

---

# Literacies, Hermeneutics, and Literature

VESA SUOMINEN AND PIRJO TUOMI

---

## ABSTRACT

With the development of new information and communication technologies, new concepts of extending the concept of *literacy* have emerged, such as media literacy, computer literacy, and information literacy. This paper addresses *literary literacy* as a form of extended literacies. The notion of literary here comprehends widely various fields of literature, with artistic literature as one, although in a sense paradigmatic, instance. The aspects of reading and literacy emphasized in this paper will have particular educational significance in contexts of general school education. Hermeneutics is a classical discipline of how we should read. It emphasizes aspects of appropriative, or *Bildung*-oriented, reading that we can oppose to the instrumental use of what one reads. Within hermeneutics, and particularly the sociological studies of literature, the paper also finds foundations for critical reading. There would be, however, a tension between the fundamentally hermeneutical appropriative literacy and critical questioning, and the notion of literary literacy should contain a dialect between them. The paper emphasizes the significance of literary literacy, since there is a danger that it disappears behind more instrumentally emphasized notions of literacy. Similarly, there is a risk that the everyday plausibility of the demand of being critical suffocates the appropriative aspects of literacy and reading.

## INTRODUCTION

With the development of new information and communication technologies, a set of new concepts of various literacies has emerged, such as media literacy, computer literacy, and information literacy. We refer to them comprehensively as “extended literacies” because all of them, in one way or another, add something to the notion of literacy as the fundamental

capacity of recognizing words made up of letters, sentences made up of words, and so on, and of recognizing what such expressions on the basic level mean. In each instance of the extended literacies of information, or media literacy, one theme is extending texts proper to comprehend such forms as pictures, sound, and combinations of these (Buschman, 2009; Gordon & Thomas, 1990). The same is true for computer literacy (Haigh, 2014). The peculiarities of and options provided by computer interfaces and the internet can be considered substantial constituents of these literacies (Špiranec & Zorica, 2008). In this article, our aim is to indicate how hermeneutics and literary sociology can give some foundation for what one may call *literary literacy* (Baleiro, 2011; Solak, 2013). We believe that while constructing this notion of literacy, it is plausible to combine more substantially social and cultural features with what one is reading or otherwise receiving.

*Hermeneutics* is a classical scholarly tradition of how we should read, understand, and interpret texts. Among the early forms of hermeneutics, there was the biblical hermeneutics of the Reformation, which we can conceive of as an answer to the question of how we should read and understand the Bible. The German hermeneutician Hans-Georg Gadamer (1979, p. 153) departs quite explicitly from this conception of hermeneutics as giving direct advice for reading and interpretation. Instead, he analyzes certain dimensions in the constitution of human existence that might have relevance for a literary literacy. In this paper, themes in the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur (1969, 1981), the French hermeneutician and exegete, will complement the Gadamerian view, especially regarding the specific mode of being of meanings within texts and literature. This leads us toward the themes of critical reading and the sociology of literature, where Jauss (1970, 1982) and Williams (1977) show the way in which literature exists as a part of social reality and so has relevance regarding how we should read it.

### FROM LISTS OF SKILLS TOWARD DEEPER FOUNDATIONS

The objectives of developing the notions of various extended literacies have been practical, quite often related to teaching of particular competences or skills. Consequently, they have often appeared in the form of lists of particular and important skills that one should teach and the students should learn, as a kind of curricula for teaching these matters. A good, already classic example is the list of the “Big Six Skills” by Eisenberg and Berkowitz (1992), which includes

1. task definition;
2. information-seeking strategies;
3. location of and access to information;
4. use of information;
5. synthesis; and

## 6. evaluation.

In administrative texts, such as the following by Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture (2013), these skills are listed for media literacy: "The European definition for media literacy as formulated by the European Commission means being able to access all media, to understand how the various types of media work, how to critically evaluate their content, to fully exploit their potential[,] and to use them in a critical, active and creative manner" (p. 23).

We may take the above list as representative, in the sense that skills constituting extended literacies tend to contain the ability to access texts and other forms of expression, and also the ability to evaluate and use them critically. Wehmeyer (2000) describes the background and aims of media literacy:

Serious critical discourse concerning the possible psychological, social, political, and cultural ramifications of the pervasive and ever-expanding mass media has been circulating through primary and secondary school classrooms, community meeting halls, church basements, and public libraries. . . . These discussions have come to promote both the idea and the practice of some form of media literacy as the necessary response to, if not the inoculation against, the lived experience of media-saturated lives. (p. 94)

There has also been a tendency toward more comprehensive cultural notions of literacies, such as the "cultural competence" of Overall (2009). Despite contributions with somewhat similar theoretical inspirations—social constructionism, for instance (Tuominen, Savolainen, & Talja, 2005)—within the literature of literacies, we seldom find any foundations within hermeneutics. An exception, however, is O'Farrill (2008), who looks for premises of a theory of learning in the light of which we can see the connection between knowledge management and the notion of literacy: "In both information literacy and information behaviour research the views on the relationships between information and knowledge have often remained closely related to an individualistic cognitive viewpoint, where reception of information is equated with knowledge acquisition in a rather unproblematic way" (p. 157).

O'Farrill talks about "knowledge acquisition," but our concern is about encountering and reading literature. Concerning extended literacies, one should consider the different possible rationalities: the interest of coping with the instructional readings of complicated, modern society or of knowledge management would be instrumental for our ultimate purpose. Perhaps we should consider the constitution of personality, as opposed to the use of readings for the everyday tasks and pursuits of an individual, a group of individuals, or an organization. In contrast with Baleiro (2011), literary for us is not necessarily only the literary text or the text as art, such as the genre of fiction, even if some of the aspects of literary literacy as

we conceive it may be most apparent in the context of such artistic texts. We believe that ignoring the particularities of reading literature—be it fiction or nonfiction (excluding the kinds of texts we would not usually characterize as literature)—risks leaving unexplored genuine educational issues of constitution and personal development. Anticipating the below discussion of Gadamer, we further characterize such literacy as *Bildung*-oriented. Another difference between our aim here and Baleiro's is that she focuses on critical literary literacy, while we examine the dialectics of it to arrive at the hermeneutical.

### APPROPRIATIVE OR *BILDUNG*-ORIENTED LITERACY

The key to approaching a possible, typically Gadamerian contribution to extended literacies is Gadamer's (1979, p. 245) emphasis on our belonging to history rather than history belonging to us. He views the historicity of our being as the condition of our being, which is a serious matter regarding the possible dimensions of the notion of literacies as well. In terms of Gadamerian hermeneutics, we can outline a dimension from instrumental skills for present practical pursuits that we have to what we call *Bildung* in Gadamerian terms. In a substantial sense, our being would be "being since the past," a being without fresh starts: that is, we all start in our term and we always start something that already is there. Within literary studies and sociology, the Gadamerian line of thought manifests itself in Jaussian reception aesthetics. The themes that we find in both Gadamer and Jauss help us to avoid subordinating all possible modes of reading and literacy to instrumentalist rationalities of making use of what we read or otherwise receive in problem-solving-type activities.

#### *Literature within the Effective Historical Constitution of Participation in Traditions, History, and Culture*

We can summarize Gadamer's (1979) view into a list, although ultimately it would be no list at all. At a crucial point of his argumentation, he refers to a triad within hermeneutics, which consists of

- *subtilitas intelligendi*, or understanding the text;
- *subtilitas explicandi*, or the ability to express or interpret what the text says; and
- *subtilitas applicandi*, or the ability to apply in one's own present situation what the text from the past, possibly from a quite distant past, is saying.

Properly speaking, however, perhaps we should not regard this as a list at all because Gadamer quite strongly emphasizes that these moments form one unity of the hermeneutical process rather than a sequence, and one cannot separate any of them (p. 274). In his thought, the last step, *applicatio*, is the decisive one. (It is also an instance of the tension between Gadamer and Ricoeur.) Gadamer further emphasizes the *subtilitas* (subtlety)

that we can oppose to methods, competences, or skills. His notion of *subtilitas* concerns his suspicious position toward “the proper method,” which he considers an “alienated” idea typical of modern science (pp. 417ff.).

According to Gadamer, we should be open to the historicity of our being and to the history to which we belong, to the condition of being a part and maker of history, which he denotes by his notion of *effective history* (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) (1972, p. 284; 1979, pp. 267ff.). What we read is a product of the past, a part of the history and tradition to which we belong and of “what the history has handed down to us [*Überlieferung*]” (1972, pp. 279, 321, 340). This can only be formal, as in the case of an internal memorandum of a meeting that took place a few hours ago. In such a case, there would be no substantial historicity involved, as we would consider the memorandum to be only a reminder for the participants. But on the other hand, the case could be that we were reading something that has its origin decades, centuries, or even millennia ago and has become a permanent part of the traditions within which we live. In such a case, the historicity of our being would be present in a more substantial sense.

In accordance with Gadamer, we may say that texts are parts of traditions and history to which we belong and that conditions our being in a substantial sense and already determines whatever each of us, in our turn, will become. Gadamer’s (1979) “rehabilitation of authority and tradition” means that what we read would be authoritative and not just a resource that we can use as it suits us (pp. 245ff.). His notion of the rehabilitation of *authority* and *tradition* contains an additional key concept: namely, *prejudice*. Together, these three concepts comprise a view wherein there are no fresh starts. A way to express this is that prejudice is “inside a person,” while tradition is external, at the level of culture and our common life as humanity.

Gadamer’s view becomes clearer when he discusses *agreement*. We can describe *hermeneutical reading*, according to Gadamer, as the search for agreement between tradition and the text we are reading. Common traditions are the conditions of “commonness,” so this would include other readers of the text as well. To say that we should be open to the tradition is not sufficient; regarding searching for agreement, the demand of openness means that we should be ready to contest our own prejudices against the text and tradition. Gadamer uses the German notion of *Bildung*, the meaning of which in this context we conceive of as enhancing and cultivating one’s belonging to history and traditions. We think of it as an educational ideal, which has its foundation, however, in what is necessarily a part of our being human. It is the further cultivating of something that in any case happens and pre-exists at some level.

To conceive of literature explicitly in the Gadamerian sense, in the spirit of historicity rather than historicism, is consequently to regard reading itself as a constituent of tradition. Jauss’s (1970) idea of the history of

reading/reception is of a history that we ourselves are continuing, and in this sense is quite similar to the general spirit of Gadamer. This bears out from his remarks on the development of the conception of history within literature studies. The disciplinary history of literary history is approximately as follows, a dialogue between two basic positions. We regard literature either as something that could and should mean something to us, as something with which we actually can have a living dialogue and that has some actuality for us; or as a reality that is “out there” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 9) in the past as an object that we should depict as objectively as possible in accordance with the ideals of what Gadamer calls “modern science.” The notion of historicism with Gadamer denotes exactly viewing history in this objectifying perspective.

This leads us to Jauss’s (1970) major idea of literary history as a “history of reception”: “Literary history based on the history of reception and impact will reveal itself as a process in which the passive reception of the reader and critic changes into the active reception and new production of the author, or in which—stated differently—a subsequent work solves formal and moral problems that the last work raised and may then itself present new problems” (pp. 23–24). According to him, any (past) moment of reading contains “its past and its future as indivisible structural elements” and thus “the synchronic cross-section” of diachronies would belong to the synchronic structure as well, even if in itself bringing the moment of temporality as well. Further, “in principle a presentation of literature in the historical succession of such systems [containing the synchronic cross-section], analyzed at arbitrary points of time, would be possible” (p. 31).

*Instrumental or Problem-solving versus Appropriative or Bildung-oriented Literacy*

The entire project of Gadamer aims at defending the appropriate and proper perspective of the humanities against the hegemony of modern science. We may adopt reading and literacy perspectives of the humanities, however, while reading the literature of physics as well, for instance. In natural science also, understanding involves prejudice, tradition, and authority—participation in what is common and has already been. In this sense, Gadamerian hermeneutics might add to the conception of extended literacies something that is not explicitly present. Gadamer (1979) writes that “hermeneutics in the sphere of literary criticism and the historical sciences is not ‘knowledge as domination’, i.e. an appropriation as a ‘taking possession of,’ but rather subordination to the text’s claim to dominate our minds” (pp. 277–278).

Gadamer does not give us very much concrete advice on how we should read, except the general point that we should be “open” to what the text has to say to us. This advice of openness has its foundation in an elaborated analysis of our being as humans and the historicity that this inevitably

implies and that therefore effectively challenges both the instrumentalist and individualist points of view of reading and literacy. This provides us with an option to consider the foundation of the rationality of literacies concerning cultural and social reproduction rather than as skills that are instrumental for individual actors. Literacy, in this respect, is not an instrument in the hands of an individual pursuing his or her own ends only. We could thus contrast literacy that fundamentally is a part of the problem-solving competency to what we might call, following Gadamer's own German concept, *Bildung*-oriented reading and literacy focused on and "listening to" the questions of texts, traditions, and history itself. In the spirit of the Gadamerian "rehabilitation of authority," we think the questions actually can be of what we read, and ultimately the questions that matter are questions of history and tradition. (See Gadamer [1979, pp. 325ff.] and the "hermeneutical priority of question.") In the cases that we can characterize as historical, in a substantial sense, the appropriate mode or reading and appropriate form of literacy could be the one focusing on those questions opened by the text, which ultimately could be the questions of the traditions and history themselves.

Lists of skills constituting information literacy typically contain those of seeking and accessing information. This may be an indication of instrumentalist assumptions: the motivation for seeking information could typically be a need within one's actual pursuits for something that could help him or her. With literary literacy, in turn, what one should be reading can be present, to a degree, in canons. The issue is how one should deal with what is there rather than how to find something that could be useful.

A preliminary-finding comment on the relative legitimacy of the instrumentalist approach while thinking about literacies might be appropriate. Recognizing the specter of rationalities and its opposite, the *Bildung*-related, appropriative literacy, reading, or otherwise receiving would be pivotal because otherwise the result could be the reduction of all possible rationality of reading and literacy into mere instrumental skills. Technical rationality, after all, has the nasty tendency to take a dominating position, not only in our time characterized by rapid information and communication technological development and a somewhat narrow understanding of the social and cultural condition of our being that Gadamer discusses with remarkable eloquence. In all times and nearly in all cultural and social contexts, the need for wished effects—for example, to make food eatable, to create protection against the weather and enemies, to be able to move from one place to another—has been a major part of the everyday life for most people. For this reason especially, there is the danger that instrumental rationality takes over, even in instances wherein we should be thinking about other kinds of rationalities.

## TOWARD MAKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS

One might say that conceiving of criticism is one of the objectives frequently contained in normative descriptions of various extended literacies (Hinman, 1980). Obviously, it is good to be critical—for instance, to avoid becoming fooled. A more specified consideration of what being critical actually could mean while reading or otherwise receiving texts or other forms of (re)presentations, however, will provide at least two possibly meaningful critical questions. First, we could ask whether we should trust what a text tells us or whether it is otherwise valid. Such a critical attitude, however, could be useful already in terms of purely instrumental literacy: a text in which we cannot trust might not have much use. Ideology-critical questions would come closer to what we mean by the genuinely educational reading that literary literacy should serve. The second question could ask whether our understanding of the text is correct. Being cautious also in this respect, of course, would be a part of critical questioning about the validity of the text already. There could be, however, even other dimensions involved (Suominen, forthcoming).

*Distance and Alienation in What Has Been Written and Literature*

A weak point in Gadamer is the concept of *criticism*; the idea that we should be critical is certainly not absent from his work (Gonzales, 2006). Yet, due to his strong emphasis on belonging to history, his texts occasionally give a strong impression of the wisdom of going along and accepting, thus leaving not much room for critical questioning. In Ricoeur, the other influential hermeneutician of the twentieth century that we shall discuss in this paper, we find argumentation that could, in hermeneutical terms, satisfy the demand of being able to use what one reads critically, which is a typical part of the list of skills constituting the extended literacies.

Ricoeur (1969) claims that hermeneutics, as a mature form of intelligence, should contain an intermediary phase of structural analysis—the semantic moment or linguistic level—on the “long detour” toward appropriation. Therefore, we can construct a short and, we have to admit, abstract list constituting his particular view on extended literacy: *structural analysis* preceding the “existential moment” of appropriation on the long detour (*cheming longue*) of hermeneutics as a mature form of intelligence (pp. 33–34); and *appropriation*—that is, the proper moment of hermeneutics, where “a subject . . . understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself,” which would be the proper aim of the hermeneutical process, according to Ricoeur as well (1981 p. 158). Because structural analysis is an intermediate stage, here we indeed can construct a list, as opposed to Gadamer’s quasi-list of subtleties, which actually constitute one whole.

Ultimately, Ricoeur’s criticism of Gadamer has its foundation in his assumption that distance, in addition to the inevitability of belonging to, is a

“primordial” component of our being, while with Gadamer, according to Ricoeur, there is an ideal of immediacy that would overcome all alienation in our being. The distances that Ricoeur (1981) refers to are temporal and spatial, but also a certain element of alienation is necessarily present in the “quasi-words of texts or literature” (p. 149). A text, when compared to oral communication, overcomes distances of time and space, but it creates new distances. There is, according to Ricoeur, already in language, especially in writing and texts and most strongly in literature, an element of distance and even alienation. A text, and then literature as a set or tradition of interrelated texts, replaces by its *own world of reference* the immediacy of the *common world of reference* present in oral communication. Within this “emancipation of the text,” Ricoeur (1981, p. 90; see also, pp. 139ff.) also defines *intertextuality* as a reference by one text to the worlds of references of their own of some other texts.

Ricoeur (1981) combines objectivity with the need for criticism (of ideologies, in particular); he argues for the need of textual and ideological criticism for the objectifying approach of structural analysis. Ricoeur discusses the ideology-critical aspect of texts’ and literature’s capacity to create worlds of references of their own or quasi-worlds to challenge the prevailing state of affairs. Criticism of ideologies actually became a part of the structuralist movement already (see Barthes, 1972). In fundamental structuralist conceptions, recognition of the lack of some particular distinction of content could have some ideology-critical significance. In Ricoeurian concepts, this could be a specific feature of the world of reference of its own of some particular item or tradition of literature as well.

In a sense, the Ricoeurian idea of distance as a primordial component of our being could bring a kind of cultural realism into hermeneutical philosophy. The distance actually would mean, among other things, that we should take into account the cultural reality of meanings that, in a sense, is given to us and is objective as well in this sense. Gadamer (1979), in turn, would consider this as “historical objectivism.” The objectifying approach that Ricoeur is suggesting as an intermediate moment would destroy the living connection between our traditions and us, which according to Gadamer would be the core of hermeneutics. We should notice here, however, that Gadamer’s way of expressing his view is, in some respects, somewhat vague. If understanding is confrontation as Gonzales (2006) describes Gadamer’s view, then we should recognize at least some tension between a person reading or otherwise receiving the tradition and the tradition itself “*qua* object” (Kusch, 1989, p. 237).

#### *The Literacy of Literature in Its Politico-Social Historicity*

Ricoeurian hermeneutics already brings critical thought into hermeneutical thinking as a subordinate moment of it. Proceeding with the idea of literary literacy, and especially the possible critical moment that there

should be, however, we should go beyond the sphere of meanings and hermeneutics proper. What we read is not only a text—that is, not only a semiotic phenomenon with expressions combined with or carrying with them some contents or meanings. Especially as regards critical reading, the social realities that have produced the texts would have significance, and a part of literacy could also be the ability of taking into account and even analyzing them. Consequently, we could pay attention to phenomena on the level of being more genuine in what we read, even for impenetrable scopes of sociology, political science, economics, and law. We could say that, obviously, a part of the social way of being of literature is being as a tradition and as a history in itself, as a consequence of events and entities produced or otherwise connected to these events.

Robert Escarbit (1970) is a pioneer of the sociologically oriented investigation of literature. As an essential factor in the phenomenon of literature, he adds the role of the reader to that of the author and the work itself. According to Schmidt (2011), “In modern societies, the actors in the social system of literature are institutionally distributed onto four action dimensions: production, mediation, reception, and post-processing of literary phenomena” (p. 114). Jauss (1982) seems to suggest something like this by asking whether we should be able to “place the ‘literary series’ and the ‘nonliterary series’ and history without forcing literature, at the expense of its character as art, into a function of mere copying or commentary?” (p. 18).

When discussing the mechanisms of hegemony, Marxist sociologist of literature Raymond Williams (1977) first remarks that the concept of *tradition* has not had a significant position in Marxist thinking, which has tended to consider it only as a part of the secondary level of society, the so-called superstructure, and only as an inert element of the “surviving past.” According to him, however, tradition is “the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits.” Here, tradition itself is what Williams calls “selective tradition,” which selects and emphasizes “certain meanings and practice” while it neglects and excludes some others: “Within a particular hegemony, and as one of its decisive processes, this selection is presented and usually successfully passed off as ‘the tradition,’ ‘the significant past.’ What has then to be said about any tradition is that it is in this sense an aspect of contemporary social and cultural organization, in the interest of the dominance of a specific class” (pp. 115–116).

The views of Williams, due to their apparent differences with Gadamer, are useful for us here while outlining the frame within which we can recognize the possible dimensions of literary literacy. With Williams, traditions are the mechanism of hegemony of the ruling classes by selecting some convenient “truths” while concealing some others. Somewhat approximately, then, we could say that with Williams, a tradition is a lie, as opposed to Gadamer’s view of it as actually the truth in itself. However,

Williams does refer to traditions in a positive sense as well: the counter-hegemonic traditions that may challenge the dominant, selective traditions and hegemony. But the emphasis with Williams remains his criticism of hegemony. The power of the selective, dominant tradition rests on identifiable concrete institutions and, even more effectively, on social processes and structures that he calls "formations." A remark by Albrecht Wellmer (1969), a Frankfurt School sociologist and another Marxist, expresses in crystallized form what Williams's literary sociology ultimately claims: "What the Enlightenment knew and hermeneutics forgets: that the 'dialogue' which (according to Gadamer) we 'are,' is also a relationship of coercion and, for this very reason, no dialogue at all" (p. 47).

### CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE CONSTITUTION OF LITERARY LITERACY AS A DIALECTICS OF *APPROPRIATIVE* AND *CRITICAL*

So far, our argument leaves us with a tension between the hermeneutical view of Gadamer and the sociological perspectives on literature of Ricoeur. Elrud Ibsch (1988), another sociologist of literature, discusses, in terms of the notions of *participation* and *observation*, the aim of teaching literature, which here we can take as the aim of teaching literary literacy as well. The aim would be that "as a participant in literary communication, the student learns to produce his own determination of meaning and to make it plausible to others and, as an observer, he learns to describe, explain and respect the constitutions of meaning by others" (p. 525). There obviously is a wide gap, however, between the general premises that we have been discussing here and the concrete formulation of what we call *literary literacy*. We cannot expect that a secondary school pupil, for instance, would be a full-fledged hermeneutician or sociologist of literature. We would be rather remote from the level of literacy as a concrete competence. Advice for readers, however, could be that they should read as much as possible because this would provide them with observations to enhance their ability to be participants in literary communication and express more interesting and mature interpretations. We could further specify literary literacy based on this duality by some more specific modes of reading, such as "close reading" or critically oriented "symptomatic reading" (Strickland, 1990). The latter of these would be quite directly opposed to Gadamer's (1979) view, who writes that the text should not be "understood as a mere expression of life, but taken seriously in its claim to truth" (p. 264).

In our view, however, combining the critical and hermeneutical, or the roles of observer and participant, would not be an insurmountable problem. It may be difficult to simultaneously be suspicious and take a text "seriously in its claim to truth"; yet, as parts of practical reading and literacy, suspicion and taking something seriously can come sequentially, one after another. The real problem once again, in our view, would be the risk of

missing the genuinely hermeneutical rationality. In order to understand this, we should take note of the following tension.

In a short text explicitly commenting on Ricoeur's argumentation, Gadamer (1984) directly criticizes Ricoeur's idea that there should be a "hermeneutics of suspicion" in addition to the Gadamerian "hermeneutics of faith": "Ricoeur who never opposes without somehow reconciling, could not avoid opposing—at least in a first approach—hermeneutics in the classic sense, of interpreting the meaning of texts, to the radical critique of and suspicion against understanding and interpreting" (p. 313). Gadamer then continues: "I think even Paul Ricoeur must in the end give up attempts to bring them together, because we have here a basic difference involving the whole philosophical role of hermeneutics" (p. 317). There seems to be, at least in Gadamer's view, a conflict that one cannot resolve. While rejecting the idea that participation and hermeneutics would be "in the first place the objectifying task of methodical thinking," he summarizes his view as follows: "Let me give you an outline of what I have in mind, i.e., dialectic as the common ground. Dialectic does not claim to have a first principle. That is, without any doubt, the excellence of the humanities, that we share a common world of tradition and interpreted human experience" (p. 322).

The proper task of hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, is to participate and to appropriate the dialectic constituting the common traditions and interpreted experience—the common and commonness, to put it simply—rather than question it. This, however, concerns particularly the fundamental *raison d'être* of hermeneutics. The comments by Williams especially, in turn, clearly indicate that we perhaps should not trust too much in those common traditions; this, further, could require even objectifying, methodological moments like the one suggested by Ricoeur. We thus have good reasons to have faith, but also good reasons to be suspicious. This leads us, in addition to the dialectic that according to Gadamer is the "common ground," to even another level of dialectics, this time between the rationalities of appropriation and critical questioning. There will be some resemblance between this and how we already had to take care of not allowing the purely instrumentalist rationalities suffocate the fundamental hermeneutical rationality of appropriation.

This other kind of dialectics would no more be the dialectic between humans or between humans and texts or other kinds of (re)presentation; rather, it would be the dialectics of different rationalities. The important point is to recognize the fundamental difference of these rationalities, the consequence of which is that we should not try to reduce either of them to the other. We should be especially careful to not lose the rationality of appropriation, belonging to, and participation in the common understanding behind the inevitably objectifying rationality of criticism. This actually would apply even in cases of disagreement and criticism. One cannot criticize

maturely without appropriating the view that one is criticizing, at least to some extent. As far as we are thinking about what we denote by the notion of literary literacy, in any case, the critical would actually be subordinate to the appropriative and participatory in the common. In our view, it is also worth thinking about the extended literacies within this perspective, which Gadamer's most convincing and fundamental view of the being of humans, and the significance of history and traditions in their being, could open. It would be the genuine perspective of *Bildung*, as opposed to the instrumentalist approaches that are ultimately reducible to the rationality of problem-solving. The perspective that Gadamerian hermeneutics could open would be crucial while thinking about the fundamental, genuinely educational, personality-constituting aspects of literacies and reading or of otherwise receiving other forms of (re)presentation.

## REFERENCES

- Baleiro, R. (2011). A definition of literary literacy: A content analysis of literature syllabuses and interviews with Portuguese lecturers of literature. *Online Journal of New Horizons in Education—October 2011*, 1(4), 16–25.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. (A. Lavers, Trans.). New York: Noonday Press.
- Bernstein, R. (1983). *Beyond objectivism and relativism: Science, hermeneutics, and praxis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Buschman, J. (2009). Information literacy, “new” literacies, and literacy. *Library Quarterly*, 79(1), 95–118.
- Eisenberg, M. B., & Berkowitz, R. E. (1992). Information problem-solving: The Big Six Skills approach. *School Library Media Activities Monthly*, 8(5), 27–29, 37, 42.
- Escarbit, R. (1970). *Litteratursociologi*. (N. P. Tollnert, Trans.). Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1972). *Warheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutic* (3rd ed.). Tübingen: Mohr.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1979). *Truth and method* (2nd ed.). London: Sheed & Ward.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1984). Hermeneutics of suspicion. *Man and World*, 17(3–4), 313–323.
- Gonzales, F. J. (2006). Dialectic and dialogue in the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and H. G. Gadamer. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 39(3), 313–345.
- Gordon, E. W., & Thomas, K. H. (1990). Reading and other forms of literacy: Implications for teaching and learning. *Journal of Negro Education*, 59(1), 70–76.
- Haigh, R. W. (2014). Planning for computer literacy. *Journal of Higher Education*, 56(2), 161–171.
- Hinman, L. R. (1980). Quid facti or quid juris: The fundamental ambiguity of Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 40(4), 512–535.
- Ibsch, E. (1988). Observer and participant in literary communication. *Poetics Today*, 9(3), 515–527.
- Jauss, H. R. (1970). Literary history as a challenge to literary theory. (E. Benzinger, Trans.). *New Literary History*, 2(1), 7–37.
- Jauss, H. R. (1982). *Toward an aesthetic of reception*. (T. Bahti, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kusch, M. (1989). *Language as calculus vs. language as universal medium: A study in Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Ministry of Education and Culture. (2013). *Good media literacy: National policy guidelines, 2013–2016*. Helsinki: Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, Kulttuuri-, liikunta- ja nuorisopolitiikan osasto.
- O'Farrill, R. T. (2008). Information literacy and knowledge management: Preparations for an arranged marriage. *Libri*, 58(3), 155–171.
- Overall, P. M. (2009). Cultural competence: A conceptual framework for library and information science professionals. *The Library Quarterly*, 79(2), 175–204.
- Ricoeur, P. (1969). *Le conflit des interprétations; essais d'herméneutique*. Paris: Seuil.

- Ricoeur, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation*. (J. B. Thompson, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Schmidt, S.J. (2011). *Worlds of communication: Interdisciplinary transitions*. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Solak, Ö. (2013). Reading literary texts through a critical point of view: Critical literary literacy. In proceedings of *The 2nd International Conference on the Reform of Curriculum and Teaching and Teacher Development* (pp. 242–249). Hangzhou: Hangzhou Normal University (Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti).
- Špiranec, S., & Zorica, M. B. (2008). Information literacy 2.0: Hype or discourse refinement? *Journal of Documentation*, 66(1), 140–153.
- Strickland, R. (1990). Confrontational pedagogy and traditional literary studies. *College English*, 52(3), 291–300.
- Suominen, V. (Forthcoming). *About and on behalf of scriptum est: A tiny philosophical prolegomena to an educational and literary concept of the library and librarianship with a rationality sui generis among the practices related to documentation and communication*. Oulu, Finland: University of Oulu Press.
- Tuominen, K., Savolainen, R., & Talja, S. (2005). Information literacy as a sociotechnical practice. *Library Quarterly*, 75(3), 329–345.
- Wehmeyer, J. (2000). Critical media studies and the North American Media Literacy Movement. *Cinema Journal*, 39(4), 94–101.
- Wellmer, A. (1969). *Critical theory of society*. (J. Cumming, Trans.). New York: Herder and Herder.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---

Vesa Suominen, PhD, has been a lecturer in information studies since 1988 at the University of Oulu, Finland. He previously worked for eight years as a librarian. His scholarly interests are in bibliography and the theory and philosophy of documentation and librarianship, especially in terms of its foundations in semiotics, hermeneutics, and political theory and philosophy. He is the author or coauthor of several monographs and was chair of the organizing committee of the SCARLID colloquium “Aware and Responsible” (2001), the proceedings of which were published in 2004. He is the present chair of the Training and Research Committee of the Finnish Library Association.

Pirjo Tuomi is a doctoral student in literary studies at the University of Oulu, Finland. Since 2001, she has been a senior lecturer in the degree program of Library and Information Services at the University of Oulu of Applied Sciences. Previously, for fifteen years, she was a music librarian in the Municipal Library of Rovaniemi (Finland). Her scholarly interests are in system theories within literary sociology, and in the role of the library as a part of the literary system. She has been the author, coauthor, or editor of several monographs published in Finnish. She is the present chair of the Fiction Literature Committee of the Finnish Library Association.