

# The David Fleming-Brown Postgraduate Travel Grant

## Report



Figure 1. Photo of IWL 2025 cohort in front of the Widener Library.

My name is Rachel Eager and I am Scottish and in the final year of a PhD in Comparative Literature in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Glasgow. Specifically, I am in the field of emblem studies and my research investigates representations of women in French emblems of the early modern period, through to the present day. I was granted the David Fleming-Brown Postgraduate Travel Grant (£400), as well as additional scholarships, allowing me to participate in The Institute for World Literature (IWL) at Harvard University (June/July 2025) for one month in Boston, MA, USA. This is the key institute in the field of Comparative and World Literature, allowing me access to cutting-edge research, to network with top and upcoming scholars in the field, and to gain crucial feedback on my own research. IWL 2025 has made the summer of dreams, academically and personally and I am so grateful to the scholarships for granting me this opportunity.

Ahead of the IWL, I prepared two presentations. My first presentation investigated how representations of political women in *Vogue* compare to political women represented in seventeenth-century French emblem books, entitled: ‘Jill Biden and Kamala Harris in *Vogue*: A Comparative Study of Political Representations of Women in the 17th and 21st Centuries’.



Figure 2. Contributing to seminar discussion.

What can we learn about society, attitudes and political events based upon the popular culture consumed? Has society and the world really changed since the seventeenth century when Georgette de Montenay wrote her own political emblem book? Conclusions concern repetition of iconography over the time periods and reveals how waves of feminism and feminist movements do not always translate to agency. Overall, it will be assessed that gender and race, which have been highlighted in the media with movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, are similarly represented in popular culture, despite being 300 years apart. This was a unique opportunity to gain feedback on my research from peers and experts in the field ahead of writing my book chapter in ‘New Feminisms, Politics, and Pop Culture: An Intertextual Anthology’, Palgrave Macmillan [Forthcoming 2026].

My second presentation: ‘Highlighting ‘Hidden’ Women – Uncovering Narratives and Challenging Erasure of Women in French Emblem Studies’ investigated the lives and works of under-researched women in emblem studies and is essential in addressing this gap in knowledge. This project uses feminist philosophy and content analysis diachronically and aims to understand the socio-political context which led to their exclusion. I contend that women emblematisers are deserving of the same scholarly interest that is shown to male emblematisers. For example, women who have published extensively yet are only occasionally found in current scholarship as a footnote. This opens the research questions to how many other ‘hidden’ women are there and what are the reasons for their erasure? I contend that their work should be entered into the field of Emblem Studies and open the conversation to uncovering ‘hidden’ emblematisers beyond the French context. I received feedback on this research which has partly formed the first chapter of my thesis ensuring it is robust and preparing me for the thesis defence.

The IWL is intensive comprising 200+ pages of daily reading, two seminar series (seminars were daily), colloquium groups (where we presented our research and received feedback), panels, talks and lectures. While it was an intense month, it was such a joy to participate in seminars and share ideas. The first seminar series I participated in was Moira Weigel’s ‘Global Media’ and the second was Mads Rosendahl Thomsen’s ‘Short Forms’. These seminars might have been my favourite aspect of the IWL: not only did I have the opportunity to read texts I would not have come across independently, but I also had the

opportunity to share my own research. Reading texts which were adjacent to my own research but not within the scope was also an excellent opportunity for me to reflect on my choices as to why I made these decisions – this will be crucial in my Viva Voce later this year.

Figure 3. Rachel Eager in front of the Comparative Literature department



I loved sharing ideas with top scholars in the field, as well as up-and-coming scholars, not only did we exchange knowledge but there was such joy in the space and the ideas we shared. On a personal note, it has reinvigorated and reminded me of my love for literature, philosophy, and my own research too. I grew greatly in confidence as I presented my own research, this was the first moment in my whole PhD where I realised that I am an expert in my field with specialist knowledge. I also received some wonderful feedback from peers and academics on my presentations.

The IWL has been a truly transformative and unforgettable experience - I am so privileged and grateful to be part of it. My fellow IWL peers

agreed that this has been the best summer ever and will be hard to top. I joined the IWL at the tail end of my PhD thesis, a time when I was mentally drained, disillusioned with my research, and overwhelmed. Yet arriving at that moment made the impact even more profound. The IWL reignited my passion for research more generally, for academic endeavours and broadened my horizons beyond my own expertise. It also gave me something invaluable: the assurance that I am an expert in my field. That confidence is now a quiet strength I carry with me as I prepare for my oral defence. I have made the most incredible connections at the IWL which I could not have expected. I also have an interest in looking at postdocs and research positions in North America, particularly the East Coast which I had never considered before. There are not enough, or the right words to express what the IWL has done for me, personally and professionally: it has nourished my mind and soul, and for this I will be forever grateful. I'm really excited to share my adventures with my students in the upcoming semester, especially my Widening Participation students who may be inspired, and also believe that they too can do something like this.