

From all this it may be concluded that thoughts put down on paper are nothing more than footprints in the sand: one sees the road the man has taken, but in order to know what he saw on the way, one requires his eyes.

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No literary quality can be attained by reading writers who possess it: be it, for example, persuasiveness, imagination, the gift of drawing comparisons, boldness or bitterness, brevity or grace, facility of expression or wit, unexpected contrasts, a laconic manner, naïveté, and the like. But if we are already gifted with these qualities--that is to say, if we possess them _potentia_--we can call them forth and bring them to consciousness; we can discern to what uses they are to be put; we can be strengthened in our inclination, nay, may have courage, to use them; we can judge by examples the effect of their application and so learn the correct use of them; and it is only after we have accomplished all this that we _actu_ possess these qualities. This is the only way in which reading can form writing, since it teaches us the use to which we can put our own natural gifts; and in order to do this it must be taken for granted that these qualities are in us. Without them we learn nothing from reading but cold, dead mannerisms, and we become mere imitators.