As Heyer has so carefully demonstrated, there are things in this world that just will not go away, and the tragic story of the Titanic is one of those. The tale of the doomed ship and the fall out of that affair still haunts the minds of many around the world. In fact, it could be argued that he too has been mesmerized by the events of 1912 to the point that it has become an integral part of his psyche, both on a personal and professional level. Indeed, the release of Titanic Century is Heyer’s second trip into “Titanic-land.”

In every respect, he steps away from many of the confusing legends about what happened on that fateful night in April 1912 to take the Titanic on a journey that places it at the forefront of defining an era. This was an age that found the Titanic in books, in movies, on the stage, in many languages; indeed, as the author points out, the Titanic was not only impossible to remove from the culture of adventures of the sea, but also had a defining role in shaping a society for over a century. It was impossible to escape the Titanic, even if one wanted to.

What I found particularly effective was the focus of the book, which remains consistent from the opening to the closing words in the contention that the Titanic was an age changing event. Heyer has cast this work within the framework of a study of communications. It must be noted that although he also takes a historical perspective in much of the book, it is not intended as a specifically historical piece. As such, he takes the New York dailies to task, charging them with the production of shoddy journalism based on early reports of the tragedy that could not be verified.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this book is the method by which Heyer uses the media of the time to sort his thinking on what he is experiencing in the present. In his desire to be at the forefront of the research on the Titanic, he includes a chapter on Canadian journalists sent to New York to investigate if any Canadians were on board the ship when it hit the iceberg. Interestingly, he has Canadian journalism historian Michael Dupuis write this chapter, rather than doing so himself.

Examining the structure of the book, the author has divided the work into three critical parts: Wireless world, Story of the century, and Imagining disaster. Although I enjoyed the complete work, I found the section on Imagining disaster to be the most effective in the final analysis. It is here that Heyer makes his claim that the tragedy was the defining moment for what was to follow in the century that succeeded the sinking of the great liner. This section has a chapter on responses in literature, some historic and some speculative. It also includes an enlightening discussion on how cinema came to grips with the event. He notes that of the various versions that came about, A Night to Remember is probably the most effective and certainly the most historically correct. He notes that Kenneth More’s role in the film defined his career in theatre. The subsequent chapters deal with both the campaign to preserve what is left of the ship and its contents, along with a serious look at the Titanic as myth.
One does not need to be mesmerized by this story to garner considerable enjoyment from a tale well told and a thoughtfulness to behold.

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