition during the 1950s as well as a
strain for the preservation of certain ideologies threatened by this escalating transformation.
While 20th Century Fox’s Titanic explores changing gender roles and the nation’s birth as a
superpower, the 1958 film adaptation of Walter Lord’s novel, A Night to Remember, with its
strong emphasis on class hierarchy, supplies a critique of the class issues emerging in Britain
during the 1950s.122

Following World War II, the general election of 1945 brought an unexpected return of the
Labour government (Howells, “Atlantic Crossings,” 432). With the Labour regime’s introduction
of the National Insurance Act of 1946 and the National Health Service of 1948, coupled with
growing public ownership of coal, electric, gas, and rail companies, Britain was transformed into
a welfare state which dramatically affected the social structure of the nation (Howells, “Atlantic
Crossings,” 432). As a result, the hierarchical divide between the pre-war upper- and lower-
classes collapsed as a flourishing middle class started to emerge. Through its focus upon the
heroic actions of Second Officer Charles Lightoller, who the film depicts as an embodiment of
this burgeoning middle class, A Night to Remember, as Richard Howells attests, uses “the
dignity, professionalism and quiet courage of this character to show the middle-classes in
ultimate command and (perceived) middle-class virtues as ultimately triumphant” (“Atlantic

122 Similar to the 1929 production of Atlantic, A Night to Remember met with harsh opposition by Cunard White
Star, which attempted to ban its release in fear of bad press. Likewise, the daughters of both J. Bruce Ismay and
Captain Stanley Lord, the commander of Californian which sat idly by and watched as Titanic sank, protested the
depictions of their fathers within the film and demanded that every showing begin and end with disclosures
announcing the film’s inaccurate and negative portrayals. (Riffenburgh 65)
Crossings,” 432). In doing so, the British production, like its American counterpart, draws upon the tragedy to reinforce societal ideals escalating during the decade. In the case of Titanic, the focus became changes in gender roles. With A Night to Remember, the triumph of the middle class worked itself into the heart of the narrative. Both, though, found within the catastrophe an instrument to explore societal shifts occurring during the 1950s.

As America quickly emerged as a superpower, the nation started experiencing direct opposition from its former Russian ally during World War II. Shortly following Germany’s surrender in the spring of 1945, the alliance between America and the Soviet Union deteriorated (Bentley and Ziegler 1070). With America’s European Recovery Program of 1948 and the Soviet Union’s Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in 1949, a bipolar world torn between capitalist and communist ideologies materialized (Bentley and Ziegler 1064). Throughout Europe, particularly Germany, this clash divided countries “into competing political, military, and economic blocs [with] one dependent on the United States and the other subservient to the USSR” (Bentley and Ziegler 1070).124 As a result, half of Europe embraced America’s parliamentary political systems and capitalist economic structures while the other half fell under the governance of the Soviet Union’s communist institution (Bentley and Ziegler 1070). What developed, according to Paul Cantor, was the growth of two nation-states where “all the power

---

123 1950s America also witnessed the middle-class’ attempts to reinforce racial and national identity. While the increasing presence of television, exploding from 17,000 sets in 1946 to 40 million sets in 1957, helped to “create a common image of American life - an image that was predominately white, middle-class, and suburban,” Senator Joseph McCarthy began a fearless assault on communism, working to define and eradicate those who failed to meet standards of the ideal American (Brinkley 794-813). In fact, in 1957, middle-class fears concerning the dangers of undesirables passing for decent citizens became a haunting reality when Ed Gein, the quiet and mild-mannered farmhand from Plainfield, Wisconsin, shocked the nation with his crimes of cannibalism, murder, and necrophilia (Schechter 111).

124 Germany experienced the worst of this political rift. Following the collapse of the Third Reich, America, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union took charge of the struggling nation. As tensions mounted between America and the Soviet Union, the country was divided into the Soviet-controlled East Germany and the American-British-and-French-controlled West Germany. With Soviet blockades in 1948, American and British airlifts that same year, and the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Germany became an embodiment of the fissure emerging during the Cold War. (Bentley and Ziegler 1071-72)
of a people [was] centralized in a single figure, who would speak and deal for the nation as a whole” (184). In Soviet and Eastern European societies, the nation-state asserted its dominance through technological and scientific supremacy while impoverishing its citizens with stagnant economic growth and artistic censorship (Bentley and Zeigler 1081).\(^{125}\) In America, the reforms of President Lyndon Johnson, namely the Immigrant Act of 1965, the establishment of the Community Action Program, and the institution of the Office of Economic Opportunity, greatly expanded the size, function, and control of the federal government (Brinkley 833-35).\(^{126}\) In both instances, the excessive power of the American and Soviet nation-states launched, as Cantor stresses, “the 1960s sense that the fate of people lies completely in the hands of their national governments and their representatives” (184). As citizens within capitalistic and communistic societies commenced to question the extent of individual free will within economic and political decisions, the notion of pre-destiny within the Titanic tragedy, a concept which developed just months following the sinking, rematerialized.

While the notion of pre-destiny within the Titanic tragedy corresponded with scrutiny of divine providence within Edwardian society, the concept, in the 1960s, emulated concerns over individual free will in an age where the nation-states of America and the Soviet Union heavily prevailed over their citizens’ lives. As Cantor attests, the intense authority of these superpowers instilled the perception that the fates of individuals rested solely within the hands of their governments. Like Gerald Hopkins and his Victorian peers’ stance on divine will, most members

---

\(^{125}\) Scholars such as Richard Hofstadter argue that the brutal tactics utilized by Senator Joseph McCarthy during the 1950s to seek out and destroy communism within American society hold a direct parallel with the artistic repression enforced by the Soviet Union. As Hofstadter argues, McCarthy’s imprisonment and inquisition of numerous authors and filmmakers was no different than the actions of extreme censorship expressed by the Soviet Union (3-40).

\(^{126}\) The governmental strengthening of America between 1963 and 1966 interestingly fulfills the demands set forth by the political scientist Richard Neustad who, in his 1960 text Presidential Power, argues that, in order to confront and solve national problems, there needs to be a significant expansion of the liberal state and presidential action (xx-xxiv).
of both the capitalist and communist nation-states of the 1960s accepted their government’s control without question. Others, though, like Marshall Everett and Thomas Hardy in 1912, distrusted whether these forces presided over everything under their power.

Refusing to accept international orders from America and the Soviet Union, the French President Charles de Gaulle began to pursue independent policies aimed at removing France from its dependency upon American economic and military forces and prevent the country’s involvement with Soviet nuclear testing (Bentley and Zeigler 1083). Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Yugoslavia followed suit, with the Czechoslovakian Communist Party’s leader, Alexander Dubček, directing a democratic socialist revolution in 1968 intended to combine elements from the capitalist and communist superpowers to create a liberal communism (Bentley and Zeigler 1083-85). Like the industrial progress and spiritualist movement which destabilized Edwardians’ view of uncontested divine providence, the efforts of de Gaulle and Dubček shook the unchallenged control of the superpowers. And, like 1912, the notion of pre-destiny within the Titanic catastrophe emerged during this shift.

In 1966, Louis MacNeice published “Death of an Old Lady.” Akin to Hardy’s poem over five decades prior, MacNeice’s text calls upon the concept of fate within the sinking, building an image where Titanic “sails toward the iceberg calm and slow” in a disaster which has been preordained by higher forces: “A boat so big it was named Titanic/Named or called? For a name is a call” (MacNeice 349). Although MacNeice’s poem appeared during the height of the superpowers’ influence during the Cold War, like 1912, it was not the only work to play upon the perception of providence within the incident. In fact, MacNeice’s literary work found

---

127 Dubček’s attempt to establish “socialism with a human face” culminated in August of 1968 with the march of Czech demonstrators throughout Wenceslas Square in Prague. Known as the “Prague Spring,” the demonstration was quickly squelched by Soviet forces and led to both the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the creation of the Doctrine of Limited Sovereignty, which granted the Soviet Union the power to invade any socialist country it deemed a threat to the nation-state. (Bentley and Zeigler 1084-85)
counterparts within popular comic books of the time. In a February 1958 edition of *Strange Journey*, the steamer’s doomed voyage is recounted as an elaborate plan of fate, with the issue’s cover depicting a cloaked Fate perched atop the infamous iceberg beckoning: “Ah, there you are, friend! Right on time…true to your course… the voyage into forever.” Likewise, in a 1972 issue of *Weird Mystery*, Destiny, reading from his Cosmic Log, relates the fictitious story of first-class passengers Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin and their five-year-old son, Gary. The only member of the family to survive the disaster, Gary, throughout the remainder of his life, experiences several unfortunate events - all of which involve water - which nearly claim his life. Eventually, on April 15, 1951, “exactly 39 years to the day after the *Titanic* went down,” Gary drowns off the coast of Long Island in a boating accident (Purcell 30). Like the catastrophe he escaped from almost four decades prior, Gary’s fate was predestined, a fact which Destiny reinforces as he completes his tale: “Fate, Chance, predestination…call it what you will” (Purcell 30).

Like their Edwardian counterparts, artists and authors in the 1960s drew upon the perceived pre-destiny of *Titanic*’s sinking to mirror their concerns about individual free will within the economic and political decisions of the world’s two superpowers. Like Everett and Hardy, who

---

128 In addition to the issues of *Strange Journey* and *Weird Mystery*, *Titanic* has been featured numerous times within comic books. Most recently, her story appeared within Matt Doeden’s 2005 graphic novel *The Sinking of the Titanic*, which retells the events of the tragedy in the fashion of a docu-drama, and Agnieszka Biskup’s 2009 *Exploring Titanic*, which follows the adventures of time-traveling archeologist Dr. Isabel Soto as she returns to the ill-fated voyage to understand the events which led to the sinking.

129 Although Gary Baldwin’s tale of predestination is fictitious, truth proves far more interesting than fiction. In 1908, Violet Jessop began a career as a stewardess aboard the transatlantic leviathans plowing the North Atlantic at that time. In 1911, she transferred to *Olympic* and was onboard the vessel when, on September 20, 1911, she collided with the H.M.S. *Hawke*. In 1912, she transferred to *Titanic*, where she escaped the sinking in lifeboat 16. During World War I, Jessop enlisted as a nurse, serving aboard *Britannic*, then converted into a hospital ship, and experiencing the steamer’s sinking on November 21, 1916. (Jessop 1-12)

130 The notion of pre-destiny within the tragedy is not limited to 1912 and the 1960s. In 1935, Edith Wharton published the short story “The Looking Glass,” which uses the perceptions of predetermination in the sinking as a plot device within the workings of a corrupt fortuneteller. Interestingly, Wharton’s tale was republished in 1963 by *Hearst Magazine*. Likewise, in 2001, Connie Willis’ novel, *Passage*, draws upon elements of fate as the tragedy plays an influential role within the past-life experiences of the narrative’s main character, Dr. Joanna Lander.
expressed their unease over God’s complete control over human fortune within the sinking, MacNeice and the creators of *Strange Journey* and *Weird Mystery* fed the decade’s growing concern regarding governmental control over citizens’ fates into *Titanic*’s tale. In all three cases, providence wins: within MacNeice’s poem, *Titanic* rendezvous with the iceberg patiently wait for her, in *Strange Journey*’s tale, the steamer succumbs to Fate’s alluring call and continues her voyage into forever, and, within *Weird Mystery*’s story, both *Titanic* and Gary Baldwin become victims of their predestined demise. Indeed, the account of Gary Baldwin, whose desperate attempts to evade drowning prove futile, holds strong similarities to the outcome of many who endeavored to challenge the overbearing dominance of the superpowers: de Gaulle’s efforts to free France from capitalist and communist influence quickly dissolved after he left office in 1969, Dubček’s revolution ended with police brutality, and the uprisings in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Yugoslavia prompted Soviet invasion and military control (Bentley and Zeigler 1083-85).

While the 1960s witnessed a recurrence of opinions on *Titanic*’s predestined oblivion, the decade also observed the ship’s emergence in varying mediums of popular culture. In addition to comic books, the ill-fated steamer sailed into episodes of popular television shows, including *The Munsters, One Step Beyond*, and the pilot episode of *The Time Tunnel* (Biel 183). Likewise, in November of 1960, Meredith Willson and Richard Morris’ musical *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* premiered on Broadway (J. Foster 302). Following the life of first-class passenger Margaret Tobin Brown, the play, and its cinematic adaptation in 1964, molded the figure, as historian Kristen Iverson argues, into a mythical icon for American ideals of perseverance and tenacity.

131 In 2012, *Titanic* gained her own television series: *Titanic: Blood and Steel*. Starring Neve Campbell and Chris Noth, the show focuses upon the steamer’s three-year construction at Harland and Wolff, with the final episode of the first season depicting the leviathan sailing off on her maiden voyage.
As audiences flocked to the sensational tale of Molly Brown, Edward Kamuda and a collection of fellow Titanic buffs began the formation of an historical society focused specifically upon the steamer’s only voyage. In 1963, the Titanic Enthusiasts of America welcomed their first members, with their quarterly publication, The Titanic Commutator, discussing every facet of the ship. By 1968, membership had reached 160 individuals and, by 1977, it grew significantly to over 1,500 (Biel 169). Contemporary poets, too, found inspiration in Titanic’s tragic journey, with Richard Ball, Anthony Cronin, and E. Merrill Root, like MacNiece, weaving poetic verses relating the fateful events of April 14 and 15, 1912.

As the decade came to a close, issues which had been festering beneath the Eisenhower opulence of the 1950s and gradually seeping toward the surface during the 1960s erupted violently in the 1970s, with the nation thrown into an era of perpetual turmoil. Following Richard Nixon’s presidential election in 1968, America experienced a cultural revolution which challenged traditional beliefs (Brinkley 859). By 1970, the postwar baby-boom generation matured and comprised more than half of the American population (Brinkley 860). Fed by the

---

132 The musical’s image of Margaret Tobin Brown as a representation of perseverance is not the first instance to draw upon this notion. In addition to newspaper accounts in 1912 which emphasized the survivor’s tenacity, a 1955 advertisement for U.S. Savings Bonds drew connections between Mrs. Brown’s determination and American persistence: “Asked how she’d done it, she replied, ‘Typical Brown luck. I’m unsinkable.’ But it wasn’t luck. It was pluck. And Americans have always had plenty of that smiling, hardy courage” (“Mrs. Brown Refused to Sink,” 201).

133 For Kamuda, the organization became a means to preserve Titanic’s history. For more than a decade, Kamuda had corresponded with Walter Belford, a crewmember aboard the steamer. When Belford died in 1963, Kamuda was mortified to discover that the survivor’s landlady had discarded all of the sailor’s mementoes from the maiden voyage. Irked by the careless destruction of history, Kamuda developed a mission: “From that moment on I would do everything in my power to form a group that would preserve these precious artifacts and mementoes for future generations” (Kamuda 66).

134 Following a bitter letter from survivor Renee Harris, which harshly questioned how anyone could be enthusiastic about a disaster, the Titanic Enthusiasts of America changed their name to the Titanic Historical Society (Bigham and Jasper 2).

135 In 2013, the Titanic Historical Society celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, with membership reaching over 5,000 individuals (Kamuda 60). In fact, the extreme popularity of the organization prompted the formation of two additional historical societies: the British Titanic Society in 1987 and Titanic International in 1989 (Howells, The Myth of the Titanic, 17).
flames of the Civil Rights Movement of the previous decade, these youth confronted the hierarchical bureaucracy of the academy, staging aggressive protests at Columbia University, Harvard University, and the University of California at Berkley (Brinkley 861). In the fields of anthropology, linguistics, and psychology, long-held concepts came under fire by revolutionary thinkers such as Albert Bandura, William Hamilton, Desmond Morris, and Edward Wilson. Furthermore, environmental advocacy, gay liberation, Latino activism, Native-American militancy, the revival of Feminism, and rising controversy over abortion all served striking blows to the staid ideologies of the 1950s and made the plight of numerous subcultures once ignored by mainstream society finally visible (Brinkley 865-78).

Amidst this unrest, Titanic, building upon her increasing presence within the culture of 1960s America, became a social critique. Like the African-American toasts and folk music ballads of the 1920s, the ship and her demise reemerged in the 1970s as a means to scrutinize prevailing issues tearing at the social fabric of the time. And, akin to the representations of Titanic half a century prior, the Titanic of the 1970s developed into an assessment of inequality.

Nourished by the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement, multiple minority groups found encouragement during the 1970s to seek activism, engage in self-expression, and demand recompense (Brinkley 865). From Native Americans and women to Hispanics and homosexuals, communities which had been perpetually abused, ignored, and silenced discovered the courage to surface from the reticent shadows and boldly alert the world of their presence and voice. Similar to the African-American toasts, which employed Shine as a redress for the black-white power struggles of the era, and folk music ballads, which amplified the exploitation of third-class passengers to mirror the misdistribution of wealth, minority artists and authors of the 1970s saw within Titanic the collapse of the hegemonic society - specifically white, wealthy, heterosexual
males - which had perpetually worked to ensure their unyielding dominance. A prime example of this factor emerges in the poem “The Sinking of the Titanic” by Hispanic activist and poet Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz.

Among a collection of Hispanic poets and cultural critics in Baja, California, Muñoz began his literary career in an age when Latino activism swept across the nation. By 1970, the number of Mexican immigrants in America increased dramatically from three million to nine million, with more than a third of all legal immigrants in the United States after 1960 being Latino (Brinkley 869). Like the immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe during Titanic’s sinking, these Hispanic masses were met with vicious xenophobia which led to rejection by numerous communities and restricted employment opportunities to low-paying service jobs with little to no benefits and security (Brinkley 689). Indeed, akin to the immigrants of Titanic’s era, Mexican immigrants were relegated to the unseen recesses of American society, where their plight became invisible. As Muñoz started his literary profession, Latino activism and the work of leaders such as Cesar Chavez began to remove this invisibility and bring the difficulties of Hispanics to the forefront of American consciousness (Brinkley 869). For Muñoz, this cultural ignorance by hegemonic society plays out in the oblivious actions of Titanic’s first-class passengers:

Men and women
Toasted together
To peace in the world
The sailors
  -Meanwhile-
Lowered the last lifeboats
Full of startled children
Of hysterical women
The cries were many (30)

---

136 In 1965, Cesar Chavez established the United Farm Workers, which pushed for increased benefits and wages for farmers. Chavez’s efforts eventually culminated into a nationwide boycott of table grapes and lettuce (Brinkley 869).
Throughout the course of his poem, Muñoz depicts *Titanic’s* first-class passengers, images of wealthy and white society, as entirely unaware of the ongoing danger encompassing them. Similar to Captain Smith within the *Titanic* toasts, Muñoz’s capitalistic tycoons prove ignorant of their impending doom, idly drinking to vain concepts of world peace as panic ensues aboard the foundering vessel’s decks. In the heated climate of America at the time of the poem’s composition, this obliviousness parallels the cultural ignorance of the dominant society which, like the millionaires of *Titanic*, casually disregards the boiling issues of inequality which threaten to rip the nation asunder with cultural revolution. Having consigned minorities to the silent recesses of American society, these members of the governing class, in the eyes of Muñoz and his activist peers, have developed a pernicious naïveté which fails to notice the ensuing bedlam about to consume the country and their very existence. In fact, Muñoz’s concept finds an equivalent within the book-length poem, *Der Untergang der Titanic. Eine Komodie*, written by Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

Published in 1978, the poem, becoming an immediate bestseller, draws connections between the 1912 disaster, 1969 Cuba, and 1977 Berlin to reveal how, in each time period, a powerful inequality in political and economic order and a strong illustration of the loss of faith in utopias prevailed (A. King 73). Like Muñoz’s text, Enzensberger’s work depicts the ship’s first-class passengers as an absentminded mass blinded by their archaic sense of privilege and wealth (Brady 4). Incapable of perceiving their imminent death, these individuals attempt to preserve an antiquated hierarchical structure which only leads to their self-destruction and deserved downfall (Goodbody 90). Hence, for Enzensberger and Muñoz, the catastrophe serves as a warning for the inherent dangers of obliviousness, especially in an age marked by repeated cultural disorder. Like the sightless first-class passengers of the ill-fated steamer, members of the hegemonic
society, ignorant of the turmoil triggering minority mobilization, are, as Enzensberger’s poem argues, doomed to a well-deserved demise. Titanic’s use as a parable during the 1970s for the intrinsic dangers in neglecting warnings was not limited to just struggles of inequality. In fact, environmental activism also found within the tragedy a caution against ignorance.

Following World War II, professional ecology experienced a dramatic growth, with the number of degree-holding ecologists doubling in the 1960s and 1970s (Brinkley 875). Likewise, the decades saw the establishment of multiple environmental organizations, including the National Audubon Society, the National Parks and Conservation Association, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society (Brinkley 875). Through activism and lobbying, these scientists and organizations launched a movement for environmental advocacy which aspired to combat the planet’s degradation. The substantial economic expansion of the postwar era had ravaged the earth: water pollution contaminated lakes and rivers, toxic fumes from factories and power plants poisoned the air, increased demand for natural resources began destroying the rainforests in Brazil, “acid rain” caused devastating effects upon ecosystems, and the blowout of an oil-well platform off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, in 1969 tainted the ocean with crude oil (Brinkley 876-77). To battle this mounting dilemma, activists fought for environmental protection, establishing the first Earth Day in 1970, the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency that same year, and the passing of both the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act in 1970 and 1972 (Brinkley 878). As supporters tussled to protect the planet in the 1970s, Titanic’s role as a fable for unheeded warnings expanded.

In 1974, Kenneth Watt published The Titanic Effect. Within his work, Watt utilizes the sinking to criticize the global depletion of natural resources. As Watt explains, humanity, despite

---

137 One of the worst cases of environmental destruction occurring during the 1960s and 1970s involved the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio. Polluted with petroleum waste dumped by nearby factories, the river burst into flames on multiple occasions and prompted the city to declare the waterway an official fire hazard (Brinkley 877).
numerous warnings, is swiftly ravishing the planet of its resources, which, inevitably, will become exhausted (6-10). In order to rectify this problem, alternate sources must be found and/or created; however, the problem with humanity, as the author stresses, is that these warnings will continue to go unnoticed until it becomes too late:

History abounds with parallels of imminent disaster. Public warnings have been ignored when they were outside the range of past experience. Consequently, the appropriate countermeasures were not taken. The Titanic and other “unsinkable” ships that nevertheless went down; the cities built on flood plains; Pearl Harbor and other military “surprises;” hospitals and schools destroyed with great loss of life after repeated warnings of what fire or earthquake might do: these are some examples. (Watt 6-7)

According to Watt, the multiple ice warnings neglected by Titanic’s crew become parallels to the abundant cautions of ecologists within the 1960s and 1970s to society’s abuse and overuse of the planet. As the author claims, in both cases, there is “a basic human tendency to ignore warnings about such possible enormous disasters” and, through this disregard, “there is a real danger that nothing will be done” (Watt 7). With the rapid diminution of natural resources, Watt fears, this ignorance and inactivity, like the events of the Titanic catastrophe, can engender pernicious results. Thus, for Watt, Titanic serves as a parable for the potential disaster awaiting humanity if it continues to discount environmental warnings. Indeed, for Enzensberger, Muñoz, and Watt, Titanic becomes an instrument to preach the inevitable hazard awaiting society if it continues to ignore the unrest of minority groups and the effects of environmental abuse. Although Enzensberger and Muñoz employ an imaginative method to explore the concept and Watt utilizes the modes of traditional scholarship, all three individuals arrive at the same conclusion: the cultural ignorance of the 1970s, if allowed to continue, will engender dire consequences on a titanic scale.

While Titanic as an allegory for ruin wove itself into the ecological studies and poetry of the 1970s, her presence within the popular culture of the era, which started to gain momentum
during the 1960s, continued to grow. Over the decade, the ship emerged in vague references on television shows such as *Are You Being Served?* and films including *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Likewise, the tragedy was featured prominently in the television mini-series *Upstairs, Downstairs* and transformed into a sensational television drama, *S.O.S. Titanic*, which aired on ABC in 1979 (Eaton and Haas, *Titanic: A Journey Through Time*, 239). Amidst the torrent of cinematic, literary, and televised representations of *Titanic*, Clive Cussler’s novel, *Raise the Titanic!*, was published in 1976.\(^{138}\) The text, and its film adaptation in 1980, built upon the 1960s perceptions of the catastrophe during the infantile stages of the Cold War and helped push those opinions into the 1980s.\(^ {139}\)

The tumult of the 1970s “inflicted damaging blows to the confident optimistic nationalism that had characterized so much of the postwar era” (Brinkley 893). With economic fluctuations, the defeat in Vietnam, minority mobilization, and the Watergate scandal, many Americans began to push for an increase in international power and a return to traditional virtues.\(^ {140}\) The presidential election of Ronald Reagan in 1981 promised to fulfill this call, with the president setting out to restore American pride and prestige in the world (Brinkley 907). In doing so, Reagan instigated a brutal attack on the Soviet regime which only reinvigorated Cold War animosities (Bentley and Ziegler 1090). Rebuking the Soviet Union for purportedly sponsoring world terrorism and perpetually referring to the nation-state as “the evil empire,” Reagan launched an arms race between America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which

---

\(^{138}\) A year following its publication, the novel became a syndicated serial comic strip (Biel 202).

\(^{139}\) Although Clive Cussler’s novel proved an instantaneous success, quickly moving up the bestseller’s list, the film was both a critical and financial nightmare, with producer Lew Grade bitterly remarking: “It would have been cheaper to lower the Atlantic” (Howells, “One Hundred Years,” 84).

\(^{140}\) The 1980s witnessed a fervent revival of religion, with evangelical Christians experiencing a dramatic growth during the decade. Likewise, the era saw the emergence of “neo-conservatives,” who aimed to “reassert legitimate authority and reaffirm Western democratic, anticommunist values and commitments” (Brinkley 900-904).
resulted in massive military spending and the creation of the Strategic Defense Initiative in 1983 (Bentley and Ziegler 1090). While this escalating arms race between both Cold War superpowers prompted numerous citizens on both sides of the Atlantic to stress the need for a nuclear freeze, others, including Cussler’s novel and subsequent film, saw the battle as a testament to American superiority.

Within both the novel and its cinematic counterpart, the military and political clash between the Cold War superpowers is featured prominently throughout the plot. In an effort to construct a high-tech missile defense shield - a top-secret endeavor titled the Sicilian Project - to protect the nation from looming Soviet threat, the American government launches an extensive global search for a rare radioactive mineral called byzanium. Tracing the mineral back to an abandoned mine in the Artic, the government discovers that the only known quantity of byzanium was loaded aboard Titanic in 1912. Employing the services of Dirk Pitt, the government initiates a secret mission to find and raise the ship in order to gain access to her cargo hold. Throughout the course of the narrative, the Cold War conflict between the superpowers proves highly evident. Not only does the menace of potential Soviet attack drive the American government to fund and initiate the Sicilian Project, but this threat becomes a reality when the mission is endangered by the insidious gaze of the Soviet Union and the deliberate sabotage by two Russian spies. Despite the Soviet threat, America emerges victorious, raising Titanic, locating byzanium, and beating the Russians to the efficient creation of the missile defense system: “The Sicilian Project proved itself an unqualified success on its first try” (Cussler 312). As both Steven Biel and Richard Howells attest within their analyses of the novel and film, Raise the Titanic! becomes a testament

141 In an interesting plot twist, the crew does not find byzanium in Titanic’s hold. Rather, the mineral is discovered in a grave in the English seaside town of Southby in Hampshire. Despite this setback, though, the American government still emerges successful in its endeavor.
to American superiority. Through the successful discovery and raising of *Titanic*, the American government asserts its dominance over the failed technology which led to the steamer’s demise as well as nature. Furthermore, by thwarting the two Russian spies and effectively creating a missile defense before their Soviet rivals, the preeminence of the American superpower finds additional reinforcement. As a result, *Raise the Titanic!*, in both its cinematic and textual forms, uses the fictional tale of liberating the doomed vessel from her watery grave to reaffirm notions of American prestige and pride during the Cold War touted by both the Reagan administration and the “neo-conservatives” of the 1980s. Indeed, Biel argues that the positive perspective *Raise the Titanic!* presents on America’s involvement within the heated arms race “help[s] make the case for increased funds for military research and development” in the effort to combat the alleged military and political threat of the Soviet superpower (215). As *Raise the Titanic!* employs the fictional unearthing and recovery of the wreck as a means to defend America’s authority as a superpower, the 1980s enthusiastically witnessed the actual discovery and subsequent salvage of the ill-fated steamer.

Plans to locate and retrieve *Titanic* began immediately after the steamer sank, with Vincent Astor, son of John Jacob Astor, announcing to the *New York Journal* on April 20, 1912, that he would finance an expedition to find the wreck and, using powerful explosives, raise it to the

---

142 Within her examination, Ann Larabee, concurring with Biel and Howells, extends the argument to assert that the narratives of both the film and novel not only champion American supremacy, but also become a testament to masculinity’s triumph over nature and technology (19).

143 Richard Howells highlights that, although both the film and novel emerged during the late-1970s and early-1980s, their notion of an extreme arms race proposed by the Sicilian Project foreshadowed the 1983 creation of Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative and the subsequent arms race which developed as a result (“One Hundred Years,” 86).

144 *Titanic* as a campaigner of the Cold War arms race was not the only political use of the ship during the 1980s. Other instances, including Lester Thurow’s article in the *New York Times* on August 24, 1980, use the sinking as a metaphor for the troubled financial climate of the decade: “Our economic ship of state slowly sinks into the briny deep” (174).
Since Astor’s initial plan, a ceaseless parade of attempts to find Titanic materialized over the course of the decades. Some, like the multiple campaigns of Douglas Woolley, who endeavored in 1968, 1974, and 1977 to raise funds to finance expeditions, and Walt Disney Productions, who partnered with National Geographic in 1978, became nothing more than fleeting dreams (Eaton and Haas, Titanic: A Journey Through Time, 185-86). Others, including the Seawise & Titanic Salvage excursion of 1979 and Jack Grimm’s two attempts in 1980 and 1981, managed to patrol the depths for the lost leviathan yet yielded no results (Eaton and Haas, Titanic: A Journey Through Time, 186-88). In June of 1985, the French Institute for Research and Exploration of the Sea and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute conducted an expedition with two ships - the French Le Suroit and the American Knorr - to use sonar technology and a deep-sea camera system to locate the wreck. After six weeks of searching, the team, headed by Dr. Robert Ballard, stumbled upon the wreckage in the early-morning hours of September 1 (Ballard 81-82). Over the course of the Labor Day Weekend, Titanic reemerged on the front page of newspapers across the globe and, similar to 1912, as the world nervously awaited the arrival of

---

145 News that Mackay-Bennett, the cable ship hired by White Star to recover bodies, had discovered his father’s body the following day quickly extinguished Astor’s scheme (Eaton and Haas, Titanic: A Journey Through Time, 185).

146 Both of Jack Grimm’s expeditions were deliberately transformed into media circuses, with the Texas oil tycoon hiring a film crew and author William Hoffman to document the anticipated discovery of Titanic. In fact, during the first exploration, Grimm arranged for a monkey, which he christened Titan, to accompany the voyage and point to a spot on the map where the crew believed the wreck rested. The scientists aboard were repulsed by the concept and “thought the idea bizarre, insane, and circuslike, which could only detract from and hold up to ridicule what they viewed as a serious endeavor” (Hoffman and Grimm 33).

147 The expedition, funded by the U.S. Navy, was meant to be a cover for the government’s testing of deep-sea technology. As tensions mounted between America and the Soviet Union during the developing arms race, the American government - fearing that the Soviets may have located the U.S. nuclear submarine Scorpion, which had sunk south of the Azores in 1968, and used its technology to their advantage - assembled the mission to document the state of the submarine. Any time remaining was utilized by the American and French scientists to find Titanic with the government’s financial backing. (Hooper-McCarthy and Foecke 88)

148 The first item of the wreck to appear before the team’s cameras was one of Titanic’s twenty-nine boilers (Ballard 82).
Titanic’s survivors aboard Carpathia, nations on both sides of the Atlantic eagerly anticipated the research team’s return aboard Le Suroit and Knorr. As Dr. Robert Ballard related their findings in a press conference at the National Geographic Society’s headquarters in Washington D.C. and the crew made plans to embark on a second expedition in July of 1986, the public’s interest in Titanic, which had been building gradually in popular culture since the 1950s, eructed into an insatiable fervor which only gained momentum as the 1980s transitioned into the 1990s. Indeed, according to Constance Holden, the discovery of Titanic did much to ignite interest in the ship and her tragedy (1369). Suddenly, Titanic appeared in a multitude of guises across numerous areas of culture. Where, in previous decades, the steamer became a symbolic instrument to examine issues of economic, national, political, and social concerns, Titanic’s iconographic state after her discovery elevated the ship, as S. Paige Baty expresses within her study of the representative character, into a commodified object consumed and used by popular culture. Once confined to a handful of books, films, poems, and songs, which collectively used the catastrophe to comment upon and scrutinize elements of the decade in which they were created, the wreck’s unearthing in 1985 jettisoned Titanic into innumerable facets of society.

In 1988, just three years after the wreck’s discovery, Paul Clifford published Titanic. Following the adventures of Edward, an eight-year-old boy who stows away aboard the vessel, the book examines the sinking from the perspective of a child and paints a grim image of the event as Edward grapples with its horrors. Despite its bleak nature, the work set the stage for an unending procession of children’s literature focused upon the tragedy. While some, including

---

149 When Knorr docked at Wood Hole’s marine facility on September 9, the scientists were met with a spectacle of pomp: hundreds of individuals swamped the small dock, already congested with satellite antennae and news crews, as banners and balloons filled the air and both a band and cannon saluted the ship’s arrival (Ballard 99).

150 In the aftermath of the catastrophe, Edward develops night terrors: “As usual I awake after a few hours, with that terrible nightmare coming back with all those upturned faces in the water crying out for aid, and that terrible sight and sound of the drowning” (Clifford 74).
Eve Bunting’s *S.O.S. Titanic*, Barbara Williams’ *Titanic Crossing*, and Ellen Emerson White’s *Voyage on the Great Titanic*, build upon Clifford’s technique and utilize the perceptions of children and adolescents to convey the incident to young readers, others employ more creative means to narrate their tales: Marty Crisp’s *White Star* focuses upon the story of a dog aboard *Titanic*, Michael Morpurgo’s *Kasper* weaves its narrative around the perspective of a cat, and Daisy Spedden’s *Polar: The Titanic Bear* views the incident through the eyes of a child’s stuffed toy.\(^{151}\) Likewise, in 1987, Thomas Bonsall published *Titanic*, a non-fiction account of *Titanic*’s construction, voyage, and death. Like Clifford’s imaginary tale released around the same time, Bonsall’s work aims to introduce children to the events of April 1912. And, like Clifford’s book, Bonsall’s historical text marked the beginning of a long line of informative works which intend to enlighten and feed children’s budding interest in *Titanic*’s story.\(^{152}\) Children, though, were not the only audience targeted by authors. Indeed, adult fiction and non-fiction experienced the same explosion, with works such as Erik Hansen’s *Psalm and Journey’s End*, Diane Hoh’s *Titanic: The Long Night*, Shannon O’Cork’s *Titanic: A Love Story*, and Danielle Steel’s *No Greater Love* fashioning imaginative accounts which transport readers back to 1912 and the fleeting glory of *Titanic*’s maiden voyage.\(^{153}\) At the heart of all these works is the budding urge to return to *Titanic*. Within their pages, the tales of Bunting, Clifford, Hansen, Steel, and their counterparts reconstruct the fated crossing with poetic detail and poignant emotion, drawing readers into the

---

\(^{151}\) *Polar: The Titanic Bear*, tucked away for decades in a trunk, was written by *Titanic* survivor Daisy Spedden for her son, Douglas, as a Christmas present in 1913. Beginning with Polar’s creation in the famous Steiff Company of Germany, the narrative follows the bear’s adventures with the Spedden family as they travel around the world, returning to America on *Titanic*.

\(^{152}\) Akin to the children’s literature on *Titanic*, the list of non-fiction about the subject proves never ending, with Simon Adam’s *Titanic*, Hugh Brewster’s *Inside the Titanic*, Susan Hughes and Steve Santini’s *The Science and Story of Titanic*, Shelly Tanaka’s *On Board the Titanic*, and Peter Thresh’s *Titanic: The Truth Behind the Disaster* comprising just a handful of the works published in the years following the wreck’s discovery.

\(^{153}\) Likewise, numerous non-fiction works, including Daniel Butler’s *Unsinkable*, James Clary’s *The Last True Story of Titanic*, and Michael Davie’s *Titanic*, granted adults curious about the details of *Titanic*’s history a perpetual array of information.
disaster’s events and, through the perceptions of the narratives’ main characters, allowing them the opportunity to experience *Titanic* in all her triumph and tragedy. In fact, as *Titanic* fever spread following the discovery of the wreck, popular culture in the 1990s repeatedly returned to the increasing desire to experience first-hand the heartbreaking events which transpired in the early-morning hours of April 15, 1912.

In his study on the influence of literature, Jèmeljan Hakemulder argues that, because “reading becomes an intense experience of the emotions, thoughts, and desires people are likely to have in certain situations,” the act of reading can become a means for individuals to experiment with differing roles and values (150). As the scholar explains, literature requires that readers temporarily engage in the “adoption of a character’s perspective,” allowing them the freedom to safely experience circumstances and emotions entirely unknown to them: “They may feel, for instance, the same fear a fictional murderer may have of being caught” (Hakemulder 17). As a result, the process of reading develops into a means for individuals to comfortably and securely explore newer perceptions and scenarios. Analyzing Beryl Bainbridge’s *Every Man for Himself*, Cynthia Bass’ *Maiden Voyage*, and Robert Olen Butler’s *Tabloid Dreams*, all three contemporary novels set aboard *Titanic*, Kenneth Womack asserts that the texts’ authors employ the sinking and the struggles it presents their main characters to “highlight the travails of survivorship, the powerful rewards made possible by psychological self-consolidation, and the simple interpersonal values inherent in living” (91). In doing so, the narratives, through the tribulations encountered by their main characters as they struggle through the disaster, become a means for readers, as Hakemulder attests within his assessment of literature, to easily and harmlessly investigate the emotional trauma of survivorship connected to the historic incident.

Hence, *Titanic*-themed literature develops into an instrument for readers, through their
association with the characters’ perceptions, to vicariously relive the voyage. The never-ending collection of fiction on *Titanic* during the 1990s, however, was not the only means the decade used to place itself upon the decks of the legendary steamer.

In 1997, Rick Archbold and Dana McCauley’s *Last Dinner on the Titanic* gave readers the ability to recreate the meals served the night of the sinking. With costume ideas, passenger biographies, recipes, and tips for setting a proper table, the work provides the key ingredients for reconstructing the final evening aboard *Titanic*’s sumptuous dining saloon. Likewise, within the classroom, instructors such as Mia Lynn Mercurio have turned the tragedy into a creative-writing exercise, where students assume the persona of a particular passenger and relate their experience in a first-person narration (216-26). Similarly, Teresa Haskin and Rebecca Sanchez, also applying character journals within their lessons on *Titanic*, have transformed the exercise into a week-long event where students dress in period clothing and reenact the fated journey of the ship and her passengers (Haskin 285-87; Sanchez 40-42). In doing so, the lesson plans of Haskin, Mercurio, and Sanchez, along with the text of Archbold and McCauley, fed into the decade’s longing to experience the maiden voyage. Like the adult and children’s literature flourishing at the time, which allowed readers the possibility to vicariously return to *Titanic* through the narratives’ characters, the reenactments proposed by Archbold, Haskin, McCauley, and Sanchez aimed to satiate society’s craving by asking individuals to physically assume the personae of various crew and passengers and, through imaginative role play, envision themselves

---

154 In 2012, Penelope Carlevato’s *Tea on the Titanic* built upon Archbold and McCauley’s idea, supplying readers with all the necessary procedures and recipes for hosting a *Titanic*-themed tea party.

155 Outside of character journals, instructors have found numerous uses for *Titanic* within lesson plans and pedagogies. Matthew Savage, for example, employs the event to teach science, including the nature of buoyancy and the laws of Newton (11-12). Likewise, professors at Kansas State University utilize the disaster as a means to examine gender theory and social class theory through statistics (Schumm et al. 368-70).
aboard the renowned ship. While role playing allowed individuals to imagine themselves sailing on *Titanic*, the exhibitions of RMS *Titanic*, Inc. presented the world with the rare opportunity to come face-to-face with history.

Debate over salvage rights began immediately after the wreck was discovered in 1985. Although Dr. Robert Ballard insisted that *Titanic* remain untouched as a memorial to the souls who perished and the United States Congress passed the RMS *Titanic* Memorial Act forbidding scavenging, the fact that the ship rests in international waters, where no nation has ultimate jurisdiction, made the law and Ballard’s plea ineffectual. In 1987, *Titanic* Venture Limited Partnership - now Premier Exhibitions and its subsidiary RMS *Titanic*, Inc. - commenced diving to the wreck, assisted by the French Institute for Research and Exploration of the Sea, with the intent to recover artifacts and display them for profit (Delgado 37).

Since their initial dive, RMS *Titanic*, Inc. has recovered over 5,500 objects, including a seventeen-ton section of the hull, and, in a 1994 ruling by the U.S. Federal Courts, was granted salvor-in-possession rights to the ship (Delgado 37). On November 27, 1996, *Titanic: The Expedition* opened at Nauticus, the National Maritime Center at Norfolk, Virginia. Displaying artifacts recovered during four

---

156 In 1996, Cyberflix provided the world with the opportunity to further relive the sailing in the privacy of their own homes with the release of their computer game *Titanic: Adventure out of Time*, which allowed players to tour a virtual replica of the ship and, as the game progresses, attempt to escape from her foundering decks (Howells, *The Myth of the Titanic*, 18).

157 The actions of RMS *Titanic*, Inc. have engendered a storm of controversy over the years in regards to the morality of raising artifacts from the wreck. While some view the process as irreverent grave robbing - in 1987, the *London Daily Express* described the act as “vandalism for profit” and a 1988 edition of Discover magazine lamented, “we all loot in a yellow submarine” - others perceive the recovery as archeological preservation, with the *USA Today* claiming that “salvaging artifacts brings the legend to life” (Delgado 37). In fact, RMS *Titanic*, Inc. stresses that their mission is “to develop an exhibition that will ensure that *Titanic*, its survivors, and those who were lost are never forgotten. It is our desire to present the *Titanic* story in a historically accurate and reverent manner and to promote further study and research into this influential event” (Eaton and Haas, *Titanic: The Exhibition*, 8).

158 The court’s ruling set stringent standards for the company, demanding that all recovered artifacts come only from the debris field and not the ship herself, each object be conserved, treated, and displayed according to international standards, that the company’s entire collection be on display to the public at all times, and that the collection must remain intact and never sold to private collectors (Delgado 37).
separate expeditions as well as samples of the deep-sea technology used to recover them, the exhibit became an instantaneous success, running for over four months and drawing hundreds of patrons (Eaton and Haas, *Titanic: A Journey Through Time*, 216). For those attending the exhibit, and its subsequent exhibitions in multiple cities throughout the nation, the artifacts award, like the novels’ fictional accounts and the creative role playing, a means to step back in time and experience history. Similar to the narratives by Clifford and his peers and the reenactments by Haskin and Sanchez, the museum displays brought *Titanic* back to life for those desperately seeking to relive her maiden voyage. Unlike the novels and role playing, though, the exhibitions offered something far more tantalizing: an actual connection to *Titanic* removed, no longer by the far reaches of space and time, but by the thin glass of a museum display case. As scores of visitors flocked to see the mementoes and personal effects of *Titanic*’s crew and passengers, Hollywood offered several productions which aimed to recreate the spectacle of the sailing for enthralled moviegoers.

In 1992, the documentary *Titanica*, which followed an expedition to *Titanic*’s wreck, brought stunning images of the decaying leviathan to the screen (Eaton and Haas, *Titanic: A Journey Though Time*, 240). Four years later, CBS’s four-hour miniseries *Titanic*, starring Peter Gallagher and Catherine Zeta-Jones, broadcasted *Titanic*’s story into the homes of millions of viewers (Biel 221). The following year, *The Chambermaid on the Titanic*, based upon Didier

---

159 Since its initial exhibit at Nauticus, RMS *Titanic*, Inc. has opened numerous exhibitions across the globe, including a permanent display at the Luxor Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, which, to date, have drawn over fifteen million visitors (Swift 155).

160 For those wishing to actually own a piece of *Titanic*, RMS *Titanic*, Inc. offers samples of the ship’s coal for sale in their gift shops to help offset the extreme costs of the expeditions and the preservations of artifacts.

161 For its first public showing, the film was projected on a specially-constructed screen reaching over seven stories which dramatically highlighted the brobdingnagian proportions of *Titanic* for stunned audience members (Eaton and Haas, *Titanic: A Journey Through Time*, 240).
Decoin’s 1991 novel, premiered in international theatres (Kinder 35).\textsuperscript{162} As \textit{The Chambermaid on the Titanic} opened in European cinemas, James Cameron’s blockbuster, \textit{Titanic}, took American and, subsequently, world audiences by storm. With a run of six months, the film remained number one at the box office for over fifteen weeks, grossed $1.8 billion worldwide, was nominated for fourteen Academy Awards and won eleven, and added gasoline to an already raging \textit{Titanic} fervor (Eaton and Haas, \textit{Titanic: A Journey Through Time}, 241). While Cameron’s epic substantially increased the public’s interest in the ship, it also built upon the desire of the 1990s to relive the sailing:

\begin{quote}
I made it a sacred goal of the production, a goal that came to be shared by everyone involved, to honor the facts without compromise. I wanted to be able to say to an audience, without the slightest pang of guilt: This is real. This is what happened. Exactly like this. If you went back in a time machine and stood on the deck, this is what you would have seen. (Marsh vi)
\end{quote}

For Cameron, complete historical accuracy was the ultimate goal. Like the exhibits, novels, and reenactments occurring during the same time, the film attempts to recreate the voyage as close to actual history as possible, providing audiences with the opportunity to stand on the decks of \textit{Titanic} and witness history.\textsuperscript{163} Indeed, as Richard Howells attests, “for many people Cameron’s \textit{Titanic} and the actual \textit{Titanic} remain one and the same,” with the director’s manic attention to

\textsuperscript{162} Unlike most \textit{Titanic}-themed narratives, both the film and Decoin’s novel do not focus upon the sinking itself. Rather, the plot centers around the catastrophe’s aftermath within a foundry in Northern France, where a young worker named Horty relates the sights he witnessed in Southampton as he watched \textit{Titanic} depart on her maiden voyage.

\textsuperscript{163} For Set Dresser Michael Ford, Cameron’s extreme attention to detail proved daunting, with his crew responsible for creating exact reproductions of everything from the first-class dining saloon’s chairs to luggage tags (Marsh 34). In fact, the director perpetually drove Ford and his crew to “faithfully reproduce the position of every potted palm, every piece of wicker furniture, the decking, the window treatments and everything else” (K. Marschall 2).
detail and claims of the film’s steadfast exactness driving many to believe that what is depicted
on screen was Titanic (Howells, “One Hundred Years,” 74).  

While Cameron’s epic allowed moviegoers of 1997 to walk the decks of Titanic and, through
the ill-fated love story of Jack Dawson and Rose DeWitt Bukater, vicariously experience the
opulence and horror of the steamer’s maiden voyage, it also reinforced changing notions of the
Titanic mythos coming to fruition during the decade. As Tony Kushner explains within his
analysis of the disaster, from the earliest newspaper accounts, popular culture has repeatedly
overemphasized the chivalry and courage of the first-class men, molding them into the epitome
of heroism: “The bravery of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ first-class passengers, obeying the moral code of
‘women and children first’ was contrasted in contemporary reporting and later representation to
the stories of panic and selfishness attributed to the racially inferior types traveling steerage”
(194). Indeed, as the instant books of 1912 attest, the amplified valor of these “wealthy, white,
paternal hero[es] was a prescriptive image providing lessons in the correct behavior for ordinary
men” (Larabee 12). In sharp contrast, though, rising zenophobia of the time transformed the
actions of immigrant passengers into emblems of cowardice. What emerged, hence, was, as
Cheryl Jorgenson-Earp explicates, a legend marked by dichotomy: “the rich/the poor; the
brave/the cowardly, the doomed/the survivors, women and children (the weak)/men (the strong),
[and] the worthy survivor (Molly Brown)/the unworthy survivor (J. Bruce Ismay)” (54). Thus,

---

164 A prime example of this inability to distinguish between the two emerged with the mistaken grave of J. Dawson in Halifax, Nova Scotia. After recovering bodies from the sea, the cable ship Mackay-Bennett brought those which were unclaimed and unidentified to Halifax’s Fairview Lawn Cemetery for burial. Among them was James Dawson, a trimmer aboard the ship. Following the release of Cameron’s film, grief-stricken fans made pilgrimages to the grave, which they believed belonged to the story’s fictional Jack Dawson, and showered it with “tributes such as flowers, plastic models of ships and - most remarkably - pictures of Leonardo diCaprio” (Howells, “One Hundred Years,” 88).

165 Quoting from an anonymous survivor, Logan Marshall’s instant book boldly testifies to this point: “There they stood - Major Butt, Colonel Astor waving a farewell to his wife; Mr. Thayer, Mr. Case, Mr. Clarence Moore, Mr. Widener, all multimillionaires, and hundreds of other men, bravely smiling at us all. Never have I seen such chivalry and fortitude” (75).
the gallant first-class men were elevated to the status of idols while the immigrant masses were relegated to the role of ignorant weaklings.\textsuperscript{166} Although challenges to this contrast surfaced during the decades following the incident, particularly in the African-American toasts of the 1920s and the poetry of minority activists in the 1970s, the image of the staid bravery displayed by Titanic’s first-class passengers remained a popular factor within the mythology, with the works of Charles Lightoller, Arthur Rostron, and Folson Young during the 1930s and the 1953 film, Titanic, reinforcing this perspective. By the 1990s, however, this concept was heatedly disputed, especially in light of the global economy developing during the decade.

With the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991, American businessmen and politicians hungered to establish an international trading system which would eradicate the restrictive practices that prevented free trade (Bentley and Zeigler 1137). In 1994, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, founded in 1947, signed an agreement creating the World Trade Organization to enforce, mediate, and monitor world trade (Bentley and Ziegler 1137).\textsuperscript{167} As a result, the 1990s witnessed an increased economic globalization and integration which boosted foreign investments, prompted unfettered movement of capital, the privatization of former state enterprises, and the engenderment of countless corporations (Bentley and Ziegler 1137). Likewise, through this global economy, the decade also saw the brutalities of economic inequality within countries marred by the devastation of almost five-hundred years of colonialism (Bentley and Ziegler 1152). For a handful of Western nations, the effects of economic globalization proved immoderately fruitful; however, for many countries, including

\textsuperscript{166} As Ann Larabee highlights, although the majority of people in 1912 were mortified by the substantial casualties experienced in third class, several individuals “made the case that rich men, who could supposedly contribute more to society, should have been saved before these poor women” (17).

\textsuperscript{167} Under the World Trade Organization’s guidance, world trade exceeded six trillion U.S. dollars in the 1990s, roughly double that of the 1980s (Bentley and Ziegler 1137).
Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, the unequal distribution of resources and income was devastating. Throughout the world, the drastic division between rich and poor nations spawned by the global economy drew outrage and protest, with the corporate tycoons who pushed for the establishment of the World Trade Organization perceived as greedy, soulless monsters. Hence, these captains of industry were diminished into villains who, in comparison to the humbled manners of the countries they impoverished, epitomized the vilest qualities within humanity. Indeed, this shift also emerged in the Titanic mythos during the decade, particularly within Cameron’s blockbuster.

Through a scene-by-scene examination of the film, David Lubin argues that, although the movie, with its comic-book characterization and overdependence upon visual effects, is not an intellectual film, through its use of Titanic’s mythology, it prompts viewers to pose questions about modern society’s divide between rich and poor, the nature of love, the meaning of sacrifice, and our contemporary obsession with technology. Through Jack and Rose’s romance, Lubin argues, Cameron creates a tapestry on which contemporary concerns, especially the international misdistribution of wealth, weave themselves into the fabric of the maiden voyage’s drama (7-14). In the case of criticism against the destructive effects of economic globalization, the film’s portrayals of first- and third-class passengers serve to strengthen opinions on the financial inequality encompassing the development of free trade. Like the culture of the 1990s, Cameron paints Rose’s fiancé, the Pittsburg steel baron Caledon Hockley, into a vivid image of the corruptible and patronizing business mogul who resorts to money and power to survive the sinking (Lubin 47). In strong opposition to Hockley, the artistic vagabond Jack, who praises the freedom and joys of simplicity, “extols the virtues of the simple, non-capitalist life” (Lubin 47-

---

168 Excessive infant mortality, lowered life expectancies, malnutrition, rampant disease, and starvation are among the numerous ailments inflicted upon these disadvantaged areas (Bentley and Ziegler 1151).
48). As a result, Cameron pits the traitorous villainy of the business tycoon against the humbled heroism of the impoverished artist.\textsuperscript{169} In doing so, the film, as James Kendrick attests, assumes “a strong stance against the rich and powerful” while fervently empathizing with “the less fortunate and powerless” (42). Gone are the images of the valiant first-class gentleman and the craven selfishness of the immigrant passengers. Rather, they are replaced by the inexorable greed of Hockley as he uses an abandoned child to gain access to the lifeboats and the selfless sacrifice of Jack as he permits Rose to remain safe atop the floating debris as he freezes to death in the frigid Atlantic. Likewise, as Kendrick stresses, Rose’s decision to abandon her aristocratic life in favor of Jack’s modest existence adds further emphasis to the ideological shift conveyed within the film, which mirrors the cultural transition in 1990s America in regards to financial inequality engendered by the global economy.\textsuperscript{170}

While the 1990s focused on experiencing the grandeur and heartbreak of \textit{Titanic} and used the catastrophe as a means to explore concerns over economic globalization, the new millennium commenced with a tragedy which society paralleled with the events of 1912: the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.\textsuperscript{171} For many Americans, the attacks “seemed to bring to a close an extraordinary period in modern American history - a time of heady prosperity, bitter partisanship, cultural frivolity and excess, and tremendous social and economic change”

\textsuperscript{169} In addition to the dichotomy between Cal and Jack, Lubin shows that the critique of global classism perpetually resurfaces throughout the film, with Molly Brown “explicitly mock[ing] the pretensions of the wealthy class” and the plight of third-class passengers dramatically rendered as “their escape exits are kept locked by ship stewards zealously intent on guarding the interests of their masters in first class” (47-48).

\textsuperscript{170} Cameron’s epic was not the only work in the 1990s and the proceeding decades to explore changing perceptions in the \textit{Titanic} myth. In fact, Derek Mahon’s 1999 poem, “After the \textit{Titanic},” which depicts J. Bruce Ismay as a cocaine-addicted derelict in the aftermath of the sinking, and Julian Fellowes’ 2012 miniseries, \textit{Titanic}, have also crafted third-class passengers into romanticized heroes and reduced their first-class counterparts to vain, egomaniacal cowards.

\textsuperscript{171} Even during the attacks themselves, there were references to \textit{Titanic}, with panicked attempts to evacuate the South Tower of the World Trade Center leading one man to bitterly remark to two women squeezing past him on the elevator: “This isn’t the \textit{Titanic}, ladies. It’s not women and children first” (Biel 233).
(Brinkley 919). As the nation attempted to grapple with the shock engendered by this new era of fear and uncertainty, the symbol of Titanic as a cultural watershed suddenly resurfaced. Akin to Jack Thayer and Walter Lord during the 1940s and 1950s, authors such as Peggy Noonan saw within both tragedies the death of an age bursting with innocence:

If it has to be compared, yesterday to most of us in New York, it was Titanic. It was the end of the assumption that ease and plenty will continue forever, that we rich folk will be kept safe by our wealth and luck; it was the end of a culture of indifference to our nation’s safety. Those Twin Towers, those hard and steely symbols of the towering city, were the ship that God himself couldn’t sink. (73)

Like the image of Edwardian confidence and incorruptibility crushed by the trauma of Titanic’s sinking, the prosperous indifference of America, as Noonan attests, was abruptly squelched by the attacks of the World Trade Centers. Likewise, in his response to the catastrophe, Randy Malamud asserts that, with Titanic and the terrorist attacks, the twentieth century was bookended by tragedy, with the era beginning and ending “in a fireball of hatred, terror [and] apocalyptically vast destruction” (150).

In spite of the devastation on September 11, 2001, public interest in Titanic failed to wane. In fact, the millennium, building upon the ardent fascination during the 1990s, witnessed a further swelling in Titanic fever escalated by the incident’s centenary in 2012. As the new century progressed, Titanic drifted into several television programs, including a 2007 Christmas special of Doctor Who and, in 2012, a four-part miniseries written by Downton Abbey’s creator Julian Fellowes (A. Wells 19). Similarly, a resurgence of fiction catapulted the ship into newer genres,

---

172 Titanic historians Don Lynch and Ken Marshall mirror Noonan’s response, viewing the terrorist attacks and Titanic, both events which destroyed the “engineering marvels of their age,” as the dismantling of complacent faith in technological progress (Lynch and Marshall 112).

173 The occasion was marked by numerous events across the globe: Biel, Heyer, and Howells printed updated editions of their texts, the Titanic Historical Society unveiled its Centennial Memorial at Oak Grove Cemetery, multiple cruise ships provided commemorative voyages which retraced Titanic’s route, Cameron rereleased his epic in 3D, magazines and newspapers published scores of articles recounting the details of Titanic’s story, libraries and universities gave lectures on the tragedy, and, in restaurants around the world, Titanic-themed dinner parties recreated the meals served the evening of the disaster.
including gay erotica, murder mysteries, vampire love stories, and the zombie apocalypse.¹⁷⁴ Likewise, Robin Gardiner and Dan van der Vat challenged the traditional narrative of Titanic’s story with the introduction of their conspiracy theory, which zealously argues that White Star deliberately switched Titanic with Olympic and sank the vessel in an elaborate act of insurance fraud.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, the new millennium witnessed Titanic’s solidification into a commercial product. Recently, Belfast, the town where Harland and Wolff built all of White Star Line’s steamers, has joined the public’s substantial fascination with Titanic, constructing a Titanic Quarter and launching the “Belfast Titanic Story” (Neill 67-68).¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Halifax, the Nova Scotian town where Titanic’s unclaimed and unknown victims rest at the Fairview Lawn Cemetery has transformed the site into a tourist attraction, with a nearby pub serving Titanic-themed beer (Ruffman 67-68).¹⁷⁷ Even the wreck sites of Titanic and her sistership, Britannic,

¹⁷⁴ In 2012 alone, there were four books, including Chris Paul’s Z Deck, which placed a zombie outbreak on the decks of Titanic, two accounts - Kristin King’s Unsinkable Vampire and Patrick Prior’s Bloodlust - of vampire romance set aboard the legendary steamer, and a reprint edition of Jack Fritscher’s gay erotic novel, Titanic.

¹⁷⁵ Gardiner and van der Vat base their claim on the severe damage Olympic suffered after colliding with H.M.S. Hawke on September 20, 1911. According to Gardiner and van der Vat, the injuries sustained by Olympic proved too costly for White Star to repair, with the shipping line’s insurance company refusing to touch the policy. As a result, J. Bruce Ismay and Lord Pirrie, chairman of Harland and Wolff, concocted a scheme to switch the wounded Olympic with the new Titanic, deliberately sinking the vessel to collect the insurance. (Gardiner and van der Vat xi-xv)

¹⁷⁶ Such an attempt to capitalize on contemporary interest in the disaster has prompted some scholars, including William Neill, to critique Belfast’s actions as a commercialization of Titanic and her “profound mythic status in Western Culture” (67).

¹⁷⁷ In Southampton, the story is entirely different. For the port town where Titanic departed on her maiden voyage, there are no streets named after victims, no memorials erected, and no use of the incident to critique societal concerns. As historian Stephanie Barczewski claims, Titanic’s sinking remains foremost a tragedy (271-72). Even today, there is “no pub, no restaurant, no souvenir shop named after the Titanic” (Barczewski 272). In fact, as Barczewski attests, Southampton has done much to distance itself from the event, making no attempt to exploit potential tourism. The reasons for this may rest in the deep impact of the sinking upon the town. Historically, the vast majority of Titanic’s 898 crew members came from Southampton, with the town losing 549 individuals to the sinking (Richardson 10). Statistically, Southampton alone accounts for thirty-six percent of the entire victims. Furthermore, Titanic’s sinking inflicted a lasting legacy within the port, with many local children raised on money from the Titanic Relief Fund (Hyslop and Jemima 42). In fact, in 1954, ninety-four individuals were still dependent upon the assistance from this relief (Richardson 11). As Barczewski stresses: “In Southampton, the tragedy was, quite simply, a tragedy; there is no ‘myth of the Titanic’ there, but only the story of a very real, very painful and, for many residents, very personal disaster” (272).
have become tourist destinations, with Simon Mills purchasing *Britannic* in 1996 with the intentions of turning the submerged leviathan into an underwater attraction (Langdon 45). Likewise, on February 26, 2013, Australian mining entrepreneur Clive Palmer hosted a dinner gala aboard *Intrepid Sea* to announce his bold ambition to build a working full-scale reproduction of the steamer (Kamuda and Kamuda 97).

From the instant books of 1912 to parallels with the terrorist attacks of 2001, popular culture and individual works have, as Stephen Cox attests, collectively created, maintained, and revised the *Titanic* mythos into an instrument to inspect modern society. As a result, *Titanic*, according to Steven Biel, has, over the course of a century, “become a facile, all-purpose reference point for negligence, incompetence, obliviousness, or futility” (234). Likewise, through the evolving perspectives of both these individual works and the community, the ship, especially following the discovery of her wreck in 1985, has morphed into a commercial object universally consumed and recognized by multiple societies and time periods. Indeed, as Cheryl Jorgenson-Earp emphasizes: “*Titanic*, it seems, belong[s] to no one and everyone” (42). Employed, at times, to critique changes in gender roles and racial inequality and, on other occasions, to explore notions of nationalism and predestination, the *Titanic* mythology, as Cox stresses, has, like the shifting connotations of Benjamin Franklin’s “JOIN, or DIE” illustration, evolved with cultural progressions, shaping our perceptions of the incident and altering *Titanic* into a representative

---

178 For Mills, *Britannic*, sunk in the shallow waters off the coast of Greece, serves as a substitute *Titanic*, whose extreme depth makes access to her wreck immoderately difficult and expensive: “With *Britannic* you are basically looking at an intact *Titanic*. When you look at *Titanic* it is pitch black - it is also in two pieces separated by a couple thousand yards. When you look at *Britannic* she is totally intact and the water is unbelievably clear” (Langdon 45). *Titanic*’s inaccessibility, though, has not deterred some. In fact, as Richard Corfield highlights, “at least one couple has been married in a submersible resting atop the poop deck of the liner” (25).

179 Although Palmer’s plans have yet to reach fruition, his concept is not unique. In fact, fiction and film, including Bill Walker’s 1998 novel *Titanic 2012* and Asylum Production’s 2010 movie *Titanic II*, have already addressed the notion of building a second *Titanic*. In the case of both Walker’s work and *Titanic II*, the literary and cinematic remakes succumb to the same fate as their predecessor.
character. At the heart of this transformative process are the forces of interpretive illustration and practices of commitment.

Like William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw’s representations of Cleopatra, which simplify the queen’s intellectual and political prowess and amplify her salacious affairs and indulgences, various artists and authors have actively engaged in the method of interpretive illustration to construct their depictions of *Titanic*. In the case of the instant books by Marshal Everett, Logan Marshall, Jay Mowbray, and Thomas Russell, for example, the authors, building upon xenophobic notions of the era, amplified the gallantry of first-class men and simplified the behaviors of steerage passengers to fashion a brutal contrast which reinforced opinions on the undesirability of Eastern and Southern European immigrants. Likewise, at the height of World War II, Nazi filmmakers overemphasized the valor of German crew and passengers and downplayed the actions of the British to create a stern dichotomy between German heroism and British cowardliness to reaffirm nationalistic ideals. In both instances, the renderings spawned by these works dramatically impacted the culture’s understandings of the event. Furthermore, they aided in the creation of a metonymy which knitted itself into the groundwork of the *Titanic* mythos and engendered what Linda Maria Koldau labels the “*Titanic* code.”

In *The Titanic on Film*, Koldau argues that the mythology encompassing *Titanic* is comprised of a “*Titanic* code,” which the scholar defines as a narrative combination of details, motifs, and scenes present in almost every work on the subject (4). Examining the major motion pictures about *Titanic*, Koldau claims that each film utilizes this code and its elements, which include the stark difference in accommodations between first- and third-class passengers and the heart-wrenching imagery of families separated at the lifeboats, to develop and strengthen perceptions of the incident and reinforce the legend’s role as a metaphor for “class distinction and social
tension, the concept of humanity and mankind’s place in the universe, [and] man’s possibilities and limitations” (4-5). Hence, through their amplification and simplification of specific details, the individual works of artists and authors, in conjunction with popular culture’s reinterpretations, developed a series of images and themes which, growing into the “Titanic code,” impacted perceptions of Titanic. Likewise, through the method of the practices of commitment, this code experienced multiple retellings and revisions which altered the mythos’ implications and purposes as societal ideologies progressed. In fact, such was the case with views of bravery in Titanic’s first-class men, with the portraits painted by Everett, Marshall, Mowbray, and Russell dissolving in the 1990s into pictures of capitalist egotism and gluttony. Thus, through interpretive illustration and practices of commitment, both individual works and popular culture cultivated a mythology which, through the evolving reinterpretations of its code, altered Titanic into a symbolic figure and directly impacted how the public comprehends and views her tragedy.
Chapter VII

A Deathless Titan: The Representative Character of Titanic

Over the past century, Titanic’s resonance within popular culture has remained steadfast. At times a simple whisper and on other occasions a thunderous cacophony, the ship and her tale - like the spectral depictions of Thomas Andrews and the orchestra within Shan Bullock and Marshall Everett’s narratives - have, unlike the sinking of Atlantic in 1873, failed to succumb to the fate of oblivion. Indeed, as the cover of Strange Journey accurately attests, Titanic’s fated crossing has proven a “voyage into forever,” with innumerable films, novels, poems, and songs refashioning the catastrophe into an iconic figure used to examine issues of class, economics, gender, politics, and race. It is this process, according to Steven Biel, that academically-trained historians find unsettling (7). For these scholars, Titanic is neither, as Walter Lord, Peggy Noonan, and Jack Thayer stress, a cultural watershed nor, as Hans Mangus Enzenberger, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, and Kenneth Watt argue, a parable for the inherent dangers of obliviousness. Rather, for many professional historians, including John Malcolm Brinnin and George Hilton, Titanic was an isolated incident in the North Atlantic which only provoked the creation of “new systems of safety precautions to be installed in all the big ships” (Brinnin 414). In fact, Brinnin emphasizes that, in the heated competition among shipping lines for supremacy, the sinking proved merely a minor hindrance: “The loss of the Titanic was awesome and dreadful, yet it resulted in only a slight gap in the front ranks of the armada of mammoth steamships” (386).

---

180 Biel is among these historians, arguing that “the disaster changed nothing except shipping regulations” (7).

181 For Hilton, these newer safety laws, including the La Follette Seamen’s Act of 1915 which demanded lifeboats for everyone, engendered serious maritime issues, particularly the capsizing of Eastland on July 24, 1915, when the increase of lifeboats made the already-unstable vessel dangerously top-heavy (1-13).

182 Even in the stock of the International Mercantile Marine, the J.P. Morgan conglomerate which owned White Star Line, the effects were minimal, with stocks in the company only dropping 0.253 percent following the disaster (Khanna 17).
While the opinions of historians such as Brinnin and Hilton reveal that, in comparison to major historic events, Titanic’s influence is minimal, their stance provides an intriguing perspective on the notion of Titanic as a representative character: in the less than a hundred years, this remote occurrence in the Atlantic - which only affected shipping regulations - has been perpetually reimaged into a universally-recognized symbol used throughout the decades to explore and scrutinize cultural ideologies. More than that, though, Titanic’s iconographic state has not been limited to one particular era or society.

In their study on the representative character Bellah et al. claim that each historical time period and each society have their own unique symbolic figures who personify the particular ideals of that individual community (153-54). In the case of the Founding Fathers and Paul Revere, for example, the iconographic status of these historic individuals is limited specifically to American culture, where their images embody notions of patriotism. Outside the confines of American society, however, this representation becomes nonexistent. Hence, the Founding Fathers and Revere would not possess the same connotations - if any at all - within British culture. What makes certain representative characters unique, then, is their ability to transcend the limits of culture and time and become universal symbols. Cleopatra, for instance, has become multiple icons for numerous communities and time periods: Nubian Queen for African nationalists, the epitome of feminine beauty for Hollywood, and the femme fatale for Western patriarchy. Unlike the Founding Fathers and Revere, Cleopatra is not limited to a singular trait within a particular culture. Rather, like the round characters of Seymour Chatman’s analysis, Cleopatra possesses a multifaceted nature which lends itself to the methods of perpetual reinterpretation at the heart of James Young’s interpretive illustration and Bellah et al.’s practices of commitment. Through frequent re-imaging by various communities throughout
history, Cleopatra has been transformed into an internationally-identified icon. *Titanic*, likewise, has undergone the same process.

Ever since J. Bruce Ismay and Lord Pirrie met in the summer of 1907 to discuss Harland and Wolff’s creation of three sisterships aimed at ruling the North Atlantic route, *Titanic* has become a symbol. Beginning as a testament to the nautical and technological achievements of the industrial age, her traumatic sinking in the early-morning hours of April 15, 1912, catapulted the steamers into multiple genres of popular culture. Through a perpetual procession of cinema, literature, and music, the individual works of artists and authors, as well as the community at large, refashioned and retold the narrative of *Titanic*’s unfortunate maiden voyage, amplifying the displays of bravery and cowardice in some crew and passengers and simplifying the same factors in others to craft a mythological tale whose evolving nature has addressed and mirrored individual and societal shifts. As a result, these artistic and scholarly re-images, like those of Cleopatra, the Founding Fathers, Marilyn Monroe, and Paul Revere, have engendered, as Richard Howells highlights, two *Titanics*: the actual vessel which plunged to the bottom of the ocean over a century ago and the mythological titan which, through continuous reinvention and reinterpretation, has remained a deathless symbol within popular culture (*The Myth of the Titanic*, 19). Identical to the representative character of Marilyn Monroe, which has been removed from the confines of an actress who died in 1962, the iconographic *Titanic* has been elevated into an emblematic object which, through her reconstituted rememberings, has become a commodified artifact instantly available for public consumptions and reinterpretation. In fact, as Howells stresses, it is this second *Titanic* - divorced from the actual event which, as Brinnin and Hilton express, only altered shipping regulations - that proves culturally impactful and significant: “It is not the physical *Titanic* itself that is the major object of concern; rather, it is
representations of the Titanic which occupy our attention. It is these representations which provide an illuminating textual manifestation of the mentalités of the societies from which they arise” (The Myth of the Titanic, 21). Furthermore, it is this second Titanic which not only expands the definition of the representative character, but also proves an ideal instrument to explore how art impacts our perceptions of history.

Through their examinations of the representative character, scholars such as S. Paige Baty, Bellah et al., Michael Grant, and Ella Shohat limit the concept specifically to humans. Indeed, as Bellah et al. emphasize: “Representative characters are not abstract ideals or faceless social roles, but are realized in the lives of those individuals who succeed more or less well in fusing their individual personalities with the public requirement of those roles” (39). For Baty, Bellah et al., Grant, and Shohat, thus, these symbols, which embody such human possibilities as failure and success within both their own lifetimes and the eras succeeding their deaths, are narrowed primarily to people rather than events and items. However, as the narrative discourse of William Glass reveals, characters can be more than humans, with inanimate objects and occurrences also falling under this classification (116-17). Therefore, as Titanic shows, historic incidents, in addition to historic figures, undergo the same processes of iconographic rememberings which meld them into public symbols for the aspirations, ideals, and visions of the societies interpreting them. Furthermore, these events, like their individual counterparts, endure the same procedures of interpretive illustration and practices of commitment which impact culture’s perceptions of the past.

For historians such as John Lewis Gaddis, Martha Howell, Walter Prevenier, and Ray Rapheal, history is an elusive entity marred by vague artifacts and tainted accounts which make the true details of individuals and occurrences difficult to decipher. Hence, as Raphael highlights,
“history can never adequately re-create the past” (275). Rather, the artists and historians who attempt to portray the past fashion erudite conjectures which, more often than not, “reduce history to a series of simple, comprehensive stories with tidy beginnings and endings” (Raphael 275). As a result, “much of what we think of as ‘history’ is driven not by facts but by these narrative demands” which amplify and simplify the specifics of particular events and figures to create romanticized portrayals (Raphael 5). It is these sensational depictions, according to scholars such as Richard Ammon, Ellie Burksdale, Donal Gallo, Robert Rosestone, Robert Toplin, and Richard Tunnell, which significantly influence how society understands the past. Indeed, the poetry of Virginia French and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, which greatly affected society’s perceptions of General Sherman and Paul Revere, reveal the sizable influence of these representations. While French’s embittered portrait of Sherman’s atrocities and Longfellow’s idealized image of Revere’s lone gallantry provide intriguing studies into art’s sway over historic perception, both cases - and the others discussed in this analysis - lack one element that creative accounts of Titanic do not: universality. Outside the reaches of Southern mythology, the vision of Sherman as a soulless monster is hardly known. Similarly, apart from the boundaries of American patriotism, Revere’s sensational heroism is lost to the cultures of other nations. The illustrations of Titanic, however, prove limitless. As Biel claims, Titanic’s story is commonly recognized, with varying cultures and time periods shaping their own artistic and scholarly perceptions of the tragedy. From concepts of German nationalism in World War II and critiques of racial inequality in America during the 1920s to Cold War concerns over predestination throughout the 1960s and notions of British perseverance amidst the economic hardships of the 1930s, these global renditions of Titanic have impressed upon the world’s awareness of the

183 In fact, as Toplin argues, these imaginative depictions, due to their entertaining and relatable nature, prove even more influential than their academic counterparts (9).
catastrophe, building a mythology fashioned around a “Titanic code” which continues to evolve. In addition to this universality, the Titanic mythos, as previously discussed, has experienced a rapid establishment and sturdy endurance which sets it apart from the myths of other representative characters.

As Paul Heyer emphasizes, the sinking, emerging during a time of significant advances in mass communication, developed into the first major disaster collectively felt by much of the world (63). While other events, such as the storming of the Bastille, took centuries to mature into icons, the newspaper accounts of the catastrophe made details of the occurrence readily available to the world and rapidly crafted Titanic into a legend. Likewise, this legacy, unlike those of other historic events and figures, has maintained an unfaultered durability over the course of one-hundred years. According to Trenia Walker, we live in a world saturated by an incessant array of media (31). As a result, scholars such as Baty and Walker stress that this boundless bombardment of popular culture creates a hazed blur of fleeting elements which meld into a single, all-encompassing mass:

Newspapers, movies, magazines, pulp fiction, coffee-table clutter, computer networks, trading cards, call-in talk shows: this world of rapidly moving pictures creates the possibility of being everywhere and nowhere all at once. The democracy of this state is unsettling. All the people and stories and drawings and logos and theme songs and jingles and histories collapse into each other. Distinctions between public and private, politics and culture, female and male, power and knowledge, past and future are lost in a euphoric present. (Baty 29-30)

As Baty express, much of the ephemeral fashions, ideals, and trends of modern society muddle together, with few things proving distinct enough to emerge from the chaos and remain longer than a passing second. For Baty, though, the representative character of Marilyn Monroe is one of these scarce exceptions, rising above the incongruous mixture and, over the period of decades, remaining a fixed point for these cultural fads to latch onto. The representative character of
Titanic, similarly, is also one of these rare occurrences. Like Monroe, Titanic has been distinguished from the befuddled assortment of popular culture and, over the century, remained a persistent anchor on which shifting ideals and trends have adhered themselves.

But why Titanic? What is it about this single incident which has elevated the ship to an iconic state and solidified her domineering presence in worldwide consciousness? The answer to this question has been heatedly debated since the first newspaper accounts began the initial formation of the mythos; however, in the course of a hundred years, one concrete and distinct explanation has failed to materialize. Some find interest in the tragedy’s fruitful metaphors: for Walter Lord, Peggy Noonan, and Jack Thayer, it is the catastrophe’s embodiment of an age of innocence crushed by modernity; for Marshall Everett, Logan Marshall, Jay Mowbray, and Thomas Russell, it is the testament of human valor expressed through Titanic’s orchestra and first-class men; for Hans Mangus Enzenberger, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, and Kenneth Watt, it is the intrinsic hazards of obliviousness; for Charles Lightoller, Arthur Rostron, and Filson Young, it is the call of perseverance in times of distress; and for James Cameron, Alfred Hitchcock, and David O. Selznick, it is the tantalizing luster of a marvelously theatrical spectacle. Others, including Stephen Cox, Don Lynch, and Ken Marschall, find appeal within the drama resting at the heart of the disaster. As James Heffernan explains within his analysis of the French Revolution, society tends to favor stories of history which offer drama and violence (xi). For Cox, Lynch, and Marschall, the sinking serves as the perfect drama. In comparison to Lusitania, which plunged to the ocean floor in seventeen minutes, and Andrea Doria, which steadily sank over the course of ten grueling hours, Titanic’s sinking, nearly equal in length to a long movie or

---

184 In the case of the French Revolution, Heffernan argues that the sensational horror of the storming of the Bastille, although historically a minor incident in the revolution’s overall conflict, overshadowed more influential movements, particularly the signing of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, due to its narrative elements of drama and violence (xi).
staged play, lasted long enough for those on board to make conscious decisions about their actions as the foundering leviathan gradually surrendered to the sea:

The Titanic took two hours and 40 minutes to go down. This was not some skimpy newsreel montage; it was a sumptuous human drama. All the imponderables of individual character, choice, and action were concentrated into those two hours and 40 minutes of deathly calm on the North Atlantic Ocean. It is hard to imagine the author who could invent a more intensely dramatic situation; and a powerful source of the intensity is the combination of urgent questions and difficult answers. (Cox 421)

And a select few, including folklorist J. Joseph Edgette, see the disaster as a lustrous example of the importance of historical preservation. As Edgette explains, the lack of written narratives and scholarly investigations can prompt, for some historic characters and incidents, a failure of memory which eventually diminishes their conservation. Through the perpetual retelling of Titanic’s tale and the persistent endurance which has been engendered as a result, Edgette views the tragedy as an exemplification for how the continuous act of retelling history prevents it from “eventually disappearing into the abyss of failing human memory” (120). Although the exact reasons behind Titanic’s allure prove intangible, one thing is for certain: this fascination has ensured that, in an age burdened by an eternal barrage of ephemeral media, the representative character of Titanic has substantiated herself as a deathless titan. Indeed, long past the point when the actual ship disintegrates in the darkened recesses of the ocean floor, this mythological leviathan will continue her voyage into forever within the popular culture of the succeeding decades. Furthermore, as Edgette claims, it is this iconographic Titanic and the perpetual reiteration of her tragic tale which will preserve the physical ship in popular memory long past her inevitable oblivion.
Works Cited


Burg, B.R. “‘Women and Children First.’ Popular Mythology and Disaster at Sea, 1840-1860.”


Cumming, Mark. “‘Such a Figure Drew Priam’s Curtains!’ Carlyle’s Epic History of the
Revolution.” *Representing the French Revolution.* Ed James Heffernan. London:


Print.

Decoin, Didier. *La femme de chamber du Titanic* [*The Chambermaid on the Titanic*]. Paris:


*Downton Abbey.* Dir. Brian Percival. Perf. Hugh Bonneville, Phyllis Logan, and Elizabeth


Print.


Pelham, Paul and Lawrence Wright. *Be British!* Words by Pelham and music by Wright. London: Lawrence Wright Music Company, 1912.


Saved from the Titanic. Dir. Eltienne Arnaud. Perf. Dorothy Gibson. Éclair Film Company, 1912. Film.


Schumm, Walter, Farrell Webb, Carlos Castelo, Cynthia Akagi, Erick Jensen, Rose Ditto, Elaine
Spencer-Carver, and Beverlyn Brown. “Enhancing Learning in Statistics Classes
Through the Use of Concrete Historical Examples: The Space Shuttle Challenger, Pearl

1941. Film.

Shaw, George Bernard. Caesar and Cleopatra. 1898. New York: Herbert S. Stone and
Company, 1900. Print.


Leachman. EMI Films, 1979. Film.


and Son, 1912.


Strobl, Gerwin. “‘Zum Rehme Englands:’ The ‘Vorgeschichte’ of the Nazi Film *Titanic.*” *German Life and Letters* 60.2 (2007): 196-211. Print.


