

# The Walk

(1795)

Friedrich Schiller

FRIEDRICH SCHILLER (1759-1805), the German "Poet of Freedom," wrote "The Walk" late in his life (1795), after the better-known philosophical poem of similar length, "The Artists" (1789), and before "The Song of the Bell" (1799). Together, these three comprise his most beloved "philosophical-historical" poems.

"The Walk" is the longest piece Schiller wrote in the unique "Distich" form, the two-line rhythm which he invented and used in hundreds of epigrams. Schiller wrote an epigram titled "The Distich," which describes the form poetically:

*In hexameter climbs the fountain's affluent column,  
In pentameter then falls it melodically down.*

Like "The Artists" and "The Song of the Bell," "The Walk" discusses the development of human civilization, treating the fundamental question of man's relationship to Nature. Schiller attacks the Romantic (or Rousseauvian) concept of Man as a mere part of Nature, which led, in Schiller's lifetime, to the horrors of the French Revolution, so vividly depicted here and in the two other poems. He counterposes to this, in beautiful poetic images, the Natural Law conception of Man, created in God's image, who is master of Nature through his creative work, and on whom "Homer's fair sun" shall shine always.

GREETINGS FROM ME, my hill, with the reddish, radiant summit!  
Sun be greeted by me, shining so lovely thereon!  
You I greet too, enlivened plain, you, murmuring lindens,  
And the jovial choir, cradled alight in the boughs,  
Azure pacific, you too, who pour your fullness unmeasured  
Round the brown mountain range, over the green-growing woods,  
And round me, who, fleeing at last the prison-like chambers  
And the small-minded talk, gladly escapes unto you.  
Zephyr streams of your redolent air race through me refreshing,  
And the hungering glance feasts on the vigorous light.  
Robust on flowery field the e'er-changing colors are bursting,  
Yet does the turbulent strife settle itself in full grace.  
Free the meadow receives me with carpet widespread in the distance,  
Through its affable green coils the rustical path,

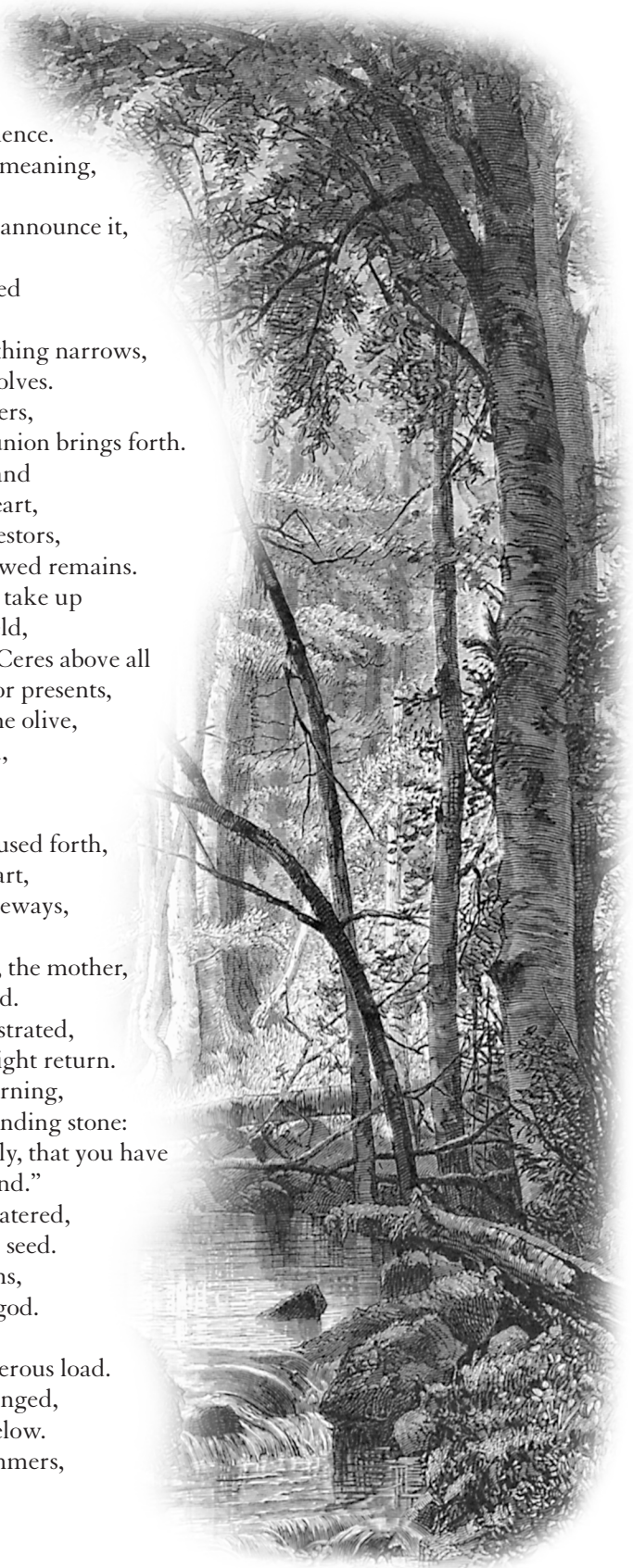
The Granger Collection, New York



Round me hum the industrious bees, on pinions uncertain  
Flits the butterfly by over the clover red-hued,  
Glowing strike me the sun's bright rays, the Westwind rests silent.  
Just the song of the lark trills in the genial air.  
Now it roars in the bushes nearby, the crowns of the alders  
Bend deeply, and the wind waves through the silvery grass.  
Night ambros' al closes me round: in sweet-smelling freshness  
O'er me the shadowy birch join in sumptuous roof,  
In the secretive woods the landscape escapes me a moment,  
And a serpentine path climbing conducts me above.  
Only sparsely with stealth through leafy grid of the branches  
Filters the light, and the blue azure looks smiling herein.  
But abruptly the crepe is rent. The opened-up forest  
Startling gives back to me dazzling the glow of the day.  
Vast and boundlessly pours forth unto my vision the distance,  
And a blue mountain range ends in a vaporous world.  
Deep at the mountain's foot, which under me slopes of a sudden,  
Flowing, the green-lighted stream mirrorlike wanders along.  
Endless see I the aether beneath me, over me endless,  
Dizzy I look up above, shuddering look down below.  
But between the eternal of height and eternal of deepness  
Safely a banistered path carries the wand'rer across.  
Laughing flee forth the ample banks approaching toward me,  
And the splendid vale praises the gay diligence.  
See those lines on the way! which divide the farmers' possessions,  
Which in tapestried field lovely Demeter did weave.  
Genial script of the law, of the God who is mankind's protector,  
Since from the pitiless world fleeing has love disappeared!  
But in more unconfined windings criss-crosses the orderly meadows,  
Now entwined in a wood, now on the mountains above,  
Climbing, a shimmering streak, the roadway connecting the region,  
On the smooth-flowing stream raftsmen are gliding along.  
Often the bleating of flocks rings out in the meadows so lively,  
And the herdsman's fair song calls the lone echo awake.  
Cheerful villages wreath round the stream, in shrubs disappearing  
Others, on back of the hill drop quickly down there below.  
Neighborly dwells still the man there along with his pastures,  
Round his rustical roof peacefully slumber his fields,  
Snugly creeping the vine ascends up the plain, humble window,  
One all-encompassing branch winds from the tree round the hut.  
Fortunate folk of the country! Not yet to freedom awakened,  
Gayly share with your field narrow restraints of the law.  
All your wishes confined by the harvest's peaceful rotation,  
As your daily work goes, thus does your life so unwind.  
But who now robs me so suddenly of this fair prospect? a foreign  
Spirit spreads quickly out over the foreign terrain.  
Britt'ly separates out what was just lovingly blended,



And 'tis only the like which follows after the like.  
Stands I see cultivated, of poplars' proud generations  
Grown in an orderly pomp splendid and elegant thence.  
Rule governs all here, and all is by choice and all has a meaning,  
Yonder retinue train heralds the ruler to me.  
Splendent the luminous cupola structures from far off announce it,  
From the craggiest core tow'ring the *city* does rise.  
To the wild outside are the woodland fawns now ejected  
Yet does devotion lend loftier life to the stone.  
Man is brought closer to mankind. Around him everything narrows,  
In him the world now awakes, lively it quickly revolves.  
See, there are kindled in fiery strife the vehement powers,  
Strife brings great things to the fore, greater their union brings forth.  
Thousand hands *one* spirit livens, high beat in a thousand  
Breasts all aglow with but *one* feeling, a singular heart,  
Beats for the Fatherland and glows for the laws of ancestors,  
Here on the cherished ground rest their most hallowed remains.  
Down from heaven descend the divinities blissful, and take up  
Festive and solemn abode there in the sanctified field,  
Wonderful presents bestowing they show themselves; Ceres above all  
Brings forth the plough as a gift, Hermes the anchor presents,  
Bacchus the grapevine, Minerva the verdant sprig of the olive,  
And Poseidon thereto leads forth the militant steed,  
Mother Cybele yokes to the wagon shaft her two lions,  
Through the genial gate comes she as citizen in.  
Sacrosanct statues! From you humanity's plantings effused forth,  
To the ocean's far isles sent you both manners and art,  
Sages discoursed on the law inside of these sociable gateways,  
Heroes eager to fight for the Penates rushed forth.  
There appeared on the bulwarks, her infant enfolding, the mother,  
After the army gazed, till 'twas by distance engulfed.  
Praying rushed she forth then, at the deities' altars prostrated,  
Pleading for vict'ry and fame, pleading that you might return.  
Honor, vict'ry were yours, but the fame alone was returning,  
On your praiseworthy deeds comments the heartrending stone:  
"Wanderer, come you to Sparta, proclaim it there loudly, that you have  
Seen us lying here still, just as the law does command."  
Rest then easy, beloved! For by your bloodshed now watered,  
Verdant's the olive, gayly sprouts up the wonderful seed.  
Kindled awake, an industry free, with joy of possessions,  
From the reeds of the stream, winks the Cerulean god.  
Hissing flies in the tree the axe, the dryad is sighing,  
High from the mountain's head tumbles the thunderous load.  
From the quarry swings up the stone, with levers bewinged,  
Deep in the mountain's gorge plunges the miner below.  
Muciber's anvil rings from swinging stroke of the hammers,  
Under the sinewy fist spurt out the flashes of steel,





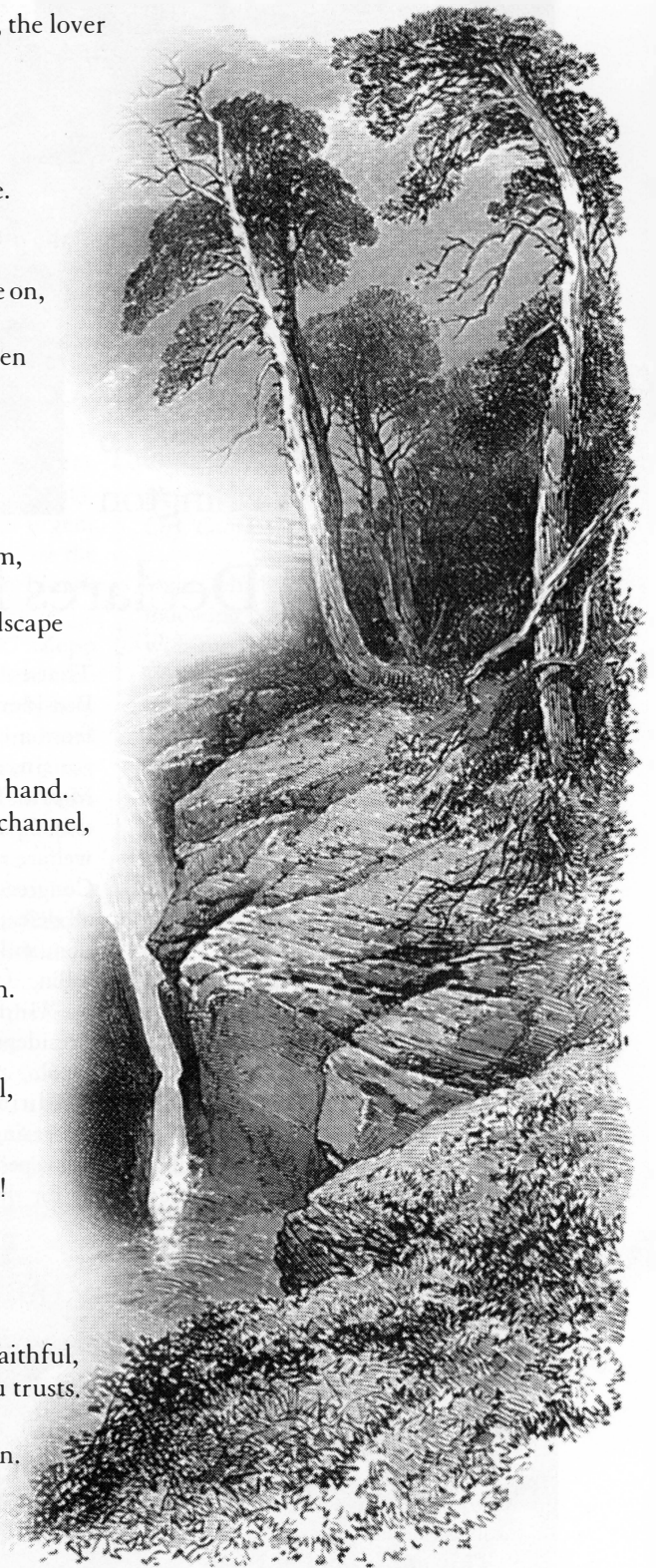
The Granger Collection, New York

Golden-hued flax round the dancing spindle glist'ning encircles,  
Through the strings of the yarn weaving the shuttle does flit.  
Far on the roadsteads cries out the pilot, the ships wait at anchor,  
Which to the country abroad carry the products from home,  
Others draw rejoicingly in with their gifts from the distance,  
High from the towering mast flutters the festival wreath.  
See there the markets are swarming, alive with joyful existence,  
Whir of the curious tongues sings in the wondering ear.  
In the market the merchant pours out the earth's fruitful harvest,  
What to glowing hot ray Africa's soil begets,  
What Arabia cooks, what the farthermost Thule is preparing,  
High with enjoyable goods fills Amalthea the horn.  
There begets happy fortune the talents of heavenly children,  
Nursed at freedom's fair breast, flourish the arts of delight.  
Imitations of life by the sculptor give joy to the vision,  
And the sensitive stone speaks, by the chisel besouled,  
Heavens synthetic rest on slender Ionian columns,  
And the Pantheon's walls all of Olympus contain.  
Light as the rainbow's vault through the air, as the cowherd's arrow,  
Bounces the bridge's yoke over the thundering stream.  
But in the still of the room, outlining meaningful figures,  
Brooding, the sage is in search, stalking the creative mind.  
Matter's power he tests, the hatreds and loves of the magnet,  
Follows the sound through the air, follows through aether the ray.  
Seeks the familiar law in the awful wonders of hazard,  
Seeks the immobile pole in the occurrence of flight.  
Body and voice the writing lends to silent reflections,  
Down through the centuries' stream borne by the eloquent page.  
There dissolves 'fore his wondering glance the fog of delusion,  
And the creations of night yield to the light of the day.  
Man his fetters in pieces breaks. The most happy! But break he  
Not with fetters of fear also the bridle of shame!  
Freedom, reason cries out, freedom the savage's passions,  
Out from Nature august, strive forth in greed to be free.  
Ah, now break in the storm the anchors, which at the shoreline  
Held it in warning, 'tis grasped strongly by incoming tide,  
To infinity carried away, the coast disappearing,  
High on the peak of the flood tosses the bark without mast.  
Steadfast stars of the Wain are extinguished behind the cloud cover,  
Naught is remaining, e'en God loses his way in the breast.  
Out from the dialogue vanishes truth, sincereness and credence  
Out of living, and oaths lie as they spew from the lips.  
In the intimate bond of the heart, in the myst'ry that love is  
Sycophant pushes in, breaking the friend from his friend,  
At the innocent treachery leers with devouring glances,  
With its poisonous bite tooth of the slanderer kills.



Venal's the thought in the breast of the one who's dishonored, the lover  
 Casts the nobly divine unsuppressed feeling away.  
 All your sacrosanct symbols, O Truth, has fraud arrogated  
 To itself, Nature's most exquisite voices profaned,  
 Which the necessitous heart in its urge for joy improvises,  
 Scarce does feeling sincere yet through the silence pervade.  
 Justice boasts of itself on the bench, in the cottages concord,  
 Only the spectre of law stands by the throne of the king.  
 Many years long, for hundreds-long years the mummy may live on,  
 May the misleading form stand for the fullness of life,  
 Till fair Nature awakes, and with hands both heavy and brazen  
 On the edifice void Time and Necessity move,  
 Like a tigress confined, who bars made of iron has broken  
 And of Numidian woods suddenly, frightfully thinks,  
 So arises mankind, with fury of crime and of mis'ry,  
 And in the ash of the state seeks for the Nature he lost.  
 O then open ye walls forth and give to the pris'ner his freedom,  
 Unto the field left behind let him in safety return!  
 But now where am I? The path is concealed. Precipitous landscape  
 Hinders with yawning abyss both 'fore and after my step.  
 After me stayed the escort familiar of gardens and hedges,  
 After me every last trace of human hand stayed behind.  
 I see only matter piled up, from out of which life will  
 Spring up, the roughhewn basalt hopes for the fashioning hand.  
 Storming falls the torrent on down through the rock's narrow channel,  
 Under the roots of the tree breaks it indignantly through.  
 Wild is it here and horribly bleak. Alone in the air-space  
 Only the eagle does hang joining the clouds to the world.  
 High above all else no feather of wind to me carries  
 Sounds forlorn of mankind marking his pleasure and pain.  
 Am I really alone? within your fair arm, within your  
 Bosom, Nature, again, ah! and it was but a dream,  
 Which did shuddering seize me with life depicted so frightful,  
 With the fall of the vale fell too the darkness away.  
 Purer I take back my life from your own purified altars,  
 Take joyful courage back too, of hopeful, confident youth!  
 Ever changes the will both its rule and its object, and ever  
 In a repeating form actions revolve and roll on.  
 But perpetually youthful, in beauty perpetually changing,  
 Pious Nature do you chastely the old law revere.  
 Ever the self-same, you safeguard for man in hands that are faithful,  
 That which the fanciful child, that which the youth to you trusts.  
 On equal breast you nourish the oft-changing ages;  
 'Neath the same azure sky, on the self-same growing green.  
 Wander the near and united the distant do wander,  
 And see! Homer's fair sun, also is shining on us.

—*Marianna Wertz*



The Granger Collection, New York