

Walt Whitman, *Passage to India* (1871) (Calamus)

SINGING my days, Singing the great achievements of the present, Singing the strong, light works of engineers, Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven outvied,) In the Old World, the east, the Suez canal, 5 The New by its mighty railroad spann'd, The seas inlaid with eloquent, gentle wires, I sound, to commence, the cry, with thee, O soul, The Past! the Past! the Past! The Past! the dark, unfathom'd retrospect! 10 The teeming gulf! the sleepers and the shadows! The past! the infinite greatness of the past! For what is the present, after all, but a growth out of the past? (As a projectile, form'd, impell'd, passing a certain line, still keeps on, So the present, utterly form'd, impell'd by the past.) 15

2

Passage, O soul, to India! Eclaircise the myths Asiatic—the primitive fables. Not you alone, proud truths of the world! Nor you alone, ye facts of modern science! But myths and fables of eld—Asia's, Africa's fables! 20 The far-darting beams of the spirit!—the unloos'd dreams! The deep diving bibles and legends; The daring plots of the poets—the elder religions; —O you temples fairer than lilies, pour'd over by the rising sun! O you fables, spurning the known, eluding the hold of the known, mounting to heaven! 25 You lofty and dazzling towers, pinnacled, red as roses, burnish'd with gold! Towers of fables immortal, fashion'd from mortal dreams! You too I welcome, and fully, the same as the rest; You too with joy I sing.

3

Passage to India! 30 Lo, soul! seest thou not God's purpose from the first? The earth to be spann'd, connected by net-work, The people to become brothers and sisters, The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage, The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near, 35 The lands to be welded together. (A worship new, I sing; You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours! You engineers! you architects, machinists, your! You, not for trade or transportation only, 40 But in God's name, and for thy sake, O soul.)

4

Passage to India! Lo, soul, for thee, of tableaus twain, I see, in one, the Suez canal initiated, open'd, I see the procession of steamships, the Empress Eugenie's leading the van; 45 I mark, from on deck, the strange landscape, the pure sky, the level sand in the distance; I pass swiftly the picturesque groups, the workmen gather'd, The gigantic dredging machines. In one, again, different, (yet thine, all thine, O soul, the same,) I see over my own continent the Pacific Railroad, surmounting every barrier; 50 I see continual trains of cars winding along the Platte, carrying freight and passengers; I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the shrill steam-whistle, I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest scenery in the world; I cross the Laramie plains—I note the rocks in grotesque shapes—the buttes; I see the plentiful larkspur and wild onions—the barren, colorless, sage-deserts; 55 I see in glimpses afar, or towering immediately above me, the great mountains—I see the Wind River and the Wahsatch mountains; I see the Monument mountain and the Eagle's Nest—I pass the Promontory—I ascend the Nevadas; I scan the noble Elk mountain, and wind around its base; I see the Humboldt range—I thread the valley and cross the river, I see the clear waters of Lake Tahoe—I see forests of majestic pines, 60 Or, crossing the great desert, the alkaline plains, I behold enchanting mirages of waters and meadows; Marking through these, and after all, in duplicate slender lines, Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel, Tying the Eastern to the Western sea, The road between Europe and Asia. 65 (Ah Genoese, thy dream! thy dream! Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave, The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream!)

5

Passage to India! Struggles of many a captain—tales of many a sailor dead! ⁷⁰ Over my mood, stealing and spreading they come, Like clouds and cloudlets in the unreach'd sky. Along all history, down the slopes, As a rivulet running, sinking now, and now again to the surface rising, A ceaseless thought, a varied train—Lo, soul! to thee, thy sight, they rise, ⁷⁵ The plans, the voyages again, the expeditions: Again Vasco de Gama sails forth; Again the knowledge gain'd, the mariner's compass, Lands found, and nations born—thou born, America, (a hemisphere unborn,) For purpose vast, man's long probation fill'd, ⁸⁰ Thou, rondure of the world, at last accomplish'd.

6

O, vast Rondure, swimming in space! Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty! Alternate light and day, and the teeming, spiritual darkness; Unspeakable, high processions of sun and moon, and countless stars, above; ⁸⁵ Below, the manifold grass and waters, animals, mountains, trees; With inscrutable purpose—some hidden, prophetic intention; Now, first, it seems, my thought begins to span thee. Down from the gardens of Asia, descending, radiating, Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them, ⁹⁰ Wandering, yearning, curious—with restless explorations, With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish—with never-happy hearts, With that sad, incessant refrain, *Wherefore, unsatisfied Soul?* and *Whither, O mocking Life?* Ah, who shall soothe these feverish children? Who justify these restless explorations? ⁹⁵ Who speak the secret of impassive Earth? Who bind it to us? What is this separate Nature, so unnatural? What is this Earth, to our affections? (unloving earth, without a throb to answer ours; Cold earth, the place of graves.) Yet, soul, be sure the first intent remains—and shall be carried out; ¹⁰⁰ (Perhaps even now the time has arrived.) After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already cross'd,) After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd their work, After the noble inventors—after the scientists, the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist, Finally shall come the Poet, worthy that name; ¹⁰⁵ The true Son of God shall come, singing his songs. Then, not your deeds only, O voyagers, O scientists and inventors, shall be justified, All these hearts, as of fretted children, shall be sooth'd, All affection shall be fully responded to—the secret shall be told; All these separations and gaps shall be taken up, and hook'd and link'd together; ¹¹⁰ The whole Earth—this cold, impassive, voiceless Earth, shall be completely justified; Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and compacted by the the Son of God, the poet, (He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the mountains, He shall double the Cape of Good Hope to some purpose;) Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more, ¹¹⁵ The true Son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

7

Year at whose open'd, wide-flung door I sing! Year of the purpose accomplish'd! Year of the marriage of continents, climates and oceans! (No mere Doge of Venice now, wedding the Adriatic;) ¹²⁰ I see, O year, in you, the vast terraqueous globe, given, and giving all, Europe to Asia, Africa join'd, and they to the New World; The lands, geographies, dancing before you, holding a festival garland, As brides and bridegrooms hand in hand.

8

Passage to India! ¹²⁵ Cooling airs from Caucasus far, soothing cradle of man, The river Euphrates flowing, the past lit up again. Lo, soul, the retrospect, brought forward; The old, most populous, wealthiest of Earth's lands, The streams of the Indus and the Ganges, and their many affluents; ¹³⁰ (I, my shores of America walking to-day, behold, resuming all,) The tale of Alexander, on his warlike marches, suddenly dying, On one side China, and on the other side Persia and Arabia, To the south the great seas, and the Bay of Bengal; The flowing literatures, tremendous epics, religions, castes, ¹³⁵ Old occult Brahma, interminably far back—

the tender and junior Buddha, Central and southern empires, and all their belongings, possessors, The wars of Tamerlane, the reign of Aurungzebe, The traders, rulers, explorers, Moslems, Venetians, Byzantium, the Arabs, Portuguese, The first travelers, famous yet, Marco Polo, Batouta the Moor, ¹⁴⁰ Doubts to be solv'd, the map incognita, blanks to be fill'd, The foot of man unstay'd, the hands never at rest, Thyself, O soul, that will not brook a challenge.

9

The medieval navigators rise before me, The world of 1492, with its awaken'd enterprise; ¹⁴⁵ Something swelling in humanity now like the sap of the earth in spring, The sunset splendor of chivalry declining. And who art thou, sad shade? Gigantic, visionary, thyself a visionary, With majestic limbs, and pious, beaming eyes, ¹⁵⁰ Spreading around, with every look of thine, a golden world, Enhuing it with gorgeous hues. As the chief histrion, Down to the footlights walks, in some great scena, Dominating the rest, I see the Admiral himself, ¹⁵⁵ (History's type of courage, action, faith;) Behold him sail from Palos, leading his little fleet; His voyage behold—his return—his great fame, His misfortunes, calumniators—behold him a prisoner, chain'd, Behold his dejection, poverty, death. ¹⁶⁰ (Curious, in time, I stand, noting the efforts of heroes; Is the deferment long? bitter the slander, poverty, death? Lies the seed unreck'd for centuries in the ground? Lo! to God's due occasion, Uprising in the night, it sprouts, blooms, And fills the earth with use and beauty.) ¹⁶⁵

10

Passage indeed, O soul, to primal thought! Not lands and seas alone—thy own clear freshness, The young maturity of brood and bloom; To realms of budding bibles. O soul, repressless, I with thee, and thou with me, ¹⁷⁰ Thy circumnavigation of the world begin; Of man, the voyage of his mind's return, To reason's early paradise, Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions, Again with fair Creation. ¹⁷⁵

11

O we can wait no longer! We too take ship, O soul! Joyous, we too launch out on trackless seas! Fearless, for unknown shores, on waves of extasy to sail, Amid the wafting winds, (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O soul,) ¹⁸⁰ Caroling free—singing our song of God, Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration. With laugh, and many a kiss, (Let others deprecate—let others weep for sin, remorse, humiliation;) O soul, thou pleasest me—I thee. ¹⁸⁵ Ah, more than any priest, O soul, we too believe in God; But with the mystery of God we dare not dally. O soul, thou pleasest me—I thee; Sailing these seas, or on the hills, or waking in the night, Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time, and Space, and Death, like waters flowing, ¹⁹⁰ Bear me, indeed, as through the regions infinite, Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear—lave me all over; Bathe me, O God, in thee—mounting to thee, I and my soul to range in range of thee. O Thou transcendant! ¹⁹⁵ Nameless—the fibre and the breath! Light of the light—shedding forth universes—thou centre of them! Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving! Thou moral, spiritual fountain! affection's source! thou reservoir! (O pensive soul of me! O thirst unsatisfied! waitest not there? ²⁰⁰ Waitest not haply for us, somewhere there, the Comrade perfect?) Thou pulse! thou motive of the stars, suns, systems, That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious, Athwart the shapeless vastnesses of space! How should I think—how breathe a single breath—how speak—if, out of myself, ²⁰⁵ I could not launch, to those, superior universes? Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God, At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death, But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, thou actual Me, And lo! thou gently masterest the orbs, ²¹⁰ Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death, And fillest, swellest full, the vastnesses of Space. Greater than stars or suns, Bounding, O soul, thou journeyest forth; —What love, than thine and ours could wider amplify? ²¹⁵ What aspirations, wishes, outvie thine and ours, O soul? What dreams of the

ideal? what plans of purity, perfection, strength? What cheerful willingness, for others' sake, to give up all? For others' sake to suffer all? Reckoning ahead, O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd, ²²⁰ (The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyage done,) Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd, As, fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found, The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

12

Passage to more than India! ²²⁵ Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights? O Soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyages like these? Disportest thou on waters such as these? Soundest below the Sanscrit and the Vedas? Then have thy bent unleash'd. ²³⁰ Passage to you, your shores, ye aged fierce enigmas! Passage to you, to mastership of you, ye strangling problems! You, strew'd with the wrecks of skeletons, that, living, never reach'd you.

13

Passage to more than India! O secret of the earth and sky! ²³⁵ Of you, O waters of the sea! O winding creeks and rivers! Of you, O woods and fields! Of you, strong mountains of my land! Of you, O prairies! Of you, gray rocks! O morning red! O clouds! O rain and snows! O day and night, passage to you! ²⁴⁰ O sun and moon, and all you stars! Sirius and Jupiter! Passage to you! Passage—immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins! Away, O soul! hoist instantly the anchor! Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail! ²⁴⁵ Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough? Have we not grovell'd here long enough, eating and drinking like mere brutes? Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books long enough? Sail forth! steer for the deep waters only! Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me; ²⁵⁰ For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go, And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all. O my brave soul! O farther, farther sail! O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God? ²⁵⁵ O farther, farther, farther sail!

America (Calamus)

Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,
All, all alike endear'd, grown, ungrown, young or old,
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,
A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,
Chair'd in the adamant of Time.