

# Appendix Season, Episode 2: Holocaust Studies

## SPEAKERS

Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor, Andrea Dara Cooper

*(Witch, Please Theme Music plays) (Dance of the Priestesses by Victor Herbert Orchestra)*

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:09

Hello and welcome to Witch, Please, a fortnightly podcast about the Harry Potter world. I'm Marcelle Kosman.

**Hannah McGregor** 00:16

And I'm Hannah McGregor. And we're back with another appendix to our rebooted interrogation of the Harry Potter books.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:25

That's right, Hannah. And this is our first guest appendix, or should I say, append-Guest-temy?

**Hannah McGregor** 00:33

I... really don't like that, for a variety of reasons, including that it sounds like we're surgically removing our guests, when in fact, what we're trying to do is surgically suture them into our bodies.

*[Sound effect of person saying "Ugh, yuck!"]*

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:48

So to mark the occasion, I thought it would be fun if in the sorting chat, we talked about one off lectures that really impacted us. And that could be like a workshop or a guest lecture or a conference talk or something like that. And, yeah, I'll give you an example. By which I mean, I'm gonna go first. *[Laughs]*

**Hannah McGregor** 01:09

Thank goodness.

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:13

Okay, so way back, maybe 2009, 2010 no way to know, I attended a harm reduction workshop for service providers. And it was facilitated by the folks from Toronto Public

Health. I knew about harm reduction, which is why I attended the- I wanted to go to the workshop because I knew about it, and I thought it would be good. But I did not know the history of the criminalization of drugs in Canada. And that is what I learned in this workshop. The workshop introduced me to the very relationship between first wave feminism, temperance, and the criminalization of substance use, and it like radically shaped my approach to studying literature, if you can believe it, particularly in relation to the so called Famous Five, the white ladies who gave white women the vote in Canada.

**Hannah McGregor 02:05**

I am struggling to narrow this down, because so many one off guest lectures and unexpected guest appearances have ended up being so, so vital and so important to my learning, you know, the power of the guest. But I am going to say that, probably around the same time, like 2009, 2010, I attended a conference at York University put on by their Women and Gender Studies department that was celebrating the work of a professor who was retiring, it was a day long, sort of symposium conference, that was critical race feminism.

And it was my first exposure not only to this literature, but also to the experience of being a white woman sitting in a feminist space that was predominantly not white women. And the embodied experience of encountering my own whiteness, and the way that it signified in this space. And it was just a phenomenal learning experience and just like a really transformative moment, and it wasn't, you know, I just kind of went because it was nearby. And I was like, Yeah, sure, that sounds cool. I'll go check it out. That was like, Oh, well, this is gonna change everything about how I do my work forever. So no pressure on our guest today. But hey, yeah. *[Marcelle laughs]*

***(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)***

As always, we want to make sure that we impress our guests by brushing up on the relevant conversations we've had thus far. Let's get to it in Revision!

**Marcelle Kosman 04:00**

Today's topic is Holocaust studies. And although we've never talked about the Holocaust explicitly, we have touched on a number of relevant topics.

**Hannah McGregor 04:11**

Most recently, we looked at eugenics as a principle of social engineering and talked about how both historically and today, certain traits are deemed undesirable, which allows state run systems like immigration, health care and the criminal justice system to target, isolate and ultimately remove such traits from the general population.

**Marcelle Kosman** 04:33

And that conversation built on a number of previous guest episodes. Jes Battis joined us ages ago way back to introduce us to the idea of the social-cultural model of disability as resistant to the medical model that treats disability as a medical problem. Tea Gerbeza joined us a short while later to talk about control and management of neurodiversity and chronic illness. Aisha Wilks introduced us to mad studies as a lens through which to understand the aesthetic of madness in popular literature, and Mercedes Eng talked to us about the prison industrial complex as a contemporary tool in the eugenic and genocidal management of populations.

**Hannah McGregor** 05:18

We also in our episode on animal studies talked about how the human-animal divide is constructed deliberately as a way of dehumanizing people in order to justify horrific acts of violence against them. In fact, in our second episode on that topic, we drew from Aph Ko's insistence that the conceptual violence of dehumanization both animalizes people of color and anchors animal oppression to race.

**Marcelle Kosman** 05:47

There are so many relevant threads that we could pull out for Revision, but let's just get right into transfiguration class and hand things over to our guest. What do you think, Hannah?

**Hannah McGregor** 06:02

I think let's do it.

***(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)***

**Marcelle Kosman** 06:13

Well, now that we've proven ourselves as very good students capable of grappling with hard concepts, it's time to learn from our guest in Transfiguration Class!

**Hannah McGregor** 06:24

Our guest today is Andrea Dara Cooper, pronouns she/her. Andrea is Associate Professor and Leonard and Tobee Kaplan scholar in modern Jewish thought and culture at UNC Chapel Hill. She received her PhD from New York University and her BA from the University of King's College, and she is originally from Toronto.

**Marcelle Kosman** 06:46

***[gasps]*** Can con!

**Hannah McGregor** 06:47

She is the author of *Gendering Modern Jewish Thought* published with Indiana University Press in 2021. Welcome, Andrea.

**Marcelle Kosman** 06:56

Welcome, Andrea.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 06:58

Thank you so much for having me.

**Hannah McGregor** 07:00

We are delighted to have you here. I mean, I'm gonna say more so, now that we realized that you're Canadian? Yeah, I am gonna say it. **[Marcelle laughs]** It's bold. It's a bold take. I don't believe in nationalism. I think the nation state is a false construct. And yet, here we are.

**Marcelle Kosman** 07:17

And yet here we are.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 07:18

I feel strong ties to my home nation state, despite all of that.

**Hannah McGregor** 07:23

It's a funny thing, isn't it? How we can be attached to things while knowing that they're not real?

**Marcelle Kosman** 07:27

I mean, it's almost like Canadian culture is designed to do that.

**Hannah McGregor** 07:34

Yeah, that's all I want to talk about now. But that's not what we're talking about.

**Marcelle Kosman** 07:38

This is not a Canadian culture podcast...yet. **[Hannah laughs]** So, Andrea, you pitched this topic to us. Do you want to maybe start by telling us a little bit about what it is about the Harry Potter series that lends itself to a reading through the lens of Holocaust studies?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 07:58

Yes, absolutely. So when I first read this series, I noticed a number of parallels that I thought were a bit more implicit. And then I found that they were getting more explicit as the series went on, to the point that when I read book seven, I was just struck again, and again, by these like, really overt references, and I've compiled a bunch.

They're not in a handy chart, they're in kind of no form. But anyway, we can go over them later. And it struck me upon reading the series that the chronology was arranged to map on to the history of World War 2 and its aftermath. So in particular, the 1945 match between Dumbledore and Grindelwald, upon which Dumbledore is victorious. Right? That's 1945. That is when the Allies defeat Nazi Germany. And that's just one example. And so, it's possible canonically that there are other reasons for that timeline. But for me, as a reader, I was very much convinced that this was a deliberate move to reflect 20th century history of European totalitarianism and genocide, and its aftermath.

**Hannah McGregor** 09:23

Immediately, the first place my brain wants to go is to be like, okay, so what are the implications for the series if we're reading it as an analogy, but that is not the segment we're on yet. So we're going to save those very exciting implications for after we've learned a little bit more about Holocaust studies as a field and this is kind of one of your fields of study. Yes?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 09:47

Yes. So my graduate training was in Hebrew and Judaic Studies, and one of my current main research interests is in post Holocaust ethics and philosophy and, yeah, I'm really taken up by a number of theorists and thinkers and writers who deal with the ethical, literary, philosophical implications of this event.

**Marcelle Kosman** 10:12

So I have learned recently that it is a mistake to assume that everybody knows what the Holocaust is. And so I think that it might be beneficial for us to just start with a primer. So, Andrea, could you give us an explanation of what the Holocaust is? And maybe explain how and why there is something called Holocaust Studies?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 10:38

Yes, absolutely. The Holocaust was the systematic state sponsored persecution and murder of 6 million European Jews, by the Nazi German regime, and its allies and collaborators. And this took place throughout Europe between 1933, when the Nazis rose to power, and 1945, with the defeat of Nazi Germany by the Allied powers. Now, the Holocaust is also sometimes referred to by the Hebrew word Shoah, which is a word meaning catastrophe. And, you know, something I also like to think about with my

students is why we use the terminology we do for historical events. So Holocaust is actually a Greek term, which originally referred to a sacrifice, an all consuming, burning sacrifice.

And as you can imagine, that's a complicated term, because it suggests, right, that there is some kind of logic, a rationalization, some kind of an economy of sacrifice, and there is no way to rationalize, there was no way we can think about sacrifice in the context of, of this, you know, mass genocide.

**Hannah McGregor** 11:56

It makes me think of the sort of teleological impulse in how we tell the story of history, which is to say that there's so often this impulse to say this terrible thing happened so that...right? Because then, you know, these people lost their lives, but then we get x, and there's that desire to sort of apply a sort of logic of causality to atrocity. And that, that language of sacrifice has that subtext to me, that it's so much of how we talk about World War 2 and about the Holocaust was, you know, people gave their lives so that we could have freedom. question mark?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 12:37

Yeah. And a number of thinkers will say that martyrdom became impossible during the Holocaust, that people didn't even, people couldn't even die in the way that we thought about it before, because this had been an unprecedented mass genocide, you know, historically. So a lot of that language of sacrifice, and martyrdom becomes kind of just meaningless. So terminology is important. Also, you know, in a lot of departments and research avenues, we encounter Holocaust and Genocide studies, because of the importance of studying mass atrocity comparatively. And that's something I'll probably mention a bit later. But certainly, we can't study any of these events in isolation. So for example, there's a documentary out that thinks about the relationship between the institution of American enslavement and, you know, how Hitler was actually inspired by America's treatment of Indigenous peoples and enslaved peoples. So we have to think about these comparatively.

**Hannah McGregor** 13:45

The version of that that we often talk about in Canada is the fact that the apartheid system in South Africa was modeled on the reserve system used to sort of manage a cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples in Canada. That these are not coincidentally mirrored systems, that these are people, people learn from other atrocities.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 14:08

Yeah. So sometimes, you know, I find my students will often say that they've maybe studied the Holocaust in isolation. Oh, that's something that happened over there in Europe, but couldn't happen in North America. Well, actually, the ideas were a lot closer than we would like to comfortably think. So a bit more historical background. So the Nazi regime enacted discriminatory laws and organized violence targeting Jews, culminating in a plan that Nazi leaders referred to as the "final solution," which was the organized and systematic mass murder of European Jews. And the regime implemented this genocide between 1941 and 1945. Sometimes the term extermination is used, but I try to avoid that terminology because it actually takes up the Nazi goal to dehumanize.

**Hannah McGregor** 15:00

I was gonna say it's pretty dehumanizing, isn't it?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 15:03

It's very, that's very intentional, right? And that's something, of course, that you've talked about a lot in your podcasts, this language of animalization and racialization and dehumanization is powerful.

**Hannah McGregor** 15:13

Yeah. Yeah. So, so dehumanization in this way is sort of part of the larger sort of ideology of anti semitism .

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 15:22

Yeah, absolutely.

**Hannah McGregor** 15:23

Can we talk a little bit more about anti semitism as an ideology, sort of what it means and maybe a bit about its origins?

**Marcelle Kosman** 15:29

That's a great idea.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 15:31

Yeah. So Nazi hatred against Jews was based on racial anti semitism . And there's also a helpful article online that I can send to you all if it's useful. And so racial anti semitism is the discriminatory and racist idea that Jews are a separate and inferior race. And this developed along with the broader racist view of the world, that was based on the alleged superiority of the white race over other races. So Nazi Germany was drawing on

this idea of racial anti semitism . And this is based on the supposed purity of the white race.

This was inspired and enforced by the contact of European colonist conquerors with indigenous populations. This was inspired by, you know, so-called pseudoscience, or social Darwinism. And, you know, the thing about that term pseudoscience, is there's nothing scientific about this, right? Racism is not scientific, it is totally illogical. There's no logic, it's completely absurd to see other humans as not human is absurd. Nothing scientific. So I use that term pseudoscience. But I also try to, you know, point out that there's, it's really not scientific.

**Hannah McGregor** 16:50

Interestingly, I've seen historians of science push back against the phrase pseudoscience from the opposite direction, that they're like calling it pseudoscience upholds an ongoing belief that science with a capital S is a thing that is objective, and always true, and that at the time, like in the 19th century, this wasn't pseudoscience, it was science. It was institutionalized mainstream science, working scientists, universities were practicing eugenics. And so it is this desire to hold simultaneously in this weird term pseudoscience, to be like, No, it was the science then. And it has zero foundation in anything we would currently recognize as scientific knowledge.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 17:41

Yeah. And I think to go along with that, to remember that it was legal to persecute and target people at this time, it was considered to be part of the greater good, right? So what we think of now as morality, you know, that science, there's something inherently good about it, right? I mean, all of these ideas, they're constructions, they're ideologies, and what was considered scientifically good and great, and, you know, legal, was what we would today consider abhorrent. So there's that.

**Hannah McGregor** 18:16

Yeah. Another good reminder. Not only that, like science is not a sort of objective, a historical category, and neither is the law.

**Marcelle Kosman** 18:25

Nope. Indeed. So maybe, Andrea, talking a little bit about the law and how this was legal. Can you talk a bit about the, and I hesitate to use the word, logic behind racial anti semitism in the context of, for example, eugenics?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 18:42



So they were drawing upon racial eugenics, you know, this anti-semitic ideology, arguing that Jews spread their “pernicious”, this is in quotes, their “pernicious” influence by actually polluting so called pure Aryan blood, and they were polluting Aryan blood through intermarriage and sexual intercourse and procreation with non Jews. So they argued that this Jewish racial intermixing was contaminating and weakening host nations. And that this was furthermore part of a conscious Jewish plan for world domination.

**Hannah McGregor** 19:23

The thing that immediately comes to mind when I hear this language is people like Elon Musk saying that white people not having enough white children is the like, most worrying path that humanity is on, like this panic over like, quote unquote, replacement levels that like white people aren't having enough children to replace ourselves, which seems just like so patently eugenicist, but I guess that is what's happening in the 21st century. We're just bringing eugenics back and calling them edgy truths or something.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 20:04

Yeah, I mean, you can see in the white supremacist chant, right? Jews will not replace us, the explicit reference to replacement theory. So unfortunately, we have the persistence and proliferation today of these white supremacist and anti semitic ideas that if Jews are not the ones who are actually doing the racial intermixing, they're somehow in charge of this conspiracy. So whenever you hear this kind of language of a Cabal, or, you know, controlling or whatever, your ears should perk up and be, you know, a little bit concerned, or a lot concerned.

**Hannah McGregor** 20:43

You know what, I guarantee you, Andrea, I am really worried. *[laughs]* Oh, sorry, that was a panic. That was a panic laugh. Okay. So I wonder if we can come now to the ethical thinking that you referenced earlier, because you said, you know, you're teaching a course, you regularly teach a course on post Holocaust ethics. And I think, sort of part of the conversation for, you know, that we want to have in this episode is, how does the Holocaust as an ethical crisis, then inform how we think about ethics and morals moving forward? So can you talk to us a little bit about post Holocaust ethics? And, and what kind of theory emerged in the wake of these events?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 21:38

Yeah, absolutely. So I wanted to mention, because I didn't mention already that the reason for a lot of scholars in the field that we refer to anti semitism, without the dash with lowercase a lowercase s, is because we want to challenge their idea, the idea that

there is something called semitism. So the dash kind of reifies, the idea that there is this legitimate form of racial classification, right, so it tries to make this idea kind of concrete.

So by referring to anti semitism without the dash, we're, you know, trying to, I guess, challenge, or at least highlight the fact that this idea is a construction, that it's ideological. So how do we want to reflect upon the ways that different thinkers have responded to the Holocaust? So first of all this changes, we have some thinkers who are philosophically and politically responding fairly early on, Hannah Arendt is a great example. So she writes *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, not not too long after. And actually a lot of folks were referencing her work in the past number of years, saying that there are haunting parallels. So you know, she's thinking about these political structures-

**Hannah McGregor** 23:03

*[laughs]* Sorry, sorry. I don't mean to laugh, just the tone of voice in which you just said "haunting parallels" felt like, really felt like 2023 in a nutshell. Just like, and there are haunting parallels!

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 23:15

Haunting parallels! I know, I hope this episode isn't too much of a bummer.

**Hannah McGregor** 23:20

Colon; the story of Witch, Please.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 23:23

So Arendt is saying, Okay, how do we reflect on this history politically, philosophically? And, you know, what she's trying to do is to say, on the one hand, we can look at this genocidal history and say, it's incomprehensible, we cannot possibly understand it, we could never possibly think to understand it. And Elie Wiesel famously says, the only, you know, respectful thing to do is to be silent and not to, you know, question the victims. And this is very soon after the war. And so you have this question of, if we're trying to understand it, if we're trying to render it comprehensible, are we disrespecting the victims?

But on the other hand, if we don't try to map the political structures, the philosophical fault lines that made this history possible, then we cannot hope to prevent this from reoccurring. And I should say that we also of course, want to consider alongside this history, the Romani genocide, we want to think about the other groups who were targeted and persecuted as well. So there's the question of on the one hand this mass genocide is incomprehensible. 1 million Jewish children, 6 million Jews, 500,000 to

maybe a million Romani. So this is on the one hand incomprehensible, on the other hand, how do we try to understand this history? So you have different thinkers, for example, you have the critical theorists from the Frankfurt School saying how do we understand that a culture this advanced produced barbarism at this level, how does that challenge our conception of quote unquote high culture?

**Hannah McGregor** 25:10

I was about to say, I was like, advanced, according to whom? But I guess that's the whole point.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 25:14

Exactly. Right, you've reflected so elegantly on this podcast about the problems with suggesting there is high culture and low culture. Problems with suggesting that certain people need to be civilized and others are inherently barbaric, right? Well, if we reflect on the fact that the most so-called civilized community or a nation state was able to enact the most barbaric of acts, then this forces us to rethink how we understand culture, how we understand education, and how we understand community.

**Hannah McGregor** 25:51

Yeah, this is my, I mean, this is the point I come back to over and over again, when we talk about reading as an improving activity. But it is part of this larger, like, you can't make any, in the wake of the Holocaust, you can't make any types of claims about cultural sophistication having moral weight to it.

**Marcelle Kosman** 26:12

Mhmm. I think too, this is part of why I know this issue of the incomprehensibility of the Holocaust is so difficult to grapple with, because the reality of it is incomprehensible. And yet it was a systematic and deliberately executed plan. And so it is quite literally comprehensible in that it was designed, it wasn't accidental, it wasn't a fluke, it was designed and initiated and put into action. And so even trying to find a way to talk about the impact, like how it has shaped thinking is very complicated, because precisely what we talked about earlier, in that the idea of it being a sacrifice, or the kind of the teleological idea of, well, this happened, therefore, this, a kind of causality. And I am living in my body right now, the very complicatedness of trying to have a conversation about it.

**Hannah McGregor** 27:26

That desire to say, how did this happen, and that sense that any how will attribute logic to something that feels inherently outside of logic, because to attribute logic to it would be to normalize it, or to draw it into the world of rational human action. And yet, to claim

that it is fundamentally outside of logic is to let all of our human systems off the hook. Solve this problem for us, Andrea.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 27:57

Sure. *[Hannah laughs]* Yeah, totally doable. Yeah, so you know, what you're both alluding to, is the fact that this was a bureaucratic process enacted by a government that required the participation and cooperation of so many people. This was very much central to Nazi ideology. And, you know, part of the way that this was accomplished was to try to convince the German population that the Jews were actual vermin that needed to be exterminated. Right? That it was for the greater good of Europe. And I mention this because I think this will be relevant for our later conversations today.

So historians, philosophers, theorists, you know, writers will grapple with the question of how did so-called ordinary people enact such atrocity? You know, often my students are surprised that the only thing that was kind of driving certain perpetrators was the concern about being socially outcast, that was really often all that drove them, you know, to murder. So, there's just a number of sociological and ethical questions to grapple with. In my own research, I am interested in thinking about how identifying the human with the animal or with even, you know, the sub animal was essential to the anti semitic program. And how the racialized thinking that inflicts the trope of animality upon certain groups of humans has dangerous consequences. And we see this play out in a number of historical circumstances.

**Hannah McGregor** 29:51

So why is this kind of what you've called racialized animalization, why is that process so widespread in modernity?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 30:02

Yeah, you know, a thinker who has been helpful for me in thinking through this question of animalization and racialization is the literature scholar, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, her recent book is *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World*. And she points out that racialized animalization is essential to liberal humanism, and to the developments of what we might think of as, you know, Western liberalism. And she wants to think about how the very category of the human is contingent, provisional, alongside racialized and politicized lines, and how both humans and animals are animalized in an intersecting process.

**Hannah McGregor** 30:49

What does that mean? Can you unpack that phrase a little bit more?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 30:52

Absolutely. So you know, you've talked on the podcast about how the legacy of imperialism runs on the logic of the inherent good of the civilizer. Right? Or we might say, you know, the logic of enslavement depends on an assumption of species difference among humans. So these systems want to attach animalization to certain humans in order to disqualify them from ethical consideration, in order to mobilize and produce racial difference.

**Hannah McGregor** 31:29

And to define the human and who ethics attach to.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 31:33

Yeah, right. In order to define human against the other, and that other unsurprisingly is gendered, is raced.

**Hannah McGregor** 31:42

It's only surprising if we forget that race was literally invented in order to justify this process. Right? It's not like race existed as a set of categories. And then white people were like, which race shall we choose to animalize? Race was a technology of division that was used to justify racialization and animalization, as a justification for oppression.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 32:09

Right. Yeah. Willa M. Johnson points out that whiteness is a stable category, but an ever shifting category. Right? And so this is a category that is mobilized to construct and explain difference. And yet it has been attached to different groups of humans at different times, historically.

**Marcelle Kosman** 32:33

So Andrea, I just, I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about the relationship between these ideologies and liberalism. Because I think that in our current society, we try to think about who is racist and who is hateful, and who does the oppressing. Those of us who think of ourselves as progressive like to think that these are anti liberal ideologies, or that being liberal means that we believe all people get to be free, or I don't know, whatever, like you can hear in my voice that I don't believe the things that I'm saying myself. But I guess what I'm wondering is just if you can maybe unpack a little bit about why these are not ideologies that are limited to people who are outwardly discriminatory, and in fact are, you know, people just like us, people just like you and me.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 33:33

Yeah, that's, I think that's also a really great question. And I don't know, I don't know if I can answer it, but I can try to think through some possible responses and reflections. So we want to think about how our political realities are made up of systems that include and systems that exclude. And so post Holocaust thinkers have considered how the concentration camp is the paradigm of what they call a bio political system, which excludes certain humans from legal rights, right?

And there are links. So for example, Arendt, who I mentioned, and, you know, Michel Foucault, Foucault, Giorgio Agamben want to think about how ancient political philosophical systems that we might call quote, unquote "liberal", have produced, what they call bare life or life that can be killed with impunity, life that is killable, life that has sacrificable. And we see this also in the thought of Alexander Weheliye, who sees in modern sovereignty, a system that enacts social and political death as necessary.

So he draws on Hortense Spillers distinction between body and flesh to illustrate what he calls this thick historical relation between the Nazi death camps legal state of exception, and its colonial and genocidal antecedents. So what do I mean by that? He says we should see racial slavery, colonialism, Indigenous genocide and the Nazi death camps as relational. We're not reducing them to one another, but we're thinking about them relationally. I'm also thinking about Holocaust Studies scholar Michael Rothberg, who wants to think about Holocaust memory as multi directional. And within the context of colonialism and historical genocide. It's not a zero sum game of competitive memory. It is a relational context.

**Marcelle Kosman** 35:49

Thank you. That's really helpful.

**Hannah McGregor** 35:52

So since we're talking about the various paralleled versions of atrocities, I guess, maybe now is a good time for us to talk about the set of parallels we find in this book series. Huh?

**Marcelle Kosman** 36:07

I think that's a great idea, Hannah.

**Hannah McGregor** 36:08

Let's do it.

*(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)*

Well, we've talked about the history. So now let's talk about the ethics of representing that history as allegory, in OWL's! Owls-egory! I'm so glad that we're finally talking about the treatment of this series as allegory. Because it is something like it's sort of, you know, it's, it's kind of impossible to talk about Harry Potter without recognizing that it is an allegorical series, you know, which means that it's got all of these like, striking parallels to real historical events that are deliberately evoking comparison to those events as part of how you read them. And I do really want us to get into, like the implications of the allegory, but I think maybe we should start off by pointing out the allegorical things. Right? Does that make sense? Point out all of the allegories and then talk about the implications thereof?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 37:18

I'm sure there are more, I'd be really interested to hear others that listeners might come up with, but here are some. So we already mentioned Dumbledore's victorious match against Grindelwald in 1945. And it struck me on a recent reread that the sign of the Deathly Hallows, which is then appropriated by Grindelwald, really evokes the swastika, which was an ancient symbol appropriated by the Nazis, which was also not originally pernicious. So Krum is really taken aback when he sees Xenophilius Lovegood wearing, we read that filthy sign upon his chest, and Grindelwald appropriates and carves it into a wall at Durmstrang. And then it becomes kind of his sigil.

**Hannah McGregor** 38:06

Surely everybody has encountered some awful white hippie who's like, uhm, actually a swastika is a sign of peace, so I'm reappropriating it.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 38:14

Yeah, I don't think it works that way.

**Hannah McGregor** 38:16

But that does seem to be what Xenophilius Lovegood is going for.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 38:21

Yeah. So there are so many references in the series to blood traders and mudblood. So I didn't mention yet the Nuremberg race laws. These were enacted in 1935.

**Hannah McGregor** 38:33

Sorry, do you mean the Nurmengard?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 38:36



Exactly, right? Okay, hold, put a pin in that. Okay. So the Nuremberg race laws were enacted in 1935, forbidding marriage and intercourse between Jews and Germans. They were the so-called law for the protection of German blood and German honor. So right, this was part of the racist ideology that Jews had to be separate from Germans to protect and strengthen Germany. Now it does not strike me at all as coincidental that the author uses the term Nurmengard as the name for the prison Grindelwald builds to hold his opponents. When I read that, I mean, listen, our biographies always inform what we read, and I was reading book seven. I think I recently started grad school. I'm the grandchild of Holocaust survivors. I mean, all of this was like informing my reading, but I stopped and said, Okay, it's not just me anymore. This is no longer a subtext. This is text, right? I mean, like it is so-

**Hannah McGregor** 39:32

It's not just that it was the Nuremberg laws. It's also that Nuremberg is where so many of the trials happened as well. So it was like the site of the punishment of Nazis by the allied forces. So the fact that Grindelwald is in a prison called Nurmengard. It seems like quite a heavy handed allegory.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 39:54

Yeah, absolutely. So I think it's a deliberate echo of both the laws and the later trials. especially because as you say Grindelwald first builds it to hold his opponents and then ends up there himself once Dumbledore catches him. Another one is, I think, a kind of inversion reflection of the Nuremberg laws, which is the institution of the Muggleborn register. When the ministry falls to Voldemort, you know, we read about how folks have to prove that they have at least one close wizarding relative. So I see that as a kind of inversion of the way that Jews were identified as having three or more- three or four Jewish grandparents. One that I think is also like Nurmengard, Nuremberg, really hitting you in the face with the analogy is the slogan on the statue in a totalitarian Ministry of Magic after it falls. And this is "Magic is Might".

So this strikes me as an explicit echo of the infamous sign at Auschwitz, which was one of the Nazi death camps. Arbeit macht frei "work makes you free". This was, of course, a deeply ironic sign because you were only free insofar as you were free in death, once upon entering the camp. So I mean, even like the, you know, we have the alliteration there. And then I recently reread this quote, where Hermione ever the close reader, as you've all pointed out for us, actually notices that the throne the pure bloods are sitting on in the statue is, we read decoratively carved thrones, that were mounds of humans, hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, women and children press together. Now, to me, this evokes the mass graves; humans made into corpses.



**Hannah McGregor** 41:55

These observations are making me think of the question when it comes to this allegory of like, who is our Hitler? Is it Grindelwald or is it Voldemort? Like what is Voldemort's power if Grindelwald was defeated in 1945 and imprisoned in Nurmengard? What is Voldemort? Like it feels like a doubling of the allegory?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 42:22

Yeah, I mean that. That's a really good question. Hermione says, "all that right to rule rubbish. It's "magic is might" all over again." You know, she's pointing out that this for the greater good that Grindelwald, and earlier Dumbledore marshaled, becomes transmuted into "magic is might," so I suppose we could read this text as suggesting that history repeats itself. What do you all think?

**Marcelle Kosman** 42:52

Yeah, I think you're right. I think that there is an active thread in the series that history repeats itself, because of the way that the two recent wizarding wars are within Harry's lifetime, right? We talked about this a bunch of episodes ago, suddenly realizing that all of the teachers have PTSD because it was only a decade ago, when Harry started school, that they lost, you know, so many friends and loved ones in Voldemort's first rise to power. So I do think you're right, Andrea, I think that there's a through line in the text about history repeating itself, but I want to talk about it as an allegory. And so and so Hannah, do you want to, it's like, do you want to respond to Andrea? And I'll just, and I'll, I'm gonna save my question?

**Hannah McGregor** 43:46

Yeah. I mean, we're all we're both champing at the bit to talk about the allegory, but it's the sort of repetition of the allegory, right, of like, we've got its literal mapping onto a 1945 historical event. But then also, it's much more allegorical mapping on to the present day of what's happening in the 90s of the wizarding world, which I do think speaks, Andrea, as you were saying to the idea of history repeating itself, and I also think speaks to, you know, this is a British series, and post World War Two British literature is full of the haunted aftermath of the Holocaust, and of the Blitz and the, you know, all of these sort of, you know, World War Two, holds this powerful, imaginative role in post 1950 British literature.

And I'm thinking right now of that great Kazuo Ishiguro novel *The Remains of the Day*. Yeah, which is, in large part, spoiler alert for *The Remains of the Day*, if you haven't read it, which is the revelation that you know, the person that our protagonist Butler is serving, that he was a Nazi sympathizer, and that so many British people were Nazi sympathizers.

**Marcelle Kosman** 45:00

I mean, we have actual historical evidence that King Edward who abdicated the throne before King George, Elizabeth, the second father, her uncle, he was an active Nazi sympathizer. And we have evidence that he was in correspondence with the Nazis to help him retake the throne. So it's not even like, like for Canadians, we know how closely aligned this country is to England, and how closely Canada follows British practice. And so for folks listening, who, again, want to think like, oh, well, even if it happened in England, like it's over there. No, no, no, we're so closely tied, the relationship is so closely tied, and we have so zero say in what the monarchy decides to do, that if this had indeed been the direction that Britain took, we, as Canada would have been compelled to either go along with it, or to sever that relationship. And I do not feel that we have any historical evidence to support the assumption that we would have severed ties.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 46:33

You know, the Canadian policy, right, "none is too many" was to not accept any refugees. So we see this all over, we see this in North America and other, you know, other locations as well. But refugees were turned away, there was in fact, nowhere for people to go, Canada didn't want to accept any Jews, the US, you know, had a quota, etc. So that you have that kind of infamous Canadian policy, "none is too many" at the time.

**Hannah McGregor** 47:02

So I think that a lot of the work that the allegory is doing, I think, in part, it's just if we want to tell a story about human atrocity, the Holocaust is very frequently the imaginative go to particularly in a European context, that like we want to describe the worst thing a person can do, or the worst thing a society can do. That is the imaginative vocabulary for it. And I do think there is also the sort of idea of, you know, history repeating itself, which is so much of the way we talk about, memorializing World War Two and memorializing the Holocaust is about the danger of history repeating itself, right, that lest we forget, like, we cannot be allowed to forget this, because if we forget it, we'll do it again.

But that all really leads into this question of like, okay, so the Holocaust is so frequently the imaginative go to for an allegory through which we're going to talk generally about the human capacity for violence and for the dehumanization of other people. What do we think about the use of this event as a vocabulary of allegory?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 48:20

First of all, you know, the question of what you've all pointed out as the conservative arc of the series, ultimately, which is that nothing structurally ever changes. So if we're going to talk about these structures repeating themselves, why wouldn't they continue to do so? Number one, so how does that work with this allegory? And you know, furthermore, for me, the central question about the ethics of using this allegory is, what does it mean to use historical atrocity as the moral mirror for your series, without actually including anyone from the targeted groups in the narrative?

**Marcelle Kosman** 49:00

So this reminds me of a conversation that we had about how Rowling very loosely dangles queer content in the series by saying, Well, of course, you didn't know that Dumbledore was gay, because gay people act just like all of us. And it's like, well, that's not how discrimination works. And you have created a series that is ostensibly about discrimination while not providing any kind of representation for any of the people experiencing discrimination that you're attempting to represent.

**Hannah McGregor** 49:41

Yeah, it's an allegory for discrimination in a world that doesn't make any presents for the people who are being discriminated against but like, in a way that is then done very deliberately, which I think brings back your point, Andrea, about liberal humanism as interwoven with racialization, and animalization, is this notion, it's a very liberal humanist notion to be like, well, all humans are just humans and are indistinguishable from one another. And we're all, you know, like Hogwarts is a sort of liberal humanist ideal in which meaningful difference has been eradicated so that everybody can just be a human. But it's very conspicuous that this fantasy of liberal humanism doesn't have anybody who is gay in a way that is gay looking, like, sorry, I mean, no gay person is gonna be offended at the idea that some people are very visibly queer. And that visibly queer people are significantly more at risk for gay bashing. That's pretending that nobody is marked with difference is bullshit.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 51:02

It's homogenization. And it's a ratio and effacement.

**Hannah McGregor** 51:07

That was why we wanted in the original read through of the series to look for any actual Jewish characters.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 51:14

I'm so convinced by your Jew watch in the original series, right? No, there are no actual Jews here. Just caricatures and convenient, maybe historical allegories. And yeah,

maybe you know, you throw in somebody with the last name Goldstein, it doesn't count, because he's a token. And you talked about who is present at Hogwarts. If we don't have any characters with disabilities, if we have no real meaningful religious difference, if we don't have, you know, other forms of difference, then it's, you know, it's the same as this notion of toleration. Right? It's, it's empty.

**Hannah McGregor** 51:55

A note too, about the absence of characters with disabilities. It is one of those absences that, you know, Rowling has said, no, there are Jewish people there, you just didn't notice. Or, no, there are gay people there. They're just not legible as gay in any way. But she has specifically said that there are no disabled people in the wizarding world. In a Pottermore article she said, there's no mundane disabilities, which is again, like a fantasy of a world in which disabled people don't exist is a eugenic fantasy. And so the world that is being created here, in which our allegory is playing out, is already a world structured by eugenicist logic, which really undermines the allegory in some pretty powerful ways.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 52:52

And, and the assumed subject here is able bodied, straight cis, Christian, white, right? And so, you know, religious studies scholars have pointed out that these norms are never truly secular, these norms are always mapped on to, you know, specific worldviews. And I mean, and we see this, we see this in the Harry Potter narrative as well, in which everyone celebrates Christmas, we see this in the UK university system, which, you know, the terms are named, according to the Christian calendar. So I think it works in a way that doesn't work.

**Hannah McGregor** 53:37

Yeah, yeah. That sort of on the surface here. The sort of surface allegorical reading is a sound one, right? It's like, here's a world in which people are getting divided out according to their blood purity level. And that is something that has historically happened in many, many historical contexts. And it's being played out for us in this children's series, to show us that what starts as a form of bullying escalates so rapidly into something much, much more terrifying, and that any attempts to divide humans, according to things like blood purity, are a literal, slippery slope into fascism.

And that allegory is, you know, it's sound, like it's taken a thing that's happened in many historical contexts, and it's moved it over into a fantasy world and it's making an argument that is, I think we mostly agree with and yet, dig a little bit further down. And the whole allegory of the series starts to fall apart so quickly.

**Marcelle Kosman** 54:46

There's an author named Aaron Mukherjee, who writes about or rather the work of hers that I've read is about the whiteness of early so-called feminist utopia novels. And she she refers to the absence of non-white people in these novels as providential genocide. Like the idea being that something happened, that eliminated the problem of non-whiteness, and by eliminating it from the text, we can just not deal with it. And I think that in a lot of ways, that's what's happening in the Harry Potter series. Any markers of difference that would complicate the text have just disappeared from the wizarding world. Or have been applied to a convenient other creature like the house elves, or like the goblins.

**Hannah McGregor** 55:52

The centaurs, the goblins, the house elves, the giants. These are, like those are monstrous others, who not only are excluded from wizarding society, but who by the end of the series, we've sort of been given, quote unquote "good reason" for them to be excluded, like they are shown to be not incorporable into wizarding society. While simultaneously we're being told excluding people based on their blood quantum is bad. Voldemort is bad because he doesn't like any of these non human magical creatures.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 56:33

You know, there were a couple of passages that really, your point is making me think of how, you know, we're told Voldemort, considered house elves beneath his notice, he treated them like animals, right? And so we're told Sirius never saw Kreacher as a being with feelings as acute as a human's. So we're given all these examples about how pernicious it is to treat other creatures as non-human, as animals. And yet the series gives us no indication that it will do anything different.

**Marcelle Kosman** 57:07

What a bummer.

**Hannah McGregor** 57:08

Oh, you know, this conversation really reinforces my ongoing belief; allegory is not to be trusted.

**Marcelle Kosman** 57:17

Everyone's nodding.

**Hannah McGregor** 57:19

Everyone's nodding sagely, we all agree allegory, the most sinister of all the literary devices.

**(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)**

**Marcelle Kosman** 57:36

Thank you, witches, for joining us for another episode of Witch, Please. If you want more of us, and why wouldn't you, we're on Twitter and Instagram at @ohwitchplease and, of course, on Patreon, at patreon.com/ohwitchplease, where you can get all kinds of exclusive perks and follow along with our journey as we figure out what's next for the Witch, Please team. Don't do social media? No worries! We're working on a newsletter to keep you in the loop for all of our adventures. Also, we want you to read Hannah's book! It's called *A Sentimental Education*, and it's available in print and ebook, and she'll even read it to you herself if you opt for the audiobook format. Andrea, do you have anything you'd like to plug?

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 58:24

Well, I'm still on Twitter so you can find me there at Andrea Dara Coop and my book which came out last year is *Gendering Modern Jewish Thought* with Indiana University Press. And the fantastic artwork on the cover is by my sister Jess Riva Cooper, a Canadian figurative ceramic artist.

**Hannah McGregor** 58:45

Oh, awesome.

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 58:47

Wait, did I already shut up my dear friend Emily Sharp who introduced me to the podcast and is a Canadian literature scholar, also a Canadian expat academic living in the States? Okay, so shout out to my dear friend Emily Sharp. And yeah, I am a huge fan of the podcast and it's kind of surreal, being able to talk with you all. And Emily joked that I've been preparing for this conversation my whole academic career. So thank you.

**Marcelle Kosman** 59:15

Thank you, Andrea.

**Hannah McGregor** 59:16

*Witch, Please* is distributed by Acast. You can find the rest of our episodes at ohwitchplease.ca, which is expanding every day thanks to our awesome newest team member Gaby! You can also find transcripts, merch, sign up for our newsletter—heck just go check it out. Special thanks AS ALWAYS to our executive producer, Hannah Rehak, aka COACH! *[Sound effect of a sports whistle]*, to our social media manager and marketing designer Zoe Mix *[Sound effect of record rewinding]*, and to our sound engineer Erik Magnus! *[Sound effect of chimes]*

**Marcelle Kosman** 59:53

At the end of every episode we shout-out everyone who left us a 5-star review on Apple Podcasts, so you've gotta review us if you want to hear me

*I think there's been a glitch,*

*I think there's been a glitch.*

I don't know, something like that.

Thanks this week to: parisjetaime and byebyenary

**Hannah McGregor** 1:00:15

We'll be back next episode to add to the appendices. But until then...

**Andrea Dara Cooper** 1:00:20

Later Witches!

***(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)***