



From the eye of the July maelstrom, the tourist-swollen gyre eddying and flowing down Hemlock Street, I would like to offer a brief commentary on the state of the village, its pulse and visceral pressures. John Steinbeck once described his beloved Monterey waterfront as "A stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream." Like a well-trained biologist scrutinizing pelagic biota under a microscope, Steinbeck viewed the subtle relationships and intimacies amongst the inhabitants of Monterey's Cannery Row. He, like most residents of small towns, knew his characters well, their quirks and idiosyncracies, their strengths of heart, their common bond of shared tribulations.

The glue that holds small communities together, that commonality of place and local society, is special and fragile. The acceleration of turbo-charged modern culture, proliferation of housing and commercial development, and a soaring tidal wave of restless population wash over villages like Cannon Beach and leave a hollowness in their wake. The changes aren't coming. They're here. Like Steinbeck's Cannery Row, the Cannon Beach people seek is largely gone, replaced instead by a nostalgia and a dream.

Emile Durkheim, if my rudimentary sociology hasn't failed me, distinguished between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* social settings. In small communities (*gemeinschaft*) people know one another intimately, have virtually daily contact, share a strong sense of place, recognize common gathering sites, resist outsiders pressuring for change.

*Gemeinschaft* towns are like large extended families. Modern cities typify the *gesellschaft*: enormous populations obliquely thrown together, grope for meaning and value in the face of sheer numbers. Characterized by anonymity, loose personal ties, and transitory living, individuals have little contact with neighbors, a quickened life tempo and increased depersonalization. Visit Beaverton, Oregon, Kirkland, Washington, or San Jose, California, for examples. I see our town scurrying inexorably toward the *gesellschaft* and my heart is saddened. The Four Horsemen of the late 20th Century have ridden into our western town and they will bully us into submission: Overpopulation, Profit, Callousness, and Greed.

That ineffable quality that draws one to towns like Cannon Beach is elusive and difficult to assay. Beyond the clamour and dash of a bustling tourist season, we are still, at core, a small community, tightly woven. We have inevitable differences, but we share strong bonds, deep feelings, and kinship with a place of great natural beauty.

I sense, with great wistfulness, changes occurring in our township that will irrevocably change the nature of this place, this state of mind, that many of us have long cherished. Swelling population in those areas proximal to our coast erodes the tranquility and pace of a small town like this one. The people who live in those dis-spirited urban centers seek connection with towns like ours, and I can't blame them. They remind me of cowbirds, soiling their own nests in other places and then flying here to occupy ours.

Our city's comprehensive plan strongly suggests that Cannon Beach maintain its "village character." I'm afraid we're joshing ourselves if we feel that's possible under the current circumstances.

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**FROM THE LOWER LEFT CORNER**

TITANIC: A PARABLE FOR OUR TIMES  
Victoria Stoppello

Titanic may have been a British ship but it's an all-American movie. The artistry of the film, like that of the ship, is magnificent, but far from subtle.

I went to see Titanic because I'd read one review that said the special effects were spectacular and it may be the "Gone with the Wind" of the late twentieth century. I also went to see Titanic with some misgivings because I'd heard adolescent girls were not only seeing it in droves, but four or five times. I assumed there would be something so superficial and sappy that I'd be irritated, but halfway through the movie, I turned to my friend and said "Now I see why teenage girls like this," and she said, "Yes, a female hero." One of the definitions of "hero" is a protagonist who rises above circumstances and limitations to act with courage and do the right thing. In this case, it is courageous just to step beyond the constraints of society's expectations of what a girl could or should do. She chooses between love and money, and as Americans, we all know what her answer should be—whether or not we choose it ourselves.

Then there's the antagonist, the bad guy, a superficial character played well. We don't quite understand why he is the personality he is—lack of love in his early life? That peasant Freud, as described in the film, probably has the answer. Why is he so cold, so calculating, so focused on accumulating even more wealth, so willing to do anything to get it? Perhaps the film makers don't really understand this kind of person either, the one for whom there is never enough. Yet it's an ever present dynamic in our lives—front page and business page news almost constantly.

I've often thought we Americans are living in the second golden age of robber barons. The first included Rockefeller, DuPont, Getty, Astor, Carnegie and Guggenheim, making riches from oil wells, railroads, mining and generally exploiting the untapped natural resources of a relatively unspoiled continent—plus dueling with each other over who will monopolize the results.

It appears the same dynamic is underway now, in the telecommunications, energy, computer, and international currency markets. Big fish have swallowed most of the small ones. With each bite, the assets are controlled by fewer and fewer, the liabilities go deeper in the culture; with mergers come downsizing, lay-offs, and fewer benefits for workers.

This all plays out in Titanic. The lower class passengers are literally locked below decks as the life boats are launched, sometimes with only twelve aboard a boat built for 60. Heavy handed, perhaps, but reminds us that a few people can monopolize resources that could provide many people with a life.

Like the Greeks with their ancient tragedies, we all know the story's ending. We're just curious to see how it will be told this time. Because we know this disaster is true, certain elements of the movie have meaning which they wouldn't in a standard disaster film. Early on, the cinematography takes us on a tour of the ship. We see the salons of the rich and the steerage of the poor. We descend to the boiler room where men work in heat and dark with impressive machinery, the highest technology of its time. But our hindsight tells us it's vulnerable, fated to fail. Hubris combines with an arrogant belief that there won't be an accident, so why worry about safety precautions or a back-up system. Sound familiar?

In June, I'll be presenting a technical paper at the national conference of the American Solar Energy Society. Usually about 300 scientists, energy policy experts, and architects and engineers attend. In preparing my abstract last November, I used a metaphor to explain how some of us are reducing our dependence on the electrical energy grid. My metaphor was that we are on a battleship which shows little sign of changing its course. Titanic's flaw was that in spite of its speed and strength, it was unable to turn quickly. I wrote that some of us are launching our little boats of energy independence in an effort to be safely away when the ship goes down and the big suck comes. I think my conference session is going to be a hit. Go see Titanic. It's a lot of fun.

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I suppose it is much more comfortable to be mad and not know it, than it is to be sane and have one's doubts.

G.B. Burgin