



**Review: *The Time Machine and the Domaine* by Richard W. Bevis
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The challenges of teaching English to late adolescents are considerable and far-reaching. Worn pedagogy, endless tests and limited funding for books often results in students quitting reading fiction altogether. Their underdeveloped vocabulary and poor writing skills remain. Yet we are also given the opportunity to inspire students to love literature and its insights. Our own keenness helps as does eliciting ideas from seasoned colleagues. Reading educational theorists and literary critics is rewarding, but theorists are often more philosophical than pragmatic and teaching guides often lack a social context. Books about English that are both rigorous and useful are rare. However, there's a new one just out and it's terrific. It's Richard W. Bevis' *The Time Machine and the Domaine; the Origins and Function of imaginative Literature*. It sounds 'heavy,' but it's not. In nimble and erudite prose. Bevis considers the questions that all English teachers face when standing before new students. "Why do we have literature and how do we use it?" and how does a writer present aspects of life's experience such that reading may become "a world or great adventure?" His analysis not only offers new views of the social functions of literature, it also reveals some surprisingly unique ways to present its structure and meaning.

Bevis cites Caudwell, who believes literature "moderates the conflicts between our desires and the world." Other critics, he says, reveals literature "serving ideology." Professor Bevis surveys writers who suggest that reading fiction brings self-recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and an antidote to alienation. His brief well-documented introduction is prescient in that a discussion of such connections would intrigue a new class of seniors. When Bevis further examines how literature addresses our experience of time, a few ideas from his book would bedazzle them completely.

The author devotes three chapters (all of Part One) discussing literature as a 'time-machine.' His analysis moves from the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, to H.G. Wells, Charles Dickens and beyond. With specific examples, he reveals the ways these and other authors create 'time travelers' in us all. His scrutiny of Wordsworth, Keats, Yeats, Huxley and Proust brings new clarity to their views of time and memory. He deals, too, with

modern Science-fiction film where he analyzes both the plot and structure of *Star Trek*, *Peggy Sue Got Married* and other 'time-driven' cinema. That's the fun of this hook: Bevis is not a literary snob. His knowledge of fiction in all forms is encyclopedic and our grasp of it is heightened by his use of 'domaines.'

Bevis defines the term 'domaine,' (French spelling) to mean an "enchanted place; literary place that changes us, where characters can have extraordinary experiences that seem magical or surrealistic." Domaines enable Bevis to venture beyond the organizing principles of themes and genres and present new ideas about the literary use of; 'Childhood and Youth,' 'Gardens,' 'Castles and Estates,' 'Culture' and 'Parties.' In doing so he broadens our understanding of the underlying human impulses that writers exploit in telling their tales. He presents new insights on C.S. Lewis (*Narnia*), Waugh (*Brideshead Revisited*), Shakespeare (*The Tempest*), Milton, Lessing, and films like *Field of Dreams* and *Lost Horizon*. His analysis of the 'bacchanals' in *Gatsby* changed the way I read Fitzgerald. Bevis also presents a timely 'domaine' analysis of Indian, African, Japanese, and Chinese literature.

Having enlarged the 'window' through which we are able to see the structure and worth of literature more clearly, Professor Bevis' much-needed book is especially useful to high-school and college English teachers everywhere. While he does not provide lesson plans, he offers a new approach to make many of the novelists, playwrights and poets you love to teach, even more interesting. His implications for more exciting, specific classes of your own making are everywhere. *The Time Machine and the Domaine* should be as much a part of your library as the Oxford Companions to English Literature. At 455 pages, in hardcover and paperback, it's a gift.

Peter Johnson is a retired teacher, coastal historian and author living in Vancouver, B.C. In the interest of full disclosure, he knows Richard Bevis; but as he says, he's even more critical just because of that.