At its heart, the discipline of Comparative Literature asks a handful of deceptively simple questions. How best to compare conflicting literary traditions and languages? How do the many ways that this has been done in the past inform how we might go about doing so in the future? And can one even compare the apples of one literature with the pears of another? Anyone who is interested in reading widely has a stake in these basic questions.

Organised by the Centre for Modern European Literature at the University of Kent – and funded by the Consortium for the Humanities in the South East (CHASE) – the Comparative Literature Summer School offered three days of intensive training in the underlying principles, the variant practices, and the latest perspectives of comparative literature. Designed to include both European and non-European perspectives on the problematic of comparison, the Summer School brought together postgraduate students working in the many fields of comparative literature, introducing them to leading specialists in the discipline, and offering them a valuable opportunity for both intellectual training and institutional networking.

The Summer School programme was delivered through a mixture of seminars and lectures spread across three days. Each session challenged participants to interrogate and broaden their own senses of different disciplinary practices. In the first seminar, ‘The Origins and History of Comparative Literature’, Professor Ben Hutchinson (University of Kent) outlined the various contested methodologies of Comparative Literature since its emergence as an academic discipline around 1800 in Europe. Through readings of three key theorisations of comparativism from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – Johann Gottfried Herder, Hugo Meltzl, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett – Hutchinson framed Comparative Literature as having a tripartite structure of hermeneutics, history, and politics. By historicising theories of Comparative Literature in this way, Hutchinson facilitated a productive conversation about participants’ intellectual relationships with the discipline’s origins, as well as their synchronic and diachronic engagement with different literary traditions.

In the second seminar, “Doing” World Literature, Professor Francesca Orsini (SOAS) critically surveyed the recent boom in World Literature scholarship. From Pascale Casanova to David Damrosch to Franco Moretti and beyond, Orsini identified a key problem facing the discipline in its contemporary forms: since World Literature routinely adopts a cartographic standpoint, it might too quickly describe the world literary space as one unified zone, which subsequently risks flattening crucial differences between diverse texts from diverse periods, thereby obscuring key overlaps and tensions. With this spatial preoccupation in mind, Orsini drew on recent research on global geographies (Massey; Lewis and Wisen; Conrad) which more deeply tackles the question of space in the twenty-first century. Orsini thus resisted overly systemic theorizations, encouraging scholars to be humble about making claims to World Literature in their work. She advocated resisting the temptation of hubristic homogenisation in scholarship and suggested approaching literature via self-conscious uncertainty and discovery instead of attempting to impose a form of systemic mastery over literary works.
In the third seminar, ‘Comparative Literature and Translation Studies’, Professor Duncan Large (University of East Anglia) led discussions on translation loss, translation gain, and the thorny question of untranslatability. Large’s approach foregrounded translation as a generative exercise which produces new modes of engagement with and new ways of thinking about texts, rather than as a process which simply reduces the authenticity of the original. Large also reflected on the question of the “invisibilisation” of the translator. While literary analysis of translated material is generally adept at scrutinising the fantasy of the “invisible” translator, Large suggested, the publishing industry and the media routinely marginalise the centrality of the translator for the circulation of non-Anglophone literatures. Having engaged with the perennial debate around the potential advantages and shortcomings of either working with texts in their original language or in translation, Large’s session illustrated how comparative study is itself a translation, a mode of reading which translates unique linguistic constructs into a shared readable or intelligible horizon.

The Summer School also invited two keynote lecturers. On the evening of the first day, Marcel Lepper spoke about his research at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv and the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, focusing in particular on his ongoing research project on the legacies of 1968: ‘Ideenkonflikte in globalen Archiven’, funded by the VolkswagenStiftung. While this project focuses on 1968 in North American, Latin American, and Caribbean cultures, Lepper’s keynote itself concentrated on the vast archival resources which expand and challenge historical understandings of 1968. In particular, Lepper explored archival antecedents and afterlives of 1968, including the reception of Hannah Arendt’s famous essay on Walter Benjamin in Merkur. Lepper’s central argument was that although the foremost political movements of 1968 aimed at a particular kind of internationalism, archival research sheds light on the at best localised and at worst provincial political concerns of certain 68ers.

The following evening, Wen-chin Ouyang’s lecture (SOAS) brought together various strands of her nascent project in which explores how the silk road has been imagined as a pre-modern form of cosmopolitan globalisation. Ouyang’s keynote, ‘World Literature and the Silk Roads’, suggested that the Silk Roads’ networks of circulation challenge binary conceptions of east/west, shifting the emphasis onto multiple centres, routes, and modes. This, she suggested, may prove to be a generative model for understanding literary circulation. Ouyang traced the movements and transformations of specific objects and forms – blue and white pottery, coffee, and shadow theatre – as they travelled along the Silk Roads. Ouyang was not satisfied, however, with a purely celebratory model of cosmopolitan circulation of objects. By focusing on the commodification of coffee, and its particular representation in the works of Mahmoud Darwish, Orhan Pamuk and Haruki Murakami, among others, Ouyang identified how the dark histories of colonialism provide the backdrop for the production and commodity chains of coffee beans, reflecting on the implications of this for her Silk Road model of world literary circulation.

The Summer School also made space for a workshop on the pragmatics of studying and working in the field of Comparative Literature. With a focus on the technicalities of the REF, on how to best submit and publish research, and on applying for postdoctoral study and lectureships, participants were given the opportunity to receive valuable advice from leading specialists in the field and discuss the practical considerations of a future career as a comparatist.
All of these workshops and lectures provided the foundations for the participants' final task of the Summer School: to present their research projects, reflect on the lessons learned over the past three days, and discuss the ongoing challenges of their practice of comparative literature. Participants were tasked to deliver presentations of up to twenty minutes in length with plenty of time for discussion among the group.

The Summer School's emphasis on Comparative Literature's histories, practices and more recent inflections has sharpened participants’ senses of the discipline, and their particular interventions within it. The Summer School also prompted participants to reflect on their own perspectives and the claims their research makes, as well as their projects’ theoretical and methodological foundations. Participants were encouraged to think not only intellectually, but also strategically, about the ways in which they might best frame and develop their current and future projects. The Summer School also provided participants with dedicated time and space to both collectively talk through and individually reflect on their work, fostering an atmosphere of collegial equality among all involved, leaving us intellectually stimulated and primed to go forth and compare.

Dominic O'Key, Ian Ellison

**List of participants**
Kirsty Bennett (Lancaster)
Carlotta Beretta (Bologna)
Sofia Cumming (UEA)
Ian Ellison (Leeds)
Naomi Fukuzawa (UCL)
Ann-Christine Kinzer (Kent)
Lorna Kirkby (Nottingham)
Paul Leworthy (Edinburgh)
Jenny Messenger (St. Andrews)
Stephanie Obermeier (Kent)
Dominic O'Key (Leeds)
Jemima Paine (Liverpool)
Alessandra Rosati (Goldsmiths)
Sigrid Thomsen (SOAS)