

EUROPEAN LITERATURE

European School of Political and Social Sciences Université Catholique de Lille
(rentrée 2013/2014)

« Europe has failed to conceive of its literature as a historical unit and I keep thinking that there lies its intellectual failure, never to be overcome », wrote, in 2005, Milan Kundera, the Czech novelist, in his essay entitled *The Curtain*.

The results of *Agrégation* and *Capes* (two teaching proficiency exams) were issued a few months ago, entrusting hundreds of young French teachers of literature with the mission of transmitting this fundamental form of civilisation. They will now have to solidify the basic knowledge of what we call, in France, ‘ the humanities ’ in classrooms of which they will be in charge for the next forty years or so; to give to the younger generations the love of our language, of our authors; to contribute to the culture of young men and women who, day after day, in their professional lives, will mix with their fellow Europeans of the 28, out of the 47, countries of our Europe; and to implement government instructions which – in despite of marginal cases of transnational relaxation – remain incredibly ethnocentric: the lists of set texts and books for students sitting the *baccalauréat* are still defiantly French-centred.

But what sin against Almighty God have Erasmus, Cervantes, Goethe, Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Pirandello, Kazantzakis, Gombrowicz or Claudel among others – those geniuses and conveyors of European humanism committed to deserve such ostracism? And even if, on account of the consanguine relationship between literature and language, the gradual acquisition of national identity demands first and foremost to become familiar with the national literature, it would be a singular form of blindness to overlook the network of allusions veining each and every page of Molière, Hugo, or Sylvie Germain. This has been true for ages and for all European artists: take away the European prism from the reading of Marguerite Yourcenar or William Shakespeare would amount to negating something, an act of dishonesty: in XXth century France as well as in XVIth century England, literatures, to some extent, meshed together and still do. Why undo, today, the Europe of the third millennium?

When Yourcenar, during her time in North America, explored her Flemish genealogy, she borrowed the title of her trilogy, *Le Labyrinthe du monde*, from Comenius, a thinker from Bohemia. Shakespeare, the English dramatist, finds the narrative behind *Hamlet* in Saxo Grammaticus, a Danish historian. Why deny the teaching of literature what is accepted in the area of musical culture, which takes on board its European dimension. Could you imagine a record library that would have works by Lully, Berlioz, Fauré, Messiaen only... Surprising! Or again some musical culture that had never heard of Purcell, Bach or Rachmaninov...

And yet, surprisingly, this is the model on which French students of all ages are taught to establish their own library:

Voltaire and his *Micromégas* : yes. What about Swift’s *Les Voyages de Gulliver* : maybe... Hugo’s visionary poetry: certainly. The poetry of Adam Mickiewicz (Mickiewicz?): never heard of him! Zola’s account of the corruption of French society in Napoleon III’s “empire”: that is important indeed. And what about Petronius describing the corruption of the Roman Empire? Well, why not? The passing of time in Proust’s *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*: brilliant ! Or in Thomas Mann: Mmm! Is literature in translation to be trusted...?

And so on and so forth, right up to the XXIst century, deploring that Solzhenitsyn or Andrukhovych are left so little room in the literary landscape of French students, because their

teachers have identified once and for all the Absurd and Revolt with Sartre and Camus, and Man's State of Disarray with Houellebecq in 2012.

Assessment of factual knowledge and methods of analysis acquired at the end of the course of "European Literature" will be by an examination consisting in a number of closed or open questions bearing on a literary or political text. Part of the questions will be strictly factual; the remaining questions will be related to underlined segments of the text and will require more detailed answers.

All this should change soon: on the initiative of Sénateur Jacques Legendre and of the Réseau Universitaire Les Lettres Européennes (University Network of European Letters), Recommendation 1833 of the Council of Europe in favour of the teaching of European literatures was adopted unanimously by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It stipulates that, from now on, Europe's forty-seven ministers of National Education should encourage the teaching – and accept the concept of "European literature". Mentioning it as such in a university prospectus is still a long way off however, unlike what has been done for Chinese or African literatures.

Yet, the impetus is here: ESPOL, l' "Ecole Européenne de Sciences Politiques et Sociales de l'Université Catholique de Lille" (European School of Political and Social Sciences at Lille Catholic University) has no equivalent. It seeks to offer excellent training (in political science), including a European dimension.

Assessment of factual knowledge and methods of analysis acquired at the end of the course of "European Literature" will be by an examination consisting in a number of closed or open questions bearing on a literary or political text. Part of the questions will be strictly factual; the remaining questions will be related to underlined segments of the text and will require more detailed answers.

NB

In his presentation, the writer of the above note has privileged the historical unity of European literature out of reverence for the illustrious Milan Kundera.

G. Fontaine : « The European Curtain », Lectures on European Literature, ESPOL 2012-2013

	Dates	Time	Teacher (1)	Lang	Teacher (2)	Lang2	Topic
Les Lettres Européennes. CM							
#1	18-sept	17h00-19h00	FONTAINE G.	EN/FR	DALIPAGIC C.	EN	Introductory lesson A Journey through Russian Literature (part1)
#2	25 sept	15h50-17h50	ROUBY F.	FR	FONTAINE G.	FR/EN	Arts et Culture durant la République de Weimar
#3	2-oct	15h40-17h50	DE CLERCQ M.	EN	FONTAINE G.	FR/EN	Motif de la mélancolie dans la littérature européenne
#4	9-oct	15h50-17h50	GORA B.	EN	FONTAINE G.	FR/EN	A journey through Polish Literature
#5	16-oct	16h00-17h30	FONTAINE G.	FR/EN	–	–	A journey through European Literature
#6	23 oct	16h55-17h50	DALIPAGIC C.	EN	–	–	A journey through Russian Literature (part2)
#7	6-nov	15h50-17h50	FONTAINE E.	SP/FR	GHILLEBAE RT C.	EN	A journey through Spanish Literature
#8	20-nov	14h50-17h50	VAN ACKER M.	EN	BUBERT M.	EN	Hagiography and its impact on Medieval European Thought Does the Romano-greek spirit constitute an “imagined community”?
#9	27-nov	15h40-17h50	CHIMKOVI TCH A.	EN	FONTAINE G.	FR	The Myth of the Wandering Jew in the European Literature and Thought Conclusion