

HIST 207CS

## **Poison: Science, Technology, and Medicine in Global History**

### How to Find Me

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### How to Find the Class

Spring 2008  
Tues/Thurs from 12:45 - 2:00  
Lewis Hall 304

From arsenic and alchemical elixirs to opium and aconite, deadly and dangerous materials and the construction of notions of toxicity around them have played central roles in global history. This course provides an introduction to the study of science, technology, and medicine in world history by deeply investigating the ideas of “poison” and toxicity in various contexts. Topics will include ancient studies of serpent toxins circulating among the Greco-Roman and Arabic textual worlds; demonic poisons and the connection between magic and healing in east Asia; natural histories and ideas of “artifice;” aphrodisiacs and sciences of fertility; and environmental illnesses and their relationships to emerging global technologies. We will also situate discussions of opium and tobacco in east and central Asia within a comparative discussion of the global construction of “poisons” such as chocolate, tomatoes, and coffee, and explore the relationship between toxicity and ideas of “foreignness” more broadly writ.

This course is designed to introduce you to a wide range of fields and media within the history of science through the lens of poison and toxicity. We will range widely over topic and geographic areas this semester. One premise of this course is that there is no *one* history of science, technology, or medicine. Rather, we will use the entire globe for our laboratory and playground as we explore different ways of constructing histories of science and medicine.

### Thinkpieces and the Course Website

We will be using the website every week to discuss the material via thinkpieces and responses. Make friends with it:

<http://webct.montana.edu/>

Log in with your WebCT ID. You all should be signed up for the course website already – if not, let me know ASAP.

To post thinkpieces and responses:

1. Log in to WebCT

2. See the Course Menu on the lefthand side of the page. It lists all of the course components.  
To post on the discussion board:
  - Click “Discussion Board”
  - Click on the topic for the week (“Week 2,” etc.)
3. To post a thinkpiece: Click the bar for Compose Message and follow the directions.
4. To post a response: Click on the icon next to the thinkpiece you’d like to respond to, and hit Reply to post your response. And so on, and so on. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Some of these thinkpieces will have a focused theme or assignment and some will be more open-ended. I will distribute thinkpiece assignments in class. Timing will be taken into account when assessing your grades for the thinkpieces/responses, so please get these in on time. However, we all have a bad week once in a while. With that in mind, if you find it impossible to get your weekly thinkpiece posted by **WEDNESDAY at 8 PM** please email me and let me know: it is always better to post a late thinkpiece/response than not post at all, as you may receive partial credit.

The course website also contains vital resources such as (some) course readings, reading guides, and assorted other goodies. Do check it out regularly. It does a body good.

#### A Note on Attendance

Regular attendance is vital to your success in this course. It is your responsibility to make up any work from missed classes, to make sure you didn’t miss crucial information, and to stay on track. I will regularly take attendance in lecture, and will use attendance as an importance factor in assessing participation grades. In order to grant an excused absence I will need to see proper documentation. Three or more unexcused absences will lower your grade.

#### Requirements

All requirements must be completed in order to pass the course:

1. Weekly reading assignments (due on the date indicated in the course syllabus)
2. Weekly thinkpiece/response assignments due each week by **WEDNESDAY at 8 PM!**
3. Participation in class discussions (Please let me know privately, via email or in person, if you are not comfortable speaking in a group. I can work with you to develop your skills, and/or we can set up an alternative.)
4. Paper:
  - a. Final Paper Due **Monday, May 05** in my office (Wilson Hall 2-168) by 5 pm

#### Grading

Your grade will be assessed according to the following breakdown:

Participation in Class Discussion: 25%

Thinkpieces and Responses: 35%

Final Paper: 40%

For the final paper you have a choice. Either:

1. Keep track of a news story (or track a SETS issue in another medium like TV, film, music, fiction, etc) and write a paper relating

it to a topic or reading from the second half of the course. A detailed description of this and a grading rubric will be distributed in class.

2. Write a 3-book review on a history of science or medicine topic of interest to you. I will work with you to identify topics and relevant books.

In this course, more than half of your grade will be based on participation in class and on the course WebCT site through thinkpieces and responses. That's a whole big bunch. Please use the following as a guide to help you assess your participation in WebCT thinkpieces and responses:

#### A-LEVEL PARTICIPATION

- The student consistently posted insightful comments and questions that prompted on-topic discussion
- The student consistently and explicitly engaged the course materials in discussion, demonstrating that s/he read and thought about each week's reading material
- In responses, the student consistently helped clarify or synthesize other classmates' ideas with thoughtful posts. In practice, this means posting more than "I totally agree!" or "That's a good point" as a response.
- If disagreeing with another classmate's ideas, the student stated his/her disagreement or objections clearly, yet politely
- The student used clear and correct English in her/his posts, paying attention to grammar, spelling, and capitalization.

#### B-LEVEL PARTICIPATION

- The student was notably lacking in one or two of the items listed for A-level participation
- The student failed to submit thinkpieces or responses on time for two or more weeks
- The participant usually, but not always, expressed her/himself clearly

#### C-LEVEL PARTICIPATION

- The student was consistently lacking in two or more of the items listed for A-level participation
- The student failed to submit thinkpieces or responses on time for five or more weeks
- The student's responses to classmates' thinkpieces were lazy or otherwise did not show a strong engagement with their classmates' ideas. Repeatedly posting responses that are nothing more than "I agree," or "That's a good point" is an example of this.
- The student rarely expressed him/herself clearly, or rarely spoke in class, even when prompted.

#### D-LEVEL PARTICIPATION

- The student was consistently lacking in two or more of the items listed for A-level participation
- The student rarely expressed him/herself clearly, or rarely spoke in class, even when prompted.
- The student failed to submit thinkpieces or responses on time for six or more weeks

#### F-LEVEL PARTICIPATION

- The student was rude or abusive to other course participants
- The student consistently failed or refused to participate at all, even when specifically prompted or questioned, even if the student's participation otherwise conforms to a higher level on the rubric

#### Readings

The course material will include short essays, book excerpts, images, and other files posted to the WebCT site. In addition, the books required for purchase include:

1. João Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*
2. Haruki Murakami, *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*
3. Thomas Abraham, *Twenty-First Century Plague*
4. William Bass and Jon Jefferson, *Death's Acre*

And now we bring you.....

The Weekly Schedule (Note: The Management reserves the right to adjust this as necessary.)

# ACT I

## PILLS

...In which we introduce the history of science, medicine, and technology in the early and medieval world as a foundation for what is to come, and because it is inherently groovy.

Week One

Thursday Jan. 17 Introduction to the Course

Reading: Make sure to read the syllabus carefully. There is a lot of information about the course in here, and you're responsible for its contents! No thinkpiece due this week!

Week Two

Tuesday Jan. 22 Serpents and Snakestones

Thursday Jan. 24 Blister Beetles

Reading for Discussion:

1. Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* ("Preface" 7-14, "Styles of Being" 195-270, "Epilogue" 271-272). **Th**
2. Vivian Nutton, "The Rise of Medicine," in Ted Porter, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine*, 52-69. **Tu**
3. Galen, *On the Natural Faculties* (brief selection). **Tu**
4. Li Shizhen, *Compendium of Materia Medica*, "Blister Beetle (*banmao*)." **Th**

Week Three

Tuesday Jan. 29 Plague

Thursday Jan. 31 Poppies

Reading for Discussion:

1. Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* ("The Formation of Western European Medicine" 1-16, "Practitioners and Conditions of Practice" 17-47, "Physiological and Anatomical Knowledge" 78-114, "Disease and Treatment" 115-152). **Tu**
2. Johannes Nohl, *The Black Death: A Chronicle of the Plague* (41-50, 68-71, 83-86, 87-107). **Th**

Week Four

Tuesday Feb. 05 Magic and Martial Arts

Thursday Feb. 07 Alchemy

Reading for Discussion:

1. Start Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*. **Th and next week**
2. Lowell Skar, "Dragons, Tigers, and Elixirs: Alchemy in Medieval China," in *Hawaii Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture*, 429-432. **Tu**
3. Nathan Sivin, "Chinese Alchemy and the Manipulation of Time," *Isis* 67.4 (Dec. 1976): 512-526. **Tu**
4. Stephen Bokenkamp, "Answering a Summons," in *Religions of China in Practice*, 188-202. **Tu**

## ACT II

### POTIONS

...In which we introduce the history of science, medicine, and technology as they shaped empire-building in the early modern world as a way to move toward our study of modernity, and because it is also inherently groovy.

Week Five

Tuesday Feb. 12 Hemlock  
 Thursday Feb. 14 Arsenic

Readings for Discussion:

1. Finish Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*. **Tu**
2. Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (selection). **Tu**
3. Nina Burleigh, *Mirage: Napoleon's Scientists and the Unveiling of Egypt* (selection). **Th**
4. Emsley, *The Elements of Murder: A History of Poison* ("Arsenic" 93-138, 139-149). **Th**

Week Six

Tuesday Feb. 19 Peacock Flowers  
 Thursday Feb. 21 Tea

Reading for Discussion:

1. Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire* (selection: "Introduction" 1-22, "Voyaging Out" 23-72, "Exotic Abortifacients" 105-149, "The Fate of the Peacock Flower in Europe" 150-193). **Tu**
2. Harold Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* ("Gardens of the Indies Transported" 304-338, and "Translating What Works: The Medicine of East Asia" 339-377). **Th**
3. George Rumphius, *The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* (selection). **Th**

Week Seven

Tuesday Feb. 26 Spice  
 Thursday Feb. 28 Chocolate

Reading for Discussion:

1. Paula Susan De Vos, "The Science of Spices: Empiricism and Economic Botany in the Early Spanish Empire," *Journal of World History* 17.4 (December 2006): 399-427. **Tu**
2. Marcy Norton, "Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics." **Th**
3. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants* (selection). **Tu**

Important Event: **Meet with professor (in person or via email) to decide on a topic for final paper.**

Week Eight

Tuesday Mar. 04 Drink  
 Thursday Mar. 06 **No Class**

Reading for Discussion:

1. Charles Altamont Doyle, *The Doyle Diary* (selection). **Tu**
2. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (selection). **Tu**
3. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants* (selection). **Tu**

Important Event: **Hand in typed description of final paper topic in class on Tuesday.**

## ACT III

### PARTICLES

...In which we finally get around to exploring science, medicine, and technology as they have shaped modern global history, because it is Objectively Important for understanding the world you live in, and because it is, in addition, inherently groovy.

Week Nine

Tuesday Mar. 18 Bodies

Thursday Mar. 20 Bugs

Reading for Discussion:

1. William Bass and Jon Jefferson, *Death's Acre*. **Th**

Week Ten

Tuesday Mar. 25 Leprosy

Thursday Mar. 27 Life

Reading for Discussion:

1. João Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*. **Th**

Week Eleven

Tuesday Apr. 01 Trees

Thursday Apr. 03 **No Class**

Reading: No reading! Make time this week to work on your final papers and make sure you're on track.

Week Twelve

Tuesday Apr. 08 Atoms

Thursday Apr. 10 Allergies

Reading for Discussion:

1. Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed* (selection). **Tu**
2. Gregg Mitman, *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape our Lives and Landscapes* (selection). **Th**

Important Event: **Thinkpiece-revision assignment begins. See handout.**

Week Thirteen

Tuesday Apr. 15 Anthrax

Thursday Apr. 17 Gas

Reading for Discussion:

1. Haruki Murakami, *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*. **Th**

Week Fourteen

Tuesday Apr. 22 Meat

Thursday Apr. 24 Mercury

Reading for Discussion:

1. Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (selection). **Tu**
2. Harriet Ritvo, "Mad Cow Mysteries," in Watson et. al., eds., *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating*: 299-306. **Tu**
3. John R. Fisher, "Cattle Plagues Past and Present: The Mystery of Mad Cow Disease," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33.2: 215-28. **Tu**
4. Timothy S. George, *Minamata: Pollution and the Struggle for Democracy in Postwar Japan* (selection). **Th**

Tuesday Apr. 29           Zombies

Thursday May 01        SARS

Reading for Discussion:

1. Thomas Abraham, *Twenty-First Century Plague*. **Th**
2. Otniel E. Dror, "Voodoo Death": Fantasy, Excitement, and the Untenable Boundaries of Biomedical Science," in Robert D. Johnston (ed.), *The Politics of Healing: Essays in the Twentieth-century History of North American Alternative Medicine* (Routledge 2004), pp. 71-81, 328-331. **Tu**

## Thinkpiece Revision Assignment for Weeks 12-14

Due each week: By Saturday at 8 pm (NO LATER)

**PLEASE NOTE CHANGE: There will be no thinkpiece revision due Week 15 in order to give you time to finish up your papers!!!**

We will use the remainder of the weekly thinkpieces to work on honing the skills that you will need in your final paper, and that are useful more broadly in historical analysis:

1. Clear, well-structured **prose**
2. A clear **argument/thesis** that...
3. ...is well-supported by **evidence** from the texts

Your job by next week is to develop an ARGUMENT involving one of the main themes of the course. (See handout for some guidelines.)

Week 12 (By 8 PM Saturday April 12):

- Post a response paper to the WebCT site. This response paper should have a clear thesis involving some major issue/theme of the course and use PETRYNA and MITMAN as evidence to support the argument. Make sure to cite page numbers from the readings whenever necessary, and make **clear and explicit** reference to the texts.
- Make sure to save a copy of your response paper as a word-processing document: this will come in handy next week.

Week 13 (By 8 PM Saturday April 19):

- Based on my suggestions on your response paper from last week, revise the response and post a new, improved version. This new version should not only incorporate revisions based on my suggestions, but should ALSO expand the response paper with further evidence culled from the MURAKAMI reading.
- In sum: the new version should represent revision/rewriting AND additional evidence from the MURAKAMI text.

Week 14 (By 8 PM Saturday April 26):

- Same deal as last week. Based on my suggestions on your revised response paper from last week, revise again and post a new, improved version. This new version should not only incorporate revisions based on my suggestions, but should ALSO expand the response paper with further evidence culled from the RITVO, FISHER, and GEORGE readings.

By the end of this semester as a result of this assignment, you should have a much more refined grasp of how to develop an elegant, clear thesis and support it with textual evidence. The

emphasis on revision will also help you develop your writing skills much more carefully than would otherwise be possible. In evaluating these as part of your participation grade, I will be looking explicitly for how much you've taken the revision seriously by incorporating editorial advice, fixing mistakes, etc.