

Molly: Hey everyone. We don't have any new patrons to thank this week. We just want to take a moment to thank everyone who's already bought merch from our store on TeePublic. The link for our store is in the episode description. Check it out. We have t-shirts, hoodies, baseball shirts, mugs, notebooks, magnets, and more. Come grab some merch by going to the link in the episode description and send us a pic on Instagram. We really want to see what you get. Now, enjoy this week's episode covering *Why She Wrote* by Hannah Chapman and Lauren Burke, the hosts of Bonnets at Dawn, with our guests, Hannah Chapman and Lauren Burke.

[Pod and Prejudice theme]

Becca: This is Becca.

Molly: This is Molly.

Becca: We're here to talk about Jane Austen, and others.

Molly: And others. Today, we're talking about a really great new book called *Why She Wrote* by Lauren Burke and Hannah Chapman, and we actually have been blessed to actually have Hannah and Lauren on the show with us. So, Hannah and Lauren, how are you doing?

Lauren: Good, [00:01:00] thank you. [giggles]

Hannah: You're doing well, I'm here in body.

Becca: Here is still like an adjective to describe.

Lauren: [laughs]

Becca: Your present state.

Lauren: The vaccine has taken me to a new level. I feel good on one hand, but also exhausted. So, Hannah. Hannah, take the wheel.

[laughter]

Hannah: That's why I already told them that I considered long COVID. They're trying to work out why I've been ill since December.

Lauren: Oh, God.

Hannah: [crosstalk] both of us really just on the verge of not dying. Very Victorian.

Lauren: You do have us in our full-- behind the scenes of Bonnets at Dawn, it's very Victorian lady illness.

Hannah: Yeah. [laughs]

Becca: You know what? I feel you guys are pre-being sent to Bath right now.

Lauren: Mm-hmm.

Becca: So, it's still a vibe that goes with the book.

Lauren: Absolutely.

Hannah: We really need to take the waters.

Lauren: We've been talking about it. We just did a **[unintelligible 00:01:51]** presentation about going to Bath and we ended with a whole segment about the Spa trip that we were going to do once it was safe to do.

Molly: Oh, my gosh.

Lauren: This is **[00:02:00]** not really related to Jane Austen, but these are our travel plans post-COVID if anyone's interested.

Molly: I love that.

Becca: That's a modern-day equivalent of going to the sea to reinvigorate your health.

Molly: Oh, yeah.

Lauren: Yeah, exactly.

Hannah: Mm-hmm.

Lauren: These days, you just sweat it out and--

Hannah: You need it hot.

Molly: Right.

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: Exactly.

Lauren: [laughs]

Becca: But thank you so much for joining us. Why don't you let our listeners know a little bit about you, the book you wrote, and a little bit about your podcast, Bonnets at Dawn.

Hannah: Sure. Bonnets at Dawn is a podcast that focuses on the lives and works of women writers from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. We started in 2017. Is that right, 2017?

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: Yeah, the year that Jane Austen note came out. That's how you can remember that little factoid. The show started off as *Bonnets at Dawn*, Austen versus Bronte. It was very much like, I was Team Austen, having read all of the Austen books. And Lauren was Team Bronte. Because she had read [00:03:00] both, but I'd never read the Brontes.

Lauren: [laughs]

Hannah: I had this whole bit about how I didn't care to. Then, the show is slowly evolved to the *Bonnets at Dawn* we have now, where we look at all sorts of writers, and it's given us the opportunity to talk about some more underrepresented authors, people that maybe aren't talked about or critiqued as much letter writers, diarists, and travel writers, and then *Why She Wrote*, a book, which we did with illustrator, Kaley Bales. That has just come out this year, and that's really an opportunity for us to dig more into those stories that are hard to capture in 45 minutes of audio. But Lauren, you can say more about the book. What do you think? [laughs]

Lauren: [laughs] The book is a mix of comics and essays, and it's funny. Both Hannah and I have been comic editors and writers in the past, and we've pitched a book of essays, essentially, with some illustrations, and our editors were like, [00:04:00] "Hey? Hang on a minute. You guys do comics. Why don't you do comics for the book?" We were like, "Okay." [laughs] I'm really glad that we did actually, because Kaley did such a beautiful job with them, and we were actually able to just really capture, just like Hannah said, more elements to these ladies lives via the visuals. Yeah, we've got some essays. We also group every author together in a chapter. So, we'll get into that a little bit later. Then, we also have some fun facts and their bibliographies. It sounds like a lot, but I think that we pulled the formatting off in the book, which I love.

Molly: Yeah.

Lauren: That's one of my favorite things about the book. Yeah, it's 18 authors, it's out now, and it's beautifully illustrated by Kaley, and yeah, we're really excited about it.

Molly: It's really fun and would recommend, listeners, would recommend. I love that there were comics in it. That just made the stories more [00:05:00] digestible to me and more relatable, because first of all, it's obviously easier to read comics than essays, because they're faster and illustrated, and that's why picture books are a thing. But I don't know, I feel it captured them as more human than an essay.

Hannah: I'm glad. Yeah.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: It helps to put a face to a name.

Becca: Yeah.

Lauren: [laughs] Yeah.

Becca: Absolutely. I also, funnily enough, when I was reading it, I blew through this because it reads really quickly, because I was looking at it as a collection of graphic novels, short stories, and what was so great about it is that the comics imbued a little humor into it, and a little whimsy into it, but I also felt, it gave it a little bit of a superhero vibe.

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: We were reading about the different *Avengers*, but instead of *Avengers*, it was influential female authors. So, I very much enjoyed the format you guys landed on for this. [00:06:00] Before we get into talking about the actual book itself, we're going to ask you a few questions which we ask every guest that comes on this show. Starting with, what is your relationship to Jane Austen?

Lauren: Ooh, Hannah, you have the more interesting relationship with Jane Austen.

Hannah: I feel it's bog-standard, but it goes on for a really long time. [laughs]

Becca: [laughs]

Hannah: One of my earliest memories is watching the 1995 BBC adaptation with my mum. But she would videotape it while we were awake, and then she would watch it back at night, and it was like really low quality. I was five at the time, and I do remember sitting on the sofa bed and watching this video with my mum. That was the first time I watched it. Then, when I was 12, I went on a holiday with my dad, and I was like, "Oh, Mom, I want to take a book with me." She gave me a copy of *Pride and Prejudice* to read. She's like, "I think you're old enough to give this a go now." I did, and I loved it, and then, [00:07:00] it was a really nice bonding thing to do with my dad, because he then started taking me to all of the stately homes that they filmed the adaptations in. I watched the adaptations with my mom, and then go and visit the homes with my dad. Then, yeah, just bit by bit, both of my parents really encouraged it, and then, by chance when I was at university at Bath Spa, I worked at the Jane Austen Center for a short time for the summer.

Molly: Oh, wow.

Hannah: Yeah. I got to wear a costume and stuff which I was really into.

Molly: Oh, my God.

Becca: I love that.

Hannah: [laughs] They asked in the interview, they're like, "How would you feel about costume?" I was like, "Oh, sign me up 100%." [laughs]

Becca: Yes.

Hannah: I really liked that job. I was really lucky, because Lauren and her husband once came, and I got to do the introductory talk and take them through the exhibit, and this is years before *Bonnets at Dawn* was a thing. Yeah, so it's never been-- I didn't study her at uni or anything, but she's been this really bigger influence in my life [00:08:00] just all through growing up. Yeah.

Lauren: I don't think my story is as interesting as Hannah's. I think that she was on summer reading, but I can't remember what year. It was *Pride and Prejudice*, which was the first book that I read by Austen, which I loved. *Pride and Prejudice* is still maybe my favorite, and I get called basic all the time for this, but I don't really care.

Becca: This is a no judgment podcast for-

Lauren: [laughs]

Becca: -whatever Austen takes you have.

Lauren: Yeah, I think that was my favorite book, and then obviously, after that, checked out the adaptations. I think in my earlier years, I've probably would have called myself an anglophile.

Hannah: [laughs]

Lauren: We've had a lot of talk on the show about, what being an anglophile is, if I still am, unclear, but I've started going to England a lot. My mother-in-law, I'm very lucky, she worked for United. So, I could fly all the time. I spent most of my 20s just taking trips. I would just go to England all the [00:09:00] time, and go to a bunch of stately homes, and then, of course, when Hannah and I became friends, I would go and visit Hannah all the time.

Yeah, I think that trip to Bath that you were talking about, that was my honeymoon.

Molly: Oh, my God.

Hannah: Yeah. I gatecrashed it.

[laughter]

Lauren: Yeah, and on my way there, I read *Persuasion* for the first time all the way through. That was really great. It was a really great experience. Then, after that trip, Hannah and I were working in comics, but we were like, "Han, we should do a Jane Austen project someday." But we just couldn't figure out what exactly to do, because there are 1 million books on Jane Austen. We were always looking for an angle, and it was always something that was in the background. So, I think for most of that time, we were just digesting material and just thinking about it, like, "Hmm, we do this, we do this, we do this." That's my relationship with Austen. It's not as intense as Hannah's, but I do love her. [giggles]

Molly: [00:10:00] I think those are both lovely stories. Speaking of stately homes, I want to give a shoutout to our listener, Sarah, who this morning went for a walk by the 1995 Pemberley, which I forget the name of the actual house, and she took a picture of our podcast in front of the house, and it made my whole day.

Lauren: That's really cute.

Becca: She was very sweet.

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: All right. Question number two. What is your favorite work of Jane Austen's?

Lauren: Oh, I'm basic. I think it's still *Pride and Prejudice*. But it changes though, because we do read-alongs on the show, and we get experts on, and then we have our listeners weigh in with their comments, and we read alongside other texts. It does change. I feel very, very passionate about *Northanger Abbey*, since our *Northanger Abbey* read-along. So, it changes all the time. But I think *Pride and Prejudice* is my constant, or maybe that's just because we just wrote about it, and I've been thinking about it a lot.

Molly: It's okay *Pride and Prejudice* is your favorite. It's a great book.

Hannah: It's very funny.

Molly: [laughs]

Hannah: *Persuasion* is my favorite. I've had an up and down [00:11:00] relationship with it. I remember reading it the first time and not giving it much thought, and then, I read it in my mid to late 20s, and I was like, "Yeah," I had an unrequited love situation going on, so I really related a lot to it. Then, I read it again more recently, and I was like, "Oh, man, I had the wrong take on it." I had a really different take when I read it after that whole situation that I was in. So, it remains my favorite.

The book that I probably had more of a reaction to is, I read *Mansfield Park* and really didn't like it. The first time I read it and just had no interest in rereading it, and then, we read it for the show. Now, I still don't like Fanny Price. Sorry, but I really liked the book. I really like everything that Austen is doing with it, and I think it's a really interesting book. So, *Mansfield Park* is probably my second favorite just in that sense, but *Persuasion* is number one. I like all of them.

Becca: [00:12:00] She has a very consistently good canon.

Hannah: Mm-hmm.

Becca: I don't think--

Lauren: Yeah.

Becca: Some people think there's a weakling. I don't think so, as far as I've read.

Hannah: No, I don't think that's a weakling.

Molly: I don't know if I'm going to be able to read *Mansfield Park* with a straight face, because do we think that the people who wrote *Funny Girl* based Fanny Brice on Fanny Price?

Becca: No.

Molly: Or is that just a coincidence?

Hannah: Coincidence. I'm pretty sure.

Becca: I'm 90% sure that Fanny Price is based on a real person.

Molly: Oh, she is. She is. She is okay.

Becca: [laughs]

Molly: Barbara Sands, don't come for me.

Lauren: [giggles]

Molly: I love my girl, Babs. I just forgot. Then also, yeah, I'm just going to be thinking about her the whole time. Head canon right now--

Becca: Barbra Streisand is starring in *Mansfield Park*.

Molly: Yes. Barbra Streisand is starring in *Mansfield Park*. That's going to be on the record for five years down the line when we get to that book.

Becca: You guys could laugh at that with me. [laughs]

Hannah: I was just trying to imagine Fanny [00:13:00] Price. I don't know anything about *Funny Girl*. I haven't seen it. But I just know that one song, and Fanny Price ain't singing that.

Molly: [laughs]

Lauren: She is not.

Hannah: She doesn't have the stones to do it.

Lauren: No, she doesn't.

Becca: No, know she does not--

Hannah: Maybe, Mary Crawford is singing that to her.

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: [laughs]

Becca: You know what? I could see that.

[laughter]

Becca: All right. So, question number three. Which character in Austen, do you relate to the most?

Hannah: We just did that [unintelligible 00:13:28] the other day, and I said that my aspirational character is Elinor Dashwood, which is true. But I think I might be a Mary Musgrove sometimes.

Becca: Very fair.

Hannah: Or just once a month. I don't know.

[laughter]

Hannah: But maybe. I do also love the book, *Emma* as well. Sometimes, I read *Emma*, and I'm like, "Ooh, I understand her."

Becca: *Emma* is fantastic. I have a lot of feelings about her.

Hannah: 100% Mary Musgrove.

Lauren: [laughs]

Hannah: If we're being honest, if we're being realistic, my aspirational [00:14:00] character would be Anne probably-- Yeah, I don't know who I most like. I always think of this, is it awful that whenever people ask that, I'm always like, "Amy March." I always just immediately [crosstalk]

Lauren: [laughs]

Hannah: because everyone's like, "Oh, I'm such a Jo." I'm like, "I'm such an Amy." Even when people ask about Austen, I'm like, "Amy March is probably literary heroine I identify most as."

Molly: That's amazing.

Hannah: I don't know what that says about me.

Lauren: Then, I'm definitely, Jo.

[laughter]

Molly: I think I'm probably, Amy, too.

Hannah: Hmm.

Molly: With a hint of Jo, like an Amy sun, Jo moon.

Becca: With the best rising. [laughs]

Molly: I've ever read *Little Women*. I'm basing this solely on the 2019.

Becca: I was going to say, yeah. Is this literary Amy March or Florence Pugh, Amy March?

Hannah: Oh, no, Florence Pugh is Amy March. I really liked her performance, but she was the least believable child I have ever seen.

[laughter]

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: In those early scenes, I was like, "I'm not buying it." [00:15:00] Timothée Chalamet is the least believable adult.

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: That whole relationship was really--

Becca: That's true. That's absolutely true.

Molly: Yeah, he's such a baby.

Lauren: [laughs]

Becca: There was a rumor going around that Timothée Chalamet was going to be playing Mr. Darcy in something recently, and I am very glad whatever that was did not pan out, because--

Molly: I think it was just a fan casting.

Becca: No, there were articles on it. I heard about it, and I was like, "I can't be in a world where he's playing Mr. Darcy," because he's a child.

Molly: Baby, yeah.

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: I could see him in different roles, but definitely not Mr. Barcy. [giggles]

Molly: Ooh, I know who I want him to play in *Sense and Sensibility*, but I'm not going to say it. I think I might have already said it.

Hannah: Say it. I want to know.

Becca: Before we continue, just so you guys know where Molly is in *Sense and Sensibility* for spoiler's sake.

Hannah: Hmm. Frankly.

Becca: She has just read the chapter, where Willoughby leaves Marianne under mysterious circumstances.

Hannah: Okay.

Molly: I would put Timothée Chalamet as Willoughby at this point.

Hannah: [00:16:00] Yeah. I've thought [crosstalk]

Lauren: Yeah, I think that's a good--

Hannah: [crosstalk] fancasting.

Molly: All right. Thank you, thank you. Thank you. Yes.

Hannah: The issue with him playing Mr. Darcy is that and this is again going back to *Little Women*. His suit when he's an adult does not fit him. He looks like he's borrowing the suit of an older man, and I can just see him in Mr. Darcy's outfit, but it's five times too big, and the sleeves are hanging down to his knees, and the boots are really high like a Muppet wearing human clothing-

Molly: [laughs]

Hannah: really is what I'm--

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: --Picturing.

Molly: Yes.

Hannah: Yeah.

Molly: Particularly, the green jacket like Colin Firth rocked so well--

Hannah: [laughs]

Molly: -but it's just coming down to his feet.

Hannah: Yeah.

[laughter]

Becca: Listeners, if you're thirsty for Timothée Chalamet, that's fine. You're allowed to be--

Molly: But you should be thirsting for Colin Firth. Let's be real.

Becca: If you thirst for either one or both, that's fine. But maybe just also, you'd have to explain why you would think he would be a decent Mr. Darcy, if that is your take. Speaking of hot takes, number four, what's your hottest [00:17:00] Austen take? What's your controversial opinion without spoilers to Molly?

Lauren: Do we have controversial opinions? We do have an essay coming out about Mr. Collins that I think.

Molly: Ooh.

Lauren: I don't think it'll be controversial, but I don't--

Becca: Ooh, wait, I want to hear your controversial take on Mr. Collins.

Lauren: Well, weirdly, strangely, we were asked to write an essay for a book of essays on Austen, and fandom, and we chose to talk about adaptations, and we did a screening of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* many years ago now. It really changed our outlook on Collins, and so then, we went back and revisited just basically every film we could get our hands on that had a Collins in it, including some 1960s versions of *Pride and Prejudice*, where you just have maybe one episode here and there. Just talked about how Collins is portrayed on screen, and how he's portrayed in the book, and how we don't [00:18:00] usually have enough time on screen to really capture the full of spectrum of Collins, because he's a very interesting character. I don't think he's exactly the creepy cousin that we portray him as on screen 100%.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: Mm-hmm.

Lauren: Also, via Collins, you really start to understand the economics of the world of *Pride and Prejudice*. That's something that's not portrayed on screen enough.

Molly: Right.

Lauren: Again, it's just you have a predator vibe around him. He's this creepy cousin that's coming to prey on his little cousins. But honestly, he's actually a really eligible bachelor, and everything's coming up Collins, if you really think about it. He's got this great job out of nowhere, right?

Molly: Yeah.

Lauren: He's an eligible bachelor. These gals are not-- they're pretty isolated. They're not actually likely to meet someone that is this financially secure-- and, yeah, so [00:19:00] anyway, it's a long paper. There's a lot of elements to it.

Hannah: Oh, my God, 6000 words on it.

Lauren: We wrote a lot of words on Collins, and we could actually write more. But essentially, it's just encouraging people to take another look at him, because of the economics of the story. Actually, and

when you reduce it down to him as a predator, then you miss out on certain elements of the world that are actually really important.

Molly: Right.

Becca: Graham, if you could throw in an Economics of Dating in Jane Austen sting right here that came up very organically?

[economics of dating in Jane Austen sound effect]

Molly: Yeah, we have a little sound effect that goes with the economics of dating. Now, though, I cannot get out of my head. I'm going to be singing, 'Everything's coming up Collins.'" [singing tone]

[laughter]

Lauren: I believe that is in the essay. Also, if you think about him marrying Charlotte too, he's got a good deal at the end of that book, right?

Molly: Oh, yeah.

Lauren: Great. Happily, ever after.

Becca: He is an amazing deal.

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: That's a good heartache[?]. I feel that's a very fair heartache to take.

Lauren: Mm-hmm?

Molly: I think our listeners will agree.

Hannah: Yeah, I guess my hot take is that, I think that [00:20:00] Jane Austen wrote *Northanger Abbey* when she was a young woman, and then, it was abandoned for a really long time. I actually think that she revisits a lot of the ideas that she begins thinking about in *Northanger Abbey*, in *Mansfield Park*, and there's a lot of parallels between the two books that aren't necessarily talked about. In my opinion, I do think she's drawing a lot on the fact that her older brother was adopted by a wealthy family, and what impact taking children from their sphere, and then them returning to a family, and I think she touches on it really briefly at the end of *Northanger Abbey*, and then, in *Mansfield Park*, really goes into it a lot deeper, and that's my hot take.

Becca: Without even giving too much of a spoiler that's briefly touched upon in *Emma* a little bit as well through certain characters.

Hannah: Yeah, it's something that she thinks about a lot definitely in her works.

Molly: I was actually going to ask-- well, I guess they can ask us when we get a little bit more into the chapters, but I did notice that the first book that it seemed like she sold in the comic [00:21:00] was *Northanger Abbey*, but then after that, she was working out other stuff and got abandoned. Yeah, I'm interested in that story for sure.

Becca: Speaking of, I think it's time to talk about your wonderful book, *Why She Wrote*.

Molly: Yeah. We have a few questions related to the book in particular. In the intro of the book, you say you started the podcast initially because you wanted to talk about classic lit together, and you were hanging out debating, and you talked about this a little bit at the beginning of the podcast, but what got you both into classic literature in general as a whole? What drove you to this path?

Lauren: I think, for me, this is pretty easy. I love history and I love reading. I think the two just go together, and I love reading a classic text and just imagining this other world, and then just what it tells me about history about the [00:22:00] world that I live in and whatnot. So, that's it, honestly, for me, I was always a history geek. I thought I would be maybe a history teacher at some point in my life. I think that's it. Really, I'm the only one in my friend group who reads classic lit, except for Hannah. I think that's one of the things that we actually bonded over is, we're the only ones that were interested, and that's one of the reasons why the podcast started.

Hannah: I have found since the podcast started, actually a lot of people I know read classic lit. They just don't talk to people about it. It's just a thing that you do on your own. People have really strong opinions about these books that they don't really discuss, because I don't want to say unless it's your personality, but unless it's your thing, and your vibe and that's what you do, it's just a book that you've read. I am probably the least well-read host of *Bonnets at Dawn*, I have not read as much classically as Lauren. I read a lot of Austen. I read Austen a lot of times. I never read the Brontes before we started the show. I read *Middlemarch* for [00:23:00] uni. I really am not a big classic lit person.

I'm reading a lot more of it now, because of the nature of *Bonnets at Dawn*, and that is a nice thing about the show is that it has introduced me to a lot of people. But I can find it quite overwhelming, because we'll talk to people, and I think they think I've read a lot of classic lit, and I just haven't. I really love fantasy, and I really love sci-fi. That's what I read a lot of as a child and as a woman in my early 20s. I'm shifting more towards classic lit now as an adult, definitely. But I've also stopped reading books by men, so I'm really just shifting towards classics written by women. I haven't really read a book by a man for about three years now, and I don't regret the choice.

Becca: Oh, man.

Hannah: I've read one Ian McEwan, and it was awful, and just it really vindicated my decision. [giggles]

Molly: I love that. I feel like I have a similar dynamic going on, because I also have read next no classic lit aside from now, *Pride and Prejudice* and half-

Becca: [laughs]

Molly: [00:24:00] -of *Sense and Sensibility*, and I'm totally like sci-fi fantasy, all the other books that I have going on are fantasy novels, and so can relate, and then Becca is like, "Yeah, my favorite book is *Wuthering Heights*," and I'm like, "Right over my head."

Becca: *Wuthering Heights* is my favorite book of all time. It's fine.

Lauren: Oh, we should talk about that.

Becca: Oh, not to go too into the weeds here, because obviously, I don't want to be giving away things to Molly, but in preparation for this, I've actually went ahead and listen to your guy's Heathcliff versus Darcy debate. It got me so high to reread *Wuthering Heights*, because I was talking about this a bit with Molly before we got on, and she did not totally understand this reference. Hear me out. *Wuthering Heights*, this is a tangent. But *Wuthering Heights* is an old timey *Breaking Bad* in a certain way, because if you've watched *Breaking Bad* or know if anybody else here has watched *Breaking Bad*--

Lauren: Yeah.

Becca: My boyfriend just made me watch the whole thing. The whole show is interesting [00:25:00] look at how somebody becomes evil, and this really interesting meld between systemic problems, failures of society towards the person, versus the fact that this person inherently has some deep flaws and has some personal accountability for the person they ended up becoming. I think that there is a more interesting look at what bad people look like in *Wuthering Heights* than has been explored in most literature. So, I think it's a very interesting book.

Lauren: Yes, absolutely. I think the fact that we usually only talk about first half of the book, and then it's portrayed as a romance has people coming into something that they don't really understand. If you were going into *Breaking Bad* thinking this is a romantic tale, you'd be like, "What is going on?" That's not what it is.

Becca: Oh, yeah. No, one walks into *Breaking Bad*, and it's like, "This is about the marriage between Skyler and Walter," and--

Lauren: Right.

Becca: What I love what you said, this [00:26:00] actually ties back into the book a little bit. You've said something in the podcast about how it would not be considered romance at all, if it were written by a man, and I think that's so insightful, and it actually reminded me of a line from the introduction of your book, "Historically speaking, women's art has rarely been seen as deliberate. Women writers are presented as hobbyists, anomalies, or accidental geniuses. Their authorship is challenged, and their content dismissed. To combat those stereotypes head-on, we wanted to show these women at work." I loved that because I think that there is this conception that it's like chick lit to read Austen or Bronte, but in reality, these are some of the most important writers that ever lived, and we got to give them their due.

Lauren: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Hannah: I find it insanely offensive that chick lit is even still taught as a class. I love chick lit. I like chick lit. I love modern chick lit.

Becca: Oh, yeah.

Hannah: I grew up reading my mom's-- I don't know, like Sophie Kinsella, and [00:27:00] Katie Ford and stuff. I love it. But then to lump Jane Austen, or to lump the Brontes in with that, they're not doing the same thing. They just happen to be written by women. Then, that class, you're selling that class to women, and you're putting it in this box and saying like, "This is a class for women about books written by women," regardless of their genre or content.

Molly: Right.

Hannah: You wouldn't do that with male writers.

Molly: Right.

Hannah: It's endlessly frustrating.

Molly: Yeah, I totally agree. One of my favorite stories that's come out of our podcast is when we had Mike Schubert on. He went to an all-boy school, and they read *Pride and Prejudice*, and he was like-- They were all going into it thinking, "This is going to be a girlie book," and none of them to read it, and then they were all enraptured, and they were shipping.

Lauren: [laughs]

Becca: They were super into it.

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: They were like, "What is Mr. Darcy doing? He completely lost his cool proposing to Elizabeth."

Molly: [laughs]

Hannah: Oh, I would love to be a fly on the wall when [00:28:00] those things happen.

Lauren: Yeah, seriously.

Hannah: Like that discussion.

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: This is actually a good place. This is a book that groups together a bunch of very different female authors, and one of the questions we have for you is, how did you pick which authors to feature in this book?

Lauren: This was really difficult. There's a lot of authors that are left out of the book that hopefully we will get to talk about in the future. We've got different plans for them. I think part of it was who we could talk to expert-wise, we wanted to get very different sides of these women as well. Something that you said at the top of the show is we didn't want everyone to seem these lofty historical figures. We wanted them to be very human. So, we really wanted to make sure that we felt like we knew them.

But then also because they're grouped together in these sections. We wanted people that had literary ties, so a lot of them are related, [00:29:00] or they're reading each other, or they're responding to each other, or they're doing the same thing in the same genre, essentially, or they're having the same publishing issues and problems with copyright, and all of that good stuff. But yeah, it was really difficult. It was really, really hard. [giggles]

Hannah: I always think it's interesting that the authors that didn't make it in, there were one or two that we had even started working on that essentially got cut. I originally was writing about Edith Eaton's sister, Winnifred Eaton, and found her story to be-- I had a real idea of what I wanted to say and what I wanted to do, but I couldn't do it in 10 pages. I just couldn't make it work. There is a really interesting story there, and I hope one day that we can work on it more, but it wasn't right for *Why She Wrote*. Again, like we were saying about those authors and the line that you pulled but the book isn't an accident and all of those authors, the chapter groupings are really intentional. [00:30:00]

I think each of the authors are selected mainly because of their connection to those subjects, and it isn't-- They're not grouped just by genre, because some of them are poets, and some of them are diarists, some of them were never published in their lifetime. I think those connections are the really interesting ones, and it gave us the opportunity to learn about, and write about authors that we hadn't heard of initially.

Lauren: Just to jump off of something that Hannah said just now, I think, yeah, I do want to impress that this is not a comprehensive list of women writers across time. God knows we are still going. We are in season five of the show, and we have so much material. But also, it's about the ties that bind and things that we discovered along the way while making the podcast. I think, essentially first chapter, which we can talk about a little bit later, but I think I was seeing a lot of similarities between Mary Shelley and Charlotte Bronte, including the literary pressure [00:31:00] of that they were both under and how they produced, and I thought that that was very similar and wanted to talk about it. So, I like that.

Molly: I would like to note that as a writer myself, or an aspiring writer myself, I found it so comforting to see the struggles that these women faced. Especially Austen, who was in Bath and trying to write, and everything was happening around her, and she could never find the time, and so many people who were like, "Why can't I sell my book?" Or, like, "Why am I writer's blocked, and why is this taking me 10 years," and stuff like that, I loved seeing those ties amongst them, but then I could also see reflected in myself and think, "Oh, when this person was 30, she hadn't done anything, and then, by the time she was 31, she's famous," and stuff like that. I found it very reassuring, and I liked being tied to them like that.

Lauren: That was so the goal. I'm really, really glad.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: [00:32:00] Sometimes, I have nightmares about the parts of the book I wrote. I'm like, "I hope these things don't happen to me."

[laughter]

Hannah: I wake up just because we spent so long working on it. I'm really aware of all of these things that happened to them, and I'm like, "It's just a dream. I'm not Frances Hodgson Burnett. It's okay."

[laughter]

Hannah: I relate to it too much.

Molly: I love it. Speaking of all of the different women that you profiled in this, we're curious if you can pick, which one is your favorite writer, and why and we can all go through and talk about our favorites and why?

Lauren: I don't know if I have a favorite, because I love them all for different reasons, their life story, or what they wrote. That's very, very difficult. But I will say this. Over the course of doing the show and reading through all of her work, the person I relate to the most often is usually, Louisa May Alcott. She comes up for me a lot. Every time we do an [00:33:00] episode about her and reading through her journals, and I love she would go and edit her journals. Like, "Oh, this is what good moments. Oh, I should put this in a book. Ooh, no, don't talk about that, or it's all about me." I really think about Louisa May Alcott all the time. Maybe, she's my favorite and I love her like gothic thrillers. They're so great. Read *Behind the Mask*. It's amazing.

Hannah: I really fell in love with George Eliot, Marianne Lewis, or Marianne Evans, or whatever you want. I'd read *Middlemarch* at uni, and my grandparents are from the area that she is from, and so, I grew up really in a George Eliot saturated life without realizing it, probably almost as much as Austen. I just cannot stop thinking about her, and something that I really love about that is that Lauren and I are really interested, having read a really great book with *Secret Sisterhood*, and I can't remember who wrote that, about the relationship [00:34:00] between George Eliot and Harriet Beecher Stowe, and I think that Harriet Beecher Stowe is to Lauren, what George Eliot is to me. I can't pass a George Eliot biography without just wanting to read it, and I have only read-- I just did *Silas Marner*. Is that it? *Silas Marner*?

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: Yeah. I just listened to the audiobook of *Silas Marner*.

Lauren: I haven't read it, because I feel I don't connect with George. But we'll get into that someday on the show.

Hannah: One day-- I've never read Harriet Beecher Stowe. It's just her life, her life is so interesting to me. She's probably one of the authors I've read the least of but just as an individual, I find her really interesting. So, it was really nice to work on a comic about someone who was so ostracized to their

behavior, and how their writing really is the thing that rehabbed to them to society, and how tricky that was for a long time.

Molly: In the George Eliot comic portion, **[00:35:00]** there was one panel that was like, “Happy New Year, George. Happy New Year, George.” They're saying it to each other, I laughed out loud. I loved it.

Becca: [laughs]

Hannah: I found out this week that he called her Polly, because I'm currently reading a book about her, and I was like, “Oh, no, there is no mention of Polly in that comic or in that essay.”

Lauren: [laughs]

Hannah: I'm kicking myself.

Becca: But if you had mentioned Polly in that essay, you would have missed out on an amazing joke.

Hannah: Yeah, that's true. Yeah.

[laughter]

Molly: My favorite has got to be Anne Lister. I had never heard of her before. How had I never heard of the first modern lesbian? I don't know, but I'm obsessed with her. She is so cool with not wearing her bonnets and wearing her little suits, and then the fact that she fell in love with someone else named Anne [crosstalk]

Lauren: Oh, my gosh. Yes. Everyone's named Anne. Everyone--

Hannah: Lauren had such a hard time with that in the comic, because everyone is named Anne and John.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: Right?

Lauren: Everyone, across generations. **[00:36:00]**

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: This is Molly's number one gripe so far with Jane Austen is that everyone has the same names.

Molly: John, Fitzwilliam, Fanny--

Lauren: [laughs]

Molly: Why are we doing this?

Lauren: Some Marys in there. Yeah.

Becca: Lot of Marys.

Molly: Everyone is Mary. If they're not a main character, they're just Mary.

Hannah: Mm-hmm.

Lauren: It's easy.

Molly: Yeah.

Lauren: You're really lucky if you're just starting your Anne Lister journey, because there's so much really good material to dig into, including, of course, *Gentlemen Jack*. We went to Shipton Hall, which was so much fun.

Molly: Wow.

Hannah: The meat closet.

Lauren: Oh, my God.

Hannah: It's all I can think about.

Lauren: Really tortured before curators and volunteers [unintelligible [00:36:36]].

Hannah: [laughs]

Lauren: Hannah had a lot of questions about some of the rehabbing that Anne Lister did.

Hannah: Yeah, she did-- It's just a room next to the chimney where you dry the meat, but they were like, "This is the meat closet." Is that what it was called, the meat closet?

Lauren: Oh, it had a more disturbing name, but I cannot remember it was.

Molly: [laughs]

Hannah: It just sounds like it really stinks, and I don't know why it's in there. [laughs]

Molly: That's so funny.

Hannah: I think it is.

Molly: Well, also just the fact that, she wrote all of these [00:37:00] journals and they were all in code, and then, I don't know if this is real or if you dramatized it for the story, but her nephew or whoever it was who decoded it all, and him-- everyone thinking that he was gay and him being, "They can't find out about you, Anne or me." I was like, "That's so beautiful," and I was crying.

Lauren: Yeah, John Lister. Yeah, absolutely, probably gay, I took that from an article that Jill Liddington wrote. Jill Liddington is an Anne Lister scholar and she's amazing. She's devoted a lot of the journals that you should definitely check out. But yeah, it's amazing that they think that's probably why he took those journals and yeah, re-stashed them.

Molly: Beautiful.

Lauren: I know.

Hannah: Because we each wrote different portions of the book, we wrote half the book each. For me, one of the most interesting comments to see Lauren working on was the Anne Lister one, partially because it was like, "How do I make Anne and Anne look different? [00:38:00] How do I make all of these people called John like different? How do I talk about the future and the past in 10 pages that feels concise?" I really loved what Lauren did with it.

Lauren: Oh, thank you.

Hannah: It's one of the standout comics to me. Yeah, Anne Lister. Who would have thought it man hiding those diaries?

Lauren: That was a difficult one too, because there was a TV show about her life, which we did not encounter with most of the authors, and then also, it had not been out when I wrote it. I was anticipating what the TV show might be, and I was like, "I want to do something different." So, that's why I was like, "Oh, Anne's a ghost." How about that?

Molly: I liked her as a ghost. I thought it was awesome.

Becca: I love that.

Hannah: But Greta Gerwig *Little Women* came out after we'd finished writing the book. There are so many parallels with my bit on Louisa May Alcott, and I was like, "I promise I didn't watch the film when I wrote this. I'd already written it. I sat in the cinema sweating.

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: Really, Greta Gerwig stole the idea from you.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: Yeah, that's--

Molly: Obviously.

Hannah: We're besties, and then she stole my work. That never happened.

[laughter]

Hannah: Please don't sue me Greta [00:39:00] Gerwig.

[laughter]

Becca: Greta, if you want to come on this podcast, we'd be happy to have you.

Molly: Literally anytime.

[laughter]

Becca: My favorite's totally a cheat, because I picked several. But I loved learning more about the Brontes, because I despise the fact that I've read *Wuthering Heights* several times, I had a pop culture understanding of Emily Bronte's life, which was everyone was surprised that this invalid woman was able to write this crazy, wild story that happens on the moors of England. Reading about the life of all three Bronte's really throws into light, why their books were so dark, and who they were, and how they understood humanity?

I think I got a deeper appreciation for the work they put out into the world by learning a little bit more about who they were. I'm one of those people who are like, "I'll listen to the same bands for years and not know the names of the lead singer."

Hannah: Me too, though.

Molly: Yeah, same.

Becca: I'm like that with authors, too. I'll be like, "Oh, yeah, I love that book," and then I'll find out like, [00:40:00] "Oh, this happened in the author's life that made this book all the more profound." I loved learning about the Brontes more in depth.

Lauren: That's really good to hear, because I think we were really torn about putting all three in, and if we should make space for someone else, and as someone who really loves the Brontes, and who has been at the Parsonage several times, and has dedicated so much time to studying the Brontes, I just couldn't decide which one had to go, and for me, it felt like I really wanted everyone to understand them as a trio as well, and get different perspectives on them. Hannah wrote the Anne chapter actually and the Anne comic ends up being one of my favorites in the book actually.

Hannah: I loved writing about Anne Bronte.

Lauren: Anne is the gateway Bronte for Austen fans.

Molly: Ooh, that's good to know. Actually, Anne was a close-- the other, that Anne was a close second to the end that I chose for my favorite. I thought that having all three of the Brontes in separate chapters [00:41:00] too, we got to see them as a trio, and see different sides of them for each thing. When we zoomed in on Emily, it made so much more sense why in the Anne chapter, she was like, "I'm not going with you to London," and I've never read any of their works. To me, I enjoyed getting to know them separate from their works, so that now when I probably eventually do read their works, I will get to know

a little bit more about them. Also, especially, when I go back to *Jane Eyre*, because I do really want to read *Jane Eyre*. I did start it once, and I would like to finish it.

Hannah: Molly, you are going to love Anne Bronte 100%.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: 100%. She is incredible.

Molly: I'm so excited.

Hannah: She's really good. She's the best Bronte.

[laughter]

Hannah: Don't read *Villette*. Don't bother.

[laughter]

Becca: All right, and on that note, I think we're going to dive briefly into each chapter of the book, [00:42:00] and maybe just ask you guys some quickfire questions about these ladies, and different fun things we might have picked up.

Molly: I did try to make a web of every time Austen was mentioned. You can see I have my tabs.

Lauren: Oh, nice.

Molly: Our listeners can't see them, but a few of them did fall out when I was going through and putting them into the outline, so that I would remember where she was mentioned, I've probably missed two of them, because two of my tabs fell out.

Lauren: But the book at one point was very much six degrees of Jane Austen. So, that's why you've got a lot of tabs in there.

Molly: Yeah. I loved that, because for me, having only read *Pride and Prejudice*, and now part of *Sense and Sensibility*, I liked seeing what overall vibe Jane Austen imparted upon the world around her/what was influencing her. That was really interesting to me. So, I guess starting out with the horror of the everyday, *Frankenstein* is one of my favorite books of all time. My first question [00:43:00] is, was Mary Shelley in a thruple?

Lauren: Yeah, that's what I'm hinting at there.

[laughter]

Lauren: I think there was even a spicier cut of that essay that my editor toned down. Yeah, the romantics, first of all, can I just say, why do they not have a Dickinson-style show? I do not know. But I

would love to write it, just putting myself out there, because there is a lot going on sexually there. There's a lot going on emotionally. It's all there.

Hannah: They're all in the lake district raising each other's children. [laughs]

Lauren: [unintelligible [00:43:35] and Shelley got into a fight on that hill. There's a lot of stuff going on with the young romantics, the older romantics. I don't know. So, I say yes.

Molly: Good. That was my maddening question. Then, I have not read any Ann Radcliffe. Just for our listeners, the authors that are mentioned in this chapter are--

Becca: Mary Shelley, Ann Radcliffe, and Charlotte Bronte.

Molly: Yes. The time that Austen was mentioned in this chapter was that [00:44:00] Jane Austen was influenced by Ann Radcliffe.

Molly: I also love the Ann Radcliffe chapter, because I had not heard of her, and what I love about this book in particular is taking authors that were big in their times, but somehow haven't come through the timeless canon of the era in the same way someone like Charlotte Bronte or Jane Austen would have.

Lauren: Yeah.

Becca: So, it was interesting to learn about the people who were really the legs on which those women stood.

Lauren: She's very much an author of her time. Can I just say, I think one of the reasons why her books haven't aged well is because they are so long and they're so winding? This is a time obviously when there's no Netflix. So, she's giving you everything. She's giving you travel, and poetry, and romance, and mystery, and so, she's just like a lot for the modern reader, I think.

Hannah: She's also in *Becoming Jane*. Have you seen it? Just when you watch it, there's a little cameo of Ann Radcliffe that you will enjoy.

Lauren: [00:45:00] Yeah.

Hannah: But Lauren, she puts it all over the Instagram account. It's cute. We love Ann Radcliffe.

Becca: Who plays her?

Lauren: Helen McCrory, who just passed.

Molly and Becca: Oh.

Lauren: Yeah.

Becca: Rest in peace.

Lauren: I know.

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: Narcissa Malfoy.

Molly: Yeah. I haven't known-- based on what I was saying earlier about relating to these women in different ways, and seeing my struggles reflected in them, I loved in Mary Shelley's essay, where you mentioned that there was a year where she was forced to be inside because of the volcanic eruption, and I've really was hoping that my time in quarantine would also produce a *Frankenstein*.

Lauren: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Well, listen. It took her a while to finish. She just got started. So, you still have time.

Molly: Yes, and I've started two novels during this pandemic.

Lauren: Oh, good.

Molly: Hopefully, at some point one of them will be done.

Lauren: Yeah.

Becca: And I have watched all of *Breaking Bad*.

Lauren: [laughs]

Becca: All right, that brings us to **[00:46:00]** Charlotte very briefly. Charlotte's got some witchy vibes, I've got to say.

Lauren: She's got a lot going on, Charlotte Bronte. [laughs]

Becca: She's really got a gothic going on, which I know is like there's a gothic element to Charlotte Bronte's work. Also, modern day goth.

Lauren: I think it would be a good competition between Charlotte and Emily for who was the bigger goth. I think Emily would probably win. But Charlotte would feel that very deeply and try to compete. [laughs]

Becca: Oh, yes, exactly.

Lauren: Yeah.

Becca: There's hugely ghostly elements to the Bronte stories. There's a lot of haunting going on.

Lauren: Yes. I love whenever women are haunted by things. This is my phase.

Becca: Yes, and they write a lot about men who are haunted by things as well.

Lauren: Mm-hmm. Yes.

Becca: They understand what it means to be really drawn in and tragically wrought by your past.

Hannah: I think that they very much well, weren't they, as a family? There was a lot of death in the Bronte family, and you can see it in their work. They were working through a lot of feelings-

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: -in their novels. [laughs]

Lauren: There was a [00:47:00] lot of death and disease and how it was at that time, and when you go to the Parsonage, it is very striking when you just are confronted with this giant graveyard that leads up to their house. It's very goth.

Hannah: Yeah.

Molly: Yeah. Well, in the intro to that chapter, something that really struck me was the idea of being haunted by something that isn't actually supernatural. Like *Frankenstein's* monster is a creature of scientific expertise-- Charlotte Bronte wrote, *Jane Eyre*, is that right?

Hannah: Yeah, she did.

Becca: Okay. Because that fits in with this though, the ghost in the attic is a woman, a human person. What you said was that they were using this genre as a way to delve deeper into their personal experiences and what women experience.

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: That was really beautiful to me, and I [00:48:00] hadn't thought about that. When I read *Frankenstein*, I did not realize it was written by a woman. I read it in my freshman year of high school, and then when I reread it, I was like, "Wait a minute. Wow." Yeah, I just thought that was really interesting.

Lauren: One thing that we talk about a lot on the show was like, "Why don't these women just say the thing?"

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Lauren: "Why are they using these devices instead?" and it's just obviously, because of restrictions, because of creativity, but something I think that's interesting that we're talking about the show right now is nature writing as sex.

Molly: Yes.

Lauren: You're reading all this stuff. That's very, very sexy, and people are like "Wait a minute, is this about sex?" I'm like, "This is about sex[?]."

Becca: *Wuthering Heights*?

Lauren: Yeah.

Becca: [laughs] A lot of wild nature there.

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Lauren: [laughs]

Becca: That I think brings us to the next chapter, actually.

Molly: Yeah, the next chapter is *Finding Their Voice*, and this is the one that Jane, our girl, is featured in.

Becca: But before we get to Jane, the Frances Burney story haunted me.

Hannah: Oh, I'm glad.

[laughter]

Hannah: It haunted me having to [00:49:00] research it. *Finding Their Voice* was initially pitched-- The chapter was called *Pride and Prejudice* in publishing because there's actually a connection between Frances Burney, Jane Austen, and Elizabeth Gaskell, and that the title *Pride and Prejudice* is inspired by Frances Burney, and *North and South* was in turn inspired by *Pride and Prejudice*. So, there's this connection between the writing these three with everything. But actually, more interesting connection was how much they embody that writing doesn't always come easily. There's emotional blockages, there's physical barriers that get in your way. There's the barrier of what you've written and the response to that, and the Frances Burney comic is about a letter she wrote about a mastectomy she had with no anesthesia. Is that anesthetic?

Becca: Yep.

Hannah: In France in the early 1800s. She wrote a letter to her sister about it, and it's one of the earliest accounts [00:50:00] of a woman undergoing mastectomy. The letter itself is a really brutal read, and I really wanted to write about it, and I read medical journal articles about it. I read a lot of articles just about the importance of it, and the importance of having a woman talking about rather than just being a patient rather than just being a medical record. I think initially, when we first pitched the book, it wasn't going to be this YA vibe, and then, so, the Frances Burney comic was a little hard, because you're like, "Can we have boobs in it?" She's having this operation. How do you handle something that is so explicit, and violent, and naked on the page? So, I'm sorry if that haunted you. It was a tricky one.

Becca: Oh, no, in a good way. I'm glad I read it. It's one of those things where these women had really harsh lives. You read that in the Mary Shelley's story as well. [00:51:00] I liked that you guys didn't shy

away from it, and I think you guys, you utilize a very difficult, but very interesting and effective technique of alluding to what was happening without having to actually show it, and I think that can be just as powerful and haunt my dreams.

[laughter]

Molly: Yeah, and the art in that comic was amazing. It really evoked what was going on, and the fact that it was bloody and painful, and that she was awake. Yeah, it just was really striking.

Hannah: The full transcript of that letter is available in the British library's website, and I'd really recommend reading it, because most of the captions in that comic are the letters. So, you're getting a lot of it. But the whole is, is one of the most powerful things that I read while researching for the book. It's a lot. It's all happening in the backdrop of the Napoleonic War, and this postal blockade, and just a really fascinating piece of history.

Molly: [00:52:00] Right.

Becca: I think that brings us to our girl herself, Jane Austen.

Molly: Our main squeeze. Yes.

[trumpets blowing]

Hannah: [laughs]

Molly: We discussed a little bit at the beginning about Bath, and her being cooped up, and not having time to write, and I thought that was so interesting. I did have a question about *Northanger Abbey* being the first one that she sold. Do you guys know why that ended up getting pushed back?

Hannah: Yeah, her publisher just didn't bother publishing it. Then, she bought it back off them. She earned enough money from writing her other books to buy the manuscript back, but then, it's ultimately believed that-- The book was really a product of its time, right, Lauren?

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: It was already suffering when it was published from the lack of context, the tax that she's-- It's a really referential book. It's a book about other books. The further away from those books you're reading it, you lose a [00:53:00] lot of the references. It's really hard for us to read it 200 years later, but people would also have had similar struggles, like not getting some of the jokes, not getting some of the references when it was finally published after her death. Yeah, *Susan* was the first book that she wrote, but it wasn't published until she died. She did try. She wrote a letter to the publisher, and she signs it, Mrs. Ashton Dennis, and the initials were mad. M-A-D, because she was very angry at them about it. She bought it back. She bought it back with 10 pounds.

Molly: What a sassy bitch. I love her.

Hannah: That's why it's like she's not just a hobbyist, she really wanted to publish. She really wanted her work to be out there, and this whole idea of her just being someone who wrote at home, something to do, that is an image that was really about by her male relatives. So, don't listen.

Becca: Our patrons get little fun facts about Jane Austen, and one of the fun facts we did was, we did a little bit about the biography her nephew published and how condescending it [00:54:00] was.

Lauren: Mm-hmm.

Hannah: There's a lot of reputational fixing, and that's why we misread some of her books today. I think it's something that came up a lot when we did the *Mansfield Park* read along was just how that early reputation protection that they thought they were doing has really affected how modern audiences relate to her work, and why she's really picked up by a lot of conservative readers.

Becca: *Mansfield Park* is not necessarily my favorite Austen, but I think that it is undeniable that in *Mansfield Park* without giving things went to Molly, it definitely touches on a lot of stuff that gives you a better sense of Jane Austen's knowledge of the world outside of her little patch of England.

Hannah: I just feel you have to look for it, because if you take it on face value and you read it as a romance, which is how we're taught to read it and how we expect to read it, especially based on the adaptations, I do think it's possible to miss it. So, I do understand why people's readings of it have been a more shallow reading, and that's definitely what I struggled with the first time I read [00:55:00] it, and I don't like Fanny as a heroine, and I think I had to come to terms with the fact that-- Yeah, again, we talked about on the read-along that she's a questionable moral center of the book, and I think it's intentional that we don't always agree with what Fanny's doing, because I think you're meant to question what everyone in that book is doing.

Lauren: I would suggest too if you guys are able to get a hold of the play text, something we've been doing with some of our read-alongs. Kate Hamill actually, did a really great version of *Mansfield Park* a couple of years ago, and if you're able to read that too alongside your reading of *Mansfield Park*, I think it's really interesting. It's great for discussion, highlights some of those bits of the book that are very relevant for today, which is a question, I think, really, in almost all of Austen's novels of where's the money coming from?

Hannah: Yeah.

Lauren: It's something that you should just start with that book.

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Becca: I love that.

Molly: Becca loves to [00:56:00] bring up the money in Jane Austen.

Becca: It's the economics of the Jane Austen world is very important to how we understand the context of the story.

Lauren: *Mansfield Park*, number one on that list, I think, actually.

Becca: Yes, I'm really struggling to not spoil for Molly, because I'm ready to get on a tangent about it, but we've got to save it. We've got to save it.

Molly: The next author in this section is Gaskell. Gas-kell?

Lauren: Gaskell. Yeah.

Hannah: Gaskell. Yeah, yeah.

Molly: Gaskell.

Hannah: You [unintelligible [00:56:26] it [laughs]

Molly: She's the one who wrote the Charlotte Bronte memoir, not memoir-

Hannah: Yeah.

Molly: -biography.

Hannah: Biography.

Molly: Biography.

Hannah: [laughs]

Molly: This was super fascinating to me that people got so angry--

Hannah: People got so angry, because she was airing their personal dirty laundry in her book.

Molly: Hmm.

Hannah: She was talking about affairs that living people were having with members of the Bronte family. She was calling a school out, a real school, where children had been [00:57:00] mistreated and allowed to die, all sorts of stuff. There are things that people were getting angry about, as well as people that were getting angry about Charlotte Bronte's morals, although we know that Elizabeth Gaskell left a lot of stuff out, because she was trying to protect Charlotte Bronte's reputation, but she wasn't holding back when it came to other people. So, it was those people who were like, "You need to rewrite this, or we will sue you."

Becca: Yeah, I thought it was prescient for today slightly, because this is how social media works. It's the oversharing, oversharing, oversharing, and then a huge pushback until it ruins her life. I didn't realize the extent to which it affected her life, but I think it's beautifully illustrated, and I thought I found this one relatable as a worst fear scenario.

Hannah: Yeah, this one keeps me awake.

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: [laughs] Lauren always says-- she always says like, "Oh, thank God, we write about people that are dead."

Lauren: [00:58:00] Yeah.

Hannah: All the time.

Becca: [laughs]

Lauren: We don't talk about authors that are living.

Hannah: Yeah.

Lauren: And a lot of people have been asking us to do *Bridgerton* stuff, and I'm like, "I don't talk about living people."

Hannah: Yeah.

Lauren: [laughs] It's my [unintelligible [00:58:10]]. Never has been my [unintelligible [00:58:10]].

Molly: Us too relate. But it was most interesting to me was that the reactions were so on opposite ends of the spectrum, because the people who were talked about were obviously very angry. But then, other people were like, "It's a masterpiece. It's brilliant. Great work."

Lauren: It's a beautiful book, if you read it, too. It's an amazing book.

Molly: Yeah, I bet.

Hannah: What's funny about that chapter is, you mentioned the thruple bit from the Mary Shelley chapter. The first draft of that, I read this book, where it was like, Elizabeth Gaskell was having an affair, and I couldn't verify it for many other sources. It's really contested, and so that comic went through so many edits, where it was just like I just had to make it less of a romantic relationship between her and Charles Norton. [giggles]

Molly: Yes, I was going to ask about that, because I was like, "Wait a minute."

Hannah: Yeah.

Molly: It seems like something's going on there," [00:59:00] and I also got that vibe, but then she went back to her husband, and she didn't say anything about it. So, I was like, "Maybe I read into that too far."

Hannah: William Gaskell got a kind of rewrite but with some additional William scenes added.

Molly: [laughs]

Lauren: It's hard to you because we have strong ties to Gaskell house, and everyone loves William Gaskell, us included.

Hannah: Yeah, we love him.

Lauren: He's actually a great guy.

Hannah: [laughs]

Lauren: I think Lizzie is just flirty, she's been married a long time, she loves traveling, she's flirtatious. I think it's just a really fun flirtation for her, is my read on it, but yeah, who knows, right?

Molly: Who is to say?

Hannah: Who is to say?

Becca: Whomst?

Molly: Whomst, indeed. So, that brings us to the next chapter, which was one of my favorites, *Activism is Art*. I hadn't delved into any of these writers before, heard their names on the periphery. I was very excited to get to learn more about them.

Becca: I almost chose Mary Wollstonecraft is my favorite chapter, and it was really close, [01:00:00] because I was familiar with Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist work, shall we say, that surrounded the revolutions of the late 18th century. I dressed up once, but I also used to work at a historical site, but I worked in Philadelphia at a historical site, and it was revolutionary war history. So, a lot of these different thinkers of the time period were very much in my periphery, and I loved reading her story. I did not know what an escandale woman she was, I loved it.

Lauren: Right. I didn't either. I definitely had a different image of Mary in my mind before we started researching her for the show. Then, I was like, "Oh, interesting. Okay."

Hannah: [laughs]

Becca: I was into it.

Hannah: She a little spicy.

Lauren: She's a little spicy. I see what Mary Shelley's trying to live up to.

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Becca: Yes, it makes me wonder how much Mary Shelley knew about her Mama's excursions loved it.

Lauren: I think she knew everything. William Godwin published that book [01:01:00] very similar to the Gaskell biography. He published a biography on his wife, his late wife, and he did everything. No

secrets. He just like let it all out, "This is an amazing woman." People were like, "Whoa, she had a child out of wedlock. What? What's going on?" It was very shocking and scandalous, but William was really open about it.

Hannah: It's the opposite of what the Austen boys did. That's the thing with women that you have to be so careful with it, because you either erase their personality and what they're really about or you give too much of it away, and then, you make them a shocking woman, which is what Godwin did to Mary Wollstonecraft. I love that. I love that comic. I thought it was really fun and hearing you talking about it. I think it would be such a good film, Lauren.

Lauren: Her whole life story is wild. I think the thing about that chapter overall that I found is, the way that we're taught about various movements, civil rights movements, and whatnot. It just seems to have a very clear-cut beginning, middle, and end. [01:02:00] This happened, and this was the, and then this happened, and then happy ending. Now, we all have voting rights. It's just always hot to us in this way, but instead of it, progress is a really jagged line, and people all have competing motivations and desires. The outcome, it's messy. It's just all messy. Mary, really, I think she thought she was going to go over to France, see this revolution, and then write this amazing book, and then she was like, "Oh, I'm here and it's a total disaster. It's a mess. What's going on?"

Molly: Yeah, that was what I was going to comment on was, at first, it almost seemed insensitive how she wanted to go about it, and that she was like, "Yeah, well, there's a war going on. I need to explain why the war is going on," but then there's people in prison, and there's blood everywhere, and she sees this firsthand, and yeah, I loved getting to see that in the comic.

Becca: On the topic of messy intersectionality within voting rights movements, that [01:03:00] does give us a great segue into talking about Frances Harper. This chapter was wonderful, and I think it captured some of the best aspects of the Women's Suffrage Movement, and some of the worst aspects of the Women's Suffrage Movement. I loved reading about her effect on the movement and her struggle with it, because again, it feels very prescient today still.

Lauren: Thank you. I remember when we did our Frances Harper episode, and I was talking with our experts, was Johanna Ortner, who's the woman who actually found her lost book of poems.

Molly: Oh, wow.

Lauren: Our whole interview was just like, "Oh, this is all same stuff, different day. Okay, this is all the same." So, yeah, our interview, it felt so current. Yeah, I love the way that that one turned out. Frances Harper was so difficult because she was such an activist for a long time. She's a quite a large canon, [01:04:00] and we just have very little of her. We don't have a lot of biographies. I think there's one biography that's on the way out maybe in the next two years. But we don't know a ton about her which is really quite shocking for someone who was politically active for 50 years.

Becca: Yeah, especially I think that there is a lot of missing voices for black women who were suffragettes, and I think that it is really important for women, especially white women, to really make the effort to see those women who were fighting for both rights to vote at the same time. So, I just loved the way you guys wrote this one. I just thought it was really well done.

Molly: I especially loved the last few panels when she's older, and there's a younger woman and then a child, and the middle woman is-- I saw her speak when I was this girl's age, and she comments on how not much has changed and all these [01:05:00] years, and the response is, "Well, I better keep on talking and writing so that they do."

Lauren: Mm-hmm.

Molly: Yeah.

Lauren: Thank you.

Molly: That's just encapsulates all of what we were just talking about.

Lauren: Because I do feel, she really handed the baton in a way to people like Alice Dunbar Nelson, honestly.

Becca: Yes.

Lauren: [crosstalk] in the book.

Becca: Yeah, next chapter. I love the segue. That was great. It was great.

Lauren: Thank you.

[laughter]

Becca: We are doing this with all the beauty and grace of a Saturday morning post vax-

[laughter]

Becca: -long COVID, and just in my case, wearing sweatpants that are too large for me.

Lauren: That's the way to go.

Becca: Because all of our struggles are the same.

[laughter]

Becca: Alice Dunbar Nelson bit was also incredibly wonderful to read. She had so few shits to give, and it was wonderful.

Lauren: [laughs] Yeah.

Becca: I love that you guys picked up the fact that she was a queer woman living through the Harlem Renaissance.

Lauren: Yes, many queer women living through the Harlem Renaissance. [01:06:00] It's something that we're going to talk a little bit more about later on this year on the podcast. It's something that I could write a whole book about. [laughs]

Molly: Ooh.

Lauren: But yes, what's interesting about Alice Dunbar Nelson again, another author that has a huge canon that was active for a long time, and there is one biography coming out soon.

Hannah: [laughs]

Lauren: I talked to this person who was writing the biography for the show. But yeah, we don't have a ton of information on her, but she did leave journals just like Anne Lister. I think writing this was really difficult, because I was trying to get a handle on her personality, and I think it's really hard with her especially, because her journals are very much a place where she goes to vent, and so you're just getting all of her struggle and anger in these journals, and gossip and whatnot. But you don't really know who she is to other people, because I'm guessing someone as successful as she was, and great at networking and whatnot, [01:07:00] she was not venting at them all of the time. Sure, she was very charming, yeah. So, difficult chapter to write in that sense, but her poetry is so lovely, and her short stories are amazing. Please check them out.

Molly: The poem that you included in the comic, *I Sit and Sew*, it's just so gorgeous. I was like, "I need to read more of this, now."

Hannah: Alice Dunbar Nelson's one of those authors, like you were saying learn where you had to go and find an expert, because it was important for her to be in the book, and there has been criticism of the book. I think it's fair criticism that there aren't a lot of women in color covered. But they're not remembered. There aren't biographies. Their works aren't available. A lot of reaching out, a lot of conversations happened, especially for the Alice Dunbar Nelson's comic, that Lauren wrote. I think it's a testament to her inclusion in that, that Lauren had the patience and the time to seek her out, because she felt it was an important to author to include in the book. I'm so thankful for that [01:08:00] research that Lauren did on that chapter. Because otherwise, it would have just been white women activists.

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: Because that's who's available.

Lauren: I think, too, for me as a woman of color, it's important to get their stories done, and it's important to get them done right. This is something that we want to work on more in the future, but we also have to change the framing of our future books, and we have to change the framing of the way that we do research. Essentially, something that I'm writing now, and I stumbled across "the other day," and I believe this woman's name was Margaret Ezell, but she said that the literary histories that were presented with are way more diverse but chaotic than what we plan for. I think we have on the show, and for the book, have just done a lot of traditional research, and now, we have to change our brains and get more in this chaotic way of thinking, and look for things in a different way in some of the episodes that we're producing, and also, some of the future work that we're producing.

Becca: Well, history is always formed by the present [01:09:00] in my mind, and it is incumbent upon us as people who enjoy things from the past to reach back and also find things that are less covered, because they were erased. So, that's the work of our generation and us individually as people with platforms to form history based on the current present, which is a present that understands that, "Hey, there were not just white people in these time periods. It's not like black people magically appeared in 1950." [giggles]

Lauren: Nice. Right. And they weren't just straight people, and they weren't-- Yeah, exactly.

Becca: Like Molly getting to learn about Anne Lister.

Molly: Yes. I was going to say I loved how so many of the women that you covered them here were queer, whether that's Alice Dunbar Nelson, who had relationships with men and women, or Anne Lister who was really, really gay, or Mary Shelley who was in a thurple.

Lauren: Louisa May Alcott, probably.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: How many more of these women would we know [01:10:00] about if the conversations and the language that we use to speak about sexuality, and gender, and stuff was the same then. Again, with the book, it's called *Why She Wrote*, none of the authors that we're writing about, identify as nonbinary, or identify as trans to our knowledge, because those are conversations that we are publicly having now.

Lauren: Right.

Hannah: But you can't say that for sure about a lot of women, how would Anne Lister have identified if she was alive today?

Molly: Right.

Hannah: We don't know.

Molly: Right. Oh, my God. Yeah, it just will get you thinking. I could think about Jane Austen. A major theme on our podcast is me calling out everyone who I think is gay or queer in some way in those books, and perhaps, they were reflection of a different side of Jane Austen that she didn't feel comfortable writing out loud.

Lauren: Totally.

Becca: Speaking of queer women--

Molly: Yeah.

[giggles]

Becca: -can take us to our next chapter here, and the next [01:11:00] chapter is about private lives. Obviously, this is the chapter with Emily Bronte in it. But it is also the chapter with Molly's gal, Anne Lister.

Molly: My new fav.

Lauren: You're going to love those diaries. Some of them are really spicy too.

Molly: Oh, I cannot-- [crosstalk]

Lauren: They are amazing.

Molly: I'm so excited.

Lauren: Ann will talk to you about her dildos. It's amazing.

Molly: Oh, yes. Oh, my God.

Becca: What does one make a 19th century dildo out of, out of curiosity?

Lauren: Oh, she'll break it down for you. Don't worry. [laughs]

Molly: Oh, my God. I just love that she literally invented a language to journal about these things. I don't know. When I'm journaling, I'm sometimes-- I guess because throughout the years, there are a lot of journals that are required reading in high school and stuff like that, and seeing all of these people whose journals became published after they died, I kind of--

Lauren: Terrifying.

Molly: Yeah. All throughout my life, I'm always like, "Maybe someone will read this someday." But in more recent years, I'm like, "No one's actually going to read my journal." I'll just really lay it out there, and [01:12:00] she was thinking the same thing, "Maybe someone's going to read this someday," and wrote it in a different, an invented language. Amazing. Her crypt hand.

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: I thought that was so badass.

Lauren: It's really badass.

Molly: Then, they were still published, and they were still discovered.

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: They literally decoded--

Hannah: It's funny that they found it, and then they were like, "This has got to go back in the wall."

Lauren: [laughs]

Hannah: “These parts have got to go.”

[laughter]

Hannah: “It's too soon. It's too soon.”

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: One of the absolute best things about this illustration is how much it's illustrated people sweating and the enlisted chapters, just men reading her journal and just sweating.

Lauren: “Oh, no. What did we discover?”

Becca: [laughs]

Lauren: Why do you love that became an obsession for John too, when he discovered these journals, and it makes sense. He was a historian. He's like, “Oh, what am I going to find about local history?” and all of this stuff. Then, of course, there's these bits that are in code, and you're like, “What is she saying? I've got to know.”

Molly: Then, it became so much more personal for him. **[01:13:00]** Okay. First, when I was reading this, I was like, “Is the show--,” because you mentioned in the opening essay, that there's a show based on her life, which like you said at the beginning of the podcast, it wasn't out yet. But at first, I was like, “Is it Anne with an E, because she has an E at the end of her name and the other Anne doesn't?” but now, I know that that's not the case. But I really want to watch the show, because while I was reading this, I'm a playwright, and I was like, “This has to be a play,” or “This has to be a novel like her life is so fascinating.”

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: Her life past her life is so fascinating. The decoding is fascinating.

Lauren: Yeah, there's too much material with Anne Lister, honestly. So, that was really to tackle in a really short, tight little story, which is why-- There was a lot of back and forth between us and our editors like, “Okay, or is this too focused on John?” I was like, “I know. I know a man is at the center of this story, but I think he's going to be the vehicle to help us **[01:14:00]** see different parts of her life, because there's so many different parts of her life that are really interesting.”

Again, you're going to have such a great journey ahead of you reading the journals, which are fascinating. There's so many out there. Definitely check out the Anne Choma book. It's amazing. She's working with Sally Wainwright, who does the show, *Gentlemen Jack*, and they're still decoding. They're decoding Ann Walker's journals as well, or transcribing them because I think some of the handwriting is really difficult. Sally Wainwright also did the Bronte movie, *To Walk Invisible*. She's up there. She's tackling all of these ladies. She's living my dream life.

Molly: Oh, man. I'm so excited to just dive into all of that. What you did in these 10 pages was get me excited to go do more of my own digging. So, thank you.

Lauren: I'm glad that-- I'm so glad.

Becca: We're just going to abandoned Jane Austen for the podcast, and it is just going to be an Anne Lister's stan podcast from now on. Pod and Anne Lister.

Molly: Oh, yeah.

Becca: That brings us to **[01:15:00]** my girl, Emily Bronte, what a queen. What I love about this chapter is that it really goes on-- First of all, the perception of Emily from everyone around her, and how she pulled herself away from everybody else, and I also love that you guys really tackled the fact that she really loved the outdoors and that's so prevalent in all of her work. For those who haven't read *Wuthering Heights*, it's hard to describe how much the moors are a character in *Wuthering Heights*?

Lauren: Yeah, and her poetry as well. I mean it. I feel it's all started outdoors. I feel that's where she goes to think, that's where she's the most at peace or at home, and I feel that's where all the composition begins out there. Then, she uses various natural elements to weave her way into her work. We're doing Ellen Montgomery right now on the podcast, and I feel I've been seeing a lot of parallels between Emily's writing and her poetry and Allen Montgomery does very effortlessly with nature as well.

[01:16:00] Yeah, Emily was one, she's one of my favorites. We've done a lot of episodes on Emily, including a panel that we did at the personage, which was called decoding Emily or discovering Emily, where we had various Emily experts on this panel, just talking about myths and misconceptions, and who was Emily. She still is just like a big question mark. We just we don't really know. Yeah, I was really like, "Ah, should I cut Emily from the book?" but then I also loved that she may have known Anne Lister. I thought that that was really cool that they may have crossed paths, and also, I just wanted to put her in context with the other Bronte's because I know some-- So many people don't know who wrote which, and I was like, "Let's clear that up for anyone that reads the book."

Molly: Like me. Yeah.

Lauren: Also, because I have such a close relationship with Emily, I think writing about the authors that we are very, very close to or that we love actually maybe a little bit extra difficult, because I haven't worked out my feelings on her, and I feel I project onto her. So, that's why you have a panel in my high school classroom where I'm just like, "What does this mean? I don't know what's going on. I don't know who she is. I'm confused." Yeah, I think I'm still trying to work out my **[01:17:00]** feelings on her, and who she is.

Molly: I really just loved getting to know all three of them as a trio. I loved that their pseudonyms were this-- They are like, Acton, Ellis and--

Lauren: Currer Bell.

Molly: Yeah.

Lauren: Weird names, weird names.

Molly: Weird names, but that they started with the same letters, their names. I really want to read these Gondal poems.

Lauren: They're really interesting.

Becca: I'm currently in the midst of reading *The Lord of the Rings* series for the first time.

Molly: I was going to say Gondor too.

Lauren: [giggles]

Becca: Well, also, what I was going to say is, I hear a lot that J. R. R. Tolkien's really the father of fantasy, but to hear that these Bronte sisters were creating a fantasy world well before Tolkien is one of those things where I'm like, "Hot damn. [01:18:00] I wish they'd really run with that a little bit more."

Lauren: Yeah.

Becca: Because they could steal the spot.

Molly: Oh, man.

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: Yeah, if we could go back in time. No offense Tolkien, but a little bit.

Hannah: Also, he's the father of fantasy. But I listened to the *Lord of the Rings* audiobooks. I've not read them for the first time in 2019, and if you think about it as him writing about the first World War, especially by the time you get to this stuff with all of the orcs, and they get to Moria. I think he's the father of fantasy. He's writing about war. He's writing about being at war, he's writing about being in the trenches, he's writing about what he knows just so deeply, which is what the Brontes are doing to an extent, but I actually think they're doing something very different and very powerful. It feels less direct. It's less about them, right?

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: Does that make sense, Lauren?

Lauren: Their childhood writings are very much like *D&D*. If you like this book, you will probably also like a book by our friend, Isabel Greenberg, called *Glass Town*, which actually [01:19:00] we've the same publisher, Abrams Chronicle. You can get it from them. But it is about the Brontes' childhood, their juvenilia. Yeah, *D&D*, it's fantasy, and I think for Emily, it was very much for her. This is like her escape, and I do think that it just wasn't for anyone else. I don't think she thought anyone else would get it or needed to get it. I think if Emily had her way if she lived in a different time period, she just-- or if she had even been born a different class, she would have just been like, "You know what? I'm just happy being

a housekeeper, or just a baker, and I just write on the side for fun.” This is not to reduce her to a hobbyist or an accidental genius but I don't think that was her true-- Her joy wasn't coming from publishing. That was very much Charlotte's drive.

Hannah: Yeah, publication is very much not a motivator of all of the women covered-

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: -in the show. It doesn't need to be a dirty word, but the ones who were, it's not offensive [01:20:00] to say that Jane Austen was motivated by money and fame and publication. But in the same way, there are going to be women who are writing-- Frances Burney, she's writing to her sister, that is not a letter that she's like., “This is going to be in a museum one day.” Emily is not writing. Everyone's like “Emily Bronte, let's talk about her.” She would hate this. She's probably spinning--

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: Well, she's a relatable lady.

Molly: She is. I love that, because something that I talked about with my therapist a lot as an artist, and a person who works in theatre and podcasting is whether or not I am working because I am doing things that aren't earning me money all the time. I'm always like, “Oh, I didn't get anything done today.” Either my therapist or my mom or my friends will be like, “Molly, you literally edited your podcast for two hours and then wrote a chapter of a novel and then this and that the other thing.” I'm like, “Oh, yeah. I guess I did do that.” What you get out in this book is that just because you're [01:21:00] doing something not to be published or to be published, it doesn't make you less valid. That's what you do.

Lauren: Totally.

Molly: She was writing, really writing, and just because she didn't really want the recognition for it, it doesn't make it any less of a valid path. So, I loved that.

Hannah: Emily anecdote, I bought her 300-page book of poetry, and as I was buying in the bookshop, the young lady at the till said to me, “It's a shame, she didn't write more.” I was like, “This book is 300 pages.”

Molly: Right.

Hannah: [laughs] “What do you want?”

Molly: [laughs]

Hannah: “What do you want?” [crosstalk]

Lauren: She died pretty young, like what are we--

Hannah: Yeah.

Lauren: What is the output that would make sense for you?

Molly: Yeah.

Lauren: [laughs]

Becca: This is something that artists talk about a lot, is the love of the art versus the business of the art. Making art your job is something that requires a separate skill set and a separate drive and passion than the art itself. Now, if you're a person who just wants to make art, no shame in that. [01:22:00] But if you're a person who wants to make art for a living, you have to learn how to network, you have to learn how to get an agent, you have to learn how to do all these specific things. So, if you compare an Emily Bronte to a Jane Austen, Emily Bronte is just sitting there being like, "Okay, how is this rhetoric fitting into this poem? Does it capture what I want it to capture?" Whereas Austen's like, "All right, I've written my book. Now, I need to understand how I can push it to the publication stage."

Hannah: Yeah.

Molly: That's just a different brain, and it doesn't mean either one of them is a better or worse artist. It just means they have different priorities of how they want their art to be perceived by the world or not perceived in Emily's case.

Hannah: That's exactly the Brontes, the three of them and their relationship to each other and how Charlotte is different to Emily, and Anne is different to Emily and Charlotte altogether, yeah, I think that's one of the benefits of having them all in the book, and not just having them is that it's really easy to be the Bronte's all motivated by the same things. They all wanted the same things in there. [01:23:00] It just isn't the case at all. Their relationships with each other are also different. They don't all have the same relationship with both of their sisters. They don't all have the same relationship with their dad or their brother, and you don't often get that.

Lauren: It's very complex.

Hannah: Yeah.

Lauren: Yeah, you don't. Yeah, I think their relationship to publishing could fill books.

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Lauren: Especially, Charlotte's. [laughs]

Becca: The next chapter is Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and this is the sexy chapter.

Lauren: Yes. Love, romance. How this is not a movie yet, I don't know. There was one early movie, but I think I want to say it was in the 40s, and there was a play based off their romance, and I know there was a film in development with Rachel Weisz, which needs to come out.

Molly: Oh, my God.

Lauren: Come on, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ill, trapped in her home, just producing. You want to talk about producing, Elizabeth Barrett Browning just wrote the hell out of everything.

Molly: Yeah.

Lauren: I think one of the biggest things that I learned about her, [01:24:00] she's an author I didn't cover in school, so I didn't really know very much about her before the show, but just that she is remembered for these love poems, but she was writing very, very serious works actually. She was really doing all these translations as well. She was very serious academic. Also, very motivated by Mary Wollstonecraft that she loved.

Then, just yeah, remember Browning is just like, "I love you. Since this love letter, I want to be with you. I want to marry you." She's like, "What the hell? What's going on?"

Becca: Straight up slid into her DMs.

Lauren: He absolutely did. He absolutely did. What a joy.

Molly: Yeah, he was bold.

Lauren: He is really bold.

Molly: Even then, he was persistent.

Becca: Hey, gentlemen, shoot your shot. If you feel there's a person out there who you're into and you feel it could be a kindred spirit, maybe do send them a DM confessing your art and love.

Molly: But it's better if it's a letter. A handwritten letter with a wax seal, do that instead.

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: If any strange man I've never met [01:25:00] sends me a letter in the mail, I'm going to be very upset. I'm sorry.

Lauren: [laughs]

Hannah: "How did you got my address? Why is your handwriting so neat?"

Molly: That is something I was a little bit like, "This is a little bit weird." The fact that he sent one, and then she didn't respond to that or did she-- He was just persistent.

Lauren: He was pretty persistent. I think he was also encouraged, and I cannot remember if I included this or not, because it's a long lead-up into their stuff. But he was producing this work and people were like, "He's okay. He's fine." She was like a literary superstar, and she and her publication was like, "Actually, he's quite good."

Becca: Oh, yeah, that was in here.

Molly: I think he latched on to that.

Lauren: I think he was like, “Oh, she does know me. She does know me, and she likes me.”

Hannah: But like mutuals.

Lauren: Yeah, they're equal.

Hannah: The equivalent of mutuals, aren't they? They're not complete strangers.

Becca: Oh, yes.

Hannah: Yeah.

Becca: Like Lizzo's [unintelligible [01:25:53] Harry Styles dance.

[laughter]

Lauren: The same thing happened with Alice Dunbar Nelson and her first husband. [01:26:00] She had a poem published, and I believe her photo was also in the paper next to the poem. He just found her, and he was the literary superstar. He was like, “You're gorgeous. We should get married.” [laughs]

Molly: Is he's the one that ended up being abusive in the end and they separated?

Lauren: Yes.

Becca: Gentlemen, if you're going to shoot your shot, make sure you're not a garbage bag to the lady you shoot your shot with.

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: Should we move on to *Public Identities*?

Becca: We should.

Lauren: Let's do it.

Molly: Okay. The first one is Edith Maude Eaton, and I had never heard of her. This was super interesting to me, just the fact that she was writing true things, but not fictionalizing them, but making them read like a novel. That's kind of the thing that I like to read.

Becca: I think it's interesting that you included this one in the *Public Identities* chapter, because I thought this could have also been in the Activism chapter. My read on it was this was very much [01:27:00] activism for those Chinese immigrants coming to America. Listeners, if you haven't heard of Edith Maude Eaton found out from this wonderful book that Edith Maude Eaton was an Asian British woman who was half Chinese, half white.

Hannah: Mm-hmm.

Becca: Ethnicity.

Hannah: Yeah, her father was British, and her mom was Chinese. But she grew up in Canada.
[crosstalk]

Molly: Yeah.

[laughter]

Becca: In this time period, this was when the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted in America, which was a very discriminatory law that was basically punishing these Chinese railroad workers who came over to America to help build a railroad system. The system was built on their backs, and then, unfortunately, there was a lot of antiimmigrant vitriol that came out around the Chinese immigrants. Basically, the law was making it illegal to immigrate from China. Edith Eaton, her activism comes through in her [01:28:00] basic defense of Chinese immigrants in North America, and the story as I read it, very much was her fighting for people who were voiceless under a pseudonym, which I thought was great.

Molly: And that protected both her and the people she was writing about which is why it makes sense for this chapter in *Public Identities*, she was like, "This is not just about me. It's about everyone I'm writing about."

Hannah: There's a lot of authors that are covered in the book, who would easily fit into three, if not four, if not all of the chapters-

Molly: Oh, yeah.

Hannah: -and one of the reasons that Edith Eaton to me makes sense in the *Public Identities* book is because one of the reasons that she was empowered to write and given the position to write on these topics is because she was a white person. Her public identity is that she is a white woman, and her private identity is that her mother is Chinese, and that she is half Chinese, [01:29:00] and so are her siblings in a society that completely pushes them down. Living in a country which borders on a country that it's completely shut its borders. She was raised in in Canada, and her father was smuggling Chinese workers into America, and it was the same with the Mexico border. The border between America and Mexico was initially guarded to stop Chinese workers from crossing from Mexico into America.

That's why for me, it makes sense for her to be in *Public Identities*, because it's very much how she is seen. She writes a lot outside of her journalism about the things that people would say to her, because of who they perceived her to be. They thought that she was a white woman, so they would speak very candidly about their disgust of the Chinese to her face, because they didn't think she was. Certainly, at the time of researching and writing this chapter, we were not going through the [01:30:00] current climate, like the post-COVID world and the extreme rise of anti-Asian hate that we're experiencing. So,

it has been really strange and upsetting to see that come just crashing upwards, not out of nowhere, because it has not come from nowhere.

The Chinese Exclusion Act, I believe, wasn't lifted until the 1940s. But I might have gotten that date wrong. This really is deeply rooted in the heart of America, and as a white British woman, I've got to say, I really got a lot out of researching Edith Eaton, but it's not something that I can say that I deeply related to, and I think that is tricky as an author when you're having to represent someone whose experiences do not line up with your own. But you can say that again about many of the authors that we covered, because life 200 years later is--

Becca: Quite different.

Hannah: Yeah, it is quite different.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: But it is sad that a lot of these stories are still **[01:31:00]** horribly relevant today.

Molly: Right.

Lauren: Yeah.

Molly: Yeah, this one, especially. One part where the publisher says, "Smuggling them into America by canoe, what will they think of next?" That's an example of what you were saying of she's white passing, they're like, "What will they think of next?" Her response is, "Maybe they'll think of changing the law." The law may be changed, but really, it's what you were just saying the rise of anti-Asian hate is not coming out of nowhere. Even though the law isn't necessarily enforcing it, it depends on who's in power, and we won't get too deeply into the politics of it, but yes, it's scarily relevant today.

Hannah: One of the reasons I was drawn initially to writing about Winnifred, her sister, who was one of the authors that we ended up not covering was that, she actually wrote under a Japanese-sounding pseudonym, because Japan is still seen as acceptable and exotic, because they didn't have a migrant workforce in the same way, **[01:32:00]** and when Edith died, Winnifred published an obituary, which said that their mother was a Japanese noble woman to further extend her public identity.

Molly: Wow.

Hannah: The Eaton sisters are super interesting. There's a really great book called *Becoming Sui Sin Far* by Mary Chapman that collects a lot of previously unknown works of Edith Maude, and she wrote anonymously for a long time, she wrote under various different pen names that I really recommend reading. Yeah, she's a really interesting author and her sister's really interesting, and there is so much to their story that isn't public **[unintelligible [01:32:39]]**.

Becca: I'll definitely going to go look into that.

Molly: Yeah, me too.

Becca: That sounds amazing. That actually brings us to our next chapter, which is Mary Ann Evans aka better known as George Eliot.

Hannah: My gal.

Molly: Yeah. What a girl.

Becca: This was a drama-filled chapter.

Hannah: [laughs]

Becca: There was a lot of escandale in this chapter.

Molly: No.

Becca: I did not know [01:33:00] that George Eliot's life was so enraptured in scandal.

Hannah: Tip of the iceberg, honestly.

Becca: Oh, my.

Hannah: Tip of the iceberg, the spiciest life. She was just sleeping with everyone's husbands.

Becca: Ooh.

Molly: I love it.

Becca: Girl.

Hannah: And I say that lovingly.

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: Listen, it's charming 100 years later.

[laughter]

Hannah: But also, deeply sad.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: Yeah. She's a sad story. [giggles]

Molly: Yeah. There's so much to say about her. It makes so much sense to be in *Public Identities*, because she wanted to write. She's one of those women who wanted her writing to be out there, but in order to be taken seriously, she had to change the name. First of all, she changed her name to show that she was with this man-- She took his name, because she loved him, even though was [01:34:00]

deeply ridden in scandal and she shouldn't be with him, and they're not married. But she took his name, and then that was too scandalous. So, she had to publish under a different name. Then, she took his name in a different way being George, I loved everything about it.

Lauren: Should have titled that one *Call Me By Your Name*, Hannah.

[laughter]

Hannah: Yeah. The thing that's funny with Mary Ann Evans, Marian Lewes, or George Eliot, depending on what you want to call her is that she was born Mary Ann Evans. She, as a young woman started going by Marian rather than Mary Ann, and then Lewes was the surname of the man that she lived with as man and wife. She considered their relationship to be godly, holy, a religious bond. She wasn't antireligious about it. She really loved him. They live together as man and wife, although he couldn't legally divorce his first wife. Then, she had this whole career as an editor, and translator, and writer under her own name. It was when she began publishing novels, [01:35:00] which was after she had run away to Europe with George Henry Lewes that she didn't feel she could write under her own name.

It's worth knowing as well that a lot of people, her friends would still call her Miss Evans. But she went by Mrs. Lewes, and it was very hurtful to her that even the people that she chose and the people that she was closest with would often like misname her. They'd reference the fact that she wasn't really married, but she was in her eyes. Publishing as George Eliot was a way of getting her work published, even when her John Blackwood first knew that George Eliot was Marian Lewes, he was like, "No, no. We should probably just keep this coming out as George Eliot."

She had friends that were like, "You should publish under your own name. It's fine." Then, she had other friends who were like, "Absolutely do not reveal who you are, because this will ruin your career." But eventually, she became too famous. She sold too many books. She could not be denied.

Molly: It is [01:36:00] really sad, because their relationship seems to me to be very loving and healthy, and the fact that it's just based on a formality that people were like, "This is scandalous, and you can't reveal this, or you won't be published. It'll hurt your career." It is so sad and romantic.

Becca: Again, kind of pressions. This is still how it's treated if you steal somebody's husband.

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Becca: Look at the Team Jennifer versus Team Angelina debate. I know that was 15 years ago, which makes me feel elder.

Hannah: I think about it all the time.

[laughter]

Molly: I just found out about that recently.

Becca: Wait, you've just found out about that?

Molly: In the last three years.

Hannah: That's so funny.

Molly: Oh, no. [giggles]

Becca: Oh, my God. Molly's two years younger than me.

Molly: I'm two years younger than you Becca. Okay, well, so here's the thing. The basic premise of our podcast is spoiler-free Jane Austen. How do you become spoiler free on Jane Austen these books have been over 200 years? Spoilers really just go over my head if I'm not steeped in the culture of the thing.

Hannah: Sure.

Molly: [01:37:00] That whole Jennifer/Angelina thing, I just found out about it when I got really into *Friends* in 2017. So, yeah, news to me.

Hannah: I miss those days. I need another celebrity divorce scandal. Come on. Why didn't more people get divorced in the pandemic? What are you guys doing?

Lauren: I know. All I do is talk about the Emma Thompson-Kenneth Branagh one over and over and over again.

[laughter]

Lauren: She [unintelligible [01:37:28]].

Becca: Yeah.

Lauren: What happened? [crosstalk].

Becca: Oh, Kenneth messed up.

Lauren: Yeah.

Becca: 100%.

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: Can I just talked about George Eliot? [laughs]

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: I think I just get it. I love Kenneth Branagh. But let me just take away from him.

Lauren: He would be great in the adaptation of the story of this.

Hannah: Ooh.

Lauren: That would be great.

Molly: Good segue.

Hannah: George Eliot is another one of those authors and women who I think that had they've been alive today, they maybe would be remembered differently, [01:38:00] that relationship that she had with George Lewes, and then what's his name? John Cross, that she remarried after his death a too much younger man. Those relationships or heterosexual relationships really define her. There's a lot of about her relationships with women also. She had a very devoted following from women that were fans of her work, and definitely, the book that I'm reading at the moment is probably leaning into that more than any other that I've read, and the nature of those relationships. I think it's believed that with two of the women, if not more, they were romantic in nature, and that George Henry Lewes was like, "This is great." He just wanted her to be happy. That was his thing and it's the success of their relationships. He was like, "If these relationships are making you happy, that's fine." Then, he was in a marriage experiment with Agnes, his first wife. She didn't just have an affair. It was an open relationship.

Molly: Right

Hannah: Which in Victorian times, gets really difficult, because he acknowledged her children that weren't his, and then he legally [01:39:00] wasn't able to divorce her.

Lauren: There's a lot going on there.

Hannah: And I love George Eliot. So interesting.

Becca: Was she having groupie sex?

Hannah: Yeah.

Lauren: Yeah, ooh.

Molly: Thank God.

Lauren: I think a lot of people were-- but we were like, how much groupie sex [laughs].

Becca: There is an E on this podcast. So, you can talk all about the groupie sex you want here.

[laughter]

Hannah: I think it's by Kathy O'Shaughnessy. The book that I read while I was researching the book was called George Eliot *in Love*. That was a great book. I loved that book. Now, I'm reading *In Love With George Eliot*,-

[laughter]

Hannah: -which is a different book. It's so interesting to me that we have to frame George Eliot in relation to her romantic relationship. But actually, for a woman who is so revered for her mind and also be sexualized, because she isn't considered conventionally attractive, I actually think it's really important that her sensual side, her physical side, [01:40:00] but that is reclaimed because bunnies, ugly women have sex too. Why not-- and there was a bit when we were doing the artwork for this comic, I really purposely wanted to capture that they had this really physical and intimate relationship, which is why there's a shot of them in bed together, because their legacy really ties into the fact that they were hot for each other.

Molly: Yeah.

Becca: Oh, yeah.

Hannah: So, I really wanted to get them naked.

Molly: I'm glad that you did.

Becca: Right on. I love that.

Molly: I also know that George Eliot did not like Jane Austen.

Lauren: Oh, no.

Hannah: Yeah, she didn't like many women.

Lauren: No.

[laughter]

Lauren: There's a really great essay she writes about it. Oh, God, something lady novelists. *Silly, Lady Novelists?*

Molly: *Silly Novels by Lady Novelists.*

Lauren: Yeah, she presents herself as the cool girl. She's into Charlotte Bronte. She's down to Charlotte.

Hannah: She was really educated. Her parents took one look at her as a baby and they were like, "This kid is not getting married. [01:41:00] So, we need to educate her." She learned Latin, she learnt Greek, she learned German. She was very intellectual. Initially, it was her intellect that was giving her that entrance into society. So, I think that she intellectually felt very alienated from women who were generally not as well educated as she was because of how society treats women. She takes it out on the other women writers.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: She definitely thought she was cooler.

Lauren: Yeah.

Lauren: Some internalized misogyny going on with George Eliot for sure.

Molly: For sure.

Becca: What a complex figure? I love it.

Molly: My favorite Bronte sister is next, I think, Anne Bronte, just such a quiet, cool person. I was fascinated. All of these conversations happening around her and, in the comic, it really shows through-- for the listeners, there was a scandal where all three sisters are publishing under male names. One of the publishers [01:42:00] claimed that one book was written by which one?

Hannah: Anne's publisher, Newby, was claiming that the author of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was the same as the author of *Jane Eyre*. Is that right, Lauren?

Lauren: Yeah, because Jane Eyre was a super success, and then they're like, "Oh, well, we also have this book-

Hannah: Yeah.

Lauren: -by the same author." Yeah, incorrect, incorrect.

Hannah: And Charlotte's publisher was not having it. They were like--

Lauren: Yeah, they're like, "What the hell? You owe us a book. Are you writing for this guy, too?"

Hannah: Yeah.

Molly: Yeah, and so Charlotte was like, "We have to go straighten this out right now, and she and Emily are fighting in the comic, and Anna sitting there like, "What about the fact that it's my book that we're talking about?"

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: Mm-hmm.

Molly: I just love her. She seems so complex and sweet, and that there's so much going on there, but is she the youngest?

Lauren: She is. Anne is the baby.

Molly: I feel she probably felt overshadowed.

Becca: Has there ever been a more stereotypical oldest, middle, and youngest than the [01:43:00] three Brontes?

Hannah: [laughs]

Lauren: I know.

Hannah: Yeah, that was true. Let me throw Branwell into the mix. Then, [laughs]

Lauren: There's a lot going on there.

Hannah: Just screaming, and stamping, and drinking.

Lauren: Yeah, there is a lot going on there. Ah, got to love Anne, though. Another book recommendation, please read *Take Courage* by Samantha Ellis. It's a beautiful biography of Anne.

Hannah: Yeah, it really is. I've read that when I was researching for it, and it really helped me get a sense of her, because not a lot of Anne has survived and partially of Charlotte Bronte as well. [laughs] going to a huge amount. That's not a lot of surviving letters. That preface that she wrote the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, I think you really feel her fire in that. So, it was a real treat to write about that moment in her career.

Becca: I Love that. All right, I think that takes us to our final chapter, which is *Protection and Profit*, which details these paradoxically children's authors who were [01:44:00] very intent on the business of their work. This, I loved because with this chapter, I had read books by all three women, which I don't think is uncommon. Beatrix Potter wrote the very famous *Peter Rabbit* books-

Molly: Amongst others.

Becca: -amongst others, but those were the ones that I personally grew up with. I think they're ones that most people know.

Molly: Right.

Becca: It was lovely to see her affinity for children through the story. I think this one in particular lends itself so well to comic, because I loved looking at the little creatures she created through her own eyes and through her own hard work, because it takes the little illustration of Peter Rabbit, and brings it forward into showing the blood, sweat, and tears that went into creating him.

Hannah: Beatrix Potter was one of the rare writers we covered in the book who actually came from money. She was financially a very well-off woman, but she wasn't independent because her parents were very outside [01:45:00] of society. They really wanted to keep Beatrix around to be their carer. So, for her writing was a way of getting out from underneath them and from getting out of that grasp. Every single pound really meant something to her. She hated the fact that her works weren't copyrighted in America and that they were bootlegged so much. She blamed her publishers for that.

The reason that Beatrix Potter is remembered as well as she is, is because there were so many products and because she created licensing. That's why we remember Peter Rabbit. It's all from what she did. I was on a call the other day with some male friends of mine, and they were talking about

George Lucas and *Star Wars*. I was like, “Have you heard of Beatrix Potter?” I really got my [crosstalk] about it.

Becca: [laughs]

Hannah: I think you're really going to like this one chapter in *Why She Wrote*, you can stop talking about those bloody lunchboxes, please.

Lauren: Yes.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: I got really angry-- [laughs]

Lauren: And someone who has worked in licensing [01:46:00] with Lucas.

[laughter]

Lauren: It's the same model. It's the same exact model.

Becca: Unreal. Also, that is very cool. [laughs]

Molly: That is so cool, very our brand, and it's so true that people totally overlook Beatrix Potter and jump straight to the man who did things publicly in America. This whole chapter and her whole story, if there's not already-- there probably is a movie about her, but if there isn't already, this would be a really excellent, heartwarming, women-empowering tale of her writing. I feel it exists already but writing these books and then citing for it to be recognized as her own and making these-- ah, my gosh, it reads like one of those movies.

Hannah: [laughs] There is a super lovely biopic with Miss Potter starring Renee Zellweger and--

Lauren: Ewan McGregor

Hannah: Ewan McGregor.

Lauren: My husband.

Hannah: But it's about her relationship with her publisher, Norman Warne. It's a lovely film. She talks to animated [01:47:00] animals in it, and it's very sweet. But again, I think it really adds to the idea that Beatrix Potter was a woman that spoke imaginary [laughs] rather than being someone who is obsessed with money. [laughs]

Molly: Right. I think I've seen it, and I just need to google it really quick, because that might be what I'm thinking of exactly, yeah. That brings us to our next chapter which is, somebody else pronounce it. Is it Hodgson or Hodg--

Lauren: I love that she has problems with it too because we both do, and we've talked about this on the podcast, and people were like--

Hannah: I was calling her Frances Hodgson Burn-ey [laughs]

Lauren: I know. Why do we always mess up her last name?

Hannah: It's Frances Hodgson Burnett.

Lauren: Frances Hodgson Burnett. Yeah.

Molly: Frances Hodgson Burnett. I did not know that maybe I did somewhere in the back of my mind, but that the *Secret Garden* and the *Little Princess* for the same person?

Hannah: I remember having that with Fleetwood Mac once when they realized with songs that they're doing. [laughs]

Molly: That's amazing.

Lauren: You're like, "Stevie Nicks."

Hannah: Stevie Nicks is to [01:48:00] music what FHB is to lit.

[laughter]

Molly: Exactly. This one resonated with me as a theatre person. We adapt stuff for the stage all the time. Usually, in my mind when I'm conceptualizing things that I would like to one day adapt for the stage, there are usually things that are in the public domain already. But the fact that this man took her book, word for word, and put it on the stage, she was rightfully upset. I love that she just went after it with all that she had.

Hannah: That had happened to her twice before, I might add.

Molly: Wow.

Hannah: This wasn't the first time. So, she is fuming by the time this has happened. It's happening to authors all around the world. It was a real issue.

Lauren: Now, it was happening to Harriet Beecher Stowe as well. I think that someone else was profiting quite a bit off of the unauthorized Uncle Tom as well.

Lauren: Mm-hmm.

Molly: Wow.

Becca: This chapter spoke to me as a lawyer.

Lauren: [laughs]

Becca: I was like, “Hey, intellectual property coming to [01:49:00] light for the first time,” and it's controversial on both sides of the debate whether the level of copywriting and trademarking in art is a good thing or a bad thing for artists. But the general consensus is that the age of copyright and the fight for intellectual property rights for authors has given authors the capacity to actually make money off their art in a way that's really difficult to do otherwise. So, it was interesting to read this because I've never associated the writer of the *Secret Garden* with this very important legal battle for--

Hannah: A landmark battle.

Becca: Yes.

Lauren: Frances, by the way, one of my favorite authors. Love, love, love *Secret Garden*, but her adult novels, which we did a read-along of *The Shuttle*, which really at the height of #metoo, because that book has some very adult themes, and themes of men and power and abuse, which was very, very powerful for us and our listeners. [01:50:00] But this woman crushed all her writing, like her adult books do not sleep on her older works. They are amazing. At that point too, she was very much writing for the stage as well, you can kind of tell. She was a total rockstar.

Hannah: There's a wonderful story where it's questionable whether or not she wants to set her house on fire to cool- [giggles]

Lauren: Yeah.

Hannah: -her public scandal. The reason people think she did it herself is that she ran out with her hair was perfect, and her night gown was perfectly pressed.

Molly: Oh, my God.

Hannah: The ruffles were super crisp.

Becca: The drama.

Hannah: It was such a-- Yeah, I love it, but that was her. She was a character. She was a real character. She loved to know people. She came from very humble beginnings like the opposite of Beatrix Potter really, because she came from no money. She loved money, she loved fashion, she loved being out in society, she loved her success, and she [01:51:00] reveled in it. It was really fun to capture someone who was like, “I am it. Look at me. I have made it.”

Becca: “I'm the moment.”

Hannah: Yeah. Just accepting that diamond bracelet, she's like, “Yes, thank you for recognizing me. Here's a toast to me.” Then, trying to capture that at the same time as depicting what happens to see them, the young man that she went up against legally. Yeah, she chewed him up and spat him out a bit.

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Hannah: [laughs]

Becca: Have you seen *The Secret Garden* musical?

Lauren: Not yet. No.

Hannah: No.

Becca: Oh, because then my second question was going to be, do you think she would have approved of that adaptation? Which I think she probably would have.

Lauren: As long as they were giving her royalty checks, I'm sure she'll be fine.

Molly: Well, speaking of books with iconic adaptations, our final author is Louisa May Alcott or the writer of Greta Gerwig's *Little Women*.

[laughter]

Lauren: [01:52:00] True story.

Becca: This is so funny because *Little Women* has made it so far back into the zeitgeist, and it was something my sisters and I read all the time when we were young.

Hannah: They keep remaking.

Molly: They do.

Hannah: That's a lot of *Little Women* for every generation.

Molly: It's true. Same with *Pride and Prejudice*.

Becca: I've got to say I did like the most recent adaptation more than I've liked the other adaptations. I was a consistent watcher of the Elizabeth Taylor adaptation when I was younger.

Lauren: Ah, I love that one. It's great. It's a great Christmas movie, isn't it?

Becca: Yeah. I think it's interesting. It does center Amy, because Elizabeth Taylor plays Amy.

Lauren: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Hannah: I haven't seen this one. My gal, Amy?

Becca: Oh, yeah.

Hannah: What?

Becca: Yeah, it's a really good adaptation. But I cried the entire time, I was watching the 2019 *Little Women*.

Molly: Oh, so did I loudly.

Lauren: Oh, yeah.

Molly: Our listeners, I think know this already, but I went with my friend, and we sat in the back of a crowded theater and sobbed, and we were the only two really loudly sobbing, [01:53:00] disgustingly sobbing. At the end, the people in front of us turned around and asked us if we were okay, because we were just-

Lauren: Oh, my God.

Molly: -completely-- faces streaked with red.

Lauren: Oh.

Molly: I have never read *Little Women*, but I've really am obsessed with Louisa May Alcott, and the fact that she did not want to write it, and didn't like it, and then once it was time for it to be published, it was like, "Ah, it's not bad. Okay, actually."

Lauren: I'll get that coin.

Hannah: Yeah. She loved that it resonated with people.

Molly: Yeah.

Hannah: At least it said something. But when I was writing that comic, one of the things that really opened up Louisa May Alcott to me was a letter that Lauren had found about the company coming to visit, and how no one could understand how tiring it was that all of these people would come and their friends wouldn't call on them anymore without bringing people, because she's Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women* and *Orchard House*, where she lives her home is the March House from the book. I think it gave us an opportunity [01:54:00] to write about someone who was dealing with fame within their own lifetime, and the negative side of it. With success, that does come a loss of privacy. She really wanted to recapture that.

Molly: What's interesting is that the reason she became so famous is because she wrote about something very personal and relatable, and the thing that she wrote about that was so personal and private became characters in this book that people then took on as their own personal private life like, "We're all one of the sisters." Oh, we were talking about the beginning, I'm an Amy, and Becca's a Jo, and you know.

Becca: [laughs] I didn't even say I was a Jo, but you just knew.

Molly: Oh, I just know.

Becca: [laughs]

Hannah: Imagine if someone's like, "Guys, I really think I'm up there." You'd be like, "Oh, you think you're up there?"

Molly: [laughs]

Hannah: "Easy. So good."

Lauren: [laughs]

Hannah: "You are so much better than me."

Molly: What's the last one's name?

Becca and Hannah: Meg.

Molly: Meg. Right. Emma Watson.

Becca: I think Meg can be [01:55:00] on her, and I think her story is actually pretty interesting. But I think that the story really often does boil down to the Jo versus the Amy, but I think the other two sisters have perspectives to offer.

Hannah: I remember reading *Little Women* as a kid. In the UK, it was published as *Little Women* and *Good Wives* as two separate books. In *Good Wives*, that's when Meg moves beyond-- The thing with Meg is that she's the only one that really remembers them having money. It is interesting to have her as one of the sisters who does like pretty things and defending that and defending her life choices. Then, in *Good Wives*, what she's doing, she isn't-- Alcott isn't really able to do it with the other sisters because Beth died and then the other two aren't doing it, is that Meg is struggling to be a mother, and to run a household, and to do all of those things that she has taken for granted for so long that her mom just does. She burns the jam. She is tempted to buy an expensive dress which is more than her husband's wages. I think Meg's story actually gives us a really vivid and realistic picture of [01:56:00] being a woman and being a wife, while Jo and Amy are giving us this aspirational career woman, who seems very ahead of her time, and it can be hard to, if the same importance to have what is a very domestic storyline?

Becca: Yes, and I do think that there are women who still resonate with that story today. There are still women who really want to be good wives and mothers, and that's totally fine. I think the pressure of society still persists to do that perfectly. Now, there's all this be a career woman on top of it as well, but I think that you get a lot of different perspectives. I really appreciated the Gerwig's adaptation adds the dress storyline into Meg's plot.

Hannah: Yeah, it shows her struggling, doesn't it?

Molly: Mm-hmm.

Becca: Yeah. It shows she made these decisions, and she thought they were right at the time, but some of them weren't consistent with her deepest desires necessarily. So, anyway, that's *Little Women*. This is Louisa May Alcott. [giggles]

Molly: My favorite part of this [01:57:00] chapter was the end where you wrote that the editor, JT Fields, gave Louisa May Alcott \$40 and was like, "Stop writing, open a school. You'll be good at teaching." She sent it back to him after she made it big and was like, "Thank you, but I've got it. I'm repaying the debts. Moving on." What a queen.

Hannah: I should really send a copy of *Why She Wrote* to my media teacher who told me I've never succeed, because I'm not determined enough.

Molly: Yes, do it.

Hannah: I should send him a copy.

Becca: You should absolutely do that.

Molly: Do it. Highlight that passage and send it to him.

Becca: Put the little bookmark in on that passage and circle it, and star it--

Hannah: With love.

Becca: With love.

Molly: [laughs]

Becca: I used quotation marks, this is a podcast.

Hannah: [laughs]

Becca: That brings us to the end of the book. Are there any other thoughts you want to impart on our listeners about the process of writing this book? Why you think it's important?

Lauren: Oh, gosh. You guys had such great [01:58:00] notes. It was amazing listening to your reactions to the book, because I feel that's why we wrote it.

Becca: *Why She Wrote*.

Lauren: [laughs]

Hannah: Lauren's stuff.

Lauren: Yeah, honestly. [laughs] I didn't plan that. Because when we were writing this book, I think there were a lot of times where like, Oh, God. Is this interesting? Is this aspirational?" We're really interested in the struggle, we're interested in the relational bits. There is a bit of literary analysis in the

book, but I don't think of myself as some literary scholar or anything like that. It's really just the stuff that I as a writer and an editor find interesting and relate to the most, and some of the stories that kept us motivated, I think, to continue not only writing but also continue our podcast, because this work is ongoing, we're still doing this, we're still looking at these stories and trying to find the ways that they relate to us and relate to each other. So, I don't know, it's so generic. **[01:59:00]** If you're writing if you're struggling, that's fine. That's normal. That's absolutely fine and just keep going. It's a journey. It's not so cliché, but it's so true for me-

Molly: Yeah.

Lauren: -and is for Louisa May Alcott, because can I just add on, I love Louisa May Alcott juvenilia. Her earlier stuff are crazy, gothic short stories. She's obsessed with Charlotte Bronte by the way, and she just keeps writing *Jane Eyre* elements and all of these gothic thrillers. Then, none of those really do it. None of them hit. No one cares. They're just like, "No, write more *Little Women*."

Hannah: Mr. **[unintelligible [01:59:39]** doesn't give a shit.

Lauren: Yeah, they're like, "Just write *Little Women*," and she's like, "Ah."

Molly: [laughs]

Lauren: It was a struggle. It's a journey. It's frustrating, but that's okay. Just try to find joy the way we can.

Hannah: Yeah, what she said.

Molly: That's beautiful. I love it.

Becca: Well, thank you so much for coming on. Listeners, if you want to purchase this book, we highly recommend **[02:00:00]** it. I blew through this. We obviously didn't get to touch on every single element of the story that is present in this book, but it's engaging, the artwork is gorgeous, shoutout to your illustrator, and it's very insightful about a lot of very different complex and wonderful female writers. So, do you want to tell our listeners where they can purchase this book?

Lauren: Sure. You can purchase it on Amazon or *bookshop.org*, which we highly recommend, or you could go to your local comic book shop or your independent bookstore, which again, we also recommend and just give them the title and they can order that for you.

Molly: Where can people find you on the internet if they want to hear more about you two or hear your podcast or what have you?

Hannah: You can find us on Instagram and Twitter *@bonnetsatdawn*, and you can find us on Facebook by searching for Bonnets at Dawn. You can join our really active and lively discussion group where we run all of our read-alongs, we share episodes, and just loads of information about **[02:01:00]** all of the authors covered in the book and show.

Lauren: At Bonnets at Dawn.

Molly: Thank you both so much for coming on and being willing to talk, and I guess thank you to your agent or whoever sent us copies of the book. That was clutch.

[laughter]

Becca: So, until next time, stay proper.

Lauren: And lawyer up, because you never know when you might need to go after someone for taking your intellectual property.

Molly: Yeah.

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