

EXTERNAL ADVISORY REPORT  
on  
INSTITUTO DE LITERATURA COMPARADA MARGARIDA LOSA  
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto

Director: Prof. dr. Gonalo Vilas-Boas

Visit Date: 01-11-2013

Advisory Committee:

Prof. dr. Vita Fortunati (Bologna)

Prof. dr. Darío Villanueva (Santiago de Compostela)

Prof. dr. Paulo de Medeiros (Warwick)

The Advisory Committee is now composed of two returning members (Fortunati and Medeiros) and a new member (Villanueva), who could not be present at the meeting. Although initially it had been planned to hold meetings on two days, finally it was decided to hold all the meetings on Friday, 1 November as such allowed for a better concentration of efforts.

Prior to the visit of the Advisory Committee an extensive dossier outlining current activities of the Institute had been sent to the advisory committee members. This also included materials related to the process of applying for new funding from the FCT. During the visit these documents were complemented by other reports of progress as well as detailed information on international conferences organized by the Institute. There were two meetings scheduled: in the morning the committee met with the representatives from all of the current research projects, who briefly outlined their work and plans for future development. In the afternoon the meeting was more restricted, including current and past members of the Institute's Directing Board, Prof. Gonalo Vilas-Boas, Prof. Ana Paula Coutinho, Prof. Joana Matos Prof. Ana Luísa Amaral, Prof. Rosa Martelo, and Prof. Fátima Vieira.

Based on the documents provided as well as on the two meetings and conversations with individual researchers, the Advisory Committee is pleased to note that a) the Institutes' current rating of Excellent (FCT) continues to be justified; the high level of research undertaken at the Institute since its inception has been maintained and improved; b) the Institute is busy with further streamlining of its research lines with the goal of more effective management of resources and increased quality and international visibility. This is a significant step inasmuch as the Institute aims at further focusing its research, building on the success of past projects, but developing a strong strategy to advance both the field of Comparative Literary Studies and to make a definitive contribution to the urgent debate on the role of the Humanities in society.

The Institute's two main lines of research, on Liminalities, and on Subjectivities and Sexualities, both comprising several sub-units, have focused on questions of Poetics, Gender Studies, Utopian Studies, Detective Fiction, Travel Narratives, Migration Studies,

Drama and Translation Studies. In all these areas there has been a significant output in the form of published books, both nationally as well as internationally, a large number of articles in peer-reviewed specialized periodicals, besides the publication of the Institute's own journal, *Cadernos de Literatura Comparada*, which remains a singularly unique scholarly publication in Portugal, both in terms of its comparative perspective as well as its international norms including peer-review. Furthermore, Institute members have participated widely in national and international conferences and have also organized consistently several outreach programs in collaboration with other cultural and educational institutions, ranging from secondary schools to national theaters.

The quality and quantity of scientific publications achieved by the Institute is impressive by itself and especially taking into account the increasing institutional pressures and actual reduction in research time due to the constraints facing higher education in Portugal. Indeed, the Advisory panel sees the mounting pressures on the Institute's members as a significant threat to their research possibilities. Although beyond the scope of the panel's tasks, which are of an advisory nature in relation to the Institute, it is our duty to alert both the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto as well as to the reviewing boards of the FCT, to the mounting pressures on the work of the Institute's researchers and their possible consequences. Although such pressures are not isolated to Portugal and can be noted throughout Europe, the intensity with which they are impacting on normal research activities at the Institute is alarming.

The Advisory Committee is pleased to note that the Institute's main lines of research have yielded significant results without exception and that as those projects near their conclusion, members have been actively discussing possibilities for renewing their research. Plans for altering the Institute's current foci were widely presented and debated throughout the day. In overall terms, the Institute members voiced concerns about a need for further focusing their research without unduly compromising individual projects or researcher's freedom. The Advisory Board is pleased to attest to the great care given to avoiding simply imposing directives from above and the genuine and democratic involvement of various members of the Institute in planning future projects. The Institute presented a plan for future research that would replace the current two main lines and their various subdivisions and would instead concentrate research into three closely related main lines: *inter/transculturalities, intermedialities, and intersexualities*. It is obvious that these three lines build on previous research and focus more precisely on current crucial topics within the Humanities such as world literature, transnational literatures and translation as an hermeneutical category and a useful tool for understanding multilingual and multiethnic European contexts/texts erasing the canonical distinction between Comparative and Translation Studies. In fact in a situation of constant migration and diaspora the notions of national literature, mother tongue, monolingualism/bilingualism, literary canons have to be re-discussed in order to find new methodologies for understanding this new European geopolitical, literary and cultural cartography. New spaces come into focus, identities are displaced and replaced within new territories, as the word of *translationality* indicates which hints precisely to the intricate circulation of texts and its bearing upon the rediscussion of the idea of nation.

In the same time, in the opinion of the Advisory Board, these new lines help to bring the work of all researchers more in dialogue with each other. The various members of the Institute are aware that in order to carry on inter/ transdisciplinary research they need some collaboration with experts in specific fields such as cinema and photography. In fact in the past they already had some fruitful collaboration as in the case of volume dedicated on poetry and photography. In the research line on intersexualities on investigating the representation of the body the Advisory Board recommended to face the humanistic theoretical paradigms with the scientific ones. The Advisory Board also suggested to the two groups, the first of Comparative Poetics (Prof. Rosa Maria Martelo), the second on migration studies (Prof. Ana Paula Coutinho) to try to enlarge their scope to Eastern countries and to the Balkans.

The new lines can serve to concentrate and sharpen the common points of the various research interests and expertise currently available in the Institute. Furthermore, the Institute has also expressed the desire to further concentrate all three lines as contributing to a joint and very much focused goal for the Institute's research as a whole, under the heading of "Literature and Frontiers of Knowledge: Politics of Inclusion". The Advisory Board welcomes this intention as it serves several purposes: one the one hand it can bring together the various research strands into a common objective, serving to further unify and distinguish the research conducted under the auspices of the Institute. It was proposed for instance, that a specific goal for the coming period would be the preparation of a series of volumes all subscribing to the common topic from various angles. Although a complex and certainly arduous task, this could definitely serve as a catalyst for integration and, at the same time, increase the visibility of the Institute's research as a whole and the Advisory Board enthusiastically welcomes such a goal.

Membership in the Institute, though not unchanged, continues to reflect a strong variety of specializations. Due to the untimely death of Paulo Eduardo Carvalho, and the recent departure of Alexandra Moreira da Silva, who took up a position at the University of Paris, the area of Drama studies has become weakened. However, this can be compensated, in part, by a renewed and intensified effort on the study of intermediality, with special attention given to the interrelations of literature, photography and cinema. The Institute has also been able to recruit a few new young members. As such, the Advisory Board is of the opinion that though the total number of researchers is relatively small, it constitutes a dynamic and well integrated team, whose varying expertises complement each other well. In the past years the Instituto de Literatura Comparada Margarida Losa has succeeded in establishing a clear national and international research profile. Many of the projects initiated are close to conclusion, with visible results in a number of important publications. The Institute has also consolidated its ties nationally and internationally with other research organizations and with individual research teams. Several of the Institute's initiatives, such as the large research project on the *New Portuguese Letters* under the coordination of Prof. Ana Luísa Amaral, or the Research group into Comparative Poetics, coordinated by Prof. Rosa Maria Martelo, as well as the projects on migration studies coordinated by Prof. Ana Paula Coutinho, and the project on Utopias, coordinated by Prof. Fátima Vieira, have been functioning as a magnet for international researchers. The launching of the new, peer-reviewed, journal on Comparative Poetics, *E-Lyra* and the online extensive sites related to Utopia Studies and

to the *New Portuguese Letters* serve to disseminate the Institute's research widely. The decision to stop the paper publication of the Institute's main journal, *Cadernos de Literatura Comparada*, though a loss, is more than compensated by the decision to make all of its content available on-line, in a pragmatic decision that clearly demonstrates the Institute's determination to face up to the current challenges in a positive manner. In the opinion of the Advisory Board, the Institute has clearly demonstrated excellence and its concrete plans for future activities promise a continuation of such excellence.