



The Women's Print History Project

The Witching Hour, *The WPHP Monthly Mercury*

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Music by MKzing, "Bells with Crows"; Alexander Kennard, "Creepy Horror Music"; Ignatius Sancho, "Sweetest Bard," *A Collection of New Songs* (1769), played by Kandice Sharren

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The Witching Hour

Kate Moffatt and Kandice Sharren



“By the pricking of my toes,
Something wicked that way goes!”

from Alethea Lewis’s *The Nuns of the Desert, or The Woodland Witches* (1805)

In last October’s episode, “*Of Monks and Mountains!!!*” Kate and Kandice each read a gothic novel found in the WPHP, and it was so much fun that we simply had to do it again. For Season 2, Episode 5, “The Witching Hour”, we read books about witches — almost every book that mentions witches in the title in the WPHP, in fact! (There are only five.)

But within that small sample, we found a full spectrum of representations of witches and witchcraft, from the fantastical (and silly) woodland witches in Alethea Lewis’s *The Nuns of the Desert* (1805), to Joanna Baillie’s spine-tingling play, *Witchcraft* (1836), set against the backdrop of the Scottish witch hunt—and everything in between.

Join us for the fifth episode of Season 2, “The Witching Hour,” to learn more about why we only found five titles, what those titles told us about the role of witchcraft in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cultural imagination, and (most importantly) which title we awarded the coveted label of “bonkers.” But be warned—recording this episode gave Kate nightmares.

Acknowledgements

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Season 1, Episode 5: "*Of Monks and Mountains!!!*"

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The Ragged Uproar: Or, The Oxford Roratory (title)

Plotwell, Joan (person, author)

The Witch, and the Maid of Honour (title)

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Donalda, or the Witches of Glenshiel (title)

Young, Mary Julia (person, author)

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00:00:00  [spooky music playing]

00:00:11 Kate Moffatt (o-host) “Now comes the fearful consummation! Her arts, her allurements, her seeming beauty, her glamour, and her power,—what will they all amount to when the noon of this day shall be past? a few black ashes, and a few scorched bones.—Fye upon these cowardly thoughts,— this sinking confidence! Revenge is sweet; revenge is noble; revenge is natural; what price is too dear for revenge?—

00:00:40 Kate Moffatt (o-host) Why this tormenting commotion? To procure false evidence for the conviction of one whom we know or believe to be guilty,—is this a sin past redemption? No; it is but the sacrifice of truth for right and useful ends. I know it is; reason says it is; and I will be firm and bold, in spite of human infirmity.

00:01:03 Kandice Sharren (co-host) ‘Yes, dearest; thou art very bold. There is not a cloven foot, nor a horned head of them all, wickeder and bolder than thou art.’

00:01:14 Kate Moffatt (o-host) ‘What brings thee here?’

00:01:16 Kandice Sharren (co-host) ‘To be in such noble company.’

00:01:19 Kate Moffatt (o-host) ‘What dost thou mean by that?’

00:01:21 Kandice Sharren (co-host) ‘Every word hath its meaning, Lady, though every meaning hath not its word, as thou very well knowest. I am great; thou art great; but the greatest of all stands yonder.’

00:01:37 Kate Moffatt (o-host) ‘What dost thou point at? I see nothing.’



00:01:43 Kandice Sharren (co-host) ‘But thou wilt soon, dearest. The master we both serve is standing near us. His stature is lofty; his robe is princely; his eyes are two flames of fire. And one stands behind him, like a chieftain of elrich degree.—But why is he thus? Can no power undo that hateful noose? It wavers before my eyes so distractingly!’

00:02:12 Kate Moffatt (o-host) ‘Thou art, indeed, distracted and visionary. There is nobody here but ourselves.’

00:02:19 Kandice Sharren (co-host) ‘The master of us all is waiting yonder; and he will not sink to his nether court again till the fair lady is with him.’

- 00:02:29 Kate Moffatt (o-host) ‘Oh, I understand thy moody fancy now. The master thou meanest is waiting for Violet Murrey.’
- 00:02:38 Kandice Sharren (co-host) ‘Yes, dearest, if he can get her. If not, he will have some one else, who is worthy to bear him company. He must have his meed and his mate: he will not return empty-handed, when a fair lady is to be had.’”
- 00:02:56 Kate Moffatt (co-host) From Joanna Bailie’s *Witchcraft*, 1836.
- 00:03:01 🎵 [spooky music playing]
- 00:03:12 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Hello and welcome to *The WPHP Monthly Mercury*, the podcast for *The Women’s Print History Project*! The WPHP is a bibliographical database that collects information about women and book production during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. My name is Kandice Sharren—
- 00:03:34 Kate Moffatt (co-host) and I’m Kate Moffatt—
- 00:03:35 Kandice Sharren (co-host) and we are long-time editors of the WPHP, and the hosts of this podcast. This season, we have some exciting special guests to interview, new research to share, and more stories to tell. Join us every third Wednesday of the month to learn more about the history of women’s involvement in print.
- 00:03:52 🎵 [music playing]
- 00:03:53 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In last year’s October episode, we celebrated Halloween by taking on a tour of the gothic as it is represented in the WPHP, pausing to read a translation of Elisabeth Guenard’s nineteenth-century bro comedy in gothic guise [Kandice laughs], *The Three Monks!!!*, and Catherine Cuthbertson’s Radcliffe knock-off, *Romance of the Pyrenees*, both of which were published in 1803.
- 00:04:28 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And we had such a good time, honestly, that this year we decided to carry on the tradition, but with a magical twist: we’re reading books about witches and bringing back a little fan-favourite segment, well, I mean, it’s my favourite too [Kandice laughs] but, “Kate & Kandice Summarize Long, Weird, & Occasionally Wonderful Early Nineteenth-Century Gothic Novels in 10 Minutes or Less”!)
- 00:04:49 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Although I will also be summarizing a play this year! And no promises about the whole ten-minute thing [both laugh]. So, to find those books, we took to the WPHP

title search, looking for titles that contained ‘witch’ and ‘witches’ to see if any of them looked appealing—and we only found 5 results in total (4 with digitizations), so we decided to just read them all.

- 00:05:18 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Before we get into what those books are, we’d like to take a minute to talk about why we only found 5. To do that, we’re going to need to revisit the definition of the ‘gothic’ that we used last year.
- 00:05:31  [music playing]
- 00:05:38 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, in the 1790s, what we would now call gothic fiction exploded in popularity, in large part because of Ann Radcliffe’s modifications to the genre. Often in the eighteenth century the origins of the gothic novel are traced to Horace Walpole’s the 1764 novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, which was originally published as a supposedly found manuscript that had been translated that outlined the history of a castle in Italy.
- 00:06:06 Kandice Sharren (co-host) However, people picked up on this, modified it, and in the late 1770s Clara Reeve published *The Old English Baron*, which was actually first published as *The Champion of Virtue*, so it had a couple of different titles. This text rewrote *The Castle of Otranto* providing rational explanations for most of the supernatural events that take place in it, and this is something that Ann Radcliffe picked up on in the 1790s.
- 00:06:35 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, her novels really focused around castles, creepy things happening, but creepy things happening that always find some kind of rational explanation down the road. E.J. Clery has talked about the supernatural explained as a way for women specifically to write frightening gothic stories while avoiding accusations of excess, although imitators would later experience backlash of their own.
- 00:07:07 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In this episode, we’re mostly going to focus on works that spawned from this Radcliffian gothic. And the tropes that are common to Radcliffe’s novels appear a lot. So, in addition to the supernatural explained, we are going to see things like orphans, castles, monks, banditti, etc.
- 00:07:28  [music playing]
- 00:07:34 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I sound so full of vim and vigor, what happened? [both laugh]. So in that summary, you’ll notice that I didn’t mention witches, which stood out to us because witches and witchcraft are things that we do strongly associate with the gothic. The fact that witches were not a major trope is born out by our search results.

- 00:07:58 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Remember how we said that ‘witch’ and ‘witches’ only brought up 5 results in the WPHP? Here are the results for some other gothic motifs: both ‘tower’ and ‘monk’ or ‘monks’ came up with 22 results. Each ‘abbey’ has 136 results and there are 8 titles that name ‘banditti’ in them.
- 00:08:20 Kate Moffatt (co-host) What! There are more titles about banditti than witches! I think I know what we have to read next year.
- 00:08:27 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I already spent four long volumes being held hostage by banditti in *Romance of the Pyrenees* last year [Kate laughs]. Please do not make me read about the banditti again.
- 00:08:41 Kate Moffatt (co-host) But you’ve had more than enough fun with witches this year. I think it’s my turn to pick, honestly [Kandice laughs]. But without further ado, here are the titles, our witchy witchy titles, that we found and read this year. Get ready to guess which one received the coveted label of ‘bonkers’! [Kandice laughs] First off, we have an anonymous work attributed to the pseudonym Joan Plotwell in 1754 called:
- 00:09:08 Kate Moffatt (co-host) *The Ragged Uproar, or The Oxford Roratory: a new dramatic satire; in many scenes, and one very long act., in which is introduced the A-la-mode system of Fortune-telling. Originally plann’d by Joan Plotwell; and continued by several truly eminent hands, well vers’d in the art of designing. The whole concluding with an important scene of witches, and fortune-tellers; a long jumbling dance of politicians; and an epilogue spoken by Mary Squires, &c. flying on broom-sticks.*
- 00:09:34 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The 1799 novel, which was also anonymous, *The Witch, and the Maid of Honour*.
- 00:09:40 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Alethea Lewis’s 1805 *The Nuns of the Desert, or the Woodland Witches*.
- 00:09:45 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Mary Julia Young’s *Donalda, or the Witches of Glenshiel*, which was also published in 1805.
- 00:09:53 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And finally, another anonymous title published by Ann Lemoine in 1810, *The Witch of Rona*, which is the one we didn’t actually end up having a digitization of, so we couldn’t read it.
- 00:10:04 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In addition to the ones that came up in our search results, I encountered while researching Romantic-period representations of witchcraft, one more: Joanna Baillie’s play, *Witchcraft* [Kate laughs], which was published in the 1836 collection simply titled *Dramas*.

- 00:10:22 Kandice Sharren (co-host) We like our straightforward titles, Joanna Baillie! Even though this one didn't come up in keyword searches because the names of the plays that are contained in it do not appear in its metadata, I decided to read it because I have had quite frankly, terrible luck in the books I've pick for these episodes [both laugh], and I thought Joanna Baillie might be able to deliver the goods. Spoiler: she did. I am so excited to talk about this play.
- 00:10:51 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Now that we've read them all, we can say (or almost all of them), we can say that these works exist on a spectrum. One that we've termed as being from silly to serious, with some titles representing a magical or seemingly magical world in which witches protect the innocent and the virtuous and others that are exploring the history of witch trials and the women who are accused of witchcraft.
- 00:11:15 Kate Moffatt (co-host) We aren't actually going to talk about *The Ragged Uproar*, or *The Oxford Roratory* because it turns out it's this really specific political satire that was such an outlier that we decided to let sleeping witches lie. So, on this spectrum, at the silliest, one could even say the most bonkers, we have (drumroll, please), *The Nuns of the Desert*, or *the Woodland Witches!*
- 00:11:40 Kandice Sharren (co-host) It was closely followed by the pseudo-*Macbeth* sequel, *Donalda or the Witches of Glenshiel*, which I did think was going to be the winner until Kate told me about the flying cats and talking ape in *Nuns of the Desert* [Kate laughs]. On the other end of the spectrum, the most serious, was the genuinely chilling *Witchcraft* by Joanna Baillie, which we read and excerpt from at the beginning of the episode.
- 00:12:04 Kate Moffatt (co-host) As someone who doesn't thrive in October, I think we read the works we were meant to read. I think it was fate.
- 00:12:14 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Kate, do you not like October? I'm appalled.
- 00:12:17 Kate Moffatt (co-host) I have nightmares in October [Kandice laughs]. For an entire month, every year, nightmares. And that month is October.
- 00:12:23 Kandice Sharren (co-host) But October is magical. October is great. October has witches and horror movies, and more witches. And on the topic of witches, Kate, I think we should really start by discussing the *Nuns of the Desert!* You texted me so many times about what was happening in this novel while you were reading it [Kate laughs]. And I'm excited to finally hear the whole story. [Kandice laughs]

- 00:12:47 Kate Moffatt (co-host) All right, fine. It begins innocently enough with a monastery, the Convent of the Desert, near which a glorious estate, named Ivy Tower, is owned by an old bachelor named Hayes. Mr. Hayes had two female cousins who he treated as his own children: Eliza and Beatrice. To put it bluntly: Eliza was good and Beatrice was bad [both laugh], this is what the book tells us! Upon Mr. Hayes' death, Eliza and her husband, Mr. Blenheim, being his relation on his father's side, is set to inherit Ivy Tower,
- 00:13:21 Kate Moffatt (co-host) and so begins the conflict that is responsible for nearly every ridiculous thing that takes place in this two-volume novel. Beatrice (and her husband, Mr. Selwyn) are absolutely nuts for Ivy Tower. But they don't inherit it until Eliza and her husband and any children they may have die [both laugh]. So when Mr. Hayes dies, the Blenheims and their two children, Jack and Aurora, move into Ivy Tower; the Selwyns and their three children, William, Sophia, and Emily, move into a nearby estate, Beech Grove.
- 00:13:54 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And they're super bitter about it. Mrs. Selwyn is *always* bitter, though. She sends her two daughters off to the convent of the desert because they're both very good, very lively, very bright, but most importantly, very beautiful. So extremely Snow-White's-evil-stepmother of her [Kandice laughs]. William is allowed to stay at home though, because he is, alas, his parents' son [laughs].
- 00:14:15 Kate Moffatt (co-host) So, he's a very rotten apple [Kandice laughs]. In the meantime, the Blenheims have a really rough go of it, actually. In a single week, their son Jack dies of an inflammation of the lungs and then their daughter Aurora drowns in the river at the bottom of the garden at Ivy tower.
- 00:14:32 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Oh no!
- 00:14:32 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Right. So the Blenheims are literally struck ill with grief and their doctor recommends they go abroad. So the Selwyns, selfless as they are [Kandice laughs], offer so kindly and generously to take over stewardship of their beloved Ivy Tower and move in with their son, William. Fast forward a few years. The Blenheims don't come back, they're assumed dead or lost. No correspondence has been received.
- 00:14:55 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Nothing's been heard of, or from them. And the Selwyns are out here like dude, "we won!" Ivy tower's certainly theirs; they're celebrating, of course, we're only about a quarter of the way through volume one. So, hold on to your pants [Kandice laughs]. At some point during this period, twin brothers Ferdinand, who I have been

affectionately calling ‘Ferdie’ in my head the entire time [both laugh], and Horatio, who is affectionately called ‘Hores’ in the book, Congreve arrive on scene.

- 00:15:26 Kate Moffatt
(co-host) Their mother was Mr. Selwyn’s half-sister and she died. So he’s caring for them until they come of age and can receive their fortunes, which Selwyn is already scheming to take away from them [Kandice laughs] by billing them for education and boarding and the like. At the convent, meanwhile, Sophia and Emily Selwyn make new friends, the sisters Lavinia and Selina. They are, the Abbess is told in secret, the illegitimate children of a duke and must take the veil so as not to upset the political landscape of the entire country.
- 00:15:52 Kate Moffatt
(co-host) They’re also beautiful and bright and lively. So the four immediately of course become fast friends. The two elder sisters, Sophia and Lavinia, and the two younger, Emily and Selina. Fast forward another few years. Sophia and Emily invite Lavinia and Selina to join them for a visit home to Ivy Tower and many VIEs (very important events) [Kandice laughs] take place during this visit.
- 00:16:14 Kate Moffatt
(co-host) The first VIE: Sophia and Lavinia meet Horatio and Ferdie. Everyone falls in love pretty much immediately. William, loser that he is, cannot decide if he’s more enamoured with Lavinia or Selina, because he’s gross. And Mr. Selwyn is also super enamoured with Lavinia, which is extra gross. The second VIE is that the young ladies have a lot of fun and Lavinia and Sophia are newly in love with Ferdie and Horatio.
- 00:16:41 Kate Moffatt
(co-host) So they start wondering if maybe the monastic life is actually not for them. And the Selwyns are not pleased. VIE number three, is that the witches finally enter the scene. The entire group decides to visit the Woodland witches. These three women who are well-known in the village for their strange and magical fortune-telling abilities, but who have very ‘normal’ names: Margaret, Rachel, and Anna.
- 00:17:04 Kate Moffatt
(co-host) The Woodland Cottage, where they live, is described over like a dozen pages and has a necromantic parlour and a “quinquangular” board hanging on the wall [Kandice laughs], which if you needed to Google that like me, means a five-pointed frame. The narrator actually manages to use the word more than once, if you can believe it [Kandice laughs]. The experience of going and getting their fortunes told involves the following: many cats with wings, talking apes.
- 00:17:27 Kate Moffatt
(co-host) Well, one anyway; when Selwyn knocks on the door and asks for the master of the house, the ape is like “master? There’s no master here, just a mistress, and she’s meeting with the daughters of Erebus (the god of deep darkness) right now, she’ll be

right out“ [Kandice laughs]. There’s a very rude gray parrot. When Mr. Selwyn walks past him, he says “By the pricking of my toes, something wicked that way goes!”

00:17:49 Kate Moffatt (co-host) and Selwyn is deeply offended, even though it’s true [Kandice laughs]. There’s a talking dog named Brimo. There are half a dozen small wizards. There’s a very grumpy Hecate. Iris, goddess of the rainbow, delivers some mail and it turns out it’s the group’s fortunes in paper form. And they’re told they cannot open or read their fortunes until they go home.

00:18:09 Kate Moffatt (co-host) So of course they go home and they read their fortunes. And the Selwyns are absolutely horrified to discover that all of their evil schemes are in there: to make their daughters become nuns so their son’s fortune won’t be impacted, trying to steal the fortunes of the Congreve twins, etc etc etc. They have a lot of evil plans. They’re very evil. Which brings us to Very Important Event number four, which is the Selwyns hatch another very evil plan.

00:18:33 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I’m so surprised.

00:18:34 Kate Moffatt (co-host) This one involves luring Sophia and Emily to their mother while plying the Congreve twins with oodles of champagne, so that Mr. Selwyn and William can lure the sisters Lavinia and Selina, respectively, into little hidden areas of the garden.

00:18:49 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Oh!

00:18:50 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Yeah, it sounds, it’s exactly as bad as you think it is [both laugh]. Selina thinks that she’s in love with William because William is the brother of her best friend. So she’s like, he must be good, even though he’s not, and he takes full advantage, but Emily and Sophia appear, thank goodness, and start trying to save her and William threatens to kill himself, which seems to be a thing that happens, that happened in three months like four times.

00:19:11 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And he declares his ardency for Selina that he loves her so very much. And Emily, his sister, says to him, and I quote, “Fiddle faddle with your faithfulness and ardency” [both laugh]. And so Selina is saved. Lavinia, meanwhile, in a different part of the wilderness is attempting to fight off Mr. Selwyn, and she is not having a good time.

00:19:30 Kate Moffatt (co-host) So she screams and the Congreve twins who, as it turns out, aren’t so easily drunk under the table as all that, hear her and Horatio manages to find her, knock out

Selwyn, drag her onto a horse and take her to the convents so that she'll be safe. Selwyn wakes up. He's really unimpressed. He goes back inside and declares that Lavinia and Horatio tried to murder him [Kandice laughs], and they send Selina back to the convent because her sister is a supposed murderer. And surprise! They end up getting reunited, which is great.

- 00:20:00 Kate Moffatt (co-host) A lot of really ridiculous things happen at the convent. Lavinia receives a really rude letter from Sophia, which makes her ill; the priest on orders of the duke who visits every year and demands his daughters become nuns immediately, gives her "cold water and fresh air" to try and let nature do away with her naturally [Kandice laughs], but obviously giving her fresh air actually helps her get better, which is very funny.
- 00:20:21 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Everyone was like, "why is he trying to kill her? He's giving her all this fresh air" [both laugh]. Anyways, there are multiple ceremonies where they attempt to make the sisters nuns. Every single one is interrupted [Kandice laughs]. First by the building shaking, second by thunder and lightning and a voice that yells "she is not thine, but mine!" [Kandice laughs]. And the third is interrupted by a talking Virgin Mary painting, at which point the sisters disappear, spirited away by a ghost. [Kandice laughs]
- 00:20:36 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Back at Ivy Tower with Emily and Sophia, Ferdinand explains what actually happened. So they're eager to go back to the convent to see their friends, but their father secretly sneaks them off to a *different* convent where they're told to become nuns immediately. They say "no, thanks."
- 00:21:00 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And they're locked away until one night they manage to tie up the woman who's watching them and escape out the window. At this point, the book takes us back to Woodland Cottage where the witches live, and surprise of all surprises, everyone is there. We've got Lavinia and Selina. We've got Emily and Sophia and we've got Horatio and Ferdinand. Now we're also at the end of volume one.
- 00:21:19 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And you might be sitting here like Kate, how are you possibly also going to sum up volume two and stay within any kind of time here? [Kandice laughs]. Well, the very end of volume one involves a man named Donald Veerman visiting the Woodland Cottage and admitting to being basically like a very sneaky lawyer guy who has worked for Mr. Selwyn for many, many years.
- 00:21:37 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Oh, lawyers! [both laugh]

- 00:21:40 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And he has a letter in which he admits to all of the atrocities that both he and the Selwyns committed. He's going to swear to its truth in front of a judge tomorrow, but first he's going to read it aloud to this group so they know what's what. And this letter does, as many a letter at the climax of an eighteenth-century novel does, reveals all. I won't bore you with every detail because it is a very, very long letter, but here are the important bits. [Kandice laughs]
- 00:22:03 Kate Moffatt (co-host) There is actually no such thing as magic. The little wizards and Iris, goddess of the rainbow, are mechanical puppets made by Rachel's husband. The talking animals are actually just Margaret using ventriloquism [Kandice laughs]. The fortunes are accurate because they spoke to a trusted servant of the family during their visit. All of the wild stuff that happened at the convent was actually the witches again because it turns out there's a secret passage that runs between their cottage and the monasteries.
- 00:22:24 Kandice Sharren (co-host) [laughs]. Of course there is.
- 00:22:25 Kate Moffatt (co-host) [laughs]. Of course there is. Lavinia is actually Aurora Blenheim, who they thought drowned. She did not die. She was kidnapped by Donald Veerman and the Selwyns. And she was sent off to live with Donald Veerman's parents so that the Selwyns would inherit Ivy Tower. They're obsessed. Turns out The Blenheims themselves are not actually dead or lost. They've just been stuck in Constantinople! [Kandice laughs]
- 00:22:51 Kate Moffatt (co-host) They were captured by Turkish corsairs during their travels. And then the "lady was confined in the seraglio, and the gentleman, who passed for her brother, employed in the gardens" of a Grand Signior. And they could only communicate by way of a very friendly eunuch [Kandice laughs]. Mr. Blenheim was like, "all right, let's bribe the Turkish ambassador so we can go home." And he wrote to Selwyn to be like, "dude, sell my stuff."
- 00:23:10 Kate Moffatt (co-host) So we have enough money for the ambassador, but Selwyn just ignored it. So they're still in Constantinople [both laugh] and the Selwyns have known that they've been there the whole time. It's quite a letter. Veerman shares it with Worship Wilmot, who believes him, and Worship Wilmot figures out how to save the Blenheims and the Blenheims come to stay with the Wilmots and Aurora is reunited with their parents and they announce to the Selwyns that they're back by sending them a dinner invitation, which I think is rather iconic of them actually. [both laugh]
- 00:23:37 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Worship Wilmot confronts the Selwyns with all of their proof of their bad behavior. They give everything back and they're super bitter about it, which is extremely on

brand [Kandice laughs], and Horatio and Aurora get married and Sophia and Ferdie get married. And Emily and Selina are best spinster friends and everyone lives happily ever after. And the author writes an afterword about ventriloquism. The end.

- 00:23:59 Kandice Sharren (co-host) It is so funny to me now, hearing you describe this, that I thought I had lucked out with the bonkers book when I was reading *Donalda, or the Witches of Glenshiel*, which just doesn't even compare. It's basically just a sequel to *Macbeth* in which an orphaned girl discovers she's an heiress whose parents were murdered by her guardians. And eventually she marries this Scottish Laird of her dreams, but *crucially* only after she finds out who her parents are, so she knows she won't accidentally commit incest. [Kate laughs]
- 00:24:31 Kandice Sharren (co-host) There will be no Greek tragedy in the Highlands, thank you very much [Kate laughs]. The only truly bonkers thing that happens is that the father-figure guardian murders his wife in order to marry Donalda, and then goes on an increasingly unhinged killing spree, leading her to exclaim:
- 00:24:49 Kandice Sharren (co-host) “When he was a father to me, he was kind and good—but now, now he wants to marry me, he murders every body!” [Kate laughs]. Oh, and the witches are real and periodically show up to recite cryptic, rhyming prophecies in verse at Donalda, or to torment the evil characters [Kate laughs]. So, compared to yours, Kate, it was a totally normal reading experience.
- 00:25:10 Kate Moffatt (co-host) I mean, it was fun to think about how this work was in some ways exactly what I've, in two years of reading a single novel for the WPHP, come to expect from eighteenth-century gothic-ish novels in the WPHP. Monasteries, towers, hidden passageways, revealed parents and children [Kandice laughs]. But in other ways it was *so* wildly different from what I expected; I'll be honest, the flying cats and the talking dog threw me a little.
- 00:25:40 Kate Moffatt (co-host) For a portion of the first volume, I really felt like I was reading a modern fantasy novel [Kandice laughs], but I mean, given that it ended up explaining all of the magic away, I did almost question if it was still bonkers. I don't know. It was so thoroughly providing a rational explanation for everything. There's an afterword about ventriloquism for goodness sake [both laugh]. But that kind of intensive over-explanation is also maybe bonkers.
- 00:26:09 Kate Moffatt (co-host) It did start to really feel like it was a very self-aware parody of the explained supernatural trope that shows up in gothic novels during the period, everyone and all the explanations, even—they were so normal. They were so insistent that everything

could be rationalized. The most ridiculous thing was the ventriloquism afterword.
[both laugh]

- 00:26:33 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I mean, that's pretty ridiculous [both laugh]. So, Kate, while you were immersed in the delightful and strange and ultimately extremely rational nuns of the desert [Kate laughs], I went on a deep dive into seventeenth-century witchcraft trials in England and Scotland with these strangely plotless anonymous 1799 novel *The Witch and The Maid of Honour* and Joanna Baillie's absolutely spine-tingling play, *Witchcraft*. I have a lot to say about both of them. So I'm so sorry in advance—this is going to take us a little while.
- 00:27:10 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Which one would you like to start with, Kandice?
- 00:27:13 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I think we should go in chronological order, which conveniently also fits with our spectrum of silly to serious [Kate laughs]. So, *The Witch and The Maid of Honour* begins with the death of Elizabeth I, which leaves her maid of honor, Isabella, free to finally marry her very patient lover, Lord Harrington. [Kate laughs]
- 00:27:35 Kandice Sharren (co-host) However, the ascension of James I to the English throne is kind of a bummer. It leaves them bored because he's just not as cultured as Elizabeth was [Kate laughs]. So they give up on court life and retreat with their four children to the Harrington country estate, Combe Abbey, which is in the wilds of Coventry, which takes three days to get to, apparently [Kate laughs]. An abbey, you say? Must be about to get gothic.
- 00:28:00 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And for a while it seems like it might. Their servant, Bridget, hears a terrifying story about a nun walking the grounds from the gardener and the children contrive to hear it. But their mother, Isabella, interrupts them before it gets going. And we, the readers, never get to find out about this mysterious and terrifying nun.
- 00:28:20 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Instead, Isabella tells her children her life story, which mostly centers around her childhood companion, Matilda, who was the legitimate offspring of a Lord by his secret wife raised by Isabella's parents. Matilda was beautiful, smart, and accomplished, but after Isabella's parents died and Isabella was summoned to court to work as a courtier, Matilda had to go live in the household of another family. And while she was there, she just disappeared.
- 00:28:48 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Everyone assumed that she ran off with the son of the woman she was living with because he was madly in love with her. But Isabella is pretty sure that Matilda would never; she wasn't that into him. Isabella has been hanging onto the rent from

Matilda's property and the documents proving that she's legitimate, just in case she ever comes back.

- 00:29:09 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Good bestie.
- 00:29:09 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So this story takes up most of the first volume and there is still no sign of the witch promised by the title, but there are whispers of political unrest. It turns out that the tutor that the Harringtons engaged for their sons is opposed to the monarchy and they fire him.
- 00:29:29 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Isabella Harrington also agrees to act as governess to the eldest princess, Elizabeth. So she shows up for a while and wins over some peasants who are also not super fond of the monarchy. If you thought that this might be transforming into a recognizable plot, you would be incorrect. [Kate laughs]
- 00:29:47 Kandice Sharren (co-host) But it does provide the novel by way of Isabella Harrington with several opportunities to explain why the monarchy is capital-G 'Good' even if the king has bad policies. Finally, the witches. So the local peasants, meanwhile, start getting worked up about some local so-called witches: an old woman who lives in a hovel and "the woman in White Cottage."
- 00:30:18 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The Herringtons are skeptical. So they try to send along some servants to investigate only to discover that none of their servants want to go. Finally, the nearby vicar's servant volunteers, and she discovers that the witch in the hovel is actually her long-lost grandmother who is too old and poor to feed and clothe herself properly. Cue family reunion, and the end of the first volume.
- 00:30:44 Kandice Sharren (co-host) But who is the woman in White Cottage? Nobody knows her name. She seems suspiciously spry for such an elderly looking woman. She has extremely useful medical knowledge *and* she pays her rent on time [Kate laughs]. Where does the money come from? It is, as the kids say, sus. Unappeased by the let-down with witch number one, the servants start getting worked up about this woman in volume two, except this time they're bringing in the magistrates.
- 00:31:17 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, the still-skeptical Herringtons decide to get involved again. Only, they can't just go visit this woman to whom they have not been properly introduced [Kate laughs]. So, they go for a walk near her cottage. One of the dogs runs off, the younger daughter chases it, and meets the woman who has a strange face, weird nun-like clothes, but is

otherwise perfectly pleasant and seems educated and genteel. The Harringtons invite her to dinner, which freaks the servants out.

- 00:31:48 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Cue some commotion in which the woman in White Cottage's face is splashed with water and her old lady makeup washes off. I'm picturing Winona Ryder at the end of Edward Scissorhands here, if you need a point of reference. [Kate laughs]
- 00:32:02 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Wow!
- 00:32:03 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Plot twist! [Kate laughs]. It's Isabella Harrington's long-lost friend, Matilda. I bet you didn't see that coming, but we're only a third of the way into the volume. So we need to spend a couple hundred pages explaining what happened to her. Long story short, the woman whose house she was taken into, wanted her dead. The boorish but otherwise nice son of this woman helped her escape with her servant. They found a trunk of cash, which is how she could pay her rent.
- 00:32:30 Kandice Sharren (co-host) She spent some time in a convent until they tried to forcibly convert her to Catholicism. Her servant married a local farmer, and she set up in the nearby cottage. Isabella hands over the documents proving her legitimacy and the son of the woman who wanted her dead shows up announcing that his mother has died. Matilda heads off to the magistrates to clear things up, no trial necessary. We get a coda in which all the Harrington kids get married or join the army depending on their preference. The end.
- 00:33:01 Kate Moffatt (co-host) That was strangely plotless, but I'm also absolutely delighted by it [both laugh]. But the other work you read, that one was by Joanna Baillie, which is a name familiar to me specifically because of my work on the WPHP. But I don't think I've actually ever read anything by her. What was *Witchcraft* like? Because it totally has the title of an 80s horror flick, which you know I would never watch!
- 00:33:30 Kandice Sharren (co-host) [laughs]. So, Joanna Baillie is a dramatist and a poet who was very, very, very popular in the early nineteenth century. Her first collection of plays, *Plays on the Passions*, was published in 1798 and it was a runaway success, except, interestingly, any attempts to stage these plays didn't go well. So she's really a dramatist whose plays are read rather than performed. *Witchcraft* as a play is way, way, way, way more intense than *The Witch and The Maid of Honour*.
- 00:34:12 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, this play begins with a woman named Annabella returning to House Dungarren in Scotland to find Lady Dungarren in distress because her youngest daughter is ill,

seemingly the result of witchcraft. Lady Dungarren leaves the room to check on her child and Annabella meditates on whether witchcraft is real or not, and how it could help her win the love of Lady Dungarren's son, who is in love with the impoverished daughter of a murderer who died in prison.

- 00:34:44 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Her servant shows up to ask some questions about the lace that Annabella ordered, and Annabella asks her if she knows of a woman named Grizeld Bane—Grizeld Bane! What a name! This is a name, surely, of a witch. And in fact, she is a woman who's new in town, but already known locally as a witch. So Annabella tells her very reluctant servant to go to Grizeld Bane and arrange a meeting.
- 00:35:12 Kandice Sharren (co-host) In the next scene, we meet Dungarren, who receives news that Annabella is back and he's like, "oh God, not her again. Violet is way less obnoxious. Why won't Annabella leave me alone" [Kate laughs]. Then we cut to the moor in a storm where two lower-class women accompanied by one of their sons gather on the moor to meet with Grizeld Bane, who has promised to help them seek revenge on their neighbors who didn't help them when they were starving last winter.
- 00:35:39 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Enter Grizeld Bane, chanting, and trying to summon the devil. A man approaches who claims to be Satan and tells them to go wait for him in the woods. As the women leave, Violet joins him. And it turns out that this guy Isn't Satan after all, just her father, Murrey, who was convicted of murder. He swapped his clothes with his servant, escaped from prison, and then ran off to Ireland. The servant died by falling in a pit.
- 00:36:07 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And by the time they found him, his face was completely disfigured. So they had to use clothes to identify the body. Also, Murrey's not technically a murderer. He just killed someone in a duel, but the only witness has gone missing. He's back to visit his only daughter for a couple of days. It turns out that this is a bad plan because when lightning strikes, the local vicar sees Violet on the moor conversing with a man who is supposedly dead.
- 00:36:34 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And even though he doesn't really believe in witchcraft, he starts to kind of think maybe he does, which is especially bad news because Annabella has decided she's going to frame Violet for bewitching Lady Dungarren's daughter by bribing a servant to bring her Violet's dress, ripping a piece out of the sleeve and planting it in the girl's room.
- 00:36:55 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Wow. Sneaky.

- 00:36:55 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Things are not looking great for Violet, but luckily she can count on her true love, Dungarren, right? Dungarren has been to university [Kate laughs], so he definitely doesn't believe in witches, but he would like Violet to explain why she was out on the moor with a man and why he heard her talking to an unidentified person in the bushes— except she can't. Because if people find out her father is alive, they will definitely execute him.
- 00:34:27 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And she is a virtuous young woman constitutionally incapable of lying. So she just gets mad at Dungarren for not trusting her. This is not a great strategy. So she ends up in prison where Dungarren visits her on the eve of her execution and tells her that there is a tunnel that she can use to escape. Unfortunately, someone else turns up to visit her just as they're getting ready to run off. She's moved to another cell and Dungarren gets arrested too.
- 00:37:55 Kate Moffatt (co-host) [laughs]. Terrible rescue plan! Terrible rescue plan!
- 00:38:00 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The people in this play are perhaps not the brightest [laughs]. Violet's one consolation is that the sheriff is actually a really nice guy. So she forgives him for doing his job and he feels sad that he's going to have to kill her in the morning, but he reassures her that she will be hanged before they burn her. The next morning, Annabella enters the house in town she's rented to watch the execution-slash-her-revenge unseen.
- 00:38:28 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And this is the scene that we read at the beginning of the episode. Grizeld Bane enters the room behind her and says that Annabella is the wickedest and boldest of Satan's disciples [Kate laughs], then claims to see a figure in the corner that Annabella cannot see. We then change to the execution itself where Violet and one of the lower-class women who met with Grizeld Bane on the moor, Mary Macmurren, are being tied to stakes.
- 00:38:53 Kandice Sharren (co-host) At literally the last possible second, Violet's father shows up and the execution is halted while things get sorted out. But before they can get very far, the scene is interrupted by offstage screams and Annabella's strangled body is brought on stage along with Grizeld Bane.
- 00:39:12 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Oh!

- 00:39:12 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Violet is off the hook, but the peasant woman who consorted with Grizeld Bane is not until a herald arrives decreeing the end of witch trials in Scotland. He is closely followed by the only witness to Violet's father's duel who clears Murrey's name, saving him from execution, and at the same time he reveals that Grizeld Bane is just a woman from Inverness who went mad after her husband died and has escaped from her keepers. Annabella's body is on stage through all of this.
- 00:39:44 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Wow. Wow. Okay. Well, first of all, man, that is an October play if I have ever heard of one. [both laugh]
- 00:39:53 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Sorry if you get nightmares.
- 00:39:54 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Let's talk about witch trials because *The Nuns of the Desert*, the novel I read, was still really recognizable as falling into that supernatural explained genre that we encountered last year in that episode, whereas yours actually sound historically engaged. So, a little bit of background here: both of the works that you read are set against the backdrop of seventeenth-century witch trials in Britain.
- 00:40:27 Kate Moffatt (co-host) As someone more familiar with the Salem witch trials, as in, I know they happened in Salem [both laugh], these works had some familiar elements, but also some really alienating and bizarre ones. James Sharpe has a useful introduction to the subject, titled *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, where he details elite and popular beliefs about witches and witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which led to trials and acquittals.
- 00:40:51 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Scotland had a more intense and sustained witch hunt. Julian Goodare claims that “it was one of the most severe in Protestant Europe”, which lasted from 1563 until 1736, although it was the most enthusiastically pursued between 1589 and 1662. The last execution for witchcraft in Scotland took place in 1727.
- 00:41:11 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Despite the differences in severity, there are quite a few common threads between the English and Scottish witch hunts beyond the fact that they both really took off under the rule of James VI of Scotland, or James I of England. In both England and Scotland, a significant majority of those accused, 80 percent in England and 85 percent in Scotland, were women—although popular interpretations of witch hunts, as examples of unruly women being punished by men, were in reality more complicated too. Women were also overrepresented as accusers.

- 00:41:42 Kate Moffatt (co-host) That said, women who were marginalized within their communities in some way were often more likely to be accused and convicted of witchcraft. And something that we found really interesting, were that the witch panics that led to large numbers of convictions and executions happened in waves rather than consistently. So often a witch panic would be followed by periods of restraint, where officials were less likely to try accused witches.
- 00:42:07 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Yeah, so both of the books that I read were written by authors clearly interested in these histories. *The Witch and The Maid of Honour* has a very specific historical and geographical setting. So one thing that I found interesting was how much it focused on representations of the aristocracy intervening on behalf of women who were suspected of being witches, which is something that Sharp notes was a common way that women accused of witchcraft would avoid conviction.
- 00:42:39 Kandice Sharren (co-host) But something the Sharp book focuses on within that is that belief in witches existed at all levels of society, whereas this novel really represents an enlightened upper-class society specifically saying that they don't think witches are real and they're always kind of acting to save the lower classes who do believe in witches, in some ways, save them from themselves.
- 00:43:05 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So a few other kind of noteworthy things about how this novel engages with the history that it's looking at, is that there's similarly a sense that the magistrates don't really believe in witches. They are looking for them, trying them, convicting them, to further their own careers rather than because they believe in it. And it's also definitely framing witchcraft as an import from Scotland with the ascension of James I.
- 00:43:34 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So this kind of negative portrayal of James I who's never really on the page, but there's all these kind of continued references to how the Harringtons don't like him, I think is kind of pointing to witchcraft being one of the changes that they see coming into the society with his ascension. It does, however, really get right that the people who were being accused were most likely to be women and specifically women who were marginalized in some way. So the first woman accused of being a witch is an impoverished old woman who has no one to look after her.
- 00:44:06 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So her place is this kind of dirty hovel—there's no food, she can't keep it warm, she can't keep her clothes clean, so she looks kind of scary. So the villagers get worried that she is going to curse them. The second woman accused of witchcraft, Matilda, is someone who just doesn't fit into the community. She's a stranger, she's nameless, they don't know anything about her. And she pays her rent on time. That is the most

shocking part [both laugh]. I know, I can't get over that. That's the thing that pushes them over the edge, that she pays her rent [Kandice laughs].

- 00:44:46 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Oh. She has money. What?!
- 00:44:48 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I know, I know. Where does it come from? [Kate laughs]. Joanna Baillie too is obviously very engaged with historical documents about the Scottish witch hunts. So she actually very loosely based her play on a witch panic that occurred in Paisley in 1697, although her temporal setting is a bit later.
- 00:45:08 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, at the end of the time when witchcraft was still a crime, which we see in the representation of the herald coming on and being like, "oh, by the way, you can't burn people for being witches anymore. It's not a real crime" [Kate laughs]. And her representation of procedures—that's accurate. So we don't actually see the trial in this play, but, women, for example, really were strangled before they were burned at the stake, which is just a really grim gory detail that I can't get over.
- 00:45:39 Kate Moffatt (co-host) I hate it so much.
- 00:45:40 Kandice Sharren (co-host) But I think it's also really important to keep in mind that neither of these texts are representing history purely accurately. They are works of historical fiction. And I think it's important to read what they're doing through the lens of later understandings of witchcraft and witch trials. So, writing about nineteenth-century representations of the Salem witch trials, Gretchen A. Adams notes the importance of metaphor as a way of understanding how the history of witch trials has entered cultural memory through different kinds, forms of representation and how the valences of those metaphors shift over time.
- 00:46:22 Kate Moffatt (co-host) So Adams is focused on what shifting representations of Salem mean in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century American political contexts, but these books, which are British and focus on different events, mean that the narratives have different historical contexts. Yeah?
- 00:46:39 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Yeah, absolutely. So, *The Witch*, and *The Maid of Honour*, published in 1799, this is so obviously a novel written in the aftermath of the French Revolution when the violence of the Terror was still fresh in everyone's minds, even though it's set during the reign of James I, so well before the English Civil War, it repeatedly kind of invokes

the future Civil War for the people in the novel through references to disaffected middle-class people, disaffected peasants,

- 00:47:13 Kandice Sharren (co-host) and Isabella's moralizing about the importance of obedience to the monarchy points toward a conservative interpretation of both the English Civil War and the French Revolution as fundamentally destructive and damaging events in history. The French Revolution is also present I think in the way that it represents the women who are accused of being witches, although this is a little bit less of a conservative take.
- 00:47:41 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So, in *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger*, David Simpson argues that by 1800, "a pervasive or obsessive awareness of the uncanny characterizes . . . the image of the stranger" which he links to the Terror and the sense of Otherness. By showing marginalized single older women, one of whom is a stranger to the parish, being falsely accused of witchcraft, this novel, I think, first draws attention to the surface level uncanniness of strangers, but it then rejects that uncanniness when it folds both the elderly grandmother and then Matilda back into the social fabric through familial and friendship ties.
- 00:49:26 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The context for Joanna Baillie's play *Witchcraft* feels a lot less like it's immediately responding to specific events. Like many of Baillie's works, especially *The Plays on the Passions*, this tragedy is focused on the inner workings of characters' minds. So Annabella's, and to a lesser extent, Dungarren's jealousy, the vicar Rutherford's wavering state of disbelief and belief in witchcraft, the peasant women's credulous desire to flaunt wealth following their neighbors' refusal to help them during a time of need. All of these things are the psychological conditions for belief and panic that I think Joanna Baillie is exploring.
- 00:49:09 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Alyson Bardsley also talks about witchcraft as specifically a legal drama, and she discusses how Baillie uses the backdrop of a pre-Enlightenment legal system to explore stadialism, or the idea that society gradually improves through different stages. And she does this by looking at the effect of Enlightenment philosophy on the legal systems of England and Scotland. So, about the conclusion, Bardsley says, "the natural interpretation of Annabella's death, that Grizeld is the murderer, comes from characters whose credibility the play has worked to question by showing how superstition, over-reliance on circumstantial evidence, and sheer pertinacity cloud their judgment.
- 00:49:56 Kandice Sharren (co-host) By making us confront the spectacle of her body without directly portraying the scene of Annabella's death, the play forces the audience to confront the inadequacy of

evidence as well as the horror of bearing witness; as the body lies there, line after line, the question is how the audience feels about and interprets the death.” So, Annabella’s death and the presence of her body is particularly interesting when you think about what exactly is going on around the body. We have rational explanations being offered.

- 00:50:31 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Witchcraft is being shown to be false, women who were literally about to be burned at the stake are being let go and expected to rejoin their communities after this abrupt decree says witchcraft is no longer legally recognized as a crime, even though the villagers clearly still believe witchcraft is real. So the so-called witches’ reintegration into society is happening on this scene with a dead body lying in the middle of it, which is this constant ever-present reminder that despite this last minute reprieve, this really is a tragedy. The title, the full title of the play is *Witchcraft, a Tragedy*.
- 00:51:14 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And this ending is kind of emphasizing that. So in thinking through what’s going on with this ending, I found Michael Everton’s discussion of Elizabeth Gaskell’s story *Lois the Witch* really helpful. He describes Gaskell’s story as “an early example of attempts to come to terms not just with moral atrocity but with the performance of restorative justice.” Reading Baillie’s play in the context of this discussion highlights how Violet’s forgiveness of the sheriff while she’s imprisoned within a wider nineteenth-century discourse about how forgiveness is represented in writing about witch trials.
- 00:51:57 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Except instead of concluding with a focus on just forgiveness and restorative justice, *Witchcraft* highlights the shifting and arbitrary nature of justice more generally, the way that justice systems are open to abuse, and, I think notably, it doesn’t even really try to do anything restorative. It just leaves things as they are. So technically speaking, the end of *Witchcraft* is just. The most straightforward villain, Annabella, is punished for her treachery with death. Although Grizeld Bane is let off the hook on account of her madness.
- 00:52:30 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I think it’s really important to pay attention to the class element that shows up in the form that justice takes here. Violet is saved by her father’s intervention, but nobody shows up to save Mary Macmurren, the peasant woman who is about to be burnt too. The only reason she doesn’t die is because the law changes at the last minute. And the problem for this character *all along* has been that she’s isolated, in need of assistance, in need of support. Because no one gives it to her, she tries and doesn’t succeed in becoming a witch, but there’s no suggestion when she is freed that anything’s going to change for her, that her life is going to get better.

- 00:53:23 Kandice Sharren (co-host) That the next time there's a really hard winter, she's not going to starve. And the fact that the villagers respond with hostility to this change of law really just underscores that. So, Violet has the opportunity to forgive the sheriff, who's about to kill her; Mary Macmurren doesn't. So there's no suggestion that anything is going to change for Mary Macmurren, that the next time there's a really hard winter, she's not in fact going to starve. And I think the fact that the villagers are so hostile to her release, and that there's no attempt to reintegrate her into society in any way, is one of the more chilling elements of the conclusion of this play.
- 00:54:12 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I think it's particularly worth noting that except for a handful of lines at the beginning of the final scene, in which she begs for mercy and refuses to confess to being a witch, Mary Macmurren doesn't speak for the rest of the play. She's also silent on the stage, although, unlike Annabella, she's still alive. Even more frustratingly, the final pages of this play are more focused on Violet's father forgiving his friend for disappearing and not being able to testify on his behalf. Remember that Murrey is only alive because he swapped clothing with his innocent servant who *did* die in prison.
- 00:54:54 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So there's this silence that is filled by a conversation about forgiveness between men who have not been accused of being witches. So Elizabeth Way has identified "Grizeld Bane and Annabella Gordon [as] the central voices of women's protest" in this play. But I think it's also important to pay attention to those characters who don't speak, especially those characters who don't speak at the end.
- 00:55:28 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And in thinking about that, Mary Macmurren's silence is perhaps the most poignant comment on the problem of women's marginalization within this society. So, wow. I sure had a lot to say about Joanna Baillie! [Kate laughs]. I could go on, but I think this is enough for this episode [Kandice laughs]. I did warn you.
- 00:55:57 Kate Moffatt (co-host) I, for one, thoroughly enjoyed how much you enjoyed working on this episode, Kandice! [Kandice laughs]
- 00:56:03 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I'm so glad!
- 00:56:05 Kate Moffatt (co-host) So, while this episode focused on a few very specific titles, because they contain the word 'witch' or 'witches' in their metadata (with the exception of Joanna Baillie's *Witchcraft*, which Kandice found) we do know that there are other witches in Romantic literature, some famous ones include Matilda, another Matilda, in Mathew Lewis's *The Monk*—

- 00:56:24 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So many Matildas! [laughs]
- 00:56:26 Kate Moffatt (co-host) and Victoria in Zofloya, both of whom make pacts with the devil in exchange for supernatural powers, but they are *actually* supernatural. And that isn't something that appeared in even the majority of what we read.
- 00:56:40 Kandice Sharren (co-host) The one exception is Mary Julia Young's *Donalda* although in that work, the witches are on the side of good!
- 00:56:48 Kate Moffatt (co-host) We love to see it. More common in the titles that we found were examples of the supernatural explained. It's the most outrageous in *Nuns of the Desert*, I think [Kandice laughs] but it's also in *The Witch*, and *The Maid of Honour*, and it's also in *Witchcraft*, where we learn Grizeld Bane is in fact an escaped madwoman and not a witch at all. Right.
- 00:57:07 Kandice Sharren (co-host) But it is interesting I think that Baillie leaves space at the end of the play. We don't see directly how Annabella dies and Grizeld Bane's claim to see a figure in the corner that Annabella can't, is, I think, quite a genuinely chilling moment that opens up the possibility that witchcraft might be real after all, even if it's presented alongside a rational explanation. This was a really refreshing change after the aggressively anti-gothic approach [both laugh] in *The Witch and The Maid of Honour*, which provides rational explanations for scary stories that readers don't even get to read.
- 00:57:50 Kate Moffatt (co-host) And the explanations in those other works are not as thorough as the ones in the *Nuns of the Desert*. May I remind you of the entire afterword on ventriloquism? [both laugh]. So even though these books are really strange, when we look at them together, we can see some really interesting common threads, despite the fact that they're existing along this really extensive spectrum. And this includes narratives about female friendship after or outside of marriage, *Macbeth* epigraphs, a pervasive association between witches and Scotland.
- 00:58:24 Kandice Sharren (co-host) We can also see some other patterns when we look at the metadata, especially in terms of how these specific books fit into established narratives about different publishers. So, *Nuns of the Desert* was published by the Minerva Press in 1805, which falls into the period after 1802, which Elizabeth Neiman describes as the initial decline of the Minerva Press, which is marked by what she calls 'a meta-discursive turn' in which writers start to self-consciously invoke common tropes.

- 00:58:58 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Oh, so that's why *Nuns of the Desert* felt like such a self-aware parody. [both laugh]
- 00:59:08 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And the other stories we read similarly fit within the frameworks of their respective publishers. *Donalda*, which was the only book to have actual confirmed supernatural content, was published by [James] Fletcher Hughes, who was known for his shocking fiction [Kate laughs]. He was Charlotte Dacre's publisher at the beginning of her career, bringing out *Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer* and *Hours of Solitude*.
- 00:59:32 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Similarly, both *The Witch and The Maid of Honour* and Baillie's collection of dramas were published by different iterations of the Longman firm, which was one of the major book-selling firms of the eighteenth century. And they focused on publishing high-quality works across all kinds of different genres. So by 1836, when *Dramas* was published, Baillie was a major established author.
- 00:59:58 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So it really makes sense that she's publishing with them, but she's always been an author who was connected to prestigious firms. Earlier in her career, She published the first volume of *Plays on the Passions* with Cadell and Davies, and they were her publishers for a while. They were one of the most prestigious publishing houses. In 1804, she shifted over to Longmans and published *Miscellaneous Dramas* with them, as well as subsequent editions of *Plays on the Passions*.
- 01:00:26 Kandice Sharren (co-host) And it's interesting to me that *The Witch and The Maid of Honour* is a Longman title. It's definitely not as salacious or fun as the other novels we looked at [Kate laughs], but I wouldn't necessarily have thought of it as high quality. I think this perhaps points to the general reputation of fiction in the 1790s and the early nineteenth century where high quality isn't so much about good writing as it is about being moral and instructive. [both laugh]
- 01:01:00 Kate Moffatt (co-host) So, you wouldn't recommend it then? [laughs]
- 01:01:04 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I feel like I said this about *Romance of the Pyrenees* last year—it depends what you're looking for, but for a good read, no, not really [Kate laughs]. Same thing with *Donalda*, which was quite silly, but fun. But I don't think someone reading it today would necessarily think it's a good novel. I would absolutely recommend Joanna Baillie's play, though. Unless you're like Kate and you get nightmares.

- 01:01:30 Kate Moffatt (co-host) [both laugh]. Okay. Well, and I would recommend volume one of *The Nuns of the Desert* because it lets you believe in magic. Volume two is really just a reveal-all. A very extended reveal-all. [both laugh]
- 01:01:44 Kandice Sharren (co-host) So it wasn't better than *The Three Monks!!!?*
- 01:01:48 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Listen, the flying cats had me thinking it might be, but volume two had me thinking like “absolutely not.” [laughs]
- 01:01:56 Kandice Sharren (co-host) Read us a bit about the flying cats, Kate, please.
- 01:01:56 🎵 [spooky music playing]
- 01:02:13 Kate Moffatt (co-host) “When they arrived at the entrance to the wood, they were obliged to descend from their carriages, and penetrate the briary path on foot, till they arrived at the wicket on the summit of the hill; where the first object that met their astonished eyes, was a large tabby male cat with a painted clock, which was tied round his neck, and covered half his back. Stalking majestically towards the company, he mewed in what they thought was an extraordinary manner; when, upon the distant tinkling of a bell, he darted into the deep of the wood, and was seen no more.
- 01:02:43 Kate Moffatt (co-host) A dread and death-like silence now for some moments reigned around. It seemed as if no creature but the solemn grimalkin, which had so suddenly disappeared, existed in that region.
Looking upon each other, they scarce knew whether they should proceed, till Fanny, the favourite of Mrs. Selwyn, who expressed an ardent wish to hear her fortune, offered to advance to the Cottage below.
- 01:03:05 Kate Moffatt (co-host) The party now descended the hill, and when they were sitting a few years of the door, several cats of a smaller make, and with an appearance of wings to their shoulders, darted from an upper window, and flew towards the thicket, carrying with them the sound of such a bell as they had heard while standing at the wicket. The ladies were somewhat alarmed. The gentlemen confessed that they thought appearances were *extraordinary*; but endeavoured to laugh away the ladies apprehensions. They approached the door. It was opened by an ape in regimentals, with a grenadier’s cap upon his head. No other living creature appeared.

- 01:03:39 Kate Moffatt (co-host) ‘Are you the master of the house, Sir?’ asked William Selwyn, with something of an abatement of courage.
‘No; nor is there a master here. My *mistress*, who is engaged with the three daughters of Erebus, will wait upon you presently,’ was the reply; which so amazed them, that they were incapable of speaking a syllable.
A bell was now rang, and Anna entered from one side of the vestibule. Curseying and smiling, she requested the company to advance, desiring pug to be silent; upon which he grinned, chattered, and ran into his box.
- 01:04:12 Kate Moffatt (co-host) As they walked through the vestibule, the singularity of the furniture attracted their observation; and as they were admiring the quinquangular board before-mentioned, the wrestling of the old grey parrot drew their attention, and turning towards him, as Mr. Selwyn was following Anna into the painted room, they distinctly heard, in his usual rough voice,
‘By the prickling of my toes, / Something wicked that way goes.’”
- 01:04:35  [spooky music playing]
- 01:04:47 Kate Moffatt (co-host) This has been the fifth episode of Season 2 of *The WPHP Monthly Mercury*! 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. You can also find us at @TheWPHP on Twitter and on Instagram @womensprinthistoryproject.
- 01:05:12  [music playing]
- 01:05:21 Kandice Sharren (co-host) [outtakes, part 1] Yes, dearest! We’ve finished the episode.
- 01:05:30 Kate Moffatt (co-host) [outtakes, part 2] I’m going to have nightmares from recording this episode.
- 01:05:34 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I’m sorry. Such a good play though. It’ll give you nightmares, but in a good way. [both laugh]
- 01:05:48 Kate Moffatt (co-host) Is there such a thing? [laughs]
- 01:05:55 Kandice Sharren (co-host) I don’t know. The intimacy—

- 01:05:56 Kate Moffatt (co-host) It's the intimacy of it all, it's being able to say 'quinguagular' and get a fist-pump out of it!
- 01:06:10 Kandice Sharren (co-host) [outtakes, part 3] Grizeld Bane! Grizeld Bane! Professional witch! [both laugh]