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Scholarship, community formation and book reviews: The *Literarisches Centralblatt* as arena and meeting place

Abstract

Book reviews serve multiple functions. They are not only used to assess the merit of individual books but also contribute to the creation and maintenance of scholarly communities.

This paper draws on nineteenth-century book reviews to outline three of their features that contributed to the self-definition of such communities: the assessment of books, the assessment of authors, and the use of positive and negative politeness strategies to address individual authors as well as a broader audience.

The analysis will be based on the book reviews of the German Semitist Theodor Nöldeke and the experimental psychologist

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Wilhelm Wundt in the *Literarisches Centralblatt* in the eighteen-seventies. In their book reviews they both criticized and praised their peers, which turned review journals like the *Centralblatt* in arenas for polemic debate as well as meeting places for like-minded scholars.

To be more precise, book reviews were used to communicate standards of scholarly excellence, expectations of the character and skills of scholars, and the acknowledgement of the value of the continued existence of aims and interests shared among a large group of academically educated and employed scholars. By contributing to the establishment and maintenance of scholarly peer groups with shared values, book reviews also reinforced the dividing line between academic researchers and lay contributors to their fields.

Keywords: *book reviews, standards of scholarship, scholarly character, communities of scholarship, late-nineteenth-century Germany, Theodor Nöldeke, Wilhelm Wundt, Literarisches Centralblatt*

Wiedza, formacja społeczna i recenzje książek: *Literarisches Centralblatt* jako arena i miejsce spotkań

Abstrakt

Recenzje książek pełnią wiele funkcji. Służą nie tylko do oceny wartości poszczególnych książek, ale także przyczyniają się do tworzenia i utrzymywania społeczności naukowych.

Artykuł ten, opierając się na dziewiętnastowiecznych recenzjach książek, przedstawia trzy ich cechy, które przyczyniły się do samookreślenia się społeczności naukowych: ocena książek, ocena autorów oraz stosowanie pozytywnych i negatywnych strategii uprzejmości w zwracaniu się do poszczególnych autorów a także szerszej publiczności.

Analiza będzie oparta na recenzjach książek niemieckiego semitysty Theodora Nöldeke i eksperymentalnego psychologa Wilhelma Wundta w *Literarisches Centralblatt* z lat 70. XVIII w. W swoich recenzjach książek autorzy zarówno krytykowali, jak i chwalili swoich rówieśników, którzy zamieniali czasopiśma przeglądowe, takie jak *Centralblatt*, na arenę polemicznych debat, a także miejsce spotkań dla podobnie myślących naukowców.

Mówiąc ściślej, recenzje książek posłużyły do przekazania standardów doskonałości naukowej, oczekiwań co do charakteru i umiejętności naukowców oraz uznania przez nich wartości dalszego istnienia celów i zainteresowań podzielanych przez dużą grupę osób wykształconych i zatrudnionych uczonych. Przyczyniając się do tworzenia i utrzymywania naukowych grup rówieśniczych o wspólnych wartościach, recenzje książek również wzmocniły linię podziału między badaczami akademickimi a laikami w swoich dziedzinach.

Słowa kluczowe: *recenzje książek, standardy naukowe, charakter naukowy, wspólnoty naukowe, koniec XIX wieku, Niemcy, Theodor Nöldeke, Wilhelm Wundt, Literarisches Centralblatt*

1. Introduction

You worthy reviewers place yourselves on [...] a pedestal and speak too much like chief justices about poor clients who stand trial before you. [...] You have too much of an eye for the defects and do not place enough value on the good. [...] That makes a writer or publisher resentful, you see.¹

In his bitter reflection on what he saw as typical approaches to book reviewing in late-nineteenth-century Germany, the Dutch Semitist Michael Jan de Goeje painted a picture of a vicious practice that encouraged reviewers to be needlessly critical of praiseworthy scholarship. The recipient of his complaint, his German friend and colleague Theodor Nöldeke, was not impressed. In his eyes, the fierce criticism in the book review that had encouraged De Goeje to reflect so disappointedly on the reviewing practice as a whole had been well-deserved. He did not deny the harshness of his judgments but stated:

In [this] matter I feel that I am more fully in the right than ever.²

¹ Leiden University Library (hereafter LUL), BPL 2389, Michael Jan de Goeje to Theodor Nöldeke, 21 April 1867. All translations are by the author, unless otherwise stated, translation by the author.

² LUL, BPL 2389, Theodor Nöldeke to Michael Jan de Goeje, 12 September 1867.

The only thing that De Goeje and Nöldeke agreed on, was that his book review had indeed been devastating.

Tension and conflict are attractive starting points for the study of the history of scholarship. They can provide unique insights into the methodological assumptions, valued practices, shared ideals, and pursued virtues of scholars. Because the genre of the book review ostentatiously exists primarily to provide the opportunity to express disagreement, critical reviews, such as those discussed by Nöldeke and De Goeje, appear to be a particularly promising research topic. In this paper, however, I do not only pay attention to such scathing reviews. After all, the vast majority of the reviews analyzed for this study have a more sympathetic character. On the basis of examples taken from the *Literarisches Centralblatt*, a review journal founded in 1851 in Leipzig, I argue that this large number of rather favorable reviews fulfilled a valuable function in late-nineteenth-century Germany, namely the articulation of shared values and thereby also the definition and maintenance of a community of scholars.

In the first section of this paper, I draw on existing research to reflect on the forms and functions of book reviews in the nineteenth century. The next sections will focus on the protagonists of my arguments: the *Centralblatt* and its long-time editor Friedrich Zarncke as well as Theodor Nöldeke and the experimental psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, whose reviews will provide the empirical backbone of this study. In the closing sections, I will reflect on the function of book reviews in light of the observations from the preceding sections. I will draw particular attention to the way in which book reviews are instrumental in shaping and maintaining scientific communities.

2. The genre of the book review

The book review is an old genre that developed hand in hand with the scholarly journal. The earliest scholarly journals already published book reviews and from the late eighteenth century onwards, specialized review journals became increasingly common.³ The requirements of the genre were not laid down in a strict manner. In his analysis of the genre's

³ Schneider 2005, p. 283.

peculiarities, the 18th-century theologian Johann Christoph Greiling distinguished as many as three different types of reviews:

Reviewing can be seen in a historical and a philosophical meaning. In the first one it would mean: stating the contents of a book. In the philosophical meaning, however, reviewing must mean: examining the spirit of a book based on the principles of the discipline to which it [...] belongs.⁴

The third type of reviews, he argued, combined the historical and the philosophical approach.

Greiling's distinctions can also be recognized in modern-day scholarship. In a recent study, Thomas Habel suggests that most of the academic book reviews in Greiling's time belonged to what the latter characterized as the historical tradition: they simply aimed to give the reader an overview of the content of recent publications without critically assessing them.⁵ Another recent study by Ken Hyland notes that modern-day reviews are predominantly of what Greiling would call the philosophical type, stating that reviewing is

essentially an evaluative genre where writers judge a text on its academic quality, clarity, integrity and value to the field.⁶

Rosa Lorés-Sanz even states that the genre as we know it today is evaluative "by definition".⁷ This paper is in line with the above observations about early-day as well as about modern-day journals because it presents the nineteenth century as a transitional period, in which academic book reviews were written in both the historical and the philosophical fashion, even if the evaluative reviews prove to be the most rewarding sources. It is also worth noting that the genre was even more variegated in those years: it was not unusual for a book review to be also used "as a platform for the elucidation of [one's] own theories".⁸ German historians, for example, often presented their "own points of view, concepts and current research" in their reviews.⁹

⁴ Greiling 1799, p. 353.

⁵ Habel 2007, p. 222.

⁶ Hyland 2004, p. 44.

⁷ Lorés-Sanz 2012, p. 98.

⁸ Giddens 1970, p. 171.

⁹ Müller 2004, p. 430.

Book reviews are interesting, however, not only because of their substantive and critical contributions to ongoing scholarly debates: they are also important in shaping “the social cohesiveness of disciplinary communities”.¹⁰ On the one hand, they pose a risk to this cohesiveness, because the critical evaluation, which reviewers are encouraged to engage in, can be perceived as threatening by reviewed authors or even serve as the starting point of a prolonged conflict. On the other hand, the genre offers both an occasion to validate reviewed authors as belonging to a scholarly community and an opportunity to draw attention to the shared values embraced by its members. The delicate social qualities of the review genre are further complicated by its twofold audience: it is directed at a reviewed author as well as at a broader group of peers. These audiences may have different expectations. The linguist Greg Myers even argues that the relation between reviewer and author requires only “little deference, while one researcher must always humble himself or herself before the community as a whole”.¹¹ Therefore, it is both important and challenging to find a “proper balance between collegiality and critique” in this peculiar academic genre.¹²

Because book reviews can have a strong impact on both the reviewee and a wider group of peers, even highly critical reviewers often make an effort to maintain social harmony. They modify their language to soften the impact of their criticism. In doing so, they make use of different politeness strategies. One set of such strategies can be described as positive politeness, which aims at satisfying one’s audience’s desire for recognition

by communicating that one’s own wants (or some of them)
are in some respects similar to the addressee’s wants.¹³

Another set of strategies can be described as negative politeness, which consists of different kinds of hedges that mollify the impact of potentially face-threatening statements, such as admitting one’s own lack of expertise or the use of qualifying verbs like *would* or *might*. In this paper, I argue that the use of both positive and negative politeness

¹⁰ Hyland 2004, p. 43.

¹¹ Myers 1989, p. 4.

¹² Salager Meyer, Alcaraz Ariza, Pabón Berbesi 2007, p. 1771.

¹³ Brown, Levinson 1987, p. 101.

strategies in book reviews significantly contributed to the reaffirming and maintaining of scholarly communities in late-nineteenth-century Germany. Before I discuss politeness strategies, however, I will introduce this paper's protagonists and investigate the most common types of praise and criticism in their reviews.

3. The *Literarisches Centralblatt* and its collaborators

The reviews based on which I will set out my argument, are all taken from the *Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland*. This review journal was established in 1850, shortly after the political turmoil of 1848-1849. These years had seen the discontinuation of some of the most influential German review journals: The *Allgemeine Jenaische Litteraturzeitung* had folded in 1848 and the following year the *Literarische Zeitung* and the *Allgemeine Hallesche Litteraturzeitung* also stopped publication.¹⁴ In these tumultuous times, the Leipzig publisher Georg Wigand, the classical scholar Otto Jahn, and the historian Theodor Mommsen decided to found a new review journal.¹⁵ In the aftermath of the revolutions, however, Jahn and Mommsen were fired from their university positions and left Leipzig.¹⁶ The editorial responsibility for the new journal now fell on the shoulders of their young collaborator, the Germanist Friedrich Zarncke. He would edit the *Centralblatt* until his death in 1891.

In his editorial opening words in the first issue, Zarncke emphasized that he was an advocate for what Greiling had characterized as the historical approach to reviewing:

The journal [...] has given itself the task to provide a complete [...] overview of the full literary activity in Germany. To this effect, it will announce every book published in Germany [...] and it will provide explanatory notes and short reports of all important books.¹⁷

However, the *Centralblatt* soon turned out to be a platform for evaluative reviews as well. Indeed, in an editorial at the twenty-five-year

¹⁴ Lick 1993, pp. 10–11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

¹⁶ Rebenich 2002, pp. 70–71.

¹⁷ Zarncke 1850, p. 1.

existence of the journal, Zarncke observed that its reviews had contributed to achieving

a wider and higher purpose: to carry the sense for correct and exact methods of research into the widest circles.¹⁸

Throughout the 50 years of Zarncke's editorship, the *Centralblatt* would publish a mixture of summarizing and evaluative reviews, even if most reviews showed some features of both approaches. In line with the concurrent trend mentioned above, some of the reviews would also present some insights and research findings of the reviewers themselves.

The success of a review journal depends to a large extent on the collaboration of a wide range of qualified reviewers. Though Zarncke often wrote the reviews of books in his own field of expertise (including his own books), he strongly depended on a network of reviewers to evaluate more than 1000 books every year.¹⁹ Especially scholars who were willing and able to provide large numbers of reviews were essential to the success of the *Centralblatt*. The reviews of two of Zarncke's most trustworthy collaborators, Theodor Nöldeke and Wilhelm Wundt constitute the corpus from which the argument in this paper is constructed. Both men were highly prolific reviewers: during the 1870s Nöldeke contributed no less than 96 reviews.²⁰ During the same period, Wundt reviewed 123 new publications.²¹ As contributors to the *Centralblatt*, Nöldeke and Wundt do not so much distinguish themselves by being more or less critical than others, as primarily by their remarkably high number of contributions. Such high numbers are uniquely suited for the analysis of general trends and tendencies. A better understanding of such trends and tendencies, then, elucidates how well-connected individual scholars could contribute to discussions about shared standards of scholarship.

¹⁸ Zarncke 1854.

¹⁹ Lick 1993, pp. 13–14. In a letter from his publisher Zarncke was informed that the *Centralblatt* had published reviews of 1131 books in 1874 and of 1199 books in 1875. Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig (hereafter UBL): NL 249/1/A/537, Eduard Avenarius to Friedrich Zarncke, 11 February 1876.

²⁰ This number is based on the list of Nöldeke's writings added to Maier 2013. This book also contains an extensive overview of Nöldeke's life and career.

²¹ This number is based on the list of Wundt's writing in: E. Wundt 1927. For biographical accounts of Wundt's life, see: Bringmann, Tweney 1980; Rieber, Robinson 2001; Lamberti 1995.

A detailed analysis of both scholars' reviews does not only allow for a close look at the different evaluative choices and rhetorical strategies that individual scholars relied on, but it also provides some insights into the subtle differences in reviewing in various disciplines. This is not only because both men worked in vastly different fields, but also because they were both knowledgeable on a wide range of topics. Nöldeke reviewed not only works about Semitic languages but also about theology and ancient Middle Eastern history. Because of his medical background, Wundt was not only able to comment on philosophical but also on medical literature. Finally, the analysis of how both scholars used book reviews to criticize individuals and to appeal to a larger community of peers allows us to acquire a better understanding of some of the vital social functions of book reviews.

4. Praising and criticizing books

One striking feature of the book reviews in the *Centralblatt* is that they reflected both on the qualities of the reviewed books and on those of their authors. This is not unique to nineteenth-century book reviews: Hyland presents similar findings in his analysis of a corpus of hundreds of late-twentieth-century reviews.²² In the next section, I will focus on the ways in which reviews are used to evaluate individual scholars and to draw attention to shared conceptions of good scholarship. In this section, however, I take a closer look at the features of books that evoked praise and criticism.

One feature that was often singled out for praise was the perceived importance of the reviewed work. One reason a book could be important was that it contained new findings. Nöldeke, for example, praised the al-Mokadassi edition of his friend De Goeje as “a book that excellently [increased] our knowledge of the Orient”.²³ Novelty was not the only reason a publication could be of interest, however. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld's edition of Abu Obaid Abd Allah Ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Bakri's geographical dictionary received his praise for being “a most rich reference book about the localities found in the ancient Arabic poetry and a part of the traditional literature”.²⁴ In

²² Hyland 2004, p. 47.

²³ Nöldeke 1877a.

²⁴ Nöldeke 1877b.

Nöldeke's appreciative reviews, he repeatedly used the same evaluative terms to draw attention to the importance of the work, such as *wichtig* [important], *bedeutend* [significant], *reich* [rich], *wertvoll* [valuable], and *nützlich* [useful].

For Wundt, the criteria of novelty and general importance figured among the main reasons to write a positive review as well. He, for example, recommended a work on microscopy with the following words:

As it includes many completely new ways of experimenting, it will be a welcome addition for those who own one of the major works on microscopic technology.²⁵

A book on the anatomy of the brain was not praised for its novel insights, but was nonetheless considered to be of interest because it clearly presented the state of the art in its field: “[...] our literature does not yet possess a work that, in a similar way, provides a generally understandable [...] exposition of the brain’s anatomy”.²⁶ In general, however, Wundt tended to give more praise to innovative work than to books providing an overview of existing knowledge.

The perceived importance of the reviewed work was not the only element evaluated by the reviewers: they also paid close attention to the manner of presentation. Nöldeke was particularly drawn to an attractive and clear style of writing. In his review of the second posthumous volume of Abraham Geiger’s works he noted that the writing was “fresh and warm” and praised “the humane undertone of [Geiger’s] being that [characterized] all his work”.²⁷ Reinhart Dozy, De Goeje’s former teacher, was also complimented for his writing style:

That the book commends itself through its brilliant conception and glowing exposition, goes in Dozy’s case without saying.²⁸

Terms that Nöldeke used for this type of praise often included *klar* [clear], *anziehend* [attractive], *geschmackvoll* [tasteful], and *anregend* [stimulating].

²⁵ W. Wundt 1873c.

²⁶ W. Wundt 1878a.

²⁷ Nöldeke 1876a.

²⁸ Nöldeke 1879c.

Wundt also frequently reflected on the way in which research was presented. Usually, he did not comment on the authors' writing styles but drew attention to illustrations instead. A publication about the larynx, which might not have been of interest to a very wide audience, was nonetheless praised because

it [was] illustrated with numerous and excellent woodcuts in such a way that it [could] indeed not be hard even for the anatomically and physiologically uneducated to obtain a quite extensive knowledge of the important organ.²⁹

At times, he also showed enthusiasm about works that benefited from the use of the new medium of collotype, a technology that made it possible to print photographs.³⁰ He praised a book on the nerves in the hand by emphasizing: "The plates in collotype have turned out excellently and give a renewed proof of the beautiful enrichment, which the anatomic expositions have gained with the adoption of photography".³¹ Late-nineteenth-century collotype, however, was often too crude to depict delicate phenomena in great detail.³² This was also made clear in another review by Wundt, in which he emphasized that detailed depictions of the brain "[could] clearly still be reproduced more faithfully through copperplate and even through woodcut [...] than by means of collotype".³³

Nöldeke and Wundt both reviewed books that were discussed in different sections of the *Centralblatt*. Almost half of Nöldeke's reviews appeared in the *Linguistics* section. Because of the traditionally close relationship between Old Testament Studies and Semitic languages, even more were featured under the *Theology* heading. Wundt had started his career as a medical researcher. Therefore, most of his reviews, 73 out of 123, were printed in the *Medicine* section. In 1874, however, he accepted a chair of philosophy in Zürich. This appointment allowed him to engage more deeply with philosophical topics than before. In Zürich, he would, for example, give his first lectures on logic and *Völkerpsychologie*, two subjects on which he would publish more extensively

²⁹ W. Wundt 1873d.

³⁰ On collotypes, see: Ward 2008, p. 113.

³¹ W. Wundt 1874a.

³² Kemp 1997, p. 6.

³³ W. Wundt 1874c.

from the eighteen-eighties onward.³⁴ His newly found opportunity to focus exclusively on philosophical questions is also visible in the wider range of topics covered in his book reviews: he would contribute 32 reviews to the *Philosophy* and 15 reviews to the *Natural Sciences* section of the *Centralblatt*.

It is notable that both Nöldeke and Wundt tended to be most critical when they reviewed contributions about more abstract and contemplative topics. A disproportional share of Nöldeke's contributions to the *Theology* section was highly critical. Even if only twelve of his 96 reviews can be characterized as such, eight of these were published in the *Theology* section, while only one of his strongly critical reviews discussed linguistics. Nöldeke's critical assessment of theological works can be understood in the light of Rudi Paret's account of him as a staunch positivist.³⁵ This characterization is in line with that of Suzanne Marchand, who describes him as "firmly ensconced in Enlightenment rationalism".³⁶ Nöldeke's critical evaluation of theological works can also be understood in the light of his uneasy relationship with his *Doktorvater* Heinrich Ewald. Already in the eighteen-sixties, Nöldeke distanced himself from the morally charged and theologically inspired studies of Ewald and cultivated his ties with the positivist text analysis promoted by the influential Leipzig Arabist Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer.³⁷

Nöldeke's critical attitude toward theology is corroborated by reviews, in which he repeatedly lambasted theologians for neglecting the essential distinction between scriptural authority and Church dogma on the one hand, and independent thinking and the application of modern critical methods of textual analysis on the other. In a review of a book by a Catholic Church historian, for example, he complained that the author "invariably [supported] the official views held by the Church".³⁸ In another, quite typical, review he sneered that seemingly in the eyes of its author "scholarly criticism no longer [had] any value when it [was] in contradiction with his religious views".³⁹

³⁴ W. Wundt 1920, p. 260.

³⁵ Paret 1966, p. 14.

³⁶ Marchand 2009, p. 176.

³⁷ Engberts 2016, p. 378.

³⁸ Nöldeke 1873b.

³⁹ Nöldeke 1873d.

In Wundt's reviews, a similar disciplinary difference can be observed. Most of his contributions to the *Medicine* and the *Natural Sciences* sections were either largely descriptive or complimentary. However, a striking number of 13 out of 32 philosophical reviews were highly critical. A closer look at his reproaches shows that he adhered to similar Enlightenment rationalism as Nöldeke, which gave him good grounds to criticize philosophies that he considered to be obsolete and speculative. Among his favorite targets of criticism were works placed in the tradition of German *Naturphilosophie*. One book in which dreams were presented as “miraculous and mystical, the opposite of the laws of the awake consciousness” was written off as the “idolizations of dreams practiced in the earlier *naturphilosophische* mysticism”.⁴⁰ Similar critiques of this school of thought are scattered throughout his reviews.⁴¹ Books supporting other philosophies that Wundt considered to be speculative, however, received their fair share of criticism as well: he sharply criticized books that built on Fichtean and Schopenhauerian idealism, Hegelian dialectics, phrenology, and the belief in the veracity of wondrous observations of spiritists.⁴²

These first observations on the elements that Nöldeke and Wundt selected for praise and critical scrutiny, provide the first outlines of how book reviews contributed to the creation and maintenance of communities of scholarship. The recurring reasons for praise, which were as diverse as significance, novelty, an attractive writing style, and insightful illustrations, identified the most basic requirements of good scholarship. Fulfilling these requirements provided an incentive to affirm the reviewed author's membership of a peer group with shared ideals of excellence. The acknowledgment of the existence of a largely like-minded peer group, however, also draws attention to the fact that not every scholar was perceived to share the same standards. The critical way in which Nöldeke and Wundt treated approaches to theology and philosophy that they considered to be dogmatic or speculative, provides a first indication that book reviews were also used to draw the line between an in-group and an out-group.

⁴⁰ W. Wundt 1876c.

⁴¹ For example: W. Wundt 1877d and 1877e.

⁴² For Fichtean idealism, see: W. Wundt 1876b. For Schopenhauerian idealism, see: *idem* 1875. For Hegelian dialectic, see *idem* 1877b. For phrenology, see *idem* 1874d. For spiritism, see: *idem* 1877c.

5. Praising and criticizing authors

Even though book reviews are ostensibly about books, they also convey judgments and expectations of these books' authors. In this section, I investigate two ways in which book reviews tell us something about the desirable qualities, character traits, and virtues of scholars. First, I pay attention to the extent to which these reviews were used to create and maintain a distinction between university-educated and affiliated researchers on the one hand and lay publicists on the other. Any obvious differentiation of this kind suggests that reviews are indeed used to strengthen the cohesion of an academic community of peers. Next, I investigate the terms used by reviewers to praise authors rather than their books. This provides an insight in the qualities that academics considered to be the main differences between themselves and others with an interest in their fields of research.

The vast majority of the books reviewed in the *Centralblatt* were written by men with a university affiliation. This was in line with Zarncke's aim to create a journal "that envisioned a comprehensive overview of scholarly literature" without "renouncing the strictest standards of [...] scholarship in any way".⁴³ In this light, it is noticeable that more than half of Nöldeke's 12 blatantly negative reviews discussed books by authors without an academic affiliation or advanced degree. These authors constituted a rather colorful group of people: Bernard Neteler was the vicar of Loburg Castle, Joseph Samuel Bloch was not yet close to finishing his doctorate in Zürich, Adolf Brüll taught at the *Philantropin*, a Jewish institution for secondary education in Frankfurt, Adolf Koch was a gymnasium professor in a small town in Switzerland, Giuseppe Barzilai was an attorney in Trieste and John Mühleisen-Arnold was the rector of a church in Cape Town.⁴⁴ I could not find any information about Georg Janich's occupation at the time the new edition of his licentiate's thesis was published.⁴⁵

Nöldeke's criticism of these authors without university affiliation suggests that he used his book reviews to some extent to draw a line

⁴³ Zarncke 1974.

⁴⁴ The books of these authors are discussed in the following reviews: Nöldeke 1873a; 1873c; 1874; 1876b; 1876c; 1878a.

⁴⁵ Nöldeke 1871d.

between peers and lay outsiders. He emphasized several times that they lacked even the most basic academic skills. Barzilai was written off as a “dilettante”, Janichs was accused of insufficient knowledge of Syriac, and Mühleisen-Arnold missed “the necessary knowledge for scholarly judgment of the Islam”. His criticism of what he considered to be lay dilettantism was further amplified by the religious themes of the critically assessed texts. As I have argued in the preceding section, Nöldeke tended to write off works that he considered to be religiously dogmatic. He applied this criticism to the lay scholarship of the vicar Neteler, the teacher Brüll, and the church rector Mühleisen-Arnold as well. He stated about the latter, for example, that “his theological point of view and his theological bias do not allow him an unprejudiced judgment of a non-Christian religion at all”.⁴⁶

Wundt’s pattern of criticism of authors without a university affiliation is strikingly similar to Nöldeke’s. The group of lay authors reviewed by Nöldeke largely consisted of authors of theological treatises, of which he was critical, to begin with. The group of unaffiliated authors evaluated by Wundt largely consisted of people who wrote about philosophical topics, a field that brought out the fierce critic in him. The critically reviewed authors can be divided into three categories: those who advocated new but unpromising fads, those advocating outmoded philosophies, and those who misrepresented Kant. The first group largely consisted of spiritists, such as the Russian journalist and translator Alexander Aksakov. In a review of a German journal edited by Aksakov, Wundt stated with relief that it proved that spiritism was “an exotic growth in Germany [...] that [did not] truly prosper among us”.⁴⁷ The attorney Robert Schellwien was one of the authors dismissed because of his advocacy of an obsolete philosophy: *Naturphilosophie*.⁴⁸ The jurist and politician Julius von Kirchmann, finally, was one of the authors criticized for misrepresenting Kant and offering their own

⁴⁶ Nöldeke has been called a “racial bigot” by one modern-day author: Irwin 2007, p. 198. This is not surprising, because antisemitism very common in nineteenth-century German scholarship, see: Gerdmar 2009, p. 3; Pawliczek 2006, p. 70. It is remarkable, however, that Nöldeke is not more critical of Jews than he is of Protestants or Catholics.

⁴⁷ W. Wundt 1877c.

⁴⁸ *Idem* 1877d.

idiosyncratic interpretation of his philosophy instead.⁴⁹ Other people's interpretations of Kant were important to Wundt because he valued his work both as a barrier against the most high-minded claims of idealist philosophers and as a rebuttal of the crudeness of nineteenth-century positivism.⁵⁰

The large majority of Wundt's reviews, however, was of works by authors who had a position as an *Ordinarius* or *Extraordinarius* at a university. Most of these reviews were neutrally descriptive or explicitly positive. He gave a negative evaluation in only five reviews of works by authors with a university appointment beyond the starting position of a *Privatdozent*. Only one of these book reviews was for the medical section of the *Centralblatt*: William Preyer's work on Weber's law, a topic very close to Wundt's heart.⁵¹ Another of his critical reviews was of a book by the same author that was discussed in the *Natural Sciences* section. The book presented a philosophical theory of the four elements, which was unacceptable to Wundt.⁵² The other few negative reviews of professorial peers were all published in the philosophical section and discussed the work of proponents of philosophical traditions that Wundt considered to be outdated. All in all, however, it appears that Wundt either highly appreciated the work of established academics or felt that it was only rarely acceptable to sharply criticize them.

While Wundt's positive reviews of established scholars are notable, in Nöldeke's case, his reviews of promising new members of the academic peer group are particularly remarkable. All published dissertations merited his praise, except for the odd exception in which the author argued that Muhammed's pride and lewdness were the cause of his rejection of the Christian faith.⁵³ The other reviews of dissertations typically explicitly welcomed their authors into academic circles. One review concluded: "We hope that we can meet the author again as a contributor to the field of Oriental studies".⁵⁴ In another one, he expected "quite some

⁴⁹ *Idem* 1878b.

⁵⁰ Wundt 1920, p. 56. The indebtedness of early Wundtian, experimental psychology to Kantian philosophy is also underlined in Boring 1950, pp. 246–250; Robinson 1981, pp. 325–326.

⁵¹ W. Wundt 1874b.

⁵² *Idem* 1873b.

⁵³ Nöldeke 1872.

⁵⁴ *Idem* 1879b.

contributions to scholarship from [the] young scholar, who [could] already present such a competent accomplishment”.⁵⁵ In the third one, he was “looking forward with high expectations to [the author’s] promised investigations about the further development of the Islamic dogmatic theology”.⁵⁶ These reviews unambiguously signaled that the new doctors were now accepted as members of a scholarly community.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the prevalence of both the evaluation of authors and their work does not only become visible through a comparison of the differences in the reception of works by various authors. It also becomes apparent in some of the terms used for approval. In addition to that used to praise scholarly works that I discussed in the previous section, there existed a vocabulary for praising their authors. The most common virtues for which authors were praised in Nöldeke’s reviews were *Fleiß* [industriousness], *Sorgsamkeit* [diligence], *Umsicht* [cautiousness], *Gelehrsamkeit* [erudition], *Scharfsinn* [ingenuity] and *Kritik* [a critical stance]. In Wundt’s reviews, the virtues of *Fleiß* and *Umsicht* are repeatedly mentioned as well. In addition, he strongly emphasized the importance of experimentation and empiricism. This partly overlapped with Nöldeke’s praise for *Umsicht* and *Scharfsinn*: “the experiments of these researchers seem to have been conducted with great caution and partly with the use of a very ingenious technique”.⁵⁷ This interest in experimental methods also coincides with Wundt’s aversion of speculative philosophies:

The author does not deduce final pictures of structural coherence from his observations; we can be very confident that the trustworthiness of the latter does not suffer from the influence of hypotheses made in advance.⁵⁸

The observations in this section illustrate how book reviews dealt not only with books but also with authors in at least two ways. In the first place, we have seen that reviewers created a vocabulary to criticize or praise authors rather than their work. In addition, we have found that complimentary book reviews were used to distinguish a scholarly

⁵⁵ *Idem* 1878b.

⁵⁶ *Idem* 1875a.

⁵⁷ W. Wundt 1873a.

⁵⁸ W. Wundt 1876a.

community of academically affiliated peers from a wide variety of lay scholars who published on similar topics. Both Nöldeke and Wundt often criticized outsiders. However, Wundt's reviews show that he was rarely highly critical of his professorial peers, while apparently, Nöldeke used his reviews to explicitly welcome recently promoted doctors into an academic community.

6. Addressing a community of scholars

In the opening section of this article, I have pointed out that book reviews address a twofold audience: the reviewed author and the scholarly community as a whole. The creation and maintenance of such communities is by now a familiar topic in the history of scholarship and the sociology of scientific knowledge. Steven Shapin has drawn attention to scientists' perceptions of the structural virtues of their communities, such as universalism and disinterestedness.⁵⁹ Thomas Gieryn has discussed how scientific communities attempt to distinguish themselves from the communities that they consider unscientific.⁶⁰ A close look at their shared virtues and demarcation criteria reveals how scholars contributed to such scientific identity debates in their everyday scholarship practices.

Because of the twofold audience of book reviews, reviewed authors are in a vulnerable position. After all, they are not just judged, they are judged in front of their peers. Reviewers find themselves in a somewhat uncomfortable position as well. Even though I have already mentioned that they need to show relatively "little deference" to the reviewed authors, their relation to their wider audience is more complicated. Hyland states that reviewers can pose a "threat to the wider community by adopting a position of authority in relation to it".⁶¹ Others, however, do not stress this type of danger but postulate that reviewers are expected to show a certain humility towards the wider community of scholars instead.⁶² Finally, the reviewer also has to consider the relationship between the reviewee and the peer group. A book review

⁵⁹ Shapin 2008, pp. 15–16

⁶⁰ Gieryn 1983, p. 781.

⁶¹ Hyland 2004, p. 45.

⁶² Myers 1989, p. 4.

can be seen as a face-threatening act for the reviewee precisely because it is shared with an audience of peers. Different hopes and expectations about these audiences call for “a *polite* realization of critical remarks” in order to maintain a “proper balance between collegiality and critique”.⁶³ A successful exercise of politeness strategies in book reviewing is therefore essential to the maintenance of communities of scholarship.

Such strategies are described at length in a seminal study by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, who distinguish positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness involves satisfying the audience’s desire for recognition “by communicating that one’s own wants (or some of them) are in some respects similar to the addressee’s wants”.⁶⁴ Negative politeness consists of efforts to “modify the force of a speech act” or – in other words – attempts to provide potentially face-threatening criticism in a sympathetic, non-judgemental manner.⁶⁵ As I will show in the following section, both Nöldeke and Wundt made use of positive as well as negative politeness strategies to soften the blows of critical observations and to underline and sustain solidarity among academics who might disagree on all kinds of scholarly insights and opinions.

One common positive politeness strategy that is primarily directed at reviewed authors is what Brown and Levinson call “gift giving”, which can include expressing “sympathy” and “understanding”.⁶⁶ All the different kinds of praise for books and authors discussed in the earlier sections fall in this category. Another, less explicit, common politeness strategy involved assuring the readers that they all shared the same interest. In one of his reviews, Nöldeke, for example, explicitly addressed “all friends of sound interpretations of the O[ld] T[estament]”.⁶⁷ In another review, he softened his criticism by assuring:

There will not be a lot of readers [...] who will be bothered by the mentioned shortcoming.⁶⁸

⁶³ Salager Meyer, Alcaraz Ariza, Pabón Berbesi 2007, p. 1771. My emphasis.

⁶⁴ Brown, Levinson 1987, p. 101.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶⁷ Nöldeke 1871b.

⁶⁸ *Idem* 1871a.

Wundt likewise postulated shared interests when he stated:

Nobody will hesitate to acknowledge that a certain advance is possible and desirable in this direction.⁶⁹

In another review, he emphasized that the book “[would] benefit those readers who [had] some educational background in the natural sciences”.⁷⁰ Such phrasings present the reviewer, the reviewee, and other readers as members of one scholarly community. For example, Wundt stated:

We have indeed always lacked a textbook of this kind until now.

The word “we” refers to himself, the book’s author Jakob Henle, and all readers interested in the anatomy of the hand.⁷¹

Negative politeness strategies in book reviews are usually exercised in order to save the reviewee’s face in front of an audience of his peers. Such strategies often take the shape of hedges that soften the impact of otherwise severe criticism. One frequent way in which both Nöldeke and Wundt were able to tone down their criticism was by insisting that their critiques drew attention to minor issues in otherwise important and well-executed books. Wundt, for example, argued that even though he could think of a few criticisms of minor details in a concise book about consciousness,

nobody [would] put down the lucidly and appealingly written book without feeling very inspired.⁷²

In one of his book reviews, Nöldeke downplayed his own criticism by emphasizing that he “only [had] to deviate from [the author] on a few trivialities”.⁷³

Another negative politeness strategy consisted of stressing that the tasks that reviewed authors had set for themselves were so ambitious that it would have been impossible to complete them without some

⁶⁹ W. Wundt 1872b.

⁷⁰ *Idem* 1872c.

⁷¹ *Idem* 1872a.

⁷² W. Wundt 1877a.

⁷³ Nöldeke 1875b.

minor shortcomings. This strategy can be interpreted as an example of what Brown and Levinson call “relevance hedges”, which are based on the assumption that criticism loses some of its edge in the light of the other merits of the reviewed book.⁷⁴ Ambition and novelty were certainly seen as such merits. Even in his largely negative review of Georg Janichs’ book, Nöldeke, for example, admitted that the topic of his research was “extremely difficult, in part”, thereby suggesting that his critique did not take anything away from the overall importance of the author’s efforts.⁷⁵ In one review, Wundt likewise drew attention to the fact that physiology was a very challenging field of research because it “[found] itself in continuous transformation”.⁷⁶ Despite his criticism, he, therefore, recommended the reviewed book to scholars with at least a basic knowledge of the latest developments in its field.

A final common negative politeness strategy consisted of drawing attention to one’s own lack of relevant specialist knowledge. This strategy is very similar to what Brown and Levinson call “quality hedges”, which suggest “that the speaker is not taking full responsibility for the truth of his utterance”⁷⁷ After all, even the most critical review loses some of its sting when it is written by someone who admits that they may have misunderstood or overlooked certain valuable qualities of the reviewed work. Wundt rarely opted for this strategy, but Nöldeke often pointed at gaps in his knowledge. In a review of a book about a Christian Syriac text, he drew attention to the fact that he was “alas not well-versed [...] in liturgical issues”, which meant that he “[had] to declare himself incompetent to judge exactly those excerpts to which the author [attached] the most importance”.⁷⁸ In his commentary on a text edition that drew on Coptic sources, he admitted that the “final judgment of their critical value” should be left to “the experts of the Coptic language”, of which he was not one.⁷⁹

The politeness strategies used by Nöldeke and Wundt contributed to the creation and maintenance of scholarly communities in at least two

⁷⁴ Brown, Levinson 1987, p. 168.

⁷⁵ Nöldeke 1871d.

⁷⁶ W. Wundt 1872c.

⁷⁷ Brown, Levinson 1987, p. 164.

⁷⁸ Nöldeke 1871c.

⁷⁹ Nöldeke 1879a.

ways. The negative politeness strategies allowed them to criticize books and authors, while at the same time assuring that the reviewees would not lose face in front of a wide audience of their peers. As such, these strategies acknowledged the dual nature of the book reviews' audience and validated the reviewees' desire to be accepted into a community of scholars. The bond between the reviewer, reviewee, and peer group was even more explicitly emphasized through positive politeness strategies. While the strategy of gift-giving was exclusively directed to the authors of the reviewed works, frequent reminders of the shared interests of the reviewer, reviewee, and audience gave expression to a sense of solidarity and common values among the peer group as a whole.

7. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that academic book reviews in the late-nineteenth century were about more than just the merits of newly published scholarly works. The practice also served to define and maintain a community of scholars. A close look at the language of book reviews reveals at least three textual elements that played a role in the establishing of this community: the assessment of the reviewed books, the evaluation of their authors, and the politeness strategies used to address both the authors and a broader audience of academic peers.

The assessment of the arguments, expositions, and methodological choices in the reviewed books served to indicate the basic qualities expected of academic work. The most praiseworthy scholarly publications either taught the reader something new or were otherwise important, for example by bringing together the novel insights of other scholars. The book reviews also suggested that excellent scholarship should be presented in a clear and attractive way, which could pertain both to an authors' writing style and to the drawn or photographic illustrations they chose to include. In addition, book reviews were also used to distinguish old-fashioned or otherwise less-valued schools of thought from approaches that the reviewers considered to be more promising or contemporary. Even the most virtuosic proponents of dogmatic biblical criticism or *Naturphilosophie* could expect a highly critical reception of their work by Nöldeke and Wundt. These types of criticism of the reviewed work served to communicate the minimal requirements of membership of a scholarly community.

Writing a novel, well-argued, modern book, however, was not enough to be welcomed into this community. The book reviews also show that reviewers scoured books for clues about their authors' personal qualities. The fact that they were praised for qualities such as industriousness, caution, and ingenuity, shows that the perceived presence of exactly these virtues was important for how a community of scholars saw itself as distinct from others. The importance of reviews as a means to include and exclude individuals from the scholarly community is further illustrated by the differing receptions of the work of academic outsiders, established scholars, and recently promoted doctors. Both Wundt and Nöldeke were remarkably critical of the outsiders, while Wundt proved to be reluctant to criticize his professorial peers and Nöldeke frequently used his reviews to explicitly welcome young scholars to the community.

Finally, the consistent use of politeness strategies by both Nöldeke and Wundt, shows that both men were constantly aware that they addressed not just an author in their book reviews. They realized that their reviews were read by a broad audience of peers. They also recognized that it was exactly the existence of this wide audience that turned their reviews into face-threatening acts for the reviewees. Therefore, they made use of positive and negative politeness strategies in their reviews. The use of these politeness strategies was itself an acknowledgment of their appreciation of the close relationship between the reviewer, reviewee, and a broader audience. Furthermore, an important element of these strategies was the repeated, explicit emphasis of shared aims and interests, which amounted to an explicit acknowledgment of the existence of a community with a shared conception of scholarly virtues. Finally, the use of such strategies communicated that modest politeness was yet another quality that members of the peer group were supposed to display.

Therefore, careful readers of book reviews learned that they could be accepted as part of the scholarly community if they wrote important, novel books in a clear and attractive style. These same careful readers also learned that they were expected to project an image of diligence, caution, ingenuity, and modest politeness. In living up to these expectations they could not only find acceptance in academic circles, but they would also affirm and reinforce the self-image of a community of scholarship based on exactly these requirements.

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