

Singing Over the Bones: James Cameron's *Titanic*

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□—*Taking issue with accounts of the 1997 film Titanic that denigrate the love story in favor of the technological rendering of the ship's sinking, we historicize the film within cultural myths surrounding the original Titanic, as well as within three classical myths—"Pygmalion and Galatea," "Tristan and Iseult," and "Eros and Psyche"—recovering the gendered tensions between romantic love and technological progress. We then show how Cameron, by allowing the action to flow from the memory of Old Rose, casts his film as a feminine descent that constrains the masculine excesses of technology by rehumanizing cultural myths of romantic love.*

"She said babe, you're just a wave you're not the water."

—Butch Hancock (1993)

It's 1:05 a.m. on September 1st, 1985, somewhere in the North Atlantic. On board the U.S. oceanographic research ship *Kuor*, the graveyard shift surveys the eerie imagery of the ocean floor beamed back from the tiny submersible *Argo* 12,500 feet below. Taking a short break in his cabin, project director Robert Ballard relieves his boredom by reading Chuck Yeager's autobiography. "As I began to read," he recalls, "my mind soon left the ocean depths and was soaring into the stratosphere."

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Suddenly, back in the control van, Stu Harris freezes. "There's something," he says hesitantly, gazing at the television monitor. Seconds pass.

"Wreckage!" Bill Lange shouts. More seconds. More ghostly shapes. Now there's no question.

"Bingo!"

"Yeah!"

The entire "Watch of the Quiet Excellence" breaks its vigil with "shrieks and war whoops" of success. On the sonar Lieutenant Rey reports, "I'm getting a hard contact."

Seconds later Ballard bursts into the van and frantically rewinds the tape. He stares in disbelief as *Argo's* camera floats over the murky outline of a massive ship's boiler. The chief explorer knows there's only one ship down there that could house boilers this monstrous; after 73 years, at 2:00 a.m., very near the time that it sank, *R.M.S. Titanic* is found! Ballard can only murmur, "God Damn. God Damn."

Twenty minutes later he makes his way to the fantail of the *Knott* where others have gathered. Raising a Harland and Wolff flag in honor of the Belfast shipyard that built the *Titanic*, he calls for a moment of silence. "Thank you all," he says, "Now let's get back to work."

Several days later a sleepless Ballard breaks off a radio interview with Tom Brokaw to choke back his emotion:

I'm not a particularly religious person, but I suppose you could say this was a religious moment, similar perhaps to the impromptu memorial service held . . . the night of our discovery a mere four and [a] half days ago. It was as if those who had perished aboard the *Titanic* could finally rest. That's how I felt.

Benediction delivered, Ballard-the-hero can finally sleep as his ship steers for shore (Ballard, 1987, pp. 132–137; 154).

An old woman who goes by many names, chief among them *La Loba*, Wolf Woman, lives in a hidden desert place that everyone knows but few have seen. She doesn't seem to want much company. Her sole work is the collecting of bones. Most especially, she saves that which is in danger of being lost to the world, sifting through the mountains and dry riverbeds, looking for remains. Her cave is full of parts of broken creatures—crows, rattlesnakes, deer—but wolves, they say, are her specialty. She creeps and crawls until she has assembled an entire gleaming white framework and every last bone is in place; then she sits by the fire to decide which song to sing. When she has precisely the right one,

she stands over the skeleton and raises her arms. As she sings, the animal starts to flesh out and sprout fur. She sings some more, and the desert shakes, the creature grows a tail, breathes, opens its eyes, leaps up, and runs away. Whether by its speed, or its splashing into a river, or a ray of sun or moonlight hitting it just so, the wolf becomes a laughing woman, and if you are out there, you might see her running free toward the horizon. Thus does *La Loba*, "by descending into the deepest mood of great love and feeling," breathe her soul voice into what is ailing or in need of restoration. This is singing over the bones (Estes, 1992, pp. 27–28).

Ever since the *Titanic* sank on April 15, 1912, it has been a magnet, not only for fantasies about finding its remains, but for myths about modernity. As Steven Biel (1996) carefully documents, although the disaster changed nothing tangible except shipping regulations, it did produce a contest over meaning of amazing longevity, "a kind of 'social drama' in which conflicts were played out and American culture in effect thought out loud about itself" (p. 8). Such a spectacular failure was bound to leave "a nagging sense of incompleteness about the unconsummated 'maiden voyage'" and to inaugurate a medley of attempts to bring it to a satisfactory completion (p. 203). The celebrations of chivalric self-sacrifice, particularly of the first-class men, for example, upheld "the rule of the sea" (women and children first), undermining women's fight for the vote and labor's stirrings of class antagonism. Such heroism pressed for a redemptive conclusion based upon *noblesse oblige* and the male "Anglo Saxon ideal" (pp.

23–58). Moralists saw the catastrophe as a fateful sign of the hubris of a progressive age, a “terrific and ghastly illustration of what things come to when men throw God out at the door and take a golden calf in at the window,” as Protestant minister Charles H. Parkhurst put it (quoted in Biel, p. 64). Yet noble death to the strains of a Christian hymn stripped away the taint of luxury and effeminacy threatening the images of wealthy men, restoring “the true nature of things” as a feminine microcosm of frills gave way “to a masculine world of seriousness, strength, and authentic experience,” reclaiming Protestantism from its feminine influence in one swift act of God (p. 76).

In his still never-out-of-print 1958 best-seller, *A Night to Remember*, Walter Lord marked the calamity as the “end of an era,” a tragedy of world-historical significance announcing a new “Age of Anxiety,” yet one in which the atomic era could be veiled by the memory of “a quainter kind of disaster” (Biel, 1996, pp. 154–157). *Titanic* buffs, verging on the fanatical, have sanctified the event as an alternative church with saints, heretics, relics, and pilgrimages, combating uncertainty by mastering every bit of arcania there is to know about the ship and its fate, and by harboring a fierce nostalgia for a more innocent time (pp. 174–203). Furthermore, film, fiction, and advertising have rewritten the incident as a resolution of marital conflict (p. 203), paeans to the ideology of domestic consumerism (pp. 162–163), a restoration of masculine American strength after its “decline” during the Jimmy Carter era (pp. 205–207), and even a triumphant “raising” of the old ship as a signature of Ronald Reagan’s America (pp. 206–208).

Not surprisingly, the majority of these attempts to penetrate the mysteries of the *Titanic* have been made by men (p. 205). When Ballard found the wreckage, he satisfied Everyman’s desire and presumed the search was over, proclaiming “‘an ending to the unfinished maiden voyage’” (quoted in Biel, p. 209). Ordaining himself, he blessed the site and put the souls to rest. It is hard scientific discovery, apparently, that closes the final chapter on both the tragedy and the myth, for how can *mythos* survive *logos* when they find the bones?

As virtually everyone on planet Earth knows by now, this discovery in no way ended the *Titanic* mythologizing. James Cameron’s 1997 film has already become the highest-grossing movie of all time, earning over \$1.8 billion worldwide as of this writing (Box Office Statistics, 1999), garnering eleven Academy Awards, and expanding the original event’s appeal past Europe and the United States to the world (Riding, 1998). Cameron was as seduced by the submerged carcass of the ship as was Ballard, making numerous dives to photograph it, but in filming the movie, he confronted an aesthetic dilemma every bit as daunting as the scientific one of how to design and mount a camera on the outside of the Russian submersible that could film the wreck without wrecking the filmmaker (Parisi, 1998, p. 10): “What to say that hasn’t been said? . . . The only territory I felt had been left unexplored in prior films,” he wrote, “was the territory of the heart” (Marsh & Kirkland, 1997, p. vi).

In 1995 Cameron pitched his film concept to Twentieth-Century Fox as “Romeo and Juliet on a boat” (Parisi, 1998, p. 34). The press widely assumed that, as it plays out in the finished

product, the first aspect draws girls and women into the theatres, and the second at least allows boys and men to tolerate it; the film is "an epic two-hanky romance for the gals that doesn't neglect the guys, either" (Murray, 1997, p. 01P). Most reviewers bifurcate the themes, and although the reactions are diverse, more praise the boat part than the *Romeo and Juliet* part. The romance is repeatedly indulged or dismissed as "hokey," "Hollywood hokum," "hohum," "hoo-haw," or even "well-chosen Hollywood hokum" (Carr, 1997, p. E1; Guthmann, 1998, p. 33; Jones, 1998, pp. 20–25; Maslin, 1997, E1, p. 1; Murray, 1997, p. 01P; Pollitt, 1998, p. 9). It is a "tear-jerking but preposterous story of a love affair" (Johnson, 1997, p. D1), a cliché-ridden "Melrose Place: The Movie" (Nolan, 1998, p. A15) that pressures us to weep when we don't feel like it (Teitell, 1998, p. 37). Reviewers are much more impressed by the actual footage of the wreck and the astounding visual effects rendering of the disaster, claiming that, whereas Cameron's gift for romantic story-telling is lacking, "when it comes to large-scale action, this filmmaker knows the ropes" (Johnson, 1997, p. D1); that "when the ship does hit the berg, we are immediately compensated for the padding . . . [of] a ship-board romance" (Millar, 1997, p. 1); and that the destruction finally reached in the last section brings the film "paradoxically to life" (Jones, 1998, pp. 22; see also Gerstel, 1997, p. D1).

But neither the fondness of males for disaster and technological wizardry, nor the painful ecstasy of teenage girls who still have not forgiven Kate Winslet for hogging the last piece of debris can alone explain the cultural importance of this film. Rather, there is "titanic"

energy released in the collision of the two forces captured in the film's pithy pitch phrase. Finding the bones, as did both Ballard and Cameron, is a big part of the picture, but it does not put the souls to rest, and it does not by itself bring this film to life. Rather, the skeleton must be gathered, piled up, assembled, and sung over. The heart of Cameron's treatment is the luminous crone, Old Rose, who, like La Loba, breathes flesh onto the wreck through the telling of her own love story, which is anything but dispensable. Only through her act can the *Titanic* be properly interred.

We are not predicting that the *Titanic* phenomenon will not rise again. The myths generated in its wake are too much a part of our cultural lore not to crest another time. Though this *Titanic* is yet another man's quest for closure, it is a significant retelling of the myth. For the energies enfolded in the phrase "Romeo and Juliet on a boat"—romantic love and technological progress—are related in Western culture and in the film so that the first compensates for the terrible price of the second. That is, technological progress dominates and distorts inner reality by valuing only outer, material experience. Romantic love is our culture's most potent attempt to retain the inner life run roughshod by progress—spirituality, soul, and "the feminine," especially as these are constellated in the masculine psyche. But progress colors romance too, so that we try to live it as an outer, not an inner, event; thus, not even this form of ecstasy can heal the technological wound. Cameron's *Titanic* turns romantic love outside in. His film crafts a feminine, spiritual antidote to technological progress by descending to the dis-membered "bones" of its namesake, re-membering them

through a wise old woman's tale, and burying them correctly.

Cameron didn't invent *Titanic's* innovations out of thin air. In most of his previous work, he has been exploring "the idea of human beings' relationship with technology, how it can be good, how it can be bad, and how it can kind of turn around and bite you" (quoted in Chambers, 1998, p. 37). Rare among Hollywood filmmakers, he has dramatized technology through several motifs that could have proven commercially disastrous. One foregrounds the tough, smart woman of action—Sarah Conner in *The Terminator* (1984) and *Terminator II: Judgment Day* (1991), Ellen Ripley in *Aliens* (1984), Lindsey Brigman in *The Abyss* (1989), and now Rose DeWitt Bukater in *Titanic*. Another reverses the spatial direction of the heroic quest. Typically, the contemporary masculine hero moves out, across, or up the landscape or sky, but Cameron's heroes are more likely to undergo a ritual *descent* to a place more hellish than alluring. Ripley goes down in an underground factory to meet the mother of all off-world monsters; Brigman dives to the bottom of the ocean to defuse a nuclear bomb; *The Terminator's* Kyle Reese comes back through time to find Sarah Conner; and, of course, Rose rescues a man from steerage and descends to the wrecked ship in her memory. Such descents are more common in female myths, such as Inanna, Persephone and Demeter, and Eros and Psyche, and their initiatory task is usually one of submission, discernment, and individuation rather than colonization—in other words, the opposite of masculine, progressive pride (Downing, 1994; Johnson, 1976; Perera, 1981; Rushing, 1989). Finally, romantic love often en-

ables Cameron's characters to ameliorate technological apocalypse.

Titanic revisits all these themes. This time, however, Cameron does not just draw from their mythic origins, but rather reworks their gendered meanings so that a feminine descent illuminates and alters masculine awareness. So, if we begin with the historical forms of the myths related to "Romeo and Juliet on a boat," we should be in a position to understand how they evolve in this film. We will then be able to climb back on board *Titanic* better prepared to grasp how Old Rose's memories provide a more promising way to stay afloat on the tools of our own making.

Mythic Origins

Three myths serve as touchstones for our analysis of *Titanic*. All entail, not a heroic outward or upward movement, but a descent of sorts, as the first two are about falling in love, and the last tells of a heroine's literal journey into Hades. From Roman antiquity we look first at "Pygmalion and Galatea," the template for *My Fair Lady* as well as for many real-life male-female relationships, because it clearly shows the construction of the feminine as a projection of male desire, a theme observable in *Titanic* both in young Rose and in the "Ship of Dreams" itself. The Arthurian legend of "Tristan and Iseult," reincarnated in *Romeo and Juliet*, can be seen as recompense for the scientific-technological attitude already burgeoning in the Middle Ages, and also as an illustration of why the cult of romantic love, conceived primarily from the masculine point of view, perpetuates rather than cures the problem. Finally, the Greek tale of "Eros and Psyche" views erotic love and individuation

from a female perspective, bearing the closest resemblance to the story that Old Rose recalls on her oceanic voyage, and taking us to a potentially healing understanding of what to do about our capacity for technological self-destruction.

Pygmalion and Galatea

Pygmalion, a gifted sculptor from Cyprus, hated women. As Ovid puts it, he "detest[ed] the faults beyond measure which nature has given to women" (quoted in Hamilton, 1940/1969, p. 108). Resolving never to marry, he nevertheless sculpted all of his genius into an exquisite statue of a woman: "Either he could not dismiss what he so disapproved of from his mind as easily as from his life, or else he was bent on forming a perfect woman and showing men the deficiencies of the kind they had to put up with" (p. 108). He labored long, but could not be content, working on the statue daily until no woman ever born could approach its beauty. When at last it was perfected, he fell deeply, passionately in love with the thing he had made, but the figure could not respond to his kiss or caress, remaining cold and passive beneath his touch. Playing with her like a toy, he would dress her in rich clothes and bring her the gifts maidens love, tucking her in at night like girls do their dolls, imagining that she was pleased, but he loved a lifeless thing, and at last gave up, hopelessly wretched. Venus was curious about this strange sort of lover and decided to help him. When he prayed to her, he asked only to find a woman like his statue, but Venus knew what he *really* wanted. One day when he returned home, "[T]here she stood on her pedestal, entrancingly beautiful" (p. 110).

Suddenly he felt his touch returned, when he kissed her lips they grew soft, and when he clasped her wrist, he felt her blood pulse. With unspeakable joy, "He put his arms around his love and saw her smile into his eyes and blush" (p. 111). Pygmalion named his lover Galatea, Venus herself graced their marriage with her presence, and we do not know what happened after that except that their son, Paphos, lent his name to Venus' favorite city.

Disdaining all real women, Pygmalion crafts his own inner vision and falls in love with it—just as Henry Higgins does with Eliza Doolittle, just as *Blade Runner's* Eldon Tyrell does with the replicant Rachel,¹ and just as many men in everyday life do who would rather make over a mate to suit their own internal fantasies than to relate to a flesh-and-blood woman. Although she does not base her analysis on "Pygmalion and Galatea," Polly Young-Eisendrath's description of the "Maiden Lover" archetype in the male psyche as "a longing for oneself in the opposite sex" is *apropos*. The man projects the "feminine" qualities that he disavows in himself onto a woman. He imagines her as the soul-mate whom he will "bring . . . into herself" by guiding and helping her, and he loves her for her potential to match or mirror him (1993, pp. 88–89): "The self-conscious emotions of pride, envy, jealousy, and embarrassment fuel this complex with narcissistic motives to reproduce what is loved in oneself and to avoid what is detested and depreciated" (p. 88). This match-mate may be Amazonian, like Ripley of the *Aliens* series and Sarah Conner of the *Terminator* films who, unlike their mythic predecessors, are tutored to wage the man's battles. Or they may be the more

traditionally "feminine" object of sexual desire as we will see in *Titanic*.

However, Pygmalion and Galatea's relationship only works through divine intervention, belying what so often happens to mortal lovers. How convenient that their story ends with marriage because, especially if the story veers towards *A Star is Born*, the Maiden Lover eventually not only equals but outstrips her mate, she climbs down from the pedestal of his soul-projection, and their union is fraught with strife. For once she is complete in her own right, what further need does she have for a master craftsman? The problem with mortal Pygmalions and Galateas is that her sole purpose is to fulfill *his* desire, not her own, and thus any transformation from object to subject ruins the bliss. The man in this story remains unconscious that his soul-projection is just that; he is unable to separate his inner feminine from outer-world women and so loses a realistic relationship to both. This dominating attitude toward things feminine is endemic to technological narcissism, which makes or makes over what it cannot accept on its own terms.

Tristan and Iseult

The story of Tristan and Iseult tells "a high tale of love and death," of joy and sorrow, of "how they loved each other, and how at last, they died of that love together upon one day; she by him and he by her" (Johnson, 1983, p. 1).² In the days of King Arthur, Blanchefleur, King Mark of Cornwall's only sister, wed King Rivalen of Lyonesse. When Rivalen was ambushed and killed, Blanchefleur lost her will to live, but before she died gave birth to a son whom she named Tristan. Hidden away from his enemies for his entire childhood, Tristan was eventually

found by King Mark, who fathered him into adulthood.

Tristan grew into a brave warrior who fought on behalf of Cornwall. Wounded by a poison barb from a giant he killed, Tristan sought out the giant's sister, the Queen of Ireland, and her daughter, sorceresses who alone could cure him. The daughter, Iseult the Fair, wished Tristan dead but, seeing that he was of noble blood, healed him instead. He returned home and learned that King Mark needed a queen to complete his kingdom. One day an eagle dropped a long golden hair into his hand. The king would have no other woman than the damsel of the golden hair, who Tristan knew to be Iseult the Fair. Obtaining Iseult as payment for killing a dragon, he set sail for Cornwall to bring Iseult to King Mark.

But on board ship, Iseult's maid, Brangien, mistakenly gave Tristan and Iseult a flask of wine magically prepared by Iseult's mother to make her fall passionately in love with Mark on their wedding night, a state that would last for three years. Drunk with love, Tristan and Iseult embraced. Brangien implored them to stop, crying hopelessly that "now henceforth forever never shall you know joy without pain again . . . for through me and in that cup, you have drunk not love alone, but love and death mixed together" (p. 41). However, an immortal desire worked in the lovers and Tristan welcomed the mixture: "Well, then, let come Death!" and the two "gave themselves up utterly to love" as the ship carried them to Cornwall and Iseult's intended husband (p. 42).

Iseult married King Mark but secretly sent Brangien to his bed in her place while Tristan compromised his loyalty to Mark with secret trysts with Iseult. Several times caught, the lovers

barely escaped and fled to a forest where they lived and loved for three years, paying no heed to their deteriorating physical condition. Led to their hut, King Mark planned to kill them, but seeing them lying so chastely, Tristan's naked sword between them, he instead placed a ring on Iseult's finger and exchanged Tristan's sword with his own. Overcome with conscience, Iseult returned to the King, and Tristan traveled far away. But before parting, Iseult gave Tristan a green jasper ring, so that if he should ever bid her, she would know it was him and would come "wisdom or folly" (p. 89).

For a time, Iseult lived happily with Mark, and Tristan served a new King, Kaherdin of Carhaix, who, in a gesture of friendship, gave his sister, Iseult of the White Hands, to marry Tristan, and he was alive again loving her. But on their wedding night the jasper ring fell off his finger, he remembered Iseult the Fair, and he refused to consummate the marriage. Beset with jealousy and doubt, he went back to Cornwall, only to find that Iseult accused him of the same faithlessness. Forgiving each other, they deceived Mark once again, and the palace guards grew so suspicious that Tristan had to flee. Iseult vowed that should this world take Tristan in death she would follow him to the next. Returning to Carhaix, Tristan was mortally wounded in battle. He sent for Iseult the Fair, telling Kaherdin that she must come to him "for we drank our death together and to remember the oath I swore to serve a single love, for I have kept that oath" (p. 125). If Kaherdin returned with Iseult the Fair, he should show a white sail, but if she refused to come, a black sail. However, Iseult of the White Hands overheard the pact and took her revenge. When the weakened Tristan asked the color of the sail, she told

him it was black, and he died. When Iseult the Fair reached the palace, she kissed Tristan, and then, as she had vowed to do, gave up her soul and died of grief beside him.

According to Robert Johnson, the epic tale of Tristan and Iseult marks the abrupt appearance of the cult of heterosexual romantic or courtly love in the Middle Ages (1983, p. xiii). Tristan is "the firstborn of our modern race" arising in the twelfth century when the seeds of our modern scientific attitude were planted. Thus, his problems and his losses are ours. Blanchelleur's tragic death in a masculine world of war leaves Tristan, which means "the child of sadness," bereft of almost all feminine traces (pp. 16-17). Growing up away from women, he becomes a warrior, a precursor to the ubiquitous "action-adventure" heroes of today. Tristan lives exclusively in this masculine realm until he accidentally falls in love with Iseult.

Accidents are usually propitious in myths, however, and though Western man has trouble coping with romantic love because it is "out of control," that is, he *falls* in love, such transport is what he unknowingly wants—"to be ecstatic, lifted out of the sterile confines of our tight little ego worlds." In short, he desires what is usually called "religious experience" (pp. 57-58), but because this would constrain the unfettered masculine ideal, he either represses or displaces its energies. "We aren't consciously interested in wholeness," writes Johnson, "only in production, control, and power," and so the spiritual instinct migrates into the one place we make for it, romantic love. Though it has always existed, it thus expands into "the single greatest energy system in the Western psyche" (pp. 55, xi). At least in the love be-

tween men and women, both lovers require that an opposite-gendered person shoulder the inner lives they shun. However, because the cultural ethos is increasingly masculine, the compensatory arena of romance comes to be considered feminine, as we have already seen in the reactions to *Titanic*, as well as in the assumptions that "weepies" and romantic comedies are women's genres, and that the woman in an action film is not the narrative center, but a "love interest" or a "love object." Man's greatest desires set sail on a feminine vessel.

The troubadours—poets of romantic love *extraordinaire*—knew intuitively that romance is a projected form of spiritual energy, for in courtly love, the knight and his lady touched only each other's soul (pp. 52–53). These spiritualized lovers had no physical relationship (her marriage to another was a formidable barrier); rather, the woman carried the knight's soul into a heavenly realm. When Tristan and Iseult meet in King Mark's garden, she muses that the castle grounds are magical. He replies:

No, . . . this is not the enchanted orchard. But, one day, friend, we shall go together to a fortunate land from which none returns. There rises a castle of white marble; at each of its thousand windows burns a lighted candle; at each a minstrel plays and sings a melody without end; the sun does not shine there but none regrets his light: it is the happy land of the living. (Bedier, 1945; quoted in Johnson, 1983, p. 84)

Here Tristan conjures up the world of the psyche outside time and space. This is an image of the whole self that can only be lived inwardly. But Tristan and Iseult make the tragic mistake of trying to dwell physically with each other in the "enchanted orchard," denying the morality of human loyalty

and commitment to the embodied people in their outer world (pp. 98, 104). In so doing they violate the everyday relationships with King Mark and with Iseult of the White Hands that could have brought them lasting happiness.

When a man expects a physical woman to carry his soul—to be his Maiden Lover—the relationship is bound to disappoint, for no woman can do this once the projections fall away. This demand also effects a split in our culture's feelings about women. On the one hand, man begins to see woman as the embodiment of purity and the sacred, "My Lady Soul." On the other, she is made to bear his own rejected qualities, so emotionalism, irrationality, softness, and weakness—closer to his unconscious than to her being—are thought to be her exclusive domain: "It still hasn't occurred to Western man to stop looking on woman as the symbol of something," muses Johnson, "and to begin seeing her simply as a woman—as a human being" (p. 71).

Because of this impossible requirement that a physical lover uphold one's soul, suffering and death seem inseparable from romance. In fact, "passion" originally meant "to suffer," and we indeed pursue suffering, even death, as though we could not do without it (p. 147). Romance "seems to require that it be lived in the face of impossible odds, terrible obstacles, and inhuman adversities" (p. 148). Tristan courts death the moment he gives in to his desire for Iseult. When Juliet waits for Romeo to come to her, she imagines him dead and "cut out in little stars" so that his brightness would put to shame "the garish sun" (Shakespeare, 1948/1968, p. 494). In Romeo's famous invocation before he must leave Juliet or be

found and killed, he cries:

Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death,
I am content, so thou wilt have it so. . . .
Come, death, and welcome! Juliet wills it
so. (p. 498)

Nor are we postmoderns immune to such sentiments, as not only *Titanic*, but other favorites such as *West Side Story*, *The Terminator*, *Out of Africa*, and *The English Patient* readily attest. Kyle Reese's and Sarah Connor's love is all the more erotic because of the "terrible obstacles and inhuman adversities" they face and because we intuit that one or both must die. The "land of death" is the inner world of the soul, and its deepest unconscious meaning is the transformation of the ego as it "give[s] up its tiny empire in order to live in the immensity of the greater universe" (Johnson, 1983, p. 151). But such a shift can only happen when we suffer consciously and voluntarily (p. 155). When we look for the spiritual realm unconsciously in romantic love, denying the reasons we seek out this place sheltered from the hard rain of our own progress, we are doomed to suffer and die again and again, like Tristan and Iseult, producing nothing. As a restorative for technological excesses, the cult of romantic love, though so full of "sweet sorrow," bears bitter fruit.

Eros and Psyche

Psyche was the youngest and most beautiful of a king's three daughters, so extraordinary so that people said she was the new Aphrodite.³ She was lonely, though, being worshipped by all but courted by none. Distressed at his daughter's unwed state, the king sought Apollo's oracle and heard a terrible judgment from the jealous Aphrodite; Psyche would be married to

Death. With heavy hearts, Psyche's family took her to a mountaintop where she was to be ravished by this most horrible creature. Aphrodite even sent her son Eros to enflame Psyche with love for the beast, but Psyche was so exquisite that Eros fell in love with her himself. He decided to make her his bride and asked the West Wind to lift her from the mountain into the Valley of Paradise. Here Psyche found heaven on earth, a place where her god-husband was with her every night and she could have anything she desired. He asked only that she not look at him nor question his identity, or he would go away and her child would be born mortal and female.

However, Psyche's two sisters, envious of her good fortune, claimed that her husband was an ugly serpent, and that she must put a lamp and a knife by their bedside, see him for what he really was, and sever his head while he slept. One night, she uncovered the lamp and stood transfixed by this god of love, the most beautiful on all Olympus. So shaken that she considered killing herself, she dropped the knife, accidentally pricked herself on one of his arrows, and fell in love just as a drop of hot oil woke him. Winged Eros took flight with Psyche clinging to him in despair. He bore her out of Paradise until, exhausted, she fell to earth. Eros alighted nearby, reiterated his admonishment, and flew back to his mother.

Psyche wanted to drown herself, but the cloven-footed god Pan convinced her to pray to Aphrodite instead. After a blistering condemnation, Aphrodite set Psyche four tasks as a condition for her redemption. First, she must sort an enormous pile of seeds before nightfall or die. Dismayed, she almost gave up, but ants heard of her dilemma and sorted the seeds for her. Second, she had to cross a river and gather some

golden fleece from the fierce rams there, and be back by nightfall or again she would die. Once more she collapsed and thought of drowning herself, but the reeds at the river's edge told her to go at dusk and take some of the wool from the brambles that the rams often passed. Having then succeeded twice, Psyche was set a much more difficult task by Aphrodite: she was to fill a crystal goblet with water from the river Styx, whose banks were guarded by monsters who would kill anyone venturing near. Again Psyche broke down, but now an eagle of Zeus got the water for her, and once more Psyche passed Aphrodite's test. Her fourth task was the hardest of all. She must descend into the underworld and get a caak of Persephone's beauty ointment. Once more, Psyche considered death, but this time a tower offered advice: she was to take two coins in her mouth and two pieces of bread in her hands. She must refuse to assist a lame donkey driver who would ask her to pick up sticks, pay the ferryman at the river Styx with one of the coins, ignore the groping hand of a dying man as he reached up out of the water, and refuse to assist three women weaving the threads of fate. She was told to toss one of the pieces of bread to the three-headed dog, Cerberus, who guarded the entrance to Hell, and to go in while the heads were quarreling. She must eat only the simplest food while there and then repeat the entire process on the way back. Psyche retrieved the ointment and started on her return. But suddenly, she was overcome by curiosity: if this substance would be so beneficial to Aphrodite, why not for her, too? She opened the caak, a fatal sleep came out of it, and she fell to the ground as if dead.

Sensing that his beloved was in dan-

ger, Eros flew to Psyche, wiped the sleep away, put it back into the jar, snatched Psyche up, and whisked her to Olympus. There he implored Zeus to make her a goddess, and, her former nemesis' tasks having been done so well, Aphrodite could hardly object. So Eros and Psyche married, and she gave birth to a girl, whom they named Pleasure, but whom we today call Ecstasy.

Although marrying Death seems dreadful, it is this end to her maidenhood that forces Psyche to evolve into a mature woman (Johnson, 1976, p. 23; Neumann, 1956/1971). She must give up her self-absorbed preoccupation with beauty, especially with being the object of male desire, and grow up. When she does marry, Eros works hard to keep her unconscious, forbidding her to look at him or to know what he does (Johnson, 1976, p. 26; Neumann, 1956/1971, pp. 70-71). When she pricks her finger (once again accidentally), given that her husband is Eros, we could say that she falls in love with love, or that, similar to Pygmalion, Tristan, and Iseult, she is blinded by her own projections, "seeing Eros in his role as the god of love rather than as a person she knows and loves for himself" (Johnson, 1976, pp. 33-34).

Once Psyche develops the strength to light the lamp of consciousness, once she sees her husband for who he is; or, if we regard him as her inner masculine, once she knows the masculine part of herself, he can no longer dominate her and keep her from growing (p. 27). At first, Eros is furious, for he has lost his compliant wife, and he makes her suffer terribly: "Yet the very act of being torn to bits by being in love presents its own possibility of solution. If one has the strength and courage for it, out of this dismemberment may

come a new consciousness of one's own uniqueness and worth" (p. 38). When Sarah Conner loses Kyle Reese toward the end of *The Terminator*, for example, she takes things into her own hands and later seeks the warrior training she needs as we learn in *Terminator 2*.

At first, Psyche cannot do what is required of her. When she thinks she has lost her husband, she wants to die; in fact, she despairs every time she is faced with a difficult task. When "touched by a god or a goddess," which is what it feels like when one is romantically in love, "most people suffer and endure the fading of the godlike vision of the beloved, settle down into the humdrum of middle age, and think that their vision of a superhuman quality was all a bit foolish anyway" (p. 40). But each time Psyche considers death, she instead sacrifices one level of consciousness for another (p. 43). Her feminine alternative to depression or acquiescence to a boring life, as well as her refusal to "enliven" her life tragically, as Tristan and Iseult did, fuels the remarkable power of this story.

So unlike the masculine hero who believes he must literally either *do* or *die*, Psyche just sits down and waits, and always, help comes. The ants sort the piles, the reeds explain how to get the fleece, the eagle fetches the water, and the tower guides her in and out of Hades. All of these helpers may well be Eros who, "now back in the inner world and no longer with Psyche in a state of unconscious animus possession, is able to mediate for her and to aid her in finding the strength and wisdom she needs to accomplish her tasks" (p. 48; see also Neumann, 1956/1971, pp. 76, 80). Psyche learns not only how to get things done, but what is worth doing. It is also *her* labor that strengthens *him* out of his boyish and

trickster characteristics, and makes him worthy of being her mate. She matures him, and he, in turn, redeems her (Johnson, 1976, p. 74; Neumann, 1956/1971, p. 91). Although she can now be a true partner to her husband, and they will create the ecstasy so sought after but denied Tristan and Iseult, Psyche is now a whole woman, for herself and not for or in the image of her husband. There is much of Psyche in *Titanic's* Rose.

Mythic Reinventions in *Titanic*

Cameron's *Titanic* sets the familiar story of machine-age apocalypse in a narrative context of hope. In terms of the three myths discussed, the film reworks "Pygmalion and Galatea" and "Tristan and Iseult" through "Eros and Psyche." That is, as a feminine antidote to technological progress, the story of Jack and Rose transforms romantic love into a human relationship in which Jack (Eros) helps Rose (Psyche) to live a fulfilled life. As Karen Schoemer says, "it's Rose's transformation that keeps people coming back" (1998, p. 64). Furthermore, because Rose is symbolically tied to the ship, the "maiden voyage" is completed in an original way. We look first at how the film's documentary strategies create an aura of historical realism, enacting in style the aid that the masculine gives the feminine in the narrative. We then consider two competing versions of mythic descent in the film showing how the feminine one suburnes the masculine. The stage is thus set for the humanization of romantic love as Rose, originally linked to the ship as Galatea, evolves into a mature Psyche through her love for Jack. We conclude by pondering what all this "weepee" stuff has to do with

the pressing cultural problems of technological arrogance.

Documentary Realism

Titanic opens with slow motion, sepia-toned images of people waving from the ship, easing us immediately into the style of documentary realism, nostalgically recalling the time when newreel shorts preceded feature attractions. Suddenly, the screen dissolves to inky blue images of a submerged capsule darting toward us, almost beckoning, then dropping down to the bottom of the ocean to reveal a ghostly shipwreck that everyone already knows is the "real deal." Two important motifs are thus established in the opening shots: as in the *Terminator* films, the lines between past and present are more liquid than we sometimes think; and this version of the "big ship" story is authentic.

Cameron's first idea for the film was to connect the past to the present in a "wraparound" story; his journal notes from 1987 read: "'Do story with book-ends of present day scene of wreck using submersibles intercut with memory of a survivor and re-created scenes of the night of the sinking'" (quoted in Parisi, 1998, p. 8). This mission eventually accomplished, he conjectures, "I thought this would connect the event to our time, and through the doorway of [Rose's] memory invest it with an added layer of poignancy" (Cameron, in Marsh & Kirkland, 1997, p. viii). In many ways, Old Rose seems to be a composite of the elderly survivors, almost all female, retelling the story in the documentaries that flooded TV during the film's reign. This permeability between past and present, history and fiction, is maintained throughout the film with intercuts and dissolves. When Old Rose is trying to snare her

memories while aboard the *Keldysh*, she looks on the TV monitor at the real ruins of the door to the Grand Ballroom, the ship comes alive for a second as the doorman greets her, and then we are back on the research vessel as she loses the thread. As Rose and Jack share their first kiss while "flying" on the prow, the moment fades to blue and dissolves to the *Keldysh* where Old Rose says wistfully, "That was the last time *Titanic* ever saw daylight." She looks at the blue bedroom of the ghost ship which blossoms again into the full colors of the suite where Jack sketches Rose. As he completes her portrait, young Rose's eye becomes that of her older self as she tells her story, and the screen cuts back to Jack signing his work of art.

The lines between the real and fictional *Titanic* are blurred still further by Cameron's already legendary attention to authenticity. "This project started with an expedition to the real *Titanic*," he explains, "Everything else had to rise to that level of dedication" (quoted in Marsh & Kirkland, 1997, p. 13). He wanted to put the audience in a "time machine" standing on the deck, with all the officers, lifeboats, band members, and so forth in their right places (p. vi). His uncompromising position brought more than one anxious studio executive to the set to tame Cameron's obsession while, on the other hand, it delighted *Titanics* everywhere: a ship built to 90% scale in Baja California, Mexico; three-and-a-half million pounds of steel, thirty thousand rivets, fifteen thousand sheets of plywood, and several tons of paint; interiors facilitated by blueprints and archives from Harland and Wolff; thousands of props exactly duplicating the opulence of the originals; costumes that incorporated actual fabrics from 1912

clothing; a girl's doll whose porcelain face "ends up" in actual footage of the ship's debris field; the fragment of carved paneling that saves Rose, painstakingly copied from one retrieved from the ocean; actors selected for their uncanny resemblance to their historical counterparts—all to be destroyed (except the actors, of course) in a final deluge of twenty-two million gallons of water (pp. 13–41). *Titanic* historians Ken Marschall and Don Lynch, received on the set like royalty for their own meticulously recreated paintings and historical knowledge, were fans of the 1959 film version of *A Night to Remember*, up until then a high point for them and other buffs for its accuracy. Next to *Titanic*'s set, Marschall thought, the earlier work looked like a "child's production" (Parisi, 1998, p. 127).

This unswerving commitment to historical accuracy, combined with Cameron's "you are there" style, creates a sense of documentary realism that legitimates *this* story as "true." That is, this film employs space-age technology and objective observation, both associated with "masculine" ways of knowing, to up the verisimilitude factor of the "feminine" love story. The masculine thus drives the feminine to "be all that she can be"; "the boat" authenticates "Romeo and Juliet."

The Descents

In the opening plunge to the wreck-age, treasure hunter Brock Lovett records his exploits for the video he hopes to market when he finds the \$30-million blue diamond necklace thought to be lost with the ship: "Seeing her coming out of the darkness like a ghost ship still gets me every time. To see the sad ruin of the great ship, sitting here, where she landed at 2:30 in the morning of April 15, 1912, after her long fall

from the world above." The crew laughs, and Lewis Bodine (Lewis Abernathy, a companion on Cameron's dives) jibes, "You're so full of shit, boss." This trip is not the reverent pilgrimage it at first seems, and Lovett is what Bill Paxton, the actor who plays him, calls a "modern-day pirate" (Marsh & Kirkland, 1997, p. 6), perhaps modeled after Texas oilman "Cadillac Jack" Grimm who tried to turn his unsuccessful 1980 search for the *Titanic* into a publicity carnival (Ballard, 1987, pp. 68–82). In the film, the ghost ship materializes out of the dark, the submersible moves over it, and as a tethered ROV (Remote Operated Vehicle) suggestively penetrates the Hockley suite, Bodine exults, "We're in! We're in, Baby, we're there." When the ROV uncovers the safe believed to hold the "Heart of the Ocean," Lovett grins triumphantly, "It's payday, boys!" Back on the *Kelley*, as they train a video camera on the safe they hope holds the feminine treasure, Lovett orders breathlessly, "OK, crack her open!" As Johnson observes, "Our irreverent culture teaches us from childhood that nothing is holy, that nothing deserves our reverence, that everything in life can be reduced to either physical possession or a sex act" (1983, p. 176).

Boys will be boys, and these blend their sexual and exploitative impulses in the time-honored manner of the mythic frontiersman who "lays the land" for simultaneous pleasure and profit (Kolodny, 1975). Though Ballard did not see his search for the *Titanic* as an irreverent chance to plunder, Lovett's penetrative imagery closely resembles the real explorer's after-the-fact reflections that, "I'd dreamed of sending my soon-to-be-completed seeing-eye robot vehicle

down the *Titanic's* staircase" (1987, p. 13). Ballard and his comrades employed various hi-tech probes, all with male names like "*Alvin*" and "*Jason, Jr.*," to go where no man had gone before. *Jason, Jr.* dives "deep inside the *Titanic*, down the Grand Staircase, the fulfillment of a dream," Ballard writes. "Emerging from the black hole, our proud little robot soldier, an R2D2 of the deep, shone his lights toward our sub as we watched him approach on Big Bird's video" (p. 204). Penetrative pleasure elides into voyeurism as these "little soldiers" are imagined as a sort of ideal body/ego, extending the human male's ability not only to enter but to gaze: "It was almost as if our little robot had a mind of his own, seeming so deliberate and inquisitive. Martin was now controlling *JJ* with such skill that his floating eyeball had almost become an extension of his own body" (p. 217; see also Biel, 1996, pp. 209–211). As if paralleling some of Cameron's earlier films, then, Brock Lovett's descent follows a well laid-out path in enacting a feminine mythic pattern in a decidedly objectifying way.

However, there is a moment that gently brushes aside Lovett's profanation and subsumes the masculine exploitative descent within a feminine transformative one. We see well-worn hands shaping a round earthen pot on a wheel. Watching TV and seeing the drawing of herself as a girl of seventeen salvaged by Lovett's expedition, 100-year-old Rose Calvert phones Lovett who, hoping that she might hold the key to the diamond he has not found, invites her aboard the *Keldysh*. Once she is settled in, Bodine excitedly simulates the sinking to Rose on his computer:

OK, here we go. She hits the berg on the starboard side, right? She kinda bumps

along, punchin' holes like Morse code—dit-dit—along the side below the water line. Then the forward compartments start to flood. Now as the water level rises, it spills over the water-tight bulkheads, which unfortunately don't go any higher than E-deck. So now as the bow goes down, the stern rises up, slow at first, and faster and faster, until finally she's got her whole ass just stickin' up in the air, and it's a big ass, we're talking 20–30,000 tons. OK, now the hull's not designed to deal with that pressure. So what happens? SKRTTT!! She splits, right down to the keel, and the stern falls back, level, then as the bow sinks, it pulls the stern vertical, and then finally, detaches. Now the stern section just kinda bobs there like a cork for a coupla minutes, floods, and finally goes under about 2:20 a.m., two hours and 40 minutes after the collision. The bow section planes away, landing about a half a mile away going 20 to 30 knots when it hits the ocean floor. [sound effects] Pretty cool, huh?

Rose studies him wryly: "Thank you for that fine *forensic* analysis, Mr. Bodine. Of course, the experience of it was . . . somewhat different." William Goldman, Oscar-winning screenwriter of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *All the President's Men*, notes the centrality of this scene: "I think I started tearing up right about there. And throughout the ensuing swift three hours, I kept coming back to that recreation" (1998, p. 85).

Rose unfreezes her memory by looking at the sketch. She fondles the recovered comb decorated with a butterfly, symbol of feminine freedom, that she wore when Jack urged her to flee the cocoon of her engagement. When Lovett prompts her to tell the story, Rose thinks back:

Rose: It's been 84 years.

Lovett: It's OK, just try to remember, anything—anything at all.

Rose: Do you want to hear this or not, Mr. Lovett? It's been . . . 84 years.

And I can still smell the fresh paint. The china had never been used. The sheets had never been slept in. *Titanic* was called the "Ship of Dreams." And it was. It *really* was.

As she enters the true mythic dream this is for her, the film dissolves to the soaring Leviathan outlined against the sky, the music swells, and we are in the midst of a bustling boarding crowd. From here on, it is this wise old woman's memory, not the explorers' technology, that frames the action, and her descent in time encapsulates their earlier descent in space. Old Rose is singing over the bones.

The Feminine Vessels

Until Rose decides to disembark with Jack when *Titanic* reaches New York, she and the ship are linked as feminine symbols of masculine projection; they are Galateas sculpted to fulfill the needs of men or Psyche before she marries "Death." Plowing through the water, the bow of this huge hunk of steel cutting two identical, roiling wakes, four gigantic funnels pointing skyward, *Titanic* may seem dynamically masculine, a replica rather than a match for its male makers. Young Rose even alludes to this at an early dinner conversation which includes the President of the White Star Line, Bruce Ismay, and Master Shipbuilder, Thomas Andrews. Molly Brown asks Ismay if he thought of the name *Titanic*:

Ismay: Well, yes, actually. I wanted to convey sheer size, and size means stability, luxury, and above all, strength.

Rose: Do you know of Dr. Freud, Mr. Ismay? His ideas about the male preoccupation with size might be of particular interest to you.

But we have always related to ships more as container than as tool. Traditional marine lore never refers to this or any other seafaring craft as "he," and the Ship of Dreams is certainly one of the most consistently potent vessels for men's contrasexual fantasies in twentieth-century Western culture. It is a complex inkblot in which we may detect every major way men commonly imagine women—every way, that is, except as whole and mature.

Womb-like sacs surrounded by water, ships evoke the peaceful prenatal state, and in this sense *Titanic* was for a few days an excellent mother. In fact, the early twentieth-century image of wealthy, pampered men, such as those who populated first class, was dangerously close to effete and parasitical (Biel, 1996, p. 42). With its unsurpassed luxury and space to kick around, this vessel was designed to make its passengers feel like they were in a floating hotel—totally insulated from the whims of nature, over-protected, even infantile. For the Euro-American hero, the lines between virile man and Mama's boy have long been a little too hazy, and as such, he has always had trouble separating Mother from adult female partner in his psyche and in his outer relationships (Kolodny, 1975; Rushing & Frenzt, 1995).

However, the *Titanic* is also a soul-mate, a target for a mixture of religious, virginal, and sexual longing, the name and shape of a cathedral's inner sanctum, the "nave," witnessing the associations between the "ship of God" guided toward Heaven by the clergy and the "Ship of Dreams" steered toward port by the captain. Both naves are a kind of chalice or Grail holding the promise of feminine and spiritual

ecstasy as did Galatea and Iseult the Fair. Old Rose first remembers the ship as chaste when she marvels over the sheets that had never been slept in, and this was the most dominant way the *Titanic* was remembered until it was found. This maiden was sculpted by men—"willed into solid reality," as Ismay says at dinner—and like Pygmalion it was hard for them to leave well enough alone. Ismay and Andrews traveled on the maiden voyage primarily to note *Titanic's* insufficiencies so it could be perfected for its return trip. Like contemporary men who enjoy a beauty contest or a spat between competing women, they wanted it to outdo its "sister ship," the *Olympic*, in finery and grace. A man-made Galatea, *Titanic* had all of the desirable qualities and none of the vexing ones of real women (or, more accurately, of the displaced inferior aspects of men), who were to be worshipped and put in the lifeboats first, but who were considered weak, dependent, and overly emotional (Biel, 1996, p. 24). At first, Rose plays into this conventional wisdom to protect her unsoiled reputation. After Jack saves her from leaping off the stern, she fabricates the story that she wanted to see one of the propellers, which works temporarily because of its girlish absurdity. "Like I said," a man from first class grumbles, "women and machinery do not mix."

As a hand-chiseled mate, *Titanic* could be controlled more reliably than a real one—pushed to fulfill men's dreams of mastery and speed. Ismay urges Captain Smith to go faster:

Smith: No, I don't see the need. We are making excellent time.

Ismay: The press knows the size of *Titanic*. Now I want them to marvel at her speed. We must give them something new to print. This maiden

voyage of *Titanic* must make headlines.

Smith: Mr. Ismay, I would prefer not to push the engines until they've been properly run in.

Ismay: Of course, I'm just a passenger. I leave it to your good offices to decide what's best. What a glorious end to your final crossing if we were to get into New York Tuesday night and surprise them all. Make the morning papers. Retire with a bang, E. J.?

The ornate carving on the first-class dining hall's Grand Staircase is, in the film as in the original, of "Honor and Glory Crowning Time," a somehow prescient indication of how the new publicity-driven century would "honor" time as the marker of technological efficiency, eventually reducing it to the same fragmented state as the sunken statue itself.

As Ismay's last line to Smith implies, *Titanic* as Galatea is romantically and sexually desired, at least before its voyage is consummated, while it still can be idealized and controlled. When young Rose snubs the big ship at first sight with, "I don't see what all the fuss is about. It doesn't look any bigger than the *Mauritania*," her fiance Cal Hockley upbraids her: "You can be blasé about certain things, Rose, but not about *Titanic*." Steaming west off the coast of Ireland, Captain Smith proudly commands his First Officer, "Take her to sea, Mr. Murdoch. Let's stretch her legs." In the male version of the descent, accounts of the search for the actual *Titanic* are saturated with the romantic lust that typically accompanies heroic exploration, and in this technological age, they are also mixed with science. "As much as anything . . . it was the scientific challenge of actually visiting and filming the *Titanic* that first captivated me," Ballard recalls,

"And yet the *Titanic* also appealed to a romantic part of my personality—the underwater adventurer, the submarine cowboy" (1987, p. 43). Before he found her, he "was not yet under her spell" (p. 44). Once he is hooked, however, the great liner calls him like the Lorelei luring him to a perilous fate. "*Titanic* was a dangerous mass of tangled wire and jagged metal," Parisi writes of Cameron's tenth dive, "Like any true beauty, her charm drew you in despite the obvious fact that familiarity could have wounding consequences" (1998, p. 76).

Indeed, finding her proves a mixed blessing—after all, romance fades when a person faces the real thing—and *Titanic* discovered was sometimes more—and less—than the frontiersmen bargained for. The first date is usually glorious. Charles Haas of the *Titanic* Historical Society said after seeing videotapes of the wreck, "It was like meeting an old girlfriend with whom you corresponded for many, many years and this was our first face-to-face meeting. . . . It was a very special feeling" (quoted in Biel, 1996, p. 210). But in Clive Cussler's 1976 best seller, *Raise the Titanic!*, Biel points out how hero Dirk Pitt and his team raise the ship, only to find that it is "a mess, like a hideous old prostitute who dwelt in dreams of better days and long-lost beauty . . ." (quoted in Biel, p. 207). On seeing the deck decimated by wood-boring mollusks, Ballard laments, "Gone was our hope of finding much *Titanic* woodwork intact, her beauty unblemished by the years" (1987, p. 190). "Though still impressive in her dimensions," he penned for *National Geographic*, "she is no longer the graceful lady that sank a mere five days into her maiden voyage. . . . Her beauty has faded" (quoted in Biel, 1996, pp. 209–

210). Ballard's fame hitched him even more surely to hers: "It seemed nice at the time—you know, she was cute, she was nice and all that sort of thing—but now I'm married to her and wondering if I made a mistake. And I can't just walk away from this one. She won't let me. . . . There is no divorcing the *Titanic*," he complained, "Ever" (p. 210).

Mother, virgin, maiden, sculpture, vixen, siren, whore, hag, nag. The *Titanic* is certainly a mixed bag of tricks for those who fall under her spell. This ship can seemingly be any kind of woman except Virgin in the original sense of "one-in-herself" unrelated to a man (Harding, 1971, p. 103). She cannot be whole as long as she serves men's unconscious needs, and her makers, captains, and explorers, within the movie and without, are anything but conscious about what these are. As the most modern of man-made maidens, *Titanic* was, in that famous paragon of denial, "unsinkable"; it would not descend to the depths, whether those be merely inconvenient "moods" or a more troublesome initiation into maturity. When Rose mocks Ismay for being unaware of his own pretensions, he mutters uncomfortably to the rest of his dinner party, "Freud, who is he, is he a passenger?"

Although perhaps not virginal, young Rose is tied to *Titanic* as a canvas for men's soul projections, although not those of the artist, Jack Dawson. Rather, the first man drawn to her is Brock Lovett who, like Kyle Reese, "comes across time" when he fishes her picture out of the elements—this time water rather than fire. Though he is mostly interested in the diamond necklace clearly visible in the drawing, which Cameron, who sketched it himself, calls "soulful" (Marsh & Kirkland, 1997, p. 117), Lovett encour-

ters the fortunate accident that in myth so often sets the unconscious hero on a road to transformation. It is difficult to tell whether Cal *has* a soul to project, but he certainly regards Rose as a possession to display and control, a sort of Galatea he can dress in pretty things and mold to his liking. He orders dinner for her prompting Molly Brown to ask, "You gonna cut her meat for her, too, there, Cal?" When Rose is impertinent to Ismay, Molly warns, "She's a pistol, Cal, hope you can handle her," to which Cal replies condescendingly, "I may have to start minding what she reads from now on, won't I, Mrs. Brown?" Of course, Rose's mother Ruth is Cal's ally, reminding her daughter that they will both be penniless if she doesn't marry Cal, and as Jack becomes a palpable threat, Cal's efforts to rein Rose in turn increasingly violent.

Rose is poised as a Galatea or a young Psyche, then, much like the ship she at first scorns, but her rebelliousness and curiosity, even before she meets Jack, suggest that Rose is already more mature than Psyche before she meets Eros. Old Rose cements the connection between her younger self and *Titanic* to the *Keldysh* crew as people board the liner: "Outwardly I was everything a well brought up girl should be. Inside I was screaming," just as the ship's whistle screams. She already shows the curiosity that prompts Psyche to light the lamp, remarking to Thomas Andrews that the number of lifeboats on board is not adequate for the passenger list. She collects Impressionist and Cubist paintings, forms that were at that time collapsing realism and revolutionizing the art world. Furthermore, although she dresses the part, she is not overly concerned with beauty and being adored. Her remembrance of Cal's

premature wedding gift of the necklace is that "it was a dreadful heavy thing." Unlike the sailing vessel upon which she travels, Rose is ready to unfurl.

The Humanization of Romance

Jack's and Rose's romance is "Romeo and Juliet on a boat," and also "Tristan and Iseult," who really did fall accidentally in love on a boat. In all three stories the girl is pledged to marry a man she does not love for the family's welfare; in all three the lovers disobey and follow their hearts; and in all three the couples are "star-crossed," kept apart by mischance and catastrophe. But this story is different. Biel, whose cultural history of the *Titanic's* myths (1996) is so perceptive, argues that the film is a "pop culture phenomenon" because it tells a story "with a very 1990s twist." It is, he notes sarcastically, "a 12-step program to becoming a New Woman, with Jack as confessor and facilitator" (1998, unpag.). Following the conventional dichotomy of admitting the visual effects are "breathtaking" but regarding the love story as ridiculous, he takes the film to task not just because it is a swoon-fest, but because it represents liberation as a matter of self-actualization rather than collective political action:

Oppressed? No, repressed! Admit you have relationship problems. Tell somebody about them. Trust your instincts. Drink beer. Dance with the steerage. Close your eyes and let the breeze blow through your hair. Open your eyes. Pose nude. Have sex in a car. Take a deep breath. Make each day count. Fly. (unpag.)

If this were really the Marxist-inspired tale some have claimed it to be, instead of saying, "Make each day count," Jack would shout, "Working men of all countries, unite!"

Biel's cynicism is based on the tired academic assumption that all myths are conservative, and that inner experience is something trivial to disclose indiscriminately to others, an excuse to avoid *social* action, but the only kind that really produces political change. This attitude unwittingly reproduces social oppression because when inner reality is denied it must be projected onto someone or something else, an inferior Other to be dominated (note that Biel apparently wants only working *men* to unite). So what *is* so different about *Titanic's* romance?

Although he is quite carnal, Jack has some associations with a winged being. Many note DiCaprio's "mercurial" quality and "fey beauty" (Parisi, 1998, p. 100). Jack flies with Fabrizio and later with Rose on the bow; he has rather improbable access to all three levels of the ship, appearing several times out of nowhere; and when he first gazes at Rose, his new friend Tommy Ryan chides him, "You'd as like have angels fly out of yer arse as to get next to the likes of her." As Rose descends in a lifeboat looking up at Jack, a flare explodes behind him, creating a halo effect around his head. Although DiCaprio initially would not commit to the role because he wanted Jack to be darker and more complex, Cameron saw his purpose as unidimensional and straightforward—Jack "lights up the screen and lights up this girl's life" (Ansen, 1998a, pp. 61–62). Jack evokes more than one mythic allusion, but surely an inner Eros is among them—not the husband who wants his wife to stay unconscious, but the interior masculine of the latter part of the story who helps Rose through *Psyche's* maturing tasks. Also recalling Eros, Jack is Rose's physical lover as well.

Jack's role as Rose's soul-mate be-

gins when he talks her out of the suicide she may or may not have been intending. Clearly, Rose is distressed over the confined certainties of her life with Cal, but she has already glimpsed Jack briefly, and who is to say that something is not already brewing at the edge of her awareness? After all, it will take an Amazonian effort to break away from her family, not to mention having to face the more urgent tasks once the ship hits the ice. Perhaps her "*Psyche*" wants to give up, or perhaps she is ready to "marry Death" and end her girlhood. Whatever her reasons, when she tells Jack to stay back, he insists, "I can't, I'm involved now." With the help of fairy godmother Molly Brown, who transforms *him* into a Cinderella (Jack is at least as much the object of the gaze in this film as Rose, who rejects her status as Galatea.), Jack dines with first class and tempts Rose with a note to "Make it count. Meet me at the clock." She accompanies him to a "real party" in steerage where she seizes a beer almost as "the crystal goblet of the water of life" as in *Psyche's* third task. Here she impresses Jack's friends with her strength, not her beauty, converting the ethereally feminine stance of *ballet pointe* into a game of macho one-upsmanship.

Cowed temporarily by Cal's violence the next morning, Rose resists Jack's persistent attempts to liberate her. When he finally corners her in the gymnasium, she tells him that she'll be fine.

Jack: Really? I don't think so. They've got you trapped, Rose. And you're gonna die if you don't break free—maybe not right away because you're strong, but sooner or later that fire that I love about you, Rose, that fire's gonna burn out.

Rose: It's not up to you to save me, Jack.

Jack: You're right. Only you can do that.
 Rose: I'm going back. Leave me alone.

The key is that Jack tries to get Rose to realize her desires, not his own. She is not a damsel in distress, but a woman who can stoke her own fire. Like the ants, he is helping her to sort out the seeds of her life that initially seemed too daunting for her to handle. What is really important? As in *Psyche's* trip into the underworld, she must ignore the needs of others—society, Cal, even her mother. On this perilous journey into herself, all outside distractions must be left behind. Rose grasps her charge when she glimpses a small girl being corrected in her lady-like etiquette. Seeing a blueprint of her own life before her eyes, Rose throws off young *Psyche/Galatea* for good. In their erotic but reckless escapades—Jack sketches Rose wearing only Cal's diamond, they evade Cal's manservant, make love in a Renault, kiss on the deck—Jack and Rose now seem much like *Romeo and Juliet*, or *Tristan and Iseult*. With eyes only for each other, Jack and Rose throw caution to the winds, obeying the morality of love and nothing else. Only it is also here that young Rose's descent begins in earnest, for their transport is now entering the ice fields.

As with their romantic predecessors, of course, everything that can go wrong does. Their fate seems to be sealed when their moonlit kiss is shattered as ship and ice collide. From here on, Jack and Rose endure the trip into Hades together, replete with gender reversals as Rose rescues Jack from his watery dungeon and climbs back on the ship when she realizes Cal does not have a "deal" to save him. When the ship finally founders, they switch roles again, with Jack advising Rose when to jump and how to surface, and giving her the floating fragment-for-one. More

like *Eros and Psyche* than *Tristan and Iseult*, Jack and Rose help each other to live rather than to die.

Jack does not will his own death as did *Tristan and Romeo*, but when he realizes his situation, as if knowing the mythic script they are set to play out, he extracts a promise from Rose to "go on . . . and make lots of babies and . . . watch 'em grow . . . and die an old . . . lady, warm in her bed." He does not ask her, as *Tristan and Iseult* did each other, to "serve one love," or to die with him so that they might enter the "enchanted orchard" hand in hand. Almost frozen, Rose falls into a deep sleep or a delirium, like *Psyche's* final collapse when the death-sleep comes over her, only this death is a transformation of life, and Rose has promised Jack that she would live: "One dies to the old self and puts on new life" (Johnson, 1976, pp. 71–72). Rose wipes *Psyche's* death-sleep off herself. She hears voices from the one lifeboat looking for survivors. She tries to call out, but has no voice. Swimming desperately to a floating victim, she takes a whistle from his mouth and blows with the little strength she has left bringing her and *Titanic's* boarding "scream" full circle as the scene cuts to the deep-seeing eye of Old Rose.

Her tale of descent now complete, Old Rose still must finish her long journey. "A woman's heart is a deep ocean of secrets," she tells her granddaughter back on the *Kaldysh*, "But now you know there was a man named Jack Dawson, and that he saved me, in every way that a person can be saved. I don't even have a picture of him. He exists now only in my memory." We again see the aging wreck, and then are returned to the stern of the *Kaldysh*, where Rose, her last secret in hand, climbs up on the railing, bright red

toenails shining in the moonlight. With a hushed gasp, she tosses the diamond necklace into the sea, where it sinks slowly in a circular dance, like a fish, like a heart.

In his analysis of "Tristan and Iseult," Johnson relates a man's dream that he considers a collective vision for how a modern Westerner might resolve his awful struggles with his Lady Soul and romantic love. It is worth citing in full:

I am carrying the bell that once belonged to the Virgin Mary to the great basilica which was built centuries ago to house it when it was found. The shape of the bell was known, and a niche has been prepared over the altar, exactly the correct size to fit the bell. A priest has been on duty at all times for several centuries to accept the bell when it would be returned. I walk into the basilica, down the long aisle, and present the bell to the waiting priest. Together we lift it up and hang it from the hook in its niche. The bell fits its place perfectly.

The priest has been instructed to go to the west end of the basilica, when the Virgin's bell should be returned, and to ring the great bells in the towers to announce to the world that the bell had been found and returned to Christianity. Those great bells have never sounded in all the years of their life, but have waited until the day when the bell of the Virgin Mary would be returned. I sit on a bench by the side of the altar while the priest hurries the length of the basilica to ring the great bells.

What should I do? Should I wait and claim all the fame and adulation that would come to me as the discoverer of the bell of the Virgin Mary? Or should I slip quietly away and avoid all the involvement? The priest, in his excitement, has not looked at me, so I could still claim anonymity. I decide on the latter.

Just as the great bells begin to ring and the town's populace begins to rush toward the basilica, I slip out a side door and begin my solitary journey out of the city. (1983, pp. 179-180)

"The soul finds its way into our lives through one great open gap in the ego's armor: romantic love," Johnson writes, and that is why "it has become by default, the vessel in which we struggle to contain everything that has been excluded from our ego empires, everything of the unconscious—all that is numinous, unfathomable, awesome, all that inspires worship in us" (p. 185). In *Titanic*, the iceberg rips that "great open gap in the ego's armor," and indeed, romantic love rushes in to fill the rift. In the dream, the bell carrier puts the divine part of himself—and if this is a "big dream" for the collective, of all of us—back into the cathedral, the inner place where it belongs, so he can live the human part "in ordinariness and simplicity. We must take our soul out of romantic love and return it to an inner place—the inner cathedral" (p. 181). The bell "sends forth a sound that is pure feeling, that darts past the mind and sets up an involuntary reverberation in the soul" (p. 182). But this is too heavy a burden that Western man has carried for too long, trying to live out in physical relationships what really belongs to the gods—that is, in the inner Psyche.

Just as the dreamer exits through the side door, ducking the adulation and riches that surely would have come to him, Rose remains uninfected by the publicity-seeking epidemic of her times and has not profited from the necklace or from her story; she has not even, as the *Chicago Tribune* self-righteously suggested, sold the diamond to finance the Jack Dawson School of Fine Art (1998, p. 5). Rather, she takes to heart what Tristan and Iseult and Romeo and Juliet could not, the difference between a human life and the inner life of the soul. We see that she has kept her promise to Jack, as the camera pans

across the photos she's brought along, which tell the story of a real life richly lived. There is no physical evidence of Jack anywhere, as she says, nor does there need to be, for he exists only in her memory which, as the song says, "goes on" in her dreams.

Perhaps Rose is dreaming now or, more likely, she has completed her life "full circle." From whatever this deep sleep is aboard the *Keldysh*, we descend one final time from the research vessel to its dark shadow ship below, and as we glide along the deck, the old wreck flashes out and comes to life, and we enter the ballroom. So many are there, rich and poor, shipbuilders and passengers, casualties one and all. Rose is dressed in white for her wedding. She ascends the Grand Staircase where Jack awaits her, and they kiss as the crowd applauds. The bell hung back in the cathedral, "the Heart of the Ocean" given back to itself, the collective can rejoice. *Titanic* no longer must be the Ship of Dreams on a perennially unconsummated maiden voyage. The last thing we see is the lovely mandala-like glass and wrought iron dome overhead. La Loba has sung over the bones, and *now* they can rest.

Epilogue

In the Eros and Psyche myth, Aphrodite orders Psyche to gather the golden fleece from the fierce rams in a certain pasture across a river. At the time this myth emerged, the suggestion that Psyche should get any of this stuff at all was quite novel, for the golden fleece is a *logos* symbol in myths, and the ram is eruptive energy and power, always associated with the masculine (Johnson, 1976, p. 55; Neumann, 1956/1971, p. 99). Psyche is told by the reeds growing by the water—she is advised by nature—not to take the fleece that still

grows on the rams, but to gather just enough to please Aphrodite (Johnson, 1976, pp. 55, 58). The tufts scraped off on the trees will do, for "elemental knowledge connected to elemental power is capable of destroying instantaneously" (p. 56). But even nature's most sensational victories over technological conceit that could teach us Prometheus' or Icarus' lessons have not. Thus it is not true that the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912 was "the end of an era" as Walter Lord claimed, or that "mankind's faith in its own indomitable power was forever destroyed by uniquely human shortcomings: arrogance, complacency, and greed" as Cameron pronounced (Chambers, 1998, p. 34). The *Titanic* as irrevocable marker event is part of its enduring mythology, but rarely have we in reality curbed our lust for the gold of technological perfection or yielded the fleece to the Goddess of Love.

Rose may be the heroine of this latest *Titanic*, but it is the men who are left to carry on its legacy. Perhaps it is worth asking how those surrounding this story, within the film and without, have related to the ship. The most relevant masculine symbols here are Ballard, Cameron, and the film's Brock Lovett, whom Cameron acknowledges is a stand-in for himself (Chambers, 1998, p. 40; Parisi, 1998, p. 69), and who also seems to represent Ballard. In fact, Ballard's search for the *Titanic* evolved directly from the better known masculine story of the Golden Fleece in which a ram with a glowing hide saved a boy and a girl from death at the hands of their father and stepmother by gathering them up and flying away. The boy was carried safely to another kingdom, but the girl was dropped into the sea and drowned. That is, the inner feminine that could compensate for

masculine "ram energy" fell into the sea of Western culture's unconscious (Johnson, 1976, pp. 54–55). The boy sacrificed the ram and gave the fleece to his king. Later, Jason forcefully captured this symbol of *logos* with the help of the sorceress Medea, whom he then spurned for a political marriage—a denial of women that resulted in Medea's terrible vengeance of killing her own children to save them from exile.

Ballard writes that in 1980 he'd "dreamed about" the deep-sea visual-imaging technology that would eventuate in finding the *Titanic* and wanted to name it *Argo/Jason*: "I had chosen the name *Argo* as a reference to Jason and his mythological ship the *Argo*, which sailed in search of the Golden Fleece in the ancient Greek legend. It seemed appropriate for what I hoped would become the cutting edge in deep-sea research" (1987, p. 83).⁴ Ballard successfully secured the backing of the Office of Naval Research by persuading them that this technology held great promise for submarine warfare. He apparently saw the search as commercial as well as military, for he refers to the one hundred square miles of ocean floor where he would look for the *Titanic* as "a big piece of real estate" (pp. 83–87). He lets on that his initial search for the ship was "a sort of diver's Mount Everest" (p. 8), that is, more of an upward quest than an inward descent. Similarly, Cameron remembers his first dive as a nightmare because his own egocentric vision kept him from seeing the wreck until he was fifteen feet from it. He had "made the mistake of not letting *Titanic* talk to me [him]. I was like the astronauts who experienced the moon as a series of checklists and mission protocols" (Marsh & Kirkland, 1997, p. xi).

Both Ballard and Cameron had similar "conversion experiences" of sorts when they actually encountered the *Titanic*—a softening when the human story crept into their technological mindset, creating a gap in their ego's armor. We have already observed Ballard's tearful and "religious" moment when he found the remains, and after returning to the *Kelbysh* from his second dive, Cameron writes, "I was overwhelmed by emotion. I had known the event so intimately from my research, and now I had been on the deck of the ship itself, and it just flooded over me. I wept for the innocents who died there" (p. ix).

Such changes of heart are typical of masculine mythic heroes who experience a deep encounter with feminine symbols (Rushing & Frenz, 1995, pp. 74–77, 213–221; von Franz, 1974, pp. 58–69). We have to wonder, however, just how indelible these particular conversions are. Ballard achieved heroic status, of course, upon finding the ship. Indeed, his discovery in some ways transformed "a symbol of failure into an affirmation of progress," as Ballard represented himself, and others saw him, as a "hero who overcame limits, who made progress possible by resisting constraints—in others words, a frontier hero" (Biel, 1996, p. 213). As Biel documents, the achievement fit well into the liberated entrepreneurialism of the 1980s, contributing in fiction and in reality to the buildup of military research and defense in Reagan's struggle against the Soviets. Ballard immediately turned himself into an entertainment commodity using his success to compete with the space program for funding (pp. 213–222), and enjoying the status of elder statesman in many documentaries and books accompanying the film's mania. In a remarkable

redux, the entertainment press wrote incessantly about the financial fiasco Cameron was creating down in Mexico only to spin the story into yet another paean to progress when the first whiff of the film's probable success was sensed. Now Cameron became a colorful hero with the courage to resist the Hollywood "suits" who ordered him to curtail his perfectionistic vision and reign this elephant in. Even before this film Cameron was "a godhead of gadgetry, revered with an awe usually reserved for rock stars or computer software billionaires" (Parisi, 1998, p. 188). Now he is one of the most sought after filmmakers in Hollywood. Whereas Ballard did not wish to plunder *Titanic* or its artifacts, he was no more immune to bragging about his capitalist success against great odds than was Cameron, who took it upon himself to castigate publically a critic who deigned not to like his movie (Ansen, 1998b, p. 70), and who unfortunately, echoing Jack's line from the film, declared himself "king of the world" at the Academy Awards.

Fortunately, the creative place myths come from often exceeds the ego's grasp. Near the end of the film on the deck of the *Kalystik*, Rose's granddaughter, Lizzie, tells Brock Lovett that she is sorry he didn't find the diamond. Lovett tells her he was saving the cigar he is holding until he found the jewel, but apparently not needing this kind of celebration after witnessing Rose's story, he throws it into the sea—this almost campy symbol of masculine potency now sharing space with Rose's feminized "Heart of the Ocean." "Three years, I've thought of nothing except *Titanic*, but I never got it," he says, "I never let it in." As his name seems to indicate, he had to give up exploiting the feminine treasure he so ardently sought when he learned to "love it." We cannot really count on our mythmakers to model for us themselves the "better angels" of their own stories, but we do have those stories, and perhaps they could change us if we would choose to let them in. □

Notes

¹In *Blade Runner* Eldon Tyrell genetically engineers a replicant "niece," Rachel, who subsequently falls in love with the hero Rick Deckard. In the novelistic sequel to the film, it is revealed that Tyrell made Rachel to fulfill his own sexual desires (Jeter, 1995).

²This rendition of the story is condensed from Robert Johnson's retelling (1983) which is based primarily upon Bedier (1945).

³We have condensed this story from versions by Robert Johnson (1976) and Apuleius (1910) which is reproduced in full in Neumann (1956/1971). We use "Aphrodite" rather than Venus, and the more familiar "Eros" rather than his "Amor" or the Valentine card-evoking "Cupid."

⁴The name later took on the additional connotation of Senator William Proxmire's Golden Fleece Awards, which were bestowed on government expenditures that he thought ridiculous; Ballard implied the joke was on the senator (Biel, 1996, p. 214).

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