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Dialectics of criticism: Argumentation in literary reviews

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"Dialectics of criticism: Argumentation in literary reviews"

Criticism is a neglected subject in the study of argumentation. In my talk, I explore the possibility of a pragma-dialectical analysis in literary reviews as a specific type of criticism. I argue that literary reviews are argumentative texts in which the critic attempts to convince the readers that his or her judgment is right or, at least, acceptable. The resolution of this non-mixed dispute between the critic as a protagonist and the reader as an antagonist is, pragma-dialectically speaking, highly problematic. First, there is no consensus among critics or between critics and their readers with respect to the norms for judging literature. Second, since the readers, as a rule, have not read the novel before they read the review, there are no facts about the novel known to both critics and readers. So, the pragma-dialectical intersubjective identification procedure and the testing procedure cannot be of any help in resolving the dispute. It seems, then, that the acceptability of the critic's argumentation relies heavily, if not exclusively, on his or her authority. Are literary (and other) reviews based on the fallacy of *ad verecundiam* or is it possible for the critic to observe all the rules for a critical discussion?