

Forever Young

Instructor: Erin Gentry

Course: English 26S.01

Meeting Times and Locations: M,W, F 11:55a.m. – 12:45p.m. Art Museum 105.

Office Hours: By appointment. I will always make time to meet with you.

Contact Information: erin.gentry@duke.edu, 381-1501

Course Description

Take a look at popular magazine headlines, your local drug store aisles or your latest batch of e-mail spam and you will see the “Anti-Aging” campaign in full swing. From Botox to Viagra, anti-oxidants to Human Growth Hormone, stem cell therapies to the search for an “immortality gene,” there is a current public obsession with looking younger, living longer and mastering mortality entirely. Recently, biologist Steven Austad bet biodemographer Jay Olshansky \$500 million that there will be a 150-year-old-person alive and in fairly good shape in 2150. Regardless of on which side you would place your money, how do we begin to think about what this kind of fervor means for – and says about – our society and ourselves?

In this class, we will examine the themes of rejuvenation, longevity and immortality as they appear in cultural “texts” from antiquity to the present. We will begin by (very) briefly surveying how these themes figure into some of the foundational stories of Western culture, among these: the Epic of Gilgamesh, Greek myths, the Bible, and various legends of the Fountain of Youth and Elixir Vitae. In so doing, we will seek to establish a common vocabulary with which to approach these themes (so that we might educatedly begin to call one another a “meliorist,” “mortalist” or “humanist.” ☺) At the same time, we will consider such questions as: Are these themes portrayed positively or negatively? What exactly is longed for in these texts? What is feared? How are images of aging, old age and death invoked and to what effect? What is manipulated, how, and with what results?

With this archive of imagery in hand, we will then trace these same themes across the late 19th and 20th centuries and into our own, particularly as they play out through new scientific and technological advancements. From chimpanzee testicle transplants, cryonics, and mind “uploading,” to vitamin and hormone supplements, cosmetic surgery and modern biology – we will look at both the bizarre and banal ways people have played the “anti-aging” game over the last century and the stories that are told about these endeavors. The “texts” we will look at will range from literature and film (with a heavy emphasis on science fiction and other “popular” texts) to scientific publications to advertisements, news sources and television. (WARNING: We will be training ourselves in literary analysis throughout this semester. However, if you feel that only certain types of “literature” deserve to be analyzed, this may not be the class for you.) In these texts, we will explore how our key themes are being textually and visually imagined and ask: Have the stories changed substantively over time, or is it just the form (not the content) that is new in our modern day quest for the Fountain of Youth and Elixir Vitae? Do we see the same desires, fears and images of old age and death, or are these differently depicted? What kind of similarities and/or differences do we see between “scientific” and “popular” depictions of prolongevity strategies? Who benefits and who suffers in the imagined outcomes of these stories? What kinds of assumptions underlie the assertions we encounter in these texts?

Consider this course a group journey into self-exploration. The most important outcome of our textual investigations is – for each one of us – a thorough interrogation of our own attitudes and assumptions about aging, death and the promise and power of science. Strap in for the ride!

Course Texts (available at Bookstore unless otherwise noted):

Atherton, Gertrude. *Black Oxen*. 1923. Reprint Services Corporation, 1992. (ISBN: 078126670X)
Braver, Gary. *Elixir*. New York: Tor Books, 2000. (ISBN: 0812575911)
Gerritsen, Tess. *Life Support*. New York: Pocket Books, 1998. (ISBN: 0671553046)
Halperin, James L. *The First Immortal*. New York: Del Rey Books, 1998. (ISBN: 0345421825)
Huxley, Aldous. *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*. 1939. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 1993. (ISBN: 1566630185)

Audio-Visual Materials

CNN Presents: “The Fountain of Youth.” 9 November 2003.
“How to Build a Human: Forever Young.” The Learning Channel. 5 August 2002.
“Kill Switch.” Dir. Rob Bowman. Writ. William Gibson & Tom Maddox. *The X-Files*. 20th Century Fox Television. 15 February 1998.
The Leech Woman. Dir. Edward Dein. Universal International Pictures, 1960.

If you cannot make the out-of-class viewings, you will need to arrange to see the materials on your own time. All of the above materials are on reserve (or will be, as soon as the Library finishes ordering them) at Lilly Library, except for CNN Presents. For this program, you will need to view it on the web at <http://www.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/presents/index.fountain.html>. This will involve signing up for a free trial of CNN News Pass.

Graded Course Requirements

- 1. Attendance and Participation.** You are expected to attend every class unless you notify me of your time conflict *before* class. Multiple absences (more than 3), especially unexcused absences (more than 1), will be reflected in your grade.
- 2. Commentaries.** You will write **12 commentaries** over the course of the semester responding to our various readings and viewings. These commentaries will not be graded for content. However, they will collectively count towards your grade. While these are informal pieces of writing, I do expect them to be proofed for grammatical errors and to show significant thought and reflection about the materials with which we are dealing. In these commentaries, you may record your observations and reactions to the material,

comparisons with other texts used in class, tie-ins with class discussions, questions and implications that the text raises for you, or points where the text links with current events/issues in our 21st century world. Your commentaries should be approximately **1 typed, single-spaced page** in length. You will have 23 opportunities to write commentaries (due dates are marked in the syllabus as “**OC #**” for “optional commentary”); you may pick and choose to write on any 12 of these 23. Handing in all 12 thoughtful and reflective commentaries on time will result in an A for this portion of your final grade. However, if your commentary shows a distinct lack of reflection or effort, I will not count that commentary towards your grade. Each missing commentary will lower your grade (11=B, 10=C, 9=D, etc.). Commentaries will NOT be accepted after the due date marked on the syllabus, so please start early! Do not leave these until the last few weeks!

- 3. Group Presentations.** Each student will participate in one of 5 group presentations throughout the semester. These presentations will coincide with the five thematic units on our syllabus. I will work with each group to suggest focuses for your presentation, places to start your research, lend helpful materials, etc. However, the ultimate topic and format of these presentations is completely up to your group. I strongly encourage creativity in this endeavor!
- 4. Individual “Show and Tell.”** In the last weeks of class, each of you will prepare a brief (no more than 7 minutes) presentation of the material for your final paper. I will ask each of you to bring *something* in to share with the class in the old school manner of show and tell. This object may be an image, text, video clip, advertisement, product, artifact or anything else that fits the bill, so long as it relates to your final paper topic. In your 7 minutes, you should introduce the topic of your paper, “show and tell” your object, and give us a sense of your position/argument on the topic you’re exploring.
- 5. Formal Papers.** There will be **1 short (5-7 page) paper** due before spring break, and **1 long (10-12) page final paper** due during final exam week.

For the **short paper**, I will provide you with a list of possible topics, though you will have the option of devising your own topic. I will ask you to provide me with a **paper proposal** a little over a week before the paper is due. This proposal need only consist of a few sentences letting me know the topic you are going to write on, the materials/texts you plan to focus on, and the argument (tentative is just fine) that you are going to make

For the **final paper**, I will provide some topic areas to help you brainstorm, but I expect each of you to develop your own paper topic out of your interests in the class. Again, I will ask you to provide me with a **Paper Proposal** well in advance of the deadline. You will also **Peer Review two** of your classmates’ paper proposals. This paper proposal should be longer and more formal than the first; it will be graded. I will provide you with details as to the format for the proposal and peer review procedures further along in the class.

I have high expectations for the quality of your writing. You can expect me to spend considerable time reading and giving feedback on your early papers and proposals. In turn, I will expect you to put significant reflection and effort into the work you hand in. Take the time to carefully read, re-read and edit your own papers – SPELL CHECK IS NOT ENOUGH!

- 6. Grade Breakdown.** The most important part of your being in this course is your participation. Being an active participant and thinking deeply about the texts and issues in

the class is just as important as learning to present your ideas effectively in writing. Your effort and engagement with the class (as shown through your regular attendance, participation, group presentation, individual “show and tell” and insightful commentaries) will figure significantly in determining your grade. Your grade will be determined as follows:

Class participation and attendance	15%
Commentaries	15%
Group Presentation	20%
Final Paper “Show and Tell”	5%
Short Essay	15%
Final Paper Proposal & Peer Reviews	5%
Final Essay	25%

Writing Resources @ Duke

The Writing Studio provides a place where students can meet individually with writing tutors to receive feedback and help on their writing. I encourage you to consider making an appointment with them before your two formal essays are due. You can find the Writing Studio online at:

<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/>

Schedule of Readings/Viewings

W 1/12	Introduction: Rejuvenation, Longevity and Immortality “Pop Quiz”
F 1/14	Gerald Gruman, “Apologism” (e-reserves) Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Tithonus” (e-reserves) OC 1 Due
M 1/17	NO CLASS – MLK Jr. Day
W 1/19	Gerald Gruman, “Prolongevity Legends” (e-reserves) OC 2 Due
F 1/21	Andrew Achenbaum, <i>Crossing Frontiers</i> (e-reserves) OC 3 Due
M	Unit 1: You Are What You Eat

1/24	Elie Metchnikoff, <i>The Prolongation of Life</i> (e-reserves) OC 4 Due
W 1/26	Aldous Huxley, <i>After Many a Summer Dies the Swan</i> (Pt. 1, Ch. 1-5, pp. 3-76)
F 1/28	<i>After Many a Summer Dies the Swan</i> (Pt. 1, Ch. 6-10 pp. 77-161)
M 1/31	NO CLASS
W 2/2	<i>After Many a Summer Dies the Swan</i> (Pt. 1, Ch. 11 to end, pp. 162-356) OC 5 Due
F 2/4	GROUP PRESENTATION 1: Hygiene, Metchnikoff and Autointoxication, Harvey Kellogg and The San, Caloric Restriction
M 2/7	Unit 2: Let's Talk About Sex Serge Voronoff, <i>Life</i> (e-reserves) OC 6 Due
W 2/9	Gertrude Atherton, <i>Black Oxen</i> (Ch. 1-16, pp. 1-77)
F 2/11	<i>Black Oxen</i> (Ch. 17-26, pp. 78-146)
M 2/14	<i>Black Oxen</i> (Ch. 27-53, pp. 147-309)
W 2/16	<i>Black Oxen</i> (Ch.54-End, pp. 310-346) Susan Squier, "Incubabies and Rejuvenates" (e-reserves) OC 7 Due (Atherton) OC 8 Due (Squier)
F 2/18	GROUP PRESENTATION 2: Sex Hormones and Glands, Charles Brown-Sequard, Eugene Steinach, Serge Voronoff, Cellular Therapy and Paul Niehaus
M 2/21	Library Research Skills/Tour Day Paper 1 Proposal Due
W 2/23	Guest Speaker: Current Theories About Aging Reading: <i>Aging Under the Microscope</i> OC 9 Due Non-Optional Assignment: Prepare 2 questions for Dr. Galanos. E-mail these to Erin by 10:00 a.m. Wednesday morning.
F 2/25	FILM VIEWING: <i>The Leech Woman</i> (7:00 p.m., Perkins 421) <i>The Leech Woman</i> Vivian Sobchack, "THE LEECH WOMAN'S REVENGE: On the Dread of Aging in a Low-Budget Horror Film" (available online at: http://www.cinema.ucla.edu/women/sobchack/default.html) OC 10 Due (<i>The Leech Woman</i> and/or Sobchack)
M	Writing Workshop: What is Good Writing?

2/28	
W 3/2	Unit 3: If You Discover It, You Will Live Ronald Klatz, <i>Grow Young with HGH</i> (e-reserves) S. Jay Olshansky and Bruce A. Carnes, <i>The Quest for Immortality</i> (e-reserves) OC 11 Due (Klatz and/or Olshansky & Carnes)
F 3/4	Gary Braver, <i>Elixir</i> (Ch. 1-4, pp. 1-65) Paper 1 Due
M 3/7	<i>Elixir</i> (Ch. 5-28, pp.66-313)
W 3/9	<i>Elixir</i> (Ch. 29 – end, pp. 314-430) OC 12 Due
F 3/11	GROUP PRESENTATION 3: Alchemy, Patent Medicines, Royal Jelly, Vitamins and Supplements, Hormone Replacement Therapy, Human Growth Hormone, Durk Pearson & Sandy Shaw
3/14 – 3/18	No Class. Spring Break.
M 3/21	Unit 4: If You Build It, You Won't Die Hans Moravec, “The Universal Robot” (available online at http://www.frc.ri.cmu.edu/~hpm/project.archive/robot.papers/1991/Universal.Robot.910618.html) N. Katherine Hayles, <i>How We Became Posthuman</i> (e-reserves) OC 13 Due (Moravec) OC 14 Due (Hayles)
W 3/23	Robert C. W. Ettinger, <i>The Prospect of Immortality</i> (available online at http://www.cryonics.org/book1.html), read pages 11-24, 49-63, 124-135 OC 15 Due
F 3/25	James L. Halperin, <i>The First Immortal</i> (pp.1-90) OC 16 Due (“Kill Switch” – should you choose to watch this optional X-Files episode, on reserve at Lilly Library)
M 3/28	<i>The First Immortal</i> (pp. 90-273)
W 3/30	<i>The First Immortal</i> (pp. 274-430) OC 17 Due
F 4/1	GROUP PRESENTATION 4: Cryonics, Nanotechnology, Artificial Intelligence, Mind Uploading, Max More & Natasha Vita-More, the Extropians and the Transhumanists
M 4/4	Unit 5: The Biotech Revolution: From Cell to Surface William A. Haseltine “Regenerative Medicine 2003: An Overview” (e-reserves) Jose B. Cibelli et al. “Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer in Humans” (e-reserves) Stephen S. Hall “Beatitude” (e-reserves) FILM VIEWING – Double Feature: CNN Presents “ <i>The Fountain of Youth</i> ” and The Learning Channel’s <i>How to Make a Human: Forever Young</i> (7:00 p.m., Location TBA) OC 18A Due (Haseltine and/or Cibelli)

	OC18B Due (Hall) PAPER 1 REWRITES DUE
W 4/6	“Selling Youth” (“ <i>The Fountain of Youth</i> ,” “ <i>How to Build a Human</i> ,” and Katz) Stephen Katz “New sex for old” (e-reserves) OC 19 Due (“ <i>The Fountain of Youth</i> ” and/or <i>How to Build a Human</i>) OC 20 Due (Katz)
F 4/8	Tess Gerritsen, <i>Life Support</i> (pp.1-86)
M 4/11	<i>Life Support</i> (pp.87-261) FINAL PAPER PROPOSALS DUE
W 4/13	<i>Life Support</i> (pp. 262-369) OC 21 Due (<i>Life Support</i>)
F 4/15	GROUP PRESENTATION 5: Genetics, Stem Cells, Cloning, Botox, Viagra, Cosmetic Surgery Peer Reviews of Paper Proposals Due
M 4/18	Olshansky, Hayflick and Carnes. “No Truth to the Fountain of Youth” (e-reserves) Caplan “An Unnatural Process” (e-reserves) OC 22 Due (Olshansky et al.) OC 23 Due (Caplan)
W 4/20	Final Paper “Show & Tell”
F 4/22	Final Paper “Show & Tell”
M 4/25	Final Paper “Show & Tell”
W 4/27	Last Day Activities
5/2 – 5/6	Final Papers Due – Date TBA