

'A Ghost of One's Own': Spectral Intrusions and Trauma in the Poetry of Joanna Baillie and Anne Bannerman

Authors : Elli Karampela

Abstract : In *Specters of Marx* (1993), Jacques Derrida refers to the ghost as an Other presence that occupies the space of the self and emanates from there, haunting in its shadowy pastness and threatening/striving to break free. In times of change, ghosts both reflect the dissolution of set principles and voice traumas of the past that create a sense of fear and instability. This paper observes the way female ghosts create connections with the living in the poetry of Joanna Baillie and Anne Bannerman, both integral, albeit under-researched in different ways, writers of the English Romantic period working in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Especially at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when ghost narratives were devoured by readers and enjoyed as stories that re-awakened sensation in times of revolution, there was at the same time fear of intrusion by terror's unruly forces that threatened to turn the readers restless. The ghost was particularly dangerous because it was associated with memory and the intrusion of past trauma in the here and now. As will be seen, both Baillie and Bannerman explore the idea of the female ghost's 'return' (a Freudian term that will be approached) which breaks both time and space boundaries to raise the suppressed female voice, threaten stability, and correct wrongs. As a result, the varied manifestations of female ghosts render Baillie and Bannerman active in the contemporary discourse about human rights and the reclamation of the agency.

Keywords : poetry, romanticism, spectrality, trauma, women

Conference Title : ICTTP 2021 : International Conference on Trauma: Theory and Practice

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : April 08-09, 2021