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## At the Movies

***Titanic*. Written and directed by James Cameron.**

**Reviewed by Francis G. Lu**

“Love must be told. Not so that it can be forgotten, but so that it may be reweven into the tapestry of the present.” (George Vaillant, Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, 1987)

Rose Calvert, this screenplay’s fictional 101-year-old present-day survivor of the 1912 Titanic disaster, tells us an extraordinary love story, which had blossomed between herself and Jack Dawson for just the final three days before the great boat sank. It is reawakened now, eighty-five years later, through her seeing a drawing of her young self and touching her lost comb and mirror, things recovered from the wreck by a recent expedition. These objects, along with haunting videotapes of the actual ship two and a half miles below the ocean’s surface, stimulate her to bring forth her remarkable story. The fortune-hunting scavengers of the Titanic wreck have been looking for the “Heart of the Ocean” diamond, believed to have been lost with the ship; what they (along with us, the audience) discover through Rose’s story is the heart of the emotions surrounding the sinking itself—not only the fear and horror, but the courage, sacrifice and love of those 1500 souls who lost their lives that fateful night. In the tradition of great epic films, the director, James Cameron, hoped that this remembered love story would serve as “a kind of emotional lightning rod, if you will, allowing viewers to invest their mind and their hearts to make history come alive again.” He has more than succeeded in this ambition; in the spirited figure of Rose, he actually provides a living bridge between Titanic’s time and our own.

The love story tosses together a seemingly unlikely pair: Rose DeWitt Bukater (Kate Winslet), a seventeen-year-old upper-class American suffocating under the rigid expectations of her mother and fiancé, who see their stratified, patriarchal Edwardian world increasing threatened by those beneath their station, and one of those threats, Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio), a free-spirited, penniless artist who has won a third-class ticket at a poker game just before the ship sets sail from Southampton. Seeing no way out of her impending marriage to brutishly rich Cal Hockley (Billy Zane), Rose decides to throw herself off the stern of Titanic on its third transatlantic evening. Young Jack spots her and, with cunning empathy, tricks her into accepting his rescue. Approaching her slowly as he buys time by describing the fierce piercing coldness of the water below, he asserts, “You jump, I jump,” while taking off his coat and shoes as if to dive in after her. She’s won over into returning to life, and the next day, as Jack opens her eyes to the possibilities of true aliveness that he finds in the world, the transgression of their forbidden infatuation becomes evident even to her mother and Cal, who immediately try to rein her in. (One of several scenes reminiscent of *Gone With the Wind* shows her mother lacing up Rose’s bodice as she guilt-trips her back into submission.)

On Titanic's fifth (and final full) day, Rose at first rebuffs Jack but finally surrenders to her passion. She rushes to him at the bow of the ship, and he lifts her up so that her arms are outstretched into the wind, a living masthead. They kiss as the camera swoops several times past them and then the entire ship at sunset while in the foreground swells the tune of the end-credit song "My Heart Will Go On." Fusing past and present, Cameron lets this joyous scene fade into the actual bow of the wreck.

Later, in a charming sequence, Rose asks Jack with bohemian boldness to sketch her wearing only the "Heart of the Ocean" diamond, which the young artist obligingly accomplishes with earnest restrained excitement. Again, Cameron reminds us of the importance of memory as we watch the young girl's face transition to the face of the elderly Rose which retains the fresh beauty of the young Rose's right eye, in a lovely piece of cinematic *trompe l'oeil*. Escaping from Cal's manservant, they consummate their love just hours before the iceberg scratches out an unexpected gash in the hull that looks like a fragment of Morse code (just twelve square feet) that opens enough compartments to doom the "unsinkable" ship.

Against the backdrop of increasing anxiety and fear as the ship starts to take on water at a slowly accelerating pace, Rose, rather than enter a lifeboat, decides to stay on board to rescue Jack, who has been falsely accused of stealing the diamond and placed in a brig below, where the water is quickly rising. Her rescue of him reverses the circumstance of their original meeting, and then, even when being lowered later in one of the very last lifeboats, apparently waving a final goodbye to Jack, she leaps off it onto a lower deck to embrace him at the grand staircase, reminding him, "Remember, 'you jump, I jump'!" The pair becomes our direct access to the catastrophe itself, the final terrible moments when the ship tilts ever more, its lights go out, and the superstructure breaks into two parts. Those left on board, including Rose and Jack, scramble to reach the stern. As the stern tilts ninety degrees, they manage to hang on together at the exact spot where they first met; this time, they plunge for real into the frigid ocean as the stern section drops beneath them. As the cries of hundreds of survivors who are literally freezing to death trickle to only a few, Jack (in the water) gently pleads with Rose, who is perched on a remnant of a wooden headboard, never to lose hope. Holding her hand, he tells her never to let go, to muster her strength to fulfill her dreams. She promises this to him. Later, a rescue lifeboat approaches, only to discover it had come too late to save the many dead, who are now frozen figures bobbing silently in their life jackets in the still, clear ocean. In a visual echo of Griffith's 1920 silent classic *Way Down East*, in which Lillian Gish precariously rests on an ice floe with her hand in the water, Rose awakens to find her frozen dead lover still clutching her hand. Overwhelmed with grief, unable to emit a cry, she lovingly lets him go and sees him slowly disappear in the depths. Then, spotting the lifeboat rowing away, she doggedly retrieves a whistle from a frozen crew member's hand and, as if immediately living out her promise to Jack, blows faintly but persistently until she is finally rescued. She is one of only six survivors to be plucked from the water that night, but she disguises her identity by naming Jack's last name as her own.

Returning to the contemporary story, the elderly Rose (Gloria Stuart) tells the captivated, tear-filled fortune hunter crew that "he saved me in every way a person can be saved. I don't even have a picture of him, only in my memory." The final scene in the film is a dream sequence beginning with a graceful passage through a cluster of photographs in the bedroom of the sleeping Rose—images of herself and family that attest to her having indeed fulfilled her pledge to live life to its fullest. The camera sweeps past Rose in her bed to a total

darkness which next reveals the bow of the wreck. The camera advances down the wreck's promenade deck as interior lights suddenly brighten the deck into its past full color and then sweeps into the grand staircase where all aboard, full of life, applaud as the young Jack turns around to face, embrace, and kiss the youthful Rose, who is coming to meet him. Possibly the dream is meant to prefigure Rose's own death, for after the camera spirals up to the crystal dome above and then dissolves into brilliant whiteness, Celine Dion poignantly sings the end-credit song "My Heart Will Go On," which proclaims the ever-present, transpersonal numinosity of remembered love ("Near, far, wherever you are, I believe that the heart does go on") and the certainty of eventual reunion of all who love truly.

What makes *Titanic* remarkable as a disaster film is its affirmation of life itself, which it achieves through a vibrant evocation of the anima, which Jung has described as the archetype of life. Through the course of the film, Rose comes to embody several characteristics that John Beebe has described as signs that a leading female character in a film is truly an anima figure: unusual radiance; a desire to make emotional connection as the main concern of the character; some unusual capacity for life, in vivid contrast to the other characters in the film; and the protective and often therapeutic effect the character exerts on someone else. ("The Anima in Film," in *Gender and Soul in Psychotherapy*, edited by Nathan Schwartz-Salant and Murray Stein, Wilmette, IL, Chiron, 1992, pp. 261–277) At the beginning, Rose's engagement to Cal—a rather sinister evocation of the Edwardian persona—foreshadows a dreary arranged marriage of status and wealth so devoid, in prospect, of passion and relatedness that she attempts to escape it by suicide. Jack, whose youthful spirit has much of the American trickster to it, slyly captivates her (and the audience's) heart in the course of rescuing her. His telling of his own stories as an adventurous artist as well as his own aliveness evokes those potentials within her. Jack embodies the therapeutic possibilities of the trickster figure, with the power to rescue the anima not only from physical, but also spiritual death. The importance of this archetypal relationship was first noted by Beebe in the pages of this journal in his essay, "The Trickster in the Arts," (Vol. 2, no. 2, Winter, 1981). Here, the trickster succeeds in rescuing the progressive anima, the other side of the Edwardian age, for our own time, inviting us to see her as a forerunner of our own recent feminist history. When Rose courageously gives up her empty engagement and her vapid upper-class life to join Jack in love for less than twelve hours in clock time, and for a lifetime in her memory, she moves our own time forward. The immediate poignancy of their love is amplified by our knowledge of their being on the doomed vessel of an inhumane patriarchy, and their heroic struggles to stay together by twice emerging from the flooded hallways is nothing less than the triumphant survival of timeless romantic values in the midst of enormous social change. Their final exchange about the need for her to live on, as a world is dying around them and as their own physical relationship ends, reminds me of a passage by Joseph Campbell, who understood the *Liebestod* theme as well as anyone: "Love is the burning point of life, and since all life is sorrowful, so is love. The stronger the love, the more the pain . . . the pain of being truly alive." (Campbell, in conversation with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, New York, Doubleday, 1988, p. 205)

In its imagery, this love story bears an uncanny resemblance to Rouben Mamoulian's *Queen Christina*, which was also based on a freakish historic event. In that 1933 film, Greta Garbo plays a seventeenth-century Queen of Sweden trapped in a court life that destines her to marry a boorish Swedish count. Disguised as a man, she escapes to a country inn, where by chance she meets a Spanish envoy (John Gilbert) who is en route to the court. His

reminiscences about romantic cities in Spain amuse and enthrall her. After Christina finally reveals herself as a woman, they fall in love and stay in bed for three days. Soon after, we are treated to a magical bedroom scene where Garbo lovingly caresses a spinning wheel, a wall mirror, the bedsheets, and bedposts while the soundtrack orchestra softly plays a lilting air. When Gilbert asks her, “What are you doing?” she declares convincingly, “In the future, in my memory, I shall live in this room.” Later, choosing not to be forced into marrying the Swedish count, Christina shocks her subjects by abdicating the throne. She rushes to meet her lover secretly on a sailing ship that will carry them to Spain, but he, having been mortally wounded by the Swedish count in a duel, is able only to speak longingly of Spain before he dies in her arms. Emerging from speechless grief, Garbo’s Christina hears again the musical theme she first heard in the bedroom scene, and it evokes the memory of that bedroom and their love. She decides to set sail for Spain alone, and she walks to the bow of the ship. There, over the next one and half minutes, the camera slowly zooms in on Garbo’s radiant face, hair flying (the way Rose’s does, supported by Jack on the bow of the Titanic), until it fills the entire screen—a face of courage, freedom, and serenity.

*Queen Christina* offers us a way to understand *Titanic*. At the start of both films, the anima figures dutifully adhere to deadening collective social expectations, while living in despair. Through improbable *coniunctios*, chance relationships with male figures who inspire them to integrate the spirit of the trickster in a positive way, they gain a sense of aliveness and fulfillment which eventually releases them from the past. Upon the untimely deaths of their rescuing trickster lovers, which suddenly cut short their physically consummated loves, these anima figures achieve a new height of spiritual freedom, transforming their grief through remembrance and internalization of their love. Through the mystery of the heart connecting with the Self, the heroines of both these films resolve with courage to go on and to live fully and freely in the present. Simply put, these are romantic films which are deeply feminist in outlook, portraying the liberation of a woman’s spirit and (for their male directors) the individualization of the anima. (It might be noted in this regard that the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, later called the National Woman’s Party, was founded in America in 1913, the year after *Titanic* sank; so there is a direct tie to Women’s Liberation as well.)

Cameron himself certainly seems to have set his own imagination free with this movie. Unlike the 1953 *Titanic* and the 1958 *A Night to Remember*, Cameron’s *Titanic* recreates exquisite physical details of the historical vessel (from constructing a ninety-percent-scale ship down to the weave of the dining room carpet), utilizes the actual human events that were recorded during the voyage, and presents the sinking with superb visual effects over one and a half hours (about sixty percent of the actual sinking time); the extraordinary verisimilitude serves an important role in fusing the fictional archetypal love/death story with the epic tragedy that is based on an actual historic event. As a consequence, this *Titanic* achieves, at times, the grandeur of great opera. Furthermore, throughout the film, the director includes contemplative moments where the soundtrack supersedes the sounds in the visual scenes (which sometimes move in slow motion); at such moments, the audience can both empathize with the characters and gain perspective and distance. James Horner’s haunting, Irish-inspired score spans the range from all-out drama to contemplative, hushed reverence as he interweaves, at critical points, the leitmotifs of the ship and their love. Although some may argue that the depiction of the 101-year-old Rose reduces the suspense of the film (“We know that she survives”), the contemporary frame into which the

remembered story is set succeeds in carrying the sense that life is to be lived even as love is remembered. It is one thing for the computer-animated graphic of the sinking to show, early in the film, the physical sequence of the end result we know so well, and quite another for an audience to contemplate emotionally the more intriguing question of how the soul survives such catastrophes and how life develops through them. For that, one has to watch the film that tells Rose's story. By the end, we not only know what happened to her, but we have been there with her; her Titanic has become a living part of our own memory, and a vital link to the past.