

Book 5, Episode 5 | Shapeshifting

SPEAKERS

Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor

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

Marcelle Kosman 00:10

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 Marcelle, this is a very special episode. Do you know why?

Marcelle Kosman 00:22

Is it because we're in the same room?

Hannah McGregor 00:26

Yeah, it's because we're in the same room! Let's talk about it in the sorting chat. *(laughs)*

Marcelle Kosman 00:29

What a good idea. So we can't actually hug while we're recording. But we did hug.

Hannah McGregor 00:34

We've hugged. I have held your new baby. And also I have played Legos with your old baby.

Marcelle Kosman 00:40

Yeah. My old baby. You know what? Keeping with our theme from the last episode of just talking about brand named products that we're really into those Legos. like the Super Mario Lego set that you were playing with, with Elliot. So fun, right?

Hannah McGregor 00:58

Yeah, it's absolutely incredible. There's a Luigi and he's got like a sensor in his butt and so he knows what color he's standing on and he reacts to different colors as though they're different surfaces. Listen, this episode was brought to you by that Lego Luigi I played with. *(Marcelle laughs)* This episode is brought to you by the color red and the concept of playing with your nibblings.

Marcelle Kosman 01:22

(both laugh) Score. Hannah, since you're here visiting Edmonton, why don't you tell us what else, who else you're going to snuggle while you're here?

Hannah McGregor 01:30

Oh my goodness. Well, I've already gotten some other high quality snuggles in. I visited friend of the podcast Claire last night and got to snuggle her new kitty, who is a still semi-feral recent adoptee named Gabby. Gabby the tabby. *(soundbite of cat meowing)* I got to just lounge with Claire and Todd on their couch.

Marcelle Kosman 01:57

Incredible.

Hannah McGregor 01:58

With their cat on my lap playing Mario? What's the one where it's a board game?

Marcelle Kosman 02:05

Settlers of Catan?

Hannah McGregor 02:10

(laughs) Yes, Super Mario, Super Mario Settlers of Catan edition.

Marcelle Kosman 02:14

That would actually be incredible.

Hannah McGregor 02:15

Yeah. That sounds really fun. No, it was some Mario video game that's a board game. Well, you need to go over there and you can play with them. It was really fun.

Marcelle Kosman 02:25

They've literally never invited me over to their house.

(Hannah laughs) We live in the same city.

Hannah McGregor 02:29

Claire told me last night that you have claimed you have never been in their backyard. And she was like we've lived here for five years. I think she's wrong.

Marcelle Kosman 02:39

I'm not, I was in her backyard for the first time for her outside birthday party.

Hannah McGregor 02:44

Just so listeners know. Marcelle now has a lap full of iPad and cat. So I've cuddled two niblings and a new cat. And tonight I get to meet friends of the podcast, Caitlin and Steve's Baybay, for the first time going to go snuggle Arden. I'm really excited. So that's basically the theme of this trip is that I'm just going to climb every mountain and hug every baby. But also, since I'm in town, we thought maybe let's record an episode in the same room.

Marcelle Kosman 03:23

Yeah, I think the last episode that we recorded in the same room was the Carry On episode.

Hannah McGregor 03:28

The one where we had a fight in your bed. Yeah, yeah, well, this one. We're gonna have the opposite of a fight.

Marcelle Kosman 03:35

Kisses? Coach is mouthing, she's miming Kisses.

Hannah McGregor 03:41

(laughs) We're gonna have kisses. Oh, we're gonna have a good time.

Marcelle Kosman 03:44

Yeah!

Hannah McGregor 03:45

All right. Let's just do it.

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Marcelle Kosman 04:02

It's been two years since we saw each other in person and we've got some reacquainting to do. So let's get started in revision!

Hannah McGregor 04:11

We can all agree the most important reacquainting that we have to do with each other is about summarizing major topics we've covered in episodes of this podcast. *(laughs)*

Marcelle Kosman 04:20

Listen, dude, you wrote the script.

Hannah McGregor 04:24

(laughs) Yeah, and I'm gonna make fun of it.

Marcelle Kosman 04:27

(laughs) As is your right.

Hannah McGregor 04:29

Yes. Thank you. So we're going to be talking today about shape shifting. And there are a few threads from previous episodes I would like to draw together before we take on that topic. First off, way back in book one, episode three, we

introduced the idea of animal studies. And during the episode we particularly talk about the divide between the human and the animal as an ideological divide. So the idea there is that humans are, of course, animals. And so defining the animal as that which is not human or the human as that which is not animal. It tells us more about the ideological notion of the human than it does about animals themselves.

Marcelle Kosman 05:11

Right. That makes sense.

Hannah McGregor 05:13

We also looked at how feminist, Indigenous, and Black theorists have pointed to the animal, human or human animal divide, as not just ideological but oppressive, and particularly entangled with white supremacy and settler colonialism, and their projects of creating discourses in which some humans are more human than other humans.

Marcelle Kosman 05:36

Oh, boy.

Hannah McGregor 05:37

With white men, of course, always being at the top of the hierarchy, the most human humans.

Marcelle Kosman 05:42

Naturally.

Hannah McGregor 05:43

Naturally, they made the hierarchy so they get to put themselves at the top.

Marcelle Kosman 05:47

They did all the hard work. (*laughs*)

Hannah McGregor 05:49

They did all the hard work of oppressing the rest of the world. So-

Marcelle Kosman 05:53

The people aren't going to oppress themselves, Hannah.

Hannah McGregor 05:55

That's a great point.

Marcelle Kosman 05:56

I know. You're welcome. And of course, don't forget Hannah, we also took a closer look at the dangers of creatures that cross the human animal divide in two different episodes. In our discussion of lycanthropy as a metaphor, we talked about how the dangerous border crossing nature of the werewolves has historically associated them with disability and chronic illness and non normative bodies in general. And we looked at how Rowling herself has claimed that her werewolves are metaphors for people with HIV and AIDS, failed metaphors, of course, because of the link this draws between illness and monstrosity. And speaking of monstrosity, we looked at some more border crossing monstrous bodies in our episode with Jess Zimmerman,

including villas, half giants, and merpeople, all of which are imagined as not quite human, and thus, not quite trustworthy.

Hannah McGregor 06:55

Mhm. We've got some more not quite human folks in the Order of the Phoenix, particularly the increasingly central role of the centaurs, but we're actually going to talk about them in a later episode. So today, I want to focus on shape shifting, and the various forms it takes through this book and in fact, the series as a whole.

Marcelle Kosman 07:14

What a great idea.

Hannah McGregor 07:15

There's a lot of shape shifting in these books.

Marcelle Kosman 07:18

You are right.

Hannah McGregor 07:19

So, to help us start grappling with what shape shifting looks like in the wizarding world I have made us a, you guessed it, chart!

Marcelle Kosman 07:28

A chart. I was just thinking the other day about how we have another chart in a while.

Hannah McGregor 07:32

Yeah, don't even worry about it.

Marcelle Kosman 07:33

Hannah. This is a very nice chart.

Hannah McGregor 07:36

Yeah, thank you.

Marcelle Kosman 07:37

I'm looking at it right now. And it is so nice. It has three columns.

Hannah McGregor 07:42

Oh my god, it's a three column chart. So the three columns are the creature, their shape shifting power, and the implications of their shape shifting power.

Marcelle Kosman 07:52

Oh, incredible.

Hannah McGregor 07:53

So, like a preliminary attempt to interpret, which we will return to, of course. So let's start with wizards. Your average wizard in the wizarding world can shape shift through the aid of polyjuice potion. So polyjuice potion makes you identical to another real person. You have to use their hair and so it can't be a made up person, it has to be a real someone. And we have figured out it can't be used for non-human transformations,

Marcelle Kosman 08:23

Right. Things go bad.

Hannah McGregor 08:24

Things go bad. When Hermione got some cat hair in her polyjuice potion, it turned her into a cat lady and she didn't de-cat for months. Hard to tell.

Marcelle Kosman 08:32

Can't remember for a while.

Hannah McGregor 08:36

Yeah. So the implications of that, I think, are that with sufficient skill and resourcefulness wizards can disguise themselves as others. So it is not something that people are born with. It is something you have to like, be good at school to do.

Marcelle Kosman 08:54

Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's polyjuice potion.

Hannah McGregor 08:58

Correct. Yeah. (*Marcelle laughs*) The other note I was just gonna make is that we only see polyjuice potion being used for subterfuge.

Marcelle Kosman 09:06

Oh, you're right. You're totally right about that.

Hannah McGregor 09:09

Which does lead you to wonder why it's like a well known widely available potion. I mean, it's not like, it's not easy to make, but like, it seems pretty easy to get your hands on the recipe for it.

Marcelle Kosman 09:20

I mean, listen, if a second year, if a 12 year old, no, 13- who even knows how old Hermione is ever, but like-

Hannah McGregor 09:28

Yeah, if a 13 year old can make it- Hermione's very smart. But like it is, you know, something an intelligent kid with access to like a high school chemistry lab can make. Sometimes it's easy to get your hands on recipes for things that are bad.

Marcelle Kosman 09:43

Okay, I see that. Next you have Animagi. Tell me about Animagi.

Hannah McGregor 09:46

Animagi. So we know a couple of things about them: the power is that they can turn into one specific animal at will. Always the same animal. That animal often has identifying markings like McGonagall's cat has spectacles and Rita Skeeter's beetle has antennae that kind of look like her glasses.

Marcelle Kosman 10:10

Maybe it's just glasses!

Hannah McGregor 10:14

Maybe it's just glasses. (*laughs*) But it seems that you have- that not only can you control the animal you turn into but that you can kind of decide what that animal is going to look like. Or maybe that it looks in a certain way the same way that your patronus looks a certain way, that it's like emanating some inner quality of you.

Marcelle Kosman 10:30

Yeah, that's a tricky one because we get like when we learn about the Marauders, right, we know, we definitely get the impression that they chose the types of animals that they would become. But also, Peter Pettigrew is a very sneaky sniffly rat-like person. And Sirius laughs like a dog. Like when he laughs he barks. So is that just because they've spent so much time being their animal selves?

Hannah McGregor 11:03

Very unclear which came first. But one thing we do know is that wizards choose to become Animagi. They're not born with it. And that it is.

Marcelle Kosman 11:16

So it is Maybelline.

Hannah McGregor 11:18

Is in fact, Maybelline. Yeah. And that it is tracked by the ministry, because they recognize that as a powerful and potentially dangerous ability.

Marcelle Kosman 11:28

That's right.

Hannah McGregor 11:29

But there's no stigma attached to it. It seems.

Marcelle Kosman 11:31

Yeah. We have no evidence of that. I mean, if there was stigma around McGonagall, we would know.

Hannah McGregor 11:36

Yeah, oh, yeah. And McGonagall is registered animagi. She does it in front of her students. They're not horrified. She doesn't lose her job. Unlike our next kind of shapeshifter, werewolves.

Marcelle Kosman 11:45

Oh, talk to me about werewolves.

Hannah McGregor 11:50

So werewolves also turn into an animal but they don't have control over it. They are forcibly turned into a creature by the full moon. And when they undergo that transformation, they lose control and become violent, dangerous, and potentially infectious. So they are definitely like there's a lot of stigma associated with being a werewolf.

Marcelle Kosman 12:14

I mean, not only do you not have control over transforming into a werewolf, you also don't have control over being infected by werewolfism. Lycanthropy. So yeah.

Hannah McGregor 12:26

Yeah. So like you choose to become an animagus.. Hmm.

Marcelle Kosman 12:31

We'll never know. (*referring to pronunciation*)

Hannah McGregor 12:32

But you don't choose to become a werewolf. It is done to you.

Marcelle Kosman 12:36

Correct.

Hannah McGregor 12:37

We've got two more that I want to talk about before we get to the one I really want to focus on. So briefly, we've got a few supernatural creatures that we encounter that are able to shape shift. Okay, so we've got the veelas.

Marcelle Kosman 12:53

Oh, okay. Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 12:55

So when they are angry, they transform maybe involuntarily, they don't seem to be associated with self control. (*Marcelle*

laughs) So they may be involuntarily transformed into monstrous harpy-like creatures.

Marcelle Kosman 13:08

I mean, ladies, am I right?

Hannah McGregor 13:13

You, you are right. (*Marcelle laughs*) And so you know, the implications of the veelas are like, don't trust hot women, they're harpies underneath.

Marcelle Kosman 13:19

They're just trying to trap you.

Hannah McGregor 13:20

Exactly. And then the other one is boggarts, which are like, by definition- exist only as a transform shape, right?

Marcelle Kosman 13:29

True. We do not know what the true nature of the boggart is because we only ever see it shifting shape.

Hannah McGregor 13:35

Yeah, because you can only see a boggart by seeing a boggart and a boggart turns into the fear of the person looking at it. It's a real ontological head scratcher. But like they're not really bad guys. Like people aren't like, oh, no, a boggart, like they're pretty easy to get rid of.

Marcelle Kosman 13:54

Yeah...

Hannah McGregor 13:55

They're more there to drive narrative in terms of revealing characters' fears and giving them a chance to grapple with them. That brings me to the final kind that I want to talk about and that I actually particularly want to focus on in this episode, and that is metamorphmagus, which is one, one of the worst portmanteaus in this book series.

Marcelle Kosman 14:16

It's not very good. It reminds me a lot of scienti-fiction.

Hannah McGregor 14:19

Yeah, scienti-fiction, same vibe. But two, we only encounter one. It's Tonks. And all the rules seem really different with metamorphmagus. So it's an innate power.

Marcelle Kosman 14:31

You're born with it.

Hannah McGregor 14:32

You are born with it. It is not Maybelline and allows you to transform your physical appearance only into other humans. I did double check this because in the movie, you see Tonks give herself like an elephant trunk. But in the books she can only give herself human parts.

Marcelle Kosman 14:52

She gives herself a pig nose. Is that also only in the movie? I can't remember.

Hannah McGregor 14:57

She gives herself a pig-like nose in the book, and Harry mentions that he feels like Dudley's looking at him. Right. So it's like a snub nose. So she can make small cosmetic changes, she changes her hair color a bunch. She changes her nose to amuse people. But hypothetically, she could make herself look like any person, real or imagined. And the implications of being a metamorphmagus are pretty unclear. But given that Tonks is an auror there doesn't seem to be much stigma affiliated with it.

Marcelle Kosman 15:38

Right, and she doesn't hide that ability. She uses it like party tricks.

Hannah McGregor 15:43

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So Marcelle.

Marcelle Kosman 15:46

Yes.

Hannah McGregor 15:47

Tell me. Do you see any interesting patterns or themes in these different types of shapeshifters?

Marcelle Kosman 15:52

Oh, boy, oh, boy. Okay. I would say that. Is this a trick question? (*laughs*)

Hannah McGregor 16:04

No. Absolutely not. I feel like I've started to notice some themes. If I think about it, I think that there's a recurring interest in control versus lack of control. That, like any transformation that happens against your will, makes you dangerous and suspect- monstrous in some way. Whereas transformations that you can control are generally associated with power, but that power itself seems to be maybe morally neutral, that like it can be used for good or for evil, but the ability to actually just change how you look, like...

Marcelle Kosman 16:47

Yeah, we never encounter anyone who is slipped polyjuice potion, unbeknownst to them? Right?

Hannah McGregor 16:53

Good question. I don't think we do.

Marcelle Kosman 16:56

I don't think so either.

Hannah McGregor 16:57

People only take it on purpose, with a deliberate sense of who they will transform into. But ostensibly, you could slip into someone.

Marcelle Kosman 17:07

You could. Yeah. Okay. One other thing. I guess this is more of a question that I have- this is less- I guess it is an observation of some knowledge that I lack.

Hannah McGregor 17:16

Truly a question is just an observation of a thing you don't know.

Marcelle Kosman 17:22

(laughs) So one of the things that I'm wondering about is, I wonder if it takes energy to transform into any of these things. If I wanted to adjust my voice, I would have to intentionally do that. It would take practice for me to do it in a long and sustained fashion. Or similarly, if I wanted to adjust my face, just using the muscles on my face, I would also have to- now I'm very hyper aware of what my face is doing. But like-

Hannah McGregor 17:53

We know that it is effortful for Tonks because every time Harry sees her do it, she's straining. She's like, hrrrrrrrrrrrr. Hair. That sounds gonna be great on mic.

Marcelle Kosman 18:08

Yeah. But then does she have to like- so she strains to change it? But then does she continue to strain to maintain it?

Hannah McGregor 18:16

Very good question. Which also leads to the question of with somebody who can transform themselves like that, is there

one default appearance that is, quote unquote, “naturally hers”? Or is it just the appearance that she happens to have chosen for the moment?

Marcelle Kosman 18:38

Wow, that's wild.

Hannah McGregor 18:39

Does a shapeshifter actually look like anything inherently?

Marcelle Kosman 18:42

Okay, so similar to the boggart, does the metamorphmagus have a default setting, a factory setting, if you will?

Hannah McGregor 18:52

(laughs) I mean, that gets us into really interesting questions about identity and appearance and performativity and essence, and I think we should talk about some of those ideas.

Marcelle Kosman 19:04

Oh, my God. Is there a default setting for gender, Hannah?

Hannah McGregor 19:08

Well, we're literally going to talk about that in the next segment. Let's go!

Marcelle Kosman 19:12

Okay!

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Hannah McGregor 19:23

All right. Well, much like we have magically transformed ourselves into people who are in the same room, (*Marcelle laughs*) it's time to magically transform your questions into answers in transfiguration class!

Marcelle Kosman 19:39

All right, Hannah, talk me through what you got.

Hannah McGregor 19:43

Okay. So what I'm really interested in exploring today is the problem of shape shifting as a conceptual problem related to things like deception and transparency and hypocrisy and the general expectation we have that the way things appear ought to correlate in a stable and predictable way to what they are.

Marcelle Kosman 20:05

Whoa, there's a lot. So we're starting from the premise that we, as a people, ideologically expect things to look the way that we expect them to look?

Hannah McGregor 20:17

Yes, we are constantly looking at things and arriving at assumptions based on their appearance. We are in the West a highly scopophilic culture-

Marcelle Kosman 20:05

What the fuck is that? (*laughs*)

Hannah McGregor 20:17

Which is a great word that comes from feminist film theory. Scopophilic is obsessed with looking at things, we love to talk about and think about what people look like, we love to talk about and think about what things look like, and we love to arrive at hasty and unthinking assumptions about people based on their appearance.

Marcelle Kosman 20:53

That is a thing. I don't know if I love to do it.

Hannah McGregor 20:57

(laughs) Yeah. Fair. But you do.

Marcelle Kosman 20:59

But I do it.

Hannah McGregor 21:00

And the way that you arrive at those assumptions is deeply ideologically underpinned, right, that you have been, we have been, we have all been trained, how to read physical appearances of people, but also of lots of other things. And that training happens unthinkingly, and constantly right from the get go through narrative and film and social coding and what we observe from other people. And, you know, we care about what things look like. But we also think that what things look like tells us something about what they are.

Marcelle Kosman 21:42

Okay. This is gonna be one of those episodes where I do a lot of learning.

Hannah McGregor 21:48

(laughs) Alright, so I'm going to be talking about a lot of concepts today, and you're gonna really get like Hannah at her most dilettante-ish. So, everybody out there who is an expert in one or more of the things I'm about to talk about, please feel free to send me 17 Paragraph DM's on Twitter. I love our listeners. So I am going to start by taking us back approximately 2400 years to fourth century BC, Athens.

Marcelle Kosman 22:20

I just got the bends.

Hannah McGregor 22:24

Because I want to talk about ancient Greek theater and the concept of the hypocrite, so hypocrisy comes from the Greek hippocrosis in hippocrites. I don't know if I'm saying those right. Anyway, the terms refer both to the literal act of performing a role on the stage, and to the general idea of playing a role including engaging in rhetoric, and outright deception,

Marcelle Kosman 22:54

Like lies?

Hannah McGregor 22:55

Yes.

Marcelle Kosman 22:56

Whoa.

Hannah McGregor 22:57

So as early as fourth century BC, Athens, those ideas were being tied together, that being an actor, made you untrustworthy as a political figure.

Marcelle Kosman 23:09

(laughs) I know I shouldn't, I know that this isn't the punch line, I know that there's so much more to come. *(both laugh)* I am literally lolling at the idea of a trustworthy politician.

Hannah McGregor 23:25

Oh yes. But that's like, so much of the political thought of Athens was really tied up in the question of how we knew people were trustworthy, and what it meant particularly to be a good leader. And this is part of why Plato in the Republic says that, like the philosopher-king has to be a person who's not actively seeking out political office, because anyone who is actively seeking out political office can't be trusted.

Marcelle Kosman 23:50

This is why people read Plato.

Hannah McGregor 23:52

This is why people read Plato.

Marcelle Kosman 23:54

Okay.

Hannah McGregor 24:55

Plato was also suspicious of art, by the way, because anything that is a layer of representation away from reality becomes more suspect. Like the further you get from the real thing, the more suspicious it is.

Marcelle Kosman 24:09

So Plato obviously never read. All too, certain.

Hannah McGregor 24:13

You know what, there's not a lot of things I'm willing to say for sure, but I'm willing to say for sure, that Plato did not read Althusser.

Marcelle Kosman 24:23

That's a really funny joke for listeners who don't know, because Althusser comes about, like 4000 years later, what year, what year was Plato writing by?

Hannah McGregor 24:31

I think Plato was like a few centuries BC.

Marcelle Kosman 24:35

So, 2000 years later.

Hannah McGregor 24:36

Some thousand years later.

Marcelle Kosman 24:38

This is funny.

Hannah McGregor 24:39

It's very funny. It's a history joke. It's a fact based joke.

(Marcelle laughs)

So Socrates was also Socrates, teacher of Plato, also famously suspicious of rhetoricians. Socrates had this whole idea that being really good with words made it possible to disguise your real intentions, and he was like hella into truth, like Socrates literally died rather than even being willing to lie to some people about his intentions.

Marcelle Kosman 25:07

Never been that committed to anything.

Hannah McGregor 25:09

They were like, please just pretend that you're gonna stop critiquing the government. And he was like, nope, time to take some poison.

Marcelle Kosman 25:17

Wow.

Hannah McGregor 25:18

So really, that begins a long history of associating the belligerent refusal to shift your stance on things with moral virtue.

Marcelle Kosman 25:29

Wow. *(laughs)* Well, that is an unfortunate trend.

Hannah McGregor 25:32

Mhm. But it's a trend I think we can still see today.

Marcelle Kosman 25:35

Oh, *yeah* we can!

Hannah McGregor 25:32

(laughs) Yeah, that suspicion of actors continued, by the way, like, up to, I don't know, now, with actors continuing to be morally suspect in multiple cultures throughout history, because of their tendency to disguise their true identities. Yeah. So being able to disguise the true self also had other implications, including the idea that there's a true self.

Marcelle Kosman 26:01

Oh, shit. Oho...

Hannah McGregor 26:02

Yeah. And that said true self should be mirrored both in one's appearance and one's behaviors.

Marcelle Kosman 26:08

Okay. Okay. Okay.

Hannah McGregor 26:10

The idea that we associate that with is authenticity.

Marcelle Kosman 26:15

Etymologically connected to the idea of authority and authorship.

Hannah McGregor 26:20

Yeah, absolutely. So authenticity requires self knowledge, which gets us into the next category I want to talk about, which is the idea of appearance versus identity. Come on this wild ride with me.

Marcelle Kosman 26:37

Okay.

Hannah McGregor 26:38

This is what it's like inside my brain all the time. It's real fun. So scholar Llewellyn Negrin, in an article on appearance and identity argues that the postmodern obsession with physical appearance has to do with the proliferation of regimes and technologies for altering the body.

Marcelle Kosman 26:55

Okay, I'll let you continue. But I have so many questions about this already.

Hannah McGregor 26:58

Yeah, I'm gonna read you this quote and then ask some questions about it, because I think this quote deserves some pressure being applied to it. So they say and I quote, "in our modern consumer culture, a new conception of the self has emerged, namely, the self as performer which places great emphasis upon appearance, display and the management of impressions. This replaces the 19th century concern with character in which primacy was given to such qualities as citizenship, democracy, duty, work, honor, reputation and

morals, whereas previously, greater emphasis was placed on other sources of identity formation than that of personal appearance. Increasingly, the self is defined primarily in aesthetic terms, that is, in terms of how one looks, rather than in terms of what one does.”

Marcelle Kosman 27:48

Oh, wow, okay, we're on a ride. There are definitely some things from this quotation that really speak to my understanding of the world. You know, like, Yes, I do know that this concept of character was once a thing that people talked about not ironically, it was defined by and used to define certain types of people. And, yeah, okay, totally, there are a lot of assumptions and emphasis placed on the appearance of people and what we look like and what we are expected to look like in certain contexts.

Hannah McGregor 28:25

But if in the 19th century people didn't like people who were hot and terrible, explain Lord Byron to me.

Marcelle Kosman 28:36

(laughs) Oh, okay. Yeah, cuz he's because Negrin is suggesting that these two things, like, one replaces the other?

Hannah McGregor 28:42

Kind of, or that one outweighs the other now.

Marcelle Kosman 28:46

Okay. Yeah, I'm skeptical of that because while we might not use the term character to refer to someone's, I don't know, morality or virtues, we certainly still assign a lot of authority and credibility to people of a certain type. And that's just, we're just coming up with different words for character now, we use words like responsible, respectable.

Hannah McGregor 29:12

Respectability. We also are obsessed today with both authenticity, and relatability is like a huge thing. Think about how many influencers, their brand is not only looking a certain way, and producing an impression of their life that is a certain way, but also performing a kind of relatability. Like, I'm just like you, and relatability has as sort of an expectation consistency, right, that you've got to have a sort of internally consistent self. That can be flawed, right? You're not trying to set yourself up as a moral paragon. But you are still expected to be a good person, if you want to have a following.

Marcelle Kosman 30:05

I don't even know if people are expected to be good. So much is consistent. If you think about the Jenners and the Kardashians. I'm not sure that people follow them. I'm not sure people keep up with them.

Hannah McGregor 30:17

(laughs) I see what you did there. *(Soundbite of drum kit punchline)*

Marcelle Kosman 30:21

Because they aren't good, but they are consistent, you know what to expect, which is sometimes the unexpected, but not like, "I'm going to give up all of my possessions and become a nun" unexpected.

Hannah McGregor 30:33

There are still like, we see a lot of conversations happening right now about canceling people because of their bad behavior. So there is still kind of a moralism getting attached particularly to the way that celebrities behave. And an ongoing disdain for hypocrisy, which suggests again, that even in a culture that is obsessed with what people look like, there is still an expectation somehow that their appearance has to match their insides.

Marcelle Kosman 31:01

Oh, okay.

Hannah McGregor 30:02

So I don't think it's quite that clear cut this difference between we used to care about character, and now we care about appearance. But I'm particularly interested in this, "we used to care about character" idea being sort of implicitly presented as like that was better than caring about appearance.

Marcelle Kosman 31:26

Oh yeah. I am always suspicious of any attempt to be like things used to be better in a moralistic way.

Hannah McGregor 31:34

So I don't want to necessarily assign that motivation to Negrin, but I think that it can be tempting to say, oh, we care about appearance now, we used to care about substance. So let's add a little history to that idea of caring about substance.

Marcelle Kosman 31:49

Oooooooooo!

Hannah McGregor 31:50

Yeah, you guessed it, it's time to talk about Calvinism!

Marcelle Kosman 31:52

I did guess. (*Hannah laughs*) No, I didn't.

Listeners, I could never have guessed that we were gonna go into Calvinism.

Hannah McGregor 31:59

You could never have guessed it. So let's talk about predestination. Let's talk about the theological concept of predestination.

Marcelle Kosman 32:02

Hit me up.

Hannah McGregor 32:08

So, predestination was a Protestant idea. Calvinist specifically, as in Calvin was the guy who, like, advocated for it.

Marcelle Kosman 32:17

So Calvin was a Protestant, and he was like, here's a particular idea that I have, y'all are gonna love it.

Hannah McGregor 32:23

Yeah. And what he thought they were going to love is the idea that God already knows if you are saved or damned, you can't convince God to do anything.

Marcelle Kosman 32:38

Because he sees you when you're sleeping. (*Hannah laughs*) He knows when you're awake.

(*Both singing*) He knows if you've been bad or good. So be good, for goodness sake.

Hannah McGregor 32:48

Uh, you better watch out because you can't buy your way into heaven. And that is very specifically a critique of the Catholic system of indulgences.

Marcelle Kosman 33:03

Yes. Okay. I do remember this. Where you pay money to the church to have some sins forgiven. And you could do that on behalf of people who had already passed. So like, your dad was a real bad guy. And now he's dead. But you don't want

him to spend too much time in Purgatory. So you would give the Catholic Church some money, and they would just, like, bump him up on the list for the goodness transplant.

Hannah McGregor 33:34

Yes. And it was, like, big business. Like, they were getting a lot of money and so very, we can see how that very quickly becomes, rich people get into heaven faster than poor people. Which is like, well, that seems wrong. I've read the Bible. That doesn't seem to be what they were into.

Marcelle Kosman 33:52

(laugh) It does explain why the Catholic Church has so much money right now.

Hannah McGregor 33:57

So much Money. Fun fact about indulgences. That was actually the first thing that Gutenberg printed in his print workshop in Mainz with movable type.

Marcelle Kosman 34:05

That is a fun fact.

Hannah McGregor 34:06

Yeah. Before he started the Bible project, he was printing indulgences.

Marcelle Kosman 34:10

So we have indulgences to thank for print, is what you're saying? Thank you.

Hannah McGregor 34:14

Yeah, thank you indulgences. So predestination was basically like a theological attempt to push back against this idea that you could sucker God into letting you into heaven faster by giving them some money.

Marcelle Kosman 34:29

Not even giving him money, but giving the church money.

Hannah McGregor 34:31

The church is His representation on Earth. Yeah. So.

Marcelle Kosman 34:35

(laughs) God doesn't need your money.

Hannah McGregor 34:37

God does not need your money. So the idea was that God is all knowing, and that God's omniscience also spans time. So it's not like God thinks you're damned now, but we'll be surprised later on to find out that actually you're a pretty good guy. God just knows. But that means that nothing you can do will change it.

Marcelle Kosman 34:57

So there's no point.

Hannah McGregor 35:00

So, rather than fixating on good works, to try to like, earn your way into heaven, Calvinists started to get really fixated

on the idea of internally directed self scrutiny to figure out if you were saved or not. So Calvinism is often linked to the rise of practices like journaling and autobiography in general. You kind of would obsessively review your own intentions and motivations to figure out if you were saved or damned. Like you wanted to be somebody who did good works. But the point wasn't that the works themselves mattered. The point was the motivation. You wanted to be somebody who wanted to do good works, you wanted to not only be a hard working person, but you wanted to be somebody who loved working hard.

Marcelle Kosman 35:51

I hate working hard.

Hannah McGregor 35:52

Which is where we get the Protestant work ethic.

Marcelle Kosman 35:56

Oh, of course.

Hannah McGregor 35:57

Right? So this is Max Weber's concept of the idea that Calvinism and its obsession with like, self scrutinizing and wanting to have the right kinds of intentions, tied in really well to capitalism, which was like it is a virtue to work hard.

Marcelle Kosman 36:15

And if only you worked hard, you would be better off in the world.

Hannah McGregor 36:19

Mm hmm. So this whole idea of like, moralizing things like work, like self restraint, self control, self management, those are all deeply Calvinist ideas. So it's like, being lazy is not only bad for capitalism, it is morally bad, because it says that you are not saved. Because if you were saved, you would just *love* working.

Marcelle Kosman 36:47

And we absolutely see this when we think about, like, we see this literally today like today on the radio, when people talk about how they can't get employees, because the government's pandemic relief fund gives them too much money to just stay home and do nothing. There's like a moralistic disparagement that continues to this very second, for anybody who would rather *not work* than work.

Hannah McGregor 37:16

And it's really important that that work is voluntary, because we don't have as positive a moral association with people who have to work three jobs to pay the rent, as opposed to people who would be fine working less, but choose to work more because they love it.

Marcelle Kosman 37:38

Yeah, yeah. Nobody looks at people who worked three jobs in order to pay the rent and support their family and think, wow, those are the saved people. I mean, I think that that's

sort of implicit in a lot of things. But that's not actually how it works.

Hannah McGregor 37:54

I mean, the American Dream is tied up in the Protestant work ethic. So the argument that Negrin is making, that the site of self scrutiny has begun to switch from the internal to the external. So we're really fixated on controlling how we look rather than like what we're like inside. Which I think it's a bit of an oversimplification. But I do think sort of the cause and effect has shifted. So we're still really obsessed with the moral value of self control and self restraint. It's just that we increasingly think that that's a thing that we can tell by looking at people.

Marcelle Kosman 38:32

Okay, let's take glitter, for example. If you are a person who enjoys glitter, as I certainly do, glitter is not evidence of my moral goodness, glitter is frivolous, and makes me look silly, and not serious.

Hannah McGregor 38:50

So things that teen girls like are silly and frivolous.

Marcelle Kosman 38:53

Of course.

Hannah McGregor 38:54

Things that queers like are silly and frivolous. Cultures associated with black women are silly and frivolous, of

course, write things that white men like and to a slightly lesser, but still significant degree, adult middle class white women like those are serious things.

Marcelle Kosman 39:13

I see. I see. I see.

Hannah McGregor 39:15

And those things often indicate inner virtue, which we see in things like what I call the Joe Rogan School of Public intellectualism.

Marcelle Kosman 39:28

Tell me more about this.

Hannah McGregor 39:30

I think that a big reason why people think that Joe Rogan is allowed to be a moral authority on various topics is because he's good at CrossFit.

Marcelle Kosman 39:39

f\ For our listeners, and also possibly me, who is Joe Rogan?

Hannah McGregor 39:43

Joe Rogan is an extremely popular podcaster. He's a very, like centrist white male who likes to just have a really wide variety of opinions on, and just be like, Oh, I'm just learning, I'm not backing any of these things.

(Marcelle makes a retching sound)

I'm just asking questions. But his authority, I think, is very closely tied to the fact that he is a very physically fit person. I think that in contemporary Western culture, your moral authority is inversely related to your percentage of body fat. Because we are obsessed with qualities like self management, self control and self restraint. We still believe that those are morally good qualities, and we think that they are perceptible from the outside. So we're still obsessed with character, we just think that character is legible through bodily management.

Marcelle Kosman 40:38

Wow, this checks out. I follow you. Sorry, wait, when I say this checks out-

Hannah McGregor 40:44

(laughs) You're like, yes, I also believe that. It sounds true to me.

Marcelle Kosman 40:49

This makes a lot of sense. I hear what you're saying.

Hannah McGregor 40:53

The last topic I want to touch on is performativity. So what we've talked about so far is this anxiety about a division between internal self and external self, and an expectation that morality is legible, legible by you as you like, confront yourself, but also ultimately legible from the outside. Because if you are managing yourself properly, you will

appear as managed to other people. So this suggests all kinds of things, including that we are legible, and that our outsides have some sort of intrinsic relationship to our insides, and that we have a stable thing called an identity. Which brings us to performativity.

Marcelle Kosman 41:37

Okay, so tell me what Judy B has to say.

Hannah McGregor 41:41

Oh Judy B. Performativity. For those of you unfamiliar, this is a concept associated most strongly with Judith Butler's book, Gender Trouble. And it's part of queer theories, radical reshaping of how we think about the relationship between appearance and identity, body and self performance and reality. So Butler is pushing back against the idea that there is a stable and knowable thing called sex, and that gender maps against it perfectly and naturally, so performativity refuses the idea that there is a stable gender with a stable relationship to sex, instead arguing that and this is from 2011, like clarification on performativity that they wrote that quote, "nobody really is a gender from the start" end quote, so Butler, also differentiates between performance, which is something an individual can do with an intention, right, like putting on a show, and performativity, which is an ongoing and collective process without an individual behind it. So the individual might create a performance, but performativity creates the individual.

Marcelle Kosman 42:51

Whoa, okay.

Hannah McGregor 41:52

So what's important there is that we distinguish between saying that gender is performative is not the same thing as saying, I woke up this morning and made the decision to do my gender in a particular way. And that's not, I mean, that's fine. Like, I also perform my gender. And that's fun and empowering. And the thing I enjoy doing, like fucking with my own gender, and like thinking about my gender, and like, expressing it, or questioning it, or playing with it through fashion and dress, but genders' performativity is there to remind us that identities are collectively created through a series of repeated gestures.

Marcelle Kosman 43:37

Okay. Tell me if I'm understanding you right. So the idea of performativity is that you can't choose to opt out of performing your gender. Like you can choose how you want to perform your gender. But you can't choose to not perform any gender.

Hannah McGregor 44:05

Not quite. The whole idea that you've got a gender and that you are performing it in a way that either aligns with or subverts it comes from the performative process of gendering that begins the moment you are born. Right? So the performances include the doctor saying, it's a boy or it's

a girl and then the way everybody reacts to you, the way everybody, like it's all of the subtle constant actions and speech acts that we engage with that codifies and reinforces gender as though it were a stable thing.

Marcelle Kosman 44:48

Okay. I think I didn't ask my clarification question properly, because I think what I'm trying to understand is like performativity is the fact that these things are ideological and exist outside of any individual's decision. Yes, like you can't stop being in the play.

Hannah McGregor 45:08

You can't stop being in the play. But what you can do is recognize that it's a play and fuck with it. Which is why drag is so interesting because drag is an embrace of the performativity of gender that recognizes it as, god, I think it's Guy Branum once wrote on Twitter, that drag basically turns gender into a fart joke, which I love.

Marcelle Kosman 45:33

(laughs) So does Coach. Look it. Look it. Coach loves Guy Branum.

Hannah McGregor 45:36

Oh, yeah, Guy Branum is great.

Marcelle Kosman 45:37

No wait. I'm thinking of Bo Burnham. Nevermind. *(laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 45:40

Coach does love Bo Burnham.

Marcelle Kosman 45:42

Yeah, I think I was confusing Guy Branum with Bo Burnham.

Hannah McGregor 45:46

Some bad faith readers have suggested that Butler's work supports the reality of biology.

Marcelle Kosman 45:52

Oh no.

Hannah McGregor 45:53

Yeah, it doesn't. It doesn't. It does no such thing. Yeah, absolutely not. Rather, what they are saying is essentially that the fetishization of biological sex as real and stable and binary, is itself an ideological construction. And like any biologist will confirm that but like there's absolutely not two biological sexes. That is made up that is not how sex works in humans or any other species just not true.

We might note how adamantly TERF;s and other anti trans rights advocates insist on their ability to visually recognize people's biological sex, just by looking at them. And at the root of that insistence, which is constant and incorrect, is the ongoing fantasy that there is some sort of stable, fixed identity that is knowable, and that any attempt to disguise

yourself as something that you aren't, is always a sign of moral suspicion, or outright criminality.

Marcelle Kosman 47:00

And this brings us full circle to what does the metamorphmagus just truly look like?

Hannah McGregor 47:08

Exactly. So let's talk about.

Marcelle Kosman 47:10

Oh, my gosh.

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

All of this sounds like a real hoot. So let's talk about it more in O.W.L's. *(Soundbite of owl hooting)*

Hannah McGregor 47:29

I really want to talk about Tonks. But just briefly, before we get into Tonks, I want to note that this book shares the general sort of like Western suspicion of hypocrisy.

Marcelle Kosman 47:41

Oh, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 47:42

And we really see that in terms of how morally suspicious anyone who cares about appearance over substance is. Right? The Dursleys? Obsessed.

Marcelle Kosman 47:51

Obsessed with appearance.

Hannah McGregor 47:54

Fudge.

Marcelle Kosman 47:55

Oh, of course, yeah, he doesn't actually care that Voldemort is back.

Hannah McGregor 47:58

He just cares how bad it would look. And of course, Umbridge.

Marcelle Kosman 48:01

Oh, because of her fluffy pink sweaters, the plates with the kittens.

Hannah McGregor 48:07

Yeah, performing a very sort of fluffy, soft femininity, that doesn't match her insides. Right? And we talked about this already as being a transphobic trope. But I think we can also see how that transphobic trope is tied to also this bigger history, because trans people have existed as long as 2/4 century BC, Athens and beyond. Right, and, so has this idea of like, no, you need to be what you look like. And if you aren't what you look like, then you're lying to me. And people who aren't attached to appearance are like, better?

Marcelle Kosman 48:49

Better, as long as they're “not-attachment” to appearance, still hits a certain level of care, right? Because if you are slovenly in appearance because you just don't care at all, like there's an expected amount of care.

Hannah McGregor 49:08

Absolutely right. So you can't care too much, because it's a sign of vanity and a lack of internal substance. But you can't care too little, because it is a sign of lack of self restraint and self management. Right. So Dudley is bad, because he lacks self restraint. And his fatness is an external reflection of the fact that he can't self manage appropriately.

Marcelle Kosman 49:42

And in this book, where he has transformed fatness into muscle, it's still a lack of self restraint because he's now beating up children and so he's shifted from- like the type of lack of self management has shifted from like he doesn't control what he puts in his body. But now he doesn't control who he inflicts with his body.

Hannah McGregor 50:12

Yes, yes, absolutely. And we see lots of other examples of people whose lack of self restraint is bad. That like, you know, most of our queer coded villains are also associated with lack of self restraint, lack of sort of moral self management. And then we've got, you know, our sort of classic hypocrites, right, who are like very self restrained, but in a way that isn't evidence of internal quality, but is

rather a mask for internal lack of quality. Right? So it's like, if you look non restrained, that means you're bad. But if you look restrained, but secretly aren't, that also means you're bad.

Marcelle Kosman 51:02

Oh, who is that?

Hannah McGregor 51:03

Well, it's the Dursley's.

Marcelle Kosman 51:05

Oh, I see.

Hannah McGregor 51:06

Right. Like Petunia Dursley and her like, absolutely immaculate home. Right, because like the Weasleys home is like a little bit chaotic, a little bit out of control.

Marcelle Kosman 51:18

But it's charming.

Hannah McGregor 51:19

And part of why it's charming is because it is well and responsibly managed.

Marcelle Kosman 51:24

Right, right. Okay. Because when they get there, when The Order gets there to pick up Harry, Tonks is talking about

how muggles are too clean, and then they get into Harry's room, and she's like, oh, this is better.

Hannah McGregor 51:39

Yes, she says it's a bit more natural. Because his room she immediately reads as being an authentic representation of what Harry's actually like. Whereas the rest of the Dursleys' house feels like a performance to her.

Marcelle Kosman 51:54

Because Harry has nothing to hide. Harry has nothing to hide, whereas the Dursleys have so much to hide, because they have Harry. Oh my gosh.

Hannah McGregor 52:04

Yeah. So that is our first encounter with Tonks. We find out first that she doesn't like being called Nymphadora. Right? She likes Tonks. Nymphadora is too fancy for her. She doesn't like the clean house, we find out that she is bad at-

Marcelle Kosman 52:20

Like household maintenance spells.

Hannah McGregor 52:24

Yes, because she can't pack the suitcase well. But her mother can.

Marcelle Kosman 52:29

She can't pack it tidally.

Hannah McGregor 52:31

She can pack it. But it won't be tidy.

Marcelle Kosman 52:33

It's so hard to even talk about these things without slipping into these like moralistic terms, because they're so embedded in how we live in the world.

Hannah McGregor 52:44

So Tonks is this person who is into authenticity, into informality, who is very quickly established as good. She's an auror. She's a young auror, she's on the side of the good guy. She's a member of the Order of the Phoenix. But she is untidy, and badly self managed. So she trips over things all the time. Right, she sets off the screaming portrait in Gremlin place because she can't stop tripping over the umbrella stand. Mrs. Weasley doesn't want her to help with the cooking because she's so clumsy. She'll probably like murder someone with a knife. And yet, she is the only metamorphmagus we encounter in the books. And the characteristic of being a metamorphmagus is that she can physically transform her appearance at will.

Marcelle Kosman 53:42

And Mrs. Weasley is actively trying to set her up with Bill.

Hannah McGregor 53:48

Yeah, Mrs. Weasley likes her.

Marcelle Kosman 53:49

Mrs. Weasley doesn't want her to help with dinner, but she does want her to help her with grandkids.

Hannah McGregor 53:53

Mhm. So Mrs. Weasley, a woman who we have figured out values substance over appearance because this is one of the characteristics of the Weasleys, she does not trust Fleur.

Right. She's gonna be really awful to Fleur later on. She likes Tonks. I think that Tonks represents substance over appearance, that she is somebody whose character is so consistent and so positive that her ability to physically transform herself emphasizes that consistency rather than undermining it.

Marcelle Kosman 54:33

Okay, so would you say that she is sort of like the exception that proves the rule?

Hannah McGregor 54:40

I'm kind of wondering if that's how we can think about her right, like we've seen lots of ways in which shape shifting is suspect. And here we've got the one person we meet who is just a shapeshifter. Like that's just what she does. She can change her appearance, and she does it constantly and for fun, she changes her hair color all the time. She gives herself goofy new noses, she's not vain.

Marcelle Kosman 55:09

Correct.

Hannah McGregor 55:10

And she's not particularly attached to looking any one way. She just kind of plays with it.

Marcelle Kosman 55:17

And she uses these powers for work also. So they are useful in her line of work. So maybe, maybe this has to do with like, usefulness. It's an ability or power upon which she can capitalize for the greater good.

Hannah McGregor 55:33

And we really know her almost exclusively as an auror and a member of the Order in this book, we don't get anything out of Tonks that isn't her sort of work on behalf of the right side of the political divide.

Marcelle Kosman 55:47

In the next book we'll see some feelings, which are icky, but we'll talk about that when we get to the-

Hannah McGregor 55:53

(Hannah laughs) Yeah, we'll talk about feelings in the next book. But what interests me so much is that as a character, she has such like, latently subversive queer possibilities. Right. Because like the second you say, she is somebody who can transform her nose into any shape, you're like, cool, she can transform any body part into any shape.

Marcelle Kosman 56:20

Well, historically, in literature, the nose is just a metaphor for a penis. So if she can transform her nose, she can transform her penis.

Hannah McGregor 56:29

We know that Tonks uses she/her pronouns, we know that she has a very strong opinion about what name is used for her. And we know that she likes to play with her physical form, that that's a form of pleasure for her. All of that is gay as fuck.

And so like, what I'm trying to sort of work through in my head, is the relationship between this character who is like, so queer, and so destabilizing of biological essentialism, of the idea that there is like a true singular stable self, of this notion that like, when you look at somebody, you should be able to figure out what their moral character is, and the way that she is, at the same time being constructed in the text as someone who is like, trustworthy, reliable, of good character.

Marcelle Kosman 57:34

Mm hmm. Tonks is one of those incredible examples of how authorial intention or like the politics of the author do not control what happens in the text, like you can try, but the text is alive.

Hannah McGregor 57:52

The text *is* alive. And I think the livingness of this question, in many ways, comes back to that very question you asked,

which is, what does a boggart actually look like? Right? What does Tonks quote unquote, actually look like? Right? In the same way that people will be like, well, what is that person's actual? Like, what sex were they assigned at birth?

Marcelle Kosman 58:15

Yeah, because what they look like as a squirming infant covered in many different fluids is what will tell me what they actually look like and are now.

Hannah McGregor 58:25

Right? Like even people who think of themselves as being very trans inclusive, still will often be really fixated on assigned sex at birth. People will use language like female bodied people, as a way to try to get at things like talking about people with uteruses or people with vaginas. So there is still this desire to be like, no, no, you can change yourself however you want, but you still were something once that was a stable thing.

Marcelle Kosman 58:56

Indeed, I was something once.

Hannah McGregor 58:58

I was something once. I could have been something and that still, like, there's still this longing to get back to essence to say like, well, the boggarts gotta look like something, even if we can never see it. It's got to have a real self. And like Tonks

has gotta be like, sure she can change things. But like, surely there's an appearance she has that is her real appearance.

Marcelle Kosman 59:27

And yet, why? What evidence is there of that?

Hannah McGregor 59:32

Show me a scrap of textual evidence that asserts that there is a stable default physical appearance for metamorphmagus.

Marcelle Kosman 59:44

I cannot and I will not. (*Hannah laughs*) So at the very beginning in revisions, I was asking questions about effort. So we know that Tonks needs to strain in order to make a change, but we don't have any textual evidence to tell us whether or not maintaining her appearance takes any effort. And it occurred to me while we were chatting about, you know, essence and what one looks like, whether your gender aligns with the sex you were assigned at birth or not, there is always effort in putting yourself together to face the world, even if that effort is like more focused on things like removing hair, or unifying the color of your face, or detangling hair or whatever, there's always effort. And so yeah, like this idea that some people put more effort in than others. And that is good or bad is really flawed and wonky, I can't think of a better word. It's a wonky way to look at bodies.

Hannah McGregor 1:00:59

And it's ideological, right, I think about this with my own gender all the time, right, I am a cis woman. And insofar as I put effort into the transformation of my body, that effort is generally about aligning my body with the expectations of femininity. I have taken female hormones in my life, as I think a lot of cis women have, right, I've taken birth control, I've taken like progesterone treatments to like induce menstruation, hormonal treatments are used to aid with fertility or to manage skin conditions or to reduce body hair growth, I remove body hair, I remove facial hair, right, I am working constantly.

I mean, not that constantly these days, honestly. But like I have spent much of my life working very hard to align myself with the ideological expectations of what being a woman in a woman's body is like. And that has included a lot of quote unquote, “artificial interventions.” It would be every bit as easy for me to grow a mustache and take some testosterone to make that mustache slightly more luxurious. But that would be perceived as a very different performance and interaction with my gender.

Marcelle Kosman 1:02:26

That's right, because you would be resisting the social expectations of what your gender big scare quotes “should look like.”

Hannah McGregor 1:02:35

Yeah, so physical appearance is often effortful. And I think, again, we see that particularly around the idea of bodily management, in terms of particularly our like hyper fixation on fitness, and thinness, and health and wellness, in our culture, right, that we treat bodies as a project, that you have to be constantly managing, and that if you are not managing it properly, you are a burden on society, you're a burden on the healthcare system.

Marcelle Kosman 1:03:11

Burden on your family, burden on your loved ones.

Hannah McGregor 1:03:15

All of this, right? And so, effort is inherently aligned with what it is to be a quote unquote “good person” that you have to be working at it. And yet, because of the anxiety about people performing or deceiving, there is also a suspicion around effortful appearance. So the question is, is the effort working to get yourself closer to what you should be? Or is your effort working to disguise your true nature?

So the moral valence of effort one way or the other depends largely on the idea that there's a real stable self that you are either working towards or working away from. So when that brings us back to that question of Tonks and the fact that we know that changing her appearance is effortful, which might suggest it's unnatural, but the effortfulness only aligns with unnaturalness if we assume that working to change your

appearance always takes you away from your true self rather than towards the person you want to be.

Marcelle Kosman 1:04:41

And I wonder if the fact that Tonks can do these changes naturally, physiologically from birth. I wonder if this idea of it being an innate ability of hers makes it less suspicious than if she were constantly dyeing her hair. Like I wonder if the text would present it quite as enjoyable and pleasurable and admirable or, or cute and whimsical, but in an acceptable way. If she showed up, and they were like, oh, Tonks, your hair is pink today. And she was like, Yeah, I bought a jar of manic panic on the way here. And she looks in the mirror and she's like, I don't know, if pinks really my color, and then buys a jar of manic panic on her way home to dye it purple.

Hannah McGregor 1:05:27

Mhm. Similarly it would probably be less whimsical if she was getting a nose job every week. Yeah, to like, fuck around and make her nose different. But right, the idea of permanently transforming your body, people get freaked out about tattoos, they get freaked out about surgeries.

Marcelle Kosman 1:05:46

They get freaked out about piercings, not because the piercing is permanent, but because the scar that it would leave behind is permanent.

Hannah McGregor 1:05:53

And much more freaked out about gauges than standard piercings. Right, the more permanent a bodily transformation is, the more worrying that transformation is unless that bodily transformation is associated with moral value. like weight loss surgeries.

(Marcelle gasps) Which are unbelievably dangerous, and still constantly advocated for by doctors. Yeah, right, doctors will very happily fuck with your body to make it smaller. But if you are a trans person who wants gender confirming surgery, they will refuse to do that surgery until you've lost weight. It's very bad. So there, I think that there is something here about non permanence, right? That it's fun, because she can always change back.

Marcelle Kosman 1:06:47

To whatever we perceive “back” to be.

Hannah McGregor 1:06:50

So there is, I do think implied in the text, through a whole variety of things, right, through her positioning against other forms of shapeshifters. Through the social responses to her playful transformations, through her reception by other morally trustworthy characters. I think there is a constant implication that her transformations are only ever surface deep, only ever temporary, and that she could always go back to something that is the quote unquote, real “Tonks.”

And yet latent in these imaginings of transformation are these really queer possibilities.

Marcelle Kosman 1:07:36

Yeah, because while that may be the implication, there is no textual evidence that there is a quote unquote “stable” or quote unquote, “real Tonks.”

Hannah McGregor 1:07:48

Because there's no textual evidence that there's a stable or real anyone because texts are themselves performances.

Marcelle Kosman 1:07:57

Whoa, that's sounding pretty phenomenological to me, Hannah. And I think we discussed in the last episode that performances and texts and media are different things.

Hannah McGregor 1:08:12

(laughs) They are absolutely not. But a text can't be evidence that there's such a thing as a stable internal self, right? It can only be an attempt to claim that there is such a thing as a stable internal self because texts reflect, they don't, I mean, they produce discourse but they don't produce reality.

Marcelle Kosman 1:08:27

No, they don't, they do not. Like that moment in, fuck, I don't know. Is it Endgame? I think it's the Marvel movie Endgame when someone uses a word, and Drax says that's a made up word. And then Thor says all words are made up and then Drax goes, Oh.

Hannah McGregor 1:08:47

Yeah, they are all made up.

Marcelle Kosman 1:08:48

Yeah, they're all made up. There are no natural words.

Hannah McGregor 1:08:51

There are no natural words and there are no natural bodies. That's the wild thing. And so Tonks somehow simultaneously evidence of some of the deeply conservative notions of appearance and identity that structure these texts as a series and at the same time one of those beautiful slippage points that we keep finding that allow us to just squirrel our gay little fingers in.

Marcelle Kosman 1:09:22

Love to squirrel my gay little fingers.

Hannah McGregor 1:09:26

(laughs) Well, that was a graphic metaphor to end with.

(Marcelle laughs)

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Marcelle Kosman 1:09:41

Thank you, witches for joining us for this very exciting recorded in-person episode of Witch, Please. You can find the rest of our episodes by heading over to NotSorryWorks.com or of course wherever podcasts are found. If you want to

hang out with us more, we're on Twitter and Instagram @ohwitchplease.

Hannah McGregor 1:10:03

Witch, Please is produced in partnership with Not Sorry and distributed by Acast. Special thanks to Not Sorry for having us, and to our team-player of a producer, Hannah Rehak aka COACH!

Marcelle Kosman 1:10:16

Thanks, coach. (*Soundbite of sports whistle blowing*)

If you're into the podcast, why don't you let us know by dropping a review on Apple Podcasts. At the end of every episode we'll shout out everyone who left us a 5-star review, so you've gotta review us if you want to hear me call your name just like a little prayer. I've really lost a lot of ideas. And I'm now just turning to lyrics, song lyrics. So thanks this week to regularflavelle.

Hannah McGregor 1:10:40

My favorite kind of Flavelle.

Marcelle Kosman 1:10:44

The regular kind.

Hannah McGregor 1:10:45

And thank you to all of our wonderful Patreon supporters for making this show possible! We are currently running a Holiday Patreon Drive to reach \$5000 USD / month by

January 1st, 2022 — If we reach that goal your support will collectively unlock a LIVE Zoom Event of Witch Please Tell Me where all patrons will be invited to tune in and ask questions in real time.

Marcelle Kosman 1:11:27

This sounds so fun.

Hannah McGregor 1:11:30

(both laugh) Yeah, it's gonna be deeply chaotic. We have also launched a new tier. The Faculty Club.

Marcelle Kosman 1:11:38

Oh, I love this.

Hannah McGregor 1:11:43

This one's really exciting. It comes with some truly special perks. You can find out more about the holiday Patreon drive, about the new tier, and about some special bonuses we are offering to incentivize your participation at patreon.com/ohwitchplease.

Marcelle Kosman 1:12:07

Oh, goody!

Hannah McGregor 1:12:08

We'll be back next episode to continue our discussion of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, but until then...

Marcelle Kosman and Hannah McGregor 1:12:15

Later witches!

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