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Office: BuTo 425  
Hours: W 1:00 – 3:00 PM

ENGL 393 001  
Th 2:00 – 3:30 PM  
MATH 104

## ***Natural History in the Anthropocene***

In a widely-read essay, Dipesh Charkrabarty observes that “anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history” (*Critical Inquiry* 2009, 201). What, exactly, does Charkrabarty mean here by “natural history”? In pursuing this question, we’ll explore the history of this genre in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including Philemon Holland’s translation of Pliny and works by Francis Bacon, Hester Pulter, Thomas Browne, and Gilbert White, to get a sense of natural history’s goals, its adjacent fields of inquiry (antiquarianism, collections of wonder, experimental science, and encyclopedism), and its practitioners. We’ll then be in a position to assess this genre’s persistence in popular, artistic, and scientific writings about the Anthropocene, which is the new (and highly contested) name for our current geological epoch. Some of this writing even dates the emergence of the Anthropocene to the early seventeenth century. More broadly, we’ll want to ascertain how this body of writing incorporates and updates for the Anthropocene natural history’s abiding goals, methods, and products. What resources – practical and intellectual – might natural history provide in the Anthropocene?

In completing this course, students will explore the cross-disciplinary genre of natural history, especially its relation to humanism, gender, scientific authority, social class, empire, settlement, and the enduring violence of collection, especially the extinction of all life forms. Students will also read several cross-disciplinary accounts of the Anthropocene, in an effort to identify the legacies of natural history to conceptualizations of climate emergency and its effects in the twenty-first century. Finally, students will have the opportunity to explore UBC’s own natural-historical institution, the Beaty Biodiversity Museum, which tags itself as “Vancouver’s natural history museum at UBC.”

### **Course Requirements**

Each student will submit **three (3)** critical response papers by the end of the semester (**30% each, 90% total**). Each paper should be **3-4 pages in length**. You decide to which readings you would like to respond. There are no set due dates. **An example:** if you wish to respond to the readings assigned for 21 and 23 January 2020, then you must submit the response on these readings at the start of class on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. You may not submit a response on these reading on the 28<sup>th</sup> or at any later point during the term. **Plan ahead!** You may choose to respond to your self-guided tours of the Beaty Museum on 16 January 2020 and/or 11 February 2020.

On three days this term, I will not be in Vancouver. I ask you to visit the Beaty Biodiversity Museum (<https://beatymuseum.ubc.ca>). It is free to UBC students. I recommend visiting as much of the collections as you can during these visits. Or you may instead wish to specialize – that is, you return to a species in the collection over the course of the visits in order to think more carefully about a particular specimen: how did it get to UBC? What things about it do you notice over the course of your visits, or in light of our course readings? What did you know about this creature before – and what have you learned about it since, from our course readings? (You could, for instance, choose to look at the beaver, an animal that will recur in our readings.) Have you been to other “biodiversity” or natural history museums? How is UBC’s different, the same? What is the relationship between “biodiversity” and “natural history”? How does the museum signal its status on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded, territory of the Musqueam People?

The remainder of the mark for the course (**10%**) will reflect active participation. There is no final exam.

**UBC Attendance Policy:** <http://english.ubc.ca/resources/resources-for-students/#attendance>

**UBC Plagiarism Policy:** <http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/academic-integrity/>

### **Course Materials**

Two of our course texts are available for purchase at the UBC Bookstore. They are China Miéville's *Kraken* (2016) and Gregg Mitman, Marco Armiero, and Robert S. Emmett's *Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene* (2018). The balance of our course materials will be available via the online Koerner Library system. I will send you electronically those marked as [PDF].

Jan. 7: Introductions & Expectations

Jan. 9: Self-guided visit to UBC's Beaty Biodiversity Museum

**We will not meet on Jan. 9 because I will be at a conference out of town.**

Jan. 14: Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene'" (2000); *Trek: A Publication of Alumni UBC*, "The Conservation Issue" (2019) [PDF]; and Dana Luciano, "The Inhuman Anthropocene" (2015) (<https://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2015/03/22/the-inhuman-anthropocene/>)

Jan. 16: Self-guided visit to UBC's Beaty Biodiversity Museum

**We will not meet on Jan. 16 because I will be at a conference out of town.**

Jan. 21: Pliny, trans. Philemon Holland *The Historie of the World* (1601) (<https://penelope.uchicago.edu/holland/index.html>)

**Read:** "Dedicatory Letter," "Letter to the Reader," Book I, and skim Book VII

Jan. 23: John Gerard, *The Herball* (1597; rev. 1633) (<https://archive.org/details/herballorgeneral00gera/page/n3>)

**Read:** entries on tulip, laurel tree, mandrake, potato, and leeks; and 2 further entries of your own selection

Jan. 28: Edward Topsell, *The History of Four-Footed Beasts* (1658) (<https://archive.org/details/historyoffourfoo00tops/page/n6>)

**Read:** entries on the beaver, elephant, hare, and rhinoceros; and 1 further entry of your own selection

**Read:** Martha Alexandra Stromberger, "Topsell's Hare" (2019)  
(<https://oecologies.com/oe-blog/>)

Jan. 30: Vera Keller, "Accounting for Invention" (2012) & Francis Bacon, **from** *The New Atlantis* (1627) [**PDF**]

Feb. 4: William B. Ashworth, Jr., "Emblematic Natural History of the Renaissance" (1996) [**PDF**] & Hester Pulter, *Poems* (1640s – 1650s)  
(<http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu/#poems>)

**Read:** "The Pismire," "The Lark," and "Upon the Crown Imperial"; and 3 *Emblems* of your choice

Feb. 6: Elizabeth Alice Honig, "Making Sense of Things: On the Motives of Dutch Still Life" (1998)

Feb. 11: Self-guided visit to UBC's Beaty Biodiversity Museum

**We will not meet on Feb. 11 because I will be out of town.**

Feb. 13: Paula Findlen, "Jokes of Nature and Jokes of Knowledge" (1990)

Feb. 18- 20 **NO CLASS: Reading Week**

Feb. 25: John Durham Peters, "3<sub>3</sub> + 1 Vignettes on the History of Scalar Inversion" (2019)

Feb 26: VISITING SPEAKER: Dr. Margaret Ronda (UC-Davis), "The Poetics of Capitalocene Time: Simultaneity, Intensity, Stagnation" | Buchanan Tower 323 at 3:00 PM. **EXTRA CREDIT**

Feb. 27: Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1672)  
(<https://penelope.uchicago.edu/pseudodoxia/pseudodoxia.shtml>)

**Read:** "To the Reader," Book I (Chapters I, III, IV, and X), Book II (Chapter VI, parts 1 and 6), Book III (Chapters I, IV and XVIII), and skim Book IV

Mar. 3: Gilbert White, **from** *The Natural History of Selborne* (1788) [**PDF**]

Mar. 5: Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History" (2009)

Mar. 10: Patricia Yaeger, "Editor's Column" (2010) & Elizabeth Kolbert, **from** *The Sixth Extinction* (2014) [**PDF**]

- Mar. 12: Juliana Spahr, "Unnamed Dragonfly Species" (2011) [**PDF**] & Kent Monkman, "The King's Beavers" (2011) (<https://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/collections/quebec-and-canadian-art/?t=monkman#detail-61170>)
- Mar. 17: Julie Cruikshank, Chapter 1 of *Do Glaciers Listen?* (2005) & Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Planting Sweetgrass" from *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013)
- Mar. 19: Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Part 1 of *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015)
- Mar. 24: Mitman, Armiero, and Emmett, *Future Remains* (2018), pp. ix-128.
- Mar. 26: Mitman, Armiero, and Emmett, *Future Remains* (2018), pp. 129-218.
- Mar. 31 and Apr. 2 – 7: China Miéville, *Kraken* (2010)

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(<https://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/collections/quebec-and-canadian-art/?t=monkman#detail-61170>).

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