October 5, 2020

Department of Modern Languages and Literatures

Santa Clara University

500 El Camino Real

Santa Clara, CA 95053

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor in French and Francophone Studies at Santa Clara University. As a literary studies scholar specializing in 20th- and 21st-century Québec and French Literatures, my teaching and research focus on cross-cultural issues, including migration narratives; theories of cross-cultural communication, intertextuality, and reception; and comparative studies (mostly with German-language literatures and cultures). Currently, I am both a postdoctoral fellow in German and a lecturer of French at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, more precisely in the Residential College (RC), a liberal arts living-learning community within the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. This semester, I teach the discussion section of *Intensive French 2*, which covers in one semester the equivalent of a standard second-year college French course.

For my doctoral studies, I was trained both at the Université du Québec à Montréal and at the Universität des Saarlandes. I received my joint Canadian-German PhD in Literary Studies in May 2017. Before coming to the University of Michigan, I spent a year at the Universität des Saarlandes as a visiting scholar and lecturer in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. I worked with the Chair of Intercultural Communication and Romance Cultural Studies, Distinguished Senior Professor Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, to design and teach French-language courses and advanced undergraduate seminars in French and in French/German. These included *L’écriture migrante au Québec* (“Migrant Writing in Québec”) and *De la bande dessinée au roman graphique : Interculturalité et ethnicité* (“From Comics to Graphic Novels: Interculturality and Ethnicity”). These advanced undergraduate literary and cultural studies courses attracted a broad range of students, namely students with Cultural Studies profiles, Intercultural Communication and Franco-German studies majors who were particularly interested in the economic aspects of France-Germany relations, future teachers of French as a foreign language in Germany, and students of Romance languages and cultures specializing in both French and Spanish. I drew constantly on my students’ prior knowledge of a variety of disciplines to establish meaningful links to subjects and theories that were at times completely new to them. I am committed to adapting my teaching methods to the particular needs of my classroom.

My recent experiences as an instructor in the University of Michigan’s Residential College have made me realize that the American liberal arts educational model fully aligns with my view of what higher education should be. The RC, a small college within a large public university, proposes an interdisciplinary curriculum in which intensive foreign language study is both mandatory and tied to concrete engagement in the real world. For instance, the French program has developed a collaboration with Freedom House Detroit, a non-profit organization offering shelter and several services to asylum seekers in the United States, many of whom come from French-speaking Africa. Through a course offered in the RC, our advanced students of French engage with Freedom House’s legal department by doing, among others, supervised translation work. They are also introduced to the U.S. asylum process.

This type of community involvement resonates with my understanding of the Jesuit model of education as it is applied at your university. My desire for community service dates back to my days at the Pensionnat du Saint-Nom-de-Marie, a French-language high school in Montreal. Now secular, the school was founded by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary and has preserved through its International Baccalaureate (IB) program most of the values that were at the core of its foundation. In the context of the IB program, I volunteered at Les Scientifines, an organization whose mission is to promote the study of science, mathematics and technology to young girls between 8 and 17 years of age from underprivileged neighborhoods in Montreal in order to fight against school drop-out and poverty. In this specific program, volunteer work always entailed a genuinely interdisciplinary reflection across school subjects. This prepared me very well to undertake a scholarly agenda that is both community-oriented and reaches far beyond one or two areas of specialization.

I was first trained as a literary scholar, but I began teaching language courses in Germany after my Ph.D. I have successfully taught beginning and intermediate French language courses to non-native speakers in the United States and in Germany; advanced undergraduate courses of my own design in Germany; and a lecture-based course to French native speakers in the Literary Studies B.A. program at the Université du Québec à Montréal. My experiences in Canada, Germany, and now the U.S. have helped me realize how much I enjoy teaching literature, media, and culture to non-native speakers of the tradition in question. I believe deeply in the role of the professor as a teacher-scholar. In the context of foreign language education, I am at my best when I teach both language courses and more advanced literary or cultural studies courses.

While my primary background is in French Studies, I have developed an active research and publication agenda in German Studies as well. Maintaining robust involvement in more than one intellectual tradition has directly informed my own vision for promoting student interest in French Studies. Both in my language teaching and in my advanced undergraduate thematic courses, I employ a double approach. I consistently turn to the theories of cross-cultural communication that are at the core of my research while using “Activating-Mobilizing Methods,” strategies that are often utilized in the German higher education system. These draw on students’ prior knowledge in a variety of ways, which is why I find activities that allow students to become an “expert” on a topic across several weeks very useful. For example, my course *De la bande dessinée au roman graphique. Interculturalité et ethnicité* is an advanced seminar-style undergraduate course which could readily be transformed to encompass solely French-language works. The course examines American, French, French- and English-Canadian, and German graphic narratives published since 2000, with a strong emphasis on intercultural relations. Our class discussions focus on how graphic narratives depict intercultural encounters or reflect on transcultural and ethnic issues. We also address topics such as race and cross-cultural communication through reflections on comics as a medium. Most students who follow this course need a proper introduction to the distinctive characteristics of comics. This establishes a common ground for discussion and, importantly, discourages overly subjective reflections on these high-stakes topics. Assigning each student an area of expertise for at least half of the semester proves immensely useful in this course. All students read a series of selected seminal articles to allow them to learn how to properly interpret the medium. In addition, individual students are responsible for a specific subfield such as 1) the use of color and symbols in comics, 2) the types of transitions between panels, 3) the representation of movement, 4) the page layout, 5) the relationship between text and image, and so on. Students have told me that this approach helps them overcome the vulnerability that is often felt by adult foreign language learners, since it gives them the opportunity to display leadership when classroom discussions relate to their area of expertise.

Within the field of cross-cultural communication theories, I use interactional approaches that often rely on methods of linguistic analysis. These approaches focus on the dynamics of situations involving cross-cultural communication and are based on the assumption that, in such situations, parties involved in a dialogue behave differently than they would in situations of intracultural communication. These approaches also start from the principle that, in situations of cross-cultural interaction, parties continuously adapt their behavior in accordance with their interlocutors’ reactions or responses. I am therefore particularly interested in the representation of pauses, misunderstandings, attribution statements, and patterns. As a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Michigan, one of my research projects focuses on the uses of national and ethnic stereotypes in recent narratives of migration, particularly in French- and German-language graphic novels. On this topic, I have a forthcoming article in the next issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Seminar* (November 2020). Migration Literature has long been an interest of mine, and I would also bring to Santa Clara University substantial teaching experience on this topic in the context of Québec/Canada. I developed a course on contemporary Québec Migration Literature which was offered in Germany in 2013, and have been refining and adapting this course to other contexts since then. This past year, I have been looking for ways to involve ethics and political theory in my reflection on this field to a greater extent. Indeed, the fictional works I am interested in address many politically charged and ethical issues pertaining to the transnational migration of people (“Who should be admitted/get in?”, “Who should be naturalized?”, “What should the rights of irregular migrants and temporary workers be?”, etc.). My current teaching and research focus on migrant narratives would thus allow me to contribute in a meaningful way to your university’s Markkula Center for Applied Ethics.

In my reflection on Québec Migration Literature, I am particularly interested in the production of cultural communities in which immigrants’ backgrounds have evolved significantly across time and generations. I am thinking in particular of French-Canadian authors who immigrated from Haiti, from which a so-called “elite wave” of intellectuals and professionals arrived in Québec roughly around 1967–1977. Unfortunately, this community sometimes disassociated itself from the subsequent waves of compatriot immigrants who arrived in the 1980s and 1990s, many of whom had already experienced integration problems in Haiti and found their access to education or to economical capital compromised. Of course, such difficulties did not resolve themselves upon the immigrants’ arrival in Montreal. Yet, collaboration did occur between these different waves of immigrants. I would welcome the opportunity to build on this knowledge, and my interest in forms of disaffiliation and solidarity among immigrant communities, to establish a dialogue and potential research collaboration with sociologist and Professor Enrique S. Pumar at Santa Clara University.

As a Canadian native speaker of French, I was educated in the French-language educational system but grew up in a bilingual environment in Montreal. I feel at ease in all levels of instruction in both French and English. Thanks to my long-term stays in Germany and several intensive German courses, I have also reached a near-native level of fluency in German. At Santa Clara University, I would be delighted to foster intradepartmental connections with colleagues in German. My first monograph, *Les usages littéraires de Thomas Bernhard et de Peter Handke au Québec. Les modalités d’une affiliation interculturelle,* is under contract and forthcoming in February 2021 with Les Éditions Nota bene in Montreal. Derived from my dissertation, the book focuses on a subject that aligns with Professor Gudrun Tabbert-Jones’ work on Berthold Brecht and questions of influence. It proposes, through the concept of “affiliation”, a typology of appropriated foreign literary traditions in contemporary Francophone literature. It draws on a representative corpus of Québec novels, short stories, and collections of poems published between 1989 and 2011, all of which involve an extensive intertextual dialogue with the works of Austrian writers Thomas Bernhard and 2019 Nobel Prize winner Peter Handke. In my assessment of contemporary Francophone literature, I show how the affiliative tendency strengthens the authorship and authority of contemporary writers (*signature d’auteur*) in surprising ways. I also engage with postcolonial theory, as is typical of any critical reflection on writing “against” or “with” the literary canon. In the context of Québec Literature, I consider the complex effects of colonialism on the cultural sphere; however, I am primarily interested in establishing a dialogue between postcolonial theory and notions such as *héritage* (“legacy”) or filiation, which have been at the core of French and Francophone literary criticism over the past twenty years.

My research has also appeared in the peer-reviewed journals *Littératures*, *Voix et Images*, *Eurostudia. Transatlantic*Journal*for European Studies, Revue d’Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande*, and *Zeitschrift für Kanada Studien (ZKS)*, as well as in different collections in Germany, including the recent *Klassik als kulturelle Praxis. Funktional, intermedial, transkulturell* (De Gruyter: 2019)*.*

Finally, I would like to clarify my understanding of the Jesuit model of educating the “whole” person through another collaboration I developed outside the academic community (but in the context of my postdoctoral fellowship) since arriving in Michigan. On my own initiative, and on the basis of a research project on the representation of iconic cars in French and German literature and culture of the 1950s and 1960s, I reached out to MotorCities, a non-profit corporation affiliated with the National Park Service that interprets and preserves southeast and central Michigan’s essential contribution to the development of the automotive industry. The idea behind my partnership with this organization is to participate in projects that will help MotorCities reach out to communities whose contribution to the development of the auto industry has been essential but neglected so far. One of these projects involves, from my part, the recruitment and supervision of young graduate students from universities across Michigan. I will foster collaboration between these graduate students and leaders from certain cultural communities in the neighborhood of Southwest Detroit, namely the Mexican, Polish, Irish, Maltese, and Arab American communities. One concrete aim is to write sections of an online guide published on MotorCities’ website. This *Southwest Detroit Auto Heritage Guide* will describe the contribution to the auto industry of workers, businesses and unions tied to these various cultural communities. Short essays will be prepared through a series of well-defined stages that include archival research, workshops, and other activities. Each step will involve both the relevant cultural communities (mostly young activists and groups of retirees/seniors) and the graduate students. At Santa Clara University and in California, I would be keen to develop similar projects that benefit the general public, include a strong research component, and allow me to mentor undergraduate students. Given the location of your institution in Silicon Valley, these projects could draw on my interest in the history of technology, which goes beyond the history of the car or transportation.

Based on my training and professional experience as a teacher, researcher, and colleague, I am confident in my ability to make important contributions to your department’s French and Francophone studies program that reflect Santa Clara University’s commitment to civic responsibility. I would very much appreciate the opportunity to convince you of this in an interview. My curriculum vitae, graduate transcripts, a teaching portfolio, and two representative samples of scholarship (one in French and one in English) are included in my application. I have asked three faculty members to submit their confidential letters of recommendation. Dr. Elissa Bell Bayraktar and Dr. Florian Henke have also agreed to be contacted for additional letters of recommendation; their contact information is on the last page of my CV. I would be happy to provide any additional materials. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Louise-Hélène Filion