

The Teaching-Research Nexus: French-Australian Migrant Literature in the First-Year French Classroom

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This article details the ways in which we bring our research on ‘French migrant writing’ to our pedagogical practice. Our research project is entitled ‘Transnational Selves: French Narratives of Migration to Australia’ and aims to discover, analyse and disseminate texts written by migrants and travellers to Australia in the French language from the nineteenth century to the present day.¹ These texts are first-person narratives of encounters with Australia and are written by migrants who have settled in the country, who have become temporary residents or, especially in the case of the twenty-first century texts, who have travelled around Australia. One of our main objectives is to disseminate these writings as widely as possible. To that end, we are publishing traditional scholarly outputs and are also disseminating the materials in other avenues. In particular, we are incorporating these texts into our teaching at all levels of the curriculum.

We have each been engaged in teaching First-Year French for about twenty years and consider it to be one of the cornerstones of our academic activity.

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We believe that it is possible to develop a teaching-research nexus at this level, by bringing the cultural materials from our research—whether these be literature, film, media or other areas—into the First-Year French curriculum. In our case, we specialise in literary studies and we have been engaged for many years in incorporating literary texts into our First-Year courses.

In this article, we first provide an overview of research into using literary texts in language teaching. We then present the shape and scope of our First-Year French curriculum, explaining how the ‘migrant’ narratives are now a core component of it. We finally discuss our process of assessing this component, and the students’ feedback on this unique hybrid French-Australian literature and language course.

Literature in the language classroom

Literature has long held a pivotal place in the language classroom at tertiary level. As Kate Paesani points out in relation to US universities—in a point that is relevant to other Anglophone cultures, including Australia—in the early twentieth century literature was the primary object of study and an understanding of literary texts was the primary goal of language study.² This guaranteed the prestigious place accorded to literature until new theories of language learning were developed in the post-war period. The audiolingual method of the 1950s and the communicative approach of the 1970s both decentred literature in the language curriculum—not by displacing it but, through their focus on oral competence, placing literature as one element of language study. Kimberly Nance wrote of the end of literature’s privileged place in the language curriculum by the end of the twentieth century, suggesting that this was because the teaching of literature had remained much the same and had not developed in the same way as language instruction.³ Also at this time, several scholars in this area highlighted the growing divide between language and literature teaching.

² Kate Paesani, ‘Research in Language-Literature Instruction: Meeting the Call for Change?’, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, no. 31 (March 2011): 161–181.

³ Kimberly A. Nance, *Teaching Literature in the Languages: Expanding the Literary Circle through Student Engagement* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010).

In many Anglophone nations, especially in the US, curricula in languages had become divided into two distinct groups of courses, based upon the teaching of language at the lower levels and of literature at the upper. Importantly, teaching staff were often also divided along this curricular division. Claire Kramsch and Thomas Nolden referred to this as ‘the institutionalised dichotomy between literary studies and language training’ and scholars such as Kamaskshi Murti and Mary Lyman-Hager have pointed to this unfortunate division. Disconcertingly, several researchers have underscored friction between teachers of language and of literature. These range from misunderstandings, as noted by Joanne Burnett and Leah Fonder-Solano, to tension and hostility, as found by Heidi Byrnes and Susanne Kord.⁴ As Geoff Hall writes in *Literature in Language Education*:

To the unreflecting linguist, literary writing or communication is a minor and peripheral area of elite writing practices (with writing in any case secondary to speech since de Saussure) inexplicably or inexcusably prominent in many state educational curricula. [...] On the other hand, for the teacher or scholar of literature, linguistics evokes an image of futile philological endeavour, characteristically demonstrating insensitive incomprehension of the cultural significance of texts, or at best using hopelessly top-heavy explicatory systems and jargon to demonstrate what ‘any sensitive’ reader could already have seen for themselves.⁵

Such stark distinctions are unfortunate—and are indeed what Hall and many other scholars in this area call us to rethink, since literature is an important element of the authentic materials now used in language curricula.

⁴ Joanne Burnett and Leah Fonder-Solano, ‘Crossing the Boundaries between Literature and Pedagogy: Perspectives on a Foreign Language Reading Course’, *SLA and the Literature Classroom: Fostering Dialogues*, ed. Virginia Mitchell Scott and Holly Tucker (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 2002), 75–106; Heidi Byrnes and Susanne Kord, ‘Developing Literacy and Literary Competence: Challenges For Foreign Language Departments’, *SLA and the Literature Classroom: Fostering Dialogues*, ed. Virginia Mitchell Scott and Holly Tucker (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 2002), 35–73.

⁵ Geoff Hall, *Literature in Language Education*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4.

Amos Paran usefully summarises this development as ‘the movement from literature as part of an elitist study of foreign languages at the beginning of the 20th century to a view of literature as an authentic source of language at the end of the century’.⁶

A prime example of this call to rethink the place of literature in the language curriculum is the 2007 report written by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA)’s Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, ‘Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World’.⁷ This report specifically targeted the changes in the language curriculum at tertiary level, and the place of literature within it. The ad hoc committee recommended moving on from a curriculum structured around the division between language and literature courses, creating instead coherent programs that meld these two elements with other important components: ‘replacing the two-tiered language-literature structure with a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole’.⁸ The overall goal of a language curriculum, the report suggested, should be to develop students’ ‘translingual and transcultural competence’⁹—knowing and understanding language and culture and, crucially, the ‘ability to operate between languages’.¹⁰

Importantly, this means a wealth of different materials should be incorporated into the curriculum to bring together language, literature and culture: film, visual art, journalism, poetry and prose, for example. Moreover, the report recommended altering departmental governance, circumventing

⁶ Amos Paran, ‘The role of literature in instructed foreign language learning and teaching: An evidence-based survey’, *Language Teaching* 41, no. 4 (2008): 467–468.

⁷ Modern Language Association of America Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, ‘Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World’, *Profession* (2007).

⁸ MLA, ‘Foreign Languages’, 236.

⁹ MLA, ‘Foreign Languages’, 236.

¹⁰ MLA, ‘Foreign Languages’, 237.

the traditional divide between language instructors and literature instructors, and involving all colleagues in curriculum development.¹¹

Significant scholarship has now developed in the area of curriculum innovation in language programs, detailing the ways in which colleagues have implemented ideas such as those espoused by the MLA report. In particular, several studies of intermediate and upper-level courses examine the ways in which literature and language can be brought together in productive ways. Byrnes and Kord underscore the importance of maintaining linguistic support for students reading literature at the upper-level, arguing that literature is most helpful to students' linguistic development when teachers scaffold text and tasks carefully, rather than merely assigning literary texts and expecting students to criticise and analyse them.¹²

Gisela Hoecherl-Alden presents drama as a means of building literature into intermediate German and extends this to develop a suite of courses that foster students' linguistic and literary skills simultaneously across the curriculum.¹³ She writes that 'L2 literature plays an essential role in avoiding a tourist view of the target culture because it offers culturally authentic information and the opportunity to try to understand an event or character through the target-culture lens'.¹⁴

¹¹ Of course, many colleagues had pre-empted these recommendations. As an example, we should like to acknowledge the degree program we studied at the University of Bath in the mid-late 1990s, which melded language, literature and culture across its curriculum and has since inspired us with our own curricular development. Here in Australia, we have encountered highly innovative language programs that incorporate the study of literary and cultural materials at all levels, and many colleagues who reject a two-tiered system of teaching either language or literature. Indeed, most departments here are relatively small, comprising fewer than ten full-time, permanent staff. Such circumstances demonstrate that the traditional separation between language and literature instructors is often simply not feasible in small departments in which teaching duties have to be shared.

¹² Byrnes and Kord, 'Developing Literacy and Literary Competence'.

¹³ Gisela Hoecherl-Alden, 'Connecting Language to Content: Second Language Literature Instruction at the Intermediate Level', *Foreign Language Annals* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2006).

¹⁴ Hoecherl-Alden, 'Connecting Language to Content', 251.

We have written of our intermediate curriculum, using Gisèle Pineau's *Un Papillon dans la cité* as a way of leading students from the first-year course into the demands of second-year study, building the curriculum around the literary text and using it as a springboard for discussion of contemporary French and Francophone culture.¹⁵ Since Pineau's text is written by a black, Guadeloupean woman, and is set in both Guadeloupe and 'banlieue' Paris, it also offers an opportunity to decolonise the curriculum. Our first-year course offers a further opportunity to decentre the curriculum, while simultaneously maintaining a focus on France and French culture. Since four of the five hours of lessons per week are devoted to French vocabulary, grammar and culture, French is clearly the centre of the course. This fifth hour devoted to migrant and travel texts emphasises the multiplicity of the Francophone world and highlights the differences between centre and periphery.

Our focus in this article is the role of literary texts in first-year French teaching. There are comparatively few studies that examine the role of such texts in first-year curricula, in relation to those that study upper-level courses. This is primarily because many First-Year French courses are built around a textbook. Often these textbooks contain literary texts as part of their cultural apparatus, which is a welcome addition, but which prescribes the literature included in an already-busy curricula. The title of Roberta Tucker's article on the use of poetry in First-Year French is revealing: 'Mallarmé's "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui" for First-Semester French Students or Who Decreed Only Prévert for First Year?'.¹⁶ In this article, Tucker calls for the teaching of poetry at beginner level, suggesting that both French and English can be used productively in classroom discussions to advance students' linguistic and cultural knowledge.

¹⁵ Edwards, Natalie and Christopher Hogarth, 'Building Bridges from Language to Civilization through Gisèle Pineau's *Un Papillon dans la cité*', *Rethinking the French Classroom: New Approaches to Teaching Contemporary French and Francophone Women*, ed. Nicole Meyer and Joyce Johnston (New York: Routledge, 2019), 68–75.

¹⁶ Roberta Tucker, 'Mallarmé's "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui" for First-Semester French Students or Who Decreed Only Prévert for First Year?', *The French Review* 74, no. 2 (2000): 263–273.

Virginia Scott and Julie Huntington have also investigated the role of poetry in teaching first-year French.¹⁷ They asked students to discuss a French poem in English, both in small groups and a large teacher-led discussion, finding that students in groups limited their discussion to translation and vocabulary, whereas the teacher-led discussion was where interpretation and analysis occurred. We have previously written of how we have incorporated autobiographical materials into our first-year classroom.¹⁸ We assign excerpts from writers from around the Francophone world in the second semester of beginners' French, using texts that align with the linguistic focus of their textbook chapters: Assia Djebar's first day at school, recounted in *L'amour, la fantasia*, as they study the *passé composé*, for example. This culminates in these beginning students writing their own 500-word autobiography at the end of the semester.

French-Australian migrant narratives

The focus of this study is a course we have developed for first-year French students—specifically for second semester beginning students, who have a grasp of elementary vocabulary and structures, and who are transitioning to learning a wider range of tenses. There are five contact hours per week in this course. The reading component in which we discuss the French-Australian texts is devoted to one of these five hours. In the remaining four hours of each week, we deliver vocabulary and grammar instruction, with the aid of a textbook that focuses on France and the Francophone world. We do not, however, make an artificial separation between language and culture. We highlight for students the connections between French and Australian language and culture through these texts and are careful not to present them as discreet units to be studied separately. We choose to group the texts by linguistic and cultural content, increasing their complexity as we move through the eleven weeks of instruction.

Our design of this component of the course is intended to incorporate all five skills of language learning: reading, writing, speaking, listening and cultural knowledge. In terms of pedagogical support, we provide students

¹⁷ Virginia M. Scott and Julie A. Huntington, 'Literature, the Interpretive Mode, and Novice Learners', *The Modern Language Journal* 91, no. 1 (2007): 3–14.

¹⁸ Edwards and Hogarth, 'Autobiography in the Language Classroom'.

with a vocabulary bank and, for each session, a worksheet that moves through three distinct stages. Each one-hour lesson starts with a warm-up exercise, in which we ask students to discuss in small groups three questions related to the content of the excerpt they will be reading. These questions are pitched at a level at which first-year students can respond with simple vocabulary: ‘*quelles sont les villes principales d’Australie?*’ or ‘*avez-vous pris un vol de longue durée? Racontez votre expérience à votre groupe.*’ This section typically takes ten minutes. We then move to the reading of the excerpt, which we have selected from the texts we are amassing and analysing in the research project. Each excerpt is approximately 200 words at the outset of the course and 400 words by the end. Following the reading, we ask four or five questions, to which students write their answers in pairs, all in French. The questions begin as a reading comprehension, asking students to read the passage closely and demonstrate understanding of its key points. We use a range of questions, asking students variously to translate passages, to paraphrase sections, to pinpoint specific information and, especially towards the end of the course, to use their critical thinking skills to interpret an author’s meaning.

Following this pair-work exercise, which typically takes thirty minutes, we move to a whole-class discussion for the remaining twenty minutes. While French is the language of instruction in our courses and we often insist on French-only answers to our questions, we are more tolerant of incursions by students into English in order to deepen their cultural understanding and empathy. In terms of participation, stronger students respond very well to this exercise and we are careful to offer support to less confident students, who worry about their lack of vocabulary or (often in the case of less confident students) their pronunciation. We make a point of always speaking in French ourselves and require that students try to make their points in French first, only accepting English if really necessary, and we ask the class to help them translate or render their points in French before providing any translation ourselves.

The overall aim of this course component, as per the MLA recommendations quoted earlier, is to foster greater cultural competence. The terminology used in the MLA report recommends ‘transcultural competence’. In our view, the most prominent work to define and recommend approaches to fostering transcultural competence is Jerry Glover and Harris

L. Friedman's *Transcultural Competence: Navigating Cultural Differences in the Global Community*, which appeared in 2015, nearly a decade after the MLA report.¹⁹ This work deals primarily with cultural competence in business and the professions, including health settings, taking the majority of its examples from situations in the USA. For the purpose of this article, we look to definitions of cultural competence in the context of the language classroom advanced by Australian applied linguists and language educators, who more frequently use the term 'intercultural competence'.²⁰ Prominent scholars of language policy in Australia, Anthony J. Liddicoat and Angela Scarino define intercultural competence in language teaching as something that

involves at least the following:

- accepting that one's practices are influenced by the cultures in which one participates and so are those of one's interlocutors
- accepting that there is no one right way to do things
- valuing one's own culture and other cultures
- using language to explore culture
- finding personal ways of engaging in intercultural interaction
- using one's existing knowledge of cultures as a resource for learning about new cultures
- finding a personal intercultural style and identity.²¹

As we explain below, we work to incorporate all of these elements of intercultural competence into the discussion of each of the texts our students study, and into the assessment activity.

The first texts serve as an introduction to the study of cultural connections between France and Australia. For the first three weeks of the course students read three texts of minimal complexity.

¹⁹ Jerry Glover and Harris L. Friedman, *Transcultural Competence: Navigating Cultural Differences in the Global Community* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015).

²⁰ Although the prefixes *trans* and *inter* are not necessarily interchangeable, and for some they are not even cognates, the distinction between them is beyond the scope of this article.

²¹ Anthony J. Liddicoat and Angela Scarino, *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning* (Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, 2013), 23–24.

In week one they read an extract from Jacques et Paule Villeminot, *Australie : Terre de fortune*.²² This was published in 1971 by two anthropologists who wrote a series of works depicting their ethnographic studies of rural Australia, especially of Indigenous cultures. They position themselves as observers of Australian life and highlight the specificity of the Australian landscape, flora and fauna, and of regional and urban spaces. Students read an excerpt that compares the six major cities—Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Sydney, Darwin and Melbourne. The passage is written entirely in the present tense and the range of vocabulary is minimal, rendering it accessible for students at this level. Moreover, with this level of cultural content, all students can engage with the text. We ask them whether they can in any way recognise the depiction of 1971 Adelaide, since they can all, including the international students, recount their impressions of this city today. We invite the students to discuss other cities, in Australia and elsewhere, so that those from overseas also feel included. In this sense, the discussion corresponds to Liddicoat and Scarino's criterion of 'using one's existing knowledge of cultures as a resource for learning about new cultures'.²³ Since the students have completed a module on vocabulary related to towns and cities, they are able to form basic descriptive sentences and can form comparative phrases.

In week two, we move to a discussion of Marie-Paule Leroux's *La Grenouille dans le billabong*.²⁴ Leroux moved to Tasmania from France in the early twenty-first century in order to start an epicurean business with her husband. She recorded her observations in this first-person narrative, published in 2004. The tone of the text is playful and light-hearted, rather than a serious, literary endeavour. It thus contrasts with the anthropological tone of the previous text and the literary tone of the one students read in the following week. The excerpt selected is also written in the present tense, sentences are short and the breadth of the vocabulary is limited. The linguistic content centres upon food, for which students have previously

²² Jacques and Paule Villeminot, *Australie : Terre de fortune* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1971).

²³ Liddicoat and Scarino, 24.

²⁴ Marie-Paule Leroux, *La Grenouille dans le billabong : Une Française en Tasmanie* (Cholet: Éditions Pays and Terroirs, 2004).

learnt a range of vocabulary. Since the excerpt also contains comparisons between the French, Italian and Greek migrant groups, the linguistic content takes the students from what they know—food vocabulary—into what they don't know: more complex comparisons. This affords us the opportunity to discuss stereotypes associated with nationalities, and to open the discussion to students who are from these groups—Italians and Greeks are particularly present in our region—and to highlight the multi-ethnic and multilingual dimensions of Australia. With reference to Liddicoat and Scarino's definition of intercultural competence, these activities allow students to demonstrate their 'valuing one's own culture and other cultures' and 'accepting that there is no one right way to do things'.²⁵

In week three, we discuss Catherine Rey's *Une femme en marche*.²⁶ Rey was a successful writer in France before moving to Australia, the land of her paternal grandparents, at the age of forty. In this text, published in 2007, she recounts her memories of her life in France and of her early years in Australia, focusing upon the ways in which she reinvigorated her life following her migration. She depicts France as a place of constraint, where her approaches to relationships, wealth and happiness are restricted. Since she mentions that this is because she is a woman, we are able to use the text as a springboard to discussion of women's experiences. We live in the state that was the first in the world to legalise female suffrage, and we planned this lesson for the anniversary of this important event. A crucial element of Rey's text is her life in another language; while she continues to write in French, she depicts the freedom of choosing words in a different language, and we choose a passage in which she incorporates some English phrases. This enables us to begin a discussion of language learning itself: our question 'Avez-vous l'expérience de "redécouvrir votre propre langue" en apprenant une autre langue (le français)?' encourages students to reflect upon the process of learning a language, which passages in a textbook would usually not. As Liddicoat and Scarino suggest, 'using language to explore culture' is an essential component of intercultural competence.²⁷

²⁵ Liddicoat and Scarino, 24.

²⁶ Catherine Rey, *Une femme en marche* (Paris: Phébus, 2007).

²⁷ Liddicoat and Scarino, 23.

Our study of Rey, a lone female voyager, leads us neatly into the reading of Emmanuelle Ferrieux's *Tour de chant* published in 2014.²⁸ This text belongs to the genre of travel writing, which is another new genre for the students to read. Since Ferrieux writes from the perspective of a young woman travelling solo around Australia, making a living as a musician, students respond well to her youthful, daring attitude. Following the more poetic writing of Rey, this text is also less literary. The excerpt we assign increases the linguistic complexity since it is written in the imperfect tense, with which students are by now familiar. The excerpt also presents a different view of Australia, describing the land as viewed from an aeroplane. This enables us to ask the students to imagine the physical experience of travel, moving from one place to another place, and the expectations, sensations and anxieties that may accompany this. We pay special attention to our international students who are invited to recount their arrival in Australia, if they wish to do so. According to Liddicoat and Scarino's definition, this allows the students to engage in 'finding a personal intercultural style and identity' through increasing their intercultural competence.²⁹

In week five, we move to another solo female traveller, this time Patricia Gotlib, who wrote *Australiades : Voyage d'une Parisienne aux antipodes*.³⁰ As its title suggests, this text also belongs to the genre of travel writing but has a more serious tone than Ferrieux's work. Published in 1999, this text also recounts the experience of travel around regional and urban Australia but from the perspective of an older woman who travels to Sydney for primarily professional purposes. Following several weeks of work in an international finance company, the source of many comparisons between French and Australian business cultures, Gotlib embarks upon a highly spiritual tour of Australia. While the excerpt we have selected is written in the present tense, it contains more complex structures, including the subjunctive. Its cultural component is also more complex; it describes the centre of Adelaide, naming famous places and ending up at the university, in ways that both celebrate and criticise the city. Beyond the humour of this—Gotlib attends a concert at the University's Elder Conservatorium

²⁸ Emmanuelle Ferrieux, *Tour de Chant* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014).

²⁹ Liddicoat and Scarino, 24.

³⁰ Patricia Gotlib, *Australiades : Voyage d'une Parisienne aux antipodes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999).

and suggests that ‘toute l’intelligentsia d’Adélaïde est aujourd’hui rassemblée dans cette salle’—its balanced view gives students a means of agreeing and disagreeing with her observations.³¹

The work of Sophie Libion, another female solo traveller, is the subject of the following week. Written in 2015, Libion’s *Une année en Australie* is the most recent text students read.³² In a similar vein to Ferrieux’s work, this text is also a light-hearted travel narrative. It provides an interesting counterpoint to Gotlib’s text, since it includes a celebration of the capital of South Australia. Students who were offended by Gotlib’s portrayal of the city of churches find a more sympathetic observer in Libion—‘on dirait presque le sud de la France!’.³³ The excerpt we selected from this text also refers to sporting culture and the notion of belonging—supporting a club and being part of a team—which enables us to probe the ways in which foreign nationals view certain aspects of Australian culture that Australians may not even realise. We thus invite students to demonstrate, according to Liddicoat and Scarino’s definition, skills in ‘accepting that there is no one right way to do things’ and ‘valuing one’s own culture and other cultures’ are integral elements of intercultural competence.³⁴

In week seven, we turn to our final female solo traveller, Michèle Decoust. A successful writer of fiction and travel writer, Decoust has published several texts set in Australia, including fiction and non-fiction. *L’Inversion des saisons*, written in 1987, recounts her life in Australia over a five-year period.³⁵ As a more ‘literary’ writer, Decoust includes more lyrical descriptions of her surroundings and more complex forms, so her work is perfect for increasing the linguistic challenge to the students. The passage we select contains both the imperfect and the perfect tense, and even includes the passé simple, which gives us the opportunity to teach students in simple terms what this is and how to recognise it. The cultural complexity is also more challenging, since the excerpt we select is a lyrical depiction of Uluru as a sacred spiritual site.

³¹ Gotlib, *Australiades*, 89. ‘All of Adelaide’s intelligentsia is gathered today in this room’.

³² Sophie Libion, *Une année en Australie* (Paris: La Boîte à Pandore, 2015).

³³ Libion, *Une année*, 67. ‘It’s almost just like the South of France’.

³⁴ Liddicoat and Scarino, 24.

³⁵ Michèle Decoust, *L’inversion des saisons* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1987).

The author's decision to climb the rock, a practice which is now strongly discouraged by Indigenous owners, is a source of debate for our students. Although Decoust expresses the impact the experience has on her—'tout mon savoir, mon expérience des mondes étrangers me semblaient tout à coup dérisoires,'—her decision leads to sensitive discussions with our students of the many aspects of Australian culture, both past and present.³⁶ As Liddicoat and Scarino pinpoint, intercultural competence also relies upon 'accepting that one's practices are influenced by the cultures in which one participates and so are those of one's interlocutors'.³⁷

In the final four weeks of the course, we introduce the students to writers from the early twentieth and the nineteenth centuries. We begin with Paul Wenz, one of the best-known French-Australian writers and the subject of one of the first PhDs to be awarded in Australia.³⁸ Wenz migrated to Australia in the late nineteenth-century, living in Victoria and New South Wales between 1897 and 1939. He wrote several works, both fiction and non-fiction, with varying degrees of success. His work depicts rural Australia in particular, as he lived and worked on the land. We assign an excerpt from his novel *L'Homme du soleil couchant*, published in 1923.³⁹ This passage is more complex both culturally and linguistically yet students cope well, since they have by now amassed more linguistic knowledge and are more familiar with the task of reading observations of Australia from different cultural and linguistic perspectives. The excerpt describes Wenz's representation of the figure of the 'swagman', portraying the harsh life of a solitary man who lives in and from the bush. We exploit this passage to discuss the division between rural and urban Australia, which our students who are from regional areas particularly appreciate.

³⁶ Decoust, *L'inversion*, 125. 'All my knowledge, my experience of foreign worlds, suddenly seemed hollow to me'.

³⁷ Liddicoat and Scarino, 24.

³⁸ Erica Wolff completed the first PhD in the Humanities, 'A French-Australian Writer: Paul Wenz' at the University of Melbourne in 1948, as documented in an article on the history of the University of Melbourne: 'Key 68: Graduate Studies and Research in the Postwar University / Doctor of Philosophy 1946 / Dean of Graduate Studies 1950 / Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) 1975'.

³⁹ Paul Wenz, *L'Homme du soleil couchant* (Paris: Callman-Levy, 1923).

We also invite students to reflect upon the ways in which these French writers depict different examples of Australians over the course of the century.

In week ten we venture further back in time, discussing our first nineteenth-century text: Oscar Comettant's *Au Pays des kangourous et des mines d'or* (1890).⁴⁰ We assign an extract from this text that allows us to exploit the sensational, exoticising nature of some texts of this time. In one passage, Comettant recounts the danger kangaroos pose to humans, describing how they accost, assault and drown men by holding their heads under water. While we include humorous questions—asking them to explain the concept of a ‘drop bear’ in French, for example—this enables us to probe the idea of a ‘newly discovered’ nation and how this might be communicated to nations on the other side of the world. Although we are both scholars primarily of twentieth and twenty-first century literature, we believe that we must acknowledge the importance of history, both in our research and in our teaching, so orient the class discussion to the history of connections between France and Australia.

In the penultimate week of the course, we turn to the oldest text on the course. Antoine Fauchery was a well-known writer and journalist in France before travelling to Australia in the mid nineteenth-century. He worked as a miner in the goldfields of Victoria and as the owner of a photography studio in Melbourne from 1852 to 1866 amongst other jobs. During this period, he wrote *Lettres d'un mineur en Australie*, in which he recorded his observations of the early colony.⁴¹ These letters were published in serial form in fifteen instalments in *Le Moniteur universel* and were subsequently published in Paris in a single volume in 1857. This text thus brings students into contact with another literary genre—epistolary narrative—as well as with a new historical perspective.

⁴⁰ Oscar Comettant, *Au Pays des kangourous et des mines d'or: Étude des mœurs et coutumes australiennes* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1890).

⁴¹ Antoine Fauchery, *Lettres d'un mineur en Australie: Précédées d'une lettre de Théodore de Bainville* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1857). Several pieces on Fauchery have appeared in this journal, including Dianne Reilly's 1986 article, 'Melbourne Through French Eyes: Antoine Fauchery' and Jill Donohoo's 2015 article, "'Terre vraiment étrange": French Travel Writers on Australian Cities between the Gold Rush and Federation', which focuses on several French travel writers in Australia.

In the extract we select for the students to read, Fauchery describes the different nationalities he observes in the early colony and even criticises his compatriots, writing of the French that ‘ils parlent toujours trop haut, développent à l’infini des théories burlesques, perdent un temps considérable à discuter des détails insignifiants et ... font bien peu fortune’.⁴² In a humorous way, this text highlights the heterogeneous nature of migrant groups and allows us to discuss with students the changing patterns of migration in Australia since this period.

We end the course with another female writer, also from the nineteenth century. No study of French-Australian writing would be complete without reference to la Comtesse de Chabrilan, also known as Céleste de Mogador. Students are fascinated by the tale of the woman who was an illegitimate child, who had become a prostitute at the age of sixteen and who had been a dancer, actress and circus rider, before arriving in gold-rush Melbourne in April 1854 with her husband Count Lionel Moreton de Chabrilan, the first French Consul of Melbourne. As Jana Verhoeven has written, the Comtesse certainly ‘rejects the prized female attributes of demureness, passivity and gentleness’.⁴³ The extract we select for the students to read is the Comtesse’s observations of her journey to Australia in *Mémoires de Céleste Mogador*, published in 1858.⁴⁴

This enables us to discuss with the students the differences between travelling by boat and by air, since they have read another migrant’s record of her flight to Australia, and to point to the differences between the French

⁴² Fauchery, *Lettres d’un mineur*, 87, ‘They speak too loudly, develop absurd theories *ad infinitum*, waste a considerable amount of time talking about insignificant details and... make very little in the way of fortune’.

⁴³ Jana Verhoeven, ‘Les Deux noms and *Petit journal de la fin de ma vie* : Céleste de Chabrilan’s *Mémoires inédits*’, *Explorations* 49, no. 1 (2010): 7.

⁴⁴ Céleste de Chabrilan, *Adieu au monde : Mémoires de Céleste Mogador* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie, 1854). This work was translated by Patricia Clancy and Jeanne Allen and published in 1999 as *The French Consul’s Wife: Memoirs of Céleste de Chabrilan in Gold-Rush Australia*. Many works on Chabrilan’s quite extensive oeuvre have also appeared in the pages of this journal. For example, Verhoeven’s aforementioned 2010 article and Patricia Clancy’s 2009 review of Dennis Davison’s translation of her 1853 play about Melbourne, ‘Céleste de Chabrilan’s One-Act Comedy, *En Australie*’.

migrants who have made the decision to migrate to Australia over the last two centuries.

Assessment and evaluation

The way in which we assess this component of second semester French is intended to ensure that it forms an integral element of the course overall. The objectives of this component of the course are for students to demonstrate increased knowledge of vocabulary in French, a wider breadth of structures in French, and a more advanced level of cultural awareness. In order to assess students' demonstration of these objectives, we ask them to complete an individual written activity of 500 words in response to the readings. A written assignment of this length is challenging for students in their second semester of language study but we break the task into smaller components in the final three weeks of the course; we ask them to brainstorm individually, then to work in pairs to share their plan, then to complete a portion of a first draft that they workshop in small groups, before each individual submits their final version.⁴⁵ We aim for them to use the readings as a springboard to expressing their own ideas about cross-cultural comparison, thus encouraging them to show creativity in their writing. As Liddicoat and Scarino argue, intercultural competence should involve 'finding personal ways of engaging in intercultural interaction' and 'finding a personal intercultural style and identity'. These constitute the core of this assessment task.

In order to demonstrate these aspects of intercultural competence, students can choose from one of three tasks that they can interpret as they wish:

1. Comparez la représentation de l'Australie dans 2 ou 3 textes étudiés ce semestre. Quels stéréotypes discernerez-vous dans ces textes ? Que pensez-vous de ces stéréotypes ?
2. Imaginez que vous arrivez en Australie pour la première fois. Suivant les modèles que vous avez lus ce semestre, écrivez vos impressions de la nation.
3. Imaginez que vous visitez la France. Suivant les modèles que vous avez lus ce semestre, écrivez vos impressions du pays pour vos compatriotes.

⁴⁵ See Appendix for examples of students' final submissions.

The first option thus corresponds to a more traditional essay, asking the students to analyse specific texts and ideas. The second and third are more imaginative, creative pieces. We give options to the students because not all want to be assessed in the same way, and because we have a range of domestic and international students, including Indigenous students, who each approach Australian culture differently. As we hope to have shown in the subject matter described above, we aim to be as inclusive and as culturally sensitive as possible in our teaching, including in our assessment.

In accordance with the learning outcomes, and therefore the assessment objectives of this element of the course, there are four assessment criteria. First is organisation—students are expected to organise their writing into a clear and coherent structure with appropriate transitions. Second, since one of the main objectives is linguistic knowledge, is the range and accuracy of vocabulary used in their writing. Third is the range and accuracy of structures used. Fourth and finally, we ask them to demonstrate intercultural competence, according to Liddicoat and Scarino’s definition.

We offer them clear directions to engage with the cultural representations they have read during the semester and encourage them to quote from the excerpts we have studied in order to state and justify their opinion on the cultural observations the writers make. Even at an early level of linguistic study, students are able to point to the limitations of stereotypes, sensationalism or exoticisation and to advance more nuanced appreciations of their and other cultures. Interestingly, most students choose the traditional essay, perhaps because they feel more comfortable with its familiar format and its scope for analysis. The imaginative essays are also of a high standard, and appeal to a range of students from different disciplines—especially those studying creative writing and media—and to international students. Overall, the students demonstrate a high level of linguistic and cultural understanding in this assignment. In 2020, for example, all students who attempted the assignment passed, and 25% garnered a distinction or a high distinction.

At the end of the semester we requested feedback from the students on this component of the course. Key issues raised by the students in their evaluations included that they appreciated seeing the language in a different context, enjoyed the challenge of the readings and had expanded both their linguistic and cultural knowledge. A small number wrote that they

wanted to learn more about France. While we regret that these students were disappointed, we have long been committed to presenting much more than just France across all levels of our curriculum, including first-year. For this reason, we use a textbook that includes content related to both France and the French-speaking world. Since we use this textbook in four of the five contact hours per week, and only devote one hour to the French-Australian texts, the emphasis of the course overall is still on France and the Francophone world. While not all students appreciate this intention to decolonise the curriculum, many enjoy learning about the diversity of the French-speaking world.

Overall, we were very pleased to bring our research on French-Australian narratives to bear upon our teaching practice and to observe the contribution it made to our students' learning experience. Their written assignments and their performance in class discussions demonstrated a high level of intercultural competence as well as an improved level of linguistic aptitude. As shown by the pedagogical research into the place of literature in the language classroom, literary texts can play a central role in the beginners-level curriculum due to the range of linguistic and cultural insights they bring. Our experience in this course suggests that students can become sensitised to the use of literature in the language classroom from the very beginning, studying literary texts alongside a range of other authentic materials, as the MLA report suggested. We hope to continue to incorporate this component in future iterations of First-Year French and to expand it into intermediate and upper-level courses.

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Appendix

Examples of students' final submissions

Extract from a creative piece:

En Australie, la nourriture est très différente. En Europe, les gens m'ont dit 'il n'y a pas de culture de la gastronomie en Australie', mais je ne suis pas d'accord. J'ai rencontré des Grecs et des Italiens qui mangent de la cuisine européenne traditionnelle. Ils m'ont dit: 'Quand j'étais jeune, mes parents m'ont appris à bien cuisiner. Il y avait toujours beaucoup de bons ingrédients'. Mais, la majorité des Australiens ne s'intéressent pas à la nourriture.

Mes semaines ici sont devenues plus variées. Au début, quand je rentrais de l'université, je prenais mon café devant la télé et peut-être je faisais mes devoirs. Récemment, je suis allé me promener dans la 'Bush' Australienne. J'ai entendu parler de 'Swagman'—un mythe Australien sur les vagabonds qui voyagent à la campagne et qui chantent des histoires folkloriques! Ils sentaient des feuilles d'eucalyptus et ils voyaient divers animaux intéressants! Je commence à comprendre! J'ai vu un gros kangourou à côté de la rivière Onkaparinga. Ça m'a fait vraiment peur! J'ai entendu dire qu'ils sont capables de tuer des êtres humains! Mes expériences ont été incroyables! J'ai rencontré des gens extraordinaires et j'ai vu des choses remarquables. J'imagine qu'une personne australienne en France ressentirait la même chose. Vivre dans un autre pays est toujours merveilleux parce que cela aide notre compréhension.

Extract from a literary essay:

Dans ce texte, il est évident que l'expérience d'Adélaïde de l'auteur n'est pas agréable. La majorité de ce texte décrit négativement la ville d'Adélaïde, selon le stéréotype qu'Adélaïde est une 'ville vide'. Patricia Gotlib mentionne qu'une seule voiture passe dans la ville toutes les dix minutes et utilise le terme 'inhabité' pour décrire Adélaïde. Je ne pense pas que Patricia ait décrit Adélaïde de manière réaliste. Pendant la journée, les rues sont pleines de monde et de voitures. Il n'y a pas autant de monde à Adélaïde qu'à Melbourne ou à Sydney, mais ce n'est pas 'inhabité'.

Patricia dit également un commentaire stéréotypé sur la nature de la population d'Adélaïde, insinuant que la majorité de la population est sans vie et sans intelligence. Je trouve que ce stéréotype est faux. Adélaïde est plein de gens créatifs, intelligents, et passionnés pour les arts! Adélaïde a le titre 'L'état du Festival' pour une raison!

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