

Joanna Baillie

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Joanna Baillie (1762-1851), a notable Scottish playwright and poet, emerged as a prominent literary figure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Her works are often related to Scottish customs and landscapes, with a focus on the analysis of human nature. Baillie was born in Bothwell, Scotland and lived there during the early years of her life. Her father was a Presbyterian minister and later a Divinity Professor at the University of Glasgow, and, because of this, her upbringing was heavily influenced by religion and academia. Her family moved to Hamilton, where Baillie learnt to read at the age of ten while attending Miss McDonald's Glasgow boarding school. While in school, she discovered theatre and immediately felt a strong passion for art, which motivated her to start learning more about plays and poems. Baillie's father died in 1778, leaving his wife with insufficient funds to support their family, forcing Baillie's mother to move to London to stay with her son William (Noe 344).

Nineteenth-century biographer Millicent Fawcett notes that "Mrs. Joanna Baillie... was a remarkable instance of a writer rapidly rising to the highest pinnacle of fame, and then as rapidly and surely descending almost to the common level of ordinary mortals" (Fawcett 509). However, Baillie's work was revisited by readers in the twentieth century, giving Baillie the recognition she deserved (Mellor 559). Baillie died in 1851 at almost ninety years old. She was buried alongside her mother and later joined by her sister in their Hampstead parish churchyard, and in 1899 a memorial was created in memory of Joanna Baillie at her birthplace in Bothwell.

The poem below, "A Child to His Sick Grandfather," was published in 1790. This poem explores the intricate stages of grief through the perspective of a child in an era when people considered children innocent. Not much is known of the public's perception of this poem since it was one of Baillie's lesser-known works. Baillie uses a uniform structure with eight stanzas, each with six lines and an aabbcc rhyme scheme. The poem is written in a mix of iambic tetrameter (8 syllables) and iambic trimeter (6 syllables) with a syllable pattern of 8/8/8/8/8/6. The genre is address, which puts words into the mouth of the fictional child, to show how his feelings are changing while watching his grandfather physically and mentally deteriorate.

Further Reading

Carney, Sean. "The Passion of Joanna Baillie: Playwright as Martyr." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2000, pp. 227–52.

Judson, Barbara. "'Sympathetic Curiosity': The Theater of Joanna Baillie." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2006, pp. 49–70.

References

- Fawcett, Dame Millicent Garrett. *Some Eminent Women of Our Times; Short Biographical Sketches*. MacMillan, 1889.
- Mellor, Anne K. "Joanna Baillie and the Counter-Public Sphere." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1994, pp. 559–67.
- Noe, Nancy. "Joanna Baillie (11 September 1762–23 February 1851)." *Nineteenth-Century British Dramatists*, edited by Angela Courtney, vol. 344, Gale, 2009, pp. 9–17.

A Child To His Sick Grandfather²⁷⁹

GRAND-DAD, they say you're old and frail,
 Your stiffened legs begin to fail:
 Your staff, no more my pony now,²⁸⁰
 Supports your body bending low,
 While back to wall you lean so sad, 5
 I'm vex'd²⁸¹ to see you, Dad.

You used to smile and stroke my head,
 And tell me how good children did;
 But now, I wot²⁸² not how it be,
 You take me seldom on your knee, 10
 Yet ne'ertheless I am right glad,
 To sit beside you, Dad.

How lank²⁸³ and thin your beard hangs down!
 Scant²⁸⁴ are the white hairs on your crown:
 How wan²⁸⁵ and hollow are your cheeks, 15
 Your brow is crossed with many streaks;
 But yet although his strength be fled,
 I love my own old Dad.

The housewives round their potions²⁸⁶ brew,
 And gossips come to ask for you; 20
 And for your weal²⁸⁷ each neighbour cares;
 And good men kneel and say their prayers,
 And every body looks so sad,
 When you are ailing,²⁸⁸ Dad.

You will not die and leave us then? 25
 Rouse up and be our Dad again.

²⁷⁹ *Fugitive Verses by Joanna Baillie, Author of "Dramas on the Passions" etc.*, Moxon, 1840, pp. 92–94. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

²⁸⁰ *No more my pony now*: the boy has used the grandfather's cane as a hobby horse in the past.

²⁸¹ *Vex'd*: to be distressed.

²⁸² *Wot*: know.

²⁸³ *Lank*: thin and flat.

²⁸⁴ *Scant*: minimal.

²⁸⁵ *Wan*: pale, unhealthy looking skin.

²⁸⁶ *Potions*: home remedies.

²⁸⁷ *Weal*: wellbeing, in this case through community support.

²⁸⁸ *Ailing*: experiencing illness or suffering.

When you are quiet and laid in bed,
 We'll doff²⁸⁹ our shoes and softly tread;
 And when you wake we'll still be near,
 To fill old Dad his cheer. 30

When through the house you change your stand,
 I'll lead you kindly by the hand:
 When dinner's set I'll with you bide,²⁹⁰
 And aye²⁹¹ be serving by your side;
 And when the weary fire burns blue, 35
 I'll sit and talk with you.

I have a tale both long and good,
 About a partlet²⁹² and her brood,²⁹³
 And greedy cunning²⁹⁴ fox that stole
 By dead of midnight through a hole, 40
 Which slyly to the hen-roost led, —
 You love a story, Dad?

And then I have a wondrous tale
 Of men all clad²⁹⁵ in coats of mail,²⁹⁶
 With glittering swords, — you nod, — I think 45
 Your heavy eyes begin to wink; —
 Down on your bosom sinks your head: —
 You do not hear me, Dad.



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²⁸⁹ *Doff*: take off.

²⁹⁰ *Bide*: remain.

²⁹¹ *Aye*: always, continuously.

²⁹² *Partlet*: a hen.

²⁹³ *Brood*: the hen's babies (chicks).

²⁹⁴ *Cunning*: clever.

²⁹⁵ *Clad*: to be armoured or clothed.

²⁹⁶ *Mail*: chainmail.