Joanna Baillie: Early foundations, Romantic poetry, and poetics.

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Joanna Baillie: 
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*carpe diem*

Guy Wallace White

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of English in
Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
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ABSTRACT

Joanna Baillie (1762-1851) is a seminal figure in the Romantic movement, whose poetry, and poetics warrants re-examination. She is one of many women who have faded away since their period of fame. This study examines Baillie’s *Prefaces*, her poetry, and songs as a collective contribution to the early Romantic movement. Her verse, and songs remain virtually unconsidered by critics since their conception. Her poetics is considered in an era of changing literary taste. Baillie’s prose, and poetry express her belief in sympathetic curiosity, and natural representation in language.

Her literary life, and its influence upon the evolution of her Romantic ideals is examined. She is a precursory figure who anticipated Wordsworth, offering her readers a theoretical framework that celebrates the subtleties and shadings of the human heart, and human psyche. Additionally, she was a member of Britain’s literary circle, and her friendship with Sir Walter Scott provided a reciprocal and critical literary relationship.

Baillie’s career is critiqued by the *Quarterly Review* *LXVII* (1841); their commentary on Baillie’s “Fugitive Verses” is analysed for inaccuracy and bias, followed by a review of “Night Scenes of Other Times,” “Fragment of a Poem,” “Thunder,” and “A Mother to her Waking Infant.” The final chapters of this study looks at Baillie as the songstress of Scotland; and “Lines to Agnes Baillie” is considered as a Romantic anthem, defining Baillie’s poetics. Joanna Baillie enjoyed a dynamic literary career as a playwright, poet, editor, critic, lyricist, and prolific correspondent. She warrants a place in a restored literary canon.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Katherine Quinsey for unconditional patience, and reassurance. She reminded me that we are all human beings destined to grow by degrees, and that our quest for academic refinement is a case in point. I am slowly learning the meaning of the word scholarly, by her example. Her enthusiasm infectiously spurs others on to strive for professionalism. Additionally, she is a kind critic in her firmness, and thoroughness.

I am also indebted to Dr. Ditsky who is noted for his quiet, conservative manner, and his perpetually open door. The subtlety of his sense of humour has inspired me to pay attention to detail between the lines—sometimes important—sometimes easily missed. I appreciate his ongoing support that extends beyond the classroom.

I shall close with thanks to the University of Windsor’s extraordinarily friendly faculty. There is comfort in a place where everyone addresses you by name. Even a chance meeting in the mail room can lead to a word of support, or some constructive advice.
DEDICATION

There is a small community in Northern Nova Scotia where the homes rest in a Victorian earthiness that is coal dust. Floor boards squeak, windows stick, and there is solace in knowing my ancestors have made this house their home for one hundred and twenty years. My grandmother was born here, in her mother’s home, and after four score she still has a resiliency fostered by stubbornness, and efficiency. It is no uncommon task to adapt to having all the oddities of student life in your midst. Thank you my grandmother, Isobel White, for contributions innumerable.

Special thanks to dad, and Freda for what words can do no justice to.
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*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* is commonly called *A Series of Plays*. The "Introductory Discourse" has been shortened to "Discourse," and is Joanna Baillie's prefatory essay to *A Series of Plays.*
Joanna Baillie's Works


   ----- Volume II. London, 1802.
   ----- ----- Third edition 1806.
   ----- Volume III. London, 1812.

   ----- Second edition, 1805.

4. Epilogue to the theatrical representation at Strawberry-Hill. London: [spoken by the Hon. Anne S. Damer]. [1804?]


   ----- New York: Pub. by D. Longworth, 1810.

9. The dream. New York: Published by the Longworths, 1812.

10. The beacon: a serious musical drama, in two acts. New York: Published by D. Longworth, 1812.


14. Author: Pettet, Alfred. *Original sacred music... composed expressly for this work, by Messrs Atwood, Bishop... etc. with original poetry, written by Mrs Joanna Baillie... [and others]. The whole compiled, and arranged by Alfred Pettet Publ. info.* London: for the editor Royal Harmonic Institution, 1825.


   ----- London: E. Moxon, 1842.

   ----- Allahabad: Belvedere press, 1904.


24. *Unpublished letters of Joanna Baillie to a Dumfriesshire laird.* Dumfries, 1930. (University of Glasgow)
Introduction

With the move in recent decades to restore lost female writers to a revised canon, Joanna Baillie has yet to be assessed for the full range of her literary contribution. She is a complex figure who has been glossed over rather than researched, and reexamined. David Perkins's "revised" edition of English Romantic Writers includes Baillie without actually recognizing her accomplishments. The most ambitious critical volume is Margaret S. Carhart's The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie, published in 1923, in which she emphasises Baillie's drama, and dramaturgy. Some critical discussion of Baillie's work occurs in Anne K. Mellor's Romanticism and Feminism (1988), and Marjean D. Purinton's Romantic Ideology Unmasked (1994), yet these writings are brief, and likewise focus on Baillie's dramatic works. Baillie's contributions to poetry, poetic theory, and the Romantic movement have yet to be subjected to scholarly analysis.

The following study aims to determine how Joanna Baillie was a key figure in the Romantic movement. She brought forward poetic theory that encouraged a break from Neoclassical and Augustan tradition. She insisted that rhetorical modes of poetry encumbered the shadings and nuances of developing passions. She celebrated the untutored poet, primitivism, and rustic\(^1\) language for their contribution to the natural expression of heartfelt emotion. Baillie's poetry supported Gothic revival, and the integration of folklore, myth, and superstition. Additionally, she opposed the use of classical characters and classical settings as remote from the reader's experience. Thus, her verse draws on the story lines of everyday British living, thereby enhancing psychological immediacy.

\(^1\) "Rustic," in this sense, refers to everyday speech, and the manners of the lower and middle classes.
It is this sense of immediacy that is the kernel of Joanna Baillie’s psychological technique, a technique that separates her from many of her predecessors, marking her as a different and revolutionary figure of early Romanticism. Baillie is a moralist whose poetry and poetics are centred on “sympathetic curiosity,”\textsuperscript{2} which refers to our natural propensity for curiosity about others, or our desire to know ourselves through others. The bulk of Baillie’s writing, regardless of genre, is character, and issue-driven; and, it is specifically crafted with reader-response in mind. Baillie’s theory and practice show both readers and writers alike that the psychological approach is appropriate for poetry. The writer considers his/her reader’s innate curiosity, coupled with the experience that the reader brings to a text. Baillie uses the reader’s innate curiosity, and his/her desire to learn as a means of achieving a pseudo-experience that awakens the passions. Her control over text in this manner allows her to challenge the dominance of eighteenth century literary aesthetics and taste, especially concerning the depiction of women, the poor, and other marginalised groups. Baillie’s longer poems contain emotionally informed character sketches that are drawn from a collection of subtle details, often coming from multiple points of view, thereby providing complete emotional renderings.

Baillie’s approach represents a departure from the rhetorical (persuasive) role of literature, and a new emphasis on the need for passion in the reader. In the “Introductory Discourse” she critiques rhetorical modes of poetry as centred on argument facilitated by form, and the presentation of fact, which keeps the reader essentially passive. How does Baillie make the reader’s experience active? Her creative process is an early form of reader-response theory. In her poetry she purposefully creates empty space, and offers

\textsuperscript{2}“Sympathetic curiosity” is dealt with in detail in Chapter 2, where Baillie considers the term as a means of generating reader interest in ways applicable to all genres.
"one stroke of nature" knowing that the reader will fill in the gaps. She depicts the human heart, its imperfections, and the subtle twists of nature showing the reader what is between the lines of social acceptability. Baillie as a poet and a behaviourist, follows nature's path, and defies the artifice of social constructs. She debunks her predecessors' enforcement of socially sanctioned, preconceived notions. Her poetry and philosophy suggest that nature and the inwardly unobservable characteristics of passion are infinitely variable. There are always the imagination, the private and unspeakable, and the unknown that lie beneath appearances, yet must be considered in artistic representation; in this light Baillie insists that the creation of poetry is a process of growth as opposed to a field of assembly and construction. She anticipates Wordsworth in her efforts to keep nature as a living breathing entity. Her goal in writing is to achieve emotional connection through familiarity.

Joanna Baillie is a participant in a literary aesthetic that was in transition in the 1790s. Not all poets of the eighteenth century followed the rhetorical model that Baillie so vehemently rejected. Her development as a Romantic theorist is best determined by examining her in the context of the eighteenth century. A select few of her predecessors opened up the pathways of psychological interiority.

**Pre-Romanticism**

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was a known "vigorous opponent of Neoclassicism" (Tillotson 2). In his essay-periodical, *The Rambler*, number 60, he penned an article about biographical writing. His description comes remarkably close to Baillie's term "sympathetic curiosity:"

ALL Joy or Sorrow for the Happiness or Calamities of others is produced by an Act of the Imagination, that realises the Event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a Time, in the Condition of him whose
Fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the Deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same Good or Evil happening to ourselves. (Tillotson 985)

Neither Johnson, nor Baillie, rejected all that was classical. There are strong similarities, and some differences between the two authors. Johnson valued biography for its ability to delight and instruct, which is a deeply classical concept that happens to be complimentary to Baillie’s moral and didactic criteria for good writing. Both authors agree that a narrative about someone’s life affords us the opportunity to learn from someone else’s mistakes. Baillie and Johnson would, however, disagree over his view of a “Uniformity of Man” (Tillotson 986). Johnson suggests that when a human being is stripped of his/her decorations, there is a commonness to humankind. He describes behaviour that is seen on the surface showing differences between people, but when you look underneath manners, we are all subject to the same causes, and effects (986): “We are all prompted by the same Motives, all deceived by the same Fallacies, all animated by Hope, obstructed by Danger, entangled by Desire, and Seduced by Pleasure” (986). Baillie, on the other hand, sees nature as a separate force that has its own shadings, and variations contributing to the formation of individuals with very different types of minds. The poet who has “faithfully delineated nature” reveals nature’s “boundless varieties” (ID32).

Johnson treats the issues of daily living, which is a prospect that Baillie celebrates. They differ in opinion when he describes the world in empirical terms of cause, and effect, and “uncorrupted Reason.” Baillie distrusts observation which is often coloured by our preconceived notions (ID 3). We see what we expect to see, or want to see. Baillie comments:

From this constant employment of their minds, most people, I believe, 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. (ID 3)

By Baillie's deduction we are not eternally observing, nor are we always accurate. Baillie acknowledges the unconscious, providing the grey areas often found in the expression of passion. She notes that violent agitation is concretely viewed, and observation may take note of "the smallest indications of an unquiet mind, the restless eye, the muttering lip, the half-checked exclamation, and the hasty start . . ." (ID 10). "But, there are instances of anger, fear, and jealousy [that are not observable]. It is characteristic of more powerful passions that they will increase, and nourish themselves on very slender aliment; it is from within that they are chiefly supplied with what they feed on; and it is in contending with opposite passions, and affections of the mind that we least discover their strength, not with events" (ID 39). Johnson recreates personality through a Lockean lens, deducing character by sense data via the scientific method. Baillie takes steps to acknowledge what cannot be seen, thereby broadening the potential for poetic imagination.

The revelation of deeply private thoughts ran contrary to the rule of eighteenth century literary aesthetics. Edward Young (1683-1765) was persistent in his "exhortation to 'Know thyself' and to 'Reverence thyself' and in the conviction that the poet's 'genius is from heaven'" (Brown 362). *The Complaint; or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality* was possibly "motivated by Young's grief over the recent losses of his stepdaughter, wife, and friend Henry Temple; readers were fascinated by the 'confessional' quality of the poet's complaint. Such personal poetry was new in 1742" (Brown 360). *Night Thoughts* was ten thousand lines of blank verse, centred on the development of passions, which is perfectly in line with the changes that Baillie was advocating. Equally supportive of Baillie's poetics is Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, (1759) which explains the differences between Neoclassic imitative
conceptions of art, and the organic theory of art that would become a statute of
Romanticism in the coming decades:

Still farther: An Imitator shares his crown, if he has one, with the chosen Object of
his Imitation; an Original enjoys an undivided applause. An Original may be said
to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it
grows, it is not made: Imitations are often a sort of Manufacture wrought up by
those Mechanics, Art, and Labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own.
(Tillotson 873) (underlining mine)

Baillie focuses on nature’s spontaneity, but essentially she and Young agree. Both Baillie
and Young share a concern that reverence for classical literature has had some detrimental
effects on writing. Young notes these “illustrious Examples engross, prejudice, and
intimidate” (Tillotson 874). Baillie extends this notion to include literary journals as a
vehicle that contributes to the detrimental effects that Young cites. He is more willing to
compromise in his plea for a change in literary taste than Baillie is: “Let us Build
Compositions with the Spirit, and in the Taste, of the Antients; but not with their
Materials” (Tillotson 874). Baillie says she does not wish to deprecate the ancients, but
her muse’s origin is much closer to home. Her mentor is Shakespeare, and her material is
drawn from life as it exists around her. Young is equally enamoured with primitivism, and
the potential of the untutored poet as a figure throughout literary history: “among the
Antients, Pindar; who, (as Vossius tells us) boasted of his No-learning, calling himself the
Eagle, for his Flight above it” (Tillotson 876). Young notes that genius is a rare and
innate feature that allows some individuals the ability for original composition, despite the
lack of formal education. Young links creativity to “wild” nature, and the freedom of
poetic imagination: “In the Fairyland of Fancy, Genius may wander wild; there it has a
creative power, and may reign arbitrarily over its own empire of Chimeras” (Tillotson
877). His use of the word “Chimeras” acknowledges the presence of poetic imagination in
classical Greek myths.

The last aspect of Young’s *Conjectures* to be borne in mind describes Baillie’s “sympathetic curiosity” from a psychological perspective, which differs compared to Johnson’s empirical view. Young relates:

A Genius fond of ornament should not be wedded to the tragic muse, which is in mourning: We want not to be diverted at an entertainment, where our greatest pleasure arises from the depth of our concern. But whence (by the way) this odd generation of pleasure from pain? The movement of our melancholy passions is pleasant, when we ourselves are safe: We love to be, at once, miserable, and unhurt: So are we made; and so made, perhaps, to show us the divine goodness; to show that none of our passions were designed to give us pain, except when being pain’d is for our advantage on the whole; which is evident from this instance, in which we see, that passions the most painful administer greatly, sometimes, to our delight. (Tillotson 886)

Young makes a plea for realism. Ornament or artifice is seen as a spectacle that takes away from true representation of tragedy. He delves into the necessity of contrasts; we need to see the bad to recognise the good. Young explores our natural propensities for pain and misery. He speaks to Baillie’s view that “we know ourselves through others.”

Baillie considers a reader or audience member’s psychological contribution to representation in drama and verse in the “Introductory Discourse.” She analyses the nature of morbid personality, our desire for spectacle, and the tempering of such attractions through writing that is designed for moral instruction.

The two figures closely related to Baillie in theory and art are William Collins (1721-1759) and Thomas Gray (1716-1771). They are important for their emphasis on human passion, natural creative ability, and primitivism. Collins’s “Ode on the Poetical Character” is a highly allegorical poem that begins with a return to the Renaissance and Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (I.1. 4). Collins considers various gifted poets and their approaches to poetic imagination. The poet’s ability to create is compared to the creations of the divine, the artisan and the creative capacities of legendary figures. Collins
speaks of poets capable of prophetic visions, yet these “gifted bards” have to resolve the workings of several forces pitted against one another. The poet who understands the “Dangerous passions” anger, jealousy, and ambition is closer to (heavenly) truth and poetic vision (l.l. 41, 57, 61). “All the shad’wy Tribes of the Mind” are natural passions that are revealed in the poet’s creation.

Many of Joanna Baillie’s longer poems contain macabre elements rooted in the Graveyard school of poetry. Baillie used Gothic elements to trigger fears and tensions easily related to by the reader. Collins’s odes are graced with ghosts, witches, and incidents of fancy. His “The Passions, An Ode to Music” is a tribute to art’s potential to manifest every emotion mythically, musically, and spiritually. The poem could be Baillie’s credo for artistic creation. Collins celebrates the Muse’s ability to paint, voice, and sing the emotions of pity, jealousy, hate, gloom, and joy. In his view, Greek myth is dynamic emotionally, thereby contributing to the history of fancy, and poetic imagination. Collins figures strongly in Baillie’s poetics with his poem “An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, Considered as a Subject of Poetry.” He makes use of rural, and rustic themes that incorporate ancient Scottish lore. Baillie’s sprites, and brownies decorate her verse, but with the secondary gain of supporting the Romantic notion of Scottish nationalism. Both Collins and Baillie have a tendency to value native British sources that offer the local wisdom of myth, legend and lore which they value over the knowledge offered by formal education.

Thomas Gray’s “The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode” shows the shift from classical to native British sources of poetry. It is ironic that Gray chose to imitate the Greek odes of Pindar, thus tying the classical past to a poet “who boasted of his No-learning.” Gray’s ode encapsulates a history of poetry in Greece, Italy and England, but the features that inform Baillie’s poetics are its focusses on the untutored poet and
Shakespeare’s implementation of natural passion and human sympathy. Gray notes that
the: “Extensive influence of poetic genius over the remotest and most uncivilised nations
[affects]; its connection with liberty, and the virtues that naturally attend on it” (sic)(Gray
n. 54-65). His description of primitivism follows:

In climes beyond the solar road,
Where shaggy forms o'er ice-built mountains roam,
The Muse has broke the twilight-gloom
To cheer the shiv'ring native's dull abode.
And oft, beneath the od'rous shade
Of Chili's boundless forests laid,
She deigns to hear the savage youth repeat
In loose numbers wildly sweet
Their feather-cinctur'd chiefs, and dusky loves.
Her track, where'er the goddess roves,
Glory pursue, and generous Shame,
Th' unconquerable Mind, and Freedom's holy flame. (Gray l.l. 54-65)

Gray’s notion of native poetry is Romantic; it is free from the confines of form, and
though it is primitive, natural genius flourishes. Gray returns the reader to a tribal
experience of wild and free poetic expression. Baillie follows a similar path in her
attempts to delineate the passions of the warrior clans of Scotland.

Gray’s Third Section, Part One, of “The Progress of Poesy” describes

Shakespeare, and thereby outlines the attributes of “nature” and “sympathy” that Baillie
strongly admired in his poetry:

   Far from the sun and summer-gale,
   In thy green lap was Nature's darling laid,
   What time, where lucid Avon stray'd,
   To him the mighty Mother did unveil
   Her awful face: the dauntless child
   Stretch'd forth his little arms, and smiled.
   This pencil take (she said) whose colours clear
   Richly paint the vernal year:
   Thine too these golden keys, immortal boy!
   This can unlock the gates of Joy;
   Of Horror that, and thrilling Fears,
   Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears. (l.l. 84-94)

Gray links cyclical nature to the birth of Shakespeare. “Mother Nature” teaches the poet
that clearly delineated passion can give poetry the power to bring forth "sympathetic tears." These words are Baillie's creed, and the foundation from which she wrote.

Romanticism

Romanticism is a problematic term, for as the previous discussion shows, what we today call Romantic trends are not confined to any specific historical period. A possible reason for outlining 1790-1830 as Romantic is that the period marks a great proliferation of romantic ideals. There is an increasing tendency to see previously defined literary periods as flowing backward and forward in time. Neoclassicism tends to be more dominant in the eighteenth century; the latter years were transitional with Romantic trends taking hold, and in the early nineteenth century there emerged a strongly Modern or Romantic reaction to Neoclassicism. Marilyn Butler notes that referring to poets as "the Romantics" was not acceptable until the 1860s (1), and most of the poets that we call Romantic today did not use the term themselves. Butler's description of the word "romantic" as it applies to the eighteenth century is a synopsis of Joanna Baillie's literary output. "'Romance' [was] a literary term denoting the archaic and remote culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and applied to art-forms which included the ballad, the lay and the Aristotan and the Spenserian epic" (1). Baillie's warrior kings and chivalrous knights in "Night Scenes of other Times" and "Fragment of a Poem" support Butler's description, as does Baillie's refashioning of the ballad form for her Metrical Legends. Butler and several of her contemporaries quote René Wellek, (a scholar of comparative literature), who offers the core of a common literary aesthetic from which most Romantic poets operate:

They all [Romantic poets] see the implication of imagination, symbol, myth and organic nature, and see it as part of the great endeavour to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the
unconscious. This is the central creed of the Romantic poets in England, Germany and France. It is a closely coherent body of thought and feeling. (Butler 7)

Wellek can make his case for the commonality of these concepts due to the poets whose treatises and manifestos committed their poetics to print.

Butler relates that “between 1797 and 1800, a handful of German writers in the Prussian town of Jena formed a group around the scholar and critic Friedrich Schlegel, who drew up a manifesto which explained how the characteristic modern style, which he called ‘romantic,’ differed from the classic manner which preceded it” (4). In London, though Schlegel’s word was not in use, Joanna Baillie explored and experimented with similar emerging trends. Baillie’s Prefaces acted as a catalyst for the adoption of Modern approaches, later deemed “Romantic.” Her publications had an added advantage of presenting theory accompanied by practical demonstration via her poems and plays.

David Perkins relates: “Romanticism is a movement of the late eighteenth, and the mid-Nineteenth centuries that rejected the statutes of Neoclassical taste. The emerging modern literary trends were a reaction to “the rational order, regularity, and generalization associated with Neoclassical art. ‘Romanticism’—largely because it was associated with the art of the Middle Ages—suggested the ‘irregular,’ ‘picturesque,’ ‘wild,’ and distant” (1). Baillie treated Neoclassicism as representative of flaws in aristocratic society and art. She saw the upper classes plagued by artifice, which in turn was reflected in poetry that was over-refined and decorous. In her poetics she relates that nature is representative of life free from social stricture. In the country environs of Scotland she witnessed the

3 No matter what the genre, whenever Joanna Baillie published a volume of plays or a book of poetry, she introduced the work with a substantial theoretical preface. The “Introductory Discourse,” (1798) at seventy-two pages, is the most ambitious piece of criticism, while Works contains similar material denoting her switches from one genre to the other. Usually this prose elucidates the experimental nature of her writing. Baillie’s theories and contributions to the Romantic movement are discussed at length in Chapter 2.
simplicity of "rustic life." In that simplicity there is freedom, a genuineness of emotional expression, and life is lived with immediacy. Natural representation entailed representing men and women as they actually lived and spoke.

Philosophically, Romanticism was an intellectual movement, and a reaction primarily against the Age of Enlightenment. Poets like Blake reacted to John Locke's assumption "that 'reality' is comprised in a world of objects external to the mind, and absolutely independent of it." Locke determined that we collect impressions out of which we form 'ideas' of the things to which our senses have been exposed. He concluded that knowledge acquired from sense data had a greater degree of accuracy, provided that we avoid interference likely to arise from emotion, and imagination (Perkins 42). For Romantics these views left out the soul, and the divine source of poetic imagination. In an age governed by the scientific method, sensory perception, fixed social systems, and systematised religion, Romantics were insisting on the necessity of poetic imagination, spiritual vision, revolution, and spiritual communion with nature. Each Romantic poet has his or her own concept of God, and must therefore be compared in that light, but they all tend to agree that the imagination is a separate faculty for without which poetry, and spirituality could not exist. C. M. Bowra relates:

Locke is the target both of Blake, and Coleridge, to whom he represents a deadly heresy on the nature of existence . . . they reject [Locke's] concept of the universe and replace it by their own systems, which deserve the name 'idealists' because mind is their central point and governing factor. But because they are poets, they insist that the most vital activity of the mind is the imagination. Since for them it is the very source of spiritual energy, they cannot but believe that it is the divine, and that, when they exercise it, they in some way partake of the activity of God. Blake says proudly and prophetically:

This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after death of the Vegetative body. This World of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the World of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World of Permanent Realities of Everything which we see in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All Things are comprehended in their Eternal
Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination. (Bowra 3)

In an empirical world Blake’s use of metaphor, and symbol would not be accepted—spirituality could not be factored. The poet operates in the realm of the unseen, the mysterious, and the unsubstantiated. Baillie would accept Blake’s Christian theosophy, but she treats the human imagination as a psychological faculty. For Baillie, creating poetry is portrayed as doing God’s work. She writes poetry so that readers can live vicariously through her characters—characters designed to foster moral and religious values.

In Baillie’s poetry often the conflict at hand concerns whether or not the protagonist gains intuitive power. In her poetic worlds Gothic settings draw on the reader’s preconceptions; for example, the graveyard or the mausoleum reinforces the threat of imminent death in a poem about a martyr who is a fugitive from the law.

Spirituality, and struggles with the conscience are fought in dream-like and dissociative states. The material world and the human body acting independently from passion and spirit lead to a failure of connection—connection to what Baillie refers to as a “larger world view” (ID 15). The imaginative faculty that Baillie was drawing on is summed up in the following:

It was not just that ‘feeling was a way of knowing’ for the Romantics, or that, as Pascal expressed it, ‘the heart has reasons that reason knows not of: but myth and symbol contained more truth than any careful, ‘true-to-life’ observation of actuality. It was for this reason that Romantics placed such importance on dreams . . . seeing them as essentially revelatory experiences; whilst arguing that poetic truth was a matter of what was subjectively apprehended, not what was objectively described. (Campbell 186)

Baillie takes dream, as a literary device, a step further replacing it with a Ghostly visitation. She has an interest in feelings of powerlessness which occur when a mighty phantom terrorises his/her victim. Dreams do not carry the same degree of threat. These
ghostly visitations come with warnings of damnation. Baillie uses this motif to explore the behaviour of powerful people, particularly if their decisions have profound effects on the lives of others.

Coleridge writes poetry that uses similar tactics to Baillie’s. His approach allows for grey areas, and he asserts that answers do not have to be in black and white. He implies that we can have poetry that indicates movement, flow, and transition. In his poem “The Picture; or The Lover’s Resolution” a loosening of associations defines the space as distorted, imaginary and concrete:

Then all the charm
Is broken—all that phantom-world so fair
vanishes, and a thousand circlets spread,
And each mis-shape[s] the other. Stay awhile,
Poor youth! who scarcely dar’st lift up thine eyes—
The stream will soon renew its smoothness, soon
The visions will return! And lo, he stays,
And soon the fragments dim of lovely forms
Come trembling back, unite, and now once more
The pool becomes a mirror. (l.l. 91-100)

Baillie does not use symbols of the type found in Spenser’s “Faerie Queen,” though occasionally you find the Christian symbolism associated with the “Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” It is Gothic symbolism that is consistently present in her verse. Night is evil, the sun is divine, and windows act as portals to other-worldliness, and places where the dead are not at rest. She uses Gothic images to represent perverse nature. Destruction, chaos and fragmentation are features that defy form, yet they are akin to Gothicism, and they routinely speak to the social and political instability of the Romantic era.

Wordsworth and Baillie are very similarly in their views on nature. Her views will be dealt with in detail in the analysis of the “Introductory Discourse.” The Romantic movement strongly adheres to nature as the source of expression. Wordsworth develops his theory of perception based on consideration of external (tactile, sensory), and internal
nature (the realm of our thoughts). His clearest expression of these views is gleaned from "lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey."

From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (Wordsworth l.l. 105-111) (italics added)

Wordsworth's theory of perception determines that what you see and hear is half of perception; the other half refers to what we bring of ourselves to what we see. He queries the functioning of human thought. How much is our creation, and how much is factual experience? The word "sense," in this case, may be an amalgamation of the body's senses and the mind's eye; the combination of the two sources of information represent true and complete perception.

After so much focus on the inner self and individual perception it is easy to make the leap to the importance of individualism. "Romanticism designates a literary and philosophical theory that tends to see the individual at the very centre of all life, and experience, and it places the individual, therefore, at the centre of art, making literature most valuable as an expression of unique and particular attitudes . . ." (Holman 442-3).

Joanna Baillie's focus on the individual centres on her desire for correction that results in social justice. In the social, and political context Romantic poetry tends to give voice, or at least consideration, to the silent individuals of society. Blake's "Holy Thursday" from the "Songs of Experience" provides an example describing child poverty with emotion, and immediacy.

... 

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!
And their sun does never shine,
And their fields are bleak & bare,
And their ways are filled with thorns:
It is eternal winter there. (Blake l.l. 5-12)

Baillie’s poetry of this ilk poses similar problems, but she chooses exotic settings so that her reader can witness solutions, though they be conceived to reflect Baillie’s personal agenda. She incorporated the elements of several eighteenth century writers to reformulate an aesthetic of her own. She could not participate in a Neoclassical tradition that educated males in Latin, and Greek. But education in the classics was not necessary in order to write in accordance with the changes in literary taste. Women, no longer impeded by lacking education, were successful writers in the 1790s. Therefore, why would Joanna Baillie insist on publishing anonymously? Hannah More (1745-1833) offers a viable answer considering women writers, and reception:

In the judgement passed on her performances, she will have to encounter the mortifying circumstance of having her sex always taken into account, and her highest exertions will probably be received with the qualified approbation, that it is really extraordinary for a woman. Men of learning . . . are apt to consider even the happier performances of the other sex as the spontaneous productions of a fruitful but shallow soil. (Rogers, and McCarthy xvi)

Baillie did issue a challenge to writing conventions in the “Introductory Discourse” (1798). It is probable that she did suppress her identity, as a woman, in order to be taken seriously about her challenges to literary theory. Her authorship remained secret for several years. As it happens her quest for change in poetic content was met with overwhelming support. She enjoyed a life of celebrity, and was noted as a key figure in the Romantic movement by her fellow writers, if not always by literary critics. Her prefatory writing clarifies her Romantic ideals, while her poetry puts theory into practice.

Stuart Curran notes that “in the arena of poetry, which in the modern world we have privileged as no other in this age, the place of women was likewise, at least for a
time, predominant, and it is here that the distortions of our received history are most glaring. Its chronology has been written wholly, and arbitrarily, along a masculine gender line” (187). He speaks of two generations of female poets who were highly prolific and well published, but he also refers to them as the first and second missing link. Curran refers to Hemans and Landon who experienced celebrity, and subsequent neglect. “Their names became synonymous with the notion of a poetess, celebrating hearth and home, God and country in mellifluous verse that relished the sentimental and seldom teased anyone into thought” (189). Baillie was noted for her mastery of masculine style, and her range of subject ran from domestic verse to scenes of military bridge construction for which she was critically praised. Curran suggests that some women were neglected due to subject matter; he refers to a “characteristic subgenre of women’s poetry . . . concerned with flowers, and not generally of the Wordsworthian species” (190). His general consensus is that some women were erased during the Romantic period due to the quotidian and domestic content of their verse. There are elements of truth to this, but Joanna Baillie was more complex. Her varying reception is more likely tied to a revolutionary literary aesthetic and controversial politics.

The authors noted, and the preceding examples of Romantic trends have been selected to provide a backdrop for Joanna Baillie’s creative efforts. Her influence, and contributions to the Romantic movement will be examined in the light of the trends just mentioned. The divisions of this study are biographical, critical, and analytical of her poetic oeuvre. Baillie’s biography, in Chapter One, introduces someone who is essentially new to many in the scholarly community, and her life experiences explain much regarding the formation of her Romantic and theoretical ideals. Most Romantics are aware of Baillie’s contributions to Romantic drama, but there is little criticism regarding her poetry, and poetics. Her relationship with Sir Walter Scott is explored. Their poetics is expressed
in their correspondence, which additionally shows the reciprocal nature of their literary consultations. The second chapter examines the poetics, and historical context of the “Introductory Discourse” contained in *A Series of Plays in Which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind* (1798). The poetry in “Fugitive Verses” (1790) is reviewed. Subsequently, Baillie’s “Metrical Legends” (1821) are considered for their capability of extending emotional capacity beyond the bounds of biographical writing. And Chapter Five looks at Joanna Baillie as the “Songstress of Scotland,” as Washington Irving called her, and studies the aspects of her career that contributed strongly to the primitivist movement. “Lines to Agnes Baillie on her Birthday” is to Joanna what “Tintern Abbey” is to Wordsworth, and acts as an anthem for Romanticism. Baillie’s domestic verse contributes more to poetics than literary history acknowledges. The final Chapter looks at the *Quarterly Review LXVII*, which offers the most detailed contemporary critical response to Baillie’s corpus.
Chapter 1

Joanna Baillie (1762-1851):  
Life and Literary Experiences

Joanna Baillie's personal background contributed largely to the formation of her Romantic ideals. Her nephew emphasises the importance of the years that she spent in the Scottish countryside. In *Works* he describes the natural beauty of the landscape contributing to her notions of the picturesque. Baillie's family background shows that romanticising history had appeal, similar to the historical approach of Walter Scott's novels, and the legends that he encouraged Joanna Baillie to write. Pride in her heritage is also fostered by a celebration of Scottish lore. The country setting of Baillie's childhood is dotted with tales of Gothic ruins, ghosts, and superstitions. Baillie's nephew explains that the move from rural Scotland to London was the impelling circumstance from which Baillie's poetic imagination first awoke:

> It was here in that gloomy house, in that dark and narrow street, the genius of Joanna first wakened into life and energy, The daily sight of her native land and its romantic beauty, the companions of her youth, and the fresh impulses derived from the study of our best authors, had hitherto sufficiently occupied her feelings; but amid scenes, the reverse of those in which she rejoiced, her heart yearned, her imagination kindled, and her poetical feeling took its appropriate form. (*Works* ix)

Baillie draws on Scots Gothic; and, in her gothicising of London, the city is shown to be a perversion of nature. The vision and imagination of her childhood are contrasted to

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4 Picturesque, by definition, supports Baillie's poetic style. Accordingly—"The method is realistic, while the story may be romantic in itself; it is presented with a plainness of language, a freedom of vocabulary, and a vividness of detail such as only the realist is permitted" (Holman 373). When the term is applied to painting "as it was codified by William Gilpin in the 1790s" it describes Baillie's poetry explicitly. "Among its features were the irregularity of line, contrasts of light and shadow, and intricacy. Typical objects in a *picturesque* painting were fractured rocks, blighted or twisted trees, winding streams, and ruins" (Holman 374). One of Baillie's main themes in poetry is fragmentation in economic life, monarchical rule, and artistic expression. Fragmentation also indicates changes in late eighteenth century taste, moving from neoclassical form to gothic, and grotesque imperfection. In times of transition, social institutions, sources of authority, and once-held beliefs show signs of fragmentation, thereby linking the aesthetic, and the social.
industrial London's distorted vision. Baillie introduces her thematic concern for the
necessity of maintaining the connection between "heaven and earth," body and spirit:

View'd thus, a goodly sight! but when survey'd
Through denser air when moisten'd winds prevail,
In her grand panoply of smoke array'd,
While clouds aloft in heavy volumes sail,
She is sublime.—She seems a curtained gloom
Connecting heaven and earth,—a threat'ning sign
of doom. (Works 796)

These lines would be as at home in Dickens's *Hard Times*. For the poem's speaker
empirical vision is secondary to spiritual, and lack of balance between the forces of human
production and nature's rhythms inspire melancholy, and a sense of doom.

Baillie's social, and political concerns led to her life-long devotion to philanthropy.
Part of Baillie's Romanticism concerns the individual, and the issue of who has voice, and
control over their lives. Power structures, and issues of control tend to influence her
portrayal of women, and other marginalised groups. Her earliest book of poetry
celebrated rustic manners as a source of plainly and genuinely expressed emotion.
Biographical detail by no means crystallises all of Joanna Baillie's theoretical concerns, but
it does explain her natural affinity for Scottish nationalism, Gothic, myth, superstition as
well as the social, and political considerations that graced the Romantic period.

Joanna Baillie was born on the 11th day of September, 1762. The family had just
moved to the manse of Bothwell near Glasgow, where her father was the newly appointed
minister. Dr. Baillie was descended from an ancient family in Scotland, which, according
to heraldic authorities, derives its ancestry from high sources, numbering among its
progenitors the great patriot of Scotland, Wallace. The Baillies also laid claim to blood

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5 *Works*, p. v. When not otherwise specified, details in this chapter are taken from the biographical preface
to the first edition of Joanna Baillie's collected works.
ties with Robert Baillie of Jerviswood who was executed for his religious, and political activities against the Duke of York; Joanna Baillie explores this lineage in her "Metrical Legends."

Her mother was also of an old family, the Hunters of Hunterston, and Mrs. Baillie was the sister of two brothers, highly celebrated in medical science, William and John Hunter. Joanna was the youngest of a family of three; her sister Agnes was her life-long companion, and Matthew, later in life, became an eminent physician. Joanna spent her early childhood in Bothwell, Scotland. Her nephew relates that, "In that locality were to be found ancient structures, wild and picturesque forms of nature, containing every element of beauty, and animated by all possible alterations of climate." Baillie's verse is haunted by Gothic images of Bothwell castle, antiquated churchyards, mausoleums, and supernaturally charged landscapes.

She and her sister Agnes were educated long before they attended boarding school. They acquired knowledge of humanity and the human condition from practical experience gleaned from their duties as daughters of a minister. They visited the neighbouring cottages attending to the needs of the poor, and the sick, and in so doing saw people in vulnerable, and starkly genuine circumstances. Joanna Baillie recalls poverty of subsistence farmers living in the west of Scotland in her poem "A Winter's Day." The line between hunger and having barely enough to eat is fine. A lapse in the farmer's good health jeopardises a whole family. She describes "the tenant of a very small farm, which he cultivates with his own hands; [he has] perhaps a horse, and some six or seven sheep, being all the wealth he possesses[.]" (Works n. 772). Though failing cottage industries, poor crop yields, and sickness loom in the background of Baillie's verse, these impoverished people find some happiness in family life, reassurance in religion, and pride in their country.
At home, Joanna Baillie, and her siblings saw the full spectrum of society. "In the kitchens of Scotch gentry, way-worn travellers were hospitably received, and entertained;" The manse was used frequently for such purposes, and over the years the Baillies heard many adventures, and experienced a variety of "strongly marked characters." Joanna's first teacher was her father, but she was not a typical student. By her sister's report she did not learn to read until the age of eleven; in fact, "she composed verses before she could read" (Carhart 5). As a child she was more drawn to the outdoors, and she had a love of horseback riding. ""Look at Miss Jack!" said an admiring farmer, "She sits a horse as if it were a bit of herself" (Carhart 6). There is a sense that the Baillie children were not restricted in terms of gender, and were free to pursue their natural inclinations. Her companionship with her brother, and encouragement from her older sister helped her over a fear of books, and learning. Her atypical development did not deter people from realising that Joanna was a clever child. Her father once commented, "Agnes is very well, but Joanna is the flower of our flock (Works vii)." There were early signs of her abilities. Her brother was labouring over an assignment to compose verse, and his father, seeing Matthew's despair said, "Joanna will do it for you;" and he was right, for two couplets were composed immediately. Her imaginative powers were constantly at work. "She took every opportunity of arranging among her young companions theatrical performances, in which her power of sustaining characters was remarkable, and she frequently wrote the dialogue herself" (Wilson 387).

After the girls were sent to boarding school in Glasgow, Joanna made progress in many branches of education, and she quickly excelled in, and developed a love of mathematics. She advanced unassisted through a considerable portion of Euclid. In 1776, Dr. James Baillie was appointed Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow. In their new home, "Joanna's mind derived new impulse from the society of some of the first
men of that period.” She thrived on debate, and controversy, and quickly developed a tendency for firmly standing her own ground.

In 1778 James Baillie died at the age of fifty-four, and as he left little inheritance, the Baillie women underwent a period of changes that were beyond their control. The widow, and daughters immediately retired into deep seclusion at Long Calderwood, in Lanarkshire, a small estate belonging to Mrs. Baillie’s eldest brother, and lived there for nearly six years. Joanna was once again amidst the Scottish countryside, at a time in her life when she was more cognisant, and appreciative of its Romantic beauty. Mrs. Baillie, and her Brother Dr. William Hunter made arrangements for Matthew to attend Balliol College, Oxford. Hunter was a profound anatomist, and lecturer, and he had the means to take Matthew into his home, and to provide his sister Mrs. Baillie with liberal maintenance.

In subsequent years Matthew became a member of the Hunter School of Anatomy on Windmill Street, London, but a short time after, Dr. Hunter died. By his will, Matthew Baillie inherited the Windmill Street School of Anatomy, and the house: ‘all the good will of the school; a grand museum, now the famous Hunterian at Glasgow, for life; the estate of the family in Scotland where the brothers Hunter were born [Long Calderwood]; and the sum of £ 100 a year for life.” Matthew believed that Long Calderwood should belong to his uncle, John Hunter, and so in 1784 he conveyed the estate to him. (Carhart 10)

Dr. Hunter’s death precipitated the Baillie women moving again. After six years at Long Calderwood they joined Matthew, and lived with him in London. This period marks the beginning of Joanna Baillie’s literary growing pains. The house on Great Windmill street was a gloomy place on a dark, and narrow lane. The stark contrast between rural Scotland, and city life fuelled Joanna’s poetic energies. In 1790 she privately, and anonymously circulated Poems; Wherein it is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of
Nature of Rustic Manners. Baillie’s nephew reports that “this work did not at first make any impression; but a friendly article in a review, praising these ‘truly unsophisticated representations of nature,’ brought the book some notice.” He felt that the poetry in this volume showed a knowledge of human feeling, the acquaintance with external nature, and a capacity for delineation.

Joanna Baillie was unsuccessful when she privately circulated Poems in 1790 purely because of timing. Part of the equation is solved by looking at German Romanticism. The German translation of Young’s Conjectures appeared in 1760. “Germany had already experienced an anti-rationalist movement in the 1730s so that the adoption of a literary aesthetic that encouraged freer, and original composition was readily accepted. England in the period between 1770, and 1790 was resistant to change in poetic taste, and the infiltration of new ideas was relatively slow. “Germany’s Sturm und Drang [Storm and Stress] movement was made manifest by the young writers Goethe [1749-1832], and Schiller [1759-1805]” (Furst 33):

All the favourite ideas of the Sturm und Drang pivoted on the figure of the truly great, exceptional man; it was his personal experiences and emotions which were to be transformed into art through the creative power of his unbridled imagination. . . . The Sturm and Drang movement includes belief in: the autonomy of the divinely inspired genius, the release of the imagination from the bondage of ‘good taste,’ the primacy of spontaneous, intuitive feeling, complete freedom of artistic expression, the notion of organic growth and development, from which arose both an interest in the past, particularly the Middle Ages, and a new pantheistic vision of nature as part of a unified cosmos. (Furst 33-34)

These ideas are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 as they are all prominently mentioned in

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6 Poems: Wherein it is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and of Rustic Manners was referred to as Poems, 1790 as recently as the Oxford: Woodstock Books Facsimile of ed. of 1994. Roger Lonsdale corrected the title noting that it was printed in London by J. Johnson in 1790. When Baillie’s modern biographer Margaret Carhart was writing, this volume of poetry was not available to the public. She, Baillie’s nephew, and the publisher of the 1994 facsimile edition, all used incorrect titles. Adding to the confusion, Baillie circulated the volume anonymously. The subsequent difficulties over titles will be clarified in chapter three; some of this poetry resides under the title Fugitive Verses (1840).
Joanna Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse.” Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge were known supporters of the philosophy of the *Sturm und Drang*, but not everyone in Britain was accepting of the change in literary aesthetics. “In the *Edinburgh Review* of 1802, [Francis] Jeffrey [1773-1850] accused the Lake Poets of being ‘dissenters from the established systems of poetry’” (Furst 45). Lilian R. Furst argues that the changes in literary taste were not “revolutionary,” but “evolutionary” because the British were gradually restoring the native [British] tradition (45); she is referring to medieval ballads, folk songs, and the oral tradition.

The literary climate of the 1790s and 1800s produced adherents to Neoclassicism, and supporters of emerging Modern trends. Critics and publishers tended to walk on the side of tradition, while experimental poets and revolutionaries favoured the spirit of change. Joanna Baillie and William Wordsworth shared similar experiences concerning reception:

Yet the discerning criticised and the reading public ignored him. His fellow poet Southey called his great ode on immortality ‘a dark subject darkly handled;’ and Jeffrey, discussing the 1807 volume, declared the ode ‘the most illegible and unintelligible part of the publication.’ Reviewing the same volume, Byron, then a mere boy, expressed what appears to have been the common opinion of those who knew Wordsworth at all: ‘We think these volumes display a genius worthy of higher pursuits, and regret that Mr. W. confines his muse to such trifling subjects.’ (Pierce 118)

Wordsworth expressed his apathy over reception as late as 1813: “My literary employments bring me no emoluments, nor promise any” (Pierce 118).

Joanna Baillie did receive critical acclaim over her poetry of 1790, but not until she published it within *Fugitive Verses* in 1840, by which time the Romantic aesthetic was firmly in place, and highly successful. However, her contribution to the formation of Romantic ideals occurred much earlier. At the age of thirty-six, Joanna Baillie anonymously published *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 (1798). The plays generated a furore, as did the mystery of authorship. "Even after the true author was acknowledged, some people insisted that [her] ambitious theoretical introduction had to be written by a man and attributed it, without any evidence, to Matthew Baillie" (Ross 8). Her introduction was simply titled the "Introductory Discourse," and it encapsulated her Romantic poetic theory.

By 1800 her volume of plays, and her extensive piece of new criticism catapulted her to a position of fame and celebrity. "As late as the notices of the stage production of De Monfort in 1800, some question existed as to the identity the play's author. No doubt remained, however, after the issue of the third edition in 1800, in which the name of Joanna Baillie appeared on the title-page" (Carhart 16). In 1804 she published Miscellaneous Plays, which was popular enough to warrant a second edition (Carhart 20). "After the marriage of her brother, Dr. [Matthew] Baillie, with Miss Denman, sister of the Lord Chief-justice Denman, Joanna, with her mother and sister, passed some years at Colchester, but subsequently settled at Hampstead, near London" (Wilson 387). Mrs. Baillie was blind for several years before her death, and shortly before she passed away she suffered a stroke. Agnes, and Joanna nursed their mother around the clock until her death in 1806. Both women deeply grieved her loss.

Agnes, and Joanna were now free from responsibilities to anyone but themselves. Margaret Carhart writes: "The Baillies' income, aside from the profits of Joanna's writings, was large enough to make them independent, but not to afford any luxuries. From the first she followed the rule of Zacchæus, and gave one half of her income to charity. Even when prosperity brought the sisters increased wants and expenditures, Joanna did not allow her charities to suffer" (26). The sisters socialised with a broad range of London's literati, and the intellectual elite. In subsequent years they travelled
abroad, and to Wales, and Scotland.

**Walter Scott's Role**

In Baillie's contemporary biography, and her later prefaces there is recurring mention of a seemingly mythical, celebrated poet, who routinely offers encouragement, and advice. In 1855 James Grant Wilson teasingly relates that "the Great Unknown found in her a congenial spirit, and, as time proved, an enduring friend. His letters to her are well known to be among the most charming he ever wrote" (387). Few people today are aware of the deep affection, and admiration that Joanna Baillie and Walter Scott felt for one another during a relationship that spanned nearly twenty-six years. They first met in 1806. Her nephew relates: "All the great poets, contemporaries of Joanna, highly estimated her genius. Most of them frequented her abode; and Byron and Campbell, and others of that distinguished band, have recorded their high appreciation for her works" (Works xiv). Scott had read and admired her *Plays of the Passions*, and was only too happy to be introduced to their author.

In November of 1806 Scott begun working on "Marmion." Shortly after its completion the Baillie sisters enjoyed an extended stay at the Scott home in Edinburgh. Baillie was reading "Scott's spirit-stirring and immortal poem of 'Marmion;' to a circle of friends... [when] 'she came suddenly upon the following lines'" (LW 85):

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Or, if to touch such chord be thine,
Restore the ancient tragic line,
And emulate the notes that rung,
From the wild harp, that silent hung
By silver Avon's holy shore,
Till twice an hundred years roll'd 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,
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Awakening at the inspired strain,
Deem'd their own Shakespeare lived again.
(underlining mine) (LW 85)

Scott referred to Joanna as “the highest genius of our country” (Works 15), but no one knew the depth and seriousness of his admiration. The underlined references refer to Baillie’s plays. In an 1836 interview Baillie was asked for her first impression of Scott: “’I was at first,’ she answered, ‘a little disappointed, for I was fresh from the Lay, and 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 my strait’” (Lockhart 139). Donald Carswell in Scott and his Circle, comments on emotion between the lines:

There is no evidence that any woman—ever touched the deeper issues of his life. .. Joanna Baillie has the distinction of being the only woman to stir in him a warmer feeling than simple friendship. The “Dear Miss Baillie” of the earlier letters soon slipped into “My dear friend,” which is the most that propriety would allow. He was just a little in love with her. She too was just a little in love. (Carswell 289)

Despite whether or not they were just respectfully affectionate, or consummate lovers, their literary relationship profoundly affected both of their lives, creating ripple effects, felt from Edinburgh to London, and back again. They were partners in literary discussion, and their correspondence is very revealing about decisions made on poetic content. The letters also show that Baillie was quietly the critic and editor for many people. The highlights of the following letter show Baillie’s blunt honesty, while giving ample evidence of her critical powers:

BROWN SQUARE, April [1808].

I write to you along with your manuscript, which I return with many thanks... The opening of the piece pleased me very much, and so did that scene which is the most important one in the whole play, between the mother and her son when he wants to discover whether she is really guilty or not, tho’ perhaps it is rather
under-written (if I may use the phrase) from a fear of being extravagant. There is in the whole Play sufficient knowledge of nature and force of expression to make your friends look forward with a very pleasing hope to what may hereafter follow, when you shall write on a better dramatic plan, and allow your delightful imagination more liberally to enrich the work.

The dry bare German way of writing suits a poor Poet, but not a rich one. Baillie places importance on the full development of emotions. She criticises past poets for mentioning the psychological crisis without revealing nature’s subtleties, and variations that occur along the way. She is being subtle, but she is asking him to make a more radical shift from Neoclassical form to Romantic depiction of the emotions. The letter continues:

If you ever make any use of this piece, I would have you to disencumber your plot of some things that might easily be spared, and bring more into view the character of George, which you have so justly imagined, while he is in the terrible state of suspense in regard to his mother’s guilt. It is a pity that all this should be put over in one scene, when the audience might be kept in a state of the most agitating suspense that would wonderfully heighten the effect of the whole Play. . . . . Thanks for the confidence you have put in me, and for the high gratification I have had in reading the House of Aspen.

She suggests a lengthier treatment of character, because of her belief in nature that is infinitely varied, and subtle in its distinctions. Detail provides what leads up to warped behaviour, and a greater understanding of the psychological crisis. In Baillie’s work character is always privileged over plot.

The reciprocal nature of Baillie’s and Scott’s literary relationship can easily be seen, and his response to her candour is typically the following: “MY DEAR MISS BAILLIE . . . I may say this with confidence, because it is the simple truth, that there breathes not a person whose opinion I hold in equal reverence, and therefore I leave you to judge how proud I am of the rank that you have given me in it” (Scott, Familial Letters 127).

Baillie’s influence upon the writing of others was not confined to Scott; she
periodically dabbled in the book trade. Whenever she read something that she liked, she was not adverse to making use of her literary friends, especially to the benefit of those less fortunate. It is significant that Baillie’s Romanticism was not just in poetics, but also in social and literary practice. Both Scott and Baillie had connections to the Edinburgh circle, and its participants supported changes in literary taste. They were particularly enthusiastic about primitivism,\(^7\) and the celebration of the *untutored poet*. “John Struthers, a shoemaker of Glasgow, whose very striking poem, ‘The Poor Man’s Sabbath,’ being seen in MS. by Miss Joanna Baillie when on a visit to her native district, was by her recommended to Scott, and by him to Constable, who published it in 1808. Mr Struthers ended his life in a very respectable position—as keeper of Stirling’s Library, an old endowment in Glasgow” (Lockhart 163-4).

Scott was extraordinarily obliging helping Baillie in her literary endeavours. Her play, The *Family Legend*, came about as the result of one of Baillie’s charitable projects. She agreed to donate all of the proceeds from “representation” and, if need be, publishing rights to a “worthy family, on whom bad fortune has borne so hard” (LW 25). “The play was produced by Henry Siddons, and was probably the first of Baillie’s dramas to be presented in her native Scotland; and Scott exerted himself most indefatigably in its behalf. He was consulted about all the ‘minutiae’ of costume, attended every rehearsal, and supplied the prologue. The play was better received than any other which the gifted

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\(^7\) Primitivism supports the use of native dialect. *A Handbook to Literature* (1986) provides the following: "Primitivism: The doctrine that supposedly primitive peoples, because they had remained closer to NATURE and had been less subject to the influences of society, were nobler and more nearly perfect than civilised peoples. The idea flourished in Eighteenth Century England and France and was an important element in the creed of the ‘sentimentalists’ of the ROMANTIC MOVEMENT. . . . One aspect of primitivism significant in English literature was its doctrine that the best POETRY should be natural or instinctive, which resulted in the search for the perfect ‘untutored’ POET . . . When Robert Burns appeared, the search for the peasant poet seemed over, and the Scottish bard was received with enthusiasm” (Holman 394).
authoress has since subjected to the same experiment; and how ardently Scott enjoyed its
success may be seen in many letters which he addressed to his friend on the occasion”
(Lockhart 185).

One of the least known of Joanna Baillie’s contributions was her active scrutiny of
the works of others. She was almost as devoted to expanding the publishing horizons of
others as she was to diversifying her own work. Her role as encouraging critic, was first
nurtured in her early letters to Scott. She was an avid correspondent, and as she gained
experience her letters rang with the words of an editor. On January 14th, 1813 she wrote
to Scott: “A THOUSAND thanks to you, my dear friend! You are, very good, and
therefore, as is meet and right, very dear to me.” He sent her “the noble poem of
Rokeby,” and in response she answers “It is a part of my treasure and worldly goods that
will do me good all the days of my life.” Her synopsis of his characterisation is filled with
praise for his realistic and emotional rendering, yet she has no apprehension about
balancing positives with negatives in her criticism:

Your images and similes too, with which the work is not overloaded (like a lady
with a few jewels, but of the best water), are excellent. Your songs good,
particularly those of Wilfrid; but they have struck me less somehow or other, than
the rest of the poem. As to the invention of your story, I praise that more
sparingly, for tho’ the leading circumstances are well imagined, the conducting of
it seems to me too dramatic for a lyrical narrative, and there are too many complex
contrivances to the bringing about the catastrophe. It seems to me you are
hankering after and nearing to the drama prodigiously. Take possession of it then
fairly and manfully. You have ample powers, and the favour of the public into the
bargain; and if I must be eclipsed in my own demesne, I will take it from your hand
rather than from any other.

Send me a better play than any I have to boast of, and if a shade of human
infirmity should pass over my mind for a moment, by the setting of the sun I shall
love you more than ever . . . . J. B. (Familiar Letters 273)

Her letter conveys a deep sense of her love of drama at a time when reception was
dictated by a fickle public. Her obvious love and admiration for Scott is characterised by
her painful honesty and genuine support. Initially she offers him the benefit of her
experience as a song writer. Subsequently, in a sense, she accuses him of creating a poem that is budding into a play, and suggests that he follow his natural inclinations to the fullest. There is an underlying hope that if he could write drama as she did, his popularity would open up the venue. She sounds very lamenting of her own decline as a dramatist. Baillie’s subsequent channelling of her energies into poetry is thus possibly a mechanism for literary survival.

And, What of her Poetry?

In all of the criticism available, from contemporary to modern, to current, Joanna Baillie’s poetry is just about invisible, yet in her own time it existed in abundance in anthologies, literary journals, magazines, and her own published volumes. Judging by commemorative poems to family members, and friends, and the periodically dated song, it appears that Joanna wrote domestic verse and lyrics throughout her career. In 1812 she released the third volume of “Plays on the Passions” which included several short poems:

According to the Monthly Mirror, ‘The superior number of The Edinburgh Annual Register of 1808 contained poems by Southey, Scott, Miss Baillie, and others, which the English reviewer thinks ought to put our English registers upon their mettle.’ Her contributions are descriptive portraits of subjects as The Kitten and The Heathcock. In 1810 The British Critic reprinted The Heathcock as one of the two notable poems in the collection (LW 27).

Baillie had by no means given up writing drama, but there was a decided shift in the direction of her energies. For the next few years the sisters continued to travel. After having visited Scott in 1817, Joanna began working on the Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters (1821). “In March, encouraged by Scott, she was at work on the “Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie.” For this volume Longman, and Company are said to have paid one thousand pounds” (underlining mine) (LW 29). The Metrical Legends was successful enough to warrant two editions in 1821.

In 1823 one of Baillie’s most ambitious projects in poetry came to fruition. She
edited and published by subscription *A Collection of Poems, chiefly manuscript, and from Living Authors. Edited for the benefit of a Friend.* Baillie’s nephew maintains that the friends, [her] acquaintance[s], and correspondents, included the most eminent of her contemporaries. In a letter to one of her contributors, “Lieutenant General Alexander Dirom of Mount Annan (1757-1830), she plainly shows her purpose, and her role as editor of this project.:

... There is a friend and old schoolfellow of mine, Mrs Stirling, formerly of Glasgow, whose husband is dead, and has left her with a family of daughters in distressing circumstances; and I have offered to edit a collection of poems to be published by subscription for her relief. It is to consist of only one vol. octavo, and I wish it to be chiefly composed of MS. poems, or such as have been privately printed but not published. To accomplish this, I am begging contributions from my various poetical friends. Will you permit me to put your verses upon the Annan into this collection? I shall be very much obliged to you. If you grant this request, I shall, with your leave, take the liberty of altering a word or two in it which will make no alteration in the idea, but only remove what may be felt as a degree of obscurity, especially to those who are unacquainted with the scenes which you celebrate. (*Unpublished Letters of Joanna Baillie to a Dumfriesshire Laird;* Feb. 16, 1822).

In a footnote to the same letter it is noted that among the famous poems are Scott’s “MacDuff’s Cross,” Wordsworth’s sonnets, “Not Love, nor War,” and “A Volant Tribe of Bards,” Southey’s “Cataract of Lodore,” and Campbell’s “To the Rain-bow.”

Baillie contributed some poetry of her own, and two Dumfriesshire writers are represented in the collection, James Hyslop, and General Dirom (*Unpublished Letters* Feb. 16, 1822 n.). In a note to Scott written July 1st, 1823 she tells him of the results of her efforts, “I took hold of your strong arm from the beginning, and leaning upon that, put forth my hand, and caught at all the rest of the Poetical Brotherhood likely to do me any good. And great goodness has come of it, for after paying all expenses of printing, etc., which came to £313 or £330, I forget which, we have realised for my friend two thousand two hundred percent stock, and when we have sold all the copies intended for Indian subscribers, we shall add better than two hundred more” (*Familiar Letters* n. 162).
In 1823 family matters took precedence once again. Few details are provided, but Joanna's brother Matthew was gravely ill. For a second time she took on the role of nurse, and attended him day and night until his passing. By all appearances Baillie's literary career had slowed down with the publication of only two short plays, the *Martyr* (1826) a verse tragedy on religion, and *The Bride* (1826). She continued to write, yet "she felt the theatre of her time was not conducive to the kind of serious drama she was interested in writing" (Ross 13). She had a collection of her plays destined for her executor's handling, and to be edited by her nephew, but when his health was seriously threatened she decided to go ahead, and have them published. Simply titled the *Dramas* (1836), a three volume set containing twelve plays, this collection completed her plays on the passions (underlining mine). The *London Athenæum, Fraser's Magazine*, and even the *Edinburgh Review*, all wrote strongly positive reviews about the surprise-volume (Carhart 53-54). Thus, Joanna Baillie's dramatic career closed on a positive note. She had written poetry and songs all of her life; now that her dramatic mission was complete she edited, corresponded, but mainly focussed on poetic works.

In 1840 Baillie published "Fugitive Verses," a volume containing the poetry written prior to 1790, the *Metrical Legends* excepting *Ahalya Baee*, and poetry written after 1790. (This poetry will be examined in depth in chapter three). *Ahalya Baee* completes the *Metrical Legends*, and was privately circulated in 1849. In the zenith of her life and her career Baillie had one last opportunity to see her name in print. "A London bookseller did demand the republication of her works, and she lived to see the complete edition of 1851—'my great monster book' as she called it" (LW 66). The volume provided the opportunity for *Ahalya Baee* to be published for the first time. *The Dramatic and Poetical Works* contains one hundred and twenty-two pages devoted to Baillie's poetry, and this offering by no means includes all of her published verse.
The following memoir offers often reiterated accolades bestowed upon Joanna Baillie by London’s literati, and her innumerable friends. The impressions of her as a quiet intellectual woman in the background, a poet of the human heart, and a devoutly religious person are very telling about her experiences as a woman writer penning her verse throughout the Romantic period.

In the memoirs of Miss Aikin, written when she was far advanced down the vale of life, is to be found this generous and pleasing tribute to the memory of her friend Joanna Baillie:—“It has been my privilege,” she says, “to have had more or less personal acquaintance with almost every literary woman of celebrity who adorned English society from the latter years of the last century nearly to the present time, and there was scarcely one of the number in whose society I did not find much to interest me; but of all these, excepting of course Mrs. Barbauld from the comparison, Joanna Baillie made by far the deepest impression upon me. Her genius was surpassing, her character the most endearing and exalted. . . . She was the only person I have ever known towards whom fifty years of close acquaintance, while they continually deepened my affection, wore away nothing of my reverence. So little was she fitted or disposed for intellectual display, that it was seldom that her genius shone out with its full lustre in conversation but I have seen her powerful eye kindle with all a poet’s fire, while her language rose for a few moments to the height of some ‘great argument.’ Her deep knowledge of the human heart also would at times break loose from the habitual cautiousness, and I have then thought that if she was not the most candid and benevolent, she would be one of the most formidable of observers. Nothing escaped her, and there was much humour in her quiet touches. . . . No one would ever have taken her for a married woman. An innocent and maiden grace still hovered over her to the end of her old age. It was one of her peculiar charms, and often brought to my mind the line addressed to the vowed Isabella in ‘Measure for Measure,’ ‘I hold you for a thing enskied and saintly.’ If there were ever human creature ‘pure in the last recesses of the soul,’ it was surely this meek, this pious, this noble-minded, and nobly-gifted woman, who, after attaining her ninetieth year, carried with her to the grave the love, the reverence, the regrets of all who had ever enjoyed the privilege of her society.” (Wilson 387-88)

Joanna Baillie passed away in her sleep February 23rd, 1851. Agnes, who was her constant companion saw her one hundredth birthday, and was laid to rest beside Joanna.

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8 This memoir is quoted in its entirety, originally found, in The Poets and Poetry of Scotland (Approx. 1855).
Chapter 2

The "Introductory Discourse"

Mary Berry, in her diary for 1799, says, ‘The first question on everyone’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 introduction as a new and admirable piece of criticism.’ (underlining mine) (LW 17)

Though no one knew who the author was, these words are the summation of the positive effect that Joanna Baillie’s *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* (1798) was having on London’s literary enthusiasts. Celebrity was not generated so much by the stage, but by the volume’s closet appeal for Britain’s avid readers. Anonymity was essential, for female authorship was still, in part, a cloistered phenomenon. As noted earlier by Hannah More, more women were writing in the 1790s, but to be taken seriously by men of critical journals and the literary establishment proved a challenge. Women who wrote powerfully, and controversially had to transpose their voicings to imitate the expected attributes of the male persona. Baillie was extraordinarily convincing in her adoption of masculine style, but her “Introductory Discourse” garnered both positive and negative reviews. She was asking for a complete reformation of all facets of the prevailing Neoclassical literary aesthetic.

“In 1798 Thomas Campbell published a favourable review in the *New Monthly Magazine*, in which he attributed these plays to a man, as did the writer in the *Critical Review*” (LW 14). Margaret Carhart chronicles a number of people’s attempts at solving the puzzle. “Mrs. Piozzi wrote in her commonplace book: ‘I remember a knot of Literary Characters met at Miss Lee’s House in Bath, deciding—contrary to my own judgement—that a learned man must have been the author; and I, chiefly to put the Company in good humour, maintained it was a woman. Merely, said I, because both the
heroines are *Dames Passés*, and a man has no notion of mentioning a female after she is five and twenty”” (LW 15). The question of the author’s identity was formally solved in 1800, with the publication of the third edition, which bore the author’s name (LW 15).

The “Introductory Discourse” to *A Series of Plays* is often referred to as a dramatic treatise, but this view neglects its contribution to the writing of all genres, specifically poetry. The seventy-two page assessment of Neoclassical and Modern taste came at a time when English Pre-Romantic, Romantic, Neoclassical, and German Romantic ideals were unstable, and each area of influence was struggling for a position of primacy. The “Discourse” holds the distinction of anticipating the seminal ideas found in Wordsworth’s *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Additionally, Baillie’s views continued to be before the public as she published almost yearly, and sometimes several times in a year. Her volumes were mostly plays, but they contained substantial prefaces based on the theories that she formulated in the “Discourse.” Her voice is consistently heard from 1798-1812, and periodically thereafter through to 1851.

The “Discourse” is a foundational work and as such is a landmark document for Romanticism. Forty-three years after the publication of *A Series of Plays*, the *Quarterly Review*, though qualified, was positive about Baillie’s reception:

> In that entire and wonderful revolution of the public taste in works of the imagination, and indeed of literature generally, which contrasts this century with the whole or latter half of the preceding, . . . we must nevertheless principally, and in the foremost rank, ascribe to the e.g., the arguments, and the influence of William Wordsworth and Coleridge, — in this great movement Joanna Baillie bore a subordinate, but most useful and effective part. (QR LXVII 437)

The *Quarterly Review* pays tribute to her, yet she played a greater role than they were.

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9 David Perkins refers to the Schlegel brothers using the term “modern” in antithesis to “ancient” (2). Modern is synonymous with Romantic, but in the “Introductory Discourse.” Baillie never uses either word, nor does she use any other term for the literary movement she describes. Baillie’s lack of naming is in itself a philosophical statement.
willing to acknowledge. The *Series of Plays* was popular enough to demand printing of a “fourth edition in 1802, and a fifth in 1806,” (LW 18) solidifying Baillie’s public presence.

Jonathan Wordsworth comments:

Her 1798 volume of plays was noticed at once. Southey, who was to be so harsh about that other anonymous collection of the year - *Lyrical Ballads* - commented excitedly in a letter of 8 July:

A very good work has passed through my hands, called *A Series of Plays* exemplifying the effects of the stronger passions. The author (whoever he may be) bids fair to become an honour to English literature.

Six months later Southey promised another correspondent a great pleasure to come ‘if he had not read the plays, adding, ‘I would go fifty miles to see the author.’ (Wordsworth, Jonathan 1)¹⁰

Francis Jeffrey (1773-1850) was the prominent source of negative criticism directed at Baillie’s theory and dramatic execution. The following review is for *A Series of Plays, Vol. 2*. Baillie is criticised for her return to Shakespearean, Renaissance and Medieval modes of expressing emotion. Jeffrey replicates Pope’s ridicule for the Antiquarians who similarly celebrated the literary heritage that Baillie was reviving.

Jeffrey relates:

To such peculiar plans, in general, we confess that we are far from being partial; They necessarily exclude many beauties, and ensure nothing but constraint: the only plan of a dramatic writer should be, to please and interest as much as possible; but when, in addition to this, he resolves to write upon nothing but scriptural subjects, or to imitate the style of Shakespeare, or to have a siege, or the history of passion in every one of his pieces, he evidently cuts himself off from some of the means of success, puts fetters upon the freedom of his own genius. and multiplies the difficulties of a very arduous undertaking (Harris 32).

... The peculiarity of Miss Baillie’s plan, however, does not consist so much in reducing any play to the exhibition of a single passion, as in attempting to comprehend within a complete view of the origin, growth, and consummation of this passion, under all its aspects of progress and maturity (Harris 32).

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Jeffrey is a reactionary critic resisting the emerging trends that Joanna Baillie embodies. He picks her weakest point—her lack of stage success, and hammers away at it. Nowhere is there mention of Baillie’s appeal to the Modern literary movement, or the recognition of changing tastes. Her attack on literary criticism goes unnoticed. His mention that “new plans” “exclude many beauties” is the key to Jeffrey’s criticism. He is of the Neoclassical school, and in the material quoted above, he rejects Joanna Baillie’s organic style of art, a style that was gaining ground at this time.

In 1790 Joanna Baillie’s volume Poems; Wherein It is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and of Rustic Manners was met with public disapprobation. As the decade progressed peoples’ attitudes changed, and by 1798 her “Discourse,” based on the same Modern poetic principles as “Poems,” was extraordinarily popular. She offered new criticism capable of unifying English Pre-Romantic ideals, and the German Romanticism of the Sturm und Drang movement. England experienced a period of Gothic experimentation where novelists, poets and playwrights dabbled in superstition, fairylsand fancy, magic, and myth. Baillie’s legends, and long poems, and plays contain apparitions, witches, fiends, corpses, lingering death, and copious amounts of blood. All is not black and bleak though, for the fantastical and diabolical are balanced by nature’s simplicity, God’s salvation, and the blessed light of heaven. The Neoclassical adherence to form, and unity is contrary to the Gothic theme of fragmentation that runs steadily through Baillie’s verse. German Gothicism, Young’s Conjectures, the influence of the Graveyard poets, German fairy tales, and a renewed sense of nationalism all coalesced to move England towards a shift in poetic taste.

Lilian R. Furst takes up the question of German Romanticism, and its influence in detail. She highlights the gradual intermingling of changing English tastes with German features. The Germans never denied the validity of ballads, or emotionally diverse writing,
and these views were enhanced further with German translations of Shakespeare. Furst relates:

The mid-1790s also witnessed the growing popularity of tales of horror with Mrs. Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1794. In England German literature had previously been dismissed, in spite of the success of *Werther*, [which was] revolutionary, sensationalist, extravagantly sentimental and not quite respectable. The German novel was stigmatised for there were a number of them translated that satisfied an English thirst for horror-stories. A spate of English imitations of dubious quality brought German literature into further disrepute. Henry Mackenzie’s [author of the novella *Man of Feeling* (1771)] paper on German drama was read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1788 and published in 1790. Here Schiller’s *Die Räuber* [The Robber] for the first time is mentioned in Britain and it is celebrated for its novelty of subject, atmosphere of horror and unbridled expression of emotional crises. It made a vehement impression on Coleridge when he read it in 1794, arousing the curiosity about German literature that was to take him and Wordsworth to Germany in 1798 (Furst 39).

Although many Romantic poets enthused over passion, imagination, and mystery in their verse, all England did not go Gothic. “Geoffrey Tillotson talks about some writers of the late eighteenth century, and the revival of interest in medieval ballads. The antiquaries were amateur scholars who studied relics of a largely local, vernacular medieval past, in an age which *Gothic* was still a synonym for *barbaric*” (16). The ardent Neoclassicists continued to equate Gothic with vulgarity. The remainder of the chapter follows Baillie’s argument for a new poetics, and aims at understanding why the pendulum of fame swung towards, or away from some of Britain’s eminent poets during the varying tides of their literary careers.

The “Introductory Discourse” as a Document of Literary Influence

In the “Introductory Discourse,” though drama\(^1\) is mentioned often Baillie

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\(^1\) The aspects of the “Introductory Discourse” that refer purely to dramaturgy without effect on Romantic poetry, and poetics have been left out of this discussion.
advocates an all-encompassing change in poetics. She continued to define and build upon Romantic ideals during a publishing career that spanned fifty-five years. Baillie implores poets to write about daily living, and issues that have immediacy. She denounces verse of her time as decorous, over-refined, filled with artifice, and relying too heavily on classical poetry of the past, thereby perpetuating a rhetorical form of poetry that created distance from experience as opposed to immediacy. She feels that the plain language of the middle and lower classes more readily shows the development of feelings. These were not new notions for Baillie as evidenced by the title of her earlier work: *Poems; Wherein it is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and of Rustic Manners* (1790). In 1851 Baillie referred to *Poems* as “Modern poetry,” signifying a complete change from the previous generation. Some of these pieces were very domestic: “A Mother to her Waking Infant,” “A Child to his Sick Grandfather,” while some of the longer poems were Gothic, horrific, and mythical, such as “Thunder,” and “Night Scenes of Other Times.”

The poor reception of *Poems* (1790) made Baillie more cautious in publishing *A Series of Plays*. “In an advertisement to the first volume, the author states: ‘The plays contained in this volume were all laid by for at least one year, before they were copied out to prepare them for the press; I have therefore had the advantage of reading them over, when they were in some measure effaced from my memory, and judging them in some degree like an indifferent person’” (LW 14). These were not just the actions of a judicious editor; she knew that her work had a radical edge, and she was not over-anxious to test the waters of publication. Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse” was the fruit of a mature writer, who had paid her dues through years of developing craft, and critical vision. She was in tune with a readership looking for psychological immediacy: “still our attention [is] most sensibly awake to every touch faithful to nature; still are we upon the watch for every thing that speaks to us of ourselves” (20).
Baillie’s views on generating interest in her readership evolve into an early form of reader response theory. Her poetics is devoted to understanding the human heart and human behaviour. By using psychological realism in delineation of the lesser known recesses of the mind Baillie invites her reader into the realm of rare experience. The thrill of the unknown is supported by the poetics of Johnson, and Young. Johnson’s *Rambler* 60 acknowledges the role of the imagination in our ability to place ourselves in someone else’s circumstances, while Edward Young’s *The Complaint; or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality* deepened the response of the imagination through “the confessional quality of the poet’s complaint . . . . Young’s poem is no lyric, but much of its energy, originating in the poet’s passionate, often pained utterance, is essentially lyrical” (Brown 360). Young’s poetry takes essentially private material, and brings it into the public realm. Poetry, and the stage offer the opportunity to speak the unspeakably private. Baillie asserts, “Our desire [is] to know what men are in the closet as well as the field” (ID 20). She accounts for different behaviour based on social context. The extent of private behaviour differs depending on location, and circumstance. For example the battle field, the blazing hearth, the social board, council, and the throne reveal varying degrees of private thought (ID 20). The reader can be privy to the agony of the prisoner’s cell, which is not typically gleaned from ordinary experience. Baillie’s literary efforts centre on a complete depiction of inner life, or accurate psychological depiction in accordance with nature.

**Faithfully Delineated Nature vs. Artifice**

Joanna Baillie reacts to the Neoclassical tradition of poetry as an impediment to verisimilitude. Her critique of traditional poetry shows her disdain for artifice: “The fair field of what is properly called poetry, is enriched with so many beauties, that in it we are
often attempted to forget what we really are, and what kind of beings we belong to” (ID 20). She is equally disenchanted with stock characters and settings that she perceived as foreign entities in her contemporary society. She uses the example of the shepherd, as a repeated figure in poetry, not connected to this “every-day world.” He “will not be called very strictly to account for the loftiness and refinement of his thoughts” (21). Baillie insists that the classical figure of the shepherd is not contemplative and reflective of her contemporary world. Text must describe something that is tangible, that can be related to. She writes the following hallmark statement for the abandonment of artifice, and the adoption of psychological realism:

I will venture, however, to say, that amidst all this decoration and ornament, all this loftiness and refinement, let one simple trait of the human heart, one expression of passion genuine and true to nature, be introduced, and it will stand forth in the boldness of reality, whilst the false and unnatural around it, fades away upon every side, like the rising exhalations of the morning (21).

Baillie takes a realist approach to writing poetry, but hers is not purely a mimetic approach. Her use of the term “trait” expands and lives once it is associated with the “human heart” and “nature;” emotion grows, dissipates, defies form, and defies order. Her view of nature, and passion as organic entities harkens back to Young, and the Sturm und Drang. Baillie’s poetry is fluid and kinetic, while the Neoclassical “decoration” and “ornament” she describes are treated as finite objects. She sums up by noting that traditional verse has become “lofty” and “refined,” indicating a stylised appearance, and form that is incapable of complete truth—truth in content, and truth in manner of creation.

Baillie’s reaction to Neoclassical poetry is a plea for contemporaneity, where in effect, she is asking poets to let something original evolve from their own lives. In her quest for realism she reminds us that it is not the description of that battle that makes its impression on our memory, but the lasting impression comes from the story of a fallen stranger who will never see home again. “How often will some simple picture of this kind
be all that remains upon our minds of the terrific and magnificent battle, whose description we have read in admiration!” (ID 22). Baillie emphasises the importance of the humble and familiar: “The highest pleasures we receive from poetry, as well as from real objects which surround us in the world, are derived from the sympathetic interest we all take in beings like ourselves” (ID 23). Few readers can visually associate with a palatial or castle-like setting, but there is universal recognition of the “humble cottage” (23). All facets of poetic presentation must be drawn in a way that allows the audience to exercise sympathy, and this cannot happen “[i]f they [writers] have not been skilful in their delineations of nature; if they have represented men and women speaking and acting as men and women never did speak or act . . .” (19). “We expect to find them creatures like ourselves; and if they are untrue to nature, we feel we are imposed upon; as though the poet had introduced to us for brethren, creatures of a different race, beings of another world (25).

Baillie’s decision to put forward a literary experiment that described a single passion from the subtlety of its development to the point of crisis was timely; England’s changing literary tastes allowed for emotion and imagination to play an increasingly prominent role in poetic content. William Blake’s Songs of Innocence (1789), and his illustration of Edward Young’s Night Scenes linked Young’s personal revelations of anguish to Blake’s spiritual vision, and radical reactions to church, government and the concretised ideals formed by the Neoclassical adherents of the previous generation. By 1798 Baillie’s audience was witnessing English literary history reflected back to them via the German celebration of Young’s Conjectures, and the increasing number of German translations of works such as Goethe’s Sorrows of Young Werther and Schiller’s Die Räuber.

Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse” makes no mention of other authors who support her causes, but by comparison she and Goethe are in agreement on the functioning of the
creative imagination. Goethe “characterises the imagination as productive and creative, connected to both the sensuous real, and the immaterial ideal. The imagination gives the psyche an organic unity, ‘rounded’ yet ‘infinite’ in its constant inner working and communication” (Engell 281). For Baillie, it is the passions of revenge, terror, hatred jealousy . . . that impress the imagination. Creative imagination privileges the development of internal character over description of appearance. The creative impulse is drawn from the poet’s understanding of human nature.

Baillie felt that the poet was in error is if the audience was only privy to a crisis without the full development of the passion behind it. Crisis alone is finite, and therefore unnatural. She relates: “In plays of this nature, [moral and didactic,] the passions must be depicted not only with their bold and prominent features, but also with those minute and delicate traits . . .” (59). Baillie’s poems tend to focus on one major character, or if there are several she portrays one at a time, fully developing each. Minor characters must be kept ‘distinct from the great impassioned one,’ and they are represented in an unagitated state” (59). “Where a plot is bare . . . the great force of truth in the delineations of nature will prevent it from being tiresome” (60). Baillie depends on the reader’s imagination to relate to natural depiction of passion, and because her delineation is based in nature, it is based on truth, and is capable of imparting a moral lesson.

Baillie’s focus on inner life is still contrary to the literary taste and experience of the majority of her readership. She had several strategies in place to make the “Discourse” successful. Firstly, in order for her poetics to have a chance of acceptance Baillie remained anonymous, and to maintain a sense of authority she adopted a masculine style supported by her judicious selection of male pronouns. Secondly, Baillie’s move to incite a shift in eighteenth century poetics is oddly dependent on eighteenth-century rhetoric. Baillie argues her case point for point. She addresses “her reader” emphasising
her explanation of the "extensive design" of her project. Writers of all genres are also implored to improve their mode of instruction. The most significant feature of Baillie's strategy is her concerted effort to defuse critics before they have the opportunity to discredit her views. Also, there is an urgency in her writing for the audience to know that she has embarked on something new and experimental. She notes: "I know of no series of plays, in any language, expressly descriptive of different passions" (71).

**In examining others we know ourselves. (ID 12)**

The crux of Joanna Baillie's poetic theory is *Sympathetic Curiosity*. Sympathy's role in capturing reader interest, and assisting the poet's imaginative powers was discussed throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century (as noted previously) by Young and Johnson. There is a long line of philosophers whose works take up the theme of sympathy including Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* "[where] he remarks that 'We naturally sympathise with others in the sentiments they entertain in us'" (Engell 147). Engell notes "however, Burke is more ready than Hume to speak of an unqualified force of natural sympathy. Writing the *Enquiry* (1756), Burke devotes a whole section to 'Sympathy, Imitation, Ambition.' He says that in observing others 'we are moved as they are moved,' and our 'sympathy must be considered a sort of substitution'" (148). Hume's empirical philosophy gradually gives way to greater consideration of the imagination. Baillie was aware of Hume's work, but Adam Smith was the person of whom she was knowledgeable (Carhart 70); "his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) opened the floodgate to a rising tide of interest in sympathetic imagination" (Engell 149). Baillie adopts Smith's view that "the mind has an innate power of sympathy," (Engell 150) and his notion of "interest in others," Baillie refers to as "sympathetic curiosity." Adam Smith relates:

> Though our brother is upon the rack . . . it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to
this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own sense only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation... we enter it as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him. (Engell 150)

Baillie adopts Smith’s views, but there are problems to be overcome. Sympathetic curiosity is defeated by our preconceived notions, especially when we label or classify. Once we classify someone, our attention to detail ceases. This is why Baillie continues to stress that every “stroke of nature” is an aid in connecting the mind to true representation (ID 14). The details may be preconceptions as well, but unlike labels they describe the subtleties and variations of nature. The details will allow “beings like ourselves” to tell original stories that have aspects of familiarity, and can easily be related to. The universals that have appeal, come from the writer’s study of the “boundless varieties of human nature” (ID 32). In effect, she contrasts Neoclassical uniformity vs. Romantic “boundless varieties of nature.”

Sympathy by its nature naturally flows into consideration of others, and of morality. Marlon B. Ross claims that Wordsworth and Baillie create a didactic literary theory that relates psychological behaviour to moral decision making, a theory which advocates exploiting poetry as a way of regulating passions in order to foster moral habits. Baillie exercises the Christian notion of teaching by example, which in a play or a poem utilises Romantic ideas of the imagination. By these means she hopes to influence her readers to act on issues of social justice. Baillie writes, “‘there is no employment which the human mind will with so much avidity pursue, as the discovery of concealed passion, as the tracing the [sic] varieties and progress of a perturbed soul.’ This sympathetic curiosity ‘is our best and most powerful instructor. From it we are taught the proprieties and decencies of ordinary life, and are prepared for distressing and difficult situations. In examining ourselves we know others’” (Ross 8). Baillie describes the stage as a venue
where audiences can empathise with a character by putting themselves in that character’s position, thereby gaining pseudo-personal experience via the dramatic presentation.

In the Romantic era the proliferation of poetry of the quotidian was directly linked to women. The freedom in choice of subject, and the use of natural language removed all barriers for women who wanted to write. The poetry of social morality rooted in everyday life soared to new heights. Stuart Curran follows this phenomenon and discusses the *Essays in Rhyme on Morals and Manners* published by Jane Taylor in 1806: “In her work the moral vantage point is obtained through the accumulation of minute detail, each piece calibrated to ground morality in quotidian life” (192). She echoes the sentiments of Baillie’s “Discourse” (1798) verbatim.

Taylor’s moralizing is deeply embedded in the Dissenting aesthetic that we have wished away from the Romantic period, but that is nonetheless present as a crucial link between Enlightenment moral satire and Victorian concerns with social- and self-improvement. To ignore it is in effect to marginalise the burgeoning role of women as social teachers in the early Nineteenth Century culture and the literary interests of the educated lower classes. . . . Women poets, with their relative freedom from establishment conventions and their investment in the quotidian, are those who explored most deliberately the extent to which its language could be incorporated in poetry. If it could describe, it could moralize, it could also incite. . . . But the ease of such verse, its dramatic involvement of the reader and the introduction of everyday slang had equal consequences for poetry, the poetry of the levelling Romanticism first enunciated by Joanna Baillie. (underlining mine) (Curran 194-95)

Curran acknowledges Baillie’s egalitarianism as a contribution to Romanticism; obviously she was a figure of influence. All of the qualities mentioned are Baillie’s, but “everyday slang” is in error. “The unembellished or plain language of the lower and middle classes” more accurately describes Baillie’s departure from Neoclassical poetic diction. Her language was drawn from humble life. Her use of symbol, metaphor, biblical allusion, subtext, and pathetic fallacy are but a few of the techniques she employed to create works somewhere between Christ’s parables, and Shakespeare’s verse.

Baillie had desired to create poetry that was anti-affectation, anti-manners, anti-
artifice and anti-fashion. Andrea Henderson writes:

The "Introductory Discourse" is grounded in the opposition of artifice and nature: Baillie relies on metaphors that contrast "bad" ancient régime-style formal gardens to "good" British natural landscapes. Thus she reveals both a progressive commitment to changing hierarchies and a somewhat conservative British nationalism. (208)

Poetry that abandoned the excesses of manners and style could educate via the affective power of undecorated nature. Baillie describes theatre audiences thus: "like the gods looking down upon the world's inhabitants, we look upon the stage" (ID 14). She comments, "if someone is of a good and benevolent disposition, a good man struggling with, and triumphing over adversity, will be to him, also, the most delightful spectacle" (ID 14). Indirectly, Baillie expresses annoyance over public taste for meaningless spectacle. "The shew of a splendid procession will afford to a person of the best understanding, a pleasure in kind, though not in degree, with that which a child would receive from it. But when it is past he thinks no more of it" (60 n.). She is fighting an uphill battle, trying to convince audiences to celebrate deeply reflective and contemplative issues. Baillie maintains that spectacle is enough of a distraction that takes the audience's attention away from "the refined beauties of natural characteristic dialogue" (60 n.)

A society that is educated in human nature is a society that is morally connected. Baillie believes that if the reader is offered something that provides "a [larger] and connected view, than their individual observations are capable of supplying," not only will they be entertained by learning something they did not know before, but they will be better judges, magistrates, advocates, and military leaders. Baillie addresses the writer's responsibility to provide content of substance (ID 15). She asserts that moral writers who attend to sympathetic curiosity create works that are more interesting and instructive (15). Baillie is more likely to write about a monarch who struggles with his conscience while weighing the cost of his subjects' lives, rather than talking about a king, and his military
exploits that focus on the acquisition of prestige, and wealth from foreign lands; her

"Fragment of a Poem" is such a piece.

Baillie's appeal for change in the content of poetry is in part reflective of her social
critique. In spite of their different views on feminism and education, Mary Wollstonecraft
and Joanna Baillie shared philosophy on truth to feeling as opposed to decorative
(constructed) affectation. Mary Wollstonecraft relates:

I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the
writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from
Rousseau12 to Dr. Gregory13, have contributed to render women more artificial,
weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more
useless members of society. I might have expressed this conviction in a lower key;
but I am afraid it would have been the whine of affectation, and not the faithful
expression of my feelings, of the clear result which experience and reflection have
lead me to draw. (22) (underlining mine)

Wollstonecraft applies the same philosophy to life as Baillie applies to poetics; she is
fundamentally Romantic in her rejection of affectation and artifice for feeling that is
faithful to "experience" and "reflection," which run parallel to Baillie's "nature" and
"sympathetic curiosity." In the Author's Preface to Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman
Wollstonecraft comments: "In writing this novel, I have rather endeavoured to pourtray
passions than manners ("Author's Preface" 2). In Maria, Wollstonecraft defines a new
taste in manners that harkens back to nature, and the agrarian simplicity of country life, as

12 Wollstonecraft refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the French philosopher and writer (1712-1778). She
rejected his placing women in a subservient position to men. She condemns the character of Rousseau's
Sophia as "grossly unnatural" and she objects to the description of "the pretty foot and enticing airs of his
little favourite" (24-25). Wollstonecraft relates: "I, shall only observe, that whosoever cast a benevolent
eye on society, must often have been gratified by the site of a mutual humble love" (25) (emphasis added).
She determines that Rousseau's Émile celebrates "the coquet[ish] slave, who is never to know the feeling
of independence, but is be devoted to render[ing] herself a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter
companion to man" (25). Wollstonecraft asserts that Rousseau only "pretends to draw his arguments from
nature" (25).

13 "Dr. John Gregory (1724-1773), Scottish physician whose A Father's Legacy to his Daughters (1774) was
one of the most popular treatises on female education at the time" (Wollstonecraft Ed. n. 22).
opposed to the affectations and mannerisms of aristocratic fashions:

And woman, lovely woman! -- they charm everywhere -- still there is a degree of prudery, and a want of taste and ease in the manners of the American women, that renders them, in spite of their roses and lilies, far inferior to our European charmers. In the country, they have often a bewitching simplicity of character; but, in the cities, they have all the airs and ignorance of the ladies who give the tone to the circles of the large trading towns in England. They are fond of their ornaments, merely because they are good, and not because they embellish their persons; and are more gratified to inspire the women with jealousy of these exterior advantages, than the men with love (Wollstonecraft 1.60-1.61).

Joanna Baillie applies Wollstonecraft’s social critique to the literary representation of character. She notes that it takes more intellectual energy to discern the differences between types of character as opposed to observations on a person’s dress (ID 4). The surface of appearances is more readily revealed than the workings of the mind. The surface is a source of vanity and weakness, an area where we are more likely to come off “whimsical and ludicrous” (5). Baillie questions whether or not we are more willing to see the ludicrous, rather than the truths and depths achievable with a greater expenditure of our mental capacities.

The polished appearances of aristocratic society and Neoclassical form do not allow the private and seamy side of life into the public forum. Outside the world of refined manners and beauties, poets of Romantic inclination sought a venue to depict the perverse, irreal, and unnatural aspects of life. The German Gothic, Graveyard poetry, medieval revival, and radical poets celebrating wild and erratic nature, fused to depict the polar opposites of refined taste. Horror is the birthplace of morbidity. Baillie’s plays and poems include spectres, night creatures, mausoleums, castles, antiquated churchyards, and other Shakespearean echoes of the macabre. Baillie’s “Discourse” examines the morbid side of human nature, and questions our attraction to what repulses us. She writes, “To see a human being bearing himself up under such circumstances, or struggling with the terrible apprehensions which such a situation impresses, must be the powerful incentive,
which makes us press forward to behold what we shrink from, and wait with trembling expectation for what we dread" (5). For those who would decline going to such a spectacle “there are very few who [would] run away from it, if they happened to meet with [a hanging] unexpectedly” (ID 6 n.). The witnessing of such a spectacle confronts us with our own death. The poet articulates, as closely as a living human being can, the experience of death—bringing us as near to the experience as talent will allow.

Baillie sets aside the world of order, form and unity to acknowledge an interior, irrational, mysterious view of the warpings of the mind. The “Introductory Discourse” explains the psychological underpinnings of terror, and the poets’ use of Gothicism to generate tension and anxiety over the unknown. The poet can rely on our morbid curiosity to maintain suspense and tension. The world of spirits fosters the wish for knowledge that cannot be gained empirically. We are afraid of what we cannot see. Baillie plays on our fears and curiosities. “No man wished to see the Ghost himself, which would certainly procure him the best information on the subject, but every man wishes to see one who believes that he sees it, in all the agitation and wildness of that species of terror” (ID 8-9). Baillie has dual purposes: one is to explain to others how to accurately depict nature; the other is to offer her view of the workings of the human heart. She describes the escalation of fears and superstitions. When fear becomes terror the individual is intellectually incapacitated. In life as well as art Baillie notes that this type of fear generates some of the strongest degrees of “sympathetic curiosity.”

In Baillie’s poetics realism is a democratic concept which refers to an all-inclusive depiction. She represents the under represented in an attempt to correctively balance her audiences’ world view. Baillie often writes about the diabolical personality and unspeakable actions. She shows passion in great detail, claiming that when the poet takes into account the condemned and suffering criminal in his still hours of privacy, such
accounts that show the shadings and development of passion can educate, enrich, and potentially contribute the betterment of individuals. The poet who knows and expresses human nature, writes with added validity that impresses and moves his/her audience.

Baillie's play "De Monfort" is an example. She draws her character De Monfort so full of hate, and jealousy that he is easily manipulated by one of the minor characters Grimbald. Shakespeare's Iago and Othello are a similar pairing, where the darker side of humanity keeps our interest. For Baillie, characters in poems and plays must not just be replicas, but they must offer the emotional fluidity that signifies living and breathing experience.

By addressing issues of depression, suicide, bereavement Baillie brings the individual to the reader; her Romantic treatment of passion gives voice to the details that define individualism. Baillie's presentation of the traits of psychological symptomatology (referring to emotional and physical signs that show deviance from normal, stable behaviour,) is congenial to the Romantic notion of individualism. Anne Finch's poem *The Spleen* 14 (1709) is an example of the type of psychological immediacy that Baillie was striving for. Other works that supported Baillie's cause were Young's *Night Scenes*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*. Our curiosity is triggered by the slightest sign of emotional disequilibrium. Anger, unlike fear, garners less sympathy, yet of the man who is angry "every eye is directed to him; every voice hushed to silence in his presence, even children will leave off their gambols as he passes, and gaze after him more eagerly than the gaudiest equipage" (ID 10). Baillie is quick to note that there does not have to be an outburst of violence to engage our curiosity, even the subtleties of an "unquiet mind" alert us to the "distant

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14 Anne Finch gives a personalised account of the genuine signs and symptoms of depression compared to a fashionable affectation of suffering that was rooted in false pretense and manners.
flashes of the gathering storm” (10-11). Typical of her poetic style, she makes use of pathetic fallacy to enhance emotional depth, where the text may otherwise lack the physical and emotional presence to portray extreme anger, frustration etc.

Baillie explores the theme of nationalism in her plays and poems. She shows the monarchy to be exploitative when nationalism is used to cover the monarchy’s private goals. She questions the monarchy’s judgement regarding the necessity for war and loss of life. The nobility sends the sons of the poor to die, and they go in the name of nationalism because they have been indoctrinated from the time of childhood. The private agenda of the monarchy concerns their desire for control over other countries’ power and wealth. In the “Discourse” she tells a story about the American Indian, however, the Scottish warrior, and English soldier are implied in her analogy. Baillie also ties national pride to the myth of male identity. It is a man’s duty to be brave and heroic; if he fails in his duty not only does his country suffer, but he is emasculated. Baillie investigates these issues of identity and power structures in plays and poetry. Marjean D. Purinton speaks aptly on this subject:

The master/ slave dichotomy is recapitulated, in both social and domestic dimensions, by the hegemony of monarch over subjects and by the hegemony of men over women. The passions to which Baillie alludes in her prefatory prose and that she dramatically depicts in her plays cannot be simply private, individualized psychological manifestations. The challenge to an ideology demanding an oppressed/ oppressor dichotomy in political configurations appears as submerged content in Baillie’s handling of gender issues (126).

Baillie deals with power structures in an often subtle, but easily decoded subtext. She uses serpent imagery, and other Biblical allusions, and repeated metaphors.

Feminism, Scottish nationalism, the British class system, Presbyterianism, incest and suicide are a few of the controversial subjects that may be overtly stated, or subliminally couched between the lines of the plot.
The Critic Critiques the Critics

In the “Introductory Discourse” Joanna Baillie is very confrontational about the practices of critics. She prepares for the coming onslaught directed at her work, and she takes care to explain the experimental nature of exploiting a single passion in a play. She admits that her project is new and unperfected, and she anticipates flaws and problems, but, more important, her success hinges on anticipating her critics, and defusing them, rendering them incapable of damaging the anonymous and absent author. Baillie notes that “critics do not infrequently write in contradiction to their own rules” (ID 62). She writes, “If I should, therefore, sometimes appear in the forgoing remarks to have provided a stick where with to break mine own pate, I entreat that my reader will believe I am neither confident nor boastful, and use it with gentleness” (62). From the very first page of the “Discourse” she notes, “Our own word is frequently taken for what we say of ourselves, but very rarely for what we say of our works” (ID 1).

Baillie asks the reader “to form what opinion . . . [your] taste or [your] humour might direct.” Just as the conscience is a universal faculty of moral insight, Baillie describes “characteristic truth”\(^{15}\) as a faculty within human beings that senses believability. She relates: “He who hath made us placed within our breast a judge that judges instantaneously of everything we say” (ID 24-25). If a poet is relating a story that seems unbelievable, “one strong genuine stroke of nature, (an aspect that is universally related to,.) will cover a multitude of sins even against nature herself” (25); we are “intoxicated” by the author’s “great knowledge of the human heart” (25). Baillie notes that there are flaws that are a necessity in creating a work, and these flaws are not anything to do with

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\(^{15}\) Baillie is very abstract in her descriptions of “characteristic truth” and its relation to the artist, the audience and the critic. She speaks in riddles and metaphors when an issue is controversial, therefore the decoding is my own interpretation, sometimes from between the lines. It is probable that these pages could generate many readings, but that is part of her point. Art is not perfect.
nature. Critics look for, and read more into a work than is actually there. Baillie writes:

Many well-meaning enthusiastic criticks have given themselves a great deal of trouble in this way; and have shut their eyes most ingeniously against the fair light of nature for the very love of it. They have converted, in their great zeal, sentiments palpably false, both in regard to the character and situation of the persons who utter them, sentiments which a child or a clown would detect, into the most skilful depictions of the heart. (ID 25)

This is material to put critics on the defensive, and it may help explain why so few were willing to write on Baillie despite her popularity. She admires Shakespeare, but is displeased with the way that critics take his works apart, and she accuses critics of creating complexities, as a contrivance to maintain a supposed superiority. “So many people have been employed in finding out obscure and refined beauties, in what appear to ordinary observation his very defects” (ID n. 26). Everyone, regardless of their degree of education, appreciates something in Shakespeare beyond more perfect poetic compositions of another nature. She alludes to her own poetic theory, where psychology, passion, and character development take precedence over sophistication of language. The greatest irony of Baillie’s anti-critical stance is that she, herself is a critic. Additionally, her seventy-two page analysis lays out expectations for the reader, poet and Modern critic who abide by Romantic ideals.

**Baillie’s Rejection of Neoclassicism**

One of Baillie’s most ardent statements for change comes from her commentary on Greek Poetry. Homer had long preceded the poets of Greece. The Grecian people were used to long sophisticated poems at their games and feasts. By the time their drama evolved they were accustomed to hearing long poetic expressions about characters of which they were familiar (ID n. 27). In a complex way Baillie explains that the Greeks knew their gods intimately, and their presence in written works automatically generated feelings within the hearts of audiences. Strong passionate action was seldom present in
the work itself. Primitivism did not occur in Greek dramatic writing, because the rules of Greek writing had already been established before drama became popular. “Had the Drama been the invention of a less cultivated nation, more of action and passion would have been introduced into it” (n. 27). She elaborates that poets were constrained by “polished models of writing that preceded them” (n. 27). Baillie comments that her experience as a writer was comparable to Greek history repeating itself. She notes that if the Greek poets had been free from “those polished and admired originals,” (emphasis mine) “[a] different class of poets would most likely have been called into existence” (n. 27). (I suspect that she is referring to a rustic class that wrote plainly and clearly).

She is acutely critical of the Greek writing establishment, but the implication is that she is speaking to England’s canonical fathers. She notes that some men would not even attempt to write works not suited to their education and experience (n. 28). For those who did write she says: “Men, therefore, whose natural turn of mind led them to labour, to reason, to refine and exalt, have caught their animation from the beauties of the Grecian Drama, and they who, perhaps, ought only to have been our Criticks have become our Poets” (underlining mine) (n. 28). Baillie’s view relates to Young’s Conjectures:

“Imitations are often a sort of Manufacture wrought up by those Mechanics, Art, and Labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own” (Tillotson 873). Baillie is concerned that poets who obsess over order and proportion do so at the expense of depicting the natural development of feeling. She relates: “I mean not, however, in any degree to depreciate the works of the ancients; a great deal we have gained by those beautiful compositions; and what we have lost by them is impossible to compute” (n. 28).

Baillie confronts British poets for their over-reliance on the classical past. She encapsulates the position of Romantic poets in the following quotation from the Quarterly Review:
'Modern poetry,' she says, 'within the last thirty years, has become so imaginative, impassioned, and sentimental, that more homely subjects, in simple diction, are held in comparatively small estimation - This, however, is a natural progress of the art, and the obstacles it may cast in the path of a less gifted or less aspiring genius, must be submitted to with good grace.' (Preface p. vi.) (QR LXVII 446) (from the "Introductory Discourse" quoted in the Quarterly Review.)

Even the abandonment of Neoclassical principles does not ensure that domestic verse will survive. As "Modern poetry" becomes more sophisticated, and more abstract, Baillie determines that its language and symbols can harden into rules, and if the Moderns (Romantics) do not take care the poet's creativity can suffer the same circumstance as the previous generation, albeit under a different set of rules.

**Critiquing History, and the Novel**

Baillie's concerns about the exclusion of women, the poor, and other marginalised groups extend into other genres. History has its failings, highlighting the exploits of the famous few, while the experiences of everyday people are not voiced. Though the historian deals with facts, the investment in some emotional detail will contribute to the reader's sense of psychological immediacy. She questions, when is writing memorable? And she describes two battles: one is scientific and successful, the second battle is haphazard with many losses. During the second battle the soldiers are being overtaken; they are surrounded by dead bodies . . . and, "they fly like a fearful flock." [Baillie suggests:]

Let some beloved chief then step forth, and call upon them by the love of their country, by the memory of their valiant fathers, by everything that kindles in the bosom of man the high and generous passions [sic]: they stop; they gather round him; and goaded by shame and indignation, returning again to the charge, with the fury of wild beasts rather than the courage of soldiers, bear down everything before them. (ID 16 n.)

In her notes, Baillie elaborates on the first battle, and describes it in terms of military skill. She asks the reader: "Which of the two battles will interest us the most" (ID 16 n.)? She
knows full well that she has made her point. A Romantic perspective can add to the completeness of the historical record.

Baillie’s sees the novel as more closely linked to her critique of society than history is. She gives the impression that the upper classes are functioning so artificially that they are missing the experience of genuine relationships. She writes about the mysteries and beauties of the descriptive novel, but notes that “those works which strongly characterise human nature in the middling and lower classes of society, where it is to be discovered by stronger and more unequivocal marks, will ever be the most popular” (ID 20); from her past commentary she could have labelled this genre the “Rustic” novel, but more specifically she is referring to the bourgeois novel. The sentimental novel is “a dressed and beautiful pleasure-ground, in which we are enchanted for a while, amongst the delicate and unknown plants of artful cultivation; the other is a rough forest of our native land; the oak, the elm, the hazel, and the bramble are there; and amidst the endless varieties of its paths we can wander forever. In a work of this nature the novelist has his [or her] greatest effect when appealing to “every faithful touch of nature; still we are upon the watch for everything that speaks to us of ourselves” (ID 20). The bourgeois novel embodies naturalism, criticises artifice of the upper classes, and integrates a strong sense of British nationalism into the descriptive text. German and English novels of feeling were depicting personally drawn characters that could be readily identified with. These passionate and imaginative novels steadily gained acceptance. Baillie encourages a departure from sentimental novels that suffer from their own sophistication and artifice, while, to her, bourgeois novels connect the reader to the every day world (ID 20-21).

Feminism

Baillie’s creed is natural representation, and as a Romantic ideal it has a way of
unearthing Baillie's socio-political concerns. She confronts the previous generation for under-representation of women, and the lower classes. In the "Introductory Discourse," she seeks equal recognition, and a celebration of male and female differences. Her stance is centred on giving respect, appreciation and value to female contribution. She sees men and woman as complimentary to one another, and does not pursue the rights and privileges that men enjoyed in her society. Rather, Baillie makes one overt and concrete statement that outlines her position regarding women:

I believe that there is no man that ever lived, who has behaved in a certain manner, on a certain occasion, who has not had amongst women some corresponding spirit, who on the like occasion, and every way similarly circumstanced, would have behaved in the like manner. (ID 36)

She supports the efficacy of the female heroine, but even that is done in a qualified manner. In life, she notes there are female heroic characters; more of these are "tender" and "pathetic," and fewer are "great" and "magnanimous" (ID n. 36). Baillie does not follow up with Mary Wollstonecraft's quest for female independence and equitable education as outlined in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). It is evident that Baillie refers to a spiritual essence of heroic behaviour that is one of the great and simple universals of human nature that transcends gender distinctions. She elaborates on her views of education, and male and female relations in Preface to the Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters (1821), where she places domestic duty ahead of the need for education. She leaves the reader wondering if she is trying to accommodate the conduct-book notion of domesticity. (This information is dealt with in detail in Chapter 4).

Baillie's characters, however, are redeeming. She balanced the scales by representing the perpetually absent mature woman. In De Monfort and the "Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie," Baillie's women are mature, and they portray personal grace and heroism.
Poetry, that Can Reach All Classes

Baillie’s sees the ballad as a medium that can educate, influence and entertain all classes. Ballads utilise a performative aspect of poetry that Baillie addresses as didactically powerful. She notes: “It was the saying of a sagacious Scotchman, ‘let who will make the laws of a nation, if I have the writing of its ballads’” (ID 57). She refers to the lowest classes as “the broad foundation of society,” and notes that they are not necessarily reached by drama, but they are “formidable ballad readers” (58). She makes the distinction that these works reach the middle class, and they exercise considerable influence upon the lower classes. In other words, the one class will learn from poetry, and those of lower circumstances, will learn by example from the class next up the line. Baillie notes, “the impressions made by [ballads] are communicated, at the same instant of time, to a greater number of individuals, than those made by any other species of writing” (58).

Although Baillie places import on the ballad as a means of popular communication she uses them as a stepping stone to create a new form of her own. Her interest was in the ballad’s contribution to Scottish heritage and the oral tradition of story telling. She makes the move from the ballad fiction to a representation of deeper emotional truth developed in the longer memorials she calls “metrical legends.” These poems add emotional and mythic qualities often lost in the prose of history and biography. She acknowledges her debt to Sir Walter Scott for “the manner of rhyme and versification” (Works 706). She and Scott shared an affinity for the past, and while he wrote Metrical Romance (The lady of the Lake, Marmion), she had a vested interest in research and historical accuracy as an integral part of her legends. Most of these tales in verse were designed to rekindle the fires of Scottish nationalism.

Baillie’s social considerations and personal agenda influence her content directly. By addressing passions that we all feel, the poet can equally reach the “Monarch and man
of low degree” (ID 42). Considering tragedy and the writing of dramatic verse she explains: “A king driven from his throne, will not move our sympathy so strongly, as a private man torn from his family” (ID n. 35). She attempts to break down class-barriers, while providing her readership with universally empathetic characters. Baillie’s poems are often like dramas in miniature, and the blending of dramaturgy and poetics will seem more appropriate upon examination of her works.

**Baillie and Wordsworth Compared**

My final consideration of the “The Introductory Discourse” rests outside its text, and looks at its place in literary history. Baillie should be located more accurately in Romantic chronology. Roger Lonsdale notes that Joanna Baillie published an untraced anonymous volume previously known as *Fugitive Verses*, which Lonsdale later identified as *Poems; Wherein it is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and of Rustic Manners 1790*. These poems, as previously noted, were not very successful; however, one reviewer praised them for their “true unsophisticated representations of nature” (Lonsdale 429). By acknowledging these works we show that Baillie’s advocacy for plain language began a full eight years before Wordsworth’s similar plea in the “Lyrical Ballads.”

In 1798 edition of the Lyrical Ballads there was no extensive theoretical preface. Wordsworth’s anonymous volume was introduced by five terse paragraphs called the “Advertisement.” He published the *Lyrical Ballads* in September, while according to Jonathan Wordsworth in the facsimile edition of *A Series of Plays* (1990), Baillie published her volume in April 1798, or possibly earlier. “The second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* was published in two volumes which bore the date 1800, though they were not issued until January 1801” (Brett and Jones ix); Wordsworth’s sixty-four page *Preface*
was added to this edition, and revised again in 1802. Baillie had completed the seventy-two page “Introductory Discourse” in 1797. Wordsworth’s “Advertisement” reads like a précis of Baillie. Jonathan Wordsworth, the editor of the 1990 facsimile of *A Series of Plays*, goes through a complex set of proofs to determine that “Coleridge and Wordsworth had access to a copy of Baillie at Alfoxden at the height of the *Lyrical ballads* period” (J. W. 3). The explicit similarity between the two authors suggests that Baillie was strongly influential as a key figure in the Romantic movement, and was a figure of inspiration to Wordsworth, and other adherents of the Modern movement.

The similarities between Wordsworth’s and Baillie’s poetics are almost symbiotic. Wordsworth begins the “Advertisement” defending domestic subject matter that he determines the critics will not approve of. “It is the honourable characteristic of Poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind. The evidence of this fact is to be sought, not in the writings of Critics, but in those of Poets themselves” (underlining mine) (Wordsworth i). Additionally, like Baillie with her plays, he maintains “the majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure” (underlining mine) (Wordsworth i). Compare Baillie’s assertion: “those works which strongly characterise human nature in the middling and lower classes of society, where it is to be discovered by stronger and more unequivocal marks, will ever be the most popular” (ID 20).

Wordworth explains that “it is desirable that such readers, for their own sakes, should not suffer the solitary word Poetry, . . . while they are perusing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents” (underlining mine) (Wordsworth ii), which rings very
close to Baillie’s title *A Series Of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted To Delineate The Stronger Passions Of The Mind*. Both poets discuss the same issues about prevailing taste, familiarity of expression, and the potential for rejection by those who are "more conversant with our elder writers, [yet the reader who is familiar] with those in modern times who have been the most successful in painting manners and passions, [will have] fewer complaints of this kind [familiarity of expression . . .] . . . to make" (underlining mine) (Wordsworth iii).

Wordsworth refutes the notion that there is "an accurate taste in poetry" (Wordsworth iii). He and Baillie both ask the reader to rely on their own reactions. Wordsworth also places importance on the originality of poetry. "... Of the other poems in the collection, it may be proper to say that they are either absolute inventions of the author, or facts which took place within his personal observation or that of his friends" (underlining mine) (Wordsworth iv-v). The echoes of Baillie in Wordsworth are innumerable, too many to mention here. I do not wish to take away from Wordsworth's creativity and originality, but wish to suggest that he was not alone in the universe. Joanna Baillie was a strong force in the Modern, Romantic movement that he so desperately wanted to come to fruition.
Chapter 3

Early Verses (1790)

Most of the critical articles even of the last decade continue to focus on Joanna Baillie’s dramatic efforts. The poetry that follows here did not receive mention in the *Quarterly Review*;\(^\text{16}\) while Baillie’s modern biographer Margaret Carhart celebrates these works, she too devotes most of her energies to Baillie’s drama and dramaturgy. Baillie writes two distinct types of poems, the “heroic” and “domestic.” Her “heroic” verse blends Medieval Romance with Gothic irrealism. Baillie’s canvas is the human imagination where she depicts psychological disturbance, wayward pride, and fragmenting worlds that explode via egalitarian forces of nature. Whether the scenes are mythical, rustic, or fantastic, the poems are issue-driven. Romantic individualism, and spiritual vision are primary themes made manifest in the following works. These poems were originally published in *Poems; Wherein it is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and of Rustic Manners* (1790); sixteen poems from this volume are preserved in *Fugitive Verses* (1840), and they are republished in *Works* (1851, 1853).

*Night Scenes of other Times: A Poem, in Three Parts* (1790)

Joanna Baillie’s early poetry milks every ounce of Gothic splendour in order to get our emotional juices flowing. “Night Scenes” is a poem in three parts, and though its events are chronological the writing is circular. Words that do not have meaning initially come clear by the poem’s conclusion, and those questionable words have greater meaning

\(^{16}\) The *Quarterly Review* article “Fugitive Verses. By Joanna Baillie. London 1840” reviews all of Baillie’s literary career, and despite the article title little attention was paid to “Fugitive Verses” itself. Chapter 7 deals with this article, and the problems of reception in detail.
with each subsequent reading. Everyone who is a participant in the plot has his/her identity deferred. Deferral is a literary device whereby Baillie shows individuals who have lost their sense of identity, often due to feeling socially oppressed, or emotionally disconnected.

The poem opening is desolate, sterile and alienated:

"Ah! round me lies a desert vast,
No habitation near;
And dark and pathless is the waste,
And fills the mind with fear. (l. l. 8-10)

Baillie's position as a woman writer of the Romantic period naturally leads her to explore associations between identity and gender. She takes the "Night Poem"17 tradition, and she sexualises it through the use of gender-loaded language: "blasted pride, (l. l. 14)" "His hand a broken dagger swayed" (l. l. 165), "threatening dart," "rugged blade," (l.l. 165-66) "his manly shoulders spread; / His mangled breast was bare," (l.l. 171-72) and a host of other expressions that range in subject from stabbing to sexual impotence. Baillie defines men as participants in two types of masculinity. The good see the consequences of their actions with immediacy. They think of battle as an issue that affects the well-being of their family and community. As a result they are whole human beings whose strength and balance serve everyone—they are lovers. On the other hand, the bad respond to the machismo of a warrior lineage, acting on the violent side of masculinity, responding to a lust for power, prestige, and greed, without thought of social, and moral consequence. These individuals live in a world of fragmentation, and in their of loss of family and community, they become emasculated; they are the warriors.

Women are portrayed in a world of jostling masculinities, and are subjected to

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17 Edward Young's (1683-1765) The Complaint; or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality is discussed on pages 3-4.
masculinely-controlled society. The women of Baillie’s early poetry make few decisions of their own. Relationships are subject to the father’s approval; therefore the man she chooses must share her father’s political convictions. Women are equally powerless in determining whether or not their country goes to war, yet they are direct recipients of the fallout; widowhood, poverty, destitution. In Baillie’s contemplations of the oppressed, the only power they have is the power to dream, and the power to end their own lives.

This poetry is simplistic in its versification, and eternal iambic pentameter, but its character-driven content and Gothic impressionism fuel the mystery that makes it entertaining. From the start, the reader is privy to the protagonist’s thoughts, but nothing is clear except that two lovers have agreed to meet in this desolate place on a vile and stormy night. Initially we are not even aware of whether the protagonist is male or female; all we know is that someone is waiting to meet a lover at an appointed place. The poetry stresses the power of the elements over humanity, but the agitated skies also replicate a specifically male anger and violence:

“For o’er thy head the dark cloud rolls,
Black as thy blasted pride.
How deep the angry tempest growls
Along the mountain’s side!

“Blasted pride” is Baillie’s descriptor for that beast in man that allows emotion to rule over reason; this theme remains prevalent throughout the body of Baillie’s work. Pride is associated with rage and violence that explodes into destruction. “Night Scenes” evokes the experience of restless night, interrupted sleep and emotional disturbance. There is a mental energy loose in this poem, and Baillie captures that movement in the nocturnal meanderings of night creatures:

Beneath the fern the moorcock sleeps,
And twisted adders lie;
Back to his rock the night-bird creeps,
Nor gives his wonted cry. (l.l. 21-24)
As Baillie is studied more she will be surely noted for her subtlety. There is no paradise in this garden of evil. The emotional landscape is a poisoned place where “twisted adders lie” in the “troubled air.” Baillie describes an other-worldly nature, while evoking the mental machinations of premonition. By the ninth stanza we discover it is “Marg’ret’s” impatience we share. The musicality of the verse is gloomy and depressive. The poet repeats the images of “dreary waste” that come to symbolise wasted effort and wasted life.

Baillie heightens our sense of Marg’ret’s anxiety through pathetic fallacy.

Marg’ret’s agitation over her lover’s whereabouts is mimicked by the “wintry blast” and as she ruminates over the possibilities “a gentle form appears” (l.l. 50). She intuitively questions the demeanor of the man who does not walk “... with a lover’s tread” (l.l. 54)

Dim sadness hung upon his brow;
Fix’d was his beamless eye:
His face was like the moon-light bow
Upon a wint’ry sky. (l.l. 61-64)

Baillie’s use of nature and light imagery paints a young man who is emotionally frozen.

He is described in terms of strength and grace, yet his appearance is ghastly “and bloody were his clothes” (l.l. 63-64). Baillie, almost to the point of aggravation, keeps the reader in a state of deferral; it is not just a matter of Gothic suspense—deferred identity and spiritual disconnection here lead to tragic consequences. This maxim is reaffirmed as the scene reveals that the young man is a friend of Marg’ret’s, and he is Edward’s murderer.

We learn through the worst of events that Edward is Marg’ret’s lover; interestingly, though, his murderer remains nameless. Many of the details are not immediate, but filled in as the poem unfolds. Marg’ret speaks to her former friend, though she is addressing the deceased Edward:

“A treach’rous friend has brought me low,
And fix’d my early doom;
And laid my corpse, with feigned woe,
Beneath a vaulted tomb (l.l. 69-72)
Baillie writes a Shakespearean Tragedy in verse. Marg’ret stands as a heroic figure; unable to live with Edward’s death, she is determined to commit suicide. She addresses the departed Edward in the presence of his murderer, “Wilt thou a narrow coffin share, / And part my winding sheet?” (l.l. 75-6). As the poem progresses Baillie addresses Marg’ret’s powerlessness. Marg’ret fell in love with Edward, but she could not act on those feelings, except in secrecy, because of the fathers’ long history of military aggression towards one another. Though her father is not present Marg’ret confronts him, “the lord of many lands,” for his role in Edward’s murder, and for the abuse of power. He has filled the graves fighting battles, and now her blood is on his hands. Marg’ret’s life is the one thing that she can take control of. We learn that Edward was murdered in battle, but his killer was motivated by his desire for Marg’ret.

The murderer tries to dissuade Marg’ret from her intention to commit suicide by appealing to her sense of filial duty. He describes her father’s “hoary hair,” a frozen image, in juxtaposition to his abundant “tears.” Baillie’s description of Marg’ret’s father introduces the theme that people who are emotionally frozen are incapable of spiritual vision. The father is able to feel grief, yet many of his decisions are emotionally disconnected, therefore he cannot exercise power with insight. The father’s castle is Marg’ret’s tower of imprisonment. Once she makes the decision not to return, images shift from the dark and gloomy storm to a light-filled sense of freedom, “Upon the wing my spirit flies” (l.l.101). As Marg’ret dies it is a “beaming day” (l.l. 106). It beams because she is finally free. In Baillie’s poetry death leads to spiritual release. Where the spirit dwells is another question, but regardless of where, its other-worldly nature is fundamental:

No longer Marg’ret felt the storm,  
She bow’d her lovely head;  
And with her lover’s fleeting storm,
Her gentle spirit fled. (l.l. 109-12)

Baille subtly mentions an act of prayer, leaving us with the thought that "gentle"

Marg'ret is with Edward, now that life's "fleeting storm" is over for both of them.

At the start of Part II all the reader knows is that Marg'ret has passed away. A

new voice and point of view are present, but once again the speaker's identity is deferred.

The resurrected storm unites the forces of Hell, and animalistic nature: ""Loud roars the

wind that shakes this wall;" (l.l. 114),

"Methinks the daemons of the air
Upon the turrets growl;
While down the empty winding stair
Their deep'ning murmurs roll. 120 (l.l. 117-120)

Baille's language is very macabre, and you can almost smell death in the tomb-like castle.

She has given enough hints that the reader guesses this is the beginning of Marg'ret's

father's lament. The old man ruminates over his life, and his way of life. Baille as social

critic determines that the problem of distorted vision has its roots in ways of the

grandfathers: "My grandsires, to my troubled sight, / Low'r on me from these walls" (l.l.

127-28). This section at first glance reads like the best of ghost stories, but most of the

old man's agony is internalised, and he is actively questioning his own sanity. Baille

continues to challenge the issue of identity. In a series of ghostly visitations we are set up

to expect the first apparition to be Edward, but when the ghost asks "Where hast thou laid

my son" (l.l. 132)? Baille leaves the reader to figure out what does not fit. The

apparition represents the dead, and his dead son, so it is probable that the ghost is

Edward's father. Baille has stated in her theories for the Metrical Legends that she plays

on the reader's assumptions and expectations to add to the character's depth and realism;

it seems this ambiguity is designed for this purpose.

Baille's psychological acumen stands her in good stead. She aptly describes the
old man’s ruminations. His insomnia gives him endless hours to think about himself, and the effects of his actions on others. As the night terrors increase he asserts:

"Vain hope! the guilty never rest;\nDismay is always near. (l.l. 137-8)"

The reader must read the poem completely before its details coalesce. Baillie weaves in Edward’s father’s death, but it is more troubling because we can visualise his decapitation. Her use of the grotesque magnifies the old man’s guilt, which stems from his decisions regarding battle. He has lost so many people that are close to him that he is beleaguered by his responsibility for death and destruction. Baillie continues her social critique by her subtle digs at those who are in power.

"The beggar, in his wretched haunt,\nMay now a monarch be:\nForget his woe, forget his want,\nFor all can sleep but me. (l.l. 145-48)"

The poor, and those who are in subservient positions, only have power in restful sleep and death.

These poems are like dramas in miniature, and the climax comes in the middle of the Second Part. The old man’s torment has increased in pitch, the weather is more violent, and now the “spirits scream” (l.l. 152-54). Baillie’s manipulation of light indicates the degree of spiritual activity:

Still, nearer to the glimmering light\nThe tow’ring figure strode,\nTill full, and horrid to the sight,\nThe murther’d Edward stood. (l.l. 161-64)"

The old man is confronted with Edward’s bleeding and wounded body. In this scene Baillie is blurring the division between physical and psychological reality. The action takes place in Marg’ret’s father’s mind, and is an exercise of his conscience.

His hand a broken dagger sway’d,\nLike Time’s dark threat’ning dart;
And pointed to the rugged blade
That quiver'd in his heart.

The blood still trickled from his head,
And clotted was his hair,
That on his manly shoulders spread;
His mangled breast was bare. (l.l. 169-76)

Baillie plays with language mixing masculine, feminine, sexual, lover, and warrior images. Edward is a disarmed warrior after the battle. The ultimate act of violence shoots "life's threatening dart," while just a short time ago Cupid's bow was the instrument of love (Marg'ret and Edward's love). Baillie could have simply referred to Edward's stabbing, but she chose to describe Marg'ret's father's vision of the event in masculinised language, "rugged blade," "his manly shoulder spread," and "his mangled breast was bare." She brings images of masculine strength, violence and war-like nature to the forefront. She implicitly criticises a warrior mentality that is emotionally disconnected from the aftermath of such activity. Marg'ret's father's identity is deferred as long as he remains incomplete emotionally. At this point the reader learns that the character at the centre of this controversy is Conrad; he is Marg'ret's father. He is finally named when he is terrified, and in crisis, because that is when he is most human, and most vulnerable.

Baillie's use of the restless dead allows the reader to witness Edward's "dark" and dreadful eye (l.l. 175); it is a vehicle for Edward to confront Conrad for his actions. Edward's ghost has no voice; once he tried to speak, but could not move his "muttering lip." The spirit's presence forces Conrad to question why him, why is he being terrorised?

In the subsequent stanzas Baillie makes several biblical allusions:

"I'd give the life's blood from my heart
To wash my crime away:
If thou'rt spirit, O, depart!
Nor haunt a wretch of clay. (l.l. 197-200)

Conrad is still a figure functioning in opposition to nature. He is lost in this world because
his decisions are based purely on the needs of the physical body. He is a “wretch of clay” who has yet to discover his spiritual essence. He cannot be absolved of his crime as long as he remains spiritually lost. Only as a fully integrated human being will he realise the significance of the death and destruction he has caused. The reader can hear echoes of repentance, as Conrad has increasing concern over Heaven and Hell. He asks Edward where he dwells, and hopes that Edward might return there. Once Conrad thinks about Edward’s spiritual fate, and contemplates his own, the ghost shows his anger, causes the walls to shake, and then vanishes. In the closing stanzas to this section Baillie continues to weave in expressions about spiritual vision. Conrad still sees with “fixed eyes . . .” / “that from their sockets swell,” and the window acts as a portal for the spirit world.

    The gladsome sun all nature cheers,
    But cannot charm his cares:
    Still dwells his mind with gloomy fears,
    And murther’d Edward glares.  220 (l.l. 217-220)

The light, and Heaven represent the imaginative sphere where imagination and sympathy for others occurs. Conrad remains in the gloom because he and nature are out of sync. Baillie uses pathetic fallacy to demonstrate Conrad’s pathological isolation. Hence, because he is unable to activate imagination and sympathy for others, nature no longer reflects human emotion.

**PART III**

In Section III Baillie explores the extent to which we are influenced by fathers and grandfathers. Does that influence extend beyond the grave in the form of lineage? Conrad’s sleep is disturbed, and in his wakeful hours he ponders this question, and considers what kind of parent he has been. Unsure of himself, he wonders if he is hearing voices: “Or is it but the rushing wind / That mocketh my despair” (l.l. 231-32)[?] He
ruminates over his father’s portrait, “‘Sad thro’ the hall the pale lamp gleams / Upon my
father’s arms:’” (l.l. 233-34). The walls contain military symbols, reinforcing Baillie’s
thematic concern for male glorification of military exploits. Nostalgically Conrad thinks of
happier times when he was well off, and the children were young. And now, everybody he
has loved is dead. His emotion is displaced as he does not mourn the loss of his daughter,
as much as he mourns “the comforts I have lost” (l.l. 264). Baillie explores the one-sided
relationship of daughter as comforter. Conrad wonders who will look after him when he
is “weak,” “forlorn” and “aged.” He asks Marg’ret why did she commit suicide:

"Unkindly fair! why didst thou go?
O, had I known the truth!
Tho’ Edward’s father was my foe,
I would have bless’d the youth. (l.l. 265-68).

The commentary that follows still addresses his losses and his needs, though the crisis has
touched some genuine feeling. Baillie plots the course of Conrad’s emotional awakening.
She uses portraits in this poem to blend the historic past with memory and present time.

“And thou art in a distant hall” may refer to Marg’ret’s portrait, or Conrad’s supernatural
experience of Marg’ret’s ghost. Baillie typically leaves open the possibility of the rational
and irrational explanations. Conrad hears Marg’ret’s harp and is afraid he is losing his
sanity:

Ha! some delusion of the mind
My senses doth confound!
It was the harp, and not the wind,
That did so sweetly sound. 280 (l.l. 276-80)

Baillie’s description of the haunting is tinged with religion and passion: Marg’ret’s harp
sounds like a “distant choir,” and the strings are described as “the soft and trembling wire”
(l.l. 85, 87). Just as previous description was masculinised these words are feminised.
The words mimic the music, but they could equally represent Marg’ret’s demeanor and
emotional state of being. The music is “like some sweet dirge [a lamentation for the
Baillie’s narrator makes a rare appearance to announce that Conrad’s “dim worn eyes to heav’n [are] cast” (l.l. 293). This is a note of spiritual transition, for his eyes have gone from “fix’d” to “dim worn.” He begins to see the light, and wonders whether or not Marg’ret is in Heaven. Between the lines the poem questions whether or not Marg’ret made the journey from consecrated ground to Heaven. Conrad describes her saintly qualities, but he is not sure she that she has met with salvation, because she committed suicide. His concern is positively answered, for once he has expressed legitimate feelings for his daughter’s well-being in the hereafter, her spirit departs:

Loud wak’d the sound, then fainter grew,
And long and sadly mourn’d;
And softly sigh’d a long adieu,
And never more return’d. 320 (l.l. 317-320)

The finality of Marg’ret’s departure suggests that she and Conrad have made their peace. Having finally received her father’s recognition on a sympathetic level, she could now be at rest. He was confronted by those whose death he caused, and having reflected on his actions, “Death’s misty shadows gather’d round, / And swam before his sight” (l.l. 323-24). Death is now upon him, but he is not afraid. He has gained emotional and spiritual vision, and having made his peace with those whose lives he had destroyed; he could leave this world. “His spirit was at rest” (l.l. 328).

Fragment of a Poem (1790)

In many ways “Fragment of a Poem” is similar to “Night Scenes,” yet for every similarity there is a difference. Baillie abandons iambic pentameter for blank verse, and nearly every line is ten syllables in length. Her lines are terse, and at times difficult. She mixes Christian allegory with her social and political critique. The setting is “Tora’s Towers,” / The strong abode of Curdmore’s haughty kings” (Works 790). The Gothic
gloom is present, but this castle is ethereally connected to a watery underworld, and an
unnaturally dark environment: “But now, no mild blue sky in gentle grandeur / Did lend
its azure covering to the main” (790). Baillie describes the primordial and furious powers
of nature, but it is clear that she is speaking of the players in war, politics and social
turmoil of the late eighteenth century:

Dull heavy clouds hung in the lower air,
Misty and shapeless, like the humid chaos,
Ere God divided it, and called it water.
The creatures of the deep forgot their prey, (790)

In the world that Baillie describes Heaven and Hell meet on a regular basis. Something in
the picture she creates is skewed. There has been a shift in the balance of power as
indicated by the “humid chaos,” and the disrupted order of “creature” and “prey.” She
describes a “deadly calm woods,” where birds are silent “And every creature, whether
fierce or tame, / Skulk’d in its hole with unwonted fear” (790) The features of the wild
merge into human characters:

Nor was that creature styled the lord of the earth
Without his fear; that secret worst of fears,
The mind unknowing what it has to dread.
Fenced in the seeming safety of his home, (790)

The same type of circular writing and impressionism of “Night Scenes” is present in this
poem. The details fill in as the story unfolds. Baillie mocks the “creature styled lord of
the earth,” which is her way to defer identity while commenting negatively on the animal
side of human nature. The people of Curdmore are like the animals of nature; they never
know when they will be attacked. The threat of war is always looming. Baillie’s
omniscience is more consistent in “Fragment of a Poem” than in “Night Scenes.” The
frenetic energy of the night is “Sleep” personified:

Sleep came, and closed full many a weary eye,
But not that gentle kindly visitor,
That oft times bringeth to the poor man’s cot
More wealth than e'er enjoy'd his haughty lord; (790)

Baillie's treatment of sleep is a good example of "the infinite varieties and shadings of nature" that she celebrates in the "Introductory Discourse." She observes subtle differences in quality of a person's sleep. "The guards who fulfilled their watch for Torah's Halls slept, but not a peaceful sleep. For the poor man, just described, sleep is an escape. The 'dejected lover' of the day, is the 'favour'd man' in his dreams. And, the ill man may be tormented by the 'foul fiends' of delirium. Even the 'condemned wretch' who is awake until exhausted, sleeps a sleep that is 'scarce known from death'" (790).

Then there is the individual who cannot sleep at all. The king's insomnia is a testament to his emotional wretchedness:

But still the red lamp, pendant from the roof,
Did cast its trembling and unjoyous light
Athwart the lofty chamber of the king;
For he alone felt not her [Sleep's] weighty power.
A load of cares lay heavy at his heart; (790)

The king, still a youth, is unsure how to handle the enormous responsibilities of the crown. Baillie examines the young monarch's struggles under the shadows of his father's identity and actions. His father was a warlike monarch, whose wrath was feared by other nations. "[The father] own'd [acknowledged] a friend and brother of the field / In each broad-chested brawny warrior" (790). Baillie makes clear her disapproval of the king's father as an overly zealous war-monger. His soldiers' bravery was the only thing that "he prized more than the wealth of peaceful realms," yet he rewarded their loyalty by "deal[ing] them death and ruin in his love" (790). The people of the kingdom were "rude," or primitive, and the land was lawless. They were dependent on a monarch's sense of "right and wrong," "and when no storm of passion shook his soul" the people were governed fairly. Baillie determines that war affects more than a monarch's soul, and her summation of the effects of war and the shattering of humanity are graphically seen and felt in the lines that
follow:

One distant nation only in the field
Could meet his boasted arms with equal strength.
Impetuous, rushing from their mountains rude,
Oft had they striven like two adverse winds,
That bursting from their pent and narrow glens,
On the wild desert meet, —in wild contention
Tossing aloft in air dun cloud of sand,
Tearing the blasted herbage from its bed,
And bloating the clear face of beauteous heaven
With the dissever’d fragments of earth,
Till spent their force, low growling they retire,
And for a time within their caverns keep,
Gathering new force with which they issue forth
to rage and roar again.—so held they strife. (790-91)

Bailie’s lines written prior to 1790 draw some similar images found in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan.”

A mighty fountain was momently forced:
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher’s flail:

... And ‘mid this tumult Kubla heard from far,
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

The fragmenting, exploding worlds of Bailie’s poems seem at home in Coleridge’s fantasy.

Even the players, the agrarian folk, and the warring monarch, ring familiar, though that is where similarity ends between Coleridge’s opium dream, and Bailie’s social critique.

In “Fragment of a Poem” Bailie asks, who is responsible for the wars of nations, and the unleashing of such violent and abominable force? Human action is subject to divine retribution. When human behaviour becomes a perversion of nature the resultant images of waste, and bloating corpses are equally an affront to all that is Heavenly and Divine. The king’s father has to answer for his role in his country’s devastation. In “Fragment of a Poem” the entirety of the world, from “herbage” to “fragments of earth,” “rage” and “roar” as a unified voice of anger from Heaven in reaction to human violence. Bailie usually defers a character’s identity until he/she has experienced an internal and emotional
connection, but the king’s father does not get that opportunity.

But e’en while Corvan gloried in his might,
Death came and laid him low. (791)

This time the king’s father does not achieve spiritual vision. Baillie probes the differences between naming and identity. The reader does not learn Corvan’s name until the forces of nature and “beauteous heaven” identify him by his actions—a cause for Divine retribution.

Allener, having ascended the throne, now struggles to determine his own identity. He struggles with the influence of Corvan’s legacy. His conscience tells him that there is something wrong in the relationship between his lineage and the lives of his people.

A hardy people, scatter’d o’er the hills,
And wild uncultivated plains of Curdmore,
Depending more on to-morrow’s chace,
Than on the scanty produce of their fields,
Where the proud warrior, as debased by toil,
Throws down unwillingly his boasted weapons,
To mar the mossy earth with his rude tillage,
Bedding his dwarfish grain in tracks less deep
Than he would plough the bosom of a foe; (791)

Baillie delves into the High Middle Ages, when warring kingdoms were in vogue. Her Gothicism strikes a balance between the other-worldliness of the imagination and concrete issues of daily life. These peasant farmers are free to grow their own crops, but their farming is not very successful. In the hope for a better life, they are intensely loyal to a long line of warrior kings. Corvan’s death is recent, and his people look to Allener with expectation, but he has many doubts. “His heart within him whisper’d / That he was left in rough and perilous times” (791). Baillie creates a primitive situation where a rustic people are dependent on their monarch for guidance. She brings us inside the young monarch’s conscience to witness his moral struggles with new burdens and responsibilities.

Allener was is in difficulty because he felt his peoples’ needs, and knew their hopes were pinned on him, but he did not know how to handle the situation. Allener is another of
Baillie’s figures who is spiritually disconnected. She emphasises her position on this matter by portraying Allener as living and dead simultaneously. He had gone to bed for the night, but by her description he is laid out in the casket, “With drooping head, and arms crossed over his breast,” and we find his “spirit has ceased to animate his body.” In this state of living death he is positioned between both realms, and is ripe for a ghostly visitation, “a thick and mazy mist had fill’d the chamber.” Baillie compacts several ideas into a short space. The ghostly visitation is associated with biblical prophecy “Foretelling plagues to some affrighted land;” she forms the apparition as an unleashed power of nature. The ghost arises from the ocean, and in its gathering momentum becomes “The towering wan majestic waterspout” / [that] “Delights and awes the wandering mariner” (791). The spirit world, Divine vengeance, the awful power of nature, and the ocean voyage are all united in Allener’s experience of the night. This spectre of the ocean is an entity of gigantic form, “One hand was wide outstretch’d in threaten’d act, / As if to draw down vengeance from the skies.” The visitation is marked by violent action, rumblings, a flash of light, and forces of destruction. The violence of the ghost’s arrival is marked by a literal fragmentation in the form of an earthquake, a literal coming apart of the world.

The spirit’s mission is to confront Allener about blind responsiveness to a lineage of war, “Bethink thee well, commune with thy heart.” The spirit argues the need for responsibility exercised with spiritual vision, and outlines consequences for erroneous decisions made.

Canst thoug have strength all singly in thyself
To bear the blood of thousands on thy head,
And wrongs which cry to heaven and shall be heard? (791)

Baillie’s moral critique of monarchical power is blatant. “Thy race is stained with blood: such were thy fathers.” The spirit assures Allener that God has given him life and knowledge, and if he neglects those he cares for because of “wasteful pride” he “Mayst fix
thy doom,—a doom which cannot change” (792). The spirit informs Allener of his choices; he can have “A life of such content and happiness,” and “thy name respected,” (792) or he can face utter destruction of himself and others. Baillie explores the privacy that rests in the unspoken word, where “thy secret thoughts incline.” Her agenda is heard through the spirit’s voice. A monarch’s greed for “wealth, power and renown” costing the blood of his subjects will not serve him well in the life hereafter. Is there not “that better gain, content and happiness” (792). The spirit offers a final warning:

“For from hence, upon that hostile shore,
A sepulchre which owns no kindred bone,
Gapes to receive thee in the pride of youth” (792).

The spirit foretells Allener’s death and burial in a foreign grave, but it is not just the place of the physical body that is disrupted. Allener is privy to Divine knowledge that informs his conscience, knowledge that his ancestors did not have. They rest in peace, granted that right because of their ignorance. He must chose whether or not to maintain the lineage of war rooted in the physical world, or to be at rest with his ancestors on his judgement day.

In the early morning the inhabitants of the castle rouse “from doubtful grey light” to “the fuller beams of powerful light.” Allener is oblivious to “the blest light of heaven,” and the early morning experiences of nature (792). He is alienated from nature, and he isolates himself further with “down cast eyes.” Baillie uses alienation to show that although Allener is “tearful,” “agonizing” and “soul searching” he is completely disconnected from his peers and his people. His internal struggles build:

His seat beneath him shook,—high heaved his breast,
and burst the bracings of its tighten’d vestment

The passions of his heart turn wild and dark. “So warr’d his doubtful mind.” But, a gradual calming of the storm and gloom is replaced by “joy.” His joy is made manifest by “... that vivid fire, / Which kindles the bosoms of the brave” (792). The call of the
trumpet rekindled all of his enthusiasm for the seeming glories of war:

Gird on mine armour,' said the rising youth,
I am the son of Corvan!

It almost seems a surprise when he denies his conscience, and rises to the call of war.

Baillie leads the reader to hope for change. We follow Allerner’s struggles for spiritual vision, and cheer him on as he becomes more closely connected to his emotions. Baillie however, gives us a cynical conclusion, which may be to her a more realistic version of the truth. Allerner succumbs to the tribal powers of a long and influential lineage. He romanticises power and wealth, while his people become a fading contemplation of the night. His actions determine his identity; he is the son of Corvan!

_Thunder (1790)_

Nature is a symbol for Baillie’s poetics. Storm, flood, and fire are classless, spiritual, and religious. Artifice, and appearance will not carry the victim of a disaster through to survival; internal strength is required. “Thunder” symbolises human violence, which once unleashed, as in war, destroys beyond anyone’s control. Joanna Baillie’s “Thunder” respects nature’s power to destroy, unimpeded by any human wish or action. She plays on the reader’s sense of helplessness when nature alone is in control. Thunder is personified as the “Spirit of strength” made manifest as the wrath of God. Baillie addresses the mystery of powers unknown, and acknowledges “O’er noon-day’s beam thy sultry shroud is cast” (789). She quickly establishes forces of magnanimity. This is not a normal storm, but a catastrophic event: “And brood aloft o’er the empurpled earth, / Spirit of strength! it is thy awful hour!” (789). Nature is shown to be socially egalitarian in her destructiveness, while humanity, and the world’s creatures fight the storm, “Pride in the lordly palace is put down, / While in his humble cot the poor man sits / With all his family
round him hushed and still, / In awful expectation” (789).

Baillie manages a musicality in blank verse that replicates the building intensity and visual experience of the storm:

From nearer clouds bright burst more vivid gleams,
As instantly in closing darkness lost;
Pale sheeted flashes cross the wide expanse,
While over boggy moor, or swampy plain,
A streaming cataract of flame appears.
To meet a nether fire from earth cast up,
Commingle terribly, appalling gloom,
Succeeds, and lo! the rifted centre pours
A general blaze, and from the war of clouds,
Red, writhing, falls the embodied bolt of heaven. (789)

Baillie offers an apocalyptic vision, decorated with biblical language and alliteration. Her storm is part of a world-warring condition. She reaffirms this state of the world approach in subsequent lines, “Crashing in rocky fragments downward hurled / Like the upbreaking of a ruin’d world,” (789). She uses gothic fragmentation to describe a world where individual strength cannot stand up to the elements. Her descriptions of nature mimic the experiences of people: “firm rooted in his cloven rock, / crashing falls the stubborn oak. No matter how strong any of us are, anyone can fall. Baillie uses lightning as a symbol of the destructive warring forces in the world, therefore “lightning” is “keen in wasteful ire.” In her subtle way she points out lightning’s effect on the church; it “Darts fiercely on the pointed spire, / rending in twain the iron knit stone, / And stately towers to the earth are thrown. The divisiveness she speaks of extends her theme of fragmentation to include society’s institutions.

In times of imminent disaster it does not matter if one is “of low estate,” “great” or the wretched prisoner (789). In crisis everyone prays; “Knees bend that never bent before,” as people are face to face with their own mortality (789). Interestingly, once people have prayed the storm reaches its climax: “Now rattling hailstones, bounding as they
fall / To earth, spread motley winter o’er the plain” (789). The hail stops, and the storm is less severe:

    The sun on all this wild affray looks down,
    As, high enthroned above all mortal ken,¹⁸
    A higher Power beholds the strife of men. (789)

Baillie concludes with a moral reflection. The “sun” representing God and Heaven, sees and knows the happenings of all existence, therefore the deity beholds “the strife of men” from a larger and more informed view. Mortal knowledge is often not capable of comprehending Divine purpose because of what we are incapable of seeing.

_A Mother to her Waking Infant (1790)_

This is the last poem that I would like to look at in the collection from 1790; it is an example of Baillie’s homely, or domestic verse. Margaret Carhart writes: “Childhood is the theme of several poems, one of which, _A Mother to her Waking Infant_, long remained popular. This is the earliest expression of her lifelong affection for children, and is filled with natural emotion, conveyed in a straightforward matter” (LW 171). Baillie argues in her prefaces that domestic verses should not be any less celebrated than their abstract cousins. “A Mother to a Waking Infant” is simply an honest address of love and affection. Baillie’s acute powers of observation would be at home with the works of developmental psychologists. She writes of anger in the infant: “when wakes the sudden bitter shriek, / And redder swells thy little cheek.’ In essence she applies her theory of “sympathetic curiosity” to the tiniest of humans:

    But when thy friends are in distress,
    Thou’lt laugh and chuckle ne’ertheless,
    Nor with kind sympathy be smitten,

¹⁸ mortal ken refers to the knowledge of humankind.
Though all are sad but thee and kitten; (788)

The poem looks at a baby’s behaviour, but it also looks at adults’ responses: “Each passing clown bestows his blessing, / Thy mouth is worn with old wives’ kissing” (788). The mother is intrigued by her strong attraction for an infant that cannot do too much. She has a unique love that only she can give, “And yet, I think, whoe’er they be / They love thee not like me” (788). Baillie maintains the mother’s perspective through representation of a pure image expressed in everyday language:

Thy smooth round cheek so soft and warm;
Thy pinky hand and dimpled arm;
Thy silken locks that scantly peep,
With golden tipp’d ends, where circles deep,
Around thy neck in harmless grace,
So soft and sleekly hold their place,
Might harder hearts with kindness fill,
And gain our right good will.

The babe evokes an image of Blakean innocense, and divine grace. The mother ponders what this child will mean to her during the various stages of her life, and she realises the depth and importance of the relationship even though just now “Thou dost not heed my lay” (788). The poem is an internal exploration of a woman’s experience. Baillie did write many domestic poems, and in the chapter 6 I deal with two more of these pieces written after 1790.
Chapter 4

The Scottish Romantic Roots
of Joanna Baillie’s
Metrical Legends

The Scottish Romantic movement links Robert Burns (1759-1796), Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), and Joanna Baillie (1762-1851) to the Edinburgh Circle, Primitivism and the Scottish ballad tradition. The history that follows serves to explain the background of Joanna Baillie’s Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters (1821). Sir Walter Scott began his literary career as a Romantic poet whose ballads were inspired by Scottish history and folklore. “As a boy of fifteen he met the Scottish lyric poet Robert Burns in Sciennes House in Edinburgh, the residence of Professor Adam Ferguson, in the winter of 1786, after the publication of the Kilmarnock Edition of his poems” (Drinkwater 478). The Primitivists who celebrated nature and untutored genius admired Burns exceedingly. Burns’s sense both of satire and of the warmth of human relations were drawn from the colourful side of agrarian life. His lyrics suggested the Romantic ideals that inspired Scott’s earliest literary pursuits. “At twenty-one [Scott] visited the wildest regions of Liddesdale, partly ‘to pick up some of the ancient riding ballads said to be still preserved among the descendants of the mosstroopers.’”19 During the seven years after this, he made ‘raids’ in Liddesdale, gathering knowledge in these unsophisticated regions and also materials that were later used in the ‘Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border’” (Pierce 70).

Scott met and made friends with several Antiquarians who were scholars and collectors of ancient poetry; some of the group wrote poems of their own, inspired by the centuries-old ballad tradition. In one instance, Scott’s friend and co-contributor to the early conception of the “Minstrelsy,” John Leyden, walked over forty miles and back to

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19 mosstrooper - a raider in the border country of England and Scotland in the mid Seventeenth Century.
find an old person who knew the last remainder of a ballad fragment” (Pierce 70-71). The growing number of poets was commiserate with their enthusiasm as they took steps to transfer an ancient oral tradition into print. They and their fellow poets were preserving, restoring and reinventing the tradition of the ballad. “William Laidlaw, a minor poet, introduced Scott to James Hogg, the shepherd poet. Hogg, a disciple of Burns, was well versed in ballad history. Scott, visiting the Hoggs in their humble cottage, heard old ballads, and very frank criticism from both mother and son while preparing the third volume of his ‘Minstrelsy’” (Pierce 73). Frederick Pierce offers Scott’s definition of the two main types of ballads:

Not counting the original contributions of Scott and his friends, the ‘Minstrelsy’ contained between seventy and eighty ballads, most of which were genuine folk poetry, and forty-three of which had never before been printed. Scott divided these into two classes, historical and romantic. ‘The Historical Ballad relates events which were either known to actually have taken place, or which, at least, making due allowance for the exaggerations of poetical tradition, we may readily conceive to have had some foundation in history.’ The romantic ballads are ‘intended to comprehend such legends as are current upon the border, relating to fictions and marvellous adventures.’ The latter class, he tells us, ‘are much more extensively known among the peasantry of Scotland than the [historical] border raid ballads, the fame of which is in general confined to the mountains where they were originally composed.’ (Pierce 76)

The two sub-genres within a genre make an interesting parallel between the historical/factual and the Romantic/wild and imaginative. Neoclassical and Romantic tendencies coexist harmoniously. Scott popularised original and newly created ballads, and as his and Baillie’s friendship grew from 1806 onward, she became intimately knowledgeable of his poetics. His influence was at the root of her experimentation within the ballad genre, and she enjoyed his full support and encouragement.

The *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* published in January, 1802 was Scott’s first great literary success. Subsequently, his “‘Lay of the Last Minstrel’ sold 27,000 copies in the first seven years and 44,000 copies before 1830” (Pierce 112). ‘Marmion’ and the
'Lady of the Lake' found an even better reception than the 'Lay' and 'Rockeby' (1813) . . . but his 'Lord of the Isles' (1815) found fewer readers; and the popular reign of Scott in poetry subsided (112). Pierce implies that Scott was followed by a host of imitators, and essentially the market for Romantic ballads was saturated. In retrospect, Scott's "Marmion" (1808) unites his and Joanna Baillie’s poetics, and as mentioned earlier contains his tribute to her Series of Plays. Just as in Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse” (1798), his defence of what was new in his own verse is given in the introductory epistles of "Marmion."

Cease then, my friend! a moment cease,
And leave the classic tomes in peace
Of Roman and of Grecian lore
Sure mortal brain can hold no more.
The ancients, as Noll Bluff might say,
‘Were pretty fellows in their day,’
But time and tide o’er all prevail—
Of wonder and war—‘Profane!
What leave the lofty Latin strain,
Her stately prose, her verse’s charms,
To hear the clash of rusty arms;
In Fairy-land or Limbo lost,
To jostle conjurer and ghost,
Goblin and witch!’—Nay, Herber dear,
Before you touch my charter, hear. (Pierce 114-115)

In a matter of a few lines he sums up the kernel of Baillie’s poetics, with the addition of German Romantic influence, which she did not specifically defend, though Gothicism permeates most of her work. Scott’s determination to incorporate Medieval Romanticism, German Gothicism, and poetic fancy as part of his own creative output is made abundantly clear. Lockhart’s anecdotes in the Life of Scott show the flow of the Sturm und Drang into English translations that inspired original works. “Scott had heard a friend’s recollections of Mrs. Barbauld’s reading of William Taylor’s then unpublished version of Bürger’s Lenore:”

. . . . . . The anxiety with which he sought after a copy of the original German; the
delight with which he at length perused it; and how, having just been reading the specimens of ballad poetry introduced into Lewis' Romance of The Monk, he called to mind the early facility of versification which had lain so long in abeyance, and ventured to promise his friend a rhymed translation of Lenore from his own pen... [He wrote through the evening, and the night.] . . . . Next morning, before breakfast, he carried his MS. to Miss Cranstoun, who was not only delighted but astonished at it; for I have seen a letter of hers to a friend in the country, in which she says—"Upon my word, Walter Scott is going to turn out a poet—something of a cross I think between Burns and Gray." (Lockhart 71)

The quotation is representative of a union of influences. Gray, Burns, Scott and Baillie all celebrated primitivism; their friendships and literary relationships unite them as a force of Romantic influence. Scott’s early meeting with Burns, and Baillie’s writing of songs for Burns’s publisher George Thomson start to form a pattern where people of similar views collectively influence changes in literary taste. The intellectual exchanges between friends, and the sharing of one another’s writing, form a picture of the early Romantic movement. The fickleness of literary taste and the unstable literary market did, however, disrupt the path of the artist. Scott’s success as a poet waned. He bowed out gracefully from the poetic genre to rise to fame and fortune through his more than prolific writing of Romantic historical novels. Baillie, on the other hand, whose pen was also never idle, distanced herself from drama. In 1821 Joanna Baillie published the *Metrical Legends* in London, and a second edition came out that same year. The *Metrical Legends* was reprinted within *Fugitive Verses* (1840). Separate from the previous books, the poem that concludes Baillie’s *Metrical Legends* project is “Ahalya Baee,” which was printed for the first time for private circulation [Spottiswoodes and Shaw], London 1849. This piece completes the *Dramatic and Poetical Works* (1851) (1853).

*Preface to the Metrical Legends*

Joanna Baillie wrote an extensive preface on the theoretical workings of metrical legends. In this literary experiment Baillie expressed a Romanticist’s concern for the
individual in life and text. She felt that spirituality, faith, heroism, pride, the soul, and humanitarian sympathy were missing from the historical record. History's main flaw is that it does not account for personal and emotional experience. Baillie was not writing ballads, but legends which she specifies are chronicles or memorials. She states: "Biography, where sources of information regarding the private character and habits of the individual remain, has made amends for this unavoidable defect in history, and is most instructive and interesting study" (Works 705). Her words resemble Johnson's views on biography in Rambler NUMB. 60. Baillie notes: "Romance, in verse and in prose, has, and often successfully, attempted to supply those deficiencies, by adding abundance of fictitious circumstance to the traces of history and biography — a task pleasing to the writer and the reader" (705). She outlines the writer's responsibility for truth in content. When a person writes he or she is not to write in conflict with what is generally known about an individual. She is tongue in cheek about "the venerated form of majestic man," (705) or the "fanciful figure" created by hiding the truth behind hype.

Baillie makes a general appeal about the long deceased, and asks that if we only know the faint outline of their stories that we leave them "unshaded" and "unchanged." Also, "where history is remote, and we know little of the hero but his name, the romance writer may seize it as lawful spoil; for he cannot thereby confuse our ideas of truth and falsehood, or change and deform what has no form" (705). She sticks to her criteria with "Lady Griseld Baillie," as the details of her life were unknown to most, but she uses historical fact as much as possible. Any embellishment had to be as true to history and the reader's expectations as possible.

Baillie tells the reader that the Metrical Legends are a new attempt. Most times when she is discussing a new approach that is slightly different there is also some interwoven self-depreciating commentary. She often refers to a "skill which I pretend not
to possess.” She also wants it known that she has not made an attempt to imitate [Sir Walter] Scott’s particular expressions. She states: “I have only attempted to write a certain free regular measure, which, but for him, I should probably never have known or admired” (Baillie 706). In actuality she draws on Scott’s definitions of the ballad with some differences. He differentiated between the “historical” and “romantic” ballad, whereas she wrote combining the effects of the two types. Her legends focus on historical truth, by “giv[ing] a short descriptive chronicle of those noble beings, whose existence has honoured human nature and benefited mankind” (705). Romantically, the legends recapture emotional intensity through “characteristic truth,” (believability,) and the reader’s sympathy achieved through sharing the characters’ adversity, joy and grief. Legends are longer poems designed to be read in one moderate sitting. Baillie’s greatest wish is to teach young people about “real worth” and “noble heroism.” She has a secondary and unmentioned agenda that celebrates the Church of the Kirk, Scottish nationalism, recognition for women of all ages, representation for people of all classes, a critique of society, and the desire for general social reform.

In the “Preface” to the *Metrical Legends* Baillie tackles the provocative question: how do we tell a true story? “In relating a true story, though we do not add any events or material circumstances to it, and abstain from attributing any motives for action, which have not been critically reported, or may not be fairly inferred, yet, how often do we spontaneously, almost unwittingly, add description similar to what we know must have belonged to the actors and scenery of our story!” (705). Baillie does not mention this, but this space of unknown details is where she moulds her text. She fills in the missing details with judiciously selected material that supports her chosen ideology. Sometimes she manipulates the material to provide a frame for sub-text; she is most likely to use this method when tackling issues of gender and sexuality, where she wants to challenge an
issue, but due to its controversial nature she is not overt about it.

Baillie also deals with the psychology of true story telling. She may be outlining the differences between true story telling and the ideology of gossip. “We have a propensity to fill in the gaps to refer to what we do not know about what went on, and this filling in is one of our great sources of pleasure” (706). But she notes, there are differences in the ways writers choose to fill in those gaps. Baillie says of her legends, “the events they record are taken from sources sufficiently authentic; and where anything has been reasonably questioned, I give some notice of the doubt” (706). If a writer is “charitable he/she writes to attain the highest level of truth possible, while the mischievous are not just writing fiction,” (706) they defame individuals, and in the permanence of text they create something that is lower than gossip. Baillie is touting a work ethic for writers which entails acknowledgement of power and responsible use thereof.

In Romantic poetry truth does not negate the existence of the supernatural, superstitious or the fantastic. In 1821 the presence of the fantastical and imaginary in verse still required a defence from groups of literary conservatives:

These days are rich in poets, whose fertile imaginations have been chiefly employed in national and Eastern Romance; the one abounding in variety of character, event, and description of familiar or grand objects, and enlivened with natural feelings and passions; the other, decorated with more artificial and luxurious description, and animated with exaggerated and morbid emotions, each in its own way continually exciting the interest and curiosity of the reader, and leading him on through a paradise of fairyland (Works 706).

Baillie is reflecting the changing literary climate where German influence is steadily on the rise, and is complimentary to Antiquarian and Primitivist interests. Her verse incorporates elements of Scottish folklore, myth and legend along with German and European manifestations of Gothicism and their respective folk literatures. She looks to the simple roots of everyday culture to address emotions in universally recognisable ways. The artifice that she refers to is not Neoclassical decoration, but commonly known symbols of
our fears: the graveyard, creatures of the night, imprisonment, torture, confinement and the unknown. Baillie uses Gothic elements for the audience to sympathise, and realistically connect to her character’s feelings and passions.

Baillie was doubtful that a Romantic and historical legend could achieve popularity in a time when many of her contemporaries, including Scott, were switching from one genre to another for the sake of literary survival. She was more interested in the preservation of her literary principles than successful marketability. She relates that “the telling of the real event . . . may not have the same chance for popularity” (706). Her goal was to tell the untold story in a way that would inspire personal reflection. She seldom admits to this, but the story is important because she is expressing a cause which necessitates its being told. She writes “It is better to take a humble place with such contemporaries, than to stand distinguished in a desert place” (706). Here Baillie pits the “humble familiar” against the spiritually defunct. She appeals to readers who are used to “intoxicating entertainment,” (706) and asks them to open themselves up to moral tales in verse, and to entertain a variety of heroic and domestic experiences. “Intoxicating entertainment” (though not explained) may refer to the abundance of German translations and locally written horror novels. The flood of these works, both good and bad, may have given Baillie cause for concern. She probably feared that competition would limit her ability to reach an audience.

Baillie participates in revisionist history and the restorative process. Her Romantic notions of individualism and egalitarianism inspire her exploration of the historical unknown. In the Metrical Legends she approaches writing the “Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie,” on the basis of academic research. Historical texts did not tell her much about women and children which fostered her interest in the under-represented. She was unaware of Lady Griseld’s heroic past until she read “Mr. Rose’s Answer to Fox’s History
of James II” (708). Rose made reference to “Lady Murray’s Narrative,” an unpublished manuscript relating Lady Griseld Baillie’s history. Joanna Baillie was shocked at her own ignorance of the manuscript’s existence, because Griseld was one of her ancestors.

When Baillie set to writing the “Legend of Lady Griseld,” she adhered to Lady Murray’s Narrative as closely as possible. Baillie notes, “I have been fortunate enough to see the original work from which they were taken and availing myself of this advantage have added some passages to it that I thought would increase the interest of the whole and set the character of the heroine in still a more favourable light” (708). Baillie’s revisionist actions are twofold. Firstly, she takes the opportunity to write woman back into history, opening doors suggesting to her readership that there is history to be revised and rediscovered. Secondly, she introduces the public to Lady Murray’s Narrative, an unpublished manuscript. She thanks Thomas Thompson Esq., the Keeper of the Registers, and she expresses her hope that such a curious and interesting manuscript might one day be presented to the public (708). She almost invites one of her readers to take up the project of publication, which is an area she pursued throughout the remainder of her life.

Her Preface and her poetry evolve into an argument for the efficacy of the female heroine. Her feminist stance is not based on wanting the same rights that men have; rather she sees women having different needs related to voice, recognition and respect. She notes that she wished to exhibit a perfection of character which is peculiar to woman. She speaks of men and women having qualities that are particular to their respective genders. In the following she echoes her “Introductory Discourse”: “I wished to exhibit a perfection of character which is peculiar to woman, and makes her, in that family that is blessed with such an inmate, through every vicissitude of prosperity and distress, something which man can never be” (Works 709). The discussion is about “Griseld,” and though it is subtle, Baillie compromises her feminism to appeal to the prevailing conduct literature that
Wollstonecraft so vehemently opposes:

‘It appears to me that a more perfect female character could scarcely be imagined; for while she is daily exercised in all that is useful, enlivening and endearing, her wisdom and courage, on every extraordinary and difficult occasion, give full assurance to the mind, that the devoted daughter of Sir Patrick Hume, and the tender helpmate of Baillie, should have made her the most magnanimous queen.’ (Carhart 173).

Baillie’s order of priority is telling. Surprisingly, “All that is useful” refers to a woman’s domestic duties, [this reference to domestic usefulness comes up repeatedly in the Prefaces and poems,] followed by the attributes necessary for patriotism. Then the father/daughter relationship takes precedence. Her relationship to her husband as the “tender helpmate” is last. The skewing of priorities in relationships is more apparent in the poetry itself, and will be taken up in the discussion of the poems later in the chapter.

Perhaps Eastern Romance extended to Baillie’s Yin and Yang approach to the psychology of gender. Accordingly, she felt that:

“A man seldom becomes a careful and gentle nurse, but when actuated by strong affection; a woman is seldom roused to great and courageous exertion but when something most dear to her is in immediate danger: reverse the matter, and you deform the fair seemliness of both” (709).

She has determined that there are predominately masculine and feminine qualities, but each gender is capable of masculine or feminine behaviour. Acting contrary to one’s gender is a situational reaction. In her “Preface” she also implies that this yielding to the masculine or feminine within the self is what creates love and respect between a couple. The Chinese view of the coming together of the masculine and feminine forces, in a give and take manner, generating harmony, runs parallel to Baillie’s views on the fluidity of nature, and its infinite varieties and shadings.

Joanna Baillie’s thoughts on the issues of female education would have mortified contemporaries like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays and company. Baillie’s feminism was not consistent. She refuted the social concerns that educated women would become men’s
rivals, and attributed male concern to jealousy. At the same time, Baillie was concerned that education might interfere with domestic duties, and if the acquisition of knowledge was purely for the sake of vanity, it was offensive. If a woman could become educated without sacrificing "what was more necessary, i.e. her homely duties," then education was acceptable. Equally important, the woman who acquires knowledge "must make no vain display." Baillie does acknowledge the double standard. The country gentleman who sought after learning of the dead languages would not be met with the same disapprobation as the tauntingly labelled "learned lady." (709). Perhaps Baillie is merely being ironic when she says: "Women have this desirable privilege over the other sex that they may be unlearned without the implied inferiority." (709) Baillie walks cautiously in these introductory notes, yet her poetry deals with a completely different feminist challenge to societal assumptions. She makes women of all ages central characters in her poetry; she challenges female aristocrats for literary elitism, and excesses of vanity; and she depicts women as capable of governing and effecting social reform.

In her closing paragraphs she makes her traditional appeal to potential critics:

I have endeavoured by the selection I have made of things to be noticed, and in the expressions which convey them to the fancy, to offend, as little as might be, the fastidious reader; and that I beg he will on his part receive it with indulgence. (709)

Just as she does in the "Introductory Discourse" and Wordsworth does in the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," she eases the public into Romantic ideals, unsophisticated language, poetry of the imagination, and her personal wrestling with issues of controversy.
The Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie

Verse Preface

Joanna Baillie creates her ideal heroine, then in her introduction she apologises to her male readership for her lack of sophistication, and the domestic nature of her subject. In reality she is only easing her audience into her pending argument. She creates a metrical legend that reads like a Shakespearean play in miniature with its prologue and epilogue; it is missing the conventional five acts, but the flow of drama is the same. “The Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie” is a story told in verse by an omniscient narrator who in the poetry proper, and within an array of footnotes is simultaneously informative and intrusive. Baillie’s authorial commentary is steadily present from the onset of “Lady Griseld.” She writes eight introductory stanzas celebrating the heroic warrior whose battles offer inspiration to humanity. But, she asks, “what has God designed as a mate for such an individual of greatness?” Baillie describes a woman’s heroic attributes, yet between the lines she asks for male recognition of “equal wisdom” in “female form.” This poem is probably the work most closely linked to Baillie’s feminism as expressed in the “Introductory Discourse.” She is validating the cliché that “behind every great man is a woman,” yet in her view the relationship between man and woman is an equal partnership. Women have attributes and qualities unique to their sex. Devotion, resilience and unique emotional capacities set women aside from men in their complementary way of braving the storm, and the tides of adversity.

Baillie makes an appeal to the reader: “And to my short and faithful lay give ear!” She tells a woman’s history, and in ballad form it offers information essential and missing from the historical record. She uses the ballad form in the way that a congregation uses a hymn; it is designed to uplift, to inspire, and to give emotional depth and intenseness of spirituality that history and biography cannot quite fulfil. She challenges males of her
readership to remember the women in their lives. Her preamble, like that of her other prefaces, is designed to defuse critics, while making way for her poetic tribute to a female heroine, that includes aspects of the lives of women during times of religious and political turmoil.

The Poem Proper

Baillie from the onset has several agendas to fulfil in writing her poem. There is an emphasised Scottishness to her verse that serves to incorporate culture and the oral traditions that include mythologised figures of Scottish nationalist and church movements. Secondly, Baillie uses German Gothicism to highlight images of the grotesque and morbid. Additionally, she maintains her plan of relating true history, where the fantastic is used to augment the feeling side of that truth. And finally, Baillie creates a spiritual Bildungsroman in verse showing her own feminism in the life of her character.

The poem’s dramatic opening is set in a prison: “The pris’ner raised his eyes with eager look,— / Is it a real form, that through the gloom appears?” (I, ll. 15-16). The apparition-like entity is a young girl, Griseld Baillie. Our poet maintains an eerie atmosphere with images of blood and the scaffold looming in the background. She uses Gothic images of death to quickly establish feelings of tension and fear as experienced by her main characters. In the spirit of suspense we are only told a bit of the story at a time. The poet infuses a religious tone in her description of the prisoner’s cell. Though the words apply to the prisoner’s immediate surroundings, the “couch of stone,” the “low arch’d door” (I, l. l. 4-7) and the assertion that Griseld was “flesh and blood” (I, l. l. 1) create a skewed image of Gothic church architecture, intermingled with an other-worldly atmosphere.

It is not surprising that we are informed that Griseld’s mission is a religious one. Her father, Sir Patrick Hume, had sent her to the prison to deliver a letter to Jerviswood.
Baillie’s pages are heavily graced with academic styled footnotes where she extrapolates on the role of the Church of Scotland, and various figures in the movement for Scottish independence. Her focus, though, remains on the young girl Griseld, whom she has drawn to cast a spiritual aura:

Meanwhile, the joy of sympathy to trace  
Upon her innocent and lovely face,  
Had to the sternest, darkest sceptic given  
Some love of human kind, some faith in righteous heaven. (IV, ll. 13-16)

Twelve-year-old Griseld successfully entered Jerviswood’s prison cell, and delivered (her father) Sir Patrick Hume’s secret letter. In parenthesis Baillie describes Jerviswood’s nationalist and religious agenda:

(For such was his†, good and devoted,  
And had at risk of life promoted  
His country’s freedom and her faith, . . . . (V, l.l. 3-5)

Baillie takes great pains to assure readers that she draws on authentic historical sources as she refers to Lady Murray’s Narrative, and directs readers to her “(†) Appendix,” yet she neglects to mention that her sources are far from secular.

In Baillie’s project of “Griseld” she functions as a Romantic poet celebrating individualism attending to the under-represented. Her Scottishness and didacticism contain a religious zeal at home in Protestant Scotland, but less welcome in the diversity of London and its environs. Hazlitt’s referring to Baillie as a “Unitarian in poetry” (Perkins 635) may be addressing her zeal more than her singularity of focus on the passions. The sparks of controversy are the elements which may have edged Baillie out of the canon. In her poetry, she takes the unusual turn of giving voice and importance to the actions of life of the young girl, Griseld. Secondly, she is on a mission to celebrate the Church of Scotland and her martyrs. Her tact in this instance is questionable. Joanna Baillie has written a wonderfully heroic, Gothic poem, but she broke an unwritten rule. Unlike her contemporaries, she was
one sided, and sectarian, which explains some of the literary journals’ negative reactions and criticism. It is difficult for anyone not of Joanna Baillie’s religious and political convictions to bypass them, and just see the Romantic beauty of her heroic legend; however, having noted the problems it is still useful to make the attempt. Her success at recreating Griseld on an emotional and realistically feeling level are worth considering. Her techniques, no doubt, influenced the writers of more homely poetry that succeeded her during and after her life.

Returning to the poetry itself, relating history chronologically in a metrical legend is near-impossible, and periodically Baillie breaks into her verse to announce just that. We are told briefly that Jerviswood (also known as Robert Baillie) had a son whom Griseld would later marry (Works 749 n). Baillie proceeds with Griseld’s story placing much emphasis on the role of the “duteous child,” (reminiscent of the period’s conduct literature). Baillie waxes zealous on James’s tyranny, and laments the hanging of the martyred Jerviswood. After writing on his death, Baillie’s eleventh stanza makes an exaggeratedly Gothic shift, reviving the verse of the Graveyard poets. Sir Patrick Hume has gone into hiding in a burning vault in Polworth church (Works n. 750)

Sad was his hiding-place, I ween,
A fearful place, where sights had been,
Full oft, by the benighted rustic seen,
Ay, elrich forms in sheeted white,
Which, in the waning moonlight blast,
Pass by, nor shadow onward cast,
Like any earthly wight:
A place where midnight lights had shone
Through charnel windows, and the glancing
Of wandering flame, on church-path lone,
Betray’d the hour when fiends and hags were dancing,

For brutes, ’tis said, will see what meets no human eye.
(XI, l.l. 1-21)

Baillie’s poetry is reminiscent of Gothic romance, and Collins’s poem “An Ode on the
Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland” (1788). Superstition adds tension and excitement while the young Griseld walks a mile to the local cemetery to bring her father food. Her mind races on a number of possible horrors and atrocities. Baillie offers practical demonstration of “sympathetic curiosity,” and she further titillates her audience reviving popular folklore. “She tells an anecdote that claims dogs have a special ability for sensing apparitions” (Works n. 750) Griseld offers that she will be her father’s “Brownie sprite” (XIII l.l. 15), which Baillie describes as a “short square man of brown colour, and hair.” Brownies were night servants that attached themselves to particular families. Though she explains the cultural and historical background of the “Brownie sprite” she emphasises its Scottishness. Baillie takes pains to link the imaginative past to her contemporary sense of Scottish nationalism.

There is a peculiar trend in early Nineteenth Century Romantic literature that borders on obsession with the father-daughter relationship; Baillie’s “Griseld” illustrates these personal dynamics. The father is in the forefront, and is discussed in detail, while her lover and husband gets only a cursory mention. The father is lauded with pseudo-incestuous language, and his relationship to his daughter is extended into old age by her continued sense of duty. Similar language can be found in Baillie’s play De Monfort between De Monfort and his sister Jane. Some of the language may seem benign, but when looked at collectively and impressionistically it raises questions concerning Baillie’s treatment of gender. This scenario of incest is expressed in Mary Hays’ The Victim of Prejudice, (1799) and in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818, 1831) between Victor and Elizabeth, and there are many ballads and novels that express similar content.

In the poem, Griseld says her duty to her father is “‘To bring him needful food, and share his lonely/ night.’” (Works XIII l.l. 16) And, though not related to her relationship with her father, on route to him she fears the “the lurking spy or rustic lover” (Works XIV
Stanza XVI describes their "tender meeting / ... With many a kiss and kindly greeting (Works XVI 1.1. 1-4). There are many more endearing words, but most of them occur as father and daughter sit down to the meal she has brought to him. Baillie's narrator voices the following:

No lordling at his banquet rare
E'er tasted such delicious fare;
No beauty on her silken seat,
With lover kneeling at her feet,
E'er wept and smiled by turns so fondly sweet. (XVIII 1.1. 8-12)

As fleetly as with trysted lover
The stealthy hour is gone.
And would there be in lovers' meeting
More powerful chords to move the mind,
Fond heart to heart responsive beating,
Than in that tender hour, pure pious love entwined?

(XXI 1.1. 5-10)

The ideology of filial piety, and the defining of a young woman's duty to her parents were certainly prevalent in conduct literature at this time. Why Baillie's narrator describes Griseld with the lover-like descriptions from Romance tradition, and with the young girl at the centre, may rest outside of the text. Joanna Baillie may have identified with her father due to his early recognition of her talents. His affiliation with the University of Glasgow, and his associates introduced her to the world of serious writing. And his vocation as a minister leads to her earliest association with the art of story telling. Daughter's attachments to fathers as teachers of advanced education, in the rare instance where such education occurred, may have yielded some of the seemingly inappropriate language Baillie uses. However, she may have been overcompensating in ways unique to her. Margaret Carhart writes about Joanna Baillie's father: "Mr. Baillie was by no means a genial man. Imbued with Scottish firmness of character, he had also a Scot's fear of emotion. Agnes [Joanna's sister] told Lucy Aikin, that her father never kissed her, and
Joanna confessed to the same friend her yearning as a child for the caresses of her family (LW 6). Carhart expands on the same theme to the degree that Joanna Baillie’s rebellion against emotional sterility may have been as much personal as it was part of the literary and Romantic movement. Her language was part of a Romantic tradition, but in such instances several women may have displaced emotion rather than simply celebrating it.

Baillie redirects her legend toward the climactic event of Jerviswood’s execution.

“Upon a woman’s arm he leant, / From earth to heaven at yester’en he went.” His sister-in-law supported him to the scaffold (Works 752 n), which is Baillie’s way of putting women back into the picture. We learn that the Humes flee to Holland for fear of their lives, and the life of the “brave Grisel’d” is taken up once more in her nineteenth year. The description of life in Holland is domestically driven with an emphasis on happiness being achievable with a woman’s industry, within a “humble home.” Griseld is celebrated as the accomplished domestic female, and Baillie, as if concerned she’s over done this line of thinking offers “And do not, gentle reader chide,/ If I record her harmless pride” (XXXV l.l. 754). Baillie manages to channel woman’s ambition within the domestic sphere, keeping it non-threatening to male defined realms outside the home.

Baillie adds warmth of character to her depiction of religious history. By her theory, she adds the passion that history often lacks, in an attempt to better impress the reader’s memory. She leads up to the time when the Humes return to Scotland:

For he, the Prince of glorious memory,
The Prince who shall as passing ages fly,
Be blest; whose wise, enlighten’d, manly mind,
Hath with unyielding courage oft contended
For Europe’s freedom, —for religion, blended (XXXVIII l.l. 1-6)

There is a brief discussion on the positive qualities of Queen Mary’s character, but this is purposely downplayed in order not to detract from the heroine (Baillie describes this method in the “Introductory Discourse”). Griseld is offered a position “In royal Mary’s
gentle train (XLII l.l. 4 755), and Baillie takes another opportunity to emphasise the
primacy of family duty: "So truly to her own she clung;— / Nor care forhonours vain,
from courtly favour sprung" (Works XLIV l.l. 11-12).

Baillie breaks from her description of the royals and pauses in Stanza XLIII to
argue the flaws of mimesis vs. the need for fancy, or poetic imagination. While describing
the Humes's joy at returning home she notes the limits of expressing emotion in words.
She implies that you cannot do justice to physicality, and what you see. She writes, "But
cease we on this theme to dwell, / For pen or pencil cannot tell." The passage is very
metaphoric; she talks about two forms of art. One contains an "imitation sun," the other
heaven's sun. "To heaven's bright sun opposed; we see / Its borrow's sheen on fallow
dun," (l.l. 15-16) relates that pure imitation is a dormant soil whose seeds pay no return.
Baillie maintains that even the "mirror" will only "reflect" aspects of reality. Heaven is
associated with fancy and the imagination inspired by the meadow, rock and tree . . . . This
stanza is another opportunity for her to bring the poetics of the "Introductory Discourse"
to yet another audience.

Baillie's story of Griseld could not wind its way to completeness without
consideration of marriage. Griseld declined to marry one of "wealth and worth," and opted
to marry for love. Her parents could not support her wishes, "For Jerviswood is poor"
(Works XLV l.l. 11). Griseld determined never to marry, but changes in the monarchy led
to the reinstatement of money and property, enabling Griseld and Jerviswood to unite. In
this instance, Baillie lets Griseld's view of marriage speak for itself. She is atypically
absent, so that the reader does not gain any sense of Baillie's view of marriage between
classes, and the need or lack there of, to preserve family money. The closing stanzas refer
to Griseld's happy marriage, and her continued duty to her father. Baillie writes of
Griseld's later years and subsequent widowhood; she celebrates Griseld's charitable and
generous spirit. Changes within the monarchy stopped the flow of money again. The main theme Baillie addresses is that Griseld’s charity in all directions is repaid. When she cannot pay her trades people and servants they recognise her for her past goodness, and continue to work for her for no wages (Works LIII-LIV 757-8). The poem concludes with Griseld’s quiet passing, surrounded by her children and grandchildren. And as the poem began it ends with woman at the centre of home, and of rural community.

The conclusion, however, is not the poem’s end. Baillie employs a last few stanzas for social and literary criticism. She asks the “polish’d fair,” (women of fashion) “What think ye of her simple, modest worth . . .?” She gives the literary canon a sharp dig: “How vain the thought! as if ye stood in need / Of pattern ladies in dull books to read.” Baillie addresses the aristocratic female fashion plate who frequently feigned inward emotion. Additionally, Baillie confronts their vain behaviour. “Her head with many a flaunting full-blown flower / And bartzan of braided locks enlarged,” [a bartzan is a small projecting parapet or tower] (758). Baillie is caustic about the “Signoras“ who proudly vie for attention. Griseld was very modest, and dissuaded people from use of flattery. Baillie charges that some women are too interested in their appearance, and the company of “some dandy beau: —” (Works 758). She is incensed by “forgotten homely spirit” (758), referring to the strength and love of family, and the necessity of genuine relationships.

In the closing lines Baillie addresses the concept of affectation. She sees upper class women as culturally constructed vs. women who reflect her ideals of the naturalistic and Romantic. Baillie fears that the “cultured” and “ambitious” woman who is smitten by “all that e’er in classic page was written,” perpetuates art that most women are excluded from by insufficient education, and by such actions they deter they progress of Romantic ideals that include everyone. Baillie writes: “Who doth with proud pretence her claims advance / to philosophic, honour’d ignorance / Of all, that, in divided occupation, / Gives
the base stamp of female degradation” (underlining mine) (758). She asks women to think for themselves, especially those who follow “Whatever careful Betty may decree,” and she implies that women who have “whit” (intelligence) do not let it show, because these woman want “the public stare,” (759), not admiration of their character. Baillie reflects, they “seem almost ashamed to be a woman” (758). Under these social circumstances, she asks about the reception of “Lady Griseld Baillie,” “Will she, I trow, any kirtled sage, / Admire the subject of my artless page?” (758). There are some within the upper classes who will find her legend appealing. She describes a few of the “British fair” who are actively involved in benevolence. In a footnote Baillie insists that charity be motivated by thought as opposed to guilt, and she makes a tribute to the natural “benevolence of the Society of Quakers.” Her hope is that the poem conveys these attributes as demonstrated by the life of “Griseld Baillie,” and that others will be inspired to live by her example.

Ahalya Baee

In 1821 Joanna Baillie published The Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters. The legend that concludes The Dramatic and Poetical Works (1851) is “Ahalya Baee.” Baillie had this work printed for the first time for private circulation [Spottiswoodes and Shaw], London 1849. This legend is almost over-powered by the detail of the footnotes which assure the reader of the validity of what transpires. As Margaret Carhart notes, the immolation of Indian widows is hardly a new theme to English literature (LW 85), yet the legend offer many unique features. In her introduction Baillie critiques history once again, but from a different angle. “Had graver historians been more descriptive as to the different states and conditions of the same country under warlike and under peaceful sovereign, we should not so frequently hear the young people complain of a peaceful reign being so dull . . .” (Works 839).
This poem, more than any other, shows Baillie following through with Romantic ideals that foster egalitarianism, and the inclusion of all people. She draws on the exotic characteristics of Eastern Romance, observing Hindu religion as it is practised in Mulwa, Central India. Her approach reads like a declaration of human rights, and she manages to suspend her religious convictions, and to open herself up to experience another culture openly and completely. Her heroine, Ahalya Baee, is a humanitarian sovereign, whose people have “styled an Avatar or incarnation of the Divinity” (n. 847). Baillie comments “[Ahalya] affords a striking example of the practical benefit a mind may receive from performing worldly duties under a deep sense of responsibility to its Creator” (847).

Ahalya Baee’s story has been extracted meticulously from Sir John Malcom’s account, and the highlights of the original can be followed in Baillie’s notes. Her achievement here is a dimensionality that draws the reader deeply into Ahalya Baee’s story with all of the feeling and emotion that comes from the poet’s personal attachment. Baillie has developed a greater degree of tact, and though she offers a good dose of evangelizing in the introduction she keeps the legend non-denominational. She briefly acknowledges the missionary presence, and moves on to look at the good in, and the accomplishments, of other faiths, and this is a theme she maintains throughout her poem.

“Ahalya Baee” is a story filled with tragedy. Ahalya’s son is murdered, and shortly after, her daughter is widowed. “An embroiderer had slain Ahalya Baee’s son, in a jealous fury, believing the son had been intimate with a female servant” (Works n. 840) Ahalya’s surviving daughter, in a state of grief, accepts and follows religious custom; she sacrifices her own life sharing her husband’s funeral bier. In Baillie’s description of events she introduces Gothic detail drawing on Indian lore and legend. She adds realism to the exotic nature of her setting. The reader learns of childhood betrothments, wooden and stone idols, Hindu religious rites overseen by the “Brahmins” and “Turbin’d chiefs.” The
grotesque and supernatural are introduced to aid the rendering of a moral tale. The reader learns of an Indian superstition that says if a person is unjustly slain his/her spirit will pursue the living (Works n. 840) Baillie uses the tale to establish the character of her female heroine. Ahalya, in her prayers to her son, relates that the murderer is suffering upon the realization of his victim’s innocence; “He slew wrongfully, and for that deed / Remorse has dealt him a fearful meed” (Works 840). Ahalya asks the spirit of her son to release his murderer, for “revenge” cannot make him live again. The mother’s wisdom is instrumental in providing her son’s spirit with a path to peace. Soon after this episode, there is closure with the ritual of the son’s burial (Works 840).

There are many emotional and moving details to this tale, but I will focus on Ahalya Baee’s character, which Baillie most strongly identifies with. Ahalya Baee’s family was the governing royalty, and the murder of her son eliminated the only heir to the throne. Their Brahmin minister recommended that Ahalya adopt a successor (Works n. 841). She rejected the minister’s suggestion, and decided to rule her nation herself: “Oh no; her noble nature spurn’d / Such narrow thoughts; her choice she turn’d . . .” (Works 841). She turned to a soldier that she trusted and promoted him to be responsible for the military. He respected the limits of his power “beneath a woman’s rule,” and over time their relationship deepened to that of a mother and son (Works 842).

Baillie’s attraction to Ahalya Baee’s story is probably inspired by its offering of potential solutions to problems posed in her Romantic critique of society. Baillie’s quest for social reform has its roots in the first wave of Blue Stocking feminism occurring in the mid eighteenth century. Sarah Scott’s novel Millenium Hall [sic] (1762)20 is known as a

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20 The full title is: A Description of Millenium Hall, and the Country Adjacent: Together with the Characters of the Inhabitants, And Such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections, As May excite in the Reader proper Sentiments of Humanity, and lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue. By A Gentleman on his Travels (1762).
Bluestocking manifesto. Scott writes about a community governed by women who offer a retreat from the restrictions of formal society. Her novel is a feminist Utopia that challenges the conventions of marriage and class. The women governing “Millenium Hall” celebrate natural behaviour and spirituality while rejecting fashion, affectation, coquetry, and vice. The ladies also took steps to educate the poor in the ways of successful manufacture. *Millenium Hall* [sic] sought social reform with men absent. Baillie addresses similar issues in “Ahalya Baee,” but her approach is egalitarian, and men and women are equally present. Baillie does maintain one link to Scott’s experiment, though; she does take the opportunity to look at governing from a female perspective.

One of Baillie’s tactics for highlighting social problems in her own society is to show how those social problems are solved elsewhere. She describes Ahalya’s India as previously war torn and unstable, “The country from all threaten’d wrong / By hostile Rajahs fierce and strong” (*Works* 842). Since Ahalya has a trusted and competent military the stability that ensues allows the monarch to concentrate on the spiritual and physical needs of her people.

Woe, want, and suffering to assuage,
Would still her daily thoughts engage;
On this her mind was most intent;
She knew she was by Brahma sent;
For works of mercy, by her hand
to be dispensed through all the land, (*Works* 843)

As the legend progresses Baillie’s social concerns and Ahalya’s are blended. Ahalya addressed the needs of strangers, the aged, infants, and even the animals “Who have no words for their sufferings to tell.” How is it that Baillie is balancing the scales? She replaces the patriarch with a matriarchal monarch whose subjects respond “She is our mother, and she loves us all” (*Works* 842). The part of India described maintained a caste system, but Ahalya did not see the lines of separation. As it was in her power, all living
beings were under her care. The declassifying nature of Ahalya’s approach is the kernel of Baillie’s poetics.

Baillie, in an interesting turn, addresses her audience and potential critics: “... Who in better, purer faith were born: / Yet pause awhile, I pray, and check your scorn; / Ye who acknowledge freely your descent” (Works 843). She reminds the audience of Britain’s pagan past, and questions “Will ye despise the simple blinded zeal / which now my truthful legend must reveal?” (Works 843). She implies that charitable and pious works are good unto themselves, and should be encouraged by governing bodies. Ahalya tried to accomplish these ends. Her government included the wisdom of the Brahmins, wide sleeved sages, chiefs of high degree, “And watchful, wary scribes, and merchants free” (Works 843).

Ahalya’s governing is contrasted to the recent past in India, but Baillie is actually examining differences in governing based on gender. She uses India’s history of male government to critique England’s period of war and instability. She relates the theme of social injustice to victims who are subject to the consequences of an indiscriminately greedy monarchy. This stanza is forty-three lines in length and, as it progresses the language is sexually loaded.

Fiercely attacking town and village,  
And fenced forts for sordid pillage;  
Treasure they did so vainly reap,  
Which all could gain, but none could keep.  
He who to-day had home and hold,  
Grain on his fields, sheep in his fold,  
To-morrow with his family fled,  
And had no where to lay his head. (844)

The resulting destruction of homes and families were empty sacrifices, providing no gain.

The exotic landscape described in this same stanza represents an inversion of the Garden of Eden. In the scenario that follows male sexuality leads to violence and death.
The brindled tiger in his reedy lair,
Purrs gruffly, while aloft is singing
The Looie gay, on light spray swinging;
There oft the baleful snake is seen,
Through flow'ry slopes and thickets green,
Where roses blush and blossoms blow,
And lilies sweet profusely grow,
Moving his sluggish, loathly length,
Then rearing up his stiffened strength,
At moving prey to take his aim,
And swathe and crush the vital frame. (844)

As scholars begin to look at these poems down the road, I suspect there will be noted echoes of Aphra Behn’s novella Oronoko. Baillie challenges issues of male power in society through images that evoke castration; such as, “By harness’d bullocks dragg’d appear.” She has an acerbic tongue in her assessment of past male rule: “Upon his elephant some chieftain proud, / Sits stately, though less rational in nature / Than that on which he rides,—a noble sapient creature” [Is she talking about the animal or his gluteus maximus?] (844). Baillie did not intend a complete removal of man, but a joint government that made use of each gender’s qualities. In Ahalya’s rule “She [was] the considerate head, and he (the military commander) [was] the ready hand” (Works 842). Baillie describes a land of immense prosperity governed by “this gentle lady.” The results of Ahalya’s government were: “With wise and equal rule the land was bless’d—and peace” (844).

Baillie is fond of inversions, and in this incident of the poem the serpent is connected to the fall of woman. Ahalya’s daughter is a widow, and in accordance with tradition the daughter decides on the honoured death of self-sacrifice. Baillie describes the funeral bier, and the serpents transform into “pointed tongues of flame below.” Baillie echoes her earlier sentiment of the male consuming the female, and this particular consumption has its roots in Hell and damnation. Ahalya, witnessing her daughter’s demise, is transformed into a rabid animal:

Who, though by friendly force restrain’d
Convulsively hath freedom gain'd,  
and beats her breast and tears her hair.  
Her gnashing teeth and bleeding hand  
Too plainly show that self-command  
Is from her princely spirit taken,  
Of all its wonted power forsaken. (846)

Baillie's verse continues to reflect the statutes of her poetics. Her poem laments a society that did not value, or recognise a twenty-year old widow. How did human sympathy not prevail, and stop the young woman's death? The daughter may have been grief stricken, and willing to die, but Ahalya had to be forcibly retrained from intervening. Baillie continues to probe the relationship between those in power, and those victimised. The poem follows Ahalya's subsequent depression, and gradual regaining of composure.

Ahalya's rule is dominated by human sympathy, and simplicity. Baillie celebrates her as, "a noble Dame" who made appointments based on merit, disparaged the wastes of war, and for thirty years maintained "her reign of peace" (Works 847).

Baillie made use of a gender-based sub-text to react against the political turmoil of the Romantic period. In between the lines of her Gothic verse she offered a revisionist history, writing woman back into the chronicles of her world. She has also reflected her own culture into an other. The comparison between Britain, and Ahalya Baee's India allow Baillie to show by example, a revisionist reaction to feminist, political and social agendas that were erupting throughout the Romantic era.
Chapter 5

Scottish Verse: The Songstress of Scotland

Joanna Baillie enjoyed popularity in yet another genre. James Grant Wilson notes: "Besides her numerous dramas, pervaded by a pure energetic strain of poetry, Miss Baillie was the author of poems as well as numerous songs, some of which are among the most popular Scottish lyrics of the present day . . . Washington Irving, who enjoyed the privilege of an intimate acquaintance with the 'Lady Bountiful' of Hampstead and its neighbourhood, described her to the writer as 'the most gifted of the tuneful sisterhood of Scotland'" (388). As a lyricist in the early stages of the Romantic movement Joanna Baillie was as much a survivor as a contributor. Prior to, and during, the time of her writing there was a struggle between Neoclassicist and Primitivist factions of the Edinburgh circle.

In Scotland there were different problems, than those experienced by their English cousins, at the root of creative divisiveness. In the eighteenth century; political and language issues contributed to the rift between the Neoclassical and Primitivist factions. The struggle for primacy between the English and Scottish language was exacerbated by the Union of the Kingdoms in 1707: "English had become the language of parliament and the court" (Butt 219). William Robertson, at the end of his History of Scotland (1759), describes "the Scottish assimilation with the English standard of taste and language, which removed 'every obstruction that ever retarded their [Scots'] pursuit, or prevented their acquisition of literary fame'" (Butt 219-20). Not everyone, however, was charmed by the adoption of English, or the untoward results of writing in a language other than one's own.

James Beattie relates "We are slaves to the language we write, [English] and are continually afraid of committing gross blunders; . . . . We have a fear that Scotticisms [will surface in our writing]." Beattie published a glossary in 1787 in order "to Correct
Improprieties of Speech and Writing” (Butt 220). This purification of Scots into an Anglo-Scots dialect produces what the Quarterly Review referred to as “Burns’s stiffer attempts in English” (QR LXVII 448). The problems of translating from one language in order to write in another were magnified by those attempting to achieve the expressiveness, emotion, and depth of the Scotch song.

There were those poets and antiquaries who felt that Scots had a living vibrancy unique to centuries-old tradition, as was evident in the Scotch ballad and Scotch air. John Butt chronicles the resurgence of Scottish vernacular poetry throughout the eighteenth century. One of the early figures of import is “James Watson, the King’s publisher [who published] in three parts Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems (1706, 1709, 1716), ‘the first of its Nature’” (Butt 222). Although it is early in the century, Watson’s choices of poems suggest contributing elements of Joanna Baillie’s poetics. “Christ’s Kirk on the Green” replicates Baillie’s union of church and nature in verse, while John Butt’s description of the prototypical poem “The Cherry and the Slae,” as a poem of “rustic revelry,” (Butt 222) is precursory to Baillie’s depiction of “rustic manners.”

The anthologists, editors and poets who were reacquainting the public with Scots dialect were a minority, voicing preliminary Scottish Romantic ideals. “In 1724 Allan Ramsay published The Evergreen, Being a Collection of Scots Poems, Wrote by the Ingenious before 1600, a collection of mostly non-lyrical poems, and The Tea Table Miscellany, described in a later reprint as A New Miscellany of Scots Sangs,” contained lyrics meant for singing and was popular with the public (Butt 223). Ramsay’s anti-Neoclassical stance is plain in the following: “In commending these poems to his readers he applauds their native imagery, and contrasts their ‘natural strength of thought and simplicity of stile’ with the ‘affected Delicacies and studied Refinements’ of modern writings” (Butt 223). Ramsay also wrote “pastorals; [that] the southern reader must have
felt what was the modern equivalent of the Doric appropriately used for the true representation of rural manners” (Butt 227). Butt cites a number of poets that form the foundation of Joanna Baillie’s poetic views. Alexander Ross’s The Fortunate Shepherdess, a Pastoral Tale in Three Cantos contributes to the manners of rustic life poems (227). Recall the title of Baillie’s first book: Poems; Wherein it is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and of Rustic Manners (1790), which readily encapsulates the views of her predecessors. Joanna Baillie gathered together Scottish Romantic ideals that had built and coalesced over an eighty-year period.

Baillie is so deeply entrenched in the history of the Scottish song that personal and historical connections abound. Alexander Ross wrote “The Rock and the wee pickle Tow,” (228) which makes an appearance in Baillie’s Works as a new version. John Butt speaks about a number of Scottish poets “setting new words to old tunes,” (228) and included his list of songs is “Lady Grizel Baillie’s ‘Werns My Heart Licht’” (Butt 228); this is the same Griseld Baillie that is Joanna Baillie’s ancestor, and the subject of her metrical legend. The figure who garners Baillie’s admiration while linking the historic past to her contemporary writing is Robbie Burns. The two composers of the Scottish air were also united under the misguided auspices of the publisher George Thomson (1757-1851).

Thomson abides by Neo-classical views. He associated English with Neoclassicism and refined taste, while Scottish dialect was vulgar and akin to Primitivism. He valued poetic form, and polished verse with high moral content. Thomson commissioned European composers to give Scottish folk songs classical arrangements. He is clear from the outset that he is creating a marketable product. His project concerns Scottish nationalism, and preserving the minstrelsy of yesteryear. He is, however, a false Romantic whose affinity for nostalgia and history on one hand is supplanted by his desire to appeal to the drawing-room market on the other. Thomson wished the Scottish airs to be
sanitised to meet standards governed by his view of contemporary taste. In his appeals to Burns he relates “It is not at all our wish to confine you to English verses: you shall freely be allowed a sprinkling of your native tongue, as you elegantly express it; and moreover we will patiently await your own time” (Thomson October 13, 1792).

Despite disagreements Thomson and Burns corresponded regularly and mutual respect must have allowed compromise for they were very productive. In addition to Burns, who suggested expanding the collection to include Welsh and Irish airs, Thomson sought the help of various English writers. “He wished to provide a number of Gaelic airs with alternative English lyrics that Southrons would understand. He rounded up a number of both Scottish and English writers to assist him, including Byron, Thomas Campbell, Walter Scott, James Hogg, John Gibson Lockhart, Joanna Baillie, and Mrs. Anne Grant of Laggan” (emphasis added) (Levin 2). Thomson edited separate editions of national songs: Scottish, Welsh and Irish. He called the first edition A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the Voice, with Introductory and Concluding Symphonies for the Pianoforte, Violin, and Violoncello. Subsequent editions were similarly titled, only the country of origin changed. He steadily published volumes of songs from 1793 through to 1841. Sadly, at the peak of Robert Burns’s creativity he died in 1796 of rheumatic fever. By his own correspondence, Thomson was a fairly rigid fellow, but Burns had a degree of influence upon him, and through his efforts Burns opened doors for those who followed him.

Joanna Baillie, known for her independence of spirit, was also celebrated as a moral poet who waxed eloquently in both Scottish vernacular and English acceptable to those south of the Tweed.

Thomson delighted in presenting local colour, and if he could introduce Snowdon or Llangollen into a song, it might at once pass for Welsh. In her 'Maid of
Llanwellyn,’ Miss Baillie’s lyric spoke of the beautiful lakes in Wales. When Thomson objected, saying that Wales had no lakes, Miss Joanna Baillie haughtily answered that since lakes would not rise out of the earth for their convenience, and since she was unwilling to alter the line, they would just have to hope that their readers would be as ignorant as she had been when she wrote it. (Levin 2)

Her surly side obviously did not impede their literary relationship, for Thomson figures prominently in Joanna Baillie’s songwriting career. She explains in “Fugitive Verses” within The Dramatic and Poetical Works (1851): “Many of the Songs are to be found in Mr. George Thomson’s Collection of Irish, Welsh and Scotch Melodies, and other musical works, both selected and original; the Ballads, too, and many other occasional pieces, are dispersed in the same way” (771).

Some of Baillie’s songs were published anonymously, and others were reproduced without her knowledge and have “their different lurking places” (Works 771). In “Fugitive Verses” Baillie selected songs that she wanted to preserve for posterity’s sake. “Be this as it may, I am unwilling to quit the world and leave them [her songs] behind me in their unconnected state, or to leave the trouble of correcting and collecting them to another—the Songs written in the Scotch dialect making it somewhat more difficult” (771). She notes that when she began writing “Burns, read and appreciated as he deserved by his own countrymen, was known to few readers south of the Tweed, where [she] then resided. [Burns is] a poet (if I dare so style myself) of a simple and more homely character, was either, among such contemporaries, placed in a favourable or unfavourable position, as the taste and fashion of the day might direct” (underlining mine) (772). Baillie differs from Burns as she adapts to a primitivist or Neoclassical approach, depending on situational need. She is more conscious of the balancing of the aesthetics of poetry with the demands of the market, though nationalist pride is preserved. “Some of the Scotch expressions might naturally be expected to have interfered with clearness of meaning and harmony of sound to an English reader, and some of those I have changed; but I have not been willing,
unless necessary, entirely to remove this national mark; and I believe those who I am most
ambitious to please, will not like my verses the worst for this defect, though the difference
of pronunciation in the two countries not unfrequently injures the rhyme” (underlining
mine) (772).

Baillie is a master of compromise. While looking over the songs in Works it is plain
to see that she writes in Scottish dialect for some publishers and perhaps her own needs,
but her writing for George Thomson is anglicised. “Volunteer’s Song of 1803” is free of
any Scotch expressions, while “Woo’d and Married and a’” is filled with a plethora of
purely Scotch “wordies.” Most of the songs in Works have subtitles that explain her
purpose for example, “A Song, (Written for Mr. Struther’s Collection of Songs)” or
another entitled “A Song, (Written at Mr. Thomson’s request as a Kind of Introduction to
his Irish Melodies).” Margaret Carhart notes:

“The majority of these songs were new words for familiar Scotch, Irish, or Welsh
melodies, or were adaptations of old songs. To the former class belongs The Wee
Pickle Tow; to the latter Woo ’d and Married and a’ and Fy, let us a’ to the
Wedding, both of which were freed from all coarseness,” Several songs were
composed especially for definite books, as It was on a morning for Struther’s The
Harp of Caledonia, and A Sailor’s Song21 for Galt’s Musical Selections. Most of
the anthologies of the Victorian era and several contemporary collections contain
specimens of her best songs. The Maid of Llanwellyn was set to music by Charles
H. Purday, and sung by Mrs. E. Sheppard. It was published in New York City. 0
swiftly glides the bonnie boat was ‘arranged for the Piano forte by J. C. Greene,'

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21 The DLB 93 shows the manuscript for “A Sailor’s Song.” The poem was contributed to Galt’s Musical
Selections (HM 41083; it is available at the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. (Ross 10-11)
and was printed and sold in New York in 1827. (Carhart 182)

Additionally, she cites the following journals, regarding Baillie’s popularity and influence on music in the Romantic era:

The *Eclectic Review* rates [her songs] as 'only inferior to those of Burns—superior to those of Haynes Bayly, and Moore, and quite equal to those of Sir W. Scott and Campbell. Need we speak of *The Gowan Glitters on the Sward, Saw ye Johnny Coming?, Tam o’ the Lin*, or the *Weary punned o’ tow?* Every Scotchman in the world, worthy of the name, knows these by heart—while, perhaps, thousands are ignorant that they are by Joanna Baillie.' [In the *Athenæum*, Jan. 1851 Carhart quotes:] These songs ‘immediately obtained an honourable place in the minstrelsies of her native kingdom. Simple and graceful, animated by warm affections, *Fy, let us a’ to the Wedding, Saw ye Johnny, It fell on a morning, Woo’d and Married* maintain popularity among all classes of Scotsmen through the world.’ Equally high praise is given them by the *Athenæum*, as ‘the freshest and sweetest of their kind in any language... It is something to have... enriched her own country’s song-book with songs which have been given to the greatest of our male minstrels one after the other because of the mastery and vigour of their music’ (Carhart 180).

The journal commentary stands on its own as a testimonial to Baillie’s lyrical output and success, but Carhart’s quotation from the *Quarterly Review* is missing some important information. Not all of the criticism is positive. The *Quarterly Review* offers the following:

We should say that [her songs] have a forced air, as if the writer had set about indicting them with no genius but that of patriotism to aid her. They are not so much Scotch-as we understand Burns, Hogg, Ramsay, Ferguson, and the inestimable, unowned minstrelsy of the elder day-as mere English verses purposely dashed here and there with words only in use beyond the Tweed. They appear to us as stiff and uncouth as Burns’ attempts in serious English. Indeed it would have been little less than a miracle if the writer of *De Monfort* had preserved or attained the spirit—the knack—of the genuine Scotch song,—a species of poetry unique, and not admitting exportation, having a simple point, a pathetic terseness, and a musical brilliancy of phrase, not imitable by dint of talent, and of which we see no traces in the attempts before us. (QR LXVII 447–48)

The *Eclectic Review* and the *Athenæum*’s shared positive view deeply contrasts with the *Quarterly Review*’s caustic disapproval. The first two journals show no Neoclassical leanings, and the articles were written in 1851, late enough to provide some critical
distance and time for Joanna Baillie’s name to accompany more of her songs in print. 

Writers looking at Baillie’s contributions over the span of her life tended to see that the body of her musical work was substantial. Thomson’s collections were not completed until 1841 and *Works* was published in 1851 so Baillie’s name was only intermittently connected to the songs she wrote.

In contrast, the *Quarterly Review* critic, in pages that preceded the above quotation, was scathing about “the principles of dramatic poetry laid down in her [Baillie’s] various prefaces,” wishing that the prefaces had been left out (QR 447). Immediately following the commentary on her songs there is a strongly negative reaction regarding a time when Joanna Baillie was asked to compose an entire hymnody for the church of the Kirk. That project was ultimately dropped; the critic may be justified in liberally criticising the peculiarity of such a notion, but it appears that his religious fervour obliterated further consideration of Baillie’s musical contributions. The popularity of Baillie’s prefatory writing and songs has been well established by other critics, therefore Margaret Carhart’s quotation from the *Quarterly Review* on its own leaves out bias that may have affected Baillie’s critical reception.

**The Lyrics Proper**

The songs should be considered as a two-pronged subgenre; on the one hand they are related to Joanna Baillie’s Romantic poetry celebrating the quotidian in unsophisticated language. Her songs are imbued with the shadings of character that offer psychological immediacy through humble and familiar experience. On the other hand, Baillie is a participant in the Scots folk tradition. Regardless of what genre she writes in, her poetic
theory is woven into her verse. Whether written in English or Scots dialect Baillie’s Songs find fascination with oddities in the lives of ordinary people. Her comic renderings are not quite caricature, for they remain realistic enough to remind us of people we know. The Scottish Songstress laughs at the ironies of human behaviour, while offering country wisdom and unaffected moral truths. She remains a Romanticist insisting that love triumphs over poverty provided that family, community, and church are there to shore up the deficiencies. Some of her characters are purely figures of fun, and the lines between sinner and saint fade in the murkiness of misguided judgement. This sample of her songs shows off some of her most lively and personable lyrics.

Woo’d and Married and a’

(Version Taken from an Old Song of that Name)

"Woo’d" is a poem in the Scottish dialect, and as such, would not grace the pages of one of George Thomson’s collections, but his competition would absorb Doric (rustic dialect) for its own specialised market. Writing of this nature appealed to Baillie’s nationalistic tendencies. "Woo’d" is a story of a charming, yet somewhat vacuous young bride, on her wedding day. Baillie’s narrator sounds like the town gossip reporting his or her version of the young couple’s pending union, yet each stanza represents another character’s view. We hear from mother, father, Johnie and lastly the bride herself. Though Baillie maintains a jovial tone she generates feelings of love and pride overcoming any lack of worldly goods. The young couple have nothing, but each other and so the question is posed: "Is she not very well off?"

The bride she is winsome and bonnie,

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22 Please note that the following translations are my own.

23 charming
Her hair it is snooded\textsuperscript{24} sae sleek,
And faithfu’ and kind is her Johnnie,
   Yet fast fa’ the tears on her cheek.
New pearlins are cause of her sorrow,
   New pearlins and plenishing too,
The bride that has a’ to borrow,
   Has e’en right mickle\textsuperscript{25} ado.
Woo’d and married and a’!
   Woo’d and married and a’!
Is na she very wee aff\textsuperscript{26}
   To be woo’d and married at a’?

The conversation that follows is between mother and father, though the bride and groom are also present. The mother feels her daughter is as out of touch because she is distracted by the pride and excitement of getting married, and as she reminisces she tries to reassure her girl with some sage advice. Baillie keeps the story tied to the land with country philosophy and metaphors. The economic questions loom in the background as the mother offers a spinner’s wisdom, reminding her daughter that the gift you earn is of the greatest value. The story is comically told, yet it still rests on universal experiences and moral truths.

Her mither\textsuperscript{27} then hastily spak\textsuperscript{28}—
   The lassie is glaikit\textsuperscript{29} wi’ pride;
In my pouch I had never a plack
   On the day when I was a bride.
E’en tak’ to your wheel, and be clever,
   And draw out your thread in the sun;
The gear that is gifted, it never
   Will last like the gear that is won.
Woo’d and married and a’,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} held back
\item \textsuperscript{25} big
\item \textsuperscript{26} well off
\item \textsuperscript{27} mother
\item \textsuperscript{28} spoke
\item \textsuperscript{29} foolish, or not all there
Wi' havings and tocher sae sma'! 30
I think ye are very weel aff
To be woo'd and married at a'!”

“Toot, toot!” quo’ her gray-headed fathert 31
“She’s less o’ a bride than a bairn; 32
She’s ta’en like a cowt frae 33 the heather,
Wi’ sense and discretion to learn.
Half husband, I trow, 34 and half daddy,
As humour inconsistently leans;
The chiel maun 35 be patient and steady,
That yokes wi’ a mate in her teens.
A kerchief sae douce 36 and sae neat,
O’er her locks that the winds used blaw,
I’m baith 37 like to laugh and to greet,
When I think o’ her married at a’.”

The sense of urgency about this wedding is solved by the father’s comment — “half husband,” “half daddy.” He does not know whether to laugh or cry. Though he has reservations he is relieved there is going to be a wedding. Baillie is mocking about the truth of human nature. The scene is played out like a ritual where everyone knows what is going on, they just do not want to admit it. The groom reassures his bride that he loves her just as she is, and asks her if she has any doubts about marriage? Baillie’s description is visual and character-driven. The reader can feel the young woman’s restlessness with something so simple as the twirling of the tag on her lace.

Then out spak the wily bridegroom,

30 With havings a touch so small
31 father
32 child
33 from
34 believe
35 child must
36 sweet or respectable
37 both
Weel\textsuperscript{38} waled were his wordies, I ween—
"I'm rich, though my coffer be toom,
Wi' the blinks o' your bonnie blue een;
I'm prouder o' thee by my side,
Though thy ruffles or ribbons be few,
Than if Kate o' the Croft were my bride,
Wi' purfles\textsuperscript{39} and pearlins anew.
Dear and dearest of ony,
Ye're woo'd and bookit\textsuperscript{40} and a';
And do you think scorn o' your Johnnie,
And grieve to be married at a'?\textsuperscript{41}

She turned, and she blush'd and she smiled,
And she lookit\textsuperscript{42} sae bashfully doun;
The pride o' her heart was beguiled,
And she play'd wi' the sleeves o' her goun;\textsuperscript{43}
She twirled the tag o' her lace,
And she nippit her boddice sae blue;
Syne\textsuperscript{44} blinkit sae sweet in his face,
And aff like a maukin she flew.
Woo'd and married and a',
Wi' Johnnie to roose\textsuperscript{45} her and a'!
She thinks hersel' very weel aff,
To be woo'd and married at a'!
\textit{(Works 817)}

Baillie has taken Fergusson's early poetry of the Edinburgh streets and moved it to the
country. Like Burns, her songs celebrate the humour and irony of everyday life. The
young woman in her bashful way makes it known to her fellow that she loves him very
much, and he readily reassures and praises her. The song is filled with simple rustic
expressions of genuine feeling, however, Baillie addresses the issues of pregnancy before

\textsuperscript{38} Well
\textsuperscript{39} ruffles on clothing
\textsuperscript{40} booked
\textsuperscript{41} looked
\textsuperscript{42} gown
\textsuperscript{43} long since
\textsuperscript{44} to praise or to flatter
marriage, and love and community as a means of triumphing over poverty. By the song’s conclusion, the reader too is reassured that, indeed, she is “very weel aff.”

from Hooly and Fairly

This Scots poem is a conventional lament that stretches the comic imagination. The speaker is a sardonic and moaning husband who is either long married, or the bloom is long off the rose. He is on an exaggerated rant about every conceivable kind of negative wifely behaviour. Baillie draws on Medieval tradition. There are minor echoes of Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” from The Canterbury Tales: the woes of marriage, and wifely disobedience towards husband, church, and figures of authority. The husband in “Hooly and Fairly” complains of his wife’s drinking, gluttony, over-spending, fighting, idleness, and sour tongue. Baillie’s song is a spoof on human folly, misplaced manners, and forgotten morals; however, there is always a tinge of truth peeking out behind the humour.

Oh neighbours! What had I a-do for to marry!
My wife she drinks posset and wine o’ Canary!
And ca’s me a niggardly, throw-gabbit cairly,
O, gin my wife wad drink hooly and fairly!
Hooly and fairly, hooly and fairly,
O, gin my wife wad drink hooly and fairly!

I’ the kirk sic commotion last sabbath she made,
Wi’ babs o’ red roses and breast-knots o’erlaid!
The Dominie stickit the psalm very nearly:

45 a drink curdled with ale or beer
46 stingy
47 a traveler or a vagabond
48 if
49 church minister
O, gin my wife wad dress hooly and fairly!
Hooly and fairly, hooly and fairly,
O, gin my wife wad dress hooly and fairly!

Baillie waxes somewhere between farce and tongue-in-cheek. Somehow neighbours, church, the distracted minister, and a fashion faux pas keep believability alive in this mockery of human nature.

A word o' guid counsel or grace she'll hear none;
She bandies the Elders, and mocks at Mess John,
While back in his teeth his own text she flings rarely

O, gin my wife wad speak hooly and fairly!
Hooly and fairly, hooly and fairly,
O, gin my wife wad speak hooly and fairly!
I wish I were single, I wish I were freed;
I wish I were doited, I wish I were dead,
Or she in the mous, to dement me nae mair,51 lay!

What does it 'vail to cry hooly and fairly!
Hooly and fairly, hooly and fairly,
Wasting my breath to cry hooly and fairly!
(Works 819)

In the last couple of stanzas the husband's credibility slips. He has too many complaints for all of them to be true, and he comes closer to blarney in his wish to leave this life. All in all, he wants the world to say you poor sod, and for all the attention he is getting he is "wasting" his "breath" crying "holy and fairly, holy and fairly!" Baillie atypically represents the woman who drinks too much. The wife is the centre of attention in a time when women were quietly in the background.

**Tam o' the Lin**

In this song the omniscient narrator tells the audience of a fearless warrior with more pride than good sense. There is a dark cloud that follows this fellow, for everything

---

50 good

51 more
he touches fails miserably. Baillie leaves the reader wondering, is he responsible for one
disaster after another, or is this just his lot in life?

Tam o' the Lin was fu' o' pride,
And his weapon he girt to his valorous side,
A scabbard o' leather wi' deil52-haet within, —
"Attack me wha daur!53 quo' Tam o' the Lin.

Tam o' the Lin he bought a mear,54
She cost him five shilling, she was na' dear,
Her back stuck up and her sides fell in, —
"A firey yaud,55 quo' Tam o' the Lin.

Tam o' the Lin he courted a may,
She stared at him sourly and said him nay,
But he stroke down his jerkin and cock'd up his chin, —
"She aims at a laird,56 quo' Tam o' the Lin.

... ... ...

Tam o' the Lin would show his lare,
And scann'd o'er the book wi' a wiselike stare,
He mutter'd confusingly but didna begin,—
"This is the Dominie's business," quo' Tam o' the Lin.

Tam o' the Lin he married a wife,
And she was the torment, the plague o' his life;
She lays sae about her, and makes sic a din,57 —
"She frightens the bailie,58 quo' Tam o' the Lin.

... ...

Tam o' the Lin lay down to die,
And his friends wishter'd softly and woefully,

52 devil
53 who dares
54 mare
55 sprightly or nimble
56 lord
57 such a noise
58a sheriff's officer
We'll buy you some masses to scour away your sin,—
"And drink at my latewake," quo' Tam o' the Lin.
(Works 821)

Baillie paints a hopeless character. He dismisses rejection by the first woman he courts, because "She aims at a laird." In all his disasters he never asks "why me?" Nor is he liable to find out. He is not going to learn the ways of the world from books, for reading is the "Dominie's business," (a school master in this sense). He chooses a wife who even "frightens the bailie," leaving us to wonder, what is her history? The comic ending shows how his crazy life is going to be the death of him. The song mocks the individual who cannot look outside him or herself. Tam o' the Lin remains cursed by his own poor judgement; he only hopes his friends "will drink to him at his wake." There is never a thought towards what might have been done differently. Though Baillie herself never took a drink, in "Tam o' the Lin," she seems to have mastered the full effect of the pub song. Although the subject is gloom and doom, the exaggeration of the protagonist's trials is done in a merry and comical style. In many of Baillie's works, including this one, "pride" is treated as a form of male machismo which translates to action without thought of consequence.

**Maid of Llanwellyn**

(called "Song, Written for a Welsh Melody" in Works)

In this poem Baillie puts a Romantic spin on pastoral convention. She meets her poetic needs focussing on rural life, while addressing George Thomson's Neoclassical bent, by using a popular classical model. Baillie designs the song for Thomson's market, keeping it anglicised with the exception of the rare generic Welsh name to give the song apparent authenticity. She reiterates her theme: love overcoming economic disadvantage.

I've no sheep on the mountains
Nor boat on the lake
Nor coin in my coffer
To keep me awake
Nor corn in my garner,
Nor fruit on my tree
Yet the maid of Llanwellyn
Smiles sweetly on me.

Rich Owen will tell you,
With eyes full of scorn
Threadbare is my coat,
And my hosen are torn
Scoff on, my rich Owen,
For faint is thy glee
When the maid of Llanwellyn
Smiles sweetly on me.

The farmer rides proudly
To market and fair
And the clerk at the ale house
Still claims the great chair
But of all our proud fellows
The proudest I'll be
While the maid of Llanwellyn
Smiles sweetly on me.
(Baillie On line) 59

The speaker offers his monologue of pride, expressing his love. "Rich Owen" and torn "hosen" are dropped in the 1851 version, removing some of the exaggerated economic divisiveness, which may have necessitated Baillie's correction. For a short poem, there are at least ten references to financial transaction, or financial status. Despite the subject matter, Baillie is still close to her Scottish predecessors in her use of rural and natural setting — mountain, lake, and country.

Even by this small sampling it is plain to see that Baillie is abiding by her belief in "the infinite variety and shadings of nature." The imbibing wife, and the near-child bride, pregnant on her way to the alter are atypically present, and we as readers feel that we have

59 This version of "Maid of Llanwellyn" is available at two Internet addresses. I have yet to find a hard copy. This version differs from Works, making several more references to wealth.
met them. We have an inkling of their characters when Baillie's song is done.
Chapter 6

Domestic Poems, with Special Attention to “Lines to Agnes Baillie”

Two Domestic Pieces

Baillie’s domestic verse is the embodiment of her quest for recognition—recognition of women in positive and negative experiences of all facets of life, especially later in life when women as literary characters tend to be invisible. Baillie’s poetry deflates conduct literature’s notions of domesticity as related in the following: “Home must, if possible, be always rendered pleasant to its master; and a wife must be amiable in the eyes of her husband, [wrote Jane West in 1806] (Todd 207). Even radical literature tends to focus on earlier stages of life, for example Wollstonecraft’s “Thoughts on the Education of Daughters” (1787). Baillie attempts to restore balance by debunking the myth of the Dame passé. As a revisionist she writes about the under-represented such as the senior members of society, integrating them back into a world view. The domestic pieces in this chapter are both moving and memorable for the genuineness of emotion depicted.

To Mrs. Siddons

Baillie writes several of her poems for the expressed purpose of debunking socially accepted myths and stereotypes. She periodically writes about survival and preservation of dignity throughout the stages of life. Her English drifts into Shakespearean accents. The question she poses is, How does one handle the demise of fame? Baillie pays tribute to Sarah Siddons (1755-1831), known as the great English tragedienne. She makes use of this poem to reiterate her theory that drama is egalitarian and classless in its potential to reach an audience. When Baillie writes “While age and youth, of high and low degree, / “In sympathy were joined, beholding thee,” it is a double-edged sword. On one hand she
refers to the audience being moved by “sympathetic curiosity” due to Mrs. Siddons’s
excellent acting; on the other hand, Mrs. Siddons can also use “sympathetic curiosity” to
benefit from Baillie’s experience of demise after fame. The two ladies can look to one
another’s experience: Siddons as an actress specialised in raising the passions is comparable
to Joanna Baillie’s vocation as the poet of the passions. Both women go through similar
experiences in art, and in life.

GIFTED of heaven! who hast, in days gone by,
Moved every heart, delighted every eye;
While age and youth, of high and low degree,
In sympathy were joined, beholding thee,
As in Drama’s ever changing scene,
Thou heldst thy splendid state, our tragic queen!
No barriers there thy fair domains confined,
Thy sovereign sway was o’er the human mind;
And, in the triumph of that witching hour,
Thy lofty bearing well became thy power.

...  ...  

Baillie’s theory of tragic passion is recalled in the line “Thy sovereign sway was o’er the
human mind;” and later she refers to Siddons “Whose lines, where nature’s brightest traces
shine” referring to natural delineation of the subtleties of human character, in the same
manner as Baillie has outlined in the “Introductory Discourse.”

Baillie comments that those who have heard Mrs. Siddons read the comic passages
of Shakespeare know that she is nearly as “remarkable” and “delightful” in those passages
as she is in those of the “grave” and “tragic character” (829). In modern terms Baillie
described Siddons as a victim of type casting, confined to tragic roles. Baillie relates:

Mrs. Siddons has been almost entirely confined to tragedy partly, I believe, from a
kind of bigotry on the side of the public, which inclines it to confine poet, painter or
actor, to that department of their art in which they have first been acknowledged to
excel, and partly from the cast of her features, and the majesty of her figure being
peculiarly suited to Tragedy. (Works n. 829).

Mrs. Siddons is the subject discussed, but the potential for bigotry is universal.
Baillie candidly writes about changing her friend’s attitude regarding aging, and the demise of fame. She uses especially positive metaphors; for example, “moonlight radiance” describes the quality of Mrs. Siddons’s personality in later life.

But though time’s lengthen’d shadows o’er thee glide,
And pomp of regal state is cast aside,
Think not the glory of thy course is spent,
There’s moonlight radiance to thy evening lent,
That, to the mental world can never fade,
Till all who saw thee, are in the grave laid,
Thy graceful form still moves in nightly dreams,
And what thou wast, to the lull’d sleeper seems:
While feverish fancy oft doth fondly trace
Within her curtain’d couch thy wonderous face.
Yea; and to many a wight, bereft and lone,
In musing hours, though all to the unknown,
Soothing his earthly course of good and ill,
With all thy potent charm, thou actest still.
(Works 829)

Baillie praises her friend; a good performance makes for cherished memories for herself, and those who have seen her performances in the theatre. Baillie’s description of Mrs. Siddons’s accomplishment reflects her Romantic values, strongly rooted in imagination, dream, wonder and spirituality, echoed in life beyond this “earthly course.” Baillie, as a Romanticist and a feminist, writes socially corrective verse that represents and gives value to characters not ordinarily present in literature.

Lines to Agnes Baillie on her Birthday

Though Joanna Baillie wrote many domestic poems this last piece is probably her most celebrated, and it involves her most important relationship. Joanna Baillie’s sister Agnes was her life long companion. Both women remained unmarried, and together they shared in success and tragedy. They had nursed their mother until she passed away in 1806, and although sad, that time marked a period of stability for the ladies. They settled in Hampstead for the remainder of their lives, and “by this domestic circle of the highest
moral purity, the happiness of life in its mid course was increased” (Works xvii). There are only hints of the sisters’ social itinerary, but they were known to entertain, and be entertained by the period’s people of literature and science. Agnes was well read, and her vast knowledge added to her attractiveness as a good conversationalist. In their later years the sisters were free to travel, and to be more active in social life. They both enjoyed great longevity, especially given the period. Baillie’s nephew notes that Joanna was nearly eighty years of age when she wrote “Lines to Agnes Baillie on her Birthday:"

The lines which have most claim upon the feelings, are those which are addressed to her sister, the generous, affectionate, cheering friend, the high-spirited and cultivated woman, who had been the partner of her joys and cares from her cradle; to look upon whom was to view her own past existence, to recall another self, one who had in equal measure shared every change, grief, anxiety, and triumph. (Works xviii)

In most anthologies containing Baillie’s work “Lines to Agnes” is presented in its entirety, and the same honour is offered here.

**Line to Agnes Baillie on her Birthday**  
(Untitled in the Quarterly Review)

‘Dear Agnes, gleam’d with joy, and dash’d with tears,  
O’er us have glided almost sixty years  
Since we on Bothwell’s bonny braes were seen,  
By those whose eyes long closed in death have been,  
Two tiny imps, who scarcely stoop’d to gather  
The slender harebell, on the purple heather;  
No taller than the fox-glove’s spikey stem,  
That dew of morning studs with silvery gem.  
That every butterfly that cross’d our view  
With joyful shout was greeted as it flew,  
And moth and lady-bird and beetle bright  
In sheeny gold were each a wondrous sight.  
Then as we paddled bare-foot, side by side,  
Among the sunny shallows of the Clyde,  

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60 [JB]* The Manse of Bothwell was at some considerable distance from the Clyde, but the two little girls were sometimes sent there in summer to bathe and wade about.
Minnows or spotted par with twinkling fin,
Swimming in mazy rings the pool within,
A thrill of gladness through our bosoms sent,
Seen in the power of early wonderment.

‘A long perspective to my mind appears,
Looking behind me to that line of years,
And yet through every stage I still can trace
Thy vision’d form, from childhood’s morning grace
To woman’s early bloom, changing how soon!
To the expressive glow of woman’s noon;
And now to what thou art, in comely age,
Active and ardent. Let what will engage
Thy present moment, whether hopeful seeds
In garden-plat thou sow, or noxious weeds
From the fair flower remove, or ancient lore
In chronicle or legend rare explore,
Or on the parlour heath with kitten play,
Stroking its tabby sides, or take thy way
To gain with hasty steps some cottage door,
On helpful errand to the neighbouring poor—
Active and ardent — to my fancy’s eye
Thou still art young in spite of time gone by.
Though oft of patience brief and temper keen,
Well may it please me, in life’s latter scene,
To think what now thou art, and long to me hast been.

‘Twas thou who wood’st me first to look
Upon the page of printed book,
That thing by me abhorred, and with address
Didst win me from my thoughtless idleness,
When all too old become with bootless haste
In fitful sports the precious time to waste.
Thy love of tale and story was the stroke
At which my dormant fancy first awoke,
And ghosts and witches in my busy brain
Arose in sombre show, a motley train.
This new-found path attempting, proud was I,
Lurking approval on thy face to spy,
Or hear thee say, as grew thy roused attention,
“What! is this story all thy own invention?”

‘Then, as advancing through this mortal span,
Our intercourse with this mixed world began,
Thy fairer face and sprightlier courtesy
(A truth that from my youthful vanity
Lay not concealed) did for the sisters twain,
Where’er we went, the greater favour gain;
While, but for thee, vex’d with its tossing tide,
I from the busy world had shrunk aside.
And now in later years, with better grace
Thou help'st me still to hold a welcome place
With those whom nearer neighbourhood has made
The friendly cheerers of our evening shade.

‘With thee my humours, whether grave or gay,
Or gracious or untoward, have their way.
Silent if dull, oh precious privilege!
I sit by thee; or if, call'd from this page
Of some huge, ponderous tome which, but thyself,
None e'er had taken from its dusty shelf.
Thou read me curious passages to speed
The winter night, I take but little heed
And thankless say, “I cannot listen now,”
‘Tis no offence; albeit much do I owe
To these, thy nightly offerings of affection,
Drawn from thy ready talent for selection;
For still it seem’d in thee a natural gift,
The letter’d grain from letter’d chaff to sift.

‘By daily use and circumstance endear’d,
Things are of value that once appear’d
Of no account, and without notice past,
Which o’er dull life a simple cheering cast;
To hear thy morning steps the stair descending,
Thy voice with other sounds domestic blending;
After each stated nightly absence met,
To see thee by the morning table set,
Pouring from smoky spout the amber stream
Which sends from saucer’d cup its fragrant steam;
To see thee cheerly on the threshold stand,
On summer morn, with trowel in thy hand,
For garden-work prepared; in winter’s gloom
From thy cold noon-day walk to see thee come,
In furry garment lapt, with spatter’d feet,
And by the fire resume thy wonted seat;
Ay, even o’er things like these, soothed age has thrown
A sober charm they did not always own:
As winter-hoarfrost makes minutest spray
Of bush or hedge-weed sparkle to the day
In magnitude and beauty, which bereav’d
Of such investment, eye had ne’er perceived.

‘The change of good and evil to abide,
As partners link’d, long have we side by side
Our earthly journey held, and who can say
How near the end of our united way?
By nature’s course not distant: — sad and reft
Will she remain, — the lonely pilgrim left.
If thou be taken first, who can to me
Like sister, friend, and home-companion be?
Or who, of wonted daily kindness shorn,
Shall feel such loss, or mourn as I shall mourn?
And I should be fated first to leave
This earthly house, though gentle friends may grieve,
And he above them all, so truly proved
A friend and brother, long and justly loved,
There is no living wight, of woman born,
Who then shall mourn for me as thou wilt mourn.

‘Thou ardent, liberal spirit! quickly feeling
The touch of sympathy, and kindly dealing
With sorrow or distress, for ever sharing
The unhoarded might, nor for to-morrow caring, —
Accept, dear Agnes, on thy natal day,
An unadorn’d but not a careless lay,
Nor think this tribute to thy virtues paid
From tardy love proceeds, though long delay’d.
Words of affection, howsoever expressed,
The latest spoken still are deem’d the best:
Few are the measured rhymes I now may write;
These are, perhaps, the last I shall endite.’
(QR LXVII 450-52)

**Commentary on “Agnes”**

In addition to “Agnes” being a beautiful tribute to her sister, the poem is the embodiment of Joanna Baillie’s Romantic theories of the imagination. Baillie gives us a clue to the degree of difficulty composing such a deeply emotional and heartfelt poem with her offering of “an unadorned but not careless lay.” Much of Baillie’s philosophy of life and art is invested in this poem. She reminisces about her sister, and their life together, but for the moment her intensity of feeling comes from wondering which of them will pass away first, and how the one who is left will manage with her loss. These are feelings of psychological immediacy that seldom find their way into text. Her memories of sixty years ago so deeply inform her poetic imagination that at the age of eighty she can still transpose every living and breathing aspect of nature into her verse. She recalls the “power of early
wonderment” when she, and Agnes shared the passion of young explorers discovering a new world. In Baillie’s experience “Fancy” is a power that allows vision beyond concrete reality. In Joanna’s power to see beyond the physical, Agnes is forever young: “to my fancy’s eye / Thou still art young in spite of time gone by.” Agnes’s very character is a symbol of domestic harmony. Their home is free of rigidity, and governed by agrarian cycles rather than imposed systems of order. Agnes is a gardener, even in “the winter’s gloom.” Her ability to see life and beauty in the winter months is akin to Romantic perception.

As winter-hoarfrost makes minutest spray
Of bush or hedge-weed sparkle to the day
In magnitude and beauty, which bereav’d
Of such investment, eye had ne’er perceived.

Joanna Baillie’s verse portraiture is a form of Romantic impressionism. Her poem gathers together the details of a lifetime, which the reader collects and receives as an impression. Emotional feeling deepens from romantic symbols of nature, age, grief and joy. Her vision of the garden runs parallel to a Romantic life approach—a Romantic approach to art.

The birthday poem defines Agnes’s role in Joanna Baillie’s imaginative development. The gardener metaphor is also applied to Agnes’s intellectual pursuits, where “weeding” is compared to “reading.” In her perusal of books Agnes removes Neoclassical works so that favour of Medieval and old Scots writing might flourish:

Thy present moment, whether hopeful seeds
In garden-plat thou sow, or noxious weeds
From the fair flower remove, or ancient lore
In chronicle or legend rare explore,

The image of Agnes as judicious reader is repeated later in the poem with the line: “The letter’d grain from letter’d chaff to sift.” The poem reminds the reader that Baillie was a tom-boy whose love of sport far outweighed her love of reading. It was Agnes who encouraged her love of tale, and story. Joanna’s childhood fascination with ghosts,
witches, and Scottish lore inspired her to tell Gothic stories of her own. Agnes’s “dusty”
books are the source of Joanna’s old Scots influence, and the sister’s love of lore and
legend are “hopeful seeds.”

Baillie’s “Agnes” offers a feminist twist. She radically rewrites the eighteenth
century stereotype of female old age as wrinkled and sterile. The stages of a woman’s life
are all positively described: childhood’s morning grace, the woman’s early bloom, woman’s
noon, and comely age. Baillie repeats that her sister is “Active and ardent,” and in her
attitudes and ways she has no age. Baillie subtly weaves in connectivity of emotion and
community in her verse. Agnes does not just help the poor, she “gain[s] hasty steps [to]
some cottage door, / On helpful errand to the neighbouring poor.” Her vitality is in
knowing people on a personal level. Baillie freely admits that her sister is the social and
outgoing member of the two:

    Thou help’st me still to hold a welcome place
    With those whom nearer neighbourhood has made
    The friendly cheerers of our evening shade.

The emphasis, however, remains on community, and the importance of relationships.

Although female friendship is important, their outside relationships are not gender-specific.

Agnes is bright, intelligent and capable, “though oft of patience brief and temper keen.”

The sophisticated and integral member of her community defies every attribute typically
applied to women of the octogenarian set—then, and now.

    Baillie’s Romantic sense of spirituality is defined in her closing stanzas to Agnes:

        ‘Thou ardent, liberal spirit! quickly feeling
        The touch of sympathy, and kindly dealing
        With sorrow or distress, for ever sharing
        The unhoarded might, nor for to-morrow caring,

    The few lines about the qualities of Agnes’s person echo Baillie’s criteria for good writing.

    Baillie’s list includes the importance of passion, political conviction that supports
egalitarianism, and freedom from poverty, a “touch of sympathy” refers to sympathetic
curiosity in the “Introductory Discourse” as well as the importance of sympathy in one’s
life-approach. Additionally, spiritual strength is fostered by a life lived with immediacy.
There are shades of pantheism in Baillie’s universe, but ultimately she and Agnes live by the
Bible. Each is a “pilgrim,” and “he above all” is Jesus. Their “earthly house” represents
the physical body, a body that one day will be left behind. And it is by an act of the
imagination that the poet and person connect to spirituality. “Agnes” is a wonderful
tribute to Baillie’s sister; it is also an expression of her poetics, philosophy, psychology,
and religion.
Chapter 7

Baillie’s Critical Reception
&
Concluding Notes

By way of conclusion I would like to offer some contemporary critical responses that help to explain Joanna Baillie’s erasure from the literary canon. The following chapter contains a critical analysis of the Quarterly Review’s article “Fugitive Verses. By Joanna Baillie. London 1840,” as well as some contemporary literary advertisements, and the Monthly Review’s article on the Metrical Legends. The Quarterly Review presents a difficult article that is extremely contradictory, at times praising and rejecting in the same breath, while much of Joanna Baillie’s theoretical material is ignored. It is useful because it is one of the few articles that addresses Baillie at length, and it is representative of the type of critical response that many early Romantic poets experienced. Additionally, the latter half of the chapter offers a reading of poems written prior to 1790, revealing their contribution to the ground work that allowed Joanna Baillie eloquence and understanding in the formation of Romantic literary principles as expressed in the “Introductory Discourse.”

In 1840 the Quarterly Review reluctantly critiqued Joanna Baillie’s Fugitive Verses (London 1840). Their critic reports that the journal recently put out an edition about “some of the most distinguished authoresses of our country” (QR LXVII 437). “They had decided to omit Baillie,” and though they neglect to state it clearly, the fifteen page assessment of Baillie’s literary influence is a veiled apology to those of the Quarterly Review’s audience who demanded her recognition. Amidst the hyperbole the critic acknowledges “Baillie’s enduring, though not much written about fame.” She is praised for her place amongst the league of “women poets” (QR 437). The Quarterly Review notes:

In that entire and wonderful revolution of the public taste in works of the
imagination, and indeed of literature generally, which contrasts this century with the
whole or latter half of the preceding, . . . we must nevertheless principally, and in
the foremost rank, ascribe to the e.g., the arguments, and the influence of William
Wordsworth and Coleridge, — in this great movement Joanna Baillie bore a
subordinate, but most useful and effective part. (QR 437)

The article contains many truths, but at times it reads like the transcript of a hostile
witness. What was slated as a critique of *Fugitive Verses* was a critical reaction to
Baillie’s literary career. In the prefaces to her plays and poems Joanna Baillie routinely
makes reference to her lack of advanced education, and her feelings of inadequacy as a
poet. The *Quarterly Review* misses no opportunity to throw these comments back at her.
Despite inconsistencies the critic offers insight. He notes that some of Baillie’s success is
owed to “the influence of better portions of Burns’s poetry, but chiefly to the spontaneous
action of her own forceful genius, that she was able at once, and apparently without effort,
to come forth the mistress of a masculine style of thought and diction, which constituted
then, as it still constitutes, the characteristic merit of her writings, and which at the time
contributed most beneficially to the already commenced reformation of the literary
principles of the country” (underlining mine) (QR 437).

The *Quarterly Review*’s assessment, though complimentary, is not completely
accurate. When considering Joanna Baillie’s influence on Romanticism it cannot be
forgotten that from 1790 to 1802 her publications were anonymous. Baillie kept her
writing a secret as long as she could. Most women writers were not taken seriously about
critical issues and, in order for Baillie to maintain credibility and have influence she donned
the guise of a male persona using male personal pronouns. She replicates the attributes of
masculine style to gain the acceptance of her readership. Additionally, anonymity forces
the reader to consider what makes this work different from known works without the
incumbrance of preconceived notions about the author. The changes that Baillie wanted to
see in literature included a departure from Neoclassical tradition, the adoption of Romantic
principles, inclusion of a feminist agenda, discussion of social and economic reform, and nationalist and theological considerations. There were negative repercussions to her critical reception due to the controversial nature of some of these issues.

Baillie, as an anonymous poet, had to separate herself from her work, and in essence the work had to be capable of defending itself. She had to defuse potential criticism in a changing and potentially hostile environment. Her situation as a woman writer determined her need to defend her work in her absence, putting her in an entirely different position from that of William Wordsworth who followed her. Her seventy-two page “Introductory Discourse” prepared the public for poetry about ordinary life that represented men and women speaking and acting faithfully to nature. Through the poet’s observation of rustic manners came from understanding unaffected passion; those gentle strokes of nature (ID 14) were fully delineated by true unsophisticated language (ID 20). Baillie wrote the pros and cons of her poetics in an attempt to out argue the critical establishment, while educating and encouraging the reader in the ways of Modern poetry. Wordsworth’s five paragraph “Advertisement” was not as successful as Baillie’s “Discourse.” The Quarterly Review notes: “Many, whose yet unyielded prejudice made them reject or even ridicule the ‘Lyrical Ballads,’ were unconsciously won over to the adoption of the essential principles of the literary reformation then in progress, by works in so different a form, and coming from so opposite a quarter”(QR 438). The Quarterly Review’s readership has to be very familiar with the “Introductory Discourse” to decode the convoluted text that follows in their article. The critic hints at criticism Baillie wrote without expressing her complete thoughts. She was confrontational about critics keeping writers entrenched in Neoclassical poetry. Her argument about over-reliance on the classical poetry of the past is what the Quarterly Review critic refers to in the following:

“The very defects of the views and arguments with which the authoress — not
herself fully sensible of the part she was in truth acting — accompanied her works, made her less an object of suspicion to those whose literary animosity had been provoked by the determined, unevadable protest and manifesto of William Wordsworth, in his celebrated Preface . . .” (QR 438)

Wordsworth’s celebrated Preface was not offered to the public until 1802, and Baillie did not imitate Neoclassical verse. Her mentor was Shakespeare, and her contemporary idol was Sir Walter Scott whose affinity to the past was Romantic, and nostalgically historical. Baillie remained true to her theory of natural representation and more “rustically” expressed language. Her period of rejection was similar to Wordsworth’s, but she began dabbling in rustic verses prior to 1790. By 1798 she still maintained that “those works which most strongly characterise human nature in the middling and lower classes of society, where it is to be discovered by stronger and more unequivocal marks, will ever be most popular” (Jonathan Wordsworth 1). Her work was contemporary, though there are reverberations of Shakespeare’s psychological depiction of the passions. She praised Shakespeare highly, therefore echoes from that quarter may have placated the public to a degree.

Baillie was a tactician, and her rhetorical efforts to close loop-holes in her poetics greatly limited the abilities of her potential attackers. People could reject her, but they could not argue with her very well. Creative survival from critics and public who had yet to make the transition to natural and rustic verse required good defensive skills. People were less likely to balk at something new if they were led into it with supportive explanation, and a humble appeal. She did not approve of critics, and she went to great lengths to anticipate their responses, negating them before they occurred. It is not very likely that the Quarterly Review or any other critical journal would celebrate her success at these manoeuvres. However, the success of Baillie’s new critical paradigm was not only of benefit to herself. Her theoretical approach gave readers the tools they needed to more
readily accept similar creative works that followed.

Setting the *Quarterly Review* aside briefly, on the final page of Joanna Baillie’s *Miscellany Plays* (Longman and Co. 1804) the last of six advertisements was for “Lyrical Ballads, with other poems by William Wordsworth.” The publisher collected testimonials to sell Wordsworth’s poetry, but the praise offered is filled with its share of negatives and reluctance. After glowing compliments the *Monthly Review* in June of 1799 wishes to see more poetry from the “same hand, written on more elevated subjects, and in more cheerful disposition” (emphasis added). The *British Critic* in October, 1799 uses similar tact, “We do not often find expressions that we esteem too familiar or deficient in dignity ... and the *British Critic* ‘prefer[s] the simplicity, even of the most unadorned tale in this volume . . .’” Are the critics of these positive testimonials more able to pick apart Wordsworth’s experiment because he did not head them off at the pass as Joanna Baillie did with her “Introductory Discourse?” How much was Wordsworth able to solve by following Baillie’s lead?

The *British Critic* of February 1801 wrote the following of Wordsworth: “Aware that his poems are so materially different from those upon which general approbation is at present bestowed, he has now defended them in a preface of some length; not with the foolish hope of reasoning his readers into the approbation of these particular poems, but as a necessary justification of the species of poetry to which they belong” (emphasis added). The critic’s caustic use of “foolish hope” is directed at the nameless author Joanna Baillie, especially with what follows. In the same quotation Wordsworth echoes Baillie’s claims “declar[ing] himself the poet chiefly of low and rustic life.” The critic’s closing words are Baillie’s verbatim from the “Introductory Discourse,” the only difference is that the subject is Wordsworth, and the word “poem” replaces “play.” “Each separate poem has, as its defined purpose, the development of a feeling, which gives importance to the action and
situation, and not the action or situation to the feeling.”

The Quarterly Review takes up the discussion of Baillie’s influence on the Romantic movement, but there is always a sense of the critic’s reluctant praise. Whether or not these numbers reflect Britain’s demographics in the early 1800s is hard to say, but we are told “... hundreds gradually learned to understand and appreciate the merit of the unsophisticated expression and truthful thought and feeling from [Baillie’s] entertaining Plays ...” (QR 438). The critic returns to his stated duty, which is an assessment of Fugitive Verses.

The characteristic qualities of Mrs. Joanna Baillie’s poetry in her Dramas are, to a considerable extent, to be found in the very charming collection of poems, which, under the title of ‘Fugitive Verses,’ she has with equal good sense and modesty just given to the world61 (underlining mine). Many of these, it appears, have been printed before: but the collection is to us, and probably to the greater part of our readers, almost entirely new. It contains the productions of the poetess in her earliest and latest years, and in all of them we have the same healthful tone, abundance of thought, the same clear and forcible style, frecked with the same petty inaccuracies of language. (QR 446)

At this point the tone of the article is inappropriate. “A summer’s day would suffice for eradicating these teasing weeds, that seem left on purpose to worry the purist; and we heartily wish some poor scholar might be commissioned by Mrs. Joanna to do the work” (QR 446). The errors the critic refers to are the result of Joanna Baillie’s Scottish dialect, that included the abundant usage of “d,” and a host of unfamiliar words. Although Baillie lived in London districts sixty years of her life she retained her Scottish brogue, and in some eyes, possibly to her detriment, she was viewed as a foreigner.

Few critics make negative mention of Baillie’s origin however; on the whole critics

61 The critic refers to Baillie’s Poems; Wherein it is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and of Rustic Manners (1790). Sixteen poems from this volume are preserved in Fugitive Verses (1840). It is implied that the public taste had not changed when these poems and many of Baillie’s others were written. Baillie called the 1840 volume Fugitive because much of her poetry had made its way into print, at times without her name, and without her permission.
tend to focus on her writing. Baillie’s Preface to Fugitive Verses causes the reader to think about what Romanticism is, what its goals are, and whether they have been achieved. The Quarterly Review critic quotes Baillie:

“‘Modern poetry,’ she says, ‘within the last thirty years, has become so imaginative, impassioned, and sentimental, that more homely subjects, in simple diction, are held in comparatively smallest estimation. This, however, is a natural progress of the art, and the obstacles it may cast in the path of a less gifted or a less aspiring genius, must be submitted to with good grace’ (Preface to Fugitive Verses, p.vi.)” (QR 446).

Baillie suggests that Romanticism faces a danger of becoming too elevated. In her preface she acknowledges that poetry does not have to “follow sublime and obscure conceptions” (QR 446). If anything, she looks to establish a genre addressing the reader who “may be very well pleased after all to seat himself on a bench by his neighbour’s door, and look at the meadows around him, or country people passing along the common from their daily work” (QR 446). In this approach she manages to put the Quarterly Review critic on the defensive; “If ‘homely’ (not meaning we presume vulgar) ‘subjects in simple diction’ are holden in less estimation now,” “how is it that Reviews and Magazines offer perpetual acknowledgements to verse of this nature” (QR 446).

The critic runs the gamut, and lists many notable poets who wrote more homely verse, and he reflects on the period of exaggerated emotion and affectation that marked the time of Baillie’s earliest efforts:

These [poets] will all say that at a time there was, indeed, when crazy fancy, and rant, and sentimentalism passed current respectively for imagination, and passion, and thought; when lingo grande — made up no scholar knows how — usurped the place of English, and the dearest associations, and the most affecting images in man’s daily life, could not be mentioned in serious verse. Since that time, under the circumstances which we began by noticing, criticism has been reformed . . . (QR 447)

The critic acknowledges that there has been change toward Romantic ideals, but Baillie is not so sure. She, looking at her own work, questions whether or not poems written in
1790 are acceptable to her audience of the 1840s. The critic is very reassuring to Baillie's cause, yet he is contradictory. His commentary could be a précis of Baillie's theory in the "Introductory Discourse" interspersed with details of her literary career. In 1798 Baillie asks for writing that is "every touch faithful to nature;" she condemns "decoration, ornament, loftiness and refinement" (ID 20-21). Similarly the Quarterly Review offers "... a wholesome diet in matter of language; and we think we can assure our authoress that the free, natural, and unsophisticated diction generally prevalent throughout this present volume would not have earned for her from the Monthly Review, or British Critic, of 1800, the hearty praise which the Quarterly Review of 1841 now takes the liberty of bestowing upon it" (QR 447). Nonetheless, after echoing the same agenda found in Baillie's poetics the critic proceeds to reject her theoretical prefaces: "She seems to regard as models writers to whom she is happily most unlike, and her plays are in general so much more legitimate than the principles of dramatic poetry laid down in her various prefaces, that we wish our own satisfaction the one might henceforth be allowed to fight their way down the stream of time without the encumbrance of the other" (447). The very prefaces that he regurgitates throughout his article are suddenly deemed an incumbrance. Baillie's anti-critical stance never gets a mention, leaving the reader suspicious about what it is exactly, that the critic is rejecting.

The Quarterly Review article winds down by briefly addressing Fugitive Verses. "The poems in this volume are in various styles, and in them all the authoress seems to us successful, except in her Scotch Songs and Hymns for the Kirk" (447). It is difficult to

62 Joanna Baillie was commissioned to write a hymnody in its entirety for the "Church of the Kirk." Ultimately there was a change of opinion, and the ecclesiastical government abandoned the project. The Quarterly Review devoted many pages expressing angst over the production of these inconsequential hymns. Unfortunately the same scathing criticism is applied to Baillie's songs. Almost all sources celebrate Baillie as the popular Songstress of a nation.
know what the *Quarterly Review* critic actually read because the specific content of Baillie’s poetry is conspicuously missing from his article. Baillie did write some dynamic and issue-driven verse, but these selections are missing from the critic’s list:

Highly, however, as we may estimate her ‘Ballads of Wonder,’ we by no means think them the best parts of this volume. She is more impressive and original in passages of ordinary life, and in the expression of domestic affection. There are many small poems in this collection of that gentler character which appear to us beautiful; and amongst these we particularly notice “Lovers’ Farewells,” the “Two Brothers,” and the “Parrot.” But it is very gratifying to us to feel that the happiest composition in this volume is that which we dare say cost the authoress the least effort, -- The following very elegant and affecting address to her excellent sister, Mrs. Agnes Baillie, on her birthday (QR 449).

Baillie is praised for a handful of her most plain and domestic verses; gone are the issue-driven and dramatic long poems, and mysteriously there is no trace of the “vigorous” “masculine” style that the critic had celebrated in his introduction. Even today this article is one of the few in existence to examine Joanna Baillie’s poetry and poetics, yet the reader is no wiser about the poetry itself. The critic hopes that the reader finds nothing in these few remarks, that will be “inconsistent with the profound respect we feel for Mrs. Joanna Baillie’s name, and that the freedom in which we have indulged will be accepted as a guarantee for the sincerity of our praise” (QR 452). The critic has not been successful in the attempt to smoothen out a response that is self-contradictory and allusive at best.
Review of the Metrical Legends

The Monthly Review[^63] writes a schizophrenic assessment of the Metrical Legends which, unfortunately, is typical of Baillie’s critical reception. They acknowledge her accompanying Scott on the walk down to octosyllabic verse [p. 76] (underlining mine) (Harris 37), as if the descent is to a low place, from which there is no return. The Reviewer writes that the “Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie” has no poetical verisimilitude in its child-like relations in verse, but of course “this is the curse of Ballad poetry [p. 79]” (Harris 38). I think this is a regurgitation of an older criticism of Hazlitt’s, when he referred to Baillie’s “baby-house theatricals” in his “Lectures: On the Living Poets” (Perkins 635). Further examination of the Monthly Review article reveals the reviewer’s Neoclassical stance; Baillie is criticised for “no longer treating heroic subjects in heroic strains. . . . She has robbed from prose without paying the tax of the essential decorations of verse” [p. 78] (Harris 37). The following comments are made on the same page: “We can experience no continuity of ideal charm, no sustained delight of the imagination, when we are so frequently recalled to the newspaper details in verse” (37). Ironically, in between the negative commentary the opposite follows:

The most pleasing tale in [Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters] is the Legend of ‘Lady Griseld Baillie’ . . . . [The] manner in which Miss Baillie has related the most extraordinary and most touching instance of filial affection, in this her family heroine, does infinite credit to her heart as well as to her poetical genius.—Although a domestic subject, in the general character of the story, it is rendered susceptible of the most elegant poetry in many parts of it by exquisite tact of the writer; and, where she fails in verse, she remains an interesting prose-narrator of singular events . . . [pp. 78-79] (Harris 37).

Is the reviewer afraid to admit to what he/she likes in Baillie’s work? as those partialities run contrary to conservative, classical taste; the style is not right, the story is too domestic,

[^63]: The article is “Miss Baillie’s ‘Metrical Legends’” in The Monthly Review, Vol. XCVI, September, 1821, pp. 72-81. Bracketed references refer to the original article’s pagination.
but it provided great pleasure. The reviewer concludes with “. . . [a] most courteous bow to the distinguished authoress . . . assuring her that, whatever unwelcome remarks our duty may have inflicted on her Metrical Legends, she has few more firm and decided admirers than ourselves [p. 81]” (38). Even with the contradictions and inconsistencies, should the reviewer fall off the fence, it is likely that he/she will land in Baillie’s back yard.

*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* relates:

That an individual to whom literature is so deeply indebted, should have her reputation so little bruited by the public voice, may appear somewhat extraordinary. Her works have never yet obtained a success proportioned to their merits. The celebrity of Joanna Baillie has been of a most peculiar nature—her fame has had about it a kind of virgin purity. It has been the unparticipated treasure of the world of taste and intellect. The admiration of her lofty talents never made itself heard in the loud huzzas of the Theatre, or in those unmeaning expressions of approval . . . She was never written up . . . in the Reviews and Magazines. (Harris 38)

The reasons for Joanna Baillie’s erasure are really not so mysterious. Her periods of acceptance, and rejection follow changes taking place during the Romantic Movement. Serious plays of the nature that she wanted to write were lacking spectacle that audiences had come to expect. Her switch to poetry came at a time when Scott’s success at poetry was declining, and the ballad market was saturated. She experimented with the ballad tradition writing chronicles of emotional history called metrical legends, and to a degree she was successful, but both public, and critics were reticent, associating her legends with poetry that was sensational and sentimental. Her erasure from the canon also begs the question, Who did she upset along the way? She blatantly rejected Neoclassicism, a faction whose adherents were the literary establishment, aristocrats, the educated, and writers of critical journals. In her fervour for unsophisticated representations of nature, and undecorous verse she may have alienated those of a more traditional bent.

The people who were most vocal about their approval for the “Introductory
Discourse" were writers, actors, proto-Romantics—not critics. Her accomplishment in writing a Romantic treatise that negated potential argument, and was vehemently anti-critical potentially antagonised critics, with the exception of Francis Jeffrey, and a select few. Her strong stance on Romantic principles was initially popular, but she exercised her craft in artistically volatile times. Furthermore, Baillie’s personal agenda was controversial. She was a Modernist (Romantic), Scottish Nationalist, Feminist, militant Scottish Presbyterian, radical and she liked to wrestle with taboo issues. Baillie’s work sold well throughout her lifetime, but her confrontational nature did affect her critical reception. Some of her theory and poetry gained in popularity as years passed, and public taste was more conducive to her ideals. Perhaps Stuart Curran’s assertion that Romantic “chronology has been written wholly, and arbitrarily, along a masculine gender line,” (187) is the final factor in Baillie’s virtual disappearance from the literary canon.

This study is the first look at Joanna Baillie’s poetry and poetics since their conception. It is a starting point for further critical examination. She introduced and concluded every work she produced with an explanation of genre, her experimentation within that genre, and her related assessment of Romantic theory and practice. Joanna Baillie kept up a dialogue about the Romantic principles of writing for over fifty-three years. By revisiting her era, one finds that her presence and influence on Romantic poetry and poetics are readily evident. I hope that this study has done her reintroduction justice, and will foster new enthusiasm for a forgotten, but important contributor to the Romantic movement.
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