

Fortunately, however, we have an answer to these reflections; and the answer is, that logically they are quite unanswerable, but that our nature, with a delightful obstinacy, refuses to be in any degree influenced by them. It behaves, in fact, just as it does in another case, which is analogous, and is familiar to all of us. Let us stand on a stony hill-side—colourless, herbless, waterless; let us realise how forbidding and bare it is, and then let us look at the distant mountains. We may know as a fact that they are quite bare also, and that their slopes, if we stood on them, would be even more forbidding. But in spite of that knowledge, to our eyes they have all the colours of heaven on them. We cannot tell why nor wherefore, they trouble the soul like music; they lift our longings above the life that fetters us, and they carry them beyond the regions of care.

And with distance in time it is the same as it is with distance in place. The imagination has its atmosphere and its sunlight as well as the earth has; only its mists are even more gorgeous and delicate, its aerial perspectives are even more wide and profound. It also transfigures and beautifies things in far more various ways. For the imagination is all senses in one; it is sight, it is smell, it is hearing; it is memory, regret, and passion. Everything goes to nourish it, from first love to literature—literature, which, for cultivated people, is the imagination's gastric juice.