

A Study in Scarlet: A Survey of Sexism and Classism Through the Eyes of Rose Dawson  
in James Cameron's *Titanic*

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A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from  
the University Honors College

Fall 2023

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## *Abstract*

This project is an evaluation of how class and gender inform each other when examining Rose Dewitt-Bukater from James Cameron's 1997 film *Titanic*. Rose evolves from a young girl who caters to the male gaze and is a manifestation of the patriarchal ideals of the Victorian era to a woman who exhibits elements of both first- and third-wave feminism in her personal life. Rose is a manifestation of the patriarchy in the beginning of the film, and she does so by her upholding of the English Rose stereotype, an ideal that calls for women to be demure and obedient. She adheres to the standards that her upper-class peers have set for her, and she perpetuates these norms by her inability to fully rebel against them. Although she tries to do so, her attempts are futile as she is shut down by her peers. As the film progresses, she begins to showcase her individuality in comparison to her upper-class peers, which is a tenet of the first wave of feminism. She wears looser clothing and her hair down, contrasting the corsets and immaculate up-dos the other first-class women don. At the end of the film, Rose becomes a sexually awakened young woman, showing that she has become a manifestation of fully-fledged feminism. She consummates a relationship with a man who is not her fiancé and returns her heart to him at the end of the film. By evaluating Rose's character in this manner, one can trace the evolution of feminism during the twentieth century from the first to the third wave as well as teaching women of that time that they are able to gain control of their lives in the same way Rose did.

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## *Background*

Two of the four waves of feminism are essential to understanding the representation of women, particularly Rose Dawson (played by British film star Kate Winslet), in the 1997 Hollywood epic *Titanic*. The most pertinent waves are the first and third waves of feminism, which parallel the historical time periods in which the film takes place and when the film was written and directed, respectively. The first wave of feminism, beginning in 1848 with the creation of the Declaration of Sentiments by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, focused on affirming the equality of women with men, a definition that is outlined within Sheila Rowbotham's book, *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action* (46). Rose demonstrates this equality affirmation by way of the evolution of her character from a young girl who quietly sits and accepts her fate of either marrying Cal or choosing to die by her own hand into a woman who realizes that the disaster of the Titanic is her ticket to freedom. The sinking of the Titanic in 1912 occurred amid this first wave, which transpired until approximately 1920. The making of the film *Titanic* occurred during the third wave of feminism, which began in the early 1990s with the Anita Hill trial and which focuses on the intent to express individuality and sexuality (Rowbotham 292). This intent is evident in writer and director James Cameron's characterization of Rose and her evolution from someone who simply accepts her mother's and Cal's words and reasonings for why she is required to marry Cal into someone who chooses whom she consummates a relationship with regardless of social class or status.

During the Progressive Era, women of the middle and upper classes were expected to marry in order to maintain or further their family's economic status.

Interestingly, lower-class women were expected to marry for the same reasons, but expectations for them were not as stringent, meaning that some lower-class women would have been allowed to marry for love because there would not have been a family fortune to protect. Likewise, there would have been lingering Victorian-era attitudes towards gender and class, such as the idea that women of the upper classes would have been characterized as not having sexual desires while women of the lower classes would have been able to express their sexuality without a stringent ideal of being “ladylike” forced upon them. This dichotomy between the classes of women is evident within Martha Vinicius’s book, *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Era*:

The artisan’s daughter was carefully raised in a suburb and surrounded by suburban furnishings. She was taught to play the piano, along with other graces. She married relatively late — around age 24 — and could expect to have only two or three children. Her career reflected the high living standards of this traditional aristocracy of labor and the essentially middle-class aspirations those living standards then allowed. In many important ways, including marriage age and family size, the artisan’s daughter resembled the middle-class woman. Her life had its own special stresses, but it cannot realistically be described as a part of working-class history. (101)

This quotation shows that women of the middle classes, such as the artisan’s daughter, had much different expectations that would compel her than the expectations that would have been forced upon a woman of the lower class. The artisan’s daughter would have been expected to comply with the demands of her family regarding what she would learn and how she would lead her life. Contrariwise, women of the lower classes would not

have had the same luxuries as the artisan's daughters. A middle-class woman's life would have had much more in common with the lives of upper-class women than with their lower-class counterparts. Rose's situation would have been similar in this regard as well.

Rose, as a middle or burgeoning upper-class woman, would not have had the same expectations thrust upon her as a woman of a humbler background. Lower-class women would have been expected to handle household chores while an upper-class woman would have had a maid or butler to these tasks (Vinicius 103). In regards to marriage, a woman of the upper or middle class would have been expected to remain "perfectly innocent and sexually ignorant" (Vinicius ix) while women of the lower-class were almost expected to supplement their paltry income with prostitution (Vinicius 81). These are just some ways in which women of different classes would have had differing expectations especially regarding their innocence and sexuality.

### *Film Summary*

In 1996, deep sea treasure hunter Brock Lovett (Bill Paxton) and his team discover a sketched portrait of Rose Dawson (Winslet) within the bowels of the RMS Titanic. The drawing shows her wearing the fictional "Heart of the Ocean," a pendant that is reputed to have been once owned by King Louis XVI of France. The team finds that the 100-year-old Rose (played in the film's present-day scenes by Gloria Stuart) is still living and brings her and her granddaughter, Lizzy Calvert (Suzy Amis), to the site of the wreckage to try and uncover the whereabouts of the pendant. Rose recounts her memories of boarding the Titanic as a seventeen-year-old girl with her widowed mother,

Ruth DeWitt-Bukater (Frances Fisher), and her thirty-year-old fiancé, Caledon “Cal” Hockley (Billy Zane), enroute to Philadelphia to get married.

Rose’s mother reminds Rose that she needs to marry Cal to keep their family wealthy and part of the upper class. During their first dinner aboard the Titanic, an emotionally distraught Rose runs out of the dinner and prepares to jump off the bow of the ship before Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio), a third-class artist who won his tickets in a poker game, convinces her to step away from the ledge. In the process of getting her to safety, Jack falls on top of Rose and accidentally pins her to the deck of the ship. When crew members come to investigate the commotion, Jack is nearly arrested due to a misunderstanding of why he was lying on top of her half-clothed; however, Rose vouches for him, and Cal reluctantly invites him to dinner the next night as thanks for saving her life. Rose and Jack form a strong, fast friendship during the voyage, a bond that culminates in Rose paying Jack to draw her nude and, ultimately, the clandestine young couple consummating their relationship in a stagecoach in the storage compartment of the ship. While running from the crew members, who have been tasked with bringing Rose back to her family, Rose and Jack witness the Titanic striking the iceberg. They return to warn the others of the collision but are instead confronted by Cal, who has found the sketch of Rose nude. Cal’s servant, Spicer Lovejoy (David Warner), slips the “Heart of the Ocean” into Jack’s pocket, and he is handcuffed to a pipe in the master-at-arms’ office. Cal then puts the pendant in his own coat pocket.

Rose’s mother boards a lifeboat while Rose refuses because she is determined to save Jack. She finds and frees Jack with an axe, and they make their way back to the deck. Cal gives his coat to Rose, and he and Jack urge Rose to board a lifeboat with Cal



falsely claiming that he has found safe passage off the boat for both him and Jack. Rose subsequently jumps back onto the sinking ship, so she can fulfill her earlier promise to Jack: “You jump, I jump.” Cal then chases them through the ship, eventually realizing that he gave Rose his coat containing the pendant. Unable to catch up to them, Cal cowardly boards one of the last lifeboats posing as a child’s father. Ultimately, Jack and Rose survive the sinking of the ship itself, but Jack dies from hypothermia after letting Rose lie on a wardrobe door that would have been unbalanced if they both had lain on it together. Rose is rescued when she leaves Jack and blows a whistle to catch the attention of the lifeboat that has turned back to pick up survivors. The survivors of the wreck are rescued by the Carpathia, and Rose hides from both her mother and Cal. She begins a new life as Rose Dawson and, presumably, dies at the age of 100 after she finishes telling Brock and his team the story and, unbeknownst to everyone, tosses the “Heart of the Ocean” into the sea.

### *Definition of Terms*

Feminism: A term that “served to highlight women’s specific oppression in relation to men...[and thus] is sometimes confined to women’s struggles against oppressive gender relationships. In practice, however, women’s actions, both now and in the past, often have been against interconnecting relations of inequality and have involved many aspects of resistance around daily life and culture that are not simply about gender” (Rowbotham 6); “Advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex; the movement associated with this” (“Feminism”).

First wave feminism: The wave of feminism that began with the Seneca Falls Convention and was led by such women as Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The convention argued that “women...had a right to equality. Individuals should be able to decide their own destinies and develop their abilities. Every person should have the same rights as citizens... Every individual was equally entitled to belong to a common humanity” (Rowbotham 46); “a period of activity during the 19th and early 20th centuries, characterized by advocacy of equality between the sexes and the organized struggle to secure fundamental political, economic, and social rights for women, esp. the right to vote, to access the professions, and to own property; the movement associated with this period of activity” (“First-Wave Feminism”).

Internalized misogyny: The “learned...patriarchal norms and expectations that govern women’s social roles in service of dominant men’s interests” (Manne 76).

Intersectionality: An intersectional approach to feminism is “one that reflects the concerns of all women, not just a privileged few” (Kendall 8). Intersectionality is typically used in reference to the inclusion of Black and other women of color in feminist spaces that have historically excluded them, but the definition has recently expanded to include disabled women as well (Kendall 15, 88); “The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise” (“Intersectionality”).

Love bombing: a colloquial term meaning to give someone excessive attention, admiration, and affection with the goal of making that person feel dependent upon and obligated to the person giving the attention (L’Amie, et al.); “To subject (a person) to an

effusive demonstration of approval or affection, esp. as means to gain trust, loyalty, or compliance. Later also in weakened sense: to show (a person or group) intense or effusive solicitude or affection” (“Love-Bomb”).

Male gaze: The idea of intimating the perspective of a male-either a character in the film, a male watching the film, or both-in which the aim is to sexualize or objectify a female character (Thornham 62-3).

Third wave feminism: The wave of feminism that is “concerned about a wider possibility of social change, consequently questions about how consciousness is formed, whether women’s interests overlap with men, whether the aim is to protect women from male sexual desire, or enable women to define and express sexuality, how to link autonomy and mutuality, and how to value what women have traditionally done without confining them in ‘difference’ (Rowbotham 292); “a period of diverse strands of feminist activity arising in the late 1980s, advocating continued political and social activism, and placing greater emphasis than second-wave feminism on inclusivity with regard to race, class, and sexuality, and individual freedom to define one’s own identity; the movement associated with this period of activity” (“Third-Wave Feminism”).

## *Thesis*

The 1997 Oscar-winning film *Titanic*, directed by James Cameron, delineates a marked disruption from the typical patriarchal mindset towards class and gender during the Progressive Era. Rose's character exhibits a feminist awakening throughout the narrative which exhibits elements of both first- and third-wave feminist ideology. The fusion of these dual sensibilities simultaneously reflects both the historical period dramatized (the 1910s, specifically 1912) and the more contemporary period (the 1990s, specifically 1996, the year in which the present-day scenes of the film take place) in which the film was made. This awakening is demonstrated as Rose navigates the bridge between classes as an increasingly independent woman.

## CHAPTER I: ROSE AS A MAMIFESTATION OF THE PATRIARCHY

### *Introduction*

*Titanic*'s seventeen-year-old female protagonist, Rose Dewitt-Bukater, introduced during a flashback scene early in the film, is a downwardly mobile upper-class young woman from Philadelphia engaged to wealthy Pittsburgh steel heir Caledon "Cal" Hockley. While not in love with the pompous Cal, she has reluctantly accepted his hand in marriage to enable both her and her mother, Ruth, to maintain their upper-class status and lifestyle, which has been in a state of decline since the untimely death of her debt-ridden father. The betrothed couple plan to marry shortly after travelling from Southhampton, England to New York City on the luxurious passenger liner, the RMS Titanic. Upon boarding the ship, Rose immediately decorates her and Cal's cabin with impressionist and surrealist paintings by Edgar Degas and Pablo Picasso. However, when Cal catches sight of the Picasso painting, he dismisses it as simply "fingerpaintings." He deems Rose's taste in art to be foolish and not becoming of a proper upper-class woman. Throughout the film, both Ruth and Cal repeatedly ridicule and admonish Rose for attempting to break free from the harsh social expectations of upper-class women in 1912. These expectations include but are not limited to the ideal of women being subservient to men, which she complies with at the beginning of the film in order to appease her mother and gain social and economic favor. This type of acquiescence is seen when Rose cleans up a broken glass, which Cal smashed during a violent outburst over his belief that she does not honor him as a wife should. The usage of the term "wife" while the two are not yet married suggests that Cal believes that he already owns and controls Rose. While there are moments in the beginning of the film in which she

attempts to rebel against traditional upper-class female gender roles – notably when she lights a cigarette and blows the smoke in Ruth’s face – Rose still upholds the patriarchy by trying to embody the qualities of the “English Rose” and complying with the gendered behavioral expectations of upper-class women.

### *The Stereotype of the English Rose*

At the beginning of the film, Rose perfectly encapsulates the character trope of the “English Rose” through her physicality, personality, and adherence to the societal expectations for a woman of her class. While Rose’s nationality is American, director James Cameron draws upon the British cultural memory of the “English Rose” through both her character’s first name and the casting of an English actress regarded as a quintessential example of the trope due to her prior screen roles as the demure daughters Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* (1995, based on the novel by Jane Austen) and Ophelia in *Hamlet* (1996, based on the play by William Shakespeare). Through the unconventional casting of Winslet, the character becomes an American variation of a traditionally British character type. Moreover, like other upper-class women from the era, Rose is expected to be beautiful, quiet, and demure, so she can marry a wealthy man to maintain or further her family’s status. To meet these social expectations, Rose composes herself in a meek and unassuming manner. Moreover, in the few instances in which she momentarily challenges these expectations (notably when she presses the architect of the RMS Titanic on the alarming lack of lifeboats), she is quickly reprimanded by her fellow first-class passengers. Through her compliance with these beliefs and her engagement to

Cal, Rose finds herself with little autonomy and seemingly little agency to change her situation.

The archetype of the English Rose is a historical designation for “the ideal English woman” (Gundle 1). According to Susie Dent, the editor of *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, the term itself originates from *Merrie England*, a 1902 comic opera composed by Edward German with a libretto written by Basil Hood in which women are the flowers of the garden. They are described as “the sweetest blossom” and “the perfect English rose” (445). This idealized feminine woman is purported to boast such astonishing physical qualities as “long, fair or light brown hair [and] full lips...” (Gundle 1). She also possesses a “remarkable complexion made up of light, roses, and milk possessed only by members of great English families” (11). The character of Rose in *Titanic* strongly adheres to this physical ideal since she is pale with blushed cheeks and “full lips.” However, rather than “long, fair or light brown hair,” she possesses fiery bright red hair. Since most of her features still adhere to this ideal, Rose still manages to encapsulate the stereotype of the English Rose fairly well by way of her physicality.

An English Rose is also expected to strictly adhere to traditional patterns of social hierarchy, suggesting a subsequent compliance with being a woman who is subservient to men. This personality type aids her upward mobility or stagnancy in her social standing, allowing her to gain or maintain economic status for her family through marriage. It is a matter of principle for an English Rose to be calm and demure in order to appear desirable to upper-class men; Gundle describes these desired personality traits as “capable of passion, [but] she is...self-contained and composed” (1). She is also “a woman who is loved not only because she is beautiful but also because she is good and

sweet, pious, and because she is not only a Venus of the flesh but also of the spirit” (13). This quotation refers to the Roman goddess of love and beauty, Venus, and suggests that an English Rose should be beautiful both inside and out.

This favored temperament for upper-class women is indicated in the film, particularly during a scene about halfway through the narrative when Rose compares her situation to that of a young girl. Rose’s outfits separate her from her supposed peers. While the adult women wear large headpieces, high-neck blouses, and their hair made up into buns, Rose does not wear a hat to bar her loose hair from flowing down her back. She also wears a low-cut white blouse and a navy-blue cardigan. Her clothing choices reflect that Rose is a much more relaxed person than her peers. At this moment in the scene, the camera tracks slowly towards Rose while keeping most of the table in view. The ladies continue to prattle on about wedding preparations as Rose notices the little girl wearing a similar outfit as the ladies a few tables over. Here, as the girl’s mother corrects her posture and the girl herself daintily places a napkin on her lap, James Cameron cuts to a close-up of Rose’s face, visually implying that Rose is comparing herself to the little girl. This brief scene succinctly elucidates the stereotype of the English Rose and its importance in a first-class woman’s life, while also highlighting Rose’s growing inability to conform to this stereotype. It suggests that upper-class young girls are trained from an early age to adhere to the strict female gender norms that their mothers were similarly taught years before.

It is particularly worth noting how the mother feels the need to correct her daughter on her failings when no men are present. These criticisms are presumably meant to ensure that Rose adheres to strict rules of feminine conduct, so she is deemed desirable



by a potential husband. The little girl appears self-contained and composed in her actions in this room devoid of a singular male presence probably because she has been socialized to do so, and the mother, likewise, has been socialized to do the same by her mother before her. The mother, as well as the women of both her generation and those that preceded it, are complicit in the perpetuation of these rules of feminine etiquette. This perpetuation would typically be fulfilled by the men of the time, as they would have had the most reason to allow this to continue in order to cement their social and economic standing; however, it is instead the women of the upper class who sustain this etiquette. According to Kate Manne, the author of *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, this is due to a phenomenon known today as internalized misogyny, meaning the “learned...patriarchal norms and expectations that govern women’s social roles in service of dominant men’s interests” (76). This definition suggests that somewhere in history, women internalized these strict ideals of acquiescence that were thrust upon them by their male peers and passed these ideals down to their daughters who then bequeathed them to subsequent generations.

This internalized misogyny is evidenced by the little girl’s immediate reaction to her own failing, suggesting that her insistence upon upholding the English Rose stereotype of being quiet and demure is an internal bias much akin to the much more modern idea of the male gaze. The male gaze is the idea of intimating the perspective of a male – either a character in the film, a male watching the film, or both – in which the aim is to sexualize or objectify a female character. According to Sue Thornham, the author of *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*,

[P]leasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly... [W]omen are simultaneously looked at and displayed...[and] she...plays to and signifies male desire. (62-3)

The little girl, her mother, and all of the other ladies in the room fall prey to the male gaze; they do not even seem to notice their subconscious upholding of this gaze. They simply play into what they believe is necessary for them to succeed financially and socially, almost like they are dolls being positioned to play house by the men around them. This subconscious upholding of the male gaze is reminiscent of a line of Rose's from later in the film, after she has already been thrust into the throes of her feminist awakening: "The last thing I need is another picture of me looking like a porcelain doll." She utters this sentiment after Jack has painted her nude; she is essentially equating her old self with the first-class women who fall victim to their deep-rooted insistence upon adhering to the English Rose stereotype. However, this same scene suggests that Rose has not completely broken free from the male gaze in the film due to the nudity only of Rose and not Jack. She is a sexual object for the gratification of Jack, the male spectator, as well as for the male filmgoers. Another assertion to be made here is that the film is directed by James Cameron, a male director, and, as such, Rose's entire narrative is framed in a male-centric manner.

Likewise, Rose, the character who is meant to break these stereotypes, initially feeds into the male gaze and subsequently the stereotype of the English Rose in much the same manner that her peers do. The first scene in which her younger self appears perfectly encapsulates this point: young Rose boards the Titanic, skipping past the health

check line that the third-class passengers are required to pass through. She wears a dress of almost pure white, broken up only by thin stripes of black and rich purple accent pieces. According to Patti Bellantoni, the author of a critical analysis of color theory in film entitled *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die*, purple, barring the fairly obvious assertion of the title, can represent a multitude of themes. The most common theme seems to fall towards the idea of royalty: "The association with the royal and regal comes from the fact that purple is the most difficult color to come by in nature. Its very scarcity associates it with the rare trappings of emperors, kings, and queens" (Bellantoni xxiv). This popular association showcases Rose as a character who is meant to be seen as royalty, and her juxtaposition with royalty is also corroborated in the characteristics of the English Rose.

Likewise, according to Gundle, the English Rose "reflects both dominance of England within the kingdom and of the monied and aristocratic classes within the social order" (17-18). The scene in which Rose receives the "Heart of the Ocean" from Cal as an engagement present also validates this interpretation of Rose's character. Rose pronounces the gift as "overwhelming"; however, Cal dismisses her worries by stating, "It's for royalty. And we are royalty." Cal, as the heir to a steel tycoon, while not explicitly descending from a royal family, sees both himself and Rose as worthy of the title of royalty due to their vast amounts of wealth and status. These examples undoubtedly tie Rose to an expectation of royalty or, at the very least, the upper class, showing that she, too, while perhaps rebelling against her upbringing internally, adheres to the strict rule of the wealthy, just as the young girl and her mother do.

As previously mentioned, Rose wears a navy-blue cardigan during the scene in which Rose compares her situation to the young girl. Blue, along with red, is among the most predominant colors used in the film. The ocean is a deep, midnight blue, as is the Titanic; the principal symbol of Rose's dispirited life in the upper class, The "Heart of the Ocean," is similarly a vivid sapphire color. This recurring use of deep blues suggests an underlying theme of "chastity, loyalty, [and] fidelity" (Hope and Atchley ix) as well as of "powerlessness" and "dependability" (Bellantoni 82). Blue is also "a color to think, but not to act" (82). These connotations associated with the color blue also perfectly depict Rose's character at the beginning of her story arc. The "Heart of the Ocean," being an engagement present from Cal to Rose, represents Rose's chastity and the loyalty she feels towards Cal and her mother. When Cal gifts her the amulet, he requests that Rose fully open her heart to him. However, after he places the necklace on her neck, she traces it with her finger and seems to subconsciously wrap her hand around her throat as if she were being choked. This movement indicates that Rose is becoming increasingly suffocated and trapped in her relationship due to her feelings of obligation towards Cal and her upper-class life; nevertheless, as Bellantoni suggested about the color blue above, she does not yet fully rebel against the loyalty she still holds for Cal and her mother and rather only thinks about doing so. Upper-class women were also deemed as "indoor" women who live fully in the "confines of the civilized world" (Clarke 122). Because of these confines, Rose is "suffocated by the world she is in, by the attitudes and the décor that physicalizes and internalizes this overbearing culture" (Clarke 123).

As this scene only occurs approximately forty-five minutes into the film, Rose has not yet had the opportunity to properly rebel against the stiff upper-class attitudes. In fact,

one of her only moments of rebellion up until this point in the film have been her collections of paintings by such revolutionary artists as Pablo Picasso and Edgar Degas. More moments of rebellion appear within Rose's dialogue – notably her saying, “[Sigmund Freud's] ideas about the male preoccupation with size might be of particular interest to you, Mr. Ismay” during discussion of the RMS Titanic – and actions such as her smoking, which are quickly snuffed out by Cal and her mother. When compared to her faking her death on the Carpathia to escape the clutches of upper class near the end of the film's flashback scenes, these actions could hardly be called rebellious; rather, they are much more akin to defiant thoughts rather than acts, perfectly aligning with Bellantoni's observations on the color blue above.

Bellantoni's observations about blue color schemes in film, as well as their subsequent elucidation towards Rose's character, also unquestionably lead towards a more complete analysis of Rose as an English Rose stereotype. An English Rose must be quiet and demure, and the analysis of Rose's blue clothing necessitates the correlation of the two. Rose is quiet and only thinks about rebelling rather than fully acting against the upper class, thus further cementing her status as an English Rose. Young Rose's initial entrance in the film also establishes her character as an English Rose archetype by way of the white dress she wears. White, according to *The Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* and to *English Liturgical Colours*, symbolizes “purity, truth, and innocence” (Dent 630-34; Hope and Atchley ix). According to Gundle, an English Rose must demonstrate a “less pronounced physical sensuality” (17-18); in other words, an English Rose must present herself as sensually and sexually pure, even if she is neither of these things in her private life. Thus, Rose is effectively ensconced as an English Rose through her name, looks, and

tendency towards the socially approved personality type at the beginning of the film. She adheres to this ideal in order to save her family's fortune and social standing, as she is reminded by her mother Ruth when she tightens Rose's corset, suppressing her yearning to act rather than simply think in order to appear to be a suitable mate for Cal. As with the little girl and her mother, Rose complies with the expectations of Ruth and the other upper-class women. Rose has also been socialized to oblige to the male gaze and presence, and, as a result, continually but unintentionally caters to the male gaze. Rose does not wish to center the male gaze in this manner, but because of her loyalty to her family and the pressure she feels to be perfect, she is unable to rebel against it at this point in her feminist awakening.

Likewise, the film itself amplifies the stereotype of the English Rose through the casting and naming choices made. The actress who portrays Rose, Kate Winslet, is heralded as a modern-day example of the English Rose stereotype. According to Nicholas Nicastro's article "Post-pre-Raphaelite: Kate Winslet" in *Film Comment*, the term of English Rose has followed Kate Winslet through her roles in period dramas and beyond (26). Lisa Stead's article "There's More to Middle Age Than a Saggy Belly: Gender, Ageing, and Agency in Kate Winslet's Post Weinstein Star Image" also corroborates this by connecting her to maturity and demureness, two cornerstones of the ideal English Rose.

Kate Winslet's career further manifests a connection with her *Titanic* character: she began her career by starring as demure characters in period dramas, such as Marianne in director Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*, and as of late has taken on roles that are prideful and sensual, such as Mare Sheehan in Brad Ingelsby's *Mare of Easttown* and

Mary Anning in Francis Lee's *Ammonite*. The character of Marianne starts off as romantic and eventually becomes more sensible and marries Colonel Brandon after the death of her first love, John Willoughby, a perfectly modest role for a beginning actress and thoroughly aligning with the ideal of the demure English Rose. However, the characters of Mare Sheehan and Mary Anning both provided more sexually charged and diverse roles for Winslet. While Sheehan is an older detective whose relationship with a younger man culminates in a sexual encounter, Anning is a woman in the nineteenth century who falls in love with another woman against the social expectations of the time. Rose is much like Marianne at the beginning of the film; she is quiet, demure, and fulfills the expectations of the English Rose. However, as the film progresses, the character of Rose evolves into a more sexually charged woman who breaks free from the traditional female roles in the vein of Sheehan and Anning. Likewise, the naming of the character, Rose, seems to be an overt allusion to the English Rose stereotype by James Cameron. It is in these ways that the character of Rose perfectly encapsulates the stereotype through her adherence to the social standards for upper-class women during the early twentieth century.

#### *Differing Expectations for First- and Third-class Women During the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era*

As briefly stated earlier, the expectations for an upper-class woman would be for her to be beautiful, quiet, and demure and to marry for economic and social reasons rather than for love. Rose, as an upper-class woman, is expected to marry Cal, a man for whom she holds no love, to preserve her family's fading honor. However, Rose's

experiences and expectations as a first-class woman hardly fully encapsulate the experiences of every woman on board the Titanic. For example, a third-class woman would not have had the same expectations to marry a rich man or to remain demure; rather, a third-class woman would have been characterized by those in first class as uncivilized and full of debauchery. Likewise, it would have been deemed absurd for a poised woman such as Rose to acknowledge these women in public. Rose's experiences, on the other hand, would have been more congruent with the ideals of the English Rose as she would have been expected to attend to the men of her class through her adhering to their admonishments and offering up her sexuality only to Cal.

During the Progressive Era, women of the upper classes were expected to marry in order to maintain or further their family's economic and social status. Interestingly, women of lower classes were expected to marry for the same reasons, but expectations for them were not as stringent, meaning that some lower-class women would have been allowed to marry for love because there would not have been a family fortune to protect. For example, Vinicius mentions that women of the working class were given purpose by their husbands and "slaved to make their men content" (106). These working-class women seemed to be much more preoccupied with the love that they held for their husbands than the women of the upper classes; Vinicius refers to first-hand accounts of lower-class women going hungry to feed their husbands and burying their husbands with his favorite meal (106).

Likewise, there would have been lingering Victorian era attitudes towards gender and class, such as the idea that women of the middle and upper classes would have been characterized as not having sexual desires while women of the lower classes would have



been able to express their sexuality without a stringent ideal of being “ladylike” forced upon them. This dichotomy between the classes of women is evident within Vinicius’s book, *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Era*:

The artisan’s daughter was carefully raised in a suburb and surrounded by suburban furnishings. She was taught to play the piano, along with other graces. She married relatively late — around age 24 — and could expect to have only two or three children. Her career reflected the high living standards of this traditional aristocracy of labor and the essentially middle-class aspirations those living standards then allowed. In many important ways, including marriage age and family size, the artisan’s daughter resembled the middle-class woman. Her life had its own special stresses, but it cannot realistically be described as a part of working-class history. (101)

This quotation shows that women of the middle class, or the artisan’s daughter, had much different expectations that would compel her than the expectations that would have been forced upon a woman of the lower class. While women of all classes would have had some level of social expectations, the artisan’s daughter would have been expected to comply with the demands of her family in regard to what she would learn and how she would lead her life. Contrariwise, women of the lower classes would not have had the same luxuries as the artisan’s daughters.

These expectations are quintessential to the early characterization of Rose. Rose, as the representation of a middle or downwardly mobile upper-class woman, would not have had the same expectations thrust upon her as a woman of a humbler background. Lower-class women would have been expected to handle household chores while an

upper-class woman would have had a maid or butler to handle those same chores (103). This is seen in the film when the ladies and children in first class are waited upon by maids and butlers while it would have been habitual for the women of the lower classes to take care of the children. In regard to marriage, a woman of the upper or middle class would have been expected to remain “perfectly innocent and sexually ignorant” (ix) while women of the lower-class were almost expected to supplement their paltry income with prostitution (81). These stark differences in sexuality between the women of upper class and the women of lower class is shown in the scene in which Rose joins the third-class passengers for a lively party, an act that is made possible by her downwardly mobile or in-between social status. While the third-class passengers freely jump and dance in time to the fiddle music, Rose instead follows Jack’s lead because she is unsure of the steps. He replies that he does not know the steps, either, and Rose continues to mimic his dancing through the call-and-response tapping in which the two partake. When Rose does take charge and improvise without Jack’s help, she falls back on what she has learned in her upper-class lifestyle: she performs what seems to be a *relevé*, which, according to the author of *The Ballet Companion: A Dancer’s Guide to the Techniques, Traditions, and Joys of Ballet*, is a move in ballet in which she stands with all her weight balanced on the tip of her big toe (Minden 806). Rose’s idea of dancing is prim and proper, a dancing style that requires years of training to master while the other dancers simply release what is in their hearts.

It seems that even with all the freedom that Jack and the other third-class passengers show her in dancing, she still does not fully embrace their ways. This is evident through Rose’s actions in the following scenes in which Cal admonishes Rose for

not coming to him the previous night and in which Ruth makes Rose aware of their limitations as women. In both scenes, Rose does not fight back against Cal's accusations or Ruth's admonishments, showing that Rose is not yet as free as the third-class women in terms of showing her emotions and sexuality. Ruth tightens Rose into her corset, thus tightening her into the upper class, and the painting in the background, *L'Étoile*, or *The Star*, by Edgar Degas corroborates Rose's lack of freedom. The painting shows a lone ballet dancer wearing a white dress and a crown as she relishes in the success of her performance. A male patron dressed in black watches from the sidelines, and here, it is important to acknowledge the atmosphere of the ballet scene during the era in which the painting was created.

According to Kelly and Flight, the authors of *Ballerina: Sex, Scandal, and Suffering Behind the Symbol of Perfection*, "...the ballerina is a subservient supplier of delights to male audiences and patrons, a concubine or prostitute" (2). Male patrons such as the one in the background of the painting were controlling and often "paid for a dancer's keep and expenses and often shrewdly represented her interests within the theater" (Kelly and Flight 14), meaning that they could ensure that their dancer garnered desired roles within the ballet in exchange for sexual favors. As Rose has performed a ballet move two scenes prior to this, she is implied to suffer from a similar fate. As her mother laces her corset up, she reminds Rose of her duty to her family and that it is imperative that she marry Cal in order to keep their family status. Here, we realize that she is supposed to trade her sexuality for economic favors, and this is corroborated by Cal admonishing Rose for not coming to him the previous night and saying that she is his "wife in practice, if not yet by law, so you will honor me. You will honor me the way a

wife is required to honor a husband.” Rose is not yet free to express her sexuality in the way that the third-class women do; while they dance freely and are asked for their consent before being touched, Rose is controlled by Cal much like the ballerinas of the nineteenth century were controlled by their patrons. These are just some ways in which women of different classes would have had differing expectations especially regarding their innocence and sexuality.

Other such examples of the expectations for Rose and other upper-class women are evident in James Clarke’s book *The Cinema of James Cameron: Bodies in Heroic Motion*. In the book, Clarke examines the utilization of Rose’s character at two distinct ages: “We see the young and old physical body of Rose....In a culture that attributes much of women’s power to their beauty, age, of course, is the enemy. Contrasting an elderly woman with her once youthful beauty is itself a form of punishment not unprecedented in recent Hollywood film” (118). Clarke then continues to critique the ways in which Rose’s conventional, youthful beauty had no bearing upon her success but rather had the opposite effect in way of her being pushed to “psychological instability” (118) because of her marriage to Cal, a wealthy and intellectual man. A woman of the Progressive era being too well-read was frowned upon: “Cal patronizingly orders Rose’s dinner for her...[and] Rose makes an outspoken comment that expresses her disdain for male chauvinists... ‘I may have to watch what she reads,’ Cal says dismissively of his fiancé” (122). However, upper-class women were also deemed as “indoor” women who live fully in the “confines of the civilized world” (122). Because of these confines, Rose is “suffocated by the world she is in, by the attitudes and the décor that physicalizes and internalizes this overbearing culture” (123).

As an upper-class woman of the burgeoning Progressive era, Rose's youth and beauty would have been one of the only commodities that she had to offer in the world, and Cal would have taken her beauty into account when agreeing to marry her. While her family's finances were more than likely a part of the equation, seemingly unbeknownst to Cal (although there may be historical context that suggests that he would have been fully aware of the fact that Rose and Ruth were using him to further their status<sup>1</sup>) Rose's family had been financially ruined. However, this fact would not have been overly detrimental to Cal in any way on account of him having his own ostentatious wealth and the expectation that Rose would not have contributed to the finances in any way except for perhaps a dowry paid from Rose's family to Cal's. In this way, Cal would have essentially had only Rose's beauty to consider whether he knew it consciously or not. This dichotomy suggests a leisurely life for upper-class women, one which does not aspire for frenetic dancing or women's intellectualism but which rather suggests a sedentary life of speaking quietly of domestic issues or gossip around the dinner table and not being invited to the men's talk of business and economics in the smoking room.

Clarke's book mentions repeatedly that Rose feels suffocated in her first-class lifestyle, and this feeling of suffocation is corroborated repeatedly throughout the film. One such scene is when Rose's mother tightens Rose's corset as she speaks of the reason of which she must marry Cal and must not become distracted with intriguing third-class passengers such as Jack: Rose must regain the family's money of which her father's death robbed them. The scene is a palpable reminder of her being forced into this world

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<sup>1</sup> This is due to the multitude of marriages that were arranged in order to further the woman's economic and class status (Coontz 61).

in which she does not belong, and this reminder is corroborated in the scene in which Cal gifts her the “Heart of the Ocean”; he is essentially confining her to a life of aristocracy by “love-bombing” her, meaning that he has become overly affectionate in order to manipulate Rose into staying with him and averting her gaze from the intriguing third-class passenger, Jack Dawson. This aforementioned suffocation seems to be lifted in the hours before the sinking when she is seen running around the ship with Jack in a loose, flowing dress rather than the tight-fitting corset that she had been seen wearing up until this point. These scenes validate the ideas that Rose felt stunted and unseen in first-class and that her characterization in the early scenes of the film adheres to the principles of patriarchy.

## CHAPTER II: ROSE AS A MANIFESTATION OF BURGEONING FEMINISM

### *Introduction*

When seventeen-year-old Rose Dewitt-Bukater is first introduced in *Titanic*, she is portrayed as a young girl without the resolve to fully rebel against her impending marriage to Cal Hockley. Despite her major reservations, the bride-to-be remains reluctantly loyal to both her fiancé and her mother, Ruth, who desperately wants the union of their two families to pull her and Rose out of financial debt. This loyalty is seen with the symbolism of both the “Heart of the Ocean” and the scene where Ruth tightens Rose’s white corset, an image that suggests that Ruth is constraining her daughter into a set of social expectations for women against her will. However, as the narrative progresses, Rose starts to transform from an obedient teenage girl to a strong-willed woman capable of living her own life. The character’s feminist awakening can be delineated into three succinct stages: the first being the outward embodiment of patriarchal ideals, the third being her evolution into a feminist, and the second being the transitional period between the other two phases.

The second stage of Rose’s feminist awakening is indicative of the first wave of feminism, which took place during the same time period, the Progressive Era (1896-1917), depicted in the film’s flashback scenes of the Titanic’s fateful voyage. This early era of feminism was marked by a woman’s desire to be considered a man’s equal in matters such as suffrage and employment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This equality only applied to white able-bodied women; women of other races or abilities were not considered in feminist ideals until the more recent fourth wave of feminism, which focuses on intersectionality. Intersectionality “...reflects the concerns of all women, not just a privileged few” (Kendall 8) and is typically used in reference to the inclusion of Black and other women of color in feminist spaces that have historically excluded them. The definition has recently expanded to include disabled women as well (15, 88).

During Rose's tentative foray into first-wave feminism, she is met with intense disapproval from her mother and upper-class peers for her views on women's equality with men. These views may have been the result of Rose's schooling in Europe as well as her interest in art and Freudian psychology. However, Rose's mother states that she does not believe schooling to be necessary anymore since, in her opinion, formal education is only a means for meeting eligible men. As a result of these traditional attitudes, Rose quickly reverts back to a repressed version of herself, which aligns with patriarchal expectations for women. Even so, around the start of the film's second half, Rose's burgeoning feminism begins to return. Rose's feminism reemerges when she engages in a clandestine relationship with the working-class Jack Dawson, who is considered dirty and uncouth by her social set due to his unemployment and third-class status on the ship.

Jack becomes fast friends with Rose after saving her from committing suicide, an act that she was contemplating due to her intense feelings of psychological suffocation. Out of appreciation for keeping her from falling overboard, Jack is invited to dinner by Cal Hockley – at the suggestion of one of his fellow upper-class passengers – in the first-class cabins. Before this gathering occurs, Jack and Rose take a stroll across the deck of the ship, where they talk about his childhood and current life as a vagabond. Rose expresses her gratitude to Jack for not telling Cal about her failed suicide attempt. “I know what you must be thinking. ‘Poor little rich girl. What does she know about misery?’,” she says to him. Jack insists she has it wrong. “No, no, that's not what I was thinking. What I was thinking was, ‘what could've happened to this girl to make her feel she had no way out?’,” he tells her. Rose explains that it was due to a multitude of reasons, but mostly because of her engagement to Cal. Jack insults her by boldly asking,



“Do you love the guy?” Rose is insulted because Jack, a man without inhibitions, has hit the nail on the head. She is not used to someone speaking their mind so freely because she has been socially conditioned to be full of inhibitions. Rose calls him annoying and demands that he leave the first-class deck. She then grabs Jack’s portfolio from him, discovering that he is an exemplary artist and has drawn sketches of prostitutes that he met in France. After Rose flips through the sketchbook, Jack remarks to her that she “wouldn’t have jumped.” In this line of dialogue, Jack suggests that he believes Rose has a hidden strength that she is not fully aware of and that she is capable of saving herself.

Shortly thereafter, Jack takes Rose under his wing and teaches her how to “spit like a man.” Rose is jealous of Jack’s stories of how he became an artist and wishes that she could similarly go off into the horizon. She yearns to have the freedom and independence to experience the same things that Jack has done, such as riding horses, chewing tobacco, and spitting like a man. Upon learning of her desires, Jack drags her over to the railing and shows her how to spit. When Rose daintily spits off the side of the boat, he states that she “really [has] to hock it back.” Rose tries spitting again, but Jack says it was only mildly better. As he tries showing her again, Ruth, Molly Brown (Kathy Bates), and the Countess of Rothes (Rochelle Rose) catch them in the act. While the other ladies are curious about Jack, Ruth is wary of him, since she is afraid that Rose may fall in love with him and jeopardize her engagement to Cal. When dinner is announced, Molly offers Jack one of her son’s suits when she realizes that he does not plan to change clothes.

These two scenes serve as the catalyst for Rose’s evolution into a fully awakened feminist. Both show that Jack believes she is more than capable of being an independent

woman, who does not have to be weighted down from the stifling ideals of the upper class. However, Rose has not yet realized that she alone is the key to changing herself from an obedient girl to an independent woman. The fact that Jack, a man, is the one to give her a push in the right direction does not necessarily negate her feminist qualities as some critics have suggested.

In his article “Unsinkable Masculinity: The Artist and the Work of Art in James Cameron’s *Titanic*,” David Gertsner examines Rose as a female character who is masculinized throughout the film. Gertsner does not read her as a burgeoning feminist with a strength and individuality, but instead rather as a woman simply adopting male ideals: “It is on the ship that [Rose] is modeled into the dream of a man...[.] The process of masculinising Rose, like that in the design of 18<sup>th</sup>-century figurehead, alleviates the repressive obstructions that hinder her” (180). Gertsner views Rose’s development as a woman throughout the film as being indicative of her yearning to be freer and more like men such as Jack and Cal, rather than a manifestation of her burgeoning feminism. However, Gertsner does not realize that Rose would have evolved into a feminist even if she had never met Jack. He directly indicates this to her by stating, “You wouldn’t have jumped.” Jack understands that she is a strong woman and fully capable of saving herself from allowing her stifling upper-class lifestyle to drive her to suicide. This clearly shows that while Rose is still loyal to her family, she is still in the process of learning how to take control of her own life.

### *First-Wave Feminism in the film Titanic*

Throughout the beginning and middle of the film, Rose strives to break away from the harsh ideals of life for upper-class women. She expresses her desire for freedom from these ideals by acting more like Jack and Cal, notably smoking in public (an act that would have been deemed socially inappropriate or even illegal for women during the early twentieth century) and by spitting over the side of the boat in order to achieve a greater level of self-confidence that is more in line with Jack's behavior. However, Rose's actions do not only represent her burgeoning feminism; they also show that she is a rebellious teenager trying to appear sophisticated and more like an adult. However, both of Rose's attempts to break away from the social mores for upper-class women are undermined by the other upper-class passengers, most notably by her mother and Cal. Her mother states, "You know I don't like that," and Cal then takes the cigarette from Rose and extinguishes it. Her mother does so because of her and Rose's downwardly mobile status in the upper class, and Cal does so because he views Rose as his property. At this point in her character development, she has not yet fully realized her feminist awakening.

The first wave of feminism, beginning in 1848 with the creation of the Declaration of Sentiments by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, focused on affirming women's equality with men, a definition that is outlined in Sheila Rowbotham's book *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action* (46). This notion is supported by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines first-wave feminism as "a period of activity during the 19th and early 20th centuries, characterized by advocacy of equality between the sexes and the organized struggle to secure fundamental political,

economic, and social rights for women, esp[ecially] the right to vote, to access the professions, and to own property” (“First-Wave Feminism”). Women of the Victorian era did not have the same social rights as men, such as the right to own property and to work a job. Women were not allowed to own property and were considered property themselves. They were also not allowed to get jobs, so they did not have economic freedom either. The only way women of the time could advance their social and economic standing was to marry a wealthy man. The injustice of these norms is directly stated by Ruth, who tells Rose, “Of course it’s unfair. We’re women. Our choices are never easy.” She recognizes that women have limited options and wants Rose to accept this fact. However, Rose wishes to become an actress and to have complete autonomy and economic and social freedom from men.

Rose’s character demonstrates her equality with men through her evolution from a young girl whose only options are marriage to Cal or suicide into a woman who realizes that she is free to become the person she wants to become. The sinking of the Titanic in 1912 occurred in the midst of first-wave feminism, which lasted until approximately 1920. As a result, the character of Rose would have been born closer to the end of first-wave feminism rather than the beginning. Ruth’s attempts to steer Rose away from feminism are most clearly seen in two scenes: the first in which Ruth tightens Rose’s corset and the second in which Ruth admonishes her daughter for smoking.

Rose’s exposure is evident by her actions throughout the beginning of the film in which she acts in a manner more befitting a first-class man than a first-class woman. A prime example of this behavior is the first dining scene in which Rose smokes a cigarette. Later in the film when Jack joins the upper-class passengers for dinner, the first-class

men retire to the parlor room to smoke and discuss business and politics; however, the women are not invited to this private smoking party. This exclusion may indicate that the sight of upper-class women smoking would not have been deemed ladylike. The women are also not invited to the smoking room because men do not consider them their equals. The men of the film do not believe that the women would have anything important to add to their conversations about business and politics.

This negative attitude about smoking is seemingly corroborated by Ruth's negative reaction to Rose's smoking. In addition, the era's gendered smoking habits caused widespread social disdain for women who indulged in this vice. According to Rosemary Elliot, "smoking was a predominantly male habit...[and] only became integral to everyday life for men...[the act] held quite different social meanings for women than men..." (2). These different gendered social meanings are expanded upon in Allan Brandt's book, *The Cigarette Century*, in which he states that, in the early twentieth century, smoking was considered a dirty habit for women and met with severe disapproval; women smoking in public was even made illegal in New York City with the passage of the Sullivan Ordinance in 1908, which was overturned only two weeks later (57-9). As a result, Rose's insistence upon smoking despite such gendered differences concerning the habit indicates her yearning to be equal to men as well as to upset her mother in an act of teenage rebellion.

The striving for equality through smoking is historically documented, as demonstrated by a quote in Brandt's article "Recruiting Women Smokers: The Engineering of Consent." He states, "For men, the cigarette evoked images of power, authority, and independence; for women, it represented rebellious independence...and

acted as a flexible symbol for both feminists and flappers” (64). This quotation indicates that women who subscribed to the ideals of first-wave feminism were much more inclined to break social standards and laws in order to smoke as a form of protest to help achieve equality. Rose, as a burgeoning feminist, shows her rebellious independence by smoking in a public dining car. She commits this indiscretion in an attempt to assert her equality with the first-class men, who are allowed to do so with no admonishments against their actions. She also does so in order to offend Cal and her mother, suggesting that the act possesses a personal dimension. Smoking is also an act of rebellion against being forced into marrying someone she does not want to marry. Rose exhibits a similar impetuous, defiant attitude when she dances energetically in the third-class cabins, an act that sees her deglamorized when she returns drenched in sweat and beer. Rose willfully engages in acts such as smoking, dancing, and drinking that causes her to look dirty, and in doing so, she showcases her disdain for the typical social standards for upper-class women of the time as well as her rebellious independence. Through her engagement in these deplorable acts, Rose likewise demonstrates that she wishes to be seen as equal with the men who are allowed to take part in typically male-dominated activities without being admonished by her mother, Cal, and her upper-class peers.

Another example of how Rose wishes to be seen as a woman equal to her upper-class male counterparts is the way in which her character is juxtaposed with Molly Brown. Molly, a Southern American woman of new money, is quietly ridiculed for her perceived impertinence and uncivilization in comparison to upper-class women of old money, who have spent their entire lives learning the particulars of social etiquette. Her character description in Cameron’s script corroborates this view, describing her as “a

tough-talking sharpshooter who dresses in the finery of her genteel peers but will never be one of them” (Cameron 32). Molly’s first line admonishing Thomas Andrews (Victor Garber), the naval architect, for referring to the RMS Titanic with female pronouns further cements this notion of her being a woman who does not adhere to the standards for the upper-class. Molly expresses her disdain by insisting that men’s obsession with referring to inanimate objects with feminine pronouns is “just another example of the men settin’ the rules their way.” A few moments later, Cal orders lamb for Rose without consulting her, and Molly jokes that Cal will probably cut Rose’s meat for her as well. In this moment, Molly is portrayed as a woman who is unafraid to question the men in her life, even the men with whom she has only recently become acquainted. She is the type of woman that Rose wishes to become; Molly is a woman who demands equality with men and does not accept anything less. Molly’s methods of accomplishing her goals are much more unyielding than Rose’s. She does not step down when men and women of old money look down upon her with disdain, while the less confident Rose allows her cigarette to be pulled from her mouth by Cal and almost immediately retreats within herself.

Rose’s desire for gender equality is similarly evident when she and Jack spit over the side of the ship. Prior to this moment, Jack had saved a suicidal Rose from jumping off the RMS Titanic to escape her oppressive life as an upper-class woman. After he rescues her, they strike up an unexpected friendship, which results in Rose confiding to Jack about her feelings of gender demoralization. Rose confesses that she feels as if she is “standing in the middle of a crowded room screaming at the top of my lungs, and no one even looks up.” In response, Jack tells her, “I see you...you wouldn’t have jumped.” Jack

recognizes that that she is not a typical upper-class girl and, instead, is fully capable of breaking free from the stifling feminine ideals expected of her.

Unlike Cal, Jack views Rose as his equal and, in turn, wants her to recognize it as well. He expresses this belief by teaching her to spit, a social indiscretion usually only committed by lower-class men. Negative attitudes toward spitting were, in large part, due to the prevalence of tuberculosis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These public health concerns necessitated the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis to create an etiquette guide to prevent the spread of the disease, the first and last rules being “Do Not Spit” (Otis 245-7). Hygiene regarding tuberculosis was “almost universally taught in schools” (245). This means that people who did not receive a formal education, notably the lower class, would not have been as cognizant of these hygiene rules as their upper-class counterparts tended to be. According to the Center on Education Policy, the percentage of children aged 5-14 who attended school was around 78% in 1870. High school education did not become commonplace until the mid-to-late twentieth century (4). However, someone such as Jack, who became a vagabond after losing his parents at a young age, would not have had the same access to education as an upper-class man. This is because education became compulsory around the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bandiera, et al. 1). Yet, despite the fact that school attendance was mandatory, children from poorer families would have been taken out of school by their parents in order to earn extra income (Yarrow). This indicates that low-income children would not have been in school as often as their more affluent peers during the tuberculosis epidemic, thus likely preventing them from being exposed to the health rules for tuberculosis.



The spitting scene opens with a straight-on medium shot, showing Rose and Jack from behind as they discuss Jack's past as a starving artist. They are standing only a few inches apart on an open-air upper level of the ship. Rose's purity and innocence are indicated by the fact that she is wearing a white bodice with her long yellow gown. According to Patti Bellantoni, author of *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die*, the color yellow can symbolically suggest an invocation of anxiousness (41). Anxiousness is indicative of Rose's character at this point in the film, since she is facing a life of unhappiness married to a man she does not love. Moreover, her anxiousness regarding these seemingly inevitable events is suggested earlier in the film when Rose's mother ties her daughter's corset. On the other hand, Jack wears an all-brown outfit, which often "suggests stability and denotes masculine qualities" (Cerrato 5). Jack, unlike Rose, is stable in how he views himself and his life; he knows who he is and while he may not know where he will end up, he knows he will enjoy the journey, which shows a self-assured confidence that Rose and other women of the period do not enjoy.

This dichotomy between Rose's anxiety about her freedom and Jack's stability in his identity is evident when the pair run to the covered part of the ship's upper deck and spit over the side. Rose tells Jack that she wishes she could head out towards the horizon whenever she felt like it. When Jack agrees and promises that they will also ride horses with one leg on each side, Rose pushes back slightly by repeating his sentence with incredulity. However, she takes a moment to think and then asks him to teach her to ride, chew tobacco, and spit like a man, showing that Rose wants to be equal with men and do what they do. When Jack takes her at her word and drags her along the ship in order to teach her to spit, she attempts to stop him, stating that spitting is disgusting and that she

could not possibly do such a thing. Her first attempt at spitting is very poor, but she shows slight improvement in her second attempt. However, this act is witnessed by her mother, Molly, and the Countess of Rothes, which puts an abrupt halt to her brief feeling of empowerment. Rose immediately composes herself and reluctantly returns to her expected role as a refined socialite with relative ease.

When recounting this altercation, Old Rose admits that her mother looked at Jack as if he were an insect to be squashed. This resentment stems from the fact that Jack is a threat to the life that has been laid out for Rose, since, in Ruth's view, Jack is Rose's ticket to poverty. Rose's immediate resignation to her mother's wishes further highlights her anxiety about her life, while Jack's incorrect assumption that he will be allowed to wear his street clothes to the formal dinner shows his naïve self-confidence. Jack shows little understanding of social class divisions, a naivete that juxtaposes Rose's opinions towards class since she shows little understanding of class divisions. Rose does not necessarily wish to break free from her class standing, a notion implied at the beginning of the film. Old Rose boards the *Akademik Mstislav Keldysh*, the research vessel that is exploring the wreckage of the RMS Titanic to find the "Heart of the Ocean," to discuss her memories of the RMS Titanic shipwreck. Old Rose brings an abundance of belongings aboard to the vessel, including her pet dog and fish. This materialism shows that she is emotionally dependent on her belongings and cannot part with them for even a short trip to visit the wreckage. This scene is reminiscent of a later flashback scene where Young Rose unpacks her copious belongings into her and Cal's cabin, thus indicating that Old Rose still harbors the same class attitudes that she possessed when she was younger. Rose does not gain self-confidence because of her class, which she had all along, even

with her family's declining status; rather, she gains it by evolving into a woman with autonomy to make her own decisions. Rose yearns to have the power to make her own choices without ridicule and repercussions, but every time she attempts to do so, she is reprimanded by her peers. This shows that Rose, while breaking out of the shell that the patriarchy has carved out for her, still fails to achieve complete equality with men due to her reservations about shutting out and ignoring the criticisms of the other first-class passengers. Rose's rebellion against the social mores expected for upper-class women of the early twentieth century is just one facet of her evolution into a fully awakened feminist.

Rose's transition from a demure young girl to a sexually awakened young woman is also highlighted in the scene where she runs around the RMS Titanic in a loose dress. Prior to this moment, Rose asks Jack to draw her in the nude and, afterwards, consummates their love relationship. In the wake of these events, Rose's new feelings of freedom are visually indicated by Cameron and costume designer Deborah Lynn Scott by dressing her in a loose-fitting dress with no corset. After the pair are chased through the bowels of the ship by Spicer Lovejoy, Cal's personal valet and bodyguard, they find themselves on the deck of the ship. Meanwhile, Cal discovers the nude drawing and reports the "Heart of the Ocean" missing. Jack and Rose witness the ship strike the iceberg, which almost causes chunks of ice to fall on them. They realize that the damage to the ship is serious when they overhear the captain say that it would be impossible to reach shore before the ship sinks "unless the pumps get ahead." Shortly thereafter, they reenter the foyer and are taken back to Cal by Lovejoy, who sneaks the "Heart of the Ocean" into Jack's pocket. Cal has the ship's master at arms search Jack to look for the

necklace, which is found in his coat pocket. Jack is handcuffed and led to the master at arms' office, all the while professing that he "didn't do this." Rose starts to doubt Jack's love and believes that he seduced her in order to steal the necklace.

A few minutes later, Cal slaps Rose across the face calling her "a little slut," but their budding argument is interrupted by a steward telling them to put on their lifejackets and board the lifeboats. Rose sees the ship's architect, Mr. Andrews, on the lifeboat deck and says, "I saw the iceberg, Mr. Andrews. And I see it in your eyes. Please tell me the truth." Mr. Andrews replies that his seemingly unsinkable ship will be at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean within only an hour or two if they are lucky. He then reminds Rose of the number of lifeboats being too small for the number of passengers onboard, before leaving and presumably preparing to die with his ship. The first-class women board the lifeboats with Ruth loudly demanding that they be seated by class. Rose tells her to shut up, saying, "Don't you understand? The water is freezing...and there aren't enough boats [for half the people on the ship.] Half the people on this ship are going to die." Cal replies, "not the better half," and Rose realizes that if she escapes on the lifeboat at this moment, Jack will die. Her mother and Cal both press her to board the lifeboat, but Rose tells Cal that she would "rather be [Jack's] whore than your wife." She attempts to walk away, but Cal grabs her and pulls her back. She spits in his face, and, Cal, astonished that Rose would boldly insult him in this manner, lets her go, and wipes his face.

After asking Mr. Andrews where she would find Jack – with or without his help – Rose runs off to save him. Here, she shows the heroism and strength that she has gained throughout the film. Upon finding him in the master at arms' cabin, she realizes she needs to cut off his handcuffs with something. She desperately searches for a tool or

weapon. At first, she runs through the ship's corridors crying for help, and when a male passenger approaches her, she begs him to come to Jack's aid, but he shows no concern and simply runs off. Rose stands there calling dejectedly for someone else to help. When the lights start to flicker, Rose realizes she must hurry to try and save Jack herself before the ship sinks. A male steward rounds the corner and attempts to forcibly take her back to the deck. However, after fails to listen to her, Rose hits him in the face; he responds, "To hell with you" and leaves her to fend for herself. Rose leans against the wall and notices an axe in a wall-mounted glass case. She unwinds a fire hose next to the case and uses it to break the glass. She then embarks on a harrowing journey to return to Jack; while she has been searching for help, the water levels have risen to the point where she is unable to walk and instead must swim through the hallways. She reunites with Jack and uses the axe to cut his handcuffs off and free him.

This scene succinctly showcases Rose's evolution into an independent woman. Rose, who started the film as a despondent girl who attempted suicide to escape the stifling upper class and was saved by Jack, now saves Jack from certain death. During the scene, a crew member attempts to take Rose to a lifeboat, showing that he views her as a damsel in distress. She punches the crew member, thus rejecting the pigeonholing. She takes a more dominant role in saving Jack when the roles are typically reversed; usually, a woman is saved by a man, but Rose helps Jack. This shows that she does not simply accept that she must be a damsel in distress as she did earlier in the film; now she realizes the strength Jack said she had and uses that strength to help him survive the sinking of the ship.

Rose's desperate run through the hallways of the ship to save Jack perfectly encapsulates her evolution into a strong woman who is both free and an equal to her male counterparts. The loose, flowing dress that she wears during the film's shipwreck climax showcases this evolution. The loose dress is a stark contrast to the rigid and restrictive corset that her mother tightened her into earlier in the film. The corset symbolized the upper-class socialite life that Rose would have endured being married to Cal, and the loose dress represents the alternative freedom introduced to her by Jack. Rose is no longer destined to be suffocated by the stiff feminine roles expected of upper-class women, and instead she is now free to make her own path. She proves that she does not need help from men such as the uncaring passenger and the stubborn steward, who refused to either help or listen to her.

Rose shows that she is just as capable as Cal in utilizing violence to get what she desires. While Cal throws the china dishes and slaps Rose because he wants to control her and own her like a piece of property, Rose spits in Cal's face and punches the steward to save the man she loves. She behaves as a man-engaging in violence as only men of the film have done – but in a way that showcases her empathy and love for another, a trait that is more commonly associated with women. This shows that while Rose wishes to be equal with men, she still values her womanhood, the opposite of what Gertsner asserted in his critique of the film. Rose does not masculinize herself solely to become equal with men; rather, she still exhibits traditional feminine traits of empathy and love even when she engages in acts that are generally associated with the opposite sex, notably hitting and spitting.

She also showcases her evolution as a character when she is one of the only passengers to be pulled from the water after the ship has sunk. After Jack has led her to the wardrobe door, they both try to lie on top of it, but it begins to sink. Jack lets Rose lie on top by herself, and he reminds her of her strength, telling her, “Don’t say your goodbyes, Rose. Don’t give up. Don’t do it.” Jack makes Rose promise that she will survive and never give up, and once she accedes, he asks her to never let go of that promise. She says, “I’ll never let go, Jack,” mirroring what Jack said to her when he saved her from slipping off the rails. They fall asleep, and a lifeboat comes back to rescue survivors. Rose then realizes that Jack has died after she attempts to shake him awake, and now she must decide whether to let go of Jack’s body and survive or to die with Jack. She keeps her promise never to give up, letting Jack sink to the bottom of the ocean, which is mirrored when Old Rose tosses the “Heart of the Ocean” into the Atlantic after she finishes her story. She swims over to the dead body of an officer who has a whistle in his mouth and takes it from him. She blows the whistle weakly just as the lifeboat was pulling away. She is then pulled into the lifeboat and taken aboard the Carpathia. In these moments, Rose shows her will to survive, which juxtaposes her suicidal ideation at the beginning of the film. She was going to jump off the ship because she did not have agency in her life, but as Jack realized, she already had the strength to live on, and this scene proves Jack correct. Even in the face of losing her true love and in experiencing severe hypothermia, she still pushes forward and saves herself by blowing the whistle.

At the beginning of the film, Rose does not have any agency. While she attempts to rebel against the expectations set for her, she is still reprimanded for doing so. She is a manifestation of the patriarchy because she has no free will; she accepts that she must

marry Cal because that is the life that has been chosen for her. Rose cannot say no to her mother because she is their only hope for restoring the family fortune and status.

However, as the film continues, Rose becomes more independent, realizing that she can have a relationship with whoever she wants. She also understands that she can save herself rather than waiting for a man to save her. She takes charge, punching the crew member who viewed her as a damsel in distress and letting Jack's body sink so she can blow the whistle. At this point in her feminist awakening, Rose has become independent, upholding the ideals of first-wave feminism.



## CHAPTER III: ROSE AS A MANIFESTATION OF FULL-FLEDGED FEMINISM

### *Introduction*

Rose Dewitt-Bukater, the seventeen-year-old American protagonist of *Titanic*, is originally introduced as a young woman who rebels against the expectations that have been set for her by her mother Ruth and her upper-class peers. Rose, as a budding female socialite, would have been sent to study at a European finishing school to learn how to be a proper wife and find a proper husband (Simonian). Ruth mentions this fact while speaking to the Countess of Rothes and an unnamed woman<sup>1</sup>: “The purpose of university is to find a suitable husband.” This means that Ruth is aware of the importance of schooling for a young upper-class woman. Because she shows that she wants the best for Rose by marrying her off to a rich man to secure her economic future, Ruth would have also wanted to ensure that Rose was socialized properly at a finishing school.

Rose would have also been expected to behave in a manner that mirrored the feminine ideals of the upper class. No form of rebellion would have been tolerated, since it would be considered important that she remained submissive to eligible husbands. When Rose attempts to subvert social expectations for women of her class, her motivations are primarily to show her mother and Cal that she does not want to be a traditional upper-class wife. Rose does not wish to follow in her mother’s footsteps by finding herself trapped in a marriage and lifestyle that is personally unfulfilling.

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<sup>1</sup> The actress does not have a speaking role and is, thus, not named in the script. Based on facial features, I suspect that this unknown woman may be Madame Aubert (Fannie Brett), the mistress of Benjamin Guggenheimer. However, my suspicions remain unfounded since I have been unable to find a script naming the woman in this scene.

However, Rose's defiant actions, such as smoking in the dining car, spitting over the railings, and dancing and running around with Jack in the third-class cabins are dismissed by her peers as simply acts of teenage rebellion. Ruth pushes Rose to conform to the standards of the upper class – being demure, obsequious, and chaste – so that her downwardly mobile family can recover from her late father leaving the two of them in debt. Because her peers dismiss her rebellious tendencies as trivial and she feels loyalty to her family, Rose does not continue to revolt after she is told to stop.

However, as the film progresses, Rose gains more confidence in herself and, as a result, becomes empowered to fully break away from the social mores of her peers. After Jack joins Rose, Cal, and their upper-class peers for dinner in appreciation of him saving Rose's life, Jack and Rose secretly venture down to the third-class cabins to attend a lively dance party. Cal's butler, Spicer Lovejoy, follows them down to the cabins and reports back to Cal that Rose has been frolicking with the lower class. The next day, Cal confronts Rose and becomes violent, throwing a table and proclaiming that Rose will honor him as a wife should honor a husband. Rose retreats into herself and covers for Cal's outburst when the maid, Trudy (Amy Gaipa), comes over to help clean up the mess. However, later in the narrative, Rose demonstrates how much she has evolved from the meek young woman who used to be obedient to her family and peers. After she asks Jack to sketch her in the nude, she leaves the drawing in Cal's safe with a note stating, "Darling, now you can keep us both locked in your safe." She does not show any trace of fear that Cal might punish her for flagrantly transgressing the traditional female social norms of modesty and chastity through her rebellious actions.

Likewise, Rose shows that her defiance of upper-class expectations is less an act of teenage rebellion and more a lifelong journey. This is seen at the very end of the film after Old Rose (Gloria Stuart) tosses the “Heart of the Ocean” into the sea and presumably dies in her cabin. The camera pans to the right, showing the pictures that she took with her when she boarded the *Akademik Mstislav Keldysh*. Taken at different stages of her life, the pictures show Rose’s at various life accomplishments, including her career as an actress, flying an airplane, riding a horse with her legs on either side of the horse’s body, and catching a fish that is larger than she is tall. All of these images foreground the fact that Rose was able to lead her own life after the shipwreck. She grew to become a confident older woman, who was unafraid to make her own life choices and not simply follow other people’s expectations of her.

Rose’s evolution into a full-fledged feminist is also demonstrated by her increasing sexual confidence and autonomy. As previously stated, she is demure and chaste at the beginning of the film, following her mother’s orders to marry Cal, but, by the conclusion, she has evolved into someone who fearlessly jumps out of two separate lifeboats twice to be reunited with a man who is not her fiancé. Likewise, in the film’s early scenes, she is portrayed as a virgin who has yet to consummate her relationship with Cal, who believes she should give herself to him, since, in his words, they are already married “in practice, if not yet by law.” However, Rose instead gives into her desires and has premarital sex with Jack. At this point in the film, Rose has the autonomy to decide who she wishes to consummate a relationship with, showing that she has become a manifestation of full-fledged feminism. This is because choice and autonomy are ideals of first-wave feminism, and embracing one’s sexuality is an ideal of third-wave

feminism. Before this point, Rose did not have the autonomy to choose a romantic partner. She was betrothed to Cal Hockley against her will, and he attempted to pressure her into premaritally consummating their relationship. Now, Rose has agency in choosing her own romantic partner.

### *Third-Wave Feminism in the film Titanic*

As the previously modest and demure Rose becomes freer in terms of her obedience to men and her mother, she starts to become more sexually independent. Her burgeoning sexual awakening and confidence is indicative of third-wave feminism, a stage that was “concerned with enabl[ing] women to define and express sexuality...[and] autonomy” (Rowbotham 292). Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s during the era of the Anita Hill trial, the widely televised sexual harassment case against Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas (292). The film *Titanic* was written, directed, and filmed during the early years of third-wave feminism. The film contemporized the well-known, real-life story of the Titanic shipwreck by including present-day framing scenes, which are set in 1996, the year of the film’s release. This suggests that writer-director James Cameron may have been influenced by the emerging third wave due to the film’s representation of a young woman’s journey into a sexually awakened adult. This intent is evident in Cameron’s characterization of Rose and her evolution into a woman who poses nude for a drawing and claims it as a sketch of her.

The first scene that foreshadows Rose’s full feminist awakening occurs during the first few minutes of the film. The film opens with a team of deep-sea treasure hunters (led by Brock Lovett) aboard the research vessel *Akademik Mstislav Keldysh*, which is

attempting to recover a safe that they believe contains the “Heart of the Ocean,” a diamond necklace. This lost treasure was reported to have been once owned by King Louis XVI and, according to some estimates, is believed to be worth more than the Hope Diamond. Instead of locating the necklace, the researchers find a charcoal drawing of a nude woman wearing the coveted necklace. Signed with the unknown artist’s initials, JD, the drawing is dated April 14, 1912, the day the RMS Titanic struck the iceberg that brought down the ship. Lovett and the other researchers arrange to have the drawing shown on a newscast with the hope that someone will recognize the woman in the sketch. Rose Dawson Calvert, a 100-year-old woman, contacts the researchers, saying, “I was wondering if you had found the ‘Heart of the Ocean’ yet.” When the researcher asks her if she knows who the woman in the picture is, she replies, “Oh, yes. The woman in the picture is me.” The research team flies Rose out to the *Keldysh*, and, after unloading her baggage, they ask if she would like anything. “I should like to see my drawing,” she replies. Upon viewing it for the first time in decades, she remarks that she was “a hot number.”

Rose’s candor about the nude drawing displays her sexual confidence as an older woman, since other women of her generation might instead keep it private. Among the reasons for this secrecy is what sexologists Robin R. Milhausen and Edwin S. Herold describe as “The normative belief that men are rewarded for having a high number of sexual partners, whereas women are penalized for similar behavior” (1). The nude drawing of Rose falls into this category, since, upon finding the sketch, Cal almost rips it in half. This shows his anger towards Rose’s openness in her sexuality, as well as his

desperate need to control her. He is starting to realize that threats of violence are no longer enough to keep her in submission.

Rose's previous submission was shown in the scene where he throws a table and intimidates Rose into "honor[ing] me, as a wife is required to honor her husband!" Before this moment, Jack was invited to dine with the first-class passengers as a gesture of appreciation for saving Rose's life. After the other gentlemen retire to the smoking room for a brandy, Jack slips a note to Rose asking her to meet him at the clock, so they can "go to a real party." They join a lively party with fiddle music and dancing in the third-class dining hall, where Rose joins in energetically. The next day, Cal tells Rose, "I had hoped you would come to me last night." Rose remarks that she was tired, but he sarcastically replies that her "exertions below deck were no doubt exhausting" – a remark indicating that he was aware of her indiscretions. Cal then throws the china dishes off the table and rants about her obligations to honor him as a wife should, even though that they are not yet married by law. With these words, Cal is suggesting the premature sexual consummation of their marriage, which will not occur until after they arrive in Philadelphia. Cal suggests that he wishes for her to submit to his sexual desires before it is proper for her to do so when he says that she is his "wife in practice if not yet by law." Cal views Rose dancing in the third-class cabins as an act of sexuality against him; he was not the recipient of this pseudo-sexual act. Like most upper-class people of the time, Cal believes dancing is a "sexual and social danger," which should only be enjoyed by "unsupervised working-class dance hall patrons" (Walkowitz 8). Cal becomes violent upon his realization that Rose has engaged in a seemingly sexual act with another man because he feels emasculated by Rose's betrayal and leaves the room after threatening

her. His behavior causes Rose to fall to her knees and hyperventilate. Not wanting to call attention to their quarrel, Rose tells the maid, Trudy, that she and Cal simply “had a little accident.” Rose covers for Cal’s behavior, showing that his threats of violence scared her back into obedience.

However, after he has caught Rose and arranged for Jack to be detained by the ship’s Master at Arms, Cal slaps Rose across the face, admonishing her as “a little slut.” This time, however, Rose simply glares at her fiancé with her hand pressed to her face. She does not fall to her knees, hyperventilate, or call it an accident as she did the first time Cal resorted to violence. The fact that Rose stands tall indicates that she will no longer permit Cal to control her. Moreover, she will not be held to a sexual double standard. She feels no shame in posing for the nude sketch or engaging in premarital sex, as many men of her class have done. This moment of character growth helps explain why Old Rose is unashamed of the nude drawing at the beginning of the film. She has fully accepted her own sexuality and does not allow anyone to shame her for her own actions or choices.

The “Heart of the Ocean,” the pendant that Cal gifted Rose as a wedding present, is a visual metaphor of Rose’s loyalty to her family and class throughout the beginning of the film. However, the necklace’s symbolism evolves over the course of the narrative, particularly after Rose asks Jack to draw her in the nude like one of the women he met during his travels in Paris. Up until this point in the film, the “Heart of the Ocean” has represented both Rose’s promise to her mother and her betrothal to Cal. As discussed previously, this color symbolism is due, in large part, to blue’s connotations of “chastity, loyalty, [and] fidelity” (Hope and Atchley ix), “powerlessness” and “dependability,” and

being “a color to think, but not to act” (Bellantoni 82). These descriptions align almost perfectly with Young Rose when she is introduced at the beginning of the film’s flashback scenes. However, after Jack draws Rose nude, the pendant and the color blue change from symbolizing her fidelity towards Ruth and Cal to her infidelity towards them. The “Heart of the Ocean” also symbolizes Rose’s love for Jack since she returns the necklace to the bottom of the ocean, Jack’s final resting place, at the end of the film.

Prior to this scene, Jack and Rose became friends after he convinced her not to commit suicide. He helps her understand that she will “die if [she doesn’t] break free” from her stifling upper-class life. Rose states that “it’s not up to you to save me, Jack,” to which he responds, “You’re right. Only you can do that.” Rose realizes that Jack is telling the truth and that she must become her own person and not live the life of others. After Jack’s words of wisdom, Rose witnesses a little girl in the first-class dining room being admonished by her mother for failing to be ladylike. In this scene, Rose is wearing a dark blue shirt, which aligns with the color of the “Heart of the Ocean” – underscoring her feelings of loyalty to Cal and the upper-class lifestyle she and her mother have been accustomed to throughout their lives. Yet, in this moment, Rose decides that she needs to take her life into her own hands. She leaves the dining room and meets Jack on the deck. Jack brings her up to the bow and tells her to close her eyes, moving her arms straight out to resemble the wings of a bird. When Rose opens her eyes, all she can see is the vast expanse of the deep blue sea spreading out before her. She exclaims, “I’m flying!”, and Jack sings, “Come, Josephine, In My Flying Machine.”

This 1910 song by Fred Fisher and Alfred Bryan was popular in the early twentieth century and depicts a romantic couple going up in a flying machine in order to



be alone for “freedom, privacy, and independence for a combination of adventure, love, and sex.” The assumption made by the song is that the woman “climbs into the cockpit [and leaves] her inhibitions behind” (Lasser 48). The song symbolizes what Jack believes Rose possesses the potential to be: free and independent from the restrictive feminine social ideals of the upper class. The RMS Titanic helps facilitate the romantic relationship between Jack and Rose, letting them enjoy adventure, love, and sex with each other. The ship provides Rose with the opportunity to leave her inhibitions behind and become a woman who is free to explore her own sexuality.

After Jack sings the song, the two kiss and retire to Rose’s cabin. Jack notices the Monet painting in the sitting room and exclaims that the painter’s use of colors is “extraordinary,” the exact opposite reaction of how Cal responded to the paintings. Rose opens Cal’s safe which holds the “Heart of the Ocean” and tells Jack that she “want[s] you to paint me like one of your French girls. Wearing this...Wearing only this.” Jack agrees and rearranges the couch while Rose lets her hair down and changes into a black robe with white dots along the sleeves. She also puts on the necklace. Rose reenters the room, stating that “the last thing I need is another picture of me looking like a porcelain doll.” She then disrobes completely and lies on the couch, attempting to mimic the poses she has seen the French girls make in Jack’s sketchbook. Jack directs her to a more fitting pose and begins to draw. Upon completion of the sketch, Rose locks it up in Cal’s safe with a note that says, “Darling, now you can keep us both locked in your safe.” She then puts on the loose, flowing dress – a wardrobe choice suggestive of her new freedom – that she wears for the rest of the evening.

In a way, the Rose that her mother and Cal know dies aboard the RMS Titanic. When Rose and the other shipwreck survivors are rescued by the Carpathia, she does not give her rescuers her real name; instead, she renames herself Rose Dawson, thus fulfilling her evolution into a new person free from her restrictive upbringing. Her taking Jack's last name also highlights her enduring love for Jack. They will always be husband and wife spiritually, if not by law. By faking her own death, Rose throws away the only life she has ever known, so that she can live out a life that she – and of which Jack, if he were still alive to witness it – can be proud. Rose, as she had once told Jack when they discussed their dreams for the future, became an actress and flew a plane. Like Josephine in the song “Come, Josephine, In My Flying Machine,” Rose left her inhibitions behind and became a bold woman unafraid to spit in Cal's face when he attempts to stop her from saving Jack during the sinking of the ship. Rose no longer feels any obligation to her mother or Cal and, by renaming herself, she is able to divorce herself from them forever.

At the very end of the film, Old Rose finishes chronicling her story on the RMS Titanic. However, she does not reveal to the crew of the *Keldysh* that she has had the necklace in her possession ever since she found it in the pocket of the coat that Cal put on her before he tried boarding her on a lifeboat. She instead allows them to believe that the pendant went down with the ship. However, when night falls later that evening, Old Rose sneaks out of her room wearing a loose, flowing white nightgown, which is reminiscent of the dress she wore in her last hours with Jack. She smiles as she steps up to the railing of the *Keldysh* with the “Heart of the Ocean” and throws the pendant into the ocean. As

she returns to her cabin to sleep, she presumably dies and, in a dreamlike sequence, is seen joining Jack in the afterlife.

The image of Old Rose tossing the necklace into the ocean symbolizes two concepts: the idea that the pendant itself is representative of her enduring love for Jack, and a final shedding of her past as a demure young woman, cementing her full feminist awakening. The necklace symbolizing her heart is shown when Cal gives it to her as an engagement present. When he opens the box containing the pendant, he says, “Perhaps as a reminder of my feelings for you,” and when he places it around her neck, he says, “There’s nothing I couldn’t give you. There’s nothing I’d deny you if you would not deny me. Open your heart to me, Rose.” Cal’s first line equates the necklace with his feelings for her, an example of the phenomenon of “lovebombing.” This is a modern-day colloquial term meaning to give someone excessive attention, admiration, and affection with the goal of making that person feel dependent upon and obligated to the person giving the attention (L’Amie, et al.). He gives Rose the necklace that she proclaims as “overwhelming” in order to prove to both her and others that he loves and owns her.

Cal’s second statement equates the necklace with Rose’s heart, and the comparison is even further drawn by the name of the necklace, the “Heart of the Ocean.” At the beginning of the film, the necklace symbolizes both Cal’s feelings for Rose and the suffocation that she feels living in the upper class. At the end of the film, when Old Rose throws the pendant into the ocean, its symbolism changes to represent Rose’s feelings for Jack. When the necklace sinks to the wreckage of the RMS Titanic, it shows that Old Rose has returned her heart to Jack. This idea of Rose returning her heart is solidified when she dies at the very end of the film. During this upbeat ending sequence,

she is Young Rose again. The audience sees her walking up the stairs of the ship while passengers who perished greet her. Jack stands at the top of the stairs, facing away from her. When she reaches the top of the stairs, Jack turns to face her, smiles, and gives her his hand. The reunited couple kiss and the rest of the passengers applaud.

The end credits begin to play with Celine Dion's hit 1997 song "My Heart Will Go On" permeating the soundtrack. The lyrics connect to the idea of the "Heart of the Ocean" representing both the physical pendant and Rose's love for Jack. Dion sings, "We'll stay forever this way/You are safe in my heart and/My heart will go on." These lyrics insinuate that Rose will continue to hold her feelings for Jack in her heart forever, even beyond her death. Although once representing her loyalty to her mother, Cal, and her upper-class life, it has been a symbol of her loyalty to Jack over the past eighty-four years. She did not want to reveal the fact that she still owned the "Heart of the Ocean" to the crew of the *Keldysh*, since she did not wish to be parted from it.

When Old Rose drops the necklace into the ocean and finds her heart reunited with Jack, she cements her full feminist awakening. This is because she shows independence, the main ideal of the first wave of feminism, and sexuality, the main ideal of third-wave feminism. She shows independence because she does not feel loyalty to her mother and Cal anymore, which is clear from the changing symbolism of the "Heart of the Ocean." She displays her sexuality because she wore only the necklace while Jack drew her nude. While the dropping of the necklace may imply to others an overreliance on her love for a man, the fact that Rose chose which man she returned her heart to makes this a feminist act. She did not choose to give the necklace to the researchers aboard the *Keldysh*, to her late husband Mr. Calvert, or to her first fiancé Cal. Instead, she

returned it to Jack, the man she knew for only a few days but with whom she fell deeply in love. It is the choice of whom she gives the necklace and, thus, her heart, that makes this action feminist.

### *Conclusion*

*Titanic* (1997), directed by James Cameron, delineates a marked disruption from the typical patriarchal mindset towards class and gender during the Progressive Era. Rose's character exhibits a feminist awakening throughout the narrative which exhibits elements of both first- and third-wave feminist ideology. The fusion of these dual sensibilities simultaneously reflects both the historical period dramatized (the 1910s, specifically 1912) and the more contemporary time period (the 1990s, specifically 1996, the year in which the present-day scenes of the film take place) in which the film was made. This awakening is demonstrated as Rose navigates the bridge between classes as an increasingly independent woman.

Throughout my thesis, I have demonstrated Rose's evolution as a woman by analyzing scenes from the film to showcase her starting place as a manifestation of the patriarchy, her transition into an independent young woman, and then her evolution into a fully awakened feminist. Rose's growth as a feminist is ongoing throughout the film, and her growth never has a true stopping point. Rose's growth as a feminist does not even end with her death, since the film can be seen by many future generations of women during future waves of feminism. For example, fourth-wave feminism did not exist yet upon the film's release, but women of the present day can still relate to Rose's struggle to find herself and become independent.

Rose's growth is also indicative of the way feminism has evolved over the years: the definition and ideals of the feminist movement have progressed from wanting suffrage during first-wave feminism to wanting to be sexually free and autonomous in one's own body. Rose's story is important to be understood because it teaches women that their lives are not stagnant. They can evolve as Rose did and live knowing they are true to themselves rather than living a life in which they are not happy. Women realize that they are fully capable of changing their lives for the better because they see Rose doing the exact same thing. Rose evolved from someone who was willing to commit suicide rather than marry a man she hated into a woman who had the agency to choose who she loved. She also built her own life from nothing after the sinking and becoming a successful woman of many talents, such as riding a horse, acting in movies, flying a plane, and catching a fish that is bigger than she is tall. Women who watch James Cameron's *Titanic* see a woman who controls her own life and is able to build a whole new life for herself without help from anyone else, and women in similar situations will realize that they, too, have the strength and agency to do the same as Rose.

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