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Garssen, B.; Svačinová, I.

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A definite must read

Argumentation in literary reviews

Bart Garssen and Iva Svačinová

University of Amsterdam | University of Hradec Králové

The present study aims at clarifying how in literary reviews value judgements about novels are justified. For this purpose we first give an overall description of the place of literary reviews in journalism. Then, we characterize literary reviews as an argumentative activity type. Next, we turn to the argumentative pattern prototypical of literary reviews. To illustrate our account of literary reviews, we present an exemplary analysis of a particular review. In so doing we propose a tool for the empirical study of literary reviews.

Keywords: argument from criteria, activity type, argumentative pattern, literary reviews, value judgement

1. Introduction

In most spheres of life people evaluate other people, objects or situations. We value our fellow human beings as more or less kind, trustworthy, sensitive or capable of performing a certain task. We evaluate our teachers and our students, our employees and employers. We evaluate food as well as cars and computers. We also evaluate works of art: architecture, paintings, musical or ballet performances. We express these assessments in value judgments and justify our value judgments by argumentation.

It is an understatement to say that in the study of argumentation the justification of value judgements is not a central topic. Looking at the literature on argumentation one gets the impression that argumentation scholars focus primarily on practical argumentation or argumentation for descriptive standpoints. Apart from studies in the domain of legal argumentation, not much has been written about the topic of value judgements. This goes especially for aesthetic value judg-

ments and their justification — like value judgments in literary reviews, the topic of this paper.¹

The present study aims at clarifying how in literary reviews value judgements about novels are justified.² For this purpose we first give an overall description of the place of literary reviews in journalism. Then, we characterize literary reviews as an argumentative activity type. Next, we turn to the argumentative pattern prototypical of literary reviews. To illustrate our account of literary reviews, we present an exemplary analysis of a particular review. In so doing we propose a tool for the empirical study of literary reviews.

2. The nature of a literary review

Literary reviews belong to the domain of media communication, more specifically, they can be classified as cultural journalism, a specific branch of journalistic production and coverage on arts and culture. Jaakkola (2015: 19) considers cultural journalism as a sub-field of general professional newspaper journalism with a specialization in artistic, cultural and aesthetic issues. Bourdieu (1993) considers cultural journalists as ‘cultural intermediaries’ operating between two fields: art and journalism or between cultural producers and consumers. Janssen and Verboord hold a similar view. They point out that reviewers are mediators interconnecting artists and their work and the public, who participate in the production and distribution or critical evaluation of culture (2015: 441).

Apparently, cultural journalism has a dual nature. It connects the journalistic paradigm based on an informative, fact-based communication about the arts and standard news values and the aesthetic paradigm based on an aesthetic, evaluative, opinion-based and educational approach to the arts (Hellman and Jaakkola 2012: 787). While the *journalistic paradigm* reflects the general values of the ideology of journalism: public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics, the *aesthetic paradigm* is governed by other distinctive values: expertise, subjectivity, autonomy, and commitment. The journalistic paradigm assumes that jour-

1. In the late nineties of the former century Rob Grootendorst, together with a group of students, set out to study literary reviews from a pragma-dialectical perspective. This project ended prematurely due to Grootendorst's untimely death in 2000. We have no intention to finish that project, but we believe that with the help of the analytic tools that have been developed in pragma-dialectics in the last two decades we can present a more in-depth analysis of literary reviews.

2. We focus exclusively on novels because the critical standards for novels seem to be different from those for literary genres such as poetry or drama.

nalists target their readers as a large audience and in everyday settings. Journalists report the various events and issues impartially and in an informed manner: reporting is conceived to be proactive and anticipatory, the journalists are not specialized but able to cover any issue and any event with their journalistic competences. In contrast, cultural journalists — i.e. reviewers or critics — are specialists in their fields of art and have a certain amount of cultural capital to gain legitimacy. They have the role of expert instructors who interpret artistic products for the readers. Criticism is reactive in nature: it comments on things that have already happened. Art criticism is “self-referential”, with the critic melting, in the journalist’s monologue his/her experience and judgments into a coherent analysis (see Hellman and Jaakkola 2012: 787, Jaakkola 2012: 485).

The difference between the two paradigms manifests itself clearly in the specific genres prevalent in each of them. The journalistic paradigm uses a plethora of journalistic genres such as news and news features. Interviews, portraits and reportages are a central part of the content while the aesthetic paradigm is tied exclusively to reviews and critical accounts of works of art (Jaakkola 2012: 485). According to Blank (2007: 7), reviews can be generally defined as “public summaries and evaluations that assist readers to be more knowledgeable in their choice, understanding, or appreciation of products or performances.” In this paper, we focus exclusively on literary reviews that provide summaries and evaluations of newly published books. Drawing on Blank’s definition, book reviews can be provisionally specified as: short essays focusing on new books that have just been published in the cultural sections of newspapers. Their intended addressee is the general audience of the newspaper; the review assists these readers by providing summaries and evaluations of the new book so that they become more knowledgeable in making their choice by having a better understanding or appreciation of the new book concerned (see Blank 2007, Drewry 1966, van Rees 1983, Hooper 2010, Pool 2007, Squires 2020).

In a literary review, a reviewer typically seeks to meet two goals, he/she should (a) inform the audience about the content of the book, and (b) evaluate the quality of the book (see Woolf 1939, Hooper 2010: 23, Pool 2007). Reviewers generally agree that their main goal is to evaluate the quality of the book; providing information about the book is instrumental in providing this evaluation. As stated by Pool (2007: 10): “[b]ecause reviewers are dealing with new books, they’re writing for an audience that hasn’t yet read the books they’re discussing, which is why not only an evaluation, but also an accurate description is such a necessary part of the review; without description, no assessment can make sense.”

A review that does not provide an assessment of the quality of book fails. Allen (2005: 180) emphasizes that “[r]eviewers are explicitly required to deliver their personal opinions within a clearly defined framework.” The task of the reviewer

is to provide the reader with an adequate recommendation „in order that he may know whether or not it is the kind of book which he may want to read” (Woolf 1939: 29). Based on the reviewer’s recommendation, the reader can more easily decide about his/her own action, which may involve specific costs – not only in terms of time (i.e. reading the book) but also financially (i.e. buying the book) (Allen 2005: 181).

Authors describing the specifics of a literary review often compare it with another type of criticism tied with the aesthetic paradigm: *academic criticism* in academic journals that offers a close analysis of predominantly high-culture forms of literature and is primarily aimed at other academics (cf. van Rees 1987, Pool 2007, Squires 2020, Titchener 1998). In contrast to academic criticism, the literary review is primarily focused on books that *have just been published*. As Pool points out: “While critics writing about the past are considering books that have been mulled over many times and can draw on a variety of ideas in arriving at their own, reviewers, writing about books that almost no one has read, lack the discussion, the argument that helps clarify opinion, and the validation that encourages confidence and even originality” (Pool 2007: 10). Van Rees (1983: 403) considers literary review as “primary” criticism, because reviewers occupy the first position with respect to the time of publication: they offer the first evaluation of the book at a time when almost no one has read the book yet.

Literary reviews are usually published in the cultural sections of newspapers on a regular – daily or weekly – basis. Due to the huge number of books that are published every day, reviewers are required to process reviews quickly. For reviewers this typically leads to a lack of time for reflection on the book, a limited opportunity to do more in-depth research,³ and a limited opportunity to become acquainted with alternative evaluations which could serve as a point of reference when writing their own review. The reviewers work with books that “have no history” and about which they have no previous knowledge. The immediacy of literary reviewing and the impossibility of keeping a distance almost necessarily results in the absence of a deeper theoretical insight. While academic critics examine already known books through the prisms of certain literary or aesthetic theories, literary reviewers are forced to write a text that is characterized by the absence of theory. According to Pool (2007: 10), the reviewer performs his explo-

3. Allen (2005:183) encourages reviewers to do research about the book and the author: “If you are reviewing a novel, read the author’s previous works, do a Google search on them, talk to your friends about them. Generally, immerse yourself in the task. Your enthusiasms and knowledge will then be conveyed through the review” (Allen 2005:183) According to Chong (2020: 36–37), during the writing process the reviewers carry out a basic research in which they usually visit the library and find other books by that same author or other books about the topic.

ration “with whatever means lie within the bounds of his personal limitation. He must produce his effects with whatever tools will work”. Titchener (1998: 3) distinguishes academic criticism and literary review based on the opposition between “studied evaluation” and “overnight reaction”. For Titchener, criticism is used to describe an expert’s evaluation of an event, while a review is “a report with opinion”. This is also reflected in the type of jargon that can be used: academic critics address a specialized audience and write in a jargon incomprehensible outside their own field (e.g. “tropes,” “semes”), while reviewers address a general audience and write in a language that everyone understands (e.g. “compelling,” “luminous”) (Pool 2007: 10).

Literary review writing is further impacted by certain formal conventions. The length of a modern journalistic review is usually between 30 and 60 lines (Hellman and Jaakkola 2012: 790). The expectations also concern the content of the text. Although the structure of the review is not strictly prescribed, there is a generically based expected minimum of what should be discussed. According to Drewry, this minimum includes a description of the book, some information about the author, a comparison of the book to others by the same author and in the same field, and an appraisal preferably indirect, through description and exposition in terms of the aims and purposes of author (cf. Drewry 1966: 12).

3. Characterization of the literary review as an argumentative activity type

In earlier studies, the literary review was conceived as a case of argumentative discourse (Grootendorst 1998, Brandt 1994, Uittewaal 2000, Fopma 1998). The tools of extended pragma-dialectics, especially the concepts of communicative activity type, strategic maneuvering and argumentative patterns, allow us nowadays to give a more comprehensive and detailed characterization of a literary review by taking account of the conventions that impact the shape of the argumentative discourse.

In pragma-dialectics, *communicative activity types* are viewed as conventionalized practices aimed at fulfilling the institutional needs of a certain domain of communicative activity (see van Eemeren 2010: 129–162). A communicative activity type is defined by its *institutional point* – the purpose that caused the activity type to come into being, associated with the *domain* it belongs to, the *genre* of communication that is implemented and the *institutional conventions* and *situational circumstances* (van Eemeren 2010: 129). Conventions that govern a communicative activity type can be seen as specific constraints regulating the permissible or expected shape of argumentative discourse in a given communicative practice.

The literary review can be conceived as a specific communicative activity type. Its institutional point is to offer a (positive or negative) evaluation of the literary quality of a newly-published book to the readers of the newspaper through providing relevant information about the book.

The realization of such a complex institutional point involves the implementation of two different genres of communication: *news-reporting* and *opinion-making*. According to van Eemeren “[c]ertain communicative activity types may (...) involve the activation of more genres of conventionalized communicative practices” (2010: 144). The complex institutional point of this activity type combines the reviewer’s intention to inform the readers about the content of the book and to evaluate its quality. Informing is implemented through *reporting* about the book: the reviewer presents the book to the readers by a description of its relevant aspects. Reporting is instrumental in achieving the evaluation of the book. Evaluating the quality of the book is implemented through *opinion-making*: the reviewer presents his/her opinion about the quality of the book to influence the readers’ opinion.

The institutional conventions and situational circumstances can be seen as partly explicit and partly implicit specific norms and constraints regulating the permissible or expected shape of argumentative discourse in a given communicative practice. How the argumentation in a review is constrained by the conventions of the communicative activity type can be demonstrated on the basis of an *argumentative characterization* of review, where the communicative activity type is described from an argumentative point of view. This can be done by comparing the argumentative practice in this activity type with the ideal model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2005, 2006; van Eemeren 2010).

In the ideal model of a critical discussion, pragma-dialecticians distinguish four stages of discussion (confrontation, opening, argumentation and concluding stage) during which the standpoint and the critical reactions to it are externalized, common ground between parties is established, argumentation and criticism is advanced, and the solution of difference of opinion is determined (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 2004). According to pragma-dialectics, each of four stages of the ideal model has its empirical counterpart in argumentative reality and these counterparts are the focal points for an argumentative characterization of a communicative activity type. In accordance with the method introduced by van Eemeren (2010: 146), we first characterize the *initial situation* of the book review, which is the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage, then we concentrate on the *procedural and material starting points* that correspond to the opening stage. Subsequently, we examine the *argumentative means and criticism* brought to bear in a book review, which constitute the empirical counterpart of the argu-

mentation stage. Finally, we characterize the *possible outcome* of the discussion, which is the empirical counterpart of the concluding stage.

The initial situation

By characterizing the initial situation of a book review we can capture the character of the confrontation between the discussion partners, i.e. the type of standpoint and type of difference of opinion at issue (see van Eemeren 2010: 43). As a rule, literary reviews consist of an informative description and a critical assessment of the literary work. The reviewer will take it that the reader will not doubt the information that is provided about the literary work. However, when it comes to the assessment of the literary work, the reviewer is likely to defend his/her overall claim about the value of the literary work (Uittewaal 2000: 97). Given the institutional point of the book review, it can be expected that the standpoint defended by the reviewer is evaluative in nature. Because the reviewer is trying to evaluate the quality of the book, we can expect that the main standpoint involves a *value judgment on the quality of the book as a whole*, which can be generally reconstructed as follows: X is (judged as) a good/bad book.

A review can be understood as a written, one-way (“monological”) communicative action from the reviewer to the audience (readers), in which the audience does not have immediate access to the discourse to externalize their doubts concerning the standpoint or the argumentation in support of it. A book review can be reconstructed as a *non-mixed* difference of opinion between the reviewer and the audience of newspaper readers, where only the reviewer takes a standpoint and bears the burden of proof for his/her judgment about the book. The review is written under the assumption that the reader does not have formed an opinion about the book yet and may be considered a party that needs to be convinced.

Standpoints about value judgments are evaluative in nature. Evaluative propositions express an assessment of facts or events (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 159). In a value judgment the value of a thing (product, artistic artifact), act, person, decision, etcetera is established. A value judgment expresses a positive or negative assessment. This assessment is subjective and presupposes intersubjective evaluative criteria (Houtlosser 1995: 183). A value judgment is not true or false but is considered to be justified based on shared evaluation criteria.⁴

A distinction should be made between value judgments and expressions of personal preference, although in practice this distinction may not always be so

4. Houtlosser points at the fact that not every value judgment is automatically a standpoint. It could well be that the value judgment is used as a reason put forward in an argument to defend a standpoint (Houtlosser 1995: 183–184).

clear. While a value judgment can in principle be doubted by a listener, a personal preference cannot. That is why expressions of personal preference usually do not constitute standpoints: they merely report a certain individual characteristic and do not appeal for approval or assent by a reader of listener.⁵

Because of the special character of the type of standpoint at issue the question arises: what exactly are value judgements? To answer this question, we turn to Taylor (2014), who presents a useful starting point for the analysis of value judgments. A very basic description is that value judgments are propositions that refer to a value object (*this novel*) to which a certain property by means of a value term (*is beautiful*) is assigned. Taylor (2014) formulates the following three conditions that need be met for identifying a certain expression as a value judgment:

X (where X is some object) is Y (where Y is some property) is a value judgement if and only if:

1. The judgement implies either logically or presumptively that the speaker has a pro or con attitude to X. [...]
2. The judgement presumptively implies that X has certain properties in virtue of which X is being said to be Y.
3. The judgement presumptively implies a standard by means of which X is judged to be Y. (Taylor 2014: 11)

These conditions are useful starting points for our further determination of the standpoint about a value judgement. The first characteristic of value judgments is that they refer to an object X that has a property that the speaker or writer either approves of or not approves of. Hence the speaker has a pro or a con attitude to X. Value terms such as 'beautiful', 'refined', 'witty', and 'beautiful' generally express approval, while the terms 'fatuous', 'crude', 'sentimental', 'sloppy' express disapproval (Taylor 2014: 13); these terms point to a positive or negative attitude to the value object respectively.⁶

5. A personal preference can be separated from value judgments. This happens for instance in the following statements: "I know that that they are not literary masterpieces, but I do like reading spy novels nonetheless."

6. Hare claims that "the primary function of the word 'good' is to commend. We have, therefore, to inquire what commending is. When we commend or condemn anything, it is always in order, at least indirectly, to guide choices, our own or other people's, now or in the future" (Hare 1952: 127), see also Schellens 1985: 120). This does not mean that every value judgment should be seen as argumentation for an implicit inciting standpoint. However, in some literary reviews the standpoint actually expresses a incitive standpoint since the standpoint involved points to a decision concerning the choice of reading or not reading the literary work. This is the reason why in many criticisms we find incentive expressions such as *you need to read this book*, or (the opposite) *don't waste your time reading this book*.

According to the second condition, value judgements imply that the value object has certain properties in virtue of which the value term is applied to that object. The existence of these properties is implied when expressing a value judgment, but they are not necessarily explicit and hence the value judgment as such can be non-specific. “To say that the table is ugly is not specific in that it does not logically imply what parts [...] of the table constitute its ugliness, as it were. However the value judgment [implies] on the present view, that there are such parts and that it is in virtue of these parts that the table is termed ugly” (Taylor 2014: 13). What we may assume is that when expressing a value judgment the speaker has certain properties of the value object in mind that justify the application of the value term. This also means that in many cases the standpoint about an value judgment as expressed is not specific because value terms like “beautiful” and “ugly” are only fully understandable if we know the properties in virtue of which the value object is called “beautiful” or “ugly”. This special property of value judgments comes in degrees and it depends on the type of value object. A claim that a certain novel is beautiful is underdetermined because it merely expresses general approval of the novel. The value judgement becomes more specific when the reviewer explains in what ways the novel is beautiful. This goes in a way for all value judgements, but a judgment like “this novel gives a very lively description of marriage in the nineteenth century” is obviously more informative.

The third condition of value judgments is that they appeal implicitly or explicitly to a certain standard. In our view this third condition is closely related to the second condition, because the properties in virtue of which the value term is applied are selected based on the standard. Like the objective properties mentioned in characteristic 2, standards do not need to be articulated for a value judgement to be made. However, they do need to be articulated to justify the judgement in an intersubjective process. In other words, they will have to come about in the argumentation albeit that this will in principle happen in an implicit form.

These observations have important implications for our conception of standpoints expressing a value judgement as well as for the kind of argumentation put forward in defence of value judgements. For standpoints expressing value judgments these implications are: (1) standpoints in literary reviews express a pro or contra attitude towards a value object, (2) they imply certain properties of the value object in virtue of the application of the value term and (3) they also imply the application of a certain critical standard.

A distinction can be made between approving standpoints that express a positive attitude towards a literary work (*This is an absolute must read*) and disapproving standpoints expressing a negative attitude towards the literary work (*This book is a waste of time*). When the reviewer expresses both approval and disap-

proval the standpoint can be called balanced. The standpoint is positively balanced in case the verdict is mostly approving (*the book is joy to read, but it might be too intellectual to some*). It is negatively balanced in case it is mostly disapproving (*the book contains some humorous dialogues, but overall it is boring*).

The judgement may be general (*This is an excellent novel*) but also very specific (*This book offers a really nice description of post-war London*), focussing on one evaluation criterion, which is rather specific. Furthermore, the scope of the standpoint may vary. The standpoint can be about the book as a whole (*this is an excellent novel*) or about a specific element of the book (*The description of post-war London is very lively*). The standpoint can be formulated more or less forcefully. Value judgment can also be formulated with more or less emphasis: *I believe this book is really good/I know for sure that what we have here is masterpiece/ This book is a masterpiece in every respect /This book is an utter nightmare / This is probably the worst book that has been published the last couple of years*. The type of judgment and the force of the standpoint determine to a considerable extent the amount of proof that is necessary to defend the standpoint.

Procedural and material starting points

In the pragma-dialectical perspective, starting points can be procedural and material starting points. Procedural starting points refer to the distribution of discussion roles and the rules of discussion. Material starting points are propositions that are viewed as mutually accepted regarding the facts and values (van Eemeren 2010: 44).

In the case of a literary review, the reviewer takes on the role of protagonist of a standpoint and commits himself/herself to defend it. The intended audience consists of newspaper readers who are potential readers of the reviewed book. Although the audience does not play an active role in the discussion, their critical responses will be anticipated by the reviewer. In any case it is anticipated that the readers are not yet convinced of the acceptability of the standpoint: should they not be in doubt about it, there would be no need to persuade them about quality of the book in the review. It can be therefore reconstructed that the readers have the role of antagonist. The audience of potential readers is rather broad and can be conceived as “mixed” it consists of individuals or subgroups with different starting points (van Eemeren 2010: 110). The potential readers can be expected to differ in their literary preferences and tastes.

The requirements on scope and content of a review are part of the procedural starting points that have an impact on the character of the argumentation. The limited scope of a review, for instance, forces reviewers to advance only a limited number of arguments, thus reducing the justification of their evaluation the most

important argumentative “branches”. The generic “minimum” (i.e. description, author, comparison, evaluation) can also be mentioned as one of the components that play a role in the evaluation of the book in the review.⁷

The material starting points consist of a set of propositions relating to facts and values that can be used in the discussion (van Eemeren 2010: 44). It can be expected that authors prefer to discuss specific topics in their argumentation. Besides the reviewed book, they are likely to refer to taste, experience, acquired knowledge, generally known facts or information that can be easily obtained, and less often to theoretical knowledge based on specific aesthetic or literary theories. In order to allow the reviewer to make the audience accept the proposed evaluation of the book, we must assume that there is a set of shared factual and evaluative starting points about what is in a given context generally understood as a *genuine literary work* or a *good book*.

The question of what makes a book a good book is typically addressed by literary and aesthetic theories. However, there are a great number of different approaches to assessing the aesthetic quality of a literary work, according to which the source of the aesthetic value of a literary work can be found in various aspects of the work. In the *Mirror and the lamp*, Abrams (1971) identifies four elements that are emphasized by different literary theories: a shared world, an audience, an author, and a text. He suggests that all literary theories can be classified with respect to the relative emphasis they place on one of these elements. According to him, *mimetic* theories emphasize the way the literary work represents or mirrors reality, *pragmatic* theories emphasize the effect of the work on an audience, *expressive* theories emphasize the author’s greatness of conception or passion and *objective* theories emphasize the formal organization of the literary work, i.e. its linguistic composition. Van Rees (1987) shows that Abrams’s typology can capture not only literary theories but also “aesthetic codes” or general “conceptions of literature” shared by ordinary readers: sets of factual and value beliefs about the characteristics and functions of genuine literary works that are generally shared in a certain cultural context. According to van Rees (1987: 279), in their evaluation reviewers may resort to different conceptions of literature that are available at any given time and place.

7. Some authors point out that whether the book meets the *generic requirements* is a mandatory part of the evaluation. In the case of a fiction, for example, there are typically five basic elements that should be considered: characters, plot, theme, setting, and style (see Hooper 2010: 32, cf. Chong 2020: 43).

Argumentative tools and criticism

In a pragma-dialectical perspective, the protagonist and the antagonist test the acceptability of the standpoint(s) shaping their difference of opinion. According to van Eemeren, for participants acting as protagonist this means that they have to advance argumentation responding to the critical doubts expressed by (or ascribed to) the antagonist, until no further questions remain to be discussed (van Eemeren 2010: 44). Since the argumentation in literary reviews is typically 'monological', only the reviewer in the role of protagonist advances argumentation. In the case of a positive review, the reviewer attempts to demonstrate the aesthetic qualities of the book, in the case of negative review, the failure to realize its expected aesthetic qualities.

According to Taylor's (2014) basic analysis of value judgments, the value term is attributed to the value object in virtue of certain properties of the value object and this attribution takes place on the basis of a certain standard. In our view, justifying a value judgment by means of argumentation always boils down to explicitly mentioning certain properties while the standard provides the link between the properties that are mentioned and the value object. This means that the way to justify a value judgment by means of argumentation is to point at the properties which, according to the standard, warrant the value judgement (applying the value judgment to the value object).

Since a value judgment implies that certain properties attached to the value object (X) make the attribution of the value (Y) concerned possible, these properties need to be mentioned in the argumentation. The selection of these properties is governed by a standard that can be seen as consisting of a set of criteria underlying the attribution of Y to the value object X. This standard is typically expressed in terms of a rule-like general statement that links the property concerned to the class of value objects.

A value judgment can only be defended by providing the right kind of criteria to justify that judgment. This means that in the defence of a standpoint concerning a value judgment on the main level only one kind of argumentation can be used: the *argument from criteria*. In this argumentation the premise mentions a criterion that functions as the standard for making the value judgement.⁸

8. Another way to justify a value judgement may be pointing at the (causal) consequences of a certain proposal. In the standpoint it is then asserted that a certain proposal is good (or bad) because the consequences of accepting this proposal are desirable (or undesirable). This type of argumentation can be seen as a subtype of pragmatic argumentation. The specific characteristic of this pragmatic argumentation is that in the standpoint only an evaluative proposition is expressed while pragmatic argumentation goes a step further: the proposition is incitive. Since

The argument from criteria is a subtype of symptomatic argumentation (Garssen 1997: 119). In this subtype the arguer tries to show that a certain thing or product has a certain – artistic, aesthetic, literary – value by pointing at certain characteristics it has. These characteristics justify assigning a certain value to that value object. The argument relies in this case on a general rule of evaluation, expressed in the bridging premise, which we consider to be the critical standard according to which all instances of the class of arguments should be judged. This general rule mentions the criterium (or the criteria) that justifies (or justify) ascribing the value judgment to the value object. The general argument scheme for arguments from criteria is as follows:

Standpoint: For X value judgment Y is justified

Because: X has characteristic Z (explicit premiss mentioning a property or properties of X)

And: For objects of type X, Z justifies value judgment Y (critical standard)

The argument scheme from criteria comes with the following critical questions:

1. Does characteristic Z justify value judgment Y?
2. Is characteristic Z by itself sufficient to justify attributing value judgment Y to X?
3. Does X have other characteristics that challenge attributing value judgement Y to X?

This analysis raises the question of the nature of the critical standards concerned: what kind of critical standards can be used in literary reviews? The character of the aesthetic quality of the book the reviewer evaluates can vary according to the general conception of literature of the reviewer. Since the reviewer can have various conceptions of literature, it is likely that different kinds of critical standards may be used.

To get a better idea of the critical standards that can be used in arguments from criteria in literary reviews, we turn to literary theory. Mooij (1979) presents a first attempt at developing a taxonomy of the types of arguments that can be found in a literary review as a consequence of the different kinds of critical standards that are employed. There seems to be wide variety of types of criteria in use. According to Mooij (1979), several types of criteria are reoccurring. Among them he distinguishes 6 main categories, which he calls *types of argument*: realistic

in literary reviews the standpoint is not about a certain plan or choice, this type of argumentation is not relevant for our purposes.

arguments, emotivistic arguments, moral arguments, structural arguments, intentional arguments, and innovative arguments.

Realistic or mimetic arguments pertain to the relationship between the work of art and the reality it is supposed to describe. The descriptions, accounts or observations made in the work of art can be judged correct or informative but also incorrect and not informative. In the case of narrative works, this perspective concerns more specifically the extent to which the literary work correctly or informatively reflects human nature, people's behaviour, aspirations and feelings. In spite of the fact that already for a long time works of art have been seen as autonomous, realistic arguments are still frequently used (Mooij 1979: 257). Emotivistic arguments relate to the emotional effect of a literary work on the reader. The work of art is touching, oppressive, fascination, compelling. The work can also be nondescript, flat or simply boring. Moral arguments relate to the extent to which certain moral principles are displayed in the work. Structural arguments are related to the way in which the literary work is constructed. It can be balanced, coherent, and economical in means and ends. Intentional arguments relate to the extent to which the author has successfully reached his or her goals with the literary work. Innovative arguments have to do with the extent to which the literary work is innovative or original. This taxonomy is, of course, far from exhaustive and the categories are not mutually exclusive: all kinds of mixtures between types of argument are possible.

Boonstra (1979) is not satisfied with Mooij's taxonomy. Her main complaints are that the taxonomy is too much based on observations and not systematic, that it is not connected to any literary theory, and that it is not exhaustive. Like Mooij, her aim is to draw up guidelines for the reconstruction of the literary view of a reviewer. Boonstra constructs a model to facilitate developing a systematic taxonomy of arguments for value judgments of literary novels and stories. Its theoretical basis is Abrams's (1971) division already mentioned. Based on her own observations of literary reviews, Boonstra adds a new element to Abrams's list. The literary work is often compared with other works and the final judgment depends on this comparison. In her view, five main categories of arguments can be used to defend a value judgment about a literary work:

1. arguments in which the literary work is evaluated in its relation to reality
2. arguments in which the literary work is evaluated in its relation to the author
3. arguments in which the literary work is evaluated as an autonomous entity
4. arguments in which the literary work is evaluated in its relation to the reader
5. arguments in which the literary work is evaluated in its relation to other literary works.

The advantage of Boonstra's approach is that her main categories are rather broad and cover a wider range of types of arguments than Mooij's list. After defining the main categories, Boonstra makes the following subdivision:

1. Arguments in which the literary work is evaluated in its relation to reality.
 - 1.1 The *realistic argument* is based on the assumption that literature should give a correct representation of reality. A book is appreciated because it is credible, probable, convincing, true to life or historically accurate. Reviewer Keiran Goddard praises a novel because of its realistic characteristics:

It's precisely that period [early 1990s] that is most closely evoked by Nolan, who brilliantly recreates a nation still wounded from the rapid dismantling of the postwar social consensus, a London of dingy hotels and greasy spoons, conversations over halves of bitter or the coveted family landline.

(Keiran Goddard on *Ordinary Human Failings* by Megan Nolan, published in *The Guardian*, 14 July 2023)

- 1.2 The *argument of abstraction* can be seen as the counterpart of the realistic argument. It based on the assumption that a literary work should distance itself from reality. The author should change reality in such a way that by omitting and exaggerating the incidental or the personal gets a general or symbolic value. In the following reviewer Alexandra Harris points at the six astronauts in the book who symbolize one interconnected collective being:

“The six characters were supposed to be one,” Virginia Woolf told a friend who had just read *The Waves*. “I did mean that in some way we are the same person, and not separate people.” Harvey's six astronauts [in the book *Orbital*] have their individual pasts and preoccupations, they think their way back to their different countries, but together they form a collective being. Their continual movement of joining and parting gives the novel its patterning as much as the movement through space. (...) But mostly it is the novelist's job to mark the moments in which these separate people, humanity's emissaries, make their own electric circle of light: “Without word or reason they sail in and join, twelve arms interlinked.”

(Alexandra Harris on *Orbital* by Samantha Harvey, published in *The Guardian*, 16 November 2023)

- 1.3 According to the *argument of commitment* the literary work is better the more commitment is expressed to the social or political current (or past) reality. The author clearly takes a stance toward a certain political

or social situation now or then. The literary work can be disapproved because of the absence of commitment in the novel. In the following example Jamila Ahmed praises the book because it aims at helping readers to appreciate a culture differently:

Revisionist retellings of literary classics typically have sociological aims. Sometimes, they are intended to help us appreciate a culture differently. Sometimes, they seek to give voice to those who were never allowed voices. And, sometimes, they hope to fill the gaps and omissions in history. Ahmed's lyrically imaginative evaluation of a much-storied, still-contested historical and literary past aims to do all of the above.

(Jenny Bhatt on *Every Rising Sun* by Jamila Ahmed, published in *The Guardian*, 5 August 2023)

- 1.4 According to the *moral argument*. A book is good if the reader agrees with the moral point that is made. The assessment takes place with reference to political, religious, social or moral norms. An example is part of a review by Lauren Groff:

I think the great splendour of Fosse's fiction [A Shining] is that it so deeply rejects any singular interpretation; (...) This refusal to succumb to the solitary, the stark, the simple, the binary – to insist that complicated things like death and God retain their immense mysteries and contradictions – seems, in this increasingly partisan world of ours, a quietly powerful moral stance.

(Lauren Groff on A Shining by Jon Fosse, published in *The Guardian*, 18 November 2023)

2. Arguments in which the literary work is evaluated with norms related to the author

- 2.1 The *expressive argument* is used when the personality of the author plays an important role in the evaluation. The book is good if it gives a clear image of the author's personality or if the author proves to be an interesting personality. The assumption of this type of argument is that every novel is the expression of a personality and that the novel is a way of getting to know this personality; work and author should be one. In a review Dina Nayeri praises the book because of the author's honest reflection of his own past.

This is a simply written book [*Stay True*], but rich with painful subtext. Hsu doesn't spare himself as a lesser writer might. As a young man he was "a legendarily self-involved person" who saw "a bad CD collection as evidence of moral weakness". An insecure cultural snob, he defines

himself by all the popular things he rejects, refusing to accompany Ken into an Abercrombie & Fitch store, rolling up the car windows when his friend plays Dave Matthews in case someone pulls up next to them. (...) This aching honesty is the heart of Hsu's memoir.

(Dina Nayeri on *Stay True* by Hua Hsu review, published in *The Guardian*, 13 September 2023)

2.2 The *intentional argument* refers to the extent to which the author succeeds in realizing his or her intentions. In many cases the critic does not know the intentions of the author so that this will be a reconstruction of intentions. Lara Pawson mentions the authors own intentions in her review of *Let Me Go*:

In the mid-1990s, Paul Griffiths set himself a challenge. He would attempt to give new voice to Hamlet's Ophelia using only the vocabulary [481 words] scripted for her by Shakespeare in the original play. In 2008, 13 years after he'd begun, his novel *Let Me Tell You* was published. (...). At the time Griffiths was curious to see if his chosen constraint might provoke another writer to take Ophelia further. Perhaps he got fed up waiting, for it is Griffiths who has produced an exquisite sequel [the book *Let Me Go On*].

(*Let Me Go On* by Paul Griffiths review, published in *The Guardian*, 15 December 2023)

2.3 The *argument of the author's poetics* is very similar to the intentional argument. With this argument the book is evaluated positively if it lives up to the literary standards of the author.

3. Arguments that judge the literary work as an autonomous entity

3.1 *Structural arguments* refer to the composition of the book. A structural criterium could be that the literary work is coherent of that subject and the structure are adapter to each other. In the following fragment from a review Misham Matar mentions the structuring elements, that are responsible for the artfully pacing:

The book [*My Friends*] is artfully paced. Long, mellifluous, meditative sentences are punctuated by short ones of bell-like clarity. The framing device of the cross-London walk is often submerged as the stories of the past overlay it. Time slows down for episodes of intense experience, then speeds up to allow marriages, births and deaths to flash by in a brief paragraph. Events in the immediate past of the novel open out into recollections of the deeper past (...).

(*My Friends* by Hisham Matar, published in *The Guardian*, 28 December 2023)

3.2 *Stylistic arguments* refer to the verbal style that is used in the novel. It concerns language use and word use, and phrasing:

Language is at the heart of *The Singularity*, moving as it does from chaos and cacophony to the simple purity of a single voice, which is one measure of its brilliance and its beauty.

(John Self on *The Singularity* by Balsam Karam, published in *The Guardian*, 9 January 2024)

4. Arguments in which the literary work is judged in relation the reader

4.1 According to the *emotional argument* the book is good if it has an emotional effect on the reader. This argument is limited to the description of emotions: in case the reviewers refers to the cause of these emotions (the style, composition of the book, etc.) the argument belongs to another category

Although highly conceptual, *Tremor* is heartbreakingly tender. The trials and tribulations of Tunde and Sadoko keep us on edge. Despite the word “tremor” never appearing in the novel, Cole sustains a sense of the tremulous agitation and excitement between them and among their friends (...).

(Kit Fan on *Tremor* by Teju Cole review, published in *The Guardian*, 20 October 2023)

4.2 The *identification argument* is about identification, empathizing and sympathizing with the main character. This argument is close to the emotional argument. The following extract from a review contains a good example of identification and sympathizing:

The protagonists [of the book *Bellies*] are maddeningly gorgeous. I found myself bitterly willing Tom to faceplant on the catwalk.

(Jeremy Atherton Lin *Bellies* by Nicola Dinan review, published in *The Guardian*, 23 June 2023)

4.3 According to the *didactic argument* the book is better if the reader gets educated by reading it or if the reader’s experience is enriched. The book will be praised when it offers knowledge or an enhanced insight into certain matters to the reader. This happens, for instance, in a review by Yagnishsing Dawoor:

To read Makhene [the author of the book *Innards*] is to understand apartheid as a live, unhealed wound. It is to contend with and comprehend, deeply, intimately, the savage realities her characters endure, and

the unconquerable memories of violence that they carry. This makes for an extraordinary achievement.

(Yagnishsing Dawoor on *Innards* by Magogodi oaMphela Makhene, published in *The Guardian*, 21 December 2023)

5. Arguments in which the literary work is evaluated by pointing to its relationship with other literary works
 - 5.1 According to the *argument of originality* a book is better when it is more original than other books.
 - 5.2 According to the *argument of tradition* the book is good if it continues a certain literary tradition. AK Blakemore mentions the literary tradition of the “natural inheritor”:

Nicola Barker has described Grudova as Angela Carter’s “natural inheritor”, and I think most writers would be pleased with such an endorsement.

(AK Blakemore on *The Coiled Serpent* by Camilla Grudova review, published in *The Guardian*, 25 November 2023)
 - 5.3 According the argument of relativity the quality of a book hangs together in a certain series of books. This argument should not be confused with the previous argument, which concerns the absolute value of a book. The relativity argument concerns the relative value of a book that people do not consider to be very valuable in itself.

This may not be an exhaustive list of types of arguments based on criteria, but we can easily add more subcategories when this is necessary. Literary scholars and reviewers are likely to use a combination of arguments in justifying their standpoint.

Outcome of dispute

In the last stage of their discussion, the communicative partners attempt to determine whether the protagonist may maintain the standpoint defended or the antagonist the doubts (van Eemeren 2010: 45). Because the reviewer and the readers do not come to an explicitly agreed-upon resolution of the difference of opinion, neither the reviewer nor the reader will explicitly retract their standpoint or doubt.

The argumentative characterization is systematically summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Argumentative characterization of communicative activity type of a literary review

Genre	Initial situation	Starting points		Argumentative tools and criticism	Outcome of dispute
		Procedural	Material		
<i>News-reporting and opinion-making</i>	Anticipated non-mixed disagreement on the quality of the reviewed book. Standpoint about a value judgment.	Reviewer accepts role of protagonist; reader implicitly accepts role of antagonist. Implicit procedural rules, limitations to size and generic minimum of the review.	Factual and evaluative starting points expressing shared conceptions of literature.	Argumentation for the judgement of the book through the highlighting of the aesthetic qualities or failures of the book; argument based on criteria on the main level of defence.	Always implicit resolution by the reader, who may accept or not accept the value judgment.

4. Prototypical argumentative patterns in literary reviews

Now the communicative activity type of the literary review has been characterized, we can further characterize the argumentative means and reconstruct the argumentative pattern to be expected in literary reviews. For practical purposes we make a distinction between arguments put forward on the main level to defend the main standpoints and arguments put forward on the sublevel in defence of arguments on the main level.⁹

On the main level we find the crucial argument by aesthetic criteria. In principle, one argument by aesthetic criteria could provide sufficient and necessary support for the value judgement. Then the basic argumentative pattern consists of an evaluative standpoint expressing an aesthetic value judgment defended by an argument from aesthetic criteria. However, in most literary reviews mentioning only one characteristic will not suffice: if the answer to critical question 2, pertain-

9. For reasons of simplicity, in our characterization of the argumentative pattern, we only take into account anticipation of critical question 2. Anticipation of the other two critical question leads to a more complex argumentative pattern.

ing to the argument from criteria, is negative: more characteristics are necessary to justify the value judgment. Most value judgements rely on a complex critical standard.: a literary work is seldom deemed good because of just one positive characteristic. Whether satisfying more evaluative criteria is required, depends on the value judgment expressed in the standpoint. Pointing at more than one characteristic makes the argumentation automatically more complex. Because the premises are meant to be sufficient together, they constitute a cumulative coordinative argumentation. Therefore, on the main level the argumentation can be represented as follows:.

Standpoint: 1 For literary work X aesthetic value judgment Y is justified

Because: 1.1a X has characteristic Z₁

1.1n X has characteristic Z_n

And: For literary works of type X, characteristics Z_{1-n} justify aesthetic value judgment Y

Anticipation to critical question 2 (Is characteristic Z by itself sufficient to justify attributing value judgment Y to X?) obviously results in coordinative argumentation. If the arguer anticipates doubt about the acceptability of the critical standard (critical question 1: Does characteristic Z justify value judgment Y?), subordinative argumentation is necessary to justify this rule. In most cases the reviewer will take it that this rule is acceptable so that further defence will not be necessary. It is much more likely that the reviewer will anticipate doubt about the explicit premise (X has characteristic Z). The defence of this premise will result in subordinative argumentation on the sublevel. There are several options to defend the statement that the literary work has a certain characteristic. The reviewer can turn to symptomatic argumentation by showing that the specific property mentioned in the main argument is really a characteristic of the book, but he/she can also opt for using an argument by example.

In an argument by example specific facts are presented as special cases of something more general. In such an argument, on the basis of specific perceptions a generalization is made. In the argumentation one or more instances are mentioned to show that what can be said of them goes for the entire class (Garssen 2017: 31). In a literary review the example chosen will be a specific part of the work (a sentence or a paragraph, a particular event, etc.) in which the specific feature(s) mentioned in the premise can be observed. In the argumentation it is assumed that the example (examples) is (are) representative of all members of the class. Therefore, we may take it that all members of the class possess the specific feature observed in the example(s). In order to assess the argument from example, it is

crucial to know whether the example is indeed typical or just an exception — or a fringe case (Garssen 2017: 31).

The following critical questions pertaining to an argument by example are relevant:

1. Is (are) the example (examples) provided a typical instance (typical instances) of the situation described in the standpoint?
2. Is the number of examples provided sufficient given the nature of the standpoint?
3. Are there any counterexamples? (Garssen 2017: 34)

The examples in literary reviews may take several forms. They can be descriptions of parts of the literary work but also citations (Uijtewaal 2000).

The complete prototypical argumentative pattern in literary reviews is as follows:

- 1 For literary work X aesthetic value judgment Y is justified
 - 1.1a (X has characteristic Z₁) [argument from criteria]
 - 1.1n (X has characteristic Z_n) [argument from criteria]
 - (1.1a-1.1n') (For literary works of type X, characteristics Z_{1-n} justify aesthetic value judgment Y) [critical standard implicit in argument from criteria]
 - 1.1a.1 [argument by example] / [argument from criteria]
 - 1.1n.1 [argument by example] / [argument from criteria]

In order to illustrate the argumentative pattern we present here a analysis of part of a review by Sandra Newman of the novel *The Glutton* by A. K. Blakemore that was published in the *Guardian* on 23 September 2023.

AK Blakemore's second novel is inspired by the real life story of Tarare, a showman in 18th-century France who made his living by demonstrating a prodigious ability to devour things: heaps of fruit, corks, stones, live animals, offal. Born to a peasant family, by his teens he was able to eat his own weight in meat in a day and was driven from home lest he ruin his parents. He became a street performer in Paris during the revolutionary period, and in the wars that followed he was a soldier and briefly a spy.

This is clearly a tale that begs to be fictionalised, and it's hard to think of a better writer to do it than Blakemore. Her debut, *The Manningtree Witches*, about the witch-hunts of 17th-century England, won the Desmond Elliott prize and was shortlisted for the Costa. It was lauded for the extravagant beauty of its language, full of wild wordplay and precise imagery, and her vision of the period felt both accurate and vividly new, in the manner of the greatest historical fiction. Blakemore and Tarare seem like an unbeatable combination. Indeed, *The Glutton* is remarkable for its beautiful language, for its hallucinatory imagery, and for its

ability to mingle these things with the world of 18th-century poor folk. We believe absolutely in Blakemore's smuggler who complains that "the peasant is taxed of his arse and taxed of his elbow by the ink-shitters of the customshouses"; in her rebellious peasant who says, "Until the fainting of the Wormwood star, there will always be more to kill." We see clearly the prosperous farmhouse that is "not a fine house, but a good house, set back from the road in well-tended fields belonging all to itself, lights shining yellow in the windows". Many details are a complex mix of tenderness and revulsion, such as the dead rat whose "fingers are clutched at its own downy breast, frozen in an attitude of strangely human-seeming panic" before Tarare devours it.

Blakemore clearly knows the revolutionary period, and sees it from an unexpected angle; the ideas stand as the recreational bullshit of fools and idle men, and the well-known events as background noise. Here, the one political truth is the human body that suffers and the powers that seek to use that suffering instead of relieving it. Tarare's doctors quibble about ethics, pontificate about the Republic, ponder whether his state is supernatural and what that means for science. Meanwhile, he is poor, he is hungry, he wakes covered in blood. That is Blakemore's revolution.

[...]

The Glutton's weakest passages are more interesting than most novels' strongest ones. If you add the wild story of Tarare to the setting of revolutionary France, and throw in the chaotic riches of Blakemore's prose, *The Glutton* is certain to be one of the most remarkable novels of the year. As a reviewer, I generally give books away when I've finished writing about them. This one I will keep.

The standpoint and argumentation in Newman's review come about in the following argumentation structure:

1. The Glutton is a remarkable novel [standpoint expressing a value judgement]
 - 1.1a It has beautiful language [argument from criteria; stylistic argument]
 - 1.1b It has hallucinatory imagery [argument from criteria; emotional argument]
 - 1.1c It has the ability to mingle the language and imagery with the world of 18th-century poor folk. [argument from criteria; realistic argument]
 - 1.1b.1 Many details are a complex mix of tenderness and revulsion [argument from criteria; emotional argument]
 - 1.1b.1.1 (An example) is the dead rat whose "fingers are clutched at its own downy breast, frozen in an attitude of strangely human-seeming panic" before Tarare devours it [argument by example]

- 1.1C.1a We believe absolutely in Blakemore's smuggler who complains that "the peasant is taxed of his arse and taxed of his elbow by the ink-shitters of the customshouses" [argument by example]
- 1.1C.1b We believe absolutely in Blakemore's rebellious peasant who says, "Until the fainting of the Wormwood star, there will always be more to kill." [argument by example]
- 1.1C.1C We see clearly the prosperous farmhouse that is "not a fine house, but a good house, set back from the road in well-tended fields belonging all to itself, lights shining yellow in the windows". [argument by example]

This review is indeed typical because the reviewer provides an short description of the book, describes other books by the same author, clearly gives a verdict, and justifies this verdict by means of arguments from criteria, which are in turn justified by means of arguments by example. The argument from criteria are stylistic, emotional and realistic by nature.





5. Conclusion







In this paper our aim was to show how in literary reviews standpoints expressing a value judgement are justified. This type of standpoint is invariably justified by an argument from criteria. This tight connection has to do with the nature of value judgements, because ascribing a value to an object (in this case a literary novel) entails always automatically claiming to be able to put forward the criteria for justifying that judgement. We explained that value judgments are likely to be justified by more than one argument on the main level. This means that the argumentation on the main level will then be coordinative. On the sublevel the arguments from criteria are most likely defended by arguments by example. In this paper we have focused on literary reviews. How our findings relate to other argumentative activity types in which value judgements are justified is still an open question.

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Address for correspondence

Bart Garssen
Department of Speech Communication, Rhetoric and Argumentation Theory
University of Amsterdam
Spuistraat 134
1012 VB Amsterdam
The Netherlands
b.j.garssen@uva.nl
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9298-4665>

Co-author information

Iva Svačinová
Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences
Philosophical Faculty
University of Hradec Králové
iva.svacinova@uhk.cz

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