

Harriet Kramer Linkin, *The Collected Letters of Mary Blachford Tighe*. Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2020. Pp. xix + 519. £108. ISBN 9781611462470.

Mary Blachford Tighe, born in Dublin in 1772 to the Reverend William Blachford and Theodosia Tighe (both of affluent Anglo-Irish landed gentry stock), lived through some of the most precarious times in Anglo-Irish history. The French *Expedition d'Irlande* in 1796, during one of the cruellest winters of the eighteenth century, saw uprising, bloodshed, and terror. The looming Acts of Union, which Tighe personally opposed, became a bone of contention among the United Irishmen, and those loyal to the English establishment.

Tighe's preserved letters serve as an intriguing and almost voyeuristic peek into some of the inconspicuous mores unique to the Romantic period; but also into the life of a young, privileged, yet unassuming woman during a time of cataclysm in Ireland for the indigenous Irish people, and the gentry to which she belonged. (Of note is that *Tighe*, derived from the clan name *Tadhg*, means poet or philosopher; thus, her vocation seemed pre-ordained).

Harriet Kramer Linkin's dedication to Tighe's legacy led to the discovery of 46 letters that had remained sequestered in a box of Hamilton family papers in the National Library of Ireland until the editor's efforts finally unveiled them in 2013 (first promulgated in *Romanticism*, Volume 21, Issue 3, October 2015, pp. 207-227). Kramer Linkin carefully and methodically edits this engaging collection of 166 letters with lucidity and ease. As the pre-eminent custodian of Tighe's letters and legacy, the editor has worked tirelessly to fully reveal the importance of Tighe as 'one of the premier women poets writing during the Romantic period' and 'one of the most unusual in her resistance to publication, and her insistence on sharing her handwritten manuscripts with a small circle of friends and family members' (1).

Having authored in excess of 150 lyric poems 'that brilliantly delineate the emotional landscapes of love, loss, memory, and desire' (1), after Tighe's death in 1810 at the age of 38 her family burned the majority of her works with the exception of a few; among these is the five-volume novel *Selena* 'which probes the social and psychological pressures of romantic, familial, platonic and, aesthetic interactions' (1), and it is the only work she printed during her own lifetime; and her six-canto allegorical Spenserian poem *Psyche; or, the Legend of Love* which places Psyche on an equal footing with her innamorato, Cupid, and installs Tighe as a feminist philosopher after the indefatigable mother of women's rights, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Psyche* caught the eye of Thomas Moore, who so admired it that he responded with his poem *To Mrs. Henry Tighe on reading her Psyche*. After her death, a new edition of the poem was published in 1811, along with some other verse that had never been published; Keats, after reading this new edition, paid tribute to Tighe in *To Some Ladies*, thus awarding the recognition she had long deserved, even if it was fated to be posthumous. Tighe's (then Blachford) early letters in this collection hint at the influential role Methodism played in her youth, and her family connections 'to the Wesleys, the Shirleys, the Smyths, the Spilsburys, and others in that circle' (10).

The funereal pyre of her writing may have been due to Tighe's reluctance to have her literary efforts publicly disseminated far and wide — 'take whatever steps can be taken towards preventing the publication' (302). While this is a substantial loss for romantic scholars, fortunately, her letters discovered, collected, and masterfully compiled here by Kramer Linkin lend us the opportunity to track and analyse Tighe's feelings and thoughts on a plethora of topics. Her impressive social connections and interactions unfurl in an elegant flurry of reflective and sincere (if not inordinately apologetic) letters. Her words fall on these pages like delicate fragments of historical artefacts and eventually what emerges is a portrait of a well-connected Anglo-Irish Romantic lady writer whose life of intellectual curiosity and literary

proficiency was all too short, and devoid of the great romantic intimacy she envisioned for her protagonists.

The author notably devotes much time and attention in signposting for the reader the exact dates, locations, senders and receivers of the letters, and letter numeration. Additionally, there are extensive notes to clarify matters pertaining to individuals and situations discussed by Tighe and her connections. Also included are editorial and bibliographical notes, chronological framing, a guide to abbreviations, and the Tighe family tree. These portions of Kramer Linkin's book are seamlessly interwoven in order that the reader is never at a loss in terms of context, content, nor Tighe's writing conventions.

Kramer Linkin's collection is so accessible and furnished with such well-informed supplementary research that it is bound to open up new opportunities for the study, discussion, and celebration of one of Ireland's most esteemed Romantic woman poets.

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