Hooking Intermediate-level Students on Literature: Reading *La maison de Claudine* with La Maison de Colette

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When I was in high school, I discovered that my younger brother was not only reading below grade level, but that he didn't even like reading books. A voracious reader myself, I made it my mission to convert him. As he tells the story, my strategy was to give him a copy of Xaviera Hollander's spicy 1971 memoir, *The Happy Hooker*. Finding a book he enjoyed turned my brother into a life-long reader, and these days he always carries a book with him; reading for pleasure has become part of his daily routine. I wish I had a similar strategy for students studying foreign languages at my university, especially those at the intermediate level who are deciding if they want to continue in the language sequence where they will have to face a required literature survey and other content courses featuring literary texts. There is often a gap between the language skills they develop in the first two years of collegiate foreign language (FL) study, and the interpretation and analysis of literary texts expected at the advanced level. This gap can be exacerbated by the two-tiered configuration of many departments where instruction in language is separate from so-called "content" courses as far as teaching methods, faculty training and expertise, and expected outcomes. For many college students in their third or fourth semester of language study, the prospect of reading literature in a foreign language can be daunting and seem irrelevant to their more communicative and career-focused goals.[1] The harsh reality is that students cannot be sold on the value of literature if it doesn't interest them and they are not prepared to read it.

With the Modern Language Association (MLA) reporting a 16.6% decline in enrollments in languages other than English at U.S institutes of higher education between 2016 and 2021, the pressure to recruit and retain students in our foreign language programs is stronger than ever. Enrollment figures show that students in lower-division language courses, many of whom are completing a foreign language requirement, outnumber those at the advanced levels by an average ratio of 5:1 (Lusin et al). As Stacey Katz rightly remarks, the intermediate-level merits special attention since this is often where poorly conceived courses "foster the

[1] This article addresses students studying foreign languages at the university level where the first four semesters comprise the lower-division courses, often associated with a general education language requirement. The upper-division courses in semesters five through eight are more advanced and usually enroll students pursuing a foreign language major or minor. I use "Intermediate" here to refer to the third and fourth semester of college study of a foreign language which roughly equates to four years of high school study. My arguments could also apply to high school foreign language curricula and programs that teach English as a second language (ESL).

disintegration of language programs" (156). Enterprising faculty are exploring strategies to entice lower-level students into continuing in their language programs, among them study abroad, internships, language for special purposes, and courses featuring film, cooking, media, and popular culture. Enrollment pressures often drive these curricular redesign efforts with many foreign language departments shifting away from literature toward a "studies" approach that prioritizes multidisciplinarity and cultural studies (Luciano Martínez 89). Cynthia Sloan raises the alarm on this trend by pointing to foreign language departments who rename themselves and drop "literature" from their new department designations in the process. According to Sloan, this change can make departments vulnerable to cuts and reorganization "by entities that see language instruction merely as a service to meet students' graduation requirements rather than a vehicle for critical thinking, historical knowledge, and thoughtful dealing with the world" (74).

That literature is often watered down, repackaged, or left out of revamped foreign language curricula seems justified by shifts in American reading habits. Less than half of Americans read for pleasure, according to data collected by the United States federal government, and this slump is continuing as Americans spend less time with books (so-called "deep" reading) and more time on their devices (Iyengar). In the academic environment, the "war on humanities" in favor of STEM disciplines makes it seem even less likely that we can sell our students on the benefits of reading literature in a foreign language.[2] Those of us who are invested in teaching literature, including the contributors to this volume dedicated to teaching 20th and 21st-century literature, are not willing to give up the fight; luckily, we are finding allies across the profession. Second language acquisition specialist Diana Frantzen, for example, views reading as the most "natural" skill, and stresses that reading literature at all levels can benefit students and reduce the language-literature separation that divides foreign language programs and faculty (Incremental 33-34). Her assessment is in line with recommendations by the Modern Language Association, second language acquisition specialists, and others who advocate for integrating the teaching of language and literature from the beginning to the end of a four-year university foreign language sequence. In the first part of this essay, I examine the changing place of literature in foreign language pedagogy; the second part describes an intermediate-level French lesson that incorporates some of the best practices for bridging the language-literature divide and integrating the curriculum. The lesson uses an interactive, student-centered approach to teach an excerpt from Colette's 1922 autobiographical narrative, *La maison de Claudine* (*My Mother's House*), using multimedia resources associated

[2] See Eric Hayot, for example, for what he calls the Humanities marketing problem. This problem is also being discussed in the mainstream media. Recent articles on the decline in reading include "The Elite College Students Who Can't Read Books" by Rose Horowitch, and Katherine Marsh's "Why Kids Aren't Falling in Love with Reading."

with La Maison de Colette 'Colette's House,' a writer's house museum located in her natal home. By scaffolding level-appropriate linguistic and cultural support materials, this lesson engages students in a virtual exploration of Colette's village and house as they connect her storytelling with their own experiences. This approach to teaching literature early in the language sequence has implications for reforming foreign language curricula and retaining students in our programs. When students experience reading literature in a foreign language not as an obstacle but as an enjoyable and personally enriching activity, they are more likely to become life-long readers and—one can always hope—may even decide to major in a foreign language.

The Place of Literature in the Foreign Language Curriculum

If, when, and how literature is taught in the curricula of foreign language programs is constantly shifting, what Jean Marie Schultz calls a cycle of "literature—no literature—return to literature" (4). This shift is influenced by a broad range of micro- and macro- factors that include the political climate, developments in both literary criticism and applied linguistics, and more practical considerations such as funding, hiring practices, training, materials and program goals. Back when the grammar-translation method ruled foreign language departments, reading literature was the whole point of studying a foreign language. Literary texts were held up as models of correct language usage for readers to emulate. Critical approaches to literature such as New Criticism, popular during the Cold War era, still placed the text at the center but divorced it from any consideration of the author and social or historical context. During that same period, Reader-Response Theory brought the reader's experience into the equation by focusing on how the reader interacts with literary texts to create meaning. Communicative approaches began to dominate language teaching following World War II with an applied emphasis that promoted the value of developing foreign language skills to accomplish practical communicative tasks that excluded literature. By the 1990s language teachers recognized the limitations of the communicative approach, with its focus on oral proficiency, and put literature back into the discussion again. According to Janet Swaffar and Katherine Arens:

> Increasingly, foreign language acquisition research suggests that literature is the necessary textual environment for creating strong readers, readers who have the cognitive strategies and linguistic resources to comprehend and interpret a work as well as an aesthetic object as a complicated act of communication within a culture. (Remapping 79)

Applied research on the reading process, as well as the development of *World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages in the 21st Century*, provided a broader framework for the study of authentic texts that include literature, connecting them to outcomes such as the development of critical thinking skills and intercultural competence.[3] Multiliteracy approaches have built on these connections over the past few decades but expanded the meaning of "text" to include "any concrete, observable product that communicates meaning" (Paesani and Menke 1-2). This real-world perspective also considers the broader multimedia environment of the 21st century where students are likely to engage with "texts" in multiple modes as varied as film, podcasts, music, artwork, social media posts, and comic books.

When literature was not excluded from foreign language teaching in the "in again, out again" scenarios referred to above, it was often reserved for advanced classes, reinforcing the problematic gap in foreign language curricula highlighted by the 2007 MLA report "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World." The report, written in the aftermath of 9/11, argues for the role that language study can play in communicating with and understanding other cultures and describes the goal of a major in a foreign language as producing "educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence" (3). One of the most discussed recommendations from this report is for foreign language departments to move away from the two-tiered configuration mentioned earlier, where literature is taught at the upper-levels by tenure-track professors with Ph.D.s, while the lower-level language sequence is staffed primarily by graduate students and instructors who are often trained in applied linguistics or second language acquisition. The specific recommendation is to replace this outdated structure with "a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole" (3).[4] It envisions the creation of an integrative and coherent curricular model that calls for teamwork and interdepartmental cooperative teaching. The MLA "Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Languages and Literature," published in 2009, reiterates the need to include both content and language from the start to finish of the major, and confirms the centrality of literature and reading in liberal arts education:

> Without language there is no communication, speculative thought or community; without literature there is no in-depth understanding of

[3] In "Reading Goals and the Standards for Foreign Language Learning," Arens and Swaffar argue for early inclusion of authentic reading materials in the language sequence and discuss how to apply the Standards as a template for an integrated second language reading curriculum.

[4] Ginger Marcus notes that the MLA recommendations are more applicable to Western languages and describes the challenges posed by Japanese orthography for students learning to read.

> narratives that lead to the discovery of other cultures in their specificities and diversity and to the understanding of other human beings in their similarities and differences. (287)

Integrating literature into lower-division courses and including language instruction in upper-division literature courses, as these two MLA reports recommend, is not an easy task. Administrative support and faculty buy-in for a department-wide curricular overhaul are both critical for the teamwork and cooperative teaching that an integrative approach entails. Professional development is a crucial and related component. While a methodology course focusing on language teaching is usually required for graduate teaching assistants and undergraduate students seeking K-12 teaching licensure, these courses rarely include approaches to teaching literature although some programs are trying to address this.[5] The professors responsible for teacher training may have never taught literature themselves or received any training on how to do so. As Amos Paran points out, that absence of training in how to teach literature sends out "a powerful message that literature is not something that is worth dealing with" (480). It socializes future professors into accepting the language-literature-divide which they then duplicate in their own classrooms (Bernhardt 199). Similarly, language instructors reinforce this two-tiered system when they see literature as an intrusion, not relevant to their course goals, demotivating for students, and something they are not comfortable teaching. In a survey of both foreign language students and teachers on the importance of reading literature, both groups placed it near the bottom, ranking it 11 out of 14 goals for language instruction (Paran 477). A survey of 96 pre-service language teachers by Cagri Tugrul Mart yielded similar results with only 11 agreeing with the statement "The integration of language and literature maximizes learning experience" (Mart 12).[6]

Lack of appropriate pedagogical materials for integrative teaching across all levels of the curriculum also plays a role. Literature anthologies used for survey classes, for example, tend to focus on literary texts and omit language tasks with the (false) assumption that students in advanced courses have sufficient mastery of

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[5] Heather Allen and Eduardo Negueruela-Azarola provide a comprehensive overview of this professional development problem. Elizabeth Bernhardt, Mary Lee Bretz, and Margaret Persin are among those who have proposed courses to remedy this gap in teacher preparation. Also see Benjamin Rifkin's survey of methods courses required by graduate programs. The collaborative reading course described by Carmen Chaves Tesser and Donna Reseigh Long also reveals the frustration and "baggage" that students bring to reading texts identified as literature, and they discuss how teacher training can facilitate teaching literature at lower levels.

[6] It should be noted that in a follow-up survey conducted after teachers took a course using a language through literature approach, Mart found that these results were dramatically reversed. James Davis et al have also surveyed foreign language students and found that they are much more positive toward the study of literature than previously thought.

the language. When intermediate-level textbooks do include literature, they often do so in the service of language, using literature to illustrate grammar points or relevant vocabulary, with comprehension, not textual analysis, as the main objective. Departments that succeed in adopting a language-through-literature approach that uses literary texts as the primary curricular component are often forced to develop their own materials. At UC Berkeley, for example, faculty members created their own readers after they eliminated textbooks from their foreign language programs (Schultz 18). Similarly, the training of graduate teaching assistants and extensive materials development were both key components in the ambitious curricular reform undertaken by the Department of German at Georgetown University to create an integrated content-oriented curriculum.[7]

The MLA recommendations have generated robust discussion about the how and why of implementing an integrative approach by teachers on both sides of the language-literature divide. The why of teaching authentic texts, defined as those written for native speakers, includes providing a valuable source of comprehensible input and "a meaningful context in which to practice and present structures and vocabulary" at all levels (Frantzen, Rethinking 110). Proponents of an integrative approach also stress the importance of the cultural and personal aspects of incorporating literature into the language classroom since it can serve as a springboard for cultural understanding and critical thinking, as well as personal interest and self-knowledge. These are transferable skills, integral to the translinguistic and transcultural competencies the MLA reports envision for a well-educated global citizen.

The scholarship addressing the how of integrative pedagogies is extensive and includes comprehensive overviews of different approaches, sample lessons, and practical "how to" manuals.[8] The lesson I present below draws on many of these best practices; in particular, the shift away from teachers lecturing on content, to a student-centered and engaged approach that focuses on reading as "the joint construction of a social reality between the reader the text" (Claire Kramsch 357). It roughly follows the steps of a three-stage process-oriented approach that Paesani summarizes as "pre-reading activities to activate background knowledge; reading activities to focus on textual content, features, and organization; and post-reading

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[7] For information on Georgetown University's "Developing Multiple Literacies Project" see the Department of German's website.

[8] Kate Paesani has written extensively on the language-literature divide, and, with Mandy Menke, has published a practical guide for teachers that uses an expanded definition of literacies. The contributors to the volume edited by Scott and Tucker address literature in the foreign language classroom from a second language acquisition perspective. Mart and Paran both provide comprehensive overviews of methods to integrate literature into language learning. Mart is among the many English as a Second Language scholars who have published on this topic. Their approaches can also be applied to the teaching of foreign languages other than English.

activities to expand on learners' knowledge and encourage creative language production" (167).

La Maison de Colette as Pedagogical Resource

The pre-reading phase of this lesson draws on multimedia resources connected to La Maison de Colette, the natal home of French author Sidonie Gabrielle Colette located in Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye, a village in Burgundy. Colette's House opened its doors to the public in 2016 as a *maison d'écrivain* 'writer's house museum,' after the house and gardens were restored to represent the period when Colette lived there.[9] Writers' houses are popular tourist destinations that draw visitors to places where writers were born, lived, or wrote, or that served as settings for their work (Mansfield 43). According to Elizabeth Emery, these sites contribute to literary tourism, which is especially robust in France, and "play a critical role in the French heritage tourism industry" (5). While tourists visiting Colette's hometown can literally walk in the author's footsteps, a virtual field trip is also possible. Teachers can set the stage for reading Colette's reminiscences about her childhood in *La maison de Claudine* by taking students on a virtual exploration of the house and village where the author spent the first eighteen years of her life.

Colette was nearly 50 years old when she published *La maison de Claudine* in 1922. It represents a return to topics that she had not written about for nearly two decades, namely her family, rural village, and especially her mother, Sido. Colette's reminiscences do not neatly fit the categories of memoir or traditional autobiography. Instead, this autobiographical narrative is composed of short, stand-alone anecdotes or vignettes about the idyllic childhood years she spent in Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye from 1873 to 1891 when her family's financial ruin forced them to move. Anne Freadman explicitly links these stories to Colette's role as a *conteuse d'anecdotes* 'storyteller' who learned the art of oral storytelling first-hand from her father (48-9). The anecdotes showcase Colette's talents as a storyteller and highlight aspects of her childhood that became major themes in her writing such as her appreciation of the natural world, her love of books and language, and her close relationship with her mother, Sido—topics that students will encounter this lesson. *La maison de Claudine* also illustrates how a particular place, a concept at the heart of literary tourism, can be used to engage students.

Proponents of literary tourism describe how readers are drawn to places associated with writers or literary texts with the expectation of experiencing a

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[9] See Tama Lea Engelking's interview with Frédéric Maget, the director of La Maison de Colette. Maget discusses the mission of the museum and his role in restoring the house. The restoration of Colette's house has been featured in numerous publications and media outlets. See, for example, the special issue of *Connaissance des Arts*. The website of La Maison de Colette is also very informative.

personal connection evoked by the combination of the author, their works, and physical spaces According to Mike Robinson and Hans Christian Andersen, this tripartite combination can add new meanings and emotions to a reading of texts that feature these places (3). A version of this combination can make Colette's texts come alive for students by explicitly connecting what they are reading with the places she writes about. La Maison de Colette is especially suited to play this role since guided tours of the house weave stories from Colette's writing into the visit narrative, highlighting the close connection between her texts and the physical spaces of the rooms and gardens. The museum's website refers to the house as a *maison-livre* 'house-book' and compares a visit there to turning the pages of a book. Although Colette never wrote in the house where she grew up, she wrote about it probably more than any author, according to the museum's director, who considers her natal home as a genuine character in Colette's work and an impetus for her writing (Engelking interview 192).

Visitors who are drawn to sites connected with authors or their works often seek an imaginative and emotional experience that goes beyond the literary text to connect them with the world created by the author, what Harald Hendrix calls the "through-the-looking-glass effect" (239). Writer's house museums draw tourists to regions associated with specific writers like Colette's Puisaye or George Sand's Nohant, but their mission is also educational—to promote interest in writers, the places associated with them, and their work.[10] Although fieldtrips to writer's houses are encouraged, this is not always possible, and the pedagogical materials created for French school children who visit these sites are not geared toward students learning French as a foreign language.[11] Many writer's house museums are, however, accessible through virtual visits that can be suitable for students accustomed to online environments. In the case of Colette, Frédéric Maget, the director of La Maison de Colette, narrates a guided visit through the house and gardens as part of "Colette au Bac"—online pedagogical materials created for students studying Colette's texts in preparation for the French Baccalaureate

[10] There are 235 officially recognized Writer's House Museums in France, supported by *La Fédération Nationale des maisons d'écrivain & des patrimoines littéraires*. This is the most active association of its type in the world. Writer's Houses in France have robust agendas that can include workshops, writing competitions, archives, performances, conferences, *visites-découverte* 'discovery visits' for school children and even escape rooms! Their popularity reflects both France's investment in its cultural heritage and the status of writers who are highly esteemed by the French. Also see David Herbert for the relationship between literary tourism and cultural heritage.

[11] There are exceptions, and one of them is La Maison de Gabrielle Roy in Winnipeg, Canada, a sister museum with La Maison de Colette. Canadian children learning French are one of the target audiences for some of their activities.

exam.[12] Maget designed his narrative for French high school students who are native French speakers, but non-native speakers at the intermediate level will be able to follow his commentary when aided by visuals, edited transcripts and dictations, and comprehension exercises. These materials make it possible for them to walk in Colette's footsteps and experience a version of the "through-the-looking-glass effect" as they prepare to engage in reading a text by Colette that takes place in these very spaces. An example included in the excerpt selected for this lesson is the story of a spider that lived in Colette's mother's bedroom.

Lesson Plan for Teaching Colette's Text "Ma mère et les bêtes"[13]

For intermediate-level students learning to read French literature, texts must be carefully selected and tasks assigned that are level-appropriate and scaffolded to make new material accessible. "Ma mère et les bêtes" 'My mother and animals' is a short and accessible first-person autobiographical narrative on the topic of family pets that also serves to introduce students to an important 20th-century French author. It can stand alone or be taught in connection with other texts by Colette or by writers of autobiographical or first-person narratives.[14] It is presented here as part of an autobiographical unit called "*Je me souviens*…" 'I remember,' that requires students to create a dossier of materials about their childhoods inspired by *La maison de Claudine* and La Maison de Colette. Teachers and students can easily access Colette's text since it is out of copyright and available online at no cost in various formats through Project Gutenberg. The lesson demonstrates how multimedia sources on the internet that relate to Colette's life and writing, her love of animals, and the restoration of her natal home, can be adapted into pedagogical materials to provide background and support for reading this excerpt.

The topic of family pets at the center of "Ma mère et les bêtes" may seem banal, but Colette's text is nuanced and has layers of meaning that students progressively uncover in the different stages of this lesson. Pre-reading activities are especially important if we are to challenge intermediate-level students to read literature without overwhelming them. The level of these introductory exercises is deliberately low so students will feel comfortable drawing on familiar material

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[12] The *Baccalauréat* or "Bac" is an accreditation students receive at the end of their secondary studies in the French education system by passing a series of written and oral evaluations. The "Bac" is required for students pursuing higher education, and preparations for the exams are extensive.

[13] A complete lesson plan in French can be accessed here https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/a6r5d4104mdhu4h87dhvg/French-lesson-plan-to-teaching-Colette-s-Ma-mere-et-le-betes.docx?rlkey=3jm6tt8huw9ywh70bopb4cgbe&st=n1ukmkhq&dl=0.

[14] *Rethinking the French Classroom. New Approaches to Teaching Contemporary French and Francophone Women*, includes some excellent examples of texts to pair with Colette. Although many of the essays are intended for more advanced students, a few present pedagogical approaches appropriate for beginning and intermediate students.

while also gaining new information they can apply to an analysis of "Ma mère et les bêtes." Following the recommendation of Cheryl Krueger, the culminating assignment at the end of this unit is a "creative personalization" project (19). Once students understand Colette's text, they can expand on that knowledge and use her text as a model to create stories of their own that go beyond communicating personal information to focus more on how form relates to meaning (19).

To introduce the main topic of this lesson, students are given a homework assignment that draws on their personal experiences with family pets. They write a short composition about a family pet providing the type of animal, its name, some characteristics (description, favorite activities), and a timeline of ownership. Students who have never had pets can write about a pet they would aspire to own. The results are shared orally in class with students writing the type of animal and its name on the board. After a brief discussion about the class preference for cats or dogs and the pros and cons of pet ownership, they examine photos of Colette from three periods of her life: A 1901 publicity photo for her first novel, *Claudine à l'école* ('*Claudine at school*') that shows her dressed as her character Claudine and posing with her husband Willy and her pet dog, Colette in a cat costume for a 1912 pantomime performance, and photo of a mature Colette at her writing desk in the company of her last cat. The photos introduce students to elements of Colette's biography that establish a timeline for her writing and the presence of pets throughout her life. An alternative approach is to search for "Colette + Cats" on Google images or to ask students to each find one photo of Colette with an animal and write a caption for it. These images could be posted on a class site.

This initial pre-reading activity establishes a link between Colette and the students' (presumed) love of animals. For homework, students watch a 10-minute video in French about Colette's love for cats that introduces her mother and the family home. A transcription of the narrative and multiple-choice comprehension questions help them access the main points that will be reiterated in the reading phase of the unit. In class, students read an introduction to Colette that identifies the origins of Claudine, a character she created for a series of popular novels that started with *Claudine à l'école* in 1901 and ended with *La retraite sentimentale* (*Retreat from Love*) in 1907. Students then compare cover photos from *La maison de Claudine* and *Claudine à l'école* that draw attention to how Colette and her fictional creation were interchanged to promote her work. The teacher then provides an overview of the chapters in *La maison de Claudine* so students can see the topics covered and locate the title of the chapter they will be reading. After speculating on why Colette included the name of Claudine in the book's title, students are asked what they already know about the different types of self-writing: memoir, personal diary, letters, autobiographies, autofiction, blogs. What distinguishes the different genres? Does Colette's book seem to fit into any of these categories? Can they give examples of autobiographies that they've heard about or

read? If they are interested in the lives of writers (or other famous people), have they ever visited or wanted to visit a house where a writer was born, lived, or one that was featured in their writing? Is there a difference between an authentic historical object/place and a copy or recreation? What does it mean to walk in the footsteps of a historical figure and why would someone want to? Students will be asked to select an image (photo or drawing) and a title for their own memoir at the end of the project and must be able to talk about the significance of their choice.

The next pre-reading section, "The Village/ My neighborhood," introduces students to the village of Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye. Students draw a map of the neighborhood where they lived around the age of 15, and include places they frequented such as the school, church, parks, shops, etc. Working in pairs, students compare the activities they did there with those of their partner. This warm-up and review of verbs, the imperfect tense, prepositions, and place names, is followed by small group work. Students generate a list of places they would expect to see in a French village at the end of the 19th century. The teacher puts these items on the board and then asks students to speculate about the contemporary village of Saint-Sauveur—what do they think has changed, been added, or eliminated? These activities illustrate the role of geographical places in developing self-identity which will be expanded in later parts of the unit.

Students then work individually on their computers using Google Earth to explore what the village of Saint-Sauveur en Puisaye looks like today. They answer a series of questions about the village and discover that very little has changed since the time Colette lived there. This activity makes the village come alive to the students because Google Earth provides a visual that allows them to see all the distinguishing features mentioned by Colette that still exist, although some of the functions have changed. The château, for example, is now Le Musée de Colette, and the school that Colette features in her first novel serves as the town hall. Of course, the house where Colette was born is now open to the public as a writer's house museum.

The section "The House / The Museum of my youth" uses several short videos with comprehension exercises to introduce students to the restoration of the house and the idea of staging objects to represent some aspect of the people who lived there. These exercises can be done in class or assigned as homework. Students relate the curatorial approach highlighted in the restoration process to their own childhood spaces by selecting an item or items that represent something about themselves. They share their selections with the class orally in a show-and-tell format with photos or illustrations of the selected objects that they will include in their dossiers. The next step is to move from the village to Colette's house by taking a virtual guided tour of the house and gardens that they can access at the "Colette au Bac" website. The rooms in the tour include "La chambre de Sido" 'Sido's bedroom' the bedroom where the spider story included in "Ma mère et les bêtes"

takes place. The chocolate warmer featured in the story is on display in this room. This particular story, already well-known by many of the visitors to the house, is part of every guided tour and illustrates the storytelling approach used in museums that has parallels with reader response and schema theory.[15] Jane Nielsen defines storytelling as "a narrative that creates engagement" by stimulating the imaginative processes that allow visitors to create meaning by connecting their experiences with emotions and memories (445). If we substitute "visitor" with "viewer," in the case of virtual visits, and "reader," in the case of Colette's autobiographical narrative, we see the potential for stories to engage a reader's and/or viewer's imagination and stimulate the "through-the-looking-glass" effect referred to earlier.[16]

The effects of storytelling in combination with "experiencing" the physical sites related to an author and her texts are especially engaging for readers who approach a literary text in a foreign language armed with their own experiences and knowledge including their ability to read in their first language. At the intermediate level, students will need help to fill in any gaps in the linguistic and cultural information needed to understand an authentic text. The extensive pre-reading activities familiarize students with the context and some of the main ideas in "Ma mère et les bêtes" that include information about the author's house and village, her close relationship with her mother, and their mutual love for animals. The reading phase first focuses on vocabulary as students analyze the significance of the word "bêtes" in the title which they compare with French and English equivalents. What is the significance of this choice? Are they familiar with expressions using the word bête such as *petite bête, bête noire*? The initial family pet assignment has already established some basic animal vocabulary that students will continue to expand. Colette's texts are often considered difficult because of her vast vocabulary that may include archaic and technical words, especially when describing flora and fauna. Intermediate-level readers will need the most help with lexical strategies. To introduce and review relevant vocabulary, the instructor divides "Ma mère et les bêtes" into sections and assigns students to work in pairs to identify references to plants and animals, including insects, in their assigned excerpt. They are also given a grid of the five senses and collect references from the text that pertain to each one. Students should use contextual clues to guess at meanings but can also refer to a dictionary to create their lists. Illustrations, matching exercises, word families and other vocabulary-building techniques such as quizlet can be applied here as needed depending on the proficiency level of the students. All these references are shared with students filling in the missing information to complete their vocabulary grids. The lesson then moves from the general to the specific to answer questions about

[15] See James Davis for an example of a reader response approach. Catherine Barrette et al. provide a sample lesson that demonstrates an interactive and process-oriented approach.

[16] For more on how storytelling works in a museum soundscape, see Engelking, "Speaking for Colette."

the *bêtes* mentioned in the text. Which ones can be considered as "pets" and what are their names? Which ones are given descriptors usually associated with people? Is this unusual or unexpected, and what is the effect on the reader? Why does Colette avoid using the expression *animaux de compagnie* 'pets' in favor of *bêtes* 'beasts'?

The students have now skimmed through much of "Ma mère et les bêtes" in their vocabulary search and discussion of the animals in the Colette household. The next step is to take a closer look at the narrative voice and the organization of the chapter. A review of verb tenses will help students establish the chronology by identifying verbs in the present tense—associated with active memory—with those in the imperfect and passé-simple. A brief introduction to the passé-simple, for recognition only, will be useful here and can be assigned as homework. This exercise will remind students how completed actions in the past are distinguished from descriptions and ongoing past actions represented by the imperfect tense. If we understand the title as the main topic, how does Colette go about introducing her mother's relationship to the creatures enumerated in the text? Students identify the contrast Colette establishes between Paris and her provincial town as the narrator (understood here as the mature Colette) recalls her memories at ages six, eleven, and sixteen, when the scene of returning from a two-week trip to Paris takes place. The class reads the opening paragraphs together and identifies the first mention of "bêtes" which doesn't appear until the third paragraph when the sixteen-year-old narrator identifies what is missing from her Paris visit—the houses there are "sans bêtes" (998) 'without animals.' Colette describes the interior of petless houses in terms of the missing sensations her younger self craves, "*sens affamés*" (999 'starved senses.' The interior setting is important because it relates to the spider story embedded in this chapter, as Sido models a symbiotic relationship with the living world that the adult author Colette, reminiscing about her youth, is able to capture in words. These words become part of both *La maison de Claudine* and La maison de Colette, when guides retell her stories. A related writing prompt could ask students to comment on the impact that virtually experiencing the site of this scene has on them as readers of the spider story or they could create their own version of a spider story.

Colette's stories may seem simple, but there are many layers to uncover in her dense descriptive writing. The third paragraph lends itself well to a textual analysis exercise as students answer questions about the colors, time of day, senses evoked, and the meaning of the three references to white in the last sentence. An effective point of departure is for students to first write a short, simplified summary of the paragraph in French or English. A close reading of Colette's language reveals how she adds color and texture to the scene to present her mother, the garden, and the family pets as an organic whole, a sort of integrated circle that is specific to this time and place. The author expands on these basic relationships throughout the

chapter with the mother's contributions to respecting and maintaining life at the center. The spider story, for example, is similar to that of the emperor moth that Sido keeps alive, and the protective white gloves she makes for the ravenous puppy. Sido's relationship with her daughter is also included in this close circle. The final paragraphs pull these references together as the author reminisces and writes her memories into the form of a vignette she titles "Ma mère et les bêtes." The meaning of the final words, pronounced by Sido each day until the end and then repeated by her daughter in the closing lines of the chapter, are a lesson that Colette has taken to heart, as she honors her mother's legacy of love: "Je ne peux pourtant pas tuer cette bête…." (1002) 'I can hardly kill the creature.'

The final assignment for this unit asks students to write their own animal story using "Ma mère et les bêtes" and Colette's spider story as examples. They are encouraged to draw on actual experiences that occurred in sites connected to their childhoods if possible and are provided a check list. Their story must take place in a specific location, include descriptions that evoke all five senses, and use a narrative timeframe similar to Colette's; that is, a memory from the past is evoked and described with its meaning reflected on in the present moment. Written stories are submitted in several drafts, collected in student dossiers, and then shared with the class in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. A poster session or a living museum approach could also work here with other French students invited to "visit" the museum and hear the stories presented by the "guides" to their childhood homes.

Conclusion

Whether we are motivated by our own love of literature, a need to save our programs by increasing enrollment and retention, or the goal of preparing students to succeed at the upper levels, exposing students to literature early in the foreign language sequence can have positive effects. Instructors may be struggling to get students to memorize vocabulary, conjugate verb tenses correctly, and pronounce a French "r," during the first two years of French study, but we tend to underestimate what they are capable of doing beyond proficiency levels, and may not understand what they really think about the place of literature in the curriculum and in their lives. Davis et al discovered surprising results when they surveyed students about their attitudes toward reading literature in a foreign language. According to their findings, students with lower confidence in their speaking ability were more enthusiastic about reading literature than students who believed they were more proficient. Their data results show that positive attitudes were linked to opportunities to "express their personal opinions," "look for the underlying meaning of the text," and "read about people and experiences different from their own" (324). I was able to integrate all these elements into my student-centered

approach to teaching a text by Colette. We also need to keep in mind that regardless of proficiency levels, reading authentic literary texts for which our students are not the intended reader puts them in contact with another culture. As with any cross-cultural activity, readers begin with what they know and then create connections that allow them to access another world, to imagine another perspective, to walk in someone else's footsteps. An integrated language-literature curriculum can help provide students with the tools they need to make this journey and become life-long readers. These are real-world skills, and, as the MLA Teagle report reminds us, "the arts of language and tools of literacy are a key qualification for full participation in the social, political, economy, literary, and cultural life of the 21st century" (285). In many ways, those of us who teach foreign languages and literature have goals similar to the promoters of literary tourism. Like guides who lead visitors on tours of writer's houses, we want our students to exit our (hopefully) integrated language and literature classes "through the boutique" where they will pick up a book to read for pleasure. If Colette could have the final word, she might recommend taking that book to a sunlit garden to read in the company of a furry friend.

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