Whitman's Journey: 1. Launch Out on Endless Seas

Words selected from the poetry of Walt Whitman (1819-92)

A worship new I sing,
You captains, voyagers, explorers yours,
You engineers, you architects, machinists, yours.
You, not for trade or transportation only,
But in God's name and for thy sake, O soul!

We can wait no longer;
Take ship, O soul,
Launch! Launch out on endless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores...
Amid the wafting winds, caroling free,
Singing our song of God, O soul!

O soul, thou pleasest me,
Sailing these shores, or on the hills, or waking in the night.
Thought, silent thoughts of time, of space like water flowing.

Bear me indeed beyond the regions infinite.
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear.
Bathe me, O God, in thee, mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O thou transcendent, Nameless,
The fibre and the breath, Light of the light,
Shedding forth universes.
Thou pulse, thou motive of the stars, of the sun.

Take ship, O soul,
Launch out on endless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores...
Amid the wafting winds, caroling free,
Singing our song of God, O soul!

– from Passage to India

I stand,
It's time to explain myself.
I launch all men and women with me.

– from Song of Myself

O to sail the sea in a ship!
To leave this steady, unendurable land!

– from Song of Myself

O to have a life henceforth a poem of new joys!
To dance, clap hands, exult, shout, skip, roll on, float on.
To be a sailor of the world, bound for all ports,
O to be a ship itself, (see indeed the sails
I spread to the sun and air,)
O swift and swelling ship, full of rich words – full of joys.
Bound for all ports!

– from Poem of Joys

Lo the unbounded sea!
On its breast a ship starting, spreading her sails,
Even her moon sails;
The pennant is flying aloft, as she speeds so stately –
below, emulous waves press forward.

– from The Ship Starting

Aboard, at the ship's helm,
A young steersman, steering with care.
Through fog on a sea-coast dolefully ringing,
An ocean bell – a warning bell, rock'd by the sea.

– from Aboard at a Ship's Helm

You give good notice indeed, you bell
by the sea reef ringing,
Ringing, to warn the ship from its wreck place.
The freighted ship, tacking, speeds away
under her gray sails.
The beautiful and noble ship speeds away
with all her precious wealth.
But, aboard the ship of the body – the ship of the soul – voyaging.

I launch all men and women with me forward
into the Unknown.
The clock indicates the moment –
but what does eternity indicate?

I launch all men and women forward with me
into the Unknown.
We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters
and trillions of summers, and trillions
and trillions ahead of them.
I launch all men and women forward with me!
Births have brought us richness and variety,
And other births will bring us richness and variety.
I do not call one greater and one smaller,
That which fills its period and place is equal to any.
I launch all men and women with me!
Forward!

– from Song of Myself

O to sing the most jubilant song!
O to make the most jubilant song!
Full of music! Full of manhood!
Full of womanhood! Infancy!
Full of common employments, full of grain and trees!
O for the voices of animals,
the swiftness and balance of fishes!
O for the dropping of rain-drops in a song!
O for the sunshine, and motion of waves in a song!
O the joy of my spirit is uncaged! It darts like lightning!
It is not enough to have this globe, or a certain time –
I will have thousands of globes, and all time.
I will have thousands of globes, and all time.
Forward! O to make the most jubilant song!
Forward!

– from Poem of Joys