Gordon Bannerman, Kenneth Baxter, Daniel Cook and Matthew Jarron, *Creatures of Fancy – Mary Shelley in Dundee*. Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 2019. Pp. 134. £7.50. ISBN 9780900019616.

Creatures of Fancy: Mary Shelley in Dundee makes a convincing case for what one of its authors, Gordon Bannerman, calls 'the persistence of place in the human imagination' (39). The place in question is Dundee, where 'Mary Godwin, as she was then, stayed […] from June to November 1812, and again from June 1813 to March 1814' (9), spending, in total, just over a year in the town at a formative age. *Mary Shelley in Dundee* reminds us that Shelley travelled to Scotland from London as 'a solitary girl aged fourteen' (9). This is the adolescent described at the time by her father, William Godwin, as 'singularly bold, somewhat imperious' (9). It is entirely believable that this was an impressionable time for her, and that Dundee made a long-term impact on her psyche, 'that the eerie, eldritch, supernatural Scottish element she absorbed […] very much informed the birth of *Frankenstein*' as Billy Kay puts it in the Foreword (2). When we consider that Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* little more than two years after her final departure from Dundee, the idea that 'it would be incorrect to portray Mary's visit to Dundee as anything other than highly significant' (8) becomes even more persuasive.

The converse argument, that while Dundee probably 'shaped' (101) Mary Shelley's fiction, Mary Shelley can also be regarded as having left a mark on Dundee in return, is made interestingly in '"The Eyry of Freedom" – Culture and Science in Mary Shelley's Dundee' (47). This is the essay by Matthew Jarron and Kenneth Baxter which forms the middle of the book. Along with entertaining stories about the history of the town – including details such as the imprisonment of a seditious tree in the 1790s (78), and the use of an alarming sounding 'whirling chair' to treat patients at the Dundee Lunatic Asylum in the 1820s (88) – this chapter looks at the zeitgeist of Dundee before, during and after the period of Mary Shelley's stay. Fascinating links are traced between Shelley and various figures who promoted 'the growth of science and learning in Dundee' throughout the reform era (100).

The influence of Dundee on Mary Shelley's writing beyond *Frankenstein* is also explored. Daniel Cook's essay, 'Mary Shelley's Gothic Scotland', concludes the publication with a discussion that encompasses Shelley's second-most-famous novel, *The Last Man* (1826), and the way 'Scotland features in the novel as a safe haven of sorts' (121). Cook points out that one particular fanciful detail the novel is known for, the inclusion of a 'sailing balloon' as the novelist's idea of 'a late 21st-century means of transportation' (121), is occasioned by a trip the protagonist takes to Scotland.

Some of what is discussed in *Mary Shelley in Dundee* is necessarily speculative. Statements based on educated guesses abound: 'Mary may well have had an interest in Dundee's small but growing art scene' (52); 'It is possible but highly unlikely that Shelley visited the Orkney Islands' (119). These reminded me of a point made by Betty T. Bennett, that 'Godwin, with few exceptions, simply didn't keep letters from his children.' Any letters the young Mary Godwin might have sent home to her father have not survived, so we cannot know what she did and where she went in Dundee with exactness. As Bannerman puts it: 'we lack much granular detail on Mary's activities' (22–23). The book highlights the limits to our certainties about even such a well-documented figure as Mary Shelley. It also explores, albeit tangentially, the room this leaves for historically and biographically inspired fiction. Billy Kay's Foreword mentions the 2013 novel *Unfashioned Creatures* by Lesley McDowell, 'which gives a fictional account of some of the crucial Shelley relationships which began during her sojourn in Dundee' (3). The endnotes to Daniel Cook's essay point to another recent work of Shelley-inspired fiction: 'A sequel to *Frankenstein*, Kate Horsley's *The Monster's Wife* (London, 2014)'. Cook notes that this 'fleshes out' the Orkney portion of the original novel. Additionally, Cook himself evokes a teenaged Shelley, who, with her most significant

Dundonian friend, Isabella Baxter, 'revelled in morbid storytelling' and a 'sense of imperilled adventure', and whose 'Gothic imagination doubtless ran riot' (110). This is reminiscent of no one so much as Jane Austen's Catherine Morland, the heroine of *Northanger Abbey*, and not just because Mary's friend and co-enthusiast of the Gothic is called 'Isabella'.

In fact, Isabella Baxter, and her relationship with Mary Shelley, is key to *Mary Shelley in Dundee*. The book's contribution to Romantic sociability studies is one of its strengths. An informative account is given by Bannerman of the friendship between Isabella and Mary: its intricacies, ambivalences, lapses, and the pressures the two women faced. This aspect of the three essays, their sense of the communities we can discover in the connection between Mary Shelley and Dundee, is especially rewarding.

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