

The Ocean Liner

Monroe, Harriet, 1860-1936

They went down to the sea in ships,
In ships they went down to the sea.
In boats hewn of oak-tree strips,
In galleys with skin-sewn sails,
In triremes, caravels, brigs—
Frail, flimsily rolling rigs—
They went down where the huge wave rips,
Where the black storm lashes and hales.
They went down to the sea in ships,
To the sounding, sorrowing sea.

They go down to the sea—oh me !—
What ships that outbrave the sea,
What ships that outrun the gale,
With a feather of steam for a sail
And a whirling shaft for an oar,
Are the ships that my brothers build
To carry me over the sea,
That my hand at the morrow's door
May knock, with treasures filled!

Steel hulls impenetrable
To the waves that tease and pull,
Bright engines that answer the beat
Of their foam-slippered dancing feet,
Hot fires that shudder and drive,
Close-tended, untiring, sure—
Like queen-bees deep in the hive
Who labor and serve and endure:
All these are down below

Far under the slippery water,
While the babe sleeps soft in his bed,
And the banquet table is spread,
And my neighbor's laughing daughter
Trims her hair with a rose-red bow.

They went down to the sea in ships,
In ships they went down to the sea.
And the sea had a million lips
And she laughed in her throat for glee.
And the floor of the sea was strewn
With tempest trophies dread,
And the deep-sea currents croon
As they wash through the bones of the dead.
But the ships that my brothers build—
Ah, they mock at the storm's mad rage;
And their burning hearts are thrilled
When he throws them his battle gage.
On the sea-foam they lean for a pillow,
They drive without paddle or sail
Straight over the mountainous billow,
Straight on through the blustering gale !
Oh they shake out gay flags as they run,
Flags that flutter and gleam in the sun!
From the tip of their turrets above
They send news of the storm to the shore;
And they hear from afar through the roar,
Down the cloud-built aisles of the sky,
Some land-bound lady's cry
To her ocean-wandering love.

They go down to the sea in ships,
In ships they go down to the sea.
And my brothers, the masterful, free,
Fear no more the white foam of her lips,

The sweet wild kiss of the sea!
They have won her, she harks to their wooing,
The love of ten thousand years,
The suing, the wild undoing,
The faith unto death, the tears.
Oh, their glory her song shall be;
Soft, soft is the kiss of her lips!
They go down to the sea in ships,
In ships they go down to the sea.