

European Literature and Civilization in an ODL System: Problems and Method

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This paper is not intended to offer any theoretical approach: it will deal only with my own experience as an ODL professor of comparative literature in Master 2 level, i.e. students beginning to specialize in comparative literature or looking forward to working on a Ph.D. in this particular field. This means that the curriculum is not aiming to initiate undergraduate students or freshmen. Our ODL setting in Dijon University (Burgundy, France) is principally addressed to French students already working (mainly in education) or part time students; but we also have a significant proportion of foreign students, generally living in countries as far away and as different as Ethiopia or South America or (due to special agreements with Dijon) Morocco or South Korea. Students are not very numerous: as many as one can find in an ordinary higher-level seminar (about 15).

My presentation will focus on a course of the Master “Letters”: *European literature and civilization*:

Europe is at stakes, which raises two questions about this wide and controversial topic:

- is there a European literature ?
- how can we study the links and interrelations between literature and civilization in the vast and historically unsteady - sometimes unsettled - context of Europe ?

Maybe it should be the last subject to deal with in an ODL context, where a grand academic question requiring many different kinds of information is not easy to deal with. But we are in Crete where Zeus led Europa, so she can't be a foreigner here ... Nevertheless, such a question might well increase the average difficulties of an ODL course. Actually, we know that our students:

- are older than the average presential student;
- generally stopped their academic studies for various reasons: if they resume their literary studies, it is to improve their standing inside the French Educational system (to go in for teaching or to sit a selective examination), for some to be prepared for the doctorate, at any rate not merely to have a better CV. All this implies the necessity of affording students general and practical information, not limited to an extremely specialized topic; so we prefer to offer students material focusing on method, in order to help them manage general literary issues, such as myths, genres and intertextuality;

- suffer a lack of primary documents and libraries as well as a lack of time: most of them are working people, not necessarily in a field connected directly to their University work;
- belong to different cultures (European and non European); furthermore, as far as French students are concerned, most of them enjoy only a limited knowledge of foreign languages, having been principally taught French literature before.

What type of means do we have? For the moment, only written lessons (booklets) and audiovisual conferences can be used, in addition to two meetings a year; there is also, of course, the possibility of using e-mails to communicate with the Professor.

Our first duty being to preserve the necessary equality of opportunity between the students, the main question should not be to define what European literature and civilization are, but to sketch the main outlines of a particular method and attempt to give some valuable answers to the question, drawing on the student's curiosity and ability. Therefore:

- using a comparative method , we consider Europe as a whole, never focusing on any national literature or any isolated history of a particular country; the issue is to vindicate the necessity of a general outlook on literature, not general literature, but literature defined as taking place historically and geographically in Europe as a whole;
- more than delivering literary history data, the first aim is to give students some general indications allowing them to discover the possible intellectual connections between different human sciences, in order to build their own interpretation by themselves, using their own resources and valorising what they already know. This suggests a method leaning more towards tutoring than towards teaching.

What type of final examination will be used for evaluation? How can we evaluate the student's progress when facing such a large (if not limitless) question?

In fact, if we consider this course as an initiation to a method, the research process is more important than the actual result; it could not be a mere lesson to be repeated by memory or a mere explanation of a single passage from the boundless corpus belonging to the subject; so for the final examination we chose the essay form (from 20 to 30 pages) relating the student's principal Master work to the European context and background; this solution leaves the student choose what method and what aspect of the course are best related to his personal research; as Professor of Comparative Literature, I consider it more important to discover original links of all sorts within European civilization than to pile up lots of scholarly and erudite references. Therefore, the Master's Course should deliver the necessary orientations with basic information and material, in a way not far from what has been done by our

colleagues of the English Open University with their series of publications: *Key to Humanities* (Faculty of Arts, Open University U. P., 2005).

A **general introduction** about the possibility of defining European civilization requires recalling some methodological principles such as:

- to consider a unique civilization as made of different national cultures;
- to try to avoid the traditional division between historical method (influences) and formal method (structures and genres) in order to insist on the existence of a common European anthropology: there is a type of European Man, characterized by his specificity and his role in society, in relation with the use of common reference concepts such as mimesis, nature, reality, individual self-consciousness etc.

We shall describe the course in three stages: establishing the written material (both on paper and on the net), offering audiovisual complements, and setting the means of evaluation.

I – About the written material:

Introduction: the keyword here might be a consideration of the common notion of *man* as the object of a slow process of construction and production during the progressive evolution of European civilization.

This assertion of the importance of the human being goes logically together with the development of the philosophy of Descartes («to become as master and owner of nature», *Discours de la Méthode*, 1637) as one of the starting points of a new turn of mind in the discovery of nature. Asserting man as a major source of value and the centre of civilization could be understood through comparison with the collective outlook in Asiatic cultures and the neglect of positive action in the Buddhist or Hinduist religions. Contrasting with these latter forms of culture, the European individual is considered as unique (thence a philosophy of human rights) as well as developing a typical philosophy of action (meaning both imperialistic conquest and development of positive knowledge).

Therefore, the student is given a possibility of studying literature as a particular field where the long historical process of discovering the self and the notion of individuality can take place; this occurs both through the history of culture and the progressive establishment of individual self-consciousness (an important stage of which appears in the development of literary writing).

Six directions are proposed, forming six different chapters.

Due to the width and importance of the topic, a selective bibliography is necessarily joined to each chapter: it consists essentially of paperbacks (including English publications) dealing with the main outlines and offering a broad synthesis. *Six chapters* means of course six points of view which are intended to introduce the student to different forms of research and different topics.

1. Origins of the Western man: *history of ideas*

The origins of the Western man are related to three main directions:

- Ancient cultures inheritance: the first notion of democracy in Greece and the notion of public space, ruled by law and the equality between Roman citizens. The source might be the Roman concept of *auctoritas* - as studied by Georges Dumézil, who insisted on what he called the “function n°1” in Indo-European societies (Indo-European etymon *aug*);
- First shift with the Jewish and Christian conception of man due to the assertion of a unique and omnipotent God, source and creator of the world; from now onwards, each individual is gifted with a personal history and aiming at his own salvation. This last point involves a certain degree of freedom and responsibility;
- From the *jus gentium* to the Rights of Man during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries: the solitude of the creature facing God is slowly, during the Enlightenment, giving way to the democratic individual (citizen belonging to a nation) and to a man gifted with reason and able to exercise freely his sound judgment. Since Descartes and Locke, man has been considered as a rational being and common reason as a legal ground for equality.

2. Referring to *anthropology*: man as a work of art

According to this point of view, the notion of education (Greek *paideia*) becomes central in European culture: man is the aim of a peculiar process of construction which considers him to be a kind of work of art, gifted with qualities defined historically and according to the evolution of European culture. Thus, literature can be read as a succession of representations

of the ideal man; such representations run as active models of behaviour on the stage as well as in poetry and fictional prose.

a) new behaviours and social types:

According to the work of Norbert Elias (*Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, first ed. 1939) and the sociological notion of *acculturation*, one can discern various stages of the historical definition of the ideal man at work in famous literary works.

- chivalry: epic poems, from *La Chanson de Roland* to *Orlando Furioso* and *Gerusalemme liberata*, insist on the importance of military and christian qualities;
- courtesy: new steps in the education of man by means of his relation to women and his love allegiance - in complete contradiction with social practice: see novels by Chrétien de Troyes and mainly *Le Chevalier à la charrette*.
- with the extension of the Renaissance from Italy to all European countries, a new model of behaviour is born in princely courts and represented in *Il Corteggiano* by B. Castiglione. According to the conception of the *uomo universale*, the ideal courtier should be a man of arms as well as a man of letters, able to serve his prince as much as a skilful diplomat as a soldier active on the battlefields. At court, the *corteggiano* is a true patron of arts and letters, a nice companion in urban conversation and a cultured lover. An interesting feature of the book is the last chapter dedicated to the ideal woman, described as the true equivalent of her male partner (except for the military abilities, of course).

Immediately translated and imitated, this book has been the source of different national adaptations, according to the succession of historical leaderships on a cultural and historical scale:

- the *gentleman* enjoyed the longest influence from the reign of Elizabeth I to the Victorian period: model of behaviour and manners, it runs associated with the British practice of the *Grand Tour*, which introduced the habit of concluding one's education by travelling through Europe to end in Italy, in order to be initiated in art and literature there (see for instance Montaigne or Goethe).
- el *caballero* which could be defined briefly as the Spanish version of *il corteggiano* during the Golden Age (*Siglo de Oro*), insisting on the importance

of honour and social reputation (*la fama, la honra, el honor*) as well as on courteousness towards women.

- *l'honnête homme*, being the French version during the Seventeenth Century, insists on the role of social life (the *salons*) and conversation to shape the behaviour of someone «*qui ne se pique de rien*» (having a general knowledge of everything) without affectation and *pédantisme* (pedantism).
- *le philosophe* during the Enlightenment marks the end of the influence of the Royal Court as an active source in the process of civilization. Its development corresponds in time with the largest extent of the influence of the *salons* and of cosmopolitanism. The *philosophe* is not only a writer: he is a man using his rational abilities to counteract prejudice and vindicate tolerance; at the same time, literature deals with an increasing variety of subject matters, thus ending a movement initiated by the Italian Renaissance and leading to the huge enterprise of the *Encyclopédie* by Diderot and d'Alembert.
- During the second half of the Eighteenth Century, excess in intellectuality and rationality leads to a counterpart: *l'homme sensible*, a prelude to Gothic romanticism in England and *Sturm und Drang* in Germany. Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* and Goethe's *Werther* could be appropriate reference books here as witnesses of a general change, both in anthropology and in the anthropological attitude when facing and evaluating human passions.
- From the beginning of the Nineteenth Century onwards, the leading reference figure is the *artist*, with such variations of meaning as the radical denial of current economic values and the example of a life entirely devoted to aesthetic activity. By the second half of the century, the type becomes closer to the *dandy*, while the conception of literature is contaminated by the ideal of art for art's sake.
- On the contrary, with the advent of the "Affaire Dreyfus" in France and the extension of the dream of Revolution among the different socialist movements in Europe, the *committed intellectual* appears as a new form of the old «*philosophe*» of the Enlightenment: literature should not be isolated from the movement of History and the intellectual (writer, novelist, poet etc.) has a precise responsibility helping the rise of consciousness among exploited classes and recalling values like man's rights.

b) At this stage, complementary information must be supplied, on the slow rising of self-consciousness and sense of individuality in Western culture.

European civilization as a whole can be described as the slow discovery of the individual through different fields as philosophy, anthropology, religion and Law. This development entails the simultaneous emergence of literary genres as means of expression of new aspects of the individual. This chapter allows the student to integrate a general reflection about the European history of literary genres into his own experience as a reader.

Hence a quick sketch is offered, focusing on the relation between shifts in anthropology and new processes of writing, from the picaresque novel to autobiography, through epistolary novel and the modern *autofiction* (Dobrovsky). For instance, the picaresque novel is linked with Renaissance humanism as well as with introspection issuing from the Reformation; the *Bildungsroman* demonstrates the consequences both of Renaissance humanism and of the conception of the individual as unique, in societies where the *bourgeois* class is gaining ever more power.

From this point of view, a central opposition appears: that between the rationalistic fixity of anthropological concepts since Plato's description of man (in the *Republic*) and the regularly alleged dynamism of mind as part of Nature (see the *De Natura Rerum*, Jean de Meung's *Roman de la Rose* or Diderot's *Rêve de d'Alembert*). Finally, literary studies can't forget the practical consequences of Descartes's *cogito* on one hand, and the early representations of the unconscious before Freud, on the other hand.

The result of this chapter is to invite the student not to get lost among piles of historical references from Antiquity to post-modernism, but to become conscious of the integration of literature in the different components of what we call «civilization»: studying French, English or Greek literature is also a part of «general literature». Method, sometimes, is more important than the amount of precise academic knowledge.

3. Towards a common western *culture*:

The general evolution of literature as a constant reaction of interpretation by historical readers and a constant integration of new works in national cultures requires the use of what could be called «intellectual tools» necessary for its study: *intertextuality* (J. Kristeva) and *theory of reception* (H. R. Jauss), for instance, help us understand how the background of Western culture is framed.

The difficult problem of constitutive interrelations in culture can be conceived through a number of separate questions:

- What are the unifying elements of Western culture?

General use of Latin language right to the Seventeenth Century; the influence of medieval universities in Europe with a common method of discussion (*disputatio*) and statement (rhetoric); the role of famous European figures once embodying the European culture of the moment: Erasmus, Voltaire and Goethe, for instance; after the Renaissance, the great prestige of the Jesuit educational system and its *ratio studiorum*, the influence of which reached even far from the boundaries of Roman Catholicism; academies, «salons», and the constitution of an actual Republic of Letters during the eighteenth century, etc.

- What could be the main characteristics of European culture?

Curiously, the ability to use on the same level pagan and biblical sources, in order to form a language of common references; the link between education and the “humanities” gave rise to the idea that a complete education could be reached only by granting the first place to literary training; unchallenged prestige of Antiquity and imitation of its masterpieces; thence, presentation of Italy as a common European source of culture: the «Grand Tour» as a consequence; royal patronage, fine arts and private collections before the rise of Museums around 1800; engraving as a means of reproducing and popularising the leading works of art; and, of course, the quick rise of printing throughout Europe since the end of the fifteenth century which unified Western Culture and allowed it to spread more widely than even the Roman Empire could have afforded.

- Is the rise of individualism at the origin of the European will to power and its spirit of conquest?

Anthropology has shown the importance of the progressive assertion of the individual: is this conception of man linked with the challenge and enterprise demonstrated by the medieval Italian contractor and the Spanish *conquistador*? Self-assertion and individual enterprise seem to be the basis of European dynamism as well as the cause of this will to become «master and owner of Nature» put into words by Descartes.

- What is an artist in the European tradition?

This question is more important than it seems at first glance, because it is linked to the problem of individuality and the status of the work of art. Since Benvenuto Cellini and Michelangelo, the artist has been recognized both as a person and as the source of a unique vision, while the architects of the great medieval cathedrals remained generally unknown; this is concomitant with the status of literary works (i.e. authorship and copyright) in Europe,

slowly rising from uncertainty to legal acknowledgement during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when a new capitalistic turn of mind takes shape.

- What should be the basis of the work of art: hard work or genius?

During a first long period dating from Antiquity, the answer was to consider the artist as a craftsman with rhetorical gifts and trained to reach perfection: hence numerous treatises about poetics as if there were one single rational way to «produce» a work of art. Under the influence of the new concept of genius during the Enlightenment, the Romantic Revolution gave birth to a second period where passion and authenticity were the new criteria of true art. «Rhetoric» now comes to mean «artificial» and, for a surrealist poet, an authentic metaphor should have its roots in the unconscious of the individual.

- What are the relations between the Arts and Power?

For a long time, the development of the arts was considered as a means of asserting the reality of power and of representing the prevailing ideology: already in Ancient Athens, theatre performances were organised by the City and, later, in Royal Courts, pageantry, festivity and luxury were associated with the king, who made skilful use of the arts. Poets, architects, painters, playwrights and musicians were required to enhance the princely power of such monarchs as Elizabeth I in England, the Barberini family in Rome, Philip IV in Spain or Louis XIV in Versailles. This long history of dependence of the arts (and literature) on the leading powers raises a crucial question: is real independence possible for artistic activity, which has always been thought of in Europe as free from all sorts of economical and productive interests?

Possible methodological conclusion:

From a Western point of view, this culture as a whole reached its full expansion during the eighteenth century (Enlightenment and cosmopolitanism). Once again, a shift is perceived with the rise of Romanticism paying new attention to national cultural sources: tradition, folklore and national history. Hence a lasting European paradox consisting in a common vision of man and the birth of nationalism, rooted in each separate tradition: this paradox has dominated European history at least until the middle of last century.

4. Common aesthetic references: Aristotle's *Poetics*

European civilization can be studied from a narrower point of view by looking for common references in art in general and literature in particular. Aristotle's inheritance could provide a major common source: from the Renaissance onwards, a certain number of concepts

originating from his *Poetics* and translated (and even rationally organized) by Italian humanists, prevailed on every European reflection about aesthetics. A sketchy outline should recall and define them briefly:

- mimesis and catharsis: the former could be the source of a discussion of what the *real* world and realism have been before Nineteenth Century Realism. Can we speak of *realism* in relation to Boccaccio's *Decameron* or Cervantès's *Novelas Ejemplares*?
- poetics and dogmatism: once a technique is achieved, a danger of repetition appears which could explain the general sclerosis of European poetry and drama during the first half of the Eighteenth Century.
- Once works like Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* were considered as models (even by Aristotle), the practice of imitation of ancient forms prevailed until the Romantic shift. This can be witnessed in the history of the novel in Europe: since the Middle Ages the epic has provided the constant reference for all types of fiction; as if this new form were unable to assert itself outside of the authorised imitation of famous Greek or Roman models (see for instance Fielding's *Tom Jones*), in so far as Aristotle himself did not consider the novel in his *Poetics*.

It could be useful to recall now the new interest (since the last quarter of the last century) demonstrated by some aspects of literary criticism for the Aristotelian doctrine and its concepts (see for instance works by the French critic Gérard Genette in *Figures*).

While Aristotelian poetics was a constant and durable reference in European culture, an other method of exposition could as well focus on the concealed opposition undermining the ancient coherence: an opposition between melancholy and reason, Dionysus and Apollo, running from the Elizabethan period to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

5. Rethinking *history*: from national history to European history

For Master level students in literature there is no need, of course, to learn everything about the complicated European History, although, during the last two decades, some good syntheses were written insisting on the necessity not to consider European History as the mere adding of several national histories, but as a whole, with its own rhythm and unity.

An ODL course could give a comprehensive view of European history by helping students:

- to learn how to replace political maps by cultural maps, to get into the habit of displaying the notion of cultural leadership versus political leadership. On a large European scale, the history of literature demonstrates a succession of cultural centers:

for instance, Italy is a cultural leader for Europe, challenged only by Spain until Louis XIV's France takes the leading part, a preponderance challenged only by Great Britain during the first half of the Eighteenth Century.

- European frontiers: it is necessary to define a moving geographical definition of Europe: from the old centre of Antiquity in the area of the Mediterranean sea to the new balance after Columbus's discovery of America and the growing importance of trade across the Atlantic Ocean. Major axes of development are from South to North and from Western Europe to the Eastern borders while the Turkish Empire collapses.
- the difference between key historical events (like battles) and evolution over a longer period: there is a logical duration of space and time which is independent of the history of kingdoms and nations, the latter being included in larger movements affecting the balance of geographical spaces (the works by the French «Ecole des Annales» and Fernand Braudel are pertinent here).
- To what extent does literature attend the rhythms of European history which appears as a succession of alternating developments and crises. For instance, the Medieval period reaches its peak during the Twelfth Century, while the Hundred Years War and the Great Plague are a period of regression and difficulty ending only with the social expansion and intellectual mobility of the Renaissance; on the contrary, the Seventeenth Century, known as a brilliant period for the arts and literatures, coincides with difficult times for the peoples of Europe (political disorder, multiplication of wars, return of plagues and frost all over Europe, etc.).

To conclude, the student is invited to discover the connections between the development of tragedy (in England, France as well as in Spain) and the weakness felt by the European man during the difficult times of the late Sixteenth and the Seventeenth centuries.

6. A history of *the idea of Europe*: ancient and modern conceptions of Europe.

In classical fashion, the definition of European civilization may start with the advent and evolution of the idea of Europe among its inhabitants. From the Antiquity onwards, people were less eager to define themselves than to assess their identity *against* someone else. Such was the first occurrence, when the Greeks defeated the Persians at Marathon and Salamine (see *The Persians* by Aeschylus): their fight for freedom was widely understood as a battle for civilization against Barbarians. In the course of time, Rome followed until its empire collapsed in front of numerous invasions. Next, this fundamental and constitutive

opposition took the new form of contrasting the Christians with the Pagans or the Muslim, political or religious unity with diversity of states, the city of God with human cities, tyranny and totalitarianism with democracy and the rights of man etc.

On the other hand, Europe as a clearly conceived idea rose late in history, being at the beginning a sort of political utopia against war between close and fraternal nations: maybe since Henri IV of France and his «grand dessein», Europe has been used by royal propaganda to claim leadership for Spain or France. With the end of LouisXIV's dream of European leadership and by the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, the idea of «political balance » between the different nations came into view; this idea was to become the centre of British foreign policy to this day.

A clear conception of Europe as «civilization »invites the student to observe in different literatures such movements as:

- the discovery of the New World and the meeting of the Other: hence the «noble savage» and the taste for exotic literature; hence also the anthropological idea of the «state of nature» (see Rousseau and Diderot).
- the birth of what we call now «Europeocentrism»: the paradox of two centuries of nationalisms (1750-1950) and the general conviction among European peoples to bring by force «civilization» to the new found «Barbarians» by means of colonialism.
- Post-colonialism and emerging literatures (in Africa for instance): asserting themselves, enhancing their local inheritance, but also acknowledging their debts regarding European literatures.

II - Audiovisual material

A series of documents in the form of audiovisual conferences reviewing the aesthetic history of Europe and following the different periods commonly distinguished in art history, is offered to the students.

Regarding the different periods, two types of classification are used systematically:

- Historical: a chronology is established for each period, displaying the main authors and global duration on a European scale. For instance, referring to the baroque period, art, literature and music are compared – with mention of the longer span of the baroque in music, from Monteverdi to Handel and Bach;
- Aesthetic: the main characteristics of each period are mentioned (forms, themes and topoi as well as poetical treatises).

Thus, the student has at his disposal a sequence of brief notes considering: Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque, Classicism, Rococo, Neo-classicism and pre-Romanticism, Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Commitment, Absurd and Existentialism, Structuralism and Post-modernity.

We wish we could integrate here some hypertext facilities, but the general shift towards a liberal economy in France is not in favour of the development of such possibilities, so we are limited to the traditional teaching of the «humanities» even with modern methods. Nevertheless, our efforts are aiming to build up the necessary illustrations for a short list of main references, from music to the fine arts, a work which has been yet possible only for the study of European opera.

III - Examination

As far as it is possible during an interview, each student is given a list of topics integrated in the European context; as was explained above, the candidate is invited to discover by himself new implications issued from his own principal Master work (which might concern a subject other than comparative literature, usually French literature), since this course is an ODL seminar.

The relation with his main work being essential, the student is required to choose a particular question among the following options, and then write an essay (of 20 to 30 pages) that could pertain to the following:

1. History of ideas:

- A history of humanism: culture and the individual;
- Cosmopolitism in question since the eighteenth century;
- Literature and religion: for instance the *De Natura Rerum* and atheism in Europe; writing the mystical quest; Blake and Romantic religion;
- Images of the individual artist since Benvenuto Cellini and Michel-Angelo: autobiography and legend; the poet himself (autobiography and lyricism: Ovidius, Petrarca, Shakespeare, Goethe, Rilke etc.)
- - The use of common European concepts: - For instance, about *Nature*: historical evolution (idealism and realism – movement in Heraclitus and fixity in Parmenides); study of a classical topos: the contest between art and nature;

Nature and landscape: landscape in the text; garden and landscape: Boccaccio, Marguerite de Navarre, *Frankenstein* etc. Or, about the main esthetic concepts: mimesis, catharsis; mirror and mimesis in a particular literature. Psychoanalysis before Freud: history of the unconscious; for instance: the unconscious in Plato's works or Saint Augustine's *Confessions* or Shakespeare's drama; representing the unconscious in European painting; Intertextuality and literary inheritance: literary myths in European literatures:

Don Juan, Faust, the Conqueror

King Arthur, Tristan and Parsifal

Feminine myths: Isis, Circe, Hecate or Artemis.

2. Theory of literature:

Literary genres: novel, short story, drama versus tragedy;

Characters in the novel, characters on the stage: construction and deconstruction;

A history of the stage director (and not a history of stage setting)

Science Fiction before Science Fiction (Jules Verne and HG Wells).

3. Cultural studies:

This term is not understood according to the US point of view (for instance involving Afro-American or Native American studies), but as a path towards new territories of investigation issued from a new definition of culture. For instance:

- Sex, eroticism and censorship: the European body (for instance: women in Sixteenth Century lyricism; the female body in European painting);
- Images of the body in European literature (pagan body / christian body);
- Books and reading: libraries, book market, the public, reading abilities etc.

4. Women studies:

Women form a large majority of students in literary studies; therefore, we try to raise some interest about women studies in the country where Simone de Beauvoir was born, not always with great success...

- Condition of women and access to literature; women, taste and «salon» managing;

- Passion, marriage and literature (for instance in Rabelais's *Tiers Livre* or Rousseau's *Emile*);
- Women's writing: historical view (Marguerite de Navarre, Maria de Zayas, Mme de la Fayette, Mary Shelley etc.) or Twentieth Century criticism of it.
- Sex and gender in a European context: historical approach (for instance in Richardson's *Pamela* or in Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*).
- Women's role in the education of instincts and sexual desire (see above the different ideals of man in European civilization: men's education is largely conceived in relation with his behaviour regarding women, the latter being the source of evaluation and agreement).

5. Developing or discussing notes about historical and aesthetic periods (see above, I.6 and II).

Aesthetic categories are always questionable: starting from the student's own specialisation and his main work, the question might be to locate what he chose (author, genre or particular work) within a specific aesthetic period. For instance: does Shakespeare belong to Mannerism or the Baroque? Can we say that Seneca and the Neronian age are related to future Baroque forms? Goethe's life and aesthetic periods etc.

Of course, such a wide topic as «European civilization» is endless, but the main lines suggested by the course are intended to give the student some feeling of freedom by getting rid of the linear narrative scheme which prevails in history of literature, history of ideas, history of forms and genres etc., in favour of free cross-research.

ODL, with its particular pedagogical constraints, is also a permanent cause of reflection about method. To give the students the necessary directions for their own research, to open fresh views more than to dictate a dogmatic answer, to breed free minds and to give rise to a certain form of intellectual freedom, to teach how to learn and how to get information, to build real knowledge, all these intentions aim to cultivate competence by considering the student as a full member of society. Acting on these principles, we will not betray the traditional conception of man which is one of the roots of European culture, with reference to ancient Greek *paideia*.