

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.

We shall be very pleased to hear from you.

Best wishes, and looking forward to seeing you soon,



Simon Kemp
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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 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, 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).

Paper I French Language

This paper is divided into two parts. 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 be asked 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, Sand, or Laclos).

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

Most 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: Marie NDiaye, *Papa doit manger*

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 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 back from the most recent text, an extract from Proust's twentieth-century masterpiece, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, to the oldest text, a medieval verse narrative:

Hilary Term

Weeks 5-6: Proust, *Combray*

Weeks 7-8: Sand, *Indiana*

Trinity Term (April-June)

Weeks 1-2: Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*

Weeks 3-4: *La Chastelaine de Vergy*

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

Set texts are available for purchase online via *amazon.fr* and *amazon.co.uk* or alternative sites such as *chapitre.com*, *abebooks.co.uk*, or *blackwells.co.uk*. Buying second-hand copies is a good way to reduce expense. Do please try to buy the recommended editions where possible, as listed below.

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* (Smartphone app versions of the dictionaries are often more practical than book form.)
- A French-English/English-French dictionary, such as *The Collins-Robert* or the *Larousse* (both 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*.)

Recommended editions of literature set texts

Paper III (Short Texts)

NDiaye, *Papa doit manger*

Recommended student edition: Marie NDiaye, *Papa doit manger* (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 cochés’*, 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).

I wish you all the best for the summer. Please do get in touch at simon.kemp@some.ox.ac.uk if you'd like to ask about anything. Otherwise, I'll see you in October.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR THE SINGLE HONOURS FRENCH COURSE

The following information is **ONLY** for students taking the French 'Single Honours' degree (i.e., NOT for those of you who are taking French with another language (French and German, French and Spanish, etc.) or with another subject (French and History, French and Philosophy, etc.).

In addition to French papers I-IV (language and literature), French Single Honours students take the following papers in film, theory and thought. In the case of each paper, your lecturers will provide you with topic-specific reading lists and essay titles. This document provides preliminary guidance to allow you to orientate yourself at the beginning.

Paper XI Introduction to French Film Studies

Introductory reading:

- Michael Temple and Michael Witt (eds), *The French Cinema Book* (British Film Institute, 2004). A detailed introduction to French cinema as an industry.
- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art, An Introduction* (McGraw Hill, various editions). A very useful introduction explaining all the technical terms that are used to analyse a film.

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth- and twenty-first century French film directors. We discuss the concepts of realism, documentary and avant-garde cinema and introduce the basic tools of film analysis. In your essay-writing you will be able to engage with the directors' ideas and with their particular way of realising them. The films under discussion involve a wide range of themes such as love, power, gender relations and autobiography. Each director has a different style of filmmaking. The focus of the course is the question of how the film medium represents contemporary reality. We will look at the way each of these directors uses devices of storytelling to present a particular point of view upon the world we live in. You will be encouraged to watch more films by each of these directors.

The prescribed films are:

1. Henri-Georges Clouzot: *Le Corbeau* (1942)
2. Jean-Luc Godard: *Vivre sa vie* (1962)
3. Bertrand Blier: *Les Valseuses* (1974)
4. Agnès Varda: *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000)

The teaching for this paper takes place in Michaelmas Term, with seminars on the prescribed films in weeks 2, 4, 6 and 8. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the films and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a different film. There will be a choice of two questions on each film.

In addition to the seminars you must follow a Faculty-based lecture-series entitled Introduction to Film Studies in weeks 1, 3, 5 and 7 in Michaelmas Term. These lectures present basic concepts of film analysis – montage, story, self-reference, and spectatorship – in four lectures devoted to four international films. These films are used simply as illustrations for the lectures and are not treated as set texts for examination purposes. The films are: Sergei Eisenstein: *Potemkin* (1925); Alfred Hitchcock: *39 Steps* (1935); Michelangelo Antonioni (1967): *Blow-up*; Claire Denis: *Beau Travail* (1999).

See the **appendix** to this document, which gives fuller introductory information about the film studies course.

Paper XII Introduction to French Literary Theory

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth-century literary critics. In your essay writing you will be able to engage with their ideas about literature and with their particular way of expressing them. You will be encouraged to apply these ideas to your own reading of texts.

The prescribed texts (note the recommended editions) are:

1. Valéry, 'Questions de poésie' and 'Poésie et pensée abstraite', in *Théorie poétique et esthétique*, part of *Variété: Oeuvres*, vol. I (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade) (Gallimard) [both essays are available electronically on Weblearn, accessible via Single Sign-On]
2. Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Folio) [Sections I and II only]

3. Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Seuil)

4. Todorov, 'La notion de littérature', 'L'origine des genres', 'Les deux principes du récit', 'Introduction au vraisemblable' in *La Notion de littérature et autres essais* (Seuil)

The teaching for this paper takes place in Hilary Term weeks 5-8 and Trinity Term weeks 1-4 in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a different author. There will be a choice of two essay questions on each author.

Paper XIII Key Texts in French Thought

This paper will introduce you to four thinkers from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. In both essay and commentary writing you will be able to engage with their ideas and with their particular way of expressing them.

The prescribed texts (note the recommended editions) are:

1. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, edited by Laurence Renault (Garnier-Flammarion)

2. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (Folio)

3. Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (PUF) [Chapters I and II only].

4. Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Folio), I, 'Introduction'; 'Mythes'; II, 'La femme mariée'; 'La mère'. (NB Both the French 'Idées' collection and the English translation have sections missing and cannot be relied upon)

The teaching for this paper takes place in Michaelmas Term weeks 5-8 and Hilary Term weeks 1-4 in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay or commentary on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. Written work should include at least one essay and at least one commentary. The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a different text, one a commentary, the other two essays. There will be a choice of one commentary passage from each text and one essay question on each text.

APPENDIX ON THE FILM COURSE

Teaching Format and Exam

In Michaelmas Term for the Prelim Sole Course in Film, you each attend parallel sets of lectures and seminars: the general lectures on film form and the language specific seminars. The reason for this division is that you are taught general film theory as well as film culture. Film culture, in this case Spanish, Russian, German or French, is specific to a geographical area: films respond to historical events, political problems, and features of society, such as differences between city life and country life, or differences between men and women. Not all the aspects of film form that we discuss in the general lectures will be equally relevant to your set films, but the general lectures aim to present you with the *scope* of film language.

General film theory concerns the *form of narration* in film. In this document you find a *dictionary of the basic terms of film form* together with references to teaching material and to the lectures.

The lectures are not a replacement for the set textbook in general film theory, which is David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson: *Film Art an Introduction*. This book, which is available in many Oxford libraries, is an excellent teaching tool. It is clearly written and has numerous examples. The lectures explore further some of the themes, which are treated in a general way by Bordwell and Thompson. Students should read in particular Chapters 6,7,8, and 9 in the section on 'Film Style'.

The purpose of the lectures is to show how theoretical terms are used within film interpretation. The theory lectures teach how to use the general concepts of film form in the appreciation of a specific film. The second part of the course, the language specific seminars, teaches interpretation of the films that you will be examined on. As a student, you are invited to combine these two parts of the course in the way that you find most useful. The general lectures are interpretations of the following four films:

Eisenstein: *Potemkin*

Hitchcock: *39 Steps*

Antonioni: *Blow-up*

Denis: *Beau Travail*

These films have been chosen because they together present a short overview of film history, beginning in silent film, moving through genre films and modernism and ending in contemporary political filmmaking.

Basics of Film Form

In studying film, we are concerned with a kind of language, which is different from the language that we speak. Film is also an aesthetic form, which can be compared to other aesthetic forms, such as music. The basic elements of communication in film is the relationship between what we see in the film image and what precedes this image in the sequence of the film. We will now introduce a number of terms, which can help us to describe in further detail this relationship.

1 *The frame*: the frame is the border of the film image at any point in time. Whatever is represented in the image, the image itself will have borders. These borders involve choice. Filmmakers must have chosen for instance where to put the camera in relation to what we see. They must also have chosen the duration of a particular frame. We will now turn to these two aspects in turn, duration and camera position.

2 *The shot*: the word 'shot' refers to any continuous piece of filming ('continuous' used in a mechanical sense: as long as the film strip has not been cut, there is one continuous shot).

3 *The edit*: when there is a transition between two shots, which have been edited together we say that there is an 'edit'. Film editing, or montage, is the splicing together of shots in order to compose a sequence of discrete images. The duration of a shot is determined by the edit.

4 *Long take*: if the camera films a scene and we see the scene continuously without edit, that is, without interruption, we say that the scene is a 'long take.' In narrative film, a single scene is often composed of many shots. This is because the filmmaker has chosen to film the scene from different angles in order, for instance, to highlight the reactions of different characters to what the other characters are saying. This draws our attention to the other area of choice, which concerns the position of the camera.

5 *Medium shot*: we distinguish between different types of shot according to where the camera is placed. If we start with the 'medium shot' this is a shot produced by a camera that is located some metres away from a dramatic scene. We see characters from their knees to their head, and we have an overview of the situation. At the same time, we concentrate on the characters in the image and not on the location or the surroundings. We can also have a 'long shot', which is made by a camera further away from the scene. Such a shot reduces the characters to parts of a larger situation. The focus is now on the setting of the scene. We can also have shots made by a camera that is very close to a character or to an object, framing for instance a face in order to record its expression. This we call a 'close-up'.

6 *Mise en scene*: we now have two dimensions of framing, involving duration and camera position. They both have a consequence for the frame or border of the image. When there is an edit the frame naturally changes. The same is true of a change in camera position. When the camera is moving, we have a change of camera position (but without an edit). Now, with these two dimensions of composition, we can describe the choices that the filmmaker has made in order to draw our attention to important moments in the story as it unfolds. We have not so far said anything about the *content* of the image, what it is that we see within the frame. The composition of the image as a physical scene, containing decoration, positions and movements of actors, costume, light and colour we call *mise en scene*. The word comes from French and originally means stage production. Filmmakers make a kind of stage production of the script before they begin filming. When we see the film, the composition of the scene *and* the choices of camera position work together and jointly form the *mise en scene* of the film.

7 *Self-reference*: the film may draw attention to itself and to the fact that it consists of images. In that case we are not just looking through the frame to figure out what happens to the characters. We look at the film image, *as* an image. We are aware that the film image is a fabrication, that it has something in common with photographs, paintings, posters and other images.

8 *Genre and narrative*: film stories are dramas, which can have a specialised setting and a particular theme. A film genre will contain certain kinds of characters, situations, types of dialogue, characteristic settings and most importantly a general mood. One of the most famous genres in the history of film is a set of thrillers made in the US, depicting the underworld of large cities in the late thirties and early forties. These films have been called 'noir' because all the characteristic features of these films add up to form a particular 'dark' mood. Narrative, or story telling, in film often presupposes such a genre convention. Hitchcock's *39 steps* is a British detective film and a spy story. The film *Beau Travail* refers to the genre of exotic war films, but in order to disappoint our expectations rather than to fulfil them.

9 *Spectator*: This notion of expectation implies a spectator. Films are made to be viewed. They are made with the viewer's reactions in mind. This is a feature of filmmaking that was explored already by Eisenstein who sought to shape the viewer's experience in a rhythmic and structured way. The film spectator can be addressed by the film on many different levels. A film may appeal to or challenge her ideas. The film may deliberately set out to confuse the spectator as Antonioni does in *Blow-up*. The spectator may be challenged to think about his own involvement with what he sees as Denis does in *Beau Travail*.