

= A Night to Remember (book) =

A Night to Remember is a 1955 non-fiction book by Walter Lord about the sinking of the RMS Titanic on 15 April 1912 . The book was hugely successful , and is still considered a definitive resource about the Titanic . Lord interviewed many survivors of the disaster as well as drawing on books , memoirs and articles that they had written . He authored a follow-up book , The Night Lives On , in 1986 following renewed interest in the story after the wreck of Titanic was found .

The film A Night to Remember , based on the book and with advice from Lord , was released in 1958 .

= = Publication history = =

Lord traveled on the RMS Olympic , Titanic 's sister ship , when he was a boy and the experience gave him a lifelong fascination with the lost liner . As he later put it , he spent his time on the Olympic " prowling around " and trying to imagine " such a huge thing " sinking . He started reading about and drawing Titanic at the age of ten and spent many years collecting Titanic memorabilia , causing people to " take note of this oddity . " He majored in history at Princeton University and graduated from Yale Law School before joining the New York City-based advertising agency J. Walter Thompson . Writing in his spare time , he interviewed 63 survivors of the disaster .

A Night to Remember was only Lord 's second book but was a huge success , thanks in no small part to the aggressive advertising campaign carried out by R & W Holt following its launch in November 1955 . The book also undoubtedly benefited from the popularity of the 1953 film Titanic and other coverage of the disaster that was published around the same time . Within two months of its publication , the book had sold 600,000 copies and remained listed as a best-seller for six months . The Ladies ' Home Journal and Reader 's Digest both published condensed versions and it was selected in June 1956 by the Book of the Month Club . The first paperback edition was published by Bantam Books in October 1956 .

Since then the book has never been out of print and has been translated into over a dozen languages . Its success enabled Lord to leave the world of advertising and become a full-time writer . After the discovery of the wreck of the Titanic in 1985 sparked a new wave of public interest in the disaster he wrote a follow-up book , The Night Lives On (1986) . Daniel Allen Butler comments that " although it was of immense interest to Titanic buffs the world over , it lacked the spark of the original , " which by 1998 had reached its fiftieth printing .

= = Critical commentaries = =

The book received widespread praise from contemporary critics . The New York Times called it " stunning ... one of the most exciting books of this or any other year " . The Atlantic Monthly praised the book for doing " a magnificent job of re-creative chronicling , enthralling from the first word to the last . " Entertainment Weekly said that it was " seamless and skillful ... it 's clear why this is many a researcher 's Titanic bible " , while USA Today described it as " the most riveting narrative of the disaster . "

The secret to Lord 's success , according to the New York Herald Tribune 's critic Stanley Walker , was that he used " a kind of literary pointillism , the arrangement of contrasting bits of fact and emotion in such a fashion that a vividly real impression of an event is conveyed to the reader . " Walker highlighted the way that Lord had avoided telling the story through the prism of social class , which had been the usual style of previous narratives , and instead successfully depicted the human element of the story by showing how those aboard reacted to the disaster whatever their class .

Steven Biel , an American cultural historian , notes the novelistic way in which Lord tells the story . The book depicts events through the eyes of multiple individuals , violating simple chronology to present an overlapping series of narratives . Nathaniel Philbrick , writing in the introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition of A Night to Remember , notes that at the time of publication it was the first significant book about Titanic for nearly forty years . He argues that the book 's hallmarks are its

restraint , brevity and readability , which downplays the extravagant and mythical aspects of the disaster and instead puts in the foreground the stories of the people on the ship . The narrative builds suspense , making the reader care about the characters and revisit the disaster from their perspective . It tells the story in a highly visual and aural way , describing the sights and sounds of the night of the disaster " with the immediacy of a live broadcast or a television documentary " , as Biel puts it .

A key to Lord 's method is his technique of adopting an unconventional approach to the chronology of the event , " [taking] an imaginative approach to time and space in which hours and minutes prove extremely malleable , the ship itself seems almost infinitely complex , and the disaster assumes order and unity from far away . " In short it is " a modernist narrative [constructed] around a modernist event . " Reviewers highlighted the way in which Lord depicted the human side of the Titanic story , which The New York Times called " the core of Mr. Lord 's account , and explains its fascination , a pull as powerful in its way as the last downward plunge of the ship itself . " While the " legendary acts of gallantry " stood out , the book invites readers to put themselves in the place of those aboard and implicitly asks how they would react in the same situation . As Newsweek put it , " What would it be like to be aboard a sinking ocean liner ? "

The significance of Lord 's book , according to Biel , is that it " gave the disaster its fullest retelling since 1912 and made it speak to a modern mass audience and a new set of postwar concerns . In the creation of the Titanic myth there were two defining moments : 1912 , of course , and 1955 . " Lord updates the popular interpretation of the Titanic disaster by portraying it in world @-@ historical terms as the symbolic and actual end of an era , and as an event which " marked the end of a general feeling of confidence . " Uncertainty replaced orderliness , and the ship 's sinking marked the beginning of the twentieth century 's " unending sequence of disillusionment . Before the Titanic , all was quiet . Afterward , all was tumult . " Biel notes that Lord 's underlying theme is a rather nostalgic reflection of the " nobler instincts " exhibited in the disaster and their subsequent eclipse . Such ideals were attractive for a post @-@ war society that celebrated the role of the nuclear family and the traditional roles of the male breadwinner and female homemaker .

Lord 's invocation of an era of confidence and certainty was also a relevant theme at the height of the Cold War . The University of California sociologist Fred Davis comments that nostalgia " thrives ... on the rude transitions wrought by such phenomena as war , depression , civil disturbance , and cataclysmic natural disasters ? in short , those events that cause masses of people to feel uneasy and to wonder whether the world and their being are quite what they always took them to be . " The turmoil and uncertainty of the early Atomic Age and the onset of profound social changes made the old concepts of the nuclear family and traditional gender roles , reflected in the behaviour of Titanic 's passengers , resonate with a mid @-@ 1950s audience .

The gradual nature of the disaster was also more comforting , in some respects , compared with the nature of modern technological failures such as air crashes . Time 's reviewer made this point explicitly : " This air age , when death comes too swiftly for heroism or with no survivors to record it , can still turn with wonder to an age before yesterday when a thousand deaths at sea seemed the very worst the world must suffer . " It was , as Steven Biel comments , " a quaint kind of disaster " in which the victims had time to prepare and chose how to die .

= = Screen adaptations = =

The book has been adapted twice for the screen . The first production was staged as a live adaptation screened on 28 March 1956 by NBC TV and sponsored by Kraft Foods as part of the Kraft Television Theatre strand . It has been described as " the biggest , most lavish , most expensive thing of its kind " attempted up to that point , with 31 sets , 107 actors , 72 speaking parts , 3 @, @ 000 gallons of water and costing \$ 95 @, @ 000 (\$ 826 @, @ 860 @. @ 5 at present @-@ day prices) . George Roy Hill directed and Claude Rains provided a narration ? a practice borrowed from radio dramas which provided a template for many television dramas of the time . It took a similar approach to the book , lacking dominant characters and switching between a multiplicity of scenes . Rains ' narration was used " to bridge the almost limitless number of sequences of life

aboard the doomed liner " , as a reviewer put it , and closed with his declaration that " never again has Man been so confident . An age had come to an end . " The production was a major hit , attracting 28 million viewers , and greatly boosted the book 's sales . It was rerun on kinescope on 2 May 1956 , five weeks after its first broadcast .

The second adaptation was the classic 1958 British drama film *A Night to Remember* starring Kenneth More , which is still widely regarded as " the definitive cinematic telling of the story . " The film came about after its eventual director , Roy Ward Baker , and its producer , Belfast @-@ born William MacQuitty both acquired copies of the book ? Baker from his favorite bookshop and MacQuitty from his wife ? and decided to obtain the film rights . MacQuitty had actually seen *Titanic* being launched on 31 May 1911 and still remembered the occasion vividly . He met Lord and brought him on board the production as a consultant . The film diverges from both the book and the NBC TV adaptation in focusing on a central character , Second Officer Charles Lightoller , played by More . Its conclusion reflects Lord 's world @-@ historical theme of a " world changed for ever " with a fictional conversation between two survivors , Lightoller and Colonel Archibald Gracie , sitting on an overturned lifeboat . Lightoller declares that the disaster is " different ... Because we were so sure . Because even though it 's happened , it 's still unbelievable . I don 't think I 'll ever feel sure again . About anything . "

= = Collection = =

After Lord died in 2002 , he bequeathed to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich , England his huge collection of manuscripts , original letters and *Titanic* memorabilia , which he had gathered during his life and used to write *A Night to Remember* . MacQuitty also donated items from his own collection of material related to the film . Items from the collection are on display at the museum and can be accessed by researchers .