

## Transcript

### Episode 4.5

#### Book 4, Chapter 5: Weasley's Wizard Wheezes

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 Five: Weasley's Wizard Wheezes.

Lorrie: Weasley's Wizard Wheezes. We get a closer look at Weasley family dynamics. This is a family of overachievers. What do you do if you're brilliant but you don't want traditional success? We found out what Fred and George are going to do with their giftedness. So here we are. Ha! We've gotten Harry out of the Dursley house into the Burrow, and we discover that Fred and George have never tested the Ton-Tongue Toffees before. "We've been looking for someone to test them on all summer..." which makes me wish that I could have been there for the moment that Fred and George realize, 'Oh. OH! We have the perfect subject to be our first tester.' So, what do you think of us being at the Burrow?

JC: Yeah. The gang's all here. The whole family is there.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And they've all come in to go to the World Cup together, so all the kids are there. Harry gets to meet Bill and Charlie finally, and so do we. We get to meet them.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: I love the moment, and this was always something that the fandom loved, too: how Harry looks at Bill and is immediately like, 'Wow, he's so cool.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Also, Harry hasn't seen a lot of adults in the wizarding world, right? He's seen his teachers and he's seen some of his friends' parents and the Minister for Magic. That's it, so when he sees Bill, it's the first time he's seen an adult wizard who actually looks like somebody Harry would like to be like.

Lorrie: Aspirational, yeah.

JC: Yeah, yeah. He notices Bill, he notices Charlie. Before we get the whole family together, we go right into the Weasleys' marriage and dynamic.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah. Well, Mr. Weasley (who should have done a little more research before busting down a fireplace) gives an empty threat to the children about how he's going to go tell Molly, and then she overhears that. Oops.

JC: "I'm going to tell your mother." "Tell me what?" Oh, shit.

Lorrie: "Uhhhhh..." Yeah. Oh, well.

JC: There's once again this dynamic that you had talked about back when we were first taken to the Burrow: this thing that you found really irritating, which is that Arthur keeps secrets from his wife with his children.

Lorrie: Yeah. Actually, I like the fullness of this chapter more. It's not presented so much as adorable and harmless. Sometimes, what gets under my skin is when the Weasleys are presented as the ideal family with the ideal marriage dynamic (which it's not), but what we see so clearly in this chapter is that they have -- like all families do -- the situation where the parents have a certain approach to how they're going to make a living and feed their children, and of course the children react to that in their own ways. One amazing, remarkable thing about this huge family of seven children is that they're all so gifted, except for Ron. They're all overachievers, and they're overachievers each in their own way. What do you do if, unlike the whole rest of the family, you're Fred and George and you aren't traditionally successful? How do you make your way in the world if you're not going to get good grades? I should be taking notes, because they are among the very few examples in this series of what you can do if you don't have the academic credentials, but you still want to be somebody and do something with your life. I also did not get as many O.W.L.s as I was expected to. This is one of the ways that Arthur Weasley's children respond to his decision that he's going to be a principled bureaucrat (which also means underpaid), which is admirable but not practical for a father of seven. So, yeah. Fortunately for them, they obviously have really amazing business sense, so yeah, there's more than one way to make a living. Molly is the first person to name their future project: she says "Weasley's Wizard Wheezes," so it's a pretty well-developed concept. Hermione hears how dangerous Mrs. Weasley is about to be about this and she gets the other kids all out of the way. Hermione doesn't laugh; everyone else is laughing and admiring. I'm with Hermione, and I think that's a flaw of mine. I think I'm clearly in the wrong. I'm so uncomfortable with rule-breaking.

JC: Yeah, we get a lot of information here about what Fred and George have been working on. We learn in this chapter that they were planning to sell all of their new inventions in school that year under the table and they'd created order forms. If memory serves, they're still going to go ahead and do that, but there's a lot of rule-breaking being planned here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: For them, it's like, 'Okay, we need to test out all of our products and this is going to be our career plan,' and their mother just really wants them to have a nice normal job working at the Ministry, where you wear a suit and you go and you do your job and then you come home and whatever. She's really concerned that her children are not taking the path that she would like for them to take. It's very interesting to see this whole dynamic playing out.

Lorrie: I really enjoy the complexity of this aspect of Mrs. Weasley as characterization. I think it's so well done, because she's jumpy for good reason. It's not safe in so many environments to be inviting scrutiny -- to be skirting the law -- and she's conformist out of a need for survival. They're in an unstable political atmosphere, so she's nervous about risk. You don't want to call attention to yourself if you're going to be rule-breakers, but at the same time she's also a revolutionary and she's really committed to that. Well, I guess we'll see that later in this volume. Her nature is to be super anxious and to know that that's something that she has to manage, but it's not voluntary and it is, in fact, a response to actual danger that she's had in her past because she's lost her brothers to this struggle. Yeah, she's going to be jumpy. Of course, as a parent, she's already wired to be concerned about the safety of her children; for them to be putting themselves out there like this, ah! She's going to be triggered all the time. There's not a whole lot she can do about that. She can try to be quiet and let them do their thing, or she can try to say, "Would you guys just have mercy on your mom and behave for once?" But there's no getting around the fact that she's going to have to be nervous all the time, and I have sympathy for that.

JC: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. You have one child who's an adult and your other child is the same age as mine, on the verge of that and making plans for the future. I recognized in Molly this anxiety around, "What are your plans for the future? What are you doing? Where could this go?"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, I recognize that anxiety.

Lorrie: Yeah. "My job is to get you to survive as adults. What is your plan exactly?"

JC: "What is your plan here?" And if you look at the three older boys, they absolutely have gone and gotten themselves good jobs and they've done... Bill's working for the bank doing... I don't even know what it is he does; we'll come back to that. Bill and Charlie both have solid jobs. Percy's just started out at the Ministry and he's very much a bureaucrat and excited about cauldron thicknesses and whatever else is going on. Then there's Fred and George, who are

next in line to go out and be adults, and they are taking a completely different path, and Molly's like, "What?!" Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, Percy's an overcorrection, because he is also reacting. One of Fred and George's reactions to Arthur Weasley's life path is that they're not going to be poor. They refuse to be poor, and Percy is so angry. His father is in the Ministry -- and not untalented -- and yet refuses to rise in the ranks. The Weasleys obviously expect their children to get top grades, and Percy's there with his twelve O.W.L.s. He's a top student; what for, if you're not going to have any ambition? What are you supposed to do with that? I think he's been resentful that his father won't rise any further and yet still expects this kind of compliance from his sons. It's a really angry position that he's in, and the way that he's so prickly against his siblings and angry at their cavalier attitudes toward the struggles that they've had to go through... He is buttoned up like Hermione, but way more rigid. There's an element in which I agree with him that he's right to be objecting to the lack of guidance. The contradiction in expecting your kids to work their asses off and get top grades all the time and yet not give them a template for using that to be successful... Percy is angry at Arthur for not being a very good role model.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Meanwhile, I really love and admire the perfection of Fred and George being characterized as tricksters in the most classical sense, which is that they are never safe. You do adore them -- they charm you -- but if you woobify a trickster, you're doing violence to the archetype.

JC: Do so at your own peril. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. They're not harmless; their stuff is actually dangerous. If you're going to be a real trickster, that note of danger... you do always go too far once in a while. It's not domesticated. And Ron says of their joke stuff: "Most of the stuff -- well, all of it really -- was a bit dangerous..." Yeah. If you can fully approve of a trickster, you're doing it wrong. This is actually the same for the Lupin character, in my opinion, who, especially being a shape-shifter, has a lot of trickster elements. He's not actually safe. As gentle and kind and insightful as he might be, he has danger in him, too, and he sometimes encourages it in others and that makes him a better character. When his dangerousness is acknowledged, he's a better character. Harry has trickster in him, too; he's not entirely safe. He does some dangerous things, as protective as we can feel toward him as readers. That makes these characters potent. The Dursleys are right to be scared of these wizards. Don't offend a wizard. You just don't want to. Don't do it.

JC: One of the things that I love in this chapter, too, is that there's all this stuff going on -- all these family dynamics going on -- and it highlights how different this family is from the Dursleys.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They're almost the complete opposite of the Dursleys.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They've got all these kids; there's all this chaos going on, where the Dursleys seem to be uptight. The Dursleys would never scream at each other in front of their children, and Molly and Arthur have no qualms about that. The house is barely held together by magic spells and stuff; there's all these people living on top of each other, quite literally. There's not even space for them to eat inside the house; they have to go outside. It's really interesting how different these are, but one place where it really stood out to me as different (because we've seen in the previous chapters): we've never really seen Petunia cooking. Someone has cooked; clearly, it's probably Petunia because of the traditional family structure.

Lorrie: Oh, she does cook, but she shoos us all out of her kitchen first, us meaning Harry and the narrator and the reader.

JC: Yeah. Then in this case, Molly is still mad and she's using all these cooking spells, and sometimes things are going awry and the potatoes are flying and then she redirects them all. It's interesting that we get to watch her cook a lot or do housework a lot. Then it also made me wonder: where did she learn all of these spells? I have not seen anything like Home Ec at Hogwarts, so is this another example of traditional women's work being not valued by a society?

Lorrie: Very much. Yes.

JC: This is clearly really complicated magic that she's doing to manage all this and to feed all these people, and she's doing it while ranting. She's very good at it. When did she learn it? Who taught her? Where do people learn this kind of magic?

Lorrie: Well, we do see in the second book that Gilderoy Lockhart makes a lot of money off of his household manuals, and we know that there are publications like *Witch Weekly*. In parallel to our culture, there's this whole industry -- a whole culture of domestic arts -- that Harry's not studying at school, but it's out there and it's visible. She partly has taught herself the way they all do. Partly, this is the kind of cultural heritage that you get rich in if you have intact family generations, like the Weasleys do, that you know is broken in Harry. If Dudley wanted to watch his mom cook, I'm sure he'd be welcome in the kitchen, but Harry sure isn't. We know Tom Riddle has none of this at all. The facility -- her skill, the depiction of how she's cooking -- is so enticing. It's so creative and funny, and there is also the hint that it's not just that magic makes you a good cook; she has some gift at it, so she's really creative. Yeah, I think in this whole chapter about wealth, they're cash-poor -- they're prestige-poor -- but culturally, they have a lot of wealth. Educationally, gosh, they're brilliant children. Yeah, if Molly and Arthur are proud of the way they raise their kids, you can see that they have some reason to be. These are really good kids.

JC: Yeah, for sure. And all of them are going to be successful by the end of the series.

Lorrie: Yeah. Of course, Ron will be the most successful of all, although no one really --

JC: Less Ron.

Lorrie: Yeah. No one really has any idea at this point how he's going to achieve that, but he really wants it, and he will be. Only one of them is going to have --

JC: He's going to be on the Chocolate Frog Card.

Lorrie: Yeah. One of them will have an Order of Merlin. Which of these seven (or six and a half) promising children is going to be the one with the Order of Merlin? Hmm. One of them is going to save the wizarding world.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That's one of my favorite things about the beautifully subtle, complicated human characterization of Ron and where he comes from and who he is: all of his best skills -- the ones that save the wizarding world, the one that gets him an Order of Merlin -- that's what he gets from Molly: how to be together, how to be partners with your loved ones. That's her skills that she's passing on to him that he can manage tons of emotional complexity flying around.

JC: Uh-huh.

Lorrie: He knows how to have enough to even give some to Hermione and Harry, people who don't have wizarding family love to acculturate them. "Welcome to my house. We don't have money, but we've got plenty of that."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But there are real reasons, too, to be angry at Weasley family dynamics that Percy shows us because he hero-worships Barty Crouch, Sr.

JC: Oh, yeah. The first mention, I think, of Barty Crouch, Sr.

Lorrie: Yeah. He has father issues and they're legit, because like Percy and like the way all the Weasley kids are expected to be Barty Crouch, Sr. -- brilliant student, perfect grades, he's a genius -- he plays by the rules rigidly. We're going to find out, *too* rigidly, but Percy's choice to idolize him is a direct refutation of his father.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, this whole 'anger at the father' theme in this volume... I do appreciate how complex and subtle the Weasley family is portrayed in this chapter.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's not judgmental, but it's quite real and it's intense.

JC: There's just so much happening here. We haven't met Bill and Charlie before. We've met all the other ones; we haven't met Bill and Charlie before. There's this moment when Molly shoos everybody outside, and when the younger kids get outside, Bill and Charlie are having a battle with the tables.

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: They are grown-ass adults, and their mama sent them out to do something.

Lorrie: And they're so loud!

JC: They're goofing around and destroying these tables; the tables are falling apart, but then they just put them back together again with their wands, which is like, 'Okay, yeah. That's how magic works, I guess.'

Lorrie: This is why Mr. Weasley thought it was fine to blast the fireplace in the Dursley house. "Well, you just put it back."

JC: "Yeah, you can just fix it. You can just put it back."

Lorrie: Right. "Will you boys act your age?!"

JC: It's very interesting, and then when the kids come out, they settle down and they conjure tablecloths out of nowhere.

Lorrie: Beautiful. Yeah.

JC: And everyone gets the tables set. It's interesting that there's that moment, which just shows you, okay, that's very much like Arthur. It can be playful and we can... yeah. I like that.

Lorrie: And they're used to this. They can handle it.

JC: Yeah, they can. Exactly. And if Molly came out and saw them, she would fuss at them, but she also has confidence that they can fix it.

Lorrie: She's the one throwing potatoes around right now.

JC: Yeah, true, and scooping up in a dustpan and then putting them back in the sink.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Yeah, yeah. Wow. Okay.

Lorrie: Cursing.

JC: Yeah, the whole time. Exactly.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I think that piece of it was interesting, too, to see, 'Okay, this is what the adults are like in this family.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. And that's, again, not like the Dursleys at all.

Lorrie: I do like that it's like, 'Well, they're at home. You can feel comfortable at home,' but that's not universally true. Percy is at home and he's not comfortable at all.

JC: Yeah. It's interesting that he lives there. He's the one that I thought for sure would get an apartment somewhere else.

Lorrie: He's still a student.

JC: I thought he graduated.

Lorrie: Oh, wait. No, no, you're right. Sorry. You're absolutely right. Yeah, no, he's there, and he's yelling at them. "Could you guys quiet down?"

JC: "I'm working up here. I got my remote work..." So there's all these conversations happening at dinner and Harry's listening to a little bit of each one, and it's like this little interesting snapshot of what these family dinners are like with all these people.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But interesting that when Percy... I hadn't thought about it through the lens of his anger at his dad in particular. It seemed like... what's the word? He's frustrated living there with all these people that aren't up to his standard or something.

Lorrie: They're not serious.

JC: Yeah, they're not taking this as seriously as him, even when they mock him for really being into the whole cauldron thickness thing with the ardor of a graduate student working on a thesis. He's like, "No, this is important, and let me tell you why it's important and blah blah blah."



Everyone's like, "We don't care, Percy." He's looking at everyone... Dismissive, maybe? That's not quite the right word.

Lorrie: It's his nature. He's a misfit in that he's obviously, naturally detail-oriented and a bit of an introvert, living amongst these extremely loud extroverts.

JC: True.

Lorrie: And that happens. With seven kids, someone's going to be an outlier.

JC: True. We get to hear about Bertha Jorkins again and learn that she actually went missing in Albania.

Lorrie: Okay, plot's being set in motion.

JC: Here's some little interesting bits. And then the whole thing about how Percy is very self-important, but also mean. He's like, "Well, there's another big event coming up that my office is involved with organizing. The one that's a *secret* that you and I know about, dad, but *nobody* else here..." It's like, "Shut up."

Lorrie: Well, it's sweet. It's his first job.

JC: Oh.

Lorrie: It's his first time that he gets to feel important.

JC: Yeah, and he does. But yeah, I do understand that feeling of going and being around people who don't think you're important.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I have a really distinct memory: I spent a year working in an organization where it was the first time in my entire life where academic expertise, let's say, was not valued at all. It was all about personality.

Lorrie: Ah.

JC: It was one hundred percent about personality. It didn't matter how smart I was or how much I knew; it didn't matter, and there was nothing I could do to break through. *Nothing*. At the end of the year, I was like, 'This is frustrating. I can't do this anymore.' I can see Percy's perspective there. 'None of these people understand what I'm bringing to the table. *None* of them.'

Lorrie: Shit is important. Yeah. Take the same person and put them somewhere else and it would work so beautifully, but not in crashing-table Quidditch land over here.

JC: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Lorrie: Also, because Harry, Ron and Hermione shut themselves up in front of Ginny, we get this reminder that in this volume and from now on, Sirius -- who he is, how innocent he is, where he is -- that's a secret that the Trio have to keep. Even Ginny can't know. Okay, that's good. More world-building for this volume being established, all the logistics about the World Cup, the introduction of Ludo Bagman, all of this is being set in place. Yeah.

JC: Some of the world-building in here that I love: there's this wonderful moment where Bill's mother is fussing over her firstborn. "Oh, your hair is too long. You wear earrings. Does your boss like that? Blah, blah, blah." Bill makes a comment: "As long as I bring home plenty of treasure, they don't care what I look like."

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Which on the one hand, eh, but on the other hand, wait a minute: he works for a bank. What does he do exactly? Bring home plenty of treasure? There's a couple of ways to interpret that. I think about my mother, who used to work for a bank: you had quotas of accounts you were supposed to open and all this stuff. Okay, is it that? You get the sense that Bill's actually going out in the world and looting.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's more like the British Museum.

JC: It's like the British Museum, right. That was exactly my impression. I'm like, 'What exactly is Bill doing out here?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Is he working at a bank or is he working in international finance?

JC: Yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: It's more like Swiss bank accounts with all their secrecy. Why do they need to be so secret?

JC: Yeah. Why are so many people getting residency on this island in the Caribbean? What's happening?

Lorrie: But yeah, no, he has kind of a smuggler feel to it. Yeah.

JC: That's what it feels like. Yeah.

Lorrie: It's very glamorous.

JC: But it's very interesting, too, because it opens up the world again of what the magical world is really like. It's not just school and the Ministry. There's other things going on, too, out there. We already had this idea of Charlie being a dragon wrangler, basically, so there's that kind of interesting world-building possibilities.

Lorrie: And that's a different example of one of the Weasley kids not feeling super comfortable at home and striking out going their own way, but he's doing it without rancor. It's not really a reproach to Arthur. That's what he likes to do, but how glamorous.

JC: And he's the oldest. I get the sense that he's mid-20s here at the most, probably.

Lorrie: He's a couple years older than Percy, who's just out of high school. In the first book, *Sorcerer's Stone*, he was already working as a dragon wrangler, and he had very recently left Hogwarts as an amazing Quidditch player. I like that when there's all this discussion of Bill's earring and his hair, that's more on the theme of conformity and presentation physically. It's more about how this volume deals with adolescence. Until now, Harry's just been a kid; now that he's starting to grow and he's starting to have to think about how to present himself, how is he going to want to be attractive? In what way? How is he going to deal with having a body? What does he want to look like? Bill is obviously extremely successful in the self-presentation department, no matter what his mom says. Okay. This is more relevant to Harry's life than it would have been a couple years ago.

JC: Yeah. So there's all these lively conversations happening, and Harry keeps tapping into different ones. When they move to the one about Quidditch. I'm really fascinated with some of the world-building here because it's very much like football talk, the way it's structured. Okay, this is how people who are into their football teams talk about this team and that team.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But we're instantly given a lot of information. Peru has a really good Quidditch team and Luxembourg... It was really interesting to see it really is the case that there are wizards all over the world and in every place in the world. They have a community, enough that they've got a national Quidditch team.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And there's this organization where all these teams are coming together to play this world tournament. 'Oh, there's leagues!' There's a South American League, there's an African League. There's all this stuff.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Again, I love that bit of world-building that opens up the wizarding world as really a world; it's not just England. I love the detail, too, that England did an embarrassing job in the tournament, which is right on par for soccer, from what I understand. I'm not a big sports fan; I thought that was funny. "Oh, yeah, they embarrassed themselves. So did Wales and Scotland!" That was pretty funny. I guess I'm always charmed by these examples of how the wizarding world is parallel to the Muggle world in so many ways and that things aren't that different, and magic is just another technology and it doesn't fix everything. Your football team is still going to suck, even if they have magic.

Lorrie: I like that there's so much world-building happening. Mrs. Weasley is going to get a list from Harry and do everyone's Diagon Alley shopping for them; of course Diagon Alley is always (from the reader's perspective) worth a visit, but no, there's just too much going on.

JC: Yeah, that's true. Actually I hadn't thought about it that way, but yeah. "We're just going to take care of that off-stage. It's going to happen off-screen. Fine."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "In the meantime, this other big thing is going to happen."

Lorrie: "We've got other stuff." Yeah.

JC: I love this whole idyllic outdoor dinner under the stars where there are no mosquitoes apparently and everything is beautiful, and Harry is just soaking it up. Ahhhh!

Lorrie: Oh, yes. This summer dinner is paradise.

JC: Yeah, and everyone's lively and enjoying each other's company.

Lorrie: It's beautiful.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Such bad things are about to happen for so long. This is a present from the author to Harry.

JC: Also, it reminds me there have been times in my life when I've had these dinners and they just stand out to me. This time where you feel like you belong with this group of people and everyone's having fun, and this is what life should be like. I'm glad that Harry gets these moments at all.

Lorrie: Yeah. There's the fluttering moths, there's the scent of grass and honeysuckle. Homemade strawberry ice cream. Oh, yum.

JC: Yeah, it's summer all wrapped up in one little package.

Lorrie: What I love, because it's so realistic and I identify with this: Harry remembers how his scar hurt. He thought about mentioning it to Ron and Hermione, and he makes a decision: 'I'm not going to mention it right now.' There's going to be time later for him to fill them in, but no, preserving this feeling is a decision he's making.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Not when he himself was feeling so happy and peaceful." Totally valid.

JC: Yeah, yeah. That's self-care right there.

Lorrie: Yes, yes.

JC: Yeah. And then we finish off with this moment where it turns out that the twins sent Percy dragon poop for his inbox, and Percy still thinks that it was official business.

Lorrie: Okay.

JC: Yeah. Again, the dynamic between the twins and Percy is amazing.

Lorrie: All right, that was funny.

JC: "That was a fertilizer sample!" They're like, "No, it wasn't." That was great. "We were messing with him."

Lorrie: Next chapter is called 'The Portkey.' We'll be hurtling into more world-building.

JC: Yes, absolutely. The title alone is a bit of world-building. An important one.

Lorrie: Yes, it is.

JC: Very cool. Yay!

Lorrie: Yeah. Looking forward to that.

JC: All right!

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

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