Evidence for literary argumentation and evaluation has traditionally been mostly monologic and text-based, i.e., text-based evidence of the literary critic evaluating the quality of a text through the literary effects it produces. Even where literary argumentation has had non-traditional aims (e.g. deconstructionist, feminist, neo-Marxism, post-colonialist), this form of critique has been largely monologic and text-based. However, the recent marked growth in reading groups, and on-line discussion fora, has led to a noticeable increase in dialogic literary argumentation and evaluation, but which has been largely uninvestigated from a linguistic perspective.

This presentation will make a contribution to understanding the nature of debate in literary social reading, shining some light on the kind of argumentation (both dialogic and dialectical) used in evaluation of books read in a variety of reading groups. Questions addressed will include: how are evaluations of literary works managed dialogically? Are there dominant patterns of dialogic argumentation / evaluation across reading groups? Are these realised through similar lexico-grammatical patterns? The presentation will highlight such questions using the quantitative tools of corpus linguistics, and in combination with qualitative software analysis.