

Diversity and Inclusion Audit 2023-4

The Sub-faculty of French is committed to ensuring a diverse curriculum that reflects the richness and complexity of the literature of the French-speaking world. This annual audit will assess the extent to which we live up to that.

The degree we offer is primarily a literary one, rather than a survey of the history of the Francophone world or a degree in area studies. But it also seeks to question the category of literature and its historical framing, and to think about the ways in which literary texts and their reception have shaped, reflected and challenged the ways in which racial, gender, and other forms of difference are understood. In both language and literature work, students also encounter ways in which other cultures and political histories have understood the question of difference: in particular, in the French context, thinking about the history of what is termed 'valeurs républicaines' gives a glimpse at a way of imagining identity that can often feel alien to Anglo-American cultures today.

We want to ensure that we study writers from diverse backgrounds, but we also seek to read more traditionally canonical authors with an eye to the ways in which their texts illuminate or explore questions of identity and its historically multiple constructions. For example, although 'homosexuality' might not be a stable identity in the early modern period, reading early modern texts might help us think about how queer lives were lived and written about before the formation of that identity.

Alongside our literary work, the degree prepares students in language skills. In language papers, source material chosen to aid language-learning skills is carefully selected to draw on the work of people of all genders and a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Translation and prose passages will be chosen with this in mind too.

THE PRELIM COURSE

Our Prelim Paper III includes work by a writer of mixed Franco-Senegalese heritage, Marie Ndiaye, whose sometimes contentious reflections on race and belonging, in both her texts and interviews about her work, will be of interest; Paper IV draws on the work of the Guadeloupian writer Maryse Condé, and introduces students to the complex history of the French Caribbean. (Students doing French sole will also read the work of Martiniquais poet and political thinker Aimé Césaire as part of the French Thought paper.)

But other texts encountered in Prelims papers also push students to think about questions of identity or empire: for example, Michel de Montaigne's *Des cannibales* explores the ethical shock of thinking about France in relation to the Indigenous world of the Americas, and paper IV's *Indiana*, by the feminist writer George Sand, explores the relations between sexual and racial oppression in nineteenth-century France and its colonies.

THE FHS COURSE

Here students begin to choose options for further study. All those options can allow students to explore questions of diversity in various ways. Oxford teaching is not centralised, and tutors teach material in multiple ways. Students are always welcome to read the canon via the lenses of gender theory and postcolonial and critical race theories,

and, if they are not provided with them, to ask for recommendations of reading that speak to those concerns or that specifically addresses questions of identity and diversity.

Work for the language papers can also engage these questions: translation work might draw on writing from across the Francophone world (as encouraged by the Faculty's Diversity Translation project); recent paper I (essay in French) exams have, for example, allowed students to answer on decolonizing Francophonie, on migration, or on Black feminism.

All students in French choose a period paper. One of the virtues of thinking about literature of a particular period is to realise that our own ideas today about identity or the nation are historically contingent; over the course of FHS work on the period papers (VI, VII, VIII), students will discover the multiple ways in which gender, religious or bodily or racial difference have been imagined over time. FHS students choosing to work on the medieval period may for instance think about the construction of the Saracen as a racial and religious other, or about how misogyny both structures and provokes debate within medieval literature, or about the place of *anorexia mirabilis* in medieval hagiography; on the early modern paper, students might think about gendered voices, about the textual construction of normative bodies, or about how France's protocolonial projects, and France's anxious eye on other early modern empires, shape the texts they read. Each year, different lecture options might cover, eg, sexuality in the seventeenth century, or in the nineteenth-century novel; and each year we feature a range of lectures on transnational French studies, focussing on racial difference in the French-speaking world from the sixteenth century to the present day.

If students choose Linguistics papers IV and V, the varieties of historical and modern French encountered will include the way in which French has been used in colonial and postcolonial settings.

On the author papers (IX-X-XI), students might choose to work on key women writers like Lafayette or the Algerian feminist Assia Djebar; they might equally choose white male authors like Baudelaire, and to investigate, amongst other things, his fraught relationship to Black femininity, or to think about the imperial rhetoric that is central to the tragedies of Jean Racine and that has been explored in more recent stagings of his work. Whichever authors they choose, we encourage students to think about the ways in which gender, sexuality and racial identity have shaped both the authors they study and the critical reception of their work.

Paper XII options allow students to work on options that explicitly address questions of identity, such as *Histories of Violence, Race and Representation*, or *Travel, Exile, Migration*; to work in depth on authors central to queer history, like Marcel Proust, or on the way in which gender has shaped the way women write and the way we read those writers, in the option on *French Women's Writing*; or, in the paper on *Medieval Intersectional Identities*, to draw on disability studies approaches to think through both physical impairment and representations of mental illness in medieval texts. The paper on *New Ecologies* prompts interrogations of the norms of human cognition. The Paper XII options feature a varied range of assessment types and activities that respond to students' different learning styles and modes of expression. Beyond that, the specialised research-led work at this level (and in the dissertation option, paper XIV) allows students working on any option to explore a variety of critical approaches in greater depth.