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What Is Applied Literature?

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Abstract

Applied literature is a term that is the outcome of a need to put literature to tangible uses in the 'real' world. A medical practitioner looking for a definition of life, for instance, finds literature a useful source for the answer. With paradigm shifts in scientific studies, interdisciplinarity has been a method to overcome the alienations that resulted from the isolation of disciplines from one another. Some would go even further to problematize the concept of being solely confined to the limits of disciplines or the textuality of literature because they are still hindrances to coming into direct contact with the 'real' world. Arguing that tangible real world should lie at the core of applied literary studies, this paper is an attempt to show how a path may be opened up towards the diverse nature of reality in literary studies through a critical review of relevant aspects of literary theory and by drawing upon studies of cultures.

Keywords: Applied literature, Reality, Interdiciplinary, Paradigm shift, Literacy

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Introduction

Applied literature is a term that is held in this paper to be positively in line with the recent tendency in social sciences and humanities that both research and practice should be effect-driven activities in the sense that societies and individuals should be benefited from them. (See Fulcher and Davidson, 2007, for instance.) According to this tendency, 'applied literature' has had interdisciplinary realizations in medical humanities, for instance, where the medical practitioner seeks a definition of life that is missing from his/her vocational training:

> What's missing in a vocational training? … It leaves out everything that makes us uniquely human. Where (in a vocational program) do we train for understanding, suffering and joy? Where do we gain ideals and models—for motivations, for patterning our lives, for fashioning our goals, emotions, attitudes, and character? Where do we think about and entertain purposes, goals, and styles of life? Where do we gain perspective on our own life, on others', and the relationships between them? These things don't just happen, however much we like to believe they do (Clouser quoted by Jones, Wear and Friedman, 2014, p. 17).

Such a use of literature for the purpose of overcoming the shortcomings in medical students' education, from an applied literature perspective, turns literature into a more serious subject matter for educators all over the world because the interdisciplinary nature of such an approach to literature should make it subject to innumerable understandings and definitions. Establishing relationship between, say, medicine and literature, ecology and literature, anthropology and literature and etc. would cause literature to be prone to various types of interpretations. To arrive at a more practical and more fruitful understanding of literature from an applied literature perspective, it is held in this paper that, first of all, it should be sought in the context of the scrutiny of theory and practice in literary studies common to academic contexts because it might be an addition to (or an extraction from) a rich literature in the field whose negligence may eventually result in misconceptions and misunderstandings. In other words, it should be noted whether literary theory can contribute to a discussion of applied literature and, if so, how much, and whether there might be patches of blindness left behind by literary theory that should be overcome. With this rationale in the background, the focus of the study is then intended to be on the literary theories that seem to possess the capacity to pave the way towards relating literature to the real world so that 'applied literature' can eventually turn into an approach to deal with real-life problems. (Within the scope of this paper, of course, just a few studies will be highlighted. For a thorough scrutiny of the topic, a book-length study is needed.) Secondly, however, there is a strong inclination in this study to go beyond 'theory' if the general intention is to deal with the real world. The rationale for this comes from studies that do not find compatibility between theory and the reality of the world. For instance, one is apt to hear in linguistics departments all over the world nowadays that the distinction

between linguistics as a 'pure' science and its application in any sense as 'applied' science is irrelevant because what happens in the real world questions the credibility of such a distinction and the justification of linguistics as a 'pure' science. Roy Harris (2001) argues how the real world issues regarding the study of languages go against what Ferdinand de Saussure portrayed as a comprehensive account of linguistics. One of Saussure's aims, according to Harris, was, theoretically speaking, to describe all known languages and record their history. Harris argues, however, that

> Progress in describing all known languages and recording their history has not been spectacular. However one decides to count the number of languages in the world (a permanently contentious issue), the majority have still not been studied in any depth. A few, on the other hand, are disproportionately well documented. These tend to be languages with the greatest number of speakers and high cultural prestige, where practical demand for teaching materials is considerable. (p. 119)

From such a perspective, therefore, the term 'applied literature' has an important implication: whatever the value of 'literature', it should have tangible practical uses.

The concept 'applied literature' is not new; George Howe in his 1920 paper entitled "An Applied Literature" wrote: "We are familiar with the distinction in the realm of scientific study between pure science and applied science. May we not apply the same terms to literature, and recognize the distinction between pure literature and applied literature?" (p. 437) Studying Roman literature against Greek literature, Howe suggested that the former is an 'applied literature' whereas the latter is a 'pure literature.'

> Roman literature is an applied literature. It is concerned with putting knowledge to work in the actual daily life of men and women. … Knowledge of truth as such is of no value; it acquires value only to the extent to which it can be made to work. (p. 438)

One might rely on Howe's view of "no truth value of knowledge detached from the actual daily life of men and women" then and argue that the necessity for pure science is obsolete now and what matters is the tackling of the real world for effect-driven purposes. From such a perspective, one might ask, "What would be the use of, say, teaching, for any reasons, a literary work that is regarded as a 'masterpiece' by the elite to a group of students who can in no way relate to it?" There was a debate about the English Department syllabus at the University of Adelaide in the 90s when I was studying there. There were opponents of English Literature claiming that to relate the study of literature to the real world, Australian literary works, including works by Aborigines, should replace English Literature because Australians did not think that they could relate to it more than they could to their own literature. (Birch, 1989, was a relevant book for me then.)

There are then needs and tendencies today to put literature to good use for practical purposes. From an applied literature perspective, literature isolated from life world situations is an irrelevant entity. Interdisciplinarity, a concept that was not available to Howe, appears to be to some extent a remedy in our times for the probable detachment of literature from real-life problems. However, it is held in this study that the challenge in line with relating literature to the real world requires the scrutiny of literary theory itself to see the weaknesses and strengths in it in this regard so that the student of literature may be enabled to experience the real world through both interdisciplinarity and literature itself. The paper, therefore, continues with a critical review of theories of literature that seem to stand in close affinity with the concept of applied literature. However, the ethnocentric tendencies in the theories considered lead to the studies of non-Western cultures, the Australian Aborigines in this case, to reveal how the real world might challenge our views of and approaches to literature.

Pluralism in literary theory

For a 'discipline' of applied literature that is supposed to relate to the everyday life the useful aspects of contemporary literary theory should not be neglected. One practical aspect of today's theory is the tendency towards pluralistic views of literature. In his *Literary Theory: The Basics*, Hans Bertens makes this statement: "The contemporary literary-critical world is a fascinating mixture of the old, the new, and the old in new guises (which does not imply a negative judgement)" (p. 93). Bertens' statement is a concluding remark to a discussion about poststructuralism leading to the concept that it is no longer acceptable within literary studies to have a true view of the world. For many critics and theorists, it is then theoretically unfounded to be able to know the world. But, for Bertens, it does not mean that there is no room for the traditionalists any more. The traditionalists themselves, who used to insist on essentialism in the sense that the essence of literature was achievable, have accepted that their assumptions no longer have the status they used to have, as a result of which they present their assumptions as a programme, or even only as a point of departure, as a perspective that will still say useful and illuminating things about literary texts. "All the time, they are fully aware that that perspective is questionable and is not the last word" (pp. 92-93). It can be a fascinating point of departure for applied literature because, when no theory or criticism has the last word in literary studies, the definition of 'literature' should be in a state of flux, and this is the view applied literature finds practical. Roger Fowler in his 'Literature,' a chapter in *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, takes sides with the view that Literature with a capital L is a construct of 'theory,' which eventually results in different views of it. Fowler considers it a realization of relativity in literary studies and entirely healthy:

> So 'Literature' is a different entity depending on what theory constructs the concept, whether 'it' is theorized by Roman Jakobson, by Northrop Frye, by Wolfgang Iser, and so on. The books by Eagleton, and by Jefferson and Robey, … display exactly this process of different theories constructing different entities with the same name 'Literature'. This relativity is entirely healthy: it shows the vitality, creativity and intellectual importance of literary studies (p. 4).

Demystifying literature

There is also a characteristic in Fowler's approach to literature that can, to some extent, contribute to the development of applied literature. A major objective in Fowler's view of literature is that it should be demystified. From an applied literature perspective, the demystification of literature is an effective step to get closer to applied purposes. Although Fowler would not suggest anti-theory or anti-scientism, the demystification of literary studies he refers to sounds to some extent like a legacy of Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical, anti-scientism stance in philosophy of language that leads to ordinary language philosophy, about which Stephen Muhlhall (2017) in an interview says that in this kind of philosophy: "…you get a radically fundamental critique of philosophy as an enterprise. It has to lose its metaphysical aspirations and its main business becomes that of curbing its own tendency towards metaphysical statement." If anti-theory and anti-scientism is attributed to the concept of 'demystification,' it is because it is supposed to be a challenge against the condition of modern society where, as Fowler (p. 7) argues, the discourses of critics and theoreticians continuously articulate norms and values which create the imagined general concept of Literature. Before the emergence of the awareness that no perspective of literature is the last word, the tendency among critics and theoreticians was to exclude and defy whatever lay outside of their ideological limits; Eagleton, a prolific scholar with a Marxist tendency, for instance, would not agree that Marxism could not be the last word in many aspects of literary studies. And the relativity in literary studies suggested by Fowler would not be welcomed by, say, a scholar who believed in essentialism. Fowler's relativity is quite ground-breaking when he states that his position is that Literature cannot be assumed to exist. Literature with a capital L, for Fowler (p. 10), is a cultural construct with its roots in the history of English-speaking Britain and America, "where there is a common economic organization, an integrated publishing and reviewing industry, and very similar educational systems." From this perspective, according to Fowler, for France, or Germany, or Russia, the history and the possible theoretical positions would be different. And there would be no Literature any more but the word 'literature,' which, for Fowler, has been an instrument in a specific theorizing of the institutionalised category "Literature" in his culture. In such an approach, Literature is no longer an object but a realization of the practices of the production, circulation and reception of entities that are theorized as literary works.

Such a view of literature is a reminder of Stanley Fish's concept of 'interpretive community'. (One might relate this view to many other literary theories such as Marxist literary theory and the New Historicism. Fish's 'interpretive community' is preferred here because it is a well-articulated concept to present the topic in a succinct manner.)

Fish's concept of "interpretive community" is the outcome of his challenge of the theorization of literature almost in the sense Fowler challenges the generality or universality of Literature. The definition, recognition and reading of a literature is bound to a specific community's view of what it is and how it should be approached. Fish's often-quoted example for this is his classroom activity with his own students who had been generally learning how to tackle Christian symbols in poetry. Fish wrote a few names on the board, told the students that that was a poem and asked them to interpret it. What followed was what Fish predicted to happen: they read it as a poem and interpreted it in religious terms. And the conclusion was that "Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them" (p. 327). Fish's view of this was that it is the "interpretive community" that determines what Literature is and how it should be tackled. There are "interpretive communities" then (a reminder of Fowler's view of Literature belonging to English-speaking Britain and America) and their views, according to Fish, can be in a state of constant change due to the changes happening in and to the communities. This should lead to the significance of the study of the practices of the production, circulation and reception of what is realized as literary works. In a nutshell, literature as a process should be studied in its context with its place and roles in social practice.

Such views should be regarded as a step towards the demystification of literature; it is part of demystification to know what is said about literature is a realization of theorization. Even it might be argued that Fowler's own view of literature, which is text oriented, needs demystification. Rejecting literature as 'imagination,' 'art,' or whatsoever, Fowler, inspired by text linguistics, suggests that Literature should be replaced with literary texts. Fowler seems to sigh with relief when he comes down to textuality of literature at the end of his article:

> The processes and values involved are easier to understand if one drops 'Literature' and simply talks about literary texts, their structures and their many roles in social practice. Such a simplification would surely also help literary education in schools, and advanced literary studies among specialists, by replacing mysterious notions like 'imagination' and 'art' with operable analytic concepts and tools. (p. 24)

Fowler's view of textuality as a simplification becomes a source of complication once non-Western cultures are taken into account. To use Fish's views, it can be argued that Fowler's concept of 'literary texts' belongs to a particular 'interpretive community' whose ethnocentric orientation becomes foregrounded when it is

realized that there might be 'illiterate' communities that do not possess a literary tradition in the Western sense of it. Textuality, therefore, seems to turn into a limitation on the way to come to close encounter with the life world.

The question of 'literacy'

'Textuality,' an essential element in Fowler's theory of literature, lies deep at the heart of Western culture's definition of 'civilisation' that is based on 'literacy' defined in terms of access to an alphabet and a writing system. Walter J. Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, now a classic in the field, is a highlight of both literacy in its Western sense and cultures that show tendency to orality. One sub-topic in Ong is that, although language is basically oral, literature (Latin *literatura*, from *litera*, letter of the alphabet), in the sense we have seen it in Fowler and regardless of its characteristics and values, is a possession of literate cultures. Therefore, it results from this view that not every culture has a literature:

> Indeed, language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages – possibly tens of thousands – spoken in the course of human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all. Of the some 3000 languages spoken that exist today only some 78 have a literature …. (Ong, p. 7)

What one may expect from such a view is that literary studies should then be confined to cultures with a literature only. Or, instead, it might be argued that literacy is dominant in today's world and that, with literacy already there, literature could be added to any literacy agenda. But, from an applied literature perspective, which promotes the concept of dealing with *the event-world*, working with only *visual object-world of texts* is problematic; forgetfulness of the real world is not a characteristic applied literature could bear. Also, it would not agree with the taken-for-granted nature of 'literacy' without a challenge.

Although they believe in the complexity of oral culture itself, scholars such as Ong hold that people of a culture totally unfamiliar with writing and literacy would have consciousness quite different from a highly literate people (pp. 174-176). And what they have in view is that literacy and writing would change the oral culture consciousness in the direction of 'advancement' and 'progress.' The terms 'event-world' and 'visual object-world of texts' are those of Ong's and they sound rather postmodern and are a sign of his view of the significance of oral culture *per se*. They are a reminder of Jurgen Habermas' (1990) concept of how Modernism is characterised by a distinction between art-world and life-world. According to this distinction, high culture art-world that relies on the technical use of materials by the artist is detached from the low culture of life-world where ordinary people live their everyday lives. Modernists would desire to affect low culture consciousness by high culture art for 'advancement' purposes. This leads to a critique of Modernism in the

guise of Postmodernism, however, in the sense that Modernism as a cultural movement is doomed to failure because it cannot have a right understanding of people's lives and needs. In the same vein, then, the Ong view that literacy is for progress and advancement is not taken for granted.

The encounter between the highly modern Western culture on the one hand and "primitive" Indigenous cultures on the other in Australia is a good example of how orality and literacy may stand face to face as the life-world and art-world do in Modernism. According to Penny van Toorn (2006, p. 8), scholars like Ong assume that writing's impact is inherent in the nature of alphabetic script and 'literacy itself,' a view that is called the 'autonomous' model of literacy. Van Toorn argues that "In doing so, it takes insufficient account of contextual matters such as ideology, institutions and socio-political relations; in other words, it overlooks the effects of the specific circumstances and contexts in which writing and literacy enter Indigenous life-worlds" (p. 9). A very serious criticism of this model of literacy is that there is the assumption that the movement from orality to literacy is a natural phenomenon on the way to 'advancement.' Van Toorn finds it Eurocentric:

> The connection between literacy and cultural 'advancement' is embedded in the English language in terms such as 'illiterate' and 'pre-literate'. Words such as these keep alive the assumption that 'humankind is characterised by "a will to writing", that writing is a universal cultural goal, and that all cultures are somewhere along the road to writing.'… The autonomous model is thus central to grand, Eurocentric narratives of cultural progress. (p. 9)

But, as van Toorn (p. 9) argues, there is a second approach to writing and literacy, according to which writing's impact should be accounted for in relation to the contextual matters such as ideology, institutions and socio-political relations. It is called the ideological model of literacy, according to which writing and literacy are never practised in vacuum and thus literacy is not an autonomous force in history. There are certainly ideologies and particular conceptions of literacy and there are institutions to enforce them. Therefore,

> … there is no such singular thing as 'literacy itself', no single set of reading and writing practices that are inherently and invariably correct, but instead a multitude of ways to practise literacy. Literacy can therefore only be validly examined in context, at particular sites, rather than in abstract general terms.

The concept 'literacy in context' strikes interesting notes that may not sound so common. In the confrontation of a highly civilised culture with a 'primitive' culture, how can the primitive culture claim for a stance on an equal level with the civilised culture in terms of literacy? (This topic reminds me of Benjamin Lee Whorf's 'linguistic relativity', in Carroll, 1956.) The discussions and debates about it in the Australian cultural context are quite tangible because Australia is a particular place where a highly modern culture has come face to face with a very 'primitive' culture;

there are, therefore, two human cultures quite alien to on another at a time they can be studied like never before. Now the question is "How could one strike a balance in terms of literacy between these two cultures worlds apart from one another?" A review of *Walkabout*, a 1971 movie about Australia, one from among many, can reveal how literacies can be viewed in context. Among many interpretations of the movie, it can be seen as a realization of what may be called 'Aboriginal literacy'. After a European father commits suicide at the outskirts of Sydney, his children, a sixteen-year-old girl and an eight-year-old boy, are lost in the outback Australia. They would not survive if they did not come across an Aboriginal boy on his way to young manhood in a ritual journey through the outback; "an adolescent aborigine would go on a 'walkabout' of six months in the outback, surviving (or not) depending on his skills at hunting, trapping and finding water in the wilderness" (Ebert, 1997). A 'walkabout' then is a realization of a 'literacy' of how to tackle the 'wilderness' which is no longer wilderness but a place for living once the 'outback-literate' young Aborigine (re)discovers it. I would call it 'rediscovery' by the individual because the young Aborigine's ancestors did discover it before and lived in total harmony with/in it according to their literacy of it for centuries without any damage to it. However, for the 'literate' European people there could not be any affinity with what they regarded as the exotic 'wilderness' unless they could change and reform it radically according to their own needs and thought plans, what might eventually result in the destruction and devastation of nature. Although Ebert is not happy with the concept that the movie is "the heartwarming story of how the girl and her brother are lost in the outback and survive because of the knowledge of the resourceful aborigine," his concluding paragraph on the 'relationship' between the European girl and the Aboriginal boy can be taken, at least at its face value, as a support for the view that there are different notions of knowledge and 'literacy' when it is contextualized:

> The film is deeply pessimistic. It suggests that we all develop specific skills and talents in response to our environment, but cannot easily function across a broader range. It is not that the girl cannot appreciate nature or that the boy cannot function outside his training. It is that all of us are the captives of environment and programming: That there is a wide range of experiment and experience that remains forever invisible to us, because it falls in a spectrum we simply cannot see.

From an applied literature perspective, then, the notion that "there are experiences falling in a spectrum we simply cannot see" is extendable to every culture and every community regardless of their level of 'literacy' or 'civilisation.' And once two different cultures encounter one another, as in Australia, the inability to see different experiences would result in misunderstanding and miscommunication. According to Ebert, *Walkabout* is about the "mystery of communication. It ends with lives that are destroyed, in one way or another, because two people [the European girl and the

Aboriginal boy] could not invent a way to make their needs and dreams clear." But let us hope that Ebert would not hold that proper communication necessitates literacy in English as a common language for communication because, according to van Toorn (p. 11), in many colonial contexts, traditional Indigenous worldviews, languages and modes of socio-political organisation have been seriously undermined by the introduction of literacy in that sense. Such a phenomenon stands against the significance attributed to orality in 'traditional' cultures. Communication, from an applied literature perspective, is not a matter of eradication or exclusion of one culture for the sake of the other. It is, rather, a matter of how, to use the terminology from applied linguistics, to communicate on the basis of 'interactive competence' (Fulcher and Davidson, 2007), according to which the interlocutors from different cultures learn to help one another, to interact with one another to procure the ability to communicate with each other. An important point van Toorn refers to with regard to the colonial undermining of oral cultures and the intention to change them systematically is that, although there are losses in oral cultures under colonialism, there are also transformations and adaptations of traditional Indigenous practices that result from "the normal dynamism and exposure to otherness that so-called 'traditional' cultures are accustomed to" (p. 11). The adaptations and transformations van Toorn argues for are the reason why Indigenous people the world over celebrate the survival of their cultures, though there are times they mourn the losses.

For the 'superior' Western culture, the 'inferior' primitive culture seems to be an empty container ready to be filled up with the precious belongings of the Western culture. Literacy with all its ingredients including language, literature and religion is the valuable possession given to primitive cultures. But the point is that, as van Toorn's study shows, 'primitive' cultures are not empty but have their own complicated knowledge systems that play a vital role in the transformations of what is introduced to them both before and after schooling. Thus, under the concept of 'writing before literacy', van Toorn (71-92) provides examples of how Aborigines carved letters of the English alphabet on their tools before formal schooling to create and imply their meanings resulting from their own culture before the European reading and writing practices. Also, her case study shows how Biraban, an Aborigine fluent both in English and in the Aborigine language Awakabal, who worked with the missionary Lancelot Threlkeld to render the Gospel into Awakabal, relates a dream of his which should be regarded as an understanding of Christianity from an Indigenous religion's perspective.

According to van Toorn, Elizabeth Hamilton Dunlop, the first Australian poet to attempt transliteration of Aboriginal songs, found in 1848 a strong sense of spirituality in Biraban's narrative of his dream. Biraban's narrative of his understanding of Christianity and Dunlop's attempt to find Aboriginal spirituality in

it seem to challenge, to some extent, Ebert's pessimistic view of people that are total "captives to their environment and programming." He might be right when he says there is a wide range of experiment and experience that remains forever invisible to us, but what counts is the attempt to deconstruct obstacles around us and before our eyes to see them. Obstacles are everywhere and can result from anything: culture, prejudice, science. Literary theory, then, insisting on literacy and textuality, can blind its practitioners towards 'illiterate' oral cultures that do not seem to have formal literature in the Western sense of it, and in the same vein, anthropology studying oral literature by people of oral cultures would go astray if it is confined to Western concepts of literacy, literature and research methods. I wonder how much Mrs Dunlop's account of Biraban's dream is compatible with the Aborigines' understanding of it in general and his own view of the dream in particular. However, a characteristic in Mrs Dunlop's work makes it worthy enough to be taken seriously: she was close enough to the Aborigines to realize that Biraban was regarded as a visionary and spiritual leader by them. (See van Toorn, pp. 46-53.) Let us hope that Mrs Dunlop's portraits of Biraban and Aborigines were the outcomes of a singular and personal experience rather than the products of genre constraints and enduring rhetorical forms. (For a discussion of discipline-oriented accounts of anthropological topics see Thomas, 1991.)

Conclusion

There is a very positive tendency in academic contexts today to have activities that are effect-driven. According to this tendency, studies are not to be confined within the school limits; they are to deal with real world issues, solve people's problems and bring about changes to the world. The good researcher is the curious wo/man who looks for questions to answer around her/him and who helps solve problems people and individuals might have. One might point to the traditional distinction between pure science and applied science and claim that the activity is not a new one and that it has had a long history. What applied science must do is to apply the findings in pure science to solve real world problems. But this dichotomy and the direction from one to the other that seems to be a routine activity is not a welcomed one in more recent approaches to science. Where does pure science take place? Some would call pure science the outcome of 'armchair research', in which the research takes place without the researcher entering the field of research. Findings in pure science are mostly of metaphysical nature; they result from the researcher's speculations and theorization of the phenomenon s/he intends to study. But who is the producer of pure science? A person standing out and above history? Not affected by any language, culture, ideology or socio-political relations? In linguistics, Saussure's theory of language as *langue* and Chomsky's as **competence** are clear realizations of pure science. They both find the real world realizations of *langue* and **competence**, which are *parole* and **performance**, respectively, insignificant. Nevertheless, their methodologies have their roots in the history of the Western

science and the Cartesian dichotomy of 'mind and body' distinction. Theorizing literature detached from and regardless of the realities of the world would fall within the domain of pure science.

Applied literature can be regarded as an attempt to release literature from the entanglements of pure theorization to put it to good use in people's everyday lives. As any other topic in today's academic context, applied literature can have numerous realizations. Interdisciplinarity and intertextuality are methods to apply literature to life world issues. In this paper under the influence of cultural studies it was held that different cultures should have different understandings of literature. Different understandings should mean different presuppositions and preconceptions of the topic resulting in hindrances and patches of blindness preventing everyone including the researcher from seeing the reality of the world. Applied literature should be a context-oriented activity then. Studies supporting it should contribute to the view that literature, literacy, reading, writing and knowledge are not fixed and stable concepts because they are all context-bound issues and in a state of flux. Their understanding by the researcher requires her close encounter with each of them in their context of use and 'theories' would be useful tools if only they could drive the researcher closer to the life world. A review of a study of the encounter between the highly modern Western culture and Aborigines as an example of 'primitive' 'illiterate' culture was an attempt to challenge the Western view of the textuality of literacy and literature, which leads in academic contexts to the exclusion of 'illiterate' cultures from the domain of literary studies. An applied literature, therefore, based upon solely the Western literary theory would have no room for cultures with a strong tendency towards orality. The researcher in applied literature should tackle neither literature nor her subject(s) as if they are known objects/things standing there to be used by her. A contextual knowledge, far from any presuppositions or preconceptions, of the people and their understanding of literature is needed to have an effect-driven tackling of literature for appropriate applied purposes.

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