

= The Sinking of the Lusitania =

The Sinking of the Lusitania (1918) is a silent animated short film by American cartoonist Winsor McCay . It is a work of propaganda re @-@ creating the never @-@ photographed 1915 sinking of the British liner RMS Lusitania . At twelve minutes it has been called the longest work of animation at the time of its release . The film is the earliest surviving animated documentary and serious , dramatic work of animation .

In 1915 a German submarine torpedoed and sank the RMS Lusitania ; 128 Americans were among the 1 @,@ 198 dead . The event outraged McCay , but the newspapers of his employer William Randolph Hearst downplayed the event , as Hearst was opposed to the US joining World War I. McCay was required to illustrate anti @-@ war and anti @-@ British editorial cartoons for Hearst 's papers . In 1916 , McCay rebelled against his employer 's stance and began work on the patriotic Sinking of the Lusitania on his own time with his own money .

The film followed McCay 's earlier successes in animation : Little Nemo (1911) , How a Mosquito Operates (1912) , and Gertie the Dinosaur (1914) . McCay drew these earlier films on rice paper , onto which backgrounds had to be laboriously traced ; The Sinking of the Lusitania was the first film McCay made using the new , more efficient cel technology . McCay and his assistants spent twenty @-@ two months making the film . His subsequent animation output suffered setbacks , as the film was not as commercially successful as his earlier efforts , and Hearst put increased pressure on McCay to devote his time to editorial drawings .

= = Synopsis = =

The film opens with a live @-@ action prologue in which McCay busies himself studying a picture of the Lusitania as a model for his film @-@ in @-@ progress . Intertitles boast of McCay as " the originator and inventor of Animated Cartoons " , and of the 25 @,@ 000 drawings needed to complete the film . McCay is shown working with a group of anonymous assistants on " the first record of the sinking of the Lusitania " .

The liner passes the Statue of Liberty and leaves New York Harbor . After some time , a German submarine cuts through the waters and fires a torpedo at the Lusitania , which billows smoke that builds until it envelops the screen . Passengers scramble to lower lifeboats , some of which capsize in the confusion . The liner tilts from one side to the other and passengers are tossed into the ocean .

A second blast rocks the Lusitania , which sinks slowly into the deep as more passengers fall off its edges , and the ship submerges amid scenes of drowning bodies . The liner vanishes from sight , and the film closes with a mother struggling to keep her baby above the waves . An intertitle declares : " The man who fired the shot was decorated for it by the Kaiser ! And yet they tell us not to hate the Hun . "

= = Background = =

Winsor McCay (c . 1869 ? 1934) produced prodigiously detailed and accurate drawings since early in life . He earned a living as a young man drawing portraits and posters in dime museums , and attracted large crowds with his ability to draw quickly in public . He began working as a newspaper illustrator full @-@ time in 1898 , and in 1903 began drawing comic strips . His greatest comic strip success was the children 's fantasy comic strip Little Nemo in Slumberland , which he began in 1905 . In 1906 , McCay began performing on the vaudeville circuit , doing chalk talks ? performances during which he drew in front of a live audience .

Inspired by the flip books his son brought home , McCay said he " came to see the possibility of making moving pictures " of his cartoons . His first animated film , Little Nemo (1911) , was composed of four thousand drawings on rice paper . His next film , How a Mosquito Operates (1912) , naturalistically shows a giant mosquito draw blood from a sleeping man until it burst . McCay followed this with a film that became an interactive part of his vaudeville shows : in Gertie the

Dinosaur (1914) , McCay commanded his animated dinosaur with a whip on stage .

The British liner RMS Lusitania briefly held the record for largest passenger ship upon its completion in 1906 . McCay displayed a fondness for it , and featured it in the episode for September 28 , 1907 , of his comic strip Dream of the Rarebit Fiend , and again in the episode for November 10 , 1908 , of A Pilgrim 's Progress by Mister Bunion , where Bunion declares it " the monster boat that has smashed the record " .

The Germans employed submarines in the North Atlantic during World War I , and in April 1915 the German government issued a warning that it would target British civilian ships . The Lusitania was torpedoed on May 7 , 1915 , during a voyage from New York ; 128 Americans were among the 1 @, @ 198 who lost their lives . Newspapers owned by McCay 's employer William Randolph Hearst downplayed the tragedy , as Hearst was opposed to the US entering the war . His own papers ' readers were increasingly pro @-@ war in the aftermath of the Lusitania . McCay was as well , but was required to illustrate anti @-@ war and anti @-@ British editorials by editor Arthur Brisbane . In 1916 , McCay rebelled against his employer 's stance and began to make the patriotic Sinking of the Lusitania in his own time .

The sinking itself was never photographed . McCay said that he gathered background details on the Lusitania from Hearst 's Berlin correspondent August F. Beach , who was in London at the time of the disaster and was the first reporter at the scene . The film was the first attempt at a serious , dramatic work of animation .

= = Production history = =

The Sinking of the Lusitania took twenty @-@ two months to complete . McCay had assistance from his neighbor , artist John Fitzsimmons , and from Cincinnati cartoonist William Apthorp " Ap " Adams , who took care of layering the cels in proper sequence for shooting . Fitzsimmons was responsible for a sequence of waves , sixteen frames to be cycled over McCay 's drawings . McCay provided illustrations during the day for the newspapers of William Randolph Hearst , and spent his off hours at home drawing the cels for the film , which he took to Vitagraph Studios to be photographed .

McCay 's working methods were laborious . On Gertie the Dinosaur an assistant painstakingly traced and retraced the backgrounds thousands of times . Rival animators developed a number of methods to reduce the workload and speed production to meet the increasing demand for animated films . Within a few years of Nemo 's release , it became near @-@ universal practice in animation studios to use American Earl Hurd 's cel technology , combined with Canadian Raoul Barré 's registration pegs , used to keep cels aligned when photographed . Hurd had patented the cel method in 1914 ; it saved work by allowing dynamic drawings to be drawn on one or more layers , which could be laid over a static background layer , relieving animators of the tedium of retracing static images onto drawing after drawing . McCay adopted the cel method beginning with The Sinking of the Lusitania .

As with all his films , McCay financed Lusitania himself . The cels were an added expense , but greatly reduced the amount of drawing necessary in contrast to McCay 's earlier methods . The cels used were thicker than those that later became industry standard , and had a " tooth " , or rough surface , that could hold pencil , wash , and crayon , as well as ink lines . The amount of rendering caused the cels to buckle , which made it difficult to keep them aligned for photographing ; Fitzsimmons addressed this problem using a modified loose @-@ leaf binder .

McCay said it took him about eight weeks to produce eight seconds worth of film . The claimed 25 @, @ 000 drawings filled 900 feet of film . Lusitania was registered for copyright on July 19 , 1918 , and was released by Jewel Productions who were reported to have acquired it for the highest price paid for a one @-@ reel film up to that time . It was included as part of a Universal Studios Weekly newsreel and featured on the cover of an issue of Universal 's in @-@ house publication The Moving Picture Weekly . Its première in England followed in May 1919 . Advertisements called it " [t] he world 's only record of the crime that shocked humanity " .

= = Style = =

The animation combines editorial cartooning techniques with live action like sequences , and is considered McCay 's most realistic effort ; the intertitles emphasized that the film was a " historical record " of the event . McCay animated the action in what animation historian Donald Crafton describes as a " realistic graphic style " . The film has a dark mood and strong propagandist feel . It depicts the terrifying fates of the passengers , such as the drowning of children and human chains of passengers jumping to their deaths . The artwork is highly detailed , the animation fluid and naturalistic . McCay used alternating shots to simulate the feel of a newsreel , which reinforced the film 's realistic feel .

McCay made stylistic choices to add emotion to the " historical record " , as in the anxiety inducing shots of the submarines lurking beneath the surface , and abstract styling of the white sheets of sky and sea , vast voids which engorge themselves on the drowning bodies . Animation historian Paul Wells suggested the negative space in the frames filled viewers with anxiety through psychological projection or introjection , Freudian ideas that had begun circulating in the years before the film 's release . Scholar Ulrich Merkl suggests that as a newspaperman , McCay was likely aware of Freud 's widely reported work , though McCay never publicly acknowledged such an influence .

= = Reception and legacy = =

The Sinking of the Lusitania was noted as a work of war propaganda , and is often called the longest work of animation of its time . The film is likely the earliest animated documentary . McCay 's biographer , animator John Canemaker , called The Sinking of the Lusitania " a monumental work in the history of the animated film " . Admired by his animation contemporaries , Canemaker wrote that it " did not revolutionize the film cartoons of its time " as McCay 's skills were beyond what his contemporaries were able to follow . In the era that followed , animation studios made occasional non fiction films , but most were comedic shorts lasting no more than seven minutes . Animation continued in its role of supporting feature films rather than as the main attraction , and rarely received reviews . Lusitania was not a commercial success ; after a few years in theaters , Lusitania brought McCay about \$ 80 ,000 . McCay made at least seven further films , only three of which are known to have seen commercial release .

After 1921 , when Hearst learned McCay devoted more of his time to animation than to his newspaper illustrations , Hearst required McCay to give up animation . He had plans for several animation projects that never came to fruition , including a collaboration with Jungle Imps author George Randolph Chester , a musical film called The Barnyard Band , and a film about the Americans ' role in World War I. Later in life , McCay at times publicly expressed his dissatisfaction with the animation industry as it had become ? he had envisioned animation as an art , and lamented how it had become a trade .According to Canemaker , it was not until Disney 's feature films in the 1930s that the animation industry caught up with McCay 's level of technique .

Animation historian Paul Wells described Lusitania as " a seminal moment in the development of the animated film " for its combination of documentary style with propagandist elements , and considered it an example of animation as a form of Modernism . Steve Bottomore called the film " [t] he most significant cinematic version of the [Lusitania] disaster " . A review in The Cinema praised the film , especially the scene in which the first torpedo explodes , which it called " more than reality " .

= = = Books = = =

= = = Journals = = =

==== Other sources =====