

# Britannia Ruled the Waves

An Imagological Analysis of the Battleship as a Cultural Image of the British Empire: 1905-1960



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# 1 - INTRODUCTION

"My childhood memories of Britain's maritime achievements centre around endless black-and-white television pictures of shrivelled up little men with faces like Furball XL5 stumbling off their battered yachts in Southampton having sailed round the world backwards.

Francis Chichester, Chay Blyth, Robin Knox Johnston. Grainy pictures of Cape Horn. And Raymond Baxter reminding us all that, once again, the noble island nation has tamed the savage ferocity of those southern oceans. Trafalgar, Jutland. The Armada etc. etc. etc. Britannia rules the waves. Always has, always will. The end" (Clarkson, 92).

Those two paragraphs were the introduction to an article published in the Sunday Times by television presenter and columnist Jeremy Clarkson in 2001. The words highlight, with an unmistakable sarcasm, that Britain played a significant role on the world's oceans in the past. A role that British television and historiographical works seem to constantly perpetuate. However, his article also suggests that British dominance of the sea is no more than a nostalgic memory in the twenty-first century. In fact, Clarkson is quite adamant that Britain has been surpassed on every front when it comes to maritime endeavours: "Now, however, we find that pretty well every sailing record in the book is held by the French. They've been across the Atlantic faster than anyone else, round the world faster than anyone else and, while plucky Ellen MacArthur grabbed all the headlines by pluckily coming second in the recent Vendée Globe race, the event was actually won by a Frog. Same as it was the year before. And the year before that" (Clarkson,92). The French repeatedly outdoing Britain in maritime matters, having been the most immediate rival of Britain for centuries, signify a symbolic decline from the glory days of the British Empire.

Clarkson's sarcastic jab at the British maritime capabilities hints at a discrepancy in the way Britain's rule of the sea is to be understood. In fact, while Clarkson argues that the Royal Navy would struggle to gain control of a puddle (92), it takes no more than a short walk through the centre of London to understand the cultural importance of the Royal Navy and the deep nautical roots that linger in Britain even today; from the light cruiser *HMS Belfast* that is sitting watchful on the Thames River to the statue of the British naval hero, Lord Horatio Nelson, standing atop a column nearly forty-five metres high overlooking Trafalgar Square. Along with him, several other statues on the square depict Britain's naval legends and the public square itself is named in memory of the decisive battle that had made the words of James Thomson's lyrics Britannia rules the waves ring true. So what changed? Britain's cultural identity was built on its naval victories and yet, the twentieth and twenty-first century has largely made a mockery out of Thomson's lyrics.

It can be reasonably argued that with the technological advances in aviation, spaceflight, and nuclear power, the importance - or perhaps even the original purpose - of the world's navies has been in decline. Previously, according to, for example, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, the navies existed to protect maritime commerce and national borders edging on the sea (7). The ability to travel across the seas safely enabled exploration, expansion, and exploitation. It enabled nations to find new corners of the

world in which to settle and build colonies. Colonies that could take advantage of the local resources and send the lion's share back to the home country. In order to accomplish this successfully, strong navies would discourage weaker powers from interfering with a nation's trade routes and from attempting to seize upon the wealth acquired. "It may safely be said that it is essential to the welfare of the whole country that the conditions of trade and commerce should remain, as far as possible, unaffected by an external war. In order to do this, the enemy must be kept not only out of our ports, but far away from our coasts" (Mahan, 145).

This was at a time when the only way to cross the oceans would be aboard a ship. Nowadays, anyone seeking to venture beyond the border between land and sea must only endure the security check at the airport and the potential lack of an inflight meal. The role of ships in the modern world is no longer a matter of exploration either, as satellites would have already mapped the planet in far greater detail than any ship could. While trading is still predominantly accomplished via sea routes, merchant shipping no longer require the immediate protection of naval vessels to successfully, and safely, deliver their cargo. In fact, any aggression at sea may see a nation use aircraft or submerged vessels as a counter to the threat rather than traditional surface warships. The current situation in the world means that the navies no longer appear at the forefront as the bulwark against foreign aggression. Therefore, it may seem reasonable that the navies of the world would have been in decline since the end of the global conflicts of the mid-twentieth century and the innovation of better means to explore the world and journey across it.

And yet, while most surface ships seem to have faded from the collective memory of the modern Brit, the largest and most impressive warships of the twentieth century endure as cultural icons of a bygone era: the battleships. As the very symbol of the watchful bulwark against foreign invasion and the safeguard of Britain's vital lifeline, the battleship remains ingrained in their cultural memory as a symbol of naval might and dominance at sea. In fiction, the battleship appears as a behemoth on the sea, dominating naval conflicts with impenetrable armour and enormous canons. In historiographical texts, battleships live on as their involvement in naval battles continues to interest readers of history. However, it is important to question what it is about the battleship that sets it apart from any other, now obsolete navy vessel. To understand why battleships, more than any other ship type, hold so much symbolic value that can even go beyond the ships themselves. With a focus on historiographical texts aimed at people with an interest in naval history, written by British naval historians, this thesis aims to investigate the following:

What is the symbolic value that is applied to the battleships by modern historiographical authors and how does it correlate with the symbolism of the Royal Navy and the loss of Britain's naval superiority?

## 2 - THEORY

In order to properly analyse the cultural significance of battleships as an image, from their emergence to their disappearance, it is necessary to establish not only a clear terminology of key concepts but also to elaborate upon the theoretical approach to the subject. As the subtitle of this thesis suggests, there are three central facets to this topic that must be clearly defined: *Culture*, *images*, and *battleships*. Each of these will be elaborated upon as a way to establish a clear and concise understanding of the terminology used within the following analysis.

Although the objective of the analysis is not to debate or to speculate upon what *culture* is or how it should be defined, it goes without saying that in order to interpret a collective cultural imagination regarding certain national icons, the word *culture* cannot be left as an ambiguous term. Therefore, the first term to be established is *culture*. This will be achieved, primarily, by utilising the works of Richard D. Lewis.

The second, and perhaps most comprehensive, term to examine is that of *imagology*. As the very purpose of this study is to understand the significance of cultural images, the theory of *imagology* will be outlined and defined. First of all, to understand what it is, secondly, to determine how it should be utilised in a cultural analysis, and thirdly to scrutinise the theory in regards to its strengths and its limitations.

Then, to conclude the theoretical and terminological foundation of the thesis, certain key terms and structures of naval matters will be defined in order to aid comprehension of the technical aspects of the topic. This will primarily be a description of ship types and their function within a 20th-century navy.

### 2.1 - Understanding *Culture*

The word *culture* will inevitably appear repeatedly as a prefix to the utilised imagological terminology or on its own as an indication of the relevance of certain national icons. However, what does *culture* actually mean? According to Raymond Williams, *culture* is one of the most complex words in the English language as it is used in a range of intellectual disciplines and in several divergent and incompatible systems of thought (87). He further argues that: "in cultural anthropology, the reference to culture or a culture is primarily to material production, while in history and cultural studies the reference is primarily to signifying and symbolic systems" (91). Following this line of thought, both the cultural anthropological and the history and cultural studies definition of the word holds some merit in order to investigate battleships as cultural images; Not only do they exist as a material object built and used by a certain group of people, they also hold a significant symbolic value to said people.

However, this definition is still a bit too vague to constitute a key term in regards to this thesis on its own. So to clarify how culture becomes a carrier of symbolic meaning it is important to understand how culture is distributed. Lewis suggests that people are exposed to cultural influence from a large number of sources; from parents who will raise



their children in a manner befitting their culture, to peers, or social institutions such as the educational system which will, in its selection of teaching materials, determine which aspect of the culture will be in focus (xxii). He adds that: "*governments* have a vested interest in their citizens sharing cultural values in order to reduce the potential for cultural conflicts" (Lewis, xxii). Culture then, as viewed in the field of cultural studies, is a world- and self-view that is influenced by many different sources and with various motivations.

As the interpretation of the perceived image of historical cultural images is the focal point of this analysis it is relevant to make a note of the educational system's part in shaping culture. Lewis argues that: "History is taught thoughtfully, often being 'remodelled' in a concern for the consolidation of shared values and myths" (xxii). Consequently, the examination of texts that claim to uphold a certain historical objectivity becomes interesting. The phrasing of history and the images created by the language will be affected by a cultural influencer who may or may not hold a certain national bias.

Understanding how culture is transferred makes it possible to identify a variety of elements that constitutes culture: "Culture incorporates such distinguishable attributes as language, attitudes, religion, artefacts, dress, beliefs, music and dance, art, sport, tools, etiquette, values, behaviours, food, and other material and nonmaterial components. Some of these attributes are subject to change, but the cultural framework generally endures" (Lewis, xxiii). With that in mind, Lewis defines culture as: "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one category of people from another" (13). Through various means then, such as the way a certain people use their language, culture emerges in the way something can be discussed or appreciated in a cultural group. Furthermore, this programming that Lewis mentions comes from a variety of sources which means that culture has several layers. "Parents program their children, teachers their students, society its citizens" (Lewis, 13). As this analysis will focus on the battleship as a cultural image, most of the analysis material will be focused upon the educational and informative influencers of creating the symbolism that is imbued within the battleships.

While Lewis defines culture as a form of collective programming that differentiates one group of people from another, Denis Cosgrove and Peter Jackson offer an addendum to this definition in which culture should, moreover, be understood as: "the medium through which people transform the mundane phenomena of the material world into a world of significant symbols to which they give meanings and attach value" (95). This addition does add a crucial aspect to culture as a key term. Battleships can easily be viewed as mundane constructions of metals and their significance can be readily ignored by anyone lacking interest in the field of naval history. However, *culture* is a medium through which people of a specific group will attach meaning.

As a closing note to the notion of culture, Raija Taramaa points out that "cultures are not bounded and separable. People share some experiences with one person and other experiences with another person. This kind of interaction makes each person a junction point for an infinite number of partially overlapping cultures" (32). With this, it should be understood that although culture, in some cases, functions as an umbrella term for an entire people, each person will have a different take on said culture due to the

manner in which they were programmed and a person may value certain cultural images in one type of interaction whilst practically ignoring them in another.

For the purpose of this analysis, therefore, *culture* is used as a key term that refers to the shared ethos that is generated through the influence of various different sources and which instils an otherwise mundane object with a specific symbolic meaning to a specific group of people.

## 2.2 - What is *Imagology*?

The second part of the analysis of cultural images is, of course, the *images*. What constitutes an *image* and how does one approach it analytically in regards to its value in a cultural context? This is where *imagology* becomes a vital tool for the analysis. In the following section, imagology will be explored as a concept before the following sections will highlight its usage in an analysis. In an attempt to explain the concept of images within the field of imagology on a basic level, Manfred Beller explains that images are:

"Graphic (pictures, statues, designs), Optical (mirrors, projections), perceptual (sense, data, 'Species', appearances), mental (dreams, memories, ideas, phantasmata), verbal (metaphors, descriptions). To be sure, images of other peoples can also be found in painting and caricatures, they are projected optically, perceived in their outward appearance and also defined metaphorically, but the most important there of origin of all national-typological fictions are the mental imaginations, ideas, and Vorstellungsbilder" (3).

Images, in this context, therefore refers to ideas and mental depictions rather than actual photographic representation of battleships. Beller further elaborates on this stating that: "In the cognitive sciences they are called 'mental pictorial representation', in which valorizations originate from the interpretation of images, rather than from objective experiences" (4). This crucial sentence highlights a key aspect of images within the field of imagology; images do not account for an absolute objectified truth, but rather a highly subjective - to a particular group - interpretation of the depicted.

This argument is supported by Joep Leerssen who states that: "we have become accustomed to viewing our representational activity in terms, not of 'fidelity to empirical reality', but of 'recognizability in a set of conventions" (1991, 165). The term image is closely linked to the term stereotype and although imagology primarily focuses on national stereotypes, it is as applicable to the examination of inanimate objects such as battleships. Especially when investigating a nation such as the United Kingdom that holds, or at the very least held, the Royal Navy in such high regard. As such, finding evidence of this valorisation of the images and the conventions used to describe battleships, will reveal a great deal about, not only the author but also about the perceived symbolic value of battleships in current historiography.

However, before scouring a selection of historiographical sources for written imaginations of battleships that, either consciously or subconsciously, influence the way the battleships are regarded in a society based on cultural values, it is essential to ask the questions: Where do these mental imaginations and ideas emerge? How are they formed? And why do otherwise inanimate objects become the subject of cultural valorisation when they, in their own right, do nothing but exist?

To answer the question of where images emerge, Leerssen suggests that literature can be considered an expression of a specific nationality through the means of the used language (2007a, 19). He further adds that: "the historical meaning of literature lies in its way of manifesting and documenting the nation's identity and its moral and aesthetic world-view" (Leerssen, 2007a, 19). Literature then can be seen as a palpable source of cultural imaginations. As authors write either fact, fiction, or even personal writings, the use of language - which is further influenced by cultural factors - saturates the writing to give a certain value to the images created by the writing.

Furthermore, written texts, as they vary in topic, genre, and style, reveal much in their word choice alone about the cultural imaginations of a certain people in regards to the object or social group that may be the subject of the text. Beller describes this thusly: "Members of different groups perceive matters from their own specific, distinctive perspective ("selective perception") and will arrive at different judgements depending on their point of view. Our images of foreign countries, peoples and cultures mainly derive from selective value judgements (which are in turn derived from selective observation) as expressed in travel writing and in literary representations" (5). Adding to this, Leerssen suggests that: "Literary sources, depending on their canonicity, have a long currency and topicality" (2007a, 26). He exemplifies this by mentioning how notions concerning Germans may have been expressed in schoolbooks, journalistic texts, cultural criticisms, or government reports but that, for example, Heinrich Mann's *Der Untertan* or Jerome Jerome's *Three Men on the Bummel* have outlasted all of the former short-lived sources (2007a, 26). Literary texts can, therefore, be considered a caption of the cultural values and identity at the time of their production. Furthermore, as Leerssen argues, literary sources may provide an insight into the shifting cultural perception towards a topic based upon their reception after the initial production: "a canonical text like Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, with its Shylock-figure, may not only testify to attitudes towards Jews at the time of its origin, but also, in its longstanding reception history, provides an interesting track record of shifting attitudes in subsequent centuries" (Leerssen, 2007a, 26). It is, therefore, fair to assume that by analysing historiographical works concerning battleships, that cultural values and thoughts on the matter can be discovered through the way they represent the topic.

As to the question of how *images* become what they are, which according to the earlier mentioned comments by Beller and Leerssen will not be based on empirical facts but rather on subjective thought and experiences, Beller suggests that: "People can only experience empirical reality in part. Once textually codified, the partial representation will represent the whole. This is an issue of information, or information processing, which together with our tendency towards value judgements, will generate prejudices. Prejudices



involve, then, an a priori information deficit. This often engenders negative valorisations, or else starry-eyed idealisations, both of which stand in need of correction" (5). This point is quite significant to the following analysis. Texts will never represent a whole but rather a subjective selection created by the author which will highlight his or her biased opinion on the subject of the text. To fully cement this point, Beller goes on to add: "Valorising the Other is, of course, nothing but a reflection of one's own point of view" (6). With that, it must be understood that images, in an imagological context, are formed in the minds of the people to whom they are presented and that they take on a meaning based upon subjective conventions and previously perceived *images*.

To further highlight the idea that images are created based upon subjective values, Walter Lippmann argues, in the context of modern psychology, that: "For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture" (81). This point emphasises what Beller and Leerssen have already stated and points to two key understandings of the image as an imagological tool. Firstly, that the perceiver, in most cases, will hold a predetermined opinion and knowledge of the perceived - in this case, battleships - before having a chance to fully form an objective opinion. Secondly, that culture affects what is perceived and what is not perceived.

Literary theorist Kenneth Burke offers more insight in regards to the relevance of the things that are not perceived by stating that: "A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing - a focus upon object A involves a neglect of object B" (49). As previously established, culture is instilled into people by a variety of sources, each of which will include and omit certain aspects of the overall objective reality to form stereotypical images of people or objects. The relevance of this omission lies in the fact that when historiographical texts discuss battleships, for example, the details that are omitted from the text will reveal just as much about the *image* of the battleship as the details that are included; details that are not explicitly mentioned may reveal a discrepancy between image and reality.

On a final note as to what *imagology* is, Beller suggests that an *image*, or a *stereotype*, is a combination of minimal information and maximum meaning (8). That images form conclusions based on details and turning them into generalisations by taking aspects of a certain culture and extrapolating this as the essence of an entire nation (Beller, 8). Therefore, to sum up the question of *what is imagology*, it can be reasonably argued that imagology is the study of images in a cultural context in which authors instil a certain value in a specific people or object based upon predefined values. This is done by picking out specific details that may either be positive or negative in regards to the object or people in question and by omitting details that would distort the desired mental imagination.

## 2.3 - Auto- and Hetero-Images

Keeping in mind that *imagology* primarily functions as a tool for analysing national stereotypes it is, of course, necessary to address the fact that the term nationality is suffused with strong and often contrasting ideas and opinions. As with culture, nationality can be seen as a form of programming that is determined by the location of the individual in question and influenced by the people residing in the same area. Furthermore, nationality can be considered a way of determining where one culture ends and another, perhaps similar or perhaps vastly different, begins.

In regards to nationality as a field of study within an imagological analysis, Leerssen argues that: "nationality could be studied as a convention, a misunderstanding, a construct; something that resulted from its articulation" (2007a, 22). This reveals a relevant factor in the discussion of nationality; if nationality is dictated by articulation or, in the case of this study, historiographical representation, the manner in which texts mention national icons becomes a vital insight into the core values of the nationality of the author and target readership of said texts. In fact, Leerssen adds to his previous statement, that nationality should be analysed in its subjectivity and in its contradictions (2007a, 22). As the following analysis will focus on a British sense of national pride in the Royal Navy and its battleships, it is therefore important to emphasise this point about the subjectivity of nationality.

According to Birgit Neumann: "National stereotyping sets in when specific traits (e.g. pride) that are usually restricted to the characterisation of individuals are predicated to a specific nation, and when these traits are held to be typical of all members of this nation, thus implying that they distinguish this nation from another" (277). It is important to note here that imagology utilises the words *image* or *stereotype* interchangeably in this regard and that the way battleships are perceived as images can be expressed as a stereotyping of the battleships and its cultural meaning. However, Neumann's point highlights another important aspect of nationality; certain traits or easily recognisable features in an individual person - or ship - may become the representation of an entire people.

To this, Neumann adds that the cultural power of national stereotypes is not found within the stereotypes themselves, but rather, that it should be located in inter- and transmedia adaptations (278). For this study, this means that the cultural significance of battleships is found in the various texts that remove the ships from being simple structures of steel and heavy weaponry and move them into the minds of the people through news articles, fictional tales, or historiographical journals. It should further be noted that the cultural power of images and stereotypes is changing constantly as they are translated, re-narrated, moved across media platforms, or reach new perceivers, however, according to Neumann: "National stereotyping is an ongoing process in which the same national character traits are represented repeatedly, often over decades and centuries, in diverse genres and media" (278). Therefore, it can be expected that the cultural power of the battleships may fluctuate over the centuries since their conception, through the light of

their years in active service, to the decline of the battleships and subsequent decades during which the battleship was but a memory.

With the understanding that national stereotyping takes recognisable aspects of a culture and applies it to the culture as a whole, it becomes relevant to examine the way *images* function depending on their origin; either internally or externally of a nationality. According to Leerssen national identities are a collection of *self-images* that takes shape in the structural context of a Self versus Other contradistinction (2007a, 22). This means that national identities rely on more than just the cultural programming of the nation and the values of the people sharing said culture. It means that national identities emphasise *self-images* that contrast the *images* of other nationalities; thereby generating a sense of us versus them.

This is where the terms *auto-* and *hetero-images* emerge. According to Leerssen: "Images can vary according to their perspective. A fundamental distinction is the one between auto-image (or 'self-image') and hetero-image: the former referring to a characterological reputation current within and shared by a group, the latter to the opinion of others" (2007b, 342). This definition is backed up by Taramaa who argues that any auto-stereotyping tend to generate positive in-group images whereas the hetero-stereotyping tend to have a negative impact on the created *images* (37). Thus, all stereotypes are loaded with meaning and an evaluation of the represented group or entity. To all this, Taramaa adds that: "within the same framework, the self-image is understood as the conception an individual has of himself or herself on the basis of auto- and hetero-images" (39). Therefore, in the context of the following analysis, the perceived image of battleships from a British perspective is determined by the auto-image of the British battleships and of the Royal Navy as well as on the hetero-images generated abroad of British naval power. Leerssen further exemplifies the nature of the *auto-image* and its complexity using the German *auto-image* as an example: "In studying the German self-image in the work of Thomas Mann, the question must always be if Mann writes, from case to case, as a German, or else possibly (and possibly at the same time) as a patrician bourgeois, a European intellectual, or a Lübecker. Images do not reflect identities, but constitute possible identifications" (2007a, 27). Hence, images must be examined both as *auto-images* and *hetero-images* and in each case, it must be understood that images change their meaning and value based upon the context in which they are represented. A battleship may hold significant symbolic meaning by their own merit, whereas they may be mere footnotes in texts focused more broadly on naval matters or on maritime subjects in general. Leerssen's example is explained by Marco Cinnirella who uses the term social identities to clarify the different perspectives of an author who may be part of many in-groups and thus may be represented by - or represent - many *auto-images*. Cinnirella explains that: "an individual's group memberships/social identities vary in their salience, such that at any one moment in time, one social identity will tend to be the most salient, and thus exert the most influence over the individual's actions and beliefs" (43). The representation of battleships, then, may depend on the subjective salience of the group that seeks to either epitomise or perceive the image of the battleships.

On the point of subjectivism Leerssen argues that: "our sources are subjective; their subjectivity must not be ignored, explained away or filtered out, but be taken into account in the analysis. The nationality represented is silhouetted in the perspectival context of the representing text or discourse" (2007a, 27). It is, therefore, crucial to consider the subjectivity of the images when analysing them and to question whether an image represents something within a given cultural frame of reference or not and to question what significance this bears to the comprehension and perception of the image.

One of the key motivating factors of the subjectivity of the *auto-images* is explained by Cinnirella who argues that: "there is an inherent motivational drive for positive self-esteem – to feel good about ourselves. Since the group to which we belong is also an extension of the self, then we need to feel good about them as well – to have a positive social identity. This is achieved by finding ways to construe our own group (ingroup) as distinct and superior to other groups (outgroup) on relevant comparison dimensions" (43). Stereotyping and cultural *images* are, after all, a way to subjectively distinguish and evaluate people and objects. This is further supported by Neumann who clarifies that:

"Cultural, literary, and popular representations of collective peculiarities frequently invoke 'national character' as a seemingly self-evident explanation for national differences as well as for claims to cultural, political, and moral superiority. Typically, constructions of foreign national characters provide an essential quality of difference against which cherished self-images materialize with much greater clarity. Constructions of the national others, so-called national heteroimages, function powerfully to define (or destabilize) consensual patterns of national identification" (275).

With this in mind, it becomes relevant for an analysis of cultural *images* to investigate the differences in the perception of relatively similar images originating from different cultural groups; in the case of battleships, to examine the battleship as a subjective *auto-image* in British texts as well as to explore the role of the battleship to other cultural groups.

## 2.4 - Why *Imagology*?

Understanding what *imagology* is and how it functions as a tool to determine the subjective perception of certain people and objects is one thing, but it is necessary to ask why this is at all important. Why is it that the perceived *image* of the battleships of the early twentieth century is relevant nearly sixty years after the last British battleship was decommissioned? The answer to that question is that there is much to be learned from our collective memory; In this case, the collective memory of another cultural group. In regards to collective memory, Ann Rigney argues that: "there has been widespread scholarly interest in the way social groups remember their past and in the ways certain views of the past come to be shared. Various terms are currently used to designate this type of

memory, including collective memory; social memory, or cultural memory" (360). As mentioned earlier, culture is partly the result of a social programming that is implanted into people through familial sources, educational sources, governmental sources, and of course through social circles. As this is the case, historiographical texts will, with their focus on certain events or evaluation of certain figures in history, create an incomplete *image* that will then be interpreted by the receiver of the cultural programming. Therefore, the way the past is remembered becomes a relevant topic of analysis. The way this ties to the concept of *imagology* is, according to Rigney that: "the idea is that collective remembrance takes place within the virtual framework of the community with which those doing the remembering identify. In other words, the act of remembrance is itself implicitly shaped by its presumed relevance to a particular community" (360). The collective memory can, therefore, be expressed as the creation of cultural *images* based upon the past. A definition to which Rigney adds that: "Shifting allegiances in the present lead to the highlighting of different aspects of the past" (361). With that in mind, the perceived significance of the battleship becomes a fluctuating concept in the present as it is likely to be remembered fondly during times of struggle or when remembering the glory days of the Royal Navy, and yet remain as an image of utter superfluity during times of budget reductions in the military or government overspending on navy vessels; thus explaining in part the discrepancy between the strong nautical roots that is evident in London alone and the critical article by Clarkson in the introduction of this thesis.

## 2.5 - Practical Application of *Imagology* on Historiographical Texts

It is one thing to have a theoretical understanding of *imagology* as a concept, however, to utilise it properly it is crucial to determine the proper method of analysing cultural *images*. In essence, how will *imagology* as a theoretical concept be applied to study battleships as a cultural *image*? According to Leerssen: "The ultimate perspective of image studies is a theory of cultural or national stereotypes, not a theory of cultural and national identity" (2007a, 27). Therefore, it must always be understood that regardless of the objectivity of the text, the images created will represent an idea about the national identity rather than an accurate understanding of it. In fact, Leerssen goes on to clarify this point by stating that: "Imagology is concerned with the representamen, representations as textual strategies vis-à-vis empirical reality, telling us that nation X has a set of characteristics Y, yet the actual validity of that referentiality claim is not the imagologist's to verify or falsify. The imagologist's frame of reference is a textual and intertextual one" (2007a, 27). The goal then will not be to prove or disprove the actual fact value or usefulness of battleships in the early to mid-twentieth century, but rather to examine perceived symbolic value that is attributed to them by later historians and authors of historiographical texts. It is, therefore, crucial to understand that *imagology* is not a sociological theory. As Leerssen argues:

"its aim is to understand a discourse of representation rather than a society. While it is obvious that current attributes concerning a given nation are textual tropes rather than sociological or anthropological data, the less obvious implication is equally true: The cultural context in which these images are articulated and from which they originate is that of a discursive praxis, not an underlying collective, let alone a 'national' public opinion. How representative a given text is of more widespread patterns is an intertextual rather than a sociological issue" (2007a, 27).

The investigation of battleships as a cultural image is then a matter of discourse and perception. How do historiographical texts represent battleships and how would this representation shape the perceived image of battleships in the respective reader?

Before looking at battleships, therefore, it is important to understand the representation of the navy in general. Battleships, in the case of this study, exist within the framework of an entire navy which again functions as part of an overarching military. It is within the context of this that battleships will be measured and evaluated; their image being ascribed value or validity based upon contemporary views on past and present relevance and success of the Royal Navy.

Once there is an adequate foundation on which to build an understanding of the Royal Navy as an entity, the first task of the imagologist, according to Leerssen is to establish the intertext of the national stereotype or image as a textual trope (2007a, 28). Leerssen goes on to pose a series of questions that must be taken into account when examining the texts used to conclude upon stereotyping and the creation of images: "What is the tradition of this trope? What traditions of appreciation and depreciation, and how do these two relate historically? To which extent is that background tradition passively or actively echoed or reinforced, varied upon, negated, mocked or ignored by the individual instance in question?" (2007a, 28). As the following analysis primarily will be anchored in historiographical texts written with an educational or informative purpose, it is thus important to understand the genre conventions that such texts are created by. Furthermore, it is relevant to question how closely a given text follows these conventions.

Once the texts are defined in regards to their genre conventions, Leerssen argues that the next step is to place the texts within a historical framework. He argues that: "Literary texts cannot be interpreted in a timeless, aesthetic never-never-land. Historical factors must be taken into account" (2007a, 28). The importance of this lies in the fact that views on the *stereotype* or *image* in question at the time of the writing of the text may influence the perception of said stereotype or image. Reading about battleships in a book written in the early twentieth century, therefore, may yield a completely different image as opposed to that created by authors of texts written in the mid to late twentieth century when battleships were no longer in active service.

It should also be noted, according to Leerssen, what the target audience of a given text may be. The author's rhetoric and use of national images may be targeting a specific audience in order to invoke a certain perception of the stereotype or image represented (Leerssen, 2007a, 28). Investigating these aspects of the texts will enable the imagologist



to understand the *images* of the self and the other created within the texts and to understand what Leerssen explains as: "the maintenance of selfhood through historical remembrance and cultural memory" (2007a, 29).

Although all this can be examined within the framework of a single text, Leerssen asserts that: "The study of national images is in and of itself a comparative enterprise: it addresses cross-national relations rather than national identities" (2007a, 29). In this case, the argument is that national images should be analysed in comparison to other national images. Leerssen exemplifies this thusly:

"Certain imagined moral-characterological oppositions are nationally unspecific and can be encountered in many different cases: Northern-cerebral vis-à-vis southern-sensuous, peripheral-timeless vis-à-vis central-modern, or western-individualistic-active vis-à-vis oriental-collective-passive. This indicates that national characterisations are often specific instances and combinations of generic moral polarities, and that our way of thinking in terms of 'national characters' boils down to an ethnic-political distribution of role patterns in an imagined anthropological landscape" (2007a, 29).

In the case of this study, therefore, investigating the Royal Navy and a British perception of the images surrounding it must be analysed in conjunction with images of other navies with which the Royal Navy would compare themselves. In this particular study, that source of *hetero-images* will come from the German Navy due to the animosity and conflict that existed between Britain and Germany during the early to mid-twentieth century. It could, with an equally interesting result, be an analysis of the *auto-* and *hetero-images* shared between the Royal Navy and the navy of the United States of America during the same period. While the images in the case of the Anglo-German study would be based on their conflict, the Anglo-American study would be based upon competing for the most powerful navy on less aggressive terms.

The approaches to *imagology* that have been put forth here are summed up by Taramaa who concludes that: "it is important to ask the following questions: 'who is using the image, what audience the author is addressing, what sort of text it is', what are the circumstances at the time the text was written, and so on. This, again, means that the historical force of national stereotypes lies more in their recognition value than in their pretended truth-value. Moreover, stereotypes can be positive or negative, and they can, for example, shift along with changing political circumstances" (27). She goes on to add:

"Furthermore, an imagologist studies not only the image of the nation in question, but also the context, and more importantly the thoughts of the author. One of the basic insights in image studies is that the mechanism of the representation of foreign nations can only be analysed properly if the attitude of the author has been taken into account since literature always reflects, directly and/or indirectly, the culture out of which it springs. This is

one of the reasons why an imagologist distinguishes between auto- and hetero-images" (Taramaa, 28).

Thereby, Taramaa and Leerssen agree that the nature of the texts that form the base of the analysis must be investigated not as monolithic texts, but as literary data that depending on the time it was written and the author holds more or less significance on the images created. Similarly, both Taramaa and Leerssen highlights the importance of investigating both the *auto*- and the *hetero-images* as these in their comparative and contrasting value gives the imagologist an insight into the self-image of the perceiver of a given text.

## 2.6 - Imagological Terminology on a Broader Scale

To conclude upon the subject of *imagology*, there is one final facet to consider that is based primarily on the works of Anthony Johnson and his article *Notes Towards a New Imagology*. The relevance of his writing comes from him broadening the scope of the imagological terminology. The approach so far has been to discuss *auto*- and *hetero-images* in relation to each other and to avoid the pitfall of analysing cultural images in isolation of their context and origin. However, as Taramaa argues: "Cultural Imagology may be divided into two main dimensions – the spatial (Geographical Imagology) and the temporal (Historical Imagology)" (28). By this, she reasons that when analysing stereotypes and cultural images, these images hold significance due to their placement in a historical context as well as in a purely geographical context. The image of a battleship may hold one meaning in one century than it does in another; even decades may alter the perception of images of the same object or group. Similarly, the image of a battleship may hold a variety of cultural significance based upon the spatial context of the image; an image of a battleship in the United Kingdom may illicit images in the collective memory of Britain's glory days when Britain ruled the waves whereas, in a nation like Switzerland or a similar nation without a need for a navy, an image of a battleship may seem like a useless object.

This is where Johnson introduces the term image-world. According to Johnson, image-worlds are subjective collections of images and stereotypes that are based on internal experience (52). Johnson uses this term to set it apart from what he describes as the exterior and material world of images through which people filter their personal images and stereotypes (52). This exterior collection of images and stereotypes is what Johnson refers to as the iconosphere (52). He argues that:

"Unlike the worlds of possible or colliding images which exist in every individual's head, the iconosphere connotes a mapped world of possibilities from a particular period which has been realised in material form: whether it be in paper, parchment, wood, silk, canvas, clay, stone, plastic, film or even digitalised and encrypted in binary code. Shored up against the irrecoverable

horizons of knowledge which were available to past minds, the iconosphere of a period consists of the traces that have survived, in whatever form, from individuals of that passing world" (Johnson, 52).

Taramaa supports this notion of the iconosphere and explains that: "Different historical periods represent phases available within literary study for the examination of different imagological manifestations. A certain historical period of time, an 'iconosphere', is composed of the physical traces that have endured the pressures of change in the societies that have produced them. These traces include all physical markings which have been transferred from previous communities to the ones that exist at the moment of observation" (44). Therefore, in the context of an analysis into the cultural images of battleships, the iconosphere represents everything that exists about battleships; blueprints, historiographical texts, photographic images, newspaper articles, writings about battleships at the time of their usage, etc. All of these sources form the iconosphere that makes up the knowledge upon which an image of the battleships is made. On the other hand, the image-worlds are fragments of the complete understanding of the battleships and all of them filled with subjective value.

Johnson sums it up thusly: "The idea of the iconosphere can function as a simple temporal marker: a moving index of all the images available 'out there' in the material world at any particular moment" (53). He further suggests the term image cache as a designation for the medium that exists between the subjective image-world and the collective iconosphere: "Within the iconosphere an object such as a poem, novel, play script, film, or even linguistic corpus may, perhaps, be thought of as an image cache. That is, it is a set of sensory cues (bounded by the limits of its physical form), which enables perceivers to reconstitute them as images in their minds. And like any other object, the literary image cache, along with the wider cultural or geographical image field within which it resides is, of course, equally susceptible to the temporal contingencies of the iconosphere" (Johnson, 53). Therefore, imagology can be summarised as the investigation of cultural images created within our collective memory. The iconosphere being the complete index of all the images concerning a particular object. However, as no one can truly study the iconosphere in its entirety, they create image-caches that serve to portray the stereotype or the image in a manner befitting the author's subjective image-world.

## **2.7 - Naval Terminology: What *is* a Battleship?**

Finally, to avoid confusion regarding the terminology used to discuss and analyse battleships and the cultural images that they represent, it is crucial to understand that the term battleship is referring to a specific type of ship whereas the term warship would encompass any weaponised ship in a fleet; Essentially, a battleship is a warship but not all warships are battleships.

Furthermore, as several ship types will come up during the analysis - seeing that battleships seldom operate alone - it is relevant to briefly elaborate upon the differences

between the five ship types that will be mentioned and in some cases compared to the battleships in regards to combat role or cultural imagination.

The five ship types will be destroyers, cruisers, and battleships as these all function in a surface warfare role predominantly. Furthermore, submarines and aircraft carriers will be defined in order to avoid any confusion in regards to their usage in a modern navy.

Firstly, the destroyers. According to David Lyon, the term destroyer comes from the initial intended combat role of the small but fast ships: hunting and destroying torpedo boats. They were, at the time known as torpedo boat destroyers (8). They were, due to light armouring and armaments, highly manoeuvrable and able to give chase quickly making them useful in a screening role for other ships, ports, and sea lanes of some strategic importance (Lyon, 110). Norman Friedman further elaborates on the role of the destroyers stating that they were fast escorts intended for a screening role for convoys or naval squadrons (9). Although destroyers - or torpedo boat destroyers - were created as a counter to hostile torpedo boats, the Second World War brought them into a new role; one that they are probably more well-known for today: "World War II again pushed the destroyers to the forefront in ways similar to their mission in the previous war. Because enemy submarines, especially those of Germany and Japan, were more dangerous than before, destroyers were now fitted with sonar, forward-launched Hedgehog anti-submarine depth charges as well as conventional roll-off, pressure-sensitive depth charges" (Morris & Kearns, 114). Destroyers then are relatively small but fast and manoeuvrable ships designed to hunt smaller threats that may prove troublesome for larger ships to evade or destroy with heavy artillery.

Secondarily, the cruisers. Eric Osbourne suggests that: "By the end of the eighteenth century, these [cruisers] were the workhorses in the navies of the world's major maritime powers" (1). Cruisers were larger than the destroyers and more heavily weaponised. "A cruiser could be any ship possessing the speed necessary to act as a commerce raider, as a commerce protector, or as a reconnaissance vessel for the main fleets in a general engagement" (Osbourne, 25).

Cruisers can be further subdivided into heavy cruisers, light cruisers, and battlecruisers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the main difference between light and heavy cruisers lie in the armament and thus whether they were designed for greater speed and manoeuvrability, or as a higher calibre gun platform. According to Morris & Kearns: "Heavy cruisers (CAs) were defined by the London Naval Treaty as ships having more guns than their predecessors of up to 8 inches and displacement tonnage of 10,000 tons or less" (98). Angus Konstam supports this definition and in doing so hints at the nature of the light cruisers as well. Due to the London Naval Treaty setting a limit on naval budgets, cruisers were fitted with 6-inch guns rather than the 8-inch guns and thereby creating the distinction between light and heavy cruisers (1). The battlecruiser is defined by Morris & Kearns as: "A lightly armoured, high-speed cruiser with the offensive power of a battleship" (45). Cruisers can, therefore, be understood as larger warships that sacrifice armour for speed while maintaining significant firepower; sometimes even matching battleships in this regard.

Thirdly, the battleship. Morris & Kearns writes that: "a battleship is a large warship, heavily armoured and heavily gunned, designed to defeat enemy surface ships in battle. Its name comes from the late 18th century, drawn from a contraction of line-of-battle ship, and by the late 19th century had come to denote a heavily gunned, turreted ironclad vessel" (46). They further mention that: "Leaders were convinced that [...] wars would be settled at sea by big-gun-ship duels" (47). This conviction would prove to be incorrect as the aircraft carrier became more influential on modern maritime warfare. However, even though the battleship may have lost its place as the king of the seas, Morris & Kearns points out that: "the battleships of World War II made a significant contribution to Allied victory in both the Pacific and Atlantic theatres of war by providing shore bombardment support to amphibious and land operations" (48). They were therefore not to be considered obsolete. A battleship then is a very large warship that has both heavy armour plating and large calibre cannons. As a result, they are slower than Cruisers and less manoeuvrable.

Fourthly, the aircraft carrier. "Aircraft carriers are warships designed to launch and recover airplanes at sea. As such, they are essentially seagoing airbases able to deploy a navy's air power around the world as the situation requires." (Morris & Kearns, 18). The aircraft carrier would usually be lightly armoured and have limited armaments beyond the aeroplane complement on board. Therefore they would require screening by cruisers, destroyers, and battleships. As the war progressed however, and as mentioned previously: "Because aircraft carriers superseded big-gun battleships as the heart of battle groups during World War II, they are now the capital ships of such groups (usually termed carrier groups or strike forces), with other surface vessels serving to protect them from hostile attack by ships, aircraft, submarines, or missiles on forward deployed areas" (Morris & Kearns, 19). This is an important piece of information as the fact that the aircraft carrier dethroned the battleship as the head of fleets may become relevant to the image created of battleships in the context of the late war or post-war era.

Finally, the submarine. Submarines are not particularly relevant to this thesis in regards to their combat role during the First World War. Rather, the role of the submarine during the Second World War and the development of the merchant raiding submarine of that war into the nuclear attack submarine of the cold war is where the submarine becomes relevant to the image of the battleship.

During the Second World War, it was the merchant shipping which enabled the United States to participate in the conflict in Europe and kept the United Kingdom from starvation and capitulation (Bishop, 434). As mentioned previously, Cruisers were traditionally commerce raiders, but during the Second World War, the submarines, especially German submarines became notorious for their role in sinking merchant ships. The reason why this would become such an issue, according to Bishop was that: "losses of warships could cause problems, but losses of merchantmen were potentially disastrous. If the loss rate had exceeded the construction rate for a significant period, the Allies' capacity to wage war would have slowed to the point of eventual capitulation" (434). The submarine, therefore, becomes relevant to the image of the battleship because it is a way to wage war on the seas that renders the battleship with its powerful armaments and thick armour useless.

### 3 - METHODOLOGY

The imagological methodology was chosen as the basis for this thesis as it provides an insight into the cultural symbolism that ties the physical vessels of the Royal Navy to British cultural identity. The method utilised to accomplish this is to examine the role of the battleship as it is represented in modern historiographical texts written on the subject of battleships or of events in which battleships took part. The specific books and articles will be what could be expected as the first step into a deeper understanding of naval history for a reader who is seeking more than what a Wikipedia search might uncover; that is, historiographical texts targeted primarily at readers with an interest in the field and a desire to know more or student of history.

In reading historiographical texts, especially texts that are secondary or tertiary sources at best, as it is the case here, it is crucial to understand that they are written by someone with a vested interest in the topic and that this interest can translate into historical bias. Furthermore, geographical or cultural factors in the authorship can be considered contaminants in the purely historical reading of such texts, however, in reading it through the lens of an imagological methodology, these biases become relevant discussion point to evaluate the images that are perpetuated by modern naval historians.

Although most imagological studies are founded in literary studies, historiographical texts may be examined using similar methods as both literary and historiographical texts include an author's bias as well as a connection to views held at the time when they were written. Furthermore, while less obvious that examining the representation of something in a work of fiction, the perpetuation of certain images in historiographical works may prove equally influential on its reader.

In the following analysis, the works of several naval historians will be scrutinised in order to examine the image of the battleship in closer detail; as an image in its own right and as an image of Britain as a whole. In order to avoid merely scratching the surface of the plethora of events that transpired during the approximately six decades where the modern battleship served in the Royal Navy, the analysis will be anchored in five major events that clearly shows the image as it was or how it changed. These events will be examined in chronological order in order to understand the change that the image underwent. Furthermore, each event will be a separate chapter of the analysis with the first chapter being an introduction to the world that the battleship would come into. The following chapters will analyse the construction and launch of the *HMS Dreadnought* and the naval race that followed in its wake. Following that, a chapter analysing the imagological consequences of the Battle of Jutland. After that, a chapter will follow detailing the Battle of the Denmark Strait during the Second World War which saw the *HMS Hood* sunk by the German battleship *Bismarck*. Then *Bismarck*'s sister ship will be examined as a *hetero-image* in the context of Britain losing a convoy headed for the Soviet Union. Finally, the image of the battleship will be explored in relation to the last British battleship and the end of British naval supremacy.



## 4 - ANALYSIS

### 4.1 - The Royal Navy Before *HMS Dreadnought*

While the main focus of this thesis is to determine the image of the battleship as it has been created and perpetuated by authors of historiographical texts, it is highly relevant to examine the naval situation prior to their introduction into active service in order to understand the impact that they allegedly had on the world and naval warfare. It is crucial to realise that battleships did not truly come into their final form until the twentieth century and that, although they were born out of rapid innovation within the fields of weaponry, armour, and propulsion, their relevance was challenged even before they had become what most people today would recognise as a proper battleship.

The roots of the battleship, however, go further back than the twentieth century. In the eighteenth century, according to Lincoln: "sea power enabled Britain to dominate world trade and acquire an empire" (1). However, it was not merely a matter of maintaining the empire that gave the Royal Navy the reputation that it held for nearly two centuries. "During this period the Navy was a vital force for national defence, trade protection and imperial expansion. It also had a huge influence on Britons' understanding of their world. [...] The Navy had such influence on public life that a study of its representation adds to our understanding of British culture, cultural politics and the ideology of empire" (Lincoln, 1). This influence can be witnessed in the city of London alone where several monuments to the nation's naval roots remain on proud display; from the light cruiser, *HMS Belfast* anchored permanently on the Thames River to Lord Horatio Nelson standing proudly atop a column overlooking Trafalgar Square. The square itself being named after the battle that proved to be a decisive victory by the Royal Navy over the combined fleet of the French and the Spanish in 1805. Nelson's monument on Trafalgar square signifies the role of the Royal Navy in British culture and the victory that Lord Nelson won only affirmed the chorus of James Thomson's poem from 1740: *Britannia rules the waves*.

Lincoln suggested that Britain's reliance, and indeed its adoration of the Royal Navy have roots in the fact that the United Kingdom is an island nation: "The British public was used to the idea of war but had no experience of war at first hand because actual conflict took place at sea or in other continents. In consequence, there was a gulf between the experience of civilians and that of fighting men" (4). Bennett supports this notion and adds that the reason for this is that: "Since the days of Elizabeth I, Britain's defensive shield was provided by the Royal Navy" (11). Britain, therefore, was fighting its wars on foreign shores and on the seas where they had the advantage.

However, maintaining a large navy was expensive. Bennett argues that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw Britain in a situation of increasing difficulty when it came to maintaining a fleet of sufficient size and power to ensure naval dominance (11). With the sheer economic cost of constructing warships as well as the material resources required, it would have been quite the strain on the government budget. Furthermore, skilled manpower would be needed not only to operate the ships but also to construct them. In regards to this increased requirement for skilled labourers, Lincoln asserts that:

"when the Navy rapidly expanded and needed men desperately, only a small percentage of seamen were true volunteers. More than half the average crew was obtained by press-gangs" (5). Although this might suggest that the Royal Navy would suffer a negative reputation as the sailors who kept Britain the dominant force at sea weren't patriotic volunteers with glorified views of the navy, but rather men forced into pursuing a career in the navy. And yet this was not the case. Lincoln suggests that the Navy actually strengthened the sense of patriotism and unity within its sailors: "Warships, isolated from society, formed their own rigid communities subject to naval discipline. The seamen, drawn from different parts of the British Isles, forged a common identity which, while they were together, overlaid regional and other local identities. The Navy abroad constituted a projection of 'Britishness' which some contemporaries appreciated and were keen to cultivate" (5). The Navy, therefore, became an important part of British identity; an identity grounded in the notion that Britain - all of Britain - was united in defending their island home, in protecting their imports and exports, and in maintaining the Empire.

To ensure this: "The British government was always concerned about available numbers of warships and men, to such an extent that seamen became of greater importance to the nation than any other sector of the labour force. The strength of the mercantile marine was closely related to Britain's supremacy at sea: a large pool of seamen was needed in order to maintain a powerful fleet at sea in wartime, although prolonged conflict in itself led to thousands of landmen and boys being trained for naval service" (Lincoln, 5). The focus on the security of the merchant ships was not merely a matter of Britain guarding its wealth that was being imported from all over the Empire, it was very much a matter of safeguarding the lifeline that would keep Britain supplied with the materials needed to sustain the population. It is, therefore, no wonder that the Royal Navy sought to maintain an advantage in ship numbers and in the ability to meet any challenge. According to Bennett though, this desire to remain firmly in a position to dominate the sea can be seen in the number of warships alone: "In the period 1808 to 1809 the British Fleet had grown to 113 ships of the line (the forerunner of the battleship). This was in comparison to the French and Spanish Fleets (45 ships each) and the Russian and Danish Fleets (34 and 21 ships, respectively)" (12). Note here that Bennett only mentions the ships of the line. There would have been other ships in the Royal Navy at the time including smaller combat vessels as well as auxiliary ships. It should also be noted that the British dominance at sea was not a result of a better fleet of vessels but rather due to efficient crews and the ability of the British Empire to outbuild its rivals (Bennett, 12).

Britain then, although ruling the waves for the better part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, did not rest comfortably in their success however. Maintaining naval supremacy required significant funding, an investment in time, and a vast supply of manpower. This can be seen either as a necessary investment to safeguard the realm, however, the level to which Britain went to secure dominance over the seas does allude to the thought that it was not merely about ruling the waves, but about being so secure in their rule that the Royal Navy would become a centre of unity for the British people; a people that was made up of Englishmen, Scots, and Irishmen on the British Isles alone, and of several other nationalities when examining the British Empire in its entirety. With

each individual nationality came individual cultural identities that would reflect their particular region within the Empire. In the Royal Navy, however, the sailors and officers were part of a unified crew and in that, they became an image of the unity of the Empire; in essence, they would cease to be sailors from Scotland, England, or Ireland and become British sailors and therein, the Royal Navy would become an image of Britishness.

The Royal Navy, however, was an expensive organisation to sustain. It depended heavily on the wealth and resources that would come in from the colonies - wealth and resources that it was indeed charged with protecting as well - but as the industrial revolution created a golden age of technological advancement, the already expensive navy became even more expensive. According to Erik Dahl: "The middle of the nineteenth century was a time of great change in naval warfare, driven largely by technological innovation. The greatest driver of change was technology unleashed by the industrial revolution, and those advances tended to affect navies more rapidly than armies. Every generation, it seemed, new technologies threatened to make obsolete all previous ship designs (112). The nineteenth century would therefore be a chaotic period, not only for the Royal Navy, but for all navies around the world as they had to catch up to the most recent innovation in naval warfare in order to remain competitive in on the seas only to see their new ships made obsolete as the next innovative ship design appeared. The technological uncertainty of the nineteenth century is exemplified in Dahl's article in which he cites one of Britain's leading shipbuilders of the nineteenth century, Sir Nathaniel Barnaby: "The introduction of the screw propeller into the Navy in 1844 made a magnificent Navy obsolete; the realization of the terrible effects of shell fire in 1854 again rendered our grand screw line-of-battle ships and frigates things of the past" (112). Within the span of a decade then, the fleet would be made obsolete at least twice. This can be reasonably argued to be a situation where the innovation and technological advancement of the age progressed faster than the construction of new battlefleets could be constructed. But it was not merely on the construction side alone that issues arose with these rapid advances. "The greatest technological development was steam propulsion, which made ships independent of the wind and gave them much greater speed—especially with the later addition of the steam turbine. Other changes affected naval armor and ordnance. These developments led to confusion in naval tactics, with some strategists predicting that future naval warfare would be chaotic" (Dahl, 112). This uncertainty in the future of naval warfare would lead to some naval strategists questioning the future of battleships or capital ships in general.

With new ships becoming obsolete within the span of a decade, the nineteenth century brought more than just confusion within the naval command structure regarding future tactics and it brought more than a financial strain on governments due to a desire to maintain an up-to-date fleet. The issue that would have been blatantly obvious to admirals and governments at the time was the fact that with such rapid advances in ship armour, armaments, and in maritime strategies, dominion over the seas would no longer be assured with a large fleet, but by a modern fleet; and all of a sudden, all nations were equal in having obsolete fleets and it would become a race to construct the newest and most modern ships possible. However, this would have been far more taxing on the naval

budget than ever before, which may explain why some admirals - in this case in France - began to look beyond the capital ships for the future of naval warfare.

This led to the *Jeune École* movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Interestingly, the suggestion that the battleship was a thing of the past came at a time where the battleship had not yet taken its final form; or perhaps its most recognisable form. According to Dahl, a movement arose within naval circles to instead rely on: "smaller, faster forces, networked by new technology and following the latest ideas of business and economics, could replace in part the large, expensive military forces currently in use" (109). This particular movement was the brainchild of French Vice-Admiral Hyacinthe Laurent Théophile Aube in the late nineteenth century and known as *Jeune École* or *Young School* (Dahl, 109). Aube's ideas weren't shared by the French naval command and according to Dahl: "The orthodox view among French naval officers at that time was essentially Mahanian, holding that only the clash of arms at sea could be decisive" (114). *Jeune École* opposed to the thoughts of Admiral Alfred Mahan can be simplified to the opinion that naval warfare should be conducted by smaller, faster, and cheaper vessels fitted with the latest technology opposed to the opinion that it is the capital ships that will be the deciding factor in maritime battles and thereby the way to achieve dominance of the sea.

The British Empire would be especially vulnerable to Aube's ideas of naval strategy; *Jeune École* being specifically developed to target the merchant navy and thereby, Britain's economic lifeline (Dahl, 113). Although the movement met resistance at the time and has since been criticised, the idea of smaller vessels utilising the most recent innovations nearly devastated Britain half a century later when Nazi Germany launched their campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare on convoys in the Atlantic. It is relevant to mention as well that the purpose of *Jeune École* was truly cemented by Aube during the 1870s when he argued that the objective of any war would be to do the greatest possible harm to the enemy. "This, wrote Aube, was to be accomplished by destroying the enemy's national wealth; the destruction of the enemy's battle fleet was by itself unimportant. The real wealth of Britain, specifically, was in its commerce, much of which was carried by merchant ships, so the prime aim of naval warfare against it was to destroy its merchant ships with commerce-raiding cruisers and torpedo boats" (Dahl, 114). Dahl further highlights a crucial phrase found in Aube's work: "To destroy England's fleet would be to humble her pride, but the way to make war on England is to sink the ships that bring the English their bread, meat and cotton and enable their workers to earn their living" (114). This would suggest that by the nineteenth century, there is an understanding within the naval command structure in France, and possibly in England as well, that although traditional maritime warfare would favour the clash of titans at sea, the sinking of the British fleet would be a matter of damaging Britain's national identity and their image of being the dominant power at sea. However, this might not have broken the British fighting spirit of their ability to reproduce what was lost. Rather, by cutting Britain off from trade routes and the materials that also supplied Britain with the wealth and resources to outbuild her rivals, a lesser navy could potentially defeat Britain at sea.

Of course, it is important to understand that although elements of the *Jeune École* was utilised successfully by the German Empire during the First World War and Nazi

Germany during the Second World War, the concept itself was too far ahead of its time to be properly implemented. According to Dahl, tests conducted during the late nineteenth century clearly showed that although torpedo boats had a promising ability to safeguard coastal areas, they would not be effective in the intended role as commerce raiders (116). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the field of naval research was constantly coming up with new and improved designs that further gave battleships an edge in the struggle between the *Jeune École* and the old guard in the naval command structures around the world. "Many of its tactical and technological innovations were quickly overtaken by other developments in naval warfare. The development of torpedo nets and electric searchlights made battleships less vulnerable to torpedo attack, and improved propulsion and rapid-fire guns gave larger ships the speed and firepower needed to counter the torpedo-boat threat. Smokeless gunpowder eliminated the artificial "fog of war" upon which torpedo boats depended to close in on larger warships" (Dahl, 119).

The large ironclads were therefore still considered the most efficient way of maintaining control of the sea at the turn of the century. The historian Lawrence Sondhaus, suggests that: "if the evolution of the submarine somehow had been advanced by a quarter-century, the *Jeune École* would have survived to establish a new paradigm of naval warfare, making cruisers the capital ships of the world's navies. In such a scenario, the battleship renaissance of the years 1890–1914 would never have occurred" (155). The battleship renaissance that Sondhaus is referring to is the previously mentioned rush of technological advances in the field of warship construction culminating in the design of the *HMS Dreadnought*, the first modern battleship and the beginning of the naval arms race that would ultimately lose Britain its supremacy at sea.

## 4.2 - *HMS Dreadnought* and the Naval Arms Race

"*Dreadnought* was an instant design icon, carefully styled to dominate her very slightly smaller predecessors. The new ship contained just enough stylistic reference to the old ironclad to demonstrate a familial connection: stark and simple, two funnels, one mast. Yet the overall effect was a new architecture of deterrence - armed might on public display, the symbol of British power in the Edwardian age - consciously referring back to a lost Victorian paradise of unchallenged naval dominance" (Lambert, 25).

The construction of the *HMS Dreadnought* put the confusion of which ship type would dominate future naval battles to rest; for a while at least. In the Lambert quote above, the image of the battleship as a dominating force on the seas is already starting to take shape and several historiographical authors paint similar images in their works. However, delving into the image will not be the first topic of this chapter. Instead, an understanding of the historical context at the launch of the *HMS Dreadnought* and the consequences thereof will be established which can then be utilised to contextualise the events and examine the battleship *Dreadnought* as it is portrayed by naval historians in the twenty-first century. It is crucial to remember though, that even in the purely

contextualising part of the analysis, certain - if not all - quotes put forth by naval historians will hold the battleship to a certain value and thereby either perpetuate or oppose the image.

According to Grove: "*HMS Dreadnought*, launched by King Edward VII at Portsmouth Dockyard on 10 February 1906, was a very special ship in every way. At a normal displacement of 18,122 tons she was the largest warship in the world. She had also taken a remarkably short time to build, having been officially laid down on 2 October 1905" (2007, 415). He further adds that: "*Dreadnought's* remarkable speed of construction reflected her even more remarkable nature. She was the first large armoured ship with an all-big-gun armament; she was also the first large armoured ship with turbine propulsion. She was, indeed, a wonder of the age, looking the part of the ship that was making all existing large armoured ships obsolescent, if not obsolete" (415). The launch of the *HMS Dreadnought* was very much a show of force by the Royal Navy; more so than any other ship launch. According to Robert Blyth: "The launch at Portsmouth was intricately choreographed to extract the greatest impact from the event. The crowd, the press, the fledgeling medium of cinema and the Royal family were all exploited in different ways to amplify the spectacle, signalling not only the arrival of a modern 'super-weapon', but also the dawn of a new naval age" (2). The *HMS Dreadnought* was in some sense, a response to the turbulent domestic politics of the Edwardian age.

At the time, Britain was seeing an increase in Irish nationalism, unrests with the trade unions, demands for social reforms, among many other changes (Blyth, 1). On an international scale, as Blyth explains: "Victorian 'splendid isolation' and imperial certainties gave way to new, more intense international rivalries and a growing unease over the security and future of the empire, as brought into sharp focus during the Boer War, 1899-1902. There was also concern that Britain was losing its place as the world's major industrial and commercial power as first the United States and then Germany overtook the British economy in several major areas, such as coal, iron and steel production" (1). The launch of the *HMS Dreadnought* was therefore given much attention by the British media in order to reestablish the image of Britain's superiority; a nostalgic memory of the British supremacy of the Victorian age reincarnated into a steel hull.

This nostalgia referring backwards in time to when Britain truly ruled the waves may, at first, seem to be eclipsed by the new and innovative design of the *HMS Dreadnought*, but the ship's name was far from new. "Fisher [Sir John Fisher, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty] was not only closely interested in the appearance of the ship and its specifications, but also kept a keen eye on the past. Dreadnought was an English ship name of impeccable Elizabethan pedigree that harked back to Drake and the defeat of the Spanish Armada; it was also strongly associated with Collingwood and Trafalgar" (Blyth, 3). The *Dreadnought* was therefore both an outward symbol of modernity and Britain's ability to create the most advanced warship of the era with remarkable speed as well as a nostalgic image of Britain's glory days as a vast Empire connected by its sea lanes and protected by the Royal Navy. Lambert further supports the notion that the name of the *HMS Dreadnought* was a significant choice loaded with nostalgic images: "The decision to call the new battleship Dreadnought was a critical part of the process that made her into



an icon. Names matter. It is hard to imagine a new warship type described as a 'King Edward VII', while no ship could compete for recognition with the hero who gave his name to the 'Lord Nelson' to cite the two preceding British battleship classes. The American *USS Michigan* was a complete non-starter. The choice of a universal name helped to turn what might have been no more than a technical development into a 'Dreadnought revolution'" (22).

From this, it becomes quite clear that the *HMS Dreadnought* was a ship that in its construction alone was noteworthy and would become significant on the matter of naval ship design. However, it does also immediately become clear that the *HMS Dreadnought* is an image deeply rooted in British culture and possibly even in the culture of naval history; though for different reasons. In the case of the former, the *Dreadnought* would be the symbol of Britain's naval supremacy given that it was, at the time, the most modern warship in the world. In the case of the latter, the image may be similar although without the sense of Britishness and national pride but rather with an understanding of the importance that the *HMS Dreadnought* had on warship design. How she became a temporary manifestation that disproved the notion that the battleships were unnecessary in a modern navy as the *Jeune École* movement had argued they would be.

Things were not that simple however. Fisher, First Sea Lord and thereby the head of the Royal Navy at the time of *HMS Dreadnought's* launch, was more in favour of cruisers. According to Grove, Fisher argued against the further development of the battleship at the time arguing, as Admiral Aube had done in France, that the development of torpedoes and sub-surface vessels undermined the battleships' function in a modern navy (2007, 419). Furthermore, Grove quotes Fisher to have suggested that: "They had only been essential when they were the only things that could sink other battleships" (2007, 419). This is an important part to take note of. This suggests that Fisher was not opposed to the battleship as a type of ship. However, he acknowledged the fact that technological advances were making the battleship more vulnerable to modern warfare and thus would not be essential to a nation maintaining naval superiority. Instead of the battleship, however, Fisher was particularly interested in the potential of the modern cruiser; the more lightly armoured and thus faster warship compared to the battleship but with similar armaments (Grove 2007, 419).

Just like Admiral Aube in France during the nineteenth century, Fisher would be up against an old guard within the Admiralty. The political head of the Admiralty, William Palmer, the second Earl of Selborne, was a conservative when it came to the matter of the battleship's place in the modern navy (Grove 2007, 419). So Fisher would have to accept that the battleship would continue to be the Royal Navy's most significant tool utilised to establish rulership of the sea. According to Matthew Seligmann, three factors contributed heavily to the decision to construct *HMS Dreadnought* and thereby continuing the battleship-focused navy:

"First, the development of gunnery, which had advanced to the point that 'long-range hitting had become practical,' but only for ships with a uniform armament of heavy guns capable of firing in salvos; second, to the increased

effectiveness of the torpedo, which required battleships to be able to fight beyond its range, again necessitating ships with large numbers of heavy guns; and third, to the assumption that, as 'some foreign country might arrive at the same conclusions' about gunnery and the torpedo, Britain, to maintain its supremacy at sea, had to be the first to build an all-big-gun battleship" (303).

The first point, regarding uniform armaments - cannons of the same calibre - may seem reasonable from a purely military point of view, however, according to Grove, another reason for this to be such an important point in the conceptualisation of the *HMS Dreadnought* was purely financial (2007, 420). Britain had, with the Naval Defence Act of 1889, adopted a two-power standard which stated that the strength of the Royal Navy should always have a number of battleships in active service equal to the combined number of battleships in the service of the world's next two largest navies (Sondhaus, 161). Furthermore, Nicholas Rodger highlights an important aspect of the two-power standard that is highly relevant to this thesis: "it cast the debate solely in terms of battleships, though the experts were at least as interested in cruisers and in the extent to which the functions of cruisers and battleships might overlap" (9). Supremacy at sea and the upcoming naval arms race would, therefore, be measured in a nation's ability to construct and utilise battleships; at least that was to become the main focal point of the issue.

In addition, Rodger argues that: "To complicate strategy, the Two-Power Standard had fixed the public's attention on battleships just as the advance of naval technology seemed to be undermining its position" (10). With the interest in the French theories on *Jeune École* in the nineteenth century, the battleship was already being tested as the absolute symbol of naval might. A symbol that was increasingly taxing on the national budget and would only continue to grow as the battleship arms race got underway. Even before the launch of *HMS Dreadnought*, as suggested by Rodger, the economic aspect of the arms race caused concern: "Seen from London, however, the overall situation continued to darken. Between 1889 and 1904, the cost of a battleship doubled, and that of a first-class cruiser increased fivefold" (10).

According to Grove: "The emphasis on economy reflected the problems the Balfour government had been facing in maintaining Britain's strength in a world of increasing competition. The rise of the German navy had advised a three-power standard but this was unaffordable" (2007, 420). The construction of *HMS Dreadnought* had levelled the playing field and in 1905, Britain was ahead of the arms race with only a single ship; the *HMS Dreadnought* itself. Britain had therefore, in one single move, acquired the most advanced warship of the time and weakened her position as the ruling nation of the world's oceans. According to Grove, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Joseph Austen Chamberlain, the head of His Majesty's Treasury, commented at the time that the time might come: "when we must frankly admit that the financial resources of the country are inadequate to do all we should desire in the matter of imperial defence" (2007, 421). At the time, the Royal Navy was an expense of nearly a quarter of Britain's national budget

(Grove 2007, 421). It can be reasonably assumed then, that Britain was not in a position, nor necessarily eager, to engage in an expensive arms race with the rest of the world. Considering that the British Empire was at a stage where former colonies sought independence, Britain would struggle to afford the consequences of the *HMS Dreadnought*.

One such consequence of building the *HMS Dreadnought*, as mentioned, was the following naval arms race. According to Grove, Admiral Fisher had countered any financial concerns regarding the *HMS Dreadnought* by stating that the new type of ship that *HMS Dreadnought* represented would be required in fewer numbers than the warships that it succeeded; three of the new ships would supposedly be able to be as effective as eight of the older ships in the service (2007, 421). However, Grove argues that Fisher's reasoning that the dreadnoughts were cheaper than the older designs did not take the following arms race into account: "by creating a more level playing field the building of Dreadnought did much to stimulate arms racing, especially the race between Britain and Germany that undermined the economy argument as naval expenditure sky-rocketed after 1910" (2007, 423). This is also where the sources differ explicitly in their interpretation of the consequences of the arms race. Where Grove suggests that Admiral Fisher was mistaken in the notion that the *HMS Dreadnought* would be a cheaper alternative to the older ship types due to the following arms race, Lambert argues that Fisher not only anticipated the arms race but actively used it as a strategy to defeat Germany without having to utilise the military might of the Royal Navy: "Throughout his career John Fisher has been intimately involved in the development and execution of British strategy. The tools of his trade as First Sea Lord, arms races, deterrence and newspaper warfare, were already strong points in his armoury by 1886" (Lambert, 26). The disagreement in the sources is by no means an issue that will be examined in regards to its historical accuracy. In this particular case, whether or not Admiral Fisher was aware of the economic consequences of constructing the *HMS Dreadnought* is irrelevant. What is relevant however is how modern historians choose to interpret his role in the arms race and thereby, the image that it helps create of the battleship; Being either a part of a larger strategy to secure Britain's naval supremacy or a potential miscalculation that would be the beginning of the end of British dominance at sea.

Regardless of whether Admiral Fisher wanted the arms race and used it to his advantage or if it was an unforeseen consequence of his desire to improve on the battleship with the advantages of his favoured ship - the cruiser - there is no doubt that the *HMS Dreadnought* triggered an opportunity for Germany to catch up on building battleships. "For Admiral Tirpitz, the mastermind of Germany's naval strategy, the *Dreadnought* appeared to offer an unexpected chance to overturn British oceanic hegemony through a concerted building programme that would concentrate German firepower in the North Sea, compelling an overstretched Britain to reach some form of compromise" (Blyth, 3). Although several nations rose to the challenge, including the United States of America, the main participants in the naval arms race would be Britain and Germany; in historiographical texts, this arms race is typically referred to as the Anglo-German Arms Race.

It should be noted though, that prior to events unfolding after the launch of the *HMS Dreadnought*, Germany had not been thought of as a threat to Britain and certainly not to the British rule of the sea. According to Rodger: "During the wars of German unification, those relations [Anglo-German] were almost entirely friendly. Britain had no essential interest at stake on the Continent so long as the balance of power was not fatally disturbed, and there was insufficient public or parliamentary support for intervention even in a relatively popular cause such as Denmark's in 1864" (7). However, the expansion of the German navy with several new dreadnoughts caused alarm in Britain (Rodger, 16). It should be mentioned that none of the historiographical sources examined for this thesis suggest that Germany was an equal rival to Britain in the arms race. Indeed, with the two-power standard in place, Britain had a significantly larger active fleet than Germany. However, as the critical component of the naval arms race, in the public's eye at least, was the battleship, the sudden construction of eight German dreadnoughts did cause alarm in Britain. Rodger describes it thusly: "The British public was as wedded as ever to naval supremacy, expressed in numbers of battleships, and no government, however large its majority, could afford to ignore public alarm. Even radicals were reluctantly forced to accept that the German challenge was real and unavoidable" (16). The battleship alone then becomes the measurement of naval power during the arms race; a rather unfair measure as several factors influenced the arms race. It is, however, a crucial understanding of why the battleship did become such a powerful image in British culture when other ship types throughout history - all of which may have contributed in equal parts to British dominance at sea if not more.

The arms race continued - in spite of efforts made by Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty from 1911 - until the outbreak of the First World War where the German Kaiser Wilhelm shifted his focus from the navy to the army (Rodger, 17). At this stage, the dreadnoughts would battle for dominance over the oceans with shells against armour rather than with wealth and industrial capability. This will be examined closer in the following chapter, however, before delving into the dreadnought as a fighting entity, the images that are created of the *HMS Dreadnought* and the battleship must be scrutinised.

The image that naval historians, such as Lambert and Grove, perpetuate, in this case, is that the battleship - with the launch of the *HMS Dreadnought* - was a symbol of strength and military power; a symbol of Britain's technological and industrial capabilities to design and construct the worlds largest, fastest, and most powerful warship in record time; a symbol of Britain's economic might which allowed her to construct battleships in such a large quantity; and a symbol of Britishness that transcended regional differences and united Britain under that one goal of maintaining the dominion over the seas that had, and still was, their lifeline as an island nation.

As both Grove and Lambert are naval historians based in the United Kingdom, the image of the battleship - the auto-image - becomes that of a merge between the old and the new. In essence, the battleship manifests Britain's place as a modern and innovative nation while clearly hinting at its past triumphs that paved the way for British naval supremacy and the cultural memories connected to the name of the first modern battleship; *HMS Dreadnought*. It is to be expected that both authors would at the very least

cover all the various aspects of the transformation of the iron-clads into a modern battleship; including the fact that it was a strain on the budget and that the idea of the battleship was challenged even before it was launched. However, as Cosgrove and Jackson explained in their definition of culture - and in this case, cultural images - it is: "the medium through which people transform the mundane phenomena of the material world into a world of significant symbols to which they give meanings and attach value" (95). Viewing battleships purely in terms of what they are: steel constructions that are larger and bulkier than other similar steel constructions, seaborne vehicles designed to conduct naval warfare, they are as unique in nature as a cruiser or a destroyer. It is through the discourse that defined them when they were created and especially the way that they are represented in modern historiographical texts that bring to life a loaded image. Considering then, that Lambert expresses the qualities of the battleship through words and phrases that are imbued with positive connotations such as 'design icon', 'stark', 'armed might on public display', or Grove doing the same with words such as 'remarkable' or 'wonder of the age', it becomes clear that there exists an underlying favouritism in regards to this particular battleship at least.

In discussing the less favourable features of the battleships, Lambert and Grove refrains from such value-rich wording and instead remains fairly factual in their delivery. Compare for example these two sentences by Grove - the first one, an expanded quote from earlier detailing the impact of the *HMS Dreadnought* and one a similarly expanded quotation detailing the financial considerations could potentially limit the future of the battleship:

"Dreadnought's remarkable speed of construction reflected her even more remarkable nature. She was the first large armoured ship with an all-big gun armament; she was also the first large armoured ship with turbine propulsion. She was, indeed, a wonder of the age, looking the part of the ship that was making all existing large armoured ships obsolescent, if not obsolete. She gave her name to subsequent battleships built along her lines. She defined previous battleships – in retrospect of course – as 'pre-dreadnoughts'. She was to give her name to an epoch of naval warfare" (Grove 2007, 415).

"A uniform armament of guns of the largest type was supported on 'fighting' grounds, but 'the purely financial side of the question is probably the most important'. The emphasis on economy reflected the problems the Balfour government had been facing in maintaining Britain's strength in a world of increasing competition. The rise of the German navy had advised a three power standard but this was unaffordable. In 1904 the Chancellor Austen Chamberlain had warned that the time had come 'when we must frankly admit that the financial resources of the country are inadequate to do all we should desire in the matter of imperial defence'. The navy was costing almost a quarter of the national budget. Fisher had come to the Admiralty promising

a cheaper naval policy to maintain Britain's position. Dreadnought was part of that strategy" (Grove 2007, 420).

Note how these two quotations read quite differently. In the first quote, the battleship is imbued with value by adjectives such as the repeated use of 'remarkable', or by the continued statement that the *HMS Dreadnought* was the 'first' battleship of its kind. On the other hand, in the second quote, an adjective such as 'uniform' in regards to the armaments mainly functions to factually explain the aspects of the battleship that was deliberated upon from a financial point of view. In the first quote, Grove quite clearly establishes an image of the *HMS Dreadnought* as a noteworthy, impressive battleship that was ahead of its time. In the second quote, Grove remains more factual in his explanation and the quote itself does little to inspire the image-creation of battleships.

The fact that the positive aspects of the battleship are highlighted by utilising a more flavourful and image-rich vocabulary compared to the negative aspects may signify a bias in the British authors regarding battleships; especially British battleships. However, it is important to remember that images reflect a stereotyping of a group or a concept that has roots in preconceptions. The iconosphere surrounding the *HMS Dreadnought* will be full of images created since its launch, some of which will be based on the highly orchestrated event that it was made out to be. As such, naval historians such as Lambert or Grove might simply perpetuate a preexisting image rather than create one for themselves.

Furthermore, looking at the time of their writing, Lambert and Grove both had their articles published in 2007-08. This provides further insight into the image that is being perpetuated considering that 2007 was the year of the global financial crisis. When Lambert suggests that the *HMS Dreadnought* was: "the symbol of British power in the Edwardian age - consciously referring back to a lost Victorian paradise of unchallenged naval dominance" (25), it is a mention of a time where Britain was a nation of incredible wealth written in a time where Britain, and indeed the world, was not. It is no surprise though, that images of national progress and prosperity surface during harder times. In that sense, the images - although they are rooted in something as specific as battleships in this particular case - becomes a way to reinforce a nostalgic longing for better times.

Comparing quotes from Lambert and Grove with historiographical texts focusing on the same topic, but written later, there is a significant change in the way the battleship is represented: "The pre-dreadnought era is usually taken to end abruptly in 1906, with the launching of *HMS Dreadnought*. The *Dreadnought* herself is more often than not considered revolutionary and an enormous advance over all previous types. The truth is somewhat different; every piece of technology that made the *Dreadnought* possible came out of the pre-dreadnought era and that included steam turbines" (Parkinson, xii). Although Parkinson's quote suggests that he does not regard the *HMS Dreadnought* as a ship of much relevance against the overarching role of history, the entire book from which this quote originates is focused on the role that the *HMS Dreadnought* played in British naval history. It is interesting how the quote, which came out of Parkinson's introduction and thus could be forgiven for being slightly more flavourful or partial to the perpetuation of the



established image, does not alter the image of Britain as being a technologically advanced nation. However, where Lambert and Grove use the *HMS Dreadnought* to represent this aspect of Britain, Parkinson does not.

A similar quotation from Arthur Marder further shows how the image that Lambert and Grove perpetuates is quintessentially British: "Every indication in 1904-05 pointed to the dreadnought as the battleship of the immediate future" (57). He goes on to add that: "He [Fisher] knew that the all-big-gun battleship was inevitable because of technological, strategical, and tactical considerations - above all, the development of long-range firing. 'It was,' as Bacon has asserted, 'the advent of long-range shooting, and not the *Dreadnought* herself, which made all existing ships obsolete'" (Marder, 57). It should be noted that Marder's image of the *HMS Dreadnought* is a hetero-image as he is an American naval historian. It is however still relevant as it may provide a foreign perspective on the more valorising auto-image that Lambert and Grove depicts. Note the phrasing 'immediate future' which hints at the realistic assumption that no innovative design would remain in the lead and that the following arms race would see even the *HMS Dreadnought* outclassed. Marder as a foreigner, however, would not hold the same nostalgic cultural memory regarding the Victorian age and the battleship that gave its name to all the battleships that followed it and designated all previous battleships as pre-dreadnoughts.

The prevailing auto-image of the battleship in the context of the *HMS Dreadnought* can be seen as that of a nostalgic memory of Elizabethan and Victorian Britain where dominance over the sea was established and seaborne commerce brought excessive wealth to the Empire. It is, therefore, an image power, progress, prosperity, and industrial prowess. An image that seems to be perpetuated in far more valorising terms during cultural low points.

The *HMS Dreadnought* was not the only battleship in the Royal Navy, and examining just one would be to take for granted that the Battleship as an image would have to have been subjected to a vast variety of circumstances and changing times that would leave it subject to be viewed differently. However, to briefly conclude upon the fate of the iconic battleship that supposedly changed the world, *HMS Dreadnought* never fired her guns in anger - even though she was in active service during the First World War (Lambert, 28). Lambert further highlights two moments that does bear some interest: "On 18 March 1915 she rammed the German submarine *U29*, cutting her in half. No other battleship ever sank a submarine. She missed Jutland, however, the one great dreadnought event in world history" (28). So the *HMS Dreadnought* did not leave active service without having contributed in some way to the purpose for which she was built, but in a different way that one might have expected. The battle of Jutland however, is the next big event to undergo scrutiny in this thesis.

It might seem odd that the battleship that was so revolutionary in 1905 would play such a minor role during the First World War; Especially in the historical event that is mentioned as *the one* great dreadnought event, the Battle of Jutland. However progress constantly demands a sense of: *in with the new, out with the old*. In 1918, new 44,000 ton ships began to eclipse the dreadnoughts; ships like the *HMS Hood* (Lambert, 28; Grove 2007, 425). Furthermore, in 1918 as Grove concludes in his article: "Dreadnought was as

obsolete as her 'pre-dreadnought' predecessors had been made by her. And the stirrings of a new revolution that would make even *Dreadnought's* huge successors obsolete were quite literally in the air" (2007, 425). The role of the dreadnoughts - not the *HMS Dreadnought* - as an image of the battleships as well as this new revolution that once again threatened the battleship will be explored in the following chapter. However, by March 1920: "She [*HMS Dreadnought*] was sold to the breakers, Wards of Inverkeithing, for £44,750 (she had cost £1,783,883 new) but was not towed round to the scrapyard until 2 January 1923. She passed largely forgotten and apparently little lamented" (Grove 2007, 425).

The purpose of highlighting this final quote here is that the image that Grove and Lambert, amongst others, have set up of the battleship is given a rather sad conclusion. One that almost personifies the *HMS Dreadnought* to the extent that the ships passing was given very little attention or grief. It once again highlights that the battleship had become more than just a mundane object, but an image with meaning and cultural significance.

### 4.3 - The First World War and The Battle of Jutland

"His [Admiral Alfred Chatfield] Board of Admiralty chose Jellicoe and Beatty as names for the last two members of the new King George V battleship class. Yet there were still echoes of unease. The fountains put in Trafalgar Square in memory of the two Jutland admirals were left anonymous. The two battleships were renamed *Anson* and *Howe* and only after the war were two busts of Jellicoe and Beatty put into the square, along with one of Adm. Alfred Cunningham, a less equivocal naval hero" (Grove 2015, 304).

The Battle of Jutland, as mentioned earlier, was *the* great dreadnought battle of the First World War. Its significance, although the battle ended somewhat inconclusively, is closely tied to the British cultural appreciation of the navy and its role in safeguarding the British Isles. Analysing the battle however is not the objective of this thesis and the intricate details will therefore not be explored. Rather, by examining key quotations by naval historians drawn from the exposition of battle, the image of the battleship will be examined further; and in a context vastly different from that surrounding the *HMS Dreadnought*.

The Battle of Jutland was fought on 31 May 1916 and lasted almost throughout the night to 1 June. It was the only naval battle of the First World War between the amassed fleets of Britain and Germany. It was a battle that in large parts had been anticipated since the outbreak of the war in 1914 by German navy officers and an opportunity for the Royal Navy to utterly annihilate one of the few fleets remaining that threatened British dominance at sea. However, the battle didn't occur within the first few years of the outbreak of the war as the German Kaiser and his chief naval advisor, Großadmiral Tirpitz, were cautious not to risk the German Navy by engaging with the Royal Navy in a battle with little to no strategic value to the Germans (Epkenhans, 122). According to Werner Rahn, the issue

that the German Navy faced was that: "By 1914, the time of the outbreak of the war, the High Seas Fleet was supposed to first overcome the numerical superiority of its enemy and then to search for a battle 'under favorable conditions'" (144). The German Navy was outnumbered and to avoid unnecessary risk, held back from participating much during the first years of the conflict.

Epkenhans makes another interesting observation in that the German Navy "contributed to respect in battle against the English and exerted its influence just by being present; it must get accustomed to waiting/persisting until he, the Kaiser, gave the order to attack or until peacetime, during which an intact fleet would become a major positive factor" (128). As mentioned previously, Britain had adopted a Two-Power Standard and sought to maintain naval dominance by being able to match the second and third largest navies of the world. However, with the German High Seas Fleet looming menacingly and a potential to strike at targets in the North Sea or against towns on the British East Coast, the Royal Navy could not ignore the idle German fleet. Even in doing nothing, the German Navy was a concern for Britain.

Although minor skirmishes occurred and that a few naval engagements were fought prior to the Battle of Jutland, it was the confrontation between the bulk of the two navies that truly stand out as a defining moment in British naval history. According to Rahn, the German High Seas Fleet numbered one hundred ships of various sizes and were crewed by some forty-five thousand men (143). Heading towards them on 31 May were one hundred and fifty-one ship of the Royal Navy with a combined crew of sixty thousand men (Rahn, 143). Of those ships, sixteen German battleships participated in the battle against twenty-eight British battleships (Rahn, 152). It cannot be overstated that this was a significant force that had been assembled on both sides. The Battle of Trafalgar for instance - a battle which the British hoped to emulate with Jutland - had compared to the two hundred and fifty ships engaged at Jutland, seen a grand total of sixty ships of the line and nine frigates (Claxton, Gurtcheff & Polles, 20).

The composition of the fleets that met at Jutland was for the British: the Grand Fleet, under the command of Admiral John Jellicoe, a battlecruiser squadron under Rear Admiral Horace Hood, a unit of two battlecruiser squadrons under Admiral David Beatty, and a battle squadron of four fast battleships of the Queen Elizabeth class, under the command of Rear Admiral Hugh Evan-Thomas (Rahn, 154). The German forces were split into two bodies. The High Seas Fleet under Admiral Reinhard Scheer and a reconnaissance force under the command of Admiral Franz von Hipper consisting of battlecruisers, light cruisers, and torpedo boat squadrons (Rahn, 154).

The battle began when Beatty's battlecruisers encountered Hipper's reconnaissance force. Although the initiative lay with the British initially, the Germans managed to sink the British battlecruisers *HMS Indefatigable* and *HMS Queen Mary* (Rahn, 161). The fact that the German's drew first blood and in such a decisive way is, according to Rahn, what prompted Beatty to utter the much quoted phrase: "There seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today" (161). It is noteworthy that the Battle of Jutland began with the initiative and the numerical strength firmly in favour of the British and yet had the German fleet deliver a sudden and decisive blow to the self-proclaimed rulers of the sea. Beatty's

outburst gives the impression that this early German victory was surprising to the British as well, and perhaps that the sinking of those two battlecruisers added the first dent in the otherwise impeccable British image of naval domination.

At this stage, however, only the forward units of the two massive fleets were actually engaged in combat action. According to Rahn: "Up until the High Seas Fleet attacked, the following losses had occurred: Beatty had lost two battlecruisers and one destroyer. Hipper, on the other hand, only two torpedo boats. While the British battleships had taken twenty-eight severe hits, the twenty-five severe hits taken by the German battlecruisers barely affected their battle worthiness. Only the *Seydlitz* had a burned-out cannon tower" (162). At that stage, the German Navy could be said to hold the advantage in the battle. According to Claxton, Gurtcheff & Polles, Jellicoe had ordered Rear Admiral Hood to rush ahead to relieve the pressure off Beatty's force and in the following exchange, Hood's flagship, *HMS Invincible* suffered a catastrophic hit that caused the ship to explode and sink (135). Although the *HMS Invincible* was not a battleship but a battlecruiser, it is quite relevant still in regards to the image presented. As battleships and battlecruisers are so closely related in form and function, the distinction of when one becomes the other is blurry at best. So although the *HMS Invincible* is classified as a battlecruiser, to the vast majority, it would not appear much different than a battleship. The reason as to why exactly the loss of the *HMS Invincible* is important in this regard is its name. A significant number of British warships bore, and still bears, names such as Indomitable, Inflexible, or Invincible. These ship names connote a certain hubris within the Royal Navy in the strength of the navy itself and hints at an image showing that the ships of the Royal Navy will dominate any opposition. Although it may not be explicitly stated, naming a large warship Invincible, indicates that the ship would be unlikely to meet the swift end that Hood's flagship *HMS Invincible* did during the Battle of Jutland.

This leads back, once again, to the thoughts within the British Admiralty that a battle with the German High Seas Fleet would be comparable to a new Trafalgar. However, when the Battle of Trafalgar had ended, Although many of his ships were badly damaged, Nelson had not lost a single ship (Claxton, Gurtcheff & Polles, 49). The main forces of both fleets had only just made contact and it was the British that had suffered the most significant losses in the form of three battlecruisers and one rear admiral.

When darkness fell, Jellicoe rejected the notion of continuing the battle between the capital ships as the German High Seas Fleet was on a homeward course. Quoting Jellicoe, Rahn writes: "I rejected at once the idea of a night action between the heavy ships, as leading to possible disaster owing, first, to the presence of torpedo craft in such large numbers, and, secondly, to the impossibility of distinguishing between our own and enemy vessels" (176). Note here that risking the battleships, the mighty symbols of power that had endured the *Jeune École* movement on paper, found the threat significant in a combat situation. This hints at a discrepancy in the image of the battleship on a conceptual level and on the practical level when actually engaged in battle.

As the battle was coming to an end, the German navy had lost a single battlecruiser, one older battleship, four light cruisers, and five destroyers or torpedo boats (Rahn, 186). Britain, on the other hand, had lost three battlecruisers, three older

battleships, no light cruisers, and eight destroyers or torpedo boats (Rahn, 186). Rahn further details to the difference in losses suffered at the Battle of Jutland by comparing the losses in ship tonnage and casualties: The British ships sunk amounted to 115,025 tons and the German ships to 61,180; in terms of casualties, Britain lost 6,094 whereas Germany lost 2,551 (Rahn, 186). Furthermore, Rahn suggests that, in counting only the hits made by the all-big-gun armament of the capital ships, Britain scored roughly around 100 hits compared to the Germans who scored around 120 (186). With these statistics it becomes clear that Britain suffered the greatest loss in terms of manpower, material losses, and that the Royal Navy generally had performed worse than their German counterparts in regards to gunnery skills. The British had however chased the German High Seas Fleet back home to its home port so the outcome of the Battle of Jutland was very much inconclusive. On one hand, the Royal Navy had established dominance in the North Sea and driven the Germans back. On the other hand though, the Germans had dealt a significant blow to the British. Furthermore, the British had failed to annihilate the German fleet and thus put an end to the rivalry between the two navies.

In England, a blame-game commenced as to which Admiral would be to blame for the failure at Jutland and in Germany, Admiral Scheer advised the Kaiser to avoid risking the High Seas Fleet in a similar action as a similar result could not be guaranteed. Similarly, he realised that "even the most fortunate outcome of a battle on the high seas will not force England to peace in this war" (Rahn, 191). The Battle of Jutland had therefore not achieved the ultimate goal of the German Navy: to weaken Britain's position as rulers of the Sea enough withdraw from any further conflict, and it had not been a successful opportunity for Britain to settle its naval rivalry with Germany once and for all; it did not become Britain's next Trafalgar.

In fact, according to Grove: "Despite the many attempts to 'spin' Jutland as a great British naval victory both at the time and since, there can be no doubt that the failure to destroy the German High Seas Fleet was regarded by many as, at best, a disappointing failure" (2015, 297). The British view on the Battle of Jutland as a failure can be further emphasised by the fact that the two commanders of the British forces, Admiral Beatty and Admiral Jellicoe were not added to the naval heroes on Trafalgar Square. The quote that opened this chapter highlights this: "His [Admiral Alfred Chatfield] Board of Admiralty chose Jellicoe and Beatty as names for the last two members of the new King George V battleship class. Yet there were still echoes of unease. The fountains put in Trafalgar Square in memory of the two Jutland admirals were left anonymous. The two battleships were renamed *Anson* and *Howe* and only after the war [The Second World War] were two busts of Jellicoe and Beatty put into the square, along with one of Adm. Alfred Cunningham, a less equivocal naval hero" (Grove 2015, 304). The battle that should have been as definite a victory as that Lord Nelson had won at Trafalgar and thus earned Beatty and Jellicoe a spot on Trafalgar Square along with naval heroes of the past, did not properly represent the image that the Royal Navy, or Britain, desired to promote of their naval superiority. Two admirals who had only managed a meagre victory, if it could even be called a victory, had not earned their place next to men like Nelson and the new battleships under construction would not be named after them. The battleships had to live

up to the image of strength, power, and technological advances. Something that could not be achieved by having names that carried connotations to naval failures.

Although battleships have not been mentioned much in this chapter, the relevance of the Battle of Jutland on their image is none the less significant. As mentioned previously, already in the nineteenth century, the role of the battleship in modern conflicts was challenged and although the old guard had won the arguments, the battle of Jutland did little to prove that the future of naval warfare rested in the capital ships and the all-big-gun armaments. Furthermore, as the most significant parts of the battle had been fought between battlecruisers and torpedo boats, the battleship - as a slow and ungainly behemoth - lacked the ability to quickly respond to threats against Britain. It is, therefore, no surprise that the post-war period brought along new challengers to the role of being the dominant force on the seas.

The Battle of Jutland, inconclusive as it was, caused military thinkers to, once again, consider the role of the large battle fleets that had dominated the oceans so far. Ship design was once again in need of an overhaul to be competitive in modern warfare. However, from the end of the First World War and onwards, the role of the massive fleets and of battleships would be in decline. As Grove exemplifies, this can be seen in ships such as the *HMS Hood*:

"The launch of the new battlecruiser *Hood* in August 1918 was used to create a self-conscious memory of the loss of the rear admiral of the same distinguished name at Jutland. His widow launched the new wonder ship, whose design had partially modified with Jutland experience in mind. Sadly the modifications were insufficient to prevent the *Hood* from blowing up in her first action against German warships in May 1941, a disturbing echo of what happened to the earlier *Hood* and his flagship *Invincible* almost exactly a quarter century before" (2015, 304).

But it was not just an aged system of waging war at sea that was threatening the battleship after the war. Referencing once again the concluding quote from Grove's 2007 article 'The Battleship is Dead, Long live the Battleship': "*Dreadnought* was as obsolete as her 'pre-dreadnought' predecessors had been made by her. And the stirrings of a new revolution that would make even *Dreadnought*'s huge successors obsolete were quite literally in the air" (2007, 425).

The aeroplane was no longer a novelty to show that humanity had crossed yet another technological frontier, it was becoming weaponised for war. Where previously the major threat to the battleship had been the torpedo boat and a concept of naval warfare developed in France, the next innovative challenger came from across the Atlantic Ocean. In the United States of America, US Army aviator, Brigadier William Mitchell was arguing that aeroplanes could fight and destroy naval surface ships (Farley, 55). An interesting side note to this is the fact that the major theories that suggested a change in naval warfare did not come from Britain but rather from her adversaries. While the French theory of *Jeune École* emerged from the inability of the French to outbuild Britain with a conventional

battleship fleet, the fact that these ideas came from other nations highlight how rooted the image of a strong navy is in British culture; Power at sea was measured in capital ship numbers, tonnage of said ships and the ability to repeat the victories of Sir Francis Drake and Lord Nelson. Jutland may have shaken that belief, but it was not enough to bring Britain to abandon ship; battleship that is.

In the United States though, Mitchell tried to convince his countrymen, and the US Navy, that airpower would become a dominant force on land and at sea. In 1921, authorities gave him a chance to put it to the test (Farley, 55). Mitchell was given a selection of older ships including the captured German dreadnought the *Ostfriesland*. The *Ostfriesland* had participated in the Battle of Jutland but its impact on the battle had been somewhat insignificant (Farley, 54). After the war, according to Farley: "The surviving German fleet was parceled out among the great powers, *Ostfriesland* going to the United States" (54). The German Navy had, therefore, ceased to be a threat in the quest of rulership over the oceans and instead, the US Navy had become the most influential opponent to British rule of the sea.

The tests conducted by Mitchell, during which US bombers attacked the *Ostfriesland* in successive waves resulted in the inevitable sinking of the old dreadnought. However, as with the *Jeune École* of the previous century, the results of the test were ambiguous at best and did little to dissuade the old guard to change their view on how naval warfare should be fought. Speaking for the future usage of aeroplanes against navy capital ships was the fact that although the *Ostfriesland* was older than most American battleships in active service, she wasn't that much different and if bombers could sink the *Ostfriesland*, they would be able to sink any active vessel as well (Farley, 55). However, while Mitchell had successfully proved that aeroplanes could sink a battleship, the Navy countered the outcome with the following arguments:

Firstly, that the *Ostfriesland* had been stationary during the test which would have simplified bombing her (Farley, 55).

Secondly, that the *Ostfriesland* was poorly maintained at this stage and the ship had already been taking in water before the bombing commenced.

Furthermore, given that the ship was used as target practice and thus unmanned, the *Ostfriesland* did not have damage control teams on board to repair damaged sections. Therefore, even minor damage could sink the ship (Farley, 55).

It should also be mentioned that the *Ostfriesland* did not have any munitions aboard. Without munitions, the ship was immune to suffering the same fate as many of the battlecruisers in the Battle of Jutland: a catastrophic explosion in the ship's magazine (Farley 55). it is not surprising that Mitchell's tests were met with opposition from the navy. Not only was he not a navy man himself, but his test - although successful - was conducted in a way that gave the Navy the ability to shrug off his success with the

comment that: sure, he could sink an unmanned, leaking ship that did not fight back or conduct damage control procedures but what did that really prove?

To Mitchell though, the test had been a great success and it proved, to those sharing his views, that surface vessels, regardless of ship type, were effectively obsolete (Farley, 56). This is not to say that the US Navy did not take the test seriously. According to Farley: "In battleship refits after 1921, the US Navy substantially increased the anti-aircraft weaponry of its main units (57). However, it should again be mentioned that this merely mirrors the situation during the *Jeune École* movement. When torpedo boats became a viable threat to the battleship, the battleship was improved to survive this new threat with counter-torpedo nets, thicker armour, and the ability to fight at longer ranges. So when the threat from the air became apparent, the battleship again adapted to be competitive in naval warfare.

On a closing note on Mitchell, Farley highlights an aspect that substantiates this comparison to the *Jeune École* movement, without mentioning it himself: "Mitchell was surely correct that aircraft would eventually take a devastating toll on battleships; aircraft would sink at least fourteen battleships in World War II, the largest single cause of loss" (57). Both Mitchell and Aube had predicted the way of future warfare and both of them had to wait to see their ideas fully implemented.

So the First World War and the interwar years seem to offer a completely different image of the battleship that during the naval arms race that *HMS Dreadnought* initiated. Where *HMS Dreadnought* was power, progress, prosperity, and industrial prowess, battleships of the Jutland era were too slow to properly reach the battle in time to support to battlecruisers, they were used as target practice to prove that they were vulnerable, and aside from the numbers in each fleet, they hold no connotative connection to the industrial capacity of their home country. In fact, it would appear that the navies clung onto the old traditional navy in spite of its failures to accomplish what was expected of it; refusing new ideas because, in Britain at least, Nelson had not won his great victory with small independent torpedo boats or aircraft, but with the raw power of his battle ships of the line.

It is also interesting that Britain wanted to make the sinking of the German High Seas Fleet into a new Trafalgar. It highlights how important the image of a strong navy, and the victories that a strong navy can achieve, were to the British cultural identity. It is especially noteworthy that in failing to make the Battle of Jutland into a new Trafalgar, the leading British Admirals were not given a place on Trafalgar Square in the presence of esteemed naval heroes such as Nelson himself.

Most of the texts that were used to gain an understanding of the image of battleships in this chapter were published in 2015. Considering that the texts from 2008 that had a nostalgic and positive spin on the image, these texts seem to either focus on the British defeat and following in-fighting in the Admiralty or omit mentioning battleships all that much. Considering that the Battle of Jutland was, as written in the previous chapter, the great dreadnought battle of the war, any mention of the battleships are severely limited. Why?

Following a similar reasoning as in the previous chapter, texts published in 2015 might have been written in 2013-14. This means that the texts would have been written



during the move for Scottish independence. However, both a financial crisis and the Scottish independence might be viewed as having a negative impact on the notion of Britain today. Both might leave people with a desire to remember a united and powerful Britain. So why does the text vary so significantly? One reason is the fact that if the battleships were supposed to be the images of British unity, having more and more former colonies or member nations of the United Kingdom seek independence shows the long decline of the British Empire. The battleship then, can either be remembered as the thing that made Britain a powerful empire or it can be left in the shadows while discussing parts of naval history that deals with British failures of the past. In fact, the frequent omission of battleships from the 2015 publications at least, could be seen as a way to preserve the image of the battleship as a powerful and dominant force at sea regardless of the outcome of the greatest naval battle of the First World War. By mentioning the battleships in such a limited capacity can almost be considered a way to avoid tarnishing the positive image that the battleships evoke by not making strong connotations between the failures of the British and the battleships themselves.

Furthermore, as it was mentioned, Britain did learn valuable lessons from the Battle of Jutland that were applied to Royal Navy warships going forward and which led to more successful naval encounters during the Second World War. However, at this point in time, Britain's role as ruler of the sea was in a strong decline and one of the ships constructed after the First World War definitively sealed this fact; The *HMS Hood*.

#### 4.4 - The Battle of the Denmark Strait

"It was at 5.51 a.m. on 24 May 1941 - Empire Day - that the British battlecruiser *HMS Hood*, in company with the battleship *Prince of Wales*, went into action against the German battleship *Bismarck* and battlecruiser *Prinz Eugen* in the southern Denmark Strait. At around 6 a.m., the *Hood*, hit by salvoes from *Bismarck*, blew up and sank. This dramatic moment of total and almost instantaneous destruction ended the career of a famous and celebrated ship; a ship referred to almost routinely as 'the pride of the navy', 'the very embodiment of British naval might, the 'ship that above all others [...] represented British sea power; a ship to whose name the prefix 'mighty' seemed as natural and necessary as the term 'Royal' in 'Royal Navy'" (Harrington, 171).

The Battle of the Denmark Strait in 1941 is an interesting battle to examine as well, as the consequences of the battle was a symbolic end to British naval domination and proof that technological advances were, in fact, threatening to make battleships obsolete. from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century Britain, as an Empire, had been slowly heading towards decline and the battleships that were supposed to be an image of might and dominance were challenged by smaller and less image-rich vehicles; vehicles with fewer ties to tradition such as torpedo boats, submarines, or aircraft. During this period, according to John MacKenzie, Britain put a considerable effort into remembering its cultural roots of greatness on land and at sea (47). For that very reason,

men like Lord Nelson and Arthur Wellesley - the Duke of Wellington - were often featured in staged spectacles along with reenactments of military successes on land and at sea (MacKenzie, 47). This nostalgic longing for the past and a desire to remember Britain as *the* ruling nation at sea was then shattered during the battle of the Denmark Sea where the *HMS Hood*, the pride of the Royal Navy, was sunk.

As with the Battle of Jutland, this battle will not be analysed minute for minute as the goal is not to establish a conclusion on the strategic outcome. Instead, this chapter will focus on the symbolic meaning in the loss of the *HMS Hood* for the British and on the role of the battleship in that regard.

*HMS Hood* was launched in August 1918 and commissioned in 1920 and spent nineteen of her twenty-one years in service sailing the oceans of a world that was largely at peace (Harrington, 171). The design concept of the *HMS Hood* dates back to 1915 and she was to be one of four of her class. The others would be *HMS Anson*, *HMS Howe*, and *HMS Rodney* (Harrington, 173). Anson and Howe being the names chosen when the outcome of the Battle of Jutland made the Admiralty decide not to name the ships after the commanders of that battle; Beatty and Jellicoe.

According to Harrington, the four ships were meant to be: "the ultimate development of the battle-cruiser concept, designed to be heavily armed and fast, with four 15-inch guns as main armament and a top speed (achieved on trials) of over 32 knots, but relatively lightly armoured" (173). However, with the result of the Battle of Jutland and the fact that the German Navy was unlikely to repeat a similar attempt to initiate a grand battle, the construction of the ships ceased and all but *HMS Hood* were cancelled (Harrington, 173). The result was, as Harrington argues, that: "*Hood* remained a one-off, something of a freak ship, although undeniably a beautiful and powerful one. For much of her career she was the fastest warship of her size and firepower in the world, and for all of it she was the heaviest and largest warship of any kind in the world" (173). What is particularly relevant to take note of here is the blurred lines between battleships and battlecruisers. *HMS Hood* was, until she was sunk, the largest and heaviest warship in the world - even larger than the German battleship *Bismarck* that would sink her - and she was armed with battleship-grade armaments. However, it is in the significantly lighter armour that the distinction between battleship and battlecruiser is to be made. In many ways, *HMS Hood* shows its close ties to *HMS Dreadnought* in the way that both ships were the largest ships of their time as well as the fastest and most advanced.

However, a part of *HMS Hood's* significance in the mind of the British public is also to be found in the way the ship was, in lack of a better term, marketed to the people. Harrington exemplifies this by a toy series made by the company Meccano in 1934 that consisted of die-cast models of British warships. In this toy series, the *HMS Hood* was the most high-profile model and described in the toy catalogue as the largest and most powerful ship in the world (174). Harrington even hypothesises that: "it must have played its part in disseminating the image of the Hood as the epitome of British naval power among many thousands of impressionable young boys in the years leading up to the second world war" (174). Unlike previous ships that may have captivated the public's imagination through the newspapers, *HMS Hood* came into people's homes. It should also

be remembered, that while Harrington emphasises the role of the *HMS Hood* in impressing young boys to uphold this image of the ship as being the most powerful in the world, it is highly likely that it would be the boys' father who would have bought the models for their sons. Thus, one can argue that for the toy to reach the hands of the young boys, the fathers would have had to be equally impressed with the image of the ship.

It was not just in the miniature form that *HMS Hood* was noteworthy though. Harrington explains that: "From the outset, *HMS Hood* was seen as embodying the finest achievements of navy, nation and empire, and she slipped easily into the role of 'an ever-travelling ambassador' for Great Britain" (174). *HMS Hood* travelled the world, representing the Royal Navy as she visited foreign ports. She was the main event when the Royal Navy undertook its Empire Cruise around the world and in all of the ports she visited, the British overseas press and local newsreels covered the interest in the ship extensively (Harrington 174). *HMS Hood* shared many similarities, as mentioned, with *HMS Dreadnought*, however, it was in part due to the ability to show it to the people that made it an even more significant image to the British public. As Harrington writes: "No other Royal Navy vessel, and certainly no vessel of any other navy, approached *Hood's* status as the mobile embodiment of the finest qualities of her nation" (174). *Hood* thereby transcends being a mundane object and instead becomes a cultural image, not just of the Royal Navy, but of Britain.

*HMS Hood* was launched too late to have made a name for herself during the First World War and it is interesting that the ship made such an impact in a time of relative peace. Especially given that four factors affected the perception of the Royal Navy in the interwar years by the British and overseas public: "economic constraint, technological change, operational overstretch and international competition" (Harrington, 175). Several of these mirror what the Royal Navy was facing at the time of the *HMS Dreadnought*. Britain could not afford to maintain such a large navy in peacetime and the technical innovations that made old systems obsolete meant that the world powers were still competing to build the most powerful fleet; an arms race that Britain certainly could not afford to be a part of, nor afford to lose as it would have been the definitive end of a Britain that ruled the waves.

Indeed, the aftermath of the First World War saw Britain introduce what was called the ten-year rule in 1919. It was based on the thought that there would be no major war for ten years and that meant a decrease in naval spending, a significant reduction in warship construction, and a decrease in the number of active navy personnel (Harrington, 175). Furthermore, as Harrington echoes the issues of technological changes that have appeared in all the previous chapters of this analysis: "Technological change, notably the rise of submarine and air power, placed a question mark over the role and even the relevance of large-scale surface naval forces" (175). The reduction in warship construction meant that *HMS Hood*, for quite a while, was the only modern - in this case meaning post-Jutland - capital ship as the only other capital ships under construction were the battleships *HMS Nelson* and *HMS Rodney*; both of which were completed in 1927 giving *HMS Hood* plenty of time as the ship of the Royal Navy (Harrington, 176). The unique

*HMS Hood* was therefore showcased to the world and the Empire Cruise became a perfect opportunity to show the world that Britain was still a naval power.

The Empire Cruise was a public relations tour during which the Admiralty made plenty of preparations with local newspapers in the ports of visit to cover the event. Furthermore, the Admiralty hired a cinematographer to be a part of the cruise to create a film about the cruise to be released on Empire Day, 1925 (177). Like the great spectacles of Britain's military heroes, the Empire Cruise would make *HMS Hood* a household name.

Harrington explains why the Empire Cruise was such a big deal: "The cruise, then, was to be part public relations exercise for Great Britain and the Royal Navy, and part training programme for the ships and crews involved; but most importantly it was to serve as a tangible, highly-visible expression of British commitment to the Empire, and simultaneously as a powerful message about the degree of Dominion naval effort the empire required" (177). Furthermore, the Admiralty arranged to have the journalist and author V. Scott O'Connor on board to write an account of the cruise suitable for publication; this turned into a 300-page book filled with illustrations and photographs that came out in 1925 as well (Harrington, 177). There can be no doubt that the Royal Navy sought to use the Empire Cruise to maintain the image of their naval superiority and that *HMS Hood* was the perfect ship to exploit public imagination. Quoting a naval officer aboard *HMS Hood* during the cruise, Lieutenant C.R. Benstead, Harrington writes: "In this immaculate battle cruiser, the largest and most powerful warship in the world, the people of the Empire beheld a triumph of British engineering skill" (179). Furthermore, when writing about Scott O'Connor's thoughts on the cruise, Harrington writes: "O'Connor similarly, if more floridly, read *Hood* as an epitome of everything Britain and the British Empire gave to the world; power, order, efficiency and a kind of beauty, backed by unparalleled military might and ceaseless watchfulness" (179). The image that emerges is then quite clear. 'A triumph of British engineering skill', 'power', 'order', efficiency', 'watchfulness', and 'beauty backed by unparalleled military might'. These images are quite similar to those used to represent *HMS Dreadnought* with 'technologically advanced' being a key image of the Royal Navy. 'Power' goes without saying, but the interesting words, in this case, is 'order' and 'watchfulness'. *HMS Hood* would represent order in an otherwise chaotic time for the Navy when it was not given priority in the government budget. Order in a world where former British colonies sued for independence. *HMS Hood* then was an image meant to maintain things as they had always been when Britain was losing its grip on naval supremacy. The watchfulness further suggests that *HMS Hood* would safeguard Britain as the Royal Navy had always done and that Britain as a superpower would observe and intervene against aggressive nations that could threaten the delicate balance of power.

Harrington further exemplifies how *HMS Hood* was represented in images, but also how she became a steel representation of the British Empire: "Whatever the importance of the other ships in the squadron, there was no doubt that *Hood* was the focus of attention, 'the cynosure of all eyes on this cruise', the nucleus of the fleet; as the squadron manoeuvred, 'each ship as she swung into line revealed the controlling impulse of "*Hood*". She represented in microcosm what the empire itself was supposed to be: ordered,

efficient, purposeful, self-contained, magnificent but humane, powerful but benign" (180). What can be gathered from this then, is that *HMS Hood* essentially became a symbol of British culture, British military capability, self-sufficient, and impressive. In a way, *HMS Hood* became an image, not of Britishness as it necessarily was, but of Britishness at its absolute best.

*HMS Hood* spent twenty years as the mightiest ship on the oceans and was celebrated for what she symbolised and this, of course, made her sinking even more shocking to the British people (Harrington, 182). What is interesting however is that, in hindsight, the sinking of *HMS Hood* is probably the outcome that was to be expected of the Battle of the Denmark Strait. According to Harrington: "When *Hood* sailed into action against *Bismarck* in May 1941, it was not an equal contest. The German battleship was brand-new, technologically-advanced and heavily armoured; *Hood* was [...] an obsolete and vulnerable ship, a virtually unaltered floating museum of 1920 naval technology. Her loss to the guns of the German ships was as wholly predictable as it was entirely shocking" (182). The German battleship *Bismarck* was launched in 1939 and thus fought with naval technology that was about twenty years more advanced than *HMS Hood*. Furthermore, *Bismarck* was a battleship whereas *HMS Hood* was a battlecruiser. Although *HMS Hood* was larger and heavier than the *Bismarck*, and both ships had battleship armaments, *HMS Hood* was more lightly armoured than the *Bismarck* and *Bismarck* had more advanced targeting systems.

Still, the loss made the London Times issue its 26 May newspaper announcing the sinking of *HMS Hood* as: "the heaviest blow the navy has received in the war" (Harrington, 182). Also within the Royal Navy did the sinking of the flagship come as a shock. According to Harrington, a naval officer serving on the cruiser *HMS Suffolk* wrote about the sinking how: "unutterable sorrow and a dumb rage against the enemy filled our whole beings", when it became clear that the *Hood* had been destroyed" (182). What might now be considered a fully predictable outcome was however devastating to Britain and it was made even more shocking by the relative ease with which *Bismarck* had defeated the pride of the Royal Navy. The battle had begun at 5.51AM and by 6.00AM, *HMS Hood* was destroyed (Harrington, 171). A decisive blow had been dealt to the Royal Navy in less than nine minutes by the German Kriegsmarine. On the contrary, the battle of Jutland had lasted for approximately twelve hours and ended inconclusively for Britain. What was worse for the British was that *HMS Hood* had not managed to hit the *Bismarck* at all during the brief battle (Harrington, 183). Only the ship accompanying *HMS Hood*, the battleship *HMS Prince of Wales*, was able to hit *Bismarck* and although she caused the German battleship to leak oil, *Bismarck* was only lightly damaged by the meeting with two British capital ships (Harrington, 183). *HMS Prince of Wales* had to disengage from the combat as she was alone against the modern German battleship and the German battlecruiser *Prinz Eugen*. This meant that *Bismarck* could sail into the Atlantic where she would pose a great threat to Allied shipping; the very veins of resources that Aube already in the nineteenth century recognised as the greatest weakness of Britain.

However, Britain did not intend to let the *Bismarck* threaten the Atlantic convoys. After the conclusion of the Battle of the Denmark Strait, which was a decisive victory for

Germany, the Royal Navy assembled a task force to hunt down and destroy the *Bismarck*. According to Harrington, the *Bismarck* was eventually hit by torpedo bombers from the aircraft carrier *HMS Ark Royal* on the day after the Battle of the Denmark Strait (183). This crippled the *Bismarck* to a crawl and the rest of the task force came in for the kill. Interestingly, British newspapers did not announce the sinking of the *Bismarck* as a successful move by the Royal Navy to secure the Atlantic convoys. Instead, as Harrington writes: "Subsequently, the hunt for and destruction of the *Bismarck* was seen in the light of *Hood's* loss, as if that event had become the central focus of the campaign; thus, the Gaumont British newsreels of 29 May 1941 reporting *Bismarck's* sinking on 26 May bore the title 'H.M.S. Hood Avenged', while the British Movietone version was 'Bismarck Sunk: Navy Revenges Hood by Sinking Bismarck'" (183). *Bismarck* had put a dent in the otherwise well-polished image of the Royal Navy being the most powerful navy in the world and *HMS Hood* being the manifestation of that power. In the Atlantic, convoys were already suffering the u-boat menace and although the *Bismarck* would have been a significant threat, it was crucial for the image of British naval power to avenge the sinking of the ship that embodied said power. The newspapers would report on the sinking of the *Bismarck* that: "H.M.S. Hood Avenged" or "Bismarck Sunk: Navy Revenges Hood by Sinking Bismarck" (Harrington, 183). Restoring, or at least attempting to restore, the image of the all-powerful, efficient, watchful navy that brought order to the Empire through 'unparalleled military might'. As mentioned, none of the shells fired by *HMS Hood* hit the *Bismarck*, but as Harrington suggests: "it could very well have been believed that *Hood's* shells had struck home, and the important point is that those confronting the loss of the ship wanted to believe that they had" (183). The image of unparalleled military might would not bear the uneven realities of the battle in which the symbol of Britain's maritime aspirations had been sunk within minutes and without having even scratched the *Bismarck's* paint.

Harrington summarises the issue of *HMS Hood* thusly: "she was designed as a fast platform for heavy guns in which armour was sacrificed for speed. She thus represented a ship type whose concept had been undermined by the experience of Jutland and whose role, perhaps more than any other type of surface ship, was compromised and unclear in the postwar world" (184). Traditional thoughts on naval strategy had guided the design and construction and the lessons learned at the Battle of Jutland came a little too late to change the role of *HMS Hood*. However, as she spent most of her active years in peacetime, her function as the symbol of power and Imperial order, would not be challenged. In his conclusion about the *HMS Hood*, Harrington reasons that:

"She sailed the peacetime ocean as a magnificent anachronism, and went to war famous, majestic, vulnerable and obsolete. *Hood* was consistently represented as the pride of the world's greatest navy, the biggest, the best, the most powerful; but she was in reality a splendid anomaly from the moment of her launch. In her glittering interwar career 'showing the flag' and in the heroism and tragedy of her destruction, this great imperial warship can

be said to have embodied the unresolved paradoxes and ambiguities of the twentieth-century British national and imperial identity" (185).

It is exactly the symbolic significance of *HMS Hood* that reveals a defining moment in the decline of the British rule at sea. However, while *HMS Hood* remains an image-rich ship in and of itself, the symbolic value that it is given in historiographical texts such as Harrington's, further implies an added layer of nostalgic value and remembrance of the Empire in modern rewritings of the Battle of the Denmark Strait.

Looking at the quote that opened this chapter, for example, Harrington makes a brief account of the battle that, by the addition of two words, makes the sinking of *HMS Hood* into a definitive symbol that Britain was moving towards decline:

"It was at 5.51 a.m. on 24 May 1941 - Empire Day - that the British battlecruiser *HMS Hood*, in company with the battleship *Prince of Wales*, went into action against the German battleship *Bismarck* and battlecruiser *Prinz Eugen* in the southern Denmark Strait. At around 6 a.m., the *Hood*, hit by salvoes from *Bismarck*, blew up and sank. This dramatic moment of total and almost instantaneous destruction ended the career of a famous and celebrated ship; a ship referred to almost routinely as 'the pride of the navy', 'the very embodiment of British naval might', the ship that above all others [...] represented British sea power; a ship to whose name the prefix 'mighty' seemed as natural and necessary as the term 'Royal' in 'Royal Navy'" (Harrington, 171).

The two words in question here are the mention of Empire Day. Empire Day was an annual event that took place on 24 May following the death of Queen Victoria in 1901; 24 May being the Queen's birthday. Empire Day, however, was a national celebration of the former monarch, but in a way, also of the progress and prosperity of the Victorian age. As mentioned in the previous chapters of this analysis, after the Victorian age, Britain did experience political decline, a beginning imperial decline, and the strength of the Empire was being challenged from all sides. So when Harrington casually inserts the fact that *HMS Hood* was sunk on Empire Day, it seems reasonable to ask why.

The mention of Empire Day, of course, leads a reader to understand that the loss of the pride of the Royal Navy occurred on the very day that Britain was reminiscing about past glory. This makes the loss seem even more devastating because rather than writing about a single battle, or a single ship, Harrington comments on the decline of the British Empire and almost suggests that the sinking of *HMS Hood* was the defining moment when Britain lost their naval supremacy. Harrington's inclusion of the fact that it happened on Empire Day further highlights the discrepancy that exists in the nostalgic memory of British Imperialism and the Britain that was during the writing of the article. Harrington's article was published in 2003 and in the years prior to its publication, the world had seen the devastating terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York, and in the capital of the former Empire, RIRA terror attacks made headlines when a rocket was fired at the MI6

building in 2000, detonated a car bomb outside of the BBC in 2001, and injuring several people with a car bomb in Ealing in 2001.

As mentioned later in Harrington's article, *HMS Hood* became a manifestation of the Empire itself and one of the images linked to the ship and the Empire was 'order'. With terrorist groups detonating bombs in the heart of Britain, that order would have belonged to another time. Similarly, Harrington described *HMS Hood* as 'beauty backed by unparalleled military might'. However, while there can be no doubt that the British military would have easily surpassed the RIRA in size, strength, and capabilities in the early twenty-first century, terrorist cells tend to operate with hit and run tactics; not using conventional warfare. That unparalleled military might would then be quite meaningless if it could not be utilised against the threat from the outside. The sinking of the Battlecruiser *Hood* then, and the mention of its loss on Empire Day, highlights the notion that Britain no longer holds the same position of power, neither at home or abroad.

The next question that might seem relevant to ask then is: what relevance does the sinking of a battlecruiser - significant as it may be in British cultural memory - have to do with the perceived image of the battleship? To answer that, it is necessary to examine the limited mention that is given to the battleships in this battle as well; which is surprisingly odd given that of the four ships that met in the Denmark Strait on 24 May 1941, half were battleships. However, at this stage in history, the new and innovative ideas that challenged the battleship were no longer merely ideas on paper, it was actual fact torpedos that threatened Britain's commercial shipping and aeroplanes that could cripple a battleship with a single fortunate hit. If the Battle of the Denmark Strait had been a case of two giants meeting for an ultimate showdown, then the crippling of the *Bismarck* by Swordfish torpedo bombers had been a retelling of the story of David versus Goliath. It does give pause for contemplation on the purpose of the battleship in a modern navy when these factors are considered. A modern battleship devastated an old battlecruiser with ease and then, a tiny aeroplane crippled the battleship, leaving it vulnerable for the Coup-de-grâce by the rest of the Navy. Although it happened twenty years after Mitchell's attempt to prove that large surface ships were vulnerable to aircraft and half a century after Aube's attempt to show that torpedos and small vessels could be efficient in modern navies, it wasn't until the sinking of *HMS Hood* and the subsequent sinking of the *Bismarck* that the world realised that modern warfare had changed; and not in favour of the battleships.

Although the battleships continued to be deployed during the Second World War, and with great success at times, the battleships had become an image of the old ways of waging war. Their sheer size and the manpower needed to sail these ships would still evoke strong images of power and might. However, they were no longer a symbol of unparalleled military might. In fact, it is reasonable to assume that the *Bismarck* being a battleship was an irrelevant factor in the symbolic value of the ship after the Battle of the Denmark Strait. The main motivation from the British Admiralty to hunt down the *Bismarck* was to avenge the loss of *HMS Hood*, and everything she represented. Britain was desperately holding onto the memory of naval superiority and *Bismarck* had completely shattered that by sinking the ship that alone became the representation of the Royal Navy as a whole; and of the capabilities of the Britain as a superpower.



The Battle of the Denmark Strait was, therefore, a relevant occurrence that required of the British that they should sink the very ship that had been so detrimental to British morale and cultural identity. It is not, however, that informative of the image of the battleship unless the omitted details are brought into the light. The moment *Bismarck* destroyed *HMS Hood*, she could have been of any ship type whatsoever. Had *Bismarck* been a cruiser herself or even a destroyer, she would likely still have been marked for revenge due to the damage she had done to British cultural identity. On the other hand, the other battleship present in the battle is hardly ever given much attention. *HMS Prince of Wales* that accompanied *HMS Hood* and managed to hit the *Bismarck* with her canons remains little more than a footnote in the battle. The question that remains then is whether the battleship, at this stage, had lost its place as the image of unrivalled maritime power and technological and industrial capacity given that they no longer receive the attention in historiographical texts or not. However, to answer that question, neither the *Bismarck* or *HMS Prince of Wales* would be suitable candidates for study. *Bismarck's* fate being sealed for other reasons than her ship type and *HMS Prince of Wales* being given so little attention. Additionally, the lack of focus on *HMS Prince of Wales* can be explained by the fact that the Battle of the Denmark Strait became a matter of the image of the Royal Navy and British identity and thus the image of the battleship would come second. Instead, the image of the battleship will be examined as a hetero-image of a battleship that was almost identical to the *Bismarck*; the *Tirpitz*.

#### 4.5 - Convoy PQ17 and the *Tirpitz*

"In June 1942, so far from making preparations for an epic battle that would resonate down the years in the collective memory of all maritime powers, both the Kriegsmarine and the Royal Navy were resolved to avoid any risk of confrontation unless victory seemed assured. As a result - for the time being, at least - the stand-off between these two mighty fleets was a high-stakes non-event" (Dimbleby, 289).

When the *Bismarck* had engaged *HMS Hood* in the Denmark Strait, she had been the most modern and advanced battleship in the world. Her sister ship *Tirpitz* would come to embody that following the loss of the *Bismarck*. However, while *Tirpitz* would become the precious pride of Hitler's Kriegsmarine and the most advanced ship in his surface fleet, the ship itself saw very little action. Regardless though, it did draw much attention from the Admiralty and the Royal Navy and in that, a strange paradox exists that is highly relevant to understand the image of the battleship during the Second World War. An image that on one hand could strike fear into the Admiralty and yet still be safeguarded to avoid it being lost like the *Bismarck*. This is also why the hetero-image of the battleship is worth investigating here, as the analysis so far has been focused on the way the battleships reinforced British cultural identity and pride in their strong maritime traditions. To exemplify what the image of the battleship could also evoke, the hetero-image must be explored.

In order to do this, one particular event will be examined in closer detail. An event that has been described as a disastrous moment in British naval history and, peculiarly enough, one in which the *Tirpitz* never played an active role. It is the annihilation of an Arctic convoy named PQ17 that will serve as the frame for this chapter and the discerning of images related to battleships.

In his book, *The Battle of the Atlantic: How the Allies Won the War*, Jonathan Dimbleby explores the fate of PQ17, a convoy that was to bring military equipment to the Soviet Union as part of the Lend-Lease agreement. The convoy itself, according to Dimbleby, consisted of thirty-three merchant ships loaded with "594 tanks, 297 aircraft, 4,246 trucks and gun-carriers, and 156,000 tons of general cargo, which was enough to equip an army of 50,000 men" (287). To protect this cargo on the voyage, the initial escort had been made up of six destroyers, four corvettes, three minesweepers, as well as four armed trawlers and two submarines (Dimbleby, 287). The escorting force, however, would grow substantially before heading off to the Soviet port at Arkhangelsk: "PQ17 had been given close cover by four cruisers and three destroyers, under the command of Rear Admiral Louis Hamilton. The Home Fleet, under Admiral Tovey, provided distant cover with two battleships, an aircraft carrier, two cruisers and fourteen destroyers" (Dimbleby, 289).

In total, the convoy was guarded by one aircraft carrier, two battleships, six cruisers, twenty-three destroyers, four corvettes, three minesweepers, and two submarines. A grand total of forty-one warships accompanied the thirty-three merchant ships of convoy PQ17. The reason for the strong emphasis on the numbers is to indicate that it was a significant force that left Britain for Arkhangelsk. However, only eleven of the merchant ships reached their destination and none of the warships (Dimbleby, 287). Dimbleby writes about the loss of PQ17 that: "it was to enter the annals of naval history as a maritime disaster that Churchill would describe as 'one of the most melancholy naval episodes in the whole of the war'" (287). It is worth noting that this, as described, most melancholy episode occurred after the loss of *HMS Hood* and thus after the severe blow to British national identity.

Opposing this convoy of more than seventy ships, the Germans raided the Arctic Ocean with Luftwaffe bombers and Kriegsmarine u-boats. The surface fleet would, according to Dimbleby, do nothing: "To the surprise and relief of the Admiralty, the might of the German surface fleet based in Norway had seemed reluctant to engage with the Royal Navy. Instead of joining the u-boats and bombers to do battle against the convoys in April and May, *Tirpitz* and *Hipper* had remained at anchor at Trondheim while *Scheer* and her sister ship *Lützow* similarly remained on their moorings in Narvik" (287). On paper then, PQ17 should have been completely safe given that a cruiser escort of six ships and twenty-three destroyers should be capable of dealing with threats from the air or from below the surface. The only thing that worried the Admiralty was the thought of *Tirpitz* going on the prowl. However, "Unbeknown to the British, Hitler and Raeder [Großadmiral Erich Raeder, head of the Kriegsmarine] had decided that the Kriegsmarine's capital ships should be held in reserve to protect against the threat of an Allied invasion of Norway unless they could be certain of success against the Allied convoys in the Arctic" (Dimbleby, 287). This notion of holding back the fleet unless a successful outcome could be assured mirrors the events prior to the Battle of Jutland where the German fleet was held back as

well. What had held the High Seas Fleet back then had been the Kaiser's fear that his navy would be lost and Dimpleby argues that similar notions were the cause of Hitler's order to hold the *Tirpitz* back as well: "Schniewind [German Admiral in charge of the Kriegsmarine forces in the North] was mindful of a further specific decision which had been made jointly by Hitler and Raeder following the sinking of the *Bismarck*. This was to the effect that no convoy should be attacked until any accompanying aircraft carriers – 'which must be recognized as the most dangerous opponents of heavy ships!' – had first been located and put out of action. Their fear was that an aircraft carrier could inflict enough damage on *Tirpitz* for the Royal Navy's heavy ships to attack and sink what was left of the Kriegsmarine's surface fleet" (290).

Although it does appear that history was repeating itself here, with a German surface fleet that was left at anchor to prevent any losses in a battle against a superior force, one crucial factor had changed between the decision to hold back the High Seas Fleet during the First World War and the decision to hold back the *Tirpitz* and the rest of the German capital ships during the Second World War: the image of the battleship! As Dimpleby argued, it was in large parts due to the loss of the *Bismarck* to an air attack that the *Tirpitz* was lingering passively in a Norwegian fjord. Where the German Navy had been concerned with a battle between the battleships of the Royal Navy during the First World War, it was not the battleships that kept *Tirpitz* out of action. In fact, given that *Tirpitz* was the most modern battleship in the world at this stage, she should have been more than capable of taking on a British battleship in combat. However, the fact that a single-seater aeroplane, that had cost the British a mere fraction of the cost in resources and manpower of the *Bismarck*, had crippled the German battleship and in a sense, doomed her to be destroyed, meant that the battleship no longer held the image of being unrivalled military might. For all of its big guns and thick armour, the battleship was now vulnerable. It was this vulnerability that makes the image of the battleship relevant in this context because it symbolises a paradigm change in the way naval warfare was to be conducted; yet, it also proves to be a time where old images of the battleship lingered on alongside the new images.

Even though the *Tirpitz* did not move to intercept PQ17, Bletchley Park did decrypt enigma signals that suggested that she was at large in the Norwegian Sea (Dimpleby, 288). The fear that the *Tirpitz* was headed for the convoy made the First Sea Lord, Sir Dudley Pound, order the convoy to scatter (Dimpleby, 294). Dimple emphasises the consequences of the order: "Such an order meant precisely what it said: the escorts would be instructed to steam away from the convoy at speed and the merchant ships, thus deserted, were to scatter before finding their way independently to Murmansk" (294). While senior officers in the Admiralty objected to the order and argued that naval intelligence was reasonably convinced that the *Tirpitz* was in fact not at large, Dimple writes: "Pound refused to change his mind. 'We have decided to scatter the convoy, and that is how it must stay,' he insisted" (295). With that, the entire escort fleet turned westward and left the merchant ships to defend themselves. It is interesting that, in spite of the fact that the Royal Navy had such a significant force guarding the convoy, including an aircraft carrier - a proven equal to a battleship in power - and two battleships, the image of

the battleship still evoked dread in the British Admiralty. It is especially interesting because while it can be argued that the *Bismarck*'s heavy blow to British cultural identity lingered on and that the near identical *Tirpitz* carried some of the same images that the *Bismarck* had done, the *Tirpitz* had done little to warrant her classification as a significant threat. However, the image of the battleship, that had been perpetuated since the construction of *HMS Dreadnought*, would have the battleship be a giant of unrivalled power and might. Everything that the battleship had represented positively for the British when they had led the battleship arms race was inverted in the hetero-image and *Tirpitz* was a menacing power that lurked in the Norwegian fjords. Furthermore, it is quite likely that the Royal Navy feared that the sister ship of the *Bismarck* would inflict yet another critical blow to British national pride.

In scattering, however, the British did stray from the image that the Royal Navy had attempted to maintain for centuries; that the Royal Navy would secure the British Empire and safeguard the commercial and merchant shipping that was vital to the survival and the prosperity of the nation; and in this case, vital to the ability of the Soviet Union to stay in the fight. It is further interesting that while looking at the auto-image of the battleship, it corresponded well to the image that the Royal Navy held in British cultural identity and the images of both would suffer over time and become obsolete. On the other hand, the hetero-image of the battleship would retain much of its previous symbolic value. The only difference being that it was no longer beneficial to the British self-image.

It seems almost like a cruel twist of fate that while the British scattered the large convoy and left it without protection, the *Tirpitz* remained at anchor about three hundred miles away (Dimbleby, 297). In fact, it took four hours from the order to scatter had gone into effect before the Germans even realised the incredible advantage that they had been given and then began taking the merchant ships out one by one from the air or with submarines (Dimbleby, 298). The Royal Navy then, had been defeated without Germany having to risk the *Tirpitz* in a battle; without leaving port even. The British fear of the German battleship and the German fear of losing it does further show this great paradox in which the battleship managed to be both a powerful image of unrivalled naval might and an image of incredible vulnerability. There can be no doubt that *Tirpitz* was a powerful warship; more than most other battleships she would likely face. However, battleships were a huge investment for a nation. They required far more resources, manpower, and even time to put into active service than any other weapon of war and the *Bismarck* had shown that even these large capital ships, for all their might and power, could still be crippled by something as small as a torpedo bomber. A notion that had seemed ridiculous a mere twenty years prior.

The paradoxical nature of the battleship image is further cemented when Dimbleby comments on the German response to the scatter order: "It was at this point, now knowing that his treasured battleship no longer had anything to fear from the British navy – that Hitler finally authorized *Tirpitz* to weigh anchor to play her part in the 'annihilation' of PQ17" (298). The *Tirpitz* would never encounter the convoy though and was recalled before even getting close to it. The battleship then, as an image, had definitely rattled the Royal Navy without any active effort to do so. However, at the same time, the battleship had also

gained the image of vulnerability that contrasted the fears she instilled in the British. Although the *Tirpitz* represents a hetero-image of the battleship in this regard, she was still representative of the ship type as a whole as well. Battleships still maintained an image of being powerful. Their all-big-gun armaments ensured that and shot for shot, the battleship was unrivalled against other types of surface ships. However, the question is, what would be the worth of that image if the battleships were kept out of combat to preserve them? How long could the battleship truly endure as a reasonable choice for modern navies to construct when their representation of might and dominance at sea was challenged with great success? Before answering that though, the fate of PQ17 should be wrapped up.

According to Dimbleby: "The cost in lives was 153 Allied seamen of many different nationalities [...]. The material cost was far higher: 210 bombers, 430 tanks, 3,350 other vehicles and almost 100,000 tons of munitions – a total of 142,000 tons of military supplies which had been destined for the Russian Front – was now rusting in an Arctic graveyard" (311). Considering that the Royal Navy had gained its reputation and the image of being the ruling navy on the seas through safeguarding the British Empire and its commercial shipping, the German destruction of PQ17 severely ruined that image. While the Admirals who had failed to ensure a decisive British victory at the Battle of Jutland were eventually commemorated with statues on Trafalgar Square in London, Sir Dudley Pound, whose order had left PQ17 on its own, would never stand among the British naval heroes such as Nelson on the public square named after in honour of the battle that defined and reinforced Britain as an unrivalled naval power; Unlike Jellicoe and Beatty who had, at least fought and lost, Pound had inflicted upon the Royal Navy an image of cowardice.

The ship that triggered the chain of events leading to the scattering of the convoy was eventually sunk in 1944. The image of the *Tirpitz* as a superior force at sea endured up until her sinking which is rather paradoxical as Jeremy Clarkson points out in a 2007 BBC documentary: "Incredibly, this mighty battleship - the pride of the German Navy - went to the bottom having never sunk so much as a fishing boat" (*The Greatest Raid of All Time*). *Tirpitz* had somehow managed, through the power of the lingering image of battleships alone, to scare away forty-one warships of the Royal Navy and she had done it from the safety of a Norwegian fjord. However, returning to the earlier questions on whether the battleship could endure as an image when it was being matched, or even surpassed, by other weapons of war. The Second World War was the last great conflict in which Britain utilised battleships. Of the battleships that had been laid down during the war only to finish after its conclusion, few remained in active service for long; the last of them, ironically, was the *HMS Vanguard*.

#### 4.6 - *HMS Vanguard*: Britain's Last Battleship

"In 1960, an almost unnoticed event took place that to a few people seemed to symbolise the ultimate acknowledgement that Great Britain had long ceased to be a major naval power. That event was the consignment to the scrapyard of the *HMS Vanguard*, the last of the mighty battleships to fly the White Ensign" (Smith, vi).

Those words in Peter Smith's introduction to his book about the great battleships reveal a conclusion to the battleship history that is not totally unexpected but definitely seems far removed from the spectacle that had initially introduced battleships into the modern navies. It further redefines the image of the battleship in the final years of active service that starkly contrast the image that represented the battleship at the very beginning of their existence. Where *HMS Dreadnought* had been the centre of attention for millions, started a naval arms race, and defined what all battleships should be like and made any other ship obsolete, *HMS Vanguard* received very little attention as it left active service and she had not been the source of any revolution in naval technology; on the contrary, *HMS Vanguard* - and the battleship as a ship type - had now become the image of obsolescence.

In this final chapter of the analysis of the image of the battleships, the last British battleship, will be explored before a conclusion on the battleship as an image can be fully reached. According to George Peden, the Royal Navy had an extensive naval construction going by the end of the second world war (241). He lists the extent of this construction program as: "three battleships, seven fleet carriers, seventeen light fleet carriers, eleven cruisers, ninety destroyers, thirty-four submarines and thirty-four escort vessels" (Peden, 241). What is highly interesting here is that the aircraft carrier construction has exceeded the battleship production by eight to one; the battleship that so far had been the image of unrivalled naval might - the measure with which naval power was defined - had been proven vulnerable with the sinking of the *Bismarck* in 1941 and the late war naval plans clearly shows that the aircraft carrier was taking the lead as the warship of the future.

The three battleships under construction were two Lion-class battleships that had been cancelled and restarted a number of times and the *HMS Vanguard* that had been progressing slowly during the war (Peden, 241). Once again, the contrast to the first battleship, *HMS Dreadnought*, is striking. *HMS Dreadnought* was praised in historiographical texts for its remarkable construction speed prior to being launched into active service. The image of the battleship, then, had suffered in the eyes of the Admiralty; especially considering that *HMS Dreadnought* had initiated a naval arms race that had made Britain increase their fleet of capital ships at an extraordinary rate. *HMS Vanguard's* slow construction meant that she was not completed until 1946 where she, following the legacy of her many iconic predecessors, was: "the largest warship ever built in Britain at 44,500 tons, and costing £9 million, exclusive of guns and mountings, which had been taken from reserve stock" (Peden, 241). The novelty value of Britain building the largest battleship might have worn off at this stage, but where Peden's comment really stands out is at the mention that *HMS Vanguard's* armaments had been scrounged from a reserve

stock. *HMS Dreadnought* had been all new, all technically innovative might and Britain had made a big deal of this fact. *HMS Hood* had similarly been praised as a unique symbol of British naval traditions. *HMS Vanguard* was fitted with existing armaments as funding into the battleship project had been insufficient to give her new cannons. Another issue that Peden uses to show how the image of the battleship had changed is that: "Manpower shortages also meant that *Vanguard* rarely had a full crew" (241). As mentioned in the first chapter of this analysis, the Royal Navy had provided Britain with a sense of unity to a people from a great variety of cultural backgrounds and geographical corners of the Earth. Although several factors would likely have contributed to manpower shortages after the Second World War, it is nevertheless interesting that the ship that - if history had repeated itself one more time - would have been the next pride of the Royal Navy, the embodiment of British naval might, and unrivalled military power, was not given new and innovative armaments and that the Royal Navy could not, or would not, provide the ship with a full complement. Either way, the result was clear: the battleship no longer held priority in the Royal Navy and possibly in the young men who would sign up for naval service. The image of the battleship was obsolescence and unnecessarily expensive weapons platforms that were outperformed by other, more modern, ship types.

It wasn't just the aircraft carrier that had made the battleship obsolete. In his book, Peden writes that in a report written by the Admiralty for the Cabinet in 1945 it was hypothesised that: "the 'battleship' of the future would bear little resemblance to capital ships of the Second World War; for example, if the rocket replaced the gun it might be possible to build a smaller ship to fulfil the function of destroying the most powerful surface ships of the enemy" (242). Now, Admiral Aube's innovative ideas in the nineteenth century were no longer foreign responses to British dominance at sea. The thought to use torpedo boats had been replaced by the invention of reliable missiles, and the image of the battleship could not endure the new weapons of war that could bring far more firepower, far further, and with a far superior precision to a target than a battleship's cannons.

As these new weapon systems had surpassed the battleship in almost every way, it is no wonder that the Admiralty eventually transferred *HMS Vanguard* to the navy reserve in 1955 and sold her for scrap in 1960. Ironically, the *HMS Vanguard* spent her time in the reserve docked in Portsmouth within viewing distance of *HMS Victory*; Lord Nelson's flagship that had been instrumental in creating the image of British naval superiority (Smith, vi). For those five years then, before the scrapping of *HMS Vanguard*, Portsmouth Harbour would be the home of the ship that embodied the image of British naval might and maritime prowess and the ship that was the image of the fact that Britain had ceased to be a major naval power.

That said, it is not as easy to find good historiographical texts featuring *HMS Vanguard* as it is with texts about *HMS Dreadnought*, the Battle of Jutland, or the *Mighty Hood*. Though this is no surprise. Reading Smith's introduction clearly shows that the image - the desired image - of the battleship is still that of power and watchfulness. Smith goes as far, in his introduction and expressed dismay at the fate of *HMS Vanguard*, to write that: "No weapon of war did more for Great Britain over such a length of time and so economically. Behind this forbidding but majestic bulwarks, Britain remained immune from

the envy and hatred of other lesser powers who sought to conquer and despoil it and subject its free peoples" (vi). In this statement alone, it becomes clear that there is a discrepancy between the image created by modern historians and the image that existed at the time when the battleships were actively utilised by the Royal Navy. Several times did the question of new means of naval warfare come up and in most cases, the aspect of economy featured in the British government. However, the image of an expensive and quite possibly conservative attitude to warfare is not one that naval historians are eager to portray. However, looking back at the previous chapters, the conservative admirals do seem to have played a large part in keeping the battleship at the forefront of the fleets for as long as they did.

Authors such as Smith then, seem to maintain a nostalgic image of the battleship which undoubtedly distorts the image of the battleship as it actually was. When Smith writes that: "In 1960, an almost unnoticed event took place that to a few people seemed to symbolise the ultimate acknowledgement that Great Britain had long ceased to be a major naval power" (vi), he highlights - with some degree of bitterness - how the decision to scrap the last battleship was given very little attention from the British public who should have been more respectful in closing the final chapter in the story of British naval superiority. In other words, Smith dislikes the altered image of the battleship as it no longer represents strength and that, in the changed image, we find evidence that Britain's cultural identity as a naval superpower is also a nostalgic image that no longer holds true.

## **5 - CONCLUSION**

Although the battleship can trace its origins back through the ironclads to the battle ships of the line, the images examined in this thesis were based on the final and most recognisable form of the battleship. However, what has become evident after an analysis of the major events that took place during the years where battleships were in active service, is that the image of the battleships and the image of the Royal Navy are closely tied together. In fact, it would not be too bold to suggest that the image of the Royal Navy is represented in physical form by the battleships and that the image is one of quintessential Britishness with deep roots in Britain's cultural identity.

It must be understood, of course, that events dating back before the battleships took on their final form played a major part in establishing the cultural identity that puts so much emphasis and value on the navy and rulership of the sea. The sea was a protective barrier around the core of the British Empire, the merchant navy was its lifeline to vital resources and great prosperity, and the Royal Navy was the shield that guarded it all. With decisive naval victories by admirals such as Sir Francis Drake or Lord Nelson, Britain had effectively established an iconosphere of images that all pointed to a desire, and a requirement, to maintain naval supremacy.

However, in examining historiographical texts written well after the Royal Navy chose to abandon their battleship program, it becomes clear that there are three distinct iconospheres at play when dealing with battleships and their role in representing not just



the Royal Navy, but Britain itself. The most obvious iconosphere would be the one filled with images that captivated the hearts and minds of the British public; from the massive media attention given to the new and modern battleships as they were launched to the fact that they became part of British households as toys for young boys. The second iconosphere being that which would influence the Royal Navy and its leadership to make decisions on naval strategy and military spending; although many of the images are shared with the iconosphere of the public, it is clear that even though many admirals were critical of new and rivalling ideas, the battleship was an expensive way to represent British dominance and one that came under constant attack from new innovations. The third iconosphere is that of the historiographical authors. While this iconosphere is based on an interpretation of both previous iconospheres, there is no doubt - after reading through the source material for this thesis - that these authors have picked out the images that portray the battleship in a nostalgic light.

So what exactly is the image that is shared across these iconospheres? It is an image that, when examined today, can reasonably be viewed as a nostalgic memory of Britain at the peak of its glory days. The Battleship as the embodiment of the Royal Navy, and thus the Empire, served as an image of strength and military might. In fact, it was even suggested that it was an image of unrivalled military might. But that image can be extrapolated from the visual appearance of the battleship with its large cannons and thick armour. The deeper images further tie the battleship to Britain as a nation as the rapid and numerous construction of these ships signified Britain's industrial and technological capacity. Furthermore, building several ships of that size and so technologically advanced also became a physical representation of Britain's wealth.

The battleships also became an image of Britain's ability to endure changing conditions in the world and still come out as a global superpower; the battleships had time and time again been challenged by new inventions - the torpedo boat in the nineteenth century and the aeroplane in the twentieth - and each time, the battleship had adapted to these changing condition by being retrofitted with counter-torpedo nets, searchlights, and anti-air weaponry. Although an expensive endeavour to participate in the naval arms race, Britain did manage to outbuild her rivals showing once again an image of the sheer will to be an unrivalled might in the world and on the seas. In times of war, the battleships would, ideally, be images of the unwavering and impenetrable bulwark that guarded the heart of the Empire and during times of peace, the battleships would be grey ambassadors sailing to ports all over the world to be seen by great crowds; thereby instilling in other nations a hetero-image of Britain as a superpower unsurpassable in might, prosperity, industrial and technological capacity, adaptability, and unity.

That is the image that would likely have been the most prevalent in the public at the time given that British and foreign nationals would have to base their image-worlds on seeing the ship and hearing about them, not on the hard factual counterpoints that would have troubled the Admiralty. For the Admiralty, the battleships, although they represented much of the same as they did to the public, were vulnerable. Battleships were expensive weapons of war that required excessive amounts of man-hours and resources to build and they required a large complement of sailors to operate. Losing a destroyer or a frigate

would be a reasonable consequence of naval warfare, losing a battleship was a blow to the national and cultural identity as well as a huge expense to replace. So as thick as the armour was on the battleship, or as big as the cannons were, the battleship was at the same time the image of unrivalled military strength and the image of the vulnerability of being the leading superpower. Furthermore, the adaptability to meet new challengers only got the battleships so far. While they retained the images mentioned previously - most of them at least - the battleship was eventually dethroned. Not because the images would disappear from people's image-worlds or that they would no longer be accurate but because some of the images were surpassed by images affiliated with other ship types. Unrivalled military might was no longer true as an aircraft carrier far beyond the visible range of the battleship and its cannons could send out a sortie to sink it.

What is curiously coincidental is the fact that the battleship, if counting the direct predecessors back to the battle ships of the line, followed the rise and fall of the British Empire almost perfectly in timing. The battle ships of the line that served in the early years helped secure Britain and her vital shipping routes and their crew of multinational men served to strengthen the image of British unity. The naval arms race that began before *HMS Dreadnought*, leading to many of her innovative features, and continued after her completion mirrored the industrial revolution that saw Britain rise even further as a global superpower. The later demand for independence by parts of the Empire, Ireland being a close example, would happen at a time where Britain's naval dominance was under threat. Finally, the decline of the British Empire and the slow but steady decline of the image of the battleship until the last one, *HMS Vanguard* was scrapped, cemented the fact that Britain had been outmatched as a superpower by the United States and firmly concludes that when the battleships disappeared, Britannia no longer ruled the waves.

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## **6.1 - Front Page Cover Image:**

Busovicki, Bryan. *Battleship Missouri*. dreamstime.com