

ENGL 121: Literature and Nation



Professor Russell A. Potter

Tuesday/Thursday 10-11:50, Fortes Room, Adams Library

<http://engl121litnation.blogspot.com>

In ancient times, literature – *litteratura* – meant classical Greek and Latin texts. The classics were classical, and texts in other languages regarded as little more than barbaric. And yet, as Europe emerged from the Dark Ages, so too did literature written in the native tongues of its many peoples. Throughout the modern era this trend has continued, such that every nation has something we can call a ‘national’ literature. And yet these paths are not all straight ones; in some cases – such as Dante’s Italy and Chaucer’s England – the literature emerged even before the language it was written in had reached its modern form, while more recently, the former colonies of European nations have had to decide whether or not one can have a national literature written in the language of the colonizers. The process continues to this day, even as, within any given country, internal debates over what literary or artistic works represent them best continues.

In this course, we’ll read – in the original when possible, and in modern translations when not – some of the works regarded as foundational or especially characteristic of the culture(s) of their native lands, from Chaucer and Dante to Joyce and Martel. With each text, we’ll not only read for content, but also to set it in its historical contents, and examine its place in its own national canon. We’ll try to see how this process has worked in the past, as well as how it works today – and in the meantime, we’ll read some remarkable books, books that have stood many other tests alongside the test of time.

REQUIRED BOOKS (Available at the RIC Campus Store)

Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno* (Ciardi Translation) (Signet)
Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (Penguin)
James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Penguin)
Lafcadio Hearn, *Kwaidan* (Tuttle)
Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads Town* (Grove)
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*
Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*
Yan Martel, *Life of Pi*

CLASS STRUCTURE AND POLICIES

Our class meets Tuesday and Thursdays from 10:00 to 11:50 in Forman Center Classroom A. Please arrive on time, and give other students the courtesy of refraining from use of cell phones and other electronic devices during class.

ATTENDANCE

As with all English courses at Rhode Island College, attendance is a vital part of your course experience; no more than two unexcused absences are allowed; any more than two may have an adverse effect on your final grade. Active, engaged participation in class – which is only possible when students have done the assigned reading – is expected from all. In addition to class discussions, every student is responsible for posting a response to each of our weekly readings and viewings on the class blog. These responses are not graded for content, but are part of your participation grade. There are also two formal critical papers of 4-6 pages in length, one due at midterm and one on the last day of class. The grade breakdown is paper #1 30%, paper #2 40%, class participation (including attendance, taking part in classroom discussions, and blog postings), 30%.

PLAGIARISM

Please familiarize yourself with the College's policies on academic dishonesty (available online in the student handbook at <http://www.ric.edu/studentlife/pdf/RICStudentHandbook.pdf>). The use of words or ideas from outside sources without proper citation is a violation of this policy, and will result (at least) in an "F" for the assignment. In addition, all such cases are reported to the Chair of the English Department.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week I (Jan. 19, 21) Tuesday: Introduction to Class. Thursday, *Inferno*, Cantos I – IV.

Week II (Jan. 26, 28) Tuesday: *Inferno*, Cantos V-XVI. ; Thursday, *Inferno*, Cantos XVII-XXIV

Week III (Feb. 2, 4) Tuesday: *Inferno*, Cantos XXV – XXXIV (end). Thursday: *Canterbury Tales*, "General Prologue."

Week IV (Feb. 9, 11) Tuesday: *Canterbury Tales*, "The Wife of Bath's Prologue." Thursday: "The Miller's Tale."

Week V (Feb. 16, 18) Tuesday: Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” Thursday: Chaucer’s Complaint to his Purse, Preface to the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, and Retraction.

Week VI (Feb. 24, 25) Selections from *Kwaidan*. Tuesday: The Story of Mimi-Nashi-Hōiche”; excerpt from film version of *Kwaidan* by Masaki Kobayashi. Thursday: “Diplomacy,” “Yuki-Onna.”

Week VII (March 1, 3) Tuesday and Thursday: Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads’ Town*.

SPRING BREAK

Week VIII (March 15, 17) Tuesday: Joyce, “Araby,” “Clay.” Thursday, Joyce, “The Dead”; in-class screening of *The Dead*.

Week IX (March 22, 24) Tuesday and Thursday: Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*. Thursday, in-class film, *Apocalypse Now!* (part 1).

Week X (March 28, 31): Tuesday: In-class film, *Apocalypse Now!* (part 2). Thursday: Start Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*.

Week XI (April 5, 7) Finish *Like Water for Chocolate*. Thursday: In-class film, *Like Water for Chocolate*.

Week XII (April 12, 14) NO CLASS TUESDAY. Thursday: Start Martel, *Life of Pi*.

Week XIII (April 19, 21) Tuesday and Thursday: *Life of Pi*.

Week XIV (April 26, 28) Tuesday: In-class film, *Life of Pi*. Thursday, finish film; final review.