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Poster Title: "Evaluation of literature by professional and layperson critics. A digital and literary sociological analysis of evaluative talk of literature through the prism of literary prizes (2007-2017)"

Presentation Category: Poster

Thematic strand: 3

Abstract:

There has been ample research on the evolution of literary criticism, though mostly with a historical bent (Dera, 2017; Dorleijn, 2009), and recently *Inside the Critic's Circle* explored the ways in which literary critics evaluate books in times of institutional change (Chong, 2020). However, little attention has been paid to the emergence of layman literary criticism itself and to the effect of peer-to-peer recommendation systems as a novel way of gatekeeping access to the literary system. The digitisation of the public sphere has led to a proliferation of the agents and media (both digital and traditional) participating in the evaluative talk about literature (Allington, 2016). These new gatekeepers are often actively involved in the field itself. As a consequence, the knowledge of professional 'pundits' is being rivalled and challenged by technological developments and the reliance on "the wisdom of the crowds".

This poster presents an ongoing research project, funded by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), that aims to study the evaluation of literature by professional and layperson critics comparatively, through both qualitative and quantitative research into the perceptions of readers and by implementing a digitally empowered method of literary sociology. It draws on a broad multilingual corpus of critical discourse generated by six literary prizes in three different linguistic communities (namely Germany, the Low Countries and the UK) in the period 2007-2017.

For this poster presentation, we seek to report on the early stage of this ongoing research and to highlight and address the early findings and the difficulties that have arisen so far. For this, we will focus on the data which has already been collected concerning the critical discourse generated by the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis. During this competition, the competitors read a chapter of an unpublished novel, which is afterwards discussed and criticised by the members

of the professional jury in the presence of both the author and an audience. The members of this professional jury typically have academic degrees in literary studies. The entirety of the proceedings is broadcast live on television and has accumulated a lively following of ca. 1500 "lay critics" on social media (mainly Twitter), consisting of journalists, writers, bookstore owners, fans, etc..

The project's corpus consists of a wide variety of sources and is excerpted from both print-based media, such as literary journals, the jury reports of the literary prizes and reviews in professional publications, and "new" media, such as the reader impressions and "sentiments" expressed on dedicated social networks like Goodreads, Twitter and Instagram. Furthermore, each of these media implements a distinct way of communicating that comes with certain expectations and limitations regarding length, register, the subject of the critical discourse etc..

The aim is, first and foremost, to analyse and mine the overall judgment and opinion expressed in these texts. For this, a fine-grained sentiment analysis approach will be developed, namely Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA), to detect not only whether a positive or negative feeling is being expressed, but also to discover whether a specific "object" (person, product, organization, etc.) is regarded in a positive or negative way. As a consequence, the focal point will be the talk of literature as a network phenomenon and not just the discussion of literary quality itself.

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