September 17, 2021

Department of Romance Languages & Literatures

Wesleyan University

300 High Street

Middletown, CT 06459

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of the Practice in French in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Wesleyan University. I graduated *Summa Cum Laude* in May 2017 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 am currently a lecturer of French at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. I work in the Residential College (RC): a semi-independent liberal arts living-learning community within the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan. I am also currently a postdoctoral fellow funded by the *Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et Culture* in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at the same college.

Before coming to Ann Arbor in the fall of 2018, I was a visiting scholar (2017–2018) in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Saarland University where I substituted for Professor Mechthild Gilzmer from April to September 2018. 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 around themes such as “*inégalités territoriales*” (territorial inequalities) and “*économie collaborative*” (shared economy) and advanced undergraduate seminars in French and 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 believe that the exposure to cross-cultural communication theories I was able to acquire in Saarbrücken – first as a PhD student, and then as a visiting scholar and lecturer – has thoroughly prepared me to develop courses similar in format and content to your “French Way(s) (FREN223-01)”, and to initiate a collaborative departmental reflection on the integration of such theories in your beginning and intermediate French language course sequence.

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 would therefore welcome the opportunity to teach advanced French or Francophone literature, culture or society courses in French or English, as well as to teach in your institution’s First-Year Seminar program in English. 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. I have included in my application the syllabus for the latest version of my course on “Migrant Writing in Québec”, which I most recently taught in the winter semester 2021 at the Univeristy of Michigan’s Residential College after adapting it to align with the objectives of a third-year seminar/readings courses in the United States. I have also included the syllabus for the intermediate discussion French course “Intensive French II” I am currently teaching this fall for the third time (please note that this is the course head Dominique Butler-Borruat’s syllabus). Finally, I have include the syllabus for my course “From Comics to Graphic Novels: Interculturality and Ethnicity”, taught at Saarland University in 2018. Other teaching experience at the Residential College that would allow me to assume your “Elementary French” I and II courses is presented in my CV.

Since last September, my experience as a lecturer at the University of Michigan’s Residential College has made me realize that the liberal arts educational model is fully consonant with my view of what higher education should be. I believe deeply in the role of the professor as teacher-scholar and I particularly appreciate the close supervision and authentically individualized feedback I am able to offer my students in such an environment, not only in the classroom, but also in the context of feedback on assessments. At the Residential College, I teach classes of fewer than 15 students as part of a truly intensive and semi-immersive language program. I am also in charge of the Thursday “lunch table” in French, after having acquired, in my hometown of Montréal, substantial experience in organizing similar activities for both German learners and native speakers: I would be prepared to take on similar responsibilities in the context of your “Table française” or at your Maison francophone. My responsibilities as a PhD student at Professor Lüsebrink’s chair at Saarland University, where I was in charge of the stay of international researchers from various fields, among others visiting professors from Poland, France and Canada, as well as my own study-abroad experience in France and in Germany – before studying at the graduate level in Germany, I spent an undergraduate year at the Université Paris VII-Denis Diderot as a “Lettres modernes” student in 2007-2008 – have also prepared me to contribute meaningfully to the organization of various cultural activities in the context of the Vassar-Wesleyan Program in Paris.

My research focus is modern and contemporary French-Language and German-Language Literatures and Cultures, with specializations in 20th and 21st century Quebec Literature and Culture and cross-cultural issues and approaches, including reception and comparative studies; migrant writing; imagology/the study of cross-national and cross-ethnic perceptions, images, and stereotypes; car culture (especially, iconic cars as intracultural and transcultural mediators of identity). Some of my recent work in the latter field could lead to an interesting collaboration with Professor Stéphanie Ponsavady. During my time at the University of Michigan, I was able to complete my first monograph: *Les usages littéraires de Thomas Bernhard et de Peter Handke au Québec. Les modalités d’une affiliation interculturelle*.It was published on February 3, 2021 by Éditions Nota benein Montreal. The book draws on a representative corpus of Québécois novels, short stories, and collections of poems published between 1989 and 2011. The works chosen all exhibit substantial intertextual dialogue with the works of Austrian writers Thomas Bernhard and Peter Handke, winner of the 2019 Nobel Prize for literature. Based on the concept of “affiliation”, my book presents a typology of appropriated foreign literary traditions found in contemporary Quebec literature. Some of my recent articles concern contemporary Québécois *Bildung* or coming-of-age narratives in which the German language appears as a theme, and an analysis of Helmut Wietz’ graphic novel *Verlorene Illusionen* (2017), which is loosely based on Balzac’s *Illusions perdues* but relocates the latter’s famous satire of Parisian literary and journalistic circles to divided Germany, developing a rewriting of the history of the media in West and East Germany. My research has appeared in French, English and German in the following peer-reviewed journals: *Littératures*; *Voix et Images*; *Eurostudia - Transatlantic* Journal *for European Studies*; *Revue d’Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande*; *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). Other research and teaching interests include sport and leisure culture in Quebec, the literature of New France/the French Regime, and recent narratives that emphasize, legacy-related issues in France and Quebec, such as the “récits de filiation” (Viart, Demanze, Lapointe, etc.).

In Michigan, my work on car culture has led to several collaborations outside the academic community that are expressly designed to address and promote issues of diversity and interculturality and that resonate with my understanding of your college’s commitment to fostering an inclusive community. Specifically, in 2020, I reached out to the MotorCities National Heritage Area Partnership*,* a nonprofit corporation dedicated to explaining, preserving, and disseminating the important role southeast and central Michigan, and especially its residents, played in the development of the automotive industry. My partnership with MotorCities involves helping the organization reach out to a wide range of communities whose essential contribution to the history of the automotive industry has not yet been recognized.

The first project I am involved in is a collaboration on the creation and conceptualization of the Making Tracks II website, a follow-up to the already existing site, Making Tracks: The African American Experience in the Auto Industry (<http://www>.makingtracks.org), founded approximately ten years ago through a partnership between MotorCities, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, and the Ford Motor Company. This site presents a series of audio clips profiling African Americans who became leaders in the automotive industry. It retraces their migration journeys north to settle in Detroit, known as “Motor City,” and the many hurdles they had to overcome as black people to establish themselves in an industry they had largely helped set up. TheMaking Tracks I website currently treats material through the year 1947. With the Black Lives Matter movement in full swing, MotorCities has recently decided to develop a new website that will include the period from 1947 to the present day. Since the end of April 2021, I am the primary researcher responsible for selecting the content for the period 1948-1980.

I am a full member of the MotorCities Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee, which includes members of the organization’s board of directors. The committee has identified a number of minority groups whose contribution to the development of Michigan’s auto industry has not (or not sufficiently) been considered in MotorCities’ preservation work. So far, I have acted as MotorCities’ intermediary in approaching French-language groups in the region: our goal in initiating dialogues with certain individuals identified as “key contacts” within these groups is to better understand in what way(s) our organization can showcase their respective contributions to automotive history and thus tell more inclusive automotive histories. Thus far, the collaboration I have established with the Haitian Network Group of Detroit has been especially fruitful: this September, for example, I will record at Real Times Media’s studio of Detroit oral histories with several Haitian American engineers whom I was able to contact through the aforementioned organization and who have accepted to share their own experience and path. Furthermore, the interview I conducted with Mary-France Oudin, a French-American senior program manager at Mahle-Behr USA, has been published on MotorCities’ youtube page this summer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovrasmb6DNU>.

While these experiences are, of course, grounded in the reality/history of the region I currently live in, they also highlight my efforts to maintain a research practice that is anchored in my community. At Wesleyan University, I would, among others, be interested in taking an active lead in mentoring your students in their community outreach projects. I would look forward, for example, to designing for both intermediate and advanced students of French translation courses tied with community engagement – for example, through a collaboration with a non-profit organization in New England offering shelter and/or legal services to asylum seekers from French-speaking Africa in the United States.

In conclusion, 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 Wesleyan University’s French program. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to convince you of this in an interview. My curriculum vitae, statement on teaching, three course syllabi as well as teaching evaluations, are included in my application. Dr. Florian Henke and Dr. Elissa Bell Bayraktar have also agreed to be available for additional information and letters of recommendation. I would be happy to provide any additional materials. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Louise-Hélène Filion