Women of Harry Potter - Fleur Delacour

Vanessa: Hi Ariana.

Ariana: Hi Vanessa.

Vanessa: Do you want to tell people what we’re up to?

Ariana: We’re recording the first episode of The Women of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. Vanessa, what is The Women of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text?

Vanessa: Well I think it’s a few things. One, it’s really an opportunity for you and I, the women of the *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text* team to talk about the women of Harry Potter more. I think that you and I have realized, over the last couple of years, that blessings have become a really special space for both of us. Whenever we do a live show you bless someone. And I think it’s one of my favourite things that we do is have you bless someone at our live shows because for days, weeks before a show you’ll come up to me and say; I think I’m blessing Ernie McMillan, no I think I’m blessing Ernie McMillan’s fourth cousin twice removed, who’s mentioned in this one line, no I think I’m blessing Harry. And it’s just like this hugely long process where I am watching you see the best out of, like, every character from the most major character to the minor-est character, and it’s really fun to watch you be anxious.

Ariana: And the wonderful thing about you blessing characters is that I think -

Vanessa: I wasn’t setting you up to compliment me, I’m sorry.

Ariana: It just felt like the natural thing to do.

Vanessa: Uh-huh.

Ariana: We’ve been really explicit about calling our podcast a feminist podcast, and talking about feminist issues and women, but blessings, and your blessings in particular, are a space that I think you’ve carved out as explicitly feminist and structurally feminist and I think that’s a really beautiful thing that you’ve done. And we kind of had this idea of making an even bigger space for that in our podcast land, an even bigger space for blessings as a symbol of the feminism of our podcast. And also as a place to, like, appreciate the women who speak to us in these books. So, each episode of The Women of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text, one of us is going to bless a woman from the books. And Vanessa, you’re going first this week, who are you blessing?

Vanessa: Easy! I am blessing Fleur Delacour. And I am blessing Fleur because she is an athlete in a man’s world, the man’s world being the world of sports. And I think that we have seen a lot over the past weeks, months and years about how hard it is to be a female athlete, and I think that female athletes are exceptional, in so many ways, and Fleur just is, like, brave and
confident and competitive and like, unapologetic about it. And I think she sort of get’s short shrift in the novels sometimes, but I love her and I love her competitive athleticism.

**Ariana:** I love that you’re taking us back.

**Vanessa:** Yes, a whole book back.

**Ariana:** And we haven’t had a chance to think about her, because she just disappears. We had all this time with Fleur and suddenly she’s gone, so I really appreciate that we get to think about her again. I’m just surprised that you’ve chosen Fleur as a figure of female athleticism when we’ve talked to much about Angelina Johnson, and Katie Bell, and all of the Quidditch Players. And it seems surprising, I’d never thought about Fleur as an athlete. Since I think about the Triwizard Tournament as a competition of being a good wizard or witch, and not necessarily one that requires athleticism in the way that I think about it. So tell me a little bit more about how you see her as an athlete.

**Vanessa:** I think that there’s something special about this opportunity of Fleur’s to complete against three men. And I think that it’s a really complicated and difficult thing the way that we think about gender and competition, and its something that comes up every Olympics, and its something that comes up with, like, the WNBA versus the NBA, and what should women be allowed to do and not be allowed to do when they’re competing against men. Because women in sports - often the sports that they do are not called sports, right? I like to say, like, oh I love sports, I love the ballet, and men will say to me, like, ballet is not a sport. And I’m like, yes it is, like those are athletes, ballerinas are athletes, right, like, there are all sorts of sports that I love that certain kinds of men, or certain kinds of sports fans, obviously not everybody in either of those categories, really like to question whether or not they are sports. As if sport is some sort of like, ideal of, like, you know, Greek competitive athleticism. That, you know, synchronized swimming is not. And so I think that I would say that the Triwizard Tournament is a sporting event in that, like, flying is something that, like, they learn in PE.

**Ariana:** They don’t have to fly, Harry chooses to fly.

**Vanessa (simultaneously):** Harry chooses to fly.

**Ariana:** I totally hear you that the question of what counts as a sport is a highly politicised thing, that maybe I’ve fallen into. I think I’m defensive of athleticism as an idea of something that’s really, bodily. My idea of the Triwizard Tournament is maybe like, closer to, like, a model UN, where you, like, have to use your faculties, your like, smarts, as a wizard to come up with the right spells, to attack this puzzle in front of you.

**Vanessa:** Yeah, but it has a real physical component of like swimming, or fighting or, running or flying, and running through a maze, right? Like, all sports have a real mental component to them of strategy and having to think about the best plays, and like, the best football players have books and books of plays memorized that they can respond to when they’re called out by code name, you know?
Ariana: Yeah.

Vanessa: I think that just because there’s a real mental component to it doesn’t mean that it’s not a sport. I think that being athletically fit really helps.

Ariana: Yes, I think, I think that’s maybe that one of the reasons why Fleur isn’t as successful in the Triwizard tournament, is that maybe her conception of what being a good wizard or witch is, isn’t one that needs to be as physical as it turns out to be in this competition. That’s what I’m resisting, is the idea of a competition that tests you and whether you’re the best witch or wizard, like, I don’t know that I want that to be something that’s athletic in principle. I want that to be something that, maybe someone like Hermione would have succeeded at if she could have put her name in the Goblet of Fire.

Vanessa: Yeah, it just, it sort of clearly doesn’t reward that though, right? Because the three guys who are all Quidditch players, at a pretty high level, obviously Krum being at the highest level, win. Right, like, Fleur comes in last place, like, by all accounts.

Ariana: Well, maybe that’s I want to say, maybe I want to say that the Triwizard Tournament turns out to be an athletic competition when it shouldn’t, and that’s why Fleur loses. Because she’s not an athlete in the same way that the boys are. She’s a brilliant witch and she loses because she isn’t an athlete.

Vanessa: I don’t know if I’m comfortable saying that she’s not an athlete. I agree with you that we prioritize athleticism way before we prioritize other things that I think are more important. I do love when the spelling bee is on ESPN, that is a great move ESPN, and I do think that, like, that isn’t a feat of athleticism but that is a feat of endurance and training and like, I think you can make a real argument about the spelling bee and whether or not it’s a sport. And I do like the idea also of like, messing with the line of what is a sport, right, on all levels. Like, I would like to like be curious as to whether football is a sport, or is, like, gladiatorial, endorsed abuse. Right, like, I- I’m not sure I want to count football as a sport and I’m not sure I don’t want to count spelling bees as a sport. But I think that within the world of, like, children sacrificing their youth to training to be the best archer, or the best figure skater, or whatever it is, right, in which other things are not prioritized in their lives except, like, the fact they were able to maintain a certain body type, is I think that in that imperfect world of athleticism Fleur experiences the downside of that. The downside of, like, a brute strength purity test, right, like, this is an old tournament, and so I agree with you maybe Fleur, I hadn’t thought of it like that. That maybe Fleur is showing up as a new kind of fantastic witch and the competition is just, like, so antiquated that it’s still counting the sort of like speed, and, like, force, where it shouldn’t be. The other moment that now I’m curious what you think because I think of it as like a really problematic moment, I wonder if Fleur in part loses on the second task because what is at risk for her, with her sister Gabriella it’s such higher risk than the other competitors. Cedric has Cho, who he has like, liked for a little while, and like been on a date with -

Ariana: Yeah, like, maybe a month or two, he’s liked her.
**Vanessa:** Right. Harry loves Ron and he’s like a brother, but he’s not his brother. And then, and Victor has liked Hermione, I mean like it’s a crush, that’s all it is, and I don’t love that it’s the woman who isn’t able to save her sister, but I wonder if the stakes just felt so outlandishly high for her. We know that Harry actually think’s that Ron’s life is at risk. And we don’t know what Fleur thinks, and since she’s the only one who doesn’t get her sister, I’m wondering if it’s because the stakes are so high for her that she isn’t able to do it. She fails because she’s attacked by the grindylows, but I just - I know when the stakes are super high for me, like, I just panic and would let something stupid happen, like getting attacked by the Grindylows.

**Ariana:** Her strategy was just as good as the other players, right? We know that Cedric also uses the bubblehead charm, which is her strategy going in. So I think you’re right that something happens to her in the water, versus in the strategy beforehand, and its only when they get to the competition that they know who’s been kidnapped. So I think it’s very likely that she gets in the water and has it in her head that her little sister could die and something like the grindylows sabotages her mission.

**Vanessa:** Isn’t it so interesting that Fleur and Cedric literally have the same strategy. The two differences are that Cedric is a real athlete, that we know about, and maybe Fleur is back home maybe she’s not, we don’t know. But the real difference is that Cedric goes after a girl he has a crush on, and Fleur is after her sister.

**Ariana:** What you’re pointing to again and again, is that the stakes are just so much higher for her. The stakes are higher for her because her sister is kidnapped and not some silly person she has a crush on, and the stakes are higher for her because she’s the only woman in the competition, and the stakes are higher for her because she’s the only woman in the competition who’s not a Quidditch player for some reason. Um, yeah, it seems like, at every turn, she has a lot more on her shoulders. I mean I think Harry has a lot on his shoulders as well as the youngest competitor, as someone who has potentially been set up to lose.

**Vanessa:** Harry has a lot on his shoulders, except that Harry isn’t in this as a competitor, right? He’s been thrust in this against his will and so, like, the only thing he has to do is survive and you know, like, giving fourteen year old Harry credit, like, not embarrass himself. Right, like, that feels like a really important, life or death thing, when you’re fourteen. But Fleur entered, like, Fleur came from France to compete, she is here to compete, so there’s like, identity on the line for her and nationalism on the line for her and then also, yeah, representing women all over the world on the line for her.

**Ariana:** Thinking about female athleticism has really stretched my imagination, because it’s not something that I think about very much, and it’s also not something I have a natural inclination towards. I wonder, with sports, how much we tell children that this is the most important thing that they can do, when it’s really just a game?

**Vanessa:** Yeah, I mean, we all know, I have, like, very strong mixed feelings about sports. And it’s not just hatred, Right, like, I could not stop watching that gymnastics video that came out of
UCLA a couple of weeks ago. It took me until, like, the 20th time watching it, that I could watch it without crying, and I think that the reason that I was crying was in large part because of the team members, like, hooting, and hollering, and screaming for her. Like, it just felt like a place where these women have, like, tortured their bodies into becoming these instruments of, like, beauty and strength and suffering all at one. And in this moment of, like, public celebration this, young woman was able to demonstrate everything she had accomplished and that her team was just beside themselves with support. Every time I would hear a certain holler, that is when I would start crying. It’s just a place where politics of female bodies becomes so visceral, right? I think that the reason that I am so obsessed with it, is because I want to fight for women’s equality everywhere. And then every year when I watch, like, the Boston Marathon, I’m like, women, with some incredible exceptions, but few, women cannot run as fast as men. We can’t. Which is, like, historically why the patriarchy happened, right? Like, they can, like, catch us and they’re bigger, they are, like, literally bigger on average. And so I think that sports bother me and make me meditate on them all the time because maybe Fleur can’t beat the Grindylows because she’s not as fast, right? I don’t know what to do as, like, someone who values athleticism, and values dedication. I loved playing sports as a kid, and I loved doing karate and I loved when my body was healthy enough to run half marathons. And I don’t know what to do with the fact that its not a place that feels like a place that women can get equality, and Fleur is someone who tried, and she tried with dignity and fierceness and I love her for it.

Ariana: I think that’s so right, that it’s this tense space to consider equality, and I wonder if maybe the only way to think about it is to actually instead interrogate why it’s so important to win. And to say, like, the only reason it’s important to think that men and women can have the same opportunity to get in the top ten at the Boston Marathon is because that’s what we value, is getting in the top ten, that like, winning is the best thing you can do as an athlete and actually, the best thing you can do as an athlete is play. And that the memories that you have playing softball or, or soccer or anything growing up, the best of those memories is not when you won the game, the best of those memories is when you had great teamwork with the people on your team. When you finally were able to throw to third base precisely every time and we have to take away the worst in the institution of sports in order to actually consider, like, how men and women can be equal in it.

Vanessa: And I just also think we have to complicate what counts as a sport. Like, ballet is an incredibly competitive space, but there is like, a whole, like, line of dancers, right and there’s the prima ballerina and like, all of that. But I think it’s important to see more and more bodies as athletes. I absolutely want to like dismantle the idea of competition, I also want to celebrate people who are really dedicated to something but I guess I just, like, want to see more spelling bees.

Ariana: Yeah. Yeah. With all that in mind and – and holding the complicated nature of that in mind. I invented a game for us to play.

Vanessa: I love games. Are we competing?

Ariana: No we’re not.
Vanessa: How do I know if I win?

Ariana: There is no winning for women in this game.

Vanessa & Ariana: *laughter*

Ariana: This is a game called: When Were Women Allowed to Play. Let’s start with the Boston Marathon, because we’ve been talking about it. When do you think women were allowed to run in the Boston Marathon?

Vanessa: So that woman just finished legally for the first time last year or two years ago, who ran it illegally 50 years ago. So they weren’t allowed in the 1960s, I can tell you that. So I’m going to say 1971.

Ariana: Very close! 1972 is the right answer. Ding, ding, ding ding, I’ll give that one to you.

Vanessa: Ooooh! Okay thanks.

Ariana: Men’s rowing.

Vanessa: Uh-huh,

Ariana: Men’s rowing was an Olympic sport starting in 1896. When do you think women’s rowing was a sport, and women were allowed to row in the Olympics?

Vanessa: So, I think this was one of the earlier women allowed things, because its, like, WASPy and women can wear like a lot of clothes while rowing, so it’s not like women showing off too much. So I’m going to say, like 1952.

Ariana: 1976.

Vanessa: Jesus!

Ariana: The 70s were pretty good for women.

Vanessa: God that’s upsetting.

Ariana: Um… fencing. Again, men 1896, when do you think women?

Vanessa: Okay, it’s obviously later than I’m going to think.

Ariana: This one might be earlier.
Vanessa: So, fencing. I’m trying to think of some logical reason. I again sort of think of fencing as this rich kid’s sport, which isn’t true necessarily, but, like, the prep school girls got, like, trained in it, and their rich dad’s would want them to compete earlier than other sports. So let’s say the end of the 40’s.

Ariana: Earlier. 1924.

Vanessa: Oh! Okay, Go prep school dads.

Ariana: Yep.

Vanessa: I just made up that whole story.

Ariana: Let’s do 1 or 2 more. Okay. Wrestling. Men, 1904.


Ariana: Yes.

Vanessa: Really?

Ariana: That was amazing!

Vanessa: Thank you. That was luck, but that – that – is infuriating.

Ariana: What was the first Olympic Games where women competed in every sport?

Vanessa: I’m going to say it hasn’t happened yet.

Ariana: No, its 2012.

Vanessa: Okay, good. Good for us. Well, Ariana, thank you so much for blessing Fleur with me. As you like to say, all the time, quoting Simone Weil.

Ariana: Yeah. Love is a practice of attention. So we’ve paid a little bit of attention to Fleur today and that is a way in which we’ve loved her.

Vanessa: Yep.

Vanessa: Thank you everyone, we hope you like this week’s episode of The Women of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. And we’ll talk to you in a couple of weeks.

Outro music plays

Ariana: Hey Vanessa, we’re back in the studio, to add one more quick note to this episode.
Vanessa: We’re sitting in that like, great in-between space of wanting to honor that gender is incredibly complex and where we want to honour women and celebrate women’s voices. And so in this world in which women in congress are finally getting a voice, and, you know, women’s bodies are being attacked in Supreme Courts, and the rights of mothers having access to their children is constantly under threat we think it is really important to be lifting up women’s voices. We simultaneously do not think a woman means any one thing, nor do we think that gender is a binary. So we appreciate, you know, your patience with us as we’re trying to find the language to thread really difficult needle. And we are doing it in an imperfect world, with imperfect language, with an imperfect text, but we still think it is a worthy conversation to be having. And we’re really excited to hear from you and helping us complicate this really important conversation.

Ariana: Thanks Vanessa, That was perfectly put. This has been the first episode of The Women of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. We’re edited by Ariana Martinez, and you can catch us in two weeks’ time where it will be my turn to bless a character.

Vanessa: Talk to you then.