

Transcript

Episode 5.31

Book 5, Chapter 31: O.W.L.s

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 Five, Chapter Thirty-One: O.W.L.s.

Lorrie: O.W.L.s. The outside examiners arrive at Hogwarts to administer O.W.L. exams to the fifth-years. Umbridge orders Ministry workers to seize Hagrid in the middle of the night and shoot stunners at McGonagall when she tries to intervene. Voldemort succeeds in planting a vision in Harry's mind. Ah... Okay, we've come to the end of the year. This is right after Ron wins the Quidditch Cup, and he starts off the chapter unable to stop himself reliving his Quidditch triumph in loving and excruciating detail.

JC: Yeah. I'm glad that he gets this just for a little bit, because the world's about to go to hell.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He gets to be a Quidditch hero and tousle his hair and look around and see if anyone saw it...

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: And re-tell the goal. He is not even, until this moment, aware that Harry and Hermione missed the whole thing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. It's so funny, but I love that he gets this moment, because it's a last happy moment that a lot of them are going to get for a while.

Lorrie: Yeah, and they want him to stock up on this feeling.

JC: Yeah. They do.

Lorrie: I feel like this character of Ron is the one that's the most closely based on a real person among the student characters. The author doesn't make fun of Harry the same way that Ron gets made fun of. The way Ron gets made fun of is very much like how you would make fun of a friend if you were both fifteen. "Oh, there he goes." In a way, Ron comes off as a lot less impressive than Harry and Hermione, but it's partly because the author ribs Ron in a way that she doesn't rib Harry and Hermione.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: It's ribbing, but it's very affectionate, and that feeling came across so strongly in this portrayal of him being boring as hell in his nth re-telling of this minute detail from Quidditch. It's that the more boring and repetitious he gets, the cuter he is, and you can see how fond Harry and Hermione feel about him. Harry grins: "Ron had just reminded Harry forcibly of another Gryffindor Quidditch player who had once sat rumpling his hair under this very tree." That is such a beautiful way to show us that this is a detail that had embarrassed Harry almost to death about James just a few weeks ago; now he's feeling affectionate toward Ron and remembering that. That happens in your feelings automatically. No matter how consciously you feel about it, still it was something about his father and something happened in him, and with the reassurance that he got from talking to Sirius and Lupin... He mentioned this excruciatingly embarrassing detail about James, and then watched in confusion as this complete adoration took over their faces. He's like, "But James was being an idiot," and Sirius and Lupin are like, "Uh-huh, yeah. He sure was." "What?" To have that and then to be able to live that right now reminded me in *Prisoner of Azkaban*: when he meets Sirius and Lupin, he understands what his father's life must have been like with friends because he has the analogy of how he feels about his friends. When he says, "I know my father wouldn't have wanted you guys to become murderers," he knows that because Ron and Hermione have just told Harry, "Don't become a murderer." "Oh, I see. I've never met James," or "I don't remember James, but I've met these people who show recognizable affection." Anyway, yeah, I love how boring Ron is about his games and how that is just pure love, and how the terrible episode of Snape's Worst Memory has already started giving Harry some treasures. Then Ron repays Harry and Hermione when he realizes that they didn't see any of it, and then he understands why. He's such a good sport.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He's completely grown up about it, and I find that quite touching.

JC: Right. Yeah, because you can see that he'd be like, "I can't believe you left, and it was such an important moment for me," but he's very much instantly like, "Oh, wow, I can't believe Hagrid's doing that. This is crazy, and he wants you to what?" Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's nice.

Lorrie: "This applies to me too, doesn't it?"

JC: Oh, my gosh. I love Ron's insistence here that they just break this promise to Hagrid. "Yeah, no, we're not going to do that." Hermione's like, "But we promised," and he's like, "Yeah, no."

Lorrie: He's like, "Uh-huh."

JC: And I'm so on Team Ron with this one. I'm like, 'No, what Hagrid has asked you to do is utterly unreasonable.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "No." We're not going to get to that for a variety of reasons, but yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. But as always, Ron shows the healthiness of common sense in his knee-jerk responses. "Uh, no, that's crazy."

JC: Yep.

Lorrie: Speaking of someone being adorable because they're intolerable and boring, my favorite minor character Ernie McMillan has my favorite moment of his ever where he compulsively recites all of the time he has spent studying on every single day and a little mental graph he's made.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. He's comparing it to other people. "Are you studying as much as me?"

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I know there are some readers who take that as competitive, but I don't think he's self-aware enough to be competitive about this.

JC: Yeah, it doesn't come across as self-aware here. That is true. Oh, my gosh. This whole studying montage (or whatever we're going to call it here) where everyone's just batshit...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: When I was a high school student, we didn't have high-stakes exams like kids have now, but these are clearly based on GCSEs or whatever the predecessor -- the Ordinary level... Whatever the predecessor of that was, the O-levels or whatever that was. The closest experience I've ever had to studying for something really high-stakes like this was the summer that I studied for my qualifying exams for my PhD. In the degree program that I went through, we had to take these three core courses -- my PhD is in mathematics -- and I took them over two years because I was not ready to take them all in one year. At the end of those two years, in order for me to go on... You either go on to the PhD program if you pass or you fail them and then you get a consolation prize of a master's degree and you move on with your life. That's how it worked, right? This is literally determining my future...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This one set of exams that happens over one week. All the students start studying obviously during the time they're taking the courses, but they happen at the end of the summer, so you spend your entire summer studying...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And you make yourself schedules. It's so much like this, where the day of the test is next week and you're like, "What? Can I do one more problem set? Should I reread this entire book?" It's too late to learn more, but yet you can't stop trying to cram more into your brain...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And the descriptions of the potions that you could take...

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yes. All the quackery.

JC: I was just like, 'Oh, my God. Should I be drinking Red Bull? Should I?!'

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: All of it was just so familiar, but I was like twenty-five when I did this and not fifteen. Oh, my God, the stress of that at the age of fifteen is just... If you took every AP exam in one week -- well, you kind of do; they kind of do, but this is much, much more high stakes.

Lorrie: Yeah. They're coming to give you the tests whether you're ready or not. I do love how we see every individual person's ticks coming to the surface.

JC: That's true. Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Yeah. It actually made me think... I just have the feeling that this might have been one of the scenes that the author was looking forward to writing since the

beginning, when she was first imagining this school for wizards. 'Oh, what do they look like when they take their fifth-year exams?' You think, 'Wow, wizards... They can do magic, they can make food appear, they can disappear into thin air.' No, but when they're teenagers, they're just lining up anxiously for their exams and poking each other, tripping over their own feet.

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Yeah. The iconic feel of this... Yes, they're just as cute and panicked as any other teenagers.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. I love the bit where McGonagall is reminding them, basically, that Umbridge really hopes they all do well because good scores on these exams are going to reflect well on her as the headmistress. She says, "But don't let that stop you from doing your best, because you still have to consider your futures." It's just this really interesting thing where she's acknowledging yeah, the political situation right now sucks, but it's probably not a good idea to use your own personal exam-taking as a protest. Probably, don't do that.

Lorrie: That is flawless to me, that statement, and incredibly deep. I take that as advice for the current time.

JC: Yes, for sure.

Lorrie: Just... yeah.

JC: Yeah. We both have kids who are seniors in high school and who are thinking about... who are really, literally, right now in the process (as we record this) of doing college applications and not knowing what the future holds or what the world will be like by the time they're there, by the time they graduate. What do you do? Ugh... You just keep going.

Lorrie: There's an ongoing, legitimate debate about what to do if you're a cog in the capitalist machine, where anything you do -- anything you produce -- is taken by the system and that's how your value is reduced. Do you protest by striking and not producing anything? Well, what's the alternative? Many different reasons why people come out on different sides of this, but for me, the demoralization of not letting myself do what comes naturally to me is so enervating. I can't do it. Honoring your own personhood by doing well at what you enjoy, even if you watch it being robbed away from you right on the spot or used to exploit you or used against you... I guess I've done it both ways. It's less damaging to still honor your personhood because in my experience, if you withhold as protest, it can be really hard to call that back to yourself when you can do it for yourself, too. That can be so painful, because without intending

to, it has the effect that the oppression has taken this from you or divided you from yourself...

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Even if you're being exploited. I was thinking about my grandfather, who was an agricultural engineer when Korea was a colony of Japan. He was smarter and better at this than any of the Japanese officials, but obviously they couldn't give credit to a Korean at the time, so everything he did, they would put their names on it. The work that they had him do was [to] turn famine areas of Korean land into beautiful, high-producing farmland to produce food for the Japanese army. It was all sickening. Does he protest? It's not like he had the option to do anything else or not; he was on their radar... yeah. What eventually happened was at some point: Japan stopped colonizing Korea, and then the land that he had made fertile, he could continue to develop it and produce food for Koreans. Now, that doesn't -- you can't know...

JC: Right.

Lorrie: I think I'm glad he did it, but yeah, he was bitter about being exploited that way and feeding the people who were oppressing all Koreans. It also answered for me Viktor Krum's dilemma, which you actually see in any high-level international sport where there's a regime that uses international sport results as part of their propaganda. Oh, God, that happened to Nadia Comaneci and it happens among the Russian oligarchs. Now, there are glamour sports; especially if you're a woman and you're the beautiful international champion, you're basically a concubine to whoever feels like claiming that privilege. There's no way out of it. Do you then sabotage yourself? Do you do what you were put on this Earth to do anyway? Do you accept the exploitation, thinking, 'Well, at least it might get my mom into a better apartment'? We see Viktor Krum: his Quidditch talent brought him to Karkaroff's notice. He did not like that and he had no respect for Karkaroff, but he played anyway. He didn't sabotage his own gift. Anyway, sorry...

JC: Yeah, no. All of this -- there are so many examples of this, and those are two... The example that I'm thinking of was so much less impactful on a human than the ones that you described, but one of the things that's happening in Texas right now is the legislature (amongst all the many things that it decided to do to fuck with schools) passed a law that said the Ten Commandments had to be displayed in every classroom. There's very specific rules about the size of the paper and the size of the font, where it has to be, blah, blah, blah. What's been really interesting is to watch Reddit threads (subreddits of teachers) talking about the malicious compliance that they're engaging in. "How am I... I have to do it," and some teachers who genuinely are like, "If I don't do this, I'm going to get fired. I need this job, and my family relies on me for the health insurance."

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: It's this feeling of... Malicious compliance is the answer to that for a lot of people. "Okay, I'll do it, but I'm also going to put up the rules of every other major religion I can find, even some you've never heard of. Oh, and the Church of Satan has them; they're going to get a poster too," or it has to be in a place where everyone in the room can see it. "How about the ceiling?"

Lorrie: Oh, my God!

JC: "Or how about the floor?" There's just all these things. "Okay, I'm going to do it because I have to, but I'm going to twist the knife a little bit as I do it." I think for these kids here, doing well on Defense Against the Dark Arts is that bit of malicious compliance despite everything that Umbridge tried to do to sabotage it. "Okay, now we're going to do really well on this O.W.L. You just wait and see."

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, yeah... Ouch. Yes, this could not be more topical. The examiners show up to Hogwarts and they are ancient! I love them! I love them so much!

JC: A level of really elderly 'no fucks to give' is so beautiful. They don't give a shit about Umbridge.

Lorrie: No.

JC: They're like, "Where's Dumbledore?"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "I wanted to talk to him about something. Do you know where he is?" That's just great. I love it.

Lorrie: And the way Umbridge has no bullshit to pull with them... She's just scared. Can you just imagine? They have the power to look up her results from when she was fifteen and just tell everybody.

JC: Yeah, and they might remember.

Lorrie: They might.

JC: That's one of the things that I really think is interesting about this exam system that exists in Hogwarts. We've talked about this before on the podcast that AP serves that purpose in the United States to a small extent; these exams are still independent of the government and they're still aligned with what the experts in the field say are important, which in some cases is true for AP and in some cases is not as true, but it's such a relief to know that that's still happening in this field. It's like, "No, I'm the examiner for Defense Against the Dark Arts and I know what's on the curriculum and that's what I'm going to test, and I don't care about your political opinion." Yeah.

Lorrie: "I am the living embodiment of institutional memory..."

JC: Yes. So good.

Lorrie: "And you can't shut me up because I can't hear you!"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Exactly.

Lorrie: There's a whole different conversation to be had about the internal politics of what AP exams consider canonical. That can get ugly, too, but it is an independent, petty, internal struggle...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Which is good.

JC: Right. Yeah.

Lorrie: And we get another penis joke. We get Professor Marchbanks saying that Dumbledore "did things with a wand I'd never seen before..." but it's really worth drawing your attention to that, even if it's with a penis joke. Just imagining how privileged you would feel to get this once-in-a-century student and get to say, "Oh, they say that this kid is a genius, let's see," and then to see it and just think, 'Wow, I am witnessing something remarkable. I'm just in awe. This is beautiful.'

JC: And to see Harry get a little moment like that, too, in this chapter.

Lorrie: Yes! Yes, and Harry's going to join the legends. Years and years -- decades ago, I got a ticket to a basketball game where Michael Jordan was playing.

JC: Ooh...

Lorrie: I know so little about basketball, and I actually tried to give my ticket to somebody who would care more because I knew it was such a big deal, but no, I went. I just thought, 'I am seeing Michael Jordan play live.' The other guys he was playing with were also phenomenal, but he was just in a class by himself. So yeah, I just love imagining seventeen-year-old Dumbledore doing whatever the heck he did on these exams.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's so great. Yeah.

Lorrie: Having some fun. We get the Great Hall arranged exactly as Harry has just seen it in the Pensieve memory with his father's class. That was an intense moment unexpectedly for me, because if he hadn't had that Pensieve memory, it would have been this first-gen experience where he walked into the hall thinking, 'Okay, what is this? Now what?' Instead, he gets a version of what it would be like if he'd grown up in a wizard family where they said, "Oh, and then in your fifth year, you'll have exams. It'll look like this. Your whole family... We all got through it. You'll get through it, too." He now has a little bit of support and context that he hadn't had before. That's just another bit of foreshadowing that he got from Snape's Worst Memory that is coming to light in this chapter. But yeah, that feeling of 'Oh, I've seen this before. I know what I'm doing.' Oh, that's emotional.

JC: I really love that the very first question on the first exam, which is the Charms exam, is one that he definitely knows he can answer, but also it's one that we as the readers could answer.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: I think that is really clever and really cute. They've been studying and they've been throwing out all these crazy facts, and it's like, 'Oh, my God, this is so overwhelming,' and then the first question is literally swish and flick.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: "Okay." There's something comforting about that. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. That was beautifully done. This is one of those moments where you (the reader) got your Hogwarts letter just by reading the series because you feel it; you feel yourself able to answer this question. You yourself, like Harry, have been marching into the Great Hall with your five years' worth of reading experience from this series. Could you pass this test? Then you see this like, 'Yes, I feel it. I feel the memory, I remember many years ago learning this,' and the reader knows both the wand movement and the incantation. This is also good grounding for the next volume. How huge the gap and the despair are when Harry goes along with Dumbledore to the cave and Dumbledore does magic that Harry has never even heard of, and Harry just looks at him like, 'We are not even the same species.' The gulf between an almost adult and somebody who's really lived a lot of adult experience... Oh. It can seem daunting how much is ahead of Harry, but it's also beautiful knowing that there's a lot left to learn. It's not just that you learn until you're fifteen and then the world has no more surprises. Anyway, I'm talking like a learning nerd.

JC: I know. As you were speaking, I was thinking about the fact that somewhere earlier in the years of this podcast, we had a conversation in which I wondered, 'Where's

wizarding college? Where do they learn more stuff? Do they go to graduate school? The very specialized kind of magic... Where do you learn it?' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's going to have to be apprenticeships or private academies, I guess, but there isn't a system for it. It's frustrating, because you know how much further there is to go to get real mastery in these things that these kids are learning the basics of. But yeah, no, sitting down with Harry to take this exam is like, 'Okay, now we all know how to do this. Hey, look at us.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Then the scene fades to black, and then the next thing we see is Hermione lying. She's going, "Well, it wasn't too bad, was it?" Just like Ron couldn't stop himself from going on and on about Quidditch, all of her anxiety about the test that she's just memorized comes spilling right out of her.

JC: Yeah. That's also very familiar to me from graduate school.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Number four. Aaahhhh!"

Lorrie: "What did you think of number four? That was crazy, right?" Ron shuts her down very sternly. He forbids her -- "We've been over this. You can't do that" -- and I felt such a pang for her. It made me wish she could have been friends with fifth-year Snape, who clearly was really... That moment when you've finished a test and you're wondering about it -- and then you go over it and then you find out what the real answer was -- there's so much learning that happens right after you finish a test if your mind is in it this way. Hermione wants to play, and Ron won't play with her. Oh, well... but yeah. You know what? Among people who do not ship Ron and Hermione and wish that Hermione could have some partner that's better suited to her in some ways, I think this is one of those canon moments where I most felt it. That's just disappointing. Oh, well.... I love that detail where you hear the students called with the rest of their alphabetical group.

JC: Oh, and they go to do the practicals.

Lorrie: Yeah, because you've never heard this particular class get grouped that way. It's the only time you see it and it feels so real.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: They're real students with their real lives, not just fictional characters that we read about. This is the only time I've ever thought of Hermione in combination with Anthony Goldstein, Gregory Goyle, and Daphne Greengrass. What a random combination! Oh, yeah...

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They walk in and they have to go in and do the thing, and then things are messing up all over the place. Yeah, amazing.

Lorrie: And that HAHA moment when Draco's distracted because he's obsessed with Harry and he smashes the wine glass.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: HAHA!

JC: Yeah, he messes up. Yeah, that's fun.

Lorrie: 'Focus, Malfoy. Focus.'

JC: Yeah. It's really interesting to think about this written and practical piece and how they have to do this for every exam. You get through all the theoretical stuff that you had to write, and then you have to go and prove that you can do it. It's really thorough and it's a really strong assessment of what they --

Lorrie: Yeah. It's so healthy.

JC: Yeah, it is. It's surprisingly so, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's like, 'Are you or are you not wizards? Are you going to have to do this or not?' Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I like the way we can tell from these descriptions that Harry does fairly well and he's well above average as a student. He didn't get a perfect score on any but Defense Against the Dark Arts and he's totally okay with it; this is his level. Did you get 'dream come true' feelings when he got to show how incredibly good he is at Defense Against the Dark Arts smack under Umbridge's nose?

JC: Oh, it's so great, and the examiner is so excited. The examiner's like, "Um, would you mind, for a little extra credit?" Yeah.

Lorrie: "As a treat for me!"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Umbridge stationed herself there on purpose to psych him out, and that backfires on her.

JC: Yeah. Oh, it's so great. Can you imagine being in the room, and then Harry Potter casts the spell that you're just...

Lorrie: Everybody stops for a second. Yeah.

JC: 'What the fuck?!'

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That question didn't show up on anyone else's exam.

JC: Right. It's so great.

Lorrie: Yeah. "Is Harry Potter the Chosen One? Look, all I can tell you is what I saw. I don't know. He eats like the rest of us, but then he did the..." Yeah. So yeah, and that is the thing that he mastered, despite everything. It's so undeniable. I like the undeniability of it and the beauty of it. Oh... Okay. This is a thing I think I've even talked about on this podcast before because it made such an impression on me: there's a video of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez when she was a college student doing a choreographed dance with a couple of classmates, and she looks so good. When she was first running for office, the opposition put this video out, saying, "Look how stupid she looks," and it so backfired. Everybody could see how incredible she looked. She's really good! Whatever you try to do to put down the opposition... Draco can't even. "All right, Draco, let's hear how your father can make a better Patronus than this or can buy a better Patronus. He can't." I learned something new about Patronuses from this scene: "Harry raised his wand, looked directly at Umbridge, and imagined her being sacked." Or it's not that I learned something; it's that I understood it better, because I used to think that this just demonstrated that Harry is so confident with the Patronus spell that he can cast one even if it's not a happy memory. First of all, this is not even a memory, and I thought that you draw on happy memories of bonding with other people. This reading (and this has to do with current events and the frustration of living under fascism), I understood it differently: he's imagining the collective joy and relief of a moment when her regime will stop oppressing the people he loves and the world he lives in. Oh, so it is actually drawing on the same emotions. I didn't know... That's a difference that I feel in 2025 that I never felt in any previous reading in any previous year, but I can imagine that feeling -- my own gladness -- expanding through all of my emotions. 'How would I feel if this oppression were lifted? Oh... oh, yeah. Okay, I get it,' and it definitely has to do with loved ones.

JC: I like that it's something that you can create in yourself, so even if you're under the influence of dementors who are sucking away all of your happiness... That was the

thing that I always thought, 'That's so wild.' The thing that you use to defend against them is the very thing they're taking from you...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But if you can create it out of thin air, that's how you defend yourself.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That's amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it doesn't have to be a memory.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: If you're somebody who hasn't had a lot of love and positivity, you may be at a disadvantage, but you can overcome it. Yeah. Just imagining her being sacked... the satisfaction...

JC: And he gets to look right at her and then go, "*Expecto Patronum*."

Lorrie: And it's the strongest Patronus anyone's ever seen. It's such a show-off Patronus!

JC: Yeah, really. It could have knocked into her and made her jump out of the way as it ran by. That would have been maybe a little too much, but yeah.

Lorrie: Well, Patronuses aren't petty, though. What they show is that generosity of spirit overpowers all of these smaller conflicts. Can you deny that soulfulness is good? Well, judging by the fact that everyone just stares and no one can speak (and were all silent looking at this thing of beauty), no, I guess none of us can deny it. So he's just been tested... I love that feeling of going into a test excited because you know that you have something to show.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Then we get poor Hermione, though. Hermione is stalking around in a foul temper. She's under so much pressure, and she picks a fight with every single thing the boys say. She mentions that Umbridge has been blaming Hagrid for the niffers and Harry tries to argue, "Well, she can't blame Hagrid; he was teaching at that time." Then Hermione says exactly what you said in the previous episode of this podcast, where you said, "Why is Umbridge even waiting for Hagrid to do something out of line? She doesn't have to. She can just make something up and sack him." Hermione says exactly that -- "Oh, you're so *naive* sometimes, Harry, you really think Umbridge will wait for proof?" -- and Ron and Harry just back away slowly.

JC: Yeah. When I read that line, I was like, 'Oh, yeah, yeah.' Hermione is like... Yeah, exactly. She's not -- yeah, and she doesn't. Yeah, Hermione's right.

Lorrie: She's seen into the future, and she has no cushion left. She's under too much stress. Oh, we get another underscoring of the beautiful theme in this series that experience is such a good teacher: Harry feels confident about the Polyjuice Potion because he's been through it. Another iteration of a similar point: Harry and Neville both do way better in the Potions practical because Snape isn't in the room.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: These are some drums that this author bangs about what makes good teaching that I'm very happy for. Then Parvati wearily says, "Only four exams left," and Hermione bites her head off.

JC: Yeah. "Only four."

Lorrie: "Nobody was foolish enough to snap back...." I realize that I get like that all the time, and when I do, there is no reasoning with me. I've seen you laugh because there have been times where I'm like that, and somebody for some reason thought it was still okay to disagree with me. Then we're looking at the bloody stump where their head used to be. 'Why? Why?! Just leave it. Just don't even engage.' Harry laughs at a joke, and then he realizes it might annoy Hermione and he just stops in the middle of laughing. 'Okay, I totally get like that.

JC: I thought it was interesting that we learned that the nifflers were left behind by Fred and George with instructions to create havoc, and Lee Jordan is the one who's been levitating them up and in through the window. What struck me about that was first of all, we're still seeing the impact of Fred and George, but the other thing that's really interesting is the amount of skill that it takes to pull off that kind of havoc. Again, it's going back to the cleverness of Fred and George and what it really took to create the things they [did], but it spread out even in their friend group. Okay, it takes some skill to be able to do that, to keep these things hidden in the school in the first place, then take one out and then levitate it up and put it in this window...

Lorrie: Imagine those nifflers going, "Wheeeeeee!"

JC: Imagine those little legs and arms flying around. Oh, my God, amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah. Lee Jordan is a graduating senior. He's fully capable. Learning that, all of the resistance jokes that you were really thrilled about you have to now consider: are they worth it? Will they get someone else into trouble? Oooh, yeah. That's just another so real-world element.

JC: Right, yeah. Though I do like the image of the nifflers in her office...

Lorrie: How happy they must be. "Ooh, shinies!"

JC: Taking things apart... All the kitten plates, or whatever those shiny things that they're stealing are. Oh, it's so great. Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, God. This is so typical of the darkness that interferes with my thinking periodically based on current events. I was thinking about her kitten plates and how revolting they are, and I was wondering if they have gilt edges on them decoratively; then I'm remembering what's been done to the White House, where every single photo op shows more and more garish crap that looks like it's been spray-painted. It is beyond tacky and too utterly revolting, and then this morning I saw a comparison of this one new shiny gold addition to the wall and shows how it was bought at Home Depot and spray-painted.

JC: Ugh... UGH...

Lorrie: Yeah, which they kind of look like anyway. It does look like that. No, that's what they are.

JC: Wow. Now, I'm imagining someone turning a niffler loose in the White House.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, if we get to the point where we can take down all this worthless crap, then nifflers would make a really quick job of it.

JC: Oh, my gosh. The whole scene of the Divination exam is how comically bad it goes. It's so wild to me, because it's like, 'Okay, we don't have to take this anymore after this. We're going to fail it miserably, and then we will move on with our lives.' How useless that was as a class, and I thought, 'How do they test that?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'What's the point?' Oh, my God. I'm trying to think of a real-life example of that and I can't think of one. Something that just seems impossible to do well unless you just happen to have some extraordinary gift, and even then it's iffy.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: What is that? What would be the equivalent of that? I don't know, but that's done. No more.

Lorrie: No more. They're done. Yeah. Again, I feel the sorrow of wasted potential because I can imagine ways in which that could have been a really valuable class. It's a cross-cultural survey studying... Yeah. Anyway, alas....

JC: Yeah. That's true, actually, yeah. Yeah, there's really interesting things that you can do. I'm thinking, 'Okay...' I still can't think of what would be an equivalent of that, but you could say, "Okay, maybe you don't have a natural affinity for being able to read in the

future, but let's talk about how it's done and let's help you recognize the signs of when you're being hoodwinked or whatever, or let's think about how people have done this through the centuries." There's so much that you could do there, and that's just not what they got for the years that they took it. Yeah.

Lorrie: Are there examples in human history of real-life wonder and marvels? Yes, there are. In fact, this series is built on some moments of real prophecy just like that. What is that? What kind of respect does it get owed? What do we need to understand about it? Can it be manufactured? No, it can't. Why not? The series itself does a better job of teaching the subject than Trelawney does, but yeah. Anyway, soon the kids will be free.

JC: Yes! I love that the astronomy exam, like the class, is at midnight, basically. That's something that I always thought was an interesting detail in this series, because of course, if you're going to actually go and look through a telescope, you have to do it at night. I remember taking astronomy as an undergrad and I couldn't take the lab; the labs all filled up, but I couldn't take the lab the same time I took the lecture. I think the only ones that were left were at 1AM, and I had 8AM classes and I was like, 'I ain't doing that.' I put it off, and then in the end I didn't need to take the lab because I changed my major again and didn't need that lab class anymore, but just the fact that there was a class that you could take where there was a lab in the middle of the night blew my mind then, and I always kind of remember that. Of course, it would be... Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And they happened to have a beautiful clear night, which in Scotland? Okay.

Lorrie: Nice.

JC: What are the odds of that? But they did. What would they do if it was cloudy or rainy? How would you have the exam? I don't know. Maybe they have access to some magic that would clear the sky above you, I don't know. Just a thought. A place where my mind went, but then the astronomy exam, of course, gets interrupted.

Lorrie: Ugh... Are you ready to talk about that disgraceful, upsetting incident? Oof... We get Umbridge orchestrating a midnight firing of Hagrid, although it seems like it's not just a firing. If she's accompanied by five other people, that seems like more than that, doesn't it?

JC: Yeah, and they're Aurors, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. They're people who are --

Lorrie: Ministry folks.

JC: Ministry goons.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, they ambush him. Yeah. It's not clear where they're from or what agency they work for or who they're answering to, or why they're doing this.

JC: Ah, yes. ICE comes in the middle of the night to take Hagrid, basically.

Lorrie: And we don't know what they're saying to him when they pound on his door, but whatever they're saying to him, Hagrid is roaring, brandishing his fists, dodging Stunners and yelling, "Reasonable be damned, yeh won' take me like this, Dawlish!" Why? What are they saying to him? Where are they taking him? What are they charging him with? The whole appeal -- "Be reasonable, collude in your own detention" -- Oof. Whatever the presenting excuse is, Hagrid is outraged, and then they get his dog. Fang gets a Stunning spell. Ookay... Whatever they were or were not charging Hagrid with before, now he has thrown a human being ten feet for stunning his dog. Okay. Oh, no... Then we get the door opening again: "A single long black shadow was now rippling across the lawn." Did you ever read the kids' books about Madeline?

JC: I don't know if I read the books or not. Don't remember.

Lorrie: There's a figure of the schoolteacher, Miss Clavel, and that's what I pictured. In the middle of the night, something is not right and Miss Clavel gets up; she can tell when something's wrong. McGonagall "rippling across the lawn..."

JC: The last authority figure left from Dumbledore's team, I guess, and the person with the most authority...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then they take her down.

Lorrie: Here we get the third reference to Snape's Worst Memory that's been building through this chapter where we get other parallels that have been cemented in Harry's mind. It's where Lily says to James, "Leave him alone! What's he done to you?" and James says, "Well, it's more the fact that he exists, if you know what I mean." Then we get this painful moment of McGonagall: "Leave him alone! *Alone*, I say! On what grounds are you attacking him? He has done nothing, nothing to warrant such --" and then they Stun her. Four people Stun her at once, so much that Professor Tofty is outraged, forgets himself. Hagrid knocks out almost all of them -- physically knocks them out -- and runs off with Fang, who's unconscious. There's no way for me to avoid thinking this is so painfully parallel to legislation that Rowling is backing against the rights of trans people that she assumes are, by nature, criminals intent on committing really specific crimes. People who just are going about their lives, and she has in her mind already decided that they're likely to commit specific crimes that she's afraid of and therefore, must... On what grounds is she attacking these people? They've done

nothing. Leave them alone. The whole "Reasonable be damned" line of argument, the whole argument that oppressors should be negotiated with... 'Come on, meet them in the middle. Give in a little. They'll leave the rest of us alone if we'll just select a scapegoat to sacrifice to them,' as though that had any rational basis at all. Well, of course, Hagrid should not be going with these people; they're charging him with nothing. It would not be reasonable for him to agree to go with them. Why are we supposed to be okay with denying basic human rights to trans people? Why is that okay? What are we supposed to be gaining by agreeing to sell out somebody? For what? The clarity of the parallel is one of the dumbest griefs of TERFpocalypse.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: One of the most depressing and outrageous of TERFpocalypse. Sorry. I know I talk this way and it makes me so angry. I'll stop talking.

JC: Yeah. What's interesting to me, too, is what you were just talking about: the compromise. The examiner doesn't really get mad until McGonagall gets taken down.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's almost like, "Well, he must have done something." That's not really said, but it's like, "No, focus on your exams. Don't focus on this atrocity happening over here."

Lorrie: Or "There's nothing you can do about it."

JC: Yeah. "Sure, they're rounding people up into vans and taking them away, but just get on with it."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Until it happens to someone who in the examiner's eye is clearly not supposed to have been attacked.

Lorrie: That crosses a new line.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's a standard of decency that Professor Tofty was not expecting to see disregarded like that, and he's shocked. Oh... Obviously, the students can't sleep now and they're saying things like, "I thought Dumbledore would be back before long, but now we've lost Hagrid too?" That whole "Nobody is coming to save us" feeling of doom... Oooh, yuck. Angelina's saying, "Why sack Hagrid now?" and Hermione cutting to it and saying it has nothing to do with his teaching; it's just that Umbridge hates part-humans. It's more the fact that he exists. Why are we rounding up legal residents with no criminal record? What have they done? No, it's not about that. Harry demonstrates something that is painfully real and current: he's so upset by all of this that he gets three

hours of extremely poor-quality sleep the night before his History of Magic exam, so that exam is doomed. I just recently did a workshop that you know about with some high school seniors who are starting to apply to college now, and I talked to them about the portion of the Common App where they ask about “challenges and circumstances” -- things that made it difficult to learn the way you needed to, disruptions like incarceration or war or displacement. I was very practical when I talked to the students about this, because that's the kind of thing where they might have, in their lives, gotten the feeling that it's not okay to talk about this because somebody is bound to say, "Well, that's no excuse."

JC: Yeah, right.

Lorrie: "Well, when I went through that, I had no trouble, so you have no excuse." Often, when you give this background, you get punished for divulging whatever it was. I could really see how they might not trust this question, but I do know from Admissions this is not actually a trick question; the people asking this and reading the applications actually know what this does to a human's ability to learn.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That is exactly what this portion of the Common App is for: to tell them "I couldn't sleep the night before because ICE came and took away one of my teachers and Stunned another one of my teachers as she was trying to prevent them from breaking the law that way. This happened in front of my eyes, and now I don't know who's running my school or who's next..."

JC: Right.

Lorrie: "Or where my teachers are or why this is supposed to be okay." I was telling the students, "When fascism disrupts your daily life, it is difficult to learn." I know some of them, in some cases, had similarly severely disruptive events in their lives that had to do with personal things, and I said, "This affects your ability to remember things, to retain facts, to think critically, come to conclusions." What I said was that a 4.0 average from somebody who's had a really stable life is a completely different animal from a 3.0 average coming from somebody who had to pull their brain together after this kind of extreme stress.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: If you manage to learn something under these circumstances, then it says something about what you had to do, preparing yourself first to get your brain back into learning mode, before you could even start to study. Yes, it's actually worthwhile to answer that “challenges and circumstances” portion of the Common App if that is, in fact, what you come from, and what I ended up saying was "just tell them the truth." It

was pretty painful to see on their faces this look of skepticism. "Really? Is this going to be one of those rare cases where telling the truth won't just get me more crap?" Well... I'd said, "People who it's their job day in and day out to look at incoming students and understand where everybody's coming from and what makes a college experience and what makes what kind of learners they are... You can deny this stuff, but it's true that you will have this enormous variety of background coming in as college first-years. Where they come from does affect how they learn and not necessarily in a bad way, but in a way that is meaningful -- that shapes the whole college -- so there's no benefit to denying it. There's only benefit to understanding it."

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: Anyway, I'm here lecturing to you as if you were not only a teacher and therefore dealing with this every day, but actually a teacher of this subject in particular.

JC: Yeah, it's funny. There were so many examples that were popping into my head as you were going through that, and I was like, 'Yeah. Oh, yeah, I saw that. Oh, I saw that the other week.' Yeah. That idea that trauma impacts your brain and the way that you think and the way that you learn, but also impacts your memory and all that stuff... This is a thing that I feel is -- I know it's a children's story, but I remember feeling this way as I read it, and I remember hearing other people talk about [how] they wished that Harry's trauma and the impact that would have on him was acknowledged in some way that was realistic. There's an extent to which the story glosses over some of that.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That's one of the criticisms. Okay, yeah, here's an example where you see the lack of sleep and he's so worried.

Lorrie: Yeah. That line: "He was finding it very difficult to remember names and kept confusing dates." Well, yeah... He only got three hours of sleep, and they were terrible sleep quality.

JC: Someone who's really important to him just had this horrible thing happen to them right in front of him.

Lorrie: Yeah. Ugh...

JC: No one... The one person who tried -- They don't know what happened to him. They also don't know what happened to McGonagall entirely.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But yeah, standing up for somebody trying to prevent injustice, getting that kind of really rapid disproportionate response... Ugh. Really, four Stunners to the chest for an old lady? Did you really need to do that in front of all the kids?

JC: Yeah. Well, a lot of witnesses. That's the other thing about our modern times: that there were a lot of witnesses, and it didn't change the fact that they did it and they got away with it.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: And I thought, 'Wow, that's very current, too, isn't it?' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I know I've said this a number of times, but going back to evidence of Harry's traumatic experiences, that's why I love Capslock Harry so much. It's one of those moments where yeah, actually, he's been through a lot. He's not going to be your perfectly behaved, happy, grateful orphan.

JC: But he's not as capslocky as I remember him being somehow.

Lorrie: No, he really isn't.

JC: That's a thing that stood out in my head. 'Capslock Harry...' but re-reading this volume, it didn't feel out of proportion to me at all, and I don't know if it's because I'm reading it under completely different circumstances or I understand it more, or if it just wasn't there in the first place. I don't actually know which one it is.

Lorrie: One guess that I think it is is that we all first encounter -- That's not true. Those of us who read the books as they came out encountered Capslock Harry at the beginning of a book after three years' hiatus, and it's very different from how he has been up until that point in the series, so you wait and wait and wait. Then you think, 'Oh, what's the next installment of *Harry Potter*?' and then suddenly he's screaming in your face. We now have the whole series and some time, but that first 1AM read after standing in line, clutching a wand and wearing a robe...

JC: And having waited three years, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I think that actually is one of those artifacts, one of those differences between reading them as they came out and reading them as a series later.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: It's just the startling moments... We forget, once we have the whole thing in front of us, to think of at once how startling they were when we got them a piece at a time. Oh, it's so sad... It's so, so, so sad that McGonagall tried to stop this violent, unjust outrage, and then, in front of all their students, got attacked like that. Ouch.

JC: That feeling of this is how empowered Umbridge feels...

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. They really don't care.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Meanwhile, Harry's there going, "*In your opinion, did wand legislation contribute to, or lead to better control of, goblin riots of the eighteenth century?*" Aside from that being super dry, this is so ominous because this is about unequal laws about access to arms for purposes of one race subjugating another.

JC: Yep.

Lorrie: Okay...

JC: In fact, all the questions on the history test caught my attention in this way...

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: And I was just kind of like, 'Oh, wow.' Because Harry hasn't paid attention, I don't know any of the stuff either, but it had this very ominous feeling of, 'Oh, boy, we're doomed to repeat history, aren't we?'

Lorrie: Oh, yeah.

JC: And how that really feels current, also.

Lorrie: Do the goblins have justifiable anger? Oh, it seems that they do. Oh... Yeah, right after we saw the centaurs being all tense about land rights.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: This is a state in which Voldemort gets his dear wish: all of his work pays off and he gains access to Harry's mind and gets to implant a carefully planned-out vision. We see that Harry as Voldemort has "a firm and purposeful tread, breaking occasionally into a run, determined to reach his destination at last." Voldemort is so prepared. Harry's been preparing for exams; Voldemort's prepared. This is it. This is his final exam, and what an image he gives Harry: the shape on the floor at the very end, taking him through the Hall of Prophecies to the spot that he's been trying to lead Harry to more and more -- closer and closer -- and then this black shape moving up on the floor like a wounded animal... Ah. Then we get the conflict between Harry's consciousness and Voldemort's occupying the same space. "Harry's stomach contracted with fear... with excitement..." That inner conflict and all of that emotion that he's containing at once... Ah. Then Voldemort really takes over Harry's consciousness: "A voice issued from his own mouth, a high, cold voice empty of any human kindness..." Voldemort is in charge of showing Harry Sirius under *Crucio* and then gives that really ominous threat that "we have hours ahead of us and nobody to hear you scream..." So yeah, in this tug of war over Harry's consciousness, Voldemort is winning at that second, and wow. Harry

wasn't in a good state to begin with here; Harry is so dissociated he doesn't even know he's screaming. "Somebody screamed as Voldemort lowered his wand again; somebody yelled and fell sideways off a hot desk onto the cold stone floor. Harry hit the ground and awoke, still yelling, his scar on fire, as the Great Hall erupted all around him." Oh, that poor child coming back into himself, and Voldemort triumphant he can withdraw now because he did it. He implanted that vision, and it worked. Oh...

JC: Yeah. Knowing now everything that's going to come... Oh...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. I guess, a few things there: one of the little messages that I feel like I get from the lead-up to this section, especially, is how important self-care is when we're fighting and how vulnerable you make yourself if you sacrifice taking care of yourself...

Lorrie: That's huge.

JC: You're making yourself vulnerable to things like this. What could Harry have done? Things are out of his control, but if you're not sleeping and you're not eating and you're not making sure that your physical health -- you're not taking care of yourself, putting your own mask on before, etc. -- you make yourself so much more vulnerable to bad things happening to you or to the enemy being able to manipulate you into thinking things are happening. Yeah. I find that a big piece of this, too.

Lorrie: I guess the happy example we have from earlier in this chapter is when Harry and Hermione actively want Ron to get as much joy as he can out of his Quidditch win. Yes, strengthen yourself, feel that. One of the beautiful things that Ron is remembering from his Quidditch win is when he had that moment of, 'Hey, you can do this.' He doesn't even know where that feeling came from, but he got that burst of inspiration and now he believes in himself. Great! Whatever that is, do that.

JC: Voldemort has figured out what Harry's weak points are here or what he views as Harry's weak points (which are arguably not weak, but he knows how to push that button).

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, and Harry has no way to know that it's not real. Well, he does have a way; it's wrapped up in his trunk.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: UGH... yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I think on this read, it really hurt me, that line: "Harry's stomach contracted with fear... with excitement..." Knowing that your own panic is making your opponent

happy -- that the more genuine fear you have, worry about your loved ones, the more they get off on it -- that is their purpose. That is what they want: to push you into a state of discomfort so that you dissociate and you lose control over your comprehension. That's the fight. That's what we're fighting for. It's quite painful to be reading this with such immediate feelings.

JC: I don't remember at this point in my previous read (which was the first read of this) what I thought was coming next. I'm sure this is the point where I kept turning the pages...

Lorrie: Yeah. It's impossible to know.

JC: But now, I'm like, 'Oh...' Yeah.

Lorrie: But yes.

JC: Yeah. I think that I was just as convinced as Harry on a first read that Sirius had actually been captured and was there and being tortured, just like Arthur Weasley had been actually being hurt, and Harry has no reason to not think that that's true.

Lorrie: It's quite convincing. If this were really happening, it would look just like this. Last time, when it was Arthur Weasley and Harry stopped heaven and Earth to get help, everybody thanked Harry.

JC: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Lorrie: The way that this book's theme is the stripping away of institutions or anything that you believe in that could support you... That's been finalized in this chapter where Hagrid's been taken out and McGonagall's been attacked, and that whole feeling of "I thought Dumbledore would be back, but it's actually way worse." Okay. Everything's been stripped away now. Oh... It is a nice moment at the end to know that the Great Hall erupted all around Harry. He's not alone; he's with people who just witnessed the outrage that happened the night before and are not going to disbelieve him. They've just seen him cast a Patronus. They've just seen that he was right about Umbridge and any mockery of Harry Potter is in the past. If this is happening to him, they're going to know that something's going on.

JC: I love that the title of the next chapter works on multiple levels.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Out of the Fire.

Lorrie: Yeah. We've left the frying pan. We've been out of the frying pan into the fire for a while now. What comes after the fire? We're about to find out.

JC: Yep.

Lorrie: So yeah, I guess there's no preparing by reading ahead. There's nothing to do but meet things as they come.

JC: Yeah.

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.