Journal of Modern Philosophy

'In Examining Others We Know Ourselves': Joanna Baillie on Sympathetic Curiosity, Moral Education, and Drama

LAUREN KOPAJTIC
Fordham University

This paper argues that Joanna Baillie's 'Introductory Discourse' to her *Plays on Passions* offers a theory of moral education based on an epistemology of passion—an account of how we come to know and understand the passions—both of which deserve further philosophical attention. Like her fellow Scots, David Hume and Adam Smith, Baillie offers a sentimentalist approach to human psychology, focusing on affective states as the primary constituents of character and determinants of action. She also shares a spectatorial approach to moral judgment, emphasizing the universal psychological propensity of 'sympathetick curiosity', which attracts spectators to those around them. I show that Baillie conceives of sympathetic curiosity in epistemic terms, as our desire to observe and know the feelings of others, claiming that 'in examining others, we know ourselves' (ID 74). However, for this propensity to serve properly in this role, it must be regulated through careful deployment and systematic reflection on one's observations. I then examine Baillie's theory of moral education through literature, showing that while Baillie sees many species of moral writing as having the function of assisting and regulating sympathetic curiosity, she privileges drama. I conclude by showing that although Baillie overstates her case in some respects, the core of her argument for the moral educational role of literature is persuasive and provides a rich resource in our study of eighteenth-century treatments of passion, character, and moral education.

Contact: Lauren Kopajtic <lkopajtic@fordham.edu>

https://doi.org/10.25894/jmp.1876

This paper makes a case for the philosophical interest of the work of Joanna Baillie (1762–1851), a Scottish writer primarily known for a series of plays designed to offer 'a complete exhibition of passion, with its varieties and progress in the breast of man' (ID102).[1] There are many fruitful connections to be made between eighteenth-century philosophy and drama. Writing of the British theater in the late eighteenth century, Jean Marsden notes that, 'attracting thousands of spectators daily', drama was 'the most widely disseminated and influential form of literature of its day. Critics and moralists alike commended theatre's superior ability to instruct a broad audience; because of the intense emotions it excited and because of the public venue in which these emotions were experienced, it was hailed as a source of national moral authority' (2019, 2). It is not surprising, then, to find British philosophers of the period with a deep interest in the theater. I will offer two examples, both of whom have indirect connections to Baillie.[2]

David Hume's philosophical works regularly allude to the theater, including a memorable description of sympathy, in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, featuring the man who enters the theater and 'is immediately struck with the view of so great a multitude, participating of one common amusement' and 'experiences, from their very aspect, a superior sensibility or disposition of being affected with every sentiment, which he shares with his fellow-creatures' (5.24). Hume's important essay 'Of Tragedy' examines the problematic pleasure spectators feel upon viewing tragedy, a topic of perennial interest in the eighteenth century.[3] Moreover, Hume's public support of John Home's *Douglas: A Tragedy*, first performed in Edinburgh in 1756, added fuel to the debate over the irreligiosity of the theater and the impropriety of clergymen writing for the stage.[4] Relatedly, Adam Smith is known for the theatrical metaphors and structures used throughout his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS),[5] especially the figure of

1. All references to Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" will be to Baillie (2001), abbreviated as ID.

2. These examples barely scratch the surface, and a larger project on British philosophical treatments of theater in the eighteenth century should address Lord Shaftesbury, Frances Hutcheson, Joseph Addison, Edmund Burke, Lord Kames, Elizabeth Montagu, Hugh Blair, and others. Expanding out from Britain adds even more candidates for discussion, including Rousseau, Diderot, Schiller, and Lessing.

3. For further discussion of Hume on the paradox of tragedy, see, among others, Dadlez (2004) and Yanal (1991).

4. For discussion of Hume's relation to *Douglas*, see Mossner (1940) and Lee (2001). According to Alexander Carlyle, who recounts this event in a letter, Hume played a part (the villain) in an early reading of this play, see Sher (2015): 77, n. 21.

5. See Marshall (1986) for an important treatment of Smith and theater. For responses to this focus on the theatricality of Smith's TMS, see Griswold (1999): 65–7; Griswold (2010); Griswold (2006); and Degooyer (2018). For further discussion of general features of Smith's engagement with theater, see Zuckert (2024); Valihora (2016); and Chandler (2016). For a specific treatment of Smith's relation to the French neoclassical tradition of drama, see Camp (2020); and for a treatment of Smith on the paradox of tragedy, see Siraki (2010).

the impartial spectator, and throughout TMS he refers to several specific plays, both classical and modern.[6] Smith also comments on the history and aesthetics of drama in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (LRBL), and addresses the history and morality of the theater in both *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (LJ) and *Wealth of Nations* (WN).[7] Like Hume, Smith was also involved in more public discussions of the theater, as Ryan Hanley shows, serving in the winter of 1762–63 on a University of Glasgow faculty committee tasked with blocking the construction of a theater in Glasgow.[8]

As interested as Hume and Smith may have been in the theater, and as popular and publicly discussed as the theater was in the period, these topics have been largely relegated to the wings in philosophical treatments of eighteenth-century views on human nature, morality, and moral education. Examining Baillie's 1798 'Introductory Discourse' to her *Plays on Passions* allows us to spotlight a dramatist's rich contribution to these areas of philosophical discourse.[9] By doing this, as I will argue, we can see that Baillie's 'Introductory Discourse' offers a theory of moral education that is based on an epistemology of passion—an account of how we come to know and understand the passions—both of which are deserving of further philosophical attention.

Baillie's 'Introductory Discourse' offers an account of human psychology akin to that of her fellow Scots, focusing on affective states—passions, propensities, sentiments, and feelings—as the primary constituents of character and the primary determinants of action. She also shares with Hume and Smith a spectatorial approach to moral judgment, placing special emphasis on the universal

6. Plays cited include ancient tragedies [Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae* (TMSI.ii.1.12) and *Oedipus Rex* (TMSII.iii.3.5), and Euripides' *Hippolytus* (TMSI.ii.1.12)], as well as more modern works in French and English [Shakespeare's *Othello* (TMSI.ii.3.2) and *Hamlet* (TMSVI.iii.45), Racine's *Phèdre* (TMSI.ii.1.4), Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* (TMSI.ii.2.3 and II.iii.3.5), Thomas Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage, or Innocent Adultery* (TMSII.iii.3.5), and Voltaire's *Mahomet* (TMSIII.6.12) and *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (TMSVI.ii.1.22)].

7. For discussion of Smith on the morality of theater, with a focus on French theater, see Dawson (1991); for an excellent treatment of Smith in relation to Rousseau, with a focus on LJ and LRBL in addition to Smith's better-known texts, see Hanley (2006).

8. See Hanley (2006): 177, who cites source material in Scott (1965) and Ross (1995). Hanley seeks to explain Smith's apparent change of mind from his early suspicion of the theater to his later support of it in WN.

9. Why expand our interest in this way? For a classic argument for the importance of recovering women philosophers throughout history, see O'Neill (1998). Sarah Hutton (2015) makes the point that we also need an 'enlarged sense of philosophical genre' to fully capture the contributions of women (17). Alison Stone (2023) applies these arguments to Anna Jameson, tracing her connections to Baillie (8–10), and in the process revealing the importance of uncovering the intellectual relationships of women as well. Stone's article also nicely emphasizes the close interconnections between aesthetics and ethics, and how women who participated in more obviously aesthetic discourse took themselves to be thereby contributing to moral discourse. Finally, Deborah Boyle (2024) extends these arguments to philosophical writings by Scottish women, finding a fruitful critical engagement between Baillie and the novelist and educational theorist Elizabeth Hamilton.

psychological propensity of 'sympathetick curiosity', which attracts spectators to those around them (ID69). After introducing Baillie, I examine her conception of sympathetic curiosity and its place in her larger argument for the role of drama in moral education. I use key points of contact between Baillie and Smith to show that Baillie construes sympathetic curiosity as an epistemic capacity, 'our best and most powerful instructor' (ID74), which functions well when it assists our discernment and classification of passions and character traits, as indicated by outward expressions. After providing an account of Baillie's conception of sympathetic curiosity and its role in her epistemology of passion, I work through Baillie's theory of moral education through literature. Unsurprisingly, Baillie argues that sympathetic curiosity is best regulated through engagement with drama, for it is 'in examining others we know ourselves', and it is by engaging with drama, she holds, that we are best positioned to examine others (ID74). I conclude by showing that while there are problems with Baillie's argument for the superiority of drama over other forms, and with her argument for the 'moral efficacy' of drama (ID93), her focus on literature as a 'school' for moral instruction nonetheless provides a rich resource in our study of eighteenth-century treatments of passion, character, and moral education (ID104).

Part 1: Introducing Baillie and the *Plays on Passions*

Joanna Baillie was born in Scotland, lived there until her mid-twenties, and then moved with her family, eventually settling in Hampstead.[10] Throughout her long life she was active in intellectual and literary circles. She was connected to prominent Scottish intellectuals through her male relatives, including her father, Reverend James Baillie, who was Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow from 1776 until his death in 1778; her maternal uncle Dr. William Hunter, a renowned anatomist and obstetrician with a London practice; and her brother, Dr. Matthew Baillie, who first joined his uncle's practice and then became a leading London physician and eventually 'physician-extraordinary' to King George III.[11] Baillie was also connected to many leading figures in British arts and literature, participating in the literary salon hosted by Anna Laetitia Barbauld and cultivating friendships with the novelist Maria Edgeworth as well as several leading literary men, including Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, and William Wordsworth. She was considered the foremost dramatist of her moment,

10. Biographical information is drawn from: Anonymous (1853); Carhart (1923); Duthie (2001); and Slagle (2002).

11. For an illuminating discussion of the parallels between Joanna Baillie's work and her brother Matthew's medical work on pathological passions, see Burwick (2004).

with Scott writing in his *Marmion* (1808) that 'Avon's swans…deemed their own Shakespeare lived again' (1893, Canto III, 107–110).

While also known for her poetry, Baillie's work as a playwright and theater theorist are my focus. Her primary literary project is the multi-volume *A Series of Plays: in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind. Each passion being the subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy* (*Plays on Passions*), the first volume of which appeared anonymously in 1798. This first volume contains the lengthy 'Introductory Discourse', as well as three plays: *Count Basil* (a tragedy on love), *The Tryal* (a comedy on love), and *De Monfort* (a tragedy on hate). The second volume (1802) includes a short prefatory note 'To the Reader', *The Election* (a comedy on hatred), *Ethwald*, Parts I and II (a tragedy on ambition), and *The Second Marriage* (a comedy on ambition). The third volume (1812) includes a longer prefatory note 'To the Reader', *Orra* (a tragedy on fear), *The Dream* (a second tragedy on fear), *The Siege* (a comedy on fear), and *The Beacon* (a musical drama on hope). The prefatory note to volume 3 of *Plays on Passions* helps scholars to work out her original scheme and her success in completing it. From this, we can determine that Baillie initially planned to delineate at least thirteen passions, with a tragedy and comedy on each: love, hate, ambition, fear, hope, remorse, jealousy, pride, envy, revenge, anger, joy, and grief. Pride was dropped, as it would make a 'dull subject' unless combined with more turbulent passions, as were joy, grief, and anger, for being too 'transient' and too frequently combined with other passions to be fit as a sole subject for a play (1812 and 1821, xiv). Her paired plays on jealousy (*Romiero* and *The Alienated Manor*) and her tragedy on remorse (*Henriquez*) do not appear until the 1836 edition of *Dramas*, and in her preface to this volume she writes that she has completed the project as far as she intends, adding that she has excluded envy and revenge because they are already a frequent subject of plays (1836, vi).

Baillie takes a theoretical approach to her dramatic writing, using the 'Introductory Discourse' to explain her project and its goals, but only after first presenting her views on human nature. She situates the work of the dramatist as a 'species of moral writing' and claims that such writing depends on 'ideas regarding human nature' (ID67). Together with the biographical details about her intellectual life, this theoretical opening to an artistic work suggests Baillie's familiarity with philosophical writing, especially the work of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. Baillie herself refers in print to Hume and Dugald Stewart (Stewart is 'a great philosophical writer', while Hume is the writer of 'sceptical works') in the preface to *The Martyr* (1826, iii), going on to quote at length from Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of Mind*. Peter Duthie, the editor of the critical edition of the first volume of Baillie's *Plays on Passions*, suggests that while Baillie can also be connected to Francis Hutcheson, in addition to Hume and Stewart, her affinities to Smith are strongest, and that reading through the 'Introductory Discourse',

'we can detect the thought and style of Smith.'[12] Several other literary scholars have explored connections between Baillie and the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, with Smith being the most frequently discussed philosopher. Baillie's focus on 'sympathetic curiosity' offers a straightforward connection to Smithian sympathy (although also to other sympathy-based theories of the period). Similarly, Baillie's spectatorial framework, derived, in her case, from the figure of the theatrical spectator, aligns nicely with Smith's emphasis on the well-informed and impartial spectator as the source of moral sentiments. While the connections made are somewhat tenuous and not always founded on thorough or persuasive readings of Smith, the scholarly consensus seems to be that Baillie's approach to philosophical questions about human nature, character, passion, and morality is closest to Smith's.[13]

I agree that Baillie's 'Introductory Discourse' can be fruitfully read alongside Smith's TMS, and while substantiating the connections between Baillie and Smith is not my primary focus in this paper, I will add to this body of literature by showing that there are important links between how each conceives of the function of *curiosity*, specifically curiosity about what other people feel, think, and desire. Such connections have not been entirely overlooked—Duthie

12. Duthie (2001): 28. Duthie, via Carhart (1923), relates an intriguing biographical report connecting Smith and Baillie. Peter William Clayden's 1887 biography of Samuel Rogers (1763–1855), a well-traveled poet and literary figure who had met Smith in 1788 and was a friend of Baillie's, provides the important details. Rogers meticulously recorded the conversations at the gatherings he frequently attended. One of these recorded conversations took place about a year after Smith's death, on April 21, 1791, at a literary party where Baillie was in attendance along with Henry Mackenzie, the Scottish novelist. Rogers reports Mackenzie as expounding on the greater cultivation of conversation in Scotland as compared with London, explaining this by holding that the Scottish 'have a more contemplative turn.' After telling a story meant to show that even Scottish farm laborers have a turn for classical literature and contemplation, he softens the pro-Scottish sentiment by quoting Samuel Johnson: 'Dr Johnson was perhaps right when he said of us that every man had a taste, and no man a bellyful.' At which point Rogers reports Baillie as responding, 'And yet you will allow that there are many exceptions to the last part of the rule, sir?…Mr Adam Smith—', whereupon Mackenzie cuts her off to agree that 'Mr Smith was an exception' (Clayden 1887: 166–67). Mackenzie is reported by Rogers to go on to describe Smith's character and manners, but there is no further discussion of Baillie's suggested admiration of Smith's intelligence and erudition.

13. See Carney (2000); Murray (2003); Myers (2004); Judson (2006); Colón (2006): 22–8; Whalen (2013); and McKeever (2020): 112–48. The earliest of these papers are from a period when philosophers were only just starting to seriously engage with Smith's moral theory after much neglect, and unfortunately rely on now-defunct assumptions and interpretations. For example, Carney and Murray both rely on an under-substantiated and now implausible understanding of Smith as a stoic; for an overview of the literature on this topic, along with an argument for why Smith is not best read as holding stoic conceptions in his sentimentalist moral philosophy, see Kopajtic (2020). Other treatments are understandably less interested in exploring the details of Smith's moral philosophy, and so move quickly from a few statements of his main ideas to the material from Baillie and other literary sources.

suggests that one of Smith's few explicit remarks about curiosity, in TMSI.i.1.9,[14] may have been the passage 'that inspired Baillie to coin the phrase "sympathetick curiosity"'—but there is much more we can say.[15] In what follows, I will use key scenes and claims from Smith's TMS to elucidate Baillie's conception of sympathetic curiosity, revealing it to be an epistemic capacity, an 'instructor' that, when properly regulated, assists our discernment and classification of passions and other psychological principles (ID74). This approach will allow me to make the case for the philosophical interest of Baillie's work, first delineating her epistemology of passion and then her theory of moral education.

Part 2: Sympathetic Curiosity

After situating the work of the dramatist as a 'species of moral writing', and claiming that such writing thus depends on 'ideas regarding human nature' (ID67), Baillie describes the chief propensity of human nature:

> From that strong sympathy which most creatures, but the human above all, feel for others of their kind, nothing has become so much an object of man's curiosity as man himself. We are all conscious of this within ourselves, and so constantly do we meet with it in others, that like every circumstance of continually repeated occurrence, it thereby escapes observation. Every person, who is not deficient in intellect, is more or less occupied in tracing, amongst the individuals he converses with, the varieties of understanding and temper which constitute the characters of men; and receives great pleasure from every stroke of nature that points out to him those varieties. (ID67–8)

First billing in Baillie's account of human nature goes to sympathy and curiosity, which, on her account, direct us primarily to other humans. She represents us as engaged in a 'constant employment' of these, inquiring into the characters, temperaments, and passions of the people around us and classifying them according to what we find (ID68). Indeed, we are so accustomed to this work of inquiry, interpretation, and classification, that it largely escapes our observation—it is the pervasive background activity of our social lives.

Baillie often runs these principles together as 'sympathetick curiosity'. Treating them separately for a moment, it is important to note that Baillie's conception of sympathy is introduced as *feeling-for* a fellow creature, not

14. References to Smith's TMS follow the accepted practice of referring to Part, section, chapter, and paragraph.

15. Duthie (2001): 28.

necessarily *feeling-the-same-as* a fellow creature, or even *feeling-like* a fellow creature.[16] For Baillie, "sympathy" often seems to function like "sensibility," that is, as a form of affective receptivity, referring to the ability to be 'affected', 'excited', or 'move[d]' by the feelings of others.[17] 'Sympathetick' primarily functions to modify 'curiosity' or 'propensity', making it curiosity *about* passions, feelings, and the affective interiors of others, or a propensity toward feeling for the affective states of others. Turning to curiosity, Baillie initially argues for the universality and strength of the propensity of sympathetic curiosity, both of which I discuss below. She most often identifies curiosity as a 'propensity' of the mind, but also occasionally describes it as a 'desire'.[18] For Baillie, 'sympathetick curiosity' is a psychological propensity that is universal, strong, and primarily targets the inner affective lives of other humans—Baillie's view of human nature holds that we are curious about the hearts and minds of others and easily moved or affected by their feelings.

Baillie's connection of curiosity with desire helpfully points to the wider context in which she is working. As Barbara Benedict has shown (2001), early modern British critics regularly raised concerns about curiosity as a dangerous or suspect desire for knowledge, construing curiosity as narcissistic, aggressive, transgressive, impious, and even fruitless (1–5). Furthermore, curiosity was often seen as an especially strong and unmanageable impulse, with Samuel Johnson describing it as 'the thirst of the soul', 'inflam[ing] and torment[ing] us' (1752, 22). Curiosity also appears as an important motivating force in the sentimentalist moral theories and literature of the eighteenth century, impelling people to engage with each other imaginatively and sympathetically. This is because, as Laurence Sterne memorably puts it in *Tristram Shandy* (1767), 'our minds shine not through the body, but are wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystalized flesh and blood' (2009, 60).[19] Given our general psychological opacity and the lack of a direct method for seeing through that opacity, the work of imagining and discerning the inner life of another is arduous and limited in success. Curiosity is a response to these obstacles, impelling us to observe, inquire into, and interpret the situations of other people. Curiosity is thus connected to what David Marshall has called 'the problem of sympathy': 'since we cannot know the experience or sensations of another person, we must represent in our imagination copies of the sentiments that we ourselves feel as we imagine ourselves in

16. For a nuanced treatment of Smith and Baillie on sympathy that corrects the overly quick readings of Smith and Baillie as holding the same views of sympathy, see Boyle (2024). I return to these dimensions of Baillie's conception of sympathy below.

17. For 'affected', see ID88; for 'excited', see ID84; for 'move', see ID82, 89.

18. For 'propensity', see ID69, 72, 74, 76, 79, 83; for 'desire', see ID70, 78, 90, 97.

19. Baillie has the titular character in *De Monfort* voice this condition: 'That man was never born whose secret soul/With all its motley treasure of dark thoughts, / Foul fantasies, vain musing, and wild dreams, / Was ever open'd to another's scan.' (Baillie 2001: 314; I.ii.95–8).

someone else's place and person' (1988, 5). Baillie and Smith both engage with this problem, positing psychological opacity and connecting it to a psychological force of attraction to the hidden interiors of others.

Whereas Baillie's interest in curiosity is announced from the start of her 'Introductory Discourse' and associated quickly with sympathy, Smith begins with sympathy, 'our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever' (TMSI.i.1.5), and the role of curiosity is implied rather than explicitly stated in the moral psychology he presents in the opening sections.[20] TMS opens with a curious spectator witnessing a scene of extreme distress:

> As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this in any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels. (TMSI.i.1.2)

The minds of others are not transparent to us, so we must rely on our imagination and experience to form some conception of what others feel. Fellow-feeling is achieved only through an imaginative change of situations where the spectator sympathetically reaches out and into the other's situation.[21] Implicit in this

20. There has been some discussion of Smith on curiosity, but it has largely focused on a different species or application of curiosity. Smith's essay 'The History of Astronomy' has significantly more to say about curiosity that targets wondrous or striking natural phenomena and motivates scientific inquiry. For further discussion of curiosity and wonder, understood as intellectual sentiments, see Schliesser (2017): 72–80 and 255–74.

21. The literature on imagination and sympathy in Smith is extensive. For a now-classic treatment, see Griswold (1999); see also Griswold (2006) and Debes (2016). For a rich discussion of Smith on imagination and observation in connection with several nineteenth-century women writers, see Vetter (2017). Vetter argues that Harriet Martineau positions her view of sympathy against

description is the assumption that something impels the spectator to go to the trouble of imaginatively reaching out to such a distressing scene. As Smith will go on to show, in such a case, curiosity can provide an extra impulse.[22]

In a subsequent scene, Smith supposes a situation where someone cries out with 'general lamentations, which express nothing but the anguish of the sufferer' (TMSI.i.1.9). The generality and the strength of these expressions 'create rather a curiosity to inquire into his situation, along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than any actual sympathy that is very sensible' (TMSI.i.1.9). Instead of feeling an immediate sympathy with the apparent anguish, the spectator's curiosity is piqued, and she inquires further. In such a case, Smith says, 'the first question which we ask is, What has befallen you?' and we seek to learn more before 'torturing ourselves with conjectures about what may be' (TMSI.i.1.9).[23] Curiosity animates the spectator to inquire further and to better understand the situation so as to better imagine it. This further inquiry is in turn requisite for well-formed moral sentiments, for to feel moral sentiments properly, the spectator 'must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents; and strive to render as perfect as possible, that imaginary change of situation upon which his sympathy is founded' (TMSI.i.4.6). This work of obtaining good information about the agent separates ordinary from standard-setting spectators—those who are 'impartial and well-informed' and whose 'sympathetic feelings' set the 'precise and distinct measure' of the propriety of different affections (TMSVII.ii.1.49).

Smith's view of spectatorship, then, implicitly requires curiosity to play a motivating role in the imaginative and epistemic work of the spectator. Most agents will express their feelings in vague, inchoate, or truncated ways. They will be caught up in their own situations, perhaps working to achieve some self-command, the effort that complements the spectator's work of imagination and information-gathering in the joint attempt to achieve mutual sympathy, and they likely will not be able to communicate clearly and straightforwardly all the details of their situation. Discerning those details and imagining the situation that knits them together is the work of the spectator, and her effort to do that work is prompted by her curiosity to know what has befallen the agent. As Smith writes in a later discussion of curiosity, because we all seek the harmony of mutual sympathy, 'we all desire, upon this account, to feel how each other is affected, to penetrate into each other's bosoms, and to observe the sentiments

Smith's in diminishing the need for and role of imagination in sympathetic understanding of others (2017: 80–2). As I will show below, in contrast, Baillie agrees with Smith about the unavoidability of psychological opacity, and the need for imaginative access since direct access is impossible.

22. Also important in Smith's explanation is the pleasure of mutual sympathy, which I do not address here. See Siraki (2010) for a reading that shows the importance of the pleasure of mutual sympathy in Smith's solution to the problem of tragic pleasure.

23. In the opening scene of Baillie's *De Monfort*, the character Jerome asks another, 'What has befallen him?' seeking to learn the cause of a marked change in De Monfort (Baillie 2001: 303, I.i.20).

and affections which really subsist there' (TMSVII.iv.28).[24] Mutual sympathy depends on open communication of feeling, and so we are attracted to others, seeking to observe, inquire, understand, and, hopefully, harmonize. Indeed, he continues: 'this passion to discover the real sentiments of others is naturally so strong, that it often degenerates into a troublesome and impertinent curiosity to pry into those secrets of our neighbours which they have very justifiable reasons for concealing' (TMSVII.iv.28). Smith is here describing curiosity about the sentiments and passions of others as a 'desire' that affects us 'all' and is 'so strong' that it 'often degenerates' into impertinent prying. To my knowledge, these remarks on curiosity, which appear in the closing pages of TMS, have not yet been brought in connection with Baillie's views on sympathetic curiosity, but it is here that we can see a very close similarity with Baillie's more strongly and explicitly stated claims about the universality and strength of this propensity.

While Baillie frequently refers to sympathetic curiosity as *universal*, the universality of this propensity seems to be meant in at least two ways. First, the propensity is universally present in human psychology, evident even in young children (ID74), and active in 'all' of us (ID67, 70). Second, sympathetic curiosity is attracted to what is felt and experienced in all human situations. As Baillie establishes in the opening pages, sympathetic curiosity is active in all our dealings with others, including our 'ordinary intercourse with society' and the 'common occurrences of life' (ID69). As we saw above, when Baillie first introduces this propensity, she claims that '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' (ID67). Sympathetic curiosity is, for Baillie, the 'universal desire in the human mind to behold man in *every* situation' (ID70, emphasis added).

While sympathetic curiosity attracts us to all human situations, Baillie soon adds that we are more strongly attracted to 'extraordinary situations of difficulty and distress' (ID69). To show this, she considers the spectacle of a public execution, surmising that given the unpleasant and shocking aspects of such an event, it must be curiosity that pulls so many to a spectacle of suffering:

> It cannot be any pleasure we receive from the sufferings of a fellow-creature which attracts such multitudes of people to a publick execution, though it is the horror we conceive for such a spectacle that keeps so many more away. To see a human being bearing himself up under such circumstances, or struggling with the terrible apprehensions which such

24. After the initial discussion in the opening pages, and before this discussion in the closing pages, there are only a few mentions of curiosity itself in Smith's TMS, and in a different register (the useless curios of TMSIV.1.6–8 or the purely academic exercise of curiosity in TMSVII.iii.intro.3).

> 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. For though few at such a spectacle can get near enough to distinguish the expression of face, or the minuter parts of a criminal's behaviour, yet from a considerable distance will they eagerly mark whether he steps firmly; whether the motions of his body denote agitation or calmness, and if the wind does but ruffle his garment, they will, even from that change upon the outline of his distant figure, read some expression connected with the dreadful situation. (ID69–70)[25]

Baillie describes spectators who are fighting through the horror of watching another human be killed, nonetheless eager to read the smallest signs—even inconsequential or false signs, like a garment ruffling in the wind—that would indicate what the criminal feels as he approaches his death. In this scene, like Smith's opening scene of the man on the rack, Baillie's spectators are reading external signs and cues to discern the inaccessible inner state of the criminal. She adds that spectators who are reluctant to attend a public execution will still eagerly converse with someone who has in order to satisfy their curiosity and 'to learn, very minutely, every circumstance connected with it, except the very act itself of inflicting death' (ID70).

We are also strongly attracted, Baillie claims, to extraordinary yet private situations—situations where imagination is necessary because we have no other way of "getting inside".[26] We do not just want to see the criminal at the public gallows; we wish 'to lift up the roof of his dungeon…and look upon a criminal the night before he suffers, in his still hours of privacy' (ID70).[27] Such a moment, when the 'disguise' of having to appear before others has fallen away, would 'present an object to the mind of every person…more powerfully attractive than

25. In this passage, Baillie is offering a response to the problem of tragedy that so many other authors of her moment discuss. Her answer to the question of why we are pleased by viewing tragic events is that our sympathetic curiosity is satisfied by witnessing a human being in a powerfully attractive and interesting scene of distress. Furthermore, her answer holds for 'real' tragedies just as for fictional ones, provided the fiction presents a naturalistic representation. See Siraki (2010) for a reading of Smith on tragedy that argues that Smith would similarly explain tragic pleasure by citing the satisfaction of a different psychological drive (in Smith's case, the desire for mutual sympathy), and similarly sees no difference between real and fictional tragedies.

26. Contra Whalen (2013: 669), I hold that Baillie, like Smith, must think we use imagination in our attempts to access the feelings of others, as we do not have any direct way of doing so. This is why the dramatist has such an important role to play in moral education, as the dramatist (and the literary author more generally) offer accessible and fully delineated portraits of otherwise inaccessible interiors. See Boyle (2024: 9) for a similar reading that holds that Baillie's conception of sympathy cannot be a contagion or direct access model.

27. As Duthie notes, she refers here to Alain René Lesage's, *Le Diable boiteaux* (1707), where the character of a devil serves as a traveling companion to the human protagonist, assisting him in his observations by lifting the roofs off houses to expose other humans in their most private moments, see Baillie (2001): 70, n. 1.

almost any other' (ID70). For Baillie, reserve, secrecy, and privacy present an almost irresistible enticement to curiosity—a call to rip off the veil and uncover what is hidden—and she regularly uses the device of a dramatic unmasking in her plays.[28] We are on the watch for the smallest signs: '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' (ID73). When we spot someone who appears to be concealing some strong passion, '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?' (ID73). We desire to be present for these private, inaccessible human situations—unseen watchers who can observe a human being *in extremis*. For Baillie, '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' (ID73). Whether it pulls us to witness a highly public spectacle of suffering or to voyeuristically imagine the most private moments of someone in an extreme situation, sympathetic curiosity is a strong and universal desire to behold man in every situation (ID70).[29]

Baillie conceives of sympathetic curiosity as universally present in humans, attracted to all human situations, and a strong, constant, at-times irresistible desire to observe the inner depths of another. Furthermore, as we can now start to see, she conceives of sympathetic curiosity in epistemic terms, as our desire to *observe* and *know* the feelings of others.[30] As we saw above, Smith also conceives of the curiosity of spectators in epistemic terms, with spectators tasked with information-gathering, observation and discernment, and interpretation. Present throughout Baillie's descriptions of curiosity are similarly epistemic terms: spectators 'observe', 'enquire', and 'examine', seeking to 'distinguish', 'discern', 'discover', and 'trace' the inner movements of feeling in others.[31] Drawing these points together, after presenting her conception of sympathetic curiosity, Baillie explicitly claims that 'God Almighty has implanted [sympathetic curiosity] within us, as well as all our other propensities and passions, for wise and

28. See *Count Basil* Act III, scene iii, and *De Monfort*, Act II, scene I, both in Baillie (2001).

29. Myers (2004), Judson (2006), and Whalen (2013) all draw out the more transgressive sides of Baillie's conception of curiosity and spectatorship, with Myers claiming that Baillie describes the 'dark side' of spectatorship 'through her predilection for a language of voyeurism, invasion, and inquisition' (88), and Judson holding that Baillie 'unabashedly places voyeurism at the heart of moral inquiry' (54). Whalen notes these dimensions but adds that Baillie's aim as a didactic dramatist is 'to turn the spectators' potentially voyeuristic gaze into a sympathetic one' (667).

30. Adela Pinch (1996) makes this point, but only briefly mentions Baillie in setting up her reading of the 'epistemology of emotion' in other figures (2–3).

31. For 'observe', see ID69, 72, 73, 75, 76, 86, 90; for 'enquire'', see ID72; for 'examine', see ID69, 74; for 'distinguish', see ID70, 85; for 'discern', see ID78; for 'discover', see ID73, 85, 98; for 'trace', see ID73, 91.

good purposes. It is our best and most powerful instructor.…*In examining others we know ourselves*" (ID74, emphasis added). Offering her own take on the Delphic inscription, 'Know thyself', Baillie holds that sympathetic curiosity has the important epistemic function of enabling understanding of human character and action, which thereby enables self-understanding.

How exactly does the constant, pervasive, near-uncontrollable activity of sympathetic curiosity produce such knowledge and understanding? Baillie gives a clue in one of her earliest descriptions of how sympathetic curiosity functions, where she claims that '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' (ID68). Sympathetic curiosity has the background function of producing a *store* of ideas of the varieties of human character, and a *classificatory scheme* to be used in sorting individuals. In this early passage, Baillie suggests that everyone has a store of ideas and a classificatory scheme that they can access, but in a later discussion she qualifies this point, holding that for sympathetic curiosity to be the 'best and most powerful instructor' as it is intended to be, it must be deployed carefully and systematically.

Baillie claims that while sympathetic curiosity is a universal propensity of the human mind, 'with the generality of mankind it occupies itself in a passing and superficial way' (ID75). They can make observations just as well as 'the sage', but what they observe 'is but the visitor of a moment; they look upon it singly and unconnected' (ID75). In contrast, the person who deploys sympathetic curiosity properly will 'reflect and reason' upon their observations: '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 to others which are concealed' (ID75). To this connoisseur of human nature, all the signs of inner feeling can be read and understood, and the play of human action will be watched as if it were a 'theatrical exhibition' (ID75).[32]

To attain this level of connoisseurship, one would need both a wide-ranging collection of experience as well as a method and ordering scheme; that is, one needs the diverse observations as well as the underlying principles that bring them together. While the 'generality of mankind' is capable of amassing individual collections of their observations, what separates them from the 'contemplative' spectator is method and order (ID75–6). For most people, 'those strokes of nature which they are so ready to remark, stand single and unconnected in their minds' (ID76). But, Baillie optimistically suggests, 'they may be easily induced

32. See Benedict (2001): Chapter 4 for a treatment of the collector and connoisseur.

to [reason and reflect]', so long as they are provided with a proper instructional aide. They require something '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' (ID76). This point is the hinge between Baillie's account of sympathetic curiosity and her presentation and justification for her literary project. It is also the hinge between her epistemology of passion and her theory of moral education. Her 'Introductory Discourse' begins with a 'demand upon the patience of [her] reader', for starting with some 'ideas regarding human nature' and not with an outline of her artistic scheme (ID67). The account of human nature that she offers does not claim to be comprehensive, centering as it does on one psychological propensity, but it does provide a strong basis from which to argue for her series of plays. Why should the public welcome a series of plays where each intricately delineates a specific passion? Because such an artwork would serve as the instructional aide needed by the generality of mankind if they are to be more reflective and methodical observers of others. Why should we aim at becoming more reflective and methodical observers of others? Baillie's answer to this question takes us to her account of moral education.

Part 3: Moral Education

Baillie has high hopes for the role of the artist in the moral education of the public. The generality of mankind, impelled by 'the great master-propensity' (ID79) to observe, watch, and examine, but in a desultory way, requires some instructional aide to help organize their ideas of human character, and to render their classificatory scheme accurate and functional. Baillie sees many species of moral writing as striving to provide just that kind of instructional resource, and she repeatedly urges that for instruction to be effective, the form must present vivid and gripping images and examples drawn from the author's own carefully exercised sympathetic curiosity: 'in proportion as moral writers 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' (ID76). But being a playwright, Baillie is not content to argue for the importance of moral education through literature of different forms. She holds that drama has a privileged role to play in the regulation of sympathetic curiosity and in moral education more generally. In this final part, I will present Baillie's account of moral education and her argument for the superiority of drama over other forms. I show that while Baillie overstates her case in some

important respects, the core of her argument for the moral educational role of literature is persuasive and worth further study.

As we have already seen, Baillie holds that sympathetic curiosity, a God-given propensity, functions as 'our best and most powerful instructor' (ID74). Baillie then explains how this propensity can contribute to our specifically *moral* education:

> 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. 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.…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. (ID74)

We have already examined this passage in part above, but seeing the fuller discussion reveals how Baillie is understanding moral education.[33] Through sympathetic curiosity, I can learn what it is like to be 'on the rack, on the scaffold, and in the most afflicting circumstances of distress.' Moreover, I can learn this from a position of relative security, 'with limbs untorn, with head unsmitten, with senses unimpaired by despair,' entering into and examining the distressing situation of another from a position of cool but kind interest. Making my observations in this manner, I learn 'the proprieties and decencies of life' forming a 'standard of excellence' for how to feel and act in different situations, especially those extreme situations which are, happily, unlikely to occur in my life. That is, through the properly regulated exercise of sympathetic curiosity, we can improve as moral judges, understanding and evaluating human character and action in all situations, and we can improve in virtue, becoming 'more just, more merciful, more compassionate', and learning to respect ourselves and humankind.

Baillie's understanding of how we learn through sympathetic and curious observation of others depends on the relative detachment or security of the observer. And, as we saw above, her conception of curiosity holds that we are

33. This passage is another one of Baillie's very Smithian moments, and with a few changes to the language (adding references to the impartial spectator), this could be close to a Smithian description of how we develop our sense of propriety.

strongly attracted to private, hidden, or otherwise inaccessible human situations. While these constraints can be satisfied in real-life encounters, taking them together, we can see why literature is such a valuable resource in Baillie's theory of moral education. The reader or spectator of a work of literature will have the requisite distance from the represented lives and situations, and the function of literature, as understood by Baillie and many of her contemporaries, is to transport readers into private spaces in a way that would not be possible in real life.[34] Referring to the rise of the novel and other forms of popular narrative literature, Baillie writes, 'our desire to know what men are in the closet as well as the field, by the blazing hearth, and at the social board, 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' (ID78). In discursive or argumentative forms of writing, it would be inappropriate to unfold thoroughly the inner lives of the characters of the speakers or subjects, and the focus is instead on quick sketches and examples; in a 'real history', the focus is too much on lofty figures in highly public situations. What we crave, as curious spectators, is to know what recognizable figures are like in the *private* moments of their lives, alone in a room, sitting comfortably with their most intimate companions, or at the table with their friends and neighbors.[35]

Baillie adds an important constraint on the role of literature in moral education, namely, that it must 'faithfully' represent nature (ID86). She repeatedly qualifies her claims on behalf of literature, noting that artworks must offer representations that are 'genuine and true to nature' (ID80), or 'faithfully delineated nature' (ID81). The artist who is 'skillful in their delineations of nature' (ID78), will satisfy the 'sympathetick interest we all take in beings like ourselves' (ID81), but a false note will be marked and judged: '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,

34. See the classic presentation of this point in Watt (1957): Chapter 6. Watt relies on an evocative image from an 1804 review by Francis Jeffrey, where Jeffrey comments on Samuel Richardson's ability to transport readers into private spaces: 'With Richardson, we slip, invisible, into the domestic privacy of his characters, and hear and see every thing that is said and done among them, whether it be interesting or otherwise, and whether it gratify our curiosity or disappoint it' (1844: 321). Jeffrey critically reviewed Baillie's *Plays* in 1803, finding fault with both the design (claiming that Baillie's attempt at isolating the passions creates an artificial portrait), as well as with the more general attempt to offer moral instruction through drama. Jeffrey's review is printed in Baillie (2001): 429–39.

35. Smith similarly notes that 'poets and romance writers' (including dramatists like Racine and Voltaire) can do a better job than philosophers of portraying the 'private and domestic affections' (TMSIII.3.14). For further discussion of Smith on the role of literature in moral education, see Kopajtic (2023).

creatures of a different race, beings of another world' (ID82). If this standard is met, though, then literature can do the work of unveiling and exhibiting the varieties of human character and passion in a full range of human situations. The educational work of this is twofold: the reader or spectator will acquire an enlarged understanding of human nature by engaging with representations of otherwise inaccessible passionate experiences (ID90), and she will thereby gain self-knowledge through examining others (ID74).

Thus far I have been examining what I take to be the core of Baillie's theory of moral education, focusing on how her epistemology of passion supports her account of how we improve as moral judges through engagement with well-crafted literature. But there is more to her account, for Baillie offers a partisan argument for the superiority of drama over other forms, and she suggests that improving as a spectator and moral judge will lead to or coincide with improvements as a moral agent. I will critically examine each of these points in turn.

Storytellers of many kinds can do the work of portraying human character and passion, but Baillie unsurprisingly privileges the dramatist, holding that she can do this work especially well, producing purer and more gripping representations. The dramatist must create living, breathing, physically present characters who will speak for themselves and not be spoken of by a convenient narrator: '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' (ID82). Where the novelist must work with too many diffuse feelings and situations, and the historian must rely on what has been witnessed and recorded, the dramatist 'can follow the great man into his secret closet', or stand beside his bed and hear 'those exclamations of the soul which heaven alone may hear' (ID86). Moreover, the dramatist can write for the performance of passion, often in soliloquy, not merely its description (ID105–106). Baillie argues, '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?' (ID86). To portray hatred rankling in the soul, or the totalizing obsession of romantic love, one needs the special forms of modern drama.

Key in Baillie's privileging of drama is the popularity and accessibility of this form over other literary forms. Baillie holds, '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 favorite amusement of every nation into which it has been introduced' (ID83). From the expressive dance of primitive peoples to the mimicry of children, Baillie holds that 'our taste for it is durable as it is universal' (ID83). Furthermore, while the 'lessons' of drama are not for 'the lowest classes of the labouring people',

> 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 them. (ID103–104)

The 'moral efficacy' of drama depends on its popularity and its public and communal nature, with spectators sympathizing together in the theater (ID93).

For Baillie, drama is especially well-suited to exercising sympathetic curiosity. She writes, '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' (ID90). She holds this is true for both tragedy and comedy, noting first that 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' (ID90). Baillie is careful to qualify her claim about tragedy, not suggesting that we can learn from the example of the actions of such lofty characters, but from their passionate experience: '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' (ID90).[36] I might not be able to make a direct connection to Lady Macbeth's ambition-driven schemes, or to De Monfort's hatred-spurred descent into madness, but I still learn something about passion and about virtue and vice from these lofty characters. Instructing audiences in these respects is the great task of tragedy, and, according to Baillie, many tragedians have failed in this task by prioritizing instead 'beautiful composition and language' (ID90), or by confining themselves to imitation of an existing tradition (ID95). Baillie positions her own work as understanding and attempting to fulfill the particular task of 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' (ID91).

36. Elsewhere Baillie similarly holds 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 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 it holds up for our immediate application' (ID93).

Comedy, too, has an important role to play in moral education, again when it is not distracted from its proper purpose. While tragedy should expose the passions of the great, 'characteristic comedy' gives us the familiar. This form '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' (ID98). This form should also portray the passions and propensities of human nature, but because of its more ordinary characters and situations, it 'offers to us a wide field of instruction, adapted to general application' (ID98).[37] Moreover, because the characters and situations in this form are closer to the experience of spectators, characteristic comedy can provide efficacious examples, calling up in the spectator 'moral reflections' that are 'more applicable' than those of other forms of drama (ID99). Her project to provide 'a complete exhibition of passion, with its varieties and progress in the breast of man' in the comedic form will thus provide instructive examples for audiences. For a spectator who does not yet suffer from a deeply-rooted passion, seeing the comedy 'expos[e] them in an absurd and ridiculous light…may prove a more successful mode of attack than any other' (ID103). He will see unregulated passion in the dramatic representation, see it ridiculed, make the connection to his own nascent passion, and thereby gain the knowledge of himself through observing others, as well as new connections in his body of knowledge of passion and character.

Baillie's argument for the superiority of drama in moral education concludes with the claim that 'the theatre is a school in which much good or evil may be learned' (ID104). But there are problems with this argument. First, Baillie does not adequately make the case *against* other forms of literature. If we are looking for a literary form suited to tracing the 'rise and progress' of the passions (ID95), portraying not only the 'bold and prominent features' but also the 'minute and delicate traits which distinguish them in an infant, growing, and repressed state' (ID104), why not select the novel? Descriptive techniques like focalized narration and free indirect discourse were still in development when Baillie wrote the 'Introductory Discourse', but the novel was already well established as the form for thorough development of familiar characters in a range of ordinary but still interesting situations.[38] Baillie seems to recognize that other forms may have the edge on drama when she notes, discussing the difficulty of portraying the slow growth of hatred in *De Monfort*, 'I could not have introduced my chief characters upon the stage as boys, and then as men' because of the 'limitation of dramatick time' (ID108). Portraying the 'slow growth' of human character and

37. McKeever suggests that even though Baillie seems to have preferred tragedy, 'comedy may actually be a more effective "school" for her, since it is less apt to veer into anti-heroic, sublime immorality' (2020: 142).

38. See Kopajtic (2023) for further discussion of the early novel in relation to moral education.

its passions from childhood to adulthood is, of course, a major feature of the *bildungsroman*, of which there were several prominent examples with which Baillie would likely have been familiar.[39] Granting the importance of delineating the passions through literature, it is unclear why drama should be privileged over other forms.

Furthermore, the formal features that most clearly separate drama from the novel depend more on the performance of drama, and Baillie also fails to address the question of whether a staged performance of a drama is *necessary* to produce the educational effects she argues for. As Marsden notes, the power of the theater was and continues to be associated with its live, communal nature: 'theatre is unlike other forms of literary activity in that it is truly alive; it is three-dimensional and exists in real time…the presence of the actor on the stage makes theatre physically embodied in a way no other art form is…it is a communal rather than an individual experience and cannot exist without an audience, just as it cannot exist without a performer' (2019, 4). Baillie affirms the importance of the communal experience in a passage we saw above (ID104), and the physical performance seems necessary for the effects Baillie argues for—the actor must express and give voice to her passions through her facial and bodily expressions (ID86).[40] Baillie herself would return to the limitations of the physical theater at different moments in her career, worrying, for example, about overly large and noisy theaters, and about the effects of harsh footlighting that obscures more subtle expressions of passion.[41]

Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, Baillie leaves unclear a crucial connection between her epistemology of passion and her theory of moral education. As we saw above, the core of Baillie's argument is that engagement with well-crafted literature contributes to improved moral judgment, for by examining others we know ourselves. The artist helps to occupy and direct sympathetic curiosity, providing scenes and spectacles to grip, satisfy, and inform. These observations must be regulated and systematized for them to have the instructive qualities they are meant to have; but if these constraints are satisfied, then literature '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' (ID90). But at times Baillie seems to want a stronger claim, sug-

39. For example, Henry Fielding's 1749 *History of Tom Jones* and Sterne's 1759 *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. It is also important to remember that many eighteenth-century novels presented themselves as a 'history' of a specific person or set of persons, following them through an extended period of time. In these respects, drama faces limitations (timeline represented, casting, and audience attention) that prose fiction does not.

40. Baillie was writing at a time when the challenges of physically staging a play were encouraging the form of the 'closet drama', a play written to be read in private, as a novel would be. For further discussion see Duthie (2001: 36–44) and Burroughs (1997).

41. See Baillie (1812 and 1821): v.3, xv–xxi and Baillie (1836): v.2, v–xii.

gesting that the representations offered in literature should function as examples that guide our *action* and not just our judgment. In a passage we have examined already, she writes that through the exercise of sympathetic curiosity we 'are prepared for distressing and difficult situations' by the 'example' offered through the conduct of another, and that 'we cannot well exercise this disposition without becoming more just, more merciful, more compassionate' (ID74). Elsewhere she makes the point that only in such naturalistic literature can 'we receive the instruction of example' (ID87). And in her treatment of how tragedy cannot provide an example of conduct, she claims that it nonetheless 'excite[s]' 'admiration of virtue, and abhorrence of vice' (ID90). Tragedy can even provide an example of how to understand and manage one's own passions, for by seeing passion develop in another, '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 head from the coming blast' (ID94). Thus, for Baillie, the 'moral efficacy' of drama goes beyond the epistemic improvements we have already examined. Drama provides examples of moral and immoral conduct, excites a love of virtue and an abhorrence of vice, encourages and guides us in governing the passions, and even makes us more virtuous (or at least more 'just', 'merciful', and 'compassionate').

Baillie's argument falters here. She is on stronger footing with her argument for the epistemic effects of literary engagements of sympathetic curiosity, and, assuming a sentimentalist framework that is more implied than argued for, she also offers a persuasive argument for the role of literature in improving moral judgment. But the further claims about the practical effects of literature and drama over-reach. How does a spectator move from example to action, or from portrait of vice to abhorrence of vice, especially when those examples are rich, complex, and faithful to nature, as Baillie argues they should be? As Gerard Lee McKeever has argued, there is a tension throughout Baillie's argument for the theater as a 'school in which much good and evil can be learned' (ID104). McKeever writes, 'wholesale pessimism, or even a fascination with the darker sides of humanity, occasionally seem more likely responses than moral learning to these plays' (2020, 118). Sympathetic curiosity is strongly excited in dramatic contexts, and the dramatist can do her best to guide and direct this propensity through her craft, but Baillie does not have a satisfying account of why we should expect things to work out as she says they do.[42]

42. Baillie would likely rely on the divine origin of the propensity if pressed here (ID74). In her preface to the second volume of her *Dramas*, concerned that people were objecting to the theater on religious and moral grounds, Baillie maintains that 'it is in the nature of man to delight in representations of passion and character', and insists, 'the blessed Founder of our religion, who knew what was in man, did not contradict nor thwart this propensity of our nature but with that sweetness and graciousness which peculiarly belonged to his divine character, made use of it for

Furthermore, to return to a question set aside above, how exactly does *sympathy* function in moving us from example to action? Baillie holds that I can learn to fend off excessive hatred and regulate more moderate episodes of that passion by engaging with the portrayal of De Monfort's hatred—is this because I feel a sympathetic hatred that matches De Monfort's own? If so, what explains my ability to detach from that hatred in order to judge that it is excessive, vicious, and to-be-avoided? Or do I not so much feel-like De Monfort, but rather feel-for him, from a position of compassionate distance? If so, what explains my achievement of detachment rather than sympathetic identification? This is where Baillie needs something like Smith's concept of *propriety*, the 'suitableness or unsuitableness…the proportion or disproportion which the affection seems to bear to the cause or object which excites it' (TMSI.i.3.6). For Smith, all instances of sympathy involve a tacit or overt evaluation of the propriety of the affection sympathized with. To fully sympathize with the passion of another is to approve of that passion, and to register any discord is to mark disapproval (TMSI.i.3.1). Baillie refers to something like this built-in evaluative sense when she discusses our ability, as spectators, to note when an artist has deviated from nature (ID82), but this is framed as *aesthetic* propriety, not the ethical propriety that she would need to explain how we move from moral example to improved moral action. Given that Baillie posits aesthetic propriety, and given that she hints at a sense of ethical propriety when she holds that from sympathetic curiosity we are 'taught the proprieties and decencies of ordinary life' (ID74), it may be possible to read a Smithian concept of propriety into Baillie, or to find a homegrown Bailliean variety. But more work would need to be done to close this gap in Baillie's argument that drama can produce more virtuous agents.

Conclusion

While Baillie's argument for the place of drama in moral education is not perfect, I hope to have shown that it is worth further philosophical engagement. In this paper, I have attempted to show that Baillie's 'Introductory Discourse' presents an unusual and rich resource for philosophical work. As my own focus reveals, Baillie is an important figure to consider for those who are working on the philosophical views of the Scottish Enlightenment and interested in the place of women in that intellectual world. While there is a good amount of work by literary scholars who trace Baillie's connections to Smith and to a few other Scottish Enlightenment figures, much more could and hopefully will be done by philoso-

the instruction of the multitude as his incomparable parables so beautifully testify' (1836: v.2, v–vi).

phers to examine her arguments and ideas alongside those of Hutcheson, Hume, Kames, Smith, Reid, Stewart, and others. Furthermore, Baillie's role as an artist who also wrote theoretically about art, psychology, and ethics makes her especially valuable to those who are interested in tracing the connections between aesthetics and ethics in the period. Baillie's role as a poet and lyricist opens fruitful paths for those who are interested in studying philosophy in connection with poetry and music. Finally, given Baillie's stature in her own moment, and her long and prolific career as a writer, her influence on other writers deserves further attention. Alison Stone has examined Baillie's influence on Anna Jameson, and Deborah Boyle compares Baillie's views to those of Elizabeth Hamilton, but there is much more to be done.[43] These are just a few of the threads that may be picked up and traced as philosophers hopefully turn their attention to Baillie.[44]

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

Anonymous. 1853. "Life of Joanna Baillie." In *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie*, 2nd edition, v–xx. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans.

Baillie, Joanna. 1812 and 1821. *A Series of Plays*…, Volume 3. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown.

Baillie, Joanna. 1826. *The Martyr: A Drama in Three Acts*. London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green.

Baillie, Joanna. 1836. *Dramas*, 3 Volumes. London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman.

Baillie, Joanna. 2001. *Plays on the Passions*. Edited by Peter Duthie. Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press.

Benedict, Barbara M. 2001. *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

43. Stone (2023) and Boyle (2024).

44. This paper would not have come to life without Deidre Lynch's suggestion, now many years ago, that I read Joanna Baillie's plays, for which I am very grateful. I would also like to thank Brad Bow and the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies for the invitation which prompted me to write the paper, and for their excellent feedback. I thank Timothy Yenter and the audience at the University of Mississippi for their helpful questions, as well as Enrique Chavez-Arvizo and the always helpful NY/NJ Research Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy for their support and feedback. Thanks as well to the audience at Smith, Ferguson, and Witherspoon at 300 in St. Andrews, for their very helpful feedback. Finally, special thanks to Deborah Boyle for very helpful feedback on an earlier draft, to Cleo O'Callahan Yeoman for her conversation and references, and to the referees for this journal for their recommendations.

Boyle, Deborah. 2024. "Joanna Baillie on Sympathetic Curiosity and Elizabeth Hamilton's Critique." *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 1–22. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2024.1

Burroughs, Catherine. 1997. *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Burwick, Frederick. 2004. "Joanna Baillie, Matthew Baillie, and the Pathology of the Passions." In *Joanna Baillie, Romantic Dramatist: Critical Essays*, edited by Thomas C. Crochunis, 48–68. Routledge: New York.

Camp, Pannill. 2020. "The Theatre of Moral Sentiments: Neoclassical Dramaturgy and Adam Smith's Impartial Spectator." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 81(4): 555–76.

Carhart, Margaret. 1923. *The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Carney, Sean. 2000. "The Passion of Joanna Baillie: Playwright as Martyr." *Theatre Journal* 52 (2): 227–52.

Chandler, James. 2016. "Adam Smith as Critic." In *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith*, edited by Christopher J. Berry, Maria Pia Paganelli, and Craig Smith, 126–42. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Clayden, Peter William. 1887. *The Early Life of Samuel Rogers.* London: Smith, Elder & Co.

Dadlez, E.M. 2004. "Pleased and Afflicted: Hume on the Paradox of Tragic Pleasure." *Hume Studies* 30 (2): 213–36.

Dawson, Deirdre. 1991. "Is Sympathy so Surprising? Adam Smith and the French Fictions of Sympathy." In *Eighteenth-Century Life* 15: 47–62.

Debes, Remy. 2016. "Adam Smith and the Sympathetic Imagination." In *Adam Smith: His Life, Thought, and Legacy*, edited by Ryan Patrick Hanley, 192–207. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Degooyer, Stephanie. 2018. "'The Eyes of Other People': Adam Smith's Triangular Sympathy and the Sentimental Novel." *English Literary History* 85 (3): 669–90.

Duthie, Peter. 2001. "Introduction." In *Plays on the Passions*, edited by Peter Duthie, 8–57. Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press.

Griswold, Jr., Charles L. 1999. *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Griswold, Jr., Charles L. 2010. "Smith and Rousseau in dialogue: Sympathy, *pitié*, spectatorship and narrative." In *The Philosophy of Adam Smith: The Adam Smith Review*, edited by Vivienne Brown and Samuel Fleischacker, 5: 59–84.

Griswold, Jr., Charles L. 2006. "Imagination: Morals, Science, and Arts." In *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, edited by Knud Haakonssen. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hanley, Ryan Patrick. 2006. "From Geneva to Glasgow: Rousseau and Adam Smith on the Theater and Commercial Society." In *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture,* 35: 177–202.

Hutton, Sarah. 2015. "'Blue-Eyed Philosophers Born on Wednesdays': An Essay on Women and the History of Philosophy." *The Monist* 98: 7–20.

Jeffrey, Francis. 1844. *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 3 Volumes. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans.

Johnson, Samuel. 1752. #103 (March 12, 1751). In *The Rambler*, part 4. London: J. Payne and J. Bouquet.

Judson, Barbara. 2006. "'Sympathetic Curiosity': The Theater of Joanna Baillie." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 25 (1): 49–70.

Kopajtic, Lauren. 2020. "Adam Smith's Sentimentalist Conception of Self-Control." *The Adam Smith Review* 12: 7–27.
Kopajtic, Lauren. 2023. "'Much Better Instructors': Adam Smith and the Role of Literature in Moral Education." In *Interpreting Adam Smith: Critical Essays*, edited by Paul Sagar, 194–213. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lee, Yoon Sun. 2001. "Giants in the North: 'Douglas', the Scottish Enlightenment, and Scott's 'Redgauntlet'. *Studies in Romanticism* 40 (1): 109–21.
Marsden, Jean I. 2019. *Theatres of Feeling: Affect, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century Stage*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
Marshall, David. 1986. *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Marshall, David. 1988. *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
McKeever, Gerard Lee. 2020. "'The Great Moral Object' in Joanna Baillie's Drama." In *Dialectics of Improvement*, 112–48. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Mossner, Ernest Campbell. 1940. "Hume and the Scottish Shakespeare," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3 (4): 419–41.
Murray, Julie. 2003. "Governing Economic Man: Joanna Baillie's Theatre of Utility." *ELH* 70 (4): 1043–1065.
Myers, Victoria. 2004. "Joanna Baillie's Theatre of Cruelty." In *Joanna Baillie, Romantic Dramatist: Critical Essays*, edited by Thomas C. Crochunis, 87–107. Routledge: New York.
O'Neill, Eileen. 1998. "Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and their Fate in History." In *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, edited by Janet A. Kourany, 16–62. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Pinch, Adela. 1996. *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Ross, Ian. 1995. *The Life of Adam Smith*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Schliesser, Eric. 2017. *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Scott, Sir Walter. 1893. *Marmion*, edited by William J. Rolfe. Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press.
Scott, William R. 1965. *Adam Smith as Student & Professor*. New York: Augustus M. Kelley.
Sher, Richard. 2015. *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Siraki, Arby Ted. 2010. "Adam Smith's Solution to the Paradox of Tragedy." In *The Philosophy of Adam Smith: The Adam Smith Review*, edited by Vivienne Brown and Samuel Fleischacker, 5: 213–30.
Slagle, Judith Bailey. 2002. *Joanna Baillie: A Literary Life*. Cranberry, NJ: Associated University Presses.
Sterne, Laurence. 2009. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, edited by Ian Campbell Ross. New York: Oxford University Press.
Stone, Alison. 2023. "Aesthetics and Ethics in Anna Jameson's *Characteristics of Women*," *Journal of Modern Philosophy* 5 (1): 1–16.
Valihora, Karen. 2016. "Adam Smith's Narrative Line." In *Adam Smith: His Life, Thought, and Legacy*, edited by Ryan Patrick Hanley, 405–21. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Vetter, Lisa Pace. 2017. *The Political Thought of America's Founding Feminists.* New York: NYU Press.
Watt, Ian. 1957. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Whalen, Melissa M. 2013. "The Suffering Stage: Joanna Baillie, Spectacle, and Sympathetic Education." *European Romantic Review* 24 (6): 665–81.
Yanal, Robert J. 1991. "Hume and Others on the Paradox of Tragedy." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49 (1): 75–6.
Zuckert, Rachel. 2024. "Adam Smith on Aesthetic Imagination and Scientific Enquiry." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 64 (1): 49–65.

Submitted: 13 May 2023 **Accepted:** 27 March 2024 **Published:** 06 November 2024