

Quick Quote Percy Shelley

Koen: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Quick Quote, a Quote Me mini episode. I'm Koen.

Ian: I'm Ian.

John: I'm John.

Anna: I'm Anna.

Koen: And today we're doing things a little bit different. Instead of our full hour to hour and a half episode, we're only going to do maybe 20 or 30 minutes. So, we're going to give you a little story about some of our favorite authors. So today I am talking about Percy Bysshe Shelley. You might know him from the poem Ozymandias or the Pamphlet in Defense of Poetry. He was a big player in English Romanticism. For those of you who don't know, romanticism is not about romance in the modern sense of like dating or relationships. It was more about the individual and talking about the imagination, spiritual freedom and themes of the human psyche. What, what does it mean to be human and also rebel against authority? So, Percy Shelley was born August 4th of 1792 to Timothy and Elizabeth Shelley. He had several siblings, a younger brother named John and four sisters, Elizabeth, Mary, Margaret and Helen. So, Shelley was meant to be a very important figure in society. He was going to be a member of parliament. He was going to get a huge inheritance, but he decided to take a different road. So, he grew up in Horsham, Sussex. He liked to tell ghost stories with his siblings, and he eventually went to the Syon House Academy in 1802. He was not a very popular kid. He was often bullied, and he generally made it worse by having a horrible temper and being bad at fights, which meant he would pick a lot of fights and not win them. He and I quote, loved trashy gothic romance thrillers. This is straight from the Poetry Foundation.

John: [Time 2:16] He sounds like a very complex character. I'm picking fights, but I'm like, really deep and like, yeah, he's thoughtful and stuff.

Koen: He's the original emo boy.

John: Oh...

Koen: Yeah, absolutely. So anyway, he spent six years at Eton College. He started at the age of 12, which that's not that impressive in the 1700s because most people lived into like their twenties and thirties. So, like, you were 12, you're in college, that's your life. So, he was still getting bullied in college. People would call him Mad Shelley or Shelley the Atheist (which was true) and it got him in a lot of trouble. So, later on he met Dr. James Lind, who gave him access to his library, and he learned a lot more about science and magic, philosophy and literature. And this is where his great two passions began. And those passions were, and I quote again, writing and loving. So, this brings us to his first novel, which I had actually never heard of, and I have an English degree, so I don't expect anyone else to know what this is. It was called Zastrozzi. It was written in 1810, and it follows the love story of Verezzi, and Julia. Shelley used Zastrozzi as a way of expressing his own dangerous opinions, which is where the atheism comes in. So, this was his sort of scapegoat. Like he could say, oh, the villain is an atheist, it's not me, I'm not the bad guy. And then this continues to be a theme in his writing and in his life. And then as he was growing up and he was becoming more romantic in the dating sense, not the romantic writing sense, he ended up having a crush on his cousin Harriet Grove, which was obviously discouraged by both families for very obvious reasons. All right. So, after this discouraged crush, he went on to go to Oxford University, but unfortunately, it was only there for less than a year after meeting his best friend and the man who would change his life: Thomas Jefferson Hogg. So, while they were in college together, they decided to write "The Necessity of Atheism." It was a pamphlet published in 1811 and they decided to send it to the administration of Oxford, who of course were very conservative. And we're not very happy to receive this pamphlet, even though the pamphlet itself wasn't really all that bad. It was just that like the title that was inflammatory. They decided to expel both of these boys. They could have gone back to school. Shelley's father told him that if he took back what he said, he apologized and he and he told everyone that he was a good Christian man, that he would pay to have him reinstated in school. Shelley decided that he would give up all of his financial support just so he could hold on to his principles.

John: [Time 5:06] Yes, he's sticking to his guns. Now Koen do you know is is is Thomas Hogg, is he as well-to-do as Percy is?

Koen: No, I didn't see anything saying whether he was or not.

John: I'd be curious to know if him sticking to his guns as costly to him personally as it is for Percy.

Ian: I would guess, though, being that he's in Oxford back then, you probably had to have some sort of money to get in.

Koen: I would think they were both probably pretty well to do.

Ian: Yeah

John: That makes sense.

Koen: But the more I go on about Hogg, we kind of start to realize that I don't. I think he just kind of doesn't care. So, these guys would go on together to write some poetry together. They talked a lot about their disdain for war and for the monarchy, which of course could take them down for treason. So, the poetry collection they wrote together, they did not put their names on.

John: Was it anonymous or did they like put fake names on us?

Koen: [Time 6:03] I think they put fake names.

John: Okay.

Koen: Shelley has two years where he is out of school and has no financial support and is not of age to get his inheritance. So, he has to figure out how to make money. During this time, he meets Elizabeth Hitchener, who he considers his philosophical soul sister, and the 16-year-old Harriet Westbrook. Now, Harriet falls in love with Shelley. Shelley falls in love with Harriet. So, Harriet Westbrook was going to a boarding school in Clapham. And we see through Shelley's writing that this experience was oppressive for her. And so he considers what he's doing as a rescue and he basically breaks her out of school. And we see a lot through his writing that this wasn't necessarily for love, but more for the sake of molding the impressionable young Harriet. So yeah.

Anna: Boo!

Koen: Oh, a little icky. So, Harriet and Percy eloped because their families did not really support the marriage. And because he didn't want to ruin her reputation, he decided to give up his belief in free love to marry her.

Ian: He is 0 for 2 with the Harriets.

Koen: Yes, exactly. Perhaps a pattern is emerging.

Ian: For sure.

Koen: And when I say free love, I do mean this. A similar idea to like the hippies in the sixties and seventies where it was like, you can kind of be in an open or polyamorous relationship. That was something that Percy liked as an ideal, and we see more of that later on. I want to get to there, but for now he's saying that he's giving it up for Harriet. Thomas Hogg marries them and then of course later tries to seduce Harriet, which is the first of a pattern of Hogg's behavior.

John: [Time 7:59] Thomas Hogg, the man who officiated their wedding.

Koen: Yes.

John: Tried to seduce the bride.

Koen: Yes.

John: Thomas Hogg is wild.

Koen: He is...

John: I mean the man is all over the place. He's a loose cannon.

Koen: He is, I'm telling you.

John: [Time 8:13] I mean, you see, he swerves when you think he's going to go here, he jumps over there. You can't pin this guy down. You just can't. Fascinating.

Koen: But it gets better. Let me tell you.

John: Tell me.

Anna: By better do you mean worse?

Koen: Yes.

John: I'm on the hook. I want to see where this Hogg thing goes.

Koen: Anyway. So, this for a while ruined Hogg and Shelley's friendship. They get back together later on and decide it's all cool water under the bridge. But for now, they've separated as friends. In the next few years, Harriet and Shelley are living with Harriet's sister, Eliza, who he didn't like very much, and he became increasingly radical. He distributed more pamphlets and was actively fighting for freedom of speech, and the presses. when he had his first child, he started writing Queen Mab. So, lanthe this is the story of a fairy queen who takes the spirit of lanthe, which is their firstborn daughter's name in 1813, on a journey through time and space to quote, reveal the ideal nature of humanity's potential behind the mistakes of history.

John: It's pretty heavy.

Koen: Yeah. He's taking his baby on a wild journey through like human philosophy. An interesting move. This will come back to haunt him. Between 1812 and 1813. Shelley spent time in London, where he joined the Bonneville Circle, an informal literary discussion group. He made many new friends, such as William Godwin, who he considered his political father and who was also later expelled from their circle of friends.

John: [Time 9:54] He expelled his dad?

Koen: Yes, he did, because of many reasons.

Ian: But not his real father?

Koen: No, his political yes, his real father and also his political.

Ian: Oh, okay.

Koen: All of his fathers.

John: The fatherless, Percy Shelley.

Anna: No dads.

Koen: But William Godwin is a very important figure in Shelley's life. He found some of his writing. Agreed with a lot of his anarchy ideals and decided to financially support him even though he was not doing well financially in the first place. And this, of course, ended up being a huge mistake because he eventually met Godwin's daughters, one of whom was Mary. I'm sure you all know of Mary Shelley, the author of Frankenstein, his second wife.

Anna: I knew she was going to come up somewhere.

Ian: I knew it, too. I was thinking it.

Koen: Very important. So, William Godwin has a lot of the same ideals as Percy. He also believes in free love and doesn't support the monarchy. As I said, he believed in anarchy. And even though he said all of these things, when Percy Shelley expressed an interest in Mary, Godwin was super against it. He was like, absolutely not. I don't want you anywhere near my daughter. At this point, Percy was 21 and Mary was 16. So, Percy Shelley considered Mary to be the, quote, ideal offspring of two great minds, this being she was the daughter of William Godwin, this anarchist, and also Mary Wollstonecraft, who was also another author and philosopher. So, Mary Godwin was like this idealized woman to him in a way. So, he falls in love with her, and he proposes this idea to Harriet that they could all live together, but he would consider Harriet as his

sister and Mary as his wife. Yeah, you're all squinting at me and. Exactly. Yes. Obviously, Harriet was heartbroken that her husband has fallen for another woman and was like: "No, I don't want to do that. I don't want to live like that." In 1814, on July 27, Mary and Percy have eloped and they go traveling around Europe. But eventually they have to come back because they have no money again.

John: [Time 12:24] Didn't really think that one through.

Koen: No, not at all. And here's the tricky part. In November of 1814, Harriet has another child named Charles, and Mary gave birth to a premature baby who did not survive. Which means.

John: So, after they eloped, they've gone back and they're all living together?

Koen: I don't think so. I'm not really sure what the living situation is when they return, because I think the Godwin's and Harriet's family have shunned them for what they've done.

John: Okay.

Koen: So, I'm assuming Harriet has moved back in with her family.

John: So, he's just going between the two.

Koen: Yeah, probably, and this is where Hogg comes back in. They've become friends again. They've made up, and Hogg and Mary decide they want to experiment with this idea of free love and so they do. Everyone is okay with it until Mary loses interest and then just, it's just kind of over. But, so they did, like, successfully do the free love thing,

John: Mmm-hmm, Mmm-hmm.

Koen: Sort of. So, in 1850, Shelley has completely embarked on this romanticism literature. He's writing "Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude and other poems", inspired by Wordsworth and the Excursion from 1814, Mary has a baby in 1816 named William, and their friend Claire Clermont has moved in with them. Claire Clermont is Lord Byron's

mistress. So, this is where they've sort of branched out their friend group. They're now friends with Lord Byron. They've all decided to meet at Lake Geneva and do seances and tell ghost stories. And this is where we got Frankenstein.

John: There's a really awesome scene at the beginning of *Bride of Frankenstein*, where they like kind of recreate these guys, like hanging out on Lake Geneva and it's Byron and Shelley and Mary, and they're all like, hanging out. And Byron's just being like, so over the top and he's challenging God and there's like a big storm going on outside and it's like: "Oh, Mary, you must tell us another story. You must tell us what happened to your monster." You know, setting up the sequel to the first *Frankenstein*. And she's like: "Oh, well, yes, here we go. Here is the tale." And she tells it. And like, they're used as a framing device.

Koen: [Time 14:40] That's cool.

John: That's the image of.

Koen: Very on brand.

John: Them I have in my head always.

Koen: All right, so finally, Shelley and Mary returned to England. He marries Mary in 1816, and when they return, they find out that Shelley's wife, Harriet and Mary's half-sister, Fanny Imlay, have both committed suicide. Harriet committed suicide by basically walking into a lake and drowning herself. This is important because I think the way that Shelley dies is very ironic. So, in 1821, the Shelley's our friends with Edward and Jane Williams, they decided to go on vacation to rent Casa Magni on the Bay of San Lorenzo near Larissa. Somewhere in Italy, I don't know. So, at this point, Shelley and Edward have a boat called the *Don Juan*. Now, I'm sure you're all familiar with the character *Don Juan*.

John: Yes.

Koen: He is a famous Spanish character who was well known for being a womanizer.

John: Quite the Lothario, as I understand it. Yes.

Koen: Yes. But Lord Byron also wrote a story that featured a Don Juan.

John: Are all Don Juans the same Don Juans, or is it a bunch of different people using the Don Juan moniker?

Koen: At this point, it's, yeah, it's just kind of like a name, like: "Oh, you're such a Don Juan."

John: Okay.

Koen: [00:16:06] So. But Lord Byron wrote a satirical epic poem about Don Juan, essentially the same character, except for that this Don Juan was easily seduced by women. Now, I would argue, that Mr. Shelley was possibly also easily seduced by women, considering his many love affairs. So, just imagine Shelley and Williams on this boat, Don Juan, and suddenly there is a squall or a localized storm, meaning it's just like a storm like around the vicinity of this boat.

John: Yeah

Koen: I mean, it's it's big, but like, it's very centered on this boat.

John: Focused, you might say, concentrated, deliberate.

Koen: Yes. So, the storm knocks over this boat and several weeks later, they find Williams and Shelly's bodies on the shore. Now, I have a theory.

John: Okay.

Koen: I like to think that Harriet has become a ghost, a spirit of the sea, if you will.

John: Fun.

Koen: And has cursed the Don Juan to take revenge on her husband.

John: [Time 17:15] I don't think that's the wildest thing. She seemed pretty unhappy about this entire arrangement.

Koen: Oh, absolutely

John: At a certain point.

Koen: Absolutely.

John: And definitely didn't seem like she was consulted on it at all.

Koen: No. I think she was definitely treated like a child by Shelley in her lifetime. So, I'm going to back up now that I told you that story about his death in my theories about sea ghosts, I do have a little bit more about.

John: His life.

Koen: Percy's life. So, after they return to England and they find that Harriet has died, Percy wants to get custody of his children. Now, remember Queen Mab?

John: Yes.

Koen: So, he went to court to try to get custody of the children from Harriet's family. And they brought up Queen Mab, saying that you are not morally fit to be a father.

John: So, at this point, at this point, Percy was no longer using characters as stand-ins for himself to espouse his own obvious ideology. What a likeable guy was Percy.

Koen: [Time 18:16] Truly, truly a likable guy. So, he loses custody, custody of his kids. And after this point, Mary has become very estranged. She's very depressed. She's like kind of she's not talking with him as much, you know, she's just not happy. There's not a lot of communication. There's not a lot of love left in the relationship, and there's probably a lot more that had happened, but I'm sure like the death of her first child and then the death of her half-sister, like, didn't help, so in 1818, Shelley's daughter Clara,

passed away, and this was what put both of them, both Shelley and Mary, into a depression. And then later in 1819, their son William, also passed away. And later in 1819 was the Hoppner scandal.

John: What is the Hoppner scandal?

Koen: So, one of the servants of the Shelley's her name was Elise Foggi, told the Hoppners, friends of Byron, that Shelley had a kid with Claire. Now, Mary didn't know about that. So, on top of the deaths of her children--and now this adultery--she is just like beyond depression.

John: So, Percy and Mary's housekeeper, a woman whose last name is Foggi, illuminated a personal scandal?

Ian: [Time 19:44] Isn't that ironic?

Koen: So, Claire, if you remember, Claire Clairmont was Lord Byron's mistress.

John: Percy had a love child with his friend Byron's mistress.

Koen: Yes, so in 1822, he was stressed about having to mediate between Byron and Claire over their daughter, Allegra. They basically were trying to decide custody and they ended up sending her to a convent, or she later passed away. There is also evidence that Shelley was in love with Jane Williams. It's sort of unclear, but he was writing poetry to her, which is, you know, in my mind very much, I'm in love with you. I'm writing poetry to you.

Anna: It makes sense to me.

Koen: So, guess what?

Ian: [00:20:26] They have baby.

Koen: No. We find out later that Thomas Hogg had a crush on Jane, too.

John: No.

Anna: He's just trying to...

Koen: He's just stealing all the women...

Anna: Hogg everyone...

Ian: Swimming in the wake.

Koen: It's just too funny not to include that.

John: This is the messiest circle of people I've ever heard of.

Anna: What is Hogg's problem?

Koen: I don't know. So, Shelley's last poem was "The Triumph of Life" based on Petrarch's "Trionfi" and Dante's "Divine Comedy." In it, his character Rousseau, is basically watching this parade of dead people. And it talks a lot about all the people in this parade. You know, there's like, Karl Marx and all these important figures. And eventually, at the end of the poem, he asks: "What is life?" And then before he can finish writing the poem, he dies.

John: [Time 21:26] That's that's, quite, man, this guy is just, just the irony, like...

Koen: His life is full of irony. It's amazing.

John: It's just. Wow. What a, what a narrative.

Koen: What a narrative. Yeah. And I mean, he met a lot of other important people in his life. He was friends with Keats. He was very influential. More so after his death. There was like, the Percy Shelley Society that formed and then later, like, got severely attacked by, like, the next literature movement because they decided they hated Romanticism. I think especially like T.S. Eliot, I think it was T.S. Eliot who didn't like Percy Shelley. I might be making that up, but whatever.

John: You heard it here first, folks.

Koen: You heard it here first. But that was like the big, very ironic, like, Karmic moments of his life that I wanted to recount. And now I will end with a wonderful little quote from Shelley, himself: "A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively. He must put himself in the place of another and many others, the pain and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination." There you have it. That's Percy Shelley.

Ian: Percy Shelley.

Anna: And Thomas Hogg.

Koen: And Thomas Hogg.

Ian: And Thomas Hogg.

Koen: Featuring Thomas Hogg.

Ian: You can't Tell the story up one without the other.

Koen: [Time 23:12] You really can't.

Ian: You really can't

Koen: They're very important.

John: That was...

Anna: Thomas Hogg will not allow it.

John: That was a journey. Koen. Thank you.

Koen: You're so welcome. I was so excited to do research for this. Please join us again for our next full length "Quote me", and then we'll be doing more quick quotes in the future, because this was really fun.

John: This was, this was a ton of fun.

Koen: All right. That's it, folks.

[00:23:37] Bye.

Outro Music:

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Works Cited:

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