



## Death of a Discipline (The Wellek Library Lectures)

By Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

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**Death of a Discipline (The Wellek Library Lectures)** By Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

For almost three decades, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has been ignoring the standardized "rules" of the academy and trespassing across disciplinary boundaries. Today she remains one of the foremost figures in the study of world literature and its cultural consequences. In this new book she declares the death of comparative literature as we know it and sounds an urgent call for a "new comparative literature," in which the discipline is given new life—one that is not appropriated and determined by the market.

In the era of globalization, when mammoth projects of world literature in translation are being undertaken in the United States, how can we protect the multiplicity of languages and literatures at the university? Spivak demonstrates how critics interested in social justice should pay close attention to literary form and offers new interpretations of classics such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Through close readings of texts not only in English, French, and German but also in Arabic and Bengali, Spivak practices what she preaches.

Acclaim for Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and her work:

"[Spivak] pioneered the study in literary theory of non-Western women."—Edward W. Said

"She has probably done more long-term political good, in pioneering feminist and post-colonial studies within global academia, than almost any of her theoretical colleagues." —Terry Eagleton

"A celebrity in academia... create[s] a stir wherever she goes." —*The New York Times*

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

*Death of a Discipline* is a visionary text which can be considered one of the most cutting-edge theoretical works today.

(*Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*)

This thought-provoking slim book is written in an eclectic style... We have been on a planetary tour, which makes us rethink human collectivity across borders?thanks to Spivak.

(Ferial J. Ghazoul *H-Gender-Mideast*)

*Death of a Discipline* is certainly the most important, sustained statement about the discipline of Comparative Literature to have appeared in English since Charles Bernheimer's 1995 report.

(John Mowitt *CLIO*)

One of the obligatory books of this decade for comparatists... One of the most passionate defenses... of Comparative Literature.

(Roland Greene *SubStance*)

#### Review

*Death of a Discipline* is not a lament but a promise. Professor Spivak invites us to imagine an inclusive Comparative Literature freed from its traditional national anchorings, a border-crossing discipline honed by careful reading that encourages linguistic competence and includes the languages of the Southern Hemisphere 'as active cultural media.' This is a visionary work that charts not only the possibility of a reformed discipline that opens itself to learning from many quarters, but also identifies emergent collectivities.

(Jean Franco, Columbia University)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* does not tell us that Comparative Literature is at an end. On the contrary, it charts a demanding and urgent future for the field, laying out the importance of the encounter with area studies and offering a radically ethical framework for the approach to subaltern writing. Spivak deftly opposes the 'migrant intellectual' approach to the study of alterity. In its place, she insists upon a practice of cultural translation that resists the appropriation by dominant power and engages in the specificity of writing within subaltern sites in the idiomatic and vexed relation to the effacements of cultural erasure and cultural appropriation. She asks those who dwell within the dominant episteme to imagine how we are imagined by those for whom literacy remains the primary demand. And she maps a new way of

reading not only the future of literary studies but its past as well. This text is disorienting and reconstellating, dynamic, lucid, and brilliant in its scope and vision. Rarely has 'death' offered such inspiration.

(Judith Butler, UC Berkeley)

In this remarkable series of lectures Gayatri Spivak outlines the genealogy of Comparative Literature as a discipline, its successive intellectual affiliations, and the potentialities that an association with area and cultural studies opens. Through a complex and rigorous exploration of the various places of enunciation from which a comparatist perspective can be built up, she traces the contours of a fascinating intellectual project grounded in a 'planetary' vision as opposed to 'globalization.' It is essential reading.

(Ernesto Laclau, professor of comparative literature, SUNY Buffalo)

About the Author

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is the Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University. She is the author of *Myself I Must Remake; In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics; The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues; Outside in the Teaching Machine; and A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. She is the translator of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps, Breast Stories, Old Women, and Chotti Munda and his Arrow*.

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