Montaigne Stumbles into the Anthropocene

Phillip John Usher, New York University

This talk steps back to a pre-modern moment — to a moment resolutely before Descartes proclaimed humans to be the “masters and possessors of Nature” — to open up Montaigne’s Essais and some works by his contemporaries. In modes alternately historicist and theoretical, shuttling back and forth between the early modern and the hyper-contemporary, we will ask what Montaigne and early modern French literature more generally might have to tell us about living in the Anthropocene (or the Chthulucene, etc.). We will explore some of the opportunities -- and some of the problems -- afforded by new eco-weavings. We will hear a call for a re-assessment of certain traditions of criticism. And we will explore, thereafter, how Montaigne and his contemporaries might end up having more to say to us about living in the age of ecological catastrophe.

Wednesday, February 24
5:30 pm (EST)
via Zoom – Registration Required

Hosted by the Department of French Studies