Of the many academic boxes I’ve ticked on application forms and CfPs, “Comparitivist” has never been one of them. And with good reason: my work is a monolingual project, centred on Anglophone texts from Kenya and Nigeria. As my focus is on the relationship of the imagined object “Africa” to imaginaries of “global space and culture”, I applied to the CHASE Comparative Literature summer school – organized by the University of Kent from 24-26 June 2019 – with the hope of generating some fresh insights into questions of world and world literature, and of intercultural communication. But I am, linguistically speaking, a definite interloper in the Comparitivist space – and I approached the summer school with due trepidation.

Over three stimulating days, however, the school proved its value to scholars, of any discipline, invested in broad questions of “worldliness”. The range and diversity of student projects was remarkable, spanning from old age and the absurd in avant-garde European radio to “Dalit” resistance poetry. I was particularly invigorated by Laura Gonzales’s (Oxford) project on the influence and adaptation of North American science writing on contemporary Spanish authors – something which spoke to my own sense of the flexible possibilities of comparative work: in this case, as much the comparison of scientific and humanistic modes of thought, as of different languages.

Of course, the workshops were impressively multilingual. Contributors spanned the more staple Europhone languages of English, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese (the latter in European and Latin American contexts), but also Turkish, Mandarin, Bengali, Hindi, Afghani and Persian. Through seminars on Emily Apter’s notion of ‘untranslatability’ and Hugo Meltzl’s ‘polyglottism’, as well as on the modifications in Samuel Beckett’s self-translations, I was forcefully made to appreciate the gains to be made on working multilingually – with hasty resolutions to rekindle my French.

However, more than being just an impressive anthology of Goethean *Weltkultur*, the school did exactly as I’d hoped in challenging conventional notions of what world literature studies and the Comparative Literature discipline could look like. I was especially struck by Francesca Orsini’s opening seminar (“South-South Comparison”) which sought to find a more embedded and regionally-attentive model of world literature thanthe macro-level, all-encompassing approaches of key figures like David Damrosch and Franco Moretti. Drawing on her own work on multilingual literature within India, as well as on Isabel Hofmeyr’s study of the shuffling reinventions and re-inscriptions of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in England and the African continent, Orsini showed how world literature questions (part and whole, individual and community, space) can be examined *within* a single site, and without recourse to “every corner” of the planet.

In world literature studies it can sometimes be easy for discussions of “world” to eclipse those of “literature”. But in the first of two keynotes (the second by UMBC’s Jessica Berman) Rosinka Chaudhuri explored Rabindranath Tagore’s idea of literature as a unique form of surplus, extravagance – “man’s plenty” – that is worldly not for its reflection of the existing world but for its generation of its own world: mankind’s summoning of ‘that which does not exist within his world’. Chaudhuri’s comments chimed, for me, with recent analyses by Nicholas Brown, among others, about the hermeneutic assumptions made as world literature studies approaches its texts as, precisely, “literature”. Brown warns us to be wary of the ‘ontological burden’ placed on the ‘literary’: Chaudhuri explored both this burden and its possibilities in her thinking through literature as a means of ‘worlding’ the self. Moreover, Chaudhuri struck a note of caution in her closing remarks, asking us to question our assumptions that literature remains a medium of significance in today’s world.

Indeed, this mixture of vibrant possibility – as evinced by the scope and ambition of the projects – and a pragmatic and self-reflective aversion to traditional ‘mastery’ models of world literature seemed to be an ethos for the school as a whole. As course director Patricia Novillo-Corvalan enjoined us: “don’t just theorize, *do*! Put these theories to the test!” Off to work we go, then…

Penny Cartwright