

REAL-WORLD PRACTICES AND INSTITUTIONS OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE, AND ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF THE DISCIPLINE

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The set of four position papers gathered here have been selected from the open workshop under the same title held at the eighteenth congress of the International Comparative Literature Association in summer 2007 in Rio de Janeiro. This heading reflected a suggestion that Milan V. Dimić, founder of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, made during the conference in Venice in autumn 2005 which celebrated the fifty anniversary of ICLA's inaugural congress there. The following head note, duly reprinted in the final congress program for Rio, explained the aims of the workshop:

The workshop will strive to build on the views and activities of self-identified comparatists over the most recent decades. But it will encourage more than reports that only mirror contents in various programs labeled Comparative Literature. Instead, it will encourage evaluative critiques of actual trends and institutions and forward-looking proposals for new directions and remedial efforts. Attention will be directed at assessing in how far the "real world" practices in various major and minor programs around the globe are helping to advance, or in certain ways impeding, the development of a vigorous discipline at the international level where ICLA strives to excel. The workshop is not intended as a vehicle for a variety of performative exhibitions in which adherents reiterate the established schools or ideologies or approaches which have been prominent in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Rather, it is intended as a place for a rigorous debate about first principles, of well-thought rejections of established ideologies or schools or approaches of recent decades. We hope to hear trenchant criticisms of reigning attitudes and of inadequate institutions. These criticisms should maintain a high level of civility but speakers or interveners should not mask their searching analyses in order to spare the feelings of sectors within ICLA's (happily!) quite diverse membership who might perhaps be surprised or feel discomforted.

The several sessions of the workshop fulfilled their purpose by attracting a large attendance and sparking lively discussions. It is gratifying that the *CRCL*, under Dimić's successor Jonathan Hart, is now carrying a sample of statements from the event, furthering the initiative for a renewal of dialog about what Comparative Literature could/should contribute on the international plane. An independent reading of the selection by the prominent comparatist, Ricardo Quinones, seemed so apropos that as organizer of the workshop I have asked both Professor Hart and Professor Quinones for permission to add the descriptive core of his commentary as a preface.