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Transcending the Material Self: Reading Ghosts in Samuel Richardson's Novel Clarissa

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Abstract

This thesis presents an analysis of the ghosts in Samuel Richardson's 1747-48 novel Clarissa, and synthesizes traditional literary criticism on that novel with British folklore and ghost traditions. It examines the novel historically and demonstrates that Richardson's novelistic approach changed between 1740 when he wrote Pamela and 1747 when he began writing Clarissa in that he relies on the ghost image to discuss the complexities of individual identity. In Clarissa, Richardson outdoes his previous attempt at depicting reality in Pamela because his use of the ghost motif allows the audience to see beyond the physical reality of the plot into the spiritual depths of the human heart. Clarissa involves the journey of a young woman attempting to establish a sense of identity and selfhood, and the ghosts of the novel supply a lens for interpreting her course toward a sense of self that transcends the material world, its wants, its objectives, its myriad institutions, and the identity she has constructed by association with those entities.

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