

ALSCW IN ALLIANCE HELPS SAVE COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Dear Colleagues,

One gratifying turn of events, as I complete my service as president, has been the news of how effective our alliances with other associations, such as the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) and the Comparative Literature Association (CLA), have been in reversing two crucial, bellwether decisions about the future of Comparative Literature in Academia.

Our first piece of good news came from our Councilor Adelaide Russo, who reported to us (a fuller article is in *Literary Matters*) at the end of August about the retention of the distinguished program in Comparative Literature at Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge:

Every detail justifying why Comparative Literature should be continued at LSU contained in the Board of Regents' staff report was in my initial October report, the one which was the basis of their desire to terminate the program. Their August recommendation did quote one new bit of information -- Susan Wolfson's letter on behalf of the ALSCW. The organization saved our program.

Then, just in time for Halloween, the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto was given a stay of execution. My letter, on behalf of the Association, was one of many, many received—and again, I worked in collaboration with members of the MLA on this, in particular David Damrosch of Harvard University, who was inspired to become a member of the ALSCW to help strengthen the alliance with the MLA (of which we are both members). This is the report I had from Neil ten Kortenaar, the Director of the Centre for Comparative Literature at University of Toronto:

“Dear Professor Wolfson

I have good news: the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto will survive. The great outpouring of international support for the Centre in the form of letters and signatures to the on-line petition made the administration think again about their plans to cut the Centre's degree programs. The Administration has also stepped back from its decision to fold the languages and literature departments into a single School of Languages and Literatures. German, Spanish and Portuguese, Slavic, Italian, and East Asian Studies will all retain their status as independent departments.

There is not only relief but also excitement. One good thing that has come out of the otherwise regrettable crisis is a new spirit of collaboration among the languages and literatures at Toronto. The Centre for Comparative Literature will develop closer links to Victoria College (the

part of the university where Northrop Frye had his academic home) and to the undergraduate program in Literary Studies housed there. This is all to the good. I would like to thank you very much for the letters you sent. Know that they worked!

Here is a copy of the story as reported in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper:

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/toronto/u-of-t-abandons-plan-to-close-famed-school/article1777093/>

and in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

<http://chronicle.com/article/A-Reprieve-Is-Possible-for/125210/>

So, the Centre for Comparative Literature is open and with a renewed commitment to the study of comparative literature.”

I excerpt first from the *Globe and Mail* article

**U of T abandons plan to close famed school
JOE FRIESEN**

From Friday's *Globe and Mail*

Published Thursday, Oct. 28, 2010 7:07PM EDT

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The renowned Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto has been pulled back from the brink after an outcry from scholars around the world and the determined protests of students and faculty. The director of the centre said he has been assured that the school, which was slated to close at the end of this academic year, will survive.

“Comp. Lit. is saved. The centre will stay open and we’re taking students for next year,” said director Neil ten Kortenaar. “I think it was the outcry from around the world. We had a lot of support from a lot of big-name people in academic circles.”

It was a battle that pitted the forces of streamlining and cost-cutting against those who would preserve structures of academic and historical significance. [The administration’s] plan sparked an intense debate across campus and led to several angry town halls this fall. More than 6,500 people signed a petition calling for Comparative Literature to be spared. Academic and literary luminaries weighed in to support the threatened centre, which was founded more than 40 years ago by the legendary literary theorist Northrop Frye.

The global edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* also carried this news, which I excerpt, too:

**October 29, 2010
A Reprieve Is Possible for Frye Centre at U. of Toronto**

By Karen Birchard

The University of Toronto's internationally renowned Centre for Comparative Literature, founded in 1969 by the literary theorist Northrop Frye, is remaining open for the foreseeable future. The center faced closure at the end of this academic year because of departmental restructuring but now appears to have been given a new life thanks in part to the vocal support of academics from around the world.

"A few weeks ago, I knew we could admit students for next year. Since then I've known we can admit students for the next five years," said the center's director, Neil ten Kortenaar, who said the public outcry to keep the center operating "was crucial, absolutely crucial. It took me aback and I know it took the administration aback. It was amazing, it was gratifying, it was remarkable."

The university, faced with a huge deficit, announced in July that it was closing the center and consolidating most language departments and some other humanities departments into a new school. That resulted in thousands of people signing petitions and writing letters, phoning, buttonholing university administrators, and sending e-mails to the president in protest.

The outcry helped spur discussions among the affected departments and a strategic-planning committee led by Meric Gertler, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, which is charged with trimming the deficit.

On the breezes of this excellent news, Adelaide Russo, fresh from "three days in New York for fall meeting of the MLA Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee," reports that she, David Damrosch, Rosemary Feal and Russell Berman (with Michael Wood, and Marshall Brown in the wings) are already talking about on-going collaboration, including we hope, another jointly sponsored forum at an upcoming MLA convention. The 2013 Convention will be in Boston (January) and would be a terrific sequel (again) for a 2012 launch at the ALSCW conference in Boston in October . . . but this is all to be shaped anon, one way or another.

Ere then, let's see how we can help save the departments of Russian, French, Italian, German, Classics, and Theater at SUNY Albany, again in alliance with the MLA and CLA . . . For now, I wanted to share the good news about our alliances with other associations on causes of common concern. United we stand!

Yours sincerely,
Susan J. Wolfson
President, ALSCW 2010
Immediate Past President, 2011