

Medieval French in the Modern French Classroom
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Rationale: A Case for Teaching Old French

In the French department at Berkeley, we use two very engaging textbooks¹ that emphasize cross-cultural understanding and authentic texts, and instructors are also encouraged to supplement their lessons with materials such as music, film clips, commercials, poetry, etc. However, in this context, “authentic texts” and other cultural artifacts are implicitly modern, most of them quite contemporary. The oldest French texts a student who completes our language sequence will see are not in fact very old, and there are rather few of them: in French 2 (second semester), students read an excerpt from Molière’s play *Le Malade imaginaire* (17th century), in French 3, a passage from Balzac and a few poems by Baudelaire from the 19th century, and in French 4, a letter from Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes* (18th century). This lack of medieval and early modern literature means that a student whose only opportunity to learn about French culture will be the language sequence could easily assume that there was no French literature of note before the 18th century. As a medievalist and as a language instructor, I find this troubling because of the rich cultural contributions of the Middle Ages are still relevant today, and because exposure to earlier forms of French would be beneficial to language learners as well as French majors. Due to my own training, the question of how to help undergraduates gain a sense of historical perspective has particular resonance: although I had no significant exposure to medieval French literature or the history of the period in my undergraduate coursework as a French major, in my third semester at Berkeley, I had what I half-jokingly call a “conversion

¹ *Chez Nous: Branché sur le monde francophone* (Albert Valdman, Cathy Pons, and Mary Ellen Scullen; Pearson, 2014) for French 1 & 2 and *Réseau: Communication, Intégration, Intersections* (Jean Marie Schultz and Marie-Paule Tranvouez; Pearson, 2015) for French 3 & 4.

experience,” when I read *Tristan and Iseult* in a facing translation, and I now specialize in the early verse romances of the 12th century. While I can’t be sure I would have fallen in love with Old French or the rich and vivid texts I work on as an undergraduate, I do know that my ignorance of the French medieval meant that my understanding of modern France was, in retrospect, incomplete. I didn’t know, for example, that the first (vernacular) stories about King Arthur were written in Old French; when I went to Paris for the first time, I didn’t know that the first French universities were centered around cathedrals like Notre Dame, and because I didn’t understand the power of the medieval church, I couldn’t fully appreciate how radical the French Revolution really was, and so couldn’t grasp the full implications of the modern French principle of “secularism.”²

Due to the course requirements for the French major at Berkeley, our majors are well-prepared to understand the ways in which pre-Revolutionary France continues to influence modern French culture; nonetheless, I want to argue for the benefits of showing language students earlier forms of the target language in approachable ways. Some exposure to Old French would put the medieval period on the radar of prospective majors who begin in the language sequence sooner rather than later, and students who only complete the language sequence would gain a sense of historical perspective. The idea that undergraduates should have some historical grounding is not a particularly new one: writing in *The French Review* in 1969, David E. Campbell notes that “many universities in the United States have successfully inaugurated curricula in Old French for undergraduates in recent years.” He justifies the inclusion of Old French at the undergraduate

² Here I would like to thank Mark Kaiser, Richard Kern, and Chika Shibahara of the Berkeley Language Center, and the Spring 2017 Fellows, Ellen Langer, Jann Ronis, and Christina Schwartz, for their help in taking this project from proposal to reality, and especially encouraging me to articulate the stakes of studying the medieval more effectively.

level in the program he designed for French majors at the University of Minnesota, Morris in humanistic terms:

The role of Old French Language and literature in this program was an important one. Whatever the student's post-graduate plans, he would have been exposed in some detail to the fact that French language and literature did not suddenly spring up out of the ground in Molière's time, but that, quite to the contrary, there was a continuity that made the Middle Ages not so "dark" after all. For the future high school teacher this is especially important. He would be better acquainted with the whole development of Western culture as it relates to his field and would therefore be able to communicate to his students his knowledge and, more important, his appreciation. He would become aware of the fact that languages live and change and would transfer that awareness to his native language...For the student who stops with the bachelor's degree, studying Old French is particularly valuable because...these French courses might well be his only experience with the history of language.³

While contemporary French programs – especially Berkeley's – fortunately emphasize "Western culture" far less, and language departments no longer expect the majority of their students to become language teachers or go on to graduate study, I am nonetheless struck by the idealism of Campbell's learning goals as well as their philological spirit.⁴ Teaching Old French gives students direct access to original texts, allowing them to encounter the generic conventions and stylistic features without mediation that can seem odd in translation. The "appreciation"

³ David E. Campbell, "Old French for Undergraduates: Two Approaches," *The French Review* (1969), 888. (Campbell outlines his department faculty's objections and his rebuttals in more detail than I have related here.)

⁴ There is no doubt much more that could be said about the changing role of the humanities and language study in today's highly pressurized university environment, but that would go beyond the scope of this report; I found my colleague Jennifer Mackenzie's Fellows Report (<http://blc.berkeley.edu/2017/01/24/italian-by-design-a-bridge-cours/>), in which she cites Sheldon Pollock's "Future Philology? The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World," *Critical Inquiry* 35.4 (2009), 931-61, very helpful in articulating my thoughts here.

Campbell describes is not, then, purely aesthetic; sensitization to the grammar and the literary tropes of Old French texts would hopefully lead a student to believe in the worthiness of medieval literature as an object of study, but also would help make the intervening periods of literature more accessible and readable as well. Overall, introducing students to the concept of language change remains useful to today's undergraduates, especially as the pace of the evolution of everyday English, and to some extent French, accelerates. Campbell's reference to the "dark ages" is, unfortunately, only more apt today, since in my experience, undergraduates' understanding of the medieval period is extremely heterogeneous. Many students have so little sense of the medieval world that *any* exposure to medieval France opens up the possibility of future study not just in French, but in medieval literature, history, politics, or linguistics, and so the stakes of bringing medieval French into the modern French classroom are perhaps of even greater importance than they were in 1969.

For the Berkeley French program, a comprehensive introduction to Old French and the history of the French language more generally would be too unwieldy to implement and certainly beyond the scope of what could be designed in one semester of fellowship. My project's aim is, more modestly, "exposure" to Old French: to make students aware of the existence of earlier forms of the language and to offer them a little taste of the rich spectrum of French literature and culture they might be able to study later. In order to present Old French as appealing rather than intimidating, I wanted this exposure to be as approachable as possible – perhaps a more complicated pedagogical challenge than it sounds, due to Old French's significant differences from modern French that pose difficulties for reading, even for native French speakers.

Old French: Difficulties in Teaching and the Problems/Solutions of Translated Texts

The term “Old French” (OFr) is used to describe the vernacular language that evolved from Vulgar Latin, and covers approximately the 9th to late 13th centuries. (“Modern French” is generally considered to begin around the early 17th century; for the French language learner, texts from the 17th, 18th, and even 19th centuries can be difficult to read, but this is mostly due to unfamiliar vocabulary, spelling, and stylistic choices, not so much grammatical differences.) William Kibler, author of the best-known textbook for learning Old French, describes it as being “distinguished by two traits: the existence of a two-case declension system for nouns, adjectives, and articles and the maintenance of hiatus, particularly in verbal forms.”⁵ For my purposes, introducing students of modern French to OFr, hiatus can be glossed over, whereas the case system is a more serious impediment to understanding. Despite often being used inconsistently, the two-case system in OFr allows for more flexible word order than in modern French, especially in verse texts, and certain case forms seem to reverse the singular and plural, which is at best non-intuitive for a reader of modern French.⁶ The spelling variation in OFr further complicates matters: the orthography of OFr differs from modern French in that it is both not standardized, and also varies according to region and/or dialect. As an example, the modern French verb *geindre*, to groan, might be spelled *gembre*, *gendre*, *geendre*, *ghiendre*, or *giembre*; while some of these forms might be recognizable to the student of (modern or Old) French, others certainly require familiarity with spelling possibilities, as well as a good OFr dictionary or

⁵ William W. Kibler, *An Introduction to Old French* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1984), 1-2. See also E. Einhorn, *Old French: A Concise Handbook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974). The “hiatus” Kibler mentions here eventually disappears in Middle French (for example, “j’ai veü” becomes “j’ai vu”), and is actually an important feature; see, for example, Jacqueline Picoche and Christiane Marchello-Nizia, *Histoire de la langue française, 5^e édition* (Paris : Éditions Nathan, 1994), 195.

⁶ See pg. 13 for further information.

two.⁷ Another, more conceptual, impediment to reading is the unfamiliarity of medieval genres and conventions, in addition to the lack of information about most early medieval authors.⁸

On top of these obstacles to reading Old French is the practical problem of accessing the texts themselves, and so my *point de départ* for this project was the question of how best to encourage students to engage with OFr without being overwhelmed by its unfamiliarity. Based on my Spring 2016 R1A class's surprisingly positive response to an excerpt of Christine de Pizan's 1402 masterpiece *Cent Ballades d'Amant et de Dame* in a French-English facing translation of my own, I wanted to experiment with level-appropriate facing translations for the French classroom.⁹ Old French-modern French facing translations of well-known texts are readily available, but are intended for specialists, not French language students, and to my knowledge there are no facing translations geared toward learners of modern French. The traditional strategy for bringing medieval French culture and literature into the language-learning classroom has been to in fact sidestep the question of Old French altogether by using modern French prose translations and/or summaries of medieval stories.¹⁰ While a translation might make the plot of a

⁷ For example, Frederic Godefroy's *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IXe au XVe siècle* (1891-1902, available in multiple online formats).

⁸ In teaching French medieval texts in translation in R&C courses, I have found the idea of anonymous texts and uncertain authorship particularly disconcerting to students who have been taught to analyze literature in conjunction with the author's biography; this is one reason I emphasized the anonymity of the *rondeau* in my first-year lesson.

⁹ *Cent Ballades*, which is available in an untranslated edition (*Cent Ballades d'amant et de dame* by Christine de Pizan (1402), ed. Jacqueline Cerquiglini. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1982), glossed for a fluent reader of modern French, is an excellent example of the kind of interesting, under-read text that training in Old French can eventually help students access.

¹⁰ Modern French summaries of OFr texts seem to have fallen out of favor at least in part due to more emphasis on authentic texts and more holistic concepts of literacy (see for example Richard Kern, *Literacy and Language Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For an example of a summary in a textbook chapter, see Gérard Jian, Ralph Hester, and Gail Wade, *Découverte et création: Les Bases du français moderne*, 5eme Edition (1990) 373-76.

story more accessible, modern French flattens many nuances of Old French, especially if the translation is in prose where the original text was in verse.¹¹

The difference in reading experience is dramatic, even in just these few lines from the passage I chose for my 2nd-year lesson:¹²

Rois, li renons qui de vos cort	Roi, la renommé qui court sur vous	<i>King, your renown</i>
M'a amené a vostre cort	m'a amené à votre cour	<i>Has brought me to your court</i>
Por vos servir et honorer,	pour vous servir et honorer,	<i>In order to serve and honor you,</i>
Et s'i voudrai tant demorer	et alors je voudrais y demeurer	<i>And I so would like to remain here for long enough</i>
Que chevaliers soie noviaux,	jusqu'à ce que je sois devenu un nouveau chevalier,	<i>That I might become a new knight,</i>
Se mes servises vos est biaux.	si ma service vous est acceptable.	<i>If my service is pleasing to you.</i>

Here, the translation gets across the meaning, but without the context of the rhyme, the rhythm, and the 8-syllable lines, the modern French would sound awkward standing alone. Furthermore, although the expression in the first line (“li renons cort”) more or less survives in modern French,¹³ OFr word order is flexible enough to permit the charming and rather typical homophony in the first couplet with the conjugated verb and the noun that mean different things but sound exactly the same. Even with no knowledge of OFr whatsoever, the facing translation allows for an interaction with it, so that students can make their own observations.

¹¹ There are myriad problems with translations of OFr verse into ModFr and into English, but the transition from verse to prose is a particularly unpleasant one. OFr often moves subjects and objects around in lines in a way that neither ModFr nor English can elegantly replicate; if a prose translation is necessary, a facing translation is of great help in understanding the logic of the text.

¹² Old French text cited from, and modern French translation adapted from Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, tr. Charles Méla and Olivier Collet (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994), 300. English translation is my own.

¹³ The idiomatic modern French would be “la rumeur court,” but for this translation I privileged the Old French over the Modern in order to underscore the similarity between “renons” and “renommée” – the only choice in translation I made that was this awkward, I believe.

In the modern French translations I prepared and adapted for these lessons, both of which were verse texts, I tried to keep line breaks the same without attempting to preserve rhyme, and to translate as literally as possible so that comparison between OFr and modern French grammar would make sense. For example, in line 350-1, one published translation elides the adverb “tant”; Alixandre is effectively saying, I want to stay here for *long enough* that I might become one of your knights, and getting this sense of time into the modern French is indeed awkward but otherwise, the “tant” in the original seems meaningless. In order to make the text more level-appropriate, I also glossed unfamiliar vocabulary and formatted the page to facilitate readability and note-taking.¹⁴

Lesson Design and Implementation

Because of the already fast-paced French language curriculum, I planned lessons to be self-contained and to take up approximately half of a 50-minute class period, and I wrote detailed lesson plans with the hope that instructors without expertise in Old French would also be able to conveniently use these materials. For first-year French, I designed a more culturally focused lesson, and for second year, a short reading. I selected materials for maximum approachability: thematically lighthearted, secular, and grammatically level-appropriate. For the first year, I presented a YouTube video of a performance of an anonymous 13th-century song that was largely historically accurate, yet modern and informal.¹⁵ For my second-year lesson, I chose a short scene from “Cligès,” a romance by Chrétien de Troyes, where a young knight arrives at King Arthur’s court that would feel typically medieval, but not too unfamiliar. Both of these lessons involved handouts with unexplained Old French on one side, and facing translations on

¹⁴ Please see Appendix 2 for an example.

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CBRNne5bXc>

the other.¹⁶ I piloted these lesson plans in six classes, three French 2 sections, two French 3, and one French 4.¹⁷ Although the first- and second-year lessons were quite different, I began each pilot session by asking students what they associated with the term “medieval.” This both informative for me – which I will discuss later – and encouraged students to ask about vocabulary they didn’t know (“le feudalisme” and “les nobles” came up many times, for example).

In an immersion context, introducing Old French to first-year French students was a delicate matter. By presenting a love song with simple lyrics, the anonymous *rondeau* “En ma dame,” I wanted to focus on cultural exposure and get them thinking about what medieval France might have been like. Who played music, and where? Who listened to it? Who wrote it? In trying to answer these apparently simple questions, students were introduced to the court culture of medieval France, medieval performance practice, and medieval authorship. Part of why this worked so well was the performance itself: it was filmed, so students could see the instruments being played, and the performers seem to be having fun with each other. Overall, it has a casual, chamber music feel that struck me as authentic, since this kind of piece would have been performed in a court, not a concert, setting. Yet the performers’ informality, and their refreshing lack of costumes, also made this video appealingly relatable and gave the *rondeau* a kind of timeless quality. In retrospect, the presentation of the video would have been more effective if I had played only the audio first, and then revealed the contemporary setting, to really emphasize the contrast between the medieval music and the modern performers.¹⁸ I played the song before

¹⁶ Please see appendices.

¹⁷ Many thanks to GSIs Lauren Dixon, Jordan Greenwald, and Patrick Lyons (French 2); Sarah Christofides and Emily Linares (French 3); Simon Rogge (French 4); and their classes!

¹⁸ Thanks to Chika Shibahara for this suggestion, which I am including in my revised lesson plans.

distributing the handout with the Old French text, after which I asked students if the text was in French – a question that was met with less confusion than I had suspected, whether because the OFr was recognizable or because by French 2, students expect materials to be entirely in French – and then asked them what the song was about, which had mixed success, even though “lady” and “heart” were glossed, and that might have been a good indication of a love song. Next, I asked them to interact with the text, asking them to do the unfamiliar task of translating, but framing it as a familiar one: to read the first line, “En ma dame ai mis mon cuer et mon penser,” and “correct” it in pairs, that is, to “put this line into normal French, the French that [they] know.” In all levels of French at Berkeley, students are specifically discouraged from translating, but they frequently see corrections, and correct each other’s work, on the board and in exercises. This, along with the limitations of French immersion, was why I used the otherwise inaccurate term “correct.” Most students were comfortable with this task, and could identify and recombine the elements of the line to make a more modern French-sounding phrase; this required them to think about the differences from modern French, such as spelling and word order, and, most startlingly to them, that a subject pronoun is not always obligatory with a conjugated verb in OFr as it is in modern French. Then I showed them the translation of the whole verse, and we watched the song again. With the text in front of them, students were easily able to identify the subject of the *rondeau*, and discuss the performance in more detail. Conversation varied organically between sections, but two questions I kept constant were whether they thought the song was simple or complex, and what it means to have an anonymous author. For a modern text, these might be fairly obvious questions, but they take on interesting complications in a medieval context; for example, asking about the complexity of the song ultimately asked students to evaluate their own criteria for judging a text and its performance, and to think about

the tension between the repetition of a text and the increasingly elaborate harmonies being sung. Similarly, does an “anonymous” text mean that one person wrote it, but without signing their name, or are there other ways that a text or a song can be composed? In this way, students were actually being invited to consider the much more sophisticated question of authorship, a vexed issue that is important to take into account when working in the medieval period. Although discussions generally went very smoothly, some students were frustrated by their difficulty understanding the Old French as it was sung, which was due to the difference in phonetics and phrasing between OFr and ModFr, as well as the general pronunciation rules for singing in French.

The second-year lesson was much more text-focused, and raised questions more explicitly about the cultural and societal context of medieval France as well as about Old French itself. In French 3, students are already working on close reading skills, so even if they were baffled by the original medieval text, I was confident they would be able to understand something about French medieval culture from the translation. I originally designed a handout modelled on the second-year textbook’s presentation of texts, with some background information on Chrétien de Troyes, one of the first great authors of French medieval romance, and Old French to orient students, but ultimately experimented with different introductions.¹⁹ I found that the less I emphasized historical background, the better response I had – it was more effective to start with a task right away after asking the class what they knew about medieval France in general (even though as a medievalist, I couldn’t bring myself to not frame the text in any way, and still included that background information in the handout). I asked them to decipher a short passage of Old French

¹⁹ Thanks to Rick Kern, who correctly predicted that opening the lesson by emphasizing the age and difficulty of the text at hand would not necessarily be the best way to engage students!

in pairs, not to translate it exactly, but to see what they could understand. These lines took the familiar form of an introduction, with fairly formulaic questions such as “Where are you from?” and “What is your name?” Before they worked together, I asked students to look at the text and tell me what they knew about it already – was it a description, a monologue, a dialogue, etc.? Was it in verse or prose? How could they tell? In the second two pilots, I broke up the octosyllabic lines by speaker, so that the conversation would be even easier to parse, although once students grasped the basic outline of the introductions, the full lines did not seem to pose too much of a problem.²⁰ Their work in pairs organically elicited curiosity about grammar, vocabulary, and spelling differences, and I asked them about what they noticed and answered their questions. Next, I treated the modern French translation pretty much the way I would any other second-year text; I asked them to read it with some basic comprehension questions in mind (i.e., to identify the characters, explain what is happening in the scene), and then we discussed as a group. After we established what the scene was about – Alixandre, a young foreign knight, presents himself at King Arthur’s court, hoping to be taken on as one of his knights – I drew their attention to some of its more salient medieval features. Why is King Arthur speaking French, for example? Does Alixandre have any qualifications for being a knight? Why would King Arthur accept his service? From students’ wide range of hypotheses, many of which were quite insightful, I was able to explain some of the underlying rules of knighthood and courtly culture. After discussing the scene itself, I then asked students to look over the Old French. I gave them some sample lines to explain and comment on to see how much they could extrapolate. By the mid-semester of French 3, second-year students are highly sensitized to grammatical details, and

²⁰ Counterintuitively (for me), using the full lines highlighted the rhyme scheme in what seemed to be an engaging way, and I believe that it was because of the obviousness of the verse form that students in the first class I visited, where the handout had the dialogue in octosyllables, were so curious to hear what Old French sounded like. (I am including some basic guidelines for OFr pronunciation in my revised lesson plans.)

it seemed that they readily applied their knowledge of modern French grammar to Old French, even exceeding my expectations. For example, in line 336, they were able to see that some pronominal verbs have hardly changed at all; in line 351, they easily identified the subjunctive of “to be” and noted the spelling changes between the OFr adjectival ending “-iaux” and the modern French “-eau.” Although I had not planned for explicit grammar instruction, several students were curious about the case system, in particular the apparent plural nouns (actually nominative case singular)²¹ paired with verbs they could tell were conjugated for a singular subject, and so in my revised lesson plan I am including a short, straightforward explanation of OFr cases.

Student Feedback

I measured student feedback in a short online survey, as well as informally by their in-class responses. In the survey, one student described Old French as “uncanny,” saying that “it sounded a lot like how I imagine a knight would speaking in English.” To me, this indicates that something of the liveliness of the OFr text was successfully communicated, and the choice of the word “uncanny” eloquently speaks to the strange experience, simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, of reading a text in an older, almost-understandable form of the language you study, as well as perhaps to the incongruity of seeing such an old song performed by such obviously contemporary musicians. Many compared it to reading Shakespeare, and one French 4 student claimed the OF text was relatively *easier* to read than Shakespeare! This might be attributed to the relatively less complex versification of octosyllabic couplets in comparison to Shakespeare’s

²¹ For example, line 351, “Li rois...respont”: the subject is in the nominative singular, meaning “le roi répond,” not “les rois répondent.” These second-year students’ impressive attention to the conjugated verb indicates, I think, that they would have been prepared to think about OFr case more specifically.

iambic pentameter and wordplay, or to the complex grammar students are expected to master in French 4 versus the relative lack of grammar instruction in most high school English classes. Overall, students were curious about a wide range of things: the genre of medieval romance, the history of the Normans, medieval French politics and war, more specifics on the differences between OF and Mod Fr, and what spoken OFr grammar would have been like. During the pilot, most classes requested that I read some lines of the OFr text aloud so they could hear how it sounded. Three instructors reported that students brought them additional questions after my pilot, and one French 4 student noted on her instructor's own mid-semester course evaluation a few days after my pilot that she would enjoy more supplemental activities like these.

The comment that surprised me the most was the French 2 student who wrote in the online survey, "I wish we could study more interesting cultural aspects of France such as this!" It's hard to square "more interesting" with the wealth and variety of contemporary cultural information students are introduced to in French 2, since, for example, in just two chapters of the textbook there is information on French holidays, changing family structures, ethnic diversity in France, how marriages are celebrated, how the French like to vacation, life in French *départements d'outre-mer*, traveling by train in France, French monuments, French hotels and lodging, and NGOs and nonprofits. I would read this student's comment not so much as a condemnation of contemporary French culture in the language curriculum, then, but as an indication of a kind of curiosity that, so far, had not been piqued. Perhaps it was simply the unexpected encounter with something unknown that seemed interesting to this student; however, I would like to think this comment gestures to the inexpressible foreignness of the medieval – the remove created by language and time – that sets it apart from the modern. Watching and hearing

“En ma dame” and reading the lyrics in Old French offered this student access to a very different version of French culture not portrayed in the textbook, and outside of the easily consumable French popular culture available online or through social media. It is this possibility of access that has animated much of my project; it seems to me that part of what we as language instructors want to offer students is the chance to learn about a world that would otherwise be closed to them, and over the course of this semester, I saw that giving undergraduates a taste of Old French, and by extension an inkling of historical perspective, was indeed exciting to them.

Conclusions

Although I was pleased by students’ positive responses, I have to recognize that my perspective might be skewed, since I was a novel presence in other instructors’ classrooms, and part of that response was surely just a result of a break in routine. However, this actually has interesting ramifications for the project in the future. Although one of my original goals was to design materials that instructors without specialized knowledge of Old French would feel comfortable using, I wonder if the format of classroom visits might not be more effective, and if so, whether some kind of teaching exchange could be set up, where instructors could present on their own specializations in other instructors’ French sections. This would enrich the French language sequence in many ways, giving students a glimpse of different historical periods as well as different approaches to studying French culture.

As for the materials I developed this semester, I hope the basic format of the lessons I have laid out here and their results will be helpful to other language instructors who would like to introduce older forms of language and literature to their own students. For the first-year level,

other forms of media instead of, or in addition to, music could be used – for example, images such as manuscript illuminations, stained glass, tapestries, or photographs of medieval architecture – and short texts, such as proverbs, might be included. Second-year students would probably also enjoy visuals and music, and I plan to expand my corpus of Old French texts to include readings of varying length, genre and difficulty.

In conclusion, I hope this project serves as inspiration for the language instructor who has expertise in earlier periods and feels limited by a contemporary cultural curriculum, as well as for the language instructor who would like to bring a sense of exploration and perspective to their classroom. I also hope I have shown that students of French are able to, and interested in, engaging with authentic medieval texts. More broadly, though, I would like to emphasize that the beauty and variety of Old French deserves to be experienced with as little mediation as possible, and that, with appropriate preparation, these texts can actually be shared with undergraduates.

« En ma dame » – rondeau du XIIIe siècle, anonyme

« En ma dame ai mis mon cuer et mon penser;
n'en partiroie a nul fuer.
En ma dame ai mis mon cuer,
si m'ont surpris si vair œil riant et cler.
En ma dame ai mis mon cuer et mon penser. »

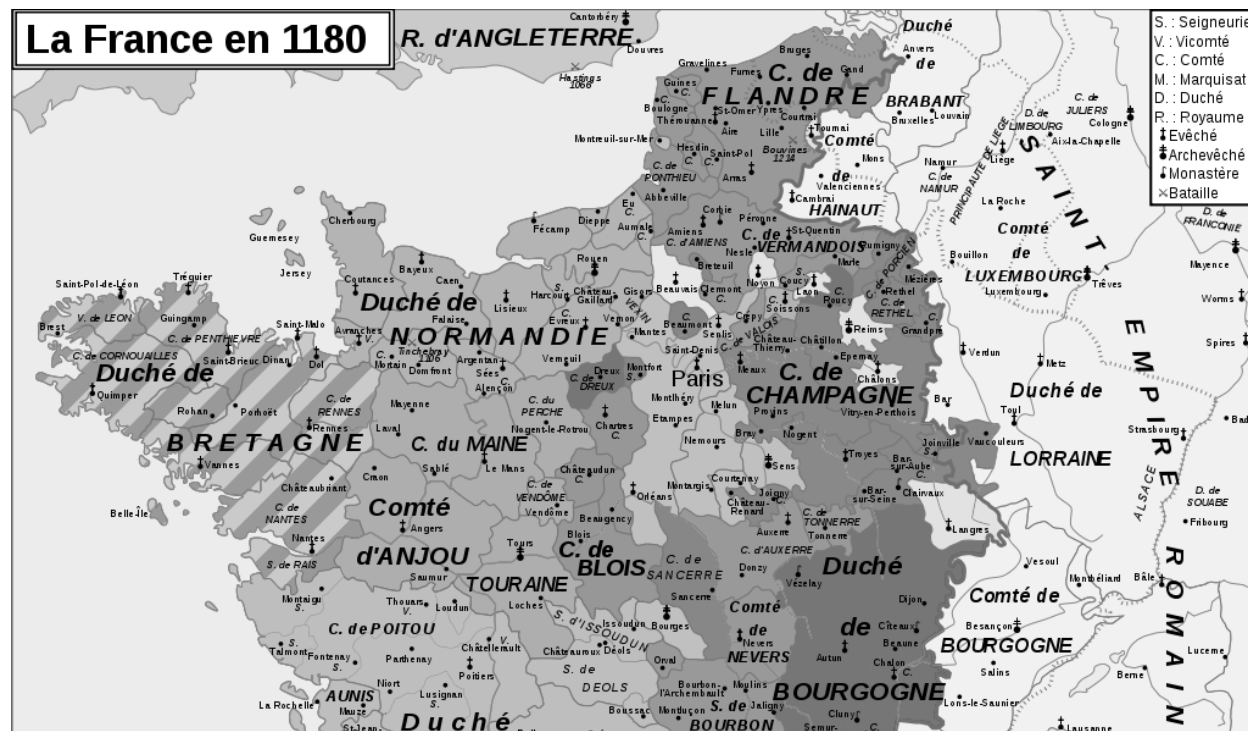
cuer = *cœur* ; penser = *pensée*

Premières questions :

Quels mots est-ce que vous reconnaissez ?

Quel est le sujet de ce rondeau ? (c'est un sujet qu'on voit très souvent !)

En regardant le premier vers (*line*), est-ce que vous pouvez le « corriger » et en faire une phrase en français « correct » ? (Vous devrez peut-être ajouter des éléments qui manquent et changer l'ordre des mots...)



<http://www.cartesfrance.fr/histoire/cartes-royaume-capetiens/carte-royaume-capetiens-1180.html>

En ma dame ai mis mon cuer et mon penser;
n'en partiroie a nul fuer.
En ma dame ai mis mon cuer,
si m'ont surpris si vair œil riant et cler.
En ma dame ai mis mon cuer et mon penser.

*J'ai mis mon cœur et ma pensée en ma dame,
Je ne me séparerai d'elle à aucun prix ;
J'ai mis mon cœur en ma dame,
Parce que ses yeux brillants, rians et clairs, m'ont surpris.
J'ai mis mon cœur et ma pensée en ma dame.*

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Lire les textes médiévaux (les textes du moyen âge)

Langue : l'ancien français (750 à 1400)

Genres : poèmes, lais, et romans (en vers et en prose)

L'écrivain Chrétien de Troyes : Chrétien (Chrestiens), qui écrivait vers 1160-80, est un des plus grands auteurs du moyen âge ; « Chrétien » est peut-être un pseudonyme, mais il est très probable qu'il habitait en fait Troyes, en Champagne ; il a écrit plusieurs romans, dont il nous reste 5, et des chansons d'amour. (Il a écrit aussi la première histoire d'amour entre Lancelot, le chevalier célèbre de la Table Ronde, et Guenièvre la reine !)

Avec un partenaire, essayez de lire ce petit texte – qu'est-ce que vous pouvez comprendre ?

(prenez des notes – ne regardez pas le verso !)

- Dont estes vos ?
- De Grece somes.
- De Grece ?
- Voire.
- Qui'st tes peres ?
- Par ma foi, sire, l'empereres.
- Et coment as non, biaux amis ?
- Alixandres me fu non mis.

Extrait de « Cligès » de Chrétien de Troyes (1176) : *Alixandre se présente à la cour du roi Arthur*

330	Douze furent sanz lor seignor, Dont je tant vos dirai sanz plus Q'onc meldres vaslez ne fu nus Mes sanz outrage et sanz desroi. Desfublez fu devant le roi	Ils étaient douze sans compter leur seigneur, de qui je vous dirai qu'il n'y eut jamais meilleur jeune homme, et en plus, sans orgueil et sans démesure. [Alixandre] s'est mis devant le roi, sans manteau, et il était très beau et bien taillé.	seigneur: <i>lord</i>
335	Et fu molt biaux et bien tailliez. Devant lui s'est agenouillez... Alixandres le roi salue...	Devant [le roi] il s'est agenouillé... Alixandre salut le roi... :	orgueil: <i>pride</i> ; démesure: <i>immoderation</i>
347	« Rois, li renons qui de vos cort M'a amené a vostre cort Por vos servir et honorer,	« Roi, la renommé qui court sur vous m'a amené à votre cour pour vous servir et honorer,	s'agenouiller: <i>se mettre aux genoux (ici, comme signe de respect)</i> la renommée qui court sur vous: <i>your renown/reputation</i> (« la rumeur qui court »)
350	Et s'i voudrai tant demorer Que chevaliers soie noviaux, Se mes servises vos est biaux. » ...	et je voudrais y demeurer jusqu'à ce que je sois devenu un nouveau chevalier, si ma service vous est acceptable. » ...	demeurer: <i>rester</i> chevalier: <i>knight</i>
355	Li rois tout maintenant respont : « Amis, fet il, ne refus mie	Le roi répond aussitôt : « Ami, fait-il, je ne refuse pas du tout	
360	Ne vos ne vostre compeignie, Mes bien viegnant soiez vos tuit, Car bien semblez, et je le cuit, Que vos estes fil de hauz homes. Dont estes vos ? – De Grece somes.	ni vous ni votre entourage, mais soyez tous les bienvenus, car bien me semble, et je le crois, que vous êtes fils de nobles hommes. D'où êtes-vous ? – Nous sommes de Grèce.	
365	– De Grece ? – Voire. – Qui'st tes peres ? – Par ma foi, sire, l'empereres. – Et coment as non, biaux amis ? – Alixandres me fu non mis La ou je reçui sel et cresse	– De Grèce ? – Vraiment. – Qui est ton père ? – Par ma foi, sire, l'empereur. – Et quel est ton nom, bel ami ? – Alixandre est le nom donné à moi quand j'ai reçu le sel et le chrême	le sel et le chrême: <i>salt and chrism (holy oil), part of the medieval rite of baptism</i>

370 Et crestienté et boutesme.
– Alixandre, biaux amis chiers,
Je vos retieig molt volontiers,
Et molt me plet et molt me hete,
Car molt m’avez grant honor fete
375 Quand venuz estes a ma cort.
Molt veuil que l’en vos i ennort...
Relevez sus, jel vos comant,
Et soiez des hore en avant
381 De moi et de ma cort privez,
Qu’a boen port estes arivez. »
...
Bien est Alixandres venuz,
Car a rien qu’il veuille ne faut,
388 N’en a la cort n’a baron si haut
Qui bel ne l’apiaut et acueille.

et la foi chrétienne et le baptême.
– Alixandre, très cher ami,
je vous retiens tout volontiers,
et cela me plaît beaucoup et m’égaie
car vous m’avez fait grand honneur
quand vous êtes venus à ma cour.
Je veux bien qu’on vous y honore...
Relevez-vous, je vous le commande,
et soyez dorénavant
des amis de moi-même et de ma cour,
puisque vous êtes arrivés à bon port. »
...
Alixandre est bienvenu,
car il n’y a rien qu’il veut qui lui manque ;
à la cour il n’y a un seigneur si haut
qu’il ne lui fasse un bon accueil.

dorénavant : *à partir de ce moment*