

# HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

## Transcript

### Episode 2.13

### Book 2, Chapter 13: The Very Secret Diary

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 long-time HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this episode, Lorrie and JC tackle Book Two, Chapter 13: The Very Secret Diary.

Lorrie: Today, we're discussing The Very Secret Diary. Hermione recovers from Polyjuice. Someone floods Moaning Myrtle's bathroom by trying to flush a 50-year-old diary down a toilet. Lockhart celebrates Valentine's Day. And this diary has some things to tell Harry. JC, are you ready to wade into this chapter?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: What did you notice about it?

JC: The fact that poor Hermione was in the hospital wing with the cat fur slowly receding for weeks and still doing her homework, and then rumors swirling about what happened to Hermione over the holiday break. Since it's been a while since I read this, I hadn't really thought about what happened to Hermione afterward. Poor Hermione. I'm just imagining her -- she misses the rest of the break because she's isolated, COVID-style. Just isolated.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah.

JC: She doesn't feel sick probably, but she's just holed up in this hospital wing, and finally Madam Pomfrey has to put curtains around her so no one can even see her. I can relate to that now in a way that I don't think I could have a few years ago.

Lorrie: Yes, and she's just horrified and having to deal with the horrific consequences of having dabbled in something that's beyond her abilities at this age. She pulled off something really daring, but at what cost?

JC: Right. And I keep thinking, too, about the fact that she mistook cat hair for human hair, and that's got to be a thing that's been eating at her this whole time. She has to be thinking, 'I know the difference. What a dumb mistake.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: If you're that kind of kid who's like Hermione, who's a perfectionist, and you know that you can do better and you make a stupid mistake and then you're paying the consequences for it for weeks, like this. Ugh! The other thing that stood out to me in this first scene is Lockhart's card, and then the way that he signed it. It doesn't quite read the same now, because everybody these days has this email signature that lists all their stuff in it.

Lorrie: Oh, that's true.

JC: In fact, the first time I read it -- yesterday -- it came across almost like an email signature would. You list all of your titles or whatever, your favorite quotes, so it felt over-the-top for an email signature. But then I realized no, he wrote that by hand with a quill, and it just had this whole other layer then. I had forgotten that this wasn't normal when this book came out. This is before email signatures.

Lorrie: With a flourish. Yes.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: It really struck me this time how much disturbing puberty is one of the themes of this book. Hermione messes with a girl who's older and bigger than she is with magic that's beyond her; she ends up with hair on her face and a tail and this misplaced sexuality weirdness, and she's corresponding with Lockhart. She gets this get-well card, and then later on she sends him a Valentine. Just the thought of someone flushing something or trying to flush something down a toilet, and then this great wash of water? 'Okay, what is all the secret stuff happening?' Then the mandrakes have acne and they're becoming moody and secretive, which reminds me of Harry in Dumbledore's office saying, "No, I don't have anything to talk about." So, just this threat; there's something that's taking people out and it's invisible, but getting worse maybe. It's very puberty, and that's connected to this lesson about books being dangerous, because Hermione is gullible about Lockhart's authorship. She's so dazzled by the myth of the author that she refuses to see the evidence right in front of her -- which is uncharacteristic -- and the boys cannot believe she's falling for this, but that's a warning. Then Ron is reciting to Harry -- when Harry's about to pick up the waterlogged diary -- and he's saying, "No, no, no. There's all these dangerous things that books can do," and he has this funny and absurd recitation of bad things that have happened to people because books have been out of control. This whole age-appropriate lesson about how to be a discerning reader, which I think is more applicable now with unregulated social media and misinformation than when this book was first published, media was a bit more regulated and there was more fact-checking, and it was less available in its sensational forms to tweens. This whole mistrusting the glamorous myth of the author and

the authority of anything printed: it's an interesting take from someone who has just changed from being an unpublished, impoverished, aspiring writer to someone who's a successful published author. It's a real preoccupation with this volume, which reminds me of Hermione at the end of Book One disavowing books and cleverness. Books and cleverness are not the things that will guarantee you greatness, and she's really going through it right now. Beware, beware the glamor of books.

JC: A lot of the things that Ron said in this chapter really jumped out at me in a variety of ways: when he was listing off the things that could go wrong, or the ways that books could be cursed and could affect you. One of them that really stood out to me was the one about -- there was a witch who found a book, and then it was a book that she could not stop reading.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Everything she did, she had to do one-handed from then on, because all she could do was read this book, and I thought, 'Well, that's familiar.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Especially if you have teenagers; the phone in the hand is constant. No, this is not just a thing that teenagers do. Everybody does it everywhere you go. But that idea that that was a curse, and what a horrible thing it would be to always have this thing in your hand that you have to pay attention to, no matter what else she would like to do. I thought, 'Well, that's come true in a way.'

Lorrie: It's addictive, yeah. Harry cannot resist the diary, and I didn't realize until this re-read, oh, this is our first sign of two horcruxes wanting to join each other because bits of soul, by nature, want to re-merge. He can't resist it "as though it were a story he wanted to finish. And while Harry was sure he had never heard the name T.M. Riddle before, it still seemed to mean something to him, almost as though Riddle was a friend he'd had when he was very small, and had half forgotten." Ooh, that is frightening, isn't it?

JC: Yeah, that struck me, too. When I read that, I just thought, oh, wow. The fact that this is the first time that he has encountered a horcrux, and there's lots of little hints of it through this chapter. And I'm sure going forward, there are things that I think that I'll pay a lot more attention to on this read than I did. A lot of what Ron says in this chapter is very interesting. Ron knows the name. He instantly says, "Oh, yeah, I remember where that name is from because I polished that shield that had his name on it. This is the guy who won the Award for Special Services to the School."

Lorrie: And everything else, too.

JC: Yeah, and all these other things, too, and I think they find out a little bit more about him. It was just fascinating that that came from Ron, considering how important that name is going to

be, and there are a lot of other things that Ron said in this chapter. Talking about how the book could be dangerous and recognizing the name: a little bit later, when they're wondering what he got the special award for, Ron says, "Maybe he murdered Myrtle." There are more things that happen like that in this chapter, and it reminds me that there was a fan theory that when Ron is joking, usually what he's saying is true.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: When Harry is really convinced something is true, it's probably not, but when Ron is joking around and says something, there's truth in it probably.

Lorrie: Yeah. I remember first thinking that maybe Voldemort had put some sort of attraction spell on the book to compel you to want it, but that can't be the case because Ron doesn't feel it at all. He just doesn't know what's wrong with Harry.

JC: Right. Ginny had it for a long time, so clearly it affected her, but there's no indication that Ginny felt the connection to it, or that Harry did either. It was more that she fell into the trap of opening the book and writing in it and the book writing back, which... oooh, wow, this is a really cool idea. The other thing that is interesting in that scene is that the kids do this series of little deductions about Tom Riddle in a way that I don't recall seeing them having done before. To me -- and I don't think that the author did this intentionally, or maybe she did: if you're a constructivist or if you've ever had any education theory, around the age of 12 (from a Piagetian perspective) is when kids start to be able to do deductive logic, and so we think about the van Hiele levels of geometric reasoning and go up through the years.

Lorrie: The what levels?

JC: Van Hiele.

Lorrie: What's that?

JC: Sorry. There's this whole theory of how kids develop logic and reasoning through geometric thinking. I'm sorry. I'm a math teacher.

Lorrie: No, no, I love this.

JC: Anyway... It starts out with kids being able to recognize shapes, and then it moves into being able to recognize classes of shapes and it moves up through the hierarchy. But that formal logic, when you can actually do deductive reasoning, that hits around the middle of middle school. That's about when kids start being able to do that, and that's what I see in the scene. They do things like: Harry notices it was bought from a newsagent in London, which must imply that Riddle was Muggle-born.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That little series of connections is not a connection he necessarily would have made a year ago. Ron immediately realizing where he had seen it before, and then all of them together go, "Oh, it was 50 years ago. This must have something to do with the Chamber of Secrets," and they go really quickly to that conclusion.

Lorrie: And Hermione scolds Ron for not making the final leap.

JC: Yeah. But the three of them together, watching these little leaps of logic, it struck me as a teacher. It struck me as, 'oh, they can do deductive reasoning now in a way they couldn't a year ago,' so it felt very age-appropriate. I was impressed. As much as I hate admitting that I'm impressed by things like that that this author does, I was like, this is really age-appropriate kind of thinking.

Lorrie: So how do you spell that?

JC: Oh, van Hiele. V-a-n, one word, and then H-i-e-l-e.

Lorrie: I'm glad I asked. This makes me wonder, though: what made you think that this author wasn't doing it on purpose?

JC: Because I didn't want to. I don't know. That's probably part of it, honestly. I don't actually know enough of her background -- or if I did, I've now forgotten it -- to know if she ever worked with middle school kids or if she ever studied to be a teacher, or if she ever learned any sort of learning theory.

Lorrie: I do know that she did teach professionally. I don't know what age. I don't think it was for more than a year or two.

JC: One thing I think is amazing about the series is that the kids feel age-appropriate every year, and I feel you either get that by just knowing a lot about kids or spending a lot of time around kids. If you read a thing -- someone writes a story that has a three- or four-year-old and the three- or four-year-old acts like an eight-year-old, but not in the way that a precocious three- or four-year-old would -- you can tell when people haven't been around children.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She knows kids and she knows how they think and how that changes over time, and it's impressive.

Lorrie: So when you do writing and you want to make sure that you get something right, you do research, right?

JC: For the most part, sometimes. Yeah. Ideally, yes.

Lorrie: But you thought this came about by accident?

JC: I think that it feels so natural that... Do I think it came about by accident? I guess because of the way the kids grow through the series, it made me think that she just had a really good handle on these characters and knew enough about kids to know how they would change over time. But maybe not. Maybe it was more than just intuition. Maybe she actually looked up how kids learn and what kind of thinking they would be able to do at different points in the story. I have no idea.

Lorrie: So this is where I'm going to go on a little digression.

JC: Ooh, okay.

Lorrie: Over the years that I've written about Harry Potter when I've said, "Okay, I see this and this and this happening; that tells us that the author had these things in mind." So many times -- and I guess it annoys me -- I've been told, "Oh, well, that's very nice, Lorrie, but you're reading more into it than the author put in. Look at you putting more thought into this than the author did." Why do you think that? I disagree. I don't think I'm seeing anything in there that she didn't put in. I don't think it's me. Sometimes I have felt a reluctance to acknowledge just how much work goes into fiction, and it's intimidating to see that too much. I will say that I've known and been friends with and worked with so many fiction writers over my life; the same people who, when reading this, say, "Well, that's very deep, Lorrie, but I don't think the author put that much into it," they're the ones writing the fiction. There is no bottom to how much they will stay up at night and read obscure books for one line in their story and just go down a rabbit hole, like learn a new language. This has generally been my experience with authors. I remember -- I don't know J.K. Rowling and I don't expect to -- when I was, I guess, in high school, and I was corresponding with Judy Blume (who is a children's author as well as an adult author). She was writing the Rachel Robinson series, which is about seventh-grade girls, and she wrote me a letter. She was a little worried because she had just gone out to see the Stephen King movie *Stand By Me*, and the boys in that movie are also seventh graders; she was a little perturbed because she had been studying so hard to make sure that her seventh-graders were developmentally appropriate, and the boys in that movie were more mature. That shook her for a bit, and then she really did her research to make this settled in her mind, to square these things. She concluded, to her relief, that no, she could stand by her research and that she got the level right, and she suspects that for the story, the maturity of these boys had been aged up a bit.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: But you can imagine, as a writer who's going to be writing something that'll be published internationally, that you really feel responsible to your readers to get this right, so she triple-quadruple checked before saying, "Okay, now I'm going to stick with what I researched." But if you've ever read a YA or middle-grade book by Judy Blume, the effect is so simple. When you

finally pick up the book and read it, it reads like she jotted it down, and it takes so much labor on her part to keep doing drafts for two years until she gets that just right. Because I had seen her labor over that, I knew how much labor went into it.

JC: Yeah. I think my reluctance to give her that credit on this part has to do with my personal feelings about the author more than what I know about authors. Obviously, it's so clear how much work went into all of these details and all the worldbuilding that she did, but when it comes to something like that? Oh, man. Yeah, I think part of it's my personal feelings about the author are getting in the way here.

Lorrie: Partly, I find when I look at the enormity of the Harry Potter saga and the depth of it and the emotional truth along so many different character lines, I find it intimidating. And I find in the fandom a tendency that -- I have fallen prey to this, and I've heard so many people fall prey to this: a sort of gleeful picking at plot holes or anything, because it equalizes the feeling, 'Well, see, she wasn't perfect, she made a mistake.' Because otherwise, to admit that someone has achieved something this sound, this robust, that can stand up to so many millions and billions of readings and interpretations... it's a lot, and I sense a reluctance in people to admit to it. Then when there's something that's so antagonistic, like her anti-trans prejudice, then it's a tendency to want to cut down your opponents, which is very, very topical for this volume.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: To bring it back. Anyway...

JC: Yeah. No, that's interesting. I appreciate you pointing that out, that I was doing that, because I think that I wasn't really conscious of it until you pointed it out. But yeah, you're right, though. It's hard to give a person that you don't like credit where credit's due sometimes or often. That's difficult, because you really don't want it to be that they're that great at what they do because they have this other thing that is so shitty and horrible. You just don't want it to be true.

Lorrie: And the stance of having to give a low whistle at how good this author is and how good this series is, that's humbling in a way I don't want. I want to hang on to myself. But that's been an inevitable part of re-reading the series for me, and I think that's actually part of why some people who loved Harry Potter and then were horrified by the anti-trans rhetoric don't want to reread the series: because they don't want to fall back in love.

JC: I see.

Lorrie: That is so much of the sensation that this chapter is about: where Ron and Harry cannot believe that Hermione is falling for the smarmiest bloke who's obviously a fraud, and that Harry is picking up this thing that's been in a toilet and Ron is saying, "Chuck it!" This push-and-pull tug between the reader and an author that is not entirely visible, maybe more powerful than you. How much of that power is you feeding into it with your own projections? How much of that

power turns out horrifyingly to be real? Yeah, this is a very uneasy interaction, and I feel kind of bad because you inadvertently stumbled on something that I've done and that I think a lot of people do, but you're the one sitting here opposite me that I picked on.

JC: No, it's fascinating. I actually really love having my thinking pushed in that way, so I appreciate it.

Lorrie: Yeah. I believe that this is the kind of thing that this particular author researched really carefully.

JC: Interesting. Well, it works very well.

Lorrie: It does. It really does.

JC: And it works so well that it feels like it was written by a person who had a lot of experience with kids.

Lorrie: Well, the other thing it sounds like to me is that you could just check out a book from the library about developmental stages of kids, and then as you are plotting it out with your characters that you know really well, you could say, "Oh, then I'll construct this dialogue this way." To me, I think these kids read older than they did even at the beginning of this book. Like what they just did now, they have learned from that mistake with the flying car.

JC: Uh-huh. Yeah, that's a good point.

Lorrie: These kids would not just say, "Well, obviously our only choice..."

JC: Right. Yeah. No, you're right actually. That's a really great example, the contrast, and that's why it stood out to me. The contrast from the beginning of the book to this point, and how much more careful they are at this point about who they tell and what actions they take.

Lorrie: Yeah, and they're really used to putting their heads together and whispering by this point.

JC: Their recognition of how well they work as a team, and all three of them play... It's a three-legged stool, and three of those legs have to be in place before things are really going to work.

Lorrie: It's beautiful. That's beautiful. Well, having just pulled off this Polyjuice caper, they're now just taking it in stride. "Oh, yeah. When we do these things, at least one of us will end up in the hospital wing. That's fine."

JC: Yeah. "That's normal. That'll be fine. They'll get better. Madam Pomfrey can handle it."

Lorrie: "Yeah, and it's not as bad as what might have happened if we didn't try to take care of things ourselves." So Schadenfreude, that theme that runs through this volume. This is the



funniest ever to me: when Peeves adds on to his "Oh, Potter, you rotter" song, he now has a dance routine to go with it. It's so over-the-top. Really, there's nothing you can do when you're being humiliated like this, except wait for it to be over.

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: You can't stop. It has a momentum of its own. Meanwhile, we have Lockhart doing this horrifying thing. As soon as the attacks stop, he jumps in to take credit because he can't be prevented.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: And this is the opposite of what we see with Voldemort later, who is thrilled to do things and then find scapegoats, but it's the same uneasy authorship theft or shift. And then we have the horrifying Valentine's Day spectacle. Whoa.

JC: Oh, my God. What I really appreciated about the whole horrifying Valentine's Day spectacle: there are a lot of things to appreciate there, but one -- I'm sure this is true outside the United States -- if you went to a public high school in the United States, the horrifying experience of Valentine's Day where the student council or whoever would do this thing where you could send candy grams or whatever. Having been a teacher, also, in a high school and how awful that day can be in the sense that your classes are getting interrupted, kids are coming in with the things and some kids have them and some kids don't, and this gleeful giggling and a disruption to your day: it's so annoying from a teacher perspective, but from a student perspective? I've experienced it on both ends.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And the fact that Lockhart brings this into the school. It's... again, I can just see all the teachers going, "Oh, my God, not this guy again."

Lorrie: "I hate him so much. I hate him."

JC: Right. He thinks he's doing this wonderful thing because he knows he's going to get a lot of Valentines. Doesn't affect him.

Lorrie: Oi, yai, yai, yai, yai.

JC: And then he'll be the hero of all the kids who want to send him one. Oh, my God, it's just...

Lorrie: Oh, my God. I had to deliver quite a few of these things as student council. Birthday greetings, holiday fundraisers. Oof. Then there's the issue that if I were Rowling's beta, I would have asked her, "Could you use a folk-tale figure that's not dwarfs?"

JC: Ah.

Lorrie: Because I remember you were disturbed by the gnomes that you have to fling. You have to get them dizzy and then fling them.

JC: I'm still disturbed about the mandrakes, by the way. "Oh, as soon as their acne clears up, we're going to chop them up and stew them." Oh, my God. Anyway...

Lorrie: I know, and I feel fine about it. Somehow, that seems to me like, "Nope, these are folkloric figures, I'm fine." But little people, humans with dwarfism, are real. I had to read carefully to make sure that she was not talking about actual real people. Instead, I think she's talking here about dwarfs who are folkloric figures, but... don't do that. Don't write about actual people. The thing that makes this horrifying to me is that it's very, very funny how grumpy these dwarfs are and how much they hate doing this, and how they put their hostility into the whole day, which just makes the day that much funnier and worse. Why? They have been hired to do a job; it is so much like any marginalized population that has a hard time finding employment, and one of the ways to make money is to play to stereotype and it's very humiliating. But the grim way that these dwarves are taking people down in order to fulfill their quotas makes me think, "Oh, they're getting paid by delivery, right?" Harry's going to get this whether he gets injured in the process or not.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. That one's grim. And that they're dressed in wings and they're carrying harps? Yeah, that humiliation is pretty uncomfortable.

JC: Right. And I read that... I don't know. I read that as Lockhart's doing and not the author's somehow. I read that as the author saying this is a thing that Lockhart would do, and look how horrible it is. That was how I read it. Maybe I didn't read it deeply enough, but that was my thinking there, was that it was more of her poking fun at this is what someone like Lockhart would do. This is what they would think was appropriate.

Lorrie: And with the gnomes, she gets that across: that gnomes are just this race that does not really enjoy coexisting with humans, and there's this antagonism and it's kind of funny. Yeah, if she had made these Valentine's delivery people into pixies or something, I think I would have had an easier time with it.

JC: Yeah. It does start to get hard to untangle. I don't want to give her the benefit of the doubt for so many reasons at this point, but yeah. Yeah, no, I was thinking about that scene, too. But also, I feel whoever was delivering the Valentine's: just the fact that you're being forced to listen to this thing. You're getting this Valentine and you're going to get it in front of people in the most humiliating way; if you've given a Valentine, you have to watch this happen to this person that you actually maybe have a crush on, so it's just horrible all around.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's taking the experience of being twelve and having a crush on somebody and trying to figure out how to handle that, and making it the worst it could possibly be.

Lorrie: When Harry's gets delivered, he's tackled. Ginny is there, poor thing.

JC: Poor Ginny.

Lorrie: And then, of course, Draco has to show up and Percy has to show up. And this is also the most inspired bit of verse in the series. "His eyes are as green..."

JC: "As a fresh pickled toad," and I'm like, "Who wrote that? Where did that come from?" I'm really curious. What were the packages you could buy here? Did you write it yourself and then someone had to deliver it? "You can get the 'I have a crush on you' package, and we'll read a poem, we'll sing a song." Where did these words come from? I'm curious.

Lorrie: I'm positive that Ginny came up with that and put maximum effort into it. It scans beautifully. It's hilarious, it's wrong, and now, everybody knows it. Because wouldn't it feel worse to Ginny if now everybody hears and repeats these words, and obviously whatever's going to feel worst to everybody is what's true about this scene?

JC: Sure. Actually, that's a good point, and she has to listen to her own brothers sing this at Harry.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Yes. I bet the author, like me and like many people, wrote things at that age that she dearly regrets and hopes nobody ever sees. I, at this point, hastily assure everyone that I have burned everything that I wrote at that age and it cannot be found.

JC: And these kids do live in that pre-Instagram, pre-TikTok world where there is no evidence, except some grainy photographs from your childhood.

Lorrie: Which I have burned, yes.

JC: They're in a box somewhere. Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: Ugh. Yeah, so we are told that the bystanders are "crying with mirth." Oh, my God. All right, I've got to admit: she's a good writer.

JC: So yeah, this whole scene just was very well... yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. And the way that kids of this age are always jumpy and haunted, worried that their peers are all talking about them and laughing at them: this is a good reminder that they're afraid of that because it's true.

JC: Yeah, because this is one of those things about how children's books play to children's fears. They take your fear and then they make it tangible and real, and then show you how kids get through it.

Lorrie: Ugh. Oi, yai yai.

JC: And as uncomfortable that can be to read for a kid that age, the idea is that it's very cathartic to say, "Okay, here's a character experiencing something that I'm also afraid of and this is how badly it could go. Okay, that's never going to happen to me. I'm not going to get tackled by someone in a cupid costume and get sung a horrible song to while everyone watches. That's probably not going to happen."

Lorrie: It's also a relief. This is the sensation that young readers have when they read an author that they feel like this author gets it. 'Oh, it's so nice to not be talked down to.' It's so nice that this person understands that just getting up in the morning and committing yourself into school for the day at seventh grade is an act of terrible bravery. With perhaps no payoff. God. Oh, seventh grade. So Draco snatches the diary in this scene, and this is where we get one of those small but real hints that Expelliarmus and Snape have something to do deliberately with how this denouement will unfold many years later. Harry has lost his temper. Now, up until this point, when Harry and Draco have lost their tempers at each other, they have fought. But instead of attacking as he would have before, he casts Expelliarmus, and the quote here from the chapter is: "And just as Snape had disarmed Lockhart, so Malfoy found the diary shooting out of his hand," which is kind of weird because the diary is not exactly meant as a weapon, and even that weirdness sort of adds to how you have to pay attention to this. She didn't have to name Snape and Lockhart here.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: She could have said, "Just like every other spell that the kids pick up along the way." Usually the kids pick up a spell and there's not that much to talk about who introduced it, because you're supposed to know that spell by now. But in this case, it's really specific. It's low-key -- you can really miss it -- but it's pointed: Harry is already learning what he used to de-escalate. And then with Percy saying, "Oh, Harry, I'm going to have to report this, no magic in the corridors," that's the final touch to make sure: you did notice this, right? And it's just one instance of Snape's name tucked in there.

JC: That moment obviously read differently to me this time around, having read your books and having talked to you about this all along. That's the first time that Harry uses Expelliarmus against an enemy, and that will become his signature; he learned it from Snape and the lesson stuck. Moreover, you talked about the idea of automaticity: that what Snape wants is for that to be the go-to.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Harry wasn't thinking. He was mad, and the first thing he did was use Expelliarmus. It's this beautiful moment of that's what Snape wanted him to learn, and it worked that way. And I think... now, I'm not comparing myself to Snape as a teacher, but something that as a teacher that I do (because I work with pre-service teachers) is I very consciously do a lot of modeling of things I would like to see my teachers doing in the classroom: the way of talking to students, the way of organizing things and all these things. There's something so beautiful about going to observe them when they're teaching and watching them do things that I do.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Okay, it's cool to see what they've picked up, but also knowing that they're doing it just like I did in the classroom. Snape wasn't in this room and wasn't in this hallway. I'm sure he'll hear about it, but I'm imagining the satisfaction when he hears that that's what Harry did.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's maybe some relief, but also, 'Okay, yeah. Maybe this kid is teachable after all.'

Lorrie: 'It's working.' Yeah.

JC: Yeah. 'Maybe all is not lost.'

Lorrie: Yeah. It's because Snape taught it to the boys as a thing you do to your enemy when you're upset at them. There's toenail-growing hexes that you only use on your enemies. But maybe Expelliarmus... you would think about it differently if you had been working with someone sweet and friendly, but no. This is what you do when you're annoyed at someone.

JC: Right. So yeah, I love how that pays off right here. It's also interesting to me that Expelliarmus is used to take someone's wand away, to take a weapon away, so the implication that the book is a weapon and no one really realizes it yet is very interesting, too.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, good for Harry. Good for Snape.

JC: Oh, wait, we get the little awful bit at the end where Draco says, very loudly, "Ginny, I don't think Harry liked your Valentine."

Lorrie: Oh, my God, Draco.

JC: Poor Ginny.

Lorrie: Punch down. That was the only satisfaction he had left. Oh, that poor girl, second-guessing what one has written to one's crush.

JC: And then the understanding that now everyone knows.

Lorrie: I can't...

JC: Now everyone knows that you have this crush. Oh, yeah, it's...

Lorrie: Too awful. Well, she's been having a bad year, Ginny.

JC: Yes, and that's something else. Every time when Ginny is mentioned, it's so interesting to look at what's happening on her face or what she's paying attention to. When Draco picks up the diary, the mental camera goes to Ginny, and this idea that Ginny looks terrified at the idea that the diary... She thought she got rid of it, and there it is and it's still flitting around, and now Harry and Draco have it? Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Oh, God, not what we wanted. The things that diary could tell...

JC: Yeah, or do to other people. If Harry is someone she cares about and now Harry has it, and she knows what it made her do...

Lorrie: Oh, God. Yeah, you can't flush it down a toilet. You can't get rid of it.

JC: Turns out this book is hard to get rid of. Where are we going to see that again?

Lorrie: Harry goes to bed early so he can spend time with this book.

JC: Valid. "I'm tired."

Lorrie: "Yeah, nobody talk to me." And nothing happens when he just puts ink in the book, but when he writes in it with his own emotion... oh, then it grabs onto him and it talks back. Harry has a part of Voldemort's soul in him and it's being kept alive by Harry, so another part of Voldemort's soul wants to join in. I love that Riddle's writing gets quicker as Harry's eagerness and curiosity get greater. His writing becoming untidier; his words are spilling out. 'Untidy' is actually a word that we have associated with Harry. His hair is untidy, his trunk is untidy. It's matching Harry's energy, and it's creating a different reading experience for Harry than it would for anyone else. The way Harry's curious, the things he's curious about, it directs what Riddle tells Harry. It tells him what Harry wants to see. In 2008, I went to a con called Terminus, and there was someone named Ryan Kerr who gave a talk called "You-Know-Who is Structuralism's He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named (The Author): The Implications of Tom Riddle's Diary." He discussed a few different theories, such as Barthes' Death of The Author theory and reader-response theory, which says that texts gain meaning when they are read. They don't sit there with meaning in themselves; it's created as somebody reads them. Looking at this: the spilled ink, it makes no mark on the diary because there was no reader intention behind the spilled ink. Then Harry, and we later find out, Ginny -- when they write in the diary, they have a reader's intention behind them. This is when the meaning can start. The theory that I've loved (that has

made more sense to me than *Death of The Author* from Barthes) has been the one that Claire Dederer proposes in her book, *Monsters: A Fan's Dilemma*, and we will note that you know a pop culture icon is problematic when she gets her own whole chapter just about her in a book called *Monsters: A Fan's Dilemma*. So yeah, there's a whole chapter about Rowling and TERF-pocalypse. In this book, Claire Dederer says that instead of the author being dead -- which in the case of Tom Riddle's diary and also the case of the Harry Potter series is literally untrue; the author is still alive, even if that person is many decades removed from the author that committed these words to paper in this book. But instead of the death of the author being the solution to describe what it is (where the meaning is made between author and reader), she says that texts are two biographies meeting: the author's biography and the reader's biography. That's what the book ends up meaning, which instantly resonated for me because in this case, the diary that Harry reads is different from the diary that Ginny would have read, or the one that Ron would have not read because he wouldn't have put anything into it. It changes according to the reader, but the author is there. The reader is not the author; there's something that the reader puts into it that will color how they understand what they read, but they're not inventing it by themselves. It's between the two, and the biography of the author -- in cases such as Riddle, and also in the case of J.K.R. -- the biography does go back and forth in time to include what we know of the author outside of the time period that they wrote this book. It does affect it, so that the book that you and I are reading now is different from the book that we would have read before TERF-pocalypse. We didn't resist the writer as much then as we do now. We weren't as jumpy for signs of transphobia or homophobia or other prejudice as we are now, and it was easier to welcome her. But we see the readers in this chapter -- we see Harry and Ron, and we don't know it, but Ginny and Hermione -- entering this approach to this diary with that caution. "I don't know if I can trust this author. Be on your guard." So, all this to say that I really do appreciate Claire Dederer's theory that it's two biographies meeting. I think that's what we see happening here. We see that the Tom Riddle in the diary has been waiting a long time for this. Considering the interest and curiosity that Harry is putting into the diary, of course Tom Riddle tells him right away the story that he comes from an orphanage and is desperate not to go back for summer. And then, just like Harry was told by Dobby this year and by Dumbledore when Harry was a child and stuck with the Dursleys, Harry's told, "No, no, being put away from this world, you'll be much safer." Yes, but is safer *better*? The desperation with which both Harry and Tom Riddle want to get away from this implies, oh, there are worse things than being in danger. So yeah, that's what Tom Riddle reflects right back to Harry, and you can imagine that somebody else reading this same story wouldn't have been as affected by it as Harry.

JC: The thing that really stood out to me on this reading was how powerful that magic is, knowing how the whole series ends and knowing this is the horcrux and how the diary is so good at reading the person that it's connecting with. In Harry's case, there's another kind of connection, but the manipulation of the memories, the wordplay... There's a point in which the diary says the monster lived on, and the one who had the power to release it was not imprisoned.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: These words are true.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But the manipulation and Voldemort is really good at that later in the series. That idea that the piece of Voldemort's soul that is in this diary is interacting with Harry in a way that's so similar to how Voldemort himself would, but also it's frozen in time because Tom Riddle created this when he was very young. But even at that age, he had this ability to read people and to manipulate them in ways that had to be terrifying for the adults around him.

Lorrie: And then when Dippet suggests that if the person was caught, then maybe they could have figured out some way for Tom Riddle to stay at Hogwarts, Riddle, he gives himself away. He's so eager. He's like, 'What? What?! Is that all it takes?' It's him thinking, 'Oh, I can set up a scapegoat. Is that all you wanted? Why didn't you say so?'

JC: It's interesting to me, too, that it's so selfish.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's single-minded.

JC: Yeah, it's very single-minded, but it's also all about me. It's this idea of, 'Well, I'm not going to get what I want. I thought I was getting what I wanted by killing all the Muggle-borns, but oh, I can't stay at the school and continue killing Muggle-borns?'

Lorrie: Right.

JC: 'Oh no, you're going to send me back to the orphanage? Okay, I'll stop and I'll blame someone else for it.' That's all it took to stop.

Lorrie: Yeah, and he's so far ahead of everybody else because the single-mindedness, the self-centeredness, makes everything so clear. He's not bothered by how it's going to hurt other people. He doesn't have to worry about it. He spends no energy on that at all.

JC: Right. Exactly.

Lorrie: I've been thinking all week about what you said when you realized Hagrid in Dumbledore's office yelling about how Harry didn't petrify anyone, how that was Hagrid having a flashback to being framed himself, because yeah, I hadn't seen that, and I think you're absolutely right. Here we see, I guess, 13-year-old Hagrid trying to tell, trying to protest, to Prefect Tom Riddle that Aragog never killed no one; even Harry, when presented with this evidence, totally believes what Tom Riddle is presenting. Yes, he thinks that Hagrid opened the Chamber and Riddle is using authorship to present his argument as objective truth. Harry, being 12, it's easy to fool him. He accepts it.

JC: Yeah, it made me think about how easy it is to fool people on the internet.



Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Even before we had deep fakes, which are terrifying on their own, the way that misinformation, cleverly constructed misinformation, was so easy to pass on and spread around -- thinking about that connection to our post-2020 experience, or, honestly, post-2016 experiences -- Tom Riddle is doing exactly what we see people do: manipulating information, manipulating images, putting misinformation out, and then letting human nature do the work for him.

Lorrie: Yes, and it's so reliable. Youth is definitely a disadvantage here. People do have an opportunity to help protect younger people against misinformation by just addressing it, teaching them. This is definitely what's happening to Ginny through this volume. She writes into the diary, then she reads what it writes back to her, and it doesn't occur to her at first that the diary is having influence over her; then she becomes critically aware and she understands the danger. This reminds me a lot about the uneasiness that I see millennials having about going back to re-reading *Harry Potter*, which they remember reading as much more defenseless children: eight-year-olds who don't have the critical faculties, and they loved and accepted this series and let it shape their minds, let it influence them. Now there's a fear: was that okay? Was it really my friend, or was it Tom Riddle? Was I somehow being groomed to be influenced by someone who's a major transphobe? These readers might have been little eight-year-old kids, trans, and let this person in; now this person lives in them and is trying to fight them and destroy them? That is really terrifying and is quite similar to both Ginny and Harry wondering what's going on in their heads, and how they're supposed to feel about their fascination with whatever they're reading. It's a natural worry about whether you've been corrupted, whether you somehow have culpability, which is such a terrible thing that happens developmentally to children, that sense of self-blame. 'Well, you shouldn't have let that happen.' 'But I was a kid.' That's what makes abuse of children horrifying in a way that's different from treating adults badly. I argue that this fear is real, this horror reaction is real. I argue that it's possible and good for millennials and anyone who first read and loved the series as a child and is now really scared to go back in, to see if they had let in some really awful ideologies without knowing. I think it's possible to be aware without being afraid if you go in. I think re-reading is empowering. I think it is the thing that can bring differentiation between who you were then, what you let in then, and what you see now. I think it can bring peace. That's the whole impetus behind my wanting to do this podcast in the first place. This uneasiness exists. This anxiety exists. Yes, we did let somebody in that turned out to say things that are, at least in my opinion, more horrifying than I would have expected from her. But I let her in. I can't undo that. Fortunately for me, I was not a child at the time, so I saw some of this and I had more defenses. But this is written for a child audience, and children's literature is explicitly ideological. But then there's the implicit ideology that it's the scary invisible part of the author that is causing this anxiety. I have really been struck by how much the solution here (both being proposed in the story, and also what I think is good here) is not *death* of the author, but *looking* for the author.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: How are you going to know how much of you is you and comes from you, and how much is possibly corruption that you want to identify and differentiate yourself from if you don't find the author as well as yourself?

JC: Yeah. That idea about how reading is about the two biographies coming together, that really resonates with me. It also resonates with me in the sense of the way that we're doing this reading now, where we're reflecting on how does this feel different after the events of the last few years than it would have in the 1990s when it came out or than it did in the 2000s, or whenever people have read these books. That ability to say, okay, I'm now bringing to it different things than I brought to it the first time. When I read this book, I was not a parent yet. There are so many things that are different now for me, but also I've lived in this world and so has the author, and the author has said and done things that are abhorrent to me. But coming back to these books with that understanding and being able to look at the books from another perspective, it's definitely been really eye-opening, even more than I expected it would be. I thought it would be fun to do this podcast and to re-read, but it's been really thought-provoking and I'm finding myself making connections to other parts of my life in ways that I wasn't expecting to.

Lorrie: Yeah, and wonderfully, the words in the book don't change. That's something stable because memory changes. Memory is unreliable; it frays. The author changes because she's still alive. We all change, but the words are something that can anchor your memories so you can do some comparison. I find that really a gift. It's a really wonderful, stable way to commemorate an intellectual time and place.

JC: It's really striking me how this is true for so many forms of art. Again, I'm a STEM person, so I don't know a heck of a lot about how people analyze art in general, and I'm learning every day. Yesterday, I actually took my students on a field trip to an art museum to look at art from a mathematical perspective, but one of the first things that happened before we did the math activity was that the museum guide talked us through how to analyze art.

Lorrie: Fun!

JC: Now, I probably took art appreciation in college a gazillion years ago, but I had never been taken through it from a more modern perspective.

Lorrie: Oh, wow.

JC: And what the guides did was they took us to three pieces of art -- and this took 45 minutes, it was 15 minutes per piece -- but they started with "what do you see?" and "how do you feel about what you see? What is it making you think about?" We went through this at every piece before we ever talked about who the artist was and what they might have been trying to say.

Lorrie: Wow.

JC: And the guides were emphasizing it is important to know and that can add to your experience, but your experience of art, the first thing you do, is that you interact with it and it makes you feel things and it makes you think about things, and that's valid and important. And as we were walking around this museum and looking at different pieces of art in different styles - Oh, and we did this one fantastic exercise where we're looking at abstract art and she made us start by taking a piece of paper and then drawing lines. She would say a word, an emotion, and we would draw lines, and she went through all these different emotions and we had a bunch of lines on our paper. Then she said, "Now look at the painting. What lines do you see that match the ones on the paper?" It was transformative for me, and I can't believe I never thought about art this way before. That idea that the art is there... That art was created 50, 60, 80 years ago, and then after we all had talked about what we were thinking, she said, "Okay, here's the artist's biography. Here's who they were, here's where they were living. Here's what was happening in their life. Can you connect to that person's experience?" I'm thinking about that in relation to what we're doing here. There's so many interesting ways to think that there's two biographies coming together, and how that coming together helps you think about what a piece of art means to you, whether it's something visual or something that you're listening to. Same thing with songs, right?

Lorrie: Oh, my, yes.

JC: We could talk a lot about music as well. I'm enjoying going back and looking at this because it's making me think of those songs that are problematic but yet you still have an emotional reaction to. "My Sharona" is a great example for me, personally. Yeah.

Lorrie: I don't know...

JC: Oh, yeah, it's a song about an adult man lusting after a teenager.

Lorrie: Oh, is that what that is? Okay.

JC: Yeah, you listen to the lyrics... My kiddo, he used to love that song until he listened to the lyrics. He was like, "I can't. I can't ever sing this song again." But yet you listen to that song and you're like, "My, my, my, myyyyy Sharona!" There's something really infectious about it, and you have to come to terms with what the song is about and what it makes you feel when you listen to it. You can't just say I'm never listening to that song again if you enjoy listening to it on some level. You have to find a way to reconnect and to acknowledge that the lyrics are problematic, and probably the person who wrote it maybe feels that way now, too, and has some regrets around it. But yet the song is still there and the song is well known, and it's a classic for a reason. For other reasons.

Lorrie: If it makes anyone feel any better, I remember some decades ago seeing MTV finding Sharona and putting her on screen and interviewing her, and she seemed very good-natured about the whole thing.

JC: Yeah. When you said the words are there and they're stable and we come to them with different things over time and we can interpret them in different ways, I thought, yeah, I experience that every day in some way. I think that's a really profound truth about interacting with art, and I think that's a good way to think about these books: as texts that had a huge impact on so many of us, and they're still there. They still exist. Pretending they don't exist anymore, it's like turning off the radio every time "My Sharona" comes on. I don't turn it off. I sing along, and in the back of my head, I'm like, 'Goddamn, these lyrics are problematic,' but I sing along, and I think that's okay.

Lorrie: The thing about ignoring books or turning off the radio is that that piece of art has encoded meaning for you that you can't access as easily in any other way. If you're going to say, "No, I know what that reminds me of; it reminds me of this very problematic piece of art and I'm just going to put that piece of art away," you're putting some memories of yourself away also. Because this series went on for so many years and was developmentally embedded with milestones in people's lives, there's too much autobiography encoded with these books for it to be entirely sane-feeling to push it all away -- because there's pieces of you in there. Can you extricate them? I know some people can. I admire that. I don't know how they do it. But no, it has encoded so much meaning within it, and I think we are strong enough as we get older to go back to wade in and look. It's not going to be harmful, I think. I think it's going to be empowering to go back and look. I was looking at other times in this series that something like this happens, like Tom Riddle presenting a partial truth and then letting things go in Harry's mind on their own. Harry sees Snape's worst memory. That's a truncated memory; he doesn't get to see the whole thing. What he does then is he goes to Lupin and Sirius for context; they don't fully soothe him, but they give him more context. And Voldemort, that happens to him: he only hears part of the prophecy. He goes nuts trying to hear the rest of that prophecy. Dumbledore, of course, knows the whole thing, and he teaches Harry: Don't put too much stock in prophecies, because the words that Voldemort failed to hear, they don't actually mean as much as each person knowing their own truth and what you know about other people and what you make of your own life. For this memory, where Hagrid is being framed, Harry can go ask Hagrid what happened. This is evidence. He can ask people who knew James about his father, and Harry knows these people (even if he didn't know his father) and he can decide for himself whether he can trust them. Readers of Harry Potter before and after TERFpocalypse can talk to other readers. That's where we're going to get the context. There is an enormous wealth of fandom response to Harry Potter from the moment through the decades. There's a million words of the series itself to show both explicit and implicit ideologies from the author. They're still there for us to re-read and interpret. They have not changed; they're not any scarier now than they were before. We're the ones who've changed. Because of the nature of time and experience, we have only gotten stronger. In the meeting of two biographies, this series has remained stable and we the readers have grown more powerful. We have more perspective. Our half of the biographies meeting has changed, and our re-reading the series will inevitably re-inscribe this text. I am arguing that what we can find, if we go in and re-read, is that our original responses to the good things in this series were sound in the first place, and they're still living and they still happen, even with all the new perspective that we've acquired. I feel really fortunate to be able to be doing this.

JC: And we're going to keep doing it.

Lorrie: Yeah. Meanwhile, at this point, Harry still thinks that Hagrid opened the Chamber of Secrets. Oi, yai, yai. The next chapter is Cornelius Fudge. Oh, we're going to be meeting Fudge for the first time. Yeah.

JC: I can't remember what that's about.

Lorrie: It's about scapegoating and false imprisonment. It's about injustice. It's pretty difficult stuff. Real stuff.

JC: Alright, then.

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