

# HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

## Transcript

### Episode 1.0

#### Introduction

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter re-read podcast, wherein two friends who read the books way back in the day as adults revisit the series through a post-2020 lens. Your hosts are Lorrie Kim, author of *Snape: The Definitive Analysis*, and JC, an educator and longtime HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this inaugural episode, Lorrie and JC kick off the podcast with introductions, their histories with the HP fandom, and their hopes for the podcast going forward.

Lorrie: Do you want to introduce yourself?

JC: Hi. Yes. I'm JC. Gosh, we've known each other more than 10 years. 11 years. We met in 2012, which seems like a really long time ago now. So I'm JC. I live in Austin, Texas. I am a long-time Harry Potter fan. We'll talk a little bit about how we got into Harry Potter a little bit later. I am a clinical faculty at a university here in Austin. I am a mom; I have a 15-year-old kid, who I will try not to talk about too much, but I probably will anyway. And yeah, that's who I am. What about you?

Lorrie: I'm Lorrie Kim. I'm the author of a book called *Snape: The Definitive Analysis*. I wrote a version of this book in 2016, and then in 2022 I was asked to make a revised expanded edition, and I had to think about whether I wanted to still create anything within Harry Potter after TERFpocalypse. Did I want to even support this franchise? I made the decision that I would do it. The second expanded edition, which includes *Cursed Child*, came out last year, October 2022. I'm Korean-American, I'm a writer and editor, and I'm married with a high schooler -- the same age as JC, 15 -- and a college kid.

JC: A college kid. That's so amazing. When I first met you, our kids were 11 years younger. We both had a pre-schooler, and you had a first grader. It's amazing to me that your oldest is in college now. It's incredible.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the older one is a Harry Potter fan; the younger one valiantly read through *Goblet of Fire* and then confessed that she doesn't actually like Harry Potter. Is it okay if she quits, and is it okay if her 11th birthday party isn't a Harry Potter birthday?

JC: Oh, wow.

Lorrie: I think she was a little nervous to ask. Yes, of course. It's your birthday.

JC: Yeah. My kiddo, who's 15, read half of the first book, and then was just like, "this is not for me," which was fascinating because he loves the Warriors series. Magical animals, the Ga'Hoole books and Warriors and all that. He just never really got into Harry Potter; he's seen the films and stuff. He did endure a magical 11th birthday in Orlando, where I actually stole an idea from you and made a tshirt for him that said "A magical 11th birthday" to come to Ollivander's and pushed him up in the front and he got chosen. He loved that. Obviously, he got to have the special birthday and everything, but as we'll probably talk about in a little bit, his relationship with Harry Potter is very strained at the moment for all the reasons it is for all of us.

Lorrie: What is your history with Harry Potter and Harry Potter fandom?

JC: I was in graduate school in the late 90s, when all the Harry Potter books were coming out and getting really famous. There were other graduate students that I knew who were reading them, and I just did not have time. I remember particularly when the fourth book came out... I can't remember what year that was. I was a doctoral student, so that was all a blur, but maybe it was 2001 or somewhere around then. I remember the other graduate students talking about it and going to midnight book releases, and I was like, "Who has time for this? I'm writing a dissertation!" I don't even know if any of the films had come out by then, honestly. I can't remember. I kind of knew of it, but I hadn't really gotten into it. A few years later, by the time the fifth book was about to come out, I had a little more time on my hands at that point and I said, "Okay, everybody I know is excited about this book coming out." I didn't realize at the time that it had been three years. There had been this big long hiatus since the fourth book, and that's part of what was happening. I went and bought the first book and I read it and I was like, "Yeah, this is cute. Okay." I bought the second book and really had to slog through it. It was just like, "Oh, my god. What is this? Bless it, I'm going to keep going," because I really wanted to go to a midnight release party for the fifth book. Third book, I was like, "Holy shit, this is incredible. Oh, my God, where has this one been?" That was where it really took off for me from there. Then I read the fifth book not long after it came out. I think I did make it to a midnight book buying event at a bookstore, but I wasn't quite ready to start reading it. Eventually I got there and read through all of that, and then I was just hooked. From there, I was involved in Yahoo groups, LiveJournal groups, and lots of different places where people were talking about Harry Potter and spinning out theories, their favorite ships, and all of that stuff, so I got really obsessive about it. I went to my very first Harry Potter convention in 2005. It was in Salem, Massachusetts, and that was really cool. I met some amazing people. It was the first fan convention I'd ever been to. I remember there being a night where everyone was in the lobby in their pajamas, and there's a big room where they were showing the movies. Chris Rankin was there, and it was that kind of environment, but everyone was just hanging out in their pajamas and it felt like being back in college, in the dorm. It just took me back in time and I thought, "This is great! I can still experience this as an adult? This is so much fun!" I went to Harry Potter conventions every year after that. Even when my son was born, I took him as a baby. I cosplayed as Tonks with her baby, I've cosplayed Ginny with Harry. I knitted him a little sweater with an H on it and wore a red wig. I did some light cosplay like that with him. And I went to a lot of HPEF conventions, I went to a LeakyCon; we met you at a LeakyCon in Dallas. That was four years ago. It seems like 10 years ago, but I think it was four years ago, or five, something like that. That was the only time I took my kiddo to a convention as not an infant, and it was an interesting experience because he was kind of on the cusp of, "Maybe I'm going to get into this". He likes the cosplaying part, but LeakyCon was a different experience than HPEF. It was very big, and I didn't realize that we would have to go an hour and a half early and wait in line to get into a panel, so that experience didn't really play out the way I

thought it would. But that's how I got started with it. Then it all kind of went off the rails a few years ago, for reasons we're probably going to get into. But what about you? What's your story?

Lorrie: Let's see. It was 2003, and I was sick, so my husband read me the first chapter of the first book. I was sick for about a week, and at that time, up to Order of the Phoenix had been published, so that was a good stretch of time for me to read all five books. Snape was very interesting to me, and I had a baby in-between then and when Half-Blood Prince came out. I read Half-Blood Prince, and I remember, after the second chapter, saying to my husband, "Snape just got even more interesting," which was the Spinner's End chapter, where he makes the Unbreakable Vow with Narcissa. After I finished Half-Blood Prince, I was just wrecked, thinking, "How is Snape going to get out of this? He's now the most hated person in his world, he's going to be hunted. How is this going to wrap up in only one novel?" His loneliness really echoed with me, so I went searching for fanfic. That's when I started making friends in the fandom and going to events. I didn't realize that I was pregnant when I was standing in line for Deathly Hallows, but that was the one midnight release I went to. Once I had the second baby, I found I had a really hard time being a mom. I wanted to stay home for my kids; I thought that would be good for them -- I wanted it -- but it was really hard for me to keep focus. Thinking about the story helped me because I thought, "The more I connect with them at this young age, I'm giving them protections for life," and that really did help me. Also, because I was writing talks for Harry Potter conventions, that was something to keep my mind occupied while I was mashing bananas or whatever I was doing. I thought a lot about what happens between an infant and a caregiver in the first 15 months, because that's the difference between Harry and Voldemort. It was hard. When my younger kid reached 15 months, that was really hard to think about because Harry went overnight from being adored by two equal parents -- who were both at home, not voluntarily -- and then the next day, his caregivers never looked him in the eyes again. If you're taking care of a baby and you don't like the baby, you don't sit there looking at it, making eye contact, teaching it language, saying how cute it is, affirming it, and basically nurturing it. That was a rough thing to really feel, but since my kid was going through that stage at the time, I was really conscious that whatever I was doing was worthwhile and it mattered. Why do some people get that in life, and why do some not? No reason. Life is unfair. No reason. Nobody deserves this. That was one connection I had with it. Then, when my older kid was seven, we started reading the series together and Sorcerer's Stone was the first book she finished reading on her own. And then I was a little worried that... at what point would they get too old for her? And I thought Goblet of Fire might be the point where she stopped, especially because the first chapter of Goblet of Fire suddenly becomes an adult novel and it's the postwar recollections of Frank Bryce. It sounds like mid-20th century Dickens. That book is the first thick one. The print is smaller. I imagine a lot of kids, probably, that's where they hit the brake, but no. She made it through and she finished the series, and that's how I got to observe that if kids are not emotionally ready for some things in a story, they just read it and don't understand it and it's okay. The same kid, two years later, will go back and say, "Oh," and this series is designed for that. You can read it on a seven-year-old level, you can read it on a teen level, you can read it again later as an adult. It's very cannily designed that way on purpose as a writing exercise, so I really admired that. Then for the older kid, we did have the whole magical 11th birthday: I woke her up at midnight with sausages, and the night before I gave her bananas and a bag of chips. We brought her to Orlando, and that was exciting. I always involved my kids in things like Snape trivia. They each presented at cons as children; my younger one, even though she doesn't like Harry Potter the series, she loves Sorting. Sorting is its own thing and she will Sort anything and anyone, and she's very interested in that, so she's done that. She's Sorted Marvel, she's Sorted the wives of Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>.

JC: While you were talking about your experience being a parent and Harry Potter, it kind of came back to me. I had weirdly forgotten this: when I first started reading the Harry Potter series, I was a couple of years into an assistant professor position and trying to have a baby. I'd been putting off having a baby because I was in graduate school and then this was it. I wanted to be a mother so very much, and it didn't happen, and it didn't happen. We spent almost six years trying to have a baby; eventually had to have IVF. I had many years of struggling with depression and struggling with infertility issues and lots of medical interventions and all the crap that comes along with that. One of the roles that Harry Potter played in my life at the time was that it got me through it. It was another place I could go to get away from the reality that I was in, and it was a fantasy world that I could escape to. That's one of the reasons why it's always meant a lot to me, because it was a place where I could be someone else who wasn't dealing with all these issues. I could be another person, and I kind of was. I split my own energy between the person who was depressed and struggling to function, and the person who had all these great conversations and engaged with other people and would go to cons and dress up and have fun. I was two different people, and probably in a way that wasn't healthy, but that's what got me through it. When you said that you didn't know you were pregnant at Deathly Hallows, I had had IVF a few weeks before Deathly Hallows came out, and I knew I was going to find out the week before. I had booked myself a trip to go to London for the book release, and it was a con happening in London, too, and I was going to go to this con. I thought, "Well, if this IVF doesn't work, I get to go to London." I was in a bookstore, listening to... I'm pretty sure it was a Draco and the Malfoys concert in my local bookstore when I got the phone call from the clinic that my pregnancy test was positive. So, literally, I was in a Harry Potter space when I found out I was pregnant, and that trip got canceled.

Lorrie: Thank goodness. Oh, wow.

JC: All of that was really wrapped up in that experience. I did go to another con about a month and a half later, and because of the nature of the pregnancy, I had to have progesterone shots daily in the ass with a giant needle. I roomed with a fandom friend who was a nurse, and she gave me my shots every day. It was one of my things. I was like, "I have to have the progesterone shot every day at 5:00 p.m. so I keep myself pregnant. What am I going to do?" And my friend was like, "Oh, I can do that. I'm a nurse." I was like, Oh, great! Every day at five, we'd have to go back to the room, and she'd give me the shot in the butt. Even then, it was all wrapped up. Reading Deathly Hollows and all of that is wrapped up in this time in my life when I was finally, after six years, actually going to have a baby and everything that came after that. It's so emotionally tied up in important things in my life that it's just always going to be meaningful for those reasons.

Lorrie: I did have IVF for only two years with my first one, and that must've reset me because the second one I did not know was coming. But that was the first time I had not been there for bedtime for my then three-year-old, and that was hard. I told her, "I'll be back by the time you wake up in the morning," but she woke up in the middle of the night and I wasn't back yet. Oh, no. Anyway...

JC: You lied, mommy. You lied!

Lorrie: Oh, my god. It was the worst betrayal. Yeah, it is tied up with that. Also, I was 38. I was the same age as Snape when he died.

JC: Oh, wow.

Lorrie: And that meant something to me. His death, the way that I found out by reading *Deathly Hallows*, that this complicated life ended here, then everything in my life, from that moment forward was going to be extra -- more than what he got -- and that was pretty emotional. What parts of the story of the series really grabbed you emotionally? What got you invested? What kind of things did you seek out fanfic about, or want to talk to other fans about? What characters or storylines?

JC: I think one of the first things that grabbed me was the relationship between Harry and Sirius Black. I think the idea that you had this kid -- who, for reasons that you've already talked about and everybody who has read the series understands -- just did not have a good childhood and not a lot of love, and to finally have this father figure in his life? That was incredibly meaningful to me. And I remember really being into the Remus-Sirius ship for a while; this idea of, 'Harry has two dads!' kind of thing. I wanted Harry to have a family so badly. This is before we found out later about why it was important for him to go back to the Dursleys, but I just wanted him to have a loving family so bad, and I wanted that to be Sirius and Remus. Sirius's death hit me really hard. I guess there's no point in warning for spoilers right now, is there?

Lorrie: We're not going to have any. There's no point. At all points, we're going to jump in and around and assume that everybody has been spoiled.

JC: Yeah, there you go. Exactly. That was one that really hit me early on. I was fascinated with Draco Malfoy, and I was absolutely straight up one of those people who wanted Draco to be redeemed and I do believe that he was. That's one of my hills I'll die on. I just love that. I love the idea of Harry and Draco being friends, being anything to each other, having any kind of relationship. That's something I loved about *Cursed Child*, was this idea that they were still, in a lot of ways, kind of equals in some sense, like they were two sides of the same coin. That relationship fascinates me. I sought it out a lot in fanfiction, but also thinking about the possibilities for Draco. It made me think of kids who are raised in families where their family's in a cult, or they're super evangelical Christians -- like the Quiverfull people -- and what they have to do to escape that and have a normal life. That's what I always thought of Draco. His family was in a cult, and his teenage rebellion years were not as strong as they could have been, but he did hit a point where he was like, 'I'm done.' Then the fact that his mother would have done anything for him, all of that. I love thinking about the Malfoy family and the things that could have happened and the way things could have turned out. I think those things, too, so it comes back to family in a lot of ways. These two kids: one kid who had loving parents who died; the other kid who had loving parents who just made really awful choices and were in a fucking cult and subjected him to all this abuse. Both of these kids came out of this together in a way, and I really want them to be friends, at least. I really want them to understand each other. Those are the things that stand out to me. You know Hermione and Ron, blah blah blah, but I think those are the ones that really stand out to me the most. I shall think of more as you talk. What about you, other than Snape?

Lorrie: What got me?

JC: Well, talk about Snape. I mean, hey...

Lorrie: I love that it took me a long time to figure out what the series was about. I know that I was fascinated by it; I always felt a little embarrassed, because there was this attitude of scorn for adults who were interested by this series. "It's so easy. It's a children's series. Grow up!" I have to say I did not find it an easy series to understand. I found it quite difficult to interpret, especially Deathly Hallows. It took me quite a while and I finally figured that it's about three questions: Who would try to kill a baby? Why did that attempt fail? And what does it take for the rest of the community to get that baby to adulthood with roughly the same chances at life as his peers? Okay, that's what it's asking. I took a long time to understand how to define Dark Magic. What makes magic Dark? Is there a rule, or is it just you make it up as you go along? No, there's a rule. I had to go to Machiavelli for that, and then I saw it. "Okay, that's exciting." And once I understood that, then all of that in the series made sense to me and was consistent. I liked very much the distinction in the series between gold magic and silver magic.

JC: I'm going to learn from this. I don't know what you're talking about. This is great.

Lorrie: Silver is yourself. Your Patronus is silver; your thoughts are silver; your memories are silver. Voldemort has silver magic. Gold only happens alchemically when you interact and connect with another human being. Your memories of love bring gold. When Harry and Voldemort have wand battles and their wands connect, it makes gold. It doesn't have to be love; it just has to be connection. If you recall at the end of Goblet of Fire, when their wands connect, it's so powerful that it creates this dome and it lifts them both in the air. Alchemy, that's love. That's the thing that enables humans to grow. Voldemort, not having had a connection with another person, couldn't get out of his rudimentary body until he stole blood from somebody who had that ability. I liked that distinction and I liked that, no matter what Voldemort tried to do to argue against it, he had to admit that Harry had an advantage and he couldn't win unless he stole some of that for himself. It took me a long time to figure out what the Elder Wand plot was. Oh, my god! And was it even worth it? Was it needlessly complicated? Was it even going anywhere? But I thought it through and then it paid off. I was really happy with what it led me to. Took me a long time to realize that Snape did not covet the Defense Against the Dark Arts position. A big one that took me years was, "Oh, Dumbledore was not being manipulative. Ah, okay." Something that really puzzled me -- and it really grabbed me, so I worked this out for myself pretty early -- was what was Snape doing crying in Sirius Black's room, tearing a photo of Harry's family apart? What was that? And that, to me, was maybe the key to the whole series for me. "What are horcruxes? Oh, that's like if your trauma is so unthinkable that you can't bear to think of it all at once, and you have to reject the parts of yourself that were traumatized and bury them. Okay, this checks out." "What does it mean to scar somebody for life when you attack them?" Back to my guy Snape: What is it to be a fascist or a white supremacist, and then genuinely feel horror and remorse and spend the rest of your life doing what you can to repay the universe? Which you won't be able to, because with Snape and with a lot of people who take that path, sometimes there's actual permanent damage. Can you make that up? Not always, but what can you do with the rest of your life? Should you just kill yourself? Is your life over? No. What if you have a lot of your life ahead of you? Are you worthless, or are you still worth something? The story of Snape being a person that can heal some things that good people, who've never been evil, cannot do? There's value in that. Somebody like Draco, who has turned evil at 16: a good person couldn't reach him, but Snape could go to him and say, "There is nothing you have done that is too disgusting for me to know. I've done it all, too. You don't disgust me. I'm taking you with me. Come on." Someone who had always been good could not

have done that. These stories occupied me and thrilled me for a long time, and every time I found out the series withstood analysis and was really robust that way, I really connected with it and I admired it. I think it started to fall apart a little bit in *Deathly Hallows* because I also liked reading it as a reader, because you can see times when the author is more confident or has more time, and times when the author is under deadline or somehow stressed. In *Deathly Hallows*, because there was unprecedented worldwide scrutiny and secrecy, you can see where the author was really desperately trying to hang on to her vision and get the book to the end, so there are times when the allegory gets stretched a little in *Deathly Hallows*. She cares so much. *Prisoner of Azkaban* is a good example of one where I don't feel like she was rushed. She had time to craft that so much that even though it's heavily allegorical, it works completely just as an adventure story. But these things -- seeing the author in the writing was also really important to me. This series was always packaged to us with the author's story, along with the autobiography of the author as a certain kind of young woman who had been a single mother on welfare, and her biography made me -- and I think many readers -- trust her story more. If she was going to write about things like the *Fidelius Charm*; I just read that as a straight-up allegory for domestic violence, when you run away from an abuser. Knowing her background, I trusted her to write the *Fidelius Charm*, for example. She's a few years older than I am, but she's a similar generation and I think we probably read the same books growing up, so that's a frame of reference that I understand.

JC: It's very interesting because as you were saying that, I was thinking about how I don't think I thought about the author very much until she started making it impossible not to think about her the last few years. I think that's partly because I came to Harry Potter fandom as a Star Wars fan. I was a huge Star Wars fan from the time I was very small: I read all the extended universe books, I read all the comics, I collected toys, and all the stuff. I've seen all the new series and all of that, but Star Wars never felt like it was solely George Lucas's. It always, and even more now, felt like it was a product of a lot of people. Part of it is because it was a film series and not a book, so it's impossible. You can have your James Cameron, your George Lucas or your Steven Spielberg, but at the end of the day, films are not a sole person's creation. I don't think I'd been in a book fandom before, so I wasn't used to thinking about it from that perspective. I don't think I really paid much attention to the author, to be honest, other than when is the next book coming out. It's especially interesting that was a big part of your experience of reading the books, having -- maybe 'parasocial' is not the right way of saying it, but having some trust for an understanding of the author, whereas I don't think that ever entered my mind, to be honest.

Lorrie: Actually, it wasn't parasocial. That's just how I read, because that's my background, is literary analysis. I know that every word and every sentence reflects a choice by the author, and you can see the person in every page. The time that makes the biggest difference for me is the difference in tone between the end of *Goblet of Fire* -- when she was super stressed and under deadline -- and in the beginning of *Order of the Phoenix*, when she was so powerful she could tell people, "I'm not going to hold myself to a deadline. You get the book when I'm done." Because she had, by that time, reshaped the entire publishing industry with her success. So, the end of *Goblet of Fire* is really stressed out and full of page after page of monologues. This is not a finished novel. This is a draft. Then *Order the Phoenix* starts, and there's this cool, confident tone. It makes me very happy.

JC: That's really interesting.

Lorrie: And I think Half-Blood Prince, to me, reads like a perfect novel. She's completely in control. It's of a piece. Then with Deathly Hallows, you see her racing her own energy stores. Is she going to be able to get this saga out before she depletes herself, which is my interpretation of the writing tone of the epilogue. It sounds to me like someone who's completely flat out, collapsed onto the floor and saying, "Then this happened, that happened. Everything's fine."

JC: It's like when people post on Twitter, "Here's how this story would go if I had the energy to write it, the spoons to write it."

Lorrie: She had spent it all. So much of the series, to me, was one person's ethics. Things like as soon as somebody threatens the life of your loved one, you drop it. Harry has the prophecy and he's fighting with everything to hold on to it, but then somebody gets Neville and says, "If you don't give us the prophecy, then I'll kill Neville," and then Harry just... "Okay. The fight is over. You're not hurting Neville." That kind of thing, or the heavy emphasis on disarmament over conflict, was one person's ethical system that this whole universe was based on with its hundreds and hundreds of characters. I had a very good time enjoying that feast.

JC: I'm going to learn a lot as we go through this podcast. I always learn a lot from talking to you about these things, but also your background and mine are so very different in the sense that your academic background is very much in literary analysis. My PhD is in mathematics and I do teacher education, so I'm bringing a very different skill set to this. I think it's going to be really interesting to talk about this book with you, chapter by chapter, or however we're going to do it.

Lorrie: I don't have an academic background. I have a bachelor's.

JC: You do.

Lorrie: I have a bachelor's. I was an English major when I was 19.

JC: That trains your brain, right? It trains your brain to think about literature in a particular way. I trained my brain to think about mathematics in a totally different way, so it's just the way that your brain works. You do a lot of hard work that you put into it.

Lorrie: It doesn't feel like hard work.

JC: That's good. It's something that you are inclined to. That's the teacher in me coming out, saying yes.

Lorrie: But yeah, I do not have a PhD. That's something that there's not that much of in the Harry Potter series. There's so many different kinds of characters. You don't have that many people who are academic failures, who try and can't do it.

JC: Hmm, that's interesting. I was thinking of Crabbe and Goyle. They did set up to be...



Lorrie: I think they have some learning challenges. What we do see, we see a tiny little glimpse. We mostly see them from Ron's perspective; I don't know that Ron would have cared that much about whether they were quick-witted or not, except that they were so mean and physically threatening. Then he would say, "Oh, and they're also really stupid," but you see Snape trying to educate them and not getting very far, but he never gives up on them. We don't see what Snape thinks of it, but you can guess: that final year, when for the first time Crabbe and Goyle show aptitude -- and it's for Dark Magic, for curses -- after he's spent six years trying to teach them, trying to get them to be employable, telling them at some point he was going to have to write their references for jobs, trying to keep them on the rails after their fathers were incarcerated. Then the Carrows show up and turn them evil and it's the easiest thing, and he has to watch that happen. Anyway, I love that there are characters, I love that you can follow what happens to them. I love that it makes sense. I love that these issues that are important, I can care about them through stories and characters. So, JC, what are some things you are hoping to explore through doing this re-read podcast?

JC: Oh, my gosh, this is a really good question. I've kind of backed away, like a lot of people I know have really backed away, from all things Harry Potter in the last... four years?

Lorrie: Three and a half.

JC: Three and a half. Since the TERF thing started happening, for reasons that I think a lot of us did, which is out of horror that someone could do this, out of despair that someone like J.K. Rowling has that kind of influence. I think that she has had a tremendous negative impact on the lives of trans folks -- in the UK in particular, but really around the world. The fuel she's added to those fires, it's awful, so there's that. Also, the number of trans and non-gender-conforming people that I know -- friends, my students, within my own family, even -- it's really hard to talk about or to engage with something that is so connected to a person like that. It's a little bit like when you have a family member who suddenly got radicalized by watching Fox News or Breitbart or whatever and just went off the deep end into conspiracy theories and right-wing propaganda, and you can't have a conversation with them anymore. You see the damage that they're doing in your family, and it's that thing of, "They were such a big part of my life. I have all these great memories. Part of me still loves them, but also they're an awful human being and they're actually actively damaging other people that I love." On a much larger scale, it's a lot like that. I backed away from engaging in anything Harry Potter for several years now. I haven't watched the movies, I haven't read the books. I haven't read the books in a long time anyway, but nothing. I put away all my Harry Potter memorabilia. I used to use sorting stuff in my classes; I don't even mention that anymore. Nothing. For me, part of engaging in this podcast is sort of figuring out: How do you go back and reconnect with your racist uncle? How do I take this thing... maybe it's not even that. I'm not trying to reconnect with her. I'm not making any excuses for her. It's more this world that she created, but also that is bigger than her. There are a lot of people who are involved in creation of this world; in particular, people that I interacted with in fandom spaces, people who wrote stories, and people who did analysis. That is what I cling to, and that's been my experience of the Harry Potter series, the movies, and things that she had some involvement with. But I think trying to figure out, what does that mean to me now, now that I have cut her off -- to the extent that she cares -- cut her off as a person? This is a person who's no longer a meaningful figure in my life. What does it mean to think about, engage in, or even enjoy this content that she created that then the world kind of took and made part of the culture? I think that's a big part of it, and I still don't know what it means to

engage with that. There are a lot of arguments that I've seen from folks online who say that if you engage with the content at all, you're supporting her. You're supporting her awful positions because you're giving her attention, or you're doing something that is somehow going to benefit her. It's bringing attention to her property, which is just going to make her even more money that she's going to use for evil purposes. I honestly don't know how I feel about any of that. I don't know. I feel very nebulous about it, but I also feel like I need to sort through this thing that was a big part of my life for more than a decade that's intertwined, like I said, with my experiences of struggling with mental health and then becoming a parent and things that brought me joy and things that helped me survive. It's such an important part of my life and I don't want to just pack it away in a little box and never think of it again, but I don't know quite what to do with it. That's the big thing. That's one big thing. The other big piece of it, if I set that aside, is coming back to it after all this time. I now have a teenager. I have a kid who's the same age as Harry was in Order of the Phoenix – which is wild -- so I'm looking at it again from the perspective of having had a child at all those ages. Also, because I'm a teacher. My career is all about teacher preparation; I prepare people to teach high school. I think that is going to be really interesting to come back and look at the series from that perspective of an educator and think about this incredibly fucked-up school situation that Hogwarts seems to be, at least in my memory. I'd like to take a closer look at that, too. What about you?

Lorrie: Oh, dear. Long before TERFpocalypse -- I date TERFpocalypse as starting in December 2019. I know that earlier than that, she had liked tweets from transphobes and then had sort of pretended that she hadn't, that it was an accident. And of course, there are people saying she has said things all along that made you know she would be a transphobe if you asked her further. But when she deliberately broke a very long Twitter silence and leveraged all of her social influence to make a statement in favor of an active transphobe, that was December 2019. Oh, God, I was so thrilled that within less than 24 hours, every Harry Potter fandom organization that was part of my worldview -- organizations that had been in touch with her, that had official relationships with her -- all just violently gagged and said, "No. You want us to choose? We choose our people. We don't choose this. This is disgusting. I don't know what you're about. Go. Stop." And then we had some months to think about COVID, and we had some months to think about Black Lives Matter and police violence protests, and the timing of it was quite racist, I thought, even if the content was not. That's when Rowling wrote up a badly edited draft of a rant about why she... I can't say it without getting sarcastic. Anyway, it's her gender manifesto.

JC: I don't think I ever read it. I just read about it enough. I couldn't stomach reading it.

Lorrie: I did read it, and as far as I can tell, her argument in that gender manifesto is that she's afraid of cis men because they are sexually violent, but there's so many of them and they're so powerful that she's going to take it out on trans women instead, and also trans men for some reason. I don't know. It was about that coherent.

**Caroline:** Editor Caroline here with a note: Future Lorrie wishes it to be known that this particular characterization of JK Rowling's gender manifesto that no one asked for was armchair speculation -- daresay, even a minor tantrum -- and not a textual read of it. At some future date, Lorrie will endeavor to do a more responsible examination of that text... as soon as the spoons can be mustered. Stay tuned. **Editor Caroline out.**

Lorrie: Oh, dear. And until then, I had, against my better judgment, fantasies that maybe somebody could talk to her. Maybe she just doesn't know? I knew. I was kind of upset at myself for letting my brain do that because it was very parasocial. I was constructing an image of her as an individual that I knew... that's not at all what's happening here. The different levels of power involved here? We think we know an author because reading somebody's fiction is very intimate. We get to hear their thoughts. But that's not what's happening. And finally, when she wrote the manifesto in June of 2020 and I did read it, I thought, "Okay, she has taught us how to handle this." This is Lily in high school when Snape calls her a 'mudblood', and she says, "I've been making excuses for you for a long time, but I can't close my eyes to what you are anymore." She has to protect herself, and he doesn't want to lose her, but there's a point at which when somebody attacks you, you have to protect yourself. This is what it means for it to be unforgivable -- because that's the only time the word 'unforgivable' is used, that Rowling uses that word, except for the three Unforgivable Curses -- when Snape calls Lily a 'mudblood'. Then the narrator says "the unforgivable word," so he is weaponizing a worldview that some people don't deserve human rights. When that happens -- that's an attack, that's an unforgivable attack -- that releases Lily from any obligation to remain in relationship with him, to forgive him, to do emotional labor for him, and she protects herself. I thought, "That's what Rowling did. She attacked and she's created a permanent scar; it hurts a lot, and we can feel when she's near." When we have memories of love and happiness and friends that are associated with the Harry Potter series, then our scars hurt more and we want to heal. Not that any decision we made would have any effect on the person we've constructed in our mind as J.K. Rowling, but it helped me to think of it as something I could let go of. So TERFpocalypse, to me, lasted from December 2019 to June 2020. After that, she has gotten worse, but I have only taken tiny peeks at what she's done now, because I just need to know that it's the same but worse. I don't need to know the details. It's not salvageable, and certainly not by me being forgiving and doing emotional labor for this person that I don't know. Another problem that I see: this has to do with innumeracy, with people not understanding what a billion is. It's not the same as dealing with somebody you disagree with who's your equal. To me, it's impossible to understand how much more money a billionaire has than even somebody I know personally who's rich. How powerful. Also, she has sold half a million books internationally [Editor Lorrie's note: Podcast Lorrie misspoke. It's half a billion, not half a million] and that's something different. Again, for most of the globe that is familiar with Harry Potter as a series, as a story -- whether it's from books or movies or merchandise or just legend at this point -- they don't think about the author. Most of the world is not Anglophone. We read Twitter in her language, so we know the stuff she's saying. Most people in the world who are engaged with Harry Potter do not know that the author, whoever that person is, is engaged in some sort of controversy. They don't know what it's about. It has nothing to do with going to the coffee shop to buy a potion, to buy your cappuccino that's got butterbeer flavoring. Nothing. Nothing to do with a costume with a robe and a wand. They're not aware.

JC: I think that's true for a startling number of people, even within the United States. There are a lot of people that I know who just have no clue that this is going on with her, because it just hasn't hit the circles that they're in or the media they consume. They just don't know. That's a thing that's happened to me a couple of times, where people like friends or family members who want to give me a Harry Potter-themed gift, and then are surprised when my reaction is like, \*GASP\*.

Lorrie: "Oh, my God, no. I don't even want to look at it."

JC: It's a genuine surprise. They have no idea. I guess being in fandom space or Twitter, I'm so aware that I forget that not everyone is. I'm still making sense of how that even plays out in culture in the US. I think in the UK, people are probably much more aware.

Lorrie: Yes, because she's actually influencing votes on policy.

JC: So how do you answer that question? You talked about it a bit, but how do you respond to folks who say that engaging in any way with Harry Potter is going to benefit her? Even if you're opposed to her completely, that engaging with this fandom, engaging with this content, is a betrayal of trans folks? When people say that, what's your thought on that? Because that's something I know I struggle with a lot.

Lorrie: It gets back to innumeracy and people not understanding the scale. Boycott is essential. Boycott is life. But you have to understand that boycotting Warner Brothers, Harry Potter? Your individual boycott will affect some things, but it won't affect the franchise. They won't feel it. It doesn't mean we shouldn't boycott. It doesn't mean that it's not important. It just means: Know your goal. 'We', meaning you and I and all our friends, could all boycott Harry Potter or all not; they won't feel it. The machine marches on without us, and it's not just about money. It's really not. It's about cultural permeation. It's done. It's out of J.K. Rowling's control, it's out of our control. It is part of the world's collective consciousness in a way that can't be undone by our individual boycotts. Doesn't mean we don't boycott. It means in order to be effective, we have to know who we're doing it for and why. We're not doing it to hurt J.K. Rowling, or to remove our support from her. She doesn't feel it. The people around us that matter to us, we do have a relationship with them and we have to negotiate with them. When people say, "If you loved me, you wouldn't love Harry Potter anymore," I have found that it doesn't work that way. I understand that feeling. I have tried to give things up that I desperately love because somebody else was saying, "It's me or that." And not only for that reason, but generally speaking, relationships where that dynamic is present, regardless of Harry Potter and J.K. Rowling, eventually they don't work out. Oh, I love this recent book: *Monsters* by Claire Dederer, which is about creators who are horrible, disgusting people, and the issue of whether or not you must turn away from their work because of that. Of course, there's a whole chapter on J.K. Rowling. What she says -- and this is so starkly true, it almost made me cry, it's so pathetic: "No individual decision you make about boycotting is going to make the slightest bit of difference. That's a capitalist way to look at it." They're trying to make this huge problem -- in this case, transphobia; or like in Michael Jackson's case, pedophilia; or in Picasso's case, misogyny -- in this case, weaponized wealthy international transphobia, in a capitalist scheme, is somehow our problem. If we go to Target with our \$20 and we think, "Should I buy that thing," suddenly it all comes down to that and "I'm a bad person." No! Don't fall for it. That is not what's going to change anything. This came to a head for me, because since I had decided, "Yes, I'm going to write this 2022 version of my book on Snape and I'm going to incorporate TERFpocalypse and the response to it, and I'm going to reconsider the series based on that." Because I had made that decision, I was going to be spending money on licensed merch. As much as possible, I didn't, but there were some things that I could not avoid buying. I went to see the short, new, gayer *Cursed Child*.

JC: I wish I could've seen that.

Lorrie: There's no way to get that used. You can get the fan-made version, but that's not what I was going for. So I had a policy: if I have to give money to the franchise, then I will give at least as much to a trans rights organization or to an individual person's GoFundMe. And if I can manage it, I will give more than that. Sometimes I can pay twice and that makes it very expensive, which is part of the point. Do I really want to be giving money? Then I heard the argument from people: "Oh, that's just performative. That's nothing. You can't just assuage your conscience by donating to an organization. The terrible thing is that you gave even one penny [to J.K. Rowling]," and I so disagree. That makes me furious. I don't know what kind of purist unrealistic world you live in, but who is fighting against all of the legislation right now? It's a little rented office of a little trans rights organization in this city and that city, on a shoestring budget, with pro bono lawyers who are totally stressed out and going to court. If you give them \$20 because you bought \$20 worth of Harry Potter merch, Warner Brothers does not care about your \$20. That little tiny trans rights organization that's going to go to court for you is going to care. Self-righteous people say, "No, you're a bad person. Don't donate to trans rights organizations to make yourself feel better." I don't care why you donate to trans rights organizations. Just do it! *That's* what's going to make a difference. Your agonizing over your \$1.50 about if you're going to buy a Harry Potter bookmark is not going to make any difference in this very fast-moving thing that's happening right now. Fighting transphobia through effective channels, like donating to the ACLU if you're in the US, that's going to make a difference. It's a matter of scale to me. Perspective is important, because I understand that the conversation that's happening is about relationships between people and about trust and about personal safety. But when you jump from your feeling of personal unsafety to making pronouncements and conditions and ultimatums, then the risk of losing perspective on what's actually happening isn't going to really bring you the safety and love that we all ultimately want. What we want is to end transphobia. That's what we want. That's what we're trying to do here. Not trying to bite each other to death with a million tiny bites, sniping between ourselves. Anyway, that's one thought. Another thought is, I just came from helping to organize a con, MISTI-Con, that -- basically, at this point, if you do anything Harry Potter related, you have to be either pro-trans rights OR genocide is okay with you.

JC: You're either Death Eaters, or...

Lorrie: Yeah. Is this okay with you or not? MISTI-Con -- like LeakyCon, which I also went to last year -- I have never seen this many rainbow flags outside of a pride event. That's the fortification. And this is the realization I had. For years, I didn't go to any Harry Potter events because of COVID. Finally, last October, I went to LeakyCon for the first time. That was my first Harry Potter in-person event in three years, and there were quite a few trans and gender-non-conforming attendees, who all had the same broken, weary expression. When we talked about it in that space -- which was a very pro-queer space -- and the subject matter of how we all were coping with this attack -- it wasn't the *only* conversation, but it was. Once that was established that this is what we were going to do, I could see people start to exhale for the first time in years, and this little tiny thing was coming out of everyone, this bit of hope and reconnection. It was, like, the first time in years that people started to talk about Luna, Neville, Wolfstar, their House. And as I watched these people come out of their fetal crouches and remember this and remember things that have been super important to them, like their gay wedding that had been Harry Potter-themed, then I saw that this love had not diminished and it had not gone anywhere; it had just been locked down and, with enormous grief and almost violence, cut off from the person's main emotions.

JC: That feels very familiar.

Lorrie: It wasn't diminished. It's not like, "Okay, I don't love it anymore." It's that that love was damaged and locked down. Actually, that love belongs to you. You have the right to it, and when people could exhale a little, let it out again, and let it back into their minds, it was very emotional. It's not something that you can kill just because you have a friend giving you an ultimatum saying, "If you don't hate Harry Potter, I will feel betrayed." We don't actually have as much control over what we love and hate as that, and it's the same thing that made the series important to me in the first place: it doesn't matter what they try to beat out of you. In the end, it's you and your feelings. I met Alex Gino. Alex Gino is an author who wrote a book that was originally published as George -- which is now published as Melissa -- and it's about a fourth grader who is trans. You should ask your kid. It might have been on their reading list in middle school or something. I met Alex Gino because they and I are in the same documentary about Judy Blume. They asked me, "So what have you been working on?" I looked at Alex and I said, "I was asked to revise a book that I wrote in 2016 about Harry Potter." We both looked at each other, and they went, "Oh," and I went, "Mhmm." I said, "Because it's a very queer fandom, it's a very trans fandom," and Alex Gino said, "Because it's a very trans story. Not feeling like your true self until you get to Hogwarts?" They and I look at each other and just nodded.

JC: I think that's been part of what's made this painful these last few years. Everyone that I know who's read it has read it as a queer allegory. It felt like that, and it was such a betrayal for the author to turn around and –

Lorrie: Be wrong.

JC: And basically be Voldemort, be the villain of her own series. Okay, this has been really good for me to hear all these things. I think that as we go forward, it's going to help me think about where all this stuff sits in my life now, all these years later.

Lorrie: But even regardless of TERFpocalypse, which despite how humongous it is, it's not the only defining reality around this fictional series. I was interested in just learning how different generations approach this story. For one thing, how old was a person when they first read it? That affects a lot. For another, how does the same reader respond differently when they re-read it at different ages? Because then the text, which has remained unchanged, operates as a time capsule, so when they reacquaint themselves with certain stories, they remember who they were at different times that they engage with that story. We also have the phenomenon that, just like 16-year-old Tom Riddle coming out of a diary, these books capture J.K. Rowling before she made her entire brand transphobia. This was before she realized that she was committing to paper a commitment to equality that she was later going to renege on. I believe the thing that made Harry Potter a successful series was this insistence that no matter how insignificant you are, any little 11-year-old is still going to have their time with the Sorting Hat, is still going to get their time with Ollivander saying, "No, not this wand. Your magic wants this wand." It's not like if you're an unimportant student, you don't get that. Everyone gets that. And then it's just about you. There's examples of what happens when your true self isn't honored in that, then it means it doesn't work. It's not right. It's not going to work until it's really you. She's committed that to a whole series; it caught on because it's true. Now she's saying something different, but that truth is still true. And the story she wrote: she's, for better and for worse, a very good writer. In my opinion. And the story holds up. It holds up to a lot of analysis, and I'm looking forward to doing that.

JC: Yeah. I'm looking forward to hearing the analysis. Literary analysis is not my strength, but I'm looking forward to going back and revisiting the story. As you were saying, it's a time capsule in a lot of ways, and at the time that I first read it, I was a very different person than I am now. Mentally, my life circumstances -- we're talking 20 years ago that I read most of the series, so it's going to be really interesting to come back and visit it again, after all this time.

Caroline: You've been listening to Harry Potter After 2020, with hosts Lorrie Kim and JC. You can find show notes for this and all other episodes at [HPAfter2020.com](http://HPAfter2020.com). There, you will also find ways to support the show, contact the hosts, and more. If you like what you heard, consider giving us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Harry Potter After 2020 is produced and edited by Lorrie Kim and Caroline Rinaldy. Original music was composed by C.L. Smith. Thank you for listening.