

Econo-Poetry Contest

“Foreign exchange ... is almost as romantic as young love.” - H. L. Mencken, “The Dismal Science”

In this contest you are invited to develop the poetry of international trade, by bringing up to date a well-known poem from a century ago. This is not any part of the assessment or requirement for the course. Participation is purely voluntary, but it should be fun, and I am offering small monetary prizes.

CARGOES

By
John Masefield

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir,
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,
With a cargo of ivory,
And apes and peacocks,
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green shores,
With a cargo of diamonds,
Emeralds, amethysts,
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.

Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack,
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,
With a cargo of Tyne coal,
Road-rails, pig-lead,
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays.

Masefield implies that the romance of trade got lost in the industrial revolution. Of course, economists will point out much that has been gained. Trade in the old days benefited only the rich: those who consumed ivory and diamonds. With the subsequent reduction in transport costs, items of low value began to be traded: now even poor consumers of cheap tin trays can benefit by getting them cheaper than if they had been produced in their own country. (This is quite apart from the fact that Masefield's romance had its own bad aspects: the Quinquiremes were probably rowed by slaves, and the galleons' cargo was obtained by massacres of native people.)

The last half century has seen two more technological revolutions in transport - containerization and airfreight. (Has that brought back some romance? Now we can trade fresh cut flowers.) The contest asks you to construct two more verses for the poem, one for container ships and one for freight airplanes.

The deadline is Monday March 22. Entries should be sent as Word files. Our own renowned poet Paul Muldoon has kindly agreed to judge the contest. The best three efforts will receive prizes of \$30, \$20, and \$10 respectively.

Good luck!