Vanessa: Hi, Ariana.

Ariana: Hi, Vanessa.

Vanessa: Welcome to this third episode of “The Women of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text.”

Ariana: Oh, welcome to you.

Vanessa: Oh thank you. I feel welcomed.

Ariana: Vanessa, it’s your turn to bless someone. Who is it you’re gonna bless this week?

Vanessa: I am blessing Poppy Pomfrey, and there’s so many things to bless her for, obviously. She is a tremendous healer, the things that she heals are incredible given that she is basically a school nurse. I would imagine that she does not have the resources of a hospital. But she takes care of all of the wounded at the battle of Hogwarts. She takes care of people emotionally and physically and reverses all kinds of magical spells. The thing I am going to bless her for is that I feel like she is the emblem of invisible labor in these books. And by that I mean, through her competence and her ability to stand up to authority like Dumbledore, and solve almost any problem brought to her, she creates an environment at that school where kids feel more comfortable experimenting and taking risks because they know at the end of the day, Madame Pomfrey is gonna be able to heal them. And I think that is a huge burden that she takes on by being a competent woman.

Ariana: That’s so interesting that you say: “Stands up to authority like Dumbledore,” because I think when you put it that way Madame Pomfrey is the character who is most like Dumbledore in this series-

Vanessa: Mmm...

Ariana: Because of exactly the reason you are talking about. Because she is always holding the safety of Hogwarts in her hands. That, anything could happen to you in the bounds of Hogwarts and Madame Pomfrey has never not been able to heal something. There’s this moment where Alicia Spinnet says: “Madame Pomfrey will sort her out. She’s never failed yet.” And that kind of confidence that like, just her presence brings to all of the students is why Hogwarts feels safe and why we so rarely talk about her as the character who keeps Hogwarts safe, we always talk about Dumbledore as that character. And yet, it is their mutual great wizardry that holds that.

Vanessa: Right. And there’s always like a woman behind the man who is doing just as much if not more labor than the man but the man is getting all the credit. I think that, you know, we’re telling these stories more and more but I think that Madame Pomfrey is not only the woman behind Dumbledore but is the only character that feels comfortable bossing him around. And,
Dumbledore doesn’t always listen to her but like certainly does not answer her back as if he has been disrespected.

Ariana: Yeah I mean I think that’s a great thing to Dumbledore’s credit. Even though nobody else in the books seems to be thinking about Madame Pomfrey in the way they think about Dumbledore. Dumbledore goes out of his way to give her the respect that she deserves and to lift her up. I think early in the series you talked about Dumbledore calling her “Poppy” rather than “Madame Pomfrey” and like, that dynamic. But I think that demonstrates an intimacy between their positions that I am really glad that Dumbledore is able to see and acknowledge.

Vanessa: Yeah absolutely. I do wish that he like called her out more frequently like at the beginning of school when he’s like: “This is Filch,” because she doesn’t come to the welcome feast she’s not sitting at the teacher’s tables.

Ariana: Oh my God I had never realized that!

Vanessa: Yeah. And I-I went and read through and like maybe not every single person is listed but like, we never hear of her at the Christmas dinner and I don’t know where she goes all of the time.

Ariana: That makes me so sad!

Vanessa: I know so I like wonder if she’s like relegated to some extent like house elves? I would imagine she spends a lot of her time healing people like house elves. So, she’s just like-right, she’s just like this invisible labor. And I’m just thinking about like-My mom used to say this wild thing to me when I was little. If-when I got sick like I got strep throat eight times in the second grade, and I would say to my Mom cause she would be taking care of me like: “Aren’t you worried you’re gonna get sick?” and she would say: “Moms don’t get sick.” And, that did, it made me feel better, right? It made me feel better and like it made me feel safe letting her care for me. And I feel like that’s just like something I was lucky enough to take for granted. And I feel like all of Hogwarts takes Madame Pomfrey for granted. And again, it’s like, they can play Quidditch as hard as they want because she can regrow bones in a second. She heals Neville in a second. They can like cast all of these terrible spells and like, you know, she’ll be able to fix eyebrows and teeth and beards. Especially Fred and George. Fred and George would never have been able to found their company without Madame Pomfrey. If they didn’t feel comfortable experimenting with their own bodies knowing that they could go to a nurse who could always sort them out, I guarantee you that “Weasley’s Wizarding Wheezes” would not exist.

Ariana: Yeah it’s so interesting, we see throughout the series the limits of the way that magic works in the world of Harry Potter. But, there’s something about the way that Madame Pomfrey heals that holds the dream of magic. The way that we wish for magic in our lives as people. That you can make any mistake and there could be this thing that just immediately reverses it without consequence. And I think that that’s particularly true when it comes to our bodies and illness and dying. Right, like, there’s something about wanting to reverse the course
of illness. We bring that to Muggle doctors um and it’s often not what the doctors are actually capable of. It’s so healing as a reader of Harry Potter to see a doctor who can do that so easily in the text.

Vanessa: And who is Chaplin-like in her caretaking when she can’t offer medical attention. So, she can’t heal the petrified student until Professor Sprout is finished growing what she needs to grow. But, Madame Pomfrey still takes care of those frozen bodies. Right, like, she overlooks those frozen bodies. And so, even when she can’t fix something she holds it.

Ariana: Yeah there’s something about the hospital wing as a sanctuary I think. As a place where like when the kids are in the midst of this chaos and they have to go to the hospital wing it becomes a time out of time for them. A place where they can be safe. And I think that’s true of the petrified kids as well like, they have to stay in this time out of time. They can’t be healed yet, but, just by virtue of being in the hospital wing they are safe.

Vanessa: Right. I wanna point out that there are two different situations in which she does not heal people. And one is where she will outsource the healing to St. Mungos. Right, like, Gilderoy Lockheart is not being cared for by Madame Pomfrey. She seems to be someone who simultaneously owns her authority and yet is willing to let go of authority when needed.

Ariana: And can I just say there’s like a Disneyland quality to that? Like, my favorite fact about Disneyland is that people aren’t allowed to be legally pronounced dead on the premises that they have to be pronounced dead like at the nearby hospital. Because like...

Vanessa: No one can die...?

Ariana: The power of Capitalism? No one can die at “The Happiest Place On Earth.” Like, it’s just not allowed. And like, there’s something about like no one dying in the hospital wing that reminds me of that. That, it is such a safe space that like, all of the dire cases end up elsewhere.

Vanessa: Yeah. I love that comparison. I do think it’s just her saying like “You need a kind of care that I can’t offer.”

Ariana: Right.

Vanessa: But, I love that idea of like nothing bad is going to happen in this space. And, we see that also, like she takes care of Katie Bell when she touches Draco’s poisoned opal necklace. But then eventually she sends Katie to St. Mungos to be like further treated. And then, we also see it in little ways like she’s offering Harry chocolate when the Dementors have come for Harry. And then she finds out that Lupin has taken care of Harry and like, that’s fine. Right, like there doesn’t seem to be ego involved in this way. But then, the only other case we have that she doesn’t heal is suspect to me and I have very mixed feelings about it. When Marietta gets the pimple attack that spells: “Snake” on her face when she turns in the DA to Umbridge. And it says that Madame Pomfrey can’t heal it. And I’m just wondering, there has been conversation in fan communities that perhaps Madame Pomfrey could but did not want to heal Marietta.
And I’m wondering what you think because it sort of puts Hermione against Madame Pomfrey and... is Hermione the one person who can create a curse that Madame Pomfrey can’t heal? I simultaneously don’t want to think there’s anything that Madame Pomfrey can’t heal but I also don’t want to think she would be biased against a student.

Ariana: That’s so interesting to me to me. Because I think Madame Pomfrey, like as we’ve been talking about, holds this middle space that we want to think of as neutral. That like, when victims of war and horrible things come to her she is the person who can treat the individual rather than having to think on the political level like Dumbledore does. And there’s something so beautiful about that.

Vanessa: And we have evidence, right? Like, she cares for Draco when he gets attacked by Buckbeak.

Ariana: Exactly.

Vanessa: Quote unquote: “attacked by Buckbeak.” So we like see her sort of offering care across the aisle.

Ariana: There’s a quote...um... when McGonagall gets stunned: “I don’t wonder you’re shocked Potter’ she said with a fierce kind of approval in her face. ‘As if one of them could have stunned Minerva McGonagall face on by daylight. Cowardice that’s what it was. Despicable cowardice. If I wasn’t worried what would happen to you students without me, I’d resign in protest.” That points to, exactly what we’re talking about, about this space of Madame Pomfrey is like having personal desires about how she identifies politically in the midst of this war and the struggle. And, her wanting to maintain the space of neutrality of like being there for the students and being a safe space. So I think looking at that piece of text I have to believe that Madame Pomfrey really tried and that she cares about all of her students. And I think, Marietta is so horribly treated in this moment. First of all, she signed a paper that she has no idea what the consequences are. Hermione has tricked her into this and then Kingsley alters her memory with no thought for her... I don’t know why I am so insulted by the charms in this book that alter people’s memories... but this moment where he like brainwashes her into saying something she doesn’t feel; I have such a strong reaction of injustice to. It’s hard for me to believe that Madame Pomfrey could know some of that and think that she deserves to still have this word on her face.

Vanessa: I agree, I think to a large extent it would be insulting to Madame Pomfrey to think that she would look at a student and not heal them but I also wonder... I can also imagine, and this is like going into fan theory mode so I don’t know if we want to stop here but, like, I wonder if she has like seen the scars on Lee Jordan’s hand and Harry’s hand and is like politically not allowed to heal Umbridge’s wounds and is choosing to say “You’re gonna scar kids? I’m gonna scar kids.” I wonder if she sees this not as an attack on Marietta but as an attack on Umbridge. Which would be terrible and I-I think I agree with you that she tries and Hermione has somehow done something that she can’t heal.
Ariana: I mean, that would make me sad but I think we see all of the characters grappling in this book with what the best way to act politically and personally is. Like, whether you stay at your post and try and fight from within or you just try and do your job and help people as much as possible or if you, you try and fight back. And it wouldn’t surprise me to imagine that Madame Pomfrey is struggling with that same thing.

Vanessa: I can just imagine like justifying that... if it was like boils. Right? I can more easily imagine justifying not curing a kid of pimples, um, for political reasons than other things. Something else that I think is amazing about her is that you don’t become a school nurse to become a war nurse. She has chosen to be a nurse at Hogwarts—there ends up being a battle at her school and she ends up taking care of the wounded at the battle of Hogwarts. And helping evacuate people and I can just imagine being like: “This is not the that I signed up for.”

Ariana: Oh, I think I disagree. I think in the way Madame Pomfrey holds such boundaries around her space and the way that she stands up to people and says “No, this is the hospital wing you have to play by my rules.” I think we see that she takes her job as this protector of these children so seriously and she sees what she’s doing as a protector role. And I think when it comes to like being confronted with war. That feels to me, just like an extension of what I imagine as her self image of herself at Hogwarts.

Vanessa: Yeah. And, it’s the way that I imagine school nurses often feel in America when there’s a shooting. It’s like this is not where this is supposed to happen. And, not that there’s like anywhere where a shooting’s supposed to happen but to some extent like it’s supposed to happen on battlefields and so to feel like: “These kids should not be living in fear of this. I should not be evacuating children from a school. This is supposed to be a safe space and I’m supposed to be a hearth within the hearth.” And so, to feel like, of course called to do everything that you can to restore that sense of safety and to take care and I’m not saying that I think she resents being a caretaker, just, the kind of betrayal that like these are not the kinds of wounds children are supposed to see.

Ariana: Yeah and I think that’s like a huge version of the very small version of like what it means to be like a nurse and doctor-

Vanessa: Mhmm

Ariana: -In our world. Right? Like I think there were so many times when I went to the nurse’s office when I was a little kid and there was nothing that the nurse could do and that’s just part of the sadness of being in a caring profession. And, its particularly sad for Madame Pomfrey who is so good at healing. She can heal so many kids of so many things and then there’s this huge atrocity and like, she can only do so much in the face of that.

Vanessa: And I think that that’s exactly—I think you just articulated so well what it is I wanna offer her a blessing for which is that even when there’s nothing she can do the fact that she exists is doing so much. The fact that someone is there that is going to try to heal you creates a
totally different environment in this school. That is mostly taken for granted but it is glorious in it’s impact.

Ariana: I love Poppy Pomfrey.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: This week’s episode is supported by “The School for Good and Evil: A Crystal in Time” by Soman Chainani. It’s the 5th book in the fantasy series packed with magic, romance and adventure that’ll appeal to all readers. If you miss the magic of Hogwarts and the fun friend dynamics of Harry, Ron and Hermione then this is the perfect series for you to read next. You’ll love meeting Agatha, Sophie and Tedros at The School for Good and Evil. It’s available now wherever good books are sold so head to: schoolforgoodandevil.com for more information.

Ariana: Well, Vanessa I have a game for you.

Vanessa: (excitedly) Yesssss.

Ariana: So you told me that you were going to be blessing Madame Pomfrey and so I was thinking about femininity and healing and how those things are intertwined. I think for a very long time women have been considered healers in Western society and then there was kind of a turn with the codification of Western medicine and the movement towards academic kind of knowledge and a certain form of knowledge that you get in universities and suddenly women were on the outside of what it meant to be a doctor in a different way. Specifically, in America. So I have some multiple choice and true and false questions about women doctors.

Vanessa: Fun!

Ariana: So, we’re gonna start here: Clara Barton-You know who Clara Barton is?

Vanessa: I do.

Ariana: She founded the American Red Cross and was it’s very first President, what other job do you think she held first? A. School teacher B. Patent clerk C. Locating missing war soldiers.

Vanessa: So like, Kaufda or Melville, one of those two were patent clerks so I’m gonna not say that one. I think she was a school teacher because that was like the only thing women were allowed to do. That’s what I think.

Ariana: It was a trick question; it was “All of the above.”

Vanessa: Really?!
Ariana: Yes. So-

Vanessa: Everyone was a freaking patent clerk!

Ariana: So, there are some fun facts that I’m gonna share with you.

Vanessa: Yay!

Ariana: She, established a school in New Jersey, she started this school and then this school hired a man at twice her salary and she resigned. And she was like: “A man is never going to be paid more than me when we’re doing the same job.”

Vanessa: I love her so much. I already loved her, now I love her so much.

Ariana: And then as a patent clerk, she was the first woman to be hired as a recording clerk and she was paid equal to her male colleagues.

Vanessa: Amazing!

Ariana: Alright, next question. It’s a True or False.

Vanessa: Okay.

Ariana: Harriot Hunt was the first women who attended lectures at Harvard Medical School in 1851.

Vanessa: Uh... true!

Ariana: It’s false.

(Vanessa laughs)

Ariana: But, there’s an interesting history, which you might, you might have guessed. It’s how I’ve created all of these questions.

Vanessa: Yeah no, I’ve now caught on. I know how to answer 3.

Ariana: Okay, Harriot Hunt she was really close to attending lectures in 1851. She wrote to Oliver Wendell Holmes the Dean of Harvard Medical School in 1850 and he actually accepted her. And then, the students petitioned. Um, there’s this quote I’ll read to you: “…resolved that no woman of true delicacy would be willing in the presence of men to listen to the discussion of the subjects that necessarily come under the consideration of the students of medicine. Resolved that we object to having the company of any female forced upon us who is disposed to unsex herself and to sacrifice her modesty by appearing with men in the lecture room.” So,
because of that, they created a formal policy against women attending lectures. And Harvard Medical School didn’t open its doors to women until 1945!

Vanessa: Oh god… Oliver Wendell Holmes was the President of the medical school?

Ariana: Senior, not Junior.

Vanessa: Oh, okay. I was like “He’s a lawyer and a supreme court judge?” Got it. I’m with you now. Okay, I’m ready for my last question.

Ariana: True or False? In its first medical school class, Johns Hopkins had 3 women.

Vanessa: I’m gonna say sort of true. But, not really true.

Ariana: No it’s really solidly true!

Vanessa: Oh that’s amazing!

Ariana: So, basically, they’re opening the hospital in the medical school at the same time and they realized they did not have enough money to open the medical school. And they had gotten all of these professors to agree to come and teach and they were like “Uh oh…” So four of the original University’s Trustees daughters like came to the board. They were all unmarried, wealthy, well educated, devoted to the new feminist movement and they said that they would raise the $500,000 needed to open the school and pay for a medical school building but only if the school would open its doors to qualified women. And, they went out, and they raised the money and there were three women in that first class.

Vanessa: So, the only moment that I cried at my college graduation was that I graduated from Washington University in St. Louis in 2004, and Wash U has a fabulous med school. And 2004 was the first year that the med school class graduated 50% men, 50% women. And when that got announced at graduation, all of the women in the medical school stood up and started cheering and then all of the women in the audience stood up and started cheering and I burst into tears.

Ariana: Uh alright, last bonus question.

Vanessa: Ohh! I love a bonus.

Ariana: There’s no story, it’s not a trick question. What year did we have the first female President of the American Medical Association?

Vanessa: It hasn’t happened yet, has it?

Vanessa: Okay. Thank you, Ariana!

Ariana: Thank you, Vanessa. Next time around it will be my time to bless.

Vanessa: Yep. This episode of *The Women of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text* is a production of “Not Sorry Productions” it is co-produced by me, Vanessa Zoltan and Ariana Nedelman.

Ariana: We are edited by Ariana Martinez and distributed by “Nightvale Presents.”

Vanessa: Thank you, and we’ll talk to you in two weeks.

Ariana: Bye!