



NEW COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Dear Student,

Congratulations on your offer of a place to read French at New College!

I wish I were writing to you under simpler circumstances. As you can imagine, there is as much uncertainty about what the next academic year at Oxford will look like as there is about everything else in our future post-Covid-19. Much of what I write below assumes normality when normality is in short supply, and in the coming months we may receive additional information from the College, or from the University, that changes things. Still, the syllabus will not change, so this is a good place to start.

I write now to give you some preliminary information about the Literature Papers in French Prelims (first year), so that you can set about getting hold of the books and reading them before you arrive in October. We *strongly* recommend that you read all of the works once through before arriving in Oxford. We'll move swiftly through the syllabus once term starts, and your day-to-day workload will make it impractical to read each work as you come to study it. You'll also be attending University lectures on some of the texts before studying them in classes and tutorials in College, so you'll need to be familiar with them in advance. (This applies to all the texts for commentary listed under Paper III which are covered in the first term.)

You must buy or very long-term borrow physical copies of all of the texts. Kindle and e-books are not normally acceptable, though they can be a useful tool alongside paper copies (especially if they are text searchable), and in the present circumstances you may have to make do with them. The usual method for obtaining the books is to order them online, and at the moment I'm typing this—15 May 2020—this should once again be possible: French booksellers have now been released from confinement and can fulfil online orders. Amazon.fr is still not operating (this may change any day), but you can try chapitre.com, fnac.com and abebooks.fr, as well as the websites of any of France's millions of booksellers. Let me know if you encounter any problems, however. In any case, do not be seduced by the very cheap pocket editions that can sometimes be found, especially of the Baudelaire and Laclos; these are often unreliable, incomplete, and riddled with typographical errors.

As regards language work, we normally recommend that you have William Rowlinson, *French Grammar* (OUP, 1994) and, ideally W. F. Whitmarsh & C. D. Jukes, *New Advanced French Course* (Longmans, 1971). We strongly advise you to have the latest Collins-Robert French Dictionary or (failing that) the Oxford-Hachette dictionary. Be sure to get the full-size one, and not a 'compact', 'concise' or 'pocket' version. You should also consider investing in a monolingual French dictionary; *Le Petit Robert* is the best single-volume example. If these are difficult to obtain at the moment, focus on obtaining a decent bilingual dictionary if you don't already have one.

Happy reading, and I look forward to seeing you in October.

Andrew Counter
Fellow and Tutor in French



Modern Languages, First Public Examination ('Prelims'): Literature in French

The literary element of the Prelims course in French is made up of two papers, numbered III and IV. For Paper III, you read three pairs of short texts, and write a commentary on a passage from one of each of the pairs in the exam. Paper IV is an introduction to the study of prose fiction, for which you read four longer works, and write an essay about any three of them in the exam. The set texts for each paper are listed below, and it's *essential* to have read these before you arrive at College in Michaelmas.

In some cases, we have suggested which editions we think most useful. In all cases, you should buy serious scholarly editions by reputable French publishers (this usually means Gallimard or Garnier-Flammarion). Do *not* buy cheap, print-on-demand versions, which are often inaccurate and incomplete.

Paper III Paired short texts for commentary

First pair: philosophical prose

Montaigne, 'Des Cannibales' from *Essais I*

[The Flammarion edition of *Essais I* (ed. Micha) is best. 'Des Cannibales' is Chapter 31. Montaigne wrote in 'middle French' in the late sixteenth century (slightly earlier than Shakespeare). You may wish to consult the modern 'translation' by Michel Tarpinian (Paris: Ellipses, 1998) but it should not be your main reference as many of the modernisations are misleading. The 'Pochothèque' version modernises the spelling and does not distinguish between 'layers' of the text: it should therefore not be used as a reference edition for Prelims.]

Diderot, *Supplément au 'Voyage' de Bougainville*, ed. by M. Delon (Gallimard: Paris, 2002).

Second pair: poetry

Charles Baudelaire, 'Spleen et Idéal', the first section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, either Gallimard (ed. Pichois) or Flammarion (ed. Dupont) editions.

[When you arrive you'll receive a list of the poems that may be set for the exam, but in the first instance you should read *at least* all of 'Spleen et Idéal', plus the opening poem 'Au lecteur'.]

Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, (Présence africaine, 1983).

[The bilingual edition, *Return to my Native Land*, with translations and notes by Rosello and Pritchard, published by Bloodaxe, London 1993, is good, but should not be relied upon.]

Third pair: drama

Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, in *Théâtre complet*, (Paris: Garnier, 1980); the Bristol Classical Press edition (London: Duckworth, 1996) has a detailed commentary on each scene.

Samuel Beckett, *En attendant Godot* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1952).

Paper IV: Prose Fiction

La Chastelaine de Vergy, in *Nouvelles courtoises*, ed. S. Méjean-Thiolier and M-F. Notz-Grob, (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1997).

Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, ed. Pomeau (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1996).

George Sand, *Indiana*, ed. Béatrice Didier (Paris: Folio Gallimard, 1984)

Marcel Proust, 'Combray', in *Du côté de chez Swann*, the first volume of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Antoine Compagnon (Folio Classique)



**Prelims French Single Honours ('Sole') Reading List
(for circulation to freshers by College Tutors pre-arrival)**

In addition to French papers I-IV (language and literature), you take the following papers in film, theory and thought. In the case of each paper, your lecturers/seminar tutor 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

This appendix gives important information about the approach to the film course, which is studied throughout Michaelmas Term.

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*.