

MEERTENS ETHNOLOGY CAHIER 2

# Crossing the Line

*Violence, Play, and Drama  
in Naval Equator Traditions*

SIMON J. BRONNER



AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

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The Meertens Ethnology Cahiers are revised texts of the Meertens Ethnology Lectures. These lectures are presented by ground-breaking researchers in the field of ethnology and related disciplines at the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam, a research facility in language and culture in the Netherlands

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Illustration front cover: King Neptune Rex orders Royal Navigator to head ship across the equator, February 2, 1965. From left to right: Royal Queen; Royal Baby (with soiled diapers); King Neptune; Royal Navigator. (Collection of Simon Bronner)

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United States Secretary of the Navy John H. Dalton had a problem. The Navy's reputation was under attack. Lurid videotapes aired on television broadcasts in mid-1997 riveted public attention on apparently brutal nautical initiations, criticized as abusive hazing in reporters' editorial comments. As a Navy man, Dalton knew the context for these initiations was a traditional ceremony called 'crossing the line' for sailors traveling across the equator, and he heard from insiders that critics outside the Navy could not comprehend the function, indeed the necessity, of the tradition. What might have seemed to outsiders as vulgar or cruel, he understood as a ritual that instilled, as no classroom session could, values essential to the Navy. For many veterans, the ceremony defined the sailors' folk experience, their sense of identity in the Navy, and as a folk tradition, it had not been subject to official regulation. With public pressure mounting, Dalton felt compelled to issue Instruction 1610.2 on October 1, 1997. In his carefully worded statement, he balanced on the one hand the view of those who defended the 'playful' and 'time-honored' practices providing beneficial social functions, and on the other, public concern that such events fostered misogyny, violence, and abuse:

Military customs and traditions have long been an integral part of the Navy and Marine Corps. Although in the past some hazing has occurred in conjunction with ceremonies, initiations or rites of passage, these activities, if properly supervised, can be effective leadership tools to instill *esprit de corps*, unit cohesion and respect for an accomplishment of another Sailor or Marine. While most ceremonies commemorate the many selfless feats of bravery of our military men and women, they also commemorate significant events.

These feats and events form the basis upon which our Core Values of Honor, Courage and Commitment were founded. Graduations, chiefs' initiations, 'crossing the line' ceremonies, and others are not only meant to celebrate and recognize the achievements of individual Sailors or Marines or those of entire units. Service members must be able to work together, building-up, encouraging, and supporting their shipmates. Hazing behavior that is degrading, embarrassing or injurious is unprofessional and illegal.<sup>1</sup>

Dalton's message was that the tradition as ceremony was useful, ritual as hazing was not. He offered a list of illegal activities constituting hazing: 'playing abusive or ridiculous tricks; threatening or offering violence or bodily harm to another; striking; branding; taping; tattooing; shaving; greasing; painting; requiring excessive physical exercise beyond what is required to meet standards; 'pinning'; 'tacking on'; 'blood wings';<sup>2</sup> or forcing or requiring the consumption of food, alcohol, drugs, or any other substance.' Further, he insisted that hazing need not involve physical contact, but could also be 'verbal or psychological in nature.'<sup>3</sup>

The instruction begged the question of how hazing functioned within the ceremony if it indeed ran counter, according to Dalton, to core Naval values.<sup>4</sup> Dalton essentially gives an ethnological analysis by positing that traditions provide beneficial social consequences of instilling *esprit de corps* and unit cohesion. With the instruction, Navy traditions were more open than ever before to public scrutiny. As a result, press releases from ships avoided the secrecy traditionally associated with the rituals, and emphasized ethical conduct. Upon crossing the equator, Commanding Officer Captain J. Scott Jones, for instance, publicly announced that the USS Bonhomme Richard had 'a great celebration of this important passage.' 'All of our Sailors and Marines joined the esteemed ranks of Golden Shellbacks,' he reported, 'and they did it in a fun and dignified way.'<sup>5</sup> But many seamen felt that the new 'dignified' tradition lost its significant purpose of building grit and even manliness, especially since the Navy in competitive moments prided itself on being the toughest of the military

branches. As one sailor wrote the *Navy Times* to complain about the new regulations, the military was turning its slogan of ‘A few good men’ with associations of courage and aggression to mean ‘A few sissy cream puffs’, thereby suggesting a primary function of the ritual to instill values of military toughness, or as some critics have asserted, homophobia and misogyny.<sup>6</sup>

The instruction was not the first ban on hazing activities for a fleet involved in ritualistic ceremonies at sea. In 1614, the Dutch East India Company prohibited the ritual dousing (*zeedoop*) in a written declaration, probably because of injuries inflicted on sailors. The added incentives of double rations at the company’s expense for ship crews that abandoned the ritual suggest that the company’s edict alone was not effective.<sup>7</sup> The Company further tried to displace the dunking with the customary thanksgiving offering of libation for crossing lines of danger and the directive that when ships reach places where dunking traditionally occurs, gallons of wine (*flapkans*) be distributed.<sup>8</sup> Swedish maritime law of 1667, apparently modeled on the Dutch ban, made a similar call for replacement of dunking observed upon passing a ‘point or headland’ with the provision to ‘every member of the crew who has not sailed past that point before, one can of wine to every mess among his crew, so that all get a drink of it.’<sup>9</sup>

The early Dutch involvement, and protest, predating by at least a century the first American accounts of the ceremony, raises another question I will address of the source, diffusion, and development of the tradition. In my analysis, the functions ascribed to the tradition need to be examined to see if Dalton’s summary of its meaning is consistently at work. Much of Dalton’s executive concern and of scholars generally has been on the *consequences* of the ceremony, although they do not give explanation of the cultural structures, symbols, and processes that define, and distinguish, the tradition.<sup>10</sup> In this essay, I offer more attention to structural and presumptive aspects of the tradition in its varied forms, to locate meanings from sailors’ participation that often run counter to social cohesion. This approach answers the question of why the ceremony as a Naval tradition persisted, even flourished, despite protests over the centuries.



In addition to using ethnographic accounts, particularly from the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, I have mined historical sources dating from the sixteenth century on, suggesting origins of the tradition in Western Europe. This finding is not new, but I divert from previous scholars who have given the Dutch hardly any credit, or blame, for the emergence of the tradition, and I argue that the tradition is more varied and adaptive in its development than has been recognized. Particularly addressing the contemporary American controversy over the official restriction of ‘hazing behavior’ in Naval traditions, I analyze the discourse of manliness and social hierarchy as a special Naval status raised by critics calling for treatment of the military as an occupation within a civil society and accountable to its egalitarian ethics.<sup>11</sup> I argue that the Naval ceremony uses the narrative structure of withdrawal from reality, the geographic symbol of the equator, and the metaphorical use of Neptune mythology as key concepts of a tradition that enforces a special sailor’s praxis as well as identity. In its structure, rhetoric, and performance, ‘crossing the line’ is intended to mark the passing of the boundary of the familiar. The ceremony enacts the penetration into a new mythological zone, often viewed as dangerous and mysterious, leaving behind the familiar realm of home to create a reversed, divided world.

## Structure and Passage

Scholars and sailors alike describe the ceremony colloquially referred to as ‘crossing the line’ in English, *Neptunusfeest* (Neptune festival) or *zeedoop* (dunking in the sea) in Dutch, *hønses for linjen* (footing for the line) in Danish, *Linientaufen* (baptism at the line) or *Äquatortaufen* (equator baptism) in German, and *passage de la ligne* (passage of the line) in French as a rite of passage or initiation into the ranks of the seaworthy.<sup>12</sup> Most often, it occurs upon the occasion of crossing the equator, although variations of the ceremony are enacted for passing the tropics, international date line, and arctic circle. The frequent reference in scholarship to the ceremony as a rite of passage invokes

folklorist Arnold van Gennep's tripartite structure for ceremonies of initiation from one life stage to another in which the central task or 'transition,' as he called it, replaces a major trauma with a manageable one. The universality of rites, Van Gennep suggested, is explained by their function of encouraging adjustment to change in the life course for the individual and its stabilizing function of institutionalizing society's expectations and values for the future.<sup>13</sup> Ethnological scholars such as Henning Henningsen and Keith Richardson, for example, apply Van Gennep when summarizing the ceremony metaphorically as a rite of passage of baptism with ritual birth and rebirth, although it is also possible to find a crawl through a chute, mock trial and punishment, mythological pageant, and mock kidnapping and ransom as central rituals in the 'transition' stage.<sup>14</sup> Rather than constituting a singular ritual, these diverse enactments demonstrate that the ceremony in contemporary practice has several themes or phases, suggesting therefore the dramatization of a multi-episodic narrative rather than a singular tripartite ritual.

A narrative rendering of a contemporary equator crossing ceremony might follow this outline:

- I. Separation from home (*initial situation and absentation*)
  1. Civilians told that they will change, mature, and strengthen after becoming a sailor.
  2. Civilians become sailors by virtue of an official training period ('boot camp') in a home country.
  3. Distance is created from home aboard a ship on the open waters.
- II. Separate world described and interdiction given to the hero (*interdiction*)
  1. Sailors categorized in discourse aboard ship as divided between shellbacks (villains) and pollywogs (heroes).
  2. Shellbacks are experienced, having crossed the equator, and are depicted as superior, if evil or corrupted, beings answering to the mythological world of Neptunus Rex.

3. Pollywogs are innocent, feminized young novices, because they have not crossed the line and belong to mother and the land (they may be derisively called ‘landlubbers’). The pollywog refers to a ‘slimy’ young tadpole.
  4. Pollywogs are advised to give proper respect to shellbacks or prohibited from joining in social activities of shellbacks. Shellbacks issue warnings to pollywogs weeks before equator crossing of their imminent doom.
- III. Interdiction is violated (*violation*)
1. Pollywogs may counter shellbacks with posters declaring their resistance.
  2. ‘Wog Day’ often held on ship featuring Wog Queen or ‘Bitch Contest’ (men dressed in drag) and mock Wog Rebellion. Wog dog auctions are also held to raise money for events or causes.<sup>15</sup>
  3. Davy Jones, evil spirit of the sea, appears the night before the ship approaches the equator delivering a message to the ship captain, warning him that he is trespassing on Neptune’s domain with slimy pollywogs aboard. He calls for trials/punishment for this violation.
  4. Davy Jones states at what time he wants the ship ready for the Royal Party and may hand over summonses for men to appear before him.<sup>16</sup>
  5. Men on the lookout for the ‘line’ may wear unusual or ‘bizarre’ clothes and use silly instruments.<sup>17</sup>
- IV. Shellbacks occupy ship and take possession of pollywogs (*trickery, complicity, and villainy*)
1. Shellbacks, often in dress of pirates or equatorial natives (often identified as ‘cannibals’), awaken pollywogs earlier than the usual wakeup time and force them to crawl on deck, often wearing underwear on the outside of their clothing.
  2. Shellbacks hoist a pirate flag or shellback banner to declare the takeover of the ship.

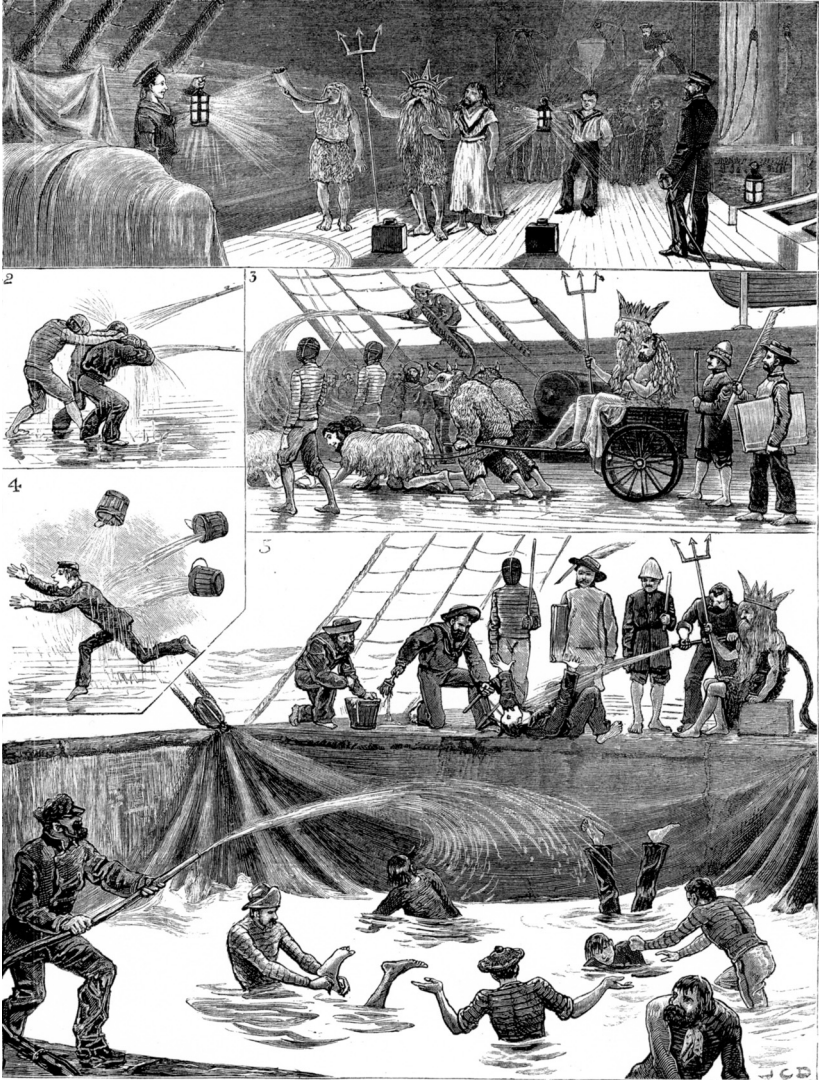


Illustration from *The Graphic* (England), March entitled 'With the Flying Squadron - "Crossing the Line": 1. Neptune's First Visit; 2. A Candidate for Initiation; 3. Neptune's Triumphal Car; 4. The Last Sheep; 5. The Final Bath.'  
 March 5, 1881.

3. Shellbacks brandish shillelaghs or cudgels made from rope, rubber hose, and paddles and hit pollywogs. They also may be shocked with a hand-driven generator.
  4. Shellbacks often force pollywogs to simulate homoerotic acts, such as retrieving objects from the anuses of other pollywogs, simulating anallingus.<sup>18</sup>
  5. Shellbacks force pollywogs to put on clothes backwards and sometimes to wear blindfolds.
  6. Pollywogs crawl through garbage chutes, often resulting in vomiting.
  7. Pollywogs may be given sickening substances to swallow. They may be served a ‘wog breakfast,’ served in a giant trough or on the floor and eaten ‘like animals’ without utensils.
  8. Pollywogs are shown to be ‘polluted.’ Flour, eggs, and other substances may be put in their hair and applied to the genitalia and other parts of the body. Tubes have been reportedly shoved in anuses to simulate enemas. Greasy substances and dark colors, often in imitation of excrement, may be smeared on wogs’ bodies or applied to clothing.
  9. Pollywogs may be given tokens (e.g. olives or cherries) which they are forced to carry or face punishment. Later, wogs may be forced to fish the token out of the Royal Belly/Baby using his mouth, in imitation of fellatio or retrieve the item from a toilet.
  10. Shellbacks yell at pollywogs to identify themselves as ‘slimy pollywogs.’ Individuals singled out for extra harassment may be also told to identify themselves as a ‘trash can’ or ‘toilet’ and substances are thrown at them.
  11. They may be hosed down or ‘disinfected’ while still in their clothes, or occasionally ordered to strip naked.
- V. Neptune arrives with Royal Court, received by captain (*mediation*)
1. Neptune arrives with his Royal Court: Davy Jones, his Queen or Aphrodite (or Amphitrite), Royal Baby or Belly,

Royal Navigator, and Royal Barber amid fanfare. Other figures that accompany them in various accounts are Royal Executioner, Lawyer, Counsel, Herald, Policeman, Priest, Chaplain, Devil, Princess, Doctor, Undertaker, Electrocuttionist, Pallbearer, Torturer, Cannibal, Skeleton, Hangman, Dentist, Taster, Clerk, and Scribe.

2. The Royal Court is received by the captain of the ship and power over the ship is transferred to Neptune.
  3. Commands or summonses are dispatched to pollywogs to appear before the Royal Court. Neptune takes the role of judge.
- VI. Pollywogs tested, interrogated, judged, and punished (*first function of the donor*)
1. Pollywogs called in front of Royal Court one by one and forced to prostrate themselves or genuflect.
  2. Crimes of pollywogs are read aloud and a hearing is held.



Pollywogs genuflecting in row as Neptune's Court enters ship, USS General A.E. Anderson, 1944 (Collection of Simon Bronner)

3. Punishments are administered, including imprisoning pollywog in stocks, rough dental exam with oversize or crude instruments by the Royal Dentist, botched haircut and shave by the Royal Barber, kissing the Royal Baby or Belly, beatings by the shellbacks, binding, and dousing.
  4. Pollywogs may pay ransom or bribe to shellbacks, often in the form of drinks or services, to avoid binding and dousing.
  5. Tests may be assigned to determine the wog's fitness for punishment. A doctor may insert a 'truth serum' (usually a liquid drink with a spicy sauce) through a syringe in the wog's mouth. Surgeons may operate on the wogs with large or absurd implements to remove organs or genitalia.
  6. Death sentences are also prepared by visits to the Royal Undertaker who forces wogs into coffins (sometimes closing the lid) and to the Royal Executioner who may stage a mock guillotining or hanging.
- VII. Pollywogs transferred, delivered, or led to water, dunked, often with struggle between pollywogs and shellbacks (*spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance, struggle, and difficult task*)
1. Shellbacks lead pollywogs to tank filled with water (often with other substances to give the water a murky or green appearance), forcibly dunk pollywogs, slide them in from board, or force them to wade across to another side.
  2. After dunking, pollywogs may be yelled at to identify themselves as shellbacks. If they respond to question of 'what are you?' with pollywogs, they are dunked until they respond 'trusty shellback, sir.'
  3. The former pollywogs take off their clothes and take showers or are hosed down. Sometimes they are joined by shellbacks who clean themselves.
- VIII. Transfiguration, Celebration, and Recognition
1. New shellbacks get dressed in clean clothes.

2. Celebrations occur including offerings of libation and feasts. The celebration may be called 'Neptune's Ball' (or Shellback Night).
3. New shellbacks receive certificates/diplomas declaring them members of the Order of the Deep, Old Sea Dog, or Raging Main.
4. New shellbacks may also receive other tokens/brands such as patches or lighters.

The structural analysis of the ceremony following an unfolding plot sequence (called by folklorists a 'syntagmatic' structure) has a connection to the formalism proposed by Vladimir Propp for the Russian wonder tale and expanded by others to various narrative and non-narrative forms.<sup>19</sup> Propp's terms for functions of the plot are designated above in italics. Propp hypothesized that the functional sequence of villainy or 'a lack established' proceeding to a central element of departure, then leading to a dramatic climax of villainy defeated or 'lack liquidated' and return constitutes the cognitive grammar of 'story' that potentially is universal, although different cultures may emphasize different aspects or characters of the narrative.

In the Russian wonder tale, for example, the common conclusion was a wedding, often to a princess who accords the male hero the reward of the kingdom. Showing the influence of cultural context, Alan Dundes applied Propp's morphology to Native American tales and found a variant progression of interdiction, violation, and consequence and a prevalence of four episodes rather than the Western European three.

The structural analysis aims to reveal social and psychological patterns underlying the use of the structure. Especially notable in the crossing of the line is the *dramatis personae* of the hero and villain. In the narrative of 'crossing the line,' a reversal of the usual order occurs because the young hero in the form of the pollywog does not defeat and punish the villain, but rather joins him. The hero is therefore not of the seeker type who vanquishes the foe but of the victim who



through ordeal and difficult tasks grows or transforms. His story is one weighted toward the initial situation to struggle and finally to transfiguration.

If the hero's departure establishes a withdrawal from reality, the return re-establishes stability and an equilibrium among characters. Without the return, the characters remain removed from reality and affirm conflict. Their scenes of departure are not in another world or timeless moment but in the same setting familiar to everyday routines. In a psychological analysis of Propp's morphological function of a departure but a lack of a return as schizophrenic, Dell Skeels points out that the hero-victim pattern 'takes place here' rather than 'out there.' He explains that 'undoubtedly the horrible achieves an increased impact, a heightening of the uncanny, when it is thrust into and contrasted with the familiar surroundings of everyday life.'<sup>20</sup> The significance of this observation in my structural analysis is that it accounts for the reversed world that is created in the crossing the line ceremony, for it emphasizes the function of departure to go to a mythologically strong, mysterious sea world rather than return to the weakness (and safety) of the land. It uses villainy to create struggle and division, and effect passage. Ascending to a corruptible image of the pirate rather than redemptive identity of sailor, the pollywog views the villainy as a function of superiority – characterized by toughness, control, and determination – necessary in this precarious sea world.

One might find the characterizations of the shellback as superior in the ceremony as unusual, considering the common European portrayal of the turtle as slow of foot and wit.<sup>21</sup> But there is an implication of the value of experience and age gained, and on the opposite end the impetuosity and weakness of the young over-hasty toad. The hardened shell symbolizes a manly toughness while the 'slimy' tadpole connotes a juvenilized, feminized softness. Indeed, in American and British folk speech, 'tad' from tadpole is used for a young boy or a small portion.<sup>22</sup> The tad is maligned, or sometimes seen as repulsive and even demonic, as in the biblical frog plague (Exodus 8: 5-14) and European 'frog prince' *fairy tale* (AT 440). In a common narra-

tive plot of AT 440, the frog transforms after violence: the princess throws the frog at the wall and he turns into a handsome prince (motif D789).<sup>23</sup> The ceremony implies that the wog has an ego problem in his coming of age and needs indoctrination in the social hierarchy on the ship. Paradigmatically, the turtle and toad provide dramatic functions of representing conflicts of hard and soft, deliberate (slow) and hasty (fast), crafty (trickster) and naïve (innocent), old and young, manly and feminine.<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that the turtle and toad do not usually constitute a binary pair in European-American folk narrative, but there may be a linguistic explanation for linking the turtle and toad from the Dutch word *schildpad* for turtle, literally translated as a ‘shell-toad,’ and metaphorically essential on Dutch ships as a nautical term for blocking.<sup>25</sup>

The importance of certain sections of the narrative is emphasized by the rendering of dramatic ‘scripts,’ readings from mock proclamations or rehearsed routines that order the events and give them a symbolic inversion of dignified judicial ceremonies. Three locations in the narrative are particularly scripted – the pre-ceremony of Davy Jones giving summonses to the captain, transference of power from the captain to Neptune, and the trial and punishment of pollywogs. All these moments underscore dominion of the sea, the exercise of social control, and the issuing of discipline. Amid general scenes of apparent mayhem on the ship as pollywogs are ushered through various torments by shellbacks, the scripts help maintain the mythological belief undergirding the narrative and structure the ‘moves’ of the narrative. When Davy Jones comes aboard, for instance, he tells the captain in front of an audience:

I, Davy Jones came out of the sea tonight to bring from His Oceanic Majesty, King Neptune, Ruler of the Seven Seas, all the summonses for the landlubbers, the pollywogs, the sea vermin, the crabs, and eels who have not been initiated into the Supreme Order of the Deep. We of the great Neptune’s Court bring serious indictments against those who still have traces of heifer dust and cow dung on their feet, as well as those of the big towns who think



Entrance of Davy Jones day before crossing of equator, USS General A.E. Anderson, 1944 (Collection of Simon Bronner)

they are real city slickers. But no matter, all will be shellbacks after the rough treatment on the morrow, at which time, those summoned will appear before the Royal Judge of His August and Imperial Majesty, Neptunus Rex, and there answer for offenses committed both aboard and ashore. Captain, a few officers and men have already requested leniency, but be it known King Neptune has no favorites. All landlubbers since men first followed the sea have endured the strict initiation required by the King of the Sea. No! There will be no leniency – all pollywogs will receive appropriate punishment on the morrow. And remember, sorrow and woe to those who resist or talk in a light or jesting manner of the ceremony, or of His Majesty, the Ruler of the Seven Seas, or of the Queen Amphitrite, or belittle Royal Members of his Supreme

Court. So – Beware! Beware! Good-bye, Captain, I will see you with the Great Neptune on the morrow.<sup>26</sup>

Notable in Jones's script is the foreshadowing of the next day's 'rough treatment' and the warning that the drama is to be taken seriously. The captain acts familiar with the rulers of the sea and compliant in punishments to be issued.

When Neptune arrives the next day with his entourage, the captain may beseech the king of the seas to be merciful, especially to his officers, but Neptune insists that there will be no exceptions. Many times the captain tells Neptune that 'it is a great pleasure to have you aboard,' which Neptune inverts as 'the displeasure is all mine.'<sup>27</sup> Neptune may then complain: 'Your ship is sorely infested with nefarious and slimy pollywogs, a situation which my Royal Party intends to correct by making them fit Shellbacks for my raging main.'<sup>28</sup> The captain yields his command by saying, 'I turn over my command to you for such time as you wish.'<sup>29</sup> The Royal Party or Court is then escorted to a 'throne' or platform and the mock trials begin.

The trials consist usually of wogs forced to come forward one by one, prostrated in front of the Court, and having their offenses read by a Royal Scribe or Clerk. A Royal Doctor may test the victim's heart to see if he is fit to be ducked and administer a huge pill or bottle of foul 'medicine.' Neptune may order the Royal Barber to give the wog a haircut and shave; the Barber cuts the wog's hair unevenly with huge scissors and forces lather into the sailor's mouth while brandishing a large wooden razor. Serious offenses may be resolved by assignment to the Royal Executioner or Undertaker, who may enact a mock hanging, followed by placement of the sailor in a coffin.

The pollywog judged by Neptune is not eliminated but is defined as a scourge or demon that is ever present and ever fought, especially by the newly-created shellbacks. By the shellback inflicting violence on others with whom he works, in a kind of exorcism, a projection occurs in which the shellback represses in a ritual re-enactment his own perceived weaknesses (a part, therefore, of his 'self').<sup>30</sup> The frequent use of dogs as sailor symbols in the ceremony to represent both manly

beast and feminine bitch is a case in point. Dramatic role-playing of having wogs act like dogs to the shellback ‘masters’ draws laughter, using the metaphor of humans controlling or domesticating life that is related to them, and at the same time sailors think of themselves as tough ‘sea dogs.’ A subnarrative of conflict rather than Van Gennepe’s harmonizing ‘incorporation’ may be implied in the climatic dunking that structurally appears to be less of a religious baptism and more of a secular deception. The verbal sparring that occurs, for example, to get the wog to ‘talk his way out’ of drowning has some parallel in the enmity between the water animal and land animal in traditional narrative. In international tale type AT 1310, for instance, the water animal, condemned to death, craftily begs not to be drowned and the land animal is duped into throwing the water beast into the water, allowing his escape. The implication again is that the enemy of the land is not vanquished, and remains a danger.

Ritual passage may also be implied with the concluding ‘Neptune’s Ball,’ which often includes the match of king with his queen. The split between shellbacks and pollywogs often continues, however, with a menu divided between foods for shellbacks and pollywogs. A representative menu has filet mignon from ‘Royal Rex’s Gourmet Cuisine For Shellbacks Only,’ but for ‘slimey pollywogs’ on the bottom of the sheet, direct from ‘Davy Jones’ Ptomaine Grille,’ are glazed fish eyes, sea slugs, and boiled aged gooney bird and sea blubber stew. The meal, one sheet pronounces, was ‘diabolically conceived by the Royal Chef, Bitterly opposed by the Royal Surgeon, But endorsed by the Captain and therefore to be endured by the crew.’<sup>31</sup> The cover art of the menu is revealing of the social division maintained right up through the conclusion of the ceremony. A smiling King Neptune hoists a glass in one hand and a trident in the other, looking over a shell filled with sea delicacies balanced on top of a turtle. To one side is a long-haired, bare-chested mermaid holding a serving tray of more food. To the other side is a small boy in diapers looking back at the couple holding a smelly, rotten fish.

The reward or ‘consequence’ of the ceremony omits or ejects women by resulting in a coveted certificate joining the sailor in a mytho-



Pollywog in drag on Wog Day sitting on mock toilet seat  
(Collection of Simon Bronner)

logical compact, an 'order of the deep,' with the fatherly Neptune, rather than with a princess. Women are equated with the pollywog, an identity intended to be repressed. The Wog Queen contest, for instance, emphasizes the femininity, and therefore weakness, of the wogs. Contestants draw laughter and ridicule, because they suggest

by outlandishly dressing in drag the absurdity of the idea of male sailors being women. Yet the contest also points out the potential attractiveness, or latent power, of the young wog that needs to be suppressed by the older, presumably less attractive, shellbacks.

Whereas Van Gennep's structure of passage suggests the ritual replacement of trauma to effect movement into a new stage of life, the syntagmatic rendering of the equator crossing ceremony implies the *creation* of trauma, raising a question about the purpose of social schism and torment in a bounded community dependent on teamwork. Sailors suggest in oral testimonies that the ritual is rough as a reminder of the severity of Naval life and the need for discipline, interpreted as obedience to experience and tradition, and especially a stern father figure in the captain replacing the mother on land. It is revealing of the association of corporal punishment with Naval discipline that several dictionaries trace 'hazing' to nautical usage of ritual punishment, harassment, or beating applied by officers to sailors.<sup>32</sup> Juvenilizing sailors as 'boys' and corporal punishment issued by officers and workmates along with ridicule, teasing, and shaming are, according to maritime ethnologist Knut Weibust, the most 'frequently used methods of social control' on ships.<sup>33</sup> If punishment, or negative reinforcement, is dished out by associates, rewards, simulating a form of patriarchal approval, of feasts, liquor, and food are provided by the captain, frequently referred to in folk speech as 'the Old Man.'<sup>34</sup>

Former sailors who have experienced 'crossing the line' recall pain and humiliation in accounts I have collected, although they temper resentment by stating that it is, after all, an old tradition that marks them as sailors, implying this is a special, superior, even extra-human status that warrants a ritual transformation analogous to coming of age and membership in a select circle.<sup>35</sup> One commander underscored that sailors participating in the ceremony 'take with them a new pride of being part of a rich historical tradition exceedingly revered in the Naval Service.'<sup>36</sup> Although the initial situation includes absurd elements such as binoculars made of toilet paper rolls to mark entrance into a narrated mythological environment with fantastical motifs and signs of reversal, its serious, obligatory enactment is hardly 'mere'



Postcard entitled 'Initiated.' The subtitle of "I Got Mine" – Crossing the Equator' has the double meaning of the certificate and the beating. 1907, Middletown, Connecticut, USA. (Collection of Simon Bronner)



fun, as some apologists have maintained. Indeed, participants understand social motivations for, and consequences of, the event. Folklorist Horace Beck thought the custom eased tensions and vented frustrations that built up on a long voyage, but the structures and symbols of the narrative embedded in the ceremony work to maintain tensions and inflict frustrations, according to sailors' accounts.<sup>37</sup> And other long journeys do not have the kind of violent markers assigned to Naval equator crossing ceremonies.

The narrative structure of 'crossing the line' suggests that being located in the sea makes the transfiguration process especially difficult, perhaps because of severing ties to the familiar idea of home symbolized by the land and family. Regeneration in this male-dominated watery isolation is effected through violence, especially in European-American societies where common public rites of passage are lacking for becoming a man, and maturing celebrations such as weddings typically are said to be for the woman.<sup>38</sup> Psychological studies of sailors, in fact, show that seafaring men place a high value on obedience and discipline, come from families with strong disciplinarian mother-figures, and tend to behave in aggressive or hypermasculine ways.<sup>39</sup> This pattern implies a need to resolve the inversion of the traditional role of the nurturing mother as stern patriarchal judge and punisher. Conflicts are created, symbolized in the ceremony, between an occupation that permits a man to engage in certain work considered feminine – such as cleaning one's quarters, washing, cooking, and sewing – and a setting that emphasizes male discipline and order on the one hand and adventure, danger, and daring on the other. Ethnologist John Whiting made the analogy of sailors' severe initiation ceremonies to male puberty rites in societies he observed where a young child has unusual opportunity to identify with females but is subjected to an especially harsh initiation to sever the child from the feminine.<sup>40</sup> There is a sense in which the bounded, isolated ship becomes a small island culture, with an exclusive social structure and rites of initiation into the tribe. But there is a major difference between such initiations with liminal states in tribal and complex industrial societies, as ethnologist Victor Turner has pointed out. He observes that in complex

societies, characterized by a high degree of social and economic division of labor, models in dramas and narratives 'do have a chance of influencing those who exercise power over the work structure of society and of modifying that structure.'<sup>41</sup> The 'topsyturvydom' he described of many initiations, often producing comic effects, refers to the world back home and attacks its control, showing it to be enervating, and displacing it with a different social and ethical structure.

The emphasis on the initial situation and departure in the equator crossing narrative raises another question of constructed gendered divisions of the land and sea. Frequent verbal references in the enactment of the narrative to 'land lubber' are not only derisive, but also allude to the 'lubber' as a vagabond and pilferer. To 'haze about' is sometimes cited as roaming aimlessly on land, implying in the nautical hazing a punishment for disorder and individualism. By implication, residence on the ship becomes a stabilizing influence, even though there is not the same sense of place marked by landscape features. It appears to be a rhetorical device to alter the perception of the vulnerable ship moving in 'placeless' open waters and give it rootedness in tradition. The spatial orientation then is shifted to the 'order of the deep' rather than the ideal mythological skyward or heavenly projection from land. At sea, in summary, the family association is to the patriarchal Neptune, which the sailor is ordered to obey, rather than to the absent mother on land.

The emphasis on departure in the narrative can be traced to initiatory nautical rituals for leaving shore, especially involving the hazing of 'greenhorns' or novice sailors on May 1 or Whitsuntide, a time of springtime reversal and fertility symbolism.<sup>42</sup> A captain of a whaler in the late nineteenth century recalled, for example, the 'ancient tradition' of hoisting on May 1 a feminine garland made of an iron hoop decorated with brightly colored ribbons as a 'symbol of Departure'. He commented that on that day the 'greenhorns... were initiated into the honourable fraternity of 'blubber hunters' in much the same way as those on board a southern-going ship were introduced to Neptune on crossing the line. The novice in northern waters, having been first blindfolded, was handed a speaking trumpet and ordered to hail the

ship in a seamanlike manner. As soon as the poor wretch did so a nauseous and evil-smelling compound was poured into the wide end of the trumpet. It had ridiculous effects, and the victim was lucky who found his christening rite had been performed with undiluted salt water. Thereafter he was shaved and ducked in the time-honoured fashion in vogue further south.<sup>43</sup> Other references going back to the eighteenth century on emigrant ships simply note the marking of departure by novice sailors with dousing them and often forcing an offering of money or liquor.<sup>44</sup>

Coinciding with the idea of springtime reversal, or at other occasions of 'crossing the line,' a time and space of liminality (following Victor Turner's concept of the redefinition of social structural categories in 'betwixt and between states'), the world appears upside down. The equator line is significant as a setting because of its division of the North Seas connected to home and reality, and the South Seas associated with being far away, an exotic location supposedly breaking from repressive mores of dress, sexuality, and conduct. Symbolic inversion occurs, by which culture frees itself from the limitations of repression and enables it to comment about itself.<sup>45</sup> Many complex societies have forms of negation that act as releases to allow return home.<sup>46</sup> But in 'crossing the line,' the drama translates into a praxis displacing the culture which participants originally considered nurturing. The ceremony represents a social corrective, by modifying the social structure as Turner theorized, and becomes extended and complicated in narrative to accomplish the task of departure without return.<sup>47</sup>

The crossing the line narrative does not equate to the wish fulfillment of Propp's fairy tales as much as Dundes's parable of instilling values indicated by the structure of interdiction, violation, and consequence and functions of departure, villainy, and transfiguration. By omitting the return, the story is more initiatory by involving participation in a new pattern or praxis that does not end. The fantasy concludes but the drama, the praxis of shellback manliness set against a pollywog threat to the ego, does not. As Dundes has observed of the hero-victim cycle, the equator crossing narrative has the manifest

function of inculcating separate (or tribal) cultural values and obedience to a select group's mores and institutions. It has the latent function of addressing an essential ambivalence – tensions created by a male dominated world with female norms.<sup>48</sup>

## Historical and Cultural Context

The most cited origin theory for equator crossing customs is Henningsen's idea that French baptisms in European waters prompted dousings on ships.<sup>49</sup> Presumably, the ritual then diffused to other seafaring powers of Europe such as the Netherlands, Britain, Scandinavia to the west and north, and to Germany, the Baltic states, and Russia to the east. Henningsen wisely points out that the ceremony has been continually changing and taking on new forms since the sixteenth century and is not so bizarre as contemporary observers would portray it, when compared to European initiations for craftsmen, merchants, and students from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. But he observes that whereas many of these initiations disappeared on land, the equator crossing custom has since the eighteenth century 'grown stronger and stronger.' The prevalence of hazing in contemporary initiations of student fraternities and secret societies casts doubt on his conclusion that seafarers stand alone among men's traditions, but it is probably true that the Naval ceremony is the most pervasive and institutionalized, and maybe most narratively complicated or dramatic, of the initiations by dousing and hazing.<sup>50</sup>

A problem with the French origin theory is accounting for absences of the tradition in the Navies of leading seafaring powers from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries such as the Spanish, Portuguese, and Italians. If the principle holds that the similarity of baptism as a christening rite among Christian cultures facilitated the diffusion from France to the Low Countries and then to Britain, it appears surprising that it would not take hold among the Spanish and Portuguese who were repeatedly crossing the equator on voyages of trade and colonialism. Further, the ceremony did not appear in accounts of La-

tin American ships, although it is vividly described in North America on United States Navy vessels after 1800 (undoubtedly from ties to British colonization and trade).

The primary distribution of naval line crossing traditions in the North Seas suggests looking for other cultural patterns common to the region. The diffusion pattern of equator crossing ceremonies overlaps traditions of the northern seas such as *Klabautermann* (a German rendering, literally meaning ‘knocking man’) beliefs more than baptism as a Christian rite, for example. *Klabautermann* is a common designation across the North Seas region for a ship spirit and as *kabouter(man)* in the Netherlands for a domestic or nature brownie, and ‘puck’ or ‘pixie’ in Britain as a hobgoblin figure around travelers. In the Brittany seaside area of France where Henningsen found connections to equator crossing rituals, the pixie figure of *lutin* or *luiton* is related as are *Puk* (comparable to the English ‘Puck’) and *Poderman* in the Baltic states.<sup>51</sup> The path of dissemination is often traced from the North Seas area eastward to the Baltic Sea. The common underlying belief in this region is in tree souls (human soul that enters a tree) and tree life (in the Baltics, non-human spirits inhabiting a tree).<sup>52</sup> The connection to seagoing vessels is the widely held belief that the spirits enter wood used in shipbuilding. As with other signs at sea, the *Klabautermann* is seen, according to oral tradition, at times of danger and can be heard, when invisible, making knocking sounds related to his entrapment in wood. The theme of entrapment may indeed be a projection of sailors’ isolation at sea on the wooden ship and fear of watery doom on to the mythological figure. Like the initiatory narrative of equator crossing, *Klabautermann* revolves around the fate of travelers far away from home, in mysterious waters or surroundings.

Several elements of the ancient *Klabautermann* cycle as a response to danger while traveling link it to belief and narrative patterns of crossing the equator. Like Neptune, the *Klabautermann* is a mythological creature often depicted in sailor lore as an old man (shown with gray hair and sometimes with long beard in the fashion of another water spirit called the *Wassermann*), although as a trickster, he is

anthropomorphized as a small man or given animal form as a shape-shifting dog, squirrel, or rat. The shellback custom of scaring pollywogs while they are asleep in the guise of ghosts or monsters may be related to the traditional belief that those who behold his appearance are doomed.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps also related to depictions of Neptune driving horses on certificates and patches, the *Klabautermann* is at times dressed as a horseman and is supposed to appear in calm seas, maybe related to the idea of the ‘horse latitudes’ as one approaches the equator (around the trade winds 30° north and south) where ships encounter tranquil seas (engendering the belief of ‘calm before the storm’).<sup>54</sup> Corroborating the folkloric pattern of the equator crossing emphasizing obedience and corporal punishment, the *Klabautermann* shouts orders, brings order and discipline on the ship (especially among a young rebellious crew), punishes evildoers, humiliates seamen and plays pranks on them, and helps or hinders sailors according to his mood.<sup>55</sup> Like Neptune, he also has a parallel relationship with the captain as an ancestral father figure, with whom he wines and dines. The enactment of *Klabautermann* is set against the backdrop of the mythological space occupied by seagoing vessels and the basis in belief that ties together the regional cultures and their sailor subcultures engaging for centuries in the equator crossing ceremony.

Another indication of a tie of ship ducking ceremonies to the North Seas region is in water games (*Waterspel*) held in May during, and probably before, the seventeenth century. According to an account by Carolus Alsted in 1673, merchants from as far south as Holland and east from Danzig would come to harbors such as Bergen in Norway with their apprentices. The ‘boys’ as they were called, despite the fact that they were young adults, were rowed out to ships lying in the harbor and were forced to undress. They were then dragged three times under the ships. According to Alsted, the initiation included whipping with birch twigs followed by a feast.<sup>56</sup> A related game also dating to this mercantile period in the North Seas is the castle or flogging game (*Borg- or Stupspil*). The castle refers to a cubicle partitioned with a canvas screen, in which is placed either a sea chest or locker. Before the game begins, the eldest person in a procession warns the novices

to comply or else face dire consequences. The boys are then brought in one by one. Their tormentors, who are disguised, pull down the novices' pants and beat them. A banquet during the evening concludes the ordeal. Water sprinkling and pranking, associated with May spring reversal festivities, are frequently reported in the tradition in Germany and Scandinavia.<sup>57</sup> Novices in the region were also engaged during the period in *Bartskerspil*, or the barber game, in which excrement was smeared on them, after which they got a shave and haircut with wooden scissors – a custom that Henningsen speculates was transferred to equator crossing ceremonies.<sup>58</sup>

Chronicles often describe flogging and smearing as signs of an uncivilized era before the Age of Enlightenment, but it is possible to find an ethnological rationale that has connections to Naval equator traditions. The open sea and Maytime are places and times associated with spirits, and even monsters or witches, because of their symbolic equivalence with danger and uncertainty. In the North Seas region, for example, April 30 to May 1 is considered a 'turning-tide' or 'cross-quarter day' as the end marker in the seasonal cycle, and therefore a mythological space in which witches and spirits of winter arise before being driven out by spring. Customs arose to deal with the seasonal line crossing. Probably best known is *Walpurgisnacht* in German (translating into English as night of St. Walburga), also known as *Valborgsmässoafton* in Swedish and *Volbriöö* in Estonian. It typically involves pranks and hazing (especially among students), costuming in the guise of evil spirits, water sprinkling, merry- and noise-making, aggressive brandishing of sticks (brooms are often mentioned) and whips, feasting and libation, fecal play and smearings, animal symbolism (representation of toads, dogs, and wolves as evil incarnations), loosening of the usual rules governing sexual behavior, and even a May King and Queen with attendants who preside over the driving out of devils.<sup>59</sup> Beatings are ritually enacted against male novices and youth in this mythological space involving crossing a threshold to drive out the demons associated with their inexperience and immaturity, and by implication, their sexuality. The saying, 'beat the hell (devil, shit, crap) out of them,' symbolizes this transfiguration,

indeed regeneration, through violence. In the folk speech and performance of the beatings, the prevalence of anality in the hazing behavior is folkloristically associated with demonism, ritual pollution, the toilet-training stage of immaturity, and in some cases, even femininity (in the guise of witches) that are driven out before the fertility, order, and maturity of spring arrive. More broadly, the beatings of the male novices (driving out demons among the mistrusted or potentially rival youth) validate the authority of the elders and redeem the community as a whole.

References to beating the ‘devil out’ of sailors in Naval equator ceremonies appear in several chronicles, indicating a relevance of the North Seas springtime customs to line crossing rituals. In 1823, for example, English readers learned from the narrative of Jacques Arago about a line crossing ceremony with the central characters of ‘his Majesty of the Line’ and the devilish ‘Lucifer.’ Arago described the devil figure having a ‘crooked beak and long claws,’ ritually beaten ‘with a broomstick, three feet long and two inches in diameter.’ Lucifer trembles with cold despite the heat, and the drama includes his escape. The scene was followed by ‘ablutions’ of novices plunged in a tub of water and forcing their oaths never to make a cuckold of the older sailors. An observer of the proceedings as a draftsman rather than a sailor, Arago recognized in the ceremony glimpses of religious or community festivals back home in Europe. He imagined that the navigators who ‘first crossed that imaginary line which is called the equator, alarmed at the distance which separated them from their country, and the dangers to which their audacity exposed them,’ resorted to familiar customs that would ‘propitiate the favor of Heaven.’ He surmised that although later voyagers may make the ceremonies more mirthful, even ‘grotesque,’ the function of redemption ‘in the moment of danger’ remained.<sup>60</sup>

Accustomed to exorcismal hazing rituals to celebrate crossing over into the warmth and light of spring, typically reinforcing (or redeeming) community bonds, European sailors noted the difference between their large boats housing many community functions and the smaller craft of Pacific cultures. The mariners reported with some surprise



that at their destinations in the tropics, they did not encounter a comparable shellback initiation tradition, although they observed coming-of-age ceremonies of various sorts. The frequent location of equator crossing rituals in Pacific waters on the other side of the world from Europe has caused some ethnologists to look for a connection to European colonialism. Part of the reversed world that exists in the ceremony is one contrasting the civilized ways of the wogs to the savage or primitive ways of people along the equator, since some of the costuming that occurs by shellbacks is in native garb or even blackface. The natives are therefore scary figures, or bogeymen, announcing a suspension of manners of home, and reinforcing another contrast in skimpy attire of the heat of the destination to the cold climates and full dress of Europe and their association with personal privacy, repression of sexuality, and self-restraint. The initiation at the equator suggests that the wogs need to be more like the natives – or at least in the manner of the mythological space: tribal, exuberant, crude, and aggressive. If inspired by colonialism in the Pacific and the view of native others – simultaneously attractive and repulsive – as indeed an opposite world that sailors incorporate into their persona, the equator crossing ceremony also appears intensified with the perception of danger, such as during wartime when the values of aggressiveness and close-knit tribalism become heightened in the face of an unseen enemy.<sup>61</sup> A year after World War II ended, in fact, the British Admiralty, concerned that crossing the line ceremonies would fade, issued a procedural document, prefaced by the view that ‘with the return to peace routine... and the obvious necessity to foster an awareness of the old traditions in the minds of the rising generation, many requests have been received for the promulgation of an authentic order of proceedings.’ It called for revival of ceremonies ‘with the dignity and regard for accuracy to which they are by custom and tradition entitled.’<sup>62</sup>

Henningesen found provocative parallels between initiation ceremonies into men’s secret societies in South Pacific islands and crossing equator ceremonies that suggest possible borrowing, or more likely, corruption or parody. Initiates are often dressed as girls and older men appear in fantastic and terrifying costumes, masked and painted,

making noise (shellbacks awaken wogs by beating pans and blowing airhorns) with bullroarers.<sup>63</sup> Mock courts, often involving accusations of feminine behavior or sex with girls, and punishments such as being beaten with rods or tests of skill and warlike bravery are associated with South Pacific cultures. Bodily mutilation – such as tooth extraction, hair cutting or plucking, scarification, tattooing, and branding – often absent from European guild or merchant initiations, are also frequently reported among South Pacific cultures. Indeed, the wearing of extensive decorative tattoos and brands, associated with South Pacific practices and designs, are still part of sailors' identities. While native initiations often involve initiates being smeared with filth or swallowing foul substances, dousing in the form of baptism is infrequent.<sup>64</sup> The absence of baptism suggests that it is a European form of the ritual death and rebirth cycle common to initiations, or else symbolically an immersion (or creation) in the watery world – the mythological space marking departure from home and arrival in a mysterious place operating on a different plane of mores and traditions – and emergence with a new superior identity.<sup>65</sup> In the water tank, sailors join the 'order of the deep,' replacing the air of the land with water and therefore taking a new life form.

Yet the documentary record reveals that the symbolism of the waters is not archetypal in the ceremony. The first traveler account with a description of an equator crossing ceremony was recorded by Jean and Raoul Parmentier during their voyage to Sumatra on a French ship on May 11, 1529.<sup>66</sup> They recount 'l'acollée en passant sous l'équateur,' or a marking of the occasion of crossing the equator with knighting of fifty sailors by an accolade, celebration of a solemn Mass, singing of hymns, and a feast of albacore and bonitos (related to tuna) held at night. Hazing connected to the ceremony appears in a traveler's journal 28 years later, again on a French ship, when Jean de Léry witnessed novice sailors having faces smeared with blackening substances, and subsequently being tied up and plunged into the sea.<sup>67</sup> He noted that the 'ceremonies,' as he called them, were 'par eux accoustumees en ce tant fascheux & dangereux passage,' drawing attention to the fact that by this time the ceremony was considered



Offering of drinks during *Neptunusfeest* on M.S. Amstelveen  
(Maritiem Museum Rotterdam, F10850)

traditional ('accoustemees') and viewed as a response to the 'fascinating and dangerous voyage.'

Although some scholars have concluded from these early French entries that the line crossing tradition originated in France, often overlooked is a Dutch traveler account by Jan Huyghen van Linschoten of an 'ancient custome,' as he called it, upon crossing the equator on Whitsuntide in 1583.<sup>68</sup> He describes ceremonies at the line on the way to the East Indies, at which point the officers were replaced by sailors in a symbolic inversion, followed by a rowdy feast with abundant consumption of alcoholic drinks. In 1598, another Dutch ship on the way to the East Indies recognized the crossing the equator with the issuing of wine, as do many Dutch accounts through the seventeenth century.<sup>69</sup> Accounts of the seventeenth century describe a roll taken by the clerk of Dutch ships upon passing the line. Sailors who had not crossed the line were compelled to pay a 'fine,' or else were 'attached to a rope, hoisted to the main yard-arm and dipped

three times into the sea.<sup>70</sup> In 1614, the Dutch East-India Company issued a letter of regulation, which prohibited the practice of taking men ‘in zee gedoopt’ (ducking them in the sea), probably by tying them up with rope and throwing them overboard or from the yard-arm.<sup>71</sup> The edict suggests that the practice of keelhauling with rope as an initiation was indeed common on Dutch ships, while French sources during the seventeenth century regularly cite dousing in a barrel on board ship more in the manner of a Catholic baptism. In fact, the oldest known image of the ceremony from 1690 shows what looks like a parody of a Catholic baptism on deck. A sailor is being dunked in a barrel while other sailors are dousing him with water from above. A bearded figure dressed in a conical hat resembling a bishop’s headgear and robes, probably imitating vestments, is reading from a book over the victimized sailor. A bugler stands behind the robed figure while other sailors have sticks in their hands poised for beating him.<sup>72</sup> Another etching in a French publication of a ceremony in 1708 shows a similar use of a barrel on board, but without the bishop-looking figure presiding, under the heading of ‘Ceremonies du Baptême de la mer’ (baptism ceremonies of the sea).<sup>73</sup> This visual and documentary record suggest cultural differences between the French *Baptême*, replete with Catholic imagery, and the early Dutch ceremony of *zeedoop* connected probably more to the practice of keelhauling as punishment for criminal offenses or binding, beating, and ducking as initiatory springtime activities for novices and apprentices. While both traditions frequently included a feast of thanksgiving or offering to the sea, the Dutch sources indicate much more of a carnivalesque atmosphere of libation, game playing (e.g. ‘choosing the king’), and the symbolic inversion of replacing the command of officers with sailors.

One source with ethnographic detail written originally in Dutch by John Esquemeling singled out French and Dutch naval ceremonies for comparison in 1666. The occasion was the passing of the area of what mariners call ‘the Raz’, a cape on the Brittany coast at a point it juts out toward the open waters of the Atlantic between the English Channel and Bay of Biscay. The sailors held a thanksgiving to mark

their safe passage past the cape known for being dangerous and mysterious.<sup>74</sup> It was, as the equator was perceived, a socially constructed line dividing 'here' and 'out there,' home on land and away at sea. The French, he reported, performed a ceremony, 'which at this passage, and some other places, is used by the Mariners, and by them called *Baptism*':

The Masters Mate cloathed himself with a ridiculous sort of garment, that reached unto his feet, and on his head he put a sutable Cap, which was made very burlesque. In his right hand he placed a naked wooden sword; and, in his left, a pot full of ink. His face was horribly blackt with soot, and his neck adorn'd with a Collar of many little pieces of wood. Being thus apparell'd, he commanded to be call'd before him every one of them, who had never passed that dangerous place before. And then causing them to kneel down in his presence, he made the sign of the Cross upon their foreheads, with ink; and gave each one a stroke on the shoulders with his wooden sword. Mean while the standers by did cast a Bucket of water, upon every mans head; and this was the conclusion of the ceremony.<sup>75</sup>

Catholic symbolism is apparent in making the sign of the Cross upon the sailors' foreheads and the blackening apparently indicates the inversion of their white world of land and home. He adds that offering of brandy to the sea is made by a silent procession of placing it by the main mast. Other gifts in the form of food, he reports, are specifically given by the 'newly baptized' to the 'old Sea-men' who make a 'Banquet, among themselves.'<sup>76</sup>

The 'Hollanders,' as Esquemeling called them, also have a dousing that they perform upon safe passage past dangerous points, but he underscores that 'their manner of *Baptizing* is much distinct from that... performed by the French.' Absent of Christian symbolism, the Dutch custom involved ducking from the yardarm as if the sailor was being punished as a criminal. The sailor



Hazing of sailor during *Neptunusfeest* on S.S. Amstelpark  
(Maritiem Museum Rotterdam, F55872)

is fast'ned, and hoised up three times at the main yard's end, as if he were a Criminal. If he be hoised the fourth time, in the name of the Prince of *Orange*, or of the Captain of the Vessel, his honour is more than ordinary. Thus they are dipped, every one, several times in the main Ocean. But he that is the first dipp'd, hath the honour of being saluted with a Gun. Such as are not willing to fall, are bound to pay twelve pence, for their ransom: if he be an Officer in the Ship, two shillings: and if a Passenger, according to their pleasure. In case the Ship did never pass that way before, the Captain is bound to give a small Runlet of Wine; which if he doth not perform, the Mariners may cut off the Stem of the Vessel. All the profit, which accrueth by this ceremony, is kept by the Masters Mate;

who after reaching their Port, doth usually lay it out in wine, which is drank amongst the ancient Seamen.<sup>77</sup>

The Dutch and French share homage to the older sailors on the ship, but differ significantly in the manner of dousing and the use of libation as offering. Worth noting are different taboos, for while the French included priestly figures to protect against evil forces, the Dutch had a tradition of prohibiting priests on board ships (another cultural pattern indicating a North Seas tie). Ethnologist Rob van Ginkel points out that this taboo is based on the belief that priests attracted forces of evil on board ship in combat. Novices could be initiated; priests and ministers could not, because they were not the corruptible sailor type. ‘Coming from outside the community,’ Van Ginkel writes, ‘they are “outsiders” in a literal sense.’<sup>78</sup> Unity of experience and orientation, if not of rank, was considered essential to completing a smooth, safe voyage.

Already in 1690, a Venetian observer, M.V. Coronelli, critical of the ceremony comments on the custom being ‘staged differently by different nations, even with variations within the same nation,’ and implies that his home Navy did not indulge in what he harshly termed a ‘sacrilegious, profane, ridiculous ceremony.’<sup>79</sup> Especially disconcerting to him and others was the parody of Catholic baptism and prayer offering. He complains that sailors ‘solemnize’ the ceremony with noise made with frying pans and pails, and he may be the first to refer to the novices as ‘*victims* of so strange a ceremony’ rather than as willing participants. That same year, a French traveler criticized his own countrymen for the mariners’ ‘execrable custom of a mock Baptism, which is fitter to be condemned with the utmost severity than describ’d.’<sup>80</sup> Another French source from that same year called ceremonies for crossing the line ‘impertinent’ but doubted they could be suppressed. ‘Tis an ancient Custom,’ he writes, ‘and will not be abolish’d without difficulty.’ It may be that if not abolished, the religious parody was downplayed, while preserving the baptizing process. His account of ‘these Rites and Mysteries’ at the equator, for example, highlights the threat of the sailors cutting off the stem of the vessel if

the captain did not give money for a crew's party after the crew went through blackening, dousing, vows and penance, and ritual washing. Indicative of the dissemination of the ceremony by this time, the voyager comments: 'Every Nation practices this ridiculous Custom after a different Manner.'<sup>81</sup> Evidence of the range of multinational reception for the account of the custom is the publication of the journal simultaneously in French and English at London and in Dutch at Utrecht in 1708, followed a year later by a German version at Frankfurt and Leipzig.

A published account of ceremonies aboard an English ship for equator crossing does not appear until 1670, when an English traveler witnessed the paying of drinks. Seventeen years later, ducking from the yardarm is reported on an English ship at the tropic, and in 1760, a seaman's narrative describes this 'custom' upon crossing the equator.<sup>82</sup> Crossing the line as a manly rite is codified in 1705 for the first time in a reference work, *The Gentleman's Dictionary*, published in London. Under 'Line,' it refers to a 'Ridiculous Ceremony' for the equator that 'navigators' know simply as 'the line.' Already at this point, a variety of practices are noticeable: 'when *Sailors Cross the Line*, or *Tropic*, that have not bin there before, they must Pay certain Forfeitures Demanded of them, or else be *Duck'd*, or *Baptiz'd* (as they call it,) either from the Main-Yard-Arm, or otherwise.' The entry notes that several nations practice it, 'indispensably in *East India Voyages*; and each practices it differently: Nay, those of the same Nation puts it in Execution in different manner.'<sup>83</sup> Although the nations claiming the custom are not inventoried, the reference to East India (Indies) voyages is evidence that the colonial powers of the Netherlands, France, and Britain were primarily involved.

An ethnographic account of a ceremony for passing the tropic involved both Dutch and English sailors and gives another opportunity for comparison of the cultural context of sailors' national backgrounds, and possibly their syncretism. On September 25, 1708, English sailor Woodes Rogers described ducking of novices from the yardarm on their way to the East Indies, 'according to custom.' Rogers reports:



The manner of doing it was by a Rope thro a block from the Main-Yard, to hoist 'em above half way up to the Yard, and let 'em fall at once into the Water; having a Stick cross thro their Legs, and well fastened to the Rope, that they might not be surpriz'd and let go their hold. This prov'd of great use to our fresh-water Sailors, to recover the Colour of their Skins, which were grown very black and nasty. Those that we duck'd after this manner three times, were about 60, and others that would not undergo it, chose to pay half a Crown Fine; the Money to be levy'd and spent at a publick Meeting of all the Ships Companys, when we return to *England*. The *Dutch* Men, and some *English* Men, desir'd to be duck'd, some six, others eight, ten, or twelve times, to have the better Title for being treated when they come home.<sup>84</sup>

Notable in this text is the joining of Dutch and English sailors, suggesting a greater affinity of customs than occurred with the French. It also indicates, however, that the Dutch, at least on this ship, were even more enthusiastic participants, with the incentive of having 'the better Title,' especially in a culture dominated by seafaring occupations at the time. This incentive may relate the precedent of initiation of merchant apprentices and novices to nautical folklife, since the observer noted the relative status of sailors having gone through the initiation and novices back 'home.'

In summary, it appears from the visual and documentary record that two main initiation or offering traditions have influenced the development of the modern equator crossing ceremony. One from France has foundations in a religious ceremony drawing on votive offerings and Catholic baptisms for pietistic thanksgivings to God and the sea, which subsequently became symbolically inverted the further out to sea the voyages and the demarcation lines of passage went. The other, probably from the Netherlands, is based on punishments and hazing for criminals, novices, and apprentices, and especially makes use of ducking from the yardarm or keelhauling. Both traditions were viewed culturally as responses to danger and markers of departure from a familiar world. Both became negotiations of reality,

taking on costuming and carnivalesque attributes, associated especially with long voyages to the East Indies and South Seas. To be sure, observers noticed variant cultural tendencies – the Dutch were famed for consuming huge amounts of wine and later, for swallowing raw fish, while the English, like the Scandinavians, especially favored binding and the paying of ransoms. It may be that the linking tradition that joined the different trajectories is the later mythological addition of Neptune, who is notably absent from the seventeenth century accounts. By the nineteenth century, Neptune and the narrative drama accompanying initiatory practices become predominant while the paying of ransom declines, perhaps because the mercantile interests of sailors – even those in service to their country – gave way to the discipline and duty of national Navies.

If ceremonies associated with crossing the line are ancient dating to classical times, one would expect the mythological narrative of Neptune as king of the seas to structure the customs early on. But that is not the case, therefore suggesting symbolic reasons for bringing Neptune to the fore. Neptune as a character and his court as a framing device for the ceremony are apparently introduced well after the tradition had become a familiar sight on Dutch, French, and English ships. With the standardization of Neptune as the presiding character in the late eighteenth century, ‘crossing the line’ comes to mean an initiatory drama occurring at the equator in the Pacific, usually on the way to the East Indies. For the Dutch, the importance of Neptune is signaled by the emerging standard name for the ceremony – *Neptunusfeest*.

English travel accounts regularly mention Neptune in the late eighteenth century as a central character in a nautical version of an English mumming play. Inglis Fletcher in 1774, for example, wrote in her journal, ‘The ceremony was a rude *mummery* with a sailor in an oakum wig playing Neptune, come aboard to welcome the ship into his tropic kingdom.’<sup>85</sup> Neptune’s appearance inexorably included his crown, robes, and long flowing beard. Especially important in Neptune’s attire was his trident, grasped royally like a scepter, suggesting the symbolism of phallic power.<sup>86</sup> An English traveler in 1791 no-

ticed, for example, ‘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. He stood at the ship’s head, as if he were rising out of the ocean, and demanded, with an audible voice, what was the ship thus encroaching upon his dominions?’<sup>87</sup> On English ships, Neptune is regularly accompanied by his entourage, including his queen Amphitrite and barber – and rough henchmen. On a voyage to China and India, the Daniell brothers observed: ‘At noon, the arrival of Neptune is announced; the marine deity is personated by a sailor, bearing in his hand the trident, and seated in a car, which is not other than a water tub, drawn by some of his companions in the character of Tritons. The appearance of Neptune and his retinue is highly grotesque; their oozy locks are composed of long, half-wet swabs, bespattered with oatmeal, and their faces are painted with red ochre. On approaching the captain, Neptune demands the object of his voyage, and receives the customary tribute from those who have not crossed the line, and choose to evade the ceremony of ducking and shaving.’<sup>88</sup>

Neptune appears in an account of a Dutch equator crossing ceremony in 1790 and visually in prints in the early nineteenth century, but is anticipated by two previous centuries of strong iconographic connection of Neptune with Dutch shipping, and indeed with Dutch nationalism.<sup>89</sup> Historian Louis Sicking traces this Dutch adoption of Neptune as a national symbol to the quest for ‘mastery of the sea’ during the Habsburg Netherlands in the sixteenth century. Inspired by empire building of seafaring voyagers in classical antiquity and the discoveries of the New World, Philip II associated himself with Neptune. In 1557, a map of the Netherlands by Hieronymus Cock shows Philip seated on a shell drawn by horses. Neptune, who directs the horses over the water heralded by a bugler in front with Dutch ships in view, calls to the ruler that his kingdom of the sea belongs to him as far as the world extends. The inscription reads that Neptune predicts the whole world will serve the king and the rights of the trident will be his.<sup>90</sup> A century later, Coenraad Decker invoked Neptune’s blessing on the Netherlands in his painting, ‘Allegorie op de Nederlandse over-



Characters in Neptune's Court, early twentieth century  
(Collection of Simon Bronner)

winnigen ter zee, 1672-73,' following sea victories over France and England, suggesting that Neptune was pervasive in Dutch maritime folk culture, which characterized the Netherlands.<sup>91</sup> There is even the proposal that the visual representation of Neptune influenced the standardization of St. Nicholas (*Sinterklaas*) with beard, staff, and robes. Besides being the most popular festive figure (in England it would be Father Christmas), St. Nicholas became the patron saint of seafarers.<sup>92</sup>

Henningens offers that the frequent staging in coastal countries of public pageants with classical figures during the Renaissance and Baroque periods inspired the transference of mythological spectacles from land to sea. In 1638, for example, Neptune and attendants of Tritons and Nereids led a memorable water procession in Amsterdam; in 1685, a pageant entitled 'The Triumph of Neptune' appeared in Antwerp with the king of the seas accompanied by Amphitrite. His chariot was drawn by sea-horses and accompanied by Tritons and mermaids.<sup>93</sup> Many pageants with Neptune are reported at Midsum-

mer festivals during the eighteenth century. This personification is significant to the line crossing tradition not only because of the symbolic association of Neptune with the heat and demarcation of summer solstice comparable to the equatorial location, but also it traditionally signifies a time of danger given to responses of a mythological space of magic and rituals (e.g. leaping through flames, divining the future). The case for movement of the pageants from community events to ship rituals rests on the prior documentation of the pageants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries whereas the seafaring journals begin reporting Neptune dramas on board ships during the late eighteenth century. The important point to make is that if this transference occurred, probably beginning with the Netherlands and Britain, it probably did so for the symbolic fit of Neptune to the rituals rather than a natural evolution.

As I have argued, Neptune elevated the 'Old Man' character to a mythological level in the liminality of the equator. As presiding patriarch over the seas and the ship's initiatory drama, he apotheosizes the father figure at sea as an inversion of the 'motherland.' He provides a model of phallic manliness for the initiates to follow, but in his issuing of judgment and punishment, he also is someone to be feared, suggesting conflicts emanating from the perceptible female norms of the ship. Perhaps the pairing with Amphritite in drag is a reminder of the sexual binary, although by 'crossing the line,' the sailor is heightening manly attributes of discipline, toughness, hierarchy, and aggressiveness. A representative testimony is from an American ex-sailor who went through the ceremony during the 1960s in answer to my question whether crossing the line engendered social cohesion:

In my view the ritual is about *masculinity*. In the broad view this ordeal was simply another means to prove one's manhood. That was a *big* issue in the Navy, especially on the deck force. The bosunmate rating (aka: the 'deck force') is perceived as the toughest duty in the Navy. Many of my mates in 3rd Division were festooned with tattoos. For 'lifers' this branding was almost a must to prove your saltiness. The language was always profane. Respect

for leadership was not a consideration: orders were given to instill *fear*. Endure the humiliation of the ritual and your mates would be reassured that you were one of them ... a *Real Man*, and a salty dog, at that. I suspect the underlying insecurity here is a fear that one amongst the crew might be gay. Yes, the ritual was very abusive. From my perspective, it was not fun. Yes, I did have a strong sense of being a part of a grand tradition given the attention paid to doing it up right. In retrospect the ritual felt like a means to: reinforce, encourage, sustain those masculine traits that have always defined 'true' Navy men; sustain a ritual that guards against queer branding and homophobic paranoia; legitimately vent any repressed feelings, at least for the shellbacks. In other words, it was OK to be sadistic up to a point. It reminded us ultimately that the Navy operates under a strict code of conduct which always relates to a chain of command. Social bonding? It's more about the pecking order than being tight with mates. It was a matter of showing our mates that we were real males. The ritual was a shock to the system, in striking contrast to the typically affable social rhythms aboard ship.<sup>94</sup>

Neptune epitomizes the 'pecking order' that this sailor mentions, for he demands respect, not just for his reign as *Neptunus Rex*, but for his wisdom and rank gained from seniority. Indeed, he inverts the stereotype of old age by brandishing symbols of virility in accompanying mermaids, trident, dolphins, and horses.

The question arises, however, about the apparent incongruity between characters of pirates, doctors, barbers, and natives. The 'fear factor' is significant in tying these figures together with Neptune. Neptune is arguably supreme because of the priority given to the framing of a mythological realm, one of obedience to patriarchal order; he represents a constellation of figures and values marking a world oriented toward the deep, a world upside down as one crosses a line from 'here' to 'out there.' His queen and mermaids accompany him in a servile role; he dominates them as he does the pollywogs. Part of that reversal is the coming of age fear of the smothering



Kissing the Royal Belly covered in raw eggs and oysters, USS Oxford, 1966  
(Courtesy Perry Christensen)

mother to fear of the repressive, revengeful father. To effect manliness at sea, especially given the view that maternally dominated, landed civilization is feminized and soft, and the military insecurity about homosexuality in an all-male environment, female figures, or men in feminized positions, are sexually dominated and ridiculed. Dealing with the often unconsciously internalized insecurity that sailors take on feminine roles on board, female (and the sodomized male) characters are externalized, ejected from the self; they are performed in Wog Queen contests, dog auctions, and homosexual enactments as ridiculous, passive, weak, and scared.<sup>95</sup>

‘Crossing the line’ involves the performance and materialization of characters associated with various fears. In the liminal, mythological space of blazing heat, of an alpha location demarcated as zero, of unnerving calm and monotony, perceived as unknown and dangerous, the sailor effects the reversible world by assuming the roles ‘out there’

that frighten him, even if unconsciously on the 'here' side. The pirate as the anti-sailor is especially prevalent in the historical context of fear during the mercantile period of being violated by those who could be comrades. In narrative terms, they are viewed as brothers who have crossed over into villainy; they are loathed, but at the same time admired for their daring and freedom from ethical restraint. The doctors and barbers similarly are reminders of ethical restraint, of conforming to modes of cleanliness, health, and appearance in landed civilization. In their corrupted versions when crossing the line, they violate one's body through groping and insertion of hard objects and fluids. The materialization of the 'line' provides a boundary to be crossed, even as fear is created at its threshold.<sup>96</sup> Like other male forms of play and ritual, crossing the line emphasizes penetration and the ability to withstand pain (especially from ganging behavior) by getting away from the 'pack.' The social and intellectual pack, often perceived to be connected to home, land, mother, and family is seen to hold the coming-of-age boy back; manly processes, culturally constructed, of 'crossing the finish line,' 'scoring a touchdown,' 'running the gauntlet,' and 'going over to the other side' symbolically provide opportunities for a new start, a rebirth, released from the umbilical cord of maternal constraint.<sup>97</sup>

## Contemporary Issues, Changing Meanings

Naval equator ceremonies persisted, even as many comparable initiatory traditions with roots in medieval initiations and festivals for guilds, merchants, and villages faded, because modern Naval identity built on a pre-modern collectivism of all-male groups. Hazing behavior was believed to build manliness necessary for the job and respond to danger or coming-of-age insecurities, and an isolation at sea that kept many crude activities hidden from public view. As home societies allegedly became increasingly individualistic, feminized, pacifist, and egalitarian into the late twentieth century, Naval leaders tolerated and even encouraged the ceremony as a way to build a sepa-



rate world based on collectivism, discipline, and aggressiveness. Crossing the line was also viewed as an important way to deal with, or adapt to, dangerous situations, such as responding to hostile environments and wars. Although a history of protesting the ceremony as sacrilegious, uncivilized, or abusive can be traced back to the seventeenth century, public outcry has been notably vocal since the 1990s, particularly in the United States. Four factors, two involving social movements, one about technological change, and one a historical incident, undoubtedly triggered special critical attention to Naval traditions.

The related social movements that occurred in both Europe and the United States were the entrance of women into formerly all-male domains of combat units and academies of the military. In the landmark Supreme Court case of *United States v. Virginia* (1994), the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) in fact argued against the admission of women on the grounds that it would destroy the hazing ‘rituals and traditions’ designed specifically for an all-male institution. VMI lawyers insisted that traditions were instrumental in building strength of character in isolation; the rituals depended on the creation of a separate world (implying that the former world of cadets was feminized), and since they were developed for a man’s world of combat and leadership, it was inconceivable to VMI leaders that traditions could be adjusted to a co-educational environment.<sup>98</sup> VMI lost, and the case was seen as a milestone for equal rights for women in society generally. Despite the skepticism of VMI leaders, the system of intense hazing of first-year ‘knobs’ was maintained; women in fact became initiated as men, ‘bonded in a *brotherhood* of survival with roots that ran deep,’ according to a female spokesperson.<sup>99</sup>

Another social movement related to establishment of equal rights and the reform project to eliminate prejudice is for the social acceptance of homosexuality. The US military had frowned upon homosexuality and actively discharged homosexual soldiers prior to the 1990s. After President Bill Clinton announced his intention to lift the ban on homosexuals serving in the military in 1992, fierce public debate ensued on the cultural appropriateness of homosexuality in the

male-dominated military. Accusations of homophobia and acts of discrimination that ran counter to the ethical values of a post-modern society were leveled at military leaders. By May 1993, a compromise was reached with a 'don't ask, don't tell' approach. Under this policy, the Department of Defense would not ask questions concerning the sexual orientation of prospective members of the military, but soldiers would be required to keep their homosexual orientation to themselves. Although homosexuals could enlist, many critics complained that they were 'baited' to come out and were abused. The cultural system of the military, and particularly its combination of homophobia and homoeroticism, became vigorously scrutinized in a public discourse over the extent of integrating sexual orientation into civil rights.<sup>100</sup>

The military claimed it had a different, hierarchical social structure and set of manly values it maintained with an obligatory set of often-brutal rituals and initiations, fitted, it said, to readiness for combat. It also had an air of guardedness as part of its persona of being engaged in critical issues of national security. The creation of a 'secret world' was culturally important to construct rituals of reversal that the military realized could appear bizarre and crude to effect the creation of an exclusive separatism, even elitism.<sup>101</sup> The contemporary question is whether a society increasingly sensitive to domestic physical and verbal abuse and effects of social discrimination would open the military to scrutiny for society's ethical values and tolerate a cultural difference in the military.

The technological change is the wider availability of photographic equipment that activists used to document instances of brutality in what was conceived as a post-modern 'war on hazing.' Activists strategized that if the public could view objectionable practices in various secretive organizations such as fraternities and Naval ships, wider, privately practiced social habits of misogyny, homophobia, domestic abuse, and prejudice could be curbed. In 1997, national news organizations aired amateur videotapes showing Marines gouging each others' chests with paratrooper's jump wing pins during a 'blood pinning' ceremony, followed by broadcasts of a crossing the line video

depicting hazing aboard the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz.<sup>102</sup> Calls were made not only to stop the hazing, often blaming the obsession of the military for aggressive manliness and exclusiveness, but to restructure the military persona with the egalitarian ethic of balancing male and females.<sup>103</sup> The debate over ‘reform’ became heated because of the prevalent military belief that in response to society’s increased individualism and pacifism (which many construed as feminine), military rituals needed to be reformed to be even harsher (which many viewed as necessarily more masculine) to effect replacement of enervating civilian values, while critics thought the military needed to be more like the home society (with implications of feminist and egalitarian values) to represent a national commitment to protection of human rights.

The historical incident that singled out the Navy for derision as a sexist culture was the sensational scandal resulting from the convention of the Tailhook Association (a private organization composed of active duty, reserve and retired Navy and Marine Corps aviators, defense contractors and others association with Naval aviation) in Las Vegas in 1991. After the story broke in the press, as a result of complaints by a female lieutenant, 140 officers were cited for disciplinary action, including 23 charged with indecent assault. The news revealed a number of sexually charged ‘rituals’ that appeared to have sources in Naval hazing. In an adaptation of a ‘gauntlet’ often part of the equator crossing initiation, when women approached a group of men, men would line up on either side of the hallway and start grabbing their breasts, buttocks, and crotch area as they tried to make their way down the hallway. Another related to the crawling phase of the line crossing narrative was called ‘butt biting,’ in which men bit the buttocks of another.<sup>104</sup> Questions arose whether the ritual, allegedly ‘over-masculinized’ traditions of the Navy fostered this behavior described as misogynistic debauchery. Although defenders noted that Tailhook was an event with its own legacy unrelated to dignified Naval traditions, others singled out the Navy among the branches for creating a hypermasculine culture dependent on the degradation of women. Parts of the Naval equator ceremony were often given by critics as evidence of abusive behavior that appeared misogynistic.

While some witnesses submitted that the ceremony was for building men rather than attacking women, critics pointed out that ‘there is an undeniable malice, and much of the sexual content is abusive and derogatory to the person in the ‘female’ role.’<sup>105</sup>

In a changing Navy with more female roles, is the ceremony anachronistic? One female ex-sailor was representative in relating to me her experience in 1999 and 2000 on the formerly all-male USS Boxer as life changing. The ship was refitted with separate berthing areas and trainings on sexual harassment policy became required. But the atmosphere was still male dominated. Her ship had 150 women out of 1000 sailors, and she talked about feeling ‘outnumbered’ and pressure to be ‘one of the guys.’ The label of ‘whiny bitch’ was especially to be avoided or else, ‘your life is going to be hell,’ she said. Women as work mates were respected, she insisted, but in what she called the ‘older ratings’ (i.e., traditional sailors’ jobs), she observed that negative attitudes toward women as ‘military’ personae prevailed. Perhaps the negation of ‘whiny bitch’ is further evidence of the psychoanalytical idea of ‘dread of the feminine’ in hypermasculine roles bound up with insecurity about manliness, and in this case, particularly the association with a strong mother figure, because of the implication of ‘bitch’ as an aggressive, dominant female.<sup>106</sup>

She looked forward to the line crossing ceremony on board but she knew in advance that changes had occurred to accommodate women. On her ship, crawling on non-skid surfaces was eliminated as were the eating of cherries out of the Royal Belly and cross-dressing in the Wog Contest. She recalled, however, the warnings of mates who told her: ‘We don’t give a rat’s ass if the Navy is getting soft, we’re still going to kick your ass, and you’re going to like it.’ It was common knowledge that some hazing had gone underground, conducted outside the view of officers. ‘They keep secrets,’ she said, remembering ‘one time a sailor had been taken to the engine room by some work-mates who ritually worked him over because he was lazy and wimpy.’ How did she feel then, having gone through this traditionally male rite? She commented positively about the ceremony, and underscored that she ‘felt *tougher* as a result of that experience.’ ‘I’m definitely

more aggressive, not afraid to stand up for my convictions and I'm not easily offended by things,' she said.<sup>107</sup> She emphasized that through the ritual she gained a Naval identity and she could not leave that identity behind in civilian life. She felt transformed differently from boot camp, because of the bond through the ceremony, she said, to 'your own little world.'

For many veterans recalling ceremonies before Instruction 1610.2, however, the purpose of the ceremony had been subverted. And most significantly, there was more of an atmosphere of paranoia about public reproach. The secret world of the military, represented in membership in an exclusive 'order of the deep' had been punctured; broadcast on the media, it began to look 'ridiculous' rather than mythological or 'dignified.' Once sheltered, and self-consciously apart, in the military world, ship crews were more aware of ethical concerns back home about Naval behavior. One veteran expressed a common view to me: 'Now it's just a party rather than a ritual. Maybe it still has some meaning on smaller ships but when the ship is a big city where you don't know who you're working with, then it loses something. Besides, in the old days, teamwork was more important. Now it's about individualism and doing your job. The fact that people volunteer to be in it is strange; before you were told that if this is your life, you had to be committed, immersed. It wasn't a choice. It was as an ordeal you had to endure if you were going to change, if you were going to be a sailor. The Navy is supposed to be about obligation, duty, obedience. The hazing is gone, and that's the whole point of the thing.'<sup>108</sup> Its meaning had changed in his experience from a ritualistic, if violent, crossing instilling fear to a festive carnival perceived as purposeless play.<sup>109</sup> If the masculinized culture of the Navy has not been restructured, it nonetheless has deflated its traditions of transformation.

Historically materialized as a boundary or threshold marking transfiguration, crossing the line is not yet ready to become inconsequential. Variants of the ceremony have become privatized at sea and maintained in student organizations and secret societies in Europe and America, despite the war on hazing in a post-modern age of sen-



Hazing of initiate by dumping eggs over his head during *Neptunusfeest* of Duikteam Medusa, Netherlands, 2004 (Photo by Danny Vanderhaeghe)

sitivity. In the Low Countries, for example, scuba diving clubs such as Duikteam Medusa are known for their own versions of *Neptunusfeest* in which new divers' heads are doused with flour and eggs while a crowned Neptune accompanied by two white-robed helpers presides. Their line is the liminal space of the shore, between land and sea. Their reference to danger and the unknown is in the depth of the waters. Solemnizing the ceremony, the helpers bring the initiates one by one before Neptune as judge and ruler. After Neptune gives a flowery speech, he is given reverence by both male and female initiates with a ritual kissing of the feet. Difficult tasks are then assigned to the initiates such as carrying a ball in a spoon without dropping it, catching a jam-covered apple dangling from a string without the use of hands (resulting in an embarrassing mess). While wearing a blindfold,

they drink champagne with a raw oyster in it, which is bound to instill trepidation in the initiate and arouses laughter from the ‘ancient mariners.’ Although the activities are described as ‘playful,’ a veteran of the club told me that ‘the impact of this ritual on the initiate is big. When they take the oath of *Neptunus*, they promise to respect life underwater. Also they promise to take care of their dive buddies when something happens. They feel that they are now part of the group. It also works in reverse; the ancient divers get to know the new ones.’<sup>110</sup> Typically held in the springtime environment of reversal and renewal, an outdoor picnic concludes the event featuring entertainment by the initiates to amuse Neptune, played by the president of the club. A creative addition to the mythological drama, perhaps indicating a post-modern guilt about, or criticism of, hazing (*ontgroening*, literally translated as de-greening) is the appearance at the picnic of Jupiter, playing the role of Neptune’s brother and god of the land (and agriculture), who on behalf of the initiates (or mainstream culture) vows revenge on the ancient mariners. A living, evolving tradition taking many forms, *Neptunusfeest*, at bottom is about crossing a line. It allows passage into ‘your own little world.’

## Notes

- \* The text is a revised version of a lecture given at the Meertens Instituut on October 9, 2005, while I was Walt Whitman Distinguished Chair in American Cultural Studies at Leiden University. I am grateful to both the Fulbright Program and the Meertens Instituut for making my stay in the Netherlands memorable. I especially want to extend a heartfelt *veel dank* to Peter Jan Margry, Marjolein Efting Dijkstra, Hermann Roodenburg, Gerard Rooijackers, Irene Stengs, Koos Schell, Hans Bennis, and Theo Meder at the Meertens Instituut and to Joke Kardux, Eduard van de Bilt, Walter van Peijpe, Mieke Spaans, and Joost Augusteijn in Leiden. I also benefited from assistance provided by archivists at the Maritime Museum in Rotterdam, the Moluccan Historical Museum in Utrecht, and Duikteam Medusa in Eke (Belgium). Additionally, Jay Mechling at the University of California-Davis graciously provided materials from his research on hazing, Michael Barton at the Pennsylvania State University-Harrisburg referred me to psychological literature on sailors, William Hansen of Indiana University provided classical references to Neptune and Aphrodite, and Roy Palmer in England shared valuable historic references on British equator crossing rituals.
1. 'Crossing the Line, Plank Owner and Other Unofficial Certificates.' [www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq92-1.htm](http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq92-1.htm). Accessed February 6, 2006.
  2. 'Blood pinning' of jump wings, or 'tacking on' of submarine dolphin pins is a ceremony where the uninitiated line up to receive their pins, which are pushed into their bare chest and pounded by each initiated member in turn.
  3. 'Crossing the Line, Plank Owner and Other Unofficial Certificates,' accessed February 6, 2006.
  4. Traditions supporting these values, or at least pointed to as justifications for perpetuating traditions, are pervasive in the U.S. Navy; see J.F. Leahy, *Honor, Courage, Commitment: Navy Boot Camp* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002).
  5. Walter T. Ham IV, 'BHR Sailors, Marines Become Golden Shellbacks.' *Navy Stand: The Source for Navy News*. Story Number NNS050526-04; Release Date 5/26/2005. <http://www.news.navy.mil>. Accessed February 6, 2006.
  6. Sam A. Moore, editorial letter, 'A Few Good Cream Puffs?' *Navy Times*, May 26, 1997, 31. On the charge of homophobia in the U.S. Navy, see Larry Doyle, 'Hey Sailor: I Want You for the U.S. Navy,' *Spy Magazine*,



- March 1993, <http://www.davidClemens.com/gaymilitary/spy93.htm>. Accessed February 18, 2006. On the definition of military manliness, see Simon J. Bronner, 'Menfolk,' in Simon J. Bronner (ed.), *Manly Traditions: The Folk Roots of American Masculinity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) 14-20; Carrie Little Hersh, 'Crossing the Line: Sex, Power, Justice, and the U.S. Navy at the Equator.' *Duke Journal of Law and Policy* 9 (2002) 277-324; Steven Zeeland, *Sailors and Sexual Identity: Crossing the Line Between 'Straight' and 'Gay' in the U.S. Navy* (Binghamton, New York: Haworth Press, 1995); Steven Zeeland, *The Masculine Marine: Homoeroticism in the U.S. Marine Corps* (Binghamton, New York: Haworth Press, 1996).
7. Henning Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator: Sailors' Baptism and Other Initiation Rites* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1961) 88. See also, Herman Ketting Jr., *Leven, werk en rebellie aan boord van Oost-Indiëvaarders (1595-1650)* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2005) 168-75.
  8. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 204-205.
  9. *Ibid.*, 206.
  10. For a critique of functionalism based on symbolic logic, see Elliott Oring, 'Three Functions of Folklore: Traditional Functionalism as Explanation in Folkloristics.' *Journal of American Folklore* 89 (1976) 67-80.
  11. Hank Nuwer traces public outcries against American military hazing to 1956 following the drowning deaths of marine recruits at Parris Island, but escalated during the 1990s and 2000s. See Hank Nuwer, 'Military Hazing,' in Hank Nuwer (ed.), *The Hazing Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004) 141-146.
  12. For a summary of international examples, see Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 86-92. See also, W.F.J. Mörzer Bruyns, 'Neptunusfeest,' in Henk Dessens, Lucas Veeger, and Jan van Zijverden (eds.), *Verhalen van het Water: Scheepvaart en mensen in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Stg. Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum / Walburg Press, 1997) 103-107; Sophy Jenny Linon, 'Le Passage de la ligne ou le carnaval de la mer', *Dix-huitième siècle* 22 (1990) 185-194; Wolfgang Steusloff, 'Äquatoraufen auf deutschen Schiffen während des 20. Jahrhunderts: Aspekte der Gewalt in einem berufsspezifischen Initiationsbrauch,' in Rolf W. Brednich and Walter Hartinger (eds.), *Gewalt in der Kultur* (Passau: Universität Passau, 1993) 387-400. Heike Dusberg, 'Äquator-taufe und Containerschiffe: Ein maritimer Brauch im Wandel der Zeit,' *Kieler Blätter zur Volkskunde* 36 (2004) 156-190.
  13. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. M.B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Barbara Myerh-

- off, 'Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox,' in Victor Turner (ed.), *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982) 109-135. For analyses of crossing the line as a rite of passage, see Keith P. Richardson, 'Polliwogs and Shellbacks: An Analysis of the Equator Crossing Ritual,' *Western Folklore* 36 (1977) 154-159; Duisberg, 'Äquatortaufe und Containerschiffe'; Steusloff, 'Äquatortaufen auf deutschen Schiffen'; Linon, 'Le Passage de la ligne ou le carnaval de la mer'; Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 291-299. More generally on entrance to the military as rite of passage, see Robert Endleman, 'The Military as a *Rite de Passage*,' in Joseph Jorgensen and Marcello Truzzi (eds.), *Anthropology and American Life* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974) 282-289.
14. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*; Richardson, 'Polliwogs and Shellbacks.'
  15. Hersh, 'Crossing the Line,' 283.
  16. An example of a customary dialogue for the reception of Davy Jones is in Leland P. Lovette, *Naval Customs: Traditions and Usage* (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute, 1939) 44-46.
  17. Ibid.
  18. Although not frequently reported, this feature is described by several informants in Zeeland, *Sailors and Sexual Identity*, 12-13, 57, 157, 191, 206, 209, 241, 281. See also Hersh, 'Crossing the Line,' 288.
  19. V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed., rev. ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968); Alan Dundes, *The Morphology of North American Folktales* (Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications, 1964) 195; Peter Gilet, *Vladimir Propp and the Universal Folktale: Recommissioning an Old Paradigm – Story as Initiation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998); Pamela Milne, *Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure in Hebrew Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1988). For related models of structurally analyzing non-verbal folk traditions that influenced my approach, see Alan Dundes, 'On Game Morphology: A Study of the Structure of Non-Verbal Folklore,' *New York Folklore Quarterly* 20 (1964) 276-288; Alan Dundes, 'Structuralism and Folklore,' *Studia Fennica* 20 (1976) 75-93; Victor Turner, 'The Syntax of Symbolism in a Ndembu Ritual,' in Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs Maranda (eds.), *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) 125-138; Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975); Henry Glassie, 'Structure and Function, Folklore and the Artifact,' *Semiotica* 7 (1973) 313-351.

20. Dell Skeels, 'Two Psychological Patterns Underlying the Morphologies of Propp and Dundes,' *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 31 (1967) 259.
21. Examples of the animal representation of toads and shellbacks are Aesop's fable of the race between the hasty hare and the slow tortoise (Aarne-Thompson [AT] 275A), the over-hasty toad (AT 288B), and the turtle who tricks a large land animal to throw him into the water (AT 1310).
22. See Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (New York: Macmillan, 1970) 1450.
23. See Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004), I, 262-263; A.P. Tudor, 'The Medieval Toad: Demonic Punishment or Heavenly Warning?', *French Studies Bulletin* 59 (1996) 7-11.
24. 'Paradigmatic' structure is differentiated from the syntagmatic (sequential or continuous) by the identification of oppositional patterns of discontinuities, and its analysis owes to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. See his *Structural Anthropology* (London: Allen Lane, 1967) and for a comparison of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic, see Alan Dundes, 'Structuralism and Folklore,' *Studia Fennica* 20 (1976) 75-93.
25. See Jaap van der Wijk, 'De Taal van het Water,' <http://www.joebattsarm.com/lexicografie/lexs.html>. Accessed March 3, 2006.
26. Royal W. Connell and William P. Mack, *Naval Ceremonies, Customs, and Traditions* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 79-80.
27. 'USS Fife Sailors Cross the Equator and Become Shellbacks,' US Southern Command News Release, June 23, 2002. <http://www.southcom.mil/pa/News/News020623.htm>. Accessed March 13, 2006.
28. Ibid.
29. Bunx, *Crossing the Line in H.M.S. Southampton* (London: Arden Press, n.d.) 28.
30. See Anna Marie Evans, 'Healing Through Exorcism and Other Supernatural Concepts,' *Taboo: Journal of Culture and Education* 1 (1997) 119-128; William F. Hanks, 'Exorcism and the Description of Participant Roles,' in Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (eds.), *Natural Histories of Discourse* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 160-200; Erika Brady, 'Bad Scares and Joyful Hauntings: "Priesting" the Supernatural Predicament,' in Barbara Walker (ed.), *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995) 145-158.
31. Menu, USS Collette (DD 370), n.d.

32. Partridge, *Dictionary of Slang*, 381; *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 137; Peter Kemp (ed.), *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 381.
33. Kut Weibust, *Deep Sea Sailors: A Study in Maritime Ethnology* (Stockholm: Akademisk Avhandling, 1969) 216-218.
34. *Ibid.*, 215-216.
35. Corroboration for this summary is found in Steven Zeeland's published interviews in *Sailors and Sexual Identity*, in which sailors view the ceremony as 'tradition' rather than homoerotic display (pp. 12-13).
36. 'USS Fife Sailors Cross the Equator and Become Shellbacks.'
37. Horace Beck, *Folklore and the Sea* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973) 116-119.
38. Ray Raphael, *The Men from the Boys: Rites of Passage in Male America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).
39. See John W.M. Whiting, 'An Anthropological Investigation of Child-Rearing Practices and Adult Personality,' in Eli A. Rubinstein and George V. Coelho (eds.), *Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health: An Anthology of Program Reports* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1970) 329.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Victor Turner, 'Comments and Conclusions,' in Barbara A. Babcock (ed.), *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) 281. For his theory of liminality, see *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).
42. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 62, 242; Harry Miller Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line: Tales of the Ceremony During Four Centuries* (New York: New York Public Library, 1957) 17-18. See also sections of antiquarian sources chronicling the symbolic inversions of spring, such as William Hone, *The Every-Day Book; or, Everlasting Calendar of Popular Amusements* (1827 rpt., Detroit: Gale, 1967) 570-635 (May Day, or May 1) and 663 (Whitsuntide or May 14).
43. Andrew Shewan, *The Great Days of Sail: Some Reminiscences of a Tea-Clipper Captain*, (ed.) R. Clements (London: Heath Cranton, 1927) 100. See also William Barron, *Old Whaling Days* (1895 rpt., London: Conway Maritime Press, 1996) 116-117.
44. See Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 217.
45. Barbara A. Babcock, 'Introduction,' in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) 20-21.

46. For the idea of 'negation,' see Sigmund Freud, 'Negation,' in: James Strachey (ed.), *Collected Papers* (London: Hogarth, 1950) vol. 5, 181-185. For a discussion of the application of this psychological view of negation into cultural terms, see Babcock, 'Introduction,' *Reversible World*, 20-27.
47. Turner, 'Comments and Conclusions,' in *Reversible World*, 281. For an application of this idea to maritime ethnology, see Rob van Ginkel, 'Tussen wal en schip: Taboes en territoriale overgangsriten in Noordatlantische vissersgemeenschappen,' *Etnofoor* 1 (1988) 108-127.
48. Dundes, *Morphology of North American Indian Folktales*, 108.
49. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 87.
50. See Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 293. For contemporary initiations involving hazing in fraternities and secret societies, see Nuwer, *Hazing Reader*; Simon J. Bronner, *Piled Higher and Deeper: The Folklore of Student Life* (Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, 1995) 126-67.
51. See Richard Barber and Anne Riches, *A Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1971) 121; Mia I. Gerhardt, *Old Men of the Sea: From Neptunus to Old French Luiton; Ancestry and Character of a Water-Spirit* (Amsterdam: Polak and Van Gennep, 1967).
52. Reinhard J. Buss, *The Klabaftermann of the Northern Seas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) 98-99.
53. *Ibid.*, 44-45.
54. *Ibid.*, 46. Many sources note the connection of Neptune/Poseidon and various seamen's beliefs to horses; see, Gerhardt, *Old Men of the Sea*; Peter Kemp (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) 398-99; Beck, *Folklore and the Sea* 119-120.
55. Buss, *Klabaftermann*, 49-51.
56. Alsted's account is transcribed in Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 242.
57. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 242-243.
58. *Ibid.*, 243-44.
59. See Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (1883 rpt., Mineola, New York: Dover, 2004), III, 1050-1051, IV, 1812-1819. For contemporary accounts, see Lars Bennett Jenner, 'Senses of Spring: Local Enactments of the Valborg Bonfire Festival in Sweden' (PhD. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1999); Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000) 170.
60. Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, 111-115.

61. See, for example, testimonies of line crossing ceremonies from 1942 to 1945 in Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, 193-204.
62. Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, 204.
63. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 284-285.
64. *Ibid.*, 284-289.
65. The symbolism of initiation as ritual death and rebirth and its establishment of mythological space, or 'symbolism of the centre' with enactments of creation owes to the classic theory of ritual presented by Mircea Eliade. See, for example, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954); *Rites and Symbols of Initiation (Birth and Rebirth)*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Harvill Press, 1958).
66. Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, 15-16.
67. *Ibid.*, 16-17.
68. Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, 17-18.
69. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 16.
70. Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, 173.
71. A facsimile is reproduced in the photo section in the back of Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, and discussed in Ketting, *Leven, werk en rebellie aan boord van Oost-Indiëvaarders*, 168-175.
72. The etching appeared in *Atlante Veneto* by V.M. Coronelli (Venice, 1690) and is reproduced in the unpaginated back photo section of Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*. Another etching showing a similar scene, but without the bishop's attire, was published in Paris in 1720 as *Voyage de Marseille à Lima* by le Sieur Durret, and is also reproduced.
73. The etching of a ceremony in 1708 was published in Paris in 1720 as *Voyage de Marseille à Lima* by le Sieur Durret, and is also reproduced in Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*.
74. Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, 25-27.
75. *Ibid.*, 25.
76. *Ibid.*, 26.
77. *Ibid.*
78. Rob van Ginkel, 'Pigs, Priests and other Puzzles: Fishermen's Taboos in Anthropological Perspective,' *Ethnologica Europaea* 17 (1987) 64.
79. *Ibid.*, 33.
80. *Ibid.*, 31.
81. *Ibid.*, 32.
82. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 36.
83. Lydenberg, *Crossing the Line*, 29.
84. *Ibid.*, 35.

85. Ibid., 52-53. Emphasis added.
86. Neptune's phallic power is also indicated by his frequent depiction driving a team of powerful surging horses through the water while holding his trident. For more on the male symbolism of the trident, see Alan Dundes and Lauren Dundes, 'The Trident and the Fork: Disney's 'The Little Mermaid' as a Male Construction of an Electral Fantasy,' in *Bloody Mary in the Mirror: Essays in Psychoanalytic Folkloristics* by Alan Dundes (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002) 55-75.
87. Ibid., 59.
88. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 25.
89. 'Neptunus aan boord,' in *Eén, twee, drie in Godsnaam, geloof en bijgeloof op zee* by H. de Bles en W.G. Boven (Den Helder: Marinemuseum, 1996) 13-14; *Het rijk van Neptunus: Maritieme prentkunst rond de Gouden Eeuw* (Rotterdam: Maritiem Museum Prins Hendrik, 1997); Louis Sicking, *Neptune and the Netherlands: State, Economy, and War at Sea in the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
90. Sicking, *Neptune and the Netherlands*, 354.
91. *Het rijk van Neptunus*, 34. See also, 'Neptunus aan boord,' 13-14. The connection of Neptune with a Dutch Golden Age is also evident from the iconography of certificates issued to Dutch sailors after crossing the line initiations. They frequently feature depictions of sailing ships from the era and pictures of Neptune, often wrapped in a rope (indicating the tradition of keelhauling associated with the period).
92. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 124, refers to the Danish bishop Peter Palladius who suggests in his church history 'St. Peders Skib' of 1554 that Catholicism converted the pagan god Neptune into the Christian St. Nicholas.
93. Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 127-131.
94. Correspondence with Douglas Manger, Baltimore, Maryland (USA), December 7, 2005.
95. For the theory of male combat ritually generating manliness, and the constant need to reassert it, by feminizing an opponent in play, see Alan Dundes, *From Game to War, and Other Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997); idem, 'Gallus as Phallus: A Psychoanalytic Cross-Cultural Consideration of the Cockfight as Fowl Play,' in Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Cockfight: A Casebook* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994) 241-282; 'Into the Endzone for a Touchdown: A Psychoanalytical Consideration of American Football,' in Alan Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) 199-210.

96. See Hilda Ellis Davidson (ed.), *Boundaries and Thresholds* (Woodchester, UK: Thimble Press, 1993). The theory of crossing boundaries is attributed to Arnold van Gennep who categorized the path from birth to death divided by a series of boundaries that are constructed by local cultures.
97. For the symbolism of penetration as a sign of male display, see Dundes 'Into the Endzone for a Touchdown.'
98. Philippa Strum, *Women in the Barracks: The VMI Case and Equal Rights* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).
99. Nancy Mace, *In the Company of Men: A Woman at the Citadel* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001) 207; emphasis added. Sociologist Gary Alan Fine argues that this accommodation to male values by women in formerly all-male domains is typical; see Gary Alan Fine, 'In the Company of Men: Female Accommodation and the Folk Culture of Male Groups' in Bronner (ed.), *Manly Traditions*, 61-76; Carol Burke, *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High and Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing Military Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).
100. See Zeeland, *Sailors and Sexual Identity*; idem, *The Masculine Marine*; David F. Burrelli, 'Homosexuals and U.S. Military Policy: Current Issues,' Congressional Research Service Report RL 30113, Library of Congress, May 27, 2005. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL30113.pdf>, Accessed March 8, 2006; Randy Shilts, *Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Military* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).
101. For the relation of the 'secret world' to manly traditions based on the sociology of Georg Simmel, see Simon J. Bronner, 'Secret Erections and Sexual Fabrications: Old Men Crafting Manliness,' in Bronner (ed.), *Manly Traditions*, 274-314. See also Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, (ed. and trans.) Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1950).
102. Hersh, 'Crossing the Line,' 320. A commercial DVD with a number of amateur videos and military films was marketed; see *Crossing the Line: King Neptune Ceremony* (Escondido, California: Traditions Military Videos, n.d.). The DVD carried a warning that the images 'may not be suitable for everyone,' because they show 'nudity and graphic scenes.'
103. *Ibid.*, 324.
104. Frances K. Pohl, 'Tailhook '91: Women, Violence, and the U.S. Navy.' *Z Magazine* (June 1994). <http://www.zmag.org/zmag/articles/june94pohl.htm>, Accessed March 8, 2006.
105. Hersh, 'Crossing the Line,' 318.



106. The classic statement of this theory is Karen Horney, 'The Dread of Women.' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 13 (1937) 348-360. For more recent adaptations of this idea, see Jay Mechling, 'The Folklore of Mother-Raised Boys and Men,' in Bronner (ed.), *Manly Traditions*, 211-227; Nancy Chodorow, *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
107. Interview with Laura Harding, June 30, 2005, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (USA).
108. Interview with Dale Russell, September 21, 2005, the Hague, the Netherlands.
109. An indication of its dissemination into popular culture as a deflated carnivalesque tradition is the issuing of crossing the line certificates and, occasionally, a mild sprinkling on planes and vacation cruises. See Henningsen, *Crossing the Equator*, 232-233.
110. Correspondence with Danny Vanderhaeghe, Secretariat Duikteam Medusa, Eke, Belgium, October 19, 2005.