



Transcript

Episode 8.3

Interview: Lily Reevaluating HP After 2020

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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. This is Season Eight, our open-ended irregularly published bonus content season, and this is episode three with our guest Lily, an undergraduate and long-time Harry Potter fan who is reevaluating her relationship to the series as a trans woman. Lily was in kindergarten when she first met our host Lorrie. As a fifth grader, she participated in Lorrie's workshops reading the first three Harry Potter books. This episode includes discussion of the death of a friend, so please be aware of that going in.

JC: Welcome, Lily! I'd love for you to introduce yourself. Just tell us a little bit about yourself, as much as you want to let us know about your age and your name and however you identify, if you feel comfortable sharing that with us as well.

Lily: Yeah. Hey, I'm Lily. I use she/her pronouns. I'm an undergrad studying computer science at Penn. I've been a fan of the Harry Potter series for a long time, and have been reevaluating my relationship with it as a trans woman over the last few years. So excited to be here with you all today.

JC: Fantastic. Computer science at Penn. That's impressive. That's awesome.

Lily: Thank you.

JC: When did you first read the books?

Lily: I got the first book, I think, in first grade, which was around when people were starting to read it, and I actually got so scared by the scene in which Harry and Draco are going to duel late at night that I put down the books and didn't read them again for

months. I was very chronically afraid of getting in trouble, and even reading content around that was too scary for me at that age. Yeah, so I picked it up again right at the end of second grade, I think, and read the whole series in a week and a half.

JC: The whole series!

Lily: Yeah.

JC: Wow!

Lily: I was a very avid reader.

JC: You didn't sleep? You didn't do anything but read?

Lily: I have this really vivid memory of sitting at lunch, nose buried in the fourth book.

JC: Wow. That's a lot of reading in one week for anyone, let alone a second grader. That's amazing. What's your relationship with the movies like? Did you see the movies? Did you read the books first and then see the movies or...?

Lily: Yeah. I read all the books first, and I was on a kick of rereading them every year for a little while, though that petered out at some point. And then for the movies, I can't remember when I started watching them; most definitely later. Part of my 'being scared of books' thing was also more manifested being scared of movies, so I didn't really watch new movies until I was in fourth or fifth grade.

JC: You sound very much like my kiddo, and my kiddo is very much like that, too. Any kind of anxiety-inducing thing... If someone's going to get in trouble, they're like, 'Nope, I'm out of here. I'm out.' What was your favorite book of the series? Do you have a favorite?

Lily: Well, it's funny. I always find that my favorite book of the series is the one that I inevitably lose. I'm not sure whether that's like a chicken or the egg situation, but it was for a while the third book because I did not have a copy of it. But I think as I've gotten older, I've been leaning more towards the fifth book on, when it gets into a little more of the meat of the rise of Voldemort and all that stuff.

Lorrie: Hmm.

JC: Ah, yeah, that's interesting. What appeals to you about the series in general? What do you find in it that you either identify with or relate to, or what drew you into the Harry Potter series?

Lily: I've always been a really big fan of fantasy. I still am. I guess Harry Potter's maybe more fiction, but I think there's something to imagining fantastical worlds that are within the reach of our own but also far beyond it that really touched me at a young age. I think

it was just something about... there is magic in the world. There's such a basic and completely world-changing premise that I think I still get so much joy out of. I think my relationship has changed with it a little bit, of no longer seeing the world through the eyes of the child. I'm a little less convinced that magic is real, but I'm still holding out hope.

JC: Ah, yeah. How long has it been since you've read any of the books?

Lily: Well, actually, since we were doing this, Lorrie sent me the questions last week and I was like, 'Oh, I should crack open the books and brush back up on it. Obviously, this is going to be like a quiz,' so I started reading the first book. I got about halfway through it, and then I was like, 'Wow, I really enjoy this.' Also, I've read this so many times I can practically recite it from memory, and it's a little less engaging now as an adult. I sort of played with the idea of skipping ahead to the fifth book, so my feeling has always been that's where things got a little more complex, but I just kind of petered out on it, which was interesting. I think when I was younger, I would do my yearly rereads and I would get through them really fast, and would just sit down and grind out the whole series, and I guess I've lost that ability a little bit.

JC: Oh, yeah. You've got a lot going on in your life right now, I think, too. You're an undergrad. Things have gotten really, really intense and busy, and your brain is probably pretty full of a lot of things right now.

Lily: Yes, definitely.

JC: So with that in mind, do you have a sense of how your perspective on the books has changed since all of your annual readings as a kid? Do you look at the characters differently or think of the events any differently?

Lily: My cousin, when I was younger, suggested that I reread the series every year, because as I'm at the age of all the characters at that point, you get more out of it, and I found that to be true.

JC: Was there a particular year that you reread that you have, had, some kind of an insight into Harry's experience, or another character's experience that you didn't have before?

Lily: I think it really was the fifth book, and it's funny. I actually stopped doing the annual rereads after that one, which probably tells you a little bit, I guess, about where all the characters are at when they're sixteen. I decided that was meaning enough in and of itself to not do the full reread.

JC: Ah, that's cool. Is there anything else you want to tell us about what Harry Potter has meant to you in your life? It sounds like it was a big part, at least this annual reread, was a really big tradition that you had for yourself.

Lily: I think it really was, at the end of the day, the belief in magic, in something fantastic, especially with regards to queerness and being trans. I think that despite herself, J.K. Rowling created a world in which that made me feel like I could be whatever I wanted, and not through magic and the fantastic that was within reach. I think there was this intense process of coming to terms with the fact... Maybe I believe magic is real out there somewhere in the world, but I'm not actually... Wherever it is, wherever I can find it, it's not the same and I'm not going to magically just fix the things in the world that make me sad. I think that was something that was hard to come to terms with growing up. I think it's maybe in a lineage of realizing your parents aren't God, realizing magic isn't real.

Lorrie: So you said that you stopped doing the rereads around age sixteen?

Lily: Yeah.

Lorrie: And is that not also the year that TERFpocalypse hit?

Lily: You're right. It is. I actually had totally forgotten that.

Lorrie: Do you remember becoming aware of Rowling's anti-trans statements?

Lily: Yeah, I do. I remember reading the essay that she wrote, actually. I think one of the things that I've always struggled with a lot, particularly with TERF ideologies, is that they really center on these very painful recollections of abuse. I think Rowling played into that very effectively, and I was having trouble reconciling that with a belief in the rights of people to do whatever the fuck they want, right?

Lorrie: The feeling of having read and been involved in this fantasy world, and then coming to terms with watching this author turn into whoever she has become now, feels very adult in a lost-innocence, bitter kind of way.

Lily: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's not family friendly.

Lily: Yeah. I had the 2020 arc of, 'I don't really know what to make of these really painful reflections of abuse being related to trans rights,' and it's so hard to reconcile. I would like to believe that she created a world knowing that it implied in it that we can exist however we want, in the same way that concept of Polyjuice Potion and Transfiguration and all of these ideas very fundamentally suggest the idea that we can change ourselves, which is in a lot of ways, I think, pretty radical.

JC: The magic sees who you are on the inside. It sees who you truly are, even if you're not able to show that on the outside. That feels like a big theme in the books, too.

Lily: I think I ascribed a lot of intentionality to the way that she wrote things. It's made me wonder over the last few years how much intentionality really went into this series, or how much of the wonderful takeaways that are in it are sort of serendipitous. It's just an emergent property of the world she's created, and not actually a thing that she intended to put into the books.

Lorrie: There's no right or wrong answer about this, but how would that affect the way you read or relate to the books if you found out either that no, she actually did see them and put them in on purpose -- or no, that's just how it happened?

Lily: I think it probably affects more how I see her than how I view the books. I don't know. It's hard, because I want to be able to come in here and be like, 'Oh, I have this very articulate opinion on the books,' but it's hard, I find. Every time I think about it, I have a different opinion because these books were so formative to me at a young age, and at the same time they're being attached to an ideology that is so fundamentally hateful of who I am and my ability to exist. I think her intentionality... If she knew what she was writing, I would wonder, why is there an exception? Why is it, 'I believe this, but...'? And if it's not the case, I would say, then, that Harry Potter is, in many ways, sort of a miracle happenstance, that the world that she created held all of these emergent properties and that it should be celebrated as such.

Lorrie: I do know quite a few people who say, "I saw myself as a trans person reading the books and I don't know what's going on in her head, but that's what I saw in the stories and I still see them, and I'm not giving up the stories." I see that, and then there comes the labor that people have to do of explaining this stance. I understand what you mean when you say that every time you think about it, your opinions change. Today, where would you say that you stand on that reading of the stories that you had, and if you still want to use the stories that way and talk to other people about them that way?

Lily: It's interesting that you say 'talk to other people about them that way,' because I think that's also been an interesting thing that's happened since 2020, particularly with other trans folk I talk to. There's so much pain and anger around this and frustration around, 'It is just this one series and people will not stop funneling money into her franchise' that people really aren't interested in having the conversation around what meaning we can still draw from her, or if there is even something to be salvaged. I think that sort of emerged as, "Well, it wasn't even that good of a series. It's a children's book series. Grow up." There may be validity to that for them, but I don't think that necessarily is something that I would project on anyone else.

Lorrie: I have a policy that I, once in a while, drop in to see what horrible transphobic thing she has said lately. Once in a while; I don't do it too often, as a self-protective measure, and also because honestly, it doesn't really change. It does get slightly worse and more entrenched, but it's nothing new so far that I've seen. But I don't avoid it

completely, and I definitely do not want to keep up with it. That's just me. Like you said, I might change that policy from day to day. What about you? Do you have a general policy about that?

Lily: Yeah. I think I hold it to the same standard that I do with consuming anything vengefully transphobic in my day-to-day life. Generally speaking, I'll avoid it, but if it comes up in the news -- in the Instagram feed and whatever -- I am curious about what's going on. I think that is very much how I've consumed my news about J.K. Rowling over the last few years.

Lorrie: That seems really valuable, though, because if you're getting it filtered that way, then you're getting the layers of protectiveness of people saying, "This is what I encountered. If you think the way I do, then here's what you need to know to not get blindsided." You had mentioned, I think a couple summers ago, that you had been a camp counselor and that you had led a game that had Harry Potter references, but that as part of it, some part of the game expressed your anger against Rowling and her transphobia. Do you remember this?

Lily: I worked at a sleep-away camp where we had an all-camp game that was Quidditch-themed, and the end scene... Usually, all the camp games have some sort of overarching story around it, and I think this one was that J.K. Rowling came in and was sowing division and was like, "We're all going to play Quidditch." Can't remember if part of it was that the rules of the game were brutally unfair, but it ended, at least, with J.K. Rowling being thrown into the lake by folks wearing a trans flag because of the division that she was sowing in our community. That was a really nice moment, because I both got to bring in a pretty functional working knowledge of how Quidditch works, and also to say, "We are going to enjoy this in our own way that is totally separate from how you ever intended it."

Lorrie: Was it a queer-identified camp?

Lily: Not specifically. It was for identified boys and non-binary kids ages 9 to 14,15. Yeah, I think it's definitely a strong queer representation, particularly amongst the counselors and I think increasingly amongst their campers, which has been a trend that I've been really interested in watching over the years.

Lorrie: That was something that I found fascinating as TERFpocalypse developed: the feeling of a community saying, "Oh, hell no. We're not going to marginalize these essential loved ones or selves." Did you do anything like get rid of merchandise or put things away, or swear off anything?

Lily: I haven't really sworn off of anything, besides physically purchasing things. I still have my little Harry Potter shelf here, mostly just because that's how my bookshelf has been organized for quite a while, and I think if I dug around, I would find the wand that I

got at Universal Studios a long time ago. Part of the reason that that shelf of books has stayed untouched for a while and the wand has stayed in whatever cupboard it's been in: I'm still really not sure how much I want to be involved in this series. Do I want to get rid of these books? Do I want to keep them here? It's something that I think about a lot every time I come home and see that shelf. I still don't have a good answer.

Lorrie: I remember you getting your wand at Universal, because that was a couple months before you turned eleven.

Lily: Ohhh. That's so funny.

Lorrie: Yeah. My kid, who is in the same grade... We did take her to Universal later that year and we were hoping that she would get picked, too, but you had come back and been pretty pleased that you had gotten chosen.

Lily: Yeah. That's funny. I noticed in the email you sent, there are so many memories of me as a child (this one included) that I just have no recollection of, which was very touching. I really appreciated it.

Lorrie: Well, I'm going to go into some of those. I would send your mother long reports of your intellectual development and your creative focus, and the things that you zeroed in on when you analyzed literature.

Lily: It's adorable. I had no idea that was happening. Wow.

Lorrie: This is a geeky mom thing, right? You can't always be telling the cute kid how proud and fascinating you find [them]. "Oh, wow. Today they used this word, but last week they weren't using that word." Secret mom clubs, where you geek out over your kids, is a thing. Okay, JC, back me up. Is this not a thing?

JC: Oh, yeah. No, we do this all the time, talking about our own kids, for sure.

Lorrie: There would be some point at which the kids might be embarrassed, or say, "I'm not that great, mom."

JC: And you have to do it with particular other parents, because there are parents who just don't want to hear you talk about your kid or whatever, right? They don't want to hear it, but if you get some like-minded parents who praise each other's kids...

Lorrie: I don't recall Lily's mom ever minding me saying, "And then this sentence was a little bit different from the one before." I remember when you learned to read, because it was right after you started kindergarten; then by the end of kindergarten and the beginning of first grade, I remember you walking with your nose in books and comic books.

Lily: Yeah.

Lorrie: Although I didn't realize you were going quite as fast as that. And in first grade, that was the year I was trying to figure out how to make chocolate frogs, but I needed to taste-test the chocolates, so I recruited Lily and I made milk chocolate, semi-sweet and dark chocolate. This was adorable, right? Because kids are different about taste tests. Some people really hate deciding; some people say they like everything. No, Lily was definitely like, "Oh, semi-sweet. Definitely." It was no hesitation, so that's what I've used ever since. Thank you. What I remember, too, was that you went through a phase of thinking that Gilderoy Lockhart was the funniest person in the world, and you would use any excuse whatsoever to start making fun of Gilderoy Lockhart to the point where it was a distraction, and we would have to rein you in because you would get started and then you wouldn't want to stop. The line that I remember you saying is, "His hair is the most magical thing in the series." You just wouldn't stop.

Lily: That's so funny.

Lorrie: It was very funny.

Lily: It's funny, because thinking back, I'm sure I picked that up from Ron and Harry making fun of Lockhart. A lot of my humor and even speaking patterns from a young age, I really think, came from Harry Potter. I think that in particular... I wonder if that's what that came from.

Lorrie: One of the things that I remember geeking out with your mom about after you went home was just how funny it is when the kids find something that they want to go off about and how hard it is to make them shut up, because each kid, of course, wants to go off on their own separate tangent, right? Oh, there was one time when we were supposed to be talking about Harry Potter, but you wanted to talk about the theory of relativity instead, so you went on about that for quite a while.

JC: This is what elementary school teachers' lives are like, by the way: managing twenty-five to thirty of these kinds of personalities in one room every day, all the time.

Lily: I appreciate you for handling it. That sounds like quite the task.

Lorrie: It was hilarious. And then one of the things we did was we looked at the different wands. You had your wand from Universal. You weren't shopping for yourself, but because you're so geeky -- or definitely fifth-grade you was so, so geeky -- you studied every single wand wood and you read every one.

Lily: I actually still kind of remember that. I remember, specifically, that packet that you had detailing the impact of lengths and wand woods and the different cores.

Lorrie: Yeah. You were calculating different combinations in your head, and then you were trying to apply them to people that you knew. This absorbed you happily for quite some time. Yeah, your mom got a report on that, too. I will say there's nothing I wrote to

your mom that I wouldn't have felt comfortable showing you. It was just like, "Well, yeah, you wish you had been here for this, because this was hilarious."

Lily: That's so funny.

Lorrie: To give the background, this was when my daughter and Lily were in fifth grade. That was a year that was really snowy in Philadelphia and there were so many snow days, and I was going crazy having just kids -- Little did we know that lockdown was going to happen. We were innocent then, but I was going completely nuts because there were so many days they were absent in school. What are we going to do? What are we going to do? The kids were bored, and I decided, 'Okay, well, let's have a Harry Potter reading group.' I asked my daughter, "Who do you know among fifth graders?" This is such a good age for that, because you start thinking, 'Well, these kids get Sorted when they're eleven, so this is the stage that I'm about to enter. The kinds of concerns they have are legible to me.' We had some fifth graders come; we got partway through the third book, and we did some of the exercises that reflected chapters in the book, and I recall you... When I said we were going to brew Polyjuice Potion, I think you realized right away, "Oh, this is going to be lentil soup." Somehow, you just knew it was the right consistency or something. Yeah. We would go through the exercises, we would imagine ourselves doing things like Sorting ourselves into Houses or trying to decide what we would do in certain situations, and do some literary analysis. This turned out to be enormously helpful to me later when I wrote the Snape book, because it turned out that fifth graders analyzed literature completely differently from how I was doing it as an adult in a way that was either more correct than my reading or there's no right or wrong. It's just that I would have missed some things entirely, and fifth graders were right on it.

Lily: Yup.

Lorrie: Yeah. It was really astonishing and helpful, and that made me respect children's literature so much because the world is biased toward the way adults see things. If children and adults see things differently, then the adult way is considered to be the correct way, and children's literature rebalances that so that actually no, the adults reading a book might be missing something that their children all pick up on; when they explain it, you realize, 'You know what? They were right. I just missed it.' That was something that I really found about children's literature as we had this discussion: 'Oh, this makes me respect ways in which kids are more correct than adults that I might miss.' I remember hearing you and the other kids disagree with each other in a thoughtful way and each of you explaining why you were disagreeing, and everyone being really informative and valid about it, realizing, 'Oh, wow, the kids already knew that everybody was going to have a good point. They knew that more than I did,' I guess, being used to being in class with a whole bunch of other people.

Lily: That's so interesting. I've been thinking a lot about that group -- just as a little exposition, I guess, as you already know -- because of Khari, a mutual friend of mine and Lorrie's older daughter who passed away this winter and was a third member of our Harry Potter meeting group. Yeah, I don't know. I didn't realize there was so much child analysis and literary analysis going on. I just remember having a lot of fun hanging out with my friends and getting to talk about Harry Potter all the time. I remember it very fondly. He moved away in sixth grade, so that was one of the last big things that we all did.

Lorrie: Yeah. I didn't know how we would handle talking about Khari. This is something that, JC, I've talked to you about, too.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Cutest kid. It's been difficult, hasn't it, dealing with this loss. Yeah, Khari's perspective on things was completely different. One of the things I remember was asking the fifth graders who proposed the Dueling Club, and you, Lily, said, "Wasn't it Lockhart?" because that was from the text. We see Lockhart claiming that he did, and Khari saying right away, "No, that was Snape," because that's the way Khari's mind worked: okay, this is the emotional stuff that's happening behind the scenes. And listening to the two of you talk about it, it was really sophisticated. This is why you each came up with the answer that you did. And yeah, this is sad. Yeah. You chose a wand for Khari; you chose a wand wood for him.

Lily: Yeah. I don't know. Khari really was an artist, and the way you described him thinking is so quintessential to him. I think one of our most common tracks was just talking about the different series we were into -- I think, at that point, it was Percy Jackson and Harry Potter -- and just theorizing. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. You studied the wand woods and you chose for him, and then I ordered it for him and gave it to him.

Lily: Really?

Lorrie: Yeah. This is sad, but that's part of the function of literature, too. When you read something that's associated with a certain time in your life, then that's one of the ways that you store your emotions and your memories of that time or those people. Which is one of the questions that comes up for me when I know that's part of the discourse: people saying, "If you love me, a trans person, you will cut Harry Potter out of your memories. I know that it was your childhood. Well, it was mine, too, and I cut it out of my childhood, and I want other people to cut it out of theirs or I'm not going to feel safe." Despite knowing -- I understand about that sense of safety or unsafety, but I'm not sure how possible that is when there are memories bound up like that. But can you do that

without losing those memories? This isn't a question that I know an answer to. I'm just getting lost in weeds, too.

Lily: Yeah. That's such a hard one, though, and a really good question, I think. Yeah. There's so much to say about, I don't know, that pain and vulnerability of transition. There are times where you really, really just need people to be there for you, to be on your side. And at the same time, yeah, at least specifically in the example of Khari, for that exact reason, I don't think I could let it go, and I can't and won't feel bad about that, with the caveat of also moderating the ways in which I engage with it and the lenses through which I engage with it, right? I think I have also had this feeling over the last couple years, thinking about the goblins at Gringotts (I'm Jewish) and the way that they portrayed the historical anti-Semitic tropes associated with goblins. Rowling went really far into that here, and that's hard. Talking about it, the house-elves discourse, I know, has been a hot thing for a long time now, just mulling that over.

Lorrie: A lot of the people that I engaged with in Harry Potter fandom... This is a phenomenon I've observed: it feels like... You know those doors that have twenty or thirty locks on them, like teenagers' bedrooms or something where you're like, "Don't talk to me!" and you slam the door and you do all of the locks? 'Great. Okay. Fine. I feel safe now.' It felt like if it's all queer Harry Potter fans... Honestly, if somebody is queerphobic or transphobic, they've been weeded out; really, there's not going to be anybody like that. You double check, triple check that you're safe, and then you start talking about Harry Potter again, talking about Draco Malfoy and Neville Longbottom. If it's safe enough, those memories can come out to play again. Is that something that you can identify with or that you could see happening?

Lily: I can definitely see that space being open. I feel like I haven't been in that personally in a while, but I think there definitely have been times. I like that. That makes me happy to hear. It's hard, because when you talk about Draco Malfoy and Neville Longbottom, I almost feel like I grew up with these people. They hold such a place in my mind and heart in the same way that your imaginary friend would, or a childhood stuffed animal. That was just how I think a lot of people engaged with books at a young age, and maybe the question that I want to start thinking about, even just for myself, is how do we go from 'this is whatever J.K. Rowling put into it' to 'this is what we can take out of it.' It's something that I've been thinking about a lot. I want to be able to find my own meaning from this series that's separate from her, and I think, intentionally or not, there's a lot that was put into it that I would like to hope has influenced people for the better from a young age. I think there's a really firm line around the whole blood purity stuff; that's a pretty meaningful lesson to impart to people very fundamentally at a young age. Just to say that that's wrong in a children's book -- and not only say that that's wrong, but really elucidate on the harm that it does and drill that into the psyches of children in a lot of ways. I think that's remarkable and so deeply humanizing, but I would like to hope that affects the way that I see the world now. I think it does.

Lorrie: Well, I will say it did then in fifth grade, because one of the exercises we did was after you brewed the Polyjuice Potion, A.K.A. lentil soup, and then you were eating lunch, A.K.A. taking the potion, and I was saying, "Okay, imagine that it's turning you into somebody else." I remember asking, "Think about somebody, maybe somebody from school that's your age that you don't know well and you might not even like them and they're different from you in some way, and turn into them; without any judgment, just imagine going through the day as them." You all took this really seriously in a really interesting way, and just went through it out loud imagining it. You were pretty sophisticated about knowing different religions and different races would really affect how you experienced your daily life. It made me respect fifth graders so much, knowing the kinds of discourse that you guys would have with each other when adults aren't listening. Have you heard of the strategy of offsets, where if there's some reason to spend money that benefits Rowling (if you want to play Hogwarts Legacy), you offset it by donating money to a trans person's GoFundMe or to a trans rights organization?

Lily: I've only ever heard of that in the context of carbon offsets, which my impression is just a subset of greenwashing. I'll have to think about that. My instinct is generally that I think whatever content exists out there, the internet is vast and has most things that cost money for free somewhere hidden on it. Even Hogwarts Legacy, right? If you gave me an hour, I could have it pirated and running on my computer. I guess with a suitable level of internet literacy, the question is not 'do you want this content?' so much as, like, 'do you want to go through the legitimate avenue to even support the creator of the content?'

Lorrie: I think this is where I'm going to go on a minor tangent of my philosophy on the offsets. There's so much need for donation to trans rights organizations and to people's GoFundMes. Forget about whether or not it's enriching Rowling; any excuse to get people thinking that they're going to donate is going to go so far. I wanted to use the energy around people policing each other's consumption. I wanted to take that momentum and try to change it toward thinking: sometimes, the amount of money that could help a community rights organization is so small and it can go so far. Essentially, what I wanted was any argument, any idea in any direction at all, that was something other than hopeless, because that's a danger with being aware of Rowling's transphobia: it can spiral down badly.

Lily: Yeah. When you present it that way, I find myself very compelled by it. I think it's the exact thing that I've grown to like, which preserves people's autonomy or doesn't presume to have that much impact on people's autonomy. I know that I'm going to have... I can moralize as much as I want or set the boundaries that I want, but that only really has even the potential to have an impact within, like you said, an immediate circle. The ways that we can offset that harm and reduce it on a larger scale is, I think,

really compelling, and also gets into this question that I think about a lot: 'How do we lower the bar for activism?'

Lorrie: Yes.

Lily: There are a lot of people who won't donate time but will donate money, and particularly will donate money just out of the blue. But if they're like, 'Oh, I'm doing this and I get to play the new Harry Potter game,' they're like, 'I'm doing this. I'm playing the new Harry Potter game, and I get to feel a little better about myself.' Actually, that is super compelling. I like that a lot.

Lorrie: Yeah. I found that that's a form of activism that can come out of this: racking your brains to try to find things to help people see a way to help each other.

Lily: Yeah.

Lorrie: Something positive.

Lily: It has been my experience that we can either write off maybe sixty to eighty percent of the world as just apolitical or useless, or we can embrace what they're willing to give. I think the offsets really fall on that theme in a way that I really like.

Lorrie: Yeah, you have been thinking about this, huh?

Lily: Yeah.

Lorrie: I want to read what I found that I sent in the email I had forgotten about, but this is something that I sent to your mother when you were in fifth grade. This is the kind of thing that I learned was going on in your head because we talked about Harry Potter and books. I told your mother, "Lily imagined inventing a book that had different stories in it every time you opened it up, according to what stories you needed and wanted to read at the time. It would have *everything* in it, all the knowledge you *ever* wanted to read about. She imagined finding a magical stone that emitted a moon-like glow, and if you placed it on part of a book, that portion of the story would become real." Do you have any recollection of this?

Lily: Not this specifically, but this feels very quintessentially me at that age, and me a little bit now even. I think that was the age at which I was like, 'Oh, I should have gotten my Hogwarts acceptance letter by now,' but I think I'd managed to suspend disbelief for a while and I was grappling with that and coming to terms with it. It was hard and painful. When you live in your head, in this fantastical world, and suddenly the real world starts to kind of start chipping away at the edges, things of that nature were the answers to a lot of those questions at that age and as I got older, because I think it was simultaneously like, 'How do I imagine a world that I want to live in and brings me joy,

and how do I make that real?' Those are still the questions I'm asking, and I guess I'm now doing it through political science, but I think it's really the same thing.

Lorrie: Can you understand how being a parent and watching kids say stuff like that would be so incredible and beautiful, and how you would want to rush to that kid's parents and say, "You'll never guess... Isn't this incredible?" Do you hear how beautiful that was?

Lily: Yeah, I don't know. It's funny. I hear it and it sounds to me like a young kid who wants to live in another world, or is living in other worlds.

Lorrie: To me, it sounded like potential. Also, because I knew that shortly after that (or maybe even during) you were writing programs and making games that would build on this kind of imagination so that you could prolong this kind of feeling for anybody that would participate in it with you. I knew that this was potentially endless in how good and creative it could be. To me, it didn't look like a different world. It looked like you had a head start in knowing what you were going to do.

Lily: Wow! That's going to be one to percolate over. Yeah. Wow. Here I am, having world-shaking revelations during a podcast recording session. It's funny. I'm going on a gap year now in part (and in stereotypical fashion) to find myself, and connecting back with this is so interesting, because it's making me think that maybe the answers are already things, that I've already found the answers and forgotten them.

Lorrie: When I think about the podcast that JC and I started about rereading Harry Potter after 2020, a lot of that is about going... 2020 is a year of such a break. It was the year that you stopped your annual rereads, we have now discovered; it's partly developmentally appropriate and partly because the world was like that at the time. When there's been a break like that and then you go back into stories where you've encoded your own past and your memories, what do you find? Are you going to find more, because you've encoded it with stories than if you just tried to do it by straight memory? Someplace, I reported on you to your mom and basically bragged. I have sent her video of you dressed up in Hogwarts robes and doing a Snape monologue. It was also pretty funny and cute. Yeah. JC, you were saying that I've been talking about the fifth grade reading group so much.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Do you get a sense of it now?

JC: For sure. Something I wanted to ask you, Lily, is I've heard about this fifth grade reading group -- probably since it was going on at the time -- and every time I've heard Lorrie talk about it, it strikes me that it felt very different from anything certainly that my kiddo experienced in school around reading. I'm curious to know what your memories of that are, and what kind of an impact you think it had on you as a reader or as someone

who was learning how to analyze literature. Does it stand out in your memory from an educational perspective?

Lily: It's funny because I don't -- What Lorrie's been describing of this interesting literary analysis... I just remember making fun potions and getting to talk about my favorite book series, and maybe that is fundamental to how you create these meaningful educational experiences at a young age. It was so much more impactful, because it was based on that childish joy and I didn't realize that I was being taught how to do literary analysis or learning how to do it. I was just happy to get the chance to, like, yap for a little while and have fun and eat Lorrie's delicious food. The snacks were always so good; it was always something fun and Harry Potter-themed.

JC: With my own kiddo, things that really stand out in my memory from when they were in fourth and fifth grade... They're just like 'Huh?' now. I'm always curious to know, looking back -- young adults like yourself -- what stands out to you from this time in your life, when you had this really cool opportunity to hang out with friends during a very snowy winter and read the Harry Potter books and do some fun activities around them? That's cool.

Lily: Yeah, I think it really was just how creative it was that still sticks in my head today, all the amazing little things that Lorrie had come up with.

Lorrie: Yeah. I remember being so struck by how this age was the beginning of some independence, because not only were the kids saying these sophisticated things and making reference to conversations they were having ongoing with each other that were obviously profound, but I was stunned because you would walk by yourself from home to our house to do this and then you would walk home by yourself after, and my kids hadn't started doing that yet. Your mom would say, "Just let me know that they got home safely." It was a moment of maturation that is really developmentally appropriate, matching with the first book of the series. Just getting to see that happening -- getting to see small children with this suddenly quite adult perspective coming out of them -- that was... I'm glad that I have that set of memories. I'm going to remember that stage in your life and my kid's life and these people's lives more clearly than other stages, because we got to go in depth like this. That's just something that comes to mind when I think, 'What good can there be in retaining a connection to the series, regardless of whatever's happening in anybody's mind now, twenty years later?'

JC: Good luck on your gap year!

Lily: Thank you, and thank you guys so much for having me. This has been so fun.

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

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