

Appendix: Giggle-ology with Dix McDevitt

SPEAKERS

Dix McDevitt, Hannah McGregor, Marcelle Kosman

(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 since we're talking about giggles today, Marcelle, I want you to tell me about something that has made you giggle lately...in the sorting chat.

Marcelle Kosman 00:27

I want to tell you about these two students of mine who are so smart. And so silly. They are the classic definition of silly girls. *[Hannah laughs]* And I love them. And Neil, friend of the pod, a former frequent guest, was their instructor last semester. And sometimes we'll just talk about how silly and smart they are, and how they are like, Oh, they're just, they are such a delight. I just adore them. And so while they do not themselves make me giggle, they giggle *so much*. And it is just a ray of sunshine in this otherwise very bleak semester. So I want to tell you about them. And I did. *[Marcelle giggles]* Oh, look! They do make me giggle! I'm giggling right now.

Hannah McGregor 01:26

Yeah, they do. That immediately made me think about the student who I had the last semester that I taught before my sabbatical. I had a student who was very, very quiet, and very, like she was consistently attending. She just really didn't talk in class. And I was doing little one on ones with students just to be like, how's the class going? Is there anything that I could be doing more or less of? And she was like, I think it would be helpful if you laughed more. The context here is that I laugh constantly in class. So she says very seriously, I think it would be helpful if you laughed more. And then she went, heheheheheh. *[Marcelle laughs]* And I was like, incredible. *[Hannah laughs]*

Marcelle Kosman 02:19

I love it. What a silly goose.

Hannah McGregor 02:22

What a silly goose. I love it. I love a giggle. I love a good giggle, a little teehee.

Marcelle Kosman 02:28

I make myself laugh constantly in class. And I'm pretty sure that this turns some students way off of me as an instructor. **[Marcelle laughs]** But the ones who stick around, they get it.

Hannah McGregor 02:46

I have really, at this point, fully given up any attempt at a serious teaching persona. And now I'm just like, The Big Gay clown who's teaching your class! Doop doop doop publishing!

Marcelle Kosman 03:03

That's how Cohen walks. Doop doop doop. **[Both laugh]** Sorry, now I'm just giggling about my kids. **[Both laugh]**

Hannah McGregor 03:11

Alright, that's enough. That's enough of that.

Marcelle Kosman 03:13

Let's get serious. **[Marcelle giggles]**

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Hannah McGregor 03:30

We're getting very silly today. But before we dissolve into giggles, we should probably lay a little groundwork in Revision.

Marcelle Kosman 03:37

Today's conversation is about laughter. But more specifically, it's about a certain kind of laughter that's coded towards certain kinds of bodies, especially feminized and disabled bodies. So let's brush up a bit on textual representations of gender and disability. We've looked at the ways in which some bodies are represented as non normative and the ways that these texts in particular encourage us to view that non normativity with suspicion. From the coding of Lupin's werewolf-ism as HIV/Aids, to the trans coding of Rita Skeeter, to the fatness of the Dursleys.

Hannah McGregor 04:15

Mhmm. And of course, these representations have an ideological force that comes from claiming the right to decide who is and is not quote unquote, “normal” and producing knowledge about those who are non-normative or “othered”. In this case, you know, when we’re talking about the Harry Potter series, narrative knowledge, and that knowledge then, in turn, reinforces the naturalness of, again, “natural.” Everything’s in scare quotes here. Naturalness of binaries, like good and bad, gay and straight, able bodied and disabled, normal and not normal.

Marcelle Kosman 04:55

And recognizing the ideological force of these character representations leads to some interesting questions about the relationship between agency and ideology. That is to say, we need to distinguish between the ideological bent of the book or *the author*, versus the perspective of the characters. And as we’ve argued many times about the Harry Potter series, what we, the reader, can see is focalized through the perspective of Harry himself, with the notable exception of like, a few tiny chapters.

Hannah McGregor 05:32

Yeah, yeah, like those really weird chapters where all of a sudden you’re like-

Marcelle Kosman 05:35

Whoa, I can see from the sky. Why?

Hannah McGregor 05:39

I can see from the sky! That’s why I was like, are you suddenly a drone? I don’t understand. **[Marcelle laughs]** The rest of the time, we’re very clearly inside Harry’s head. And, of course, naturalizing the perspective of our white male protagonist as the neutral perspective is itself pretty ideologically charged as a narrative choice. We discussed that way back in our first episode on Chosen One narratives.

Remember? We were so young back then. But knowing that Harry’s narration is neither neutral nor fully reliable, lets us ask some more specific questions about how Harry himself is describing the world around him. And of course, what he’s leaving out, which is like the whole premise of Marcelle’s Devastating Fun Facts, is that there’s all kinds of stuff happening around the edges of these stories that we don’t find out because they aren’t happening to or near Harry.

Marcelle Kosman 06:33

[laughs] And like none of them are fun, like roller skates. **[Both laugh]** I don’t know why I’m like this. Anyway, part of how we can question Harry’s perspective is by noting places where it doesn’t match up with the in-text reality. So for example, in Book Three,

Harry describes Sirius as sneering at Harry's parents death, but of course Sirius didn't. He was their best friend, and he wouldn't. That is clearly an interpretation that Harry applies to Sirius based on his incorrect belief that Sirius killed his parents. So we, the reader, who are following along, we also think Sirius killed his parents, and then all of a sudden we learned otherwise. On the other hand, Harry's queer coded descriptions of Rita Skeeter and Gilderoy Lockhart become homophobic and transphobic when it becomes clear to us that these characters are villains and that Harry was right not to trust them.

Hannah McGregor 07:32

Mmhmm. So, with this groundwork established, there's a new aspect of Harry's perspective that we are anxious to unpack. And lucky for us, we have an exciting guest who's ready to help us do just that.

Marcelle Kosman 07:50

Like Pandora's box. Let's open it! *[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]*

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Marcelle Kosman 08:05

Theory is no laughing matter. So everyone keep a straight face as we head into transfiguration class.

Hannah McGregor 08:12

We have another thrilling guest today. Dix McDevitt, pronouns she/her, is a self identified chancer, which sometimes leads her to magical situations like this one, and other times actively damages her career, like the time she applied to be the production manager of the royal court when she was 19. Dix studied English Literature at Cambridge University, graduating in 2022. Dix recently graduated from the Curious School of Puppetry, and is taking the first steps towards starting her interdisciplinary, radically inclusive and queer as fuck Theatre Company, Anything That Moves. Welcome Dix.

Marcelle Kosman 08:57

Wow, welcome. Oh my God.

Dix McDevitt 08:59

Hi, guys. I'm just glowing to be here. I sound sarcastic because I'm English. *[Marcelle and Hannah laugh]* I really mean it.

Hannah McGregor 09:14

That's okay. It's okay. I have enough English friends to understand that you just have to really, you have to get really granular to parse the emotions. *[Marcelle giggles]*

Dix McDevitt 09:24

You've got to have a thick skin and just, I would say, take everything the kindest way. It just makes life nicer. I would say just if people are trying to be sarcastic with you, take the compliment.

Hannah McGregor 09:38

I mean, I will take that feedback but you will never convince a Pisces to take things in the best possible way. *[Marcelle and Dix laugh]* That's not gonna happen.

Dix McDevitt 09:49

See, I'm a Libra. So I'm very good at compartmentalizing. I'm very good at switching up, seeing things from different perspectives.

Marcelle Kosman 10:00

[Quietly] I'm jealous.

Hannah McGregor 10:01

So let's talk about reading laughter in a text.

Dix McDevitt 10:07

Yeah. So I've dabbled before in reading laughter in novels. And I learned from trying to do it once before that you have to get specific about what it is that you're trying to do. Because laughter is, in practice, very simple. We all know how to do it. It's something that pretty much to my knowledge, happens in every culture, we learn to laugh before we learn to speak. And often we don't even know why we're laughing. Sometimes we laugh uncontrollably.

Marcelle Kosman 10:50

[Laughing] Story of my life.

Dix McDevitt 10:54

But as soon as you start thinking analytically about laughter, it becomes a sort of semantic hellscape. So I thought that I would simplify the close reading to follow with a framework so that we know what it is that we're not analyzing, and we know what it is that we are analyzing. Does that sound good?

Marcelle Kosman 11:22

That does.

Hannah McGregor 11:23

Yeah, it really does. Yes. Hey, Marcelle, what does the word semantics mean?

Marcelle Kosman 11:28

Fuck you. I think semantics is like the study of language and meaning? And so when you're talking about the semantics of something, you're talking about the way that the meaning is encoded in the words?

Hannah McGregor 11:45

Yeah, that's exactly right.

Marcelle Kosman 11:46

Oh, good. Okay. Still, though. Fuck you.

Hannah McGregor 11:49

Oh, yeah. No, absolutely. I would have asked Dix, but too mean, so I could only direct it at you. *[Marcelle laughs]*

Dix McDevitt 11:56

Man, I escaped with my life there.

Hannah McGregor 11:58

Yeah. So we're talking about the semantics of laughter. What kinds of categories are useful for us?

Dix McDevitt 12:05

So, listen, the thing is, is that laughter, essentially, is quite mysterious. There have been umpteen attempts, by your usual suspects, dead white men philosophers, *[Hannah laughs]* to make it really boring. And to try and pin it down, theoretically. But fundamentally, as is clear from the many different schools of thought about laughter, it's not something that we can pin down with a stable cause or a stable meaning. And so obviously, what I'm about to say, there will be exceptions to it. And I would encourage all, myself included, to not be smart ass-ey about it yet, because in terms of analyzing it, in a text, I think it's really helpful to distill it down to what I'm going to term laughter relationships.

Which is an entity that provides a stimulus and an entity that provides a laughter response to that stimulus. And you know, what, if you do want to be smarter ass-ey

about it, and say that you laugh at yourself, say, I laugh when I'm alone, we can still use this framework, because you are the entity providing the stimulus, maybe via thoughts or memory, and then you are also the entity providing the laughter response. So it works out.

Marcelle Kosman 13:48

Okay. Okay.

Dix McDevitt 13:50

So within the form of the novel, this laughter relationship can occur on different levels of the storytelling, which is, I think, the main aspect that gets really confusing about talking about laughter within novels.

Marcelle Kosman 14:09

I feel like this is one of those instances where we want to talk about diegetic and non diegetic. And I can never remember the difference between those two things.

Hannah McGregor 14:21

I have a Johnny Mnemonic for remembering diegetic versus non diegetic, which is that diegetic is like dialogue. So it's happening in the thing itself. **[Dix and Marcelle say "oooooooo" in unison]** So diegetic music in a movie is like dialogue, it exists within the world of the movie. Non diegetic is the opposite. So it's not dialogue, people can't hear it. So like, that's the score.

Marcelle Kosman 14:49

So if we take this idea of diegetic and non diegetic, and we apply it to laughter in the text, is diegetic laughter when two characters are laughing together? And non diegetic is when like, I'm the reader and I'm laughing?

Dix McDevitt 15:08

So almost, pretty much. Yes. And also, by the way, I've made up this framework, possibly other people have talked about this as well.

Hannah McGregor 15:20

I love that you're the theorist.

Marcelle Kosman 15:23

Yeah. Yes.

Dix McDevitt 15:24

So, yes. Diegetic, as you said, perfectly, it is within the world of the story. It is between two characters, but it's not necessarily two characters laughing together, it's just that the laughter relationship exists diegetically within the world. So the stimulus and the laughter response, both happen inside of the world of the novel, or inside the world of the story. And yes, non diegetic laughter relationships in a novel are pretty much always the reader providing the laughter response. But it can occur in a couple of different ways. So I'll just take you through the four that I dreamed up. I'm sure there's more that other people can dream up.

Hannah McGregor 16:16

We'll make a chart. And then people can add to it.

Dix McDevitt 16:19

I love a chart. So diegetic number one, the whole laughter relationship taking place inside the world of the novel. It doesn't matter whether the region laughs or not. Number two, semi diegetic. Now that's a controversial word. I think some film buffs are gonna come after me. I'm gonna wake up with Neil knocking at my door.

Marcelle Kosman 16:42

Yeah, Neil. Yeah. Can you imagine?

Hannah McGregor 16:46

Yeah, pounding at your door.

Marcelle Kosman 16:48

He would never. I tell you what Neil would do. He'll go, "Huh. Well, that makes a lot of sense." That's what he would say.

Dix McDevitt 16:56

No, it's like he's here with us. So I'm calling this one semi didactic. This laughter relationship is between a character within the world and the reader. The character provides a stimulus and the reader provides the laughter response. Maybe you don't laugh, but the human relationship being set up is between the character and the reader. So to give you an example of this in the Harry Potter books, my favorite one is when Harry's trying to convince Snape that his nickname is Runel Wazlib.

Marcelle Kosman 17:37

Runel Wazlib. Mhm. *[Marcelle and Dix laugh]* So funny.

Dix McDevitt 17:41

It's so funny. And it might be the one good joke JK Rowling's ever written. It's genuinely objectively hilarious.

Hannah McGregor 17:51

And Snape doesn't laugh. It's not funny to him.

Dix McDevitt 17:54

It's not funny to him. And it's also not funny to Harry, Harry's not trying to be funny. He's actually trying to get himself out of quite a serious bind. But the humor relationship there is because the reader has a relationship with Harry, and they understand the backstory as Harry does, of why this occurrence has taken place. So that is what we're calling semi diegetic.

Hannah McGregor 18:21

Amazing.

Dix McDevitt 18:22

You're ready for number three?

Hannah McGregor 18:24

So ready. Is it non diegetic?

Dix McDevitt 18:27

Hey, yeah, it's non diegetic! Laughter relationship. part one, part un. Is that correct? **[Marcelle and Hannah laugh]** I've never done French. So this is between a third person omniscient narrator and the reader. Now as you've mentioned, Hannah, JK Rowling's narrative voice is erratic to put it kindly. There's not a particular pattern set up there with really why she sometimes just drops Harry's perspective and goes in wild directions. But one chapter that we can be fairly certain about, a drone chapter, it's one of the drone chapters is the first chapter of the first book.

We follow different characters. We see different scenes, we're not attached to any one particularly. And so an example of this kind of laughter relationship between that style of narrative voice and the reader is the first line of the first chapter of the first book. How does it go? Mr. And Mrs. Dudley of Number Four Privet Drive were proud to say that they are perfectly normal. Thank you very much. It sets up a humorous tone. But the tone is, you know, not readable to Mr. And Mrs. Dursley, that they, you know, they're just living their lives. This humor is between that narrator and between the reader.

Hannah McGregor 20:12

It's a joke made by the narrator at the character's expense for the reader.

Dix McDevitt 20:16

Yeah. And I think actually, that's a great legacy of the novel form. Because you do get a lot of these third person omniscient narrators as the novel form developed.

Hannah McGregor 20:31

I feel like this is really Austenian. Like, Austen does this a lot.

Dix McDevitt 20:35

Yeah, totally.

Marcelle Kosman 20:37

Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*, also. There's a lot of, not that there's anything particularly dead about door nails but... yeah, it's the whole like, the narrator is a kind of character and so like, makes jokes sometimes.

Dix McDevitt 20:51

Yeah, exactly. Exactly that. So that's number three. Although it doesn't occur that often in these books, I would say, just because of the fact that JK Rowling, maybe if she'd carried on in that vein, she could have created a stable narrative voice but nope, it just got dropped in. Number four, non diegetic laughter relationship *parte deux*, between the author and reader direct.

Marcelle Kosman 21:24

Okay, how?

Hannah McGregor 21:28

How? **[Marcelle laughs]**

Dix McDevitt 21:30

How? **[Hannah laughs]** Obviously, we have to differentiate between the narrative voice and the author. So it's not through the rows itself, or any particular voice that we encounter in the novel that is providing the stimulus. Rather, it is other more meta aspects to the work that creates a wink/nudge relationship between the author and the reader. So this often shows up in terms of structure, and can reveal itself humorously through devices such as dramatic irony, which can transcend the cognisance of even the narrative voice, the order in which we see things, and in plays, for example, visual gags that can provide humorous content.

But actually in the Harry Potter books, I think that the most common form of the author-reader laughter relationship is in puns and wordplay, that are entirely, their comedic value is entirely ignored by the narrative voice and by the characters in the world. And so therefore, is sort of a direct line of humor from JK Rowling to the reader. So for example, the fact that the school is called Hogwarts, and no one ever goes...

Hannah McGregor 23:06

And nobody is like, I'm sorry, what? *[Marcelle and Hannah laugh]*

Marcelle Kosman 23:10

Yes.

Dix McDevitt 23:12

And many other aspects, including character names, which obviously many of them are incredibly offensive and incredibly racist and incredibly, just terrible, just very, very poorly done, but are also in again, a Dickensian fashion supposed to say something about the character that is never referred to by any of the characters. I mean, Remus Lupin, turns out to get bitten by a werewolf. Imagine if you called your kid Remus Lupin.

Marcelle Kosman 23:51

[laughs] And then you're surprised that they get bitten by a werewolf. Come on.

Hannah McGregor 23:55

I mean, a member of the Lupin family. So are we to assume that he is the first one to whom this tragedy has occurred? Or like does everybody in the Lupin family have some sort of wolf related run in or was it just them doubling down with the first name Remus? Does he have a twin brother named Romulus, who we've never met? Was Romulus eaten by wolves when he was a child and it just doesn't come up? *[Dix laughs]*

Marcelle Kosman 24:22

Because it's not part of Harry's journey. *[All three laugh]*

Dix McDevitt 24:26

I like to think that he changed his name after he got bitten because he's just like, might as well lean into it. You know? We've come this far.

Hannah McGregor 24:34

Remus Lupin is his dragname.

Dix McDevitt 24:37

That's incredible. I just love, I love everything about the implications of that. I feel like that needs to be a whole episode in and of itself. I'm going to be writing some fanfiction about that. *[Marcelle laughs]*

Those are the four laughter relationships, the main ones that, I think, crop up when you're thinking about laughter in novels in particular. And for us today, we're going to narrow down to diegetic laughter relationships. So the very first one, stimulus and laughter response, both occurring inside of the world. So it's not about pinpointing any aspect of the book that is intended or otherwise to make the reader laugh. Many of these things are funny in and of themselves. But actually, what we're doing is we're looking at the entire exchange, rather than partaking in it.

Hannah McGregor 25:36

Which is useful, like, I mean, both the sort of specificity of this terminology, but also like, sometimes as much as I love thinking about reader reaction, sometimes readers are so unbelievably like, it's so hard to talk about what's funny to a reader, because reading is such a profoundly subjective experience. But we can definitely say things about what's written in the text, which is part of why we love close reading so much.

Marcelle Kosman 26:01

Yes, exactly.

Dix McDevitt 26:02

Exactly. And that's actually perfect, because that brings me on to my sort of final, the aspect, the really important aspect to this close reading of the texts, which is that we are not going in the vein of all the humor theorists that have come before in terms of trying to pinpoint why people laugh, what their laughter means, in any kind of objective sense. That is a rabbit hole that other people can go down. I'm not, I'm not enticed by it whatsoever. Because in these texts, what we have is an unreliable narrator, who is oftentimes himself, sometimes he is the stimulus.

But oftentimes, he's actually not inside the laughter relationship in question. He is observing it, and he is interpreting it and reading it and communicating it to the reader. So what we're seeing often is not just a laughter relationship, what we're seeing is Harry's perspective of a laughter relationship, which is really, really important, because the ways that he reads those relationships tell us a lot about him. And they tell us a lot about how he understands and values the other characters in the books.

Marcelle Kosman 27:35

Okay, yeah. I'm convinced.

Hannah McGregor 27:37

I am totally convinced and I feel like I'm really ready to dive in and look at some examples of laughter in these books.

Dix McDevitt 27:47

Let's do it!

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Hannah McGregor 27:57

Hey, Marcelle. Did you know that someone in this zoom call is an owl in disguise?

Marcelle Kosman 28:03

Oh, my God, who?

Hannah McGregor 28:04

It's you, obviously. *[Marcelle gasps and a sound effect of an owl hooting plays]* It's time for OWL's.

Marcelle Kosman 28:10

That was really funny, Hannah. That was so funny.

Hannah McGregor 28:15

I stole that joke from my friend Bart, who sometimes listens. So, Bart, if you hear this, Thanks.

Marcelle Kosman 28:21

[Laughs] All right. There are so many examples in this book series of the kinds of laughter relationships that we're not talking about, that I want to talk about. And so I just want to start this section by naming that I'm going to try really hard to stay focused on the diegetic laughter relationships.

Hannah McGregor 28:45

Good. And specifically, I think we're going to be narrowing in on Harry's fucking problem with giggling. What's your fucking problem, Harry?

Marcelle Kosman 29:00

[Laughs] "Giggling should be made illegal" is a real thing.

Hannah McGregor 29:04

He says.

Marcelle Kosman 29:06

[Laughs] It's so funny.

Hannah McGregor 29:09

So. *[Laughs]* So what's the deal, Dix, with Harry? Why does he think giggling should be made illegal?

Dix McDevitt 29:20

This is the question. This is the question of all questions.

Hannah McGregor 29:23

That line is like. It's a jokey line.

Dix McDevitt 29:27

Yes. So I think this is a really helpful moment to put into practice what we were talking about, about how, how to get out of the quagmire of the semantics of laughing and how to focus in on just one of those relationships because this line itself; "Giggling should be made illegal," Harry thought furiously." If you take the line, as it is at face value, you could start going down the road of trying to think, is that a laughter relationship between the narrator and the reader?

But JK Rowling's narrative voice is sort of like a fly that buzzes around Harry's head and can sometimes hear his thoughts. But I think you know that this is a helpful example of that. Because actually, the way that this line is relevant to the conversation that we're having, is that this is Harry's response to having witnessed a diegetic laughter relationship, which is him as the stimulus walking down the corridors. And the girls, the Hydra or unnamed anonymous girls, in a haze around him who are giggling, so this is his reading of that relationship.

Marcelle Kosman 30:52

Okay, so because we're talking about giggling, do we want to spend some time talking about the other types of laughter that we hear so that we can kind of separate out why giggling is distinct for Harry? Like he doesn't want to make, for example, sneering illegal.

Hannah McGregor 31:09

Be at no point suggests that chuckling should be a crime.

Marcelle Kosman 31:13

No. But even though he is the object of a significant amount of sneering, I would like to see a chart that compares the two but that's for another time.

Dix McDevitt 31:23

Yes, that is a really good point. So I mean, I don't know if it's just me that it really jumped out this lexicon JK Rowling has for descriptors for laughter. It really is very prominent to me in her writing style. These words that come up again and again, sneering, roaring, chuckling, chortling all of these things, it's quite bizarre. And I think all of those words, as all the words ever, obviously communicate things to us. That's what words do.

Hannah McGregor 31:59

That's what words are up to. That's their whole, that's their whole thing. **[Marcelle laughs]**

Dix McDevitt 32:03

I would say that there isn't a synonym for laughing or a subcategory of laughter that Harry defines with a choice of words that so clearly demarcates the way that he feels about the person enacting it, because certainly Ron does his fair share of sneering and certainly Harry has moments where he is sneering at other characters. He has been quite unkind. He is making contemptuous comments towards them. Does sneering even mean laughing?

Hannah McGregor 32:49

Yeah, yeah. Sneering might not be, like overt laughter, but it certainly is a form of mocking alongside some of the other language you've pulled out here. So if sneering is a thing that we see, both protagonists and antagonists do in the series, that suggests that it's not as stably coded as like, as giggling is because giggling does seem to be really stably coded. Now, when I think about giggling in the series, I think about girls, I mean, I think about book four, especially, which is giggle filled. I think about the attempts to ask girls out and how they're always giggling, I think about like, Lavender. I guess in Book Three, there's also quite a lot of giggling because Lavender and Parvati, are they the ones who are always giggling in divination?

Dix McDevitt 33:50

Now, this is interesting. It's really interesting that that's in your mind, because let me tell you, I've done some key searching of all the books, and Book Three, Parvati and Lavender basically don't giggle in Book Three. **[Marcelle and Hannah gasp]** Because most of the times that we are exposed to Parvati and Lavender and Book Three is in

divination, and they are serious about divination. They're not giggling during that class. You know who is giggling? Harry and Ron!

Hannah McGregor 34:26

But it doesn't use the word giggling, does it? *[Marcelle gasps]*

Dix McDevitt 34:29

It uses it once for Ron in the whole series. Our one hero giggles once. It's Ron. He's in a fit of silent giggles in divination. But often in those divination classes, Harry and Ron are described as quote unquote, stifling laughter. Or chortling, smirking, anything other than giggling, and Harry never describes himself as giggling throughout the entire series. Not once. Doesn't happen.

Hannah McGregor 35:05

That's wild that I remembered them as giggling.

Marcelle Kosman 35:08

Well, this is really interesting because they do giggle so much that this suggests that even the scenes in which they are serious, we, as readers have become so accustomed to them giggling that we remember them as giggling even when they're not.

Dix McDevitt 35:24

Yeah, exactly. And also, actually, in this book, Ron is described as giggling as much as they are. I think there's one reference to them giggling in that book. But Ron giggles once. They giggle once in that book. But we remembered them as giggly. I mean, they're described as giggling in many other books a lot. So that's part of the reason.

But also, I think, because within that context of the divination class, it is a context that is silly. It is presented to us as a silly context. The people and the women that we are encouraged to trust, aka Hermione, and McGonagall, have a lot of contempt for this subject. They dismiss it. And so it's almost like a kind of weird double negative, where in that space, the people who aren't taking it seriously are the serious characters, whereas the characters who are taking it seriously are the silly characters.

Hannah McGregor 36:34

Absolutely. It just really locked into my brain how all of those scenes are basically, like straight, white men making fun of women, particularly women of color, for liking divinatory practices. And it just made me so mad. So as I remember, every time that a man has been, like, do we have to talk about astrology again? And I'm like, we talk

about your fake thing all the time. Why does your fake thing get to be a thing that we take seriously and my fake thing, you roll your eyes at? **[Dix and Marcelle laugh]**

Marcelle Kosman 37:23

You can take courses on your fake thing at University. It's called Economics.

Hannah McGregor 37:27

I listen to you talk about fucking your keto diet for half an hour. You can listen to me talk about my rising sign. **[Marcelle giggles]**

Dix McDevitt 37:36

Exactly. Exactly. Exactly.

Hannah McGregor 37:39

Ron giggles once. How many other men giggle according to your searches?

Dix McDevitt 37:46

Yes, my searches. Well actually, Asterisk, Ron does giggle again. I should say that this is the only time he giggles when he is of quote unquote, sound mind.

Hannah McGregor 38:00

[Gasps] Ah, he giggles under the influence.

Dix McDevitt 38:03

Yeah. It's when they're in the Ministry of Magic. And it's not very clearly written, but he gets hit with some kind of spell. And he can't stop giggling in this really inappropriate setting where they're all fearing for their lives. Harry asks, What's wrong with Ron? And the word used to describe his tone is "fearfully". The fact that Ron is giggling in this situation is that it is really sinister to Harry. To be fair, you know, it is a bit weird.

Marcelle Kosman 38:38

But as you are pointing out, he is hit with that spell from a Death Eater. So this is a curse. He's giggling due to a curse. It's a curse.

Hannah McGregor 38:54

It's a curse and a crime.

Dix McDevitt 38:55

It's a curse and a crime. And that links to something else I found which blew my mind, which is also in Book Five when they are in St. Mungo's and Harry is reading the floor

plan for the different wards in St. Mungo's. Let me read you one. It is bonkers. The ward for plant poisoning. And it just lists "rashes, regurgitation, uncontrollable giggling, et cetera. Third floor".

Hannah McGregor 39:33

Oh. So giggling is really linked to lack of control.

Dix McDevitt 39:37

Yeah. Massively. Absolutely.

Marcelle Kosman 39:41

Oh my God. They describe it as a fit of giggles! A fit! You have a fit when you're having some kind of mental health breakdown. Oh my god!

Dix McDevitt 39:52

Yeah. And it is also I would say, really, really linked with hysteria as well. Which in and of itself, an incredibly gendered phenomenon, in the way that it's been used to, oh, what's it been used to do?

Marcelle Kosman 40:15

Control of feminized people's bodies?

Dix McDevitt 40:19

Yeah. Exactly, exactly. So there is this element of volatility to it, of uncontrollability. And this is a really important point, because what all of these examples dance around is that, the patterns that keep occurring across the series, that Harry is associating giggling with a couple of different things, but these couple of different things, as all things do, intersect at points. So those things are a certain brand of femininity, that generally is either threatening to him or I wouldn't even say threatening, I would say, illegible to him, actually.

Hannah McGregor 41:14

You got to double "mhmmm".

Dix McDevitt 41:19

It's something he perceives as a language between these anonymous girls around him. I mean, obviously, there are a couple that he knows their names, but for the most part, he doesn't seem to know the names of any of the girls who go to Hogwarts whatsoever.

Hannah McGregor 41:35

It's amazing, because the student body is like 20 people.

Dix McDevitt 41:38

I know. It is. It's entirely bizarre. I find it totally bizarre. But so he associates giggling with this brand of femininity, and also with juvenility as well. And I think already there's a massive overlap between that brand of femininity and his perception of juvenility. But also, that bracket can be used to explain why, for example, Hermione, you know, she has a penchant to giggle in the first few books, but after Book Four, she doesn't so much. Whereas in Book Two Lockhart at times, in Book Four Krum at times, you know, she giggles once or twice, but she becomes serious, she gets a control over this impulse as she matures. She does giggle at Ron actually, a few times.

Hannah McGregor 42:39

But her interest in him is generally represented either as anger that Harry helps us interpret or as a kind of, like softening. *[Marcelle laughs]* Like, right, like he'll say something and she'll, like, look sort of surprised or pleased or something. But like that, giggling excited school Girl crush energy is something she grows out of.

Dix McDevitt 43:10

Yeah, I think that's, that's really true. I think that, I mean, that in itself could be I'm sure. It's something that some fans online have written epics about. So you have this aspect of juvenility too, as well, which is also why you have one or two instances, well, just the one actually have Ron giggling, of sound mind, but still, when they're pretty young in the books, because young boys can engage in that behavior, I would argue before, a sort of romantically charged bifurcation, of course, only two stable genders. I hope you got from my tone that was sarcastic.

Hannah McGregor 43:54

I enjoyed your bro voice. *[Marcelle laughs]* I think it's also worth noting that divination class is this, like, dangerously feminized space. That it is run by a woman. It obviously appeals more to women. But it's also like, like, it's very womb-like, it's always very warm in there. It's draped in fabrics.

Marcelle Kosman 44:16

There's incense, they pour tea.

Hannah McGregor 44:21

It's like an aggressively feminized space, where you can almost think that giggling is almost sort of something that happens to them as a result of being in this bad lady room.

Dix McDevitt 44:34

Yeah, totally.

Marcelle Kosman 44:37

I want to ask you guys a question. Because, Dix, in your notes, you describe giggling as abject or as an abject kind of laughter. And so I want to talk, Hannah, could you define what the word abject means for the listeners?

Hannah McGregor 44:54

Yeah, absolutely. So the abject is a phrase, I believe, coined or at least theorized most explicitly by Julia Kristeva, who was a feminist sort of psycho analyst who worked around the same time as Hélène Cixous, sort of mid 20th century theorists, and her concept of the abject was the kind of things that our bodies do that challenge our sense of ourselves as discrete and self contained subjects. So that as part of our sort of development into, you know, thinking, acting, mentally functioning, because this is linked to madness, right?

So part of our development into subjects is that we sort of create these barriers around ourselves that are like, Here is me, and here is what's not me. But there's this problem where our bodies are constantly like leaking, and oozing all of these things that aren't us. And that reminds us that our bodies are not quite as stable as we would like them to be. And one of the points that Kristeva makes is that the abject is particularly affiliated with feminized bodies, because, like, it's linked to breast milk and menstrual blood, and like, the sort of particular things that feminized bodies ooze.

So, abjection is kind of like your body producing something disgusting, in a way that, at a deeper level, sort of challenges our whole concept of like, autonomy and self contained-ness. So abjection, as is often linked to madness.

Marcelle Kosman 46:51

Beautifully articulated, Hannah.

Hannah McGregor 46:52

Thank you. Thank you. So yeah, it's interesting to think about giggling as abject because it's this thing that like disgustingly emerges from women's bodies

Marcelle Kosman 47:07

And causes horror to the men around them.

Hannah McGregor 47:09

And causes horror, and causes horror for Harry in particular, but it is also linked, as you have pointed out, Dix, it is also linked to a kind of pervasive ableism through the series. So can we talk about that a bit more?

Dix McDevitt 47:27

Yeah, absolutely. So this first became apparent to me, when after noticing how gendered giggling was, obviously then I was thinking, well, what are the instances in which characters who are men or in Dobby's case, I guess, a man?

Hannah McGregor 47:52

So Dobby is a male character who giggles. But Dobby is erratic and unstable.

Dix McDevitt 48:01

Absolutely. And also as well, I would argue as well that there is a lot that codes Dobby as disabled, especially in the second book, this idea that, left his own devices, just harms himself, that he doesn't know what's best for him, that he is out of control, all of these things. And that's a pattern that recurs with most of the instances in which men giggle in this series, which is that it's a marker of a perceived simplicity of mind on Harry's part.

So other men who giggle within the series, I think, very significantly, are Morphin. Voldemort's uncle is described as giggling, from Harry's perspective of this memory that we have of the scene. So we've got two layers of interpretation happening here. But the final one that we're given is Harry's perception, which is Morphin giggling, and Morphin is very emphatically coded as mentally disabled in some way. And we also get an instance of Amicus, the Death Eater giggles a couple of times, and I couldn't believe the way that JK Rowling just described this line. "A lumpy looking man with an odd lopsided leer gave a wheezy giggle."

Hannah McGregor 49:47

[Laughs] There's so much happening to that sentence to be like, a bad man who was bad did a bad sound badly.

Dix McDevitt 49:54

So here we have again, the giggle representing a perceived simplicity of mind from Harry's part and also a sinister lack of control from that character, again, a sense of volatility. And also the fearfulness of somebody laughing in an inappropriate setting, which I would argue is something that is also coded as the behavior of somebody who is mentally disabled.

Hannah McGregor 50:28

So giggling is like it's almost always threatening. And it's consistently feminized and linked to characters coded as mentally disabled in a way that links back to the history of hysteria and the way that mental disability and mental instability are themselves historically, deeply feminized. So all of this leads me to a question which is does Bellatrix LeStrange giggle?

Dix McDevitt 51:05

Drum roll. **[Hannah laughs]** No, Bellatrix LeStrange doesn't giggle once in these books, which is fascinating. Because she embodies this trifecta, she is girly-pops. **[Marcelle laughs]** She is emphatically juvenile from Harry's perspective. But I also think she exhibits some behaviors. I mean, when she's taunting Harry after killing Sirius, she's described as using a mock baby voice, which is...

Hannah McGregor 51:44

So sinister.

Marcelle Kosman 51:46

Makes me...

Dix McDevitt 51:48

It's really, really icky. And also is very much coded as mentally unstable. However, she doesn't ever giggle. She does other things. She shrieks, she cackles, she screams with laughter. But she doesn't giggle which led me to start thinking about giggling in a slightly different way. Because while I agree that it is a threatening entity to Harry, in the books, generally, I don't think it's mortally threatening to him, either in terms of his safety, sort of physical safety against evil, or the safety of his masculinity in the romantic and sexual arena either. Because fundamentally, the women in his life aren't the gigglers. He likes women who are not like other girls in a really, really annoying way. JK.

Hannah McGregor 52:59

Cho might be surrounded by girls who are giggling, but Cho herself does not giggle.

Dix McDevitt 53:04

Yes. And also when he asks Parvety to the ball, she giggles and he hates it. But when he sees her and she's all dressed up, he says that she's looking quite pretty. And she's not giggling. That's good, isn't it?

Marcelle Kosman 53:19

That is good.

Hannah McGregor 53:21

So giggling is a thing that is marked as untrustworthy and unsavory from Harry's perspective, but it's not, like, actively dangerous in the sense that gigglers are not serious threats, or threats to Sirius. Eh?

Dix McDevitt 53:42

Mhmm! Exactly. What giggling time and time again demonstrates from Harry's perspective, what it demarcates is the characters that Harry is dismissing in some way. And he might be dismissing them because he thinks that they're bad and wrong. Or he might be dismissing them just because he thinks they're silly, and he doesn't think they're worth his attention and worth his time. In the case of Parvety and Lavender, who in this actually, I think brings it round to how the trivial version of him dismissing these girls in his year, because they're silly, and they giggle a lot. Actually, it comes round at the end of the books in a way that makes me so upset and so angry, which is that in the final book, we see Lavender being attacked by Fenrir Greyback. And she's laying there lifeless, and we don't find out whether she lives or not. That's not mentioned. And so-

Marcelle Kosman 54:49

Because she's not serious, she's not a serious character. She's not a serious part of Harry's world.

Dix McDevitt 54:57

But she was in Dumbledore's army. She was in his year group for six years, he lived with her in this space, but ultimately entirely dismissed her to the point that if we're to take these books as we are forced to take them as Harry's journey, then whether or not Lavender Brown is dead, is not an important part of his journey to him, which I think is really profound and quite upsetting.

Hannah McGregor 55:33

Yeah, and a reminder of what's at stake when we have these kinds of conversations that, that this brings us back to the ideological force of narrative, that something as small as a word choice, like giggle versus laugh or chuckle signifies that some characters are the ones that we worry about whether they live or die, and other ones are not. And that actually unfortunately, has real world ramifications for whose lives we think are the lives that need to be attended to and whose or not.

Dix McDevitt 56:06

Absolutely.

Marcelle Kosman 56:07

Is it OWL's if we don't end on a bummer?

Hannah McGregor 56:13

[laughs] By which I mean, teeheeheehee!

[Dix and Marcelle join in giggling with Hannah]

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Marcelle Kosman 56:31

Thank you, witches, for joining us for another episode of *Witch, Please*. If you have questions, comments, concerns, or PRAISE, come hang out with us at @ohwitchplease on Instagram or Twitter 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 have a newsletter to keep you in the loop for all of our adventures — you can sign up at our website.

Hannah McGregor 57:10

Dix, if people want more of you, where can they get you?

Dix McDevitt 57:15

You can find me on Instagram. My handle is Dixie.McDevitt. Find me on there. I'm pretty funny. And I'm doing all sorts of stuff. I write things. Basically I'm unemployed. Please give me a job.

Hannah McGregor 57:33

Anybody who's got jobs to give, give one to Dix. *Witch, Please* is distributed by Acast. You can find the rest of our episodes on Acast or at ohwitchplease.ca, which is expanding every day thanks to the brilliant Gaby, who I think has been around long enough to merit her own sound effect. **["Boing" sound effect]** 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! **[Soundbite of a sports whistle plays]** to our social media manager and marketing designer Zoe Mix **[Soundbite of a record rewinding plays]**, and to our sound engineer Erik Magnus. **[Soundbite of chimes plays]**

Marcelle Kosman 58:23

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 Marcelle *purring in my lap cuz she loves me*

Thanks this week to: Valeriusjka, HannahLisaD, Martiboeki, SigneGT, lottixcatsandowls, Googooibvvg, Ella_Loves_Cheesecake, and picpacpoc.

Hannah McGregor 59:09

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

Dix McDevitt 59:15

Later witches!

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)