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# The Rime of the Globalised Mariner: In Six Parts (with Bonus Tracks from a Chorus of Greek Shippers)

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## Abstract

This article borrows the form and metre of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to describe and analyse the social situation of the globalised mariner. The shipping industry is characterised by complex global value chains and an outsourced, casualised labour force. The paper aims to be a piece of 'public sociology' and (in seeking to appeal in as vivid a manner as possible) is written in a style that Wright Mills called 'sociological poetry', attempting a pastiche of perhaps the best known poem in English. The auditor in the poem is a late-modern consumer and the narration is shared between the mariner, an inspector of shipping and (to remind the reader and the auditor of the mariner's partisanship) a Chorus of Greek Shippers. The narrative covers deficiencies in seafarer training, reductions in crew numbers, the consequent long hours and seafarer fatigue, and the failure of global governance of the industry.

## Keywords

global governance, globalisation, public sociology, sociological poetry

## The Rime of the Globalised Mariner (with Bonus Tracks from a Chorus of Greek Shippers)

### PART I

It is a global Mariner,  
And he stoppeth one of three.  
'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,  
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?'

A globalised Mariner meeteth  
three gallants outside a shopping  
centre and detaineth one.

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'The centre's doors are opened wide,  
And Bourdieu got it right:  
Consumption lends distinction.  
So get you out my sight.'

The Consumer protesteth against  
detention outside the shopping  
mall.

He holds him with his glittering eye –  
No Big Issue<sup>1</sup> sale is sought,  
But fifty yards from B&Q  
The would-be Consumer's caught.

The Consumer is spell-bound by  
the mariner and constrained to hear  
his tale.

So spake the doleful mariner,  
Transfixing with his e'e,  
In fluent, graphic English –  
The language of the sea.

Proficiency in English is a  
requirement of a seafaring career.

'I had no wish to work on ships –  
Filipinos<sup>2</sup> know it's hard –  
Mouths were many, jobs were scarce,  
From birth my life was marr'd.

The Mariner telleth of early  
hardships and how he and his  
parents were cheated by the  
maritime colleges and the crewing  
agents.

'From green island homes we travel,  
As mariner, nurse, or maid,  
And remit<sup>3</sup> to our loved ones  
The pittance we get paid.

'Father scraped up money  
For training college fees –  
A scam of the local senator,  
Whose throat I'd gladly seize.

Filipino maritime training  
institutions are often controlled  
by persons with powerful political  
connections.

'The college had no equipment,  
Just endless, pointless drill,  
No qualifications either –  
The news made my father ill.

The academic training often  
follows a military model and is  
of poor quality. And it does not  
qualify cadets for certificates  
of seafarer competency without  
additional practical experience  
– 'sea time'. Most colleges fail to  
arrange 'sea time' for their cadets.

'Course passes gained no certificates,  
Without some time at sea.  
There was no ship to serve on,  
But the senator had his fee.

'Father paid a crewing agent:  
Yet another fee required,  
But at least I'd get a berth,  
And that's what we desired.

Many ship operators out-  
source crew recruitment and  
employment to specialist crewing  
agencies with offices in the

'The agent sent me to train then  
At a dismal-looking place  
More fees and little learned,  
Sad repetition of my case.

'A lifeboat stood on davits,  
By a creek filled-up with mud.  
"For audit purposes only",  
That pristine lifeboat stood.

'There's so many schools for training –  
Why'd the agent send me there?  
The training was quite useless –  
Why didn't that agent care?

'It seemed he got a "rebate"  
(kickback to you and me)  
For every trainee sent there,  
A percentage of their fee.

'They issued my certificates,  
But their paper had a price:  
My father's hard-earned money,  
Stolen once, then twice.

'Ever since it's been the same:  
When I come home from sea,  
The agent wants another course,  
And I must pay the fee.'

[Enter Chorus of Greek Shippers<sup>4</sup>]

'O woe to us, and to our ships,  
But what are we to do?  
The wages they are paying now,  
Won't draw a young Greek crew.

'So we take these global mariners,  
Who're really up for it,  
But they can't begin to work a ship:  
Their training's frankly s\*\*t!

'Someone, somewhere, should sort it out,  
We've really had enough:  
Inspect and close the colleges,  
It's time for getting tough!'

major labour supply countries.  
Cadets graduating from maritime  
colleges must pass a basic safety  
training course before they can  
go to sea. The courses are usually  
conducted at specialist training  
institutions with requisite  
equipment such as lifeboats.  
State regulatory agencies inspect  
the training institutions to  
ensure the requisite equipment is  
present, but not that it is used.

Corrupt crewing agents distort the  
seafarer training market

Specialist short courses must be  
taken to allow employment in  
particular trades, such as tankers.  
Usually, the seafarer must pay the  
course fee.

Ship operators moan that  
international standards of seafarer  
training are not being properly  
enforced.

## PART II

Consumer groaned to Mariner:  
 ‘So you each believe the same!  
 But if *all* think your training’s s\*\*t  
 Then, truly, who’s to blame?’

‘Our union said, there is a law –  
 A real law, no invention –  
 That lays down training standards,  
 An international convention.<sup>5</sup>

The Mariner relateth that there are international standards on seafarer training.

‘Government should enforce it,  
 End the bribing and the feigning,  
 Close-down the useless paper-mills  
 And give us decent training.’

But these international standards rely on national enforcement.

‘Yes, yes,’ the Chorus chorused,  
 ‘Our ships need well-trained crew.’  
 ‘So what went wrong?’ Consumer asked,  
 But the Mariner hardly knew.

‘There are no simple answers,’  
 Voice grated, knife on rock,  
 ‘The true path’s no open highway,  
 Good governance no wind-up clock.’

A gaunt figure stepped among them:  
 He gave each a piercing look.  
 His boots were worn, his cloak was stained,  
 And he bore a calf-bound book.

‘Who art thou?’ they cried in wonder,  
 ‘And what thing’s your burden there?’  
 ‘I’m the Inspector,’ spake the stranger,  
 ‘And the Law’s my burden fair.’

An Inspector calls.

The Chorus shrank and muttered,  
 The Mariner downed his e’e.  
 ‘I’ve heard tell of you,’ he whispered,  
 ‘As have all who sail the sea.

‘You come aboard, unheralded,  
 You seek out the rusting hulks:  
 You cow the cruel masters,  
 Ships’ agents get the sulks.’<sup>6</sup>

Consumer viewed Inspector,  
Eyes lit with wild surmise:  
'It's up to you to punish,  
Right wrongs, and nail their lies?'

'In truth, that *is* my duty –  
The goal for all my kind –  
But the journey is a long one,  
And the road's not paved, nor signed.

'Those who inspect the colleges  
In each poor country of the Earth:  
They're government employees  
And are not paid their worth.<sup>7</sup>

'The owner is a man of power,  
The inspector – he is not,  
The one dines in his castle,  
The other in his cot.

'The inspector has a check-list,  
To work through, line by line.  
If a lifeboat's at the college,  
Then it gets a tick – that's fine.

'We know it can't be launched:  
It's to be *ticked*, naught more.  
Poor men must heed the letter,  
Not the substance, of the law.'

The mariner had silent stood,  
Hands clenched and visage pale,  
Eyeing the Inspector,  
As he ground out his tale.

'I thank you,' cried the mariner,  
'Now I know the bitter worst:  
No remedy in law books –  
My mates and I are cursed.'

'Don't blame the law, nor malice,  
Nor trade that's getting slack,  
Global economic forces  
Strapped these burdens to your back.

The Inspector concurrereth with  
the mere lip-service maritime  
colleges pay to international  
training regulations, but  
believeth that the local  
inspectors are powerless to  
obtain fuller compliance.

‘Colleges *could* train you better –  
With lifeboats working too –  
But higher costs would close ’em down,  
Then where’d we find a crew?’

The ship operators see poor-quality training as an economic consequence of the seafarers’ need for cheap training.

The Inspector laughed most harshly,  
And turned to face the Greeks:  
‘He who looks for truth  
Must beware of that he seeks.

‘Good training’s too expensive:  
The poor can’t pay the fee.  
You state the matter clearly,  
And I cannot but agree.

‘Yet I can well remember  
When companies paid the fees,  
Time-Past – *they* paid for training,  
Invested in their employees.

The Inspector recalleth that 40 years ago, it was commonplace for ship operators to pay for seafarer training through cadetships and apprenticeships.

‘You complain of training standards,  
Cackling like geese  
You want *action* to be taken,  
But you don’t pay a penny piece.

‘It seems to me, hypocrisy,  
When the poor turn-out their pockets,  
To criticize their training,  
While adding up your profits.’

### PART III

The Chorus blushed and shuffled,  
But still they stood their ground.  
They’d got their MBAs,  
They knew their case was sound:

‘You’re talking of the past,  
Dim, distant days of yore,  
We don’t train our seafarers –  
We don’t employ ’em any more!’

Consumer quizzed the Chorus:  
‘You don’t employ your crew??’ –  
‘Our labour’s all outsourced,  
The late-modern thing to do.

The Chorus confirmeth the Mariner’s tale that crewing agencies, not ship operators, employ seafarers. Agencies then contract with operators to supply crews with the requisite qualifications.

‘If a shipper paid for training,  
He’d have an extra cost,  
He’d be under-cut by others –  
His business would be lost.



‘Pay for training? Better wages??  
Remember shipping’s quite anarchic:  
We’d love to be more generous  
But you cannot buck the market.’

The Inspector gave a mirthless smile:  
‘The market’s always cited  
As a sovereign power and reason  
Why wrongs cannot be righted.

‘But the remedy is simple here:  
The flag-State of every nation  
Shall charge a levy on each ship,  
Paid at each ship’s registration.

‘The levy would pay all training costs,  
A burden shared without distortion.  
It would pay for good inspections too –  
No need for doubts or caution.’

The Mariner did slowly nod:  
‘The scheme would work – I see –  
My last ship flew Mongolia’s flag,  
For a three-thousand-dollar fee.’

‘Mongolia?’ quizzed our Consumer,  
‘That’s surely rather queer?’  
‘Not really,’ saith the Inspector,  
‘Some think a proper flag too dear.

‘Each ship is like a piece  
Of far-off, sovereign soil –  
Its flag denotes allegiance,  
Republican or royal.

‘The flag-State has a duty,  
Be the country rich or poor,  
To check each ship is ship-shape –  
As laid down in the law.

‘But flags can be commodities,  
And flags can be for rent,  
To businessmen and lawyers,  
Who’re out on profit bent.

‘When ships are policed badly,  
Their seafarers should beware.  
Policing ships for profit  
Is a mighty strange affair.

The Inspector proposeth a training  
levy to be paid when each ship is  
registered by the flag-State. See  
Afterword.

Although Mongolia is 850 miles  
from the sea, the Mongolian  
People’s Revolutionary Party  
granted a license in 2003, to a Mr  
Chong Kov Sen, a Singaporean  
businessman, to operate the  
Mongolian Ship Registry. Mr  
Chong previously operated the  
Cambodia Registry under license  
until 2002, when the license was  
withdrawn following international  
protests at Cambodia’s failure to  
police its ships. In 2008, 73 ships  
were flying the Mongolian flag.

‘Some run their business well,  
Some run it as a racket,  
With only one objective:  
To make themselves a packet.

‘Now, compliance is expensive,  
So compliance is a sham  
When the flag a shipper flies  
Really doesn’t give a damn.

‘A shipper heeds his costs,  
A shipper looks to save,  
But if he flies a cut-price flag,  
Consequences can be grave.

‘Ships that fly a proper flag,  
And meet their obligations,  
Incur much extra cost  
To comply with regulations.

‘They’re under-cut, bankrupted, bust,  
When complying as they should.  
There’s an iron law all must obey:  
Bad ships drive out the good.’

The Chorus sighed and scuffed their feet:  
‘What the Inspector says is true,  
But the fault is not all ours –  
Ship charterers are guilty too.

‘If they wanted well-found ships,  
And skilled, contented crews,  
They should have thought to ask us,  
Or given us some clues.

‘Truth is: they don’t want “good,”  
Or freight rates getting steep.  
*We skimp, they save –*  
Truth is: they’re wanting “cheap.”’

The Inspector sighed in turn,  
‘Some charterers do care,  
Oil majors first and foremost,  
Others – rather rare.

‘Inspectors board all tankers –  
For days, they sniff around –  
Ensuring chartered ships  
Are those that pass as sound

An OECD report states that ‘a significant percentage of total vessel operating costs could be saved by sub-standard operations’ (OECD, 1996: 27).

Thomas Gresham, a 16th-century Chancellor of the Exchequer, found it was impossible to improve the quality of the English coinage, by simply issuing good quality coins. People hoarded the good coinage. So it was necessary to also withdraw the clipped and debased coins from circulation. Hence Gresham’s Law: ‘Bad money drives out good’.

The Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF) has set up and funded its own private inspectorate, SIRE, to ensure the seaworthiness of tankers under charter. Those tankers deemed satisfactory on inspection can expect more business and better terms from the oil majors, eager to avoid the bad publicity of marine pollution incidents.

'Oil majors don't like bad headlines  
When tankers hit the rocks  
And oil pollutes the beaches  
Because the ships are crocks.

'The public doesn't like to see  
Seabirds black with oil;  
Alas, for all the tanker crews,  
The public doesn't care at all.

'So the tankers get inspected  
With much resource and care,  
But the crews of all the rest  
Make do with me ... and prayer.'

#### PART IV

The Mariner then spoke up:  
'Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Turk,  
Many pray who sail the seas,  
But their prayers concern their work.

'We do not fear a foundering –  
Hull pierced, stove in, or rent.  
Such a thing may happen,  
But it's a very rare event.

'Pirates may seize the ship,  
And hold us on foreign soil,  
But what we fear most is different:  
It's the endless, grinding toil.

'Each and every ship we join,  
Seems there's fewer crew,  
An officer gone, a rating gone,  
But there's still their jobs to do.

'The master now must take a watch,  
Though there's paperwork aplenty.  
So many crew have disappeared,  
The vessel's almost empty.

'The master's nodding on the bridge,  
His tired eyes are red.  
He's still to call Head Office,  
Before he gets to bed.

'The mate then takes a watch,  
Though it's two days since he slept –  
Problems with the cargo –  
But his watch must still be kept.

Increasingly, ship operators have been seeking to save crewing costs by reducing the number of watch-keeping officers. Where second officers have been dispensed with, then watches must alternate between the master and the first officer (mate), although each of them has many other duties to perform. An OECD (2001a) report instances a saving of \$37,000 pa by undermanning a 20-year-old 30,000 dwt bulk carrier by two crew. See Afterword.

‘Turnabout, the two must watch,  
There is no other way,  
Six hours on, six off,  
Twelve hours in every day.

‘In sickness and in health,  
Each watch they duly take,  
Dog-tired, red-eyed, grey-faced,  
Four months, four months, without a break.

See Bloor (2011) on crewing levels, fatigue and seafarers’ health.

‘No gentle couch our cabin:  
The ship is pitching in the waves,  
There’s engine noise, vibration,  
Yet we sleep the sleep of babes.

‘Too soon, too soon we’re wakened,  
We scarcely catch our breath.  
An ignoble thing, this tiredness –  
As if we slowly bleed to death.’

#### PART V

As ever when the Mariner spoke,  
The Greeks did swell with pride:  
‘There is no law that’s broken there,  
There’s nothing for us to hide.’

‘You surely lie,’ Consumer cried,  
‘I know little of the sea,  
But to have a master standing watch –  
That’s folly, plain to me.’

The grim inspector then did speak:  
‘In truth, they break no law.  
The law itself is here at fault –  
Therein we find the flaw.

‘The law on Minimum Manning  
Lays down for every ship  
The crew that must be carried  
On each and every trip.

‘What *is* the minimum manning?  
This is what we’re taught:  
It’s the smallest competent crew  
To bring a stricken vessel safe to port.

In fact the maximum number of daily hours of work for watch-keepers is specified by the IMO as 14 hours, and the maximum number of weekly hours is 91.

‘To make that stricken vessel safe,  
Huge effort they’ll expend,  
Yet *must* they slave thus daily?  
Til their contract’s at an end?’

Consumer scratched his head:

‘If some members of the crew  
Exceed twelve hours each day,  
Surely that’s illegal too?’

‘We falsify our working hours,’  
Replied the old seadog,  
‘To keep the owners happy,  
Each day, we flog the log.’

‘Then change the minimum manning law –  
No more idle chatter –  
Require crews to be larger,  
It seems a simple matter.’

The mariner sighed and shrugged.  
The Inspector took-up the tale:  
‘Flag-States must vote the change,  
Or else the measure fails.

‘Flag-States that exist for profit,  
And take the operators’ gold,  
They can’t increase the crewing costs –  
They’ve reputations to uphold.

‘The flag with the greatest tonnage  
Flies o’er the Panama Isthmus,  
When Panama votes for change,  
Then turkeys’ll vote for Christmas.’

Falsification of working hours is so widespread in the industry that it has entered everyday slang as ‘flogging the log.’

Consumer doth not understand why the flag-States at IMO do not change the international legislation to provide adequate crewing numbers, allowing shorter hours.

## PART VI

[All in chorus: ...]

‘So come all you kind consumers,  
Who the honey’d wine have sipped,  
Take pity on the mariner,  
Beware how your goods are shipped.

‘The crews are outsourced workers,  
A study in dejection –  
Casualised, long hours, poor training –  
And the law is no protection.

‘If charterers thought the public cared  
How seafarers are mistreated,  
They’d pass the message down the line:  
“Our consumers are quite heated.

It is suggested that public concern for seafarers’ welfare might act in the same way as public concern about marine pollution and be transmitted down the supply chain from charterers to ship operators. Operators who could ‘brand’ their vessels as well crewed could then command premium freight rates.

“It’s bad for our public image,  
Like seabirds and pollution,  
So get your act together,  
And find a true solution.

“We’ll pay your higher freight rates,  
If you’ll deploy more crew.  
Or we’ll contract your opposition –  
See if they know what to do.”

‘So the shippers get the higher rates,  
Increase the crews and cut the hours,  
Strike the flag of Panama,  
And so, at last, they smell of flowers.

‘One day it really just might happen,  
A fairy tale come true,  
It’s even very possible,  
They’d employ and train the crew!’

## Afterword

The decision to write this article as a poem requires some explanation. There is, of course, some satisfaction to be gained from rhyming ‘Panama isthmus’ with ‘turkeys voting for Christmas’, but that is certainly not the sole reason for writing, and seeking to publish, the above. There are two interrelated arguments to be made here.

First, the worlds of sociology and poetry are not wholly distinct. Denzin (1996) has argued this point and Laurel Richardson, in particular, has published sociological studies in poem form (see, e.g. Richardson, 1994). But most important to the present argument is the short paper written in the 1940s by C. Wright Mills, called ‘Sociological Poetry’ (Mills, 2008). Mills called for, and defined, sociological poetry as:

... a style of experience and expression that reports social facts and at the same time reveals their human meanings. As a reading experience, it stands somewhere between the thick facts and thin meanings of the ordinary sociological monograph and those art forms which in their attempts at meaningful reach do away with the facts, which they consider as anyway merely an excuse for imaginative reconstruction. If we tried to make up rules for sociological poetry, they would have to do with the ratio of meaning to fact, and maybe success would be a sociological poem which contains the full human meaning in statements of apparent fact. (2008: 34)

Successful or not, this essay is an attempt to find a style of expression which conveys the human meanings behind the social facts of contemporary seafaring life in the international fleet. Coleridge’s friend and contemporary, Wordsworth, in the 1802 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, famously described poetry as ‘the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation’ (Coleridge and Wordsworth, 2006[1802]: 10). It is the vividness of expression in poetry to which we can turn to convey those human meanings.

Second, over the last 12 years, I have authored and co-authored a number of research reports and academic articles on seafaring and the shipping industry, presented papers, served as a delegate to the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Joint Maritime Commission, and have been quietly dismayed at the lack of impact of the research findings of myself and my academic colleagues. This piece is therefore framed as a contribution to 'public sociology' (Burawoy, 2005), appealing in a small way to the public over the heads of policy-makers. Possibly, a poem, and particularly a pastiche of one of the best known poems in the English language, is a potentially valid and effective way to make such an appeal. Just as Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* borrowed the old popular ballad form to explore the then contemporary conscience and consciousness of the Romantic Movement (cf. Reeves, 1959), so this article borrows the form of Coleridge's *Rime* to describe and analyse the social situation of our late-modern contemporary, the globalised mariner. The burden of the dead albatross that Coleridge's mariner must wear around his neck is the burden of guilt that is coupled with the romantic sensibility; the albatross of the late-modern mariner is the burden of globalisation itself, transformative economic processes experienced more acutely in the shipping sector than in any other traditional industry (ILO, 2001). The mariner's spell-bound auditor in Coleridge's poem is the wedding guest detained unwillingly at the threshold of the feast; the main auditor here is the late-modern consumer detained unwillingly on the threshold of the shopping centre, wherein lie all the glittering prizes of the globalised economy made available by low-cost maritime freight rates.

There is the further question of whether a sociology journal is the best place to publish a sociological poem, framed as a piece of public sociology. The public influence of poetry has undoubtedly fallen substantially over the last hundred years or so. It comes as a surprise to discover that William Morris was better known to the Victorian public as the author of the multi-volume poem sequence, *The Earthly Paradise*, than as a pioneer of the arts and crafts movement, or as a campaigning socialist (Thompson, 1976[1955]). Sales for contemporary poetry books in the UK are small, and are likely to fall further following the 2011 withdrawal of the Arts Council's grant to the Poetry Book Society. So a poem in the journal *Sociology* is quite likely to have a larger readership than a book of poetry. But such a calculation is irrelevant, because a *long* contemporary poem such as the *Rime*, composed by a previously unpublished poet (as opposed to, say, Seamus Heaney), has a vanishingly small chance of being published by specialist poetry publishers. Magazines which previously published sociological articles for a wider public have largely disappeared (witness, *New Society* in the UK and *Ramparts* in the USA), but self-evidently, a long poem is disbarred by its length from publication in general magazines and poetry magazines alike. The same properties of Coleridge's *Rime* that make it attractive as a vehicle for a sociological pastiche – its narrative content and its generous length – make it almost impossible to publish as a poem rather than as a sociological article.

But, once published, poetry can be disseminated much more widely than its print-run might suggest. I don't just refer to electronic downloads here, but to the mysterious way that snatches of poems snag the memory and enter everyday speech. Many who've never read a line of Coleridge can quote the lines 'Water, water every where/ Nor any drop to

drink.' Publication of a poem can be the starting-point, not the end-point, for dissemination. Burawoy's clarion-call 'For Public Sociology' (itself published in a sociology journal) is disappointingly vague on the media for the dissemination of the many forms of public sociology that he identifies. However, he is clear that:

... the success of public sociology [...] will come when public sociology captures the imagination of sociologists, when sociologists recognise public sociology as important in its own right with its own rewards, and when sociologists carry it forward as a social movement beyond the academy. (Burawoy, 2005: 25)

Sociological poetry is no social movement, and it would be presumptuous for any author to claim a poem had an importance in its own right, but sociological poetry – through the vividness of its expression – can undoubtedly capture the imagination and convey the human meanings of social facts.

The social facts of the condition of the world's seafarers are a particularly appropriate topic for a would-be piece of public sociology. Part I of the Rime is concerned with the inadequacy of seafarer training, Part II with inspections of training establishments, Part III with the inadequate governance of the industry by national ship registries, Part IV with the exhaustion of crews consequent to the progressive reductions in crewing levels, Part V with the inadequate international regulation of crewing levels, and, lastly, Part VI is concerned with a possible partial remedy for these ills. Each of these is examined in turn, but first it is necessary to address an emergent underlying theme in the Rime, namely the political economy of the globalised shipping industry.

The shipping industry underwent a rapid transformation in the late 1970s and 80s. The OPEC oil price rise caused a contraction in world trade volumes at the same time as the shipping industry was experiencing a rapid increase in carrying capacity; the result was a disastrous collapse in maritime freight rates and a wave of bankruptcies and mergers. Many of the new-builds had been financed by ship mortgages from financial institutions. When the mortgagees defaulted and ownership of the vessels reverted to the mortgage-holders, the latter found the secondhand or scrap values of the vessels to be so low that they resolved to continue with the operation of the vessels at a loss, leading to the growth of specialist international ship management companies operating fleets of vessels on behalf of a variety of transnational corporate owners (Lane, 1986). The continuing market presence of these previously bankrupt vessels did little to assist industry recovery and very many operators sought to cut costs by 'flagging out' from traditional national maritime registries to the 'open' commercial registries such as Liberia and Panama (later joined by bizarre entrants such as Mongolia). Originally set up between the wars by US interests to evade US shipping regulations, by the 1980s the open registries were attractive to ship operators who sought to exit from national collective bargaining agreements and employ cheaper seafarers from the new labour supply countries, like the Philippines. The new labour force was also casualised, with only some senior officers being retained on permanent contracts: junior officers and ratings would be contracted to serve for a 'trip', typically of between four and eight months.

Just as separation was occurring between ownership and operators through the rise of ship management companies, so also separation now increasingly occurred between



operators and employers, with the rise of specialist crewing agencies who would contract with operators to supply a crew with the required paper qualifications for a global sum for a given trip. However, the late-modern shipping industry is characterised by still more complexities: ship operators and owners do not own the cargo – this is normally owned by the charterer; charterers and ship management companies can ‘re-let’ vessels to other charterers and ship managers; and vessel ownership can be hidden behind ‘single-ship’ companies and off-shore brass plates. As an illustration, when the tanker ‘Erika’ foundered in 1999 and polluted 400km of the French coast, it was being re-let by an Italian ship management company (‘Panship’) to another operator (‘Amarship’), the main charterer (Totalfina) had re-let on a time charter to the Bahamas-based ‘Selmont International’, and the registered owner was a single-ship Maltese Company (‘Tevere Shipping’) although it ultimately emerged that the ‘beneficial owner’ was the London-based ship-owner Giuseppe Savarese, who had bought the 24-year-old tanker with a loan from the Bank of Scotland (OECD, 2001b: 30–3). Thus the shipping industry is a textbook example of the complex ‘global value chains’ identified by Gereffi et al. (2005) in their structural analysis of late-modern capitalist enterprise.

The sub-contractor/outsourcing principle, a characteristic of these global value chains, is strongly associated with casualisation of the labour force, and casualisation is in turn associated with reduced labour power (Bernstein, 1986). Part I of the Rime is intended to show how the outsourcing of labour may also impact on the quality of training. Forde and Mackenzie (2004; MacKenzie, 2000) documented this process in the UK construction and telecommunications industries, while the case of training in the global shipping industry was examined in Bloor and Sampson (2009). The growth of employment agencies has been shown to be associated with segmented labour markets (cf. McDowell et al., 2008), and some crewing agencies will seek to position themselves as suppliers of high quality labour to blue-riband companies, and some agencies will seek to guarantee the quality of their recruits with their own training centres. But other agencies will have no strong interest in the quality of the training received by their employees. Indeed, pressure from ship operators to supply them with ‘just-in-time’ qualified labour may encourage agencies to cut corners in securing necessary training. The structure of seafarer training varies cross-nationally and, in some of the new seafarer supply countries (e.g. Indonesia), the cost of seafarer training is part met by the state, but in most of the developing world (including the Philippines) the burden of training is largely borne by the seafarers and their families. And seafarers and their families are likely to prioritise low-cost over quality of training.

The narrator in the Rime has been given a Filipino identity because the Philippines provides fully a quarter of the seafarers in the international fleet (Wu and Sampson, 2004). The Philippines has also had its share of training scandals. For example, the Norwegian Maritime Directorate refused to recognise the certificates issued by two large Filipino training centres, MTCP and Admiral (later closed down by the Filipino authorities), because they were alleged to be ‘paper-mills’, issuing and charging for certificates without any training (Shipmate, 2002). The scandal of the ‘rebates’, described in the Rime, is particularly difficult to address because it is nigh-impossible to distinguish from the offering of legitimate corporate discounts: corrupt office employees of the crewing agencies will direct their agency’s seafarers to attend a particular training establishment

because they are pocketing a 'rebate' (kickback) from the training centre. Filipino training centres thus find themselves competing, not on the quality of their training, but on the size of the rebates they can offer. To afford the rebates, training centres economise on the training. In outsourcing the labour supply, industry loses control over the quality of training with a strong potential for adverse consequences.

Part II of the Rime is concerned with whether good governance of international regulations on training standards can avoid those adverse consequences and introduces the figure of the Inspector, as the agent for the enforcement of those regulations. There is a comprehensive framework of international law governing the shipping industry (even – uniquely – an international minimum wage) regulated by two UN agencies, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO); the former regulates training standards through its convention on standards of training, certification and watch-keeping (STCW78) amended in 1991, 1994, 1995 and 2011. The 1995 amendment required labour supply countries to demonstrate their compliance with these standards: only those countries demonstrated to be in full compliance would appear in an IMO 'white list'; certificates issued by non-white-list countries would no longer be internationally recognised (IMO, 2011).

The three main maritime inspection functions are flag-state control, port-state control, and inspection of training establishments; in some countries the inspectorate is also concerned with seafarer examinations, but in other countries this function is overseen by bodies answerable to the respective ministries of education. Flag-state inspections are conducted at regular intervals on behalf of the national ship registry with whom a ship is registered. As will already be evident, the rigour of flag-state inspections varies across flag-states: flag-state control has been described by the UK judge, Lord Donaldson, as 'a broken reed. Sub-standard shipowners can transfer their ships to the flags of those states which ignore their international obligations. And they do' (Donaldson, 1996: 4–5). Port-state control has evolved to compensate for the perceived deficiencies of flag-state control: regional associations of port-states deploy national inspectorates, following a common methodology of inspection, to enforce international regulations on berthing ships in their ports, regardless of flag. It is these port-state inspections that, in the Rime, cause the Chorus of Greek Shippers to shrink and mutter and the ships agents to get the sulks. Port-state control has adopted a governance strategy, termed within socio-legal studies 'smart regulation' (Gunningham et al., 1999), which seeks to incentivise ship operators to pro-actively comply with international regulations by 'naming and shaming' vessels found to be deficient on inspection, thus influencing the freight rates that those deficient vessels are able to command in the market. However, a cross-national study of port-state enforcement of seafarers' health and safety regulations concluded that port-state inspections were having only a limited impact on market freight rates, because of the widely recognised variation in inspection practice (Bloor et al., 2006).

Similarly, international regulations on seafarer training have been shown to be enforced variably and ineffectively by local inspectorates (Bloor and Sampson, 2009). Appearance on the IMO 'white list' of approved STCW training countries is achieved by the submission of paperwork to IMO by national maritime administrations demonstrating that their local training institutions have been audited. Socio-legal studies writers such as Hutter (2001) have demonstrated the weakness of this governance

strategy of 'enforced self-regulation', which may only secure paper compliance. Some of these weaknesses are illustrated in Part II: the disparities in wealth and power between members of the inspectorate and owners of training establishments, and a checklist approach which is satisfied with the mere presence of a lifeboat as opposed to evidence of its use. Many developing countries struggle to resource and train their inspectorates. In India, a generic inspectorate undertakes port-state inspections, flag-state inspections, seafarer examinations and college inspections; although they are experienced seafarers (typically ex-masters and ex-chief engineers), their salaries are only about a fifth of what they could earn in the international fleet. In the Philippines, college inspections are overseen by the appropriate government authority but the inspectors themselves are not government employees, being drawn from a pool of Filipino seafarers from the international fleet currently on shore leave and seconded from their employers.

Part III begins with the Chorus explaining the shift towards outsourcing of labour and their abdication of responsibility for training. It then goes on to identify the major difficulty of a flag-state structure of global governance where flag-states operate for profit, with the flag of landlocked Mongolia as an illustrative example. As an OECD report put it, the national maritime administrations of many open registry countries have been 'less rigorous in their pursuit of high standards, as this has conflicted with their greater aim of maximising the number of ships under their registries' (OECD, 2001b: 8). Additionally in Part III, the Inspector proposes a remedy to the resourcing problems faced by developing states in policing seafarer training: ship operators could pay a levy towards training costs as part of their ship registration fee to the flag-state, which in turn would remit the levy to the IMO for controlled distribution to the new labour supply countries. This is not a proposal that has received serious consideration, but, were it ever to be adopted, then ship operators would seek to pass the cost of the levy to their charterers. And as the Chorus point out, while operators may wish for well-trained crews, the charterers merely want them 'cheap'. Cheap maritime freight rates have been one of the motors of globalisation, with the transportation costs of a pair of Chinese jeans to a British consumer standing at only around 33 US cents. The need to motivate charterers to concern themselves with seafarers' conditions is a topic that is returned to at the conclusion of the Rime.

Thus far the Rime has been concerned with the problems of *enforcement* of regulatory standards in a globalised industry, but Parts IV and V of the Rime are concerned instead with inadequate *regulation*. In common with labour forces in many other industries (cf. Green, 2004), seafarers have been required to expend increased effort for each hour of work ('labour intensification') – for example, containerisation has dramatically reduced port turnaround times and crews' 'deadtime', and email communication has increased head office surveillance. But, unlike many other occupations, seafarers have also experienced increased hours of work ('labour extensification') through reduced crewing levels. While technological changes such as automated engine-rooms have allowed some reductions in crew numbers, the changes in crew levels that have occurred go far beyond what is warranted by technology. The changes are particularly glaring in respect of reductions in bridge watch-keeping officers. As the Rime reports, on some vessels bridge watch-keeping officers have been reduced to two (the master and the first officer [mate]),

requiring each to keep watch turnabout for 84 hours per week on top of their multiple other duties – liaising with head office, ships agents and port authorities, supervision of cargo handling, supervision of bunkering, being the ship safety officer, being the ship security officer, being the ship medical officer, personnel reports, course planning, chart corrections, supervision of deck maintenance, purchase of stores, etc, etc. Ironically, an additional duty for senior officers is that of keeping records of hours of work and rest, but these are widely falsified to give the appearance of keeping within international law.

Falsification of international regulations on seafarers' hours of work and rest is difficult for port-state inspectors to detect, but the root problem of governance in this area lies in the inadequate regulation of crewing levels. Individual flag-states specify the minimum safe manning level for each ship on their register. As stated in the Rime, traditionally the minimum safe manning has been considered to be the smallest crew with the requisite qualifications required to bring a ship safe into port in an emergency, although the IMO definition runs to many pages and (from January 2012) embraces the European Union's earlier Maritime Working Time directive which requires seafarers to have a minimum of 10 hours of rest in any 24-hour period and 77 hours of rest in any seven-day period. Responsible flag-states, such as the UK, define the manning level as one which 'ensures that the manning level is adequate at all times and in all respects, including meeting peak workloads' (Maritime and Coastguard Agency, 2002: 6) and endorse the Maritime Working Time directive. Whereas the popular open registry of Antigua and Barbuda (based in Oldenburg, Germany) simply states that its certificates specify 'the minimum number of persons necessary for the safety of navigation and operation', continuing that 'additional personnel as may be considered necessary for cargo handling and control, maintenance or watchkeeping and as needed for required rest periods, are the responsibility of the owner and master' (Antigua and Barbuda Maritime Administration, 2012). Another open registry, St Kitts and Nevis (based in suburban London), has a table for guidance on its website indicating that coastal vessels of under 10,000 gross tonnage need only have a master and a mate as bridge watchkeepers (St Kitts and Nevis Maritime Administration, 2012). This is despite the fact that the relevant IMO convention commits flag-states to 'require that watch systems are so arranged that the efficiency of all watchkeeping personnel is not impaired by fatigue' (IMO, 2011: 37). As the statutory authority, commercial maritime administrations administered for profit may allow minimum manning levels which attract cost-conscious ship operators to their flag to save on operating costs by manning their vessels with skeleton crews. The same commercial maritime administrations vote on, and participate in the drafting of, the international conventions that they administer.

In Part VI, the Rime addresses the fact that vessel charterers currently have no strong interest in the living and working conditions of the casualised and outsourced crews. However, public pressure has required the oil majors to take a very strong interest, as charterers, in marine pollution from tankers, and a number of major companies in other sectors are now seeking to demonstrate to the public a 'green profile' in the transportation of their goods. It therefore seems plausible that seafarers might find their conditions of work materially improved by public pressure on charterers, who might in turn tolerate higher freight rates in return for operators providing more satisfactory crewing conditions. Walters et al. (2011) have shown how attention to seafarers' health and safety on oil tankers has increased as a result of pressure from the oil majors, and the International

Transportworkers Federation has attempted to pressure cruise ship operators into improving crew living and working conditions by its 'Ships of Shame' publicity campaign.

Thus, a political economy of the shipping industry highlights the complex global value chains that are said to be typical of globalisation, including the outsourcing of labour. In outsourcing their labour, enterprises lose control of labour-force training with consequent threats to the quality of the labour force. Effective governance of globalised industries has often been considered problematic, and it is clear in the shipping industry, firstly, that recourse to international regulatory controls of training has so far been relatively ineffective through defective local enforcement, and secondly, that international regulatory controls of seafarers' hours of work have been relatively ineffective through defective local regulation. With effective global governance problematic, and seafarers lacking labour power, it may be that only public pressure on charterers to demonstrate a 'labour standards' (as well as a green) profile in the transportation of their goods can serve to improve the quality and the conditions of the shipping industry labour force.

It is right that, in a sociological journal, the commentary on a poem should give some account of the empirical work that lies behind it. Fuller accounts appear elsewhere of the three main studies that have been referred to (Bloor, 2011; Bloor and Sampson, 2009; Bloor et al., 2006). In the first of these studies, funded by the ESRC (grant R000239864), a comparative study was undertaken of port-state inspections in India, Russia and the UK: 104 inspections were observed and 37 semi-structured interviews were conducted with inspectors and a range of industry stakeholders. The second study, funded by the European Maritime Safety Agency, was part of a larger qualitative and quantitative study of training capacity in seafarer supply countries; in one of the major supply countries I visited 18 maritime education and training institutions, conducted nine focus groups with local seafarers, observed two examinations, and interviewed six employers, two staff of national regulatory bodies and one senior examiner. And the last study, core-funded by the Seafarers International Research Centre, I conducted 37 semi-structured interviews with seafarers, either in one of two port missions<sup>8</sup> or when accompanying a port chaplain on ship visits.

One final point. There are around a million seafarers working in the international trade, so their welfare is no small matter, but the applicability of this analysis beyond the shipping industry might be thought to be quite limited. However, while shipping might be the traditional industry which has been most radically changed by globalisation, many other industries have been affected by globalising economic forces to some degree, and may be further changed in the future. The seafarer labour force may be proto-typical rather than atypical.

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## Notes

- 1 Common figures in UK shopping centres are homeless street-sellers of the *Big Issue* magazine.
- 2 The Mariner is a Filipino because a quarter of the world's one million seafarers are Filipinos (Wu and Sampson, 2004). While there are national differences between the various new labour supply countries in the organisation and delivery of seafarer training, problems with the quality of that training are widespread.
- 3 Remittances of overseas workers are by far the largest 'export' earner in the Philippines' balance of payments.
- 4 A literary conceit. Strictly speaking shippers are forwarding agents rather than ship operators, but 'shippers' is the term preferred here for scansion's sake. Although Greek ship operators remain an important section of the industry, ship ownership is increasingly separated from ship management and both ownership and management have a wide international distribution. As Reed (1980) recognised in his oral-historical analysis of the ballad form, the ballad narrative inevitably entails a partisan perspective – that is its strength – and so (to remind both the reader and the auditor of the mariner's partisanship) the device has been chosen of periodic commentary by a Chorus of Greek Shippers.
- 5 A reference to the International Maritime Organization's 1978 convention on standards of training, certification and watch-keeping (known as STCW78). See Afterword.
- 6 Ship operators appoint local ships agents in berthing ports to arrange a variety of shore-side services from provisioning to health-care. A ship that is detained by inspectors, until repairs are made and deficiencies are rectified, thus creates a headache for the agent.
- 7 Arrangements for college inspections vary cross-nationally. See Afterword.
- 8 Missions to seafarers perform an important welfare function and cater for seafarers of all religions and none.

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