

[Name]
[Name of Instructor]
[Subject]
[Date]

Technological Hubris Lead To The Sinking Of The Titanic

Introduction

The Titanic was a British passenger liner that sank in the early morning of year 1912 in the North Atlantic Ocean. During her maiden voyage to New York City of the United States from Southampton of the United Kingdom and after colliding with an iceberg, the Titanic became a symbol of a technological hubris. The ship was built in Belfast by the Harland and Wolff shipyard and was operated by the White Star Line as the 2nd of 3 *Olympic* class ocean liners. With the loss of over fifteen hundred lives, a major role has been played in popular culture by Titanic. For many years, the Titanic herself has been an object of public interest. Numerous of works of arts, poems, songs, films, plays, and books have been inspired by it. Including as romantic tragedies with personal heroism, as an indictment of the class divisions of the time, as a classic disaster tale, as basis for fail-safe improvements, and as a symbol of technological hubris, the story of the ship has been interpreted in various overlapping ways.

It is invoked regularly as a cautionary tale of the limitations of ambition and modernity and has inspired various political, social, and moral metaphors. This paper reflects upon the theme of technological *hubris* presented by Titanic. Extreme self-confidence or pride is referred to as *hubris*. It is usually punished when the Gods of ancient Greece have been offended by it. Rather than a group, it is perceived as a characteristic of an individual, although consequences resulted from the wrongful act may be suffered by the entire group which the offender belongs to. Especially, when the individual exhibiting hubris is in position of power, a loss of contact with an overestimation of one's own capabilities, accomplishments or competence and reality is often indicated by hubris.

The Concept of Technological Hubris

For the gratification or pleasure of the abuser, those actions that humiliated and shamed the victim are referred to as *hubris*, in ancient Greek. On the perpetrator, the shame is reflected and a strong sexual connotation is upheld by the term, i.e., *hubris*. The theft of sacred or public property or sexual crimes, battery, and assault are terms that are used in today's world for violations of the law against *hubris*. Orator in ancient Greece and a prominent statesman are two well-known cases found in the speeches of Demosthenes. Against other mortals, the infractions by mortals are referred usually as *hubris* in Greek literature. In unlimited technological *hubris*, there is no safety.

Overconfident arrogance and pride are denoted by *hubris* in its modern usage. In fiction, examples of *hubris* are often found, such as, Victor depicted in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelly and Lucifer depicted by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*.

The Theme of Technological Hubris presented by Titanic

According to Foster, with her rigid segregation between the *ersatz* historical architecture of her interiors and the classes, Titanic can be perceived as a stage. Theatrical overtones were maintained by the maiden voyage itself, such as the historic nature of the maiden voyage of the largest ship of the world highlighted by the advance publicity. As archetypes of stock roles, the crew and passengers were perceived and summarized by Foster as Manifest Hero, Poor Emigrant, Stayer at Post, Deserter of Post, Martyr, Unsung Hero, Socialite, Rich Man and etc. As a kind of morality play, the story of the Titanic can be perceived in such interpretations. According to Foster, one of the alternative perceptions regarding Titanic is as somewhere between an Elizabeth and a Greek tragedy and the theme of hubris in the form of vain gloriousness and wealth. Also, drawn from classical Greek tragedies its final catastrophe of meeting an indifferent fate is quite alike.

Also, behind the continuing popularity of the story of Titanic, a number of factors were identified by Stephanie Barczewski. With different individuals reacting in various manners to the threat of death, one of the sources of fascination is the human aspects of the story. Barczewski concluded that jolting people out of hubristic complacency is served by the story above all. Besides the story of Titanic, its sinking has also been interpreted in various ways. Amongst them the major part perceived the disaster as the demonstration of the folly of placing the trust of one in progress and technology and as the result of the hubris and arrogance of the Anglo-American elite and the owners of the ship.

To raise the two broken halves of the Titanic and exhibit them was the plan of two rival groups in the early 21st century. However, the efforts were disrupted by a massive earth quake in year 2010 and under a wave of undersea mud; the sunken ship was buried irretrievably. The dangers of technological hubris and the dangers of

over confidence are two significant lessons taught by the Titanic. *“To set-up a weight-less lab”*, a sponsor of one salvage effort has *“booked space on Skyhab 3”* as mentioned by Clarke along with elaboration on *Experimental Fusor, Lagrange 3, Challenger and Chernobyl*. In keeping with the general level of technological advances, such activity does not seem to be present in space. As an advance over the communications satellites once championed by Clarke, the laying of a trans-Arctic cable was described by Clarke. To improved communication on Earth, the ideal answer is not the space stations, as described by Clark, *“by eliminating the long haul up to the geostationary orbit, and its slight but annoying time delay, the global phone system had been noticeably improved.”*

Technological Hubris as a Common Perspective in Memorable Disasters including Titanic

The Titanic sank after hitting an iceberg in year 1912 in the Atlantic Ocean. It is one of the memorable disasters; therefore, it has become part of our mythology and will be talked about for years. There are two rules that make a disaster memorable, i.e., first to keep the attention of the survivors, the time span of the disaster must be short enough and second, there must be a huge number of survivors as they are the key to a memorable disaster. The cream of Anglo-American society was carried by the Titanic. In terms of the survivors' conditions, there was an ideal weather condition when the ship sank down. The ship sank slowly, with no wind absolutely and with a cool weather of thirty-five degrees. Finally followed by the riding high over the waves and the stern of the ship, nearly two hours were taken by the ship to lower itself slowly into the waves. The view was spectacular as even the lights of the ship continued to burn almost to the end. There was little physical discomfort comparatively for those that survived. Remembering every detail and concentrating on the importance of what was happening was easy. For a rich disaster mythology, the required tremendous details are carried by the survivors.

Besides, the number of survivors, the time span of the disaster, the survivors' conditions, technological pride – technological hubris is one of the elements that make a disaster memorable. Titanic was the most advanced and the biggest transportation system of that decade. A proud attitude was maintained by its designers and engineers. To reflect how strong mythology is, unsinkable was the claim made by the owners of the Titanic, i.e., the White Star Lines. Since the claim got resonated with the hubris-of-technology theme, therefore, the claim still stood by.

The disaster of Titanic can be seen as a story of heroism which can be seen as a divide between narratives of the age which fascinates and horrifies the humankind. The disaster took around 160 minutes and engulfed the ship which was supposed to be unsinkable. This defines the fact that even though the ship was caught in a disaster, there is an intriguing relationship regarding the disaster and the hubris that was involved in the tragedy. There had been disasters before the incident but the fact that this disaster made an impression on so many people was due to the fact that the liner had crashed which was thought to be indestructible.

With the modern invention of wireless technology and distribution of news and media, the news of the disaster was able to reach the far corners of the world in little time and was a morbid form of entertainment for many of the people who were linked to it. Even with people who had no relationship to the incident, they were connected to it through the fact that they felt they had a vested interest in the situation. This theme is followed in the current world as well where people follow 24 hours news media in certain events. The way people were glued to their TV screens when the events of 9/11 were taking place are an example of this.

Many of the people who were watching the events unfold were neither in New York nor were they involved in the incident. Still, following the incident play-b-play and watching each and every event that unfolded had them gripped and they wanted to know more and more. The theme can be seen on everyday basis where news media exploits this sentiment and shows each and every detail of an event taking place. This was the same reason that this incident resounded with the people so much and is still remembered nowadays. The other factor that kept people interested was the fact that the ship had been advertised and marketed as being indestructible. People were seeing a claim crumble in front of their eyes and they wanted to see how the events were going to take place.

The morbidity of the situation might seem appalling and disturbing nowadays. To think and imagine a reality where people were listening to deaths of 1600 taking place while following it second by second might seem like an alien idea. If someone is told such a thing, they might cringe and judge the people of that era. However, the irony of the situation would be lost on the people as they would be the first ones following any such event taking place on the TV screen nowadays trying to know each and every detail taking place.

The one stark contrast that did exist in that situation was the fact that Titanic had been advertised as being a ship that had not been seen before. People were sold the idea of the ship by being told that it was not going to sink under any situation. This claim alone would make people follow the event under any circumstance as people had to see the voyage was going to take place. This is the same reason that people used to see live shuttle launches taking place on TV to track how the voyage was going to start. It was the advent of a new era for people who were seeing the pioneer of sea travel for the day. The space shuttle was the embarking of a similar journey where man was

going into space and the first shuttle launch saw the same interest in it. People were going to follow the whole journey of the Titanic from start till the finish.

The interest was further heightened by the fact that most of the travelers were elite and part of the higher society. Most of the people who were following the journey was due to the fact that they were not wealthy enough to afford a trip on the Titanic and they were doing so vicariously through the actual travelers of the ship. Similar to how people follow celebrities and life style of the wealthy and see how they live, this was an identical thrill of the people of 1912 who were listening in to the radio and following how the voyage was taking place. This was the only form of entertainment the people had and radio stations were able to use this as a highlight in their transmissions. It was able to fill time and gain the ratings that were required by the radio stations.

The last part of the interest in the disaster of Titanic was the fact that the ship had been promoted in a manner that had been unheard of till then. People had been told that it was the safest ship journey in the world. When the news of the iceberg hitting the ship came around, there was a moment of humility for the promoters of Titanic. They had to eat their words and had to accept the responsibility that their ship did have flaws and imperfections. They had to agree to the fact that they were mere mortals in the end and like mortals they did make flaws and mistakes.

The people got to reinforce this idea and theme by making sure that the hubris of the builders was finally realized and recognized. They had made a claim and now the creators had to retract from the statement which would have publicly embarrassed them. It is the same reason why Richard Nixon had to resign. He had already made claims that he had not bugged the Watergate Hotel or that he had any such recordings of the bugging incident taking place. If there was an actual tape that could have showed that he was lying, people would have followed the event like flies to honey and would have taken the same level of interest in it like people in 1912 did.

The fact that Richard Nixon would have had to disprove the statement he had made earlier and would have failed to do so would have shown that he had been lying initially. The same way, people were now able to catch the creators of Titanic with their pants down. The high profile nature of ship and its voyage only added to the interest. The promoters of the Titanic had made sure that the popularity and fame of the ship was done far and wide. The promotion was carried out on a Trans-Atlantic scale and people in further remote areas were interested in the voyage due to the pioneering nature of the ship, everyone was interested.

To be publicly and openly embarrassed was a shame to the people involved with the Titanic and their hubris was going to be proven by the failure of the very first voyage. The hubris and the complete disregard to information and news shows that when the ship finally failed and was proven wrong, people wanted to see the egg on the promoters face and see the extent of damage or fall of grace for the owners. This was finally a time when the owners were going to be disgraced and the people were going to hold them accountable. This is the reason why Richard Nixon had to resign and then incidents like Katrina and BP Oil spill show that when there is evidence against the claim of the people, the ones who make the claims are held responsible for their statements. The news media of the world was holding the owners of Titanic responsible and this was their way of voicing their opinion by following the events live or as close to live as possible.