

Thomas Laqueur: New Lives of the 'Titanic'

London Review OF BOOKS

VOLUME 35 NUMBER 2 24 JANUARY 2013 £3.50 US & CANADA \$4.95



PREMIER EXHIBITIONS INC. describes itself as 'the leading provider of museum-quality exhibitions throughout the world': *Bodies* lets visitors 'see inside carefully preserved real anatomical specimens' and *Dialog in the Dark* features New York in a blackout ('and here's the twist – your guide is visually impaired'). But Premier Exhibition's core business is RMS Titanic Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary that has exclusive rights to salvage artefacts from the wreck that was discovered under 12,500 feet of water in 1985.

The spoils can be seen by the public in 'Titanic': *The Experience* next to Disney World in Orlando or in 'Titanic': *The Artefact Exhibition* at several venues, among them the Atlantic Station in Atlanta and the Luxor Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, where it shares a bill with the comedian Carrot Top and *Menopause: The Musical*. 'Titanic': *The Experience* is the bigger show; among other treats, it 'immerses visitors in the hundred-year story as never experienced before' – an unhappy metaphor perhaps – by allowing them to feel 'the chill of the cold Atlantic air' as they look up at the starry northern sky from a replica of the promenade deck. They can view hundreds of recovered artefacts, among them 'little big piece', the second biggest chunk of the ship ever recovered, and take tours led by actors in period costume 'portraying actual Titanic notables'. They can also walk up the full-size model of the grand staircase, a fantastical confection, and peek into the Marconi wireless office and a first-class suite. Every Saturday there is a *Titanic Dinner Show*.

The smaller but still substantial artefact exhibitions are lucrative: more than 25 million people have paid (\$32 for an adult and \$24 for a child in Las Vegas, plus tax) for the opportunity to hear 'countless stories of heroism and humanity that pay honour to the indomitable force of the human spirit in the face of tragedy'. They have bought replica artefacts, replica clothes, replica perfume ('Legacy 1912 Titanic' – a tie-in to a display of vials owned by a perfume merchant called Adolphe Saalfeld and salvaged from the deep), a gold-plated bracelet, Prussian blue gold-plated china from First Class, soup bowls and coffee mugs from Third. RMS Titanic Inc. recently launched a three-city tour for the *Jewels of the 'Titanic'*, most of them found in 1987 in a remarkably preserved Gladstone bag. The idea is to relive the catastrophe from a safe distance,

Why name a ship after a defeated race?

Thomas Laqueur

THE WRECK OF THE 'TITAN'

by Morgan Robertson.

Hesperus, 85 pp., £8, March 2012, 978 1 84391 359 7

SHADOW OF THE 'TITANIC'

by Andrew Wilson.

Simon and Schuster, 392 pp., £8.99, March 2012, 978 1 84739 882 6

'TITANIC' 100TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION: A NIGHT REMEMBERED

by Stephanie Barczewski.

Continuum, 350 pp., £15.99, December 2011, 978 1 4411 6169 7

THE STORY OF THE UNSINKABLE 'TITANIC': DAY BY DAY FACSIMILE REPORTS

by Michael Wilkinson and Robert Hamilton.

Transatlantic, 127 pp., £16.99, November 2011, 978 1 907176 83 8

'TITANIC' LIVES: MIGRANTS AND MILLIONAIRES, CONMEN AND CREW

by Richard Davenport-Hines.

Harper, 404 pp., £9.99, September 2012, 978 0 00 732166 7

GILDED LIVES, FATAL VOYAGE

by Hugh Brewster.

Robson, 338 pp., £20, March 2012, 978 1 84954 179 4

'TITANIC' CALLING

edited by Michael Hughes and Katherine Bosworth.

Bodleian, 163 pp., £14.99, April 2012, 978 1 85124 377 8

keeping its romance and forgetting its horror. The exhibitions use the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's trick of giving visitors the name of an actual person with whom to identify; at the end they discover whether 'their' passenger survived.

Almost from the start there was an irresistible theatricality about the sinking of the world's greatest ship. From a mile away 'the spectacle was quite fairylike,' a survivor told the *New York Times*. The ship, 'illuminated from stem to stern, was perfectly stationary like some fantastic piece of stage scenery... For three hours cries of anguish were heard like some vast choir singing a death song.' Joseph Conrad wrote with a 'certain bitterness' shortly after the night of 14-15 April 1912 about the 'good press' the story was receiving. The white spaces and big lettering of newspapers had, he thought, 'an incongruously festive air', with 'a dis-

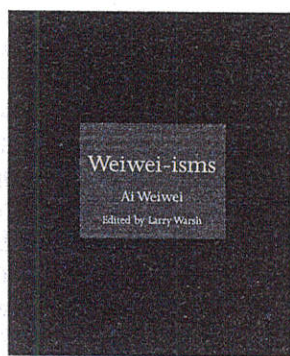
agreeable effect of feverish exploitation of a sensational Godsend'.

Even before the ship sank it seemed as if the century of progress was pregnant with the Titanic's fate: the strange, profitable pleasures people could take from contemplating catastrophe were already there to be enjoyed. In 1898 a minor, prolific and, until this centenary, largely forgotten American writer of sea tales called Morgan Robertson published *Futility, or the Wreck of the 'Titan'*. Fourteen years later he cashed in by changing the tonnage of the fictional ship to nearer that of the real one, and cutting 'futility' from his title. 'She was the largest craft afloat and the greatest of the works of men,' his book begins. Hubris was waiting in the wings: 'The steamship Titan was considered practically unsinkable.' She was commanded by officers who 'were not only seamen but scientists'; 'she was a floating

city containing within her steel walls... all that makes life enjoyable.' Readers knew this ship would have her comeuppance. A little more than a third of the way she does: '75,000 tons – dead-weight – rushing through the fog at 50 feet a second, had hurled itself at an iceberg.' (The real ship's displacement tonnage was 52,310. The figure usually given – 46,000 – refers to its Gross Registered Tonnage, which is arrived at through a complicated algorithm and has nothing to do with ordinary measurements of weight.)

One might have known that naming a ship after the defeated race of Greek deities was a mistake. Kronos, the leader of the Titans, came to power by castrating his father and was defeated by the Olympians with Zeus at their head. The Titanic's slightly smaller sister ship, *Olympic*, survived the Great War and became a great favourite with travellers because she was a replica of her ill-fated kin, a relic of the lost age of innocence. Walter Lord, who wrote the 1955 classic *A Night to Remember*, which, as Andrew Wilson says in his wonderful retellings of survivors' stories, marks the beginning of the modern era of Titanic myth and memory, sailed on her as a boy. (The *Olympic* had her share of bad luck too. She was rammed by a warship in 1911 and limped into port with two compartments flooded. Then in 1934 she ran into a lightship. The third of the sisters, the *Britannic*, hit a mine off the Greek island of Kea in 1916 and sank.) 'Titanic' spelled trouble: like Lucifer, rebel against God; like Rome, fallen. Carlyle used the word to describe Danton and he came to no good. The White Star Line was asking for trouble.

But it is an ill wind that blows no good. Jules Brulatour, pioneer of American cinema and founder of Universal Pictures, released what Wilson calls the world's 'first exploitation movie' less than five weeks after the ship went down. It starred a real-life survivor – the 22-year-old Dorothy Gibson, already famous as a model when she became Brulatour's mistress (both were married). Rushing across the ocean to be in Brulatour's arms, she had found a place in a half-empty lifeboat that failed to go back and rescue would-be survivors flailing in the freezing sea. How important her role was in this cowardly decision is one of the many questions on which the literature on the Titanic thrives. No question about her role in the film: it was heroic. Brulatour had



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Edited by Larry Warsh

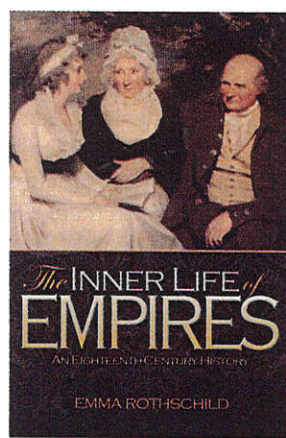
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Who split first?

Jackson Lears writes: 'On Christmas Eve 1938, in Sweden, the physicists Lise Meitner, one of the few "girls" among the *knaben*, and Otto Frisch . . . bombarded a uranium nucleus with a neutron, making the nucleus wobble, then split into barium and krypton' (LRB, 20 December 2012). The bombardment of the uranium nucleus with slow neutrons was first carried out in Rome in 1934 by Fermi and his group, and he considered it likely that they had produced transuranic elements. It was Hahn and Strassmann, working in Berlin late in 1938, who did the bombarding that found barium. Hahn sent a letter to Meitner, his former colleague, asking for the explanation, since he was a chemist and relied on her for physics.

Frank Tangherlini

San Diego, California

Jackson Lears states that 'the manufacture of uranium would require building the first nuclear reactor.' What he should have said is 'the manufacture of plutonium . . .' Lears makes another error when, after referring to the failure of the gun assembly plutonium bomb, 'Thin Man', he writes that Oppenheimer moved on to design a plutonium implosion bomb. This didn't involve 'bringing together several sub-critical mass pieces', as Lears states, but rather imploding a single spherical sub-critical mass of plutonium to an extremely dense – and, therefore, critical – mass by exploding a carefully designed charge of high and low explosives around it. This design made for a bulky, spherical bomb, which was why it was named 'Fat Man'.

Tony Cheney

Ipswich

Every Man with Every Man

In the course of an interesting discussion of the different ways in which Hobbes has been read by contemporary historians, Phil Withington offers a brief account of Hobbes's theory of the state, one element of which he describes as 'the basic contract between governors and governed' (LRB, 3 January). What Hobbes proposes is not a contract between governors and governed, but a covenant 'of every man with every man' whereby each gives up his right of governing himself to one man or assembly of men, on condition that the others do so too. This is the creation of *Leviathan*, a commonwealth in which a multitude of men unite to institute a sovereign whose actions are authorised by each and every one of them. The sovereign is not a party to this, as Hobbes emphasises, explaining that because his authority is given to him 'by covenant only of one to another, and not of him to any of them', he cannot forfeit that authority by breach of covenant. The sovereign cannot do just as he likes; his office is to procure the good of the people, to which he is obliged, not by contract, but by the law of nature, and is accountable to God, and to no one else. It is evident that Hobbes's argument for absolutism depends on the sovereign's not being a party to the covenant.

John Benson

Kendal, Cumbria

Gentlemanly Pastime

Thomas Keymer writes about Eliza Haywood, who was arrested in 1749 and questioned about her pamphlet attacking George II but supposedly written by a Gentleman of the Bedchamber serving the Young Pretender (LRB, 3 January). Three years earlier, another bookseller, Ralph Griffiths, had been hauled in to explain his novel, *Ascanius*, which featured Charles Edward Stuart as the protagonist. Griffiths represented the book as a gentlemanly pastime, 'a pleasant expedient . . . calculated for no bad purposes whatever', and insisted on his loyalty to the Protestant succession. The novel did well. An earlier pamphlet of his, purporting to be the letters of executed Jacobites, had been seized and his whole stock confiscated. He got off by protesting that the letters only pretended to be real; or, as he put it when complaining about the loss of time and expense in going backwards and forwards to Westminster trying to retrieve his property, represented 'the whimsical production of my own Brain'. Fact or fiction, political allegiance or opportunity to sell words? Nobody knows. But I don't think we have to assume, as Keymer suggests, that Haywood 'never really mattered enough' to be prosecuted. Booksellers like Griffiths and Haywood knew how to play the game with the authorities. Griffiths, mind you, could be more direct. When the Duke of Newcastle's men came for him after he published *Fanny Hill*, he reportedly threatened them 'with a large hammer'. He wasn't prosecuted for that, either.

Norma Clarke

London N15

What a State Might Do

A few years ago an exhibition of photographs in Safarikovo Square in Bratislava commemorated the 40th anniversary of the uprising against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The square was near my apartment and several times I saw older men speaking emphatically to the student at the information desk. When I asked her what the men were saying she told me they wanted the tanks to come back. Under Communism, they said, we could be sent away to camps if we said the wrong thing, or even if we said nothing, but everyone had a job, and healthcare and education were free. What you did at home was your own affair. You had a private life. Today we can say and do what we want. But unemployment is high while healthcare and education are expensive.

Neal Ascherson argues that Anne Applebaum, in her book *Iron Curtain*, questions not only totalitarian Communist regimes but also the welfare state (LRB, 20 December 2012). She sees what was wrong with Communism but fails to see what its attraction was; what, in short, a state might do for its citizens. It would never have been possible in imperial Russia or the Austro-Hungarian Empire for a peasant to be a teacher, a miner a lawyer, a woman a doctor. Under Communism, at least at first, the playing field in Eastern Europe had been level as it had not been before.

Robert Buckeye

Middlebury, Vermont

Right to Work

Helena Kennedy and Philippe Sands want our support for their minority report to the Commission on a Bill of Rights, arguing that if there is to be 'any change to the Human Rights Act, it should reinforce the European Convention, not undermine it' (LRB, 3 January). Yet neither of these documents includes the essential 'right to work' that was in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Chris Purnell

Orpington, Kent

Ancient Refrigerators

Mary Beard describes the conundrum of the big storage jars set into the shop counters of Pompeii and Herculaneum: they were unglazed, which would surely make them unsuitable for the storage of food or drink (LRB, 3 January). In some hot countries, such as Spain and India, porous pots are still used to cool water. In a process similar to human sweating, water stored in the pots slowly seeps to the surface and evaporates, thereby cooling the pot and the water that remains inside. In a more modern, African take on this old idea, glazed food-storage pots are placed in wet sand inside larger porous pots to make solar-powered 'pot-in-pot refrigerators'. Perhaps Mary Beard's enigmatic jars were the Roman equivalent of wine chillers.

Richard Carter

Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire

Like Alan Bennett . . .

Grammar schools such as Leeds did not, as Alan Bennett says they did, 'turn themselves into direct grant schools on the introduction of comprehensives' (LRB, 3 January). By that time they had been direct grant for more than forty years. After the advent of comprehensives in the 1960s and then the Labour government's abolition of the direct grant system in 1976 they had the option of becoming entirely independent, which Leeds and most of the other 177 direct grant schools decided to do – thus giving the independent education sector its biggest boost in modern times.

David Woodhead

Leatherhead, Surrey

'The only other notable resident of Bramhope,' Alan Bennett writes, 'is (or was) Saddam Hussein's cousin.' Other famous Bramhope residents have included rugby commentator Eddie Waring and Chris Norman of the band Smokie. It was also the birthplace of Jeremy Paxman.

Joe Swan

Leeds

Product Placement

A recent episode of BBC1's *Last Tango in Halifax* included the estranged, intellectual dreg husband of a sexually ambiguous school principal. The husband has on his side table, next to a drained whisky bottle, a neatly folded copy of the LRB – a flag of intelligence or a status symbol? I'm sorry to say I think it's the latter. Who in this world returns the paper back to coverfold when reading?

Jonathan Hauxwell

Crosshills, North Yorkshire

been making money from the disaster even before the movie appeared: his newsreel about the Titanic was in cinemas before the end of April.

In 1943 Goebbels commissioned a propaganda movie about the Titanic, intended to show that its fate was a parable of British hard-heartedness in the pursuit of Mammon. Like the ship, the movie was excessive. The most expensive German movie made to date, it was wildly over budget. No one made any money from it. Goebbels had the director arrested for badmouthing the film's Kriegsmarine consultants and then murdered in his cell under cover of suicide. The stand-in for the Titanic, the *Cap Arcona*, was sunk by British bombers just before the war's end and more than four thousand people drowned. The thin-moustached villain of the film was Bruce Ismay, director of the White Star Line, who according to the script insisted that the ineffective Captain Smith, emblem of Britain's exaggerated sense of its seafaring skill, drive his ship at full speed through an icefield so it could set a transatlantic record that would push up his company's share price, allowing him and his friends on the boat to profit by selling the shares. The hero is the German first officer, Petersen, who resists Ismay and then works selflessly to save the passengers, jumping into the icy water with a baby in his arms after failing to prevent the collision. (Conrad had written in 1912 that the king's enemies would take pleasure from the disaster: 'certain public prints have betrayed in gothic letters their satisfaction.')

We last see Petersen in a courtroom where he fails to persuade a British inquiry to bring charges against Ismay. We are also shown upstanding German passengers in steerage in stark contrast to the British sleaze in First Class. (Oddly there are no Jewish financiers in Goebbels's movie although some very rich ones were on board. Perhaps this is because their bravery in the face of death was already so well known that to have allied them with the villains would have been a stretch even for him. A beautiful and mysterious Russian émigrée is Petersen's main ally.) The story is nonsense: there was no stock manipulation, and all the WSL shares were owned by J.P. Morgan's holding company; no German officer; no effort to set a record (everyone knew the Titanic was not the fastest ship on the Atlantic route, since those of the Cunard line were clearly faster). Ismay, however, famous for having infamously survived, was a good choice of villain. Some footage from the German film, especially the scenes of water rushing in, was so good that it was used in the enormously successful 1958 British movie *A Night to Remember*, based on Lord's bestseller, and the harbinger of the modern Titanic entertainment business. An earlier film, the 1953 *Titanic*, was really just an excuse for a redemptive father-son relationship made possible by impending death. It won an Academy Award. Debbie Reynolds was in a 1964 film version of *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, based loosely on the life of one of the most famous of the first-class survivors, which was nominated for six Oscars.

With the discovery of the wreck in 1985, some twenty kilometres from where the

Titanic had reported its position, the ship's afterlife reached commercial maturity. (The navigational error, like so much else about the wreck, has generated its own subgenre of debate. When everything goes right celestial navigation can place a ship to within a couple of kilometres but getting it right depends on entering time, speed and star positions accurately and in correctly reading the tiny type of densely printed columns. Errors, especially at some latitudes, are easy to make.) Thousands of artefacts were recovered from the wreck, including big chunks of coal, splinters from which found their way into pendants; in 1996 passengers on two luxury cruise ships paid \$5000 each to watch on live TV what turned out to be an abortive attempt to raise an 11-ton section of the hull. The movie director James Cameron, fascinated with what he called the Everest of wrecks, filmed a dive that became part of his blockbuster 1997 movie (the footage was recently repurposed for a documentary). The new 3D version of the movie released in time for the centenary took its gross earnings above two billion dollars. In the movie, the 101-year-old Rose DeWitt Bukater, who was 17 when she survived the sinking, learns that a 1996 expedition had been looking for a necklace, the Heart of the Ocean, that went down with the ship but found instead a sketch of a young woman wearing it. She contacts the expedition's leader and tells him that she is that woman. Today for between \$549.99 and \$799.99 (on eBay) you can buy a reproduction of the fictional necklace made soon after the film came out; or you can buy a reproduction of the reproduction

for only \$19.95 which includes a first-class menu and other memorabilia.

Southampton, where the Titanic began its voyage, has cashed in only modestly. The contents of the pockets of a third-class steward called Sidney Sedunary are on display at the city's maritime museum. So is his watch, stopped at 1.50. We'd love to do more, a local official said. Belfast has done more. Stephanie Barczewski quotes an editorial from the *Belfast Telegraph* of July 1999: 'In marketing parlance, the story of the liner is a unique selling point for Northern Ireland, and could open the door to thousands of tourists.' The Titanic, built in the huge and militantly Protestant Harland & Wolff shipyard, ended up at the bottom of the sea, a symbol of failure. Not much to celebrate there. But by the 1990s the Troubles were waning and interest in the Titanic was waxing as a result of the Hollywood blockbuster. And so the ship escaped its fraught history. A spectacular new museum and conference centre, Titanic Belfast, whose façade replicates four 90-foot hulls, stands near where the Titanic's hull was launched into the River Lagan. It opened last year and houses exhibitions dedicated to Harland & Wolff and its most famous ship and is itself the anchor of the Titanic Quarter, an urban regeneration project on the site of the shipyard. 'We reckon it could be the biggest tourist attraction in Ireland,' its director said in January 2009, 'up there with the Guinness brewery in Dublin.'

But the natural history of lucrative popular culture does not explain the 68 new books and videos that appeared in connection with the centenary, or the hundreds published earlier. Not every boat – indeed no other boat – demands such attention. Nothing much, for example, came of the sinking of the paddle steamer *Princess Alice* during a 'moonlight trip' down the Thames. Struck by a collier on 3 September 1878, she sank within minutes, taking 650 passengers down with her. Those who weren't trapped inside did not so much drown as succumb to sewage, millions of gallons of which had just been released from newly completed outflows for London's waste. There isn't much romance in an ordinary boat being rammed, sinking like a stone – with no time for heroism or cowardice or stories of any sort – and leaving survivors bobbing for a few minutes in shit.

The Titanic and her sister ships, on the other hand, were the crowning glory of the century of progress. A White Star Line poster reproduced in Michael Wilkinson and Robert Hamilton's collection shows the great hulk of the ship, sunlit, belching smoke out of three of its four funnels – the fourth was there only for effect – and cutting a swathe between a small sailing ship and a three-masted square rigger. A sliver of bright red hull is just visible at the waterline, like a blazing torch in the darkness. Robertson's novel *The Wreck of the Titan* had made much of the fact that the eponymous ship could cut through ordinary boats without noticing. WSL's poster suggests as much. Do not stand in the way. It is an adaptation of one of the most famous posters celebrating Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. There too a steamship was juxtaposed with a sailing boat as a roaring locomotive is to a stage-coach. Progress.

The Titanic may not have been as technically innovative as Brunel's *Great Western*, the first transatlantic steamer, had been in 1838: her two state of the art engines generated what was then an astonishing 750 horsepower. Titanic's two more conventional engines each weighed 1000 tons and generated 30,000 horsepower between them; it also had a third, smaller engine. The three sister ships of the 'Olympic' class had more horsepower on board than all the steam engines in all the dark satanic mills and deep mines of England in 1830 when the Industrial Revolution was in full stride. Forty years earlier Harland & Wolff had built what was then the largest ship afloat at 3078 tons. Titanic was more than 15 times as large. It was an astonishing piece of maritime engineering as well as a triumph of decorative art and craft. In retrospect there was, as Conrad put it, something ludicrous – at the very least it tempted the gods – about a 45,000-ton hotel made of thin steel plates, decorated in the style of the pharaohs or Louis XV, ploughing through the water at 21 knots: 'a perfect exhibition of the modern blind trust in mere material and appliances'. But it was no less magical for all that. Longer by far than St Paul's or the pyramids or New York's tallest skyscraper were tall, as one of WSL's ads showed, the Titanic was the biggest man-made object in the world.

Perhaps its sinking would not have come to be seen as portentous had it not happened on the eve of the Great War. Memories of the war would have remained potent without the Titanic. It is not so clear that the Titanic would have remained in the collective memory without the war. Richard Davenport-Hines quotes Osbert Sitwell's autobiography, in which he says that at the time he thought it foreshadowed disaster. But he was writing more than thirty years later. Only a few weeks after the sinking Conrad wrote that in its 'magnitude, suddenness and severity' it should have some 'chastening influence . . . on the self-confidence of mankind', and Henry Adams likened the news to the foundering of the Republican Party: 'the sum and triumph of civilisation . . . our greatest achievement sinks at a touch . . . Nature jeers at us for our folly.' The sinking of the Titanic very quickly seemed freighted with meaning. Perhaps the Lisbon earthquake was the Titanic's Enlightenment equivalent; the wreck of the *Medusa* made infamous by Géricault's gigantic painting never came close as a marker crisis. Every age gets the disasters it deserves.

WHETHER contemporaries thought that the sinking signalled the end of the century of progress can be debated. But there is no question that by 1920 it had become emblematic of just that. Five years after *A Night to Remember*, Walter Lord published a book called *The Good Years*, about the decade before the sinking. In *Gilded Lives, Fatal Voyage*, Hugh Brewster places the Titanic squarely in its era. (Brewster is a big player in Titanic's media world – as his cover blurb says, he has '25 years' experience' in creating books about her.) Robber barons, richer than their fellow citizens to a degree unequalled until the 21st-century United States, sped

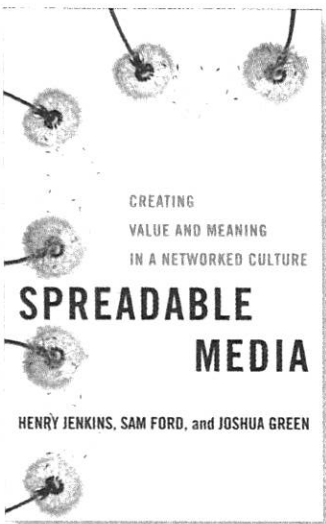
through the icy North Atlantic while dining as if in the finest restaurant in Paris. Lords of the universe. Within a few hours most were dead.

We know a great deal about the glitterati on the doomed liner and the stories are both absurdly delicious and irresistibly sad. Mahala Douglas, wife of the Quaker Oats heir, sat at the table where Captain Smith was dining with, among others, Eleanor Widener, wearing her \$250,000 pearl necklace, and her husband, the Philadelphia businessman George Widener. They were on their way home from Paris, where they had been looking for furnishings for the Ritz-Carlton, which he was about to open. Douglas reported that they ate caviar, lobster, quail from Egypt, plovers' eggs and hothouse grapes and peaches. There were pink roses and white daisies on the table. John Jacob Astor, the richest man in America, and his young new wife, Madeleine, were on their honeymoon. The 46-year-old mining magnate Ben Guggenheim was having dinner in the rococo dining room with his latest mistress, Ninette, a 24-year-old cabaret singer he had met in Paris travelling as Mme N. Aubart. She had a state-room of her own. (Peggy, the art patron, was a teenager and back in New York with her mother.) Quigg Baxter, son of the Canadian millionaire and rogue Diamond Jim, was with his girlfriend, Berthe, 'well known in Brussels in circles of pleasure', a Belgian paper later reported. His mother, also on board, didn't know that her son had booked a suite for her.

All these men were partying at 11.30 and all of them were dead less than three hours later. All of the women survived. Most of the men would die as gentlemen. Thomas Andrews, the ship's designer, inspected the damage soon after the collision, told Captain Smith that it was mathematically impossible for the Titanic to stay afloat for much more than two hours, and then quietly awaited his death after helping people into lifeboats. Some of the men who did survive were disgraced: Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon, husband of the fashion designer Lady Lucile, was said to have resorted to bribery to make it into a lifeboat; Bruce Ismay, the chairman of the White Star Line, claimed that an officer more or less urged him to take a place – others said he pushed his way in. Neither lived down the fact that they survived. Just as paternalism had been the moral cover for exploitation in the old regime, self-sacrifice was meant to redeem the rich of the Gilded Age. Not everyone bought the redemption story.

The Titanic sank just a little more than a decade after the founding of the Labour Party and just a year after Lloyd George's battle with the House of Lords over the People's Budget. Eugene Debs, candidate of the Socialist Party of America, won almost a million votes in the presidential election of 1912. The seeming ascendance of the working class coloured the politics of the age and, in turn, determined an important element of the counterstory. Conrad's screed against the 'vulgar demand of a few moneyed people for a banal hotel luxury', and the union leader Ben Tillett's protest against 'the vicious class antagonism shown in the practical forbidding of the saving of the lives of the third-class passengers', quoted

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disapprovingly in the *Daily Mail*, make the point. In response the paper cited misleading statistics – there were almost as many third as first-class passengers saved – and self-righteously chastised Tillett for his ‘ill-timed introduction of class distinctions at a time of national mourning’; it also published story after story of millionaire bravery. Brewster’s book, while not in so many words taking sides in the class war, is with the *Mail* and the rich and famous. James Cameron is a late 20th-century advocate of the Tillett position, with an added twist of anti-British Irish nationalism.

There are two ways round this simple story. Davenport-Hines, in his elegant and poignant book, very much in the spirit of *A Night to Remember* and a worthy successor to it, gives it depth and colour. To begin with, he makes clear, the Titanic was not the hell-hole of 19th-century immigrant traffic. Quite the contrary. What the White Star Line lost in speed it made up in amenities. If First Class was the Ritz, Second Class was a Lyons Corner House: warm, comfortable, solidly bourgeois, at the higher end not much less expensive than modest First Class. And Third Class was more than fine. It was spread over four decks and not, as was usual, confined to the waterline. The public rooms were whitewashed pine; sofas were teak. There was a bunkroom for the lowest-paying passengers but there were two and three-berth cabins for those paying a bit more; there were showers for everyone, almost unheard of on other ships. There were lavatories, not open trenches. The dining room had chairs instead of benches. Food was good and plentiful, kosher for Jewish customers. The most expensive suite (£512) cost almost eighty times more than the lowest third-class ticket, but the median first-class fare was only eight times the median fare in third, smaller than the difference between a first and an economy air ticket from London to New York today.

While Davenport-Hines tells the well-worn stories of first-class worthies he also gives second and third-class passengers names and stories and memorials. At the time no one much cared about steerage. He does: he writes about two Greek farm workers, Panagiotis Lymperopoulos and Vassilios Katavelas, whose monument outside their village speaks of the treacheries of the seas and the safety of the land; and John and Annie Sage, who were travelling with their nine children to take over a citrus farm on which they had paid a deposit – they all died. He also tells the story of a Lebanese woman called Shawnene Abi Saab who worked as a laundress in Ohio and had earned enough to bring her three sons and two daughters over to America. She then sent one of her sons, accompanied by a sibling, back to Lebanon to recover from what sounds like TB, and rushed there herself when he took a turn for the worse, but arrived too late. She was on her way back to America. There are also two cranky mysterious women travelling second class, Imanita Shelley and Lutie Parrish, one over fifty, the other 25, who claimed to be, but surely weren’t, mother and daughter. Davenport-Hines reminds us that the Titanic’s sinking happened in an age when ocean travel was commonplace

and served a burgeoning global labour market, with lots of ordinary people going back and forth.

Finally, his account of the collision and sinking makes clear that class was a secondary factor in the high death toll and even in determining who was rescued. Famously, the Titanic carried lifeboats for only 1178 out of a capacity load of 3547 passengers and crew. There were 2224 people on board; even if every boat had been filled to capacity, more than a thousand would have drowned. As it was, around 1500 perished; the exact number is still in dispute. But, as Davenport-Hines points out, provision on the Titanic was better than on most liners. There had been bitter, class-inflected battles to stop overloading and thus save the lives of hundreds of seamen every year until the Merchant Shipping Act of 1876 made the Load or Plimsoll Line compulsory, but no one fought for lifeboat provision. In 1894 the Board of Trade fixed a standard for waterline markings on ships above 10,000 tons, which was then as big as they came, but no one in the relevant circumlocution office thought to change it after that. ‘As long as the record was a clean one,’ one of its advisers said, he saw no reason to alter it. Maurice Clarke, the inspector who approved Titanic for sailing, defended his cursory survey by saying that no more was customary: ‘Well, you will remember I am a civil servant,’ he told the British inquiry. ‘Custom guides us a good bit.’

WHEN the collision happened there was no evacuation plan. Some passages from third-class quarters to the lifeboat decks were blocked; many people refused to board the lifeboats because they thought the ship was safer. The crew had not been trained to lower boats; some distrusted the davits that held up the lifeboats and were reluctant to board a full load. No one quite knew how to launch the four collapsible Engelhardt boats. Contingency, chaos and prejudice had as much to do with who was saved as class. The highest mortality rate was not in steerage but among the men in Second Class, who died at twice the rate of men in steerage and five times the rate of women there. The foreign staff of the first-class restaurant – they worked for the licensee and not WSL – suffered the highest proportion of deaths because they weren’t British and no one cared. Only three out of 66 survived compared to 22 per cent of the men in the engine room.

In fact, this still misses the big story: gender. First-class passengers were indeed 37 per cent more likely to survive than third-class. But men in all classes were 58 per cent more likely to die than women. Since there were three times as many women as men in Third Class and more or less even numbers in First, sexual selection took its greatest toll there. Put differently, women in steerage survived at a higher rate than men in first. (A vast set of Titanic data comes packaged free with the open-source computer program R, used for doing statistics in the social sciences. Novices are invited to play with the data to practise regressions and other statistical manipulations.) The reason for gender disparities

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is clear. Broadly speaking, men died in disproportionate numbers as the price of patriarchy. Their chivalry, their adherence to a masculine code of honour, demonstrated to the establishment on both sides of the Atlantic how deeply in error feminism and particularly the women's suffrage movement really was.

Davenport-Hines quotes Churchill's letter to his wife: 'The strict observance of the great traditions of the sea towards women and children reflects nothing but honour upon our civilisation.' And he hoped it would set right 'some of the young unmarried lady teachers' – aka suffragettes – 'who are so bitter in their sex antagonism and think men so base and vile'. That view was widespread. 'When a woman talks women's rights, she should be answered with the word Titanic, nothing more – just Titanic,' a correspondent in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* observed. Emma Goldman thought suffrage had been dealt a blow by the Titanic: woman 'continues to be as weak and dependent, as ready to accept man's tribute in time of safety and his sacrifice in time of danger, as if she were still in her baby age'. She praised the toilers and drones of the ship, its crew, braver than soldiers on the battlefield. But even among them gender played its part: 87 per cent of women crew members survived, 22 per cent of men. Emmeline Pankhurst claimed that 'women and children first' was simply a rule and that the sinking of the Titanic proved nothing about chivalry or suffrage.

On board the ship Edwardian codes of masculinity were on occasion enforced with insane zealotry. Second Officer Charles

Lightoller, the most senior survivor of the crew, interpreted the captain's orders, 'women and children first', to mean women and children first and only. No men. He forced boys as young as 11 out of boats. (Lightoller ended up in the freezing water and was miraculously rescued by a last blast of hot air from an air shaft, which put him near a boat that rescued him.) He told an inquiry that he was defending what he took to be a law of nature, that men deferred to women at times of supreme danger. Nothing impressed one correspondent more 'than the admiration expressed by the women for the men who sacrificed their lives in order that the women might escape'. Men on the starboard side fared better because First Officer William Murdoch interpreted the order to mean that men could board if no women and children were waiting for a place. And some men – most important, some lowly crew members and strong labourers among the passengers – sneaked onto boats on the port side when Lightoller was turned away. This was a good thing, because they were able to row the boats away from the sinking ship.

The vernacular anti-semitism of the age also played itself out. As Lifeboat 5 was being lowered, the corpulent Dr Henry Frauenthal leaped aboard and landed on another first-class passenger, Annie Stengel, whose husband made much of the incident once they were safely back in New York. (He made it into the boat because it was launched from Murdoch's starboard side.) Fortunately for the reputation of Jews, Ben Guggenheim, after ushering his

mistress to safety, proclaimed that he would die a gentleman, and Isidor Straus, co-owner of Macys, refused a place because of his age. His wife of 41 years announced that she had lived with her husband for most of her life and she would die with him. They sat on deckchairs as the boat sank.

THE DISASTER was thus at the time and remained a parable of the great issues of its day. It was, and is, also sustained by its intimate connection with the most advanced technology of its day, technology that looked not back to the mechanics of the 19th century but to the triumphs of electromagnetism in the 20th. Wireless communication was barely ten years old when the Titanic issued her call for help. She was not the first ship to send a radio SOS. Those letters only became standard in 1908 and were used by a Cunard steamer in trouble off the Azores in 1909. ('CQD' had been the emergency call before then, and the Titanic used both codes. The surviving wireless operator Harold Bride told the *New York Times* that before things became dire he had joked with his boss, Jack Phillips, who did not survive, that he should use 'SOS': 'It's the new call and it may be your last chance to send it.')

The wireless on the Titanic was the most powerful in civilian use – the technology was of military origin – and the Titanic was the first wreck of a new age in which events far from land could be communicated through the air. Wireless traffic functioned like an aircraft's black box, but also as a giant gossip machine, or an electromagnetic Mercury, as the Marconi ads showed, delivering good or more usually horrible news, offering a real-time account of disaster as it happened and evidence from many vantages for reconstructing it afterwards. Barely a decade after the first test signal had crossed the Atlantic the new communication technology would shape the way the Titanic entered history.

The Bodleian has produced an informative and quite beautiful collection of wireless communications about the disaster: transcriptions of the *procès-verbaux* of ten ships and two land stations with the Titanic, with one another, and also some between third parties in the hours before and after the sinking; personal and official correspondence from ship to shore; and a sampling of other relevant telegraphy. The existence of this book shows the narrative reach of the Titanic story. In December 2004, Marconi, which once held the patents that made wireless transmission possible and controlled most of the North Atlantic traffic in the early 20th century, gave Oxford University its archives, including all communication with and about the Titanic. Bernard Quaritch Ltd, the rare book dealers, underwrote the publication of *Titanic Calling*, because they too had a connection with the ship. The American bookseller A.S.W. Rosenbach had sent a message to the son of the firm's founder within days of the sinking, informing him that one of their best customers, Harry Elkins Widener, had died: 'Harry Widener and Father Lost, Titanic. Mrs Saved.' Quaritch posthumously purchased 18 lots on Harry's behalf in 1912 and his mother continued to buy

books from both firms to build up her dead son's collections. They in turn became the nidus of the great Harry Elkins Widener Memorial Library at Harvard, which she endowed in honour of her dead son. Harry died clutching a 1598 copy of Francis Bacon's *Essays* that he had loved too much to trust to the post and took with him on the boat.

This assemblage of transmissions reflects a technology that was still unsocialised. In some measure the problems were technical. The equipment was cranky; the operators on the Titanic, employees not of the White Star Line but of the Marconi Company, had just spent seven hours fixing their transmitters and were busy sending a backlog of private messages. The range of wireless signals was dependent on atmospheric conditions – normally between 250 and 400 miles, but on a very good night up to 2000 – and transmissions sometimes went from ship to ship to shore station to other shore station and out again instead of directly. The origin of any given message was sometimes hard to identify. They were not private. Some of the records reprinted here are of messages overheard by third parties, like a children's party game in which each successive retelling adds to the muddle. It was hard to sort through simultaneous transmissions and to tell who had sent what and when. But people worked around all these problems.

More important, protocols of communication were not in place. The problem was cultural. Cyril Evans, the wireless operator on the *Californian*, by far the closest ship – around twenty miles away, possibly less – had tried to tell his colleagues on the Titanic about an hour before the collision that his boat was surrounded by ice and had stopped for the night. He was told: 'Shut up, shut up, I am busy; I am working Cape Race.' (Cape Race was the Marconi station at the south-eastern tip of Newfoundland.) Evans was not insulted. His loud signal, coming from nearby, was screwing up distant transmissions and Jack Phillips, the Titanic's head wireless operator, needed him to be quiet. Evans went to bed and by the time he was woken up at 3.30 and tuned in to radio chatter it was too late to save anyone.

The same sort of muddle determined whether warnings about ice from other ships did or did not reach the Titanic bridge. There were five or six such messages as well as overheard chatter from other ships; Captain Smith did in fact alter his route southwards. These warnings were quasi-official communications and were supposed to take precedence over private messages, and perhaps they did on occasion. But there was no protocol in place as to when or how they were to be delivered; they were certainly not taken to the bridge as they came in. The officers on the Titanic thus had no sense whether the warnings were becoming more frequent or urgent. Marconi's radio operators were too busy sending off a backlog of sweet nothings to rush word of iceberg sightings up to the bridge. This was not their primary job. Safety depends on protocols, on routines, and there were none. Indeed, no one knew that there needed to be any. They are, as a saying in the US Navy goes, written in blood. After

the Titanic sank rules were laid down: radio operations on ships above a certain size were to be kept open 24 hours a day and information relevant to navigation had to be passed on promptly.

The new technology failed to prevent the disaster but it provided a big chunk of the narrative of the Titanic. We have the love notes of Dorothy Gibson and Jules Brulatour: '12 April - Will do everything make you completely happy Love you madly, Julie'; '14 April - Fancy adjoining room Great Northern'; '16 April - Will be worried to death till I hear from you.' And we have the reconstructed log of the Carpathia, the ship that rescued the survivors: '11.20 pm Heard Titanic calling "SOS" and "CQD". Answered him immediately. Titanic says "Struck iceberg, come to our assistance at once. Lat 41.46 N Long 50.14 W." Informed bridge at once.' At 12.28 the last blurred message ended abruptly. At 12.27 the Virginian's procès-verbal reports: 'MGY [Titanic] calls CQ. Unable to make out his signal. Ended very abruptly as if power switched off. His spark rather blurred or ragged. Called MGY and suggested he try emergency set but heard no response.' Phillips stayed at his station until the end but, with reduced power, no one heard him. In the hours and days to come there are messages not to bury anyone at sea; a garbled list of survivors; relieved messages from relatives in New York; business messages. And there is the record of the two inquiries into all this - one in Britain, one in America. In the age of Twitter and the web it is commonplace to witness great events at huge distances and to dissect them minute by minute. Electro-

magnetism has made possible new kinds of narrative. The Titanic, modest as the wireless now seems, was the first.

THESE BOOKS bear witness to the nearly unprecedented narrative generativity of the sinking, with stories that look to past and future. What if the binoculars had not been left in a cabinet in Southampton; what if First Officer Murdoch had rammed the iceberg head on, not grazed it; what if the Californian had heard the distress signal; what if it had recognised the flares as signs of distress; what if it had recognised the Titanic as the ship sending the signal and gone to its aid. And so on. Every passenger had a story, as Davenport-Hines shows so amply. And scores of would-be passengers had stories: Lord William Pirrie, the chairman of Harland & Wolff, would have been aboard his shipyard's greatest achievement had he not been recovering from a prostate operation.

Every survivor had a story. Children remembered the last glimpse of their father, wives of their husband. Everyone thought they remembered the orchestra playing 'Nearer, My God to Thee', until very near the end. For all sorts of reasons the stories of the rich and famous have dominated; theirs are the lives that have always been better documented. But everyone who survived that night became a 'survivor', watched by the world, and given obituaries. The last of them, Milvina Dean, died in 2009. Ever more stories were generated in the process of generating stories. Walter Lord gathered new material from 63 survivors still alive in 1954 that has in turn

been incorporated into the current crop of books.

The two inquiries produced still more stories, national rivalries and further questions. The US inquiry, as Barczewski shows in her history of some of the Titanic's multiple afterlives, was informed by populist hostility; the British one by patriotism. Captain Smith was the villain of one and the hero of the other. As the ship sunk lower in the water and the tilt increased, he is supposed to have taken a megaphone and shouted: 'Be British.' You can't make this up. Many individual errors made by the inquiries needed, in the view of some, to be righted in the century to come. Captain Stanley Lord of the Californian, for example, although not formally charged with negligence by the British inquiry, disputed the Board of Trade's finding that his ship could have reached the Titanic in time to help rescue people had it started moving when it saw the sinking ship's first rocket. He appealed, but since he had not been disciplined the Board rejected his request. When Walter Lord repeated the charges in 1954, Captain Lord (no relation) tried again, backed up by two petitions from fellow mariners, and was again rejected. Finally, in 1990, with Lord now dead, and after the discovery of the Titanic's wreck far from its reported position, the secretary of state for transport was induced to order the Marine Accident Investigation Branch to look into the matter again. An inspector from outside the agency largely agreed with the original findings; the deputy chief inspector of the Marine Accident Investigation Branch, on the other hand, agreed in

a separate report with Captain Lord's view and concluded that the Californian was not as near the Titanic as had been thought. And so it goes.

What happened on the night of 14-15 April 1912 projected into both the reality and the fiction of the future, back and forth. The greatest university library in the United States owes its existence to the sinking of the Titanic; so does the opening premise of *Downton Abbey*. Cameron's Titanic portrays First Officer Murdoch in a bad light: his face at the moment of collision suggests culpability; it is left ambiguous whether he took a bribe from Ismay to get him a place on the boat; worse still, he is shown shooting a passenger before killing himself. Barczewski reports on the ensuing dust-up. Murdoch's nephew wrote to Cameron after reading the script but got no answer; an SNP MP proposed a motion in the Commons putting his dismay at the inaccuracies of the film on record; the *Mirror*, the *Independent* and various Scottish papers joined in. Finally, in 1998, Twentieth-Century Fox capitulated: its executive vice president conceded that there were no grounds for the film's portrayal of Murdoch, apologised and personally delivered a £5000 donation to the Dalbeattie High School prize fund, established almost a century earlier to honour the town's brave son. Even the iceberg has a narrative afterlife. *Chasing Ice*, the spectacular film on global warming released at the end of 2012, is about 'the calving of a massive glacier believed to have produced the ice that sank the Titanic'. Finally, a century on, civilisation takes its revenge on nature. □

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