## Last Word

## How and When Shall We Commit Suicide?

Stephen Slemon's review article ("Lament for a Notion," *ESC* 29.1-2) quite rightly concludes that Gayatri Spivak's vision of an idealized merger with the more politically savvy Area Studies as the way to a new, revitalized Comparative Literature (CL) is flawed. However, his assertion that CL is moribund, or at the very least sporting a much-bloodied nose, is indeed "extrapolated from insufficient ground." Critics have been writing of the imminent demise of our discipline since at least 1958 (Guérard, whence our title), and we're still kicking. Crisis is our middle name.

The "comparatist's lurking panic" (Damrosch) is part and parcel of the "productive and melancholy precariousness" our discipline offers all those comfortable with the "plural and contingent" (Hutcheon). Far from being "in its moment of dying transition" (Slemon), CL provides a rejuvenating and privileged viewpoint from which to read linguistic, cultural, and individual difference—and what else is literature for?

Readers of *ESC* should know that Spivak's is just one of many recent publications on the subject by comparatists, not all of whom share her dire view. In his 2003 report on the state of the discipline, Haun Saussy points out that the time is ripe for the age of Comparative Literature, a discipline that implicitly counters the "googlization" of knowledge, challenges any superpower's hegemonic claims, and performs the interdisciplinarity and transnationalism that are the current buzzwords of our educational institutions.

Let us also dispel the notion that CL is the new kid on the block, strangely 'other' and therefore a natural target for bullying. CL is in fact

no more a neophyte than Slemon's own discipline as we know it today. Robert Scholes locates the replacement of oratory by literature as the subject matter of (and thus the birth of) "English" at the turn of the twentieth century. CL has been taught at Cornell since 1871, Michigan since 1887, and Harvard since 1890 (Bassnett). While a relative newcomer here, CL in Canada has produced such renowned comparatists as Northrop Frye, Linda Hutcheon, Eva Kushner, Wladimir Krysinski, Mario Valdés, Milan Dimić, and E. D. Blodgettin, to name just a few. Furthermore, CL is in the ascendant on virtually every continent except our own: over the past ten years, new programs have sprung up in Asia, South Africa, and Europe. Canadians would do well to heed this trend.

Rather than cowering in the schoolyard, Comparative Literature is adopting an anti-bullying technique by projecting confidence. Other recommended strategies: "tell someone," "make friends," and "avoid the bullies." This last we refuse to do. You'll find us "little guys" hanging out in the same places you do—the library, the bookstore, the classroom—for quite some time to come.

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