

## Invitation to participate in a working group on Joanna Baillie's *The Tryal*



Google Doodle for 11 September 2018, celebrating Joanna Baillie's 256th Birthday

Dear Colleagues,

In October 2024 I'm planning to host a rehearsed reading of **Joanna Baillie's *The Tryal*** at the Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds. At this time, I am **inviting anyone interested in contributing to this event to come forward**.

By "contributing to the event" I mean anything from discussing the play and Romantic theatre more broadly to attending the event as an audience member to auditioning to read a part. Depending on the level of interest, my thought is to hold 2-3 Zoom meetings with members of the working group in the lead-up to October. The aim of these meetings would be to help shape the event into something interesting and attractive and useful for both scholars and members of the general public. (While anyone, globally, is welcome to join the group, it is not clear whether the event itself will be hybrid; it would be great to record it—even if merely the audio—but this is something yet to be sorted.)

I have British Academy funding to hire the venue for two nights: 23 and 24 October have been agreed with the Theatre Royal. (NB: tickets to attend would be free for all). I am also able to hire a professional director (I have approached an excellent, experienced individual and have a verbal agreement with him). However, I don't have funding beyond this. As a result, participation in the working group and/or in the event itself would have to be undertaken voluntarily.

*The Tryal* (1798), from the first volume of Baillie's larger *Series of Plays on the Passions*, is a comedy focused on the passion of love in which two young women, Agnes and Mariane, trade places. Portionless Mariane acts the part of her wealthy cousin and gleefully torments suitors interested in Agnes only for her wealth. In turn, Agnes pretends to relative poverty. She also deliberately behaves obnoxiously in hopes of ascertaining the authenticity of one Mr Harwood's attentions. The self-awareness of the play has been noted by critics such as Catherine Burroughs: at one level, this is a play *about* amateur theatre performed in domestic spaces. But it is also a play about scientific experimentation: the women submit several men to various tests or indeed "tryals" in the medical-scientific sense in order to separate pure from adulterated love. My own interest in the play stems from this latter aspect. It is one text I explore in my current book project *Sense and Morbid Sensibility: Pathologies of Sympathy in Romanticism and the Long 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. Holding a rehearsed reading offers a valuable way to think through this play while also sharing Romantic theatre with a wider public.

If you are interested in being involved in the working group, please email me at [christopher.bundock@essex.ac.uk](mailto:christopher.bundock@essex.ac.uk) **before 1 March 2024**. Feel free to share this invitation with postgraduate students, non-academics, or any others whom you think may be interested.

Best,  
Chris Bundock