

## General Information and Reading Lists for Students of French

I'm very much looking forward to welcoming you to Somerville. I'm writing to you now to prepare you for studying at Oxford by giving you information about what to expect on arrival, and some advice on what reading you will need to do before the course begins. I have enclosed with this letter a brief outline of the first-year course that I hope you will find useful. You will need to read it carefully and keep it for reference, as it sets out the shape of the course in terms of the papers that you will be working towards, and it highlights the set texts that you are required to study in depth.

I also include a list of recommended texts required for the course that you should purchase before the course begins. In French literature, you will be working towards Paper III in the first term, so it is most important that you get hold of the texts for these papers in the recommended editions and read them thoroughly before the start of term. Don't worry if it seems a slow process to begin with; you'll soon find yourself reading texts with more fluency. You will also find it useful to revise your knowledge of French grammar, and to try to develop that knowledge beyond A-level before you arrive in Oxford. In particular, if you are not familiar with the *passé simple* (past historic) tense ('je fus, tu fus, il fut...'), now is the time to do some independent research on it and master its regular and as many of its irregular forms as you can.

I hope that you are looking forward to continuing your study of French. Should you have a query about any aspect of the course at Oxford, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me. My email address is [simon.kemp@some.ox.ac.uk](mailto:simon.kemp@some.ox.ac.uk).

We shall be very pleased to hear from you.

Best wishes, and looking forward to seeing you soon,

Simon Kemp  
Associate Professor of French, Somerville College

### THE FIRST YEAR (PRELIMS COURSE)

The first year of the French course is designed to effect a transition from the kind of work that you have done at school to the more demanding kind of work that you will be expected to do when preparing for the Honour School in your second year. You will be encouraged to consolidate and improve your written and spoken language skills, and you will be introduced to some techniques of literary study. The examinations are taken at the end of Trinity Term in the summer, and consists of four written papers and an oral component.

### Language

The French language textbook with integral exercises that underpins the first year course is R. Hawkins and R. Towell, *French Grammar and Usage* (Arnold). In order to increase your vocabulary, you are also expected to work through J. A. Duffy, *Using French Vocabulary* (Cambridge University Press). It is arranged in three levels: level 1 represents a good minimum level of attainment by the end of the first year. I suggest that you buy and begin working with these

books now, well before you come to Oxford. You will also find a good variety of material (including grammar exercises) available on the Internet; you will find useful links via the University of Oxford Language Centre website ([www.lang.ox.ac.uk](http://www.lang.ox.ac.uk)).

### **Paper I            French Language**

This paper is divided into three equally-weighted parts. Parts 1 and 2 require you to translate from English into French. Part 1 is made up of about twenty sentences exemplifying common points of grammar as explained in Hawkins and Towell, *French Grammar and Usage*. In Part 2, you will also be asked to translate a passage of continuous modern English into French. Part 3 requires you to summarize a passage of French critical writing in French.

### **Paper II            Translation**

This paper is in two parts. Part 1 asks you to translate into English a French prose passage. Part 2 requires you to translate into English a passage from one of the three novels prescribed for Paper IV (i.e. from either Proust, *Combray*, Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin* or Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*).

### **Oral**

There will also be an oral component to the Prelims exam, testing comprehension in spoken French and requiring regular attendance at oral classes.

## **Literature**

Many students begin the course without having made much, if any, formal study of French literature. Both the literature papers that you will cover in the first year require you to undertake a close reading in the original French of a range of literary texts selected from different periods and different genres so that you will gradually build up your reading speed, and learn how to approach French literary texts and how to write critical commentaries and essays. The course is designed to provide a sure grounding for the literary study that you will do in the second year and beyond. **It is vital that you have read these texts thoroughly before you begin the course.**

### **Paper III            Short Texts**

This course will introduce you to the technique of close reading through the study of six short works:

#### **Michaelmas Term (October-December)**

##### **Drama**

**Weeks 1-2: Beckett, *En attendant Godot***

**Weeks 3-4: Racine, *Phèdre***

##### **Poetry**

**Weeks 5-6: Baudelaire, a selection from the section ‘Spleen et Idéal’ of *Les Fleurs du Mal***

**Weeks 7-8: Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal***

#### **Hilary Term (January-March)**

##### **Prose**

**Weeks 1-2: Montaigne, ‘Des cannibales’**

**Weeks 3-4: Diderot, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville***

Paper III is examined by critical commentary. One passage is offered from each of the texts, and you are required to write on one passage from each of the three pairs of texts. You will need to show that you know the texts well by establishing the context of the passages, but the skill is to show that you can comment in an interesting and informed way on the particular piece of French in front of you, on its language and ideas. When commenting on texts written in verse, you are required to show an understanding of the author's use of versification.

The Baudelaire poems to be studied are the following:

Au lecteur ; 3 Elévation ; 7 La Muse malade ; 10 L'Ennemi ; 19 La Géante ; 21 Hymne à la beauté ; 23 La Chevelure ; 25 'Tu mettrais l'univers entier dans ta ruelle' ; 28 Le Serpent qui danse ; 29 Une Charogne ; 31 Le Vampire ; 36 Le Balcon ; 40 Semper eadem ; 44 Réversibilité ; 48 Le Flacon ; 49 Le Poison ; 50 Ciel brouillé ; 53 L'Invitation au voyage ; 62 Moesta et errabunda ; 66 Les Chats ; 69 La Musique ; 74 La Cloche fêlée ; 75 Spleen ('Pluviôse, irrité contre la ville entière') ; 76 Spleen ('J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans') ; 77 Spleen ('Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux') ; 78 Spleen ('Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle') ; 81 Alchimie de la douleur ; 83 L'Héautontimorouménos ; 84 L'Irrémédiable ; 85 L'Horloge

(Note to students of the **European and Middle-Eastern Languages** joint school: due to the heavy workload involved in learning the middle-eastern language at this point in the course, EMEL students do **not** study Paper III, and join the literature course in Hilary Term to study Paper IV.)

#### **Paper IV        Narrative Fiction**

This paper introduces you to four longer narratives. We'll work from the oldest text, a medieval verse narrative, to the most recent, an extract from Proust's twentieth-century masterpiece, *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

#### **Hilary Term**

**Weeks 5-6: *La Chastelaine de Vergy***

**Weeks 7-8: Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses***

#### **Trinity Term (April-June)**

**Weeks 1-2: Sand, *Indiana***

**Weeks 3-4: Proust, *Combray***

This paper is examined by essay. You are offered a choice of two essay questions on each text, and you are required to answer three questions, each on a different text. You will need to show that you can analyse the implications of the question set and construct a clear, relevant and interestingly-written argument, supported at every stage by detailed knowledge of the text.

You'll be attending lectures at the Taylor Institute throughout the first year on each of the set texts, as well as on reading Old French and understanding versification. In college, you'll have two seminars with the whole year-group on each of the texts, followed by a tutorial in a smaller group, in which we'll discuss an essay or commentary you'll have written on the text in question. You'll be expected to write at least one substantial commentary or essay each week during term for French, as well as completing a number of pieces of language work and preparing actively for classes and tutorials. The terms are only eight weeks long, and very intensive, which is why it's important to get as much preparation done as possible in the vacations beforehand.

#### **BUYING YOUR SET TEXTS**

I would advise you to make enquiries about ordering your set texts as soon as possible, as some may take several weeks to arrive. In order to reduce the expense, you may find that some of these books can be bought second hand, for example from the second-hand department of Blackwell's Bookshop in Oxford, or via the Web. **Please note the advice below concerning the importance of buying these texts in the recommended editions.** The following suppliers are recommended:

www.amazon.fr, www.chapitre.com, www.abebbooks.co.uk, www.blackwells.co.uk

### **Essential texts for language study**

It is recommended that you own copies of the following texts:

- A good monolingual French dictionary, such as *Le Petit Robert* or *Larousse* (Pocket dictionaries will NOT be adequate for the course. App or CD-ROM versions of the dictionaries, on the other hand, are often more practical than book form.)
- A French-English/English-French dictionary, such as *The Collins-Robert*, also available on CD-ROM, or the *Larousse* (also available as an app).
- Key French grammar for the first year course – R. Hawkins and R. Towell, *French Grammar and Usage* (Arnold), and the grammar workbook to accompany this text - R. Hawkins, M.-N. Lamy and R. Towell, *Practising French Grammar*.
- Glanville Price, *A Comprehensive French Grammar* (Blackwell). This reference grammar will be required for language work from your second year onwards, but is worth getting now.
- Key vocabulary book for the first year course – J. Duffy, *Using French Vocabulary* (Cambridge University Press). (There is also a useful companion volume, Bachelor and Offord, *Using French Synonyms*.)

You may also find it helpful to have a book setting out all the regular and irregular verb forms, such as W. Rowlinson, *French Verbs* (Oxford University Press)

### **Recommended editions of literature set texts**

You should try to buy if at all possible the recommended editions of the set texts. There is a strong reason for this: editions can vary greatly in the amount and quality of the assistance that they provide. In the case of earlier works, the text itself may differ substantially between editions. (As a result, you may find that the texts we recommend are not always the cheapest.)

### **Paper III (Short Texts)**

#### **Beckett, *En attendant Godot***

Recommended student edition: Beckett, *En attendant Godot* (Minit)

#### **Racine, *Phèdre***

Recommended student edition: Racine, *Phèdre*, ed. by R. Parish (Bristol Classical Press)

#### **Baudelaire, selection from 'Spleen et Idéal' in *Les Fleurs du Mal***

Recommended student edition: Baudelaire, 'Spleen et Idéal' in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ed. by G. Chesters (Bristol Classical Press)

#### **Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal***

Recommended student edition: Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal/Notebook of a Return to my Native Land*, ed. by M. Rosello and A. Pritchard, bilingual edition (Bloodaxe)

**Diderot, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville***

Recommended student edition: Diderot, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, ed. by M. Delon (Folio classique).

**Montaigne, 'Des cannibales', (*Essais* I, 30)**

Recommended student edition: Montaigne, *Essais: 'Des cannibales' et 'Des coches'*, ed. by M. Tarpinian (Ellipses).

#### **Paper IV (Narrative Fiction)**

**Proust, *Combray***

Recommended student edition: Proust, *Combray*, ed. by L. Hodson (Bristol Classical Press). Avoid the GF Flammarion edition edited by Sandrine Costa, which is not the full text.

**Sand, *Indiana***

Recommended student edition: Sand, *Indiana*, ed. by Béatrice Didier (Folio)

**Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses***

Recommended student edition: Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, ed. by R. Pomeau (Flammarion)

***La Chastelaine de Vergy***

Recommended student edition: *La Chastelaine de Vergy*, ed. by J. Dufournet and Liliane Dulac (Folio classique).

#### **Reference Texts for Literary Study**

While they are not essential purchases, there are a number of general books that you'll find helpful in your literary studies, which you may wish to get hold of now. *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. by P. France, is an excellent reference tool that will enable you to situate unfamiliar authors, literary concepts and literary movements within their historical context. *A Short History of French Literature* by Bowie, Cave and Kay is a very useful overview of French cultural history.

I wish you all the best for the summer. Please do get in touch at the email address below if you'd like to ask about anything. Otherwise, I'll see you in October.

Yours,

Simon Kemp

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