

Transcript

Episode 4.18

Book 4, Chapter 18: The Weighing of the Wands

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter reread 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 Four, Chapter Eighteen: The Weighing of the Wands.

Lorrie: The Weighing of the Wands. The whole school except Hermione seems to resent Harry for being in the tournament; she gets him to write to Sirius about becoming champion. Ollivander inspects the champions' wands and they meet Rita Skeeter, a tabloid journalist. Sirius sends back an owl. Here we go, JC! What do you think of this chapter?

JC: Oh, this was so painful, and I don't remember... I think it gets worse. Harry's life is not fun in this chapter.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But I do like that it opens up with Hermione coming to his rescue with, "I've got you some breakfast. Let's get out of the castle and go for a walk," reminding him that she believes him. It's just so nice that there's somebody on his side.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But also, I think what stands out to me there is that the age difference and the maturity difference between her and the boys is so clear. She is a mature voice of reason here. She tells him why Ron is acting like this, she tells him he needs to write to Sirius; then when Harry pushes back, she gives him a really good reason why he needs to and he agreed.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He needed that kind of a friend at that moment, and I'm so glad that he has her.

Lorrie: I was so impressed with her. She thinks of everything, because what we see is that she's thought ahead several steps (showing up with the toast), but then after she talks him into writing to Sirius, then she conveniently produces the quill and parchment.

JC: And then walks him to the tower where the owls are. "You're not getting out of this."

Lorrie: So very many steps ahead of him.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

Lorrie: I love her explanation of Ron's reaction. When Harry says, "Does [Ron] still think I entered myself?" and Hermione says, "Well... no, I don't think so... not really," I thought, 'She's put her finger on it totally. Yeah, he's going to say that, but...' Oh, and then I was so impressed with her when Harry says, "Oh, is that what he's thinking? Well, you tell him --" and she says, "I'm not telling him anything," Hermione said shortly. "Tell him yourself. It's the only way to sort this out." Okay, she's fifteen. She is such a role model about how to communicate and not get tempted to go into the middle of them and facilitate. I was so old before I learned this skill. I am so impressed with her. The whole contingent of people who feel like literature, especially for kids and young adults, should be models of how to be: here you go. This is a model of how to communicate or not communicate when your friends are fighting.

JC: I really appreciated, too, that she said, "Sirius would really want to hear this news from you." Yeah, he's going to read about the paper really soon. This is what people who, when you care about someone, you don't let them read bad news about you in the paper or hear it from somebody else. Or worse, see a Facebook post about it, which is what I'm thinking about in the modern world. If somebody in your extended family passes away and you hear about it on a Facebook post or you get somebody's news that way, you think, 'Wow, why didn't they call me and tell me about it?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I just think that's a really important point about how important it is to connect with the people that care about you. Harry is still learning that, because he grew up with the Dursleys, right? He's still learning. There's that fine line between "I'm a burden" or "I need to communicate this", and he just hasn't quite figured that out yet, and Hermione's advice to him here is really solid.

Lorrie: Then when Harry and Sirius do write to each other, again, it's perfect correspondence. It's so moving. Harry, as much trouble as he has with wondering how he's going to get across the enormous anxiety he's feeling, he is able to get down to

basics. He writes with so much clarity so Sirius will have no trouble reading between the lines, and of course he'll know what Harry is feeling. Again, the answer he gets back is so good. I kind of didn't understand in earlier years why the fandom was so big on Sirius, and I think it might have been because I read books four and five right after each other. In Book Five, we see him falling apart more and it affecting Harry more, but wow... In this book, he's such a good support for Harry; since Harry barely knows him, every time he gets any communications from Sirius, he's learning more about his wonderful godfather.

JC: Yeah. Even briefly, for Harry to have a parent figure that he can at least go to when he's got an issue that he's not sure what to do or he's worried, he has that. There's this brief period of time when he has it, so it's nice to see it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Then there's this funny detail in the middle of all this, where they're just standing there looking at the lake and Harry tosses out the piece of toast and the squid tentacle comes up, grabs it, and sucks it back under. It's just this little moment of, "Oh, yeah, we're in... all this is happening. We're still at Hogwarts. Yeah. There's still all this magic going on around us." Oh, the sad moment when Hedwig is mad at him, too.

Lorrie: So sad!

JC: Even Hedwig is mad, and you can't explain it.

Lorrie: No. She's miffed, and it's for the sweetest reason. She's like, "I'm your owl, I'm ready," and the adorable way that she sticks out her leg is so cute. Then she turns her back on him. Oh, gosh. Yeah. She's miffed, but she does love him.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I think when Harry is encountering the way the whole school has mistrust and hostility toward him -- and Ernie McMillan and Justin Finch Fletchley, the two nicest people... They're in Herbology and they're laughing unpleasantly at him when he gets smacked in the face. That is so sad and jealousy is so real, and I hadn't put it together until now: oh, this is one of those ways that we see the author's life coming through. At this point, she must have experienced that quite a bit from people she had known, who had been close to her her whole life, responding to her suddenly becoming extremely famous and wealthy.

JC: Oh, that's interesting.

Lorrie: By this time, by the time the fourth book was out, she was a phenomenon. She was very lucky.

JC: So that feeling of everyone looking at you and thinking that somehow you must have cheated?

Lorrie: Or just, just being jealous and it coming out in the worst way. Later on in this chapter, we get Rita Skeeter, the tabloid journalist, so clearly that's more experience that this author has had with being famous that she didn't have when she started the series. But I hadn't realized until this read that oh, the jealousy must be there, too.

JC: That's interesting. I think, on a different level of reading it, it really conveys adolescent jealousy well. This is exactly what would happen.

Lorrie: Yeah. People are acting differently around Harry...

JC: Except for Malfoy, who has the best year in some way... at least this part. He's got carte blanche to torment Harry and to come up with schemes to torment Harry, and everyone will be on his side *finally*.

Lorrie: Well, on the one hand that's true, and that's (in a horrible way) credit to Draco's great creativity that he uses in such a terrible way. But also, before we got to that emotional state, it made me think, "Oh, actually, I bet Draco was painfully jealous of Harry more than anybody."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: At first, when he gets plucked from the ranks of all the other little fourth-years to suddenly this status... Draco managed to find ways to get over it, but that first pang... It must have been such a blow to Draco.

JC: Oh, yeah. Draco's main character syndrome, right? He's like, 'I should be the main character.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Right. Harry is now... he's not only the most famous fourth-year. He's up there with Viktor Krum. What the heck?!

JC: Right. Right. Yeah.

Lorrie: And the other thing, too: Draco says that he bets Harry's going to die ten minutes into the first task. In some way, that's the most empathy Harry has gotten. He's the only one who's thought, 'How can Potter be a champion? Potter doesn't know any more than I do.'

JC: Yeah. Yeah, which is true. Ugh.

Lorrie: Well, Draco's the one person who understands that what's happening to Harry is super dangerous.

JC: And he's excited about that. But yeah, that's... Aww. When they first get to Care of Magical Creatures, that's where Draco first gets his opportunity and then Hagrid interrupts it, but I love the comic relief in that scene. Hagrid sets everyone to taking these awful Blast-Ended Skrewts for walks. Harry's having this genuinely awful time in his life, and Hagrid's pulled him aside to sort of say, "I believe in you, Harry. I support you," and in the background of this there are people walking these things with the comic addition of sometimes, every now and then, one of them will go blast off from its back end and it'll drag the person forward. There's this image of people hanging onto the leash and getting dragged along behind.

Lorrie: On their stomachs! On their stomachs.

JC: And trying not to get stung or worse.

Lorrie: Or burned. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. All this is happening in the background, and Hagrid and Harry are having this little heart to heart. Oh, my God, that's hilarious.

Lorrie: And the Skrewts are described as having no "recognizable heads or eyes", and they're "immensely strong and very hard to control". I thought, 'Oh, that's another good image for how jealousy feels.'

JC: Ooh! It's like taking a Blast-Ended Skrewt for a walk.

Lorrie: Yeah, and that jealousy can just drag you along on your stomach. There's nothing you can do about it.

JC: And fart in your face. But I felt relief. I felt Harry's relief that Hagrid believes him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Then when Hagrid says, "Wow, Harry, it seems like everything happens to you," and Harry's like, "That's what I've been saying!" The relief of knowing that there is an adult who recognizes that this is happening, that it's not just in Harry's head...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. With exception of Hermione, the kids are too jealous to really notice, but Hagrid is the one who's like, "Yeah, Harry, you get shit on a lot by life," and Harry's like, "Yes, I do. Thank you."

Lorrie: The worst is because Ron's not talking to him.

JC: Oh, it's so painful.

Lorrie: And it says: "The next few days were some of Harry's worst at Hogwarts. It was lonely with this pouring in on him from all sides."

JC: That's awful.

Lorrie: That is the formative trouble that is the basis for *Cursed Child*. When this troubled childhood is revisited -- when Albus goes through being ostracized at Hogwarts and Harry responds with this really dysfunctional way, "Well, you're going to have to get through it this way and that way, because that's how I got through my time at Hogwarts" -- is so sad because Harry assumes (he doesn't even know he's assuming) nobody will help the child because nobody helped Harry. We see the scraps here and there of Hagrid and Hermione, but all the bullying that's happening... It doesn't occur to anybody to say, "This is wrong. Stop it." All Harry has got is this classmate saying to him under her breath, "Ignore them, ignore them, ignore them," which, as you may recall from having been this age, doesn't help all that much.

JC: I don't think it helps as an adult, because I'm just thinking about people that I know who have been piled on on the internet. People can say, "Just ignore them," but...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It shakes you to your core when you have that amount of hate coming at you.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Yeah. That's kind of what it makes me think of. What Harry is experiencing here is that pile-on of people hating you, and people jumping on the train to hate you because everybody else is doing it and it must be fun. Who's going to stand up for him in that moment, because they're also going to get...

Lorrie: Yeah. Apparently it's allowed. Yes.

JC: Yeah. It makes me think about people that I know who experienced that online, and it's just awful. Even the badges that Malfoy makes... He really worked hard on that. That's pretty clever, right?

Lorrie: Yeah. Imagine if he used his powers for good.

JC: Yeah, for good. Exactly. That reminds me of the way that people online will do something similar. It's almost like that idea of every time someone makes a new tweet or a post somewhere or a TikTok talking about how awful someone is, it's the badges flashing, "POTTER STINKS! POTTER STINKS!"

Lorrie: And quite reasonably, Harry is doing extremely poorly in class because as Hermione says, "You just weren't concentrating properly."

JC: And Harry's like, "You think?"

Lorrie: Yeah. And that is textbook. That's exactly what happens.

JC: Oh, for sure, and ironically it's the Summoning Charms which he's going to need.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Oh. Then we get to the whole incident outside of Potions class, which I don't know where to start with that.

Lorrie: Well, let's start with racism.

JC: Okay. Yeah.

Lorrie: Draco has these brilliant, terrible badges and he taunts Hermione and says, "Do you want one? But don't touch my hand. I don't want to touch a Mudblood." That's one of those moments when it becomes so clear why reading Hermione as Black or a person of color is such a compelling reading, because when this is happening, Hermione has encountered it before (this kind of provocation) and you just think, "Well, no wonder she is so motivated to study." Studying will not guarantee that it can help her hold her own, but it's a possibility. No wonder she gets strategies in her mind for what to do when things get so dangerous so quickly; this is not the first time. She's the one who says, "Harry!" warningly when Harry responds to this provocation. At the same time, it's also very telling that Harry has been enduring bullying the whole time at himself and just put up with it, but then his friend who's been so good to him gets it and he breaks.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It hurts worse sometimes when you see it happening to somebody else, so Harry loses it. These two dorks have a duel.

JC: In front of all these people, and the words for these hexes are not words that I think have appeared in the books before.

Lorrie: No.

JC: It's like, 'Okay, where did they learn these hexes from?' That's an interesting question, but yeah.

Lorrie: Swear words in other languages.

JC: Exactly.

Lorrie: The things that you --

JC: Learn from. And then the fact that they both look at each other and then they draw at the same time.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then they both miss.

Lorrie: Oh, God.

JC: And then they both hit each other's second, basically.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: It's just like, 'Oh, my God!' The one person that has been sticking by Harry is the one who gets caught in the crossfire. Oh, it's just painful. It's painful.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Goyle, whatever. Goyle's fine. I don't care about Goyle, but Hermione... Ugh. Oh, God... You probably have a different take on this than I do, but the way that Snape is so cruel to Hermione in this moment... Oh, God. I think that for a lot of readers, this is irredeemable.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: She was an innocent bystander here. If he's going to be cruel to anybody, be cruel to Harry, but the fact that it's Hermione...

Lorrie: But that's old. He gets to be cruel to Harry every day.

JC: And he's going to continue. He would have continued to be cruel to Harry if Harry didn't get pulled out of class, but it's just... It's just cruel. He's just cruel to her.

Lorrie: What I love is that the whole fiasco starts out with the classic way that Snape always shows up exactly when you don't want him to. Every time he shows up is perfect dread, perfect awfulness. So there they are, and Goyle has boils on his face and Hermione is panicking over her teeth. "'And what is all this noise about?'" said a soft, deadly voice. Snape had arrived." Okay, this is a perfect character. You do not want him there! Then Draco is being such a little shit and Snape totally is in league with him. "Potter attacked me, sir --" and Harry is incredulous.

JC: In front of all these witnesses, but yeah.

Lorrie: "We attacked each other at the same time!" But Draco knows exactly that Snape is going to take his side on this. He looks at Hermione's buck teeth, that are now growing beaver-like and then past, and he says, "I see no difference." He's attacking her looks and she's a teenager.

JC: That's rough.

Lorrie: And anyone who's the target audience for reading this book is going to know what that feels like.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Although the way he attacked Neville's confidence as a student the previous year is also extraordinarily destructive, Hermione manages to survive this attack on her appearance more than some other people would, but that's just chance; there definitely would be other girls that would not be able to survive it emotionally.

JC: We've seen him do shit to people all along, and this one... I feel like for a lot of people, this is the point in which it's like, "Okay, fuck that guy." Not that they haven't said it in the past, but it just feels like, "Okay, he is dead to me."

Lorrie: It's giving in to a cruel impulse, because it's not even that important what he said. It's not like, "Neville, you have to poison your toad," which is full-on planned cruelty. This is more the kind of thing that might occur to you in your head but you know better than to say it, but he gave into it. It didn't seem like it just burst out of him; it seemed like a choice. But what I have also been looking at in this scene is this wouldn't have happened except that Ron forces the issue. Ron forces Hermione to show Snape her teeth; Hermione wasn't going to do that. She knows the rules of engagement between her and Snape. 'Don't look at him; go take care of it on your own.' Ron physically drags her hand away from her teeth and he makes Snape look, because Snape looked at Goyle and he's like, "Go to the hospital wing." From his tone, you can tell that he thinks, "All right, this is unfortunate, but it's not that big of a deal. You'll be okay," and I believe Hermione's intention was to say nothing and go do the same thing, knowing that's how she and Snape operate. "I ignore you. You do what you..." But Ron is the one who is arguing against Snape's unfairness. He's criticizing Snape for being biased, for only listening to Draco about the attack and not acknowledging that Harry also got attacked. "How can you treat your... Oh, you treat your own student properly. What about Hermione?" Snape responds to criticism of his favoritism the way he always does: he doesn't take it well. The thing that made me read this scene that made me think, 'Oh, okay, that's the pettiness.' The grievance that's at the bottom of this for him is when we see the choreography of the scene. Pansy and the other Slytherin girls are pointing at Hermione from behind Snape's back as he is staring at her and saying, "I see no difference." And then I thought, 'Oh! Oh, if you think about how that looks, he's got all of his Slytherins behind him and he's facing those mean, spoiled Gryffindors. Oh.' In his mind, somehow this is payback for Moody and the ferret. Somehow, this is like, 'Well, people can just do whatever they want to torture Slytherin, so see how it feels.' He is being far less mature than the 14-year-olds in this scene, but what specifically is it coming from? Oh, the girls standing behind him. That's where he's regressing to.

JC: So you think there's a way... So he's regressing. It's making me think... We know that he was the subject of this kind of ridicule and bullying when he was that age, so is he doing what he wished a teacher would do for him?

Lorrie: No.

JC: Is it that?

Lorrie: Oh, I don't think he... No. I think he's doing what he wished he could do.

JC: 'What I wish I could have done at that age, or what I could have said.'

Lorrie: Maybe eight years old. I don't think he's acting like a 14-year-old. I think it's younger than that.

JC: When he's standing in front of all the Slytherins, he's standing there as one of them and not as their teacher. Interesting.

Lorrie: Well, it is their teacher because he's remembering how he couldn't do that for Draco when this other teacher turned Draco into an animal and then slammed him repeatedly on the ground from a huge height, and there was absolutely nothing Snape could do about it. This is his impotence and rage at that feeling. It's a tantrum, right? If you see a small toddler throwing a tantrum, it's not that there's an argument that they're trying to advance; they're just saying, "I feel yucky and it's about this." Yeah. When I think of how it must feel to be Draco's Head of House and then see a teacher slam him to the ground like that and, instead of looking abashed, say, 'Oh, you have a problem with this? Well, come into my office. I'll do the same thing to you,' and no one's going to do anything about it. I guess... Skipping super way ahead, when we get the image at the end of *Deathly Hallows* of Voldemort as this wounded baby creature that can barely breathe, that's what he regresses to. That's the emotional age of hurt that is causing him to behave like this. I think the emotional age that Snape regresses to... He's older than a little wounded baby, but he's not even as old as fourteen here to me. The feeling I'm getting is no, this is an impotent tantrum, unfortunately combined with a teaching position and ostensibly an adult age.

JC: What's interesting about that is the way that Harry reacts when they go to the classroom. First of all, Harry is full-on lizard brain. There's no way Harry was going to be able to do anything in that class. He's so angry, and every one of his thoughts are about how he's going to punish Snape for this, and he's thinking about punishing him as an equal. He's not thinking, 'That's a teacher.' At that point, Snape... You get the impression that he's not thinking about the teacher/student divide. He is like, 'I'm going to bash his head in with a cauldron.'

Lorrie: I actually don't agree, and I wonder if this is simply one of those things where it depends on who you are and what your life experiences are. First of all, I think what Harry imagines doing to Snape is hilarious. I laugh every time. The line is: "Harry imagined picking up his cauldron, and sprinting to the front of the class, and bringing it down on Snape's greasy head." And I thought, why is it making me laugh? It's the word 'sprinting'. He's going to do this so efficiently, and it's torture. He wants to torture Snape. I read that... I didn't think it was as an equal. I have felt similar rage as a child or teen

when someone who is supposed to be an adult abuses that position of power and is acting so much younger than even me, and it's a specific kind of hatred that I have felt for childish, abusive adults that I remember from being Harry's age. I don't know how much of that reading is just me. I don't know.

JC: I don't feel like I'm saying anything different than what you're saying, though. If he's not going to act like an adult, then it's more like that. Snape is obviously not being a responsible adult in this situation. He's not controlling himself like an adult, so I feel like that gives Harry carte blanche to imagine taking his revenge in a way that... It feels really different than what we've seen in Harry's brain before, I guess, but also it's the anger and the frustration. A lot of it is, again, lizard brain's turned on.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's a really good thing that Colin Creevey comes and grabs him.

Lorrie: Oh, God. Breaks that... Yeah.

JC: That whole scene is, "No, he has to bring his stuff with him."

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: "No, he's not coming back." Oh, my God.

Lorrie: The way I said Snape is perfect, in that he shows up at the worst moment and then he behaves the worst, Colin Creevey is revenge. This is the perfect thing that Snape doesn't want. Oh, yeah, and Hermione, too... She handles it so well. Well, she is hurt. She whimpers and "her eyes filled with tears" when he says this mean thing. She's not used to him looking at her and acknowledging her. As long as they have their detente, where she pretends that he's just her teacher instead of this very cruel, petty person, and he pretends like she doesn't exist... As long as that's going on, she can pretend to herself that she can get by in his classes and whatever, but when he actually looks at her and he is that person to her just like he is to everybody else, ugh. It's so mean and I just find her so gutsy that she knows what to do -- she turns and runs away -- and that she knows she is not going to get in trouble. In other circumstances or if it was somebody else, he might say, "I didn't give you permission to leave," and he might get them in trouble. She knows he's not going to stop her. There's just a lot of adult knowledge about her and how she handles this. Yeah. The contemptuous hatred that Harry has for a grown-up not acting like a grown-up... That's not how she's operating, and I just admire it. That was tough. So when Colin Creevey shows up and says, "The star has to have a photo shoot," of course everyone with the POTTER STINKS! badges starts flashing them at Harry, and Snape, of course, has no reason to stop them from doing this.

JC: Yep.

Lorrie: Yep. I guess this is exactly the kind of fictional moment that you hate the most.

JC: I do hate it. I hate it.

Lorrie: When it's just negative and just gets more and more...

JC: And just keeps going. There's no bottom. It just keeps getting worse. Yeah.

Lorrie: Sorry.

JC: It's just torture. To read this, I knew it was going to be bad. I had to curl up under a blanket with a cup of tea, with a cat on my lap, so I can get comfort while I read this. I knew it was going to be bad. I was like, 'I need the maximum comfort to even face this.' The awfulness is --

Lorrie: So difficult.

JC: But mostly, the rejection that Harry is experiencing here is just a nightmare for me, personally.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Ugh, by everybody. By everybody.

Lorrie: Right. Then there's the moment he has to eat alone in the Great Hall, because the one person who's eating with him is still in the hospital wing getting her teeth fixed.

JC: Oh, my God. Yeah. That's so sad.

Lorrie: That made me feel like ninth grade was just yesterday.

JC: Ugh. Yuck.

Lorrie: Yeah, I know.

JC: Yuck, yuck, yuck. I hate it. I hate it, but it's real. It's real. Yeah.

Lorrie: It's unfortunately very real. So he shows up to this photo call...

JC: As we meet Rita Skeeter.

Lorrie: And here's a new fresh hell!

JC: Here's a new fresh hell. The description of her I find fascinating in a lot of ways. Again, I'm side-eyeing the author, because she's got some really distinctly masculine features. There's this idea that we're not supposed to trust her because she's not as perfectly feminine as she should be. Then she's got these masculine features, like her jaw and her fingers and stuff. Then she's got these really hyper-feminine ones, like she's got this curly hair and these long, red, claw-like fingernails.

Lorrie: Talons.

JC: These talons, and she's got this huge alligator purse. She's described in a way that makes me think, okay, we're supposed to look at her and know that she's not... What am I trying to say? I can't not read that as the author saying, "Don't trust this person, because I'm giving you conflicting messages about her based on her appearance."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Which feels gross this time around.

Lorrie: When TERFpocalypse started and people were saying, "Well, you could tell from the writing that Rowling is not to be trusted on these issues," the description of Rita Skeeter was one of the things that people pointed out that had always made them uncomfortable. This is really a stereotypical, hostile description of drag queen or transmisogyny that these traits are something that you can look at and amplify in a negative way, and then ascribe negative personality traits to them in a stereotypical way. I knew that okay, this is one of those things that I'm going to have to examine when we're approaching this on our reread in the context of what has become really horrendous transmisogyny from Rowling, to the extent that she had that surreal attack on the Olympic Algerian boxer based purely on her assumptions about appearance.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I was dreading this because I know we had such a difficult time, you and I, when we dealt with the Aunt Marge blowing-up chapter in *Prisoner of Azkaban* because there was so much body shaming and fatphobia. This I was dreading, too, and I'm feeling similar because it makes me realize that in previous rereads, I skimmed over this so fast with my fingers over my eyes because I knew I wasn't going to enjoy it. It was like, 'Okay, okay, I know what's there and I'm just going to...' But looking at it for these purposes, for reread purposes, I've read every word and it was very unpleasant.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: She's meant to be a grotesque figure, and it's the heavy-jawed face and thick fingers that make her grotesque and all of the poorly applied signifiers of femininity that are being mocked. But the point at which I just felt actually sick was the phrase "large, mannish hands", and that's when I felt really threatened by the transphobia.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I feel unsafe reading this.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: What kind of a hostile gaze is this? It's not a safe environment.

JC: I'm trying to remember... I know that I was aware that that description was off. Yeah. Reading those words when I read this chapter again was like, 'Oh, God.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is one of the most uncomfortable moments of a post-TERFpocalyptic reread. It's really damaging. It's hard to see past this to the point that the author is making, which is that tabloid journalism is really harmful. At this point, we know for a fact that she had been victimized by tabloid journalism, and naming this person Rita Skeeter is such a good, clever move. Yes, that's how it feels, that they're just parasites, but to couple it with this transmisogynistic gaze... It's really unsafe.

JC: Yeah. There were some other things that stood out to me, too, this time that I think didn't stand out to me as much before. Rita Skeeter is writing for the Daily Prophet, right? She's not writing for the National Enquirer. This is the media, period. There's one, maybe two sources of media in the wizarding world and this is one of them, so this is an official representative in the media. That made me think so much about how, in the last decade, my relationship with the media has completely been upended, and a lot of people's too, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And how media has been fundamentally changed by lots of things in the nature of the world that we live in, and how we may be heading in an even worse direction where people are afraid to print things that are in opposition to the government. The other thing that really stood out to me this time was the Quick Quotes Quill was always funny and this disdainful thing, but the first thing that came to my head this time was, 'Oh, it's A.I.'

Lorrie: I know!

JC: Right?

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: It's A.I. writing the story and writing the fake news (or whatever you want to call it) that people are then going to believe. You could have A.I. generate or have an army of Russian or whatever bots writing stories that are not true in putting them out there, and that there's not much you can do to counter that...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: All of that is tied up in the world we live in right now, for me.

Lorrie: What I like about the point that the Quick Quotes Quill is making is that sensationalism is the default, like the human brain being wired to accept conspiracy or to think ill of others when we're feeling insecure or threatened. That's the default, and Harry is valiantly trying and failing to counter that default, saying, "That is not true. What it's saying is not even true." Nobody cares. It's going on anyway. It is possible to counter

it, but it's stacked against you. So yeah, we encounter Rita Skeeter and the buzzing mosquito cloud of transmisogyny around the portrayal of Rita Skeeter.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Oh, what a fallen world we live in!

JC: For sure. It is kind of terrifying to think about how the first time I read this book, I lived in a different world than the one I live in now and how different it felt to read a lot at this than it did the first time. Maybe that's a sign of my freaking privilege that I didn't have to think about that, but wow... There's a lot of stuff that this chapter just felt a lot darker to me than it did the first time.

Lorrie: Closer.

JC: Yeah, it's closer. Right.

Lorrie: So then Ollivander comes back into the narrative.

JC: Yeah. Very interesting.

Lorrie: And in my mind, Ollivander is the most magical character in the series. He's pure magic -- so when he shows up, that's when you know that it's getting the deepest -- and his presence means that this is about the core magic of each champion. This is about their souls, who they really are. This is when we get the confirmation that Fleur's grandmother is a veela. What did you think of the different wand inspections of the champions?

JC: I think what stood out to me was the world-building that was accomplished here. We learn that there are many different philosophies of wand making and that Ollivander has opinions about them. We learn that he gathers the materials for his wands himself, even going out to sneak up on a unicorn and rip a tail hair out. He does that work himself, which... I don't know if I thought, 'Oh, he buys that stuff on the black market.' No, he actually goes and finds a unicorn and yanks out some tail hairs. He knows and respects Gregorovitch, who also is a wand maker. This idea that he could just pick up the wand... If you're that good of a wand maker or maybe you're just really magical like Ollivander, you know your craft so well that that tells a story.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Even if you didn't make the wand, you can still read the story of the wand and I find that really cool. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I didn't realize until this read what has always bothered me about the spell he uses to test Fleur's wand. He does a different spell with each one to make sure it's fully functioning; he makes flowers appear out of hers, which, obviously, that's her true

nature (she's a flower), and the word he uses is 'Orchideous!' I always felt like, 'Oh, that's hostile.' Not from Ollivander, but from the author. That's one of those little digs that the author makes against Fleur and not trusting this very pretty, seductive girl. I thought, 'Oh, it's partly because the word 'hideous' is contained in 'Orchideous',' and 'Orchideous' is such a strange neologism. Yes, spell names are made up, but this one is really odd. It doesn't sound beautiful to me. If you were going to make up a spell that's going to make flowers bloom out of your wand, there's so many beautiful and easy and obvious ways you could go to just make someone think, 'Oh, blossoms! Oh, how pretty, how fragrant, how gracious! Orchideous?' And then I thought, well, 'orchid' means 'testicle'.

JC: Does it?!

Lorrie: Yes, it does.

JC: WOW!

Lorrie: Yeah. It's because the bulbs of orchid flowers supposedly resemble testicles.

JC: Oh. I'm not a gardener.

Lorrie: Well, also if you have surgery and you have testicles removed, it's an orchiectomy.

JC: What?! Okay. Yeah, I didn't know that either.

Lorrie: Yeah. I'm not sure why I know these things, but the way that this author goes into Latin and Greek root words to coin her spells and the way that she thought about making a flower spell for this character whom she doesn't like and she doesn't trust, and the way that 'hideous' is the opposite of the beautiful that Fleur is and that she's part veela (which is somebody who turns into somebody really ugly)... I never thought about it before. I just knew that every time I saw 'Orchideous', I just thought 'Oh, that is not what I would have chosen for a beautiful rosewood, pink and gold spell name,' so that's Fleur. Then poor Cedric gets the foreshadowing. His spell to test his wand is silver smoke rings, like he's going to be soon. He's both sexy and masculine and also pure with that unicorn hair in his wand, and then Viktor getting birds.

JC: That immediately fly out the window.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's the other thing that I... Yeah, I'm a little unclear on how the magic works. You can just create living birds that are just going to go fly out the window and be part of the world now? Okay.

Lorrie: I don't know.

JC: I don't know, or they just vanish at some point. I don't know.

Lorrie: This is all leading up to the heavy Christian symbolism for Harry. His wand is made of holly, which is a Christian symbol for the crown of thorns and the holly berries that are read like the blood on the cross, and the core being phoenix feather that means resurrection or, in the language of this series, second chances. Then we get that long memory of when Harry bought his wand, and Ollivander is thinking, "Curious," that Harry is compatible with the wand that is the brother to Voldemort's core. This is Voldemort matching with that wand because he always had in him the potential for a second chance in life; Harry, getting the wand that's the brother, he's got the potential to be the one we can bring that about in Voldemort by connecting with him. The thing about Voldemort is that he doesn't connect with people, except that there's this wand that makes it possible that somebody else has. All of this about second chances and the Christian symbolic wood and core in Harry's wand... The culmination of this scene is that Ollivander makes Harry's wand shoot the fountain of wine. I like that the author brought in *THE* most magical figure, Ollivander, in order to pull off this really deeply symbolic scene. No matter how badly Voldemort has damaged his soul, if he connects with Harry, there is a chance that his soul could be restored.

JC: So Harry is thinking about the fact that he's never told anybody that his wand has this relationship with Voldemort's wand. He's never told anyone, and he's sitting there thinking, 'God, I hope he doesn't say it. Don't tell Rita Skeeter,' who's over in the corner. I think Ollivander's smarter than that, but the fact that Ollivander just doesn't say anything apparently... He waves Harry's wand and just makes it shoot wine, and he hands it back. 'There you go.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Doesn't say a word.

Lorrie: And he spends a lot longer inspecting Harry's than anyone else's.

JC: Yeah. Ooh! What does that look like to the other folks in the room, right? 'What's going on here?'

Lorrie: So after that uncanny brush with magic, Harry goes back to Gryffindor Tower.

JC: Thankfully does not have to go back to Potions.

Lorrie: Oh, yes, the only good thing that happened that day.

JC: Then he goes back up to the tower... And now this brief interaction with Ron, who just basically reminds them they've got detention tomorrow night with Snape. Oh, something to look forward to.

Lorrie: Great. I love that the letter from Sirius comes back with the owl on his pillow, so Sirius knew to put extra security on this. It's like getting signature confirmation. Yeah, he doesn't want this owl to be intercepted.

JC: Ooh, yeah.

Lorrie: But he does feel safe enough to put in the letter the exact time and date to be by the Gryffindor fire, so it's only the first layer of security here.

JC: What kind of security cryptography have we got going on in the wizarding world? We send off your mail order with your credit card number or whatever, your owl order.

Lorrie: Yeah. In Sirius's letter, what an affirming thing to say. He writes, "I know better than anyone that you can look after yourself." Oh, that is such a good thing for a parent figure to say.

JC: For sure. "I know that you can take care of yourself and I've got your back."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Very much so.

Lorrie: And he repeats Harry should tell him about anything unusual. It's a good ending to this excruciating chapter. At least this letter from Sirius means somebody is still out there that Harry can turn to. Next up, we have The Hungarian Horntail.

JC: Ooh, in which someone else is also on Harry's side, if I recall correctly.

Lorrie: Mm-hmm.

JC: Good for Harry!

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.