

CROSSING THE LINE: A LOOK AT THE SYMBOLS OF THE RITUAL THROUGHOUT
TIME

by

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During the Age of Sail, sailors often marked their experience by the crossing of the equator or another Tropic line. This crossing indicated that the sailor had moved from the rank of inexperienced pollywog to the new rank of experienced shellback. The ceremony was, and still is, a rite of passage that led the sailors from one state to another, providing trials that helped move the sailors through the liminal phase between the two states of being. The symbolism inherent in the costumes, props, actions, and words can aid in modern understanding of this age-old tradition. This research looks at the symbolism involved in these rituals in order to achieve a better understanding of the meaning behind the rituals, while also applying the knowledge to modern day perceptions of the rituals in film, literature, and art.

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John Quincy Adams, while giving a speech commemorating the Pilgrims' landing on 22 December 1802, made the following statement: "Courage and perseverance have a magical talisman, before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish into air. These qualities have ever been displayed in their mightiest perfection, as attendants in the retinue of strong passions" (Adams 1802:13). This thesis is the culmination of not only my passion for history and four years of experience in the Maritime Studies Program, but also of years of hard work and perseverance over life's obstacles. Many individuals have helped to guide me, shape me, and support me throughout this journey, and I would like to take a moment to recognize those individuals now.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In his novel *The Diligent*, Robert Harms provides an account of a crossing the line ceremony found in the journal of Robert Durand, a French sailor. Durand describes the ceremony as a “[b]aptism of the Tropics—a carnivalesque inversion of the religious order and the social hierarchy—was...designed to create solidarity among ordinary crew members and relieve the pressures created by the rigid shipboard command system. The immediate purpose of the ceremony, however, was to baptize the six crew members who had never before crossed the Tropic of Cancer...” (Harms 2002:105). Although this example pertains to the Tropic of Cancer, the brief introduction to the ceremony provides a glimpse into the meaning of all such ceremonies at sea which were, and still are, often centered around the equator. As the quote above so aptly indicates, the ceremony served a dual purpose: to create solidarity and to baptize the new sailors. Just as the ceremony contained a dual meaning, the various components of the ceremony, physical, verbal and material, can carry a multitude of meaning. Through the examination of the meanings of individual ritual aspects found in the first hand accounts of crossing the line ceremonies throughout history, the changing importance of the rituals as well as importance of the ritual to the sailors themselves can be analyzed, providing a better understanding of this aspect of shipboard culture.

Although the crossing the line ceremonies changed somewhat over time, many of the accounts during the Age of Sail follow a general outline. First, the ceremony would often be announced by Davy Jones the night before. Davy Jones would alert the captain of the ship to the expected arrival of King Neptune the following day. When King Neptune arrived, he would temporarily take control of the ship from the captain and he would lead the ceremony, which would consist of trials that must be passed by the inexperienced sailors before they would be

accepted as one of the experienced members of the crew. Other characters may be present if decided by the experienced sailors. All sailors, experienced or inexperienced, knew their role in the ceremony and they understood the purpose, even though the inexperienced sailors may have dreaded the trials that faced them during the initiation.

Beyond the general meaning of the crossing the line ceremony is the meaning of the particular props, actions, and language used during the ceremonies and the way that these meanings changed over time. By examining the meanings of the individual components of the rituals, a more complete comprehension of the ritual will be established. The examination is done using the techniques put forth by Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and others whose studies were based in semiotics. Through the study and use of semiotics, a study of meanings and symbols, these individual meanings are examined in order to better understand these rituals at sea, to gain insights into the mentality of the sailors who performed these rituals, and to create a clearer image of the events of the past on board ships at sea.

The seclusion of sailors to their floating world makes the study of these rituals a key to understanding sailors as a folk group, or subculture. Just as members of other folk groups have lives and families that exist outside of the group, sailors also have families and lives on shore waiting for their return from sea. However, their inclusion in the folk group is often apparent even when on shore between voyages. Their clothing, their language, and perhaps even the way that they walk all signify that they are a part of a particular folk group. These pointers only grow stronger while the sailors are at sea. Sailors' lives depend on the smooth running of the ship and all of its parts, which required them to be well versed in the terminology of the ships as well as the actions required to properly follow orders. In addition to the skills required to run the ship, sailors also have their own folk stories and customs related to the profession, its dangers, and its

comical moments. Occasionally the stories are meant to warn of dangers or of places or situations to avoid. Other times, the customs are a way of breaking in a new sailor, such as sending him to hunt for an item that did not exist. The crossing the line ceremony is one of the more popular rituals, which formally presents the new sailors with a new status on board the ship. These aspects of sailors' lives are able to be studied due to the seclusion from the society at home for long periods of time and the writings kept or letters sent detailing life on board ship.

The focus of this research is on the symbolism within the crossing the line rituals as performed by sailors as a folk group. Using the study of semiotics as a guide, this study will examine the rituals for their content and the change of that content over time. The research will begin with a general historic view of the rituals, their potential beginnings and use among cultures, and any cultural variations. Next, specific examples of rituals as recorded in sailors' journals or other written accounts will be examined and their detail analyzed for symbolic meaning using the techniques of semiotics. Finally, the rituals will be analyzed in a broader sense, the opinions of sailors and non-sailors alike will be documented, and the view of the ceremony in artistic media will be analyzed.

CHAPTER 2: SEMIOTICS AND THE STUDY OF RITUAL

The world today is full of signs and symbols, from jewelry and personal belongings to statuary and community items. Even commemorative events and actions are ripe with symbolism and meaning, even though the meaning is frequently overlooked or taken for granted. The symbols often take the form of colors, shapes, numbers, and actions. For example, a bride wears white on her wedding day which symbolizes purity; whereas at a funeral, mourners wear black to symbolize their grief. The meanings are often specific to a group of people with similar cultural characteristics. Sometimes it is a large group, such as a country, that share these characteristics while other times it is a smaller occupational group, such as sailors. These groups which have similar cultural characteristics are considered folk groups and study of these signs and symbols is called semiotics. Through an understanding of the historical development and anthropological applications of semiotics in combination with a familiarization of the folk group being examined, the symbols and meanings associated with rituals performed by the chosen folk group can be studied.

Semiotics of Language

Semiotics, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is “a general philosophical theory of signs and symbols that deals especially with their function in both artificially constructed and natural languages and comprises syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics” (Merriam-Webster 2012). This definition relates to the focus on language and the symbols and meanings tied to the creation and use of language, as was studied by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and others. In his work *Elements of Semiology*, Roland Barthes (1964:9-10) explains that “semiology...aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these which form the content of ritual,

convention or public entertainment...” and that the study of semiotics eventually includes language. This understanding, coupled with the importance of the occupational language on board ship, makes it essential that a study of shipboard ritual include a basic understanding of the semiotics of linguistics and written language.

In linguistics there exists both language and speech, two different entities that are reliant upon each other for existence. Language “does not exist perfectly except in the ‘speaking mass’; one cannot handle speech except by drawing on the language” (Barthes 1964:16). It is clear that each relies on the other, being separate yet intertwined, to create linguistics. Within the general realm of semiotics, this relationship becomes complex as many of the words used are part of what Merriam Webster’s definition above called artificially constructed language, which draws from but is not necessary to the natural language. An artificially constructed language is a language created for a specialized purpose while a natural language is the language of a country or culture. Often times the artificially constructed language derives some of its words from a natural language, either a home language or a foreign language, and a mispronunciation may assist in the creation of the artificially constructed language terms. For example, English sailors during the Golden Age of Sail could use the natural language to speak to one another, and those Englishmen who were not sailors could understand this language. However, the vocabulary used on board of a ship that was necessary for sailors to know and understand in order to keep the ship sailing correctly may not be understood by many on shore and may be a mispronunciation of a foreign maritime-related term. This shipboard language is an artificially constructed language that draws on, but is not necessary to, the natural language.

Once the difference between language and speech is understood, Barthes takes the concept of the sign, the central focus of semiotics, and breaks it down into two parts based on

Saussure's studies: the signified and the signifier. The signified is not a physical entity, but is a "mental representation" of the physical entity (Barthes 1964:35, 42). This means that it is the object or situation that is pictured in one's mind when a word or phrase is read or said aloud. The signifier, on the other hand, provides substance to the sign, and this substance is material in nature (Barthes 1964:47). The signifier would be the words that are being read aloud from a book or paper in the previous example of the signified. Both the signified and the signifier join to create the sign in a two-part process called signification, as was put forth by Saussure (Deledalle 2000:104). However, in order for the meaning of the sign to be complete, the value of the sign must be taken into account. The sign itself derives meaning from the other signs and the setting, around it (Barthes 1964:48-55). The use of context to derive meaning also occurs outside of linguistic semiology. This concept of adding a third component logically based on the surroundings derives from Pierce, a contemporary of Saussure (Deledalle 2000:104). Returning to the shipboard example, during the crossing the line ceremonies signs were abundant both verbally and materially. However, taken out of context and away from one another the signs do not hold the same meaning, or value, for the sailors who were taking part in the rituals.

In regards to the discussion of value, and the relation of signs to one another, Barthes (1964:58) also discusses what he calls the "two axes of language": the syntagm and the system. A syntagm is defined as "a combination of signs, which has space as a support" which in language means that each word has value that is based on the words around it. In other words, the syntagm is like a sentence, where each word derives its exact meaning based on its use with the words around it and the way that a paragraph is divided up into multiple sentences. The second axis is the system, which pertains to the relationship of the words, or as Saussure called them "terms," and their similarity and dissimilarity, or opposition (Barthes 1964:71-72). This

relationship is based on things such as the word order, and how that order or modifications to that order change the relationship, and possibly the meaning, of the words. The syntagm and the system can be broken down to even smaller units of a word and letters. The organization of the letters gives the word meaning, and different organizations can form different words whereby creating a different meaning. An example of this is the words *god* and *dog*. Both words use the same letters, but they are arranged differently creating different meanings. The crossing the line ritual has very specific terminology for both the inexperienced and the experienced sailors, words such as *pollywog* and *shellback*, that when taken out of context hold a completely different meaning. The way that the terms and phrases are organized aids in determining the meaning of the terms.

A final aspect of the semiology of linguistics deals with the different types of meaning of words and phrases, denotation and connotation, and their relationship to metalanguages. Denotation is “a direct, specific meaning” (Merriam-Webster 2012) such as a definition found in a dictionary, whereas connotation is “the suggesting of a meaning by a word apart from the thing it explicitly names or describes” (Merriam-Webster 2012). Connotation could also be explained as the mood or feeling that is inferred when a particular word is used, and is often considered when choosing politically correct language, such as the word *obese*, as opposed to everyday language, such as *fat*. When these meanings are then explained and discussed in a denotative form, the language used in the discussion becomes a metalanguage (Barthes 1964:92). Essentially, during a ritual, a metalanguage is symbolic language, often non-verbal, that causes participants and potentially even observers to reflect on a larger concept. The metalanguage consists of “costumes, masks, floats, banners, tableaux, microdramas, and the like” which cause individuals to reflect on and better themselves (Turner 1982:203). This research, in a way, aims

to become a metalanguage, using the denotations to explain the connotations inherent in the crossing the line rituals on board ship during the Age of Sail.

Advancing from the basic study of semiotics in the formation, ordering, and use of words in linguistics, William York Tindall (1955) examined the use of signs and symbols in poetry and prose, which is discussed in his work *The Literary Symbol*. Signs and symbols, although interrelated, are not one in the same and are not interchangeable. Tindall explains the relationship, stating that a sign is “a pointer” that leads us to the underlying meaning of a symbol (Tindall 1955:6). In a written work, however, the symbol can have different meanings depending on the background and the understanding of the reader. For example, suppose an author depicts his character in a particular color and model of a car. The reader, if he has a certain positive or negative history in regards to that color or style of vehicle, may interpret more from the inclusion of the car in the work than was intended by the author. It is this background, the feelings of the reader, as well as the feelings intended by the author, if the author intended the use of the symbol, that must be taken into account (Tindall 1955:16-19). The author in the above example most likely did not intend for the reader to have specifically positive or negative feelings for the vehicle that he chose to use in his work. These feelings, however, will play at least a slight role in the reader’s critique of the work. For those authors who kept historic accounts of the crossing the line ceremony, the aspects of the ritual that are documented or detailed were what stood out to the author at the time and may or may not include the symbolism as understood by the sailors. This information, or lack thereof, is very helpful in telling about the author of the work or about the general opinions of the time period; however, it is important to note that the account may leave out important details helpful for the study of the ritual itself.

Despite the fact that a work remains unchanged for generations, the meanings imbedded into the work may change from one generation to the next, or as Tindall (1955:124-125) states, “...no symbol tells all its meaning to any generation.” This concept indicates that any research into the written accounts of historic events, such as the rituals on board ship, must be analyzed carefully and any apparent symbolism should be researched with an understanding of the meaning of the symbol at that time. Understanding the cultural and historic background of the people and the time period can clarify the beliefs inherent in the rituals. With this understanding, reading through an historic account multiple times may help pull out the symbolism that was missed during the first or second reading of the work, as “[e]ach rereading of a work adds fresh discoveries...” (Tindall 1955:71) which may enhance the understanding of the crossing the line rituals being studied based on the limited information provided by the author.

Semiotics of Ritual

The examination of symbolism in language is just one of the initial applications of semiology. Another application is in the study of folklore, specifically the study of rites of passage, and frequently takes place among tribes or in areas where the influence of the rest of the world is minimal. At the most basic stage, the study of folklore and the rituals of a people begins with a study of the culture of the people. Culture is more than the artwork produced by a group, or the traditional clothing worn, but consists of prescribed public norms designed to maintain a certain standard of behavior within a society (Geertz 1973:11-12). These norms may be based on religious beliefs, superstitions, past events, or perhaps just a society’s common sense. An understanding of the basic culture of a group allows for a better understanding of the events and rituals that are performed, although it may take some time and may never be fully comprehended by outsiders as it is by natives (Geertz 1983:44-77). Sailors were, and still are, an exclusive

group that, although they belong to a larger society with its norms and customs, can be identified as an occupation-related society with its own norms and customs. Shipboard rituals, often considered rites of passage, which have been performed throughout history and which may seem odd to an outsider, become better understood through a study of the culture: the norms, beliefs and expectations.

Rites of passage in general, sometimes referred to as initiation rites, occur when an individual or a group passes from one social status to another within a society. These initiation rites were initially studied in depth by Arnold van Gennep (1960) and were greatly expanded upon by Victor Turner (1967) during his work with the African Ndembu tribe. Based upon the results of these studies, the ritual process can be broken down into three phases: rites of separation (pre-liminal), transition rites (liminal), and rites of incorporation (post-liminal) (van Gennep 1960:11). Edmund Leach adds a fourth phase to this list, the “phase of normal secular life” which consists of the time between “two successive festivals of the same type.” It is this period between the festivals or rituals that allows human beings to record the passage of time, and to note times of special significance (Leach 1961:184). Just as certain periods of time are considered more important than others, each of these ritual phases can have varying degrees of significance depending on the practicing culture and the meaning of the ritual (van Gennep 1960:11).

During rites of separation, the individual or individuals are separated from all aspects of the society in which they live. This separation phase is a time when the individuals are released from their current responsibilities of their social status and are able to reflect on the importance of their upcoming change in status. This phase includes time away from family, from the home, from work, and from the society as a whole. The length of the separation time can vary

depending on the society and what is expected from the person or people being initiated, or as Turner (1992:137) refers to them, the *initiands*, based on the change they are to undergo. The sailors on board ship who were, and to a certain extent still are, expected to undergo the crossing the line ceremony often times are separated from the more experienced sailors as much as is possible with the small space on board ship. This separation may begin the day or night before the ritual is to begin, or may have to wait until the day of the ritual depending on the circumstance surrounding the vessel at the time and what work may require completion. However, by the start of the ritual, the dividing line between the experienced and inexperienced sailors is clearly marked.

Following this period of separation, initiands are placed in the care of the leader of the initiation and are expected to follow his or her directions throughout the rite of passage. It is this leader who moves the initiands from the separation phase to the transition rites, or liminal, phase and through the trials that are in place as the initiands make their way from a ceremonial death to a ceremonial rebirth. It is during this phase that the initiands completely lose their identity and are considered to be “betwixt and between” the status levels of society; no longer belonging to the previous societal status, but not yet achieving the new societal status (Turner 1969:95). The initiands often form a bond during this period, which Turner refers to as *communitas*, or a bond among a group of individuals who share equality in the sense that they are powerless. Turner (96-97) identifies three types of communitas: spontaneous, normative, and ideological. Spontaneous communitas, as the name suggests, is unplanned and defies any attempt at cognitive construction. Normative communitas is an attempt to define and constrict the spontaneous communitas with rules and principles. Lastly, ideological communitas consists of remembering the connection of communitas during the liminal phase of the rite and using that as a guide to

reform society. The inexperienced sailors on board the ship tend to develop this communitas as the time for the ritual becomes apparent. As the sailors perform the tasks required by the ritual leader, and as they complete their tasks and officially change their status on board the ship, they feel a sense of community with those around them who have accomplished the same tasks. They may also begin to feel a connection to the experienced sailors, a group to which they now belong once the ritual is complete.

This third phase returns the initiands to the society, prepared to accept the new status and related responsibilities, and with a new level of respect and expectation from the society as a whole. This may mean a myriad of things, such as the individual is now an adult in the eyes of the community, or perhaps is now a spouse, or a religious leader. In this new role, the individual is expected to use the knowledge gained during the initiation for the betterment of not only their own personal life, but also of the entire society. Following the ritual and the initiands' rebirth to the structure of society, they must find a balance between the communitas and structure in their new role within their society (Turner 1992:59). This balance allows the individual to successfully fulfill his or her new role in the society while at the same time taking steps to positively impact and potentially change the society as a whole. In this way, the liminal phase of a ritual promotes social cohesion but also social change (Smith 1975:10). This continuation into society is followed by the final phase, as added by Leach, which consists of normal life in this new role and lasts until the next rite of passage when the initiands again undergo a ceremonial death and rebirth into a new status. Leach argues that without rituals or festivals, the fourth phase would not exist as people create time by creating intervals in social life (Leach 1961:184). On board ship, just as with any trying occupation, rituals and celebrations, such as the crossing the line ritual, break up the difficult and occasionally monotonous workdays and provide entertainment

to the crew. This makes the hard work and constant threat of injury or death more endurable (Glassie 1975:125).

Throughout the multi-phased ritual process, the various individuals involved may perform actions while using objects and speaking words, all of which can hold various meanings in regards to the ritual being performed. Turner (1982:16; 1992:18) refers to these symbols as “multivocal (literally ‘many voiced’)” as they “represent ideas, objects, events, relationships, ‘truths’ not immediately present to the observer, or even intangible or invisible thoughts and conceptions.” The study of the general culture of a society can aid the researcher in understanding many of the various levels of meaning carried by the symbols. These symbols may also have two different poles of meaning, an ideological pole and a sensory pole, depending on how, when, or by whom they are used, as Turner discovered. The ideological pole consists of the norms and values of society, while the sensory pole consists of “natural and physiological phenomena and processes” and the meaning is “closely related to the outward form of the symbol” and brings about emotions or desires (Turner 1967:28). Typically, these symbols and their meanings provide examples of what is going on within the ritual to those who witness the ritual’s events. Turner provides the example of a milk tree that excretes white latex which is a representation of breast milk to the Ndembu, who view breast milk as “gross,” a societal norm. It also represents universal Ndembu experiences and is, therefore, “gross” as in large or encompassing (Turner 1967:28-29). However, these symbols not only serve as examples of what is taking place during a ritual, but also indicate what societal norms are in place, occasionally by reversing those norms.

The concept behind the reversal of social norms is that by making clear what norms have been reversed, the expected norms are better understood (Abrahams 1982:392). This even

includes role reversal, where a person in power may temporarily lose power and a person in a low social status may assume a higher position. During a ritual, this generally takes place during the liminal phase, when the initiands have lost their previous status but have yet to receive their new status; however, role reversal is not limited to ritual events and can be found in festivals and celebrations in various cultures. According to Turner (1969:97), “[l]iminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low.” Essentially, the initiands are stripped bare of everything in their lives including their status, and are symbolically cleansed and made new through the ritual process. This loss of status and role reversal during the ritual affects the society as a whole, and may be seen either as an uncomfortable situation in which all of the society is transitioned, or may be seen as a game or a festival, causing a “breakdown of social orders and boundaries” (Abrahams 1982:404). The rituals, however, always have an overseer or someone in charge of directing the activities, almost like directing a play or performance, which prevents the norm reversal from becoming an out of control situation.

Semiotics of Performance

During rituals, just as during festivals, participants take on roles in order to bring more meaning and entertainment to the event. These participants put on a performance that ties into the ritual and acts as a mode of communication that moves the ritual through each phase to the next based on the response of the initiands or the audience (Bauman 1986:3). These performers draw from their own experiences, the prescribed actions of the initiands or other performers, and from the audience reactions. This interaction between performers and audience demonstrates their own understanding of their cultural tradition and group membership and clarifies their social identity (Toelken 1996:136; Bauman 1986:113). Interpretation of these rituals requires an

understanding of the culture of those involved, as well as a focus on not only the performers and their actions but also the audience and their reactions to the performance. During the crossing the line ritual, sailors have been known to create rudimentary costumes and to play the role of key characters in the ritual process, even going so far as to dress as women to fulfill the cast of characters, in order to entertain the audience of experienced sailors and to add to the effect of the ritual for the initiands.

The performance itself is often the first aspect of ritual that is studied; however, studying the performance requires much more than reading texts and speculating about the ritual's history, as Glassie indicates was done by older scholars studying the Irish Mummers (1975:xii). By focusing in on just one aspect, anyone studying the event or ritual cannot have a complete, or even a mostly complete, understanding of the ritual. Cultural norms, past events, and even daily routines can provide pertinent background information that can clarify even the smallest aspects of a ritual performance. Every individual who is involved in the ritual, either as a leader, a participant, or an audience member, brings to that ritual their past experiences which are held in their memories, or events that are remembered as a whole social group. These experiences and memories then dictate the actions and reactions of individuals or groups based on the surroundings (Glassie 1975:57). These actions and reactions, in turn, can help guide the ritual to completion. Without an understanding of the background and culture of the performers and the audience, it is difficult to gain a more complete understanding of the meanings of the ritual and the reasons behind the ritual process (Toelken 1996:130). The characters who appear on board ship during the crossing the line ceremony are characters that are well recognized among seafarers across the centuries; yet, a landsmen who is unfamiliar with the practice and with the

culture of the sailors may be at a loss to explain the various members of the cast and the purpose of their performance throughout the ceremony.

When witnessing a performance, the focus is generally on the performers who are providing the entertainment. The performers know the script and have a firm understanding of the meaning behind what they are performing, and they often will dress the part and take on the mannerisms and assumed voice of the character or characters that they portray. These individuals control the performance and “manage the audience’s access to information about what is going on...” during the performance (Bauman 1986:37). The clothing, words, and actions of the performers are what provide entertainment for an audience, add meaning to the performance, and progress the ritual from one phase to another. Although they must follow the general outline of the performance, the individual performers bring their own style and attitude, making each performance unique (Glassie 1975:78). During the crossing the line ritual on board ship, one of the most important characters portrayed is King Neptune and an experienced sailor on board will use available materials to morph into the understood likeness of that character in order to preside over the ceremony. Although often rudimentary, the costume adds to the entertainment value and the symbolic value of the ritual.

The performers are just one aspect of the ritual equation, the audience makes up the second aspect, and they both interact with one another throughout the ritual process. The audience may consist of members of the social group, family members of the performers, or possibly outsiders who are watching the ritual for the first time. The audience, just as the performers, bring their past experiences into their role in the ritual, and, depending on the ritual, the performances may be tailored to fit the audience to allow for more involvement and entertainment (Glassie 1975:79, 90). In the case of sailors, the audience may consist of sailors

who had already undergone the initiation ritual on a previous voyage or other non-sailors on board who are not subjected to the ritual, such as passengers. The performance may be adapted to meet the desires of the audience, should the audience demand a specific treatment of the initiands or cheer for a treatment that they prefer over the others.

As is often the case, the same rituals may be performed on a regular basis, and the same audience may view the same ritual many times in their life while only once being a participant. The reasons behind this repetition vary, as indicated by Toelken (1996:137), and include entertainment or renewing important emotions, value reinforcement, induction of new group members, and the distinguishing of non-group members. All of these aspects are present in the crossing the line ceremonies on board ship, as the non-participant crew are entertained by the performance, the values of the group are reinforced through the process of the inexperienced joining the experienced sailors, the new experienced sailors are inducted, and those who are not sailors, such as the occasional passengers or clergy, are typically not included in the ceremonies.

Toelken also distinguishes among the various types of audience: central, bystander, outsider, and cultural. Central audiences are familiar enough with the performances or rituals to have an influence. Bystander audiences tend to those people in the area who are outside the realm of the ritual and who show the most excitement over the stereotypical aspects of the ritual. Outsider audiences are just that, people who are from outside the social or cultural group, and often times the performers refuse to perform for such an audience. Lastly, the cultural audience is an implied audience which either gives approval or disapproval of the ritual performance (Toelken 1996: 137-140). The audience on board ship most likely would tend toward Toelken's central audience, as the majority of people on board the ship would be familiar with the ritual being performed with only a few possible exceptions. Those on board who are not sailors and

who are not directly involved with the ceremony would either fall into the bystander audience, which has some interest in the ceremony, or the outside audience which would have little if any interest in the ceremony. Those who do have an interest occasionally leave brief accounts of the ritual, with or without opinions, which can aid in building an understanding of the crossing the line ritual and the many layers of symbolism inherent within said ritual.

Conclusion

In order to undertake a study of a folk group's ritual, an understanding of the history of semiotics and its anthropological applications must be coupled with a familiarization of the chosen folk group. These folk groups share common characteristics and beliefs, and may be small clubs or large civilizations. The symbols found within these groups are often specific to the group and can take the form of words, material objects, or actions. These symbols provide a greater understanding of the beliefs and norms held by these groups and may provide a better understanding of daily activities or objects that are typically taken for granted. This understanding of everyday life often leads to a feeling of interconnectedness with the individuals in the folk group being studied. In this case, the research will focus on the sailor folk group during their crossing the line rituals and will analyze the symbols found throughout the ritual from its earliest days up until the modern day.

CHAPTER 3: ORIGINS AND EARLY EXAMPLES

Every action that becomes ritual or tradition has an origin, a point when it was brand new. Often times, as the years pass, the origin and original purpose of the tradition is forgotten, the reasons for and ways of performing the ritual change with the times, and the participants rarely stop to think about why they habitually take part in the tradition. The crossing the line ritual that is known and recognized today among sailors and landsmen alike has undergone various changes in both the reason behind the ritual and also the way that it is performed. In order to better understand the ritual today, it is pertinent to study both the possible and probable origins of the rituals and the reasons those cultures started the rituals that they performed. Using a basic knowledge of the modern crossing the line rituals and the few accounts of early rituals in the historic written record, may bring to light the often forgotten origins of the crossing the line rituals which, even at such early times, remained rituals tied to transitions. Among the sparse written accounts, there are several cultures mentioned as possible sources for the crossing the line ritual as it is known today. Although the Vikings are occasionally named as an early source for the crossing the line ritual (Lovette 1939:42-43), their written accounts of seafaring rituals are relatively few and most were written down centuries after the events they describe. Many aspects of the modern ceremony point toward a heavy Mediterranean, as opposed to a Viking, influence including the Egyptians and Phoenicians but more so the Romans and the Greeks.

Early seafarers had an understanding of the equator and the various associated latitudes even before the equator was officially named. These ancient seafarers noticed the changing position of the sun and stars in relation to their position on the water, as well as differing weather patterns in various areas of the world. Because ancient seafarers had no concept of modern, man-made lines drawn around the earth, their ceremonies could not include these lines or use them as

a guide. Instead, ancient seafarers performed rituals and ceremonies based on a mixture of their cultural beliefs and their knowledge of the waters in which they sailed. The ancient seafarers adopted the gods and goddesses of the wind and storms as patrons, occasionally naming the ships after these deities, as a way of asking for protection and safe travel. Often times these gods or goddesses would have a special space on board the ships, either at the bow or the stern, for worship during the voyage to ensure divine protection (Brody 2008:448). However, these patron gods and goddesses of the ships were not the only ones who were called upon for protection during voyages. Important natural navigational features, such as headlands or mountains, which marked transition points where either land or water based boundaries were passed, were often dedicated to specific deities with shrines built that could be viewed from the sea. During the voyage, when these landmarks were passed, venerations would be made to the gods or goddesses at the available shrines (Brody 2008:450). Many of the early seafaring cultures who built these shrines continued to explore away from their home ports, leaving clues of their exploration along the way.

Some of the most familiar maritime cultures that explored the waters both near to and far from their homeland were the Mediterranean cultures. These cultures offer various clues into the origin of the modern crossing the line ceremony. The seafaring cultures of the Mediterranean were actively engaged in trade with one another, and accounts were often kept of the vessels, the trade goods, the voyages, and their outcomes. They “took to the sea as a thoroughfare so familiar as to call for no comment other than that it was used” (Lydenberg 1957:3) although despite the lack of great detail, they did leave more information for modern researchers than did the Norse cultures. These Mediterranean cultures, namely the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Romans, and Greeks, provide much more in the way of the life of sailors than the Norse cultures provide,

occasionally including accounts of rituals performed to the various cultural sea gods at liminal points, or points of transition, before, during, and after voyages. The travels of the Mediterranean cultures are followed by the early voyages of Europeans following the Middle Ages, when Europeans ventured into unfamiliar territories for exploration, expansion, and trade.

Egyptians

The Egyptians relied on the Nile for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which was travel. Much of the land within the kingdoms of Egypt was desert, making travel over land difficult and dangerous. The Nile River, for Egypt, became the “natural highway for all communication... [t]he Nile and its canals were the ordinary roads of the Egyptians; baggage of all kinds was carried by boat, all journeys were undertaken by water, and even the images of the gods went in procession on board the Nile boats” (Erman 1894:479). The Nile was not the only waterway used for transportation; the coastal waters of the Mediterranean were used as well. The Egyptians required trade with other countries along the Mediterranean for goods such as spices and lumber. One of the earliest accounts of trade, written by an Egyptian scribe in 2650 B.C., describes the shipping of Lebanese cedar logs on forty ships from a Phoenician harbor to Egypt (Casson 1959:4-5). The importance of ships in the trade with other Mediterranean countries can also be seen on the walls of tombs throughout Egypt, such as the image located on the walls of Queen Hatshepsut’s burial temple portraying the arrival of vessels, the trading of goods, and the departing of vessels at Punt. The vessels upon their departure are loaded with valuable trade goods visible on the decks of the ships (Casson 1959:13). This image and others found on the tomb walls of Egyptian leaders often show people with their arms raised to the sky, possibly indicating a celebration or a ritual of thanksgiving to a god for his or her protection. The Egyptians built ships in honor of their gods and goddesses, and it was believed that the deities

would protect namesake ships during voyages. They also built boats with the lone purpose of carrying the image of a god or goddess, as indicated in hieroglyphs at Karnak (Erman 1894:275-276).

Although there is information regarding Egyptian travel, trade, and religious beliefs associated with boats and sailing, information regarding specific seafaring rituals is vague and can only be inferred from the texts and images left within the tombs of the various rulers.

Applying the study of semiotics to the sparse information passed down from the ancient Egyptians, it is possible to find a connection between their uses of ships, their cultural beliefs, and, in a loose sense, their rituals. Rites of passage, when studied through the lens of semiotics, are processes of transition in which an individual or a group move from one status to another within a culture or society. If indeed the Egyptian reliefs indicate celebration at the beginning or end of a voyage, this celebration would relate to the start or completion of a transitional period, with the voyage itself being considered the transition, or liminal period. The Egyptian belief regarding the afterlife also included the use of boats or ships, as indicated in the Egyptian Book of the Dead which describes, among other actions, the use of boats for ferrying the dead at various points in their underworld travels (Budge 1895). This journey through the underworld is a liminal period as well, transitioning the deceased from their previous life to their impending afterlife through a series of trials. The appearance of boats in this process indicates their place of importance among the Egyptian people, and brings an air of familiarity to the soul traveling through the underworld. Although a full examination of Egyptian shipboard rituals is impossible given the lack of information, the use of boats in cultural practices and religious writings in Egypt is a step closer to discovering a potential origin of the modern shipboard rituals, namely the crossing the line ceremony.

Phoenicians

At least one of the cultures that neighbored the Egyptians travelled well beyond the shores of their home, even venturing out into the Atlantic. One of the better known of these far-reaching ancient seafaring cultures in the Mediterranean was the Phoenician culture, which is known for not only its travel and trade in the Mediterranean, but also its early exploration along the Atlantic shores. The Phoenicians were, therefore, a major seafaring culture of the ancient Mediterranean and even the European world. Unlike the Egyptians, the Phoenicians ventured into open waters and explored areas beyond their familiar sea. Well aware of the dangers of sailing and the constant threat of death that came with the sailing profession, the Phoenicians performed rituals at various transitional periods in order to secure a safe and successful voyage. As was common among Mediterranean seafaring cultures, rituals were performed prior to the start of a voyage in order to ask protection for the voyage and also at the conclusion of the voyage in thanksgiving for a safe arrival. “Classical authors mention Phoenician seafarers making sacrifices to Herakles-Milqart before setting sail and after landing in harbor” which would be considered periods of transition during the voyage (Brody 2008:449). A second type of transition point that called for religious practices was the passing of a particular geographic feature or religious shrine, such as Ba’l Ro’s (“Lord of the Promontory”), Ro’su Qudsi (“Sacred Promontory”), and “Ros Milqart (“Promontory of Milqart”). Unfortunately, just as with the Egyptians and the Norse, the Phoenicians left no detailed description of religious practices at these and other locations. Lastly, when faced with difficult weather, dangerous seas, or any other perilous transitional situations, ancient Phoenician sailors would conduct rituals in order to appease the god or goddess and ask for protection (Brody 1998:74-75).

These Phoenician rituals, whether conducted at the sacred geographical points, in harbors, or on board ship, may not have been simple, solemn affairs. At least one shipwreck of the time, the Uluburun shipwreck, produced material culture which could possibly be related to the performance of rituals. Among the objects recovered from the wreck were “a horn made from hippopotamus tooth, a matching pair of bronze finger symbols, a possible whistle made from tin, and five tortoise shells which were used as sound boxes for stringed instruments such as lutes or lyres” (Brody 1998:79-80). Unfortunately, this is only a possible connection to rituals on board ship, as there is no record detailing the ceremonies that were used by sailors before, during, and after that voyage or any other specific Phoenician voyages. Although the Phoenicians left a bit more evidence in regards to seaside shrines with particular names, sacrifices made, and possibly material culture in their shipwrecks, just as with the Egyptians there is little in the way of detailed accounts of the rituals themselves. The application of semiology to these clues of Phoenician shipboard ritual is nearly as vague as with the Egyptians; however, the seaside shrines with the names of particular deities in conjunction with the musical instruments found in the archaeological record provide some indication that ceremonies took place during the voyage, whether on land or on board ship. Either way, the shrines indicate that protection was sought during the liminal period of the voyage, or the point when the sailors were in between the safety of ports and were faced with the uncertainty of the sea.

Romans/Greeks

The Romans and the Greeks, two very distinct ancient cultures, share much in the way of mythology and tradition. The majority of Greek gods and goddesses have their Roman counterparts who have similar attributes and share similar myths among them. For example, the Greek god of the sea was Poseidon, his Roman counterpart was Neptune, both were credited

with giving horses to men, driving a chariot or shell over the sea, and both carried a trident. The modern crossing the line ritual sees Neptune as the ruler of the sea, but he is often joined by his wife, Amphitrite; however, Amphitrite was a Greek goddess who was the daughter of the Titan, Ocean, and who was actually the wife of the Greek god Poseidon, not the Roman god Neptune; her Roman counterpart is Salacia (Dillaway 1833:106-107; Hamilton 1942:28-29). Salacia plays a minor role in Roman mythology when compared to her Greek counterpart, perhaps indicating why Amphitrite was chosen for use in the modern ritual. Because the gods and goddesses of each of these cultures intertwine within the modern crossing the line ritual, it seems appropriate to study their cultures together in order to better understand the relationship across the ages.

The god of the sea that is most recognized and plays a central role in the modern crossing the line ceremony is Neptune (Poseidon), who is the son of Saturn (Cronus) and the brother of Jupiter (Zeus). Neptune, as well as Poseidon, was credited with giving the first horse to man through a contest of skill with Minerva (Athena) and Vulcan (Hephaestus) and often the image of the horse is meant to symbolize a ship (Dillaway 1833:106; Hamilton 1942:345-350). The image of Neptune can be found on some ancient medals and he is described “with black or dark hair, his garment of an azure or sea-green color, seated in a large shell drawn by whales, or seahorses, with his trident in his hand, attended by the sea-gods Palæmon, Gaucus, and Phorcys; the sea goddesses Thetis, Melita, and Panopēa, and a long train of Tritons and sea-nymphs” (Dillaway 1833:107). During the crossing the line ceremonies, Neptune is often joined by his wife, Amphitrite, Roman Salacia, the goddess of the sea. As mentioned previously, the combination of Neptune and Amphitrite mixes the Roman and Greek mythologies. Amphitrite was the granddaughter of the Titan, Ocean, who was “the river that was supposed to encircle the earth” (Hamilton 1942:26-28). These deities were the foremost religious figures related to the

waters of the world. It would make sense that these gods and goddesses would be several of those to whom sailors appealed for protection before, during, and after a voyage.

There were other Greek and Roman deities that were helpful to sailors aside from those specifically designated as sea gods. Two such gods were Castor and Pollux, the twin sons of Zeus and Leda. Sailors used the constellation associated with these twins for navigational purposes at night, therefore making the support or blessing of these deities extremely important for the success of any voyage. Also, the sailors believed that Castor and Pollux would appear on board in the form of the phenomenon known as Saint Elmo's fire, during which a glow is caused by static electricity in the air and appears on masts or yards. The sailors, when the glow would appear, believed that Castor and Pollux were protecting the ship during the voyage and that a "story was over," or a transition had occurred. The Roman gods Venus of Cyprus, Minerva, and Vulcan were also believed to protect sailors at sea (Rouge 1982:197). Venus (Aphrodite) is said to have formed from the foam of the sea and that the winds and the storm "flee before her," which would make her an important goddess for sailors who are at the mercy of not only the waters but the winds. Minerva (Athena) was the warrior daughter of Jupiter (Zeus); she carried his weapon, the thunderbolt, and was known for wisdom. Sailors, desiring safety during their voyages, would want to appease this goddess so as not to invoke her wrath and thereby the use of her thunderbolt. Finally, Vulcan (Hephaestus) was the only ugly immortal god and was held in high regard in Olympus for his work as an armorer and smith (Hamilton 1942:30-35). Sailors may have looked to Vulcan, the maker of armor and weapons, for protection from enemies or protection in general.

Just as the Phoenicians and the Egyptians, the Romans and the Greeks built shrines dedicated to the gods of the sea and also to the gods of the winds at important geographical

locations such as headlands and ports not only in their home lands but also in their overseas territories (Brody 2008:445). These geographical locations may have marked boundaries such as where a river met the sea or the sea met the ocean. These would have been, and to some extent still are, areas that created dangerous sailing conditions and which during the ancient Greek and Roman times would have required the conducting of a ritual to appease the gods or goddesses and to ask for their protection. Authors of the time make mention of “Greek fleets offering communal prayers before voyaging,” and of Roman sailors “pouring libations of wine and making animal sacrifices from on board ship” (Brody 2008:449). The dangers of these transition areas were occasionally visualized as great sea monsters, such as in the Odyssey, and rather than appeasing the gods or goddesses the sailors may have made sacrifices in order to appease the monsters themselves, such as when Ulysses tossed members of his crew overboard (Beck 1999:116).

The detailed accounts of Greek and Roman mythology as well as accounts of Greek and Roman seafaring provide a better understanding of the maritime rituals conducted than many of their Mediterranean counterparts. The knowledge of their mythology and the various gods and goddesses that were of importance to sailors, of at least some of their shipboard rituals, and of the connection of portions of their voyages with stories or transitions connects the modern crossing the line ceremony to the beliefs and practices of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Religion was not the sole driving force behind the rituals; some were meant to appease monsters, not to honor gods. Additionally, the details in the ancient accounts demonstrate that the sailors understood the concept of liminality and the transition from one state or status to another. One example of this is the sacrifices that took place in the Odyssey as previously mentioned. Although this is a classical account which is at least partly fictional, it would include situations

and actions that were common to the people of the time, including shipboard sacrifice. These sacrifices, according to the story, occurred in areas between bodies of water, or transitional areas. These areas could be subject to varying winds, currents, or other nautical dangers and were obviously exemplified in writing with monsters that must be appeased. The Greeks and Romans recognized the differing areas, and the liminal zone in between the two which was full of uncertainty and trials. The Greeks and Romans also saw transition in the form of the phenomena of St. Elmo's fire, which was the appearance of Castor and Pollux. In her work, Jean Rouge states that this was seen as the end of a story, which means a new story would be starting (1982). The appearance, then, indicates that the ship and its sailors are in transition between stories, or in a liminal zone between stages of the voyage.

Following these accounts of ancient seafaring cultures, very little can be found related to seafaring rituals until the European world emerges from the Middle Ages. As countries throughout Europe regained strength, the monarchs of several of these countries ventured to finance voyages of exploration to areas of the world which were previously unknown to them. These voyages, whether for simple exploration, desire for trade, for religious conversion, or for acquisition of land, produced accounts that indicate the humble beginnings of the modern crossing the line ceremonies. These accounts, discussed below, provide the earliest known accounts of the crossing the line ceremony as it is recognized today.

Europeans of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

The last decade of the fifteenth century ushered in a period of maritime exploration in Europe that would later come to be known as the Age of Exploration. Well-known explorers such as Vasco da Gama, Christopher Columbus, and John Cabot set out with an incomplete understanding of the world beyond their shores, but what they found and the information that

they brought back inspired men as high as government leaders and as low as able-bodied seamen to explore, and often exploit, the world. As technology and knowledge of the world advanced, the aim was no longer exploration but commerce, ushering in the Age of Sail. The sailors who made these voyages, just as their predecessors in the Mediterranean world, operated under their own social structure and developed traditions unique to the profession. These traditions may not have been ones that were formed on a whim; instead they may have been carried forward from ancient and medieval sailors. Unfortunately, the records of most ceremonies, as well as voyages themselves, are scarce at best, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the accounts are silent on the origins of these traditions. Despite the unclear origin of the ceremonies, the historical record does provide a few descriptions of celebrations and ceremonies that took place on board European ships as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

One of the earliest instances of crossing the line ceremonies comes from a 1529 French account of a voyage made by Jean and Raoul Parmentier. The sailors were travelling to Sumatra from France and had just crossed the equator when the ceremony took place. During this voyage, the sailors took time to celebrate the crossing of the line with a knighting of sailors who had newly crossed, as opposed to the typical dunking that occurred in the next century. The occasion was also marked with a meal of albacore and bonitos and with the celebration of a Mass, which included singing that, according to Lydenberg (1957:15-16) “was not a simple plain song which might have been sung from memory. It was a choral work for 3, 4, or 5 voices by some skilled composer...” This knighting of French sailors at such an early date appears from this source to be a common occurrence that was deeply rooted in the Catholic faith; however, prior to this source, no accounts exist detailing this ceremony. It is unclear why so few accounts were kept during this time. One possible reason for the lack of written accounts prior to the sixteenth

century could be that such long distance voyages were not common and the record-keeping of the occasional long distance voyages was still developing. As long distance voyages became more commonplace, the numbers of accounts as well as the details in the accounts increased. A second possible reason that the origin of the ceremony was not mentioned may be due to the fact that sailors typically did not know, and therefore could not provide, information regarding the origin. The assumption was then made that the origin was beyond collective memory, and therefore must have been ancient. Many of the accounts of the sixteenth century contained the most basic information about the destination as opposed to the voyage itself, due to the fact that the destination and the discoveries were the main focus of the government funding the voyages. Following this initial period of discovery, sailors' accounts began to include details of the voyages themselves.

A second sixteenth century account comes from the middle of the century, on 4 February 1557, when the Frenchman Jean de Léry (1578:41 in Lydenberg 1957:16) noted that his ship bound for Brazil had crossed the “center of the world.” He documented that the sailors took part in a traditional ceremony commemorating the dangerous voyage, which involved dunking sailors into the sea and blackening their faces using old flags that had been rubbed on the cauldron. De Léry went on to state that those who did not want to participate could be exempted through a donation of money or wine. This account is nearly identical to the ceremonies documented throughout later periods in the Age of Sail. Also, as Lydenberg (1957:16) points out in comparing these two French accounts, the actions are very different, but in this second French account the ceremony is specifically said to be a tradition. Lydenberg’s (1957: 16) question, then, is “[h]ow long does it take to make tradition?” Again, this could be nothing more than the author making inaccurate assumptions based on a lack of solid information regarding the origin

of the ritual. However, it is also possible that the ritual had taken place for years, and was simply never recorded either due to the fact the public was not interested, that it was considered commonplace and therefore did not warrant documentation, or possibly due to a desire to keep it secret as is often the case with initiation rituals of groups or organizations.

A final example of a sixteenth-century ceremony comes from the Dutch toward the end of the century, and there was an obvious difference from the ceremonies described above in the mode of celebration. John Huyghen van Linschoten traveled to the East Indies in 1583 and his ship crossed the equator on 26 May of that year. The celebration at this crossing was not a religious ceremony, nor did it involve dunking, but it was more akin to a large dinner party.

Crossed the line May 26; on May 29 (Whitsunday) the sailors chose an “Emperour among themselves” as was the “ancient custome.” After changing ‘all the officers in the ship’, they held a feast which lasted for 3-4 days. An argument broke out and rapiers and swords were drawn, they would not listen to the Captain, who was knocked down to the deck. If it had not been for the Archbishop who stepped out to stop the fight, they might have killed each other. Those who started it were punished and put in irons.” (van Linschoten 1885:15-18 in Lydenberg 1957:18).

At that point, the crossing the line ritual was already being called an “ancient custome,” although the trail of accounts that could lead toward the origin are scarce. In regard to the mode of celebration, it is possible that the variance from the first account lies in the difference in belief systems of the Catholic French and the Protestant Dutch, but even then there are not enough earlier Dutch accounts available documenting the ceremony to say this for certain. In comparison to the second French account above, the difference may be purely cultural and the feast may

have been the celebration practiced by the Dutch sailors throughout their history. By the end of the sixteenth century, and early in the seventeenth century, the number of accounts increases, providing much more in the way of resources for study and expanding understanding of shipboard life of the period.

During the seventeenth century, the accounts that were kept of voyages greatly increased, providing later generations with a more complete understanding of life on board ships of the day. Despite this increase in overall accounts, English accounts of a crossing the line ceremony are unknown, have been lost through time, or never existed. This is not to say that the English records were inadequately kept, as English sailing records proliferated just as in other seafaring nations; however, the English sailors either did not practice the crossing the line ceremony or did not feel that it was something that needed to be recorded. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know if either of these was the case based solely on the accounts alone, as is evidenced in the account of William Cornellson Schouten (1619:13 in Lydenberg 1957:19), a sailor in the early seventeenth century who noted that on “[t]he 19. and 20. about noone we past the equinoctial line, and had a south east and a south southeast winde until the 24. and then an east south east winde and held our course south. The water being hollow, that our blind saile was stricken in pieces with the sea, that day at noone we were under 3 degrees 43 minutes southward of the line.” This brief account of the crossing of the equator serves as an accurate example of the log entries during voyages of the day. Although Schouten’s (1619) account provided detail of the voyage itself, it failed to mention whether or not any ceremonies took place on board; it was strictly a business entry.

Other seventeenth century European cultures, however, did not adhere strictly to business with their log entries. A short Dutch account of the sailing of the ship *Fame* in 1642 kept by

Thomas Campanius Holm (1834:70 in Lydenberg 1957:19) mentions that on August “21st, about mid-day, we sailed along the coast of Portugal, where the crew performed the ceremony of tropical baptism. It is the custom with seamen, when they cross the equinoctial line, to dip in the water those who have never crossed it before. One may be exempted from that ceremony giving a little money to the sailors, and in that case they receive only a little sprinkling.” In this case, the religious concept of baptism, at least in name and physical action as practiced by the French in the previous century, was intertwined with the horseplay of dunking sailors into the water, although there was still no mention of costumes or specific characters. Once again, the ceremony was considered customary, yet there was no indication of when or how it started or who started it; it was something that was simply understood as tradition.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, the ritual began its transformation into something more akin to that which is recognized in modern times. An account of the Frenchman Fran ois Leguat’s (1891:19-21 in Lydenberg 1957:32) voyage on the ship *Relation* provides much more detail into the “ancient [c]ustom” in which

“[o]ne of the Seamen who had past the Line before, drest himself in Rags, with a beard and Hair of Hards of Hemp, and black’d his face with Soot and Oil mix’d together. Thus Equip’d, holding a Sea-Chart in one Hand, and a Cutlass in the other, with a Pot full of blacking Stuff standing by him, he presented himself upon Deck attended by his Suffragangs, drest as whimsically as himself, and arm’d with Grid-Irons, Stoves, Kettles, and little Bells; with which rare Instruments they made a sort of Musick, the goodness of which may easily

be imagin'd."

This account from the end of the seventeenth century was one of the first in which a sailor was chosen to be the leader of the ceremony. He was dressed in a rather elaborate costume given the circumstance, and was joined by others who formed a group of servants. The servants all carried random items with which they made music, something that was alluded to in the earliest French accounts of the religious ceremony, as well as in the ancient Mediterranean. Although specific names of the characters were not given, this instance was the first to resemble the English and later the American ceremonies performed from the eighteenth century forward. It was not until the late eighteenth century that Neptune once again became a part of the ceremonies conducted on board, just as he had been in ancient times, and that other characters were added to the cast list.

Conclusion

Although the Norse are often credited with the creation and subsequent dissemination of the crossing the line ritual, the written evidence points to a Mediterranean origin with a focus on the Greeks and the Romans. These cultures recognized the dangers inherent in sailing and looked to their deities for support. The ancient religious rituals which were directed toward specific gods or goddesses were performed in order to request protection from trials at sea, a transition period was based in the teachings of Christianity to celebrate the crossing of the equator, while the modern ritual is much more of an initiation ritual meant to celebrate the transformation of inexperienced sailors into experienced sailors through a series of tests or trials. The ritual has clearly changed over time, as will be discussed in the following chapters, with the participants slowly becoming less aware of the reason for the start of the ceremony and with the ceremony itself undergoing even more changes throughout the Age of Sail and into the modern period.

CHAPTER 4: THE DEVELOPED FORM OF THE RITUAL

As Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, sailors from various European ports began to explore the seas beyond their shores. As more lands were discovered, this Age of Exploration gave way to what is now commonly called the Age of Sail. During this time, European exploration and travel increased dramatically. This increase in sea travel and the desire to validate and share discoveries brought about an increase in record keeping during ever lengthening voyages. These records were both administrative, such as logs for weather, speed, and goods traded, and personal reasons, such as letters home or journals. As the years progressed, the number of records that were maintained grew exponentially and the details about voyages expanded to include not just brief descriptions of lands visited but also navigational and meteorological data, descriptions of the ship and hardships during the voyage, and records of memorable events that occurred. From these records, it is possible to glean details related to rituals carried out on board ships that crossed the equator or one of the tropic lines. Many logs and personal accounts of the period only briefly made mention of the crossing the line ceremony, if it was mentioned at all; however, when the information that is available from the Age of Sail is compared to the information that is available from ancient and medieval times, there is a noticeable increase in the number of accounts kept. From these accounts, it is possible to track changes in the ritual throughout the centuries, changes in the imagery used throughout the ritual, and changes in the meaning of this imagery to those experiencing the ritual first hand.

Although crossing the line ceremonies were performed by many cultures, this research focuses primarily on the ceremonies conducted on board ships from England, which would later become Great Britain, and North America. This limitation was adopted in order to control the cultural influences, to lessen the possibility of information being lost in translation, and to shape

this research as a starting point for later examinations of specific aspects of the crossing the line rituals. This limitation, however, creates a degree of difficulty in finding sources that date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the few existing accounts of a crossing the line ceremony are not English in origin. Nevertheless, the non-English accounts are important for this research as they provide a glimpse into the transition of the ritual from ancient and medieval days, showing the changes that occurred within the ritual over time. For this reason, several accounts of equator crossing ceremonies spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were examined in the previous chapter, but semiological analysis on these rituals was completed, in order to keep the focus of the analysis on English accounts.

The Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century saw the first English account of the crossing the line ceremony, although it appears that English sailors were aware of the ritual long before 1700. An entry in *The Gentleman's Dictionary* (Guillet de Saint-Georges 1705), which was published in London, described the custom as a “Ridiculous Ceremony” that was performed upon crossing the equator or tropic line. The author of this entry went on to say that it was “used by most Nations...and each practises [sic] it differently” and that even sailors from the same country may have practiced it differently. The author states that one version of the ceremony included the Boatswain’s mate or another officer, with his face “bedawb’d,” dressed with ropes all over his body, holding a book of navigation, and followed by others who were also dressed the same. The officer then required all of the initiands to swear an oath to perform the same ceremony to others when the situation arose. Once the oath was made, the initiand turned and walked toward the bow of the vessel as tubs of water were thrown on him by his shipmates as a form of baptism. This entry provided details of the ceremony consistent with what was performed up until its time

of publication, despite the fact that no known English account of the ceremony had been documented up to that point. Only three years later, in 1708, the first English account of the crossing the line ritual as known today was documented by Woodes Rogers during his voyage around the world, and the number of accounts detailing the ceremony increased from that point forward.

These eighteenth century English accounts vary in the amount of information provided in regards to the crossing the line ritual. Some accounts remained business oriented and gave no information about the ceremony whatsoever. At least one account of the period mentioned that the ceremony was forgone by the sailors themselves with the only reason provided being the lack of desire among the sailors to perform the ceremony. The accounts that did provide the necessary information for analysis also varied in the amount of information provided. Some accounts included descriptions that fall into the three phases of ritual as put forward by Arnold van Gennep (1960:11); others include only the liminal phase. Through examination of these ritual phases within the accounts that provided the information, the various meanings of the symbols to the sailors become apparent and allow for a better understanding of the ritual and the reasons that it was performed.

The Start of the Ceremony: Rites of Separation (Pre-liminal)

The crossing the line ritual throughout the eighteenth century often started the same way on all English vessels sailing past the equator. The first step in the ritual process was to determine who was eligible for initiation, and the formality of this process varied slightly from vessel to vessel, but the outcome was the same. The determination was made by the experienced sailors, occasionally limited to officers, who had previously crossed the line. These officers or more senior sailors would ask “the rest of the Ship’s Crew, Whether they were ever that Way

before” (Chetwood 1734:12) and have them “prove upon the Sea Chart that he had before Crossed the Line” (Wharton 1893). This could be done by simply asking the crew members of their experience, such as in Chetwood’s (1734:12) account, or it could be more formal, such as in Hooker’s (1896:19) 1768 account when “a list was brought into the cabin containing the names of everybody and thing aboard the ship (in which the dogs and cats were not forgotten); to this was fixed a signed petition from the ship’s company desiring leave to examine everybody in that list that it might be known whether or not they had crossed the line before.” With permission given, a lieutenant then examined the qualifications of the passengers and crew. Once the determination had been made, these sailors were separated from the rest of the crew.

This process, which could be considered the pre-liminal phase of the ritual, separated the inexperienced sailors from the experienced sailors both physically and metaphorically. Although during the eighteenth century it was not specified, this separation was occasionally literal such as in the *Journal of a Lady of Quality* (Andrews 1922:70) in which the inexperienced sailors were “below waiting, in trembling expectation...” Although the ships of the eighteenth century maintained a formal hierarchy, during this ritual that hierarchy was replaced with one based solely on sailing experience, not on governmental or naval promotion. The experienced sailors who took charge of this ritual examined everyone, including officers, as evidenced by Hooker (1896:19) who noted that “Captain Cook and Dr. Solander were on the black list, as were I myself, my servants, and dogs...” Through the carrying out of this ceremony, the rigid social structure that helped to maintain the daily routine on board ship was often disrupted. Although allowing this ceremony to occur was a risk taken by the Captain and other officers, not holding such a light-hearted celebration during long and tedious voyages also carried a risk, so aptly stated by Staunton (1799:74), as “[t]he lower orders of mankind, who know little of life except

its labours, are not easily forgetful of any occasion, recurring to them so seldom, of enjoying a momentary gleam of happiness and independence. It reconciles them to subsequent subordination, and, even, suffering.” Despite this, there certainly were times when the Captain or the crew opted not to hold the ceremony for one reason or another, such as in 1787 when John White (1790:37-38) noted that at “[a]bout five in the evening we crossed the equator, without any wish or inclination being shewn by the seamen to observe the ceremony usually practiced in passing under it.” Because the ceremony accounts are few and far between, it is difficult to say with any certainty how often the ceremony was foregone by the crew or forbidden by the captain and his officers.

With knowledge of the events performed during the ritual, it is easy to understand why the inexperienced sailors or officers were apprehensive about participating. As a way to appease those who were adamant about not participating, each of the sailors eligible for the ritual had the ability to choose his fate. Nearly every account describes the choice laid before the men: either pay the fee or undergo the ceremony. The fee typically consisted of money, alcohol, food or some combination thereof. This payment exempted the sailors from the remainder of the ceremony; however, not all sailors could afford or were willing to part with the fee requested. Those sailors, either willingly or unwillingly, were forced to undergo the liminal phase of the ceremony which transitioned them in the eyes of their peers from inexperienced to experienced sailors. Because it was the action of undergoing the ritual that brought about the change in the initiated sailors, it could be assumed that the sailors who paid their way out of the ritual were not seen as equal to those who underwent the ritual. The primary sources, however, are quiet on that account, providing no information regarding the treatment or understanding of those who paid the fee and excused themselves from the ceremony. One possibility was that the sailors who paid

their way out of the ceremony, because they were given a choice, were still considered experienced sailors with no questions asked.

Viewing the crossing the line ceremony through the lens of semiotics, it is possible to see how the components of the ritual's beginning fit within the pre-liminal framework set forth by van Gennep and expanded upon by Victor Turner and others. The first component that fits into the framework is the temporarily changed social structure on board ship, with those sailors who had previously crossed the equator holding the upper class positions and those sailors who had not previously crossed the line holding the lower class positions. This change was made regardless of the previous status of the sailors and officers in the original shipboard social structure, and is an example of the first part of the concept of communitas noted by Victor Turner. According to Turner (1992:59), social structure is "the patterned arrangements of role-sets, status-sets, and status sequences" and is the opposite of social structure; in fact, communitas can be found only where social structure no longer exists (Turner 1969:126). During the crossing the line ceremonies, the social structure or hierarchy was broken; officers who had never before crossed the line were considered equal to the lowest able-bodied seaman on his first shipboard assignment. Once this hierarchy was broken, communitas began to form, and relationships were created among those chosen to undergo the initiation.

A second component of the crossing the line ceremony that relates back to the pre-liminal concept of communitas and ties into the change in social structure was the physical separation of the inexperienced sailors from the experienced sailors. This separation removed the inexperienced sailors from the shipboard society of which they were a part and provided time for the sailors to reflect upon the change they were to undergo and for their apprehension to grow concerning the specific actions of the ritual itself. This separation, whether it was to a space

below deck or to a different part of the ship's deck, just prior to the ceremony leads back to the creation of communitas among those who have been separated. The individuals who were chosen to undergo the initiation ceremony were considered part of a community of equals with no structure or hierarchy among them (Turner 1967:98-99). These individuals, as a group, had to "submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders," who, in the crossing the line ceremony, were the sailors who had previously crossed the equator. During this brief ceremony, the inexperienced sailors formed a friendship as initiands that may have remained even after the ceremony although the strong bond of communitas only lasted through the initiation process.

The Transition of the Seamen: The Transition Rites (Liminal)

Following the separation of experienced and inexperienced sailors, and the resulting status change, the initiation of the inexperienced sailors began. The ceremony was typically held as soon as it was verified that the ship had crossed the equator. A similar ceremony was held at the Tropic lines instead of the equator or when the ship entered a new body of water, the location of which was decided by the experienced crew members. Regardless of the area in question, the ceremony began immediately following the crossing of the line, or soon thereafter when the conditions were feasible for the crew to pause for a celebration. Although the use of costumes is common today, the English accounts do not mention costumes of any sort until the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Throughout the first three-quarters of the century, the ceremony was conducted in a simple manner that was similar on board many of the English ships and which, although a good bit of fun, was relatively organized. The last quarter of the eighteenth century saw changes made to the ritual performance which increased its complexity through the use of costumes and shaving.

The first step of the ceremony itself was to rig the mechanism for dunking, “a Rope thro a Block from the Main-Yard...” (Rogers 1726:23). Blocks provided leverage to make the dunking and retrieving of sailors much easier, and the mainyard allowed for a decent fall into the water. Occasionally, the accounts mention a security feature that was added to this rig, consisting solely of a “stick cross thro their Legs, and well fastned to the Rope,” (Rogers 1726:23) or of “three pieces of wood” that were fastened to the line, “one of which was put between the legs of the man who was to be ducked, and to this he was tied very fast, another was for him to hold in his hands, and the third was over his head, lest the rope should be hoisted too near the block, and by that means the man be hurt” (Hooker 1896:19). Sailors during this time were difficult to come by, so causing injury or death to any member of the crew would cause hardship amongst the remaining members and may have reflected poorly on the ship during future recruiting attempts. Most accounts of the crossing the line ceremony did not mention such a mechanism, but neither did they give much detail into how the individuals were dunked, so it is possible that a similar or modified design was used on board most ships.

Once the dunking mechanism was constructed, the sailors awaiting initiation were typically given the opportunity to excuse themselves from the ceremony by paying a fee which would allow them to avoid the full effect of the dunking. The fee varied from vessel to vessel, with some requests consisting of “a Bottle [of rum] and Pound [of Sugar]” (Chetwood 1720:12), “a Bottle of Rum” (Wharton 1893), “a small forfeit to be deducted from their pay” (Chandler 1817:2), “four days’ allowance of wine” (Hooker 1896:19), “a forfeit of brandy” (Forster 1777:48), or “offerings of silver” (Staunton 1799:74). If there were sailors who could not pay the fee, did not want to part with the items requested, or actually wanted to undergo the dunking either due to “favourable” weather (Wharton 1893) or as a way of “exulting in their hardiness”

(Hooker 1896:20), they were forced to experience the full effects of the crossing the line ceremony.

Once the fees had been paid, the remaining sailors underwent the crossing the line initiation ceremony. In the accounts prior to 1774 costumes were not documented and the ceremony consisted of attaching the sailors to the rope mechanism and dropping them into the ocean. Most accounts do not give the number of times; however, the accounts that do provide this information state that the sailors were “duck’d after this manner three times” although on at least one occasion sailors “desired to be duck’d some six, others eight, ten, and twelve times, to have the better Title for being treated when they come home” (Rogers 1726:23). The dunking of these sailors into the sea provided much amusement to the rest of the crew, and was accompanied by a “Huzza! and a fire of Volley of small shot” (Chetwood 1720:12) or with “much broad laughter” (Staunton 1799:74) from those who had previously undergone the ceremony or from those on board who were not participating either because they paid the fee or because they were not sailors but passengers or soldiers who were not required to partake in the ritual but who were permitted to watch the festivities.

During the 1770s, there was a change made in the way the ceremony was conducted on board English vessels. It was at that time when the use of costumes and role-playing began to be documented in the written record of voyages, usually in personal journals. One of the earliest accounts dates to 1774 and describes in unusual detail the arrival of “old Tropicus and his ancient dame” who were, respectively, a wizard and a witch who “inhabit an invisible Island in the Seas” and who obtained “contributions” from the sailors on every ship who had never before sailed through the tropics (Andrews 1923:70). Eleven years later, the work *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (Grose 1785) described a crossing the line ceremony unlike any

others, but with the same general idea and one that also required the use of costumes. That account stated that: “a man who is to represent king Arthur, ridiculously dressed, having a large wig made out of oakum, or some old swabs, is seated on the side or over a large vessel of water, every person in his turn is to be ceremoniously introduced to him, crying hail king Arthur!”

In that case, the laughing sailors took turns dressing, or playing the role, of King Arthur as they each poured a bucket of water over the king. It is unclear, however, whether or not there was separation of experienced sailors and inexperienced sailors. Only seven years later, an account again mentioned the costuming of sailors, this time introducing Neptune into the crossing the line ceremony, although few details of his dress were given. The account states that “[t]he amusements, on this occasion, consisted chiefly in dressing up a sailor, of a good figure and manly countenance, in the supposed proper habit of the sea god, Neptune, armed with a trident, and his garments dripping with the element submitted to his power” (Staunton 1792:74). Prior to the close of the century, and only four years after the appearance of Neptune, he was joined by his wife, Amphitrite, although the account, *Dyotts Diary* (Jeffery 1907:87), provided no detail as to their “most ridiculous” costumes.

Beginning around the last quarter of the eighteenth century, during the time when costumes became regular inclusions in the crossing the line ceremony, the way that the ceremony was practiced changed. The sailors frequently refrained from using the yardarm to dunk fellow sailors into the sea, instead opting for a water treatment on board ship. This could have been a “jolly boat” that “was taken down...to be filled full of pump water” and on the side of which the sailors sat while undergoing the rest of the ceremony. These sailors, who were usually blindfolded, eventually fell or were pushed into the jolly boat, thinking that it was the ocean (Andrews 1923:71). Another option, and one that was practiced earlier when ship speed or

weather made dunking unsafe, was to use buckets of water dumped on the head of the initiands, such as in the *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* account of the King Arthur-based ritual (Grose 1785). Lastly, instead of using the jolly boat, sailors would use a large tub of water with a pole placed across on which the blindfolded initiands sat, and which was pulled out from under each initiand immediately following the ceremony (Jeffery 1907:87).

In addition to the change in the use of water during the crossing the line ceremony of the late eighteenth century, another component was added which was documented in several accounts of the time period: that of shaving the initiand, typically with something that felt like, but was not, a razor blade. In *A Journal of a Lady of Quality* (Andrews 1923:71) from 1774, the author briefly mentions the shaving process and its connection to the use of water, stating that “[t]he wizard began to shave him with a notched stick and pot-black. The sharp notches soon brought blood, and the poor devil starting from the pain, tumbled into the boat amongst the water, and thinking it was the sea, roared with terror.” Here, it was the shaving pain that caused the sailors to fall into the jolly boat filled with water. A second account from *Dyott’s Diary* (Jeffery 1907:88) at the end of the eighteenth century also tied the shaving component into the shipboard dunking:

“Then comes on the barber’s work, who after daubing
the face and head of the fast-bound stranger with the
vilest of all possible compositions, of tar, grease, etc. etc.,
proceeds to shave him with a piece of old iron, which not
only takes away the sweet-scented fine oily lather but
scratches the face (carrying some particles of skin with it) to
that degree to cause howlings most hideous. The barber

and attendant, by way of conge, and considering it absolutely necessary that the face, etc., should undergo a washing, on a sudden pull away the pole on which the victim was seated, and souse he goes into the water; thus ends the ceremony."

The overall goal of the crossing the line ceremony was to initiate the inexperienced sailors who had never before crossed the line into the realm of the experienced sailors. At the start of this transition, the inexperienced sailors entered into what Arnold van Gennep (1960:11) termed the *liminal phase* of rites of passage. This phase was separated from the familiar structure of shipboard life, both the way that it was before the ceremony and the way that it was expected to be following the ceremony. The sailors who went through this initiation process and found themselves in this phase were characteristically "ambiguous," meaning that they were no longer the previous version of themselves, but they were not yet the anticipated version of themselves (Turner 1969:94). This period can also be viewed as a tunnel or a threshold and those who are going through this liminal phase are referred to as "liminaries" who are "dead to the world as they transition" (Turner 1992:49). Even in this period of transition, however, there were rules that were followed and a prescribed activity that moved the ceremony forward and brought the initiates closer to their ultimate goal. Although these prescribed activities changed over time, and varied slightly among specific ships, the structure and the meaning behind the ritual activities remained intact.

In order to better understand the meaning behind the ritual activities, it is necessary to examine the individual actions, the context in which the actions were taking place, and their possible meanings. Toelken (1996:130) makes it clear that this contextual knowledge must exist or else it "is unlikely that we will ever get very close to understanding or even seeing the

dynamics that underlie the traditional process.” One of the components of the crossing the line ritual that stood out in every account was the use of water to initiate the sailors. This process may harken back to the earliest accounts of the crossing the line ritual, when the French referred to the process as a baptism. Religiously, baptism in and of itself is a ritual which celebrates the Christian individual’s new life, or new beginning, following God. Christians believe that by anointing an individual with holy water, or by dunking him or her into a body of water, the past sins and transgressions are then washed away and the individual is free to begin his or her new life following the teachings of Jesus Christ. Rites of passage or initiation often feature the themes of death and rebirth as a means of freeing the initiand from his or her previous status and welcoming him or her into their new role or status in society (Turner 1992:31). When they began crossing the equator and venturing into the uninhabitable “torrid zone,” the sailors found a “new world opening before them and they felt it was fitting to mark the event by baptism as they began this new life” (Lydenberg 1957:8). This baptism, although a simple rite that may have involved the celebration of a mass, turned into the full yardarm dunking by the seventeenth and eighteenth century, which was somewhat reminiscent of the river baptisms found in the Bible. Although by the time the above accounts were written, the lands below the equator were well understood to be inhabitable and some also economically valuable, the tradition of baptizing continued. The initiated sailors were baptized into the realm of the experienced sailors, a new life for them within the shipboard community.

The addition of the act of shaving to the ceremony during the eighteenth century may also have tied into the concept of starting anew. During the eighteenth century, men’s fashion dictated that being clean shaven was often more respectable than having facial hair, which was more often seen in the working classes. Although sailors may have often carried shaving kits

amongst their belongings, the ability to shave would be dictated by the work load on board ship at any given time. In other words, unlike landsmen, sailors were not always clean shaven due to a lack of water and free time, and the leaders of the crossing the line ceremony took full advantage of that situation. The act of shaving removed the growing hair, which could have been taken as a sign of being lower class, and metaphorically bettered the social status of the sailor being shaved. Even if the shave was not actually done, the action of shaving using whatever material was available still indicated the desired change in status and starting again within the new social status as an experienced sailor, very much as the baptism was a way of marking the beginning of a new life for the initiated sailors upon crossing the equator.

The use of costumes also held meaning for the sailors, as both the experienced and the inexperienced typically knew what the meaning was behind the costume, and knew what was to follow. The costumes not only added to the effect of the ritual on the sailors, but also allowed those who were performing the ceremony to escape from their typical social role on board ship and slip into the role expected through the use of the costume. This concept tied into the role-reversal that accompanied the social structure reversal during the crossing the line ceremonies, with sailors playing roles that were often much different than the roles they normally played within the shipboard society. Rather than it just being the roles that changed, the sailors running the ceremony changed their identity through the use of costumes. The costumes themselves related back to the ancient religious ceremonies in the Mediterranean when offerings were made to Neptune and others in return for a safe voyage. The sailors on board ship, especially toward the end of the eighteenth century, began using the images of the deities of the ancient Greeks and Romans to exact tribute from the sailors crossing the line for the first time, or to inflict a sort of

punishment in place of the tribute, or fee, even though a sincere belief in the particular deity or deities had long since diminished.

The main mythological beings that the sailors portrayed had associated characteristics that were well suited to the meaning of the crossing the line ceremony. The first character to appear was generally the messenger of Neptune, who when named was called Davy Jones. Davy Jones was considered the spirit of the sea by sailors; although, not always one that was beneficial, making it appropriate that he would be announcing the arrival of the sea god (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014). The sea god Neptune, or occasionally Poseidon, was the ruler of the sea in the Roman or Greek pantheon and brother of Zeus, or the leader of the gods. He controlled the storms and waves, both strong forces that carried the dual possibility of being helpful and harmful to sailors. The sea god was frequently joined by his wife, named Amphitrite, who was “a granddaughter of the Titan, Ocean” (Hamilton 1942:28). It was these three main characters that most often appear in the crossing the line ceremony on board ships throughout history, which is due to the connections that all three have to the sea and therefore the lives of sailors.

The sailors often had an opportunity to avoid the dunking by paying a fee, which varied from ship to ship. The fee was typically something that was considered valuable to the sailors and the option clearly applied more so to those sailors who were slightly better off than their peers, or who were willing to do without to avoid forced participation in the ceremony. The fee requests may provide insight into what material possessions were of importance to the sailors while far from home; however, they seem to indicate the desire for a short-term period of enjoyment based on the eventual use of the goods. Typically, the fees consisted of money or alcohol and plans were made for their use at the conclusion of the ceremony, either immediately

or at the next port. As previously stated, it was these brief periods of enjoyment that helped the sailors perform their duty in what was a difficult and dangerous profession.

The Transformation Complete: The Rites of Incorporation (Post-liminal)

Following the conclusion of the crossing the line ceremony, the sailors who underwent the ritual process were incorporated back into the shipboard society within their new status as experienced sailors. They were no longer inexperienced sailors, but now found themselves among the ranks of their betters in terms of crossing the equator. The ceremony not only celebrated a milestone, but was also a means of inclusion and bringing the new sailors into the folds of the older sailors. The handling of this event was not always documented specifically, and some accounts only state that the ceremony ended after the dunking. However, several accounts from throughout the eighteenth century mention what happened following the ceremony's conclusion, with some opting for an immediate finale, while others chose to hold out for a later date. In 1708, Woodes Rogers (1726:23) stated that the money collected was "to be levy'd and spent at a publick Meeting of all the Ships Companys," when they returned home to England, while Forster (1777:49) stated that aboard Cook's ship in 1772 the sailors opted for an immediate celebration during which "[t]he quantity of strong liquors, arising from the forfeits of the rest, served to heighten the jovial humour, which is the predominant characteristic of sailors." While these two accounts focus on the concept of celebration with alcohol, another account from the eighteenth century provides a different sort of ending to the ceremony. In the 1774 *Journal of a Lady of Quality* (Andrews 1923:71), when the ceremony ended, the author stated that "custom licences [sic] the sailors to treat the officers with every degree of freedom, nor do they fail to take the opportunity. The Cap^t, mates, supercargo and all were chaced [sic] round and round, and drenched in the water from the boat, which they threw at them in bucket-fulls."

This final phase of the ritual, the process of incorporation, returned the newly initiated sailors to their familiar shipboard society. Although the society was the same, their status within the society had changed, and they were seen differently through the eyes of their fellow sailors, just as Geertz (1973:416) and his wife were finally accepted in Bali following the raid on the cockfight when they ran from the authorities along with the locals. Whether it was through partaking in alcohol immediately following the ceremony, joining the others for drinks when the ship returned to port, or taking one last opportunity to exploit the upheaval of the social structure by dousing their leaders with water, the celebration at the end of the ceremony was what Turner (1969:95) referred to as consummating the passage. This activity brought the entire ritual full circle, restored order to the society on board the ship, and began the newly initiated sailors' new role within that society wherein they were equal in status with all others on the ship who had previously crossed the line.

The Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century ushered in technological changes that had permanent effects on sea travel. Advances in sail technology, followed by the invention of steam power, increased the speed of travel making it possible to reach a destination in less time. This increase in speed of voyages led to an increase in passengers who were travelling for leisure or for relocation, and who were now able to travel over sea in increasing comfort. Through the personal accounts of not only sailors but also these passengers, many of the details of crossing the line ceremonies were introduced to non-seafaring populations. This change in accounts led to a change in the ritual itself, whereby solidarity remained an outcome of the ceremony, while the ceremony evolved from one that was a morale-building celebration performed by the sailors for the sailors,

to one that was an entertainment-based ceremony performed by the sailors for the audience composed of both passengers and other sailors.

The ceremonies of the early nineteenth century followed much of the routine of those in the late eighteenth century albeit with a bit more description. Neptune's assistant, or sometimes even Neptune himself, would climb on board and would announce the impending arrival to the Captain who graciously accepted the announcement and welcomed Neptune's arrival. This announcement was made either at the moment of or the night before Neptune stepped on board. Neptune was typically accompanied by his wife, who was almost always named Amphitrite, and his court grew throughout the century to include any or all of the following: a doctor, barber, bears, the royal baby, servants, and any odd characters that were specific to particular vessels. These characters all played some role in creating the atmosphere surrounding the arrival of the sea god and some ran portions of the ceremony that pertained to their character. The ceremony itself still maintained the basic form early in the century, including the shaving, the dunking, and the ability to pay a fine in order to escape the harsh treatment of other sailors. The costumes became much more intricate, and the narration much more scripted over time, while it seems that the ceremony ended abruptly, with little carry over into the evenings.

Analysis of Additions or Changes in the Ceremony

One of the first additions found in the nineteenth century was the drinking of seawater, which was called “the favourite element of the azure god...” by J. Johnson who was a surgeon for the Royal Navy (1807:15). In Johnson's account, Neptune himself forced the uninitiated sailors to drink the sea water as they introduced themselves to him prior to undergoing the usual shaving and dunking. This treatment was occasionally reserved for officers or others who were not well liked by the crew, as stated in an 1809 account by Captain Marryatt. During that

ceremony, the drink was provided to the first lieutenant of the marines who played his German flute to the great annoyance of the sailors. In addition to putting him through the bath, the sailors “made him drink half a pint of salt water,” which they “poured through his own flute as a funnel” (1852:485). The practice of forcing the sailors to drink the sea water may only have lasted a short time, as it did not appear frequently in later accounts throughout the century.

The drinking of sea water, at least in the earlier account, seems to have been done as a way of showing respect to the sea god. The drinking of the sea water took place while the initiand was in what van Gennep called the liminal state, which was when the individual was in between the previous state of inexperienced sailor and the future state of experienced sailor (1960:11). His goal was to make it through the initiation, and whatever was required therein, to achieve the higher status bestowed upon him at the end. With the increase in theatrics, however, the sailors and passengers were aware that the sea god was a fellow sailor and the activity was carried out by the experienced sailors as a means of their own entertainment and that of any spectators at the expense of the initiands. In the later account mentioned above, the drinking of sea water was not necessarily done solely as a sign of respect for Neptune and was not only a way to transition a sailor from one realm to another, but also was done as a way of providing a more difficult initiation process to a sailor who was considered difficult or annoying by the majority of the crew members. In that specific account, the sailors added insult to injury by using the one item that causes their frustration with the sailor, his flute. By that point in time, the action was a combination of theatrical and symbolic meaning related to crossing the line and was done to further embarrass the sailor in order to help him rise in stature at the conclusion of the ceremony.

A second change in the ceremony in the nineteenth century was that the ducking tub of water grew larger and was often filled using the bilge pumps. Although it was not as common throughout the nineteenth century, its use is mentioned several times throughout the century and well into the next. The earliest mention comes from Marryatt's 1809 account, when the cow pen "was lined with double canvas, and boarded; so that it held water and contained about four butts" (1852:485). A later use of a large pool of water occurred in 1885 on board the U.S. Flagship *Lancaster* and was described by a schoolmaster, James Brady, who was on board during the ceremony. "[T]hey were carefully lifted from the bridge and dropped into an awning in the port gangway, so secured as to form a large tub, which was filled with water by a hose connected to the steam pumps" (1885:8). As seen in the second example, the technology of steam power made it possible for the crew to amend the ceremony and to increase the size, and therefore the physical presence and entertainment effect of the tub.

The meaning of the tub of water in regards to the semiotics of the crossing the line ritual does not change as the size of the tub increases. The sailors were still sent to the tub, or pool as it eventually became, to be ducked typically following the treatment of the doctor and the shave by the barber. Just as in previous centuries, this ducking was a part of the liminal phase of the ceremony and was most likely linked to the even earlier concept of religious baptism as practiced by the French in the Age of Discovery. The larger tub allowed for more sailors to be ducked at one time, expediting the process on ships with larger crews. The use of bilge water as opposed to sea water was also a change in this aspect of the ritual; typically baptisms involve clean, or relatively clean, water to wash the initiands and prepare them to begin anew as experienced sailors. As already mentioned, this use of bilge water was made much easier through the development of new technologies; however it also provided another level of disgust to the entire

ritual, as the bilge water was the often putrid water that collected in the bottom of the vessel. The practice of using bilge water added to the humiliation of the sailors to further strip them of their previous attachments and egos prior to their emergence as experienced sailors, while simultaneously enhancing the theatrical entertainment of the performance.

A third aspect of the crossing the line rituals that began to receive a bit more attention in writings of the nineteenth century than those previous was the description and use of the lather that was applied by the barber before the shaving. Several accounts of the period took a moment to describe the lathering process, the first of which was the account of Captain Marryatt in 1809, which stated that, the sailor “was asked his place of nativity and the moment he opened his mouth, the shaving-brush of the barber, which was a very large paint brush, was crammed in with all the filthy lather with which they covered his face and chin” (1852:485). Although this early account of the shaving brush and lather did not provide details, it made clear that the substance used was not one that would have been acceptable to place in anyone’s mouth under normal circumstances. Almost twenty years later, Maria Hackett was travelling by ship and noted that sailors were “treated to a coat of grease and tar” (1912:15) prior to their shaving, while a later account from 1842 stated that “the attendants forced a brush dipped in tar and ashes into our mouths...” (Hill 1893:30). By 1885, a recipe of soap, molasses, and flour was listed for the making of the soap used by the barber on his victims (Brady 1885:8).

The additional information documented in nineteenth century accounts pertaining to the lather that was used for shaving the initiands provides a better understanding of the materials available to the sailors and also the discomfort the initiands must have felt having that mixture applied to their face. The wide variety of ingredients indicates that there was no set recipe for the lather, and that the sailors were free to use their creative minds to produce something that could

easily be applied, clearly be seen by all, and be difficult to remove. Lather, being a necessity when shaving, was fitting for the ritual; however, the combination of ingredients served as one of the obstacles the sailors were to overcome during the liminal phase of the ritual. Although the action of shaving the inexperienced sailors remained the same, and may have held the same meaning as during the previous century, the details added to the action of shaving indicate that it was also for the amusement of the experienced sailors, the entertainment of the passengers, and the humiliation of the initiands.

These several examples all demonstrate the use of humiliation through disgust as a means of initiating of sailors. Although these activities provided entertainment for both the experienced sailors and any passengers, they also served a purpose in the overall initiation of the inexperienced sailors. As Turner (1969:170) pointed out, the understanding of initiation or induction rituals “is that for an individual to go higher on the status ladder, he must go lower than the status ladder.” Sailors who underwent these initiations knew that they were elevating their status as members of the crew; but, before they could simply claim to be members of the experienced group they had to be humbled by those who had gone before. By going through the humiliating trials set before them, the sailors moved from the pre-liminal phase, were stripped of all status and identity during the liminal phase, and emerged at the end with their new status and a new appreciation of the status that they obtained. All of this was accomplished using costumes, characters, and theatrics for entertainment of crew and passengers.

Lastly, the crossing the line rituals of the nineteenth century changed in the theatrical aspect including the number and type of characters, the conversation or script between Neptune and the Captain of the vessel, and the costumes worn by the characters. The number and type of characters increased throughout the nineteenth century, moving from just the main personas of

Neptune and Amphitrite to an entire royal court. Occasionally the number of participants and their specific titles are glossed over with a general “long train of sub-marine deities” as in Johnson’s account (1807:15), possibly due to the fact that the characters were well known to those familiar with the ceremony or sailing. Other times, the writers are more apt to list the participants and describe them in detail, such as in the works of Captain Marryatt where Neptune’s court was said to include “his secretary of state...his surgeon...his barber...and the barber’s mate...” while Amphitrite’s entourage included “six white men...one of the boys of the ship dressed as a baby...his nurse...[and] sea-nymphs...”(1852:484). An account by G. R. Gleig added a parson and a treasurer to the list (1829:118) while James Brady included Neptune’s police, clerk, and bears (1885:8). The bears, which continued to be used into the next century, were placed in the pool of water to assist with ducking the initiands who were sent in to them throughout the ceremony. It is important to note that not every ceremony contained all of these characters, with each having its own combination of the ones mentioned above. The number of participants very much depended on the number of available crew members who had already crossed the line previously and were therefore not required to undergo another initiation and could aid in initiating their fellow sailors.

The addition of the extra characters, listed above, to the ceremony’s performance did little to increase the meaning of the ceremony, as the main character of the ceremony was always Neptune himself. Rather early into the ceremony, he was joined by his wife, Amphitrite, and by the barber who performed the shaving. The character of Amphitrite served as a royal counterpart to Neptune, and someone who could be brought into the conversation that occurred before the start of the ceremony. The royal barber was the character responsible for making sure that the initiands were properly groomed and prepared for their baptism. The reason for the inclusion of

the additional characters beyond those three listed above was not explained; however, there were at least two possible reasons that they were created. One possible reason to add characters to the crossing the line ceremony was that there was an abundance of experienced sailors on board ship, and therefore a large pool of men available to play a role. Creating characters allowed for more sailors to take part in the ritual. A second reason was that the additional characters added more to the entertainment value for the passengers and other sailors on board. Just a simple shave and douse with water seemed to not be enough to satisfy the experienced sailors, so the addition of the other characters and the roles that they played added to the theatrical quality of the ritual.

The theatrical conversation which took place at the start of the ceremony between Neptune and the Captain or Admiral of the ship also increased in length and content during the nineteenth century. In earlier times, Neptune would arrive and greet the Captain showing that they had some history of knowing one another. That aspect was expanded to be an entire conversation by the nineteenth century, which was exemplified in Marryatt's account when Neptune, after welcoming the Captain to the tropics, asked about the King, the Prince, the Prince's relationship with his wife, provided his opinion as to how the Prince's relationship could be improved through the beating of his wife, raised a toast to the King with the Captain, and then provided instruction to his court in regards to the ceremony (1852:484-485). Around 1815, Gleig recounted that "the royal couple were paid many compliments on their appearance, and that of their family, and many inquiries made respecting the welfare of their dominions and friends, when, to refresh themselves after their journey, they condescended to partake each in a glass of rum" (1829:119-120). Although this account did not provide quotes of the discussion, it was clear that Neptune and the Captain were familiar enough with one another that such a

conversation could be held. This also made it clear to those watching that these two individuals shared camaraderie. A later account from 1885 did not have the conversation taking place just prior to the ceremony, but instead had the conversation held the night before when Neptune made an annunciation visit. After arriving on board, Neptune, joined by Amphitrite, “addressed the Admiral and Captain in 24 lines of rimes ‘composed by...[the] Quarter Gunner,’ paying respects to Admiral English, Captain Potter, and his ‘fine ship’ with ‘big guns,’ recommending that the ‘good crew’ be made better by shaving...” (Brady 1885:8). In this account by James Brady, not only was the conversation scripted, but it was also the first time that any author noted that it was conducted in rhyme.

The extended conversation between Neptune and the Captain or Admiral at the start of the ceremony was intended to create an air of familiarity. It indicated to the initiands and also to the spectators that the two men had met under similar circumstance at least once and possibly many times before. Prior to the nineteenth century, the conversation typically consisted of a simple greeting and the question of one another’s health and well-being. The meaning itself did not change with the additional words exchanged, as the same basic purpose of the conversation was maintained. The expansion of the conversation coincided with the increased theatrics of the ceremony, making it quite possible that the sole purpose of the addition was to increase the entertainment value. This was made clearer in Brady’s account when the entire conversation was held in rhyme, which was done for no other reason than to increase the theatrical aspect of the performance and add entertainment to the ritual.

Just as the words used during the crossing the line ceremony became more scripted throughout the nineteenth century, the costumes that were created became much more elaborate and theatrical. Marryatt describes the characters in detail, stating that:

[t]he god was attended by a splendid court; his secretary of state, whose head was stuck full of the quills of the sea bird of these latitudes; his surgeon with his lancet, pill-box, and smelling-bottle; his barber, with a razor, whose blade was two feet long, cut off an iron hoop; and the barber's mate, who carried a small tub, as a shaving box...(1852:484)

Amphitrite was also costumed, with a male playing the role, and was wearing a “woman’s night-cap...ornamented with sea-weed” and carrying a harpoon while on her lap was a boy dressed in long clothes and a cap as a baby (1852:484). This account, and others of the day, indicated that the costumes and props were created from everyday items found on board the ship or in the general area surrounding the ship’s location. This progression of costuming and props continued throughout the century, becoming more elaborate in the creation in that time. In 1815, Gleig described the barber as having “a basin on his head, and an immense beard covered with sea weed,” the sea-parson as “dressed in an unassuming suit of black, wears a large wig, and holds underneath his arm, what I thought an immense book” (1829:119). In Frederic Stanhope Hill’s account of the ceremony in 1842, only Neptune was mentioned as a character and his costume consisted of “a wig of tow, with a long beard, carrying as a trident a pair of grains, a kind of four-pronged fish spear” (1893:30). This description seemed to follow the general belief of the image of Neptune, as by the end of the century he was described as having a “long gray beard of teased manila, tin crown on his head, and trident in right hand” while Amphitrite’s image was not always regal as the same account states that she “with long blond hair of the same material as his whiskers, troupe, and stockingless and shoeless pedal extremities” looked very little like a Queen (Brady 1885:8). This increase in the costuming

added to the theatrical aspect of the ritual, rather than to the symbolic meaning for the initiads themselves.

The costuming of the characters in the crossing the line ceremony likely increased in complexity for several reasons. First, the costumes were made from items that were readily available to the sailors on board ship. Throughout the nineteenth century and later, the quantity and type of objects available for use to the sailors increased as the technology changed the types of objects on board and improved the quality of life for those sailing on the ships. Second, the crew would often have their own belongings on board and props and costumes could be made from these items as well. Lastly, the desire to create more elaborate costumes stemmed from the overall increase in the theatrical aspects of the ceremony. A sailor simply wearing a beard or seaweed in his hair was not enough to entertain the other sailors or the audience, so often times the full clothing costume was created in order to make the characters seem more realistic to what was often thought to be the image of Neptune. Other than providing a stronger sense of character, and perhaps a little more fear in some of the initiads, the creative increase in the design of the costumes added to the theatrical aspect, not just the symbolic aspect, of the ritual.

In addition to the costumes and increase in characters, there is one notable prop that appeared in several accounts throughout the nineteenth century that should be mentioned. When the monarchs arrived from the sea, they were occasionally transported along deck by means of a rudimentary carriage, often times a repurposed gun carriage. This prop was first mentioned by Gleig in 1815 when “[t]rumpets flourished, drums beat, and sea horses pranced, preceding the state carriage of His Majesty, drawn by four beautiful horses” (1829:119); however, without details provided it is impossible to know for sure what item served as the carriage, who portrayed the horses, and how the carriage was propelled. The carriage was mentioned again in 1818 when

James Hackett described “Neptune, and the fair partner of his watery throne, being seated in due form upon a gun-carriage surrounded by numerous train of Nereides” (1818:20). From this description, it was still unclear as to who pulled the carriage or if it even was moved; however, the carriage was clearly defined as a gun carriage, an everyday item on board ship that would not have required construction or intricate work to create. Later in the century, however, sailors did go to such lengths for props such as the carriage. In James Brady’s account, the “Chariot, on which he and his wife were seated, was made by lashing two halliard racks together; the motive power, eight of his followers, manned a drag rope secured to it” (1885:8). It was difficult to determine if both the descriptions and the ceremonial process changed throughout this time, or if just one or the other expanded in the scope of the information provided.

The appearance and use of the carriage to transport Neptune and Amphitrite on the deck was a symbol of their prestige and indicated the required respect that the two monarchs were to receive. It seemed fitting that, in the first account mentioned above, the two should ride upon a gun carriage, one of the most indicative signs of a ship’s military power. However, this item may also have been chosen simply for ease of use; the gun carriage was already wheeled and the sailors would not have had to create a prop out of other materials. The later account indicates that the sailors either did not have appropriate items to use for a carriage or were intent to make their own. Either way, the addition of a carriage to carry the monarchs across the deck of the ship was an indication of their importance, adding meaning to the ceremony itself as the fact that Neptune and Amphitrite were considered royalty was reiterated in the ritual. It seemed that this addition, like most of the others addressed in this section, was meant as both a means of entertainment and as a symbolic gesture.

Just as in the previous centuries, it should not be assumed that all ships that sailed in the nineteenth century performed the crossing the line ceremony. Several accounts from the period make note that, although known and even expected at times, the ceremony was not carried out on many of the vessels that crossed the equator, and the reasons provided vary. In 1831, J. N. Reynolds stated that the ceremony was not held on board the United States' frigate *Potomac* and that “[c]ommanders differ in opinion as to the propriety of permitting the ‘*old sea dog*’ to exercise his rough jokes upon those who are about to pass, for the first time, into the southern hemisphere” (1835:29). It would seem that the decision to hold the ceremony was still a choice held by the Captain, although that decision may have been less based on fear of mutiny or unrest on the ship, and more based on the treatment of the inexperienced sailors and/or passengers.

Occasionally, when the ceremony was held on board a ship that carried passengers, the passengers would simply refuse the ceremony, as recounted in 1849 by Samuel Upham (1878:190). It should be noted that the passengers did not always completely understand the concept of the equator, as in one account kept by a Roving Printer around 1855. In that account, one of the passengers held a vigilant watch for the line as they crossed it. He expected the line to be a physical object that could be seen with the naked eye, just as on the maps that he had seen (1861:41). Other times, throughout the mid to late nineteenth century, Neptune would be mentioned in a brief journal account, but details of the ceremony were completely left out, with occasional mention made of certificates and fines (Lydenberg 1870:160-178). When the ceremonies were not held, often the journal accounts explain that the practice was outdated and barbaric, such as the account by Mark Twain, who stated “[w]e had no fool ceremonies, no fantasitics, no horse-play. All that sort of thing has gone out” while going on to explain that the ducking from the yard arm and the appearance of Neptune was considered funny to sailors who

were on board for long periods of time and who needed entertainment, but that such practices would never be found funny on shore or even on shorter voyages (1897:66).

Also of note, unlike in the previous centuries, there is very little mention of any events taking place following the nineteenth century crossing the line rituals. Previously, it had been customary to collect fines of either money to buy alcohol or of alcohol itself, and then to celebrate following either the end of the ceremony or the end of the voyage. The nineteenth century accounts occasionally mention that fines were collected, such as in Cooper's account when he said that "certificates were given to all those who had crossed the line, and tribute exacted from the remainder;" however, the exact nature of the tributes are unknown (Lydenberg 1870:168-169). It could have been that the sailors did celebrate with a drink either after the ceremony or later in the evening, or perhaps that the celebration took place at the next port. However, the silence in the accounts could also indicate that no celebration took place whatsoever. This lack of information makes it difficult to ascertain the post-liminal aspect of the ceremony when the newly initiated were welcomed back into the shipboard society with their new status.

Conclusion

The documentation of the crossing the line ceremony as performed on board English vessels began in the early eighteenth century and proliferated in the decades following to provide first-hand accounts as well as a better understanding of the changes that took place within the ceremony during the generations that followed. These accounts make it possible to better understand the events as they relate to "local understandings" (Bauman 1986:3) on board the vessels, or in relation to context, and it is accomplished through the use of semiotics as put forward by van Gennep and others. This understanding of the ritual and the changes that it has

undergone make it possible to compare rituals from various time periods and the changing importance of various aspects of rituals as ideals change over time. The rituals studied in the eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries can then be compared to rituals in the twentieth, and twenty-first centuries both in what aspects were kept, and what aspects changed and why they changed, as well as the changing meaning behind the ritual processes.

CHAPTER 5: MODERN PERSPECTIVES

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided a fountain of information regarding the crossing the line ceremony when compared to the early years of sail, making it possible for future generations to read and study the changes in the ritual. As the nineteenth century gave way to the early twentieth century, the detailed passenger accounts continued to appear at a moderate pace, providing details from sailors and passengers alike. As the world became embroiled in large-scale wars beginning around 1914, accounts of crossing the line ceremonies slowly decreased; the ones that were still kept most often came from sailors aboard naval vessels during the wars. Around the middle of the twentieth century, the written accounts dwindled to nearly nothing.

The accounts from this time period highlight yet another change in the purpose of the ceremony. During the Ages of Exploration and Sail, the rituals which began as religious events became initiation events that centered on the initiation of inexperienced sailors by their experienced fellow sailors. At that time, the performance of the ritual was geared toward the initiands and their experience was meant to welcome them into the full membership as a crew member. Throughout the nineteenth century, changes were made to the ritual creating more of a theatrical production in addition to the symbolic initiation of sailors. By the middle of the twentieth century, the Royal Navy issued a guide for conducting the ceremony which included lighting effects, sprinklers, and sound systems. The ceremony in general had become one of theatrics, as well as one of initiation, meant to torment the inexperienced sailors and to entertain the others on board. Not long after the production of this manual, accounts of crossing the line ceremonies dwindled and today are difficult to find, which could be a result of several factors related to the rapid increase in technology.

One factor that could have resulted in the decreased number of accounts was the decline in sailing as a major form of transportation. Although the shipping and cargo industry used, and continues to use, ships as a means of transporting goods around the world, following World War II travel overseas may have been slow to resume, and when it did resume it was most likely done using commercial airlines and over time the cost of such travel became reasonable enough that not only the rich were using planes as a means of transportation. This meant that fewer travelers were using ships to visit overseas locations, so there were no journal accounts, letters, or news articles written by the passengers to be published when they arrived at their destination or when they returned home. This is not to say that sailors did not still practice the ritual, only that there were no longer these published accounts from passengers who were now traveling more by plane.

Another reason for the decline in the accounts of crossing the line ceremonies could be the change in the way people communicate over long distances. Around the middle of the twentieth century, when the accounts of crossing the line rituals seemingly disappear, the use of telephones, telegraphs, and postcards had increased. Letters were still written, but fewer of the authors of those letters found themselves on board ships. The telegraphs and postcards were a quick way to say hello and to let others know that they were travelling safely without providing much detail into the experiences of the traveler. As the use of the telephone increased, many times travelers simply called to let loved ones know that they are doing well on their trip. Even if these conversations did include details of sailing adventures or crossing the line ceremonies, there would be no way to document that without a recording or a transcription of that recording.

The decline in accounts should not be assumed to mean that the crossing the line ceremonies happened less frequently. The ceremonies that were performed were not documented

in a written form as frequently, and although some photos survive of the ceremony from the middle and late twentieth century, it seems that much of the information was either shared by word of mouth or was kept among the crews involved so as not to share the secret too openly with non-sailors. These ceremonies seem to fall into insignificance until the very end of the twentieth century when they reappear, in a much more negative form, as fodder for the press to address the act of hazing within the navy in general and the military as a whole. This aspect of the ritual will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

The Twentieth Century

Throughout the early twentieth century, the number of accounts detailing crossing the line ceremonies steadily increased. There were occasional changes to details of the ceremony which were decided by the crew of the ship that was holding the celebration. With the start of two world-wide wars and the expanding military presence of countries such as Britain and the United States in other parts of the world, the number of naval accounts that documented crossing the line ceremonies increased. The overall number of accounts begins to decline slightly in the 1920s and 1930s, until by the early 1950s the accounts are difficult to find if not nonexistent until the concern over hazing arose in the later part of the century, leaving researchers to speculate as to the reason or reasons for the decline. One possible reason was that communication greatly improved between sailors and their families at home, allowing for more phone conversations, conversations through letters, and later email conversations. Because the sailors were no longer out of touch with loved ones for such long periods of time as in previous centuries when voyages took months or even years, sailors no longer kept journals detailing shipboard activities such as the crossing the line ceremonies or those journals have not been published for the public to read and study. Because they could talk more regularly with their

loved ones through the means mentioned above, they may not have felt a need to keep a journal to pass the time and record events while on board. A third possible reason for the decline was that the sailors did not want to share the detail of the ritual, so as to shield future initiands, as well as non-sailors, from the activities that took place during the ceremony. This silence would then create a secretive society, of sorts, that only those initiated would understand. Whatever the reason, the accounts did indeed become scarce after the 1950s following the climax in the earlier part of the same century.

Analysis of the Changes Applied to the Ceremony

The ceremonies of the twentieth century, just as those previous, often began with an announcement the day or night before of the impending arrival of Neptune. Sometimes this announcement was made by Neptune himself, other times by an assistant who typically appeared as Davy Jones. Rather than just announcing that Neptune would be on board the next day, this portion of the ceremony became much more formal including an official summons that was often times read, and on occasion physically provided to the uninitiated crew members. An early example of the summons was provided in the account maintained by Elmer Geittmann in his work *In Memory of My Cruise to Honolulu, the Philippines, The South Seas, and the Orient 1909-1910*. The summons read:

DOMAIN OF HIS MAJESTY,

NEPTUNUS REX.

Equatorial Regions, October 11, 1909

To.....

GREETINGS!

Being a landlubber and daring to enter our aqueous and

equinoctial regions, without due and submissive ceremony, you
are hereby ordered and directed to appear before My Most August
Presence, in latitude 0°0'0" and longitude 165 east, on October 14,
1909, to explain your most contumacious conduct and to accept most
heartily and with good grace, the pains and penalties of the awful
tortures that will be inflicted upon you, to the end that you may
become an honored Shellback.

(Signed): NEPTUNUS REX

(Seal.) Attest: DAVY JONES (1910:31)

The summons could also list the “offenses” with which the initiands were charged, and requested them to “appear and obey or suffer the penalty,” whereby they were actually being punished for imaginary and sometimes ludicrous offenses against King Neptune (Lovette 1939:42-47). The ceremony was taking on a more official demeanor, and on at least one occasion a mailbag including the summons for each of the men, and certificates for those who had already crossed the equator previously, was delivered by Davy Jones before his departure (Codd 1919:63).

The summons, whether read or written, added to the atmosphere of the ceremony for the initiands, and no doubt stirred mixed emotions among them anticipating the “tortures” and desiring their status change at the end of the ceremony. It is at that point that they found themselves in the pre-liminal phase of the ritual, no longer a member of the overall shipboard society, but not yet experiencing the trials required for them to be considered an experienced sailor, which by that time was called a shellback. The writing out of the summons provided a tangible memento of the occasion that sailors could keep if they wished, documenting the

process of being welcomed back into the community. It also added to the theatrical aspect of the ritual, which carried over from the nineteenth century. There was no doubt in the minds of either the sailors or the spectators that those who received a summons were about to be provided a memorable experience.

The next day, Neptune arrived at the time indicated during the summons, and with him would be his entire court. Just as in the nineteenth century, the number of members in his court varied based on the number of available participants. He was almost always accompanied by his wife, Amphitrite, although on two occasions it was not specifically Amphitrite that joined him. In 1903, Nobbs and Berger indicated that it was Britannia who joined Neptune on the gun carriage upon their arrival (1904:72) and in 1913 Holland states that the procession was led by “Neptune and his daughter,” who remained unnamed (1913:21). These variations may be nothing more than incorrect spectator assumptions, but they were important to note as they may also be an indication of the creative license of those who planned the ceremony on individual ships. The appearance of Britannia in 1903 may indicate the prominence that Britain felt in regards to their rule of the oceans and the power that they exerted with their naval strength. Either way, Neptune was almost always accompanied by a female companion when he made his appearance on board ship for the ceremony.

The court almost always had the barber present to conduct the shaving either near to or “rigged up over” the bath (Ricketts 1907:38). He typically carried with him his razor, which was usually made of wood or iron and was oversized, to say the least, with one account stating that it was made from “boards three feet long” (Codd 1919:64). In addition to the razor, the barber carried with him a homemade lather which he applied to the faces of the initiands prior to the shaving. The lather, just as in the previous century, varied from one ship to the next, but was

always formed from a grotesque combination of left over materials on the ship. One account stated that it consisted of “soap mixed with grease and a small proportion of tar” (New York Times 1907:6), another stated that it “was made of gravy left over from the previous supper, oil, and ochre” (Geittmann 1910:43), while a third consisted of only whitewash and soot (Morely and Hodgson 1926:131-134). In 1946, the British Admiralty created a guidebook for the crossing the line ceremony, in which they described the lather as “a paste of flour and water in white and two other colours, but in these days of food rationing some less palatable substitute may have to be found” (Lydenberg 1957:208).

In order to apply the mixture used as lather, the barber carried a shaving brush, which was typically not a small object. Many accounts simply describe this object as a whitewash brush, which was much larger than a typical shaving brush (Ricketts 1907:39; Loomis 1913:17; Lydenberg 1957:187,209), while others created a brush from items found throughout the ship. On board the Lamport and Holt Steamers, the shaving brush was “made out of unraveled manila rope yarn” (New York Times 1907:6) while on board the U.S.S. *Colorado* in 1909, the crew employed an electric brush “that was charged with about two hundred volts of electricity, and when it came into contact with his face or body the blue flames danced before his eyes and he became rigid at once” (Geittmann 1910:43). It appeared that throughout the century, the whitewash brush was the object most frequently chosen as the shaving brush, and that the electric brush was not popular or decided against by those planning the ritual more often than not.

The barber character was a continuation from the previous centuries, and the meaning of this character did not necessarily change throughout that time. What did change were the details of the barber’s costume and props as well as the way the barber was portrayed and the effect that

his portrayal may have had on the initiands. Symbolically, the character of the barber may have been a way of ritually cleaning the face of the initiand prior to his baptism into Neptune's realm; preparing the initiand to be accepted by the sea god himself. The accounts documented a symbolic razor made of boards or metal and being 2-3 feet in length, which would not be necessary if the shaving were solely meant to prepare the initiand. The inclusion of the razor, the lather made of the unpleasant combination of ingredients, and the oversized whitewash brush were symbolic of the ritual cleansing and the removal of the old self in order to welcome the new self, but were also included as a way to frighten the initiand and to entertain the spectators.

In addition to the barber, Neptune was frequently accompanied by the doctor who was meant to provide his own form of medicine should the initiands be considered by him to be unwell. Sometimes the doctor visit came before the barber, other times after the barber, but in either occasion, the initiands were almost always greeted by a medicine that was on the same level with the lather. One early twentieth century account explains that the doctor "prescribed a pill of soot, soap, etc." (Nobbs and Berger 1904:73), and again six years later in 1909, the initiand was "thrown upon the operating table and forced to take a pill that was composed of sour dough, linseed oil, and quinine" (Geittmann 1910:43). In 1911, a variation occurred in which the doctor "prescribed some of his yellow, pink, or blue liquids or watersoaked biscuits, which were remedies administered down the back or up the sleeve" (Loomis 1911:17) which avoided ingestion of a substance all together. By 1923, the ingesting of a medicine had returned, this time in drink form with a mixture of "tea, coffee, rum, pepper, salt, mustard, beer, and a very small quantity of aqua vitae" as noted by Morley and Hodgson (Lydenberg 1957:187). Nearly twenty years later, following in the path of the barber's brush, the doctor's treatment transformed into something much more uncomfortable for the initiands, when Heinz reported for the New York

sun that “they were seated in an electrically charged doctor’s chair to have their mouths sprayed with gentian blue” (Lydenberg 1957:199). This practice must not have been popular or did not last long, as two years later, in the handbook provided by the British Admiralty there is no mention of electricity being applied to the initiands.

The character of the doctor made more regular appearances in the twentieth century accounts, and his meaning was likely the same as that of the barber. The appearance of the doctor character may be related to the increased focus on the science and study of health and healing throughout society during this time period. The doctor was to make sure that the initiands were healthy enough and fit enough to cross into the realm of Neptune. Should he find that the initiands were lacking in health, which he almost always did, he administered his medicine. He was ceremoniously preparing the initiands for their acceptance into the realm of Neptune and was transitioning them from inexperienced to experienced sailor during the liminal phase; however, just as with the barber, the doctor’s costume and props went above and beyond the requirements of his role. The doctor’s medicine was, much like the barber’s lather, composed of ingredients that together made for a wretched combination that was sure to bring a reaction from the initiand. Also, just as with the lather, the reaction was drawn in part as a rite of passage for the sailor, but also as a form of entertainment for those who were watching the ceremonies.

The third character, actually a set of characters, which came into use in the late nineteenth century and which continued to be used in the twentieth century were the bears. The bears were used regularly toward the very end of the nineteenth century, and continued to be characters that were present in the twentieth century. Typically, the bears were stationed in the pool of water to make sure that the initiands received a proper ducking (Nobbs & Berger 1904:73; Lydenberg 1957:187, 192). On one occasion, the bears were replaced with mermaids;

however, their task remained the same (Ricketts 1907:39). The bears did not carry props as did the other characters; however, the British Admiralty did provide a description of their costume, stating that “[t]he basic part of the costume was black canvas lightly thrummed with yarns. A fearsome embellishment of teased-out spun yarn, like phenomenal furs of an unknown species, thickly draped their necks, shoulders, waist...; on their heads they wore navy socks in the manner of fishermen’s caps” (Lydenberg 1957:209).

The addition of the bears to a maritime ritual seems odd, as bears were nowhere near the ships sailing on the ocean. Their addition may have been more for convenience than for symbolic meaning. However, one possible reason that the characters were created as bears could be due to their position in the ceremony and their purpose. In the wild, bears were often be seen in a stream, at the base of a small waterfall, where they were waiting for the jumping fish which they then caught and ate as their meal. The bears on board ship were located in the water where the initiands were ducked following the doctor’s treatment and the barber’s shave. They stood, waiting in the water for their prey, ready to catch them and make sure that they received a proper ducking. The image of the bear may have been what came to mind and was considered recognizable when it was decided that the characters playing that role would be bears. Their inclusion added to the entertainment value of the ritual for the spectators and to the torment of the initiands.

The crossing the line ceremonies occasionally contained a myriad of other characters whose roles were either minor or were just not described in detail. Not all of these characters were present in all of the documented ceremonies and their inclusion depended on the number of experienced sailors available and the desire of the crew performing the ceremony. Some of these characters include the princess, judge, secretary of state, attorneys, court bugler, chief of police,

navigator, chaplain, cook, undertaker, musicians, devil, and the royal baby (Geittman 1910:39; Lydenberg 1957:186-205). There was also a random array of assistants to the various positions that were common, as well as additional main characters, such as doctors and barbers, when the number of sailors to be initiated was overly large. The inclusion of these characters did little to add more meaning to the ceremony, but their presence added to the overall theatrical value of the ceremony for those who were watching the treatment of the initiads.

The characters conducted the crossing the line ceremony in the twentieth century much the same way as they did in the previous century, including the shaving and the ducking. Unlike in the nineteenth century accounts, the twentieth century accounts include some detail about the end of the ceremony, the post-liminal phase, and how the activities came to a close. In some cases, the crew simply returned to the typical shipboard routine with no fanfare or mention of other activities (Geittmann 1910:44) while at other times the clean-up process of both the ship and the initiated individuals was given, which could take several weeks (Holland 1913:22; Lydenberg 1957:196). Although these accounts contained no specific activities that were out of the ordinary for the sailors, the return to normal for the initiated individuals included their new status among the sailors. In the everyday routine that status change may not have made a difference; however, just the recognition among their fellow crew and their status during the next crossing of the line made the sailors feel more included by their peers. Several accounts do mention a celebration of sorts, but one that was not used previous to this century: Neptune and all the members of his court jumped into the ducking tank with the newly initiated sailors (Hamilton 1921; Loomis 1913:18; Holland 1913:22). This could have been done for entertainment, or also due to the heat of the day and the desire for all of the sailors to cool off in the water. However, the joining of Neptune and his entire court in the ducking pool may also

indicate the equality that has been gained by the initiands and the sailors who had previously crossed the equator.

No matter the way the ceremony itself ended, by the twentieth century, the sailors who were initiated typically received a certificate indicating their new found rank amongst the rest of the crew. The certificate was even included in Kendall's *Dictionary of Service Slang*, the entry for which is "a Neptune Certificate...given in ceremony on Equator" (1941). Some were more entertainment based, placing the sailors in "various fish families" (Loomis 1913:18) and "attesting to the fitness of the recipient to sail 'the seven seas'" (Holland 1913:22). Others were made to appear official, containing maritime terminology, the captain's signature, and the ship's seal (Lovette 1939:47). In the British Admiralty's handbook for the ceremony, the certificate was instructed to consist of "(a) The ship's crest, (b) A photograph or drawing of the ship, (c) The main body of the Certificate, [and] (d) The seas of Neptune and Amphitrite" (Lydenberg 1957:211) such as Dr. Metz's certificate below (Figure 1). The certificates seem to have become more formal as the formality of the event increased throughout the century, culminating in the final example by the time the written accounts of the crossing the line ceremony became sparse. During World War II, the certificates became much smaller and formalized, with areas for information about the sailor to be typed onto the provided lines. The certificates were the size of typical ID cards and could be kept in a wallet to be shown when desired (Figure 2). Although less stylized, the certificates still provided the desired result, allowing sailors to mark their passage with a memento. Despite the increased formality, the certificate functioned as a physical object that was an indication of the status change that resulted from the participation in the crossing the line ritual and provided proof on later voyages of the status change achieved.



Figure 1: Certificate of a Dr. Metz, 1927 (Cavanagh 2003:

http://www.iub.edu/~iuam/online_modules/metz/metz/adventures.html

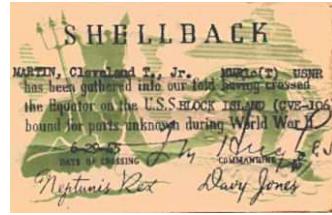


Figure 2: Shellback, 1945 (Martin 2007:

<http://www.washburn.edu/cas/art/cyoho/archive/OurFamily/Martins/JackMartin/>

Just as in previous centuries, not every account of a voyage documented crossing the line ceremonies either because the author did not feel the need or, more likely, the ceremony was not held. There were several accounts in the twentieth century that made mention of the fact that the ceremony was not held on board the particular ship, or on board other ships, and the reasons provided vary. After describing the ceremony that took place on board his ship, Loomis (1913:18) stated that “[i]t is only on the palatial passenger boats that the ceremony is dying out,” suggesting that the ceremony was still being practiced regularly on board other vessels. This understanding should be kept in mind when studying later accounts that specifically mentioned that the ceremony was not held, as the account may have been written by a passenger on board a

passenger ship or someone on land with a misunderstanding of the activities on board ship. Such may have been the case in the *Dictionary of Sea Terms*, published in 1919 by Ansted, in his entry for “The *line*,” when he wrote that “[t]he practice is still kept up to a minor extent, but is gradually dying out” (1919:162). Aside from just passengers, the nationalities of the sailors on board may have been cause enough for the ceremony to be reduced to a toast of Neptune’s health. Butler recalls that the large number of “Peruvians, Chileans, and Spanish” on board the ship created a concern that they would not understand the ritual or the meaning behind it (1923:89).

The political situation also played a role in the carrying out of the ceremony, as the World Wars and other smaller conflicts could have brought about unsafe situations for the sailors to let down their guard for even a short time. In at least one case, this was remedied through the reading of a script, marking the passage without holding the ritual. In 1919, H.M.S. *Renown* crossed the line, and the conversation between the Captain and Neptune performed over a wireless connection was recorded in the ship’s magazine. Neptune began by requesting the identity of the ship entering his realm, and Captain Taylor responded with the identity of the ship and a welcoming to the sea god to come on board. To this Neptune responded:

My realm is yours. We are Allies, and Allies we’ll always be;

You obeyed my rules in your hundred wars,

You are fit to traverse my sea.

I helped you in fifteen eighty eight,

When Spain’s Armada came,

And I’ll help you until the end of fate,

For I know you will play the game.

You did not sink a Hospital Ship—You bombed no Red Cross Camp;

You did no murder for murder's sake,

In liner or eight knot tramp.

There's a seat on my salt-encrusted throne

Which is yours till time shall cease;

The waters I rule you may call your own

In everlasting peace ("Aren't We Lucky?" 43).

This response, just as with the appearance of Britannia with Neptune in 1904, relates directly to the self-image held by Britain during this time. Britain's view of itself as a successful sea-faring nation throughout history carried over into the wars of the twentieth century. Neptune's speech indicated that he is on the side of the British in the most recent war, just as he was throughout wars past, and that he viewed the British as being the side of the just and moral. This speech is the obvious creation of the British, and provides a glimpse into the mindset of the sailors of the nation.

Images of the Ritual

Until the invention of the camera, and often times even up to the modern day, one of the best ways to share images, scenes, and events was through the visual arts. The artistic creations of individuals can evoke emotions that are as varied as the public who views those creations. These works of art can also tell a story from the past, which can guide those who are searching for answers or details and provide some of the fodder for their intellectual fires. Paintings and drawings of the crossing the line ceremony, although infrequent, not only evoke emotion, but also allow for a more unbiased account of the ceremony and a glimpse into the past to understand the meaning and symbolism behind the actions of sailors crossing the equator. Many

of the paintings and drawings come from the nineteenth century, and they elaborate on the written accounts of that time.

One early image comes from aboard the sloop Favorite in 1805 while it was making a voyage to the west coast of Africa (Figure 3). The drawing was published in “Account of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa” by F. B. Spilsbury, and was titled “Ceremony of Shaving on Passing the Line” (1807). The image is that of an inexperienced sailor who is receiving his initiation into the realm of experienced sailors. He is sitting or teetering on the edge of a large, wooden tub that is being filled with water by a fellow sailor behind him. As he is being lathered with a dark substance that may have been tar or a combination of other available ingredients on board, the victim’s facial expression and body language suggest a panic or extreme trepidation for what is about to occur. The man holding the brush and applying the lather-type substance is a fellow sailor who, tattooed and shirtless, is wearing a decoration or costume piece on his head, full length, button-front pants, and no shoes. The look of pleasure at the expense of another permeates the man’s face, making it clear that he is thoroughly enjoying his duty for this crossing the line ritual. To the other side of the victim, a third sailor dressed as the barber stands at the ready with a toothed blade in hand, a checkered cloth draped over his shoulders, his own decorative head piece, and an apron covering his pants to protect them from the mess. As he holds the victim’s head back during the lather application, he also wears a grin on his face and appears to be enjoying his role in this crossing ritual.

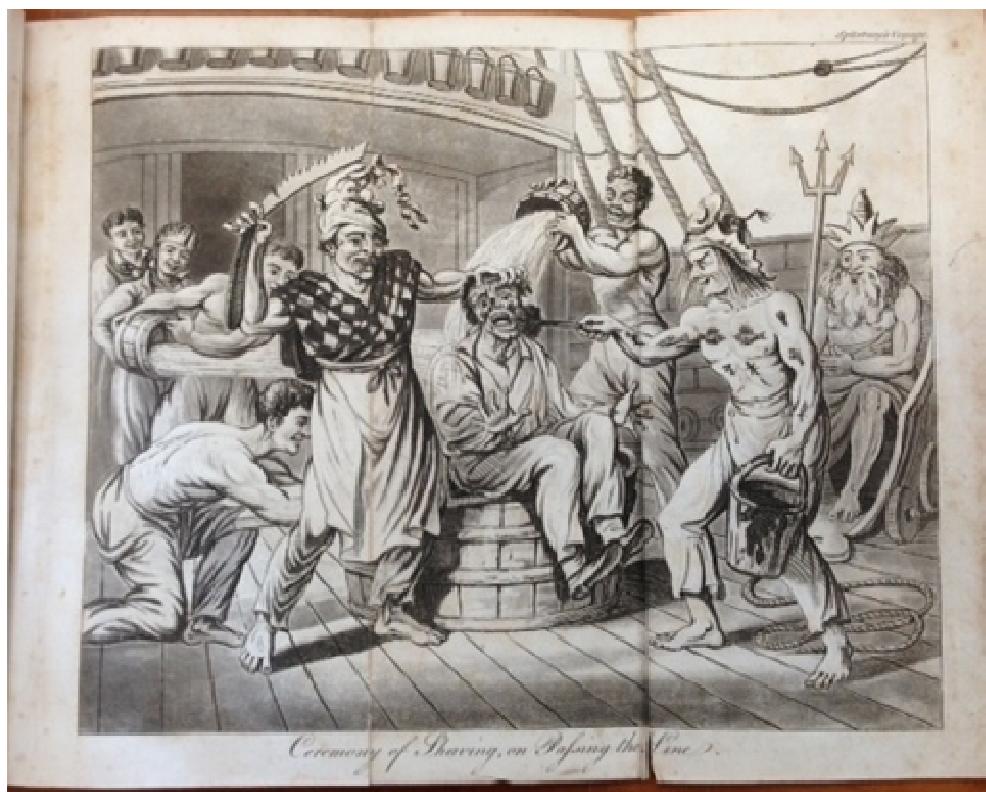


Figure 3: Ceremony of Shaving on Crossing the Line (Spilsbury 1807: <http://sca.blogs.wesleyan.edu/files/Account-of-a-Voyage-2.jpg>)

Behind these three characters are a number of sailors who are responsible for the victim once he has gone into the tub of water, who are occasionally referenced as bears in the written accounts. Two of these men have buckets of water that are being dumped into the larger tub, and one man is kneeling next to the tub holding onto what appears to be the seat of the victim at the edge of the tub. At least one man appears to have a head covering of sorts that could be ceremonial, but the others are wearing nothing special with their sailor pants and even one appears to still be wearing his jacket. However, it is the figure in the background on the right that appears out of place and who marks the ceremony as that of crossing the equator: Neptune. He is a bearded man who is seated, wrapped in a toga-like robe, holding a trident, and wearing a tall crown indicating his status of ruler or king. He has a smile across his face as he watches the festivities unfolding before him.

Through this image, we can see that the actions taken during the ceremony and therefore the meaning behind the ceremony is very much like that of the written accounts of the time. The sailor is pictured while transitioning through the liminal phase, neither inexperienced nor experienced, but crossing the threshold. He is being prepared for this transition by two of his shipmates who are shaving his face to ritually cleanse him for the entrance into Neptune's realm of experienced sailors. Behind the initiate, we can see Neptune looking on, waiting to welcome the sailor into his realm once he has been cleansed in the tub of water. Although not the early baptism that was practiced on board ships, the image fits with the written descriptions of the ritual during the early 19th century that have been analyzed in the previous chapters of this research.

Another early nineteenth century image shows a slightly different scene, although many of the same meaningful elements are present. Hand colored by Thomas and William Daniell, and printed in *A Picturesque Voyage to India by the Way of China* (1810), the image shows a sailor approaching a man seated on a board across a large tub (Figure 4). The man in the tub, and several others around him, is wearing a dark wig and body paint while on his lap he holds a map and a pair of dividers. The tub is situated on a thin wooden platform, and attached to the sides of the tub are ropes or cords that are held by two kneeling figures wearing similar wigs which may indicate that the tub and platform function as a chariot of sorts for Neptune who appears to be the man sitting in the tub. An assistant behind Neptune holds the trident while Neptune works with the map on his lap. To the front of Neptune, a sailor approaches in a slightly bowed manner with his hat in his right hand and his left hand outstretched toward Neptune in a welcoming gesture. The entire scene is surrounded by other sailors who appear to be onlookers to the ritual at hand, although it is unclear what the ritual will entail from the still image itself.

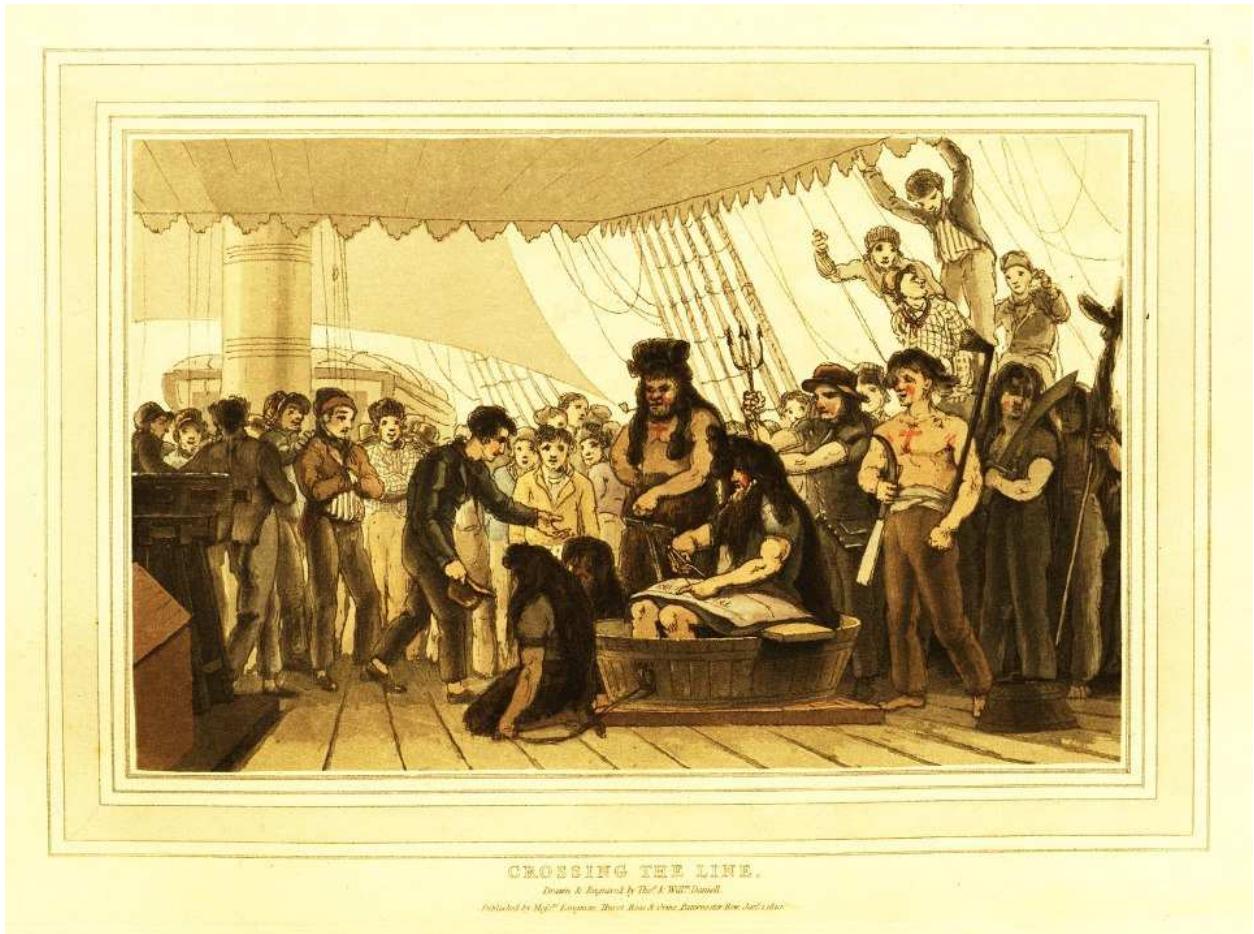


Figure 4: Crossing the Line (Daniell 1810)

It appears that the ritual's victim in this image is the man approaching the tub where Neptune is seated. He has already removed his hat and is bowing as he approaches the tub, both of which signals a respect for the seated man in the tub. It is also possible that he is welcoming Neptune on board; however he is not dressed as an officer who, according to written accounts, would hold such an honor. The tub is also serving a different purpose in this image than in many of the other images and accounts; instead of a place of baptism it may be Neptune's chariot being pulled by sailors playing the part of members of Neptune's realm. Some of the onlookers who are also wearing wigs appear to be armed with swords, but they are standing in a guarding position as opposed to a threatening position, so it seems as though they are not meant to play a role in the ceremony itself. Overall, the image provides documentation that the crossing of the

equator was celebrated, and although many of the same components are present, the details of the liminal aspect of the ceremony are not evident from the print.

A popular image from a little later in the nineteenth century comes from H.M.S. *Beagle*, made popular by Charles Darwin during his time at sea. An equator crossing ceremony was documented on board ship by Fitzroy in *Voyages of the Adventure and Beagle. Vol. II* (1839) which included a print titled “Crossing the Line.” Unlike the previous print, the image of the ceremony on the *Beagle* shows a multitude of activities taking place at one time with many of the usual characters involved (Figure 5). Two initiates are visible, both of whom have been stripped down and blindfolded, and one of whom is being shaved by Neptune’s assistants. Neptune is seated on deck below the shaving and dunking area with his back toward the artist, and several sailors are looking on from all areas of the ship. One interesting difference in this image from the others is that the assistants, who are dressed with decorative headpieces, have a dark complexion and stand out markedly from the light-skinned sailors who are being initiated. These assistants could be servants who were brought on board and who are working as servants to Neptune, or they could be men who came on board from lands where the ship had sailed. Either way, the separation of individuals into certain roles by skin color may show the attitude of the shipboard society, or perhaps just that of the artist, during this voyage.



Figure 5: Crossing the Line (Fitzroy 1839)

As in the previous images, many of the same ritual aspects are present in this image; however, each of the images takes on its own form and feeling based on the artist and the time period. In this image, Neptune clearly holds a place of honor seated just below the ritual, wearing a crown, and carrying a trident. The initiates are pictured in the liminal phase, one undergoing a shaving and the other being led to the shaving area, both having been stripped of their clothing with some clothing lying visible on the deck of the ship. At the shaving area, one sailor is lathering the face of the initiate, while the other raises a large shaving blade in the air in preparation for the rite. In the background on the left hand side of the image, sailors can be seen dumping water, but it is unclear as to whether there is a tub or if the water is being dumped on individuals in a sort of baptism. All of the experienced sailors who are participating in the ceremony appear to be enjoying the initiation of their fellow sailors as they all have a look of satisfaction on their faces.

Many of the images that appear in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries take the form of photographs as opposed to paintings or prints. One of the rare paintings that exists from these later dates was painted by Anthony Gross in 1941 and is titled “Neptune Ceremony” (Figure 6). The image is not as clear as the previous ones due to the artistic style, but several ritual components are still visible. One noticeable difference is the number of both participants being initiated and spectators watching the events. The window-areas of the background are filled with individuals watching the events below, and the deck is awash with bodies who are in some form or another participating in the crossing the line ritual. Neptune can be seen on the right standing next to a large pool of water and holding a trident. A number of sailors can be seen in and entering the pool of water for their dunking after what may be a shaving ceremony at the edge of the pool.

The mood of the ceremony in this image is markedly different than in many of the other previous images of the crossing the line ritual. The image itself has a child-like feel to it, with the people and setting having simple lines drawn to indicate the surroundings and color being added to areas both inside and outside the lines of the objects. Whereas the previous images show an orderly, well planned out ritual sequence, this image causes a feeling of chaos or disorganization during the ritual, as though no one person has control over the situation. It is unclear if this is just the artistic style of the author or if perhaps it indicates a change in the ceremony itself; a liminal period between the organized, meaningful rituals of the past and the occasionally violent, dangerous rituals of the modern age.

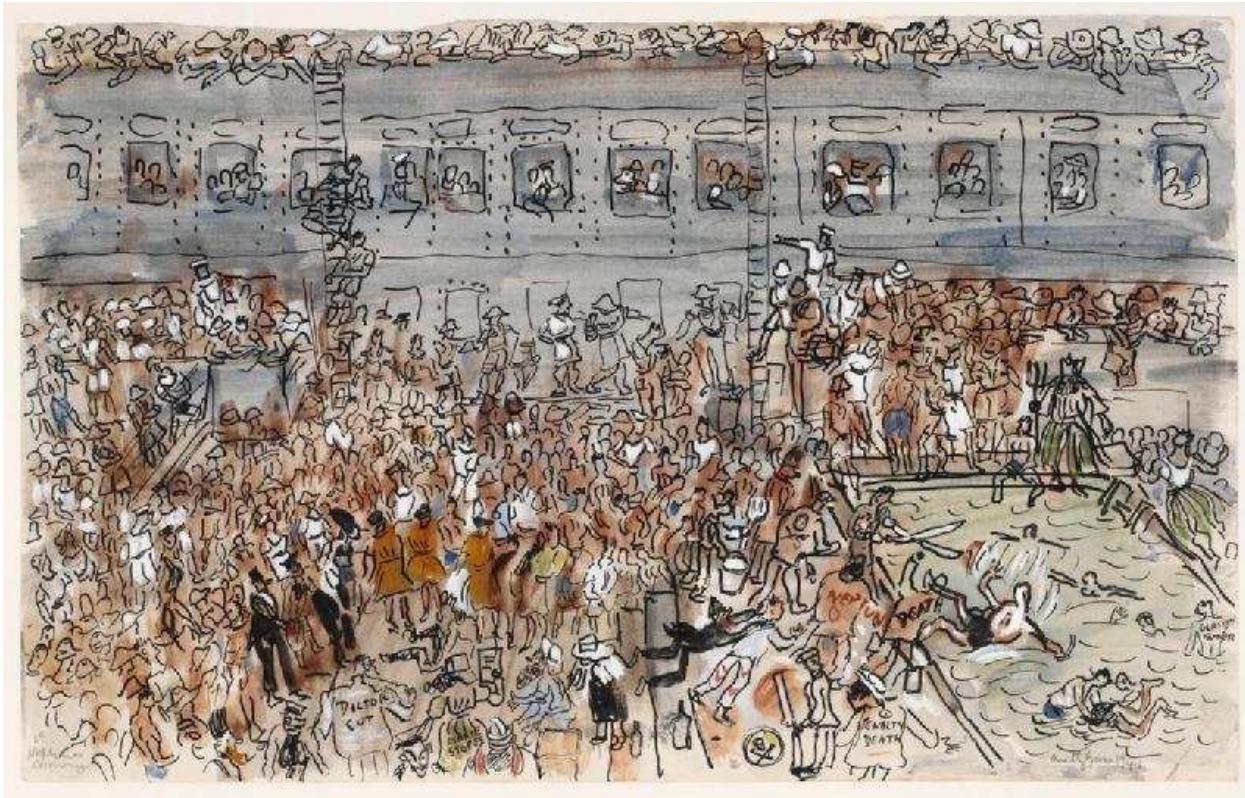


Figure 6: Neptune Ceremony (Gross 1941: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/11510>)

Photographs

As cameras became more common among travelers for documenting their travel experiences and unique situations, the crossing the line ritual began to be captured on film instead of just in words or drawings. These photographs provided even more unbiased details of the ritual and the components involved, as the photographer could not easily decide to leave out what was considered unimportant details from the images. However, it should be kept in mind that the ritual had gradually changed over time so many of the props, costumes, and techniques that were described in written accounts of the ritual in earlier days were rarely or no longer used by the time that modern cameras began to be used on board ship. This means that, although cameras produced a less-biased image on which to base analysis, the analysis is limited to the

dates for which the camera was available to take photos. Most photographs come from the very late nineteenth century and later.

One early photograph of a crossing the line ceremony comes from a training manual for would-be sailors called the *Manual of Seamanship for Boys' Training Ships of the Royal Navy* (1898). It is included in the twentieth century information as photography was a major part of the modern era, and this photograph taken at the very end of the nineteenth century helps to usher in the modern era. The photograph depicts a sailor lying on his back on the deck, surrounded by other sailors who appear to be holding his legs and administering some kind of treatment to the man's abdomen (Figure 7). There are several other sailors standing nearby who are wearing rudimentary costumes and wigs, although it is unclear who these sailors are meant to portray. Another sailor stands to the left, barely clothed, as though he is awaiting his next step in the ritual process, while a second sailor stands off to the right near a bench with an unclear object in his hand and wearing a head decoration and apron. The entire background of the photo consists of sailors who are watching the festivities without being active participants in the ceremony itself. A bucket can be seen behind the man with the apron; however there is no dunking tub in this photograph.



Figure 7: Image from Manual of Seamanship (Admiralty 1898:

<http://library.sc.edu/zellatest/masefield/images/opt/manual3.jpg>)

As evidenced by this photograph the crossing the line ceremony still had a ritualistic feel at the end of the nineteenth century. The sailors who have entered the liminal phase of the ritual have been stripped down to what appears to be only underwear or something similar and are standing among sailors in costume awaiting their fate. In this photo, it appears that the man wearing the apron is either just beginning or just completing his duty, as he is hunched over his stool with an object in his hand, smiling while he watches the treatment of the man on the deck in front of him. Unlike the paintings and prints that were done of similar ceremonies, it is rather difficult to make out the characters being portrayed in the photograph and therefore to interpret their meanings. The fact that the sailors did dress in costumes and that actions were taken to

transition the initiates from inexperienced sailors to experienced sailors indicates that a symbolic meaning to the ceremony was still held by sailors at this point in history. This information is in agreement with the written accounts of the time, which has been discussed throughout the previous chapters of this research.

Several years later, a crew on board an American ship held a crossing the line ritual which clearly identified the individuals involved in the process. The photo comes from the USS *Georgia* in 1908, which was part of what was called the Great White Fleet, a fleet of United States Navy ships sent out by Theodore Roosevelt to circumnavigate the globe (NHHC 2005). The photo catches in action the initiate being sent down a slide into what other photos indicate was a pool of water created using tarps attached to higher points on the ship itself (Figure 8). In the background, Neptune can be seen looking on as the sailor enters into the pool to emerge from the liminal phase as an experienced sailor. The initiate is lowered down with the help of the barber, who holds a large wooden razor in his right hand and a hooded mask over his head and face. Other images from the collection indicate that not only were Neptune and the barber present for this ceremony, but also Amphitrite, the Constable, and the Constable's assistants (Stewart 2012). The sailors, true to the written accounts, held the meaning and initiation ritual events intact despite some changes in the technology and ability to carry out the tasks, such as the tarps in place of wooden tubs.



Figure 8: USS Georgia, Great White Fleet, 1908 (Stewart 2012:

http://www.greatwhitefleet.info/First_Leg_Crossing-the-Line.htm)

As the world found itself at war twice in the first half of the twentieth century, sailors found themselves being sent yet again around the globe and crossing the equator along the way. Crossing the line ceremonies during this time changed somewhat, as the well-known characters were not always involved in the initiation of the inexperienced sailors and the ritual itself took on a more physical aspect which required more from the initiates and bordered on the hazing actions that came with later ceremonies. In the image below from an initiation on board the *USS Astoria*

in 1936, an inexperienced sailor “runs the gauntlet” past his fellow sailors who appear to hit him with towels or other objects as he passes as a way to “initiate him” (Figure 9) (Jones 2014). Other images from the collection indicate that a wizard and Amphitrite were present, and that homemade pills were forced down the throat of the initiates throughout the ceremony.



Figure 9: Running the Gauntlet, USS Astoria, 1936 (Jones 2014:

http://www.ussastoria.org/Fleet_Problem_XVII_1936.html)

The ceremony on the *Astoria* pictured above does maintain some aspects of an initiation ritual, although it seems to be stepping away from both the traditional meaning of the initiation of sailors and the traditional way of holding the equator crossing ceremony. The goal of transitioning from inexperienced sailor to experienced sailor is still maintained in this and other related images, and the concept of the sailor running through a line of shipmates who are helping him along the path to a new phase of shipboard life could be symbolic of the emerging from a birth canal into a new life. Just as birth is a painful process, the beating of the sailor with towels and other objects creates pain in the process of becoming one of the experienced sailors. The

focus of this ritual seems to be more on the creation of pain and discomfort than on entering into Neptune's realm. As can be learned from the written records, this process continues until the rituals become nothing more than a severe hazing and are limited, or in some cases stopped, by action from Naval leaders. Faced with a crackdown from high ranking naval officials, sailors of the twenty-first century have been forced to return to a much less harsh ritual when crossing the equator.

Tattoos

In addition to a certificate that could be kept as a memento, sailors may have also chosen to commemorate their rite of passage by way of a personal tattoo on their bodies. Tattoos allowed sailors the opportunity to create imagery pertaining to their ceremonial experience which held special meaning to them. Tattoos also served as a permanent reminder of the sailors' time at sea as well as a conversation piece for anyone who may be interested in hearing the tales or seeing the artwork associated with the crossing the line ritual. Many of the following images came from online tattoo shops and personal blogs, where the sailors chose to share their unique designs in a public forum for the viewing pleasure of any interested parties. It should be noted that these are merely examples and that many more unpublished pieces of art may exist from the smallest turtle shell to the larger canvas-like images.

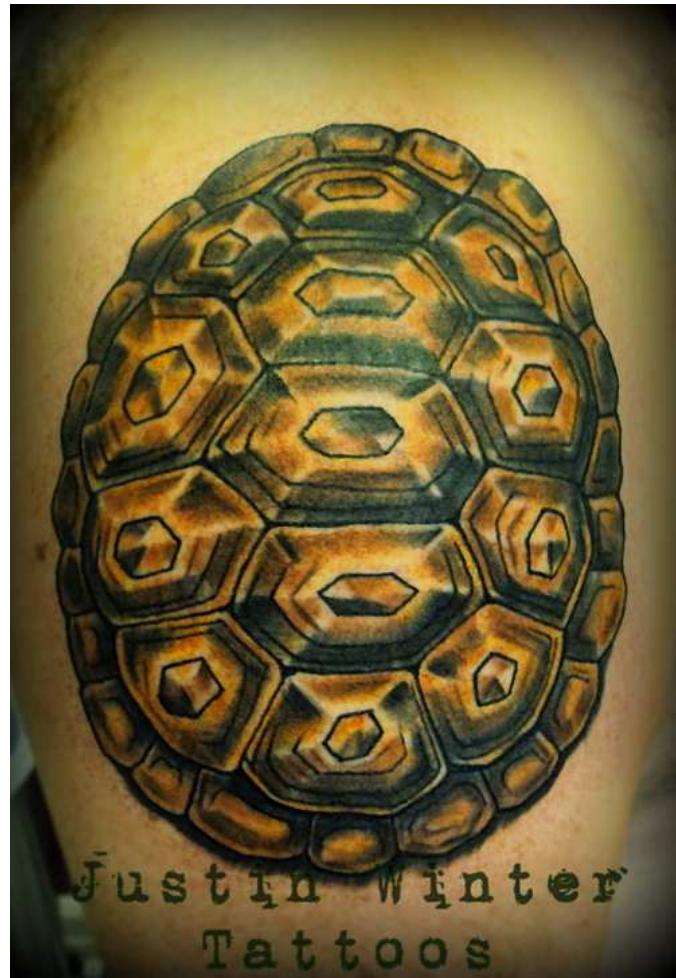


Figure 10: Tortoise Shell (Winter 2013)

One very basic tattoo that is used to commemorate the crossing of the equator is that of the tortoise or turtle shell, indicating the sailor's rank of shellback (Figures 10, 11). The shell may be large enough to cover a shoulder or upper arm, or may be a small, more personal image anywhere else on the sailor's body. Often times the images are nicely colored or shaded and artistically convey the durability and strength of such a simple object. Sailors also have chosen to portray the idea of a shellback in the form of an entire turtle or tortoise as their tattoo. The image of the animal may be true to life, or it may also be an artistic rendition of a turtle or tortoise, both of which indicate the sailor's rank of shellback. For the sailors, a shell, a turtle, or a tortoise in a shell, and therefore the term shellback, indicates that they have proven their

strength, they can weather any storm, and that they are able to be counted upon for knowledge of shipboard life and culture; they are members of a unique group of experienced sailors from the modern day and throughout history.



Figure 11: Sea Turtle Shell (Rose 2008: <http://www.jasonrose.com/huahine/>)

Sailors may also choose to create an immense work of art to place on their bodies in commemoration of the crossing the line ceremony. These works often contain nautical images, much like the certificates, and may include the latitude and longitude coordinates of the crossing. In the example image shown below, the sailor has included a variety of maritime related concepts including a compass rose, personified images of the winds, mermaids, and what appear to be a spout of water rising up in the center (Figure 12). The artist stated on the website that the images came from a certificate that was awarded for crossing the equator (Kenen 2008). Around the bottom of the compase rose, the sailor has placed the latitude and longitude coordinates of his personal crossing of the equator, marking the unique crossing that he experienced during his time at sea.

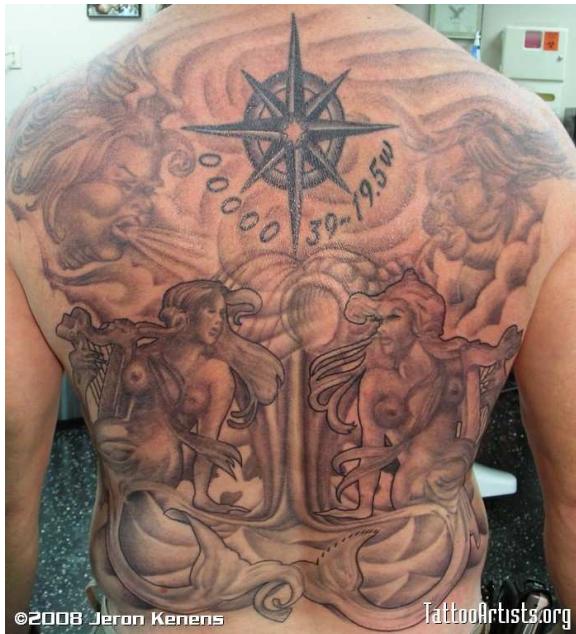


Figure 12: Crossing the Equator Memorial Backpiece (Kenen 2008)

There can be little doubt of the immense variety of tattoos that sailors have chosen as a means of remembrance of an event of the significance of crossing the equator and becoming a shellback. Just as with the certificates, tattoos provide sailors with a means of documenting their experience in a way that can either be shared with others or kept personal. Despite this variety, the existence of these tattoos indicates the feelings of pride and accomplishment that is still felt by sailors who have gone through this rite of passage and have achieved the often desired title of shellback and the recognition and respect that still accompanies that title among fellow sailors even today.

Through the application of tattoos and the extensive use of artistic media to document the crossing from the realm of inexperienced sailor, through the liminal phase, and into the realm of Neptune, sailors have provided an intimate and occasionally detailed glimpse into the crossing the line ceremony on board a variety of ships throughout several centuries. These creative outlets, coupled with the written and spoken accounts of the crossing the line ceremony, provide a rich cache of first-hand accounts and individual opinions of the crossing the line ceremony.

Through the eyes of these writers, painters, and artists, the crossing the line ceremony is brought to life for those who have never and may never experience it.

Conclusion

By the middle of the twentieth century, written accounts of the crossing the line ceremony dwindled, making it difficult to find sources from the 1950s and later. Although this decline did not necessarily indicate that the practice itself declined, it does make it difficult for researchers to study any modern changes to the ritual when there are few written accounts over a long period of time. The works that were published after the 1950s that pertain to the crossing the line or other sailing accounts often are historical works that focus on a much earlier period, such as the Age of Discovery or the Age of Sail. This may be due to the fact that not many accounts of the crossing the line ceremony were to be found in written form from voyages made after 1950 when the means of communication changed and those who were far away from home in the middle of the ocean did not have to rely on long letters or keeping journals to document their travels; they were able to send post cards or telegrams, or later even to phone home or email.

Following the period of relative silence, the accounts picked up again at the end of the twentieth century, but for a completely different reason and in a much more negative light. It was during the mid-1990s and later that the activities that took place on board ships were reported to higher administration officials with the accusations of hazing placed on experienced sailors and officers against the inexperienced sailors. These accusations led to investigations and eventually judicial cases as a way of bringing order to groups of people who were viewed to be out of control. The ritual, which began as a way to celebrate an initiation or coming of age ceremony for inexperienced sailors, had morphed into a theatrical production meant to torment the initiands

and to entertain the public, and had continued to change until it was considered hazing and led to investigations and legal charges brought against individual sailors.

CHAPTER 6: CROSSING THE LINE RITUAL AS HAZING

Following the wartime period of the 1940s, English and American sailors could often be found throughout the world in various foreign conflicts in places such as Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East. Despite this consistent presence of sailors on board ship, and the innumerable equator crossings that must have taken place throughout those conflicts, accounts of the crossings are incredibly few. This relative silence lasts until about the last decade of the twentieth century, when accounts of the crossing the line ritual reappear in news accounts and court cases due to the brutality and seemingly irrelevant actions performed by sailors on other sailors. The ritual was, by this time, no longer portrayed as a rite of passage or as an exciting transition into the realm of experienced sailors; instead, it was considered hazing by the media and the public. This led both the victims of the supposed hazing and the officers high up in the naval hierarchy to decide that it was an activity that must be controlled and punished.

The view of the crossing the line ritual as hazing, however, was not held by all members of the navy. Sailors who had experienced the ritual during their time at sea as well as some who were still serving did not consider the ritual to be the problem that others were touting. These men often spoke fondly, or at least with a tone of acceptance, of their memories of the crossing the line ritual, even when it caused them anxiety as inexperienced sailors. Their statements were frequently in direct opposition to the descriptions provided by the newspapers or court proceedings of the more recent incidents, clearly indicating that they were in favor of maintaining the ritual as a rite of passage within the navy. Just as sailors were a cultural group with their own language, mannerisms, and opinions throughout history, it would seem that even today they maintain those differences. The accounts given by sailors regarding the crossing the line ritual differ greatly from the accounts found in newspaper articles and court documents, and

both deserve attention in order to have a complete understanding of the impact of the ritual on sailors today.

The differing views of the ceremony fall into an -etic, meaning outside, versus -emic, meaning inside, argument. The views of the ceremony from those individuals who are not sailors and are therefore not within the folk group are vastly different from those individuals who are sailors and are accepted within that folk group. Granted, the ceremony today involves much more humiliation and somewhat less formality than the ceremonies of the past; however, the individuals doing the interviews, the institutions printing newspapers or running television news programs, and a majority of the general public are all outside of the folk group in question. This seemingly simple difference in point of view is much more significant when it is considered that the disagreement with the crossing the line ceremony falls along the same line.

The –Emic Point of View

The crossing the line accounts given by sailors can be found in two varieties: sailors who served in years past and who are reminiscing, or sailors who are still serving and who are reflecting. The treatment of the sailors during the ritual described may vary, but the ritual is very much the same in its purpose: to initiate the inexperienced sailors into the realm of the experienced sailors. Unfortunately, it seems that much of the history behind the ritual has been forgotten by the sailors; however, the purpose of initiation and acceptance into the folk group still exists. Both types of accounts are important, as they were collected during a time when the ritual was under scrutiny and was starting to be considered hazing as opposed to a rite of passage. Although the actions taken during these initiations need to be considered in relation to the meaning of the ritual, the opinions of those providing the information are also of importance as they may indicate difference between the views of the sailors and those of non-sailors.

Retired Sailors Looking Back

In the last years of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, sailors were once again making headlines in various parts of the country. While some reporters were covering accusations of harassment and hazing amongst sailors, others were interviewing retired sailors in an attempt to record their accounts and thoughts on their service, including their experience with the crossing the line ritual. These two avenues of inquiry produced the opposing –emic versus –etic views of the crossing the line ceremony and its place in the twenty-first century navy. In early 2002, a retired U.S. Coast Guard sailor named Dick Daron gave his account to the *Ludington Daily News* in Michigan. Daron had served in the Coast Guard during World War II and had been on board the U.S.S. *Dickman* transporting British troops to India when he crossed the equator (Nutter 2002). He was able to provide detailed information about his crossing the line ceremony and the effect that it had on him at the time.

Daron recalled sitting on a chair with his back to a tank of water and then being tipped backward into the pool where fellow sailors were waiting. He stated that the sailors in the pool served a dual purpose: to make sure the initiate came up for air, and to make sure that after taking a breath he went back under the water. The goal with this ceremony was for the sailor being dunked to say the word ‘shellback’ during one of those breaths. As soon as this was accomplished, the sailor was considered a shellback and was allowed to leave the pool. The author of the article states that Daron’s “pride is evident as he look[ed] over some darkening 61-year-old photographs and display[ed] the certificate he and others were presented...” (Nutter 2002). Toward the end of the article, Nutter summarizes Daron’s thoughts on the ritual saying that the “ceremony didn’t really change his life...although it does make for fond memories...” (2002).

In 2006, another World War II veteran provided a brief account of his crossing the line ceremony to the *Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier* in Iowa. The veteran, Richard Turner, told the author of the article that he joined the service in 1942 and spent two and a half years of his three years of service at sea on board the USS *Izard* in the South Pacific. Turner recalled both “lighthearted” memories during his time as a sailor, as well as uncomfortable memories that typically occurred during combat situations. One of the lighthearted memories that Turner shared was that of the crossing the line ceremony. “‘They made your college hazing look like a Sunday school party’ Turner said” (Heinselman 2006). Some of the various activities associated with the ritual were “kissing the cook’s big toe or getting hit with wet canvas” (Heinselman 2006).

Although modern college hazing is understood to be dangerous, painful, and destructive, from the description provided by Turner it appears that it was in no way as difficult as the initiation that he endured during the naval crossing the line ceremony. It is important to note that despite the difficult, and perhaps disgusting, nature of Turner’s initiation ceremony, he still described it in the article as being a lighthearted memory. This indicates that Turner, like Dick Daron in the previously discussed article, reflects positively upon his crossing the line experience and remembers it with fondness. The opinions and reflections of these two retired sailors falls in line with the –emic view of the crossing the line ritual in that both men served their time within the navy and view the activities through the lens of one who was a member of the folk group and understands the need for communitas and comradeship during dangerous and difficult situations.

Some of the articles do not provide intimate details of the crossing the line ceremonies, but the indication that they were favorable events is made clear. Ruth Williams, who served as a nurse on board the USNS *Mercy* during Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s, told the *Harrison Daily Times* that “[o]ne of her fondest memories during that deployment was when she

earned the ‘Shellback’ title after...a ‘gentle hazing’ on the trip home.” She described the term shellback as “one of the Navy’s most coveted titles” (Jeppsen 2009). It is not clear just what the “gentle hazing” entailed, but for Ruth it was clearly a worthwhile experience that brought with it a title of pride, rather than a feeling of mistreatment. Other former sailors feel that the problem is not hazing, but more a matter of the sailors actually documenting their actions to share with others. In a letter to the editor of the *Vero Beach Press Journal* in Florida, Gerald Freitas addresses the removal of eight sailors for hazing on board the USS *Bonhomme Richard* in 2012. Freitas, whose age is not given in the letter, served as a sailor from the age of 17, heading for the South Pacific from San Francisco. He reflects on his experience as a polliwog, watching the other sailors build a low-standing tent on an upper deck and wondering what the inexperienced sailors would be forced to endure. Freitas recalls being forced to crawl through week-old garbage under the tent which was only two-feet tall at the peak, and having survived other roughhousing while in boot camp. He directly blames the video that was made of the incident, stating that “[i]t should not have been shown to the officers in charge. Once that happened, the officers had no choice but to report it. All eight sailors should be reinstated as soon as possible” (Freitas 2012).

From the point of view of the former sailors in the previous examples, the crossing the line ritual is not something to be banned but something to be experienced. There is little talk of the symbolism involved; in fact, there is very little detail provided at all in comparison to the accounts of the past. The crossing the line ritual today is meant to be an initiation whereby the inexperienced sailors are put through trials meant to make them experienced sailors, but the trials vary in nature and may have nothing at all to do with sailing. As the last example showed, they do not even have to involve water other than that which the sailors use to wash themselves off following the ceremony. Nonetheless, these sailors seem to feel a special affection for their

experiences during the ceremony, which were meant to build trust and community on board ship, and they would not go so far as to consider it an offense punishable by law.

Active Duty Sailors Reflecting

Active duty sailors who gave their accounts of the crossing the line rituals to newspaper reporters have varying opinions of the ceremony. In 1997, Darlene Himmelsbach covered the story of the amphibious assault ship, *Essex*, which had returned to San Diego shortly after crossing the equator. Although the recommendation was to not conduct a ceremony due to the fear of hazing accusations, it was decided that a voluntary initiation would take place that would be simple enough to not garner unwanted attention for hazing while satisfying to the sailors who wanted to participate. One of the sailors who participated in the ritual, Staff Sgt. Gustavo Garcia, was interviewed by the author of the article. He stated that, although he did not know the point of the ceremony, he did not think the initiation was hazing; “just a fun thing” and that he would do it all over again (Himmelsbach 1997). The voluntary nature of the ritual made sure that no one would be made to do anything against his or her will.

Another sailor on board, Lance Cpl. Frank Allen, had previously gone through an initiation in 1992, but provided his insight into the ceremony in general. In light of the modern criticism of the ritual, he made clear that “[i]t was a little more extravagant then. We had more freedom, but the recent awareness of hazing has toned things down...We never had to ingest anything, just put our faces in something and blow.” Allen explained that typically, the sailors ended up with food or glue in their hair and on their clothes, so they took a shower, threw away the clothes, and continued about their voyage. Allen’s reason for going through the ritual sounds familiar to the reasons given by retired sailors: “I wanted to have a memory that I could tell my kids. It’s a unique experience like the prom or boot camp. It was cool” (Himmelsbach 1997).

This desire of some sailors to be a part of an age-old tradition, in modern times when sailors have a choice of participation, is a common theme among supporters throughout the accounts given in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

It is important to note that, as Staff Sgt. Gustavo Garcia so aptly stated, the sailors do not necessarily know the point of the ritual, just that it was a fun experience. It would seem, then, that these men and women have little or no understanding of the history of the ritual, from the entering into unfamiliar areas south of the equator to the paying of homage to Neptune or the equatorial baptism and prayer for safe passage over the sea upon reaching this imaginary line. This ritual's historic lineage may very well be lost on the sailors of the modern navy who see the ritual as an experience that they can tell their families about or that they can use when swapping stories with others about what they accomplished while in the navy. This lack of historical knowledge does not mean that the ritual has lost its meaning as a source of connection between the new sailors and the experienced sailors. The ritual, a symbolic rite of passage from inexperienced sailor to experienced sailor, has become a cool, unique experience that is achieved for the end result of being a talking point for the sailors on board naval vessels while still maintaining the purpose of welcoming the sailors as members of the folk group. While the above mentioned sailors all hold the –emic view of the ritual, the officers and others in charge are less inclined to support the ritual, just as their historic counterparts, albeit for different reasons.

The –Etic Point of View

Officers and administration in the Navy appear to hold a completely different view of the ceremony than do most sailors due to the accounts of hazing that have surfaced in the public eye. This may be due to the fact that superiors within the Department of the Navy may place the blame not only on the individuals who performed the actions but also on the officers for failing

to maintain control of their crews. The officers then, being separated from the overall notion of crew, hold a position that follows the –etic argument. Because they are being held to different standards, and are to be above the crew of the ship, they place themselves as outsiders of the communitas and comradery that develops among the crew members. This division places them just on the outside of the folk group, despite the fact that they are sailors on board the same ships as the sailors who are members of the folk group. The officers walk a fine line in this position, needing to maintain the trust of their crew while at the same time carrying out their duties as commanders on the ship.

The position of the officers is unique within the –etic point of view, as they are the individuals closest to the sailors as a folk group and typically were members themselves as they moved up the ranks. This is much different from the view of the public and the press who has little or no connection to the folk group and tends to view the crossing the line ceremony solely from the outside looking in with limited understanding of the environment on board ship. This lack of understanding is then used to condemn the actions of members of the folk group and give an inaccurate or incomplete account of the crossing the line ceremonies that have taken place. These accounts are then used to fan the flames of the –etic point of view, that the crossing the line ceremony is a barbaric form of hazing and that superior officers and administration in the navy need to legally put an end to the practice.

Officers and Administration

In 1993, Secretary of the Navy John H. Dalton sent a letter to Navy commanders which stated that “[a] clear and succinct signal should be sent to your entire chain of command...to eliminate inappropriate behavior and physical abuse” (Jordan 1993). The letter followed a news broadcast that aired a video which showed tobacco and human waste being poured on new

Marines by fellow Marines, and shoe polish being smeared on the buttocks and genitals of the two new members (Jordan 1993). While the situation may have been handled privately, it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain whether or not the same letter would have been sent to the Navy commanders, or if it would have been made public to the local newspapers, had the incident not been covered by ABC news. Jordan points out in the article that Dalton's letter does not give a specific course of action and that typically hazing elicits "nonjudicial punishment rather than criminal convictions" (1993), which may indicate that a stronger stance was taken due to the publicity received through the news broadcast.

A similar message of prohibition was sent in August of 1994 from the Navy's then new chief of personnel, Vice Admiral Frank Bowmen, who stated that hazing was "when individuals assume the authority to coerce our sailors to participate in cruel, humiliating, unsafe, or meaningless acts" and that "sexually explicit activities, props, costumes, skits, gags, or gifts" were prohibited (Vistica 1994). Although the crossing the line ritual traditionally included the various prohibited items, this warning did not prohibit rituals outright; instead, it offered guidelines for naval personnel to follow in their initiation ceremonies including: 1) the involvement of a commanding officer in both the plans and carrying out of the ceremony, 2) no glamorization or abuse of alcohol, 3) respect for all backgrounds and beliefs, 4) no coercion to participate, and 5) proper medical screening prior to the event of those wishing to participate (Vistica 1994). These guidelines allowed the celebration of a rite to continue, with changes made to protect those who felt intimidated by their superiors.

In the years immediately following the admonishing of the Navy by their superior officers, sailors were swiftly punished for any hazing offenses that were discovered. In 1997, the ship *Princeton* was on a cruise to South America and the Caribbean on a counter-narcotics

deployment. A crossing the line ceremony was planned according to the approved standards set forth by the Navy; however, the night before the official ceremony, about six sailors held one of their own. According to a news article that was written when the ship returned to port, “[a] petty officer first class was held down by several sailors while two other petty officers first class shaved the sailor’s chest and spread food over his torso” (Crawley 1997). When the captain of the ship was alerted to the actions of these crew members, he cancelled the official ceremony and organized a “captain’s mast” where disciplinary procedures were handed down to the sailors involved. Five of the sailors were recommended for administrative discharge while seven others were otherwise punished for their participation (Crawley 1997).

Nearly eight years later, another hazing incident took place which resulted in discharge for some of the sailors who were involved and punishment for others, including a Navy officer. In an attempt to show how serious the Navy is taking the issue of hazing, the commander of the Atlantic ships flew out to oversee the hearing on board the ship. The hazing included “some hitting” and taping sailors to chairs, according to Navy spokesman Lieutenant Commodore Charles Owens. Four of the sailors were discharged from the Navy, three were otherwise punished, and the ship’s executive officer was temporarily reassigned while a decision was made as to whether or not he would be removed from his position. The hazing victims were also reassigned in the hopes that they “could get a fresh start” (Lindsey 2005).

These examples of incidents and of the handling of crossing the line and other initiation rituals in modern times demonstrate the changes that have occurred in the application of the initiation itself. In the past, sailors planned and conducted the ritual unless forbidden by the captain of the ship, who had to take into account the threat of mutiny or distrust should he not allow the occasional relaxing of shipboard duties for entertainment purposes. During those times,

the initiation was seen almost as a baptism into a secret society, where the experienced sailors dunked the inexperienced sailors after some horseplay. The use of food or mixtures of ingredients served the purpose of a shaving cream for the ship barber or the medicine of the ship doctor. However, it always ended in a dunking into water. The modern rituals have changed over time and seem more so to be experienced sailors exerting superiority over others as a way of causing humiliation of the initiands so that they may be entered into the folk group. In this case, both ritual and hazing were lumped into one and were to both be treated as hazing for the purpose of putting an end to discriminatory treatment of sailors by fellow sailors. What made the Navy take such a stance appears to have been the fact that stories were no longer being kept to sailors on board ship. Those who were not happy with the treatment took their stories to superiors or to the media in order to get justice for their mistreatment, which could disrupt the trust that was meant to grow following the end of the ceremony. At the same time, hazing in other areas of society was also being investigated and denounced in the press, linking the activities in the navy to the activities of less notable organizations and groups. The unwanted negative public attention seems to be what stemmed such a response from the Navy's top officials who either had forgotten the reasons behind the ritual or who refused to allow those reasons to dictate what they felt was necessary to prevent a baneful light from illuminating the actions taken by sailors in the navy.

From the View of the Public

During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries when reports of rituals would make their way off the ships and into the public realm, the outcry from everyday citizens was strong. The activities were seen by many in the community as hazing and bullying, as well as physically and emotionally dangerous. Some of the citizens who were against such activities,

most often those with no naval experience, put their thoughts to paper in their local newspapers in order to share their own personal insights and feelings with fellow readers. These opinion pieces provide us with a better understanding of the feelings and considerations behind the opinions of average Americans, although they should not be considered the opinion of all citizens as individual opinions may vary and those who may not have felt strongly one way or another would not be compelled to write to a newspaper.

One such opinion piece was written to the *Sun-Sentinel* in Florida in 1995, shortly after eighteen sailors were punished for hazing on board the USS *Merrimack* and the USS *Monongahela*. Although the author's name is not provided, the strong feelings against hazing in general, and hazing in the navy specifically, are clear. He or she states that hazing is the equivalent to an assault and should be treated as such, with a punishment of jail time. As indicative of this belief, the author quotes from Florida's anti-hazing law which prohibits "'Whipping, beating, branding, forced calisthenics, exposure to the elements, forced consumption of any food, liquor, drug, or other substance...sleep deprivation' or any other forced conduct that could harm someone's mental or physical health and safety, or cause extreme embarrassment or indignity" (1995). The author also states that then President of the United States, Bill Clinton, should order the Navy to investigate all hazing fully, that hazing crosses the line into sadism, and that "[o]ld traditions die hard, but die they must" (1995).

Often times with modern technology, opinions can be placed on the same page as the digital article. This allows researchers to examine the opinions of internet users from all walks of life. Such was the case with an article about a hazing incident in the *Navy Times* online about a recruit division commander who ordered his recruits to recite nursery rhymes, among other things, and who was punished by his superiors. The story was published on 12 September 2013

and included instances of recruits being forced to recite “Itsy Bitsy Spider” while doing a Soldier Boy dance, to stand on one foot while waving a hand in the air and reciting “I’m A Little Tea Pot,” and to recite “Jack and Jill.” The outcry from citizens was almost immediate, with opinions ranging on both sides of the debate. Some people sided with the officer, such as retired Aviation Machinist’s Mate 1st Class (AW/NAC) Ed Walters who stated, “If the only thing that [RDC] did was make them sing and dance, then we are all outraged...This sailor should have been applauded for being so nice, not condemned for hazing. If our current leaders think that is hazing then they are training the most pathetic military in the world” (Faram 2013). Other readers, such as C.J. Abel, an RDC at Great Lakes, supported the Navy’s response saying “[a] good leader does not have to resort to demeaning and humiliating recruits to get your point across...There are many ways of taking care of business that are effective. I see this RDC’s actions as a mockery of those of us that are dedicated to training and turning out premium quality recruits” (Faram 2013).

In addition to the publishing of opinion pieces in local papers or online, some citizens found themselves caught up in the middle of naval hazing through no intention of their own. Such was the case of Robert Branaman, a man from Garden Grove, California who bought a videotape at a garage sale with the intention of taping a movie on his television. When he put the tape, assumed to be a blank tape, into his VCR he was stunned to see that the tape contained video of sailors conducting a crossing the line ceremony in the South China Sea in 1991. The video included footage of simulated sexual acts, “sailors crawling naked across the deck on their hands and knees, and being dunked in a greenish fluid resembling anti-freeze” (Kramer 1997). Branaman was appalled at the video, saying that although he appreciated the idea of partying and enjoying himself, “this was just totally beyond...In my heart of hearts, I’m a taxpaying citizen. Where was the captain? Who was running that ship?” (Kramer 1997). Branaman turned his tape

over to a local television station and essentially launched another inquiry into military misconduct.

Conclusion

The public reaction to reports of hazing in the United States Navy has varied depending on the event and the outcome, although most often it is a negative reaction that spurs further investigation by those in higher positions of power within the Navy. The –emic point of view argues that the public, not being accustomed to life in the navy, has little to no understanding of the history and reasons behind the hazing events that take place. That argument assumes that the sailors themselves understand the reason behind the rituals that have been held onboard ship throughout the history of sailing, even if they do not always know the history. It seems that with the changes that have been made to the rituals, the public outcry is based on the fact that the activities done today do not mirror the activities used to mark the ceremony in the past. However, the public are not members of the navy and therefore are viewing the hazing without the understanding of the shipboard culture. Due to this disconnect, the public may not be justified with their accusations and condemnations of the actions taken by sailors on board ship.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this research, the crossing the line ceremony has been examined through artistic media such as paintings, certificates, and tattoos, through the opinions of modern sailors and non-sailors alike in regards to the necessity of the crossing the line ritual, and through specific examples of the ritual from the earliest days of sailing, to the journals of sailors during the Age of Exploration, up to the modern day navy with its accusations of hazing. The discipline of semiotics has been applied to the accounts as a guide to explore the meanings of the ritual content through the written accounts as well as the changes that occurred in that content over time. This analysis was done by looking at sailors as a folk group, singling this group of people out among the rest of society to better explain the world of the sailors.

As a folk group, sailors were often secluded from their homes and society for long periods of time, and their writings reflect their unique perspective based on this seclusion. As has been shown, these writings often include the details of the crossing the line ceremony, among other events that took place on board ship. The ceremony was meant as a way to break in the new sailors, to make them part of the folk group, and to distinguish them as fellow crew mates whose experience could be trusted on board when tense life or death situations arose. This community building could be seen not only during times on board, but also in their everyday dress and language both on board ship and on land. These differences distinguished them from others at home, making them part of their own folk group, or subculture. This study of their crossing the line rituals helps modern scholars to better understand the sailors and their floating world.

This understanding comes from the application of the discipline of semiotics to the written documentation provided by the sailors. Semiotics examines the meanings of the

individual components of the rituals, in an attempt to gain a clearer image of life on board these floating societies. The study of meanings of symbols, semiotics, was first put forth by Arnold van Gennep and was expounded upon by Victor Turner, among others. This study went beyond general meanings and looked at particular actions, props, and language during the ceremonies and examines their changes over time. It is through these details that the more in depth understanding of sailors, their customs, and their rituals emerged and served as a means of study for the more complete understanding of that microcosm of society, life aboard ship.

The research presented in this study indicates that the crossing the line ritual was heavily influenced by the Mediterranean cultures, most particularly the Greeks and the Romans, who would honor gods and goddesses and request assistance or protection from these deities. This ritual was Christianized by Europeans who designed a mass or religious ceremony as a means of giving thanks to God for their survival and asking continued protection during the voyage. As the years progressed, the celebration turned more toward a symbolic baptism, complete with a dunking into either the ocean or a tub of water, and the ceremony that is most recognized today began to take shape. The ceremony was adapted throughout centuries, with changes and additions being made as the situations and technologies of the day dictated and allowed.

Following the ritual outline provided by van Gennep and Turner, the crossing the line ceremony began with a pre-liminal phase wherein the decision was made as to who was to be initiated and what fees would be accepted from those who were chosen but who did not wish to participate. Because officers could be chosen, this changed the social structure of the shipboard community and created a physical separation between initiands and experienced sailors. The liminal phase of the ritual included a dunking and often time included a shaving as well. Both of these actions were a way of cleansing or preparing the initiands for their new role in the

shipboard society. The post-liminal phase varied throughout time, with earlier accounts mentioning a celebration either immediately or upon arrival at the next port while later accounts forego any mention of a celebration and focus on a return to normal shipboard life with the initiands being accepted with their new social status.

While the structure of the ritual changed only slightly over time, the details within the rituals underwent changes as the rituals became larger and more theatrical. The dunking of sailors started as a seat lowered into the sea using a yardarm, was then moved on board into a water-filled jolly boat or wooden tub, until finally it was a large canvas lined pool filled using the bilge pumps. Costumes, which were not mentioned prior, were introduced in the 1770s and as the years progressed they became more elaborate and theatrical. The number of characters in Neptune's court also grew, as more sailors wanted to be involved in the initiation of new sailors and they developed characters such as a doctor, the bears, and various other assistants. The props that were used increased in number and disgust and the overall ritual became more like a play or theater production.

Despite the change in details and the increase in theatrics, the ritual maintained its semiological meaning through the modern era. The dunking was considered the main goal of the ritual, and its purpose was to cleanse the initiands to prepare them for their new role in the society, much like a baptism. The shaving of the initiands also was meant as a cleansing preparation; however, due to the disgusting nature of the lather, it also could be seen as an obstacle that had to be overcome by the initiands before entering their new social status. The creation of the doctor character was most likely due to the increased interest in the health sciences of the day, but his role was the same as the barber. With all of the additions and

changes, the ultimate goal of the ritual was to bring the initiands to a low state in the society so that they could then move up the ladder to a higher social status upon exiting the liminal phase.

This study of the crossing the line ritual has also opened doors to potential research possibilities that would further the understanding of the crossing the line ritual throughout time as well as the symbolism involved. This study focused solely on the British and American accounts of the crossing of the equator; however, other countries have practiced this ritual simultaneously. A more complete picture of the ritual could be gained from studying the rituals of various cultures and the similarities and differences. This could also apply to the role of race in the rituals and what role, if any, various races played in the ritual when multiple races were present on board. Also, other rituals have been created over time, including rituals for the crossing of the Arctic Circle, the Antarctic Circle, the tropic lines, the International Date Line, and any combination of these lines at the same time. A semiological study could be conducted on these rituals and their history to determine the origins, similarities, and differences. One specific area of this study that could benefit from future research is the use of humiliation as part of the initiation process. Much of the added theatrical detail centers on the humiliation of the initiands, which could spawn a study of that detail specifically. Lastly, another of this study that could be examined in detail is the props that are found to be used continuously in rituals on board ship and the meaning of these props to sailors in general.

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