In THIS ISSUE:

Editor's Column . . . . . 1
Notices . . . . . . . . . . . 1
Events . . . . . . . . . . . 4
Conference Reports . . . 7
Early Career and Postgraduate Column . . . . . . . . . 13
Reviews . . . . . . . . . . 17


This review was commissioned by Simon Kövesi and David Higgins, and edited by David Higgins.

Author of four historical tragedies, avid theatregoer and student of the drama, close friend and associate of actors, playwrights, and other key theatrical figures, and, according to Thomas Campbell, poet and biographer of the renowned actress Sarah Siddons, one of ‘the most trustworthy lovers of the drama’. This description of William Godwin might surprise scholars who are more familiar with his role as one of the Romantic period’s greatest political thinkers, author of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and *Caleb Williams* (1794). But as David O’Shaughnessy reveals in his recently published edition and monograph, Godwin’s devotion to drama and the theatre was substantial. Knowledge about this aspect of his life and work, O’Shaughnessy argues, is fundamental to understanding the evolution of his literary and political career.

*The Plays of William Godwin* is the first edition to feature Godwin’s dramatic oeuvre, namely, his four historical tragedies: *St Dunstan* (comp. 1790; never performed), *Antonio; or, The Soldier’s Return* (Drury Lane, 1800), *Abbas, King of Persia* (comp. 1801; never performed), and *Faulkener* (Drury Lane, 1807). Published in a modern scholarly format, each for the first time, these plays showcase Godwin’s investment in the drama and the theatre as major vehicles for social and political activism.

O’Shaughnessy prefaces the above dramas with a lucid and well-written introduction, in which he provides biographical and historical background along with overviews of the tragedies, including their composition history, plot, sources and influences, and reception. In the process of documenting Godwin’s education and his devotion not only to the theatre and its practitioners but also to dramatic literature, O’Shaughnessy makes his argument clear: Godwin’s philosophical project was inextricably bound up with his investment in the drama. Rather than viewing the theatre as a realm of decadence and delusion, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau did in his *Lettre à d’Alembert* (1758), Godwin sought to bridge the gap between political philosophy and mass consumption by imagining the theatre as a vehicle for social instruction: a space of public edification.

In short, *The Plays of William Godwin* constitutes an unearthing of buried treasure. Because Godwin’s plays are no longer bound by the archive, scholars can now enjoy straightforward access to a wealth of literature that reveals significant information about Godwin’s philosophical tenets, his growth as a dramatic writer, and the artistic and political world that surrounded him. The packaging of Godwin’s dramas in a high-quality edition is an added bonus. In addition to a thorough introduction, the volume features a helpful chronology, editorial and textual notes, and a selective bibliography along with complementary readings, including Godwin’s previously unpublished ‘Note on Tragedy’ (1822). (O’Shaughnessy’s transcription of *Abbas, King of Persia* is especially noteworthy for its reproduction of Coleridge’s and Lamb’s annotations, including Coleridge’s symbols.) And for those who require more information about these plays along with critical analyses of them, there is O’Shaughnessy’s monograph.

*William Godwin and the Theatre* is the first book-length study of Godwin’s dramatic output and life-long engagement with the stage. In the Introduction, O’Shaughnessy uncovers a number of remarkable facts. For instance, on a page-for-page basis, Godwin committed more time to authoring his dramas than he did his novels. He also spent an immense amount of time preparing to write them: prior to undertaking *Antonio*, Godwin read around seventy plays. Hardly less devoted to the playhouse, he attended the theatre almost 2,000 times over the course of fifty years, and his attendance peaked in the seventeen years
that he wrote his plays – 1790 to 1807 – the time, it also turns out, of his greatest fame.

By documenting such information, O’Shaughnessy establishes Godwin’s sheer reverence for drama and shows how it played a major rather than a minor role in his life. While he acknowledges the fact that Godwin’s tragedies were theatrically unsuccessful, he also contends that this should not preclude scholars from studying them. Respected writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats also penned complex yet difficult-to-stage dramas. Instead, O’Shaughnessy asks a more salient question: just what was it that attracted a writer like Godwin to the theatre?

He provides two possible answers: first, that Godwin desired the fame of a great tragedian, and second, that he believed his dramas (and his fame) would provide a means to effect social and political change. From this position, O’Shaughnessy moves on to explore what it was about the drama, per se, that could afford the latter possibility. He contends that, for Godwin, Dissenting links between oratory and performance and between education and conversation were prominent influences. In other words, Godwin’s turn toward the drama grew out of an investment in the idea that theatricality could enhance the transmission of knowledge and that open, collaborative discussion could produce knowledge and reason. Zeroing in on the latter notion, he observes that Godwin’s concept of conversation changed over time, from a didactic to a discursive model, and argues that a study of his dramas provides key insight into this shift and, moreover, into his intellectual project as a whole.

In William Godwin and the Theatre, O’Shaughnessy invites readers to revisit Godwin’s work with fresh eyes. He charts the long arc of Godwinian thought as it is interwoven between his political tracts, novels, and dramas. This intergeneric exploration allows readers to adopt a wider and more complete view of Godwin’s political philosophy: one that takes into account the fact that the theatre was central to his intellectual project. By revealing the high esteem in which Godwin and his peers held tragedy and by carefully documenting the socio-political influences that aided or prevented the staging of his plays, he also provides a new resource for understanding the theatre in the period. Finally, by investigating how Godwin’s playwriting informed his novel writing and vice-versa, he stimulates a larger conversation about theatrical influences in Romantic-era literature as a whole.

O’Shaughnessy’s detailed account of the link between politics, literature, and the theatre in the 1790s sets the stage for a compelling read. One discovers that the decade that saw the publication of Godwin’s most famous works also saw his dedicated attendance at the playhouses and regular interaction with London’s political, literary, and theatrical elite, including figures such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Coleridge, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Thomas Holcroft. For a book that charts these fascinating correspondences and also makes note of the prominent female roles in Godwin’s tragedies, it was a bit surprising not to see an analysis of the pressures that these women endure due to gender constraints and a broaching of Mary Wollstonecraft’s potential influence in this regard. But that may be a topic for another scholar altogether, and O’Shaughnessy’s edition will help make such a study possible. Indeed, these volumes are sure to spark new research on Godwin and his circle for years to come.

Over the past few years, Godwin has been the recipient of a burst of scholarly attention. Works such as Julie Carlson’s England’s First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley (2011), Tilottama Rajan’s Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft (2010), Pamela Clemit’s The Letters of William Godwin (2011), Robert M. Maniquis’s and Victoria Meyer’s Godwinian Moments (2011), and new online editorial projects – such as Mark Philp’s, David O’Shaughnessy’s, and Victoria Myers’ William Godwin’s Diary, and Elizabeth C. Denlinger’s and Neil Fraistat’s Shelley-Godwin Archive – attest to the recent flourishing of academic interest in Godwin. O’Shaughnessy’s publications stand out as an essential and refreshing component of this revival, because they offer a unique and altogether new perspective through which to view one of the
most important minds of the period. For students and scholars of Romantic-period drama, political philosophy, educational theory, or of Godwin and his circle, they will no doubt prove to be invaluable texts.

Terry F. Robinson
University of Toronto


These new critical editions make available three novels – all previously out of print – concerned with debates around female reading and education; whilst Mrs Costello’s *The Soldier’s Orphan: A Tale* offers a model of etiquette and morality for its female readers, Sarah Green’s *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* and Eaton Stannard Barrett’s *The Heroine* both warn of the corrupting effects of reading on the female mind.

As its title indicates, Sarah Green’s *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* takes the producers and consumers of popular fiction as the target of its satirical attack. By the time of its publication in 1810, Green had written a number of novels, including a gothic romance; but the opening pages of *Romance Readers* unleash a forthright and daring condemnation of the literary field, Green vehemently criticising numerous named living authors including such prominent figures as Matthew Lewis and Sir Walter Scott.

In this light, the novel aims to ‘shew the effects of romance reading on the weak and ductile mind of youth’ (11), focusing on the fate of Margaret Marsh whose romance-reading is evident in her fanciful notions and aspirations to become a heroine; as the novel progresses, her weak mind is further preyed upon through reading Rousseau and de Stael which lead the way to an illicit affair. Margaret suffers harsh punishment for her wrongdoing, left abandoned by her lover with an illegitimate child at the novel’s close.

Margaret comes to realise the error of her romance-reading ways and, as Christopher Goulding details in his introduction, the novel was thus well received as setting out an instructive example for young women – if a little daring in its depiction of seduction. Not all reading is considered dangerous by Green, and Goulding’s introductory discussion identifies how all the principal female characters’ fates are determined by their reading habits, with the works of Hannah More and Fanny Burney given the nod of approval.

Goulding’s introduction is also illustrative on the satirical techniques employed by Green: the interplay between fiction and reality are integral to Green’s satire, and the ironic demarcation of ‘historique’ facts and Green’s own use of footnotes add further layers to a work that is dense in its intertextuality. These features demand attentive and detailed editorial work, and Goulding’s preparation of the text is highly informative on such points.

Similarly satirising the reading culture of the period, Eaton Stannard Barrett’s *The Heroine; or Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader* parodies the gothic novel through the narrative of Cherry Wilkinson, a farmer’s daughter who, as a result of her novel reading, aspires to ‘become a Heroine’ (10). Tired of her bland life and convinced that she must be of higher birth, she renames herself Cherubina, assumes a case of mistaken parentage, and sets out to prove her right to the title Lady Cherubina de Willoughby. Through the course of the novel, recounted through Cherry’s letters to her former governess,