ADOLESCENT READING AND THE REPRODUCTION OF LITERARY JUDGEMENT

What adolescent book reviews of self-selected texts reveal

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Abstract

A contrast is sometimes drawn between prescribed literary texts that develop literary judgement and, contrasting with them, self-selected texts read for pleasure. There is some scepticism in literature didactics about the ability of the latter to develop adolescents' literary judgement. This article reports on a study that questions this scepticism. One aim of the study was to establish whether and how adolescent readers can offer intersubjectively comprehensible and discursively negotiable judgements about the literary quality of texts with which they autonomously engage. A second aim was to determine with which elements of fictional texts they connect these literary qualities. We analysed 55 texts from a corpus of 450 reviews on the Swiss internet site www.jugendbuchtipp.ch in which adolescent readers write about self-selected books. These reviews provide information on the preferences of adolescent readers as well as their ability to perceive and convey their judgements on literary quality. We initially drew on concepts of literary evaluation from reception theory and then further inductively developed a 35-category analytic grid. Participants in a literature didactics research seminar at the University of Basel were closely involved in devising this grid with which to classify the various qualities of evaluation that adolescent readers applied in their reviews. Our analyses confirmed that adolescent readers do verbalise their judgements in intersubjectively understandable statements and arguments. These judgements focus on emotions, the perspective of characters, and the poetic form of texts, three aspects considered central in notions of literary judgement that are currently authoritative in literature didactics. Our findings suggest that autonomously selected texts can provide reading pleasure as well as develop the ability to deliver literary criticism. For literature didactics, our study illustrates the knowledge that teachers may derive from adolescent readers' book reviews about their learners' reading processes and their processes of literary judgement. Furthermore, involving students in the study, enhanced their capacity as prospective teachers to promote the development of adolescent readers' literary judgement.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

'Reading Jürgen Banscherus's *To Sansibar and beyond* is filled with suspense. However, it's not for people who wish to read between the lines. Although Marius and Linda's 'love story' stands in the foreground, it is not described particularly deeply.' (Michelle, 14 years, on Jürgen Banscherus's *Bis Sansibar und weiter* [*To Zanzibar and beyond*])

Adolescent literature and school have an ambivalent relationship, especially in the German-speaking world. This has long been recognised and has been taken up as a challenge within literature didactics. Two decades ago, Haas (1995), amongst others, already drew attention to the 'paradox' brought to light in reading research. On the one hand school, as an instance of reading promotion, trains the 'cultural technique of reading'. Beyond inculcating this crucial basic skill, school also familiarises learners with 'initial propaedeutic analyses' of literature (Haas, 1995, p. 218), thereby prompting the development of literary judgement. On the other hand, school has been proven to hinder the development of individual reading – and this in a 'grave manner' (Haas, 1995, p. 218). At the very least, literature instruction appears to have a questionable effect on the development of reading activity and interest in reading literary texts (see for example Pieper, Rosebrock, Volz & Wirthwein, 2004). From the perspective of school, pleasurable reading and pleasurable texts, in turn, seem suspect (Rosebrock, 1995).

Pleasurable reading is alleged to mainly take place in relation to texts that are deficient in assumed literary standards. Novels – whether for adolescents or adults – employ specific narrative linguistic frames, frames that are recognisable as form-giving features of the text, with which to present a plot and show characters, their actions, thoughts and feelings. However, as a rule, novels selected for pleasurable reading present the narrated content so explicitly that readers can follow without the effort typically associated with more demanding literature. Adolescent readers are attracted by the reading offers of these novels, amongst other reasons, because it is relatively easy for these young readers to find their way into and within the narrated worlds of these texts. As a result, it is believed that these autonomously selected texts that are read for pleasure fail to promote adolescent readers' ability to develop an awareness of the truly poetic features of literature (see the discussion on the canon: Paefgen, 1999, p. 54ff.; Fleming, 2007). The assumption is that pleasure-oriented reading fails to notice that which is genuinely literary in aesthetically formed texts. It is suspected that the reason why readers fail to notice the genuinely aesthetic features of these texts is that pleasure-oriented reading takes place in a vortex of immersion that consumes the reader. This tug that the text exercises on the reader is not restrained by resistant signals within the text. Accordingly, there is a deficit in the disclosure typical to literary works that call for

interpretation by means of analyses of inner-literary relations (Grzesik, 2005, p. 315ff.).

Brought to a point: in this briefly indicated discussion, notions of pleasurable reading with hedonistic intent are juxtaposed to notions of literary learning that develop literary judgement (see for example Muth, 1996; Graf, 2004). As can be observed, at least in the German-speaking world and in France (Dauney, 2007), but probably also beyond, little seems to be done to reconcile reading pleasure and the didactic goals associated with literary texts. Corresponding to this disregard for pleasurable reading, there is a dearth of knowledge about the real potential of self-selected pleasurable texts to promote adolescents' literary understanding and judgement.

Given this fact, there is justified interest in research that ascribes a high potential to freely chosen texts to at least develop reading attitudes that support the forming of literary judgement. Of particular significance in this regard are studies on such autonomously selected texts that twin with learners' reading interest and hence strengthen their reading motivation. In their meta-study on Anglo-American research, Guthrie, Wigfield, and You (2012), for example, conclude that, in reading texts of their own choice, learners do not only develop reading motivations but, beyond that also 'reading engagement' (Guthrie et al., 2012, p. 626). German research has confirmed that such motivation and engagement in turn result in both extensive reading and intensive involvement with the texts that adolescents self-select (Moritz & Rosebrock, 2011). Similar conclusions were drawn in an earlier Swiss study that observed the development of adolescent readers (Schneider & Wiesner, 2011; Bertschi-Kaufmann, 2011). In their reading activity, these adolescent Swiss readers were primarily found to seek the experience of meaning, an experience they are more likely to find in autonomously selected texts. The Swiss sample also confirmed earlier findings that these texts animated participants to additional reading. Indeed, motivation and positive attitudes to reading are unquestioned important preconditions for access to literature centred on understanding. Even if motivation and positive attitudes do not in themselves fully constitute successful literary reading, they may prepare the way for a successful literary reading process.

Reading motivation has often been proven to be a multidimensional construct (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Schiefele & Schaffner, 2016). This includes activity-related reading motivation (the readiness to read) and object-related reading motivation (interest in specific texts and in the contents of texts). We also assume that emotional judgements play a role in the development of both forms of reading motivation. When reading fiction, readers can direct the emotions they bring up at the fictional events, at their own reality, or at the form of the narrative. On all these levels, emotions are experienced more positively or negatively and in this sense readers constantly make emotional judgements (Grzesik, 2005, p. 297ff.). The measure of this type of emotional judgements is subjective feelings (van Holt & Groeben, 2006; Grzesik, 2005, pp. 302ff.; Winko, 2003); the measures of the social-

ly recognised literary judgements, in contrast, are measures aligned to the text. Such literary judgements are manifested in the contextualisation and assessment of what has been read, which makes them intersubjectively comprehensible and discursively negotiable.

Traditionally, these literary judgements are deemed to be the preserve of literary critics and literary scholars. They may occasionally also be entrusted to habitual readers who are connoisseurs of literary texts. But novice and adolescent readers, in contrast, are generally not deemed competent to deliver literary judgements that meet these expectations. Presumably this limited interest in adolescents' ability to form literary judgements is due to schools' traditional lack of confidence in the aptitude of young novices to deliver judgements of intersubjective interest (Haas, 1995; Bertschi-Kaufmann, 2013). This is exacerbated by our lack of knowledge about learners' ability to form literary judgements. In the German-speaking world, while we do have some insight into the ability of students on the gymnasium level to form literary judgements (Frederking, Henschel, Meier, Roick, Stanat & Dickhäuser, 2012), little is known about the literary judgement of learners on the higher levels of secondary school (generally ages 16 – 19); and as for the lower levels of secondary school (generally ages 12 – 16), the picture is even less complete. As a result of this lack of confidence and knowledge, the emphasis within literary didactics has been on promoting adolescents' literary acquisition. However, since literary understanding and the ability to form literary judgements are in fact central to the acquisition of literature (Abraham & Kepser, 2009), such disregard of literary judgement has adverse consequences.

2.   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

German-language literature didactics that draws on reception theory emphasises the 'development of imagination' when reading and listening, as well as 'subjective involvement' that is 'brought alive with exact perception' (Kammler, 2006, p. 16). Within this tradition, three elements that are considered central to literary judgement are emotion, characters, and form. In literary texts emotions are linguistically represented and the representation of emotions is constitutive for literary texts (Winko, 2003, p. 338). On the side of the readers, evaluative feelings are central to continuous and sustainable reading processes (Miall, 2006, p. 44) This is followed by further partial competences such as 'understanding the perspectives of literary characters' (Hurrelmann, 2003) and, finally, the perception of poeticity by 'attentively perceiving linguistic form' (Kammler, 2006, p. 16).

Emotions are central to literary judgement because they make readers perceptive to the message of the text (Bertschi-Kaufmann, 2013, p. 141) and contribute to reading motivation. Emotional involvement plays a significant role in the readiness of adolescent readers to follow complexly structured fictions (Bertschi-Kaufmann, 2011). Findings on reading biographies underline the importance that a positive attitude has for reading activity (see Keen, 2007; for Germany, see for example

Graf, 2013; Schön, 1993 and others) and how the 'communicative promise and anticipation of meaning' (Graf, 2013, p. 286) makes readers perceptive to the qualities of texts. Emotions, then, are not primarily the *effect* of literary understanding; on the contrary, emotions are one *source* of literary understanding and hence constitutive for literary judgement. As Winko comments in relation to the rules of emotional meaning: 'Literary knowledge is attained in a manner that includes cognitive and emotive aspects' (Winko, 2003, p. 335).

Qualitative studies in the Anglo-Saxon world (Miall, 2006) have shed particular light on the place of emotions in the different phases of reading and how readers' emotions steer reading processes. On the one hand, emotions which are prompted in readers by characters and actions in the text, steer these readers' expectations regarding the upcoming passages. On the other hand, changes in emotions that happen as a reader reads through an episode correct her initial expectations and thereby modify her understanding. The emotionally loaded process of expectation – disappointment of expectation – correction of expectation is an important organising principle of the reading process. This process is built into the text and is constructed and reconstructed on the side of the reader (Miall & Kuiken, 2002). Concerning the activation of emotions during reading, van Holt and Groeben (2006) distinguish emotions that are directed at reality, at the fictional world, and at the textual artefact and have also explained this with reference to various studies in reading psychology. This differentiation and specification of the reading-related concept 'emotions' is helpful for a more exact understanding of reading reactions.

Characters are crucial to literary reception because they count amongst those aspects of literary texts that most interest readers, and because empathy with characters plays a considerable role in enabling this interest. In psychology, empathy is described as sharing an emotion with another person, as feeling with them or understanding their feelings [*mit- oder nachempfinden*] (Schön, 1993), or in the case of fictional reading, with fictitious personae. Presupposing the taking of perspective, empathy is a demanding reading attitude. Characters invite readers to see the narrated events from a different perspective, to place themselves in the characters' shoes, to go along, to feel along and thereby to fully immerse themselves in the reading. Characters allow readers to identify with what is narrated but also to encounter what is different, foreign, or other. Readers who are ready to establish contact with characters are, in the words of Hurrelmann (2003, p. 6), on 'the royal road of motivated reading'. Characters open the doors to fictional worlds, because they help readers to imagine the narrated world as a real one. How readers describe such 'identification' with characters varies greatly (Keen, 2007).

Taking on characters' perspectives does not only entail deep emotional involvement, it is also a considerable cognitive achievement (Winko, 2003). Iser (1991, p. 193) uses the term 'synthetic activity' to describe this achievement with which the reader enters the text and 'is present' in it. Following Iser's reception theory, fictionality can be described as an offer on the side of the text. Imagination, in turn, is the capacity of readers to use their own creative imagination to pick up

the imaginary that is installed in the text. Thereby the reader reacts productively to the offer in the text. The imaginary is therefore part of the literary process; readers take it up in their imagination, which is mostly directed at the characters. In order for readers to properly sink into the story, they must adapt the perspective of individual characters – in other words, readers must lose their I-borders. This is similar to what Roland Barthes – in his attempt to explain *The pleasure of the text* – describes as the 'subject losing itself' (Barthes, 1974, p. 86). The literary text, according to Barthes, calls upon the reader to dive into a space of possibilities, to live with the characters, mentally and emotionally. In fusion with the text and the characters, readers are invited to engage in a concrete and at the same time pleasurable (reading) experience.

In view of the perception of literary form, literature didactics commonly emphasises two aspects. The first is textual features themselves and the demands that poetically formed texts place on readers (Eggert, 2002; Kämper-van den Boogaart & Pieper, 2008). These aesthetic features of texts include: language rhythms; symbolic connections and metaphors; dramatic and narrative structures; as well as openness of meaning, ambiguity, and polyvalence. As has been mentioned, adolescents' self-selected texts indeed differ greatly in the degree to which they meet these formal aesthetic expectations of literary didactics. The second aspect on which literature didactics focuses is the extent to which readers succeed in actually noticing the mentioned features of literary texts and the capacity of adolescent readers to develop and refine their awareness and ability to judge aesthetic form (Spinner, 2006; Zabka, 2006).

3. AIMS AND QUESTIONS

Against this background, our research aims to understand the potential of self-selected pleasurable texts to promote adolescents' literary judgement, their ability to justify these judgements, and their ability to communicate these judgements in intersubjectively comprehensible and discursively negotiable form. Rather than address these issues in general terms, we seek to get detailed and concrete answers by focussing on the three aspects that German-language literary didactics describe as central to literary judgement. Accordingly, we sought to answer three sets of questions related to emotions, characters, and form.

1) Do adolescent readers express emotional judgements? If yes, what type of emotional judgements do they communicate about? (Miall & Kuiken, 2002; Winko, 2003; van Holt & Groeben, 2006)
2) Do adolescent readers express judgements about closeness to characters and the taking on of characters' perspectives? If yes, what type of judgements regarding closeness to characters and the taking on of characters' perspectives do they communicate about? (Keen, 2007)
3) Do adolescent readers express judgements about formal aesthetic qualities of texts? If yes, which formal aesthetic qualities do they communicate

about? (van Holt & Groeben, 2006; Kämper-van den Boogaart & Pieper, 2008)

4. METHOD

4.1 Sample

To observe adolescents' literary judgement, we examined reviews they had written of self-selected books. The reviews were extracted from a corpus of 450 book reviews on the Swiss internet site www.jugendbuchtipp.ch. This site has a dual function: it invites adolescents to publish reviews of books they had chosen themselves; and it offers them the opportunity to read the book recommendations by other adolescent critics and to be inspired thereby to read further books. For the present study, we closely analysed 55 of these reviews by 13 to 15-year-old learners, limiting the initial selection to those texts that had been uploaded within the same three months (April 2015 – June 2015). To be retained in the sample, a review had to contain three elements: narrative parts; an explicit judgement; and an explicit recommendation to either read or not read the book. This corpus as a whole, as well as the selected subsample of reviews, offer a productive resource to examine adolescents' literary preferences. The reviews also offer rich data on the interaction between adolescents reading processes and their written reproduction of their reading experiences in general and their literary judgement in particular.

4.2 Data analyses

To identify and to distinguish elements of adolescent readers' literary judgement, we conducted qualitative content analyses of their reviews. Drawing on theoretical categories related to the reproduction and evaluation of the reading experience developed in Heydebrand and Winko's (1996) reception theoretical analyses, we deductively developed an initial analytic grid. In the course of applying the grid, we enriched and inductively refined it. When it was fully developed, the grid comprised four main domains consisting of a total number of 35 categories.

The four main impact-related values were: (1) individual-affective values with explicit reference to the reader's own emotions (texts are judged with explicit reference to own emotions that the reader identifies in relation to the text, either during reading or retrospectively); (2) individual-affective values as well as individual cognitive values with explicit reference to one or more characters (texts are judged with reference to a figure or figures, their thoughts and actions); (3) formal-aesthetic values (texts are judged with explicit reference to formal-aesthetic values such as aesthetic form of the language, style, narrative form, text structure, complexity/simplicity, polyvalence/unambiguity, openness/closedness, appropriateness etc.); and (4) general effect-related values, with which the effects of the texts are

judged (texts are judged according to the perceived effect, both emotional and cognitive, they have on a reader).

These four main value domains were further subdivided. The fourth domain, namely effect-related values was, for example, further divided into four subcategories. This domain particularly interested us because it signalled adolescent readers' ability to observe and to verbalise the effect that the texts have on them and these readers' ability to render this effect discursively:

1) Individual cognitive stimulation, insight, or knowledge gained in reading (Texts are judged with reference to the gain in knowledge they bring: this includes transfer of knowledge, gain in information, and prompting reflection.),

2) Reading understood in terms of the orientation it provides for individual practical action (Texts are judged with reference to action, ethics, significance for life, and concern [*Betroffenheit*].),

3) Individual affective values such as being moved, pity, equanimity, identification/distancing etc. (Texts are judged with reference to values with an affective and emotional effect. The emotional effect is related to how reading prompts emotions and how intensive the emotions are. Reference is possibly also made to actions that may be prompted by these values. The precondition for these judgements is mostly taking on of perspective and involvement.),

4) Individual hedonistic values such as reading pleasure, entertainment, suspense (Texts are judged with reference to joy, suspense, sensory satisfaction etc.).

Together with participants in a research seminar at the University of Basel, we conducted a first wave of analysis in which we put together all excerpts from the reviews that belonged within a specific category. For example, together with other similar excerpts that refer to literary form or linguistic expression, we collected the extract:

> 'Reading Jürgen Banscherus's *To Sansibar and beyond* is filled with suspense. However, it's not for people who wish to read between the lines. Although Marius and Linda's 'love story' stands in the foreground, it is not described particularly deeply.' (Michelle, 14 years, on Jürgen Banscherus's *Bis Sansibar und weiter* [*To Zanzibar and beyond*]).

under the overall domain *Formal aesthetic values* and the subcategory *Linguistic presentation*. On the basis of this first wave of categorisations, the categories were further refined and distinguished. In a second wave, the analysis was conducted with the complete grid. Inter-rating was conducted by four pairs of students, who had previously received rater training together with all participants in the seminar. Deviation in inter-rater agreement was less than 8%, with most deviation in the category *effect-related values*. Deviations in allocations were discussed, a follow-up reanalysis was conducted and a final allocation determined. This was followed by the interpretation of the data.

An overview of the selected reviews from the sample initially allowed us to distinguish the main dimensions of literary criticism contained in the corpus and to subsequently connect concrete utterances in young critics' reviews to important elements of literary judgement such as emotion, taking on characters' perspectives, and the perception of form.

5.   RESULTS

5.1 Judgements related to emotions

Most prominent amongst all the judgements observed, were judgements about emotional involvement. Our analyses showed that readers are indeed able to develop emotional proximity to narrated events and to then step back in order to deliver literary judgements about the ability of texts to prompt such emotional closeness. As the following excerpt illustrates, adolescent readers' book reviews show that they can express emotional closeness to a novel even when they broadly disapprove of the narrative content.

> 'I found it impressive how much the book *influenced my thoughts. How much I wanted to influence many of Lena's decisions and thoughts when I did not like them.*' (Lilli, 14/15, on Lauren Oliver's *Delirium*)

We classified this as an example of emotional participation in the lives of the characters and qualified this with 'Empathy for the emotions of the characters on the basis of precise recognition and understanding. The reader takes the perspective of a witness, or observer, maintains reflective distance and judges the protagonists and their actions.'

Lilli's review shows her ability to communicate a complex emotional attitude, that is, to render in words her emotional relation to the text. In her review there is clear evidence of her ability to distinguish between her own emotions and the feelings of the literary character, and this, notwithstanding her wish to shape the literary character according to her own desires. She can take the role of an observer, while at the same time also maintaining reflective distance. She can manage the relationship between emotions related to the fictional world of a story on the one hand, and, on the other hand, emotions that relate to the real lifeworld of the reader.

Arguing from the perspective of reading psychology, van Holt and Groeben (2006) accentuate this distinction between emotions oriented to fiction and emotions oriented to reality. This distinction, we argue, is also helpful to categorise readers' literary judgements. When readers, like Lilli, successfully combine these different kinds of emotions with attitudes of involvement and of distancing, they show evidence of an empathetic reading attitude, an attitude which integrates both emotional and cognitive achievements.

At the same time, it is also possible to observe the successful combination of emotions related to reality with emotions related to fiction when these are tied to each other in an empathetic reading attitude. When, while reading, Lilli wishes to influence the decisions and thoughts of a character, two reading attitudes appear alongside each other: empathetic involvement as well as distancing. In addition, it is also possible to observe the achievement of the reader and reviewer to communicate – that is to verbalise – this type of complex emotional reception.

Even though our findings suggest that complex emotional judgements like Lilli's are not very common in adolescent readers' reviews, we could establish that emotional participation in narrated events is the most important gratification and source of motivation to adolescent readers. What they call 'living along' or *mit-fiebern* constitutes the actual real intensity of the subjective experience of the text, as the following extract shows:

> 'Overall I am quite convinced by the book because one can put oneself in the fairy-tale-type story really well and feel some emotions and intrigues shared with betrayal and hate of the old times and the transferability to present times.' (Tarek, age unspecified, on Kirsten Boie's *Skogland*)

'Living along' with the text, is described here as connecting interest in fictional events with 'current times', as the possibility to mentally update what has been read. The reviewer, however, does not perceive this mental updating that the text prompts and the reader carries out as a cognitive achievement, which our discussion of Keen (2007) above showed it also is. Instead, he describes such updating as sensing, as an emotional experience of identification. Generally, such identification while reading fictional texts comes about when readers feel close to characters.

5.2 Judgements related to characters

One type of closeness to characters that adolescent readers express is identification. Such identification can shade into distantless fusion. Where identification takes the form of fusion, readers do not report any difference in their awareness of their own real experiences and the narrated experiences of others.

> 'I can put myself in the position of the characters a lot. I live in them, think with them, feel with them.' (Selina, 15, on Haruki Murakami's *Kafka am Strand* [*Kafka on the shore*])

We classified this as 'Judgement in relation to the offer to identify that is taken up: fusion' which we further qualified as 'Reader does not mark distance from the characters'. For Selina, characters clearly have considerable importance, and this to the extent that the difference between her own person and the characters of the story is suspended. This is evident from her comment that they invite readers to imagine, to take on their perspectives, and to live with them. (It is also evident in the extract below, in which Manuel describes reading as sinking into another world.)

When adolescents refer to this form of fusion with another character, they use expressions such as *putting oneself in the place of the character*, *submersion* and *living along with a character or events* [*sich einleben*]. Such an immersion into the space of possibilities offered by the text can be detected in the following extract:

> 'When I sometimes ask people why they like reading, many answer: 'One sinks into a different world!' With Tolkien's books one does not only sink into the book; no, one lives the story. He succeeded in creating a perfect, new world.' (Manuel, 14, on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*)

These comments are indicative of adolescent critics' mental and emotional involvement with the character as described by Iser (1991) and Barthes (1974).

Closeness to characters is also associated with *selbstvergessenes lesen*, reading in which the readers is lost to the world. Generally adolescents see such closeness to characters positively and comment on how it pulls them along:

> 'When you have read your way into the book, you practically can no longer stop reading as you can absolutely live along with the person and the story. The main point why I love the book so much is, as already said, that I felt like the main character.' (Lilli, 14/15 on Lauren Oliver's *Delirium*)

Closeness to the texts and its characters is equally evident in the excerpts from reviews by two young critics who laud texts for their ability to familiarise readers with very different worlds, without their own and the characters' perspectives being fused. Michael, for example, positively judges Jon Krakauer's ability to familiarise him as reader with events in a distant world, such as an expedition to Mount Everest:

> 'The author knows how to transmit suspense, fascination and dangers on the mountain so that the reader sees the past situation exactly before his eyes.' (Michael, 14 years, on Jon Krakauer's *In eisige Höhen* [*Into Thin Air*])

Martin, in turn, praises a novel for its ability to transfer him to another world:

> 'I find this book very good because it is as if one is transferred to another world [...]. The best thing about this crime thriller is that one does not experience it from the distance of an outsider but one feels like Hilmer Erikson.' (Martin, presumably 14, on Mats Wahl's *The invisible*)

In contrast to strong identification between readers and characters, some excerpts confirm that adolescent readers sometimes take on characters' perspectives without such fusion. When they take this second attitude, adolescent readers try to understand emotions, thoughts and actions with which they are not familiar or that do not match their own. Such an understanding of the other, which in literature didactics is also referred to as the experience of alterity (see for example Spinner, 2007), complements reading as identification. In this case, understanding of the other does not require direct proximity to the characters; instead, it requires distancing.

Adolescent readers additionally seem to be especially gratified when the two modes of perspective taking, namely identification and distancing, alternate. That is, when traces of the familiar can be found in fascination with the other:

> 'In this way there is a fusion of reality with the surreal, dreams with everyday life, death with life. The whole novel, however, has an effect that is very close to reality, although I know exactly that it could never have happened like that.' (Selina, 15, on Haruki Murakami's *Kafka am Stran*d [*Kafka on the shore*])

Admittedly, the judgements adolescent readers express in their reviews provide only limited evidence of such reflective distancing from characters as in these extracts. Instead, unquestioning proximity to the characters is more common. Taking on the perspective that is perceived as that of a character, rejecting it and finally integrating it into the reader's own reading judgement – all of this requires a considerable effort from readers, whether they are adolescents, connoisseurs or professional critics. In addition to the emotional achievements required to attain this integrative goal, readers also need to attain the achievements of critical distancing, self-observation and, last but not least, close attention to the text.

5.3 Judgements related to form

In their literary judgements, professional literary critics often address the poetic signals in a text, the text structure, and the ways in which the reader is guided through the text. Extracts from adolescent readers' reviews confirm that, like their professional counterparts, they are also able to observe these textual features, even if to a limited extent:

> 'I particularly liked the descriptions. It doesn't matter whether it's a building, a person or something else: Mrs. Rahlens has excellently described or painted everything. This at once pulled one into a reading rush, when one started reading these descriptions.' (Manuel Kaufmann, 13, on Holly-Jane Rahlens's *Prinz William, Maximilian Minsky und ich* [*Prince William, Maximilian Minsky, and I*])

Applying our analytic grid, we categorised such signals of the evaluation of textual quality as *formal aesthetic values*. These were further sub-divided into judgements concerning narrative form, the structure of the text, or style.

In more than half of their reviews did adolescents reviewers refer to formal-aesthetic values in their judgements of the texts they had read. This included formal-aesthetic judgements about the form of the language, style, narrative form, text structure, complexity/simplicity, polyvalence/unambiguity, openness/closedness, appropriateness etc. Further examples that reflect adolescent readers' awareness of the importance of critical attention to form in literary judgement are spread throughout the reviews:

> 'She has an exciting and varied writing style' (Vivienne, 14, on Isabel Abedi's *Whisper* [*Whisper*]);

'Seen purely linguistically, a delicacy' (Michael, 15, on Alois Prinz's *Lieber wütend als traurig – Die Lebensgeschichte der Ulrike Marie Meinhof* [*Rather angry than sad – the life story of Ulrike Marie Meinhof*]); and

'Monika Feth knows how to wonderfully write sentences that would actually not be great.' (Sarah, 16, on Monika Feth's *Der Erdbeerpflücker* [*The Strawberry Picker*])

From such examples we infer that (even if they only explore these formal linguistic elements to a limited extent) these adolescent reviewers firstly, acknowledge that literary judgement includes attention to such aesthetic qualities of texts and, secondly, are actually able to form judgements regarding such formal linguistic features.

A noticeable number of reviews show that adolescent readers do not restrict themselves to judgements on the aesthetic form of the text. In addition, they also pay detailed attention to the interactions between aesthetic form (that is the signals in the text) and their own reception of such form. In her review of Isabel Abedi's psychological adventure novel *Isola*, Elea, for example, explores such interactions between the text and the reader when she writes:

'The author's writing style is easy to understand. Emotions are often described precisely and in detail, so that one can easily put oneself in the position of the individual persons. For myself, while reading I felt as if I were on this island myself.' (Elea, 14, on Isabel Abedi's *Isola*)

This reader clearly draws connections between the formal qualities of the text on the one side, and, on the other side, her involvement and ability to take on the perspective of the characters. She argues that readers can easily place themselves in the position of the characters because of the literary style, that is because the emotions of the protagonists are 'described precisely and in detail'. In addition, these formal qualities serve as arguments in favour of the book: because the style is 'easy to understand' and 'modern' – that is, because the style is close to the language of the adolescents – adolescents will respond to it positively and the book can therefore be recommended to her peers.

When these adolescent critics connect features of the text with the effects that the text has on them while reading, they are capable of artefact-directed emotions, emotions that van Holt and Groeben (2006) identify as particularly appropriate to literary reading. Evidence of such artefact-directed emotions can also be gleaned from the following example:

'*The teller of fairy tales* is written in oral style and rather easy to read. I admire Antonia Michaelis's writing style, because, despite this youthful language, she succeeds in writing sensitively as well as poetically.' (Alisa, 14, on Antonia Michaelis's *Der Märchenerzähler* [*The teller of fairy tales*])

In this extract, the adolescent critic is able to identify features of the text and to use these to explain the reading as 'easy'. Furthermore, easy reading – or rather reading that is *experienced* as easy – is also connected to processes on the side of the reader.

Reviews by adolescent critics also confirm that some of them are able to connect the perception of literary form with either gratification or a lack of it. Even if these judgements are infrequent, and notwithstanding their limitations, they confirm that in building up a reading repertoire, adolescent readers are open to developing pleasure in felicitous linguistic structures, appropriate formulations, and original representations. As the 15-year-old Selina notes:

> 'This book has really shown me how wonderful German can be when one uses the right expressions, although it is translated from Japanese. The whole language runs in harmony, like a song that continues and never stops. It is the first book of which I can say that I would read it a second time. Because, with this book one keeps on learning, cannot get enough of it. This book has given me the push to, from now on, read higher quality books, to engage even much more with a book, to yield to the book even more, to let myself be captivated.' (Selina, 15, on Haruki Murakami's *Kafka am Strand* [*Kafka on the shore*])

6. DISCUSSION

The broader backdrop to this study on the development of adolescents' literary judgement is the purported tension between pleasurable reading with hedonistic intent on the one side, and literary learning on the other side. The view that pleasurable reading and literary learning are mutually exclusive means that schools do not sufficiently consider ways in which to reconcile reading for pleasure with the didactic goals associated with literary texts. Because we question the theoretical soundness of such dichotomisation, we examined texts in which adolescent readers document and judge their self-selected reading. We developed a 35-category grid to conduct a detailed qualitative empirical analysis of 55 adolescent book reviews. Our analyses sought to fill in some gaps in our knowledge of the potential of self-selected pleasurable texts to promote the literary understanding and judgement of adolescent readers in the lower secondary school levels. To fill these gaps, and to explore ways in which reading for pleasure could potentially be reconciled with the didactic goals associated with literary texts, our study pursued two broad aims.

Firstly, and more generally, we sought to gain some understanding of the extent to which the texts that adolescents self-select for pleasurable reading promote their ability to judge these texts, to justify these judgements, and to communicate these judgements in intersubjectively comprehensible and discursively negotiable form. In general, our analyses of adolescents' reviews confirm that they are in fact budding appraisers, who, in their reviews do judge these texts. Importantly, they successfully connect reading and their writing about their reading in such a way that they are able to justify their judgements and can communicate these judgements in intersubjectively comprehensible and discursively negotiable form.

Secondly, and more concretely, we sought to identify the literary qualities on which adolescents base their judgements. Our analyses show that these judgements concern emotions, character, and literary form. Adolescent readers' emotional evaluations of texts include perception of their own involvement in repre-

sented actions as well as evaluations of such involvement. A range of affective responses can be discerned, from unconditional involvement in narrated events to distancing attitudes. In addition, these adolescent critics are able to develop closeness to characters and to take on characters' perspectives, thereby allowing for empathetic reading which spans from fusion to distancing and includes alternation between identification and reflection. Finally, they are able to observe and judge textual features as well as their own perception of such features. This includes judgements about the felicity of aesthetic form and the gratification, or lack thereof that readers obtain from observing such form.

Combined, the findings from this study give initial empirical support to our argument that it is possible to bring together the reading of self-selected texts for pleasure with the construction of literary judgement. Our overall analyses show that adolescent readers are not only capable of literary judgement, adolescent readers can in fact successfully combine the development of literary judgement with largely savouring pleasurable self-selected reading that they consider meaningful and that promotes their reading motivation. This conclusion, which is borne out by the overall analyses, is also concisely confirmed in the instance of an account of the reading experience:

> 'I caught myself how, after each chapter, I peeped at the page numbers and every time I was disappointed that I had again come closer to the end of the book. It may possibly sound crazy, and I swear that this has never happened to me, but I did read slower than usual, even cautioned myself not to read too much and on some days even totally let it be, only to enjoy the book longer, only that I don't come closer to the end.' (Inge, 14, on Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*)

The texts that adolescents self-select and that they find particularly exciting admittedly seldom include canonised works that are conducive to acquiring the forms of literary perception valorised in reception aesthetics. Nevertheless, the adolescents do have experiences with their self-selected texts that strengthen both their reading motivation and their literary learning. These experiences chime with the definitions of literary competence that are currently authoritative in German-language literary didactics (Spinner, 2006; Kammler, 2006). The reviews in our corpus show that, in reading self-selected texts which they experience as meaningful, adolescent readers to varied extents are emotionally involved, do understand characters' perspectives, and are attentive to linguistic form. At the very least, in judging these texts, these adolescents prepare themselves for the acquisition of the competences currently considered crucial to literary judgement. In other words, contrary to views that construe them as mutually exclusive, the construction of literary judgement can be reconciled with the experience of reading pleasure.

Our study has some limitations that future research may address. The book reviews merely contain the traces of adolescent reader's reading processes: recapitulation and judgements of what they have read. In these traces we can observe the readers' accomplishments regarding understanding and judgment even if the study was not designed to measure the extent of these accomplishments. If one wanted

to measure these readers' levels of knowledge and competence, it would be necessary to measure their literary understanding (Frederking et al., 2012). The qualitative approach for which we opted gives initial but clear indications that voluntary, largely self-directed reading, is compatible with literary learning.

An additional limitation concerns the sample: the 55 reviews we analysed constitute a subsample of the 450 reviews available on www.jugendbuchtipp.ch. Close analyses of this subsample made it possible to trial the analytic instruments we had developed and to gather the findings presented here. However, a larger investigation containing a bigger sample and which takes into consideration the literary quality of the selected books as well as the quality of the reviews, will further fill existing knowledge gaps.

Our overall finding, namely that in their reviews adolescents express literary judgements on texts they self-select for pleasurable reading, has several implications for practice. Firstly, connection reading and writing in literature instruction, does not only aid learners to verbalise and thereby recognize the results of their own reading and to develop the competence to express intersubjectively comprehensible and discursively negotiable judgements. Connecting reading and writing also sheds light for teachers on the corresponding processes in their learners. Secondly, drawing on our analyses and analytical grid, we developed a much simplified grid for interested teachers. Those teachers who do connect reading and writing with their learners and who do use internet platforms to upload book reviews can use this simplified grid to focus their observations of their learners' ability to make literary judgements. Thirdly, for the students who participated in the research seminar on literary didactics, the insights gained provide orientation for the design of their future literature instruction.

We would like to believe that our study opens some potential avenues for future inquiry. This includes an ongoing mixed methods study (*Texte, Aktivitäten und Motivationen im Literaturunterricht* (TAMoLi), see www.literaturunterricht.ch) that connects the qualitative approach to text selection and literary judgments from in the present study on which we report here with the capturing of larger populations and quantitative methods. In the latter study, in which teachers and learners in lower secondary school level are interviewed about their reading motivation pertaining to literature set in school and to self-selected leisure reading as well as on their perspectives on the selection of texts for literature instruction. The findings from the new study should allow us to proceed beyond literary judgments on isolated works to an understanding of the perspective that learners have on reading and literature instruction. These findings should give further indication of measures in literature instruction that motivate learners and promote reading.

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