

Hi everyone,

welcome to climate crisis 101, also known as English 22.

So today is our first real lecture, we won't be jumping right into the literature,

that'll be the next lecture. Today we're going to go over some basic ideas, some key terminology, and really

you know deal with the issue of why we're approaching

you know the environment and climate crisis,

which we are indirectly. Why we're doing it from the

perspective of you know an English class?

So

you know a few years ago, I remember, I was into my doctor for my annual checkup,

and he asked what I did and I told him

that I was a professor. And then he asked

what kind of professor, and I noted that

I had

a joint appointment at UCSB as an
English professor
and in environmental studies. And he
looked
kind of quizzical for a moment, and then
asked how those two were related because
well you know to be honest it's not
intuitive
why that would be the case. And by
the way, you know I get this
all the time, when I give you know
public talks and people hear
that they're going to talk on
the climate crisis, people you know
pretty excited, but then when they hear
it's coming from an English professor,
they
you know often look well a little
disappointed you know. Why don't
we get a real expert on the subject here
rather than an English professor?
Well the argument that I'm going to make
now
by way of the first lecture, but more

generally in this class,
is that- well first off that all sorts of
different fields
can help us understand the current
environmental
crisis that we're in. And in fact, we're
going to be looking at more than just
you know approaching this from a
literary perspective, we're also going to
look at things like
approaching it from the point of view of
religion, eco-theology, eco-philosophy,
eco-environmental studies.
So all that, that does matter, but
for our particular perspective, which is
going to be the thing that we keep
coming back to again and again
throughout the term,
from a literary point of view, we can get
a
certain kind of insight into the way
culture works and into a way
people think. So let's just jump right
into the lecture,

and I'll show you what I mean. So this of course is our prezi.

We're gonna- you know next time we're gonna deal with all this, start with the lecture, we're gonna be doing this lecture to begin with. But right now let's do this little introduction that we have here.

Click on this here, and go right in.

By the way, I don't know if you can hear that in the background, but I'm doing this talk in the morning, it's a beautiful morning here in Santa Barbara, but I'm about 12 feet away from my chicken coop in my backyard.

You know I may have mentioned, I don't know if I have mentioned,

I'm an urban farmer you know I grew up on a farm, and even though I live in a small house with a small yard in Santa Barbara, we have a lot of vegetable garden here, and a lot of- well a lot of trees,

and a chicken.

Anyhow, so if you're wondering what that noise is, that's the chicken.

So this lecture we're going to deal with two main ideas here.

Why approach environmental issues from literary perspective?

And that's what I was just talking about, you know why this particular perspective has something important to bear on the situation.

And you know a more basic question, which often doesn't get approached,

which is you know why approach this from

literary, I mean why do we read and study

literature at all? And you know often in

English classes we just assume that everybody knows the answer to that, or everyone has

you know an answer to it, but it's not an intuitive question, and I think it's

worth

spending a little time with here. So

first off, what is environmental criticism? And environmental criticism is similar, methodologically, to other forms of cultural criticism, so Marxist, postcolonial, queer, feminist criticism. In the last 40 years or so, maybe 50 years even, literary critics and people who study environmental-literary critics, sorry, and people who study culture have really spent a lot of time thinking about things like the role of class, which is what Marxist criticism does, or the role of- so for example women in a culture.

So let's look at feminist criticism for example. So what do feminists do? Well they look at a culture for representations of gender and women. In other words, what can

that work of literature tell us about
that culture
with respect to you know how women were
imagined, how
gender, as like a binary for example,
traditionally has been imagined,
or if it's not imagined as a binary. All
these are really interesting questions,
and literature,
and we're going to see in a moment, why I
can offer a particular perspective
on that. So.

Environmental critics, not unlike
feminist critics,
are similarly interested in
representations of nature and the
natural world as they change over time.

Yeah I don't know if you can hear that
chicken, but she's particularly loud this
morning.

Hopefully she'll calm down a little,
and hopefully- however it works I have a
little mic above me, a shotgun mic, that's
what you're hearing me through,

and hopefully that's directed pretty
much at my mouth
so you're not hearing- you know it's kind
of directional is what I'm saying, so you're
not hearing that kind of sound too much.
But anyhow, so if you were interested in
understanding
how a culture thought about nature, their
relationship to the planet, their
relationship to certain features of the
planet and how they change over time,
well you know working at- looking at
literary works to try to understand that
can often be a very
effective approach.

One thing to think about is that these
things change
over time, so gender, perceptions of women
change over time.

And furthermore, they're not only
generated by particular cultures, they
play a role in generating those
cultures. So what do I mean by that? Well
if a writer

writes about let's say women in a particular period, that work, that literary work, would reveal, if you look at it carefully, it could often reveal a great deal about the way that women were thought about in that period. So that's important because you know it's generated by that culture in that sense. And what I mean is you know if the writer just were writing what everybody thought, let's say that women you know this is a patriarchal society that women should have a subordinate role in the whole culture, that would often be reflected in that work because it would be sort of generated by that work, because in fact the author in some sense is generated by it, born into that culture. But it can go further because that work, if it continues that particular

stereotype

and in fact you know enhances it, it can

help

reinforce that belief and even go

further,

it can help generate that culture. So you

know

if it not only believes that women you

know should be subordinate, but

some other thing, and it adds to it,

it could add to that belief.

Or it could take the opposite role, and

milestone text could do something like

that,

it could take the opposite position and

challenge it and say

you know that's actually not right, that

women should not be subordinate,

and then it can make that argument.

If it's an influential and effective

work, let me pop one screen here if I can.

If it's an influential work, it could

actually then help shape

culture. So in other words, works are not

only shaped by culture,
but they can shape culture too, sometimes
in little
subtle ways, sometimes in really big ways
I mean really big milestone works by
important writers who help
shift culture can do that. And that's
why these works, and we'll get into this,
are in part so important.
But I call that a feedback loop because
you know it's both
that the writer is informed by their
culture, and then
informs the culture too, you know is
shaped by the culture themselves,
the writing in turn shaped by the
culture, or
in addition the writing and
the author can shape their culture.
So if you want to understand
contemporary America's attitude toward
the environment,
looking at its history is you know, which
in some sense is 5000 years old,

obviously in the United States no way near
that old, but
the history of western thinking goes
back that far,
that's why we're going to look at it. And
some of the attitudes that we hold
toward the environment, and this
might be surprising,
go back 5000 years, important ones go
back 3000 years,
some not as long, some go back- we'll be
looking at Henry David Thoreau 150 years,
or we finish with Rachel Carson just
50 years.

But these attitudes are you know
alive and well,
and you can see them, in some cases fully
formed in the literature, which is what
we'll be doing.

So, jump to the next part.

So what do we, and for the
purpose of this class you're going to be
an environmental critic as well,
what do we explore? So

first off, we explore a range of literary periods, so it is the case that 150 years ago when Thoreau was writing, a little before that when Wordsworth was writing, it's a very exciting era where contemporary attitudes toward the environment begin to emerge. But the fact is, these go back very very far, so that there's no particular period that is unimportant, let's put it that way. Some may be more important, I would argue that you know Wordsworth Thoreau era is very important because it informs what becomes modern environmentalism, but all sorts of eras are important. So we will be looking at, that's one of the reasons we go back so far. The fact is deforestation, air pollution, endangered species, wetland loss, animal rights, rampant consumerism, and a whole host of issues like that,

have been appearing in western literature for hundreds, some cases thousands of years. And sometimes appearing is very controversial, even sort of you know debated back and forth. And I mentioned how like a milestone text could change the way a culture thinks about things.

Well

you know we're going to see, go for the last thing here, rampant consumerism, where that has been you know people have drawn attention to, been very concerned by, and you know make sort of an attack on that, or at least want us to reconsider it.

Henry David Thoreau may be most famous for that in- among our readings 150 years ago, but we're going to read you know reading 350 years ago where you know Thoreau's attack really emerges full-fledged.

So. One thing to think about, and you know you may have come to this class

thinking well this is going to be
environmental literature, it's all going
to be you know like studying, nature
poetry, and all,
that's not the case, in fact we don't
really study much of that at all here.
We explore a variety of genres though,
and any genre can be environmentally
significant. So what I mean by genre,
of course, is that there are you know
different categories of
literature, of writing, you know you can
have a poem, a novel, a play,
non-fiction, short story, you can have all
different sorts of things.
And even works that seemingly have
little environmental
imports, so works that you might think
well why in the world would that
work, because the author wasn't writing
nature poetry or even
any kind of you know nature writing any
genre,
you know even something like

song lyric. So I'm gonna actually give you an example of a contemporary song, and we're gonna analyze the lyrics just a little, just as a sort of a preface to the course to understand that you can approach all different sorts of things from environmental point of view, and don't expect it just to be something like nature poetry. Normally when I've taught this class in past years, in an actual auditorium, I actually play part of the song that I'm about to analyze.

So if you want to actually hear it, if you'll go through the prezi, it should pop on. But I'm going to skip that now, and the reason is because this is a popular song, and if I post this video onto youtube, and I've embedded a song in it, Youtube might decide not to put my video up because of copyright issues, so we're

going to just jump right through
to the lyrics of that song.
So the song is 'Rockstar' by
Nickelback. So let me pull this down a
little so that you can see that,
'Rockstar.' And it's an interesting song,
been
around for a few years, and I could have
gone with any number of songs
in this vein, but this one I thought was
as good as any to
deal with the concept that
we're talking about here.
So you know "I'm through with standin' in..,"
by the way I will not be singing this
song. "I'm through with standin' in line/
To clubs I'll never get in It's like the
bottom of the ninth/ And I'm never going
to win/
This life hasn't turned out/ Quite the
way I want it to be."
And then there's a refrain, another voice,
"Tell me what you want."
"I want a brand new house/ On an episode

of Cribs.” And that’s a reference to,
I think it’s now defunct, MTV series
‘Cribs,’
I don’t think it’s on anymore. And
what this was, was visiting the homes of
very wealthy people and looking at their
incredibly,
opulent, expansive homes. “And I want a
bathroom I can play baseball
in/ And a king size tub big
enough/
For ten plus me.” And then yeah, tell me
what you want, the refrain
again. So let’s walk through this a
little, thinking about this
not as whether it’s a good song, but
whether
it can tell us something about an
attitude toward the environment
that is widespread at this time. So in
other words, we’re acting kind of as
cultural historians here,
we’re not going- looking at a work that’s
you know 5500 or

5000 years old, we're looking at relatively contemporary work, and trying to understand what that culture that generated it believed towards the environment, and how a work like this reinforces that belief. That's the feedback loop, right? It's sort of generated by the culture, and it's continuing to generate this belief. And again, there are lots of songs that could do this, I just thought this was a particularly useful one. So the lines, "This life hasn't turned out/ Quite the way I want it to be."

You know we'll see this for thousands of years, philosophers, poets, artists of all sorts, have been speculating on what we all should want, and usually this comes under the broad rubric of the "good life."

In other words, what do human beings really want? What's the good life? If you

could have the ideal life you know what
would it be?

And all sorts of answers have been put
forth over the years,
over the millennia, by philosophers and
thinkers,

love is an example. So
honor. So if you read- I'll give examples
of these. If you read, for example,
Homer right, the Iliad, the Odyssey,
boy it's all about honor, I mean personal
honor is what it's about. It opens you
know

the Iliad sing to me muse of the
wrath of Achilles,
about this guy Achilles and why he feels
that he's been dishonored, and why this
whole war is
unfolding the way it is because of this
issue of honor.

Truth and beauty. Well you know
Socrates and Plato, and we'll be
looking at these people.

Truth and beauty becomes central, the

pursuit of truth becomes everything, in
Greek it's "aletheia," it's-

Well he calls it, Socrates and
Plato, calls it the good, which is to
Agathon, but it's all about beauty
and truth, and why they're so
important, and why we pursue those in
life.

Much much later equality becomes an
issue, that really doesn't become an
issue until just a few hundred years ago.

We might think that this has been a
concern of the West for hundreds of
years,

thousands of years, but it's not,
that's a relatively recent thing.

But all these things have been offered
up as the goal
of individuals, and the goal of a culture.

So not only you know the life that we
would want, but the life that we would
hope we're born

into. In other words, a culture where
equality

is the case. And unfortunately right, even though it's been you know not that long, but still hundreds of years that we've been taking up the issue of equality, and it's not the case that we live in a culture where equality is even working now, we're still you know trying to pursue that. But anyhow, I digress, continue.

“I want a brand new house/ On an episode of (tv show like) Cribs/ And a bathroom I can play baseball in.”

So another version of what the “good life” is, not what philosophers have been thinking, but has been in the western tradition, is success at obtaining and making a show of excessive wealth. And we're going to talk about that, making a show of it and the obtaining of it, which is

achieved by the way,
and you know we have to be honest about
it, at the cost of exploiting other human
beings and the planet.

This has always been the case, I mean
we're going to see Cato and Varro
2000 years ago in Rome, and talking
about their beautiful farms and all,
but how was it made possible? We're
going to see the environmental
implications of it, and how it was
damaging to animals and all,
but we're also going to see that it was
based on slavery 2000 years ago in Rome,
which was a slave culture.

So we don't have slavery,
modern slavery, today in most of the
world,
but it is the case that other people are
harmed by you know when one
person you know aggregates a phenomenal
amount of wealth.

Don't think that there isn't a flip side
to that story you know great poverty,

and don't think that you know all this
can be done without environmental cost.

But this is a particular version of the
good life
that now has enormous sway in our
culture.

So in other words, here we are as
historians, and we're looking at this
text,
and we're saying what's the good life
here, and let's go through some of the
possibilities. Is it honor? Is it truth? Is
it beauty? Is it equality?

No, that's not the one being
propounded here,
the one being propounded here is
excessive wealth and a show of that
wealth.

"I want a brand new house... And a king size
tub big enough/

For ten plus me..." So read in this sense, it
contains- this song contains a very clear
ideology. We might not think of it as
having an ideology, or even

profound enough to have an ideology, and
yet one

is here, and it has profound

environmental import

as this you know version of the good

life requires that we over

exploit the planet's resources.

So I'll explain how that works, but I

mean it's- well you can see it,

it's obvious right off the bat right you

know I mean. Could everyone on the

planet,

there's seven and three quarter billion

people on the planet now, could we all

live this way? Could the earth possibly

sustain that? The earth is having trouble

sustaining

us as we live right now, but this is

just over the top. You know

“On an episode of Cribs...” right. And

this is

the song you know showing it's a little

dated right. We would-

we refer to, and I don't know that the

Kardashians were fully on the scene at this time when this- maybe we're on the scene, but not quite the way they are. That we've heard it's like a Kardashian lifestyle right, this incredibly opulent you know billionaire class lifestyle. This is a cornerstone of the US economy, and is widely promoted in popular culture.

And we could refer to it just as a US thing, but it's really worldwide now, I mean US might be kind of close to the epicenter of where this culture is being generated.

Interestingly, right? I'm giving this lecture from a university in California. California culture in a way is sort of the epicenter of this sort of Kardashian- what we call Kardashian lifestyle right now.

But you know it is all about consumption, it is all about a show of what you have, a show of incredible

consumption. And it doesn't
have to be a thing per se, it can be you
know all these
images of influencers, and private jets,
and all.

That you know it's the activities
that you engage in too,
like flying around in a jet, which is
environmentally horrible, people talk
about

that in this class in some detail. But
you know

this is the American dream
now right. So again, you're a cultural
historian, you know nothing about this
culture, suddenly you realize

this culture is built on a view of the
good life, which is a dream
for everyone. You know not everyone
subscribes obviously,

but it's held up as the dream that
everyone should want.

And you know how do you know that as a
cultural historian? Well here it is,

written large in this text.

It's just screaming it, I mean

literally the

lead singer is screaming it, that

this is what he wants,

this is what you know life is about.

Yeah. So continuing with the

you know the lines here, I want a

bathroom I can play baseball in.

This will

come under attack throughout the western

tradition.

So it's not just that this attitude is

alive and well

for a while, and it is, and we're going to

see the birth of sort of modern

capitalism and all 400 years ago.

But even before that, writers, and I

mentioned here Horace, Ben Jonson, Henry

David Thoreau, we're going to be reading

them all.

They've been enormously critical,

specifically of this issue, of building

large

trophy houses. And there are
other people,
Andrew Marvell, we're going to be reading,
is also critical of it.

These people wonder if this could
possibly
make us happy. And they also know,
starting with Horace and Horace's
contemporary Virgil two thousand years
ago, right as the Christian era comes
into being,

you know these people are enormously
concerned and critical of it,
and Horace comes right out and questions
whether this can actually make us happy.

Ben Jonson, 400 years ago, focuses really
on the environmental devastation of
like building large houses. And Henry
David Thoreau decides to actually do
something about it,

is he tries to come up with his exact
you know
counter to. In other words, if you could
do something the exact opposite of

building a massive
big fancy what was called- you know we
called "trophy" house- was called a "trophy"
house at the time,
we know it under a different name,
generally as a McMansion.

But Thoreau wondered: if I made the
exact opposite of a McMansion what would
it be? And he comes up with the little
house-

the cabin that he lives at Walden
pond, which is
yeah about the size of a modern garden
shed. So

you know he is actually not just
thinking about it, but actually going to
act on it and try to come up with
sort of an antidote to what we have here.

Yeah. There are lots of different ways
you can
count this, but the average American
consumes 18 times more of the earth's
resources
than the average person

on the planet, and that's remarkable. And
the flip side is true,
that the average American then not only
consumes resources, but
emits things, like emits toxic
waste or-

We don't do it directly, you may not be
emitting it in your home, but
toxic waste is generated by creating
products and things that you want.

And the big one is of course, with the
climate crisis,

we emit a ton of greenhouse gases.

Just to give you that in perspective,
you know

three billion people on the planet, the
poorest three billion people, and it's
almost the poorest half of the people on
the planet,

you know if you want to know like what
percentage of greenhouse gases have
that group put in the atmosphere, it's
about 5%.

What that means is, the wealthiest half

of the planet has put

95% of the greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

And in particular, the developing world- and the developed world rather, and this would have been

in the last 60 years, principally during the beginning of that anyhow. The United States and the EU, the countries of Europe, together we put in two-thirds of all the greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, even though we're only like 12%

of the world's population. So

here's the dirty downside of this from an environmental point of view. Yeah you can talk about how great a big house would be and all, the wonder of it, and this song does, and all sorts of songs, and all sorts of you know other works too.

But the flip side, the dirty side, the side we don't talk about,

is the incredible cost that this has on

the planet.

And you know, for example, the poorest three billion people on the planet, which you know don't have any of this. And by the way you know, if you were to look at the wealth of the poorest half of the planet, that would be in this case almost three and a half billion people.

If you were like you know take all the money that they all had, and aggregate it together, and take that amount, and compare it to the wealthiest people on the planet.

You know how many wealthy people would it take to equal the poorest three and a half billion, to have the same amount of money?

Would it take you know 10 million, a million, what do you think?

The way that money has been aggregated on the planet, 100 people, in fact far fewer depending on how you calculate it,

100 people
on this planet have more wealth than the
poorest half
of all humanity. That
is of course you know championed here, we
love this idea of a billionaire class
and people living that way.
And we kind of forget that you know
flipside is the poorest people on the
planet, we don't talk about that because
our dream is
this economic one. So anyhow.
You know to put this another way, you
know
100 average Americans consume more
natural resources than entire towns
in the developing world, it's you
know
extraordinary. And the flip side is emit
more, and in particular,
in terms of the climate crisis, emit more
greenhouse gases
than entire towns by a long shot,
and that's enormously problematic

obviously.

Yup. One thing to think about regarding all this, that you know our attitudes toward the environment, and in fact most things are not innate. In other words, we're not born thinking that we want to live in an incredibly lavish big home. Where does that attitude come from?

Well it comes from culture, it comes from the aspects of the things that we do that are generating it. In other words, works of literature, works of art, all sorts of things. For our purposes, works of literature like this, that are constant, like the song, that are constantly reiterating that view and telling it to you. So you're a child growing up in that culture, you know you learn what a culture values. And you know

nowadays,
you know kids by the time they're in
their teens, they're all about you know
seeing influencers online and all,
and people propounding this very
view.

May not be in songs, maybe in videos,
maybe in all sorts of different ways,
and it often is in a lot of ways, in a
lot of subtle ways,
but there is a consistent you know theme
going through it all,
and this is current iteration of the
American dream.

It's kind of always been like that, but
you know if you're a cultural historian
approaching this
issue, you could see the American dream
morphing along the way
until we got where we are. Wealth has
always been part of it,
nowhere near like what it is today. And
if we were
focusing just on this issue from this

perspective, you know we could make a study of the last hundred years of the American dream, and you know from our perspective, how that dream has impacted the environment. So this really asks a basic question, and that is how do we know what we know? And what I mean by that is, you know how do you know how you feel about you know life, about what the good life is? You know most of this is not innate, and I don't- what I mean by that, it's not like biologically encoded in us, but rather you get it from you know a culture into which you were born. It doesn't matter which culture you're born into right. You could be born into this one, or any other cultures that we're going to look at throughout this term. You could have been born nearly 5000 years ago in the culture that they gave us the Epic of Gilgamesh,

it doesn't matter because human beings
are sort of this general
purpose, kind of almost like a general
purpose computer, we
we take on the apps you know, we take on
the way of
approaching the world that's loaded
into us,
and what we you know take on
is the beliefs of that particular
culture.

If you're born into a slave culture
right,
it's you know you're told that this
is normative,
this is just the way it works, whether
you're a slave or the people who keep
slave- I mean slaves.

The culture has an incredible
investment in telling you that this
is okay and normal, and you may
come to believe it, that it's absolutely
normal.

On the other hand, you may

realize that it's not
and you know counter it, and works of
literature in fact are great at doing
that,
great works of literature have done that.

But

it is interesting to think about, and it
could be little beliefs, it doesn't
have to be something like huge
like that, it could be you know
what do you think is the standard of
beauty?

Right? That is you know you would
think
that people sort of intrinsically know
what's beautiful.

Well you know I don't think that's the
case,
if you look in the last 50 years or
so, the standard of beauty in America
has changed dramatically.

And you know this is
not that human beings are looking
different, people

look basically the same as they did 40
50 years ago,
but what our culture told us was
beautiful,
you know that's changed. And where did we
get that? Well we got that through a
range of texts and artworks right. I mean
not all of them high artworks, but
you know you go into a supermarket and
you see you know all sorts of glossy
magazine covers, you know fashion
magazines,
there it was, the standard of beauty,
again and again and again and again.
And you still get it today, but my
point is it's changed over time,
but it's here alive today, it has its
disturbing aspects
now. I mean the disturbing aspects of you
know from 50 years ago was far more
racist then, it was sort of a
you know white normative thing, now
that's changed, but there are other
things that are disturbing about it too.

So people who do find these things
disturbing
want to you know not only see what's
going on, but they want to change what's
going on.

Yeah. But I asked this question
because

I think it is the primary way that we
learn about the world is from
the culture that we're born into.

I'm going to skip another song here,
and then I'll just show you a picture of
it here so.

This is Lourde's 'Royals,'
you may have known this song from a few
years ago.

Move the cursor off of Lorde here.

I think it's a great song,
but from our point of view it's a very
interesting song because counter to
that Nickelback song 'Rockstar,' this one
argues against excessive consumption you
know.

At one point, she you know the- Lorde

sings and-

I want to get myself out of the picture

here with Lorde. Lorde

sings the persona in the

story, the poem, the song, says "My friends

& I/ We've cracked the code."

In other words, she's come to see through

what her culture has told her about

excessive consumption and all, and what

every song is saying,

and she's cracked the code and realized

that's not going to get you to the good

life,

that's not going to be happy- give

you happiness.

In that sense, this song is a wonderful

example of anti-consumerism, or an

attempt to make an anthem

of the anti-good life

anthem for the current American view of

the good life.

Of course you know it's not perfect in

that regard.

I don't really know enough about Lorde's

subsequent career, and whether she now
lives in the house you know with the
bathroom big enough that you can play
baseball in it, but I do know the song
definitely

is squarely taking on the sort of
culture that we saw in
Nickelback's 'Rockstar.'

So I want to give you some other
examples, we don't have to just
look at literary text, and a song lyric
is a literary text, I mean it's really a
poem to music, but we can approach-
see this in- what we're talking about
in a variety of cultural artifacts here.

So

let's look at for example, I won't
spend a lot of time with this, but a work
of art.

So this is,

hold on, yeah. Sorry I'm-
if I'm making you dizzy, I'm very sorry. I
should have focused on here that this
is by a guy named Gustave Dorè, it

was made in 1860.

I'll get out of the picture, you can see that. This is an etching, and it's called "Niagara," so it's a work of art and we'll take a look at it.

And I want to stay out of the scene for a while. Throughout the 19th century you had a lot of works to celebrate it and promote it, the beauty of the natural world, that was not the case a few decades- a few centuries before.

This was a time, this is the rose time basically.

This is coming- this work was made six years after Walden was published, and it's all about the incredible sublime beauty of wilderness, in this case

Niagara Falls, New York, which you know today we don't-

if you've been to Niagara Falls, it's really not quite like this, it's been very developed and all. But

at the time, this was seen as like a huge

wilderness area

in eastern United States, and

people were fascinated by

wilderness then. So by

natural beauty, it's not like a nice

cultivated garden is what interested

them, this was the thing.

We'll talk about that and how this

emerges throughout the term.

So note the tiny human beings here,

there they are. They are

really tiny. So

you don't have to know anything else

about this work and suddenly you're

seeing

a view of nature here, and the

relationship of human beings to nature

you know on display. Nature first,

it's a fascination with wilderness, kind

of a dangerous place right, those

guys are near you know where they

could fall off a cliff.

And also human beings are

imagining themselves as small in terms

of nature.

In doing that, they're really focusing on the enormity, the vastness of nature, how frightening and powerful it is, and that's an attitude that you're going to see in Thoreau.

Yup.

The romantic poets, and we'll read like Wordsworth and all.

And by the way, in terms of how to approach this course, since it is recorded. If at any time you know you want to stop and read, well just push the pause button right. So normally if this would have been a lecture in a you know face to face, I would have stopped to give you time to read this, I'm not necessarily going to do that.

Sometimes I will read things, sometimes I'll focus on them, but you know you may just want to stop and read them.

You know this is romantic poets, like Wordsworth and all, are putting this idea forth. In fact the notion of nature sublime even comes in the previous century, the 18th century, was people like Edmund Burke, who developed the idea, and Immanuel Kant, the philosopher. Seeing nature is beautiful, all inspiring, frightening.

You don't have to have known about that history, when you look at that picture compared to human beings, nature is beautiful, all inspiring, and frightening.

Now think about the fact that nature is not innately sublime right, it's carefully constructed in this etching as such. And just to go back to that, and we'll talk about this in a minute, but good time to say it, is two centuries before that's not the way people looked at the environment,

as being sublime, and beautiful, and all
inspiring, they saw it scary, and
dangerous, and frightening.

But this attitude is now coming on the
scene

as a way of viewing wilderness, and it's
being represented

here in this particular etching. So

how does he do the

you know do that, make you know nature
seems sublime?

Well human beings in the scene are much
smaller

by way of perspective than the birds. So

look at the birds here, and you know

just look at the wingspan of that bird

compared to the height of a person, it's

many times

bigger, this is like not as big as a

condor, this is big as like a

pterodactyl or something.

And it's of course perspective because this

bird is supposed to be you know sort of

flying closer to us than the people

there.

But nonetheless, you know not only is the whole scene you know dwarfing the people there, even the birds and all are. So Dorè is- you know he's done a good job of conveying this attitude toward wilderness here in the painting.

Yeah. Dorè has wrote a number- did a number of etchings, and for example, he does a series on the Bible, another one on Milton's 'Paradise Loss,' which we're going to read from, which is a story about the Bible. And in those works he has you know religious pilgrims here with the staff in hand. But look at this guy with the staff and all, you know these people are like these guys here, like religious pilgrims

that have come to this place, like a
place of worship.

And they're even you know they're
represented like pilgrims, but even sort
of bowing down,

kneeling, in this you know religious
perspective. You will have people
right after this, for example, John Muir
who go

right out and say you know Yosemite
Valley here in
California

is a great temple, it's one of the
greatest temples on the planet, forget
about all these cathedrals like Notre
Dame and all

in Europe that you may have seen or
heard about, the most
wonderful one of all is in Yosemite. And

you know basically what Dorè is saying
here this is a temple too,
and these people are like pilgrims.

That's a very specific way of looking at
the environment. Again, 200 years before

this, people didn't think that way.

It might seem natural enough to us to think of that as being like a holy place where God is,

but that's only because we were born into a culture that has fully inherited this particular view of nature.

Yeah Henry David Thoreau and John Muir.

And we're going to see it with Thoreau too in what we read, but it's Muir who comes out and actually calls it a temple, and he calls people who would destroy a place like the Yosemite Valley, which was happening at the time because they were building a reservoir, and he was he was railing against it. You know he will call those people temple destroyers.

Yup. So

you have, and I keep mentioning like a couple centuries before, but a couple centuries before you have someone like John Evelyn in the 17th century.

Evelyn is known for having a very

detailed journal that he kept, which tells us all sorts of things about the- what people thought at that time, in the 17th century.

But at one point he goes to Italy, and to get from where he is, England to Italy, you have to cross the Alps.

And he describes that trip across the Alps, and it was not like this, it was not religious reverence, it was not beautiful, it was not all inspiring, it was the most frightening thing that he could possibly imagine, he keeps thinking he's going to fall to his death.

Perhaps like these guys should be concerned about that, but he's not going to openly go out and do that, go to that you know that edge to get the best view and risk it, he just wants to get through the Alps as quickly as possible.

Most people at that time did not think well of

the- of wilderness, for all sorts of different reasons, because they were afraid of things like wolves and other animals, they were afraid of the fact that criminals often hung out in places like that. So we'll get into all that, but just know that this is a particular attitude toward wilderness that was you know merging at this time, that was not innate, it's not like everyone thinks that way.

The interesting thing is you might think that way, many people do think that way, that wilderness is like a holy place. You go there, you're just overwhelmed by the beauty, the awe of it all, but that's not an intrinsic feeling as surprising as it may seem.

I'm going to talk about how all that works. Yeah.

If you look carefully you know at any

sort of artwork, whether it's this
artwork,
song lyric, literary text,
you can get an interesting
insight into what a culture thinks about
the environment. So that's going to be
our project,
you know we've looked at these. The goal
of the course is to understand better
how the perspective of the environment
that we've inherited.

And we're going to see you know how
we've inherited
you know basically 5000 years
of thinking, how that was all constructed,
and we're going to see it being
constructed along the way,
we're going to see
milestone text where attitudes
toward the environment were changing
and being fashioned.

And the real goal, and we'll get to
this now, is you know what this tells us
about our relationship to the

environment today.

But first, a few useful ideas.

So we talked about what you know
environmental criticism is, but here are
a few things that

it's good to know. I'll pop back on here.

What we're talking about here is
called environmental criticism, it's also
referred to as "green" criticism,
that's principally in Europe that you'll
hear it referred to as that. More often,
in the US, it's referred to as
"ecocriticism,"

so you'll hear me talk about that all
the time, that's why I called this course
eco-criticism 101.

You should know what eco-criticism means,
it's a contraction for
ecological literary criticism,
or more common- or less commonly,
ecological cultural criticism, but you
know you kind of lose the literary
culture on the middle, and you
contract it into eco-criticism. But it's

just

a way of approaching literature, or
culture from an environmental
perspective.

Important word to know, eco-criticism.

Also by environment, often in part

because of the project of

Thoreau's era and Dorè's era, which

you just saw,

you might- when people talk about the

environment you might think of something

like wilderness, the environment is

always

you know meaning wilderness. But from our

point of view,

environment can mean any sort of

environment. Wilderness? Yes, but also

what we generally refer to as a built

environment. What would that be?

I mean something that human beings have

built or encroached upon,

it could be a farm, and that's you know

people have changed the environment

there,

it could be a suburb, people have changed
it even more there, could be a city where
it's really changed a lot.

All those are environments, they're built
environments, but environment doesn't
just meet wilderness. So it's good to
keep that in mind because you might
think that like if you're talking about
an environmental poem,
that that means a poem about wilderness
or nature, but it doesn't, you can talk
about the environmental import of a poem
focusing on the city. Yup.

As a consequence, we
ecocritics, and for the duration of this
course, you're an eco-critic,
are interested in all sorts of
landscapes and all sorts of
environments. So we will not
be, and maybe before you took this course,
you assume this is going to be a poem
about literature and the environment,
it's going to be about nature writing,
about work celebrating the environment

and saying how beautiful it is and all.

There'll be little on that in this course, but not a lot.

And in fact, we will just be drawing attention to why the writer thought it was beautiful, and why the writer wants to convince us that it's beautiful.

So nature writing is, in the traditional sense, is not our subject, our subject is writing that reveals something about how we feel toward you know the environment, whether it's a build environment, like a city, or wilderness.

So the word ecology is another important word for us to keep in mind, especially since we're doing ecological literary criticism.

The word was coined in 1866, and this is just after Darwin introduces his theory of evolution by a German biologist named Ernst Haeckel.

And Haeckel coined the word to suggest
that all life

is connected. So you know we have the
word biology.

Biology, the ology means study, it's coming
out of

Greek, and bio also coming out of Greek
means life. So what is biology? It's the
study of life.

When you talk about like the biology of
a mouse or a dog,
you're talking about that particular
form of life.

But what if you wanted to talk about you
know like an area,
an environment, say a forest where
there was all kinds of different life.

How do you-

You could call that biology, but Haeckel
wanted to have a word
that would talk about all the life there,
and the interaction of all the life
there, and that's why he coined the word
ecology.

It's biology, but it's the biology
not of an individual you know
species or you know
genera or whatever, but it's the biology
of a range of different
life that cohabitates there
basically.

It comes from two Greek words. So again,
logos,
that's the ology, and oikos means a
"household."

Maybe not the best choice of words
because there were words in- there are words in
Greek for like region and all,
but he was-. Basically the idea that
Haeckel wanted to
get across here, imagine that you know
an
area is like a household,
where all sorts of plants and animals
live under one roof,
an ecosystem is that, it's where plants
and animals
all live together. Again, there are lots

of different individual biologies there,
but the interaction of them all,
that is ecology.

So let me just go back before that, I
just thought of one thing I
should further say.

You may know- you may see the word
ecology a lot, and we'll even talk about
it in this class, as an ecosystem.

An ecosystem is a way, and really we get
to this at the very end of the course
with

Rachel Carson because you know Thoreau
and all is actually before

Haeckel. Incidentally, a little bit of
trivia, many people

for a long time thought that Thoreau
coined the word ecology because he is a
little before Haeckel,

because of something he wrote in one of
his journals. Now that was kind of
wishful thinking,

people had looked carefully at that
journal entry and realized that

it was another word that looked like
ecology.

But what Haeckel wanted to talk about
here is kind of best summed up by the
idea of an ecosystem,
and that is a system of life working
together,
all interrelated. And why that's
important is if you alter
one you know form of life in that system,
it can have
implications throughout. You take a key
predator out of a system,
life is going to change dramatically
there, that's
because it's all interconnected,
interrelated.

I note here that you know there is a
reader for the course, you're going to
need it for the Epic of Gilgamesh, which
will be the next lecture. If you haven't
gotten it, you need to get it. Yeah,
so. Important question,
why approach environmental issues from

literary perspectives? It's the one I started with, but I want to actually offer up an answer here, I'm going to offer multiple questions- multiple answers rather. And the fact is that there are other perspectives, there's eco-philosophy, eco-psychology, eco-theology. And by the way, we will be addressing all those in this class under the larger rubric of the environmental humanities, and of course the- what I call the hard sciences here, the natural sciences. Any of these are useful, and you know as I note here, they're all valid, and useful, and and crucial. And so I want to be very clear, it's not like I'm saying I think the science is unimportant or unnecessary, I think it's incredibly important, incredibly necessary, I think eco-psychology is incredibly

important, I think it all
is, it's just that they do not happen to
be the
subject of this course. It would
be great if
you know you took a course
on each one of those things,
because I think they would all hopefully
be illuminating and help you
get a better handle on how we understand
and interact with our planet.

But this is just one of many approaches,
and one of many valid approaches.

So with that said, we will be employing
eco-philosophy, eco-psychology
eco-theology, you know
environmental history and others. So
even though
the course is you know a 101 in
eco-criticism,
it also- it will touch on these, and
hopefully
give you some insight into those, and
maybe even kind of you know spark your

curiosity so you want to go further and take a course like an eco-psychology. Yeah. But I want to make the argument that literary approach, taking the form of cultural historical analysis, that's what we're doing, that's why the course is laid out as that sweeping you know evaluation of 5000 years of western culture, that this is uniquely useful.

Uniquely in the sense that it's definitely unique and different, but not again saying that the others aren't, you know other approaches are also uniquely useful

I would argue. But this one has certain characteristics that are unique, that we're not going to see elsewhere, and what we're going to do here is focus on that.

And to be totally honest, I also feel that it is particularly important, not more important than other fields, but

really important

in certain ways. So let's talk about those.

Yup. To do that however, I think we need to kind of confront the 800 pound gorilla in the room and ask this more basic question, which we've already hinted at, and I actually had at the very beginning.

And that is, why do we read and study literature

at all? I know this sounds like a basic question, it's the most basic question.

Unfortunately, it's one that a lot of people just don't stop to think about, and even in courses, in literary courses, we don't stop to

you know focus on that for a little bit. So let's do it, and let's go through a few of the possibilities.

Well a lot of people read for diversion right.

So and by you know by reading, I mean encounter works of literature, so you

may do that now
not just by reading, but now that we have
motion pictures and television
and Youtube, that we encounter
things, written works brought to
life in those forms.

And you know diversion, that's you know
you binge watch something, it's just you
know to
as a little diversion a way of you know
chilling or whatever.

Pleasure, vicarious pleasure right.

So this is why you know romantic novels,
in like a modern sense of romance
novels-

not romantic romance novels, why
they're so popular in a way, it's sort of
a vicarious pleasure, you sort of step
into a world and you see all sorts of
emotions of play there,
and it's enjoyable. You could
argue the same for reality tv
too in a certain way, but reality tv
that's just the opposite of pleasurable,

a lot of unpleasantness happening that I guess is gripping as well.

Education, another good one, one of my favorites here.

I would argue comes under the broader heading, or co-heading of edification, that you would learn something, you know this not only includes like non-fiction like you know reading an essay or watching a documentary, but you know other works can teach you things too. I think that's a great reason for reading of course.

But I'm going to give you another one here, you can tell I like this one because it's so big.

Understand human nature, and as as far as you know the belief that human nature and what we value

does not change over time. This is an important concept to note here, this is called

New Criticism, and this was a critical approach, enormously influential, and widely used

up until around 1970, this is New Criticism.

And you know what this is about, I note here the most conspicuous feature of it, of New Criticism, is that history is largely irrelevant. Let's see how can that be the case?

Well the notion is that certain enduring ideas, and these would be things like platonic ideas, things like beauty, presumably do not change much over time.

So what am I really saying here? The idea is

that basically human things, things like you know pride, and love, and competition, and all sorts of things, these are always

been around

in this view. You know if you want to go back, let's talk about love.

You don't understand love? Go back to you know Sappho 2700 years ago, Sappho will teach you about love in a way that will be understandable to you today, it will ring true to you, you may be overwhelmed by how beautiful her poems are. And why is that? Well because

love is the same, we are human beings, we share these basic emotions, love is the same now

2700 years ago, it was the same 400 years ago

when Shakespeare was writing about it,

it's the same

if a writer was writing about it last year.

Why? Because these are basic enduring human qualities.

So you know you can see why

this is of interest to writers

because you know it taps into- you
often hear it, you know the timeless
human condition, the timeless things that
people value,
it's still alive and well
today. I mentioned
New Criticism was very popular
up until 1970s, so you might think that
it was
just a planet, in large measure
it was,
it doesn't mean that it still hasn't
hung on, it still isn't out there.
And even in schools, and you may have
encountered it like in high school,
because to teach the historical content
of something-
context of something, it can be very
difficult to like understand
Shakespeare's era, to understand love
in his era
can be very difficult.
That's one view. Another reason
that we read- so that's one reason you

read. So

what's the- how would I fit this under
you know basically what do I mean here?

The basic idea here is that you read
to get a better insight into the human
condition, the shared human condition
that we've all shared as human beings
for as long as we've been writing and
producing art.

So that's important, and that's
the timeless beauty
of art and humanity.

Yeah. To understand history
is another reason, and that's to learn
about
past cultures through their literature,
it's more or less what you would call
traditional historicism.

It existed, incidentally, concurrently
with New Criticism,
but was never popular for a variety of
reasons.

What I mean by that is popular among
writers, but even popular in

schools and universities, and the reason for that is it's time consuming. So in other words, if you're a student and you want to learn about Shakespeare's era, you have to do an awful lot of research, you have to have a professor or a teacher telling you an enormous amount about the era.

And as a consequence, it was difficult to teach text right. So if you're doing New Criticism, you don't have to think about any of that, that's what we just talked about in the last slide, you just jump right in and say let's talk about love you know, and everybody can talk about love.

But if you're doing this form of criticism, you have to talk about you know what love meant to Shakespeare in his era, hence I note here under "b," it's very difficult to teach it for that reason. But the

bigger issue I would argue

is that it lacks, this is “c,” any sort of
contemporary payout.

In other words, okay let's say you decide
to do this, and you decide to do it for
Shakespeare.

Well you know you'll learn about

Shakespeare's era,

if it's done well of course or if you do
a lot of work and research,

fine, that's interesting, now you know
about Shakespeare's era.

But how does that have any pay out for
you today,

especially if love in Shakespeare's

era, if that's what you're particularly
interested in,

is very different than ours? Well, not
much

right. I mean you know about

Shakespeare's era, that's good, you

might like history, that's great,

but it doesn't really have any impact

for us

today necessarily. So as a consequence,
it's hard to get people to go along
with it, which arguably is why New
Criticism was more popular even though
these
two things concurrently, traditional
historical system existed at the same
time,
because, approaching Shakespeare, if we just
talked about
love as the shared thing across the ages.

Well
that helps you understand love,
that can help you
feel you know these concepts more,
more strongly and all,
so you can see why people liked it more.

Anyhow we're not done with our
reasons that we read. They're all valid,
all of those I would say. And what I
mean reading for diversion, reading for
pleasure,
New Criticism, traditional historicism,
but perhaps not as important as the

following. So you can tell right away, I'm setting up the approach that we're going to use. So yeah, I'm going to argue that what we're going to be doing is- yeah I don't know the more important is the right word here, maybe I have to redo this slide, but I mean more relevant for us that you would you know care more about this. Yeah so, let's see what I'm talking about. You read, we read, to understand our culture in the sense that we learn about our culture from the past, this is generally called New Historicism. I'm introducing this under the broader rubric of New Historicism, just to be clear, a whole range of cultural approaches have come out of this in recent decades, and we're going to be talking about those. But one of the

most important, or the most important from our perspective, is that New Historicism gave birth to the type of eco-criticism that we're doing, but let's take a look at this.

There's another one that comes out of that. So

here, what are we trying to understand our culture?

Understand- and this is why it has a contemporary payout right because we can understand about the 21st century attitude toward the environment that gave birth to the climate crisis, that's what we're going to be doing in this course. But there's an even bigger payout potentially for you personally,

and that is not just to understand our culture, but ourselves,

as ourselves are culturally historically constructed,

this is also New Historicism. So

what I mean by this is, remember

a little while ago I said that you know
the attitudes that we have come from the
culture
to which we are born. If you didn't you
know- if you're born into a culture
where you know you thought nature,
wilderness, was scary and frightening,
you would probably think wilderness
was scary and frightening. But
why do you think that? Most people you
know have a feeling toward the
environment today, attitudes toward the
environment,
they assume it might be innate, but in
fact it is culturally constructed, it
comes from thousands of years
of history that has informed and changed
these views of nature and all
along the way. Most people just, again,
don't think about it-
or many people don't think about it, and
many people think that it's probably
just innate,
that's the way everybody feels about it,

or probably born that way because
look everybody I know thinks that way.
Well everyone you know thinks that way
not because they were
born that way, but because the culture
has reinforced that and taught you that,
inculcated the dead idea
from you since the moment you were born.
That's what we're going to be looking at,
trying to understand both what our
culture believes about the environment,
where it came from. But as a personal
journey,
more importantly, what would you may
think about, what I may think about the
environment, this is an
opportunity to sort of you know to
interrogate our personal
beliefs and see them as what they
are, which is
culturally historically constructive, and
this as I note here is also a form of
New Historicism.
I'm curious what your primary reason for

reading is, and

there is no bad answer here right,

no wrong answer.

Diversion or pleasure could be the main
reason that you read,

I often read for diversion and pleasure,

and it's incredibly you know

important. So

it's absolutely fine to do

that too,

but I just want you to think about it.

So let's talk about New Historicism.

As the cultural analysis that we're

doing has come out of this

New Historicism, I think it's important

that we have a better understanding of

it.

Comes on the scene right around 1980,

but it's still influential today, but

still

you know these names are kind of dated

now right. New Criticism

is hardly new since it kind of you know

came out of prominence in 1970.

New Historicism, yeah it was super new in 1980, but not so new now.

But it is still extraordinarily influential, maybe not directly in the sense that you know if you go ask all your professors in the English department if they think of themselves as new historicists, they may not say that they do. But if you ask them if they think of themselves as cultural critics, they may well very likely say yes, and that in part is coming out of the turn towards New Historicism that takes place right around 1980. So let me get out of the scene here, and also let me center this down.

This is like traditional historicism, in that it requires a great deal of research.

So if you were doing a new historical analysis of Shakespeare's era, in fact like the first new historical- new historicist analysis of literature

by the guy who coins the term,
Stephen Greenblatt,
was about Shakespeare's era. If you're
doing that, it still requires
a lot of work, just like traditional
historicism. Why? Because you have to
learn about the entire era,
and that's the same, it is a form. In that
sense,
you know it's worth noting here, it is a
form of historicism,
but it has advantages over that
because it uses history in the form of
text from past
cultures to interpret the present, or at
least it can.
So it can, and this is the way our class
will approach it,
it can make the past ancient literature,
including not so ancient like
Shakespeare relevant today,
which is why we're reading older texts
rather than completely modern ones
because

you know these texts, surprising as it
may seem,

Shakespeare as surprising as it, may seem
can tell us about our contemporary
attitudes toward things.

Not only does this allow us to interpret

you know

modern culture, but this was the number

seven in the previous group of slides,

it also allows us to interpret ourselves

as we too

come into being in historical content.

20th century philosopher, Martin

Heidegger, once argued that at birth

we're all randomly thrown into a culture

right. Where you land

is entirely you know not up to you,

where you're born.

You happen to have been born in the

culture you were born in,

you know but you could have been born

500- 5000 years ago in another culture,

speaking another language and all,

and you would have taken on the values

of that culture
yourself. You may ultimately have
challenged them, you might ultimately
have written that down
and become a milestone text because you
helped generate something new in the
culture, but it doesn't change the fact
that you're born into the culture and
took on those values.

So let me just back up one thing before

I get to this,

in terms of our previous example of

love. So I do this to help

clarify what

the difference between New Historicism

and

say you know New Criticism. So New

Criticism,

I mentioned, look at the idea of love. It

doesn't matter if you go back 2700 years

ago with my example of Sappho, 400 years

ago with

Shakespeare, or contemporary artists

today, love is the same,

all the time. Well New Historicism
is not going to take that position,
they're going to take the position that
yeah
you know you cannot think about love in
the same way
today as Sappho's Greece 2700 years ago,
it was totally different there. Moreover,
okay Sappho was gonna, and did present a
problem for new historicists in a-
new critics in way, because Sappho was
writing about same-sex
love. I'm sorry you know a new
historicism would say,
you cannot talk about same-sex love and
heteronormative love as being identical.
Okay they're all love, not saying one's
better or anything, I'm not saying that,
but I am saying is they're different, and
furthermore
in different cultures they are different.
So to talk about same-sex love
and you know
significantly heteronormative culture

where same-sex love
is you know frowned upon and even
policed, you know talk about that
in terms, exact same terms, as you know
heteronormative love,
that's not gonna work. So yeah,
okay it's love that Sappho is talking
about, but we have to really
look about the love that she's talking
about and what it reveals about her
culture.

Go my other example, Shakespeare 400
years ago,
as you may know if you've read sonnets,
Shakespeare alternately writes about
love, the love of beautiful young man, and
alternately,
the love of an older woman, his dark lady.
I'm sorry those loves are different,
and to say that that's all just the
basic human feeling of love,
yes it is a basic human feeling of love,
but that's
different, those two are different. And

furthermore,
you know Shakespeare's culture to
understand
how you know men express same-sex love
and all, that's very different than today,
it's very different than
you know 50 years ago in the United
States where you know
suddenly LBGTQIA you know
rights emerges as an issue. And wasn't
even that complicated,
you know it was just sort of thought of
as gay rights at the moment-
at that moment in time. But the point is
it's all different right, we just can't
say
that love is love. Yes there is something
wonderful and basic about love, and the
human capacity and desire to love,
but it is different at different times,
and it's different for different people.
New Historicism will look at all those
contexts, and it'll just- and then
suddenly

love shatters into a million different forms right.

Again, it's all love but it all has to be seen in its own terms, in its own way, in its own culture. And that's why you can see where New Historicism would kind of give birth to where we are today, that we can look at you know Sappho trying to get- trying to understand Sappho in her own terms, in the terms of her culture, and in the terms of same-sex love, and that's so different than just trying to say love is love, whether it's Sappho, Shakespeare, or you know someone else. Anyhow.

So let's look at how traditional historicism works, and I'm doing this to show you then how New Historicism works, but traditionally I use old text. So let's take Hesiod,

who we'll be reading
as an example. What do you do with that?
You know why are we doing it? You do it
to interpret
something, we call that- another word
for interpretation is hermeneutics,
and this is often called the science
of hermeneutics,
and that's to interpret. So what are we
using these old texts to interpret? Well
we're using it to interpret historical
cultures, Greek culture.
So again, that's the payout, the payout is
you know if you've read these texts
carefully, if you've read Hesiod is
writing you know
well over 2000 years ago, carefully, you
will understand
something about his culture, that's the
payout.
You're not saying you're going to
understand our culture today, but you're
understanding that culture. And again,
that's a value right.

Let me get out of the scene here. It does provide insight into past cultures that's not found in archaeology or physical anthropology, however it's entirely directed to the past, as those arrows that I put- these arrows here suggest to the past, as it tells us very little about our present culture and ourselves. But keep in mind, it has value from like a point of view of literary, or analysis of art, in that it does tell you something that you're not necessarily going to get in another- in other forms. So in other words, I mentioned here archaeology or physical anthropology. Well you know some approach to the past would be you'd actually do a dig right of the city where Hesiod is living, or somewhere near Hesiod where he lived.

And you'd learn about that culture through pottery and through all sorts of other things, and about their relationship of everything there, and you'd learn a lot. But the thing is, you know for nearly 5000 years, people have been writing about what they think, how they feel and all, and that gives us a different sort of insight. So on our first major literary text, which we're going to jump right into the next lecture, you know with the Epic of Gilgamesh, we know like virtually nothing about Gilgamesh. I mean we know he was an actual you know ruler at the time, he was an actual king, but beyond that we really don't have anything else that we can talk about with him if we're just talking about physical anthropology.

But we actually have a lot that we know about Gilgamesh because the story was written about him. So we can learn a lot from text and artwork that you can't necessarily from physical anthropology, it's not saying it's a better approach, you can learn things from physical anthropology and archaeology that you can't learn from text, fair enough, but our approach that we're using does give us a particular insight into older cultures. So this traditional historicism is good in that sense. But let's look at New Historicism, let's look at it starting the same way. We use old texts, let's use Hesiod again, to again interpret, and again this is the science of hermeneutics, to interpret what historical culture. So let's give an example of that, Greek culture and this belief in a

Golden

Age, which like Eden, this one earth was
at a perfect locus amoenus.

We're going to see this idea again and
again by the way, we're going to see it
with

Eden and when we look at the Hebrew
Testament of the Bible, we're going to
see it with Hesiod

coming a little later, you're going to
see it still later with

Virgil. The notion that human beings
once had a perfect relationship to the
planet that was lost,

whether it was lost because we don't
live in the Golden Age anymore according
to Hesiod, he actually calls it the
golden race. But

according to him, we now live in this
sort of fallen world, the Iron

Age, iron race, and the biblical story

is the same, we live in an

era where you know Eden has been lost
to us.

But in any event, that's what you learn about that culture, you learn that you know that that was a belief at the time, the belief of a Golden Age. Hesiod is not creating that, he's not the one who comes up with the idea, his culture believed that, and that was their kind of like a creation with their way of trying to understand who they were, understand their history, because they didn't have physical anthropology and archaeology. They had to make up a story, and this was the story that they made up, and they believed it. Hesiod didn't make it up, he just in this sense he's not generating the culture, this view is being generated by the culture that he's born into. But here now we're doing something

different

because remember, in what we just did with

New Historicism, this is the end point

here, so that would have been an example

of what you would have learned about a

past culture,

an important thing to learn, but that

would have been where it ended.

But this allows us to, and now we're

doing interpretation again,

we're still in the hermeneutic project,

but we're interpreting something else as

our arrows.

You know this by the way I mean to be

historical, this is going back in time

right, we're going back from you know the

21st century back

to you know Hesiod's culture. Now

we're going Hesiod's culture, and we're

heading forward because we're going to

our

present-day culture, ourselves.

How does this in any way you know allow

us to understand ourselves?

I'm gonna pull this up a little bit

if I can.

Oh that's not pulling it up at all.

There, sorry. So this is allowing us to interpret our present selves. In this particular case, what does that mean?

Well our belief that human beings once had a perfect relationship with the earth,

which is not innate, but is rather culturally constructed from ideas that we've inherited over the years apart from Greeks like Hesiod.

What do I mean by this? Well you may well believe,

and again I'm not talking about our culture in a general way, but you personally,

may well believe that at one point in time human beings lived at peace with the planet.

You may believe this for religious convictions in the case of believe that that time was known as

Eden, or
you may believe it in a more
general way, that you know
well some point in time, maybe
Native Americans, before the arrival of
Columbus, they live at peace with the
planet.
Maybe people even do it today, sort of
you know the tribes where first contact
hasn't been made
in the few places where they're they
still exist, like
in the Amazon basin or something. Or just
somewhere you may have this vague notion
that
you know we live in an environmentally
troubling time,
and we've screwed everything up, which is
really unfortunate because we used to
have a really perfect relationship with
the planet,
people used to live you know in harmony
with the earth.
You may not be able to put a date on

that, you might think it's 400 years ago
in the Americas, you might think it's a
little older than that,
you might- I don't know when you think. But
if you hold that belief,
let's just assume that you do for a
moment, and you may well, but let's assume
that you do.

Where did that come from? Did that come-
you know is it innate that every human
being shares that belief?

No, and in fact you know if you look
at the modern
archaeological record, you look at what
we know about you know human beings,
about the earth, about evolution.

Yeah if you go back in time, you're not
going to find that place, you're not
going to find it 400 years ago,
4000 years ago, 40,000 years ago. And
we'll talk about this in detail,
but you know the the historical
record
does not show that that time existed

anywhere on the planet.

So if you feel that way, where did it come from? Well it's not innate, and it's actually not accurate. Then where did it come from? And the argument is here, it comes from

text like this that we've inherited over the years that have made us believe it. Let me continue this here.

This is known as the hermeneutic circle, or is an example of the hermeneutic circle,

where you know you've used text to go back and understand the older culture, that allows you to understand yourself better. If you then go back again, take a second pass at it, Hesiod is going to open up an entirely new way.

Hesiod- At first you might have thought you know, you may not have thought much about him at all, but then if you go back and look at it again, you may find Hesiod interesting and

important

because of the way that he helps shape

modern beliefs,

and even shape your belief. You may find

them really interesting right because if

you're like-

you suddenly think well wait a minute if

the historical record

doesn't show that human beings live at

peace with the planet, why do I believe

this? I really want to know why I believe

this,

I want to try to interrogate that belief,

and I want to try to understand where it

came from.

And lo and behold you have to go back

you know thousands of years to see

in part where it's coming from, that's

what the hermeneutic circle

does. So you can see why New Historicism,

like in this example,

can have a real payout, and not just

in helping us understand our culture,

because it can, because we as a culture,

and we'll go over this and look at the numbers, believe that- often believe that it is the case that we live at peace with the planet.

In fact, there was a poll done 2012, I forget exactly, but it asked Americans if they believed that you know that basically that life began under 10,000 years ago in Eden when we had a perfect relationship with the planet. So this is asking people if they literally believe in the Hebrew Testament version of the creation.

And 48% of Americans, that's about half of Americans, literally believe, according to this poll, according to how they self-identified, literally believed that we lived at peace with the planet, had a perfect relationship with the planet known as Eden.

So you may not have that religious

conviction you know or you might
do, and we're going to talk about this
you know.

You can read that Hebrew Testament, the
so-called Old Testament of the Bible, the
book of Genesis we're going to be
looking at,

and not take it literally, not believe
that we
you know lived that way 10,000 years ago.

You might fully believe in evolution of
the big bang in a
universe that's you know 13 odd billion
years old,

but that is a question of hermeneutics,
whether you read
something incredibly literally and
that's your way of interpreting it,
or whether you have another interpretive
strategy that allows you to
build in evolution and other things
into a reading.

So all this, you know so much is
predicated on

interpretation in the science of
hermeneutics. And
as I hope you'll see, and the class
really will take
this form here again and again of trying
to understand
older cultures, but with the goal of
better understanding our present-day
culture,
present-day ideas that we share, and
maybe even
you know understanding yourself.

New Historicism in some sense has been
around, developing rather, for 500 years
in the thinking of people like Martin
Luther, we'll talk about this, he begins
the religious reformation.

Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Heidegger's
Student, Gadamer,
Michel Foucault, influenced by Gadamer,
Stephen Greenblatt, who in fact coined
the term

New Historicism. I should note that
Stephen Greenblatt was one of my

dissertation advisors at Harvard, so I am
sort of in this line too. I really
wouldn't think of myself as a new
historicist,
mainly rather as an ecocritic and as
a cultural historian, but
I am in this tradition too I guess.

But hopefully
you know this above understanding of
what New Historicism is,
the arrows and the notion of how a
hermeneutic circle
can function in this case, hopefully it
makes clear.

And hopefully this course will make
clear the cultural analysis
by way of a historical interpretation of
literature, that's what we're going to be
doing,
historical interpretation of literature.

Bring something
unique to the table, all together, unlike
anything
that the hard sciences or any other

field of inquiry,
because it allows us to interpret our
culture, our ideas,
and our self more fully. Again,
it's not to say it's better than hard
sciences or some other form of
humanities or social sciences, I'm not
saying that, but I am saying
you know it brings something to the
table, something
unique, something that you know you're
not going to necessarily
get in other fields in the same way. And
hopefully,
I hope you see the project here
is not dusty historicism. It's not that
you know we want to learn about
Hesiod's period, we will learn about that
along the way,
but the way it's structured, the way I've
structured the course, the way I've
structured the reader, the way I've
structured how we're going to go into it,
is all with a goal. A goal not of

understanding each of those periods,
but of understanding our modern culture.

Yup. In so doing, it answers-
provides an answer to both of our
questions. You know so why do we read
literature at all?

Well, again, you can read it for diversion,
and pleasure,

and all that, but perhaps most

importantly, and I would argue

that you know it has a claim on being

the most important,

we study and read literature in order to

better understand our modern culture,

that's why, and understand ourselves.

And it can even be a modern work, but

we'll get into that, how a modern work

can reveal

a lot about our present day

culture. In fact, we just saw that right,

when we're looking at Nickelback's song,

'Rockstar,' that reveals a lot about our

culture. So if you-

if you get in the habit of doing this,

which hopefully by the end of the term

you will, you will

be interrogating contemporary

things,

like songs, you may be hearing songs,

maybe already.

Maybe the next time you hear a song, and

it's going on about how wonderful

you know it is to have so much, and to

have more than everybody else, and to

have a crude

you know wealth at the cost of

exploiting

people and the planet,

maybe you'll start noticing that

everywhere.

But it's not dusty old history, but

it's a relevant

inquiry into today,

and one that can be very

personal, and hopefully

underscores the value of literature

more generally.

So the second question we had, which

is why

approach environmental history-

environmental issues from a literary

perspective?

For our particular ecological purposes,

it allows us to better understand how

the relationship that we have with the

environment

emerged historically. So in other words,

not only aren't these

you know things intrinsic, or innate, but

rather they have a history.

But we're going to look at that history,

we're going to see the emergence over

time.

And again, it will allow us to more fully

understand

contemporary American attitudes toward

the environment,

and our own feelings, both you know as

individuals and as a culture toward the

environment.

An example would be the belief in you

know

a Golden Age, a time when human beings once had a perfect relationship to the environment.

You may believe that, you may still believe it, it's fine if you believe it at the end of this course. I that's not- I don't want to you know change your beliefs or values at all, but I do hope that the course will get you thinking about things like that, and whether or not that's you know based on fact on your part. In other words, if you ask yourself why you believe it you know, is it because of the historical record, is it because of all these works that have created our culture that now you share in. Hopefully it'll get you, yeah I guess it's that simple, it'll get you thinking. Yeah. Other disciplines can offer their

own sort of relevant and important cultural payout, there's absolutely no doubt of that, but you know not this sort, this sort is particular to this. Now it doesn't necessarily mean by the way that you can't do the same thing and focus on other sorts of texts, we use text in a pretty broad way now. What I mean by that is you can do you know a film and media course and evaluate those texts, because film and media we do think of as text too, and that would be using the same kind of approach. You know you could do the same thing, you could analyze you know song lyrics as we've done already. So. But this cultural analysis, what I broadly called New Historicism, a New Historicism so you can see historically how that emerged as an idea.

But this sort of cultural analysis that we're doing you know has important and relevant payout that you just can't quite get elsewhere. And again, you might get entirely different things from other approaches that are equally important, but maybe not the same as this. So hopefully this is clear, this whole breakdown that I've done. But one of the beauties of having filmed lectures is that you can just go back if something's a little confusing. And you also too have the lectures themselves available to you so you can just go right to the prezi, and you can see what's you know at work there, you could walk through it, you could walk through when those arrows go through New Historicism and around in a circle and all. And two, the video that you're

looking at, if you
view it directly on Youtube, down below
in the description
it should be broken into essentially
chapters. So if you want to just click
on you know a particular part you can
just jump right there,
so something's not quite clear, you don't
have to kind of like scrub through. You
can do that, maybe that's even faster, I
don't know. But if you want to go
through and see this as you know as
chapters, as a
bunch of different topics, which they
were, which the way was set up here,
you can do that too. So that's concludes
number one.

So, there you go, one lecture down.

And hopefully you know it's not so much

I wanted to

give you a whole bunch of terms here,

which I did, I know, and it's not like I

wanted to just explain

the methodology of the course, which I

did. But I
also wanted to make a case for why
we're doing what we're doing,
and I wanted to make a case for it being
relevant and important,
which I really believe it is. So
you know, again, another class, if this
were done
like a new histori- an older historicist
approach,
I might have said well here you're going
to learn a lot about what we thought
you know about the environment
throughout history and the West,
and that's important. And you know you're
going to really learn a lot about Greece,
and learn especially a lot in this
course about the early modern period,
the so-called Renaissance. Well that'd be
great, and you'd know
all sorts of stuff about the Renaissance,
and that's fine, and that's useful.
But I'm trying to make a case for
here, and I hopefully I have,

and that's why my concluding argument will take this form, is that we can just learn a lot about our present culture and how we got here, and learn a lot about ourselves and where our ideas come from. And that's interesting in its own right, but it also makes clear that these are culturally constructed ideas that we share as a culture, and as such, they represent just one of many possibilities for ideas. So we may feel, for example, that we are you know the most important creature on the planet, and by virtue of this fact that we should be able to you know dominate the planet and do whatever we want with it. Well that might be an attitude that is alive and well in America today, and we're going to see where that could

have come from, where that attitude does exist,

but that doesn't mean that we have to keep that attitude

right. That doesn't mean that even if you you know believe that, or in the back of your mind you kind of think maybe that is true,

we can challenge that if we understand

that we believe it, if we understand that our culture in particular

you know raises us to believe that, raises us to believe a lot of things.

We have the ability, and this is where literature you know is not just

generated by a culture, but can generate

culture, it doesn't just take on what

we've learned, but it can challenge it.

But we can do that here in this class,

but you can do it personally. In other

words,

if you have a better understanding of

what you believe and where

those ideas come from,
I think it should be clear that these
are just ideas, and there
are other ways of thinking about it you
know. So shift back
to not thinking about eco-criticism, but
say you know a feminist approach.
If you, so the way early feminists
did,
early modern feminists like say 50 years
ago, you know suddenly realized that the
culture was you know patriarchal, and had
you know
misogynistic, and had all these views
that were put out there.
Realizing that is a great thing,
realizing that you know
you may have been born into a culture as
a woman, for example, feeling that you
were
inferior in different ways. Well
you might interrogate that feeling and
say that's just one attitude, and I'm not
going to buy into it,

I am not inferior. And that was the wonder of you know the first group of modern feminists. And by the way, feminists go back, we're going to be looking at the early feminist Aemilia Lanyer 400 years ago.

But especially the modern feminist movement of say 50 years ago or so because they were able to clearly-practitioners there were able to clearly see that these beliefs were widespread, and that they might even been you know taught to buy into them, saw that they were just one of many possible ideas, and dug their heels in and said no, we're not going to buy into it, and in fact we're going to put forth new ideas, we're going to challenge it, we're not just going to keep generating the culture, we're going to generate and cause the you know regeneration of the culture in

a new way.

We, 50 years later, have inherited what they did, and the world I would argue obviously is a much better place because of it. Environmental critics are in the same position, we can generate new ways of looking at the world, and these ways will greatly benefit the planet and everybody else in the same way that you know early feminist critics greatly benefited all women, but put everybody in the process, and that's the greater project.

So not to put too strong an edge on what we're doing, but that is the goal, to not just understand our culture and ourselves, but with that understanding to think about how we can build a better relationship with the planet. And again, this is not

going back to Hesiod's idea that it existed in the deep past, but rather it exists in the future to come, that we can build a more harmonious culture, a more wonderful life, an edenic sort of life in the future. It may seem an almost impossible goal given that we have so much going on environmentally, and especially we're in the middle of a climate crisis that will reshape the whole planet and our species, but the end game could be, I would argue should be, a better relationship with the planet in the future, and that's where we have to set our sights right now. And we have to approach that in a fundamental way, by thinking about these attitudes and ideas that we have toward the planet.

So anyhow, that's it for today. And hopefully that gives you an overview of the project that we've embarked upon, and next time the first literature that we're going to take up, the Epic of Gilgamesh, we're actually going to embark on that project. So buckle up, it should be a lot of fun, and I'll see you next time, take care.