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.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, JUN. AND W. DAVIES, IN THE STRAND.

1798.

INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE

It is natural for a writer, who is about to submit his works to the Publick, to feel a strong inclination, by some Preliminary Address, to conciliate the favour of his reader, and dispose him, if possible, to peruse them with a favourable eye. I am well aware, however, that his endeavours are generally fruitless: in his situation our hearts revolt from all appearance of confidence, and we consider his diffidence as hypocrisy. Our own word is frequently taken for what we say of ourselves, but very rarely for what we say of our works. Were these three plays, which this small volume contains, detached pieces only, and unconnected with others that do not yet appear, I should have suppressed this inclination altogether; and have allowed my reader to begin what is before him, and to form what opinion of it his taste or his humour might direct, without any previous trespass upon his time or his patience. But they are part of an extensive design: of one which, as far as my information goes, has nothing exactly similar to it in any language: of one which a whole life time will be limited enough to accomplish; and which has, therefore, a considerable chance of being cut short by that hand which nothing can resist.

Before I explain the plan of this work, I must make a demand upon the patience of my reader, whilst I endeavour to communicate to him those ideas regarding human nature, as they in some degree affect almost every species of moral writings, but particularly the Dramatic, that induced me to attempt it; and, as far as my judgment enabled me to apply them, has directed me in the execution of it.

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

stitute the characters of men; and receives great pleasure from every stroke of nature that points out to him those varieties. This is, much more than we are aware of, the occupation of children, and of grown people also, whose penetration is but lightly esteemed; and that conversation which degenerates with them into trivial and mischievous tattling, takes its rise not unfrequently from the same source that supplies the rich vein of the satirist and the wit. That eagerness so universally shewn for the conversation of the latter, plainly enough indicates how many people have been occupied in the same way with themselves. Let any one, in a large company, do or say what is strongly expressive of his peculiar character, or of some passion or humour of the moment, and it will be detected by almost every person present. How often may we see a very stupid countenance animated with a smile, when the learned and the wise have betrayed some native feature of their own minds! and how often will this be the case when they have supposed it to be concealed under a very sufficient disguise! 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.

I will readily allow that the dress and the manners of men, rather than their characters and disposition are the subjects of our common conversation, and seem chiefly to occupy the multitude. But let it be remembered that it is much easier to express our observations upon these. It is easier to communicate to another how a man wears his wig and cane, what kind of house he inhabits, and what kind of table he keeps, than from what slight traits in his words and actions we have been led to conceive certain impressions of his character: traits that will often escape the memory, when the opinions that were founded upon them remain. Besides, in communicating our ideas of the characters of others, we are often called upon to support them with more expence of reasoning than we can well afford, but our observations on the dress and appearance of

men, seldom involve us in such difficulties. For these, and other reasons too tedious to mention, the generality of people appear to us more trifling than they are: and I may venture to say that, but for this sympathetick curiosity towards others of our kind, which is so strongly implanted within us, the attention we pay to the dress and the manners of men would dwindle into an employment as insipid, as examining the varieties of plants and minerals, is to one who understands not natural history.

In our ordinary intercourse with society, this sympathetick propensity of our minds is exercised upon men, under the common occurrences of life, in which we have often observed them. Here vanity and weakness put themselves forward to view, more conspicuously than the virtues: here men encounter those smaller trials, from which they are not apt to come off victorious; and here, consequently, that which is marked with the whimsical and ludicrous will strike us most forcibly, and make the strongest impression on our memory. To this sympathetick propensity of our minds, so exercised, the genuine and pure comick of every composition, whether drama, fable, story, or satire is addressed.

If man is an object of so much attention to man, engaged in the ordinary occurrences of life, how much more does he excite his curiosity and interest when placed in extraordinary situations of difficulty and distress? It cannot be any pleasure we receive from the sufferings of a fellow-creature which attracts such multitudes of people to a publick execution,[1] though it is the horrour we conceive for such a spectacle that keeps so many more away. 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.[2] For though few at such a spectacle can get

1 Cf. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* 43-44; ch. 15 (Appendix A.3.iii).

2 [Baillie's note] In confirmation of this opinion I may venture to say, that of the great numbers who go to see a publick execution, there are but very few who would not run away from, and avoid it, if they happened to meet with it unexpectedly. We find people stopping to look at a procession, or any other uncommon

near enough to distinguish the expression of face, or the minuter parts of a criminal's behaviour, yet from a considerable distance will they eagerly mark whether he steps firmly; whether the motions of his body denote agitation or calmness; and if the wind does but ruffle his garment, they will, even from that change upon the outline of his distant figure, read some expression connected with his dreadful situation. Though there is a greater proportion of people in whom this strong curiosity will be overcome by other dispositions and motives; though there are many more who will stay away from such a sight than will go to it; yet there are very few who will not be eager to converse with a person who has beheld it; and to learn, very minutely, every circumstance connected with it, except the very act itself of inflicting death. To lift up the roof of his dungeon, like the *Diable boiteux*,[1] and look upon a criminal the night before he suffers, in his still hours of privacy, when all that disguise, which respect for the opinion of others, the strong motive by which even the lowest and wickedest of men still continue to be moved, would present an object to the mind of every person, not withheld from it by great timidity of character, more powerfully attractive than almost any other.

Revenge, no doubt, first began amongst the savages[2] of America that dreadful custom of sacrificing their prisoners of war. But the perpetration of such hideous cruelty could never have become a permanent national custom, but for this universal desire in the human mind to behold man in every situation,

sight, they may have fallen in with accidentally, but almost never an execution. No one goes there who has not made up his mind for the occasion; which would not be the case, if any natural love of cruelty were the cause of such assemblies.

1 In Alain René Lesage's picaresque novel *Le Diable boiteux* (1707), Asmodée, the engaging little devil-companion of Don Cléofas, takes immense pleasure in revealing human ugliness and depravity to his companion by gaily lifting off the roofs of houses. Margaret Carhart claims that this is Baillie's "only use of material from French literature" (78).

2 See Adam Ferguson's (1723-1816) *A History of Civil Society* (1767). Ferguson, the "so-called 'father of sociology'" (John and Julia Keay, *Collins Encyclopaedia of Scotland* 366), explored what he felt to be features common to "Red Indian," ancient Greek, and traditional Gaelic society, inspired by travellers' reports at the time. He was appointed commissioner to the American colonies in 1778 then engaged in the War of Independence about which Ferguson had written a pamphlet.

putting forth his strength against the current of adversity, scorning all bodily anguish, or struggling with those feelings of nature, which, like a beating stream, will oft'times burst through the artificial barriers of pride. Before they begin those terrible rites they treat their prisoner kindly; and it cannot be supposed that men, alternately enemies and friends to so many neighbouring tribes, in manners and appearance like themselves, should so strongly be actuated by a spirit of publick revenge. This custom, therefore, must be considered as a grand and terrible game, which every tribe plays against another; where they try not the strength of the arm, the swiftness of the feet, nor the acuteness of the eye, but the fortitude of the soul. Considered in this light, the excess of cruelty exercised upon their miserable victim, in which every hand is described as ready to inflict its portion of pain, and every head ingenious in the contrivance of it, is no longer to be wondered at. To put into his measure of misery one agony less, would be, in some degree, betraying the honour of their nation: would be doing a species of injustice to every hero of their own tribe who had already sustained it, and to those who might be called upon to do so; amongst whom each of these savage tormentors has his chance of being one, and has prepared himself for it from his childhood. Nay, it would be a species of injustice to the haughty victim himself, who would scorn to purchase his place amongst the heroes of his nation, at an easier price than his undaunted predecessors.

Amongst the many trials to which the human mind is subjected, that of holding intercourse, real or imaginary, with the world of spirits: of finding itself alone with a being terrifick and awful, whose nature and power are unknown, has been justly considered as one of the most severe. The workings of nature in this situation, we all know, have ever been the object of our most eager enquiry. No man wishes 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 terrour. To gratify this curiosity how many people have dressed up hideous apparitions to frighten the timid and

superstitious! and have done it at the risk of destroying their happiness or understanding for ever. For the instances of intellect being destroyed by this kind of trial[1] are more numerous, perhaps, in proportion to the few who have undergone it than by any other.

How sensible are we of this strong propensity within us, when we behold any person under the pressure of great and uncommon calamity! Delicacy and respect for the afflicted will, indeed, make us turn ourselves aside from observing him, and cast down our eyes in his presence; but the first glance we direct to him will involuntarily be one of the keenest observation, how hastily soever it may be checked; and often will a returning look of enquiry mix itself by stealth with our sympathy and reserve.

But it is not in situations of difficulty and distress alone, that man becomes the object of this sympathetick curiosity;[2] he is no less so when the evil he contends with arises in his own breast, and no outward circumstance connected with him either awakens our attention or our pity. What human creature is there, who can behold a being like himself under the violent agitation of those passions which all have, in some degree, experienced, without feeling himself most powerfully excited by the sight? I say, all have experienced; for the bravest man on earth knows what fear is as well as the coward; and will not refuse to be interested for one under the dominion of this passion, provided there be nothing in the circumstances attending it to create contempt. Anger is a passion that attracts less sympathy than any other, yet the unpleasing and distorted features of an angry man will be more eagerly gazed upon, by those who are no wise concerned with his fury or the objects of it, than the most amiable placid countenance in the world. Every eye is directed to him; every voice hushed to silence in his pres-

1 Baillie later explored the passion of fear in *Plays on the Passions, Vol. 3* (1812). In *Orra*, Hughobert, Count of Aldenberg, plots to frighten the young heiress, Orra, into marrying his son, Glottenbal, by locking her away in a remote, allegedly haunted castle. The plot takes some unexpected twists, and in the end Orra is driven mad from superstitious fear.

2 Cf. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* 13.41 and 14.42 (Appendix A.3.i and ii) and Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 1.1.1.7-16 (Appendix A.4.i and ii).

ence; even children will leave off their gambols as he passes, and gaze after him more eagerly than the gaudiest equipage. The wild tossings of despair; the gnashing of hatred and revenge; the yearnings of affection, and the softened mien of love; all that language[1] of the agitated soul, which every age and nation understands, is never addressed to the dull nor inattentive.

It is not merely under the violent agitations of passion, that man so rouses and interests us; even the smallest indications of an unquiet mind, the restless eye, the muttering lip, the half-checked exclamation, and the hasty start, will set our attention as anxiously upon the watch, as the first distant flashes of a gathering storm. When some great explosion of passion bursts forth, and some consequent catastrophe happens, if we are at all acquainted with the unhappy perpetrator, how minutely will we endeavour to remember every circumstance of his past behaviour! and with what avidity will we seize upon every recollected word or gesture, that is in the smallest degree indicative of the supposed state of his mind, at the time when they took place. If we are not acquainted with him, how eagerly will we listen to similar recollections from another! Let us understand, from observation or report, that any person harbours in his breast, concealed from the world's eye, some powerful rankling passion of what kind soever it may be, we will observe every word, every motion, every look, even the distant gait of such a man, with a constancy and attention bestowed upon no other. Nay, should we meet him unexpectedly on our way, a feeling will pass across our minds as though we found ourselves in the neighbourhood of some secret and fearful thing. If invisible, would we not follow him into his lonely haunts, into his closet, into the midnight silence of his chamber? There is, perhaps, no employment which the human mind will with so much avidity pursue, as the discovery of concealed passion, as the tracing the varieties and progress of a perturbed soul.

It is to this sympathetick curiosity of our nature, exercised upon mankind in great and trying occasions, and under the influence of the stronger passions, when the grand, the gener-

1 See Francis Hutcheson's discussion on Cicero's Fourth Book of *Tusculan Questions* (*Essay*.1.3).

ous, the terrible attract our attention far more than the base and depraved, that the high and powerfully tragick, of every composition, is addressed.

This propensity is universal. Children begin to shew it very early; it enters into many of their amusements, and that part of them too, for which they shew the keenest relish. It tempts them many times, as well as the mature in years, to be guilty of tricks, vexations, and cruelty; yet God Almighty has implanted it within us, as well as all our other propensities and passions, for wise and good purposes. It 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 others we know ourselves.[1] With limbs untorn, with head unsmitten, with senses unimpaired by despair, we know what we ourselves might have been on the rack, on the scaffold, and in the most afflicting circumstances of distress. Unless when accompanied with passions of the dark and malevolent kind, we cannot well exercise this disposition without becoming more just, more merciful, more compassionate; and as the dark and malevolent passions are not the predominant inmates of the human breast, it hath produced more deeds—O many more! of kindness than of cruelty. It holds up for our example a standard of excellence, which, without its assistance, our inward consciousness of what is right and becoming might never have dictated. It teaches us, also, to respect ourselves, and our kind; for it is a poor mind, indeed, that from this employment of its faculties, learns not to dwell upon the noble view of human nature rather than the mean.

Universal, however, as this disposition undoubtedly is, with

1 Though Baillie states in the preface to her volume entitled *Miscellaneous Plays* (1805), that she "not only never read any German plays, but was even ignorant that such things as German plays of any reputation existed" (*Works* 289), this paraphrasing sounds very similar to one of the 414 polemic epigrams written collaboratively by Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), collected under the title of *Votive Tablets* (1797). An 1851 translation by Edgar A. Bowring reads:

> The Key
> Wouldst thou know thyself, observe the actions of others.
> Wouldst thou other men know, look thou within thine own heart.

the generality of mankind it occupies itself in a passing and superficial way. Though a native trait of character or of passion is obvious to them as well as to the sage, yet to their minds it is but the visitor of a moment; they look upon it singly and unconnected: and though this disposition, even so exercised, brings instruction as well as amusement, it is chiefly by storing up in their minds those ideas to which the instructions of others refer, that it can be eminently useful. Those who reflect and reason upon what human nature holds out to their observation, are comparatively but few. No stroke of nature which engages their attention stands insulated and alone. Each presents itself to them with many varied connections; and they comprehend not merely the immediate feeling which gave rise to it, but the relation of that feeling[1] to others which are concealed. We wonder at the changes and caprices of men; they see in them nothing but what is natural and accountable. We stare upon some dark catastrophe of passion, as the Indians did upon an eclipse of the moon; they, conceiving the track of ideas through which the impassioned mind has passed, regard it like the philosopher who foretold the phenomenon. Knowing what situation of life he is about to be thrown into, they perceive in the man, who, like Hazael,[2] says, "is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" the foul and ferocious murderer. A man of this contemplative character partakes, in some degree, of the entertainment of the Gods, who were supposed to look down upon this world and the inhabitants of it, as we do upon a theatrical exhibition; and if he is of a benevolent disposition, a good man struggling with, and triumphing over adversity, will be to him, also, the most delightful spectacle.[3] But though this eagerness to observe their fellow-creatures in

1 Cf. Stewart, *Philosophy of the Human Mind* 5.1.1.274–85 (Appendix A.5) and Wordsworth, "Preface" (1800) 246 (Appendix D.1.i).

2 The biblical king of Syria (c.841–820 BC). As an officer of King Benhadad, Hazael was sent to hear Elisha's predictions of Benhadad's health. While consulting with Elisha, Hazael was told of the horrific evil he would perform on the children of Israel as King of Syria. See 2 Kings 8:13.

3 Cf. Samuel Johnson's scathing review in 1757 of Soame Jenyns' *Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* in the *Literary Magazine* (1757) 2.13.171–75, 2.14.251–53, 2.15.301–06.

every situation, leads not the generality of mankind to reason and reflect; and those strokes of nature which they are so ready to remark, stand single and unconnected in their minds, yet they may be easily induced to do both: and there is no mode of instruction which they will so eagerly pursue, as that which lays open before them, in a more enlarged and connected view, than their individual observations are capable of supplying, the varieties of the human mind. Above all, to be well exercised in this study will fit a man more particularly for the most important situations of life. He will prove for it the better Judge, the better Magistrate, the better Advocate; and as a ruler or conductor of other men, under every occurring circumstance, he will find himself the better enabled to fulfil his duty, and accomplish his designs. He will perceive the natural effect of every order that he issues upon the minds of his soldiers, his subjects, or his followers; and he will deal to others judgment tempered with mercy; that is to say truly just; for justice appears to us severe only when it is imperfect.

In proportion as moral writers[1] of every class have exercised within themselves this sympathetick propensity of our nature, and have attended to it in others, their works have been interesting and instructive. They have struck the imagination more forcibly, convinced the understanding more clearly, and more lastingly impressed the memory. If unseasoned with any reference to this, the fairy bowers of the poet, with all his gay images of delight, will be admired and forgotten; the important relations of the historian, and even the reasonings of the philosopher will make a less permanent impression.

The historian points back to the men of other ages, and from the gradually clearing mist in which they are first discovered, like the mountains of a far distant land, the generations of the world are displayed to our mind's eye in grand and regular procession. But the transactions of men become interesting to us only as we are made acquainted with men themselves. Great and bloody battles are to us battles fought in the moon, if it is

1 Eighteenth-century philosophy had freer range than philosophy does today. Baillie is specifically referring to those thinkers whose interests took their meditations and writings into the early scientific consideration of human psychology.

not impressed upon our minds, by some circumstances attending them, that men subject to like weaknesses and passions with ourselves, were the combatants.[1] The establishments of policy make little impression upon us, if we are left ignorant of the beings whom they affected. Even a very masterly drawn character will but slightly imprint upon our memory the great man it belongs to, if, in the account we receive of his life, those lesser circumstances are entirely neglected, which do best of all point out to us the dispositions and tempers of men. Some slight circumstance characteristick of the particular turn of a man's mind, which at first sight seems but little connected with the great events of his life, will often explain some of those events more clearly to our understanding, than the minute details of ostensible policy. A judicious selection of those circumstances which characterize the spirit of an associated mob, paltry and ludicrous as some of them may appear, will oftentimes convey to our minds a clearer idea why certain laws and privileges were demanded and agreed to, than a methodical explanation of their causes. A historian who has examined human nature himself, and likewise attends to the pleasure which developing and tracing it, does ever convey to others,

1 [Baillie's note] Let two great battles be described to us with all the force and clearness of the most able pen. In the first let the most admirable exertions of military skill in the General, and the most unshaken courage in the soldiers, gain over an equal or superiour number of brave opponents a compleat and glorious victory. In the second let the General be less scientifick, and the soldiers less dauntless. Let them go into the field for a cause that is dear to them, and fight with the ardour which such motives inspire; till discouraged with the many deaths around them, and the renovated pressure of the foe, some unlooked-for circumstance, trifling in itself, strikes their imagination at once; they are visited with the terrours of nature; their national pride, the honour of soldiership is forgotten; they fly like a fearful flock. 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 every thing that kindles in the bosom of man the high and generous passions: 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 every thing before them. Which of these two battles will interest us the most? and which of them shall we remember the longest? The one will stand forth in the imagination of the reader like a rock of the desert, which points out to the far-removed traveller the country through which he has passed, when its lesser objects are obscured in the distance; whilst the other leaves no traces behind it, but in the minds of the scientifick in war.

will employ our understanding as well as our memory with his pages; and if this is not done, he will impose upon the latter a very difficult task, in retaining what she is concerned with alone.

In argumentative and philosophical writings, the effect which the author's reasoning produces on our minds depends not entirely on the justness of it. The images and examples that he calls to his aid, to explain and illustrate his meaning, will very much affect the attention we are able to bestow upon it, and consequently the quickness with which we shall apprehend, and the force with which it will impress us. These are selected from animated and unanimated nature, from the habits, manners, and characters of men; and though that image or example, whatever it may be in itself, which brings out his meaning most clearly, ought to be preferred before every other, yet of two equal in this respect, that which is drawn from the most interesting source will please us the most at the time, and most lastingly take hold of our minds. An argument supported with vivid and interesting illustration, will long be remembered when many equally important and clear are forgotten; and a work where many such occur will be held in higher estimation by the generality of men, than one its superior, perhaps, in acuteness, perspicuity, and good sense.

Our desire to know what men are in the closet as well as the field, by the blazing hearth, and at the social board,[1] as well as in the council and the throne, is very imperfectly gratified by real history; romance writers, therefore, stepped boldly forth to supply the deficiency; and tale writers, and novel writers, of many descriptions, followed after. If they have not been very 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; if they have caricatured both our virtues and our vices; if they have given us such pure and unmixed, or such heterogeneous combinations of character as real life never presented, and yet have pleased and interested us, let it not be imputed to the dulness of man in discerning what is genuinely natural in

1 Dinner table.

himself. There are many inclinations belonging to us, besides this great master-propensity of which I am treating. Our love of the grand, the beautiful, the novel, and above all of the marvellous, is very strong; and if we are richly fed with what we have a good relish for, we may be weaned to forget our native and favourite aliment. Yet we can never so far forget it, but that we will cling to, and acknowledge it again, whenever it is presented before us. In a work abounding with the marvellous and unnatural, if the author has any how stumbled upon an unsophisticated genuine stroke of nature, we will immediately perceive and be delighted with it, though we are foolish enough to admire at the same time, all the nonsense with which it is surrounded. After all the wonderful incidents, dark mysteries, and secrets revealed, which eventful novel so liberally presents to us; after the beautiful fairy ground, and even the grand and sublime scenes of nature with which descriptive novel so often enchants us; those works which most strongly characterize human nature in the middling and lower classes[1] of society, where it is to be discovered by stronger and more unequivocal marks, will ever be the most popular. For though great pains have been taken in our higher sentimental novels to interest us in the delicacies, embarrassments, and artificial distresses of the more refined part of society, they have never been able to cope in the publick opinion with these. The one 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 hazle, and the bramble are there; and amidst the endless varieties of its paths we can wander for ever. Into whatever scenes the novelist may conduct us, what objects soever he may present to our view, still is our attention most sensibly awake to every touch faithful to nature; still are we upon the watch for every thing that speaks to us of ourselves.

The fair field of what is properly called poetry, is enriched with so many beauties, that in it we are often tempted to forget

1 Cf. Wordsworth, "Preface" (1800) 254 (Appendix D.1.i).

what we really are, and what kind of beings we belong to. Who in the enchanted regions of simile,[1] metaphor, allegory and description, can remember the plain order of things in this every-day world? From heroes whose majestick forms rise like a lofty tower, whose eyes are lightening, whose arms are irresistible, whose course is like the storms of heaven, bold and exalted sentiments we will readily receive; and will not examine them very accurately by that rule of nature which our own breast prescribes to us. A shepherd whose sheep, with fleeces of the purest snow, browze the flowery herbage of the most beautiful vallies; whose flute is ever melodious, and whose shepherdess is ever crowned with roses; whose every care is love, will not be called very strictly to account for the loftiness and refinement of his thoughts. The fair Nymph, who sighs out her sorrows to the conscious and compassionate wilds; whose eyes gleam like the bright drops of heaven; whose loose tresses stream to the breeze, may say what she pleases with impunity. 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 alone in the boldness of reality, whilst the false and unnatural around it, fades away upon every side, like the rising exhalations of the morning. With admiration, and often with enthusiasm we proceed on our way through the grand and the beautiful images, raised to our imagination by the lofty Epic muse; but what even here are those things that strike upon the heart; that we feel and remember? Neither the descriptions of war, the sound of the trumpet, the clanging of arms, the combat of heroes, nor the death of the mighty, will interest our minds like the fall of the feeble stranger, who simply expresses the anguish of his soul, at the thoughts of that far-distant home which he must never return to again, and closes his eyes, amongst the ignoble and forgotten; like the timid stripling goaded by the shame of reproach, who urges his trembling steps to the fight, and falls like a tender flower before the first

1 Cf. Wordsworth, "Preface" (1800) 250–54 (Appendix D.1.ii).

blast of winter. How often will some simple picture of this kind be all that remains upon our minds of the terrifick and magnificent battle, whose description we have read with admiration! How comes it that we relish so much the episodes of an heroick poem? It cannot merely be that we are pleased with a resting-place, where we enjoy the variety of contrast; for were the poem of the simple and familiar kind, and an episode after the heroick style introduced into it, ninety readers out of an hundred would pass over it altogether. Is it not that we meet such a story, so situated, with a kind of sympathetick good will, as in passing through a country of castles and of palaces, we should pop unawares upon some humble cottage, resembling the dwellings of our own native land, and gaze upon it with affection. The highest pleasures we receive from poetry, as well as from the real objects which surround us in the world, are derived from the sympathetick interest we all take in beings like ourselves; and I will even venture to say, that were the grandest scenes which can enter into the imagination of man, presented to our view, and all reference to man completely shut out from our thoughts, the objects that composed it would convey to our minds little better than dry ideas of magnitude, colour, and form; and the remembrance of them would rest upon our minds like the measurement and distances of the planets.

If the study of human nature then, is so useful to the poet, the novelist, the historian, and the philosopher, of how much greater importance must it be to the dramatick writer? To them it is a powerful auxiliary, to him it is the centre and strength of the battle. If characteristick views of human nature enliven not their pages, there are many excellencies with which they can, in some degree, make up for the deficiency, it is what we receive from them with pleasure rather than demand. But in his works no richness of invention, harmony of language, nor grandeur of sentiment will supply the place of faithfully delineated nature. The poet and the novelist may represent to you their great characters from the cradle to the tomb. They may represent them in any mood or temper, and under the influence of any passion which they see proper, without being

obliged to put words into their mouths, those great betrayers of the feigned and adopted. They may relate every circumstance however trifling and minute, that serves to develope their tempers and dispositions. They tell us what kind of people they intend their men and women to be, and as such we receive them. If they are to move us with any scene of distress, every circumstance regarding the parties concerned in it, how they looked, how they moved, how they sighed, how the tears gushed from their eyes, how the very light and shadow fell upon them, is carefully described, and the few things that are given them to say along with all this assistance, must be very unnatural indeed if we refuse to sympathize with them. But the characters of the drama must speak directly for themselves. Under the influence of every passion, humour, and impression; in the artificial veilings of hypocrisy and ceremony, in the openness of freedom and confidence, and in the lonely hour of meditation they speak. He who made us hath placed within our breast a judge that judges instantaneously of every thing they say. We expect to find them creatures like ourselves; and if they are untrue to nature, we feel that we are imposed upon; as though the poet had introduced to us for brethren, creatures of a different race, beings of another world.

As in other works deficiency in characteristick truth may be compensated by excellencies of a different kind, in the drama characteristick truth will compensate every other defect. Nay, it will do what appears a contradiction; one strong genuine stroke of nature will cover a multitude of sins even against nature herself. When we meet in some scene of a good play a very fine stroke of this kind, we are apt to become so intoxicated with it, and so perfectly convinced of the author's great knowledge of the human heart, that we are unwilling to suppose that the whole of it has not been suggested by the same penetrating spirit. Many well-meaning enthusiastick criticks[1] 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,

1 Cf. Wordsworth, "Preface" (1800) 251–52 (Appendix D.1.i).

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 depictments of the heart. I can think of no stronger instance to shew how powerfully this love of nature dwells within us.[1]

Formed as we are with these sympathetick propensities in regard to our own species, it is not at all wonderful that theatrical exhibition has become the grand and favourite amusement of every nation into which it has been introduced. Savages will, in the wild contortions of a dance, shape out some rude story expressive of character or passion, and such a dance will give more delight to his companions than the most artful exertions of agility. Children in their gambols will make out a mimick representation of the manners, characters, and passions of grown men and women, and such a pastime will animate and delight them much more than a treat of the daintiest sweetmeats, or the handling of the gaudiest toys. Eagerly as it is enjoyed by the rude and the young, to the polished and the ripe in years it is still the most interesting amusement. Our taste for it is durable as it is universal. Independently of those circumstances which first introduced it, the world would not have long been without it. The progress of society would soon have brought it forth; and men in the whimsical decorations of fancy would have displayed the characters and actions of their heroes, the folly and absurdity of their fellow-citizens, had no Priests of Bacchus[2] ever existed.[3]

1 [Baillie's note] It appears to me a very strong testimony of the excellence of our great national Dramatist, that so many people have been employed in finding out obscure and refined beauties, in what appear to ordinary observation his very defects. Men, it may be said, do so merely to shew their own superior penetration and ingenuity. But granting this; what could make other men listen to them, and listen so greedily too, if it were not that they have received from the works of Shakspeare, pleasure far beyond what the most perfect poetical compositions of a different character can afford.

2 Bacchus is the Roman god of wine, the Dionysus of the Greeks, son of Zeus and Semele. Bacchus was honoured at the Bacchanalia, a triennial festival which is considered to be the source of our dramatic tradition.

3 [Baillie's note] Though the progress of society would have given us the Drama, independently of the particular cause of its first commencement, the peculiar circumstances connected with its origin, have had considerable influence upon its

In whatever age or country the Drama might have its rise, tragedy would have been the first-born of its children. For every nation has its great men, and its great events upon record; and to represent their own forefathers struggling with those difficulties, and braving those dangers, of which they have heard with admiration, and the effects of which they still, perhaps, experience, would certainly have been the most animating subject for the poet, and the most interesting for his audience, even independently of the natural inclination we all so universally shew for scenes of horrour and distress, of passion and heroick exertion. Tragedy would have been the first child of the Drama, for the same reasons that have made heroick ballad,

character and style, in the ages through which it has passed even to our days, and still will continue to affect it. Homer had long preceded the dramatick poets of Greece; poetry was in a high state of cultivation when they began to write; and their style, the construction of their pieces, and the characters of their heroes were different from what they would have been, had theatrical exhibitions been the invention of an earlier age or a ruder people. Their works were represented to an audience, already accustomed to hear long poems rehearsed at their publick games, and the feasts of their gods. A play, with the principal characters of which they were previously acquainted; in which their great men and heroes, in the most beautiful language, complained of their rigorous fate, but piously submitted to the will of the Gods; in which sympathy was chiefly excited by tender and affecting sentiments; in which strong bursts of passion were few; and in which whole scenes frequently passed, without giving the actors any thing to do but to speak, was not too insipid for them. Had the Drama been the invention of a less cultivated nation, more of action and of passion would have been introduced into it. It would have been more irregular, more imperfect, more varied, more interesting. From poor beginnings it would have advanced in a progressive state; and succeeding poets, not having those polished and admired originals to look back upon, would have presented their respective contemporaries with the produce of a free and unbridled imagination. A different class of poets would most likely have been called into existence. The latent powers of men are called forth by contemplating those works in which they find any thing congenial to their own peculiar talents; and if the field, wherein they could have worked, is already enriched with a produce unsuited to their cultivation, they think not of entering it at all. 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. 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 it is impossible to compute. Very strong genius will sometimes break through every disadvantage of circumstances: Shakspeare has arisen in this country, and we ought not to complain.

with all its battles, murders and disasters, the earliest poetical compositions of every country.

We behold heroes and great men at a distance, unmarked by those small but distinguishing features of the mind, which give a certain individuality to such an infinite variety of similar beings, in the near and familiar intercourse of life. They appear to us from this view like distant mountains, whose dark outlines we trace in the clear horizon, but the varieties of whose roughened sides, shaded with heath and brushwood, and seamed with many a cleft, we perceive not. When accidental anecdote reveals to us any weakness or peculiarity belonging to them, we start upon it like a discovery. They are made known to us in history only, by the great events they are connected with, and the part they have taken in extraordinary or important transactions. Even in poetry and romance, with the exception of some love story interwoven with the main events of their lives, they are seldom more intimately made known to us. To Tragedy it belongs to lead them forward to our nearer regard, in all the distinguishing varieties which nearer inspection discovers; with the passions, the humours, the weaknesses, the prejudices of men. It is for her to present to us the great and magnanimous hero, who appears to our distant view as a superior being, as a God, softened down with those smaller frailties and imperfections which enable us to glory in, and claim kindred to his virtues. It is for her to exhibit to us the daring and ambitious man, planning his dark designs, and executing his bloody purposes, mark'd with those appropriate characteristicks, which distinguish him as an individual of that class; and agitated with those varied passions, which disturb the mind of man when he is engaged in the commission of such deeds. It is for her to point out to us the brave and impetuous warrior struck with those visitations of nature, which, in certain situations, will unnerve the strongest arm, and make the boldest heart tremble. It is for her to shew the tender, gentle, and unassuming mind animated with that fire which, by the provocation of circumstances, will give to the kindest heart the ferocity and keenness of a tiger. It is for her to present to us the

great and striking characters that are to be found amongst men, in a way which the poet, the novelist, and the historian can but imperfectly attempt. But above all, to her, and to her only it belongs to unveil to us the human mind under the dominion of those strong and fixed passions, which, seemingly unprovoked by outward circumstances, will from small beginnings brood within the breast, till all the better dispositions, all the fair gifts of nature are borne down before them. Those passions which conceal themselves from the observation of men; which cannot unbosom themselves even to the dearest friend; and can, often times, only give their fulness vent in the lonely desert, or in the darkness of midnight. For who hath followed the great man into his secret closet, or stood by the side of his nightly couch, and heard those exclamations of the soul which heaven alone may hear, that the historian should be able to inform us? and what form of story, what mode of rehearsed speech will communicate to us those feelings, whose irregular bursts, abrupt transitions, sudden pauses, and half-uttered suggestions, scorn all harmony of measured verse, all method and order of relation?

On the first part of this task her Bards have eagerly exerted their abilities: and some amongst them, taught by strong original genius to deal immediately with human nature and their own hearts, have laboured in it successfully. But in presenting to us those views of great characters, and of the human mind in difficult and trying situations which peculiarly belong to Tragedy, the far greater proportion, even of those who may be considered as respectable dramatick poets, have very much failed. From the beauty of those original dramas to which they have ever looked back with admiration, they have been tempted to prefer the embellishments of poetry[1] to faithfully delineated nature. They have been more occupied in considering the works of the great Dramatists who have gone before them, and the effects produced by their writings, than the varieties of human character which first furnished materials for those works, or those principles in the mind of man by means of which such effects were produced. Neglecting the boundless variety of nature, certain strong outlines of character, certain bold features of passion, certain grand vicissitudes and striking dramatick situations have been repeated from one generation to another; whilst a pompous and solemn gravity, which they have supposed to be necessary for the dignity of tragedy, has excluded almost entirely from their works those smaller touches of nature, which so well develope the mind; and by showing men in their hours of state and exertion only, they have consequently shewn them imperfectly. Thus, great and magnanimous heroes, who bear with majestick equanimity every vicissitude of fortune; who in every temptation and trial stand forth in unshaken virtue, like a rock buffeted by the waves; who encompast with the most terrible evils, in calm possession of their souls, reason upon the difficulties of their state; and, even upon the brink of destruction, pronounce long eulogiums on virtue, in the most eloquent and beautiful language, have been held forth to our view as objects of imitation and interest; as though they had entirely forgotten that it is only from creatures like ourselves that we feel, and therefore, only from creatures like ourselves that we receive the instruction of example.[1] Thus, passionate and impetuous warriors, who are proud, irritable, and vindictive, but generous, daring, and disinterested;

1 Though Thomas Gray (1716–71) was a popular poet of his day – having introduced a sense of the violent, the intuitive, and the sentimental into what became a new poetry of romanticism – other poets, such as perhaps Baillie here, struggled with his treatment of language. Cf. Wordsworth, "Preface" (1800) (Appendix D.1.ii). Samuel Johnson (1709–84) as well felt Gray's language was "too luxuriant." Johnson, in the chapter on Gray (Ch.7) in his *Lives of the English Poets* (1781), writes that "An epithet or metaphor drawn from Nature ennobles Art; an epithet or metaphor drawn from Art degrades Nature. Gray is too fond of words arbitrarily compounded."

1 [Baillie's note] To a being perfectly free from all human infirmity our sympathy refuses to extend. Our Saviour himself, whose character is so beautiful, and so harmoniously consistent; in whom, with outward proofs of his mission less strong than those that are offered to us, I should still be compelled to believe, from being utterly unable to conceive how the idea of such a character could enter into the imagination of man, never touches the heart more nearly than when he says, "Father, let this cup pass from me" [Matt. 26:39,42]. Had he been represented to us in all the unshaken strength of these tragick heroes, his disciples would have made fewer converts, and his precepts would have been listened to coldly. Plays in which heroes of this kind are held forth, and whose aim is, indeed, honourable and praise-worthy, have been admired by the cultivated and refined, but the tears of the simple, the applauses of the young and untaught have been wanting.

setting their lives at a pin's fee[1] for the good of others, but incapable of curbing their own humour of a moment to gain the whole world for themselves; who will pluck the orbs of heaven from their places, and crush the whole universe in one grasp, are called forth to kindle in our souls the generous contempt of every thing abject and base; but with an effect proportionably feeble, as the hero is made to exceed in courage and fire what the standard of humanity will agree to.[2] Thus, tender and pathetick lovers, full of the most gentle affections, the most

1 At the value of a pin. Cf. *Hamlet* 1.4.65: "I do not set my life at a pin's fee."

2 [Baillie's note] In all burlesque imitations of tragedy, those plays in which this hero is pre-eminent are always exposed to bear the great brunt of the ridicule; which proves how popular they have been, and how many poets, and good ones too, have been employed upon them. That they have been so popular, however, is not owing to the intrinsick merit of the characters they represent, but their opposition to those mean and contemptible qualities belonging to human nature, of which we are most ashamed. Besides, there is something in the human mind, independently of its love of applause, which inclines it to boast. This is ever the attendant of that elasticity of soul, which makes us bound up from the touch of oppression; and if there is nothing in the accompanying circumstances to create disgust, or suggest suspicions of their sincerity, (as in real life is commonly the case,) we are very apt to be carried along with the boasting of others. Let us in good earnest believe that a man is capable of achieving all that human courage can achieve, and we will suffer him to talk of impossibilities. Amidst all their pomp of words, therefore, our admiration of such heroes is readily excited, (for the understanding is more easily deceived than the heart,) but how stands our sympathy affected? As no caution nor foresight, on their own account, is ever suffered to occupy the thoughts of such bold disinterested beings, we are the more inclined to care for them, and take an interest in their fortune through the course of the play: yet, as their souls are unappalled by any thing; as pain and death are not at all regarded by them; and as we have seen them very ready to plunge their own swords into their own bosoms, on no very weighty occasion, perhaps, their death distresses us but little, and they commonly fall unwept. [Burlesque: from the Italian *burla* (ridicule, mockery), was a literary composition or dramatic representation aimed at provoking laughter by treating comically a serious subject or reducing the spirit of a serious work to a caricature. The burlesque was connected to amorous adventures and debauchery. Henry Fielding (1707-54) had great aspirations to write comedy in the tradition of William Congreve (1670-1729), yet he excelled in the lesser modes of farce and burlesque. His masterpiece of burlesque, *The Tragedy of Tragedies: or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731), for instance, had a reputation of making even the sternest of men laugh. Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816), a later producer of burlesques, wrote *The Critic* (1779) based on *The Rehearsal* (1671) by George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham (1628-87). Cf. Alexander Pope's *Moral Essays* (1731-35), Epistle 3, in which he describes burlesque, and Sir Walter Scott's (1771-1832) *Peveril of the Peak* (1823).]

amiable dispositions, and the most exquisite feelings; who present their defenceless bosoms to the storms of this rude world in all the graceful weakness of sensibility, are made to sigh out their sorrows in one unvaried strain of studied pathos, whilst this constant demand upon our feelings makes us absolutely incapable of answering it.[1] Thus, also, tyrants are represented as monsters of cruelty, unmixed with any feelings of humanity; and villains as delighting in all manner of treachery and deceit, and acting upon many occasions for the very love of villainy itself; though the perfectly wicked are as ill fitted for the purposes of warning, as the perfectly virtuous are for those of example.[2] This spirit of imitation, and attention to effect, has

1 [Baillie's note] Were it not, that in tragedies where these heroes preside, the same soft tones of sorrow are so often repeated in our ears, till we are perfectly tired of it, they are more fitted to interest us than any other: both because in seeing them, we own the ties of kindred between ourselves and the frail mortals we lament; and sympathize with the weakness of mortality unmixed with any thing to degrade or disgust; and also, because the misfortunes, which form the story of the play, are frequently of the more familiar and domestick kind. A king driven from his throne, will not move our sympathy so strongly, as a private man torn from the bosom of his family. [Baillie may be alluding here to the well-known scene in Chapter 34 of Henry Mackenzie's (1745-1831) novel *The Man of Feeling* (1771), in which not only one but two fathers risk being torn from their families. On Christmas Eve, old Edwards saves his son, Jack, from a roguish press-gang, by purchasing his freedom with all his savings and enlisting himself. Margaret Carhart recounts a journal entry of Samuel Rogers' about a Hampstead gathering on April 21st, 1791, at which he met Henry Mackenzie. "When the conversation turned on Scotland, Mr. Mackenzie attacked its men of genius, and Joanna Baillie mentioned the name of Adam Smith. Mr. Mackenzie did not allow her to make her point, but interrupted, and was off on another long tirade" (13). Also cf. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Men* 58, in which she describes the mentally infirm King George III as "A father torn from his children,—a husband from his affectionate wife,—a man from himself!"]

2 [Baillie's note] I have said nothing here in regard to female character, though in many tragedies it is brought forward as the principal one of the piece, because what I have said of the above characters is likewise applicable to it. I believe 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. With some degree of softening and refinement, each class of the tragick heroes I have mentioned has its corresponding one amongst the heroines. The tender and pathetick no doubt has the most numerous, but the great and magnanimous is not without it, and the passionate and impetuous boasts of one by no means inconsiderable in numbers, and drawn sometimes to the full as passionate and impetuous as itself. [For Baillie's reference to "some corresponding spirit" cf.

likewise confined them very much in their choice of situations and events to bring their great characters into action; rebellions, conspiracies, contentions for empire, and rivalships in love have alone been thought worthy of trying those heroes; and palaces and dungeons the only places magnificent or solemn enough for them to appear in.

They have, indeed, from this regard to the works of preceding authors, and great attention to the beauties of composition, and to dignity of design, enriched their plays with much striking, and sometimes sublime imagery, lofty thoughts, and virtuous sentiments; but in striving so eagerly to excell in those things that belong to tragedy in common with many other compositions, they have very much neglected those that are peculiarly her own. As far as they have been led aside from the first labours of a tragick poet by a desire to communicate more perfect moral instruction, their motive has been respectable, and they merit our esteem. But this praise-worthy end has been injured instead of promoted by their mode of pursuing it. Every species of moral writing has its own way of conveying instruction, which it can never, but with disadvantage, exchange for any other. The Drama improves us by the knowledge we acquire of our own minds, from the natural desire we have to look into the thoughts, and observe the behaviour of others. Tragedy brings to our view men placed in those elevated situations, exposed to those great trials, and engaged in those extraordinary transactions, in which few of us are called upon to act. As examples applicable to ourselves, therefore, they can but feebly affect us; it is only from the enlargement of our ideas in regard to human nature, from that admiration of virtue, and abhorrence of vice which they excite, that we can expect to be improved by them. But if they are not represented to us as real and natural characters, the lessons[1] we are taught from their conduct and their sentiments will be no more to us than those which we receive from the pages of the poet or the moralist.

But the last part of the task which I have mentioned as peculiarly belonging to tragedy, unveiling the human mind under the dominion of those strong and fixed passions, which seemingly unprovoked by outward circumstances, will from small beginnings brood within the breast, till all the better dispositions, all the fair gifts of nature are borne down before them, her poets in general have entirely neglected, and even her first and greatest have but imperfectly attempted. They have made use of the passions to mark their several characters, and animate their scenes, rather than to open to our view the nature and portraitures of those great disturbers of the human breast, with whom we are all, more or less, called upon to contend. With their strong and obvious features, therefore, they have been presented to us, stripped almost entirely of those less obtrusive, but not less discriminating traits, which mark them in their actual operation. To trace them in their rise and progress in the heart, seems but rarely to have been the object of any dramatist. We commonly find the characters of a tragedy affected by the passions in a transient, loose, unconnected manner; or if they are represented as under the permanent influence of the more powerful ones, they are generally introduced to our notice in the very height of their fury, when all that timidity, irresolution, distrust, and a thousand delicate traits, which make the infancy of every great passion more interesting, perhaps, than its full-blown strength, are fled. The impassioned character is generally brought into view under those irresistible attacks of their power, which it is impossible to repell; whilst those gradual steps that led him into this state, in some of which a stand might have been made against the foe, are left entirely in the shade. These passions that may be suddenly excited, and are of short duration, as anger, fear, and oftentimes jealousy, may in this manner be fully represented;

Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 150: "… I will allow that bodily strength seems to give man a natural superiority over woman.… But I must insist, that not only the virtue, but the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree…." Also cf. Appendix B.]

1 John Dennis (1657–1734) and Joseph Addison (1672–1719) debated earlier in the century the source of dramatic lessons. Dennis believed it was a rational issue and maintained that we learn "virtue by seeing its rewards." Addison, on the other hand, preferred the emotions and believed that "the spectacle of tragedy teaches, more obliquely, such things as humility, forbearance, and distrust of worldly success" (Carlson M. 128). Cf. Review in *Literary Leisure* (Appendix E.1).

but those great masters of the soul, ambition, hatred, love, every passion that is permanent in its nature, and varied in progress, if represented to us but in one stage of its course, is represented imperfectly. It is a characteristick of the more powerful passions that they will encrease 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. But in tragedy it is events[1] more frequently than opposite affections which are opposed to them; and those often of such force and magnitude that the passions themselves are almost obscured by the splendour and importance of the transactions to which they are attached. But besides being thus confined and mutilated, the passions have been, in the greater part of our tragedies, deprived of the very power of making themselves known. Bold and figurative language belongs peculiarly to them. Poets, admiring those bold expressions which a mind, labouring with ideas too strong to be conveyed in the ordinary forms of speech, wildly throws out, taking earth, sea, and sky, every thing great and terrible in nature to image forth the violence of its feelings, borrowed them gladly, to adorn the calm sentiments of their premeditated song. It has therefore been thought that the less animated parts of tragedy might be so embellished and enriched. In doing this, however, the passions have been robbed of their native prerogative; and in adorning with their strong figures and lofty expressions the calm speeches of the unruffled, it is found that, when they are called upon to raise their voice, the power of distinguishing themselves has been taken away. This is an injury by no means compensated, but very greatly aggravated by embellishing, in return, the speeches of passion with the ingenious conceits, and compleat similies of premeditated thought.[2]

1 Cf. Wordsworth, "Preface": "it is proper that I should mention … that the feeling … gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling" (Appendix D.i.8).

2 [Baillie's note] This, perhaps, more than any thing else has injured the higher scenes of tragedy. For having made such free use of bold hyperbolical language in the inferior parts, the poet when he arrives at the highly impassioned sinks into total inability: or if he will force himself to rise still higher on the wing, he flies beyond nature altogether, into the regions of bombast and nonsense.

There are many other things regarding the manner in which dramatick poets have generally brought forward the passions in tragedy, to the great prejudice of that effect they are naturally fitted to produce upon the mind, which I forbear to mention, lest they should too much increase the length of this discourse; and leave an impression on the mind of my reader, that I write more on the spirit of criticism, than becomes one who is about to bring before the publick a work, with, doubtless, many faults and imperfections on its head.[1]

From this general view, which I have endeavoured to communicate to my reader, of tragedy, and those principles in the human mind upon which the success of her efforts depends, I have been led to believe, that an attempt to write a series of tragedies, of simpler construction, less embellished with poetical decorations, less constrained by that lofty seriousness which has so generally been considered as necessary for the support of tragick dignity, and in which the chief object should be to delineate the progress of the higher passions in the human breast, each play exhibiting a particular passion, might not be unacceptable to the publick. And I have been the more readily induced to act upon this idea, because I am confident, that tragedy, written upon this plan, is fitted to produce stronger moral effect than upon any other. I have said that tragedy in representing to us great characters struggling with difficulties, and placed in situations of eminence and danger, in which few of us have any chance of being called upon to act, conveys its moral efficacy to our minds by the enlarged views which it gives to us of human nature, by the admiration of virtue, and execration of vice which it excites, and not by the examples[2] it holds up for our immediate application.[3] But in opening to us the heart of man under the influence of those passions to

1 Cf. *Hamlet* 1.5.81-86. Also see Burroughs about women's preface writing in the eighteenth century, Chapter 3.

2 Nahum Tate (1652-1715) created a new, immensely popular version of *King Lear* (1681) in which Cordelia is spared and betrothed to Edgar. Joseph Addison (1672-1719) believed that such an ending destroyed the beauty of the play, while Samuel Johnson (1709-84) was so disturbed by the tragic ending that he confessed that he could not endure re-reading it until 1765 (See Carson 136).

3 Cf. Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (Appendix A.5.ii).

which all are liable, this is not the case. Those strong passions that, with small assistance from outward circumstances, work their way in the heart, till they become the tyrannical masters of it, carry on a similar operation in the breast of the Monarch, and the man of low degree. It exhibits to us the mind of man in that state when we are most curious to look into it, and is equally interesting to all. Discrimination of character is a turn of mind, tho' more common than we are aware of, which every body does not possess; but to the expressions of passion, particularly strong passion, the dullest mind is awake; and its true unsophisticated language the dullest understanding will not misinterpret. To hold up for our example those peculiarities in disposition, and modes of thinking which nature has fixed upon us, or which long and early habit has incorporated with our original selves, is almost desiring us to remove the everlasting mountains, to take away the native land-marks of the soul; but representing the passions brings before us the operation of a tempest that rages out its time and passes away. We cannot, it is true, amidst its wild uproar, listen to the voice of reason, and save ourselves from destruction; but we can foresee its coming, we can mark its rising signs, we can know the situations that will most expose us to its rage, and we can shelter our heads from the coming blast. To change a certain disposition of mind which makes us view objects in a particular light, and thereby, oftentimes, unknown to ourselves, influences our conduct and manners, is almost impossible; but in checking and subduing those visitations of the soul, whose causes and effects we are aware of, every one may make considerable progress, if he proves not entirely successful. Above all, looking back to the first rise, and tracing the progress of passion, points out to us those stages in the approach of the enemy, when he might have been combated most successfully; and where the suffering him to pass may be considered as occasioning all the misery that ensues.

Comedy presents to us men as we find them in the ordinary intercourse of the world, with all the weaknesses, follies, caprice, prejudices, and absurdities which a near and familiar view of them discovers. It is her task to exhibit them engaged

in the busy turmoil of ordinary life, harassing and perplexing themselves with the endless pursuits of avarice, vanity, and pleasure; and engaged with those smaller trials of the mind, by which men are most apt to be overcome, and from which he, who could have supported with honour the attack of greater occasions, will oftentimes come off most shamefully foiled. It belongs to her to shew the varied fashions and manners of the world, as, from the spirit of vanity, caprice, and imitation, they go on in swift and endless succession; and those disagreeable or absurd peculiarities attached to particular classes and conditions in society. It is for her also to represent men under the influence of the stronger passions; and to trace the rise and progress of them in the heart, in such situations, and attended with such circumstances as take off their sublimity, and the interest we naturally take in a perturbed mind. It is hers to exhibit those terrible tyrants of the soul, whose ungovernable rage has struck us so often with dismay, like wild beasts tied to a post, who growl and paw before us, for our derision and sport. In pourtraying the characters of men she has this advantage over tragedy, that the smallest traits of nature, with the smallest circumstances which serve to bring them forth, may by her be displayed, however ludicrous and trivial in themselves, without any ceremony. And in developing the passions she enjoys a similar advantage; for they often most strongly betray themselves when touched by those small and familiar occurrences which cannot, consistently with the effect it is intended to produce, be admitted into tragedy.

As tragedy has been very much cramped in her endeavours to exalt and improve the mind, by that spirit of imitation and confinement in her successive writers, which the beauty of her earliest poets first gave rise to, so comedy has been led aside from her best purposes by a different temptation. Those endless changes in fashions and in manners, which offer such obvious and ever-new subjects of ridicule; that infinite variety of tricks and manoeuvres by which the ludicrous may be produced, and curiosity and laughter excited: the admiration we so generally bestow upon satirical remark, pointed repartee, and whimsical combinations of ideas, have too often led her to forget the

warmer interest we feel, and the more profitable lessons we receive from genuine representations of nature. The most interesting and instructive class of comedy, therefore, the real characteristick, has been very much neglected, whilst satirical, witty, sentimental, and, above all, busy or circumstantial comedy have usurped the exertions of the far greater proportion of Dramatick Writers.

In Satirical Comedy,[1] sarcastick and severe reflections on the actions and manners of men, introduced with neatness, force, and poignancy of expression into a lively and well supported dialogue, of whose gay surface they are the embossed ornaments, make the most important and studied part of the work: Character is a thing talked of rather than shewn. The persons of the drama are indebted for the discovery of their peculiarities to what is said to them, rather than to any thing they are made to say or do for themselves. Much incident being unfavourable for studied and elegant dialogue, the plot is commonly simple, and the few events that compose it neither interesting nor striking. It only affords us that kind of moral instruction which an essay or a poem could as well have conveyed, and, though amusing in the closet, is but feebly attractive in the Theatre.[2]

In what I have termed Witty Comedy, every thing is light, playful, and easy. Strong decided condemnation of vice is too weighty and material to dance upon the surface of that stream, whose shallow currents sparkle in perpetual sun-beams, and cast up their bubbles to the light. Two or three persons of quick thought, and whimsical fancy, who perceive instantaneously the various connections of every passing idea, and the significations, natural or artificial, which single expressions, or particular forms of speech can possibly convey, take the lead thro' the whole, and seem to communicate their own peculiar talent to every creature in the play. The plot is most commonly feeble rather than simple, the incidents being numerous enough, but seldom striking or varied. To amuse, and only to amuse, is its aim: it pretends not to interest nor instruct. It pleases when we read, more than when we see it represented; and pleases still more when we take it up by accident, and read but a scene at a time.

Sentimental Comedy treats of those embarrassments, difficulties, and scruples, which, though sufficiently distressing to the delicate minds who entertain them, are not powerful enough to gratify the sympathetick desire we all feel to look into the heart of man in difficult and trying situations, which is the sound basis of tragedy, and are destitute of that seasoning of the lively and ludicrous, which prevents the ordinary transactions of comedy from becoming insipid. In real life, those who, from the peculiar frame of their minds, feel most of this refined distress, are not generally communicative upon the subject; and those who do feel and talk about it at the same time, if any such there be, seldom find their friends much inclined to listen to them. It is not to be supposed, then, long conversations upon the stage about small sentimental niceties, can be generally interesting. I am afraid plays of this kind, as well as works of a similar nature, in other departments of literature, have only tended to encrease amongst us a set of sentimental hypocrites; who are the same persons of this age that would have been the religious ones of another; and are daily doing morality the same

1 Though the complex variety of comedy at this time thwarted any attempts to classify it, Baillie was not the first to take on the challenge. Isaac Bickerstaffe (1733-1808) conceived of two kinds: of "Character" or "Heart and Understanding" (sentimental comedy) and "Intrigue" (his own drama). Reverend Charles Jenner (1736-74) described three: comedy of "wit and character" and comedy of "nature and sentiment," both of which he borrowed from Diderot and "Comedy of Stage-trick and Decoration." Hannah Cowley (1743-1809), in her preface to *The Town Before You* (1797), could not see a distinction between farce and sentimental comedy and, dismayed by contemporary public taste, gave up writing plays altogether. Perhaps Baillie formed her classification on plays such as William Wycherley's (1640-1716) *The Country Wife* (1675) for satirical comedy, William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) for witty comedy, Sir Richard Steele's (1672-1729) *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) for sentimental comedy, and any one of the many adaptations of Molière's plays by dramatists such as Hugh Kelly's (1739-77) *The School for Wives* (1773) and Charles Macklin's (1699-1797) *The School for Husbands* (1761) for busy comedy. See Bevis, *The Laughing Tradition* 84-88.

2 [Baillie's note] These plays are generally the work of men, whose judgement and acute observation, enable them admirably well to generalize, and apply to classes of men the remarks they have made upon individuals; yet know not how to dress up, with any natural congruity, an imaginary individual in the attributes they have assigned to those classes.

kind of injury, by substituting the particular excellence which they pretend to possess, for plain simple uprightness and rectitude.

In Busy or Circumstantial Comedy, all those ingenious contrivances of lovers, guardians, governantes and chamber-maids;[1] that ambushed bushfighting amongst closets, screens, chests, easychairs, and toilet-tables, form a gay varied game of dexterity and invention; which, to those who have played at hide-and-seek, who have crouched down, with beating heart, in a dark corner, whilst the enemy groped near the spot; who have joined their busy school-mates in many a deep-laid plan to deceive, perplex, and torment the unhappy mortals deputed to have the charge of them, cannot be seen with indifference. Like an old hunter, who pricks up his ears at the sound of the chace, and starts away from the path of his journey, so, leaving all wisdom and criticism behind us, we follow the varied changes of the plot, and stop not for reflection. The studious man who wants a cessation from thought, the indolent man who dislikes it, and all those who, from habit or circumstances, live in a state of divorce from their own minds, are pleased with an amusement in which they have nothing to do but to open their eyes and behold; the moral tendency of it, however, is very faulty. That mockery of age and domestick authority, so constantly held forth, has a very bad effect upon the younger part of an audience; and that continual lying and deceit in the first characters of the piece, which is necessary for conducting the plot, has a most pernicious one.

But Characteristick Comedy, which represents to us this motley world of men and women in which we live, under those circumstances of ordinary and familiar life most favourable for the discovery of the human heart, offers to us a wide field of instruction, adapted to general application. We find in its varied scenes an exercise of the mind analogous to that which we all, less or more, find out for ourselves, amidst the mixed groupes of people whom we meet with in society; and which I have already mentioned as an exercise universally

1 Governesses and chamber-maids, both types of female household servants that became stock theatrical characters.

pleasing to man. As the distinctions which it is its highest aim to discriminate, are those of nature and not situation, they are judged of by all ranks of men; for a peasant will very clearly perceive in the character of a peer, those native peculiarities which belong to him as a man, though he is entirely at a loss in all that regards his manners and address as a nobleman. It illustrates to us the general remarks we have made upon men; and in it we behold, spread before us, plans of those original groundworks, upon which the general ideas we have been taught to conceive of mankind, are founded. It stands but little in need of busy plot, extraordinary incidents, witty repartee, or studied sentiments. It naturally produces for itself all that it requires; characters who are to speak for themselves, who are to be known by their own words and actions, not by the accounts that are given of them by others, cannot well be developed without considerable variety of judicious incident; a smile that is raised by some trait of undisguised nature, and a laugh that is provoked by some ludicrous effect of passion, or clashing of opposite characters, will be more pleasing to the generality of men, than either the one or the other when occasioned by a play upon words, or a whimsical combination of ideas; and to behold the operation and effects of the different propensities and weaknesses of men, will naturally call up in the mind of the spectator moral reflections more applicable, and more impressive than all the high-sounding sentiments, with which the graver scenes of Satirical and Sentimental Comedy are so frequently interlarded. It is much to be regretted, however, that the eternal introduction of love as the grand business of the Drama, and the consequent necessity for making the chief persons in it such, in regard to age, appearance, manners, dispositions, and endowments, as are proper for interesting lovers, has occasioned so much insipid similarity in the higher characters. It is chiefly, therefore, on the second and inferiour characters, that the efforts, even of our best poets, have been exhausted; and thus we are called upon to be interested in the fortune of one man, whilst our chief attention is directed to the character of another, which produces a disunion of ideas in the mind, injurious to the general effect of the whole. From this cause,

also, those characteristick varieties have been very much neglected, which men present to us in the middle stages of life; when they are too old for lovers or the confidents of lovers, and too young to be the fathers, uncles, and guardians, who are contrasted with them; but when they are still in full vigour of mind, eagerly engaged with the world, joining the activity of youth to the providence of age, and offer to our attention objects sufficiently interesting and instructive. It is to be regretted that strong contrasts of character are too often attempted, instead of those harmonious shades of it, which nature so beautifully varies, and which we so greatly delight in, whenever we clearly distinguish them. It is to be regretted that in place of those characters, which present themselves to the imagination of a writer from his general observations upon mankind, inferiour poets have so often pourtrayed with senseless minuteness the characters of particular individuals. We are pleased with the eccentricities of individuals in real life, and also in history or biography, but in fictitious writings, we regard them with suspicion; and no representation of nature, that corresponds not with some of our general ideas in regard to it, will either instruct or inform us. When the originals of such characters are known and remembered, the plays in which they are introduced are oftentimes popular; and their temporary success has induced a still inferiour class of poets to believe, that, by making men strange, and unlike the rest of the world, they have made great discoveries, and mightily enlarged the boundaries of dramatick character. They will, therefore, distinguish one man from another by some strange whim or imagination, which is ever uppermost in his thoughts, and influences every action of his life; by some singular opinion, perhaps, about politicks, fashions, or the position of the stars; by some strong unaccountable love for one thing or aversion from another; entirely forgetting, that such singularities, if they are to be found in nature, can no where be sought for, with such probability of success, as in Bedlam.[1] Above all it is to be regretted that those adventitious distinctions amongst men, of age, fortune, rank, profession, and

1 A contraction for St. Mary of Bethlehem in London, the first English asylum for the mentally insane.

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country, are so often brought forward in preference to the great original distinctions of nature; and our scenes so often filled with courtiers, lawyers, citizens, Frenchmen, &c. &c. With all the characteristicks of their respective conditions, such as they have been represented from time immemorial. This has introduced a great sameness into many of our plays, which all the changes of new fashions burlesqued, and new customs turned into ridicule, cannot conceal.

In comedy, the stronger passions, love excepted, are seldom introduced but in a passing way. We have short bursts of anger, fits of jealousy and impatience; violent passion of any continuance we seldom find. When this is attempted, however, forgetting that mode of exposing the weakness of the human mind, which peculiarly belongs to her, it is too frequently done in the serious spirit of tragedy; and this has produced so many of those serious comick plays, which so much divide and distract our attention.[1] Yet we all know from our own experience in real life, that, in certain situations, and under certain circumstances, the stronger passions are fitted to produce scenes more exquisitely comick than any other; and one well-wrought

1 [Baillie's note] Such plays, however excellent the parts may be of which they are composed, can never produce the same strength and unity of effect upon our minds which we receive from plays of a simpler undivided construction. If the serious and distressing scenes make a deep impression, we do not find ourselves in a humour for the comick ones that succeed; and if the comick scenes enliven us greatly, we feel tardy and unalert in bringing back our minds to a proper tone for the serious. As in tragedy we smile at those native traits of character, or that occasional sprightliness of dialogue, which are sometimes introduced, to animate her less-interesting parts, so may we be moved by comedy; but our tears should be called forth by those gentle strokes of nature, which come at once with kindred kindness on the heart, and are quickly succeeded by smiles. Like a small summer-cloud, whose rain-drops sparkle in the sun, and which swiftly passes away, is the genuine pathetick of comedy: the gathering foreseen storm, that darkens the whole face of the sky, belongs to tragedy alone. It is often observed, I confess, that we are more apt to be affected by those scenes of distress which we meet with in comedy, than the high-wrought woes of tragedy; and I believe it is true. But this arises from the woes of tragedy being so often appropriated to high and mighty personages, and strained beyond the modesty of nature, in order to suit their great dignity; or from the softened griefs of more gentle and familiar characters being rendered feeble and tiresome with too much repetition and whining. It arises from the greater facility with which we enter into the distresses of people, more upon a level with ourselves; and whose sorrows are expressed in less studied and unnatural language.

scene of this kind, will have a more powerful effect in repressing similar intemperance in the mind of a spectator, than many moral cautions, or even, perhaps, than the terrifick examples of tragedy. There are to be found, no doubt, in the works of our best dramatick writers, comick scenes descriptive of the stronger passions, but it is generally the inferiour characters of the piece who are made the subjects of them, very rarely those in whom we are much interested; and consequently the useful effect of such scenes upon the mind is very much weakened. This general appropriation of them has tempted our less-skilful Dramatists to exaggerate, and step, in further quest of the ludicrous, so much beyond the bounds of nature, that the very effect they are so anxious to produce is thereby destroyed, and all useful application of it entirely cut off; for we never apply to ourselves a false representation of nature.

But a complete exhibition of passion, with its varieties and progress in the breast of man has, I believe, scarcely ever been attempted in comedy. Even love, though the chief subject of almost every play, has been pourtrayed in a loose, scattered, and imperfect manner. The story of the lovers is acted over before us, whilst the characteristicks of that passion by which they are actuated, and which is the great master-spring of the whole, are faintly to be discovered. We are generally introduced to a lover after he has long been acquainted with his mistress, and wants but the consent of some stubborn relation, relief from some embarrassment of situation, or the clearing up some mistake or love-quarrel occasioned by malice or accident, to make him completely happy. To overcome these difficulties, he is engaged in a busy train of contrivance and exertion, in which the spirit, activity and ingenuity of the man is held forth to view, whilst the lover, comparatively speaking, is kept out of sight. But even when this is not the case; when the lover is not so busied and involved, this stage of the passion is exactly the one that is least interesting, and least instructive: not to mention as I have done already, that one stage of any passion must shew it imperfectly.

From this view of the Comick Drama I have been induced to believe, that, as companions to the forementioned tragedies, a series of comedies on a similar plan, in which bustle of plot,

brilliancy of dialogue, and even the bold and striking in character, should, to the best of the authour's judgment, be kept in due subordination to nature, might likewise be acceptable to the publick. I am confident that comedy upon this plan is capable of being made as interesting, as entertaining, and superiour in moral tendency to any other. For even in ordinary life, with very slight cause to excite them, strong passions will foster themselves within the breast; and what are all the evils which vanity, folly, prejudice, or peculiarity of temper lead to, compared with those which such unquiet inmates produce? Were they confined to the exalted and the mighty, to those engaged in the great events of the world, to the inhabitants of palaces and camps, how happy comparatively would this world be! But many a miserable being, whom firm principle, timidity of character, or the fear of shame keeps back from the actual commission of crimes, is tormented in obscurity, under the dominion of those passions which set the seducer in ambush, rouse the bold spoiler to wrong, and strengthen the arm of the murderer. Though to those with whom such dangerous enemies have long found shelter, exposing them in an absurd and ridiculous light, may be shooting a finely-pointed arrow against the hardened rock; yet to those with whom they are but new, and less assured guests, this may prove a more successful mode of attack than any other.

It was the saying of a sagacious Scotchman,[1] 'let who will make the laws of a nation, if I have the writing of its ballads.' Something similar to this may be said in regard to the Drama. Its lessons reach not, indeed, to the lowest classes of the labouring people, who are the broad foundation of society, which can never be generally moved without endangering every thing

1 We may never know exactly who this Scot was, if he ever existed at all, but he is quoted by Andrew Fletcher (1655-1716) of Saltoun, a Scottish patriot and opponent of the Treaty of Union of 1707. Writing anonymously in *An Account of a Conversation Concerning a Right Regulation of Governments for the Common Good of Mankind* (1704), Fletcher describes perhaps an imaginary conversation with the Earl of Cromarty, Sir Edward Seymour, and Sir Christopher Musgrave: "I knew a very wise man so much of Sir Chr——'s sentiment, that he believed if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation."

that is constructed upon it, and who are our potent and formidable ballad readers; but they reach to the classes next in order to them, and who will always have over them no inconsiderable influence. The impressions made by it are communicated, at the same instant of time, to a greater number of individuals, than those made by any other species of writing; and they are strengthened in every spectator, by observing their effects upon those who surround him. From this observation, the mind of my reader will suggest of itself, what it would be unnecessary, and, perhaps, improper in me here to enlarge upon. The theatre is a school[1] in which much good or evil may be learned. At the beginning of its career the Drama was employed to mislead and excite; and were I not unwilling to refer to transactions of the present times, I might abundantly confirm what I have said by recent examples. The authour, therefore, who aims in any degree to improve the mode of its instruction, and point to more useful lessons than it is generally employed to dispense, is certainly praiseworthy, though want of abilities may unhappily prevent him from being successful in his efforts.

This idea has prompted me to begin a work in which I am aware of many difficulties. In plays of this nature the passions must be depicted not only with their bold and prominent features, but also with those minute and delicate traits which distinguish them in an infant, growing, and repressed state; which are the most difficult of all to counterfeit, and one of which falsely imagined, will destroy the effect of a whole scene. The characters over whom they are made to usurp dominion, must be powerful and interesting, exercising them with their full measure of opposition and struggle; for the chief antagonists they contend with must be the other passions and propensities of the heart, not outward circumstances and events. Though belonging to such characters, they must still be held to view in their most baleful and unseductive light; and those qualities in the impassioned which are necessary to interest us in their fate,

1 Cf. Schiller. "The stage is an institution combining amusement with instruction, rest with exertion, where no faculty of the mind is overstrained, no pleasure enjoyed at the cost of the whole" (*Essays*, "The Stage as a Moral Institution" 345).

must not be allowed, by any lustre borrowed from them, to diminish our abhorrence of guilt. The second and even the inferiour persons of each play, as they must be kept perfectly distinct from the great impassioned one, should generally be represented in a calm unagitated state, and therefore more pains are necessary than in other dramatick works, to mark them by appropriate distinctions of character, lest they should appear altogether insipid and insignificant. As the great object here is to trace passion through all its varieties, and in every stage, many of which are marked by shades so delicate, that in much bustle of events they would be little attended to, or entirely overlooked, simplicity of plot is more necessary, than in those plays where only occasional bursts of passion are introduced, to distinguish a character, or animate a scene. But where simplicity of plot is necessary, there is very great danger of making a piece appear bare and unvaried, and nothing but great force and truth in the delineations of nature will prevent it from being tiresome.[1] Soliloquy, or those overflowings of the perturbed soul, in which it unburthens itself of those thoughts, which it cannot communicate to others, and which in certain situations is the only mode that a Dramatist can employ to open to us the mind he would display, must necessarily be often, and to considerable length, introduced. Here, indeed, as it naturally belongs to passion, it will not be so offensive as it generally is in other plays, when a calm unagitated person tells over to himself all that has befallen him, and all his future

1 [Baillie's note] To make up for this simplicity of plot, the shew and decorations of the theatre ought to be allowed, to plays written upon this plan, in their full extent. How fastidious soever some poets may be in regard to these matters, it is much better to relieve our tired-out attention with a battle, a banquet, or a procession, than an accumulation of incidents. In the latter case the mind is harassed and confused with those doubts, conjectures, and disappointments which multiplied events occasion, and in a great measure unfitted for attending to the worthier parts of the piece; but in the former it enjoys a rest, a pleasing pause in its more serious occupation, from which it can return again, without any incumberance of foreign intruding ideas. 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; whereas some confusion of circumstances, some half-explained mistake, which gives him no pleasure at all when it takes place, may take off his attention afterwards from the refined beauties of a natural and characteristick dialogue.

schemes of intrigue or advancement; yet to make speeches of this kind sufficiently natural and impressive, to excite no degree of weariness nor distaste, will be found to be no easy task. There are, besides these, many other difficulties peculiarly belonging to this undertaking, too minute and tedious to mention. If, fully aware of them, I have not shrunk back from the attempt, it is not from any idea that my own powers of discernment will at all times enable me to overcome them; but I am emboldened by the confidence I feel in that candour and indulgence, with which the good and enlightened do ever regard the experimental efforts of those, who wish in any degree to enlarge the sources of pleasure and instruction amongst men.

It will now be proper to say something of the particular plays which compose this volume. But, in the first place I must observe, that as I pretend not to have overcome the difficulties attached to this design, so neither from the errours and defects, which, in these pages, I have thought it necessary to point out in the works of others, do I at all pretend to be blameless. To conceive the great moral object and outline of a story; to people it with various characters, under the influence of various passions; and to strike out circumstances and situations calculated to call them into action, is a very different employment of the mind from calmly considering those propensities of our nature, to which dramatick writings are most powerfully addressed, and taking a general view upon those principles of the works of preceding authours. They are employments which cannot well occupy it at the same time; and experience has taught us, that criticks do not unfrequently write in contradiction to their own rules. If I should, therefore, sometimes appear in the foregoing remarks to have provided a stick wherewith to break mine own pate,[1] I entreat that my reader will believe I am neither confident nor boastful, and use it with gentleness.

In the two first plays, where love is the passion under review, their relation to the general plan may not be very obvious.

1 Head or skull.

Love is the chief groundwork of almost all our tragedies and comedies, and so far they are not distinguished from others. But I have endeavoured in both to give an unbroken view of the passion from its beginning, and to mark it as I went along, with those peculiar traits which distinguish its different stages of progression. I have in both these pieces grafted this passion not on those open communicative impetuous characters, who have so long occupied the dramatick station of lovers, but on men of a firm, thoughtful, reserved turn of mind, and with whom it commonly makes the longest stay, and maintains the hardest struggle. I should be extremely sorry if, from any thing at the conclusion of the tragedy, it should be supposed that I mean to countenance suicide,[1] or condemn those customs whose object is the discouragement of it, by withholding from the body of the self-slain those sacred rites, and marks of respect commonly shewn to the dead. Let it be considered, that whatever I have inserted there, which can at all raise any suspicion of this kind, is put into the mouths of rude uncultivated soldiers, who are roused with the loss of a beloved leader and indignant at any idea of disgrace being attached to him. If it should seem inconsistent with the nature of this work, that in its companion the comedy, I have made strong moral principle triumph over love, let it be remembered, that without this the whole moral tendency of a play, which must end happily, would have been destroyed; and that it is not my intention to encourage the indulgence of this passion, amiable as it is, but to restrain it. The last play, the subject of which is hatred, will more clearly discover the nature and intention of my design. The rise and progress of this passion I have been obliged to give in retrospect, instead of representing it all along in its actual operation, as I could have wished to have done. But hatred is a passion of slow growth; and to have exhibited it from its beginnings would have included a longer period, than even

1 David Hume's (1711-76) essays on suicide and the immortality of the soul were completed and published around 1755. Controversy led to their physical removal from these publications. Clandestine French (1770) and English (1777) editions appeared, but it was not until 1783 that they were published with Hume's name attached, though not with his permission.

those who are least scrupulous about the limitation of dramatick time, would have thought allowable. I could not have introduced my chief characters upon the stage as boys, and then as men. For this passion must be kept distinct from that dislike which we conceive for another when he has greatly offended us, and which is almost the constant companion of anger; and also from that eager desire to crush, and inflict suffering on him who has injured us, which constitutes revenge. This passion, as I have conceived it, is that rooted and settled aversion, which from opposition of character, aided by circumstances of little importance, grows at last into such antipathy and personal disgust as makes him who entertains it, feel, in the presence of him who is the object of it, a degree of torment and restlessness which is insufferable. It is a passion, I believe less frequent than any other of the stronger passions, but in the breast where it does exist, it creates, perhaps, more misery than any other. To endeavour to interest the mind for a man under the dominion of a passion so baleful, so unamiable, may seem, perhaps, reprehensible. I therefore beg it may be considered that it is the passion and not the man which is held up to our execration; and that this and every other bad passion does more strongly evince its pernicious and dangerous nature, when we see it thus counteracting and destroying the good gifts of heaven, than when it is represented as the suitable associate in the breast of inmates as dark as itself. This remark will likewise be applicable to many of the other plays belonging to my work, that are intended to follow. A decidedly wicked character can never be interesting; and to employ such for the display of any strong passion would very much injure instead of improving the moral effect. In the breast of a bad man passion has comparatively little to combat, how then can it shew its strength? I shall say no more upon this subject, but submit myself to the judgment of my reader.

It may, perhaps, be supposed from my publishing these plays, that I have written them for the closet[1] rather than the stage. If upon perusing them with attention, the reader is disposed to think they are better calculated for the first than the last, let him

1 A place of private study; in this case, for the purposes of being read as opposed to being performed.

impute it to want of skill in the authour, and not to any previous design. A play, but of small poetical merit, that is suited to strike and interest the spectator, to catch the attention of him who will not, and of him who cannot read, is a more valuable and useful production than one whose elegant and harmonious pages are admired in the libraries of the tasteful and refined. To have received approbation from an audience of my countrymen, would have been more pleasing to me than any other praise. A few tears from the simple and young would have been, in my eyes, pearls of great price; and the spontaneous, untutored plaudits of the rude and uncultivated would have come to my heart as offerings of no mean value. I should, therefore, have been better pleased to have introduced them to the world from the stage than from the press. I possess, however, no likely channel to the former mode of publick introduction; and upon further reflection it appeared to me that by publishing them in this way, I have an opportunity afforded me of explaining the design of my work, and enabling the publick to judge, not only of each play by itself, but as making a part likewise of the whole; an advantage which, perhaps, does more than over-balance the splendour and effect of theatrical representation.

It may be thought that with this extensive plan before me, I should not have been in a hurry to publish, but have waited to give a larger portion of it to the publick, which would have enabled them to make a truer estimate of its merit. To bring forth only three plays of the whole, and the last without its intended companion,[1] may seem like the haste of those vain people, who as soon as they have written a few pages of a discourse, or a few couplets of a poem, cannot be easy till every body has seen them. I do protest, in honest simplicity! it is distrust and not confidence, that has led me at this early stage of the undertaking, to bring it before the publick. To labour in uncertainty is at all times unpleasant; but to proceed in a long and difficult work with any impression upon your mind that your labour may be in vain; that the opinion you have con-

1 *The Election*, Baillie's comedy on hatred, appeared in the second volume of *Plays on the Passions* in 1802.

ceived of your ability to perform it may be a delusion, a false suggestion of self-love, the fantasy of an aspiring temper, is most discouraging and cheerless. I have not proceeded so far, indeed, merely upon the strength of my own judgment; but the friends to whom I have shewn my manuscripts are partial to me, and their approbation which in the case of any indifferent person would be in my mind completely decisive, goes but a little way in relieving me from these apprehensions. To step beyond the circle of my own immediate friends[1] in quest of opinion, from the particular temper of my mind I feel an uncommon repugnance: I can with less pain to myself bring them before the publick at once, and submit to its decision.[2] It is to my countrymen at large that I call for assistance. If this work is fortunate enough to attract their attention, let their strictures as well as

1 Margaret Carhart describes some of them: "Among Joanna Baillie's thousand admirers, as [Sir Walter] Scott called them, were Wordsworth, Lord and Lady Byron, Southey, Maria Edgeworth, George Ellis, John Richardson, Mrs. Hemans, George Crabbe, Henry Reeve, William Sotheby, Lucy Aikin, Henry Crabb Robinson, Mrs. Grant of Laggan, Mrs. Jameson, Mrs. Siddons, George Ticknor, Harriet Martineau, Mary Berry, Mrs. Barbauld, William Erskine, Daniel Terry, and William Ellery Channing" (36). For a more complete description of Baillie's circle, see Aloma Noble's *Joanna Baillie as a Dramatic Artist*.

2 [Baillie's note] The first of these plays, indeed, has been shewn to two or three Gentlemen whom I have not the honour of reckoning amongst my friends. One of them, who is a man of distinguished talents, has honoured it with very flattering approbation; and, at his suggestion, one or two slight alterations in it have been made. [We will probably only ever be able to guess just who this might be. Men such as Mrs. Anna Laetitia Barbauld's husband, the dissenting minister in Hampstead from 1787 to 1802, or her brother Dr. John Aikin (1747–1822), who not only studied in Edinburgh, practised medicine in London, and wrote *Evenings at Home* (6 vols. 1799–1815) in conjunction with his sister, may have been too close to the inhabitants of Hampstead to keep the secret of Baillie's initial anonymity. Or, might Baillie also be referring to either Sir George Howland Beaumont (1753–1827), English landscape painter and art patron, or Charles James Fox (1749–1806) Liberal statesman and a later supporter (1783) of Lord Frederick North (1732–92)?. Florence MacCunn writes: "But Scott was not the only one among her contemporaries who hailed a new literary force in Joanna Baillie: Sir George Beaumont, that fastidious connoisseur of all the arts, declared that he had hardly dared to hope that such strains could be heard at the end of the eighteenth century, and Fox wrote five pages of eulogy in reply to Sir George's recommendation of the plays" (294). Further evidence to support this conjecture might be that the Hon. F. North wrote the prologue for the 1800 performance at Drury Lane, or that perhaps Baillie may have been making a silent nod to Beaumont by creating a character in *The Tryal* of the same name.]

their praise come to my aid: the one will encourage me in a long and arduous undertaking, the other will teach me to improve it as I advance. For there are many errours that may be detected, and improvements that may be suggested in the prosecution of this work, which from the observations of a great variety of readers are more likely to be pointed out to me, than from those of a small number of persons, even of the best judgment. I am not possessed of that confidence in mine own powers, which enables the concealed genius, under the pressure of present discouragement, to pursue his labours in security, looking firmly forward to other more enlightened times for his reward. If my own countrymen[1] with whom I live and converse, who look upon the same race of men, the same state of society, the same passing events with myself, receive not my offering, I presume not to look to posterity.

Before I close this discourse, let me crave the forbearance of my reader, if he has discovered in the course of it any unacknowledged use of the thoughts of other authours, which he thinks ought to have been noticed; and let me beg the same favour, if in reading the following plays, any similar neglect seems to occur. There are few writers who have sufficient originality of thought to strike out for themselves new ideas upon every occasion. When a thought presents itself to me, as suited to the purpose I am aiming at, I would neither be thought proud enough to reject it, on finding that another has used it before me, nor mean enough to make use of it without acknowledging the obligation, when I can at all guess to whom such acknowledgments are due. But I am situated where I have no library to consult; my reading through the whole of my life has been of a loose, scattered, unmethodical kind, with no determined direction, and I have not been blessed by nature

1 Samuel B. Rogers (1763–1855), author of *The Pleasures of Memory* (1792), reviewed this edition (*Monthly Review*, September 1798). Rogers became a close friend of Baillie's, and his positive review afforded her great encouragement. "Encouragement, received from the pen of a celebrated poet, did, in the words of Joanna, 'enable her to make head against criticism of a very different character'; and this expression from one of firm mind, tenacious of its convictions, showed how keenly she had felt strictures launched with all the poignancy consummate talent could employ" (*Works* x). See also Carhart 42–43 and introduction.

with the advantages of a retentive or accurate memory. Do not, however, imagine from this, I at all wish to insinuate that I ought to be acquitted of every obligation to preceding authours; and that when a palpable similarity of thought and expression is observable between us, it is a similarity produced by accident alone, and with perfect unconsciousness on my part. I am frequently sensible, from the manner in which an idea arises to my imagination, and the readiness with which words, also, present themselves to clothe it in, that I am only making use of some dormant part of that hoard of ideas which the most indifferent memories lay up, and not the native suggestions of mine own mind. Whenever I have suspected myself of doing so, in the course of this work, I have felt a strong inclination to mark that suspicion in a note. But, besides that it might have appeared like an affectation of scrupulousness which I would avoid, there being likewise, most assuredly, many other places in it where I have done the same thing without being conscious of it, a suspicion of wishing to slur them over, and claim all the rest as unreservedly my own, would unavoidably have attached to me. If this volume should appear, to any candid and liberal critick, to merit that he should take the trouble of pointing out to me in what parts of it I seem to have made that use of other authours' writings, which according to the fair laws[1] of literature ought to have been acknowledged, I shall think myself obliged to him. I shall examine the sources he points out as having supplied my own lack of ideas; and if this book should have the good fortune to go through a second edition, I shall not fail to own my obligations to him, and the authours from whom I may have borrowed.

How little credit soever, upon perusing these plays, the reader may think me entitled to in regard to the execution of the work, he will not, I flatter myself, deny me some credit in regard to the plan. I know of no series of plays, in any language, expressly descriptive of the different passions; and I believe there are few plays existing in which the display of one strong

1 Baillie's signature appeared on an "Address of certain authors of Great Britain to the Senate of the U.S." requesting the enactment of a copyright law, Feb. 2, 1837 (Huntington Museum 11234).

passion is the chief business of the drama, so written that they could properly make part of such a series. I do not think that we should, from the works of various authours, be able to make a collection which would give us any thing exactly of the nature of that which is here proposed. If the reader, in perusing it, perceives that the abilities of the authour are not proportioned to the task which is imposed upon them, he will wish in the spirit of kindness rather than of censure, as I most sincerely do, that they had been more adequate to it. However, if I perform it ill, I am still confident that this (pardon me if I call it, noble) design will not be suffered to fall to the ground; some one will arise after me who will do it justice; and there is no poet, possessing genius for such a work, who will not at the same time possess that spirit of justice and of candour, which will lead him to remember me with respect.

I have now only to thank my reader, whoever he may be, who has followed me through the pages of this discourse, for having had the patience to do so. May he, in going through what follows (a wish the sincerity of which he cannot doubt) find more to reward his trouble than I dare venture to promise him; and for the pains he has already taken, and that, which he intends to take for me, I request that he will accept of my grateful acknowledgments.[1]

1 [Baillie's note] Shakspeare, more than any of our poets, gives peculiar and appropriate distinction to the characters of his tragedies. The remarks I have made, in regard to the little variety of character to be met with in tragedy, apply not to him. Neither has he, as other Dramatists generally do, bestowed pains on the chief persons of his drama only, leaving the second and inferiour ones insignificant and spiritless. He never wears out our capacity to feel, by eternally pressing upon it. His tragedies are agreeably chequered with variety of scenes, enriched with good sense, nature, and vivacity, which relieve our minds from the fatigue of continued distress. If he sometimes carries this so far as to break in upon that serious tone of mind, which disposes us to listen with effect to the higher scenes of tragedy, he has done so chiefly in his historical plays, where the distresses set forth are commonly of that publick kind, which does not, at any rate, make much impression upon the feelings.