



RUSSIAN FIRST YEAR: Suggested Reading

Congratulations on being offered a place at Oxford to read Russian. Here is some information about the course, and about the reading that you need to do between now and your arrival in Oxford. Please do not limit your preparation to reading, however. Try to learn a few words every day (perhaps on the flash-card system, if that works for you). Keep up with Russian news on the Internet (the yandex.ru site gives you a selection of generally rather pro-government stories; Ekho Moskvyy and Novaya Gazeta, as well as Meduza and Colta are oppositional). Watching YouTube videos can be a fun way to immerse yourself in the culture – though quite some distance from the kind of material you will be covering in Oxford, which is what I shall concentrate on here.

A. The Preliminary Examination

During your first year at Oxford, you will be working towards the Preliminary Examination, sat at the end of the third term, and consisting of four papers. Paper I has a passage for translation into Russian and grammatical exercises, and Paper II comprises translation in English and comprehension. The two literature papers provide a general introduction to reading Russian literature. Paper III is made up of a selection of *poemy* (narrative poems) ranging in date from the late eighteenth to the mid twentieth centuries; and Paper IV (prose) contains five short stories written at dates between the 1830s and the 1960s. Work on these two papers will introduce you to a number of classic Russian writers. It will also allow you to form a grasp of changes in the literary language, and of shifts in genre conventions and strategies of literary representation, which will stand you in good stead for your later work in the Final Honours School.

B Preparatory reading before arriving in Oxford

It is very important to make a good start on reading your set texts before you come up. Lectures on any of the Prelims authors can fall in any of the three terms, but our tutorials on Pushkin, *Mednyi vsadnik* and *Pikovaya dama*, and Lermontov, *Mtsyri*, will be taken in Michaelmas Term. Therefore, you *must* have read at least these three texts before Michaelmas Term starts. You would also be wise not to defer reading too many of the other texts for the first time until the Christmas and Easter vacations, which you will find go past quickly (particularly the former), and part of which you will need to devote to (a) revision and (b) rest. While you would be wise not to attempt the Derzhavin, the Akhmatova, and perhaps also the Dovlatov until later on, as these texts are relatively difficult, and you will benefit from course-work at Oxford before tackling them, do by all means make a start on the Chekhov and the Blok.

The Preliminary Examination, taken at the end of the third term, includes compulsory translation and commentary passages from the set books, which test knowledge of the Russian text. Where people fail the literature element of Prelims, which is rare, but not totally unknown, this is almost always because they have come to Oxford without having done their preparatory reading. You will be set a diagnostic test ('collection') including translation passages from the books that you have been asked to read, shortly after you arrive in Oxford.

C. Editions of the set texts

There are obvious advantages to using stressed, annotated texts where possible, and the following list concentrates upon such editions. The Faculty Library at 47 Wellington Square keeps multiple copies of many of them, and Blackwells and Thorntons in Broad Street usually have some for sale. Two series in particular recur in this bibliography:-

- i) "Bristol Classical Press": Bloomsbury Academic have taken over Bristol Classical Texts from Duckworth; this series took over Blackwells Russian Texts, itself a takeover of the old 'Bradda Books' series. Although you may come across identical (and cheaper) editions of some of the titles under earlier guises, bear in mind that a few of them at least have been revised and expanded. You may find what was a fairly lightly annotated Bradda text, has since been reissued with fuller notes and/or vocabulary in one of the later series.
- ii) 'Russian Readers with Explanatory Notes in English', published by Russkii yazyk, Moscow (and referred to below simply as 'Russkii yazyk'), are an uneven series, but useful where no better edition is available. Sometimes school editions of the classics (e.g. 'Shkol'naya biblioteka') can be a way of getting hold of copies that have at least the more difficult vocabulary explained (in Russian!)

If you cannot find copies of the set texts in these editions, use any others; if all else fails, copy the texts from a collected works (*Sobranie sochinenii*) of the author concerned. If you are in genuine difficulties (e.g. live miles from a decent bookshop or library), contact me as soon as possible and I will try to help. But do not leave this until too late, or you will never get the reading done. *Many texts are now available on Runet (the Russian-language internet), which is convenient and low-cost, but do make sure to check the version against a printed edition, as strange mistakes can creep in.*

By all means use translations as an aid to understanding the Russian texts: the effort which goes into coping with the language of some of the more difficult texts can leave one with a poor feel for the text as a whole, at least after one reading. But do not be tempted to use translations as a substitute. Remember the passages for translation and commentary in class and in the Preliminary Examinations are set on the assumption that you are familiar with the Russian originals. You should also note that the main Modern Languages Library at Oxford does not, as a matter of policy, stock translations; the same is true of college libraries.

1. Pushkin, **PIKOVAYA DAMA**

Pikovaya dama. Bristol Classical Press, ed. J. Forsyth.

2. Pushkin, **MEDNYI VSADNIK**

Mednyi vsadnik, Bristol Classical Press, ed. T. Little.

3. Chekhov, **SELECTED STORIES**

Anna na shee, Sluchai iz praktiki, Dom s mezoninom.

These are, respectively, Nos. 10, 11 and 12 of Chekhov, *Oxford Russian Reader* (Clarendon Press and reprints), an annotated edition with vocabulary, available in multiple copies in the Faculty Library at Oxford.

4. Lermontov, *MTSYRI*

Mtsyri -- published as *Lermontov's Novice (Mtsyri)*, accented Russian text, with intro., notes and vocab. by J. D. Duff (Cambridge U.P., 1919). Long out of print, but in some libraries.

Stikhotvoreniya. Poemy. Russkii yazyk, 1988. (Includes *Mtsyri*. Bilingual text with notes.)

5. Blok, *NA POLE KULIKOVOM, DVENADTSAT.*

Both texts are available in *Selected Poems of Aleksandr Blok*, ed. J. Woodward, various edns., most recently Bristol Classical Press.

6. Akhmatova, *REKVIEM*

An annotated edition will be supplied by the Faculty Office, 41 Wellington Square, when you reach Oxford; the text also appears in most post-1987 collections of Akhmatova's work.

7. Dovlatov, *CHEMODAN*

We will supply a copy of this text when you reach Oxford, though if you happen to be in Russia and can pick up a paperback edition, by all means do. The text is also available on the Internet: see the writer's official site <http://www.sergeidovlatov.com/>

8. Derzhavin, *FELITSA*

A Faculty annotated edition will be supplied when you reach Oxford; the text also appears in all standard editions of Derzhavin's work.

D. BACKGROUND READING

Your first and absolute priority should be to read at least some of the Prelims texts before you come up. Critical literature on the texts themselves will be indicated when you get here. However, background reading such as the following would be useful, provided you do not use it as a substitute for reading texts:-

N.B. These are suggestions – you do not have to read these particular works if you find them hard to get hold of.

- i) General cultural and literary background, e.g.:

The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Russian and the Soviet Union.

N. Rzhevsky (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture* (Cambridge U. P. 1998; there is also a revised edn., 2012).

V. Terras (ed.), *Handbook of Russian Literature* (Yale U.P.: very useful, although not covering much of the post-Soviet period : it is worth buying this if you can, though it's also in the College Library);

Neil Cornwell, *A Reference Guide to Russian Literature* (Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998)

M. Jones & R Feuer Miller (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel* (CUP 1998).

A. Kahn (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Pushkin* (CUP 2007).

A. Wachtel and I. Vinitsky, *A Cultural History of Russian Literature* (Polity, 2009).

Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature* (2011).

Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov, *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism* (2011).

Andrew Kahn, Mark Lipovetsky, and Stephanie Sandler, *A History of Russian Literature* (Oxford, 2018).

Older studies include D. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature* (still a classic); R. Hingley, *Russian Writers and Soviet Society 1825-1904* (crisply written and opinionated as well as informative). C. Moser (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature* (generally solid, though the standard of the contributions is variable – the chapter on early C20 poetry, for instance, is not too good at all).

Some of these titles are out of print, but a lot of libraries have them, or you may be able to pick up a secondhand copy.

ii) Russian history, e.g.:

J. Westward, *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History from 1801* (OUP)

G. Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union: Final Edition*

I. De Madariaga, *Catherine the Great: A Short History*

S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, especially Chapter 1.

S. Sebag-Montefiore, *Prince of Princes: The Life of Potemkin*.

-- and also the recent books on the Russian Revolution from Mark D. Steinberg, Laura Engelstein, and Stephen A. Smith (2017). Stephen A. Smith's *Very Short Introduction to the Russian Revolution* and Stephen Lovell's *Very Short Introduction to the Soviet Union* are excellent modern compressed overviews.

E. RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

If your grammar is rusty or has serious gaps, remember that the language side of the course here emphasizes formal written skills and you will not have a better opportunity to revise them than in the summer before you come up. If you know you have problems, do something now. The first year course is quite busy enough, even for those who arrive well-prepared. You can normally expect to have a monolingual Russian test as soon as you get here to identify weaknesses (not unlike the substitution exercises in the A-level writing skills papers), and you will start written prose translation classes into Russian in Week 1. Use whatever books and materials you are familiar with and can work best with, rather than throwing money at the problem by acquiring new ones. If your need is for a reference grammar, rather than a 'course-book', the best candidates are:

Terence Wade, *Comprehensive Russian Grammar* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

There is a work-book of exercises to go with it:

Terence Wade, *A Russian Grammar Workbook* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

Derek Offord, *Modern Russian: An Advanced Grammar Course* (Bristol Classical Press, 1993), is also a very good grammar workbook.

F. DICTIONARIES

RUSSIAN-ENGLISH:

If you have no dictionaries I would recommend the large-size *Oxford Russian Dictionary* (OUP). Smaller-size dictionaries, such as *The Pocket Oxford Russian Dictionary*

(OUP), are not really detailed enough for later stages of university work, and the full-size dictionary is a good investment. A good basic kit is the ORD plus a Russian-Russian dictionary (see below). The Oxford dictionaries referred to are both Russian-English and English-Russian. In addition, the old single-volume *Oxford Russian-English Dictionary* may still be around second-hand.

Much inferior for English-speakers to *The Oxford Russian-English Dictionary* is A. I. Smirnitsky's frequently reprinted Russian-English dictionary, which, however, you may find you can pick up second-hand quite cheaply. It was written with Russians' problems with English in mind and gives minimal morphological and grammatical information.

Extremely useful for prose translation is the infrequently reprinted:

P. N. Denisov & V. V. Marvkin, *Slovar' sochetaemosti slov russkogo yazyka*. Moscow: Russkii yazyk, 1983.

It can help you find the right adjective to go with a noun, the appropriate construction following a particular verb, etc. Internet searches are also helpful here – try typing in a combination of words and see where it leads you.

RUSSIAN-RUSSIAN:

Recommended are the following one-volume dictionaries: either the relatively recent *Bol'shoi tolkovyi slovar' russkogo yazyka* (St Petersburg: Norint, 1998), or an up-to-date edition of S. I. Ozhegov's frequently reprinted *Slovar' russkogo yazyka*, Moscow: Russkii yazyk). A dictionary of this kind enables you to check back on whether a rendering suggested by one of the Russian-English dictionaries really is appropriate. This is the kind of purchase you might be able to make in Russia. Also note the following online resource: www.ruscorpora.ru (Natsional'nyi korpus russkogo yazyka), which, unlike Soviet-era dictionaries such as Ozhegov, provides dates, and far more examples of usage (up to 1000 and more) than any print source could manage. It does not define, but you can grasp the meaning from the context.

ENGLISH-RUSSIAN:

The *Oxford Russian Dictionary* (OUP), recommended above, is English-Russian as well as Russian-English. You may be able to pick up the old single-volume *Oxford English-Russian Dictionary* second hand. E. A. Wilson's *The Modern Russian Dictionary for English Speakers* (Oxford: Pergamon & M.: Russkii yazyk, 1982) places rather more emphasis upon speech and idiom than upon the literary language.

Myuller's English-Russian companion to Smirnitsky (see above) is fairly crude, but I.P. Gal'perin's *Bol'shoi anglo-russkii slovar'v dvukh tomakh*, 2nd ed. M.: Russkii yazyk, 1977 and later editions, is much better, though still less helpful to native English speakers than the dictionaries mentioned above.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (e-mail Josephine.vonzitzewitz@gmail.com)

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