

Harriet Kramer Linkin, ed., *Selena by Mary Tighe: A Scholarly Edition*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012. 749pp. £90. ISBN 9781409405498 (hbk); ISBN 09781409405504 (ebk).

Mary Tighe has become increasingly known and highly regarded as a poet, largely due to the critical championing of her work by Harriet Kramer Linkin and Averill Buchanan. Her novel *Selena*, published for the first time from a manuscript copy in the National Library of Ireland, is certainly a poet's novel, featuring several characters who write poetry, the frequent quotation of poetry by both the fictional characters and the narrator, and chapter epigraphs drawn from a strikingly wide range of reading which includes Shakespeare, Restoration verse tragedy, Italian poetry, mid-eighteenth-century poetry (especially Thomson), and a range of contemporary female poets (including Baillie, Barbauld, Seward, Smith and Porter). Tighe's own prose often gestures towards the common tropes and rhythms of contemporary verse, particularly the poetry of sensibility. Just before the moment of the novel's happy resolution, *Selena* responds sympathetically to the plaintive melody, the 'melancholy murmur' of the stock dove and sighs that she alone can attend to its song (720). The climax of the novel's plot takes place in Killarney in Ireland, where the dramatic landscape is described in a painterly poetic style. And the frequent poeticism of the novel's style enables its probing of intense feeling. *Selena*'s close friend, Lady Emily Trevallyn, envies that she 'can always act right with so much ease' (416), but the novel plumbs the pain and longing which characterise *Selena*'s inner emotions, and which are no less heartfelt than the more extreme acts and thoughts of characters such as Edwin Stanmore and Angela Harley. As the editor of the modern critical edition of Tighe's poetry, Linkin is well placed to annotate and contextualise these significant elements of the novel.

Yet, as Averill Buchanan has shown, Tighe's 'Reading Journal' demonstrates that she was an equally avid reader of contemporary women's fiction, admiring Edgeworth in particular. And, in contrast to its frequently poetic voice, the novel also accommodates many comic and satiric touches, often the result of a cool narrative irony which resembles that of Austen: the observation, for example, that Lady Harriet 'displayed her charms with the least possible disguise save that which her great grandmothers the Picts were accustomed to employ at once as ornament and covering' (511); or that the post-boy, unlike the heroic lovers at the scene, had no reason to find secret contentment in a carriage accident: 'It was no easy matter to obtain any information from this their companion in misfortune, who not having like the rest of the party that secret internal consolation of being in the presence of those most dear to their hearts had already found his whole stock of good temper totally forsake him, and seemed better inclined to grumble over his broken carriage and beat his horses' (301). The annoyance caused by Clara peeling nuts (165), the fastidiousness of Lady Greysville turning the pages of her novel with a knife and fork so as to avoid its dirt (95), and the presentation to Lady Harriet of her perfumed handkerchief on a salver (209): such images give a sense of the novel's frequent comedy.

The novel's considerable length (376,400 words) permits it to incorporate many distinct and varied elements: a defence of Methodism in the characters of the redoubtable curate Mr Mason and the school-mistress of Emily's charity school, Mrs Harley; the interest in plants and botany evident throughout, but particularly in the use of flowers as a secret code between lovers; its celebration of music; the legal imperatives and intricacies underpinning marriage and inheritance arrangements; and the traditionally novelistic misunderstandings and entanglements of the various romantic couples and its satirising of ostensibly 'polite' society life. The novel is also striking for its depiction of the strongly supportive, because often critical, friendship between *Selena* and Lady Trevallyn, a friendship which, unlike

earlier representations of female solidarity, does not preclude a close bond between Selena and her younger sister, Clara. And it includes interesting, if brief, descriptions of the acting of Mrs Jordan, amateur theatricals, visits to Harewood House and to Strawberry Hill, while its plot includes a suicide attempt, the incarceration of a wife in a gloomy mansion in Wales, several brutal shootings (of men and horses), a threat of sexual assault, the scheming of an illegitimate son against his step-mother, a mother's miscarriage of her illegitimate child and subsequent opium addiction, and a husband's parading of his wife's beauty.

The edition retains the light punctuation of the original manuscript, thus capturing its ebullient style, and it notes alterations made in another hand on the manuscript (principally, deletions of Lord Dallamore's indecorous curses). A very attractive feature of the edition is its incorporation of eight illustrations from an 1805 manuscript volume, where the watercolours accompany the same poems which are reproduced within the novel. I would have liked to see the works cited within the novel given a separate section within the bibliography; the sonnet written by Sidney to Selena which is coyly withheld might have been included in a footnote since that sonnet was published in Tighe's 1811 posthumous collection of poems (733); and the novel's important reference to the Scotch song 'Roy's Wife' – which Selena suddenly stops playing to spare Emily's embarrassment (52) – ought, I feel, to have been annotated. But these are minor quibbles in what is otherwise a very fine scholarly edition which brings this previously 'hidden' work to light.

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