

## **TITANIC: THE MYTH & RECYLING PROCESSES OF MYTH-MAKING\***

Nilüfer ÖCEL\*\*

### ***Titanik: Mit ve Mit Oluşturmanın Devingen Süreçleri***

Tarihe baktığımızda, kültürlerin çeşitli mitler ve bu mitlerin sözlü ya da yazılı öyküleri ve filmleri ile dolu olduğunu görebilmekteyiz. Günümüzün en önemli mit kaynakları ise basın yayın araçları ile ortaya çıkmaktadır. Öylesine devingen bir yapı vardır ki, her an unutulduğunu sandığımız bir mit ile karşılaşabilir ya da eğer gerekli teknolojik olanakları ve toplumsal yapıyı uygun biçimde kullanabilirseniz, yeni mitler yaratabilirsiniz. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmada Titanik filminin ve oluşturduğu mitin ekonomik, politik, ideolojik iletileri ile günümüz iletişim dünyasını nasıl sardığı ve nasıl çağlar boyu sarmaya devam edeceği vurgulanmaya çalışılmaktadır. Gerçek bir olaydan ortaya çıkarak oluşturulan Titanik miti, geçmişte olduğu gibi günümüzde de oldukça geniş bir izleyici kitlesini etkisi altına almayı başarmış ve nesillerden

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\*\* Öğr. Gör. Dr., İstanbul Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Radyo, Tv Sinema Bölümü

nesillere iletişimin her yönü ile karşımıza çıkmaya devam edecek olan kavramlardan biridir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Mit, Sinema, Devinim Kuramı, İletişim, Titanik

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The history is full of examples of myths and films of these myths. The paper discusses the general qualities of a myth and myth making process at different levels of the society. The paper concentrates on one the films as a myth and its recycles at different points of history. "Titanic" is going to be analyzed as an example of myth; the history, ideology, and the social classes it represents will be questioned. As a myth it constitutes a part of the public culture and with every new film, it changes the circle of its social classes and involves several different messages. The economical, political and ideological messages given through the films reconstruct the myth again and again through different perspectives. Titanic as a real event is recreated with each Titanic film and the myth starts again in different societies and echoes at different levels of those societies. Each new generation has a different point of view and a new interpretation of the same myth. The mysteries about the event itself and the involvement of many other factors make the event a myth which will have even further reinterpretations through different forms. The ongoing structure of the myth passing from one generation to another and films on this myth, keep the myth as vivid and as fresh as a new piece of news.

## **Myth and The Social Role of Myth**

In popular use, myth could mean a false belief or untrue story, whether those of ancient or contemporary peoples. Myth also means an ancient tale of fabulous people and incredible places. Here, however, myth is not a false belief or untrue story. Myth is not ancient and unreal. Myth is understood as a societal story that expresses prevailing ideas, ideologies, values and beliefs. More broadly, myth is an essential social narrative, a rich and enduring aspect of human existence, which draws from archetypal figures and forms to offer exemplary models for social life. (Jung, 1959; Eliade, 1958)

Traditionally, myth has provided the stories that make sense of a society, for a society. Myth has been called upon to give meaning to incredible events, to explain that which cannot be explained and to reaffirm values and beliefs, especially when those values and beliefs are challenged. (Lule, 2002: 276)

Moreover mythology refers to the social discourses which are drawn upon widely-held archetypes and thus express prevailing values and beliefs. Myths in news tend to manipulate the myth considering its political or ideological aspects. That's why the same myth or similar ones could be seen in different cultures. The variations are due to the social, cultural, linguistic differences. The social groups, as well as the different levels and individuals in those groups, give importance to different factors within the same discourse. So, the same message, changing some aspects,

details or the percentages of their parts cycle around within an unlimited time and space. Today, there are special studies for such changes giving much more importance to understand and analyze how different people perceive the world in different ways and how they shape their expectations, beliefs, etc. Especially, hermeneutics and reception aesthetics studies have rich sources showing how individuals or groups value the different perspectives of the same event, occasion or tale. Myths are born in the societies but they could never die. Depending on the needs, expectations and the perceptions of the social groups throughout the time they gain new dimensions, new meanings forcing them to recycle in different ways.

Although modern societies believe they have replaced myth and ritual with science and technology, myth is indispensable for human understanding of the world. Philosopher and historian of religion Mircea Eliade argued that "certain aspects and functions of mythical thought are constituents of the human being."(Eliade, 1963:183-184)

He wrote:"It seems unlikely that any society could completely dispense with myths, for of what is essential in mythical behaviour - the exemplary pattern, the repetition, the break with profane duration and integration into primordial time - the first two at least are consubstantial with every human condition. Seen in this way, the stories of myth are necessary to human lives and the societies they construct."

As myths have certain functions in the ancient society, news has similar functions in the modern ones. The news in the society is deeply rooted in the tradition of storytelling. Even before the advent of writing, news was cast in dramatic stories told in tribal gatherings, or town squares. Early journalists understood news as story with roots in drama, folktale and myth. (Stephens, 1988) As Michael Schudson has pointed out, however, the storytelling tradition of news was overtaken in the late nineteenth century by an information model that conceived of news as objective and scientific rather than dramatic and mythic. (Schudson, 1978) However, the very nature of the news - as story- encouraged other understandings of news.

Also in 1957, in his *Mythologies*, The French philosopher and writer Roland Barthes analyzed modern myths in subjects as varied as professional wrestling, advertisements and novels. He wrote, "The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the naturalness with which newspapers, art, and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history." (Barthes, 1972: 11)

For Barthes, myth is a political speech that attempts to make a particular ideology seem beyond question. Myth, he noted, is difficult to isolate in the news, because myth functions best when its role goes without saying. "Myth does not deny things," he said. "On the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply it purifies them, it makes them

innocent, it gives them a natural, and eternal justification." (Barthes, 1972: 143)

Marshall McLuhan, in a 1959 essay, "Myth and Mass Media," sought myth in technology, in the media themselves. Nothing that people seek "collective postures of mined," he said: "In some respects, myth was the means of access to such collective postures in the past. But our new technology gives us many new means of access to group-dynamic patterns." (McLuhan, 1959: 339-48)

The newspaper, McLuhan said offered a montage of experience, similar to myth: "The newspaper page, since the introduction of the telegraph, has had a formally auditory character and only incidentally a lineal, literary form. Each item makes its own world, unrelated to any other item save by date line." (McLuhan, 1959: 291) In a provocative passage, McLuhan called the newspaper a morn "Babel of myths." And he said, "we can regard all media as myths and as the prolific source of many subordinate myths." (McLuhan, 1959: 295)

For Barthes and McLuhan, newspaper was very important because it was the media of the time, but in recent years media developed to a wider extent to include the television, radio and computer especially through internet connections.

### **News and Myth as Cultural Forms**

Carey said "less as sending or gaining information and more like attending a Mass: a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed." (Carey, 1975:8) Carey noted: "We create, express, and convey our knowledge of and attitudes toward reality through the construction of a variety of symbol systems: art, science, journalism, religion, common sense, mythology." (Carey, 1975: 17)

### **News and Myth as Ideological Forms**

Bird and Dardenne argued persuasively that "news is a particular kind of mythological narrative with its own symbolic codes that are recognized by its audience." (Bird, 1988: 70-71) John Pauly, Richard Campbell and Christopher Campbell have also used myth to explore the role of news in culture. (See W.Lance Bennett, 1980: 166-79) These scholars argued that the primary function of news, like myth, is to create, shape and sustain an ideological order. From this perspective, the news and myth are inherently social and political narratives that help support the status quo and maintain social order.

Stuart Hall (Hall, 1982: 72) found that news, like myth, draws from the prevailing codes of a culture so that writers unknowingly and unconsciously maintain the dominant ideology: "Just as the myth-teller may be unaware of the basic elements out of which his particular version

of the myth is generated, so filmmakers, broadcasters may not be aware of the fact that the frameworks and classifications they were drawing on reproduced the ideological inventories of their society. Similarly, John Hartley noted that myth is "formed and reformed according to the relations between social groups and forces." Thus, one of the primary functions of news is to "signify myths through the everyday detail of 'newsworthy' event," Hartley said. "News is mythmaker."

### **The Functional Approach**

News and myth are considered important because of the particular function they serve in society. Scholars in symbolic interaction affirm that stories undoubtedly contribute to social order - but, they emphasize, stories cannot be reduced to societal functions or ideological subterfuge. Stories are how humans understand and comprehend the world. Kenneth Burke and his follower Hugh Duncan for example explored this larger relationship among stories and societies. Individuals, Burke said, see themselves and the world in dramatic terms. The dramatic works and stories that people compose and interpret can be understood, Burke said, as "strategies for situations," including "strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, etc."such strategies are "equipments for living," a means of managing existence. These insights can add to study of the mythological role of news, filmmaking and the



recycling reproductions of these attempts in the other forms such as the news and the advertisements in the media.

### **Figurative Meanings In Titanic**

In times of human suffering and loss, the myth of the Victim plays an important social role. A crucial element in the myth is that the victim represents society and its individuals. The victim symbolizes society. We must see ourselves and cast ourselves too, in the part of the victim.

In stories such as Titanic there are so many different elements to have a certain figurative meaning or a set of meanings changing throughout the time.

### **The Event and The Reflections on Titanic**

Titan, in Greek mythology, a brood of 12 gigantic beings born to Uranus and Gaea. After Cronus overthrew Uranus, the Titans, under his supremacy, controlled the world. When the Olympians, under Zeus, rebelled, they fought a 10-year war with the Titans. With the aid of the Cyclopes and Hecatonchires whom Zeus released from Tartarus, the Olympians defeated the Titans and cast them down to Tartarus. The titans are the six brothers and sisters. Hesiodos shows two different etymological meanings in the word "Titan". Thus the meaning of gigantic in size or power, showing one that stands out for greatness of achievement

takes its roots from "titainein", meaning becoming larger or disseminated, "gigantic" or "huge". The other is "tisis" meaning "revenge". (Erhat, 1984: 314, 354)

Titanium, is the metal and element (symbol Ti). The element is the ninth most common element in the earth's crust and the fourth most abundant metal, but it is difficult to obtain it in pure form, and even small quantities of impurity make it brittle and useless. When it is obtained pure, titanium is corrosion resistant and stronger, weight for weight, than any other metal, including steel. (Grolier Universal Encyclopedia, 1970: 102)

Because of its high cost of preparation, most of its uses are in military. It is also useful in electronics and nuclear reactors. Having a brilliant white colour, it does not dissolve in water. These are the qualities mostly used in its figurative meaning. Naming a ship as "Titanic", has some associations. Its white colour symbolises its purity and innocence and the quality of not dissolving in water brings together the idea of making "*an unsinkable ship*".

From this point of view, we could also notify the ideal of men making ships traveling across the oceans without interrupted by the old myths and mythical elements such as the dragons and the sea giants. This idea is also contributed a lot to make a ship to carry as many as people from the old continent to the new one. In such a ship they would be safely protected. The figurative meaning of the word titan as having "*high costs of preparation*" could be mentioned here with a double meaning as in the

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etymology of the word "titan". This kind of a vehicle is not easy to prepare and it has high costs when it sinks.

Titanic is the British transatlantic liner, sunk in one of history's greatest marine disasters. The 46,329-ton Titanic, then the largest ship afloat, sailed on her maiden voyage from Southampton on April 10, 1912 with 1310 passengers and 898 officers and crew. The passenger list ranged from hundreds of immigrants in steerage to many socially prominent figures. (Grolier Universal Encyclopedia, 1970:102)

Despite fog and wireless warnings of icebergs, the Titanic drove ahead at full speed. Suddenly, near midnight on april 14, she crashed into the underwater projection of an iceberg. Her watertight compartments should have kept her afloat indefinitely, but the freak accident had ripped the bottom off of several of them, and she sank in 2<sup>1/2</sup> hours. The sea was calm. There would have been time to take everyone off, but there were only enough lifeboats for a third of those on board. Another steamer was close at hand, but her wireless operator had turned in for the night. Lifeboat space went to women and children first, though those in steerage did not have equal opportunity. Altogether, 1,503 lives were lost. (Ana Britannica, 1990: 35-36)

The world was stunned in 1912 by the loss of the liner *Titanic* on her maiden voyage and 86 years later the world remains fascinated. Each generation seems to find new meanings in the tragedy; witness the recent spate of mini-series and a huge Hollywood film. *Titanic: The Unsinkable*

Ship and Halifax, presents a fresh Nova Scotian perspective on the disaster. Halifax arguably has one of the most moving and intimate connections with the *Titanic* tragedy, playing a key role during the sinking and becoming the final resting place of her victims and wreckage.

Using many recently acquired artifacts and unpublished photographs, the exhibit traces *Titanic's* creation, as the hoped-for trump card in the technological race to control Atlantic travel. Promoted as unsinkable even as the first reports of her destruction arrived in Halifax, *Titanic* brought the term "*floating palace*" into the language.

*Titanic's* popularity was boosted in recent years by its discovery in 1985 and subsequent exploration. Visitors can re-live the discovery experience viewing a model of the *Titanic* wreck though a careful replica of a submersible port as first glimpsed by Robert Ballard. Halifax scientists have led the way in researching parts of the *Titanic* wreck including Henrietta Mann who has explored the microscopic jungle inside the "rusticles" that are literally eating away the wreck and pose questions about how long *Titanic* has left.

This event had many echoes in the media of the time. Many newspapers had written on it for days. So many "cycling messages" were appeared in the media through the people who were lucky enough to survive. The names of the passengers, their social identity prior and after the shipwreck and all their life stories were added to the news throughout the time. The individuals and the societies made several references to the

event. Many international multidisciplinary studies are carried on Titanic. As an example, University of Southampton, Film and Media Programme had "NIGHTS TO REMEMBER", Memory, Modernity and the Myth of the Titanic (20-23 July, 2000)

Here, "The Titanic" is referred as a monumental icon of the twentieth century that has inspired, and continues to inspire, a wealth of representations across national boundaries, and across the arts. Southampton itself is a key location in the great ship's journey, and offers a rich source of local history. The conference aims to link the local experience with the global myth, bringing together scholarship in Film and Media, Music, Art History, Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, Theatre Studies and History on the subject of the cultural meanings of the Titanic. In this respect, the topics, such as

- \*Shared memory: the Titanic as transnational phenomenon
- \*History, memorabilia and mourning
- \*Apocalypse and survival: class, gender, ethnicity
- \*Technologies, history and modernity
- \*Music, sound and memory
- \*Cultural meanings of disaster
- \*Special effects, spectacle and narrative are discussed and shared.

The conference was attended by more than 70 delegates from around the world, who gathered at Southampton University's Avenue

Campus to exchange ideas with scholars from diverse disciplines on the cultural meanings of the Titanic. Although the primary focus was on cinematic representations, the multidisciplinary emphasis was reflected in the range of papers, which covered topics such as music and song, literature, theatre, art history, poetry, newspapers, spectacle, audience reception, the Internet, science fiction, fakes, special effects and heritage narratives. There were 45 speakers organised into fifteen panels: Myths and Appropriations I and II; Modernity and Postmodernity; Realism and Fantasy; Space, Place, Music; Reception; Irish Experience; Historical and Heritage Narratives; Myths and Memories; Romancing Disaster; Spectacle; Mourning and Modernity; Subjectivity and Individualism; Literary Representations; and Space, Race, Gender. The cinematic presence in James Cameron's 1997 version of the Titanic story is discussed mainly.

In setting up the event, the organisers intended to displace the globally successful Cameron Titanic, to uncover the rich history of multiple versions of the Titanic myth in order to understand its cultural power.

The programme of film screenings supported this aim: a rare showing of the 1912 German film, *Titanic: In Nacht und Eis* in a reconstructed 35mm print was a highlight, but almost as exciting was the evening of archive newsreels from the National Film and Television Archive, including some fakes, followed by a 35mm version of the

spectacular, stylish 1943 German propaganda film Titanic. The first Titanic film was just six months after the events. "Saving From the Titanic" (1912) was a short and a silent film and an actress surviving the real tragedy was the main figure in the film.

It is interesting to see this "news" of "a certain event" finding its place in the form of cinema, because cinema, is known to be the place to dream, to relax. Whatever they watch the people get out of the cinema taking some lessons from what they watched and thanking God that it was not them in the film. It is interesting to see a different nation to handle the Titanic as a cinema film topic having different ideological messages these films mainly concentrate on the social levels of the passengers.

The second Titanic (1943), was one of the pet projects of Gebbels', since he considered it a chance to show the British at their most craven and greedy, Selpin was assigned to it, because he had made two other sea stories -though he preferred light comedy, with which he had made his name. This could be given as an example of how different myths are somehow and in some ways have a kind of correlation and bridges in between, and every myth has its impact in different societies in different ways. In this film, related to the German society a German couple is given who show themselves so much more heroic than anyone else on board. (Shipman, 1982: 312)

A third one, the 1958 British film "A Night to Remember", on which the Cameron version draws heavily, was a bit different. Walter

Reisch and Richard Breen, fresh from their success on Niagara, bring too much taste and too few details to the tragedy of the *Titanic*, though the actual sinking is as well done as expected. (Shipman, 1982: 726)The long fictional frontispiece chiefly concerns a failing marriage, with an American wife (Barbara Stanwyck) taking her children back to the States to prevent them of the values learnt in the salons of the old continent: that it works so well is also due to Clifton Webb as the husband, really showing his mettle in a serious role. Some actual names of the real event are used - the 'Molly Brown' character is there, played by Thelma Ritter - but the only one of the now legendary incidents used in this that concerning the elderly Jewish couple who refused to be parted: perhaps because we know it to be true, it is the only moving moment. "Titanic was a lavish recreation of a certain event and Barbara Stanwyck was Clifton Webb's American wife, bringing the children away from corrupt old Europe." (Shipman, 1982: 595, Dorsay, 1999: 149-152)The ship Titanic in this case also has a recycling association of having "great expectations", "a purified life", "starting a new life", etc.

In the Conference report it is stated (<http://www.english.upenn.edu/CFP/>): "The Southampton context was well represented: a local theatre group performed cabaret at the opening night reception, which was held at Harbour Lights cinema, and also featured a photographic exhibition donated by the City Council. We were honoured and delighted that Titanic survivor Milvinia Dean was able to be



at the reception. A very successful conference bookstall was organised by local co-operative October Books. Several papers addressed the local dimensions of the Titanic experience, in Southampton itself, but also further afield, in Ireland, for example, and in Finland."

Cameron's 1997 film is a "gigantic" one too. It's not only incredibly long, but also has a higher cost than any other Hollywood film. In return, it's the one collecting numerous Oscars in it. It's been remembered with its great love theme in it rather than the great technical and filmic success. It's been presented into the public as the end of innocence.

These three films are not the only cycles of the same myth. One other example is the film mocking Titanic in a humorous way. The "Wrongfully Accused" is a comedy starred by Leslie Nielsen and Melinda McGraw. The setting seems to be similar to the Cameron story but there are a lot of comical references to the original one. There was also a "Titanic" musical on Broadway having five Tony prizes. In Hamburg, millions of dollars are paid for the original objects found in the Titanic. There was also an exhibition showing the objects. New York Christie's was prepared to sell the "help" messages sent from Titanic. The sound tracs of the film Celine Dion *My Heart Will Go On* would also have a high selling rate. There were even the dolls just looking like Kate Winslet (around 25 dollars), and having high prices for different types of dresses and a rich wardrobe. The famous gourmet of Paris Paul Bugat famous for

producing chocolates and cakes for many years made a Titanic of chocolate weighing 7 kilograms. To have it, Bugat says that he needed to observe the original one twice. It is claimed that the USA highschool girls arrange nights to cry for the Titanic hero, Leonardo Di Caprio. The different societies liked the film for many different reasons. In Moscow for example, it is said that the people would like to see the film at the weekend especially to have at least two days to recover. In Tokyo, in Japan, Leonardo Di Caprio became an idol amongst the youngs and his stoic reflection in case of the tragedy was appraised a lot by the Japanese people. The French people liked the meals served in the film and the commented more on the democratic values of the film. Philosopher Bruno Mattei claimed that the film is a metaphore of the reality and except the democratic ones, every society has a hidden iceberg to make it go down deep. The film was acclaimed a lot even in Cario in which the big budgeted Hollywood films such as "The Independence Day" failed once. One third of the people in Jarusalem watched the film Titanic to make it the most profitable one in Israel. In Argentina, weekly 70 thousand people watched the film. And in Buenos Aires the film was almost considered as a Latin American Serial.

The reflections and products for the Titanic are quite a lot in variety and themes. The main function of all are just to revise the same theme. So many people believe that it is a good theme to sell. The social classes, the ideology makers, different societies for different reasons

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would like to be a part of the old myth. The question is who is buying the theme and why? Some people like the documentary part, the reflections of the real world. Some people like the mythical part, the mysterious events. The researchers claim that although the theme appealed to many people but rather to the old ones till very recently, the film appeals to the younger generations more than ever. Most of the people spending their lives to tell the stories of survival affected many others and people who feel themselves closer to the events are just the people sharing similar memories or the same time cluster. Young people also have a kind of curiosity for the film helping them to understand the time, history and the feelings of the past. At the end of the first week, Titanic had 27,6 billion dollars.

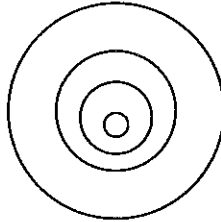
The myth never ends, it goes on to cycle having even greater circles. Once the cycling event starts, it is almost impossible to stop it. The book by Richard Howells has a great affect on the recycling news. (Howells, 1999) Professor Jeffrey Richards comments on the book in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* as follows: "Howells's book is a model of cultural history, thoroughly researched, carefully argued and consistently illuminating" "There are two *Titanics*; this book is about the second of them. The first is the physical *Titanic*, the rusting remains of which can still be found at 49° 56' west, 41° 43' north, at a depth of twelve thousand feet below the north Atlantic Ocean. The second *Titanic* is the mythical *Titanic*: the *Titanic* which emerged just as its tangible

predecessor slipped from human view on 15 April 1912. It is this second *Titanic* which is the much more important, and infinitely more interesting, of the two." "This study seeks to present the first critical analysis of the *Titanic* as myth. It pays particular attention to a detailed analysis of previously neglected, non-canonical materials to both describe and interpret the myth of the *Titanic* as articulated in British popular culture from 1912 to 1914. It begins with the launching of the 'unsinkable ship,' and ends with the outbreak of the 'war to end all wars.' It has a tripartite aim: first to analyze the *Titanic* myth to create an insight into the particular culture and values of late-Edwardian society; second to demonstrate that late-Edwardian culture was one in which myth was both produced and employed just as it was in ancient and 'primitive' societies; and third to draw far greater conclusions about myth, mythogenesis, popular culture and society as a whole. It concludes by contending that myth is not limited to seemingly diverse societies divided from us by both time and space but is, rather, equally vibrant and extant in late 20<sup>th</sup> century western civilisation. In this way, this investigation marries theory and practice with the noumenal and the phenomenal to create a case study which not only relegates the physical *Titanic* to a supporting role, but which is also not even primarily about the *Titanic* at all." <sup>1</sup> (Howells, 1999)

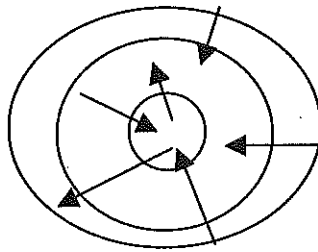
Recycling is inevitable in texts. The texts here refers not only to the written ones but also to the visual and oral ones. Generally the



recycling appears taking its roots from the past moving to the future. (Figure 1) There is almost a movement from the simple to the complex and dense, though there could sometimes be some flashbacks to the past or to the future. In fact this recycling does not bring the idea of leaving the first or original cycle but adding more to it. It mostly involves the re-validation of the past with the values of the present system. This could be having the same perspective as well as a different one. (Figure 2)



*Figure 1: Different Cycles Of the same text*



*Figure 2: Interaction among the different cycles of the same text*

There could also be some kind of interaction between inner cycles. The relationship among these create new outer cycles having a wider point of view. Through the differences of telling the same story, the

differentiation between the perspectives cause new stories related to the old one. (Figure 3) These cycling circles even touch each other.



*Figure 3: Creation of the outer cycles of the same text*

After the event, many things were said and numerous people commented on it. This also contributed to the myth to be recreated with each new aspect. Some people tried to find something mysterious to explain the sink of such a giant ship. Some brought the idea of a Titanic Mummy, for example. Among the stories was a tale about an unlucky mummy whose curse was as responsible for that accident as that floating island of ice the tore open the ship's hull.<sup>2</sup> Though the story had been around for years, it spread rapidly in the wake of the popularity of the film *Titanic*. Each new circle would add something to the myth of Titanic, as well as they take from it. This mutual relationship is the core of the recycling event. The circles get larger and wider in each new generation and their depth would be different in each society. Thus, the Titanic sinks in all films, in all side products but the profit part of it and the circulation of the story never ends. In his film review, Kraut says<sup>3</sup>, (Kraut, 2001) "Ever since *Titanic* met its demise, people all over the world have been

enthralled with the disaster, some becoming obsessed with every nuance and minute detail. To understand the intensity and persistent pull, one must see the story of the *Titanic* disaster as, in essence, a modern myth, which carries its meaning more on an allegorical level than in its concrete facts. And, as the appearance of the hugely successful motion picture *Titanic* suggests, its warnings are particularly relevant to our civilization at the turn of the millenium."

"First, it speaks to the peril of assuming we can control Nature. Regardless of how much light we shed on the natural world and how much we discover about the way it operates, its mysteries will remain shrouded in darkness and its unknowable side will always exist. The darkness of the unknown can be a terrifying thing. The illusion of superiority over nature is essentially denying the vastness, if not the very existence of that unknown. Nature, after all, resides in places to which we are only now beginning to have access and its power still eludes our attempts at prediction, easily rendering us helpless. To believe that the human mind and its creations can somehow contain or tame the natural world, or even coax it into passively standing by and watching our manipulative attempts, is to invite disaster. In 1912, the world took notice of that message being delivered when the sea ripped through *Titanic's* shell, filled it with water and dragged it to the cold, black ocean floor. Had there been more respect for the power of the ocean and an awareness of her capabilities, tragedy

would have been avoidable. Failure to acknowledge the darkness clearly led to disastrous consequences."

"There were a number of aspects to the *Titanic* incident that made it inevitable. When considered together, they bring into focus the power and importance of the event and shed some light on its particular significance for us in this moment of time. These elements pertain to the collective psyche of our culture, both then and now, and the ways in which it interacts with the world."

"The steerage passengers on *Titanic* were the unfortunate recipients of this sort of projection from their more affluent upstairs neighbors. James Cameron chose this "class" problem as the focal point of his recent motion picture, *Titanic*. (At the end of the picture, we see what is meant to be either a dream *Titanic* or a heavenly *Titanic*, where rich and poor are apparently happily integrated.) It follows that the more rigidly materialistic a culture is, the more conflict and disparity will exist between its upper and lower classes, and the more the poor will be further burdened with having to carry the shadow projections of the rich. In other words, the more one projects the inner numinous onto material things, the less inclined one will be to see the numinous in other people. So, in addition to the stark split between man and the natural world below, there was another schism between the humans aboard *Titanic*, along material lines."

He also questions if it is a mere fate or an overdosed neglect to make the Titanic sink. "Some of the wireless warnings were minimized; others never even made it up to the bridge. Personal messages to and from the passengers were given far more importance, in an attempt to keep the customer satisfied. To make matters even more outrageous, the two lookouts who spotted the iceberg were making do with the naked eye on a moonless night, since the binoculars had been "missing" since soon after the voyage began. It makes a rather visceral image: the most impressive ship ever built, steaming faster and faster through the icy waters of the April Atlantic, without regard for the ice warnings that had been coming in for days, which, taken together, provided obvious documentation of the critical need for caution."

*Titanic* was a virtually microcosm of society in 1912 and the exhibit tells the story of victims from all classes. The doomed Halifax millionaire George Wright and the gloves believed to be those of railway tycoon Charles Hays attest to the glamorous rich who died, but more telling still is the Swedish immigrant family the Pålssons, wiped out, despite the myth of women and children first. Tragedy also mixed with intrigue with the mysterious Michel Navratil, a fugitive and kidnapper whose body, found with its loaded revolver, was buried under his secret identity and it was many years before his children learned of his resting place.

*İLETİŞİM FAKÜLTESİ DERGİSİ/ TITANIC: The Myth & Recycling Processes of Myth-Making*

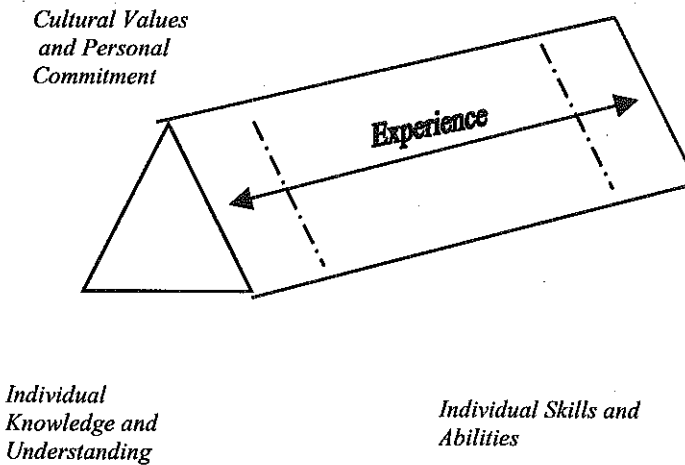
	1997	2000	2001
<u>Population, total</u>	473.4 million	474.3 million	474.6 million
<u>Life expectancy at birth (years)</u>	68.7	68.8	..
<u>Fertility rate, total (births per woman)</u>	1.7	1.6	..
<u>Urban population (% of total)</u>	63.3	63.4	63.5
<u>Exports of goods and services (% of GDP)</u>	31.4	42.9	37.4
<u>Imports of goods and services (% of GDP)</u>	34.1	38.6	33.9
<u>Gross capital formation (% of GDP)</u>	24.1	21.2	20.6
<u>Fixed lines and mobile telephones (per 1,000 people)</u>	201.9	314.2	..
<u>Telephone average cost of local call (US\$ per three minutes)</u>	0.0	0.1	..
<u>Personal computers (per 1,000 people)</u>	28.1	45.4	..
<u>Internet users</u>	3.1 million	14.6 million	..
<u>Paved roads (% of total)</u>	82.2	91.3	..
<u>Aircraft departures</u>	773.2 thousand	769.9 thousand	..
<u>Trade in goods as a share of GDP (%)</u>	51.2	65.6	..
<u>Trade in goods as a share of goods GDP (%)</u>	98.8	132.3	..
<u>High-technology exports (% of manufactured exports)</u>	6.8	10.5	..
<u>Foreign direct investment, net inflows in reporting country (current US\$)</u>	23.7 billion	28.4 billion	..

Source: *World Development Indicators database, April 2002*

As with most legends the story of the *Titanic* is not immune to some fictitious tales. Once the survivors arrived in New York City on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1912, anyone who had a story to tell did and for the most part these stories were accurate. However, some folks just couldn't help adding a little spice to their experience. The press at the time couldn't help it either. If they didn't have a story to run, they made them up. Pure and simple. Below are all kinds of tall tales that have come out of the sinking

of the *Titanic*. All are untrue and have been proven so time and time again. However, they still continue to be told and believed.<sup>4</sup> (<http://www.execpc.com/~reva/html3d1.htm>)

When the facts are considered such as the growing population and the developing communication facilities, it would not be regarded to be too optimistic to believe that the myths and myth-making cycles would never end. Thus, everyone having a different piece of the same myth would survive his own and thus in fact *titanic* never sinks. (Figure 4)



*Figure 4: Everyone has an individual Titanic*

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<sup>1</sup> Additional praise for *The Myth of the Titanic*: "Richard Howells make a gripping story out of the fashioning of a myth. He delights equally in fixing the facts which unsettle the fairy stories, as he does the richly human stories themselves. Taking on the movie and showing up its mythic deceptions without a tremor, he returns to face Edwardian England just as coolly, and quietly identifies its necessary illusions. Then he rolls up all the tales into a single mighty myth, all the while doing justice to truth, to horror, to sentimentality, and to a rattling good read."

-- Fred Inglis, Professor of Cultural Studies, University of Sheffield.

"*Finally*, a book that probes not only the cultural frameworks enclosing the *Titanic* disaster between 1912 and 1914, but how those frameworks endure today."

-- Professor John R Stilgoe, Harvard University.

Extracts from *The Myth of the Titanic* © Richard Howells, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> In the late 1890's a rich, young Englishman visiting the archaeological digs near Luxor purchased the coffin and mummy of The Princess of Amen-Ra. He arranged for it to be shipped back to his home, but was not there to receive it. He disappeared, never to be found. One of his companions on the trip later died, another lost an arm in an accident and a third lost his fortune in a bank failure.

The coffin reached England and was purchased by a businessman. Three members of the businessman's household were injured in an auto accident and his house caught on fire. Convinced that the mummy was unlucky, the man donated it to the British Museum. The staff at the museum reported hearing loud banging and crying noises coming from the coffin at night. Things were thrown around the exhibit room without explanation. Finally a watchman died. Then a photographer took a photo of the coffin. When he developed it, the image that appeared was so horrifying that the photographer killed himself. The museum wanted to get rid of the unlucky mummy, but with it's reputation they could not even give it away. Finally, an American archaeologist, who didn't believe in the stories, purchased the mummy and coffin and had it sent back to the states on board the Titanic. The rest was, well, history...

Other version of this story has the archaeologist bribing the *Titanic* crew to have the mummy put into a life boat and later it winds up in New York City. The mummy is sold and shipped again and involved in one or two more shipwrecks before winding up on the bottom of the sea. Is this a true story? Or just a weird tale?

Shipping records show no mummy was on board the *Titanic* (this may be why some versions of the tale say that the archaeologist smuggled it aboard). In no account by any *Titanic* survivor do they mention sharing a lifeboat with a mummy (which wouldn't have been easy to forget). Nor did any rescuer report taking a mummy on board.

The tale probably has its origins with two Englishmen named Douglas Murray and T.W. Stead. Murray and Stead claimed that an acquaintance of theirs bought a mummy in Egypt and had it placed in a drawing room in his home. The next morning every breakable item in the room had been smashed. The next night the mummy was left in another room with the same results..

The pair also visited the British Museum and saw the coffin lid of Priestess Amun (there wasn't ever a mummy, only the lid). They decided that the face depicted on it was a tormented horror. Combining the two stories, that of the breakable items and the scary lid, the two sold the tale to the newspapers. The tale later grew to include the *Titanic*.

The *Titanic* portion of the story may have been inspired by the loss of the Menkaure sarcophagus in 1838. The sarcophagus, which was being shipped from Egypt to England, was considered to be one of the finest examples of art from the Old Kingdom period. It went to the bottom of the sea when the ship carrying it, *The Beatrice*, sunk in deep water somewhere near Cartagena.

The truth is that the Priestess Amun coffin lid (British Museum item No. 22542) is still sitting quietly in the British Museum's second Egyptian room, where it can be seen today