

"TITANIC"

I was very specific. I told our congregation that they should not waste their time & money to see Jas. Cameron's 3'20" film (but to see "Amistad" instead, in anticipation of a Conversation of Consequence on it). Didn't work. If you can't lick 'em join 'em, so I saw it myself today. More worth a Thinksheet than I would have thought.

1 Something for everybody--guys/gals, young/old, rich/poor. But only for white folks: no "minorities" in it. And nothing for God, whose name is often but only in profanity. Good cocktail for making money, of which it's made more than has any other film in the history of cinematography.

2 Overlaid on an 80-year-old tragedy is the obligato of a modern style fe/male romance (RHD2 meaning 7: "a love affair" between lower-class Jack Dawson & upper-class Rose--who, after seducing him, & after his hyperthermic death in the Atlantic, refers to herself, in proleptic fantasy, as "Rose Dawson").

3 The redemption theme is entirely exhausted in the love affair, which is in the religious sense the movie's only redeeming feature. Rose is liberated from her tight-corset entrapment in upper-class society, engaged to a man whose wealth could clear up her deceased father's debts (which is why her mother is throwing her into his arms). (Metaphor: Her mother tightens on Rose's corset.)

The throw-back format is sustained throughout. Rose as a centenarian is recounting, to a suboceanic exploration team, the sinking as she experienced & remembers it. In stunning superimposition (the film is classic for its special effects), we see her old face fade back into young Rose's face, the eye seemingly a perfect match. And almost the last thing she says to the crew is this: "He [Jack] saved me in every way that a person can be saved." (Scratch Jesus: his services not needed.)

4 So, an old-fashioned romance. He literally saves her from suicide: the exodus, the way out of her trap, is not the ocean of water but the ocean of libido. The whole notion infuriates modern feminism: a self-esteeming, self-respecting female should take responsibility for working her way out of traps without male help; & she's not truly free as long as she awaits/welcomes a male savior (for she cannot fall into his arms without falling into his hands, his control [becoming dependent on him]).

While it goes too far in the autonomous-individual direction, I'm with modern feminism when I think of my grandmothers, who married glamor when substance (they claimed to their small grandchildren, in bedtime stories) was available: their old-fashioned romances, instead of freeing them from traps, were themselves traps.

The heart of old-fashioned romance is that it was/is experienced as a way of salvation (& frequently proves to be a way of damnation).

And probably the film's most corrupting influence is on young girls: I haven't heard the latest count of the number of times our age-13 granddaughter has seen it. It infects them with IFD disease: unrealistic idealism about the glories & salvific-ecstatic-transformative powers of erotic ("fall in") love; the frustration of finding, in actual love-experiences, that the love-stories you'd fed on (including this film) were unrealistic, utopian; & the resulting disappointment-despair-(often, in teen addictions & suicides) death. (One reason it's the highest grossing film is that it is itself an addiction for hordes of pubescent females.)

5 It's a new-fashioned romance in that, resisting all pressures to get her to conform to the customs of her "set" & the will of her mother, she chooses the man she wants & seduces him: we are expected to admire her for both the liberation & the fornication. Hypotext: Fornication can be liberating. The guy saves the gal, then the gal does everything she possibly can to save the guy. Each, be-times, takes the initiative: partnership? Not all values in the picture are skewed. Part of the film's appeal here is that the open-endedness of the Jack/Rose relationship is where "romance" is in this society at the present time: in process of reform-

ation. It's like Romeo/Juliet in that society is only a negative participant in the relationship: it's unlike R./J. (in which the couple are married by a priest) in the entire absence of God/clergy/church. New-fashioned romance bears the new burden of being the coupling of two hypertrophied individuals, each in particular ways psycho-isolated from society. The fact that such coupling has a dismal prognosis is obscured by the fact that (as in the case of some mating insects) the male dies soon after the coupling, which continues (for most of a century!) only in the female's fantasy-life. From the "family values" viewpoint, it's a sick film. But the society is now sex-sick, & gets some comfort in seeing itself reflected in sick entertainment (including pornography, of which there's only a whiff in "Titanic": we see some of Jack's sketches of Parisian prostitutes, sketches that Rose wants to pretend herself into--so Jack does her nude in a traditional whore-pose, a drawing that becomes the chief item the underseas explorers rescue from the wreck). (It's a formula film: profanity, nudity, violence, & the 60s-ish worship of antisocial attitudes & actions & their hero[ine] embodiments.) (And it's a formation film: it inwardly forms young adults to view society as enemy of the only salvation there is, viz. in the courage to (as Jos. Campbell is famous for saying) "follow your bliss").

6 And its thoroughgoingly cynical, loaded with whatever can in combinations produce the maximum manipulation of a jaded public's yearning for stunning spectacle. Director Jas. Cameron, in receiving one of the film's Oscars, cried out what Jack cries out on the Titanic's prow: "I'm the king of the world!" Fantasy. Reality: When Loree & I left the theater, my eye caught a tabloid with the head "Cameron's Woman Throws Him Out!" IFD disease?

7 Interwoven **themes**: Anti-hubris: The "unsinkable" sinks....Anti-class: 1st/3rd-class clashing....Anti-technology, but mixed with oh!wow! awe of the Titanic's marvels....Anti-wealth: Old Rose drops into the ocean what's touted as the world's second greatest diamond, the prize the wreck-crew failed to find....Anti-sexism: Rose's fiancé was a control-freak, from whom she struggles--finally successfully--to break away....The fragility of life: Guggenheim, on top of the world, is soon at the bottom of the ocean....The proximity of life/death....No race: nobody here but just us white folks....Almost no religion: The last piece the string quartet plays is "Nearer, my God, to Thee"--but it's not identified. During the sinking, a priest shouts the Hail, Mary & concludes with words at the Bible's end: "There shall be no more sea....no more death." And in a 1st-class worship we hear a few lines of "Eternal Father, strong to save."

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