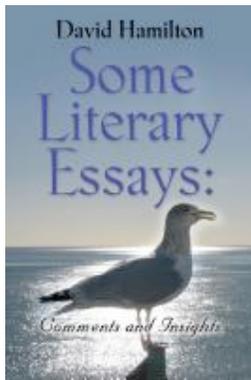


David Hamilton

Some  
Literary  
Essays:



*Comments and Insights*



*This collection of literary essays re-considers some important dramatists of the last hundred years: Shaw, Beckett and their influences like Ibsen. Brecht was an influence on the three ideological dramatists considered, David Edgar, Howard Brenton and Edward Bond. It considers Thomas More's Utopia because of its influence on contemporary Utopian thinking and how Shakespeare created depth of character. It looks at three intrinsically fascinating styles of Elizabethan poetry: lyric, Metaphysical and Cavalier poets and verse satirists.*

# **Some Literary Essays**

## **Comments and Insights**

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# **Some Literary Essays: Comments and Insights**

**David Hamilton**

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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-63263-166-4

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-63263-167-1

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2014

First Edition

## Chapter Nine: Middlemarch and Describing Reality

An ideological approach to literature by Marxist revisionists or Cultural Marxists like Roland Barthes and Louis Althusser, was popularised by academics such as Catharine Belsey. The argument in Belsey's *Critical Practice* (1980) is that *Middlemarch* is a Classic Realist text and these attempt to efface their own textuality, by acting as windows on the world rather than as literary constructs. They create realistic characters the reader can identify with as the readers were mainly middle-class themselves. They say it makes the individual unique and important and obscures the way the individual is constructed by systems outside ourselves such as language, advertising, fashion, consumerism and social gender formation, and do not have primacy. The argument continues that Classic Realism obscures the notion that we are ideologically constructed. This is to slot people into capitalist- social society. Orthodox ideologies are constructed for the dominant elites by academics who are in their service as they are trying to do to this expansive novel. *Middlemarch* shows individuals as belonging to families and groups within local communities who affect their lives but the Cultural Marxists falsify this to claim they are presented as individual and therefore liberal capitalist constructs.

The ideological critics are trying to break the link of realist literature with the surrounding sensory world and present these works as ideology not descriptions of reality. They are trying to slot writers, characters and texts into their pre-conceived ideology. These writers are empirical and observe the world around them and derive an understanding of human behaviour and how social organisations work from it. It is the opposite process. Their creations of characters and descriptions of the world are such as you would come across in the material world and behave as we do in situations in the world. When Eliot sat down to write she was not a construct nor an empty vessel but a perceptive and insightful woman with a gift for writing and conjuring profound and efficacious metaphors with which to clarify her descriptions. These empirical writers might accept the social myths

and explanations of their time but they are not consciously propagandising a political ideology like the political dramatists I mentioned in the third essay.

The ideologues claim that language imposes meaning on the writers and that writers do not create it; but writers create much of their meaning and change what they have inherited. The ideological imperative behind the grotesque nonsense is that there is no author in control. They are projecting their own minds filled with second-hand ideologies. That we are products of particular cultures, historic period and education and created by them with nothing of our own within; that we are empty vessels filled by culture and propaganda is only half the story. The main writers help to create the culture. There are qualities like intuition, instinct and insight that are beyond language and create feelings in response to people and the world around us immediately.

Marshall McLuhan used to say, the medium is the message, meaning that the form of a medium becomes part of the message, influencing how it is perceived. We can not bring thoughts and feelings into consciousness and contemplate them without language but not all of our thoughts were put there by outside agencies; many are our own likes and dislikes, intuitions, products of instinct and fears, loves, attractions and repulsions. We often meet people and feel ourselves withdrawing inside which is an intuitive warning about them for us. That is from inside. We sometimes see others and dislike them and if we try to befriend them do not get on. The personal is expressed from inner causes and not just received and propagandised opinions. It might be true that realists were reinforcing the myths needed for people to accept a place in the capitalist social formation but now the ideologues are trying to get people to accept their place in the Cultural Marxist formation which is used to justify a much less humane form of capitalism, Globalism.

However, it is the content that fills the structures that make a joke, an ordinary story, or a profound work different and deeper. Middlemarch deepens our understanding of ourselves and others. It expands our consciousness. The content is transmitted to the reader by the words used and explicatory figures of speech. The “social web” is

an example and will be looked at. It is the content that makes it a work of encompassing genius not the structure. It was described by Henry James as “*A loose, baggy, monster.*”

To a large extent it is true that we are made by ideology, religion, propaganda and so on but underneath is the personal self. In personal relationships which extend from the family through the community, the inborn qualities and faults of the self are important. The error is to treat people as empty vessels merely filled by ideology. We have needs and these are not satisfied by just by rational thinking. There is more to us than that and it is what makes us human. I noted above in my piece on Utopia that the emotional needs are sacrificed in rational societies for the sake of efficiency. The examples we have of these from the twentieth-century of the world the Cultural Marxists are trying to recreate are Mao's China and the Soviet Union and they were evil regimes that murdered over 100 million ordinary people.

In *Middlemarch* the Rev. Farebrother says, “*Character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do.*”

This is an excellent metaphor because it is true for many who are swayed by propaganda especially through popular entertainment. These are the shallow people but there are also those with a deeper view of life with principles or convictions and have character rather than personality and do what they believe is right and stand their ground.

Casaubon, was rigid and repressed, a buttoned-up character, unable to face the world or change. A prototype post-Modernist with a retreating mind; one suited for monastic life or life in secular monastery's the universities, where inward-looking post modernists see the text as the centre of their universes and reality as threatening. It is so much easier to turn away from it to safety in the text or pretend it does not exist. The governing beliefs in society have been created by these people and this has led us to a period of chaos where common sense is thought incorrect thinking.

Dorothea learnt from experience and her essential qualities were developed by experience but not extinguished. The term intertextuality

refers to “texts quoting other texts” it is intertextual palimpsest replacing consciousness and myth.

Virginia Wolf’s *To the Lighthouse* is about seeking an artistic vision in which the experience can be encapsulated. It ends with a painter putting a stroke on a canvas and saying, “*There I had my vision.*” To Post Modernists that overarching vision was impossible. There was a shift from the writer to the reader, from life to ideology, from consciousness to the language and a shift from seeking meaning to examining how meaning is created.

Hegel believed that there was an increasing rationalisation of the spirit following The Enlightenment. Even the unconscious has to be rationalised. In my forthcoming book of poetry *King Alfred’s Jewel* I try to create ephebic poetry which is spontaneous and from inspiration. The Enlightenment brought the era of the belief in an inherent human good nature, the perfectability of humankind, and the general progress of rationality. The answer to the human condition was that we could become ever more rational and through rationality create a better world, a utopian order. These were the meta-narratives people had lived by. After the appalling wars of the last century and the evil totalitarian regimes that originated in Utopian thinking we can no longer take these things seriously, but prudently try to understand human nature.

It is clear from experience that people are formed within a culture and a family and worked on by the elites with the propagandising of the orthodox ideology which distorts reality but does not obliterate it. There are also local characteristics which differ by area. People in some areas are open and welcoming to strangers, others more closed where they need to get to know newcomers. Then there are personal qualities which attract or repel others but they are essential to a person be they shallow or deep or otherwise.

Characters like Rosamund Vincy are said to be not presented as individuals but social constructs of Miss. Leman’s Finishing School but that is overstated. She was moulded there and is shallow but there is still a sense of self and personal advantage operating underneath. People use the system for their advantage but that is not being constructed by it. Dorothea the heroine, is fully developed and

individual within her social connections and grows from her inner sources like ardour, honesty, goodness. The inherent faults like naivety are corrected by experience as she lives life. The writer had these thoughts not the narrator and tells us, “*Think no unfair evil of her, pray: she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary; in fact, she never thought of money except as something necessary which other people would always provide.*” (3.27.12).

Those are personal faults not ideological ones. Classic realism described the lives of people in middle-class towns between 1830-70, during the industrial era, and the interactions of the middle-classes and the working people in the town. It presents an ordered and usually stable world which is explained to us by an omniscient narrator. This order is disrupted and we are guided through difficulties until harmony is re-established. It is the long-gone world that Marx argued against.

*Middlemarch* is set in middle England the provincial counties which run down from just under the industrial areas through the centre to just above London. A “March” or “Marchland” was the no man’s lands created by the Normans on borders with Wales and Scotland. These divisions obtain to a lesser extent on the borders between counties. The novel is an opening out of inter relationships and shows individuals good points and failings which makes it realistic. Omniscient author or not Eliot was not God and had human weaknesses but this masterpiece is sharply perceptive. It covers aspects as wide and varied as, political, agricultural, aristocratic, plebeian, religious and scientific. Its ambitions are those of Balzac’s *Human Comedy*. It is a microcosm, local, but also universal; containing both bodies and minds, individuals, families and groups, birth, death, tragedy and comedy.

Depth is created by words and metaphors. They irradiate the sense and subject. Two metaphors for the community are the social web and the underground river. Eliot compares society to a web woven together from various strands of different lives. In her narrative she shows the interrelations of characters through the intersecting and complicating plot lines. Many are related to the Vincy family, for example. There are the hidden connections that come to light such as Ladislaw’s with Bulstrode’s. Lydgate, feeling aloof from the town when he arrives, gets

hopelessly tangled in this web, with Rosamond and Bulstrode's scandal.

Anyone who has travelled and knows provincial towns has experienced the sense that everyone is related. It seems like that but as you get under the surface you realise that they are not literally all related but know one another. The smaller towns are inward-looking, hostile to outsiders and given to feuds within. The larger ones outward looking and in rivalry with other towns. Outsiders are expected to learn their ways and adapt. The middle classes are not as territorial as the local families but they expect newcomers to join them not go against them as Lydgate did.

The underground river nourishes and is exemplified in unworldly Dorothea who puts the needs of others first. This quotation about Dorothea illustrates the metaphor:

*For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it . . . Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive; for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts, and that things are not so ill with you and me as thy might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.*

Mr. Garth works quietly in the background, generously giving more than is expected of him to insure life goes on smoothly around him.

Our attempts to make sense of the world, is validated by Classic Realism which is an attempt to make sense of the world. While the various characters interact and converse they are under the control of the omniscient narrator who explains to us the conversations and even the characters beyond the self-understanding she has given them. Actually, the author created all of it. This idea of and knowledgeable author guiding their creations through tribulations is taking at as reality rather than a realistic creation of reality. We are reading a novel.

The ideologues object that the empiricists never point out that our notions of individuality might be ideologically constructed to make people feel content in the capitalist system. This is universal though as ruling elites usually present themselves as benevolent and flatter the population that they have good lives and are being looked after. It has changed lately with the poor and sick hounded to work or penalised for having too many bedrooms while corporations have cheap labour brought in for them and pay no tax because they are based off shore. The Cultural Marxist writers stopped none of that and, in many cases, provided justifications for it. This is no more unreal than anyone of us commenting on the nature or behaviour of another.

These people knew nothing about their individuality being propagandised and accepted it as real. It was a religious era. To the Victorian middle-classes these realistic novels were synonymous with reality and it liked reading about itself and looking at itself as in "Genre Paintings." It is said the idea was to efface the distinction between text and world and individuality and show the readers individuals just like themselves. To put it plainly they were describing the world around them in a fictional context. They use figures of speech to clarify reality as Eliot describes Lydgate's gradual deterioration into mediocrity from his early idealism:

*Nothing in the world more subtle than the process of their gradual change. In the beginning they inhaled it unknowingly. You and I may have sent some of our breath towards infecting them when we uttered our conforming falsities or drew our silly conclusions or perhaps it came from the vibrations from a woman's glands.*

Eliot addresses the reader throughout in this intimate, conversational manner as "you" whereas earlier fiction writers distanced them with "reader." She is addressing us as participants rather than onlookers. The way we lead our lives is like that of the characters and beneath the surface changes of fashion, manners and language we behave in a similar way now when emotions are in play. Love and hate lie deeper than fashion though the means of expression change as there are more murders with guns now than before they

were invented and there were more murders with swords when they were popular. *Middlemarch* is not just a book, but an exposition of reality.

In 896 pages, there is little action as the aim is for us to understand the characters and how a local society works, how they interact and interweave within their world. It eschews usual novelistic devices like melodrama, caricature, and sensationalism and concentrates on the everyday and the pettiness of small town life whereas with Dickens we are in a world of caricature and melodrama, often with convicts and cruel people. Eliot was writing about the world around her and that is what we call “reality” so she wrote about reality as she saw it. There are always distortions through one's beliefs especially the general beliefs like religion or ideology but there also different individual qualities like a penetrating analyses or being perceptive that allows greater accuracy in seeing what is happening before one. In this case it is imbuing a fictional but representative world with the type of behaviour of people typical in that type of world.

*Middlemarch* is a mediocre, provincial town without a real hero or heroine as it is about the interactions of the whole town and community. The forming of factions and in-fighting are particularly drawn in Lydgate's case. Ideology is not as distorting in empirical analysis as it is to theorists and those self-conscious purveyors of ideologies who avoid reality and present it as a construct. It is affected by personality, personal beliefs and even the shape and size of one's body but it is there outside the beholder.

It is about the ordinary, the unheroic and the familiar to the reader. It is about the failure of the individuals and the effects of the actions of others. Eliot disavowed the idea of fate affecting people's lives and wanted to show that lives are affected by one's decisions and the actions of others. She says of Lydgate:

*In the multitude of middle-aged men who go about their vocations in a daily course determined much in the same way as the tie of their cravats there is always a good number who once meant to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little. The story of their coming to be*

*shapen after the average and fit to be packed by the gross, is hardly ever told even in their consciousness.*

The story *Middlemarch* tells is hardly ever told not because it deals with not triumphs of heroes which is novelistic but the failure to a triumph over the ordinary. Throughout she uses metaphors from science and examines society under a microscope. It is about how individuals are, how they behave in society. Of course, there are no literal webs covering society but the image is an attempt to describe an effect on a life of a collection of people in motion, doing things with and against each other.

In relation to Rosamund Vincy and Miss. Leman Eliot returns to her web metaphor for society. We are not free agents and the web represents the sense of social constriction and is a predatory image with the individual trapped within. It is a story of how Lydgate comes to be shaped and trapped in the web. Dorothea, is the main figure and her story leads to reconciliation at the end between individuality and socialisation. She is caught in the web of socialisation and motherhood but the very last passage advises us that Dorothea remains, “*A finely touched spirit*”. When we read this we assess the characters as if they were real and pronounce some sort of psychological understanding of them. How could Dorothea start well with such an inept, guardian failing to give her wise guidance based on his own experiences and understanding of human nature?

Her career shows that becoming socialised without compromising one's integrity and individuality, providing one has some innate spiritual endowment which is deeper than the social-constructive process, is usual. That is a firm knowledge of self. To ideologues novels impart “*The myths and beliefs necessary to enable people to work in the existing social formation.*” This conformative impulse is present but the ideologues remove the substance, that is human nature and reality from the novel and render it a mere ideological construct to make it safe for their retreating minds.

Dorothea began wanting to improve her community not change the social formation. She wanted to be a radical, she wanted to reform cottages, marry Milton and be Saint Theresa. The story is how she

took her place within the community and kept her individuality. It offers a pattern of the individual taking their place in society but is complicated by Eliot's ambiguity about socialisation. Dickens was aware of institutionalisation in Victorian England and *Bleak House* refers to greater state control through the spread of bureaucracy; the proliferation of the legal system, offices and office clerks as representative man. He was saying individuals were flourishing as eccentrics.

*Mill on the Floss* like *Middlemarch* is set 40 years earlier in the 1830s. In St. Oggs there are quaint figures with quaint views like Mr. Tollivar, the miller. There is alarm at the spread of education, information, circulatory magazines and libraries which threatened the quaintness by embracing provincial communities within a centralised state net. The threat is that this centralisation will destroy the innocence of small communities like St. Oggs which make it quaint and not bring it into the network of the state even though the book protests against the lack of education of these communities.

There is a similar ambiguity in *Middlemarch*. Lydgate is trapped in a social web after arriving in Middlemarch amid much gossip and has to compromise himself by voting for Tyke against his will and is normalised by Rosamond in a mediocre town.

The scientific metaphor is prominent in the novel as Eliot examines the society under a microscope. The social web is like a network of cells that traps Lydgate but enables Dorothea's influence to spread as she adapts to it but preserves self; she is allowed to in her second relationship but for Lydgate love made him conform to mediocrity. "*Municipal town and rural parish gradually make fresh threads of connection,*" Eliot observes, showing how these work as the railways are installed, or elections take place. There is a description of how Rosamond "entangles" Lydgate with an interwoven gossamer web of glances which is connected to a marvellous image of Rosamond in chapter 27:

*An eminent philosopher among my friends, who can dignify even your ugly furniture by lifting it into the serene light of science, has shown me this pregnant little fact. Your pier-glass or extensive surface*

*of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! The scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection.*

The pier glass analogy is Eliot's most famous metaphor for egoism. It illustrates, as she points out, that we interpret all things with a bias as long as we only use the light of our selfishness to see by. Rosamond Vincy, is like a child and cannot imagine anything apart from her own interests or viewpoint.

Dorothea is bemused in Rome as she stares at statues with marble eyes "*that seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world*", while the red drapery hung in St Peter's basilica entangled her eye-line and "*spread itself everywhere like a disease of the retina*". Biology, society, the self and others are linked through this powerful metaphor with increasing implications.

There is no outside society, no neutral land on the outskirts. Individuality exists in society. They only become individuals within this cellular network and are only individual in relation to others. Darwin's influence is shown in the case studies in adaptation to environments.

The novel opens on Dorothea's dream of doing something great and in the penultimate paragraph of the novel she returns to those ambitions and comments:

*Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion. For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual*

*life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's burial: the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone. But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know.*

Eliot's Conservatism is clear in both *Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*. In “*Mill*” Maggie is cleverer than her brother but not allowed an education. Eliot regards this as unfair. Maggie follows the pattern of duty to family when she returns to St.Oggs rather than go off with Steven Guest. Her story is seen as a career of self-abnegation and stoical resignation to her circumstances:

*No, I don't sacrifice you—I couldn't sacrifice you,” she said, as soon as she could speak again; “but I can't believe in a good for you, that I feel, that we both feel, is a wrong toward others. We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or for another; we can't tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us,—for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. I know this belief is hard; it has slipped away from me again and again; but I have felt that if I let it go forever, I should have no light through the darkness of this life.*

The authorial voice intrudes frequently. For example, “... *to face now,—that sad, patient, loving strength which holds the clue of life,—and saw that the thorns were forever pressing on its brow.*”

This a Christ image and suggests her life is taking on a Christ-like suffering as a woman of sorrows.

Eliot is explicit that being socialised into the web of society involves to an extent, renunciation of individual fulfilment. In *Mill on the Floss* Maggie trifles with renunciation which foreshadows what is to come when she is reading Thomas a Kempis and we are told she is enjoying it too much which suggests playing a part. Similarly, in *Middlemarch* we are told that Dorothea enjoys giving up, like horse

riding and is playing at renunciation as she later gives up Casaubon's fortune for Will. They learn what renunciation really is through experience. Eliot tells us that Dorothea “*learns through this sympathy with the sorrows of her fellow beings.*” The message is not just socialisation but socialisation through sorrow which is a theme in the novel and is part of her conservatism.

She objects in her books to the roles of women, marriage, no female education; but she was no cynical or polemic writer, she advocates endurance in a non-radical philosophy of patience. In *Mill on the Floss* she takes pains to show the development of St. Oggs from Roman times, the slow, gradual building up of a community which has deep roots in the past.

Darwin caused the rejection of the theory of Catastrophism. This is that history and evolution proceeded through sudden lurches or catastrophes an era or type of creature was wiped-out instantly – crises lead into new modes and eras and dominant types. Darwin replaced this with a model of progress through natural selection. Natural selection is a gradual development of species over millions of years imperceptibly. Species did not replace the former but laboriously developed from it and this influenced Eliot's thinking. Her comment on “*The growing good of the world*” indicates that she knows it is getting better but slowly through small human acts of kindness. She rejects sudden, catastrophic change even if it would remedy injustices. Those changes belong to Romance not science; Melodrama, not Realism.

As we look at these cellular organisms under the microscope we see, as Darwin had shown, evolution is a slow process. The Darwinian process indicates why Eliot set these two novels at the time of the Reform Act in 1832 - *Mill on the Floss* refers to the burning of York minster in 1829 - the movement for reform created great optimism for the future but in fact the extension of the franchise was limited. It failed to manifest the expectations it had aroused and this suggested the failure of the Catastrophe model of change and the hope that society can be changed instantly was quashed.

The deep insights into human nature and aptly expressing them in descriptions that enhance our understanding of the insights. Casaubon,

having just been told he is mortally ill has his growing realisation explicated:

*When the commonplace 'We must all die' transforms itself suddenly into the acute consciousness 'I must die - and soon', then death grapples us, and his fingers are cruel; afterwards he may come to fold us in his arms as our mother did, and our last moment of dim earthly discerning may be like the first.*

Dorothea in the disappointment of newlywed misery:

*That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.*

The political doldrums of Middlemarch and St. Oggs, the lesson of gradually working within the web is being inculcated. Even in Dorothea's moves to London as an MP's wife not a radical. Eliot wrote a more genial world than Dicken's or Mrs. Gaskell's slums.

Not all succeed: Maggie Tulliver could not adapt. Her fate is explained by evolutionary metaphors. Like Hallam in "In Memoriam" she has been born too soon like an aberrant organism whose talents and desires outstrip the society into which she is born and progress is too slow. Female education does come but in the meantime she exemplifies:

*I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie - how it had acted on young natures in many generations... The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented in this way in every town and by hundreds of obscure hearths. (4.1.3)*

Eliot does not minimise that suffering in *Mill on the Floss* of the nobler organism that can not adapt to the rate of change Maggie's martyrdom is given prominence but this element has lessened when she began *Middlemarch* twelve years later. It is present in Lydgate whose medical ambitions sought to race ahead of progress as he adapts to failure. Dorothea, was similarly endowed with talent but adapted to the time. The Dorothea who dies out is nicknamed "Dodo" by her sister. One of Darwin's chapters was entitled *The Struggle For existence*" and Eliot writes about the struggle for existence and adapting the self to that existence.

The final paragraph:

*Her finely touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.*

She affirms Dorothea's course of action in conforming to expectations and becoming a wife and mother but preserves her individuality which her husband allowed her to do whereas Rosamund stifled Lydgate.

This profound, complex book, which is not forced into a tight structure, has an ending which is schematic. Will becomes a Liberal MP and he and his wife Dorothea move to London and she becomes his helpmeet. One aspect is that the good of the world depends on unhistoric acts, like Dorothea's domesticity; while, historic acts are done by Will, the MP. But this marriage attains harmony. In *Bleak House* Dicken's rejects Parliamentary effects for the home – opposite to *Middlemarch*.

## Describing Reality

A novel can be read in two ways. As a story to see what happens or to see how it the effect was achieved. The first is reading a story the second are aspects of form in fiction. The possibilities of the raw material modify the idea in progress and prompt new ideas during the practice of writing. The original conception would also be influenced by previous works both in idea and technique. That is previous works the writer has read and what was studied at college. The original idea is often not known fully and develops in practice as the writing gets underway and some things are dropped and others developed.

The writers via medium is language. We choose which words to use and create descriptive metaphors but there is a natural predisposition to use certain features which is not necessarily a purely rational operation but also has inspiration and often both are at work. What the writer has to say can be largely unconscious and these aspects come out in the writing.

Previous works show the different techniques used that are available to a current writer as each sentence has some connection with previous sentences and the way nouns, verbs and adjectives describe what exists or is like what exists. Sometimes models from life are used, sometimes amalgams of subjects, sometimes inventions to be like existing objects. There are differences between writing history, fantasy and realist fiction. With latter you decide what type of narrator to use, what point of view to use and how to represent speech. How do you write time, as long on a short period as a long one or the opposite; and do you repeat the same events in the work.

Students need to know how writing works and what effects it has. To a writer it helps to understand the techniques used to create the effects and that comes from study but it can also be instinct or intuition and flow freely.

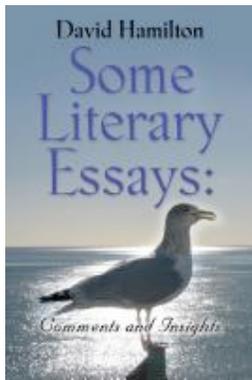
Henry James wrote *Washington Square* after he had read a novel by Honore Balzac. "*Balzac offers us the facts,*" he declared. Balzac had "*carefully observed human life, French society as portrayed in the novel and has produced a fiction that contains the essence of his observations and is in that sense true to life.*" There is the paradox that

while Balzac was writing fiction he was conveying truth but the fictional story is a vehicle for observed reality. The world and the language were already there when we started exploring.

When you hear a concrete word an image of the thing denoted pops into your mind not an image of something else; this is not so with abstractions. When the image comes it is a cultural phenomenon and the link is not between two objects but the one spoken. Many words have no inherent connection to the objects denoted but many do. An analogy that has been suggested is a dress code or Traffic lights. This is that we accept that red means stop, green means go but if we decided purple meant go and orange meant stop there would be no difference to the traffic system. This separation from reality is fallacious and an attempt to leave people without orientation in space and time like Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*.

If you see a red light in a proper place you know to stop if you are driving but not if you are walking unless it is on the walking area. This suggests that meanings are produced contextually and depend on the system of distinctions in which they are caught up. Meanings are not necessarily arbitrary. Red is the colour of blood and in violent times would easily come to refer to danger and green nature, because of the wide spans of surrounding grass.

When we first walked forth people began making distinctions between things and giving them names to bring order into chaos. The obvious ones would be the stars and planets but we can see from Pythagoras notating music that an ordering process was at work. The days were separated and given names as were the months and in some places the years; these were further divided into hours, minutes and seconds to bring order into the world. These correspond to the different shades of light and are not all arbitrary. They are responses to observation and differ in different countries due to the differences in observed phenomena.



*This collection of literary essays re-considers some important dramatists of the last hundred years: Shaw, Beckett and their influences like Ibsen. Brecht was an influence on the three ideological dramatists considered, David Edgar, Howard Brenton and Edward Bond. It considers Thomas More's Utopia because of its influence on contemporary Utopian thinking and how Shakespeare created depth of character. It looks at three intrinsically fascinating styles of Elizabethan poetry: lyric, Metaphysical and Cavalier poets and verse satirists.*

# **Some Literary Essays**

## **Comments and Insights**

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