

Transcript

Episode 2.6

Book 2, Chapter 6: Gilderoy Lockhart

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 2, Chapter 6: Gilderoy Lockhart.

Lorrie: Hi, JC.

JC: Hello.

Lorrie: We are now about to meet the second Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, Gilderoy Lockhart. Are you ready?

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: So this is your first time re-reading this chapter in years. What did you think?

JC: So the first time I read this, Lockhart reminded me strongly of Donald Trump for a lot of reasons. He was just kind of this buffoonish guy. Winding time back about a decade, think about the public perception of Donald Trump. He was on a reality show, and he was this character. He was a character in New York and everyone knew he had done awful things, but people were willing to overlook it somehow because he was just this character. Lockhart struck me at the time as being very much like that and I thought I would see that the second time, but so much has changed in the last decade that he was just not Trump at all. The idea of Trump running for president the first time I read this was just not even on my radar. It was a joke that had been floating around for a while, but it wasn't reality, so Trump seemed kind of harmless at the time in a way that obviously he wasn't in reality. This reading of Lockhart this time around, I'm thinking, 'Yeah, he's annoying and he's a narcissist, and he's definitely done bad things, but he's kind of impotent otherwise.' He's just annoying and he's meddling and he doesn't make Harry's life any better, but he's not as dangerous as the way that I look at Trump now. It was really interesting to come back to that and to realize how much my perception of Donald Trump has changed since the last time I read this book (which it has for everyone obviously), but that was one thing that really stood out to me.

Lorrie: Whereas... after a few re-reads of this book, every time I read it, Lockhart seems more and more evil to me.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: But we don't know that yet. It's startling, at the end, what he's willing to do, and the coldness with which he can turn things on and off. Here, I think what struck me was how impervious he is to the disgust on people's faces. That's a trait, a skill, that most people I know don't have. Most people I know are super rejection-sensitive; he can see people looking like they're about to vomit in his face, and just blithely go on. That's cold. That's chilling.

JC: Interesting. I had a lot more to say about him. I don't know if we want to hit it as we get to it in the chapter, but yeah.

Lorrie: Let's just go. Why don't you just go on about Lockhart?

JC: One of the things that I find fascinating about him is looking at how different people react to him through this chapter. Everyone seems to understand that he's full of shit, with the exception of some of the girls at the beginning who kind of have crushes on him. The scene where he comes out with Professor Sprout: Professor Sprout, who indisputably is the expert on all of this stuff, she comes out and this dude is like... She clearly has spent all this time fixing the tree from when the car hit it, with this guy mansplaining her job to her the entire time. She's described very subtly in this way that makes me go, "Oh, my God, I know that expression. I know exactly what's going through her head right now," and she's just like, "Oh, my God," and there's nothing she can say. She can't tell this guy to go to hell because, again, he's a celebrity and there's a power imbalance there. But oh, God, I felt that, and we've all been in spaces like that, where there was some guy telling us how to do our job and we already knew more than he did. Oh, my God, that was so relatable.

Lorrie: The thing that strikes me about her: she's so cheerful. Very little ever upsets her; the phrase here is that she looks 'distinctly disgruntled'. It takes a lot to make Professor Sprout THAT annoyed.

JC: Yes, and poor Harry reads it the wrong way. I think he reads it as, "Oh, it's all my fault. We hit the tree, etc." I don't know. It's interesting that Harry misses that, but as a reader we get these little hints of what's really going on.

Lorrie: That line about her being distinctly disgruntled is one of the first ones that I point kids to. There's an exercise I do with kids about who really sets up the Dueling Club, and one of the exercises I do is to have them look up how people react to Lockhart and how predictable he is. That's the first sign we see, is Sprout reacting this way, just to say: how universally is Gilderoy Lockhart understood? Pretty universal. In this chapter, we have Justin Finch-Fletchley giving him the benefit of the doubt; and, of course, famously, we have Hermione who, being a girl and more mature and also actually older than Harry and Ron, seems to be hitting puberty a year or two earlier than they are in the timeline. But yeah, just the way that Dean and Seamus are portrayed as shaking with laughter at this clown...

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. There's so much to say about Lockhart. The repeated theme of Lockhart... Okay, the way I'm reading it is Lockhart putting his own intentions onto Harry's behavior. Lockhart's coming into the situation and Harry's doing a thing, and Lockhart just immediately thinks "what I'd be doing or thinking in that situation." It's so narcissistic, this idea of

not being able to put yourself in the position of another person to understand what's happening. He just comes and goes, "Of course, you want to be a celebrity just like me, etc.," and it's just torture for Harry...

Lorrie: It really is.

JC: That's exactly the opposite of what Harry wants, we all know.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And the fact that this adult, who's really famous, is coming in and giving him this kind of attention and he can't escape from it. How do you handle that as a 12-year-old kid? He has no idea. Oh, my gosh, but then that attention is actively making his life worse every time. Lockhart comes within ten feet of him, you see Harry go, "Oh, shit. What now?"

Lorrie: "Oh, no." There's an awesome line: Harry is at the greenhouse. "He was about to follow Ron and Hermione inside when Lockhart's hand shot out." That was written so beautifully, because we don't even see the rest of Lockhart. It's just this disembodied hand from nowhere and it shot out. It's so inexorable.

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: There's no avoiding it, but I actually have a different read on what Lockhart is doing with Harry. I think it's all deliberate. I think he's threatened because he knows that Harry's a bigger celebrity than he is, but he's always on the lookout for what he can do for more publicity. I think he's trying to use his overwhelmingness and his position of power over Harry to frame the script incorrectly; he knows -- and Harry knows -- that Harry is more famous, but Lockhart's like, "Haha, I was even more of a nobody than you at this age." Lockhart is so calculating about publicity. He knows exactly where he stands relative to Harry, but if he can exert dominance over the situation and the relationship now, then he can hitch himself onto Harry. As soon as there's anything happening, he has to be right there to take ownership. Anyway, that's what I saw having done a little work in journalism and PR. The way that publicists will tell you you should always, always, always be thinking how to sell yourself, how to solidify your brand is a really tiring way to live.

JC: Oh, my God. It sounds exhausting.

Lorrie: He's really committed.

JC: Definitely. I think, too, every time it happens, it's like, UGH. The one, I think, at some point in the chapter where Colin Creevey comes up with his camera and Lockhart catches wind of this; then Draco witnesses it, which makes it even worse for Harry.

Lorrie: Yes. So funny.

JC: It is funny, but something that I find interesting here is that Draco knows that this is a sore spot for Harry, so he's poking it. He knows Harry doesn't enjoy this. One thing that I thought of when I was reading this this time was, 'Oh, he learned this from Snape.' Snape taught Draco this. Not directly, but this is exactly how Snape introduced Harry to the Potions class. "Oh, you're a celebrity, and that doesn't mean everything."

Lorrie: Oh, yeah. That's true.

JC: And saw Harry's reaction to that word.

Lorrie: Mortification, yeah.

JC: Yeah, being mortified. Draco knows, 'This is a button I can always push on Harry.' He knows what button to push on Ron. He's going to find a button to push on Hermione. This is Harry's button, and he will push it every chance he gets.

Lorrie: And it helps that Draco is personally annoyed by it all. I like the sophistication in Harry. He knows exactly what Lockhart is doing when he thinks: "The last thing he needed was for Lockhart to hear the phrase, 'Harry Potter fan club.'"

JC: I wrote that down, too.

Lorrie: Yeah, he's so cynical and tired in that thought. This makes Lockhart completely predictable, it makes him impossible to respect as a teacher, and that is such a damning and accurate portrayal of part of life as a middle school student. That's sort of how it feels being in middle school. When Draco has the unbelievable good fortune to stumble upon this scene and gets to make gold out of it for himself. That is a major theme in *Chamber of Secrets* more than the other six volumes: humiliation. Humiliation in front of your enemies and Schadenfreude: Harry and Draco both do this to each other when they see something bad happen to the other, and it's the best moment of their lives. As awful as it is -- and I know not everybody loves this -- I think it's so well-written, because whether you're the one going through it or whether you're the one enjoying it, it's hilarious. Even while you're in the middle of suffering, you have to admit, okay, this is awful but it's really funny. Of course, Draco Malfoy had to be here, and you can't make Draco shut up because everything he's saying is correct.

JC: Yeah. The way that that whole scene is written, you can just see Draco's just vibrating with the joy of the moment, slipping into the crowd with one last ringer. That was a good day for Draco, for sure.

Lorrie: Yes, it was.

JC: Another big Lockhart moment, of course, is the class. For me, as a teacher and a teacher educator, I find this whole thing hilarious because it is so funny to me that what the author did was say, "Okay, we're going to take the most narcissistic, full-of-himself celebrity who thinks he can control everybody and manipulate everybody to do what he wants, and we're going to put them in a classroom with middle schoolers and just see what happens," and it's beautiful.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: He tries to manipulate them, and they just stare back at him like, "What?!" They're looking at him kind of confused, and then they start laughing at him. Everything he's doing is, as the kids would say, peak cringe. He has no idea how cringy he's being, but he's doing everything wrong to get to middle schoolers and it's just beautiful to watch.

Lorrie: And they feel embarrassed for him. When he makes a bad joke, a few of them feebly laugh.

JC: They're giving him the benefit of the doubt, but then he's lost them in this lesson. He's lost them. "Oh, honey."

Lorrie: The way that, as soon as class is over, they can't get out of there fast enough. They just don't want to be part of this.

JC: Oh, my God. It's just like that first day of school. This is a nightmare. Most teachers have this first-day-of-school nightmare where you go in and everything goes wrong, and it actually happens to Lockhart; the first-day-of-school nightmare actually happens. Yeah. Oh, my God, it's amazing.

Lorrie: And the pixies are middle schoolers, the way that they act.

JC: Oh, yeah, sure.

Lorrie: And not yet, but the mandrakes are going to be. The mandrakes are babies now, but I like that these supernatural creatures are also underscoring the theme of the mental age of these students and the stuff that they have to put up with. When Draco is needling Harry and can't be stopped and is absolutely correct: that's an ongoing Malfoy versus Weasley thing. There's a lot going on under the surface in this chapter about how people are either at peace or uneasy with credit or consequences, whether they're allocated correctly or not. We have this ongoing theme from the previous book (Harry being the exception to the "no first-years as a Seeker" rule, no "first-years having brooms") that was unfair; that continues to have consequences, that's going to play out in this volume. The switch from Slytherin to Gryffindor at the end of the year for the House Cup? That's massively unfair; that's going to continue to have consequences. Meanwhile, we have the Arthur Weasley versus Lucius Malfoy feud, where Arthur is correct. Lucius is generally a shady character, and Arthur is correct to say, "Oh, I'd love to get him for something;" but in this case, Arthur has abused his power, such as it is. He is the head of this mid-level office, and he has written the laws with loopholes deliberately so that he can violate the purpose of his own office. The Malfoys see this; everybody sees that Arthur Weasley is now in trouble because he abused his own power this way. Even Hermione feels that because at the beginning of this chapter, she's cold to Harry and Ron; but then after they get the Howler, she feels they've gotten the blame they deserved and it's done and she's friendly again. To me, this is feeling around, okay, Arthur Weasley really was the person that has to be called out for this. It's over. In the Weasley versus Malfoy fight, Malfoy might be the bad guy but Arthur Weasley really messed up. When Draco was needling Harry, yeah. Yeah, yeah. This is one case where, if this had gone wrong for Draco -- if Harry had done something this blatant and then gotten away with it as a favorite -- then the whole Slytherin revenge-victimization narrative would have been so strong. But it didn't happen. It happened fairly, and we don't even need Snape on the scene. If Harry had gotten away with it, Snape would have never let anyone forget that, but he didn't. And yeah, it's really the grown-up who has to be called to responsibility for it. But Howlers.

JC: I have a lot of thoughts about Howlers.

Lorrie: How brilliant are Howlers?! What an invention!

JC: Oh, man. I have a lot of thoughts about these. One is that it's this physical manifestation of - when you were talking about before, people who are very sensitive to rejection after criticism. It's this physical manifestation of what it feels like when someone more powerful than you reprimands you in front of other people.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: It feels like in reality, they may just be using a stern tone or some stern words; as a child, it feels like you're being yelled at -- the amplification of what you're feeling, especially if it's happening in front of other people, the humiliation of it. This is just this physical manifestation of that feeling. It's so loud it shakes the walls; everyone can hear it. You can't not hear it. Then that idea that you're powerless when this is happening to you; that comment about, "You just have to take it."

Lorrie: "It'll be over soon."

JC: "It'll be over soon. You've just got to take it and then it'll be over, and then you can get on with your life." That feeling of being powerless and just having to take it... it's interesting how that was written here.

Lorrie: Also, when you're airing your dirty laundry like that, it's because you're so mad and also because it's too late. It's too late; everybody already knows. But then there's also a bit of sympathy, like people saying, "Oh, yeah. I had one of those." There's this feeling like this comes to all of us at some points later.

JC: Yeah, so I find them interesting because I also think about it from a parenting or a teacher perspective. I have very strong feelings about punishment and about using shame to punish kids. Alfie Kohn has written about this with a lot more eloquence than I can manage to say on this podcast, but punishment doesn't really help kids learn and grow. To do it with these elements of shame and humiliation just makes it that much worse. From a child development perspective, this is a horrible thing to do to someone.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The kids already feel guilty, everyone already knows what's happened. There are ways that they could be making amends that would actually be productive and help them grow as people. This does none of that. From that perspective, I'm like, "Oh, my God, Molly. What are you doing? Don't do this." But for the other reasons we talked about, it is funny in the moment and it's a common experience. People are treated badly; children are treated horribly all the time. The same in the Wizarding World, even by loving families.

Lorrie: Or not even children. People in relationships. Every once in a while, you'll be going about your life, and then you'll hear a girlfriend come and break up with her boyfriend in public and then somebody will live-tweet it. I guess we don't tweet any more, but yeah. Wow.

JC: That actually brings up another interesting thing that makes me think about Howlers: the first time I read this, we weren't on social media. The experience of getting an ugly message was something that we had all had at the time this book came out, but it's different now. Imagine Howlers in this world, but coming at you via Twitter or some social media network. It's the idea of a pile-up but worse, so I think people have experienced having a virtual Howler. That part of it read a little differently to me, too. Oh, God, it'd be like getting a thousand of those coming at your inbox, and you just have to take it. There's nothing you can do; you just have to take it. You can't fight back. Yeah. Twitter with Howlers, oh, my God.

Lorrie: Well, there are two things that this Howler accomplishes, though, that are separate from the humiliation. Alfie Kohn, by the way, is a child development writer who is good.

JC: I didn't mention who he was. We all know who Alfie Kohn is.

Lorrie: Right, some of us know. For people who are into attachment parenting from a certain generation, like JC and I are, Alfie Kohn is somebody that has helped us a lot.

JC: And he's also well known in education circles. He's written a lot of stuff about schooling, so I use his work with my students all the time for that. I knew him first as an educator and I was like, "Oh, he's written about parenting?" Anyway...

Lorrie: It's a more merciful and therefore more effective philosophy than this Snape-y punishment humiliation thing, which doesn't teach you the intended lesson but does start up a whole lot of other resentments that then fester and is very common. The two things that I'm getting there from Molly's Howler here, there's that line: "WE DIDN'T BRING YOU UP TO BEHAVE LIKE THIS," that she says to Ron. No, Molly. YOU, Molly, didn't bring him up to behave like this. I don't think you can say the same for your husband. Where did Ron get this idea from in the first place? That's a crack in their marriage. Then when she says, "YOUR FATHER IS FACING AN INQUIRY AT WORK AND IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT!" Ehh. Or Arthur could have not done anything in the first place to deserve this inquiry.

JC: Right. Blaming the kids for the parents' misdeeds?

Lorrie: Because you didn't keep the secret. Yeah, but that actually turns out, I think, to benefit both Ron and Harry, because it does show, you know what? You can only blame the kids for this so much, and the adult in charge is facing an inquiry at work and he deserves it. If you want to be pure and good and go after Lucius Malfoy, you have to take care of your own self a little better than that.

JC: Ah, true. Yeah, I hadn't thought of that before, but because she literally airs their family's dirty laundry in a very public way there, it does take some of the pressure off of Ron and Harry, for sure. "Oh, wow, Ron's dad is in trouble about this," and I think it's clear to everyone listening that it's not Harry and Ron's fault.

Lorrie: No, no. Harry and Ron could not have invented a flying car. Somebody else did that, but also this, to me, is an activist lesson. Arthur Weasley, activist, trying to effect change from the inside through proper channels. I'm with you, I believe in you, I agree with you: Lucius Malfoy should be brought down. You want to do that kind of work, you have to be pure. You have to be completely unimpeachable. You have to be impeccable, and he wasn't this time. Anyway, it's a practical lesson.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Also about Howlers, I love that they're such a popular cosplay. I've seen quite a few cute ones, where you just make yourself up in the cutest possible dress that's parchment-colored with red accents and a fascinator that's yelling at people, and you can just be cute all day.

JC: I don't know if I've ever seen a Howler cosplay. That's interesting.

Lorrie: And then when Harry thinks: "His insides were burning with guilt. Mr. Weasley was facing an inquiry at work. After all Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had done for him over the summer..." That's an ongoing theme in this series: kids always have a nagging conscience over small secrets or medium secrets that they're keeping. It's actually pretty easy to manipulate that in kids, knowing that kids always have something to feel guilty about, and it's so small and innocent usually. But that happens in the series when people say, "Oh, what secrets are you keeping?" and he's

afraid that people will find out where Sirius is because he's keeping that secret, or how he feels about Ginny. Anyway, this is something that is subtle and ongoing in the series that I think is a good piece of writing from this author.

JC: Another topic that really caught my attention this time was the mandrakes. Coming at this as a reader who reads things very literally and my own background: What the hell are they? They're not plants. They're not animals. How did this evolve? What the hell? They're sentient beings who are clearly capable of unearthing themselves and moving around, and then at the end of this book we harvest and slaughter them? It is so fucking dark. There's all this story line later about how they become teenagers and they act like teenagers. They're little sentient beings that we just chop up for potion at the end. What the hell?! I was so disturbed by this. I don't know.

Lorrie: Well, there's some plants that grow so fast and uncontrollably that you just have to hack at them.

JC: Like bamboo or something?

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. They grow so fast that you can actually, literally, sometimes see them move. If a leaf has just been unfurling for a while, and then finally it springs and then you see it living. Or cucumber. Oh, God. This summer, my daughter wanted cucumbers in the garden, so I thought, "Okay, fine." I got four little cucumber plants. Wow. They are killing everything, they are invading everything. That was part of it, but the other thing I thought was it's one of her metaphors about children, and at this age that they are, 12, the mandrakes that they first met in this chapter, they're babies. I was eleven when my brother was born, so I was old enough to be taking care of a baby, and the whole portrayal of mandrakes as crying all the time (they didn't want to be taken out of the Earth, but they didn't want to go back in either) just made me think of all the times that I had to put my kids in car seats.

JC: Oh, my gosh. Or in the bath.

Lorrie: There's this thing that babies do when they don't want to go to the car seat, where they make their body really rigid and they arch their backs.

JC: Yes. Nothing you can do. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: And if you are way, way stronger than the baby and you have to get out of there, you absolutely have to. "Seriously, kid? We're on the side of the highway. We have to get you in the car. We have to get moving again." If you press down hard enough on their midsection, you can make them sit in the car seat, but it feels so awful and the baby is screaming. And you have to tell yourself, "I'm not killing them by doing this. They're not resisting." It's not a huge resistance. It's just that they're babies, so they can't modulate. Everything sounds life or death whether it is or not, but they're fine. They're fine, and we have to get going. Yeah, anyway, so these squalling babies that don't want to be out of the earth don't want to be in the earth. Sprout makes it look easy; after one session, the kids are covered in dirt and exhausted.

JC: Right. Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: That is totally being the mom of a young toddler to me. Oy.

JC: Yeah, that part is funny, but the other thing that it makes me think about: the scene with the ear muffs. "Put the ear muffs on!" First of all, these are clearly magical ear muffs, because you

put them on and then all sound is gone. As the parent of a drummer, I can tell you that there is no device on Earth that will block out noise like that. They have to be magical. But that whole idea that the kids are constantly in this school working with things that are so dangerous that, if they won't kill you, they'll knock you out for a few hours, and that's just no big deal. The concept of lab safety at Hogwarts seems non-existent: there's no goggles or gloves in the potions classroom, I don't think that dungeon is particularly well-ventilated, there's no fume hoods. None of the things that I'm used to seeing in science classrooms are present in any of the science-y environments in this school. It's funny, but it also stands out to me as a teacher. I'm just like, "How?!" It's amazing that we don't have more awful things happen. They just send them off to Madam Pomfrey if something goes wrong, who just fixes it. But wow, it's so wild to me from the perspective of my life.

Lorrie: It also has a retro feel.

JC: Yeah, that's true, too.

Lorrie: Like those social media posts where they say, "Wow, we have seat belts and we have airbags. When I was little, we would just all climb into the backseat of the station wagon, and somebody would be smoking..."

JC: In the back of the pickup truck.

Lorrie: And there would be the ashtray in the door handle, and people would just tap their cigarettes into the ashtray.

JC: And if you were going *coughs* they'd just crack the window a little bit, which made no difference. Yeah. Oh, lord, yeah.

Lorrie: So that is a little retro here.

JC: Yeah, for sure. For sure, and that's a theme of all these books: these kids are just constantly in mortal peril, constantly, and it's just a fact of life and they just deal with it and move on, so that's funny. And we also meet a few new characters. We meet Justin Finch-Fletchley, and we meet Colin Creevey in this, which is fun.

Lorrie: It's sad, too.

JC: Yeah. Well, yeah, knowing what happens.

Lorrie: Yeah, I know. Doomed.

JC: But I think Justin Finch-Fletchley's whole little monologue about how he was down for Eton, and his parents were disappointed that he's going to Hogwarts. But yeah, that was really fun to read, too. I think all of the perspectives of the Muggle-born kids I find really interesting, because it's these little windows into how the outside world interacts with the Wizarding World, and I find those all fascinating where they appear in canon.

Lorrie: Another thing about the ear muffs, though: there's that weird gendered thing about how nobody wants the pink and fluffy ones, and that picks up on the theme of Lockhart's appearance.

JC: Ooh, interesting.

Lorrie: That he's presented as untrustworthy because of his color palette. His favorite color is lilac, which is super not masculine, and he's in sweeping robes of turquoise; that's definitely portrayed as both unfitting for a male teacher, to be this concerned with his color palette, and also untrustworthy. He's got his golden hair shining under a perfectly positioned turquoise hat with gold trim, and even though Snape isn't named in this chapter, he is the contrast. He is in every way the opposite of Lockhart, including that he never pays attention to his appearance, his hair is the opposite of golden and shiny, and he has one color. What the author is doing here is teaching the reader: distrust surfaces and expect to look to see if there's something under the surface that's different. This turns out to be completely true of Lockhart, and that sets up the possibility later that it's true of Snape as well.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, that's really interesting. So do you read anything into the fact that Lockhart's color palette leans toward feminine, and that that's being used as a way to sort of paint him as evil here?

Lorrie: I think it's the author using a set of prejudices that she has, mistrusting, I guess, men who are vain in a feminine way. On the other hand, she doesn't like these colors on women, either.

JC: That's true. Think about later on...

Lorrie: Anything Petunia or Pansy Parkinson wear, when it's described by color, you can tell that this author doesn't like those colors, like salmon pink or frilly pink.

JC: Or Dolores Umbridge, who's pink personified.

Lorrie: Yeah. Actually, that's a good point: the gender aspect is part of it, but it's more just that this author doesn't like those colors.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: They're a little too showy. This isn't true of all literature (and this is definitely not true of all writers) but in this writer's world, people (characters) are more trustworthy when they have more substance to them and not so much surface, and actually that's something that is suited to me as a reader. That's one of the reasons why I find this universe comfortable to stay in, because I do believe in having an inner self that is not necessarily the same as what you see on the surface. She also is doing something super specific to the era that she's from. I'm a few years younger, but we're in the same 1980s pop culture feminist era. During that time, there was a huge push back against the idealization of blond beautiful women from the 1970s, and it's true that blondes from the 70s especially were portrayed as angelic and good, and brunettes were portrayed as suspicious and evil and dark.

JC: Oooh, right. Uh-huh.

Lorrie: In the 80s as part of pop culture feminism, there was this movement to point that out and to fight against it and say, 'This is ridiculous. Hair color is just hair color. It has nothing to do with whether you're a good person or not.' But we see Rowling deliberately in this series make sure that if there's somebody who's blonde, it's not an angelic good character. The Malfoys, they all have the same hair color.

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: And the ostentatious gold blond of Lockhart is seen as something that's vain and not trustworthy.

JC: Dudley is blond.

Lorrie: Yeah, I guess so. It comes off possibly a little heavy-handed now, because I think that's not as much of a trope.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, you're right. I hadn't thought about that.

Lorrie: But at the time, she was pushing back against something that had been really overwhelming in the late seventies.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: And that's going to be something subtle. That's one of those things where if you didn't live through it, you might just think, 'Well, that's a weird foible. I don't know why this author is stuck on this.'

JC: "She doesn't like blonde people very much. What's going on?"

Lorrie: Yeah. But no, it's actually an era-specific thing.

JC: That's interesting. So another thing that is becoming an issue in this chapter is Ron's broken wand, and that will continue to be an issue. But I did have this moment of thinking, 'How the heck is he just getting through the day? He has to use his wand in every class. Doesn't Hogwarts have to deal with this on a regular basis? It seems like kids would break their wands, and maybe they would have some generic wand check-out program. Do you go to the library?'

Lorrie: Like a broom, like a crappy broom. J

C: Yeah. Yeah, you go to the library, they check out a loaner wand to you until you can get a new one. That seems like it would be dangerous to have kids walking around with -- and as we see later, it is dangerous to have kids walking around with broken wands. Surely, a teacher has noticed this by now. Again, I'm like, 'What the hell is happening at this school?'

Lorrie: Well, something that seems really realistic to me is that the more privileged you are, the more you know about such programs.

JC: Oh, for sure. Yeah. Though Ron being a pureblood and one of the youngest of all of his brothers, you would think that... anyway, I don't know. That's a good question.

Lorrie: You would, but then on the other hand, he just thought it was a good idea to fly a car to school, so it's partly age.

JC: He is twelve.

Lorrie: But whether or not you're aware of this kind of thing, there's also the element of how ashamed you are. If your wand is broken and you just haven't had time to go send for another one, that's one thing. If it wasn't a great wand to begin with and now it's broken and there's no money to replace it, that's totally another.

JC: Yeah. I guess I'm just thinking... is this the chapter where there... I've forgotten. Is this the chapter where they're in Transfigurations, and Ron is having trouble transfiguring beetles into buttons?

Lorrie: Oh, the coat buttons. Yes.

JC: Or is that the last chapter?

Lorrie: No, no. This is the one where Hermione makes perfect coat buttons, and it makes Ron grumpy.

JC: Okay, yeah.

Lorrie: That detail. Yes.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: And Ron squishes his beetle, and he has to get another one.

JC: Right, he has to get another beetle. But I'm thinking McGonagall is smart. McGonagall is looking around the room and she knows that this kid would probably be struggling anyway, but the fact that his wand is taped together? I don't know. It just seems, as a teacher, you wouldn't just let that slide. You'd be like, "What happened to your wand? Hmm, okay, let's see if we can get you a good... I'm sending you to the library to get a loaner, because you're going to hurt somebody with that thing and probably yourself." I don't know. I'm just going to be constantly criticizing what's happening in this school.

Lorrie: The Teacher Eye, yeah.

JC: The Teacher Eye. I can't turn it off.

Lorrie: Well, we need this for purposes of the plot.

JC: We do, it's true. We do need it for purposes of the plot, yes. But it is funny. Oh, another thing that happens in this chapter that I completely had missed the first time or forgotten about: we get an explanation of how magical photos work. I was like *gasps* when I read that. Colin's like, "Oh, we develop the film in a potion and it makes them move," and I just thought, 'Oh, my God!' That's such a cool little detail to sneak in there.

Lorrie: So because I have a Snape perspective on everything, even though he's not in this chapter, I still think it's about him.

JC: The interesting thing about him in this chapter is that his absence... he's present because of his absence.

Lorrie: Yep. He does that.

JC: The fact that he doesn't appear: 'Where's Snape? What's happening?' You do think about him, because his presence is so large and looming.

Lorrie: And the chapter ends with: "'Look at all those amazing things he's done.' 'He says he's done,' Ron muttered." So on the one hand, you have the untrustworthy villain, Lockhart, who's somebody who brags about things that he hasn't done; that sets things up later to open up the

possibility that people who don't or can't take credit for the things that they do that are good might be heroic, and it certainly might be difficult.

JC: I really like the way that you're describing this, that Lockhart is set up as the opposite of Snape. I hadn't thought of it that way before, but thinking about what I remember happens later in this book, that is really setting us up to pay a lot more attention to Snape in a different way than maybe we would have through the first book. That's really interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. You think Snape is really horrible and there's nothing about him that you would like, but then you see Lockhart and you think, 'You know what? I could do with some greasy, ugly black right now. I've had enough of this glowing turquoise.'

JC: Who can't deal with pixies. The idea that he opens the cage full of pixies shows he has no clue what he's doing.

Lorrie: Yeah. That would not happen in Snape's classroom.

JC: Oh, God, no. No.

Lorrie: You might not want to be in Snape's classroom, but at least you won't have to put up with this.

JC: Right, yeah. Yeah. Clearly, if he can run a potions lab with no safety equipment and really for kids not to die on a regular basis, he's actually a good teacher. He's doing it well.

Lorrie: It does make you appreciate the security of knowing that a teacher, a grown-up, knows more than you about the areas they're supposed to, and just how empty life is when you have to put up with a world where the grown-ups try to get all the respect that's due to them from seniority without earning a bit of it.

JC: That's a really good point.

Lorrie: That is a really demoralizing way to live, and that's a political situation.

JC: Right. Also, kids are sensitive to that, and this is something that, as a teacher, I'm very familiar with. If you don't know what you're talking about and you pretend that you do, kids zero in on it. When I work with pre-service teachers, we talk a lot about the fact that... 'Don't pretend.' If you don't know, say you don't know and you will get more respect from the kids; if you pretend that you did and they find out that you were lying or posturing, kids hate that. Yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, a lot gets set up in this chapter.

JC: It's also really interesting to me that Hermione hasn't completely changed her mind about Lockhart at the end of this chapter. All the other kids are like, 'Oh, this guy is like... he's clearly fake.' Maybe not all the other kids, but the ones that were seeing, and Hermione is still drawing hearts around his name on her schedule and she's excited to get all the answers right on the quiz about himself. Thirty-three pages and they're all questions about him, which is so over-the-top and hilarious.

Lorrie: Fifty-four.

JC: Right. Hermione gets them all right, as Hermione is wont to do. She's not usually so easily fooled, so it's interesting, but then that's what adolescence is like, and that's what crushes are like.

Lorrie: Hermione, her whole identity is that she's a reader. She's THE reader of the series. Anytime there's reading to be done in the series, she does it.

JC: Oh, and he's a writer.

Lorrie: Yeah, and that's what she's taking with credibility. He has published. He has successfully published. Whatever gatekeepers there are in publishing, he has managed to get out these glossy hardcovers. He's a best-seller, he's in every household, so he's done something right. He has produced text. She has memorized it all, she has gotten proper credit for memorizing it all; unlike what happens with Snape, where she memorizes everything and he doesn't think that's impressive. Plus he won't call on her, anyway.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: But this is what you're supposed to do with books. You're supposed to believe in them, you're supposed to read them, and you're supposed to get credit for remembering what's in them. She's doing everything right at this point. What's it going to take to fundamentally alter Hermione's faith in publication as a self-evident good?

JC: Oh, and that is going to be useful later. Wow.

Lorrie: Yeah, because that's her weakness. Her weakness is that people say, "Oh, yeah, you just got that from the book. You don't really understand it." In order to become the flexible and capable witch adult that she wants to be, she's going to have to break through that.

JC: But also, the naivete of thinking that just because something is printed an official way that it's true. That's something that we all learn at some point and that's also going to be important later, but that idea that Hermione's giving him credit -- "But he's a published author and he's a bestseller," all the things you were just saying -- and to realize that you don't actually have to have earned that to get that. Ugh, that's a hard lesson. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. And now, of course, there's fake information. In a way, the gatekeeping of 1990s publishing did make it a little harder to get that much misinformation out. The way we have now, people have to use this skill every day. 'Is this trustworthy? Can I believe in it? Do I just want to believe in it? How pretty is it?'

JC: 'How does it align with my world views?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, you're right. That distrust of official information, or official-looking information; the natural skepticism that we all are supposed to have, that we're teaching kids to have. We actively teach kids to be skeptical in ways that we did not in the 90s.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You're right, and I'm wanting Hermione to have a skill that would not have been time-appropriate. That's interesting.

Lorrie: Well, she's at the right age to be developing it. She's not late at this; she's learning this at the right time.

JC: Right. So do you think that it's her crush on Lockhart that's blinding her to this, or is it more her belief in what it means to be a writer that's blinding her to who he is?

Lorrie: I think she has a crush on books and he's good-looking, and those two things coming together are designed exactly to capture somebody like her. There are other good-looking people around; she doesn't feel this way about them. There are other writers around; she doesn't feel this way about them. But together, I read it as this author who has just gone from being an unpublished nobody to getting her dream come true. I think she's writing the story of how romantic and desirable it feels as an unpublished author to be on the other side of it, to be a part of the published world. Also, a commentary on probably some of the recent disillusionments that she's experienced becoming part of that world. It's a cautionary tale.

JC: Yeah. Also, all of Lockhart's books are so full of apparently just bullshit. It makes me think of all the political figures that seem to pump out books. Suddenly, they have an entire book out, and it's like, 'You didn't write that. What the hell?! None of that is...' Yeah. 'Oh, it's a best-seller? Really?!' It feels a bit like that.

Lorrie: Or a case like pop singing acts, where the real voice is somebody who's not that attractive, but the name of the act is somebody who's maybe lip-syncing, who is very attractive. But he's right, he has publicity skills.

JC: Definitely. He definitely has some skills.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They just have nothing to do with teaching middle schoolers. That was so satisfying, that whole... I know it was torment for the kids, but it was satisfying from my perspective, too, to watch him fail so miserably with middle schoolers. 'Yes, you deserved that.' Oh, amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I can hardly think of a worse punishment for someone like that than to put them in the classroom full of middle schoolers. Oh, that's great.

Lorrie: Well, he doesn't feel it yet. That's the weird thing about this character. That's what makes him, I guess, a narcissist. The fact that he has failed this badly, he totally could have predicted this. He has no idea what to do with these Cornish pixies. He hasn't even checked to see if the spell he made up is going to work. He doesn't seem ashamed at all. If that happened to me, I wouldn't go to work the next day.

JC: Sure. Yeah.

Lorrie: He doesn't think he did anything wrong. That's weird. He's odd, but it's a very masterfully done portrait of this kind of personality.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: This author has given us a classic in Gilderoy Lockhart. And the divine name. How perfect! How perfect is that name?

JC: Yeah, and again, compare it to Severus Snape.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Yeah. Opposites in almost every way. All the beautiful alliterations in Severus Snape, you've got Gilderoy Lockhart. Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: Well, we have now met Gilderoy Lockhart, and the next chapter that we'll talk about is called Mudbloods and Murmurs. That sounds ominous, doesn't it?

JC: It does indeed. I remember the Mudblood part. I'm not sure about the murmurs, though. I guess I'll find out.

Lorrie: So it's almost like reading this for the first time.

JC: It kind of is. My kiddo was not conceived the last time I read this book, for sure, and my kiddo is a sophomore in high school, so that's a long time ago.

Lorrie: Yeah. All right. Well, I look forward to hearing what you think of it.

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. 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.