

The Walk, Aldous Huxley

The Walk

I. THROUGH THE SUBURBS.

Provincial Sunday broods above the town:
The street's asleep; through a dim window drifts
A small romance that hiccoughs up and down
An air all trills and runs and sudden lifts
To yearning sevenths poised ... not Chopin quite,
But, oh, romantic; a tinsel world made bright
With rose and honeysuckle's paper blooms,
And where the moon's blue limelight and the glooms
Of last-act scenes of passion are discreet.
And when the tinkling stops and leaves the street
Blank in the sunlight of the afternoon
You feel a curtain dropped. Poor little tune!
Perhaps our grandmother's dull girlhood days
Were fired by you with radiances of pink,
Heavenly, brighter far than she could think
Anything might be ... till a greater blaze
Tinged life's horizon, when he kissed her first,
Our grandpapa. But a thin ghost still plays
In music down the street, echoing the plaint
Of far romance with its own sadder song
Of Everyday; and as they walk along, ...
The young man and the woman, deep immersed
In all the suburb-comedy around ...
They seem to catch coherence in the sound
Of that ghost-music, and the words come faint:-
Oh the months and the days,
Oh sleeps and dinners,
Oh the planning of ways
And quotidian means!
Oh endless vistas of mutton and greens,
Oh weekly mimblings of prayer and praise,
Oh Evenings with All the Winners!
Monday sends the clothes to the wash
And Saturday brings them home again:
Mon Dieu, la vie est par trop moche
And Destiny is a sale caboche;
But I'll give you heaven
In a dominant seven,
And you shall not have lived in vain.

"In vain," the girl repeats, "in vain, in vain ..."
Your suburb's whole philosophy leads there.
The ox-stall for our happiness, for pain,
Poignant and sweet, the dull narcotic ache
Of wretchedness, and in resigned despair
A grim contentment ... ashen fruits to slake
A nameless, quenchless thirst. The tinkling rain
Of that small sentimental music wets
Your parching suburb: it may sprout ... who knows?...
In something red and silken like a rose,
In sheaves of almost genuine violets.

Faint chords, your sadness, secular, immense,

Brims to the bursting this poor Actual heart.
For surging through the floodgates that the sense
On sudden lightly opens sweeps the Whole
Into the narrow compass of its part.

He.

Inedited sensation of the soul!
You'd have us bless the Hire-Purchase System,
Which now allows the poorest vampers
To feel, as they abuse their piano's dampers,
That angels have stooped down and kissed 'em
With Ave-Maries from the infinite.
But poor old Infinite's dead. Long live his heir,
Lord Here-and-Now ... for all the rest
Is windy nothingness, or at the best
Home-made Chimera, bodied with despair,
Headed with formless, foolish hope.

She.

No, no!
We live in verse, for all things rhyme
With something out of space and time.

He.

But in the suburb here life needs must flow
In journalistic prose ...

She.

But we have set
Our faces towards the further hills, where yet
The wind untainted and unbound may blow.

II. FROM THE CREST.

So through the squalor, till the sky unfolds
To right and left its fringes, penned no more,
A thin canal, 'twixt shore and ugly shore
Of hovels, poured contiguous from the moulds
Of Gothic horror. Town is left at last,
Save for the tentacles that probe, ... a squat
Dun house or two, allotments, plot on plot
Of cabbage, jejune, ripe or passed,
Chequering with sick yellow or verdigris
The necropolitan ground; and neat paved ways
That edge the road ... the town's last nerves ... and cease,
As if in sudden shame, where hedges raise
Their dusty greenery on either hand.
Their path mounts slowly up the hill;
And, as they walk, to right and left expand
The plain and the golden uplands and the blue
Faint smoke of distances that fade from view;
And at their feet, remote and still?
The city spreads itself.

He.

That glabrous dome that lifts itself so grand,
There in the marish, is the omphalos,
The navel, umbo, middle, central boss
Of the unique, sole, true Cloud-Cuckoo Land.
Drowsy with Sunday bells and Sunday beer
Afoam in silver rumkins, there it basks,
Thinking of labours past and future tasks
And pondering on the end, forever near,
Yet ever distant as the rainbow's spring.
For still in Cuckoo-Land they're labouring,
With hopes undamped and undiscouraged hearts:
A little musty, but superb, they sit,
Piecing a god together bit by bit
Out of the chaos of his sundered parts.
Unmoved, nay pitying, they view the grins
And lewd grimaces of the folk that jeer ...
The vulgar herd, gross monster at the best,
Obscenum Mobile, the uttermost sphere,
Alas, too much the mover of the rest,
Though they turn sungates to its widdershins ...

And in some half a million years perhaps
God may at last be made ... a new, true Pan,
An Isis templed in the soul of man,
An Aphrodite with her thousand paps
Streaming eternal wisdom.
Yes, and man's vessel, all pavilioned out
With silk and flags in the fair wind astream,
Shall make the port at last, with a great shout
Ringing from all her decks, and rocking there shall dream
For ever, and dream true ... calm in those roads
As lovers' souls at evening, when they swim
Between the despairing sunset and the dim
Blue memories of mountains lost to sight
But, like half fancied, half remembered episodes
Of childhood, guessed at through the veils of night.
And the worn sailors at the mast who heard
The first far bells and knew the sound for home,
Who marked the land-weeds and the sand-stained foam
And through the storm-blast saw a wildered bird
Seek refuge at the mast-head ... these at last
Shall earn due praise when all the hubbub's past;
And Cuckoo-Landers not a few shall prove.

She.

You have fast closed the temple gates;
You stand without in the noon-tides glow,
But the innermost darkness, where God waits,
You do not know, you cannot know.

The End