



## A Fatal Likeness

*Lynn Shepherd*

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A mystery that explores the dark lives and unexplained secrets of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and his wife Mary, author of *Frankenstein*.

In the dying days of 1850 the young detective Charles Maddox takes on a new case. His client? The only surviving son of the long-dead poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and his wife Mary, author of *Frankenstein*.

Charles soon finds himself being drawn into the bitter battle being waged over the poet's literary legacy, but then he makes a chance discovery that raises new doubts about the death of Shelley's first wife, Harriet, and he starts to question whether she did indeed kill herself, or whether what really happened was far more sinister than suicide.

As he's drawn deeper into the tangled web of the past, Charles discovers darker and more disturbing secrets, until he comes face to face with the terrible possibility that his own great-uncle is implicated in a conspiracy to conceal the truth that stretches back more than thirty years.

The story of the Shelleys is one of love and death, of loss and betrayal. In this follow-up to the acclaimed *Tom-All-Alone's*, Lynn Shepherd offers her own fictional version of that story, which suggests new and shocking answers to mysteries that still persist to this day, and have never yet been fully explained.

## **A Fatal Likeness Details**

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Author : Lynn Shepherd

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# From Reader Review A Fatal Likeness for online ebook

## Jane says

Last year my hand was seized by an omniscient narrator, and she pulled me back into nineteenth century London and she showed me such dark and wonderful things. And now she has seized my hand again, and shown things that are even more extraordinary.

We arrived in a dark, cold London street, and straight away I saw a familiar figure. Charles Maddox, the detective who had been pulled into an investigation that had uncovered dark goings-on at Tom-all-Alone's. He was a little older, and a little wiser after all that he had experienced, but he still had much to learn.

Charles had been summoned by Sir Percy Shelley, the son of a famous poet and a celebrated author. He was asked by Sir Percy and his formidable wife, Jane, to assist with sensitive matter. Someone had threatened to publish papers that would show the poet in a less than favourable light, undermining their efforts to elevate his reputation. Charles was to negotiate to buy those papers.

He suspected that matters were complex, more troubling, than the Shelley's were telling him. And he was right.

His meeting with a remarkable woman – Claire Clairmont, who famously had a love affair with Lord Byron, and bore him a child – confirmed his suspicions.

But he had to go on. Because his great-uncle, who had been a great detective until his mind and body began to fail him, had crossed paths with the Shelleys years before. He wouldn't speak of it, he tried to stop Charles, but his efforts only made Charles more determined to uncover the truth.

I saw a tangled story unfold. A story that was spun around real lives, real facts, and filled the gaps with details that were utterly believable.

I watched Charles as he found his way through a complicated web of lies and deceit, jealousy and rivalry, fear and self-interest. He uncovered truths that were dreadful, but horribly believable. I looked over his shoulder as he read letters, documents, and his great-uncle's records. And I followed him home, and saw that some things had changed and some things had remained the same in his unorthodox household.

I was steered perfectly, sometimes guided, sometimes left to watch, and sometimes struck by an acute observation. By someone who had knowledge, understanding, and the clearsightedness that a little distance brings.

I was wrapped up in rich prose that brought times, places and people to life. In a story that was dark but so very, very vivid.

I turned the pages quickly, because I was fascinated, and because I needed to find answers to so many questions. Though I found that I had to pause from time to time, to try to understand complex characters, to consider difficult situations, to ponder many things that were not what they first seemed.

Now I have turned the last page, now I have answers but I am still asking more questions.

Still fascinated...

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### **Arielle Walker says**

I have never attempted to read this book, so I can't comment on whether it's good or bad, but I do think it's a shame that people are reading this, instead of something much more stimulating for grown-up minds. I really shouldn't be able to make comments like this without even attempting to know what I am talking about but it's not petty at all, because I say it isn't.

Of course the lack-of-hype for *A Fatal Likeness*, and the fact that I'd never heard of it, means it must be good, as over-hyped books are dreadfully wearying and bound to be bad. Fortunately, because this book has *not* been over-hyped, it means that the life will not be sucked from every other book ever, so other ordinary authors don't have to worry about being overshadowed. Any writer that does start to write decent books should stop before they become excessively popular and ruin it for everyone else.

If this *does* happen to an author, the best move for them would be to write only for children, as children do not deserve or need mentally-stimulating or well written stories (and therefore, of course, no children's books are either well written or mentally-stimulating).

Don't worry - I'm sure this won't happen to Lynn Shepard anyway, as she is far too busy complaining about other authors ruining everything for everyone (but not in a jealous way, mind) to actually be writing anything decent.

This could actually be a good book. She could actually be a lovely person. I guess I'll never know.

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### **Bloggeretterized says**

It took me a while to finally review this book because it was a bizarre read for me. I had high hopes for this book but I gave it one star for the sole reason that I didn't like it.

I am not a connoisseur of the Romantics. Of course I know who Mary Shelley is, always wanted to read *Frankenstein* (and will read it next month). Haven't read her husband's work (Percy Bysshe Shelley), but know of his existence. But I wasn't aware of the mystery surrounding their lives.

I requested this book on NetGalley attracted by its cover and title. I thought it was going to be a tragic romantic novel about a woman who was nothing but trouble. And I was right with the tragic part. There was no happy romance in the story. The author presents a story about a woman with what in our times we would consider serious mental issues and how her actions create a disturbing, tormented, dark relationship with everyone around her. A torment that her descendants carry with them no matter how much time has passed.

So, if the book was about what I thought it would be, why didn't I like it?

Well, first of all, Charles Maddox, the star detective in the novel is no Sherlock Holmes. I had just read *A Study in Scarlet*, and couldn't help but compare both detectives. The way Maddox worked wasn't

entertaining enough for me. I simply couldn't relate to his detective ways. I felt like he wasn't a career detective but just a normal person trying to find out about others.

The way the story is told wasn't for me. The "facts" were confusing enough and all that going back and forth made it even more confusing.

Like I said, I am not a connoisseur of these people's lives, but from this book I can tell the author is absolutely not fond of Mary Shelley. I kind of felt like reading this book was a bad thing. Like talking behind someone's back. The author created fiction out of non-fictional characters. But the fiction that she created can even be considered insulting to the memory of these people.

The story didn't make sense for me, until I read the author's notes at the end. That's when all made sense. The author explains what the real facts are and which her inventions are. Her inventions were the things that didn't make any sense to me. They were too cruel, twisted and disturbing to be true. I do have to give her credit for her imagination, but in this case, the mystery surrounding the Shelley's is one to be left unexplained.

This book is for people who have a deep knowledge of the Romantics. This book is not for the plain normal reader who can get confused and really believe what the author invented about these people. If you read this book, read it with an open mind and don't try to make sense out of what you find makes no sense.

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### **Paula Cappa says**

Why is this book worth reading? Isn't that the point of all these book reviews? Here's a question I'd like to ask the author Lynn Shepherd. Why is this book worth writing? Truly, why would you write this story? To be honest, I liked this book and I did not like this book. While it's well written and well researched (Shepherd is a talented writer), the author has made some wild speculations about the Shelley family, Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley. The Shelleys (I've read numerous biographies) had a tragic life filled with deaths, suicides, betrayals, lies, deceptions, guilt, loss, abandonment, self-indulgence, scandal after scandal, to say nothing of the madness of literary genius in the mix. Geez, wasn't all that juicy enough? Now, Shepherd has added murder into their fictional lives. There is nothing, no hint of suggestion at all in any of their biographies that suggest the crime of murder. So, maybe the character Charles Maddox needed a murder or two to solve, but why use the Shelleys? I think when an author writes historical fiction (or biographical fiction as this essentially is), the author must be careful not to damage the dead. After closing this book, I did feel that Shepherd's wild speculations of murder in the Shelley family were not appropriate, even under the umbrella of creative license. Instead of gaining enlightenment about the Shelleys, I felt hustled and manipulated. Fiction often speculates to fill in the blanks and most of the time I like that when the speculation makes sense. A Fatal Likeness did not make sense to me and seemed to be an attack on the Shelleys' graves. Why do it?

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### **Diane S ? says**

Love the atmosphere of this time period, the wonderful characters, slowness of the plot to develop and the richness of the details and the setting. This is the second book in this series featuring, Charles Maddox, and

in this one he takes on the Shelley family and their scandal ridden past. A case that goes into the past of this famous family and into the past of his uncle.

Solid writing, just not sure I was wholly convinced by the plot, though it was certainly interesting following where the author led. Good series, will definitely read the next one.

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### **Morana Mazor says**

Iako sam nekako više o?ekivala od ove knjige, super je to što se dosta saznaje o životima poznatih pjesnika Shellyja i Bayrona, a i autorice Frankenstein, Mary Shelly. A životi su im zaista bilo jaaako osebniji. Ina?e je poprili?no mra?na i šokantna knjiga.

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### **Brooke says**

I read an advance copy of this novel received through LibraryThing's Early Reviews program. I had originally signed up to receive a copy because I had just read Frankenstein for the first time a few months ago, and I was intrigued by the idea of reading a mystery spun around the author and her husband. The copy of Frankenstein that I read contained biographical information about the pair, but nothing that really addressed anything personal about who they were.

I also read Lynn Shepherd's book The Solitary House in preparation for reading this one, since they both followed the same main character, private investigator Charles Maddox. That ended up not being necessary, since they are stand-alone stories. A Fatal Likeness does make small references to the first book, and the exposition about Charles Maddox and the other characters in his household is not really repeated for a new reader's benefit. However, while The Solitary House was very much so about Charles and his household, A Fatal Likeness uses them only to serve as the backdrop for focusing on the Shelleys. I forgot much of the time that Charles was part of the story.

Lynn Shepherd emphasizes in her afterword that this was a fictional novel. However, she also takes the time to lay out what biographers and contemporaries of the Shelleys have said about them, and she explains where and why she added her own fictional solutions to the gaps in our knowledge about the pair. One thing that Shepherd conveys that I didn't appreciate from the biographical information included in my copy of Frankenstein was just how young these people were, and how at odds they were with the rest of society at the time. She also did an excellent job bringing them to life and injecting personality into them. While this may or may not be an accurate reflection of them, since this IS fiction, it made for a wonderful read. It's also made me very interested to learn more about them, and Shepherd recommends a good number of books that she relied on for her research for anyone wanting to read more.

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### **Nicole Soutar says**

I forced myself to finish it, I wanted to stop half way. Very confusing story, and I think unless you have some background knowledge of Mary and Percy Shelly (which I did not) it is hard to follow. Not my kind of book, though I normally enjoy historical fiction.

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## Jo says

A Fatal Likeness

By Lynn Shepherd

Summery courtesy of Goodreads.com

A mystery that explores the dark lives and unexplained secrets of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and his wife Mary, author of Frankenstein.

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Charles soon finds himself being drawn into the bitter battle being waged over the poet's literary legacy, but then he makes a chance discovery that raises new doubts about the death of Shelley's first wife, Harriet, and he starts to question whether she did indeed kill herself, or whether what really happened was far more sinister than suicide.

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Review

This is possibly the the worst book I've ever read, the language was overly descriptive in places, the flow of the plot was disconnected and don't get me started on the character assignation that this author used when describing two of the literary worlds most famous authors.

1 Star

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## U?itaj se! says

Šim je izašla, ova knjiga odmah je privukla moju pozornost: ne samo da se radi o svojevrsnom viktorijanskom krimiću, kakve inače obožavam?itati, već su i neki od njenih likova znameniti književnici: Mary i Percy Bysshe Shelley, te lord Byron.

Centralni lik cijele priče je Charles Maddox, mladi istražitelj, kojeg Percy Shelley, sin Mary i Percya Bysshea Shelleya, i njegova supruga, unajme kako bi istražio navodnu ucjenu Percyjeve majke, kojom joj prijete da će objaviti neke privatne dokumente koji se odnose na njen i život njenog pokojnog supruga, a koji će baciti loše svjetlo na Shelleyeve. Osoba koja navodno ucjenjuje i progoni Mary Shelley njena je bivša bliska prijateljica Claire Clairmont, koja, kad ju Charles posjeti, priču o ucjeni ispriča iz posve drugog kuta. Charlesu je sve jasnije da je razlog zbog kojeg su ga Shelleyevi unajmili u biti samo krinka, pod kojom su zapravo naumili doznati što o izvjesnim događajima iz prošlosti zna (i postoje li o tome kakvi dokazi, te gdje

se nalaze) Charlesov ujak, koji je u tim prošlim događajima također odigrao ulogu.

U nemogućnosti da od ujaka, koji je ranije pretrpio manji moždani udar, direktno dozna što se u prošlosti dogodilo između njega i Shelleyevih, Charles će morati stvari istražiti na svoj način i odgovore potražiti negdje drugdje. Otkrivajući, malo pomalo, tu tajnu iz prošlosti, čiji obrisi, što više o njoj doznaje, Charlesu počinju činiti sve jasniju sliku, otkrit će ne samo detalje iz života Shelleyevih koje oni pod svaku cijenu pokušavaju sakriti, nego i detalje iz života njegovog vlastitog ujaka, koji su mu do sada bili posve nepoznati. Na kraju, Charles će morati odlučiti što učiniti s onim što je doznao - jer, neke tajne treba otkriti, a za neke je, pak, tajne ponekad ipak bolje da ostanu sakrivene.

Prije svega, moram napomenuti da mi zaista nije jasno tko i kako odlučuje o tome kojim će se redoslijedom prevoditi knjige iz nekog serijala. Ova je, naime, tek treća knjiga u serijalu o Charlesu Maddoxu, a uobičajeni odgovor svih izdavača na pitanje zašto se neki serijal nije počeo prevoditi od početka, dakle od prve knjige, uvijek je taj da je knjige tog serijala moguće čitati i po nasumičnom redoslijedu. To, dakako, zna biti slučaj kod nekih serijala, zbog čega sam, iako razočarana što se ne radi o prvoj knjizi, ipak krenula pročitati ovu knjigu i mogu vam reći da - da, možete serijal čitati nasumce, ali - samo ako vam ne smeta što ćete tijekom čitanja imati podosta neodgovorenih pitanja, odgovori na koja se nalaze u prethodnim knjigama.

Primjerice, zašto Charlesu nedostaje prst na jednoj ruci? Zašto tuguje, odnosno osjeća odgovornost zbog smrti jedne prostitutke i što joj se uopće dogodilo? Što se dogodilo s njegovom mlađom sestrom Elizabeth? Koji je slučaj kojim si je Charles izgradio ime i kako su s njime povezane kuće Tom All-Alone'sa, te zašto bi vam prezime iz naziva tvrtke W.H. Smith & Sons trebalo biti poznato? Sve su to pitanja na koja vam i sama spisateljica skreće pozornost dok čitate ovu knjigu, referirajući se pritom na ranije knjige iz serijala o Charlesu i ne odajući niti jednu pojedinost vezanu za ova pitanja, nego ih ostavljajući neodgovorenima (barem ako već niste (ili dok ne pročitate) prethodne knjige).

No, kad ostavimo redoslijed knjiga po strani, ova je konkretna knjiga jedno jako zanimljivo, pitko i napeto štivo koje se s užitkom čita. Lynn Shepherd uglavnom se oslanja na stvarne činjenice iz života Mary i Percyja Shelleya, pune čini praznine iz već znanim nam njihovih biografija fikcijom kakva se u te biografije savršeno uklapa. Začin cijeloj priči čini mračna i tajanstvena atmosfera kakva obično obitava u Marynim i Shelleyevim književnim ostvarenjima, uz sveprisutnu aluziju na Maryino najpoznatije djelo - Frankenstein - koje je i samo po sebi obavijeno tajanstvenošću.

Dok čitate, upoznat ćete ove slavne književne stvaraoce na nekoliko načina, nakon svakog novog događaja stvarajući novu sliku o njima, sve se vrijeme pitajući tko je od svih tih likova ovdje pravi Frankenstein, pravo čudovište, ili pak samo žrtva niza nesretnih okolnosti. Onako kako su prikazani u ovoj knjizi, ovi likovi i na način koji je Shepherdica upotpunila praznine u njihovim životima, čine uvjerljivu sliku onoga što je lako moguće da se i stvarno dogodilo, a što, zbog nedostatka podataka o njima, vjerojatno nikada nećemo saznati.

I sam Charles, nositelj radnje, također je fascinantni lik, o kojem također štošta doznajemo, dovoljno da poželimo čitati o još njegovih dogodovština. Slika viktorijanskog Londona koju nam je spisateljica ovdje prikazala jednako je fascinantna i čini zanimljivo okruženje za uživanje u ovoj priči. Natruha dekadencije, nemoralna i društveno neprihvatljivog, pa i skandaloznog, ponašanja, koja vlada u odnosima između likova dodaje još jednu zanimljivost čitavoj priči, čineći ju sličnom mračnim gotskim romanima kakve su pojedini njeni likovi svojedobno pisali.

Uvijek je zanimljivo čitati o knjigama i književnicima, kao i tajanstvenostima koje su okruživale njihove živote i stvaranja njihovih djela. Dodajmo na to mističnu atmosferu 19. stoljeća, krimi-misterij koji treba



riješiti i karizmatičnog detektiva na kojem je da to učini, i dobit ćemo odličan način za provesti nekoliko sati, uživajući u pametno i vješto ispređenim rečenicama spisateljice koja nam je taj užitak i omogućila. Ako vam sve ovo što sam napisala dobro zvuči, svakako pročitajte ovu knjigu. Ostavljam vam jedino da odlučite (ovisno o tome koliko vam smeta ne znati na što se na nekim mjestima spisateljica referira), hoćete li ju pročitati odmah ili pričekati dok ne pročitate prve dvije knjige o Charlesu. Što god odlučite, užitka u čitanju vam neće manjkati.

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## **Suzie Grogan says**

The research and imagination that has gone into this book takes it well beyond the Victorian crime genre that it might otherwise be slotted into. As it examines a mystery at the heart of the life of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley much of the 'action' takes place much earlier in the 19th century. Unlike the book it succeeds, Tom All Alone's, Charles Maddox Junior does not drive the story as viewpoint switches between characters via letters, notes and journal entries, which reveal his great uncle - CM Snr - to be rather more fallible than we have been previously led to believe. This results in a tale that constantly surprises and challenges beliefs and at the end our views of the poet Shelley and the women he bewitched and betrayed are transformed by the author's imagination. It will be hard to think of this complex Romantic poet in the same way again!

Charles Maddox, both junior and senior, are flawed heroes in many ways. However an interesting detective is never a simple soul.

I look forward to the next book in this thrilling and intelligent series.

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## **Chaitra says**

After reading this, I feel really sorry for the Shelleys. They don't deserve this, not after so long, not when they can't defend themselves. I know this is fiction, but most of my acrimony comes from reading the author's notes at the end. It's the license Shepherd took with the "eloquent silences" in Mary Shelley's journal and justifying one step sister's jealousy of another as cause for believing that one of them is capable of murder that bothers me. Shepherd really believes that she didn't have to stretch the truth a lot, which, even given my near-total ignorance of Shelleys, doesn't seem right.

Shepherd must really hate the Shelleys. There can't be any other reason for this book - her detectives at no point display an open mind. Oh, they might not immediately believe Mary as the murderess, but they believe she is a liar, a manipulator, a neglecter of her children and that of Claire's, a crass and vulgar person, someone with no morality, and a person who would take Percy Shelley's masterpiece (Frankenstein) and parade around as her own. Also, she's a sometimes crazy murderess. If there's some hideous quality that Mary isn't accused of in this book (and in the author notes), I missed it. I wonder when it became a crime to have changes made to your manuscript by your husband, the famous poet? So what if Percy Shelley made some (maybe radical) changes to Mary's book? The basis of this author's assumption that Mary didn't write Frankenstein comes from the fact that even the most fanatical of believers in Mary's authorship "admit" that her next books weren't much. Harper Lee never wrote another book after *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Maybe she plagiarized her book too.

I wonder she didn't think that the silences and the ripped pages weren't because people in the future would

make ridiculous assumptions based on pages written in anger. It's sad that these ridiculous assumptions were made anyway. That Mary may have neglected her children, I don't dispute. (Although I have no idea if she did or not, it's a feasible scenario given her depression and Percy's philandering). What's hubris is to assume that Mary was the sole cause for this, based on some sketchy descriptions by a hardly unbiased source - Claire Clairmont. They were not exactly close step-sisters who were (supposedly) trying to share the attentions of a single man. How can their relationship ever be less than acrimonious? I also wonder why I'm supposed to sympathize with the Claire of this book? Other than the fact that she's still attractive to our detective (and Mary isn't). She has a thing for her brother-in-law, and she's upset that Mary would try and sabotage her?

It made me angry, this book. I'm not a fan of Frankenstein. I've never read anything else by Mary. Of Percy Shelley I only know of Ozymandias, which I had to study in school. I'm fond of Byron's poetry and some of his legend, but that's the extent of my relationship with the Romantics. But I don't think this should have been written, that two important literary figures should have been made the focus of this accusing book. As I've written, it's not even a good mystery. The detective is so judgmental that it's hard to believe he would have even bothered to look at another person had an opportunity presented itself. It doesn't, so that's that. One after another, events just fall into place damning Mary and Shelley, and exonerating everyone else (Fanny Imlay, Claire Clairmont, Harriet, Eliza Westbrook). There are too many letters written around "telling" of events.

I did finish it, and having done that, I've decided to not read another book by Lynn Shepherd again. I'm overreacting, probably. But that's my opinion anyway. 1 star.

*I received a copy of this book for review via NetGalley.*

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## **Tania says**

There is no problem, however intractable, that cannot be resolved by the steady application of logic and observation

I love Netgalley, it allows me to choose books I would never otherwise have read. After requesting this title, I really thought I made a mistake. Whodunit's is not really my genre, I new nothing about the romantic poets, and I belatedly noticed that this was the second book in a series. Despite all of this I really enjoyed it.

I was interested in learning more about Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley and Claire Clairmont and their contemporaries. I never realized that free love was already a concept in the Victorian age. I was glad that the author explains in detail what is fact and what is fiction in her notes, as it's always difficult reading about a new spin on historical figures if you are not familiar with the basic facts.

I love how vividly she painted London in the 1800's. I thought the writing also reflected the time period very well. It was my first time reading a novel told from a 3rd person omniscient point of view. It was a bit jarring in the beginning, but by the end of the book I quite liked it.

The suspense in A Fatal Likeness was amazing. There was twists on top of twists and layers on layers. Every time you thought that all answers were now revealed, there was yet another revelation waiting in the wings. Charles Maddox (who reminds me quite a bit of Sherlock Holmes) sees the case, and possible answers, from

all the suspects point of view.

Thanks Mrs. Shepherd, because of your book I've now discovered a new favorite genre - Historical Crime.

The story: When his great-uncle, the master detective who schooled him in the science of "thief taking," is mysteriously stricken, Charles Maddox fears that the old man's breakdown may be directly related to the latest case he's been asked to undertake. Summoned to the home of a stuffy nobleman and his imperious wife, Charles finds his investigative services have been engaged by no less than the son of celebrated poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and his famed widow, Mary, author of the gothic classic "Frankenstein."

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### **Karyn says**

There were many times during the first third that I thought I was going to abandon this book as the plot seemed to be stalled and I wasn't emotionally involved in the characters. What kept me going was a fascination with the lines between the author and protagonist's points of view and the ethics of using real people as characters in fiction.

Charles Maddox, our main character, remains a cypher for me. Perhaps the first book he appears in fixes this, but I would not be able to tell you about his passions or abilities. My lasting impression will be that he really didn't treat his servants well. Most of the plot moves forward through information falling into his lap - letters, journals, and case notes from the past are all recreated here and take up much of the novel. The story is also told from the point of view of his great uncle, also Charles Maddox, and this is where my first fascination comes in.

Maddox the elder is a very judgemental man, decrying Shelley's and Godwin's beliefs in free love and equality between the classes as many a Victorian gentleman would. There is also a strong authorial narration, remarking on events from a modern perspective. Shepherd lets her characters' interpretation of events stand and mostly applies diagnoses to characters, like a centuries too late psychiatrist. With these two voices Maddox the elder's point of view blends into the author's point of view, her diagnoses supporting his beliefs and making him her mouthpiece. If this is true, then Shepherd really doesn't like the historical people she writes about.

Then there are the non-fictional characters, or perhaps it's better to say the fictional representations of real people. I've read real person fiction in the past and *never* had such a negative reaction to it before. This makes little sense, I have no particular attachment to the Shelleys and their crowd. Perhaps it is because I have never read such a negative portrayal before? Throughout the novel the Shelleys are accused of almost every crime imaginable. They are wretched people, spreading misery wherever they go. The wrongs pile up higher and higher into an unreal level of accusation and innuendo. Do fiction authors have a responsibility toward the real people they write about? Or are they just fodder for the imagination once they are gone?

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### **Alana White says**

1850/1816 London. One man, four women. The man is Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. The adolescent women who protect him at all costs are the interrelated Fanny Godwin Imlay; Shelley's first wife, Harriet Westbrook; his second wife, Mary Godwin Shelley; and Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairmont. Lord Byron is

here, too, as the natural father of Claire Clairmont's baby.

The fictional protagonist, Charles Maddox, carries the weight of this disquieting tale. Summoned by Shelley's son in the fall of 1850, our Charles, who is a private detective, agrees to investigate the "stranger" who claims to possess papers that will reveal the late poet's secrets to the world. These secrets propel Charles through this complex story of suicide, deceit, lies, accusations, and breathtaking meanness. What is true? Who betrayed whom? What terrible truths may be revealed that has the acclaimed author of *Frankenstein*, Mary Godwin Shelley, determined to quash them in order to protect her husband's reputation and, quite likely, hers, as well?

Childlike, prone to horrific dreams, Shelley is eccentric and a raving madman on occasion. Employing an omniscient viewpoint that allows her to step out of the story and interpret events from time to time (from as far away as the 21st century, which I found jarring), Shepherd deftly peels away the layers of Shelley's disturbing world. Incriminating papers are burned, children die or go missing, the guilty go unpunished. Even Charles Maddox falls from grace as he judges those around him and finds them lacking while remaining blissfully unaware of his own shortcomings. A fatal likeness, indeed. Despite its unsettling underpinnings, the writing in this work is glorious, and I recommend it highly.

The book contains a genealogy with comments on the interwoven Shelley and Godwin families and extensive author's notes.

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