

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF FRANCOPHONE STUDIES

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1. I had the honor of being named Silver Chair in April, 2002. This appointment emphasized, via my teaching and research, the role of Francophone culture and literature within the French Department and at New York University more generally. This is, in fact, an important statement about the *future* of French and Francophone studies in North American universities.
2. Since the 1980s, the evolution of the societies and peoples of the former French colonial empire in the Caribbean, North and sub-Saharan Africa has been expressed in the French language. The defining features of this post-colonial Francophone space—phenomena such as socio-political upheaval, demographic expansion, and increased education and opportunity—inform the rapid growth of multiple genres (fiction and non-fiction, poetry and theater) in diverse Francophone literatures. Let us not forget that in the past (from the 1930s to the 1960s) such leading figures as **Aimé Césaire**, **Léopold Senghor** and **Frantz Fanon** constituted a first axis of Francophone writing linking the Caribbean, African and Mediterranean worlds. Today, numerous doctoral theses, seminars and colloquia proliferate in these same areas, seeking new theoretical perspectives on these crucial questions.
3. Inside France itself, often in the suburban spaces of Paris and the largest cities, there is a revolutionary Francophone idiom being created by a generation of immigrants and their children. Born of the anger and despair of the most marginalized communities, this literature displays dynamic, disorderly and radically novel qualities that reflect its quest for an adequate expression of its multiple identities.
4. In response to the fundamentalist violence of the 1990s there is a growing body of feminist Francophone writing that radiates from Algeria to Europe and the Middle

East. Women writers use the French language to resist widespread misogyny, narrow conceptions of identity and retrograde socio-political movements. Writing in exile becomes, for some of these women, a real form of survival.

II

1. Faced with this new material, with all of its disorder, irregularity and unevenness, criticism (with the notable exception of **Edouard Glissant**'s essays on Caribbean Francophone literature) tends to be hesitant, contradictory and frequently lacking.
2. It would be neither presumptuous nor excessively ambitious to express my desire to form, within the Faculty of Arts and Science at New York University, a group devoted to the study of Francophone literatures and media. In the years to come, a group of 5-6 committed professors at New York University engaged in this enterprise would constitute an avant-garde of Francophone studies on a global scale.
3. The mandate of this group would fall into two parts:
 - a. During the first two years of its existence (2004-2006), the definition of a research program would be implemented through such special activities as colloquia, workshops, seminars and other scholarly forums. These would help form a future generation of graduate students involved in the definition—indeed, the expansion—of the discipline.
 - b. This program would necessarily build bridges with other departments and programs at New York University, such as Comparative Literature, Middle Eastern Studies and the other language and literature departments.
 - c. It is worthy of note that the most interesting work on Francophone literatures is currently taking place in Germany, Italy and Spain—which is to say, outside France. In France, with the exception of two or three universities, the

value of Francophone literatures is underestimated or approached from a conservative, traditional viewpoint. We have an obligation at New York University to cultivate and develop this program in order to modify the current situation.

- d. Among the most important issues to be investigated, we might list the following:
 - i. Women's studies.
 - ii. The literature of immigration.
 - iii. The confrontation between writing and violence, both in France and in the former colonies.
- e. Together with the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, the group will examine the relationship between literature, the question of gender and religion, specifically the status of the writer under religious censorship.
- f. Together with the many programs of the Tisch School of the Arts, the group will explore orality, cinema and music in works about and by immigrants and exiles. Often the Francophone does not content his- or herself with mere writing, but makes incursions into the visual and performative arts in order to find something that adequately express the memory of his or her heritage.
- g. After this first phase of the group's existence, and once its activities have been accounted for, plans will be laid for a wider and more permanent liaison between the Francophone studies group at New York University and other institutions in Europe, the USA and the Francophone world.