

*King Neptune, the Mermaids, and the Cruise Tourists:
The line-crossing Ceremony in Modern Passenger Shipping*

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Abstract: The line-crossing ceremony is an ancient maritime tradition that marked the transition from inexperienced sailor to experienced sailor. This ceremony has been co-opted by the cruise industry for the purposes of portrayal and commercialisation of the heritage of passenger shipping for consumption by cruise tourists. This paper discusses this process of adoption and commodification of the traditional crossing the line ceremony by the modern cruise industry. While the cruise ship version bears some similarities to the traditional ceremony, it differs in purpose, the brutality of the original version is lessened, and the gender onboard cruise ships permits a difference in the makeup of participants (including the portrayal of mermaids) and a reduction in the need for transvestite performances. It exists for two reasons: for the amusement and diversion of passengers, and in an attempt to buttress the historical portrayal of cruise ship as part of a naval tradition. Data is drawn from interviews with cruise ship workers and published accounts of the ceremony by cruise tourists.

Keywords:

cruise industry, line-crossing ceremony, mermaids, passenger shipping, commodification

On the back deck of a modern cruise ship in the middle of the Atlantic — or the Pacific, it doesn't really matter which — a curious ceremony is taking place. Despite the luxurious and pampered nature of cruise tourism, passengers and a few crew are submitting to having food smeared over them. The (invariably male) cruise director, dressed in a white

sheet in facsimile of a toga, wearing a long straggly beard and holding a trident, watches on, grinning. The (usually male) assistant cruise director stands beside him in drag wearing a green wig and a green shiny dress. Several female entertainment staff are dressed as mermaids. Musicians play music on trumpets, trombones and saxophones and besmeared passengers are accused of ridiculous grievances before being pushed one by one into the increasingly fouled water. The cruise director rouses himself to read loudly from a scroll in archaic language. Hundreds of laughing and jeering passengers and a few bemused crew watch this bizarre ceremony. The ship has not been taken over by mutineers or pirates or madmen; rather this is the modernised and touristically adapted version of the ancient line-crossing ceremony.

Humans have ventured seaward for millennia; yet the sea is an unnatural place for humans. We cannot easily exist there and it is fraught with danger. Because of this strangeness, over the centuries, superstitions and arcane beliefs, rites of passage and protection, and stories of monsters gained currency among those who took to the sea. Sailors know one of these rites as the line-crossing ceremony. This ritual is a rite of passage for new sailors whenever a ship crosses the equator. The ceremony divides a ship's company into those who have already crossed the equator (called 'trusty shellbacks') and those who have not ('filthy pollywogs¹'). While modern merchant and military vessels continue to perform this ceremony, it is also reconstructed aboard modern cruise ships. The modified and hyperreal cruise version exists as a diversion for guests rather than a ritual trial by fire. It is an attempt by cruise ships to co-opt this historical maritime tradition to create a facade of the heritage of maritime travel for consumption by guests. The production of 'heritage' and 'the golden age of shipping' is one of the selling points of modern cruise tourism (Cashman and Hayward, 2015).

In this paper, I reflect on the differences between the commercial cruise and the traditional versions of this rite, including the inclusion of mermaids in the cruise version, the alteration from a rite of passage to amusing diversion, and the fabrication of historical verisimilitude for consumption by cruise tourists. The implementation of this ancient ritual demonstrates how the cruise industry constructs fabricated and hyperreal versions of maritime history for consumption by cruise tourists to enhance the importance and status of the cruise ship experience. Data for the paper is drawn from several sources, including my own experiences observing cruise ship ceremonies in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Augmenting my own observation are interviews with 14 working ship musicians and online accounts of the cruise ship tourists. These responses were analysed using a grounded theory methodology.

The line-crossing ceremony

The line-crossing ceremony is an ancient maritime tradition. The ships of many seafaring nations participate in this ceremony, called *Neptunusfeest* (Neptune festival) or *zeedooop* (sea baptism) in Dutch, *hønses for linjen* (footing for the line) in Danish, *linientaufen* (baptism at the line) or *äquatortau-fen* (equator baptism) in German, and *passage de la ligne* (crossing the line) in French (Bronner, 2006). It is a maritime rite of passage — from inexperience to experience, from purity to corruption, and from peril to safety. New sailors (pollywogs) are considered weak, feminised, young landlubbers. This is in sharp contrast to experienced sailors (shellbacks) who are regarded as superior and masculinised but also evil and corrupted by Neptunus Rex, the king of the seas. By participation in the ceremony, thereby paying homage to and consequently being corrupted by Neptunus Rex, sailors are kept safe. Traditional naval ceremonies and cruise ship ceremonies share features, but also maintain unique characteristics.

The origins of the ceremony itself are unclear and largely lost to history. Lovette (1939) cites the Vikings as an early source, but provides no evidence. The equator itself was only crossed by documented western ships in the 1470s in great trepidation of boiling seas, sea monsters and running off the end of the world and into hell (Rodrigues, 2013: 238). The first written reference to any ceremony associated with the equator dates from 1529, during a voyage from France to Sumatra by French sailors Jean and Raoul Parmentier. An account of this voyage described a ceremony celebrating the crossing of the equator by “knighting” new sailors (Hersh, 2002; Bronner, 2006; Rodrigues, 2013). The Dutch had developed a form of the line-crossing ceremony by 1583 and Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, travelling to the West Indies, described it as an “ancient custome” (Bronner, 2006: 34). Gradually the French adopted these traditions and by the 1670s it was also being performed on British ships. The 1705 *Gentleman's Dictionary* (Guillet, 1705: listed under ‘line’) describes a “Ridiculous Ceremony” when “Sailors [who] Cross the Line, or Tropic, that have not bin there before ... 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 practise it, “indispensably in East India Voyages; and each practices it differently: Nay, those of the same nation puts it in execution in different manner” (ibid). The tradition of the line-crossing ceremony continued throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

Passenger shipping adopted this tradition early. It existed on the packet sailing ships of the early 19th century (*North Wales Chronicle and General Advertiser*, 1828: 12) but seems to have fallen into disuse on passenger sailing ships at the end of the 19th century because of an “increase of steamships and frequent and rapid passages” (*The Clarence River Advocate*, 1901: 6). In the 1930s, passenger lines reintroduced the ceremony as a part of an equator crossing (*The Sphere*, 1931: 411; *The Argus*, 1936: 8). It was even performed aboard the airship Graf Zeppelin (*The Advertiser* 1930: 18). By the late 1950s, the ceremony was an advertising point for cruising (*The Sphere* 1959: 41). The modern cruise industry, which rose with Norwegian Cruise Lines, Royal Caribbean and Carnival in the late 1960s and early 1970s, did not at first adopt the line-crossing ceremony as early

runs did not take them to the equator. Rather, traditional lines such as New Zealand's Matson Line (Koenig, 1968) continued to mount these. By the mid 1970s, upscale cruise lines such as Royal Viking Line were undertaking world cruises (Guylay, 1975). Even today, it tends to be mid-range and expensive cruise lines, such as Regent, Crystal, Cunard and Silversea that mount these as these lines are more likely to cross the equator. The more accessible Carnival and Royal Caribbean lines tend to stick to cruising in the profitable Caribbean, Alaskan, European and Australian markets. However, any cruise ship that crosses the equator, whether as part of a world cruise, a South American cruise, or a repositioning cruise, is almost certain to perform the line-crossing ceremony.

The traditional naval line-crossing ceremony takes several days and includes several prescribed participants:

the ceremonies are orchestrated and run by King Neptune's court, headed by Neptunus Rex himself — traditionally the oldest or most senior shellback in the crew. Other members of the "royal court" assist him, including Davy Jones, the mythological evil spirit of the sea; Her Highness Amphitrite, often a young seaman in a costume of seaweed and rope; the scribe; the doctor; and the barber. Other members often include the royal baby, usually the fattest man in the crew wearing only a diaper; the navigator; the chief bear and his assistants, the latter of whom perform the dunkings; the chaplain; jesters; and the devil. The royals also have a secretary, sometimes known as a clerk, notary, or chancellor, whose job is to enter the names of the candidates to be sentenced by the court. The king's entourage also includes a judge — Davy Jones sometimes performs this function — who passes sentence on the pollywogs (Wildenberg, 2014: 55).

Little is known about the origin of Neptune's court in this ceremony. Some characters exist outside of this ritual but they have been taken from multiple traditions. Neptunus Rex is Roman, based on Neptune, the god of the sea. Amphitrite,ⁱⁱ comes from Greek mythology, and was a nereid (sea nymph), the wife of Poseidon.ⁱⁱⁱ The origins of Davy Jones, the sailors' devil, are unclear. Some origin stories say Davy Jones was the captain of the legendary ghost ship, the Flying Dutchman, doomed with his ship to wander the seas forever unable to make port. Others that Jones is a corruption of the biblical story of Jonah. No-one is quite sure (Mambra, 2018, Andrews, 2017).

Outside of this ritual, there is no evidence for a court of King Neptune with barbers, surgeons, secretaries, or chancellors. The court makeup seems to have developed over time.

Bronner (2006) identifies eight stages in the traditional form of the line-crossing ceremony:

1. New sailors are separated from home. They may go through a basic training before being assigned to a ship. They are told that they will become more mature and stronger as sailors.
2. The ship becomes a separate world, and its inhabitants, a family. Pollywogs may be forbidden to participate in activities that are enjoyed by shellbacks. Pollywogs must give proper respect to shellbacks.
3. The day before the equator is crossed, this established order is violated. Pollywogs may stage the mock 'wog rebellion'. This can include a 'bitch contest' comprised of sailors in drag and culminates in the crowning of the 'wog queen'. At this stage, Davy Jones appears on the ship and warns the captain he is in Neptune's domain with pollywogs on board, and to expect King Neptune and his court onboard at a certain time to impose fitting trials and punishment
4. On the day of the crossing, the shellbacks take back control of the ship through trickery, complicity, and villainy. Dressed as pirates or as equatorial natives (called 'cannibals'), Shellbacks hoist a pirate or shellback flag and wake the pollywogs earlier than usual. Before the arrival of Neptunus Rex, pollywogs undergo ritual humiliations.
 - They may be physically attacked with rope, rubber hose, or hand-driven generators. They may be verbally attacked as 'slimy pollywogs'. Individuals, unpopular or distinctive in some way, may be targeted for special treatment.
 - They may be forced to undergo homoerotic acts such as retrieving objects from the anus of other sailors.
 - They may be forced to wear blindfolds or wear clothes backwards.
 - They may be forced through garbage chutes.
 - They may be fed sickening substances to swallow or fed a 'wog breakfast' in a trough without implements.
 - As polluted pollywogs, flour, eggs, and other less pleasant substances may be applied to their hair and genitals. Greasy substances, representing excrement, may be poured over the pollywogs.
 - They may be hosed down or forced to strip naked.
5. At the appointed time, Neptunus Rex appears to mediate on behalf of the pollywogs, accompanied by his court. He greets the captain and assumes command of the ship.
6. Pollywogs are tested, interrogated, judged, and punished. The shellbacks present the pollywogs to Neptune and his court for testing. Neptune prescribes punishments such as faked dental exams by the royal doctor, botched haircuts and shaves by the royal barber, kissing the royal baby, beatings, or being doused with seawater. Under verbal examinations, the royal doctor may administer a 'truth serum' comprising a liquid with hot sauce. Pollywogs may be 'executed' and put in coffins by the royal executioner.
7. In a struggle between the worlds of the pollywog and shellback, pollywogs are led, sometimes struggling, to a tank of water and forcibly dunked. Once they

emerge, they are questioned 'what are you?' and until they reply "a trusty shellback", they are re-dunked.

8. After the ceremony, the pollywogs are transfigured as trusty shellbacks. Feed and drink flow at 'Neptune's ball'. New shellbacks receive certificates declaring them 'trusty shellbacks'.

Figure 1 shows a pollywog being doused in a woodcut of an 1816 ceremony.



Figure 1: Relation complète du naufrage de la frégate La Méduse faisant partie de l'expédition du Sénégal en 1816, by A. Correard, H. Savigny, D'Anglas de Praviel and Paul C.L. Alexandre Rand des Adrets

The cruise version maintains a broad similarity to the traditional ceremony. Alterations are for ease of consumption by cruise guests, to make the ceremony shorter, and to ameliorate the more brutal aspects of the traditional ceremony. The ceremony is generally well-known by regular cruisers, who form a significant cohort of the passengers, and tend to advertise it by word of mouth. The event is further advertised and contextualised by the cruise director after the evening show for several days before the ceremony, by the ship's daily program, by the daily announcements over the loudspeaker and potentially within the onboard lecture series. In the days leading up to the event, participating passengers and crew — pollywogs — will have signed up at the purser's desk and via their section heads. At about 11.30am, there will have been an announcement on the ship tannoy directing passengers to the pool decks. Passengers arrive wearing old clothing that can be ruined without concern. At midday (regardless of when the ship actually crossed the equator) King Neptune and Queen Amphitrite arrive, typically accompanied by ship musicians. They are sometimes accompanied by a reduced court consisting of perhaps

Davy Jones and one or two other courtiers. In a similar fashion to the naval ceremony, the accused are charged as pollywogs, and 'crimes' tallied. Punishments are meted out that are amusingly humiliating and messy, often involving food made for the occasion. The punishments invariably concludes with the accused kissing a large fish drawn from the ship's kitchen and then being thrown into the pool. After the ceremony — usually lasting about an hour — all pollywogs are determined to have become shellbacks. King Neptune and Queen Amphitrite are then usually thrown in the pool themselves. With this, the ceremony is declared to be at an end and the cleaners then move in to return the ship to its pristine and luxurious condition.

The cruise version maintains broad features of the traditional ceremony along with many of the same players, but differs in several key aspects. Consumers of cruise tourism undertake cruises for enjoyment and are unlikely to take pleasure from brutal and humiliating naval rituals. Neptune's court is smaller and sometimes omitted altogether. Pollywogs are voluntarily participating for fun and for the facsimile of naval heritage, whereas pollywogs in the original ceremony participate as a rite of passage. A participant describes a ceremony that took place in 1969:

One of the fondest memories I have of ocean travel way back was when we crossed the equator. I transitioned from Pollywog to Shellback in 1969 on the TSS Castel Felice. I was only eight years old at the time. I was brought before King Neptune and was charged with the heinous crime of being a Pollywog, King Neptune summarily pronounced my sentence and I got doused in a lovely liquid concoction of well ... let's not go into the details of what it consisted of, but it was yuk. And thus I became a shellback. So each time I cruise I pay an ongoing penance to King Neptune to thank him for allowing me to cruise upon his oceans. I do this by tossing something small and edible overboard. (Dobby_The_Ship_Elf, 2016)

While there are equivalents of Bronner's (2006: 9–14) eight stages of the traditional ceremony, these are mitigated for consumption by cruise guests. From my observation and that of several informants, there is similarity between the line-crossing ceremony of different cruise lines.

1. As new sailors are separated from land, cruise passengers are separated from home, albeit in a space that is designed to reassure them of safety and luxury.
2. The world onboard is definitely a separate and self-contained world. The onboard human societies of guests and crew are markedly different to land-based societies.
3. The established order is violated in that the back of the ship, usually the domain of sunbathing tourists, is taken over for the ceremony. Announcements touting the ceremony are made in the ship news and on the public address system.
4. Rather than trickery, cruise tourists are the subject of amusing and good-natured ridicule, though little of this takes place ahead of the ceremony.

5. King Neptune and his court appear in their traditional mediation role. The captain may or may not be present. The makeup of the court is changed though: traditional members of Neptune's court such as the barber and royal baby are typically not in attendance in the cruise ceremony. Instead they are replaced by mermaids.
6. The pollywog guests are led out tied together by their hands and presented to King Neptune who metes out various ridiculous 'punishments' for amusing 'crimes'.^{iv}
7. After these punishments, cruise tourists are pushed into the swimming pool paralleling the dunking of pollywogs.
8. In most cruise lines, this is where the ceremony ends. Participating guests are given a certificate, certifying them as a 'trusty shellback'. Some cruise lines mount an evening 'Neptune's Ball' (*The Telegraph*, 2016)



Figure 2: King Neptune and Queen Amphitrite arrive on a cruise ship for the line-crossing ceremony



Figure 3: Mermaids, pirates, and musicians during a line-crossing ceremony. (Photo courtesy of Gary Bembridge, www.tipsfortravellers.com)

The cruise and naval ceremonies considered

The cruise version of the line-crossing ceremony has points in common with the naval version. It is clearly recognisable with many of the same characters as the original. Bronner's eight stages are still observable. However, it varies in three particular ways. First, the **makeup** of Neptune's court is different due to the greater availability of female crew, for ease of consumption by cruise guests, and out of consideration of the potential offence taken by guests. Secondly, the **purpose** is different. The traditional ceremony is a ritual of protection and of transition whereas the cruise version is a diversion and attempt to reinforce the historicity of shipping and the purported unbroken line of authenticity from naval ships to cruise ships. Thirdly, because of this different purpose, the **brutality** of the ritual is ameliorated to allow consumption by cruise tourists.

Participants vary from the traditional ceremony to the cruise version. The traditional ceremony includes Neptunus Rex and his court. Neptunus Rex is a corruptor of sailors, malevolent and impetuous, capable of saving or claiming a sailor swept overboard. The members of his court are brutal and equally malevolent. Despite being portrayed as elderly, he brandishes a trident, a symbol of virility. An entourage of supernatural beings accompanies him, all of whom, like the pollywogs and shellbacks, are subservient to him. In the cruise version, however, this entourage is different. Neptunus Rex and Amphitrite are in attendance, but the ceremony includes few of the traditional courtiers. The addition

to the modern cruise version that is not regularly in the traditional ceremony is mermaids. Early accounts of the traditional line-crossing ceremony do not mention them as taking part in the line-crossing ceremony. In the original naval line-crossing ceremony, female characters were (and are) performed by males in drag. Given the era in which the ceremony originated, and the relative commonness of drag on the male-dominated stages of Shakespeare and Marlowe, perhaps this is not too surprising. While cross-dressed performances as mermaids did feature in some traditional ceremonies (Hersh, 2002), they were not a regular inclusion. An account from 1920 of Edward VIII (then Prince of Wales) partaking in a naval line-crossing ceremony describes a “leggy, rope skirted Amphitrite, and the aged and rouge-cheeked mermaid who attended her” (*The Times of India*, 1920: 3), though this appears to have been unusual as other accounts do not mention mermaids. Bronner (2006) notes that this representation of the feminine by the masculinised sailors is absurd, outlandish and sexualised, a portrayal of the transition from the feminised and ‘attractive’ pollywog to the tougher, grizzled and evil shellback. Traditional drag performances during the line-crossing ceremony are not feminised, but rather masculinised in opposition to their costumes in a similar way to that of pipe band performers wearing kilts (Tye, 2014). Gender — portrayed or actual — is less important than performance and the need to fill the historical roles.

Drag portrayals aboard cruise ships are different. The full entourage of Neptune’s court is usually replaced by mermaids. Mermaids are among the most identifiable mythological creatures associated with the sea. In the form of sirens from ancient mythology, they were omens and provokers of disaster, sexually desirable, and tempters of sailors (Alexander, 2012: 90). However, the modern ideal of the mermaid is of more benevolent (but still overtly sexual) beings, as typified by Daryl Hannah’s Madison character in *Splash* (1984) (Hayward, 2017). Within the context of the cruise line-crossing ceremony, mermaids are regarded as a popular and sexually desirable and are portrayed beautifully, rather than in a drag performance by a hairy sailor. Drag and cross-dressing does exist on cruise ships, in particular regular drag performances by dominantly Filipino staff in the crew bar. However, on a cruise ship, females are comparatively in abundance (Zhao, 2002: 5), so there is less need for drag portrayals to cover the roles required for the ceremony. The mermaids depicted on the cruise ship version are traditionally played by young female staff. The dancers from the production show cast are often given this role as they are, by the nature of the work they chosen for, young and attractive. Alternatively, they may be chosen from the other entertainment staff including youth workers or cruise assistants. In this role, they will dress up in costumes that are often green and shiny and which are designed to portray a facsimile of a fish’s tail (see Figure 3). Their role is to attend King Neptune and assist in the management of pollywog passengers. Cruise ship entertainment is designed specifically to give no offence, and the sight of drag performances could conceivably displease some socially conservative guests.

The line-crossing ceremony as performed on cruise ships is a historical and heritage product that packages and confers a sense of naval history for the consumption of cruise

guests. The industry portrays concepts that are of use to it in its creation of diversions for guests. One of these is the concept of the heritage of passenger shipping. This can be observed in onboard signifiers that reference popular cultural images of the golden age of passenger shipping, such as the costume and performances of musicians on board, ballroom dance, and naval ritual such as the 'Captain's Cocktail party', 'formal nights' where the wearing of tuxedos is encouraged or mandatory, and by the line-crossing ceremony. The original ceremony is a rite of passage for sailors who become more masculine and worthy sailors. The cruise ceremony is a farce; a diversion with which tourists can safely interact. It is a signifier of history and heritage, but does not depict it accurately.

Though the modern ceremony differs markedly from the original in several key aspects, it is similar enough to be recognisable. Because of this difference of purpose, the cruise version is performed in an altered fashion with several of the more brutal rituals removed. The purpose of the original is for pollywogs to display their worth in order to transition by a trial by fire to the exalted status of shellback. However, there is no great difference between shellbacks and pollywogs among tourists, many of whom are older than their counterpart pollywogs would be on naval vessels. Participation is optional for guests and enforced for naval personnel. The result is a playful, hyperreal representation of the line-crossing ceremony that emphasises fun and inclusiveness rather than the rigours of naval life and a transition from inexperienced to experienced sailor.

Cruise tourism, space, ritual and the line-crossing ceremony

Tourism is a production industry whereby experiences are packaged for consumption by tourists (Cohen, 1988; Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999; Chhabra, Healy and Sills, 2003; Tung and Ritchie, 2011). In particular, cruise ships are packaged tourist experiences with unique characteristics. A hyperreal tourism product, the cruise industry packages and improves reality (Berger, 2004, 2011; Kulhanek, 2012; Cashman, 2013), creating experiences with which tourists playfully interact (Feifer, 1985; Wang, 1999; Yarnal and Kerstetter, 2005). Cruise ships are places of transition referred to by Augé (1992) as *non-lieux* and by Relph (1976) as a state of placelessness. While cruise ships exist in one geographical point, this point is mobile. Relph points out that the process of a 'space' becoming a 'place' occurs within the process of human naming and, the ocean being, for the greater part, uninhabitable by humans, it is not as precisely named. Cruise ships therefore have less relation to geographical space. Yet they are also mobile geographies unto themselves. These are some of the largest manmade spaces of inhabitation, with the largest measuring 360 metres by 60 metres. The spaces contained herein become places by naming them both in nautical tradition (starboard/port, forward/aft) and by name (the 'Emerald Lounge', the 'Red Lion Pub', the 'Queen's Room'). These spaces are not actually lounges, pubs or ballrooms, but are fabrications. Thus cruise ships are also

hyperreal spaces where the boundary between reality and fantasy is blurred (Eco, 1987). The line-crossing ceremony is particularly noteworthy as one of the few examples of the non-space of the cruise ship interacting with geographical space in the wide ocean.

Ships broadly are spaces of liminality (Lett, 1983; Yarnal and Kerstetter, 2005; Kriwoken and Hardy, 2018). The fetters of everyday life are off and participants are free to act in manners they would not on land. On board a cruise ship, this can mean indulging in the luxury of the ship, going to see live entertainment every night, travelling to exotic places, and participating in faux-naval ceremonies. The very liminality of the ship, whether naval, merchant or passenger, permits and mandates rites of passage such as the line-crossing ceremony (van Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1969, 1974). The pollywog and shellback tribes are discrete and delineated by participation in this rite of passage. Onboard the various ships, participants in the line-crossing ceremony are separated not only from everyday life on land, but from everyday life onboard the ship. On the cruise ship, they are grouped, wearing old clothes and are the object of derision by the other passengers and the crew. During the ceremony, they enter a space of liminality where they are neither pollywog nor shellback. They prove themselves worthy of the title of shellback by trial of initiation. At the completion of the ceremony, they emerge proclaimed by King Neptune as trusty shellbacks and certified as such. Cruise passengers can even indulge the conceit that they are actually shellbacks, as can be observed in the aforementioned quote by Dobby The_Ship_Elf.

The line-crossing ceremony invokes the hyperreality inherent in cruise tourism in three manners: the artifice of the ceremony, the artifice of the involvement of the actors, and the artifice of the participation of the passengers. Reality and fantasy are blurred by the ceremony itself. The ceremony is not the traditional one that marks the important transition of sailors from pollywogs to shellbacks; while the ceremony is memorable to tourists, it is of marginal significance to them. Further, the cruise director is not King Neptune. Nor are cruise tourists actual sailors going through the ceremony put through the brutality of the traditional ceremony. They are fabricately taking part in the ceremony. Passengers go through a construction of the ritual rather than the actual ritual. They are not beaten. They do not have to drink hot sauce or eat days old food. The ceremony is a farce, representative of the naval tradition, but different to it.

Conclusion

The line-crossing ceremony continues to be performed on military vessels, though it has changed as well. Increasingly since the 1980s women have actively served aboard naval vessels of various nationalities, thereby changing the power relationship of the traditional weak and feminised pollywogs to strong and masculinised shellbacks. The tolerance for hazing rituals has decreased in recent years. Although the ceremony still occurs, it has

changed. One of Bronner's (2006: 51) informants noted that "that 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". Although it still exists, the line-crossing ceremony is regarded with suspicion by the public. By contrast, the line-crossing ceremony on cruise ships maintains its popularity. While it bears some verisimilitude to the traditional ceremony, it differs in purpose, the brutality of the original version is lessened, and the gender balance onboard cruise ships permits a difference in the makeup of Neptune's court (including the portrayal of mermaids) and a reduction in the need for cross-dressing performances. It exists for two reasons: for the amusement and diversion of passengers, and as a representation of a historical performance.

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Endnotes

- ⁱ A pollywog is a late middle English term for a tadpole. However, the origin of the usage of 'shellback' and 'pollywog' in this instance is unknown.
- ⁱⁱ Both King Neptune and Queen Amphitrite are characters in the animated US television show *Spongebob Squarepants* (1999–), presumably taken from this ritual. Both are portrayed as mer-people.
- ⁱⁱⁱ In Roman mythology, the consort of Neptune was Salacia, the goddess of salt water.
- ^{iv} One participant recorded that: For their crimes, the pollywogs are subjected to a series of "humiliating" punishments for the amusement of the assembled crowd. "Wearing a speedo^{iv} on the pool deck" for one older gentlemen. "Cutting in line at the breakfast buffet" for another lady as the standard of such indiscretions. In my case, my crime of "having limited French linguistic skills," resulted in a four-pronged sentence: arm crawling across a tarp covered in dishwashing liquid — my comical struggle for propulsion was met with laughter from the crowd, kissing Neptune's feet, kissing a fish for good luck and finally crossing the line by swimming under a rope in the ships pool marked the end of my penance. (Smith, 2015)