

JOANNA BAILLIE: THE THEORY IN HER PLAYS ON THE PASSIONS
AND AN ANALYSIS OF FOUR DRAMAS WITHIN THAT SERIES

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JOANNA BAILLIE: THE THEORY IN HER PLAYS ON THE PASSIONS
AND AN ANALYSIS OF FOUR DRAMAS WITHIN THAT SERIES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the theatre theory as outlined by Joanna Baillie in the Introductory Discourse to her *Series of Plays in Which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind: Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy* (the *Plays on the Passions*). It has become common among theatrical and literary scholars to condemn Baillie's work as either a dramatic failure or a literary oddity. Although attempts have been made to rehabilitate Baillie's reputation, most of the work has been done from the feminist perspective and Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* project continues to be perceived as a failure. Using contemporary reviews, modern analysis, and Baillie's theory, this thesis analyzes four of Baillie's plays from her *Plays on the Passions* series to determine how well they adhere to Baillie's theory. Using the findings of that analysis, this thesis analyzes Baillie's work according to the context she establishes for herself in her Introductory Discourse.

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Joanna Baillie: the Theory in her Plays on the Passions and an analysis of Four Dramas within that Series,” presented by Megan A. Baker, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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To Joanna: thank you for the journey

Women (saving Joanna Baillie) cannot write tragedy;
They have not seen enough nor felt enough of life for it.
I think Semiramis or Catherine II might have written
(could they have been unqueened) a rare play.

--Lord Byron

INTRODUCTION

Theatre history is celebrated for its successes, great moments and pivotal developments that color the current era and evolve to form the hallmarks of the subsequent era. As we study the timeline of theatre history, we can see how certain developments and changes in dramaturgy helped to pave the way for later dominant trends. Though these high points form an essential part of its foundations and convey an overall impression of a period, we cannot overlook the importance of the so-called ‘failures’ as well. For the theatre is not fueled purely by the glories of theatrical achievements, it is also propelled forward by its apparent failures. After all, many of theatre history’s most acclaimed moments were only declared so by benefit of hindsight and were considered bizarre failures or even acts of lunacy during their respective eras. Conversely, there have been many theatrical endeavors that were wild successes at the time of their debut that our modern eyes regard as purely ‘bad theatre.’ Nevertheless, these successes and failures are all interwoven to form the fabric of the modern theatre. It is for this very reason that the work of Joanna Baillie cannot be disregarded when studying British theatre of the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that she is almost unanimously regarded as a failure, her *Plays on the Passions* and the theatre theory contained therein can be regarded as a forerunner to modern realism as well as more experimental forms of drama.

I first stumbled across Joanna Baillie as I was preparing to research the development of Gothic drama as a whole, in hopes of using the information I gleaned as the foundation of my thesis. I was intrigued by this Scottish playwright who, despite

high critical acclaim and a loyal reading audience, could not manage a truly successful staging of her plays and who went to her grave truly believing herself to be a theatrical failure. I read every book I could find that even mentioned the work of Joanna Baillie and eventually managed to locate nineteenth-century copies of her *Plays on the Passions* and *Dramatical and Poetical Works*. After reading contemporary reviews of Baillie's plays and stage productions as well as twentieth and twenty-first century critical essays on her works, I became curious about Baillie's implementation of her theories within her *Plays on the Passions* series. I asked myself whether Baillie truly did what she planned to do, as outlined by her theatre theory. Though many critics and theatre scholars have damned her plays as boring and impossible to stage, though Baillie managed very few staged productions of her work during her lifetime, none of which was successful, I believe the true test of Baillie's success as a dramatist lies within the comparison of her theatre theory to the plays within her *Plays on the Passions*.

At the time of her death, Joanna Baillie, whose career spanned nearly half a century, was considered a powerful force within the English literary world. She was, arguably, the most respected and important playwright in England during the early-to mid-nineteenth century. Her body of work includes twenty-six plays, more than a hundred poems and songs, and eight metrical legends, a treatise on the nature and dignity of Jesus Christ, and the dramatic theory recorded in the Introductory Discourse to her three-volume *A Series of Plays: in which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind, Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy* (frequently referred to as *Plays on the Passions*). The first volume of her dramatic

experiment managed five editions in the first six years following its 1798 publication.¹ If her influence was so far-reaching, if she had the friendship of the greats of Romantic literature--Sir Walter Scott, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and William Sotheby, among others--why has her work fallen by the wayside? Why did it take so long for twentieth-century scholars to rediscover her work?

Joanna Baillie was a woman writing decidedly out of her time. In a theatrical climate noted for its lavish spectacle, cavernous theatres, stock characters, and exaggerated acting, she introduced a drama built upon the idea of an intimate theatre space and characters whose actions are driven by their own psychology rather than forced by outward circumstances. Though her work was revolutionary for its time and exciting to read, it did not achieve success on the stage. Because of this fact, her entire body of work is perceived as a total failure. Such a broad condemnation is not right, for it removes Baillie from her appropriate context and compares her work to dissimilar plays of the period that managed successful runs on the stage and to the closet writers, who wrote specifically for a reading audience. Due to the unique nature of her project, it would be wise to regard the *Plays on the Passions* as an autonomous unit within the Romantic theatrical canon. Since Baillie was not writing according to the conventions of the period, it is not possible to classify her according to those conventions. In formulating a theory of drama, Baillie effectively establishes her own context for analysis within Romantic drama. Baillie's plays, therefore, should be evaluated according to that independent context. Because of the context formed by the creation of

¹ Jeffrey N. Cox, *Seven Gothic Dramas 1789-1825* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 50-51.

Baillie's theatre theory, it is far more important to examine the success of Baillie's plays in concordance with her published theory than to determine her overall success based on the number of successful performances she achieved on the public stage.

This paper will attempt to explore Baillie's dramatic theory and will analyze four of her dramas from the *Plays on the Passions* series in accordance with her theory. In doing so, this author hopes to analyze this fascinating playwright and her work within the correct context and offer a new way of regarding Baillie's important contribution to nineteenth-century British drama.

CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNING OF A LITERARY LIFE

Born in Scotland in 1762 to Reverend James Baillie and Dorothea Hunter Baillie, Joanna did not at first appear to have the makings of the influential literatus she would later become. She was an active child who favored outdoor games to reading and admitted, in an 1831 letter to her friend Mary Berry, to “not being able to read but in a very imperfect manner [until] the age of eight or nine.”¹ It was the love of ghost stories, a fondness which was shared by her older sister Agnes, and her propensity for play-acting that laid the foundations for her dramatic writing. Though she received no formal education, aside from grammar school and the informal teachings of her mother, she was most likely raised no differently from her brother, Matthew, who later rose to prominence in the medical field to become physician to King George III.

Although her chosen career would be that of author and playwright, the young Joanna showed no interest in reading, despite her sister Agnes’s attempts to interest her in books. Even before she could read, Joanna would compose little verses and fantastical stories for her sister and for her school-friends. “However,” Joanna wrote in a letter to Mary Berry,

my Mother very sensibly knocked that on the head, by saying to me when I had completed my tenth year, ‘Remember you are no longer a child and must give up making verses. People would only laugh at you now were you to pretend to do it, though they might commend it and be amused by it from a child.’ I followed her advice and thought no more at that time and long after, of writing verses.--During the heedless period of my teens a few things of no value were written by me and carefully concealed. But during those years, though I had never seen above three

¹ Christine Colón, *Six Gothic Dramas* (Chicago: Valancourt Books, 2007), xv.

or four Plays a love of the Drama took hold of me, and I began to borrow Playbooks and to read them with great avidity, though I must confess that the pictures of Mrs Yates and Mrs Cibber with their wide hoops and high feathered heads, at the beginning of each piece, had more than their due share of admiration.²

In 1776, Joanna's father was appointed to the position of Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow, and the family moved there the following winter. A mere two years later, James Baillie died, leaving the family with very little financially. Joanna's brother Matthew was set to study medicine under a fellowship at Oxford in March of 1779 and so, while Matthew set off for London, the Baillie women stayed at Long Calderwood, the country-home of Joanna's uncle, Dr. William Hunter, who was at the time the most famous physician in London.³ In 1783, Dr. Hunter died and--Matthew Baillie having inherited the entirety of his uncle's estate--Joanna and her mother and sister moved to London to keep house for him. It was during this time that Joanna published her first volume of work, a collection of poems, simply titled *Poems* (re-titled *Fugitive Verses* in her collected works), which she published anonymously in 1790. The book received little to no recognition, having only one review, and did not sell any copies. Joanna was far from discouraged, however, and continued to write. While still at her brother's house in London, Joanna felt her first stirrings toward dramatic composition. She described the moment of discovery to Mary Berry in a letter dated 1831:

....when my Mother came with my Sister and myself to live with my Brother in London in seeing our incomparable Mrs Siddons and other good actors in

² Dorothy McMillan, ed. *The Scotswoman At Home and Abroad: Non-Fictional Writing, 1700-1900* (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1999), 93-94.

³ Margaret Carhart, *The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1970), 9-10.

theatres not too large for natural expression and effect, my love for the Drama was greatly increased, and one day, seeing a quantity of white paper lying on the floor which from a circumstance needless to mention had been left there and which I knew would be entirely thrown away, it came into my head that one might write something upon it, and then followed a thought, natural enough, that the something might be a play. The play was written or rather composed while my fingers were employed in sprigging muslin for an apron and afterwards transferred to paper, and though my Brother did not much like the bent given to my mind, he bestowed upon it so much hearty and manly praise, that my favorite propensity was fixed for ever. I was just two and twenty when we first came to London and this took place I believe the following summer about 9 months afterwards.⁴

The play in question was a tragedy called *Arnold*, which she worked on for three months. Unfortunately, the play no longer exists, for it was either destroyed or re-written some time after its composition and subsequent fraternal review. Matthew Baillie married Miss Sophia Denman in 1791, and so his sisters and mother quit his London home to make way for the new bride, exploring numerous possibilities for settlement before deciding upon Hampstead, then situated on the outskirts of London, where they lived out the rest of their lives.⁵

A Circle of Friends

Though Joanna Baillie is frequently described as leading an isolated, solitary existence, with naught but her spinster sister for company, she had a rather active social life with a wide and diverse circle of friends, comprised of some of the greatest literary minds of her time and who are still highly respected today. According to Carhart: “to the simple home in Hampstead went most of the noted literary men and women of England,

⁴ McMillan, *Scotswoman*, 94.

⁵ Carhart, *Life and Work*, 11-12.

as well as many from other countries. In Hampstead she was a delightful hostess; in London, a welcome guest.”⁶ Among what Sir Walter Scott would call her ‘thousand admirers’ were William Wordsworth, Lord and Lady Byron, William Sotheby, Lucy Aikin, Sarah Siddons, George Ticknor, Mary Berry, Laetitia Barbauld, and Samuel Rogers.⁷ She was most likely introduced to many of these important names through her aunt, Anne Home Hunter, authoress and lyricist, who wrote the well-known “My Mother Bids Me Bind My Hair” and other popular songs.⁸ Joanna was encouraged by her aunt to pursue writing and, better yet, to aim for publication. It was most likely her aunt’s influence and the encouragement she received from the literary society into which she was placed that inspired Joanna to publish her book of poetry in 1790 as well as the first volume of her *Plays on the Passions* in 1798.

Baillie had a long and rather close friendship with writer Mary Berry, whom she most likely met some time in the late 1790s. Around 1801, Baillie was asked to compose the prologue for Miss Berry’s *Fashionable Friends*, which was going to be produced at Berry’s home, Strawberry Hill. In October, Baillie sent the prologue to her friend, along with a note that read, “I send you a plain, simple Prologue of no pretensions, but such I hope as you will not dislike; if you do, throw it aside, and I shall not be at all offended.”⁹ By all accounts, both prologue and production were very well received. Throughout their friendship, both Baillie and Berry would solicit criticism from each other in regard to their writing.

⁶ Carhart, *Life and Work*, 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸ Peter Duthrie, ed. *Plays on the Passions* (Toronto: Broadview Literary Texts, 2001), 16-17.

⁹ Carhart, *Life and Work*, 18-19.

Baillie's association with Lord Byron was more professional than personal; her true friendship was with his wife, with whom she sided once the scandal of Lord Byron's affairs broke. Her concern was all for her friend, and she damned Byron as the blackest of blackguards and truly believed, as did Lady Byron, that he had a touch of madness in him. The respect in the Byron-Baillie relationship was nearly all on the side of Lord Byron, who greatly admired Baillie's writing and even attempted to mount a revival production of *De Monfort* starting in 1815. In the same year, Byron famously wrote, "Women (saving Joanna Baillie) cannot write tragedy."¹⁰ After Lord Byron's estrangement from his wife, Baillie grew highly critical of Byron's poetry and writing, and even chastised her dear friend Sir Walter Scott when he wrote a positive review of Byron's work.

Perhaps the most precious of all her friendships was the one she shared with Sir Walter Scott. The two met in 1806, when William Sotheby introduced them in London. "I was at first a little disappointed," Baillie said,

for I was fresh from the *Lay*, and had pictured to myself an ideal elegance and refinement of feature; but I said to myself, if I had been in a crowd, and at a loss what to do, I should have fixed upon that face among a thousand, as the sure index of the benevolence and the shrewdness that would and could help me in any strait! We had not talked long, however, before I saw in the expressive play of his countenance far more even of elegance and refinement than I had missed in its mere lines.¹¹

Scott, similarly, was surprised by Baillie's unexpected and rather contradictory physiognomy:

¹⁰ Carhart, *Life and Work*, 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

I saw a small, prim, and Quaker-like looking person, in plain attire, with gentle unobtrusive manners, and devoid of affectation; rather silent, and more inclined to listen than to talk. There was no tinge of the blue-stocking in her style of conversation, no assumption of conscious importance in her demeanor, and less of literary display than in any author or authoress I had ever been in company with. It was difficult to persuade yourself that the little, insignificant, and rather commonplace-looking individual before you, could have conceived and embodied with such potent energy, the deadly hatred of De Montfort or the fiery love of Basil.¹²

Their friendship would continue, unabated, until Scott's death in 1832. Aside from the death of her dear sister Agnes, one can surmise that there could be no worse blow to Joanna. Indeed, Baillie spent nearly all of the year following his death soliciting contributions to fund his memorial monument.¹³ When they first met at Sotheby's home, both were at the pinnacles of their respective careers. They began writing to each other in earnest by 1808, progressing from mere acquaintances to close friends in a mere two years. Theirs was a friendship based on mutual respect, collaboration, and a willingness to offer honest and loving criticism on each other's work. Scott encouraged Baillie in her dramatic endeavors and she in his poetic and prose works as well as encouraged him to write for the stage, when he expressed a tentative interest in that area. In February of 1808, the first two thousand copies of Scott's *Marmion* had been distributed, with another six thousand sold by the following May. In the third canto of this poem, Scott paid tribute to his friend Baillie, elevating her to the realm of Shakespeare:

¹² Carhart, *Life and Work*, 28-29.

¹³ Judith Bailey Slagle, *Joanna Baillie: A Literary Life* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 172.

Or, if to touch such chord be thine,
Restore the ancient tragic line,
And emulate the notes that rung
From the wild harp which silent hung,
By silver Avon's holy shore,
Till twice an hundred years rolled o'er;
When she, the bold Enchantress, came
With fearless hand and heart on flame!
From the pale willow snatch'd the treasure,
And swept it with a kindred measure,
Till Avon's swans, while rung the grove
With Monfort's hate and Basil's love,
Awakening at the inspired strain,
Deem'd their own Shakespeare liv'd again.¹⁴

A Quiet End

There is a tendency among scholars to depict Joanna Baillie as a naïve, dull, and retiring woman, especially in her later years, but such is not the case. As is seen in her vast body of work, her diverse circle of acquaintances, and the valuable legacy of letters she has left behind, it is clear that Joanna Baillie was an active participant in her era. As Margaret Carhart writes, “Baillie’s later letters reveal a tenacious and ambitious woman, receiving visits from friends and family, publishing *Ahayla Bae: a poem* in 1849, and editing her complete works nearly to the time of her death in 1851 at the age of 88.”¹⁵ Joanna Baillie died in her home in Hampstead on 23 February 1851. She had just finished editing what she called her ‘monster work’--a volume of her collected works, titled *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie*.¹⁶ She was buried in the parish

¹⁴ Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field* (New York: The Mershon Company, 1900), 64.

¹⁵ Carhart, *Life and Work*, 23.

¹⁶ Slagle, *Literary Life*, 288.

churchyard of St. John in Hampstead, alongside her mother's grave. Agnes Baillie would join them in internment in 1861. After Joanna's death, the literary world mourned and several obituaries and tributes were published in the London newspapers. Some, like the following excerpt from the 01 March 1851 edition of the *London News*, celebrated her achievements and testified to her literary importance:

Miss Baillie commenced early in life that literary career which was to extend over more than half a century. The first production that stamped her fame was her "Plays on the Passions," one volume of which appeared in 1798; the second volume was published in 1802. Sir Walter Scott was among ardent admirers of this work. . . . To the inexpressible grief of all who knew her, this great poet and excellent woman departed this life on the 23rd, at Hampstead, being at the time close on her ninetieth year. In her death passed away, we believe, the last of those maiden authors whose brilliant list includes the names of Edgeworth, Porter, and Moore, and who rendered the literature of this country, a few years ago, illustrious by their original genius, exquisite fancy, and admirable morality.¹⁷

Other accounts lauded her popularity and gentleness of character, but emphasized her failure on the stage as well:

The works of Joanna Baillie, which appeared anonymously at the end of the last century, when a brilliant phalanx of names had begun to excite general attention, created as great a sensation as any production of the period, and the impression which was the result of their first appearance was much heightened when, contrary to all expectation, they were found to be the writings of a woman. This impression was further increased when it was discovered that the authoress was still young and always led a secluded life. Several of her dramas have been acted. . . . but the writings of Joanna Baillie are rather adapted for reading than the stage. Though her fame tended greatly to draw her into society, her life was passed in retirement. . . . Gentle and unassuming to all, with an unchangeable simplicity of manner and character, she counted many of the men most celebrated for talent and genius among her friends. . . .¹⁸

¹⁷ Slagle, *Literary Life*, 291-292.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 290-291.

Setting aside the issue of whether or not her plays are more suited for the stage or for the reader alone, it cannot be argued that Joanna Baillie is unparalleled in terms of the sheer volume of high-quality work she produced during her lifetime. In fact, it can be argued that she succeeded in crafting plays for both the performer and for the reader.

Regardless, Baillie was clearly a professional in terms of her approach to writing and garnered the respect of her fellow writers, of her reading audience, and even of her most disparaging critic, Francis Jeffrey, even though her plays were consistently unproduced on the professional stage. Her lasting legacy is a cogent and cohesive dramatic theory that had the distinction of being ahead of its time; for that alone, regardless of how her plays are viewed, she is worthy of study and celebration.

CHAPTER 2

A PASSIONATE NEW THEORY

Joanna Baillie's theory came along at what was, in terms of literary value and cultural psychology, precisely the right moment for it to do so. English literature was moving away from the formality of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers and into a wildly experimental world. The Romantic mindset had overtaken writers and most were happy to experiment with the new aesthetic, churning out a wealth of poetry, novels, and essays. The world of the drama, however, was not so optimistic. Romantic writers regarded the plays of the nineteenth century with as much disdain as do many twentieth and twenty-first century scholars. They deemed it unliterary, unpoetic, unrefined, and therefore unworthy of regard. Many Romantic poets were turning to closet drama as a way of expressing their dramatic impulses, penning poetic experimental dramas that were never meant to be performed on stage. Into this rapidly changing literary environment, an anonymous volume of plays, titled *A Series of Plays: In Which It is Attempted to Delineate The Stronger Passions of the Mind, Each Passion Being The Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy* (summarily called the *Plays on the Passions*), was published in 1798, introducing a new theory of the drama. Rather than endorsing the current theatrical trends of plot-driven dramas, exaggerated acting, and cavernous theatres, the author of the *Plays on the Passions* advocated a smaller, more intimate theatre, natural expression of gesture in acting, and character-driven plays with simple plots, following one character as he is overtaken by a single passion. In addition to suggesting physical changes to theatre structures, the mechanics of playwriting, and

conventional acting style, the author desired an elevation in the moral tone of the drama, so that the theatre might be a tool for educating its audience, not merely a means of diverting them.

Volume One of the *Plays on the Passions* was not an immediate success. In a letter to her nephew William Baillie, the author wrote:

The first vol of Plays lay for some months at the Booksellers, who had refused to publish them at his own risk and cared very little about its success, without being called for or noticed, notwithstanding a review of them full of the highest & most liberal praise, published in the first Review for reputation in those days, the writer of it being equally ignorant of the Author....None of those literary persons, as far as I know, took any notice of it but Miss Berry, who saw much company at her house and spoke in the highest terms of it to every body. To her zeal in the cause I have always felt myself to be a debtor. Thus, after a time, it got into circulation, became a subject of conversation in the upper circles....¹

The year following its publication, popularity of the little volume suddenly soared, with the best and the brightest among literary circles discussing it in print and in their informal gatherings. After its initial publication, writer Mary Berry, who was by then more than a passing acquaintance of Joanna Baillie, received an anonymous package in the mail containing the volume of *Plays*. In a 1799 letter to her friend Mrs. Cholmely, Berry wrote:

Do you remember my speaking to you in high terms of a series of plays upon the passions of the human mind, which had been sent to me last winter by the author? I talked to everybody else in the same terms of them at the time, anxiously enquiring for the author; but nobody knew them, nobody cared for them, nobody would listen to me; and at last I unwillingly held my tongue... This winter, the first question on everybody's lips is, 'Have you read the series of plays?' Everybody talks in the raptures (I always thought they deserved) of the tragedies and of the introductions as of a new and admirable piece of criticism. But, whoever the author is, they still persist in preserving a strict incognito, for which I honour their honest pride, which scorns to be indebted to ANY name for

¹ Slagle, *Literary Life*, 73-74.

the success of such a work, and, with the patient sense of real merit, has quietly waited a whole twelvemonth for the impression it has at last made on an obdurate public. The author...still refuses to come forward even to receive emolument; says the piece is before the public, that the Theatre may do what they please with it, only desires the simplicity of the plot may not be infringed upon. Neither fame nor a thousand pounds therefore have much effect upon this said author's mind, whoever he or she may be. I say she, because and only because no man could or would draw such noble, such dignified representations of the female mind as the Countess Albini and Jane de Mountfort [*sic*]. They often make us clever, captivating, heroic, but never rationally superior...²

Soon, talk began to circulate amongst the learned circles of a production of one of the plays to be performed at Drury Lane. Indeed, John Philip Kemble and his sister, Mrs. Sarah Siddons, had approached Joanna Baillie--still cloaked in her anonymity--through her bookseller in hopes of staging *De Monfort* at Drury Lane. The production was initially earmarked for success, and, shortly after its opening in 1800, Joanna Baillie came forward to reveal that she was, in fact, the author of the celebrated *Series of Plays*.

In her letter to her nephew William Baillie, she described the aftermath of her revelation:

....so passed away the earliest & brightest part of my career, till the feeble success of de Monfort on the stage, and the discovery of hitherto conceald [*sic*] Dramatist being not a man of letters but a private Gentlewoman of no mark or likelihood, turned the tide of publing [public] favour, and then influential critics and Reviewers from all quarters North & South, attacked the intention of the work as delineating in each of the Dramas only one passion, and therefore quite unnatural & absurd....the inferences drawn from their own remarks was all that they deigned to lay before their Readers.³

Despite its lack of success on the public stage, Baillie's work generated a fierce loyalty and high regard amongst its reading audience. The first volume of *Plays on the Passions* went through five editions in the six years following its 1798 publication, the second volume, published in 1802, went through at least three editions, and the third volume

² Donkin, *Getting Into the Act*, 162-163.

³ Slagle, *Literary Life*, 74.

was published in 1812, followed by a three-volume set of the entire series published in 1821.⁴ In 1851, Baillie published her complete works, *The Dramatic and Poetic Works of Joanna Baillie, Complete in One Volume*, which she called her “great monster book.” The volume, running at over 800 pages, was published shortly before her death in February of that same year.⁵ Before the completion of her *Plays on the Passions* project, Baillie published *Miscellaneous Plays* (1804), thirteen dramas written independently of the theory she outlined in the Introductory Discourse. These plays were written in response to criticism Baillie had received in regard to the *Plays on the Passions*, particularly the opinions of Francis Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh Review*, who complained that Baillie’s plan for writing a play focusing on a single human passion was too narrow in its scope. Baillie published *Miscellaneous Plays* in the hope that they would be more stageable than her previous work. Some of her friends expressed concern that she was abandoning her project, but she was quick to reassure them that her *Series* would continue. William Sotheby was among those who feared the publication of *Miscellaneous Plays* as ‘acting’ plays might damage the reputation of *Plays on the Passions* as ‘reading’ plays. In an 1804 letter to Sotheby, Baillie wrote,

But why do you say, out upon me for my inflexibility in persevering to attempt acting Plays? A play certainly is more perfect for being fitted for the stage as well as the closet, and why should I not aim with all my strength to make my things as perfect as possible, however short I may fall of the mark?⁶

In her statement to the reader prefacing her *Miscellaneous Plays*, Baillie references her inability to get one of her plays staged in the London theatres, a fact which, despite her

⁴ Slagle, *Literary Life*, 27-30.

⁵ Cox, *Seven Gothic Dramas*, 51.

⁶ Baillie, *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, 179.

success with her reading audience, would always be a source of great sadness to the playwright, for she desired nothing more than to see her plays staged. “I have wished to leave behind me in the world a few plays,” she wrote, “some of which might have a chance of continuing to be acted even in our canvass theatres and barns; and of preserving to my name some remembrance with those who are lovers of that species of amusement which I have above every other enjoyed.”⁷ Indeed, the critics’ assessment that her work was inferior and that her writing was torpid when performed exasperated her and she often felt she was unfairly labeled a closet dramatist. Baillie acknowledged her own limitations in the Introductory Discourse when she wrote, “But in the first place I must observe, that as I pretend not to have overcome the difficulties attached to this design, so neither from the errors and defects, which, in these pages, I have thought it necessary to point out in the works of others, do I at all pretend to be blameless;”⁸ and, later:

How little credit soever, upon perusing these plays, the reader may think me entitled to in regard to the execution of the work, he will not, I flatter myself, deny me some credit in regard to the plan. I know of no series of plays, in any language, expressly descriptive of the different passions; and I believe there are few plays existing, in which the display of one strong passion is the chief business of the drama, so written that they could properly make part of such a series. I do not think that we should, from the works of various authours, be able to make a collection which would give us any thing exactly of the nature of that which is here proposed. If the reader, in perusing it, perceives that the abilities of the authour are not proportioned to the task which is imposed upon them, he will wish in the spirit of kindness rather than of censure, as I most sincerely do, that they had been more adequate to it.⁹

⁷ Joanna Baillie, *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie, Complete in One Volume* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 2nd ed.), 1851, 387.

⁸ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, Vol. 1, 60.

⁹ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 70.

Baillie later lamented the infrequency with which her plays were staged, not only out of a natural desire to see her work appreciated, but also out of a need to see her plays enacted so that she might more easily locate problem passages that would benefit from rewriting. She wrote in 1804:

The chief thing to be regretted in this failure of my attempts [to have her plays staged] is, that having no opportunity of seeing any of my pieces exhibited, many faults respecting stage effect and general impression will to me remain undiscovered, and those I may hereafter write be of course unimproved. Another disadvantage, perhaps, may present itself to the mind of my reader; viz. that not having the trial of their merits immediately in prospect, I may become careless or forgetful of those requisites in the drama that peculiarly refer to the stage. But if I know any thing at all of my own character, this will not be the case. I shall persevere in my task, circumstanced as I am, with as anxious unremitting an attention to every thing that regards the theatre, as if I were there forthwith to receive the full reward of all my labours, or complete and irretrievable condemnation.¹⁰

In total, Baillie wrote around twenty-six plays, only seven of which were staged during her lifetime.¹¹ Out of all of these, *De Monfort*, published in the first volume of *Plays on the Passions*, was by far the most frequently produced, with several performances in London, Edinburgh, and New York.¹² Unfortunately, none of these performances received a very long run, although frequent revivals were attempted in various cities--from the theatres of thriving metropolises to small theatres in rural areas.

Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* were an ambitious experiment to see if an alternative to the excesses of the London stage and its overwrought, oversized plays could be devised. Her plan was to focus on human nature rather than on the plot

¹⁰ Baillie, *Works*, 388.

¹¹ M. Norton, "The Plays of Joanna Baillie." *The Review of English Studies* (Vol. 23, No. 90 (April 1947)), 132.

¹² Cox, *Seven Gothic Dramas*, 51.

contrivances that had become the staples of the London theatres. Though her plays would focus on the emotions of the protagonist, Baillie was more interested in exploring the effect a strong emotion will have on a character, rather than the character himself. She showed, not a single character responding emotionally to a variety of trials and situations, but a normal or morally superior person who became consumed by a single driving passion and was subsequently overwhelmed and possibly destroyed by that passion. The Introductory Discourse outlined in great detail her philosophy on human emotion and delineated her intentions for her proposed project. After encountering minimal success on the London stage, Baillie made addenda to the preface of Volume Three of her *Series*, but did not alter the heart of her theory. Instead, she addressed her lack of success, reiterated her intentions, and described in great detail the unfavorable theatrical climate in London, suggesting several improvements not only in terms of the theatrical conventions of the time, but also in regard to the physical theatre space. In 1836, thirty-eight years after the initial publication of volume one of *Plays on the Passions*, Baillie published what were to be the final three plays in her *Plays on the Passions*. The plays were published in a three-volume set titled *Dramas*, which included several other works unassociated with the *Plays on the Passions*.

The Plays on the Passions

As a preface to the first volume of the *Plays on the Passions*, Joanna Baillie included an Introductory Discourse in which she carefully described her design for the project. Her intention was to examine several strong human passions, dedicating a comic and a tragic play to each one. The passions she had originally selected were love,

hatred, ambition, fear, hope, remorse, jealousy, pride, envy, revenge, anger, joy, and grief. After the first two volumes of the series had already been published, Baillie reconsidered some of the passions she had chosen to depict and, in the preface to Volume Three, Baillie explained why she had decided to omit writing on the passions of anger, joy, grief, pride, and envy:

Joy, Grief, and Anger, as I have already said, are generally of too transient a nature, and are too frequently the attendants of all our passions to be made the subject of an entire play. And though this objection cannot be urged in regard to Pride and Envy, two powerful passions which I have not yet named; Pride would make, I should think, a dull subject, unless it were merely taken as the groundwork of more turbulent passions; and Envy, being that state of mind, which, of all others, meets with less sympathy, could only be endured in Comedy or Farce, and would become altogether disgusting in Tragedy. I have besides, in some degree, introduced this latter passion into the work already, by making it a companion or rather a component part of Hatred.¹³

Baillie's *Plays on the Passions*, then, would be devoted to the passions of love, hatred, ambition, fear, and hope. It was Baillie's intention that she would later add the passions of remorse, jealousy, and revenge, but only "if I live long enough."¹⁴ Volume One is devoted to *Basil*, her tragedy on love, *The Tryal*, her comedy on love, and *De Monfort*, her tragedy on hatred. Volume two holds her comedy on hatred, *The Election*, and three plays covering the passion of ambition: *Ethwald, a Tragedy*, parts one and two, and a comedy, *The Second Marriage*. Volume three contains three plays on fear, two tragedies: *Orra* and *The Dream*, and a comedy on the same passion, *The Siege*. Volume three also includes *The Beacon*, a musical drama on the passion of hope. In addition to being her only intentional musical drama, *The Beacon* differs from the other works in the

¹³ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 3, xiv.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

Plays on the Passions in terms of its genre. Baillie specified in the preface to volume three that *The Beacon* was neither a tragedy nor a comedy, unlike her other plays that adhered to a strict genre label. She also expressed concern that the passion of hope “when it acts permanently, loses the character of a passion, and when it acts violently is like Anger, Joy, or Grief, [is] too transient to become the subject of a piece at any length.”¹⁵ She considered omitting the passion from her series altogether, but reconsidered because,

...what it wanted in strength it seemed to have in grace; and being of a noble, kindly and engaging nature it drew me to itself; and I resolved to do every thing for it that I could, in spite of the objections which had at first deterred me....As this passion, though more pleasing, is not so powerfully interesting as those that are more turbulent, and was therefore in danger of becoming languid and tiresome, if long dwelt upon without interruption; and at the same time of being sunk into shade or entirely overpowered, if relieved from it by variety of strong marked characters in the inferior persons of the drama, I have introduced into the scenes several songs. So many indeed, that I have ventured to call it a Musical Drama.¹⁶

In 1836, she published *Dramas*, which contained the final three plays in the *Plays on the Passions*. They were: *Romiero*, a tragedy on jealousy, *The Alienated Manor*, a comedy on jealousy, and *Henriquez*, a tragedy on remorse. These three plays were intended as the conclusion to Baillie’s *Plays on the Passions*, while the whole of *Dramas* was published to mark the end of Baillie’s work as a dramatist. All of the plays in this collection had been written many years prior to publication, but Baillie had held back on publishing them due to her lack of success on the popular stage. Baillie had not intended to make these plays publicly available until after her death, and only after her decease

¹⁵ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 3, xii.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xii-xiii

would they be offered to the “smaller theatres of our metropolis, and thereby have a chance, at least, of being produced to the public with the advantages of action and scenic decorations, which naturally belong to dramatic compositions.”¹⁷ However, realizing that English theatres were not accepting of her style of drama and, “any promise of their soon becoming so is very doubtful,” Baillie was “induced to relinquish what was at one time my earnest wish”¹⁸ and publish the last of her plays without any hope or expectation of stage production. In her preface to Volume One of *Dramas*, she wrote:

The first volume comprises a continuation of the series of Plays on the stronger Passions of the Mind, and completes all that I had intended to write on the subject. . . . In thus relinquishing my original intention, there is one thing particularly soothing to my feelings, -- that those friendly readers who encouraged my early dramatic writing (alas, how reduced in numbers!) will see the completion of the whole. This will, at least, gratify their curiosity; and it would be ungrateful in me not to believe they will, also, take some interest in the latter part of a work, the beginning of which their partial favour so kindly fostered.¹⁹

The whole of Baillie’s dramatic theory rests upon the idea of what Baillie refers to as mankind’s “sympathetick curiosity,”²⁰ or human beings’ innate curiosity about the people they encounter. Baillie’s aim is to focus the audience’s attention toward the passion itself so that they may direct their scrutiny and judgment toward it and not toward the person who is controlled by that passion. She planned to accomplish this goal by applying certain principles of dramatic writing to her plays, which will be discussed later in this section. Baillie’s theory, though considered original to the realm of dramatic composition and performance, was by no means new in regard to the

¹⁷ Baillie, *Works*, 312.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 312.

²⁰ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 4.

philosophy of human emotions. David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), and Edmund Burke's treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) all preceded her theories by several decades. Baillie's theory diverges from the theories of her predecessors in the area to which it is applied. While Hume, Smith, and Burke apply their philosophy of emotion to human life and existence, Baillie applies it to the drama, both in terms of dramatic writing and theatrical practice.

According to Burke, "The first and simplest emotion which we discover in the human mind, is Curiosity."²¹ He continues,

It is by the first of these passions that we enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost anything which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected....²²

Baillie's whole project is contingent upon this idea of sympathy--the idea that human beings enjoy the discovery of kindred feelings in the breast of their fellow human beings:

From that strong sympathy which most creatures, but the human above all, feel for others of their kind, nothing has become so much an object of man's curiosity as man himself. We are all conscious of this within ourselves, and so constantly do we meet with it in others, that like every circumstance of continually repeated occurrence, it thereby escapes observation. Every person who is not deficient in intellect, is more or less occupied in tracing amongst the individuals he converses with, the varieties of understanding and temper which constitute the characters of men; and receives great pleasure from every stroke of nature that points out to him those varieties.²³

²¹ Edmund Burke, *On Taste; On the Sublime and Beautiful; Reflections on the French Revolution; A Letter to a Noble Lord*. Charles W. Eliot, ed. (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909), 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 40-41.

²³ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 2.

Baillie argues that the tendency to classify the behavior of those we encounter daily is an unconscious one, and one that is present within us from childhood. “Most people, I believe,” she writes, “without being conscious of it, have stored up in idea the greater part of those strong marked varieties of human character, which may be said to divide it into classes; and in one of those classes they involuntarily place every new person they become acquainted with.”²⁴ She goes on to mention society’s tendency to discuss the outward trappings of its members, how “a man wears his wig and cane, what kind of house he inhabits, and what kind of table he keeps,”²⁵ rather than discussing his inward character and the events that may have influenced the development of that character. Her reasoning is that it is far easier to comment on a man or woman’s mode of dress than it is to provide evidentiary support for a judgment passed on his or her temperament, for:

...in communicating our ideas of the characters of others, we are often called upon to support them with more expence [*sic*] of reasoning than we can well afford, but our observations on the dress and appearance of men seldom involve us in such difficulties. For these, and other reasons too tedious to mention, the generality of people appear to us more trifling than they are: and I may venture to say, that, but for this sympathetick curiosity towards others of our kind which is so strongly implanted within us, the attention we pay to the dress and manners of men would dwindle into an employment as insipid, as examining the varieties of plants and minerals, is to one who understands not natural history.²⁶

Baillie suggests that our judgments about our fellow human beings’ inner passions are not as readily discussed in society as are fashions and outward displays of wealth because such statements would be regarded as unfounded and would be a source of tedium to the listener, much in the same way an impromptu lecture on the natural

²⁴ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

sciences would be to an audience who is uninformed on the subject. Baillie, therefore, believes that these passions should be held up for society's exaction in the public sphere of the drama, for it is through the actions of the performers and the sight of the passion unfolding before one's very eyes that best allows the viewer to see the effects of strong passion on a human being. Theatrical performance, according to Baillie, is something as natural as passion itself:

Formed as we are with these sympathetick propensities in regard to our own species, it is not at all wonderful that theatrical exhibition has become the grand and favourite amusement of every nation into which it has been introduced. Savages will, in the wild contortions of dance, shape out some rude story expressive of character or passion, and such a dance will give more delight to their companions than the most artful exertions of agility. Children in their gambols will make out a mimick representation of the manners, characters, and passions of grown men and women; and such a pastime will animate and delight them much more than the daintiest sweetmeats, or the handling of the gaudiest toys.²⁷

The enacting of passion is something that is inherent in the human organism and is seen universally, in the dances of "savages" and in the frolic and play of children.

But it is more than just the inherent nature of human curiosity that makes the depiction of passions right for the stage. Baillie offers up her body of work as a method of instruction for her audience. In tracing the progress of a passion in the protagonist of each play, the audience may examine their own nature and ponder how they would respond if placed in the same situation. "In examining others we know ourselves," Baillie writes.

With limbs untorn, with head unsmitten, with senses unimpaired by despair, we know what we ourselves might have been on the rack, on the scaffold, and in the most afflicting circumstances of distress. Unless when accompanied with

²⁷ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 25.

passions of the dark and malevolent kind, we cannot well exercise this disposition without becoming more just, more merciful, more compassionate; and as the dark and malevolent passions are not the predominant inmates of the human breast, it hath produced more deeds--O many more! of kindness than of cruelty.²⁸

Through watching a drama enacted upon the stage, the audience may experience the same destructive effects of the passion experienced by the onstage character, but without any danger to their own moral fiber or personal integrity. However, it cannot be just any passion depicted onstage. It must be a strong one--one with a potentially destructive outcome. Hume and Burke have both commented on humanity's tendency to be attracted to situations of misfortune and pain experienced by others in their respective treatises. They explain that it is part of human nature to be attracted to such scenes and that it is possible to derive a sort of pleasure from the experience of witnessing the pain or despair of others. This type of pleasure should not be malicious nor should the person who experiences it revel in the pain of others, but rather it should be the passive enjoyment of one vicariously experiencing a perilous situation at no immediate risk to themselves.

David Hume, in his *Treatise on Human Nature*, argues that a person would have to be free of any threat of danger before he or she would be able to experience any sort of pleasure at another's suffering or peril: "it is absolutely necessary my life should be out of any imminent hazard before I can take a delight in the sufferings of others, real or imaginary, or indeed in any thing else from any cause whatsoever."²⁹ In this sense, the theatre is a perfect venue for the depiction of suffering, for the audience, though hopefully rapt with attention at the events unfolding onstage, is fully aware that they are

²⁸ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 11-12.

²⁹ Duthrie, *Plays on the Passions*, 398.

not in harm's way and will be able to leave the theatre at the close of the performance and make their way to their homes with the knowledge that they need never experience the same dangers as the protagonist of the play they have just seen. This type of innocent voyeurism is the same impulse that draws spectators to the site of a public execution. Burke writes,

I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that of no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others; for let the affection be what it will in appearance, if it does not make us shun such objects, if on the contrary it induces us to approach them, if it makes us dwell upon them, in this case I conceive we must have a delight or pleasure of some species or other in contemplating objects of this kind. Do we not read the authentic histories of scenes of this nature with as much pleasure as romances or poems, where the incidents are fictitious?³⁰

Hume is of a like mind with Burke, for he also feels that it is the pleasure that is derived from witnessing the suffering of the condemned that brings spectators to scenes of public executions. He argues that it is the pleasure that is extracted from the real and immediate sufferings of another human being that causes people to turn their eyes to the criminal upon the gallows or at the executioner's block, and that the macabre desire to witness genuine distress as it unfolds in real life is more alluring than even the most exquisitely-written, well-performed stage tragedy could offer.

Chuse a day on which to represent the most sublime and affecting tragedy we have; appoint the most favourite actors; spare no cost upon the scenes and decorations; unite the greatest efforts of poetry, painting and music; and when you have collected your audience, just at the moment when their minds are erect with expectation, let it be reported that a state criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of real sympathy.³¹

³⁰ Burke, *On Taste*, 41-42.

³¹ Duthrie, *Plays on the Passions*, 397.

The real emotions demonstrated by the condemned criminal at the moment of his execution, Hume claims, are far more capable of arousing pleasure and sympathy in the breast of a spectator than the imitative arts of even the most skilled and gifted actor. The spectator longs to feel that unity of shared sympathy with his fellow observers and so will brave the carnage of an execution in order to experience that communion.

However, Baillie takes a rather different view on the same subject. She believes that “it cannot be any pleasure we receive from the sufferings of a fellow-creature which attracts such multitudes of people to a publick execution, though it is the horror we conceive for such a spectacle that keeps so many more away,”³² but rather it is the desire

To see a human being bearing himself up under such circumstances, or struggling with the terrible apprehensions which such a situation impresses. . . . that makes us press forward to behold what we shrink from, and wait with trembling expectation for what we dread. For though few at such a spectacle can get near enough to distinguish the expression of face, or the minuter parts of a criminal’s behaviour, yet from a considerable distance will they eagerly mark whether he steps firmly; whether the motions of his body denote agitation or calmness; and if the wind does but ruffle his garment, they will, even from that change upon the outline of his distant figure, read some expression connected with his dreadful situation.³³

For Baillie, it is not the pleasure of experiencing the suffering of another individual that brings an audience to an execution, but the desire to see how the character of the condemned withstands the agony of his imminent death. To see the play of emotion across the criminal’s face and to see if he meets his death with a firm resolve and a steady step or if he breaks under the strain of such strong all-encompassing emotion. She believes that the “universal desire” to see “man in every situation, putting forth his

³² Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

strength against the current of adversity, scorning all bodily anguish, or struggling with those feelings of nature”³⁴ is what draws the spectator both to the scene of the execution and to the theatre.

It is the universal curiosity in all of us, Baillie says, that leads us to wonder about the passions lurking within the human breast, passions that, out of wont of propriety, are hidden from society’s eyes under the guise of manners and a calm demeanor. Baillie proposes the idea of the ‘closet,’ or the experiences of a person or a dramatic character that often remain unseen or unperformed due to their private connotations. Her theory of the drama proposes the composition of plays that explore those unseen moments where one is overcome by a hidden passion and even depicts those moments before the audience’s very eyes. She calls for plays that portray

Those unseen passions which conceal themselves from the observation of men; which cannot unbosom themselves even to the dearest friend; and can, often times, only give their fulness [*sic*] vent in the lonely desert, or in the darkness of midnight. For who hath followed the great man into his secret closet, or stood by the side of his nightly couch, and heard those exclamations of the soul which heaven alone may hear, that the historian should be able to inform us? and what mode of rehearsed speech will communicate to us those feelings, whose irregular bursts, abrupt transitions, sudden pauses, and half-uttered suggestions, scorn all harmony of measured verse, all method and order of relation?³⁵

Baillie holds that it is the responsibility of the drama, especially tragedy, to portray these closet moments for our scrutiny. She acknowledges the potential of the theatre to transform the minds of its patrons, but argues that the nature of the theatre is to educate, not to corrupt.

³⁴ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 6-7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

The Drama improves us by the knowledge we acquire of our own minds, from the natural desire we have to look into the thoughts, and observe the behaviour of others. Tragedy brings to our view, men placed in those elevated situations, exposed to those great trials, and engaged in those extraordinary transactions, in which few of us are called upon to act....But if they are not represented to us as real and natural characters, the lessons we are taught from their conduct and their sentiments will be no more to us than those which we receive from the pages of the poet or the moralist.³⁶

Here, Baillie begins to lead into her very specific philosophy of the drama. It is not enough to depict strong and compelling emotions onstage or private scenes in which a character struggles with a dominant passion; the portrayal of such scenes must be done in a manner that is true to nature, both in terms of character delineation and in acting.

Baillie described her own views concerning what the function of tragedy and comedy should be. She held that it was the responsibility of tragedy to present “the passions, the humours, the weaknesses, the prejudices of men,”³⁷ to exhibit the “great and magnanimous hero” in all his superior glory, and to show how he is “softened down with those smaller frailties and imperfections which enable us to glory in, and claim kindred to his virtues.”³⁸ Tragedy must also depict the dark side of human nature through the “daring and ambitious man planning his dark designs, and executing his bloody purposes, mark’d with those appropriate characteristic[sic], which distinguish him as an individual of that class; and agitated with those varied passions, which disturb the

³⁶ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 36.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

mind of man when he is engaged in the commission of such deeds.”³⁹ Most importantly, and most pertinent to Baillie’s project:

It is for her [Tragedy] to present to us the great and striking characters that are to be found amongst men, in a way which the poet, the novelist, and the historian can but imperfectly attempt. But above all, to her, and to her only it belongs to unveil to us the human mind under the dominion of those strong and fixed passions, which, seemingly unprovoked by outward circumstances, will from small beginnings brood within the breast, till all the better dispositions, all the fair gifts of nature are borne down before them.⁴⁰

A particularly interesting aspect to Baillie’s theory is the idea of showing the evolution of a passion from its inception to its conclusion. It can be argued that all drama portrays human passion working upon its characters, but what sets Baillie apart is her belief that it is not enough to show what happens to the protagonist after he is already in the throes of a destructive passion, but the character must be seen as the passion germinates, takes root, and comes to its fruition. Baillie attempted to adhere to this idea throughout all of her plays in the *Series*, but with some plays like *De Monfort* (1798), she had to be more flexible and begin the play with the passion already present and working in the protagonist.

Baillie felt that the playwrights of her age, despite their best attempts, had ultimately failed in their representation of human passion. She accused them of looking too much into the past and seeking to emulate writers like Shakespeare instead of relying on their own originality. She also found fault with her contemporaries’ unrealistic depiction of human beings and their emotions. Instead of faithfully representing the true nature of humankind, playwrights instead chose to pen beautiful poetic dialogue for flat

³⁹ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

stock characters. The fault, wrote Baillie, lay within the bad habits and stock conventions that had been handed down among generations of playwrights and even from one contemporary writer to another. The reason for this reliance on formulas was the desire to capitalize on the popularity of the old conventions.

From the beauty of those original dramas to which they have ever looked back with admiration, they have been tempted to prefer the embellishments of poetry to faithfully delineated nature. They have been more occupied in considering the works of the great dramatists who have gone before them, and the effects produced by their writings, than the varieties of human character which first furnished materials for those works, or those principles in the mind of man by means of which such effects were produced.... Thus, great and magnanimous heroes, who bear with majestic equanimity every vicissitude of fortune; who in every temptation and trial stand forth in unshaken virtue, like a rock buffeted by the waves: who encompass with the most terrible evils, in calm possession of their souls, reason upon the difficulties of their state; and, even upon the brink of destruction, pronounce long eulogiums on virtue, in the most eloquent and beautiful language, have been held forth to our view as objects of imitation and interest: as though they had entirely forgotten that it is only for creatures like ourselves that we feel, and therefore, only from creatures like ourselves that we receive the instruction of example.⁴¹

Despite this rather pointed commentary on her fellow playwrights' work, Baillie was not completely disparaging their work. Indeed, she had great respect for her contemporaries' poetry, use of imagery and storytelling, and command of stagecraft, and she found much to admire in the characters depicted in their plays. What troubled Baillie most was how other playwrights incompletely portrayed the passions in their work, using them to "mark their several characters, and animate their scenes, rather than to open to our view the nature and portraiture of those great disturbers of the human breast."⁴² Instead,

We commonly find the characters of a tragedy affected by the passions in a transient, loose, unconnected manner; or if they are represented as under the

⁴¹ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 31-32.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

permanent influence of the more powerful ones, they are generally introduced to our notice in the very height of their fury, when all that timidity, irresolution, distrust, and a thousand delicate traits, which make the infancy of every great passion even more interesting, perhaps, than its full-blown strength, are fled. The impassioned character is generally brought into view under those irresistible attacks of their power, which it is impossible to repel; whilst those gradual steps that lead him into this state, in some of which a stand might have been made against the foe, are left entirely in the shade. These passions that may be suddenly excited, and are of short duration, as anger, fear, and oftentimes jealousy, may in this manner be fully represented; but those great masters of the soul, ambition, hatred, love, every passion that is permanent in its nature, and varied in progress, if represented to us but in one stage of its course, is represented imperfectly.⁴³

Baillie hoped that through the publication of her *Plays on the Passions*, audiences and playwrights alike would be more willing to accept this more complete portrayal of a character and that the state of the English drama would be transformed. Baillie was certain that “tragedy, written upon this plan, is fitted to produce stronger moral effect than upon any other.”⁴⁴ For that was the ultimate purpose of the drama according to Baillie--to transform the viewers in a positive and moral way and to educate them about the repercussions of submitting to one’s more destructive emotional impulses.

While Baillie felt tragedy had been led astray by its writers’ desire to imitate their predecessors, she believed that comedy had taken a turn for the worse due to the ever-changing modes of fashion and manners in society, and that the public’s fondness for clever wit had led comedy “to forget the warmer interest we feel, and the more profitable lessons we receive from genuine representations of nature. The most interesting and instructive class of comedy, therefore, the real characteristick [*sic*], has been very much neglected, whilst satirical, witty, sentimental, and, above all, busy or

⁴³ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 37-38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

circumstantial comedy have usurped the exertions of the far greater proportion of Dramatick Writers.”⁴⁵

Baillie finds fault with the popular comic genres of her day and indeed appears to be more critical of that genre than of tragedy. In “Satirical Comedy” character is “talked of” instead of enacted and the “persons of the drama are indebted for the discovery of their peculiarities to what is said of them, rather than to any things they are made to say or do for themselves.”⁴⁶ Baillie compares what she terms “Witty Comedy” to “shallow currents” and “perpetual sun-beams.” Though this type of comedy “pleases when we read,” she says, it is a superficial breed of comedy and has no lasting value. “To amuse, and only to amuse is its aim,” Baillie argues. “It pretends not to interest nor instruct.”⁴⁷ . Baillie calls the plots of these comedies “feeble” and condemns the tendency of the most memorable of the characters to color the tenor of the play with their own wit, whether they be the central characters or not.

“Sentimental Comedy,” though it addresses the “embarrassments, difficulties, and scruples....sufficiently distressing to the delicate minds who entertain them.” The sympathy such scenes generate in the audience, Baillie claims, do not hold the same power as a more tragic representation. “In real life, those who, from the peculiar frame of their minds, feel most of this refined distress, are not generally communicative upon the subject; and those who do feel and talk about it at the same time....seldom find their friends much inclined to listen to them. It is not to be supposed, then, long conversations

⁴⁵ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 44-45.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 46.

upon the stage about small sentimental niceties, can be generally interesting.”⁴⁸ Baillie finds fault with this brand of comedy, not because of its moral intentions, but because of its artificiality. Baillie finds similar fault in what she calls “Busy or Circumstantial Comedy,” which is characterized by its rapid succession of scenes and comic bits that provide escapist entertainment for the viewer and “stop[s] not for reflection.” She believes this type of comedy is extremely detrimental to its audience, especially to its younger, more impressionable members and that “continual lying and deceit in the first characters of the piece, which is necessary for conducting the plot, has a most pernicious [effect].”⁴⁹

Baillie advocates what she calls a “Characteristick [*sic*] Comedy,” in which a variety of characters, drawn directly from life, are placed in uncontrived situations that may easily be experienced in the real lives of the audience. This type of comedy “illustrates to us the general remarks we have made upon men” and “stands but little in need of busy plot, extraordinary incidents, witty repartee, or studied sentiments. It naturally produces for oneself all that it requires.” Baillie goes on to recommend “characters who are able to speak for themselves, who are to be known by their own words and actions, not by the accounts that are given of them by others”⁵⁰ and laments the tendency of interesting and highly comic secondary characters to steal focus away from the main plot and the protagonist. She believes that this split focus creates a

⁴⁸ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 46-47

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

“disunion of ideas in the mind,” which is detrimental to the effect of the whole play.⁵¹

Quite often, she feels, playwrights will rely too heavily on the eccentricities and idiosyncrasies of their minor characters, usually to mask inferior writing or deficiencies in the plot. Baillie argues that the focus of the play should stay with the main characters and that the minor characters should be merely supernumerary. Baillie believes that comedy is capable of stirring the same strength of emotion as tragedy and can even be more effective than tragedy in terms of moral education. According to Baillie,

In comedy, the stronger passions, love excepted, are seldom introduced but in a passing way....violent passion of any continuance we seldom find. When this is attempted, however, forgetting that mode of exposing the weakness of the human mind, which peculiarly belongs to her, it is too frequently done in the serious spirit of tragedy; and this has produced so many of those serious comick plays, which so much divide and distract our attention....in certain situations, and under certain circumstances, the stronger passions are fitted to produce scenes more exquisitely comick than any other: and one well-wrought scene of this kind, will have a more powerful effect in repressing similar intemperance in the mind of a spectator, than many moral cautions, or even, perhaps, than the terrifick examples of tragedy.⁵²

Baillie suggests in a footnote that we, as an audience, are more apt to be moved by passionate scenes in comedy than in tragedy, because of the tradition of tragic characters belonging to the more aristocratic and privileged classes, while comic characters tend to be associated with the middle and lower classes, who made up the majority of the theatrical audience in Baillie’s day. Baillie’s theory of dramatic characterization says that we must see characters represented onstage who are like ourselves if we are to be appropriately affected by the play in which they inhabit. Earlier in her *Introductory Discourse*, Baillie writes, “We expect to find them [the characters] creatures like

⁵¹ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 50.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 52-54.

ourselves; and if they are untrue to nature, we feel that we are imposed upon.”⁵³ Baillie wants to identify with the characters she sees on stage and argues that her fellow theatregoers feel the same way.

Comedy, according to Baillie, should show the developing stages of a passion, just as should tragedy, rather than showing the protagonist already in the midst of his difficulties. For example,

We are generally introduced to a lover after he has long been acquainted with his mistress, and wants but the consent of some stubborn relation, relief from some embarrassment of situation, or the clearing up some mistake or love-quarrel occasioned by malice or accident, to make him completely happy. To overcome these difficulties, he is engaged in a busy train of contrivance and exertion, in which the spirit, activity and ingenuity of the man is held forth to view, whilst the lover, comparatively speaking, is kept out of sight. But even so when this is not the case; when the lover is not so busied and involved, this stage of the passion is exactly the one that is least interesting, and least instructive: not to mention, as I have done already, that one stage of any passion must show it imperfectly.⁵⁴

It is Baillie’s belief that the most interesting drama follows a passion from its first gentle stirrings to the height of emotion and through to its ending. If this is true for tragedy, she says, it is equally, if not more so for comedy.

Joanna Baillie considered the stage to be a school for its audience. Since the audience comprised the middle and lower classes, then the theatre should take pains to represent primarily those demographics onstage in both the tragic and the comic genres. Baillie wanted the theatre to educate its spectators, but she wanted it to instill in them the correct moral values and not merely serve as an empty diversion for the masses. She aimed “to improve the mode of its instruction,” but acknowledged that her “want of

⁵³ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

abilities” might hinder her success.⁵⁵ Baillie recognized the difficulty of the task she had laid out for herself. In order for her to be successful, she must accurately portray the passions, not only in their most heightened moments, but also in the

...minute and delicate traits which distinguish them in an infant, growing, and repressed state; which are the most difficult of all to counterfeit, and one of which, falsely imagined, will destroy the effect of a whole scene. The characters over whom they are made to usurp dominion must be powerful and interesting, exercising them with their full measure of opposition and struggle; for the chief antagonists they contend with must be the other passions and propensities of the heart, not outward circumstances and events.⁵⁶

Interestingly enough, Baillie calls for the protagonist of her plays to struggle against an inward force to create conflict rather than have them pitted against an external antagonist. This viewpoint contradicts the type of drama prevalent on the nineteenth-century English stage, in which the hero and heroine are clearly delineated and confront an obvious villain in order to create the action of the play. Baillie feels a play is made all the more effective and powerful if the hero is struggling against his own warring passions rather than defeating an outward force. Secondary characters, according to her theory, must remain subordinate to the protagonist and must not be allowed to dominate the production. Instead,

...they must be kept perfectly distinct from the great impassioned one, should generally be represented in a calm unagitated state, and therefore more pains is necessary than in other dramattick works to mark them by appropriate distinctions of character, lest they should appear altogether insipid and insignificant.⁵⁷

At first glance, this appears to be a rather contradictory statement. Secondary characters must remain unobtrusive so that the protagonist is clearly set apart from them, but they

⁵⁵ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 57.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

must not be rendered so insignificant as to be purely functional. What Baillie calls for is a balance: for the supporting characters to be fully developed and for their actions and dialogue to serve as a foil to enhance the struggle of the protagonist.

As Baillie wanted her plays to “trace passion through all its varieties, and in every stage,”⁵⁸ she called for a simplified plot, so that the passion is unobstructed by theatrical contrivances and the bustle of onstage activity. However, to avoid the “very great danger of making a piece appear bare and unvaried,”⁵⁹ she made allowances in her plays for the presentation of spectacle. It is interesting that an author who devised an entire theory of playwriting that advocates what amounts to a character-driven drama and then wrote thirteen plays based on that theory would allow the very thing which made so many of her contemporaries condemn the theatre altogether. In a footnote, she clarifies her reason for including spectacle in her work:

To make up for this simplicity of plot, the show and decorations of the theatre ought to be allowed to plays written upon this plan, in their full extent. How fastidious soever some poets may be in regard to these matters, it is much better to relieve our tired-out attention with a battle, a banquet, or a procession, than an accumulation of incidents. In the latter case the mind is harassed and confused with these doubts, conjectures, and disappointments which multiplied events occasion, and in a great measure unfitted for attending to the worthier parts of the piece: but in the former it enjoys a rest, a pleasing pause in its more serious occupation, from which it can return again, without any incumbrance of foreign intruding ideas.⁶⁰

Spectacle, then, can either be a useful tool to save a play from torpidity or it can be a distraction from the essential events of the drama. Baillie feels that since she intended

⁵⁸ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1., 58.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

the action of her plays to be simplified, the use of processions, rituals, and grand scenery serves a true and useful function and is not simply spectacle for its own sake.

Baillie was adamant from the very beginning of her project that she intended her *Plays on the Passions* to be performed on stage and not isolated to a reading audience. She made sure to address this issue in her Introductory Discourse, in hopes of forestalling those who would, by virtue of her plays being published before a production had been mounted, relegate her work to the closet and never read them with performance in mind.

It may, perhaps, be supposed from my publishing these plays, that I have written them for the closet rather than the stage....A play, but of small poetical merit, that is suited to strike and interest the spectator, to catch the attention of him who will not, and of him who cannot read, is a more valuable and useful production than one whose elegant and harmonious pages are admired in the libraries of the tasteful and refined....I should, therefore, have been better pleased to have introduced them to the world from the stage than from the press. I possess, however, no likely channel to the former mode of publick introduction: and, upon further reflection, it appeared to me, that by publishing them in this way, I have an opportunity afforded me of explaining the design of my work, and enabling the publick to judge, not only of each play by itself, but as making a part likewise of the whole; an advantage which, perhaps, does more than overbalance the splendour and effect of theatrical representation.⁶¹

Baillie published her *Series* in hopes that a theatrically minded and connected individual would read it and decide to stage one or more of her plays. Publishing her works before achieving a stage production afforded her the opportunity to describe her project in writing so that the reader and, hopefully the future producer of the play, might better understand her intentions and analyze the work accordingly. Fearing criticism for publishing but one volume of the series prior to the completion of the other intended

⁶¹ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 64-65.

plays, Baillie included a disclaimer in her Introductory Discourse, explaining that it was “distrust” and not an inflated “confidence” that led her to publish volume one while the project was still in its infancy.⁶² While her literary friends had given her a favorable critique on the plays of the first volume, Baillie was aware that the parameters of her project and the style of her writing might not be pleasing to a wider audience. It was the fear of completing and publishing the entire series only to find her efforts were “in vain”⁶³ and the plays entirely unsuccessful that spurred her to early publication. Above all, she desired to know the opinion of her “countrymen at large” so that she could determine whether she should amend her project or abandon it altogether.

If this work is fortunate enough to attract their attention, let their strictures as well as their praise come to my aid: the one will encourage me in a long [and] arduous undertaking, the other will teach me to improve it as I advance....I am not possessed of that confidence in mine own powers, which enables the concealed genius, under the pressure of present discouragement, to pursue his labours in security, looking firmly forward to other more enlightened times for his reward. If my own countrymen....receive not my offering, I presume not to look to posterity.⁶⁴

Baillie had no pretensions about her work. The *Plays on the Passions* were, by her own admission, an experiment by a writer with little practical experience in playwriting and theatrical practice. However, she was aware that her undertaking was, as far as she could tell, unique in its design and execution. “I know of no series of plays, in any language, expressly descriptive of the different passions,” she wrote,

If the reader, in perusing it, perceives that the abilities of the authour are not proportioned to the task which is imposed upon them, he will wish in the spirit of kindness rather than of censure, as I most sincerely do, that they had been more

⁶² Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 66.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

adequate to it. However, if I perform it ill, I am still confident that this (pardon me if I call it so) noble design will not be suffered to fall to the ground: some one will arise after me who will do it justice; and there is no poet, possessing genius for such a work, who will not at the same time possess that spirit of justice and of candour, which will lead him to remember me with respect.⁶⁵

The prefatory statement to Volume Three, published in 1812, was devoted to the changes Baillie felt should be made to the London stages in order for plays of her design to succeed. These addenda to her original theory were perhaps sparked by Baillie's own disillusionment with the London stage. Despite soliciting a favorable response with her reading audience through the publication of her *Plays on the Passions* and other dramatic and poetic works, Baillie had achieved rather limited success on the stage. It was her dearest wish to see her plays performed, but after John Philip Kemble's unsuccessful production of *De Monfort* at Drury Lane in 1800, Baillie began to reexamine her project. She determined that the condition of the London theatres was simply not conducive to the staging of her type of drama.

Baillie intended volume three, published nine years after the previous volume, to be the last published work in her *Plays on the Passions*, though she planned to continue writing plays according to that particular design. In the preface to the third volume she explains:

The Series of Plays was originally published in the hope that some of the pieces it contains...might in time make their way to the stage, and there be received and supported with some degree of public favour. But the present situation of dramatic affairs is greatly against every hope of this kind...i am therefore strongly of opinion that I ought to reserve the remainder of the work in manuscript, if I would not run the risk of entirely frustrating my original design.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 70-71.

⁶⁶ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 3, xv.

The preface to volume three is decidedly less optimistic in tone than the Introductory Discourse. By the time volume three was published, Baillie's knowledge and experience of the London theatres had significantly increased. She was now all too aware of the types of plays the public favored and had discovered that while the public loved to read her plays, they were less interested in seeing them performed. Baillie was of a like mind with other Romantic writers, who preferred good writing to lavish scenic spectacle. Rather than accusing the theatregoing public of having poor taste, Baillie simply acknowledges that the timing was not right for her type of drama.

The Public have now to chuse between what we shall suppose are well-written and well-acted Plays, the words of which are not heard, or heard but imperfectly by two thirds of the audience, while the finer and more pleasing traits of the acting are by a still greater proportion lost altogether, and splendid pantomime, or pieces whose chief object is to produce striking scenic effect, which can be seen and comprehended by the whole.⁶⁷

Baillie is not entirely opposed to the use of spectacle, if it is used to support the action of the play. She acknowledges that as human beings, we have a natural love of "active, varied movement in objects before us,"⁶⁸ and that an enjoyment of

splendid decorations and magnificent scenery, is as inherent in us as the interest we take in the representation of the natural passions and characters of men: and the most cultivated minds may relish such exhibitions, if they do not, when both are fairly offered to their choice, prefer them.⁶⁹

Baillie holds that the use of spectacle can create interest in otherwise static scenes and can add verisimilitude to certain heroic genres of tragedy. Baillie absolves the public of their enjoyment of spectacle, reasoning that there is no need to condemn them for

⁶⁷ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 3, xvi.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

“preferring an inferior species of entertainment” that can be understood and followed by those who observe it, “to a superior one, faintly and imperfectly given.”⁷⁰ Baillie’s view is that there is no way for a literary drama to succeed in the theatre if no one in the audience can hear or understand the words being spoken onstage.

The size of our theatres, then, is what I chiefly allude to, when I say, present circumstances are unfavourable for the production of these Plays. While they continue to be of this size, it is a vain thing to complain either of want of taste in the Public, or want of inclination in Managers to bring forward new pieces of merit, taking it for granted that there are such to produce. Nothing can be truly relished by the most cultivated audience that is not distinctly heard and seen, and Managers must produce what will be relished.⁷¹

Baillie recognizes that theatre managers must make a profit from what they produce onstage and staging something that is not enjoyed by the public--though it may be infused with artistic merit--is a bad business plan. The benefit of staging familiar plays, like the works of Shakespeare and Sheridan, or new plays with exaggerated action, is that the audience will be able to clearly follow the plot and be sufficiently entertained by what they see, even if the dialogue is partly inaudible and the actors’ faces indecipherable from the audience. Baillie’s main complaint about nineteenth-century theatrical conditions was regarding neither the public’s dramatic taste nor theatrical management’s penchant for staging popular melodrama. Rather, she found fault with the size of the theatre buildings themselves, which she deemed too large to effectively stage anything but scenic spectacle.

⁷⁰ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 3, xvii.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICING WHAT SHE PREACHES: AN ANALYSIS OF *THE TRYAL*, *THE ALIENATED MANOR*, *ORRA*, AND *DE MONFORT*

Joanna Baillie, in her *Plays on the Passions* project, was very careful to outline a distinct and specific line of theory. She was very particular in her expectations of the drama and playwriting, her opinions on acting, stagecraft, and theatre construction, as well as the individual roles of genre. Though she made her opinions clear in her Introductory Discourse and the prefaces to her other volumes of plays, Baillie did not always closely follow her own concept. There are examples in several of her plays where she deviates from her original precept--particularly in the area of the delineation of passion--in favor of what she believes to be stronger dramatic construction. In the case of *De Monfort*, Baillie explains her reasons for altering her plan:

The rise and progress of this passion I have been obliged to give in retrospect, instead of representing it all along in its actual operation, as I could have wished to have done. But hatred is a passion of slow growth; and to have exhibited it from its beginnings would have included a longer period, than even those who are least scrupulous about the limitation of dramattick [*sic*] time, would have thought allowable. I could not have introduced my chief characters upon the stage as boys, and then as men.¹

Though Baillie consciously chose to deviate from this key component of her work in *De Monfort*, there are instances in some of her other plays where she unconsciously lapsed in this respect, most likely because of her desire to retain the audience's interest.

¹ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 63.

Baillie also stressed the importance of keeping the focus of the drama on the protagonist and not to let the secondary characters overtake the struggles of the main characters. Baillie felt this was something to particularly look out for in the realm of comedy, where comic servants and quirky characters often overshadow the main plot. Baillie followed this element of her theory more closely in some plays than in others. In plays like *The Tryal*, it is sometimes unclear whose progress of passion we are meant to follow as the struggles of the protagonist are often overwhelmed by supernumeraries.

It cannot be denied that Baillie was a gifted writer, particularly when it comes to the poetic dialogue found in her tragedies. Comedy was unfortunately not one of her strengths, and her comic characters frequently speak in the same poetic language as do her tragic characters, much to the detriment of the comedy. Though her comedies possess a light and airy exuberance, Baillie's flaws are those of a playwright who has not been given beneficial criticism that would enable her to self-edit her work in order to grow as a writer. We find endless praise of her poetic abilities in reviews and in excerpts of letters from friends and admirers, but it is her dramatic talents and not her poetic abilities that are under repeated scholarly scrutiny. She had strong literary support from friends like Sir Walter Scott, William Sotheby, and Mary Berry, none of whom were truly successful dramatists. She received editorial suggestions from the managers and star actors of theatres that produced her plays, but their advice was in the interest of showing themselves to their best advantage and not of helping Baillie grow as a playwright. Due to her lack of dramatic guidance, she has a tendency to write purely expository scenes, insufficiently motivated characters, and protagonists who *say* rather

than *do*. Consequently, we are left with the impression that her plays are devoid of action, crisis, and complications. Baillie has interesting ideas--stageworthy ideas--and manages to write some very funny and moving scenes in her *Plays on the Passions*, but her construction lacks the strength of consistency, almost as if she has been inspired by a wonderful idea, but does not know how to effectively realize it.

The Tryal: A Comedy on Love

The Tryal, Joanna Baillie's comedy on love, was first published in 1798 as a part of volume one of *Plays on the Passions*. It was written as a companion to *Basil*, which was Baillie's tragedy on love as well as the first play in volume one of the series. While *Basil* demonstrates the tragic consequences of an all-consuming love, *The Tryal* emphasizes the importance of moral fortitude in a romantic love.

The Tryal focuses on Agnes Withrington and her beautiful cousin Mariane, who have traveled to Bath to visit their uncle. Agnes is a wealthy heiress who is tired of being courted by nonsensical men who are only interested in her for her fortune. Mariane, though she has no wealth, is happily engaged to a distant cousin. Agnes proposes that she and Mariane exchange places in order to secure a worthy husband for herself. It is decided that Mariane will entice two fops, Sir Loftus Prettyman and Mr. Opal, to pursue her hand in marriage, while Agnes selects Mr. Harwood for herself. Mariane agrees to encourage the fops to pursue her so that she might torment them and to try to attract the attention of Harwood to see if he will become interested in her or if he will prefer Agnes. As can be expected, the fops pursue Mariane while Harwood becomes enamored of

Agnes. In order to test Harwood's affection, Agnes pretends to be unpleasant, short-tempered and extravagant, but her ill humors only seem to increase the intensity of Harwood's love for her. When Harwood approaches Agnes's uncle Withrington to seek Agnes's hand in marriage, she proposes one final test of his moral fiber. She, Mariane, and their uncle conceal themselves behind a screen at a friend's lodgings and leave, in plain view, a letter that impugns Agnes's honor so that Harwood may read it and doubt Agnes's character. Harwood reads the letter and, after falling into a manly swoon, announces he will never marry someone so deceitful. Moved by his honor, Agnes rushes out from behind the screen. The entire scheme is revealed, misunderstandings are cleared up, and Agnes and Harwood pledge to be married.

On the surface, Baillie's *The Tryal* is almost Tartuffian, with its games of deception, tests of honor, and cast of comedic characters. While in Molière's comedy, Orgon realizes the error of his blind devotion to a religious charlatan, Mariane and Valère are united, and the con man Tartuffe receives his comeuppance; Baillie's play has a more unsatisfying solution. For their own amusement, Mariane and Agnes humiliate Sir Loftus Prettyman and Mr. Opal, while Agnes torments Harwood with manic behavior. None of their schemes goes awry, everything works out for the girls, and, by the end of the play, no lessons have been learned by the ladies except how to successfully torment the young fashionables of Bath. Though Agnes is the one to suggest that she and Mariane exchange places, it is Mariane who delights in the prospect of "frolick[ing] it away, in all the rich trappings of heirship [*sic*], amongst those

sneaking wretches the fortune-hunters! They have neglected me as a poor girl, but I will play the deuce amongst them as a rich one.”²

Agnes’s testing of Harwood seems gratuitous, for he gives no indication of ignoble behavior. There is no real obstacle to their love, save that of Agnes’s own making. Christine Colón, in *Joanna Baillie and the Art of Moral Influence* likens Agnes and Mariane to “playwrights” and describes their antics in this way:

Like Baillie who creates plays to see if her audiences will respond appropriately to her moral influence, Agnes and Mariane create a plot in order to test their audience of perspective lovers. Agnes knows that Harwood will be a good husband because he responds appropriately.³

Agnes’s final test of Harwood, in which she leads him to believe she is deceitful and dishonorable, has the desired result: he rebukes his strong affection due to her apparent lack of virtue. When the game is uncovered and the play happily ends with their engagement, all appears as it should be. However, does the end justify the means? Should Agnes have used manipulation to determine Harwood’s worth? It is understandable that Agnes would realize that her previous suitors pursued her because of her sizeable fortune, since she has not the inducement of beauty to attract them otherwise.

Ag. ...For if I am to marry at all, I am resolved to have a respectable man, and a man who is attached to me, and to find out such a one, in my present situation, is impossible. I am provoked beyond all patience with your old greedy lords, and match-making aunts, introducing their poor noodle heirs-apparent to me. your ambitious esquires, and proud obsequious baronets are intolerable,

² Joanna Baillie, “The Tryal,” in *A Series of Plays in Which it is Attempted to Delineate The Stronger Passions of the Mind: Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy*, vol. 1 (London: T. Cadell, Jun & W. Davies, 1802), 203.

³ Colón. *Art of Moral Influence*, 80.

and your rakish younger brothers are nauseous: such creatures only surround me, whilst men of sense keep at a distance, and think me as foolish as the company I keep. One would swear I was made of amber, to attract all the dust and chaff of the community.⁴

But Harwood is smitten with Agnes from his first stage entrance in Act I, scene two, even though he is aware that she is supposedly the poor relation of Mariane Withrington. At the beginning of the scene, he and Sir Loftus comment on the respective attractions of Mariane, Agnes, and their “magpie” friend Miss Eston as they pass by.

- Har.* There is something so delightful in the play of her countenance, it would even make a plain woman beautiful.
- Sir Loft.* She is a fine woman, and that is no despicable praise from one who is accustomed to the elegance of fashionable beauty.
- Har.* I would not compare her to any thing so trifling and insipid.
- Sir Loft.* She has one advantage which fashionable beauty seldom possesses.
- Har.* What do you mean?
- Sir Loft.* A large fortune.
- Har.* *(looking disappointed)* It is not the heiress I mean.⁵

Baillie is using this particular exchange not only to introduce Harwood--the object of Agnes’s affections--but also to establish Harwood as a man of high moral fiber. He is already in love with Agnes, despite never having been introduced to her, and sees only beauty where others see plainness and poverty. Because the society in which he lives

⁴ Baillie, “The Tryal”, 196.

⁵ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 207-208.

values wealth and beauty, they cannot see Agnes's value the way Harwood does and, therefore, Harwood is disappointed in society, as represented by Sir Loftus.

Sir Loft. Who is it then, Harwood? I see no body with Miss Withrington but Miss Eston, and the poor little creature her cousin.

Har. Good god! what a contemptible perversion of taste do interest and fashion create! But it is all affectation. (*Looking contemptuously at him.*)

Sir Loft. (*smiling contemptuously in return*) Ha, ha, ha! I see how it is with you, Harwood, and I beg pardon too. The lady is very charming, I dare say; upon honour I never once looked in her face. She is a dependant relation of Miss Withrington's, I believe: now I never take notice of such girls, for if you do it once they expect you to do it again. I am sparing of my attentions, that she on whom I really bestow them may have the more reason to boast.

Har. You are right, Prettyman, she who boasts of your attentions should receive them all herself, that nobody else may know of their real worth.

Sir Loft. You are severe this morning, Mr. Harwood....⁶

The fact that Sir Loftus can see nothing attractive in Agnes and Harwood cannot see how she could fail to be attractive to anybody is one of the ways that Baillie demonstrates that Harwood is an honorable man and is meant to be the correct choice of husband for Agnes. Harwood's exclamation after Loftus leaves him to walk with another friend further reinforces the man's honorable nature: "What a contemptible creature it is! He would prefer the most affected idiot, who boasts a little fashion or consequence, as he calls it, to the most beautiful native character in the world."⁷ Since Loftus failed to really look at Agnes, other than to note that she was standing next to an heiress, we are meant

⁶ Baillie, "The Tryal," 208-209.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 209-210.

to see he is nothing but an empty man of fashion and is, therefore, deserving of the pranks Agnes and Mariane pull on him.

The romance between Harwood and Agnes is particularly perplexing. Baillie makes it evident that he is in love with her from his very first scene, in which he says, “I could stand and gaze after her till the sun went down upon me,”⁸ however, Agnes’s affection is more subtly drawn. She first speaks of Harwood in Act I, scene one, while she and Mariane are planning their game. Mariane is not convinced of Harwood’s suitability at first and voices her doubts that he is “too grave and dignified”⁹ for someone of Agnes’s high spirits and that their time will be wasted in pursuing him. Agnes reassures her that it is not so and that Harwood is a very good candidate for her:

Ag. ...He kept very near me, if it did not look vain I should say followed me all the evening, and many a varied expression his countenance assumed. But when I went away arm in arm with my uncle, in our usual good-humoured way, I shall never forget the look of pleasant approbation with which he followed me. I had learnt but a little while before the mistake which the company made in regard to us, and at that moment the idea of this project came across my mind like a flash of lightning.¹⁰

Throughout the rest of the play, Agnes accepts Harwood’s attention with what appears to be mild amusement and tolerance. Though part of her plan is to behave out of character around him to see if he will still love her if she is an ill-tempered shrew, we are shown no convincing evidence that she feels anything for him at all. We are told of her feelings by the other characters, never do we see evidence of them or hear her speak of them herself until the end of the play. This is troubling, for it makes an otherwise charming

⁸ Baillie, “The Tryal,” 207.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

and likeable character seem like a woman who is simply desperate to be married and doesn't care to whom, as long as he is a sensible man. The closest thing to a declaration of love that we get from Agnes occurs in Act III, scene one. Mariane and Agnes are conversing after dinner and Mariane states that she will no longer attempt to attract Harwood, for "he has eyes, ears, and understanding, for nobody but you, Agnes."¹¹ After this revelation, Agnes grows very excited and exclaims,

Ag. Do you think so! give me your hand, my dear Mariane, you are a very good cousin to me--Marks every turn of my eye! I am not quite such an ordinary girl as my uncle says--My complexion is as good as your own, Mariane, if it were not a little sun-burnt. Yes, smile at my vanity as you please; for what makes me vain, makes me so good humoured too, that I will forgive you. But here comes uncle. I am light as an air-ball!¹²

Later in the play, Agnes demonstrates stronger feelings while conversing with her uncle Withrington. Withrington tells her that Harwood has come by to ask for her hand in marriage, despite Agnes's bad behavior. Despite Agnes's elation over the news, Withrington warns her that Harwood might not be as honorable as he appears:

With. But there are men whose passions are of such a violent over-bearing nature, that love in them, may be considered a disease of the mind; and the object of it claims no more perfection or pre-eminence amongst women, than chalk, lime, or oatmeal may do amongst dainties, because some diseased stomachs do prefer them to all things. Such men as those we sometimes see attach themselves even to ugliness and infamy, in defiance of honour and decency. With such men as these, women of sense and refinement can never be happy; nay, to be willingly the object of their love is disrespectable.¹³

¹¹ Baillie, "The Tryal," 237.

¹² Ibid., 238.

¹³ Ibid., 276-277.

Agnes resolves to subject Harwood to one final test to prove that he truly loves her and is not the victim of a “diseased” mind. If he fails the test, then she will “renounce him, but no other man shall ever fill his place.”¹⁴ Here, we have clearer proof of Agnes’s affection for Harwood, but words are not enough to counterbalance her apparently indifferent behavior to him throughout the bulk of the play. Though we are aware that she is testing Harwood with her little game, her focus is more on how well the machinations of Mariane are progressing. Harwood seems to be more of an afterthought. In Act V, after the phony letter is revealed to be a trick and Agnes’s behavior is explained, Withrington says to Harwood, “she pretended to be careless of you when she thought of you all the day long.”¹⁵ Again, we have to take Withrington’s word for it, for the audience has not seen Agnes engage in this behavior.

In the Introductory Discourse, Baillie defines the overall goal for her project as “to give an unbroken view of the passion from its beginning, and to mark it as I went along with those peculiar traits which distinguish its different stages of progression.”¹⁶ Despite the playful antics of Agnes and Mariane that dominate the action of *The Tryal*, the play is not, in fact, meant to mark the development of Agnes’s love for Harwood. Rather, we are meant to follow the growing seed of affection in Harwood’s heart, as he falls in love with Agnes. Harwood is not a wealthy man, and fashionable society--even his friend Colonel Hardy--cannot understand why he would seek to attach himself to a woman without fortune. Such circumstances would provide a wonderful conflict for

¹⁴ Baillie, “The Tryal,” 277.

¹⁵ Ibid., 292.

¹⁶ Ibid., 61-62.

Harwood to struggle against were external conflicts at the heart of Baillie's theory. But Joanna Baillie's theory promoted inner conflict and she presented no obstacle--other than Agnes--to Harwood attaining his bride of choice, and the only reason this plot failed to achieve the playwright's intended level of conflict was due to the lack of attention given to Harwood in the script. We are supposed to watch as Harwood's interest in Agnes blossoms into a full-fledged love. As the play is a comedy, we expect Harwood to win Agnes's affections by the end of the play. Everything ends as is expected, but without depicting Harwood's love in its "infant, growing, and repressed state."¹⁷

We are not shown the absolute beginning of Harwood's attraction to Agnes for, according to Act I, scene one, they first saw each other at a ball, where Harwood's eyes were on Agnes all evening. Though Agnes recounted the situation to Mariane, if Baillie were to truly follow her plan of the passions, she would show the very moment that Harwood fell in love with Agnes, even if that 'love' were merely a slight attraction. Instead, we are shown a scene the next day, in which Harwood has a chance to reinforce Agnes's description of his behavior. Our only clue that this is the man Agnes describes to Mariane is how he describes her to Loftus and Opal, but this is no confirmation that he is the same man; we just have to assume he is. From this scene, we are treated to four soliloquies of varying lengths in which Harwood talks of his feelings for Agnes. Each of these soliloquies is intended to show us how Harwood's love is progressing and is driving him to distraction. At the end of Act II, scene one, he bursts onto the stage after Withrington has exited, only to be disappointed that Withrington is no longer there. He

¹⁷ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1 58.

then explains that he is too restless to stay indoors and has been to Agnes's house six times that day, in hopes of seeing her. At the conclusion of his speech, he runs after Withrington in hopes of catching up to him. Harwood's soliloquy at the beginning of Act III, scene two, shows an indecisive Harwood arriving at Agnes's front door for the third time that morning. He expresses his embarrassment at his doting behavior and expects the entire household believes him to be mad.

The Act IV, scene one, soliloquy is probably the most important of Harwood's speeches. Through this speech we can see most clearly what Baillie was trying to achieve in Harwood's character. The opening stage directions state that Harwood is "*discovered walking about with an irregular disturbed step, his hair and dress all neglected and in disorder,*"¹⁸ indicating that he is so consumed by love for Agnes that his health and mental well-being are suffering for it. His speech confirms it:

Har. I have neither had peace nor sleep since I beheld her; O! that I had never known her! or known her only such as my first fond fancy conceived her!--I would my friend were come; I will open my heart to him; he perhaps will speak comfort to me; for surely that tempter must be violent indeed, which generous affection cannot subdue; and she must be extravagant beyond all bounds of nature, who would ruin the fond husband who toils for her... Who would not struggle with the world for such a creature as this?--Ay, and I must struggle!--O! that this head of mine would give over thinking but for one half hour!¹⁹

Though Harwood's speech is impassioned, it is relatively consistent with his behavior throughout the whole play. We don't really see any growth of depth of feeling or intensity of his behavior. From the very beginning he is a devoted--if somewhat

¹⁸ Baillie, "The Tryal," 252.

¹⁹ Ibid., 252-253.

obsessive--swain who is so struck by Agnes that he visits her multiple times a day and hangs fondly over her chair as she works on her needlework. His affection does not waver, even when she verbally abuses him and treats him with indifference and disinterest. By the time we reach Act V, Harwood has reached the peak of his intensity. After discovering Agnes's letter, in which she reveals herself to be the teller of falsehoods, he is overcome by her admission of dishonor and drops to the floor in a dead faint. Everything works out well for him in the end, for, not only does he attain the object of his affections, but he also gains a small fortune through marrying Agnes. Harwood's passion cannot be mistaken for anything but love; it is an intense, powerful affection, incapable of being derailed by the very apparent faults of his love interest. But we do not see it progress from a mild attraction to an all-consuming emotion, his love is intense throughout the play, culminating in the swooning fit of Act V and Harwood's subsequent rejection of Agnes when he believes her to be untrustworthy.

The most significant fault in the execution of this play is not in Baillie's unsuccessful attempt to show the progression of love in Harwood's heart, but in the lack of focus given to his struggle with his affections. Baillie seems to want us to struggle with Harwood as he comes to terms with the fact that the woman he views as perfection itself is acting like a madwoman. The idea is that, despite Agnes's unpleasant actions, her innate virtue and goodness shines through and it is to those qualities Harwood is invariably drawn. Unfortunately, Harwood's struggle seems to take a back seat to Mariane's persecution of Sir Loftus and Mr. Opal. Far from appearing as the protagonist that the audience is supposed to identify with, he instead has the bearing of a supporting

character, and his trials and tribulations are far less interesting than what is happening in the subplot. This type of situation is exactly what Baillie had hoped to avoid in her plays.

The problems apparent in *The Tryal* are the result of the construction of the play. Rather than opening the play with Harwood, shortly after seeing Agnes and becoming interested in her, we are first introduced to Agnes and Mariane and their scheme to exchange places. The ordering of scenes in this manner is not a catastrophic mistake on Baillie's part, but the play could be greatly strengthened had she altered the ordering of scenes or introduced Harwood's plight of love in a different manner. The length of the first scene and the dialogue therein sets up the expectation that the play is going to be about Agnes and Mariane, or at the very least Agnes and the progression of her love for Harwood, but such is not the case. Harwood appears supernumerary, popping up every so often to speak a soliloquy and remind us that he is, in fact, the protagonist. By the time it is made apparent that we are meant to follow the arc of his character, our attentions are so firmly fixed on Mariane, Loftus, and Opal, that our interest in Harwood's adoration is purely incidental.

Sir Loftus and Mr. Opal, as amusing as they are, are the antithesis of what Baillie desired in her minor characters. One of the things Baillie wanted to change about the comedy of her age was the popular habit of writing memorable idiosyncratic minor characters. Baillie believed these types of characters to be detrimental to a play because their actions, though amusing, draw focus away from the protagonist, whose struggles should be the focal point of the play. The success of such plays, Baillie says, enables

[an] inferiour class of poets to believe, that, by making men strange, and unlike the rest of the world, they have made great discoveries, and mightily enlarged the boundaries of dramattick character. They will, therefore, distinguish one man from another by some strange whim or imagination, which is ever uppermost in his thoughts, and influences every action of his life. . . . Above all it is to be regretted that those adventitious distinctions amongst men of age, fortune, rank, profession, and country, are so often brought forward in preference to the great original distinctions of nature; and our scenes so often filled with courtiers, lawyers, citizens, Frenchmen, &c. &c. with all the characteristicks of their respective conditions, such as they have been represented from time immemorial. This has introduced a great sameness into many of our plays, which all the changes of new fashions burlesqued, and new customs turned into ridicule, cannot conceal.²⁰

Loftus and Opal are typical English fops of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Characters of their ilk can be found in the plays of Sheridan and Congreve, as well as in the novels of Jane Austen. In Act one, Agnes describes Loftus as a man who

has never suffered a higher idea to get footing in his noddle than that of appearing as a man of consequence and fashion; and though he has no happiness but in being admired as a fine gentleman, and no existence but at an assembly, he appears there with all the haughty gravity, and careless indifference of a person superiour to such paltry amusements.²¹

Mr. Opal is no better than Loftus in terms of his interests but, rather than attempting to establish new trends in fashion, he seeks only to emulate those who have already made a particular fashion popular. Mariane mentions Opal's current apery of Sir Loftus and says, rather disparagingly, that he has "for these ten years past so successfully performed every kind of fine gentlemanship, that every new fool brought into fashion."²² It appears, with these characters, that Baillie has fallen victim to the very trap she was trying to avoid. While Harwood is busy falling in love with Agnes and she is testing the strength

²⁰ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 52-53.

²¹ Baillie, "The Tryal," 203.

²² *Ibid.*, 204.

of that affection, we are too busy watching Mariane humble the lofty Loftus and swindle thousands of pounds out of the witless Opal. Opal and Loftus are characters distinguished from the others by their “singular opinion” about “politicks, fashions, or the position of the stars; by some strong accountable love for one thing, or the aversion from another.”²³ In this case, it is Loftus’s preoccupation with his role as a man of fashion and Opal’s desire to emulate Loftus that set them apart from the other characters. These minor characters and their subplot have wrested the focus of the play away from where it should be. Baillie devotes so much stage time to the tormenting of the fops, that, when Harwood and Agnes have cleared up all of their misunderstandings and have pledged to wed, the play still feels as if it lacks a proper resolution. Fortunately--or perhaps regrettably--Baillie writes a resolution for Mariane’s storyline and Opal receives his rather undeserved comeuppance at the end of the play.

That Baillie found joy in what she was writing is apparent in the charming characters who inhabit the play. It is possible that Baillie, wrapped up in the delight of writing the play, neglected to pay close attention to the plan she’d laid out for her *Plays on the Passions*. Or perhaps she was merely fearful of writing a dull play and added her fops and silly Miss Eston as a form of spectacle, to add the variety she wrote of in her Introductory Discourse. The play would benefit from some restructuring of the order of the scenes and the elimination of some of the extraneous servant characters and superficial subplots. Since this was one of Baillie’s first plays in her *Plays on the Passions* series, perhaps we can afford to be more lenient in our judgment of it,

²³ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 51-52.

especially since there are other plays within the *Series* that more closely adhere to her plan.

The Alienated Manor: A Comedy on Jealousy

The Alienated Manor was Joanna Baillie's comedy on the subject of jealousy. *The Alienated Manor* follows the progression of jealousy in the breast of Charville, a well-to-do man of the upper middle class, who has recently married a beautiful woman. From the beginning, it is made clear that he is possessed by a suspicious and jealous nature, and is fearful of his wife paying any sort of attention to any man other than himself. Mrs. Charville, who is of a playful and social disposition, hardly seems to notice her husband's jealous fits and starts, for she sees nothing untoward in her behavior.

Charville's neighbor Crafton is attempting to buy Charville's estate from him. The house once belonged to Crafton's family before his uncle lost the family fortune and sold the estate to Charville. Crafton petitioned to buy the estate two years before, but Charville refuses to sell, as he is fond of the estate, as is his new wife. Crafton's nephew, Sir Robert Freemantle, who is visiting his uncle, is in love with Charville's sister, Mary, who lives at the estate with her brother. Mary is not yet of age and cannot marry without her brother's consent or else risk losing her dowry, and, as Freemantle is not a man of great wealth, Charville is certain to refuse his suit. Crafton advises his nephew to pay

“particular attention”²⁴ to Charville’s wife, using Charville’s jealous nature to their advantage, in hope that Mrs. Charville will appeal to her husband to consent to his sister’s marriage to Freemantle and that Charville’s jealousy will compel him to sell his estate to Crafton.

Upon his arrival at Charville’s estate, it is discovered that Freemantle is an old acquaintance of Mrs. Charville’s, for she is a close friend to his sister Charlotte. As they walk in the garden, chatting like old friends, Charville’s jealousy is rekindled, and from that moment onward, he is convinced that his wife and Freemantle are lovers. He goes to great lengths to spy on his wife, trying to catch her in the act of cuckolding him. While Charville has been making himself ridiculous through his attempts to entrap his wife, Freemantle has been secretly wooing Mary, and has succeeded in winning her heart and her consent to marry him.

Charville’s jealousy, in the mean time, has overtaken his ability to think rationally. In a later encounter with Freemantle, he takes the other man’s declaration of love for Mary as a confession that he has been trysting with Mrs. Charville.

Char. ...Ha! Freemantle. *(Turning away his head.)*

Free. Did you not know me? But that look of distress and displeasure!
What does it mean at such a moment as this?

Char. Do not inquire. Your own conscience will answer your question.
What has been your motive for lingering about my house?

Free. You have discovered my secret, then, and the sight of me is
hateful to you.

²⁴ Baillie, “The Alienated Manor” in *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie, Complete in One Volume* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 1851), 338.

Char. What! you own it: the poor covering of secrecy [*sic*] is done away; you look in my face and own it. I am degraded even to this.²⁵

Charville returns to his home and confronts his wife about what he thinks he has learned from Freemantle. He upbraids her with his knowledge of her supposed secret and how Freemantle confessed the fact himself. Crafton and Freemantle enter, which angers Charville even more. He renounces his wife, leaving her to Freemantle if he desire to keep her. Everyone but Charville assumes he is upset over the revelation that Freemantle wants to marry his sister and they do their best to calm him.

Craf. Be calm, my good sir. He has, indeed, gained the lady's affections unknown to you, and--

Char. And may take her and her affections also, and the devil give him his benediction.

Craf. Well, Freemantle, e'en take the lady as she is offered to you, though it be not in the most gracious manner. Fortune is no object now; take her and marry her out of hand.

Free. I cannot follow more pleasing advice.

Char. Marry her without a divorce! I'll not divorce her. I'll be hanged if I give her up to any man alive.

Craf. Pray, good sir, turn your eyes upon the party. I believe this match, which my nephew has so long desired, may be accomplished without a divorce.

Char. (*turning round and seeing SIR ROBERT with MARY's hand in his*). My sister! you bewilder me.--Where is my wife?

Craf. Most dutifully employed laughing at you in her sleeve at the other corner of the room.

Mrs. Char. (*advancing*). My dear Charles, I told you you would prove a fool at last.²⁶

²⁵ Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 358.

All misunderstandings are explained, and Charville consents to his sister's marriage, vowing to amend his suspicious ways. Charville offers to sell the estate back to Crafton, but Crafton believes that he no longer deserves it, having exploited Charville's jealousy in order to win the property.

The Alienated Manor is one of Baillie's strongest comedies. Aside from a few extraneous characters, the construction of the play is fairly tight and adheres very closely to her plan of dramatic composition. In this later play, she avoids some of the mistakes that she made in the writing of *The Tryal*, particularly in writing characters who *say* rather than *do*. In *The Alienated Manor*, we are treated to Charville both verbally describing his jealousy toward Freemantle and demonstrating it through his actions. Though the first characters we meet are Sir Level Clump, a Capability Brown-like landscaper, who has been hired to re-do the grounds in the "modern taste,"²⁷ and Crafton, Charville's neighbor, Baillie effectively sets up the situation of the play through Sir Level and Crafton's description of Charville, his wife, and his problems with jealousy. In this play, more so than in *The Tryal*, the supporting characters, though comic in their own rights, remain suitably inferior to the main characters. There are even a few characters that could stand to be eliminated altogether. The servants Dolly and Isaac serve no real purpose except as functional characters and could be eliminated from the play without damaging any of its key scenes. The character of Sancho, a servant of African descent, is a bit problematic. He appears out of nowhere in Act IV, scene 1, with

²⁶ Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 359.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 336.

the purpose of sending a message to Charville regarding Sancho's "Massa."²⁸

Dickenson, the butler, emerges from the house to tell Sancho that Charville has no message to impart, for he is very angry with Sancho's master. It is not immediately clear who Sancho's master is, until he responds angrily to Dickenson:

Very angry! Ay, my massa be poor, and every body be angry wit him.--Your massa not angry, our massa very fond of him when he shake a te dice, and take all a te money from him. te tevil will shake him over te great fire for tat. --You tell him, he be in prison; he be cold; he be hungry?²⁹

The audience must then recall an earlier conversation between Crafton and his nephew, in which Crafton references Freemantle's cousin, Mordant, who was bankrupted in a game of dice by Charville. Sancho's presence in the play is unnecessary, due to the fact that his master is mentioned only a few times, and then, is only mentioned briefly in passing. The only time Sancho has any direct effect on a scene is in Act V, scene 2, when he attempts to kill Charville, thus enabling Freemantle to save Charville's life, much to Charville's chagrin.

In *The Alienated Manor*, Baillie is more successful than she was in *The Tryal* at depicting the progression of passion in her protagonist. It is clear from the very beginning of the play that we are meant to mark and chart the progress of jealousy in the character of Charville. His jealousy truly does begin its life in an infant state, as a mere pettishness that his new wife does not wish to wear the roses he has given to her in her hair. She relents and agrees to wear the blossoms, but sparks his jealousy once more by encouraging him to take a journey he would otherwise put off so that he might "not

²⁸ Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 352.

²⁹ Ibid., 352.

leave thee a week; not half a week; no, not a day.”³⁰ Mrs. Charville reminds him that it is normal for married people to spend time apart on occasion and that the marriages are often strengthened because of it.

Char. ...My absence, I *suppose*, would be no interruption to your happiness?

Mrs. Char. Your occasional absence, perhaps, might increase it. The most wretched pair of all my acquaintance is the only one always together.

Char. Who are they, pray?

Mrs. Char. Lady Bloom and her jealous husband. The odious man! She can't stir, but he moves too, like her shadow. She can't whisper to a friend, nor examine a picture or gem with an old cognoscenti, but he must thrust his nose between them.--But how is it now? You are as grave as a judge, and twisting off the heads of those very flowers, too, that have occasioned all this commotion. How is it with you now?

Char. You take part against the husband very eagerly, I perceive.

Mrs. Char. Not very eagerly; but I hate a man who is so selfish that he must engross his wife's attention entirely....³¹

From this point, his wife can do no right in his estimation; every word is dissected, every gesture is heavily scrutinized.

By the beginning of Act V, it is apparent that Charville's jealousy is close to destroying him. He withdraws to a wooded area on his estate to muse over the state of his marriage. By scene two, he is contemplating suicide, deciding that he cannot bear to live and love a wife who would betray him and never love him in return. However, though he can bring the pistol to his head, Charville finds he cannot pull the trigger.

³⁰ Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 339.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 339.

Char. (after walking with hasty disturbed steps to the front of the stage, stops short, and continues musing for some time before he speaks).
She will think of all this when it is too late: it will embitter her days; she will then bear her torment in secret. She will know I have loved her; she will know it then. The time runs on; it should be done. O that it were done! But the doing of it is a fearful effort. (Pulls out a pistol, and looks at it ruefully).
Is there no way of getting rid of this hateful world but by this miserable act of self-destruction? O that some friendly hand would rid me of my wretched life! I cannot do it.³²

He throws away the pistol, which is immediately snatched up by Sancho, who was hiding in the bushes while Charville reconsidered his course of action. Sancho shoots at Charville, the shot goes wide, and Freemantle rushes in to restrain Sancho. Although Freemantle has just saved his life, Charville does not change his feelings about his perceived rival. Rather, Charville is even more perturbed that he owes Freemantle a debt of gratitude. Freemantle, believing Charville is angry because he has secretly engaged himself to Mary, confesses his secret. Charville interprets this declaration as a confession of his affair with Mrs. Charville. This purported confession stirs Charville to confront his wife about the affair:

Char. No, madam; do not follow me; it is vain to explain it. The secret is out--the guilty secret is out: he has had the boldness to acknowledge it himself--to acknowledge to my face. I am such a creature now as he need no longer keep measures with. Away, perverted woman! Do you follow me still? Do you look me in the face?
(Beating his forehead).
He acknowledged it himself.³³

³² Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 357-358.

³³ *Ibid.*, 358.

If *The Alienated Manor* were a tragedy, Charville's jealousy would have had a more disastrous effect, resulting in Charville's death and, most likely, the death of his wife and her presumed lover as well. Since *The Alienated Manor* is a comedy, explanations are given for Freemantle and Mrs. Charville's behavior, reconciliations are made, and lessons are learned by all involved. The only thing lacking in the resolution is the restoration of Crafton's familial estate. Charville offers to sell the estate back to him, at the very price that was originally paid for it, but Crafton, after all his schemes to purchase the place, declines.

Mary (*after a pause*).
Charles, you look so melancholy; what are you thinking of?

Char. What I never suspected before--that I have been a very selfish fellow.--Mr. Crafton, I know that this estate was purchased by my family at an unfair price. I return it to you for the sum which was given for it.

Craf. No, Sir; after the indirect means I have used to wrest it from you, I feel that I do not deserve it. I too have been a selfish fellow.³⁴

Had Charville insisted more firmly upon returning the estate to Crafton, his moral redemption would have been complete and the resolution of the play more satisfying. However, the fact that Crafton's family estate is not restored to him reinforces Baillie's perspective of the drama as a moral teaching tool. Though the return of Crafton's family estate would have redeemed Charville, it would have rewarded Crafton for his unscrupulous behavior, for he used Charville's extreme jealousy to his own advantage in order to procure the property he desired.

³⁴ Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 360.

Charville is not a jealous man because his wife behaves unscrupulously, he is jealous because he is by nature a selfish man, and this selfishness has harmed others in the past. Charville is directly responsible for the ruination of Mordant, Freemantle's distant cousin, who lost his fortune to Charville at the gaming table. Mordant's present circumstances and Charville's role in his downfall are mentioned by several of the characters, and Charville, even after he discovers he is wrong about Freemantle, never shows remorse for his behavior toward Mordant, nor does he take any steps to make reparations until the very end of the play. In Act II, scene four, Charville rebuffs his sister after she mentions Mordant:

Char. Don't mention that poor wretch. He would be ruined: it was not my doing.

Mary. Did you dissuade him from playing? and were you obliged to receive all that he lost? My dear brother, let me speak to you on this subject when you are composed and at leisure.³⁵

Thankfully, Baillie makes it so that poor Mordant will not languish in prison for much longer, for, while Crafton resolves to do what he can to aid his distant relation, it is ultimately Charville who does the right thing and promises to make reparations to the man he ruined.

Char. Speak no more of it: my heart has often smote me on that subject. I have renounced the gaming-table for ever, and I restore to poor Henry [Mordant] all I have won from him, though it was, by every rule of honourable play, fairly won.

Craf. I believe so entirely. But I wish the rules of honour came a little nearer to the good Bible precept, "Think not of your own matters, but think also every one of his neighbour's." You risked a small part of your ample fortune against the whole of poor Henry's, and

³⁵ Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 346.

you took it from him. However, in restoring it, you do what has seldom been done by men of honour; and, on the part of my thoughtless relation, I gratefully receive your generosity.³⁶

Baillie was concerned that the comedies performed upon the London stages did not teach the audience correct values and, in some instances, were detrimental to the developing moral code of younger audience members. It was Baillie's hope that, in watching her plays, the audience would be better able to recognize the beginnings of detrimental passions within themselves and prevent the passion from overtaking them as it does the characters in her plays. Baillie argued that when one is in the throes of destructive behavior, it is difficult to recognize the danger ahead and halt the passion before it reaches the point of no return. She writes:

We cannot, it is true, amidst its wild uproar, listen to the voice of reason, and save ourselves from destruction; but we can foresee its coming, we can mark its rising signs, we can know the situations that will most expose us to its rage, and we can shelter our heads from the coming blast....Above all, looking back to the first rise, and tracing the progress of passion, points out to us those stages in the approach of the enemy, when he might have been combated most successfully; and where the suffering him to pass may be considered as occasioning all the misery that ensues.³⁷

The Alienated Manor satisfies Baillie's desire to teach a moral lesson whilst entertaining her audience with an interesting play. She manages to convey her message without sounding overly moral. There is no single character who serves as Baillie's mouthpiece to recite the 'moral' of the play. Instead, the message is carried out through the actions of Charville, who makes himself ridiculous with his unfounded accusations of jealousy and the foolish behavior that results from the infection of jealousy within him. By the

³⁶ Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 360.

³⁷ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 42.

end of the play, several characters have learned a lesson: Charville has learned to be more trusting and less selfish, his wife has learned that she must be more aware of her husband's feelings and not to pursue only her own interests, and Crafton has learned not to be as selfish in his own desires. Because the central characters have learned their lesson, the audience is educated as well and can resolve to watch their own behavior for signs of jealousy and selfishness.

The Alienated Manor is an excellent example of what Baillie wrote about as one of her goals for the *Plays on the Passions*. Using jealousy as her central passion, Baillie exhibits

Those strong passions that, with small assistance from outward circumstances, work their way in the heart, till they become the tyrannical masters of it...It exhibits to us the mind of man in that state when we are most curious to look into it, and is equally interesting to all.³⁸

The seed of jealousy was already present in Charville's nature, all it took was a slight suspicion for that feeling to germinate and grow into a hateful weed that threatened to choke out both the flowering vine of his marriage and his own mental well-being.

Despite Baillie's stronger delineation of her intended passion in *The Alienated Manor*, she still has a problem with adhering to her own principles regarding supporting characters. While her supporting characters don't steal the proverbial spotlight in this play, as they did in *The Tryal*, she does include several characters that serve purely comic purposes and could even be eliminated from the script with no harm to the plot. The characters of Sir Level Clump, Smitchenstault, and Mrs. Smoothly each serve

³⁸ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 41.

functions within the play, but are still the type of comic characters that Baillie seems to speak out against in her Introductory Discourse.

Above all it is to be regretted that those adventitious distinctions amongst men, of age, fortune, rank, profession, and country, are so often brought forward in preference to the great original distinctions of nature; and our scenes so often filled with courtiers, lawyers, citizens, Frenchmen, &c. &c. with all the characteristics of their respective conditions, such as they have been represented from time immemorial. This has introduced a great sameness into many of our plays, which all the changes of new fashions burlesqued, and new customs turned into ridicule, cannot conceal.³⁹

Try as she might, Baillie cannot really justify Sir Level Clump's presence in her play. He is like Sancho, a peripheral character who relates only to a small line of the plot. Sir Level Clump is on the estate to improve the grounds, which can be considered an affront to Crafton, whose family used to own the estate and who likes the grounds as they are. But the fact remains that Sir Level Clump is only present in the play to justify the presence of Smitchenstault, who plays a direct role in fueling Charville's jealousy in a later scene. In the first scene of the play, Sir Level explains his business on the estate to Crafton and Freemantle and, in doing so, gives explanation for Smitchenstault's being there as well.

Craf. Is that the German philosopher we have heard of?

Sir Level. Yes; so he calls himself. I only pretend to make these grounds visibly beautiful; he will demonstrate, forsooth, that they become at the same time philosophically so....⁴⁰

The reason given is a feeble one, but it works for Baillie's purposes. Smitchenstault is essentially an ethnic stock character who is given a higher purpose. His dialogue is

³⁹ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, 52.

⁴⁰ Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 338.

written in a highly stylized German dialect, which only adds to the ridiculous nature of his character. Smitchenstault has taken it into his head that he should be the one to wed Mary and thus secure her fortune for himself. He is fully aware that Charville will never give consent to the marriage, and so he does whatever he can to encourage Charville's jealousy, and even to advocate his suicide, in hopes of receiving the inheritance after he and Mary are wed. This subplot of Smitchenstault is not given a lot of focus in the script, and the only true moment when Smitchenstault helps to advance the plot is in Act IV, scene two when he arranges to meet Mary in the "haunted chamber."⁴¹ Mrs. Smoothly-- Mary and Mrs. Charville's lady's maid--is really the one who has set up the assignation. She has had enough of Smitchenstault sniffing around Mary, trying to get her money, and so she sets up the meeting to humiliate him. Smitchenstault suddenly rushes into the chamber and, upon seeing Mrs. Smoothly, blurts out that someone is pursuing him. He ducks into a closet, while Mrs. Smoothly hides in an old wardrobe just as Charville and his butler rush in. They are chasing Smitchenstault, whom they believe to be Freemantle, sneaking into the house for a tryst with Mrs. Charville. After he is discovered in the closet, Smitchenstault confirms the story, and claims he saw Freemantle run through the chamber as he peeked through a crack in the closet door. Charville believes the German's account until the very end of the play, when Smitchenstault admits he only saw Freemantle that night in his "imagination."⁴² Mrs. Smoothly performs a similar function as Smitchenstault in two of the scenes in *The Alienated Manor*. First of all, she

⁴¹ Baillie, "The Alienated Manor," 352.

⁴² Ibid., 360.

is the one who lures Smitchenstault to the haunted chamber in the previous scene, which allowed the philosopher to confirm Charville's wild story and thus increase his jealousy. Secondly, she inadvertently fans the flames of jealousy in an earlier scene, when she is charged with the task of delivering a letter addressed to Freemantle to Crafton's estate. After the manservant Isaac teases her about her infatuation with Crafton's butler, she resolves to hide the letter in her dress so that no one will know where she is going and tease her further. Charville witnesses her hiding the letter and, after demanding that she relinquish it, is immediately suspicious of its contents. Mrs. Smoothly can be regarded as the typical stage maidservant or go-between that is seen in countless plays of the period. Though she is careful not to let their antics overtake the play as she did with the supporting characters in *The Tryal*, Baillie is guilty of not adhering to her own theory in their character delineation.

Orra: a Tragedy on Fear

Joanna Baillie's *Orra* is a unique play for several reasons. It was one of three plays that Baillie wrote concerning fear, which is already a deviation from her plan for the *Plays on the Passions*. As the title of the series states, Baillie intended to pen a comedy and a tragedy on each of the passions she'd chosen to explore. All of Baillie's plays on fear were published in volume three of her *Plays on the Passions* series. *Orra* is the first play in the volume, followed by *The Dream*, Baillie's only play written in prose and containing only three acts. Both *Orra* and *The Dream* deal with the issue of supernatural fear; while the character of Orra is fearful of ghosts, spirits, and the walking

dead, the protagonist of *The Dream* is filled with trepidation over what awaits him after death. *The Dream* centers on a male protagonist named Osterloo, while *Orra*'s protagonist is female, which is unusual for Baillie; most of her protagonists are male. *The Siege*, Baillie's comedy on fear deals with cowardice and a protagonist who fears confrontation in battle.

The play is set in Switzerland in the late 14th century, opening immediately after the conclusion of a tournament held by Hughobert, Count of Aldenberg. Glottenbal, Hughobert's boorish son, enters in great agitation. He and the other men of the court made a poor showing at the tournament and were bested by Theobald of Falkenstein, a nobleman of reduced fortune. Because of Theobald's lower rank and reduced circumstances, the defeat is particularly humbling for Glottenbal, especially since, in winning the tournament, Theobald earned the honor of receiving a sprig of greenery as a victory favor from the Lady Orra, Hughobert's ward, whom Glottenbal hopes to marry. Theobald is in love with Orra as well but, as he is much poorer in status than she and Hughobert has made it clear that she will marry his son, he despairs of ever winning her affections. Theobald's friend Hartman offers to intercede on his behalf, but Theobald is reluctant, for he feels their efforts will not be successful.

Hart. (*pushing him away with gentle anger*).
Go to! I praised thy modesty short-while.
And now with dull and senseless perseverance,
Thou wouldst o'erlay me with it. Go thy ways!
If through thy fault, thus shrinking from the onset,
She should with this untoward cub [Glottenbal] be match'd,
'Twill haunt thy conscience like a damning sin,

Orra and convince her to marry him so that he can gain her wealth and the respectability that the circumstances of his birth have denied him. Hughobert is at first reluctant to agree to the plan, for he feels it is cruel and he had made an oath to Orra's father to protect her, but he eventually agrees.

While Rudigere drips his poison into Hughobert's ear, Hartman and Theobald approach Orra to begin their courtship of her. Orra expresses her sorrow that one day she will have to marry and give up her freedom and her property to her husband. Hartman points out that she might seek a husband who will make her an equal partner, but Orra is realistic. She knows, since her fate is in the hands of her guardian, she will never marry anyone who is not handpicked by Hughobert. Rather than relinquishing her independence, she plans to become co-burgher of Basle with Theobald and to hold a "little, snug, domestic court" with her ladies-in-waiting, "Plying our work with song and tale between."⁴⁵ When Hughobert delivers his ultimatum to Orra--marry Glottenbal or be banished to the haunted castle--Orra responds defiantly that she would rather marry a corpse than marry "the living lord/Your goodness offers me."⁴⁶

Orra is sent to Brunier's castle to live out her banishment. Cathrina, in the mean time, has been filling Orra's head with the ghost stories associated with her new dwelling. Already teetering between titillation and true fear, Orra begins to panic when she hears the sounds of hunting horns and horses riding around the castle at night, for the story of the ghost dictates that at midnight, the ghosts of the hunting party will ride through the forest, sounding their horns. The rest of the story claims that at midnight on

⁴⁵ Baillie, "Orra," 28.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 37.

St. Michael's eve, the murdered hunter will blow his hunting horn three times at the gate and enter the castle to seek retribution for his heinous murder. The ghosts that Orra hears, however, are simply a band of outlaws who are imitating the famed specters in an effort to scare away the castle's new inhabitants, lest they discover the outlaws' lair.

While in the haunted castle, Rudigere attempts to convince Orra to marry him, and, though she is repulsed by his attentions and scorns him, he continues to force his attentions on her. Cathrina continues to weave her fearful tales, while the outlaws continue their ghostly masquerade, both of which cause Orra to grow more and more frightened of the castle and of the midnight hours. In the mean time, Theobald has pursued Orra and, since he lacks the manpower to storm the castle, seeks out the outlaws for assistance. Coincidentally, the leader of the outlaws, Franko, is Theobald's old friend from childhood, who has somehow transitioned to the life of criminal. Franko is happy to assist his friend and tells Theobald of the hidden tunnels that lead from the outlaw's cave to the tower where Orra is being held. They decide that on St. Michael's eve they will once again pretend to be the ghosts of the hunting party and, in the resulting chaos, smuggle Orra out of the castle through the tunnels. They send one of the outlaws to the castle to deliver a letter to Orra, informing her of the plan, but Rudigere sees the delivery and burns the letter before Orra is able to read it.

Just before midnight on St. Michael's eve, Orra is pacing in her tower room. She is working herself into a panic with thoughts of the ghosts that will soon ride. Cathrina joins her and promises to wait with her through the midnight hours. To distract her, she tells Orra more ghost stories. After midnight passes, Orra experiences a brief burst of

bravery and allows Cathrina to leave her, but quickly loses her courage when she is alone once more. The hunting horns begin to sound and Orra begins to work herself into a frenzy. She attempts to leave the room, but the door is locked and she is unable to flee. Just as her fear reaches its peak of intensity, a door bursts open and she sees the shadow of a huntsman framed in the doorway. She shrieks and falls senseless to the ground. Theobald, dressed as a huntsman, rushes to her but is unable to revive her. He and Franko carry her out of the room and to the caves.

The next day, Hughobert and his entourage arrive at Brunier's castle. Rudigere's plot has been discovered and Hughobert has come to retrieve Orra and arrest Rudigere. But Rudigere escapes judgment by stabbing himself with a concealed dagger and inflicts further damage by slicing Glottenbal in the neck with a dagger that has been secretly poisoned.

Hughobert and his court arrive at Franko's cave. Shrieks are heard from within the cave as Orra, mad from fear, is escorted out to stand before her friends and family. Her friends do their best to recall her to her senses, but she does not recognize them. She only sees the dead standing before her. As Hughobert and the others express their remorse for the roles they played in her destruction, a servant rushes in to tell Hughobert that his son has died from his wound. As Hughobert groans in despair, Orra rushes to him:

Orra. ...I'll tell thee how it is:
A hideous burst hath been: the damn'd and the holy,
The living and the dead, together are
In horrid neighbourhood--'Tis but thin vapour,
Floating around thee, makes the way'ring bound.
Poh! blow it off, and see th'uncurtain'd rech.

See! from all points they come; earth casts them up!
In grave-clothes swath'd are those but new in death;
And there be some half bone, half cased in shreds
Of that which flesh hath been; and there be some
With wicker'd ribs, thro' which the darkness scowls.
Back, back!--They close upon us.--Oh the void
Of hollow unball'd sockets staring grimly,
And lipless jaws that move and clatter round us
In mockery of speech!--Back, back, I say!
Back, back!

*(Catching hold of HUGHOBERT and THEOBALD, and dragging them
back with her in all the wild strength of frantic horror, whilst the
curtain drops.)⁴⁷*

Orra differs from most of Baillie's plays in the treatment of the growth and transformation of the selected passion. With *Orra*, rather than showing the gradual decline of the *Orra* as she is consumed by the passion of fear, Baillie shows *Orra* delighting in the very passion that threatens her. *Orra* does everything that she can to be exposed to the sensations that fear causes in her, and even goes so far as to ask for ghost stories while she is waiting in dreadful anticipation of the ghosts that will ride after midnight. From delighting in fear, *Orra* progresses to feelings of genuine fear, then utter panic, resulting in a mental break when her fear is too much for her and becomes not merely a tale told by candlelight, but a reality. Baillie's other protagonists usually try to fight the passion that is threatening to consume them, but not so with *Orra*. She is ultimately destroyed by her passion in the end, and Baillie, much like Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, seems to be warning her audience of the dangers of giving in to the highly popular trend of Gothic romances and tales of the supernatural. However, while Austen's novel is playful and more satirical of the Gothic genre itself, Baillie's play has

⁴⁷ Baillie, "Orra," 99-100.

more serious undertones, for Baillie truly believed there was danger in letting one's imagination run unchecked.

Baillie wants us to sympathize with her characters, and Orra does attract our sympathy. However, our sympathy toward Orra does not stem from the "sympathetick curiosity" Baillie wrote of in the Introductory Discourse. We sympathize with Orra, not because she is overwhelmed by her passion of fear, we sympathize with her because she has no real control over any portion of her life. Orra encourages her fear of the supernatural. She revels in the sensations fear stirs within her--she delights in them--and it is because of her propensity to seek out fear that she brings about her own destruction. She can choose to fight these impulses to wallow in fear, she can choose to distance herself from the ghostly stories she loves so much, but she does not. Though Orra's fate is tragic, her insanity and how it comes about is not what makes us sympathize with her. Instead, Orra is a sympathetic character because she is at the mercy of the whims of the men in her life. She is an heiress who has inherited considerable property and money from her father. Since she has the means to support herself, and a disinclination to marry, she prefers to remain a spinster and retain a measure of independence than marry and relinquish all her property and freedom. Even were she to remain unmarried for the rest of her life, she would never be completely free. As part of her father's dying will, he entrusted her to the care of his friend and relative, Count Hughobert of Aldenberg. It was also understood, as a part of the will, that Orra would marry Hughobert's son, Glottenbal. As she is Hughobert's ward, she is subject to Hughobert's desires and, though she acts as an independent woman, she will never truly be independent while she

Theobald is the only man in the play who values Orra for her person, and not for her wealth. He is painfully aware that his status is well beneath hers and that his lack of wealth rules him out as an adequate suitor. Orra, though she was impressed with his performance in the tournament, shows no desire to marry him and become his property. She has to be persuaded by Hartman and even then, she does not yield, but instead offers to be co-burgher of Basle and live as his equal rather than marry Theobald and be considered his inferior.

Orra begins much differently from some of Baillie's other plays. With *Orra*, she takes great care to set up character relationships and to allow time for the audience to understand their place in the world of the play. In the first scenes of the play, other characters reference Orra's love of ghost stories and the effect they have upon her constitution, but evidence of Orra's fears are not seen until Act II, when Orra and her ladies are talking of ghost stories associated with Brunier Castle. Indeed, one of the problems with Baillie's plan for dramas based on the passions, and a characteristic seen in all of her plays, is that there simply isn't enough time to develop her characters so that they are fully-fleshed and their actions are well-motivated. Since it is so, noblemen like Hughobert remain tyrannical overlords, villains like Rudigere, heroes like Theobald, and heroines like Orra remain character types lifted from a melodrama. Her characters are interesting, they are charming, they are, indeed, passionate, but we never fully comprehend why they are evil, why they are fearful, or why they are objects of desire, we simply have to accept that they are so and not expect explanation.

With *Orra*, in particular, we aren't allowed enough stage time to really experience Orra's struggle with fear and subsequent mental breakdown. Since her journey of passion begins with an enjoyment of the passion, progressing to genuine fear until madness comes upon her, there is an incredible opportunity for a playwright to *play*. Instead of introducing Orra to us as a woman who delights in being safely frightened and becomes insane when she is forced to confront genuine fear, Baillie spends the majority of the first act introducing the audience to the villain of the piece and the other external obstacles that Orra must surmount. We meet Orra for the first time in Act I, scene 3, when she comes in to tease Glottenbal for his humiliating defeat. We see, not a girl who delights in fear, but a girl who enjoys embarrassing her boorish suitor before tripping lightly out of the room. Though Baillie's theory advocates protagonists who are confronted by internal conflicts rather than external obstacles, with *Orra* Baillie seemed to inherently understand that external impediments are at the heart of good drama and included numerous roadblocks for Orra to overcome on her path toward independence. Indeed, her physical barriers assist in aggravating her fears, ultimately leading to her mental break and subsequent insanity.

According to Rudigere's orders, Cathrina fills Orra's head with stories of how a hunting party of ghosts rides round Brunier Castle at midnight and on St. Michael's eve, the ghost of the hunter-knight searches the castle for his murderer or his direct descendents so that he might kill them and achieve his revenge. This story affects Orra adversely and Alice, her lady-in-waiting, begs Cathrina to stop the tale. Cathrina remarks

how Orra has been sleeping fitfully as of late and tells her that she considered waking her, but did not know if she should.

Orra. ...It is not dreams I fear; for still with me
There is an indistinctness o'er them cast,
Like the dull gloom of misty twilight, where
Before mine eyes pass all incongruous things,
Huge, horrible, and strange, on which I stare
As idiots do upon this changeful world,
With nor surprise nor speculation. No;
Dreams I fear not: it is the dreadful waking,
When, in deep midnight stillness, the roused fancy
Takes up th'imperfect shadows of its sleep,
Like a marr'd speech snatched from a bungler's mouth,
To visions horrible:--this is my bane;--
It is the dreadful waking I fear.⁴⁹

This speech of Orra's is the first indication that the gratification she receives from experiencing fear might be affecting her negatively. While she is still in the safe and sunny atmosphere of Hughobert's castle, however, it is easy for her to forget her fears until the night falls. Once she is forced to inhabit a castle populated by the very specters she fears, her imagination becomes too much for her and she begins to panic. Her escalating fear causes her mind to play tricks on her and, mistaking Theobald for the dreaded hunter-knight coming to kill her in retribution of his death, she shrieks in terror and her mind breaks. This result would be more effective and, indeed, more pitiable, had Baillie used the earlier scenes of the play to build steadily toward her desired end. Instead, *Orra* flirts lightly with the idea of fear at the beginning of the play, and gluts itself with the passion at the end. Instead of a gradual decline, Orra's downfall seems to come upon her all at once.

⁴⁹ Baillie, "Orra," 31-32.

***De Monfort* : a Tragedy on Hatred**

De Monfort is probably Baillie's best known and most frequently performed play. The first of her plays to receive a staged performance, it was also the play that set Baillie up for the frequent disappointment she would encounter throughout her career. Before her authorship was publicly known, she was approached through her publishers by the illustrious John Philip Kemble and his sister Mrs. Sarah Siddons, who wished to produce *De Monfort*, the final play in volume one, on the Drury Lane stage. Baillie was delighted and gave permission for them to begin rehearsals. *De Monfort* opened on Tuesday, 29 April 1800 at Drury Lane⁵⁰ to a full and rather enthusiastic audience. Since previously, the success of a play on the stage had to be determined before the playscript would be published, Kemble's production at Drury Lane would serve as the ultimate test of Baillie's dramatic abilities. Initially, it appeared as though the play would be a success, but as the run continued, attendance dwindled until the show closed after eight nights of performance. Though the length of the 1800 Drury Lane production of *De Monfort* cannot be considered dismal by any means, the overall feeling was that the power of Baillie's poetry was lost in the translation to the stage. Elizabeth Inchbald shared her view of the performance in a letter to a close friend. She wrote:

I sat in the same box with Mrs. Hughes on the first night of "De Monford" [*sic*]. That fine play, supported by the most appropriate acting of Kemble and Siddons, is both dull and highly improbable in the representation...its very charm in the reading militates against the power in the acting.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Carhart, *Life and Work*, 110.

⁵¹ Donkin, *Getting Into the Act*, 163.

Later on, the play would achieve many revivals, in London, Scotland, and in America in both the large metropolitan and smaller rural theatres. Most of these revivals had rather short runs with mixed success.

In her Introductory Discourse, Baillie described *De Monfort* as the play that “will more clearly discover the nature and intention of my design,”⁵² and so one might expect to find that this play adheres most closely to Baillie’s theory, but such is not the case. While *De Monfort* does not strictly follow all tenets of Baillie’s theory, it is one of the most successful of her works in depicting the disastrous consequences for a man who is governed by a single destructive passion.

De Monfort focuses on the Marquis De Monfort and his hatred of his childhood acquaintance, the Marquis Rezenvelt. The play begins with De Monfort’s arrival at the home of his landlord, Jerome. De Monfort is fleeing his hometown to escape the company of Rezenvelt. Unfortunately for De Monfort, Rezenvelt has arrived in the country ahead of De Monfort and is residing with De Monfort’s neighbors and friends, the Count and Countess Freberg. Concerned about her brother’s recent dark moods and his sudden departure from home, De Monfort’s sister Jane pursues him to the country in order to discover what ails him. For the sake of his sister and his friends, all of whom consider Rezenvelt to be an amiable gentleman, De Monfort attempts to stifle his feelings of hatred, but the more contact he has with Rezenvelt, the more pronounced his hatred becomes. He eventually makes a public declaration to put his previous animosity

⁵² Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 63.

behind him and, though he is unable to offer friendship, promises to behave civilly toward the object of his loathing:

De Mon. ...But take this hand, the token of respect;
The token of a will inclined to concord;
The token of a mind, that bears within
A sense of impressive of the debt it owes you:
And cursed be its power, unnerv'd its strength,
If e'er again it shall be lifted up
To do you any harm!⁵³

For a moment, it seems as though all will be well, but Rezenvelt's response provokes an angry reaction from De Monfort:

Rez. Well, be it so, De Monfort, I'm contented;
I'll take thy hand since I can have no more.
(*Carelessly.*) I take of worthy men whate'er they give.
Their heart I gladly take, if not, their hand;
If that too is withheld, a courteous word,
Or the civility of placid looks:
And, if e'en these are too great favours deem'd,
'Faith, I can set me down contentedly
With plain and homely greeting, or, "God save ye!"

De Mon. (*aside, starting away from him some paces.*)
By the good light, he makes a jest of it!⁵⁴

De Monfort's hatred continues to poison his mind against Rezenvelt and, upon hearing the rumor that his beloved sister has pledged herself in marriage to Rezenvelt and, after witnessing the two of them strolling companionably in the garden, he decides he can no longer bear the man's presence. He learns that Rezenvelt will be riding from the Freberg's estate to visit a friend of his and will be walking alone in the woods near a

⁵³ Baillie, "De Monfort" in *A Series of Plays in Which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind: Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy*, vol. 1 (London: T. Cadell, Jun & W. Davies, 1802), 357.

⁵⁴ Baillie, "De Monfort," 357-358.

And only them. He had no other wound.⁵⁶

The play ends with Jane sending Rezenvelt's corpse with Freberg so that it might be buried in his family plot and asking the Sisters if she might

...within these sacred cloister walls
May raise a humble, nameless tomb to him,
Who, but for one dark passion, one dire deed,
Had claim'd a record of as noble worth,
As e'er enrich'd the sculptur'd pedestal.⁵⁷

One of the biggest problems in Baillie's *De Monfort* is the character of De Monfort.

Throughout the play, his servants, friends, and sister describe him as a "quiet and lib'ral man,"⁵⁸ of "noble"⁵⁹ temperament, who, despite his faults, was subject to "bursts of natural goodness from his heart,"⁶⁰ and yet, this is not the character we see. The other characters of the play comment on the other side of De Monfort's nature, wherein he is suspicious, prideful, stubborn, hot-tempered, and apt to hold grudges and slow to forgive them. The negative qualities are what Baillie chooses to show, though there are moments of tenderness exhibited by De Monfort, mostly toward his sister Jane, but also toward his devoted landlord Jerome, and so it is the negative qualities that dominate our opinion of the character. But these moments of goodness and calmness of mind are not enough to show us what De Monfort might have been like before he was claimed by his dislike of Rezenvelt. We only see the man unsettled by hatred, so that when Jane eulogizes him at

⁵⁶ Baillie, "De Monfort," 409.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 409-410.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 304.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 327.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 305.

the end of the play, it seems unfitting that he should be honored by such a noble lady after murdering a man for no sound reason.

Rezenvelt also seems to exhibit none of the negative traits De Monfort assigns to him. De Monfort calls his enemy a “villain”⁶¹ and a “cursed reptile.”⁶² Indeed, Baillie seems to do everything she can to make Rezenvelt a likeable character. After encountering Rezenvelt for the first time in the play, De Monfort exclaims,

De Mon. Abhorred fiend! he hath a pleasure too,
 A damned pleasure in the pain he gives!
 Oh! the side glance of that detested eye!
 That conscious smile! that full insulting lip!
 It touches every nerve: it makes me mad.
 What, does it please thee? Dost thou woo my hate?
 Hate thou shalt have! determin'd, deadly hate,
 Which shall awake no smile. Malignant villain!
 The venom of thy mind is rank and devilish,
 And thin the film that hides it.
 Thy hateful visage ever spoke thy worth:
 I loath'd thee when a boy.
 That men should be besotted with him thus!
 And Freberg likewise so bewitched is,
 That like a hireling flatt'rer at his heels
 He meanly paces, off'ring brutish praise.
 O! I could [curse] him too!⁶³

This is a description of the Rezenvelt that De Monfort sees, a Rezenvelt that seems to exist solely within the confines of his own mind. We do not see in Rezenvelt what De Monfort sees. Instead, we are presented with an affable gentleman, who seeks to repair the rift that exists between himself and De Monfort. He is pleasant to all, including the

⁶¹ Baillie, “De Monfort,” 316.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 323.

man who hates him, and is liked by every one, which only serves to make De Monfort's impassioned hatred of him seem irrational and unfounded.

Freb. He is indeed a man, within whose breast
Firm rectitude and honour hold their seat,
Tho' unadorned with that dignity
Which were their fittest garb. Now, on my life!
I know of no truer heart than Rezenvelt.⁶⁴

Freberg's praise of Rezenvelt is par for the course, for others in the play speak just as highly of him; only De Monfort sees him as deceptive and two-faced. But is Rezenvelt's apparent good humor and pleasant demeanor all an act? The role could be performed as such, but the evidence of a dual nature would have to be evident elsewhere in the play in order for such an interpretation to be credible. Indeed, De Monfort's dislike of Rezenvelt seems more akin to one man's mad delusions than a genuine passion.

Baillie specifies in her Introductory Discourse that she wants us to convey the same sympathy on De Monfort as we do on the other characters she's written and begs us to pass judgment on the passion of hatred and not on the man consumed by it. For,

this and every other bad passion does more strongly evince its pernicious and dangerous nature, when we see it thus counteracting and destroying the good gifts of heaven, than when it is represented as the suitable associate, in the breast, of inmates as dark as itself.⁶⁵

However, the man Baillie presents, though not an evil man, is certainly not the type of man to arouse sympathy in an audience. His hot temper and disinclination to set aside his feelings of dislike for a man everyone else seems to admire, attracts neither sympathy nor pity. De Monfort is ruled by his petty jealousy of a man who is guilty of nothing but

⁶⁴ Baillie, "De Monfort," 352.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

rising in prestige and wealth, being well liked and successful in all he attempts, and sparing his life in a duel that De Monfort forced upon Rezenvelt. In the end, De Monfort kills the man he hates for reasons justified only in his own mind, leaving us with a sense that the events of the play take place within De Monfort's own head, an impression that is reinforced by the almost Expressionistic augmentation of Gothic elements as De Monfort spirals deeper and deeper into his own dark hatred. De Monfort's hatred, by all appearances, seems to lack sufficient motivation. Rezenvelt has not committed any specific or severe infraction upon De Monfort, yet his person is entirely detestable to De Monfort. This apparently unmotivated dislike of Rezenvelt on the part of De Monfort appears to be precisely what Baillie intended for her protagonist. She writes,

For this passion must be kept distinct from that dislike which we conceive for another when he has greatly offended us, and which is almost the constant companion of anger; and also from that eager desire to crush, and inflict suffering on him who has injured us, which constitutes revenge. This passion, as I have conceived it, is that rooted and settled aversion, which from opposition of character, aided by circumstances of little importance, grows at last into such antipathy and personal disgust as makes him who entertains it, feel, in the presence of him who is the object of it, a degree of torment and restlessness which is insufferable. It is a passion, I believe, less frequent than any other of the stronger passions, but in the breast where it does exist, it creates, perhaps, more misery than any other.⁶⁶

Since Baillie intended for De Monfort's hatred of Rezenvelt to be a hatred born out of petty jealousy and seemingly unfounded by everyone else of their acquaintance, it begs the question: does this type of hatred allow for a successful delineation when condensed into a dramatic timeline? Baillie provided reasons why *De Monfort* deviates from her prescribed intentions:

⁶⁶ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 63-64.

The rise and progress of this passion I have been obliged to give in retrospect, instead of representing it all along in its usual operation, as I could have wished to have done. But hatred is a passion of slow growth; and to have exhibited it from its beginnings would have included a longer period, even than those who are least scrupulous about the limitation of dramattick time, would have thought allowable. I could not have introduced my chief characters upon the stage as boys, and then as men.⁶⁷

Since Baillie wished for De Monfort's passion to stem from his boyhood relationship with Rezenvelt, she felt she could not justify showing the passion from its very first moment. Such a decision was undoubtedly wise in terms of dramatic composition; however, one cannot help but think *De Monfort* would have been better received had De Monfort's passion been sparked by a specific incident; a particular instance in which De Monfort was wronged and, because of which, Rezenvelt's continued presence becomes too much for De Monfort to handle, leading him to murder his foe in the forest. This solution certainly would be more dramatically interesting for the audience and would help them justify De Monfort's anger toward Rezenvelt, yet still allow for them to be horrified by his murder at De Monfort's hand. It would certainly help the audience better understand De Monfort's violent and apparently unprovoked crime.

Baillie struggles with some of the same faults that can be found in *The Tryal* and many of her other plays. While the dramatic construction of *De Monfort* is reasonably tight, lagging with only a few extraneous scenes, Baillie inserts a rather problematic character into the play, the character of Conrad. Conrad's presence in the play is puzzling, a sentiment shared by many critics, in their reviews of the play. Critic Thomas Dutton wrote at least eight reviews for the *Dramatic Censor* on the 1800 Drury Lane

⁶⁷ Baillie, *Series of Plays*, vol. 1, 63.

production of *De Monfort*. In his review on 30 April, he wrote, "...the piece is still much too long, and would receive great additional improvement by totally rescinding the part of *Conrad*, who is only an incumbrance to the Play."⁶⁸ Dutton's 02 May 1800 review reiterates this opinion in more scathing terms: "...CAULFIELD's part, as *Conrad*, is an absolute excrescence, which not only requires the pruning knife, but ought to be totally lopped off."⁶⁹ Conrad makes his first appearance in Act IV, scene one, after a banquet at Count Freberg's. He mistakes Freberg for De Monfort, an error that is immediately corrected by Freberg, who offers to introduce him to the Marquis. Conrad declines, stating that his friend Rezenvelt can make the introduction. Freberg warns him not to mention the name of Rezenvelt to De Monfort unless "thou would'st seek thy ruin from De Monfort."⁷⁰ After Freberg exits, Conrad muses aloud over how he can use De Monfort's animosity toward Rezenvelt to his advantage. He seeks an audience with De Monfort in the following scene and asks for aid from him. When De Monfort shows no interest in assisting him, Conrad resorts to underhanded tactics:

Con. ...Who will believe my wrongs if I complain?
 I am a stranger, Rezenvelt my foe,
 Who will believe my wrongs?⁷¹

De Monfort's attitude immediately changes. He becomes agitated, and, gripping Conrad's coat, vows to do everything in his power to assist him, since they share an enemy. Conrad quickly backpedals and says,

⁶⁸ Duthrie, *Plays on the Passions*, 449.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 454.

⁷⁰ Baillie, "De Monfort," 363.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 368.

Con. Nay, pardon me, it were not well advised,
If I should speak so freely of the man,
Who will so soon your nearest kinsman be.⁷²

When De Monfort presses him for information, Conrad recounts the rumor that Jane is betrothed to Rezenvelt and will soon become his wife. When De Monfort explodes with rage, Conrad realizes he's carried his plan too far and makes his exit while De Monfort interrogates Jerome about his sister's behavior toward Rezenvelt. This incident marks Conrad's final appearance. His request for aid is never resolved and he is never referred to again in the play. Dutton's opinion that the character should be eliminated has its merits, for, at the start of Act III, the Countess Freberg, jealous at the attention her husband is lavishing upon Jane, reveals her intention to tell De Monfort the selfsame rumor perpetrated by Conrad. We never see the Countess carry out her plan, as Conrad is introduced to do it in her stead. Perhaps the Countess has spread the rumor amongst her friends and Conrad is meant to be demonstrative of how far the false account has spread. Baillie's reasons for introducing Conrad are unclear, but it seems unnecessary and a bit sloppy to introduce a character who serves no dramatic function except to push De Monfort to the breaking point, especially since the same result could have been achieved by the already-familiar character of the Countess. Countess Freberg certainly has stronger motivation to spread the rumor than does Conrad, who appears, performs his dramatic function, and vanishes into the ether from whence he came.

De Monfort is a victim of a problem inherent in nearly all of Baillie's *Plays on the Passions*--over-theorizing. Though Baillie is a gifted writer, her plays tend to get

⁷² Baillie, "De Monfort," 368.

bogged down with her own dramatic theory, causing the action to lag because of incidental scenes and extraneous characters. Rather than watching a character be consumed by hatred, we hear him talk about it. Baillie seemed to recognize the potential danger of her plays lagging due to heavy use of dialogue and tried valiantly to inject some visual interest into *De Monfort* through the use of minor spectacle. The balls and banquets at the Freberg's home, the procession of nuns and monks, and the Gothic settings are interesting to look at, but are simply window-dressing; they contribute nothing to the evolution of De Monfort's hatred, they merely serve as a momentary diversion from the progress of the passion. Had the motivations driving De Monfort's passion been stronger, the effects of the passion itself would be enough to hold the audience's interest, and Baillie would not need to rely on processions and banquets to prevent the audience's mind from wandering.

CONCLUSION

MINOR WRITER OR MAJOR ODDITY: THE CONTEXT OF JOANNA BAILLIE

Theatre history is marked by its successes, but it is also built upon its failures. One cannot merely examine the high points of history and use them to form a cohesive impression of a theatrical or literary era. Whether one regards Joanna Baillie as a brilliant theatre theorist and playwright or a reclusive writer of torpid closet drama, Baillie's importance to British Romanticism cannot be overlooked. The author of twenty-six plays, lyrics to numerous songs, multiple volumes of poetry, and play prefaces outlining her dramatic theory, Baillie has, until recent years, been widely ignored in the context of theatre history and British Romantic literature. She has not suffered this fate alone, for there are innumerable Romantic writers--male and female alike--who have been consigned to the annals of authors whose work and identities have been obscured by time. Baillie's exclusion from the ranks of celebrated nineteenth century writers is perplexing, considering the esteem in which she was held in the eyes of her contemporaries and the popularity she gained among her reading audience. Alas, for Joanna Baillie, public taste is changeable and, within forty years of her death in 1851, the public had already begun to view her work with disfavor. An article titled "The Bookworm" appeared in a 1900 issue of *The Academy*, stating the following opinion of Baillie's potential legacy:

Every one recalls Byron's dictum that, 'Women, save Joanna Baillie, cannot write tragedy,' and some may recall Miss Mitford's remark--'That Mrs. Joanna is a true dramatist, as well as a great poet, I, for one, can never doubt.' Poor Miss

Mitford! Her dramas are as dead as those of the woman she thus absurdly praised. What play by 'Mrs. Joanna' lingers on the stage? What poem by 'Mrs. Joanna' has found an abiding place even in anthologies? Her poems and plays are both buried for ever in the one-volume edition published in 1853.¹

Sadly, once the flames of Romanticism burned out and a more realistic drama fell into vogue, playwrights like Joanna Baillie were regarded as old-fashioned and unworthy of remembrance or stage production. Kelley and Feldman account for the continuing negative view of Romantic writers as perpetrated by twentieth and twenty-first-century scholars:

The change in literary taste brought about by World War I and by the onset of the modernist aesthetic values made any Romantic sensibility seem naïve, melodramatic, embarrassingly sentimental....But when, some decades later, literary critics and the academic world in general began to rediscover and to revive the English Romantics, the male writers seemed to be the only candidates for recanonization; the women authors of the period and their rich artistic legacy were ignored. It was not a conspiracy or a deliberate silencing, for the Romantics had all been silenced for some time. It was, instead, an absence of sufficient curiosity and advocacy--of the zeal necessary to rehabilitate the name of any forgotten writer, whether male or female--an absence of political power and energy to break the silence already there.²

Now, with the resurgence of interest in forgotten writers, particularly forgotten women writers, it is the perfect time to reevaluate the British Romantic canon, to allow for the inclusion of a variety of authors writing in a variety of genres, so as to paint a clearer picture of the British literary and theatrical climate during the nineteenth century. The literary Romantic aesthetic was not limited to poetry alone, nor was it solely the province of the traditional Romantic poets. Instead, it was an aesthetic that encompassed

¹ Charles Lewis Hind, ed., "The Bookworm," *Academy* (issue 1478 (1900: Sept 1)), 166. The author is referring to Baillie's 1851 publication of *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie, Complete in One Volume*.

² Paula R. Feldman & Theresa M. Kelley, eds., *Romantic Women Writers, Voices and Countervoices*. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), 2-3.

poetry, essays, novels, as well as plays. In restricting what constitutes the Romantic, we limit our understanding of both the period and the aesthetic. In a similar vein, the tradition among theatre scholars and historians to regard nineteenth-century British theatre as an antitheatrical and melodramatic wasteland until the importation of Ibsen is mendacious and inaccurate. The theatre of nineteenth-century Britain was thriving, vibrant, and active. Though there were many theatre lovers of the period who lamented the decline of theatrical taste, both onstage and among the audience, the theatre was alive with experimentation in both form and in stagecraft. Because the Romantics were already experimenting with written form and genre and theatre artists were testing the limits of what the stage could portray, Joanna Baillie's theatre theory and body of work should not seem out of place, nor should she be considered an historical oddity; rather, she should be regarded as an essential part of the fabric of Romantic theatre writing.

Joanna Baillie has been condemned to the same fate of the popular dramatists of her day, and is disparaged, marginalized, and mostly forgotten, except for the times her work is trotted out for analysis as an historical oddity, an icon for feminist revisionists, or a failed dramatic writer. These mindsets ignore the fact that Joanna Baillie is neither an historical oddity nor a bad writer; they ignore the high reputation she earned during her lifetime, they forget she was regarded as the answer to the English theatre's dry spell of literary drama, that Baillie was expected to revive the theatre of Shakespeare and usher England into a new golden age of drama. Shortly after the publication of Volume One of *Plays on the Passions* in 1798, a review of the book was printed in *Critical Review*, praising the quality of her work. The reviewer, who believed the anonymous

book to be authored by a man, did not believe Baillie's writing was on the same level as Shakespeare's, but declared it was not far from it:

We would advise this writer to study the versification of Shakspeare [*sic*], and the other dramatists of that time. He may soon versify with their facility; and we may then place his volumes near those of Massinger and of Beaumont and Fletcher. He has already avoided the faults of our modern theatrical authors; we meet with no whining dullness, no idle rhapsodies, no metaphorical absurdity. His language is that of nature; and the heart owns it. We are pleased to find that he has chosen the better path, and that our drama may boast another writer who possesses 'the eye that can see nature, the heart that can feel nature, and the resolution that dares follow nature.'³

Baillie's work was not universally acclaimed, as evident in a number of reviews published before and after her authorship was made known, but these negative opinions do not detract from her considerable talent nor from her importance as a dramatist. The writing of Joanna Baillie offers us a different perspective into the 'acting' drama of the nineteenth-century, a perspective not often considered, due to the habit of lumping Baillie into the category of closet writers. Baillie was not a closet dramatist, by virtue of her own admission. The closet writers of the period purposefully wrote plays designed for a reading audience and not for stage performance, but Joanna Baillie had every intention of seeing her work acted. The fact that her plays were more literary than the standard popular fare of the day and did not do well on the London stages does not automatically shunt her work into the closet; Baillie's intentions must be taken into account when categorizing her work. In an 1804 letter to William Sotheby, Baillie addressed the issue of her closet status:

A play certainly is more perfect for being fitted for the stage as well as the closet, and why should I not aim with all my strength to make my things as perfect as

³ Tobias George Smollett, ed., *Critical Review, or, Annals of literature* (Issue 24 (1798 Sept)), p. 13.

possible, however short I may fall of the mark? Don't be afraid I shall injure them as reading plays on this account. It is endeavouring to suit pieces to the temporary circumstances of particular theatres, and not to the stage in general that injure them in this way. One who never expects as long as she lives to see a play of her own acted, and who never intends to offer a play to any of our Theatres under their present management, is not very likely to do her works much harm by keeping the stage in her eye. Don't [*sic*] you therefore find fault with me, or encrease the number of those who are for quietly setting me aside as a closet writer. I will still go on, having my drums & my trumpets, & my striking situations, & my side scenes & my back scenes, & all the rest of it in my mind, whilst I write, notwithstanding all that you can say to the contrary.⁴

Finding a place for Joanna Baillie within the Romantic canon and making a case for her importance to theatre history is not a simple endeavor and, certainly, will take more than the work of one person alone. As long as her success and relative importance are determined by the number of staged productions she achieved instead of her literary reputation and influence, she will never be settled into an appropriate niche. She will continue to be an odd figure, ill suited for both major writer and minor writer status, an historical oddity who defies classification and fulfills Laetitia Barbauld's prediction that Baillie was "an excellent woman who was raised to an unchallenged eminence in the lettered circles of her day...in danger of being undervalued in other generations."⁵

Joanna Baillie is an unique figure of the Romantic period. She concocted her own recipe for dramatic writing and established a framework for her plays through her Introductory Discourse. However, Baillie was anything but a formula writer. Rather than rigidly adhering to her theory as gospel, she moved with flexibility within that framework and, in doing so, prevented her plays from becoming formula pieces. Baillie did not set out to craft a mere formula for play construction, but rather proposed a

⁴ Baillie, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 179-180.

⁵ Slagle, *Literary Life*, 24.

philosophy of playwriting, a mode of thinking that would allow dramatists to explore the effects of human emotion in higher concentration than in conventional plays.

To staunchly condemn Baillie as a dramatic failure is foolish, for there is no standard of measure to provide either a rating of 'success' or 'failure' for her project. While it is true theatrical success is traditionally determined by length of run and number of positive reviews, some allowances must be made in the case of Joanna Baillie. Her project was entirely original to her time and, although the playgoing public was not quite ready to see purely psychological dramas onstage, the reading public enjoyed her work within the theatre of their minds and clamored for more. Though Baillie's plays explore human emotion much in the same way as her counterparts, the Romantic poets, she cannot be consigned to the ranks of closet dramatists. Baillie's plays were written to be acted and are, arguably, very performable, given the proper circumstances. Since Baillie is so distinct from both the closet dramatists and the popular stage dramatists of her age, cannot be classified according to the characteristics of either set, nor can she be effectively compared to either group due to differences in intention, content, and genre. How, then, is one able to determine whether Baillie was successful in her endeavor? Is it even necessary to do so? Better to evaluate Baillie within her own context, rather than studying her out of that context and trying to force her into a niche not suitable for her work. Her *Plays on the Passions* must not be regarded as an unsuccessful foray into playwriting by an inexperienced dramatist, but rather as a body of work that was out of its time. A set of plays that, although not in tune with the popular plays of the period, anticipate the style of playwriting of the late nineteenth century. In fusing elements of

spectacle used by popular stage playwrights of her day and her own philosophy of playwriting she served as the bridge between spectacular melodrama of her age and the psychological realism of Ibsen that was to come.

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