

# Modes of Narration and Myth(o)logy

Revelation and Transformation in  
Beryl Bainbridge's *Every Man for Himself*  
and James Cameron's *Titanic*

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In the year 1996 Beryl Bainbridge published her award-winning novel about the *Titanic* disaster, *Every Man for Himself*. The following year James Cameron's film *Titanic* was released to the acclaim of eleven Oscars. These two recent dramatisations of the 1912 catastrophe at sea are far from the only examples of the cultural preoccupation with this event. To my knowledge, the world has seen eleven earlier cinematic productions, sixteen novels, twenty-three books for young readers, as well as a number of versions in art, poetry, drama, and the musical. In addition, there are hundreds of non-fictional accounts, articles, books and documentaries. Also the academic world has paid tribute to this collective memory. In July of 2000, for instance, an international, multidisciplinary conference was held at the University of Southampton, entitled: "Nights to Remember: Memory, Modernity and the Myth of the *Titanic*".

It is clear that the *Titanic* disaster, unlike many other disasters of similar tragic magnitude, is generally seen as a defining moment in time. For, as W.W. Dixon points out in his book *Disaster and*

*Memory*, all historical disasters do not become part of our collective memory (44). Apparently this particular historical event not only continues to capture the imagination, but is also charged with historic momentum, reflecting a need to revisit and revive a cultural mythology. In the latter vein it has been suggested that the conspicuous return of the *Titanic* at the turn of a new millennium in a commended novel and a grand-scale movie is to be seen as a reminder of the danger inherent in an unexamined trust in the virtues and excellence of technology and the ideology of materialism. In a film review entitled “The Titanic Myth: Why Now?” James N. Kraut argues that we have not yet learned the lesson:

The prevailing historic interpretation of the *Titanic* sinking has always been that it was the death of a cherished dream: the growing hope of an ideal, materialistic world ruled by man, built with Technology and Science is said to have been shattered on April 15, 1912. In addition, it has always been said that *Titanic* served as a wake-up call to the twentieth century, warning of the perils of unbridled technological progress, greed and hubris [...] I do not think we have yet responded to it as a lesson learned. In fact, a quick look at history after *Titanic* clearly shows otherwise. [- - -] It is our failure to have absorbed the lessons of *Titanic* that has maintained its ability to capture our imagination.

In this view *Titanic* is a metaphor of the Western world headed for disaster on the “unsinkable” ship of innocence and ignorance (a number of reviews on the Bainbridge novel refer to it as a “Ship of Fools”), in a way that resembles Nietzsche’s observation of the shortcomings of modernity in *The Birth of Tragedy* that “science, spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly towards its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck” (as qtd. in Kaufmann 97). On the individual level it

also provides a fitting metaphor for the journey of life, or rites of passage, thus emphasising the inescapable interrelatedness of private and public cultural mind-sets.

My contention is that part of the present resurgent interest in the myth of the *Titanic* is that the ship and its destiny display the culturally suppressed interrelatedness of the two “different forms of knowing” (Labouvie-Vief 14), or two “modes of speaking” (Lincoln 3), namely *logos* and *mythos*. Once equally central and complementary as valid explanatory discourses and views of life in ancient Greece, *logos*, rationality and logic, now seems to reign supreme in modern Western cultures.<sup>1</sup> The two first chapter selections in the *Titanic* DVD version are significantly called “Logos” and “Ghost Ship”, and in these selections, ‘contemporary technology’ views the wreck “fallen from the world above” to the accompaniment of sonar pings, mechanical whirrings, factual details and a digital reconstruction of the sinking. The *Titanic* was/is a space in time which bears witness to the potential of scientific calculation and rationality (*logos*), as well as to the cultural disposition to mythologize and ascribe meaning (*mythos*). This sentiment of mytho-logic integration is captured in Bainbridge’s *Every Man for Himself* when the narrator muses on the ship’s uniqueness. It is not the luxury or splendour of the ship that impresses him the most:

[I]t was the sublime thermodynamics of the *Titanic*’s marine engineering that took us by the throat. Dazzled, I was thinking that if the fate of man was connected to the order of the universe, and if one could equate the scientific workings of the engines with such a reciprocal universe, why then, nothing could go wrong with my world. (Bainbridge 36)

In 1912, the myth of its “unsinkability” combined with its artistic grandeur, unparalleled size, and associations with the promise of

the new world, turned it into a literal “Ship of Dreams”. Now, the fact of its “sinkability” and associations with death, loss, and shattered dreams, turn it into a symbolic space which reflects the contradictions and uncertainties of the postmodern era.

The recent interest in revisiting the *Titanic* in literary and cinematic narrative form at the turn of the millenium coincides with a critical interest in bridging the alleged rift between *logos* and *mythos*,<sup>2</sup> as well as a growing cultural feeling of alienation and lack of purpose. Invested with a sense of both modes, the *Titanic* provides a historical/mythological framework for coming to terms with the seeming contradictions of modes of thinking and being in the world. As Mieke Bal points out, the presence of past memories “takes many forms and serves many purposes, ranging from conscious recall to unreflected reemergence, from nostalgic longing for what was lost to polemical use of the past to reshape the future” (vii).

The novel *Every Man for Himself* and the film *Titanic* are examples of “conscious recall” at the levels of both authorial production and fictional narration. Both writers (Cameron wrote the script as well as directed the film) have taken pains to re-present the technological facts, events, historical people and properties of the ship, as well as the myths, and both present the journey from the perspective of a fictive survivor. The fictive survivor in both narrative versions boards the ship as a troubled young individual, departing for “home” with misgivings and an uncertain future. In this way a historical event in collective memory is represented through the fictive “personal” recollection, which happens to be at odds with the traditional assumption that boarding the *Titanic* must have been a day of glory for every passenger, steerage or otherwise. Readers and viewers are consequently prepared for something more than the chill of irony because the fictive narrators clearly think they face bleaker prospects than death by drowning. To the film character

Rose, the *Titanic* is a “slave ship” taking her home in chains to be cast into an arranged marriage for the sake of money, and to Morgan, orphaned in infancy, the departure for home, where his substitute mother, cousin Sissy, has just delivered a baby son, sets off an attack of renewed childhood separation anxiety. The result is that the ship in both versions becomes a public space against which the discrepancy between social identity (*logos* in the sense of the unquestioned order of things – “the order of the universe” [Bainbridge 36] above) and the sense of self (as a mythological “space”) stands out as a salient narrative concern.

The words *logos* and *mythos* both mean ‘word’, ‘speech’, and ‘discourse’. In addition, *mythos* denotes tale, story, or narrative, and *logos* reason, sense, and law. On the grounds of this very basic lexical level the terms have commonly come to be associated with dichotomies such as mind/heart, rationality/emotion, science/art, truth/fiction, masculine/feminine, philosophy/poetry, history/story, all privileging the first term (*logos*) in relation to truth or validity. In metaphysical and ontological thinking, however, the picture is slightly different and the *interrelatedness* of the terms are emphasised. *Logos* is defined as both mystery and rationality, and *mythos* is “a way of discovering *logos* on the level of our cognitive abilities” (Strozewski 182). *Mythos*, then, reveals how things come to be the way they are, whereas *logos* in Heraclitean thinking, for instance, explains how things are by appealing to an unquestioned “ordering principle of the cosmos” (Meyers 165-166), that is, existing independently of any individual *logoi*. The basic assumption of this view is that *logos* is characterized by its “commonness” and its primacy, as is also suggested in the Christian tradition of St John’s identification of *logos* as the beginning (Strozewski 176). Whether secular or sacral, the idea of *logos* seems paradoxically to be associated with issues of truth and belief, much as the narrative discourse of *mythos*, as Lincoln points out, is commonly understood today

as “sacred” truth as well as “lie” (i). The views of the interrelatedness of the terms as well as their shifting nature form the basis of my analysis of the relationship between identity and self in Bainbridge’s novel and Cameron’s film. Pertinent to my discussion is also Strozewski’s suggestion that *mythos* can constitute a “‘private mythology’ – the result of the search for meaning in our lives”, which inevitably refers to “some sense”, that is, “our private *logos*” (186).

The two versions of the *Titanic* disaster, however, employ different modes of narration: the film is cast in the romantic mode and the novel in the ironic mode.<sup>3</sup> This would suggest that the novel favours *logos* and the film *mythos* in their treatment of “what was lost” and injunctions to “use the past to reshape the future”, that is, to reveal “the lesson”. But my examination of the relationship between the two modes of narration and the two modes of reasoning in relation to social identity and self will show that the modes of narration undermine the initial view of social identity as *logos* and self as *mythos* by revealing the shifting and ideological nature of both terms.

My immediate concern, however, is the cultural situatedness of the history and the story of the *Titanic*. The apocalyptic aura that surrounds the fate of the *Titanic* in cultural conception, perishing as she did at the end of an epoch only a few years before World War I, combined with the similar sentiments evoked by the notion of a new ‘millennium’, forms a contextual and pertinent background to the two versions and their modes of narration. Apocalypse in the biblical sense is not only the end; it is also revelation and transformation. In these respects, the two versions offer complementary narrative approaches in that *Every Man for Himself* centres on ironic revelation and *Titanic* on romantic (i.e., centring on ‘self’) transformation, which explains the differences in the modes of narration.

## *Titanic*

Unlike *Every Man for Himself*, in which Morgan, the survivor, narrates the events on the ship from an unspecified point in time with an emphasis on revelations of his past life, *Titanic* strives to effect a transformation of its contemporary viewers' lives by placing them in the same narratee position as the contemporary cynical treasure-hunters, Brock Lovett and his crew, to whom the 101-year-old Rose tells the story of her transformation. When Rose has finished her tale, we are supposed to exclaim with the reformed, tear-eyed Brock: "For three years I thought of nothing but the *Titanic*. I was obsessed by the *Titanic*, but it never got real – I never let it in". Although a reviewer comments that he is "not convinced that Cameron 'got' *Titanic* either" (Hertenstein 4), it is clear that the film works as a romantic Apocalypse, revealing the end to herald the hope of a new beginning through transformation, as reinforced by the priest's reading from the Book of Revelation (21-24), while the ship is sinking, ending, "for the former world has passed away".

To ensure the transformation of the audience and pave the way for a definition of what constitutes the hope for a new beginning, the film not only places the viewers in the narratee position of the contemporary frame story, but also invites us to repudiate this position of postmodern rational scepticism and relativism. The camera probings of the wreck are accompanied by Brock's mock documentary commentary on the specifics of the ship (*logos*) and the unimaginable tragedy (*mythos*), both of which are dismissed as "Bullshit" by Brock as well as his associate. The appearance of a bathtub is similarly greeted with the cynical remark "Somebody left the water running", thus further violating the viewers' sense of propriety. When the safe, believed to contain the object of their quest, the legendary diamond "Heart of the Ocean", is salvaged, cigars are about to be lit and lives are about to change because "It's payday, boys". The values of contemporary *logos* are thus presented

as money-oriented pragmatics and *homo oeconomicus* throws away the cigar in disappointment at finding the safe empty of riches. What they find, though, is a representation of the desired but absent object in the form of a drawing of a nude woman wearing the diamond. Covering up his failure by pretending to deeper sensitivities and meanings (*mythos*), while arguing that the diamond can be retrieved elsewhere (*logos*), Brock appears on TV showing the drawing, rhetorically asking: “Should this have remained unseen at the bottom of the ocean for eternity?” The viewer readily recognizes the falsehood of the rhetoric and might be tempted to answer “Yes”.

But the cinematic direct narrative address, or interpellation, also positions the viewer in *logos*, that is, in the unquestioned patriarchal and symbolic order of culturally constructed gender, which in Lacanian terms differentiates and positions male and female subjectivity through the opposition ‘having the phallus’ (being fullness)/‘lacking the phallus’ (being lack). The image of the nude woman wearing a diamond in the shape of a heart simultaneously positions the masculine (male or female) narrated subject to identify with having the signifier of female desire, while the feminine position (male or female) identifies with being that signifier of male desire.<sup>4</sup> When Rose steps forward to say “The woman in the picture is me”, shortly after adding, “Wasn’t I a dish?”, the promise of a satisfying narrative closure is held out to both positions.

The shift from the values of pragmatic economism to the values of humanity in the frame story is effected by the narration of a past transformation, that is, Rose’s story of her “experience” aboard the ship. Moved by Rose’s tale of love, courage, and death, Brock finally discards the attribute of masculinity, the cigar he has saved for when he would find the diamond, as a sign of the new belief that the material values of the “Heart of the Ocean” are gone forever and replaced by a different perception of values. Masculinity

is linked with *logos* in psychoanalytical thought and this association is demonstrably played on in the film. Not only do the pumping pistons in the machine-room and the villain's pistol evoke masculinity (while we are told that women and machinery "don't mix"), but the idea is also verbally introduced. When Ismay, the managing director of the White Star Line, pompously talks about the "stability", "strength", "luxury", "supremacy", grandness in scale, and "sheer size" of the *Titanic*, Rose tauntingly responds: "Do you know of Dr Freud, Mr Ismay? His ideas about the male preoccupation with size may be of interest to you". The ship, once, as Ismay puts it, "willed into solid reality" (*logos*), poised vertically above the level of the sea before sliding down into the deep, signals the end of the power of the phallus, or more to the point in this film, the end of its association with biological presence and absence. Giving up his quest for the diamond, the representation of the absence of the desired, Brock is feminized ('castrated') and shown as 'having lack' rather than 'having the phallus' (being fullness). His reconciliation with the idea of loss represents a resistance to the orthodox cultural gender differentiation because, if, as Cohan and Shires put it, "the male must *have* the phallus as the cultural price of attaining his gender, he can only lose the plenitude he desires" (160). Similarly, Rose constitutes a questioning of the social order that prescribes that the female "has to *be* the phallus as the cultural price of attaining her gender", thus "doubly divided from plenitude, split as the object of male desire and the subject of her own" (160). As we shall see, Rose not only *is* the phallus, she also *has* the phallus (the diamond) and moves from the position of 'being lack' to that of 'being full'.

For, as an apocalypse in the romantic mode the narrative also signals a beginning of something new through transformation. Before Rose is allowed to tell her story, she is treated to a digital and shortened reconstruction of the sinking, which she dismisses

as “forensic analysis” (*logos*), because “the experience was somewhat different” (*mythos*). From the moment she looks at herself in her retrieved and cracked stateroom mirror, drily observing that her “reflection has changed a bit”, the theme of transformation supersedes that of revelation, even though we are promised “the yet untold stories, the secrets locked deep inside the hull of the *Titanic*”. The film, in fact, offers the kind of apocalyptic myth or “fictive concords with origins and ends” that Kermode suggests is needed “to give meaning to lives and to poems” (7). Thus the end scene presents what seems to be Rose’s death-bed vision, or dream, concordant with the beginning that she recalls in terms of virgin territory, “the smell of fresh paint”, “china that had never been used”, and “sheets never slept in”: she reenters the *Titanic*, reunites with her lover on the grand staircase to the applause of all the people on board. Love seems to be the privileged element of the new beginning. But this is not the whole picture, as Davis and Womack point out in their commentary on the last frames:

A magnificent fable of human reconciliation, the scene underscores the tremendous emotional power inherent in Cameron’s decidedly unironic narrative. In short, Cameron’s ethics of sentimentality in *Titanic* engages our innate hope for spiritual transcendence, allowing us to dream our own impossible dreams.

The dream of spiritual transcendence is cast in the romantic mode of the quest for self-fulfilment and in the form of a dream-like, fairy-tale narrative. Although seeing it as a “Slave ship” when she boards, in retrospect Rose concedes that the *Titanic* was a ship of dreams, “it really was”. Unpacking her paintings, she finds a Picasso particularly fascinating,<sup>5</sup> “like being in a dream or something, there is truth, but no logic”, thus introducing *mythos* in the positive sense of “primordial truth” or “sacred story” (Lincoln i), and preparing

the viewers for an account of how she came to survive and be what she is in terms of the truth of a tale instead of rational explanation.

This narratee stance is reinforced by the character Jack who serves the function of a fairy-tale rescuer and guide, the *agent* of transformation rather than a passionate lover. A “tumbleweed, blowing in the wind”, he proclaims himself “King of the world” and elevates also Rose to the position of “Royalty”. Adding to the myth-like quality is the factor that he does not “exist” in the social sense. Since chance put him on the ship, there is no record of his passage, or as Rose says: “Now he only exists in my memory. A woman’s heart is a deep ocean of secrets. He saved me in every way that a person can be saved. I don’t even have a picture of him”. The encounter with the artistic and effeminate Jack transforms, or rather liberates Rose from the social strictures (as symbolized by the corset she is aggressively strapped into) of outwardly being “everything a well-brought-up girl should be” while “screaming” inside, to an independent and fulfilled individual. The process is one of masculinisation: he teaches her to drink, dance, spit “like a man”, and swing an axe; he inspires courage, rebellion, and above all, encourages her desire to fly and ride horses (“straddled” like a man), and makes her promise to “never let go”, nor “give up no matter what happens, no matter how hopeless”. Her collection of photographs shows that she has learnt to ride straddled, to fly an aeroplane and that she has been active in public life as an actress. We also learn that she married, had children and is now spending her old age making pottery in an idyllic surrounding of plants and flowers in abundance. In short, she discovers that the unquestioned order of social identity (*logos*) is not a natural order but a myth in the sense of a lie. Transcending the gendered space that defines woman as lack, she learns to live in plenitude, which is shown to lie in a refusal to conform to unquestioned norms of masculinity

and femininity and fulfilling her promise to Jack to survive and “to make each day count” by *doing* rather than having or being. To underline this romantic idea of true selfhood, Rose throws the diamond, which has been in her possession all the time, into the sea. Dave Kehr sees a transformation of the symbolic meaning of the diamond from being a “symbol of commercial profit” to being “an image of the place the past occupies in the present, as memory and inspiration”. The *act* of throwing it into oblivion also demonstrates a wish that it remain a symbolic memory and inspiration of human values, not to resurface as an imaginary substitute for attaining fullness in terms of money or being, but allowing us “to dream our impossible dreams”, as Davis and Womack put it.

This effect is not only seductive; it also draws attention to the inversion of the modes of reasoning because the transformation of Rose from an unfulfilled captive of social circumstances to a fulfilled, free-moving individual rests on the idea that there *is* a true self to liberate. Rose, in fact, is shown to have become what she, as it were, has always been, although, as Jack points out, “they’ve got you trapped”. The mythic mode of narration thus proclaims the truth that self is *logos*, the unquestioned and true order of things. Rose is not only true to the memory of Jack but to herself. The inversion of modes of reasoning corresponds to the Greek original distribution of significance to *logos* and *mythos*. Lincoln convincingly demonstrates that before *mythos* yielded to *logos* as the privileged term in Ancient Greece, it was associated with truth proclamations while *logos* was the speech of deception and manipulation. In addition, *mythos* was the prerogative of kings and poets, authoritative figures “having the capacity to advance powerful truth claims [...]” (Lincoln x).<sup>6</sup> In this perspective, the royal and artistic labels attached to the protagonists seem particularly well chosen, or simply bear witness to traces of cultural memory.

Davis and Womack observe that Cameron “taps into our

shared systems of culture and humanity” in *Titanic*. He also taps into the specific American literary tradition of the quest for authentic self, ranging from the optimistic *Huck Finn* and *The Scarlet Letter* to the pessimistic *Catcher in the Rye* and *Story of My Life*. In fact it can be ‘viewed’ as a counterargument to the lament of the loss of the true values of the original American dream of self-fulfilment through honesty and hard work and of its corruption by the wealth of America that Milton Stern sees as a central theme in *The Great Gatsby*. If Daisy sells herself by choosing “a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars” (Fitzgerald 82), giving up the human values of a love letter, which is “coming to pieces like snow“ in the cold bath, Rose refuses to be corrupted and entrapped by a priceless diamond and chooses the drawing, which significantly survives over the years in icy water. While Daisy remains on the couch “p-paralysed by happiness” (Fitzgerald 15), Rose lifts herself from a life of “inertia”, spreading her arms in a gesture of flying at the fore of a ship moving West in the “golden moment” that Daisy waits for and always misses (Fitzgerald 18). In other words, by resurrecting the original American dream of self-fulfilment through hard work and honesty, *Titanic* transforms a historical tragedy into the American myth *par excellence*, the success story. Lincoln develops a view of “myth as *ideology in narrative form*” (xi), and as such the film *Titanic* proclaims and celebrates the myth that individualism is the key to regeneration.

### *Every Man for Himself*

There is no romantic seductiveness in Bainbridge’s novel. Although the title indicates a similar focus on the individual, the ironic apocalyptic narration offers little hope of restorative transformation, only the change effected by the recognition of revelation. This is reinforced by the absence of a frame accounting for the narrator’s motives for telling the story, or providing knowledge as to his fate

in the present (i.e., the future *visavi* the events recounted). There is certainly survival and symbolic death and rebirth, but not to a new and promising beginning: “I had thought I was entering paradise, for I was alive and about to breathe again, and then I heard the cries of souls in torment and believed myself in hell” (Bainbridge 221). The emphasis of the narrative as *mythos* is rather on the revelation that life itself is ceaseless transition and constant loss, a liminal state of being between birth and death.

If Rose learns to live in plenitude, Morgan in *Every Man for Himself* learns to adopt a stoic attitude to life as loss. The repetition of the phrase “*All is not lost*” (Bainbridge 29, 39) early in the novel, does not signal optimism about the state of affairs, but refers to the inevitable state of suspension that is created between hope and fact, belief and disillusion, expectation and actuality. Listening to Adele’s (a fellow-passenger) performance of an aria from *Madame Butterfly*, which describes Cio-Cio-San’s (and Adele’s) futile but “never tiring” waiting for her husband/lover to return, Morgan is struck “suddenly and dreadfully” by a realization of “how cruelly she had been kept waiting, for hope springs eternal, as they say, even though the one who waits, be it a woman [Adele/Madame Butterfly] on a hillside or a child [Morgan] swinging its legs on an orphanage bench, already divines that the mandate of heaven is lost and the waiting must last forever” (Bainbridge 131-32). Shortly after this experience Morgan asserts that he does not believe in heaven, “Only justice” (Bainbridge 138). As he finds out, though, there is as little equation between “the fate of man”, “the order of the universe”, and “the scientific workings of the engines” (Bainbridge 36), as there is between “the fate of man” and “justice”.

Like so many of Bainbridge’s novels,<sup>7</sup> *Every Man for Himself* recalls the myth of the Fall, or humankind’s desire for the Paradise that “we long for as our natural state” as Michael Polanyi puts it in a discussion of the impact of religious myths on works of art (157).

As we have seen, *Titanic* also evokes associations to the ‘fall’, but unlike the film, the novel does not offer any hope in terms of redemption or restoration, only “unease which deepened into guilt, for in that moment I had already begun to forget the dead. Now that I knew I was going to live there was something dishonourable in survival” (Bainbridge 224). Among the debris floating on the water at the very end are “a creased square of canvas with a girl’s face painted on it; and two bodies, she in a gown of ice with a mermaid’s tail, he in shirt sleeves, the curls stiff as wood shavings on his head, his two hands frozen to the curve of a metal rail” (Bainbridge 224). The unidentified portrait is the painting of the mother he never knew, but has clung to, and the equally nameless bodies are those of Adele and Rosenfelder, in whose lives he becomes involved in the course of the journey, and whose fate he had earlier predicted as “The two would rise together” (Bainbridge 172). In the context of the novel’s general ironic mood and its suggestion that death is an upward mobility, this can be read as a literal truth-claim as well as an ironic prediction.

Instead of belief in essentialist notions of identity and selfhood, the novel dissolves the dichotomy between outer and inner worlds by insisting on the interrelatedness of social identity (“place”) and the self (“space”) and its continuous process of mythic construction through random trajectory events. After a short *Prologue*, the novel opens with a reminder that death is not confined to disasters, and that life is circumstantial rather than ordered, but more importantly, it opens with the issue of selfhood:

At half-past four on the afternoon of 8th April 1912 – the weather was mild and hyacinths bloomed in window boxes – a stranger chose to die in my arms. [...] With his very first words he made it plain he wasn’t overwhelmed by circumstances. ‘I know who I am,’ is what he clearly said. [...]

‘It’s as well to know oneself,’ I replied, and walked on.  
(Bainbridge 11)

Unlike the dying man, who turns out to be Adele’s lost lover, Morgan, aged 22, does not know who he is either in terms of social identity or self. His father died before he was born and his mother when he was three. Later it is revealed, to him and to the reader, that he was taken care of by an old woman who was subsequently poisoned by the landlord. As Morgan’s name was mentioned in a newspaper article on the trial in England, steps were taken by his uncle J.P. Morgan, the owner of the White Star Line, to bring him to the U.S. and raise him there. At the age of twelve, his cousin Jack informs him of his humble beginnings, the truth of which he “didn’t find all that upsetting”, simply being thankful he had not “slithered into the world on the wrong side of the tracks” (Bainbridge 14). Nevertheless, he feels like “the cuckoo in his [Jack’s] nest” (Bainbridge 13) and shows every sign of being preoccupied with his lack of parentage.

But Morgan’s anxiety about lacking identity is in sharp contrast to the way he is perceived by others. He is treated as an equal and as belonging to the leisured classes by everyone throughout the journey, and the flashbacks reveal that, as a Harvard graduate and by virtue of his “connections” (a term frequently used), he has been embraced by the ‘best’ of families throughout his life. Yet, he belongs nowhere socially – “You had the right name and nothing else” (Bainbridge 121) – and his liminality is reinforced by his seeking recognition, and displaying ignorance of codes, in every stratum of society. His homelessness is accentuated by his difficulties in finding his cabin on the ship even though he has contributed to her creation as a draughtsman on Thomas Andrews’ staff. The liminal stage, as Victor Turner argues, is one of ambiguity; it is being “neither here nor there”, and “betwixt and between

all fixed points of classification” (232). These points include being in-between *logos* and *mythos*, as Morgan is unable to make sense of, or integrate, either his position or his life experiences. Murray Stein uses the term “liminal space” for the experiential void “when the ego is separated from a fixed sense of who it is and has been, of where it comes from and its history, of where it is going and its future” (22). This situation prevails throughout as Morgan’s history is only partly revealed to him and to us. Although he learns that his mother was far from the sacred mother of his imagination, knowledge of his father remains hidden, as does his future.

Whereas Rose in *Titanic* tries to break out of her social identity to find her true self, Morgan struggles to find his true social identity, as a way of dealing with his lack of sense of self. He is a bundle of contradictions, has little or no control over his emotions or body, drinks too much, echoes other people’s ideas, constantly seeks the approval of others, especially surrogate fathers, acts both rationally and irrationally, and is prone to rationalising mythic experiences. His unquestioned order of things, *logos*, is when “people know their place [which he ironically does not], just as long as I’m not required to step on them” (Bainbridge 23), while his inner space is the site of emotional turmoil, nightmare dreams, hallucinations, guilt and longings. Suspended between haunting images of the past and failure to envision a future, he exists in a liminal time-space. While his friends have “plans for a golden future” he has no certainties that “the future would be different from what had gone before. [...] I lay flat and contemplated the heights above and the depths below” (Bainbridge 87). His *mythos* is the “growing belief” that he is “special” and “destined to be a participant rather than a spectator of singular events” (Bainbridge 15), while the *mythos* of the narrative asserts the *logos* that ‘every man’ is subject to the same destiny of existential uncertainty in their human, rather than social, identity. The everyman-quality of Morgan’s predicament is

further emphasised by the ironic revelation that his sense of being “special” is seen as normality by others. Rosenfelder points out that none of his friends are “normal” (Bainbridge 142) or “live in the proper world” and that Morgan is “different” because he has a “conscience” (Bainbridge 143), that is, a human being rather than simply a being.

The focus on liminality as a stage of individuation in Turner’s anthropological sense, is also developed into the realm of the mythic through the introduction of the mysterious Scurra, who serves as the traditional mythological and liminal go-between and mediator of worlds, a trickster hero, who “risks all and brings whatever sacred gifts a people use (in Levi-Strauss’s pattern) to identify themselves as human beings” (Spinks 1). His presence marks the narrative as *mythos* despite its elaborate signs of historical faithfulness and accuracy of detail. This figure is a man with a split lip and changing eye-colour (brown, black, grey), who knows everybody and whom everybody knows of, but is known by nobody: “It wasn’t until he had gone that I realised he’d told me nothing about himself” (Bainbridge 110). He is everywhere, has been everywhere and can appear from nowhere, and not even the stewards know where his cabin is. His occupation is anybody’s guess – “he could be any one of a number of things” (Bainbridge 142) – and his liminality and boundary-crossings are demonstrated in his resistance to cultural categorisations, norms and values. “‘Not *Mr*,’ he replied. ‘In my experience such prefixes erect barriers. Haven’t you found that to be the case?’” (Bainbridge 37). Similarly, his reaction to Morgan’s suggestion that it would “look pretty rum if one of the stewards saw him” escorting a steerage passenger to E deck, also indicates his outside position: “‘What an extraordinary chap you are,’ he said. ‘What does it matter what anyone thinks?’” (Bainbridge 79). His account of how his lip was scarred varies depending on the mythical needs of the people he tells it to: “One

should always attempt to understand what is being asked of one, don't you think?" (Bainbridge 39). Towards the end of the novel Morgan wants the truth about Scurra's lip but changes his mind: "For all it mattered, God himself could have taken a bite out of him" (Bainbridge 198).

Morgan resigns to the human fate that the truth lies neither in the logic of causal connection, nor in the realm of imagination, but is an impossibility in both, or as Scurra puts it: "Everything is already diagnosed. It's simply that we can't see the whole picture" (Bainbridge 75). Having once mistaken a red splash on a partly veiled painting for a flower, Morgan discovers that the red is actually blood on a canvass "depicting the bloodiest of battles. Later I was to remember that moment; I had mistaken a part for the whole" (Bainbridge 76). The "later" moment, however, is never revealed to the reader in any certain terms. The most likely interpretation is that it refers to the 'primal scene' as he witnesses Scurra making love to Wallis being tied to the bed. The combination of the cord and his mother's portrait on the wall triggers memories of what we may assume to be "the whole picture" of his mother and of his misdirected centring on the belief that what is lost is retrievable: "It was she, not the fetid old woman who counted gold all night, who had bound my wrists with string and tied me to the iron bolt of those half-closed shutters overlooking that stinking worm of water" (Bainbridge 153). Scurra's mediating function in this event is evident when combined with the story he tells Morgan about his lip, a story which demonstrates the interrelatedness of *logos* and *mythos* and the idea that either one can be held as a lie or a truth of "the whole picture". At the age of six Scurra encountered a mackaw croaking "*All is not lost*", and his mouth was pecked when he "cockily replied, "*What has gone missing?*" (Bainbridge 39). This *story* that Scurra tells explains how his lip came to be the way it is (*mythos*), and at the same time identifies *logos*

by refusing to provide the answer to the specific “what” and the implied “why”. It is significant that the version told to the childhood-haunted Morgan includes a child. Since the proclamation is made by a marble-eyed parrot with “unused wings”, mimicking a cultural saying to a child who is innocent of the unquestionable order of culture (*logos*), its false appeal to nature is revealed. In the absence of logic the bleak revelation of “what has been lost” is that nothing has gone missing since everything is always already lost. The second example of the all-is-not-lost pronouncement is when Morgan thinks he hears Scurra (a man) saying to a woman (Adele) who believes in cultural notions of true love, “*All is not lost. There is always another way*” (Bainbridge 29), without specifying the alternative, thus suppressing the obvious one, namely death.

The title of Bainbridge’s novel about the *Titanic* alludes to the popular myth of Captain Smith’s last words to his crew, as he relieved them of their duty. In the novel the legendary words are displaced both in terms of situation and utterer. This displacement serves to emphasise the focus on the generalised ‘everyman’ predicament rather than the unique individual, as the words are uttered by the amoral Scurra. Morgan, feeling betrayed by his friend, confronts Scurra about his unbridled sexual escapades with the prude and icy, but perversely desiring Wallis, the object of Morgan’s desire: “‘We have but a short time to please the living,’ he said. ‘And all eternity to love the dead’, [...] ‘Have you not yet learnt that it’s every man for himself?’” (Bainbridge 154). The trickster function calls notions such as honour, duty, and love in question, while revealing the operative codes of this civilised cultural setting. Neither good nor evil, neither god nor human, Scurra the trickster does not provide either the truth of logic or the truth of meaning, but his linguistic tricks and actions remind us of the arbitrariness of cultural values and the possible misdirection of “giddy ideals” (Bainbridge 107). It is significant that so many of his utterances

are followed by tag-questions, or come in the form of rhetorical questions which seem to make truth-claims but also invite different responses: “My word, life is a tragedy, what?” (Bainbridge 19). The point does not seem to be a question of truth but a matter of reflection, choice, or finding “another way”. Like Rose, Morgan, knowing Scurra “for a liar” and being “tired of his philosophising” (Bainbridge 198), opts for life, whether tragic or not, and chooses action, ironically heeding Scurra’s injunction: “Save yourself if you can” (Bainbridge 7), the note on which the novel opens.

The narrative force of both Cameron’s film and Bainbridge’s novel about the *Titanic* disaster paradoxically privileges action over truth in the form of either *logos* or *mythos*. Romantic or ironic, both millennial versions centre on individual responsibility in the face of cultural shortcomings and existential uncertainty. The *logos/mythos* divide is revealed as relative in regard to truth-claims, as both terms are linked to persuasion or deceit rather than to essentially stable entities (ontologies) of different truths. The way to human survival, either in the form of overcoming social limitations (‘place’) or existential uncertainty (‘space’) in the context of a public disaster involving the tragedy of individuals, points in both versions more in the direction of Victor Frankl’s definition of “tragic optimism” than cultural pessimism:

That is, an optimism in the face of tragedy and in view of the human potential which at its best always allows for: (1) turning suffering into human achievement and accomplishment; (2) deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better, and (3) deriving from life’s transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action. (139-140)

Whether the impulse for transformation and action is tribute to love or acceptance of loss is, as Scurra might say, a matter of “tem-

perament” and “beginnings” (Bainbridge 108).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Armstrong.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Andersson, Hicks, and Witkowski.

<sup>3</sup> See Frye.

<sup>4</sup> This reading draws heavily on Cohan and Shires argument “that a narrative representation of subjectivity functions similarly as a signifier with which a reader or viewer identifies (149), and on their application to text and film of Lacan’s theory of subjectivity (153-74).

<sup>5</sup> The painting in question is Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907). This anachronistic and illogical detail, i.e., a painting on display today at The Museum of Modern Arts in New York supposedly lost with the *Titanic*, not only underscores the mythic character of the narrative as a fictional/historical crossover, but also connects the past to the present as an injunction to make us see that “the truth without logic is out there” for us to see even today.

<sup>6</sup> Lincoln’s argument throughout his book is that our understanding of the two terms must “become more dynamic” because these words in ancient Greece were “the sites of pointed and highly consequential semantic skirmishes fought between rival regimes of truth”, highlighting the real issues of “[w]hose speech would be perceived as persuasive, and whose merely beguiling? Who would inspire trust, and whose arouse suspicion? Which discourses would be associated with ‘truth,’ and which (at best) with ‘plausible falsehoods?’” (18).

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of this theme in Bainbridge’s novels, see Wennö.

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