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, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, I am both a postdoctoral fellow in German and a lecturer of French 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, receiving 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, including *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: those 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.

Since last September, my experience as an instructor in the University of Michigan’s Residential College has made me realize that the American liberal arts educational model is fully in line 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 not only mandatory, but also 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 are able to engage with Freedom House’s legal department by doing, among others things, supervised translation work; they are also introduced to the US asylum process.

This type of community involvement resonates with my understanding of the Jesuit model of education as it is applied at your university. In fact, my desire for community service dates back to my days at the *Pensionnat du Saint-Nom-de-Marie*, a French-language high school in Montréal. Now secular, the school was founded by the *Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* and has preserved through its International Baccalaureate Program most of the values that were at the core of its foundation. In the context of the IB program, I did volunteer work 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 Montréal 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 which, I believe, has 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 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 self-designed courses 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 in 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, and, 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. In fact, maintaining very strong interests in more than one intellectual tradition has directly informed my own vision for promoting student inte

rest in French Studies. Both in my language teaching and in my advanced undergraduate thematic courses, my approach is double: 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 and which draw in a variety of ways on students’ prior knowledge – in this sense, I consider activities that allow students to become an “expert” on a topic for several weeks to be very useful. For example, my course “*De la bande dessinée au roman graphique. Interculturalité et ethnicité,*” an advanced seminar-style undergraduate course which could readily be transformed to encompass solely French-language works, 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 such topics 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 features of comics – this not only establishes a common ground for discussion, it also, importantly, discourages overly subjective reflections on such 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 do read a series of selected seminal articles allowing them to learn how to properly interpret the medium, but they are additionally responsible for a specific sub-field 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, etc. Students have told me that this approach has helped them overcome the state of vulnerability in which learning a foreign language in adulthood may often place one, since it provided them with adequate means to display leadership when classroom discussions were related 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 concentrate on the dynamics of situations of cross-cultural communication and are based on the assumption that, in such situations, parties involved in the dialogue behave differently than they would in situations of intracultural communication. These approaches also start from the principle that, in such situations of cross-cultural interaction, partners constantly adapt their behavior to the situation in question 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 a substantial teaching experience on a such subject in the Québec/Canadian context, as I developed a course on contemporary Québec Migration Literature which was offered in Germany in 2013 and that I have been refining and adapting to other contexts since then. This past year, I have been looking for ways to involve to a greater extent ethics and political theory in my reflection on this field; 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-Canadians authors who immigrated from Haïti: a so-called “elite wave” of intellectuals and professionals arrived from Haïti in Québec from roughly 1967-1977, and, unfortunately, sometimes disassociated itself from the subsequent waves of compatriot immigrants who arrived in the 1980s or 1990s, many of whom had already in Haïti integration problems, and a compromised access to education or to economical capital – difficulties that, of course, didn’t resolve themselves on their own at their arrival in Montréal. Yet, forms of collaboration between these different waves of immigrants also existed. In this sense, and because I am interested both in forms of disaffiliation and solidarity among immigrant communities, I would welcome the opportunity to establish, at Santa Clara University, a dialogue, and a potential research collaboration, with sociologist and Professor Enrique S. Pumar.

As a Canadian native speaker of French, I was educated in the French-language educational system, but I grew up in a bilingual environment in Montréal; I feel at ease in all levels of instruction in both French and English. Thanks to my long-term stays in Germany, and to several intensive German courses followed through the years, I have also reached a near-native level of fluency in German. At Santa Clara University, I would therefore be delighted to foster intradepartmental connections with colleagues in German. My first monograph – under contract and forthcoming in February 2021 with Les Éditions Nota bene in Montréal – focuses on a subject which is in line with Professor Gudrun Tabbert-Jones’ work on Berthold Brecht and questions of influence. Derived from my dissertation, my book “Les usages littéraires de Thomas Bernhard et de Peter Handke au Québec. Les modalités d’une affiliation interculturelle” 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 include 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 in surprising ways the authorship and authority of contemporary writers (“*signature d’auteur*”). I also engage with postcolonial theory, as any critical reflection on writing “against” or “with” the literary canon almost always entails. In the context of Québec Literature, I think about 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)* and in different collective works in Germany, including the recent *Klassik als kulturelle Praxis. Funktional, intermedial, transkulturell* (De Gruyter: 2019)*.*

Finally, and because it is in line with my understanding of the Jesuit model of educating the “whole” person, I would like to discuss one more collaboration I have developed outside the academic community since arriving in Michigan – yet, this collaboration also takes places in the context of my postdoctoral fellowship. On my own initiative and on the basis of one my research projects, which deals with the representation of iconic cars especially in French and German literature and culture of the 1950s and 1960s, I have reached out to *MotorCities*, a nonprofit 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 in universities across Michigan and will foster a 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. Concretely, the project is aimed towards the writing of the sections of an online guide published on *MotorCities*’ website called the *Southwest Detroit Auto Heritage Guide* –– and that will describe the contribution to the auto industry of workers, businesses and unions tied to these various cultural communities. Short essays will be carefully prepared through a series of well-defined stages that include archival research, workshops, and other activities involving, at each step, both the participation of members of the cultural communities – mostly young activists and groups of retirees/seniors –, and that of graduate students from universities across Michigan. I would look forward to develop at Santa Clara University and beyond in California projects of a similar nature that would benefit the general public while including a strong research component, and allowing me to act as a mentor to undergraduate students. Given the location of your institution in the Silicon Valley, these projects could draw on my interests in the history of technology, which go beyond the history of the car or that of transportation.

On the basis of 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 sample in French and one sample 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