

***Selena. A Scholarly Edition.* By Mary Tighe. Edited by Harriet Kramer Linkin. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012. xiv + 749p. £80.00 (hb). ISBN 978-1-4094-0549-8**

The tremendous importance of archival research should never be overlooked. *Selena* by Irish writer Mary Tighe, completed in 1803 although never published; has languished in archival obscurity in the National Library of Ireland until painstakingly resurrected by Harriet Kramer Linkin who has subsequently offered the literary community an annotated *Scholarly Edition* of what is thought to be Tighe's semi-autobiographical novel. Although predominately considered a poet, Tighe's novel is revelatory and the cultural significance of Kramer Linkin's project is evident; we are afforded intimate insight into Tighe's experience of late eighteenth-century society, its morals, or lack thereof and into her own marital afflictions via her central character Selena.

In terms of plot, *Selena* is the victim of the machinations of eighteenth-century patriarchy and particularly paternal duplicity, which renders her powerless and in a state of dejection, a state that she has to secretly negotiate in order to continue alongside her peers, but which also precludes her from the happiness one expects from the sphere of love and marriage. With this central concern and the heartbreaking sub-plots in which the limitations and abject iniquity that women of the period experience, regardless of class status; this courtship novel possesses a stark, gritty realism, akin to Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman*. It could be considered as almost a prototype to Eliot's later realist proclivities, and it exists with a depth of characterisation which is harder to locate in the eighteenth-century works of Wollstonecraft, Richardson and Burney. However, a stock Romantic lexicon abounds and *Selena* is 'empassioned'; 'trembling' in 'transports'; these lexical registers firmly ground the novel within its Romantic frame of reference (Tighe 562).

Although there are similarities between *Selena*'s moral integrity and naive beauty that echoes the likes of earlier female protagonists Pamela, Evelina and Radcliffe's stock

heroines; Tighe painstakingly develops Selena, foregrounding her anguish and desire, and characters such as Lady Travellyn, Angela and Sidney, are expanded psychologically and emotionally, as the novel progresses. The reader is able to intellectually and sympathetically connect with these sensitive representations of character far more readily than those of Austen's candy coated satirical caricatures, which while observationally astute and entertaining are perhaps lacking in the profound nuances and complexities of human nature that Tighe identifies.

This scholarly edition of the text is for the most part, quite effective. When originally considered for publication the novel was posthumously edited by Tighe's husband Henry; thus Tighe's authorial voice is somewhat problematised and ironically tainted with the patriarchal brush that she is subversively trying to expose within the novel's themes (something that Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman* also suffered from through Godwin's editorial and authorial framing). Kramer Linkin has re-asserted Tighe's textual authority by presenting the original text as Tighe had intended it and there are succinct references which highlight where and how Henry has changed the phraseology which he clearly deems 'unladylike' and, as Kramer Linkin observes, tainting to Tighe's angelic 'reputation' as 'beautiful dead poetess' (in Tighe 4).

In fact, the style of referencing is actually somewhat refreshing. In this scholarly edition the reader is afforded footnotes rather than endnotes which foreground the inter-textual complexities of Tighe's Romantic propensities as well as her wider literary considerations. These homages to both Tighe's contemporaries and bygone literary greats often provide an ironic counterbalance to the novel's proceedings, but also at times significant depth and poignancy. However, the novel should come with a spoiler alert. Kramer Linkin's 'Introduction' while extremely informative in terms of biography, thematically and even theoretically (a scant Freudian aside to Lady Greyville seems extraneous), is overlong and exposes too much of the plot and the story's dramatic features,

so much so, that one is left with few surprises which is unfortunate because at nearly seven hundred and fifty pages, this is a novel not for the fainthearted student or scholar. However, criticism aside, this is an important addition to the Romantic canon which is still dominated by the poetry of the “big six”, and one that encapsulates the rudimentary genesis from Romantic to realist tradition.

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