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For Becky

Introduction / An apologia for “rules of art”: the case for aesthetic normativity in the 21st century

- 1 The citizens of post-Kantian, post-modern 21st century have, it seems, little use for the concept of “rules of art”. They will rather think of artists as “free spirits” and of artistic pursuits as intrinsically at odds with the more controlled aspects of society. The creative freedom, unbridled originality and dissenting marginality of bohemia have become defining traits of how we collectively think of artists: as sympathetic, non-violent and thought-provoking outlaws. In short, *unruliness* seems to have become a largely approved paradigm of art, in that it literally does not have any rules, and is a (socially and politically) disruptive activity.
- 2 The purpose of this article is to play Devil’s advocate and make the case *for* rules of arts, in defense of what could be called *aesthetic normativity*. It shall present the view that literary rules of art exist and are useful and beneficial – or, more precisely, *that it is useful and beneficial to assume a normative aesthetic framework in the discussion of artistic works and processes*. This calls for preliminary remarks, historical and conceptual.

Before (and after) “aesthetics”: an historical question

- 3 Unruliness was not always the default standard for art; there are times in Western cultural history when rules of art were integral to artistic creation, and rule-making the avowed end of criticism – namely, the classical and neoclassical periods. Aristotle, Horace, Vida, Boileau-Despréaux, Pope or Dmochowski (and their many colleagues) were, essentially, engaged in a nomothetic effort, formulating laws (*νόμοι*) of sorts to guide poets on the right path, and teach the public how best to enjoy their works. These critics’ work produced the field of *poetics* and their approach, which had the prospective goal of furthering artistic craftsmanship, can be said to be *poietic*.
- 4 Normative poetics, however, was increasingly challenged in the course of the 18th century by other critics such as Du Bos, Baumgarten, Schlegel and Kant, a development known in intellectual history as “the birth of aesthetics”¹, which provided the theoretical bedrock of the first Romantic generation – and a good riddance it was, too, or so today’s aesthetic consensus seems to hold. The question remains, however: why did so many poets, critics, philosophers (of art), and writers of all sorts, think it worth their while to analyse literary works (theirs, their contemporaries’ and those from the past) in normative terms, and to discuss at length the nature and formulation of such “rules of art”²? What are the theoretical grounds for such an approach to literature, and how could one seriously contemplate adopting it today?
- 5 The first of these questions is the overall object of this article, and answers shall be offered in the conclusion. The second question (grounds for aesthetic normativity) shall be addressed by reading from a cornerstone of neoclassical poetic criticism, Alexander Pope’s (1688-1744) *Essay on Criticism* (1711), and the third question (aesthetic normativity as a liveable approach in the 21st century) by drawing from the critical essays of fiction writer Philip Pullman (*1946). A Catholic Tory eighteenth-century neoclassicist and a socially-minded, secular humanist twenty-first-century novelist certainly are strange bedfellows; however the core of their views of aesthetic normativity are surprisingly convergent.

Objections to rules of art, political and theoretical

- 6 The unruly view of art seems to object to aesthetic normativity in two major ways, one political, the other theoretical.
- 7 Most of us in the 21st century will spontaneously agree that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”, thus making individual impressions the accepted standard of aesthetic judgement, at once universal and subjective, as per §22 of Immanuel Kant’s third *Critique*³. When we deem something “beautiful”, we mean we approve of it, and want this approbation to be shared to others; but this operation calls on the subjective and imaginative part of our understanding and not the objective, cognitive, *rational* part⁴. There is no room there for the “analysis of beauty” (to borrow Hogarth’s phrase) and the rules of arts that the poietic approach used to set forth: in this view, aesthetic normativity is, from the start, theoretically unwarranted.
- 8 We also spontaneously tend to consider that artists actually *are*, to use Pope’s words, “above the critic’s law”⁵. Such a phrase is hardly devoid of political undertones: the purported existence of “the critic’s law” implies a hierarchical worldview in which a set

of social usages and norms give bounds to art (such as propriety, akin to Horace's decorum or French bienséance) – which is much of what artistic unruliness stands against. Rules then amount to a form of censorship, either soft (as they invite writers to censure themselves in the course of their creative process) or hard (when they are used by critic to devalue published work), making aesthetic normativity the critical avatar of political authoritarianism. There certainly are historical examples to sustain that view: the rules set forth by poets associated with autocratic regimes, such as Horace in Augustan Rome or Boileau-Despréaux in Louis XIV's France, can easily be interpreted as seeking to unify the public's taste in approval of official art.

- 9 One concise way to sum up these two objections combined is to rephrase them in terms of direction of fit. Whether rules are fitted world-to-word (*i.e. statements* describing a state of artistic affairs) or word-to-world (*i.e. commands* that artistic practice should follow), they are unwarranted: if there is no possibility of an analysis of beauty, they cannot have any content and are devoid of reference, which in turn means they have little legitimacy as directive speech acts, making them empty and arbitrary⁶.
- 10 Those two general objections can combine into a myriad of others, aimed at particular traits of aesthetic normativity, such as (a) conceptual closure: arguing, in the line of Morris Weitz, that the formulation of rules of art (at least significantly) forecloses the possibility of further original creation; (b) antecedence: it is probably unfair to appraise works of art in the light of rules which were formulated *after* the time of their composition (a basic idea in the Quarrel between Ancients and Moderns); (c) *ars difficilis*: rules are made from a comfortably theoretical position by critics whose creative powers have never been put to a test, which calls their legitimacy into question and leads to (d) consumerism: since the critic is but a *consumer* of literature (following Paul Valéry's terminology), their rules are not only unwarranted on the grounds of (c), but also subject the artist (the *producer*) to the pressure of consumer demand, potentially turning the literary field into an echo chamber. Assuming all these objections to be fully verified, rules of art would be (a) inhibitive, (b) historically unsound, (c) condescendingly irrelevant and (d) narrow-mindedly consumerist, making aesthetic normativity a conservative, unimaginative, and overall unlikeable theory. It need not be so, however.

1 / Alexander Pope's critical empiricism (1711)

- 11 Alexander Pope was one of the principal exponents of neoclassical poetics in the English Augustan age. However, in contrast to his avowed predecessor Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, whose *Art of Poetry* (*L'Art poétique*, 1674) was explicitly intended for fellow poets as a practical guide (including a few developments on criticism), Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711) is first and foremost, as per its title, a discussion of critical taste. It is still largely, in due Horatian fashion, a demonstration of the principles of poetry on both a theoretical and practical level (the letter of the didactic poem doubling as example for principles it conveys); but Pope shifts the main topic from the abilities of the proficient writer to those of the sagacious reader, developing ideas aimed at shaping the reception, rather than the creation, of poetry. The *Essay* is therefore a work of meta-criticism, setting forth a theory of the ancillary discipline that is criticism ("the Muse's handmaid"). In the context of the "birth of aesthetics", Pope's neoclassical

synthesis does much to bridge the gap between early modern neo-Aristotelian poetics on the one hand, and aesthetics as a theory of the receptiveness to art on the other.

Poetics, critics, and gifts from Heaven

- 12 That Pope's theory of aesthetic judgement is not separate from that of poetic creation is apparent in the analogy drawn between the figures of the poet and the critic:

'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.
In poets as true genius is but rare,
True taste as seldom is the critic's share;
Both must alike from Heaven derive their light,
These born to judge, as well as those to write⁸.
- 13 Each is assigned a particular intellectual virtue (the creative virtue of "genius" which allows one "to write", and the receptive virtue of "taste" which allows one "to judge"), and both owe their respective virtue to a selective grace, which seldom grants them in their fuller ("true") form.
- 14 Pope also brings up the first and foremost difficulty encountered by anyone dabbling in meta-criticism, to wit the lack of uniformity in judgement and taste, encapsulating two ideas in the comparison with watches: that similar conformation between individuals does not guarantee similar results, and that people spontaneously tend to follow what is their own (rather than trust someone else). This variety, however, is counteracted by the existence of "common sense"⁹: "Yet if we look more closely, we shall find/Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind¹⁰". This optimistic echo of Descartes's famous opening lines of the *Discourse on Method* hints at the possibility, if not of critical accord, at least of conceptual common ground.
- 15 Having established criticism as a mirror of poetry and common sense as a remedy to relativism, Pope can expand on the virtuous circle between criticism and poetry: "The generous critic fanned the poet's fire,/And taught the world with reason to admire¹¹". The critic here stands as a rational operator between two things bordering on the irrational and unaccountable (the poet's inspiration and the public's admiration), nudging both in the right direction, playing arbiter in the Republic of Letters.
- 16 All critics are probably not "generous", though, if "true taste" is "but rare": what then happens when a *bad* critic shows themselves – for instance one of those who "without invention's aid,/Write dull receipts how poems may be made¹²"? Poetics then turns from a stepping stone for genius (or a fan for "the poet's fire") into a kitchen recipe (a striking metaphor Pope would later develop at length into a satire of epic poetics¹³). This remark on bad critics seems to uphold the *ars difficilis* objection: critics who do not demonstrate a sense of poetic *inuentio* have no business setting rules to be followed by those who do. But on the other hand, if genius and taste are indeed different virtues, it may seem unfair to ask invention (a creative quality) to manifest in a critic. How exactly, then, do rules bridge the gap between the productive and receptive aspects of literature?

How natural are rules of art?

- 17 Pope's answer in a nutshell is that rules of art are part of a *natural* order of things. That (today at least) is far from self-evident: the notion that rules of *art* could be *naturalised* seems blatantly paradoxical. Notwithstanding, "Nature" should be the critic's first study:

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard, which is still the same:
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchanged and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of art¹⁴.

- 18 Pope's "Nature" here is not *natura naturata* – the world as it is, and the object of the Aristotelian *mimesis* at the root of neoclassical poetics: that art is an imitation of nature may imply that observed natural laws should be reflected in poetic depictions (water in poems should still follow the path of least resistance), but says nothing about the process of imitation itself. By "Nature", Pope here clearly means *Natura naturans*, i.e. the divine order of Creation, eternal and infallible. Two things are to be noted.
- 19 First: in true Catholic fashion, humans are free to "follow" this divine order or not: that it is such does not imply they automatically conform to it – rather, accordance with Nature calls for an effort of human free will. Second: since Nature as such is, in neo-Aristotelian fashion, the first cause and the first motor of *everything*, it logically provides for all aspects of art: the genius of poets ("the source"), the admiration of the world ("the end"), and the taste of critics ("the test" – mentioned last for thematic emphasis, since it is the critic's part).
- 20 Here again the idea surfaces that the (diligent) critic is a third party in the artistic relation, who has access to the same "Nature" which accounts both for the creation and reception of poetry. The critic is tasked with the study of it, to try and formulate the rules which account for creation:
- Those rules of old discovered, not devised,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodised;
Nature, like liberty, is but restrained
By the same laws which first herself ordained.¹⁵
- 21 The first two lines suggests that the formulation of rules is a nomothetic endeavour akin to scientific enquiry. It is a process of discovery relying on a method, rather than of arbitrary invention ("devised"). While poetry echoes Nature via the creative process of *mimesis*, criticism is "Nature still" via the intellectual effort of methodic judgement; and just as good poems are eventually rewarded by posterity, rules are also subject to the test of time ("of old" referring back to the times of Aristotle).
- 22 Opponents to aesthetic normativity may object to the idea that rules are "not devised". After all, Pope's rules are predicated on a natural theology one must accept if they are to have any reference, and many may find it too high a (metaphysical) price to pay: Nature's godlike authoritativeness hints back at the authoritarian character of rules of art. The answer to this is twofold.
- 23 Firstly, it doesn't change much to the substance of Pope's idea if, stripping "Nature" of its theological epithets, one elects to take it to simply mean "reality" rather than "God's creation" (the crux of it remains that both the writing and appraisal of poetry

are made in reference to some external reality common to the poet and the critic): “Nature” can be secularised. Secondly, discovery, rather than the polar opposite of invention (devising), can be taken as a middle term between invention (human and arbitrary) and revelation (divine and transcendent). The intellectual gifts of genius and taste may be graces from Heaven, but rules are not *revealed*. Much to the contrary, they are very clearly confined to the realm of human activity and discourse; they entail an active epistemic effort on humanity’s side, are “discovered” by empirical enquiry, and therefore falsifiable (the proof of which being that there *are* bad critics who produce erroneous rules akin to cooking recipes).

- 24 Poetics (as a rule-making discipline) is nomothetic in essence, made up of normative utterances called rules of art. These are *not*, however, things *in* Nature but, at their best, an adequate intellectual representation *of* Nature. The empirical and inductive nature of rules is evident in their genesis: “Just precepts thus from great examples given,/ [Greece] drew from them what they [*i.e.* “her sons” the first poets] derived from Heaven¹⁶” – *i.e.* further poetry, brought about by the transitivity between nature and poetics. Exactly how that happened is best explained by a look at Aristotle’s career.

What Aristotle did: rule-making as an empirical process

- 25 The last section of Pope’s *Essay* is devoted to “the history of criticism, and characters of the best critics¹⁷”, which starts by framing Aristotle’s seminal role in a striking metaphor of singled-handed sailing.

The mighty Stagyrite first left the shore,
Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore;
He steered securely, and discovered far,
Led by the light of the Maeonian star.
Poets, a race long unconfined, and free,
Still fond and proud of savage liberty,
Received his laws; and stood convinced ’twas fit,
Who conquered Nature, should preside o’er wit¹⁸.

- 26 Just as Homer (the “Maeonian star”) inaugurated poetry, Aristotle launched criticism, at once emulating Homer’s foundational gesture and taking him for the principal object of his study¹⁹. Two things in particular are to be noted about Pope’s presentation of what Aristotle actually did.
- 27 Firstly, Aristotle is, rather unsurprisingly, presented as a lawmaker who set forth the first rules of art, keeping in check the “savage liberty” of poets (a formulation echoing the rather conservative Roman topos of *nimia libertas*, and potentially consolidating a view of rules as authoritarian language acts). Secondly, and much more originally, Aristotle’s nomothetic endeavour is framed not as the outcome of philosophical meditation or magisterial teaching, but rather as an adventure (a voyage of discovery) where masterful sailing leads “far” into the unknown, possibly in the face of danger (as the mention of Homer is likely to prompt Odyssean imagery). This metaphor has two noteworthy implications.
- 28 First: a voyage of discovery is an *outward* venture, essentially different from inward meditation. Aristotle did not make up the rules of art contemplating the workings of his own mind, he *discovered* them enquiring into *outer* objects: his process there was essentially empirical, driven by something not unlike scientific curiosity. The periphrasis “who conquered Nature”, while it certainly has some Cartesian undertones,

should be primarily understood in this empirical, Lockean framework. It is not (only) an argument from authority establishing Aristotle as a tutelary figure of both moral and natural philosophy (neither Pope, a friend of Isaac Newton, nor his contemporaries had much regard left for Aristotle's science, which had been all but obliterated by Francis Bacon's attacks, the many advances of early modern scientists, and the Quarrel); it also hints at a methodological continuum in the inferential process of both the scientific and the critical enquiry²⁰.

- 29 Second: Pope frames the *Poetics* as a product of intellectual daring; embarking on this voyage did not only require curiosity, but also some pluck. This is a very Aristotelian idea at heart: an instinctive taste for knowledge in human beings plays an important part in the early chapters of the *Poetics*²¹, and intellectual virtues are detailed in Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Pope, who is avowedly interested in the "character" of critics past, is less concerned with Aristotle's authority than with characterising the Stagyrte's nomothetic process as a display of what may well be called *the intellectual virtue of critical curiousness*.
- 30 Aristotle's authority is therefore warranted by a *process* (the nomothetic effort *per se*) rather than simply its output (poetical "receipts"); he "discovered far", but probably not *all*, leaving room for new discoveries by his followers (who are duly listed in "the history of criticism"). Pope's Tory conservatism and stance as an Ancient in the Quarrel are personal opinions that may (to an extent) account for his deference to Aristotle and his unwillingness to challenge the Stagyrte's authority, but they have no bearing on his definition of artistic rule-making as an empirical, cumulative process, with room for falsifiability and debate.

The fable of young Virgil, or the poet as critic

- 31 Notwithstanding his many qualities, Aristotle was *only* a critic and as such, his career does not fully illustrate the porous nature of the limit between poetry and poetics. That point is best exemplified by "Pope's fable of a young Virgil²²", of which a double-pronged moral of poetic humility and poetical empiricism is to be deduced.

When first young Maro in his boundless mind
A work t'outlast immortal Rome designed,
Perhaps he seemed above the critic's law,
And but from Nature's fountains scorned to draw:
But when t'examine every part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same:
Convinced, amazed, he checks the bold design,
And rules as strict his laboured work confine,
As if the Stagyrte o'erlooked each line.
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
To copy Nature is to copy them²³.

- 32 Virgil at first may seem like poet after a Romantic's or a Transcendentalist's idea: his mind is "boundless", he is "bold" and full of youthful enthusiasm, and appears "above" rules and disdainful of anything but the most direct source of his inspiration ("Nature" again). In short, his poetic genius seems to transcend the exactness of critical rationalisation.

- 33 This, however, is but an appearance, and “perhaps” (v. 132) indicates how deceitful it is. After the first moment of feverish creativity comes a time of analysis to “examine every part”, which leads to a realisation that “Nature” (as providing the structure of poetic *mimesis*) and what Homer did coincide to an amazing degree. The lesson learnt by Virgil here is one of creative humility, and the “bold design” he alters is not his desire for posterity, but rather the irreflexive petulance of his creative process: all in all, young Virgil realises he has better chances to produce “a work t’outlast immortal Rome” if he cultivates (and idea implied by “laboured work”) his natural gift by paying attention to the works of his Greek predecessor, who trod the path of creation before him.
- 34 Virgil, Nature and Homer are the main parties of the fable. Aristotle is but a spectre haunting it, embedded in the unreality of comparison (“as if”): Virgil’s rules are “strict” independently of any actual reference to works of criticism. Rather, the young poet acts as a *critic of himself*, realising on his own that “’Tis more to guide, than to spur the Muse’s steed²⁴”. While the fable hints at a hierarchy where Nature, the source of intellectual gifts and the primary object of *mimesis*, comes first, then poetic genius, then only criticism, the latter has an essential cautionary function integral to the cultivation of ingenuity, which it performs by rationally checking the productions of genius against Nature.
- 35 The moral for Pope’s reader is an *a fortiori* argument: if even Virgil was tamed by the realisation that “ancient rules” Homer abided by and Aristotle formulated, so should you, dear reader, trust them. It is, undoubtedly, an argument from authority, formulated during the Quarrel in favour of the Ancient party. It predictably did not convince the Moderns, and probably holds very little appeal to a post-modern reader.
- 36 This fable however holds two more ideas that are distinct from endorsement of the Ancients’ canon. The first is that rules are not arbitrary edicts from God (as *Natura naturans*), a poet (like Homer) or a critic (like Aristotle); rather they are attainable through rational analysis even by those who seem at first least disposed to accept them (young Virgil as an overconfident genius). The second is that *some* recipes at least (those written by good critics such as Aristotle) *can* work to some extent, since they are just the theoretical expression of a good poet’s relationship to Nature. Poetics thus counterbalances, in part at least, the inequality in the gift of genius: while *some* of it is probably necessary to be a worthy poet, knowledge of, and practice from, rules of art, can profit to *anyone*. These ideas are integral to what Michel Charles calls the “age of rhetoric”, which is “*par excellence* the age of invention, of production, in that it lays as little guilt as possible on authors and takes the drama out of writing, in that it develops as much as possible the idea that anyone can practice literature²⁵”. In that light, the fable of young Virgil should be read as an invitation to use canonic texts and criticism as a stepping stone towards poetic accomplishment, rather than an awe-inspiring affirmation of the sheer genius of a few canonical authors.
- 37 That doesn’t mean that Pope completely discards the *je-ne-sais-quoi*. As all neoclassical poeticians, he formulates a theory of poetic licence, which immediately follows the fable of young Virgil:
- Some beauties yet, no precepts can declare,
For there’s a happiness as well as care.
Music resembles poetry, in each
Are nameless graces which no methods teach,
And which a master-hand alone can reach.

If, where the rules not far enough extend,
 (Since rules were made but to promote their end)
 Some lucky licence answers to the full
 Th' intent proposed, that licence is a rule²⁶.

- 38 This passage may at first glance seem rather dismissive of the critic's nomothetic efforts, as it not only presents rules as ancillary but also sets a limit to their usefulness. However it should come as no surprise that rules of art are instrumental in nature: the critic's task is to facilitate poetic creation and ground its enjoyment in reason, and their rules are no end in themselves. As for the indefinite "nameless graces", they are not the whole of the art, since licence accounts only for "some beauties"; rules are still necessary to reach the stage where the need for something else arises ("yet", "not far enough" certainly mean that *to a point*, rules are completely relevant), and while no "methods" can make a "master-hand", the very same phrase suggests such a hand must be well practised (thus benefiting from practical, if not theoretical, knowledge). Serendipitous finds ("happiness", "lucky") coexist with labour ("care"), and that the former occasionally occur has no bearing on the overall relevance of the latter.
- 39 For all the pompous rhetoric in *An Essay on Criticism* (which can be ascribed to Pope's youthful ambition, the polemic atmosphere of the prolonged Quarrel, or a number of other things), Pope's account of aesthetic normativity is actually a rather *modest* one. It is Aristotelian in nature, and rests on a kind of poetical hylomorphism: the works of poets will present recurring characteristics which can be observed and from which rules can be methodically inferred that do not significantly differ, in structure or method, from the laws produced by the observational sciences. The existence of an absolutely original genius (such as Homer) does not invalidate the existence of rules of art: much to the contrary, it kickstarts normative criticism by providing its first object. The critic, extrapolating from the manifestation of sheer genius, aims at the cultivation of ingenuity. And while all humans are not destined to be Aristotles, they are endowed with the rudiments of critical judgement; similarly, while all humans are not destined to be Virgils either, it is very likely they are also endowed with rudiments of creativity. Then the "just esteem" one should feel for rules of art is not submission, but enablement of one's poetic potential, after the fashion of the "age of rhetoric".

2 / The Aristotelian spectre in Philip Pullman's essays (2017)

- 40 Philip Pullman is best known for *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000), a young-adult fantasy trilogy rewriting the Fall of Man (as per *Genesis*, Milton and Blake) within as the coming-of-age story of adolescent Lyra, but he is also a critic. His "essays on storytelling" (mostly reworked from talks and lectures), collected in 2017 under the title *Daemon Voices*, develop his approach to storytelling and literature, drawing as much from his practice of writing as from his experience as a teacher of English or his convictions as a secular humanist. The reflexive essays illustrate the porous frontier between being a writer and theorising on writing, especially since Pullman regularly pokes caustic fun at the "ladies and gentlemen of literary theory"²⁷.
- 41 Many essays in the collection can adequately be said to formulate (parts of) Pullman's poetics, and amongst those is "Let's Write it in Red. The Practice of Writing", whose title very explicitly refers to the *poietic* approach. Per its (playfully detailed) subtitle,

the essay bears “On writing as a game with rules, including rules for the beginnings and endings, the making-up parts and the writing-down parts – and how not everything should be written in red²⁸”. There are echoes from Aristotle and the “age of rhetoric”: “beginnings and endings” transparently refer to Aristotle’s theory of narrative structure²⁹ as having “a beginning, a muddle, and an end³⁰”, while the “making-up” and “writing-down parts” present many analogies with rhetorical *inuentio* and *dispositio* on the one hand, and *elocutio* on the other. As for the analogy with a “game with rules”, it carries (perhaps less deliberate) Wittgensteinian undertones, suggesting that storytelling is a “language game” one learns to play in the course of human communications³¹, which is certainly the case in the way Pullman frames it.

Rules and knowledge

- 42 The starting point of the essay is an anecdote of the writer witnessing “two girls (...) about eight or nine³²” who set out, to pass the time on a train journey from Oxford to Newcastle, to write a story.

They began by deciding how their heroine should be called (...) and all that. And then they got down to writing the opening of the story, and then one of the little girls said to the other, “Are we allowed to write that she can do magic³³?”

- 43 The question (put by one of the aspiring writers to the other and not to an authority figure like the lady who supervised them) implies the existence of rules which may be negotiated, but must be agreed upon. From this anecdote Pullman derives three “principles of storytelling”, of which the first and third are relevant to the present discussion.

The first principle is this: there are rules. (...) As we know about all games, it’s much more satisfying to play with rules than without them. If we’re going to enjoy a game of football in the playground, we need to know where the touchline is, and agree on what we’re going to regard as the goalposts. The we can get on with playing, because the complete freedom of our play is held together and protected by this armature of rules. The first and last and only discovery that the victims of anarchy can make is: no rules, no freedom³⁴.

- 44 Rules, in football or storytelling, provide two things. The first is a common frame of reference: a makeshift pitch in the playground for football, or guidelines for storytelling (whether or not the heroine of the girls’ story can or cannot do magic falls under what Pullman dubs fictional “consistency”). Those rules are in reference to *outside* criteria: the laws of association football; the grammar of a language; general criteria of intelligibility; etc. The second thing rules provide is meaningfulness: we actually need rules to experience satisfaction in the game. Preliminary agreement on rules, Pullman contends, does not conceptually close the game, but rather enables it: a normative approach provides for a space or structured freedom, while anarchy only has “victims”. The setting of debated rules provides a safe space in which the opportunity of everyone to enjoy whatever is going on is protected: this political analogy, from an author who staunchly advocates the principles of liberal democracy, may prompt a more liberal reading of Pope’s lines “liberty, is but restrained/By the same laws which first herself ordained”.
- 45 Rules are thus part of a body of knowledge, the acknowledgement and exploration of which are the object of Pullman’s third principle of storytelling.

my third principle of storytelling (...) was implicit in what the girls on the train were doing (...) I mean *knowledge*. They thought there were things to know about storytelling, that it was an activity which was discussable, learn-able, practisable – il such a word exists. That's what I think too³⁵.

- 46 Pullman finds himself agreeing with the very idea that prompted Pope to write *An Essay on Criticism*: namely, that creative writing as a human activity is something we can learn, argue about, practise, and get better at. To add an adjective to Pullman's list and sum it up, it is *communicable*, which (for a philosopher like Moritz Schlick *e.g.*) suffices to deem it an object of knowledge³⁶.
- 47 Besides rules, the aspiring writer's knowledge should include preexisting literature ("we need to know stories, dozens of them³⁷") building up, in Russell's terminology, a *knowledge by acquaintance* of storytelling. The inductive and comparative process at work here is in essence not very different from poetic education according to Pope. But whereas the Augustan poet identified isolated towering figures (Homer, Virgil) within a rigid canon, the contemporary storyteller opts for a much more inclusive approach building in the legacy of 19th-century criticism, where folk tales can side along Milton or Austen or Blake. The idea remains, however, that acquaintance with existing works provides intellectual nourishment for one's own creative purposes in that they help one discern the rules of a game that exists *outside of us* (since there quite obviously already *are* poets and storytellers). The kind of rules Pullman thinks of here are clearly "discovered, not devised": they are those of a language game that has been played long before us and in which we wish to join.

Keeping oneself in check

- 48 Pullman's non-exhaustive list of rules includes "stories must *begin*" (p. 144), "consistency" (fictional – the one the girls on the train showed they were aware of –, stylistic and more, p. 145), "don't be afraid of the obvious" (p. 147), "every story has to have an ending" (p. 149), and
- many other rules (...) such as the one that says Whatever doesn't add, subtracts, and the one that says The pluperfect is not the right tense to tell stories in, and the three very interesting laws of the Quest: "the protagonist's task must be hard to do, it must be easy to understand, and a great deal must hang on the outcome"³⁸.
- 49 Some of those rules are evocative of Aristotelian doctrine, others of 20th-century narratology, others quite idiosyncratic. Of those "don't be afraid of the obvious" is:
- a very important rule. It's so important I've written it on a piece of paper and stuck it above my desk. (...) Because it's very tempting, once you've begun to tell stories seriously, to over-complicate. (...) You don't want them to think you're writing trash so you try to avoid the stock situations, the stereotyped characters, the second-hand plot devices, all the obvious things trashy books are full of. But the habit of resistance has to be supervised and kept in check³⁹.
- 50 The "serious" writer's resistance to the obvious is motivated by a pressure for originality, inflicted by the anonymous public made of "them", in the name of a certain idea of what non-trashy books are made of, and Pullman's rule consists in *resisting* that judgmental demand (thus rebutting the consumerism objection). The rule asserts the right of a writer to resist the paradigm of originality to use *loci communes* as they see fit (and, in passing, the value of such *topoi*). It is relayed by "that voice at [the writer's] shoulder" saying "Don't go for the obvious", which Pullman has "fortunately" learnt

“how to resist⁴⁰”. It is *hard to follow*, to the point it had to be placarded on the wall, and the object of acquired mastery. It constitutes both practical and theoretical knowledge.

Of grace and work

- 51 Building from Heinrich von Kleist’s essay on puppet theatre, Pullman observes that “the first consequence of knowledge is self-consciousness”. The girls on the train were immune to it because, while rule-minded, “they were very young”, and therefore not yet “sophisticated enough for the knowledge they were acquiring to trip them up⁴¹”. There is little doubt, however, that such sophistication is coming, and that the acquisition of storytelling knowledge was, in that very moment, contributing to it. It would therefore be delusional for a grown-up writer to reject rules of art to try and emulate the carefree creativity of children, especially since children making up stories are rule-minded anyway, as Pullman witnessed (and Gianni Rodari explored at length⁴²). The solution, then

to become unself-conscious again is not to go back to innocence (the way is barred by an angel with a fiery sword) but to become more interested in your subject-matter than in the way you appear to others to be dealing with it. And there is so much to be interested in⁴³.

- 52 Even supposing there *were* an Eden of innocence to go back to, that paradise is lost for good, and the acquisition of *more* experience, or reflexive knowledge, is the only way forward. Pullman’s emphasis on the final “in” is a new instance of a normative critic insisting on the benefits of looking *outwards*, and focusing on the activity of creation rather than on the creative self or the social perception of creators: the answer is in confrontation with objects of the world.
- 53 This is one of the many lessons of Philip Pullman’s epic coming-of-age story *His Dark Materials*. At the beginning of the trilogy, Lyra soon discovers she has a very particular gift, and is able to read the alethiometer⁴⁴ (which very few people can). At the end of the story, that gift is lost, and Lyra feels it painfully. She first complains about it to the angel Xaphania, who answers:

“You read it by grace”, said Xaphania, looking at her, “and you can regain it by work.”

“How long will it take?”

“A lifetime.”

“That long...”

“But your reading will be even better then, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding. Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely, and furthermore, once you’ve gained it, it will never leave you.”

“You mean a full lifetime, don’t you?” Lyra whispered. “A whole long life? Not... not just... a few years...”

“Yes, I do,” said the angel⁴⁵.

- 54 An angel is, indeed, barring the way back to innocence: not waving a fiery sword, though, but kindly nudging the heroine towards an unending “effort” (which Pope would doubtlessly call “laboured work”). What is to be gained is not reentry into that earlier state of arbitrary grace (which was fleeting and transient), but access to rational mastery which, while probably lesser (at least at first), will also be more authentically her own.

Rules of art as democratic

- 55 Lyra brings up the same question later with Scholars in a fictional Oxford. She first describes her gift, via a telling comparison, as feeling like an integral part of her own nature: “Well, I was like a monkey in the trees, it was so quick. Then suddenly – nothing (...) All those thousands of meanings... Gone”. To which Dame Hannah Relf, a scholar of the alethiometer herself, kindly answers: “They’re not gone, though, Lyra (...) The books are still in Bodley’s Library. The scholarship to study them is alive and well⁴⁶”. What one can (or could at one point) do effortlessly can also be learnt through the consultation of outer references (which is what libraries are for) and interaction with others (implied by the “scholarship” Dame Hannah refers to). Whereas awe-inspiring genius sets the virtuoso apart, cultivated ingenuity is *social* in essence: it connects craftspeople, with each other (such as the little girls on the train debating their story) and with their forerunners (through the stories Pullman reckons all writers should know, or Virgil reading Homer according to Pope).
- 56 Another idea Pullman develops at length in his essays is “the great democracy of reading and writing⁴⁷” (which is related to the immaterial “school of morals” described in “Talents and Virtues” and the utopian concept of “The Republic of Heaven”). It is, for the most part, concerned with the ethical and hermeneutical aspects of literature, rather than the theory of writing. Pullman’s approach to rules of art, however, fits right into his liberal view of literature: rules have democratic potential.
- 57 This idea transpires in “Let’s Write it in Red” as he refers to the girls as “these great eight- or nine-year-old artists⁴⁸”, and to the first one repeatedly as “my colleague⁴⁹”, because he was awed by the understanding of his own craft the girls demonstrated. There is obvious playfulness in that, but earnest meaning as well: it implies a fundamental equality between children trying out the writing of stories (as many of us were) and a seasoned and acclaimed writer. Much like the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers from Michel Charles’s “age of rhetoric” (Pope included), Pullman reckons that, while there certainly is such a thing as immense and unaccountable genius, it is not the norm, nor is it wise to consider it the only worthwhile option for any pursuit. What Pullman’s essays and novels extol is something akin to Aristotle’s intellectual virtue of *techne* (ability, craftsmanship): acquired mastery and cultivated ingenuity, for which rules of art serve as stepping stones.
- 58 Such an emphasis on the value of cultivated ingenuity is perhaps not surprising from a writer who is also a craftsman, namely a wood-carver and engraver – Pullman himself produced the woodcut vignettes for each chapter of *His Dark Materials* (a craft he elaborates on in one essay, and which provides comparisons for the art of fiction in another⁵⁰). Another reason for this humility is that Pullman is aware that some (if not many) may consider children literature, the genre in which he operates, as subaltern to the higher genres of (proper) literature:
- But your nature, the nature of your particular talent, is rarely as balanced as your intentions, and I realised some time ago that I belong at the vulgar end of the literary spectrum. I suppose it would be nice if you could send back your talents and ask for a different set, but you can’t do that. You’re stuck with the daemon you’ve got, as Lyra learns. However, I’m reconciled to my limitations, because much as I enjoy the writing-down part, and hard as I try to do it as well as I can, I do find that the making-up part is where my heart lies⁵¹.

- 59 Two things. First, Pullman accepts without much trouble the idea of a “particular talent” mysteriously bestowed on individuals, quite akin to Pope’s gifts from Heaven (that Pullman as a secular humanist does not believe there is a Someone to send your talents back to is besides the point, which is that there is an arbitrary limit to the scope of one’s particular literary aptitudes). Second, as a writer of “genre fiction” and “popular art”, Pullman accepts he favours “the making-up part” (*i.e.* fiction) over “the writing-down part” (*i.e.* diction). This order of priorities is very Aristotelian, as the Sagyrite clearly states that the “fable” (μύθος) is the most important part of *mimesis*⁵² – something also reflected in Pullman’s reference to his writing as “stories” rather than “novels”.
- 60 Favours fable over language, or prioritising structure over style, involves giving precedence to the logical construction of the narrative over its more aesthetic (*i.e.* decorative) dimension, and a preference for working on a larger scale (plot rather than words). The corresponding receptive attitude is “reading for the plot” (per Peter Brooks’s phrase⁵³) rather than the disinterested enjoyment of language for its own sake – in short, it privileges the more intelligible aspects of literature over the more sensible – which of course doesn’t mean that these latter aspects are neglected, but emphasises the cognitive nature of literature as an art form.

Conclusion / Rule-mindedness and critical liberalism

- 61 Surprising though it may seem, there is much agreement when it comes to rules of art between Alexander Pope the Catholic Tory 18th-century neoclassicist, and Philip Pullman the socially-minded, secular humanist 21st-century novelist. There is complementarity, too: Pope brings an element of systematism, and Pullman an element of liberalism, to this combined outlook on aesthetic normativity – elements which answer a number of objections.

Answering objections

- 62 Aesthetic normativity according to Pope and Pullman is grounded in practical experience and a lifelong apprenticeship in the trade of writing, their status as critic-writers takes granting it a legitimacy that answers the *ars difficilis* (c) objection. It is also warranted by the continuum between the poietic and the critical activities theorised in Pope’s naturalisation of rules.
- 63 The reflexive nature of their rule-making also offers a response to the antecedence (b) objection: the understanding of rules is a gradual realisation over the course of writing (for Pope’s young Virgil just as for Pullman pinning cards over his desk). As for the nomothetic claims of critics without literary ambitions of their own (such as Aristotle), they are warranted by *empiricism*: just as no one in a post-Lockean world would dare ask a scientist to formulate natural laws without prior observation, it would be an extraordinary ask to demand *a priori* rules from scholars of poetics. That rules of art have a prospective value (as normative guidelines to be used by aspiring writers) does not imply they should predate *any* writing: just like any knowledge, they are *a posteriori* rationalisations of experience, and at the very best (in the case of particularly reflexive writers), literature and its rules will happen *at the same time* (and Pope warns his

readers that rules happening before the fact are more likely to be cooking recipes than any poetics worthy of the name).

- 64 Such “dull receipts how poems may be made” certainly are what Morris Weitz would call a “close concept” of poetry, but they are also exactly what poetics according to Pope *shouldn't be*. Rules according to Pope and Pullman are, much to the contrary, *enabling guidelines*, thus answering the conceptual closure (a) objection. Art is indeed difficult, and inspired genius, while it *does* exist, will only take the writer so far: there is such a thing as the Homeric nod (when even the most original of writers are not at the top of their game, to borrow Pullman's football metaphor), and not everyone can be Homer or Virgil anyway. In short, rules are *shortcuts* rather than *edicts*, and exist to sustain striving genius or aspiring talent.
- 65 Little (if anything) about Pullman's account of putting rules into practice (such as “don't be afraid of the obvious”) differs from Pope's idea of rule-abiding: they are a conscious check of the artist's self, gradually discovered, mastered through practice, and teachable. They are not necessarily easy to put in practice, and do not imply blind alignment on the public's taste, which addresses the consumerism (d) objection: Pope insists that the critic is a *mediator* between writers and the public, whose rules should shape *both* the creation and reception of literature, and Pullman balances public pressure and expectation with narrative efficiency in his normative process.
- 66 All that adds up to aesthetic normativity as a (a) democratically enabling, (b) empirical, (c) reflexive and (d) fine-tuned theory, much more liberal, creative and (hopefully) likeable than might have been thought of at first glance.

A quick definition of aesthetic normativity (with a summary of its benefits)

- 67 In sum, aesthetic normativity amounts to three propositions. (1) Existence: there is such a thing as rules of art; (2) Knowability: these rules are knowable; (3) Usefulness: these rules are useful.
- 68 *Existence*. There is no plainer formulation than Pullman's “there are rules”. Now, *how* exactly rules exist (whether we should be realists like Aristotle, nominalists like Hume, or adopt a Wittgensteinian language-game approach) is not the matter at hand. Rules are normative utterances, with some leeway in their degree of intensity, positing that things *must*, or *should*, or *ought to* be done a certain way regarding what Pope would call the “parts” of writing. They make up *the proper way to go about writing*, and they exist as such whether one has knowledge of them or not.
- 69 *Knowability*. They are, however, *knowable*, as are any laws derived from the nomothetic process of empirical enquiry. They can be discovered (by the critic), and need not necessarily be taught (magisterially or through a practical apprenticeship) to the writer: experience, practice, experimentation, serendipity are a few of the other ways the can be come by. The fundamental idea that “there are rules” defines art as an object of *curiosity* as well as *wonder*: there is *something to be known* about art itself (which is different from, if connected to, what it tells of the world and the effect it has on us). That also entails that, as any piece of knowledge, rules of art are *falsifiable* – they are up for debate, as the girls writing on the train demonstrated. Pullman's “democracy of reading” explicitly provides for the *disputability* of rules, and even Pope, who still places

great stores by authorities (which is a token of his literary, religious and political conservatism), insists that rules are in no way *revealed*, but “discovered”. In sum they are *objective* in the sense that they are quite literally *put out there*, i.e. out of either’s mind, as the *object* of critical discussion

- 70 *Usefulness*. Curiosity for the rules of art is not gratuitous, but eminently practical. Rules are what stand in for genius in a writer’s weaker moments; they are how writers grow in their trade, and how they can overcome the self-consciousness that comes with experience (or outer pressure). They are a remedy to the solipsism of the writer’s creative vertigo and the arbitrariness of the critic’s hastier judgements because they ground both in the reality of art. They are a pivot for poietic empathy, providing common discursive ground for the writer and critic to meet, a *locus communis* in the strongest sense of the term.
- 71 Beyond that, the scope of rules of art is actually quite limited. Neither Pope nor Pullman claim that rules can or should account for *everything* in any given work: there *also are* such things as inspiration and genius and serendipitous finds and sublime licences, which aesthetic normativity does not challenge. For that reason, it is *liberal*. What Pullman calls the “armature of rules” only means that *there is something to discuss* about writing and reading that can be objectively known and has practical use. That means the writer *and* the critic in every human (from children on a train to serious adults) can legitimately express themselves on literary matters with at least *some* degree of success – isn’t it, after all, the idea behind any creative writing course? For that reason, aesthetic normativity is profoundly *democratic*. In the end, aesthetic normativity is what we *assume* every time we go beyond “I like it” when discussing a book, a performance or an exhibit. Whether in Pope’s Republic of Letters or Pullman’s Republic of Heaven, rules of art are the stuff and condition of a liberal and democratic aesthetic conversation.

NOTES

1. Serge Trottein (ed.), *L’Esthétique naît-elle au XVIII^e siècle ?*, Paris, PUF, “Débats philosophiques”, 2000.
2. I asked a very similar question in the context of Polish neoclassicism in the 18th century: Dimitri Garnarczyk, « Les règles de l’art, le poète et le mathématicien », *Revue des études slaves* [En ligne], XC-4 | 2019, mis en ligne le 15 décembre 2020, consulté le 28 février 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/res/3322> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/res.3322>.
3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790), §22 (translated by Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett, 1987, p. 90): “For although the principle is only subjective, it would still be assumed as subjectively universal (an idea necessary for everyone)”.
4. Idem, §1 (p. 44): “Hence a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment and so is not a logical judgment but an aesthetic one, by which we mean a judgment whose determining basis *cannot be other than subjective*”.
5. Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, v. 132 (in *The Major Works*, ed. Pat Rogers, Oxford, OUP, “Oxford World’s Classics”, 2008, p. 22).

6. These objections are not objections to particular rules of art (*i.e.* particular aesthetic norms), but objections to there being rules of art in general (*i.e.* attacks on aesthetic normativity on principle). As particular objections only target one rule (or a set of rules) as irrelevant, incomplete, inadequate, false, etc., they can perfectly exist within a normative aesthetic framework (in fact, they *assume* it). This is enough for the purpose of this discussion of aesthetic normativity, *i.e.* rules of art *in general*, which is not concerned with the content of particular rules, except for illustrative purposes).
7. Alexander Pope, *Op. cit.*, v. 102 (p. 21).
8. Idem, v. 9-14 (p. 19).
9. Idem, v. 28 (p. 19).
10. Idem, v. 19-21 (p. 19).
11. Idem, v. 101-102 (p. 21).
12. Idem, v. 114-115 (p. 21).
13. First published first in the *Guardian* (78, June 10, 1713), and later included in the *Peri Bathous* (1728); reproduced in *The Major Works*, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-236.
14. Idem, vv. 68-73 (p. 20).
15. Idem, vv. 88-91 (p. 21).
16. Idem, v. 98-99 (p. 21). That the reference of personal pronouns can get quite confusing in these two lines (even in their original context) only reinforces the continuity between nature and culture, spontaneous genius and cultivated ingenuity.
17. Idem, p. 18.
18. Idem, vv. 645-652 (pp. 36-37).
19. This is only partially true, since in the *Poetics* Aristotle focuses more on drama (Sophocles's especially) than on Homer's poems, and concludes that tragedy has precedence over the epic. Pope's shift of the Aristotelian focus onto Homer, however, is well established in the early modern critical tradition (since Scaliger at least).
20. For an informed vindication of Aristotle's approach to the natural sciences see Armand Marie Leroi, *The Lagoon: How Aristotle Invented Science*, London, Bloomsbury, 2014.
21. In particular 1448b12: "μανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἥδιστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως".
22. This apt phrase was coined by Hugh B. Nisbet, Claude Rawson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, t. IV, "Editors' preface", p. xvi.
23. Alexander Pope, *Op. cit.*, vv. 130-140 (p. 22).
24. Idem, v. 84 (p. 21).
25. "L'âge rhétorique est par excellence l'âge de l'invention, de la production, dans la mesure où il déculpabilise autant qu'il est possible l'auteur et dédramatise l'écriture, dans la mesure où il va aussi loin qu'il est possible dans l'idée que tout le monde peut pratiquer la littérature", Michel Charles, *L'Arbre et la source*, Paris, Seuil, « Poétique », 1985, p. 186.
26. Alexander Pope, *Op. cit.*, v. 141-149 (p. 22-23).
27. Philip Pullman, *Daemon Voices. Essays on Storytelling*, Oxford, David Fickling Books, 2017, p. 87.
28. Idem, p. 141.
29. *Poetics*, 1450b27: "ὅλον δέ ἐστιν τὸ ἔχον ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσον καὶ τελευτήν".
30. Philip Pullman, *Op. cit.*, p. 85.
31. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).
32. Philip Pullman, *Op. cit.*, p. 142.
33. Ibid.
34. Idem, p. 143-144.
35. Idem, p. 157.

36. "Toute connaissance est communicable et tout ce qui est communicable est connaissance", Jacques Bouveresse, « Moritz Schlick et le problème des propositions synthétiques *a priori* », *Les Lumières des positivistes*, Marseille, Agone, 2011, p. 214
 37. Philip Pullman, *Op. cit.*, p. 160.
 38. Idem, p. 148.
 39. Idem, p. 147.
 40. Idem, p. 148.
 41. Idem, p. 157.
 42. Gianni Rodari, *The Grammar of Fantasy: An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories*, New York, Teachers and Writers Collective, 1996.
 43. Philip Pullman, *Op. cit.*, p. 158.
 44. A golden compass of sorts, with four hands pointing at thirty-six symbols painted on the dial which, properly used, will give an exact and truthful answer to any question.
 45. Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials. The Amber Spyglass*, London, Everyman's Library, 2011, p. 1064.
 46. Idem, p.1083.
 47. Philip Pullman, *Daemon Voices*, *op. cit.*, p. 433-434.
 48. Idem, p. 143.
 49. Idem, p. 145 and 150.
 50. Respectively "Reading in the Borderland" (p. 279-280) and "The Cat, the Chisel and the Grave" (p. 375-376).
 51. Idem, p. 24.
 52. *Poetics*, 1450a15: "μέγιστον δὲ τούτων ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις".
 53. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984).
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ABSTRACTS

The concept of "rules of art" feels, in the context of 21st-century aesthetics and critical discourse, like an antiquated idea with unsound theoretical bases (it is by definition at odds with Kantian aesthetic subjectivism) and authoritarian undertones (regulating art being often seen as political censorship). The purpose of this article is to play Devil's advocate and make the case for rules of arts, in defense of what could be called *aesthetic normativity*, through a commentary of critical writings by Augustan age poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744) and contemporary novelist Philip Pullman (*1946). The introduction presents this project from an historical and critical perspective; Pope's and Pullman's views of aesthetic normativity are then discussed in succession, on the basis of which the conclusion offers answers to anti-normativism, and a definition of aesthetic normativity as a beneficial framework for the democratic discussion of artistic works and processes.

Le concept des « règles de l'art » a tout l'air, au 21^e siècle, d'une idée dépassée, aux fondements théoriques approximatifs (elle contredit le cadre subjectiviste de l'esthétique établi par la troisième *Critique* de Kant) et aux résonances autoritaires (normer l'art pouvant facilement être entendu comme une censure politique). Le propos de cet article est de se faire l'avocat du diable et de défendre les règles de l'art et ce que l'on peut appeler l'*esthétique normative*, à travers le commentaire des écrits critiques de deux auteurs britanniques : le poète classique Alexander

Pope (1688-1744) et le romancier contemporain Philip Pullman (*1946). L'introduction présente les enjeux historiques et théoriques de ce projet ; suivent successivement les analyses de l'esthétique normative selon Pope et Ph. Pullman, dont la conclusion tire des réponses aux objections qu'on peut adresser à l'esthétique normative, ainsi qu'une définition de cette dernière comme le cadre bénéfique d'une conversation démocratique sur l'art et ses enjeux.

El concepto de "reglas del arte" parece, en el siglo XXI, una idea anticuada, con escasos fundamentos teóricos (al contradecir el marco subjetivista de la estética establecido por la Tercera Crítica de Kant) y resonancias autoritarias (normar el arte puede entenderse fácilmente como censura política). El propósito de este artículo es hacerse el abogado del diablo y defender las reglas del arte y lo que puede llamarse una estética normativa, a través de un comentario sobre los escritos críticos de dos autores británicos: el poeta clásico Alexander Pope (1688-1744) y el novelista contemporáneo Philip Pullman (*1946). En la introducción se presentan las claves históricas y teóricas de este proyecto; a continuación, se analizan las estéticas normativas según Pope y Pullman, y en la conclusión se dan respuestas a las objeciones que pueden plantearse respecto a las estéticas normativas, así como una definición de éstas como marco beneficioso de una conversación democrática sobre el arte y su significado.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Alexander Pope, Philip Pullman, règles de l'art, esthétique, normes

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