Research/Scholarship Statement

Québec Literature is a designation that dates back only to the 1960s. Its inception coincided with a wave of Quebecois nationalism that stimulated a rapid collective realization on the part of French-speaking Quebecers of their second-class status compared to English-speaking Quebecers. Like most literatures from marginalized cultures, it was long characterized by its ideological discourse focus on identity struggles in Quebec. Quebec literature was born from the unusual circumstances of the province that, until the 1960s, was culturally dependent on France despite no longer being a French territory for almost two centuries, while also suffering the consequences of the socioeconomic and cultural hegemony of Anglophone Canada. Quebec became a truly postcolonial *and* officially Francophone cultural space after the “*Révolution tranquille*” (*Quiet Revolution*). Many Québécois writers then took on the mission of emphasizing the value of a specifically Québecois cultural identity, distinct from that of the rest of Canada, and celebrating Québécois French as a cultural asset with its own dignity and value. It comes as no surprise that from the 1960s to the 1980s, Quebecois literary historians often read Quebec fiction through the lens of nationalist ideas of identity. From the 1980s, Quebecois literature began referencing earlier works in the genere, reflecting writers’ perception that quoting Québécois writers of the preceding decades testified to the existence of a genuine Québec literary tradition. In this context, the reception of foreign literatures beyond French and British literature in contemporary Quebec fiction has been deeply neglected and remains a largely unexplored topic in literary criticism. To address this shortcoming, I have researched the impact of German-language literatures and cultures in modern and contemporary Quebec literature for nearly fifteen years. My work on the “Québécoises Germanies” has led to pioneering theoretical models in transnational literary theory and multiple research projects in Migration Studies and Mobility Studies in Quebec Literature and German Literature. I intend to extend my research to include other minority French-language literatures produced in North America, especially Francophone Canadian Indigenous Literature and Louisiana Literature.

In some of my earliest work on perceptions of German-language cultures in contemporary Québec literature and culture, I examined eyewitness accounts and diaries of French Canadian civilians who lived in Europe during the Second World War that expressed a range of perceptions of Nazi Germany. Following long-term archival work at the *Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec*, I published one of my first book chapters on this subject (2013).[[1]](#footnote-3) I presented this research at an international conference at the Universität des Saarlandes (Saarland University, Germany), where I had the opportunity to develop professional relationships with several colleagues working there. These research collaborations led to co-organizing four international conferences (2017, 2018, 2022, and 2023) at the Canadian Centre for German and European Studies at the Université de Montréal and Saarland University. Most contributions to the two first workshops were published in 2019 in an issue of the peer-reviewed trilingual journal *Eurostudia: Transatlantic Journal for European Studies*,edited by Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, Robert Dion and me.[[2]](#footnote-4) Many contributions in this issue focus on how contemporary writers and filmmakers integrate diverse perspectives in their fictionalization of history through innovative patterns of perception of other cultures or the construction of inventive forms of intercultural memory. The current research project I am conducting with Robert Dion and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, “Connected Modernities: Québec-Germany 1900–2000. Literary, Cultural and Intellectual Transfers,” expands its scope to include the early twentieth century as we continue to reflect on Québec-Germany relationships. Our activities (2022–2023) are funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

Cross-cultural intertextuality is also at the core of my research, especially concerning Québécois-German cultural and literary contact. Having always been interested in how intertextuality replicates positive and conflictual cultural relations, I believe the study of authentic forms of cross-cultural intertextuality should be linked to a methodological and theoretical viewpoint that deliberately considers their cross-cultural nature. One of my earliest peer-reviewed book chapters suggests how we can build upon two recent French theories of intertextuality in order to develop such a viewpoint.[[3]](#footnote-6) This chapter is included in my application. My research into cross-cultural intertextuality and hypertextuality is my most significant contribution thus far to the field of transnational literary theory. I published my first monograph on this area in 2021, the first thirty-five pages of which I have included in this application*: Les usages littéraires de Thomas Bernhard et de Peter Handke au Québec. Les modalités d’une affiliation interculturelle*.[[4]](#footnote-7)In this book, I refine my concept of *affiliation* as an essential tool for the intercultural analysis of Québec literature. This analysis is based on a corpus of seven Québec writers (novelists, poets, and short-story writers) who have appropriated certain aspects of the works of Thomas Bernhard and Peter Handke. I reserve the central concept of *affiliation* for contemporary fictional works that not only present forms of cross-cultural appropriation of literary works from the past but also imagine a process whereby the contemporary writer’s *signature d’auteur—*that is, the author’s signature*,* or authorship and authority*—*tends to be reinforced through the relationship developed with literary heritage. The four-part typology I presented in my book is useful for examing on appropriations of distant literary traditions that empower contemporary writers from other minority cultures beyond those of Québec.

My book engages with the work University of Michigan Romance Languages and Literatures Professor Michèle Hannooscs. In the fourth chapter, I propose a systematic review of some of the fundamental contemporary Anglophone and Francophone theories of parody and pastiche to measure their merits and weaknesses for studying cross-cultural appropriations. The book also reflects on the utility of “affiliation” compared to other concepts used over the past 30 years to reflect on cross-cultural appropriations of literary texts, such as the concepts of “productive reception” and “cultural transfer.” It also discredits thefiliative view of contemporary Francophone Literature that has become so prevalent in Québec and France since the publication of Dominique Viart’s 1999 seminal article “Filiations littéraires.”[[5]](#footnote-8) Indeed, since this article’s publication, the concept of filiation, as opposed to affiliation, has frequently been used by scholars in France and Québec to analyze issues related to literary, family, and cultural legacies they have identified as essential to developments in contemporary fiction in both countries. Beyond studying the appropriations of German-language works by several Québécois authors, I have also shown how the German language can be integrated into contemporary Quebec fiction to engage with issues of legacies and thereby be interpreted as an “unexpected” inheritance or influence. My peer-reviewed article included with this application, *The Uses of German in Contemporary Québécois Bildung Narratives: Eric Dupont’s “Bestiaire” and Diane-Monique Daviau’s “Colères!,”*[[6]](#footnote-9) examines how German or some of its dialects enables the protagonists of two contemporary Québec prose works to reflect on the most private subjects, as well as to discover incapacitating family and filiative cultural legacies–and then to turn away from them.

As a visiting scholar and lecturer at Saarland University after my PhD, and shortly as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Michigan, I expanded my interests to the representation of situations of cross-cultural communication and the uses of ethnic and national stereotypes in graphic novels and comics published in Québec, France, and Germany over the last twenty years. Focusing on cartoonists such as Guy Delisle, Yasmine and Djibril Phan-Morissette, Nacha Vollenweider, and Paula Bulling, I pay special attention to the relation between stereotypes and the organization of dialogues, or the conventions defining how dialogue progresses. I am particularly interested in works that empower expatriates, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers by illuminating their cross-cultural competence in daily conversations. Employing both comic theories and theories of cross-cultural communication from the German-speaking world (Volker Hinnenkamp, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, Bernd Müller-Jacquier), I examine how the authors organize and develop conversations between those characters who are citizens of Canada or Germany and those who are not. Within the field of cross-cultural communication theories, I apply interactional approaches that often rely on linguistic analysis methods. Unlike film or television series, the comic book is a medium that has, to my knowledge, not systematically been studied through the lens of cross-cultural communication theories. Rather, comics that represent cultural diversity are usually analyzed through the often ambiguous notion of “multiculturalism”*—*a strategy adopted by Ayaka and Hague[[7]](#footnote-10) and Aldama,[[8]](#footnote-11) among others in the English-speaking world.

My research in this area was published in a 2020 special issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Seminar*, devoted to the Social Justice Work of German Comics and Graphic Literature.[[9]](#footnote-14) I focus on cross-cultural dialogues in Paula Bulling’s *In the Land of Early Risers (Im Land der Frühaufsteher*),[[10]](#footnote-15) a reflection on current affairs in Germany in 2012, characterized by demonstrations and hunger strikes by asylum seekers in the country. The comic depicts the daily life of refugees and asylum seekers in Saxony-Anhalt, especially those from Burkina Faso and Mali, representing the discrimination or racism they face and their attempt to defend their rights. In the same 2020 publication, I also analyzed Nacha Vollenweider’s *Footnotes* (*Fußnoten*),[[11]](#footnote-16) which tells the story of an Argentinian who immigrates to Germany at the peak of the European migrant crisis in the fall of 2015. As *In the Land of Early Risers*, Vollenweider’s graphic novel often links various forms of injustice faced by non-citizens in Germany at the hands of the forces of law and order. I show that in both comic books, the foreign characters are more capable than local Germans of working through cross-cultural communication difficulties, allowing the conversation to move forward. My paper furthermore reveals how these graphic narratives either completely subvert common stereotypes about Black Africans or encourage a reassessment of the alleged openness of Germany in an era of global migration and displacement.

In the same vein, I am currently preparing an article on *Khiêm*,[[12]](#footnote-17) a graphic novel recently published in French by Vietnamese-Canadian sibling cartoonists Djibril and Yasmine Morissette-Phan. This graphic narrative represents three women from three different generations: the grandmother in her youth in Vietnam between 1940 and 1950; her daughter, who fled Vietnam and ended up in Canada at the age of 15 in 1979; and her granddaughter, whose life at the intersection of Vietnamese and French-Canadian culture, is presented in the Montreal of the 1990s and 2000s. I am especially interested in how the daughter and granddaughter are depicted as “on duty” first- and second-generation immigrants, each playing a role while being deprived of an identity of their own, and how positive stereotypes of Canada as a land that welcomes for immigrants and refugees are subverted. Within studies of so-called Migration Literature in Québec, it should also be noted that the medium of comics, unlike the genres of the novel, the theater, or even the essay, has received almost no scholarly attention. Comics of this type have not been the object of any in-depth study beyond book reviews, to my knowledge.

In my scholarship as an FRQSC-funded postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan, my work has also addressed diversity in other ways. I examined the resurgence of a sense of democracy in post-Second World War German-language fictional texts through the relationship with an object, the Volkswagen Beetle, considered a widely-accessible car. My extensive research on German novels of the 1950s revealed that salient representations of the Beetle in this period all reflect an invested emotional attachment developed by various protagonists to the original Volkswagen. Based on motivational theories of emotions, my work argued that the relationship with the Volkswagen serves as a metaphor for emotions and related conduct. This is metaphor is valuable for the authors in the context of Germany’s post-WWII reconstruction and the return of the “democratic subject,” countering the paradigm of an “inability to feel” that scholars have long associated with the immediate post-WWII period in Germany. I was particularly interested in novels depicting their protagonists’ highly emotional relationship with VW Beetles, integrating key concepts and terms from Nazism and radically subverting their meaning to promote diversity. In *The Greased Lightning* (*Der geölte Blitz*),[[13]](#footnote-18) this technique allows for a positive evaluation of mixed /interracial unions. My research has shown that by consistently highlighting the importance of sympathy and empathy while depicting the relationship between the Beetle and their owners, the texts anticipate the more permissive emotional culture that emerged in 1960s Germany and in which more empathy with the victims of National Socialism could take shape.

In Michigan, my work on car culture has led to several collaborations extending beyond the academic community and expressly designed to address and promote issues of diversity and interculturality. These are described in detail in my DEI statement. In addition, inspired by the various research projects I undertook with Francophone workers in the automotive industry in southeast and central Michigan, I plan to include road narratives by Francophone Louisianian and Francophone Indigenous Canadian creators in my future scholarship. Researchers have already focused on road stories found within Quebec, Acadian, or Francophone Literature from the West of Canada,[[14]](#footnote-19) and research has been done on road narratives found in Anglophone Indigenous Literature and Art from North America.[[15]](#footnote-20) However, Francophone Louisianan and Francophone Indigenous Canadian literature, film, and music have not been studied in this regard. Nevertheless, comparative perspectives with the existing scholarship appear promising and raise several intriquing questions. Do Francophone Louisianian authors include forms of mobility similar to those found in Acadian Literature, as one might perhaps expect? How do Indigenous Francophone writers and filmmakers rely on cars, buses, or highways to integrate a reflection on the challenges they face regarding their languages and territorial claims—at times writing from Québec, where debates around the survival of the French language and territorial sovereignty also remain particularly sensitive? Drawing from a variety of literary and cinematographic genres, including non-fictional road stories and oral histories, and also from the medium of music, I will focus on how Louisianan and Indigenous Canadian Francophone authors foreground a quest for their rights through the road trip narrative – the road embodying various meanings, from colonial violence to a positively connotated site of cultural and linguistic memory for their community.

At the University of Michigan, I would also be eager to integrate data science tools and techniques into my research on Quebecois comics and graphic novels, enabling me to establish a quantitatively and qualitatively accurate picture of diversity and cross-cultural relations within them. While substantial research has already been done on cultural diversity within Quebec cinema, television series, and media such as newspapers and radio,[[16]](#footnote-21) and while the lack of racial or ethnic diversity on the theater stage in Quebec has given rise to numerous debates, especially in the past five years, Québécois comics have not been studied in this regard. I would like to undertake a history of Québécois comics from the angle of diversity. Drawing on recent work that addresses race and ethnicity in Hollywood films through digital humanities,[[17]](#footnote-22) I would like to explore the following questions and more: How many characters from different ethnic or racial groups are represented in Québécois comics?; What is the actual percentage of their contribution to dialogues?; How different or similar are the words used by Black, Near Eastern, or East Asian characters compared to the white characters?

A history of Québécois comics seems especially promising. This is because, after having long been perceived as an ideal medium for the incorporation of stereotyped images, the comic form has now come to be seen as having a significant transcultural potential: “Given its reliance on symbols and iconography, comic art speaks in a language that is accessible to a wide audience, transcending many of the national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries imposed by other media and giving it a reach that is as democratic as it is immediate.”[[18]](#footnote-23)

All these projects reflect my continuous commitment to intercultural approaches in literary studies, especially to developing such approaches to study minor literatures and the depiction of marginalized groups in contemporary fiction.

1. “Entre distanciation et médiation. Perceptions de l’Allemagne nazie et rencontres interculturelles chez Hélène J. Gagnon, Simone Routier et Paul Péladeau,” in Valérie Deshoulières, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, and Christoph Vatter (eds.), *L’Europe entre Texte et Lieu. Interculturalités en temps de guerre (1914–1954) /* *Europa zwischen Text und Ort.* *Interkulturalität in Kriegszeiten (1914–1954)*,Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, coll. Frankreich-Forum, 2013, pp. 199–211. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
2. “Les fictions de l’histoire – configurations germano-canadiennes et transculturelles,” a journal issue co-edited with Robert Dion and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, *Eurostudia. Transatlantic*Journal*for European Studies*, Vol. 13, Nos. 1–2(2019), pp. 183–391: <https://www.erudit.rg/en/journals/euro/2011-v7-n1-2-euro04209/1067279ar/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
3. “Nouvelles perspectives sur l’intertextualité interculturelle: théorie de la *référencialité* et *critique spatiale*,” in Christiane Solte-Gresser, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, and Manfred Schmeling (eds.), *Zwischen Transfer und Vergleich. Theorien und Methoden der Literatur- und Kulturbeziehungen aus deutsch-französischer Perspektive*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013, pp. 137–149. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
4. *Les usages littéraires de Thomas Bernhard et de Peter Handke au Québec. Les modalités d’une affiliation interculturelle*. (Montreal: Éditions Nota Bene, 2021). 460 pp. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
5. Dominique Viart, “Filiations littéraires,” in Jan Baetens and Dominique Viart (eds.), *États du roman contemporain*, Paris/Caen: Lettres modernes/Minard, coll. La Revue des lettres modernes/Écritures contemporaines, 1999, pp. 115–139. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
6. “The Uses of German in Contemporary Québécois *Bildung* Narratives: Eric Dupont’s *Bestiaire* and Diane-Monique Daviau’s ‘Colères!’,” *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien*, No. 70 (February 2020), pp. 143–162. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
7. Carolene Ayaka and Ian Hague, editors, *Representing Multiculturalism in Comics and Graphic Novels*, London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
8. Frederick Luis Aldama, editor, *Multicultural Comics. From* Zap *to* Blue Beetle, with a foreword from Derek Parker Royal, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
9. “L’usage des stéréotypes et la structuration des dialogues interculturels dans *Im Land der Frühaufsteher*de Paula Bulling et *Fußnoten*﻿ de Nacha Vollenweider,” *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 3–4 (November 2020), pp. 322–344. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
10. Paula Bulling, *Im Land der Frühaufsteher*, Berlin: avant-verlag, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
11. Nacha Vollenweider, *Fußnoten*, Berlin:avant-verlag, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
12. ##  Djibril and Yasmine Morissette-Phan, *Khiêm. Terres maternelles,* Montreal: Glénat, 2020.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
13. Martin Beheim-Schwarzbach, *Der geölte Blitz: Aus den Aufzeichnungen eines Volkswagens*, Hamburg: Hans Dulk, 1953. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
14. Jean Morency, Jaap Lintvelt and Jeanette den Toonder (eds.), *Romans de la route et voyages identitaires,* Québec: Éditions Nota bene, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
15. Deena Rymhs, *Roads, Mobility and Violence in Indigenous Literature and Art from North America,* New York: Routledge, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
16. Among others: Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Christoph Vatter (eds.), *Multiculturalisme et diversité culturelle dans les médias au Canada et au Québec,* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
17. Vicky Svaikovsky, Anne Meisner, Eve Kraicer and Matthew Sims. “Racial Lines: Race, Ethnicity, and Dialogue in 780 Hollywood Films, 1970–2014,” *McGill .txtlab Collaborations*, (June 2018), pp. 1–10: <https://txtlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Racial_Lines_2018.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
18. Derek Parker Royal, foreword, in Frederick Luis Aldama (ed.), *op. cit.,* p. x. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)