The work which is being done in preparation of the Renaissance volumes within the *Comparative Literary History in European Languages* shares many assumptions as well as many problems with other parts of the project; but again, it contains problems and assumptions of its own.

The common ground is first of all, a strong belief in the renewal of literary historiography. There would be no point in pursuing this large undertaking, at such a synthetic and international level, if the “fall of literary history” described by René Wellek in the *Proceedings of the VIth I.C.L.A. Congress* (1970) were a definitive fall from which there was no return. It is assumed that all the movements which have been taking place in many countries towards the intrinsic study of texts do not preclude, but in fact, condition in a favourable manner the renewal of literary history by forcing the literary historian to base any general statement upon a patient, inductive study of many texts; and to beware of genetic fallacies as well as evolutionary determinisms in all their forms.

Secondly, all parts of the project share the hope of attaining a truly international coverage of the phenomena in question; this means an unprecedented effort to overcome the lesser accessibility of certain languages and to do justice to a phenomenon wherever it occurs. It also means a more inquiring glance at periodization, which has customarily been reliant on models drawn from certain “major” literatures.

* This paper was given, in its first version, at New York University (April, 1978).
Finally, all participating research groups, and implicitly at least, all participants, share the willingness to experiment with collective historiography. This is due to their recognition of the vastness of the task — too vast even for the most hard-working historiographer endowed with the farthest-reaching knowledge. The multiplicity of texts in many languages makes collective writing, if not necessary, at least eminently worthwhile as an experiment. Why the cautious note? Because, many recent encyclopaedic examples notwithstanding, writing history and especially literary history implies a unity of vision. Modern theory of general history stresses the activity of the historian's mind as he transforms what had been res gestae into historia rerum gestarum. When it comes to literary works, individual perception becomes even more important: is it even possible to harmonize several individual perceptions, without reason to any one, sufficiently to draw them into meaningful statements concerning phenomena of literary history? We should begin by raising this question in the most serious manner, without attempting an a priori answer. It may be that a volume consisting of individual contributions will be no more than a series of juxtaposed articles, without the artifice of seams, and showing its diversity in the frankest of manners. Even that will be a significant contribution to Comparative literary history, provided all unexplored territory in terms of relations between relevant national literatures has been covered. It may even be that no dictatorial attempt will be made by the editor to curb individual viewpoints in regard to critical vocabulary, theoretical preferences or even Weltanschauung. If so, the resulting book may be a mosaic of treatments, eclectic and broadly humanistic in that each methodology in conjunction with each problem can become an original contribution taken in its own right; in that case the reader is called upon to work out the resultant, as if he were listening to a complex dialogue. Naturally, however, voices will be raised against the lack of unity (which might simply be a lack of homogeneity) of such a book.