November 12, 2021

Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

James Madison University

Keezell Hall

MSC 1802

921 Madison Drive

Room 301

Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

**Application for the Position of Assistant Professor of Francophone Studies**

I am writing to apply for the above-named post and ask you to kindly take the following information into consideration in addition to the other documents I have submitted.

I am currently a postdoctoral fellow funded by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec – Société et Culture at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where I am also a lecturer of French in its Residential College (RC), a semi-independent liberal arts living-learning community. Before coming to Ann Arbor in Fall 2018, I graduated *summa cum laude* from a PhD program in literary studies jointly convened by the Université du Québec à Montréal and the Universität des Saarlandes, receiving both Canadian and German qualifications. I was also a visiting scholar (2017–2018) in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Universität des Saarlandes where I, with others, acted as substitute for Professor Mechthild Gilzmer. I have successfully taught French language courses to non-native speakers at all levels and advanced undergraduate cultural and literary studies courses of my own design in both Germany and the United States, as well as a survey course of my own design for native speakers of French in the Literary Studies B.A. program at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

My doctoral training took place within both a literary studies department at the Université du Québec à Montréal, and in an interdisciplinary group of doctoral students with a primary focus on cultural studies, with Professor Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink as chair, at the Universität des Saarlandes. Here, I designed and taught both French language courses and developed undergraduate literary and cultural studies courses in French. I have taught both beginners and more advanced students in French oral comprehension and expression around themes such as territorial inequalities and shared economy. I have also designed advanced undergraduate literary and cultural studies on the topics of migrant writing in Quebec and issues of interculturality and ethnicity in comics and graphic novels. I furthermore have substantial teaching experience at the RC over the last two years. In winter 2021, for example, I adapted my course on “Migrant Writing in Quebec” to align with the objectives of a third-year seminar in the context of an intensive and semi-immersive language program. I have included the syllabus for this course in my application documents for your reference. My course pays particular attention to the work of writers of Haitian origin who now reside in Quebec. My interest in Haitian diaspora literature is, furthermore, complemented by my ongoing work with the Haitian-American community in southeast and central Michigan as a research fellow and member of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee at the MotorCities National Heritage Area Partnership, a nonprofit corporation based in Detroit and affiliated with the National Park Service. I have provided further detail on this experience in my diversity statement. As a result of my experience, I would be very interested in developing courses that could be offered for your Latin American, Latinx, and Caribbean Studies minor, and to organize events for the James Madison University’s Furious Flower Poetry Center. I have also provided further details of other teaching experience at the University of Michigan in my *curriculum vitae*. My advanced, seminar style undergraduate course “From Comics to Graphic Novels: Interculturality and Ethnicity,” provides further testimony to my commitment to celebrating diversity and facilitating inclusion in the classroom. The course examines French, French- and English-Canadian, American, and German graphic narratives published since 2000, with a strong emphasis on issues of intercultural relations. I could readily adapt this course to encompass solely French language works for your students to meet the requirements of courses such as your “FR 447: Special Topics in French Culture.” Class discussions focus on how graphic narratives depict intercultural encounters and reflect on transcultural and ethnic issues, addressing topics such as race and cross-cultural misunderstanding through reflections on comics as a medium. This course also directly relates to my current postdoctoral fellowship research on the use and subversion of ethnic and national stereotypes in recent comics and graphic novels published in Quebec, France, and Germany. I have presented findings from my work in this regard at the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association in San Diego and as an invited speaker at Johannes von Moltke’s graduate seminar “Cinema and Migration: How to Look at Refugees” at the University of Michigan. My work has also been published in a recent issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Seminar* (Vol. 56, No. 3–4, November 2020). My research focus, more broadly, is on modern and contemporary Québecois literature and culture, specializing in intercultural approaches and issues including imagology, theories of cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural intertextuality, migrant writing, and reception studies.

I was educated in the French language educational system in Canada, grew up in a bilingual environment in Montréal, and therefore feel at ease in all levels of instruction in both French and English. However, I also possess a near-native level competency in German and am affiliated with the University of Michigan’s German Department. As such, I would very much welcome the opportunity to contribute to James Madison University’s German Studies major and minor programs. In German Studies, much like in French and Francophone Studies, my teaching and research interests lie in cross-cultural and human rights issues as depicted in narratives of migration. This past year, I have been looking for ways to involve political theory and ethics to a greater extent in my reflection on such narratives, as in how do literary texts reflect on high stakes issues such as immigration and naturalization criteria and the rights of irregular migrants and temporary workers. In this sense, your institution’s advocacy of “ethical reasoning in action” resonates deeply with my own teaching objectives: to train curious and competent intercultural learners and critical thinkers; and to help students identify how their education in French may be conceived of in terms of purpose, core values, and lifelong learning, as well as career objectives.

The fact that I have taught at many different types of institutions has well prepared me to develop courses for an increasingly diverse student body such as yours. The Université du Québec à Montréal has consistently distinguished itself by championing democratization of and accessibility to higher education. Many of my students were first-generation college students who also had to take paid work. At the Universität des Saarlandes, I developed courses that were offered, among other places, in the binational French-German Bachelor of Arts program, “Études franco-allemandes: communication et coopération transfrontalières/Deutsch-Französische Studien Grenzüberschreitende Kommunikation und Kooperation.”Each year, a cohort of both French and German students are admitted, the French-speaking students studying in Metz and the German-speaking students in Saarbrücken for the first year. In the second year, all students are together in Metz, and in their final year of study they pursue their coursework together in Saarbrücken. I thus had both French and German students in my courses. At the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, I teach in a semi-immersion language program in which my students are generally able to devote considerable time to their studies, and to language learning in particular. I have had excellent students and have felt equally at ease in all these settings. Moreover, given the topics of my courses, I can generally count on several students of recent immigration background enrolling in my course(s) during any given term. The course on migrant writing allows students to reflect on the implications of being a “minority within a minority” in North America.

While at the University of Michigan, I have completed my first monograph, based on my dissertation, *Les usages littéraires de Thomas Bernhard et de Peter Handke au Québec. Les modalités d’une affiliation interculturelle*, published on February 3, 2021 by Éditions Nota Benein Montréal. The book draws on a representative corpus of Québecois novels, short stories, and collections of poems published between 1989 and 2011 which exhibit substantial intertextual dialogue with the works of German language writers Thomas Bernhard and Peter Handke. My book shows the utility of the concept of “affiliation” for the intercultural analysis of surprising and unexpected literary influences. My research on perceptions of German language cultures in contemporary Quebec literature and culture, as well as on contemporary intercultural literature from Quebec and Germany, has been published in French, English, and German in the following peer-reviewed journals: *Littératures*; *Voix et Images*; *Eurostudia - Transatlantic*Journal*for European Studies*; *Zeitschrift für Kanada Studien (ZKS)*; *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*,as well as in different collections in Germany, including the recent *Klassik als kulturelle Praxis. Funktional, intermedial, transkulturell* (De Gruyter, 2019). I have also presented my work at several international conferences such as the Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association and the Annual Conference of the Association for Canadian Studies in German-Speaking Countries. I also presented a comprehensive summary of my work on perceptions of German language cultures and literatures in Québec as a keynote speaker at the yearly ACFAS congress in May 2021.

This semester, I am teaching the intermediate French conversation course “Intensive French II” at the University of Michigan for the third time. I am also currently responsible for the Thursday French language table; much like your department, we offer French tables which students must attend three times a week in their first year of study and once a week in their second year. I would look forward to taking on similar responsibilities in the context of your “Pause Café” and/or to serving as a faculty adviser for your French Club. Moreover, given my thorough training in both metropolitan French andFrancophone literatures and cultures – my B.A. in French language literatures at the Université de Montréal included a one-year stay abroad at the Université Paris VII – Denis Diderot – I would also be eager to participate in the “Summer in Paris” program. Finally, I have read with great interest the description of your institution’s “The Arts and Culture of Montréal” program and would be very keen to contribute to that, building on my still very active network of contacts in Canada, to develop partnerships that would allow for the creation of a new study abroad program for your students focused on language learning in Montréal or elsewhere in Quebec.

Given my varied and substantial training and the diversity of my professional experience as researcher, teacher, and colleague, I am confident in my ability to make an important contribution to James Madison University’s study programs. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to convince you of this in an interview. My *curriculum vitae*, references, a diversity statement, and my sample syllabus, are included with this application, but I would be happy to provide any additional materials you might require. Finally, may I thank you for considering my application.

Yours sincerely,

Louise-Hélène Filion