

## Transcript

### Episode 8.5

#### Seeing Tom Felton in Harry Potter and the Cursed Child

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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 Five with reaction, review and discussion from Lorrie and JC about seeing the New York production of *Cursed Child*, which currently features Tom Felton reprising his role as Draco Malfoy.

**Lorrie:** Hi! You're right in front of me.

**JC:** Yes, I know! We are recording this in a fourth-floor hotel room on 40th Street in New York City, and we're recording it the morning after we went to see *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* with Draco Malfoy being played by Tom Felton.

**Lorrie:** The original Draco Malfoy. What an emotional return for him, and for many long-time fans of the franchise who collectively gasped and then sat in virtual queues for hours trying to get tickets to this performance. Was it worth it?

**JC:** Yeah, actually.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, it was.

**JC:** Yeah. For a couple of reasons. We're going to get into more into our reactions for that in a minute, but I guess we just wanted to start by reminding folks that if you have never seen the play and you don't know anything about it, we're making assumptions here that you know who the characters are and what the general plot is. Also, we'll be

spoiling things, so if you've never seen the play and you don't want to be spoiled, this is maybe an episode to skip.

**Lorrie:** But yes, as usual with our podcast, we're just going to figure, 'This material's been out for ages. We're just going to talk like everybody knows.'

**JC:** Yeah. Awesome. Let's see... I guess one place to start would be to talk a little bit about how the format of this version that we saw is a little bit different from the original version that premiered in the West End and also on Broadway.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. This is the third format I've seen. I did see the original with two separate plays that went really long; then in late 2021 I saw the version that I call 'the shorter, gayer *Cursed Child*', where the two plays were condensed into a single play with an intermission. There were certain changes to remove references to Scorpius and Albus being attracted to girls and women, and it was reconfigured to make it clear that they were each other's most important person. Then the version we saw last night -- I did not know to expect this -- was a shorter version of the 'shorter, gayer version'. A lot of things were trimmed down here and there. I wasn't expecting that, but in spirit, it was the short, gay version.

**JC:** But even shorter...

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Somewhat gayer version, maybe. Possibly. Yeah, I saw the original West End production, two shows -- I think I saw a matinee and then an evening performance -- and I also saw that version here in New York, and that would have been pre-pandemic. I can't remember what year, but I saw the one in London by myself, and then a few years later saw the one in New York. This is my first experience seeing the shortened version of it, and I remember thinking, 'How are you going to take all of that and condense it into two hours?' And then, to my delight, they did; there were things that were missing, but similarly to the way that people are talking about the pair of *Wicked* films (that that could have been one film, probably), I feel like this works well as one play. The things that were cut, I didn't really miss them that much, and I think that the audience around me did not notice that anything was missing. I think they got to see the story and they were happy with what they saw.

**Lorrie:** The interesting thing about having the longer version out in the world is that that's the version you can get if you buy the script. In that sense, it feels a little bit like a novel having been converted into a movie, where the novel is hundreds and hundreds of pages long and the movie is two hours; these two things are separate -- related and separate -- and you can refer back to the longer source material if you want backstory.

**JC:** Though, the shorter, gayer version... Things have been changed.

**Lorrie:** Things have been changed.

**JC:** Things have been changed, so yeah. That's going to be one of our talking points. I think that we want to start with the casting of Tom Felton.

**Lorrie:** Yes!

**JC:** That's why we're here.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** As someone who obviously read the books but then was also a fan of the movies, I really enjoyed him being in this role, and I think that seeing the audience reaction to him around us was part of the fun of that. The applause when he came on stage... Oh, people were really excited to see him in this role, and it made me think... I don't know... The average person who was in the theater last night: do you think they've read the books, or do you think they've just seen the movies?

**Lorrie:** What I know is how long I had to be in the virtual queue to get a ticket, and that made this time seeing the show different from the other times, where I can imagine other times people might have come because they had a passing interest in *Harry Potter* but they wanted to come to a Broadway show or something like that. If you weren't committed to seeing the Tom Felton version of *Cursed Child*, you had to jump through too many hoops. You would not have signed up for the pre-sale and gotten your number and been given the window when you could be online, and if you have an office job, pretend to be doing your job while you have this window open, because if you close the window, then you get booted out of the queue, right? If you were there, you really wanted to be there.

**JC:** Yeah, and that's a great place to be in a theater.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** As a long-time fan of musical theater, the times that I remember being in a theater when it was the hot show and it was new, and everybody sacrificed something to get that ticket...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That's different from a theater that's two-thirds full and half of the people there stood in line at the half-price tickets – Yeah, yeah. It's a different feeling in the room, for sure.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I definitely did feel that energy last night. That's really true.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. I felt that the presence of Tom Felton changed the story.

**JC:** Ooooooh... Okay, say more about that, please.

**Lorrie:** Just that you knew people were conscious. This was very much a *Harry Potter After 2020* viewing in that the people who cared to see this remembered him as a child - - perhaps they had been around the same age when they watched movies when he was a child -- and they came to it with him being their point-of-view character. 'We want to rejoin the same person that we grew up with, knowing that he's been through the same past twenty years that we have. We want to revisit that.' Usually, Harry Potter is the person who's the point-of-view character where we know what this kid went through as a teen; through *Cursed Child*, we're rejoining him as a middle-aged parent. Knowing that there is an actor who really did live through those past twenty years and has the same meta history with this story, yeah, everybody was sensitive to the Draco character arc, which is a very close second to Harry's as the play is written. But yeah, everything was meta. Every line out of him, people felt like, 'Okay, that came from Draco Malfoy, the character, and also Tom Felton, the actor.'

**JC:** Yeah. It's interesting, because I've always had a soft spot for Draco. The other two times that I've seen the play, I was very interested in Draco's story arc, but I can imagine that people who didn't have my perspective weren't looking for that, and that his presence in the cast draws attention to his character's arc in a way that -- I see what you mean. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Well, we knew going in that the first time Draco Malfoy enters the stage in this play, there would be applause not for Draco Malfoy but for Tom Felton, and the actors have to do that thing where they adjust the timing so that they stay in character, in universe, and wait for the audience to finish applauding before they continue with their lines. That's a well-established theatrical phenomenon, right? You respect the audience, you acknowledge that they're there, you acknowledge that they've changed the rhythm of the show, and then you carry on with the story that they paid money to come see. It wouldn't be natural to the play -- to the script -- for everyone to pause and wait for the applause to die down...

**JC:** For Draco Malfoy.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, for Draco Malfoy, but it was natural to the performance, knowing that people wanted to respect how important it was to see this actor come back and live. What is it like to be the same person this many years later?

**JC:** And that part of it is really fun to think about. When it was announced that he was cast, it made me think, 'Oh, wouldn't it be interesting if other actors return?' I know that Daniel Radcliffe will never do this and I doubt that Emma Watson would, but I just started thinking, 'What would it be like to have other actors from the franchise come in and portray some roles here?' Oh, wow, that would be kind of fun. It really connects it

back to the original series in a way that I think a lot of fans... When the story became known -- when the version of *Cursed Child*, the two-play version, first came out and people started seeing it -- a lot of fans rejected it outright.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** "This is just fanfiction. I don't include this in my canon." Having Tom Felton come in and play the role, there's a way in which it kind of legitimizes this as the eighth *Harry Potter* story.

**Lorrie:** Yes, it does.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And it emphasizes that the specifics of the plot are not as important as the feeling, which is the part of this play that I think always worked, even with people who absolutely loathed the premise. But they went to see it, and they would come out saying, "I hate the story, it makes no sense, and yet, somehow for some reason, I felt something." This completely goes with that energy. Does it matter what the story is, or did you just want to spend time with these characters in this different phase of their life?

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And are they the same characters? Yeah. Tom Felton playing Draco Malfoy... No matter who plays Draco Malfoy, I think this Draco is written to be recognizably Draco. It always felt, to me, authentic. Yes, this is the Draco we know as someone who's led a complicated, middle-aged life.

**JC:** And having the actor in the role, I think (as we said earlier) it makes the audience pay more attention to his story, but I felt more sympathy for Draco came through.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Yeah. He's the son of Lucius Malfoy, and he was himself a Death Eater. He has a Dark Mark.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He has to live in this society with that Mark on him and with that stain on his family, and his kid... He knows that his child is paying the price.

**Lorrie:** Yep.

**JC:** The only child that he had, and his wife is dead... He's very alone.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He kind of taught that theme of loneliness...

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** When he and Harry have a conversation about that. I felt that more, I think, than I did in the past, and I do think that part of it was having him in the role, because it really connects it back to the original stories in a way that maybe I wasn't even buying into as much until this viewing.

**Lorrie:** There were several things cut from the second iteration that I missed a lot. One of the lines that I was really looking forward to seeing Tom Felton deliver (and he didn't - it was cut from his version) was a scene in which Draco comes into Harry's office at the Ministry and Draco says, "I never actually wanted to be a Ministry man." Harry asks him, "What did you want to be?" and adult Draco confesses to adult Harry Potter, "I wanted to play Quidditch." That... I still get chills. What maturity it takes to be Draco Malfoy, who was never as good as Harry Potter (who could have gone on to play Quidditch, but was too good and had too many other important things to do), and their whole time at Hogwarts, Draco was always failing to catch the Snitch because asshole Potter was so much better. For him to confess to his most hated rival that's what he had wanted... he had failed. He had never been good enough to play Quidditch, and that maturity blew me away in the first and second versions. I had been hoping to see Tom Felton deliver that and he didn't, and yet his presence and his emotion delivered that same feeling to me anyway, where seeing him and the way he carried himself in whatever lines he delivered made you conscious that this adult Draco cannot run away from a single thing from his past because if he does, he'll be letting down his son. And Lucius was never any help.

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah, I think he really played him as tired... Just tired and constantly frustrated and always with his guard up about how people were viewing him and viewing his kid. So protective of his son, but protective in a way where he felt a little bit like, 'There's only so much I can do. It's a cruel world, and there's only so much I can do to protect my kid and I'm going to do it, but also that recognition that my kid has to go out and live in this world.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah, but also that even though there's not much you can do about some of it, just the kids seeing that the dad cares enough to make an effort is in itself important, and that's the thing that Harry is missing in this story that middle-aged Draco is trying to teach middle-aged Harry: 'You don't seem to realize that just seeing you make the effort is its own virtue.'

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** 'Albus is looking at you like, "Why aren't you making the effort for me?" Yes, I understand you never had a dad. Lucius Malfoy, whatever his shortcomings, was my dad and I saw him make the effort. Terrible effort, but he made it.'

**JC:** Yeah. Harry at the end says to Albus, “I had no father figure here.” The closest thing he had to a father figure was Dumbledore, so the question is raised: is it better to have a terrible father or no father?

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** And Scorpius has a good father. Listen, Draco is a really good father.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Harry is a shitty father in this, and Draco is actually a really good father.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He tries so hard, and he recognizes Harry’s shortcomings and tries to point them out. I don't know anything about Tom Felton's real life. I don't know if he has kids, I don't know if he's married; I know nothing about him at this point in his life. He's in his thirties, I'm sure. I don't know where he's at in his life, but he did a really good job of embodying that. I believed him.

**Lorrie:** One of the meta things about watching Tom Felton is knowing that the Tom Felton/Jason Isaacs relationship has been strong and nurturing the whole time, and has continued even before Tom Felton was cast in this and then has been prominent in the casting. Jason Isaacs came to the first performance and was part of the publicity. Even throughout the years on social media, they tagged each other and said, “Hey, Dad,” “Hey, son,” and then they brought in the actor who's currently playing Scorpius. In the lead-up publicity to this run, that was something that was emphasized in interviews with that actor being kind of emotionally overwhelmed, like the whole *Cursed Child* cast when THE Tom Felton walks in to just sit down with them and do line read-throughs. ‘Oh, my God, it's real Draco!’

**JC:** ‘It's real Draco,’ yeah.

**Lorrie:** ‘Yes, and you are real Scorpius.’ ‘Oh, my God, we're all part of this together!’ That was something that I saw. In the final bows, you saw Tom Felton with his arm around the actor playing Scorpius. ‘Yes, this is our role in the story, and I'm here to be a mentor to you in the strange life that is being an actor that's part of the Harry Potter franchise.’

**JC:** Yeah. There were some beautiful little moments of Tom Felton on stage... The scene at the end that is very emotional, where the whole group is back in time and they're basically having to stand by while Voldemort is killing James and Lily Potter...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Every time I've seen -- the two times (I say 'every time' as if I've seen it a lot) I've seen it before, my focus was on Harry because Harry breaks down and his family has to stand there and hold him.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I watched Draco this time...

**Lorrie:** Right?

**JC:** Who grabbed Scorpius and pulled Scorpius' face to his chest, like comforting a child.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. 'Oh, my God, this is about parents and children, and you are my whole life.' Yeah.

**JC:** Right. I'm getting emotional.

**Lorrie:** I am, too.

**JC:** That... I've never looked at Draco before in that scene, and I would not have looked him except for Tom Felton.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, because in that scene I have always looked at Albus and a little bit Ginny, but yeah. It's a big gift to be given this direction to suggest that we consider the same very emotional story from this specific other vantage point.

**JC:** Yeah. At the beginning, you said that you felt like it changed the story.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. What are some other ways that it changed for you, do you think? What are some other things it made you look at that you haven't maybe looked at? You've looked at everything, probably, but are there any other things that are standing out to you?

**Lorrie:** It was a really meta experience for me. It was very much a *Harry Potter After 2020* experience for me, partly because to be somebody from the original movie series who continues to be publicly affiliated with the *Harry Potter* franchise means that you are accepting the role of somebody who will always be asked, "How can you be a humane person knowing about TERFpocalypse without condemning everything? Why aren't you joining Dan and Emma and Rupert in being banished forever (being dead to J.K. Rowling) because you stand up for trans rights?" That's something that you agree to take on if you're going to continue to be the face of the franchise, so that was something that I was aware of. Unlike a few people who have continued to be affiliated with the franchise... There are a few people where they just sound transphobic, and that's not where Tom Felton is situating himself, but he is very much being somebody through whom the complicated emotional connection to this saga can continue.

Anybody who grew up with this series or had it in their past has a history with it, whether they repudiate it or not. Yes, if you want to go back and feel all the things that have changed and all the things we've learned when the big times come, you rejoin those people, even if they've been your enemy. At the end of the world or the end of life (or the end of consciousness or whatever), I expect J.K. Rowling to be there in my mind. When Harry walks through the forest, there are people who show up; are they friends? Are they enemies? Yes, no, yes... When King Arthur is born, his dying body is being borne on the barge by four queens, and one of them is Morgana le Fay (who in many ways was not a happy person in his life), but at the end of the journey they were important. In that sense, Harry and Draco are part of each other's stories. In the larger, more meta sense, J.K. Rowling is part of the story: the person we wouldn't be as horrified by if we hadn't loved her so much at one time. The presence of one of the actors from the original franchise being in this play at this moment really focused on that for me...

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Unlike, say, Keira Knightley, who is a voice actor in the current audio reproduction of the series and who I think (and commonly people think, I think) was lying and pretending that she didn't know about the controversy. She in particular has been called out a lot on social media for hypocrisy because there's just something you can see in someone's face when they're being a bad liar. Unlike that, you know that it's not that Tom Felton was unaware of the controversy; he knows that this is something he's taking on.

**JC:** There were some changes that you had noticed from the previous shorter version that you saw. Were there any others that were focused around Tom's performance that stood out to you?

**Lorrie:** The scene that I most missed was in the fascist universe. Scorpius barges into Draco's office, and in this timeline Draco has the job that Harry has -- he has an office in the Ministry; he's high up. Scorpius comes and confronts him about all the wartime horrors that he has to realize his dad did. Can he trust his father? Can he love his father? How can he be a loving son to someone who committed actual horrible crimes in his past? Draco has mixed feelings and is defensive and also offended and confronts Scorpius about it, because this is a conversation that's dangerous for them to be having in that environment. The way Scorpius resolves his feelings at the end was remembering that no matter what, it's not false that there's something good in Draco Malfoy because Scorpius's late mother loved him. "Okay, you don't have to be afraid that you were wrong to love something and see something in this person. Something was there. Something real was there." That was something that it would have been nice if they had the time to keep that in.

**JC:** Yeah. I think I would have liked to have seen more interactions between Draco and Scorpius, that's true. We see so much. I think that's something I remember and now I've forgotten: the contrast between Harry and Albus's relationship and Draco and Scorpius's relationship (even though it doesn't get equal stage time) is something that I had forgotten about, and we don't really see much of that in this particular version of it. I think one of the ones that stands out to me the most is when Harry and Draco had their little duel scene, where Ginny leaves them in the kitchen; they can't stand it and they, very childishly, have this duel where they hurl childish hexes at each other, but they inserted the line from the movie where Draco says, "Scared, Potter?"

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And Harry says, "You wish," which is right out of the movie, and the audience erupted at that. They clearly changed that dialogue, and it was a cute nod -- this meta nod -- to "Look who's playing Draco Malfoy!" It was like that, but then they did a really good job with that duel. One of the things that I miss from that scene (that I remember from seeing earlier versions of it) was that it's very acrobatic. Seeing that they're on wires -- it's a lot of wire work -- there are points when it becomes clear that they are too old to be doing this. I didn't see it as much last night as I have in earlier versions where they start going, "Ow, ow, ow... Wait, wait, my back. Let me get my back in the right spot!" I didn't see that as much, and I don't know if that was just taken out in the shorter version or what, but I did miss that. I think that would have been fun to see.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It was emotional.

**JC:** Oh, okay, another moment... I don't know if it was in the original or not, but there is a moment toward the end when Ginny is kind of taking charge of everything and telling people what to do...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And Draco starts to stand up to her and then admits that he kind of likes being yelled at by her, and I heard this incredible titter go across the audience. Okay, all the Draco/Ginny shippers are popping out of the woodwork, but I don't remember that moment either. Maybe it was in there before...

**Lorrie:** It was. There was...

**JC:** That was there before? Okay.

**Lorrie:** There was, in the original script, a tiny nod to Draco/Ginny and the nod to Draco/Hermione, which brings up the other thing that is meta currently happening.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** One of three things, which is that this is the season of Draco/Hermione fanfic going commercial and making a huge wave in the bestseller fiction lists.

**JC:** With *Manacled*?

**Lorrie:** Yeah, with *Alchemised* and at least two or three other novels that are being marketed deliberately as having been adapted from Dramione fanfic. The fact that these stories originated from fanfic is being presented as something powerful that means that it comes with its own devoted following already, has been product tested by the merciless, discerning critiques of nameless AO3 commentators. So yeah, it's the season of Dramione not only within *Harry Potter* fiction, but within fiction publishing, period. It's made a big commercial wave this season. When there was a moment of erotic tension - - just a reference between Draco and Hermione here -- you did hear the "WOOOO" from the audience.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. It was very clear what that was about.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. That was there from the beginning, because Dramione was one of the ships that there was a little tiny nod to at the beginning; it's just that the knowing laughter from the audience shaped it a little differently this year, and it will, I think, always be there from now on because we now live in a post-*Alchemised* world...

**JC:** Interesting, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Where number one on the New York Times Bestseller List was taken up by official Dramione.

**JC:** Wow.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Okay, speaking of shipping, then, I was looking for... When I first saw this performance, I remember thinking that they left open this door at the end for Harry and Draco to be friends. I feel like this version of the play opened it even wider because not only are their sons best friends, but the implication that they're more than friends was --

**Lorrie:** They're going to have to be in-laws.

**JC:** They're going to have to be in-laws. They're going to have to spend holidays together.

**Lorrie:** Yeah!

**JC:** I thought, 'That is so interesting to me,' like going to Malfoy Manor for Christmas or something.

**Lorrie:** 'Awww, this is the table that's right over the dungeon where Wormtail died.'

**JC:** Right, exactly. Oh, my God.

**Lorrie:** 'Awww, this is the chandelier that Dobby...' Yeah.

**JC:** The two performances that I saw of the two-play version... It was very clear that these boys were interested in girls. There was this theme of Scorpius having a crush on Rose; at the very end he finally works up the courage to ask Rose on a date, and then there's this implication of this sexual tension between Delphi and Albus. I guess they're, what, fourteen, fifteen through this?

**Lorrie:** It's the same age as *Goblet of Fire*.

**JC:** Yeah, okay, so they're just starting to think about these kinds of things and having crushes and things like that. This version that we saw – and you had mentioned this before -- all references to these boys being heterosexual are just gone.

**Lorrie:** Yep. Erased.

**JC:** Erased completely, and it's very clear that their relationship to each other is the most important thing for them, and they talk about that a lot. The first version that I saw - - the scene where Harry's forbidden Albus from being anywhere near Scorpius -- there's all these scenes at the staircases, the moving staircases...

**Lorrie:** The staircase ballet.

**JC:** And yeah, everything moving... I remembered watching at the time and going, 'This is really gay.'

**Lorrie:** 'This feels shippy.'

**JC:** 'It feels shippy.' Yeah. It feels like we were intended to view it in a particular way, but then it didn't follow through, which as a person of a certain age, I'm used to that little bit of --

**Lorrie:** That's true. That's a generational shift.

**JC:** Right. I've watched *Sherlock*.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. At that age, you're used to being shown that, and then being viciously slapped in the face by the narrative.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** So you're waiting for the slap, as opposed to millennials and younger, who are just plain confused. Why would you go to the effort of setting up all of that emotional tension and then not carry it through?

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Why would you waste that?

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And in this version, they don't waste it.

**JC:** They don't waste it, yeah. That was such a joy to see, especially in this world that we live in right now. It was just joyful to know that that was going to be respected and honored, so they wrote the connection between these boys. I guess there were a couple of things... We talked about this a little bit last night after the performance about things that had changed from the first version, when Delphi is torturing Scorpius to get Albus to do what she wants.

**Lorrie:** Ouch.

**JC:** She no longer talks about Albus's strong friendship with Scorpius, but talks about Albus's love for Scorpius.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** "I know that you love him, and I'm going to use that against you."

**Lorrie:** "Your weak spot is love."

**JC:** When Scorpius wakes up in the fascist version of the world and Albus is not there (because Harry died as a child), all Scorpius can think about is getting back to Albus.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He talks about the line multiple times, and I don't know if this was there before or not, but it's "I need to do this for Albus."

**Lorrie:** Yeah. No, that was always there.

**JC:** Oh, that was always there. Okay, so yeah. It felt more...

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Well, because they cut down of all the other stuff.

**JC:** Okay, then, that's an interesting thing. When you cut things out, then what do you leave?

**Lorrie:** Yes. Gets emphasized.

**JC:** Yes, gets emphasized, those aspects of the relationship. There was that. I think all the hugging, all the tense hugs, were Albus as very excited just to give Scorpius these big hugs and Scorpius is very awkward. Oh, there was another thing: when they Polyjuiced, they Polyjuiced themselves into Hermione and Ron and Harry, right? Those are the three they Polyjuiced into, so the actor who plays Harry is now playing Scorpius being Harry.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Completely shifted his mannerisms to something that was almost pushing against the stereotype of the way that gay men behave. It was such a shift, and it felt like that's very intentional.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Wow.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and that's been a TERFpocalypse-long narrative. Rowling, from the beginning of when this play was first on stage, there was an outcry of "Please make Scorpius and Albus canon," and she pushed back and said, "No, that's not the intention." That was one direction of the tension, and then later with TERFpocalypse she just became much more prejudiced versus the world of theater. I think what I've experienced with *Cursed Child* is the larger the cast and crew of a play, the more powerfully, matter-of-factly gay the whole world is. You cannot pull off this incredibly ambitious stage production without the entirety of the gay world pitching in.

**JC:** For sure, for sure.

**Lorrie:** Where are you even going to find homophobes to be in this play? Who's pulling the wires for the costume changes? Who's playing the music? You want them to be all TERFs? You can't. You can't find that many TERFs on Broadway.

**JC:** Yeah, exactly. In the theater scene in New York? Ain't going to happen.

**Lorrie:** This is going to be a pro-trans production no matter what, because it's on Broadway or in the West End. I'm so angry. Speaking of which, the dress code has changed. The first time I saw this play was pre-TERFpocalypse and I dressed Ravenclaw. This time, you don't dress in a single pro-Harry Potter tone. I wore my T-shirt with Fox Estacado's graphic on it that said "Harry Potter Fan for Trans Rights." You have to dress for the controversy, for the complexity.

**JC:** You say that, but I didn't see very many people doing that. I saw a lot of people in house scarves, and I didn't see anybody in cosplay. I didn't see anything like that, but I don't know. I didn't get the feeling that the audience was overly thinking about TERFpocalypse.

**Lorrie:** I think other times I've seen it, it's been more...

**JC:** It's the first weekend of December. You have a lot of... Yeah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** But also, we got to the theater not long before the performance started.

**JC:** Yeah. We didn't miss the beginning, but it was a close thing.

**Lorrie:** Sorry.

**JC:** We didn't get a lot of time to people-watch, that's true.

**Lorrie:** But I did make you a scarf.

**JC:** Yes, yes. You made me a -- I was surprised with a beautiful Hufflepuff scarf that has trans flag colors on one end and rainbow flag on the other end, so that was nice. Now I can wear a Hufflepuff scarf again. I own several Hufflepuff scarves, and I have not really been able to wear them.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah, but I thought, 'Okay, I feel like I can wear this one.' Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, because there was a bunch of official merch. There's definitely a before and after where there was an era -- increasingly long-ago, distant era -- when I would have looked at official merch with a thought of 'Do I want it?' All of it's behind this thick barrier now of 'Even if I want it, I'm not going to buy it, but I so heavily don't want it.'

**JC:** But it was interesting to me, too, that there's a merch campaign commemorating Tom Felton's appearance...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** So a lot of the merch was more geared towards 'you came because you wanted to see Tom Felton in this and not because you're here to support J.K. Rowling.' I felt that when we looked at the merch. It's capitalism... I'm not saying that they're doing anything, really, but there was definitely a shift in what the merch looked like.

**Lorrie:** You know, it doesn't land with me to say, 'Oh, it's capitalism; therefore, it's empty.' It's not empty. It's capitalism, but also, it's because...

**JC:** It can be both.

**Lorrie:** When you come to something... When you come to see a story because it has an emotional pull on you, you're going to want to take some of that feeling home. It's too much emotion to just carry around inside; having something external to help you with it is beautiful.

**JC:** That is a thing that was a before and after, for sure. Before, I used to ask my students what Hogwarts house they were in. There are things that I cut out of my public display of Harry Potter fandom. Even for this show, I didn't bring anything. I wasn't going to dress in a particular way. I wasn't going to wear anything that indicated the twenty-plus years that I've been a fan of this series. It was not a thing I was going to do. Then you brought the scarf, and I was like, 'Oh, look, I can have a thing!' I saw people

wearing house scarves and things, but it didn't stand out to me. But again, we didn't get to do a lot of people-watching.

**Lorrie:** One of the heaviest, ugliest meta feelings about this viewing, of course, is that the first time I watched this play, the dark timeline was unimaginably distant. Now, as with other things that we've noticed on our reread, it's just room temperature, the worst, most disgusting, awful thing being that it was extreme the first time Scorpius shows up in the dark timeline and hears the dungeons with the screaming Mudbloods being tortured, which he learns was his idea in that universe. Meanwhile, you cannot encounter the news these days without hearing about literal children being taken by ICE and being literally tortured. It's no metaphor at all.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** And they're citizens?! They're at Hogwarts because they are magical children.

**JC:** They got a letter, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. This is probably my biggest complaint about the production that we saw last night: I remember spending more time in that dark version and learning more about how awful it would be. 'What would the world be like?' It's a question that fanfiction has explored, but it's a question of 'What would the world turn out like if Voldemort had actually won, if Harry had... if all of it hadn't happened the way it did?'

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That part of the play explores that in a way that I found very satisfying, because I think that's what we want in the story of our hero. We want all those sacrifices to make a difference, and I came out of the two-play version with such a strong feeling: Cedric Diggory's sacrifice meant something, and I feel like I lost a lot of that in this shorter version. Maybe it was because of the presence of Tom Felton and I was more focused on the relationships between the characters, but that was a really big piece of it that I felt was missing. I wanted to spend more time in that fascist world, partly because I think it's an important part of the story. Also, because of all the things that we have talked about on this podcast, I wanted to be in a room full of people seeing that.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** You know what I mean?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I wanted people to acknowledge that could be us.

**Lorrie:** And it is, actually, us.

**JC:** Yeah. I want people to acknowledge that and to see those parallels, and then have to sit with it for an uncomfortably long time and then watch someone fix it. I wanted that emotionally, and I didn't get it. It was over too fast.

**Lorrie:** Yes, it was definitely over too fast.

**JC:** It was fixed too easily.

**Lorrie:** I can also imagine that they were reading the mood, and maybe people don't want to spend a lot of time in that because we just turned off the news before walking in.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** But something that they did keep that came across very differently to me this time: I took it as a lesson when Scorpius tells Snape in the fascist timeline, "In my world, the other one (Harry Potter) does survive and the people who fought did bring about change, and we do know about your sacrifices." That's a message that I actively took away: it would be helpful (for us going through this timeline) to think there were things that we wanted that didn't happen, and remembering those helps us know what to fight for and not to just assume that this was inevitable and the only way to be. That's something that does happen. Sometimes I make the unfunny joke, like, "Oh, yeah, well, in the alternative timeline where we got health care..." but you do have to know what to fight for.

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah, I hadn't thought of that before, but that's true. That makes me again wish that we could sit in there a little bit longer... just another five minutes. Just a few more scenes in there showing that. I think that would have been good.

**Lorrie:** But the other thing, too, is that TERFpocalypse is affecting the economy of what show decisions this play has to make. It's a really expensive play to put on. It has a huge crew because of the very many special effects.

**JC:** Yeah. As I was watching it, I thought, 'God, this is expensive.' Oh...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Everything... Yeah. Wow.

**Lorrie:** That guided a lot of the decisions around what to cut. If you're going there with a mandate to cut, say, thirty minutes from the runtime (which I think they achieved word-by-word, editing down and removing things), then the things that you don't want to lose are the set pieces that are the special effects, so you build it around the set pieces. Then, when you see which emotional beats you had to take out, then you might want to reword and replace here and there, but you have to build it around the set pieces.

**JC:** That's true.

**Lorrie:** And no matter what, the ticket prices will always be super expensive for this show for that reason, and in an economy when TERFpocalypse has changed who wants to spend money on *Harry Potter*. What decisions are you making, knowing that this run is going to have Tom Felton? 'Okay, that's a huge built-in guaranteed source of income for this. Okay, we know that we have to cut it down.' It was just apparent to me what things they had to keep in mind to make it shorter.

**JC:** Yeah, and that makes sense if you're looking at the economics of cutting it down. Things that people go for... People want to go to that show to be immersed back in that world that they found so magical, and that's something the show does really well.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** From the very beginning, the magic happens and it looks so effortless that people gasp the first few times, and then you're just in that world.

**Lorrie:** They're in it, yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. You stop gasping because now you're there. That's done so well, and I think it was a joy to see that again, how well they integrated the magic into it. It's very good.

**Lorrie:** This is what you pay money for, hoping to have, and they do it for you. There comes a point fairly early on when you can relax because yes, you're being taken care of.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** The storytellers are taking care of you.

**JC:** For sure. I like that a lot, but getting back to the gay because that was where we were headed. The main relationships of the story are the father/son relationships, but then at the center there's Scorpius and Albus's relationship, and that is allowed to be at the center in the shorter version; we're focused in on it more. There's the beautiful... We see lots of little hints of it and then it keeps growing, but then I was really struck by the fact that at the end, when everything's kind of resolved and the characters are doing their little "We're re-establishing who we are and where we're going," Scorpius comes in and, like in the previous version, he had said he had finally worked up the nerve to ask Rose out; this time was, "I asked her to be my friend, and she said maybe," or something like that. It shifted there, which was really kind of fun to see. Then the boys are sitting on the stairs, and Albus says (this was new to me, and maybe it wasn't) something about Scorpius imagining having... It was a castle or something.

**Lorrie:** A palace of harmony.

**JC:** A palace of harmony and he was going to invite his friends, and Albus says, "Well, is that who you want to invite?"

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** There's this really beautiful moment where Albus reaches out and puts a hand on, I think, Scorpius's shoulder or something. It was a physical touch, and the physicality of that moment where the two of them were looking at each other...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** It was completely clear to everyone in that theater what that was about.

**Lorrie:** And that is a way that the staging of the production can protest against homophobia or transphobia without changing any of the lines, because none of that is in the dialogue that's written. That's something that the actress playing Rose did, I noticed (which has changed a little bit every time I've seen the show), where the line is, "This doesn't have to be weird unless you make it weird." Originally, what that meant was Scorpius asked her out and she said no, and with gestures and with timing and delivery (especially last night), the actress playing Rose emphasized "this"; what she meant by "this" is "Everybody knows that you guys want to be a couple. That doesn't have to be weird unless you guys make it weird." She shows up as someone who has rejected Scorpius's friendship -- doesn't want to be in their lives -- but hey, this part of it is fine. Nobody has a problem with this part and this part of it is real and that is all delivery, and no far-away billionaire author can control how individual actors play that every day on the stage.

**JC:** Yeah, for sure. So there's that piece, and then we move into a scene where Harry and Albus are having a conversation. Albus tells Harry, basically... Albus -- who's, what, fourteen maybe, going on fifteen at this point -- tells Harry that Scorpius is the most important person in his life, and then Harry says something like "I know;" then Albus says, "He might always be the most important person in my life," and Harry says, "I know."

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and says, "And I like it."

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. Harry's like, "I like him. Yeah, yeah. Great. Yeah." It very much was not lost on anybody in that room when that scene was about. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It was a little PFLAG commercial.

**JC:** Yeah, for sure. For sure. Yeah. I think everybody walked out of that theater going, "Oh, okay."

**Lorrie:** "Okay. Make canon."

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah. "Albus and Scorpius are a couple. Okay, yeah." Harry and Ginny are like, "Yeah, this is great," and Draco's like, "Oh, great, my kid has someone." Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** They're all fine.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. "Yeah, we tried keeping them apart. We're never going to make that mistake again."

**JC:** Yeah. Right.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And that was beautiful. Seeing that moment made me go, 'Oh, okay, yeah.' When you had said, "Oh, it's shorter and gayer," now I'm like, "Oh, yeah."

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Not only is it, yeah, shorter and gayer, it's actually making a statement that Harry Potter may have fucked up a lot of things as a father, but he wasn't going to fuck that one up.

**Lorrie:** No.

**JC:** He was... Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's not the gender of Scorpius; it's that he's Draco Malfoy's kid.

**JC:** Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Yeah. That part of it was really amazing.

**Lorrie:** Just the general *Cursed Child* PSA: I think the majority view of this play is that the plot line is trash and not canon, and I have a minority view in which I think it is absolutely the eighth story. One of the common criticisms of it is that the plot points feel like fanfiction; my read is yes, they're supposed to, because these are the ways that the fourteen-year-olds are making up stories to try to figure out what is going on in the fathers' heads and in their fathers' pasts. That's why it feels like embarrassing fan fiction: because it's being imagined by two fourteen-year-olds, and that Delphi is presented as a shadow because that's the Jungian term for some creature or projection of the parts of yourself that are so awful that you can't face them. Delphi, the child of Voldemort, is Albus's shadow self, the child of Harry Potter and all of the things about Harry Potter that are unknown and scary to him. As Harry very overtly says to Delphi in the finale, "When you bring the shadow into the light, then the shadow loses its destructive power and then doesn't exist anymore." No, Voldemort did not copulate with Bellatrix and produce live birth offspring. Anyway, yeah, the whole Delphi storyline is (in my read) Albus working through what it feels like to be the child of a person who had such a traumatic childhood that they fail drastically at an essential part of parenting.

**JC:** Yeah. I think that if you go into this show really thinking too hard about the plot... Whether someone takes the allegorical read that you take or not, I think that you

shouldn't look too hard into the plot. We were in a theater full of people who were there because they wanted to see Tom Felton, and like you said, they queued for tickets, they paid a lot of money, they clearly are fans. I heard people crying around us, people were laughing... Everybody in that theater was thrilled; people leapt to their feet at the end to clap. Go on vibes.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** If you're skeptical about the plot, just let it go. Go for the emotions, go for the relationships, go for the vibes, and go for the beautiful magic. Don't worry too hard about the plot; just ride with it. I think that it's an enjoyable experience. I think it's an incredible contribution to this series, whether you think that the plot is good or not. I don't know how else to explain that, except that I've already thought through 'The plot this, the plot that.' The relationships between the characters are what makes the story for me.

**Lorrie:** As always, yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. I don't care about the specific stuff. Did Voldemort fuck Bellatrix? I don't care. That's not important to me. What's important to me is seeing Harry Potter dealing with being middle-aged and being a parent and their kids falling in love. That's what I care about. I don't care about the other shit, so yeah.

**Lorrie:** The thing is, though, that if you're somebody who reads or follows this saga for Voldemort, it does matter. I would say trust this plot. There's a reason why this play works (even if you don't, on the surface, follow along), because the fact that Albus is imagining that the Voldemort that we all know through the Harry Potter viewpoint could have had a child with Bellatrix... That's about how you can't know what your parents lived through. We the audience have lived through meeting Voldemort through Harry's eyes, so we know no, the emotional reality of Voldemort (whether or not he ever had a kid) is not the same as what Albus can imagine decades later. That's just what it's like when you try to deal with the influence that your parent's past has on your present life as a teen. Of course, what we're really seeing is Albus and Harry play-acting their mental versions of what Voldemort and a theoretical child of Voldemort might be saying to each other. It's not about that; it's about the two of them. That's something that I missed, that they cut out for this version: Delphi's really wrenching and pitiful plea to the person that she thinks is Voldemort at the end, where she just says, "I just wanted to do whatever it took to be worthy of you, and to have you notice me and care about me."

**JC:** That's true. She died a lot faster in this version. They cut that scene way down.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. When that scene is given its full due, I hope and believe that it makes it clearer that this is the Albus explanation for why he's so miserable around Harry. What can he possibly do to force this legendary father to be happy with whatever Albus brings

to the table as a little tiny boy? “Why are you causing all this trouble, Albus Potter?” “Because you’re my dad, and I don’t know how to live up to you.” I missed that.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. I’m really glad that I saw the longer version...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** But I’m also really glad I saw this version last night.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** It’s interesting that this story has evolved and changed, because that kind of gets at the heart of what we talk about on this podcast. That text remains the same, but the way we see it changes. This is an interesting version of that because the way we see it changes, but also the text is changing in response to the world we live in.

**Lorrie:** Yes. It’s a living adaptation.

**JC:** Yeah. That is amazing. That’s fascinating, and that is a reason to keep going back every few years and seeing it.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. That’s the whole concept of the Broadway revival: what of that story is going to speak to audiences now? Because if you want the original, that is there as your foundation.

**JC:** Yeah, so I would recommend it. Ten out of ten, would see again. I would recommend it, and I think he’s in the production until May.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** If you’re listening to this, if you’ve been on the fence... If you’re listening to us, then you have complex feelings about this show. If you have the opportunity to see it, I do think it’s worth it.

**Lorrie:** I don’t know if any tickets remain.

**JC:** Really?

**Lorrie:** I don’t know.

**JC:** I don’t know, either.

**Lorrie:** They had to extend the run.

**JC:** Yeah, which is great. Great for everyone involved, but yeah. Anyway, I recommend it, and I’m really glad that we saw it.

**Lorrie:** I've been on board with *Cursed Child* since it was first published, and every iteration of it has felt fascinating to me. But then again, I don't read it the same way a lot of people do.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** And happy for me: I think the few people sitting to my right were Snape fans. They had emotional reactions to him sacrificing himself again in this storyline, and I did want to turn to them and say, "Oh, do you like Snape? Would you like to talk about Snape?" But yeah.

**JC:** "I wrote a whole book about Snape, actually." Yeah.

**Lorrie:** It was very nice to be in a theater full of people who went through something in order to get those tickets and really cared to be there to make the story together.

**JC:** Yeah. It was a little bit like being at a K-pop concert, in that way. Oh, everybody had to queue for these tickets. Everybody's been looking forward to this, everyone had to travel to get here.

**Lorrie:** Oh, my God. "Tom Felton is here. We can seal the Honmoon."

**JC:** "Yes, with our applause and our gasps." Yes, absolutely. One more thing about Tom Felton: he's small. I don't know how tall he is, but I didn't realize -- he was small compared to the other actors, and when he first came out, I was like, 'Oh, wow.'

**Lorrie:** Awww...

**JC:** But then I thought, 'I've seen Daniel Radcliffe on stage a couple times.'

**Lorrie:** That's true.

**JC:** He's even smaller!

**Lorrie:** Daniel Radcliffe is tiny.

**JC:** He is short, so yeah, but he ends up playing characters for whom that shortness really works. Anyway, yes, it was great!

**Lorrie:** Thank you, Tom Felton, for going through what must be a really huge emotional and career commitment to provide this for all of us who are in this story with you.

**JC:** Yes, absolutely. That was great. He fit so seamlessly into the ensemble, and it is an ensemble. The last part of that is truly an ensemble moment scene, and he just fit really well into that. He did a great job.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The way that he was such a major presence and part of the ensemble really emphasized that's what these stories are: everybody is an important part of the story.

**JC:** And they did a great thing with the curtain call, because I'm sure it was tempting to have him come out and do a separate curtain call and they didn't do that.

**Lorrie:** He did that thing where actors present when they want the audience to acknowledge somebody, and he waved toward the Scorpius actor. 'Make sure this child gets his due.'

**JC:** Right. So yeah... Very good. Yay!

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