

INTRODUCTION

The present volume contains the contributions to the Fifth International Colloquium organized by the Committee on Literary Theory of the International Comparative Literature Association, which was held at the University of Madeira from 1 to 4 June 1992. The organizing university and the members of the Committee had chosen as a theme «Fact and Fiction in Literature and Literary Theory». This proved to be a happy choice, as it occasioned a host of stimulating papers, as well as a particularly lively discussion.

The theme itself was considered from a number of vantage points: With respect to *literary theory*, the following subdivisions of problems were proposed.

(a) the problematic aspect of factual knowledge in literary history, caused by the importance of narrative and rhetorical devices and procedures in writing history (cf. the work of Hayden White);

(b) the discussion of the concept of «fictionality»: is it a textual feature or a social convention?

(c) the upgrading of facts in the empirical study of literature (for instance through the responses of real readers).

With respect to *literature* itself, two general topics were suggested:

(a) the on-going rewriting of history through the historical novel, up to the present brand of postmodern varieties of the genre;

(b) the influence of real facts, such as cross-atlantic discoveries for instance, on the emergence of new literary forms and genres.

The various articles produced here display a broad spectrum of approaches to these questions, all of them valid and important when the general theme of the fact/fiction divide in literature is addressed.

As editors we have grouped the papers according to the following lines: the *first* section contains general and theoretical reflections on the nature of the problems involved; section *two* addresses the observer's dependence on cultural and historical knowledge as a given and inescapable fact of the reader; the *third* section, finally, contains papers which are geared toward the fact/fiction distinction in literary history and the history of poetics.

We believe the collection produced here, thanks to the local organizers and the ICLA Committee on Literary Theory, presents a rich and well-furnished state of the art, that we hope readers of *Dedalus* will find informative and stimulating reading.

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