

# Detachment —An Essay—

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## 1

Few writers can be equal to Shakespeare in the art of creating the best style of speech for each character in his plays. And few instances can prove the excellence of his genius in this respect more gloriously than the scene of the oratorical duel performed before the multitude of Roman citizens inquisitive of the cause of the murder their great dictator had suffered a few moments before.\* Here we see a miraculous achievement of his rhetorical art realizing the two distinctly different modes of human mind represented by the two orators now struggling to satisfy the multitudinous audience with their respective causes quite contradictory to each other.

There is on one hand the fiery speech of Brutus still hot with the excitement at the scene of the bloody act in which he himself has been a partaker. On the other hand we have the long-winded, cool-blooded confutation given by his antagonist Mark Antony, apparently gentle and low-postured, yet cherishing in it the unquenchable flame of his firm latent will armed up in the unperturbable perfection of subtle "meiosis". One need not puzzle oneself trying to decide which of the two is telling the truth. I myself who am in two minds about their respective causes have no mind to pretend to set too much by such a question. Yet I do not think a little analysis of their respective rhetorical styles themselves too insignificant to be here attempted.

One of the factors that characterize Brutus' fiery address is the predominance of imperative sentences. Just take up the principal part of the address from the beginning down to the first intermission given by the orator to wait for his audience to answer him. One cannot fail to observe here that, of the 27 grammatical units of which the part of the address consists, 10 (approximately 37%) belong to the grammatical category of "commandment". It goes without saying that of all the four grammatical categories of sentences (i. e. statement, question, exclamation and commandment) this is the one intended to work the most powerful and direct personal influence upon the auditor. This very predominance of the imperative sentences shows, there fore, the greatness of the hasty irritation the fiery nobleman is in at this moment. He is, indeed, simply too hotly excited to try to be logical and wait till his consistent discourses satisfy the reasoning minds of his audience. He feels he has no time to lose. He is only eager to get, nay to grasp and overwhelm, the minds of the audience with all the might of his whole fiery personality. Compared with this, it is quite remarkable that the number of the imperative

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\* *Julius Caesar*: Act III, sc. ii

sentences used by his antagonist Mark Antony in the corresponding part\* of his speech does not exceed 2 among the 35 grammatical units to be found in it.

Again, do not let the high integrity with which the main theme or cause occupies the whole body of Brutus' speech escape our observation. Brutus' cause for his bloody deed lies in his conviction about the wickedness of Caesar's ambition, and he chooses a notably direct way in expounding this cause before the audience. Concentrating all his words and phrases in his effort of ideological justification of this main theme, —Caesar's ambition—, he does not even let himself divert his stream of speech into any branch of discourse. It is true he frequently uses the rhetorical technic of contrast and tells of some virtues belonging to the character of the murdered conqueror. Yet he never allows himself to tarry any longer on such a negative element but rushes past these items in a few words or phrases to resume the main course as if he were afraid of missing that unmistakably conspicuous target among the apparently contradictory minor elements. This makes his speech quite unsubstantial as well as brief. In this hasty discourse he even forgets to tell about the details of his main cause. From his speech alone we cannot know in what particular respects Caesar was ambitious any more than we can guess in what concrete manner Caesar had loved him.

See how Brutus' speech begins with a markedly frequent use of the rhetorical art called "repetition". This frequency of repetition and the shortness of the intervals between the recurring words or ideas form another factor that characterizes his oration.

- 1) Hear me for my cause, and be silent *so that you may hear.*
  - 2) Believe me for mine honour, and have respect  
for mine honour                      so that you may believe.
  - 3) Censure me in your wisdom, and wake up  
your senses                              so that you may the better judge.
- .....

This is not to say that his antagonist lacks in this rhetorical art of repetition. The remarkable recurrence of the statement

"Brutus is an honourable man"

in Antony's speech can never escape our observation. But the most remarkable fact is that Antony generally puts several lines of unheated statement between the recurring ideas while Brutus does not admit more than a few words to come between the recurrent words or ideas. Nor is the meaning itself of the repeated ideas less significant. Brutus generally repeats the words or ideas which he really means to propound, while Antony is pretending to put an emphasis on what he never means to justify. — Thus, the further we go

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\* i. e. from the beginning to the first intermission

appreciating the respective modes of their speeches, the more we get convinced that this is not so much a strife between two contradictory political ideas themselves as a duel between two different modes of oratory.

Here I call to mind one of the commonplace laws of optics. It is a law concerning the correlation between the intensity of light and the distance from its source. Suppose the light is originated at the point P, and let the intensity of light to be had at the point A be represented by  $I$ , and the formula given by the law is

$$I \propto \frac{1}{PA^2}$$

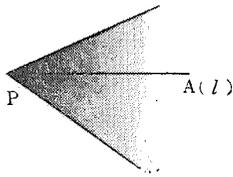


Fig. 1

Applying this law to the case of the two competing orators, we may ascribe the intensity of emotion and the directness of the way of discussion characterizing Brutus' speech to his immediate mental contact with his own experience and cause, while we may understand the mental attitude of his antagonist to be far more detached from the same. The former clings to

the purpose of his speech—the justification of what he has done—even to the annihilation of the respective distance that might reasonably exist between him and his audience, while the latter at least pretends detachment both from his own cause and from his audience.

There is another factor we must take into consideration together with this fundamental optical theory. It is the invariability of the visual angle on the part of the "subject of perception". From the theory itself one (as the "subject of perception") may have the less intensity and vividness of sight as one detaches oneself from the "object of perception", but, as one's visual angle remains constant despite of the variability of one's standpoint, one can at the same time have the wider range of visual field in proportion to the decrease of the visual intensity (Fig. 2). And, luckily or unluckily, the objective world is too extensive and variegated to be contained in any single visual field of a single man no matter how clear-sighted he may be. This is the very point at which the fiery nobleman blunders. Too deeply immersed in the intense light that comes directly from his own great experience, he quite forgets the simple fact that he is talking to the multitude of citizens upon whom the light from the same particular experience cannot be expected to have the same engrossing influence as it has upon him. This fatal psychological gap between the partaker in the incident and its lookers-on is fully taken advantage of by his clever opponent who stands remote enough from the blazing flame of the experience to allow himself to look before and after and even beyond the range within which Brutus was raging. See with what calculated assiduity he tells the citizens about the details of Caesar's past virtues to which Brutus does not even pretend to devote a single concrete item. No wonder his fiery words should fail to keep the minds of the audience on his side for long. However furious and powerful the raging sea may look under the influence of passing gales, it cannot stir up the coiling undercurrents that remain as peaceful as ever below the maddening waves, and the fish that live deep below the surface will be quite free from the destructive

influences. Yet Mark Antony's is the might of the soundless tidal wave that comes from afar to invade the land with all the weight of the whole body of oceanic waters now heaving in one unperturbable, long-waved and tremendous mass from the very bottom to the uppermost surface.

## 2

The optical theory above alluded to may be more widely applied. There are some writers who, like Brutus, live blazing up in the intense light that comes from the phenomenal world. There are also some others who, analogous to Antony, keep themselves detached from the actual incidents of life which are the materials of their works. A typical example of the former mode of experience may be observed in the following extract from Mr. Hemingway's "*Farewell to Arms*".

"The forest of the oak trees on the mountain beyond the town was gone. The forest had been green in summer when we had come into the town but now there were the stumps and the broken trunks and the ground torn up, and one day at the end of the fall when I was out where the oak forest had been I saw a cloud coming over the mountain. It came very fast and the sun went dull yellow and then everything was grey and the sky was covered and the cloud came on down the mountain and suddenly we were in it and it was snow". (Chapter 2)

In order to see the characteristics of the above passage more clearly, let us rearrange it as follows.

- 1) The forest of oak trees on the mountain beyond the town was gone.
- 2) The forest had been green in the summer when we had come into the town  
but
- 3) now there were the stumps and the broken trunks and the ground torn up  
and
- 4) one day at the end of the fall when I was out where the oak forest had  
been I saw a cloud coming over the mountain.
- 5) It came very fast  
and
- 6) the sun went dull yellow  
and then
- 7) everything was grey  
and
- 8) the sky was covered  
and

- 9) the cloud came on down the mountain  
and  
10) suddenly we were in it  
and  
11) it was snow.

Mark the predominance of simple sentences connected with each other by co-ordinate conjunctions. Here are the records of the images begotten by a type of writer whose eyes are engrossed at each moment by each section of the series of phenomena passing upon the changeful visage of nature. Now the cloud comes over the mountain, and he feels himself overwhelmed by the immense influential power radiated from the huge mass of the vaporous air. Then it comes on towards him very fast, and, having his eyes ever fixed upon it, he thinks of nothing but pursuing, as if enchanted, its speedy course of development. Then the sun turns yellow, and he feels the turning colour with his whole self. Then the cloud enwraps him, and he realizes that he has been enwrapped in it. How generously his mind is given to each particle of the series of incidents! Every moment in his life comes quite new to him loaded with its own brave new influence to absorb his whole self in it. He lives every moment with his whole self. His life may be said to be a series of innumerable lives quite independent to each other. He not only lives *close by* the phenomenal world but also lives *in* it. One may well wonder here whether his life could keep its intrinsic coherence through such series of independent particles of enchanted lives. . . . . Then he reaches out, reasonably enough, for something that may serve to prevent his series of experience from dissipation. And this accounts for the remarkable frequency of the co-ordinate conjunction "*and*" serving to connect the simple sentences each one of which would otherwise go its own way regardless of all its fellows. (Fig. 3)

If the almighty God should make his appearance before mortal eyes, the intensity of the light of His personal influence would be enough to annihilate in human minds every other thought of the phenomenal world, and men would have their eyes so dazzled and engrossed that they would feel themselves nothing better than mere appendices to each particle of His behaviour. Thus it is quite reasonable that a style quite similar to Mr. Hemingway's should be observed at the beginning of the first book of Old Testament where it reverently tells us of the most miraculous of all the godly miracles, — the creation of the heaven and the earth.

- 1) In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.  
and  
2) the earth was without form, and void;  
and  
3) darkness was upon the face of the deep.  
And

- 4) the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.  
And
- 5) God said,
- 6) Let there be light:  
and
- 7) there was light.  
And
- 8) God saw the light, that it was good:  
and
- 9) God divided the light from the darkness.  
And
- 10) God called the light Day,  
and
- 11) the darkness he called Night.  
And
- 12) the evening and the morning were the first day.

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(*Genesis* : Chapter I, 1-5)

Let us turn our eyes to another passage taken from a writer belonging to an older generation than Mr. Hemingway's. It is a part of the 43rd chapter of Thomas Hardy's "*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*" where the author gives us a description of an incident similar to the one pictured by Mr. Hemingway in the passage above quoted — the first snowfall of the coming winter. (The figures given at the head of each series of lines indicate the corresponding sentences in Mr. Hemingway's passage above.)

- 1-3) There had not been such a winter for years. It came on in stealthy and measured glides, like the moves of a chess-player. One morning the few lonely trees and thorns of the hedgegrow appeared as if they had put off a vegetable for an animal integument, .....
- After this season of congealed dampness came a spell of dry frost, when strange birds from behind the North Pole began to arrive silently .....
- Cobwebs revealed their presence on sheds and walls where none had ever been observed till brought into visibility by the crystallizing atmosphere hanging like loops of white worsted from salient points of the outhouses, posts, and gates.
- 4) Then one day a peculiar quality invaded the air of this country.
- 5-9) There came a moisture which was not the moisture of rain, and a cold which was not the cold of frost.  
It chilled the eyeballs of the twain, made their brows ache, penetrated to their

skeletons, affecting the surface of the body less than its core.

10) They knew that it meant snow,

and

11) the night the snow came.

In vocabulary, in sentence-structure, or in any other respect, few sets of two passages written upon the same subject can be more outstandingly lacking in common elements. Among the rest of these characteristic differences, however, let it be noticed that here Hardy keeps himself enough detached from the subject of his writing to enable himself to ponder whether the moisture be that of the rain or not, or to consider the comparative intensities of the impression given by the moisture to the *surface* of human body and that given to its *core*. Mr. Hemingway even seems to be pretending to have no time to question about the cause or effect of each particle of the passing phenomenon. Nor is there even a single simile or metaphor used in the American writer's passage above quoted, while this extract from Hardy's "*Tess*" is rich in metaphorical expressions.

What comes on the wing of the huge, *visible*, dynamic cloud in Mr. Hemingway's passage comes, with this cold philosophic novelist, stealthily along with the invading steps of the *invisible* moisture. This is also suggestive of the cause of frequent appearance of "nexus substantives" in Hardy's works.\* These "nexus substantives" are the very means by which he synthesizes in the furnace of his philosophic consciousness the subject and the predicate which would be caught separately by a mind less detached from the phenomenal world.

Let it also be remembered here that this philosophic writer very frequently represents his heroes and heroines with general terms fitted to each situation they are put in, when an ordinary writer might feel no irrelevancy in calling them with their proper names. A man, in his usual way of representation, may be represented as "the rider" when he is on horseback, and the same person may also be called "the taller figure" when he is walking with his little son. Just take up, for example, the first few pages of "*Jude the Obscure*", and you will find there at least seven terms used to represent the same character.\*\* How nervously he tries to avoid mere reproduction of the materials taken from the outer world of experience in the raw forms in which they are given him! Here again we realize that he cannot be satisfied until he has completely reconstructed the raw images

\* cf. the description about the cobwebs in the passage quoted above

cf. also the following passage picturing the figures of two loving young souls dancing together:

"The perfect *responsiveness* which their tender *acquaintance* threw into the *motions* of Nicholas and his partner lent to their *gyrations* the fine *adjustment* of two interacting parts of a single machine" (*The Waiting Supper*)

\*\* (1) the schoolmaster (2) the departing teacher (3) the master (4) Mr. Phillotson (5) the latter (6) the present teacher (7) His(=Jude's) patron and teacher

All these seven terms stand for the same single person, "Mr. Phillotson". (*Jude the Obscure*: Ch. 1)

of the phenomenal world in his own mental crucible. Out of this detached “centre of indifference” comes the latent glow of his artistic soul clad in the heatless objectivity with which he faces this series of little ironies called “human life”.

### 3

A writer and a word have this one function in common — to stand between the phenomenal world and the reader intercepting and interpreting, on behalf of the latter, the shower of impressions coming from the former. Then it would not be unreasonable if I should try to apply what has been stated above to the problem of “nuance” concerning the sense of words. There are words which convey to us the unmistakably clear-cut images of the things and ideas they stand for. There are some other words which give us but very faint notion of the things and ideas they stand for. Some words overwhelm us with the intensity of their senses, and some others soothe us with the tender light of their senses. There is indeed the same variety in the characters of these words as we find in the characters of writers.

Just as the thick-lighted and narrow-fielded vision of the phenomenal world is given us by a writer keeping an immediate mental contact with it, so from a word situated close by the things and ideas it stands for we get a full-lighted yet narrow-scoped field of meaning. Just as a writer’s visual field widens as he detaches himself from the objective world, so the range of the meaning of a word grows wider as the intensity of the light it casts upon a special notion decreases. “*Sweet*”, which has a wider range of meaning than “*beautiful*”, “*kind*”, or “*odoriferous*”, may be a weak word to cast its light upon any one of these specified attributes that are to be denoted by these words of more specified meaning. One may call a girl “*beautiful*” if one wants to put an emphasis upon her goodliness in appearance. One may employ the word “*kind*” when one is telling of her goodly personality. Yet one must not forget that in the wide field of meaning appertaining to the word “*sweet*”, there hovers an atmosphere, a comprehensive, blended light of meaning, which can never be fully interpreted by any other word of more specified and narrower scope of meaning. One had better call her a “*sweet*” girl if one feels in her something more than mere beauty or kindness, — something, so to speak, like an *atmosphere* of “a flower of light” or “like a melody played in tune” (Fig. 4). In this way the simplest words of the simplest children can often move men with their faint but mysteriously blended light of significance which the children themselves never mean to impart. It was this kind of atmospheric light that gave the inspiration to Katherine Mansfield’s beautiful story “*Something Childish but Very Natural*”. It was this kind of atmospheric light that engendered in Wordsworth’s mind “thoughts too deep for tears” at the sight of “the meanest flower” of the field. It is, again, this kind of faint atmospheric light that enwraps the “aerial kisses of shapes haunting the wilderness of human thought”.

These, however, are not meant to propound a sermon of mere detachment on behalf

of Mark Antony or Thomas Hardy against the style of Mr. Hemingway or the Holy Scripture. The truth is, either style has its own virtues and its own perils. On one hand I envy Mr. Hemingway the intensity of impression radiated from his works, but on the other hand I have to admit that his is a mode of perception which, when it is carried too far, may put the "subject of perception" under the blind control of the vicissitudinous outer world. I admire Hardy's philosophical coolness and ingenious brevity resulting from his excellent talent of abstraction, but this mode of perception may sometimes make us incapable of artistic empathy when the predominance of the "subject of perception" over the objective world goes far enough to annihilate the tender sensibility in the "subject of perception" itself.

This is the point where the idea of artistic freedom should introduce itself into our thought. To have our mental eyes dazzled and blinded by the excessive intensity of the light coming from any particular ingredient of experience to the exclusion of a sound understanding of the whole world of experience as a whole is one way of losing one's mental freedom. To live aloof in the cold citadel of philosophical subjectivity and strip oneself of all the tenderness of the nerves that may tremble in sympathy with the fresh joys and sorrows of one's fellow creatures is another way of losing one's mental freedom. One is a way to have oneself enslaved by the outer objects. The other is a way to have oneself enslaved by one's own self. If the essence of life lies in mental freedom, death unmistakably comes to one when one loses it, be it caused by murder or by suicide.

Most playwrights of the age of Shakespeare failed to equal him when they lost their artistic freedom in their too close contact with the materials of their creations. The comic characters in "*Every man in his Humour*" or in "*The Alchemist*" scarcely have the subtle atmospheric nuance which hovers around the fools in Shakespeare's comedies. The murdering scene of "*The Duchess of Malfi*"\* may stun its spectators with the glaring horrors of the unnatural crime acted on the stage. Yet one cannot help complaining its lack of the sense of sublimity which is present even in the blood-smeared last scene of "*Othello*"\*\* where the jealous Moor wrings out his spiritual agony in a beautiful *metaphorical* language before he sets out strangling his heavenly Desdemona. The scene of guilty Evadne under her brother's duress depicted by Beaumont and Fletcher\*\*\* is, for all the similarities of situations and even those of particular words and phrases spoken by the characters, no match for the corresponding scene presented in "Hamlet" by their great contemporary.

These, however, do not make us the less regret Shakespeare's lack of lyrical sympathy to natural symbols. Most of his lyrics involved in his "Sonnets" would hardly be lyrics in the eyes accustomed to the auguries of innocence to be found in the works of later romantic poets who never thought of distilling the life of the rose flowers into a drop of

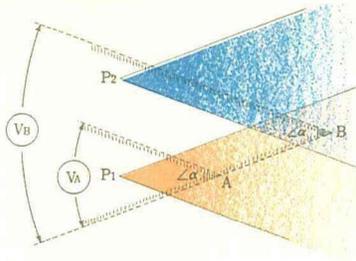
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\* Act IV, sc. ii.

\*\* Act V, sc. ii.

\*\*\* *A Maid's Tragedy*: Act IV, sc. i. cf. *Hamlet*: Act III, sc. iv.

Fig. 2



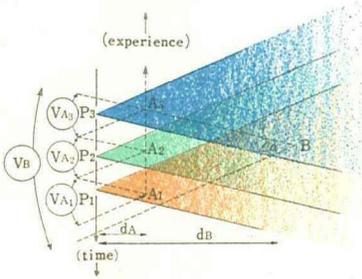
$P_1, P_2$  = the objects of perception

$A, B$  = the mental positions for the "subject of perception"

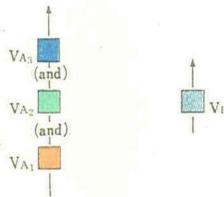
$\angle \alpha$  = the invariable visual angle of the "subject of perception"

$V_A, V_B$  = the respective visual fields to be had at  $A$  and  $B$  by the "subject of perception"

Fig. 3



(mental visions to be had by each subject of perception)



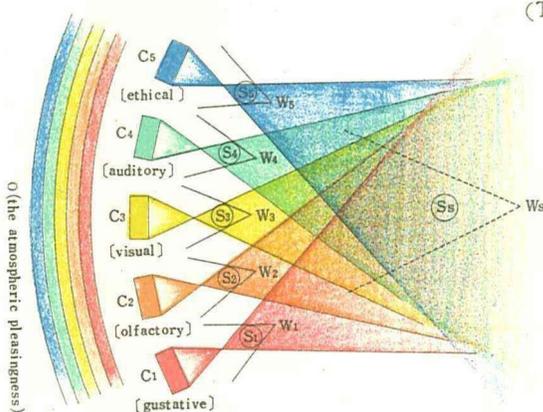
e. g.  $V_{A_1}$  stands for the mental vision to be had by the subject  $A$  at the point  $A_1$

$P_1, P_2, P_3 \dots$  = the phenomena in the outer world of the "objects of perception" flowing upon the current of *time*

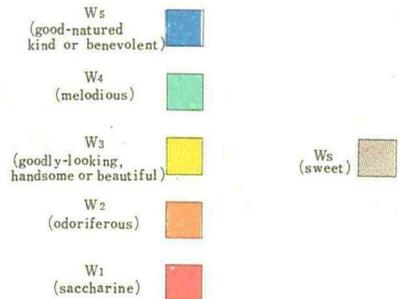
$A, B$  = the subjects of perception each at the distance of  $d_A$  or  $d_B$  from the phenomenal world  
 $\angle \alpha$  = the invariable human visual angle

(Here Mr. Hemingway is supposed to be keeping the distance of  $d_A$  from the phenomenal world, while Hardy keeps the distance of  $d_B$  from it. The rough chart of the mental visions is meant to show how Mr. Hemingway gets intensely-lighted but separate visions which he connects with each other using the conjunction "and", while Hardy's is a pale-lighted but synoptical vision of several passing phenomena. The cause of the remarkable predominance of "nexus substantives" to be observed in Hardy's work can also be elucidated as analogous to what has been stated above by substituting  $P_1$  with the idea of "substance" and  $P_2$  with the idea of attribute, permanent or changing". For example, Hardy perceives "its presence" when Mr. Hemingway might perceive that "it (=  $P_1$ ) is present (=  $P_2$ )".)

Fig. 4 (An Hypothetical Chart concerning the Sense of Words)



(The sense-light imparted by each word)



- 1) The impressions from the outer world ( $O$ ) are *distilled* by the subject of perception into specified ideas ( $P_1, P_2, P_3 \dots$ ) through the respective categories shown as  $C_1, C_2, C_3 \dots$
- 2)  $W_1, W_2, W_3 \dots$  represent the words respectively intercepting the light of the specified ideas. Each of these words is supposed to be situated at a position *little enough detached* from the specified idea it represents to enable it to keep its sense-field ( $S_1$  or  $S_2 \dots$ ) undisturbed by the light of any idea else than its own. The sense-fields of these words are supposed to be *small* and, analogous to what has been stated in Fig. 3, the light of each specified idea intercepted by each of them is supposed to be *intense*.
- 3)  $W_s$  represents the word supposed to be situated *remote enough* to intercept the *pale* but blended, synoptical light that showers down upon the whole range of its *larger* sense-field

lifeless perfume.\* Shakespeare, indeed, succeeded in detaching himself from the thick-lighted stage of actual life, but even this great genius could not succeed in detaching himself from the most enslaving of all enslavers —his own subjective category of perception, which, it must be admitted, he had unawares acquired under the insinuating influence of the spirit of his age.

And here I again realize the profound difficulty of life where the idea of perfect emancipation or freedom has been, and may remain to be, an eternal dream —a thing “still longed for, and never seen”. We have always been trying to introduce some new devices to emancipate ourselves from all the restrictive influences of our own traditional inheritances. When the “blank verse” was first used in English literature, people might have looked upon this refined form of poetry as something quite brave and new that would at last bring down the image of perfection upon the stage of human art. Yet this “blank verse”, when it is uniformly used, will only serve to make people think of something else, something more alive and free, and I wonder whether even Shakespeare is really happier in his blank verse than in other short lyrical forms that pepper his works with their twinkling treasures. Free verse, when it was first introduced into our country, I admit it was really a kind of revelation. But now in this present world under the tyrannous reign of free verse, I cannot help cherishing a faint yet persistent home-sickness for the once wearied-out style of rhymed verse. The history of mankind has been, indeed, the history of vain hopes and trials on our way of pilgrimage after something ever fresh and new, something that might make us ultimately free and detached from every factor enslaving us from without or from within.

To cling to a sermon of detachment might be, I admit, as some libellous pictures against free-thinking once depicted, in itself another form of losing one's own liberty. Yet in this twentieth-century world of glaring stimulus where glaring words and behaviours are invented every day by men against men, where the glaring energies of the glaring achievements in the field of practical sciences are overwhelming humanity into a state of sordid incapability save of the function of so-called “conditioned response”, and where, human music itself threatens to reduce itself to the raw clangours and clamours of barbarians, I cannot but groan for something less heated and more consoling, something less thickly lighted and more like the gentle sound of the “first real rain of spring”\*\* as Katherine Mansfield once put it. I know not whether the commonsense maxim telling us that half a loaf is better than nothing can be really valid in this field of human problems. Yet I myself want to begin my pilgrimage after this pale-lighted “something” with trying to detach myself from the glaring intensity of clearly defined words and phrases of today. The white glow of daylight is too much for me. I am for twilight and its blended shades of meaning.

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\* cf. *Sonnets* and *A Mid-Summer Nigh's Dream*: Act I. sc. i

\*\* cf. *A Feuille d' Album*