

Alice: Hello and welcome to Queer as Fact. I'm Alice.

Eli: I'm Eli.

Irene: I'm Irene.

A: We're a queer history podcast talking about people, places and things in queer history from around the world and throughout time.

We are very excited today because the 1st of April is Queer as Fact's 1st birthday. Thank you everyone who's been listening to our podcast over the last year – we really appreciate you, and we hope you enjoy the next year and hopefully many more, of Queer as Fact.

Today I'll be talking about Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*. Before we start, I would just like to thank the-mad-prince-of-denmark on Tumblr for recommending Mary Shelley to us, and alerting me to that fact that she was queer.

So before we get in to the actual episode, I have some content warnings. We're going to be talking about suicide, mental illness and drug abuse, there's also several drownings, and several mentions of miscarriage, abortion, and the death of young children. There's also a relationship with a very large age gap, some explicit sexual content and the death of several animals. So if any of that is something you don't want to hear, feel free to skip this episode and listen to any of our other episodes – they have content warnings at the start of all of them.

Mary was born in 1797, in the countryside outside of London. Her mother was Mary Wollstonecraft, who has been referred to as “the mother of feminism”. I'm assuming you've heard of Mary Wollstonecraft.

E: Yes.

I: I have.

A: Yeah. She wrote a lot about the rights of women, and especially about education for girls, and she also travelled to France during the French Revolution just to like, report on the French Revolution.

Unfortunately, Mary never actually knew her mother. So Mary Wollstonecraft died ten days after Mary Shelley – who was at the time Mary Godwin – was born, but she did know a lot about Mary Wollstonecraft growing up, because she read all her works, she would go with her father to visit her grave all the time. There are a lot of stories that she learnt to read from reading the letters on her mother's grave, and I couldn't find a source for it.

E: I'm so depressed already.

A: I'm sorry.

[laughter]

A: I'm not saying it's not true.

I: I mean, given that Mary's own name is on the grave that's like, one of the first things you're gonna learn to read.

A: Yeah, like...

I: This sounds convincing.

A: She definitely visited the grave as a kid, and they shared a name, 'coz they both would have been called Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, so, it could have happened. It's plausible. I want it to be true.

So Mary's father was called William Godwin, and he was a political philosopher, and he has been called “the father of anarchism”, so he's also a pretty cool dude.

E: The father of anarchism married the mother of feminism...

A: Yeah.

E: ...and this is what they wrought.

A: Yeah.

E: Good.

[laughter]

A: It's a good start to life.

E: Yes.

A: Mary's home when she was growing up had a lot of kind of intellectuals and political radicals and philosophers just coming round all the time. She remembers as a child hiding behind her couch to listen to Samuel Coleridge recite *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*....

E: Oh wow.

A: ...when she was supposed to be in bed.

I: Aww!

A: Also Aaron Burr came to visit...

I: Oh really?!

A: ...and like, hung out in the nursery with her.

[laughter]

E: He was good with children, wasn't he?

A: Yeah! He was really good with kids, he was...

E: I mean, he was at least very good with his own child, so...

A: Well, he was also good with Mary and her siblings...

E: That's nice.

A: ...and they liked him and yeah, it was really good.

E: Maybe he should have just been a stay-at-home dad.

A: Yeah. I think it would have been better. Yeah, this was after he had shot Alexander Hamilton and he was kind of in a bit of exile and he hung out at the Godwins' house for a while.

I: A bit of exile.

A: In some exile.

[laughter]

E: Just a tad of exile there.

A: After Mary Wollstonecraft died, William Godwin was left to raise her two daughters by himself. So before she had Mary with William Godwin, she'd had a daughter named Fanny, who was an illegitimate child, and her father wasn't really around. Godwin ended up raising Fanny and Mary both as his daughters. He's not that good about it.

I: So he does it but he's resentful of it.

A: He's not resentful of it. He definitely likes Mary more, and he's quite open the fact that he likes Mary more. So I have a couple of quotes – he wrote to a friend:

My own daughter is considerably superior in capacity. ... Mary ... is singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active of mind. Her desire of knowledge is great. Her perseverance in everything she undertakes is almost invincible.

And then he added:

My own daughter is, I believe, very pretty. Fanny is by no means handsome.

I: Ouch!

E: Alright, less good about it.

A: Yeah, so he's not good about it, but he does support and raise them both.

So when Mary was four, Godwin remarried to Mary Jane Clairmont. Mary Jane also had two kids, five-year-old Charles and three-year-old Claire.

E: I was gonna say, were they also both called Mary?

A: Claire at this point in her life went by Jane, so we have two Marys, and Mary Jane and a Jane.

E: Mmhm.

A: But she starts going by Claire later in life, and I'm gonna call her Claire just so we don't have to deal with this situation.

And then Mary Jane and William Godwin had a son called William. So that's the large number of siblings we're gonna have to deal with.

I: Okay. So from oldest to youngest...?

A: The key ones to remember are Fanny is Mary Wollstonecraft's daughter..

I: Mmhm.

A: ...by another partner. Mary is our main character – I don't think you'll forget her – and Claire is Mary Jane's daughter, so Mary's step-sister.

E: So just to be clear, it's Fanny who wrote *Frankenstein*. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

[laughter]

A: Have you got the Godwin family down?

I: Yep.

E: Vaguely, yeah.

I: There are five kids. I don't know what order they go in, but I know who they are.

A: Fanny is the oldest, and then Mary - and Claire and Mary are almost the same age – I think Claire's a tiny bit younger.

E: They're either gonna love or hate each other.

A: Yeah, they hate each other.

E: Cool.

[laughter]

A: They don't get along well. They're very competitive and they're kind of rivals for a lot of their lives. They don't *hate* each other as such, like they're kind of friends. They're siblings, but...

E: Do they have the same love-hate relationship that Victor Frankenstein and his creature have for each other?

A: Yes. Yes.

[laughter]

A: I see you're so ready.

[laughter]

E: I just want to talk about *Frankenstein*.

A: Okay. We're getting there. We're getting there. [laughs] Okay. Mary and Mary Jane also hated each other, 'coz Mary was used to being kind of the centre of the household and Godwin's favourite, and then suddenly Godwin was focussing attention on his new wife, and so Mary was very jealous of Mary Jane, and Mary Jane sort of came in and wanted to take control of the household, as the new female head of the household, and so she fired all the servants and got her own servants in, and Mary had really liked all the servants and didn't like that, and stuff like that. Mary's four at the time, to be clear.

I: Okay.

E: Oh. For God's sakes.

[laughter]

A: She's an intense four-year-old.

I: No, I think that's like, an understandable reaction from a four-year-old.

A: It does make... the jealousy part definitely makes sense for a four-year-old.

I: And the sending the servants away, like....

A: Yeah, there was like her nurse that had helped raise her and stuff.

I: Yeah.

A: Basically this situation where Mary was very unhappy and constantly in conflict with Mary Jane and less so in conflict with Claire continued for kind of most of her early life up to her early teens, and she remembers this part of her childhood very unhappily. And then when she was 14, she was sent for a few months to stay with a man named William Baxter, who was a friend of Godwin's, and a fellow political radical that he corresponded with.

I: Is there any reason for that? Was she just unhappy and William Godwin was like "I guess you want a holiday? Will that help?"

A: Kind of yeah. So the sources closest to the time – I think it might be letters from Godwin – say that she was sent in the hope of curing her "weakness", so I'm not sure what that refers to. Possibly it refers to very bad eczema which she had at the time.

I: Okay.

E: Mm.

A: Possibly it refers to mental illness – she struggles with depression for her whole life. That might have been the reason. Or it might have just been that she was in constant arguments with her step-mother and

he wanted to get her out of the house.

I: Does Baxter live by the seaside?

A: Baxter lives – I don't if he lives directly on the seaside, but he lives quite close to Dundee, in Scotland, which is a major whaling port.

I: Okay.

A: So yeah, he does live by the seaside. As I mentioned before, Mary Wollstonecraft was very passionate about education for women, and Godwin carried that on and was really passionate about educating his daughter, and so he writes this long letter to William Baxter about how he's really worried about sending his daughter away, and he really hopes that Baxter takes good care of her, and he says "I am anxious that she should be brought up ... like a philosopher."

I: Does he care to educate Claire and Fanny?

A: I think he does but to a lesser extent. So Claire goes to boarding school for a while, and Claire is educated more in kind of singing and music and those more things that a woman would traditionally be educated in at the time.

I: Alright, yep.

A: But I'm not really sure if that's because Godwin likes Mary better; because Mary is his daughter with Mary Wollstonecraft – that was something that he and Mary Wollstonecraft both valued; or just 'coz Mary's more interested in this like philosophy and politics and stuff.

I: Okay.

A: I'm not really sure.

I: And we don't know about Fanny?

A: We don't know a lot about Fanny, no. It seems that because Fanny wasn't biologically related to either parent that they kind of ignored her. She was like, in the household and they looked after her, but nobody seems to show any interest in her.

I: Ohh.... poor Fanny.

A: Which is very sad, yeah.

So Mary went to Scotland, and she loved Scotland. She was much much happier in Scotland. She later wrote that this was where she was first inspired to start writing. She spent a lot of time exploring the countryside and she also grew very close with one of Baxter's four daughters, whose name was Isabel. Isabel is two years older than Mary – so she's 16. She's a very big fan of Mary Wollstonecraft, and she's also very into the French Revolution. She and Mary like to play-act being their favourite people from the French Revolution.

I: Aww.

E: Who? Who did they do?

A: Ah, I definitely read this but I can't remember which specific ones. I think it was Marat?

I: Okay.

E: Sure.

[laughter]

A: I think? That might be wrong. Yeah, they also like to read each other poetry, they used to tell each other ghost stories, and they used to go and explore the ruins that were near where they lived.

At the house of Isabel's sister Margaret – so Isabel's sister Margaret was a bit older and she was married – they carved their initials into a window-pane using a diamond, and until the 70s, that was still there, and then it was stolen.

E: Ohhh....

A: So people used to go and see it as like a Mary Shelley pilgrimage site, and now we can't.

Margaret, Isabel's sister, was quite sick, and she died while Mary was in Scotland, and her husband David – who was 47 – showed a brief interest in Mary – who didn't return his interest – and then...

I: Reasonable.

A: ...ended up proposing to and marrying Isabel.

I: Unreasonable.

A: Yeah. It's not a good relationship. It doesn't go well. But she is 16, he is 47, and they are married now.

E: Does that just last until presumably his death?

A: They do stay married, but not happily. Both her and Mary kind of romanticised David as this interesting older figure who would take them seriously even though they were teenagers, and that kind of stuff.

I: Okay, yeah.

A: So they saw it as being good at the time, and obviously it didn't turn out to be good. So not long after they got married, David forbade Isabel from having any more contact with Mary.

I: Well, that's bad.

A: That is bad. So that might be because pretty soon after this Mary goes and gets embroiled in her own scandal with Percy Shelley, that we're about to talk about, and so she was no longer socially appropriate, or one biographer I read said that it might have been because he felt Mary and Isabel were too close.

E: Mm....

A: And he wanted to break apart what was possibly a romantic relationship between them. I can't say whether it was a romantic relationship or not. They were very close, and Mary does refer to Isabel as her "soul mate" in some of her writing. They may have just been good friends, it may have been romantic. They may not have known. We don't know.

I: Yep.

E: Either way, shockingly this relationship with a man 30 years older than her already sounds unhealthy.

A: Yeah, it's not good. It's not good. Mary returned home from Scotland in March 1814 and she went back to her family home and it was there that she met her father's friend Percy Shelley. So Shelley was 21 at the time.

I: What did he look like?

A: Ahhh....

[laughter]

A: Do you want me to just like, paint a word picture...

E: Yeah.

A: ...of Percy Shelley?

E: Yes. Start with his eyes.

A: I don't know what his eyes are like. He's quite kind of pale and thin. He's got a lot of dark hair.

E: Hot.

A: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

[laughter]

I: Sounds goth.

E: Sounds like.... he sounds like Robert Smith.

A: He looks exactly how you picture that he would look.

I: Just making sure, just making sure.

A: Yep. Shelley is the 21-year-old son of a baron. He's recently been expelled from Oxford for writing anti-religious articles with his friend Thomas Hogg – Thomas *Jefferson* Hogg, to give you his full name.

E: Thomas Jefferson.

[laughter]

E: Why was he named after Thomas Jefferson?

A: [laughs] I do not know.

[laughter]

E: And a swine?

[laughter]

I: I mean, presumably as like a political radical, naming people after figures from the American Revolution was the go at this time.

A: Yeah, I guess so. Percy had left university after that, he'd had a bit of a falling out with his baron father, and then he'd gone off to Ireland and also to Wales to help organise resistance against the British.

I: Go, Percy, go.

A: Yeah, so he'd had quite a life by 21. He'd been corresponding with Godwin for a while.

E: Mmhm.

A: And Godwin was particularly interested in him because he was the son of a baron, he was a political radical, and Godwin hoped that he would use some of the money he had from being the son of a baron to support Godwin.

Shelley and Mary met at dinner at Godwin's house in about May 1814. After their meeting Shelley wrote Thomas Hogg, "I do not think that there is an excellence at which human nature can arrive that, she does not indisputably possess..." And that's just one quote of like, a very long, gushing letter about how much he likes Mary.

E: I was gonna say that that was verbose.

A: That was so concise.

E: I know.

[laughter]

A: Mary and Shelley started to meet in secret. Claire would help them by saying, "Oh, I'm going out for a walk with Mary and Shelley," so it was respectable, and you know, it wasn't a man and a woman just out by themselves, and then she'd just walk off someone else while they sat on a park bench and talked.

I: That was nice of her.

A: That *was* nice of her.

E: Are we about to see the return of second-base hut?

[laughter]

A: One of the places that Mary and Shelley would often go for their secret meetings was Mary Wollstonecraft's grave, 'coz they were both big fans of Mary Wollstonecraft.

I: So the sex on the grave part is also sounding pretty plausible.

A: The sex on the grave is sounding pretty plausible. After they'd been meeting for about a month, in late June, while visiting the grave, Mary confessed her love to Shelley, and in her journal she records that they lay on the ground touched each other with, quote, "the full ardour of love".

I: Alright. So they had sex on the grave.

A: So you can decide for yourself whether or not that is sex. One biographer I was reading was like, "Look, it's unrealistic that they had sex, because women's undergarments were just too complicated for that," and I was like "Women had sex in the 1800s. You know that." [laughs]

I: It did occur.

E: But like, spontaneously and outside?

A: Yeah, maybe so. I mean I feel like although they had a lot of undergarments it was essentially just layers of petticoats. The grave is in a very like, secluded corner of the graveyard, with a lot of like, willows around it to screen it off so...

E: That's convenient.

A: ...they could have had sex there. Decide for yourselves.

I: Second-base gravestone.

E: Mm.... Third-base gravestone. Second-base hut.

I: Ah, yes.

E: I feel unclean.

[laughter]

E: Which cemetery is this?

A: St. Pancras.

E: Oh, okay.

A: At the time it was a bit outside of London, and kind of countryside area, but now it's just in London. So listeners, if you're in London, you too can have sex on that grave.

E: *Don't* do that.

[laughter]

A: We don't condone that.

E: That's definitely illegal.

A: So, they've just potentially had sex on the grave, and there is one major obstacle – Shelley is already married.

I: Oops.

E: Oh!

I: Isn't he like 21?

A: He's 21, yep.

I: How long has he been married for?

A: A couple of years, I think?

I: Okay, okay.

A: So he's married to 19-year-old Harriet Westbrook. When she was 16 he “rescued” her from her boarding-school. They ran away together.

E: So you quotation marked around rescue. How much is this a kidnapping?

A: She was on board with this.

E: Okay.

A: “Rescued” is more like, she didn't need rescuing as such, in that she was just a girl in boarding-school.

E: Okay.

A: But he definitely frames it as “I rescued her from this.”

E: I see, I see.

A: He also tried to rescue her sister as well, but I'm not sure if the sister wasn't interested, or if she was like, “No, I don't want to bring my sister along.” He has a thing for rescuing women from situations they don't need rescuing from.

E: It does seem weird to kind of elope with someone and be like, “What if your sister came?”

A: Well....

I: [laughs]

A: Yeah. [laughs] We'll talk about that more in a minute. Yeah, Harriet's now 19. They have a daughter – lanthe – and Harriet's pregnant with a second child, but Shelley's kind of lost interest in her. He pretty much lost interest from when she got pregnant with lanthe. He kind of just doesn't want to be tied down by this domestic thing of having a wife and kids – he wants to travel around and help revolutions and be radical and...

E: If you're not interested in that, getting married and then having sex with that woman's probably like...

A: Yeah.

I: ...a bad call.

E: ...not the best step you could take.

A: Those are the steps to having a wife and kids

[laughter]

I: Sex ed with Queer as Fact.

A: So yeah, he and Harriet have been separated – he left her about six months earlier – but they are still legally married. Mary assumes that her father will support her relationship with Shelley because Mary Wollstonecraft had an illegitimate child when he married her, and he was fine about that; Mary Jane's two children, Claire and Charles, she had from two different relationships, both illegitimately before she married him, and he was fine about that. So she kind of sees this as another thing that he'll just be fine about – he's fine with unconventional relationships. But he's not fine with this.

I: Is this just he thinks he wants something better for Mary?

A: I'm not entirely sure. He does definitely become more kind of moderate in his views as he gets older.

I: Okay.

A: So it might just be part of that. I'm not really sure, but Mary and Shelley tell him they're in a relationship, and he kicks Shelley out of the house, he confines Mary to the schoolroom, and he won't let them see each other.

E: To the schoolroom?

A: That's like, the room in the house where she spend her days just like, studying and stuff.

E: Okay.

A: Like, the room where she generally spent her time in the house, she's kind of confined to spending all her days in that room...

E: Oh I see.

A: ...and she doesn't go out of the house. But Claire helps them sneak letters back and forth. Early in the morning on the 28th of July, Mary and Claire sneak out of the house and meet Shelley at a carriage waiting to take them to Dover and then on to France. So let's return to eloping with your partner's sister.

E: Yes.

A: Which he's definitely doing right now.

E: Why is Claire here? Why does she want to come?

A: There's several possible reasons for why Claire is here. A lot of biographies will say it's because she spoke French, and they were on their way to France, but Shelley also spoke French.

E: Okay.

A: So that doesn't really hold up. Possibly she just, because of the rivalry she had with Mary, refused to let Mary go off on what she probably saw as an exciting adventure, and just leave her at home, and because she'd been helping with the secret meetings, helping with the letters, she kind of had some power over them to say, "Well you have to take me too or I won't organise your elopement." Possibly it's part of Shelley's thing about rescuing women – he did try to take Harriet's sister with him last time he eloped. Those are some possibilities.

Shelley even wrote to Harriet and asked her to come too, but she ignored his letter.

I: Reasonable. [laughs]

A: Yeah. Shelley doesn't understand human interaction very well.

[laughter]

A: They got a boat over to France. Mary was very seasick. She didn't have a good time.

E: Mm.

A: But Claire had a very good time. On the first night they arrived in France Mary Jane turned up...

E: Oh.

A: ...to try and bring them home.

I: That was efficient.

A: Yeah. [laughs]

E: I forget how feasible it is to just go to France if you're from England.

A: Yeah, yeah. Like, they had an overnight journey I think and they arrived the next day.

E: Yeah.

A: Mary Jane turned up. Mary Jane wasn't interested in bringing Mary home – she didn't even attempt to convince Mary to come, she was just kind of like, "Yeah, okay. You're gone." She tried to convince Claire to come home, and Claire was almost convinced, but then Shelley convinced her to stay.

E: Okay.

A: So Shelley obviously does want her here.

I: Does he just not expect romantic relationships to be monogamous – is that just not what he...?

A: No, Shelley doesn't expect romantic relationships to be monogamous. He's quite a proponent of free love, as I think they called it at the time.

I: But not in terms of he personally, does he just not expect that expectation to be around generally?

A: I think he knows that expectation is around, and he enjoys flouting societal expectations.

I: Okay.

E: So is he just openly carrying on with Claire? Is that what you're saying?

A: No, he's not carrying on with Claire, but...

E: So that...

A: ...he knows that in running away with both sisters...

E: Ah, okay.

A: ...everyone's gonna think he's carrying on with Claire, and he's obviously accepted that fact.

Shelley and Mary had what they called their "wedding night" in France, though I'm pretty sure they'd slept together already, but that's how they talk about it. They read each other Byron, and they read each other the works of Mary Wollstonecraft...

[laughter]

I: Hang on! Byron is like, their contemporary, right?

A: Yeah, they don't know Byron at this time, but he is a contemporary poet who's writing at the time.

I: Okay, so it's not like if I was having sex with my girlfriend and I got out like, Eli's poetry and was like, "We're gonna do a poetry reading now!"

A: [laughs] No, no. They have not met Byron at this time. They're just like, "Hey! Here's a popular poet who shares some of our like, kind of philosophical ideas."

I: That makes more sense.

E: Mary's mother is weirdly present in their relationship.

A: All three of them – Claire as well – are very much kind of acolytes of Mary Wollstonecraft and they talk about her works a lot, and they read her works to each other all the time and stuff like that.

E: Okay.

A: So yeah, they started out very happy, and then things went downhill, mostly 'coz they didn't actually have any money.

I: That would do it, yeah.

A: Percy ended up borrowing some money, and selling his watch to support them. They eventually decided to leave Paris – probably 'coz it was too expensive. They brought themselves a donkey, which died of heat exhaustion.

I: Oh no!

E: Oh my God, what?

A: And then they...

E: You can't just introduce a donkey and then snatch the donkey away from me in the same sentence!

A: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But yeah.

I: I don't actually know what year we're in here. 18....

A: We're in the early 1800s. I think we're in 1814. Summer 1814. And it's very hot, and they're having to carry all their luggage across the French countryside because..

E: ...they have no donkey.

I: ...their donkey is dead.

A: Shelley twists his ankle.

I: I hope then Mary carries him.

[laughter]

A: No, they end up getting a mule, and he rides on the mule.

E: Is the mule okay?

A: The mule is okay. Pretty bad time at this point. Shelley describes the French people as “the most unamiable, inhospitable, and unaccommodating of the human race.” In France's defence, it was recovering from the Napoleonic War.

E: I mean, we've established that Percy doesn't know how to interact with other human beings.

[laughter]

A: Yeah, that's true. He really doesn't. He really does not.

So eventually they gave up on France, and they moved on to Switzerland. They lasted about two days in Switzerland, before they realised they didn't actually have enough money to support themselves and they decided they had to go home.

E: Well that was a...

A: So that was a very failed elopement.

I: Get a job, Percy.

A: [laughs] Percy does get a job later on. He becomes a poet!

[laughter]

E: That's not a job! As my father says.

[laughter]

A: So they head back home to England. We're not actually sure how Mary felt about this whole elopement experience. She kept a journal at the time but it was a joint journal with Shelley.

I: Ahh....

A: So she's not really in a position to kind of write, "Oh, you know, I really regret eloping with this man who doesn't know how to interact as a human."

I: A joint journal is a weird concept.

A: Yeah, I dunno. It is a weird concept.

I: What did they do, like, alternate?

A: I think they both just wrote in it when they wanted to write in their journal, yeah.

I: Alright.

E: It reminds me of those like, very 90s joint answering machine messages that couples do.

[laughter]

A: Yeah. They would have had one.

[laughter]

E: God that would have been awful.

A: Claire also keeps her own journal at the time, and she reports that Mary was obviously very unhappy and obviously regretted running away. I mean, Claire also has her own biases – she's quite jealous of Shelley and Mary and she doesn't really enjoy this...

E: Mm.

A: ...trip they're on, so.... but yeah, we're not really sure.

So they get back to England. Mary finds out just before they leave Europe that she's pregnant. When they came back to England they found that they were totally ostracised from society because Shelley had just eloped with two sisters.

E: Oops.

A: Yeah, there were also rumours that Godwin had actually sold them...

I: Okay. [shocked laughter]

A: ...to Shelley, because Godwin was constantly trying to get loans out of Shelley and Shelley had given him some money just before he left so...

E: That's... a lot.

A: Yeah, so people have started saying that he'd sold his daughters to Shelley. And even Godwin himself wanted nothing to do with them. So yeah, Godwin won't see them – he crosses the street when he sees Mary, if he sees her on the street – and they have no money. They used the very last of their money getting

back to England and they're just totally broke and they kind of move around a lot, writing a lot of letters to acquaintances begging them for money. They end up borrowing some money from Harriet.

I: Does Harriet... has her own money?

A: Harriet empties Shelley's bank account while he's gone.

I: Ah.

E: Good.

[laughter]

I: Fair enough.

A: So Shelley kinda has to go back to her and be like, "Harriet, can you give me some of my money?" and he spends quite a long time trying to negotiate this with her.

E: New plan. What if Harriet and Fanny get married?

I: Yeah.

A: Mm. I like it. I like it.

I: Yeah, that would work fine.

A: So during this time, Shelley spends a lot of time away from home, or from wherever they happen to be staying, trying to get money out of people, and also hiding from creditors, so he doesn't end up in a debtors' prison....

E: Jesus.

A: ...which was a thing at the time. Mary usually stays at home because she's pregnant and her pregnancy takes quite a toll on her, and so it's often Claire who accompanies Shelley when he goes out. And as I mentioned with Harriet already, Shelley loses interest in Mary when she's pregnant – he's not that interested in this kind of domestic thing, and he grows a lot closer to Claire during this time.

E: For God's sakes Percy!

A: Percy's not very good.

I: This is what happens when you have sex with people!

A: Yeah, yeah. Originally when he's spending time away from he writes these really long love letters home to Mary and they're like, writing back and forth all the time, but as her pregnancy goes on, he starts to write long letters to Claire if she's not with him, and Mary just gets these short little notes. So there's obviously a lot of tension here between Mary and Claire and between Mary and Shelley, and then Shelley has the bright idea to fix this by setting Mary up with his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg.

I: Okay. [laughs]

A: Mary doesn't like Hogg at first.

I: She's pregnant with your child, Percy!

A: Yeah! She is pregnant with his child. So Mary doesn't like Hogg at first but he eventually grows on her and it partly seems to be just because she needs emotional support...

E: Hmm.

A: ...and she's kind of got nothing. She does end up writing a letter to Hogg that kind of says like, "Our relationship could become more, and possibly physical, but like, I'm pregnant at the moment, like I can't

have a physical relationship with Shelley either at the moment, but maybe when I have a baby.”

In February 1815 she gives birth to a daughter, Clara.

I: Clara? Did she...

A: Clara.

I: ...name her after Claire?

A: After Claire.

I: So you mislead us when you said they hated each other.

E: You've given us no evidence that they hate each other.

A: Do you want the evidence that they hate each other?

E: I mean I feel that now that you've said that they hate each other you should probably...

A: Okay.

E: ...provide that as part of the picture.

A: In the next few months we see it kind of get worse and worse between them, and Mary refuses to even use Claire's name in her journal. She'll say Shelley went out with his f"riend", or Shelley is talking to "the lady", and stuff like that, and she keeps this really obsessive track of all the time that Claire and Shelley are spending together.

E: So did they always have this animosity or is this because of the current situation where she's kind of getting it on with Mary's husband?

A: They've always had a rivalry, but the like, level of hatred is because of the current situation.

E: Okay.

A: It is strange that she called the daughter Clara, you are right. That is weird.

I: I mean, not really, like the way you've sort of painted this so far, it still seems like they both care about each other and the circumstance is what's leading to this animosity.

A: Yeah.

E: It's very hard to tell with siblings, like...

I: Yeah.

A: Mm.

E: I dunno, siblings just kind of hate each other sometimes, and it's very hard to tell when that's serious, and when that's....

A: Yeah.

E: ...just people growing up in close proximity.

A: Yeah, and you have to remember as well that they are teenagers at this time.

E: Mm, yeah.

A: Yeah, like Mary is 17, so...

I: They're both like 17.

A: Yeah, I think Claire's 16. Mary's 17. Yeah.

I: Yeah.

A: So they're very young, they're siblings who are very close in age and have always had a rivalry, so it's kind of very hard to read how their relationship actually is.

I: In that context, I don't feel like the refusing to write her name in the diary is a huge deal, like...

A: That sounds like something a teenager would do, yeah.

I: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

I: Exactly.

A: The baby is two months premature, and she lives for less than two weeks.

I: Oh....

A: The baby dies. Mary turns to Hogg, rather than Shelley, for emotional support when the baby dies.

I: Reasonable, considering that Shelley had like, not really spoken to her for a couple of months.

E: And Harriet exists.

A: Yeah.

E: So is Hogg just like, a decent human being, or...?

A: Hogg seems pretty fine, yeah.

E: Okay. "Hogg and Shelley" sounds like a children's novel about a turtle and a pig who go on adventures.

[laughter]

A: If only that's what this was.

[laughter]

A: Yep. Once Clara is born, and then dies, Shelley gets interested in Mary again.

E: Okay.

A: And their relationship improves, she loses interest in Hogg, he loses interest in Claire, and so Claire and Mary's relationship starts to degrade even more 'coz Claire feels like she's just been used while Mary was pregnant.

I: Which she absolutely has.

A: Which she has. Then quite suddenly, in May – so that's a few months after Clara's death – Claire suddenly leaves to stay in a cottage in Devon.

E: That sounds quite pleasant.

I: Reasonable, yeah.

A: It does sound quite pleasant. Possibly a lot of biographers speculate that this is because Claire is pregnant with Shelley's child.

E: Oh no.

A: And she's gone to Devon to have the baby, you know, away and hide the scandal.

E: Yup.

A: We don't know if that's true or not.

I: She may just not wanna hang out with them anymore.

A: She may just not want to hang out with them. Like, I would believe she was sleeping with Shelley at this time. It sounds like she would've been sleeping with Shelley at this time, so I would believe this, but we can't know either way. Both Mary and Claire's journals are missing from those months.

E: Why?

A: Mary's journal is often missing at points where there's something that people might not want us to know, something like this, like Claire maybe having a baby with Shelley.

E: Okay.

A: And we don't know if Mary's removed those pages, or a descendant of Mary has removed those pages. So that definitely adds to the theory that that's what's happening there.

E: I have to remember to hoard all my papers forever.

A: Yeah you do.

I: Yeah...

A: But like, also to organise them in a way that's understandable and so they're...

I: That'll ruin the fun for the archivist.

A: Like, there's levels of fun.

E: [laughs]

I: I need them to have a job!

A: Okay, yeah. That's true, that's true.

E: But they won't have a job, they'll be volunteers.

A: In January 1816, Mary has another baby.

E: Yep.

A: She calls him William, after her father who still isn't speaking to her. They...she and Shelley called him Wilmouse.

I: Awww. So is the situation here that Shelley has got over his aversion to pregnancy?

E: He's just got over his aversion to having sex with this woman.

I: Okay.

A: Yeah, I think his interest in sex outweighs his aversion to pregnancy. It seems that Claire is still quite jealous of Mary and Shelley, and so she hatches a plan.

I: Oh no.

A: To one-up Mary, by seducing a more scandalous and more well-known poet.

I: Oh no!

A: Lord Byron.

E: No! Don't do it, girl!!

I: [laughs] Oh my God, Claire.

E: This isn't worth it!

A: No it's not. So she starts writing him letters talking about all her sort of radical philosophical ideas she has, inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft and her connections with William Godwin, her stepfather, all these kinds of things.

E: Don't sext Lord Byron.

A: She's sexting Lord Byron. They arrange to meet at the theatre, and then they go back to his place, and they sleep together.

E: Yup.

I: That was efficient.

A: Yeah, like she gets what she wants.

E: She should plan heists instead of this.

A: She should. So, they start an affair, but Byron has no interest in this being a long-term relationship, like he's absolutely just in this for the casual sex.

E: So he's Lord Byron.

A: 'Cause, he is Lord Byron, this is what he...

E: Yeah.

A: ...does.

E: I know people, including a lot of our listeners, are very fond of Lord Byron, but do they know that he's actually a very bad person?

A: He is a bad man.

E: He's a very bad man. I mean, he's....mad, bad and dangerous to know, okay?

A: [laughs] Yes. This is not gonna depict him well. He's not interested in a long term relationship, and he's planning to go on this holiday to Switzerland anyway, so Claire goes to Mary and Percy and says, "Hey guys, why don't we take a holiday to Switzerland? It's just an idea..."

I: Aren't they broke?

A: Not enough to not afford a holiday to Switzerland, apparently.

I: I'd like to be that kind of broke.

A: Yeah... They get to Geneva in May, a little bit before Byron turns up, and then Byron turns up a few days later, in his exact replica of Napoleon's war carriage.

E: Yes.

I: [laughs]

A: With his eight dogs, his three monkeys, his five cats, his eagle, his crow, and his falcon.

I: [more laughter]

E: I love him, but he's a giant pile of garbage.

A: Yeah. He is, but he's kind of great. But he's a bad man.

E: He just has so many animals.

A: He does have so many animals, it's true.

E: So many...

A: He turns up. Byron and his doctor, John Polidori, take a house on the side of Lake Geneva. Shelley and Mary and Claire take a house very nearby.

I: So, is what happened that Claire was just like, casually to Byron, "Oh, so you're taking a holiday to Switzerland. Where will you be staying?" and he named the town and she was like, "What a coincidence!" while she was like, on Airbnb looking up the house next door.

A: That's a hundred percent what occurred.

E: [laughs]

A: No, they were actually all staying in a hotel at first, but it was basically an English tourist hotel, and the rest of the guests just kind of couldn't cope with the scandal, and they were like, "Look, we're just gonna leave this hotel". The hotel is on the other side of the lake, and the guests have like a telescope set up where they watch them in the house across the lake.

E: What, really?!

A: Yeah, I'm not kidding.

E: Okay...we sometimes say things in a very facetious manner.

I: [laughs]

A: No, that's factual.

E: Okay. Jesus Christ. I wanna be scandalous enough that people are like, "Please move outta this hotel," but only if they then put me up in another hotel.

A: Yeah, and then set up a telescope on their balcony.

E: Yeah...I mean, I guess.

A: The London newspapers really enjoy reporting on what this group is doing.

E: Good to know newspapers have always been trashy.

I: [laughs]

A: Yeah, they refer to them as the "League of Incest".

I: [laughs louder]

E: Bad, bad superhero group.

A: [laughing] Oh no!

I: Oh no. What are their superpowers?

A and E: No! Nooo!

A: Claire is interested in Byron, but also kind of maybe still in Shelley. Polidori is crushing pretty hard on Mary. Mary and Shelley are together.

E: I mean, it is pretty incestuous, to be fair.

A: It's pretty incestuous. The League of Incest...look, it's an apt name, to be perfectly honest. So, they have their holiday together. It's 1816. 1816 is known as the year without a summer.

E: Mm.

I: Ah yes.

A: Just to make it gother for you. There was a big volcanic eruption in Indonesia, and so the ash clouds meant that the weather was really messed up, and so there was no summer. So in Geneva, it was very very stormy, and they're pretty much confined inside a lot of the time.

E: What are we gonna do to entertain ourselves?

A: What *are* they going to do to entertain ourselves? They find an old book of ghost stories.

E: Gooooood...

A: And they start reading each other ghost stories.

I: So like, Mary has had some practice at this with Isabel.

A: Yes.

I: So Mary is the best at ghost stories.

A: Yeah, yeah. So um, they read their book of ghost stories, and Byron is like, "Look, this is kinda lame. Why don't we write our own ghost stories?"

E: Byron would be the first to die in a horror movie.

A: [laughs] And Byron very much sees this as it's gonna be a contest between him and Shelley, who are both kind of, the poets. And him and Shelley, for their whole friendship, have this big rivalry going on. They're always trying to kind of best each other. And he doesn't really think about what Mary might write, but Mary goes off and she starts *Frankenstein*.

E: Mary goes off and casually pioneers the science fiction genre.

I: [laughs]

A: Yeah! I don't even know what the others wrote, but it obviously wasn't that important.

E: Didn't *The Vampire* come out of this?

A: Yeah. Yeah no, it did.

E: Written by "Lord Byron", in heavy quotations.

A: Yeah no, it did, it did.

I: Wait, what's the situation there?

E: John Polidori writes a vampire story, and it was misattributed to Byron for many years.

I: Ah, okay, yep, yep.

E: Because I think Byron just sort of...

I: Took it?

E: I don't remember whether it was a situation where Lord Byron was like, "Yeah, I'm just gonna publish this under my name", or if John Polidori was like, "This would get me more readers" or something. I can't remember.

A: Polidori notes in his journal that everyone else went off and started writing straight away, and Polidori was kinda sitting there and he couldn't think of what to write, and he felt kind of embarrassed and like...

I: Aww.

A: ...he wasn't the cool writer friend of the group.

E: Aww.

A: Mary later on writes that she didn't know what to write, and everyone else went off to write straight away, and later on she had this nightmare where the idea came to her. We don't know which version of events is true. Polidori wrote his version of events at the time, and Mary may have been trying to distance herself from kind of the coming up with her work, because as a woman it was kind of very shocking that a woman had had this idea.

I: Ah, all right, yeah.

A: And that was considered quite inappropriate. And also it's just a bit more kind of romantic...

E: Yeah.

A: ...to say, "Oh, it just came to me in a dream."

E: Doesn't she say that she like, woke up, and she sat up in the middle of the night, and she's like, "I've found it!"

A: Yeah, she says that she was like possessed by the idea, and...

E: Mm... There's definitely a lot of looking at the Alps involved in this, I'm sure. Like a solid third of this book is just like...

I: ...looking at the Alps?

E: ...nature description.

A: Yeah, after she's started writing they do go off on some kind of day trips around the Alps and it's just really obvious that this inspired a lot of the setting of Frankenstein.

E: Yeah, yeah.

A: They spend summer in Geneva, and in September they go back to England. By this time, Claire is pregnant with Byron's child. Byron kinda has no interest in this child.

E: Surprise.

A: Shelley tries to convince him to help support the child, and eventually Shelley ends up sort of promising to give some money to the child, which leads to a rumour that it's actually Shelley's child, which doesn't help this League of Incest scenario.

I: Yup.

A: But briefly, Shelley and Mary and Claire are living together, and they're like, reasonably happy. Shelley

writes this nice letter to Byron where he says, "Mary is reading over the fire; our cat and kitten are sleeping under the sofa; and little Willy has just gone to sleep." So he sounds happier with his domestic scenario.

E: Aww.

A: But then in the last few months of 1816, both Fanny and Harriet commit suicide.

I: Oh! Are you sure they didn't just fake their own deaths and elope to the Mediterranean somewhere?

A: Mary blames herself a lot for both of their deaths. Fanny because she feels like she's neglected her as her sister, and Harriet obviously because she's run off with Harriet's husband. Mary Jane blames Shelley for Fanny's death, because she claims that Fanny was unrequitedly in love with Shelley, and that drove her to suicide.

I: That seems improbable.

A: It does seem improbable, but I think Mary Jane is just kind of determined to hate them all at this point. Shelley becomes determined, suddenly, to get custody of her and Harriet's children.

E: Okay.

A: Who he's never really shown an interest in until this moment.

I: I mean...where else might they have gone, I guess.

A: Harriet's family would've looked after them, and Harriet's family wanted to look after them.

I: Okay.

A: At this point, Mary and Shelley decide to get married to increase their chance of winning the custody battle.

I: I did wonder how that happened.

A: Yeah, so, both of them don't have an interest in marriage and marriage doesn't fit with their philosophical ideas, so this is the only reason they do get married, and Shelley writes a letter to Byron afterwards like, "To be clear, I haven't changed my ideas on marriage, this was just a marriage of convenience." So Mary records the wedding in her journal, but she records the wrong date, so, like obviously it's not that important to them. But being married does make them much more socially acceptable, and suddenly Godwin is happy to talk to them again. He comes to the wedding. Godwin's like, radical politics and personal behaviour don't really line up... But, it doesn't win them the custody battle.

I: Fair enough, they don't look like great parents.

A: No, and in January, 1817, Claire has her baby. Claire calls the baby Alba. The baby is later baptised as Allegra, and Byron calls the baby Allegra.

E: Okay.

A: I'm not clear on what's happening there. We're gonna call her Alba, I've decided. Byron still has no interest in this kid, so Claire continues staying with Mary and Percy. Mary also has another baby in September that year, which she calls Clara again. So, it's during her pregnancy with Clara that she finishes writing *Frankenstein*, although it isn't published till later that year after Clara is born. So, we'll give a quick plot summary of *Frankenstein*. So...

E: Victor Frankenstein needs to chill, but he doesn't chill.

A: And a lot of people die.

E: Yes.

A: The story's actually told by a man named Captain Walton, who is on a ship trying to reach the North Pole, and Captain Walton finds a man, who is Victor Frankenstein, kind of, just on the ice. He's been in a sled that's been pulled by dogs, most of his dogs are dying, he's had a terrible time. And so he gets Victor onto his ship, and Victor tells him his story.

E: I don't know why every gothic novel has to have some kind of like...

I: ...weird framing device?

E: ...weird framing device, yeah.

A: Yeah, so it's all actually in letters written by Walton home to his sister. So Victor's story is, he was a student at university, he was learning about biology and chemistry, and he decided to create life, because he doesn't know when to stop. That's a key theme of the book, that he does not know when to stop.

I and E: [laugh]

A: So he made himself...Frankenstein's monster. As soon as the monster opened its eyes, and comes to life, Victor is horrified by what he's done, and he flees the room. And the monster obviously flees as well, and they don't see each other for some time. And then a few years later, Victor hears that his younger brother William has been murdered. A local woman, an orphan named Justine, is blamed for the murder of William, and she is executed for the murder of William, but Victor figures out that it's actually his monster that killed William and framed Justine.

I: Victor, you made a mistake.

A: Yeah.

E: Victor is aware. Victor is destroyed by remorse, don't worry.

A: Yeah, a lot of the book is just Victor going, "Oh god, what've I done?" for a long time.

E: Victor periodically has like, complete lapses into insanity and is just out of the picture for two months because he's being eaten by grief in a room somewhere.

I: Okay. My like, full memory of this book is that I remember the ice and I remember travelling around

Europe.

A: Yeah.

I: That's all I remember.

A: Victor eventually runs into his monster in - I can't remember what the town is called. There's a town in Switzerland that Mary had been to while they were in Switzerland - or on a glacier near there. And they have this sort of confrontation, and the monster explains that since he ran away from university when Victor created him, he's taught himself the language, and he was hiding out in different kind of houses and different towns, and he ended up hiding next to this one cottage, and he would kind of spy into the window of the cottage, and he watched this family who he became very very fond of, and he, like, at night he'd sneak out and help them kinda gather firewood and stuff like that, but they never knew he was there.

I: Aww...

A: And eventually he thinks, "Well, it's time for me to come out and introduce myself to this family."

E: I love that you just had a little like, Freudian slip, and phrased that as "come out".

A: [laughing] Yeah. Yep. So he's gonna...come out to this family, and they'll hopefully take him into the family, and he can live with them, and that's his plan. So the patriarch of the family is this blind man, and so he introduces himself to the man, and the man can't see that he's a monster. He looks like, horrific.

I: Okay, cool.

A: Everywhere else he's been, people have kind of run from him, and been horrified by him. So he introduces himself to this man, and he kind of says, "Look, if you met someone who you thought was good, and then something horrific was revealed about them and people tried to ostracise them, would you still support them?" And the man is like, "Yes, of course I would." And then the rest of the family gets home, and they see the monster and they're horrified by him and the woman faints and they drive the monster out of the house. The monster finds Victor, and he says, "Look, this is what's happened to me. What I want is for you to create a female creature, like me, so that I can have a family."

I: Aww.

A: But Victor's so horrified by what he's done that he refuses.

I: Aww.

A: I mean, it's more complicated than that - he kinda wavers back and forth about it, but ultimately, he refuses. So then, to shorten the end of the novel, there are many more deaths. The monster kills many more people in kind of an attempt to convince Victor like, no you've gotta do this. He eventually ends up pursuing the monster all around the world...or, all over kind of, that part of Europe.

E: All over Europe, which is the world to 19th century Europeans.

A: Yeah. And um, he eventually chases him up towards the North Pole, and that's when Walton finds Victor and pulls him out of the sea. Walton's very happy, because he's been writing in his letters to his sister, you know, "I'm having this adventure and everything, but what I really want is a friend. I just need someone who like, understands me," and he pulls Victor out of the sea, and he's like, "I've found him."

I: Aww.

E: He spends a lot of time being like, "Oh, he's got such beautiful, intelligent eyes."

A: Yeah.

I: This sounds heterosexual.

A: Victor tells his whole story to Walton, but then Victor ultimately dies.

I: Oh!

A: Because he's been out on the ice.

E: Physically through so much in his life.

A: And mentally through so much in his life.

E: Yeah, yeah.

A: So Victor ultimately dies. Walton lays out the body, and then he finds the monster mourning over the body.

I: Aww.

A: And before Victor's died, he's said to him, "Look, Walton, what you have to do for me is, if you see the monster, you have to kill the monster, because of all the things it's done to my family." It's killed so many of his family. So Walton finds the monster in mourning over Victor's body, and he doesn't kill it.

I: Fair enough.

A: And the monster runs off onto the ice, and the book ends.

E: The implication is that the monster is going off to die deliberately, though.

A: Yep.

E: He's like, "Now that Victor is dead, I am alone in the world, and I'm gonna walk off onto the ice and die."

I: Aww.

E: So there's no burning windmill.

A: Yeah...[laughs]

I: That was a sad and beautiful story. Like, it was your recount, but I feel it was quite well done.

E: It's a good story.

A: It is, it's a good story.

I: Yeah.

A: No, it is.

E: It's like, half a travelogue, but it is a good story.

A: Yeah, there's - if you like descriptions of icy scenery, you should read *Frankenstein*.

E: Mm.

A: At the time critics hated *Frankenstein*. They called it "a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity". They called it "uncouth". They called it "amoral". And as I mentioned before, one of their greatest horrors about it was that it was written by a woman, because women shouldn't think about things like that. So, now we can talk about whether *Frankenstein* is queer.

E: [laughs]

A: It's time. A lot of people have written about how it's just inherently queer, because it talks about being ostracised from society.

I: There are a bunch of ways you can be ostracised from the society that are not necessarily queer.

A: Yeah...

E: For example, you can be pieced together from bits and pieces from a charnel house and be nine feet tall.

A: [laughing] Yes... For example, you can elope with a married man and bring your sister along, and be ostracised from society. Like, ostracised from society is definitely something Mary has experienced throughout her life.

I: Yeah.

E: Yeah, it's one of those things where it's not inherently a queer book, but it is, and has been, of interest to queer people, and therefore a lot of adaptations of *Frankenstein* are queerer than the original because queer people make them.

A: Mm-hm.

E: And make them gayer.

A: Yeah, and I think because queer people read *Frankenstein* and it resonates with them, because *Frankenstein* really just wants to settle down with a partner and be happy.

E: A lot of it is really explicitly as well he has, *Frankenstein* has - no, oh my God, we're doing the thing.

A: We are, yeah.

E: The creature has this whole thing where he just wants to be a part of normal family structure, but he's excluded from the like, normal, two parents and their children family structure because...

I: ...because of what he is.

A: Yeah, and I think it's especially clear in that conversation he has with the blind man, where he's like, "Look, I'm just a normal person, but there's something about me that is gonna horrify people," and the blind man is like, "Yep, that's fine, I would still support you," and then doesn't still support him, because when people actually see him they become appalled by him.

I: Yeah, I can see how that's a queer narrative.

A: I think it's definitely a queer narrative even if Mary didn't intend for it to be a queer narrative. The second thing I was gonna say is, the second queer reading of it is like, Walton is pretty gay.

E: Oh yeah. I mean, I don't think like, he actually necessarily is, but I like to think of Walton and Victor finding love.

A: Yeah, I don't think Mary intended...

E: No.

A: ...that reading.

E: No, I think that is legitimately, you know how people are like, "No, that's just how people talked in those days..."

A: That is.

E: Like it is just legitimately that, but also...it's cute. I'm surprised that you said that the other way is the whole Walton thing, because I thought that you were going to talk about trans people's thing with *Frankenstein*.

A: No! You can talk about trans people's thing with *Frankenstein*.

E: Um...The prominent trans scholar and historian, who has done some of the like, only works just on trans history, Susan Stryker, has an article called, "My Words To Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamoni", which is I think where the windmill scene is set, right?

A: Yes.

E: So in... I think it's the 1931 Universal horror movie that established like, what we generally think of as a the Frankenstein story today.

A: Yeah, yeah.

E: Where it ends in the windmill and the windmill catches on fire and Frankenstein dies, and Frankenstein is played by Boris Karloff.

A: Yeah, that is definitely the defining Frankenstein work for us.

E: Yeah, yeah, which just doesn't happen in the book at all. [laughs] I love Universal horror movies. Yeah, has this article where she writes about the similarities of Frankenstein's experience of the world to her experience of the world, in terms of like, having this sort of disassociation and disgust for your own physical form, and being ostracised from society on the basis of it, and things like that. So yeah, I feel like there's kind of more grounds for reading it, and identifying with it, in terms of a trans story than in terms of being same-sex attracted.

A: Yeah, no, that does make sense, yeah.

E: Mm. Like I do think that it's being queer is more solidified by its adaptations, than by the original text.

A: Yeah, I think its being queer is a possible reading that you know, adaptations have taken, rather than Mary sitting down and being like, "Yup, I'm gonna write a queer book."

E: Mm, the director of the 1931 *Frankenstein*, and the sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein*, in which the Bride of Frankenstein actually happens, was a gay man.

A: Mm-hm.

E: Who I believe identified with Frankenstein on the basis of gay things.

A: Yeah.

E: And so Frankenstein's monster's whole thing about like watching the people is much more homoerotic. He gets really obsessed with some like, random woodsman or something.

A: Yeah, in the book he gets obsessed with the family, but you could very easily turn that to him being obsessed with the one man. Irene, as a person who hasn't interacted with *Frankenstein* for some time, did you have any ideas that *Frankenstein* was queer?

I: I definitely I think had sort of considered the queer narrative of being viewed as a monster.

A: Mm-hm.

I: And that kind of being driven to - driven to monsterhood, almost?

A: Yeah, that is something I wanted to talk about. I'm glad you brought that up.

I: Yeah.

A: Because I forgot that. Yeah, it's definitely a strong part of the monster's narrative that he's not a monster. He's been driven to being a monster because society won't let him in.

I: Yes.

A: And Victor's being like, "I have to kill you because of what an awful monster you are," and he's basically saying, "But no, I just wanted a family. I had to kill people because they wouldn't let me have that."

E: Do we want to talk about how when he killed the little boy, he was trying to kidnap the little boy to raise him to not know he was a monster.

A: Yes, yes! I forgot to mention that.

I: Aww.

E: He's trying to kidnap this little kid, and he's like, "Hey, he won't know yet that I'm deformed, so I can raise him away from society and then I'll have a son".

I: Aww.

E: But also like, kidnapping children is bad.

A: Yeah...and also like, the kid sees him and does know he's deformed.

E: Mm.

I: Yeah.

A: And that's why he kills the kid, because he thinks that you know, a child that young won't know, but a child that young...

I: ...already knows.

A: Not long after she published *Frankenstein*, around the time she published *Frankenstein*, she heard from William Baxter, so Isabel's father...

I: Oh!

A: ...that Isabel was very unhappy in her marriage to David. He wasn't treating her well, they were very poor... Mary began to plot to free Isabel from her unhappy marriage.

E: Now Mary kidnaps someone.

A: Yeah...

I: This is a rescue that needed to happen, though.

A: Yeah, yeah. So she starts to write these letters to Isabel. Coincidentally Isabel comes down to London, and Mary writes to her and begs that they should meet in secret, and that their children should have playdates.

I: Aww...

A: But David won't let them see each other and we're not sure if they ever do manage to meet or not.

E: Aww.

A: There's no record of whether that ever happens.

E: I hate David.

A: Yeah, David's pretty awful. David also should not have married a sixteen-year-old.

I: Nobody should do that.

A: That was bad. So while this was going on, Shelley writes a poem, which was called *Rosalind and Helen*, which is about - basically about Mary and Isabel. And Rosalind has chosen to be in a conventional but very unhappy marriage to support her children, while Helen has an unorthodox relationship with a radical aristocrat.

E: Yeah.

A: So Rosalind is Isabel, and Helen is Mary, but in the poem both their husbands die, and Rosalind and Helen end up moving in together, and they kind of make a family, and their children marry each other. Unfortunately, Mary and Isabel don't get this happy ending that Shelley imagined for them.

I: I love how acceptable it used to be to just write sort of, full-on, shameless, self-insert fanfiction.

A: Mm...There is a lot of that at this time.

I: Yeah...like, Shelley's doing it. Tove did it. Nobuko did it.

A: Yeah...

E: Bring it back, Irene.

I: Yeah, obviously.

A: Sit down and write a...

I: ...shameless self-insert fic about three friends who have a podcast...See, we're not in a blanket fort anymore, or we could call it *Three Queers in a Blanket Fort*.

A: In *Rosalind and Helen*, there's also a random incest sideplot, not with Rosalind or Helen. Just kind of unrelatedly.

I: Alright...

A: There's this incest sideplot. And um...this was a very scandalous thing, and Shelley's reputation, partly because he published this incest poem, was becoming quite a social problem for them, and they were getting worried that they may lose custody of their children, and so in March of 1818, Mary, Shelley, and Claire, and their children, decided to leave England for Italy.

I: Is it just the two girls in Italy?

A: No no no, no, it's the whole family. It's Shelley and Mary and Claire.

I: Oh okay.

A: And the kids. And the kids' nurses.

I: And the cat.

A: Maybe the cat! I dunno.

E: And its kittens?

I: [laughs]

A: And its kittens. So, they're very happy. Mary writes in her journal about how even the cows in Italy are beautiful.

I: Aww.

A: They're very excited because they've read a lot of classics and they get to kind of see a lot of where...things they've read are set. They really like Cicero, for some reason?

E: [laughs]

A: They're very excited they're going to see Cicero's home. [laughs]

E: Sure.

A: Meanwhile, Byron was still in Italy.

E: Oh no.

A: And Byron's only legitimate child had recently died.

E: Oh.

A: And Byron suddenly became interested in Alba, his illegitimate daughter. He decided he wanted custody of Alba. Mary was also quite keen for Byron to take Alba, because then Claire wouldn't be dependent on the Shelley family, and she could kind of just go out and get a job as a single woman and support herself rather than being a single mother who was quite kind of, socially outcast and had to depend on them. So um, it took a lot of persuasion, but eventually Claire was convinced to send Alba to Byron.

I: Oh no.

A: And so Alba's nurse Elise took her to stay with Byron near Venice.

I: I'm glad the nurse went too, at least. I wasn't gonna trust Byron with a baby on his own.

A: No, the nurse did go too.

I: How big is Alba now?

A: Quite young still. Probably one or two?

I: Okay.

A: She's quite young. And then, a few months later, Elise wrote to the Shelleys asking them for help, saying that Byron had forced her and Alba out of the house, that he had a plan to raise Alba to be his mistress, and that basically they need to come and save her.

I: Yes, all right.

A: Claire and Shelley went off to see Byron. Mary stayed home with the children, because Clara was very sick at the time. And then Shelley wrote to her asking her to come and join them, because Byron liked Mary a lot more than he liked Claire, and that might, you know, help convince him.

I: Why does Byron like Mary better now?

E: 'Coz he's not bored of her, 'coz he hasn't had sex with her yet maybe?

A: Yeah, he hasn't slept with her yet and discarded her?

E: Byron's a really bad person.

A: Mary and Byron connect quite well intellectually.

I: Oh okay.

A: Like they talk about writing and stuff together.

I: They're legit just like, good friends.

A: Yeah, they're legit just friends. So Mary's very worried about travelling with her very sick child, but she does end up going. Clara died not long after they arrived. Alba ended up staying with Byron. They decided that Elise had exaggerated the situation and that it was okay, but Elise did leave. So Elise went home with them, but Alba stayed. Alba eventually ended up living with another family that Byron was friends with, a married couple who cared for her, and Byron was nearby.

I: All right, that's a reasonable arrangement I guess.

E: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

E: I don't think there's really any like, 19th-century men who are just gonna raise a child. Like I don't think that was ever really on the cards...

A: No.

E: ...that he was gonna, take care of her day-to-day.

A: And um, later on, she ends up in a convent for a while. So she's raised by various people, but Byron has custody... That's in September. The following June, Wilmouse dies of malaria. Mary wrote, "After my William's death, this world seemed only a quicksand, sinking beneath my feet." She had already blamed Shelley for Clara's death, because he'd asked her to travel while Clara was very sick, and she hadn't wanted

to. Now William was also dead, she started to isolate herself from Shelley even more. They kind of stopped spending any time together, having any relationship. In November, 1819, Mary had another son, Percy.

I: But, she was isolating herself from Shelley?

A: So I think she was pregnant before this happened.

I: Ah, so she was already pregnant. Okay.

A: Their relationship didn't improve after she had a child. She refused to speak to Shelley again. She wrote to a friend and said "...a woman is not a field to be continually employed in bringing forth or enlarging grain."

I: Fair enough.

A: Fair enough. She, you know, she's had very bad experience with having and losing children, and she's not interested in Shelley anymore. Shelley writes letters to his friends complaining about her, and when a wealthy patron invited Shelley to the Middle East, he asked Claire to go with him rather than Mary, and he didn't even tell Mary he'd been invited.

I: Awkward.

A: That fell through, so that never happened.

I: Okay.

A: But that was his plan. But not long after that, Claire found a position as a governess and moved away, so she's no longer living with the Shelleys.

I: I hope she's happy.

E: I hope she's happy too.

A: Claire moved out. A couple called Jane and Edward Williams came to stay with the Shelleys. The Williamses are similar to the Shelleys. They eloped together. They had both been married before they eloped together, but they'd run away to Geneva together when Jane was sixteen. Mary wrote when she first met Jane, "Jane is certainly very pretty, but she wants animation and sense."

I: [laughs] She wants animation and sense?

A: Yeah. She found Jane very boring, but not for long...

E: Okay.

I: I see...

A: They eventually bonded over their kids, who were a similar age. Jane had a son called Edward. Mary was named the godmother of Jane's second child, Rosalind. Shelley, as soon as Jane wasn't pregnant with Rosalind, became very interested in Jane.

I: Of course.

A: 'Coz he's like this. He found her fascinating, especially the fact that she could speak and sing in Hindi, 'coz she grew up in India.

E: Oh, that's pretty cool.

A: Which is pretty cool! He referred to himself as the Ariel to her Miranda, from Shakespeare's *Tempest*. So the like, spirit looking after her.

I: Yep.

A: He wrote her love poetry.

I: Shelley!

A: He wrote this poem that he gave to both of the Williamses kind of saying, in more poetic language, you know, "I'm stuck in an unhappy marriage, and I'm jealous of your happy marriage and in love with Jane".

I: That's not a good gift to give to your friends who are in a marriage!

A: I think he ended that with, "So maybe we shouldn't hang out for a while."

E: Oh, okay.

A: But they continued hanging out.

I: All right.

A: While Percy was growing closer with Jane, Mary grew closer with a man named Edward Trelawney, who was a Cornish sailor who came to stay with them. She wrote in her journal about "his Moorish face... his dark hair, his Herculean form".

E: His Moorish face?

A: Ah...I think he has just, quite dark colouring.

E: Okay.

A: Like, I think just as...I think he is a white man.

E: Okay.

A: Just a white man with dark colouring.

E: Okay, so yeah, they just haven't seen enough people of colour to not be surprised by tans still?

A: Yeah, I think that's where we're at. She started going out with Trelawney at night. They'd go for long walks. They eat out together. He'd take her dancing, which Shelley had never done, because he kinda wasn't interested in conventional society. A fair bit of Mary's journal from this time is missing, so it's quite possible

that she had a relationship with Trelawney. Seems highly likely. And then in summer 1822, the Shelleys, the Williamses, and Claire, took a house on the Gulf of La Spezia, in northern Italy, while Byron, Trelawney, and another friend named Leigh Hunt, stayed nearby near Pisa. Shelley was very happy in La Spezia. He got a boat, because Byron had a boat, so Shelley had to have a boat.

E: For god's sakes.

A: Which he named *Ariel*.

E: Ah, for god's sakes!

I: Did he just name his boat after his own like....Shakespeare--

E: --sona...

A: Yeah, specifically his Shakespeare-sona of his affair.

I: Okay Shelley.

A: I mean, I don't think they're having an affair, but he's interested in her.

E: He wants to be having an affair.

A: And he named his boat after her.

E: I always forget that Percy Shelley's kind of garbage, because Byron is there being just so much worse.

A: So Shelley spent a lot of days out sailing, he was really really happy. Mary was miserable and abandoned. She felt very isolated in this small town they were in. There was an unbearable heat wave. And also just before they'd left La Spezia they'd heard that Alba had died of typhus.

I: Aww.

A: Yeah the household was very tense and very unhappy. And then in June Mary had a miscarriage.

E: It's kind of surprising that she wrote *Frankenstein* before most of the death in her life happened.

A: Yeah I think at the time when she wrote *Frankenstein* it was more kind of about the social ostracisation.

E: But there's just so many deaths.

A: Yeah because in *Frankenstein* the whole family died, and a lot of Mary's family dies. Speaking of...So on the 1st of July, Shelley, Williams and a boathand set out in Shelley's boat to visit Byron, Hunt and Trelawny. Shelley's boat - when he got his boat, he was very disappointed to discover it was smaller than Byron's boat. So he demanded to have the masts lengthened and more sails put on to make his boat bigger and faster than Byron's boat. Which means it was very top-heavy and not particularly seaworthy.

I: Right.

A: So when they set off in this boat across the open ocean, they made it to Byron's place but they never

made it home. On the 19th of July the bodies of Shelley, Williams and the boathand washed up on the coast. They were by that time pretty degraded from being in the sea. Shelley was only identifiable by the volume of Keats in his pocket. It was Trelawney who kind of took charge of things and organised the funeral, so they were cremated on the beach.

E: We're getting back to the goth stuff.

A: We're getting back to the goth stuff. They were cremated on the beach because of Italian laws, I think quarantine laws that I'm not quite sure how that works but they had to be cremated rather than taken and buried and everything. Trelawney reached into the pyre and plucked Shelley's heart from the funeral pyre.

I: In whose words?

A: I'm not really sure, but he definitely had an object that he said was Shelley's heart and apparently burned his hand doing it.

I: So he legitimately did just like reach into the fire and be like "Imma grab his heart".

A: Yeah, yeah I guess so.

I: Trelawney. Was he even that close with Shelley?

A: Not really. He kind of after Shelley's death starts playing up the friendship starts playing up the friendship for his own notoriety.

I: Alright.

A: Yeah. He wasn't that close, but he's the one who takes charge and he's the one who takes the heart. Mary wasn't even at the funeral and neither was Jane. They didn't want to come. But a lot of Mary's friends were very critical of her reaction to Shelley's death. They felt that she was unmoved by it, she didn't seem upset enough. People also started saying that she'd been making him miserable in the lead-up to his death.

I: Oh, it's *her* fault now.

A: And that he'd actually killed himself. So her friendships with both Trelawney and Hunt were pretty badly damaged by this rumour that was going round that he'd killed himself.

E: Where's the heart end up?

A: So Trelawney originally gave the heart to Hunt, rather than to Mary because of this situation where people were being very critical of Mary. It was Jane who went and begged Hunt for the heart to give to Mary. Mary kept the heart for the rest of her life and she kept it in her travelling desk. I don't know where the heart ended up after that. So in the aftermath of the deaths of both their husbands Mary and Jane grew very close, and Mary wrote in her journal referring to Jane "...no woman had ever been more in need of a protector".

Mary also grew very close with Byron at this point, which is always a mistake. And it is possible that they had a relationship. Mary notes in her journal that Teresa, Byron's mistress, was jealous of whatever was going on between Mary and Byron. Also, interestingly, and we can discuss this in a minute when we talk more about Mary and Jane, Mary hid her relationship with Byron from Jane. So Jane went back to England, and Mary wrote to her saying, oh, "I see very little of Lord B[yrone] he does not come here" two days after she'd written a letter to Byron which says come "this evening at your usual hour".

I: Alright, yup.

A: She doesn't really hide her relationship with Byron from anyone else – it's just Jane.

The next year Mary went back to England. She moved back in with her family – so with Godwin – and she also attempted to rekindle her relationship with Isabel Baxter.

I: Oh! Isabel is back.

A: Isabel is back. Isabel visited her, but Isabel was recovering from a nervous breakdown, possibly caused by David, possibly by living in poverty...

E: Mmm.

A: ...I don't really know. Mary wrote: "The great affection she displays to me endears her to me & the memory of early days. ... Else all is so changed for me that I should hardly feel pleasure in cultivating her society." So she felt that Isabel had changed and their relationship could never be what it was.

I: Aww...

A: Probably because of what Isabel had suffered in her life.

E: With David.

A: So Mary was now single, and she hoped to support herself through her writing, but she ended up relying on Shelley's father, Sir Timothy, for an allowance, which he gave her on the condition that she didn't publish anything by or about Shelley.

I: That's okay, yeah.

A: She did publish a biography of Shelley not long after that, but she did it anonymously.

[laughter]

A: Everyone pretty much knew it was her, I think, so Sir Timothy knew it was her, but there was no way to prove it.

I: Yep.

A: So she got away with that.

E: So she definitely had to write about herself in third person a bunch.

A: Yeah, I guess she did.

E: Okay.

[laughter]

E: That's a normal thing to do.

A: That's a normal thing to do, yeah. So when she got home to England, Mary and Jane spent a lot of time

together – one of the first things they did together when Mary got back was to go a play of *Frankenstein*, that had recently opened.

I: Aww!

A: By 1824 – so that's I think the year after she returns home – Mary wrote in her “I love Jane more than any human being...” and that summer she moved to live near Jane in Kentish Town. They visited each other every day, they went for long walks, they went to the theatre together.

I: Did they go to second-base hut?

[laughter]

I: On their walks?

A: You're going to have to decide that for yourself.

I: I see.

A: Mary, who continued to struggle with depression and was often quite depressed, wrote “I cannot be sorrowful while with her.”

E: Mmm.

A: Referring to Jane.

E: That's nice.

A: It is quite sweet.

I: I love how she started this story with, “Look, Jane is good-looking, but she's really boring.”

E: Mm.

A: Yeah. Not anymore!

E: Jane has found animation.

A: Yeah.

A and I: And sense!

[laughter]

A: So Mary's dream was to earn enough money from her writing to support Jane and both their children and take them back to Italy to live together.

I: How many children does Mary have now?

A: Percy. She's just got Percy. And Jane's got Edward and Rosalind. So in the next few years, Mary turned down several marriage proposals from men. When one of her friends tried to set her up with another friend, Mary wrote to him: “You must really come to an end of bantering me on that subject - because after all, it is all a mistake...” And she added that she could tell him “a fact or two that would astonish you” to prove how much of a mistake it was.

I: I see.

[laughter]

A: I dunno what those facts were... but I suspect it was something involving her and Jane. More tellingly, regarding her refusal to marry men, she wrote in her journal, “To her” - that being Jane - “for better or worse, I am wedded.”

I: Yeah okay that's...

A: [laughs]

I: ...that's not straight.

A: And she added "...I continue in the love-lorn state..." So yep. It's not very straight. It seems from her journals and generally what biographers have said about this - when they're willing to accept this, which they're often not – that Mary found it much easier to accept a relationship with a woman than with a man because she felt she would always be comparing a man to Shelley.

I: I mean, I feel like you wouldn't have to put that much effort as a man to compare favourably to Shelley.

A: After Shelley's death she does think very highly of Shelley.

I: Yeah, I guess I can see how that happens.

A: Unfortunately Mary never felt that Jane returned her feelings to the same degree. She wrote "I love Jane better other human being, but I am pressed upon by the knowledge that she but slightly returns this affection." And then in 1825, Mary discovered that Jane had been having a secret relationship with Thomas Hogg.

I: Oh! *He's* back!

A: He's back. There are like five people in England.

I: So the incest club is not just the five that...

A: No. The incest club is this whole like, strata of English society.

I: Alright.

A: On the day that she found out about this relationship, Mary writes, "I know now why I am outcast. ... I make not her happiness. ... O miserable fool - grieve, but be not mad." And the rest of that page of her journal is missing.

E: Mm.

A: So Mary started to tell Jane that Hogg wasn't worthy of her, and she promised Jane that when Sir Timothy died and Mary's son Percy inherited the Shelley family fortune, she herself would support Jane, so Jane didn't need to go and find a man. Mary encouraged Hogg to take a holiday to Italy, to work on his poetry.

I: Mary...

A: Jane also encouraged him to go, and so he departed for Italy in August 1825. While he was gone Mary and Jane grew much closer, and Jane starts to kind of return these feelings of devotion that Mary's expressing.

I: So Jane encouraged Hogg to go because she was like, "Look, I like you, but I really wanna get it on with Mary," or was she just being supportive of his writing career?

A: We're not really sure how Jane felt about Hogg. Because of her social position as a single mother - and she'd never married Edward Williams...

I: Oh, okay.

A: ...so as a single mother with two illegitimate children, she may have just needed a man to kind of legitimise her in society.

I: Yeah, okay.

A: And also to support her financially. So we don't really know how strongly she did feel about Hogg.

I: So it might be that when Mary was like, "Look, don't worry, when the inheritance comes in I'll support you," she was like, "Okay. Bye Hogg!"

A: Yeah. But also she was technically still married to her first husband – so before she eloped with Edward Williams she had married another man – she could not marry Hogg.

I: Okay.

A: So therefore it's been speculated that she wanted to kind of test Hogg's devotion to her, knowing that it would be so difficult for them to have a relationship by saying, you know, "Will he still love me if he goes away and he comes back a while later, or is this just a kind of passing interest thing?"

I: That sounds less convincing honestly.

A: Yeah, so you know, take the interpretation you choose. So while Hogg's gone, she starts writing that she loves Mary, that she needs her more than anyone else in the world and they're very close. But Hogg came back the next year, and he and Jane renewed their relationship. By February 1827, Jane was pregnant, and she went to live with Hogg as his de facto wife.

Mary tried to be supportive of her, but she also worried that Jane wouldn't be happy with Hogg, and she writes in her journal that maybe it's just that she doesn't want Jane to be happy with Hogg, and she kind of worries that she's being a bad friend in that way. And then in mid-1827, Mary made another unpleasant discovery about Jane.

I: Oh no.

A: So I talked earlier about how Hunt and Trelawney and other friends were very critical of Mary after Shelley's death, and kind of said she'd driven him to suicide. And Mary discovered that it was Jane who had been spreading that rumour.

E: Ohh....

I: Jane, why?

A: And she'd continued to sort of spread rumours like this once they'd returned to England.

E: That's so awful.

A: It is awful. So probably the speculated reason that Jane did this is just her own self-advancement. So with the exception of Mary, Jane was the woman who been closest to Shelley leading up to his death, and also quite close with Byron...

I: Yeah.

A: ...who had recently died. And so with Mary out of the picture Jane would become a really socially interesting person, if she said, "Well Mary and Shelley kind of, there wasn't anything going on there. I was the one who was close to Shelley."

So Mary discovered this in about July of 1827, but she didn't immediately confront Jane about. So there's a couple of possible reasons for this.

I: I mean, that's already just an awkward thing to. When you hear somebody's been spreading rumours about you it still feels like you're accusing them of something.

A: Yeah. Especially if it's someone that she's been so close to and so infatuated with, basically.

I: Yeah.

A: There also there was other things going on in her life. In 1825 – so a couple of years before – Mary had

met at a party a write named Doddy.

I: Named what sorry?

A: Doddy. So Doddy was born as Mary – or possibly Maria, for some reason that's not clear – Diana Dodds.

I: Thank God she used Doddy.

[laughter]

A: So they weren't both called Mary. I've chosen to use 'they' pronouns for Doddy, 'coz I'm not entirely sure what's going on with gender identity – possibly they were a trans man, but I'd need to do more reading on this to know. They went by Doddy among their friends.

E: Doddy is very cute.

A: Doddy is quite a cute name. They were a writer. They were known for looking quite masculine, and for having love affairs with women.

So after Doddy and Mary met, Doddy began to write Mary letters saying how much they missed her on days when they didn't see her...

E: Yes....

[laughter]

A: They referred to her as “my pretty” and “*meine liebbling*”, which is...

E: Aww, that's so cute.

A: ...which is apparently means “my darling” in German. Mary wrote that she very impressed with Doddy's charm and conversation, but she didn't actually return Doddy's...

E: Oh....

A: ...advances towards her, possibly because she was interested in Jane at that time. But they did become friends, and Mary helped Doddy find buyers for their work – publishers for their work – and then in 1827 – so we're almost back up to where we were when Mary discovered Jane had been gossiping about her – Mary met Isabel Robinson. And it's Isabel Robinson who tells Mary that Jane's been spreading this rumour.

E: Wait, so is this a second Isabel?

A: Yes. This is not...

E: Whyyy?

A: ...Isabel Baxter. This is Isabel Robinson. So Isabel was 19 years old. She lived with her family, but she an illegitimate daughter named Adeline, who her family knew nothing about. So Adeline lived at a secret address elsewhere, with her wet-nurse. So Isabel often came to stay with Mary and they became very close. One of the biographies I read said that “for a time, Isabel virtually replaced Jane in Mary's affections.” I couldn't actually get hold of Mary's journal from this time, so I've only got quotes, so I can't be sure. But it seems that Mary tried quite hard to convince herself not fall in love with Isabel, and kind of tried to justify her feelings towards Isabel as just friendship.

I: How old is Mary at this time?

A: I think she's 30?

I: Okay.

A: And Isabel's 19. Mary writes in her journal about Isabel: “But now my desire is so innocent. Why may I not hover a good genius around my lovely friend's path?” So Mary seems like she's trying to justify that no,

she's just friends with Isabel, she's not romantically interested.

So Isabel wanted to start a new life with her daughter. Doddy, it seems, wanted to live openly as man, so Isabel, Mary, and Doddy hatched a plot.

E: Oh good.

[laughter]

I: Is Mary about to set Doddy up with Isabel?

A: Yeah.

E: Awww.

[laughter]

I: Aww.

A: So on September 23rd, in 1827, Doddy arrived at Mary's home, dressed in male clothing. Mary wrote a letter to her friend Payne – that's the friend who tried to set her up earlier on with another man – telling him that she wanted to help some friends - a couple, a man and a woman called the Douglasses - to get passports, but that they were and they couldn't come to London to get passports – so would he just hire some actors to like, pretend to be the Douglasses and go and sign for them?

E: This is such a plot.

[laughter]

A: It's a good plot. And get them passports. So Payne – not knowing what plot he was involved in – went and did that.

I: Payne was a good friend.

A: Payne... Payne's a good guy. Friends turned up to visit while this was going on...

I: Yeah.

A: ...to visit Mary where Doddy was staying with her, and saw Doddy and was like, "Yeah, this is a man" and didn't question this. So Mary felt that they were going quite well. They got false passports, and Doddy, Isabel and Adeline left England for France under the names Mr. and Mrs. Walter Sholto Douglas.

I: Walter Sholto.

A: And Adeline as their daughter.

I: Walter Sholto.

A: Walter Sholto. Yep. I dunno what Sholto is.

I: Sholto is a name. I've heard it before.

A: Okay. I'd never heard it before.

I: But not usually after Walter. Walter Sholto.

A: Yep, that's Doddy's name now. Isabel and Doddy's marriage wasn't very happy.

E: Noooo! Doddyyy!

A: Isabel seemed to see it more as a marriage of convenience.

E: Aww....

A: And Doddy was very jealous when Isabel had affairs with other men.

I: I mean...

E: There are so many affairs this episode.

A: There are so many affairs.

I: I mean I can see how this happened, in that it very much was a marriage of convenience.

A: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

A: Yeah. But it appears that Doddy very much was interested, and Isabel either was and then moved on, or wasn't. And then, so in 1829, two years later, Doddy died in a debtors prison in France.

E and I: Ohhhh....

A: Isabel came back to England, and Mary saw her again, and was very disenchanted with her. She found her shallow and manipulative, and she wrote "Good Heavens - is this being I adored?" So that was that.

I: That was a sad end to a good heist story.

A: It was. It was a good plot story, and I was like, "Do I tell you the ending?" and then I decided I should.

That's what Mary was doing just after finding out that Jane been spreading these rumours about her. She was actually gonna go to France with them, but she got sick and she ended up staying home. But it's during that period – so from July when she finds out about the rumours, to February when she eventually confronts Jane – that we see the most explicitly queer letters between Mary and Jane.

I: Oh good, I wish to hear them.

A: She writes in August – this is a bit of a weird letter, I'm gonna try and explain it to you as best I can.

E: Okay.

A:

Messer Domine...

So, God

...I am grateful to you for several things, but for nothing so much as my gender – in fact, dear, except the feminine[,] what is amiable except our pretty N – the word is too wrong I must not write it...

Scholars suspect that "N-" is the word 'notches' which is slang for vulva.

I: Okay.

A: She continues:

...but I shall certainly decline only haec & hoc dilecta vel dilectum[,] Jeff...

So that's Hogg...

...must not see this.

Must not is underlined.

E: Okay, alright so.

A: So what just happened?

I: I did not understand that line at all.

A: So, first she says 'I thank God that I am a woman' or 'I thank God for women'. This next phrase I'm not, I feel like I'm parsing a foreign language here. Then she says, "in fact dear, except the feminine, what is amiable except our pretty n-", which apparently means vulva.

E: Maybe.

A: Maybe. Then she says "I shall certainly decline only *haec* & *hoc* *dilecta* vel *dilectum*". So *dilecta* means 'beloved', something like that in this context.

I: Yes.

E: What does *haec* and *hoc* mean? Oh *haec* and *hoc* I see, okay.

I: Yes.

E: I didn't realise we were in Latin there.

I: What are they in Latin?

E: 'This' and 'that'.

A: 'This' and 'that'. So the point here is that she has declined the nouns, I assume you know, you write out the cases of a noun, only in feminine and neuter not in masculine.

E: And then *dilecta* vel *dilectum* is also in...

A: ...feminine and neuter. She's saying 'beloved' and deliberately leaving out the masculine form.

I: Ah. But keeping feminine and neuter.

A: But keeping feminine and neuter.

I: I don't know how much to read into this, about Mary's, like, concept of gender.

[laughter]

A: I don't know because Latin's concept of gender is also here. But I think the point I want to make is that quote where she says "I shall certainly decline only *haec* & *hoc*" so 'this', in Latin, "*dilecta* vel *dilectum*" so 'beloved' in Latin, specifically in feminine and neuter but not in masculine. So she's focusing on the word 'beloved' not being a masculine word.

E: Why is neuter here at all?

A: I don't know why neuter is here.

I: That's why I was wondering how much we should read about Mary's conception of gender.

A: I mean, this is just around the time that she's interacting with Doddy, so you know, she's probably having some thoughts about gender, maybe that's going on.

I: Yeah, maybe. I would be happy if Mary Shelley turned out to be on board with non-binary gender. That was certainly a possible explanation.

A: It was. And the following line is "Jeff must not see this". So she also writes in another letter "I'm not sure that male eyes will not trace these lines, so I will endeavour to be as demure as an old maid". She refers to Jane as her 'fairy girl'. She used to call Shelley her 'elfin knight'.

E: Oh god.

[laughter]

A: So I think there's definitely a parallel there. In February she finally did confront Jane but she struggled to stay angry with her. She writes to Jane after they had a conversation about this:

If I revert to my devotion to you, it is to prove that no worldly motives could estrange me from the partner of my miseries – the sweet girl whose beauty, grace & gentle were to me so long the sole charms of my life ... When I first heard that you did not love me – every hope of my life deserted me...

So they remained friends, but they were never as close as they had been previously.

I: Understandable.

A: Yeah. In the 1830s – so the following decade – Mary had several failed relationships with men. She wrote to Trelawney, who she was talking to once more:

Do you think I shall marry? Never ... Mary Shelley shall be written on my tomb – and why? ...it is so pretty a name that .. I never should have the heart to get rid of it.

E: Okay.

[laughter]

E: That's very flippant.

A: [laughs] It is very flippant.

I: Yep.

A: Okay. In 1835 she writes another letter to Trelawney saying "Ten years ago" - so that's around the time that she was first moving to live near Jane - "I was so ready to give myself away, & being afraid of men, I was apt to get tousy-mousy for women."

E: [laughs]

I: Alright. That's fairly clear.

[laughter]

I: Tousy-mousy is definitely like...

[laughter]

A: So tousy-mousy has various meanings, depending on what part of England you're looking at the slang of. So 'tousy' is apparently Scots for 'tousle', and tousy-mousy can mean sort of pull around roughly, or tousle. And also it's West Country slang for vulva.

I: Alright. Yep.

A: It's pretty queer. A lot of biographers have kind of glossed over Mary's relationship with Jane, or struggled to deal with it. One biography I was reading wrote: "It should be recognised that Mary had been a little in love with Jane, if that phrase can be used about two women without implications of abnormal behaviour."

E: When was that published?

A: The 80s, I think. More recently, one of her biographers – and I think that I would agree with this much more – writes: "Where Mary stands on the spectrum of sexual orientation may not be entirely clear even to herself. Possibly it's more fluid than polarised."

E: Okay.

I: That seems fair, yep.

E: Yeah.

A: Yeah. I don't know that Mary would ever have kind of seen this as an identity, where she was attracted to women.

I: That honestly seems historically to have been a fairly uncommon thing, sort of conceptualising same-gender attraction as an identity rather than an experience I guess.

A: Yeah.

E: Mm.

I: Or an action that you take.

E: It's certainly in this century that that paradigm...

I: ...is shifting.

E: Yeah. But...

A: Yeah. And she's still quite early in this century.

E: ...I can see people saying she probably never considered this an identity, as a way to minimise that, which I would consider to be ahistorical.

A: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

A: No, that's true too.

I: Yeah. And that's certainly not what you want to say when you say that's not the paradigm with which people talked about same-sex attraction. It's not like, "Okay, it wasn't a deal, this isn't queer history" – like, I don't think that has to minimise it.

A: Yeah, yeah. No, that is true, and I don't want to minimise this.

I: Yeah. Even if Mary Shelley never would have sort of seen herself as being attracted to women as part of

her identity, it doesn't make the action less significant.

E: Mm.

A: Yeah, no.

E: It's the thing where people very much are like, "Well she probably never considered herself to be" - say like, for the sake of argument "bisexual." And even if that's the case, I mean she almost certainly never considered herself to be heterosexual either.

A and I: Yeah.

E: You know?

A: Yeah.

E: Like I think what people do is say like, "Oh, you know, if they didn't have this identity as like, some kind of queer, then by default they have an identity as heterosexual."

I: Mm.

E: And it's like, no, if you're arguing that this paradigm didn't exist and therefore she couldn't identify with it, then she couldn't have identified with heterosexuality either.

A: I also think in that quote where she talks about getting tousy-mousy for women...

[laughter]

E: English slang is... anyway, continue.

A: ...she talks about this period of her life, being afraid of men and apt to get tousy-mousy for women, I think she may have a period in her life where she was interested in women, and that other period in her life when she was maybe interested in men.

I: Yeah.

A: Mary published several more books, often on the theme of women's role in society, and kind of championing their independence from men. She became a very well-recognised, well-regarded author. In 1839 she published a second collection of Shelley's works. This collection very much kind of sanctified Shelley. She refers to him in the preface as a "pure-minded and exalted being", and she really focusses on his, like, work as a poet rather than his scandalous life and his radical political ideals. And it's this volume of Shelley's works that is kind of the reason Shelley became really known and remembered as a famous poet.

She also republished *Frankenstein*, and the version that she republished is the version that we know today. And so in that version she kind of increases the mentions of the dangers of ambition.

E: Which she really like, hammers on.

A: Yeah, as we were saying, like, the key message is Victor needs to stop.

I: Okay.

[laughter]

I: And that was not originally the key message?

A: That was in there, but it wasn't as strong.

I: Okay.

A: And she also – Victor has a fiancée, who is killed by the monster. She also decreases the agency of the fiancée..

E: Oh!

A: ...and makes her kind of much more of a helpless and silent character.

E: That's interesting.

I: Okay Mary. Yeah.

A: Which I think I guess is possibly to make more of a point about kind of what women are forced into, but I can't really say without having read the original *Frankenstein*.

I: Yeah. Look, reducing a character's agency doesn't really sound like it's making a feminist point, but I haven't...

A: Yeah.

I: ...read it, so yeah.

A: I don't know.

E: She could certainly make points about what women were forced into in other ways.

A: For the last 10 years of her life, Mary was quite ill. She had frequent head-aches, she found walking difficult at times, and she would sometimes wake up unable to move. And doctors struggle to diagnose her for a long time, and they generally put it down to a nervous complaint, 'coz that's how they diagnosed women in the 19th century.

She focussed her attention later in life on one remaining living child, Percy, and she lived with and his wife, Jane. In December 1850, she was finally diagnosed with a brain tumour, and she died age 53, in February 1851, with Percy and Jane both by her side.

E: She died so young, really.

A: Yeah, she was actually quite young. But she did a lot.

E: Why haven't I defined a new literary genre?

[laughter]

A: That's a high bar.

So with that, we're Queer as Fact. Thank you for listening. I'm Alice.

E: I'm Eli.

I: I'm Irene.

A: If you liked this episode, you can find us on social media, on Facebook, Tumblr, or Twitter as Queer as Fact. You can listen to more of our episodes on Podbean or iTunes or wherever else you get your podcasts. If you want to contact us directly you can email us at queerasfact@gmail.com and we would love it if you did. We'll be back on the 8th of April with our first ever Queer as Fact mini episode, when you can tune in to find out whether Swedish people really called in gay to work when homosexuality was classified as an illness. And we'll be back with our next full-length episode on the 15th of April, when Eli will be talking to us about the American civil rights activist, lawyer, priest, and poet Pauli Murray. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you then!

[music plays]