

Podcast Transcript

Yito: 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4.

So we go,(in spite of all of it)

Be Human

So we go,

Dayo: Nae Nae, Nae Nae!

Yito:(in spite of all it)

Be Human

With my slime.

Dayo: Slime, slime slime! Welcome back Creepy Crawlers to the PSP. Not a video game console, but the Purple Snails Podcast, where we talk about all. Things. Literature! Today we're discussing the tensions that exist between physical nature and human nature, and how those tensions enrich the human experience. Physical nature in terms of fauna and flora, and human nature as it relates to the natural tendencies of humanity. A nature versus nurture discussion completely void of nurture.

I want to preface this episode with the same anecdote that reoccurs every Purple Snail podcast about triviality, which I feel will be especially relevant to today's podcast. I want to transport us, for one second, to the glorious land of Purplelandia.¹ Where there exists a jaded, gluttonous snail by the name of Don Pablo, who has been feasting on the finest of leaves and snail delicacies. He has feasted to the point where the food is no longer enjoyable as it once was, and eating has degraded to a menial, boring task.²

Don Pablo: (MMM FOOD)(MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH)

Dayo: This amazing privilege has become trite for Don Pablo.³ Now we transport ourselves to the outside of Purplelandia where there exists another snail, Juanito, who has been starved for days, due to the lack of food outside of Purplelandia. When Juanito gets to eat the same trite meal as Don Pablo, is the literal coming of Christ for our little snail. Juanito reaches the pearly gates in that moment. The amazing thing, though, is that his famished snail jaw has not met not manna from heaven but the same menial, boring food that Don Pablo takes for granted without fail. The food will never change, we can only change our approach to the food.

If we hold literature to be analogous to food in this anecdote, we are quickly put in the position of Don Pablo's privilege. We practically have unlimited access to every work that has been preserved until today, and it is only natural for us to consume and consume without tasting

¹ Manuel de Sica- Till then

² Pickle ASMR Eating sounds BIG crunch Intense- Spirit Payton

³ Jose Antonio Mendez-La Gloria Eres tu

the manna of what we are consuming. The natural tendency of anyone eating amazing food everyday, is to degrade amazing food into trite and mundane food. ⁴

Don Pablo: !!!!!

Dayo: However, we not only have the choice to not allow elements of our lives to become trivial but we have the tool in other's perspectives to keep triviality at bay. Discussions such as these are the grounds for keeping us in check in the height of information accessibility in humanity's X amount of years of existence. That being said I couldn't fathom to tackle such a rich topic by myself so today we have special guests from Dean Lisa's Literature Humanities section Andrea and Caitlyn. To start off, can you guys tell me a little bit about your literal experience as freshmen in Lit Hum?

Andrea: Yeah, Lit hum is a defining experience for every student at Columbia College. It's something that everyone shares- whether they are a freshman or a senior. You can always strike up a conversation with someone about Homer or Austen, or make a comment about how much Lit Hum reading you have to get done. I love it when a conversation about school work turns into a debate about best and worst Lit Hum pieces- everyone has such passion surrounding the topic even if their main interests lie outside of the humanities. Even with all the classes being remote, Lit Hum still gives us an opportunity to connect with other students and to take the first step in being a part of the Columbia community.

Caitlyn: Yes, I definitely agree with Andrea. The Core at Columbia, especially Lit Hum, is a great class that allows students to come together from different backgrounds to discuss the different ways we interpret and analyze books. It's always interesting when a classmate brings up a different perspective that I haven't thought of, giving me a whole new way to look at the text. But as the pandemic hit, the course had to shift online, adding some new challenges, but also allowing the students to make connections in new ways. For example, although we cannot meet as a whole class in a classroom setting, there are features in Zoom that make it feel as if we are almost in a classroom. As students are bringing up new points in the discussion, others can use the chat box to keep the conversation of the class going, while also adding in other ideas or insights they had. There's also fun reactions Zoom has, where we can applaud another student if they make a really nice comment. Zoom classes have been a struggle for everyone, but I feel as if Lit Hum is one of those classes where Zoom has not had as much of a negative impact. We are still gathering as a class twice a week, and making the most out of the time we have.

Dayo: Yea, speaking about the shifting of century old traditions, we know the Lit Hum syllabus to be relatively controversial. Literature Humanities was instituted in 1937 as part of the Core Curriculum and there has been little fundamental change to the works that make it up. Sure there have been some removal and insertions tragedies here and there but the essence still

⁴ Pickle ASMR Eating sounds BIG crunch Intense- Spirit Payton

remains. Obviously we can't change the whole core curriculum, but what singular work do you think would contextualize itself best within the works of Lit Hum?

Andrea: The book that we thought would be the most suitable addition to the syllabus, especially with a focus of human nature and physical nature, would be *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. It was a revolutionary text when it came out, paving the way for future science fiction and horror tales. Even the premise of the idea was born because of nature- after being holed up during a stormy weekend, Shelley was inspired by the eerie atmosphere and the ghost stories that she and her authors told to pass the time.

The most notable thing about the story of *Frankenstein* is Dr. Frankenstein's complete violation of nature, and the natural way that things are born and come to life. He created his monster from the corpses of other creatures, its unnaturalness reflected in the monster's hideous and revolting appearance. In the monster's birth, we also see the perversion of the father-son relationship. Familial relationships, particularly father-son dynamics, are something that we have paid close attention to throughout our readings in Lit Hum. Another scenario where we have seen the rejection of this relationship is the legend of Zeus and Kronos, which we looked at in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Similar to this story, *Frankenstein's* monster rises from initial rejection with motivation to kill his creator.

When *Frankenstein* has the opportunity to improve the solitary nature of the monster with a female counterpart, he destroys his work and leaves the monster in solitude. A parent would usually do anything to improve the happiness and future of their child- when Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* was in a similar scenario of estrangement and desperation, we witnessed his mother putting his every need before her own. *Frankenstein* instead is more aligned with the actions of a self-interested parent, such as Clytemnestra from the *Oresteia*. There are parallels with things ending badly for a self-interested parent, the authors showing that this perversion of nature returns to punish them, just as the mistreatment of his creation returns to haunt Dr. Frankenstein. The monster is responsible for the unnatural and murderous deaths of Dr. Frankenstein's brother, best friend, wife and father.

However, there is speculation on what the nature of the monster truly was. It could have been born with a natural goodness and innocence, the brutal treatment of other intelligent beings driving him to seek revenge and turn towards badness. This is of course something that was considered throughout many of our readings- whether or not humans are born naturally good, bad or neutral. We look at this in works such as the Bible and Augustine's *Confessions*. Shelley presents this same question after the readers are exposed to the gentle and curious nature of the monster, leaving them to wonder if things would have been different had the monster been given a chance to be good.

There is also the persistent involvement of physical nature throughout *Frankenstein*. The nature of the world around *Frankenstein* and his monster is like the third main character in the novel. Most of *Frankenstein's* and his monster's interactions take place in extreme environments- at the top of mountains or in icy caves, their final confrontation taking place among the glaciers of the North Pole. There is also the symbolism of the seasons showing what is occurring in the story. The monster is created in the spring, which is a time for birth and blossoms. Many of the deaths occur in the fall, which is the season during which much of nature

dies. Then the final scenes take place in the winter, when both Viktor and the monster feels cold and empty, surrounded only by death and the need for vengeance.

Caitlyn: The book we thought should be removed from the syllabus is Montaigne's Confessions. There are several reasons for this choice, but the main one is that Montaigne only provides one perspective throughout the whole book. It is solely a story of his own journey with religion, and different aspects of human nature. While reading the book, we only get the perspective of Montaigne, leaving us with single-minded musings. It is also unstructured and starkly opinionated- for every story that we are exposed to, we are only seeing one point of view and one conclusion. The other stories that we have read in Lit Hum expose us to different ways of thinking. It is not prevalent to human nature to make only one conclusion and have only one way of thought. It is supposed to be a harmony of different ideas.

*Enter Dean Lisa

Dean Lisa: Very nicely put.

Dayo: Yea very nice--

Wait Dean Lisa!! How did you get here? We have security in the Purple Snails Podcast building!

Dean Lisa: I'm trying to remember.

Dayo: Well while you do that, hey Andrea, I remember you telling me you, you had a work that you thought Frankenstein should take the place of.

Andrea: Um yeah, I thought that the work that would make the most sense to remove would be the Bible Books of Luke and John. I agree that Montaigne is a good choice to take off the syllabus, but I thought that the Bible would be a better choice. I felt like we already got a lot out of the text when we read it in the first semester, with the Books of Genesis and Job and the Song of Solomon. In terms of the focus of human nature, how can we derive a lot of information about human nature from a story that focuses on everything that separates Jesus from humanity? The Bible is not a story about nature, but about what defies nature. We can definitely still learn a lot from it by seeing what separates Jesus from humanity, and how his divinity is shown by the way that physical nature bends to his will.

Dayo: I think both of you guys make very solid points, and while I don't think either of you are right or wrong, in your own respective ways, I think this discussion in itself is the answer to a much bigger human problem in how we relate to the world around us. By engaging in discussion and showing our sensibilities, Austen and Machado de Assis would argue that we have engaged in what they hold to be the most intriguing aspects of life. How we relate to each other.

The cacophony of ideas and colors and textures that appear to be life and nature and humanity, quickly become this harmonious melting pot of ideas as we relate to others.

I think it would be quite impossible for, say an alien, to take any one human being, and get an accurate representation of humanity through that individual. In the same way we cannot take one disposition and have that be the culmination of a rich and fulfilling human experience. We cannot take situations, we cannot take on interaction, we cannot take one book, because our experience is not one of singularity. Nature as we know it is not confined by singularity. Time as we know it is not confined by singularity. They are infinitely divisible into smaller or larger portions.

So did I learn something about being human from our broken Lit Hum?⁵ Well, well well. Aside from becoming hyper aware of the passage of time, coming to terms with the inevitable joys and sorrows that time prods us through, I learned it is impossible to not draw meaning from any experience we want to draw meaning from. And that, in itself, is reason to go outside, smell the roses, or the garbage. To enjoy a beautiful Sappho poem, or a Nietzsche rant on the lies of human existence. Oh silly Nietzsche! Or to be annoyed by Augustine's whiny, complaining, droning tone,(clears throat)or to be enamored at the detail and intricacy of Morrison's symbolism. To go on a diet, or eat a dollar slice of New York pizza that I have not had the pleasure of trying. To see a monster and see yourself, or to see a bird and see yourself. To go be human. To go be us. Thank you so very much for tuning in to the Purple Snails podcast. Be a Juanito and relish. Enjoy.

Dean Lisa: We have our last book next week guys, relish it all of you. Go be human.⁶

⁵ Liz Eight- Franco Mannino and Sergio Montori

⁶When I see you again-Charlie Puth