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– Introduction –

In a volume preceding this one (called *Sauntering: Writers Walk Europe*), Théophile Gautier wandered the ancient cemetery of Pera, Istanbul, and slowed by a tomb ‘diapered with azure and gold’. Here, he told us, he might light a ‘chibouque’, have a coffee, and gaze awhile . . . and so ended his rather short walking story, caught in a hundred footsteps, or less.

But it’s tempting to think what lay behind the writer’s gaze, related to things pedestrian. Was it not a gaze beyond the walls of Pera to points farther flung? To footsteps across other parts of Europe. Across Africa and Asia, the Americas and Antarctica, and Australasia too. Footsteps across all sorts of land and cityscapes, in all sorts of climes and times; be they solitary, paired, or grouped. Footsteps that suggest a host of reasons for leaving the sedentary life behind.

If Gautier’s thoughts were not expansive, were just about having a smoke in the ‘weird moonlight’ of a certain spot, then fine: let’s leave him there . . . loitering. But an attempt has been made to find the farther points, and they form the pages of the book you hold: *Globetrotting: Writers Walk the World*. The first are planted by the banks of the River Thames, and the last are laid down in a suburb of Melbourne – yes, there are many, *many* footsteps to come. Their trajectories

are caught in extracts from essays and letters, diaries and memoirs. Plus, the rhythm of walking gets us singing on occasion, so expect a sprinkling of songs within earshot. It's almost sixty journeys done!

Which meant this editor's first task was to guide them towards a direction of travel; towards a narrative shape. Allowing you, the walker reader (for I'm betting you walk as much as you read), to make your way through three sections familiarly trod. At least you know where you are with the promise of 'Setting Off', the joys of being 'En Route', and the fatigue of 'Final Steps'. And according to some writers, the world's seven continents wait to be 'strolled' and 'scampered', 'roamed' and 'rambled', 'tramped' and 'trotted' in the sections mentioned. I began with Europe, put Africa second, Asia third, and so forth, to show how our footsteps move across contrasting ground; in the heat, the cold, and the temperate; in 1492 and in 2010 – as a searcher of the New World steps upon Bird Rock, Bahamas, 'wandering for good water', beguiled by the wildlife; and as a more recent figure records a different kind of wildlife – a human, urban one – on the streets of pre-war Kyiv.

It's actually mid-collection when Thomas Jefferson asks the question any walker reader would ask: *why* do we walk?

He provides a reasonable and limited answer – for fresh air and exercise; ah, leaving the desk and taking to the road is good for everyone. But if a message is due,

it's that wherever the road leads, fresh air and exercise are only the tip of it. Early in 'Setting Off', barely into full stride, we learn how the world opens up on foot; and as we pass through it, our senses become sharpened. Aiming, say, for the 'tip-top' of Table Mountain, the sights are far-ranging (Cape Town stretching below) and near to (the little bits of leather from long abandoned boots). And somewhere else entirely: hear the sounds on the breeze: the chants of coffee-bean carriers as they lug loads around Rio de Janeiro. Old chants to clear the streets of the traffic – of the dawdlers and the dalliers, and the newly arrived.

Sights and sounds; and a smell and a touch (the 'scent' of sugar trees, the 'chill' of late night, in remote Japan). And as the senses soar, so does the mental side of walking intensify. In 'Setting Off', we witness how physical movement frees the mind to wander; often brightly, to those farther points. Heading north from the aforementioned Thames, a stranger describes how life on the thoroughfare overwhelms him; how this 'human Niagara' carries along all shapes and hues imaginable. Who are the people of the pavements? he asks aloud, slowing to a halt, taking stock, and his confusion turns to awe eventually.

Another time in 'Setting Off', it's to the polar regions: to where a small group ponders the big whiteness, prior to leaving camp to map out the territories. And to be engulfed, they conclude. But the trek will imbue each man with a sense of comradeship in extremis; as if walking as *one* into the whiteness . . .

into a state of equanimity . . . into a state of collective well-being. The leader of the group observes this special ‘spirit’ emerging: ‘If anyone thinks Wisting, Hassel, and Bjaaland took a solemn farewell from of us who stayed behind – no. They left the tents at 2.30 a.m., and vanished in their directions amid much laughter and chaff together!’

That leader was Roald Amundsen, the first to reach both poles, who traverses the sections ahead with a number of fellow explorers and adventurers. They cross the snows and the sands, and climb the peaks, for a variety of reasons: to claim land for self or nation, to find new species, to settle old scores (and regarding the last, you’ll meet a ‘fine figure of a man in sombrero and leggings’, admired by the hobette, Ethel Lynn). They make their locations on foot of course, because whatever the age, an animal or an engine only gets you so far – then the real story begins. And don’t they know how fitting, how heroic, it can be to travel like this, even if plain necessity is the driver.

The more I guided people into *Globetrotting*, the more I found they spoke as types. Why walk, and *who* walks? Yes, there are the explorers and adventurers, with specific aims and routes; and there is someone quite the opposite – quite the polar opposite – who doesn’t hike or climb or wade. He or she is the stroller. Out and about in the name of curiosity and quirky quest. Where the walk itself becomes a creative act, the subject matter committed to the page. Théophile