Case Western Reserve University
Department of English

ENG 508: Rhetorics and Poetics of Immortality
Fall 2002

Instructor: Prof. H. L. Meakin
Class Meetings: Tuesdays 4:30-7 in Clark 103
Office Hours: Wednesdays 2-5 pm and by appointment
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Course Description

What do poets mean when they promise that language can bestow immortality? How do writers understand language as a mediator between death and the writing/written subject? What’s memory got to do with it? Why should literary immortality—as achievement or as consolation—matter to a person once they’re dead? Falstaff’s recognition in Henry IV, Part One (5.1.131ff) that honor likely cannot be enjoyed when you’re dead challenges the notion that a sacrifice of the material self—through war or martyrdom or patronage (!)—is the very act which guarantees the subject one or more kinds of immortality. How, then, are the classical notions of fame, reconsidered through the prism of the Christian (especially Augustinian) rejection of earthly glory and advocacy of private virtue and conscience digested by the Renaissance humanist project, which in Alastair Fowler’s words contributes to a “cult of intellectual immortality”? If the death and resurrection of Christ--the Word made flesh--guarantees immortality of the soul and even the flesh, and sexual procreation achieves immortality of the body on earth in one’s progeny, what does poetic language guarantee? We will also ask how writers imagine immortality or its impossibility, and we’ll end the course by jumping from Milton’s cosmos to postmodern immortality in the work of Milan Kundera, Andy Warhol, the strange promises of plastic surgery adverts, and corporate endowments.

“Immortality has already been put off until death and does not figure as one of our constant tasks as mortals, a transmutation that is endlessly incumbent upon us, here, now--its possibility having been inscribed in the body, which is capable of becoming divine.” Luce Irigaray

Required Texts:
Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans (Penguin)
Bible, King James Version (Gospel of John) (available on-line at http://www.ohiolink.edu/db/bible.html ) FREE!!*
Cavendish, Margaret. Texts at Renaissance Women Writers Online (http://www.wwp.brown.edu/texts/rwoentry.html) FREE!!*
Chaucer's Dream Poetry (Longman) or hand-out of The House of Fame
Horace, Odes (Oxford World Classics—English only, or Loeb Classical Library—Latin and English bilingual edition)
Kundera, Milan. Immortality—The Book of Laughter and Forgetting
Milton, Complete Poetry (edited by Shawcross)
Ovid, Metamorphoses (Oxford World Classics or Loeb)
Plato, The Symposium (Penguin)
Phaedrus (Penguin)
The Last Days of Socrates (Penguin)
Shakespeare, The Sonnets (edited by Booth or Vendler)
Hand-outs from Instructor
*These texts are free but must be accessed via the KSL research database site (i.e. only subscribers can access the site and you must be on CWRUnet).

Recommended Texts:
Brown, Raymond. Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary
Grant, Michael. Myths of the Greeks and Romans (rev 1995)
Ovid, Metamorphoses. The 1567 Arthur Golding translation
Steiner, George. Real Presences. (Faber)
MLA Style Guide

Assignments:
• Weekly response papers (approx. 1000 words) on readings 40%
  (You must write papers for any 10 of the 13 weeks of readings)
Here are the guidelines on how I will assign a grade to your response papers:
4: Shows extraordinarily thoughtful and thorough engagement with the reading and the issue under discussion. Clear, technically clean writing.
3: Shows engagement with the reading and that you are thinking. Relatively clear, almost no technical errors.
2-0: Too short to develop ideas, or way off the point, or technically so sloppy as to interfere with my ability to determine what you’re saying, or all of the above.
• Seminar Presentation (subject to be chosen in consultation on a topic different from that of your research paper) 30%
Guidelines and a schedule to be distributed in class
• Research Paper (25 pages); subject to be chosen in consultation with instructor; will undergo 1-2 revisions; Final product should be of publishable quality 30%
Due dates: outline: Oct 15; draft: Nov 15; final paper: Dec 10
Reading Schedule

N.B. I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus during the semester. Any changes will be announced in class.

N.B. Texts marked with an asterisk (*) will be available in my mailbox for photocopying.

August 27:
Introduction: Myths of immortality; definition of terms

September 3
• Plato, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Symposium, Republic Bk X*
• Asmis “Plato on poetic creativity”*

September 10
• Ficino, Commentary on Plato’s Symposium and Platonic Theology (selections)*
• Irigaray, “Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato, Symposium, ‘Diotima’s Speech’”*

Suggested Reading:
• Halperin, “Why Is Diotima a Woman?”*
• Irigaray, “Divine Women”*

September 17
• Ovid, Metamorphoses, esp. Books III, VI, IX, X-XI (up to and including the death of Orpheus), XII (II.38-63 on Fama) and XV (section on Pythagoras, and envoi)
• “Arachne”* & “Tereus”* by Ted Hughes; “The Flaying of Marsyas”* by Robin Robertson
• Horace, Odes (selections)
  Bk 1: odes 1, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 24, 26, 28, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37
  Bk 2: odes 13-16, 18-20
  Bk 3: odes 2, 5, 6, 11, 13, 18, 25, 27, 30
  Bk 4: odes 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 14

September 24
• The Gospel According to John
  Texts available at [http://www.ohiolink.edu/db/bible.html](http://www.ohiolink.edu/db/bible.html) via KSL research database site
  1. Read the entire gospel as it appears in the King James Version (1611)
  2. Carry out a comparative reading of ONE of the following passages using the translations listed below:


    **Trans:** Tyndale (1526); Geneva (1560); Bishops’ (1568); Rheims-Douai (1582);
    • St. Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans, Books XI-XIV; XIX-XXII; On Christian Doctrine (selections)*
• Commentaries on the Gospel of John: Augustine, Origen, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin (hand-outs)
• Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17): On the Immortality of the Soul*

Suggested Reading:
Raymond Brown, Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary

October 1
• Chaucer, The House of Fame (Longman edition of Dream Poetry OR handout from instructor of this poem alone)
• Petrarch, Letter to Posterity, Trionfi (English translations by Morley and Sidney)

October 8
• Shakespeare, Sonnets

October 15
• Shakespeare, Sonnets
• epitaphs/elegies on Shakespeare by Jonson, Milton, Pope*

October 22 FALL BREAK: NO CLASS

October 29
• John Donne
Sermons: Cockayne Funeral Sermon*; Death’s Duel
Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions
from Biathanatos*

November 5
• Sir John Davies, Nosce Te ipsum
• Fulke Greville, A Disquisition Upon Fame and Honour*
• Cecilia Bulstrode & Venetia Digby elegized (Donne, Jonson, Feltham, Townshend)
• Sir Kenelm Digby on immortality

November 12
• Anne Cecil de Vere, Epitaphs
• Rachel Speght, Mortalities Memorandum
• Alice Sutcliffe, Meditations of Man’s Mortality
• Margaret Cavendish, Bell in Campo, selected prefaces, letters, prose and poems TBA
November 19
• Milton, Prolusion VII*; Lycidas; Paradise Lost; selections

November 26
• Frederick Nietzsche,
• Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion; selections from Totem and Taboo, Civilization and Its Discontents*
• Carl Jung, selections from On Psychology and Religion*
• Bertrand Russell, from “A History of Western Philosophy” (Nietzsche vs. Buddha)
• George Steiner, from Real Presences*

December 3: Postmodern Immortality
• Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting
• Kundera, Immortality
• “Conversation in London and Connecticut with Milan Kundera” from Philip Roth’s Shop Talk: A Writer and His Colleagues and Their Work*
• Andy Warhol’s “Fifteen Minutes of Fame”
• Plastic Surgery Ads*