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,

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of Francophone Studies in the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures at James Madison University. 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 the Residential College (RC), a semi-independent liberal arts living-learning community within this college. 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 Saarland University (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 Saarland University where I, among others, had the opportunity to act as the replacement/substitute professor for Professor Mechthild Gilzmer. My research focus is modern and contemporary Québec Literature and Culture, with specializations in intercultural approaches and issues, including: imagology; theories of cross-cultural communication and of cross-cultural intertextuality; migrant writing; reception studies. I have successfully taught French language courses to non-native speakers at all levels in Germany and in the United States; advanced undergraduate cultural and literary studies courses of my own design in Germany and in the United States, as well as a survey course of my own design to French native speakers in the Literary Studies B.A. program at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

My PhD training took place in both a literary studies department at the Université du Québec à Montréal, and in an interdisciplinary group of PhD students with a primary focus on cultural studies at Professor Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink’s Chair of Intercultural Communication and Romance Cultural Studies within the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Saarland University in Germany. Here, I designed and taught both French-language courses and advanced undergraduate literary and cultural studies courses in French. In my language teaching, I have trained beginners as well as more advanced students in oral comprehension and expression in French around themes such as “*inégalités territoriales*” (territorial inequalities) and “*économie collaborative*” (shared economy). I have also self-designed advanced undergraduate literary and cultural studies on the topics of “*L’écriture migrante au Québec*”/“Migrant Writing in Quebec” and “*De la bande dessinée au roman graphique. Interculturalité et ethnicité*”*/*“From Comics to Graphic Novels: Interculturality and Ethnicity.” As outlined in my CV, I have also acquired a substantial teaching experience at the University of Michigan’s Residential College these past 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 a truly intensive and semi-immersive language program in the United States. I have included the syllabus for this course in my application. In this course, a special attention is paid to the production of writers of Haitian origin who now reside in Québec. Given my interest in Haitian diaspora literature, and my current experience working 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 – this experience is presented in detail in my diversity statement –, I would be interested in developing courses that could be offered in the context of your Latin American, Latinx, and Caribbean Studies minor, and to organize events for the James Madison University’s Furious Flower Poetry Center. Other teaching experience at the University of Michigan that has utterly prepared me to teach both elementary and intermediate French language courses at James Madison University is presented in my CV.

My advanced, seminar-style undergraduate course, “De la bande dessinée au roman graphique: Interculturalité et ethnicité/From Comics to Graphic Novels: Interculturality and Ethnicity,” also testifies of my commitment to diversity and inclusion in the classroom. In its current version, 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 a course such as your “FR 447: Special Topics in French Culture”. In this course, class discussions focus on how graphic narratives depict intercultural encounters and/or reflect on transcultural and ethnic issues, addressing topics such as race and cross-cultural misunderstanding through reflections on comics as a medium. This course is also directly tied to the research I am pursuing at the University of Michigan as a postdoctoral research fellow on the uses of ethnic and national stereotypes (and especially their reversal) in recent comics and graphic novels published in Quebec, France and Germany. On this topic, I have presented my work at the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association in San Diego and again as an invited speaker in Johannes von Moltke’s graduate seminar “Cinema and Migration: How to Look at Refugees” (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).

As a Canadian native speaker of French, I was educated in the French-language educational system in Canada, and grew up in a bilingual environment in Montréal. I therefore feel at ease in all levels of instruction in both French and English. I also possess a near-native level in German and, at the University of Michigan, I am affiliated with the German department. At James Madison University, I would welcome the opportunity to contribute to your German studies major and minor. In German Studies, much like in French and Francophone Studies, my teaching and research interests involve 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 (how do literary texts reflect on high stakes issues such as “Who should be admitted/get in?”, “Who should be naturalized?”, “What should the rights of irregular migrants and temporary workers be?”, etc.). In this sense, your institution’s call to develop “Ethical Reasoning in Action” resonates deeply with my own teaching objectives: to train curious and competent intercultural learners, and critical thinkers; to help students identify how their knowledge and learning of French may be envisioned in terms of purpose, core values and lifelong learning rather than just in terms of 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. Among them was the Université du Québec à Montréal, a Canadian public, French-language university founded in 1969 that has consistently distinguished itself by concretizing the ideal of democratization of and accessibility to higher education. Many of my students were first-generation college students who had to work several hours a week outside their academic commitments. 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 select cohort of both French and German students are admitted. The German-speaking students spend the first year of study in Saarbrücken, while the French-speaking students study at the Université de Lorraine in Metz. 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.

During my time at the University of Michigan, I also 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 Québécois 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. Based on the concept of “affiliation,” my book presents shows the utility of this concept for the intercultural analysis of surprising, unexpected literary influences. On perceptions of German-language cultures in contemporary Quebec literature and culture, as well as on contemporary intercultural literature from Québec and Germany, my research 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*. Furthermore, I also recently 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 (May 2021: Université de Sherbrooke/Université Bishop’s).

This semester, I am teaching for the third time the intermediate French conversation course “Intensive French II” at the University of Michigan. I am also currently responsible for the Thursday French language table – much like your department, we offer French tables which students must attend 3 times a week in their first year of study and once a week in their second year. I this sense, I would look forward to taking on similar responsibilities in the context of your “Pause Café” and/or to serving as a Faculty Advisor for your French Club. Moreover, given my thorough training in both metropolitan French *and* Francophone 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 utterly disposed to collaborate to this program and/or, 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 Québec.

In conclusion, on the basis of my training and professional experience as researcher, teacher, and colleague, I am confident in my ability to make important contributions to James Madison University’s French program. 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 in my application. I would be happy to provide any additional materials. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Louise-Hélène Filion