

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

FACULTY OF MEDIEVAL AND MODERN
LANGUAGES



Information for the Preliminary Course in

RUSSIAN

2010/2011

SUB-FACULTY TEACHING STAFF

The Sub-Faculty of Russian and Other Slavonic Languages is part of the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages. It is made up of the following holders of permanent posts (their general areas of research and teaching are given in brackets):

Prof D.M. Bethea (Wadham) (Russian Literature)
Dr P. R. Bullock (Wadham) (Russian Literature)
Dr J. A. E. Curtis (Wolfson) (Russian Literature).
Dr J. Fellerer (Wolfson) (Slavonic Philology, especially Polish and Ukrainian).
Dr A. S. Kahn (St Edmund Hall) (Russian Literature).
Prof C. H. M. Kelly (New College) (Russian Literature).
Dr C. M. MacRobert (Lady Margaret Hall) (Slavonic Philology, especially Russian, Old Church Slavonic and South Slavonic languages).
Dr J. D. Naughton (St Edmund Hall) (Czech and Slovak Language and Literature).
Dr M. A. Nicholson (University College) (Russian Literature).
Prof A.L. Zorin (New College) Professor of Russian (Russian Literature)

Other specialists in Russian and Slavonic languages and literatures in the university who are members of the Sub-Faculty include:

Dr Jennifer Baines (Lecturer in Russian, Magdalen College) (Russian Literature).
Dr Alexander Krasovitsky (Russian Lector).
Mrs Natalia Keys (Russian Instructor).
Mrs Nina Taylor-Terlecka (St Hugh's College: tutor in Polish Literature) (Polish Literature).

THE PRELIM COURSES

THE FIRST YEAR POST-A2 COURSE (COURSE A)

The first year of the Russian post-A2 course is designed as a bridge between the kind of work done at school and the kind of study expected in the second part of the course. Preparation for four examination papers is devised to achieve two aims. The first goal is to consolidate and improve written and spoken language skills. The second aim is an introduction to the close study of literature at university level.

LANGUAGE

A major aim of the Preliminary Course is to build a more secure knowledge of Russian grammar, idiom and vocabulary. The Sub-Faculty provides grammar classes involving written exercises, classes in spoken Russian with a native speaker, and classes to develop active command of the written language and translation technique by translating from English into Russian. You will have additional classes organised through your college for translation from Russian into English.

At the end of their first year, all those studying post-A2 Russian (no matter what their other subject is) take the following two language papers, each of which is assessed by written examination lasting three hours:

Paper I

The paper tests translation into Russian, and command of Russian grammar and syntax. It consists of a passage of English for translation into Russian, and of exercises in Russian grammar.

Paper II

The paper tests translation from Russian into English and comprehension of Russian, and gives students an opportunity to show their knowledge of vocabulary and sensitivity to nuance and register. It consists of one passage, usually of literary prose, for translation, and a second passage, usually of discursive prose (journalism, literary criticism, etc.) on which a number of questions are set, to be answered in English.

LITERATURE

Many students begin the course without having had the opportunity to undertake much formal study of Russian literature. Both literature papers require a close reading in the original Russian of a range of literary texts selected from different periods and different genres. The close study of these texts provides a valuable way of getting a feeling for the interconnectedness of Russian literature and history, gradually building up reading speed and learning how to analyse literature. You will be trained in basic analytical techniques and categories, such as (in prose) narrative point of view, the handling of 'real' time and narrated time, and fundamental patterns in gender roles; (in verse) metre, rhythm, rhyme, and the stanza in their historical development, figurative language, stylistic registers, and authorial point of view. Over the course of the year, you will learn how to write the critical essays and commentaries that will form the basis of work on literature in subsequent years of the

course.

Lectures are offered on all of your set texts over the three terms of the year, putting them in context and elucidating thematic and formal questions and problems. There are also lectures on general subjects, for instance introducing the techniques of versification, the analysis of language and style, and discussing the historical background to the texts. Throughout the year, tutorials and classes in college will give you the opportunity to discuss these works and to write about them in essays and commentaries.

Assessment for the literature sections of the Preliminary Examination is also in the form of two written papers sat over three hours. Paper III consists of three commentaries (one compulsory, two chosen from a selection of four), and Paper IV of a compulsory commentary and two essays (chosen from a selection of four). Undergraduates reading Russian with a Middle Eastern language choose one of these two literature papers; all others studying post-A2 Russian take both Paper III and Paper IV.

Paper III

Poetry

This paper introduces the techniques of close reading through the study of six great works of narrative poetry, stretching from the period of Catherine the Great to the Soviet period. Many themes, such as the relation of the writer to the ruler or state, the individual to nature, the image of St Petersburg, link these works:

1) *Felitsa* (1782): An ambiguous tribute to Catherine II by perhaps Russia's greatest eighteenth-century poet, Gavriila Derzhavin, this lively, sardonic, and entertaining poem will introduce you to the riches of pre-1800 Russian literary culture, and to the tradition of the formal ode.

2) *Mednyi vsadnik* (1834): Pushkin's famous masterpiece, a gripping evocation of the catastrophic 1824 floods in St Petersburg, is also a profound meditation on the costs of historical change and the nature of historical greatness.

3) *Mtsyri* (1839): A high point of Russian Orientalism, Lermontov's lush and sensual evocation of the landscape of the Caucasus is also a powerful psychological study of the tormented Byronic personality.

4) *Na pole Kulikovom* (1908) and 5) *Dvenadtsat'*: Two contrasting works by one of Russia's foremost Modernist poets, Aleksandr Blok. *Na pole Kulikovom* is a cycle of lyric poems evoking the Battle of Kulikovo (1380), a famous victory of the Russians over the Tatars. Blok addresses this battle as a historical parallel to the period at which he himself was writing, and agonises over the future of Russia. *Dvenadtsat'* captures the violence and confusion of the 1917 October Revolution through a collage of fleeting impressions, half-glimpsed events, and revolutionary songs.

6) *Rekviem* (1935-1940): Anna Akhmatova's famous and poignant lament for the victims of Stalin's Great Terror (1934-1938), a monument of writerly resistance to the totalitarian state.

Paper IV

Russian Prose Fiction

Russian literature has produced many masterpieces of short narrative, and this paper will

introduce you to the development of the short story over nearly a century. Irony and a critical distance on social reality are hallmarks of all these works:

1) *Pikovaya dama* (1834): Pushkin's prose masterpiece, lying somewhere between a ghost story and a psychological study, is the precursor of the introspective fiction of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov.

2) Chekhov: *Anna na shee* (1895), *Dom s mezoninom* (1896), *Sluchai iz praktiki* (1898): Three contrasting stories by an internationally recognised master of short prose, ranging in style from the ironic and anecdotal to the lyrical.

3) *Chemodan* (1986): Sergey Dovlatov's collection of sketches, based on memories evoked by the few objects he was able to take with him in his suitcase into emigration in 1979, provide a sophisticated, wry, sometimes bitter, picture of Russian life in the fading years of the Soviet regime. Bureaucracy, the black market, social and political structures, personal relationships are examined in a language which, while accessible, is challenging in its use of contemporary lexis and reference.

THE FIRST YEAR BEGINNERS' COURSE (COURSE B)

The primary aim of the first year course in beginners' Russian is to provide a thorough grounding in Russian grammar, as well as practice in writing Russian accurately, and to build up vocabulary and grasp of syntax so that students can start to read moderately demanding texts by the end of the year. Students receive six hours per week of grammar classes with the Russian Language Instructor, one hour per week of oral work with the Russian Lector and one hour per week of reading classes with other teaching members of the Russian sub-faculty, based on the following texts:

Akhmatova, *Pesnya poslednei vstrechi*

Blok, *Noch', ulitsa, fonar', apteka*

Chekhov, *Spat' khochet'sya, Tolsty i ton'kii, Smert' chinovnika*

Lermontov, *Parus, Vykhozhu odin ya na dorogu*

Mandel'shtam, *Ya slovo pozabyl*

Pushkin, *Ya vas lyubil*

Tokareva, *UPK*

Zhvanetsky, *Konservatoriya, Nyuansy*

At the end of the first year beginners in Russian take an examination consisting of the following papers:

Paper BI

Translation from English into Russian and Russian grammar exercises.

The paper tests translation into Russian and command of Russian grammar and syntax. It

consists of a passage of English for translation into Russian and exercises in Russian grammar.

Paper BII

Translation from Russian into English and comprehension of a passage of written Russian.

The paper tests translation from Russian into English and comprehension of Russian, and gives students an opportunity to show their knowledge of vocabulary and awareness of translation technique. It consists of one passage, usually of narrative, for translation, and a second passage, usually of discursive prose (journalism, literary criticism, etc.) on which a number of questions are set, to be answered in English.

Paper BIII

Dictation and Aural Comprehension.

The paper tests comprehension of spoken Russian and awareness of the relationship between pronunciation and spelling. It consists of two passages which are read aloud, one to be taken down to dictation and a second on which a number of questions are set, to be answered in English.

Paper BIV

Oral

There is also a short oral test, about ten minutes in length, which is intended to check that students have mastered the pronunciation of Russian and can use the spoken language for purposes of everyday communication.

PREPARATION FOR THE SECOND YEAR OF THE BEGINNERS' COURSE

Students who have taken Course B as beginners in Russian are required to spend the second year of their studies on a specially designed eight-month language course in Russia. This course has been arranged for Oxford students by a British charitable organization, Russian Language Undergraduate Studies Ltd (www.rlus.co.uk), and is held at the State University in Yaroslavl'. The aim of the course is to consolidate first-year work and develop active competence in both written and especially spoken Russian. During the year in Yaroslavl' students are required to read in Russian a number of texts, mostly those set for the post-A2 Preliminary Examination, to write two essays on this material over the course of the year, and send them for marking to their tutors, who act as liaison officers with RLUS and monitor students' progress on the year abroad.

The total cost of the eight-month course in Yaroslavl' should not be greater than a year at Oxford, but approximately £2,800 (covering fees and travel expenses, but not living expenses) will have to be paid at least two months in advance of the course, which starts in October. Colleges and the Faculty may be able to help with small grants.

Useful information for both course A and B

Oxford has a significant community of Russian speakers; there are two Eastern Orthodox churches (<http://www.annunciation-oxford.org> and <http://www.stnicholas-oxford.org>), a Russian delicatessen (in Cowley Road), and several bookshops where Russian-language materials are available. Political figures and writers visit the university frequently, and the City of Oxford has a twinning scheme with Perm', in the Urals (details available from Mrs Karen Hewitt, Department of Continuing Education). The university has a Russian Society, run by graduate students, which organises parties and other social events as well as film showings, talks (many by outside speakers), and debates.

The University has three offices, the two Proctors and the Assessor, held by members of the colleges in rotation for one year at a time, who have a University-wide role of ombudsman. The Proctors have particular responsibility for University student discipline and formal complaints, while the Assessor is concerned with student welfare and support. You should refer to the *Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum*, available from the University Offices or your college, for information about such matters (<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/guidance/index.shtml>).

The University's Complaints and Appeals template may be downloaded in **Word** or **pdf** versions for inclusion in student handbooks.