

STANDARDS AND NORMS OF LITERARY STUDIES

Editorial

This issue of the *Journal of Literary Theory* is devoted to the question of the standards and norms in the field of literary studies. The choice of topic gave rise to a range of responses that turned out to be remarkably diverse. Remarkably diverse from the perspective of the editors and their assistants, who usually, for other issues, receive contributions that are more homogeneous and thus more easily comparable, but also for the assessors in our peer-review process, which has never witnessed so much scathing criticism and so many diametrically opposed appraisals. The contributions are diverse first in terms of how they approach the question of standards and norms, and second with respect to the answers they put forward.

What we expected and desired was a variety of contributions covering a spectrum ranging from the general rejection of standards because of their restrictive effect on creativity and individuality, to the advocacy of standards as a source of scholarly comparability and adequacy – a spectrum that reflects at least in outline the positions held in the field. We did, in fact, receive contributions along these lines, but there were few among them that drew on the findings of recent work on the theory or nature of scholarship and science in support of their positions. This reluctance to draw on relevant research posed a problem when it came to evaluating submissions, for it meant that at least one of the criteria normally used for assessing contributions to thematic issues was not met. However, instead of rejecting all submissions to this issue that did not meet these ›standards‹ – and thus leaving perspectives on the foundations of the field of literary studies that are thought-provoking and deserving of attention unrepresented – we decided to treat our own standards as an expression of a particular attitude toward our theme, to question them, and to attach even more importance to diversity than usual in this issue. For this reason, when putting the issue together, we made a point of asking for comments on standards in individual disciplines so as to reflect this very diversity; some colleagues, though, refrained from providing such comments in view of the lack of openness in their discipline.

As a result of our decision, the present issue contains various types of contributions: reconstructions of practices in literary studies, analyses of practices of evaluation in literary studies and the humanities in general, pieces of a normative character that argue for or against particular norms in a given discipline or standards in general, as well as comments, some of a personal nature, about standards in various philologies. We have refrained from grouping them under different head-

ings, so that readers can form their own impressions. We hope that this issue will, first, stimulate debates that will clarify the particular situation of individual philologies and, second, help to solve overarching problems that relate to the theme of standards and norms in literary studies.

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