Episode 4: The Literary Canon

**Intro:** You’re listening to New Moon, a podcast series written and produced by Luna Negra Magazine and Black Squirrel Radio. Each episode, Luna Negra staff discusses literature or the arts, incorporating their own experiences and outside sources to provide you with a well-rounded discussion.

**Jillian Bremner:** [00:00:00] You're listening to New Moon, a podcast series written and produced by Luna Negra magazine and Black Squirrel Radio. Each episode Luna Negra staff discusses literature, or the arts incorporating their own experiences and outside sources to provide you with a well-rounded discussion.

**Peyton Trout:** We are back with the Luna Negra new moon podcast. I'm Peyton, a sophomore English, professional writing student and,

**JB:** And I'm Jillian, her cohost today. I'm also a sophomore English major. I'm a literature student. Today we're supposed to be talking about the literary Canon. So chances are, you've probably read something from it because it's very large.

**PT:** Yeah. It's very large. Especially if you went to high school, you've definitely read something from the canon. Yeah.

**JB:** The requirements are like, it has to be, like the copyright has to be [00:01:00] some old, some old number. We don't really know, but some examples of things that are like from a literary Canon, like really popular examples are like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Lord of the Flies*, almost everything Shakespeare wrote, like *Romeo and Juliet* and all the other really famous plays, so yeah.

**PT:** And quite honestly, most of us, I feel like did not like a lot of the stuff that we read in the literary Canon with the couple of exceptions, like I'm sure, I would've liked *To Kill a Mockingbird* if I didn't, if I wasn't forced to read it when I was 14 and then write an analytical essay, I think I would have liked it, but it's just, yeah.

**JB:** Yeah. Like 90% of the general public things that those books kind of suck. We know, like this is not a lecture, like we're not going to talk about like all the boring stuff that you had to like read for high school. So we thought that [00:02:00] we would just kind of take the conversation in a bit of a different direction.

So like, what was the worst book that you read in high school? They were all pretty bad. They were all the worst ones.

**PT:** They were all pretty bad. I could get through *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I understood like how it was good and whatnot. *Merchant of Venice* though. My Shakespeare, I, I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't even with the *No Fear Shakespeare* right there.

I just, I hated it so much and I could never go back. What about you?

**JB:** I had to take a class in high school, just all about like, like Lost Generation literature. So we had to, I had to read a lot of Faulkner for that class and *The Sound and the Fury* was actually probably the worst book I ever read. Because like there were no grammatical functions. It was, the whole book was actually like just a really long sentence. I'm really sorry if there's anybody out here that likes Faulkner, but I don't.

**PT:** Unfortunately, we don't like Faulkner in this house.

**JB:** Not in this house, [00:03:00] not a good one. I really liked, I really liked *Hamlet*. I liked Shakespeare. I don't have a personal problem with Shakespeare.

**PT:** I was really into when I took my first, like, ancient British literature class. *Paradise Lost* and like, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, like epic poetry, I really liked epic poetry. That was, that was my thing. Everybody, every English major has their area of literature that they like and mine is epic poetry.

**JB:** Enough of us being haters, hating. We're done. We're done being haters. But I think that we should maybe talk about some things that we *do* like because we are English majors, we do have to read a lot. So I think that it would be kind of worthwhile to talk about where, instead of where the literary Canon has been, like, where it's headed and where it's going.

So like some books that I personally think of, like what I've read and just kind of other, like, kind of [00:04:00] inserting myself in like the discussion with like other like critics, like what we think is going to be like part of the Canon and probably like 25 to 30 years.

**PT:** Like what are considered currently modern classics.

**JB:** Yeah. So some of the big ones are like *Slaughterhouse-Five* or like *Mother Night* or like anything Kurt Vonnegut has written because one of the, I think one of the requirements to like have your stuff you put in the Canon is like, you have to have received like multiple accolades over like decades of being around. People think Vonnegut is part of the Canon, but not quite yet.

**PT:** He's almost there.

**JB:** I have a vivid memory of like, I had to read like Vonnegut short stories in high school, and I had a really old textbook. And the textbook said that he was like still alive and that he hadn't died yet. And my teacher was like, actually guys, you like, why don't, y'all just do me a favor and like cross out, scribble out the line that like he's still alive.

Cause [00:05:00] he actually died in 2007, I think. I would look it up, but I, but like, I just have, like, that was like my first exposure to Kurt Vonnegut. He's like one of my favorite authors, but that was like the earliest memory I have of. Like him, I guess, like, so like, yeah. I feel like people think he's really like old and ancient, but like he, he just died in 2007.

Like he died in like our lifetime. So another big one, like those of you that have read, like *Things Fall Apart* and like the *Kite Runner*, like a lot of stuff, that's very, like, post-colonial like that type of literature. I have yet to read those books, but I've heard nothing but good things about them.

I also like *Secret History*, by Donna Tartt, that's great book. That's my favorite book of all time actually. *The Color Purple* is another big one. I think Alice Walker then the name of the author.

**PT:** I believe so. I think that's who that is. I have read *In Cold Blood*, and *In Cold Blood* is another one of those where I feel like people think it's a little older, but it's only, [00:06:00] yeah, that book is not that old. I highly recommend that one. That's one I read for class, and I thought it was really good.

**JB:** Yeah, like Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, or like *Song of Solomon*, anything like that. I had to read *The Bluest Eye* and I really liked that.

**PT:** A lot of people really liked *The Bluest Eye*.

**JB:** *The Bluest Eye* was good. And I remember I had to do something for it, with like the ACT or the SAT or whatever; it was on one of those tests. Gabriel Garcia Marquez with like *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* *Love in the* *Time of Cholera*, like that type of like that genre of literature or whatever it is. But I know that there's a genre for it, like, like the Murakami-esque, Isabel Allende, that, like, I don't know what to call it, but it's like all of those, like authors have something in common. Yeah. And like the *Alchemist*. Didn't you say you read that or, you know, someone who read that?

**PT:** I know a couple of people who read it, and they've really like. I haven't gotten around to buying a copy and reading it, but I've heard countless good things about it.

**JB:** Yes. I see it everywhere. Everyone tells me to read it, but I haven't yet. And then [00:07:00] like Zadie Smith with her novel, like *White Teeth*. I've read her short story collection, *Grand Union.* Really, really good. So that's why I thought *White Teeth* would be a good one to mention on here. So. Yeah. That's like kind of what the general consensus among critics is.

My personal picks for the literary Canon. I think that we should start talking about, you know, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation,* a fairly new book, but I think that like with the amount of praise that it's getting, I think that's headed in a very positive direction towards being like a classic. Any of her books really.

**PT:** I haven’t read any of her books yet, like *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*. I hear so many good things about pretty much all of her books. I'll see them everywhere. And everybody's like, Ottessa Moshfegh, like I just need to,

**JB:** It's just necessary. Yeah. Like her books are just necessarily on the bookshelf. I also, like, if I'm thinking about like modern classics, I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about *Infinite Jest*, [00:08:00] the notorious thousand page book by David Foster Wallace.

This is so random, but if anyone has seen the movie like about David Foster Wallace with like Jesse Eisenberg and Jason, Jason Seagal, it's a great movie. It's called *The End of the Tour*. And it's about the writing of *Infinite Jest*. If anyone doesn't want to read a book that's like a thousand pages, you could go watch the movie. I can't remember if it's about like *Infinite Jest* in particular or just like David Foster Wallace, but like it's a, it was actually really good movie. I thought it was going to be really stupid, but I really liked it when I watched it. But yeah, like what, what do you think? Modern classics?

**PT:** Modern classics. We've talked about the *Secret History* and we'll get in, we'll get into Donna Tartt in a, in a second. We also, we've talked about *Fight Club*.

**JB:** We like *Fight Club*.

**PT:** We love *Fight Club*, and not in like the way that it, not in a weird way.

**JB:** No, not in a weird way, not in the wrong way, but

**PT:** it's just such a good book. And we've talked about the [00:09:00] allegories behind the writing, and

**JB:** Yeah, no, Chuck Palahniuk is definitely, there's a spot for him in the Canon.

Like *Survivor*'s another really good book that he wrote. And I have yet to read like some of the other big ones, like *Haunted* or like *Invisible Monsters*, but I've heard like, also really good things about them, like nothing but good stuff.

So I thought it'd be kind of fun to like, close out this podcast—cause we kind of hit all our points, since we didn't really want to discuss like the literary Canon and all its formalities—but I thought it'd be fun to kind of just talk about like since the literary Canon is like basically just a list of books to get to know like the culture of like literature and writing as a whole. That's basically what it is. I feel like I could ask, oh, what's your personal, like literary Canon, like a, like a letter box, top four of books that you could be like, oh, well this is like these are the books that I think are the most important out of everything that I've read. And to [00:10:00] me, yeah.

So if you had to give your top four…

**PT:** My top four? My top floor, I think is a bit of a doozy. I've got the *Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt. Probably my number one book of all time, I read it over the summer. It's so good. It is about like 800, 900 pages, but it's worth the read. I promise. It's really good. Number two, *Twilight*.

**JB:** Okay. A slay,

**PT:** For cult classic reasons. *Twilight* got me through some tough times over the summer, the movies? Camp.

**JB:** *Twilight* has become like its own sort of like cultural beast. I kind of love it, like, because the amount of people that like it, like ironically and unironically, and then there's people that like got into it ironically, but now enjoy it unironically it's like, almost like *Twilight* has taken on its own, like post ironic, like connotation.

Like it's actually so interesting. Like what it's evolved into. [00:11:00] It's now valid to be like, oh, my favorite book is *Twilight.*

**PT:** My favorite book and some of my favorite movies are *Twilight*. Even if it's a poorly written book, it doesn't matter. And number three, I have *Annihilation* by Jeff VanderMeer the books on the book.

I really liked that book. It was very short read. It got me out of a reading slump. It's just a good like scifi horror. The imagery in that book is really cool. And I think the progression of the story is really nice as well. And then my last one is the *Virgin Suicides*. That's a great book. It's a great book.

And I quite like the movie as well, but that book also got me out of a reading slump. Most of these books got me out of reading slumps, like the power that they have. They have done a lot for me in my, in the span of my life. But the *Virgin Suicides* is the last one. And then honorable mentions are going to be *Circe* by Madeline Miller and *A Little Life*.

**JB:** Okay. Those are all like solid choices.

**PT:** Yeah. Yeah. That's fine. Good [00:12:00] reads top four.

**JB:** Okay. So yeah, I think about this all the time. I have like a list prepared. I'm like, what if someone asks me what my favorite book is? Like, like I can, cause I'm so bad at being like put on the spot and I'm like, I have to have like the answer prepped like I have to have it on lock. So my favorite book of all time is *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt. It's so good. If you haven't read it, you should read it. It’s really good. I have a copy, like literally come to my house and I'll give it to you. Like, I'm basically just like a Donna Tartt like a living, breathing plug. Like, I just love her book so much.

And then probably a, like a close second as I've already mentioned, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, which is funny. Cause when I read that book, I was like, what's all the hype about, and then I really thought I wasn't going to like it, like at all. Cause I was like, hmm, this sounds kind of boring.

Like so yeah, I was like I just don't know how that premise is going to fill up like 250 odd pages. So I like read it kind of like, Ah, let's see what this is about. And I ended up really [00:13:00] liking it and like the more I sat on it and thought about it, I was like, yeah, this was a really good book.

So there's that kind of like in a different vein of literature, I really like *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* by David Sedaris. It's like an essay collection, kind of like a funny, like, but also heartfelt like essay collection. I've like, I'd recommend any of his books, but that was the first one that I read. And that has a special place. It has, it does have a special place in my heart. Cause he's written so many books.

**PT:** The first one always has a special place.

**JB:** Yes, the first one always does have a special place. It's also like if you're one of those people that's like wants to get into essay collections, but you don't know where to start, I'd recommend any of his books, but in particular, that one is like a good starting point. So yeah. And also, and then my last choice. It's a *Sharp Objects* by Gillian Flynn.

I loved that book. That was another one I wasn't like expecting to like as much as I did. I'm in the process of watching the HBO series with Amy Adams. So far it's a pretty solid adaptation, pretty on the nose. But the book is just like so good. Like if [00:14:00] you're a fan of any type of like thriller, like *Silence of the Lambs*, *Gone, Girl*.

**PT:** Which like Gillian Flynn also did—*Gone Girl*.

**JB:** Right. I would argue that it's better than *Gone Girl*. I think it, I think she wrote it before she wrote *Gone Girl* too. So that's just my, that's my little, little opinion. My little soap box. I'm going to get up on that. It's better than *Gone Girl*, but yeah. And then like honorable mentions would probably be like *Normal People* because as much like, I would probably never be like, that's my favorite book of all time, but I think about it a lot, a lot.

Like, I think about it more than somebody who like, just didn't like the book at all, like yeah. Like I think about it a lot. So I feel like that deserves like an honorable mention. And also like, I would say like *American Psycho* or like anything by Bret Easton Ellis is like a good honorable mention, because like, I would never be like American Psycho is my favorite book, because I don't want to look like a freak, but [00:15:00] like,

**PT:** You don’t want to look crazy.

**JB:** Like, it's a good book. Like, it's so good, but like, it's good. Like, it's just, it's interesting. And yeah, like I enjoyed it when I read it. I read it a long time ago, but I'm in the process of like a reread, which I almost never do because I was just like, oh, I don't remember anything that happened in this book.

I just remember I liked it. So, yeah, I'm in the process of rereading it now. So I would say like honorable mention for a favorite. Cause it's good. It's another one. I just think about it all the time. So yeah, I would say do you want to get to know me read those books and that's about all, I think we're at time we're at time,

**PT:** Yeah, I think that's all we have as well, but

**JB:** That was all the points on the list,

**PT:** So yeah. Well, we'll see you next week.[00:16:00]