

Phillip Staffe, Ship's Carpenter,
Ponders His Loyalty to Henry Hudson,
After the Mutiny

Damme, if I know
why I told Juet, Green, and Wilson
to shove it; not that I thought
all the world and the Seven Seas
of the Old Man — changing first-mates
the way wind shifts in a squall
blowing up big as Leviathan.
And as for him being a navigator,
the Passage flies from him
like dolphins and mermaids.

I stayed with him for one reason:
a captain's the law, and without law
all the imps of Hell jump from their holes;
not that they haven't already:
Green as close to the Dark Man
as any I've seen whispering discord;
Juet a grumblin' bugger
for being passed over as mate;
Wilson a savage in love with killing
for the sight of blood on his blade.

Besides, if I'd thrown in
with them devils, who's to say
I wouldn't swing for mutiny?
There's nothing in England for me,
none I'll grieve, and none I'll mourn
to hear I've froze to death
or been eaten by those monster-fish
that make a man wish he could fly.

I'll likely see my last
of earth in this shallop.
So be it, a ship's carpenter
can't choose his comings and goings.

ROBERT COOPERMAN