



The Women's Print History Project

1816 and 2020: The Years Without Summers, *The WPHP Monthly Mercury*

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1816 and 2020: The Years Without Summers

Kate Moffatt and Kandice Sharren



This double episode of *The WPHP Monthly Mercury* is part of *Romanticism on the Net*'s special issue, "Romanticism, Interrupted." The script has been peer-reviewed.

We are fast approaching the end of this (incredibly long) year. 2020 has been a year of climate crisis, of political upheaval, of a global pandemic; on a smaller scale, it has been a year of working from home, of finding new ways of forming community, and of learning how to function in a world that looks drastically different from years past.

In this peer-reviewed double episode of *The WPHP Monthly Mercury*, hosts Kandice Sharren and Kate Moffatt put 2020 and its many catastrophes into conversation with 1816, known as "the Year Without a Summer," the unusually cold year during which *Mary Shelley* began to pen *Frankenstein*. More generally, 1816 was, like 2020, a year of catastrophes, marked by riots, political upheaval, and typhus and cholera epidemics set against a change in the weather that we now know was caused by the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia. This episode uses the WPHP to explore what other works exist about those years beyond what might be called the "1816 canon"—think *Lord Byron*, *Mary Shelley*, *John Polidori*. Looking at *Elizabeth Heyrick's Exposition of one principal cause of the national distress*, *Helen Maria Williams's Letters on the events which have passed in France since the Restoration in 1815*, *Charlotte Caroline Richardson's Harvest*, *Jane Waldie Watts's Sketches descriptive of Italy in the years 1816 and 1817*, and *Frances Jane Carey's Journal of a Tour in France in the years 1816 and 1817*, we examine how women writers acknowledge global background catastrophe, what they can tell us about the voices we hear and the voices we do not, and how our own experiences this year have shaped our readings of their works.

Including reflection pieces of the hosts' own experiences of 2020, as well as considerations of how the year's seemingly-endless disasters have had far-reaching and severe consequences whose effects have been distributed unevenly across gender, class, race, and geography, Episode 7: "1816 and 2020: The Years Without Summers" considers the intersection of print, production, and processing in both 1816 and 2020.

WPHP Records Referenced

Watts, Jane Waldie (person, author)

Sketches Descriptive of Italy (title)

Shelley, Mary (person, author)

Frankenstein (title)

Heyrick, Elizabeth (person, author)

Exposition of one principal cause of the national distress (title)

Jane Carey, Frances (person, author)

Journal of a tour in France (title)

Williams, Helen Maria (person, author)

Letters on the events which have passed in France Since the Restoration in 1815 (title)

Richardson, Charlotte Caroline (person, author)

Harvest, a poem (title)

Shelley, Percy Bysshe (person, author)

Byron, George Gordon (person, author)

Wordsworth, William (person, author)

Hunt, James Henry Leigh (person, author)

Political Writing (genre)

William Darton, Joseph Harvey, and Samuel Darton (firm, publisher/bookseller)

Baldwin, C. Cradock, and W. Joy (firm, publisher/bookseller)

Immediate, Not Gradual, Abolition (title)

Elizabeth Heyrick, Mother of Immediatism (spotlight)

Travel Writing (genre)

Spence, Elizabeth Isabella (person, author)

Letters from the North Highlands, During the Summer 1816 (title)

John Taylor and James Augustus Hessey (firm, publisher/bookseller)

John Murray II (firm, publisher)

Poetry (genre)

Austen, Jane (person, author)

Persuasion (title)

The Last Man (title)

Emma (title)

Northanger Abbey (title)

Thomas Egerton (firm, publisher/bookseller)

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- 00:00:00  [music playing]
- 00:00:09 Kate Moffatt (co-host) In chapter 4 of Jane Waldie Watts' *Sketches Descriptive of Italy in the Years 1816 and 1817, with a Brief Account of Travels in Various Parts of France and Switzerland in the Same Years*, she writes of her time in Lyon: “The idea of [Napoleon’s] second return, indeed, I found very general among the lower orders in this part of France. They believed, and perhaps still believe, that the man we hold in custody at St. Helena is not the real emperor, but some one who personates him, while he is himself lying in concealment somewhere on the Continent, and will appear again in time.
- 00:00:44 Kate Moffatt (co-host) No arguments that I could use, could persuade the people with whom I conversed on the subject, of the reality of Buonaparte’s present detention, or that his former escape was not the design and contrivance of the British ministry, whom, however, they now suppose to be as completely deceived in regard to his identity, as the whole British people. At that time, indeed, the Lyonese looked forward to the probability of their idol’s re-appearance with ill-concealed pleasure.
- 00:01:09 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Wherever we went, we heard complaints of the decay of trade, and the dearness of grapes, which, however, absurdly, were invariably coupled together, as if both emanated from the same cause, —the reign of the Bourbons; and to the ill-conduct of that unfortunate race, were referred all the disorders and distresses, public and private, which were experienced during this disastrous year.”
- 00:01:28  [music playing]
- 00:01:36 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In the essay, “Screengrabs,” included in Zadie Smith’s 2020 essay collection *Intimations*, she writes: “There is an ideal, rent-controlled city dweller who appears to experience no self-pity, who knows exactly how long to talk to someone in the street, who creates community without overly sentimentalizing the concept—or ever saying aloud the word “community”—and who always picks up after their dog, even if it’s physically painful to do so. Whose daily breakfast is a cigarette and a croissant from the French place on the corner, although to accommodate her new walker, Barbara now eats and smokes on the bench outside the hairdresser, properly intended for clients of the salon. But no one minds because this is Barbara and Beck we’re talking about, regular in their habits and known to all.
- 00:02:22 Kandice Sharren (co-host) There she sat on that last day—I was passing with my little dog: a final chance for Maud to pee before we put her in the rental car—and I could see Barbara was preparing to bark one of her ambivalent declamations at me, about the weather or a piece of prose, or some new outrage committed by the leader of a country which, in

Barbara’s mind, only theoretically includes her own city. Already missing New York, I was keen to hear it. Instead she sucked hard on her cigarette and said, in a voice far quieter than I’d ever heard her use:


- 00:02:53 Kandice Sharren (co-host) “Thing is, we’re a community and we got each other’s back. You’ll be there for me, and I’ll be there for you, and we’ll all be there for each other, the whole building. Nothing to be afraid of—we’ll get through this, all of us, together.” “Yes we will,” I whispered, hardly audible, even to myself, and walked on, maintaining a six-foot distance, whether to conform with the new regulations or to avoid Beck biting me in some vulnerable spot I couldn’t tell.
- 00:03:20  [music playing]
- 00:03:32 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Hello and welcome to *The WPHP Monthly Mercury*, the podcast for *The Women’s Print History Project*. The WPHP is a bibliographic database that collects information about women and book production during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. My name is Kate Moffatt—
- 00:03:47 Kandice Sharren (co-host) and I’m Kandice Sharren—
- 00:03:48 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And we are long-time editors of the WPHP, and the hosts of this podcast. On the third Wednesday of every month, we’ll introduce you to anecdotes, puzzles, and problems related to recovering evidence of women’s involvement in print.
- 00:04:01  [music playing]
- 00:04:09 Kate Moffatt (co-host) This episode is part of *Romanticism on the Net’s* special issue, “Romanticism, Interrupted,” which called for “in-the-moment responses to current social, political, and cultural events, and tracings of relations between the past and present.” The script has been peer-reviewed, and we would like to thank the reviewers and editorial team of *Romanticism on the Net*, especially Matthew Sangster and Michael Sinatra, for their expertise and willingness to take on this format. We would also like to thank project director Michelle Levy for her feedback and WPHP Research Assistant Victoria De Hart for her behind-the-scenes support on this episode.
- 00:04:43  [music playing]
- 00:04:51 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In April 1815, Mount Tambora erupted in Indonesia. The following three years of temperature cooling resulted in global crop failures, cholera and typhus epidemics,

and riots. In Western Europe and North America, 1816 came to be known as “the year without a summer” or “eighteen hundred and froze to death.”

- 00:05:10 Kandice Sharren (co-host) While it is often referenced as the cold and fog-laden year in which an 18-year-old Mary Shelley came up with the idea for *Frankenstein*, 1816 was more generally a year of crises: political, environmental, and epidemiological. As Jane Waldie Watts writes in the travel memoir that we quoted at the beginning of this episode, “in Europe the abrupt shift in climate and its agricultural and economic fallout was closely tied to the political upheavals taking place, especially the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France.”
- 00:05:39 Kate Moffatt (co-host) This feels painfully familiar. 2020 has been a year of climate-induced wildfires, of necessary political unrest and resistance, and, of course, of a world-wide pandemic. It has been a year of constantly chasing the non-existent ‘new normal’, of working towards the necessary ‘better’ normal that we hope for, of spending weeks operating on some desperate form of autopilot only for the enormity of the world’s happenings to hit you all at once at three o’clock on a Wednesday afternoon and render you overwhelmed until the following Tuesday.
- 00:06:08 Kate Moffatt (co-host) In British Columbia, where Kandice is based, many of the measures taken in response to the first wave of the pandemic were framed in terms of ‘giving people a summer’ before the anticipated second wave of infections hit in the autumn. And, weather-wise, we did have a summer; August 2020 was the hottest month on record in the northern hemisphere. But the summer we had was unlike any other: no conferences, no family barbecues, no road trips.
- 00:06:32 Kate Moffatt (co-host) These restrictions led us to question what, exactly, makes a so-called summer? Is it simply the space of time between the summer solstice and the fall equinox? Is it defined by the weather? The activities you engage in? What, exactly, made 1816 a year without a summer, and does 2020 count as a year without a summer too?
- 00:06:52 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And yet, even as we recognize the manifold and particular catastrophes of both 1816 and 2020, we also know that the events of both years reflect a culmination of systemic problems with broad and far-reaching consequences, which are unevenly distributed: geography, class, race, and gender have impacted how different individuals and groups have experienced and continue to experience upheavals.
- 00:07:15 Kandice Sharren (co-host) We don’t yet have the distance from any of the events of 2020 to be able to see their long-term repercussions or comment on them—and we are a podcast about

eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women's writing [Kate laughs], so for that kind of analysis we suggest you go elsewhere—but this year has prompted us to look backwards, to similarly tumultuous times in the past, including the original Year Without a Summer.

- 00:07:37 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Our heightened sense of the unequal effects of catastrophe has prompted us to reconsider what we know about 1816 and its crises, asking: how were its social and political effects represented in print more broadly? How were they distributed by class and gender? And how can we use the metadata collected in the WPHP to find out more about how women writers, specifically, responded to the catastrophic years between 1816 and 1818?
- 00:08:06 Kate Moffatt (co-host) For this episode of *The WPHP Monthly Mercury*, we went digging for non-canonical representations of the year without a summer and its aftereffects and found five obviously topical titles: one political pamphlet, Elizabeth Heyrick's *Exposition of One Principal Cause of the National Distress*; three travel memoirs, Frances Jane Carey's *Journal of a Tour in France in the Years 1816 and 1817*, Jane Waldie Watts' *Sketches Descriptive of Italy in the Years 1816 and 1817*, and Helen Maria Williams' *Letters on the Events which Have Passed in France Since the Restoration in 1815*; and also Charlotte Caroline Richardson's *Harvest, a Poem, in Two Parts; with Other Poetical Pieces*, published in 1818.
- 00:08:45 Kate Moffatt (co-host) In this episode we will discuss how we found these titles and what they can tell us about the crises that marked the period between 1816 and 1818. Our findings highlight the intersections between different social, political, and environmental phenomena. In the works we found, we were struck by how writers leveraged these separate issues in conjunction with or against each other, and how different publication formats and genres highlight the effects of these crises on everything from daily life to important political and economic debates.
- 00:09:13 Kate Moffatt (co-host) At the same time, reading these works forced us to ask: whose voices are we hearing, and how are they being mediated and brought to our attention? How does print as a system allow for a diversity of voices and genres, and which ones get left out? The books we identified are not canonical, but most of their authors were wealthy and educated enough to travel and write books, and to have access to networks that made publication possible. Although some of these writers do consider experiences beyond their own—such as Heyrick's advocacy for the working poor in manufacturing districts, and Williams's sympathy for the rural poor in France—we only encounter the voices of the lower classes secondhand.

- 00:09:51 Kandice Sharren (co-host) We were also struck by the pervasiveness of catastrophe in these texts, the impact that it has on both public and private life, and the longing for a solution as simple as a leader stepping up. In the passage from Jane Waldie Watts’s travel memoir that we quoted at the beginning of this episode, the French link the “decay of trade, and the dearness of grapes” to “the same cause, —the reign of the Bourbons,” as though Napoleon had the ability to control the weather.
- 00:10:17 Kandice Sharren (co-host) This parallels our own current moment and the long- and short-term failures of leadership that have resulted in a climate crisis that has been foreseen for decades and a global health crisis that has, in a short space of time, completely reshaped our interactions with other humans, from how we greet each other to if and where we interact at all.
- 00:10:35 Kate Moffatt (co-host) We opened this episode by pairing the Jane Waldie Watts passage with a quote from Zadie Smith’s latest essay collection, *Intimations*, published earlier this year, for the way that it speaks to the individual emotional response to these changes, as well as their potential to reshape and fracture communities. We didn’t want our focus to be solely on the past—we originally conceptualized this as an episode about the Year Without a Summer loosely inspired by our own experiences, but over the last few months it mutated into an ongoing conversation about how our distinct experiences over the course of this year have been shaped by our own privileges and precarities.
- 00:11:08 Kate Moffatt (co-host) So, this month we’re going to try something a little different. After we’ve talked about our findings, we’re going to conclude the essay with our personal reflections—a little bit of processing, if you will—to consider how the books we found in the WPHP have allowed us to see our own moment more clearly.
- 00:11:23  [music playing]
- 00:11:31 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, the existing scholarship about 1816 is largely dominated by discussions of canonical texts, especially those inspired by the infamous evening that spurred Mary Shelley and John Polidori to write their genre-defining works. However, as Gillian D’Arcy Wood explores in *Tambora: The Eruption that Changed the World*, the effects were simultaneously global and local in scope—what might a wider range of texts tell us about how these effects were experienced by a wider range of people? And how might they help us frame our experiences now?

- 00:12:04 Kandice Sharren (co-host) To understand what the non-canonical texts we found can contribute, first we need to look at the canon to identify what its blind spots are. So, the majority of current scholarship about the Year Without a Summer has focused on how it was represented in canonical texts like the literary productions of the Byron-Shelley circle or Jane Austen's final novel, *Persuasion*.
- 00:12:25 Kandice Sharren (co-host) All of these we know were composed at that precise historical moment from sources outside of the books themselves. This means that we've heard a very limited range of voices on the effects of the Year Without a Summer. Many of which are from the same group of friends who represent radical, but also elite perspectives. In these works, we see philosophical representations of crises that explore what they mean for humanity on a large scale.
- 00:12:53 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, David Higgins has talked about *Frankenstein* as a "reflection on the vulnerability of human communities, living with uncontrollable geophysical and climactic forces, the entanglement of humans and non-human nature and the possibility of human extinction." Similarly, Chris Washington talks about both *Frankenstein* and one of Mary Shelley's later novels, *The Last Man*, saying that they participate in what he calls "post apocalyptic Romanticism", which he defines as a propensity to "think within the ashes of posthuman history, to theorize life and the hope of life in the darkness they find themselves unexpectedly strangling through."
- 00:13:32 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Not all of the works he discusses as examples of post-apocalyptic romanticism were inspired by the Year Without a Summer, but a lot of them are, and both Higgins and Washington frame the existential questions that exist in these works in their own kind of contemporary theoretical terms. While these works aren't necessarily engaging directly with strange weather or crop failure or food shortages, they are still, though, responding to the anxieties of the moment, and these scholars have kind of taken those anxieties and applied contemporary terms to them.
- 00:14:14 Kandice Sharren (co-host) *Persuasion* is a novel that focuses a little bit more on the kind of immediate effects of what's going on. So, its attention to the seasons, especially the chill of autumn really makes sense when it's considered against the backdrop of both its composition and its setting. It was written in 1816 and set during 1814, which was another unusually cold year.
- 00:14:36 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And Amelia Dale has kind of talked about its relation to climate and weather saying "*Persuasion* was written and read with the immediate experience of 'frosts' and 'springs' capable of 'revolv[ing]' in irregular rather than predictable rhythms, and

subject to multitudinous variations in length, moments of appearance and severity. *Persuasion*'s seasonal temporal markers therefore potentially denote radical instability and a capacity for a 'revolution ... almost beyond expression' in established rhythms that coincide with the novel's striking narratological innovations and attentiveness to socio-political change."

- 00:15:15 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So essentially what she's saying here is that the disruption in weather patterns during the time of *Persuasion*'s composition gives rise to possibilities of change and renewal, both politically, and in terms of narrative structure, narrative innovation. All of these canonical representations are really clearly attenuated to questions of environment, politics, and population, but they aren't texts that really directly represent the people who were, for example, starving to death.
- 00:15:45 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Those people are largely effaced by these existential questions that arise in the face of disaster. As we've grappled with, in this year in 2020, different sections of the population suffer the consequences of crises in different ways. So a farmer in France whose apricot crop failed is going to have a really different experience of 1816 than Lord Byron with his personal physician and pet bear in a Swiss Villa. [Kate laughs]
- 00:16:19 Kate Moffatt (co-host) That said, it isn't necessarily easy to find literature that grappled with this topic outside of the canon. This is, in part, because it was only in the twentieth century that the famine and disease that swept across the world was linked to the Tambora eruption and could therefore be understood as part of a larger global climate event. As David Higgins points out, "Tambora does not provoke a significant body of catastrophe literature by canonical writers working within Britain, for the obvious reasons that they were largely protected from its effects and that it was not widely reported."
- 00:16:52 Kate Moffatt (co-host) But even though the events of 1816 and 1817 were not obviously linked to the Tambora eruption, they *were* occurring against a backdrop of philosophical and scientific shifts that suggested events should be considered within the context of a larger scale. Climate and especially changes in climate and their causes began to be discussed in scientific and philosophical literature in the latter half of the eighteenth century.
- 00:17:13 Kate Moffatt (co-host) According to David Womble, Montesquieu theorized the relationship between climate and population as early as 1748, arguing in *The Spirit of the Laws* that the characteristics of populations were shaped by their climates. Gillian D'Arcy Wood talks about Benjamin Franklin theorizing that volcanic eruptions could cause changes

to the global climate in 1783–4, though Franklin’s speculations were dismissed at the time.

- 00:17:36 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And discussions about climate were also shaped by a growing sense of the scale of history. Noah Heringman, for example, has traced the emergence of geological science in the eighteenth century, which resulted in a new understanding of history in geological terms, which meant that the human became dwarfed in the face of “deep time.”
- 00:17:52 Kandice Sharren (co-host) While these large-scale concepts had largely theoretical (and theological) implications, specific, local instances of crisis that resulted from the Tambora eruption were visible and had pretty immediate effects on people throughout the world; as Olivia Murphy reminds us, “climate is a planetary phenomenon with myriad local consequences.” The kinds of writing that most evidently capture these local consequences are forms of writing that allow for immediate representation, things like meteorological records and newspaper reports.
- 00:18:24 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, for example, Alexis Harley has looked at the early meteorological accounts kept by London resident Luke Howard, whose records of the weather in London seem surprisingly unconcerned with the unusual temperatures he recorded in 1816 and 1817. Alongside eyewitness accounts of the Tambora eruption and a discussion of the Shelley-Byron circle’s writing that came out of 1816 and after, David Higgins focuses on the way periodicals represented the effects of the Tambora eruption.
- 00:18:50 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So he says that “They should be read as part of a broader public discourse about the so-called ‘distresses’ affecting Britain after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which were caused by a complex matrix of factors: high taxation; the post-war collapse of the coal, iron, and textile industries; agricultural foreclosures; unemployment; and the climatic conditions.”
- 00:19:14 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Higgins sets the calls for reform that appeared in William Cobbett’s *Two Penny Trash* and Leigh Hunt’s *Examiner* against the refusal of conservative papers like *The Courier* to acknowledge the possibility of systemic solutions to the intense poverty experienced by the lower classes in Britain during this time.
- 00:19:31 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And as an aside, it’s worth noting that, although Higgins is trying to kind of expand the scope of this discussion beyond the Shelley-Byron circle, and although the *Examiner*’s influence predates the Shelley-Byron circle by a number of years, Leigh Hunt’s association with its members has largely dominated discussions of his

newspaper. As a result, Higgins's focus on Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* continues to center canonical Romanticism because of these connections to the Shelley-Byron circle.

- 00:20:04 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Because newspapers and meteorological records offer relatively immediate commentary on local conditions and events, reporting on an event is likely to happen within a given date range. It means you can read through a newspaper or a meteorologist's journal in the weeks after a given event and be reasonably certain that you'll find something relevant. The WPHP's focus on books, broadly defined, makes things a bit trickier. While some of our findings are similarly immediate, published in 1817 and 1818, the others have a significant lag between composition and publication.
- 00:20:36 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Elizabeth Heyrick's pamphlet was written and published in 1817, while the crises of 1816 and 1817 were ongoing. Pamphlets usually aimed to comment on a contemporary issue, so were intended for immediate distribution; like Hunt's and Cobbett's newspapers, Heyrick used the current crisis to argue for structural reforms, in this case a minimum wage for the urban poor.
- 00:20:57 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Helen Maria Williams's *Letters on The Events which Have Passed in France* comment on the time period between the second restoration of the Bourbon monarchy and the book's publication in 1819. So it also had a fairly immediate focus and was designed to provide news and information quite immediately. Charlotte Caroline Richardson's poetry collection *Harvest* was also published in 1818, which is the year of the bumper crop that saw the end of this particular crisis.
- 00:21:27 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The reviewers of this episode actually very helpfully identified a notice of publication by subscription in the March 1818 issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* for *Harvest*, which gives us a much more precise date of its publication. Essentially, this means that the book was written and published before the 1818 harvest, which means that the optimistic representation of bounty that we find in its pages is anticipatory. And at the same time, its pervasive imagery of unpredictable weather and small disasters suggests a continued anxiety, will this year's harvest be successful?
- 00:22:05 Kate Moffatt (co-host) While both *Harvest* and *Letters On the Events Which Have Passed in France* saw fairly immediate publication, they were exceptions. Books overall, as result of genre and form, took longer to prepare for the press than pamphlets and newspapers, and therefore tended to have a more significant delay between composition and publication, which we see with the travel memoirs that we found. Frances Jane

Carey's *Journal of a Tour in France, in the Years 1816 and 1817* was published in 1823, six years after her trip.

- 00:22:32 Kate Moffatt (co-host) The author even acknowledges this delay in her preface, writing, “the publication of this journal has been delayed between four and five years by circumstances, an explanation of which would be uninteresting to the public” (which does, of course, make me want to know intimately these uninteresting circumstances). But also Jane Waldie Watts's *Sketches Descriptive of Italy in the Years 1816 and 1817, With a Brief Account of Travels in Various Parts of France and Switzerland in the Same Years* was published in 1820, three years after her trip.
- 00:23:01 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Delays could be even more substantial; it took twenty years before Mary Elizabeth Southwell, the Baroness de Clifford's *A Short Journal of a Tour, Made through Part of France, Switzerland, and the Banks of the Rhine in the Months of May, June, July and August, in 1817* appeared. It was published in 1837, which nudges it just outside the dates of the WPHP, so we won't talk about it in detail, but this gap of twenty years between the journey being discussed and its publication *did* lead us to hope for a more reflective consideration of the year's historical significance. But no! [Kate laughs]. Instead, it reads like a society report, complete with “A list of English visitors at Paris, in June 1817.” [Kate laughs]
- 00:23:46 Kate Moffatt (co-host) As we've already mentioned, the works most widely associated with the Year Without a Summer are canonical, and the WPHP, as a resource that seeks to account for women's involvement in print more broadly, offers the opportunity to move beyond the canon. Using the WPHP to search for works dealing with 1816 was not a particularly straightforward undertaking; rarely, if ever, do titles read “A book about the wild weather of 1816 and its direct impact on my life,” or “Daily processing in 1816: a memoir.”
- 00:24:17 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Most of the relevant canonical works don't explicitly deal with the Year Without a Summer, in either their contents or their metadata. As Amelia Dale traces in relation to *Emma* and the “potential ‘error’ describing apple trees in ‘blossom’ in June”, identifying how nineteenth-century climate conditions may have affected a novel requires really careful historical and, in this case, meteorological scrutiny; these kinds of effects will not be obvious to the casual reader.
- 00:24:42 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Because Shelley and Austen are canonical writers, They've been subject to that degree of scrutiny. We know quite a bit about their composition, including when and under what kinds of conditions they were created—but there isn't actually anything in their

metadata, other than the dates of publication, that suggests these works—*Emma*, *Persuasion*, *Frankenstein*—should be read in the context of events like those that shaped the Year Without a Summer.

- 00:25:04 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And it's worth noting that while publication dates can be helpful, they do not always have a direct relationship to date of composition. Northanger Abbey, for example, which was published at the same time as *Persuasion*, was actually written about twenty years earlier. So, how did we use the WPHP to find our works of interest for this episode?
- 00:25:22 Kandice Sharren (co-host) First, we considered that the books *about* 1816 would be very unlikely to have a *publication date* of 1816, so we searched for post-1816 titles in the database. The WPHP collects data up until 1836, so an advanced title search for publications from 1817 to 1836 provided us with twenty years of titles: 3606 titles, to be exact! This was too large a number for us to reasonably sort through, so we narrowed our search to the titles published in the years 1817 to 1820. This gave us 739 titles. Again, this number felt unwieldy. Excellent for the sheer volume of production involving women, but difficult to work through looking for thematically specific content.
- 00:26:12 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Using our advanced search and limiting the results to anything published in 1817 or later though, we began to search for keywords. Most of these search terms had very limited results and many of the results fell outside the scope of our interest. While everything published post-1816, particularly in the years directly following, could technically be read through a lens of global catastrophes, we were looking particularly for works that dealt directly or explicitly with 1816's disasters and those of the surrounding years.
- 00:26:47 Kandice Sharren (co-host) We tried the common words associated with the disasters we knew were taking place: "harvest," ... of poetry, "disaster," nothing, "catastrophe", still nothing, "plague," nothing, "typhus," nope, "typhoid," nope, "cholera," nope, and even "volcano" and "eruption", although, as we've mentioned, it wasn't until years later, many years later, that the cause of the Year Without a Summer was widely known. We also searched for "storm", nope, "terror", nope, and "weather", still nothing. Finally, we searched for "1816" and "1817"—not works published in these years, but works that actually contained them in their titles— and, finally, success! This is where our travel memoirs came from!

- 00:27:34 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Our research for this episode also led us to another keyword that brought us some results. I found the term, “the distresses” in David Higgins’s discussion of periodicals, which revealed it was a term frequently invoked to describe the state of Britain during this time. Searching for “distress”, as a keyword, led us to Elizabeth Heyrick’s pamphlet.
- 00:27:59 Kate Moffatt (co-host) As our search results indicate, there are limitations to using a database that is metadata, rather than content-focused, for thematic searches: titles, while in our metadata, are not always descriptive. A full-text corpus would likely yield more results (although those results would likely be no less unwieldy than our own). And a lot of poetry collections had generic titles like “Poems on Several Occasions.” Titles for fiction often feature the names of characters or fictional places—things that are ultimately meaningless unless you have actually read the work in question.
- 00:28:31 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And this contributes to many of our relevant results being travel memoirs—they often indicate both the time and place of travel in their titles, which renders them more readily visible in metadata searches. Publication data is useful, but must be considered carefully. As we’ve already pointed out, some of the works we ended up finding by searching for “1816” were actually published many years later. Searching by publication date can really only be as reliable as the searcher is thorough, and specificity (for example, looking for works only published in 1817) can actually be to the searcher’s detriment.
- 00:29:04 Kate Moffatt (co-host) It is also worth considering that meanings of words change over time and have particular connotations during particular periods, so keywords used for searches might not mean what you expect them to mean in titles. For example, when we searched for “distress”, it did give us Heyrick’s pamphlet, but it largely led us to works about women whose virtue is in peril [Kandice laughs].
- 00:29:26 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So even though we didn’t find a vast body of women’s writing about the Year Without a Summer hidden in plain sight, what we did find was fascinating and represents a range of genres and approaches to representing current events, from the explicitly political to the literary. So we’re going to talk about the most explicitly political works first, starting with Elizabeth Heyrick’s *Exposition of One Principle Cause of the National Distress* (self-published and sold by Harvey, Darton and Co. in 1817), and, then we’re going to talk about Helen Maria Williams’s *Letters on the Events which Have Passed in France* (published by Baldwin, Cradock and Joy in 1819).

- 00:30:05 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Elizabeth Heyrick has already turned up in one of our podcast episodes, our August episode, “Black Women and Female Abolitionists in Print”, where we discussed her as an uncompromising abolitionist whose 1824 pamphlet, *Immediate, Not Gradual, Abolition*, called for a boycott of West Indian products like sugar until emancipation was effected and demanded immediate emancipation of enslaved people.
- 00:30:30 Kandice Sharren (co-host) One of our RAs, Victoria De Hart, has also written a spotlight about her that you can find on the WPHP site. *Exposition* is an earlier example of her argumentative style that displays a similar awareness of economic issues on a larger scale. In it, she calls for a government mandated increase in wages as a way of at least mitigating the effects of intense poverty. And in this pamphlet, Heyrick links the distresses experienced in Northern England's manufacturing communities in 1816 and 1817 to the horrors of slavery, arguing that *both* are products of England's economic model.
- 00:31:09 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So about this, she says, “It is probable that even the horrors of the slave-trade may with justice be referred to ambition, to the love of distinction, rather than to any innate principle of cruelty in human nature. The love of distinction exerts itself in an endless variety of pursuits, but none with more extended and pernicious influence than that of trade in general.” Let us observe the influence of the spirit of trade in our own country, during the last fifty years.
- 00:31:29 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Before that period England might be considered as an agricultural, rather than a commercial country. It was then, comparatively, a poor and insignificant, but at the same time, a contented, a happy, and a virtuous country. In the same proportion as its agricultural was exchanged for a commercial character it became rich and powerful; its influence with foreign nations was extended; but simplicity, contentment, virtue and happiness, gradually deserted the land.”
- 00:32:10 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In other words, Heyrick would have us believe capitalism is the virus [both laugh]. So while Heyrick's pamphlet focuses on the distress being experienced by the poor in manufacturing towns, Helen Maria Williams's 1819 *Letters on the Events which Have Passed in France* outlined the political and religious changes that have taken place in France since the second restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1815, following Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo. Her wide ranging discussion covers attempts to integrate the Napoleonic code into the French legal system, as well as the ongoing persecution of Protestants in rural regions.
- 00:32:52 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And the main thrust of Williams' discussion is really that France has at last settled into the compromise of a constitutional monarchy after the chaos of the revolution

and the despotic rule of Napoleon. Her writing in 1819 is focused on celebrating the end of military involvement in France. And there's really only a brief reference to the difficulties being caused by the strange climate event late in the book. And when she represents it, she actually kind of represents it as an event that has already passed. And instead she's focusing on the new potential of France in 1818.

- 00:33:33 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, she writes, "Nature seemed also to be in sympathy with man, and decorated France with lavish gifts for the festival of deliverance. The harvest had been abundant beyond the hopes of the husbandman, and the vintage crowned with gay profusion this season of gladness. All was in strong and delightful contrast with the gloomy horror of the preceding year.
- 00:33:56 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The corn had been destroyed by incessant rains, and the half-famished peasants, unable to find either employment or bread, flocked in crowds to Paris, demanding alms in the streets, in a tone of importunity that told the passer-by to beware of refusal. But sedition and hunger, humiliation and despair, were all forgotten together in the joys of this auspicious moment. The husbandman no longer saw the tent of the stranger pitched in his field; and was no longer compelled to furnish subsistence for men who expressed their desires, or their discontent, in strange accents, and a confusion of tongues, all to him equally unintelligible."
- 00:34:39 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Both Heyrick and Williams are really unusual for women writers in this period, and their direct engagement with the political sphere reflects this. So, Heyrick was an independently wealthy and widowed woman who converted to Quakerism after her husband's death and devoted herself to philanthropic causes, especially the emancipation of slaves. And it's her financial freedom, and the fact that she's not married, that really allows her to participate in public debates beyond what was typical.
- 00:35:06 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So Williams was a bit different. She was a high profile writer who had been writing dispatches from France since 1790, which provided up to date political context and analysis. So she'd really been living in Paris and France and traveling around Europe for at this point almost thirty years. So this is quite late in her writing career. Her writing about France was primarily published in book form and her books really blurred the boundary between more journalistic reports and the popular travel memoirs genre.
- 00:35:40 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In the WPHP we've listed Williams' writing about France as political writing, but it's also included in for example, Benjamin Colbert's database of *British Women's Travel*

Writing, and in an article about his database's findings, Colbert treats her writing as straightforward travel memoir.

- 00:36:00 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Although the blurred space between political report and travel memoir may have provided Williams with an opportunity to comment on contentious political issues in the guise of a travel narrative earlier in her career, by the time she published the 1819 *Letters*, Williams was well established as a political commentator, and you can see this in the fact that she does not frame 1819 *Letters on the Events which Have Passed in France* in terms of her personal experience as a traveler at all. Instead, she writes from a relatively omniscient and reporterly perspective. She's giving you a kind of overview of the political situation and the developments, but she's not really in the story. She's not a figure in the story.
- 00:36:42 Kandice Sharren (co-host) That said, travel narratives by women weren't actually all that common either. It's not in print at least a particularly feminized genre. So Colbert has pointed out how "women accounted for only about 5 percent of travel books published in Britain and Ireland" between 1780 and 1840." And this is a significantly lower percentage than their participation in other genres, such as the novel, where men and women's books are fairly equal. In his recent book, *Stepping Westward*, Nigel Leask explores this further, and he kind of points out that it wasn't that women didn't travel or write about traveling, but that their accounts circulated primarily in manuscript.
- 00:37:29 Kandice Sharren (co-host) For example, he identifies only four travel accounts of the Scottish Highlands by women that were published between 1770 and 1830. By contrast, there are thirty-six known travel accounts of this region by women in manuscript. He also points out that women could really be subjected to harsh rebuke if they seemed to be too authoritative in their travel accounts, as Elizabeth Spence was in her 1817 travel memoir. So the content of Williams's 1819 *Letters on the events which have passed in France* forms a really sharp contrast with the actual travel memoirs we found that engaged with the *Year Without a Summer*, which Kate read and is going to talk about.
- 00:38:18 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Unlike the political writing we found, which is attempting something of a systemic approach, the travel memoirs offer individual and personal perspectives, which while very compelling, can sometimes eclipse the larger social and political events taking place at the time. For example, one of our results was Elizabeth Spence's *Letters from the North Highlands during the Summer 1816*, published in 1817.

- 00:38:40 Kate Moffatt (co-host) This is one of Spence's works mentioned by Leask and interestingly it's one of the only works we looked at in this episode that actually has scholarship available about it, which isn't unusual for works that we have in the WPHP. This work fell within our date range, and it appeared to be precisely what we were looking for—1816, summer, published very soon after the journey—but it actually almost completely ignores any of the disasters that we've identified as having taken place during 1816 and the surrounding years.
- 00:39:08 Kate Moffatt (co-host) At the very least, I expected some reference to the strange weather, but it's more preoccupied with sharing Scottish history and generally describing the land, the cities, and the people than reflecting on her specific journey at that particular moment in time. It's written kind of like a guidebook encouraging readers to visit Scotland rather than a record of her lived experience that would do something like capture peculiarities. The lack of documentation, of course, could have been the result of a number of circumstances. It could be because the author didn't personally experience or notice the changes, because she wasn't directly impacted by them, or even possibly because they didn't serve the purpose of her work.
- 00:39:45 Kate Moffatt (co-host) From works like *Highlands*, which Spence wrote, that contain no visible engagement with the year's crises, to the travel memoirs that are directly complaining about the terrible and unusual weather, there was a broad diversity of documentation taking place, which we see in the memoirs that we did choose to look at a little bit more closely today.
- 00:40:05 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Williams's travel memoir that Kandice just talked about, feels journalistic. Frances Jane Carey's *Journal of a Tour in France in the Years 1816 and 1817* and Jane Waldie Watts's *Sketches Descriptive of Italy in the Years 1816 and 1817*, in comparison, feel intimate. It's by considering their voices, their narration that is so inflected by both personality and by their status as tourists, that we begin to get at one of the questions at the heart of this episode: whose voices do we hear and have access to during moments of catastrophe and how are they mediated?
- 00:30:40 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Frances Jane Carey's *Journal of a Tour in France in the Years 1816 and 1817* was published in 1823 by Taylor and Hessey, and it includes in the preface that an effort “to be useful to succeeding travellers has induced the author to enter into many trifling and minute details, respecting the modes of conveyance, the charges at inns, the state of the roads, and the weather, which she is apprehensive may prove very uninteresting to the general reader.”

- 00:41:06 Kate Moffatt (co-host) We are perhaps not general readers, but we are very interested to see how Carey notes what we know are actually effects of the Tambora eruption. The descriptions she includes are largely in terms of how it impacted her travel. Her recounting of August 1816 includes that on one day, “the morning was beautiful, and we enjoyed the sunshine exceedingly after the cold wet weather we had so long experienced.”
- 00:41:31 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And in another, she writes, “we spent three weeks at Tours ... It rained every day for the first week: and was so cold on the 30th of August, that we had a large fire in the drawing room; afterwards it cleared up, and became extremely hot.” Her description of September 19, 1816 includes “the sky being very black, and the lightning vivid, we did not walk out; and in the morning the fog was so thick, that we could not take a view of the town till it was dissipated.”
- 00:41:59 Kate Moffatt (co-host) However, Carey does also include brief descriptions of the impact of this strange weather that she has recorded. But again, these are largely framed by her status as a tourist. The human impact is largely veiled. Instead of explicit descriptions of the people affected, she describes their crops. In August 1816, she notes “this garden of France abounds with fruit of all kinds. The season was unfavourable; but the green gage plums, for which it is famous, were delicious; the peaches, though very large and beautiful to the eye, were wanting in flavour; and the apricots had failed.” She also writes “the clover appeared to be very luxuriant: a small quantity is cut at a time, and brought to market for immediate use. We saw hay lying on the ground nearly spoiled by the continual rain...”
- 00:42:45 Kate Moffatt (co-host) We don't have much biographical information about Frances Jane Carey, which is the case for many of the authors in the WPHP. That's not unusual. But traveling with her husband and son suggests that they had the wealth to do so. This wealth is also suggested at the beginning of their travels, when she writes that they were looking to purchase a carriage to use while in France— can you imagine buying a car to use while traveling through a foreign country? We must take her status into consideration here. Her experiences of these years likely look very different from those who, for example, had their hay “spoiled by the continual rain” or had a failed apricot crop.
- 00:43:20 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Jane Waldie Watts, who wrote the other sort of true travel narrative that we're looking at today, was in a similar position. While there's limited information available about her as well, what can be found indicates that she married George Augustus Watts of Langton Grange. And this was following her travels, which she did as a single woman

with her sister. George Augustus Watts of Langton Grange is a man who is of a country house, which suggests a certain status.

- 00:43:45 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And this implies that Watts herself was of a similar class. Her book *Sketches Descriptive of Italy in the Years 1816 and 1817, with a Brief Account of Travels in Various Parts of France and Switzerland in the Same Year*, was published in 1820 by John Murray, and is perhaps the most explicitly personal of the works that we're dealing with today.
- 00:44:06 Kate Moffatt (co-host) There's a very delightful and ridiculous moment where she complains about this French man from Philadelphia that she meets, who is annoying in both languages. She says he was "bemoaning himself in French and English alternately" [Kandice laughs] because he hadn't gotten to see a pretty valley with the rest of the party, and how, "as he wanted no lack of self-conceit nor forwardness" [Kandice laughs], they had quite a lot of trouble getting rid of him—
- 00:44:29 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Relatable.
- 00:44:30 Kate Moffatt (co-host) She also shares—at least three times—how much she *loathes* getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning to catch boats, which is, I would argue, also relatable. [Kandice laughs]
- 00:44:41 Kate Moffatt (co-host) In a lot of ways, Watts's memoir is exactly what I expected to find when looking at records of 1816. Personal anecdotes aside, she records the strange weather regularly, especially when it impacts her travel. Early in the work she mentions that "though the weather had been extremely stormy for some time, we made a most prosperous passage; light and favouring gales wafting us across the Channel with a steady course." She also directly refers to the summer of 1816 as a cold one, calling it the "wintry summer of that year."
- 00:45:09 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And she, much like Carey, records the impact of the weather on the areas that she travels through. One memorable example is when she describes a village "almost in ruins, from the effects of a late dreadful overflow of the river, which had laid the whole country under water, carried off horses, cows, sheep, and corn; and drowned two poor women, who were busy in the cellars of the village at the time of the inundation."
- 00:45:35 Kate Moffatt (co-host) But unlike Carey, Watts also references her conversations with the people that she talks to on her travels. The quote we used at the beginning of this episode was from

this memoir and it begins to gesture to some of the responses to crises more specifically. The cause of the poor weather was unknown, but its effects and also the political upheaval following the Napoleonic wars were all keenly felt and the responses were more specific. Watts writes that the people of France are convinced that Napoleon will return and save them from poor crops and other disasters. It's a reaction that she seems to find mildly ridiculous. She spends much of her memoir talking about other people being ridiculous.

- 00:46:12 Kate Moffatt (co-host) But it's one that we find particularly interesting for its resonances with our current moment. Throughout the US election campaign, and the pandemic more generally, public debates have revolved around the expectation that our leaders can and should save us. Although what or who they're saving us from depends on who you ask. The urgency of this issue is largely a class-based one; Watts is able to poke fun at the French lower orders because she is less affected by the catastrophes that have ravaged their homes and their livelihoods.
- 00:46:43 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The political and travel writing that we found is similar to the reporting that David Higgins talks about, in that it is relatively explicit about its subject and when it was written. And it has a journalistic quality that records conversations with lower orders or the influence weather has on one's travel plans. Trying to identify non-canonical literary works was more difficult; as we discussed in relation to canonical works by Mary Shelley and Jane Austen, nothing in their metadata aside from publication dates suggested a link to the *Year Without a Summer*.
- 00:47:15 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Short of reading every single work of fiction or poetry published after 1816 in the database, how could we identify relevant works? Not easily. We only identified one through our date and keyword searches: Charlotte Caroline Richardson's *Harvest*, a collection of poems printed for the author in 1818 and sold by a consortium of booksellers. And what a find it was! These poems are agricultural *and* political, linking the end of the Napoleonic Wars to a plentiful harvest.
- 00:47:47 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The opening two-part georgic poem "Harvest" includes descriptions of abundance and joyful soldiers returning home after nine years of war, but it is also haunted by images of storms and frosts. Other poems in this collection are also kind of explicitly political in various ways. So, Richardson was one of many people to write an ... mourning the death of Princess Charlotte of Wales, the beloved daughter of the less popular Prince Regent. So she died in childbirth in 1817, and one of the poems in this volume is dedicated to her.

- 00:48:24 Kandice Sharren (co-host) More unusually, Richardson also includes a poem commenting on the Prince Regent's opening speech in Parliament in 1818. There's also a poem literally called "The Distressed Villagers," which recounts a local tragedy caused by a weather event; the poem announces that it was "Occasioned by the Loss of Twenty-Nine Fishermen, belonging to Runszvick and Slaiths, Yorkshire, in a Storm at Sea."
- 00:48:51 Kandice Sharren (co-host) This poem offers small portraits of the grief of local families, young and old. And it really kind of sets these losses alongside the poem mourning the death of Princess Charlotte, granting them greater significance. The author herself, Charlotte Caroline Richardson, came up in our first episode, on Jane Austen, as one of only four women in the database associated with Austen's first publisher, Thomas Egerton. So just to recap, Egerton was the proprietor of a military library and therefore a slightly unlikely publisher for a domestic novelist like Austen.
- 00:49:28 Kandice Sharren (co-host) However, the more political and even military at times, focus of Richardson's poetry makes a bit more sense. Richardson herself is a really, really fascinating figure. Her father was a clerk and after his death, her mother ran a small boarding school at Vauxhall. So she's a much, she occupies a position much lower on the class rung than many of the other writers we've encountered in this episode, whether canonical or not, and her relationship to publishing was really shaped by the annual, *The Ladies' Diary; or Woman's Almanack*, which ran from 1704 until 1840 and had a focus on science, mathematics, and natural history and phenomena such as eclipses.
- 00:50:15 Kandice Sharren (co-host) It also included witty exchanges of verse, which is actually how her parents met. In addition to her published works, Richardson along with her parents and two sisters, were frequent contributors and this periodical shaped Richardson's personal life as well as influencing her poetry. So her parents met through a flirtatious exchange in the pages of the periodical. As well, after her father's death, Richardson was sent away to live with an aunt.
- 00:50:45 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And after 10 years, she was finally able to regain contact with her mother by publishing a poem addressed to her in the pages of *The Ladies' Diary*. *The Ladies' Diary's* focus on practical science, mathematics, and calendar year, natural phenomena, manifests in Richardson's book in a few ways. Most obviously in its dedication to Charles Hutton, a mathematician who was also the editor of *The Ladies' Diary* between 1774 and 1818. So he would've been Richardson's editor.
- 00:51:20 Kandice Sharren (co-host) We also see the influence of *The Ladies' Diary* in the titular poem, "Harvest", which celebrates the end of the Napoleonic wars as an opportunity for agricultural renewal.

So in this poem, a harvest is interrupted by a sudden storm that causes the gleaners to flee in search of shelter. But quickly anxiety gives way to relief, when the storm is not as dramatic as feared. So Richardson writes, “The God of Harvest comes not to destroy! / Lightly the show’r descends: the thunder rolls / On the far distant shores ; the op’ning skies / In lovely azure glow ; and all around / The setting Sun a soften’d lustre throws. Refreshing breezes fly across the plains, / And dash the moisture from the drooping Corn. / Tis mildness all, and Nature smiles again In sweet serenity ; then sinks to rest.”

- 00:52:14 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So this resolution invites a reading of the poem as a hopeful way of looking forward to a new agricultural year, following two years of crop failures. However, this is far from the only instance of weather, especially destructive weather, that appears in the book. Two short poems, much later in the volume, called “Redbreast,” and “The Early Primrose”, represent a northern wind blasting through the scene. However, unlike in *Harvest*, these poems do not resolve with “Nature smil[ing] again / In sweet serenity,” but rather in small tragedies.
- 00:52:49 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In “Redbreast,” a robin appears at the speaker’s door in the midst of winter, and the speaker takes him in “Till warmer suns appear.” However, a local cat has an empty belly and other plans [Kate laughs]. The poem concludes with the robin being devoured and the speaker “weep[ing] o’er Robin’s tomb.” Likewise, “The Early Primrose” describes a flower whose “untimely bloom” “dares tempt yon frowning sky.”
- 00:53:15 Kandice Sharren (co-host) At the conclusion, the speaker links, “the driving show’r, the cruel storm / [that] Will soon thy lovely charms deform” to “Fate’s dire storm,” which “O’erthrew my joys, my pleasures quell’d, / With anxious cares this bosom fill’d, / And check’d it’s calm repose.” In both poems, a fragile symbol of spring appears out of season and suffers the consequence. However, while the primrose is merely battered to death by a storm, the robin is rescued from the cold only to encounter a new peril. While less direct than the poems mourning the deaths of the fisherman and the Princess of Wales, these poems together suggest a vulnerability to circumstance and an anxiety about the future crisis that will arise once the present one has been resolved.
- 00:54:07 Kate Moffatt (co-host) The deep-seated anxiety seeded throughout the poems in *Harvest* is a familiar one to us this year: you manage to bloom even though it’s cold, then a storm comes along and knocks you down. Richardson captures the psychological impact of living with crises continually in the background—especially large-scale crises like those related to

the climate. While Richardson comments on the deeply personal, the other writers that we have considered in this episode take a variety of other perspectives.

- 00:54:34 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Each one illustrates the degree of severity to which particular groups are impacted: Heyrick’s pamphlet communicates the economic effects of the abnormal weather on the urban poor and uses it to advocate for concrete government policy, Williams’s political dispatches speak to the state of France, and the travel memoirs by Watts and Carey underscore the buffer that exist between catastrophes and more privileged classes.
- 00:54:57 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So to return to the question of how women writers specifically responded to the catastrophic years between 1816 and 1818, the answer seems to be not in any unified way. This finding is a striking one for us, given that the social effects of the 2020 pandemic have disproportionately affected women, whose increased domestic duties have led to them leaving the workforce in record numbers. Of all the writers we looked at, only Charlotte Caroline Richardson represents the specifically gendered experience of disaster in her poem “The Distressed Villagers.”
- 00:55:29 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In it, she describes the grief of the widows and children of the twenty-nine drowned fisherman, and ends with a plea for those better off to provide financial aid to the families that have just lost their primary source of income. The absence of gendered commentary in the other works prompts us to think about who it is we’re hearing from. In most cases, those with the wealth and position to travel and with access to print.
- 00:55:58 Kate Moffatt (co-host) In many respects, in 2020 print remains a bastion of privilege, but this is an issue that current writers seem more interested in self-consciously investigating. In trying to identify writers and works that address our current moment, the two writers who immediately sprang to mind were Zadie Smith and Ali Smith, both of whom have already published books addressing the events of 2020.
- 00:56:18 Kate Moffatt (co-host) But some of the same questions arise: whose voices are we hearing, whose don’t we hear? What circumstances allow us to hear them? As successful writers both, Zadie Smith and Ali Smith are prestigious enough to produce something quickly and release it into the world through traditional publishing avenues; they can create and publish something without going through the lengthy process more typical of publication.

- 00:56:41 Kandice Sharren (co-host) But this is also a time in which less traditional forms of publication or more generally the platforms for sharing information are flourishing. Twitter, blogs, Instagram, and other digital avenues provide a space, if not always a guaranteed audience, for written reflection or processing. In this spirit, Kate and I will be sharing short reflection pieces of our own prompted by both our experiences this year and our work on this podcast episode, which finds value in the personal records and documentation that goes beyond the most frequently heard canonical voices. Go ahead, Kate.
- 00:57:18  [music playing]
- 00:57:28 Kate Moffatt (co-host) I have a friend who shares posts tagged as “daily processing” on her blog. The other day on Twitter, I saw a tweet that read: “The main thing I’ve learnt in 2020 is that background global catastrophe really decimates your attention span and short-term memory. I keep forgetting what i’m doing *while I’m doing it*.” (I can relate—I forgot I was making banana bread while halfway through making it a few weeks ago.) Another friend asked me recently, “How many sick days can I reasonably give myself this year in the name of being ‘gentle’ with myself when the actual issue is I can’t seem to remember how to function?”
- 00:58:07 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Since March of this year, I have crocheted no less than three queen-sized blankets and a cardigan; attempted NaNoWriMo (twice); baked countless loaves of banana bread; made homemade tortillas for the first time; made homemade pasta for the first time; hand-painted a dozen Christmas ornaments as gifts; created a blog specifically for writing about the steam that curls up from my coffee cup and how golden hour hits my bookshelf just right at eight o’clock in the evening in June; did cartwheels in my backyard every day for a week straight in July because I realized I couldn’t remember the last time I did a cartwheel;
- 00:58:39 Kate Moffatt (co-host) bought myself a Debussy music book with a great amount of trust in my single year of official piano lessons that I took at the age of nine; and painted a half dozen studies of works from my favourite artists. It has been, to say the least, a year of restless energy, and this restless energy of mine is finding itself made manifest in various creative endeavours. I am constantly eager to work with my hands, eager to produce, eager to translate this year’s cocktail of nervous energy—a combination of adrenaline, fear, and frustration—that is constantly running beneath the surface of my skin into something.
- 00:59:14 Kate Moffatt (co-host) But nothing I’ve created this year, if one were to look at this odd collection in fifty, a hundred, two hundred years, explicitly betrays its roots. That my blankets, whose



colours and shapes are inspired by the landscapes and topographies of places I've called home, are probably an instinctive response to the environmental crisis; that my blog about coffee and sunlight is probably an attempt to gasp for air during the lockdowns caused by the global pandemic.


- 00:59:43 Kate Moffatt (co-host) It is, as the tweet I quoted above, so aptly puts it, “background global catastrophe.” It is unnecessary to name it explicitly because it is obvious. Everyone knows the context of this year. The term “2020” will forever have connotations of ongoing and inescapable disaster. “What a 2020 last night was!” will undoubtedly make its way into vocabularies. But if this is the case for what I've produced, my endless streams of cartwheels, and my studies of famous paintings, and my painstakingly decorated Christmas ornaments and an ode to summer's golden hours all seemingly disconnected from 2020—might it also be the case for, say, the travel memoirs that we found?
- 01:00:22 Kate Moffatt (co-host) So too are the catastrophes of their period in the background of these authors' lives. Privileged enough to avoid direct or devastating impact, these women and I refer to disaster in distanced ways, only vaguely acknowledging its position on the periphery of our lives—but there is, when one looks, evidence of its constant presence and influence.
- 01:00:41  [music playing]
- 01:00:52 Kandice Sharren (co-host) My experience of this year has really been framed by the fact that I've taught some unlikely courses. Unlikely, at least for anyone who knows me. I began the year teaching a theory survey and am ending it with a twenty-first century literature class. As someone who tends to take a historicist approach, both of these presented some practical and conceptual challenges, which I responded to by seeking to ground both in contemporary events and asking students to consider how theory and literature can help us understand the immediate and the personal in a larger social and political context. From the beginning, there was no shortage of material.
- 01:01:34 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Across what is currently Canada, land defenders disrupted major supply and transit lines in January and February in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en resistance to the Coastal Gaslink Pipeline. In mid-March, Canadian universities shifted to remote delivery for the rest of the semester, and in a stroke of luck, maybe the only one of the year, the week I had planned on biopolitics and affect came after we'd moved online. Foucault's discussion of the right to life and death, as well as Clemence X. Clemantine's discussion of the cultural dominance of the couple form, felt newly

urgent amidst a pandemic that made more visible the inequalities between different populations and demanded populations exist within a narrowly defined ‘household.’

- 01:02:19 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Since September, I’ve been teaching remotely a twenty-first century course built around readings that engage explicitly with events contemporary to their composition and publication; from the start of the new millennium—remember how we all thought that computers would crash?—to 9/11 to the Ferguson protests and the emergence of Black Lives Matter.
- 01:02:40 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The last reading on the syllabus, which I was in the process of teaching while we were scripting this episode, is Ali Smith’s *Spring*, the third novel in her *Seasonal Quartet*, a project that tries to present an immediate and localized representation of contemporary events, including Brexit, climate change, and the refugee crisis, by closing the gap between when a manuscript is submitted and when the book is published. It turns out she’s whittled it down to six weeks. One of the major throughlines of this course has been the ubiquity of allusion and direct reference, to past events, as well as cultural touchstones and other works of art.
- 01:03:16 Kandice Sharren (co-host) It’s really highlighted for me how powerful the urge to look back, to reach out, to draw connections to other different-but-similar events is when confronted with a bewildering new reality. And, as it developed, that’s very much what this podcast episode became, in part inspired by the conversations I’ve been having with students all semester. In that spirit, we’re going to close this episode by juxtaposing Charlotte Caroline Richardson’s poem “Redbreast,” with some Ali Smith—a short passage from the most recent and final installment in the *Seasonal Quartet*, *Summer*, which speaks to systemic and personal failures amidst upheavals.
- 01:03:57 Kate Moffatt (co-host) First though, we want to turn briefly to how our experiences this year have shaped our understanding of the relationship between print, production and catastrophe. The creation of this podcast episode and of *The WPHP Monthly Mercury* podcast more generally, which aired its first episode in June 2020—occurred within the context of global disaster.
- 01:04:18 Kate Moffatt (co-host) It was, for us, a pandemic production: I had the opportunity to leave my job in retail to work as a Research Assistant in the late spring, and Kandice, who is a contract instructor, wasn’t teaching this summer, so we had the time and the resources to devote to the podcast’s creation, albeit time that was available to us due to our current positions, which, despite the privileges they offer—working from home, producing academic work—are also precarious.

- 01:04:41 Kandice Sharren (co-host) We tried to start this podcast in the summer of 2019. It didn't work because between my teaching schedule, and the conferences I was attending, and Kate moving provinces, we didn't have enough time. In the inevitable slowdown of a pandemic summer—was it even a summer?—and the restless energy that ensued, we finally did it.
- 01:05:00 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And part of how we did was through collaboration. Developing and scripting each episode becomes an ongoing conversation in which we discuss a topic from a variety of angles. The conversational mode of podcasting resists settled conclusions and encourages us to draw new connections between our objects of study and our lives—and many a scripting session has thus become part therapy. [Kate laughs]
- 01:05:25 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And that's something that this episode made us think about. The relationship between production and processing. We don't want to get too meta with this, but this episode was not easy to write. Inspired by our own weird summer, we wanted to talk about the 1816 Year Without a Summer—but it was impossible to do so without recognizing the frankly uncanny parallels to our own somewhat incomprehensible year. This episode required us to turn off the autopilot that seems to kick in on a daily basis so that we can keep functioning— and that meant engaging with all of the things that we've been avoiding.
- 01:06:00 Kate Moffatt (co-host) It required looking critically at the many disasters happening in the world in 2020 and their disparate impacts; it required acknowledging the precarity of our own positions, even as we recognize and appreciate the privileges that come along with them; but it has also allowed us to engage with and understand the historical writing that we've looked at today as its own form of processing.
- 01:06:20  [music playing]
- 01:06:31 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Now for a reading of Charlotte Caroline Richardson's "Redbreast":
- Cold blew the freezing Northern blast, / And Winter sternly frown'd ; / The flaky snow fell thick and fast, / And clad the fields around.
- Forc'd by the storm's relentless pow'r, / Embolden'd by despair, / A shiv'ring Redbreast sought my door, / Some friendly warmth to share.

- 1:06:54 Kandice Sharren (co-host) "Welcome, sweet Bird!" I fondly cried, / "No danger need'st thou fear, / "Secure with me thou may'st abide, /Till warmer suns appear.
- "And when mild Spring comes smiling on, / "And bids the fields look gay, / Thou, with thy sweet, thy grateful song / "My kindness shalt repay."
- Mistaken thought! But, how shall I / The mournful truth display? / An envious Cat, with jealous eye, / Had mark'd him as her prey.
- Remorseless wretch! her cruel jaws / Soon seal'd her victim's doom, / While I in silence mourn his loss,/ And weep o'er Robin's tomb. / So, oft in Life's uneven way, / Some stroke may intervene ; / Sweep all our fancied joys away, / And change the flatt'ring scene.
- 01:07:41  [music playing]
- 01:07:51 Kate Moffatt (co-host) From Ali Smith's *Summer*:
- "Then she'd told Iris—foolishly, her selfish self knows now— about Art and herself going to visit the detainees in the SA4A Immigration Removal Centre and how a clever and thoughtful young virologist being held indefinitely there had taken pains to explain to them, and this was back in early February, when nobody much was taking the virus seriously in England, about the dangerous-sounding virus that was beginning to take hold in various countries and had reached England via the airport right next to the Immigration Removal Centre they were sitting in now, from which the planes that took off over their heads made the room they were sitting in literally shake every few minutes, and the virus was apparently now also present in the city just down the road from here where they were about to go and stay for the night.
- 01:08:36 Kate Moffatt (co-host) He told them that if the virus happened to get into this centre he was being held in then all the detainees would catch it because the windows are make of a combination of perspex and metal bars, none of them openable to the outside world, the only air in there the recycled old air filtering through the place's ventilation system. Iris's eyes had lit up. They'll quietly let them out, she said. They won't want detained people dying and becoming a bad publicity story."
- 01:09:05  [music playing]

- 01:09:15 Kandice Sharren (co-host) This has been the seventh episode of *The WPHP Monthly Mercury*. We will be releasing an episode every third Wednesday of the month. If you're interested in learning more about what we discussed today, we've compiled a list of suggestions for further reading and links to some relevant entries in the WPHP in a blog post that you can find at womensprinthistoryproject.com.
- 01:09:36  [music playing]
- 01:09:47 Kandice Sharren (co-host) [outtakes] [laughs] There's so much lag going on.