

Back streets, Aldous Huxley

#### BACK STREETS

BACK streets, gutters of stagnating darkness where men breathe something that is not so much air as a kind of rarefied slime. . . . I look back down the tunnelled darkness of a drain to where, at the mouth, a broader, windier water-way glitters with the gay speed and motion of sunlit life. But around all is dimly rotting; and the inhabitants are those squamous, phosphorescent creatures that darkness and decay beget. Little men, sheathed tightly in clothes of an exaggeratedly fashionable cheapness, hurry along the pavements, jaunty and at the same time furtive. There is a thin layer of slime over all of them. And then there are the eyes of the women, with their hard glitter that is only of the surface. They see acutely, but in a glassy, superficial way, taking in the objects round them no more than my western windows retain the imprint of the sunset that enriches them.

Back streets, exhalations of a difficulty puberty, I once lived on the fringes of them.

The end