
French @ Newcastle

School of Modern Languages

2024-25 · Edited by Dr Damien Hall



Welcome!

Dr Damien Hall, Head of French and Senior Lecturer in French Linguistics

Welcome to this year's edition of the French Newsletter from the School of Modern Languages at Newcastle University. In these pages you'll find a selection of articles that introduce you to some of the things we do in French here:

- opportunities available to students
- discoveries they've made through their studies
- Year Abroad experiences
- some of the fascinating research done by lecturers in French here



Damien Hall

Thanks for coming to Newcastle—we hope you enjoy it and find it useful. If you've any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch: damien.hall@newcastle.ac.uk.

You'll find all our subject newsletters **here**:



Social Justice in French and Francophone Cultures

Dr Sarah Leahy, Reader in French and Film

Why was France so much slower to respond to the #MeToo campaign than the US or the UK? How does Republican universalism intersect with ideas of social justice? What threads continue to bind France and Belgium and former colonies, and how do they entwine with postcolonial violence or migration? How can young people from the disadvantaged banlieue navigate French institutions that seem designed to exclude them? Can a work of art help to bring about justice?



Sarah Leahy

These are a few of the questions we've been exploring in a new module for final students of French where we explore aspects of social justice and injustices in the French and Francophone world.

The module is taught by a team with a wide range of expertise across geographical and historical contexts as well as different conceptual approaches. This past year, we've covered the French response to #MeToo in literature and the audiovisual industry, explored ideas of spatial justice and 'Le Droit à la ville', questioned the impact of France's institutional colour-blindness on migration, race and social class, and looked at postcolonial narratives of injustice in relation to the legacies of French and Belgian colonial occupation in Algeria and the African Great Lakes region. In doing so, we've encountered forms of expression from street protests to personal memoirs, mass participation events to legal processes and examined stories and images presented across a range of media from literature, film and TV to street art and music. Next year we'll also be adding *bande dessinée* into the mix!



Some of the culture we look at in our Social Justice module

French Year Abroad Opportunities at Newcastle

*Dr Elizabeth Marcus, Lecturer in French and Francophone Studies
and Year Abroad Officer for Francophone outgoing students*

*The range of different French-language opportunities available to students on the Year Abroad continue to make it one of the many great reasons to study here. Here, **Dr Elizabeth Marcus** takes us through some of what you can do in your third year.*



Elizabeth Marcus

The French and Francophone Section continue to run a really exciting Year Abroad Programme. Our students have been completing internships (ranging from work in a chocolate company, to a fashion design studio, to a PR firm), teaching in schools across France, and attending programmes at universities across France and Belgium. We have longstanding links with a dozen universities in French-speaking countries, and we are thrilled that we've expanded our university links with 2 other French universities this year—Université Lumière Lyon 2 and Audencia Business School, in Nantes—and we're close to signing off a partnership with Sciences Po Lyon, which would be especially suitable for students on our new degree in Modern Languages and International Relations. Everyone is so willing to talk about their experience and to help you choose between working, teaching or studying. Our students can also combine their options (for example, spending one semester studying and one semester working) to maximise their experiences, and many have even found longer-term work experience, along with new friends, in their chosen city. Whatever option you go for, we know our students have a wonderful year, building long-lasting connections to the place and people they lived in and alongside, not to mention making amazing advances in their language development! The Year Abroad Team help with every step of the way (from advice about visas, to which cities you might want to live in). We're here to help, and most of all, excited to support you on this linguistic and geographic adventure.



L-R: Luke Trinnaman,
Barbora Šachlová (both Newcastle)
and Ally Claessens (Cambridge)
on their Year Abroad
hiking in Le Grand-Bornand, in the French Alps

« Lecture contre le grain » : découvrir les mystères de la Révolution haïtienne

Georgia Davison (diplômée récente en langues vivantes)

Georgia Davison graduated in Modern Languages last year. Her main languages were French and Spanish, and she also studied Catalan in her degree, and Russian in the extra-curricular University-Wide Language Programme. She also spent a Summer representing the University as an intern in the city administration of Nancy, France—an opportunity regularly offered to our students. Here, Georgia tells us about a key technique for historical research, and some discoveries it led to during her undergraduate dissertation research on the Haitian Revolution.



Georgia Davison au cœur du paysage près de Nancy

Désormais la colonie la plus rentable de la France, l'Haïti est devenu le premier état indépendant dirigé par d'anciens esclaves en 1804, après 13 ans de révolte. Il reste néanmoins beaucoup à découvrir sur cette révolution. Un enjeu clé est un déséquilibre parmi les sources principales : la majorité des esclaves étant analphabètes, il existe peu de sources relatives à leurs expériences, en comparaison aux écritures de l'armée française qui essayait de mettre fin à la révolte. Les vies de milliers des esclaves ont été réduites à des mentions minuscules dans les archives, ou, encore pire, ont été complètement effacées. La question est donc : comment pouvons-nous utiliser les principales sources disponibles pour récupérer ces histoires ?

Je vous présente le concept de la « lecture contre le grain ». C'est la pratique d'analyser des sources dans un but contraire à celui des auteurs d'origine, d'étudier ce qui est inféré, et ce qui n'est pas dit. En étudiant les histoires des personnes marginalisées, les silences archivistiques sont tout aussi importants comme ce qui est écrit.

Étudions un exemple : le 8 février 1803, un article bref apparaît dans le journal français *Le Moniteur Universel*. Il s'agit d'un rapport du tribunal et de l'exécution de Charles et Sanitte Belair, condamnés pour avoir incité une rébellion échouée en Saint Domingue, le nom colonial de l'Haïti. Son but est de convaincre les Français que l'armée française est capable de vaincre les troubles en Saint Domingue, mais si nous lisons contre le grain, nous pouvons apprendre beaucoup de choses sur les pratiques de l'armée haïtienne, l'influence des traditions africaines sur ses structures sociales, et la position des femmes noires dans la hiérarchie de l'empire français. Quand nous lisons cet article en combinaison avec d'autres rapports des tribunaux, il est clair que les femmes luttèrent dans l'armée haïtienne comme des soldats gradés. De plus, si nous

investiguons davantage, nous pouvons traquer cette tradition jusqu'aux pratiques militaires en Afrique. Dans l'article en soi, il est évident que les auteurs considéraient que les femmes étaient la propriété de leurs maris, et ce, particulièrement dans le cas des femmes colonisées. Nous pouvons donc tirer de ce document des conclusions sur les attitudes distinctes envers les femmes en Afrique, en Europe, et dans les colonies antillaises. Ces analyses représentent une situation beaucoup plus complexe qu'un simple succès de l'armée française, et elles sont cruciales pour approfondir nos connaissances des vies silencées et des histoires marginalisées.

A day in the life of a Research Fellow in French cultural history

Dr Hannah Scott, Research Fellow in French Cultural History



Hannah Scott giving a talk from her piano

Dr Hannah Scott is a Research Fellow in French cultural history in the School of Modern Languages. Her current project explores the role of music as a tool for communicating and responding to experiences of disease, public health, and medicine in nineteenth-century Paris, and she has wider interests in popular music, dance, variety theatre, & street spectacle.

9am Sit down at the piano, put an 1870s anti-vax music-hall song on the stand, and attempt to work out why they thought yodelling would dissuade people from getting the smallpox jab. Attempt to learn to yodel – in French – in case this helps.

9.30am-midday Read voraciously, about myriad aspects of life and society; about comedy, about psychology, about urban planning, about public health, about gender, about racism, about inequality, about hope. One of the joys of being in modern languages is that it doesn't stop at learning the language; it means having the wonderful opportunity, day after day, to use words as a gateway to the people who speak them, to the inner workings of human society, and to the crux of who we are.

Today, I've been reading newspapers from the 1880s about whether working-class Parisians had undergone the same evolutionary processes as the upper-middle classes, or whether their frontal lobes were more like those of monkey. Truly, scientific advances are only as good as the people who surround them...

Lunchtime Turn on a French pop music mix on Spotify or – guilty pleasure – a French TV talent show (preferably *Danse avec les stars*). I'm researching French performance culture, so this definitely counts as work.

12.30-2pm Work with colleagues on the outline for a possible new undergrad module. Debate which of the many exciting topics we have space to include. Can we fit in a seminar on the cancan? On plague? On photography from the French Empire? Shall we offer creative writing as an assessment option?

2-4pm Start work on translating a musical from the 1850s. I'm working with a researcher in theatre history to revive a show that hasn't been performed in over 150 years, to be performed with participants and audiences from all around Newcastle. We're grappling with issues of historical accuracy, how to deal with the out-dated prejudices which come through the original script – especially about religion and body image – and how on earth to translate the puns so they are still funny despite being in a different language, place, and century.

4-5pm Attend a seminar to hear about the fascinating discoveries that my colleagues, including postgraduate researchers, have been making in their research projects – I've recently heard amazing talks on everything from German travelling theatres and recycling culture in China, to protest novels in French Guiana and the impact of recent politics on the European music industry.

***La vita è bella* at Newcastle!**

Jenniveve Grason (Modern Languages, recent graduate)

Did you know that at Newcastle, as well as studying your main languages, you can also pick up other languages and have them count for credit in your degree? If you're doing French or Spanish, you can do Italian or Catalan; if you're doing German, you can do Dutch; and if you're doing Chinese or Japanese, you can do Korean.

Jenniveve Grason graduated in Modern Languages in 2024, with French and Spanish her main languages, but she also did Beginner's and Intermediate Italian. Here, she reflects on something she enjoyed doing as part of the Intermediate Italian module, and an additional way of communicating as well...

La vita è bella ('Life is beautiful') is a heart-warming but also heart-breaking film about a father who tries to shield his son from the atrocities of a Nazi concentration camp through his imagination. Jewish bookshop owner Guido Orefice and his wife Dora, along with their son Giosuè and uncle Eliseo, are sent to the internment camp. Although separated from his family, Guido often makes grand gestures such as



Jenniveve on the Spanish Steps in Rome

using the camp's loudspeaker to send messages so his wife would hear that he and Giosuè are safe. However, in the camp Guido wants to hide the true terror of what is going on from his son, so devises a game where Giosuè must perform tasks with his father to collect points, and the first team to reach 1000 points would win a tank. As the allied forces are approaching, Guido tells Giosuè to stay in a box until everybody has left, which is the final task before receiving the tank. Guido rushes to try and find Dora but is caught and ordered to be executed. He passes Giosuè one last time, always remaining in character in the point-scoring game, and is then taken down an alleyway and shot and killed. Giosuè and Dora are reunited, still unaware of Guido's death.

We studied this film as part of our topic on the history of Italian fascism. Whilst it is horrible to learn and hear about, it is also incredibly important to study serious topics so we can honour the memory of the victims of such atrocities. The film showed us the extent that a parent will go to for their child, to protect them at all costs. All of the topics we study here at Newcastle University are relevant and they're all made interesting to learn about. As well as all of these topics, we learn grammar in depth to allow us to communicate freely!

Se da un lato abbiamo imparato argomenti importanti come questi, dall'altro abbiamo avuto modo di studiare argomenti divertenti come i gesti delle mani in italiano! Tutti sanno che gli italiani sono espressivi con i gesti delle mani, ma chi sapeva che esistevano così tanti gesti diversi con significati diversi! È divertente poterli praticare con gli amici e ancora di più praticare la comunicazione non verbale. Questi gesti sono molto utili se vi trovate in Italia e dimenticate la parola per qualcosa! Infatti, secondo il Centro linguistico italiano, ci sono circa 250 gesti diversi usati dagli italiani ogni giorno!