

Witch, Please Book 7, Ep. 6 | Eugenics

SPEAKERS

Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor

Hannah McGregor 00:00

Hey witches. Today's episode is about eugenics. And in it we talk about real examples of Canada's genocidal treatment of Indigenous peoples. If this conversation could be triggering for you, feel free to skip it. Take care of yourselves.

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

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

Marcelle Kosman 00:33

And I'm Marcelle Kosman. You know, Hannah. I was thinking that the best way to get ourselves into the right headspace for today's episode might be to talk about our favorite breeds of dog. So why don't you tell me everything you look for in a good boy in the sorting chat?

Hannah McGregor 00:56

Marcelle opening an episode on eugenics with a conversation about dog breeds is so dark.

Marcelle Kosman 01:01

I mean, it's gonna come up again.

Hannah McGregor 01:03

Yeah, and it's apt. Okay, so my hottest of hot takes is that I think that breeding dogs is really gross. I think that breeding animals is really gross.

Marcelle Kosman 01:14

I'm shocked by this, you're a vegan! *(laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 01:18

I know. *(laughs)* It's so at odds with my normal politics, I really don't like when people buy designer dogs, though usually, I think that um, the punishment ends up just being

the fact that you then have a pretty bad dog. Everybody getting one of these current trendy poodle and something else crosses which are like, you know, the big trend dogs.

Marcelle Kosman 01:45

This exact thing is going to come up in like 45 minutes.

Hannah McGregor 01:49

And it's really funny because cross anything with a poodle and you get a version of that dog that is now also, like, evil. Like, poodles are super smart, and spend the first four years of their lives being completely uncontrollable. And so I love watching all of these people who got themselves a designer, bern-a-doodle, and now have a dog that they're like, What do I do with this? It's learned how to open doors like the velociraptors in Jurassic Park! *(Marcelle laughs)* Anyway, so I think that animals should come from the dump. However, that said, obviously, I love all kinds of breeds. I particularly love a small thick Terrier or Bulldog.

Marcelle Kosman 02:38

I love English Bulldog's so much.

Hannah McGregor 02:40

I love a dog that is the same width the whole way.

Marcelle Kosman 02:47

(laughs) Like it's just a sphere. It's just a sphere with feet.

Hannah McGregor 02:51

Yeah, like I just, I just want it- I'm making this hand gesture. That is what I do when I've got my hands on a thick little terrier, I just wanna grab 'em by their little scruff. And then my other favorite kind of dog is the sort of extreme opposite which is like I love like a deer hound.

Marcelle Kosman 03:10

Oh, like a pointy dog.

Hannah McGregor 03:12

Like a pointy, an enormous pointy dog. Like a truly huge dog that just looks like it came from the mist.

Marcelle Kosman 03:21

So, you love both dogs that are like fully when they're three dimensional. I mean, most dogs are three dimensional. *(laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 03:29

Most, yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 03:30

You love dogs that are perfect spheres and dogs that are two dimensional, is, I guess what I'm trying to say, right? Like those pointy dogs, you turn them to the side and you don't see them anymore. *(laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 03:41

Yeah, they disappear. They disappear. And my ideal is that I want one of each of them. And then I want them to be friends. Yeah, yeah. Okay, Marcelle, tell me about your favorite dog.

Marcelle Kosman 03:51

It's so weird to simultaneously be like, no, dog breeding is fucked up. And also, I love these dogs. *(laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 03:59

We know that it's possible to love something and critique it at the same time, Marcelle.

Marcelle Kosman 04:04

I know, I know. But it's also like, I love them. But I don't want them to exist. You know, like, it's weird. It's a weird place to be, which is why I really love animal shelters that specialize in specific breeds because that's where you go to get the kind of breed that you have some weird affinity for, so that you can like absolve yourself of any kind of responsibility for the eugenic breeding of dogs. Anyway. *(Hannah laughs)*

I have a real love for wrinkly dogs, like the dogs that just look like they're melting. Bull dogs, Basset Hounds

Hannah McGregor 04:44

(in a cooing voice) They always look so sad.

Marcelle Kosman 04:46

And I guess similarly, dogs that will just decide to stop walking. You know, they're just like, I'm done now and they just want to take a nap and you're like five minutes into your walk. I just really respect that.

Hannah McGregor 04:57

I was in the park with a friend of the pod, Ushra, this past weekend and she was saying that somebody needs to make a compilation video of dogs that decide that they are done with their walk. And just lie down and are like, I'm done. So you can solve this now but I will be walking no further. Maybe that does exist. Somebody send it to us.

Marcelle, do you remember that time that you and I were eating vegan brunch in Victoria and there was this tiny perfect, unbelievable dog. And both of us momentarily-

Marcelle Kosman 05:31

-lost our fucking minds-

Hannah McGregor 05:33

-Threw our politics out the window. And we were like, Well, I guess we are both going to purchase miniature Australian sheep dogs because this is the perfect-est puppy I have ever seen. And I want 100 of them.

Marcelle Kosman 05:46

I can't even remember if I asked permission to take photos of the dog or if I just surreptitiously took photos of the dog.

Hannah McGregor 05:55

Of course you did, you always ask for consent.

Marcelle Kosman 05:56

Okay, because all I know is that I sent pictures of this dog to Trevor and was like this! I want this! And he was like, no. **(both laugh)**

Hannah McGregor 06:04

Get me one!

Marcelle Kosman 06:05

(in fancy british accent) Get me one of these! Immediately! Bring me a dog. **(both laugh)** That's the voice I use when I purchase purebred dogs. **(in fancy british accent)** Trevor! **(back to normal voice)** *Whew.* This episode is going to be unhinged. Let's go.

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Sometimes looking at the past means coming face to face with some pretty despicable things that you did and said. Fortunately, this process also keeps us accountable and ensures we're able to keep learning. So let's do just that in revision.

Hannah McGregor 06:54

Marcelle, are you suggesting that we have said and done despicable things in past episodes?

Marcelle Kosman 07:01

Never. I would never admit to a mistake. I just want our listeners do be prepared for the absolute shocker that cis white women like us have been and often still are complicit in some pretty horrific politics even when they/we claim to be feminists. *(Soundbite of a crowd gasping in shock)*

Hannah McGregor 07:26

So we should definitely start the segment by looking at what we've had to say about feminism and its constant need for intervention.

Marcelle Kosman 07:34

Absolutely. So when we first introduced feminist literary criticism back in 2020, we opted to center the voices of Black feminist writers and scholars like Audre Lorde and bell hooks. We did this because in spaces dominated by white voices, like universities and politics, Black women's concerns, especially, tend to get treated as fringe or secondary to a non-existent neutral feminism that is imagined to be unaffected by race. In other words, white women have conversations about women's issues, when what we actually mean is white women's issues. So it was important to us that we preempt that kind of thinking by introducing feminist literary criticism intersectionally.

Hannah McGregor 08:22

Mm hmm. So we actually first talked about intersectionality in our episode on class, when we quoted from Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, who explains the inherent relationship between class and race in a capitalist society. And then in book four, episode three, we were joined by guest K. Alex to talk about critical race theory in detail. She walked us through the fandom's reading of Hermione as Black and how that reading makes visible all kinds of structural inequities in both of the wizard and muggle worlds. K. Alex also drew our attention to the ways that JK Rowling was able to capitalize off how fandoms read Hermione without actually doing the work of making the character canonically Black.

Marcelle Kosman 09:02

Speaking of JK Rowling being a shitty white feminist, it will also be helpful to remember that in our introduction to queer theory, we introduced the concept of heteronormativity. So Hannah, you quoted from Lauren Berlin and Michael Warner, who describe heteronormativity as, quote, “the institution's structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent, that is, organized as a sexuality, but also privileged,” end quote.

Hannah McGregor 09:34

And one way to think about privileging heterosexuality is looking at the ways institutions are organized around presumed heterosexuality. So, deviations from heterosexuality become not only unthinkable but are made to seem wholly unnatural and even dangerous.

Marcelle Kosman 09:53

That's right. We had similar conversations about disability, neuro divergence, and trauma in our episodes with Jess Battis, Tea Garbeza, Lucia Lorenzi, and Addie Merians. In fact, in our very first foray into disability studies with Jess Battis, Hannah, you used the phrase light eugenics to describe the wizarding world's obsession with blood status. So as we're getting into the history of Eugenics as a way to understand Voldemort's fascism, we need to remember that like queerness, and like race, neurodivergence and disability have been treated as “other” and therefore as something needing to be socially controlled and managed.

Hannah McGregor 10:35

Hey, Marcelle, speaking of social control, and management, are we going to need to talk about our episode about the nation state?

Marcelle Kosman 10:41

I think this is all we have time for, but I'm glad you brought it up.

Hannah McGregor 10:45

Well, it was in the script...

Marcelle Kosman 10:46

So, what do nationalism, racism, ableism and heteronormativity have to do with eugenics, you may ask?

Hannah McGregor 10:54

I will. Hey, Marcelle. What do nationalism, racism, ableism and heteronormativity have to do with the eugenics?

Marcelle Kosman 10:59

I'm so glad you asked, Hannah. Let's find out in our next segment.

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

Hannah McGregor 11:12

If there's one thing white feminism does it's take a shitty lady who did one good thing and transfigure her into a hero to hide all the other harmful things she does. And no, we're not talking about JK Rowling. It's transfiguration class!

Marcelle Kosman 11:28

For today's deep dive into eugenics, I'm drawing on a couple of different sources, but the main one is actually a book written by my PhD supervisor PhD supervisor, Cecily Devereux, and it's called *Growing a Race: Nellie McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism*.

Hannah McGregor 11:47

Nellie McClung, a great example of a historical figure who we celebrate for one good thing, even though she super sucks, right up there with Tommy Douglas, which is a Canadian reference that only Canadians are gonna get.

Marcelle Kosman 12:03

And probably not even most of them.

Hannah McGregor 12:05

He came up with socialized medicine, he was like, he was the socialized medicine guy.

Marcelle Kosman 12:09

Shockingly, a eugenic principle. Anyway, we'll get to that. Don't worry, don't worry. Okay.

Hannah McGregor 12:14

I was worried but I'm comforted.

Marcelle Kosman 12:16

Good. I'm glad that me yelling at you not to worry comforts you. It's one of my love languages. *(laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 12:21

So Marcelle, what's, what's eugenics?

Marcelle Kosman 12:25

Eugenics is one of those 19th century pseudosciences that justified a lot of racist, ableist, and generally violent oppressive behaviors. So it is not unrelated to phrenology. **(Soundbite of crowd booing)** Okay, so the basic principles of eugenics are as follows; The term comes from a 19th century British scientist named Francis Galton, he used the term to refer to his science of selective breeding, or what he called judicious mating. So now you see why I wanted to start by talking about dog breeds. Okay? So to quote Cecily, “the basis of eugenics was genetic, the idea that many characteristics or tendencies, not only physical characteristics, but perceived inclinations towards, for instance, alcoholism, tuberculosis, or insanity are hereditary. The logic of selective breeding suggests that if bad characteristics could be blocked and good ones fostered the quality of a nation's people or its race could be improved, made individually and collectively stronger and healthier, and thus the nation itself would be made more powerful,” end quote.

Hannah McGregor 13:55

Okay, so nationalism, it was worth noting in revision.

Marcelle Kosman 13:58

Nationalism plays a major role in the popularity of eugenics. So in Canada, eugenics was fundamentally intertwined with the aims of the expanding British Empire. Okay? So the colonization of Turtle Island by Anglo Saxons was understood as a project to extend the reach and power of Great Britain. Even after Confederation when Britain recognized Canada as a sovereign state, Canadian social reform movements were generally figured as in service to the British Empire.

Hannah McGregor 14:33

So I mean, not surprised to find that there is a connection between eugenics and colonization, which I'm sure we will talk about more. But I want to ask here about nationalism and science because I feel like right now, when we think about conservative, Neo fascist nationalist movements that are on the rise, they tend to actually be quite you anti-science.

Marcelle Kosman 15:01

Yes, yes, they do. So we want to keep in mind that Galton was developing this so-called “science of selective breeding” during a period in the 19th century that emphasized ethnicity and language as the general criteria for nationhood. So he's writing at a time when people are actively using these so-called sciences to defend the idea of an ethnic or language based nationalism.

Hannah McGregor 15:34

Gotcha. So it's not really about being anti-science so much as it is about being pro whatever tools help you push forward a sort of white supremacist agenda.

Marcelle Kosman 15:43

Yeah, so not anti-science, not pro-science. But pro-white supremacy, I think, is a pretty loosey goosey way to describe it.

Hannah McGregor 15:51

I think we can kind of see that now with the resurgence of some of these pseudo sciences.

Marcelle Kosman 15:58

Totally. So I'm gonna quote from Cecily, again here because she argues that quote, "Underpinning Galtonian eugenics was an impulse to refine and strengthen a nation conceived in these terms. As an identifiable racial community whose preservation was necessary to the protection of a particular geopolitical space," end quote. So if we think about this new Canadian nationalism that was emerging during this period, eugenics was as much about building a new so-called race called Canadians, as it was about building strong hearty workers who would settle and colonize and defend this colonized land from so-called enemies.

Hannah McGregor 16:44

Yeah, okay, this makes a lot of sense, this sort of collapsing nationality and race, but like those two things become synonymous in a way that then, you know, has an impact on immigration policy, amongst other things. So walk me through what a social policy for selective breeding actually looks like.

Marcelle Kosman 17:08

Mhm. So I think it's important to stress that what we're describing now as efforts towards eliminating specific traits, that these efforts were very literal, and can actually be kind of mapped out by looking at the histories of state run institutions. So one example I think that is becoming increasingly apparent to Canadians and to people paying attention to news stories about this is the way that residential schools in Canada were part of a system of genocide and not any sincere effort at assimilation. Right? So like, the claim that Canadian lawmakers ever had good intentions with residential schools is unsupportable if we actually look at how they functioned and what they did.

Hannah McGregor 17:57

Yeah, like the mortality rate of children who attended those schools was staggering.

Marcelle Kosman 18:01

Yeah, exactly. And if we look at the rates of incarceration and institutionalization of residential school survivors, we can see that eugenic policies actually operate as a vast network, right? So for example, the province of Alberta passed what was called a Sexual Sterilization bill in 1928. And this I'm taking out of Cecily's Lee's book, again, it quote, "empowered a board of four members to inhibit through surgical sterilization, the power of procreation for anyone residing in a provincial institution, deemed a mentally defective person", end quote. So a panel of four people would be able to decide that anybody who was institutionalized in any state run institution should be sterilized.

Hannah McGregor 18:53

I think it can be tempting to sort of look back and say, like, oh, well, that was a really terrible period in our history, but we don't do that anymore. But we know that's not the case functionally.

Marcelle Kosman 19:07

Right. So like, we know that throughout the 20th century, Indigenous people in state run institutions account for a hugely disproportionate percentage of people who were forcibly sterilized. But then, when we had our guest, Mercedes Eng on with us to talk about these continued disproportionate rates of incarceration among Indigenous folks and specifically Indigenous women, she was able to provide contemporary examples of how this is exactly a policy that continues.

Hannah McGregor 19:39

Yeah. And that the disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous women is a eugenicist practice, insofar as it is a response by the state to the fact that, like Indigenous youth are the fastest growing population in Canada.

Marcelle Kosman 19:57

Exactly, exactly. So these policies, whether they were explicitly eugenic or not, because the language changed over time-

Hannah McGregor 20:06

They did, in their origins, a lot of these policies were like, this is for eugenics thumbs up, that language becomes less popular, but we can tell that the policies stay really similar. So the language shifts, but the practices don't always.

Marcelle Kosman 20:21

Exactly. And these were intentional and systemic and broad sweeping efforts to define Canada as a white Anglo Saxon and Protestant country. And, you know, like you're saying, Hannah, that the language shifts, and as a result of that, a lot of the social policies that are in place today, which we might even be fans of, like socialized health care, like we talked about earlier, these come from eugenic principles. So another example is the current laws around the regulation and control of alcohol and drugs. These come from eugenic practices and eugenic principles because eugenic feminists like Emily Murphy, a very good friend of Nellie McClung, described these things as, and I quote, "racial poisons," end quote, because they apparently or allegedly slowed the birth rate of hardworking white people by making their users impotent.

Hannah McGregor 21:25

Oh, my God, I want to talk more about drug policy. But should we pause and tell our non Canadians who Emily Murphy and Nellie McClung are? Or are we going to get to that?

Marcelle Kosman 21:34

Okay, because probably a lot of people are like, I don't know who those bitches are.

Hannah McGregor 21:38

So Emily Murphy and Nellie McClung are two of what we refer to as "the famous five." Who were five white ladies, in the early 1900s?

Marcelle Kosman 21:53

The early 1900s, 20th century, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 21:56

Aren't they the ones who advocated for women to be legally defined as persons in Canada, so that they could hold office?

Marcelle Kosman 22:06

That's right, so that they could hold office, so that they could vote. But, and this is the part that activists and intersectional feminists will point out, the part that gets left out of that advocacy of the Famous Five is that they were specifically talking about white women.

Hannah McGregor 22:25

And very specifically talking about white women, and they tend to be celebrated as these like, major feminist figures in Canadian history. But when you, when you like, scratch the surface of their politics, it's not we're talking about white women, because we aren't thinking about women of color. It's we are talking about white women,

because we believe that the legal recognition of white women is part of furthering the white supremacist goals of this nation. So let's get back briefly to the criminalization of drug use, which actually I feel continues to be a kind of cause that is strongly associated with like white women who believe that they are bettering their society.

This sort of patronizing, caretaking white lady politics often aligns with this idea of like, we need to take care of drug users and by take care of we mean, like, not treat them like humans with agency and autonomy, but like, put them somewhere else where you can't see them. And that is, you know, the criminalization of drug use is eugenic, because we have plenty of studies that show us that harm reduction, safe supply, safe drug use sites, it saves lives. However, it remains incredibly difficult to get safe consumption sites approved, so saving lives is clearly not the goal here.

Marcelle Kosman 23:58

That's right. And it never has been. So the anxieties about drugs and alcohol, as Cecily puts it, in her book, were never about the quote, "individual well being of members of a national community," end quote. They were policies responding to anxiety related to the slowing biological reproduction of white people at a time of increasing immigration, particularly the immigration of non white people.

Hannah McGregor 24:29

It's such a bummer how totally fucking contemporary this conversation feels, like listening to people just unabashedly talk about like, quote unquote, replacement rights and the like, social crisis of white people not having enough children. It's just like, fucking 100 year old vintage eugenics.

Marcelle Kosman 24:49

Yeah, but like you said earlier with new words, so we don't with new we don't recognize it as eugenics because eugenics is a dirty word. We know it's bad. So we instead call it other things like I don't know, old stock Canadians. Sorry, that's another inside reference.

Hannah McGregor 25:07

That was a conservative dog whistle in Canada. Old stock Canadians. Okay, so this is interesting because at the same period of time, like the early 20th century was a period of Canada actively recruiting a lot of immigrants to colonize the country as part of the project of pushing Indigenous people out of their traditional territory. So the regulation and control of so called racial poisons is one response to the need to sort of breed this Canadian race. How else does eugenics respond to immigration?

Marcelle Kosman 25:41

So this is where I want to come back to dog breeding because the logic of eugenics, in my humble opinion, is best exemplified if we look at dog breeding. Okay?

Hannah McGregor 25:54

It is quite an unabashed version of it. Like, you can really see the logic at work in how dog breeding works.

Marcelle Kosman 26:00

Totally. And because its animals we're like, Yeah, okay. Sure, because it's not people. But we have a whole episode about animal studies that we probably should have brought up in revision, but, you know.

Hannah McGregor 26:13

Listen. This is a complex topic and obviously intersects with a lot of our other content.

Marcelle Kosman 26:17

Shockingly. Okay, so, eugenics takes the position that there are different races of humans in the same way that there are different breeds of dog. Okay? And if we look at dog breeding, we can see that the objective isn't no mixing between breeds ever. The objective is deliberate and controlled mixing to enhance specific characteristics. So, Labradoodles, some guy, some ding dong, puts a poodle and a lab together in the backyard and makes a Labradoodle and now the Labradoodle is so popular that all these other kinds of doodle, like the Bernadoodle follow suit. So pop quiz, Hannah, what are the qualities of a Labradoodle that make it such a popular breed? I can only think of one, because evil is not on my list. *(laughs)*

Hannah McGregor 27:13

(laughs) Okay, my understanding is actually that the idea is that the poodle makes the dog hypoallergenic because poodles are hypoallergenic dogs. And so they're trying to take other dogs that don't have the personalities of poodles, they have to find dogs with better personalities, and then cross them with poodles having coats that are not as furry, they don't shed as much and so they can be easier for people with allergies, but like, that's also not how breeding works. So you end up with a Bernadoodle with the coat of a Bernese mountain dog and the personality of a poodle.

Marcelle Kosman 27:47

Yeah, yeah, you just end up with an evil dog and you're still allergic to it, you know, like it's complicated stuff. *(Hannah laughs)* So you've got to keep in mind that these same attitudes were unironically held by people. Unironically and consciously held by people,

okay, it's we're not talking like a subconscious, internalized racism or xenophobia. We're talking like, British people truly believed that British people were superior, and that white Anglo Saxon Protestants possessed superior genes, and that those genes made them morally good, hardworking, and even immune to so called defects like homosexuality and alcoholism.

Hannah McGregor 28:37

Okay, Marcelle, but I know for a fact that there are some homosexual white laughs. Explain that.

Marcelle Kosman 28:44

(laughs) Yeah, not only some homosexual white people, but also some alcoholic Britons.

Hannah McGregor 28:51

Okay, yeah. Also a legitimate point.

Marcelle Kosman 28:56

So like, unsurprisingly, like all human beings, some Brits are hardworking and some are not. And so, some poodles are good and some poodles are evil, you know, because this isn't actually how anything works. So while there was absolutely a class factor in terms of which Brits were considered hearty and strong enough to do homesteading, because the upper classes were too delicate and they couldn't, it became necessary to encourage hard working Canadians to mix with other desirable hearty races.

Okay? So desirable, scare quotes, racist, scare quotes, scare quotes around everything. Okay? So the Swedes and the Dutch, like Nordic Europeans, were considered very beneficial to the Canadian race because of their capacity to work hard in cold conditions.

Hannah McGregor 30:00

Okay, so speaking of meaning these things literally, there's this book that I have used very frequently in my own teaching and writing that I know you have also used frequently in your own teaching and writing, because it is quite a remarkable historical artifact, which is a guidebook on the desirability of different immigrants in Canada.

Marcelle Kosman 30:29

That's right. And as another friend of the podcast and friend of ours, Professor Julie Rack, told me, it was progressive. It was considered a progressive text.

Hannah McGregor 30:42

So the book, it's by this guy who I think he was, like a minister, like a progressive minister. His name was JS Woodsworth. He wrote this book called *Strangers Within Our Gates, or Coming Canadians*, and he was absolutely a progressive, who thought that this was, like, helpful to discourage the immigration of people who could not thrive in Canada. It's a very paternalistic attitude of saying, like, I'm actually just doing this for your own good, you actually wouldn't be happy in Canada. It's very cold here and only good for white people.

Marcelle Kosman 31:25

You don't have the genetic makeup to till the land, said to people who have been, like farming and cultivating land-

Hannah McGregor 31:37

-formany, many generations. Yeah. Yeah. Okay, so what was Woodsworth, you know, hierarchy of who should come to Canada?

Marcelle Kosman 31:46

So it won't surprise you that the cream of the crop- (*laughs*)

Hannah McGregor 31:52

Let me guess, let me guess.

Marcelle Kosman 31:54

It was British people. It was British people. It's 100%. British people. Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 31:59

I think Americans are up there, too. Who's like, Listen, if they want to come, they're welcome.

Marcelle Kosman 32:04

You're not wrong about that, because his book is also very anxious about the fact that America had stopped being American because of the number of undesirable immigrants who had gotten there. So the top three categories of people are really the only ones who I want to raise because everybody else was increasingly unwelcome. And there are some terms that I just don't feel like it's appropriate to say on a podcast. I'm not going to name the rest of them.

Hannah McGregor 32:31

Yeah, we can actually skip over how he felt about like, Jewish people and Black people. Maybe?

Marcelle Kosman 32:37

Yeah, so he recommended Brits, Scandinavians, including Icelandics, it's in parentheses. And he recommended Germans, particularly Mennonites.

Hannah McGregor 32:49

I write about this, the fact that my family came over as part of these eugenicist immigration policies in my book, *A Sentimental Education*. Out now.

Marcelle Kosman 32:56

I'm going to have to get a copy of that from my local library. So I mentioned that Woodsworth has a chapter about the problem with immigration. And in it, he describes Canada and the US as quote, "the old world's dumping ground," end quote, and he gives the example. Because you know what? Early 20th century writers loved sentimental examples. Okay. So he uses the example, he describes Canada as follows. Okay, quote, "fancy a mother with her own baby to care for adopting half a dozen other babies, some of them too, of very uncertain tempers," end quote.

Hannah McGregor 33:48

Oh, yeah, man. What a bad mother that would be to take care of many children.

Marcelle Kosman 33:57

So like, we know that there are oodles of problems with American immigration policy. But I think it's worth noting that Woodsworth is writing at this period when people are flocking to America because the whole statue of liberty, give us your tired, you're weak, you're hungry.

Hannah McGregor 34:19

Whereas Canada's like, actually, sorry. No, thank you. If you are tired, weak or hungry, you are not vigorous enough for our cold hearty country. We would actually only like the well rested, the strong and the amply fed.

Marcelle Kosman 34:36

Yeah, I mean, other other examples of things that, quote unquote, progressive Canadian said in and around this period, you know, like Vincent Massey, I know this is a few decades later, but he referred to there being a problem in Canada of people with Old Testament last names, you know, like the active white supremacist nation building agendas of progressive Canadians is so virulently racist when you actually look at the

things that they said and did that, I, you know, I just, Canada really has a reputation for being the good one. And it's not.

Hannah McGregor 35:27

Sorry, folks, we have a slightly better political system. That's literally all we've got, we've got a slightly better political system. We've got that socialized healthcare, but as you pointed out, that itself comes from eugenic histories. You know, I think one of the things that's really crucial here is that rather than looking at Canada and the US and seeing, you know, the US as a country with more diversity, but also a country with more problems, like racial violence, and you know, Canada as a country where like, we don't have a race problem, which is often the sort of perspective from outside, you have to look at these different immigration policies, which is that the US often had a more lenient set of immigration policies that were then paired with internal laws about managing racialized populations.

The creation of ghettos, obviously, you know, enslaved laborers, lots of sort of histories of bringing in labor, but then policing those populations. Whereas with a small number of exceptions, for example, bringing in Chinese workers to build the railroad, Canada just had significantly more prohibitive immigration policies. Like why do we not have as publicized a problem of antiBlack violence in Canada? Well, a big part of it is because there's a significantly smaller Black population in Canada. And that is because the US response to anti Black racism was enslavement, Canada's was expulsion. So they're two sides of the same coin. They're not like, here's the good country. And here's the bad country.

Marcelle Kosman 37:08

You know, Hannah, you reminded me bringing in Chinese workers to work on the railroad also came with it, a lot of, obviously a lot of anxieties about miscegenation and so a lot of anxieties about white women marrying Chinese men and women who were white women who were in relationships with Chinese men were frequently institutionalized by their families, because families had the capacity during this period to have their daughters institutionalized. So when we're thinking about the ways in which eugenics manages and controls, the, quote, unquote, mixing of quote, unquote, races, we're really talking about people putting their children in institutions to prevent them from being in relationships with non white people.

Hannah McGregor 38:02

Yeah. And we are also talking about, you know, this kind of deliberate, quote, unquote, breeding of stronger workers, right? So I think it's really helpful to remember, and this is

gonna, this is going to come up I think, when we talk about this book. This Harry Potter book that we're going to talk about.

Marcelle Kosman 38:23

I forgot about the book.

Hannah McGregor 38:24

Yeah, because this is a Canadian History podcast, obviously, what both of us secretly longed for it to be, but the idea of, oh, we must maintain blood purity by keeping undesirables out. And the idea that, Oh, actually, we will strengthen the bloodline by bringing in new blood that produces hybrid vigor. Those are both eugenics, its a debate about the best way to do eugenics but it's both eugenics, it's both treating humans as breedable and race as genetic and controllable categories.

Marcelle Kosman 39:09

Yeah, like a set of traits that determine what kind of person you will be.

Hannah McGregor 39:17

Alright, well, this is all a bummer. Let's talk about Harry Potter for a while.

Marcelle Kosman 39:30

That sounds great.

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)

You know some might say birds of a feather flock together, but we say don't bring birds into your xenophobic nonsense. It's time for OWL's. ***(Soundbite of an owl hooting)***

Hannah McGregor 39:44

The wizarding world is chock a block full of eugenics.

Marcelle Kosman 39:46

Oh, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 39:47

Like it's one of the structuring logics of the wizarding world. And we find that out fairly quickly because people talk about being pureblood, half-blood, and either muggle born or mudblood. So the language of blood here is explicitly eugenicist language.

Marcelle Kosman 40:10

So, we learn those things in the first book. And then in the second book, we learn about squibs. Right? Which is the wizarding world's version of muggle borns like the flip side, I guess?

Hannah McGregor 40:23

Yeah, non magical. People born to wizarding families but who don't have magic.

Marcelle Kosman 40:28

So, on the one hand, we're definitely encouraged to see the focus on blood status as problematic. That's something that the books want us to think.

Hannah McGregor 40:40

Yes, that's a bad thing that the bad guys think.

Marcelle Kosman 40:43

And yet, and yet, structurally, the series and this book, in particular, remain obsessed with the idea of genetics as something that you can manage.

Hannah McGregor 41:00

We've got to talk about the revelation about Harry's ancestry, that he is descended from one of the Peverill brothers.

Marcelle Kosman 41:05

The Peverill brothers. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 41:08

So on the one hand, we've got the like, almost straw man, explicit eugenicist language that Voldemort uses. That's what the book is pointing to, as here is the bad guy version of eugenics. There's that scene really early on in the book where we see Voldemort and his followers in Malfoy Manor. And he's talking specifically to Bellatrix about, you know, the fact that she comes from this very proud, pureblood family, but that some of her family members, and I think Voldemort's talking about Tonks, specifically because Tonks is with a werewolf and that is so unacceptable.

And he says, Many of our oldest family trees become a little diseased over time, you must prune yours, must you not, to keep it healthy, cut away those parts that threaten the health of the rest. It's the same logic though, right? It's about sort of this idea that you must manage the breed through this kind of, you know, selective breeding, selective splicing, a kind of biological management. And then he continues to say that like, as in your family, so in the world, we shall cut away the canker that infects us until only those

of the true blood remain. So Voldemort is for sure saying the quiet part out loud. Right? He's like, let's make a list of the undesirables. We will find them, we will incarcerate them, we will, you know, use the institutions we have access to, to round them up and eliminate them. And yet, arguably, Voldemort is a product of a wizarding culture that is structurally obsessed with genetics and inheritance at every level, rather than being an aberration from a culture that otherwise doesn't care about blood status.

Marcelle Kosman 43:21

Right! Like he didn't invent the idea of wizarding eugenics. He's capitalizing on it and building his power by speaking to people who feel that way. He's not introducing the concept.

Hannah McGregor 43:41

Yeah, so look at, for example, wand control. One of the really villainous things happening in the ministry under Voldemort's rule, is that muggle born wizards and witches are being brought in, they're being questioned. And then, based on this kind of, like, circular logic of well muggle borns can't be magical. And so if you are muggle born and are magical or have a wand you must have stolen it, you know, they're questioning them and they're taking their wands away.

That's, you know, like, obviously, a terrifying expression of the fascism of the wizarding world under Voldemort. And yet, it was already the job of wizarding institutions to select who was adequately magical and give only those people wands and access to magic. Right? We get Neville in the first book saying that like they thought he might be a squib, like if you're a squib, you don't get invited to Hogwarts and if you don't get invited to Hogwarts, you don't get a wand, and then we also get the explicit revelation that wizards keep one magic away from other magical creatures like goblins. So that's literally the whole logic of we are selecting who gets access to magic and who doesn't already is how the whole system works.

Marcelle Kosman 45:17

And even the people who are not explicitly eugenicists, are using language in a way that justifies that practice. Right? So if we think back to what Ollivander says, and what comes back in this book, The wand chooses the wizard, that would suggest that if the wand isn't choosing you, then you don't get one. Right? And so it's just so it's just implicit.

Hannah McGregor 45:50

That there's something inherent in you.

Marcelle Kosman 45:52

Yeah, that the wand would choose you if you deserved it. And so this is what we hear from, and I am so sorry if I'm confusing the movie with the book. But Mary Cattermole, who's like, it was mine, I got it when I went to Ollivanders and the wand chose me.

Hannah McGregor 46:10

We see her being questioned. And she's like, No, I got like, I got it when I was 11, and went to Diagon Alley and visited Ollivander and it deliberately evokes the first book and Harry sort of experience of going to Ollivanders so that will feel like it's an injustice, right? And doesn't evoke any of the squibs who didn't get to have that experience. And it doesn't evoke Petunia Dursley being told that here's the special thing that your sister gets access to, and you're not allowed to have it because you're not special. Like, there is an a logic still of selectivity.

Marcelle Kosman 46:48

Yeah, yeah. And so, if we think about selectivity, if we use that as our keyword, for example, and then we sort of build from that to think about the way in which we see squibs, for example, being treated in the wizarding world like, at least not that I can think of, we don't have any examples of squibs who have children with witches or wizards.

Hannah McGregor 47:11

That's so interesting. The squibs that we see in the book are all childless. Oh, oh, that's so grim. I can watch Coach getting bummed out in real time.

Marcelle Kosman 47:28

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but like the series seems to suggest that there are good eugenics and bad eugenics, that like, bad eugenics is, well if you keep marrying your cousins, you're going to end up with Malfoy and we all agree that Malfoy sucks, but good eugenics is when Ron and Hermione get together and they have children because that's introducing good quality new wizard stock instead of old wizard stock.

Hannah McGregor 47:57

You know, the, the flip side of the sort of like white liberal, progressive version of eugenics, which is about like, kind of a selective interbreeding of people in order to produce virility and vigor as opposed to like old world conservative aristocratic notion of like, inbreeding that makes you weak and pale. You know what I'm talking about? Like, we see this in a lot of British literature. And it's the logic of the Gaunts, right? That they are this family that's overly obsessed with blood purity. And the examples of the Gaunts

that we see are like, very clearly being coded to us as inbred. And then what produces this remarkably powerful wizard?

Marcelle Kosman 48:49

Remarkably powerful, but still with that strain of evil, it was in the bloodline.

Hannah McGregor 48:55

Absolutely. And then the other side of the bloodline that we get is our revelations about Harry and his deep roots in Godrich's Hollow, which is, you know, one of the big revelations of this book that I continue to find narratively so lazy.

Marcelle Kosman 49:09

So necessary. Yeah, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 49:13

Like, it just feels like, Sorry, this didn't come up in any of the previous books. Like there's no, there's no foreshadowing, there's no planting of any seeds. There's no it's just like, anyway, Godrich's Hollow, like so. And so this revelation, right that he's that builds on what Hagrid said to Harry in the first book, which is that he was probably going to be a strong wizard because both of his parents were.

Marcelle Kosman 49:41

That's right, a thumping good one, is what Hagrid says.

Hannah McGregor 49:43

And then we get this like, oh, it's not just that both of his parents were, though you know, he is also to some degree, a product of that same kind of logic of like, you know, an old family crossed with a new family produces particularly good wizards.

Marcelle Kosman 50:00

Because Lily is muggle born, of course, of course,

Hannah McGregor 50:03

Because Lily is muggle born. But James comes from a very long history that goes all the way back to the Peverell brothers.

Marcelle Kosman 50:12

And this just occurred to me as you were describing it, the heirloom that's passed down is the invisibility cloak. So it's not even just that he's one of the three Peverells. He was the good one.

Hannah McGregor 50:25

Oh, yeah, for sure. For sure. Dumbledore specifically says that he comes from the youngest brother, who we know lived the longest, because he was the best.

Marcelle Kosman 50:38

Yeah, he's the one that had the children, the other two died because they were bad.

Hannah McGregor 50:43

Yeah, all of this is really this, like, I was gonna ask this in the last segment of like, how much of this is is the misapplication of Darwin that as soon as people understand how evolution works, and how like, evolution selects for particular traits, it so quickly becomes people being like, oh, evolution does it? I'll do it better. I will select, I will select for traits. And you know, evolution is not saying that it's better to be this kind of turtle than to be that kind of turtle. It's just like explaining why there are more of this kind of turtle, but people so quickly turn it into a hierarchy, right? Survival of the fittest, which is like, absolutely not what Darwin's talking about,

Marcelle Kosman 51:30

I don't think that evolution is forward thinking. Evolution is responsive.

Hannah McGregor 51:37

It's descriptive, not prescriptive. And people very quickly tried to turn it into prescriptive. And that, you know, I think we see that in survival of the fittest, the best of the Peverell brothers, the smartest and the Peverell brothers got to go on and have children and those children became smart, good wizards like Harry. So this book in particular, but the series as a whole, that becomes just such a perfect encapsulation of the way that a white liberal perspective points at explicit eugenics, often as a way to distance themselves from the tacit eugenics that they're engaged with, usually through the organization of institutions and that they're actively benefited from.

That is why we see that Voldemort is a logical outcome of a deeply eugenicist wizarding world. And at the end, despite all of the flaws that we have seen in the logics of the wizarding world, it returns to the same, it returns to a handful of special children going off to their special school, you know, wondering whether they're going to turn out to be good or turn out to be bad. Even the logic that like you're genetically, a Slytherin or Gryffindor or a Hufflepuff, right? Like the anxiety we see in that epilogue over the possibility that you will be the bad son because you will not have inherited the desirable traits from your famous father.

Marcelle Kosman 53:22

You're not brave. You're not genetically brave.

Hannah McGregor 53:25

You're not genetically brave. Like it continues to be this sort of structural logic of the series, even in *The Cursed Child*, right? It's like the bad Potter son who didn't inherit his father's bravery. And then this poor kid who people think is Voldemort's child, like it continues to be obsessed with the possibility of inheritance, which is why we keep coming back to this, like, Who's the next Voldemort gonna be because this world, as it's designed, is gonna keep producing Voldemorts. It's insidious. It's insidious, and it weaves through this whole series.

Marcelle Kosman 54:05

But more on that in the appendix.

Hannah McGregor 54:19

Thank you, witches, for joining us for another episode of *Witch, Please*. If you want to hang out with us some more, we're on Twitter and Instagram at @ohwitchplease. And we are also on Patreon at patreon.com/ohwitchplease. And recently Coach gave us the RSS feed that lets us access the bonus content. So I've been listening to all of the blooper reels, and I got to say that they're really funny and you should probably go to our Patreon and get some of those bloop. Love a bloop.

Marcelle Kosman 54:54

And you know what, *Witch, Please* is produced in partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University Press and distributed by Acast. You can find the rest of our episodes at ohwitchplease.ca, along with transcripts! Special thanks AS ALWAYS to our team-player of a producer, Hannah Rehak, aka COACH! 🙄🎵🏁 **(Soundbite of a sports whistle blows)**, to our *Witch, Please* apprentice Zoe Mix **(Soundbite of a record rewinding plays)**, and to our sound engineer Erik Magnus! **(Soundbite of chimes plays)**

Hannah McGregor 55:30

At the end of every episode, we shout out everyone who left us a five star review on Apple podcasts so you've got to review as if you want to hear Marcelle...

Marcelle Kosman 55:38

(singing quietly) Say it ain't so.

Hannah McGregor 55:43

What's the song? Say it ain't so? **(starts singing another song)** Go it's still keep the lights on. Carry me home.

Marcelle Kosman 55:54

Pretty good. That's good. That's good. No, this is the Weezer song, *Say it ain't so*.

Hannah McGregor 55:58

Oh, yeah, if you want to hear Marcelle **(singing)** say it it's so whoa, whoa.

Marcelle Kosman 56:05

Because my love is a heartbreaker.

Hannah McGregor 56:07

Okay, who's breaking our hearts this week?

Marcelle Kosman 56:08

MacrinaMM, OhRosa, NikkiPug, Aloia, and liv4it

Thank you all so much. We'll be back next episode to continue our discussion of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. But until then...

Hannah McGregor 56:35

Later witches!

(Witch, Please Theme Music plays)