

Honors Course:
The Politics of Waste
MW 1-2:15 p.m.

Alexander Bay, associate professor of history; Tom Zoellner, associate professor of English

Course description:

The Politics of Waste is an interdisciplinary medical humanities course to be taught in the Honors Program. By waste, we are referring to effluent, garbage and industrial pollution. The medical humanities literature on world health points to sewer systems as one of the fundamental advances in terms of disease prevention in the 19th century. The field of medicine as well identifies water-based flush toilets as a major medical achievement. The history of these achievements however reveals the contested nature of eliminating waste from the environment. Our course has relevancy to current world challenges. Sewage disposal is a problem today for over 2.5 billion people who do not have access to proper sanitation. Numerous global initiatives such as the Gates Foundation's "Reinvent the Toilet Challenge" continue to seek effective responses to this never-ending problem. This course's outcome has value in informing a larger understanding of a worldwide concern and thus embodies the University's goal of producing students who live "inquiring, ethical, and productive lives as global citizens."

Tom Zoellner brings familiarity with literature—novels, short stories and the like—as a professor of English. He will lead the students, through the primary materials written by Martin Luther, Wolfgang A. Mozart and Sigmund Freud for example, to an appreciation of how concepts and practices related to effluent and other waste have changed over time. Bay, as a historian of both medicine and Japan, brings unique expertise to the classroom. The questions and assumptions that inform the medical humanities, and the conclusions that come out of this

scholarship as well are firmly grounded within the US/European experience and western archive. Bay offers a corrective to this predominantly Eurocentric field, through the Japanese experience, because it is based on a fundamentally different empirical base. He will lead the students to an understanding of how ideas concerning health and the body are products of specific times and places. This will reinforce the teaching Zoellner's teaching goal as well. This course examines – from perspectives of history, literature, psychology, politics and economics -- the various ways that humanity has struggled to both accommodate and marginalize the greatest taboo. Our course not only contributes to expanding the breadth and depth of medical humanities inquiry, but it also addresses a topic that remains a global problem today.

Objectives:

In this course, you will:

- 1) Connect contemporary scientific and environmental topics with a larger history of these developments
- 2) Examine familiar or local issues in non-western contexts
- 3) Establish connections between historical and current problems across both time and space as causes and results of larger global phenomena such as urbanization, westernization, colonialism and postmodernism
- 4) Develop critical tools for analyzing the multidisciplinary subjects of literature, history and science
- 5) Write critical essays that engage the larger field of the medical humanities

Criteria for grading:

Collaboration and class contributions: 40 percent

Reflective essays: 30 percent

Final essay: 30 percent

Required Texts:

The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why It Matters, by Rose George (New York: Macmillan, 2008)

Garbage Land: On the Secret Trail of Trash, by Elizabeth Royte (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2006)

Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing, ed. Harvey Molotch and Laura Noren (NY: New York University Press, 2010).

Robert Stolz, *Bad Water: Nature, Pollution and Politics in Japan, 1870-1950* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

Midterm Conference:

Around the seventh week, you'll be asked to meet with Tom or Alex individually to discuss your progress as a waste theorist and your aims for the remainder of the term. We will also suggest paths for improving your grade.

Equity and Diversity

Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in Chapman's Harassment and Discrimination Policy: <http://tinyurl.com/cuharassment-discrimination>. Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the Dean of Students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.

Classroom conduct:

The classroom is a professional environment and should be treated as such. I'm likely to call you out on the following. Please show up on time. Please don't eat or chew gum during class. It is okay to read assigned literature off a laptop during class, but please refrain from typing -- and certainly keep off the Internet. And at the risk of sounding blue-nosed, kindly keep a lid on profanity except within necessary contexts.

Late Work:

Strive always in this class to favor production over perfection -- "don't let perfect be the enemy of good," as the saying goes. Pieces more than three days late will not be accepted, and not turning in your essays on time will obviously have major grade impacts.

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism is a serious breach of trust with the reader and will result here as an automatic F on the story as well as a potential referral to the Dean's office and failure of the class. This is a class in nonfiction writing and, as such, I am assuming that the material you present is something that "actually happened" that can be verifiable by the standard tools of objectivity. Fabricating an event or making up anything that claims to be fact within the narrative will result in an F on the

assignment and a possible referral to the Dean. Checks for both veracity and originality may be conducted. Please note here the Chapman policy on academic integrity which states in part:

Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor and referral to the university's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions up to and including expulsion.

Schedule of classes

Monday, August 31—Introductions, syllabus review

Wednesday, Sept. 2 – Reading: “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” by Jonathan Swift; “Gargantua,” by Rabelais; “Poem 36,” by Catullus

DUE: first reflective essay

Monday, Sept 7 –Reading: “Introduction: Learning from the Loo,” *Toilet*

Wednesday, Sept. 9 –Reading: “Everybody Poops,” by Taro Gomi; excerpt from *The Scatological Rites of All Nations*, by John Bourke

Monday, Sept 14 – (Shit) Reading: Laporte, *History of Shit*.

Wednesday, Sept. 16 –Reading: “Garbage,” by A.R. Ammons

Monday, Sept. 21—(Environmental I) Reading: Bruno Latour, *The Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard university Press, 2004). Introduction, Ch. 1 **PDF**

Wednesday, Sept. 23 –Reading: “Austin Sewage Plant,” by Nate Blakesee; Field trip: Stanton Sewage Treatment Works

Monday, Sept. 28—(Environmental II) Reading: Daniel Schneider, *Hybrid Nature: Sewage Treatment and the Contradictions of the Industrial Ecosystem* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). Introduction, Ch 1 **PDF**

Wednesday, Sept. 30 ---Reading: Chapters 1-5 of *The Big Necessity*

Monday, Oct. 5—(Environmental III) Readings: *Bad Water: Nature, Pollution and Politics in Japan, 1870-1950*. Intro, Ch 2, 3, Conclusion

Wednesday, Oct. 7---Reading: excerpt from *Gulp*, by Mary Roach

Monday, Oct. 12—(Socio-technological I) Reading: Alexander Kira, *The Bathroom* (NY: The Viking Press, 1976). Ch 8-12, 17-19. **PDF**

DUE: Second reflective essay

Wednesday, Oct. 14---Reading: “The Bear,” by Galway Kinney, Chapters 6-10 of *The Big Necessity*

Monday, Oct. 19—(Socio-technological II) Reading: Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Environmental Services in Urban America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008). Introduction, Part III: The New Ecology, 1945-2000s. **PDF**.

Wednesday, Oct. 21—Reading: excerpt from “Patrimony,” by Phillip Roth; excerpt from “The Corrections,” by Jonathan Franzen

Monday, Oct. 26—(Socio-technological III) Reading: Maureen Ogle, *All the Modern Conveniences: American Household Plumbing, 1840-1890* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press). Introduction, Ch 2, 4. **PDF**

Wednesday, Oct. 28—Reading: excerpts from *A Rebours*, by Joris-Karl Huysmans; *My Struggle*, by Karl Knaussgard

Monday, Nov. 2—(Toilet Discipline) *Toilet*, Ch 2, 4

Wednesday, Nov. 4—Reading: Chapters 1-4 of *Garbage Land*

Monday, Nov. 9—(Legal) Reading: Jamie Benidickson, *The Culture of Flushing: A Social and Legal History of Sewage* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2007). Introduction, Ch 8, 12, Conclusion. **PDF**

DUE: Third reflective essay

Wednesday, Nov. 11—Reading: excerpt from Chapter 4 of “Ulysses,” by James Joyce; “Character and Anal Eroticism,” by Sigmund Freud

Monday, Nov. 16—(Health) Reading: James C. Whorton, *Inner Hygiene: Constipation and the Pursuit of Health in Modern Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Ch 1, 8 **PDF**; Michael Pollan, “Some of my Best Friends are Germs” *The New York Times* (5/15/2013).

Wednesday, Nov. 18 – Reading: excerpt from *Life Against Death*, by Norman O. Brown

Nov. 23-25—Thanksgiving

Monday, Nov. 30—(Gender) Reading: *Toilet*, Ch 9, 12.

Wednesday, Dec. 2—“Leck Mic him Arsch,” by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; “Table Talk,” by Martin Luther

Monday, Dec. 7—(Japan, again) Reading: Alexander R Bay, “Nation from the Bottom Up: Disease, Toilets and Waste Management in Prewar Japan,” *Historia Scientiarum* 22:2 (2012) **PDF**. David L. Howell, “Fecal Matters: Prolegomenon to a History of Shit in Japan,” *Japan at Nature’s Edge: The Environmental Context of a Global Power*, ed. Ian J. Miller, Julia A. Thomas, and Brett L. Walker (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013). **PDF**.

Wednesday, Dec. 9 –Wrap-up

DUE: Final paper